

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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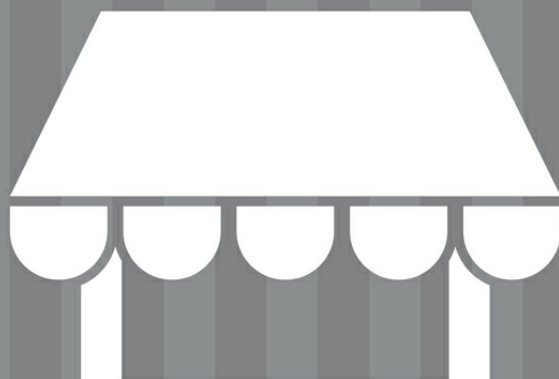


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Prologue

Your life might be yours and yours alone, but there isn't much about it you get to choose for yourself. Take your parents, for example. If it were up to you, you'd ask for kind, considerate people who are financially well-off. But not being able to get what you want is a part of life, and that's just the way things have to be.

If all mothers were slim-figured, beautiful, kind, good at cooking, and could even dish out two-hit multi-target attacks, society would collapse. Bloody wars would break out between fathers and sons competing to win the same woman. Indeed, the world is made up of complex balances. I understood this fully in my previous life, even though I only experienced a short twenty-five years of it.

My life started without me particularly wanting it to and reached its final conclusion under the wheels of a truck—not the kind of death I'd hoped for.

In other words, I had no say in the moment I was born nor the moment I died. And even in the brief moment between my death and my reincarnation, I still wasn't allowed the freedom to choose my own job.

I was in a room for people seeking to be reincarnated. It was like a small conference room, containing a number of folding chairs and nothing else. It was so *normal-looking*. Nothing about it let on that this was the afterlife. One moment I was dying in a traffic accident, the next I was here.

Near the front was a stern-faced man in a suit, interviewing the deceased one by one. He was going over where they would next be reincarnated and what job class they would be given. There didn't appear to be any careless, voluptuous goddesses handing out cheat skills...

Well, expecting some kind of meet-cute before my reincarnation was probably as wrong as trying to pick up girls in a dungeon. Besides, a fox-eyed lady knight was more my type than an airheaded goddess. Holding out for a

woman like that might be a long shot, but it would reduce competition. I decided I'd keep my hopes high for my next life.

At any rate, it seemed being hit by a truck really did send you to another world for reincarnation. That wasn't just an urban legend. This room was filled with people waiting to be sent off to their next life.

"Wow, you were hit by a four-ton truck? Mine was ten tons."

A man with a face covered in pimples was bragging to a scrawny boy about the size of the truck that had hit him. Apparently guys who prided themselves on the stupidest things were a dime a dozen; you could find them anywhere.

It's not like you wanted to be hit by a ten-ton truck, I thought. If you cared about size so much, you should've just gone to the US and flung yourself in front of an 18-wheeler.

I couldn't help but be pleased when he was sent to the next world with the lame job of novice mage. I had no doubt he'd wanted a better job. When he heard what he'd been assigned, his bitter disappointment was written all over his face. In comparison, the boy who'd been taken out by a mere four-ton truck was on his way to the next world as a hero.

It seemed the weight of the trucks that had killed us had nothing to do with how good of a job class we were assigned. Or at the very least, bigger wasn't necessarily better. That was a bit of a relief, since it'd been a mini truck that had done me in.

"Yusuke Yahagi."

"Yes, sir!"

Hearing my name, I sprang to my feet with vigor. It was probably strange to describe myself in such a lively way considering I was dead, but I felt it was good to stay positive.

"It looks like you are going to be transferred rather than reincarnated," the man said, flipping through some documents.

"Transferred?"

"That is correct. You will be sent off to the next world exactly as you are."

“Huh...”

Even if I objected, it wasn't like I'd be able to overturn the decision. I had to obediently accept this new life I'd been given. Just like I'd said, there wasn't much in life that you could choose for yourself.

“As for where you will be headed, it is what we call a world of swords and magic.”

Even upon hearing that, I still didn't object. That meant my next life was likely to be filled with battles and warfare, but I'd be content so long as I got a busted cheat skill. I intended to do my best to live.

“It has also been decided that you will be a dagashi-ya.”

Okay, cool, so I got an easy job as a...what?

“Um,” I started hesitantly, “what do you mean by a dagashi-ya?”

“Are you unfamiliar with what dagashi are?” he asked. “They are snacks cheap enough for even children to afford.”

Yeah, I do know that much. And a dagashi-ya is the person who sells those cheap snacks.

“If you tell your shop to open, it will do so on its own,” he continued. “Likewise, if you tell it to close, it will. It is a convenient ability, no?”

The suited man in front of me spoke with such confidence. I couldn't help feeling a little irked at his smug face.

“Can I ask a question?”

“Now then,” he said, ignoring me, “please enjoy your next life.”

And with that, I was tossed into a new world.

Chapter 1: Dagashi-ya Yahagi's Grand Opening

I had just discussed how you can't choose the parents you're born to. In a similar vein, not being able to choose the country and region you're born into is another of life's absurdities. Even being transferred to a new world worked the same way.

When I came to, I found myself standing on a filthy road in the middle of a town. The road had poor drainage, and the dirty water was staining my sneakers brown. It seemed I had been sent into this world with nothing but the clothes on my back.

It was currently sometime in the morning, so there were a decent number of people around. Many of them were equipped with swords and leather armor. Based on how everyone was walking in the same direction, I could imagine they were headed toward something like a guild or a dungeon.

The more I started to take in this new world, the more it dawned on me just how far I'd traveled from my own. Even though my T-shirt, khaki pants, and jacket didn't quite fit in, the most I got from people passing by were a few glances. No one stopped to gawk at me.

There was no point in standing there doing nothing, so I decided to try and follow the crowd.

Going along with what everyone else was doing was one of my specialties as a Japanese person. Sure, I had arrived in a new world, but old habits die hard, and not nearly enough time had passed for me to forget my roots. In an unfamiliar place like this, choosing to go with the flow was an effective means of self-preservation.

The line of people stretched all the way to the town's outskirts. As I kept walking, my gaze darting to and fro, I finally reached a wasteland that lacked any buildings. Some distance away from me was an area surrounded by walls, with a wide staircase descending into the ground. A signboard was posted in front: "Dungeon Entrance."

Just as I'd thought, all these people were dungeon-bound adventurers.

Street vendors had set up shop near the staircase's entrance, selling things like food and equipment. It appeared to be a common place for adventurers to have breakfast, and they were all purchasing various kinds of food from the shops.

Now that I think about it, I'm hungry too.

Enticing smells wafted from a nearby stall. It was selling what looked to be this world's version of a hamburger, with assorted fillings like meat and onions nestled between two buns.

Even though I wanted a taste, I didn't have a single coin in my pocket. If that didn't change soon, I was going to starve to death. I needed some way to make money, but following the other adventurers into the dungeon was a no-go. I mean, I wasn't a hero or a mage. I didn't have any weapons or armor. I was just a plain old dagashi-ya.

Huh? Wait a second... That's it! I'm supposed to be a dagashi-ya!

And if I was a dagashi-ya, then all I had to do was sell my snacks and I'd be golden! There were so many people around that surely some of them were potential buyers. I'd earn money like that and get myself an isekai burger. If I remembered right, all I had to do was tell my shop to open...

Hold up, wait. Is it really a good idea to suddenly set up shop here? If I come out of nowhere with a full-blown store, maybe the street vendors around me will get upset.

When I thought about it, my considerate nature prompted me to head toward an out-of-the-way corner. I was much farther away from the dungeon's entrance now, but setting up shop here probably wouldn't bother anyone.

Taking a deep breath to calm my nerves, I spoke in a small voice.

"Store, open."

I could feel energy burst forth from deep within me. I'd been told that this was a world of swords and magic, so I was sure the shop had appeared by consuming some of my mana or something.

But my “store” wasn’t really an actual store.

What appeared before me was a small but lengthy carrying pole, with each end connected by strings to a large plate laden with goods to sell. It was a simple set-up.

Huh? Even my appearance changed!

Without me noticing, a brown apron had wrapped itself around my waist.

Is this what an official dagashi-ya is supposed to look like? I wondered.

I moved to a spot with a rock that looked good for sitting and set my carrying pole on the ground. Then I checked over the goods I was selling; they were all products that I was very familiar with.

The lineup included gum and sweets cheap enough to buy with a ten-yen coin, small cases of ramune candy, along with jars containing things like curry rice crackers and skewered squid.

“Man, this takes me back...” I murmured without thinking. There had been an old dagashi-ya from the Showa era near my parents’ house, and I’d gone there nearly every day as a kid. The goods that now lined my shop were all similar to what they had sold there.

That said, the packaging was slightly different. The writing on it was that of this new world.

Come to think of it, I had no trouble reading here. I’d also been understanding what the people around me were talking about, so it seemed like I didn’t have to worry about learning a new language. *What a relief.*

Well, I wouldn’t get any customers if I didn’t speak up, so I decided to try and put myself out there. I had absolutely no marketing or sales experience, but I was firm in my resolve to sell my products.

“How would you like some snacks? They’re cheap and delicious!”

One passing adventurer at least gave me a glance, but he continued past me without a word.

Scary...

Not only did his face *look* like it could kill, but he was also walking around with a weapon that could *actually* kill. I was just an ordinary guy from the peaceful country of Japan. Of course I had the jitters.

But if I don't do this, then I can't make a living!

I mentally slapped some tape on my cracking resolve.

“How about some snacks...?” I tried again, my voice quivering, and although my words had been quiet, a short-statured girl looked my way. Her large, round eyes were darting between me and the snacks with great curiosity. *Now's my chance...*

“These snacks are very cheap,” I said. “How about them?”

The girl trotted over to me and began to peruse the goods on the plates, her short pink hair swaying in the wind.



“This looks so cute,” she said, pointing at some gum with a cat on the wrapping paper, “What is it?”

The pieces were bite-size, and I remembered them fondly from my previous life as “Ten-Yen Gum.”

“Oh, that’s Ten-Yen Gum...”

The moment I focused on the product, information about it flowed into my mind.

Product name: Ten-Rim Gum

Description: Recovers one MP every ten seconds until it loses flavor. Made with artificial strawberry flavoring!

Price: Ten rims

I didn’t know if recovering what amounted to six MP a minute was a lot. I also didn’t know about the price. Back in Japan, even a child could afford ten yen, but I had no idea about ten rims. I guessed I would have to watch and see how this adventurer reacted.

“That’s Ten-Rim Gum,” I corrected myself.

“What is gum?”

Oh, so I have to start from there... Guess gum doesn’t exist in this world.

“It’s a tasty snack meant to be enjoyed by chewing on it without swallowing,” I told her, “and so long as it doesn’t lose its flavor, it restores six MP a minute.”

“Wow, that’s cool!”

Her reaction suggested some surprise, but her socks hadn’t exactly been blown off. There was probably an even better recovery item out there on the market.

“So it’s ten rims?”

“Yep. Would you like to buy one?”

“Yeah, I think I will. It sounds interesting, and it’s cute. I’ll grab one for Mira too.”

It seemed that she was going to buy one for a friend of hers. If she was buying another without even batting an eye, that probably meant ten rims wasn’t crazy high. The girl paid for her purchases with two worn out copper coins. They were a little smaller than ten-yen coins.

So these are what ten-rim coins look like...

They were the first fruits of my labor. When I thought of it that way, I found myself especially grateful for these battered coins.

All right, I’ll just keep this up and aim to build a stable life for myself here!

Afraid to lose my very important profits, I stuck my earnings deep in my pocket.

Once the morning rush ended, the dungeon plaza emptied out. The crowd of adventurers had headed underground, so the vendors were beginning to clean up.

Even with all my enthusiasm, the Ten-Rim Gum was the only thing I’d managed to sell in the end, earning me a measly total of twenty rims. A howling wind spun the leaves around, buffeting my body. I felt like I was being frozen right to my core. Overcome by a fierce hunger, I turned to my own goods for a bite to eat.

Product name: Curry Rice Cracker

Description: Restores stamina. Warms you right up in cold conditions.

Price: Twenty rims

It’s delicious... It really was warming up my body, and I was feeling motivated again. Similarly, the Ramune and Odama Candy also had wonderful effects. The reason these things hadn’t sold was likely just that I sucked at marketing them. I

made up my mind: once those adventurers came back, I'd be bold and call out to them to promote my dagashi.

The Curry Rice Cracker alone wasn't enough to fill me up, so I pulled out another type of jarred snack, a Squid Skewer.

Product name: Squid Skewer

Description: Sharpens the senses for a short duration.
Makes it easier to detect enemies.

Price: Thirty rims

Perhaps because of the Squid Skewer's sense-sharpening effect, I became aware that I'd caught the eye of a fellow street vendor. It seemed the Squid Skewer I was eating had piqued his interest. He kept glancing over at me as he cleaned up his own shop. Maybe he'd be willing to buy something off me.

I decided to casually greet him. "Hello."

"Heya there," he said in return. "Haven't seen you 'round here before."

"I opened up my business for the first time today. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"So you're a newbie, eh? Right back at ya. Incidentally, whatcha selling there?" The old man was staring at the products on my plates with great curiosity. "I don't recognize a lot of those goods."

Evidently it really was hard to tell what I was selling at a glance. The lack of instant product recognition was inconvenient, but it was also proof that I wouldn't have much competition. I'd try to stay positive!

"These are dagashi."

"They're what now?"

He didn't know what dagashi were? *Oh, of course!*

"Dagashi" wasn't a commonly known word here. No wonder everyone had been unmoved by my advertisements; the word didn't mean anything to them.

“They’re cheap snacks,” I informed him.

“Ah, gotcha. So these are snacks.” The old man nodded.

“Would you like to buy one?”

“Nah, I don’t like sweets.”

“I have ones that aren’t sweet as well,” I offered, “like this Squid Skewer I’m eating, or the Curry Rice Crackers over here.”

The man caught a whiff of the Squid Skewer and scrunched up his face. “Yuck! What’s with that stench? And what the hell is a squid anyway?”

“Huh? A squid is a squid. They live in the ocean.”

“Did you say the *ocean*?! They’re from that far away?”

Based on this guy’s response, this country must be landlocked.

“Oh, but these smell pretty appetizing,” he said upon sniffing the Curry Rice Crackers.

“Of course,” I replied. “They’re sprinkled with plenty of spices.”

“Well, I’ll be!” he exclaimed, “Spices are luxury items! How much do these go for?”

“Twenty rims.”

“That’s dirt cheap! Are you sure they got spices?”

“Yes, they do. So please try one.”

“Well,” he relented, “at twenty rims, I guess I won’t be too pissed off if it tastes like crap...”

Yep, it was as I had thought. Twenty rims really was cheap here. The old man paid me with two copper coins. With that, I now had forty rims.

Since this was his first time eating dagashi, he appeared to be wary of it. He took a bit of the edge between his teeth and crunched down on it.

“It’s tastier than I expected,” he said after a pause. “Twenty rims was plenty worth it.”

“Right? And it pairs so well with alcohol that even the bar I used to go to had

these in stock.”

“I can see it being a good drinking snack,” he agreed. He then finished up his rice cracker and gave a good stretch.

“My body’s all nice and warmed up somehow,” he said. “I’m feeling pretty good, so I guess I’ll close up shop and head on home.”

“That’s thanks to the rice cracker’s special effects!”

“I see. An interesting snack that is.”

Huh? Not much of a reaction there either. To me, a snack that warmed my body up and gave me energy was the stuff of dreams. Wasn’t it so incredible as to make you suspect that it was made with an illicit drug?

Well, considering that this was a world of magic, a product like this might not really be all that. *Or was it that he didn’t believe me?*

Before the old man got back to work, I made sure to ask him a very important question.

“By the way, is there a place I can get some water around here?”

After eating the rice crackers and the squid, my throat was parched.

“If you want a water station, you gotta head into town.”

Apparently, there was a spring in town which you could freely draw water from. It’d be a while before all the adventurers would return from the dungeon, so I figured I’d take this as an opportunity to gather all the intel I could.

I said the magic words to close up my shop and headed into town.

My senses were still sharpened thanks to the squid, so I managed to find the water station without getting lost. I had been imagining a well of some kind, but that wasn’t quite right. There was a lion statue reminiscent of what I’d see at hot spring hotels, with water gushing from the mouth.

I’d intended to quench my parched throat right away, but I realized I didn’t have a cup or a canteen on me. With no other option, I used my hands to gulp down the water. The possibility that I’d wind up with an upset stomach did

cross my mind, but I couldn't find it in myself to care. That's how much a Squid Skewer could dry your throat out.

I guzzled the water...and it was delicious! Why did it taste so sweet after eating that squid? It was so delectable, I was tempted to eat more squid just so I could reexperience this sweet deliciousness. I eventually calmed down and took stock of my surroundings once more.

There were plenty of buildings here, but you couldn't deny that this town had seen better days. If I had to compare it to something, it was like a hot spring town that had thrived in the Showa era but then had fallen into decline once Reiwa rolled around. The buildings were all old, and people were scarce. If you converted that vibe to a more European setting, it would probably look something like this town.

Now that I had quenched my thirst, I just let my feet take me where they willed.

Oh yeah, I have to find an inn for the night.

It was a slightly chilly time of year, similar to spring in Japan. Sleeping outside in these temperatures would be rough, and if it started raining, I'd be in huge trouble.

As I walked along, I saw a signboard advertising an inn: "The Safe Swindoll Con Inn. Starting from 850 rims."

That name made me feel the opposite of safe, but 850 rims for one night sounded like a steal. From what I'd gathered, one rim was equivalent to one yen. Back in Japan, a typical stay at a business hotel went for around 7,000 yen. Even a stay at a capsule hotel or an internet café would go for at least 3,000 yen a night. Compared to that, wasn't 850 rims a more than fair price? Although I was sure I'd be getting what I paid for...

Well, with only forty rims under my belt, I was getting ahead of myself. Even such cheap lodgings were still far from what my nearly empty wallet could afford. I once again steeled my resolve to buckle down and get serious about selling my goods.

As the sun dipped toward the western horizon, the dungeon plaza began bustling with life again. The adventurers were surfacing from the depths of the dungeon.

“Mister!”

Two girls were running over to where I’d set up shop at the edge of the plaza. One of them was the lively, pink-haired adventurer who had bought the Ten-Rim Gum this morning.

“Hurry up, Mira! Let’s go!”

The blue-haired girl named Mira had a much calmer demeanor.

“Don’t rush me so much, Meryl.”

Mira emanated a soft, warm aura as she arrived at my store.

“Oh, wow, it’s just like Meryl said.” She clasped her hands together, appearing awed. “So these are all snacks?”

“How was the Ten-Rim Gum?” I asked Meryl.

“It was delicious, and it came in handy,” she replied, “’cuz it did restore a little bit of my mana.”

“Just like I said, right?”

“Still, it lost its flavor really quickly, and the MP gain effect wore off...”

Yeah, that is one of the bad things about Ten-Rim Gum. It’s cheap and delicious, yet the flavor only lasts so long.

“Um...” Mira, the blue-haired girl, started meekly. “When I opened the wrapper, this came out with it...”

It was a slip of paper with the words: “Win. Redeem at store for a free gum.”

Oh right, I thought, this gum has a lottery.

“Congratulations,” I said, holding out a piece of gum. “Here’s your gum.”

“Oh my!” she exclaimed. “Are you sure?”

“Of course. That’s how this product works.”

Mira carefully pocketed the new piece of gum I'd given her, which she would no doubt use during her dungeon crawl tomorrow. It made me happy to think that it'd be useful for her.

Meryl, on the other hand, was looking at Mira with envy. "You lucky duck! I wanna win a free gum too!"

"If you want something else with a lottery," I said, opening up a box of Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins, "I have this too."

Product name: Ten-Rim Chocolate Coin

Description: A chocolate coin that looks a lot like a copper coin. Restores some HP.

Price: Ten rims

"Wow, they're shaped exactly like ten-rim coins," she remarked.

"It's chocolate inside."

"Chocolate?! But that's something only rich people can afford to eat!"

So not only were spices luxury goods, but also chocolate? *Maybe I should raise the prices on them...*

No, forget it.

My pride as a dagashi-ya wouldn't allow that. Painstaking research had been put into making dagashi cheap enough for even children to afford. How could I find it in me to trample on the efforts of my predecessors for mere greed? The great thing about dagashi was that you could buy plenty of it even on a pitiful allowance. I had a lot of fond memories of dagashi from when I was a kid, thanks to that. Who would I be if I didn't give this world's novice adventurers some support?

"So if I win, I'll be able to get one more?" Meryl asked, gazing at me with eyes sparking with expectation. I grinned and wagged my finger.

"Nope. Instead, there are tradable coupons inside."

“Ooh, like what?”

“It depends. There are coupons in there worth fifty, thirty, twenty, or ten rims. If you get one, you’ll be able to trade it in for an item of equal value at my shop.”

“Sold!”

Meryl immediately handed me a ten-rim coin and glared at the many chocolate coins.

“What are you doing, Meryl?” Mira asked.

“I’m trying to choose the one that has a coupon inside... Be quiet for a bit, Mira.”

Her efforts would probably be in vain since the product was designed so that you couldn’t tell which one was a winner. Still, this was all part of the thrill of buying dagashi, so I just left her to it.

Finally, Meryl made up her mind and thrust her hand into the box.

“I got you now!”

She clutched her carefully selected Ten-Rim Chocolate Coin in her hand. With nervous fingers, she shakily removed the film and revealed that inside the wrapper was...a single four-letter word, “lose.”

“Sorry, better luck next time.”

Meryl bit her lip in frustration. “Grrr...!!!”

“But it’s still delicious,” I said, offering her some solace, “and it restores some HP.”

“Huh.” Meryl tossed the Chocolate Coin into her mouth, and her face lit up with a smile. “Whoa, you’re right! It’s delicious! And I think it took the edge off of my exhaustion.”

At that, Mira’s interest was also piqued.

“Give me one too, please,” she said.

“Got it. Choose whichever you’d like.”

Mira selected one in no time at all and nimbly opened up the foil. “Oh?”

Amazingly, a ten-rim redeemable coupon was stamped inside of the wrapper!

“Congratulations!” I said to her, “You can trade that in for any ten-rim item in the shop.”

“Are you certain?” she asked, “I feel a little bad...”

Mira must have had the ultimate luck if she’d managed to win again. But Meryl couldn’t just sit back and take this.

“Why is it always her?!” she pouted. “What, are you playing favorites because she has bigger boobs than me?!”

“Of course not!”

“E-Exactly,” Mira whimpered, “so keep your voice down. It’s embarrassing...”

But Meryl didn’t stop there.

“Fine, then I’ll just buy three more!” she declared.

“Hey, easy now...”

“Here, thirty rims!”

It seemed Meryl was the type to get easily fired up, but thanks to the ruckus she was causing, some of the other adventurers came over to check out the shop.

“What’s all the fuss about? You got something good there?”

“You all better stand back!” she screeched at them. “That coupon’s mine!”

I explained what dagashi were to the young adventurers.

“Seems kinda interesting,” said one of them. “Give me some gum and chocolate.”

“Some Odama Candy for me,” said another.

Completely unlike how the morning had gone, my shop was bustling until dark.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 1

I found an interesting shop today—a street stand that sells snacks like gum and rice crackers, on top of a bunch of other stuff that is completely unfamiliar to me! And it's all cheap! As a novice adventurer, buying snacks is pretty harsh on my wallet, but even I can easily afford this stuff. There are so many products with cute designs on the packaging that it makes me really excited. The wrappers are things like strange shiny paper or thin metal, which makes me curious how they're made. It's a total mystery!

All of the snacks have various magical effects, but they're just kind of okay. None of them are as effective as a good MP potion or anything. But then again, they're at two totally different price points. Dagashi are cheap and tasty, so I'll visit the shop again tomorrow.

I took Mira along with me, and she seemed to like it. She even said that she wanted to go again. She almost never says things like that! Hold on, what if she has a thing for the shop owner guy?

I can't really say that the shop owner is super good-looking or anything, but he seemed like a kind person. I like my men handsome and a little more wild, but he might be Mira's type.

This is the first time I've ever had dagashi, but I'm pretty sold on it. It's really nice how you can eat a little bit of it while you're taking a break and restore some mana and HP.

Whenever I'm up against a monster with high defense stats, by the third powershot I'm usually misfiring. But thanks to the snacks, I could restore some of my HP and mana today to cleanly dish out three consecutive attacks.

Wait a second... If I eat more of that gum and those candies, I might even be able to do four attacks in a row! But then, would my belly get all fat...?

My slender body is one of my charm points, but when I consider the snacks and the effects they offer, frankly, I just want to eat more of them. Also, they're

cheap enough that if I splurge only a little bit outside my means, I can easily obtain them. That's what makes them so enticing.

Oh, speaking of enticing! That damn lottery! What is up with that?! It should be illegal for dagashi to have such a fun system. It makes them way too dangerous! With things like lotteries and redeemable coupons, how am I supposed to resist buying them?!

Man, it was a bummer that luck wasn't on my side today. I mean, I was putting so much money into it while Mira was standing next to me winning left and right. Before I knew it, I was all worked up and pushing myself to keep going until I won. I've gotta take better care to not let myself get carried away.

Things have been a little tight for me financially recently, but I'm happy that I have more things to look forward to after work. I'll make more money at the dungeon, and then tomorrow I'll show that chocolate who's boss!

Chapter 2: My New Regulars

Thanks to Meryl, I got more customers, and by the end of the day I had made about 2,070 rims. The average amount I earned per customer was around 200 rims. Meryl had gotten way too fired up trying to win, so I was sure she'd spent 300 rims, or maybe more! Teary-eyed, Meryl had finally won her redeemable coupon on her seventh try. It was only worth about 30 rims, but that was more than enough to satisfy her, and she'd told me she'd come again tomorrow. It seemed like Dagashi-ya Yahagi had gained some cute new regulars.

Oh right, I wound up naming my shop something simple: Dagashi-ya Yahagi. Something super stylish wouldn't be fitting for a dagashi-ya, and I thought it was the perfect way to get my name out there.

For dinner, I stopped by a street stall to buy some bread with meat and vegetable filling and headed for the inn that I'd had my eye on. It was the Safe Swindoll Con Inn. Seeing it in the darkness like this, the vibes reminded me of the slums I'd seen in foreign films, which made the inn look twice as shady.

When I passed through the small door, I found an old lady behind the counter idly propping her cheek up on one hand. Her frame and the look in her eyes both reminded me of a wild boar. Upon noticing my presence, she spoke in a cold, gruff voice. "Night's stay? A break?"

The old lady's voice was so sharp, I kinda felt like I was being interrogated.

"I'll be staying the night," I said.

The old lady rose to attention, scrutinizing me. "What's your job?"

I hesitated. "I'm a street vendor." I left it vague since I didn't think she'd understand if I told her I was a dagashi-ya, and I was too exhausted to explain.

"I need 850 rims up front."

As shady as this place was, I couldn't say that the price tag was false

advertising. After I handed over the 850 rims, the old lady wearily heaved up her hulking form to guide me to my room.

“Keep quiet at night. You could start a fight if you’re too noisy.”

The walls were thin enough that your voice could easily be overheard. If you accidentally woke up the wrong adventurer, they were likely to complain with a drawn blade in hand.

Better tread as lightly as I can...

The room I was taken to was small, no bigger than three tatami mats. But even if it lacked in size, it had been kept pretty clean. There was nothing inside except for a shabby bed and a lamp set on a bedside table. The bedding only included a pillow and a thin blanket.

“That magic lamp there only has two hours worth of magic crystals in it,” the old lady informed me.

It seemed that meant the magic lamp would automatically turn off in two hours. I was thoroughly beat, so staying up late wasn’t the plan anyway. As soon as the old lady left, I pulled the thin blanket over my head and conked out.

The sound of footsteps woke me up the next morning. It was difficult to keep the floor from creaking no matter how careful you were, so I couldn’t be mad. Once I was awake, I headed toward the well in the courtyard. The wooden floorboards groaned beneath my weight, and I heard someone somewhere suck their teeth in disapproval.

Lots of moody folks around here, huh...

I splashed some water on my face at the well and wiped it off with the hem of my shirt. Now that I thought about it, I lacked so many things; I didn’t even have a towel. I currently had 920 rims. The street stalls at the dungeon plaza sold a variety of items. If I looked hard enough, surely I could find a towel.

I’d been told I could leave at any time to check out, so I did my best to soundlessly make my way outside.

I purchased a towel for five hundred rims at a street stall that opened early in the morning. Although I called it a towel, it was a far cry from the type I knew. It was made of a simple cotton fabric. Still, it'd be useful to me. If I wrapped it around my neck, it could serve as a scarf, and I could also use it to wash my face or my body.

I went to browse the street stalls, searching for some cheap food to have for breakfast, when a lively voice called out to me.

"Oh, there you are! Is your store not open yet?"

It was Meryl and Mira.

"Good morning, Meryl. And good morning to you too, Mira."

"Hey, hey, is your store still not open yet?" Meryl asked again. "I think I wanna buy at least three more of that Ten-Rim Gum." Her expression pleaded with me that she simply couldn't wait.

"Roger that. Well, I'll be opening pretty soon, so come with me."

I led the two of them to a place that looked like a decent spot to set up shop.

"Store, open!" I said. "Dagashi-ya Yahagi!"

My carrying pole immediately appeared at my call.

"Oh my," Mira piped up happily, "you're a mage just like I am?"

Well, the truth was a little complicated... My job was just a dagashi-ya. "I'm not sure. This shop's about all I can do with my magic."

"Still, it's a rare power. Maybe it's a form of spatial manipulation magic?"

The free-spirited Meryl then butted into our conversation. "More importantly, I need that Ten-Rim Gum. If we don't hurry, we'll be late for our meeting time."

She had already bought so much yesterday, but it looked like she still hadn't had her fill.

"Are you going to be all right buying that much?" I asked her.

"If it's just thirty rims, then it's no big deal," she replied.

I guess there's nothing to worry about when my dagashi are so cheap.

"Also, I'm going to use that gum to dish out plenty of power shots in a row. I'll earn it all back and then some!"

"How do you earn money?" I asked. Mira and Meryl looked dumbfounded at the question.

"Obviously by taking down monsters, duh!"

Yeah, I figured that much.

"No, that's not what I'm talking about," I said, trying to clarify. "I want to know how defeating monsters translates into making money. I'm guessing you fulfill bounties or something?"

The two of them exchanged glances as if to say, *Is this guy right in the head?* And so, Mira carefully explained it to me like I was a five-year-old.

"When you defeat monsters," she said slowly, "they drop magic crystals and money before disappearing. Were you unaware?"

Well, I guess you learn something new every day.

"I see," I said, "so the more monsters you defeat, the more money you earn."

"Exactly," Meryl said before she paused. "Oh crap, it's getting late, Mira!"

"Oh no, we should be going now."

Meryl and Mira hurriedly gathered their things.

"We're off," said Meryl, "see you again tonight."

"Got it. You better come back alive!"

"Gosh, don't say such ominous things!"

"We'll come by again later," Mira said.

With that, the two of them dashed toward the dungeon's entrance.

"Hello—"

As if switching places with them, a group of young adventurers approached me. One of them had stopped by yesterday and was back this morning with a bunch of his buddies. All of the adventurers were young, with boyish innocence

still left in their faces.

“Welcome,” I greeted them.

“You still got those Curry Rice Crackers? I wanted to show them to my buddies.”

His friends were eyeing him doubtfully. “I heard those things are delicious and restore stamina. Is that even true?”

“I’m telling you, it’s true,” he insisted. “Fine, consider it a scam. Just buy one anyway. It’s only twenty rims.”

“Then I guess I’ll get one.”

“Same here.”

In the end, they picked up some cola-and soda-flavored Odama Candy along with the Curry Rice Crackers.

Product name: Odama Candy

Description: Slightly increases agility upon consumption. Flavors available include cola, soda, grape, lemon, and more.

Price: Ten rims

The morning rush was hectic. I didn’t get much time to sell my products, but I still turned a profit of 360 rims. With that, I had a total of 720 rims. Even so, another stay at the Safe Swindoll Con Inn remained 130 rims out of reach.

Peak hours started up around sundown. I stood there waiting for the adventurers to return to the surface, like a dad waiting for his kids to come home from primary school. Word had gotten around about my shop and soon enough, I had several customers buying my goods. It was around then that I spotted a familiar pair walking from afar. They were my two regulars, Meryl and Mira. But something was off. Meryl, who was usually so lively and cheerful, was holding on to Mira’s shoulder and dragging her feet.

“What’s the matter?” I called out, jumping up and rushing over to them.

“Meryl was caught in one of the dungeon’s traps,” Mira explained. “Now she’s under a dizziness spell.”

Dizziness spells were pretty mild and not life-threatening on their own. Still, the physical exhaustion they caused, as well as how they could immobilize you, could spell serious trouble if you were inside the dungeon.

“I’ve got just the thing for you. Come with me.”

I helped Mira bring Meryl over to where my shop was.

“Do you have a cup?” I asked Mira.

“I do.” She paused. “Oh, will you be giving her some medicine?”

“No, not medicine. I’ll be giving her a beverage.”

“A beverage?”

This was what I’d have Meryl drink:

Product name: Powdered Drink Mix (Grape flavor)

Description: Dissolve in 120 milliliters of cold water and drink. No fruit juices included. Effective against curses.

Price: Thirty rims

In addition, there were five other flavors, each with its own individual effect: grape was effective against curses, orange was an antidote, strawberry reduced mana cost for fifteen minutes, melon gave ten minutes of twenty percent EXP gain, and pineapple gave twenty percent rim gain for ten minutes.

“Mira, do you have any water?”

“I’ll make some right away.”

Mira produced a ball of water out of thin air.

“We don’t need that much,” I told her. “If there’s too much water, it dilutes

the taste and ruins it.”

If I was going to have Meryl drink this, I wanted her to actually enjoy it. I took the metal cup Mira handed me and mixed in the fine powder to make a grape-flavored beverage.

“Here. Drink up.”

“Mm-hmm...”

Meryl seemed to be struggling to breathe, but she opened her mouth a little. I slowly tipped the drink in. She swallowed and swallowed, drinking faster and faster, until she had drained the entire cup.

“Well?” I asked. “How are you feeling?”

“Isn’t there any more?” Meryl was now completely alert and well enough to demand a refill. The color had also returned to her previously pale face.

Whoa! The drink was unbelievably effective!

“Each packet only has a little bit of powder in it,” I said. “My dream as a kid was to use five of these things at once and throw them down the hatch.”

“I totally get that!”

As Meryl and I shared a good laugh, Mira remained astonished.

“Meryl, are you sure you’re all right now?” she asked.

“Yeah. I actually feel really refreshed!”

“That’s amazing...” Mira then turned to me. “Um, there seem to be five different flavors of that drink mix. Do they all have the same effect?”

After I explained the powdered drinks to them, Meryl jumped on the pineapple flavor. “Hey, wait a second. So, suppose I take down a giant bee. Giant bees usually drop at least a hundred rims. If I drink this beverage beforehand, I’ll get 120?!”

“Yeah, that sounds about right.”

“Gimme all ten of them!”

Wow, she just bought my entire stock.

Now I was all out of pineapple. Meanwhile, Mira was interested in some of the other flavors.

“I’d like three each of the grape and orange packets, please,” she said. I could guess she was a cautious person based on her choices—she’d chosen the flavors effective against curses and poisons.

“Now then, let’s try again at the Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins!”

After buying up all the pineapple-flavored packets, Meryl was sticking her hand in the Ten-Rim Chocolate Coin box. It was hard to believe that she’d been under a curse mere moments ago.

“Oh, I see you’ve come again.”

The young adventurers who had bought my Curry Rice Crackers had appeared. Somehow, it felt like there were even more of them than before.

“Welcome. How were the Curry Rice Crackers?”

“Thanks to them, I didn’t run out of stamina at all. I was skeptical at first, but they actually are the real deal. And the candy made it easier to move around. The boss had nothing but praise for me today!”

“So I assume you made a lot of money then?”

“Yep. That’s why we’re back to buy more stuff.”

The lively young adventurers noisily browsed through the goods.

“Hey, mister, what’s this?”

“That’s Magic Flute Ramune Candy,” I told the boy. “If you blow into it, it makes a high-pitched sound that attracts monsters.”

“What the hell? That’s super scary!”

“But wouldn’t it be great for luring a monster into a trap?”

“Oh yeah! Then I’ll buy one.”

“Just make sure you don’t use it in a place with too many strong monsters around,” I warned. “That’ll be sixty rims.”

My sales today were looking pretty good.

“Ugh! I lost again!” Meryl cried, indicating that she had lost the chocolate lottery yet again.

“Just give up already.”

Meryl brushed me off. “Shut up, I’m not done yet! I need another one!”

She was probably the type to lose big-time when it came to gambling, but it wasn’t so bad if all she was betting on were some Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins. Still, I was worried for her future.

“Meryl, you’re getting way too fired up. Buy this and eat it.”

“What is that?” she asked.

“It’s a Mini Mini Cola.”

The dagashi I showed her was a small plastic case packed with cola-flavored candy tablets. I personally really liked their superhard texture.

Product name: Mini Mini Cola

Description: Cola-flavored ramune candy. Has a calming effect.

Price: Forty rims

“It may be good for you to always have one on you, Meryl,” said Mira with a cute smile, “so you don’t ruin your own life.”

When I’d invested in that towel this morning, I’d prepared myself for the worst-case scenario of having to sleep outside tonight. However, thanks to the new regulars Meryl had brought me, I’d made over 3,000 rims. That meant I could afford another night at the good ol’ Swindoll Con Inn.

“Night’s stay? A break?” the innkeeper asked me. Since this wasn’t my first showdown with the innkeeper and her curt attitude, I was unfazed this time.

“I’ll be staying the night, please,” I told her.

“Your room from before is unoccupied, so use that. And don’t forget, keep it

down.”

It appeared the innkeeper remembered my face. That was probably only natural, since I’d stayed here just last night. Although, I might’ve simply stood out because of how Japanese my face looked. If I had to describe the typical look of the people here, many of them had more finely chiseled and defined features than I did.

Huh? The counter is stained on one corner. That wasn’t here yesterday.

“There’s a stain here...” I said hesitantly. The innkeeper let out an especially heavy sigh.

“There was a fistfight just a second ago, all right?” she said, exasperated. “Jeez. You try keeping this place clean and see how you do!”

Yeah, I’d had a feeling this was practically a den of thieves. Unfortunately, I still hadn’t made enough money to go to a better hotel. No matter how much I wanted it, my current situation didn’t allow it. Doing my best not to make a sound, I tiptoed up the stairs.

The next day, I once again woke up bright and early to head to the dungeon plaza. I was going to earn a little more money this time around so I could afford a slightly safer hotel.

I secured a spot closer to the dungeon’s entrance than usual and mentally recited the words, “Store, open.”

“Whoa!” I exclaimed. “Did I get an upgrade?”

What had appeared before me was my usual carrying pole, but it had some more goods now. Not only that, but the pineapple-flavored Powdered Drink Mix had also been restocked, and there was a large piece of cardstock hanging from my pole. When I turned it around, I was greeted with Rocket Bombs that took me back to my childhood.

Rocket Bombs were also called Jump Bullets. They were plastic toys. If you inserted the paper ammunition and threw the rocket, the gunpowder inside would burst upon impact, making a loud noise. It featured a lottery system,

which let you win a big Rocket Bomb or three small ones.

Yet, these Rocket Bombs were a bit different from what was sold back in Japan.

Product name: Rocket Bomb (Lottery item)

Description: Will violently detonate with Explosion Magic once thrown at a monster. Consumable item. The bigger the rocket, the stronger the impact.

Price: Fifty rims per try

No way! You gotta be kidding me... Is this really the kind of thing that a dagashi-ya should be selling?

I was considering not putting them up for sale since they were dangerous, but then I thought of Meryl and Mira. They made a living battling monsters. If these Rocket Bombs could make them even a little safer, then...

“Whoa, the pineapple drinks are back! They’re all mine!”

As lively as ever, Meryl and Mira appeared.

“You’re really gonna buy them again?” I asked.

“Uh, duh! Of course!” Meryl then caught sight of the Rocket Bombs. “What’s this?”

I did my best to explain the Rocket Bombs to them, but my knowledge of the magic they used was spotty. *I should ask the specialist here.*

“Hey, Mira,” I said, “is Explosion Magic strong?”

“Let’s see... It likely depends on the wielder, but it is quite effective as offensive magic. I can’t use it myself, however.”

In other words, you can’t be sure until you actually try it.

“How about trying your hand at the lottery, Meryl?” I suggested.

“Whaaat?” she whined, “but I only wanted the pineapple drink.”

She pushed three one-hundred-rim coins into my hand and swiftly pocketed all the packets.

“I’d like to try,” Mira smiled, raising her hand. She really did have a calming presence.

“Well then, have a go at it.” I presented her with a bunch of small paper pieces.

“Which one should I choose...?” she pondered aloud before her face lit up. “This one!”

She wound up pulling a ticket that had the number three on it. A number one ticket won you a large Rocket Bomb, two gave you a medium-sized Rocket Bomb, three gave you three small Rocket Bombs, four gave you two small Rocket Bombs, and five gave you one.

“Congratulations,” I said, handing Mira her prizes. “Here are three small Rocket Bombs for you. You really have some crazy luck with this stuff.”

Mira giggled, and while her smile was cute, her hands held deadly weapons.

“Handle those with care.”

“I’ll be fine. I’m used to handling magical items like this,” she assured me. “Also, these have locks on them to prevent them from exploding on their own. It seems you must channel magic into them to release the locks before you can use them.”

I had no idea!

Mira’s words lifted a weight off my shoulders. That meant the Rocket Bombs hanging off of my carrying pole wouldn’t just explode on me. With that, I was able to rest easy and continue selling them.

“Hey, Misteeer!”

It was early evening when Meryl returned from the dungeon and pounced on me.

“Whoa! Wh-What’s with you?” Her sudden grip on me threw me off.

“Today was totally awesome thanks to that pineapple drink mix! I think I earned like one thousand more rims than usual? Also, those Rocket Bombs were crazy!”

“How so?”

“One of them blew up a Poison Lizard in a single shot!” she exclaimed. “Those things usually put up a pretty tough fight, but the Rocket Bomb one-shotted it! Now I’m definitely gonna try that lottery! Hurry, hurry!”

Mira arrived just as Meryl was taking a stab at the lottery.

“I have returned.” She then noticed Meryl. “I see she wasted no time trying out the lottery for herself.”

“She seems pretty pumped about it.”

“That’s because anyone can use those Rocket Bombs. They’re not as powerful as the magic some veteran adventurers might use, but they’re perfectly useful.”

I see. At a mere fifty rims, it gives a pretty good bang for a newbie adventurer’s buck.

Meryl took her time choosing before she pulled her lottery ticket.

“No!” she despaired, “I got number five!”

Down on her gambling luck as always...

“Hello,” greeted one of my other regulars as they came over, “I heard you got new items in stock.” A small boy followed in their wake.

“Welcome,” I said. “It seems to be your first time here.”

“That’s right,” the boy said. “My name is Rigal. I work as a porter. I don’t have much pocket money, but I heard I could buy things here for as little as ten rims.”

“You’ve heard correctly. There’re ten-rim snacks around here.”

Dagashi-ya existed precisely for little kids like him. The shop grew lively with a crowd of customers, and even as the sky grew darker, they didn’t let me close up shop for quite a while.

I had earned more today, but still not enough to have any real leeway in my budget. That meant yet another night at the Safe Swindoll Con Inn.

“So, you’re here again?”

Now that I’d hit my third night here, the innkeeper was softening up a little.

“Yes. I need another night’s stay, please.”

“I’ll give you a discount if you’re staying more than two days in a row. It’s 3,500 rims for an additional five days.”

That would only save me around 150 rims per day. I did want to move on to a better hotel soon, but I was still nowhere near having that luxury. It’d also be good for my food expenses. In order to eat well, I’d have to put up at the Swindoll Con Inn for a while longer.

“I won’t force you if you don’t want to,” she said.

“No, I gratefully accept.”

I paid the 3,500 rims up front.

“Also, about that room of yours...” the innkeeper started then hesitated. What could make someone as blunt as her hold back?

“Did something happen?” I asked.

“Your neighbor tonight is a particularly dangerous character, so watch out.”

“Are they a criminal or something?”

The Swindoll Con Inn seemed like the perfect hideout for unsavory types, but the innkeeper’s head shook atop her thick neck.

“Nah, he ain’t that kinda small fry. The guy next to you is a man they call a Shinigami, a god of death. There’s no concrete proof, but rumors say he’s killed countless people.”

That’s scary as hell!

“Why are the authorities letting someone like that roam around freely?” I asked.

“You really don’t know anything, huh... Wait a sec.”

I didn't know if she was simply bored or what, but the innkeeper made me some tea. It tasted like something between roasted green tea and black tea. I felt bad letting her treat me, so I summoned my carrying pole and picked out a snack.

Product name: Chocodora

Description: Two bite-size dorayaki with chocolate cream filling. If you share them with someone, you two will become closer. Existing friendships will become even stronger. Don't make them eat too much. Abusing it is prohibited!

Price: Thirty rims

My goal wasn't to seduce the innkeeper or anything, but I still chose the Chocodora because it seemed just right for two people to split.

We aren't going to get too close, right? I'm kinda scared.

"Please feel free to help yourself," I said, offering the Chocodora to her. "It's one of the snacks I sell at my shop."

"Oh ho, you shouldn't have," she said, tossing the Chocodora into her mouth. Her face lit up. "This is delicious! I had no idea you were selling this kinda stuff. How much for one?"

"Thirty rims."

"Cheap, ain't it? Sell me ten."

I'd never pictured making sales somewhere like this, but here we were. I also ate my half of the Chocodora and took a sip of my tea. "So why are the authorities letting him run loose?"

"Oh. That." The innkeeper tore open one of the packages of Chocodora she had just bought and munched away. It appeared she was going to eat them all by herself. I had no objections to that. If we shared any more of those things, we might wind up as lovers. Then, if she happened to have a husband, I'd find

myself stuck square in the middle of an affair—the last place I wanted to be. I shut up and sipped my tea.

“You know that this country is at war, right?”

This was actually news to me, but I kinda nodded anyway.

“Our best generals and soldiers are all deployed at the border. On top of that, you gotta remember the king’s curse.”

“What curse is that?”

“You don’t know that either?”

“I just arrived here a few days ago.”

The innkeeper relaxed. “Then I suppose you couldn’t have known. The king had a fiancée, once upon a time. She was a famous witch by the name of Michelle. But then one day, their engagement was suddenly called off.”

“Why is that?”

“Because the king fell in love with our current queen,” the innkeeper sighed. “How cruel it was. The queen’s the kind of voluptuous and beautiful woman who can instantly capture the hearts of men. Even our king couldn’t resist her charms. Men, I swear...”

“So that witch got mad and cursed him.”

“From what the rumors say, he’s so unwell that he’s bedridden, and his skin’s turned scaly, like a fish’s.”

Doesn’t sound like something the grape-flavored Powdered Drink Mix could fix.

“Ever since the king stepped down from government affairs, this town’s grown more and more lawless. Even if there are shady folks around, no one looks into them.”

So that’s why the Shinigami is still around... “And so, what happened with the witch?”

“Seems she escaped deep into the dungeon. The reason high-ranking adventurers are so eager to head down there is to capture her.”

In order to break the curse, the witch had to be caught. It was true that taking down monsters was a part of an adventurer's job, but the ultimate goal was apparently to apprehend that witch. She had a one-hundred-million-rim bounty on her head.

So, it was a one-sided breakup...

"You know," I said, "I kinda feel sorry for that witch."

The innkeeper looked at me with some surprise.

"Indeed. However, you'd better keep that to yourself in this town. Those soldiers won't do a damn thing about the criminals, but they'll be sure to get you if you dare insult royalty."

Yikes. If word about what I'd just said got out, I'd be in big trouble. I decided I'd thank the innkeeper and head back to my room.

"Thank you for the tea."

"Sure. And I'll say it again but be very careful around your neighbor. Don't be trying to peek into his room either."

"Um, can't you give me another room?"

"Sorry, but we're booked up."

I had just started getting used to this world. I didn't wanna die yet. I took my time climbing the stairs so that I wouldn't produce even a single decibel of sound.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 2

I made a really stupid mistake again (sob). There's a stone gargoyle statue that casts a dizziness curse on you if you touch it, and I just grabbed it.

But it's not my fault! I mean, it was right where there was some uneven footing, and that bald head was perfect for grabbing on to! My superior literally warned me about it too, yet I did it anyway. That got me a little depressed. With Mira's help, I managed to get out of the dungeon, but the urge to vomit was so intense, and I was so dizzy that I thought I was going to die.

Luckily, the dagashi-ya's owner gave me something good to help with that. It was a drink that could cure curses. I drank that grape-smelling drink, and what do you know? I was back to normal, and I even felt refreshed! It's crazy that something like that is only thirty rims. The one bad thing about it is how little of it there is in the packet. If I had some more money to spare, I'd wanna get a beer mug, throw ten of them in there, and chug the whole thing.

Really, though, the shop owner is super nice to me... Wait, does he like me? I mean, I personally think I'm kinda cute but... Nah, there's no way. I'll eat some of that Mini Mini Cola I bought and calm down.

There was a new item in stock today. They're called Rocket Bombs. I didn't care about them at first since they weren't food, but then Mira tried the lottery. As expected of her scary-good luck, she won three of those things. Man, I must've been born under the unluckiest star in the universe. I didn't win at anything today!

No, I can't be that unlucky. A five-hundred-rim coupon is bound to come out of those Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins sooner or later. So I'll keep buying them every day until I finally win! I'll show them all! That's what I call Meryl's Way!

Aah, I got off track again. I'll eat another piece of the Mini Mini Cola... Munch munch. These are actually pretty tasty and addictive. The tiny bottle they come in is cute, and its size makes it easy to carry around.

Oh, yeah, the Rocket Bombs. Today, we stumbled into an area where there were a bunch of Poison Lizards around. I hate those things. Honestly, I think anyone who specializes in short-range combat feels the same way. I mean, their blood is poisonous.

It's not like you die from getting their blood splattered on you, but you do develop a super itchy rash if you touch it. It sucks. But with those Rocket Bombs, even a soldier like me can make long-range attacks. Their power also isn't half bad, so they'd be really good against enemies with low defense. Even if I got put up against an enemy with a thick hide, I think I'd be able to use them to stun it so I can get some good attacks in with my sword. It'll probably be a popular item for adventurers who use one-handed weapons.

That's why I'm going to try that Rocket Bomb lottery again and again. Of course, I'll be aiming for the number one ticket! It seems like the bigger the rocket, the more powerful it is. Even the dagashi-ya's owner had no idea of the extent of it.

Wait, maybe it'd be so powerful, it'd be good against stuff like Evil Kongs or Giant Golden Frogs! Evil Kongs consistently give 80,000 rims while Giant Golden Frogs drop gold bars sometimes. In that case, I'd make a fortune, and then I could buy all the Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins I could ever want!!! All right, I'm going to pull that Rocket Bomb lottery like nobody's business!!!

Chapter 3: The Shinigami and the Dagashi-ya

Knowing that the Shinigami was sleeping right next door, I couldn't seem to shut my eyes. If I so much as snored, would he appear, scythe in hand, to slay me? Such delusions ate away at me, frustrating my attempts to sleep. Still, I guess I was just so tired from work today that in no time at all, I had drifted off.

Next thing I knew, it was the middle of the night. I didn't have a clock on me, so I had no idea what time it was. My surroundings were still pitch-black and cloaked in stillness. The only voice I heard was the silent scream of my own bladder. That was what had woken me. I *really* had to pee.

At this rate, I'd be wetting my pants here. If that happened, I'd be put on this inn's blacklist for sure. The Innkeeper would never let me stay here again, and I'd be in huge trouble. Inns this cheap didn't exactly grow on trees. Even so, the toilet was in the courtyard. This late at night, the chances were high that any noise I made would wake the Shinigami. To die or to pee—that was the question.

I girded my loins and stood. Rather than bow my head and submit to living in shame, I had resolved to die a noble death. I let ten seconds pass before I slowly opened the door and stepped into the dark hallway. To my surprise, the door next to mine had been left ajar, and light was pouring from inside. *So, the Shinigami is awake...*

I wanted to turn back, but my near-bursting bladder was holding me at gunpoint. I had to pass the Shinigami's door in order to reach the staircase. There was no other option!

But my curiosity would be the death of me. I knew it was a bad idea, but the urge was impossible to hold back.

If it really is just for an instant, then maybe...

Even though I knew I shouldn't, I peeked into the Shinigami's room.

The layout was exactly like mine and equally cramped. It was empty, with the Shinigami nowhere to be found. But something on the bed caught my attention.

“Why is something like that...”

The items were neither a skull nor a scythe. They were pale-pink pieces of women’s underwear. It was a proper set, with both bra and panties. They were probably made of silk, judging from their luster. Despite the distance, I could tell that the cup size was large.

No way! The Shinigami is a panty thief?! Or is this just what he’s into?

If it was just something he liked to do, then I had no problem with it. I myself had enjoyed gender-swapping apps in my previous life. It wasn’t like I didn’t understand the appeal. So long as they weren’t stolen, I had no right to deny the man his personal freedom. I decided to pretend I’d seen nothing and hurried to the toilet.

Basking in the glory of an empty bladder, I strolled into the courtyard. *My heart and body feel so much lighter now...* In a good mood, I looked up and noticed a faint light peeking from the eastward horizon. Dawn was apparently just around the corner, and the crows were greeting it with caws. There was probably no reason to head back to my room. Instead of risking my life for a bit of extra sleep, it was better to just check out.

Maybe a bite of breakfast first? I was getting hungry now that I’d relaxed. But once I was outside, I realized that no shops would be open at this hour. Having no other option, I mentally recited the words “Store, open” to pick something out from my own goods.

“Huh? I think I got an upgrade.”

In the brightening courtyard, my slightly upgraded carrying pole appeared. Up until now, I’d only had two large plates hanging evenly from each end, but now there were tiny little chests instead. I could make a nice display of my goods by opening each drawer like a staircase.

“Oh,” I said, picking up a small pack of potato chips, “looks like I got more stuff now.”

Product name: Monster Chips

Description: Lightly salted potato chips. A monster card is included inside. Using it, you can summon a monster for three minutes. There's a 1-in-3,000 chance of obtaining the SSSR card, Ancient Dragon Bismarck!

Price: One hundred rims

This looked like yet another item that would please the adventurers. *I'll try one. Let's see...*

As I munched away at the potato chips, I opened up the monster card.

Flying Snake C (Common): This monster can fly using the wings on its back. It specializes in aerial attacks.

Habitats: Dungeon B1 and Jambala Plains

Signature Moves: [Coiling Attack] [Poison Fang]

If I started building a deck with these cards, I could probably head into the dungeon myself. But I wouldn't stand a chance against a direct hit. It was for the best that I didn't go anywhere dangerous. I decided to keep the card in case of an emergency.

The potato chips were good, but their small quantity didn't appease my hunger. I opened up a bag of Chocodora. *This stuff's pretty filling actually*, I thought to myself.

"Hey, who's over there?"

A low, husky voice that seemed to resound from the depths of hell made me let out a small squeak of terror. When I turned around, a dark-haired figure in jet-black clothes was standing there. I couldn't read his expression due to the silver mask he wore. However, his glowing pupils captured me in their gaze. *So, this is the Shinigami...?*

“I’m a street vendor, and these here are my products—dagashi.”

Dear lord, have mercy on me. Please don’t kill me!

“Dagashi... Are they snacks?”

“Yes! Would you like one?”

I really didn’t want to die, so I offered the Shinigami the other half of my Chocodora. He did hesitate for a second, but he accepted the food and slid it under the mask and into his mouth.

Oh, I just shared a Chocodora with the Shinigami...

“Delicious...”

Wait, what? I could’ve sworn I heard a woman’s voice just now...

“Ahem, ahem! I mean, it’s good...”

Huh. Guess it was my imagination. His voice had turned husky again.

“I’m glad to hear it,” I said.

“What else do you have...?”

“What? You mean my goods?”

“Yes.”

After I finished explaining my products to him, the Shinigami snagged one snack after another until he’d racked up a bill of over 1,000 rims. Was this because the Chocodora made him more amiable toward me?



“Do you like sweets?”

“No, not really.” He’d denied it, but the majority of his purchases had been sweets. He’d completely passed over the Rocket Bombs, Curry Rice Crackers, and Monster Chips.

“Are you always at this inn?” he asked.

“For now.”

“I see.”

Once he’d paid for his snacks, the Shinigami quietly left. At some point, the sky had turned bright, and now the sparrows were loudly chirping. It seemed I had lived to tell the tale.

Meryl arrived at my shop very early in the morning and immediately began worrying about me. “You okay? You look pretty pale.”

“I was staying at an inn for the night, and a guy they call the Shinigami was right next door to me. I was so scared I couldn’t sleep.”

“I know him!” she exclaimed. “He wears a silver mask, right?”

“Yeah, him!”

It seemed he was pretty infamous.

“That guy is a saber master. Once, I saw him slice up a Giant Snake that was two meters in diameter!”

“And not only that,” Mira said, putting her two cents in, “I witnessed him using second-rank magic. I’d never seen anyone wield such incredible magic before.”

So even Mira knows the guy, huh?

“Are the rumors about him killing tons of adventurers true?” I asked.

“Who knows,” said Meryl, “but I’ve seen him beat up adventurers who came around asking for trouble.”

“I as well. I’ve witnessed him defeating ten people at once.”

Okay, so he's still scary.

"Oh! A new item!" Meryl was looking at the Monster Chips now. "And it has a monster card inside? That sounds like fun!"

"I would also like one."

The two of them purchased the newly stocked Monster Chips.

"There should be a small pack inside," I informed them. "That's where the monster card is. And what do you know? You'll be able to use that card to summon a monster for three minutes." The two of them promptly opened up their chip bags and took out their monster cards.

"Wow! An R-Rank Stone Golem! This is a good card suitable for both offensive and defensive purposes."

"That's great, Mira! How about you, Meryl?"

"A slime..."

Ah, Meryl. That horrible luck of hers never disappointed.

"Oh right, Mira. How about you do a bit of part-time work for me?"

"Like what?"

"It's just that I got even more new goods in stock," I said, pulling out the items, "but I'm gonna need you to use your magic to freeze them."

Product name: Anzu Stick

Description: Minced apricots soaked in syrup contained in a stick-shaped pouch. Fills you with courage upon consumption.

Price: Thirty rims

Anzu Sticks were tasty enough to eat on their own but freezing made them more like sherbet, which was extra enjoyable. However, Mira gave me an apologetic look.

"I'm sorry. I can't actually use Ice Magic."

“I see... That’s too bad.”

“Should I use it instead?” came a voice from behind me. It was husky and just a bit too familiar...

“Shi—”

I just barely managed to bite back the word “Shinigami.” That man dressed all in black was standing there.

“Welcome.”

“Mm-hmm. So what do you want me to do?” The pupils looming within his silver mask bored holes into me. I was terrified of offending him, so I decided to just accept the favor.

“I’d love to take you up on your offer,” I said, treading carefully with my words, “but I wouldn’t know how to repay you. I don’t have much money...” The change of clothes I’d bought from the marketplace earlier had left me with only 2,500 rims.

“No need.”

Cold gusts of air gushed from his hands, and the Anzu Sticks froze up in a flash. He’d used his magic for me for free. *Maybe he’s actually a nice guy.*

“Well, help yourself to one of the Anzu Sticks you froze for me then. It’s tasty, like a sherbet.”

“Sure...”

The Shinigami inserted the Anzu Stick through his mask. He bit into it then chewed in total silence.

Oh god, does he not like it?

“Sell me ten of them.”

Nope, it seems he does.

Relieved, I sold him ten of the Anzu Sticks and pocketed three hundred rims. I thought he would just go home now, but he plopped down in front of the shop and started browsing my goods. Somehow, I got the feeling he was having fun. He didn’t care at all that the hem of his long black cloak was trailing on the

ground as he looked over my snacks. Thanks to him, no other customers would dare approach my shop. That was a big problem for me, but there was no way I could speak up about it.

“Well, we must be going now.”

“See ya!”

Mira and Meryl practically ran away. My other regulars similarly scampered off to the dungeon.

I probably wouldn't get any more customers this morning, so long as the Shinigami was hanging around my shop. Even the veteran adventurers took major detours the second they laid eyes on him.

The Shinigami had gone to the trouble of freezing the Anzu Sticks for me, but they had already thawed by early evening.

If I level up some more, will I get a refrigerator or a freezer? Now that I thought about it, I remembered that old dagashi-ya had featured a glass refrigerator. As a new dagashi-ya myself, I would have loved to display my drinks like that.

“Hey there! Lemme try that Rocket Bomb lottery.”

One of my regulars arrived. It was around the time people would usually be resurfacing from the dungeon, but I felt like there were fewer than normal.

“There aren't a lot of people today,” I commented.

“Nope. Apparently, the witch was spotted for the first time in a while down below. I think all the high-ranking adventurers are after her right now.” Then he paused, looking at what he'd pulled. “Oh, I got a number three.”

“Congratulations. Here're three small Rocket Bombs for you.”

“I guess if I got three of those, I may as well grab some drinks and Magic Flute Ramune too. You still got any of that drink mix?”

“Everything except pineapple, sure.”

“Then I want the strawberry and melon ones!”

It had become popular to buy Rocket Bombs, Magic Flute Ramune, and Powdered Drink Mixes as a set. The adventurers first drank a Powdered Drink Mix that gave fifteen minutes of reduced mana cost or one that gave ten minutes of twenty percent EXP gain. Next, they'd use the Magic Flute Ramune to attract the monsters, and finally they'd use the Rocket Bombs to blow them all away. Apparently, it was a winning strategy among young adventurers. This set usually went for 120 rims. I also felt it was only a matter of time before the hundred-rim Monster Chips gained popularity too. They were a little on the pricey side compared to my other products, but they were both practical and probably irresistible to collectors.

All the items lining my shop were cheap, but they actually cost nothing to stock. That meant any money they brought in turned into profit for me. At this rate, I could finally kiss the Swindoll Con Inn goodbye within the week. If that happened, I could move to a safer inn, or even rent an apartment if I wanted to. My overoptimistic calculations carried me away into a daydream.

Once I have more spending money, I can live a better life, and a lover might not be out of reach... Yeah, if we're gonna eventually move in together, I gotta go with the apartment... Ehe heh heh.

"Hey."

A fox-eyed warrior would still be my ideal type of woman. Even if I was in a different world now, that much hadn't changed. Also, I would've had to settle for a cosplayer if I wanted someone who ticked those boxes in my past life, but here? *If I actually looked around, I could definitely find someone like that.*

"Hey."

Someone with an easygoing personality, but who can be unexpectedly fierce in bed...

"Hey!"

"Whoa?!"

When I snapped out of my daydream, the Shinigami was squatting right there and staring up at me.

"W-Welcome, Shinigami."

Yikes! It slipped out...

“Who the hell are you calling Shinigami? My name is Mi—”

“Mi?”

“Minerva...”

I’d thought I was a goner, but instead he simply picked up one of my dagashi. “Give this to me,” he said, handing me the orange-flavored Powdered Drink Mix. It was a flavor that had some efficacy against poison. Come to think of it, his clothes were dirty all over and torn up.

“If you’re buying the orange flavor, does that mean you’ve been poisoned?”

“It’s nothing...”

That was what he said, but I could see how pale the nape of his neck was. It was hard to believe it really was just nothing. I made a cup of the drink for him on the spot. Maybe because we’d shared a Chocodora before, I found I couldn’t simply leave him be.

“Here,” I said, offering him the cup, “drink up.”

Minerva didn’t say anything, but he drank slowly to savor the flavor. I had used two packets to make it a little stronger.

“Well? Do you feel like the poison’s worn off?”

“Yes...”

Huh? His voice sounded a little high-pitched just now.

“I-I’m fine. Ahem, ahem.”

Nope, it’s the usual husky voice.

“I’ll come again.”

Minerva paid before disappearing into the crowd. It was only after I’d lost sight of him that I realized something.

Wait. Pause... Isn’t Minerva a woman’s name? Maybe not? At least, not in this world...

I leveled up again a few days later. It seemed that these level-ups were related to my sales, but the exact details were beyond me since I didn't keep an account book. What I gathered was that the more I sold, the more my shop would upgrade. In any case, I got a full restock along with some new products—most notably, the Scratch Card.

Product name: Scratch Card

Description: Receive a stat bonus when you line up matching pictures. Depending on the pictures, you may receive increased physical strength, increased speed, or increased magical strength. (Lasts half a day.)

There is also a chance to win a two-hundred-rim coupon. Effects will not stack. Gum included.

Price: Thirty rims

I had experienced my first taste of gambling at the dagashi-ya. Now that I thought about it, dagashi-ya had items that required a good deal of luck. The one I used to frequent had tradable coupons stuck on some cardstock, with the ultimate prize being a two-hundred-yen coupon. Sure, I'd lost more often than not, but it was something I'd tried anyway when my wallet allowed.

If the stat bonuses from these Scratch Cards only lasted half a day, I should sell them first thing in the morning. There were people who headed to the dungeon at night, but not many.

I need to make sure Meryl doesn't get too fired up, I thought to myself.

As of late, Meryl had been keeping a firm grip on that Mini Mini Cola of hers that helped keep her head cool.

"Mornin'!"

"Good morning, Garmr."

My first customer of the day was the young adventurer who had introduced my Curry Rice Crackers to his buddies. He was also one of my very first regulars,

after Meryl and Mira.

“Oh, I see you got some new stuff,” Garmr noted.

“Right, so these are Scratch Cards—”

I explained them to him, and they seemed to pique his interest.

“Huh, sounds like fun,” he said. “No harm in trying my luck when it’s just thirty rims.”

“Take whichever one you want.”

Garmr did as I said and peeled a card off of the thin cardboard. “So what am I supposed to do with this?” he asked me.

“You scratch the silver circles on it with a coin.”

Garmr took a ten-rim coin from his pocket and began scratching away.

“All right, let’s see... Oh! There’s a picture now.”

Indeed, it was a picture of a sword.

“You’ll get increased physical strength if you get three of those pictures in a row,” I informed him. That definitely got him excited.

“All right then...” Eyes sparkling with anticipation, he started scraping the second circle. That increased physical strength would be useful to Garmr since he was a soldier. The next image that showed up was...

“Hell yeah! Two in a row!”

He now had two swords. But this wasn’t an uncommon situation. Whether the last one would also match was the real kicker here. Biting his tongue, Garmr scratched off the last circle. His buddies had appeared in the meanwhile and were watching the results over his shoulder.

“O-Oh!!!”

The last image was also of a sword. The moment the third matching picture appeared, the card released a dazzling red light that was absorbed into Garmr’s heart.

“Whoooa, what the hell is this?! I feel so powerful!”

It seemed that the card had swiftly come into effect.

“That’ll last only about half a day, so be careful,” I warned him. “Well, I’m sure it’ll be long enough for your dungeon crawl today.”

“G-Give me one!” one of the boys shouted.

“I want one too!” said another. “And some of that Cola Candy!”

Business was booming as usual for Dagashi-ya Yahagi. That was good news for me, since it meant I could buy many of the necessities I had been lacking, like clothes or a bag or a comb. There was a lot I still needed.

“Whoa! You’ve got even more interesting things now!” Meryl exclaimed, arriving with Mira in tow.

“They’re Scratch Cards—one of my new products,” I told them.

“Wow, thirty rims, huh? Well, those cards won’t scratch themselves, so...”

I had to step in.

“Stop right there, Meryl. Have a piece of the Mini Mini Cola before you try it.”

Meryl groaned. “Ugh... Okay, fine.” She took out the tiny bottle she always carried and put one of the hard beads in her mouth. “Happy?”

“Just so you know what you’re getting yourself into, it’s common to lose at this. And if you do, all you’ll get is gum.”

“That only makes me even more determined...”

Meryl took her time selecting a card. Then, of all things, she decided to use a silver one-thousand-rim coin to scratch the first circle.

“I’ll be even luckier using a silver coin!” she declared.

There was literally no basis for that. It was just the gambling addiction talking.

The first image that appeared under the foil she scratched off was a staff. If she matched three staffs, she would get increased magical strength. But her hopes shattered before her eyes when she scratched off the second circle. Beneath the foil appeared a picture of boots, which would have given her a speed boost.

“Ugh... And another one bites the dust...”

Hey, you’re using that phrase wrong.

She never ceased to amaze me. The results of her Scratch Card revealed a staff, boots, and a crown, none of which matched. Most people at least got two.

“That sucks. If only you’d gotten three crowns, you would’ve gotten a stat boost across the board.”

“One more... Just one more!”

Chewing her pity gum, Meryl reached for another Scratch Card.

“Just give it up already.”

“But the rumors these past few days say that the witch is in the lower levels of the dungeon, right?” she protested. “So I wanna give my abilities an extra boost, even if it’s only by a little bit.”

Say what now?

“Wait, wasn’t the witch living way underground?” I asked.

“Yeah, about that... There were eyewitness accounts placing her on B3 yesterday. The top team managed to hit her with a special poisoned dart, but she got away in the end.”

“Huh. By the way, what does this witch look like? It seems everyone else is already in the know, so is there a wanted poster or something out there?”

“It’s posted over at the plaza in front of the royal palace,” she informed me. “Oh, also, the Chime Blossom Bugs are attracted to the witch’s body, as a reaction to the curse she cast on the king.”

“Chime Blossom Bugs?”

“They’re bugs that live in the dungeon. They usually don’t make a sound, but whenever the witch is nearby, they start letting out this shrill noise.”

So, like a bell cricket.

“As low-ranking adventurers, we run the second we hear those bugs start wailing.”

I hummed in thought. “Then get me one of those bugs.”

“Why?”

“Well, because a Chime Blossom Bug could alert me if the witch is nearby. And if it starts screaming, I’ll go running.”

“You scaredy-cat. The witch never comes out of the dungeon.”

You sure? I mean, I’m guessing even the witch needs to procure food and snacks.

“Also, the Chime Blossom Bugs can’t live outside of the dungeon depths.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. And you can only find those bugs on floors B2 and below.”

Come to think of it, I doubt she would attack a dagashi-ya. It was the king she resented, not the rest of us. Wait, no, everyone’s after her, so there’s the distinct possibility she’s hostile toward all of humanity now... I think I’ll stop by that wanted poster when I stretch my legs after the morning rush.

For breakfast, I had some vegetable soup and a big sausage from a street stall. I was thrilled that I finally had enough money to eat whatever I wanted. My soup was 150 rims, and the sausage was 350. Food with meat in it was generally pricey, so the common folk couldn’t often eat it.

With my belly full, I strolled toward the plaza in front of the royal palace just like I had planned, buying a leather knapsack at a bag store along the way. It was a large knapsack that looked like something an adventurer would use. It seemed convenient for storing daily commodities. I used up most of my funds buying it, leaving only 3,000 rims in my pocket.

The royal plaza was way bigger than the dungeon plaza, and it was cleaner to boot. I could tell they likely hired people to clean it. A billboard was set up in one corner, and some official government notices were pinned there, informing the people about the toll at the bridge going up, and that a felon had been arrested. It was like a very basic daily gazette.

I looked all around for what I had come here for and quickly found the witch

Michelle's wanted poster. It was a sheet of paper about as big as a movie poster, with her portrait drawn on it. Her black eyes were tired and listless, with some faint dark circles under them. Her hair was jet-black and reached past her shoulders, and her large chest strained against her white blouse. While she was gloomy and reserved, I had no doubt she was beautiful. *She does look a little sulky though...*

"So this is Michelle... She's rather pretty," I said without thinking.

"You think?" a husky voice spoke from behind me.

"Whoa?!" I yelped, jumping back involuntarily. The Shinigami stood there in his silver mask. "Minerva! Don't scare me like that!"

"It's not like I meant to..." he mumbled.

Maybe it was because of the Chocodora we'd shared, but I wasn't so afraid of him anymore.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me.

"I just wanted to know what that rumored witch looked like."

The Shinigami and I gazed up at the wanted poster together.

"Are you after the witch too?"

"Not at all," I said. "I'm just a street vendor. And I can't help feeling a little sorry for her..."

Oh, oops, should I not have said that? I had completely forgotten the innkeeper's warning. But Minerva didn't really seem to care.

"What makes you say that?" he asked.

"I mean, she suffered a one-sided breakup, right?" I said, trying to explain my position. "I do think that casting a curse on the king was going too far, but there is some room for sympathy here."

"Hm... By the way..."

Somehow, the Shinigami seemed a little fidgety. *What's getting him so worked up?*

"Um...were you being serious?"

“About what?”

“Wh-What you just said. That you thought she was pretty or something.”

“Oh, you’re talking about the witch.”

“Yeah. Uh, what’s special about her?”

Hm. Maybe despite himself, the Shinigami preferred a woman who looked more cheerful rather than reserved? I suppose it is true that people want what they don’t find in themselves.

“Well, isn’t she rather good-looking? Sure, she does seem a little gloomy, but you might find out she’s a good woman if you started dating her.”

“Hm... So you see it that way, huh. But she wasn’t popular at all...or so I heard from the rumors...”

It felt like we might be talking for a while, so I brought out one of my store’s new products—Carol Chocolate. They were bite-size chocolates that came in a variety of flavors, with really fun and colorful packaging.

Product name: Carol Chocolate

Description: Bite-size chocolates. Slightly increases your happiness upon consumption.

Price: Twenty rims

“Feel free to have one,” I said, offering it to him. “It’s chocolate.”

“Th-Thank you...” The sweets-loving Shinigami ripped the wrapping paper right open.

“Well, continuing where we left off, I didn’t expect to hear she was unpopular.”

“People in this country prefer lively women. Plus, she has absolutely no sex appeal.”

That surprised me. “Huh, really? But isn’t it sexy for a woman to look a little tired? She has big boobs too. I could totally go for her.”

“Y-You think? She also has a large butt, you know. Doesn’t that make her body look awkward?”

“That’s even better!” I exclaimed. “She definitely gives off the vibe that it’s easy to set her off, but she’s got plenty of other charms to make up for it.”

How had my conversation with the Shinigami turned into locker-room talk? Also, I felt really protective of the witch for some weird reason. It was especially strange since I’d never even met her.

“By the way, you’re pretty knowledgeable about the witch, right?”

“I only spotted her once a long time ago.”

“Don’t tell me you’re actually a fan of hers,” I teased.

“Hmph. I hate that woman.” Minerva pushed the Carol Chocolate under his mask and into his mouth. He paused. “Ah, it’s strawberry flavored...”

“My shop has four flavors of that chocolate in stock right now. There’s strawberry, caramel, milk, and pistachio.”

“G-Give me every box!”

As expected of a lover of sweets! I suddenly earned 2,400 rims all in one go.

“Your name?” he said out of the blue.

“Huh?”

“I’m asking for your name...”

“Ah. My name is Yusuke Yahagi.”

“Yusuke, huh.”

I was really enjoying my time with the Shinigami, and we’d begun to talk more and more casually. Was this the magic of the Carol Chocolates?

“You know, I am happy that you buy my products, but eating too many sweets isn’t good for you.”

“I mean, like, I can’t help it. I just love them.”

Like? He had suddenly taken on a more cutesy way of speaking... But he still had the husky voice of a man.

“Ah, I mean... I like them so much, I can’t stop eating them.”

Oh, right. Minerva owned some women’s undergarments, those pink ones made of silk. There was a chance he had some desire to become a woman. *Everyone has secrets they can’t tell anyone else*, I thought to myself. *I shouldn’t just pry into it.*

The two of us talked about all sorts of things, like snacks and recent news, until it was almost noon. We ended up becoming pretty close.

“By the way, I just wanted to confirm it one more time...”

“Confirm what?”

“You really think that witch is cute?”

“Don’t make me keep saying it,” I griped, a little exasperated. “All I said was that she was kind of my type, but I can’t know for sure unless I meet her.”

“Hm...”

I couldn’t tell you why, but the Shinigami was pretty persistent about that topic.

The evening sun was dyeing the westward horizon a bloodred color. I’d been pretty restless ever since this morning, plagued by an inexplicable feeling of foreboding that kept me uneasy. I’d broken my display by kicking my carrying pole immediately after opening my store, and I’d accidentally given back too much change.

Nothing good ever happens on days like this.

The most unusual thing today was how Meryl kept winning at things left and right, from the Odama Candy to Ten-Rim Gum to the rare card she got from the Monster Chips.

“Whoooa!!!” she exclaimed. “I got the Ghost Knight card!!!”

Even a mere R (Rare) card was a miracle for someone like Meryl.

“Incredible...” Mira said in awe. “You might die tomorrow, Meryl.”

“Don’t say things like that, Mira! Today’s just my lucky day, and you know

what they say! A day like this only comes three times in your entire life.”

You shouldn't be wasting such a precious day at a dagashi-ya... And honestly, I couldn't help feeling that this was more my *unlucky* day.

“I'm going for the Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins next, Mister Yusuke!” Meryl declared. “It's payback time!”

“Payback?! What did I ever do to you??”

The dungeon plaza began to grow rowdy in the middle of our argument. I looked around, wondering what the fuss was about, before I saw a body of soldiers headed our way.

“We're here to check your license. All merchants must present one!”

I broke out into a cold sweat. By license, he meant something like a business permit, right? I had just up and started my business without permission, so I didn't have anything like that. *Am I in trouble?*

I thought about closing up my shop and running away, but I didn't want to do something so unlawful in front of Mira and Meryl.

“Show us your license.”

I decided I'd be honest and tell these soldiers the truth.

“My deepest apologies,” I said sincerely. “I don't have one.”

“What was that? How long have you been running this business?”

“I started about eight days ago.”

“And is that true?”

My regulars around me corroborated my claim.

“Usually, we jail people like you,” said the soldier, “but your honesty is admirable. I'll let this slide just once with a fine, but you'll need a license to continue selling in this town!”

I'd managed to get away with only a fine.

“I thought you seemed pretty ignorant about the world, but I'd never have guessed you didn't have a license,” Meryl said, astounded.

“Well, I’m still really new to the area...” I said weakly.

I paid my taxes on time back in Japan, but I totally forgot about that in this new world!

“How much does a license cost? Most of my money was taken by the fine, so I don’t have a lot left over.”

“If I remember right, street vendors must pay twelve thousand rims a month,” Mira told me.

“Twelve thousand rims?!” I cried in disbelief. “What am I going to do? I only have four thousand two hundred rims left...”

“Oh no, that’s no good...”

I only had enough money to stay at the Swindoll Con Inn and eat. But if I couldn’t sell anything from tomorrow onward, I’d have to starve.

“I have a good idea,” Meryl said.

“Really? You do?”

“Yeah. There’s just one place in this town where you can sell your goods without a license.”

“Oh yes, that is an option,” Mira said, nodding in agreement.

“There’s really a place like that?!” I asked, desperate. “Tell me, Meryl! Where is it?”

Meryl pointed at the ground with a snicker. *What is she saying?*

“No way, I can’t do it here!” I protested. “I literally just got a fine, you know!”

“Sure. Aboveground you did.”

It was starting to dawn on me. “Wait a second... You’re not telling me to sell my goods in the dungeon, are you?”

“I am.”

She was so nonchalant about it, but come on. I was a totally normal person who didn’t own a single weapon!

“Look, monsters show up in the dungeon, right?”

“Of course, duh. It’s a dungeon.”

“I don’t like this... Oh, but if I open up my shop near the entrance, then it shouldn’t be too dangerous.”

If push came to shove, I could just run outside, but Mira told me that was off the table.

“Selling items in the vicinity of the dungeon’s entrance is prohibited by law,” she said. “If you block it off, the other adventurers will scold you. If you would like to sell your goods, you will have to do it from Zone Two onward.”

It seemed Zone Two was about five hundred meters deep into the dungeon from the entrance. And even that area had the occasional monster encounter.

“Hey, could one of you be my bodyguard?”

“Even I make about 5,000 rims per day,” Meryl said. “If you offer me even more than that, then I’ll think about it.”

If I had to pay her 5,000 rims, there’d be almost nothing left over for me. I could easily go into the red on slow days.

“You don’t have to worry so much. The monsters in Zone Two aren’t too bad. The cards from your Monster Chips are more than enough to handle them.”

Oh right, I have that Flying Snake card. Instead of having a proper dinner tonight, I decided I’d eat tons of those Monster Chips to prepare to open up my shop tomorrow.

If I get ten of those cards, I think I’ll survive to the end of the day...

“At the very least, could you guys tag along with me when we enter the dungeon? I’ll let you have whatever snacks you want.”

Meryl and Mira exchanged glances before they smiled.

“Sure, leave that to us,” Meryl said.

“Since it is on our way, we will take you,” Mira smiled.

It was way too scary to brave it alone in my first dungeon, but I could be at ease with these two trusty friends by my side. My lack of a license meant I couldn’t keep running my shop today, so I hurried back to the Swindoll Con Inn.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 3

A dagashi-ya is way too tempting to a young maiden's heart. It's dangerous! I saw those Scratch Cards lined up, and man, they're crazy... If you get three of the same picture, you'll get a stat boost. Plus, you'll even have a chance to obtain a two-hundred-rim coupon! Who could ever resist that?!

God, I'm scared it's going to consume me body and soul. I bought those Mini Mini Colas to calm myself down, but I'll wind up overdosing on them at this rate. Although, I really don't get tired of these things. They've basically become like some OTC medicine you keep at home, but they come in a lot of flavors like blueberry and milk soda. I need to keep taking this tasty medicine so that the dagashi don't eat up all my money.

Well, maybe I don't actually need to worry about that so much. After all, I finally got a rare card from the Monster Chips! I've bought them like ten times before now, but they all had common cards. I'm so happy about it that I don't think I can ever use this Ghost Knight card! Maybe I'll frame it and hang it on the wall!

I do want to try it out to see how strong it is. Even though I got only common cards like Slimes and Demon Crows up until now, they actually came in handy during battle. The Ghost Knight card has mobility and offensive abilities, so I expect it to be pretty strong.

Yeah, I shouldn't frame it. I'll carry it around like a protective charm instead. After all, you never know when you'll run into a really tough enemy in a dungeon.

Right, so there's recently been a pretty scary person hanging around Mister Yusuke. He's an incredibly strong adventurer called the Shinigami. There're a lot of bad rumors about him, so it worries me. He's apparently got a sweet tooth, and he bought out all the chocolate snacks.

Mister Yusuke said he isn't a bad guy once you talk to him, but I wonder about that. I really didn't think he was the type to hang around a dagashi-ya, though...

He seems like a standoffish person with a vibe that makes others hesitant to approach him.

Like, he especially gets this piercing gaze in his eyes whenever Mira and I are having fun with Mister Yusuke. Mira suggested that maybe he wants to join in with us, but I dunno...

Wait, he's not after me, is he?! It's not unheard of for female adventurers to get attacked in the dungeon. I'm so lively and charming that it wouldn't be my first time with this sense of danger.

Now that I think about it, he was looking at me in a pervy wa— Wait, huh? I didn't sense that at all, actually. Was he ever even looking at us? I feel like he was only ever looking at Mister Yusuke... Th-That's just my imagination, right? Hey, risk avoidance is one of the basics of being an adventurer. I'm going to pretend like I didn't see anything!

Chapter 4: To the Dungeon

To prepare myself to enter the dungeon the next day, I had Monster Chips for dinner just like I'd planned. I opened all ten Monster Chips I had in stock and pulled out the cards one by one.

C. Kobold Soldier: Cute with a strong sense of loyalty.

C. Giant Crow: A large crow.

R. Zombie Knight: Scary and strong.

C. Pixie: It confuses enemies.

C. Piranha Bird: A flying piranha?!

SR. Turtle Ninja: A turtle ninja with a blade on its back.

C. Goblin: The most basic of basics.

C. Dancing Knife: A tiny dancing blade?

R. Stone Golem: Excels at offense and defense.

C. Jack O'Lantern: Has a brutal stare.

(C=Common R=Rare SR=Super Rare)

And that was all ten of them.

If what Meryl and Mira had told me was true, then even the common cards were effective against the monsters that showed up in Zone Two. If I was having trouble, I could just use two of them instead for a virtually guaranteed victory.

I chewed on my potato chips as I gazed at my cards. Eating three of these bags was no sweat, but I understandably was growing tired of them by my fourth. It would have been a waste to just throw them out, so I gave them to the old lady at the Swindle Con Inn, who was more than happy to take them off

my hands. Somehow, I felt like we had gotten even closer to each other...

As I waited by the dungeon's entrance early in the morning, Meryl and Mira appeared just as they had promised.

"Gooooo morning!" Meryl shouted cheerfully. She normally seemed a little like the irresponsible type, but this morning she looked extremely dependable.

"I-I'll leave it to you."

"Whaaat? Mister Yusuke, I think you're a little too nervous. Relax a little. It's not like we'll be going to floor B2."

"Precisely," Mira chimed in. "Why not eat some of your Anzu Sticks?"

Eating Anzu Sticks gave you courage. I did as she said and decided to make this single stick my breakfast.

"Yeah, I think I'm feeling better."

"Attaboy."

"Now let us go," Mira said, following close behind me as Meryl took the lead. Being sandwiched between the two of them put my fears even more at ease. Thus I headed into my very first dungeon.

The dungeon's entrance was kind of similar to a subway's. It wasn't as bright, but the walls glowed with a faint light that helped me see. Its size was also similar to that of the station I used to commute from, so it all kind of felt familiar.

"There are sixty steps in this stairway," Mira said from behind me.

So if a monster appears, I'll have to run back up all sixty of these stairs.

Just the thought of that already exhausted me. It'd probably be easier for me to simply whip out those monster cards I'd gotten last night and make a stand. I wondered if I felt that way thanks to the Anzu Stick I'd just eaten.

As we approached the bottom of the stairs, we reached a spacious area that looked like an entrance. There, several adventurers were checking over their

equipment and discussing their strategies for the day. There were more people than I'd expected, which put me at ease.

"Now on to Zone Two," Meryl said. "Brace yourself."

"All right..."

I kept a firm grip on my monster card, prepared to use it at a moment's notice. I'd decided my first one would be the Goblin.

We proceeded down the dark passageway along with some other adventurers. A number of small alleyways branched off from our path, but Meryl completely ignored them. We eventually passed under a large gate engraved with a relief, and we once again arrived at a slightly spacious area that was akin to an entrance.

We hadn't fought a single battle along the way nor had I even seen any monsters. *I got all worked up over nothing.*

"Good job making it this far," Meryl congratulated me. "Beyond here is Zone Two."

"Thank you. There were more people around than I expected, so it wasn't that bad."

"Yeah, but it depends on the day. There are times when a lot of bug-type monsters pop up, so you can't let your guard down."

I guess that made sense. If this were a safe area, then there'd probably be a lot more street vendors around. However, there were only three here, including myself. I had imagined I'd be all alone, so I felt strangely comforted by their presence.

"Thank you, guys," I said to Mira and Meryl. "Just like I promised, you can choose whatever snacks you want, so long as they're worth three hundred rims or less."

"Then I want some Monster Chips!" Meryl declared.

"Sorry, we're sold out."

Because I used them all... I really wish she wouldn't look at me so forlornly. I'm putting my life on the line here too.

After the two of them left, some of my regulars came and stopped by my shop.

“Oh, I was just wondering where you were, but I see you’ve decided to set up shop in here.”

“Yeah, you know, some stuff happened. So what’ll it be today?”

“Give me a Squid Skewer and some Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins.”

“All right, that’ll be forty rims.”

The location might have changed, but I was doing what I always did. I wasn’t earning as much as I had before, but I still got a decent number of customers.

Once the morning rush had ended, Zone Two suddenly grew quieter. Most of the adventurers were headed to the floors below B2. The few left around here were mostly rookies. Every once in a while, I’d hear angry voices or the high-pitched sounds of metal striking metal, but that was all.

I thought about packing it up and heading home, but my two fellow street vendors showed no signs that they’d be following suit. One of them was a stick-thin old man with portable blacksmithing tools. He probably made a living off of repairing weapons or something. The other one was a woman who looked to be in her thirties, with a signboard posted in front advertising “Recovery Tea.” I supposed I might as well say hello.

“Good morning. I’m Yahagi, and I sell snacks. Pleased to meet you.”

“I’m Mirai,” the woman said. “I sell recovery tea.”

“Hey. I’m Sanaga.”

These two don’t say much.

“Are you going to keep your shops open?” I asked.

“My work is just getting started, you see,” Mister Sanaga replied. “Some brats have to chip their weapons in battle first.”

That made sense. Not many people would stop by a blacksmith first thing in

the morning.

“Same goes for my recovery tea,” said Miss Mirai. “It’s marketed toward injured adventurers.”

It seemed that recovery tea had the power to heal injuries.

So, these two had no intention of heading back up. That was kind of a problem for me. Sure, Meryl and Mira had brought me here, but I’d have to go back home alone. With no adventurers around, if any monsters showed up I’d have to fight them off myself. And even if I did make it back to the surface once, I’d have to brave it alone yet again to make any evening sales.

In that case, I wonder if I should just stay here.

As those thoughts were racing around my mind, a thick fog materialized from nowhere.

“Hmph!”

Mister Sanaga, who had been sitting with his back against the wall, suddenly sprang to attention. The recovery tea-selling Miss Mirai prepared herself with a spear she had produced from somewhere.

“What’s happening?” I asked.

“It’s coming!” Mister Sanaga said.

“What do you mean?”

“A monster!” said Miss Mirai.

Wait, seriously?! I put myself on guard, retrieving the Goblin card I had been keeping in my breast pocket. I didn’t even have time to say the typical “Goblin, I choose you!” line or anything.

What emerged from the fog were four Goblins, of all things. The card in my hand was also a Goblin. Was that going to be a problem? But it was too late for me to choose another card. Just like the instructions said, I tossed out the card and said the magic words, “Monster summon, activate!”

Indeed, what appeared was a Goblin. Just as I began to despair that there was no way my monster could win four-to-one, it suddenly lunged at one of its

opponents. It took its knife and sliced open the arteries in the other Goblin's neck. The defeated Goblin emanated light as it crumbled into smoke and disappeared. All that remained were some small copper coins and green magic crystals.

"Good job, Goblin! Now get the others!" I cheered. Then I paused. "Huh?"

I had been caught up in the moment, but I was now forced back to reality as the three opposing Goblins began beating up my monster. It had only managed to defeat that first one because it had caught it off guard. It was outnumbered, so I should have figured.

Still, that Meryl gave me some unreliable information here. One common card is enough, my ass. We won't last long at this rate.

With that in mind, I didn't hesitate to whip out two more cards in one go.

"Monster summon, activate! Go, Piranha Bird! And one more! Monster summon, activate! Pixie!"

The Piranha Bird attacked one of the Goblins from behind, biting with its sharp teeth, while the Pixie rapidly flew around, confusing the enemy. Thanks to them, my Goblin was able to pick up its knife once more and finish off the rest.

"Whew... It's over," Miss Mirai breathed.

The pair had been holding their breath as they watched on.

"That sure gave me a spook," the blacksmith Mister Sanaga sighed, wiping the sweat from his brow. "I didn't expect that four of 'em would show up at the same time."

"Does this not happen often?"

"Yeah, usually the fog only creates one monster."

Huh, so the monsters are born from the fog, and normally only one at a time. So it wasn't that Meryl had been wrong, but rather that this had just happened to be an uncommon situation.

But seriously, I was glad I had prepared several monster cards. I had put some Rocket Bombs in my pockets too just in case, but I'd managed to get by without

using them. I was glad I didn't have to expose my terrible pitching skills. I wasn't proud of it, but I'd really sucked at things like baseball and darts in my previous life.

"It's a good thing we had a summoner here with us," Miss Mirai said.

"I'm just a dagashi-ya," I corrected her, flustered. "I'm no summoner."

"Then what was that just now?"

"Those were just some of the prizes that come along with the products I sell."

I then explained my dagashi.

"It sounds like those cards are useful," Miss Mirai noted. "If they're only a hundred rims, then I'd like one."

"I'm sorry. They're actually sold out."

Because I bought them all up myself...

"Hey, Mister, you ain't gonna pick up the money and magical crystals?"

The item drops that the Goblins had left behind were still lying on the dungeon floor.

"Is it okay for me to take these?" I asked.

"You're the one who took 'em down. Of course they're yours."

Miss Mirai had no objections to that, so I decided to take them.

The Goblins had dropped two hundred rims total. So, that meant they probably dropped fifty rims each. If I sold the magic crystals I'd gotten, I'd apparently get about ten rims per crystal. Compared to the three hundred rims' worth of cards I'd used, I was now in the red.

"But, Yahagi, what's a summoner guy like you doing as a street vendor?" Mister Sanaga asked me, tilting his head and looking utterly confused.

"Like I said, I'm a dagashi-ya, not a summoner."

"With those sorts of powers, you could earn even more on the floors below us, no?" Miss Mirai said, as if also confused.

"I don't want to put myself in danger," I replied. "Plus, I like my job."

No matter what anyone said, my job class was dagashi-ya, and I had grown to enjoy my work.

Neither monsters nor customers stopped by my shop for a while, but as lunchtime approached, the rookies who had been hunting down monsters on B1 began showing up in twos and threes. Those with mild injuries drank recovery tea from Miss Mirai's shop, while the adventurers with nicked blades and damaged defensive gear went to Mister Sanaga for his services.

Several hungry adventurers were also drawn to my shop.

"Ugh, I'm so hungry. Maybe I'll get some Tasty Sticks."

"Some Curry Rice Crackers for me."

It was noon, so it seemed these adventurers were famished. Of course, they had probably already had lunch, but they were young. They got hungry again fast.

That was when I had an idea. Until now, I'd had this one product that I couldn't put up for sale, but with Miss Mirai's help, I might be able to sell out my stock.

"Miss Mirai, may I have a moment?"

"What's wrong, Mister Yahagi?"

"I would like your assistance. You see, I'd like to sell this."

Product Name: Porky Noodles (Tonkotsu flavor)

Description: Mini cup noodles. Boil 180 milliliters of water to cook. Although small, it fills you right up.

Price: Eighty rims

Miss Mirai had the means to boil water since she sold recovery teas. My plan was to first sell the Porky Noodles to the adventurers and then send them to Miss Mirai to buy boiled water.

“This is so good!” one customer exclaimed. “I’ve never tasted anything like this before, but I like it!”

“You can really taste the pork broth!”

Everything went according to plan, and I had soon sold out my stock.

The entrance to Zone Two once again emptied out as midday passed. The adventurers who had been on break had scattered throughout the dungeon, looking for monsters. I decided I’d eat the bread and apples I had brought with me.

Just as I was about to have lunch, a voice cried out from farther in the dungeon: “Hey, is anyone there?! We’ve got a man down! We need help carrying him!”

They didn’t sound too far away. I was certain it would be dangerous, but I couldn’t just ignore a cry for help. I readied my Flying Snake card and ran in the direction of the voice.

The deeper I advanced into the dungeon, the more clearly I could hear people’s voices. It sounded like they were still in the throes of battle.

“Hey! Where are you?!”

“Over here!” a voice called out. “The porter’s got a leg wound! Get him somewhere safe!”

When I moved toward the voice, I found five adventurers fending off a rhinoceros-like monster. A boy was collapsed on his back at the edge of the room. If I remembered right, he’d come to my shop before.

“Rigal,” I shouted, “stay with me!”

He groaned weakly. “Ngh...”

The other adventurers were busy fighting against the monster while protecting Rigal, so they had their hands tied.

“Hurry up and take him!”

“On it!” I scooped Rigal into my arms and ran back the way I’d come.

Once back at the entrance to Zone Two, I looked over Rigal’s wounds. A

gaping gash on his thigh was oozing blood.

“Miss Mirai, some recovery tea, please.”

Recovery teas were drinks, but they were also effective when poured onto an open wound. I tore off a portion of Rigal’s pants and poured the cooled tea over his wound.

“Gah!”

I was sure it stung, but Rigal bore it with tears in his eyes. The bleeding slowed down, but the wound was nowhere close to healing.

“More tea, please.”

“I don’t know...” Miss Mirai murmured. “With a wound this severe, my recovery tea alone won’t be enough.”

Even so, I want to do what I can!

“I’ll pay for it, so please, just one more!”

“What’s wrong?” asked a husky voice. The Shinigami suddenly emerged from the gloom of the dungeon. Miss Mirai and Mister Sanaga let out involuntary squeaks of terror and even Rigal, who was lying there injured, began to tremble.

As for me, I had long since grown used to the Shinigami. Sure the rumors had branded him a killer, but he really was just a normal guy once you talked to him.

“It’s just what it looks like,” I told him. “This kid is hurt. Oh, do you have any bandages on you? Please spare us some if you do.”

“I don’t.”

“That’s too bad.”

I had to find some type of tourniquet to stop the bleeding. As I searched through my bag for anything I could use in lieu of rope, Minerva approached us. Then, he brought his hand close to Rigal’s thigh.

“Whoa!”

A green light gushed from his hand, healing Rigal’s wound in the blink of an eye.

“Hey now, I didn’t know you could use Recovery Magic!” I said, amazed.
“That’s incredible!”

“This much is nothing special,” the Shinigami replied brusquely, although it seemed he didn’t mind the praise.

“U-Um, er...” Rigal said, trembling, “thank you very much.”

He’d managed to express his gratitude as well.

“By the way, why are you here, Yusuke?” Minerva asked, turning to face me.

“I don’t have a license, so I can’t sell my goods on the surface anymore.”

“So that’s why. I looked all over for you, but I was surprised I couldn’t find you anywhere.”

Now that is a surprise.

“You were looking for me?”

“No, I wasn’t!” the Shinigami spluttered, waving his hands dramatically in denial. “It’s not like I was just wandering the dungeon plaza in search of you or anything!”

“But you said so yourself. You said you looked for me.”

The Shinigami fumbled for words. “Er, I mean, well... I’m just saying I wasn’t desperate or anything. I wanted to make sure you didn’t misunderstand me...”

What’s going on with him?

“Oh, I got it. You’re having a hankering for sweets again, aren’t you?”

“Y-Yeah...”

“But really, eating too many sweets isn’t healthy. Here, I’ll share some of my bread and apples with you, so let’s eat them together.”

“N-No... I brought my own lunch.”

“So, it’s your lunchtime, huh? Mine too.”

Minerva suddenly leaped to his feet.

“Hey, Yusuke!” he shouted while staring me down. *Did I hurt his feelings or something?*

“Wh-What’s wrong? Why are you shouting all of a sudden...”

“I-If it’s okay, do you want to have lunch together?!”

“What?”

“I... I’ll give you...this,” he said, taking out a cute pale-blue lunch box. A picture of a cat walking in a field was painted across the side.

“But then you won’t have anything to eat.”

“Don’t worry. I have another,” Minerva assured me, producing a similar but pink lunch box from his belongings.

So, we’re matching...

I felt kinda weird about all this, but the guy was saying he was willing to share his lunch with me. I couldn’t let his goodwill go to waste.

“Are you sure you’re all right with this?”

“Yeah. I just happened to make two today.”

He...what? How does that even happen?

Well, whatever. Now that I could rest easy knowing Rigal was all patched up, I was more hungry than ever. Plus, not getting hung up over small details was one of my good traits. *Yep, it’s something I’m proud of.*

“Then, don’t mind if I do.”

When I opened the lid, inside were a sandwich and fruit, all neatly arranged. The sandwich had sautéed chicken, vegetable, and bacon filling.

“Wow, this looks delicious,” I marveled. “I see you’re a great cook.”

“No, not really...”

“All right then, I’m gonna dig in. Oh, I’ll go get us some tea. Miss Mirai, some for him too, please.”

“A-Ah, yes!” Miss Mirai squeaked, and she poured the tea with trembling hands. It seemed she was still afraid of Minerva.

“It’s all right,” I assured her. “Sure, his appearance and his voice are scary, but he isn’t actually a bad guy.”

“I-I see...” She didn’t seem entirely convinced.

“What are you doing, Yusuke?!” the Shinigami suddenly demanded. “Don’t waste your time talking to other women. Just hurry and get back over here! Led on by the charms of an older woman, unbelievable...” He kept on grumbling to himself.

What is he going on about? Is it his hunger getting the best of him?

“What are you, some overbearing boyfriend? This is exactly why people get the wrong idea about you!”

“I don’t really care.”

“Jeez... Okay, I’m digging in.”

That very first bite surprised me. I had never eaten a sandwich so delectable before. The vegetables were crisp, the meat was juicy with umami, and the mustard and butter that went along with it created a delicious symphony of flavors in my mouth.

“Whoa, this is delicious!”

“You think? Heh heh... Eh heh heh...”

That was a cute laugh and all, but his appearance just makes it sound like the cackle of a heinous criminal. Sorry, Shinigami.

Incidentally, what was that mask for anyway? Did he have some burns under there or something? If that was the case, I shouldn’t go asking questions. *Even a man sometimes wants to hide his scars.*

I didn’t know why, but as we ate our lunch together, Minerva seemed especially happy.

One day, Meryl came to me with a proposal.

“Open up your store deeper in the dungeon,” she suggested. “I’m sure you’ll earn more that way, so it’s a good deal for you too.”

It might’ve been because of my small taste of experience in battle, but I was feeling a little more confident. Armed with my monster cards and Rocket

Bombs, I felt I'd be all right enough heading even deeper into the dungeon.

"Hm... I would like to earn a little more than what I'm making right now..." I admitted.

"You'll be fine. I promise," she pleaded. "There'll be other adventurers around when you head in, right? And you can walk home together with us."

According to Meryl, there was a convenient room near the staircase that led down to B2. Adventurers used that room for their breaks. Monsters also seldom appeared, so it was relatively safe. The adventurers who actually headed down into B2 returned to that room to take a breather, so I could expect to earn a lot of money if I opened up shop there during the day.

"It'd also be good for me if you started doing your business there. I can easily buy Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins and stuff from you when I get tired."

"Can't you just stock up in the morning?"

"But I eat them up fast, so I wanna buy more whenever I run out."

I think you just need to learn some self-restraint.

Still, I did want to earn more money fast. I wanted to get a license and rent an apartment as soon as possible. I couldn't rest easy at the Swindoll Con Inn. If this would earn me more money, I felt it was worth getting out there and taking some risks.

"We'd all be really happy if you came, Mister Yusuke," Mira told me. In the end, it was her words that swayed me. I decided I'd try and head for that room the next day.

The next morning, I exited the good ol' Swindoll Con Inn to find Minerva leaning against the wall.

"Oh, Minerva?!"

"Good morning," he said. "What a coincidence..."

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing really..."

He acted like he wasn't up to much of anything, but it was raining out today. If he was hanging around here in spite of that, I figured he must have had an especially important reason, but what would I know?

"I'm on my way to the dungeon. How about you, Minerva?"

"I was about to head there myself."

"I see..."

Did we really happen to run into each other by chance? With that brief thought crossing my mind, I headed with Minerva to the dungeon.

Michelle's Side

Oh my god, I did it... I did it! I really did it!

I'd actually been waiting out there since before dawn, and thanks to that, I'd managed to pass everything off as a coincidence so I could walk with him to work! He'd eaten the sandwich I'd made for him yesterday, and he'd even said it was delicious. Although my plans were perfect, they had been going a little too well, and that scared me.

Aah, I really hope he returns my feelings. Ever since I'd first laid eyes on him at that cheap hotel, I had thought he was kind of good-looking. Our rooms were right next to each other too... This just had to be fate! Once I'd talked to him, I'd fallen in love with how refreshingly down-to-earth he was, how he didn't put on an act. He'd even seen my wanted poster and said I was beautiful. I was sure he hadn't been lying either. To think, he'd looked at a gloomy woman like me and found me attractive... He might be an angel from another world!

I wonder if he'll eat the lunch I prepared again today? It would be easy to have him look my way by using the Secret Magic Arts of Love, but I knew that was wrong. Besides, I wanted to gain his love without resorting to magic.

But how am I supposed to let him know I'm a girl?

In order to make sure no one found out I was Michelle the witch, I routinely cast a cognitive obstruction spell around me, but perhaps I should undo that?

No, no, that's too hasty of me. Oh, how about this? I "coincidentally" press our

bodies against each other. I wonder if that would give him the hint...

Oh no, since when have I been so dirty? It seemed that it was true what people said—that love changes a woman. Today, I planned to act as Yusuke’s bodyguard lurking in the shadows of the dungeon. *Oh, I’m just sooo happy right now!*

Yusuke’s Side

We quickly made it to the dungeon’s entrance, spurred onward by the rain. This world didn’t sell anything like an umbrella. The closest it had to even a raincoat was a hooded leather cloak.

Minerva actually kept ramming into me along the way, which made it rather hard to walk. Was he being playful? That mask made it really difficult to get a read on his expression.

We met up with Meryl and Mira by the dungeon entrance.

“Morning,” I said.

“Good morning...” Mira greeted me back, hesitating.

Maybe it was because Minerva was here, but the two of them looked more nervous than usual.

“Minerva, you should say hello too.”

“Hmph. You’re those cheeky brats who’re always ogling him. If you get carried away, I will destroy you.”

“Hey, what are you being so rude to my regulars for?!”

“S-Sorry. It just slipped out...”

Could it be that he just dislikes women? At the very least, he tended to be socially awkward and definitely wasn’t good at talking. When I gave him that firm scolding, Minerva hung his head dejectedly.

“Don’t mind him. Sometimes he says some weird things. He doesn’t mean any harm.”

“Huh...”

Though things had suddenly turned a bit awkward, we merged with the crowd of adventurers headed into the dungeon and continued toward our destination.

I witnessed adventurers in battle several times along the way, but we reached the area near the break room without anything particularly dangerous happening.

“So, these are the stairs that lead down to floor B2, huh? They’re wider than I expected.”

This staircase looked to be a good seven meters wide.

“The break room is over here,” Meryl told me.

“You wretch,” Minerva seethed. “What are you planning to do with him there?!”

“Have him open up the dagashi-ya...”

“I see... Then that’s fine.”

Minerva was acting stranger than usual.

The room they took me to was about as big as a banquet hall at a ryokan. That reminded me, I had gone to one of those during one of my company trips.

Japan is so far away now...

I moved to a corner and set up my shop there.

“Store, open. Dagashi-ya Yahagi.”

Whoa?! I leveled up a ton this time!

What appeared this time around was something like a festival stall. The curtains hanging over the top had the words “Dagashi-ya Yahagi” written on them in big Japanese letters. I also had even more products to sell than before. My shop was lit up with decorative magic lanterns that emitted a glittering light.

“What does this say?” Mira asked, curious.

“It says Dagashi-ya Yahagi,” I replied. “It’s written in the language of my hometown.”

“The letters look rather charming...”

Laid out on the stands were not only snacks, but also things that appeared to be toys. Though, considering they were from my shop, I was sure they weren't just regular old toys.

“What is this box?!” Meryl exclaimed. In a corner of the store was an old game machine.

Product name: Dungeon Conquest Game

Description: Insert a ten-rim coin. Then pull the spring lever to flick the coin and aim for the goal. If you make it to the goal on B7, you'll receive a prize. The prize is a universal elixir.

Price: Ten rims per try (Only accepts ten-rim coins)

This really takes me back. It was exactly like the *Bullet Train Game* I'd seen at a retro game place. I remembered there had been other similar games too, like *Catch Ball* and *Car Race*.



But wasn't a universal elixir a bit too overpowered for a prize? It was an elixir that cured any illness and healed all wounds. To be fair, though, this Dungeon Conquest Game looked harder than the ten-yen ones I remembered.

Meryl wasted no time inserting a ten-rim coin and giving the game a shot.

She was doing surprisingly well. "You're pretty good at this," I said.

"Yeah, instead of leaving it all to Lady Luck, it looks like I'm way better at something like this. I really am a woman of talent!"

"Oh, be careful there. If you hit it too hard, it'll fall off the other side."

"I can see that. I just gotta do this, and..."

Unfortunately, Meryl relaxed a little too much, and the coin fell into the hole in front of her.

"Gah! I messed up!" she cried. "Tch, one more time!"

"Just go to work already..."

Dagashi-ya Yahagi now had a new specialty to offer.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 4

Mister Yusuke looks like a guy who knows what he's doing, but he sometimes makes really big mistakes. I was shocked when I found out he was doing business without a license. Mira said that kind of thing was a little cute, but honestly? I think she's the type to go for no-good men in the first place, which frankly worries me. Was she really being serious there?

Well, in his defense, he's a foreigner so it's whatever. But I wonder where Ja Pan is? I've never heard of that country. Mira's the knowledgeable one here, but even she had no idea. Hachi Oji, Ja Pan? I have no idea what kind of place that is. I can't even guess from the name.

I recommended that he start selling his goods inside the dungeon since he didn't have the money to buy a license. That was a brilliant idea, if I do say so myself. Once noon rolls around each day, I'll be able to go and hang around that dagashi-ya.

He's going to start selling his stuff right near the stairs in front of B2, so I'm gonna be able to stop by a lot more frequently! Also, those Porky Noodles are amazing when you're hungry. They're small, but they fill you right up, and their cheap price of eighty rims makes them really convenient. I'm so grateful to have some hot soup on a cold day.

Garmr and the others really like that dagashi-ya too, so they go there all the time to eat. To us novice adventurers, Dagashi-ya Yahagi is becoming an incredibly important place.

Still, that new ten-rim game that made its debut this morning was super hard. Even though there were many challengers, I heard that only a single person made it to the end. I myself tried my hand at it three times, but I just couldn't get past floor B4. In truth, I wanted to play more but after three tries, a huge line was waiting behind me, so that's all I got. I mean, the prize you get when you reach the goal is a universal elixir. There were people who wanted to have one just in case, and there were even veteran adventurers lined up hoping to

resell it, which I absolutely get. If it really is a universal elixir, then you could sell it for like a million rims.

Still, that game is just way too hard. I can't complain too much since it's only ten rims per try, but I'm sure it's only a matter of time before everyone gives up. I even saw an old guy hitting the box, yelling that he'd never try it again.

Wait a second, if so many people are lining up just to try it, then is Mister Yusuke making a killing?! I bet he's even earning more than I do. Maybe I should charge him a consultation fee? Since, you know, it was my brilliant idea to have him start selling near floor B2 in the first place? It definitely was worth at least two Meat Skewers.

I heard he put his life on the line to rescue Rigal. He also has decent financial resources. Come to think of it, he actually might be something of a catch.

Maybe Mira has a good eye for people after all? Hm... Now I'm even starting to think Mister Yusuke is kind of cute. Well, I'm definitely not going to fall for him. In my eyes, he's just kind of like a nice big brother.

Chapter 5: Minerva's Rapid Approach

Business in the break room was booming this morning. The line for the ten-rim game just wouldn't die down, which made total sense. I mean, for just ten rims, you had the potential to win a universal elixir—who wouldn't want to try that?

In the end, though, only one person managed to beat the game. When I went to retrieve the coins, I found 4,020 rims in there.

So that means the success rate was about 1 in 402.

As the shopkeeper, I at least had the ability to retrieve the coins, but even I couldn't lay a finger on that prize. It automatically restocked itself. If I wanted that universal elixir, I had to try my luck at the ten-rim game myself.

I'd had the lone winner give me a look at that elixir. It was a light-brown square tablet, similar to the traditional Japanese dessert rakugan. I wanted to have one for myself, just in case of an emergency. I had the shopkeeper's privilege of trying my hand at it to my heart's content after closing time, so I decided I'd do so tonight.

Oh, but if I did it at the Swindoll Con Inn, my next door neighbors were sure to complain... If I got unlucky, I might even get beaten up.

Oh, well. I'll figure out where I'm going to try it out later.

"Hellooo."

It was Rigal, the one who'd been injured the other day.

"Oh, Mister Minerva," Rigal said, catching sight of him. "Thanks for last time."

"Yeah."

Minerva was gazing in this direction from a short distance away, having not gone monster hunting today. His gaze was pretty piercing, so I was a little bit scared—was I under surveillance?

"Hey there, Rigal. Taking a break?"

“Yeah.” Rigal then winced. “Ooh, ouch...” He gave a strained smile as he held his left shoulder.

“What’s the matter? Did you get yourself hurt again?”

“Yeah, I rammed into something during battle.”

“Then I got just the thing for you.”

My shop had featured plenty of goods and snacks that were useful in battle, but not really any recovery items—that was, until now. Finally, Dagashi-ya Yahagi had a new item in stock that could heal wounds. That item was this:

Product name: Morocco Yogurt

Description: A snack made up of a sweet and sour cream. You eat it with a wooden spoon. Heals wounds slightly.

Price: Twenty rims (If you win, you get one more)

“You’ll heal right up if you eat this.”

It wasn’t as effective as Miss Mirai’s recovery teas, but it was easy to carry around thanks to its small size. Rigal bought two and immediately dug in. The bruise on his shoulder then vanished completely.

“It’s cheaper than a life potion, and it makes a good snack. I’ll buy it again next time!”

“Yeah, so long as you have one on you, it significantly increases your chances of survival.”

It was small enough that it could easily fit in a pocket without being obtrusive. Even Meryl and Mira each bought three as a precaution.

My first day doing business at the break room was over. I had made more money than back when I’d sold my goods in front of the dungeon entrance. A lot of that was likely thanks to that ten-rim game and my new products, but the lack of competitors had also played a part. If I sold my goods here again

tomorrow, I'd be able to buy a license sooner than I could blink. But I wasn't particularly motivated. If I had to hand over 12,000 rims for that license, it was better for me to just keep doing business down here. Also, it made my regulars very happy. Having my store open in this location was convenient for them.

Some monsters did appear, but the adventurers nearby had cleaned them up, so I'd never had the chance to make my debut. Well, it wouldn't have been *my* debut so much as it would've been my monster cards'. Also, for some unknown reason, Minerva had stayed nearby the entire time, so I never felt in any danger.

"Minerva, don't you have to work?" I asked him.

"I decided to take the day off."

"Then why don't you go out and have fun?"

"Hmph. But that's exactly what I'm here doing."

Minerva had occasionally tried the ten-rim game or eaten dagashi, but otherwise, he'd spent most of the time just kind of staring at my store. Was that really that fun for him? I supposed it was up to each individual person how they wanted to spend their time off, so I would just keep my mouth shut.

There were fewer people than before as the evening rush came to an end. I probably should have been going home soon too. If I didn't go along with everyone else, I might wind up in danger here.

"I'm gonna close up shop," I told the adventurers who were still playing around. All I had to do after that was say, "Store, close," and I was all finished.

"Are you going home?" Minerva asked, approaching me.

"Yeah. Do you wanna come along?"

"W-Well, if you're going out of your way to ask, then I guess I can't refuse. Those cheeky brats... I mean, Meryl and Mira... It's a little worrisome if those two are your only escorts, so I'll tag along."

I couldn't really hate the guy when he had this nice of a side to him.

Minerva, Meryl, Mira, and I headed through the dungeon, walking alongside each other.

“By the way, is there a place I could go where I won’t be noticed?” I asked the three of them.

“What’s the matter?” Meryl asked.

“I’m hoping to get that universal elixir from my game, so I want a place to practice.”

“Then why don’t you do it over there?” Meryl gestured toward an area we were passing.

“I’m scared I’ll get robbed if I do it at night in town.”

Even if this was the Royal Capital, public order was in shambles.

“I honestly wanted to do it at the inn, but people will get pissed off at me if I make any noise.”

All of a sudden, with great force, something grabbed my shoulder.

“Gah!” I yelped. The Shinigami’s fingers in their black leather glove were digging into my flesh.

“Ow! What the hell are you doing, Minerva?” Despite my protest, he wouldn’t let go. On the contrary, that silver mask got right up in my face, like he was picking a fight.

“W-Well, in that case, d-do you want to come over to my place?”

“Your place? You mean your house? Never mind that. Just let me go first! That hurts a lot!”

“O-Okay...” Minerva finally let go.

“So, you have a house?”

“I rented it just the other day, so there’s nothing really there. If that doesn’t bother you, then...”

“Can I play that ten-rim game there?”

“I don’t mind. Y-You should have dinner and stay the night too!”

“Seriously? I feel kinda bad...”

“A-Anything to help a friend. No need to be shy.”

Whoa, we’re friends now? When did that happen? Well, if he was going so far as to say that, I couldn’t feel too bad about it. Also, he was a great cook, so I was looking forward to what he’d make. He’d treated me to a boxed lunch again today, and man it had been delicious.

“Don’t be modest. I’ll make you as much food as you want.”

As Minerva kept sweetening the deal, I decided I was in.

“All right, I’ll take you up on your offer,” I said. “Thank you.”

Maybe we can have some fun playing cards tonight or something. I decided I’d gratefully use one of Minerva’s rooms.

Michelle’s Side

Is this a dream? I’m on a date with Yusuke right now—a date shopping at the market for ingredients for tonight’s dinner. I’d managed to be relatively casual when I convinced him to come over to my place. *Oh, I’m so glad I had the courage to grab onto his shoulder.*

Love truly was a force of nature. Going out to buy groceries for dinner was just like something two people living together would do. *Aah, is it getting kind of hot in here?*

“Minerva, do you drink?”

“Just a little bit.”

“I guess we can pick up some wine too then.”

What is he going to do once he has me drunk? Well, that was fine. He was worthy of being my first time, as well as my lover for life...

Oh, but before that, dinner! ≡ I had to use plenty of medicinal herbs and elixirs to inscribe this taste of heaven into his mind and body forever. *They do say that the key to a man’s heart is through his stomach. I have to make him lots of delicious food so he can’t leave me...*

Yusuke's Side

Once we were done buying groceries for dinner, we headed to Minerva's house. He had said he was going to pay for the ingredients himself, but there was no way I could let him when he was already doing me such a big favor. I even got a kind of nice wine for us to share. It'd be my first time drinking together with a guy friend since arriving in this new world. Tonight, I wanted him to teach me all sorts of things about this country.

Minerva's apartment was located away from the heart of town. It was down an inconspicuous back alley and appeared somewhat like a hideout. But the building's interior was spacious, and no matter where you looked, it was obvious he'd spared no expense.

"Your place is pretty nice," I commented.

"Not really."

"No, seriously, you don't have to be so modest." That was when I noticed the circular bathtub just visible beyond an open door. "Oh, wow, you even have your own bath?"

The bathroom itself was spacious enough that it could easily fit several people, and the bottom of the bathtub was lined with blue tiles. It looked extremely luxurious.

"Would you like your bath? Or your dinner? Or perhaps, little old m—mmph!" Minerva was cut off as blood gushed out from beneath his silver mask. *Don't tell me he's coughing up blood?!*

"Why are you bleeding?! Get a hold of yourself, Minerva!"

"Sorry, my powers (of delusion) got away from me. I'm fine."

"You don't look fine at all..."

"You may not believe me," he said, "but I'm actually feeling great right now. So great, I don't know what to do with myself."

Is he experiencing some backlash from his powerful magic?

"Go ahead and have a bath. I'll make us dinner in the meanwhile."

“I’ll help you,” I offered.

“I don’t want you to come into the kitchen...”

“All right. I’ll go ahead and take a bath then.”

“Take your time.”

With a wave of his hand, the bathtub instantly filled up with hot water—truly the work of a first-class mage.

Michelle’s Side

I hadn’t expected this, but just the thought of Yusuke holding me was enough to trigger a nosebleed. Now was my chance to take off my mask and wash myself off. Time was of the essence; I needed to prepare the Black Lizard innards to use in my cooking. Though they took an exceedingly long time to prepare, if you ate them, you wouldn’t get sick for an entire year. Plus, they made a man stronger in certain other ways...

Oh no, my nosebleed again... I have to get a grip. I need to make sure I keep my true love healthy!

“Cry out, Dancing Sword! And Sealing Barrier, activate!”

I used my Martial Arts Magic to finely chop up the ingredients and apply pressure to the pot to prepare soup.

My magic is working better than it usually does. I’m sure this is the power of love. I feel like I could become even stronger, so long as it is for Yusuke’s sake.

The meal was coming along nicely. Yusuke emerged from the bath.

“It smells good in here.”

He had changed into a sleeveless shirt, so his arms were bare to the world.

Oh no, he’s pretty muscular... I had always thought he had beautiful fingers, but I loved arms like these too. I was itching to get my hands on them.

“If there’s anything I can help with, let me know.”

No, no, I have to concentrate on my cooking.

“Don’t worry. Just go ahead and play that ten-rim game.”

I somehow managed to suppress my emotions and finish making dinner.

Yusuke’s Side

Did some hot oil splash on Minerva or something? I’d seen him writhing around. I didn’t think I had to worry about him too much, though, considering he was a master of Recovery Magic.

I brought out the ten-rim game as I was waiting for dinner and decided to try it out in the living room. I wanted to somehow get my hands on that universal elixir tonight.

More and more coins were sucked from my pocket with each moment I spent on that ten-rim game. The farther down a coin progressed, the more difficult the game became. The machine had drained thirty-two of my coins in the blink of an eye, but I finally felt like I’d gotten the hang of it.

“Oh, honeeey...≡ Oops, I mean, Yusuke! Dinner’s ready.”

Hm? Did he call for me? I was so focused on the game I hadn’t heard him clearly.

“Did you call me?” Then I noticed the entire feast laid out on the table. “Whoa, this looks so delicious! You’re amazing, Minerva!”

I pointed to one of the dishes. “Wow, what’s this one?”

“Lobster mousse.”

I pointed to another. “And this one?”

“It’s broiled lamb with mustard but, like, it’s still got the bone.”

“Like...?” *There he goes again, talking like a girl...*

“It’s broiled lamb with mustard. Now eat up. I’ve got dessert too.”

“Sure...” We took seats on opposite sides of the table, facing each other. “By the way, how are you planning to eat? I dunno how you’re going to with that on...”

Dagashi were small enough to fit in the gap under his mask, but he probably couldn't eat dinner with it on.

"Yeah, I'm gonna take it off."

Wait, what?! He's taking it off?! I was surprised, but I simply kept my mouth shut and waited. Now, what will his face look like? ...Hold on, what's this?

Michelle's Side

I had already prepared for this moment. I had to take off my mask if I wanted the two of us to eat together, but I couldn't let him know that not only was I a girl, I was also the witch Michelle. I didn't know what would happen once he found out who I really was... I still lacked that confidence.

"Hey, what did you do? You've got a smiley over your face!"

"Sorry, I heightened the intensity of my cognitive obstruction spell. I have my reasons."

"I see... Well, whatever! Let's eat."

He was way more easygoing than I could have ever imagined, and we spent a brief but special time together. It was like a dream come true. He had plenty of topics to bring up, and he happily listened to me explain more about this country. But even though Yusuke was smart, he surprisingly lacked common sense in certain areas. He didn't even know about licenses. *This man... I have to keep a close eye on him! ≡*

Oh wait! I can just have him live here with me!

"If you want, you can live here too, Yusuke," I eagerly offered. "I have plenty of rooms you could borrow."

"I can't do that. Plus, I wanna rent my own place."

I don't want to let him go. The sweet temptation to confine him here stirred within me. I wanted to spoil him rotten until he couldn't live without me, so that he wouldn't leave me. *Shall I cast the barrier spell Infinite Tower to trap him here?*

No, I can't do that. He wouldn't love me if I did. Plus, I adored watching him interact with the other adventurers at his dagashi-ya.

But to tell the truth, I wanted him to be my own little dagashi-ya, even if only for a short while.

Oh, what should I do?

I continued to agonize over it long after Yusuke had fallen asleep.

Yusuke's Side

When I awoke, I was startled to see a silver mask hovering just before my eyes. I was in a guest room in Minerva's apartment.

"Waugh!"

"Good morning."

Once I got a handle on my situation, I found that Minerva was sitting on the edge of the bed peering into my face.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"I was...just studying how you look when you're sleeping."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Is it for his magic studies? Like phrenology or something?

"I made breakfast, so come with me," he said, totally ignoring my question.

Freshly made pancakes, omelets, bacon, salad, and cut fruit were all assembled on the table, and, as expected, everything was delicious. I couldn't believe how beguiled I was by his cooking. *It's like it's magic.*

"You really have no blind spots."

"I'm good at All-Sensing Domain Circles," he said, "but how would you know that?"

"That's not what I'm talking about. I'm in awe of how flawlessly you do everything. Of course, there's the whole sword fighting and the magic stuff, but you're so good at cooking too. Your breakfast today was absolutely delicious."

He started to fidget. “I-I put my all into it...”

“Yeah...” It seemed he had a habit of fidgeting when he was praised. It didn’t really suit a guy like him, but I wouldn’t say anything. It might hurt his feelings, and even a scary-looking guy could sometimes have a sensitive heart. “Now, shall we clean up? Let me handle it.”

“You should just stay seated, Yusuke.”

“I feel bad leaving it all to you,” I insisted, before noticing something on the floor. “Oh, what’s this?”

Numerous papers with magic circles on them were scattered across the floor. All of them seemed to have been drawn halfway before being scribbled out. Were these his failed attempts at something?

“Those are for the Infinite Tower!” Flustered, Minerva snatched the paper right out of my hands.

“What the—? Oh, this is your magical research, huh? Sorry, I shouldn’t have touched it.”

“I-It’s fine,” he mumbled. “Just, last night, I had to fight off some fierce temptations that were closing in, but I managed to hold them off until sunrise. I think my efforts deserve some praise.”

“I...don’t really understand, but that’s amazing,” I said, patting his shoulder. “Good job.”

He flinched.

“Wh-What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. It’s nothing but, if you would stay like this a little longer, I’ll offer everything to you...”

“Huh? What do you mean ‘offer everything’? Like you’re a sacrifice? And you’re making me your evil deity?” Then it hit me. “Oh, I get it.”

“Get what?”

I moved behind him and placed a hand on each of his shoulders.

“I bet your shoulders are stiff from trying so hard last night,” I said, beginning

to knead them. “I’ll give you a massage as thanks for letting me stay here.”

“Wh— Ah... Aah...” Minerva’s husky voice cried out.

“Here? Or does it feel better here? Tell me.” He had a surprisingly delicate physique. I thought he’d be more muscular since I’d heard he was a master of the sword. *I’m sure he strengthens his body with magic in battle.* “Does it feel good?” I asked, rubbing out the knots around his shoulder blades.

“Yeah... I feel like I’m going to melt.”

I laughed maniacally. “Then swear that you’ll belong to me! Offer up your body and soul to your evil deity!”

Ha! As if.

“I swear. I’m all yours...”

Oh, he’s playing along pretty well. But...

“No way!” I kept lightly hacking at his shoulders.

“What?”

“It’s absurd to think you can own another human being,” I said. “I oppose slavery, and the weight of owning another person’s life is way too heavy for me.”

“Oh... Really?”

“Yeah, of course. Oh wait, is slavery a thing in this country?”

“The buying and selling of slaves is prohibited by law.”

Thank god.

“Well, you know, even when it comes to love, I don’t think it’s good to be too controlling, and it’s tough to be controlled as well.”

“I...see.”

Huh? Does he disagree?

“Are you the type to control your girlfriend?” I asked.

Minerva seemed deeply troubled by my question... Not that I could see his face, thanks to his mask.

“I don’t think it’s a good thing,” he admitted, “but if I came to love someone, I think that’s what I’d wind up doing.”

“I think she’d have a problem with that,” I said. “If you go too far, won’t she run away?”

“I’ll be careful not to let them get away...”

Hm? What a strange way to word that. *Well, as long as he says he’ll be careful...*

With that, we dropped the subject and cleaned up the dishes together. Minerva seemed somewhat quieter than before, but I didn’t think too much of it.

We headed off toward the dungeon together.

“Oh yeah, are you after that witch, Michelle, too?” I asked him.

“I have no business with her,” he replied. “Only with this.” Minerva showed me a purple orb with a leather strap attached to it. It glowed faintly.

“Is it a tool for magic or something?”

“Yeah. It’s a magical item that saves up mana. I’m currently researching it.”

Maybe it’s like the batteries we had in my previous life?

“If I complete this, it’ll be possible to use magic on a scale larger than ever seen before.”

“So what does that have to do with the dungeon?”

“In the deepest part of the dungeon, there’s a rift in the earth,” he told me. “A high concentration of magicules flows from within it. I’ve been experimenting with charging my magic orb using the mana there.”

“So that’s why you’ve been going into the dungeon depths,” I said, understanding now.

“To be honest, I want to leave this town, but I don’t know of a better mana hot spot than this,” he said with a resigned shrug.

I then took his hand and enclosed an item in it.

“Yu-Yusuke?!”

“This is the universal elixir from that ten-rim game yesterday,” I said. “You let me stay at your place, so I’ll give it to you as thanks. You may be strong, but take it just in case of an emergency.”

“But...” he protested, but I immediately reassured him.

“Don’t worry. I’ll try that game again so I can get one for me too. I’ve gotten the hang of it, so I’ll win another one in no time.”

With an apologetic air, Minerva carefully stored the elixir away in his pocket.

Michelle’s Side

There was just one thing I understood: the importance of a thing could be sensed the moment you touched it. This became clear to me as soon as Yusuke’s hand encircled mine—that he was my destiny, and that he was more important to me than anything else in the world.

Was this lovesickness? Then I was too scared to ever take this elixir. If this love was an illness, then I wanted to stay sick.

I won’t ever let him go...

Yusuke’s Side

Customer traffic abruptly stopped once noon passed us by. The only ones who remained inside my store were Meryl and Mira, who were devoting themselves to that ten-rim game. They had made over twenty attempts by now, but that universal elixir continued to elude them.

I brought the chair that accompanied my street stall out to the front and opened up the lunch box Minerva had made for me.

“Whoa...” Grilled chicken, a mysterious terrine, pickled vegetables, homemade bread, and a small banana cake were all tightly stuffed inside. Meryl looked at me, a little dumbfounded.

“What? You’ve got something to say?” I asked her.

“Just thinking it looks like a lunch box a loving wife would pack.”

“A loving wife? Look, I know Minerva sounds like a girl’s name, but he’s a guy. And we’re just friends.”

“Really? It doesn’t look that way to me...” Today, Meryl seemed like she was biting something back.

“What does it look like to you then?”

“There’s no way you’re just friends.”

“I agree,” Mira said, stepping into the conversation.

“Wait, even you, Mira?”

“Yeah, I think you’re *best* friends!”

“Not even close!” Meryl shouted, her shoulders raised in agitation. “Look, that’s not what I meant. I’m saying that Minerva is definitely in love with you!”

“Yeaaah, I wonder about that.”

“I’m telling you, he is!” she insisted. “I’m sure you’ve realized it too, right?”

It was true that the possibility had crossed my mind. I just didn’t have anything concrete to go by.

“If he wasn’t, he wouldn’t have made such an amazing lunch for you.”

The lunch box suddenly felt like it weighed ten tons. *Love is heavy...*

“You think?” I asked.

“Obviously!” Meryl said, frustrated. “He gets all pouty if he sees Mira and me getting even just a little bit chummy with you.”

Yeah, he does keep calling them cheeky brats...

“So what are you going to do?”

“About what?”

“About Mister Minerva! Who else?”

I personally thought it was fine for guys to like other guys. But if you asked me

whether I could have a man as my own lover, that was a different story. I just couldn't get turned on if my partner wasn't a woman. I'd asked my gay friend about this before, and he'd told me that if you could get off while thinking of a man, then you could be gay. *I've never tried it for myself, but I don't think my body would react...*

"But it's not like he's confessed," I protested. "You don't actually know what he's thinking, do you? You shouldn't jump to conclusions."

"I dunno. It just sounds like you're trying to put off dealing with the problem to me."

Meryl's ten-rim coin fell into a hole. It was game over.

"All right then, we should be going now," Meryl said. "We need to earn a little more money."

"Yes, it's about time we go."

As Meryl and Mira headed back to work, I let vague thoughts of Minerva drift through my mind.

I thought he was a good guy. No matter what others said, he was at least nice to me. *Oh right, he did give off the vibe that he doesn't like women...* He hadn't reacted at all to the witch Michelle's big boobs when he saw her wanted poster.

Meryl had said all that, but in the end, I felt it was best to cross that bridge when we got there. It'd be a waste of time to worry about it when the man in question wasn't even here. Minerva had headed into the deepest part of the dungeon, and he'd said he wouldn't be back for three days.

I'll leave this to future me to deal with.

A rowdy band of adventurers was returning. It was one of my regulars, Garmr, and his buddies.

"Give me four Morocco Yogurts, Mister Yusuke," Garmr said.

"Here you go. That'll be eighty rims," I said, handing him the Morocco Yogurts. "Did you get hurt?"

"Yeah, it's nothing major." Garmr poked one boy's face. "This guy here just made a mistake."

“What was I supposed to do? I had to sneeze.”

“We were after some Stray Methane. They spook easily, so we’re not supposed to make any noise.”

Stray Methanes were gaseous monsters, and they dropped a good amount of money despite how easy they were to defeat.

“But, you know, it’s really tough that we can’t give any orders since we have to stay silent.”

“Yeah, and it’s hard to use any hand signs since we’re holding weapons.”

“Then buy this,” I said, recommending one of my products.

Product name: Cocoa Cigar

Description: Candy shaped like cigarettes. If you think to yourself while holding one in your mouth, you can communicate with people within a ten-meter radius. However, both of you must be holding a cigar in your mouth.

Price: Thirty rims (Six pieces included)

When I was a kid, we would stick these things in our mouths and pretend we were smoking. It probably used to be fun to imitate adults.

It appeared that these Cocoa Cigars could function as soundless transceivers in this world. There were plenty of flavors besides cocoa too, such as orange, blueberry, and cola.

“Let’s test some out.” Garmr and his buddies put the Cocoa Cigars that they had bought in their mouths to see if they really could communicate with each other.

“Whoa, amazing! I can actually hear voices in my head!”

“Hey, who the heck said penis!”

“Ha ha ha! No, don’t make me laugh!”

“Don’t say poop either!”

“Ga ha ha ha, are you stupid or something?”

It seemed like it didn't matter whether they were in Japan or another world—a lot of boys were idiots.

But if you used these things properly, wouldn't they become an indispensable item for dungeon attacks? Thirty rims was cheap enough for any team of rookie adventurers to easily obtain them.

I should start featuring them more...

Minerva was standing there when I headed out of the Swindoll Con Inn early in the morning. He had been in the dungeon depths, so this was the first I'd seen of him in three days.

“What a coincidence, Yusuke,” he said. “Didn't think I'd run into you here.”

I kinda felt like we'd been running into each other all the time recently, so it didn't really feel like a coincidence...

“Good morning, Minerva,” I greeted him.

“Are you heading to the dungeon right now? I was just about to head there myself. We may as well go together.”

His invitation was just a little bit pushy, but we headed for work together.

“By the way, were you able to buy a license?” he asked along the way.

“No, I'm going to keep selling my goods in the dungeon for a while. I wanna earn money fast so I can rent an apartment.”

“I see...”

Having to pay 12,000 rims every month would hurt my wallet, and I got more customers down below anyway. In particular, customers that stopped by during the day had contributed significantly to my sales.

I'd started going to the break room by myself yesterday. I would be with the other adventurers heading both in and out of the dungeon, and so long as I had my monster cards, I'd decided it wouldn't be that dangerous. Plus, I had Minerva with me today, so I'd be especially safe. I didn't know his intention in

joining me, but when it came to bodyguards, there was no one more reliable.

When we arrived at the break room, I recited the words “Store, open” to bring out my shop.

“Oh? I’ve got some new games! There’s a ten-rim game different from the one I got the other day, and capsule toys!”

Product name: Ten-Rim Game (Continental Conquest)

Description: Play with a ten-rim coin. The prize is a defensive barrier charm.

Price: Ten rims per try (Only accepts ten-rim coins)

“Whoa, this is that thing where you fight by taking over land!” I exclaimed. “It’s different from the ones I know, though.”

“Hm,” Minerva said, approaching with his interest piqued, “there’s a map of the continent of Nautilus drawn here.”

A continental map was drawn on the front of the case, featuring the continent of Nautilus, where we were currently located.

“So, how do you play?”

“It’s just like the Dungeon Conquest Game next to it,” I told him. “First, you put a ten-rim coin here.”

When I put the coin in, the left and right roulettes below the screen began to spin. The left roulette had numbers, and the right one had pictures.

“Using the stop button, you first stop the left roulette,” I said before demonstrating.

“Hm. It’s a ten.”

“That’s a big number. Now’s our chance. Next, you use the right button to choose a picture.”

There were four pictures: a princess, a king, a witch, and a skull.

“If you get the princess, you can occupy a number of countries equivalent to

the number you rolled,” I told him. “If you get the king, you’ll get twice that number. But if you roll the witch, you’ll lose as many countries as the number you rolled.”

“So, the witch is the bad guy... Then what happens if the skull appears?”

“Death is the end of everything, so you’ll get a game over.”

When I pressed the button, I got the princess. Ten lamps representing ten countries lit up on the screen.

“If you keep this up and take over all fifty countries on the continent, you’ll get the prize.” My luck then immediately ran out. “Whoops, I got the skull.”

And that was game over.

I looked back at him. “You wanna try?”

“I’ll pass,” he replied. “It’s more fun to watch you do it.”

I feel like I once knew a girl who would say things like that... Though his scary, husky voice was the same as always, at times like this Minerva seemed like a girl.

“I see.” I then turned my attention to the other new item in the room. “Now what’s this gachapon?”

The capsule toys inside seemed relatively large and appeared to be of a more recent type.

Product name: Capsule Toys - Miniature Furniture (Eight types + a secret item)

Description: Miniature furniture made by a famous furniture maker. Skilled artisans painstakingly crafted each and every one of them. The first series features chairs and sofas.

Price: Three hundred rims

The label on the front displayed a picture of a leather sofa and a velvet-

covered chair. They all used real materials and appeared very extravagant.

Maybe I should get the full set and decorate my store with them?

I thought a lineup like this would tickle the fancy of collectors, but the adventurers didn't so much as look at the Capsule Toys. I didn't understand why...

"It's too expensive," Meryl informed me while eating a frozen Anzu Stick. Meryl and Mira had returned here for a break.

"Hm... So, the problem is the price, huh...?" It was true that for Dagashi-ya Yahagi's products, three hundred rims was on the higher end.

"It's not like it's a magic item either," she said, showing no interest in the Miniature Furniture.

"But it's cute, right? Wouldn't you like to try arranging them?"

"We're too old to be playing with dolls. If I had three hundred rims, I'd use it on the other stuff you sell."

All these adventurers were so pragmatic. I had my doubts I could sell these at all.

Actually, what would happen at times like these when something wasn't selling? After a certain period of time, would the contents be switched out? It wasn't like it'd be a loss for me, so it wasn't anything serious, but I was a little curious about how it worked.

I used my own money to try it for myself. I got a one-person sofa covered in black leather out of it. The seams were beautiful, and it looked perfect as a reading chair. It was way too small for me, though. After I admired it for a while, I placed it on a shelf.

It was right as I was about to close up for the day that some unusual customers stopped by Dagashi-ya Yahagi.

"Pardon me."

Hearing an especially high-pitched voice, I stood up and looked around, but I

saw no customers.

“Huh? Was that my imagination?” I wondered aloud.

“No, we’re right here.”

I heard a voice, but I didn’t see anyone anywhere. *Has some invisible person come to my shop?*

“Yusuke, at your feet,” Minerva said. When I looked down, I saw three dwarves less than ten centimeters tall there. One was an old man with a long beard while the other two seemed to be young men.

Other worlds are incredible! I had no idea a race like this could exist. But it’d be rude if I seemed too surprised, so I calmly made their acquaintance.

“Welcome.”

“Mister shopkeeper,” said the old man, “our two youngsters here said they saw a beautiful chair at this store. If you still have it, could we please have a look?”

He had to be talking about that capsule toy, huh. I took the miniature sofa I’d set up as decoration and placed it on the floor.

“Is this it?”

“Oh! How wonderful,” he marveled. “It looks so comfortable for sitting.”

“It’s just like we said, right, Elder?”

I wanted to close up my shop already, but the dwarves were gathering around the chair and stirring up a fuss. The “dwarves” that had appeared at Dagashi-ya Yahagi introduced themselves as earth sprites known as gnomes.

“Mister shopkeeper. We’d like you to sell us this sofa, but how much is it?” It seemed that the gnome elder had taken an especially keen interest in my sofa. He had asked me with such a serious expression, but this wasn’t something I sold in my store.

“To tell you the truth, this is one of the items from my gachapon.”

“Gachapon?”

“I’m talking about this.”

I explained what gachapon were to the gnomes.

“In other words, for just three hundred rims, we can get furniture from here?!”

The gnomes grew excited.

“That’s right. Although, in return you won’t know what’ll come out.”

“Hm,” the elder said thoughtfully. “It seems we’ve found an amazing store. Itchee, Scratchee, tomorrow we must bring our whole clan here together.”

“Indeed, Elder!”

“If it’s only three hundred rims, we can buy his entire stock!”

Whoa, they’re going to buy up everything? This gachapon could fit a maximum of fifty capsules inside it. With forty-nine of them in stock, that meant I’d get 14,700 rims if they bought all of it!

“Are you going to open your shop here tomorrow as well?”

“Yes. So, by all means, stop by.”

“Then we shall be back tomorrow morning!” The elder tapped the cane he held against the ground and with that, their bodies were swallowed into the earth and disappeared.

“It’s rare for gnomes to appear,” Minerva said once they had left. “They must have really liked that sofa.”

“Do gnomes not show themselves in front of people?” I asked.

“There likely aren’t many adventurers who have actually seen them, even among those who go into the dungeon. I have only seen them a couple of times myself.”

Then I guess I’m lucky.

“By the way, do gnomes have money?”

“Gnomes are very wealthy, I hear.”

While that was all well and good, there was one problem.

“But if you’re that tiny, isn’t it impossible to lift a hundred-rim coin?”

You needed three one-hundred-rim coins per try for this gachapon. A hundred-rim coin was far bigger and heavier than a ten-rim coin.

“They’re probably fine. Gnomes are masters of Earth Magic and are great sorcerers. I’m sure they can handle something like lifting a coin.”

That was how Minerva explained it to me, and sure enough, he proved to be right.

The next day, just as I was opening my shop, those gnomes came carrying two whole ten-thousand-rim silver coins. They had said they would bring their entire clan over, and there really did seem to be about a hundred of them here. Their noisy high-pitched voices resounded against the dungeon’s walls.

“Mister shopkeeper,” said the elder, “please allow us to exchange these. It is also difficult for us to turn the gachapon’s dial. I’m greatly sorry to trouble you, but could you turn them in our stead?”

“That’ll be no problem.”

I then called out to Minerva. “Sorry, could you help me?”

“Me?”

“Yeah, I need a temporary employee.”

“Working at the store together...” Minerva thought for a moment before he nodded his head. “All right.” He started silently putting in the smaller coins that the gnomes had exchanged, turning the knob. I took the capsules that he dispensed and twisted them open to retrieve the contents. Every time I placed a piece of furniture on the floor, the gnomes all cheered.

“Hey now, what’s all this fuss about?”

“Wow! There are so many gnomes here.”

Meryl and Mira had arrived on the scene.

“Great timing,” I said. “It can be just for the morning, but could you two do some part-time work for me? I’ve got my hands full right now.”

“I guess we can’t say no,” Meryl smiled.

“Leave it to us,” said Mira.

My two long-standing customers were well acquainted with my products. They had even memorized the prices, so I was perfectly comfortable leaving my store in their hands. Thanks to that, Minerva and I could focus on opening the forty-nine capsules and handing the furniture off to the gnomes.

“Oh!” cried the elder. “The secret special item was a rocking chair! I’ll take this to my room.”

It seemed he had taken a great liking to the rhythmically swaying rocking chair.

The elder then peered up at me. “Sir Yahagi, you’ve graced us with a fine shopping haul. Please allow us to express our gratitude.”

“No need. And thank *you* for buying out my stock.”

I had thought these things wouldn’t sell at all, but now they were all sold out. I’d even made a killing off of them.

“But is this really all right? You’ve sold such wonderful pieces of furniture to us for so cheap.”

“It’s no problem,” I assured him. “I sold them to you at their regular price point.”

“But I can’t accept that...” The elder perked up. “Oh, that’s it! Sir Yahagi, do you like baths?”

I was from the country of Japan, a land of hot springs. I’d been a bath lover back then, and that hadn’t changed since transferring here. However, bathtubs were a luxury item that only the rich had in their homes in this new world. Of course there was no way my usual place, the Swindoll Con Inn, had one either.

“I love them. Why do you ask?”

“I see! You like baths! Then we will tell you the secret location of a hot spring.”

“What?!” I cried in excitement.

“On floor B2 of this dungeon, there is a secret spot where a hot spring wells

forth. It's located at the former site of an ancient temple, so it's a safe place where monsters do not appear."

The elder wriggled his nose with seeming pride.

"I'm grateful for that information," I told him sincerely. "I love hot springs."

"Oh ho ho, that's splendid to hear. Please feel free to use it how you please. We won't mind if you tell your friends either."

The elder entrusted me with a map that showed the hot spring's location and left, leaning upon his cane.

Once the gnomes had gone, Meryl and Mira, who had been nearby, raised their voices in excitement.

"A hot spring?! That's amazing! Let's go for a dip ASAP!"

"Agreed!" Mira said eagerly. She then picked up one of my store's products. "Oh, please sell us these Squirt Guns. We'd like to play with them at the hot spring." What she held in her hand was a blue Squirt Gun.

"Hey now, you can't go playing with toys in a public hot spring," I scolded her.

"What's the harm? There won't be anyone there but us. And recently, my shoulders have been quite stiff..." With a pained expression, Mira tapped her own shoulder. *Mira does have some pretty big ones...*

Product name: Squirt Gun

Description: A toy you play with by putting water in it and squirting it. If you aim directly at a pressure point on the body, then there's a massaging effect. It reduces painful shoulder stiffness and lower back pain.

Price: One hundred rims

At a glance, it looked like the pistol type of water gun that'd been around for ages. But this world's Squirt Guns were high-quality. The fact that they could

massage you made them an especially exceptional item. Mira had a good point. It was still a private hot spring, so there was some room for a bit of horsing around in there. I hadn't used these things before either, so I decided I'd test them out for myself.

However, as we were getting fired up about the idea, Minerva angrily shouted at us.

"No! Nooo way! You can't!!!"

What's he so upset about?

"Why not?" I asked, a little annoyed.

"I won't allow the three of you to go to a hot spring together!" he seethed. "You shameless hussies! You intend to sandwich Yusuke between your naked bodies and have him completely, don't you? I won't let that happen!"

Minerva's words left Meryl and me speechless.

"Of course we're going to be taking turns. Where did you get the idea that there would be any mixed bathing?"

"I don't dislike Mister Yusuke or anything," Meryl started, "but it's not like we're lovers, so I don't wanna go in together."

"Huh?" Minerva paused. "Really?"

"I personally don't mind," Mira suddenly said, ever the natural airhead.

"Mira?"

"All we'll be doing is entering a bath together, right? So long as we use towels, nothing will show."

With those large assets of hers, I don't think towels would cover much...

But Minerva wasn't having it. He exploded with rage. "I will *definitely* not allow that!!!"

It took a lot of effort to finally calm him down.

Michelle's Side

This was unbelievable. At this rate, Yusuke was going to fall prey to those cheeky brats. And of all things, Yusuke was going to take them to the hot spring! He had no idea how dangerous that was! To make matters worse, he'd completely left me behind.

No, of course Yusuke had been kind enough to invite me along. But I couldn't go with him. If I went down to B2, those annoying Chime Blossom Bugs would start whining, and my true identity would be revealed. It was likely I'd have to reveal that I was Michelle the witch to Yusuke eventually, but I wanted to wait until after we'd gotten a little more intimate.

This had seemed like a good opportunity, but I hadn't expected those two would butt in... That mage Mira was especially in the way. She acted all airheaded, but she couldn't fool me. I could see through her scheme to seduce him with her womanly assets, clear as day. Also, my breasts were bigger than hers. If I didn't have this cognitive obstruction spell on me, Yusuke would stop even giving other women the time of day. *Aah, this world is so unreasonable.*

But what should I do? I had faith in Yusuke, but I could think of some worst-case scenarios. If those two both seduced him at once, his rational mind might crumble. Hot springs were full of mana that lowered people's inhibitions. No, I had to go and protect him. But what should I do about those Chime Blossom Bugs?

...I could just burn them all.

It was so simple. Why hadn't I thought of this sooner? Everyone hated those things anyway since they sucked out your blood. I was sure their population would increase again, but if I worked through the night using my Fire Magic to incinerate them, I felt I could stave off the Chime Blossom Bugs on floor B2 at least.

All right, I'll pull an all-nighter and then go to the hot spring with Yusuke tomorrow. ≡

Yusuke's Side

Minerva, who had been sulking beside the store, abruptly stood up. It seemed

he'd had a strict upbringing. He was so scandalized by the mere idea of men and women going to a hot spring together. We'd appeased him by telling him it wasn't like we were going in at the same time, but was he coming back to complain some more?

"Yusuke, about tomorrow... I'll go with you to the hot spring after all."

"O-Oh. That's fine, but didn't you say you had something to do?"

"Don't worry. I decided I'll take care of it tonight. So sell me a box of Ten-Rim Gum."

"A whole box of it? Are you going to be using a lot of mana?"

"Yeah, just a bit of a Maximum Inferno spell."

I had no idea what that entailed, but the name alone sounded pretty crazy.

"Don't push yourself too hard," I said, handing him my remaining box of Ten-Rim Gum.

"Don't worry. I'm simply going to exterminate some pests."

"Huh..."

Minerva's mood had seemingly done a one-eighty, and he now looked pretty pumped.

Michelle's Side

The dungeon at night, emptied of people, had fallen completely silent. I gathered up the wind to check my surroundings, but there were only monsters, with no adventurers left on floor B2. Only the Chime Blossom Bugs' shrill cries were reverberating throughout the area. These things were also called Whining Striped Mosquitoes, and they looked very much like bulked-up mosquitoes.

The insects were chirping loudly, "Chee, chee, chee."

"Hmph. Cry as much as you want now. You've gotten in my way time and time again. Thanks to you all, those adventurers are always after me."

They kept crying out.

“Are you begging for your life now? Sorry, but this is also for the sake of my happiness with Yusuke.”

Readying my magic, I shouted, “Take this, Maximum Inferno!”

An enormous flame gushed forth into the dungeon’s passageway, surging and sweeping across the floor. For some time, the bright flare illuminated the darkness before the dungeon was once again consumed by shadows.

“Did I do it...?”

To my dismay, the insects’ whine sounded again.

“Why, you—!” I yelled. “You’re still here?!”

I tossed some Ten-Rim Gum into my mouth and let the mana course through my body once more.

Several hours had passed, and those insects were still chirping away. No matter how many times I burned them, the Chime Blossom Bugs would reemerge like ghosts from the depths of hell. I couldn’t take this anymore.

Their chorus continued, “Chee, chee, chee.”

I’m the one who wants to cry.

“Chee, chee, chee.” They wouldn’t stop.

“Shut up!” I screamed. I blasted a flame toward them, burning them to a crisp, but after a moment their cries started up again from somewhere.

This might be impossible...

“Tee hee! Mister Yusuke, I’ll rinse off your back for you!”

“Aw shucks, heh heh.”

Just as I began to resign myself, the image of a naked Mira closing in on a dreamy and dazed Yusuke floated into my mind’s eye.

No, no, noooo!!! I wouldn’t let those two have their way with Yusuke! If it came down to it, I’d make it so he couldn’t hear anymore...

“Wait, that’s it!”

I was such an idiot! Instead of trying to exterminate all the Chime Blossom Bugs on floor B2, it'd be way easier to make it so that Yusuke and those brats couldn't hear them! I'd make full use of my Acoustic Magic and turn those cries into the sounds of chirping birds!

Once this ingenious idea came to mind, I plopped down on the floor. Dawn was approaching, and our meeting time was right around the corner.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 5

Mister Yusuke's store got a new product. They're called Cocoa Cigars, and they really came in clutch today! We took down a Horned Rabbit, which is super sensitive to sound. Whenever we find one and start whipping up a quick plan, it always runs away.

But not this time! When we put those Cocoa Cigars in our mouths to communicate with each other, we hunted it down, no sweat! Thanks to that, I think I earned about seven hundred more rims than usual!

I did mess up a little today, though... I forgot that I had a Cocoa Cigar in my mouth and just thought to myself, "Oh man, I can't wait for work to be over! I'm gonna go ham on those Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins after this!" It was super embarrassing to have my thoughts leak out to my partners. Well, I guess it was better than what Mira was thinking: "Oh, my boobs are so heavy. They're making my shoulders stiff."

Also, I just bought so much Morocco Yogurt. I'm part of the vanguard, so I'm constantly getting tiny cuts and bruises here and there. I've gotten into this snack because the sweet and sour flavor seems to heal my mind and body. My poor little heart especially can't resist how you can win another! Not that I have yet...

It does suck that the quantity is a little lacking though. The amount is about the size of the tip of my thumb. Mister Yusuke said he might eventually get a Jumbo Morocco Yogurt in stock. Apparently, its contents are around ten times more than a regular one's. I can't deny that eating with a tiny wooden spoon feels kinda elegant, but getting to gulp down a large Morocco Yogurt to my heart's content sounds like a dream come true. I want Mister Yusuke to level up quickly so he can sell those jumbo-sized ones soon.

Tomorrow, we're going to be looking for the hot spring the gnomes told Mister Yusuke and us about. I always go down to B2 to explore, but I had absolutely no idea that a place like that existed! I rarely get to take baths, so I

was really excited. For common folks like us, we might be able to afford the occasional public bathhouse, but we otherwise usually wipe ourselves off with a damp towel or save up water in a washbasin and clean ourselves there. Every once in a while, I go to a secluded forest or somewhere and get some water from Mira's magic. Being doused in a whole ton of water feels like heaven, but it probably feels even better to be gently immersed in a hot spring.

It's all thanks to Mister Yusuke. Maybe I'll at least massage his shoulders for him tomorrow? No, I can't do that... Mister Minerva is gonna bite my head off if I do something like that. He seems really strict about what guys and girls can do with each other.

Chapter 6: Hot Spring Yahagi

The hot spring I'd been told about was on floor B2, so the trip there would be dangerous. I used the products from my store to thoroughly prepare myself to take on the challenge. Even if Minerva, Meryl, and Mira were going to be with me, I wanted to at least look after myself. I hated the idea of looking ridiculous in front of everyone. Even a dagashi-ya wants to act cool.

I only had four monster cards left: C. Giant Crow, R. Zombie Knight, SR. Turtle Ninja, and R. Stone Golem. I had some decently strong cards left, so I felt I could probably manage whatever came my way.

Before I went out, I pulled some Scratch Cards too. I finally won on my fourth try, and with my three matching swords, I got increased physical strength.

Whoa, I really do feel stronger! I wonder what's the heaviest dumbbell I can lift now?

Also, I had two Anzu Sticks for a burst of courage, and I put agility-boosting Odama Candy and a Morocco Yogurt into my pocket.

I had done what I could, so the rest was up to fate. All that was left was to roll with the punches.

Meryl and Mira soon appeared as I waited by the dungeon's entrance.

"Good morning, Mister Yusuke," Meryl greeted me. "Is Mister Minerva still not here?"

"Yeah. He's usually very punctual, but he's pretty late today."

Whenever we would meet up, it was usually Minerva who showed up first. We often ran into each other in places I wouldn't have imagined, and he'd always comment on how unexpected it was or how it was such a coincidence. It had reached the point that it felt like he was lying in wait wherever he expected me to show up.

And yet today, Minerva was late. He had said he had some important business to take care of yesterday. Was he busy because of that?

After we waited for a while, Minerva appeared from inside the dungeon.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Nah, it’s no big deal, but are you all right?” I asked. “You sound really tired.”

“I’m just a little sleep-deprived. Pay it no mind.”

Even the way he was walking told me he was running on empty. Was he really okay?

“Monsters don’t show up inside the hot spring,” I said, “so I think you should take a nap there.”

But Minerva just couldn’t accept my suggestion. “No, there’s no way I can sleep. I have to keep watch to make sure those two girls don’t commit any indecencies...”

And he’s still going on about that...

Minerva seemed thoroughly exhausted, yet his eyes alone held a fiery glare.

I had seen the stairs that led down to B2 a million times by now, but this was my first time actually using them. There were several terrifying stone statues, and the vibes were overall a lot more ominous compared to on B1.

“Hoot, hoot, hoot.”

As we headed farther inside, we started hearing cries reminiscent of a bird’s.

“What’s this weird hooting?” I asked. “Is there a monster nearby?”

I readied myself for battle, tightly gripping my Giant Crow card in my hand. Meryl and Mira both looked around with worried faces.

“I’ve never heard cries like this before,” said Meryl. “Is it a new monster species?”

The strange hoots continued.

“The rhythm is similar to a Chime Blossom Bug’s, but it is certainly the sound of a bird...” Mira observed. “I’ve never heard such a thing before.”

While the three of us were on high alert, Minerva, of course, was perfectly calm.

“There’s no need to panic. A pigeon got lost within the dungeon is all.”

“A pigeon?”

“It sounds like there are multiple birds, though...” Mira mumbled.

“A whole flock of them got lost in here!” he said hurriedly. “Instead of wasting our energy worrying about such trivial things, let’s get a move on.”

Minerva then snatched the map from me and speed-walked ahead of us.

We encountered some monsters along the way, but Minerva made quick work of them all. I had heard he was superpowerful, but he was on a totally different level from the other adventurers. His adeptness impressed Meryl and Mira time and time again.

Eventually, we passed through a narrow alleyway just barely big enough for one person to squeeze through, arriving at a slightly larger blind alley.

“We’re here,” Minerva said, handing the map back to me. “Now all you have to do is recite that spell those gnomes told you.”

I knelt on one knee and tapped on the floor with my fist.

“Oh, heed my knock,” I said. “Open that secret door. Beckon us unto that room from whence warm spring water flows.”

The wall before us slid to the side after I finished reciting the spell, revealing a passageway behind it.

“I sense no monsters,” Minerva said. “Let’s head inside.”

Minerva led the way as we arrived at what looked to be a break room with a door. Was the hot spring behind it?

I flung the door open at once. Thick steam came rolling out. Unlike the fog that preceded a monster’s appearance, it was accompanied by the scent of hot water. Once the steam thinned, a large and beautiful bath was spread out before my eyes. At a famous hot spring, I’d once seen a bath that could hold a hundred people, but this one looked even wider. Hot water gushed out all along

the edge of the bathtub, filling it with free-flowing spring water straight from the source.

“Whoa, it looks really nice,” I marveled. “The bottom of the bathtub is covered with gravel.”

“The water feels silky smooth against my skin!” Mira rejoiced as she dipped her hand in the bath.

“All right, let’s go in right away! Ladies first. I’ll wait in the other room until you guys are done.”

“Don’t mind if we do!” Meryl chirped.

“I’m so excited!”

I was going to leave the girls to it and head to the other room, but for some reason, Minerva wasn’t budging. Jeez, he’d been so strict about men and women not getting in the bath together, but here he was acting the funny guy by “forgetting” to leave. It was like he was setting me up to join in a comedic skit.

“Hey!” I barked at him. “Don’t play stupid and try to get left behind!”

“What?”

“You’re a man, aren’t you?!”

When I decided to play the straight man for him, Minerva became flustered.

“Oh, right. I am. Sorry, sorry.”

“There’s always gotta be at least one guy who pulls that act whenever you go to a hot spring.”

“That wasn’t what I was trying to do...”

“Now go on ahead of me.”

“All right.”

Minerva and I returned to the room that had preceded the hot spring. It was completely deserted, with nothing inside, but at least it was safe since no monsters would appear. If I called up my shop, I’d get that chair that came along with it, so I decided to do so and take a breather.

“Store, open.”

Once I chanted the words, I discovered that I had once again leveled up.

“Whoa...”

My heart trembled with excitement as finally the thing I had long been yearning for made its debut.

The new item at my shop was a refrigerator with glass on all four sides. The glass probably messed with the refrigeration’s efficiency, but it was made that way so you could easily see the products inside.

“What is this box? There’re a lot of differently colored bottles inside.”

“It’s called a refrigerator,” I told Minerva. “It’s a device that chills whatever you put inside it. And this is great! It’s already got two different kinds of drinks in it!”

Product name: Ramune

Description: A soft drink. A soda with a citrus-like flavor. Drinking it regulates the flow of mana within the body.

Price: One hundred rims

The term “ramune” seemed to have originated from a mispronunciation of the word “lemonade.” It had started as “lemonade,” then got shortened to “lemone,” before arriving at the word “ramune.” I had always loved this stuff. As a kid, once I finished drinking a bottle, I’d always open it up to take out the marble.

“Yusuke, are those other colorful ones medicine or something?”

“That’s Nikki,” I said. “It’s a sweet drink flavored with cinnamon. It stings your tongue and your throat, but it’s tasty.”

“It looks like there’re three kinds. Are they all different flavors?”

“No, it’s just their colors that are different.” These things reawakened vivid memories of my friends and me showing each other our brightly colored tongues dyed by the artificial food coloring.

Product name: Nikki

Description: A soft drink that contains cinnamon extract. Drinking it reduces fevers.

Price: One hundred rims

It was great that I had cold drinks in stock now. My shop hadn’t felt like a proper dagashi-ya without them. Now if I could just get some Hiyashi Ame or Mikan Water too, then it’d really be perfect.

“A drink that regulates the flow of mana within the body sounds interesting,” said Minerva. “Give me one of those Ramune things.”

“How about you drink it after you get out of the bath then?” I suggested. “It’ll taste even better that way.”

The cold Ramune would definitely refresh our bath-heated bodies.

“I see. That’s a good idea.”

Minerva and I played the Continental Conquest game, and some other things like the dartball game that came out as a prize, while waiting for the girls to return.

“Whew, that was a great bath.”

“We could completely relax in there!”

Meryl and Mira had emerged from the bath. It was cute how their faces were flushed from the heat. Maybe the hot spring had a skin-beautifying effect because their faces were glowing. They were holding the Squirt Guns they had bought from my shop.

“How were those?”

“They were amazing!” Mira exclaimed, uncharacteristically excited as she

explained. "I had been suffering from stiff shoulders for so long, but thanks to these, I've finally found relief. I'm so glad I bought them!"

It seemed that the Squirt Gun's massaging effects were the real deal.

"Glad to hear it," I said. "I'll give it a whirl myself then."

"By all means! I highly recommend it!"

I picked two orange Squirt Guns from my shop.

"All right, let's go in." I invited Minerva along and headed toward the bath. However, he didn't move a single step.

"What are you doing?"

"Huh? What do you mean?" Minerva looked at me with a blank expression.



“Like I said, let’s hurry up and take a bath.”

“...Together?”

“I mean, that was my intention.”

He suddenly began to tremble. *What’s the matter?*

“Oh,” I said, “do you not like other people seeing your body? In that case, you can go in before me.”

Fellow men or not, there were people out there who didn’t want to be seen naked. There was no need to force him to go together. It wasn’t like I was dying to see him naked either.

“N-No, it’s fine... Let’s hurry up and go in...”

His voice was still somewhat tremulous, but he briskly entered the bathroom. *What was that about?*

“Well, we’re gonna go inside,” I told the girls. “There’re some cold drinks there, so feel free to help yourself. I’ve got Ramune and Nikki.”

Leaving Meryl and Mira there, I too headed into the bathroom.

The sound of splashing water resounded throughout the bathroom, and the water’s surface rippled. Even looking at it all again, I could only conclude it was an extremely relaxing bath.

I began quickly taking off my clothes.

“All right, let’s get changed so we can go in...” Then I paused. “What are you staring at?”

Minerva gawked at me, frozen. He wasn’t saying a word.

“Hey, don’t stare at me so much,” I said, beginning to feel uncomfortable. “Just because we’re both guys doesn’t mean I won’t get embarrassed.”

He sputtered. “S-Sorry! I’m simply unfamiliar with such a sight, so...”

Unfamiliar?

“Are there no public bathhouses in this country? Or is it customary to wrap a

towel around your waist when you go in?”

When in Rome, do as Romans do, the saying went. For me, it was a given that you’d be naked when you went to a bathhouse, but I did want to respect this country’s customs.

“No, we have them. I don’t believe you need to conceal yourself with a towel either. This is just a me problem...”

Oh, I see. So, he isn’t used to going to places like this.

“Got it,” I said. “If it bothers you, I’ll wrap a towel around myself.”

“No, it’s fine!” he interjected. “Just stay like that. I think it’s for the best that I get used to it now...considering things later down the line...”

What’s that supposed to mean? Oh! That probably means he’s already thinking he’ll go to more public bathhouses in the future, and he wants to be prepared for it.

“All right, then I’ll go just like this.”

“Mm-hmm. Also, Yusuke?”

“What’s wrong?”

“For various reasons, I think I still can’t show you my face or my body. May I use a cognitive obstruction spell today? I do want to show you my everything one day, but...”

I didn’t particularly want to be shown his everything... *I might get depressed.*

“Do as you please.”

“Thanks.” With a wave of his hand, a large mosaic appeared, covering him from head to toe. I couldn’t tell what was what.

“Yep, I can’t make head nor tail of you now. I can’t even see the outline of your body.”

“I see.”

I left Minerva to his own devices and sank into the water first. It was a sensation I hadn’t experienced in a long time, so my skin felt like it was tingling.

“Hmm, the water feels great. You should hurry up and come in too.”

“Coming~! ♪”

“Huh?”

“I said I’m coming.”

“Sure thing...”

Minerva climbed into the bath next to me, not that I could see anything thanks to that mosaic.

“It feels great, doesn’t it?”

“Mm-hmm.”

It might’ve just been my imagination, but Minerva kept sneaking glances at me. Well, the mosaic made it hard to tell, though.

“We really gotta bring one of those hot spring chairs the next time we come down here,” I said. “I brought a bucket, but I didn’t have the foresight to get a bath chair.”

“If you’re okay with it being made of stone, I can make one for you.”

Minerva used some Earth Magic to immediately make a chair for me.

“Impressive as always. Well then, let me try it out.”

I got out of the water, settled on the chair, and aimed the Squirt Gun I had brought at my shoulder. I then pulled the trigger. The mana-charged stream of water squirted out with exquisite force to stimulate the pressure point.

“Whoa!” I exclaimed. “It really is effective!”

I forgot myself in the pleasure of the Squirt Gun, pulling the trigger again and again. With each squirt, I felt the exhaustion disappearing from my shoulders, my lower back, and my calves.

“You should try it, Minerva. It feels amazing.”

“Does it now...”

Minerva timidly came over and sat next to me. I couldn’t really see the details because of the mosaic, but I thought his skin seemed super pale. *It looks like he*

has some decent pecs too...

From what I could see, Minerva aimed his own Squirt Gun at the nape of his neck, but that mosaic made it hard to tell...

The water rushed out as he pulled the trigger.

“Ooh...”

“How is it?”

“It’s really nice...”

“I know, right?! I was surprised that it was this good! Oh, right, here. I’ll get your back for you!”

“Huh? But...”

“Don’t be shy! You can’t really hit your own back, right? So do it for me later too. Okay, here I go.”

I moved behind Minerva and settled for a good spot to aim for, but as I took aim...

“No... No, no, nooo!” Why was he refusing so hard? It was in a kind of cutesy way too...although his voice was still as scary as always.

“What’s wrong?”

“I just...think we’re moving too fast...”

Was there such a thing as “too fast” when it came to shooting a water gun at someone? I supposed it wouldn’t be strange for this world to have rules I was unaware of. *Well, the man said so himself, so I have to back off.*

“I’m feeling a bit lightheaded...”

“Me too...”

“Let’s get out and drink some Ramune.”

“Yeah.”

We put our clothes back on and headed once more to the front room.

Meryl and Mira were drinking Nikki when we got back.

“Mister Yusuke, this hurts my throat, but it tastes pretty good,” Meryl told me. “Oh, but we don’t know how to open this Ramune thing.”

You had to push the marble attached to the top so it went inside of the bottle. It was probably hard to tell for a first-timer.

“Got it. I’ll get it for you, so hang tight.” I popped four bottles open one after another. We all took a sip.

“It’s delicious!” Mira said. Then, giving her opinion as a mage, she added, “And the flow of mana within my body has become smoother.” She seemed to have really taken to the drink.

“Yeah, this is really nice,” Minerva agreed. He even immediately purchased one to store inside his bag. He could whip out his Ice Magic to chill it whenever he wanted, so he could easily keep one at the ready at all times.

I tilted the bottle so that the marble inside wouldn’t slip in, and as I took a sip, a fizzy sensation accompanied by a refreshing scent rose to my nose.

“Mm, that’s good! This really hits the spot!”

Had it been about a year since I’d last drunk this? Whether at summer breaks, temple festivals, or public baths, ramune was an important drink that recalled many special memories to mind. Today, I had found the hot spring with Minerva and the others. Now that I had connected this memory to the Ramune, I could store it away inside my heart as well.

We all sat alongside one another on a stone bench that Minerva made for us. For a time, we basked in the leisurely feeling of being fresh out of the bath. It was a pleasant atmosphere, and we were lulled by the distant sounds of splashing water.

“It’s so quiet here,” I said, “and best of all, no monsters appear here, so it’s safe.”

“I know, right? I’m kinda getting sleepy. I wish I’d brought a futon or something,” Meryl said, looking very drowsy from the bath.

“If we could use this as a break room, it’d make our B2 dungeon crawls a lot

easier.”

Mira’s words lit a sudden light bulb over my head.

“It’d be nice if I could start selling here,” I said.

“In here?”

“Yeah. We could leave the bath open to the public, and I’d set up my dagashi-ya right here. There’re no monsters around, so I could safely sell my goods as well.”

“I think your regulars would be super happy to see you here,” Meryl said eagerly, her drowsiness blown away by my idea. “There are a lot of young rookies who are thinking about heading down to B2 soon too.”

I could do this all immediately starting tomorrow.

I should make a public announcement, I thought to myself. But there was one problem.

“There’s only one bath here,” I pointed out. “There’s no dressing room or anything either, so it’s pretty inconvenient.”

Wouldn’t it make both men and women uncomfortable if we made this hot spring a mixed bath? On the other hand, I thought it’d be too much trouble for adventurers to bring a bathing suit with them when they were off exploring.

“Hm, so all you need is a partition?” Minerva said, standing up.

“What are you going to do?” I asked.

“I’ll make one for you with my Earth Magic.”

“You looked tired. Are you sure you’ll be all right?”

“I feel refreshed thanks to that bath.”

Minerva put one hand on the bathroom floor and sent his mana into it. With a rumble, a four-sided boulder protruded from the floor, rising into the ceiling.

“Nice! Now men and women can have their own sections.”

“I’ll go and partition off the entrance and the dressing room too.”

Thanks to Minerva, we had the proper arrangements for a bathhouse set up

in the blink of an eye. It was still pretty rough around the edges, but this was an unmanned public bathhouse located in the dungeon; it didn't need to look super elaborate or anything.

"When it comes to keeping it clean, I think everyone who uses it should clean up after themselves," I said.

"So long as you have a mage who can use Water or Wind Magic, that'll go by in a flash. I'll help as well!" Mira exclaimed with the utmost enthusiasm.

"Great! I'll give away a free mana-regenerating snack like Ten-Rim Gum to any mage who cleans up!"

I hoped that this place could become somewhere nice and relaxing for all of the adventurers.

One week later, the hot spring on B2 was bustling with adventurers. There were many who would stop by for a bath after work before heading home. Most of my customers up until this point had been relatively young adventurers, but I had recently been getting more veterans too.

"Hey, gimme some Ramune."

"Thank you for your continued patronage!"

My sales were gradually increasing, mainly thanks to the drinks people would purchase after their baths. However, one of the most popular items I had were the Squirt Guns.

"Kazakh, aim for my back."

"All right. Get my calves later for me too then."

"I know. Oh, go to the left a bit more. Yeah, that's the stuff! Ooh... You're good at this."

The sight of naked middle-aged men exchanging Squirt Gun shots was kind of surreal, but Squirt Guns were selling well among that age group. There'd been a population explosion of butt-naked guys holding a towel in their left hand and a colorful Squirt Gun in their right. As for what was trendy with the young adventurers, Menko was experiencing a silent boom.

Product name: Bomb Blast Menko

Description: A toy made of thick cardboard. It's a card the size of your palm, and it comes in various shapes. It's usually used to play a game or as a collector's item, but if you use it against a monster, it'll activate the spell Bomb Blast Storm to blow it away. As it is a magic item, it will disappear upon use.

Price: Twenty rims

Playing with Menko was easy. First, you decided who would go first with a game of rock paper scissors (yes, that existed in this world too). Whoever was going second would then put their Menko on the ground. Then the person who was going first attacked by smashing their Menko against the other player's. If you caused their Menko to flip, then you won, and you got to take that Menko as your own.

The Menko I was selling featured illustrations of famous adventurers throughout the generations. They had a manga-like touch to them, with many cute or handsome adventurers. They were sold in little packets the same way trading cards were, so you couldn't see what you got until you opened it.

"Ugh! I got the witch Michelle!"

It seemed currently active adventurers were included in the Menko as well. One boy was despairing over the witch Michelle card he'd pulled, so I traded my Menko with his. The witch truly was unpopular.

There was a description on the front of the Menko.

Witch Michelle: A great sorceress who established the Theory of Infinite Type Mana Circulation. An SS rank adventurer.

She was extremely talented and yet so hated. Was that all because she'd cast

a curse on the king? Or maybe the government was carrying out a smear campaign against her? Or was she really a bad person after all?

“I think she’s pretty cute, though,” I muttered. The witch in the painting had a gloomy, sour look. On the Menko’s illustration, I stroked the witch Michelle’s black hair with my finger.

For some reason, Minerva seemed in good spirits all day long.

I decided to officially move my shop down to the room in front of the B2 hot spring. I’d heard it was good for business if multiple stores were clustered together, so I invited the blacksmith Mister Sanaga and the recovery tea seller Miss Mirai to join me, and they happily offered their cooperation.

I didn’t know who had started it, but at some point, the hot spring had been designated Hot Spring Yahagi. It flustered me every time I heard it.

A team of young adventurers stopped by my shop first thing one morning.

“Hey, Mister Yusuke, you still got that Cherry Mochi?”

“Yep, both the cherry and green apple flavors are back in stock.”

There had been a recent epidemic of something called the Dungeon Flu going around wreaking havoc. If you contracted it, you’d come down with a high fever and difficulty breathing. There were even some cases in which people had died from it. This product was selling pretty well as a result.

Product name: Cherry Mochi

Description: Twelve pieces of gummy mochi. It protects against Dungeon Flu upon consumption. Even if onset occurs, it prevents the symptoms from worsening. Green apple and mikan flavors are also available.

Price: Thirty rims

It had been mostly young adventurers buying this stuff at first, but recently veteran adventurers had been joining the mix too. They said they were going to have their families eat them.

In this world, illnesses were typically cured by people who could use Healing Magic, but it seemed Dungeon Flu didn't respond well to magical treatment. At any rate, I was just happy that the snacks I sold were of use.

I stabbed a small piece of Cherry Mochi with a toothpick and had a bite for the first time in a while.

Yep, that's the stuff.

It stuck to your teeth, but I loved the unique flavor. In my previous life, there'd also been cola and soda flavors. Would they come to this world soon too? I gave some of my mochi to Minerva, Meryl, and Mira as well to prevent them from getting sick.

It was just past noon when some customers I hadn't seen around the dungeon before stopped by. They were a plump middle-aged man accompanied by an escort of eight soldiers. He had rather refined attire, and a somewhat large gold ring adorned his finger.

"Is this Dagashi-ya Yahagi?"

"That's correct. And I'm Yahagi, the shopkeeper."

"That is good to hear. The way here was confusing, so it had me worried," the man said, looking relieved as his eyes restlessly surveyed his surroundings. No matter how I looked at it, he didn't seem like an adventurer who would go dungeon diving. This hot spring was likely a novelty to him.

"So, this is the rumored Hot Spring Yahagi. It is more spacious than I anticipated."

"Are you here to partake of the hot spring's healing effects?"

"Oh, no, no, I am not." The man bent forward and lowered his voice. "To tell you the truth, I heard that this store sells a universal elixir. Is that true?"

"Oh, so you came for the universal elixir," I said. "In that case, you'll have to

try that game over there.” I then explained the rules of the Dungeon Conquest game.

“So, you are not selling it at your store. It is simply a prize from that game... Then I suppose I must try it. I am sorry for the trouble, but please allow me to exchange this at your store,” he said, handing me a gold one-hundred-thousand-rim coin.

Rich people are always a handful.

“We don’t carry that much change here,” I said. “You can exchange up to 10,000 rims, but 100,000 rims isn’t very feasible.”

“Oh my! How careless of me! I suppose I have no other option.” He then turned to his convoy. “You all, lend me some small coins.”

At his command, the soldiers searched through their own pockets for small coins and gathered them up. There looked to be about 4,000 rims’ worth of silver and copper coins.

“Hm... This should be more than enough.”

“Just so you know, this is a popular game,” I told him. “If there are people lining up behind you, let the next person have their turn once you get a game over.”

“So, that is the rule on the streets. I understand.”

Though he was pretty pompous, he seemed like a harmless middle-aged man. He accepted the terms of my store and immediately started the game.

“Oh! The coin already fell in the hole!!!”

“Nooo! I can’t get past the wall on B3!!!”

“The fourth floor at last... Ughhh! There is no way to cross that bridge...”

He was a lively person. At first, the soldiers had been quietly watching him play, but they eventually started wanting a turn too.

“Baron Ethel, please leave this to me, Grante.”

“No, leave it to me, Toll.”

“I will definitely accomplish this task or else my name isn’t Venti.”

It got really noisy with all their declarations, but it died down after a while.

“How could this be...?” the man said in despair. “I have used up all 4,300 rims.”

Oh dear.

“Shopkeeper, is it really possible to reach the goal? Are you sure you are not forcing people to try a game where one cannot capture anything at all?”

“It is true that it’s difficult, but it’s possible to clear it,” I said, taking a ten-rim coin from my pocket and inserting it into the slot. I had tried this game at least three hundred times by now, so I knew everything, like the little nuances of how much force to use and the right timing. Also, as the shopkeeper, it seemed I had some special abilities coming into play, and I succeeded in my conquest with relative ease. I lost on B6 on my first attempt but won splendidly on my second run, obtaining that universal elixir.

“See? I cleared it.”

“Ooh...”

Impressed, the middle-aged man and his cohorts suddenly looked at me sternly before bowing their heads.

“Sir Yahagi!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Please bestow that universal elixir upon us!”

Hmm... So, now it’s come to this.

“I can’t do that,” I said. “It’s a prize.”

“I am a noble of the kingdom, Moe Ethel,” said the man. “Please, I request that you give me that universal elixir for the sake of His Majesty, who has long been afflicted with a sickness.”

“Baron Ethel, do you intend to present this universal elixir to His Majesty?”

“Precisely. At this rate, our government affairs will remain at a standstill, and society will continue to fall into disrepair. I implore you!”

Man, what should I do?

“Mister Yusuke, don’t you pity them?” said Mira, who had stopped by for a break and was now mediating the situation. “Why don’t you give it to them just this once?” She was nice to everyone, so I was sure she’d been moved by Baron Ethel’s earnest display.

“All right. Just this once,” I relented, giving him the elixir. “Next time, please earn it yourself.”

“Oh, I deeply thank you! With this, I am certain His Majesty’s illness will improve. This is a sign of my gratitude. Please humbly accept it.”

Baron Ethel pushed a small leather bag into my hands before hurrying out of the room. I was sure he was heading straight to the king.

“Hey, that king is under the witch Michelle’s curse, right?” I asked Minerva, who was nearby. “Can the universal elixir cure curses?”

“Nope,” Minerva answered coldly. “His condition will improve for about two weeks, but it doesn’t mean that the curse itself will be gone. He’ll return to how he was.”

“Huh. So, that means that old guy will come back again.”

“Yep. Although, that curse should be wearing off soon.”

“Why do you know that, Minerva?”

“Th-That’s because...I’ve heard it before.”

“Heard it? From whom?”

“...From the witch Michelle.”

So, those two knew each other. I thought about asking for the details of how that had come about, but he suddenly hightailed it somewhere in a hurry.

Thanks to my thriving business, I was finally able to rent the apartment of my heart’s desires. With that, I could kiss my days at the Swindoll Con Inn goodbye. It was a cramped apartment with two bedrooms and a small kitchen, but it was a comfortable size for one person. Above all, I was thrilled that every small noise I made would no longer be met with jeers of “I’ll kill you!” or “Get outta

here!”

But there was just one problem. There was this guy who came over every single day...

“I bought ingredients for dinner. I’ll make it for us.”

When I opened the door, Minerva was once again there to greet me.

“So, you’re back again...”

“I’m making stew tonight.” Minerva headed toward my kitchen like it was the most natural thing in the world. For some reason, he’d stored a bunch of his personal belongings in my kitchen, almost like he was setting up camp there.

“Hey, are you going to leave some more of your weird tools in my house?”

“This is a cooking appliance called a blender,” he said. “It’s handy for making potage but...does it bother you?”

“It’s fine for now, but if I got a girlfriend, she’d definitely hate it...”

“You have a girlfriend?”

Minerva was trembling in his boots. *Is the idea that shocking?*

“Well, not yet,” I said, “but I do want a partner eventually. And if I’ve got a guy friend coming over every day and hanging out all the time, I don’t think she’d be too happy.”

“Of course not. He’d be nothing but trouble!”

“Right? So if I get a girlfriend, you gotta take back all this stuff you got here.”

“Mm,” Minerva mumbled before meekly nodding his head. “So, you do want a partner?”

“Well, yeah. If I had a girlfriend, that’d make life more fun. We could talk to each other about all sorts of things or go on dates, and it’d enrich my life, you know?”

Minerva nodded his head in agreement.

“Also, I’m no saint, so I wanna enjoy our time together at night in the bedroom.”

“The bedroom?!”

“Is it really that surprising? Have you never thought of doing it yourself?”

“No, to be honest, I do have...a great deal of interest in that.”

He’s always complaining about this or that, but he’s the same as me! You closet pervert!

“But if you’re staying over every single night, I won’t be able to do that.”

“Mm...”

“It’s not like I don’t like you,” I said, trying to reason with him. “It’s just that even if we’re friends and all, I think it’s a little questionable for you to be staying over every single night. Do you understand me?”

“I do. That means you want to stay with your partner forever and always.”

“Forever? I mean, I guess so...”

It’d be kinda suffocating if we were literally together twenty-four seven all year round, though...

“I understand that desire very well. I’ll do my best.” In good spirits now, he started to cook.

We made food together, ate together, cleaned up together, and then afterward we’d talk as we drank tea or alcohol; or occasionally play a game from my store’s products, like Shogi or Reversi; or sit side by side as we read books...

Wait, isn’t this kinda weird? This is a bit like what you’d expect a pair of lovers to do... No, no, no, wait, we haven’t done anything sexual. He stayed the night at my place, but we slept in separate beds. Minerva used the couch he had given to me as a housewarming gift. And yet...

That day, we were again drinking brandy after our meal while relaxing on the couch. The brandy had also been a present from Minerva. It was a pretty pricey brand, but Minerva was eager to keep refilling my glass. Was he trying to get me drunk? I felt a bit wary, yet I lost myself in the delicious taste of the alcohol. Before long, my consciousness was beginning to dim. That was when Minerva came at me with a barrage of questions.

“Tell me the truth. You really don’t have a girlfriend?”

“No way. If I had one, I couldn’t drink with a guy friend every night like this.”
As fun as it was to talk to Minerva, I didn’t want that to be all there was to my life.

“Then what’s your type, Yusuke?”

“Type...? Hmm, I dunno!”

“There’s no way you don’t know.”

“I dunno what I dunno.” In my previous life, I’d liked fox-eyed lady knights, but I hadn’t been that fixated on them in real life. Up until now, all of my romantic experiences had involved falling for people who were already around me. I didn’t have any particular preferences.

“Lemme guess. You like someone with big boobs like Mira?”

“Hm? Well, Mira is cute, so she’s a good choice. Big boobs, she’s nice, a calming presence—what’s not to like? And I like really lively girls like Meryl too. They seem easygoing but are actually compassionate, and I find that charming about them.”

“So, you do like them...”

I could hear a sound from under his mask like he was grinding his teeth.

“But they’re too young for me, so I wouldn’t go after them.”

“What?”

Oh, I’m getting so sleepy...

“Then how about someone older than those hussies?” he asked. “With big boobs, a big butt, who’s a great cook, and the strongest adventurer around?”

“Woow... What about her face and her personality?” I said with a yawn.
Man, I can’t stop yawning. I wanna sleep...

“Her face is...a little plain.”

“Hm, well, that’s no big deal. What’s most important is her personality. I’d want someone who’s kind... Yeah...”

Minerva was still talking to me, but I was at my limit. I was drifting off into a comfortable world of dreams. Before the last dregs of my consciousness slipped away, I thought I caught Minerva mumbling something.

“I understand. I’ll become a nice person.”

I barely registered anything, but I responded.

“That’s...good to...hear... Zzz...”

Michelle’s Side

Yusuke was passed out drunk. I slowly removed my mask right in front of him. I also cast aside the magic robe that concealed my womanly figure.

If he happened to wake up now... At that thought, hope and anxiety swirled together within me, wrenching my heart.

I picked up Yusuke’s defenseless body and carried him to his bed.

“Oh, you’re just hopeless without me,” I murmured. He didn’t wake up even when I poked his cheek. *Maybe I should do the usual while I can...*

I quietly crawled in beside him so we could sleep together. The warmth I felt from his body started making me drowsy too. *How happy I would be if I could fall asleep next to him just like this...*

“A kind person, huh...”

I felt like I could become the nicest person in the world, so long as that was what Yusuke desired.

Yusuke’s Side

My head hurt. I was completely hungover. Apparently I’d gotten carried away last night and drunk too much.

“Here, drink some water,” Minerva said, using his magic to fill a glass with water for me.

“Thanks,” I said, accepting the glass, and as I drank the cold water, it felt like it

was rehydrating every parched cell in my body one by one.

“Whew,” I breathed once I was finished, “I’ve been revived.”

I kinda feel like I’ve been depending on Minerva a lot lately...

“Are you going to take the day off?” he asked me.

“No, I can’t,” I said, taking out one of my dagashi. “My regulars are waiting for me.”

Product name: Sky Mint Blue

Description: Soft candy with a refreshing mint taste.
Sobers you upon consumption.

Price: One hundred rims (Fifteen pieces included)

The spring breeze blew in from the window Minerva had opened. It carried upon it the scent of an unfamiliar flower, mixing it with the smell of mint inside my nostrils.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 6

Instead of going to the dungeon for work, I went there looking for a hot spring. It's nice to do things off the beaten path every once in a while.

We had that supertalented Mister Minerva with us, so I wasn't scared at all. Yeah, he gets all angry if we get too friendly with Mister Yusuke, shouting that we're shameless or calling us hussies, but he might normally be a nice person. I mean, he was so considerate of us when we were on B2, walking ahead of us to ensure even my and Mira's safety. I might've been misunderstanding him up until now just because his face and his voice are scary. I think I'll start making more of an effort to approach him.

The hot spring we found was just gushing with hot water, and it felt amazing! And those Squirt Guns we bought from Mister Yusuke were out of this world! Mira especially looked like she was going to melt. Her shoulders are always so stiff!

I also had Mira squirt my calves, and I felt all that tension in them dissolve away. If this hot spring becomes famous, those Squirt Guns are definitely going to sell like hot cakes! Maybe I'll buy another one while I still can. I'll have Mira do the same, and then we'll use our two Squirt Guns to ease all our stiff muscles!

It'll make it easier to go exploring if Mister Yusuke opens up his shop at the hot spring. I could stop by to soak in the bath after work and use those Squirt Guns to relieve my fatigue, and then I'd be ready to work hard the next day! Drinking Ramune straight out of the bath just feels amazing, and if I have those lotteries to get all excited about, then I can feel like every day is nothing but fun!

Wait a second. I'm pretty obsessed with Dagashi-ya Yahagi, huh? Well, whatever! What can I say? Dagashi-ya are fun. I think having an oasis for my weary heart down on B2 would be really good for my day-to-day life.

We got surrounded by Killer Bees today. They're bee-type monsters only about

ten centimeters across, but I think there were at least a hundred of them. They're weak to fire, so we normally take them down with several fireball shots, but today the mage on our team just had to run out of mana.

Mira can barely use Fire Magic, so we were especially panicked. Those bees and their stingers have neurotoxins in them, so you'll be paralyzed if you're stung. In the worst-case scenario, they feast upon you while you're still alive... It's so scary, I don't want to even imagine what that's like.

We retreated immediately, but those things would not give up on chasing us. That was when I remembered my Bomb Blast Menko. This Menko had one of my favorite adventurers on it—Shooting Star Galaga. I didn't want to use it because of that, but it wasn't worth risking my life over. As wasteful as it felt, I threw my Bomb Blast Menko at those Killer Bees.

It was pretty strong. The moment it hit the earth, it let out a huge gust of wind that threw the Killer Bees against the wall or the ground, knocking them all unconscious. Thanks to that, it was easy to subdue them. I'll remember to buy more of those things tomorrow in case I ever need them.

I wonder, will I ever become an adventurer famous enough to be drawn on a Menko?

Chapter 7: Mobile Forces

I had leveled up once again, and I could now create a store layout similar to a vendor's booth in a department store. My selling area had gotten an expansion, and I now had more new products in stock.

And when I laid eyes upon the new products I found that morning, I couldn't keep my voice from trembling.

"Oh my god..."

There was a certain line of plastic models that used to be sold at dagashi-ya and toy stores in Japan. It wasn't like I'd ever seen any myself. I only knew *about* them. They were legendary products that were traded on e-commerce sites at exorbitant prices even to this day. They say that these products were copyca—I mean, *homages to* a robot anime that boasted nationwide popularity. However, the plastic models that had arrived at my shop this time were actually homages to those homages.

Product name: Mobile Force Gungalf

Description: A plastic robot model. Can be assembled without glue by slotting the pieces into place. It is possible to move it with mana.

Price: Three hundred rims

There were a total of seven types, such as the main protagonist robot, Gungalf, the enemy Mass Production Type Zako, the High Mobility Type Gugurecas, and so on... The finished product was as big as the palm of your hand, even smaller than a gnome. Their weight was a different story, though; they were much heavier than they looked. *Maybe they've got metal or something inside.*

"What is this? A homunculus...or rather, it looks more like a golem." Minerva

had stopped by again today and had taken some interest in my new product.

“It’s called a plastic model,” I said. “You build it to play with it. Although, it seems you can play with the plastic models of this world by channeling mana through them to move them.”

“Seems interesting. Give me one.”

Minerva selected Kian, a model that looked like a warrior clad in armor and a helmet. I similarly selected the main protagonist, Gungalf, and unboxed it.

“It’s easy to assemble,” I told him. “All you have to do is insert the arms and legs into the body like this.”

All of the joints were moveable, and Gungalf was way more polished than the Gungalf I knew. Only in this new world could you find something this high-quality at only three hundred rims.

Within five minutes, our plastic models were complete. According to the instructions on the box, you could establish a magic link between you and your model by touching it to your forehead. The only magic I could use were my “store, open” and “store, close” incantations, but I should at least have had mana. In which case, even I should be able to move Gungalf.

“Whoa!” The moment I touched the model to my forehead, I felt a threadlike line of electricity or something connecting us.

I stood Gungalf up on the floor and sent it my thoughts. *Move one step forward!* Once I did, even though my Gungalf was trembling a little, its right foot took a slow step forward.

“It moved!” I exclaimed.

While I was shaking, so moved by this display, the blue-colored Kian that Minerva had built briskly strode past Gungalf. Its movements were way smoother than my Gungalf’s.

“Is your Mobile Force a monster, Minerva?!”

“If you can give it detailed mental images, it’ll react accordingly,” he said coolly. “In order for it to remain stable, a certain level of mana needs to be maintained. Conversely, if you want it to exert more power, then you apply

more strength, but it'll stop moving if you overdo it with your mana."

Kian moved like a gymnast, leaping and jumping with effortless movements all around the place.

I can do that too, damn it!

"Go, Gungalf!" In my head, I visualized a somersault and conveyed it to Gungalf. Although he did whack his head in the process, he put his legs together and somersaulted across the floor before gracefully standing back up. "Whoa, I did it!"

"Looks like you're starting to catch on," observed Minerva.

I'm getting the hang of it, somewhat! The key here was that you had to smoothly send your mana and your mental image simultaneously without interruption.

"Okay, here I come, Minerva!" I commanded Gungalf to tackle Kian. Suffering this sudden surprise attack, Kian fell over.

"Wh-What the—?!"

"It's professional wrestling—pro wrestling," I said. "If you pin both of your opponent's shoulders against the floor for three seconds, you win."

I wanted to pin Kian down, so I had Gungalf stand up holding its thighs. Kian's body was twisting and turning, trying to get away.

"Hey, what are you doing with those dolls?! That's obscene!"

Meryl and Mira had stopped by to hang out. When I came to my senses, I realized that my regulars had been watching my match with Minerva.

"What are you calling obscene? It's pro wrestling," I said.

"Pro wrestling?"

"I guess you could call it pla wrestling instead? For plastic."

I explained the rules of pro wrestling to everyone.

"It seems like fun. It's three hundred rims, right?"

"Yep. I think it's a good bargain."

“Then give me this Zako one. I kind of like it.” Meryl had a good eye if she could see the value in Mass Production Types like that.

“Please give me a Dome model,” Mira said. *So, she’s going to buy one too, huh?*

“I want Gugurecas.”

Garmr too?

“I’m jealous...” Rigal the porter sighed, looking longingly at his senior adventurers. “I want one too. I need to save up some money somehow.” It seemed he wanted one pretty badly.

I had sold all forty I had in stock by the end of the morning. There was even one adventurer among my customers who had bought six different models.

As the shopkeeper, I had also looked into the Mobile Forces and found out that each model had different special characteristics, like how Mass Production Type Zako lacked power but was the easiest to pilot, or how the High Mobility Type Gugurecas was fast but difficult to manipulate with mana. Each of them had its own pros and cons, but I felt like the main protagonist, Gungalf, was the most well-rounded.

“Mister Yahagi, I heard you were selling a new product called a Mobile Force!” a boy adventurer said, bursting into my shop all out of breath.

“Sorry, I’m all sold out,” I said. “I should be getting a restock tomorrow, though, so stop by again then.”

As I watched him head on home with his shoulders slumped in disappointment, I sensed the dawning of a new trend.

It had been about four days since I had first started selling them, but I was consistently selling out of my Mobile Force Series as soon as they came back. My shop was restocked with forty of those models every day, but they’d all be bought out in less than two hours.

Adventurers weren’t the only ones interested in them either. There were

even ordinary folks who would go out of their way to head down with an escort to Hot Spring Yahagi on B2 to purchase these plastic models.

“This is a toy that’s just right for practicing using mana to maneuver something,” Minerva told me, sending his own Kian into an elegant dance. It seemed that these toys were good for educational purposes as well. Mobile Force units were only about as strong as something that was radio-controlled, so they weren’t dangerous. They were probably toys safe for even children to play with.

“Zako is on a totally different level than yours!”

“Don’t underestimate me! No one can move Gungalf as well as I can!”

Today yet again there was a heated battle unfolding in the ring I had specially installed next to my shop. I had made it for my customers but frankly speaking, I hadn’t expected people to be so excited about it. People would gather here each morning and evening to participate in matches or spectate them.

“It’s a sweeping victory! Mister Yusuke, gimme some Ramune!” Meryl came up to me after the match, her cheeks flushed.

“You won again?”

“That’s right,” she chirped. “My Red Shoulder is somewhat different from the rest, you know?”

Meryl had painted her Zako’s shoulder protectors red, like those of a certain elite force in an old mecha anime. Very different things were getting all jumbled together, and it gave a Japanese guy like me some complicated feelings.

At first, most battles had been conducted like pro wrestling matches, but recently more battles featuring close-quarters combat with weapons had been popping up. The blacksmith Mister Sanaga had made some miniature weapons in his spare time, and they had become a major hit among the player base.

“Thanks to you, Yahagi, I’m making a killing,” he’d told me. “I’m more busy with this than my usual line of work.”

Mister Sanaga had been getting one order after another, and his production couldn’t keep up with the demand. Yesterday he had even taken on an

apprentice for the purpose of making weapons for the Mobile Forces.

If a Mobile Force unit sustained a blow above a certain level of power, the magic link between it and its owner would be severed. If that happened, it'd count as a knockout, thereby deciding the outcome of the match.

"Mister Yusuke, you can see how passionate everyone is, so how about you hold a Mobile Forces tournament?" Mira suggested to me, stroking her Dome.

"Oh, sounds like fun," Minerva said. It seemed he was on board too. Everyone was obsessed with these things, so there'd probably be a lot of participants. It wouldn't be a half-bad idea to sponsor a tournament as a way of showing my loyal customers my appreciation for their patronage.

"It does sound like fun," I agreed, "so I'll give it a shot. Dagashi-ya Yahagi will sponsor prizes for the winners too. Although I'll only be able to offer up a mix of snacks and toys."

It'd be awesome if I could throw something as amazing as the universal elixir in there as an extra prize. Even now, there hadn't been many people who had obtained it.

"I'll enter too then," Meryl declared. "I'll prove that my Zako is the strongest one in town!"

"What nonsense are you spouting, you small-fry hussie? No one can beat my Kian. It's a fine model."

"My Dome won't lose either."

The three of them were already getting fired up about the competition.

A nobleman leading his guards came by my shop a little before noon. It was Baron Ethel, whom I had met before.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Yahagi," he greeted me.

"Long time no see. How fares His Majesty since our last meeting?"

"That universal elixir worked, and he is in a stable condition. Alas, the curse itself has not disappeared."

One of Baron Ethel's subordinates was already trying the ten-rim Dungeon Conquest game. Having learned from their previous mistakes, they'd come prepared with a massive number of ten-rim coins they had acquired themselves.

"Incidentally, Sir Yahagi, I have caught wind that a toy called a Mobile Force has been all the rage lately."

"That's right. It's been well received. No one's there right now, but people start having matches in that arena every day around evening."

"Oho, might you happen to have them in stock?"

"I just so happen to have two remaining." One of them was the most popular type, Gufufu. The other one was Jujiong, which was difficult to maneuver. Gufufu came with a whip by default, so you could immediately join a match with it. I had also heard buying one of the swords or shields that Mister Sanaga sold really boosted its strength.

Jujiong was conversely a model geared toward more advanced users. It had no legs, so it moved by floating through the air. It was possible to stretch out its arms to attack from all directions, but that meant you needed a ton of mana and good visualization skills to manage it well, which could be a pain. I'd tried operating one myself, but merely trying to maneuver it freely through the air had been tough.

"They look interesting. Please sell me both of them."

Baron Ethel opened the boxes on the spot and assembled the units. Once he had some practice moving them, he and his subordinate soldier enjoyed a wrestling match with the toys.

"This is great!" he exclaimed. "Positively amazing! Of course people cannot help but be captivated by these!"

This guy was a nobleman, but there wasn't a pretentious bone in his body.

"I'll be holding a Mobile Forces tournament soon," I told him. "If you'd like, why don't you participate in it? The grand champion will also receive the universal elixir as a prize."

“Oh my! So, that means I shall be able to participate as well?”

“Everyone who possesses a Mobile Force unit is allowed to participate.”

“That just gets me itching to put my skills to use. I must begin training from today onward!”

Baron Ethel had some Curry Rice Crackers and Ramune as a part of his snack time, and then he had another Ramune once he got out of the bath. He picked up another five on his way home to bring back as souvenirs.

Even a nobleman like Baron Ethel was totally engrossed in the Mobile Forces. That meant it was possible there'd be many participants in the contest beyond adventurers. In that case, I'd need to set up about five of these arena rings to accommodate that. I should enlist the help of a certain reliable partner.

“Oh, my dear Minervaaa!”

“Wh-What is it? Why are you calling me like that?”

“I have something I need to ask of you.”

“I-I'll at least hear you out. (*Hurry up and spit it out! I'll do anything for you!*)”

“Could I ask you to use your Earth Magic to set up four more Mobile Forces rings? Is that all right?”

“Hmph. That'd be no trouble at all. (*I'm so happy I can be useful to Yusuke.* ≡)”

That was Minerva for you. After all was said and done, he coolly took on any task given to him.

“What would you like as thanks? You can take anything you'd like from my shop.”

“I don't need anything.”

“You don't need to be so humble. Do you wanna try my new product, Mikan Water?”

“Well, if you're going to insist...” His voice trailed off.

“What's the matter? Say what's on your mind.” Sometimes Minerva became extremely shy. It could be a pain.

“My magical research has recently been at a standstill, and my shoulders have been...ooh...ow...” He trailed off, wincing, but I got the picture.

“Oh, you want me to give you another massage for your stiff shoulders? That’d be no problem at all! I’ll even throw in a Mikan Water for you.”

“Y-Yeah. (I’m so glad I got the courage to ask! Good job, me from three seconds ago!)”

Minerva immediately made the rings for me, and I gave him a thorough massage. It struck me yet again how delicate Minerva’s body really was, seeing it up close like this. It was kind of squishy too, like a woman’s...

Like a woman’s...?

“What’s the matter?”

No, it was probably just my imagination. No girl could have a voice this deep and threatening...right?

I advertised the upcoming tournament to my regulars who stopped by in the morning.

“I’ll be hosting a Mobile Forces tournament, so come by this evening if you’d like.”

“Wait, really? Can I participate too?”

“Garmr, you have the Gugurecas model, right? Anyone who has a Mobile Force can participate. Tell your buddies too.”

“Got it. All right, I’ll stop by after work,” he grinned. “Woo-hoo! I’m so excited!”

“Hey, now! Focus on your work,” I warned him. “It’d be stupid to get yourself hurt over this.”

“I know. I’ll switch over to work mode like I’m supposed to. Don’t worry.”

God, I hoped so. He worked a dangerous job that could put his life at risk.

“I’ll show you the true might of my Gugurecas’s naginata!” he declared.

“Yeah, right! My Gufufu is way stronger.”

Garmr and his friends left, chattering away excitedly. It sounded like they were over the moon about the tournament. Organizing it had definitely been worth it.

Once evening came, the tournament participants began showing up one after another. Most of them were my regulars, including Minerva, Meryl, Mira, and those like Garmr and his buddies. I had thought it would be mostly young adventurers, but I did see some middle-aged veterans here and there. It looked like the Mobile Forces’ popularity crossed generational boundaries.

Ultimately, I cut off entries for the day after thirty-two participants had shown up. Things would get way out of hand if there were too many participants. Hot Spring Yahagi was packed, with what I estimated to be more than a hundred spectators.

“All right. We’ll be starting!” I announced.

Matches kicked off in each of the five arenas. We needed to get through thirty-one matches before the winners could be decided, so we had to be efficient here. I could hear shouts of joy from here and there throughout the room. It appeared a fierce battle was unfolding in the very first match.

Oh, wait. Did they already decide on a winner in that arena? It hadn’t even been two minutes since we’d started.

“Amazing! That’s the Shinigami Minerva for you!”

“That silver mask guy is crazy strong!”

It seemed that Minerva had immediately knocked out the enemy. His Kian had dished out a crushing victory against the opposing Zako with a decisive, fierce thrust of its blade.

“Congratulations, Minerva,” I said.

“It’s only the first round.”

Minerva made it look like it was just another Tuesday. On the other hand, Rigal, who had only just recently bought his own Gungalf, came over to my shop

with his shoulders slumped.

“I lost,” he said, shaking his head as he cradled Gungalf close to his chest like something precious. He had worked his darndest at his porter job to save up the three hundred rims he’d needed to buy that. If he’d gone and broken it right away, he’d be so crushed he might never recover.



Mobile Forces were made to be sturdy, but they could suffer damage during rough battles. In those cases, you had to replace the damaged parts or buy a new model.

“How’s the damage?”

“It’s only scratched,” he said. “It isn’t broken.”

Even I breathed a sigh of relief. “Glad to hear it. That means you can try again.”

“You know,” he said with his eyes sparkling, “I’ve never been so devoted to something before! Every day is so exciting now! I’m really looking forward to the next tournament!”

It was moments like these that made me glad that I’d become a dagashi-ya. It was because of how keen my customers were to frequent my shop that I could keep working hard. *It truly is wonderful to feel like you’re needed.*

Still, if I eventually got something like Mini 4WDs, things might get pretty crazy. *Well, that might be fun in its own way, though.*

The matches continued, and the best eight proceeded to the next round. My regulars Minerva, Meryl, and even Garmr were among them. Baron Ethel had also participated in the tournament today, but he’d been defeated in the first round.

“Oh my, and I was so close...”

“You were just narrowly defeated, Baron Ethel,” I consoled him.

“Indeed. I want to show all of you my good side in the next tournament!”

Apparently, those of nobility had a lot of free time, so Baron Ethel came down here every day to participate in matches. His official stance was that he was down here to obtain the universal elixir from the ten-rim game for the king, but his subordinates were the ones actually taking it on. They used up at least 3,000 rims every day but still hadn’t been able to obtain a new elixir.

The tournament progressed, and the four semifinalists were determined. Minerva and Meryl were two of them.

“They got me!” Mira cried, making a rare show of displeasure. She was normally so peaceful and easygoing, but it appeared she was extremely frustrated that she hadn’t made it into the final four.

“There, there. Let’s hold an after-party for the tournament tonight with everyone. It’ll be my treat.”

Mira perked up. “Really? Wow! Where will we be going?”

My shop was turning a profit, and Meryl, Mira, and Minerva were always helping me out.

“I heard that!” Minerva shouted. “You’re inviting Mira on a date right now, aren’t you?!” Why did he sound like he was about to cry? And where had he even come from anyway?

“I only said that we should have an after-party for the tournament with everyone. You’ll be coming too, right?”

Minerva deflated a little. “Y-Yes. Of course.”

“Now go and blow them all away. I’ll let whoever wins drink some high-grade booze.”

“That’ll be a piece of cake. (*I’ll definitely beat everyone!*)”

“Think again!” Meryl said, butting in. “My Red Shoulder and I will be taking that victory, thank you very much.” She then turned to me. “Mister Yusuke, let’s make a ranking table after the tournament. I’m going to make sure my name will be forever etched beside the word ‘champion’!”

“I hear ya. Now go do your best.”

In high spirits, the two of them faced the semifinals head-on. Unfortunately for Meryl, though, her Red Shoulder was taken out by veteran adventurer Mister Komusai and his Jujiong.

“Jeez, it should be against the rules to stretch its arms out to attack from behind!” Meryl huffed angrily. However, dishing out an attack like that while maneuvering the model at the same time required a lot of skill. All you could

say was that her opponent's mana management skills were a cut above.

On the other hand, Minerva easily took down a naginata-wielding Gugurecas and moved on to the finals.

"You're crazy strong, Minerva! There's no one else out there who can move a Mobile Force as smoothly as you!" one spectator called.

"And that's not all," Meryl agreed. "Your sword-wielding abilities were on a whole different level to begin with."

Minerva was so strong, even Meryl could only meekly sing her praises of him.

In the final round, it was Minerva's Kian against Komusai and his Jujiong that had torn down Meryl, but with a lightning-fast thrust and a blinding flash, Kian won.

"Congratulations, Minerva. You were amazing," I said.

"It was nothing... (*I'm happy! I'm super-duper happy! Yay! ≡*)"

I turned to Meryl. "I'm sorry, Meryl."

"Waah! My Red Shoulder..." Meryl's model was damaged, and she'd lost, ending up in fourth place.

"Now then, I'll hand our top three winners their prizes, specially from Dagashi-ya Yahagi!" I gave each winner their prize, commending them on their bravely fought battles.

"You folks were all super into this," I called out to the crowd, "so I'll probably start up another tournament soon. Will you all be participating?"

"Yaaaah!!!"

The tournament ended on a high note, with the venue exploding into huge roars of excitement. And thus concluded the event.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 7

An amazing new toy debuted at Mister Yusuke's shop. It's called a Mobile Force. When adventurers have free time now, all they talk about are those Mobile Forces. They're like tiny golems that you can move with mana. Nothing could be more interesting!

I saw Mister Yusuke and Mister Minerva fighting with them, so I bought one on the spot. I was broke, though, so I made do with nothing but bread and water for dinner that night but I had absolutely no regrets! That's how great it is.

It wasn't just me either. As levelheaded as she normally is, Mira immediately bought one. So did Garmr and everyone else, along with all of Dagashi-ya Yahagi's regulars. I even saw an old nobleman I've seen around sometimes buying some.

That just goes to show how fascinating they are. They were so popular that there were many adventurers who couldn't buy any. I think they're gonna start a huge trend.

My model is called a Zako. The name is kinda meh, but it's easy to handle and so can dish out a variety of attacks. It's really nice that it can replicate stuff humans can use like one-on-one fighting sports or martial arts. It's just that its reaction speed and power are a little lacking compared to the other models. Its stability is outstanding, though.

Mira bought the Dome, which is a model that can move fast. She told me she wanted something that had what she didn't. She is exceptional at magic, but her physical abilities aren't really anything in comparison... She might've admired how the Dome can zoom around like crazy.

I played with the Mobile Forces with Mira until it got really late that day. You shouldn't go dungeon diving while sleep-deprived, but I couldn't resist. But playing with Mobile Forces might help practice how to control small amounts of mana. Because you have to continuously feed them with mana, Mister Minerva

said that playing with them could possibly increase how much mana you have over time. In other words, playing with these could make our magical abilities stronger! Thus, there's no need to hold back!

I wanted to try differentiating my Zako from the others, so I dyed his shoulder protectors red. They came out with a fine craftsmanship that you can't help but admire, if I do say so myself. And once my name and my Red Shoulder get out there, I'm sure our fame will resound far and wide throughout the country.

First, I'm going to totally beat Garmr, who always picks fights with me, and show him that we're on two completely different levels! And I'll even beat Mister Minerva one day!

I'm so excited for tomorrow, I can't sleep. I'll calm down with a Mini Mini Cola and go lie in my bed.

Chapter 8: Dating

After the Mobile Forces tournament was safely wrapped up, we all decided to hold an after-party at a tavern.

“It’s a place that makes really good food,” Mira told me. “It’s particularly renowned for its fried chicken.”

I salivated. I hadn’t had fried chicken since my previous life. Did they squeeze lemons over it here too? I wanted to eat as soon as I could, so I hurriedly closed up my shop.

“Everybody got your stuff?” I asked.

“You always travel light, Mister Yusuke. I’m jealous,” Meryl said, envious of me as she hefted a heavy-looking knapsack on her back.

I could store away everything just by saying, “Store, close,” so I had no luggage to carry whatsoever. All I had in my hands were my monster cards and the Rocket Bombs I’d use if we got caught in battle.

C. Giant Crow, I choose you...today!

“Hey, Minerva! We’re going to head out,” I called out to Minerva, who was deep in conversation with Baron Ethel. Or rather, it was more like Baron Ethel wouldn’t stop pestering him.

“Sir Minerva, I beg of you,” he said, clasping his hands against his chest, pleading. “Please hand over that universal elixir you received as an extra prize!”

“It’s to cure the king’s illness, huh...”

“Precisely! His condition remains stable at present, but one of these days, his physical health will once again deteriorate because of that curse. I humbly beg of you, we need that elixir for when that happens.” Despite how often Baron Ethel was challenging that ten-rim game, he still hadn’t obtained the prize.

“Sir Minerva, I implore you!”

“But Yusuke gave this to me...”

He was really persistent. *Well, I guess that goes to show how valuable that universal elixir is to him...* But I couldn't wait any longer. I'd heard that when night fell, strong monsters increased in number in the dungeon. If you were as tough as Minerva, then all was well, but for an ordinary guy like me or for Mira and Meryl, who were still kind of newcomers, it was too much to handle.

"We'll be going on ahead, Minerva."

"Huh? W-Wait!" Minerva rummaged around his bag and took out the universal elixir. "Here, take it!"

"Oh, I humbly thank you. How would you like me to repay you?"

"I don't want to accept any rewards from the king. I don't need anything, so let me go. Yusuke's gonna leave." Minerva was finally released after he handed over the universal elixir.

"There. Now I shall proceed onward to the castle and store this away in the treasury. Sir Yahagi, I shall take my leave." Baron Ethel and his subordinates ran off in a hurry.

"Are you sure you're fine giving it to him for free?" I asked Minerva.

"Hmph. I don't want to accept money or anything else from the king." Sounded like Minerva didn't like the guy. Had something happened between them in the past?

"I see," I said, deciding not to pry. "All right then, I'll be treating you tonight, so eat and drink as much as you want."

"You don't have to. I have money."

"I want to celebrate all your efforts today!" I insisted. I then put an arm around Minerva's shoulders. "Okay, let's go!"

"Ah... (*Oh my god, no way, is this real life? I wish time would stop here forever...*)"

We made merry, talking about things like what we'd eat or drink as we returned to the surface.

I might have been feeling unstoppable that night. I'd started making a stable life for myself, and I had rented my own apartment. My sales were doing well, and if I wanted to buy a license, I easily could. I was now able to safely set up my shop anywhere I wanted.

Also, I had those trendy new toys to sell, and that tournament I'd held using them had been a huge success. No one could blame me for feeling like I was on top of the world.

"Let's make the next tournament even bigger!"

"Good idea, Meryl. I should have a big trophy made then."

"What's that?"

"It's a large winner's cup that's proof that you were the champion. It gets passed down to other champions over the generations. I'll ask Mister Sanaga to make a really grand one."

"Ooh, that's getting me all pumped up! Hey, Miiiss, I want another beer!"

"I'd also like to win a prize next time," Mira said. "Another glass of wine for me, please."

Meryl and Mira could both hold their alcohol, and they emptied glass after glass.

"You should drink too, Yusuke," Minerva said. He had been especially nice to me tonight. "What are you going to have next?"

"Lemme see... Maybe something a little sweet."

"The white wine I'm drinking is really tasty."

"Wow, can I have a sip?"

"Huh...?"

I took Minerva's glass and tried the wine. It was a white wine with a rich and syrupy mouthfeel. The color was more yellowish than white.

"Ah, it is tasty," I agreed. "Let's get the bottle."

"Yeah...soooo sweet..."

“What?”

“It’s nothing. Just drink already!” Minerva thrust the wine at me, and we both gulped down every last drop.

In good spirits, the four of us ate and drank to our hearts’ content, and although it was rare for me, I drank until I was intoxicated.

By the time we left the tavern, I was plastered and just barely managing to stay on my feet thanks to Minerva’s support.

“Are you okay, Mister Yusuke?” Meryl asked.

“Yeaah, I’m to’lly fiiine. No sssweat...”

“I’m a little worried,” said Mira.

I was, in fact, aware that I was slurring my speech. It appeared I had drunk a little too much. Actually, Minerva had really encouraged me to drink tonight.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take him home. You two better head straight home too.”

“I guess there’s nothing to worry about if you’re gonna be his escort, Mister Minerva.”

“Good night then,” Mira chirped.

Minerva’s voice became a little gentler once we couldn’t see the two of them anymore.

“My place is closer than yours. You wanna stay the night?”

“Huuuh? I’d feel bad.”

“Don’t worry about it. This is exactly what I planned.”

“What you planned?”

“So don’t worry about it!”

Hmm. My brain was refusing to think because of the alcohol.

“Aw ’ight, I’ll stay th’ nigh’ at youw place.” I didn’t want to be a burden, so I shakily started walking, but Minerva lent me his shoulder. He and his silver mask were right next to my face. *This guy... Such a nice guy.*

“You know, I kinda smell somethin’ nice—a girl’s scent. I wonder where it’s comin’ from?”

“It’s because you’re drunk, stupid...”

“Really?”

I was feeling good as I walked along the nighttime streets.

Michelle’s Side

Everything had gone according to plan. I had even gotten rid of those nuisances, Meryl and Mira. Yusuke staggered drunkenly as he clung to me. I was certain he’d go right to bed once he got to my place. And then he’d be all mine. I’d have him take off his clothes, and I’d make him comfortable...and then I’d watch his sleeping face to my heart’s content.

I got him drunk all to satisfy my own desires... Am I a terrible woman?

But it was fine. Even my academy professor had said that a first-rate researcher must be faithful to their own wishes.

If I undid two...no, three of the buttons on Yusuke’s shirt, that’d make him more comfortable, right? M-Maybe I’d even touch his hand? Would he report me if he found out? No, no, I have to be more assertive.

I had always been passive when it came to love. But now, I was going to kiss that weak self of mine goodbye!

Yusuke’s Side

It was pitch-black when I came to. *This isn’t my room. Oh, this is Minerva’s house.* The familiar lines of his guest room confirmed it. *Oh, I vaguely remember now. I stumbled drunk into Minerva’s house and crashed.*

When I looked myself over, I noticed my shoes and shirt had been removed, and I had been made much more comfortable. Considering how my things were arranged neatly on some hangers, Minerva had likely helped me out of my clothes. I had once again caused trouble for him. Tomorrow, I’d have to make it up to him by offering to make breakfast. He got really happy even when I just

poured him some coffee. His appearance and voice were intimidating, but he had his cute side as well.

Outside the window, the stars were twinkling. Although I'd woken at a weird time, somehow my head was crystal clear. I did stumble a bit when I stood up, but I felt all right.

"I want water."

All the water in my body had probably been used up trying to break down the alcohol in my system. Every single cell in my body was begging for moisture. I usually had Minerva make me water using his magic, but he was probably asleep at this hour. I guessed there might be some left over in the kitchen, so I staggered out of the bedroom.

I found some water in the kettle and downed it in one gulp. *Delicious*. In this world they apparently had a saying—"The first sip of water after a night of drinking is worth a thousand rims." But at that moment, I would have gladly paid more.

I may as well take a bath while I'm at it.

Minerva had told me I was free to use the bathroom whenever I wanted, and whether I stayed awake or went back to sleep, my desire to feel refreshed remained the same.

Oh right, Minerva normally doesn't go into the hot spring. Aside from that one time we had gotten in together, he hadn't used it even once. Perhaps it really was true that he didn't like getting in with everyone?

When I got to the bath, the light was on. It appeared he'd forgotten to turn it off before going to sleep. I took off my clothes and opened the bathroom door.

Huh?

There was something black undulating in the round bathtub—someone's long hair. Underneath it was a white body swaying in the water.

There's a woman here?!

I averted my gaze the moment our eyes met.

"I'm sorry!"

I shut the door in a panic and threw my clothes back on.

What the hell?! Was that Minerva's girlfriend?

I thought it was common sense to not bring his girl over on a day he'd invited me to stay the night, so I was a little pissed off. *But he probably has his reasons.* Still, this was awkward. That wasn't just anyone's naked body I'd just glimpsed. She was my best friend's girlfriend of all people. Although it had been just for an instant, I had even gotten a good look at her breasts.

Man, I messed up...

I needed to cook up a proper apology, so I waited in the kitchen for her. I took out some of Meryl's beloved Mini Mini Cola and tossed back seven beads at once. These things had a calming effect. As I crunched on the ramune-flavored beads, the pounding of my heart subsided.

I won't make any excuses. I'll just apologize with all the sincerity I can muster. With that intention in mind, I waited for her. A lot of time had passed before I finally heard the bathroom door open.

"I'm sorry for earlier!" I said, bowing my head deeply to the woman who entered the kitchen.

Now that I was getting a second look at her, I saw that she was rather beautiful, with long black hair; she looked to be in her midtwenties. Her expression seemed a little stiff. *Figures. She must be mad that I saw her naked.*

"I'm Yahagi Yusuke. I'm a good friend of Minerva's."

"Yusuke..."

"Yep, that's my first name."

Huh, I felt like I'd seen her somewhere before. Um, actually, I felt like I'd seen her several times. Was she one of my customers? *No way, I would definitely remember her...* Then was she an adventurer I'd seen around the dungeon? I felt like that wasn't it either. If I remembered right, she was in the Menko...

"Ah!" I shouted without thinking.

After all, the person standing right before me was the woman from the wanted poster, the witch Michelle. Now that I thought about it, Minerva had

said something to the effect that Michelle was an acquaintance of his. They were both remarkable adventurers, so that might have something to do with it.

“Um...are you Minerva’s friend or something?”

“Yusuke, no, that’s not it...” she said, taking an awfully familiar tone for someone I’d just met.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s me.”

“Who is ‘me’? I don’t think we’ve ever met...”

“I’m Minerva,” said the witch Michelle, looking like she was about to cry.

Then that means...this is what Minerva looks like under that silver mask?!

Minerva was one of my regulars. He was always kind to me, and he’d become my closest friend as of late. We were together every day, and he cooked for me, and even with his scary voice, he’d talk like a girl sometimes and act weird whenever I noticed. We had even gone into the hot spring together... That whole time, Minerva had actually been *the witch Michelle*?!

“I did think something was off a few times, but I ignored it, thinking there was no way...”

“I’m sorry. That’s probably what my cognitive obstruction spell had you think. But I really wanted you to find out, so I’ve been weakening my magic recently.”

And yet even after she’d done that, how dense was I that I still hadn’t realized it until she’d come out to me herself?! *No, that just goes to show how powerful her cognitive obstruction spell is.* I had even thought her hair was short before this, but now that I looked at her, she actually had long black hair. I’d had no idea at all.

“Who would’ve guessed my best friend, who I thought was a guy, was really the witch Michelle...?”

“Do you hate me now?” Minerva...no, Michelle asked me with a sorrowful expression.

I once again took out my Mini Mini Cola and tossed some back. I didn’t bother

counting how many. Their unique fragrance filled my mouth as I crunched away.

“Not at all,” I assured her. “Sit down. Do you want some of these? It’ll calm you down.”

She accepted the bottle I had offered her and also put the ramune-flavored candy in her mouth. The bottle was empty when she returned it.

Michelle and I sat at the kitchen table face-to-face. Neither of us knew where to begin, so we continued to sit in silence for a while. I decided I wanted to sort out the situation for now, so I took the initiative.

“What made you want to tell me that you’re the witch Michelle?” I asked. If she’d wanted to deceive me, she could’ve, yet Michelle had revealed herself to me despite the potential danger it could bring her.

“When I was in the bathtub and you saw my real face, I was startled, but I thought it was a good opportunity. I had wanted you to see the real me eventually.”

“Why?” I kind of knew the answer already. Meryl and the others had brought it up before. Still, I wanted to confirm it for myself here and now.

“It’s because I love you.”

For the first time in my life, a girl had confessed to me. *Yeah, this is what happiness feels like...* Though it was kind of a problem that she was a wanted criminal.

“Um...yeah, that does make me happy.”

Michelle’s face immediately lit up with an expression that I’d seen neither on her wanted poster nor on the Menko.

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“So you’ll be my boyfriend?!”

“Hold your horses.”

Are you a hunting dog ready to pounce on your prey or something? I thought to myself, dismayed. *You're getting way ahead of yourself...*

"I want you to tell me what happened between you and the king," I said.

Michelle's face clouded over, and her slightly sulky expression reappeared. Yeah, *that* was the face I'd seen on the wanted poster.

"Nothing really," she said. "I don't want to talk about it, but if you really wanna know..."

"I want to know you better."

"You want to...know me better..." she echoed. "Yeah, I want you to know all about me too!" Michelle adjusted herself in her seat and looked like she was gathering her thoughts for a second before she started.

"I was a teacher at a magical academy when talk of marriage with the king arose."

"You were a teacher?"

"I graduated at the age of eighteen and immediately became a teacher at the magical academy," she told me. "I've loved studying since I was little and immersed myself in studies of magic, so I thought becoming a teacher was my life's calling."

"And that's when the marriage talks happened."

Her face became even gloomier.

"Word really got around about the thesis I'd presented, the Infinite Type Möbius Circulation Theory. People were praising me all around, calling me a genius. It seems I piqued the king's interest because of that."

"So, that's how your engagement to him happened?"

"Thinking back on it, he was probably motivated by the possibility that there'd be some magical benefit for him from making me his wife. But at the time, I was over the moon with excitement that the king had proposed to me."

"Did you love him?"

Michelle looked surprised by my question and shook her head so vigorously I

was worried it'd fall off.

"No!" she said. "It's just that ever since I was little, I've always been deep in my studies, so I had never fallen in love before. Guys would always bully me because of my reserved personality and how gloomy I was. On top of that, I'd use the magic I was so adept with to get back at them, so eventually no one wanted anything to do with me... For someone to turn up wanting to marry me despite all of that caused me to lose sight of myself."

So, that's how it was. But she had said something that concerned me a little.

"Can you tell me exactly what you mean when you say, 'get back at them'?" I asked.

"I'd give them nightmares and make them wet the bed. Or I'd use my Water Magic to make their toilet overflow while they were using it, or my Spatial Magic to hang just one of their shoes from the very tip of one of the Great Temple's spires."

Hmm... That's some impressive magic!

"So, you cast a curse on the king just like you would've done to those other boys?"

"I mean, he was just horrible!" she said, defending herself. "He broke off our engagement to marry Chichi instead!"

"Chichi's the current queen, right?"

"That's right, and she's my twin sister."

Talk about a surprise!

"The queen is your *sister*?!"

"Yeah, although we don't look like each other at all."

Michelle then explained the situation to me with a look of disgust on her face.

"My sister Chichi has always had a cheerful spirit and has never gone without a lover. She completely neglected her studies to fool around instead. I have no idea how many men she's stolen by now." From the way she talked about her, Michelle appeared to really hate her sister.

“I’d been summoned to the royal palace that day. I was such a fool. I stayed up all night making him a special potion as a gift, and I truly believed that he’d be happy. Yet when I got to the royal palace, Chichi was standing there by his side. The king told me he’d be marrying Chichi instead, so he wanted me to act like our engagement had never happened!”

“That’s awful.”

“Chichi was wearing a vulgar dress that showed off her breasts like she always does, and she was smirking like I was beneath her. I got so upset, I cursed the king on the spot.”

“What kind of curse was it?”

“He’d be afflicted by poor physical health for three years. He humiliated me, so I felt it served him right.”

Ah, so that’s why she said that the curse would probably go away soon.

“I honestly wanted to curse Chichi as well,” she admitted as tears began to roll down her cheeks, “but she put up a resistance right before I could. She’s always been a slacker, and yet she’s somehow really good at choosing the right magic at the right time.”

“It seems it still hurts to talk about,” I said, feeling for her.

“It’s not that. I don’t care about the king anymore. I never loved him in the first place.”

“Then why are you crying?” She might’ve still had some lingering affection for him without realizing it.

“Because I couldn’t curse Chichi.”

Huh?

“It frustrates me!”

It’s not some lingering affection for the king, but hatred for her sister?! So, to sum things up, the two had been compared to each other ever since they were little and had grown to hate each other because of it.

“So, um...” Michelle started, fidgeting.

“What’s the matter?”

“Will you love me?”

Just like that?!

“I mean, I was good friends with you when you were Minerva,” I said, “but asking me out of the blue if I can love you as Michelle because of that makes me too flustered to reply. Let’s see... Can’t we start out as friends first?”

“But we’re already friends, right?” she asked, gazing at me with eyes that glistened with tears. *That is kind of cute...*

What she said was true. Though I’d learned that Minerva was really Michelle, we were already friends. But I also had the caution that came with age. They say that you fall in love with people in an instant, but I couldn’t say that I loved Michelle without knowing who she was as a woman. Still, I did have a suggestion.

“Th-Then how about we start dating first?”

“Dating...”

“We were interacting as friends up until this point,” I said, explaining myself, “so we can consider this a time for getting to know each other on an even deeper level.”

“Is that okay? I’m a wanted criminal, but you’d still date me?!”

Oh, I’d forgotten about that... Well, I couldn’t take back what I’d already said. Also, I did like Michelle. It was possible I’d already fallen under love’s spell.

“Well, y’know, let’s give it a shot.”

“Yeah! I’ll be careful not to get caught so I can stay with you forever!” She beamed at me. So I’d be dating a wanted criminal... I was happy and anxious at the same time, but I felt it’d work out somehow. If push came to shove, maybe we could just flee the country? Coming to this world had kind of toughened me up. Dying once had probably made it so that I no longer sweated the small stuff.

Rather than worrying about the fact that she was a wanted criminal, I was a little more concerned about the weight of her love. It was just my guess, but she’d probably be pretty controlling. Thinking back on it, she tended to get

really pouty just seeing me talking to Meryl and Mira.

A faint flash of anxiety passed through my chest, but I told myself we could just start dating for now and get to know each other bit by bit.

Baron Ethel's Side

At the royal palace, Baron Ethel was staring at the king and queen as they shamelessly flirted with each other. His expression was calm, but a fiery anger was swirling in his belly. The peace and order of this country were falling apart, and yet these two had no interest in the people and their lives. The baron had just about had it with their refusal to engage in nothing but debauchery.

"Your Majesty, is my new castle still not ready yeeet?" Chichi wheedled, sounding like a spoiled child. The king embraced her as he played with his Mobile Force unit. The Mobile Forces had become the king's favorite new toy, and he battled against his servants every day.

"I know, you want that castle by the lake, right? I've told them to hurry up, so don't worry..." He paused. "There!"

The Gungalf the king was controlling stabbed its sword through his servant's Zako.

"Ha ha ha! Did you witness my true power?!"

"As expected of Your Majesty," said the servant. "Someone such as I can hardly expect to compare to you."

"Of course, of course. There's no one who can move Gungalf better than I!"

As the king roared with laughter, Chichi whispered in his ear, "Your technique grows more polished by the day, Your Majesty. How I long for you to penetrate me as well..."

At the queen's obscene suggestion, the king's face took on a lewd expression.

"Oh, what a naughty queen you are," he said. "But that's what I find so endearing about you."

Baron Ethel saw them off with frigid courtesy as they withdrew to their

bedroom, the king's arms wrapped around the queen's shoulders. The baron had presented the universal elixir to his king in hopes that his improved physical health would lead him to regain his interest in politics. However, now that his condition was stable, all His Majesty did was eat and drink his fill and fully indulge himself in lewdness with Chichi.

Although the baron at least kept up the appearance that he was a noble overflowing with loyalty to the king, he was actually on the verge of giving up on him.

Is this finally the limit...? thought the baron. *For the sake of the future, I must soon have His Majesty relinquish his throne...*

One man's face appeared in the baron's mind. It was the face of General Bartos, renowned for his skill with both pen and sword, the younger brother of the current king.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 8

There's something that's been bugging me. It's about Mister Yusuke and Mister Minerva. I feel like those two have been acting weird as of late. It's like they've gotten closer than before... There are even times when they give off the vibe that they're flirting.

I think things started feeling weird the day after the after-party. Surely Mister Minerva wouldn't have seduced Mister Yusuke while he was drunk?! Mira got a little mad at me, saying that there's no way that could be true, but I can't shake off my suspicions. Those two...have got something funny going on.

Mira and I have been sort of like apprentices in our superiors' team up until now, but we've finally decided to go independent. We're going to patrol the dungeon by ourselves starting tomorrow. I do feel anxious of course, but I also have high hopes. At the end of the day, we'll see huge boosts in our incomes. It'll be easier to get by, and I can even put aside some money as savings. I could buy a new weapon for my Mobile Force if that happened.

I wanted to order a battle-ax from old man Sanaga for Zako, but the quote he gave me was 2,500 rims. Why the hell is it worth over three times more than Zako's original price?! Still, I do want it...

But this is the last day I'll ever have to worry about these things! I'll be stacking coins like there's no tomorrow and buying whatever I want. Mira and I plan to stop by Mister Yusuke's shop a little early tomorrow and carefully select some of his goods. Dagashi-ya Yahagi is a reassuring pillar of support for novice adventurers like us.

Candy, gum, Rocket Bombs, Morocco Yogurt, and Cocoa Cigars... What else do I need? I should use at least 1,000 rims, just to be safe.

Oh yeah, Garmr and the others are so brazen that they're going to go independent too. We need to section off our separate turfs so they can't take

our spoils... But will they quietly stand down and abide by that? I did thoroughly beat Garmr's Gugurecas with my Zako yesterday. Oh man, it was my low kick and upper kick combos that beautifully did him in. It felt so good!

That was my fourth victory against Garmr, and I've lost once. Against Mira, I've won seven times and lost twice. Everything's going great! Even Rigal, who finally got his Gungalf, looks at me with admiration in his eyes. He's earnest and cute, so if I find the opportunity, perhaps I'll teach him how I puppet my Mobile Force? Oh, I'm such a nice older sister figure. What if he falls in love with me...? As if!

Mira and I are going to hunt near Hot Spring Yahagi until we get used to being on our own. It's a safe zone where monsters don't show up, and Mister Yusuke will be there if something happens. He isn't reliable in battle, but it is a relief just to know Dagashi-ya Yahagi is nearby.

Chapter 9: Sweet Days

Michelle's Side

I told Yusuke he could stay the night, but he insisted he was going to go home no matter what. Perhaps he was feeling shy now that he knew I was a girl. Or could it be that he didn't find me attractive as a woman?

He's just not interested in plain and gloomy women? No, I don't think it's that. Yusuke was just a really sincere person and was taking good care of me. He was totally different from a certain perverted king. That realization blew away every lonely feeling I had.

"See you later then. Let's meet up in front of the dungeon," he said. It was the same time and place as always, but there was something different about this rendezvous. I mean, we had started *dating*.

"I'll make us lunch boxes again today, so you don't need to buy anything for lunch."

"I always feel bad, but..." Yusuke hesitated before he smiled at me, "please do make it. You make the best food in the world."

Just hearing those words from him made me want to dive into his embrace. I really didn't want him to go anywhere, but I smothered those feelings and saw him off.

The room felt so much bigger now that I was alone.

"I went out of my way to buy these, but I didn't need them." I tossed the handcuffs I would've used to restrain Yusuke into the trash can. The heavy leather straps hit the bottom of the can with a clang.

I-I didn't really intend to restrain him! I'd just wanted to use them to tie us together, just to see. I'd thought that would finally let me feel secure.

But I didn't need them anymore. We'd started going out for real now, after all!

Yusuke's Side

Michelle was wearing her usual silver mask when we met up in front of the dungeon. Even though she'd revealed her true self to me, it didn't change the fact that she was a wanted criminal. She would probably need to keep up her disguise for a while longer.

"Good morning."

She had the same low, husky voice as always. Experiencing it again, I could really sense how amazing her cognitive obstruction spells were. I doubted there was anyone who would suspect someone like this was actually a cute girl.

"Let's get going then," I said.

Side by side, we descended the dungeon staircase.

There was nothing different about Michelle from the usual. I only felt that she had drawn a little closer to me than she used to. We bumped shoulders a number of times as we headed down the stairs. I guessed that she wanted to hold hands as we went into the dungeon.

But, Michelle, who would do that in such a dangerous dungeon? You should leave your dominant hand open so you can grab a weapon at any time.

When we got to our destination in front of the hot spring, I recited the words, "Store, open" to open up my shop.

"Oh," I said, "the gachapon got a restock."

My gachapon had been sold out ever since the gnomes had bought up everything. But today, it had suddenly been restocked with some new products.

Product name: Capsule Toys - Waterproof Notebooks and Mini Pencils (Six types)

Description: A mini waterproof notebook and pencil set that you can write with even in heavy rain. Also has some fire resistance.

Price: Two hundred rims

The capsules themselves were bigger than before, but they were cheaper by one hundred rims. When I bought one to try it out, the capsule produced a memo pad a little smaller than the palm of my hand and a small pencil around four centimeters long. The cover of the notebook was red, with a cool fiery crest design. There were designs for the usual four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, along with designs for light and darkness, totaling six different types in all.

Quill pens and ink were the typical writing tools in this world, and I'd never seen something like a pencil here. They had paper, but the stuff I had seen was the low-quality, coarse kind. Compared to that, this notebook looked much more robust.

I scribbled my own name to test it out and found the feel of the pencil astonishingly smooth. In my previous life, I had read an article about how Special Forces personnel carried around a waterproof memo pad, something called a tactical notebook. There might be demand for it among this world's adventurers too.

"What is that?"

Meryl, who had come to hang out, immediately zeroed in on the new item. She was a sucker for new things.

"These are writing tools," I said. "The stuff you write with these won't get smudged even if you're in the pouring rain. They're also resistant to fire to some degree."

"Really?" Mira asked, also showing interest.

"Yep. It's even written in the description. If you think it's not true, then try it out for yourself," I said, handing my notebook over to Mira.

"Don't mind if I do then. There!" Mira suddenly engulfed the notebook in an Aqua Ball.

"Hey now! I know I said all that but that's kind of going a little too..." I stopped. "Oh?"

“Amazing!” Mira exclaimed. “It really doesn’t tear!”

The pages were stuck together, but they were neither torn nor smudged. You could clearly read my clumsy signature.

Mira immediately tried the gachapon and obtained a notebook with a water design on it. She wasn’t the only one who was interested in a waterproof notebook. Even Garmr tried the gachapon.

“The other guys and I are a forgetful bunch, so if we write down our routes in this, we’ll probably be able to search deeper in the dungeon.”

The notebook was likely also just right for mapping. On that morning alone, people tried my new gachapon around nine times. Michelle also gave it a go and won the darkness notebook. I would venture to say that its design was very fitting for her. Instead of going exploring, she settled down next to me and poured her all into writing something in the small notebook.

“Are you okay not going out to explore?”

“I’ll go after I finish writing this...”

“Is it a research report or something?”

“No, it’s a love poem...”

“I-I see...”

“Do you wanna read it?”

I both did and didn’t want to see it, which was a strange feeling. What was written in that notebook with the darkness design? Mysterious words of love? Michelle’s desires? *I won’t be cursed if I read them, right?*

Hot Spring Yahagi suddenly became noisy that afternoon.

“Out of the way! We’ve got wounded!”

“We need four cups of recovery tea!”

It sounded like they’d brought in some injured adventurers. Worried, I went to have a look, but they weren’t serious injuries. I was relieved to see they healed with Miss Mirai’s recovery tea. However, one mage remained lying limp

on the ground, not moving a muscle.

“What’s wrong with her?” I asked a nearby adventurer.

“A Gas Ghost got her. Those things go straight for mages.”

As the name implied, they were gaseous ghosts. They were weak to fire-type magic, and if you defeated them, they’d drop at least a ten-thousand-rim coin. Of the monsters on B2, they were especially lucrative to go after, thanks to those factors. However, they seemed to be aware of their own weaknesses, so they targeted mages before anyone else. Also, they could prevent mages from reciting their spells by placing a silence curse on them. People who were possessed by them lost their strength and even their ability to talk.

I squatted next to the collapsed mage. The woman’s face was pale, and her lips were purple. She was trembling a little, and her condition didn’t improve even after drinking Miss Mirai’s recovery tea.

“Wait a sec. I got just the thing for you.”

Product name: Sour Kelp

Description: Kelp with vinegar-based flavoring. Cures silence curses upon consumption.

Price: One hundred rims

I fetched the item from my store and slipped a piece of the white-powdered Sour Kelp through her slightly open mouth. When it came to curing curses, the grape-flavored Powdered Drink Mix would have worked too, but it was a pain since you needed to dissolve it in water. Also, the Sour Kelp specifically helped with silence curses, so it was nice and easy.

“How are you feeling?”

The woman didn’t say anything. *Uh-oh. Did it not work?*

Then she suddenly started coughing. “Oh my god, it’s sour!” she sputtered. “What the hell is this?!”

“Oh, you can talk now.”

“Huh? Wow, you’re right!” The mage had successfully gotten her voice back and, thanks to that, I sold four Sour Kelps. I was happy that I’d made some decent sales, but Michelle, who had come to hang out at my shop, started to pout, turning her back to me.

When I went over to see what was up, she was using her Mobile Force Kian to single-mindedly beat the stone wall over and over again. *I don’t think this is a part of her Mobile Force training...*

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing.”

There was no way it was just nothing. It looked like we needed to talk, but Michelle was a wanted criminal. She usually lived her life as the Shinigami Minerva, so we had to keep our lovers’ talk to a minimum.

I checked our surroundings. There weren’t any customers around right now, and the room was empty. We could at least talk a little. I gently poked her shoulder.

“Hey, tell me. Did I do something wrong?”

“You fed her that.”

“Fed her what?”

“The Sour Kelp. You fed a woman, and it wasn’t me.” So, she was pouting because I fed some kelp to a mage who had been cursed?

“I had to. She was basically sick.”

“I know...” Even so, Michelle’s Kian didn’t stop bashing the wall.

“Mister Yahagi! Lemme at that Rocket Bomb lottery.” *Whoops, I got some customers now.*

“Just hold on a second. Stay here,” I told her as I left to go tend to the customers. Afterward, I took one of my store’s products and brought it back to her.

“Minerva, stand up a bit and face me.”

“...What?”

“Here’s a little something from me. Say ‘aah’ and open wide.” I gently slid the Blueberry Cigar between her lips through the opening of her mask. Then I also took out one for myself and put it in my mouth.

(Don’t be angry anymore. Let this overwrite that bad memory. This is my new product, Blueberry Cigar.)

With Cocoa or Blueberry Cigars, you and anyone else holding one in their mouth could converse through thought alone.

(...)

(Now we can convey our feelings to each other without saying anything aloud. Are you still upset?)

(I’m not...)

Judging by the way she’d said that, she really wasn’t mad anymore.

(Still, I should’ve thought to use these Cocoa Cigars sooner. We could’ve talked to each other like this even in front of other people.)

(Yeah.)

(But let’s be careful. If anyone else holding a cigar in their mouth comes within a ten-meter radius of us, they’ll hear what we’re talking about.)

(You’re right.)

Even though we could finally talk to each other one-on-one, Michelle still didn’t have much to say. It felt more like shyness rather than pouting though. *Oh right, Kian isn’t punching the wall anymore.*

(Yusuke.)

(What’s up?)

(Sell me ten each of the Cocoa, Blueberry, and Cola Cigars. I want to stay like this forever.)

(Ha ha, thank you for your continued patronage! But I don’t need money. Just take them.)

(No.)

Michelle could be a stickler for obligations at some weird times. It appeared I would have to keep holding this cigarette-like snack in my mouth for a while longer. *I feel like a chain smoker.* It was far too sweet, in multiple senses of the word.

The sky was overcast with low-hanging clouds that morning. Still, I was in no position to take a day off just because of bad weather, so I headed for the dungeon. Once I'd stepped outside of my apartment, I took the precaution of securing my door with two separate locks. I'd heard it was common for empty houses to be robbed in this neighborhood.

Even though I was in the capital, the public security was lacking. There were tons of substance abusers, robbers, and burglars around here. The innkeeper of the Swindoll Con Inn had said that government affairs were at a standstill thanks to the king's curse, but apparently, that wasn't actually the case.

The curse that Michelle had cast was mild and would only intermittently give him headaches or stomachaches. She insisted that it wasn't serious enough to prevent him from doing his job.

"Chichi and the king are just living it up. That's all," she'd said bitterly, and it had turned out to be true. The rumors said that there were plans to erect a new castle for the queen. Upon the ostentation-obsessed queen's request, it'd be a gaudy one at that. *There's a literal war going on at the border—what are they thinking?*

As I briskly walked toward the dungeon, I spotted a familiar face down a back alley. It was one of my regulars, the porter Rigal. A group of three boorish-looking men and women were surrounding him.

What's going on there?

I quietly approached the entrance to the back alley.

"Just hand it over already. You've got a few coins in there, don't you?"

"Well..."

"Hurry it up. Don't piss us off."

It looked like Rigal was getting a shakedown. If I described it like that, it just sounded like a petty offense, but this was no different than a robbery. Rigal had no relatives, and he worked his hind off as a porter. And in the midst of such a life of struggle, he was a regular who'd visit my shop while clutching his slender allowance.

I wanted to help him out somehow, but I couldn't use my monster cards or Rocket Bombs in the middle of town. *Oh right, I have just the thing.*

Product name: Snap Ball

Description: A toy that lets out a loud sound if you throw it against the ground or step on it. It's a type of firework. It casts the spell Fear within a fifty-centimeter radius of the explosion.

Price: Fifty rims (Ten pieces)

I quietly sneaked up behind the group and threw a Snap Ball on the ground.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Eek!"

"Augh!!!"

It was a small sphere only one centimeter in diameter, but it made a satisfying racket. The hoodlums who'd been surrounding Rigal jumped up and scampered off. *Looks like the Fear spell is pretty effective. But to think of robbing someone first thing in the morning...* This was probably also a result of the decline in public order, huh?

"Rigal, it's all right now," I said, extending a hand to the boy, who was slumped on the ground.

"M-Mister Yahagi..." Rigal was shaking. It seemed he'd gotten caught in the cross fire of that Fear spell.

"Here, eat this," I said, taking out the grape-flavored Powdered Drink Mix. "It should calm you down."

It could lift spells, so it was likely to be effective against Fear too. You were supposed to dissolve it in water and drink it, but I had neither a cup nor any water on hand. He would have to take it just like that.

“I-I’m sorry...” He then erupted into a coughing fit. If you lapped up the Powdered Drink Mix without any water, sometimes you ended up choking on it. After a while, the color returned to Rigal’s face.

“Well? Have you calmed down?”

“Yes, thanks to you,” he said with a small sigh.

“Does stuff like that happen to you a lot?”

“I’m a kid, so I’m not usually a target, but robbers come out all the time at night. So, I can’t go outside once it gets dark.”

“It’s a tough world out there.”

I looked toward the workers who were coming and going along the road. There seemed to be more adventurers around lately. Previously, few people had been willing to live the risky life of an adventurer, but this society had rotted to the point that people couldn’t afford to be choosy anymore.

“There have recently been more people entering the dungeon who don’t even wield body-strengthening or attack magic,” Rigal said. “Well, I’m in the same boat...” Unlike Meryl and Mira, Rigal didn’t possess any combat abilities. Yet, he had to do his best to live without any parents, even though he was a boy not even fifteen years of age.

“Take this as a protective charm,” I said, giving him my favorite monster card.

“What? But this is the SR-rank card Turtle Ninja!” he exclaimed. “No way! I can’t accept this!”

“It’s fine. Just take it. I can’t let any of my regulars die on me.” If this cheerful Turtle Ninja could protect this young boy, then it was much better that he had it instead of me.

“Thank you.”

“If you feel like you’re in danger even for a second, you better use it,” I told him. “Don’t think of it as a waste. Living is more important than anything else.”

“Yes, I promise. I want to compete in the next Mobile Forces tournament, after all.”

“That’s the spirit. Oh yeah, Minerva said something like if you improved your mana management skills, you could possibly wield some new magic.”

“Really?”

“That’s right. The only magic I can use are my ‘store, open’ and ‘store, close’ spells, but he told me I might be able to use an elemental magic one day. It’d be cool if I could eventually use Fire Magic or something.”

“Then I need to study hard too,” he said, determined. “Learning to move Gungalf around freely and even gaining magic on top of that would be a dream come true!”

“Right?”

Rigal was still a young boy, but he had the strong will needed to make it in the dungeon.

“All right! We should get going.”

Rigal and I then left for the dungeon, walking side by side.

We had entered the season when all the new leaves and greenery were bursting into life. From what Michelle had told me, this place had pretty hot summers. It would’ve been great to start selling shaved ice or ice cream before the sun’s rays became too strong, but it didn’t look like that was in the cards anytime soon.

Michelle was away in the dungeon depths to conduct research on filling her magic orb with mana, so she wouldn’t be back until tomorrow. Still, that wouldn’t affect my daily life too much, so I merrily set up my shop as usual today.

“Gooood morning! Lemme at that Scratch Card first!” Meryl chirped as she entered my shop.

“Good morning, Meryl,” I said. “You’re raring to go as always.” Meryl tried her luck at the Scratch Cards every morning but had only ever won once. If there

was one thing in life that was guaranteed, it was her terrible gambling luck.

“Good morning,” Mira said, also greeting me. “Some Ten-Rim Gum and Sour Kelp for me, please.”

“Are you going to be taking down some Gas Ghosts, Mira?” I asked. Sour Kelps were indispensable items when it came to dispelling a Gas Ghost’s silence curse.

“Yes. I’d like to make a lot of money so I can go to Garges.”

“Garges?”

“I’m talking about Mount Garges. The wysterie flowers are splendid this time of year, and everyone from the capital goes there to see them.”

“You really don’t know anything, Mister Yusuke,” Meryl mused. “It’s trendy now to buy a lunch box from a first-rate restaurant and go to Mount Garges to see the flowers.”

I guess it’s probably similar to cherry blossom viewing in Japan, I thought to myself. The world was rough right now, but that seemed to make people all the more eager to enjoy simple pleasures like flower viewing.

“Is Mount Garges near the capital?”

“If you take a stagecoach, you’ll be there in one koku.” So about an hour. “We’re going to book a private carriage for ourselves.”

“Yes, we need to earn enough money for that too.”

Apparently renting a private carriage to go to Mount Garges was another popular thing to do.

“Hm,” I said, considering the prospect, “it sounds like fun. I think I’ll invite Minerva to come with me.”

Meryl grinned big when she heard that.

“You two have been awfully close lately,” she remarked. Well, we *were* dating in secret. If everything went well, then this flower viewing would be our first date.

“You’re not going to get a girlfriend, Mister Yusuke?”

That caught me off guard. “Huh?!”

“I have also been wondering about that myself,” Mira said. “If you wanted to, you could find one right away.”

“R-Really?”

I had never in my life been popular with women. *Oh, except for Michelle.*

“Yes, you work earnestly every day, and I would say your face is rather passable.”

Hey!

“Exactly!” Meryl agreed. “It looks like you bring home some decent money, and you have a good personality. You also seem like the type to give a girl anything she asks for.”

The two of them looked at each other, giggling.

“Are you guys making fun of me?” I demanded.

“Not at all,” Meryl said. “All we’re saying is that from a general standpoint, it wouldn’t be weird for you to have a girlfriend.”

“That’s right,” said Mira, “but everyone hesitates because you always spend time with Minerva. There were quite a number of female adventurers who had their eyes on you, but they’re all scared of Minerva, so...”

“Really?!”

I’d had absolutely no idea. *It’d be for the best if Michelle didn’t hear about this...* She’d immediately get jealous and sad. Was it because she wasn’t confident in herself? She was a genius at magic, cute, attentive, with a figure beyond comparison—it was so strange she would feel that way.

I should give her plenty of praise when she gets home.

“By the way, where’s that popular restaurant?” I asked. “And what kind of carriage are you reserving?” It was going to be my first date with Michelle, so I threw myself into gathering all the information I could.

Michelle looked exhausted when she got home. There were many strong

monsters in the dungeon depths, which made it a never-ending barrage of stress. Even so, she came back to my apartment holding a large shopping bag and attempted to make us dinner.

“I’ll make dinner tonight,” I told her, “so you just sit down.”

“No, I’ll make it.”

“Come on, eat some of my cooking every once in a while. I’ll put plenty of love into it.”

Michelle made a sound like she wanted to protest, but she relented. Despite her attempts to persevere, I somehow got Michelle settled in a chair and made her pilaf. As confident as I had sounded, all I could cook was simple stuff like that. I put a fried egg on top of the pilaf, which I seasoned with spices, and made a vegetable soup with some bacon in it. Still, Michelle was happy with what I’d made.

“It’s very delicious,” she told me. Being praised sure made me happy. I’d put too much pepper on the pilaf so it was a bit spicy, but the taste wasn’t half bad.

Oh right, I should take the chance to invite her to see the flowers on Mount Garges.

“Are you busy with your research, Michelle?”

“Now that you ask, I suppose so,” she replied. “My experiment this time didn’t go so well. Why do you ask?”

“You know, I haven’t taken a break from the shop at all this whole time.”

“Oh, you’re right. You have that shop open every day.”

“So,” I said, “I was thinking that maybe I should take some time off soon. How about we go somewhere together? Like Mount Garges or something.”

Michelle didn’t say anything, so I continued. “They say these flowers called wysteries are really pretty. I’ve never seen them myself, so if you have the time, I was thinking that maybe we could go together?”

Clank! The spoon fell from Michelle’s hand and made a loud sound against the plate of pilaf.

“You mean...” she said slowly.

“Well, I’m basically inviting you on a date.”

“Urk...” *Huh?! She’s suddenly gripping her chest with tears in her eyes?!*

“Hey, are you all right?”

“Yusuke, I need a Mini Mini Cola...” she wheezed. “My heart is in pain...”

“Aren’t you exaggerating a bit?”

“No, I’m so happy I could die...” She looked like she was about to start hyperventilating. Panicked, I hurriedly filled a glass with some water and had Michelle drink it.

“You feeling better?” I asked.

“Yeah...” she said, but she was still gasping for breath.

“So, what do you say?”

“Huh?”

“Would you like to go with me or not?”

“I would,” she said. “I’m definitely going!”

Michelle was shyly casting her gaze downward, but her lips were raised in a small smile.

It had been pouring rain since the day before, but late last night it had finally stopped. Today was the day I was going to Mount Garges with Michelle. I woke up early, got myself ready, and went to pick Michelle up in the carriage we had reserved. It was a convertible type, so we would get a good look at the scenery around us. *That’s right! I really pulled out all the stops for today.*

The coachman gave us a strange look as I lent Michelle a hand to help her into the carriage. She was still a wanted criminal, so she was disguised as a man again with her silver mask. There were also the effects of her cognitive obstruction spells, so no doubt anyone looking at her saw only a man. It was probably rare to see a man escorting another man, but I didn’t care. We were dating after all.

Once we were inside the carriage, she immediately put a Cocoa Cigar in her mouth.

“Do you want one?” she asked. I wasn’t in the mood for sweets, but these would let us talk freely about whatever we wanted.

“I guess I will,” I said, taking one. The moment I had it in my mouth, Michelle started talking to me.

(I’m sorry, Yusuke. I wanted to wear something nicer than this, but...)

(There’s nothing we can do about it. I’ll look forward to seeing that in the future.)

We’d discussed the possibility of fleeing to another country after Michelle reached a stopping point with her research. There was also a decent chance she would be granted amnesty if she cured the king’s curse and offered some kind of compensation. I was positive the day would come when we could freely walk together in public.

(Let’s go and get the lunch boxes from that restaurant first.)

(Maybe I should’ve made us lunch after all. I wanted to have you eat to your heart’s content...) She sounded unsure.

(Let’s save that for next time too.)

Michelle had originally said that she would cook, but that popular lunch box’s container was so extremely cute that she hadn’t been able to fight the allure of its charms.

The lunch boxes we picked up were ceramic and had three tiers. The cover was decorated in tiny flower designs that came in calming pastel pinks, whites, and pale blues.

(How cute...) She seemed to have taken to it. *(The next time we go out together, I’ll stuff this full of my cooking.)*

Michelle usually wasn’t very talkative, but she’d been really chatty all morning. I wondered if the coachman who was driving the carriage found it weird. From his perspective, it looked like we were sitting in silence the whole

time with those Cocoa Cigars in our mouths. He'd only looked back once to speak with us.

"I've got a light," he offered. "Would you like to use it?"

"This isn't a cigarette," I explained.

He'd probably only said that to be kind.

Mount Garges was a lush mountain shaped like an upside-down bowl, with an elevation of only about one hundred meters. Wysterie flowers were bursting into full bloom here and there across the mountain. Their colors ranged from pale pinks to deep purples, and their shape was similar to wisterias'. The mountain was so thick with the blossoms that it seemed to glow with a faint light.

"This is amazing," I marveled. "No wonder everyone comes to see these."

"Yeah. I'm glad I could come here with you this year."

The entrance to the mountain was packed with visitors here to see the flowers. There were many stalls too, and it was loud with the voices of the merchants touting their products.

"Let's move away a little," Michelle said, so we struck out along the mountain trail.

I didn't know if going up the mountain was too much of a pain for everyone or what, but the farther we climbed, the fewer people we saw. As the long staircase continued, I started to run out of breath. Still, I was looking forward to seeing all the flowers from the top, so I pushed on. Finally, we mounted the last step and gained the summit. We would have a good view from here.

"Whoa. This is amazing..."

The sight of the wysteries spread out below me took my breath away. They looked like a cloud aglow with peach and purple light.

"I wanted to share this view with you..." Michelle said.

"Thank you for bringing me here. I've never seen something like this before."

For a while I stood there in awe of the dazzling landscape. Then Michelle spoke up in a trembling voice.

“Y-You know, there’s a legend that says if you share a kiss with your lover here, you’ll live happily together until the next time the wysteries bloom.”

So, essentially it’s like a charm meant to ensure a couple’s happiness for a year? Come to think of it, I’d seen various lovebirds kissing here and there. *Jeez, what show-offs...*

“W-Well, I guess it doesn’t matter to us since I can’t take my mask off anyway...” Michelle mumbled, sounding a little wistful. She returned her gaze to the scenery. Wind blew up from the valley, past the wysteries in full bloom. Michelle and I were separated by a space roughly the width of five apples. I couldn’t look away as her black hair fluttered in the breeze.

Did she cast a love spell on me? No, the witch I knew was brilliant, but I had the feeling she couldn’t use magic like that. *A couple living happily together for a year, huh...?*

I wasn’t the type to believe in legends like that, but there was no doubt that a kiss would make this moment a happy one. And more than anything else, it seemed that Michelle wanted it. If that were the case, then it was my job to step up and make it happen. For an oh-so-mysterious dagashi-ya such as myself, my store’s products were always at my fingertips.

Product name: Monster Smoke

Description: If you apply this medicine to your fingertips and continuously make a pinching motion, a strange smoke will appear. It’s highly effective as a smoke screen to ensure your escape in battle.

Price: Thirty rims

I put the potion that was attached to the Monster Smoke card onto my fingers. Then, as I tapped my thumb and index finger together, a white smoke appeared and faintly enveloped us. No one should be able to see us now.

“Is this your doing, Yusuke?” Michelle asked.

“A dagashi-ya’s magic isn’t half bad, eh?” I said with a grin. “Michelle, can you take off your mask?”

“Huh? Sure...”

It was my first time seeing Michelle’s face outside. It was rarely exposed to sunlight, so her skin was so white it was translucent.

“My lips are too big, so I don’t like my face...”

“I like them. You’re beautiful.”

Michelle gazed at me with surprise. She stared at me for so long, in fact, that I couldn’t help laughing.

“Come on, I need you to close your eyes,” I smiled.

“What?”

“I’m too shy to kiss you like this.”

“Ah...”

This time, Michelle screwed her eyes shut with all her might, almost as if she’d just seen something scary. There had to be something wrong with that king for dumping a cute witch like this. *Though we’re together now thanks to that...*

I leaned forward then and pressed a kiss upon her puckered lips.



The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 9

Tonight at Mira's place, I whipped up something called the "Snap Ball Trap" to take down some monsters tomorrow. I don't think many adventurers are aware of it yet, but those Snap Balls that cast the Fear spell are really useful items. They're especially good if you use them in a small room, a blind alley, or just any kind of narrow space. They throw monsters into a panic and make them unable to dish out any good counterattacks. If they're a species that has low intelligence, there's a chance they'll even accidentally kill each other.

My Snap Ball Trap is a special and great one cooked up by yours truly. Well, all I did was put a conducting wire through some Snap Balls, so it's a pretty simple thing. It's a trap that has a mechanism that'll explode if you channel some mana through the conducting wire. If I lay this out beforehand along the monsters' path of retreat, it'll throw them into a funny frenzy of chaos.

If I connect ten of those Snap Bombs together and set them all off at once, it'll cause all the monsters on B2 to panic. Then, once they've lost their composure, it'll be easy to clean them up with some mid-range attacks. There's no reason for me not to use them, considering I can greatly lower my risks by spending just fifty rims. I'm aiming to make a killing on tomorrow's monster hunt, so I made thirty of those traps tonight.

But why do you get so hungry when you work at night? Mira gave me some Sour Kelp when I pestered her for snacks. Hm... I think all of Dagashi-ya Yahagi's products are tasty, but Sour Kelps are the only ones I'm not a fan of. Actually, I've disliked vinegary stuff ever since I was little.

Mira says such rude things without thinking sometimes, though! She told me that my boobs won't get bigger if I'm picky. It's not like mine are that small! It's just that most normal girls' would look that way compared to hers!

I plan to use my Snap Ball Traps to take down some Stone Bears tomorrow. Defeating just one of them drops a hefty 5,000 rims, and I want to make a total of at least 20,000. If I manage to earn that much, I'll be able to go see the

wysteries, no sweat.

Speaking of the wysteries, Mister Yusuke and Mister Minerva—two men—apparently went to Mount Garges together. Mister Minerva was fidgeting like he was really happy when they were telling us about it. Are those two dating each other after all? Mira put up a composed front, but it seemed she was actually bothered by it.

I think it's all right for men to love each other, but then that makes me curious about Mister Minerva's real face. He might be a real beauty under that mask... How old is Mister Minerva anyway? Based on his voice alone, he sounds like he's middle-aged or even past that.

I can't fully support them when I think about Mira, but Mister Yusuke is important to me, like a big brother. I want him to be happy.

Chapter 10: A Business Trip for Dagashi-ya Yahagi

Cheers suddenly erupted from the Mobile Force arena. Meryl's Zako had somehow defeated Michelle's Kian. After such an unexpected turn of events, the entire venue was going wild, but no one was more fired up than Meryl.

"I did it!" she shouted. "I finally beat Minerva!"

Michelle silently picked up her Kian, her magic link with it having been severed, and left, retreating to the walls.

She had been zoning out a lot recently. If I had to guess, I'd say she started acting this way after our kiss on Mount Garges. I'd never seen her in this state before, but she'd been making a lot of mistakes lately, like burning her cooking.

Is she going to be okay like this? She had to go into the deepest depths of the dungeon for her research. I was worried sick about her. The truth was that I wanted to tag along, but the idea of me doing so was completely off the table. I'd encountered a monster again the other day on B2. I had managed to overcome it with my C. Giant Crow and R. Zombie Knight cards, but one wrong move and I would've been hurt. Yet apparently, the monsters in the dungeon depths were so vicious the small-fry enemies on B2 couldn't hold a candle to them. The only card I had left was my R. Stone Golem card. I'd only be a burden to Michelle if I went.

I took some Monster Chips and settled beside Michelle, who was sitting with her back against the wall.

"You want some?" I asked, offering them to her.

"No, I don't feel like eating," she said.

I opened up the bag and found an SR. Fire Condor card inside.

"Oh, lucky me. It's an SR card." The Condor wrapped in a fiery blaze looked like it was strong, but Michelle only gave it a single glance before she hung her head.

“Hey now, what’s wrong? I’m worried about you.”

“I can’t stop thinking about it...” she murmured.

“Huh?”

“I can’t stop thinking about you, Yusuke!”

That caught me off guard. “L-Lower your voice!”

I looked around but the adventurers were all engrossed in the Mobile Forces match. None of them were looking our way.

“Hey, you said you were going into the dungeon depths tomorrow,” I said, “but maybe you should cancel that? It’ll be dangerous if you go there while you’re like this.”

“Yeah... I think that’s for the best too.” Something worse than a simple injury might happen to her if she went in this state.

“Um,” I started, “is our kiss getting to you? I’m sorry about that.”

“Not at all!” she blurted out. “That was an unforgettable moment for me. That’s why I can’t stop thinking about it!”

“Again, keep your voice down.” She was a wanted criminal. Who knew if or when her real self would be discovered?

“How can we make it so you can focus on your research or exploring?” I asked.

“I have no idea...”

She probably had no choice but to take a break for a while.

“How about you stay away from the dungeon until you calm down?”

“Yeah...” She paused for a moment. “Do you hate me now?”

“Why would I?”

“Like, maybe you think I’m too much, since I’m getting all worked up over something like a kiss...” she said, hugging her knees before she lowered her head onto them, gaze fixed downward.

“Of course not,” I assured her. “At any rate, take two or three days off and

see how you feel. You'll feel better in no time."

"Can we be together during that time?"

"Sure. I'd feel more at ease that way."

Michelle leaned against the wall that whole afternoon, zoning out. She'd occasionally giggle a little in her superhusky voice or say things like "I won't let you get away, not now," which would make everyone flinch.

She was probably indulging in some weird fantasy. Maybe she was daydreaming about capturing some supervicious monster. *Wait, it isn't about me, right?*

Baron Ethel called out to us when Michelle and I left the dungeon together. It seemed he had been waiting for me the entire time.

"Sir Yahagi, I have come here to make a request of you," he said. Was it about the universal elixir again? That was what I had assumed, considering it was the baron asking, but he'd actually come to me with a completely unexpected request. "My domain is the town of Grantham, located about forty kilometers away from the capital. There will be a festival held there next week."

"A festival?" I asked.

"Indeed. It is a festival held in hope of a bountiful harvest this year. The most famous part of this event is a majestic sight to behold—the Milk Can Carrying Race, in which one must run down from the top of a hill while shouldering milk cans."

"Don't tell me you want me to participate in that?" I said with slight dread. I was a dagashi-ya, not a festival enthusiast.

"No, not that. I would like you to open your store on the festival grounds."

Just like how you'd open up a street stall on the day of a festival, he was requesting that I open up my shop to help liven the event up.

"I would particularly like you to sell your Mobile Forces. Their sacred grounds are at Hot Spring Yahagi, but I would like Grantham to follow in that tradition."

“I’m most grateful for your request,” I said, “but I’m only able to sell forty Mobile Forces a day at most. Will that be a problem?”

“The festival will last for three days,” replied the baron, “so I would like you to come to the venue the day before. That way, you can sell them for four days in a row, and there will be 160 Mobile Forces in circulation. I shall deem that acceptable for now.”

For now? Did he have plans to call me to do this again in the future?

“I shall prepare the carriage and accommodations for you, so by all means, please do come.”

Before I gave my final answer, I turned to Michelle.

“Will you come with me, Minerva? I’m unfamiliar with the geography of this land, so I’ll need an escort and some guidance.”

“H-Hm. I’ll give you a hand, Yusuke. *(An overnight stay... I-I’m not prepared to give him the rest of me too, but I’m definitely going!)*”

“Will it be a problem if Minerva comes along with me, Baron?”

“Certainly not. I must repay Sir Minerva for letting me have the universal elixir. I shall prepare a suite in Grantham’s finest hotel so by all means, please enjoy the festival.”

Michelle needed a break, so this was a godsend. It’d also be a good opportunity for me to learn more about this world. *All right, Dagashi-ya Yahagi will be taking a business trip to Grantham!*

The farther we traveled from the capital, the worse the road became and the more loudly the carriage rattled along. Michelle and I were headed for Grantham, shaking around inside the carriage the baron had prepared for us. She had cast a strong barrier spell on the carriage, so no one could see inside. The Wind Magic she had used to create a noise barrier ensured our voices wouldn’t be overheard either, so Michelle had taken off her silver mask and relaxed.

“Have you been to Grantham before?” I asked.

“I haven’t,” she said, “but I’ve heard it’s a pretty big town. It’s known as a major center of wool production.”

“Yeah, the feudal lord, Baron Ethel, seems like a rich guy.”

“The town’s also famous for its mutton dishes.”

“So sheep, huh,” I mused. “Oh yeah, I used to often eat lamb skewers a long time ago.” I had loved the spices they sprinkled on the skewers at my favorite family restaurant, so I had often ordered them.

“You like lamb meat then. I’ll cook some for you next time.”

“It’ll definitely be delicious if you make it.”

“Oh, Yusuke, you...” she blushed. “Very well, I’ll go pick the Eviren spices that only grow in the deepest parts of the Savra Desert to flavor the skewers just for you.”

Michelle’s love was extraordinary, as always.

“You don’t need to go that far...” I said.

It’d be evening soon. We’d be spending tonight at an inn along the way and then continuing to Grantham tomorrow. Since the horse was allowed to rest along the way, our journey was a relaxed one. My butt kept getting sore, but Michelle used her Healing Magic to help with that each time.

“Wh-Whoa!!!” the coachman suddenly bellowed and stopped the coach. Judging by how densely the trees grew on both sides of the road, it seemed we weren’t in town yet.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, sticking my head out of the window. The old coachman looked troubled.

“It appears that the road ahead is blocked, so there is a crowd of people gathered here.”

We still had ten kilometers to go before we reached Grantham. I didn’t want to be stuck here.

“Let’s go have a look,” Michelle said. She put her mask back on and left the carriage as I followed suit.

There was a huge boulder right smack-dab in the middle of the road. It was about five meters tall and large enough to block the way. *Where did this thing come from anyhow?*

“Looks like one of those Vivalde sprites showed up.”

“Sprites did this?” I asked.

“Yeah, Vivalde sprites love to make mischief for humans, and they’re infamous for placing boulders in inconvenient places.”

“Sounds like they’re some troublesome little sprites.”

“That’s not true,” she said with a dry laugh. “The rocks Vivalde sprites leave vary in size. If they’re small, they may be the size of a pebble, while the big ones are usually like the one we’re seeing now.” It seemed that the boulder we saw before us was as big as they got.

“No, no matter how you look at it, this is clearly a pain.”

“Even so, those sprites always hide treasure under the boulders they leave. For example, say that someone trips on one of their rocks and skins their knee. In exchange, they’d find a gold or silver coin beneath the rock.”

I couldn’t tell if these sprites were a nuisance or benevolent.

“Apparently it’s just in their nature to enjoy seeing humans frown in confusion. They are a nuisance sometimes, but humans don’t hate them that much because they leave behind treasure.”

Still, this was a problem. It’d be difficult to walk to town from here.

“If this boulder is this big, then maybe it’s hiding some crazy treasure underneath it,” I suggested.

“Sorry, but size has nothing to do with the treasure’s value. No matter how big it is, it’ll always be hiding a single gold coin at most.”

One hundred thousand rims was a lot of money, but if you took the cost of removing the boulder into account, you’d probably wind up in the red. The road was between a slope and a ditch, so it was possible to go around on foot.

However, it'd probably be impossible for a carriage.

"Don't worry, I'll destroy it," she assured me. "Once it's in small pieces, you all can move them out of the way."

"That's our Shinigami Minerva."

"Don't call me a shinigami. Though, you know, the treasure will disappear if I do this."

This boulder wasn't just any regular old boulder. The treasure beneath it would disappear if it was hit with a magical attack. That kinda felt like a bit of a waste. *Oh, that's it!*

"Minerva, let me try something," I said, taking out one of my snacks.

Product name: Jumbo Cutlet

Description: While it appears to be a cutlet, it's made of fish paste. Just as its name suggests, it is a large snack. If you shout, "Power Boost!" after consumption, you'll receive a superhuman boost in physical strength for three seconds.

Price: Thirty rims

It was a rather filling snack, and thanks to the sauce it used it was delicious to boot. I had just started feeling a bit peckish, so I took the Jumbo Cutlet from the bag and sank my teeth into its crispy flesh. I chewed and gulped it down until I had finished it.

"All right, I'm prepared now."

Back in the dungeon, there was a huge door that had been rusted shut for ages, but Garmr had told me he'd easily opened it after eating this. There was a possibility that I could make this big boulder move too.

I placed both hands on the boulder and loudly declared, "Power boost!" The moment I did, I glowed with a golden light, and my whole body began overflowing with power. *Now's my chance.* When I flexed both of my arms, the

boulder began to move slightly, rumbling as I strained against it. *Just a little more...*

“Grrr!”

Before my three seconds were up, I managed to push the large boulder off the path and to the side of the road, making enough space for a single carriage to pass through.

“Whoa! That’s amazing, mister!” Cheers erupted from all around me. I waved at them all shyly.

“Yusuke, this was underneath the boulder,” Michelle said, approaching me and handing over a small box. Engraved on the cover was a face resembling a fat cat sticking out its tongue. So, this was the Vivalde sprite. The face pissed me off somewhat, but it had a charm that made it hard to hate.

After returning to the carriage, I opened the box and found a small bracelet inside. It consisted of a golden chain of medium thickness with three small gems attached to it. I thought the red one in the middle was a ruby and the blue ones on each end were sapphires. They also might have just been glass beads, but the bracelet looked rather pretty.

“Give me your arm.” Taking Michelle’s hand, I put the bracelet on her wrist. It suited her way more than it would have suited me. “Yep, it looks good on you.”

“Yusuke...”

“If you don’t like it, we can get you something else—”

“No! I like it!” She had apparently taken a shine to it. She giggled to herself. “A present from Yusuke... I’ll cast a curse on it so no one will steal it... I’ll make it so anyone else who touches it will be cursed with bad dreams, along with an electric shock. A curse that makes all your body hair fall off might be good too.”

She’s changing some regular old jewelry into a cursed item?! Well, she seemed happy enough, so I’d leave her to it...

The town of Grantham that Baron Ethel oversaw was a large one surrounded by castle walls. Both agriculture and business seemed to be flourishing here,

and the townspeople looked more lively than those in the capital. I had thought that the baron was just a plump and good-natured uncle type, but maybe he was actually an astute ruler? That was the impression I was getting anyway.

The carriage arrived at the baron's residence located in the center of Grantham. My body was all stiff, probably because of how rough the roads were as well as the inherently low quality of a horse-drawn carriage. If I hadn't had Michelle use her Healing Magic on me, my lower back pain would have been pretty bad.

"Sir Yahagi, how fared you on your trip?" Baron Ethel chirped cheerily, coming out to greet us in the parlor.

"Nice to see you again, Baron," I said. "We made it safely here, thanks to you. This is a good town. It seems to be flourishing."

"Thank you. Now, make yourselves comfortable. I shall have some tea prepared for you."

I then took out some new additions to the Mobile Force Series that I'd brought as souvenirs.

"This here is the easy-to-use Jam model, and this one is the powerful Zuccotto."

"Oh, you have my thanks!" He already owned all the other models I'd sold up until this point, yet he was pleased with these two new ones as well. "Once you have had a break, I will have you guided to the hotel where you will be staying. Afterward, perhaps you ought to have a look at the venue where you will be doing business, yes?"

"I would appreciate that. We've made our preparations on our end." At most, I'd only see a restock of forty Mobile Forces per day. Setting up shop as soon as possible and selling at least some of them now would help more people obtain them in the long run.

We left Baron Ethel's residence and arrived at the hotel we'd been directed to. It was a splendid stone building and a high-class luxury hotel at that, with a doorman waiting by the entrance. It was probably among the best of the best in this world. I could really sense Baron Ethel's passion for the Mobile Forces from

the fact that he had gone out of his way to prepare a hotel like this for us.

“Hello! I’m Yahagi,” I said. “I was referred here by Baron Ethel.”

“Sir Yahagi, yes? I’ve been told about you. Please, right this way.” Once we were checked in at the reception desk, the concierge took our luggage and showed us to our room. That was a high-class hotel for you.

“This is your room,” the concierge informed us.

“Whoa, it’s really nice.” Just like Baron Ethel had promised, it was a suite with two adjoining rooms furnished with some wide beds. There was also a parlor area in the inner room. The suite had a spacious bathroom and a toilet as well. It was a far cry from the Swindoll Con Inn I used to stay at.

“You can see the Kumpf Plaza from the balcony,” we were told. The Kumpf Plaza was where we planned to open up Dagashi-ya Yahagi. There weren’t many people there right now, but I’d heard that it’d be packed come the festival.

“Please, make yourselves at home.”

“Thank you... Wait, what?!”

“Is something the matter?”

There was plenty the matter! With how things were right now, it was as if...

“Um,” I said, “is there only one room? What about a room for Minerva here...?”

“Our hotel becomes booked solid around the time of the festival, so we have no single rooms to offer. Will that be a problem?”

Of course it would be a problem. *I mean, Michelle and I would be staying in the same room...*

“If you can, I’d like for you to prepare two rooms for us. Of course, I’ll pay for both of them.”

“Unfortunately, we’re fully booked. We apologize for the trouble.” With a look of remorse, the concierge then took his leave. Michelle and I were left in the room at a loss for what to do. She hadn’t said a single word the whole time.

"I'll look to see if there are any inns that have a vacancy," I told her.

"I-I don't mind," she stammered. "You've stayed at my place plenty of times before, right? Don't act like it's such a big deal now."

"Michelle, your hands are shaking. Aren't you the one acting like it's a big deal? Also, things have changed now. I didn't know you were a girl back then."

Michelle hesitated for a second before she protested once more.

"W-We're only staying the night. All we're doing is staying the night in the same room together, right? There shouldn't be any problems then."

"I mean, yeah, but..."

"Considering the festival, you won't find any rooms available anywhere."

It wasn't like I didn't have a sex drive. On the contrary, I really wanted to take my relationship with Michelle to the next level. To make matters worse, I found her pretty dang attractive. But there were no condoms or birth control pills in this world. If we did the deed without any contraceptives, we might suddenly have a kid on our hands.

"Puh puh... Goo goo."

All of a sudden I was visualizing our baby, dark circles just like Michelle's under its eyes. Its name was Macherie. *How cute... No, snap out of it!*

My love for Michelle was growing stronger by the day, but I wasn't prepared for *that* yet. Besides, we couldn't give it a stable upbringing when its mother was still a wanted criminal. We couldn't relax until we had sorted all those problems out. But if all we were doing was staying the night together...

"Got it," I said, finally relenting. "I promise I won't do anything to you."

"Oh, wait!" she said, waving her hands in a panic.

"Did you change your mind?"

"That's not it... It's just, you can do a *few* things...to me..."

How much was a few? *No, no, no, I can't.* It'd definitely snowball from there. I just knew it.

"Now, let's leave our luggage and go set up shop at the Kumpf Plaza. It's

about to get real busy...”

Without giving her a clear response, I hurriedly prepared to open my shop.

The area prepared for Dagashi-ya Yahagi was spacious, and they had even provided a Mobile Forces arena next to it. *Baron Ethel made us some nice arrangements*, I thought to myself.

“Store, open. Dagashi-ya Yahagi.” Today, I brought out the street stall version of my store. It was perfect to use outdoors.

“What the hell is this?!”

“There’s a bunch of stuff I’ve never seen before.”

“How pretty...”

All the local kids had immediately gathered around my store.

“Come one, come all!” I said. “Please stop by and have a look! We’re a very popular dagashi-ya from the capital!” My shop wasn’t that popular, but it was typical for street vendors to exaggerate in their sales pitches.

“It says this thing is gum,” said one child. “What is it?”

“It’s a snack you enjoy by chewing without swallowing. It has a lottery.”

“What’s a lottery?”

The kids kept bombarding me with questions, their eyes sparkling. Before long, a boy took a ten-rim coin from his pocket.

“I would like this, please.” He had selected a cola-flavored Odama Candy. Cola and soda didn’t exist in this world, so you could say it was a pretty bold choice. It took courage to try something you didn’t know.

“Thank you,” I said, accepting the coin. “There’s a lottery ticket inside the wrapper, so look carefully. Also, don’t throw your trash around here. Throw it in this cardboard box instead.”

“Okay.” He unwrapped the Odama Candy and timidly put it in his mouth. His face lit up. “Wow, it’s delicious!” he exclaimed. “And it’s huge!”

He seemed to struggle to get the words out around his mouthful of candy, but he enthusiastically expressed his excitement to his friends.

“I see,” I said. “Hey, try moving around.”

“You want me to move?”

“That candy boosts your agility when you eat it.”

“Really?” The boy gave the ground an experimental kick. “Whoa?!” He was amazed at the speed of his own movement.

“This is amazing!” he exclaimed. “If I raced someone right now, there’s no way I’d lose!”

His rave review seemed to completely sell the other kids on my goods.

“Seriously?! Give me some candy too!”

“Gum over here!”

“Some chocolate for me!”

Yep, kids are always full of energy, no matter what town you visit.

I wasn’t in the dungeon today, so I decided not to sell dangerous items like my Rocket Bombs. They were items meant for adventurers, so these kids weren’t ready for them quite yet.

Actually, the baron had said he wanted me to popularize the Mobile Forces. He’d gone out of his way to prepare an arena for me, so I might as well put it to good use. I’d also brought some of Mister Sanaga’s Mobile Forces weapons to sell on his behalf as part of a consignment deal.

“Minerva, I have a favor to ask of you,” I said to Michelle.

“What is it?”

“Give a martial arts demonstration using your Mobile Force unit. You’re the capital’s champion, so it’d be a good way to attract customers.”

“Got it.” Michelle took out her Kian and began moving it, drawing all of the kids’ attention in her direction.

“Whoa! The doll is moving!”

“How are you doing that?”

The kids were brimming with intense curiosity.

“It’s called a Mobile Force,” I said. “It’s a really popular toy back in the capital.”

“Can we move them too?” one kid piped up.

“You betcha. Anyone with mana can use them.” Of course, none of the children immediately whipped out three hundred rims, but they were all very interested.

“So, it’s three hundred rims for one?” asked a grandpa who had brought along his grandchild.

“Yes, that’s right. Regardless of type, each one is three hundred rims.”

“Then let’s get one.” The grandpa handed me three one-hundred-rim coins and turned to the child. “Which one would you like?”

“Hm... Gungalf!” Little kids seemed to like the protagonist mechas.

“Would you like to assemble it right away and try it out?” I suggested. “If you choose to do it now, the capital’s champion will instruct you.”

“I will?!” Michelle blurted out, so surprised she used her normal voice.

“Why not give them a bit of a hand?” I said. “You’re good at teaching, aren’t you?” She used to be a teacher at a magical academy, and she had been thorough when teaching me too.

“G-Got it. Young boy, come this way.”

Michelle really did have a knack for teaching. Soon enough, the young boy could walk his Gungalf around. After that, other customers came one after another.

“Gufufu please.”

“I’d like Zako.”

“I’m going to bring my mom!”

“Me too!”

This continued until I'd sold all forty units I had prepared.

"When will you be opening your store tomorrow?" asked a young man with bloodshot eyes. *I think he was the one who bought the last Zako. Maybe he wants some of the other models too?*

"Maybe around ten."

"Really? All right, I'll come by around that time and buy everything you got. Let me reserve them now."

Baron Ethel wanted to popularize the Mobile Forces among the people of this town. I myself also wanted a lot of people to enjoy them, so I couldn't allow them all to be bought out.

"I can't do that. I'm only selling one unit per person this time."

"Why?! I can make a deposit right now if you want!"

"I want as many people to know about these as possible," I explained, "so I've decided that I'll only be selling one unit per person this time around."

"No way!" he exclaimed in dismay. "But your earnings will be the same either way, right? How about this—I'll pay four hundred rims per box!"

He was kinda annoying.

Just as I was debating how I was going to chase him off, a line of five soldiers came running this way. They bowed once to me before putting up a sign next to my shop. *What's written on it?*

Notice:

Buying out Mobile Forces and reselling them is strictly prohibited. Violators will be sentenced to thirty days of hard labor.

Ruling Lord Baron Moe Ethel

Huh? That guy who'd been pestering me to sell him the Mobile Forces was gone. *I guess that means he was aiming to resell them.*

Had Baron Ethel predicted this would happen? If he was taking these preventative measures against resales beforehand, then maybe he really was an astute man.

I continued to do business as the sky grew dim, and I reflected on the fact that my Mobile Forces had sold out. Even around here, they were pretty popular.

“These sold really well thanks to you, Michelle,” I said to her.

“I didn’t do much, really...” she mumbled.

“You showed those kids the ropes on how to move them, and you even accepted their challenges, right? Although you did completely wipe the floor with them.”

Holding back wasn’t her forte, it seemed.

The setting sun sank behind the buildings, plunging Kumpf Plaza into twilight. The children had long since gone home, and the people who were already hyped up for the coming festivities had headed to the pubs or restaurants to celebrate the eve of the festival. There hadn’t been any customers in a while, so it was an ideal time to close up shop.

“It’s a little early for dinner,” I said, “so you wanna stroll around as we head back?”

“Yeah.” Michelle was happy, fidgeting bashfully. Due to her cognitive obstruction spell, all people would see was a wriggling mask-clad man. I wanted to shout to the heavens, *She’s actually really cute!* But there was no way that was happening. Since this was an unfamiliar area, I had at least wanted to try walking around town holding hands, but I managed to restrain myself.

When we got back to our room, I wearily plopped down on the sofa. There’d been a lot of customers, and after all of the bustle, I was exhausted.

“Michelle, how about you take off your cloak and your mask too?” I said. *She’ll be much more at ease like that.*

“I will but...can you close your eyes?”

“I can, but why?”

“I wanna change into something that’s a little more comfortable.”

“All right.” I closed my eyes and hid my face behind my hands. I was definitely not thinking about sneaking a peek between my fingers while she was changing. *I won’t lose to temptation!*

With a rattle, the sound of an opening suitcase reached my ears, followed by the rustling of clothes. *I guess she’s getting undressed now...* I suddenly remembered the first time I had seen her true face. It wasn’t just her face I’d seen—I had also glimpsed her entire naked body... My face was suddenly burning.

“Can I open them now?”

“Not yet! Just a bit longer.”

I heard the pitter-patter of Michelle’s footsteps grow fainter as she headed toward the bathroom. I continued to sit in silence with my eyes closed, adjusting my posture as I sank deeper into the couch. *Girls probably just take a while to get ready.* Keeping my eyes closed was gradually making me sleepy, though.

“You can look now, Yusuke.”

“Hm? All right.” I had nearly fallen asleep. As I yawned, I looked over at Michelle...and suddenly found myself at a loss for words.

“Ah...”

“What do you think?” she asked shyly. “I wanted to show you this, so I bought it. It’s sad I can’t wear it outside, though...”

All my sleepiness evaporated at once. Michelle was wearing a new evening dress. It was black—a fitting color for her—and her knee-length fishtail skirt was made of several layers of fluffy fabric. Her long, white legs stretching from beneath the skirt were radiant. The open chest and sleeves were decorated with lace and had a chic and sensuous charm. Even though she was shy, she moved her body a little and showed off the dress’s details.

“Very beautiful—both you and the dress,” I said, words of praise naturally

rushing from my mouth.

“Y-You think?” she squeaked. “Can I confirm it through a truth-judging magic experiment? I’ll draw up the magic circle right away.”

Wait, there’s such a thing as a magical lie detector?!

“Just believe me!” I said, a little alarmed. “I’m being serious here.”

“Sorry, I’ve just always been insecure about my appearance.”

“I’m telling you, you’re really pretty.”

I actually found her so attractive, I didn’t know what to do with myself.

“Yusuke.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Do you really like me?” she asked, gazing up at me through her eyelashes.

“If I didn’t, then we wouldn’t be dating.”

“Then can’t you put my worries to rest?”

Huh? Where is this going?

“How can I do that?” I asked.

“I want you to let me use a Mobile Force unit to determine if you’re telling the truth!” she said. “I believe you, but I did have my engagement broken off once...”

Has she come to distrust men by any chance? If that was the case, then I supposed I had no choice...

“Okay, I understand.”

“Just wait a bit!” Michelle spread out a large piece of paper and started drawing a magic circle. First, she drew a circle then arranged various shapes and characters around it. Lastly, she split it in half and labeled the left side with a circle and the right side with an X.

“There, I’ve completed the preparations. Yusuke, put Kian against your forehead.”

As Michelle and I put the Mobile Force Kian between our foreheads, she

recited a spell. Then with Kian as the bridge, a magic link was established between the two of us.

“Hey, this is...”

“Don’t move,” she warned, carefully putting Kian in the middle of the magic circle. “The link is really sensitive, so it can easily break.”

Once she’d set it down, she told me, “Now put out both of your hands.”

“Don’t ask me anything weird,” I said.

“...Okay.”

That strange pause had me a bit concerned, but I put my hands on top of hers.

“This is my first time using this magic, so let me practice a little,” she said.

“Got it.”

Michelle took a deep breath.

“Answer all my questions only with ‘yes.’ Yusuke, you like plum cakes.”

“Yes.” The dried plum cake that Michelle made was just the best. She probably knew very well that I liked it since I’d badgered her to make it so many times. When I answered, “Yes,” Kian, which had been placed in the center of the magic circle, turned ninety degrees and pointed its sword at the circle mark. In other words, it had ruled I was telling the truth.

“Whoa!” I exclaimed.

“Let me test it out some more.”

“Great! Just amazing!” I would expect nothing less from a mage of her prowess. She’d used her Mobile Force to put together this kind of magic. Even I was starting to enjoy this.

Michelle returned Kian to its original position and asked more questions.

“We didn’t sell any Mobile Forces today.”

That wasn’t true. They’d sold out today.

“Yes.” Kian’s sword pointed at the X. *I see, so this is how she’ll determine if I’m*

telling the truth.

“Looks like it’s working properly. Then we should go ahead already...”

We both gulped. I knew that my love for Michelle was nothing but true, but I was still nervous.

“Here I go,” she said. “Yusuke, you like Michelle more than you like Mira.”

“What the hell is that?”

“Don’t question it. Just answer, ‘Yes!’ Yusuke likes Michelle more than he likes Mira.”

“Yes...” As it should, Kian aimed at the circle with its sword. Michelle let out a sigh of relief.

“That wasn’t fair,” I said. “I told you, I love you more than anyone.”

“I’m sorry. It’s just that I know you’re always glancing at Mira’s boobs.”

Huh?! She noticed?! I supposed I needed to repent too.

“Now on to the next question.”

“The next?” *No way, there’s more?*

“Yusuke likes Michelle more than he likes Meryl.”

“Hey, hold on a second! That’s enough!” I protested. “You need to let this go already!”

“But you’re always worrying about Meryl over the least thing,” she said. “I thought that maybe you had some romantic feelings for her...”

“Ugh! Okay, how about you ask this instead? Ask if Yusuke Yahagi loves Michelle more than anything in the world.”

“Huh?”

“You want to check if I love you, right?” I said. “So, hurry up and ask.”

“S-Sure. Is that okay?”

“You’re chickening out now? Just ask already.” I was also dying of embarrassment knowing I was going to be asked this question.

“D-Do you love me more than anything else in the world?” she stammered.

“Yes.” Kian pointed its blade straight toward the circle mark. Even if I’d been pretty sure of my own mind, I hadn’t been able to help worrying, *What if?* Now that Kian had made the correct judgment, I breathed out a sigh of relief.

“I’m so glad...” Michelle said with big tears glistening in her eyes. “I believed you, but I just couldn’t shake off my doubts.”

“Hey, now. You don’t have to cry.”

“Let me ask one more thing!”

“Say what now?”

“Are you okay with a girl who has a big butt?” she asked.

More than okay, I love it...

“Yes.”

“Th-Then, tonight we should go to bed together and—”

“Wh—!” I sputtered. “You’re asking way too many questions!”

I shook myself free of Michelle’s hand. At once, I heard a small snapping sound in my head, so I knew that the magic link had broken off.

“Let’s lay off the truth-finding for the day and have some dinner, huh?” I said.

“Sure...” She seemed just a bit unsatisfied, but she let it go since she had confirmed that I did love her. I decided we’d order some room service so she could stay in her evening dress for dinner tonight.

I thought I’d be way too nervous to sleep in the same room as Michelle, but surprisingly, I wasn’t. My heart was pounding at first, but the second I got in bed, I was struck with a wave of drowsiness and didn’t wake up even once until morning. Michelle was a little sulky because of that.

“I couldn’t sleep a wink, but you were sleeping like a baby...” she pouted.

“Ha ha ha! I’ve always been the type who can switch gears at the drop of a hat.” I’d never been one to get too hung up on things. It was a mistake to think

that men were pervs all year round, twenty-four seven.

“Then I’ll wear this tonight!” Michelle dragged a black lingerie set from the trunk along with a baby doll dress, also black. The dress’s length was short and the fabric was see-through, so her underwear would definitely show.

“That’s gotta be against the rules!” I shouted.

“But it’s just not fair!” she complained. “So, we’re gonna be sleep-deprived together, Yusuke!”

“No, that makes no sense!”

“Huh?”

Hmm... Yeah, if I see her in such sexy underwear, I doubt I’ll be able to sleep. Worse, that thing looks like it’ll really suit her...

“Are you really going to wear that?” I asked.

“I mean, I want to be together with you.”

“Then you should get a good night’s rest just like me. We have work tomorrow too.”

“But I can’t sleep when I think about how you’re next to me. It makes my heart start racing.” The dark circles under her eyes were even darker now. At this rate, this was going to negatively impact her health.

“Is there any way you can manage somehow?” I asked, trying to find a way to settle the matter. Then I perked up. “Oh right, maybe some Mini Mini Cola will help?”

“That’s the dagashi that has a calming effect, right?”

“Yep, exactly. You may be able to curb your excitement if you use it.”

“I understand... *(Although I actually want you to be just as excited as I am...)*”

It was a pity that I couldn’t see her in that baby doll dress, but for the sake of our peaceful sleep, it had to be done.

Wait, it absolutely has to be done? Something’s telling me it’s still worth seeing even if I have to sacrifice my sleep... No, no, best not to explore this matter any further.

Since it was morning, I opened up my shop at the same location as yesterday. Once I did, people started lining up, hoping to obtain a Mobile Force. Just as Baron Ethel had been expecting, the Mobile Forces were taking root in Grantham. It became hotter as the sun rose, so my drinks also sold well today. The Ramune was particularly popular, and it sold out in the blink of an eye.

Also, the new product that I'd started selling today was wildly popular.

Product name: Super Orb

Description: It's a ball two centimeters in diameter, and a magic item. If you hold this and jump, your jump height will increase by about thirty centimeters.

Price: Fifty rims

In my previous life, Super Balls were rubber balls that bounced super well, but in this world, they made humans bounce instead! You'd get at least an additional thirty centimeters on top of your natural jump, so everyone was bouncing up and down with delight. They were sold through a lottery system, and the size of the ball increased with each number, one through five. Your jumping ability would increase accordingly, and it seemed you would be able to jump as high as one meter or so. I worried that the impact of landing on the ground might hurt, but it was designed with safety in mind. You'd bounce a little when you landed so you wouldn't get injured.

It was popular among not only little kids but also teenagers. Soon Kumpf Plaza was overflowing with jumping people. There were 110 Super Orbs attached to each sheet of cardstock, but they were flying off the shelves—so much so that I had to bring out a second sheet.

Customer traffic at the shop slowed down around noon. It looked like I could finally have some lunch. This was a festival, so there were plenty of food stalls around Kumpf Plaza. I'd pick something up from there. As I was discussing lunch

plans with Michelle, the plaza suddenly burst into a commotion. *What's going on?*

"We did it! We won!"

"Whooooa!!!"

Excitement spread across the plaza like wildfire through a dry field. What did they mean by "won?" I decided to ask someone nearby.

"What did they win?" I asked a man.

"The war!" he exclaimed. "General Bartos and his troops that were stationed at the border defeated Aheluka's troops!"

Oh right, the innkeeper of the Swindoll Con Inn did tell me this country was at war. So they'd brought news of that to Grantham...

"General Bartos and his troops have already left the border for a triumphant return to the capital," he continued. "It seems they'll arrive at Grantham tomorrow."

"Wow, is he going to take the opportunity to have a look around the festival?"

"Yep, it's also a huge honor for the town of Grantham!"

The man then left excitedly.

So, the war was over. Now that I thought about it, I had heard that this country's most competent personnel had gone to war. Maybe public order in the capital would improve a little once its more respectable officers and men came back.

"What kind of person is General Bartos?" I asked Michelle, who was next to me.

"The younger brother of the current king," she said. "He's much more competent than his stupid older brother. I don't like him, though."

"Why not?"

"He's a perverted womanizer," she said. "He keeps *two* beautiful female lieutenants by his side."

"Huh..." So, he was someone who would actually recreate a harem in real

life... *All great men make great lovers? Is that the saying?*

“Don’t tell me you’re jealous, Yusuke.”

“Not at all,” I said. “A harem would only be a mess to deal with.”

“I-Is that so? If you really wanted one, I could use Clone Magic for you.”

“What the hell?”

“I’d create five clones of myself,” she said. “Then they could all love you, right? It’s some pretty advanced magic, so I think I’m the only one in this country who could create five.”

The quintessential girlfriends?!

Handling five Michelles, huh... I had the feeling it would be way too much for me to endure.

“Just one of you is enough for me.” I told her.

I *was* interested! I *was*! But even so, the idea of five times as much love was terrifying.

Once the festival had embarked on its third day, the famous Milk Can Carrying Race commenced. It was a competition that spanned across Grantham’s eight districts, in which you had to run a long-distance relay race through town while shouldering cans big enough to hold twelve liters. The most challenging part was a section of the suburbs where you had to run down a hill. If you fell and spilled the milk, you’d have to start again from the top. However, most of the participants tripped and fell, ending up soaked in milk and mud.

I remembered how those rags used to clean up spilled milk during school lunches would wind up. *I wonder how bad everyone’s clothes will smell by tomorrow.*

Kumpf Plaza was the race’s finish line, so it was crowded with people. By this point, the victor had already been decided, and an award ceremony was underway. Everyone was busy watching it, so we had free time at the store. As I enjoyed a short breather, a large shadow enveloped me.

There wasn't a single cloud in the sky today, but maybe an evening shower was coming on? When I looked up, it wasn't a cloud I saw. Instead, there loomed a large-bodied man nearly two meters tall. He had also brought two beautiful women with him. What was more, the woman at his left side had long ears. *Is she an elf?!* It was my first time seeing one in this world. She was dressed in a pretty risqué manner. Her clothes exposed a wide swathe of her chest, and the slit in her skirt ran high. I didn't know where to look.

"Welcome."

The large man who had been staring intently at me smiled broadly. He was big and scary-looking, but he had a strange charm when he smiled.

"Shopkeeper," he said, "I heard you were selling something called Mobile Forces here. Where are they?"

"Sure thing! I've got them right here. We only have three boxes left, though."

They had sold well again today, so there were only three remaining: Gufufu, Kian, and Jujiong.

"I see! Is it okay to pick them up?"

"Go ahead. There's an explanation on the side of the box."

The big man picked up Gufufu and carefully read the box. Between the two of us, the man looked older, but he had the earnestness of a young boy. After taking a leisurely ten minutes to compare them all, he finally decided on his purchase.

"I'll go with Gufufu after all," he said. "I feel it'd be most compatible with me."

"So, Gufufu, huh? Would you like a weapon and some armor with that?" I introduced him to Mister Sanaga's weapons as if I were offering him a side of french fries. Most people bought them together, after all.

"Let's see. Which do you think is good, Cres?"

"I do believe a spear would be good," said the elf with a giggle, hugging herself right beneath her boobs and exuding allure as she gave her two cents. Her pheromones were off the charts.

“What about you, Rana?”

“How about you get something unique like a whip instead?” she suggested. “The box art has one.” This girl had an overly serious air about her. There was indeed an image of Gufufu equipping a whip on the box art.

“Hmm...” The large man extracted the parts from the box and began assembling Gufufu in front of the store. It was extremely easy to assemble a Mobile Force unit, so even a small child would only need a max of five minutes. His fingers were big and tough, but they moved dexterously and he assembled Gufufu in no time at all.

“Can I try having it hold a weapon?” It sounded like he wanted to decide after actually having his Mobile Force equip it. Despite his large size, he might possess unexpectedly delicate sensibilities.

“That’s fine, but please do not hit it against something and break it.”

“I understand.”

The man put Gufufu against his forehead and established a magic link between them. He then proceeded to move its body so smoothly you’d never have guessed it was his first time. I’d never seen anyone move it so skillfully, aside from Michelle.

“Oh, this is great!” he exclaimed. “It’s truly quite fun!”

He had Gufufu fly and jump and assume a fighting stance without its movements ever once faltering. *This man right here might just be what is known as a master.*

After the man tried out various weapons, he selected the unpopular longsword. It was a rather large sword with a slight curve, like the Green Dragon Crescent Blade. The blade itself was a matte black color with red decorative engravings.

“I like this. I’ll take it.”

“What will you do for armor? This shield here is popular.”

“I don’t need a shield,” he said. “It’ll hold its weapon with both hands.”

I see. That’d probably make its sword more powerful...

The serious-looking girl named Rana paid for the items. She was staring at my face very intently... Was something bothering her?

“Incidentally, Shopkeeper,” the man said, “I heard that you can get some training from the capital’s champion if you buy a Mobile Force. I’d like a match with him. Will that be all right?”

I looked over at Michelle, who had been sitting with her back against the wall of a building, but she had already stood up and begun stretching her arms. *I guess she knew that things would turn out like this.*

“Is that all right with you, Minerva?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’s no problem.” Michelle was having her Kian equip its sword and shield. She somehow seemed kind of fired up.

“Now, come this way,” I said.

The man nodded and set Gufufu down in the arena. It held the long sword that he had just purchased.

This was supposed to be a Mobile Forces match, but the air was thick with the kind of tension you might feel before a duel between two fellow knights. The next thing I knew, a great number of spectators had begun ignoring the closing ceremony to observe the match instead.

“This isn’t an official battle, so we don’t need to introduce ourselves,” the man said, taking a pretty lighthearted approach to the battle that lay ahead of him.

“Bring it on.” Michelle’s fighting spirit was laid bare to the world. She was the type to get heated in fights.

There had been no signal to commence the match, but the two Mobile Force units dived into battle at the same time, as if they had agreed on a signal beforehand.

Both units stepped swiftly forward, their swords clashing. Gufufu’s attacks were heavy as a result of its two-handed grip on its sword, and Michelle’s Kian staggered slightly. Taking advantage of that moment of weakness, the big man

launched an attack.

However, Michelle's title as the original champion wasn't just for show. She lithely pulled Kian's body back then did a huge leap backward in order to open up some distance between them, escaping the attack by the skin of her teeth. She even used the recoil from landing to spring toward him with a lunge. Compared to the other models, Kian was extremely adept at stabbing.

Gufufu used its big sword to change the trajectory of Kian's thrust, but he couldn't fully evade it. The unit suffered a blow to its shoulder, snapping the magic link. It had been a gripping battle that kept you on the edge of your seat, but Michelle was the victor in the end.

"Damn... I give up."

Michelle bowed without a word.

"As expected of a champion," said the man. "There are not many as skillful as you. Are you an adventurer?"

"Yeah."

"Man, this was truly an experience. Let's have a rematch one of these days."

Once the battle was over, Michelle returned to her original place and sat down as though she had lost interest. It seemed she wasn't going to indulge him by commending his fighting spirit. It actually looked like she was trying to say as little to him as possible. *Maybe they know each other?*

"You almost had it," I said to the man who had just finished his match. "As is the nature of my business, I've witnessed many people using those Mobile Forces, and your skills were particularly remarkable."

"Thank you. I've heard there was a big tournament for these held in the capital?"

"Yes, I held it on B2 of the dungeon. Many of my store's customers are adventurers."

"I see. Then won't you have a tournament somewhere aboveground next time?" he suggested with an amicable expression on his face. "It'd make for an even bigger and more spectacular event."

“I’d like to if I could,” I admitted, “but it’d be difficult to acquire a venue. I imagine it’d be expensive as well.”

“I suppose so. But you might see it realized eventually.” The man then exhaled. “Whew, I had a lot of fun. I’ll see you again.”

The big man waved his hand, taking his leave with his two beautiful women in tow.

I went to sit next to Michelle.

“Good work today. He was a peculiar man, wasn’t he?”

“That was the king’s little brother, General Bartos,” Michelle revealed, lowering her voice.

“Was it?! I heard he might come see the festival, but I hadn’t thought I’d get to meet him myself.”

“He’s a pleasure-seeker, the same as his brother, which is something I don’t like.” Michelle didn’t seem to hold a favorable opinion of General Bartos.

“Hm,” I hummed. “You did say he was a competent but perverted general, and he really does seem that way, now that I’ve met the man himself.”

His drive was intense, and I had the impression that he was the type who wanted to grasp all that this world had to offer. I didn’t think he was a bad person, but I wasn’t good with his type either. I wanted to live my life peacefully while having fun.

“Well, if he’s in such a high position,” I said, “we probably won’t see him that often.”

In reality, the general and I didn’t have many chances to see each other after that day, but that man would go on to influence my life in a major way.

Baron Ethel’s Side

General Bartos was relaxing in the living room of Baron Ethel’s residence, downing some alcohol from a large cup. Cres was nestled right beside him, while Rana was sitting up straight. The baron was seated opposite, smiling as he

kept him company in his drinking.

“I had a peek at that dagashi-ya you told me about,” said the general.

“Did it meet your expectations?” the baron asked.

“I bought this.” The general put the Gufufu model he had just purchased on the table. It was a brand-new Mobile Force unit, but there was already a small crack in its shoulder.

“Was it to your liking?”

“It was. It’s a well-made toy, although I prefer to fight using my own body.”

“Naturally. Your Excellency is a seasoned veteran, after all.”

The baron replenished Bartos’s glass from a bottle of alcohol.

“It appears my brother is obsessed with them,” the general said, glancing meaningfully at him.

“Indeed,” he agreed. “He is thoroughly pleased with them. Every day, he engages in Mobile Forces battles against his servants to his heart’s content. It has reached the point that even Her Majesty the queen is fed up with his obsession.”

“I’m certain he hasn’t realized that they’re holding back and falsely believes that he’s winning thanks to his own strength.”

“Alas, that is about right.”

With a keen gaze, the general asked the baron, “So, what do you think? If a Mobile Forces tournament was held at the capital, then do you think His Majesty would leave the palace?”

“Most likely... That’s how enthralled His Majesty is with the Mobile Forces as of late.”

Even if he was an incompetent debauchee, the present king was very cautious. He fooled around while indulging in every luxury he could, but he would never leave the safety of his palace.

The general licked his lips, wet with alcohol, and sighed.

“There are many magical barriers all around the palace created by a number

of people across the generations. It's impossible for my troops to do anything. To catch him, we must get His Majesty out of that palace."

"Even if His Majesty leaves the palace, he will still have his convoy of imperial guard knights, no?"

"If we get him out of the palace, then we can easily crush his guard," the general said. "The most important point is to have him leave that palace. If we lure him out of the palace using the Mobile Forces..."

These two were plotting to use the Mobile Forces to stage a military coup d'état.

"That man is named Yahagi, right?" he asked the baron. "Won't he join our camp? I have some interest in his partner, the Shinigami Minerva."

"I wonder about that. He is the kind of man who has no interest in riches and honors." The baron accompanied his words with an amused but restrained laugh.

"What are you saying?" the general exclaimed in disbelief. "Such a man exists? When you're born into this world as a man, you eat delicious food, down delicious alcohol, and sleep with beautiful women. Are these not normal desires?"

"How shall I put this? It is not as if Sir Yahagi is uninterested in such things. He simply is not the type to desire much."

"Hmm," said Bartos, making a vague expression that made it hard to gauge whether he truly understood. "Well, that's fine. At any rate, treat this Yahagi well. According to what intel I have, it seems that the more his store sells, the bigger it'll get."

"That is true," the baron confirmed. "I invited him to the festival here in Grantham for that very purpose. At the present moment, he can only sell forty Mobile Force units per day, but if the scale of his store grows bigger, then he may be able to sell more."

"Let's give him authorization to conduct his trade at the finest location in the capital. I'll pull some strings on my end. For now, we spread the Mobile Forces far and wide, and hold a tournament that will garner the king's interest."

“Leave it to me, Your Excellency,” said Baron Ethel, bowing deeply.

Yusuke’s Side

The three-day festival had ended, and I was calculating my turnover in my hotel room.

“Wow, I earned almost 170,000 rims in just three and a half days,” I marveled. “That festival really did work wonders.”

Aside from the Mobile Forces, toys like the Super Orbs, along with the more expensive drinks, had also sold well.

“That’s great, Yusuke.” Michelle smiled at me, having removed her mask. She had changed into some comfortable loungewear and was relaxing.

“I can buy those boots I’ve been wanting now.” The sneakers that I’d been wearing since my previous life were falling apart as a result of my coming and going from the dungeon every day. It probably wouldn’t be long before the soles wore completely through.

“Do you want me to get you something too, Michelle?” I asked her.

“Me?! I mean, it is almost the thirty-day anniversary of when we started dating, but...”

Sorry, I don’t remember how many days it’s been.

“You remember even minor details like that?”

“It’s because I have this,” she replied, taking out her Waterproof Notebook that was decorated with the crest of darkness. Apparently she was on her tenth curse—er, *poem* notebook. Now that I thought about it, the contents of the gachapon were just about to run out. *I wonder what’s the next thing it’ll be replenished with...*

“Oh right, I’ll make a note of our conversation just now,” she said. “Yusuke asked me what I wanted as a thirty-day anniversary present. I want a ring, but maybe it’s too soon for that? I need to save matching rings for our one-hundred-day anniversary...”

Her inner monologue was leaking out.

“Do you really have to record your life to the last detail like that?” Also, she was slightly distorting what had actually happened. I didn’t think it was acceptable to rewrite history.

“It’s fine,” she said. “Just rereading this notebook makes me happy. I always carry them all around with me.”

So, in the near future will she be walking around with a hundred notebooks?

“Oh, Yusuke...” Michelle drew closer to me then, her eyes wet with tears after reading her poem. It seemed that her own words had moved her. She sat beside me and leaned against me only slightly. Satisfied with just that, she smiled as her cheeks flushed.

Our time at Grantham had ended in the blink of an eye, and today was the day we’d go back home to the capital. We had come to the baron’s estate to say our farewells.

“We made some good sales thanks to you,” I told him.

“Oh, no, no. I am pleased that you could further popularize the Mobile Forces for me,” the Mobile Forces-loving Baron Ethel said, nodding in what looked like great delight. “Incidentally, I have a good proposal for you.”

“What would that be?”

“There are talks about having you set up Dagashi-ya Yahagi in the best spot in the capital,” said Baron Ethel with a triumphant look on his face, but I was left astounded. *What the hell is this old man saying?* That’d be like opening up a dagashi-ya in the best spot in Ginza. I couldn’t help imagining an old Showa-era wooden house sandwiched between those famous luxury brand high-rises.

“I’m a mere dagashi-ya,” I said. “Those who need me are mostly child porters and novice adventurers. That suggestion doesn’t suit someone of my status.”

“But you have items in your store that certainly do not suit their low price tag. I am speaking of those Mobile Force units and the universal elixir. Even if you priced your Mobile Forces at 2,000 rims, I believe they would fly off the

shelves.”

“It’s not about my earnings. The reason I can make it as a dagashi-ya is because of the people who need me...” If I were surrounded by brands like Chanel and Gucci, I’d feel intimidated. *No thanks.*

I thought my rejection would sour the baron’s mood, but he only smiled slightly.

“It seems you truly are the type who does not concern himself with wealth and honors, Sir Yahagi.”

“Huh?”

“No, what I said was unimportant. Do forget I said anything. But will you hear me out on one request?”

“What is it?”

“I would like you to sell those Mobile Forces aboveground as well. I want to also popularize the Mobile Forces in the capital.”

That *would* be nice, but my shop belonged in the dungeon. I couldn’t bear to leave behind the rookies I had grown close to.

Maybe he’d read my answer in my expression, but Baron Ethel came up with a proposal. “If you would prefer, we can establish a consignment sale. Of course, I shall not charge a handling fee, nor shall I try to earn a profit through resales.”

The baron was rich, so I didn’t need to worry about him becoming a cunning reseller. It seemed he purely wanted to spread the good word of the Mobile Forces.

“I understand,” I said. “Then I’ll give you thirty boxes a day, Baron.”

“I see!” he exclaimed, quite pleased. “That would be of great help! With this settled, it seems that it shall not be long before I can host a Mobile Forces tournament.”

“A Mobile Forces tournament?”

“Indeed,” he answered. “I am thinking of sponsoring a grand tournament. Will

that be a problem? Why, there is a chance that His Majesty the king himself will sponsor it.”

“The king?!”

“To tell you the truth, His Majesty has been completely engrossed in the Mobile Forces ever since I presented them to him.”

This had suddenly become a serious matter. But when it came to a tournament, my stance was that it was fine for anyone to sponsor it, so long as everyone could enjoy themselves.

Upon our return from our trip, Michelle had settled down and gone to the dungeon depths to conduct her experiments. She’d looked reluctant to leave me, but she was a natural-born researcher. Love was important to her, but she couldn’t just ditch her experiment. I thought she was amazing for being so serious about her work. It had been three days since she’d left, so it was just about time for her to be returning. I’d make her dinner once she came back.

I had gotten accustomed enough to the dungeon that I could make it to Hot Spring Yahagi on my own. Even my level had increased thanks to me opening up shop at Grantham’s festival. And at long last, this certain new product had been added to my lineup.

Product name: Shaved Ice

Description: Comes in three types - Strawberry, lemon, and melon. Once consumed, you won’t become dehydrated even in extreme heat and can remain in good health. Increases stamina if you add condensed milk.

Price: Two hundred rims (Condensed milk: +Fifty rims)

It was already early summer, and the temperature rose with each passing day. I was glad I’d been able to get my hands on this stuff for the season. I was sure it’d be a great help to the adventurers. It would also probably be delicious to eat right out of the bath.

A good ol' fashioned hand crank ice shaver sat atop a small freezer. The ice would automatically spawn inside of the freezer. *Magical worlds sure have their conveniences.*

A banner was also included as an optional item to promote sales. Of course, it was none other than the banner with the character for "ice" written on it—something that I had often seen in my previous life. The character had been changed to the writing of this world, but the blue of the waves and the red of the writing remained the same. I didn't hesitate to display it at my storefront.

"Huh? There's more new stuff!"

Meryl and Mira, who patronized my shop every morning, immediately noticed the Shaved Ice.

"Good morning," I greeted them. "This is my new product, Shaved Ice."

"Shaved Ice? You mean ice that you've whittled down?"

"No, it's ice that's shaved down much more finely than that," I explained.

"Well now, since you two are regulars, I'll let you have some exclusive samples."

I took a block of ice out of the freezer and set it in the machine. As I cranked the handle, the shaved ice gradually filled up the glass bowl while emitting a satisfying scraping sound. Including one for myself, I brought three mini Shaved Ices to the table and set them down.

"What flavor do you want?" I asked. "From left to right, we have strawberry, lemon, and melon."

"I want strawberry!"

"Then melon for me, please," Mira said.

I drizzled plenty of syrup on top of their Shaved Ice for them.

"Whoa, the colors are so vibrant!" Meryl marveled.

"It looks refreshing and tasty!"

"All right, they're done!" I announced. "Go ahead and have a taste."

Meryl and Mira each scooped up a small bit of the Shaved Ice and put it into their mouths. Their faces lit up.

“This is delicious!” Meryl exclaimed.

“It’s cold and refreshing,” said Mira. “It’s very good!”

It seemed that Shaved Ice would have a good reception in this new world too.

“Delicious isn’t all it is,” I said. “It makes you highly resistant to heat if you eat it. It’s effective for about half a day.”

“Then it’s a good idea to eat some before you head to the B3 Lava Belt, huh?”

“Right,” Mira agreed. “We generally can’t go there due to how hot it is, but perhaps we’ll be able to take down some Fire Mice if we eat this beforehand?”

Fire Mice were Dungeon Mice wrapped in flames. For how easy they were to defeat, they dropped a lot of money.

“If you also add condensed milk to it, it makes you more resistant to fatigue.”

“What’s condensed milk?” asked Meryl.

“It’s a product of adding sugar to milk and boiling it down,” I said, topping Meryl and Mira’s Shaved Ice with condensed milk.

“Oh, the taste is milder now. This is delicious too!”

“It somehow looks gorgeous all of a sudden!” Mira gasped.

“It’s delicious this way too, right?” I boasted.

“Yeah, I definitely like this better!” Meryl agreed. It sounded like she’d really taken to the strawberry condensed milk Shaved Ice. “All right, we’re going to beat up those Fire Mice and save up a ton! Once I’ve made enough money, I’ll buy a new bathing suit!”

“It is just about the season when the pool opens.”

They have pools in this world too?

“Do they have pools in the capital?” I asked. “I didn’t know that...”



“It’s along the bank of the Ribou River,” Mira told me. An artificial branch of the river had been created, which had been turned into a pool by amassing water there.

“Oh right, let’s go to the pool together, Mister Yusuke!” Meryl exclaimed.

“That’s a good idea. As thanks for always helping us, we’ll show you the way.”

Going to the pool with Meryl and Mira, huh? That sounded like fun.

“If you see me in a bathing suit, Mister Yusuke, then you— Eek!”

Meryl squeaked, and both of their faces suddenly went pale.

“You hussies,” a displeased husky voice reverberated from behind me. “This is what happens the second I look away.”

So, she’s back...

“Welcome back, Minerva.”

“Good to be back... I am unamused by seeing you discuss such shameless things in broad daylight.”

“We were only talking about going to the pool together,” I told her. “And I’m not going anyway.”

“Huh? Really?”

“I have work to do.” I shrugged. If you had a girlfriend, you shouldn’t be going to a pool with other girls in the first place. And no matter what, Michelle couldn’t go to the pool. I’d feel too bad if I was the only one who got to enjoy it.

“I-I see...”

“More importantly, I have a new product. It’s called Shaved Ice. You want some too, Minerva?”

“Ice?” Michelle asked, a little surprised. “That reagent-colored thing is ice?”

“It’s tasty if you eat it. Here, just try it.” I gave her my own melon-flavored Shaved Ice.

“Hm... (*An indirect kiss! My reward!!!*)” Michelle quietly brought a single scoop of it to her mouth.

“How is it?”

“It’s so good, I’m getting dizzy...” Then she paused. “Wait, huh? My head hurts!”

I’d been sure Michelle would like it since she had such a sweet tooth. I had even poured on a little more condensed milk than necessary.

“Your head hurts if you eat cold things all at once,” I said, “but drinking some lukewarm water will fix that right up. Just a bit of trivia for you.”

After that, other customers came to my store as well.

“Mister Yusuke, what is this sign?”

“It’s my new product, Shaved Ice. Do you wanna try it?”

It looked like today would be another busy day.

It didn’t get cooler even when the sun started to go down. At this rate, we were in for a sweltering night. Michelle, who had returned to the surface for the first time in a while, invited me over to have dinner at her place. She prepared food that was refreshing and easy to eat, like cold pasta and cold vegetable terrine. Recently, Michelle had relaxed enough that she’d even begun leaving some of the little prepwork things to me, so I had gotten better at washing ingredients and cookware. We would stand in the kitchen together, talking over things like recent events or her research as we cooked.

Michelle was especially fidgety once we had finished dinner. It seemed every time she began to say something to me, she would swallow the words back down.

“What’s the matter?” I asked. “You look like you have something to say.”

“Well... It’s more like I can’t make up my mind...”

“If you’re trying to be considerate of me, you don’t have to hold yourself back.”

“Okay. Just wait here for a bit.”

Michelle eagerly withdrew into an inner room. Did she have something she

wanted to show me? It'd be interesting if it was something like an artifact she'd found in the dungeon depths, but I'd be a bit scared if it was some grotesque discovery. People in this world were okay with that kind of stuff. The circumstances they lived in were different from the Japan I'd known in my previous life, so their sense of values and opinions regarding life and death were also much too different. A lot of time had passed since I'd arrived here, so I had gotten pretty used to that disparity, but things like keeping disgusting monsters as pets were normal. I wanted to avoid seeing weird things as much as possible.

"Sorry to keep you waiting..."

Hearing a tiny voice, faint as a mosquito's whine, I looked up and there was Michelle standing in the doorway. I was so surprised, all my words escaped me. I mean, she was in a *bathing suit*.

"You didn't go to the pool for my sake, right, Yusuke? So..."

I didn't really know what she meant by "So..." but I didn't care. There was no need for logic and reason when faced with a black bikini. The cloth didn't cover much and Michelle's skin was so dazzling, I couldn't look away. She was gorgeous and sexy, alluring and...arousing. I'd expected to be shown something creepy enough to shorten my lifespan, but I'd been dead wrong. On the contrary, the glorious sight of Michelle in a bathing suit might just have *extended* my life by an extra ten years.

"You're beautiful." I was a man of common sense, so I only complimented one aspect of her. It was wisest to keep the word "arousing" to myself. "When did you buy something like this?"

"I made it myself, last week. I wanted you to see it." Michelle was talented, so she was even good at sewing.

"I made a matching one for you too. Not that we can go to the pool together..." She handed me some black swim trunks. "It's embarrassing if I'm the only one in a bathing suit, so you wear yours too..."

"S-Sure..." Was it just me or had the temperature on this steamy night gone up a few more degrees? My head and body were so hot that even my Shaved Ice wouldn't be enough to cool me back down.

“Michelle,” I said, “can you fill the bathtub with some cold water? It’d be like a standin for a pool, right?”

“Oh! I’ll be right back!”

Michelle ran off, her big breasts bobbing. *She looks happy...* Since she was a wanted criminal, it had probably been many years since the last time she had gone to a pool. Thinking it’d be fun to float them in the water, I took out several Water Balloons from among my products.



The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 10

Strawberry with condensed milk is the best! I'm obsessed with this Shaved Ice stuff now. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it's become a must-have food for the summer. That's Dagashi-ya Yahagi for you. Every single product that pops up on its shelves captures my heart.

Even better, the thing about it making you resistant to heat was actually true, so we managed to take down some Fire Mice at the B3 Lava Belt. Normally, we'd get all worn out just by going there, but thanks to that Shaved Ice, we kept up our strength without getting dehydrated. Fire Mice drop between seven hundred and 1,000 rims, which makes them rather lucrative targets. However, there isn't a single adventurer willing to go to the Lava Belt because the conditions are way too harsh. But just eating some Shaved Ice made it a walk in the park. We made some good money today thanks to that.

It's okay if it'd cost more money, but I wonder if Mister Yusuke would let me put extra condensed milk on my Shaved Ice next time. Also, I wanted to try putting all the syrup flavors on it at once to make it a three-colored Shaved Ice. I'll be sure to ask. I'm going to eat Shaved Ice tomorrow again and work hard! ...But I'm sure by tomorrow there'll be adventurers other than us there who will have eaten the Shaved Ice. If a lot of people come to our hunting grounds, that'll obviously mean there'll be less prey for us to catch. It makes me want to tell them, "Shoo! Go away!" Man, something always has to happen.

Speaking of which, Mira was pretty down. She had been looking forward to going to the pool together with Mister Yusuke, but he ended up declining. She had even really put her all into choosing a bathing suit. It was one that was a bit bold too, which was unusual for Mira. Well, I also put a ton of effort into choosing my own bathing suit...

I'm sure we're much too childish for Mister Yusuke. Or rather, I think Mister Yusuke likes men.

Yeah, I can say that for sure! I mean, I feel like he and Mister Minerva have

gotten even closer recently! They give off the impression that they can already have a conversation just by looking at each other, like they can understand just by meeting each other's gaze. That's the voiceless conversation between lovers! Those two have probably taken the next step. I have no doubt about it!

If that's the case, then I feel sorry for Mira. She'd deny it, but I think Mira likes Mister Yusuke after all. But I think it's better for her to give up sooner rather than later. Like, Mister Yusuke is in love with a man. No matter how big her boobs are, there isn't any point. Sob sob.

This whole thing is headache-inducing. It's not the sort of thing that can be fixed just by drinking lukewarm water, like when you eat Shaved Ice too fast.

Chapter 11: My Store's Location

That morning after I opened up shop, the first customer who came barging in was the porter Rigal.

"Good morning, Mister Yahagi!" he shouted.

"Good morning," I greeted him back. "You're looking full of energy today."

With a radiant smile, Rigal thrust the palm of his hand toward me. *Is he pretending to hand me a fart?*

"Please look at this!" When he spread out his palm, facing upward, a small blaze appeared.

"Oh?! So, you can use Fire Magic now."

"That's right," he said, his eyes sparkling. "This is thanks to the Mobile Forces!"

Moving Mobile Force units served as good practice for mana management. As a result of him using Gungalf every day with a keen fervor, Rigal, who had never had any offensive magic capabilities, had acquired some new magic.

"That's amazing, Rigal. Keep this up for a bit longer, and you can graduate from being a porter."

"Yeah. Mister Garmr promised me that if I could start dishing out three-fireball attacks, he'd make me an official member of his team."

"I'm glad to hear it. Here, this is a gift to congratulate you." I grabbed a handful of Ten-Rim Gum and gave it to Rigal. They'd help him recover mana. "It'd be a good idea to chew on these while you're practicing your magic."

"Thank you very much!" Rigal exclaimed, accepting my gift. "I'm going to train lots so I can make an even bigger flame!"

Witnessing the growth of someone I knew was wonderful. All of a sudden, it seemed that Rigal had gotten a little taller.

Meryl and Mira were the next to stop by. Meryl was excitedly clutching a leaflet printed on some coarse paper. “Mister Yusuke, did you see this?!”

“Are you talking about the Mobile Forces tournament?” I asked. “Yeah, that surprised me.”

“It’s more than surprising,” Meryl said, enthusiastic. “It’s a tournament that’s being sponsored by His Majesty the king himself! On top of that, the winner’s going to get one million rims! We can’t just *not* participate!”

Back when Baron Ethel had suggested it, I had dismissed it as a pipe dream, but the king really was going to host a tournament. Baron Ethel had requested a consignment deal between us regarding the Mobile Forces, but even now, he was selling out his stock every day. This was in spite of the fact that my stock had increased thanks to my level-up, and I was currently entrusting him with fifty boxes per day. I had heard there were even incidents of theft and robbery in town concerning the Mobile Forces. At this point, they could be called a social phenomenon.

“My Red Shoulder’s going to be the winner this time!” Meryl declared. She had landed in fourth place in the last tournament at Hot Spring Yahagi. However, there were many more people participating in matches than before.

“There’re a lot of competitors this time around, so do your best,” I said.

“That’s the problem!” Meryl complained. “Stop selling your Mobile Forces, Mister Yusuke. I can’t get any more rivals.”

“I can’t do that. If you get into the top eight, you’ll get a cash prize, right? Win on your own merit.”

“Pretty please, Mister Yusuke? Aren’t we friends?” she pleaded, sidling up to me while giving me puppy dog eyes.

“Get away from Yusuke, you hussy.” Michelle, who’d just finished cleaning the bath, had returned to the store.

“Good work, Minerva,” I greeted her.

“Yeah,” she said. “I left the bath spick-and-span with my magic.”

Meryl stepped back, overwhelmed by Michelle’s intensity. “You two guys are

as close as always...”

“Hmph!”

Michelle was still using her cognitive obstruction spells, so Meryl and Mira remained under the impression that she was a man. She sat down next to me without even trying to hide her displeasure.

“Will you be participating in the tournament as well, Mister Minerva?” Mira asked her.

“No.”

On a scale as small as the Hot Spring Yahagi tournament, it was no problem for her to join in, but she’d stand out if she entered a tournament sponsored by the king. It was improper for a wanted criminal to participate, so she’d said she’d refrain from going. Michelle, of course, could’ve won it all. When I asked her if she wasn’t interested in the one million rims, she boasted that she could earn that much at the drop of a hat. Apparently, monsters in the dungeon depths dropped a ton of money. Even so, Michelle set aside that money as funds for her research, so she wasn’t superrich or anything. She did still earn much more than I did. She’d outright said she would provide for me anytime, but I didn’t feel like becoming a kept man.

As I lost myself in thought, Mira suddenly directed a question at me. “Mister Yusuke, are you not going to participate?”

“Me? No way,” I said. “I have to do a Mobile Forces exhibition and sale event that same day.”

“What? That’s such a shame. You’re rather strong, aren’t you?”

Michelle had actually been training me. I’d gotten strong enough to beat Mira and Meryl in some practice matches. *I mean, if I get good at piloting Mobile Forces, then maybe I’ll get some new magic abilities like Rigal...* That was why I was training hard. I had yet to see signs of any new magic abilities, though.

“Mira, don’t say that. I don’t want to get more rivals than I already have!”

Meryl was always true to herself.

“Well, you two do your best in my stead,” I said. “More importantly, I have

some new products.”

I proceeded to recommend my shop’s new candy.

Product name: Dodon Pachin

Description: Candy that pops in your mouth. If you use a physical attack while it’s still popping, your attack will be accompanied by lightning. Orange flavored.

Price: One hundred rims

Lightning would increase your power along with your attack speed.

“It pops in your mouth? That sounds like fun!” Meryl loved new things, so she bought one right away.

“Don’t put too much in your mouth at once,” I warned her. “It really hurts if it pops too much.” It was a lesson I’d learned from experience when I was very young.

The Mobile Forces tournament kicked off toward the end of that summer. I’d heard that the number of applications had exceeded one thousand, so there’d even been some preliminary matches. I was deeply moved to think that they had gotten that popular. The best one hundred, who had been picked in the prelims, included many familiar faces, like Meryl, Mira, and Garmer. The veteran adventurer Mister Komusai, who had gone up against Michelle in the Hot Spring Yahagi tournament finals, was there too.

The main tournament’s venue was located in the town’s arena, which looked like a small-scale Colosseum. It was a pretty spacious venue, yet it was packed with people. I once again opened up my shop at a location Baron Ethel had prepared for me. I planned to set out the Mobile Force units in a short while.

To my amazement, the king and queen would be among the tournament’s spectators, so a royal VIP enclosure had been prepared for them. The king would soon give his opening declaration.

“Minerva, do you want to see the opening ceremony?” I asked Michelle.

“No. I don’t want to see the king and queen. I don’t even want to hear their voices.”

Michelle might cast a curse on Queen Chichi if she went, so that was fine. There were also several hundred imperial soldiers stationed around the venue. *I’d rather this tournament not become a bloodbath...*

“Well, I’m going to take a peek, so I’ll leave the shop to you.”

“Sure.”

I was a little curious as to what kind of people the king and his queen were. Neither of them seemed to be popular among the people, but I still wanted to know. They’d done terrible things to Michelle, so I didn’t have any positive feelings toward them myself. Thinking I ought to at least get familiar with their faces, I headed into the venue.

I saw the king while he was making his speech, and to be frank, he seemed like a shady man. He was fairly good-looking, but he was also oozing shallowness and arrogance. Right then, I thought how glad I was that Michelle hadn’t wound up with a man like that. Also, his speech was both long-winded and dull. Everyone at the venue looked like they were bored out of their minds. Listening to him any further would’ve been a waste of time, so I inconspicuously headed back to where Michelle was minding the shop.

“I’m back,” I said. “I saw the king and queen’s faces.”

“Hm,” Michelle responded indifferently. She probably truly wanted nothing to do with them.

Everyone else was at the venue, so the area around the store was deserted. This seemed like a good chance to have a private conversation without worrying that anyone might overhear us.

“I thought that maybe you’d look a little similar since you’re sisters, but you two really do look totally different.”

“We’ve been told that since we were little,” she said, sounding glum. “Chichi looked way prettier than me, right?”

“You think?” I asked. “Everyone hyped her up as a woman of ruinous beauty, so I admit I went with high expectations, but she isn’t my type at all. Well, sure, her face has striking features. She does also have a sexy allure. But you can really see the kind of terrible person she is on the inside.”

Michelle remained silent.

“I would definitely choose you any day of the week, Michelle. No doubt about it.”

“Yusuke...”

“Whoa, your mask got red!” I exclaimed, shocked. “What’s up with that?!”

Even if her face got red, her mask shouldn’t, right?!

“I’m sorry. I got so happy, my cognitive obstruction spell just...” Her magical powers had apparently become discombobulated. I looked around us in a panic, but nobody was looking our way.

From there, the tournament proceeded without incident, and Meryl was left standing as one of the best sixteen. Mira, Garmr, and Rigal hadn’t made it that far, so it was truly worth a pat on the back. She would’ve received a prize if she had won the next match but unfortunately, she was defeated. In a stroke of bad luck, she’d been put up against the previous tournament’s runner-up, Mister Komusai.

“No one can use Zako better than I can, and yet...” She was slumping her shoulders, heartbroken. I could hardly bear to look at her in this state.

“I was thinking about earning a million rims to put into a reserve fund so I can open a small general store one day...” she continued glumly.

Adventurers worked a trade that required them to dance with death. It wasn’t something you could keep doing forever. It seemed Meryl and Mira were both saving up enough money so they could eventually head into a different trade.

“Cheer up,” I comforted her. “I’ll treat you to some lunch today.”

“I don’t need lunch,” she said. “More importantly, give me that thing, Mister Yusuke!”

What Meryl pointed her finger at was a Mobile Force unit that wasn't for sale.

Product name: Jhar Zako

Description: A custom model with a thirty percent increase in propulsion. Its power-up makes it more difficult to pilot. It's painted a deep crimson color.

Price: Not for sale

Probably as a result of my level-ups, I'd gotten some Mobile Force units to use in sales promotions. The Jhar Zako was a special model meant for display. Not only did this model have a high performance, but it had a certain panache as well. For those who used Zako, like Meryl, it probably had them drooling.

"I can't," I said. "This is a prize that'll go to the grand champion."

"Make an exception for me!" she pleaded desperately.

Meryl was my dear regular, but I couldn't give in to this request of hers. It would clearly be favoritism.

"If you keep that model on display, Meryl will keep wanting it," said Michelle. "How about you quickly hand it over to the baron?"

"You're exactly right, Minerva. I'll go, so wait here for a bit."

"I'll go with you."

The baron was taking a breather in the arena's VIP lounge before the best-eight matches commenced in the afternoon. It was off-limits to members of the general public, but they might pass along a message if I showed my special Mobile Force unit. Michelle and I walked there together.

The antechamber where the baron and king were resting was in a heavily guarded building. Various imperial guards, who normally spent their days arrogantly lounging around the palace, were rushing in and out of it. We headed straight to the gate, but we were immediately stopped.

“Where are you going?” a guard demanded.

“I’m Yahagi,” I said, introducing myself. “I sell Mobile Forces. I have some business with Baron Ethel.”

“And what business would that be?”

“I came here to deliver this special Mobile Force unit to him.” I took out Jhar Zako’s box and showed it to the guards. However, their expressions didn’t change.

“This is no place for commoners like you. Try again at another time and place.”

If I did that, the tournament would be over by then. We wouldn’t be able to make a formal announcement to give this to the grand champion either.

“This is an urgent matter,” I pleaded. “Could you somehow pass along our message to the baron?”

“Back!” the soldier cried. “Back, I say! Go home!”

We had literally been turned away at the gate. It’d be stupid to force things and wind up in prison, so I decided I would just give up. Nothing good was likely to come from involving myself with the authorities.

I turned to face Michelle. “Guess we can’t do anything about it. We’ll have to hand this over to the champion ourselves.”

“That should be fine.”

We were about to take our leave when, to my surprise, I spotted the baron approaching us. It looked like he had been out and was just heading back. His face grew anxious for some reason once he saw us.

“Oh, Sir Yahagi,” he said. “What are you doing in such a place as this?”

“Perfect timing. You see, I got this special model, so I wanted to have you give it to the grand champion as an additional prize.”

“Huh...” For some unknown reason, the baron appeared distracted. He kept glancing inside the building. This guy would normally be jumping for joy at the sight of a rare Mobile Force unit. *What is wrong with him?*

That was when a group of imperial soldiers came rushing out toward us, and the three of us dodged to the side.

“What’s going on?”

Nobody acknowledged my question, but I soon got my answer. To my astonishment, the king and queen emerged from the building. If it weren’t for Baron Ethel being with us, we would’ve already been removed from the premises.

I glanced over at Michelle. *She’s not going to do anything weird, right?* I was worried, but she maintained her levelheaded attitude. *She really does think nothing of the king.*

Just as I was thinking things would be fine so long as nothing happened, the king passed me and suddenly shouted, “Oh! Wh-Why...”

The king was looking at *me* for some reason. No, to be more precise, he was looking at what I was holding. *Ah, is he looking at the Jhar Zako model that I was about to hand over? Oh no, I have a bad feeling about this...*

“What’s that you’re holding?” The king briskly stepped closer to us and snatched Jhar Zako from my hand as if it already belonged to him. “This is Zako now, isn’t it? However, it looks a bit different than the one I know.”

“It is a special model, Your Majesty,” Baron Ethel explained in my stead.

“A special model you say. What is different about it?”

The king had asked yet another question of the baron, but their exchange was interrupted by a certain someone.

“Wait just a second! You there...” Queen Chichi was staring directly at Michelle.

Michelle’s cognitive obstructions were perfect. They kept people from finding it unusual that she wore a mask—yet the queen was scowling at her silver mask with a grim expression. The queen seemed to be a famous witch herself, so had she realized Michelle’s true identity? This was bad.

“You there, take off your mask,” she ordered Michelle. “How insolent of you to wear it in the king’s presence.”

“I have a terrible burn. I cannot show you all something so unsightly.”

“Unsightly, is it...?” The queen then sighed loudly with an exaggerated shrug of her shoulders. “It’s true that the sight of a lady with such a gloomy face is unsightly, but this is our first reunion in a long time. Show us your true face, won’t you, Michelle?”

So, she *had* realized it! When I looked over at Michelle to see what she’d do next, she readily took off her mask. She’d probably deduced that there was no chance of fooling them now. *How in the world is this going to play out...?*

“What made you realize?” asked Michelle.

“I was curious how a supposed man would never once look at me.” Queen Chichi was an alluring and beautiful woman. Your average guy would pay a lot of attention to her. *So, it was Michelle completely avoiding her gaze that gave her away...*

“Also,” Chichi added, “you’ve always stuck your fingers together like that whenever you’re nervous. Have you never noticed?”

I looked at Michelle and sure enough, all the fingers on her left and right hands were intricately intertwined. *I didn’t realize she had that habit...*

The imperial soldiers all drew their swords, and the air filled with the heated promise of an explosive situation.

“What are you planning to do with me?” Michelle asked the royal pair, showing not a trace of fear.

“I’ll have you punished for the curse you cast on me!” the king shouted, abruptly losing his temper.

“I did that because you disrespected me, right?” she replied. “Also, that curse of yours should have already been lifted.”

“That’s irrelevant!” he snapped. “You haven’t the slightest idea how much I’ve suffered because of that curse.”

Chichi giggled wickedly. “This is the end for you, sister. You were always an eyesore, but it seems we can finally settle the score.”

Her red lips were twisted into a smile. To me, that ruthless personality

seeping out of her expression was hideous beyond compare. Her beauty didn't hold a candle to Michelle's.

"Guards, capture the witch Michelle!"

"Capture me?" Michelle scoffed. "You think you can arrest me with this many soldiers alone?" She was surrounded by a hundred imperial soldiers, but that didn't seem to ruffle a single one of her feathers. Was that simply how strong the witch Michelle's powers were? However, Chichi's smile grew wider, transforming into something one could truly call an evil expression.

"You won't be able to keep your head for much longer. Behold this!"

Chichi took the staff she held in her hand and stabbed it into the ground. A crack of light ran from it along the earth, making the air around us ripple. A heavy feeling settled upon me, as though a barrier had been raised, entrapping us.

"This is..." Michelle's expression showed anxiety for the first time today. Chichi giggled.

"This is a magical item that I had specially developed so that I could take you down," she said.

"So you can take me down? What do you mean?"

"This staff is a device that, when someone attempts to use magic, will release a wave of opposing magic to cancel it out. I've been waiting for you this whole time so I could use this the minute you appeared. Today will be the day that you kneel before me!"

The queen roared with laughter, as if she'd already won.

"Hear, hear, my queen," the king assented. "We were thoroughly betrayed by the witch Michelle. Once we've humiliated her through torture to our heart's content, we'll have her executed. Ha ha ha..."

The king and queen were real pieces of work. I was really glad that Michelle hadn't married a guy like this. But what should we do? We were surrounded by over a hundred imperial soldiers, and Michelle couldn't use magic. Without a doubt, this was the biggest crisis I'd faced in my entire life. In the worst-case

scenario, Michelle would be caught, and after putting her through the wringer, they'd execute her. I might meet a similar fate. Or would my life at least be spared?

Your life might be yours and yours alone, but there isn't much about it you get to choose for yourself... Even so, in moments like these, it was crucial to make your own decisions anyway. Even if you couldn't choose your parents, you could at least choose whom you loved, and I had no intention of letting Michelle go. *I'll try believing in the power of a dagashi-ya.*

"By order of the king, capture the traitor Michelle!"

With the king's ringing declaration, the soldiers came rushing in. However, a sudden strong gust of wind blew away the soldiers as they attempted to capture Michelle.

"Wh-What's the meaning of this?!"

The dust that the Bomb Blast Menko had stirred up made it hard to see our surroundings. Just as I'd thought, that staff's reversal spell was only effective against Michelle's magic and wouldn't react to my toys. I stepped in front of Michelle to protect her.

"Don't you dare put your filthy paws on Michelle," I hissed.

"What the hell's up with you?!"

Queen Chichi hadn't spared a glance for me before this, but she was now staring at me in shock. Without a word, I threw my Rocket Bomb at her feet, while she continued screeching loudly. Small pebbles kicked up by the explosion pelted her, and she began to tremble.

"Shut up, ugly!" I shouted.

"Did you just call me ugly?!" Chichi was rendered speechless by the insult that had probably never been hurled her way before. I didn't care how pretty she was on the surface. As I saw it, an ugly personality made an ugly woman.

I brandished the giant Rocket Bomb from my number one lottery ticket at some soldiers who were about to rush in with their swords in hand. It was about as big as a rugby ball, and even I didn't know how strong it was.

“Nobody move!” I warned. “If this thing goes off, the king and queen will be blown to bits!”

I kept the soldiers in check by holding the gigantic Rocket Bomb high above me with both hands. *Oh, to hell with it.* I’d take the king hostage and break free from this place. For now, we needed to get far enough away to escape the range of that magic item sealing Michelle’s power.

“Can you move, Michelle?”

“Yeah.”

Just as the two of us were about to move, a sudden loud voice boomed from outside. In its wake appeared General Bartos, wielding a large sword as he rushed in along with his subordinates. His two beautiful female lieutenants also rushed in at his side. *I bet they’re also strong fighters.*

The gate that was supposed to be our escape route was suddenly crammed with General Bartos’s soldiers. Everything had looked like it was going to work out, but was this game over for us? *It might be impossible to escape now...*

“Michelle...”

“Yusuke...”

“We’ll be together forever!” we said in unison. We’d chosen the same words at the same moment.

Even in this hopeless situation, we smiled with our hearts as one.

Once he’d reached us, General Bartos bellowed, “What is going on?!”



The king had been frightened, but he seemingly relaxed at the sight of a dependable ally and cried, “Bartos, those two are rebels who attempted to cause me harm! Cut them down! But capture Michelle alive!”

My gaze met Bartos’s.

“So, that’s the witch Michelle,” he said. “But why are you here, Yahagi?”

“Stand back, General,” I warned, “or else I’ll detonate this giant Rocket Bomb.”

Chichi’s shrill cry interrupted our conversation. “My Sealing Staff is holding back the witch’s powers! She can easily be captured now. General, do something about that bomb!”

General Bartos turned his gaze toward the staff stabbed into the ground.

“I see, so this is it...”

In the very next moment, the general’s large sword flashed as it sliced the Sealing Staff right in half. With the staff broken, the piercing, high-frequency sound ceased, and the oppressive air that had been weighing upon us faded.

“What are you doing?!” Chichi screeched. She snatched up the staff in a panic, but there was no fixing what had been destroyed.

General Bartos barked out a laugh. “It’s exactly what it looks like.”

“What’s the meaning of this, Bartos?” the king demanded, appalled. “Are you going to disregard my command? I’m telling you to capture the witch and that man!”

General Bartos had been given his orders, but he turned his back on us to face the king instead. He let out a heavy sigh, sounding completely fed up.

“Let’s end this already, brother,” he said.

“End this? What do you mean?”

“I’m tired, you see.”

“Tired? You’ve taken plenty of time off since you returned from the front lines, haven’t you?”

“That’s not what I’m talking about. I mean that I’m tired of serving an incompetent fool.”

“You bastard... What are you saying?”

It seemed the king could not make sense of the general’s actions. General Bartos sneered at such a foolish king and loudly declared, “My subordinates have already surrounded this arena. Put away your swords, soldiers. From this moment forth, I, Bartos, will succeed to the throne. If you surrender now, I’ll guarantee that you’ll retain your positions. If anyone has any objections, feel free to step forward.”

Whoa, this is a coup d’état! I kind of feel like I’m witnessing history in the making.

“D-Don’t be ridiculous!” The king made an unsteady grab for the general, but General Bartos struck him instead. The general was overwhelmingly more powerful in battle, so it was akin to a child challenging a heavyweight boxer. After just one light blow, the king collapsed to the floor, and the Jhar Zako he had been holding tumbled out of his hands. I slowly moved to pick it up, but nobody attempted to stop me.

“I’ll have you relinquish your throne at once, brother. It’s preferable to dying, is it not?”

“Urgh...”

General Bartos turned to his subordinates. “Escort my brother and the queen to the room. We’ll have them sign the declaration of their abdication.”

None of the imperial guards had moved a muscle. It seemed they had abandoned the king and accepted this conclusion. These soldiers were directly under the king’s control, so it was pitiful that even they hadn’t bothered to protect him. Still, he was simply reaping what he’d sown. Nobody paid any mind to Michelle and me, who were lost amid the chaos as General Bartos, Baron Ethel, and the others removed to the VIP lounge in the back.

I couldn’t read Michelle’s expression as she silently watched them drag the shrieking king and queen away. I myself didn’t know what to think about such a development. Mere moments ago, I had prepared myself to die when all those

soldiers had surrounded us, but now it was like they'd forgotten I even existed.

"Oh... Can we go home now?" It was an embarrassingly anticlimactic question, but I decided to ask for Michelle's opinion anyway.

"Yeah, probably," she replied.

The two of us smiled wryly at each other.

The afternoon matches at the arena had already commenced. I was astonished that they were continuing the tournament, in light of all the commotion that had just happened. The general population would learn about this coup d'état much later, I supposed.

The tournament completed its final rounds, and in the king's place, Baron Ethel handed over the award certificate and prize money to the champion. With that, the event came to a close.

Not many days passed before General Bartos became king. He lowered the taxes a little, reinforced the maintenance of public order, and cut back on wasteful public spending, so the people were pleased. I'd also heard that the plans for the new castle being built for the queen had been completely scrapped.

The former king and queen had been incarcerated and were now living under house arrest. They were being forced to live on a diet of only bread and water to repay the hefty bill of their luxurious lifestyle—though I was sure that alone wouldn't be enough to make up for the torrent of cash they'd drained from the treasury.

Well, these were the results of the coup d'état. The world was becoming a better place bit by bit, so it was something to celebrate, but for the general public, things had just been so terrible up until now. I'd put my hopes in what was to come.

Even if we were under a new king now, my basic lifestyle hadn't changed. Today, I had once again opened up my shop at Hot Spring Yahagi. Michelle was absent, conducting her research in the dungeon depths like she always had. Michelle's love for me was both deep and heavy, so I felt loneliness mixed with

a sense of freedom as I merrily ran my business.

Just a little before noon, a certain someone stopped by my shop.

"It has been a while, Sir Yahagi," the baron said to me.

"Hello, Baron Ethel," I replied.

Our greetings were stiff and awkward.

"My life has been rather hectic of late, so I could not come visit for a while."

Well, there *had* been a coup d'état, so of course things would be hectic. Word on the street was that the baron had also taken up an executive position in the new government. He had apparently been one of King Bartos's coconspirators.

"For what reason are you here today?" I was grumpy, considering they had exploited my Mobile Forces for their plans. I was aware that my words sounded just a little harsh.

"It seems you are displeased after all," the baron said, picking up on my dissatisfaction. "Are you upset that we used your Mobile Forces in our revolution?"

"I wouldn't say I'm upset," I said hesitantly, "but I wouldn't say I feel good about it either."

"It was the only way to lure the former king out of his heavily guarded palace. We may have used them as a means to an end this time, but my love for the Mobile Forces is true. I would like you to believe that at least."

"Well..."

The baron had gone out of his way to come here and apologize. I doubted there were many nobles out there who would do such a thing. Also, I had never disliked this old man in the first place.

"How would you like some Ramune?" I asked. "The weather's grown much cooler, but I'm sure you're thirsty after walking here."

"I shall gratefully accept it."

As the marbles clanked inside our bottles, we made our peace.

"Incidentally," started the baron, "is there something I can do to thank you?"

You have done us a favor after all, Sir Yahagi.”

Michelle’s situation was what obviously came to mind. With a new king on the throne, her crimes might be forgiven now. If she was taken off of the wanted list, then we could date openly.

“I only have one thing I’d like to request,” I said. “Would you be able to remove the witch Michelle from the wanted list?”

Baron Ethel looked a bit astounded by my question. “Is that really the only thing? I can do much more for you than just that.”

“No, just that alone is fine.”

He smiled a little. “How very like you, Sir Yahagi. I understand. I shall undertake this request of yours.”

Michelle would now be able to completely throw herself into her research, no holds barred. She wouldn’t have to wear a mask anymore, and we would no longer have to date in secret. I might find myself more tightly bound in her shackles than ever, but perhaps that would be its own form of happiness. As I mulled over these things, I drained my Ramune down to the last drop.

“Okay, so Ramune and Mikan Water for you, right? That’ll be two hundred rims.”

A black-apron-clad Michelle was smiling sweetly at the rookie adventurers. My regulars like Meryl and Mira watched on from a slight distance.

“I had no idea that Mister Minerva was the witch Michelle,” Meryl was saying, still a little shocked. “Not only that, but she’s also your girlfriend? I can’t believe this!”

Now that she was no longer a fugitive from justice, Michelle had removed her mask, and she’d been helping out at the store ever since. Without a bounty on her head, there was no longer any reason for the adventurers to go after her. They’d all been scared of her at first, but once they’d seen her selling my dagashi with a smile on her face, they’d accepted these new circumstances in a span of days. My dagashi-ya wasn’t so busy as to need more hands on deck, so

she was more like an uninvited employee.

“What happened to your research?” I asked her. “Shouldn’t you be going to the dungeon depths?”

“It’s fine. We can finally be together in public now. I’ll start my research again next week” was Michelle’s reply.

“Man, you two make a great pair!” Garmr grinned. “I’m happy for you, Mister Yusuke.”

“Oh, Garmr, you flatter me.” Michelle then suddenly narrowed her eyes, as if she’d grown suspicious. “But do we really...?”

“O-Of course. You’re the number one couple in the dungeon,” Garmr stammered. His delivery was decidedly forced, but he’d managed to scrape together some praise.

“You’re a good, honest boy.” Satisfied with his response, Michelle recited a long chant and cast a spell on him. A band of white and gold light wrapped itself around Garmr. *What is that?*

“There you go. I cast the ultimate magical blessing, Archangel, for you,” she told him. “You’ll be able to take down even the Orc King on B4 now. It only lasts three hours, so be careful.”

Garmr leaped up and excitedly turned to his friends. “She said the Orc King! They’re super amazing since they drop 150,000 rims each! Thank you, miss! Let’s go, everyone!”

He and his team dashed out of Hot Spring Yahagi.

“Hey, is that all right?” I asked Michelle.

“I’m sharing my happiness,” she replied. “Just this one time only.”

Oh, Michelle... Still, I couldn’t say I didn’t understand that sense of liberation she felt. She had spent so long living under that mask, hiding her face and her feelings.

Looking back on that day, I thought we had really lucked out. We could’ve lost our lives there in that arena. I might have regretted my own actions if I had died there—I wasn’t that strong of a person—but I was still just a little bit proud of

myself for what I'd said that day: "Don't put your filthy paws on Michelle!"

"Mister Yahagi, let me pull the Super Orb lottery."

Some fresh-faced porters had once again come to my shop.

Well, living until you eventually kicked the bucket was just life, and this place, Dagashi-ya Yahagi, was the stage upon which I'd live mine.

"Welcome!" I greeted the adventurers with a smile on my face.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 11

There's so many crazy things to talk about, I don't even know where to start. For one, we got news that the king had relinquished the throne, and his younger brother, General Bartos, had succeeded him. Apparently a coup d'état happened during the Mobile Forces tournament. The king always did whatever he pleased, so the citizens didn't like him one bit, which meant that all we really felt was, "Serves him right." It's poetic justice, if you ask me.

Still, I was surprised that the witch Michelle who cast that curse on the king was actually Mister Minerva. And she's even dating Mister Yusuke?! I don't know how to make heads or tails of it! Mister Yusuke won't tell me anything whenever I ask him, but Mister Minerva...I mean, Miss Michelle told me a lot more. She said that Mister Yusuke fought against three hundred imperial soldiers to protect her. He shouted something like "I won't let you touch my Michelle!" or whatever. Is that true? I can't really imagine that, considering how Mister Yusuke normally is.

Oh, but Mister Yusuke did acknowledge that the two of them are dating. I'm sure it's true that he risked his life for the sake of his girlfriend. I had the impression that their bond was deep. After all the hurdles they've overcome, they can officially say that they're a couple now, so I want to wish them the best.

But Mira... She was smiling at Hot Spring Yahagi the whole time but cried on the way home. She really did like Mister Yusuke, huh? Tonight, Mira got herself dead drunk at my place on some hard liquor mixed with Ramune.

I hear that almost all first loves are doomed, and it seems that's held true for Mira. But she's a strong-willed woman even if she normally looks ditzy. If she grumbles her complaints while downing some drinks and then gets a good night's sleep like this, I think she'll be good as new tomorrow.

You could say that the same goes for me. To tell the truth, I did also like Mister Yusuke a little. Well, there's no point regretting what's already over. I'll seal

these feelings away in my memories and carry on with my fun dagashi-ya life again starting tomorrow.

Mira was crying while downing drinks just a few moments ago, but she's fast asleep next to me now as I write in my journal. Love is bittersweet—kinda like this Ramune-mixed liquor I have.

Epilogue

The former king and queen were imprisoned in Rondas Tower, located along the lower reaches of the Ribou River. As punishment for their reckless governance, they would be forced to live in simplicity for the rest of their days.

In a complete reversal of the luxurious lifestyle that they had indulged in, they were now subsisting on only bread and water. The former king had already more or less given up. There was no spark left in his eyes. However, though Chichi put on a humble air, the fiery flame of hatred that lay hidden in her eyes had not been snuffed.

*(I'll definitely get out of here and rise anew to the pinnacle of high society!
And then I'll get my revenge on Michelle and that man who dared call me ugly!)*

Chichi's unspoken resentment had yet to reach Yahagi and the others. Just the same, in the near future, their fates would be intertwined once more...

END OF VOLUME
BONUS

Dagashi-ya Yahagi



RECOMMENDED
PRODUCTS!



Yahagi

I'll open up Dagashi-ya Yahagi.
Take your time and look around.



★★★★★

TEN-RIM GUM

★★★★★

Recovers one MP every ten seconds until it loses flavor.
Made with artificial strawberry flavoring!



PRICE:
10
RIMS

Mira

This is a necessity for a mage.
I pulled a winning ticket again today.



★★★★★

CURRY RICE CRACKER

★★★★★

Restores stamina. Warms you right up in cold conditions.



PRICE:
20
RIMS

Yahagi

It's delicious, and it also goes
well with alcohol. Perfect to pair
with hot whiskey on cold nights.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

MINI MINI COLA

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Cola-flavored ramune candy. Has a calming effect.

*Milk soda and peach
flavors now available.



PRICE:
40
RIMS

Meryl

I have to eat these to calm down.
I mean, I just get so heated in contests.
Ha ha ha...



★★★★★

COCOA CIGAR

★★★★★

Candy shaped like cigarettes. Six pieces included. If you think to yourself while holding one in your mouth, you can communicate with people within a ten-meter radius. However, both of you must be holding a cigar in your mouth.



*Brand-new flavors
make their grand debut!
Refreshing blueberry,
orange, and cola
now join in the fun!

PRICE:
30
RIMS

Michelle

This isn't any old candy. This Cocoa Cigar is a bridge to love. It's the sweet rainbow that connects Yusuke and me. It's an extremely thick red string of fate that can never be cut!!! It's a gift from the god of love, Cupirosea!

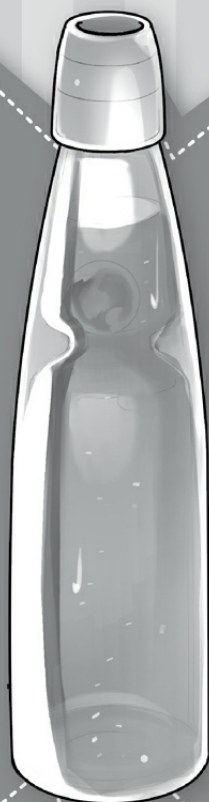


★ ★ ★ ★ ★

RAMUNE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A soft drink. A soda with a citrus-like flavor.
Drinking it regulates the flow of mana within the body.



PRICE:
100
RIMS

Michelle

Drinking Ramune regulates your body's mana circulation, so it's effective to drink before a Mobile Forces match. I can slowly close in on Yusuke's Gungalf when he's trying to run away... I definitely won't ever let him escape...



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SHAVED ICE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Comes in three types - strawberry, lemon, and melon. Once consumed, you won't become dehydrated even in extreme heat and can remain in good health for a period of time. Increases stamina if you add condensed milk.



PRICE:
200
RIMS

CONDENSED MILK:
+50 RIMS

Meryl

This is the best thing to have when it's hot. There's nothing better than eating strawberry Shaved Ice with condensed milk after getting out of the hot spring. The Extra Condensed Milk that's on the secret menu means you can get double the condensed milk.

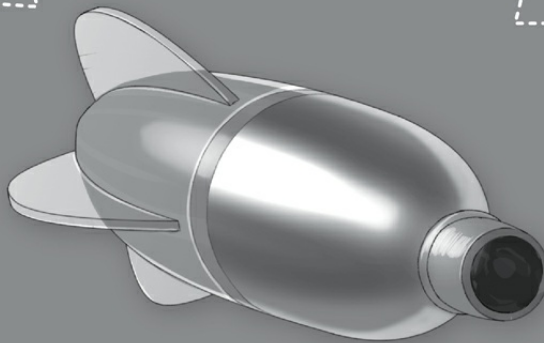


★★★★★

ROCKET BOMB

★★★★★

Will violently detonate with Explosion Magic once thrown at a monster. Consumable item. The bigger the rocket, the stronger the impact. As a lottery item, the size and quantity change. There are rumors that the giant Rocket Bomb you obtain with the number one ticket can even take down a dragon! (Unverified.)



PRICE:
50
RIMS

PER
TRY

Yahagi

A frightening item
that you can throw at enemies.
It's easy to use, so it's a popular product.
I also always keep some in my pocket
when I head into the dungeon.

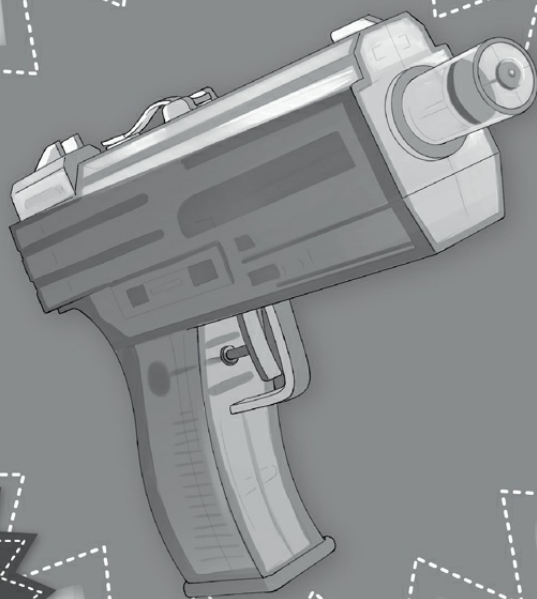


★★★★★

SQUIRT GUN

★★★★★

A toy you play with by putting water in it and squirting it. If you aim directly at a pressure point on the body, then there's a massaging effect. It reduces painful shoulder stiffness and lower back pain.



PRICE:
100
RIMS

Mira

Thanks to this, those stiff shoulders that had been bothering me for so long are gone! I'm grateful to Hot Spring Yahagi and Mister Yusuke.



★★★★★

MOBILE FORCE GUNGALF: KIAN MODEL

★★★★★

A plastic robot model. Can be assembled without glue by slotting the pieces into place. It is possible to move it with mana. It's good at using swords in hand-to-hand combat and excels at pushing forward with explosive force.



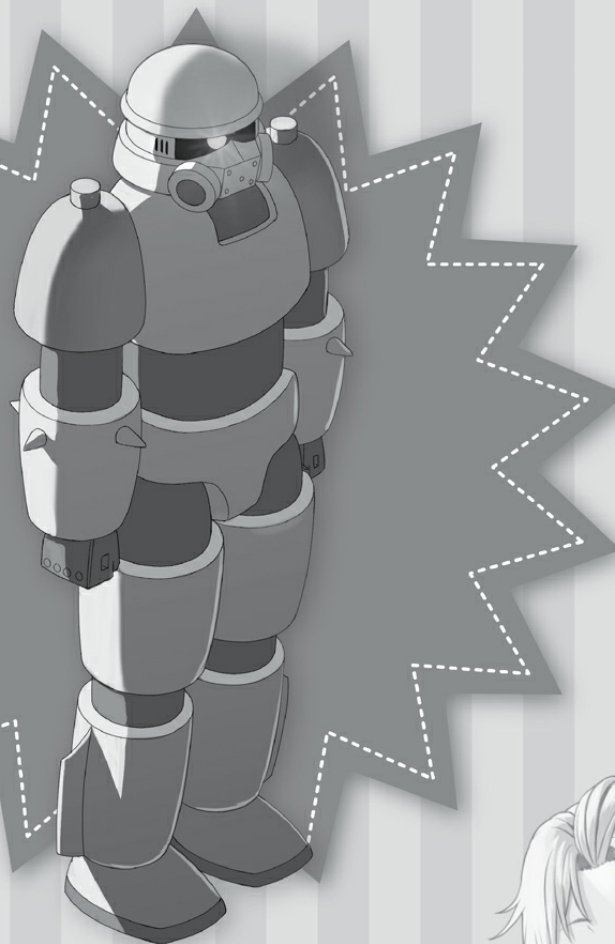
★★★★★

MOBILE FORCE GUNGALF: ZAKO MODEL

★★★★★

A plastic robot model. Can be assembled without glue by slotting the pieces into place. It is possible to move it with mana. Its mana consumption is low, so it's a easy-to-pilot unit.

PRICE:
300
RIMS



Meryl

Its reaction time is slow, but it's easy to move. It has a variety of skills, which makes it appealing. In an extended competition, you can also use the strategy of luring your opponent into running out of mana.



Afterword

Thank you for purchasing *Dagashi-ya Yahagi: Setting Up a Sweets Shop in Another World* volume one. As an author, it's a great pleasure to be able to share one of my stories with you all. I would also like to express my thanks to everyone who made this publication possible, and Neruzo Nemaki-sensei for their wonderful illustrations. Thank you very much.

If I must confess, my mother was strict, and she never bought me dagashi when I was a kid. I'm sure it was because she was worried for my health, but I have bitter memories of looking on as the neighborhood kids around me enjoyed their dagashi. If I ever said something like "But Acchan's parents buy them for her," my mother would immediately pull out her trump card: "Our house, our rules!"

But then once I entered the upper grades of elementary school, I also began to go to the dagashi-ya in secret, so her concern for me went to waste. She'd find me out from my bright red tongue, dyed by the artificial food coloring. During those moments, I'd obediently listen to her scoldings, and then I'd go to the dagashi-ya with my friends again the next day. The dagashi-ya was the social hot spot for kids, and I was the belle of society. I couldn't just *not* go. Oho ho ho! (Lie.)

This work of fiction was born from these memories. When I overlaid these nostalgic memories with fantasy, it opened a door to a new world. I then immediately ran off to a dagashi-ya in order to gather material.

It was only natural, considering it'd been a few decades since I had last crossed the threshold of a dagashi-ya, but there were tons of dagashi I'd never seen before in the store. On the other hand, there were dagashi that'd been around for decades as well. There were also several that were no longer in production. Nostalgia and loneliness mixed together and wrenched my heart. However, I felt that the sight of children buying dagashi and toys wasn't much different from back then. Even with the impact of the changing times, a

dagashi-ya's essence doesn't change much.

I've taken up fishing since last year. It started with an invitation from some fellow creators, and I got completely hooked. I'm writing this toward the end of June, and the weather continues to be humid. Today, I'm once again looking up at the cloudy sky and dreaming of the riverbank on a clear day. Once the rainy season ends, I want to go to the Sea of Japan or the Pacific Ocean.

I've been catching horse mackerels and Japanese whittings and cooking them at camp. Eating freshly caught fish with some sake just hits the spot. I can enjoy both the sake and the fish. I don't eat dagashi like I used to as a kid, but if I start talking about it with my fellow light novelists over drinks, they get pretty excited.

Not only does dagashi excite them, but also nostalgic toys. I guess it's how that one saying goes—a leopard can't change its spots? A certain novelist got really passionate as they were talking to me about Gundam plastic models and Mini 4WDs. Of course, I didn't forget to take notes! I'll use them as reference for the next installment.

Please turn the pages of this book.

Can you hear it? The rattling sound of the aluminum sash door opening?

Can you see them? The stacks of colorful snacks? The lottery cards hanging and the toy boxes lined up on the wall?

“Welcome.”

Dagashi-ya Yahagi is waiting for you.

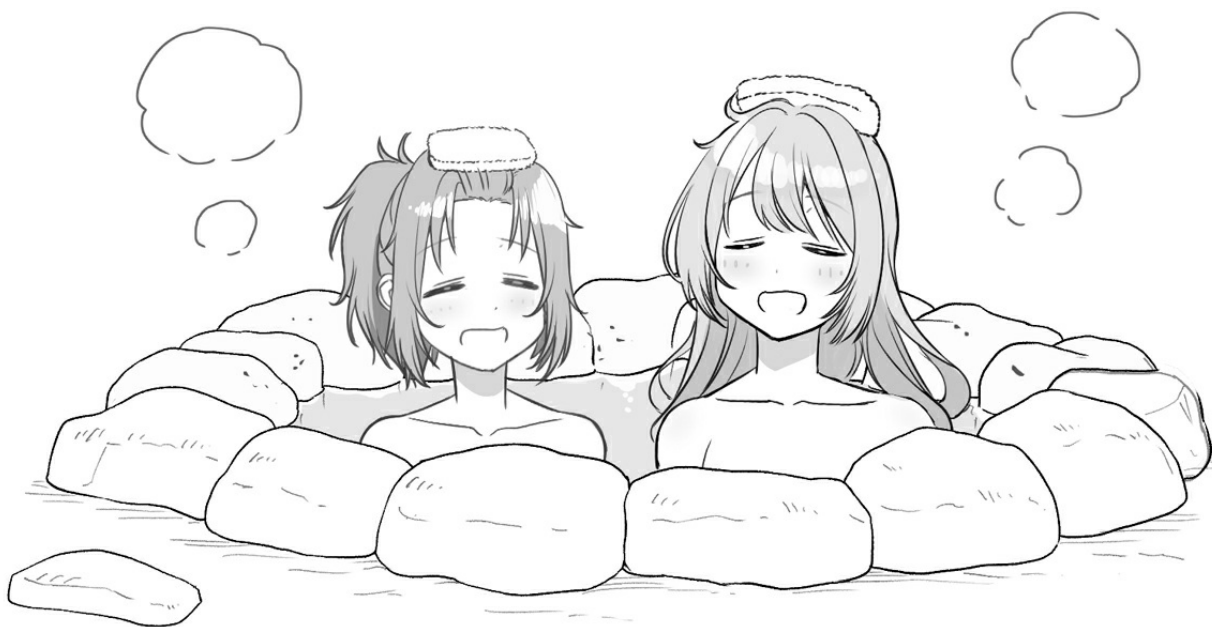
—Bunzaburou Nagano

I had a lot of fun undertaking so many new things as I worked on this, such as the colored character introductions that spanned across three pages and the robot designs.

I'm looking forward to drawing these fun and friendly characters again.

Thank you very much!

- Neruzo Nemaki



Bonus Short Story

Inspection: Ten-Rim Gum

My name is Yusuke Yahagi. I'm a dagashi-ya from Japan who's 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 take down a dragon after eating one of my Tasty Sticks 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.

The muggy weather had persisted, raining day after day. Maybe the adventurers had lost their motivation in such gloomy weather, but even when it came time for them to set off into the dungeon, they were still lounging around in front of my store.

"Don't you have to earn money?" I asked Meryl, who was dispassionately chugging some Ramune.

"Can't," she replied.

"You can't...?"

I wasn't sure whether the climate had something to do with it, but the number of monsters in this part of the dungeon had increased. After bearing with stressful situations one after another, it seemed these languid adventurers were mentally exhausted. I let them be, deciding I'd get started inspecting my

dagashi.

“Let’s begin then, Michelle,” I said.

“We’re supposed to inspect the Ten-Rim Gum today, right?” Michelle asked.

Product name: Ten-Rim Gum

Description: Recovers one MP every ten seconds until it loses flavor. Includes artificial strawberry flavoring!

Price: Ten rims

“But how are you going to inspect it?”

“With this.”

I took out a plastic model robot called a Mobile Force, one of the items sold at my store. Despite being a toy only about the size of your palm, it was a revolutionary product that you could move around using your mana.

“You’re gonna use a Mobile Force unit?” she asked. “Are you going to host a tournament or something?”

“I was thinking of doing a marathon.”

I had no idea how much mana I had since there was no way of quantifying that. That was why I’d decided to make a Mobile Force unit run around until I reached my limit and then eat some Ten-Rim Gum once I could no longer move it.

“Hey there, what are you doing, Mister Yusuke?” Just moments ago, Meryl and the others’ eyes had been completely dead, but now they were standing next to me. Their bodies might be feeling sluggish, but they were still attuned to anything that looked fun. I explained the marathon to them.

“I wanna compete! What does the winner get?” Meryl exclaimed.

I didn’t say anything about holding a tournament... Well, it was fine. It’d be more fun to have everyone join in, but my own aim was purely to inspect the Ten-Rim Gum. Everyone would be running alongside me, but I’d give my

inspection my full, undivided attention.

On the floor, I drew a running track that was thirty meters per lap.

“This is a contest of stamina, so the winner will be determined by how many laps you can run,” I said. “Whoever runs longest will be the victor.”

“All right!”

Before I knew it, we’d been surrounded by multiple adventurers.

“Wait, we’ve got more participants?!” I exclaimed. “Garmr, Rigal, you guys are gonna participate too?”

“Got nothing else to do,” Garmr shrugged, “and I thought I’d show that Meryl what’s what.”

“Tch! Dream on!” Meryl shot back. “Your little Gugurecas can’t hold a candle to my Zako!”

Meryl and Garmr were always competing against each other every chance they got, but it never felt mean or like they were dragging each other down. It was more of a friendly rivalry between two people of similar ages. I found it kinda refreshing to watch.

Everyone placed their Mobile Forces at the starting line. Based on the rules I’d set, those with lots of mana had the upper hand, but each Mobile Force also had its own individual characteristics. There were those that were fast but bad at managing their mana consumption, those with quick response times but that weren’t good for moving across long distances—they all had varying specs, so you couldn’t predict who would win.

“All right,” I said, “let’s start. Ready, set...go!”

The Mobile Forces sprang into action at once. Every participant was a fierce fighter who regularly competed in the arena, so their units all moved smoothly. The first to leap forward was Mira’s Dome, which excelled at moving on land, and Jujiong, which could fly through the sky.

“Ha ha! Don’t be such a slowpoke!” Garmr taunted.

“Shut up, stupid!”

Garmr's Gugurecas had surpassed Meryl's Zako. Still, the battle had only just begun. Zako's mobility was inferior, but its mana consumption rate was the best of the best. Who knew how this contest would turn out in the long term? I decided to completely focus on moving my Gungalf without worrying about anyone else.

Inspection Results

After making Gungalf run for twenty minutes, my throat began to feel parched, and I grew dizzy. These were the early symptoms of mana depletion. Thinking I'd collapse at this rate, I popped a Ten-Rim Gum in my mouth. The instant I began chewing the gum, the strawberry flavor filled my mouth. At that very moment, my dizziness disappeared, like fog clearing away. This was evidence that the gum did replenish mana. Even though it didn't replenish a lot, you could say it was rather effective for squeezing out one final magical attack at the last second.

Around my fifth lap, the gum lost its flavor and the effect began to wear off, but I felt I had proved the Ten-Rim Gum's usefulness. I could continue selling these with confidence.

In terms of the competition, the two people who were controlling Jujiongs retired fifteen minutes after it had started. As expected, the amount of mana consumed when piloting an airborne unit was incomparably high.

The victor was no surprise to most people—Michelle and her unit that had completed 208 laps. Rather than a display of the Mobile Force Kian's superiority, this was probably more of a reflection of the unmatched, immense amount of mana Michelle possessed. She said she could've gone for much longer but quit halfway.

Also, Meryl, who had really stuck it out, came in second place. She'd made good use of what mana she had, running 184 laps. Michelle watched on as Meryl shouted with joy and murmured, "Meryl might improve dramatically in the future. She'll become a rather high-ranking adventurer."

"You think?" I asked. Judging by the simpleminded way she was currently gulping her Ramune, I couldn't really see it.

"Women suddenly change without warning," she replied.

“Hm...”

I see. When she put it like that, I felt she might be right.



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Dagashi-ya Yahagi: Setting Up a Sweets Shop in Another World: Volume 1

by Bunzaburou Nagano

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Original Japanese edition published in 2022 by Earth Star Entertainment This English edition is published by arrangement with Earth Star Entertainment, Tokyo English translation © 2024 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: September 2024