

story

Itsuki Mizuho

art

Nekobyou Neko

To Another World...

with LAND MINES!

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WITH LAND MINES!

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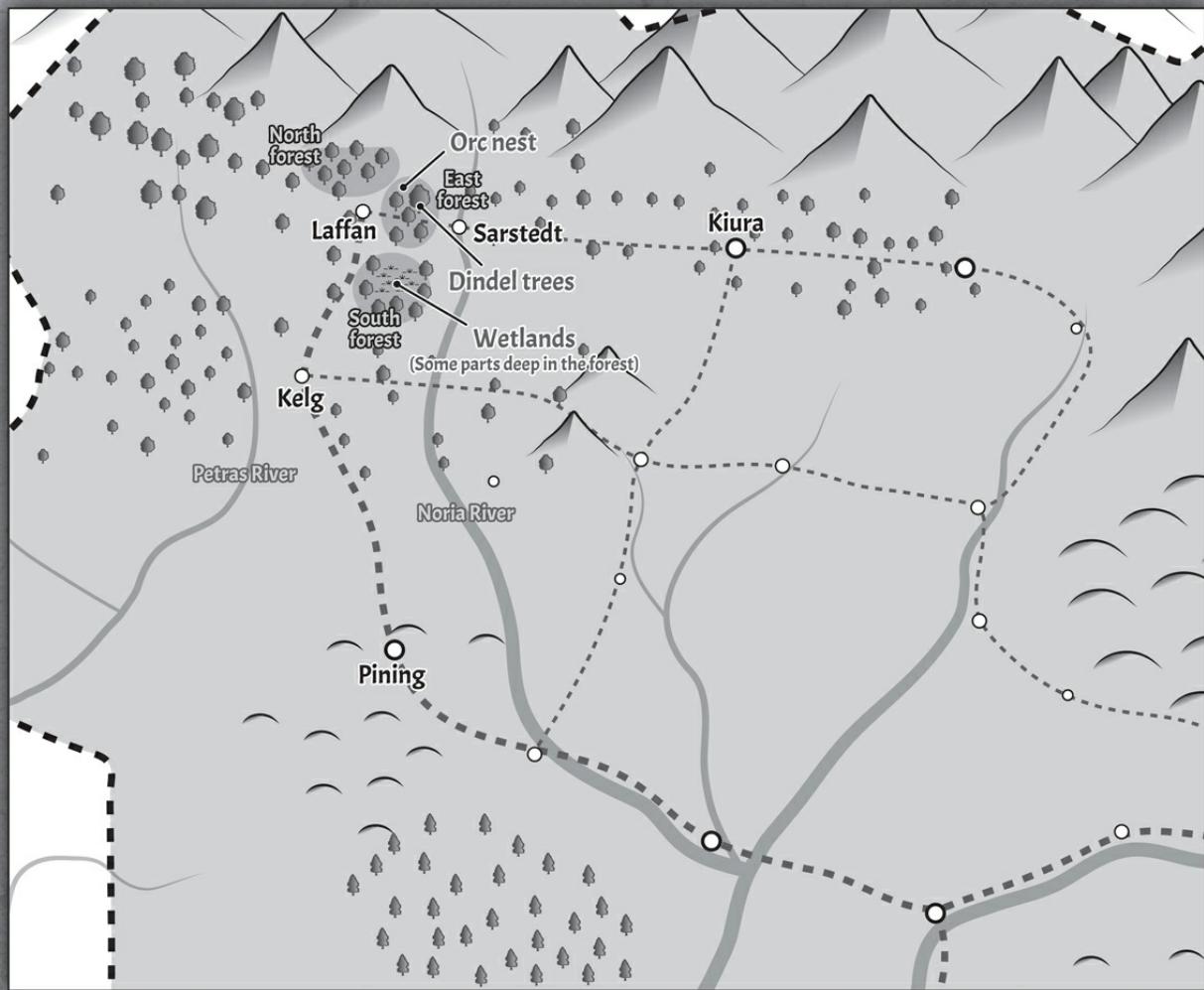
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Prologue

A few months had passed since we were transported to this world, and we had barely scraped together the funds for the construction of our own house before winter. However, an obstacle had appeared in our way when a mushroom disaster struck Laffan right before construction on our house was about to wrap up.

Back on Earth, fungus would only damage houses with filthy interiors. The idea of a mushroom halting construction on a house would have seemed absurd. However, from our perspective, the most unrealistic thing about the whole incident was how quickly the mushrooms had grown. Those barrash mushrooms were capable of growing in a flash to a size that was large enough to destroy a house, a fact that had surprised and frightened us. On top of that, the local lumberjacks had all been busy dealing with the large number of barrash mushrooms that had popped up across town, so construction on our house had temporarily come to a halt.

The threat that the barrash mushrooms had posed to the town was relevant to us as well, so we had accepted a quest from the Adventurers' Guild to deal with the problem, accompanying an alchemist whose name was Riva. Luckily for us, our efforts had paid off, and the construction of our house was finished before the weather turned cold. A while after we moved into our new house, we decided to host a dinner party and invite some people who had helped us out since our arrival in this world.

"Thank you for the invitation," said Diola.

"Th-Thank you!" Riva exclaimed.

"Welcome!"

Touya and I greeted our guests, who had both arrived more or less on time. The two of us had managed to find something to do even though we weren't of any use in the kitchen. *It's not like we got chased out and were told we were in the way or anything!*

“Diola-san, Riva, thank you for coming over today,” I said.

We had only invited Diola-san and Riva for today’s dinner party. We could have invited Aera-san and Tomi as well, but we had felt like it wouldn’t be very relaxing with too many people. Besides, today’s dinner party was a housewarming party, so we had decided to invite the two people who had directly contributed to our ability to purchase a house.

“The preparations for dinner aren’t done yet, though, so I’m afraid you’ll have to wait for a bit,” I said.

“That’s perfectly fine,” Diola replied. “I don’t have any business that I need to attend to after this, so there’s no reason to hurry.”

“Thank you for being understanding,” I said. “By the way, did the two of you come here together?”

Precise and accurate clocks didn’t exist in this world, so the idea of arriving at an event five minutes early wasn’t common sense here, and it was also difficult to pull off. That being the case, the only way for two people to arrive somewhere at the same time would be for them to meet up beforehand and then travel together to their destination.

I had assumed that must have been the case when I asked Diola-san, but she responded to me with an awkward smile. “Oh, no, I bumped into her when I arrived and saw a suspicious person hanging around out front with her head completely hidden by a hood.”

As Diola-san spoke, she glanced at the girl next to her, whose head was hanging low in embarrassment.

“Um, I’m sorry, I just felt really nervous...”

So the suspicious person was Riva, huh? Riva was wearing her usual outfit, a hooded robe. The hood wasn’t covering her face at the moment, but it must have been hidden before she entered our house.

“Oh, don’t worry about it, Riva,” I said. “It’s normal to feel nervous when visiting someone’s house for the first time.”

“R-Really? What if weird rumors spread as a result of how I acted...?”

Does she mean rumors of a suspicious person loitering around a newly built house? That does kind of sound like trouble!

Diola-san chuckled. “You don’t have to worry about things like that in this part of town.”

“Huh? Why is that, Diola-san?” I asked.

“Such things aren’t unusual in this area,” Diola replied. “Some adventurers return from the field completely covered in blood, after all.”

Oh yeah, this is an area of town where the Adventurers’ Guild does middleman work. According to Diola-san, it was mostly adventurers who moved into this area of town, so the locals were used to the sight of people who looked or acted suspiciously, and it would take a lot to shock them.

“Riva-san wasn’t walking around with anything that looked like an unsheathed weapon, and she’s not that tall either, so she probably didn’t appear that suspicious by your neighbors’ standards,” said Diola.

“Really?! I’m glad to hear that!” Riva exclaimed.

Riva looked quite relieved, but I wasn’t sure if we should be happy about the fact that we had moved into a new house in what was apparently a pretty scary area.

“Well, I guess all that matters is that our neighbors won’t file any complaints,” said Touya. “More importantly, how should we kill some time?”

“Hmm. It shouldn’t take that long for the girls to finish preparations, but...”

The parlor was the room we were supposed to use for entertaining guests, but it was currently empty. There weren’t any sofas or even chairs inside, so we couldn’t entertain guests there at the moment. However, it wasn’t like we could just ask our guests to stand here in the entrance, so I was at a loss for what to do.

“Why don’t you give them a tour of our house while you’re waiting? After all, this is a housewarming party.” Haruka had appeared all of a sudden from deeper inside the house.

“Oh, Haruka, are the preparations done?” I asked.

“Almost. I came over because I’m done with my part.”

Diola-san took a step forward. “Congratulations on the completion of your house, Haruka-san. The Adventurers’ Guild wishes you continued success as adventurers here in Laffan, and I personally feel the same way.”

Since Diola-san had greeted Haruka in a proper and formal manner, Riva took advantage of the situation to greet Haruka without having to say too much. “Good luck...!” That difference seemed like evidence of Riva’s lack of socialization. Even so, I felt like she was acting a bit too reserved. I wanted her to feel free to drop by casually, so greetings like that weren’t really necessary at all.

“Therefore, I’ve brought some wine to commemorate this occasion,” Diola continued. “As far as I can tell, none of you imbibe regularly, so I went out of my way to procure some high-quality wine that’s smooth on the palate.”

“Um, I didn’t bring anything that special with me, but...” As Diola-san presented a small cask, apparently full of wine, Riva handed over a cloth bag that seemed to contain all sorts of things.

Haruka smiled awkwardly when she saw the gifts. “Um, this is just a small dinner party, so there was no need for either of you to bring any gifts...”

Diola-san chuckled. “Not bringing a gift to a housewarming party wasn’t an option for me.”

Riva vigorously nodded. “Yeah, exactly! That’s why I prepared this set of alchemist tools!” Immediately after speaking, her ears drooped and she looked apologetic. “Um, well, actually, since I don’t have that much spare money, these are my old tools that I don’t use anymore...”

“Don’t worry about it, Riva,” said Haruka. “I really appreciate this gift. Thank you.”

Haruka smiled as she took the cloth bag from Riva. It was probably a genuine smile, not one she was forcing out of a desire to be considerate. Haruka had some alchemist tools already, but only a few, since she wasn’t a professional alchemist by any means. According to Haruka, it was actually quite difficult to assemble a complete set in Laffan; there wasn’t that much demand for such

tools. With that in mind, Haruka was probably happy to receive even secondhand tools that had belonged to a professional alchemist.

“I’m glad to hear that,” said Riva. “I really don’t have that much money, so...”

“Hm? Didn’t you earn a lot of money from the mushroom disaster?” Touya asked.

Riva timidly denied his suggestion. “O-Oh, no, the mushroom withering medicine isn’t something that sells for a lot of money.”

“Really?” asked Touya, looking confused. “I was sure something like that would sell for a lot. Wait, does the Adventurers’ Guild pocket the profits?”

“No, it doesn’t!” Diola exclaimed. “The Adventurers’ Guild is *mostly* an impartial organization!”

Although Diola-san had firmly denied Touya’s allegations when he gave her a look of doubt, the word “mostly” had slipped out. Honestly, it made sense to me: we had gotten preferential treatment to a certain extent, so you couldn’t claim that the Adventurers’ Guild was absolutely fair and impartial.

“One thing I can say for certain is that the guild doesn’t try to make a huge profit from incidents like mushroom disasters—and neither does the guild take a cut of the reward from people who cooperate to resolve such incidents!” Diola exclaimed.

“Mm, doing so would incur resentment and grudges,” said Haruka.

“Correct. And in any case, there are better methods of making a profit if needed,” said Diola. “The Guild took its standard commission out of the quest bounty for the mushroom withering medicine, and the remainder was distributed to Riva-san for her work and to you for escorting her.”

According to Diola-san, the remaining mushroom withering medicine had been sold at a fair price, so Riva had earned slightly more than usual from her role. *Actually, wait, what did Diola-san mean by “better methods of making a profit”? I guess it’s the right mentality to have if you’re on the management staff of an organization like the Guild. Diola-san’s probably quite competent at her job.*

"You went out of your way to bring a gift over despite your financial troubles, Riva?" I asked. "Sorry about that."

"O-Oh, it's fine. Like I said earlier, the tools are ones that I don't use anymore..."

Riva sounded quite modest and reserved, but I felt like there was a chance that she had lost out on some potential income by giving us these tools. In this world, secondhand goods were a bigger part of the market, and most of them sold just fine, including worn-out clothes. In fact, if there were secondhand goods available, ordinary citizens would always check them before buying new. With that in mind, Riva's secondhand alchemist tools would probably have fetched a decent price if she'd sold them. However, she had kept those tools until now, and I figured there must have been some reason for that.

I tried my best to think of something that we could give to Riva in return, and I remembered something Riva had said before. "Oh yeah, Riva, you mentioned that you like kuttoes, right? We told you that you can come over to our house whenever you want and harvest some, so would you like to bring some home with you today?"

"Um, are you sure about this?" Riva asked.

"Yeah, feel free to gather as many as you want," I replied. "It's not like we can eat them all by ourselves, and they're not worth that much on the market either."

Kuttoes could last for quite a long time if preserved, but there was no reason for us to stock up on them; they would grow back by next year. This was a fairly cheap gift to give in return for the secondhand alchemist tools, but Riva would probably have hesitated to accept anything more expensive, so it was probably the right choice.

"I-In that case, I'll take you up on that offer." Riva smiled, seeming slightly embarrassed. "I already finished eating the kuttoes that I harvested the other day, after all."

Oh, she already ate all of them? She picked up quite a lot back in the forest. I guess she really likes the taste.

"All right, Nao, Touya, can you give Diola-san and Riva a tour around our house?" Haruka asked. "I'll put away these gifts while you're at it."

"Sure. Let's start with the second floor," I said. "Well, it's just our rooms on the second floor, so..."

Our rooms were located to the left at the head of the stairs leading up from the entrance hall; the rooms to the right were technically guest rooms but were currently empty. Those rooms had no beds and no blankets in them, so we couldn't use them to accommodate guests yet.

"Yeah, that's all there is to the second floor," said Touya. "I guess we can show you our rooms, since there's no point showing the empty ones."

"In that case, let's start with my room," I said. "There's nothing interesting to see inside, however."

"U-Um, this will be my first time entering a boy's room!" Riva exclaimed.

I had decided to start with my room since I couldn't show the girls' rooms without their permission, but Riva seemed a bit nervous when she heard that.

Diola-san smiled at Riva's reaction. "Oh, that's such a fresh and innocent reaction. I remember those da—"

"D-Do you have a lot of experience with these thin—eep!"

"Now then, I wonder what Nao-san's room looks like."

A nervous scream had escaped from Riva's mouth even though Diola-san had merely glanced at her, and Diola-san maintained a smile as she dodged the subject with ease. I was honestly quite impressed by the fact that Riva had been brave enough to throw that kind of question at a single woman who was approaching middle age. Riva probably hadn't meant any harm, but it was practically like prodding one of Diola-san's anger buttons.

As someone who prioritized safety above all, I made sure to remain silent as I led the two of them to my room. However, the only things inside were a bed and a wooden box that I used as a storage chest. There were no curtains in the windows, so as I had mentioned earlier, there really wasn't anything interesting to see. I hadn't had any particular preferences about the curtains, but the girls

rejected my nonchalant attitude in a way that was gentle but also weirdly threatening. When they insisted that it wouldn't look good if the curtains didn't match, given that our windows were all visible from the front of the house, I couldn't really object. In the end, the girls had decided to purchase cloth in order to make some curtains themselves. Their rooms had priority, so my windows probably wouldn't have curtains for quite a while. As a result, if I had to describe my room, then...

"Um, this room looks quite dreary—"

"This looks like a simple, tidy, and practical room," said Diola.

"Y-Yeah, that's just what I was about to say!" Riva exclaimed.

Diola-san's choice of words was quite good. Riva had tried to go along with Diola-san's description, but her actual impression of my room was fairly obvious.

"You don't have to hold back! We were living at an inn before now, after all," I said. "We could have filled our rooms with furniture right away if we'd wanted to, but we decided that it'd be better to take our time and save up to purchase high-quality ones."

The first item of furniture that I wanted to purchase was a rocking chair. I'd really liked the one that I discovered at the exhibition hall.

"That's a great idea—high-quality furniture can last for a very long time," said Diola. "The bed here is quite simple, but it also appears quite well made."

"Um, the view from this window is quite nice too!" Riva exclaimed.

Riva, you don't have to force yourself to find something to praise about my room. The view from my window was decent, since it was on the second story, but all that you could see from here was our unkempt yard and the cluttered townscape. In any case, unlike back on Earth, there wasn't anything in my room that I wouldn't want people to see. *Actually, wait, hold on.* There were multiple magic bags inside of the wooden chest, and while it would be hard to figure that out at a glance, Riva was an alchemist, so...

"O-Okay, let's get going. There's nothing else to see here," I said. I casually walked in front of the wooden chest and gently pushed Riva on her back to urge

her to get going.

Her ears trembled a little in confusion. “Hm? Nao-san, what’s the rush?”

I smiled as I dangled a figurative carrot in front of Riva. “Well, I thought that if we finish the tour sooner, I could help you gather some kuttoes...”

She took the bait just like a real rabbit. “Oh, will you help me out?! Let’s hurry, then! Next up is the first floor, right?”

Riva happily walked out of my room. Diola-san followed, but she gave a pointed chuckle as she passed by me. *It’s not what you think it is, Diola-san! I can’t actually explain myself, but still!*

On top of that, Touya also walked over to whisper something to me. “Hey, Nao, where did you manage to buy those kinds of things in this world?”

Et tu, Touya?! I didn’t snitch on you to the girls about the things we discussed that we had to keep secret from them, and you have the gall to suspect me of such things?!

“Touya, meet me behind the school building later,” I said.

“Huh?! Why?! Also, where do you mean by school building?!”

I lightly punched Touya in the ribs while he was confused and then exited my room and led the way back down to the first floor. I showed Riva and Diola-san the rooms on the right side of the house, including the one that was going to be our bathroom and the two empty rooms that we hadn’t decided for sure what to do with. After that, we headed towards the alchemy room. Haruka was at work with her back to the door, but the moment we entered the room, she turned towards us.

“Oh, are you already done with your tour of the second floor?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, there wasn’t much to show,” I replied. “Diola-san, Riva, this is our alchemy room.”

“Well, it’s an alchemy room in name only,” said Haruka. “However, it looks a lot better now with the tools that you gave us, Riva.”

The room hadn’t looked anywhere close to an alchemy room until earlier this morning, but it had some more tools in it now—presumably the alchemy tools

that Riva had given Haruka. The tools looked a bit old, but they also made the room seem like a lot of alchemy had been performed here.

“I’m glad to hear that my tools will be of use,” said Riva.

“Mm, I’ll make the most of them,” said Haruka. “What’s left to show? Is it just the sewing room?”

“Yeah, since preparations are still underway in the kitchen and dining room,” I replied.

There were other rooms that we hadn’t shown them, such as the toilet, along with the empty parlor and living room, but there was no need for us to show those for now.

“All right, let’s all go to the room next to this one,” said Haruka. “In a way, it’s the room that’s the most complete currently.”

Diola-san had a slightly perplexed look on her face after Haruka suggested that we head over to the sewing room. “Oh, did you set aside an entire room just for sewing, Haruka-san? I’m aware of your proficiency at the art of sewing from the backpacks that you’ve made, but...”

“Mm, it’s because we have plenty of spare rooms,” Haruka replied. “In addition, sewing takes up a lot of space.”

“Oh, indeed. I suppose it’s convenient to set aside a room for sewing if you do have the space,” said Diola.

“Yep. Now then, this is our sewing room.”

When we entered the room, the first thing that came into view was the table in the middle of the room, which was large enough that I could have spread out and fallen asleep on it if I’d wanted to. Laying on it were some unfinished curtains. There were also some shelves against the walls that had different types of cloth and leather stored in them, plus plenty of clothes lined up on hangers that hadn’t been finished yet. The only things that were missing from the sewing room were tools like sewing machines and dress forms.

Riva looked very surprised when she saw the inside of our sewing room. “I-I didn’t expect this room to be so large in scale. There are so many cute clothes in

here..."

"Making your own clothes is cheaper than buying them, after all," said Haruka. "If we make them ourselves, we can also design them the way we want."

Diola-san, standing next to the two of them, sighed at Haruka's words. "That only applies to people who don't need to buy secondhand clothes, Haruka-san."

"Yeah, secondhand clothes are cheaper than the amount of cloth needed to make a new pair of clothes," said Riva.

"Really? If you purchase the materials in bulk, I think it's cheaper than some secondhand clothes—at least clothes that are in good condition," said Haruka.

The girls had purchased enough materials to make clothes and curtains for all five of us. Haruka was an expert at negotiation, so she probably wasn't lying about the materials being cheap—for her.

"Hmm. Riva, if you don't mind, we can make you some clothes," said Haruka.

"Huh? O-Oh, um, you don't have to do that..." Riva hesitantly shook her head, but she continued to glance at the nearby clothes on hangers, so, as usual, her true feelings were quite obvious.

"Don't worry about it, Riva. I'm sure Natsuki and Yuki would be more than happy to make some clothes for you," said Haruka. "Honestly speaking, I think your current clothes look quite dull and unfashionable."

Haruka was smiling as she harshly criticized Riva's clothes, but she was completely right. Even Diola-san had described Riva earlier as someone who looked quite suspicious.

Riva must have been somewhat aware of the problem; she let her shoulders drop in a disheartened way. "Ugh, I mean, I don't have much of a choice when it comes to clothes that I can completely cover myself with. Well, also, there's a benefit to this kind of outfit, you know? Looking a bit suspicious actually makes people trust you more as an alchemist. Well, probably."

"Just probably?!" Touya exclaimed.

"Eep!" Riva flinched and hunched her shoulders up when Touya suddenly

barged into the conversation, then finished what she'd been saying, looking at us with puppy dog eyes the whole time. "U-Um, yeah, it's quite effective. People don't ask me unnecessary questions when I'm wearing this kind of outfit."

I had a feeling that the kind of effect she had mentioned wasn't actually a good thing for business.

"W-Well, let's put that aside and talk about your new clothes," said Haruka. "Do you have any plans for today?"

"Oh, um, I was just planning to gather some kuttoes while waiting for dinner to be ready," said Riva.

"Sure, feel free to do that," said Haruka. "What about you, Diola-san?"

"I'll help out with the kutto gathering," said Diola. "Riva-san played an essential role in resolving the mushroom disaster, after all."

"Thank you very much!" Riva exclaimed. She clenched her fists as though to pump herself up and then muttered, "I need to gather enough to last a year..."

The rest of us were moved almost to tears when we realized the implication behind Riva's words, so we all ended up helping her gather kuttoes until Yuki came outside to tell us that dinner was ready.



"Thank you for coming to celebrate the completion of our fabulous and amazing dream house!" Touya exclaimed.

"Don't say it like that, Touya!" I exclaimed. "You make it sound like our house is an uncomfortable one that only looks good on the outside and might fall to ruin after just a few years!"

I had jabbed back at Touya almost involuntarily, but very few people would actually understand why I had felt uneasy about his words, and naturally, Riva wasn't one of them.

"Why's that? I think this is a great dream house," said Riva. "Plus, it has a large yard."

"Don't worry about it, Riva. It's just one of Nao's delusions," said Haruka.

“Besides, this house was built with practicality prioritized above all, so it’s nothing like luxury houses that are designed without any care for how comfortable they’ll be for their occupants.”

“Yeah, exactly, and construction wrapped up fairly quickly as a result,” said Yuki. “Well, maybe there was too much of a focus on practicality...”

“Mm, our house is shaped almost like a rectangular box!” Touya chuckled.

There was nothing playful or unnecessary about the design of our house, and it had been built with a focus on ease of maintenance, durability, and comfortable living. However, the final result was something that looked quite complete.

“I’m honestly happy with how our house turned out,” I said. “Riva also praised our house just now. Right, Riva?”

“Yeah. It doesn’t have to be this large, but I’d love to own a house like this with a yard someday if possible,” said Riva.

“Oh! You can make that dream come true right away if you just mar—”

“I-I’m sorry, no thanks.”

Riva had promptly rejected Touya’s proposal, and his ears drooped in sadness when his hopes got dashed. “I got rejected instantly...”

“Boo, Touya! Read the room, dude!” Yuki exclaimed. “Your wife isn’t anywhere around!”

“Ugh! Can’t a man dream about having a chance...?”

“Nope. You’ll never have a chance if you just try asking recklessly without first changing yourself as a person,” said Natsuki.

After Yuki and Natsuki bashed him, Touya looked to me for help, but I shook my head in response to indicate that I couldn’t back him up in this situation. If he was serious about wanting to marry Riva, then there was a proper way to go about getting her attention, and proposing in a joking manner definitely wasn’t it. In any case, even if Touya wanted to test the waters to see if he had any chance with her, this wasn’t the place. He was lucky that Yuki had jumped in right away and made fun of him to make it sound like it was all just banter, but

there was still a chance that Riva, as our guest, felt quite awkward due to his words.

“From my point of view, Touya-san is a decent prospect as a partner in marriage, but compatibility is also important,” said Diola.

“Mm. Nao, can you take over the opening remarks from this inconsiderate and insensitive dude over here?” Haruka asked.

“Me? Err...”

Haruka had probably removed Touya from the role so that Riva wouldn’t feel awkward about having turned him down, but I wasn’t prepared for this at all. However, I had no choice but to do my best.

“We’ve finally managed to obtain a house thanks to the contributions of everyone here, including Diola-san and Riva. We’ve gotten into some dangerous situations from time to time, but we’ve come this far without any serious missteps or problems because we’ve been careful with the work and quests that we take on,” I said. “And that being the case, we’ll continue to work hard from now on. Last but not least, I’d like to thank the girls for providing the delicious dishes tonight. Cheers!”

Everyone exclaimed “Cheers!” in unison after I had finished.

I took a sip from the cup that I had raised in the air just now, and a sweet, fruity grape taste filled my mouth along with a fragrant smell. “Whoa, this tastes delicious. This is the wine that you brought over, right, Diola-san? Thank you for this high-quality wine.”

“Don’t worry about it. Oh, also, this is an easy drinking wine, so each of you will have to take care about the amount that you drink,” said Diola.

“Yeah, I’ll be careful,” I said. “Now then, time to try out the food.”

The large table in front of us was filled with delicious dishes that the girls had worked very hard to make, including our standby—orc meat—along with the fish, crabs, and shrimp that we had caught the other day, so there was a lot of variety on offer. Up to this point, we’d only been able to cook these ingredients by boiling or grilling them with salt, but they had tasted amazing even given that we didn’t have access to a proper space for cooking.

With that limitation now removed, I was curious and excited to find out how good these dishes would taste. However, of all the dishes in front of me, one in particular caught my attention. It was a squarish object about three centimeters thick. Its surface was grilled to a nice golden brown, and it looked quite similar to a large hanpen fish cake. I approached it to take a sniff, and my nose was instantly filled with the rich smell of butter.

“That’s sautéed barrash mushroom,” said Natsuki. “We made it from a chunk of raw mushroom. The normal way to eat them is by drying them before consumption. Feel free to take a scoop with this spoon.”

“Oh, this is from those giant mushrooms? Let’s see. Whoa, it’s so soft and tender...”

I took a scoop with the spoon Natsuki offered me, and the fluffy sautéed mushroom gave no resistance to the utensil. I raised the spoon to my mouth, and the dense umami of the mushrooms mixed with the rich butter to create an explosive, fragrant flavor inside of my mouth.

“Delicious!” I exclaimed.

Diola-san blinked a bit; she seemed quite impressed by the dish. “This dish was made from barrash mushrooms? I didn’t expect it to be quite this good.”

Riva had a look of bliss on her face as she held a hand to her cheek while tasting the sauté. “I-It’s so good...”



Haruka and Yuki had probably had a taste of the dish earlier, since they didn't seem surprised at all, but they looked like they were quite satisfied too. As for Touya, he remained silent as he shoveled his portion into his mouth.

"Did you make this dish, Natsuki?" I asked. "I'm really amazed."

"It's the main ingredient that's amazing. I merely cooked it with salted butter and kutto oil," said Natsuki. "All I had to do was to make sure not to burn it while it was frying."

"Oh, is this fragrant flavor from kuttoes?"

"Oil extracted from kuttoes is said to be one of the relatively easy ones to obtain here in Laffan," said Diola. "One thing I can say for sure is that it's much easier to obtain than butter."

"It's still not cheap, though..."

Riva was the one who had muttered that last comment, but she seemed like someone who would hesitate to spend money on snacks, so kuttoes probably weren't actually that expensive. *Man, I really feel bad for her...*

"However, it takes skill to make ingredients taste delicious just by frying them," said Diola. "This was probably your first time using this ingredient, after all."

"Is this also the first time that you've had a dish made from barrash mushrooms, Diola-san?" Natsuki asked.

"Yes. Giant barrash mushrooms are completely different from normal ones. It's forbidden to cultivate barrash mushrooms in this area, and raw ones go bad quite quickly, after just a few days," said Diola. "I wanted to try some, but I was too busy dealing with the aftermath of the mushroom disaster. Natsuki-san, how did you preser—oh, right, the magic bags."

"Mm, I bought some barrash mushroom while it was still being sold on the market," said Natsuki. "It was quite expensive, though, so I didn't buy very much."

"Oh, yeah, it really was," said Riva. "I couldn't afford to buy any even though I worked hard to help resolve the incident..."

“The mushrooms are that expensive?”

I turned towards Natsuki when I asked that question, and she paused in thought for a bit, looking up in the air, before nodding in response. “Think of the barrash mushrooms as being similar to high-grade wagyu beef. I only bought some because we’re celebrating.”

It sounded like it was a price we could afford, but one that was still exorbitant given that it was for just one ingredient.

“I think it’s perfectly fine to splurge for an occasion like this. This might sound a bit imprudent, but barrash mushrooms are a delicacy that can only be eaten during the short period after a mushroom disaster has occurred, and such incidents only occur once in a few decades,” said Diola. “In a way, it’s like a luxury that you can only enjoy once in a lifetime.”

“Once in a lifetime? I guess that kind of makes sense,” I said.

Mushroom disasters were something that it would normally be better to prevent from happening in the first place, especially since our house was located here in Laffan. With that in mind, if the authorities succeeded in preventing such incidents, then we would never get another chance to eat giant barrash mushrooms. *Should I take my time and savor the taste of these mushrooms while I can?*

However, before I could follow up on the thought that had popped into my mind, one of the other people at the table had already finished his portion.

“Whew. This barrash mushroom sauté was delicious, but it wasn’t very filling,” said Touya. “I’d rather have something else as a main dish.”

Touya had the biggest appetite of any of us, and it seemed that Yuki had predicted his reaction, because she handed him another dish.

“Don’t worry, we prepared plenty of orc steak as well,” said Yuki.

“Hell yeah, now this is what I’m talking about!” Touya exclaimed. “A meal isn’t complete without meat!”

After Touya began eating, Yuki continued adding more pieces of meat to his plate. She also recommended some of the meat dishes to Riva. “Feel free to eat

as much as you want, Riva. We made a lot for tonight's party, but we're all light eaters."

"Sure, thank you," said Riva. "I'm more interested in the fish dishes, though..."

"You can eat as much of those as you want too," said Yuki. "I'll make more for you if there's not enough. After all, I'm your big sis!"

"O-Oh, I'm not capable of eating so mu—big sis...?"

Riva cocked her head in confusion when she heard Yuki's nonsense, and Haruka gave an exasperated sigh when she saw what was going on. "Yuki, don't try to force that idea of yours onto Riva. Look, she's really confused by what you just said."

"Ugh, my plan got busted! I tried my best to be nonchalant about it, and yet..."

There was nothing nonchalant about how you approached it, Yuki. In fact, your intentions were really obvious.

"Honestly, Yuki, I think you're a better fit for someone's *little* sister," I said.

"Oh, come on! I want to evolve into a reliable big sis character!" Yuki exclaimed.

"That probably isn't possible for you, Yuki," said Natsuki. "Especially not with your height. But there's nothing wrong with that, since you're cute as you are."

"I refuse to accept discrimination based on physical features!" Yuki exclaimed. "There's an age limit to how long cuteness can last for a girl!"

Yuki didn't seem happy about our comments, but her own words sounded like ones that could easily make her some enemies. In fact, Riva looked like she was somewhat hurt by Yuki's words, since she was cute and older than us, and the oldest "girl" here had a slightly scary smile on her face.

"Yuki-san, would you care to explain how your words might apply to me?" Diola asked.

That oldest "girl" placed one of her hands on Yuki's shoulder, and Yuki froze up. "O-Oh, I believe you have the wrong idea! You're more the *beautiful* type of

girl, so this isn't really relevant to you, ha ha..."

"Hee hee, if you say so. That's obvious flattery, but I'll accept it," said Diola.

Some spooky conversations like that happened at intervals throughout the dinner party, but it was peaceful for the most part. However, shortly after Riva got full and stopped eating, things took a weird turn.

"Aha ha ha! We're the owners of our own house now! Yay, yay! Aha ha ha!" Yuki exclaimed.

"...Yuki, are you drunk?" I asked.

Yuki looked like she was enjoying herself quite a lot—she was spinning around and laughing—but I was a bit spooked. She did seem like she'd be a giggly drunk, but I couldn't detect any trace of restraint in her.

"Me? Drunk? No way! How could I get drunk on this stuff? It tastes like juice! Aha ha!"

"I see. In any case, drink some water as well. Okay?"

"Aha ha! Water tastes delicious as well, yay!"

I poured some water into an empty cup and handed it over to Yuki, and she happily drank the whole thing. I had heard before that dehydration would result in a hangover, and one cup probably wasn't enough. Meanwhile, Haruka had suddenly appeared out of nowhere at my right side—she must have dragged her chair over next to mine. On top of that, she was clinging to me, so it was kind of hard for me to move my right arm.

"Haruka, it's hard for me to eat like this..."

"Really, now? In that case, I'll feed you. Here, open your mouth."

Haruka used a fork to stab a shrimp, still in its shell, and raised it to my mouth. I bit into the shrimp after I realized I had no choice in the matter, and Haruka smiled at me as I continued eating. She sounded more or less the same as usual, but I was fairly sure that she was at least somewhat drunk because she usually wouldn't do things like this in public. In fact, her long elf ears were flushed completely red.

"Are you okay, Natsuki?" I asked.

“Mm. However, I think this wine has high alcohol content despite being easy to drink.”

Natsuki was sitting directly across from me, and she swirled the wine in the cup in her hand as she replied to me. Her cheeks were slightly flushed and her eyes were a bit watery, but she probably wasn’t lying about being okay; she sounded just fine. After all, Natsuki probably had the highest alcohol tolerance of any of us, since she had skills like Poison Resistance and Robust. Touya was supposed to be resistant to the effects of alcohol as well, since he had a decently high level for his Robust skill, but he was lying on the floor with his belly up in the air and snoring. However, that was probably because he was totally stuffed rather than because of the alcohol.

As for why I was relatively sober, it was because I hadn’t drunk much of the wine. I had been battling some crabs one-on-one, so I wasn’t actually strong against alcohol. I probably didn’t have to worry about Riva, since she was sleeping in Yuki’s room. Diola-san looked the same as usual, although she had consumed a decent amount of wine herself, and seemed like she was having fun observing the rest of us.

“Diola-san, don’t tell me...”

“Oh, do you not remember? I did warn all of you earlier to take care with the amount that you drank.”

Diola-san was smiling, but I had a feeling that her intentions weren’t completely innocent, since she had chosen this kind of wine even knowing that we weren’t used to alcohol.

It seemed like Diola-san had picked up on my skepticism; she continued what she was saying while tilting her cup. “However, if I had to say something, then I’d say the Adventurers’ Guild is willing to turn a blind eye to a certain extent when it comes to useful and competent adventurers—as long as those adventurers aren’t criminals.”

Since Haruka was clinging to my arm, I could feel nervous tension steal over her body when she heard Diola-san’s words, and I carefully observed Diola-san’s face as I attempted to confirm her intentions.

“...What do you mean by that?” I asked.

“Oh, I’m not trying to imply anything. All I’m trying to say is that adventurers who make a positive contribution and bring in profit are important to the guild,” Diola replied. “The guild has no intention of prying into the private lives of such adventurers if they don’t want to reveal their circumstances. In addition, conversations at night over drinks are conversations that everyone forgets after a good night’s sleep.”

Diola-san didn’t seem bothered by the fact that I was feeling very cautious and wary. She continued to smile, then shook her head.

Chapter 1—How to Live Our Lives

Instead of going right back to work, we spent the day after our housewarming party getting our house set up. Natsuki was assigned to finish the curtains while Haruka, Yuki, and I were assigned to craft magic bags in the shape of cupboards so that we could use them to store freshly made food. The cupboards ended up being of great help to the girls; they wouldn't need to spend so much time preparing meals in the future. That didn't extend to Touya or me, since no one, myself included, had any desire to eat meals cooked by the two of us. Back on modern-day Earth, anyone could make do even if they were bad at cooking thanks to the existence of things like prepackaged food and condiments, like mentsuyu and barbecue sauce, that were good on anything, but that wasn't the case in this world.

As for Touya, since he couldn't contribute as much to the crafting work as the rest of us, he was assigned the task of cleaning up the unkempt yard as well as a little blacksmithing. His Blacksmithing skill wasn't yet advanced enough to make good weapons or armor for us, but it was still useful for other purposes. While he was practicing, he used a shack in the corner of our yard as his forge and made some pots and kettles for us.

The last thing we worked on was getting our bathroom ready to use. Haruka was in charge of making a magical device that could create hot water for the bath, Natsuki was in charge of sewing bath towels and mats, and Touya was in charge of making some floor grates, doing the best he could as an amateur. As for Yuki and me, we were assigned the task of preparing a bathtub.

“Now then, let's find Simon-san and place an—”

“I don't think we're expected to go to him, Yuki,” I said.

The two of us probably wouldn't have been assigned this task if all we had to do was place an order with Simon-san. In addition, there was a good chance that if we placed an order with Simon-san for a wooden container capable of holding a lot of water, he would just end up giving us something like a huge

barrel.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right, Nao. We probably have to make one with Earth magic, huh?”

“Most likely, yeah. There’s the option of placing an order with Tomi for a metal bathtub, but...”

If Tomi were working with white iron, which was resistant to rust, it would probably take him forever to complete a bathtub, so it wasn’t a realistic option.

“You’ve made some dice before with Earth Magic, right? Show me what you’ve got, Nao! I believe in you!” Yuki exclaimed.

“So you’re telling me to give it a shot? I mean, sure, I guess. First I’ll try making a bowl-sized scale model of a bathtub.”

My abilities with Earth Magic had developed quite a lot since I had tried making those dice. In fact, I had made both the shack that Touya was using as his forge and the furnace inside of it, so a bowl-sized bathtub shouldn’t be hard at all. I went along with Yuki’s flattery and managed to create a miniature bathtub in no time. However...

“Is it just me, or does this look a bit dirty?” Yuki asked.

“Come on, don’t call it dirty. I think it’s actually quite refined! You know, like Bizen ware,” I said. “In fact, I bet an appraiser would describe this as fine pottery.”

I was trying my best to justify the result of my magic, but the brown miniature bowl that I’d made from the nearby earth did have a rough surface. It also didn’t look especially clean, which wouldn’t be a problem if we were going to use it as something like a jar but wasn’t acceptable for a bathtub. It probably wouldn’t actually leak, but if someone had asked me whether I’d like to take a bath in it, even I would have hesitated to say yes.

“Hmm, nah, a bathtub like this would do all kinds of damage to my beautiful skin!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Your skin must be almost as hard as steel now, Yuki,” I said.

“Please! Let’s see if you can still say that after touching my soft cheeks! Come

on, do it!"

Yuki approached me while pointing to her cheeks, and I pushed her away. "Okay, okay! I get it, I'll polish the surface!" I held up the bowl again, but she still didn't look happy.

"No, this won't do! I want a high-quality bathtub—something that looks like white pottery! You know, like the bathtubs with legs that appear in Western movies!"

"Those are porcelain bathtubs, aren't they? Are you telling me to go gather porcelain and use that to make a bathtub, Yuki?"

"No, silly. Earth Magic has the spell Create Earth, so if you give it your best shot, I bet you can create something with the ideal composition."

Create Earth was a spell that would usually just create regular soil, but if Yuki was right about it being possible to adjust the mineral composition, then...

"...Quartz and sericite are similar to porcelain, right?" I asked.

"Yeah, and so is feldspar. However, I think the key thing to focus on is what those materials are composed of," said Yuki. "Quartz is made of silicon dioxide, right? What about sericite?"

"Are you seriously asking me that, Yuki? I think it's partially aluminum, but I don't really remember," I said.

This wasn't something to be proud of at all, but my grades at school back on Earth had been worse than any of the girls'. My knowledge of random trivia was okay, but Yuki probably knew much more than I did about things like chemical formulas.

"Aluminum is used in refractory bricks, right? Those are whitish, so maybe it could work for this."

"Haruka or Natsuki might know the answer," I said. "Also, do we actually need sericite? It's not like we're going to bake pottery, right?"

Even if we fortified and hardened stones and shaped them into a bathtub, the end result wouldn't be porcelain. Based on my first attempt at making a bathtub with Earth Magic, it seemed like it was possible thanks to the nature of

magic, but the most important consideration here was the vitreous surface.

“Hmm. Are you saying you could make a bathtub just out of quartz? That’d be a crystal bath, which actually sounds kinda nice!” Yuki exclaimed.

To me, that sounds like something that the nouveau riche would enjoy, but I guess whatever works, as long as you’re happy about it, Yuki.

Yuki smiled as she pumped herself up about that idea. “If I recall correctly, silica sand is what we need for silicon dioxide. All right, it’s time for my Create Earth to shine! *Create Earth!*”

The result of Yuki’s Create Earth was a small mountain of white sand appearing on the ground—barely enough to scoop up with two hands.

“Whoa, success?!”

It seemed like Yuki hadn’t really believed in herself; she looked quite surprised as she scooped up some of the sand and inspected it to see if it was actually silica sand. I scooped up some as well. I had no idea how to tell if it was actually silica sand—I had never seen any in person before—but it looked like it. *Wait, hold on. If this is silicon dioxide, then wouldn’t it be possible to create other metallic elements as well? Perhaps it’s possible as long as it’s something that can exist in stable form inside of the earth, such as iron oxide for iron or bauxite for aluminum. If that’s the case, then...*

I hesitantly asked Yuki about the idea that had popped into my mind. “Hey, Yuki, do you think you can make something like gold with the Create Earth spell?”

Yuki’s eyes went wide when she heard my question. “Uh, I’m not sure. Gold can be found inside of earth, so it technically should be possible, but if it were that easy to make gold, this would be like the alchemy that people dreamed of in the past, so...”

“Yeah, I figured. There’s no way it’d be that easy, ha ha!”

“Mm, Earth mages would all be rich if that were possible, ha ha!”

Yuki and I looked at each other and continued chuckling for a bit, then put on more serious expressions and nodded.

“However, it wouldn’t hurt to give it a try, right?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah, why not? It’s like how you can’t win the lottery without buying a ticket,” I said.

“Mm. All right, here goes! *Create Earth!*”

Even though it was just a gamble, Yuki sounded very motivated when she chanted the spell, but her face suddenly twitched and turned pale.

“Cancel, cancel! Th-This is really dangerous!” Yuki exclaimed

Yuki feebly shook her head and started to collapse to the ground, but I hastily caught her. “A-Are you okay, Yuki?!”

“Kinda, but I feel really exhausted,” Yuki replied. “Nao, lend me your lap...”

“Sure, I don’t mind. Oh, do you want me to take you back to your room?”

“Nah, I’ll be fine if I just rest for a bit. Whew.”

I let Yuki use my lap as a pillow and wiped the sweat from her brow—probably the result of a sudden large expenditure of mana. I knew all about that; I had also experienced how uncomfortable it was a couple of times in the past. Excess mana consumption wouldn’t cause a mage to faint or pass out, but that was only because the mage would become too weak to maintain their magic, so it was still quite painful. A mage would probably pass out if they managed to withstand the weakness and continue using magic, but that wasn’t normally possible for most mages.

“All right, I feel a bit better now. I guess it didn’t work out,” said Yuki. “I think the amount of mana consumed by the spell scales with the rarity of the elements produced.”

“Oh, so it’s like trying to extract some specific material from the earth created by the spell? With that in mind, if we take the rarity of gold into account, then...”

Yuki’s face had recovered a little color. She looked up at me with a bitter smile. “Mm, I would probably need thousands of times more mana than the amount that I used to create silica sand in order to create the same quantity of gold.”

Even if we'd dug up one ton of earth in this vicinity and then tried to extract gold from it, we probably wouldn't even have obtained an amount that was visible to the naked eye. If the same principle applied to the earth produced by the Create Earth spell, then we probably couldn't obtain any gold even if we used enough mana to create one ton of earth.

"I guess it was too good to be true," I said. "Oh well."

"Yeah, I bet someone's already tried this before, since magic is normal in this world," said Yuki.

On a side note, I learned at a later time that the amount of gold within the earth was about a few hundred millionths of the amount of silica sand. That being the case, if Yuki's theory was correct, then the amount of mana required to create gold would be a few hundred million times more than the amount required to create silica sand. If a mage wanted to earn money with Earth Magic, that amount of mana could be put to better use in construction work.

"Well, in any case, all that matters is that we can create silica sand with the Create Earth spell!" Yuki exclaimed. "Time to make som—"

I pushed Yuki's shoulders back down before she could get up. "You still feel exhausted, right? Feel free to lie down and rest for a bit. I'll try to make something with this silica sand while you're resting."

"Well, okay, I'll take you up on that offer."

I let one of my hands hover over the mountain of silica sand. "Hmm..."

"What's wrong?"

"It actually feels harder to make something with this silica sand than with regular earth."

I used more mana on my second attempt and made a bowl-shaped object out of the silica sand, but...

"Uh, this looks kind of white and cloudy," said Yuki.

"Maybe it's because I lack the necessary expertise," I said. "I can't really call this crystalline."

The bowl felt like glass to the touch, but its color was a milky white that was

only slightly translucent, so it wasn't anywhere close to the image of a crystal bowl I'd had in mind.

"Hmm, maybe it's because the silica sand that I made wasn't very pure," said Yuki. "Well, I think this is fine for the purpose of making a bathtub. Besides, a completely transparent bathtub would be kind of awkward, you know?"

"Yeah, I guess you're right about that," I said.

A transparent bathtub sounded like something they'd use in some kind of TV variety show, maybe filled with boiling water. From a practical standpoint, a bathtub that others couldn't see through was better, so this result was actually okay.

"Well, next up is to figure out how much silica sand we need for an actual bathtub," I said.

The silica sand that Yuki had created was almost all gone after I'd made the bowl. The bowl itself was normal in size, with a capacity of somewhat less than one and a half liters.

"Hmm. If we assume the bathtub will have a simple box shape, and the capacity of the bathtub needs to be a thousand times the capacity of this bowl, then I think the walls need to be a hundred times thicker," said Yuki.

"That sounds like the size of a large bath," I said. "However, that's only if the walls all have the same thickness, right?"

"Mm, that's another factor to consider," said Yuki. "I'd like the walls to be at least ten centimeters thick—or even double, just to be safe."

"Yeah, I agree. This bowl already seems pretty durable as is, though," I said.

When I flicked the bowl with my finger, a hard and clear sound vibrated through the air, but I had no idea about its actual durability. If we took into account all sorts of factors, such as our current level of expertise, the stability of the shape, and the durability of the silica sand when solidified through the use of magic, then it was probably a good idea to play it safe for the entire process.

"The bowl's about five millimeters thick, so the final bathtub should be at least two thousand times thicker," said Yuki. "However, if we want to be safe,

then four thousand times would be better.”

“Yeah, the bathtub could scale to an unbelieva-bowl size depending on the shape, ha ha!”

“That’s not a funny pun at all, Nao! Ugh, I can’t believe this...”

“You can’t believe how good my pun was?” I asked.

“No, that’s not it! Also, just so you know, I put a lot of effort in earlier when I made the silica sand!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Mm, I could tell how serious you were when you said it was time for your Create Earth to shine,” I said.

“Yeah, I did my best, but I can’t believe how far away our bathtub goal is if I have to perform the same feat a few thousand times!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki started to roar and groan like a tiger about the hard work ahead of us, so I tried to calm her down. “Relax, I’m sure the amount of silica sand that you can make through Create Earth will increase once you get used to it. I’ll help you out as well.”

“I’m counting on you, Nao,” said Yuki. “It still won’t be easy, though...”

We both looked at the small bowl and sighed in unison. We ended up spending the next few days creating silica sand while asking the others about considerations like size and shape in order to reach an agreement about the kind of bathtub that would satisfy everyone’s requests. The final plan that we came up with was for a much larger bathtub than we had initially planned, but over time, Yuki and I had become more efficient at our work, and we succeeded in creating a bathtub. Around the same time, Haruka also completed the magical device for creating hot bathwater, so we were all able to enjoy a proper bath for the first time in several months.

“Hey, everyone, gather around for a bit,” said Haruka. “I want to discuss our plans for the near future.”

On the day after our bathtub had been completed, Haruka gathered all of us for a meeting.

“Oh, is it time to get back to work?” I asked. “We’re more or less done with

setting up our house for now, and we've taken a lot of days off."

"I'm down for work again," said Touya. "I didn't slack off on training, but I've been feeling a bit out of shape recently."

Touya had a smile on his face and seemed quite motivated to get back to work. We still had a decent amount of savings left, but I felt somewhat uneasy about not working, since we didn't have anyone that would take care of us in this world if something happened to us.

"That's part of what I want to talk about as well, yeah," said Haruka. "Let's drink some of the tea that Natsuki made for us while we chat together."

"Here's some tea, Nao-kun," said Natsuki.

"Oh, thanks. Whew, this tastes good."

Natsuki handed a cup of tea towards me, so I took it from her and had a sip from the cup. The hot and slightly bitter tea flushed down my throat and warmed up my stomach. It had become a bit cold recently, so warm tea like this wa—

"...Hm? Tea? Wait, tea?!"

"Of course this is tea," said Touya. "What's wrong, Nao?"

Touya had his eyes slightly closed as he slurped and enjoyed the delicious tea, and I pointed my cup at him as I turned around towards Natsuki. "I mean, like, this is green tea, right?! Where did you find this? Was it sold at a store?"

The tea was green and had an astringent taste to it along with a slightly sweet taste, so it was definitely green tea. Tea itself was available at Aera-san's café, but the teas served there were moussek tea and some drink that seemed to be some kind of tea that I had no idea what the ingredients for it were. Those teas tasted good as well, but they tasted completely different from green tea.

"This green tea is homemade," said Natsuki. "I found some things in the forest that seemed similar to the *Camellia sinensis* plant, so I tried making some green tea with their leaves. It's a bit out of season, but this tea does taste decent."

"Homemade, huh? Honestly, I think this tastes quite good, but is this safe to drink?" I asked. "What if those plants only looked similar and were actually

poisonous?"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that."

Natsuki smiled at me in a gentle way that made me feel at ease, so I sighed out of relief. "Yeah, I should've figured that you wouldn't let this kind of problem slip—"

"After all, I have the Poison Resistance skill."

"Cough, cough! Natsuki?!"

I choked on my tea out of surprise when I heard Natsuki's words, but Haruka and Yuki both laughed at me.

"Relax, Nao. We asked around for information from people like Diola-san, Riva, and Aera-san, so it's safe," said Yuki. "Nobody actually knew the actual name of the plant, but it doesn't seem like it's something that's known as a poisonous one."

"Yeah, our General Knowledge skill didn't provide any knowledge about the plant either," said Haruka. "I'm sure our skill would've told us about it if it was a dangerous plant like Japanese andromeda or lacquer trees, so you can rest at ease."

"Natsuki..."

I sighed as I turned around and looked at Natsuki, but she stuck her tongue out and told me that it was just a joke. *Oh well, I'll accept that cuteness as an apology. The green tea tastes good as well, so I have no real reason to complain!*

"There are a few different types of tea that are sold here in Laffan, but there weren't any that were made from *Camellia sinensis* plants," said Natsuki.

"Oh, does that also include things like herbal tea?" I asked.

"They were mostly things like persimmon leaf tea, loquat tea, and *Houttuynia cordata* tea," Natsuki replied.

"Whoa. I guess they kind of count as types of herbal tea, but they sound more like healthy kinds of tea instead of luxurious ones," I said.

What I had in mind for herbal tea was teas that had a strong scent and a light taste to them. Back on Earth, Haruka had served all of us some herbal tea and had told us that it was good quality tea. She hadn't been wrong about the quality part since the packaging, looks, and scent of the tea were good, but the tea had tasted more or less the same as hot water. At the time, she had tried to play it smooth by praising the tea as having a good scent, but she never bought some luxurious herbal tea ever again, so she probably also thought that the tea didn't taste good.

"Moussek tea tastes good and all, but I wanted something more familiar like green tea," said Natsuki. "However, I'm not completely satisfied with the quality of this."

"Really? I think this tea that you made tastes good enough that you could get money for this," I said. "Wait, hold on, could this be a good extra source of income?"

Green tea wasn't the only kind of tea that could be made from *Camellia sinensis* plants. Other teas included different varieties of the plant that could be fermented for black tea or semi-fermented for oolong tea, but they were all made from the same *Camellia sinensis*.

"Oh yeah, there were times in the past when the value of tea was the same as its weight in gold, right? With that in mind, is it possible for us to get rich off tea?" Touya asked.

Touya grinned as he imagined the idea of us getting rich from tea, but Natsuki responded to him with a bitter smile. "Well, it might be possible if we succeed at branding our tea as something valuable, but I think it would be quite difficult. Unlike things like alcohol, there's no distinct tea that tastes good to everyone, and if we're competing under the category of the tea market, then I'm not sure if people would be willing to pay a lot of money to drink a new type of tea."

Natsuki's response was a realistic one, but it seemed like Touya wasn't ready to give up. "Oh, what if we somehow establish a connection with a king and present some green tea as a gift to him? If he enjoys the tea, then we can sell the tea as something approved by royalty, right?"

"Eh, I don't think we'd need to work for extra income if we actually had

connections with royalty,” said Yuki. “Besides, I don’t think that’s a realistic possibility for us.”

“No good, huh? What if we just go ahead and advertise our tea as royalty appro—”

“That’s an easy one-way ticket to the gallows, Touya!” Yuki exclaimed. “Well, Touya, we’ll see you off when it’s time, so take care on the other side.”

“What do you mean by the other side?!”

“Oh, sorry, Touya, I don’t think I’ll be around to see you off,” I said. “The sight of you getting hanged would be a bit too much for me.”

“Look, I was just speaking hypothetically! I’m not actually going to do it!”

“Touya-kun, make sure you provide testimony about how you had nothing to do with us if you get asked about this,” said Natsuki. “We’re strangers, okay?”

“Everybody abandoned me without hesitation?! Was our friendship that fragile?! Noooo!”

Touya covered his face with both of his hands as he looked up at the ceiling while pretending to cry, and the rest of us all laughed in unison.

“Hee hee. Okay, that’s enough joking around for now,” said Haruka. “Let’s get back to the main topic.”

“Right, we were talking about resuming work again,” said Touya. “I’m ready whenever!”

Touya had stopped his fake crying right away, and Haruka nodded ambiguously in response. “That’s part of what we’ll be talking about. We managed to obtain a fine house like this thanks to our combined efforts, and while it’s not as good as how things were back on Earth, we also managed to obtain decently comfortable lives here in this different world. With all of that in mind, I think it’s a good idea to take some time to discuss together about what to do from now on.”

“Oh, yeah, our lives are pretty comfortable now since we have a bath, clean beds that we can sleep in, and delicious food that we can eat,” I said.

Our first day in this different world had been awful, since we lacked enough

money for lodging fees on the next day. On top of that, we were always worried about how we would be doomed if any of us suffered serious injuries or became sick. However, those worries were a thing of the past by now. Lodging wasn't an issue anymore since we had our own house, and we could sleep in peace at night. We also didn't have to purchase dirty secondhand clothes anymore. All of these were huge differences from before, so we had sort of managed to finish something like a story arc in our lives.

"Don't forget that it's thanks to the hard work of us girls that we can eat delicious meals!" Yuki exclaimed. "You better thank us for this!"

"Yeah, I really appreciate it. Thank you very much, Yuki," I said.

"Y-You'll make me feel embarrassed if you directly say thanks to me like that! Don't do this, Nao!"

Yuki had told me to thank her, so I'd obeyed her request, but she blushed in response as she scolded me. *I don't get it. What was I supposed to do?*

"Yuki, you shouldn't have said that if you were going to get embarrassed by it," said Haruka. "In any case, we don't need to go out of our way to take risks if we only want to maintain our current comfortable lives, since we can earn money from simple kinds of work."

"Oh, right, we're capable of earning decent amounts of money from work that's relatively safe for us now," I said.

Under ordinary circumstances, tusk boars were a good source of income for us. Dindels would suffice for money during autumn, and we could hunt orcs from time to time as well. All of those were things that were relatively safe and easy for us, and our current weapons and armor were more than enough for our work. If we didn't have to spend a large amount of money on upgrading our weapons and armor, then all of that unspent money would go to our savings as well.

"Yep. We have freedom of choice to a certain extent now," said Haruka. "In fact, we could take on less adventurer work and become tea farmers for the most part if we really wanted to."

"Eh, I don't think the tea farmer life would be enjoyable, but you're right that

we have a lot of choices ahead of us,” I said.

I sort of wanted to continue our lives as adventurers, but that would mean making the girls tag along with me for potentially risky work for new things. With that in mind, I couldn’t just voice my opinion out loud right away, so I wasn’t sure what to do.

On the other hand, Touya seemed like he had an idea that he was willing to bring up. “Can I start by mentioning what I want to do? I’d like to aim for as high as we can for adventurer ranks. It’s fun to get stronger, and I also want to save up more money. My goal is to eventually find and get a cute wife with animal ears, after all!”

“Oh, yeah, I guess becoming a high-rank adventurer is one way to make yourself attractive as a marriage partner,” said Yuki. “Your goal hasn’t changed at all, huh?”

Touya grinned as he replied to Yuki. “Yep! I’m someone that keeps his word, but try not to fall for a cool dude like me!”

Yuki smirked when she heard Touya’s words. “Of course I won’t. There’s no way I’d fall for someone obsessed with animal ears, since that’s a bleak dead end.”

“How rude! Besides, what do you mean by bleak?! I have this colorful and fluffy tail right here!” Touya exclaimed.

Touya wagged his tail around to show off, but that wasn’t relevant to the topic at hand. However, I couldn’t deny that I had an itch to touch his tail.

“Well, Touya’s right about one thing, and it’s the fact that high adventurer ranks are important, since it’s hard for people like us to obtain a steady job,” said Haruka.

“On top of that, it’s possible to get married even if there’s no love in the relationship as long as you have money,” said Natsuki.

“So you’re going to purchase a wife with money, Touya? I guess you definitely need to earn a lot for that purpose,” I said.

“No, that’s not it! I want to fall in love with a girl that has animal ears and

nurture a relationship together through marriage!"

We all brought up realistic points, but it seemed like Touya wasn't happy with our words. However, all we had in response to his complaints were looks of pity.

"Please face reality, Touya-kun," said Natsuki. "It's a fact that you can't nurture a relationship without money in this different world."

Natsuki smiled as she tapped Touya on his shoulder, and he covered his head with his hands before he started to howl. "Ugh, this really is a harsh world to live in! Like, I understand that, but still! Oh, by the way, what do the rest of you think about this?"

Touya stared at us as he asked for our opinion, and Yuki was the first one that answered him after she paused in thought for a bit while folding her arms. "Well, I think I mentioned this before, but there's a high chance that some of our other classmates had used the Plunder skill on me and Natsuki, so it's kind of difficult for us to get married to a normal person due to the potential difference in life span. With that in mind, if I were to get married, then it'd have to be someone who understands this, but..."

Yuki paused and glanced at me for a second before she slammed the table in front of her. "Honestly speaking, I'm perfectly fine with how things are at the moment! I don't want to potentially go back to a poorer living standard due to marriage! To be more specific, I don't want to ever eat rye bread again or live a life without a bath and the Purification spell!"

"Oh, right, those are some really good points!" Touya exclaimed. "Do I have to continue living here right after getting married? That doesn't sound very good..."

Touya had started to fantasize about his future even though it wasn't realistic for him as of now, but that wasn't important. Yuki's situation was quite dire since she couldn't use the Purification spell herself, unlike Natsuki.

"Well, in any case, I also want to continue our adventurer lives for now," said Yuki. "I think it's too early at our age to decide that we're at our limits and can't climb higher. However, I can't exactly say that I'm willing to put my life on the line for this."

"I agree with Yuki as well. Safety is important, but I believe that a goal in life is also necessary," said Natsuki. "With that in mind, I think something like Touya-kun's desire to obtain a cute wife with animal ears can work as a goal, but..."

Nah, there's no need to follow Touya's example, Natsuki. If you suddenly said something like wanting to find a cool husband, then I'd suspect that you're either joking or suffering from some kind of mental illness.

"The main thing to keep in mind is what we want to do in life," said Haruka. "One such thing could be like becoming someone important and significant at a profession in life, such as our current one as adventurers. We've only just started our lives, so the road ahead of us is quite long."

What I want to do in life, huh? I had dreamed about wanting to become something in the future just like any other kid, but I had never really thought about exactly what I wanted to become or do. I had vaguely thought that I would just go to a university, graduate, and eventually end up finding some kind of job. However, employment in itself was actually the beginning of life as an adult rather than being an end goal. Natsuki probably hadn't imagined back on Earth that she was going to become an adventurer in the future, but it sounded like her stance on this was to do her best at it since she had become one. On the other hand, I had gone with the flow for the most part, so I didn't have a strong opinion in either direction of continuing our lives as adventurers or not.

"We should make sure we have enough savings to quit whenever we want or need to, however," said Natsuki. "I'd like to avoid having to delay quitting our lives as adventurers when we're older because of a situation like being worried about not having enough savings for after retirement."

"So you're also in favor of continuing our lives as adventurers, Natsuki?" Haruka sounded slightly amazed as she chuckled in response. "You sure are a serious person. I don't think it would hurt to be a bit more carefree."

Natsuki smiled in a mischievous way after Haruka had chuckled at her. "Well, I think that living a peaceful life here in this house together with Nao-kun would be quite nice as well."

"Huh, me?"

I looked at Natsuki out of surprise when she suddenly brought up my name,

and she smiled at me in response. “Mm. If we continue our current lives as adventurers, then you won’t get many chances to meet other girls around your age, right? How many have you actually met so far over the last few months?”

“Um...”

I had barely seen any other girls so far during my time in this different world. There weren’t any young and beautiful guild receptionists at the Adventurers’ Guild, and I hadn’t seen any other cute female adventurers either. The people that sold stuff at places like stores, bazaars, and stalls were all middle-aged men and women, and cute waitresses at dining places were nothing but a dream that didn’t exist in reality.

“Oh, Aera-san and Riva count, right?” I asked.

Natsuki silently gasped for a brief moment as if she had forgotten about those two, but she hastily shook her head in response right afterward. “Well, I’m fairly sure that Aera-san is much older than you, since she had saved up a lot of money over time to start her café. Riva’s a beastwoman, so I don’t think she’d be a good fit for an elf like you, Nao.”

“Oh, I guess that makes sense,” I said.

On average, apprenticeship was something that wouldn’t provide that much income for the apprentice. However, Aera-san had saved up enough money to purchase a store and pay for things such as renovations, expensive magical devices, and she even had enough money left for a self-proclaimed consultant to rob off her. With that in mind, she probably had spent a lot of years as an apprentice to save up all of that money. Riva was only slightly older than me, but she was technically of a different race than I was. That in itself wasn’t something that bothered me, but it was probably different from Riva’s perspective.

“...Um, just to be clear, it’s not like I want to get married to either of them or anything, so...”

I wasn’t responding to anyone in particular, but Natsuki nodded when she heard my words. “Right? See, you don’t have any other choices. Or what, do you have any complaints about living together with me, Nao-kun?”

"Well, no, but..."

Natsuki had probably meant marriage by living together, and I had heard stories back on Earth about how cultural differences could be an issue for marriages with a foreigner. I was in a different world right now as well, so other hurdles most likely existed on top of that. *Is Natsuki actually the ideal marriage partner for me, since I know her well and because she shares the same Japanese cultural values as I do...?*

Natsuki got closer to me and started to whisper in my ear. "We're already living together in a new house, so technically speaking, we're already marr—"

"Hold on!" Haruka forced herself between me and Natsuki in order to block her off. "Don't ignore me and Yuki!"

"...Huh?"

Haruka, Yuki's looking very confused by what you just said, you know?

"Don't worry, Haruka. There aren't many young girls out there, but there are plenty of young guys at the Adventurers' Guild," said Natsuki. "I'm sure you and Yuki can easily find a partner from there."

"I r-e-f-u-s-e! Other adventurers aren't even worth considering!" Haruka exclaimed.

"Yeah, they're completely out of the question!" Yuki exclaimed. "In fact, why don't you go choose anyone you want at the guild, Natsuki?"

"I'll pass on that idea," Natsuki replied. "I don't think any of the other adventurers there would be a good fit for me."

"Then don't try to suggest those other adventurers as a partner for me!" Yuki exclaimed.

It seemed like even Yuki wasn't willing to consider other adventurers as a partner in life, and the girls forgot about me as they started to argue with each other. *They sure are energetic...*

My mind was near a blank state as I gazed at what was happening in front of me, and Touya came over to tap me on my shoulder. I turned around to look at him, and he was grinning at me.

"You sure are popular, eh, Nao?"

"Nah, I think it's just due to the process of elimination, Touya. The girls don't really have other choices."

Most adventurers were very dirty, and this especially applied to low-rank adventurers such as the ones that were here in Laffan. For example, their hair and beards were uncut and unkempt. They would bathe themselves with water since it would cause issues for work if they smelled really bad, but that wasn't enough to be clean, so the girls were probably disgusted by such adventurers and didn't want to get anywhere near them. Part of it wasn't completely the fault of those adventurers, since they had no money and weren't able to use the Purification spell. However, I would feel quite depressed if I ever got compared to those adventurers and was considered as the worse option even though I wasn't an overconfident person by any means.

"Besides, I'm sure they're not serious about this," I said. "We're not even twenty years old yet, you know?"

While I was chatting with Touya, I heard some things from the direction the girls were in such as "First come, first served," along with words like "This isn't Japan" and "Long life span," so I was slightly disturbed by what the girls were talking about.

"I'm not so sure about that, Nao." Touya chuckled for a moment before he turned around and started talking to the girls. "Hey, if you're all going to talk about things like that, then do it and come to a decision when Nao's not around! We were discussing whether or not to continue our adventurer lives, right? Nao, Haruka, what do you two think? Neither of you has said anything about this yet."

Uh, you know, it'd be kind of weird for me if the girls decided things behind my back, but I guess you make a good point, Touya.

It seemed like Touya's words had calmed the girls since they stopped their secret chat with each other right away, and Haruka turned around to respond to Touya. "Hm? Nao, you want to continue being an adventurer, right? I'll tag along as well, of course. Well, if we put aside Yuki and Natsuki's circumstances, then Nao and I would normally live the longest lives, so money is needed to live

happily together in old age.”

Yuki stared at Haruka with a look of disbelief. “Wait, what?! Haruka?!”

Natsuki gave me a look that seemed like it had some hidden implications behind it. “Is that so, Nao-kun?”

“Huh? W-Well, yeah, I also want to become a higher-rank adventurer,” I replied.

“Hmm, if you say so, Nao-kun. In that case, the first thing we need to do is report to the guild about how we had exterminated the orc nest,” said Natsuki. “Diola-san didn’t question us about this, but I’m fairly sure she has a clue about it.”

“Yeah, it’s not that hard to guess since we had turned in a lot of orcs on a constant basis,” said Touya.

“Mm, she hinted about the fact she had an idea back during our housewarming party,” said Haruka.

“Right. Wait, you actually remember what she said, Haruka?” I asked. “Weren’t you drunk at the time?”

Touya had been completely asleep back then, and I was fairly sure that Natsuki and I were the only ones from our party there that were sober, so I questioned Haruka about this, but she looked up at me and gave me a glare. “Nao, you should never bring up things like this, even if you notice. Understood?”

“U-Uh, yeah. Sorry, I guess...?”

I wasn’t sure about the reason for this, but it seemed like my words had made Haruka angry.

“He he. Now, then, let’s go to the orc nest once again to take a look,” said Natsuki. “Quite some time has passed since we exterminated the orcs there, so it would be an issue for us if other orcs have taken up residence at the nest.”

“Yeah, it’s possible that our efforts for the hunt quest might be considered a failure if that happened,” said Touya.

We had exterminated the orc nest at the time, but that nest was one that had

been made by some orcs that lurked around parts of the forest that weren't very deep inside. According to the materials at the reference room of the Adventurers' Guild, it seemed like a lot more orcs inhabited the deeper areas of the forest. In addition, the purpose of the hunt quest itself was to eliminate the orcs that would wander out onto highways. It wasn't a quest that required adventurers to completely exterminate all of the orcs in the forest, and that in itself wasn't exactly something that was possible either. With that in mind, orcs as a source of income for us would never disappear.

"Too many orcs wandering out from deeper within the forest could be an issue, but I guess it works out for delivering ingredients to Aera-san's café," I said.

Luckily for Aera-san, it seemed like her café had become quite popular, so it probably wouldn't cause an issue for a business even if we stopped supplying her with orc meat. However, I wanted to do as much as I could to help her out. After all, she was a cute elf, and we were indebted to her because she had shared her inspiel sauce with us, and things like the tonkatsu pork cutlets weren't complete without that sauce. The inspiel sauce could also be used for all sorts of other purposes, so it was an extremely valuable sauce that could become even better depending on the ingredients that were used for it.

"Well, we can always go deeper within the forest to hunt orcs if we need to stock up on more orc meat. Oh, also, it's probably a good idea to discuss how to split monetary rewards if we're going to continue being adventurers," said Haruka. "I think we should set aside half of what we earn from adventurer work as a pool of money for shared expenses and split the other half among the five of us. What do you all think about this?"

Up until now, we had followed a policy of pooling everyone's money together for efficient use as a party in order to avoid wasting money so that we could stabilize our daily lives, but that objective had been accomplished since we had obtained our own house and had a steady flow of income. According to Haruka, she had thought it was a good opportunity for everyone to manage their own money from now on.

"I don't mind, but what falls under shared expenses?" Yuki asked.

“Everything that’s required for our adventurer lives, including weapons and armor, food expenses, maintenance expenses for our house, and furniture expenses for shared areas of our house,” said Haruka. “I think that’s about it. Things like clothes and furniture for our own rooms should be paid for with our own personal money.”

“Um, can we include the clothes that we make by ourselves as part of the shared expenses?” Natsuki asked. “It’d be quite annoying to sort out who bought what for the cloth materials. On top of that, it would be kind of weird now to make Nao-kun and Touya-kun purchase their own secondha—”

“Oh, please, no, I don’t want to do that!” Touya exclaimed. “I’d like to wear the clothes that you girls can make! I’ll pay for my part, please!”

I nodded in agreement with Touya. “Mm, the clothes that you girls make feel way more comfortable than the secondhand clothes that we bought before.”

It was possible to find and purchase new underwear, but their quality wasn’t very good, and most of our usual clothes had been secondhand ones. It would be a better use of money to pay the girls for clothes made by them instead of placing an order for new clothes at a store.

“I’m down for this idea as well,” said Yuki. “It’s actually kind of fun to sew clothes, and there aren’t many things that we can do for fun in this world.”

“Mm. In that case, the clothes that we make will be paid for from shared expenses, and the ones that we buy ourselves will be paid from our own money,” said Haruka.

Hmm. I guess that means I’ll only be spending my own money on furniture for my room, so it should be fine, though I’d probably have to save up money for future purposes. In this different world, money was needed for things such as marriage. This could come from anything like a stable job, owning farmland, or having a high social position, but the most important factor was the ability to make a living. It was a fact that romantic feelings were a much lower priority for ordinary citizens in this different world than they had been for people back on modern-day Earth. On the other hand, it also meant that anyone could get married, even if they were old or didn’t have confidence in their own looks, as long as they had money.

It seemed like it was fairly normal in this world for people to get married to younger people by taking on their debt. Such a scenario sounded like a cliché tragic situation in a story from my common sense of things, but that didn't seem to be the case based on the common sense of this world. In fact, it seemed like most people here would actually be happy to get married to someone in order to get rid of their own debt, as long as their partner wasn't too weird, dangerous, or creepy. The reason for this was because debt in this world wasn't something that could be cleared merely by declaring personal bankruptcy. People that defaulted on their debt would be sent to a brothel regardless of whether they were guys or girls as long as they were young, and those that had large amounts of debt or were old would be sent to some dangerous brothels. However, if those people in debt couldn't even make a living from working at a brothel, then they would be forced to do manual labor at dangerous places that had a high mortality rate.

With all of that in mind, it seemed like most people in this different world would prefer getting married to someone with money, even if their partner wasn't their preferred age or didn't look good, since they could still lead normal lives this way compared to the fate that awaited them if they defaulted on their debt. On a sidenote, adventurers that were lucky enough to get married thanks to money were in the minority. Most adventurers weren't able to get married and would die of old age or die even before they could reach old age. A relaxing and luxurious life in retirement at old age didn't exist for adventurers due to the tough nature of their work. As a result, saving up money was a necessity in order to avoid the common fate of most adventurers. However, Touya looked quite happy and started to mutter things about how he was happy that we weren't on an allowance system anymore and was pondering to himself about what to spend his money on.

Haruka sighed exasperatedly when she saw Touya's actions. "Touya, just so you know, you should put money into savings for old age, okay? Don't slack off on this."

"Hm? Oh, come on, do we really need to worry about our lives in old age when we're not even twenty years old yet?" Touya asked.

"Even back in Japan, you're forced to save money; it's just in the form of

things like payroll deductions and taxes for pensions and insurance fees,” said Haruka. “We have to look out for ourselves in this different world since none of that exists here, so you’ll die if you don’t take these things seriously.”

Touya sounded a bit unhappy that Haruka had ruined his good mood, but she had merely pointed out the reality in this world. Health insurance premiums back in Japan weren’t cheap at all, but they weren’t as ridiculous as medical bills in the United States of America. My parents had always complained about the health insurance premiums being expensive when they were healthy, but they would always mention that those premiums had helped them out whenever they became seriously ill, since the health insurance would cover the majority of the cost for medical bills.

The pension system was something that was commonly criticized by people as well, but it was more than worth the deductions that you had to pay for it, and it seemed like it was a good bargain considering the fact that you would be provided with money when you couldn’t work anymore due to an injury or illness. However, as Haruka had mentioned, none of that existed in this different world, so we had no choice but to look out for ourselves as part of self-responsibility. Exemptions for expensive medical bills didn’t exist, and nobody would provide us with pension money even after we couldn’t work anymore. With all of that in mind, we would suffer in old age if we didn’t save up money while we were still young.

“Well, you don’t need to save up money if you intend on dropping out of life before you reach old age, but that’s not the case, right?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, I have no intention of dying early!” Touya exclaimed. “Fine, fine, I get it! I won’t waste money!”

Touya looked slightly annoyed after Haruka had lectured him about this, and he muttered some words that sounded like “Are you my mom or something?” in a low voice.

Haruka sighed again after she heard those words before she brought up something else to motivate him. “You’re planning on getting married to a cute girl with animal ears, right, Touya? Do you plan on saving up no money for her?”

“Oh, right, I need to provide a good life for my wife! Okay, I’m going to become an expert at saving money!”

Touya suddenly became quite happy again as he grinned while fantasizing about his married life, even though he had no chances of accomplishing that as of now, and the girls all gave him exasperated looks. This was a perfectly okay method of motivating him if it was enough to make Touya actually save up money for life at old age, but...

“You really sound like his mom, eh?” said Yuki.

“Please don’t bring it up,” said Haruka. “I feel kind of sad about this...”

Yuki was joking around with Haruka, but Haruka seemed quite exhausted as she sighed again, and the look that she had on her face left quite a strong impression on me for some reason.



A lot of time had passed since we had last entered the east forest, and there were signs everywhere that winter was approaching. The ground was covered with fallen leaves, and a lot of trees had turned red to match. The changed scenery made it a bit hard to navigate our way through, but we somehow managed to trace our previous path deeper into the forest. We eventually arrived at the orc nest that we had exterminated, and it didn’t look that much different from before. The nest seemed like it hadn’t been damaged by other animals, and this was probably thanks to the fact that we had burned everything after slaying all of the orcs in the nest at the time. However, there was technically one major difference, and it was the fact that grass had begun to sprout from the ground. It had probably rained here a few times since our last visit to this nest, and there were patches of green everywhere that had spread all over the hard ground.

“No orcs, huh? That’s a shame,” said Natsuki. “It looks like we can’t secure some new meat.”

It seemed like Natsuki had a favorable impression of orc meat due to the fact that a good source of fat could be obtained at the same time along with the meat, and it made sense to me since vegetable oil that was sold on the market in Laffan was more expensive than other cooking ingredients. Or rather,

considering how much time was required to make them, cooking oils that had been sold back on Earth were actually very cheap. With that in mind, it was only natural that vegetable oils in this world were expensive, since people would have to cultivate small seeds like rapeseeds and take the time to gather them in order to extract their oil. However, I really enjoyed eating things like tempura, so I wanted to obtain as much vegetable oil as possible.

“It’s good that nothing happened here, but what now? Should we head back right away?” I asked.

“I feel like it would be a waste to head back without obtaining anything when we took the time to get here,” said Natsuki.

“What can we obtain, though? Most fruits should almost be out of season by now,” said Touya. “Oh, what about something like firewood?”

“Firewood? I guess we do need some since we’re not living at an inn anymore,” I said.

We hadn’t needed to worry about such things up until now since we had been living at an inn, but things such as gas, electricity, and fuel oil weren’t obtainable in this world. Firewood was the main source of fuel for ordinary citizens, though some people with enough spare money could afford to use charcoal instead. There was a much more expensive option of using a magical device to burn magicites as fuel, but that wasn’t realistic for us since we were ordinary citizens. Heating would be required once the weather became much colder, so it wouldn’t hurt for us to stock up on as much firewood as possible. The only problem with firewood was that we would have to dry it after we brought some back before we could actually use it, but we also had the backup option of just relying on the Warmth spell, so enduring cold weather probably wouldn’t be an issue for us.

“I’d like to change the stove in our kitchen to a magical device as soon as possible,” said Haruka. “The one we have right now is a bit hard to use, after all.”

“If you mean something like the one at Aera-san’s café, then I completely agree,” said Natsuki. “We’ll definitely need one for the sake of cooking delicious food.”

"That sounds good to me," said Touya. "What should we do about heating devices?"

"I think magical devices should work for that as well," said Haruka. "It's not like we're lacking in mana, so yeah."

"Mm, we won't need to use any actual fuel if Haruka and I just use our mana for a magical device to heat our house," I said.

Magical devices were powered by mana, but there were two methods of supplying that mana. One method was by using magicites, and the other method was by pouring the user's mana into the magical device. Most people in this world possessed mana, so they were capable of using magical devices even if they weren't capable of using magic, but the only problem was the amount of mana that magical devices would consume. It would be difficult for the average person to power a magical device for heating all day, so that was why there was demand for magicites as a source of fuel for those devices, but this wouldn't be an issue for us.

"I kinda want to make use of the fireplace since we have one, though," said Yuki. "Flames feel quite warm, after all."

"I mean, yeah, I feel the same way, but what about our individual rooms?" Haruka asked.

According to Haruka, setting up a fireplace was only realistic for rooms like the dining room, living room, and parlor, and she brought up various reasons for this, such as the cost of firewood, the cost of actually building a fireplace, and the amount of time it would take to clean them.

After I heard Haruka's words, I paused in thought for a bit before I replied to her. "Can't we just spend our days in winter inside of the dining room or the living room? There's also the Warmth spell if needed, depending on how cold it gets."

We probably wouldn't spend that much time in our own rooms aside from our days off work, and the use of the Warmth spell in each of our rooms would probably suffice for keeping our rooms warm during our sleep.

"Now that you mention it, maybe we don't actually need to go out of our way

to obtain magical devices for heating purposes,” said Haruka.

“Mm. Natsuki and Touya are the only ones among us that can’t use the Warmth spell, but I can use the Warmth spell for her room whenever she asks me for it, and Touya has his own fur to protect himself from the cold,” said Yuki.

“No, I don’t have that much fur!” Touya exclaimed. “The only places I have fur are my ears and my tail!”

“Oh, really? I didn’t know about this since I haven’t seen exactly how much fur you have,” said Yuki.

Yuki chuckled as she joked around, but there was no way that she didn’t actually know because Touya had no qualms about wearing nothing for his upper body out in the open, such as during training sessions.

“Honestly speaking, I was gonna try to file a complaint with that ‘evil’ god if I had a higher percentage of beast traits as a beastman,” said Touya. “I’d be willing to put my soul on the line for this!”

“Whoa. I’m pretty sure complaints for something like this would be a nuisance for that ‘evil’ god!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki was right about this, but I was actually on Touya’s side deep down since people like Riva looked really cute, so I was perfectly fine with things as is.

“Well, in any case, I’m actually thankful since the current balance of humanoid and beast traits is good,” said Touya. “Okay, let’s get back to the topic at hand. We’ll need to venture deeper into this forest if we want to advance our ranks as adventurers, right?”

“Mm. This forest is divided into three sections, with the deepest area being the foot of the mountains that we can see afar from here,” said Natsuki. “The area we’re in right now is near the end of the first section, and it seems like the guild classifies the first section as a buffer zone, so the guild issues hunt quests if a group of orcs starts to appear in this section of the forest.”

It seemed like this area of the forest wasn’t as deep as we had initially thought it was. According to Natsuki, the guild treated this first section of the forest as the area where the average adventurer would perform adventurer work, and it seemed like the guild left the second and third sections untouched

since those sections didn't have any direct effect on the safety of highways or the town.

"Does that mean there's no information about what's inside the second and third sections of the forest?" I asked.

"No, not exactly. Do you remember the information about how there's a severe lack of supply for the precious wood that's necessary for Laffan's furniture industry? That precious wood grows and can be found in the second and third sections of this forest," said Natsuki. "The local official in charge of Laffan considers this a serious issue, so it seems like investigations on the second and third sections of the forest have been conducted before."

According to Natsuki, some gathering quests for precious wood had been issued at the guild, but the reward for those quests wasn't enough to justify how dangerous those quests were. On top of that, adventurers foolish or desperate enough to take on those quests would most likely die during their attempt, so the guild would also warn adventurers away from those quests. As a result, it seemed like the most that the guild had done so far was research about the monsters that inhabited the deeper areas of the forest.

"Based on what was written in the reference materials, it seems like the monsters that inhabit the second and third section of the forest are scalp apes, bind vipers, and ogres," said Natsuki.

"Scalp ape? That sounds like a weird name for a monster," I said.

"Um, it seems like this monster was named as such because of what it was holding in its hands when someone had first discovered it," said Natsuki.

"Yikes..."

It sounded like what Natsuki meant by the thing in the hands of the monster was the scalp of a person, and that referred to the skin on top of someone's head.

"The reference materials also mentioned how scalp apes are large monkeys that surround their prey in groups of ten or above and use things like clubs or throwing rocks to attack, so they're a bit of a difficult foe to fight," said Natsuki.

According to Natsuki, those monkeys possessed a lot of brute strength and

were capable of inflicting serious injuries to normal people merely by punching them with their fists. On top of that, it seemed like those monkeys would also perform cruel and dangerous attacks such as grabbing the head, arms, or legs of their prey and would swing them around before smashing them onto the ground.

“Seriously? It sounds like those scalp apes are really dangerous due to their numbers and the fact that they’re smart enough to use tools,” I said.

“Mm. The most important thing to do when facing such scalp apes is to avoid getting surrounded,” said Natsuki.

It would be quite dangerous to get surrounded by ten scalp apes that were throwing rocks at you, and it also sounded like those apes had the strength of a gorilla, so it was possible that those rocks could cause death if they were thrown with such strength. *Hmm, it might actually be a good idea to prepare large shields to protect ourselves against ranged attacks like this.*

“As for bind vipers, they are big snakes with a length of about five meters,” said Natsuki. “They sneak up on the prey from above on the trees and kill their prey by choking their neck in a bind or hanging them, but they’re not that dangerous if we can discover them before they discover us.”

Whew, I’m so glad that I have the Scout skill. I’d be scared as hell if a large snake suddenly appeared from thick foliage, after all! According to Natsuki, blunt attacks weren’t very effective against bind vipers due to their flexible bodies, so they weren’t exactly an easy foe to defeat, even if we were able to discover them first.

“Blunt attacks, huh? It sounds like Touya’s attacks won’t be very effective against those bind vipers,” I said.

“Nah, my sword can technically stab things as well, you know?” said Touya.

“Those bind vipers will be on top of trees, Touya. Can you really reach them with your sword?” I asked.

“This again?! Ugh, I didn’t manage to slay any of the brancheater spiders myself!” Touya exclaimed.

We hadn’t actually slain that many brancheater spiders in total, but most of

those kills had been accomplished by Haruka and her bow. She had managed to shoot the brancheater spiders through the gaps between the thick foliage, and the way that she had sniped through those small gaps was quite impressive.

“The skin of bind vipers is quite tough as well, so I think it would be difficult even for Haruka to kill them with her bow,” said Natsuki. “We’d probably have to forcefully smash the heads of the vipers to kill them or slice them up with the kodachi that Haruka and Yuki have.”

The smashing option sounded like we would have to aim for the heads of those vipers when they lowered them, right before they attempted to wrap themselves around our bodies in order to bind us, and that sounded quite annoying to pull off. However, according to Natsuki, bind vipers were monsters that would generally only appear one at a time, so that was a good thing to know.

“As for ogres, they are just outright strong in every regard. They’re slightly smaller than orc leaders, but ogres are much faster and stronger than them,” said Natsuki. “Considering our current strength, it would be a good idea for us to flee if we encounter ogres, but we probably can’t escape from them due to how fast they are. The best way to deal with ogres is to rely on Nao-kun’s Scout skill to avoid encountering them in the first place.”

“Faster and stronger than orc leaders? We definitely shouldn’t fight them!” Yuki exclaimed.

“I feel kind of uneasy about this, but surely it should be easy to tell with my Scout skill if they’re that strong.” *It better be that way, please. This is a lot of pressure on me, since we could die if I fail at scouting out ogres...*

“As for animals, the most dangerous ones deeper within the forest are wipe bears, so we should be fine against them as long as we don’t let our guard down,” said Natsuki. “There are also wolves in this forest, but it seems like they usually don’t go out of their way to attack people.”

Based on the information that Natsuki had provided us, it sounded like the main problem that we had to deal with when venturing deeper into the forest was the monsters. If the monsters didn’t exist, then this forest wouldn’t be that much different from ones back on Earth in terms of how dangerous it was.

“Hm? Hold on, didn’t the reference materials at the guild also mention things like normal snakes?” I asked.

I asked Natsuki about other animals when I suddenly recalled that information, and Natsuki looked a bit surprised before she placed one of her hands to her mouth. “Right, I forgot about this. It seems like there are some poisonous snakes and insects deeper within the forest as well. However, they’re not that dangerous for us since those poisons can be cured with Light Magic, but they’d be lethal otherwise.”

“Oh, is that so?”

It seemed like those snakes and insects had poisons that were strong enough to kill people, and I could recall some reference materials that had mentioned a few types of poisonous snakes that possessed dangerous bites.

“Things like serum do not exist in this world, and there are limited options for transporting someone afflicted by poison, so most victims without anyone around who can use Light Magic will die before they can reach town,” said Natsuki.

“Are there no items like herbs and antidotes that can cure poison?” I asked.

“Items like the ones in games that have an immediate effect fall under the category of alchemy,” said Natsuki. “The ones that you can make with Pharmacy only have an effect on specific poisons, so there isn’t anything that works for all sorts of poisons.”

There wasn’t any sort of thing back on Earth that could work for all sorts of poisons either, so specific serums were needed to treat different types of poisons. It was possible to order such antidotes even if the nearby hospitals didn’t have any in stock, but that was only possible in modern-day Earth. You would have to look for antidotes or make them yourself in this different world, so Natsuki was right about how most people afflicted by poisons would die before they could reach a town. However, according to Natsuki, it was fairly obvious that animals like poisonous snakes were dangerous, so incidents of getting bitten by snakes were quite rare since people that entered forests would cover themselves with things like tough boots for self-protection.

“Okay, I think we should return to town now,” said Haruka. “We’ve

accomplished our objective here, after all.”

Haruka brought up the idea of returning to town after Natsuki had finished explaining things to us about the deeper parts of the forest, and I nodded in agreement. “Yeah, let’s pick up some firewood on our way back and slay boars if we encounter—”

I stopped in my tracks before finishing my sentence, and Haruka turned around to look at me. “What’s wrong, Nao?”

“My Scout skill detected something, but I’m not sure what it is...”

The signals that my Scout skill could detect would differ depending on whether they were something that I had encountered before or not, and this one seemed to be something unknown to me since I couldn’t tell exactly what it was; it felt somewhat hazy to me.

Everyone else threw on serious faces once they noticed my confusion, and Haruka frowned before she spoke again. “Maybe we spent too much time here. The signal you detected isn’t an ogre, right?”

“I’m sure I would’ve noticed as well if it was something that strong,” said Touya. “We’d have no choice but to face it if that were the case.”

Touya had answered Haruka’s question instead of me, and he looked like he was more than ready to fight since his tail was perked up.

“Mm, I think we should face this new foe here,” said Natsuki. “It’s better than getting attacked by something we haven’t encountered before inside of the forest.”

“Yeah, I agree as well,” said Yuki. “There’s a lot of space here, so we can surround our new foe and beat it up!”

The rest of us had no real reason to object to the reasons that Natsuki and Yuki had brought up, so we all held up our weapons and braced ourselves for combat. After a while, some monsters that had one rusty sword each in their hands appeared in front of us, and they were something that would commonly appear in fantasy settings.

“Skeletons, huh?” I said.

We all loosened up a bit since we felt somewhat deceived that this was the result even though we had been on full alert.

“Mm. They’re some strange monsters indeed—it’s weird how their body parts are connected to each other even though their legs have no muscles,” said Haruka.

“Is that really what bothers you, Haruka? I think the parts of the skeletons are probably just bound together by some kind of Coulomb force,” said Yuki.

“The gaps between the bones seem to be way too large for just Coulomb force to be enough, though,” said Natsuki. “Also, gravity is inversely proportional to the square of the distance between two objects, so...”

The bones of the skeletons had large enough gaps that made rattling sounds, and Yuki sighed when she heard what Natsuki had pointed out. “I wasn’t asking for scientific evidence, Natsuki. Oh well. There’s two of these skeletons, but I guess we should probably leave them to Touya.”

“Yeah, spears aren’t really well suited for fighting against skeletons since there’s nothing to pierce,” I said. “On the other hand, Touya has a blunt weapon, so it’s perfect for crushing bones.”

“Um, you know, my weapon is technically a sword even though it’s not sharp,” said Touya. “In any case, back me up if something happens.”

The movements of the skeletons were slow and sluggish, so they didn’t appear to be very strong. As a result, Touya seemed like he wasn’t nervous at all as he leaped forward with his weapon. The reactions of the skeletons towards Touya’s movements were also very slow, and he managed to destroy a part of the skeleton in front, from the skull to the collarbone, right before it could hold up its weapon against him. The second skeleton had its cervical spine swiftly broken by a backward slash from Touya, and its skull fell towards the ground afterward.

“Damn, they’re really weak!” Yuki exclaimed. “Wait, Touya, the second one’s still moving!”

“Oh, hmpf!”

The first skeleton had collapsed and stopped moving from Touya’s initial

attack, but the second one was still moving around even though its skull had fallen to the ground. Touya hastily smashed the skull of that second skeleton after Yuki had pointed it out, and then he smashed its body in half that was holding up its sword in the air.

“Ugh. They’re not strong at all, but it’s a pain to fight these skeletons,” said Touya. “There’s a high chance of getting injured if you let your guard down after thinking that you’ve slain them.”

“You can probably slay them in one hit if you smash their magicites, but that would also destroy the source of income from them,” I said.

Nobody would actually pay for the bones of skeletons as materials, right? There were places back on Earth where body parts were used as materials to make medicine and places where skin was used to bind books, but I didn’t want to bring back skeleton bones with me, even if demand actually existed for them. The most that I could tolerate for body parts would be hair, and skeletons were completely bald. However, I had no intention of gathering hair even if they weren’t bald.

“The magicites of skeletons should be inside of their skulls,” said Natsuki.

Touya scooped up a magicite from the skull that he had smashed open and stared at it. “Oh, is this it? It’s bigger than I thought it would be. *Appraisal!* Sixteen hundred Rea? Damn, that’s a decent amount of money!”

I was also surprised at how large the magicite of the skeletons was considering how weak they were. Touya sounded quite surprised when he used his Appraisal skill and found out how much the magicites were worth, and it was probably because he had also compared it with how weak the skeletons were.

“It’s probably safer to break the magicite as well, but it would be somewhat of a waste considering that value,” said Haruka.

“It’s possible to instantly slay skeletons if you can extract the magicites from the skulls, but it’s a question of whether or not you can do so in the middle of battle,” said Natsuki.

The only ways to extract the magicites from the skulls of skeletons would be

to smash them open like Touya had done or stick your hands inside of the skull, but that second option probably wasn't a realistic one. The magicite was located where the brain was supposed to be due to the bone structure of the skull, and the hole which was connected towards that area was too small for someone's hands to fit through. In addition, if you had the luxury of taking the time to attempt at sticking your hands through a skeleton's skull, then it would be easier to just smash the skull open instead.

"I don't think we have to be worried about this considering how weak the skeletons were, but you might have to be careful in order to avoid smashing the magicites," said Touya. "Oh, I found the second one. Nice, it's in good shape."

"Yeah, I guess we don't have to worry since the magicites weren't damaged by your atta—behind you, Touya!" I exclaimed.

Touya swiftly responded to my warning and pulled out his sword from his hips as he dropped the magicite in his hands onto the ground, and then he performed a slash as he turned around. However, his attack passed through the air without any resistance.

"Huh? What the hell is this?!"

A blackish monster that was translucent had appeared behind Touya, and it looked like a humanoid haze that was covered in a black robe. However, it had no arms or legs, and the only thing visible at the part of its body where its face should have been was pure darkness. There was a bluish light that seemed to be emanating from deep within its "face," but its whole shape was translucent, so it was hard to tell if that was actually the case.

"Is this some kind of undead monster since we just fought skeletons?!"

Touya yelled as he swung around his sword, but his sword merely passed through the haze. The haze reached forward with its hands towards Touya, and Touya almost fell to his knees the next moment, but he barely managed to hastily leap backwards in time.

"It felt like my strength suddenly disappeared when it touched me!" Touya exclaimed.

"I think this is what my Scout skill had actually detected!" I exclaimed. "Touya,

fall back! *Fire Arrow!*”

My Fire Arrow was a trusty spell that had performed quite well in all sorts of situations up until now, but it also passed through the haze just like Touya’s sword had earlier. On top of that, the spell itself landed on the tree behind the haze and set it aflame, so it had betrayed my trust in it at a crucial moment.

“Yikes!”

“Nao, you idiot!” Yuki exclaimed. “*Extinguish Fire!*”



Yuki managed to swiftly cover my mistake and extinguished the flames on the tree in an instant. *Good job, Yuki. I actually trust you more than my Fire Arrow spell right now.*

“Thanks, Yuki!” I exclaimed. “More importantly, does magic not work against this haze?!”

I had blasted the haze with my magic since I figured that magic would work if physical attacks didn’t, but my magic hadn’t been able to even stop it in its tracks.

“Nao, can you use the Holy Fire spell?” Haruka asked.

I yelled back at Haruka when she requested something ridiculous from me. “Of course not! That’s a Level 7 Fire Magic spell!”

Holy Fire was a spell that seemed like it would be very effective against undead monsters from its name alone, but according to the grimoire that had mentioned its existence, it was a Level 7 spell. The level of spells that we could use didn’t necessarily match the skill levels that were displayed in our status screens, but the levels in grimoires indicated how difficult it was to learn and cast a spell. Due to this, a Level 7 spell was quite difficult to learn, and it wasn’t a spell that I was capable of using at the moment. On top of that, I hadn’t expected to encounter any undead monsters, so I hadn’t tried practicing this spell at all either. The undead monster in front of us was something that had felt hazy to my Scout skill as well, so it probably wasn’t something that was weak at all. None of us had prepared any weapons or holy items that were effective against undead monsters, so we definitely weren’t ready for this battle.

I stared at the blackish haze that was slowly approaching us for a bit before I made up my mind. “Ugh! Let’s retreat!”

“Hold on, Nao-kun! *Purification!*”

I was confused for a second as to why Natsuki had decided to use that kind of spell on the blackish haze, but when the light of Natsuki’s spell landed on it, the haze started to screech in a grating way.

Haruka swiftly joined Natsuki when she saw how the blackish haze had

reacted to Natsuki's spell. "*Purification!*"

The haze had already become thinner from Natsuki's spell, and Haruka's spell ended up being the finishing blow, as the haze vanished into the air after her spell had landed on it.

"Oh, right, *Purification* isn't a spell that's only meant for cleaning things like our laundry and bodies," I said.

I breathed a sigh of relief once I had remembered the other purpose of the *Purification* spell and placed a hand on my head as I crouched down on the spot.

"Mm, *Purification*'s original purpose is for purifying undead monsters," said Haruka. "I'm surprised you managed to remember, Natsuki. I'd completely forgotten about this until now."

"Well, I had also forgotten about this up until now," said Natsuki. "However, I managed to remember after you brought up the *Holy Fire* spell, Haruka."

"Oh, right. Yeah, I should have thought of Light Magic first for dealing with undead monsters," said Haruka. "My bad..."

Natsuki and Haruka both had bitter smiles as they talked to each other, and Haruka sighed at her own mistake. Right after that, Yuki walked over to Haruka and patted her on the shoulder. "Just treat this as a valuable experience, Haruka! After all, people can learn from setbacks, ha ha!"

"Well, yes, that's true, but it feels weird hearing that from you when you didn't contribute at all, Yuki," said Haruka.

"Mm, it doesn't sound quite right," said Natsuki.

Haruka and Natsuki both stared at Yuki with scornful eyes, and Yuki hastily glanced away from them. "O-Oh, well, I was busy covering Nao's mistake, so yeah!"

I wanted to comment about the situation as well, but it was true that Yuki had covered my mistake, so I decided to keep silent for now.

"M-More importantly, what was that monster just now? Touya's attacks and Nao's magic didn't have any effect on it at all," said Yuki. "I mean, I know it was

an undead monster since Purification worked on it, but..."

"According to my Appraisal skill, it was a monster called shadow ghost, but I didn't have the time to look in detail," said Touya. "Also, I felt very uncomfortable when it touched me, since it felt like my strength had disappeared or had been drained from me."

"Oh, I'm surprised you had the clarity of mind to use your Appraisal skill on it even in that situation," I said. "Maybe it was some kind of energy or level drain? Such things are a staple for undead enemies in games."

"Wait, it better not have drained my levels or something!" Touya exclaimed.
"Oh, it seems like I'm fine."

Touya had hastily looked in the air after he heard my words before he breathed a sigh of relief.

It seemed like Touya had checked his status display screen, and Yuki smiled mischievously when she saw his reaction. "Oh, are you sure about that? You know, character levels exist in this world, and you can't check those, so..."

"Don't scare me like that, Yuki! Wait, have I actually become weaker...?"

Touya looked down at his body and slapped himself all over, but there was no way he could tell by doing that, so he still had a look of unease on his face.

"Yuki, don't say things like that without any proof for it," said Haruka. "We're the ones that'll be in trouble if our meat shield gets scared of tanking in front, you know?"

"Huh?! That's very mean of you as well, Haruka!" Touya exclaimed. "I mean, yeah, it's my job to be the front line, but still..."

Touya looked a bit sad as he drooped his ears and tail, and Haruka chuckled when she saw that. "I'm just joking, Touya. Shadow ghost, huh? We should do research to find more detailed information on it after we get back to town and prepare countermeasures to deal with them in the future if needed. Also, Nao, did your Scout skill not react to this monster properly?"

"Yeah, kinda. Something felt wrong and hazy to me from my Scout skill, but I couldn't tell what it was until it actually appeared in front of us. Sorry about

this."

I had initially thought the reason why my Scout skill hadn't been able to pick up the signal properly was because of the skeletons, so I hadn't considered the possibility of other enemies. It was completely my fault as the person who was in charge of scouting for our party.

"I'm not blaming you or anything, Nao. Besides, the fact that we've been dependent on just your sense of feeling with the Scout skill isn't actually a good thing," said Haruka. "In any case, from now on, we should also be wary of monsters that the Scout skill can't clearly detect."

"Mm, I didn't notice at all either, so it's not just Nao's fault," said Touya.

"Thanks for saying that. The signal did feel weird and hazy to me, so I think I can recognize such things with some training, but..."

My Scout skill had contributed to the safety of our adventures up until now, but monsters that couldn't be clearly detected by the Scout skill meant that it wasn't completely reliable for us anymore. It was only natural for things to exist that the Scout skill didn't work quite well on because skills were something that varied in effectiveness depending on your expertise at using one, but it didn't change the fact that I had been naive about this.

"Skills like Stealth and Sneak exist, so I believe that it's a good idea to practice and train those types of skills," said Natsuki. "I can contribute to this when we carry out these kinds of training sessions."

"Yeah, I'd really appreciate your help when the time comes, Natsuki," I said.

"No problem. Let's do our best together," said Natsuki.

Sneak was a skill that could be used to erase your presence, and Scout was a skill that could negate the Sneak skill. We could probably level up those skills if we used them against each other, and it was something that we needed to do as soon as possible. It was only due to luck that our lack of training hadn't been fatal for us this time, but luck wasn't something that would last forever.

"Well, Nao's Scout skill didn't really work on the shadow ghost, but it wasn't that strong, right? After all, it got deleted in two shots of the Purification spell," said Touya.

“I’m not so sure if you can call it weak based on just that,” said Haruka. “Purification is technically the spell that Natsuki and I are most proficient at, right?”

“Mm, that spell has helped us out the most so far,” said Yuki. “I’m so glad that the two of you can use that spell...”

Purification was the spell that had helped us maintain our peace of mind for a long time up until we had managed to obtain our own bath recently, and I was fairly sure that our friendships with each other could have been damaged a bit if we didn’t have access to this spell.

“Also, the fact that only Haruka and I can effectively damage shadow ghosts is a problem,” said Natsuki.

“Right, that’s true. My sword was completely useless during our battle against the shadow ghost.” Touya walked over to where the shadow ghost had vanished and picked up something from the ground. “Oh, it seems like it dropped a magicite. This one looks a bit larger than the ones from the skeletons.”

“The monster looked like a haze with nothing inside of it. It still dropped a magicite? That’s great!” I exclaimed.

I was quite happy about the fact that we didn’t have to clean up after slaying monsters like shadow ghosts and skeletons.

“Yeah, it’s kind of fascinating, but I completely agree!” Yuki exclaimed. “This magicite looks quite big as well, so I wonder if undead monsters are actually a good source of money.”

“I’m fine with undead monsters as long as we don’t have to fight zombies!” Touya exclaimed. “I’m sure they’ll be rotten and will stink, so I don’t want to retrieve the magicites from zombies...”

“Zombies, huh? Yeah, I don’t want to touch zombies either. Wait, hold on, do any of you recall information about undead monsters appearing in this area?”

Yuki held a finger to her chin and tilted her head in thought as she looked around at all of us, but we all shook our heads in response.

"The only things I know are what I explained earlier," said Natsuki.

"Mm, same here. Did we not do enough research, or is it just that the guild doesn't know about this either?" Yuki asked.

"Hmm. We should probably take the time to talk and check with Diola-san about this," said Haruka.

If the guild knew about the fact that undead monsters could appear in this area of the forest, then information about them was probably somewhere within those reference materials, which had seemed like they were handmade by someone.

"In any case, one thing we learned from today is that we shouldn't advance farther into the forest without preparing for it first," said Haruka. "Let's head back to town for now and report back about how we've exterminated this orc nest."

"Mm, we can prepare countermeasures for dealing with undead monsters afterward, and that includes methods for everyone to be able to efficiently deal damage to undead monsters," said Natsuki.

Touya's sword had been useless against the shadow ghost, and Yuki was in the same boat as I was, since my Fire Arrow had been useless against the shadow ghost as well. There was a Water Magic spell called Holy Water, and it seemed like it was the only other effective option for magic aside from Light Magic and the Holy Fire spell. However, according to the grimoires that I had read, this spell was also a Level 7 spell, so it wasn't a spell that any of us were capable of using. Wind Magic didn't have any spells that seemed like they would be effective against undead monsters. Earth Magic had a Level 7 spell called Burial, but that spell would only bury an enemy in the ground, so it was highly unlikely that it would have any effect against undead monsters, and especially not the ghost type of undead monsters. *I hope we can get our hands on an easy way to deal damage against undead monsters...*

Chapter 2—An Unexpected Reunion?

We arrived back at Laffan fairly early, which allowed us to visit the Adventurers' Guild at a time of day that wasn't usually too busy. None of us wanted to become famous or stand out in a bad way, so visiting the guild when there weren't many people around was optimal for us, and it would also be more convenient for Diola-san.

Luckily for us, today didn't seem to be any different from usual; the guild building was fairly empty when we arrived, and Diola-san noticed us right away. "Oh, hello, everyone. Thank you for the invitation to your housewarming party the other day. Are you all returning to adventurer work now?"

"Mm, we are. We've taken quite a long break, after all," said Haruka. "As usual, we're here to turn in materials, but we also have something to report."

"A report? Hmm." Diola-san's eyebrows twitched when she heard those words. "Well, let's head to the warehouse first."

We followed Diola-san to the warehouse in the backyard of the guild. Our recent deliveries had mostly been orcs, so there had barely been any times when we'd only had to turn materials in at the counter in the front of the guild. The change in our routine was only natural due to how large the orcs were. Even their skin and fur were quite heavy, so it would probably be painful for Diola-san to carry them herself, though she was actually pretty strong.

"I see that your party brought back a large haul this time as well," said Diola. "At this pace, you'll exterminate all the orcs from the nest in no time, ha ha!"

Oh, perfect timing. Diola-san was chuckling and joking around while she nonchalantly inquired about our recent activities, and I nodded in response. "Yeah, actually, we've exterminated the orcs at the nest. That's what we were going to report today."

"Ha ha—huh? Exterminated?" Diola-san froze up for a moment and then tilted her head as she asked us for confirmation. "The whole nest, not just an

orc leader? Did I hear that right?”

We all nodded.

“Mm, though we only slew the orcs that were in the nest at the time and the ones that returned shortly after our initial battle,” said Haruka.

“We can’t say for sure if we’ve actually slain them all, but we slew a total of four orc leaders,” I said.

“Four orc leaders?!” Diola exclaimed.

“Yeah,” Haruka replied. “Let me take out the magicites that we retrieved from the orcs.”

Haruka took out the four magicites from the orc leaders along with about ten regular orc magicites and set them down on the counter.

Diola-san hastily picked up one of the orc leader magicites. “U-Um, please wait a moment.” From under the counter, she took a device out that looked like a set of scales and placed the orc leader magicite in one of the plates. “Oh, this is indeed an orc leader’s magicite...”

Diola-san looked back and forth between us and the scales with an expression of incredulity on her face. I had some complaints that I wanted to voice in response, but I was more interested in the device that Diola-san had taken out, since it was my first time seeing something that looked like it could be used to detect different types of magicites.

Luckily for me, Touya asked the question that was on my mind. “Diola-san, what are those scales?”

“Oh, this? This is a magical device that can measure the amount of mana inside a magicite,” Diola replied. “You can’t tell the name of the monster that a magicite was extracted from, but there aren’t that many different types of monster in this region, so it’s not actually a problem.”

According to Diola-san, there were higher-quality versions of these magical devices that would also tell the user the name of the monster that a magicite had been extracted from, but the value of magicites was decided based on the amount of mana they contained, so these scales were sufficient for the purpose

of assessing materials at the Adventurers' Guild.

"Let me measure the other magicites as well. Mm, just as I thought." Diolasan sounded quite amazed; she sighed. "Very impressive, I must say. A single party of Rank 2 adventurers wouldn't normally be capable of exterminating an orc nest, you know?"

Natsuki smiled gently. "We whittled down their numbers slowly. It wasn't like we assaulted the nest head-on."

"Didn't you predict that we'd be able to exterminate an orc nest, Diola-san?" Yuki asked.

"I did, but what I had in mind was a normal orc nest," Diola replied. "I didn't think the orc nest would contain four orc leaders!"

Diola-san seemed a bit excited; she slammed her palm down on the counter. According to Diola-san, the orc nest hunt quests that the guild had funded and organized in the past had generally been for orc nests that only contained one orc leader. The handful of exceptions when there had been two orc leaders at a nest had resulted in a lot of casualties.

"Orc leaders are a formidable foe even for high-rank adventurers," said Diola. "Well, there are a few adventurers who are capable of slaying orc leaders with great ease, but..."

Oh, there are actually a few adventurers out there who can slay orc leaders without any effort? I guess some of the adventurers in this world are much stronger than I realized.

"However, those kinds of adventurers aren't active here in Laffan," said Diola. "There was an incident in the past when an orc general spawned as a result of adventurers failing to deal with the orc nest quickly enough, and the official who was in charge of Laffan at the time had to issue a quest and solicit the help of adventurers from other towns."

According to Diola-san, the fee that the official had had to pay to bring in high-rank adventurers had been quite expensive, so that official had been forced to take responsibility for the incident and was dismissed from his post. Future officials learned from their predecessor's mistake and made it a policy to

fund the Adventurers' Guild so that it could issue orc nest hunt quests before the nests became too dangerous.

"An orc nest with four orc leaders isn't as dangerous as one with a single orc general, but the nest you took on could still have caused a significant number of casualties," said Diola. "I suppose the reason there haven't been that many casualties is that your party whittled down the number of orcs."

"Well, the orcs served as a good source of money for us," I said. "In any case, I'm glad that we were of help to Laffan."

"Mm, your efforts have probably saved many lives," said Diola. "All right, I've completed the assessment. Follow me to the counter at the front for your payment."

Although she'd been caught off guard by what we'd accomplished, Diola-san had been steadily assessing our materials this entire time. It made sense to me that she could multitask even when frazzled, since she was a professional. We exited the warehouse and followed Diola-san back to the front, but instead of heading towards the usual counter, she turned towards the stairs that led up to the second floor.

"Hm? Where are you going, Diola-san?" I asked.

"Everyone in your party needs to be ranked up, so I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce you all to the branch master of the Adventurers' Guild here in Laffan," said Diola.

"Oh, we're ranking up? Or rather, I haven't seen the branch master at all before," said Yuki.

"It would be wrong to leave your party at Rank 2 when you've managed to exterminate an orc nest," said Diola. "Your conduct has been unimpeachable as well, so there's no reason not to rank your party up. As for the branch master, he doesn't show up unless some kind of trouble has occurred, so it's to be expected that you haven't seen him before."

Diola-san chuckled as she explained things to us. Her explanation about the branch master made sense to me. I would be quite scared of a company where the boss or CEO was sitting at the reception desk or something similar. In a way,

the fact that we hadn't encountered the branch master until now was a measure of how comparatively peaceful and free of major crises our lives had been so far—although that in itself made me unsure of how our lives might change after we met the branch master today.

We eventually arrived in front of a door on the third floor of the Adventurers' Guild. Diola-san knocked. "This is the branch master's office. Branch master, I'm coming in!"

Diola-san opened the door without waiting for an answer and beckoned the rest of us to follow her into the office. The interior was slightly cluttered but fairly normal-looking—it wasn't fancy at all. Lining the walls were shelves stuffed with wooden boxes; some of their contents were spread across the floor as well. In the middle of the room was a desk, and sitting in a chair behind it was a man on the older end of middle age. He had somewhat of a receding hairline, but he looked quite muscular, so he was most likely a former adventurer himself.

The middle-aged man didn't look surprised at all by our sudden visit and responded to Diola-san with a lethargic look. "Diola, huh? Are those the adventurers that you have great expectations for?"

"Mm. I believe they deserve a rank-up, so I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce them to you," Diola replied. "They're young adventurers, but they work at a safe and steady pace; they aren't reckless or overconfident like many people their age."

"Hmm, I see. Well, if that's your judgment as the vice-branch master, then I have no reason to object. Let me introduce myself. My name's Marcus, and I'm the branch master of the Adventurers' Guild here in Laffan. Our acquaintance will probably be short, but good luck with your adventurer work."

The branch master gazed at us with a prying look in his eyes for a moment before leaning back in his chair. He didn't seem very enthusiastic, but this was probably a normal way for someone in his position to greet low-rank adventurers. *Wait, hold on, Diola-san's the vice-branch master of the Adventurers' Guild here in Laffan? I knew she had an important position here, but I never imagined she was that high up...*

“Branch master, please greet them properly!” Diola exclaimed. “They’re the rare adventurers who are willing to settle down in Laffan!”

“...Huh? You’re serious, I take it?” Marcus asked.

“Yes. They own a plot of land—I helped facilitate the sale—and construction of their house just wrapped up the other day,” Diola replied. “I can expect a performance bonus for this, right?!”

Marcus-san suddenly smiled and stood up. “Oh, I apologize for what I said earlier. You see, the majority of adventurers who rank up tend to leave Laffan immediately because there isn’t any work available that suits their new, higher ranks. I should add that Diola’s performance bonuses will depend upon your party’s accomplishments in the future.”

Diola-san’s shoulders dropped in disappointment when she heard the words that Marcus-san tacked on at the end.

“Is there really no work available for higher-rank adventures?” Haruka asked.

“Mm, none at all. Adventurers like you who have magic bags can earn money from orcs, but there isn’t any work available that’s sufficient for ranking—oh, that’s right! If your party participates in the orc nest hunt quest issued by the guild, then...”

“Oh, branch master, Nao-san’s party has already taken care of the orc nest,” said Diola. “On top of that, it seems there were four orc leaders at the nest. This should suffice as an accomplishment, shouldn’t it?”

“Is that so?! Four orc leaders?! Damn it all, I wish I could’ve fought them myself!”

Marcus-san sounded quite disappointed. *Huh? This isn’t the reaction that we expected.*

Diola-san chuckled as if she knew what we were thinking. “This fellow here used to be a high-rank adventurer. In fact, he was the kind of strong adventurer that I mentioned earlier.”

Seriously?! This guy was one of the adventurers who could slay orc leaders with great ease?!

"As a result, he's always eager to hop back into active duty," said Diola. "He's proficient at his job, but..."

"Oh, come now, all that matters is that I take care of business, isn't that so? Well, if that's the case, then I'm afraid I really don't have any work that I can recommend to your party," said Marcus. "Quests such as escorting lumberjacks to the south forest would be too easy. Oh, what about the precious wood in the north for—"

Marcus-san had muttered those last words in a low voice, but Diola-san interrupted him in apparent fury. "Are you trying to get them killed, branch master?!"

"Of course not. The words happened to slip out, you understand? Well, I think Rank 4 or Rank 5 adventurers would be capable of that kind of work if there were a well-paved road all the way to the foot of the mountains, but..."

The branch master said he was well aware that adventurers would leave Laffan due to a lack of work that suited their ranks, and he had spent a long time searching for a way to resolve this problem. On top of that, the scarcity of precious wood was also a serious problem for Laffan, and the official in charge of Laffan was apparently willing to subsidize efforts to harvest precious wood. However, the amount of money from those subsidies wouldn't be enough to attract high-rank adventurers who were capable of constructing and paving a road through the forest, and there was no way to make do with the adventurers already in Laffan since they would leave as soon as they ranked up. As a result, the branch master had made no progress towards resolving this problem.

"Um, just to be clear, it wouldn't be wise to expect us to solve this problem," said Natsuki.

Although Natsuki sounded slightly hesitant, she voiced her opinion without equivocation, and Marcus-san laughed and nodded. "Don't worry, I'm well aware of that. I'm not going to request your party's help. After all, Diola would kill me if I dared."

"Branch master...?" Diola-san smiled as she stared at Marcus-san, but the look in her eyes was quite different from her smile.

When he noticed that look, Marcus-san hastily shook his head. "Oh, well, I

was just praising you for how considerate and nice you are towards our adventurers, Diola! Mm, I happen to believe those are great virtues!"

"Indeed. Forcing impossible tasks onto adventurers would be a heinous act, would it not?"

"Of course! I absolutely agree!"

Diola-san was smiling as she spoke to Marcus-san, but sweat was dripping from his brow as he nodded in response, so it was easy to tell who really had the upper hand in their everyday interactions.

"Regardless, I can't recommend or introduce any decent work for your party, but I'll do what I can to assist you," said Marcus. "I'm looking forward to your party's future accomplishments, so please do your best, Haruka, Nao, Touya, Natsuki, Yuki!"

We all nodded and responded with an "O-Okay!" Marcus-san gave each of us in turn an encouraging clap on the shoulder and then shook our hands. The fact that he hadn't messed up any of our names probably meant that Diola-san was right about him being proficient at his job. Each of us had unique traits that made it easy to distinguish among us, but that only mattered if someone made note of those traits, which seemed to be the case for Marcus-san. I was quite surprised by how competent he was, even though he looked like nothing more than a big, brawny guy.

"However, someone needs to check the current state of the orc nest," said Marcus. "All right, that settles it! I'll go take a look!"

"Branch master! Top management like you shouldn't just head into the field like that!" Diola exclaimed.

"In that case, are there any other adventurers who you can count on to discharge this quest apart from Nao's party?"

Diola-san hesitated before replying. "Well, um, if the guild issues a joint quest for two parties, then..."

Marcus-san grinned. "That's fine if you can squeeze the necessary funds out of the budget, Diola. Can you?"

“Ugh! Not really...”

“Right? I can take care of this myself, and it won’t cost any money, so this is a better idea, is it not?”

“From a financial standpoint, yes, but...”

Diola-san averted her eyes from Marcus-san and held one of her hands to her cheek as if she felt conflicted. It was probably because she understood the benefits of the branch master’s proposal, but it wasn’t something that she could easily permit as the vice-branch master. *Middle management sure seems like difficult work if you have a superior who does whatever she or he wants to do.*

However, there wasn’t anything we could do to help Diola-san out, so I hesitantly asked her, “Um, is it okay for us to leave now?”

Diola-san gasped when she realized that she had forgotten about us. “Oh, yes, I’m sorry. I’ll deal with the paperwork for the ranking up process and hand over the payment for the materials that your party turned in. Let’s return to the counter on the first floor. And branch master, don’t head out of the guild while I’m gone!”

Marcus-san shrugged and chuckled. “Don’t worry, I won’t. I don’t even know where the orc nest is located yet.”

“Right. I’ll ask Nao-san’s party about the location of the nest—once we get downstairs. Let’s get going!”

We returned to the first floor, and as Diola-san handed us our payment and dealt with the paperwork, she asked us where the orc nest was located. Once she was done with all of that, she hastily dashed back upstairs in order to do battle with Marcus-san. Her objective was simply to keep him from heading outside of the guild. I wasn’t sure who would be the victor, and there was no way for us to help her out. All we could do was hope that she didn’t get too stressed out; we owed her a lot.

“I really didn’t expect us to jump up two ranks to Rank 4 all of a sudden,” I said.

I’d thought we would simply rank up to Rank 3, but according to Diola-san, no

Rank 3 party was capable of exterminating an orc nest by themselves. I felt like she was overestimating us, since it wasn't like we had exterminated the orc nest in one go, but I was still quite happy that we had jumped up in the ranks.

"Right? Hee hee, we're no longer rookies now!" Yuki seemed quite happy as she looked at the increased number of seals on her adventurer card. Everyone else was examining their cards and smiling too.

"However, not much will change as a result of us ranking up, will it?" Natsuki asked.

"Mm, our general social standing won't change as a result of being Rank 4, since ranks are basically just a numerical representation of how much the guild trusts specific adventurers," Haruka replied. "However, apparently adventurers who manage to climb up to Rank 7 or higher are respected by everyone and gain a significant degree of social standing."

"I wonder if the perks of being Rank 4 might just be slightly favorable treatment," said Yuki.

According to Haruka, Rank 3 was the minimum rank that you had to achieve in order to graduate from being considered a weak rookie. Rank 4 wasn't that different from Rank 3, but it was enough to earn some respect and acknowledgment from other adventurers. Our party was composed of more girls than guys, so I hoped that our new ranks would help chase away trouble to a certain extent.

"Actually, adventurers have to be Rank 4 before they're allowed to enter dungeons, so that's technically a perk as well if we plan on doing that," said Haruka.

Apparently the restriction that Haruka had mentioned only applied to dungeons under the control of the Adventurers' Guild. That was the public stance of the guild, anyway; there were ways to get around this restriction. I had no plans to enter a dungeon anytime soon, but I wanted to explore at least one at some point in the future, so as far as I was concerned, it was advantageous that we were Rank 4 Adventurers now.

"Dungeons, huh? I'd like to explore one, but are there any nearby?" Touya asked.

"No, unfortunately. The nearest towns that are famous for their dungeons are quite far away," said Yuki. "There are probably also dungeons out there that I don't know about, but I haven't heard any information about dungeons close to Laffan."

According to Yuki, dungeons weren't actually that dangerous in themselves. Monsters wouldn't burst out of dungeons even if they were left alone, so the general consensus was that dungeons wouldn't cause any negative effects to their surroundings. Or rather, if you were lucky, it was easy to obtain materials from monsters in dungeons along with magical devices, so dungeons were actually considered a valuable resource, and there were a decent number of lords who would attempt to make use of dungeons in order to bring prosperity to the lands that they governed.

However, the chances of failure in such an endeavor were also decently high due to a variety of factors—for example, if a dungeon was too dangerous relative to the materials that adventurers could obtain from it, if the location of a dungeon was too inconvenient to attract adventurers, or if the lord spent too much money maintaining and controlling the area around the dungeon and no longer had the funds to maintain his own lands. There was also a potential impact on public safety and order due to an increase in the number of adventurers who were essentially ruffians. The cases of failure outnumbered the successes, so attempts to develop towns around dungeons were considered a gamble. In fact, it seemed that many lords would choose the safe option of leaving a dungeon alone even if they received reports about someone discovering one in their lands.

"The Adventurers' Guild still records information about dungeons even if the local lords leave them alone, though," said Yuki, "so I'm pretty sure Diola-san would know if there were any dungeons close to Laffan. It sounds like we'd have to go on a long trip far away from here if we wanted to enter a dungeon."

"I guess that means we're definitely not going to enter one anytime soon," I said. "Our house was just finished, so..."

"Mm. It would be such a waste to be away from our newly constructed home for a long time," said Natsuki.

We continued to chat as we made our way back home. Suddenly, Yuki brought up another issue. “Oh, wait, I think we forgot to ask about the undead monsters...”

“I didn’t forget, but do you really think we could have brought it up at the time?” Haruka asked. “Diola-san looked quite busy...”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” said Yuki. “Well, it’s not like we’re in a hurry.”

“Mm. However, I think we should do some research ourselves and try to discover countermeasures against undead monsters before we go ask Diola-san,” said Haruka. “I feel like we’ve relied on her a bit too much...”

“Yep. We should put in the effort ourselves, even if we end up having to turn to Diola-san again,” I said.

Diola-san would probably answer us if we asked her about it, but it felt somewhat wrong to depend solely on her for information. That said, it wasn’t like we had access to a lot of different sources of information.

“All right, I guess I’ll go visit weapon shops around town and ask people like Gantz-san,” said Touya.

“In that case, I’ll go check the reference materials at the Adventurers’ Guild once again,” said Natsuki. “It’s possible that I missed or glossed over something.”

“I’ll go ask Aera-san if she knows anything about undead monsters,” said Haruka. “I’m fairly sure that she’s more experienced than us as an adventurer, actually.”

“I guess I’ll tag along with Haruka,” said Yuki. “It wouldn’t be a good idea for me to walk alone.”

Only a few months had passed since we first arrived in Laffan, so the people we could obtain information from were the ones who we knew and had talked with before. It was a fact that we didn’t have many connections.

“Hmm. I guess I’ll wander around town and see if I can find any good items,” I said.

We had met Aera-san as a result of my wandering, so it was possible that I

would stumble across someone wonderful again. However, it wasn't like I was expecting to come across another cute girl like Aera-san. All I was hoping to come across was something that would be effective against undead monsters, and it would be wrong for anyone to assume any other motives on my part. In addition, I felt like it would be somewhat unsafe leaving it to the girls to enter shady stores that dealt with the occult. Such places weren't unusual in this world, but that didn't change the fact that visiting those stores would probably be safer for me than for the girls.



The next day, I walked around Laffan by myself, just as I had planned. I had discovered Aera-san's café by walking around the new town district, the area where the municipal administration was located, but this time, my objective was to search for items, so I walked around the commercial district looking for stores that might have what I wanted.

"I don't know what kind of store I'm supposed to be looking for, though. Shady stores, I guess?"

Based on my assumptions about what stores that dealt with the occult would look like, I tried looking for shady stores, but the stores lining the main street all looked pretty normal. I tried exploring the alleys as well, but it wasn't that much different there aside from the fact that there were fewer people around. I also checked places like general goods stores to see if they had anything in stock that I was looking for, but none of them had any goods that seemed effective against undead monsters. *Man, I wish this world had a large hardware store where you could find almost anything. That way I could easily get my hands on items like shovels or shotguns that can slay undead monsters like zomb—actually, never mind.*

"If I recall correctly, Riva's store should be around here..."

I had gotten bored of searching and searching to no avail, so for a change of pace, I decided to look for Riva's store. It didn't take me too long to find a store that seemed to be the place. However...

"This sure looks way more...compact than the nearby stores."

Based on what Riva had told me, her store also served as her personal

dwelling, but it was nowhere near the size of Aera-san's café. In fact, it was even smaller than Gantz-san's store. Just as she had said, there was no yard, and the building itself looked quite old. It had a gloomy atmosphere; it seemed like the kind of store that would scare off most first-time customers.

"Well, this does fit the 'shady store' condition that I set for myself earlier, so..."

I was lucky that this was the kind of store I had been looking for in regards to both my initial and second objective, so after a moment, I discarded my hesitation and entered the store. The interior was dim, just as I'd thought it would be. The objects for sale that were lined up on the shelves also looked a bit shady, and behind the counter at the back of the store, a person was sitting in a crouch, completely enveloped in a black robe with a hood that hid their face.

The person behind the counter greeted me in a low and hoarse voice when I entered the store.

"...Welcome."

I was beginning to lose confidence in myself and to question whether I'd found the right store after all. "Um, you are Riva, right...?"

"Huh? Oh, is it you, Nao-san?"

When I cautiously asked for confirmation, the voice from under the hood suddenly changed and became more familiar; simultaneously, the person made a sign with their hands and the store became a bit brighter. After that, the person straightened their back and lowered their hood, and some distinctive pink rabbit ears appeared. *Yeah, it's definitely Riva.*

I breathed a sigh of relief before voicing my complaints about the way her store had spooked me. "What's up with this store, Riva? It took me a bit to muster the courage to enter, you know?"

Riva smiled awkwardly. "W-Well, my store was designed for this kind of atmosphere. It's what ordinary people expect from alchemists..."

Her response made perfect sense to me. I had no rebuttal, since this kind of shady store was exactly what I had been looking for during my search for items

that were effective against undead monsters.

“I still think it’s kind of careless not to even glance up at potential customers, though,” I said. “Someone who walked in the door could easily grab some of the objects on sale, after all.”

“Oh, those are just things that *look* like alchemical goods. They don’t actually have much value,” Riva replied.

“They’re just props to complement the atmosphere of this store?!”

“U-Um, they’re not *completely* worthless. Also, they’re not that easy to steal, since I have magical devices set up to prevent theft. Besides, don’t you think most people would be scared of stealing something from a store like this?”

Again, Riva’s response made perfect sense to me. I would definitely hesitate to pick up any of these objects even if she had told me that I could have one for free.

“But I barely get any customers even though I’ve managed to produce the right atmosphere for my store...”

In that case, I think this might actually be the wrong way to go about things, Riva. I wanted to say something to her, since she was laughing sadly about the lack of customers, but I wasn’t that familiar with alchemy stores, which made Riva’s situation harder to figure out than Aera-san’s café had been, since similar cafés had also existed back on Earth. Or rather, there were no alchemist stores at all back on Earth; this was my first time visiting one. As a result, I had no idea about what kind of advice would be right for Riva, so I had no choice but to keep my mouth shut.

When Riva saw my reaction, she seemed to come to her senses; her expression changed to a smile. “Hee hee, sorry for complaining. I shouldn’t have—I’m older than you. Anyway, Nao-san, I see that you’re by yourself today. What would you happen to be looking for?”

In my head, I had never considered Riva older than me, but I decided to avoid commenting about that. “O-Oh, yeah. You see, I’m looking for items that are effective against undead monsters...”

Riva tilted her head and sounded a bit confused. “Undead monsters? Did you

take on a quest that requires you to exorcise a haunted mansion or something?"

"Nah, we encountered some undead in the east forest," I replied. "We managed to defeat them with our magic, but I was wondering if there were any items that could produce similar results..."

Riva looked a bit troubled; her brow fell after I had explained things to her. "Um, Nao-san, things like undead monsters generally fall under the type of work that people at temples deal with, you know?"

"...Oh!" I clapped my hands. *Right, maybe there are people like shrine maidens and priests who are capable of exorcism and so on!* "Does that mean there are no items here that are effective against undead monsters?"

"Well, actually, I do have some items in stock that could be useful," Riva replied.

"You do?!"

"Mm. There's a potion that you can use to ward off undead monsters to a certain extent, and it's somewhat effective if you spread it around your surroundings."

It's not completely effective, huh? That sounds similar to an insect repellent that you can spray around you.

"This potion is worth it for ordinary people to use in emergencies, but I think it's a bit too expensive for adventurers to use on a regular basis," said Riva. "With that in mind, there's another option available. Do you know what elemental metal is, Nao-san?"

"Uh, no, I don't think I've heard of it before," I replied.

"As you can probably infer, it's a type of metal that's imbued with a specific magical element. For example, elemental metal imbued with the Light element can be used to craft weapons that are effective against undead monsters," said Riva. "Alchemists are the only ones who know how to make elemental metal, but..."

Riva's explanation made it sound like the perfect solution for dealing with

undead monsters, but her voice trailed off for some reason.

“Do you not have any in stock here at your store?” I asked.

“I can make some if someone places an order, but I’m not that good at making elemental metal,” said Riva. “The crafting process requires a lot of mana, and the raw materials are also quite expensive. I think it might be better if you asked Haruka-san to try and make some herself.”

I hastily asked Riva to confirm that she wanted to throw away this excellent opportunity to make a profit. “Uh, wait, Riva, are you sure about that?!”

It would be a different story if she were unsure about whether or not someone would purchase her product, but given that elemental metal sounded extremely valuable, it would be a good source of income for her if we ordered some.

However, her response was a timid smile. “It’d feel kind of wrong to make a profit off friends...”

“That kindness is a precious virtue, but I think receiving proper compensation for hard work is completely fair,” I said.

The act of providing discounts to friends was fine to a certain extent, but refusing to accept any money from friends for your own hard work seemed wrong to me. However, it sounded like the crafting of elemental metal would require a lot of mana, so the most realistic option would probably be paying Riva to teach Haruka how to do it. With that in mind, I asked Riva about the price of the materials for crafting elemental metal, but it turned out that they were way more expensive than I had expected.

“Mm, these aren’t things that we can buy right away,” I said. “I’ll have to get back to you after discussing things with the others, but once that’s done, I’m counting on you, Riva.”

Riva chuckled sadly. “Ha ha, sure. I’m down for helping out if you need me to do so. I don’t have much money, but I do have a lot of free time...”



“If I recall correctly, I need to turn right here.”

Riva had seemed a bit reluctant to part with me, probably because she had nothing else to do. However, I wanted to drop by the temple in Laffan, so I'd parted ways with her after asking her for directions. Weapons crafted from elemental metal sounded like they would be an effective way to deal with undead monsters, but they probably weren't something that we could obtain in a short amount of time. On top of that, since we were professional adventurers, it would probably be a good idea to carry around multiple tools for dealing with undead monsters.

"A temple, huh? Now that I think about it, I haven't gotten involved with religious stuff at all in this world."

When I thought of the word "temple," the images that appeared in my mind were of Greek-style temples like the Parthenon, but things like Shinto shrines could technically be considered something similar. I was actually sort of looking forward to finding out what temples looked like in this world.

"Is this it...?"

After a bit of walking through Laffan, I eventually discovered a fine building that looked sort of like a mix between Greek architecture and a simple church made of stone. The building itself wasn't exactly solemn or majestic, but it was larger than the other ones nearby, and the plot of land it sat on was also quite large.

"This is a temple, right? Is it okay for me to go inside...?"

I felt a bit hesitant because there wasn't a sign indicating that anyone could enter, but this temple didn't seem to be a tourist attraction, so I probably wouldn't have to pay an entrance fee. After a moment, I made up my mind and slowly opened the doors. When I passed through the gate, I saw a woman standing inside. She looked like she was in her early twenties and was clad in voluminous white robes. Her long hair was a transparent gold color and was braided up behind her neck. Once she noticed my presence, she turned around and smiled at me.

"Welcome. Are you here to pray?"

There was no way I could say something like "I'm not here to pray, so just tell me effective methods for dealing with the undead," so I nodded. "Um, yes," I

replied. "Also, there's something that I'd like to consult you about..." *I don't know what kind of god is worshiped or enshrined here, however!*

"Consultation? I'd be more than willing if it's something that I can help with, but..."

The woman, who must have been a priestess, had a gentle expression on her face and seemed like she was willing to listen to me, but after I explained my circumstances, that expression became slightly troubled, and she laid a hand against her cheek. "Effective methods for dealing with undead monsters? I believe items such as amulets or holy water would work, but amulets aren't items that can be given away easily."

The priestess told me that her name was Ishuca. According to her, proper amulets that were effective against undead monsters were scarce and valuable items that very few people were capable of crafting. Ishuca-san was apparently one of those people, but she told me that she couldn't easily take on this task because of how much time it would require her to spend away from her duties at the temple.

"I see. In that case, what about holy water?"

"It isn't as scarce and valuable as amulets, but the same applies for holy water..."

According to Ishuca-san, the holy water that temples distributed was completely different from the water that you could create with the Water Magic spell called Holy Water; the former was made by consecrating water through prayers offered by a priest over a long period of time. On top of that, it seemed that holy water was only effective against undead monsters if you directly splashed them with it or soaked your weapons with a large volume, and that effect would fade away once the water had dried up. As a result of the fact that holy water wouldn't last forever, you'd need a lot of holy water if you wanted to use it against undead monsters.

"There have been rumors recently of shady people selling fake holy water at low prices, but holy water is something that is only distributed to faithful believers," said Ishuca. "Of course, I believe you're a pious individual and would never be deceived by such trickery, Nao-san, but..."

Ishuca smiled as she looked at the statue of a god that was enshrined deeper inside the temple. The statue appeared to be made of stone and seemed to depict a male god, and it was about as tall as Natsuki.



There was a box in front of the statue that looked somewhat similar to the kind of donation boxes that you would find at Shinto shrines, and when I took a peek inside, I saw a few coins at the bottom. *Oh, I see. I have to “offer” money along with prayers, huh?*

“...May I offer a prayer here?” I asked.

“Of course. Please take a step forward to do so,” Ishuca replied.

I walked in front of the statue and started to search inside my wallet. We had evenly split the reward for the extermination of the orc nest between the five of us yesterday, so my wallet had a decent amount of money inside, but I was the type of person who would only offer a few hundred yen at shrines back on Earth, even during the first visit of the new year. As I grabbed some silver coins, I hesitated and glanced at Ishuca-san, but she now had a completely straight face that displayed no trace of her gentle expression from earlier. I tried to play it smooth as I pushed away the silver coins into the corners of my purse and grabbed the large silver coins, but it felt like only a tinge of her gentleness had returned. When I noticed that, I pushed away the large silver coins as well and decided to grab a gold coin, and thanks to that decision, it seemed like her expression had returned to normal. *I guess I have no choice but to offer this gold coin...* I tried to convince myself that this was a necessary expense as I tossed the gold coin inside of the donation box, then knelt on the ground and clasped my hands to offer a prayer. Suddenly, I was engulfed in a bright light.

“Congrats! You’re eligible for the first-time login bonus!”

I was very confused when I suddenly heard those casual and carefree words out of nowhere. “Huh...?”

“Man, you Japanese sure aren’t religious. You’re the first person to visit my temple even though I transported over thirty of you to this world! Of course, a decent number of those thirty died right away, ha ha ha!”

I was still engulfed in a bright light and couldn’t see anything, but I slowly came to a realization after I heard those words. “Um, would you happen to be that ‘evil’ god?”

“Yep, that’s how I introduced myself to you in the beginning. However, I go by

the name of Advastlis in this world, so I'd appreciate it if you kept that in mind."

"I-I see..." *Oh, so is Advastlis-sama the god of the temple that I visited?*

"Yeah, this is my temple. The only other temple in Laffan is Beoforg's, so I expected someone would come here much sooner, but..."

Beoforg must have been the name of another god. We had probably all been transported somewhere near Laffan, so it wasn't that unnatural that Advastlis-sama would expect us to pay a visit to his temple, but that was only if we were accustomed to praying to the gods on a regular basis.

"Uh, yeah, ceremonial occasions are the only times that Japanese people my age have anything to do with stuff that has religious influences," I said.

In fact, I had completely forgotten about the existence of temples until Riva had brought them up earlier today. Some people would opportunistically rely on gods during difficult times, but my four friends and I were the kind of people who would instead try to solve our own problems by earning money, so obviously we didn't consider gods completely reliable. In fact, I was fairly sure that most Japanese people didn't think they could always depend on the gods in times of need.

"Mm, that must be it. Well, there's no point in praying to gods who can't actually affect the world, so I guess it makes sense," said Advastlis.

Advastlis-sama's words would probably have gotten him in trouble with most religions back on Earth.

"U-Um, well, there are good things about religion, like a sense of morality and peace of mind..."

"Sure, that's true, but if you cast aside the veil of religion, you could also look at it as people being mentally immature," said Advastlis. "Maybe they only avoid doing bad things because they're scared of their god finding out, or maybe they tell themselves they're doing something because their god approves of it but twist their god's words to their own ends. What are they, sheep that can't think for themselves?"

Those words were quite harsh, but I agreed with Advastlis-sama. No matter how nicely a religious person tried to word something, it wouldn't change the

fact that religion was a driving force behind their ideology. Food was one example that came to mind. The animals that were okay to eat would differ between religions, and there were plenty of religions with different precepts in that regard. Some religions forbade the consumption of beef and pork, which I had eaten on a regular basis back in Japan, and there were also some people who considered the act of consuming whale or dog meat to be barbaric.

But for some reason, most religions permitted the consumption of mutton, so sheep were a pitiful animal that nobody wanted to protect. I wouldn't go out of my way to consume dog meat, but if someone asked me the difference between dog meat and beef, I wouldn't know how to answer, so I had no right to tell someone to not eat either. *Oh well, all that matters is that beef tastes good.*

"It's fine to use precepts or commandments to guide people during the early stages of a world's development, but I think your world is mature enough that everyone should shift to thinking rationally for themselves," said Advastlis. "After all, it's not like there are any gods who actually get involved with mortal affairs in your world."

A dry and awkward laugh escaped my lips. "Ha ha, right. Well, there are people back on Earth who still deny things like the Copernican system and evolution. Is it okay for a god to say this stuff, though?"

"Well, gods like me can actually affect the mortal world. In fact, I can deliver divine punishments upon people who commit foolish acts."

"...You can?"

"Yep. I am a god, after all."

Whoa, that's amazing! It sounded like gods in this world were also capable of providing benefits for people's mortal lives. I was probably biased, but as far as I could tell, the only "benefits" that the major religions back on Earth offered were the promises of Heaven or paradise in the afterlife. Of course, those religions would also claim that they provided benefits for believers in their current lives, but I wasn't religious myself, so it was hard for me to consider good luck or fortune as a kind of gift from some higher being.

"Religion's a pain in the ass because it's vague and ambiguous in many ways,"

said Advastlis. “Oh—more importantly, let’s talk about your login bonus. This stuff is popular with your generation, right? What’s it called again—gacha, right?”

“You’re quite knowledgeable...”

“I am a god, after all. Since this is your first time, I’ll give you some good power! It’s like being guaranteed to roll a rare or better!”

Man, that sounds really tempting. With this god, though, I bet there’s a catch...

“Ha ha ha, don’t worry, there isn’t!”

Oh, I guess it’s fairly normal for a god to be capable of reading minds.

“This place is my divine realm, after all.”

Ugh, that means I can’t think of anything wei—well, I guess there’s no point in trying to resist. It’s not like I’ve achieved enlightenment or anything like that, and I’m not talented enough at controlling my own thoughts either.

“Besides, people who chose weird skills when we first met have no one but themselves to blame, right? All I did was offer normal skills,” said Advastlis. “The skills that you think of as ‘land mines’ are actually well-tuned and balanced. There’s no way a super powerful skill would come with no risks or downsides, right?”

“Yeah, I guess that’s true...”

It wouldn’t make sense for a god from this world to provide unfair amounts of favorable treatment to people like us who had arrived from a different world. Similarly, if someone tried to convince you that you could earn a lot of money quickly by investing in something, wariness would be the correct response. If it were that easy to get rich quick, then the logical conclusion would be for that person to invest their own money instead of trying to convince others to do it. Mythology and folklore back on Earth also contained a lot of stories about people who fell for a god’s sweet talk and then suffered as a result of their foolishness. Gods in Japanese mythology were relatively tame, but there were a lot of gods from different world mythologies that couldn’t be trusted.

“However, didn’t you offer us useful skills like Appraisal and Scout, Advastlis-sama?”

“Oh, those are bonus skills that I slipped in. After all, you and your classmates lived in a peaceful country—there’s no way you could suddenly learn to detect danger to your lives, right? I didn’t want you *all* to die right away.”

“Mm, those kinds of bonus skills have helped us out a lot. Although Third Eye hasn’t been of much use so far...”

“Really? It can’t reveal all of the target’s abilities, but I think it’s quite useful to be able to tell whether or not you can defeat someone in a battle just by looking at them.”

“Oh, I guess that’s true...”

It sounded like it was our own fault for not knowing how to use the Third Eye skill properly. None of us were experts at martial arts or anything like that, so it was impossible for us to accurately measure other people’s strength with the Third Eye skill. The same limitation also applied when we used it on monsters, but if we had some idea of the difference in strength between us and a monster, we would have the option of fleeing. Such information was important in order to avoid falling into a situation where there was no way for us to flee from a foe that was much stronger than us.

“By the way, if you work hard and manage to level up the Third Eye skill, you’ll eventually be able to predict what kind of attacks your opponents are about to use. That even includes monsters and people you’ve just met.”

“Whoa, that does sound really useful! What do I have to do in order to level it up?”

“You have to accumulate experience. It’ll eventually level up on its own if you keep on battling all sorts of monsters.”

It sounded like there wasn’t an easy way to level up the Third Eye skill, but it made sense to me that I’d learn to predict my opponent’s moves in a battle once I had accumulated enough experience.

“Now then, let’s get back to the topic of your first-time login bonus.”

“Oh, okay. Um, is this login bonus only for me? What about my friends?”

“Well, this is a bonus for you because you’re the first person to visit my temple. It wouldn’t be fair to provide a bonus to everyone else as well. It’s my way of saying thanks for paying a visit.”

“I see...” Is this really his way of saying thanks? What if there’s a catch that I haven’t noticed?

“Hm, are you still doubtful? Mm, that carefulness of yours is a good trait. However, this really is my way of saying thanks, and it’s not going to be something overpowered. You know, like how developers need to keep the gameplay balanced.”

Oh, is it the kind of gacha that doesn’t have any powerful rewards even though a rare is guaranteed? Sometimes the art is still quite good, but even so...

“Uh, if you want, I can drop the gacha idea and choose a blessing for you that’ll help your friends as well. However, to balance things out, it’ll be something weak.”

“Weak, huh? Well, I’d actually prefer that if possible.”

I had only visited Advastlis-sama’s temple today by coincidence, and it was thanks to the efforts of everyone in my party that we had survived this long, so I would have felt bad if I were the only one who benefited from this chance encounter. With that in mind, it was probably a better idea to get a blessing that benefited everyone, even if it would be a bit weak. *Advastlis-sama, I sincerely pray that you won’t choose a land mine blessing for us! Please!*

“Hmm. Well, okay, I guess. Let’s see what might be good. Oh, I know, I’ll bestow a blessing that’ll increase the number of experience points that you and your party members gain by ten percent!”

Ten percent?! That’s definitely a weak blessing. What a stingy number! Wait, hold on...

“Um, isn’t that just like the land mine EXP skills that were available during the character creation process...?”

I was quite scared when I asked for confirmation, but Advastlis-sama cleared

up my suspicion right away. “Nah, this is a pure increase in the number of experience points that you gain. There’s no catch. Also, the EXP skills can be useful depending on how you use them, you know? I was completely fair with the skills that I offered, after all. However, it seems like nobody has figured out how to make good use of the EXP skills, unfortunately.”

So there is some kind of loophole to the EXP skills, huh? My theory was that you had to combine them with other skills, since the EXP skills on their own are nothing but a disadvantage, but...

“By the way—so experience points do actually exist in this world?” I asked.

“Yeah. I said in the beginning that your entire class was going to get transported to a world with things like level-ups, right? I thought you’d all be happy about it and work hard to level up, but to my surprise, things didn’t turn out that way!”

“I mean, we can’t check our current levels and experience points...”

“Exactly! I was planning on telling whoever came to my temple about their current level and experience points—like, your current level is 13, and you need 2,580 EXP to level up—but nobody came!”

Advastlis-sama sounded quite upset when he said that, but a system like that where you could only check your level and EXP at a temple and it wasn’t displayed in your status screen sounded like something that you’d only encounter in old games. I found that a bit weird, since he had previously brought up modern game elements like gacha. *Wait, hold on...*

“Huh? Are those numbers actually my level and experience points?”

“Yeah. You’re currently Level 13, which is pretty decent considering that you’ve only been an adventurer for less than a year.”

Seriously?! Character levels do exist in this world?! I already knew that something similar to character levels existed in this world, but it finally felt real to me now that I had heard my exact number of experience points. Man, I feel really happy about this—it’s very motivating to me as a gamer!

“So can I check my levels and experience points whenever I visit your temple, Advastlis-sama?” I asked.

"Yeah, you can. However, make sure to offer a donation of at least one silver coin each time. Actually, for the sake of other believers, I'd appreciate it if you could donate more—say, up to one large silver coin."

Money really does matter, huh? I had donated way more than usual this time—one gold coin—due to that scary look from Ishuca-san, but even one large silver coin every time would get to be quite expensive. The desire to check my experience points every day was only natural for a gamer like me, after all.

"One silver coin is fine as well if you visit my temple frequently. I don't judge the faith of believers by how much they donate."

I mean, Advastlis-sama, I believe in your existence, but faith is a different story. "Just to make sure, it's not like donations in the donation box go into your pocket, right, Advastlis-sama?"

Ishuca-san probably wouldn't do such things, but I was concerned about the possibility that there were greedy priests out there who would use donations to lead luxurious lives.

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that. In this world, donations to the gods always go to righteous causes thanks to the existence of divine punishments."

"I see. That makes sense. I guess someone would have to be quite brave and foolish to attempt to pocket the donations."

It sounded like it would be safe to trust priests in this world. Trying to sneak things past the eyes of the gods was simply too risky.

"Nothing escapes my watchful gaze when it comes to the responsible use of donations," said Advastlis. "Donations to my temples fund a network of orphanages, after all."

"Orphanages?"

"Yeah, there's one located at the back of this temple."

Oh, I see. There wasn't a social security system in this world, so it sounded like it would be a good idea to do my best in order to offer donations on a routine basis, and even a donation made in an insincere or hypocritical spirit would have a purpose and meaning if it was for the sake of supporting orphanages.

“Whoops, time’s almost up. From the next time onward, we won’t be able to chat like this, but bring your friends with you when you visit again. Don’t worry—I’ll tell you your level and experience points each time. See ya!”

“Oh—”

Our conversation had come to an abrupt end; Advastlis-sama had sounded like he was in a hurry as he parted with me. Immediately afterward, the bright light around me vanished, and I found myself back at the temple, kneeling in front of Advastlis-sama’s statue.

“Uh, that wasn’t a dream, right...?”

I couldn’t completely believe what I had just experienced, so I opened up my status display screen to check if anything was different.

Name: Naofumi

Race: Elf (Age: 17)

Condition: Healthy

Skills: Help Guide, Weapon Proficiency: Spears, Magic

Aptitude: Time

Level 2 Spearmanship, Level 1 Dagger Wielding, Level 2 Staff Fighting

Level 2 Evasion, Level 2 Indomitable, Level 2 Enhanced Muscles

Level 1 Magic Barrier, Level 2 Greased Lightning, Level 2 Robust

Level 2 Hawk’s Eye, Level 2 Stealth, Level 1 Traps and Snares 101

Level 4 Scout, Level 2 Third Eye, Level 4 Time Magic

Level 4 Fire Magic, Level 1 Water Magic, Level 3 Earth Magic

Level 2 Disassemble

Blessing: Increased Experience Gain (Tiny)

Oh, there’s a new Blessing row with something called Increased Experience Gain in it?! It didn’t mention the exact ten percent figure, but the word “tiny” within parentheses was an accurate description. However, there was still no

trace of character levels or experience points in my status display screen, so Advastlis-sama probably hadn't been lying earlier when he said that I would have to visit his temple in order to check those numbers.

"I see that you prayed quite fervently for some time."

I turned around when I heard a voice from behind me and saw Ishuca-san smiling at me. It seemed that she had been standing there the entire time I was praying. I decided to apologize, since I wasn't certain whether I seemed suspicious. "Oh, I'm sorry. Has a lot of time passed since I started praying?"

Ishuca-san gently shook her head. "No, not at all. But it appears that you are a much more devout believer than I initially thought, Nao-san."

I put on an ambiguous smile and tried to nonchalantly refute her impression of me. "Uh, I'm not so sure about that..." That was how I truly felt about myself. She probably had no idea that when I arrived at this temple, I hadn't even known the name of the god who was worshiped here.

Ishuca-san extended one of her hands towards me and opened it to reveal a bottle. "Please accept this gift. It probably won't be of use during battles, but it could help you out in emergencies."

"Oh, is this a bottle of holy water? Is it really okay for me to accept something like this?" I asked.

"Of course. Sharing holy water with fellow believers is perfectly fine," Ishuca replied. "May the gods bless you."

I couldn't exactly tell Ishuca-san that it was sort of thanks to her that I had actually received a blessing from Advastlis-sama, so I simply accepted the holy water and thanked her before heading out of the temple.



When I returned home, Touya greeted me with a smug expression on his face.

"All right, let's report our individual results to each other!" Touya exclaimed. "I'll go first!"

"I probably don't have to ask this, but did you *get* any results?" I asked.

"Yeah, I did! According to Gantz-san, you can use something called elemental

metal to make weapons that are effective against the undead, so I'll be able to fight them once I have one!"

I'd had a feeling that that would be the kind of information Touya discovered. It made sense for Gantz-san, as the owner of a weapon shop, to know about that.

"I see. That sounds great," I said. "By the way, Touya, did you ask about the price of those weapons?"

Touya tilted his head in confusion. "...Huh?"

Haruka and Yuki assisted me in dashing Touya's hopes.

"Based on what Aera-san told us, weapons made from elemental metal aren't really affordable," said Haruka.

"Aera-san has a dagger made of elemental metal, but apparently even that was quite expensive," said Yuki. "However, apparently you can make elemental metal with alchemy, so it'll be cheaper if we can provide the material ourselves."

Touya turned towards Haruka and gave her a pleading look. "Haruka...?"

However, Haruka dashed his hopes once again. "I can't make any myself yet. Besides, we'd have to purchase the materials required to make elemental metal, so..."

"Ugh, does that mean I'm still gonna be useless in battle against undead monsters for a while? Did anyone else find another solu—no? Ugh..."

We'd all shaken our heads when Touya asked us for other solutions, but Yuki walked over to cheer him up, patting him on the shoulder. "You can fight just fine against undead monsters that have physical bodies, so I don't think you need to worry about it too much. Aera-san also mentioned that it's usually a good idea to avoid battling undead monsters that don't have physical bodies since it's annoying."

"She also mentioned that undead monsters such as shadow ghosts aren't that dangerous to elves, since we have a lot of mana," said Haruka.

Touya nodded as he listened to the girls, but he tilted his head once he caught

the implication behind Haruka's words. "Wait, hold on, does that mean they're dangerous to *me*?"

"Now that I think about it, Diola-san mentioned that shadow ghosts might be dangerous to people who can't use magic," said Natsuki.

"Oh, did you get a chance to talk with Diola-san, Natsuki?" Haruka asked.

"Mm. She dropped by while I was looking through the reference materials at the Adventurers' Guild," Natsuki replied. "Oh, by the way, it seems that the branch master of the guild has escaped and gone to check out the orc nest."

"Diola-san failed to stop him, huh? Alas," said Haruka.

"Apparently the budget issue was too hard to resolve. Diola-san also told me that there were no records of undead monsters appearing in the east forest," said Natsuki. "I did as much research as I could, but I didn't manage to obtain any usef—"

"Wait, more importantly, what about me?!" Touya asked. "Am I doomed?!"

He sounded quite nervous, and the girls exchanged a glance.

"It sounds like people with less mana are more easily affected, but it's probably fine since we're eighty percent safe," said Yuki.

"That percentage is for our party of five, isn't it?!" Touya exclaimed. "That means I'm not safe at all! It's one hundred percent dangerous for me!"

Touya probably considered this a serious problem for him since he was the one who the shadow ghost had actually hit with some kind of energy or level drain.

As a result, I proposed a solution. "Don't worry, Touya. There are amulets in this world that can probably solve your problems."

"Whoa! I knew I could count on you, Nao! You're my *best* best friend!"

"However, it seems to be nearly impossible to obtain one."

"Damn it! You're just my normal best friend!"

But I am still your best friend, though, huh? I really like that about you, buddy.

Natsuki chuckled as she listened to the banter between Touya and me, then

chimed in. “I heard about amulets from Diola-san, and I asked her about how to obtain them, but...”

“Oh, what did she say?” Touya asked.

“She said that it’s very difficult to obtain one unless you can pay a huge sum of money,” Natsuki replied. “However, Diola-san knows someone who could help us out, so she told me that she would try contacting them and that I should come back tomorrow and check in with her.”

“Whoa, nice! I knew I could count on you as my last hope, Natsuki!” Touya exclaimed. “So, what about you, Nao? Anything on your end? I didn’t manage to find many details, but I found out about the existence of elemental metals, you know?”

Touya was looking so smug that I tried to punch him, but he easily caught my attack, so I pressed my fists against his as I voiced my rebuttal. “Just to be clear, I learned about elemental metal as well. However, unlike you, I didn’t bring up the idea since I knew it was too expensive. I also managed to obtain information about amulets and holy water, but...”

“Holy water probably won’t be easy to use since we’d have to splash it directly on undead monsters or soak our weapons in it,” said Haruka. “On top of that, it seems to be difficult to obtain.”

“Yeah, it is,” I said. “Oh, and by the way—I managed to obtain some holy water.”

Everyone looked quite surprised when I produced the bottle of holy water that I had received from Ishuca-san and placed it on the table in front of us.

Yuki grabbed the bottle and stared at it for a moment. “So this is holy water, huh? Haruka and I gave up on trying to obtain some.”

“It’s just one bottle of holy water,” I said. “It cost one gold coin.”

“Bleh?!” A weird sound escaped Yuki’s mouth as the bottle almost slipped out of her hands, but she hastily hugged it to her chest to prevent it from falling to the floor. “Th-That’s way too expensive! A small bottle like this one would be empty after just a few splashes!”

“Yeah, it’s basically just like a good luck charm to keep on us, so we shouldn’t throw it at undead monsters,” I said.

There wasn’t even one cup of holy water in the bottle, but it was worth the equivalent of ten thousand yen, so there was no way that we could use a lot of it on a regular basis.

“Leveling up our Light Magic might be the best option for us,” said Haruka. “The Holy Weapon spell is available from Level 5 onward, after all.”

“Mm, Haruka and I will have to work hard on that,” said Natsuki. “By the way, Diola-san also told me some intriguing information about holy water.”

The information that Natsuki added was more or less the same as what Ishuca-san had told me, but Natsuki had some additional information: it was apparently possible to obtain holy water at a town called Kelg. According to Natsuki, Kelg was located far to the south of Laffan and could be reached by following the highway, and a new cult that had sprung up in that town was selling holy water.

“I heard the same thing from the priest who gave me this bottle of holy water,” I said. “She warned me not to get deceived by fake holy water.”

Natsuki said, “There’s more to this, Nao-kun. New cults usually get ignored and don’t flourish, but apparently this new cult has managed to gather a lot of believers. It’s called the Holy Satomi Sect.”

We all grimaced when we heard that name, and Touya blurted out what we were all thinking. “I don’t wanna get anywhere near that cult!”

Cults were something that I would respond to with a “yikes” under the best of circumstances, but the name of the cult only made it even worse. It was technically possible that the cult had nothing to do with any of our classmates, but that probability was close to zero.

“Satomi, huh? I can’t recall if there was anyone with that name in our class,” said Haruka.

“I’m not sure either,” said Natsuki. “It’s hard for me to remember the first names of people that I’m not close with...”

Satomi was a typical name for Japanese girls, so Touya and I weren't of any use; neither of us could even recall the last names of most of the guys in our class. Apparently no one came to mind for Haruka and Natsuki either.

However, Yuki was the most sociable person among us, and she seemed to have a clue. "If I recall correctly, Takamatsu-san's first name was Satomi. I don't remember the kanji, though."

Is remembering other people one of the secrets to being a very sociable person? I can't recall the face of the person Yuki's talking about even after hearing her surname...

Touya must have been the same kind of person I was, since he muttered, "Was there a person like that?" as he tried to rack his brains.

"Takamatsu-san was a plain-looking girl, right?" Haruka asked.

"Mm, if I recall correctly. I remember seeing her reading magazines at her desk during breaks at school," said Natsuki. "However, I don't know much about her; we never really interacted."

The surname seemed to be enough for Haruka and Natsuki to recall who this person was, and after they'd provided me with that extra information, I found that some memories had finally surfaced. I couldn't recall ever having had a proper chat with this classmate, but my memories told me that if I was thinking of the right person, Takamatsu was a demure girl with long black hair. It was hard for me to match that image with someone who would start a cult. *Is this her way of starting anew in a different world? I guess she's been somewhat successful in the sense that she's gathered a lot of believers, but...*

"So did that Takamatsu person become a cult leader?" Touya asked.

"We don't know for sure yet, but that's probably the case," said Haruka.

"A new cult happened to pop up around the same time we got transported to this world, and that cult happens to be located in a town near Laffan, and the name of that cult happens to have 'Satomi' in it," I said. "Yeah, there's no way this is a coincidence." At least, I would have been shocked if it were. The odds had to be infinitesimally low.

"Well, let's put aside the topic of Takamatsu-san herself for now," said

Haruka. "More importantly, the holy water that cult is handing out has to be fake, right?"

"I'm not sure. It seems to be selling quite well for some reason," said Natsuki.

"Mm, that's most likely because of some skill that Takamatsu-san has. It's just some 'holy' water from a new cult, after all," said Haruka. "It's not an issue if she actually has a skill that allows her to create real holy water, but I bet the skill she's using is a dangerous one that can control or influence people's minds."

"Wait, hold on. Was Takamatsu the person who deceived Aera-san?" I asked.

"Possibly, yeah. After all, that 'consultant' somehow 'convinced' Aera-san to go along with their ideas," Haruka replied.

I had no idea exactly what kind of skill Takamatsu had used, but it sounded like a dangerous one that would be difficult to counteract, so I wanted to avoid her at all costs. It went without saying that I was uncomfortable with the idea of any of us getting mind controlled.

"I think we should avoid going anywhere near Kelg for the near future," I said. "Does this sound good?"

Everyone agreed to that plan. "Yeah!"

The combination of a new cult and one of our classmates made Kelg sound like a whole field of land mines, one that would be suicidal to explore, so I was glad that we were all on the same page.

"Ugh, I can't believe one of our classmates is responsible for this." Touya sighed and sounded quite exhausted about this discovery. "By the way, is it actually that easy to start a new cult in this world?"

"Yes, surprisingly," said Haruka. "Well, it's more like the country we're in isn't that strict about cults..."

According to Haruka, the way that cults were treated would differ from country to country. There were some stricter countries out there that would chain up and possibly execute anyone who tried to start a new cult.

"That said, it's normally pretty difficult to recruit believers for a new cult in

this world.” Yuki shrugged before continuing. “Gods actually exist here and deliver oracles and punishments, so it’s hard to get people to fall for suspicious new cults.”

“Are you sure those aren’t just coincidences or strained interpretations of what’s actually happening?” Natsuki asked.

Natsuki sounded quite doubtful; of course, she was a realistic person and didn’t have the General Knowledge skill.

Haruka shook her head. “What Yuki said seems to be common sense in this world. It’s hard to prove the reality of oracles, but divine punishments are quite obvious—there have been incidents of priests being struck by lightning or spontaneously combusting in public after committing fraud or injustices.”

“Those incidents sound like they could be the result of ordinary magic, but I take it that’s not what you’re talking about?” Natsuki asked.

“Of course. Magic in this world is a mundane type of power,” said Haruka.

“They’re probably otherworldly phenomena that are way more overwhelming than regular magic,” said Yuki. “That’s what I think, at least!”

The people in charge of maintaining law and order in this world undoubtedly took the existence of magic into account when investigating crimes, and people who specialized in such tasks probably knew how to distinguish divine punishment from mere magic.

“Well, I doubt we’ll have anything to do with divine punishment if we just lead normal lives,” said Haruka.

Uh, Haruka, I think you might’ve jinxed us by saying that. We had just talked about the existence of the Holy Satomi Sect, so there was a chance that we would have to get involved at some point. But I’m not gonna say anything—we might get jinxed for real if I do!

“Now, then, I think that should be it as far as the information that we gathered today,” said Haruka. “It feels like we’re still over-relying on Diola-san, but let’s go to the guild tomorrow in order to discuss things with her.”

Haruka was attempting to wrap things up, but I held up a hand. “Hold on,

Haruka. I'm not done yet."

"Hm? Do you have some amazing information to share?"

"Yeah, I saved the best for last."

Haruka looked like she wasn't expecting anything great from me, but I smirked back at her with absolute confidence. The last information bomb I had to drop wasn't really related to the main topic of discussion, but I was still fairly sure that it would be the most surprising and useful discovery any of us announced.

I paused for dramatic effect, waiting until everyone was ready to listen, before I revealed what I'd learned. "You see, I actually met a god earlier today."

Everyone froze and lapsed into a painful silence. Several moments passed before someone finally broke that silence.

That someone happened to be Yuki. "...Touya, call an ambulance."

"Wee-ooo, wee-ooo! Ugh. It pains me to say this, but the patient is beyond help!" Touya exclaimed.

"We were too late to save him, huh? If only we had been quicker..." said Haruka.

"Indeed. I wish I had noticed the darkness that was plaguing Nao-kun's heart and mind beforehand," said Natsuki.

What's with this skit playing out in front of me?! I can't believe you all improvised your dialogue so easily!

"Listen, you guys have the wrong idea! Also, please don't join in their skit, Natsuki!" I exclaimed.

Natsuki was covering her face with both of her hands and looking down, pretending like she was sad, but when I told her to drop the act, she looked up, stuck her tongue out at me, and giggled. It was pretty cute, but it wasn't the reaction I wanted at the moment.

"Sure, it's my fault for acting dramatic, but I'm serious here!" I exclaimed.

Touya said, "I mean, I'm pretty sure that's how we were supposed to react to

what you just said. Or what, is it some kind of metaphor, like how you met your ‘goddess’ or something? You happen to be quite lucky when it comes to meeting new girls like Aera-san, so...”

Haruka’s brow knit when Touya mentioned Aera-san’s name. “Who is it, Nao? Did you meet someone at the temple...?”

“Well, it’s true that Ishuca-san was pretty—she looked very pure and feminine, but—”

“Damn it, so you did meet a new girl! Why are you the one who gets to meet young girls whenever you walk around town, Nao?!” Touya exclaimed. “What’s the difference between you and me?! I usually only meet middle-aged dudes around town, you know! Of course, I went to a weapon shop this time, so...”

Touya had suddenly interrupted me to voice some complaints, but it wasn’t right for him to blame his bad luck on me. “That’s just because of where each of us went this time. Besides, I checked out a lot of different places like general goods stores, and the people there were mostly middle-aged dudes. I didn’t get any good information from those places, however.”

Riva-san was the only young girl I had met at any of the stores I’d visited today. Besides, I had met Riva through an introduction from Diola-san, so Touya’s complaints didn’t apply in this case.

“Also, I’ve only met two new young girls so far, so I don’t think it’s fair to call me luc—”

“Explain in detail, Nao,” said Haruka.

“Um, okay.”

Haruka sounded like she wouldn’t accept no as an answer, so I obeyed her command and explained who Ishuca-san was. Ishuca-san was probably a bit older than us—maybe in her early twenties—and my conversation with her had been entirely businesslike. On top of that, she had seemed pretty scary for some reason. I emphasized that part as I explained that nothing had happened between her and me. I wouldn’t have put a gold coin into that donation box if Ishuca-san hadn’t seemed so scary at the time, after all.

“Do you understand now...?” I asked.

I was a bit nervous as I slowly asked Haruka for confirmation, and she closed her eyes before nodding. “Mm, sort of. What about the ‘god’ that you met, then?”

“There’s nothing more to it than what I said,” I replied. “Well, I’m not sure if you can say that I actually ‘met’ the god, but...”

“Touya, call an ambu—”

“Enough of that skit, Yuki!” I exclaimed. “Look, what I mean is that I didn’t actually meet the god in person. I only heard his voice.”

I tried my best to accurately recount what I remembered of my conversation with the god. The most important details were his name, the information about character levels and experience points, and the blessing that he had bestowed upon me, but it was possible that the others would notice something I hadn’t due to their different perspectives.

“I see. If your status display screen actually changed, then I guess it means you weren’t daydreaming, Nao,” said Haruka.

“I completely believed you from the beginning, Nao!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Yeah, right, sure you did. I honestly didn’t believe it myself until I checked my status display screen,” I said. I would have hesitated to recount all of this to everyone if my status display screen hadn’t had that new blessing row in it.

“So that ‘evil’ god was Advastlis-sama, huh?”

“Oh, do you know about this god, Yuki?” I asked.

“Yeah. Based on the General Knowledge skill, Advastlis-sama is one of the Five Great Gods,” Yuki replied. “Beoforg-sama, who you also mentioned, is another of the five. The other three are Igurimayer-sama, Orfar-sama, and Veshmia-sama.”

“I had a hunch about this, but it’s good to know that the ‘evil’ god is well-known in this world,” said Natsuki.

“Is that really a good thing?” Touya asked. “Well, I guess it’s better than his true identity being some sealed evil god, but still.”

I didn’t even want to think about the theory that Touya had brought up, since

that would mean we were all doomed. I had no intention of becoming the type of hero who slew gods, but I also didn't want to be on the side of those who would get slain by such heroes.

"Well, it's possible that we could mitigate any issues that result from people finding out about our circumstances if we explain that it was a divine act by Advastlis-sama," said Haruka. "Divine punishments exist in this world, so that should also work in our favor."

"Mm, most people would be too scared to lie about the acts of a god, so that makes sense," said Yuki.

I wasn't sure if that would be enough to make people trust our word, but it would be better than trying to explain that an "evil" god had transported us to this world.

"I'm surprised you got something called a first-time login bonus, though," said Haruka. "It sounds like a joke, but I'm glad that Advastlis-sama actually granted you a blessing. Thanks for taking the rest of us into consideration as well, Nao."

Haruka smiled at me, and I averted my eyes from her and covered my mouth with my right hand. "O-Oh, don't worry about it. Our lives in this world have only been possible because of our team effort, so I just felt like it would be wrong if I were the only one who benefitted from the bonus."

"I still think it's impressive that you managed to think of that at the time," said Yuki. "Thanks, Nao."

"Mm, you had to face a god one-on-one, so it's proof of your mental fortitude," said Natsuki. "Thank you very much, Nao-kun."

"I would've wished to be bound by fate to a cute girl with anima—never mind, forget that. Cheers, Nao!" Touya exclaimed.

I felt a bit embarrassed when I heard everyone express their thanks, though one of them had done so a bit differently from the others. *That said, Touya, there's nothing wrong with wishing for something like that. As a fellow guy, I completely understand how you feel, although it seems like the girls don't approve.*

Touya's honesty earned him some cold looks from the girls, and he hastily

continued talking in an attempt to dance around the subject. “I-I gotta say, though, ten percent sounds kind of stingy. Sure, it affects all of us, but still.”

“I don’t think so. Ten percent might not seem like much if you view experience points as mere numbers, but I believe that a permanent increase in how fast we level up relative to other people will make a huge difference in the long run,” said Natsuki.

“At the same time, it won’t actually be useful unless we continue to work hard and gain experience points,” said Yuki. “I guess Advastlis-sama really is a just god who prioritizes fairness and balance!”

Oh, so it’s not like a simple difference between Level 10 and Level 11, huh? Thinking about it in terms of savings, compound interest was the analogy that came to mind. It wouldn’t feel like there was much difference at first, but it would pay off eventually. However, the amount of money that I’d had in my savings back on Earth wouldn’t have been enough to make a huge difference even after dozens of years, and the rates were quite low as well.

“Thanks to this blessing, I guess we can feel a bit safer if we ever end up facing off against our classmates,” said Haruka. “Although that’s only if we never stop working hard.”

“Our classmates, huh? Do you really think we’ll have to battle some of them?” I asked.

“Of course. People like Umezono-san are like cute puppies barking at us, but there’s a high likelihood that one or more of our other classmates attempted to use the Plunder skill on Yuki and Natsuki,” said Haruka. “Classmates like that are our enemies, so peacefully coexisting with them isn’t an option.”

Umezono-san had been very hostile towards us, so I was amazed by how bold and courageous Haruka was; she had more or less described Umezono-san’s threat level as “cute” and not worth worrying about. It was true, however, that I wasn’t that scared of Umezono-san either. She looked cute and was basically a careless person who’d dug her own grave. In fact, I felt an overwhelming sense of pity for her once I recalled the way she had gloated as she ran away from us. *I guess it wouldn’t hurt to treat her kindly if we ever meet again...*

“Well, those classmates probably died when they tried to use the Plunder

skill, but I'm not sure how things might turn out with that Holy Satomi Sect if Takamatsu was the one who scammed Aera-san," said Haruka.

"Mm, it's possible that she and her cult might try to mess with us even if we do our best to avoid her," said Yuki.

"Eh, I don't think there's any point in worrying about that. It's possible nothing will happen." Touya clapped his hands as though to clear the slightly somber atmosphere before changing the topic to something cheerful. "More importantly, experience points! It's great that we can actually find out about our experience points!"

"Yeah, I'm curious about my own experience points!" Yuki exclaimed. "There probably isn't much of a difference between mine and Nao's, however..."

"The main drawback of checking is the fact that we have to pay donations each time, but it'll be good to know how close we are to leveling up," said Haruka.

"Based on what Nao-kun mentioned, the donations are used to fund an orphanage, right? I think contributing to such causes is perfectly fine," said Natsuki. "We can spare that much nowadays, after all."

Advastlis-sama had told me that even silver coins would do if I visited his temple on a regular basis, but large silver coins were probably a better choice based on the look that I had received from Ishuca-san. One large silver coin might as well have been a cup full of our own blood back when we first arrived in this world, but Natsuki was right that we could spare that kind of money nowadays. On top of that, gods actually existed in this world, so accumulating virtue through acts of charity would be a good idea as well. *Wait, is it possible to accumulate virtue if I have ulterior motives? Eh, don't think about it too much.*

"Okay, let's all drop by the temple tomorrow before we go see Diola-san," said Haruka.



The next day, we left our house immediately after finishing breakfast. I led the way to the temple, which was located in an area of Laffan that no one else had

visited before. It was a very distinct building that would definitely attract tourists, so everyone seemed quite intrigued once we had arrived outside and were looking up at it.

“Is this the temple of the evil—I mean, is this Advastlis-sama’s temple?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah. However, we probably shouldn’t call him an ‘evil’ god from now on since he’s one of the Five Great Gods in this world,” I said.

“Oh, right. It would be bad if a priest overheard us,” said Yuki. “I guess we should all refer to him as Advastlis-sama from now on, even though it’s a bit hard to pronounce.”

The rest of us all nodded. Advastlis-sama had referred to himself as an “evil” god, but there was no way that his believers would be happy to hear their god being talked about that way. On top of that, we might be subject to an inquisition if zealous believers found out, though I wasn’t sure if things like that actually took place in this world. In any case, actions that discredited other people’s faith were dangerous, and we absolutely had to avoid doing such things.

“Okay, let’s enter the temple,” I said.

Everyone else was still looking up at the temple, so I urged them to follow me as I stepped inside. We were greeted by the sight of Ishuca-san cleaning the interior. However, she paused when she noticed me and looked quite surprised. “Oh, Nao-san, correct? Are you here today with your friends to offer prayers?”

“Yeah, I am,” I replied. “My friends said that they wanted to offer prayers as well, so I brought them with me.”

“I’m very glad to hear that. The watchful eyes of our god are ever present,” said Ishuca.

Ishuca-san gently smiled at us and watched as we all walked in front of Advastlis-sama’s statue. Each of us then tossed a large silver coin into the donation box for a total of five. Ishuca-san seemed a bit confused when she saw that sight.

“Um, the donations are greatly appreciated, but you don’t have to force

yourself to donate so much,” said Ishuca. “It’s the thought that counts, and acts such as pious donations should only be ones that you can afford. Our god does not discriminate based on the amount of money that you donate, after all.”

Uh, the god himself told me to donate money. Also, Ishuca-san, didn’t you pressure me to donate more money last time, like the amount that I initially planned on giving wasn’t enough? Was that just an initiation fee? What about my friends, then? Do they not need to pay? Is it a perk of me introducing them to the faith?

I was a bit confused because of how differently Ishuca-san was acting compared to yesterday, but Haruka smoothly responded for me. “Oh, this is perfectly affordable for us. This temple runs an orphanage, right? We simply want to help out children who are less fortunate.”

“Oh, that’s a wonderful mindset to have! I’m sure our god will bless you all,” said Ishuca. “Please let me do what I can to help you all out by praying for your safety.”

Ishuca-san seemed very moved; she clasped her hands and walked over next to us, then knelt down and started praying. I felt a bit awkward. It was almost as if I had to donate more due to the fact that Advastlis-sama had blessed us with things like skills. We all imitated Ishuca-san and prayed towards Advastlis-sama’s statue.

“Your current level is Level 13. You need to gain 2,320 EXP in order to level up.”

The voice I heard in my head was the same as the one I’d heard yesterday, but I didn’t receive an answer when I tried to think of some questions, so apparently the only things that I could check here were my level and my experience points. Another thing I noticed was that the number of experience points that I needed in order to level up had decreased a bit. I hadn’t slain any monsters since yesterday; all I had done was my daily training. *Does that mean you gain experience points from training as well? Hmm...*

The others had started to stand up while I was lost in thought, so I hastily copied them and lowered my head towards Ishuca-san, who was the last to rise to her feet. “Thank you for your time today, Ishuca-san.”

“The gates of the temple are always open to those in need,” said Ishuca. “Donations are not absolutely necessary, so feel free to visit whenever you want to offer prayers.”

Ishuca-san saw us off, and after we parted ways with her, we walked for a while until Haruka broke the silence by muttering in an exhausted tone, “I completely understand what you were talking about earlier, Nao.”

“Right?! Ishuca-san’s really good at making you feel like you need to donate a decent amount of money!” I exclaimed.

“Mm, I guess there was no need for us to worry about you getting too close to her,” said Yuki.

“She had a gentle demeanor, but she also seemed very competent at her job,” said Natsuki.

The girls and I had arrived at an understanding, but Touya glanced at us with a look of confusion on his face. “Eh, really, Nao? I think she seems nice. She said that we don’t have to force ourselves to donate money!”

“I don’t think you’re wrong about her being a kind person, but I interpreted her words as implying that we should donate a lot if we can afford it,” said Haruka. “There’s a chance that I’m being too cynical, but those are my honest feelings.”

“Yeah, I think you’re a bit too distrustful...”

It seemed like Touya still wanted to believe that Ishuca-san was pure-hearted, but he was alone in that opinion, and Touya’s point of view would probably never outweigh the combined intellect of the four of us.

“Well, I don’t think there was anything *wrong* with the way Ishuca-san acted,” said Natsuki. “She’s probably in charge of managing that temple, and it’s detrimental to have a pure-hearted person at the top of any organization, so I’m glad that doesn’t seem to be the case here.”

“Mm, that’s a good point,” I said.

It wouldn’t be a problem if an organization consisted entirely of good people, but there were bad people in the world who genuinely believed that they had

to deceive others to get ahead in life and that their victims had only themselves to blame for getting deceived. People who deceived others were bad people, but having someone at the top of an organization who was easily deceived would also be a bad thing, and it would be a nightmare for the people under them. We had to be wary of the Holy Satomi Sect, so the fact that religious figures in Laffan were shrewd and strong-willed was good to know; with that knowledge, we could rest at ease.

Touya didn't seem completely convinced, but he also didn't seem to care that much; he changed the topic with excitement in his eyes. "Well, if Ishuca-san is a good person, then I guess it doesn't really matter. More importantly, let's talk about our levels! I'm Level 13!"

"I'm also Level 13," Haruka replied. "Nao is probably the same level as well."

"I'm Level 12, maybe because Yuki and I joined the party a bit late," said Natsuki.

"Mm, I'm also Level 12," said Yuki. "The level gap is probably because you three trained for a while before visiting Sarstedt."

"Well, a gap of just one level shouldn't really matter," I said. "Our levels will probably even out at some point in the future when it becomes harder to level up, after all."

It was fairly normal in games for leveling up to become more difficult at higher levels, and the same applied to reality: once you got really good at something, your improvement plateaued. In addition, safety was our highest priority, and it wasn't like we could tell the ideal level for confronting a particular kind of monster anyway, so the only purpose of levels was to tell us roughly how strong we had become.

"Level 12 and Level 13, huh? We've been adventurers for about half a year, right? Is that considered fast or slow?" Yuki asked.

"Well, Advastlis-sama told me that Level 13 is quite decent for someone who's been an adventurer for less than a year," I said.

"Yeah, we've put in a lot of effort compared to others," said Touya. "I would have felt a bit depressed if Advastlis-sama had said we've slacked off too

much..."

"We've definitely worked harder than most of the other adventurers here in Laffan, but I don't think there's any point in comparing ourselves with people who haven't achieved as much as we have, Touya-kun," said Natsuki.

"Mm. You only get a small ego boost when you think about how other people are worse than you, like when it comes to grades," said Yuki. "It doesn't actually help your own growth."

I was quite impressed by the positive mentality that the girls had, especially since they'd had very good grades back on Earth. On the other hand, I'd always been the kind of guy who'd feel satisfied as long as my grades were higher than average, although I had made sure to put in enough effort to avoid getting Fs. Honestly, it was more like the girls had forced me to study. I was always grateful for the help, but they hadn't gone easy on me at all.

"Nao, just to make sure, Advastlis-sama said Level 13 is quite decent, right?" Haruka asked. "If Level 13 is just 'decent,' then that probably means there are people out there who have worked harder than us, and there's a possibility that some of those people are our classmates."

"I mean, yeah, but I don't really think there's any way for us to work harder—actually, I guess we technically can," I said.

I had worked hard and given adventuring my all, but our lives in this world were easy in some respects. We had prioritized earning money over combat, and we had also taken a semi-vacation, namely the fishing trip. With that in mind, we would probably be stronger than we were now if we had spent all of that spare time focusing on combat, but...

"I'm honestly fine with our current pace of growth," said Yuki. "I do want to become stronger so we can protect ourselves better, but it's not like I enjoy combat for its own sake, and we don't really have any reason to force ourselves to work harder, right?"

"Mm, becoming stronger is just one means to an end," Haruka replied. "And of course, combat comes with risks as well."

"I feel exactly the same way," said Natsuki. "It's true that we need to work

hard, but there's no point in working extra hard if it leads to us dying."

The girls were all hard workers, but they seemed to consider combat different from studying. When it came to studying, the only risks associated with working extra hard were fatigue and damaging your eyesight, but working extra hard to level up would mean putting our lives on the line. It was even possible to suffer injuries that we couldn't easily heal with magic. With that in mind, there was no point in forcing ourselves to do such things.

"Yeah, I'm also perfectly fine with our current pace," I said. "We're putting in just about the right amount of effort to make it enjoyable for me."

"Huh? We aren't going to work on leveling up even though we can check our levels and experience points now?" Touya asked.

Touya was pouting and sounded a bit upset, probably because he wanted to enjoy the gamelike elements of this world. As a fellow guy, I knew how he felt, but I wasn't so obsessed with combat that I was willing to risk my neck.

"I never said that we're not going to work on leveling up. There's just no point in forcing ourselves to work extra hard for it," said Haruka. "Well, if you desperately want to work on leveling up and become the world's strongest man, I'm not going to stop you, but we aren't going to tag along with you either."

"Oh, are you going to become the kind of warrior who seeks out stronger adversaries in order to overcome them? Good luck with that, Touya," I said.

"We'll come to cheer for you if you participate in fighting tournaments!" Yuki exclaimed.

"Tournament fighters probably need a different diet to be in top condition. They'd need meals with low calories and a lot of protein and vegetables," said Natsuki. "I think the main source of protein available in this world is beans, but I'm not sure if it's possible to make tasty meals with those ingredients."

"Four-on-one training sessions—all of us against Touya—should be good for him as well," said Yuki.

"In that case, we can also leave combat to Touya for the most part and focus on backing him up, and—"

Touya hastily interrupted the girls. “Uh, well, I don’t want to become stronger that badly! I’m just saying that leveling up seems fun, but earning money is still my top priority!”

Natsuki, Haruka, and Yuki chuckled when they heard Touya’s rebuttal.

“You want to get married to a cute girl with animal ears, right?” Natsuki asked.

Touya grinned and gave a thumbs up. “Yep! Actually, come to think of it, I guess that means earning money comes second since that’s my top priority!”

“I see that you’re as determined as ever, Touya,” I said. “In that case, let’s go discuss things with Diola-san as well.”

I voiced my support for Touya’s dream before we started to walk towards the Adventurers’ Guild.

“I’m sorry for asking your party to go out of your way to visit today,” said Diola.

“Oh, that’s fine. We had things that we wanted to ask anyway,” said Haruka. “So, what’s the subject matter this time?”

“It’s somewhat of a long story, so let’s move somewhere else first,” Diola replied.

It seemed like Diola-san had calculated when we would arrive based on our usual visits since she was waiting for us at the counter, and we followed her as she led us to one of the rooms on the second floor of the guild. It was our first time entering such a room, and it looked like a simple parlor. The interior of the room wasn’t fancy like ones that were meant for hosting important guests, but there were some decent quality sofas and a table, so it was sufficient for the purpose of sitting down for a while to discuss things.

Diola-san told us to sit down on one of the sofas and left for a bit. Eventually, she brought some warm tea back with her and served that tea to all of us before she slowly started the conversation. “Has your party heard anything about the haunted mansion that’s located in this town?”

The question that Diola-san asked us felt a bit sudden and out of nowhere, so

we all looked at each other out of confusion.

“You’re talking about the haunted mansion that you guided us to while we were looking for a house, right? If so, then we haven’t really heard anything about it since then,” Haruka replied.

Everyone else shook their heads as well to indicate that they didn’t know anything either, but I paused in thought for a bit before I recalled something that I had heard the other day. “Oh, someone asked if I had taken on a quest to exorcise a haunted mansion when I was looking for items that are effective against undead monsters.”

The person who had asked me that question was Riva, and I didn’t think much of it at the time since she had asked it in a nonchalant manner, though I was curious if this meant that it was normal for people in Laffan to connect the dots between undead monsters and a haunted mansion.

I felt somewhat happy once I had recalled this information, but a troubled look appeared on Diola-san’s face once she heard my words. “I figured as much. It was only a matter of time before one of you caught word of this if you searched for items that are effective against undead monsters. Now then, please allow me to take the time to explain things about the haunted mansion in this town so that your party doesn’t get confused or deceived by inaccurate or incorrect information.”

“Um, is a detailed explanation really necessary?” Natsuki asked. “The mansion did seem like it had a story to it, but it was just one where the mistress of a noble had lived in and how people who rented it would get sick, right?”

I hadn’t been able to sense anything from that haunted mansion at the time, but Diola-san had been adamant that we shouldn’t enter the mansion, so I was fairly sure that it was a spooky and dangerous place.

“Mm, that’s how I explained things at the time. However, that’s not completely accurate,” said Diola. “I merely explained it that way because a lot of people in this town believe that about the haunted mansion.”

Uh, I have a bad feeling about this. Is this really something that we’re supposed to know about?

However, Diola-san didn't seem to notice my confusion as she carried on with her words. "The full story goes back a few decades ago when some mithril had been discovered in these lands. You all know what mithril is, right?"

"Um, in simple terms, it's a very expensive metal, right?" I asked.

Diola-san chuckled when she heard my frank description. "Mm, it's a very valuable and expensive metal. It's very attractive due to its quality of brightness that doesn't tarnish, and it's quite popular as a material for making accessories as well. I'd love to meet a wonderful person one day who can afford to gift me a ring made of mithril—" She paused in the middle of her sentence when she noticed some warm looks from us and gently coughed on purpose before she continued on with her words. "Oh, I'm sorry for getting off-topic. Now then, mithril is quite valuable, but its true value only comes to surface when it's crafted into things like weapons. In fact, weapons made of mithril can turn the tides for a war, depending on the circumstances."

The way that Diola-san had described mithril made it sound like it was the difference between a wooden sword and a metal sword. According to Diola-san, mithril wouldn't be capable of changing the course of a battle in one blow, but lords with mithril weapons would always win battles against lords that didn't have mithril weapons. As a result, mithril was considered more valuable than gold, and lords would become overjoyed if a mithril mine were discovered in their lands, since it would basically promise them fortune and success for the future growth of their territory.

"The lord of these lands was very happy when mithril was discovered here, of course, and he ordered for the mining of the mithril to begin."

"Um, that's a good thing, right?" Yuki asked. "Mithril can support the growth and development of lands, so..."

"Mm, correct. However, that's only if the mining of the mithril was done through proper means and procedures."

"Huh?" We were all very confused when we heard those next words from Diola-san.

"As I have explained, mithril is a very valuable resource, so mithril mines are managed by the kingdom," said Diola. "The mining and sale of mithril without

permission is heavily outlawed and restricted, and the consequences of breaking this law are as grave as treason.”

“W-Wait, hold on, Diola-san,” said Haruka. “This sounds like something we shouldn’t know about, so...”

Haruka had hastily tried to interrupt the scary turn of events that I had more or less expected, but Diola-san shook her head before she continued with her words. “No, this is something your party needs to know about. It would be an issue if rumors cause your party to have a warped perception of Viscount Nernas, the lord of these lands.”

According to Diola-san, the lord had started mining operations for mithril and kept it a secret from the kingdom, but he couldn’t openly recruit miners due to the confidential nature of this operation. The lord had initially used local troops for mining mithril, but those troops had their own work to do as well, so the shortage of workers became a problem. The solution that the lord had in mind for this was to force felons to do the mining work. Felons could be worked to death, unlike local troops, and things had turned out well for a while, but there weren’t that many felons in this viscounty since it wasn’t a very populous one. As a result, the lord had decided to “create” more felons himself.

“Yikes, was that the start of the dark ages for the Nernas viscounty?” Touya asked.

“Mm, that’s what things were like at the time,” Diola replied.

Diola-san smiled in a troubled manner, but it seemed like the situation at the time was nothing to laugh or smile about. According to Diola-san, people were chained up for minor offenses that would normally only warrant a warning and taken away to never be seen again, and a lot of cases had occurred in this viscounty where family members had never returned from heading out to shop for things, so the ones left behind had only managed to find out what happened after hearing about it from a witness.

“This honestly sounds way spookier than the haunted mansion...” said Yuki.

“Mm,” said Natsuki. “Laffan seems like a peaceful town, and yet...”

“It is a peaceful town nowadays. However, there are still some residual effects

from those days,” said Diola. “This includes things like how there aren’t many competent adventurers here in Laffan and how there aren’t many dining establishments that serve good food.”

It seemed like adventurers that were quick to act had fled from Laffan at the time, so negative rumors had spread across nearby towns. In addition, the owners of dining establishments that had served good food for a long time were held responsible for fights that broke out between drunk people at their restaurants, and many of them had been arrested as a result.

“At the time, those dark days seemed like they would never end, but a righteous person rose to the occasion,” said Diola.

According to Diola-san, the name of that person was Christopher Shellington, and he had sworn to report to the king about the deeds of Viscount Nernas once he had discovered that the mithril mine was the cause of all the problems that had occurred. He had gathered proof of the viscount’s misdeeds before he headed towards the capital of the kingdom, but...

“Unfortunately, he wasn’t able to arrive at the capital,” said Diola.

“What happened to him...?” I asked.

“No idea. It was said that he was killed by bandits, but nobody knows the truth,” Diola replied.

The circumstances of his death sounded quite suspicious, but nobody was capable of investigating the incident aside from the viscount, so it seemed like all hope was lost. However, according to Diola-san, the viscount had disappeared soon after that incident, and it was most likely that something had happened when the viscount had gone to visit the mithril mine, but there wasn’t any information about the details of this incident either. In the end, the younger brother of the viscount had returned from the capital and replaced him as the new lord of the viscounty, and he had exposed the deeds of the previous lord to the public.

“As a result, peace was restored to Laffan as well. The current lord is the son of that younger brother, which makes him the nephew of the lord that had caused all these problems,” said Diola. “This is my personal opinion, but I think the current lord is decently competent at his job.”

“I had no idea that there was this kind of history behind the viscounty that we live in. By the way, how come the new viscount didn’t have his titles and lands stripped from him?” I asked. “The execution of all related family members might be a bit too much, but wouldn’t it be normal for them to lose their nobility status? These misdeeds were as grave as treason, right?”

“Let’s just say that there were some highly political implications taken into consideration for the decision not to do so,” said Diola. “Would you like to know about the details?”

Diola-san was smiling as she asked me that, but I immediately shook my head in response. “No, not at all.”

Based on what Diola-san had told us, the person that had returned from the capital to become the new lord at the time was the younger brother of the previous lord, so that person probably had powerful connections or possibly belonged to a faction among nobles that made things complicated. With that in mind, we had nothing to gain from learning about this, so remaining ignorant was the correct choice here.

“Okay, I understand what you’ve told us, but how is this story related to the haunted mansion, Diola-san?” Natsuki asked.

Touya blinked out of surprise when he heard what Natsuki had pointed out. “Oh, right! I completely forgot about this while I was listening, but you didn’t mention the haunted mansion at all!”

I had listened attentively to Diola-san’s story as well, but I wasn’t sure if this was something that we really needed to know and had no idea how it was relevant to the haunted mansion.

“Mm, what I’ve mentioned so far are things that even ordinary citizens know about if they have a knack for gathering information,” said Diola. “However, what I’m going to talk about from now on is information that can’t be made public, but I trust that your par—”

“No, we don’t want to know about this,” I said. “We don’t want to get involved with troublesome circumstances.”

“Please listen to what I’m about to talk about,” said Diola. “Your party will

eventually have to take on quests that have nobles involved once you achieve higher adventurer ranks anyway.”

I had tried to say no to Diola-san before she could nonchalantly provide us with dangerous information, but she deflected my attempt and tacked on some more information that was painful to know about. Involvement with nobles was something that we wanted to avoid as much as possible for our lives, but the caveat that Diola-san had mentioned made that seem quite difficult.

We all had some looks of unease on our faces, but Diola-san smiled and flapped her hands around to comfort and reassure us. “Oh, you don’t really have to worry about this. The information I’m going to bring up isn’t something that can be made public, but people in the know are aware of this. Now then, let me continue. In regard to the Christopher person who I had mentioned, he happens to be the person who gave that mansion to his fiancée as a present, and the name of his fiancée was Edith Senior.”

“Fiancée? Not his mistress?” I asked.

“Mm, his fiancée. Now, this is where things get complicated,” said Diola. “When Christopher was killed, the person that went to that mansion in order to inform his fiancée about Christopher’s death was someone called Kevin Beckman, and that person was one of their mutual friends. However, nobody knows what truly happened at the mansion at that time, so...”

According to Diola-san, the details were unclear, but based on the evidence that was present at the scene, it was highly likely that Edith had stabbed Kevin to death and committed suicide herself afterward.

“Information about this event was spread incorrectly, so that’s why rumors popped up about things such as suicide pacts between a man and his mistress,” said Diola.

Haruka sighed when she heard the explanation from Diola-san. “Well, I guess it makes sense for such rumors to pop up based on the circumstances.”

Diola-san nodded solemnly in response to Haruka, but her next words to us were something that none of us had expected. “Now then, let’s get to the main topic.”

Yuki blinked out of confusion for a bit before she voiced some questions.

“Huh? Wait, wasn’t all of this the main topic?”

Despite Yuki’s confusion, Diola-san had a composed look on her face as she continued with what she was talking about. “No, this was just what your party needed to know before the main topic that I wanted to bring up. I’d like your party to take on the quest for exorcising the haunted mansion.”

We all fell silent for a bit once we heard Diola-san’s sudden request, and I timidly asked her for confirmation. “Um, Diola-san, that haunted mansion is the one you were just talking about, right? Like, the one where you turned away from the gates?”

“I seem to recall how you tried to lead us away from entering that mansion at the time, Diola-san,” said Haruka.

“Mm, there was no need to take unnecessary risks when that mansion wasn’t in a state fit for renting,” said Diola. “However, things have changed since then.”

According to Diola-san, the first major difference was the fact that we had been looking for effective ways to deal with undead monsters, and the second difference was the fact that we were strong enough to exterminate an orc nest by ourselves.

“Strong willpower and a lot of mana are required to deal with undead monsters that don’t have a physical form. With that in mind, your party meets those conditions,” said Diola. “On top of that, your party also has members that can use Light Magic, so it makes perfect sense to request your party to take on this quest!”

Diola-san sounded quite confident about our abilities, but Touya hesitantly raised his hands to voice an objection. “Um, Diola-san, I can’t use magic, so...”

“Mm, I’m aware of that, and that’s why I mentioned the first major difference. The haunted mansion has been an unresolved problem in this town for quite a while, and it’s only become worse over time.”

According to Diola-san, she’d had an amulet on her when she had dropped by that haunted mansion to inspect it before introducing it to us, but she had

immediately left due to the fact that the amulet had vanished right away upon touching the gates. It seemed like that amulet was something relatively cheap that she had borrowed from the branch master, but discussions had occurred at the guild about how it would be a bad idea to continue leaving the haunted mansion alone.

“Due to this, I had tried to contact people that I know for help in order to obtain high-quality amulets,” said Diola. “Unfortunately, I only managed to obtain one of those amulets, so...”

Diola-san placed a small drawstring pouch on the table in front of us, and it seemed like it was only large enough to fit a small rock inside of it. It looked like the pouch had been made with some green cloth, and it was also decorated as a whole by some fine embroidery made with some silver thread. It didn’t look like something very expensive at a glance, but what mattered the most was how effective this pouch actually was as an amulet.

“How effective is this amulet?” I asked.

“Well, it’s definitely effective enough to protect you from being harmed by the ghost at the haunted mansion,” Diola replied.

Diola-san had experienced an amulet vanishing from interacting with the haunted mansion before, so the amulet in front of us was most likely a high-quality one due to how confident she sounded. This kind of amulet was definitely something that we absolutely wanted to obtain at the moment, but...

“I’ll lend your party this amulet if your party takes on the quest for exorcising the haunted mansion, and you can keep the amulet as a reward upon successfully completing the quest,” said Diola.

It felt like Diola-san had placed the amulet on the table to show it off to us, and she was smiling as well this entire time. We were all somewhat perplexed as we looked between her and the amulet.

“Diola-san, are you using this amulet as bait to make us take on this quest?” Haruka asked.

“Haruka-san, it’s common sense to prepare what someone wants when negotiating with them, you know?”

Yep, you're completely right about that, Diola-san! In the end, we had no way to resist this bait. However, another reason why we had decided to take on the quest was because of the fact that we trusted Diola-san. The quest probably wasn't too dangerous since it was something that she had recommended to us, after all.

Chapter 3—The Haunted Mansion

Diola-san had sent us off with a smile as we headed out and dropped by the haunted mansion on the same day. We used the keys that Diola-san had lent us in order to open the gates, and we were greeted by some dense greenery that was almost like a forest when we stepped inside. I felt like this place had a dark and gloomy atmosphere to it due to the fact that we had just heard about the history behind this mansion from Diola-san earlier.

“This mansion definitely has a spooky atmosphere to it...” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, it feels kind of cold here,” said Yuki. “Is it just my imagination...?”

Natsuki had snuggled up to one of my arms, and Yuki was hugging herself in a protective way, shuddering as she rubbed her upper arms with both of her hands.

“We should probably wear our cloaks,” said Haruka. “After all, we’ll definitely get dirty once we enter the mansion itself.”

“Yeah, it seems like this mansion’s been left alone for quite a long time, so that makes sense,” I said.

According to what Diola-san had told us earlier, it seemed like this mansion hadn’t been cleaned for over a decade by now, and even the Adventurers’ Guild had no idea about what kind of state the mansion was in nowadays. We wore our cloaks to also protect ourselves from the cold as we ventured farther into the greenery that looked like a forest. Diola-san had told us earlier about how this “forest” was once a beautiful yard, but there were no traces of that here since the mansion was completely covered by the greenery.

“I guess this is what happens if you neglect a yard for a very long time,” said Touya.



“The growth rate of trees is actually faster than you would expect,” said Natsuki. “They can grow many meters over a year if you don’t prune them, so it’s only natural for a yard to end up like this with trees planted here if the original yard wasn’t just a grassland.”

We paved our way through the trees as we walked along the areas that were still somewhat traversable, and the mansion eventually came within sight. If I had to express how it looked in a nutshell, then I would describe it as something that really looked like a noble’s mansion. It was mostly made of stone and had balconies along with verandas, and it also had elaborate carvings all over it. Anyone could tell that a lot of money had been spent on the construction of this mansion, and it was quite different from our mansion, since ours was a plain rectangle shape that had been mainly made of wood and mortar. It was unfortunate that the mansion in front of us looked quite dirty, but it didn’t look like it was in bad condition compared to how long it had been abandoned for, and this was probably because it had been well made originally.

“I’m glad that this mansion isn’t some ruins,” said Touya. “I don’t want to think about getting serious injuries due to things like the floor breaking while we’re walking inside.”

“Mm. It’s still got a spooky atmosphere to it, though,” I said.

The greenery was a nuisance to navigate through, but we eventually managed to arrive in front of the mansion and used the keys that we had on us on the doors before we pushed on them. The doors made a squeaking sound that grated on our ears as they opened and revealed the interior of the mansion, and it was in quite a bad state, since there were piles of dust along with a lot of spiderwebs all over the place.

“I feel an itch to just barrage this place with the Purification spell,” said Haruka.

“I know how you feel, but hold back,” I said. “We’re here for a quest, so...”

We had to exorcise Edith’s ghost for our quest, so spamming the Purification spell wouldn’t work since we wouldn’t be sure if we had actually succeeded at exorcising the ghost that way.

"The best way would be to confirm with the ghost herself, but I'm not sure if she'll actually be visible," said Haruka.

"The shadow ghost that we encountered was visible, so this shouldn't be a problem," said Touya. "Let's just head inside for now."

"Mm, there's no point in hesitating out here," I said. "You have the amulet on you, right, Touya?"

Touya confidently responded to me as he slapped the pocket area of his cloak. "Of course! This is my lifeline, after all!"

The powerful amulet was inside Touya's cloak, while the rest of us had a lot of mana due to being able to use magic. I wasn't sure if he was safer than us or not, but I felt slightly envious of him since he had something he could rely on that Diola-san had guaranteed to be effective.

"All right, then. *Light.*"

The entrance hall was lit up by Haruka's magic, and after a closer look, it was less damaged than I'd thought it would be. There was a lot of dust and spiderwebs everywhere, but none of the windows were broken, and there were no traces of roof leaks from rain. Small animals like rats would cause abandoned homes to stink from their waste matter, but there were no traces of that either. In fact, it seemed like it would be possible to live here if someone cleaned things up. I breathed a sigh of relief once I realized this, and I was about to take a step forward before I was interrupted by someone else.

"Wait! Stop in your tracks!" Natsuki exclaimed.

We all stopped moving while Natsuki crouched down and stared at the floor for a while before she pointed at something. "Look over here. It's a bit hard to tell because of all the dust, but there are some faint traces of footprints."

"I wonder if they're the footprints of people that visited in the past to clean this mansion," said Haruka. "I can't say they did a very good job if their footprints remained here."

"I'm not sure, but there aren't any footprints leading out of this mansion," said Natsuki.

We all fell silent once we had realized the implications behind Natsuki's words.

"Th-The doors were locked, right?" Yuki asked. "Th-This is starting to feel very scary..."

"I mean, yeah, this is a real haunted mansion, so of course it's scary," said Haruka.

In this case, rumors about a house being haunted weren't just rumors due to the fact that undead monsters actually existed in this different world.

"There were just rumors about how people who tried to rent this mansion got sick, right?" I asked. "I don't recall hearing anything about people going missing here."

"I-I'm sure the cleaner left this mansion from the back door!" Yuki exclaimed. "Yeah, that has to be it!"

Yuki had tried to strongly declare something that she herself probably didn't actually believe in, but nobody agreed with her. In fact, Touya looked quite calm as he pointed farther into the mansion. "Well, we can just investigate that ourselves. Let's get going."

"Are you not scared at all, Touya-kun?" Natsuki asked.

"Well, I'd be scared if ghosts actually existed back on Earth and appeared in front of me, but it's normal here in this different world, so yeah," Touya replied. "We have ways to slay ghosts as well, so they're more or less the same as other monsters. Besides, we've already slain a shadow ghost before."

"I think what you said makes perfect sense, but I feel a bit different about this," said Natsuki.

"Oh, are you afraid of things like ghosts, Natsuki?" I asked.

Natsuki was standing closer to me than usual, and she smiled at me in response. "You see, I was actually capable of sensing such things, so..."

Yuki raised her voice out of surprise instead of me when she heard Natsuki's words. "Wait, really? I don't remember you ever mentioning this before, even though we've known each other for quite a long time by now."

"It's because you'd get scared if I brought it up, Yuki," Natsuki replied. "It's not like anything would happen to me even when I had bad feelings about these things, so I couldn't say for sure that I was sensitive to spiritual things."

According to Natsuki, it wasn't exactly something that she could prove, so she had done her best to subtly avoid spiritual places and also used other excuses to lead Yuki away to safety.

"Oh, now that I think about it, that explains a lot of situations in the past," said Yuki.

"Mm. I wasn't sure if my actions had any meaning, though," said Natsuki. "Either way, I'm not really good with ghosts due to this, so..."

"Oh, I see. You can hide behind me if you want, Natsuki," I said. "Well, I can't really say I'll be able to protect you, but yeah."

I was fully intent on protecting Natsuki if she needed my help, but I wasn't actually capable of dealing damage to things like ghosts at the moment, so I offered my body as a meat shield instead in case that would make her feel better.

However, Natsuki bravely smiled at me in response and turned down my offer. "Thank you, Nao-kun. You don't need to worry about me, though. After all, I have the Purification spell now."

"Right. Well, just don't force yourself, okay?"

Yuki and Haruka started to whisper to each other once they heard that exchange of words between me and Natsuki.

"What's your verdict, Haruka?"

"Almost guilty, but not quite. This is my first time hearing about this as well, but I don't have any evidence to deny this."

"Wasn't Natsuki the first one to use the Purification spell against the shadow ghost, though?"

"Maybe she's just afraid of this mansion's atmosphere. After all, it is quite spooky here..."

It had become a bit brighter thanks to Haruka's magic, but it wasn't enough to

clear the dark and gloomy atmosphere of the mansion. Yuki and Haruka looked like they weren't as calm as their usual selves, but Touya seemed quite relaxed compared to the rest of us.

"Hey, I'm gonna leave you guys behind if we don't hurry," said Touya. "This mansion is quite big and wide, so the sun will set if we're slow about this."

"Mm, that would be bad," said Haruka. "Let's get going."

Most of the windows were closed by shutters that prevented light from entering the mansion, so the brightness probably wouldn't be that different between day and night, but it seemed like Haruka didn't feel comfortable about being inside of this mansion at night. We all nodded in agreement about this as we took out the house plan that Diola-san had lent us and relied on it as a reference while we investigated the first floor of the mansion. There were a lot of rooms that were all quite spacious and covered in dust, and the furniture that had been left behind in those rooms also looked similar to the expensive ones that we had seen before at the exhibition hall. We made sure to be careful in order to not damage that furniture as we took the time to look around all of the rooms on the first floor, but...

"Hmm, there was nothing here at all," said Touya.

It seemed like Touya hadn't noticed anything, but he was completely wrong about this.

"Um, there were some explosive sounds that you can't exactly describe as rattling noises along with objects moving by themselves, so yeah," said Natsuki.

"Mm, there were also some child crying sounds and suspicious shadows," said Yuki.

We had encountered a lot of unnatural phenomena during our search of the first floor such as the ones that Natsuki and Yuki brought up. Natsuki was also the one that had strongly suggested the idea of using the Purification spell against such phenomena, but the majority opinion was to properly investigate the mansion first, so our conclusion was to hold off on the use of the Purification spell for now.

"Also, Touya, how come you weren't scared at all?" I asked. "I feel like you

haven't been careful enough here."

Haunted mansions at places like amusement parks had more gimmicks than the one we were in, but this mansion had a suspicious and paranormal atmosphere to it to make up for that gap. Natsuki had more or less stuck to my arms and flinched at times, and even Haruka had flinched as well, but Touya had seemed completely unfazed when he opened the doors of new rooms. I wasn't sure if this was because he felt safe due to the amulet or if it was because he wasn't very sensitive to unnatural phenomena due to the difference in the amount of mana that we had. However, I felt somewhat uncomfortable about the fact that Touya was unfazed while I was only putting up an act of being unfazed and was actually scared deep inside.

"I mean, to be honest, the shadow ghost was scarier to me since I was actually harmed by it, so yeah," said Touya.

"Sure, but you're still way too unfazed. Well, in any case, your bravery has been reassuring, so I guess that's a good thing." I sighed as I took out the house plan once again and looked at it. "Where should we check next? Should we go to the second floor or the basement?"

The mansion we were in actually had a basement instead of just something like a cellar, so that meant there were multiple scary rooms below ground level. Luckily for us, there was only one floor beneath the mansion, and I would have considered this mansion as a dungeon if there were multiple floors underneath.

"The basement is a typical hiding place for dead bodies, so..."

Haruka grimaced when she heard those words. "Don't say such things, Touya. We don't know for sure if someone has died yet or not."

We weren't able to follow the vague footprint traces, but all the window shutters were closed, and there were no footprints leading towards the back door of the mansion. Someone walking backwards to escape wouldn't be unusual in a mystery novel setting, but that probably wasn't the case here.

"Just as a reminder, our goal here is to find Edith's ghost and exorcise her or confirm that she doesn't exist anymore," I said. "With that in mind, we have no choice but to check out the most suspicious places in this mansion."

It was somewhat contradictory that I didn't want to meet a ghost even though meeting one was our goal here. I was well aware of this when we had accepted this quest, but I hadn't expected the haunted mansion to be this scary. I had thought that it wouldn't be that bad if we moved as a unit of five, but the air in the mansion felt quite different from normal places. If miasma existed in this different world, then I was fairly sure that the mansion was filled with it.

"Mm, that's true," said Haruka. "I guess we have to get going, then."

None of us were enthusiastic about this, but we had no choice since this was a quest that we had accepted. Haruka sounded quite melancholic as she sighed before we all dragged our feet as we headed towards the basement. Compared to the fine-looking stairs that led to the second floor, the stairs down to the basement were much narrower. They were less than one meter wide, and the walls next to the stairs were just made of stone and had no decorations on them. That in itself was just something normal, but these stairs were definitely more plain than the other areas of the mansion, so they were a good fit for leading to a deep and tucked-away area. The air around us started to become colder as we advanced down the stairs, and our breath turned visibly white as well. Natsuki hugged her cloak next to me and shivered due to the cold air.

"The temperature here feels like it's cold enough to serve as a refrigerator," said Yuki. "Should we make a basement ourselves as well in our own house?"

"Do you think this is a normal temperature underground? It's possible that it's only this cold here due to the influence of a ghost," said Haruka.

The topic that Yuki and Haruka were talking about seemed quite odd for the situation that we were in, but it was also possible that they were trying to distract themselves from feeling fear. I had been on full alert with my Scout skill ever since we had stepped foot inside of the mansion, but I could only detect something that was vague and ambiguous. It felt like there was a thin veil of hostility everywhere, so it was quite stressful for me.

We eventually arrived at the bottom of the stairs, and the structure of the basement was much simpler than the floors aboveground. There was a straight and narrow hallway in front of us with rooms lined up on the left and right, and

everything looked more or less the same as what was depicted by the house plan. The basement of the mansion seemed like a place with rooms for storing things or for a noble's servants to live in, but it wasn't really habitable here due to it being this cold regardless of the fact that it was winter.

"It looks like there aren't many rooms here, so we should be done rather quickly. Time to find out what's here." Touya rubbed his hands together before he reached out for one of the doors, but he paused for a moment as he sniffed the air with his nose and tilted his head out of confusion. "Something smells weird, but whatever, I guess. I'm gonna open the first door."

"What do you mean whatever?!" Yuki exclaimed. "Touya, wai—"

Touya had brought up something that sounded like we absolutely had to be wary of considering the place that we were in. Yuki hastily tried to stop him, but she wasn't able to delay his numb and reckless decision. Touya stepped inside of the room after he had opened the door, but he stopped in his tracks right away.

"Ugh, what the hell is this?! There are so many spiderwebs and so much dust!" Touya exclaimed.

He had probably knocked down some things that were piled up, since a large amount of dust and spiderwebs had collapsed on him and his face.

"This is so dirty! Bleh!"

He immediately dashed out of the room and took off his cloak as he wiped his face while he tried to shake off the dust. As a result, that dust was spread into the surroundings and flew in our direction.

"Cough! Touya, don't shake your—wait, is it really okay for you to take your cloak off?" I asked.

"Huh? What do you—"

Touya seemed a bit confused as he looked at me, but he suddenly froze as his face went blank. Right after that, he threw away his cloak as if it was trash and held his hands to his waist as he started to laugh hysterically.

"Heh heh heh, ha ha ha, mwa ha ha! Finally, after all this time! I've finally

obtained a physical body! I can now enact my revenge on the lord!"

His voice sounded like the usual Touya, but his words were quite different from usual, so we were very wary of him.

"Who are you?" I asked. "Are you Edith Senior?"

"Oh, you know who I am? Well, I guess it's only natural since you visited this mansion. That's right, I am Edith Senior, and I am someone who has absorbed vengeful ghosts to accumulate their resentment against the lord of this viscounty over a long time—uh, how many years again? Let's just say it was a lot of years!"

"Dodging the subject, huh?" said Yuki.

"Mm, she definitely did," said Haruka.

"Oh, come on, the number of years doesn't matter!" Edith exclaimed.

The number of years seemed like something important if she had waited here for a long time, but I had nothing to say if the ghost herself didn't care about it. However, she seemed kind of frustrated despite what she said.

"In any case, I spent a lot of time and worked very hard to become stronger as a ghost!" Edith exclaimed. "And just as I thought an easy target had visited this mansion, I was blocked by a powerful amulet! Why?!"

"What do you mean by 'why?'" I asked. "Anyone would come prepared if they had to enter a haunted mansion, right?"

"Mm, that's true. Even I would come prepared if I had to do the same thing," said Edith. "That amulet was a huge nuisance, however!"

What's wrong with this ghost? She makes no sense and sounds very selfish...

"Thankfully, the person with the amulet parted ways with the amulet! Or rather, I made that person part with the amulet!" Edith exclaimed. "Anyone would take off their cloak if it became very dirty! I'm so smart!"

I'm fairly sure that was just Touya being stupid and careless. Was his sense of danger numbed due to the amulet being too powerful, or was it because he thought he could handle whatever was waiting by assuming that the worst that could happen was something like a shadow ghost? Also, the way that Edith's

talking makes it hard for me to feel a sense of danger myself. In fact, I feel less scared now compared to before.

“By the way, Edith, you said just now that you’re going to enact your revenge on the lord, right?” I asked. “What do you plan on doing?”

“Exactly what I said, of course. I’m going to kill him to avenge my fiancé!” Edith exclaimed.

Edith had a scary look in her eyes as she made some stabbing gestures in the end.

“I see. I guess that makes sense since there were rumors about that,” I said. “How do you plan on doing that, though?”

“It’s the truth! My fiancé was murdered by the lord!” Edith exclaimed. “Well, I’ll use my feminine charms if I have to in order to get close to the lord and stab him!”

“Feminine charms, huh? Just so you know, the body that you’re possessing right now is a guy’s body,” I said.

Edith froze after I had pointed that out and gasped as she looked down at Touya’s body. “Um, would the lord happen to be gay?”

“Don’t ask me about that! I have no idea!” I exclaimed.

“In that case, I’ll just possess a girl’s bo—ugh, right, I can’t possess the rest of you! Why does your party have two humans that are powerful mages just like the other two elves?! This is ridiculous!”

Ridiculous, huh? I feel like only Touya has the right to say that here, since he got possessed against his own will and yelled at for not being a girl.

Edith clutched her head and stamped her feet out of frustration again, and Haruka sighed for a moment before she brought up something else that the ghost hadn’t noticed. “I’m fairly sure the current lord is a different person from the one you’re thinking about as well. The lordship of this viscounty changed hands twice, after all.”

“Huh? Really? What happened to the lord that I know?” Edith asked. “If I recall correctly, his name was Philip, so...”

"He's most likely dead by now," Natsuki replied. "Well, technically speaking, he went missing, but yeah."

"Seriously? Does that mean all of my effort and hard work over the years have been pointless...?"

"Now that you understand, we'd appreciate it if you left Touya's body." I tried my best to voice my words in a gentle voice since I didn't want to provoke Edith as she seemed very dejected. "There's no point in possessing him anymore, right?"

Unfortunately for us, Edith managed to recover very quickly. "Hold on, no, my lingering regrets can't just end like this! I won't be satisfied until I actually kill the perpetrators who murdered my fiancé!"

"The perpetrators were bandits, right? It's also highly unlikely that those bandits are still alive by now," said Natsuki.

We had no idea about the exact year when Christopher had been murdered, but twenty years had passed at the very least since that incident. There were very few adventurers that were capable of living to an old age, so the same applied for bandits that were weaker than adventurers. It would be a different story if those people had quit being bandits, but that wasn't exactly something easy to do.

However, Edith still seemed confused even after we had explained all of that to her. "Really? I can still detect the whereabouts of the dagger that I gave to Chris as a gift, and it seems like it's located somewhere between Laffan and Kelg. It doesn't seem like it was thrown away either."

"Are you actually capable of knowing this much about that dagger?" Natsuki asked.

"Yeah. That dagger was something that I poured a lot of love into when I made it, after all!" Edith exclaimed. "Well, I only became capable of detecting its location after I became a ghost, and it's probably because my lingering regrets have to do with Chris. Oh, by the way, I was an alchemist during my lifetime."

According to Edith, Christopher had gifted her this mansion, so the dagger

was a gift in return from her that she had spent a lot of money and time to make herself with hopes that it would protect him.

"Hmm, I'd like to find out what happened to that dagger at the very least," said Edith. "Can you help me out with this? I won't be able to pass on in peace otherwise."

"Well, we took on a quest for exorcising the ghost in this mansion," I said. "In addition, it'd feel kind of weird to work for free as adventurers, so..."

It wasn't like we needed money as much as we did before, so it technically wouldn't hurt for us to help others a bit, but we would probably need to put in more than just "a bit" in terms of effort and time to help Edith out. On top of that, the problems that had occurred in this viscounty had already been resolved, so it would only comfort Edith's feelings if we helped her out.

"He he he, are you sure you can say no to my request? I'm the one possessing this body right now!" Edith exclaimed. "You can't attack your friend, right? Cooperate with me if you value this guy's life!"

Edith sounded very confident as she pointed at us and declared that our only choice was to help her out, but we all felt awkward instead, and Edith tilted her head out of confusion at the way that we had reacted to her words.

A few seconds later, Natsuki hesitantly voiced the reason behind our reactions. "Um, we can use Light Magic, so..."

"Huh?"

"We've held back from using Light Magic since we wanted to properly investigate this mansion first, but we can test to see if it's possible to exorcise you with the Purification spell while you're still possessing Touya," said Haruka.

Edith hastily stuck out her hands in front of her as she asked us to reconsider. "H-Hold on, don't be hasty here! We can talk things out! Words are an excellent tool that we can use to achieve mutual understanding!"

"Do you really expect us to trust someone who suddenly possessed Touya?" Haruka asked.

"I-I mean, um, I'm a pitiful victim that lost her fiancé to murderers! You'll feel

bad about mercilessly exorcising a girl like me, right?"



Edith clasped her hands together and looked at us with puppy dog eyes in an attempt to evoke sympathy from us, but her gestures didn't change the fact that she was using Touya's body for this, so it felt really creepy instead.

It seemed like Edith had noticed that this wasn't going to work since she changed her plans right away. "Um, oh, I know! I'll hand over the rights to this plot of land and mansion if you help me out! First come, first served! This is a onetime offer!"

"Uh, that's kind of whatever," I said. "Besides, can ghosts even own land and housing?"

Even if it was possible for ghosts to own land and housing, I wasn't sure if anyone would be convinced if we told them that a ghost had handed over the rights to us.

"Also, we just paid for our own house recently," said Yuki. "It's not like we need another one, so..."

"It's convenient to have multiple houses!" Edith exclaimed. "Don't you think the idea of owning a vacation house sounds fantastic? Owning one is a symbol of being rich!"

"Actually, it's annoying to own a vacation house if you never use it," said Natsuki. "If you don't take care of it yourself, then you have to do things like hire people to take care of it for you, so..."

Oh yeah, Natsuki would know about this since her family back on Earth was quite rich. It was a fact that there was no point in owning a vacation house if you weren't someone that could take a lot of days off as holidays throughout the year. The money required for maintenance fees would probably be put to better use by staying at a luxurious inn instead. On top of that, we were adventurers that would potentially have to camp outside a lot for work, so we weren't even sure about how often we would actually stay at home.

"Well, it's not like all of you are family members with each other, right?" Edith asked. "You're a group of two guys and three girls, after all. It's true that there's a lot of weird adventurers out there in the world, but weird marriages like thi—"

“No, that’s not it! None of us are married!” I exclaimed.

Normal forms of polygamy would sort of make sense, but the idea of us being all married to each other was way too weird, and I sincerely hoped that such a future would never come true.

“Mm, in that case, having another house would be a good thing, right? I’m sure it would be painful to live in the same house with a newly married couple in the future,” said Edith. “The guy I’m possessing right now is saying about how he wants to live in his own home with his wife as well. Wait, does this guy actually have a wife?”

“No, he doesn’t,” said Natsuki. “In fact, he doesn’t even have a chance with anyone at the moment, so...”

“O-Oh, I see. Sorry...”

Edith had an awkward look on her face as she apologized to her own body. *Hold on, does that mean Touya isn’t unconscious? Can Edith communicate with him?*

“Hmm, there probably isn’t any money left in this mansion, so I don’t know what else I can offer. Oh, actually, there are some alchemist tools here in the basement that I used in the past,” said Edith. “I’m pretty sure you’ll be able to get a decent amount of money if you sell them, so you can also have these as a reward for helping me. What do you think?”

It seemed like Edith had realized that the mansion wasn’t attractive enough for us since she tacked on additional rewards.

Haruka sighed as if she had caved in once she heard those words, and I wasn’t sure if it was because she felt pity for Edith or if it was because she was tempted by the bundle of the land and mansion along with the alchemist tools. “Fine, we’ll give it some thought. However, there’s no point if you don’t actually own this land and mansion.”

“Mm, yeah. Chris didn’t have any relatives, and I hadn’t gotten married to him yet at the time since he was still my fiancé,” said Edith. “Was this mansion confiscated with no one to inherit it? I didn’t have any relatives either, so...”

“If I recall correctly, the name of the person that issued the exorcism quest is

Wales Beckman,” said Natsuki.

“That bastard...!”

As soon as Natsuki had brought up that name, some kind of black miasma started to leak out of Touya’s body, and the temperature around us dropped as well. The miasma had felt less dense when Edith had possessed Touya, and it started to feel even thicker than before, but...

“Calm down!” Haruka exclaimed. “We’re going to use the Purification spell on you if you don’t!”

“I’ve calmed down!” Edith exclaimed.

Haruka had succeeded at calming down Edith by threatening her with the Purification spell. *Damn, the Purification spell really is effective against undead monsters even if it’s not actually used.*

“Uh, we don’t know what actually happened, so can you explain to us?” I asked. “All we know about is that you killed Kevin and then committed suicide. Also, there were rumors about how your deaths were a suicide pact between a man and his mistress, so—”

“Don’t say any more! I don’t even want to think about that scenario!” Edith exclaimed. “I mean, I can understand why people might think that based on how things turned out, but still!”

Edith sounded quite disgusted as she firmly denied the rumors, but it also seemed like Haruka’s threat earlier was still effective since she sounded relatively calm as she continued with her words. “Wales is Kevin’s younger brother, but he wasn’t directly involved with this. Kevin is the issue here. Chris considered him a friend, so it seemed like he had discussed with him about how to reveal the lord’s misdeeds to the king. However, that bastard betrayed Chris.”

According to Edith, Kevin had pretended to cooperate with Chris, but he ended up snitching on Chris to the lord. As a result, Kevin was directly responsible for Chris’s death, so it seemed like Edith had more hatred for him than the lord.

“Why did Kevin do that, though? What did he stand to gain from snitching on

his friend?" Natsuki asked.

"Oh, the answer to that is simple. I didn't notice at the time since I was deeply in love with Chris, but it seemed like Kevin had feelings for me as well," said Edith. "Such feelings were very unwelcome, but I was a beautiful young girl, so yeah."

It's kind of hard for me to believe that since you're possessing Touya's body right now while saying this, Edith...

"On top of that, when he told me about his feelings, he also told me to become his mistress since he couldn't get married to someone who had a fiancé," said Edith. "Can you believe that? Absolutely ridiculous! Also, he said all of this right after he told me about how Chris was killed by bandits!"

"That sounds quite yikes," I said.

There was no way anyone could defend Kevin's actions at the time. It was very wrong for a guy to try to take advantage of a girl that had just lost her fiancé, but this was even worse than I had imagined.

"I refused, of course, and we got into an argument," said Edith. "During that argument, hints about what he had done slipped out of his mouth since he was stupid."

According to Edith, Kevin hadn't stated it out loud, but some words had slipped out of him that allowed her to infer that Kevin had snitched on Chris to the lord and acted as the middleman between the lord and the bandits that had murdered Chris. Edith became furious when she had realized this, and it seemed like Kevin had tried to assault her afterward as a last-ditch attempt. *Yeah, okay, that guy deserved his death.* None of us voiced our thoughts, but we probably all had the same opinion about Kevin.

"I managed to kill him instead, however!" Edith exclaimed. "Unfortunately, I was just a weak girl at the time, so I suffered some serious injuries myself and died just like that."

Based on the normal age for marriage in this different world, Edith was probably about the same age or slightly younger than us at the time. It would normally be impossible for a girl that hadn't received any combat training to

fight an adult man head-on and succeed at killing him, but the reason for Edith's victory over Kevin was most likely because she had been more determined than him. Kevin probably had been reluctant about the chance of dying, while Edith had been willing to put her life on the line to kill him. It was hard to imagine based on the fact that she was somewhat cheerful right now, but she had also died in the end, so her death had been a valiant and brave one.

"So yeah, I managed to avenge Chris by killing Kevin, but the other person responsible was still alive," said Edith. "I thought to myself about how I wanted to somehow kill him as well to avenge Chris, and that's how I ended up becoming a vengeful ghost."

"Chris must have been a wonderful person if you had such strong feelings for him," said Natsuki. "It sounds like he had a strong sense of justice himself as well."

Natsuki sounded a bit moved after she heard Edith's tale, but the response from Edith was quite different. "Huh? Oh, Chris wasn't exactly some sort of saint. He had his own interests in mind as well, but his sense of justice was just a little bit stronger than that. In fact, the reason he proposed to me in the first place was because I was a genius alchemist, and I myself thought that he would be a good source of money. Well, we ended up loving each other for real after some time, but yeah."

According to Edith, the reason Chris had decided to attempt at revealing the lord's misdeeds to the king was because he had thought that he would be able to replace the viscount if he succeeded, so Chris's actions weren't completely based on his sense of justice and righteousness.

"It was technically possible since Chris was a baron himself, and he was an excellent noble," said Edith. "He earned a lot of money and was quite handsome, so the only thing that he lacked was proficiency at combat. That's why I had made a good dagger for him as a gift, but it wasn't enough, unfortunately..."

Edith had a distant look in her eyes as she sighed and muttered "Oh, I guess he also wasn't a good judge of people since he chose the wrong person to become friends with" in a sad voice.

“What do you girls think we should do?” I asked. “There’s the option of just ignoring everything Edith has said and just exorcising her.”

Edith’s shoulders flinched when she heard the idea that I had brought up. It seemed like she was paying attention to us even though she was acting in a way to gain our sympathy.

“Some bandits probably have the dagger that Edith mentioned. Bandits are bad people, but that doesn’t change the fact that we’ll probably have to kill them to retrieve the dagger,” I said. “On top of that, there’s no guarantee for the rewards from helping Edith out, so I don’t really think it’s worth our ti—”

“Hold on, please! I’ve told you my story, right?! Don’t you feel like it would be the right thing to do to help out a pitiful girl like me?!”

Edith tried to cling onto me, but I pushed her away. “If you actually were a girl, then maybe, but you’re possessing Touya right now, so yeah.”

“Damn it! I had no idea that possessing a guy would have such a negative effect!” Edith exclaimed. “You would’ve felt more pity for me if I possessed one of three girls here even if I said the same things, right?!”

“Well, yeah, I can’t deny that,” I said.

There was a high chance that I would have felt a bit swayed if someone like Haruka had clung to me, even if it wasn’t actually her doing it. *I’m a guy, after all!*

“Nao, you need to be rational with decisions. Also, we need to discuss things with Touya first,” said Haruka. “Edith, you don’t have to leave Touya’s body, but can you switch with him? Also, I’d like to use the Purification spell here to clean things up, since it’s quite dirty and dusty.”

We were completely covered in dust, just like our surroundings, due to the fact that Touya had tried to shake off the dust from his cloak earlier. A lot of dust had fallen on us during our investigation of the mansion up until now as well, but we had held back from the usage of the Purification spell since we weren’t sure what kind of effect it would have on the ghost here.

“Oh, will you clean up this basement for me? I’d appreciate that. I had cleaned up the bodies of intruders, but normal cleaning was hard for me since I

didn't have a physical body," said Edith. "It was quite a struggle for me to gather all the dust and spiderwebs that fell on this guy, you know? Also, yeah, I can switch with him, so don't worry about that."

"Oh, I see," I said. "Hm? Wait, did you just say that you cleaned up some intruders?"

Edith had moved behind us to dodge Haruka's Purification spell, but it seemed like it still caused a stinging sensation for her. I turned around as I felt the dust disappear from my body and looked at Edith to confirm with her about what I had just heard. "What do you mean by intruders? We heard about how the people who rented this mansion became sick, but we didn't hear about this. Did you kill people in cold blood?"

If Edith had actually murdered innocent people, then there was no way that we could actually help her out, regardless of the rewards that she offered us.

"Well, I made the people that rented this mansion leave in a peaceful way since I wasn't that powerful at the time," said Edith. "However, I'm not sure if this was during the last ten or few years, but there were some thieves that had barged in from time to time. They tried to steal some furniture from my love nest that belongs to me and Chris!"

"I'm not really sure if making people become sick can be called peaceful," I said. "Thieves, huh?"

"By the way, I threw all of the dead bodies inside the innermost room here in this basement," said Edith.

We all inadvertently looked at the end of the hallway when Edith had suddenly brought up that extra information. She was strangely cheerful for a ghost, but that didn't change the fact that she was a vengeful ghost that had committed normal ghost deeds. On top of that, I felt like her sense of morality had become a bit strange compared to a normal person's, but I wasn't completely sure about this.

"All right, I'm gonna switch with him now," said Edith. "I hope that you'll be kind enough to provide me with a helping hand!"

The look on Touya's face returned to normal after Edith had finished her

sentence.

“Uh, Touya, are you back?” I asked.

“Whoa, I can move my own body again!” Touya exclaimed. “Oh, yeah, I’m back.”

“Welcome back, Touya! I gotta say, though, you were way too careless!” Yuki exclaimed. “Things turned out just fine because Edith wasn’t that dangerous, but why did you throw away the amulet from your body when it was your lifeline?!”

Touya seemed quite happy as he wiggled his hands around, and more dust was blown up in the air when Yuki slapped him on his shoulders. All the dust on him really needed to be cleaned up by the Purification spell, but that wasn’t exactly possible right now since Edith was still inside of him.

“I mean, yeah, I’m sorry about that,” said Touya. “Well, to be fair, I couldn’t sense anything dangerous for some reason, so...”

Touya seemed quite confused about why his sixth sense hadn’t alerted him this time even though it had helped him out a lot up until now, and I wasn’t sure if it was because it hadn’t functioned properly this time or if it had assessed Edith to be someone that wasn’t very dangerous. It was technically possible to conclude that his sixth sense had worked since things had turned out just fine, however.

“Well, I’m glad that you’re okay,” said Haruka. “By the way, is Edith listening to our conversation right now?”

Touya paused in thought for a bit when he heard Haruka’s question before he shook his head in response. “Hmm, it seems like she isn’t. She just told me that we can go ahead and instantly exorcise her if we decide to not help her out.”

“I see that Edith knows how to accept defeat in good grace if it comes to it, though it’s also possible that she might be a bit conflicted about this as well,” said Haruka. “I’m not sure what her original personality was like, but maybe she changed as a result of absorbing vengeful ghosts like she mentioned.”

“I dunno. All I can say is that I didn’t have a bad feeling about her,” said Touya. “Well, aside from the fact that it was kind of creepy to watch her control

my body, but yeah.”

“Mm, it was really weird!” Yuki exclaimed. “In fact, I hallucinated an image of a girl behind you!”

Yep, I felt the exact same way. However, Touya’s gestures were the only things that had felt weird to me. Edith had talked with Touya’s usual voice, so the only difference was the way that she had acted while doing so, but it had been creepy nonetheless.

“Well, in any case, I’m down for helping out Edith,” said Touya. “Are you opposed to this, Nao?”

“Yeah, I already gave my reasoning for a rational decision earlier,” I replied.

“What if you made a decision based on your emotions, Nao?” Haruka asked.

“Huh? Where did that come from, Haruka? What happened to the motto of prioritizing self-care and safety?” I asked.

I answered Haruka’s question with another question, and she seemed a bit hesitant as she lowered her eyes. “I mean, yeah, that’s still important, but I can relate to Edith’s feelings. For example, I would try to avenge you if you were killed, Nao.”

“Don’t say such things, Haruka!” I exclaimed. “Well, I understand that kind of mentality, but yeah.”

Edith’s fiancé had been murdered in cold blood, and the traitorous friend responsible for his death had a nasty personality as well. She had managed to get revenge on the traitor, but she also died herself as a result. With all of that in mind, it made sense to me that she had become a vengeful ghost since all of this had happened right when marriage was around the corner for her. *Now that I think about it, she’s actually very rational and calm for a vengeful ghost, considering what happened to her.*

“I guess I don’t mind if we help Edith,” said Yuki. “What about you, Natsuki?”

“Hmm, I’m not sure. I’m not exactly a crazy advocate for the concept of universal human rights, but it seems like a lot of people have been harmed by Edith,” said Natsuki. “However, I do feel bad for her, so...”

"Oh, right, the people that she caused to become sick and the thieves that she killed," said Yuki. "Well, she only made people become sick to chase them out of this mansion, and I think that the thieves sort of deserved their fates since it can technically count as self-defense."

"Mm, it's possible that we might end up killing thieves ourselves as well if some barged into our house," said Haruka.

It was actually somewhat easy to prove self-defense in this different world, since the organizations that were in charge of maintaining law and order weren't very trusted. Self-defense would work most of the time if it was in response to someone trespassing upon your property, and it could work as well for other cases depending on the situation. However, the most important factor necessary to prove self-defense was the defendant's credibility, so evidence didn't matter as much. It would be hard to judge who was in the right between a ghost that had almost no credibility and some thieves that had trespassed someone's property, but nobody would feel sympathy for the latter since thieves had no rights in this different world.

On a side note, adventurers had low credibility, so they were at a disadvantage if they got into a conflict with ordinary citizens. However, it would be a different story if the other side were criminals or if the adventurers were high-ranked ones, so this was another benefit of climbing up the ranks as adventurers.

"Let's think about this first without factoring in the benefits and drawbacks for a bit," I said. "What Edith wants us to help her out with is finding what happened to the dagger that she gave to her fiancé as a gift, right?"

"Yeah, and we'll have to slay the bandits as well if they're still alive," said Touya. "She just told me that they need to be exterminated, so yeah."

"That's quite violent from someone who was the fiancée of a noble. Well, whatever," I said. "In any case, it seems like we don't actually have to commit criminal acts like killing the current lord to fulfill Edith's request."

"Mm. In fact, slaying bandits happens to be a good thing to do," said Natsuki.

"Yeah, but that's only if we ignore how we feel about this," I said.

We all fell silent as we paused to think over things for a bit. Back when we had attacked Iwanaka and his party in self-defense, we were completely intent on killing them, but they were probably still alive. However, if we had to slay bandits, then that would require us to directly kill other people. I felt a sense of aversion to that idea, but it was a fact that we would potentially have to kill other people at some point in the future if we continued our lives as adventurers, and we would die ourselves if we hesitated at that kind of crucial moment. With that in mind, I felt like this was a good opportunity for us to get used to the feeling of killing other people, since we could “practice” against opponents that we could kill without feeling bad about it.

“Well, we might as well treat this as a good opportunity to get experience,” said Touya. “Besides, I think that people like bandits that actively attack and kill other people for a living can be treated in the same category as monsters.”

Touya had purposely voiced a harsh opinion, and Haruka nodded in response to him. “Mm, this is for the greater good. Natsuki, Yuki, are the two of you opposed to this?”

“Not exactly. I’d like to avoid killing other people if possible, but there’s always the danger of being attacked by other people in this different world,” said Natsuki. “With that in mind, not being able to deal with such situations when the time comes would be very risky for us, so yeah.”

“I feel more or less the same as Natsuki,” said Yuki. “In the end, what matters the most to us is our own lives.”

It seemed like nobody in our group was really opposed to the idea of helping Edith if we didn’t factor in the benefits and drawbacks of doing so. I would be opposed due to financial reasons if this event had happened back when we hadn’t obtained our own house yet, but I had similar feelings about this idea.

“In that case, I’d like to assume that we’ll end up helping Edith for now, but there are other questions at hand, like whether we can actually defeat the bandits and whether Edith has been completely truthful with her story or not,” I said. “We should probably make a final decision after reporting back to the Adventurers’ Guild about this. After all, we definitely need to report about the fact that there are some dead bodies here in this mansion.”

All of us slightly grimaced when we looked down the hallway, since Edith had told us that there were some dead bodies beyond there. The correct thing to do would be to properly investigate ourselves before reporting to the guild about this, but we all looked at each other and nodded before we turned around and headed out of the haunted mansion.

We headed back to the Adventurers' Guild in order to report about what we had discovered from Edith's story. Diola-san told us that the guild would start investigating this right away, so this meant that all we could do was wait for that investigation to finish. After all, there were nobles and a previous lord of this viscounty involved in this incident, so there was a high chance that unfortunate things would happen to us if we tried to poke around ourselves. With that in mind, the right choice for us was to leave the investigation to professionals, so we returned to our house in order to wait, though Touya was still being possessed by Edith.

"Whoa, this is absolutely delicious!" Edith exclaimed. "I had no idea such delicious food actually existed out in the world!"

Edith was using Touya's body to enjoy the food that the girls had made for dinner. Dinner time had rolled around when we returned to our house, so the girls had started to prepare food as usual, but Edith had mentioned that she wanted to try eating some food since she hadn't eaten anything for a very long time. Touya had seemed quite reluctant to hand over his body to Edith for dinner since the dishes on the menu were pork cutlets, but it seemed like he had caved in after Edith had exclaimed that she hadn't been able to eat anything for dozens of years.

Edith looked a bit confused at first since the dishes that the girls had prepared for dinner were ones that she had never seen before, but that confusion was blown away as soon as she had taken a bite out of the pork cutlets. However, her excitement was perfectly understandable since the pork cutlets that the girls had made were very delicious. They had used lard for the batter to fry the cutlets, and the cutlets themselves were made from thick and juicy orc meat. On top of that, there was also a sweet and spicy sauce to dip the cutlets in before eating them, so that made them even better. The total amount of calories from all of this was a large number, but it also meant that these pork

cutlets were a very fulfilling meal, and Edith was probably extra shocked by the pork cutlets since this was her first meal after a few dozen years of not being able to eat.

“Ugh. I probably wouldn’t have been in Laffan if I knew such delicious food existed,” said Edith.

Edith placed one of her hands to her cheek and sighed as she continued to munch on some pork cutlets, but Natsuki tilted her head out of confusion when she heard Edith’s words. “What do you mean by that, Edith?”

“Well, I was a beautiful, young genius alchemist, so I received offers from scholars at the capital to join them there to do research,” Edith replied. “I turned down those offers since I liked this town, but I probably would have hesitated if I knew about food like this.”

Edith had claimed that she was a genius alchemist back when she was still alive, but it seemed like she wasn’t just boasting about this. According to Edith, she had received such offers from many different places multiple times, so it sounded like she had been quite talented at alchemy if she wasn’t lying about this. However, there wasn’t any real reason for her to lie to us now, so what she had told us was probably true even if she had slightly exaggerated some things, but the “beautiful young girl” part was still hard for me to believe.

“This town, huh?” Yuki grinned and had a playful look on her face before she asked Edith a question. “Wasn’t Christopher-san the real reason why you turned down those offers?”

“Well, at the time, I wasn’t engaged to him yet, but it’s true that he was part of the reason why I didn’t want to leave Laffan.” Edith sounded quite calm as she answered Yuki’s question, but she paused for a moment and grinned before she continued with her words. “Oh yeah, now that I think about it, Chris started to give me more expensive gifts after I told him about the offers that I had received.”

I almost teared up out of sympathy for Christopher as a fellow guy. On a sidenote, given that Edith was currently possessing Touya, it was possible that her grin would have looked quite charming and seductive if she had done it in her former body, but since it was Touya’s face, it looked like a grin from

someone that was planning to commit a crime.

“Just so you know, there’s no guarantee that food like this exists in the capital,” said Haruka. “The sauce we’re using was made from a secret recipe among elves, and these pork cutlets are something that we made ourselves.”

“Really? In that case, I guess staying in Laffan was the right choice,” said Edith. “After all, I ended up being able to eat these pork cutlets right now.”

Edith had responded with a smile after she heard Haruka’s words, but there was a high chance that she wouldn’t have gotten engaged to Christopher and would still be alive if she had left Laffan for the capital of this kingdom, so I wasn’t sure if agreeing with her was the right thing to do here.

It seemed like Haruka felt the same way as I did since she changed the subject to something else. “Edith, if you were a genius alchemist, then that means you’re quite knowledgeable, right? If it’s okay with you, can you provide me with advice? I’m a beginner alchemist myself, so I would highly appreciate it.”

“Sure, I don’t mind. My knowledge was something I had to keep to myself back when I was still alive since it was the tools of the trade that I needed to make a living, but it’s not really useful to me anymore in my current circumstances,” Edith replied. “However, I can’t just share my knowledge with you for free. If you want to know my alchemy secrets, then...”

“I have to make a lot of delicious food for you in exchange, right?”

It seemed like Haruka had immediately realized what Edith was implying based on what she was looking at, and Edith smiled as she nodded in response to Haruka’s words. “Yeah, exactly! On a sidenote, this body sure has a huge appetite, so it’s much different from what I’m used to since I was a small eater. My former body was that of a slender and beautiful young girl, after all.”

It seemed like Edith was persistent about claiming to be a beautiful young girl during her lifetime. If that was true, I wanted to see what she looked like when she was still alive, but according to Edith, there were no portraits of her left at that mansion. On the other hand, this also meant that Edith could claim whatever she wanted, since there was no way for someone to obtain proof for refuting her claims.

"Right, sure, you were a beautiful young girl, mm," said Yuki.

Yuki had a kind and gentle smile on her face as she played along with Edith, and Edith chuckled when she heard Yuki's words. "Oh, you sound like you don't believe me at all. Well, I guess it's only fair since I'm saying this while possessing Touya's body, so—actually, now that I think about it, maybe it's a bad idea to eat a lot while I'm possessing his body since he might get fat."

"Nah, you don't have to worry about that as long as you exercise to make up for the amount that you eat," I said.

"Well, I was smart, but I wasn't exactly very physically fit," said Edith. "If I was, then I wouldn't have died myself after I had managed to kill Kevin. It's a bit of a shame that I couldn't kill more people since I died right away."

"Yikes, you really are an evil spirit that's rotten to the core!" I exclaimed.

"Huh? Please, Nao, I'm not rotten at all since I'm pretty sure my dead body was cremated before it could rot," said Edith. "I probably wouldn't need to worry about getting fat if I had come back to life in my former body, but I also probably wouldn't be able to taste or digest food! Ha ha ha! Wasn't that a funny undead joke?"

"Nah, that wasn't funny at all," I replied. "Or rather, we would have slain you right away if you appeared in front of us in your former body!"

There was also the fundamental problem of whether or not undead monsters like zombies or skeletons were capable of communication, but I wasn't sure if we would be willing to listen to such monsters even if it was possible to communicate with them.

"We would have probably used the Purification spell right away if that were the case," said Natsuki. "A talking zombie or skeleton would be quite scary, after all."

"Mm, I figured as much. With that in mind, I'm actually quite grateful to you, Touya," said Edith. "I didn't think I'd be able to eat such delicious food after dying, after all. Huh? Leave exercise to you? I can eat as much as I want? Thanks, Touya! You're such a cool and handsome dude! Second to Chris, that is!"

Edith started to eat many more pork cutlets after Touya had provided her with his approval, but it seemed like she had reached her limit once she had eaten about one and a half times more than the usual amount that Touya would eat, and she paused to reach out for a cup full of warm tea. She took a sip from that cup and seemed like she really enjoyed the taste before she breathed a sigh of contentment.

“Well, I have to admit that I pretended to be quite confident to Touya, but I was actually quite nervous deep inside,” said Edith. “I was scared that I would just eventually disappear, but now—”

“We haven’t actually decided yet if we’re going to help you out or not,” I muttered.

Edith froze when she heard what I had muttered. “Huh? Is this a last meal for me to have a good time before I die?”

“You’re already dead, Edith, but that’s not what I mean. What I mean is that it depends on the results of Diola-san’s investigation,” I said. “I’m personally leaning towards helping you out, but I can’t say for sure what our final decision will be as of now.”

Edith sounded quite relieved as she took a deep breath after she heard my words. “Oh, that’s it? That’s perfectly fine. I’m quite happy about the fact that you’re willing to consider helping me out!”

It seemed like Edith was being truthful about her feelings; she had a very happy expression on her face as she smiled cheerfully at me, but it didn’t change the fact that she was smiling with Touya’s face.

We ended up doing a lot of things together with Edith over the next few days, such as showing her around Laffan, and she seemed quite glad to see that Laffan had become a peaceful town nowadays. We also took her with us to Aera-san’s café, and she was amazed by the delicious taste of the food made by Aera-san, but she was shocked and filled with despair when she tried out some stall food on a different occasion. It seemed like she hadn’t been lying about being a genius alchemist either, since she participated in some alchemy practice lessons with Haruka, Yuki, and Riva. I wasn’t sure exactly what they were learning about since I wasn’t directly involved, but they used a lot of time for

this. Unfortunately for her, Edith wasn't able to perform alchemy herself since she was possessing Touya's body, and she was quite frustrated about the fact that she wasn't able to show off her amazing abilities at alchemy. However, it seemed like it didn't change the fact that it was a valuable use of time for the other three alchemists.

On the other hand, Touya was the one who got the short end of the stick. We had cleaned ourselves with the Purification spell once again right after we had left the haunted mansion since we were all covered in dust and spiderwebs, but Touya couldn't receive the Purification spell since he was still being possessed by Edith. Our bath had been used for luxury purposes up until then since the Purification spell had sufficed for cleaning purposes, but the bath was finally used for its original purpose of washing bodies. According to Touya, he was really glad that we had a bath, and he mentioned that he would have frozen to death from cold water if we didn't have one. Bathing with cold water at this time of the year could be quite dangerous, so he hadn't been exactly exaggerating about this. Normal adventurers would just use a bucket of hot water to wash their bodies, but that wouldn't feel very refreshing, and you couldn't completely clean your body that way either.

Summer would cause people to sweat a lot, but bathing with cold water was perfectly fine during summer. On the other hand, people wouldn't sweat a lot in winter, but bathing with cold water would be dangerous in winter. As for what season when adventurers were dirtier between the two, the right answer was that adventurers were dirty in both seasons. Adventurers would become covered in sweat and dirt during summer after a half day of work, and it wasn't easy to clean equipment compared to your own bodies. Adventurers could maintain a decent level of cleanliness if they took off their equipment after they were done with work and changed clothes after they washed their bodies, but diligent adventurers like that were quite rare. As for winter, you had to be capable of affording to pay for hot water to use in order to stay clean, or you had to be brave enough to cover yourself with cold water. It was a sad fact that staying clean was very difficult for most low-rank adventurers, even if they wanted to.

Touya had lent his body to Edith most of the time on top of not being able to

rely on the Purification spell to stay clean, so the only times that he had been able to control his own body for sure was during our training sessions and his bathing sessions. I was curious if he was actually okay with that, but it seemed like Touya was actually doing just fine with this kind of lifestyle. We had become used to Edith's presence after ten days had passed like this, and that was also when we had received an update from Diola-san about the investigation.

Chapter 4—Bandit Slaying

“I apologize for making you all wait for a long time, especially since this must have caused a lot of trouble for Touya-san,” said Diola.

“Nah, this is actually faster than we had expected it to take for the investigation to finish,” I said.

Touya himself had commented about how he felt like someone was at his side the entire time, but there weren’t any real problems aside from that. As for Edith, she had told Touya that she would avoid looking when Touya had control of his own body and implied that he was free to beat his meat if he wanted to, but it seemed like even Touya wasn’t bold enough to do so. In any case, ten days was actually quite fast considering the fact that the speed of travel and information was much slower in this different world compared to things back on Earth.

“Well, I whipped everyone that was involved for maximum speed, so that’s why,” said Diola.

Diola-san moved around her hands as she said the word “whipped,” but those movements didn’t look like a slapping gesture. *You didn’t actually whip them physically, right, Diola-san...?*

“First up, in regard to the haunted mansion, there is no need to exorcise it anymore since it’s been confirmed that Edith-san has left the mansion,” said Diola. “As a result, your party will be paid in full for the successful completion of the quest, and you can keep the amulet too, as I promised. Oh, there were some dead bodies found in the basement, but it seems like those bodies belong to thieves for sure, so that’s not an issue.”

It seemed like Diola-san was used to dealing with dead bodies from her time at the Adventurers’ Guild since she sounded quite nonchalant as she brought up the topic, and the way that those thieves were treated sounded quite normal for criminals in this different world.

“Does this actually count for the completion of the quest?” I asked. “I thought it wouldn’t fly since we haven’t actually exorcised Edith, but...”

“That doesn’t change the fact that the mansion isn’t haunted anymore,” said Diola. “The method used to achieve the result doesn’t matter, after all.”

Our expectations had been quite low for this, but it seemed like this meant that we had managed to obtain the absolute minimum profit for ourselves. All that was left was to decide on what to do about Edith, but that would depend on what else Diola-san had to tell us.

“As for the mansion itself, Kevin Beckman had the rights of ownership to it when he was still alive, and his younger brother Wales had inherited the mansion from him upon his death, but there were some suspicious things about the sequence of events that led to this, so the inheritance has been invalidated,” said Diola.

“Huh? If I recall correctly, Wales is the person who funded the reward for this exorcism quest, right?” Natsuki asked. “Is that really okay?”

“The invalidation happened after the quest was completed.” Diola-san paused for a moment and smiled at us before she continued with her words. “As a result, the guild has nothing to do with this. The reward for the quest had been paid in advance, after all.”

“Yikes, that’s really unfortunate for him,” said Yuki. “He was forced to pay the reward in advance and got the mansion confiscated from him right after the quest was complete, so...”

It seemed like Yuki felt bad for Wales since he had issued this quest in order to be able to sell the mansion after the quest was completed, but Diola-san’s response was very calm and nonchalant. “There’s no reason to be concerned about that. The chances of Wales having been involved with Kevin’s schemes are quite low, but it’s hard for him to claim that he had been completely unaware based on the circumstances. It’s not a bad trade for him if he won’t get interrogated further in exchange for the mansion being confiscated from him, but I’m not sure if Edith-san is pleased about this or not.”

Diola-san looked at Touya for an answer, and Touya paused in silence for a bit before he shook his head in response. “Uh, Edith said that she doesn’t care

about Wales at all and that we don't need to worry about this."

"Oh, is that so? I'm glad to hear that. The rights of ownership will be transferred back to Edith-san due to the circumstances at hand, but Edith-san is already dead and has no heirs to inherit the mansion, so it legally belongs to the viscounty."

"Oh, I figured as much," I said. "I guess Edith can't reward us with it for her requie—"

"However, Nao-san, the lord mentioned that it is fine for your party to receive the mansion as a reward for completing Edith's request," said Diola.

We were all very surprised when we heard those words from Diola-san, and I asked her for confirmation. "Really? Wouldn't it normally not count if someone said that they were promised a reward for completing the request of a ghost?"

I was fairly certain that the lord of this viscounty would laugh off our claims, especially since they involved handing over the rights of ownership to an asset that legally belonged to the lord, so only a carefree fool wouldn't suspect that there was a catch to this.

"Mm, I managed to secure approval from the lord due to the circumstances," said Diola. "However..."

Diola-san lifted one of her index fingers to her lips to form a shush gesture. *Okay, we just have to keep our mouths shut about this, right? Gotcha.*

"I also investigated about the bandit gang that were involved in this, and I managed to discover the existence of a gang that seems to be it," said Diola.

"Those bandits are still around? Wouldn't those kinds of bandits normally be already slain by now?" Natsuki asked.

Natsuki tilted her head out of confusion, and Diola-san sounded a bit troubled as she sighed deeply in response. "Unfortunately, it seems like there weren't any hands available to deal with those bandits due to the circumstances around the change of lordship. It seems like the leadership of the bandit gang has passed on to a second generation, but they still appear to be active. Another reason for this also seems to be because they had gone into hiding."

"I see. Can you provide us with information on those bandits?" I asked.

"Of course. Also, this quest for slaying these bandits will be processed as a quest from the Adventurers' Guild, so the guild will also provide a reward upon successful completion of the quest along with the reward that your party will receive from Edith-san," said Diola.

We all fell silent since we hadn't expected this either, and we looked at each other for a bit before we settled on Haruka and Yuki to ask some questions for us as a group. "That sounds oddly generous, so it comes off as a bit suspicious..."

"Yeah, it really does," said Yuki. "We would have left our seats and headed out of the guild if it wasn't you that told us about this, Diola-san."

"I'm glad to know that I've earned your trust." Diola-san chuckled in response to their questions before she started to explain things to us. "This is also a quest from the lord himself, and I believe it's his way of showing that he's sincere about this by paying out of his own pocket, since the mansion itself as a reward was just something that he had unexpectedly obtained. As a result, the guild isn't actually paying that much for the completion reward."

"Did the lord issue this quest for the sake of eliminating all traces of the scandal that happened in the past?" Natsuki asked.

"No, it's nothing like that, but the existence of a bandit gang that accepts assassination tasks in this viscounty is a problem for a lord even if those bandits aren't exactly capable of pulling assassinations off smoothly," Diola replied. "In addition, it seems like this bandit gang has become quite active again recently, and the method they've employed for their crimes is cruel and atrocious, so they need to be dealt with swiftly."

According to Diola-san, this bandit gang had repeatedly committed crimes by only attacking targets that they were definitely capable of defeating and left no survivors, so the lord and the guild had been slow to discover this since nobody had survived an attack from those bandits. However, a proper investigation had been carried out after we requested information about this bandit gang, so it seemed like a few cases had been confirmed as a result.

"Whoa, this sounds like a serious problem," said Touya. "However, why did

this start to happen all of a sudden?"

"It's most likely due to a sudden influx of people recently," said Diola.

"A sudden influx of people? Do you mean something like how new bandit gangs have appeared, Diola-san?" I asked.

"No, it seems to be something even worse. I can't say for sure, but I believe the reason for the recent activity of bandits is due to the sudden increase of bankrupt people in Kelg recently," said Diola.

I had a bad feeling about the topic at hand when Diola-san brought up the town named Kelg, and it was because it made me think of the words Holy Satomi Sect that I had heard about before.

"I've told Natsuki-san about this before, but a new cult that sells holy water has popped up at Kelg, and it seems like more and more people are spending their entire life savings on that holy water for some reason," said Diola. "On top of that, it seems like some of those bankrupt people have also fallen in deep debt to the point where they can't even leave Kelg anymore."

Ugh, so we really did jinx ourselves! Damn it...

"There are also adventurers among those bankrupt people, right?" Haruka asked.

Diola-san froze for a second when she heard Haruka's question, and then she sighed in response. "Yes, it's possible that might be the case, but I'm quite surprised that you're aware of this, Haruka-san."

"It's the only reason that I can think of as to why the Adventurers' Guild would offer a reward for this," said Haruka. "You want us to deal with those adventurers, right?"

Trust and confidence in the Adventurers' Guild was important for the organization. Things like escort quests for protecting people such as merchants were something that the guild would handle, so it would be a problem if those adventurers had become the ones that attacked those merchants.

"What you're saying is that this situation is something the guild can't ignore if some adventurers actually have become bandits, right, Diola-san?" I asked.

"Yes, exactly. There's no need for your party to attempt to capture such adventu—well, actually, to be honest, it would be better if you just outright killed them on the spot to eliminate any further trouble," said Diola. "Bonus rewards are available as well if you retrieve their adventurer cards and turn them in."

The Adventurers' Guild wasn't an organization that was in charge of maintaining law and order. It wouldn't be an issue if we killed bandits during combat, but we would have to hand them over to the guards of a town if we captured them. According to Diola-san, the guild had no intentions of attempting to cover up the situation, but it was apparently better to have adventurers deal with other adventurers in order to take responsibility as an organization both internally and externally. The way Diola-san had phrased things made the Adventurers' Guild seem like a scary organization, but this was just apparently how the guild operated. In addition, the fact that Diola-san had nonchalantly described the harsh and ruthless policy of the guild made me realize once again that she was someone older and much more experienced than us. However, this harsh side was most likely necessary due to the fact that the Adventurers' Guild was in charge of managing adventurers, and adventurers were technically a type of outcasts from regular society, so it made sense to me.

"There's still the issue of whether or not we can actually defeat the bandits, though," I said. "I'm down for accepting this quest, but not if there's a high chance of us suffering serious injuries."

I had clearly stated the fact that safety was still our highest priority, but Diola-san chuckled in response. "Oh, I don't think your party needs to worry about that at all for this, Nao-san."

"Why's that? Aren't these bandits quite dangerous?" I asked.

"They're only dangerous for weak people. Bandits can't earn much from assaulting merchants in these areas since this is a remote region of the kingdom," said Diola. "If the bandits were strong enough to be capable of defeating your party, Nao-san, then they could earn money themselves through normal jobs, and those that wanted to perform bandit activities would move to other places with better and richer targets."

According to Diola-san, the fact that this bandit gang hadn't moved to a different place served as proof that they weren't very strong. With that in mind, the only worry I had left was the fact that none of us had any experience with actually killing other people, but this wasn't exactly something that we could discuss with Diola-san. It was true that Diola-san was someone that we could count on, but overreliance was not a good thing. If we were going to take on this quest, then we had no choice but to brace ourselves for the fact that we had to kill other people.

"All right, then. Oh yeah, Edith can detect the location of the dagger that she gave to her fiancé, right? Can we make use of this to find the location of the bandits?" I asked.

I looked at Touya as I asked my question, and he looked up in the air as he scratched his head in response. "Uh, yeah, she said she can detect the location of the dagger, but she also said that it's probably a better idea to avoid directly heading to the location of the dagger if we're planning to slay the bandit gang."

I wasn't sure exactly where the dagger was located, but if it was at a bandit gang's hideout, then we would have to assault that hideout as a mere party of five people to retrieve it. It wouldn't be an issue if we were capable of sneaking in without being detected, but it was possible that the bandits would become wary of us or even flee if they found out.

"Uh, does that mean we should bait them out of hiding to fight them?" Yuki asked.

"I think so, yeah," I replied. "Hmm..."

We had no idea about how to bait out bandits, however, so this was probably an area where we had to count on advice from Diola-san.

I looked at Diola-san for help, and she confidently nodded in response as she slapped her ample bosom. "Leave that to me. I have a great idea!"



Diola-san's great idea was for us to disguise ourselves as merchants. The idea itself was technically a fairly normal one, but strange didn't necessarily mean better, so we went along with this idea because Diola-san was someone that we

knew we could trust and rely on. We prepared a fitting horse-drawn covered carriage, and the rest was simple after we made Touya hide inside of the carriage. The rest of us didn't look strong at a glance, and it would be impossible for others to know that Haruka and I were elves if we covered our faces with hoods. All we had to do as a final touch was to place me and Yuki on the perch in front of the carriage to make us seem like easy targets for bandits. The only problem with this was that none of us knew how to drive a horse-drawn carriage, but luckily for us, we had a convenient solution in the form of Yuki. In fact, she easily managed to learn how to drive a carriage with her Copy skill after someone who knew how to do so taught her.

On a side note, Diola-san was the one who had helped arrange for a person to teach Yuki how to drive a carriage, and she mentioned that this was because she was the one that had brought up this idea. However, it was the guild that lent us the horse-drawn carriage itself, along with the horse required for it. Diola-san had prepared cheap ones for us since there was a chance that we would lose them from being attacked by bandits, but our monetary reward for completing the quest would be greatly reduced as a penalty if we couldn't return the carriage and the horse, so we had to be careful about this.

Once we had finished with our preparations, we headed out for our quest to slay bandits. The journey from Laffan to Kelg would take about three days with a horse-drawn carriage, and we were excited at first since this was our first journey with a carriage, but that excitement had died down halfway through the first day. The carriage itself wasn't a really comfortable ride, and that along with the idyllic scenery dampened our moods. There was a possibility that this would have been different if we were riding on an expensive carriage, but there was no way we could have requested to borrow something like that since it would have placed us in the red financially even if we factored in the maximum potential reward for this quest.

"We have to spend the next two days like this, huh?"

The areas where the bandits had been spotted were nearer to Kelg than Laffan. With that in mind, there was a high chance that we would encounter them on the third day of our journey, so I looked up at the sky and sighed at the thought of the road ahead.

However, I heard Haruka's voice from inside of the carriage right after I had sighed to myself. "Don't let your guard down, Nao. Bandits aren't the only things that we could get attacked by since there are monsters out there as well."

"I'm counting on you, Nao! I can't see anything from inside, after all," said Touya.

"Yeah, gotcha. Well, my vantage from here is quite clear, so I don't think we have to worry too much about monsters," I said.

We were fairly sure that there weren't any bandits nearby at the moment, but we'd made Touya hide inside of the carriage just in case. He was lying down and completely covered by a blanket, so I was responsible for scouting out any potential foes. The amount of trust I had in my Scout skill had decreased by quite a lot recently, but I was hoping that it would still work just fine for everything aside from undead monsters. *There aren't any bandits out there with high levels for skills like Sneak or Stealth, right? I guess I should stay on alert more than usual...*

"Oh yeah, I'm really glad that we managed to complete the portable toilet in time!" Yuki exclaimed. "Thanks, Haruka!"

"Oh, right, we had discussed this before," I said. "So you girls actually managed to complete the magical device?"

Our toilet circumstances outdoors had been a very painful experience for Yuki in the past, and we had previously discussed the idea of obtaining a magical device to solve this problem.

"Yeah, with the help of Riva and Edith," Haruka replied. "Edith really wasn't exaggerating at all when she called herself a genius alchemist."

"Hey, I helped out as well," said Touya. "I'm the one that let Edith borrow my body, after all."

Touya claimed that he had contributed as well, but Haruka merely replied with a "Yeah, yeah, thanks" and brushed him off before she continued with her words. "The results of our work has also helped with upgrading the toilet at our house. You know how our toilet has a bidet implemented now, right?"

“Oh, yeah, that function was added a while back,” I said.

The toilet seat had also become warmer around the same time. Our toilet itself had already been quite decent originally, but it felt even more comfortable after that new function had been implemented. Natsuki had made a custom toilet seat cover as well, but the toilet seat felt cold to sit on now that it was winter without the new function.

“I guess that means our hoe won’t be used for creating a hole to use as a toilet anymore,” I said.

“Mm, we can use that tool for its original purpose from now on,” said Haruka. “The portable toilet magical device cost a lot from our pool of money for shared expenses, though. However, that shouldn’t be an issue since it’s not like you and Touya are actually willing to do your toilet business in the open, right?”

“Yeah, we’re not,” I replied. “Even we aren’t willing to plant our feet somewhere with nothing to block the view, right, Touya?”

“Yep. Well, I wouldn’t mind standing up to take a piss, but that’s something different,” said Touya.

The surroundings of highways in this world were clear, with nothing to obstruct the views. Anyone would have to eventually drop a number two over a few days, and even us guys weren’t comfortable about the idea of dropping a number two out in the open, and the same definitely applied for the girls. There was the option of heading inside of a forest to deal with toilet business, but that would require us to split up our party to have people to be on guard for both the carriage and whoever went to the forest, so the fact that the girls had completed a portable toilet magical device was actually very helpful since it solved those problems.

“How many functions did you actually manage to implement for the magical device?” I asked.

“Well, some functions include the ability to dispose of waste matter, deodorization, and a bidet,” said Haruka. “Those three functions have also been implemented for the toilet at our house. The magical device itself has become a bit larger than initially planned due to this, but it’s not really an issue since we have magic bags.”

Haruka had used the word “larger” to describe the magical device, but it was only about fifty centimeters on all sides. Those dimensions were enough to fit a whole Western-style toilet and weren’t exactly something that would be easy to carry by hand without magic bags, but I felt like the magical device itself was actually quite small considering the fact that it had so many functions to it.

“As for the sound insulation function, we had to compromise with just halving the sounds made while using the magical device,” said Haruka. “After all, it would be dangerous to completely block out sounds from the outside, and limiting it to only block sounds from the inside was way too expensive to implement.”

It would be an issue if the person inside that was using the magical device couldn’t hear any warnings from the people outside that were on guard, so this compromise made perfect sense to me.

“Just to be clear, Touya, Nao, you guys better not dare to try listening to the sounds whenever one of us is using the portable toilet!”

“We won’t!”

Both Touya and I immediately protested against Haruka’s warning. Neither of us were the kind of perverts that enjoyed listening to the toilet sounds of girls, after all.

“As for the toilet partitions, we’ll be using normal boards to assemble some,” said Haruka. “They’ll take up some space, but again, it’s not an issue since we have magic bags, and boards are also cheap.”

According to Haruka, it seemed like they had discussed the idea that it would potentially be safer if the person that was using the magical device could see their surroundings from the inside, but they had all finally agreed on the opinion that the person using the portable toilet could assign guard duty to our other party members and that they wouldn’t feel comfortable for toilet business if they could see other people standing nearby from the inside. I wouldn’t be able to feel relaxed enough myself to deal with my toilet business even though the people wouldn’t be capable of seeing inside, so I completely agreed with their conclusion.

“We also implemented one last function for dealing with emergency

situations, such as if monsters charge at our portable toilet,” said Haruka.

“Do you mean something like a magical barrier? That sounds like it’d be difficult to implement. Did you succeed at doing so?” I asked.

“Yeah, we somehow did thanks to the help from the self-proclaimed genius alchemist,” Haruka replied. “However, one magicite is consumed to block an attack regardless of how strong the attack is, so it’s a bit expensive.”

According to Haruka, magicites from goblins wouldn’t work since goblins were too weak, so the magicites had to be from at least hobgoblins or stronger monsters. With that in mind, this meant that about six hundred Rea would disappear every time the barrier blocked an attack. It wouldn’t be an issue if we had a lot of magicites from hobgoblins on us, but we hadn’t encountered many of them recently, and the other magicites we had on us were from skeletons and orcs.

“I guess that means we’ll suffer serious financial damages if we fail at defending our portable toilet,” I said.

“Mm. On top of that, only ten magicites can be set at a time for powering the barrier, so whoever is using the toilet at the time needs to finish their business before the magicites get consumed,” said Haruka. “If they don’t, then they’ll be caught in an embarrassed state out in the open and suffer severe mental damage.”

“Our toilet has something like a health bar of ten points, huh? It should be fine unless someone has an upset stomach,” said Touya.

“Well, we’d probably take the day off from work if that were the case, and we have the Robust skill as well, so yeah,” I said.

It was thanks to the Robust skill that we hadn’t encountered any stomach issues as a result of things such as water. In fact, all of us had remained perfectly healthy so far. The girls had played a part in this as well in terms of caring for things like food and clothing, but the Robust skill was still something very good to have considering the risks and demerits of becoming sick in this different world, so I was very grateful to Advastlis-sama for this.

“I gotta say, though, I’m impressed that you girls managed to complete this

magical device,” I said. “I was sure that it would take much longer, so...”

“Edith was of great help to us for this,” said Haruka. “She revealed and shared a lot of her knowledge with us, and Riva was more than happy to help out as well.”

“I felt really sad about the fact that Riva wasn’t scared of me when I switched with Edith...” said Touya.

“O-Oh, really? Uh, well, cheer up, Touya,” I said.

Riva considered a ghost to be less scary than Touya, huh? Touya’s sad voice echoed from inside of the carriage, and Yuki chuckled when she heard his voice. “I think it’s just that her thirst for knowledge overwhelmed her fears. After all, she was scared at first when we told her that Touya was possessed by a ghost, but she didn’t seem to mind as soon as we started discussing alchemy things.”

“Mm, I learned a lot from that discussion,” said Haruka. “I used up a lot of my pocket money as a result, though.”

“Same here. Cold winds blew through my pockets that became almost empty, so I blame winter for this!” Yuki exclaimed.

According to Haruka and Yuki, they had used our pool of money for shared expenses to fund the things that were directly related to the portable toilet, but the materials that they had used for the necessary research to complete the toilet had been paid for out of their own pocket money. I felt like it would have been fine to cover those under shared expenses, but they mentioned that they had avoided doing that since it would have dropped our shared pool of money to dangerously low levels otherwise. *Oh yeah, now that I think about it, we evenly distributed our earnings up until now after we paid for our house.* Our recent income had only been from the extermination of the orc nest and the reward for exorcising the haunted mansion, but the most valuable thing that we had received from the latter was the powerful amulet. The current quest that we had accepted was something that was going to take a week for a round trip, and the preparations had cost a decent amount of money as well. On top of that, the girls had also made food in advance for us to eat during this trip and stocked it in magic bags, so it made sense to me that a lot of our shared funds had been consumed as a result.

"It's possible that we could break even or earn more if we could sell this portable toilet, but magical devices like this won't sell at all since it's too expensive," said Haruka.

A magical device like the portable toilet that the girls had made was something that other female adventurers would want for sure, but there was the issue of the price and the difficulty of carrying around the magical device without a magic bag. People like wealthy merchants and nobles were capable of affording these kinds of magical devices, but there probably wasn't any demand among those people for these devices. A clean and comfortable toilet was something that I considered absolutely essential, but I had heard before back on Earth about how even nobles in the past had used things like chamber pots for toilet business and that they had used perfumes to mask odors. With that in mind, there was a good chance that the nobles in this different world were similar.

"Well, in any case, it was worth it if we consider this as a self-investment," said Haruka. "Besides, it also makes our lives easier when we have to camp outside."

"Mm, it really does," said Natsuki. "Camping along highways is a safe choice, but..."

"It's absolutely awful for toilet business if we camp along highways because there's nothing to block the view!" Yuki exclaimed. "I would have carried a hoe with me again and run into the forest if we hadn't managed to complete the portable toilet in time!"

"Yeah, I completely agree," said Touya. "Even I wouldn't feel comfortable enough to dig a hole here for toilet business."

If you were willing to cast away your sense of shame, then highways were quite safe for toilet business since there was nothing to block the view in all directions, and people who enjoyed that kind of free and open feeling would probably love it. I wasn't that kind of person, however.

"All right, let's focus up again since our worries for camping out have been resolved," said Haruka. "We're going to be facing off against foes that can think with their brains for the first time, after all."

“Yeah, you’re right about that,” I said.

People that had chosen the life of a bandit were scum, but they were still probably smarter than orcs. We still felt a bit hesitant about the idea of having to fight and kill other people, but there was a high chance that we would be caught off guard if we didn’t keep in mind the fact that other people were capable of using their wits to come up with cunning methods to attack us. If our foes had the brains to come up with plans and strategies, then they would probably keep a watch on their prey ahead of time. With all of that in mind, we tightened our facial muscles as we renewed our vigilance against the foes that were awaiting us.

The third day of our journey was different from the previous ones, and that was what we had initially expected.

“Hm? What’s this?”

My Scout skill had detected some strange signals that felt different from the signal of a monster, and I paused in thought for a while. *Oh, hm, right, these are the signals of hostile people.* I had detected something similar back when Tokuoka and his party had attacked us inside of a forest in the past, but the signals this time felt rather weak.

“It seems like we’ve got company that’s awaiting us,” I said.

“An ambush, huh? Well, I guess we were kind of awaiting them as well,” said Haruka. “How many of them are there, and how far away are they from us?”

“They’re located about two hundred meters ahead, and they’re lying in wait on both the left and right side of the highway,” I replied. “As for their numbers, I think there are twelve of them.”

I avoided asserting for sure about the number of bandits since I had somewhat lost a bit of trust in my Scout skill. Bandits were probably armed with ranged weapons as well as melee ones, so we had to be on our guard for this, since it would be a disaster if there were some that had somehow escaped my Scout skill.

“Twelve people, huh? I think we can slay half of their numbers if Nao, Yuki, and I attack them together with our magic,” said Haruka.

"If we can catch them by surprise, then that's probably possible," I said. "Touya, would you be able to dodge our Fire Arrows if we blasted you with them?"

"Uh, if I was on my guard against them, then barely, yeah," Touya replied.

We had improved our Fire Arrow spells to a faster and more powerful version compared to the initial one, but it seemed like Touya was capable of dodging them.

"Just to be clear, that's only possible for me if I'm absolutely aware and careful," said Touya. "It'd be difficult for me to dodge Fire Arrows if I were caught by surprise from long range."

"The long range advantage is something that we have this time," said Haruka. "There's also the option of using the Fireball spell instead, but..."

"We can incapacitate the bandits and their ability to continue combat if they were grouped up in one spot," said Yuki.

The Fireball spell was capable of blasting off the top half of a person's body if the caster landed a clean hit, but the main difference between the Fireball spell and the Fire Arrow spell was the fact that the Fireball spell would somewhat spread out to the surrounding area upon impact. Due to this, it wasn't a useful spell if we wanted to retrieve materials from monsters, but it would be highly effective against other people since burns were a good method of incapacitating other people if we ignored the fact that it wasn't a very humane method, and it seemed like Natsuki was concerned about this.

"Um, I'd prefer if we used the Fire Arrow spell instead," said Natsuki. "I'm not saying that we shouldn't use the Fireball spell against people that attack us first, but I'm not quite confident yet about whether or not I can actually finish off people that are suffering from burns."

"Hmm. In that case, let's just go with Fire Arrows," said Haruka. "Prioritize making sure that none of the bandits escape from us."

We would only have to deal with six remaining bandits if we were capable of taking out six of them with our initial volley of Fire Arrows. Even if they recognized how dangerous we were and tried to flee right away, it would still

be possible for us to hunt them down before they escaped out of range from our magic.

"Natsuki, Touya, if it's too painful for you two, then you can both sit out if you want to," I said. "I'm pretty sure it'll be harder to overcome hesitation for directly killing people compared to killing them at range, and the rest of us can probably deal with all of the bandits with our Fire Arrows, since there aren't too many of them."

"Nah, I'm willing to get my hands dirty," said Touya. "It would be wrong for me to sit out and leave it all to Haruka or Yuki, after all."

"...I'm ready as well," said Natsuki.

I had told Touya and Natsuki that they didn't need to force themselves to kill other people, but Touya shook his head in response right away. As for Natsuki, she fell silent for a bit before she replied to me with a few words and had a slightly strained look on her face as she clenched her spear.

"Is that so? All right, then. Yuki, aim for the bandits that are farthest out in front. Haruka, aim for the bandits that are farthest behind us. I'll take care of the ones that are hiding," I said. "After our initial volley, we'll continue to cast Fire Arrows and aim them at the bandits farthest away from us and leave the closest ones to Touya and Natsuki."

There was no need for me to say anything further if Touya and Natsuki were prepared to kill other people. During our discussion with each other, we were getting closer to the place where the bandits were hiding, so I swiftly gave out instructions for what to do as a party. Everyone nodded in response to my instructions, and some men jumped out at about the same time as they surrounded our carriage from the front and back. They were all wearing masks and had weapons in their hands, so there was no way that they were mere hunters or lumberjacks, since they looked like typical bandits.

One of those bandits yelled loudly towards us. "Stop in your tracks! If you value your lives, then leave and put down all of your belongings!"

The number of bandits that had jumped out was exactly twelve, and that meant there weren't any more bandits in hiding if my Scout skill wasn't lying to me. I was actually very surprised by how careless and foolish the bandits were

since they had all revealed themselves. On top of that, they had threatened us to leave our belongings if we valued our lives despite the fact that they had killed everyone that they attacked. The dead bodies of their victims hadn't been found, but it was highly unlikely that any of them were still alive.

"Are you guys bandits?!"

I stopped the carriage and pretended to be unaware as I yelled a question, and the bandits fell silent for a moment before they all started laughing with a condescending tone.

"You're asking us if we're bandits? Ha ha ha!"

"Seriously? What else would we be in this kind of situation? Are you stupid or something? Aha ha ha!"

"Y-You'll let us go if we hand over our belongings, right?" I asked.

"Of course! Right, my dude?"

"Yeah, you can trust us, ha ha ha!"

Uh, you bandits need to try harder if you really want to deceive us. I can tell that you guys have no intention of letting us go by the way that you're all looking at Yuki next to me. Yuki's face was completely covered by a hood, but it was easy to tell that she was a girl based on her facial features that were slightly visible underneath the hood and the physique of her body. In any case, it was convenient for us that they had admitted that they were bandits and had jumped out in the open to approach us. I had been fairly sure ahead of time that they were bandits, but accidentally killing people that weren't bandits would be an awkward situation. Fire Arrows were lethal with a clean hit, so there was no way for us to apologize for "accidentally" shooting someone with a Fire Arrow. We wouldn't even have anyone to apologize to since they would be dead, after all. I checked once again with my Scout skill to make sure that there weren't any other bandits in hiding before I gave a signal to Haruka for her to take the initiative with me and Yuki.

"Fire Arrow!"

The three of us cast our Fire Arrows at about the same time, and the bandits had sluggish reactions to the sudden appearance of six Fire Arrows. Touya was

probably right about the fact that Fire Arrows were hard to dodge if you weren't on your guard against them. Yuki and Haruka had aimed for the bodies of the bandits instead of their heads since it was easier to dodge with the head, but none of the bandits managed to react and collapsed to the ground after the Fire Arrows pierced through their bodies. As for me, I had aimed for the head as usual since my targets were closer to me, and two headless bodies collapsed to the ground as a result.

"Wha—"

"Mages?!"

The bandits were absolutely shocked and confused by our sudden attack, but there was no reason for us to wait for them to snap out of it. Touya and Natsuki had jumped out of the carriage at the same time that our Fire Arrows had flown towards the bandits, and they attacked the two bandits that had approached us from behind on our left and right. After that, the remaining four bandits somewhat recovered from their shock, but it was too late since we blasted three of them with Fire Arrows right as they properly held up their weapons. As for the last bandit, Touya swung up his sword as he dashed towards him to finish him off.

"Nagai, wai—"

"Huh?"

The last bandit had tried to say something at the last moment, but Touya merely twitched his eyebrows in response as he swung down his sword at the bandit and sliced off his head. The head collapsed to the ground with a thud, and blood started to gush out from the neck after that. Touya leaped backward right away to dodge the blood and looked around to make sure there weren't any remaining bandits nearby that were still standing up before he breathed a sigh of relief and lowered his sword.

"We managed to make it through this, huh? Let's see..."

I breathed a sigh of relief as well before I hopped off the carriage and looked around the vicinity. The headless bandits were dead for sure, and the ones with holes in their bodies were probably dead as well since they weren't moving. However, there was a chance that one of the bandits that Touya and Natsuki

had attacked at first were still alive.

“Oh, this guy still seems to be alive,” I said.

It seemed like Natsuki had missed the vital spots of the bandit that she had attacked, since there were traces of bleeding from the bandit’s body from rolling around on the ground, but it seemed like that bandit was already dead. As for the bandit that Touya had attacked, it seemed like the bandit’s bones from his shoulders to his ribs had been smashed and broken, but the bandit looked like he was still alive despite being unable to move.

“Yeah, I held back a bit since the thought occurred to me that we needed to question one of the bandits about the location of their hideout,” said Touya. “Well, it seems like none of these bandits have the dagger we’re looking for, so I’m not sure if this was necessary, but yeah.”

“Oh, right, I forgot to make sure about that,” I said. “In any case, I think it’s worth it if we can obtain information about their hideout itself along with its location, so good job, Touya.”

“That means it was worth the effort to make myself hold back a bit on the fly,” said Touya. “All right, I guess we have no choice now but to gather up these bandits...”

Touya grimaced as he pointed at the dead bodies, and I nodded in response. It was fine to leave dead bodies alone in a forest, but leaving dead bodies alone near highways would cause trouble for other people. Touya and I ignored the bandit that was still alive as we started to gather up the dead bodies. The girls started to move as well once they saw what we were doing, but their faces were pale and their movements were sluggish. The dead bandits with no heads weren’t that bad, but looking at the ones with holes in their bodies felt quite revolting. I had to hold back from vomiting as I dragged the dead bodies to gather all of them up in one place.

“By the way, what did that last bandit try to say, Touya?” I asked.

“Oh, did you hear him? It wasn’t anything important,” Touya replied. “He just happens to be someone that we know. Here, take a look.”

Touya seemed to be in a bad mood as he kicked one of the heads on the

ground to make it faceup, and its eyes were wide open in death. Yuki looked away from the head once she saw that, while Haruka and Natsuki turned a bit paler as well.

“Is this guy Iwanaka?” I asked.

“Yeah, it seems like it,” Touya replied. “I dunno where he disappeared to after we reported about what they did, but I guess he ended up joining a bandit gang.”

Iwanaka and the other two guys had lost their adventurer licenses thanks to the testimony that Riva had provided for us. I had thought that they had fled to a different town, but it seemed like they had stooped so low to the point of becoming bandits. However, they were already irredeemable when they had attacked the girls. They hadn’t managed to succeed at their attempt, but what they had planned to do if they had succeeded was probably something even more vile than the average bandit’s crimes.

“Does that mean the other two guys are among these dead bodies as well? I guess we have to make sure since we need to retrieve their adventurer cards,” I said.

I felt very reluctant about the fact that we had to do this, but Touya and I tore off the masks of the bandits and searched their pockets. In the end, we had managed to discover a total of six adventurer cards from the bandits. It was possible that some adventurer cards had been lost along with parts of their bodies, but luckily for us, there were two cards among the six that seemed like the ones that had belonged to Tokuoka and Maeda. We weren’t absolutely sure about this since their actual names weren’t written on the adventurer cards themselves, along with the fact that the supposed dead body of Maeda had no head, but it was highly unlikely that they hadn’t stuck together as a party of three. However, we had discovered a slight issue as a result of our search, and it was the fact that the guy who had been stabbed by Natsuki and writhed around on the ground in pain leading up to his death seemed to be Tokuoka.

“Are you feeling okay, Natsuki?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just feel slightly disturbed by this,” Natsuki replied. “They weren’t people that I was on good terms with anyway, and they had tried to do

things to us that justified us being merciless towards them.”

“Yeah, they tried to kill us before,” I said.

“They have probably also attacked and killed some other people themselves after they became bandits,” said Natsuki.

I wasn’t sure if Natsuki was actually completely fine or if she was just pretending to be fine. Natsuki was the type of person that tended to conceal her true thoughts and feelings, but I felt like she was trying to convince herself that she had done the right thing.

It seemed like Natsuki’s hands were a bit shaky as she clenched her spear, but I decided to ignore that as I tried to comfort her. “I see. Well, let me know if there’s anything I can do for you.”



Natsuki smiled a bit when she heard my words. “Oh, will you comfort me if I ask you to, Nao-kun?”

“Yeah, I’ll do anything you want me to do,” I replied.

I was willing to tag along with her for anything, including binge eating, hearing her out, or even forcing myself to consume alcohol to the point of becoming drunk if it was needed. I only felt slightly disgusted when I looked at dead bodies at the moment, since I had braced myself for this, but I wasn’t sure what would happen once I had calmed down after this was over since the memories would definitely disturb me.

“Hee hee. In that case, I’ll take you up on that offer when the time comes,” said Natsuki. “Let’s get this over with first for all sorts of things.”

“Mm. Well, we’ve finished gathering the dead bodies in one spot, so the only thing left for us to do is to interrogate the bandit who’s still alive.” I glanced around at the faces of our other party members and pointed at Yuki. “Yuki looks quite pale as well, so can you tag along with her, Natsuki? Take her to the inside of the carriage or a place slightly away from here for her to get some rest.”

“Oh, okay. Thank you for being considerate, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki.

Natsuki voiced her thanks in a low voice before she headed off towards Yuki, and Haruka approached me in her place. She looked pale as well, but not as much as Natsuki or Yuki. With that in mind, I felt a bit bad about this, but I wanted her to participate in the interrogation as well. A few moments later, Touya walked over from behind us, dragging the last bandit, who was gasping for air.

“I’m sorry for making you guys do most of the work of dragging the dead bodies,” said Haruka.

“Don’t worry about it. Things like this should be our responsibility as guys,” I said.

“Yeah, you girls have helped us a lot with daily life for things such as cooking, so it’s all good,” said Touya.

We weren’t fundamentalists about gender equality, so we had an unwritten

agreement that people should just do what they were capable of, but the girls were in charge of most of our daily life tasks due to the fact that their skills and magic were more suited for them. With that in mind, it was only fair for me and Touya to contribute whenever and wherever we could for other kinds of tasks.

“Okay, let’s move on. This bandit is still alive, right, Touya?” I asked.

“Yeah, for now.” Touya held up his sword and was on full alert as he glared at the bandit. “Listen up. We’re going to ask you some questions, and you better answer honestly for your own sake.”

“P-Please, help me...”

A raspy voice escaped from the bandit, whose eyes were out of focus. Blood was leaking out of his mouth as he coughed from time to time, and there was a watery sound coming out of him too, as if his broken ribs had stabbed into his lungs. The bandit seemed like he wasn’t going to live for much longer, but Haruka kept a straight face even after she saw that, as she reached for her pocket and took out a small bottle. “That depends on how you answer us. We’ll save you if you answer our questions honestly. Was the boss of your bandit gang among your group of twelve men that attacked us?”

The bottle that Haruka had revealed looked like something with medicine in it that Natsuki had made with her Pharmacy skill as practice. The medicine was enough to cure most cuts and light wounds, but it wasn’t super effective like magic, so it wasn’t sufficient for healing the bandit’s injuries.

However, the bandit stared at the bottle and sounded quite desperate as he forced himself to reply to Haruka’s question. “N-No, our boss isn’t here. H-He’s at our hideout, and I’ll tell you where our hideout is, so...”

The bandit’s voice was quite hoarse and raspy as he told us the location of their bandit gang’s hideout. I wasn’t sure if he was telling the truth or not, so I glanced at Touya for confirmation. He blinked for a bit before he realized why I was looking at him and fell silent for a few seconds before he nodded back to me in response. *Hmm, I guess that means the hideout is in the same direction.*

“Okay, next question,” said Haruka. “How many people are there remaining at the hideout?”

“T-Twenty-five, I think...”

I wasn’t sure if the bandit’s answer to Haruka’s next question was ambiguous because he didn’t know the exact numbers or if it was because he couldn’t think straight, but I felt like he wasn’t lying about it. With that in mind, it meant that the original size of the bandit gang was almost forty members, and that seemed like quite a large bandit gang to me. On top of that, the remaining bandits were double the number that we had slain in our first skirmish with them, so it seemed like this wasn’t going to be an easy quest for us to complete. Haruka muttered “That’s quite a lot” in a low voice to herself before she looked at me and Touya to ask us if we had any questions of our own. Both of us shook our heads in response, and Haruka quietly sighed afterward.

“Okay, last question,” said Haruka. “There have been very few women among the dead bodies of your bandit gang’s victims. Do you know the reason?”

“...I-I had nothing to do with this.”

“That’s not what I asked you.” Haruka’s voice turned cold when she heard the bandit’s answer. “I asked you if you knew the reason behind this or not, but your answer is that you had nothing to do with this, huh?”

If the information that the Adventurers’ Guild had gathered was accurate, then the number of dead women that had been discovered so far was much less compared to the estimate for the number of victims, and the bandit could have just replied that he didn’t know anything if he was clueless. However, the bandit’s response was that he had nothing to do with this. I wasn’t sure how clear his mind was at the moment, but the fact that he had answered with those words meant that he had most likely committed some acts that resulted in the small number of dead women that had been discovered.

The three of us all glared at him once we heard his response, and it seemed like the bandit could feel it, as his hands were shaking when he extended his right hand towards Haruka. “P-Please, help me. I don’t want to die...”

Haruka tucked the bottle back into her pocket as she replied to the bandit. “Of course. I am someone that keeps her word with others, no matter who the other person is.”

“Wh-Why...?”

"I'll spare you the sweet release of death at the hands of someone else," said Haruka. "Goodbye, and good luck."

"No, I, ugh..."

The light of hope had faded away from the bandit's eyes as he coughed out a huge amount of blood, but Haruka wasn't looking at him anymore as she had already turned around and walked off. Touya and I stayed behind for a bit to make sure the bandit was dying before we started to catch up to Haruka, and the coughing sounds from the bandit had faded away after a while.

Yuki and Natsuki were sitting down and waiting for us under a tree that was a bit far away from our carriage, and that was probably because the carriage was too close to where we had slain the bandits. The two of them had some empty cups in their hands and poured some water into those cups before they handed them towards us.

"Is it over?" Natsuki asked.

Haruka took one of the cups from Natsuki and gulped down some water before she answered Natsuki's question. "Mm. It should be over soon."

Natsuki glanced behind us and seemed to understand what Haruka was implying with her words, but she didn't comment on it and thanked us instead for taking care of this.

"Yeah, we got what we needed," I said. "Are you okay, Yuki?"

"Um, not quite. Sorry," Yuki replied. "I thought that I've become mostly used to seeing gruesome scenes, but the fact that we actually killed other people feels very disturbing..."

"It's fine. That's just a natural reaction," I said. "In fact, I feel the same way, but I'm just doing my best not to show it."

Yuki would have scared me instead if she had felt nothing about the fact that she had created huge holes in the guts of other people's bodies. She looked like she had mostly recovered from the experience, but it was probably a good idea to let her continue resting for a bit longer.

"By the way, Haruka, do dead bodies turn into undead monsters if they're left

alone?" I asked.

"It seems like that can happen if they're left alone in areas that are rich in mana," Haruka replied. "It shouldn't happen in normal areas, but that's not guaranteed, so the recommended course of action is to cremate them."

"What happens if you just bury the dead bodies instead?" I asked.

"It's no different from leaving them alone," Haruka replied. "The dead bodies can become zombies or skeletons depending on how long they've decomposed leading up to it, and there's a low chance that they can become an even stronger undead monster."

"Yikes, I don't want to fight zombies!" Touya exclaimed. "I bet they're rotten and smell really bad, so it'd be like being constantly afflicted by a status ailment for me."

"A pungent smell like that would definitely be very effective against beastmen like you, Touya," said Haruka. "Also, if you don't bury the dead bodies deep enough, then it's possible that they might get dug up by wild animals, although it seems like animals won't become undead monsters even if they feed on dead bodies."

"Oh, I guess that means something like a sky burial could work as well for dealing with dead bodies," I said.

If it was possible to convert other living beings to undead monsters through the consumption of food, then people who lived in areas rich in mana would have nothing they could eat from animals, so this made perfect sense to me. I was glad that there was no need for me to consider the possibility of undead monsters forming in the stomachs of people or animals.

"Well, let's just cremate the dead bodies," I said. "Iwanaka and the other two guys became bandits, but I don't mind doing this much out of goodwill since we were born in the same country."

The dead bodies of atrocious bandits deserved to be feasted on by wild animals, but there was no guarantee that such wild animals would actually do that. With that in mind, there was a possibility that the dead bodies would become undead monsters if we left them to the whims of wild animals, so we

technically had no freedom of choice for this issue.

“I figured you’d say that, so I gathered the stuff that doesn’t burn well,” said Touya.

Touya pointed at a bunch of weapons and wallets that had been piled up on the ground, but I wasn’t sure if “piled up” was the correct expression for this since the wallets were almost empty.

“I heard that there are tough people out there in the world who actively attack bandits for a living, but these bandits had almost no money on them,” said Touya.

“What kind of scary world is that?! The idea of a world where there are enough bandits for people to earn a living from hunting them and the hunters themselves both sound really scary to me!” I exclaimed.

“Hmm. I think it’s possible that the bandits stashed all of their money and treasure at the hideout,” said Yuki.

“Eh, I don’t think bandits are capable of saving money,” I said.

Even most adventurers wouldn’t save the money that they earned from their work. In fact, the majority of them would just spend all of their earnings on things like alcohol, so the idea of bandits “working” and saving money felt unrealistic to me since some of those bandits were former adventurers themselves. It was possible that there would be a lot of money and treasure at a bandit’s hideout if they had recently robbed some other people, but that probably wasn’t the case this time due to the fact that a group of twelve bandits had been waiting in ambush for us.

Touya inspected all of the weapons that he had gathered in one place from the bandits and sighed before he shook his head. “The weapons that the bandits had were all bad quality ones as well. In fact, they look like they’re mostly made from scrap iron.”

According to Touya, the swords that the bandits had were decent enough for actual use, but they weren’t made from special types of iron like yellow iron, and it seemed like bad quality iron had been used to make these swords. A lot of them looked like they hadn’t been maintained properly since they were very

rusty, so they probably weren't worth any money even if we brought them back with us to someplace like Gantz-san's store.

"I can probably make things like pots or kettles if we melt the iron from these wea—"

"No, Touya. I don't want to cook using cooking utensils that were made from such iron," said Haruka.

"I feel the exact same way," said Natsuki. "If you're going to bring these weapons back with us, then you should sell all of them."

"Mm, don't even think about using the iron from them," said Yuki.

"O-Oh, okay," said Touya.

Touya hadn't mentioned anything about actually wanting to make use of the iron from the weapons that the bandits had used, but he nodded in response even though he seemed a bit confused by the strong backlash from the girls. The weapons themselves would merely become normal iron if they were melted, but it was a fact that it probably wouldn't feel good to use cooking utensils made from the iron of weapons that had been used to murder other people. There was a clear line that separated weapons and cooking utensils, and crossing that line was a bad idea regardless of which side it was from. It was wrong for a cook to use something like a frying pan as a weapon, after all.

"Well, if all the things that don't burn well have been removed, then I guess I'll try burning the bandits," I said.

I threw a Fireball at the pile of dead bodies that had been gathered up in one place a bit away from us. However, the spell's area of effect was quite narrow since it had only burned the area that it had directly landed at.

"Can you cast a bigger Fireball, or do you need me to gather some firewood?" Touya asked.

Touya had brought over the last dead body and threw it into the fire as he asked me that question. I was aware of the fact that the last bandit had doomed himself, so I remained silent as I threw a slightly stronger Fireball at the pile of dead bodies.

"Hmm. It looks like you can burn them all after five or six more uses of your spell," said Touya.

"Yeah, but that's only not an issue if we didn't have to deal with the bandit hideout after this," I said.

We had to deal with the bandit hideout as soon as possible due to the fact that we had already slain a group of bandits. The bandits that had remained at the hideout would probably become wary if the ones that had headed out to rob people didn't return, and there was even a chance that those remaining bandits would flee from their hideout. With that in mind, it was a bad idea for me to use too much mana for cremating these dead bodies.

"I guess we can't waste too much time with this either," I said. "Touya, stand back a bit."

We had a carriage this time for transportation, so it would probably work out better if I used a large amount of mana in one go and made use of the gained time to rest for recovering my mana. On top of that, I had become quite good at tweaking spells as well from my efforts with the Fire Arrow spell.

"Speed, explosive power, and burn time aren't needed at all," I said. "All I need is to adjust the potency, the temperature, and the area of effect, so..."

My Fireball had grown to a very large size after I infused it with a lot of mana, and it slowly flew towards the pile of dead bodies before it landed. Upon impact, a huge pillar of flame erupted into the air, and some hot wind from that impact reached me and blew up my hair in the front even though I was standing a bit far away. The flames disappeared after a few seconds to reveal nothing but some burnt earth, and there were no traces left of the dead bodies at all.

"Whoa..."

"Nao, I think you overdid it," said Touya.

"Uh, well, it's true that the Fireball ended up being stronger than I had expected it to be," I said. "Let's just say that it's because I've become stronger as a mage."

"Are you sure about that?" Touya asked.

It seemed like the size of the pillar of flame had been large enough to the point that the girls were surprised by it as well, even though they were standing even farther away. They all hastily started to run over to my location, and I tried to hide the site of the flames by using Earth Magic without much success. However, the ground looked a bit better after I had created some earth to cover it, so I was satisfied with the results.

“Are you okay, Nao?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, I’m perfectly fine,” I replied. “Let’s hurry and head to the bandit hideout. Oh, it looks like our horse is still next to the carriage, so it must be really brave.”

I looked around and saw that the horse hadn’t moved at all from where we had hopped off the carriage. In fact, it was eating some grass on the ground and seemed quite relaxed. I wasn’t sure if this was because it had been trained to not react to most things because it was a horse that the guild had lent us or if it was because our skirmish with the bandits wasn’t actually a very fierce battle, but I was glad that it hadn’t run away or panicked since that would have been difficult for us to deal with.

“It’s possible to get attacked by monsters on the highway, so it seems like horses like this have been tamed and trained for similar situations,” said Natsuki. “This horse isn’t worth much since it’s quite old, but it’s quite experienced due to its age.”

“Mm, we were told that this horse is close to retirement age,” said Yuki. “Its age is why even I can handle it easily, but...”

Yuki brought over the horse and petted its neck, but the horse’s reaction was very aloof.

“Well, it’s good for us that this horse won’t randomly panic,” I said. “What road do we have to take to reach the bandit hideout?”

“I think we have to go in that direction,” said Touya. “I’ll go take a look.”

Touya ran off to check the road ahead real quick, and I hopped inside of the carriage to lie down sideways. The directions that we had pried out of the last bandit took us down a hidden road, and it was probably used to transport

carriages that the bandits had stolen. The road itself wasn't very smooth, but there were wheel tracks on the ground, so it looked like our carriage could advance through the road. We were mostly silent on the way for a while after Touya had returned and hopped into the carriage, but my Scout skill had eventually managed to detect a place that seemed like the hideout of the bandit gang.

"We should stop our carriage here," I said. "We're quite close to the hideout now."

If we were going to sneakily approach the hideout, then the loud size and sounds that a carriage would make were unsuitable for that purpose. Yuki pulled the reins to stop our horse after I had stuck my head out to warn her, and we all quietly hopped off the carriage, but we had to decide what to do about the carriage itself first.

"We have no choice but to leave the carriage around here," I said. "However..."

Our goal was to eliminate the people that used the hidden road we were on, so there was no need for us to worry about the carriage blocking the road for other people or the possibility of someone stealing the carriage, but there were other problems that we had to worry about.

"Mm, we need to somehow protect this carriage from wild animals and monsters," said Haruka. "Can you deal with this via your Time Magic, Nao?"

"You're asking for the impossible," I replied. "It's true that I can use the Sanctuary spell now, but I can only make one that's strong enough to ward off insects."

The grimoires had mentioned this as well, but spells that mages had just become able to use weren't very strong or effective. My Sanctuary spell would become capable of deflecting things like magic and arrows in the future if I trained and practiced it, but it wasn't that useful as of now. There weren't any signals of monsters from my Scout skill, and that was probably because weak bandits had decided to use this area as their hideout, but there was a chance that carnivores such as wolves would come over from far away.

"I guess that's not enough to keep animals like wolves away. Oh yeah, wild

animals stay away from the territory of animals that are stronger than them, right?" Yuki asked. "Some carnivores mark their territory with urine to keep other animals away."

"Mm, I've seen this on the news back on Earth, but I'm not sure if it's actually effective," I said. "What about it, Yuki?"

I looked at Yuki to ask her with my eyes about why she had brought up this topic, and she seemed a bit embarrassed as she hesitantly replied to me. "Oh, well, um, Touya, you drank some water earlier, right? Do you feel an urge to go to the toilet?"

Touya fell silent for quite a while as he processed Yuki's words, and he raised his voice in surprise once he finally understood what Yuki was implying. "Are you telling me to do marking with my piss?!"

"O-Oh, no, that's not what I mean at all, please," said Yuki. "It's just that, you know, we're inside a forest, so there's no need to set up our portable toilet for this, right?"

Yuki had pretended to deny Touya's allegations, but the way she had done so was basically replying in the affirmative. However, none of us had a better plan, so...

"Oh, I've been feeling the urge to piss more often recently since it's cold," I said. "Sorry, Touya, but can you tag along with me?"

"What kind of excuse is that?!" Touya exclaimed. "I mean, sure, but still..."

I reaffirmed the strong bond of my friendship with Touya as bros, since he had nodded to my request while sighing at the same time. After we were done with that, I used my Sanctuary spell to cover our carriage and the horse before we ventured deeper into the forest. There weren't any proper roads in the forest, but all we had to do was to follow the wheel tracks on the ground.

Once we had approached quite close to the bandit hideout, Touya suddenly grimaced and stopped in his tracks. "Uh, can we take a detour for a bit?"

"What's wrong?" Haruka asked.

"My nose detected a scent that bothers me," Touya replied.

Touya's response to Haruka's question was very ambiguous. We had no spare time for a detour since we had to hurry, but nobody refuted Touya's opinion since we all sensed that it was serious from the look on his face. A minute had passed since we had started to follow Touya's lead away from the wheel tracks, and my nose started to pick up on the scent that had bothered Touya. It smelled like something very rotten that was fairly common to smell inside of a forest, but it was quite strong this time compared to those other instances. The scent started to become stronger and stronger as we continued to walk through the forest, and we eventually arrived in front of a large hole in the ground. I had a bad feeling about this as I peeked inside of the hole, but I was not ready for what was awaiting us.

“Ugh...!”

One of us had reacted with a voice full of disgust, but I wasn't sure who it was since I was too shocked by what I had just seen. It was a sight far beyond my imagination. There were a large number of dead bodies lying on top of each other inside of the hole, and most of them looked like they had been decomposing for a long time. The ones at the bottom didn't even look like the shape of a person anymore, but the ones on top were still in proper shape. All of the dead bodies were naked, and most of them were probably women. Their bodies seemed like they had been carelessly discarded into the hole, and I could almost feel as if resentment were oozing out of their eye sockets.

“Ugh. That bandit dared to claim that he had nothing to do with this, huh?”

I swallowed down the nauseous feeling that had traveled up my throat before I made Haruka and Yuki turn around and pushed their backs away from the hole, and Touya copied me as he pushed Natsuki's back as well.

Haruka took a deep breath before she slowly started to speak. “Whew. I finally understand what Diola-san meant by this bandit gang being cruel and atrocious,” said Haruka. “We definitely need to deal with them swiftly.”

I wasn't sure exactly how much information the Adventurers' Guild or the lord of the viscounty had grasped about the crimes and deeds of the bandit gang, but it was definitely a group of criminals that couldn't be ignored.

“Were Iwanaka and the other two guys involved with this?” Yuki asked.

"No idea, but it's possible that they were based on how they acted towards us," said Natsuki.

It was highly unlikely that those three guys had organized this since they were probably new members of the bandit gang, but it was a fact that they had belonged to the bandit gang that had committed these vile deeds. Advastlis-sama probably wasn't a god that approved of or encouraged evil deeds like this, so it was a good thing that we had killed Iwanaka and his party, even if this wasn't the best way to state it.

"I originally thought about capturing some of the bandits if they were easy to defeat, but now I think that we should probably just kill them all," said Touya.

"Yeah, I completely agree," I said. "I definitely won't hesitate now."

"Mm. However, we should be careful about this since there might be others at the hideout, such as people that were captured by the bandits," said Haruka.

We all looked at each other and nodded in unison before we ventured back to our original path.

After a while, we arrived at the bandit gang's hideout, and the hideout itself was quite similar to a small settlement. It seemed like the bandits had cut down a lot of trees to make open space, and there were about a total of ten huts side to side with each other that were surrounded by some simple fences. There wasn't a lookout tower in the settlement, but it seemed like the bandits had some people on guard duty since there were three bandits standing at the entrance of the settlement. However, the bandits seemed like they weren't very wary or alert, since all three of them yawned from time to time and hadn't noticed us at all. We were hiding, of course, but both Haruka and Touya lacked the Stealth and Sneak skills, so the way the bandits at the entrance were acting was a good thing for us.

"All right, how should we approach this...?"

My Scout skill had detected a total of twenty-six signals from the bandit hideout, and that number was more or less the same as what we had pried out of a bandit earlier, but it was still quite a lot for us to handle. Even if the bandits weren't strong individually, it was a fact that they outnumbered us, and we would be at a disadvantage if they managed to surround us in battle.

However, it seemed like Yuki had a simple answer for my concerns. “I think we can just approach this the same way that we did the orc nest. The bandits here in this hideout are basically no different from monsters, so yeah.”

Yuki had a look on her face that indicated she was absolutely serious. It was probably because she was furious from what we had seen earlier as a result of our detour, and none of us objected to her idea since we all felt the same way about this. However, we ended up adjusting our plans a bit since our current situation was a bit different from when we had attacked the orcs. We had assumed that the orcs would notice us right away once we had attacked them at their nest, but our goal this time was to whittle down the number of bandits while doing our best to prevent the other bandits from noticing. With that in mind, it was important for the mages in our party to slay them in one hit at the same time from a position that wasn’t visible from where the bandits were at, but this was something that Haruka, Yuki, and I had all become used to by now.

“*Fire Arrow.*”

Haruka, Yuki, and I had whispered as we chanted our spells, but the Fire Arrows didn’t lose any potency or speed because of it. All three of the Fire Arrows struck the bandits at the same time and slew them for good, and Touya swiftly dashed towards the bandits afterward to retrieve their dead bodies and threw them into the forest in order to hide them. As for Natsuki, her role was to protect us mages just in case we were attacked all of a sudden by bandits, so she remained near us while Touya took care of the role that he had been assigned.

“All right, it seems like the other bandits haven’t noticed us,” I said. “Haruka, aim from the left. Yuki, aim from the right.”

“Sure,” Yuki replied.

“Okay,” Haruka replied. “Be careful, Nao.”

Haruka headed towards the left side of the bandit hideout along with Touya while Yuki headed towards the right side along with Natsuki. Our plan was to snipe the bandits within range from outside of the hideout, but the most important part was to carry out this plan without being noticed. We would be in trouble if the bandits made use of their numbers advantage to kill us one by

one, after all. As for me, I was assigned to the area near the entrance of the hideout, so I climbed up a tall tree that was nearby in order to snipe bandits from on top.

“I hope we can whittle down their numbers to single digits, but maybe that’s asking for too much,” I said.

The bandit hideout had a relatively large building in the middle, and the huts were in an arc around that large building. It sort of seemed like a line of defense for the bandits, and most of them were walking inside of that line, so it wasn’t easy to obtain a straight line of sight from the forest to attack them with magic. None of this was an issue for me since I had climbed up to a high place on top of a tree, but normal arrows fired by a bow would be affected by the wind too much from here, and it also wouldn’t be easy for people that weren’t elves to climb up this high.

“Even if we slay some of them, the rest will notice right away since they’re so close to each other,” I said. “Hmm...”

The orcs back at the orc nest hadn’t been organized at all, but the bandits here at this hideout had set up a proper line of defense with very few blind spots, and I was a bit frustrated by the fact that the bandits were smarter than orcs even though what they had done was much more vile. In addition, it seemed like the girls had very few easy targets to take out as well, since Haruka had only slain one bandit while Yuki had only slain two bandits based on what I could see from where I was standing.

“Oh, looks like I’ve got some targets to take out myself,” I said.

Two bandits had walked over to the entrance of the hideout, and this was probably for the sake of changing shifts with the previous three bandits. The two of them seemed a bit confused by the fact that there was nobody on guard duty at the entrance, but I blasted their heads off with my Fire Arrows right away.

“I can probably slay one more here,” I said. “Hmm...”

A large volume of blood had gushed out of the two dead bandits as they collapsed to the ground, so the surrounding area was a complete mess. Due to this, there probably wasn’t any point in me climbing down and attempting to

hide the dead bodies. A few moments passed before another bandit started to approach the entrance of the hideout, and as soon as he saw the dead bodies of the other bandits and stopped in his tracks, I sniped him with another Fire Arrow.

“Is it normally a group of three for guard duty? If it is, then I wish they had moved together.” *Man, I could have sniped another bandit if they actually moved in a group of three.* “Oh well, I guess there’s no point in complaining about this. It’s time for phase two of our attack plan.”

It seemed like new targets had only appeared on Haruka’s side since nothing had changed on Yuki’s side. We probably wouldn’t be able to whittle down any more of the bandits as is, so I started to prepare for the next thing that I had in mind and chose a hut that seemed like there was nobody inside as my target to sneakily set on fire with my magic. The flames from my magic were quite weak since it would be bad if the bandits thought that they were being attacked by other people, but it seemed like even that was enough to start a fire for a crude hut that was very dry due to a lack of rain recently. The fire surged up instantly and made loud cracking sounds as it started to burn and spread. The fire was so fierce that even the carefree bandits noticed it right away, and some of the doors of the other huts were hastily opened as a bunch of bandits jumped outside.

“Twenty-five, twenty-six, hmm,” I said. “Is this all of them?”

I carefully used my Scout skill once again to make sure that there weren’t any other bandits. *Okay, done. It looks like I don’t have to hold back at all.*

“A fire broke out! Extinguish it right away!”

“Go bring some water, now!”

The fire was a great way to distract the bandits since it meant that they would become less wary of other things, and our plan was to aim for the bandits that were alone as a result of the fire. I used my magic along with Haruka and Yuki to attack the bandits that were moving alone to fetch water and the bandits that were standing a bit farther away from the scene of the fire, but the bandits didn’t stay completely clueless for too long.

One of the bandits noticed what was going on after we had slain about four

bandits, and he tried to raise his voice to warn the others. “Ugh, we’re being atta—”

Before the bandit could finish his words, I threw a Fireball at him that I had spent some time preparing, and then I slid off the tree I was on to hop down to the ground. The large sound made by the impact of my Fireball was the signal for us to group up, and I only had to wait for a bit at the entrance of the hideout before everyone else ran over to me.

“What’s the result?!” Touya asked.

“There should be only around twelve bandits left,” I replied. “We can probably handle this!”

I hadn’t been able to check the result of the last Fireball that I had aimed at the bandits, but I had probably slain a decent number of them with it. However, that wasn’t a reason for any of us to let our guard down. Right after I had replied to Touya with a conservative estimate for the results of our attack plan so far, we invaded the bandit hideout. The hut that I had set on fire was located a bit far from the entrance of the hideout, and this was a deliberate choice on my part. Once we had arrived at the scene of the fire, we saw what looked like an absolute disaster, since there were a bunch of dead bodies lying on the ground that were all completely burnt black. It seemed like about two or three of those bodies were a result of my Fireball spell, but it also seemed like the fierce flames that had spread to the surrounding area had inflicted burns on a few other bandits. On top of that, it looked like the sheer force of the explosion from my Fireball spell had also caused the burning hut to collapse and crumble to the ground.

“Who the hell are you guys?! Did you guys do this?!”

“What do you think, idiot?” Touya asked.

“Mm. Feel the weight of your sins as you die,” said Haruka.

Touya and Natsuki dashed forward to slay two more bandits before the rest of us joined the battle as well, and it didn’t take too long for us to whittle down their numbers until there was only one bandit left. That remaining bandit happened to be the boss of the bandit gang and didn’t seem very strong since Touya was perfectly calm as he dashed towards him, but he looked quite

surprised when he saw the dagger that the bandit had hastily pulled out.

“Tch!”

Touya forcibly stopped himself from dashing any farther before he clicked his tongue and jumped back to where the rest of us were at. The bandit seemed very surprised by Touya’s reaction, as he had a dumbfounded look on his face for a moment before he snapped out of it and started to hysterically laugh at us.

“He he he! I-I guess even you guys know a good weapon when you see one! This is much different from your average cheap weapon! Come on, I dare you to attack me. Your weapon might be the one that gets destroyed when we clash!”

“You goddamn bastard. Scum like you has no right to use that weapon,” said Touya.

Touya’s voice was very deep and full of anger as he glared at the bandit, and I had never heard him this angry before. The way that the bandit was holding the dagger in his hands seemed like he wasn’t an amateur at combat, but Touya was much stronger than him and would most likely win if they clashed their weapons together. However, Touya had retreated in spite of that, and there was only one reason I could think of for this.

“Is that the dagger we’re looking for, Touya?” I asked.

“Yeah, it is,” Touya replied. “It’s apparently capable of slicing through normal iron with ease.”

“Seriously? Did she manage to create that powerful of a weapon...?”

I guess Edith really is a genius alchemist. Touya’s sword was made of blue iron and probably wouldn’t break since it was thicker than the dagger that the last bandit had in his hands, but the issue here was the dagger itself. Our weapons were important as well, but they were generic products that we could turn in for repairs if they were damaged or even just purchase new ones, so only our wallets would suffer as a result of this. However, the dagger that the bandit had was a unique one, and it was also one of the reasons why we had attacked the bandit hideout in the first place, so it would be really bad for us if we accidentally destroyed it.

In addition, Edith didn't act like one at all, but she was actually a vengeful ghost, so if the dagger that she longed to retrieve were destroyed, I wasn't sure what would happen to her or Touya since she was possessing him. We could probably exorcise Edith with the Purification spell from Haruka or Natsuki, but I wanted Edith to pass on to the afterlife in peace if possible.

"Come on, are you guys scared now?! Huh?!"

The bandit sounded quite energetic and confident from his words alone, but his forehead was covered in sweat, and his hands were shaking as well as he held the dagger with them. It was obvious that the bandit was panicking since he refused to meet our eyes, but that was a natural reaction considering the fact that he was facing off against a group of people that had slain over twenty of his fellow bandits in a short amount of time. *Now then, how should we deal with this?* There was a chance that I could swiftly slay the bandit in a blink of an eye with my spear, but the tip of my spear or the dagger itself would probably break if they happened to clash with each other. The dagger would probably be fine if I used the handle of my spear, but if it was capable of slicing through normal iron, it could probably slice through ironwood too. Even if I was willing to accept that, there would be no point if I couldn't slay the bandit. However, something had happened before I could come to a conclusion.

"So be it, then," said Haruka.

Haruka sighed after she had finished her words, and a hole was created in the chest of the bandit from his back in the next moment.

"Huh—"

The bandit muttered something while the dagger fell out of his hands as he looked with shock at the hole in his chest, and he tried to cover up or seal that hole with his hands for a bit before his movements stopped. After that, his body started to slowly tilt forward and fell face-first onto the ground.

"We don't absolutely have to fight people head-on in close combat, after all," said Haruka.

Haruka was the one that had opened up a hole in the chest of the bandit, and she had probably thought that it was a better idea to slay the bandit with magic given the situation we were in. However...

“Are you feeling okay, Haruka?” I asked.

“Hm? Oh, if you’re asking about my remaining mana, then I’m fine. It was a bit difficult to suddenly attack the bandit from a blind spot and required more mana than normal, but I’ve used less mana than you have this time so far, and I also have more mana than you because I have the Enhanced Mana Capacity skill,” Haruka replied. “In addition, I have the Swiftcast spell as well, so I was the most suited for this situa—”

Haruka was much more loquacious than usual, but I interrupted her words as I hugged her body. We had killed a lot of other people during our attack on the bandit hideout this time, but most of those kills were performed from long range via magic, and the kills that had been performed in close range were while we were pumped full of adrenaline from facing off with weapons aimed at each other during combat. On the other hand, Haruka had directly looked at the bandit that we had somewhat talked with before she did her best to calmly kill him, so the amount of mental stress on her as a result of this was probably much worse than the other instances. I could feel Haruka shivering in my arms, but I ignored that as I gently patted her on her back.

“Thank you, Haruka,” I said.

“I-I...”

I hugged Haruka even tighter before she could say something back to me, and nobody spoke until her shivering subsided.

“Hey, Nao-kun, is it just me, or did you react much differently this time compared to how you reacted to me?” Natsuki asked.

Natsuki sounded a bit upset as she asked me that question. She had probably held off from asking this until Haruka had calmed down, but I wasn’t sure exactly how to respond to this.

“I mean, I told you that I’m willing to do anything that you want me to do, right?”

“You gently hugged Haruka without being prompted, didn’t you?! It’s not fair! Do you really think it’s easy for girls to bring it up?!”

Natsuki, are you telling me to comfort you the same way that I did Haruka?

That's way too hard! I'm not that good at this! I was confident that Haruka would forgive me for sudden physical contact, but it wasn't the same for Natsuki. I probably didn't need to worry about Natsuki freaking out and accusing me of sexual harassment, but there was a chance that she would force a fake smile and subtly keep her distance from me as a result. If that ever happened, then my heart would easily shatter since it was as fragile as something like cover glass. In fact, a single flick would be enough to smash it to pieces.

"Oh, come on, you're better off than I am, Natsuki," said Yuki. "I was completely left alone, even when I was doing my best to hold back pure maiden juice from slipping out of my mouth!"

I mean, sure, Yuki, you looked quite pale at the time, but it's not like I didn't do anything. "I sent Natsuki to tag along with you, didn't I? I'm pretty sure I was considerate with my words as well, so..."

"No! That's completely different!" Yuki exclaimed. "The difference matters, Nao! No discrimination, please!"

"Mm, exactly! You should be as kind to us as you are towards Haruka, Nao-kun!" Natsuki exclaimed.

"Well, it's only natural that Nao treats me differently since we've known each other for longer and are more intimate friends, after all," said Haruka. "I'm the main character right now, hee hee!"

It seemed like Haruka had recovered from her stressful experience, but she added fuel to the fire while she looked up at the others from my chest.

"That's so mean! Are you saying Natsuki and I are merely supporting characters or something?!" Yuki asked.

"I think things like this can lead to the disbanding of parties," said Natsuki. "What do you think, Nao-kun?"

Huh? What am I supposed to say in this situation? I'll get stabbed if I try to dodge the subject by saying something like "Everyone's the main character of their own lives, right?" Also, Touya, help me out here.

"Hold up!"

Touya barged into the conversation as if he were answering my inner call for help. *I knew I could count on you in times of need, buddy. Go ham!*

“Mm, Tou—”

“The main character of the situation we’re in is me, Edith-chan!”

“Huh?! Edith?!”

“Yeah! Touya said that now is the best time for me to appear, but I don’t know why he said that!”

Bro, did you run away and swap with Edith to avoid dealing with this situation, Touya? Ugh. I guess I should’ve expected that kind of resourcefulness from my best friend.

“Besides, the reason why we came here in the first place is to find the dagger that I gave to Chris as a keepsake!” Edith exclaimed. “You can quarrel all you want among yourselves after you return home! It’s painful for a sad and lonely single person like me to watch!”

The only choice we had was to shut up after hearing Edith’s words, because they were quite heavy coming from someone like her. *This is my chance!* I hastily picked up the dagger from the ground and handed it over to Edith. “This is the dagger that you’re looking for, right?”

“Mm, it is. It’s the one that I poured a lot of love into and gave to Chris as a gift,” Edith replied. “Chris...”

Edith took the dagger from me and held it to her chest. Right after, as she muttered the name Chris, a burst of light engulfed our surroundings, and the silhouette of a girl appeared in the air next to Touya. She had silver hair with a tinge of blue to it, and it extended all the way down to her waist. Her body was slim and slender, and she was wearing a sky blue dress. The expression she had on her face gave off the impression of someone that was very wise and intelligent, but it also seemed a bit soft and charming. In fact, I was absolutely amazed by how pretty and frail Edith looked, since it was almost impossible for me to connect the dots based on how she had acted up until now.

Yikes, I’m pretty sure I would have said yes to her right away if she asked me for help in that body. I was really glad that she possessed Touya since there was

no way I could have responded to her in a calm and rational manner. It seemed like I wasn't the only one that was amazed by Edith's actual body because everyone was at a loss for words as a result of the phenomenon that had occurred in front of us, but Haruka was the first one among us to recover. "Uh, Edith, forgive me if I'm wrong, but did you make yourself look better than you really are?"

"Huh?! That's your reaction?!" Edith exclaimed. "You're supposed to be amazed and shocked by the fact that I'm a beautiful girl beyond your wildest imaginations!"

Edith clutched her head in her hands and leaned back since Haruka hadn't reacted the way that she wanted her to, and the mystical aura from her beauty vanished right after that. *Ugh, what a shame. I feel like I've seen the pure definition of someone that only looks beautiful when they're not talking.*

"I'm just joking. You really are a beautiful young girl," said Haruka. "I was fairly sure that you were quite beautiful since a noble fell in love with you, but I didn't expect you to be this beautiful."

"Right?! You have a good sense for beauty, Haruka!" Edith exclaimed. "Also, you have a good sense for alchemy as well. You're still far from me in terms of expertise, but your creativity and innovativeness might actually be better than a genius like me!"

"O-Oh, really? I see..."

Edith seemed quite confident and happy as she lifted a finger to her jaw as she nodded in response to Haruka, but Haruka had an awkward expression on her face and didn't seem too happy. It was possible that Edith had figured out the effects of Haruka's Craft Aptitude: Alchemy skill, but her compliments were probably hard for Haruka to swallow since Haruka's creativity and innovativeness were the result of her experiences back on Earth.

"I think you're a quick learner as well, Yuki," said Edith. "You'll probably be able to become a decent alchemist if you work hard, but neither you nor Haruka will ever be a match for a genius alchemist like me!"

Edith had a very smug look on her face as she declared that, and the impression she gave off while doing this was more of a cute one than a frail

one. She didn't seem like a genius at all with how she was acting, but she actually had been one during her lifetime.

The genius in front of us clapped her hands together all of a sudden, as if she had realized something. "Oh yeah, I left my research notebooks at the bottom of that mansion, so I'll be happy if you girls make use of them together with Riva. After all, those notebooks are kind of like the proof of my history and life." Edith emphasized to Haruka and Yuki that this was important before she turned around and looked at Touya. "I'm sorry for causing a lot of trouble for you, Touya. You had to tag along for conversations about things that weren't relevant to you at all."

"Don't worry about it. I didn't really mind," said Touya. "Are you going to disappear now...?"

Things had returned to normal for Touya after Edith had left his body, but he had the most unhappy expression on his face among us and sounded a bit lonely as he asked that question.

"Well, yeah. I don't have any lingering regrets left, after all," said Edith. "By the way, I was happy when you were angry about the dagger."

Touya averted his eyes from Edith after she thanked him while smiling, and he replied to her in a slightly cold tone. "It's because you kept talking to me about your sweetheart, so I inadvertently felt some empathy for you."

Edith had a heartwarming expression on her face as she looked at Touya for a bit, but then she turned around towards the rest of us. "Nao, Natsuki, thank you for agreeing to take on my troublesome quest. Honestly speaking, I wouldn't have blamed any of you if you decided not to. I was down for resorting to sex appeal as a last resort, however."

"With Touya's body? You made the right choice not to," I said. "We would have definitely said no to you if you went through with that last resort."

"Mm. Even if you tried doing that with your current body, Natsuki would have probably blasted you with the Purification spell," said Yuki.

"Of course. The weight of your actions doesn't change depending on how you look," said Natsuki.

“I figured as much, though I’ve never actually tried to use my sex appeal to seduce people. A beautiful young girl like me was able to get her way most of the time by simply asking, after all!” Edith had a playful tone to her voice as she replied to us, but her tone returned to normal after she looked at all of us once again, as if for one last time. “Well, I only got to know you all for a short time, but I had fun. I’m also happy about the fact that I managed to find three people who’ll carry on my research as an alchemist. Oh, I guess this also counts as something that used to be one of my lingering regrets.”

Edith paused for a moment to sigh, and her body slowly started to shine. “I wonder if I’ll be able to meet Chris once I pass on to the afterlife...”

“No idea, but it’s possible that things might actually work out for you,” said Touya. “There’s no guarantee that death is the end for everything, after all.”

“Yeah. We’ll pray to Advastlis-sama for you since we know him,” I said.

“Oh, ha ha! I appreciate the sentiment,” said Edith. “Thanks for making me laugh during my last moments! Ha ha ha!”

Both Touya and I weren’t joking at all, but it seemed like Edith didn’t think that we were serious since she laughed in response to our words, and the girls chuckled as well. Edith’s laughter eventually subsided as her body suddenly started to fade away, and a gentle breeze passed through us.

“...Chris? Oh, you were there all this time...”

Those were Edith’s last words in a faint voice before she disappeared with the wind in front of our eyes.



“I see. First off, thank you all for your hard work,” said Diola.

Diola-san lowered her head and bowed to us after we had returned to Laffan and explained to her about the sequence of events that had happened during our quest. After we had sent Edith off on her journey to the afterlife, we’d worked on destroying the huts at the bandit hideout in order to relieve our stress and anger. Edith had passed on in peace, and we had succeeded at eliminating the bandit gang. We hadn’t managed to rescue any victims of the bandit gang, but there probably wouldn’t be any more victims from bandits as a

result of our efforts. That was fine and all, but it didn't change the fact that Edith and her fiancé had met an untimely demise, and it wasn't like justice had been served in regard to the lord that had caused all of this, so we felt a bit uncomfortable and frustrated about how things had ended. In fact, Touya was the most frustrated person among us, since he had destroyed half of the huts by himself.

We gathered the materials from the destroyed huts in one place in the middle of the hideout just like we had done for the orc nest and burned them all together with the dead bodies of the bandits to provide nourishment for the forest. During the process, we had managed to obtain a total of two more adventurer cards, but the bandits didn't have much money stashed at the hideout in terms of coins. On the other hand, we had obtained some things that would fetch us a decent amount of money in the form of horses and carriages. Horses were quite expensive in this world and were equivalent to the value of an automobile back on Earth, so we were quite lucky that four horses and one carriage had been left at the bandit hideout.

We sold the horses and the carriages right after we had returned to Laffan, and they had fetched quite a large sum of money as extra income since it seemed like the horses were good ones. In addition, we weren't sure if this was thanks to Touya's marking, but we had also managed to safely bring back the horse and the carriage that we had borrowed from the Adventurers' Guild, so our total earnings from our expedition to slay bandits had added up to a lot of money.

"The guild will deal with the dead bodies that your party discovered and reported about, so you can rest at ease," said Diola.

"We're sorry for the trouble, but thank you very much," said Haruka.

We weren't sure about what to do about the dead bodies that we had discovered in the forest. Abandoning those bodies as is wasn't an option, but it wasn't a realistic idea for us to retrieve those bodies either, and it would become impossible to identify the victims if we cremated all of them. It seemed like cremation was the standard method for disposing of dead bodies in the kingdom that we were in, and the remaining ashes would be gathered all together to be buried at cemeteries that were managed by temples.

However, we weren't sure if it was okay for us to do all of this by ourselves. According to the General Knowledge skill that Haruka and Yuki had, it would be perfectly fine and more than enough if we cremated the bodies and brought the ash back with us, but our common sense that we had built up from our time back on Earth made us hesitate, so our conclusion was to leave this for the Adventurers' Guild to deal with.

"As for the reward that was promised for the quest and the ownership of Edith-san's mansion along with extra rewards for retrieving the adventurer cards, the guild will grant you all of this within the next few days," said Diola. "That's all from me, but do any of you have other questions?"

Diola-san asked us if there was anything else we wanted to confirm with her after she had finished explaining things to us. We considered her someone that was reliable and trustworthy, so none of us had any qualms or questions about our rewards, but we had discussed among ourselves beforehand to ask her one specific question. We weren't expecting to obtain an answer for this, but not asking at all wasn't an option, and I had been assigned the role of performing this duty.

"Diola-san, do you know where the graves of Edith and Christopher are located?" I asked.

"Their graves? Well, Edith should have been buried at a temple because she was a commoner when she died, but Christopher's whereabouts are unknown since it's not clear if his corpse had actually been retrieved or not," Diola replied.

According to Diola-san, Christopher would have normally been buried at the Shellington family cemetery, but his death was a result of his defiance against the lord of the viscounty at the time, so the circumstances around his death were complicated. It also seemed like Christopher's death was one of the reasons why his family and relatives had moved out of the viscounty around the time of his death, so Diola-san wasn't sure if the Shellington family cemetery still existed here or not.

"I can help investigate this for you if needed, but I wouldn't expect any positive results if I were you," said Diola. "It'll also cost some money to issue

this investigation, so..."

Diola-san seemed apologetic about the fact that we would have to pay for this if we wanted to obtain information, but it made sense that this would cost us money since this was a private matter, unlike when she had investigated the circumstances around the haunted mansion. I was willing to pay for this if we had to, but it sounded like there was no point in doing so. The girls and Touya merely shook their heads in response when I looked at them for confirmation, so that was the end of this topic.

"Oh, it's fine. Thanks for the offer, though," I said.

"I see. Very well. Once again, thank you very much for taking on the quest for dealing with the bandit gang. A lot of problems have been resolved thanks to the efforts of your party, and a lot of potential lives have been saved now that peace and safety has been restored to the highways." Diola-san paused for a moment to look around all of our faces before she continued with her words. "However, it looks like all of you are mentally exhausted from this experience. Your party has earned a decent amount of money this time for your living expenses, so I believe it would be a good idea for your party to take some time off work to rest for a while. Consider this as some heartfelt advice from me."

Diola-san raised her index finger and smiled as she brought up an idea for us, and I felt somewhat relieved when I saw her usual smile.

"Well, that might actually be a good idea," said Haruka.

"Mm. A healthy body and mind are required for good performance at work, and eating delicious food could be great for that purpose," said Diola. "If it were me, then I would recommend something like fishing. Also, I would appreciate it if your party would treat me to some of the delicacies from what you catch on a fishing trip."

"Sure, feel free to join us for a meal," said Haruka. "You've helped us a lot once again this time, after all."

Diola-san's pleading for meals cooked by the girls was quite obvious, but we all smiled in response since we could tell that she had brought this up out of concern and care for us. *Oh yeah, Edith had high praise for the food that was cooked by the girls.* I smiled as I thought back to the past, and this was how the

chain of events that had started with our efforts to search for effective ways to deal with undead monsters had ended.



We had accepted Diola-san's suggestion and taken some time off work, but we ended up making use of that free time to be productive.

"I sure didn't think we were going to clean up and take care of this yard before our own yard," I said.

We had cleaned up the yard of the mansion that Edith had handed ownership of over to us. Natsuki had a large yard at her house back on Earth, and Yuki had claimed that gardening was one of her hobbies. Their knowledge and experiences weren't exactly relevant or reliable for this, but the rest of us had no choice but to follow their lead as we trimmed through the overgrown greenery and transformed the yard to an acceptable state for viewing. This kind of yard work was probably something that we had to hire a specialist to do, but gardeners were all taken and hired by rich people or nobles, and the option of hiring someone that worked at a landscaping company was something only available back on Earth. In addition, even if we were able to find a gardener to hire, we would have to pay that gardener a constant salary for maintaining the yard, so we had dropped this idea early on.

As for the mansion itself, we had made use of brute force via the Purification spell to clean it up. It was a well-built mansion to begin with, so the Purification spell was more than enough to make it look decent and much different from the typical appearance of a haunted mansion on the outside.

"It was quite tough, but we managed to make this yard look somewhat decent," said Haruka.

"We're amateurs that lack the proper knowledge for taking care of a yard this big, so I think this is the most that we can do," said Natsuki.

As for why we had done this kind of hard work, it was because of the dagger that Edith had left behind. Touya had been holding the dagger in his hands at the time, but the dagger had crumbled to dust around the same time that Edith had disappeared in front of us. It was technically a shame that this had happened since the dagger was something that was probably high quality and

very valuable based on what Edith had told us about it, but that in itself wasn't really an issue since there was no way any of us would have been willing to use a keepsake like that dagger in battle. However, we were at a loss as to what to do with the remains of the dagger. Throwing the remains away as trash wasn't an option, and we had thought about the idea of burying the remains at Edith's or Christopher's grave, but we had no idea where either of them were located.

In the end, our final conclusion as a party was to create a small shrine in the corner of this yard that Edith had passed on to us in order to enshrine the remains of the dagger there. However, we couldn't exactly build a small shrine in the middle of a yard that was covered in overgrown greenery, so we worked hard to clean up the yard and mansion in order to make them look as close as possible to what they had looked like back when Edith was still alive and living here. The work wasn't easy at all, but it was a nice change of pace for us, since we felt better as we moved our bodies and saw how the yard had slowly become cleaner and nicer to look at thanks to our efforts.

"I wonder if Edith would have been happy to see this," said Yuki.

"No idea. Someone like her would have probably said something like, 'This looks completely different from when I lived here!' but I think she would have laughed with joy in the end," said Touya.

The small shrine was made of stone, and it was about the same size as the kind of shrines with Jizo statues that you could find along roadsides back in Japan. Yuki and I had done our best to make the shrine with our Earth Magic, so it probably wasn't something that would break or wear down easily. We enshrined the remains of the dagger inside of the shrine and covered it with a rock before we clapped our hands together to pray. I had prayed at Advastlis-sama's temple just like I had promised Edith, but the only response that I had received was the usual information about my level and experience points, so I wasn't sure if my prayers had reached her or not.



Advastlis-sama had mentioned something about the cycle of rebirth before he had transported us to this different world, so I wasn't sure if Christopher had already been reincarnated or not, but...

"I hope that Edith's next life will be a happy one," said Haruka.

Haruka's quiet words reached my ears, and the trees around us were swayed by some wind that blew past us. The rustling sound of the leaves on those trees felt like they overlapped with the sound of Edith's cheerful laughter in my head, and it was probably due to what Touya had brought up earlier.

Side Story—My Adventures Have Just Begun! (Part Two)

Journeys in this different world were much harsher and more unpleasant than I had imagined they would be. *Actually, maybe that's not the right way to describe it.* Most journeys were definitely exhausting since I had to walk on foot, but they were carefully planned out by Adonix-san who was very experienced with this and helped me out quite a lot, so I only had to do what I could do by providing a source of water for our party. I had participated in combat as well, but Adonix-san and the others were much stronger and better at it because they were veterans. It wouldn't have made a difference even if I hadn't been able to contribute to combat, so it was basically as if they had used battles as training sessions for me. Due to all of this, there was no need for me to force myself to use up all of my stamina, and my mental state was stable as well. It was all thanks to the fact that I had been lucky enough to find and join their party, and my journeys in this world would have definitely been harsh and unpleasant if I'd had to do everything by myself.

However, my party's policy was to take things slow and steady while prioritizing safety, so the speed at which we traveled was much slower than I had expected. Highways weren't that dangerous, but we were slowed down by the fact that we had to be on guard at all times on small roads or inside of forests, since there was the danger of being attacked by monsters at any time. In addition, we had to stay in villages or towns if it rained to wait for it to end before heading out again, and we also had to delay departure if it seemed like the weather would change in the near future. As for when we needed to camp outside, we had to choose a relatively safe spot to camp while the sun was still up and prepare meals, so we weren't able to travel very far each day. I was aware of the fact that we had no choice in regard to this, but I was still unhappy about the fact that we were going so slow.

I had asked Adonix-san if it was normal to be this slow, but according to him, we were actually better off than most people that traveled to other places in

this world. He told me about how they would have had to carry a lot of water on them or factor in the location of water sources when choosing a spot to camp if I couldn't use Water Magic, and all of that would have consumed even more time. It seemed like most adventurers wouldn't move away from the town that they mainly worked at, and I understood why that was the case after I had experienced the difficulty of journeys in this different world. After all, most of the time, adventurers wouldn't earn any income during a journey itself. It would be a different story if adventurers were lucky enough to find an escort quest that would lead them to the destination that they wanted to travel to themselves, but those were rare cases. With all of that in mind, I was fairly sure that adventurers who didn't save money and planned things out ahead of time would go broke in the middle of traveling to different places, and this was the reason why Adonix-san's party had saved up a lot of money before they had started their journey to a dungeon city.

Money happened to be another reason why travel was slow for us. The Super Wealth skill had provided me enough starting money for weapons and armor that made me look like a proper adventurer, but I didn't have enough money left for things like lodging fees. As a result, we had to take on quests as a party from time to time to earn money for me at the towns that we passed through and stayed at during our journey. However, it was thanks to those quests that I had forged a bond with my other party members, and I had also obtained some essential knowledge and techniques for an adventurer as a result, so it wasn't a complete waste of time. About half a year had passed since I had first joined the Dungeon Seekers party and started this journey. Winter had already passed as spring rolled over, and the weather had started to become hot when we had finally arrived at our destination.

"We've finally arrived at a dungeon city!" I exclaimed. "I've been looking forward to exploring a dungeon!"

I raised my voice out of excitement as soon as I had passed through the gates of the dungeon city, and my other party members were shrugging their shoulders as they looked at me with smiles on their faces, but I was way too excited to be bothered by their reactions.

Adonix-san chuckled when he saw how excited I was. "You sure seem happy

about this, Sai."

"It's because our journey to get here was a very long one!" I exclaimed. "I didn't expect it to take so long when we departed from Kelg. Well, I slowed us down quite a lot, but still."

I sighed out of disappointment at myself after I had finished my words. Tezas-san patted me on my shoulder as if to tell me not to worry about it, and I appreciated his silent thoughtfulness.

Hmm, I guess this is a good opportunity to go over the profiles of my party members. Adonix-san was the leader of my party, and everyone would sometimes refer to him by the nickname of Ado. His age was around twenty-six, and he was about two meters tall with a crew cut for his hair. He was a muscular guy that had the most physical strength among the members of my party, and the fact that he was capable of easily swinging around a huge two-handed sword was proof of his immense strength. He was also the calmest and most rational member compared to the others since he was the leader of my party, and he was also a very caring person that I could trust and rely on.

Marcos-san was a tall and muscular person who was also bald, although Adonix-san was taller and more muscular than him. Despite his huge muscular appearance, Marcos-san's combat style was one of a warrior that prioritized speed, since he would move around swiftly in battle with a one-handed sword and a shield. If I had to describe him in a positive way, then he was a cheerful and easygoing person who was the life and soul of our party. On a side note, according to him, he had shaved off all of his hair in order to improve the speed of his movements. I wasn't sure if this was actually true or if it had actually helped him become faster, however.

Lucas-san was a muscular person with long hair tied behind his head, and he had a slightly lean body compared to the others. As for his height, he was about 185 centimeters tall. A muscular wrestler would probably be the best way to describe the type of person that he was the most similar to instead of a muscular bodybuilder. As for his combat style, it was much different from the other three guys, since his position in the party was similar to one of a scout that would fight from long range. He was somewhat of a frivolous person, but he was decently handsome as well. With that in mind, Lucas-san seemed like

the kind of person that wouldn't struggle to get married, but the fact that he had joined this party probably meant that marriage really was something difficult for adventurers to achieve.

Tezas-san was a bit shorter than Marcos-san, but the thickness of his muscles looked even greater than Adonix-san's muscles. His main equipment was a one-handed sword and shield, and he was a very reliable person due to being composed at all times. He would probably get angry at me if I ever brought this up, but he was actually someone who liked kids despite his muscular appearance. Unfortunately for him, his intimidating physique and the fact that he was a quiet person were reasons why kids were scared of him. However, Tezas-san was probably the kindest and most caring person among the four people that I've described so far. He had protected me during combat multiple times throughout our journey here to this dungeon city, and he had looked out for me the entire time. I wasn't used to traveling in this world, so he had provided me with all sorts of help and advice.

As for me, I was the last member of this party, and I was a short and skinny guy who wielded a spear and could use Water Magic. *Yikes, there are way too many muscular guys in this party! I don't want to call myself a short and skinny guy, but there's no way to avoid it if I compare myself to the other dudes! I actually look like a kid while we're all lined up and walking together! In fact, Adonix-san is over forty centimeters taller than me!*

Height was something that I'd had a complex about for a long time back on Earth, but the difference in muscle thickness was huge as well. In fact, the only way I could describe myself was flat compared to how thick the other four guys were. *Man, I never thought that I'd ever use the word "flat" to describe something that wasn't a girl's chest, and I especially didn't think I'd ever use it to describe myself!* The other four guys would often treat me as a kid due to my appearance, but I had more or less accepted this kind of treatment by now due to the fact that they were all much taller and more muscular than me. On top of that, all four of them were around twenty-five years old and much more experienced than me as adventurers too. In fact, the kid treatment was actually kind of convenient for the purpose of asking questions because I was lacking in experience and knowledge. To sum things up, I was treated like the youngest

brother in this party, and this kind of position was a bit comfortable since it wouldn't be out of character for me to say or ask slightly weird things. I had no idea what was common sense or knowledge in this different world, so this was probably the best position for me to be in.

"Well, we're all looking forward to the dungeon as well," said Adonix. "With that in mind, let's start off with—"

"The dungeon?" I asked.

"No, dummy! We need to head to the Adventurers' Guild first to gather information," Adonix replied. "We've gathered some information beforehand, but it's also our first time entering a dungeon, so we need to find out what the rules are."

"Oh, right, we can't just enter a dungeon without permission," I said.

"Yep, exactly," said Adonix. "All right, let's ask around for directions to the guild!"

I wasn't sure if it was because we were in a dungeon city, but Lucas-san made use of his excellent communication skills to ask someone nearby and managed to obtain information about the location of the Adventurers' Guild in this city right away. It seemed like the guild building was located in one of the best areas of the city, and we followed Lucas-san's lead as we walked through the main street of the city, since he had understood how to get there from brief instructions.

The dungeon city was much larger than any of the towns that I had visited up until now, and there were a lot of things I hadn't seen before in the surroundings that caught my attention, but the first thing I noticed was the fact that there were a lot of other adventurers here. It was probably because we were walking in the direction of the Adventurers' Guild, but there were still many more here compared to the number of adventurers that I had seen back at towns like Kelg. I also noticed that there were a lot of buildings that catered to adventurers, such as dining establishments, inns, and weapons shops, so it seemed obvious that the dungeon had served as the catalyst for the development of this city. This was something that I had expected ahead of time, but there was also something that was different from my expectations.

“Hmm. This dungeon city seems much safer and more peaceful than I expected it to be,” I said.

“Huh? What did you expect, Sai?” Marcos asked.

Marcos-san sounded a bit confused, and I paused to think for a bit before I replied to his question. “Well, I expected to hear the sounds of brawling everywhere in this city, drunk people occupying alleys, and rough adventurers swaggering around, so...”

It was true that there were a lot of adventurers in this city, but they all looked cleaner than the ones back at Kelg, and most of them didn’t give off the impression of being rough people. There were some adventurers that looked a bit dirty, as if they were returning from work, but there weren’t that many of them. In fact, my party seemed rougher and more dangerous compared to most of the other adventurers, since four of our members were huge and muscular. I’d learned that they weren’t bad people after I had gotten to know them, but it was a fact that Adonix-san and the other three guys were quite intimidating at first glance. With all of that in mind, the atmosphere of this dungeon city seemed to be much more relaxing and peaceful than I had expected it to be.

“I was a bit wary at first based on what you guys had told me, so was the information wrong?” I asked.

“Well, not exactly. This dungeon is one that’s under the control and management of the Adventurers’ Guild,” said Adonix. “You remember the conditions that need to be met for adventurers that want to enter a dungeon, right?”

“Yeah. Only Rank 4 or higher adventurers are allowed to enter a dungeon, right?” I asked.

“Yep. On the other hand, if you drop below Rank 4, then you can’t enter a dungeon anymore,” said Adonix. “On top of that, it’s hard to climb ranks again if you’ve dropped ranks before. With that in mind, do you think there are adventurers who would go out of their way to cause trouble?”

Nah, no way. There would be no point for adventurers to stay at this dungeon city if they couldn’t enter the dungeon here. The journey to get here in the first place was very costly as well, so adventurers were probably careful with how

they acted here as long as they weren't crazy ones.

"Personal conflicts between adventurers inside of a dungeon are absolutely forbidden by the guild. The guild's goal is to retrieve as many materials and resources as possible from a dungeon, but not at the expense of adventurers dying as a result," said Tezas. "It's also because the guild thinks that it's more profitable to raise as many competent adventurers as possible."

"On the other hand, it seems like most dungeon cities that are under the control and management of people like lords are dangerous places," said Marcos. "There are no restrictions on who can enter the dungeon in those cities, and the lords don't care about what happens to adventurers inside of the dungeon. All that matters at these kinds of dungeon cities is if you can bring back results, apparently."

According to Marcos-san, those conditions meant that only adventurers that were close to becoming criminals and outright criminals would gather at most dungeon cities that were managed by people like lords, so those cities were quite violent and dangerous.

"Yikes, I don't want to go anywhere near places like that," I said.

"Right? That's why we purposely chose this dungeon city after much careful thought and research!" Marcos exclaimed.

Marcos-san smiled in a smug way, as if he were asking for praise, but Lucas-san ignored it and chuckled as he shrugged his shoulders in response. "Well, there are some loopholes that adventurers here can exploit to enter the dungeon even if they aren't Rank 4 or higher, so it's not a flawless restriction."

"Really?" I asked.

"Yeah. One such loophole is you, Sai," said Lucas.

"Me? Oh, right, lower-rank adventurers can just party up with people that are Rank 4 or higher." I'd been confused at first when Lucas-san pointed at me, but I had realized what he was implying right away.

"Yeah, that's one way to bypass the restriction. However, the guild staff will check for this when adventurers register members for a party, so those on a blacklist will get filtered out," said Lucas. "Due to this, the main method for

lower-rank adventures to enter dungeons is by joining a party as someone who carries the party's luggage and loot."

According to Lucas-san, there was a limit to the amount of stuff that adventurers could carry with them even if they managed to obtain a lot of materials inside of a dungeon, and carrying around a lot of luggage could hamper their combat abilities and potentially lead to death. Due to this, one member of a party would be assigned the role of carrying the party's luggage and loot. Not all parties would have a specialized member for this, but it seemed like most parties would hire someone for this task, and registering these members wasn't a requirement.

"In fact, luggage carriers might actually be the people that you need to be the most wary of," said Lucas. "This goes for when hiring one as well, but don't let your guard down if you encounter one inside of a dungeon."

"O-Okay, I'll keep that in mind," I replied.

I wasn't actually too worried about this since I had Adonix-san and the others with me, but Marcos-san suddenly rejoined the conversation. "However, Sai, it might be a good idea for you to consider working on climbing up adventurer ranks."

"Huh? Really? Isn't it not a problem since we're in the same party?" I asked.

My adventurer rank was currently Rank 2, and I had achieved this rank within six months due to the number of quests that we had been forced to take on due to financial reasons on our way here to the dungeon city. However, it seemed like it wouldn't be easy for me to climb up past Rank 2. A level of trust from the Adventurers' Guild was needed in order to rank up, and this was more or less decided by if you were on good terms with guild staff. A mere friendly relationship wasn't enough for the purpose of ranking up, but there was no way for any guild staff to be capable of deciding whether an adventurer was trustworthy or not regardless of their performance if that adventurer was someone that had recently dropped by the town they were in.

If you really wanted to climb up adventurer ranks, then you essentially had to stay at one town for a certain period of time and complete a bunch of different quests until the guild staff remembered your face and considered you as a

trustworthy adventurer. In fact, Rank 3 and above wasn't something possible for me, since I had spent the last half-year taking on quests while traveling from town to town. Also, it wasn't any easier for me to rank up in this dungeon city. It seemed like the retrieval of resources and materials from a dungeon was essentially the same thing over and over and somewhat similar to routine work, and there weren't many opportunities to build up trust from guild staff, so it wasn't a type of work that could help me with climbing up adventurer ranks. With all of that in mind, I had more or less given up on the possibility of ranking up while I was staying at this dungeon city, but...

"I mean, yeah, it's not an issue while we're in a party together," said Marcos. "However, there's no guarantee that this will last forever, right? I can't exactly say no to my wife in the future if she tells me to quit being an adventurer, after all."

"Huh?! Is that your plan for the near future?!" I asked.

"Did you betray us, Marcos?!" Adonix asked.

I was extremely surprised by what I had heard from Marcos-san, and Adonix-san sounded quite angry as he asked him for confirmation, but Marcos-san shook his head in response and grinned as he gave us a thumbs up. "Nah, I don't have any plans yet, but you never know what might happen in life!"

"Oh, is that it? I guess we don't have to worry about this for quite a while, then," I said.

"Huh? What do you mean by that, Sai?" Marcos asked.

I breathed a sigh of relief after I had heard Marcos-san's response, and then he grabbed my head with one of his giant hands as he applied some physical pressure on me. It was actually kind of painful, but I looked at him with a kind smile on my face.

"Marcos-san, it's time to face reality. There's also no guarantee that you'll be able to meet new girls just because you've arrived in a new city," I said.

I wasn't able to meet anyone even after being transported to a different world, after all! The person you're destined to be with isn't someone that you'll meet eventually, but someone that you have to find yourself! This kind of

mentality is what matters! Life isn't easy enough that you can just wait for your destined partner to fall into your lap! Well, I'm fine with any cute girl even if she isn't my destined partner, but yeah.

"Besides, haven't you been deceived by women multiple times in the past, Marcos-san?" I asked.

"Huh?! Which one of you guys snitched me out to Sai?!"

"It's the truth, isn't it? Don't tell me that you can't remember how many times you've spent money on women and got ditched after they were done using you," said Adonix.

"We've lent you a lot of money up until now because of this," said Lucas. "Don't you think it's about time to become more realistic about your prospects?"

"You can be a bad example for Sai to learn from, but being too bad isn't ideal either," said Tezas.

Everyone else had told me about Marcos-san's failures with women in the past, and Marcos-san was at a loss for words after they had all glanced at him with exasperated looks in their eyes. "Ugh! I'm perfectly aware! That's why I shifted to saving money instead nowadays! I'm pretty sure marriage is probably within reach if I work hard to save up more money here in this dungeon city!"

"Well, it's true that you need money in order to get married, but it's not like you can definitely get married if you have money, right?" I asked. "After all, you have to find someone who's willing to get married to you first."

Saving up money for marriage was merely a necessary requirement, so there were also other things that a guy had to work on. However, everyone had a troubled look on their faces after they heard my words before they looked at each other. They fell silent for a bit, as if they were juggling around the duty of who was going to tell me something that was hard to say. In the end, Lucas-san was the one who slowly started things off. "Well, not exactly, Sai. It's possible to find someone to get married to as long as you have enough money. After all, there are a lot of people out there that desperately need money."

"...Do you mean by purchasing slaves or someth—"

"Shh, don't say things like that! Slavery is outlawed in this kingdom, you know? Guys that provide monetary compensation to girls that need money happen to fall in love with each other and get married, that's all."

"Huh? That just sounds like you're trying to sugarcoat it. I don't really approve of such things..."

Lucas-san had tried to word it nicely, but it didn't change the fact that what he had described was basically making use of other people's debts to get married to them, and I felt like it was more or less the same as purchasing a slave.

I had a judgmental look in my eyes as I glanced at the other guys, but Marcos-san held up one of his hands as he told me to reconsider. "Think about it this way, Sai. If you gallantly appear in front of someone who needs help and rescue them, then that's more than enough for them to develop positive feelings, right? Any girl would fall for their savior and want to get married to them, right?"

"I'm pretty sure that only applies to handsome guys," I replied. "I can see it happening for Lucas-san, but not for you, Marcos-san. If you try it, you'll just seem like you're using money to force someone to get married to you."

It was true that people would feel positive feelings for a person that helped them out, but the ulterior motives felt a bit off to me. If someone were that desperate, then I felt like it would be better to just purchase a slave to get married to. It seemed like slavery was outlawed within this kingdom, but this implied that it wasn't outlawed in other countries.

"Ugh! I feel like you're really harsh towards me for some reason, Sai," said Marcos.

"Accept it, Marcos. It's a fair and normal attitude for him to have," said Adonix.

Adonix-san was grinning as he patted Marcos-san on his shoulder, but Marcos-san brushed away Adonix-san's hands before he pointed at his face. "You're no different from me, Ado! I dare you to go ask a girl to compare our faces to judge who looks more intimidating between us!"

I had expected Adonix-san to clap back, but Tezas-san was actually the one who muttered a rebuttal to Marcos-san's words. "Ado is actually surprisingly popular."

"Wait, really? I haven't heard about this at all," said Marcos.

"Yeah. It's because he's actually polite despite having an intimidating face, unlike you, Marcos," said Tezas.

Oh, I guess some people find the difference between his face and personality attractive for Adonix-san. Adonix-san was relatively polite and courteous compared to the other three guys for an adventurer, but that in itself was a much different impression. It made sense to me that someone like Adonix who seemed intimidating at first would leave a positive impression if he talked politely to others.

"Seriously? Ugh!" Marcos exclaimed. "I guess I have no choice but to win someone over with the use of money..."

"Honestly speaking, the fact that you're relying on money for it makes me feel like there's nothing romantic about this," I said. "Besides, I don't think it's that easy to find a household in debt that happens to have a young daughter at a ripe age for marriage, right? Oh, or do you mean something similar to buying the freedom of a prostitute to make one your wife?"

The last example I had brought up was somewhat understandable to me, but Marcos-san's reaction to my words was much fiercer than I had expected it to be. "You idiot! Amateurs shouldn't even think of trying to dabble with things like that! Just so you know, Sai, you should never believe any sweet words that prostitutes whisper to you. They're professionals at their work, so you'll merely get deceived if you believe them."

Marcos-san had a serious look on his face as he warned me about prostitutes, but I looked away from him to turn towards Adonix-san, and he shrugged his shoulders as he chuckled in response. "That's not always the case, and there are plenty of cases of adventurers who had saved up a decent amount of money purchasing prostitutes that they really liked and getting married to them. It's just that Marcos has been deceived by prostitutes multiple times in the past, so yeah."

“Oh, so the women that he got deceived by were prostitutes?” I asked.

“Mm. There are very few people that he can become ‘intimate’ enough with in the first place, after all,” Adonix replied.

“Yeah, yeah, you’re right, I’m a guy that’ll never get an opportunity to meet girls otherwise!” Marcos exclaimed.

“Doesn’t that mean there’s no hope for him?” I asked.

“Not exactly. As the saying goes, it takes one to know one,” Adonix replied. “This is a little bit different, but one of the services that the Adventurers’ Guild offers includes the option of setting you up with a girl if you ask them.”

“Huh? Are those pimp ser—”

“Like I just said, it’s a bit different. They offer marriage brokerage services, and it’s important that you don’t confuse it with something else.”

Seriously? I feel like the Adventurers’ Guild offers way too many services. They perform all sorts of things like staffing agency work for day laborers, real estate brokerage, and marriage brokerage, right? This sounds quite different from what I initially had in mind about an Adventurers’ Guild. Is all of this actually legal?

“Just to be clear, the marriage brokerage services that the Adventurers’ Guild offers have a good reputation among all sorts of people, including the women that sign up for this,” said Adonix.

“Really?” I asked. “Even though it’s a relationship fostered by money?”

It had sounded like households would sell their daughters for money, but it was a bit different from what I had initially expected after I heard Adonix-san’s explanation. According to him, the guild wouldn’t just introduce any kind of adventurer to girls via their marriage brokerage services. The possession of a decent amount of savings was a minimum requirement, and the adventurer would also need to have a lot of trust from the guild. Basically, what that meant was that the guild would only introduce adventurers that had good earnings and conduct. Such people weren’t bad choices as partners for marriage, and a household in need of financial help would be saved if a match were finalized.

In addition, there were benefits for the guild as well to arranging marriages for good adventurers. Some adventurers would quit the profession after marriage, like the person that Adonix-san and the other guys had called a traitor, but most of those people had only known how to earn money via adventurer work. Even the high-rank adventurers would have to find a job again if they used up their savings, and married adventurers would often perform a good job for their work. On top of that, the adventurers themselves would become happy as a result of marriage, so nobody would lose out from this most of the time. With all of that in mind, it actually didn't sound like that bad of a system to me anymore. It was normal for arranged marriages to be set up by the head of a household in this different world, after all.

"Well, the ideal is to find a marriage partner by yourself, but being an adventurer makes it really hard to find someone," said Lucas.

"Is it that hard?" I asked.

"Yeah. If you don't count female adventurers, then the only other girls that you'll meet are guild receptionists and waitresses at taverns," said Tezas.

I had seen a few female adventurers during our journey to the dungeon city, but Marcos-san was right about the fact that none of them had looked like "girls" to me. Unfortunately for me, the female adventurers that I had seen were all taller and more muscular than me. The girls that had seemed attractive to me were guild receptionists and waitresses at taverns, just like Tezas had mentioned, but I had no idea how to approach those girls. It wasn't like I had actually tried to do so, but there was probably a lot of competition, and I was scared of what other adventurers would do to me if I had tried to participate. I was an amateur adventurer and an amateur at romance as well, so it was too much for me.

"By the way, do any of you guys have any tips for how to hook up with girls?" I asked.

I hadn't expected a positive answer at all for my question, and I was greeted with exasperated looks from three of the other guys. *Hm? Wait, three?*

"If I knew how to hook up with girls, then I wouldn't be in this party," said Marcos.

"I have no idea. I'm not good at talking with people, after all," said Tezas.

"You should ask Lucas about this," said Adonix. "I'm not sure why, but he happens to get acquainted with girls from time to time."

"Oh, Lucas-san, please impart your knowledge upon me!" I exclaimed.

I looked at Lucas-san as if I had found my savior, but he shrugged and chuckled in response. "I don't really have any specific tips. It's just that the other three guys come off as way too intimidating from their appearance. It's important to come off as a reliable guy, but scaring off girls upon first contact makes it hard to start anything. It's a different story if you slowly get on good terms with a girl over time, but..."

Lucas-san walked over and secretly whispered to me about the faults of the other guys in detail. According to him, Tezas-san had a hard time getting along with girls because he wasn't good at talking, and Marcos would often fail due to being too impatient. On the other hand, Adonix-san was decently popular with girls, as Tezas-san had mentioned earlier, but it had never gone past being merely friends since Adonix-san was too muscular. It seemed like all of these problems could potentially be resolved if they settled down in one place for a long time and slowly deepened a relationship, but that wasn't exactly a realistic choice, since adventurers like us often had to leave a town for a long period of time.

"You don't exactly seem very strong and reliable, Sai, but I think you'll be able to become popular with girls," said Lucas. "You're a rare type of guy, after all."

"Huh? Oh, am I a cool and handsome guy?" I asked.

"No. I'm talking about your ability to use magic," Lucas replied.

"Ugh. I don't know if I'm supposed to be happy about that," I said.

It was better than being told that girls wouldn't consider me as a potential love interest at all, but the way that Lucas-san had phrased things made it sound like my magic was my only value. *Actually, if my magic can help me hook up with girls, then maybe that means I made the right choice to get magic-related skills in the beginning.*

"Well, I think your looks are decent, but you probably shouldn't aim for

female adventurers,” said Lucas. “Instead, I think you should aim for—actually, never mind.”

“Huh?! Don’t just leave me hanging like that, please!”

“Oh, well, hmm, how do I put it...?”

I took a deep breath and was about to try and urge Lucas-san again to spill out what he was thinking when Adonix-san tapped my shoulders to interrupt me. “You guys can talk about this later. We’re arrived at the guild.”

“Huh? Whoa, this building is huge...”

I looked up and saw a building that was much larger than the one that I had seen back at Kelg. That one happened to be one of the largest Adventurers’ Guild buildings among the towns that we had passed by on our way to the dungeon city, but it was no match for the size of the one here. The width of the guild building in front of me looked like it was three times that of the other nearby buildings, and it was also a five-story building that had one entrance on the left and one on the right. I entered the building along with my other party members from the right entrance, and the first thing I saw was a receptionist counter. It seemed like the first floor of the guild building was a large hall that could fit four special-purpose classrooms, and about a third of the hall’s right side was occupied by receptionist counters, and the other two thirds were occupied by a dining hall.

There were a couple of tables in the dining hall that were filled with a decent number of adventurers who were eating and drinking even though it was only noon, and they also sounded quite cheerful as they were laughing together. At the back in the middle of the hall were some stairs that led to the second floor, and there was a bulletin board next to those stairs that had posters for quests on it, but the size of the bulletin board itself seemed rather small compared to the large size of the guild building.

“Hey, let’s get going,” said Adonix.

“Oh, okay,” I replied.

I had accidentally become absorbed with observing my surroundings for a bit, but we had to head over to one of the receptionist counters first. I followed

Adonix-san after he had reminded me about this to one of the counters, and the guild receptionist there was someone who spoke in a drawling manner.

“Welcome~ Is this your first time here?”

“Yeah,” Adonix replied. “We’ve arrived here because we want to enter the dungeon in this city, so...”

“In that case, you need to register your party~ Please write your names and adventurer ranks here in this form and hand in your adventurer cards as well~”

Adonix-san wrote all of our names and adventurer ranks on the form since he was our party leader and handed the form over to the guild receptionist along with our adventurer cards. The guild receptionist seemed like she was quite familiar with this work, as she swiftly checked our cards and applied stamps onto the form. Adonix and the other three guys received a stamp of approval right away, since they were all Rank 4 adventurers, but the guild receptionist paused for a second when she reached my name, since I was a Rank 2 Adventurer. However, she muttered to herself that I had no previous record of rank demotion before she applied a stamp next to my name as well right after that.

“Okay, I’ve finished checking~ Please show this tag to the people at the entrance of the dungeon before entering~ In addition, you cannot enter the dungeon without both the tags and your adventurer cards, so please keep this in mind~”

The guild receptionist had handed five wooden tags over to us while she was explaining things. The tags were about the same size as our adventurer cards and had our names on them, and they also had what seemed like an anti-counterfeit measure in the form of large stamps imprinted on the back of our tags.

“All right, let me go over the rules that you have to obey for the dungeon in this city~ If you break any of these rules, then you will lose your right to enter the dungeon and will also receive an adventurer rank demotion, so please listen carefully~ There are only two main rules you need to obey, however~”

According to the guild receptionist, the first main rule was that conflicts between fellow adventures were forbidden. Adonix-san and the others had told

me about this beforehand as well, but we were strictly told to avoid trying to resolve conflicts via force and to report to the guild if problems occurred. The second main rule was about the fee that we had to pay for making use of the dungeon in the city. Twenty percent of the price for the resources and materials that were obtained from the dungeon would be taxed from us by the guild for this purpose, and adventurers who tried to smuggle out those resources and materials would lose their right to enter the dungeon and also receive an adventurer rank demotion, so the guild receptionist emphasized this as something to avoid doing.

“What about high-rank adventurers who have magic bags, though?” Adonix asked. “Can’t they smuggle out resources and materials if they want to? Or does the guild check every time upon entry and exit of the dungeon?”

“The guild usually doesn’t check since high-rank adventurers are people that the guild trusts~ The guild does carry out unannounced inspections from time to time, but people that try to cheat the guild are quite rare because the risks outweigh the benefits~”

According to the guild receptionist, there was no point in trying to smuggle out things that weren’t worth much, and adventurers would struggle to find a way to dispose of valuable things even if they were able to smuggle them out. They obviously couldn’t sell smuggled goods to the guild, and word would easily spread even if they managed to sell those valuable goods at a different place, so the smugglers would become marked by the guild as a result.

If the adventurers had contacts they could hit up for places like the black market, then they could secretly dispose of valuable smuggled goods. However, it was possible that the adventurers would only receive a fraction of their actual value, get charged a huge handling fee, or even get dragged into criminal activity depending on the circumstances. With all of those risks in mind, it was a better idea to simply pay the dungeon usage fee to the guild, since you could earn much more profit through methods such as offering valuable goods for bid at auctions, and the twenty percent fee had been set with all of that taken into consideration.

“In addition, the guild also offers cash deposit services here, so feel free to make use of this to keep your money safe~”

It seemed like the guild would only store money for adventurers here in this dungeon city, so adventurers couldn't withdraw money from their deposit at a different town or city, but according to the guild receptionist, this service was actually a factor that contributed to the safety and peace of this city since most adventurers would carry all of their assets on them. Our party didn't have much money on us since we had just arrived at the dungeon city, but we would eventually save up a decent amount after we had explored the dungeon a couple of times to earn money since that was our goal.

However, it would eventually become an issue if we had to carry all of our savings on us the entire time. There weren't any watchful eyes inside of the dungeon, and there was a good chance of encountering fellow adventurers that had a lot of money or valuables on them. In fact, it was also possible to encounter fellow adventurers that had been weakened by injuries from battle. Only adventurers that the guild considered to be decently trustworthy would be allowed to enter the guild, but there was no guarantee that someone wouldn't be tempted to break the rules. According to the guild receptionist, the cash deposit services existed for the purpose of eliminating such risks beforehand. If everyone in the dungeon was aware of the fact that they probably wouldn't be able to obtain much from attacking other adventurers, then doing so would become a high-risk and low-return act that no adventurer would be foolish enough to commit.

"Hmm. This sounds like a well-thought-out system," said Adonix.

"Preventing weird issues and problems from happening in the first place is beneficial for the guild, after all~"

It sounded like there was no reason for us to ever head to a dungeon city that wasn't managed by the Adventurers' Guild as long as we were proper law-abiding citizens. Living an honest life in this world definitely seemed like the best choice for me.

"An appraisal area and a reference room are located on the second floor, while a clinic and temporary lodging are located on the third floor of the guild building~ Feel free to make use of these facilities if needed~ Are there any other questions you would like to ask?"

“Can you recommend an inn for us?” Adonix asked. “A very expensive place is out of reach for us, but we’re not that starved for money.”

“There are a lot of inns available since this is a dungeon city~ Do you have any preferences?”

“We’d like an inn that’s suited for long-term stay, and it’d be ideal if there are individual rooms available as well,” Adonix replied. “It’d be too musky and stuffy if our entire party stayed in the same room, after all.”

“That makes sense~ In that case, I would recommend an inn called The Independence~”

The guild receptionist had nonchalantly agreed to Adonix’s words as she recommended an inn to us that had a slightly weird name. It seemed like it was an inn popular among solo adventurers and adventurers that preferred single rooms, since every room that the inn had was a single room, so it was a perfect match for what Adonix-san had requested. Discounts for long-term stay would apparently depend on the number of days that we stayed at the inn, but the base fee without a discount was eight large silver coins per night without meals included. That fee sounded a bit expensive, but it was probably a fair price considering the ranks of adventurers that earned money from exploring the dungeon. We all thanked the guild receptionist for her help and exited the guild to head in the direction of the inn that had been recommended to us, and we started to see more inns and adventurers walking around nearby as we got closer to our destination.

“It looks like there are a lot of inns here,” I said.

“Yeah, this is probably an area of the city that caters to adventurers since this city was originally built to attract adventures to the dungeon here,” said Adonix. “There’s probably a red-light district nearby as well, but you should be careful, Sai.”

“Mm. You definitely need to be careful, Sai,” said Lucas.

“Huh? What do you guys mean?” I asked. “Are you telling me that I can’t go to a red-light district?”

I had no opportunities and no money up until now for brothels, but I would

probably be able to afford a visit after I had earned some money from the dungeon. With that in mind, I was actually sort of looking forward to this in the future, so I was confused as to why I was being warned.

“Nah, we’re not saying that you can’t go,” said Marcos. “It’s bad if you get serious for prostitutes, but feel free to do what you want if you’re just playing around. However...”

“Yeah, it’s actually dangerous for you, Sai,” said Tezas. “In your case, I wouldn’t recommend going near a brothel.”

I felt a bit uneasy after everyone had warned me to avoid brothels. *Will something bad happen if I go to a brothel?* I had thought that it was normal for adventurers to visit brothels regardless of their gender, though there were probably more guys than girls that made use of brothels, so it felt a bit unfair to me if I couldn’t do the same.

It seemed like the other guys had noticed my discontent, and Lucas-san was the one that continued the conversation on behalf of everyone else. “Uh, well, let’s confirm something first. Are you sexually attracted to other guys, Sai?”

“Huh?! O-Of course not!” I exclaimed.

I hastily shook my head in response when Lucas-san had said something scary out of nowhere, and everyone nodded when they saw my reaction.

“Mm, we figured as much,” said Adonix. “But, well, you kind of look like an easy target, Sai.”

“Huh? Seriously?” *Is this really not some kind of joke or prank on me because I’m a virgin?*

“Yeah, for real. You told us that you’re an adult, but you don’t look like one,” said Marcos. “I’m pretty sure you might get in trouble if you don’t tighten your ass, ha ha!”

“On top of that, you’re an adventurer as well, so it’s easy for someone to drag you into a brothel with them,” said Tezas. “It’s definitely dangerous for you to go near brothels alone, Sai.”

Marcos-san smirked as he made an ass-fondling gesture with his hands, while

Tezas had a look of pity in his eyes as he glanced at me and sighed. According to the other guys, it wasn't legal for people to forcefully drag kids into a brothel, but if an adult male adventurer was forcefully dragged into one and got raped, then people would merely laugh and look down on the victim. Gender equality for such things didn't exist here, so this was something inconvenient for guys in this different world.

"It's possible that you might get raped by a female adventurer instead, but is that something you'd be okay with?" Lucas asked.

"U-Uh, no, I don't want to lose my virginity to some random person," I replied.

The idea itself felt a little bit attractive to me at first since I was a virgin, but I was fairly sure that I wouldn't be able to get hard after I had recalled the average looks of the female adventurers that I had seen up until now.

"In that case, stay away from the red-light district when you're alone," said Lucas. "We'll invite you to come with us instead when we're going there."

"Okay, thanks a lot," I said.

I was a guy that was just as horny as any typical young dude, but I wanted my first time to be a fond experience that I could think back to in the future. *I definitely don't want to lose my virginity via getting raped by another guy!* It seemed like there was no need for me to worry about being kidnapped on the main street of the city or normal areas, but it was probably a good idea for me to tag along with the other guys in my party at all times if possible.

"By the way, just to be sure, I can trust all of you guys in regard to this, right?" I asked.

"The fact that your ass has been safe up until now is your answer," Adonix replied. "Oh, it looks like we've arrived at The Independence. This inn is actually quite large, huh?"

Adonix-san chuckled in response after I had asked him to make sure that none of the other guys were aiming for my ass, and he stopped in his tracks when we arrived in front of our destination. I wasn't sure if it was because this inn only had single rooms, but The Independence looked much larger than the other

nearby inns. It seemed like the inn was a three-story building, and there was probably a dining hall on the first floor, since I could hear the loud sounds of chatter even though it was still early in the day. The building itself didn't look too old either, so it seemed like a decent inn to stay at.

"Sai, how long are you going to be standing there for?" Tezas asked. "Get over here."

"Oh, okay!" I replied.

The other three guys had already entered the inn, and I hastily followed them after Tezas had urged me to get going.



"Bleeeeh, I sure slept well," I said. "I still feel kind of sleepy, however..."

I had enjoyed a good night's sleep at the inn, and I yawned on my bed inside of the inn as soon as I woke up the next morning. One reason for why I had been able to sleep well was because it had been a while since I had last stayed at an inn, and another reason was because I had been able to sleep in a single room. It wasn't that I didn't feel at ease around other guys, but there were some things that would bother me if we all stayed in the same room, and one example was snoring sounds. One of them would snore quite loudly, and the beds that we had slept in up until now weren't very comfortable either, so it had been very painful whenever I woke up in the middle of the night. I wasn't able to complain about this because I had no idea if I snored or not as well and also because they had helped me out a lot for my life as an adventurer, but there was no need for me to worry about any of that in a single room. The single room itself was small to the point that two beds lined up together would occupy all of the space in it, but it was spacious enough for me since I wasn't actually going to do anything inside of the room. I hopped off my bed and stretched for a bit before I changed my clothes.

"Whew, okay. I'm kind of hungry now, so I guess I'll go downstairs," I said. "Should I go wake up the others? Hmm, nah, I probably don't need to."

I had returned to my room last night right after I had finished dinner, but the other guys had stayed up late to drink alcohol with each other, so they were probably all dead asleep. With that in mind, it probably wasn't a good idea for

me to forcibly wake them up, so I headed down to the dining hall on the first floor by myself. The inn had been quite noisy late into the night yesterday, but it was rather quiet at the moment, and this was most likely due to the fact that it was still early in the morning.

“Maybe adventurers that explore the dungeon tend to wake up a bit late in the morning in this city.”

The Adventurers’ Guild at other towns were busy from early in the morning since adventurers would wake up early to obtain good quests before others, but most of the adventurers in this city had arrived here for the dungeon. There was no need for such adventurers to compete against each other for good quests, and they could enter the dungeon at any time. The dungeon was open all day, so it wasn’t like you could earn more either if you entered the dungeon earlier in the day. As a result, there weren’t that many people in the dining hall, and I sat down at one of the open seats before I placed an order for breakfast. The cost for meals at this inn for guests that were staying here was one large silver coin for both breakfast and dinner, but things like alcohol and appetizers were charged separately. I felt like this dining hall was a bit expensive compared to the dining halls in other towns and cities, but the meal that I had eaten for dinner last night was quite satisfying. *Hmm, I wonder what breakfast is going to be.*

“Ugh...”

A gasp of shock inadvertently escaped out of my mouth. The breakfast that I had been served looked delicious, but the issue was that all I could see on my plate was meat, and it was more or less the same as what I had had for dinner last night. Meat was a resource that could be obtained from the dungeon, so it seemed like the price of meat in this city was cheaper compared to other places. I hadn’t eaten much meat at previous towns starting from Kelg, so I’d been quite happy to eat meat last night, but two meals in a row with nothing but meat wasn’t very appetizing to me, especially since the second one was for breakfast. Even young guys in high school back in Japan that had a voracious appetite since they were still growing would lose their appetite for meat on the next day if they had gone to an all-you-can-eat BBQ restaurant. I wasn’t sure if every guy in high school was like this, but it was definitely the case for me,

especially since it was still morning.

“Is it normal for adventurers to continuously eat nothing but meat...?”

Adonix-san and the other guys probably wouldn’t hesitate to devour a lot of meat for breakfast, but it was difficult for me. However, there was only one dish served for breakfast at this dining hall. It was probably possible to receive a smaller portion if I asked for it, but I couldn’t ask for a different dish. There was the option of heading outside to find breakfast, but I had already paid for the dish here, and one large silver coin was a significant amount of money for me at the moment.

I looked around the dining hall to see if anyone else among the small number of people here felt the same way as I did about nothing but meat for breakfast, and I saw one person that had a painful expression on their face as they forced some meat into their mouth. That person looked around my age and was a rare female adventurer. I couldn’t see her face since I was sitting diagonally behind her, but her light purple, shoulder-length hair that was tied behind her stood out to me. It seemed like she was a well-bred person since her sitting posture and her table manners were proper and pleasant to look at. She was gracefully advancing through her meal with her work, but the reason why she was slow was probably because it was too much meat for her. *Yeah, I know that feeling. A lot of meat this early in the morning sure is painful.*

I had nodded to myself in my mind when I found something relatable while looking at the girl, but she had probably noticed my gaze since it seemed like she was about to turn around, so I hastily looked back at my plate and started to eat. I was about halfway done with my breakfast when I heard the sound of a door closing, and I peeked again only to see an empty plate, so it seemed like the girl had already headed out.

“Whew, she didn’t notice—actually, nah, she probably did.”

There was no way an adventurer would be that unaware of other people that were gazing at them, so she had probably just ignored my gaze.

“Oh, are you already eating breakfast this early, Sai?”

I looked up when I heard a voice and saw Lucas-san grinning at me. “Oh, good morning, Lucas-san.”

"Yep, morning. Hey, one order of breakfast for me as well!" Lucas exclaimed. "Okay, while I'm waiting for my breakfast, tell me what's up, Sai. Are you interested in that girl who was just here earlier?"

So that's what you were grinning about? I sighed and pulled out a chair for Lucas-san to sit down on. "Did you see what happened?"

"Yeah, I saw you staring at that girl when I got down from the stairs," Lucas replied.

"I wasn't exactly staring at her or anything," I said. "I was just thinking to myself that so much meat for breakfast was probably hard for her to eat."

Lucas-san sat down on the chair that I had pulled for him and brought his face closer to whisper something to me. "Sure, if you say so. Well, just so you know, adventurers like her tend to have a complicated history or circumstances."

"Really?" I asked.

"Yeah. Most of the adventurers in this city are here for the dungeon, but dungeons aren't easy enough for adventurers to be able to explore solo," Lucas replied. "There's a limit to the amount of luggage you can carry by yourself, and you can't switch with someone for lookout duty to take a break either. Despite all of that, she was by herself, so she definitely has a complicated history or circumstances."

Lucas-san sounded quite confident in his theory even though he hadn't explored a dungeon himself before, and there were some points that I could agree with, but there was one major flaw with his reasoning. "Lucas-san, you've forgotten to include one possibility."

"Hm?"

"What if she came here to eat breakfast early, just like me?"

"...Hurry up and finish your meal!"

Lucas dodged my question and started to eat the dish that the owner of the inn had brought over.



"All right, let's get going," said Adonix-san.

The other three guys had arrived down at the dining hall not too long after Lucas had shown up and had finished their breakfast as well, so we headed out of the inn after we were done preparing for the day.

“Is it finally time for us to enter the dungeon?” I asked.

“No, relax. Don’t be so hasty,” Adonix replied.

Adonix-san had somewhat of an exasperated look on his face when he heard my question, but I had a proper reason for being worried. “I mean, you know that I don’t have much money left on me, right?”

I had covered the expenses of my journey via the monetary rewards from the quests that we had taken on and completed as a party on the way, but we had moved on to the next town as soon as we had earned enough to continue our journey, so I hadn’t actually been able to save a lot of money. As for Adonix-san and the other guys, they had already saved up plenty of money beforehand for the journey, and we had evenly split the rewards from the quests between us on the way, so they had probably only used up a little bit of their savings. The lodging and food expenses in this city weren’t cheap at all, so it was necessary for me to earn some more money as soon as possible.

“Relax, we’ll lend you money for lodging and food expenses,” said Adonix. “Haste makes waste, after all.”

“Okay, sure, but what are we going to do first instead?” I asked.

“We’ll head to one of the temples in this city,” Adonix replied. “One of Advastlis-sama’s temples is located here, so we have to visit the temple to offer prayers.”

From what I could remember, Advastlis-sama was one of the Five Great Gods that were worshipped in this world. The existence of gods was something that had been accepted to be true, so almost everyone in this world believed in gods, but the degree of faith varied from person to person. There weren’t that many devout believers in this kingdom, and it seemed like most people would only visit temples occasionally to offer prayers. With all of that in mind, the idea of visiting a temple to pray for safety and protection since we were about to challenge something new by exploring the dungeon in this city had sort of made sense, but I wasn’t sure what Advastlis-sama had to do with this since I hadn’t

heard any stories about him being the tutelary deity of adventurers or anything like that.

“Um, do you all believe in Advastlis-sama?” I asked.

The only reason I could think of for visiting Advastlis-sama’s temple instead of other ones was that the other guys believed in him, but I received an unexpected answer from Adonix-san. “I grew up in an orphanage that was founded by one of Advastlis-sama’s temples, so I guess I technically count as a believer.”

“Wait, really?!”

“Yeah. I worked very hard after leaving the orphanage to get here in life, but I owe my life to Advastlis-sama, so praying to him is how I express my gratitude.”

I felt like it was thanks to the orphanage that Adonix-san had managed to survive instead of Advastlis-sama since I wasn’t really a religious person, but Adonix-san probably had a different mentality from me because he was born in a world where the existence of gods was closer to people than back on Earth.

“Aside from Ado, Tezas is a fairly devout believer as well, but Marcos and I just tag along with them when told to,” said Lucas. “Neither of us two are devout believers of one specific god, but Marcos fervently prays each time.”

“Yeah, I prayed for luck with finding a marriage partner!” Marcos exclaimed. “Advastlis-sama is a perfect god for this!”

“Uh, is it because he’s the god of marriage or something like that?” I asked.

Gods of love or matchmaking were commonly found at shrines back in Japan, but Marcos shook his head in response to my question. “Nah. It’s just that it would be embarrassing to pray to a goddess about wanting to get married, right? Belfaug-sama is also a male god, but he’s known as a serious god. On the other hand, Advastlis-sama seems like a chill god, so yeah.”

“Lenient and tolerant are better ways to put it,” said Adonix. “But yeah, Advastlis-sama is the god that most adventurers believe in.”

I had never considered the act of praying at a shrine to be something embarrassing, but perhaps it would be in a world where gods actually existed if

the gods could hear my wishes when I prayed to them. However, gods probably weren't free all the time to listen to the prayers and wishes of every one of their believers, so it probably wasn't necessary for me to worry about it. The other question that would come up in this case was if there was any point in praying if the gods didn't actually listen, but even someone not religious like me had purchased lucky charms at shrines back in Japan, so I had no qualms about the act of praying itself.

Adonix-san had probably asked around for directions ahead of time, since he led the way without hesitation, and we eventually arrived at a temple. I was quite amazed by how magnificent the temple itself looked as I entered, and everyone else started praying right away. I had no idea what the proper prayer etiquette was, so I merely copied how the others were praying. *Uh, let's see, I need to offer some money as a donation—huh? One gold coin, Adonix-san?!* I didn't have much money in my wallet, so I copied Lucas-san and donated one large silver coin. That amount of money was still quite a lot for me, but I wasn't brave enough to only donate one silver coin or even just one copper coin. After I had finished donating money, I got on my knees and started to pray. *Hmm, what should I pray for? Uh, Advastlis-sama, I wish that you'll help protect me so that I'll continue to be safe and sound in the future.*

"Sai, your current level is Level 13. You need to gain 1,880 EXP in order to level up."

"Huh?!"

"Be quiet, Sai."

"Oh, um, I heard a voice in my head just now, so..."

I hastily tried to explain why I had raised my voice when I was told to be quiet, but Tezas-san responded to me with a look of concern on his face. "Are you tired, Sai? It was quite a long journey to get here, so I can understand that. Do you want to take another day off to rest?"

"No, I really did hear—never mind..."

Marcos-san and Lucas-san gave me exasperated and concerned looks along with Tezas-san, so I had no choice but to cut myself short and dropped the subject. I was fairly sure I had heard a voice in my mind and prayed again, but I

didn't hear anything this time about things like levels and experience points. *Am I actually that tired? Have I hallucinated a game message in my head as a result of built-up stress from being transported to a gamelike world?* However, status display screens were something that I could access in this world, so I decided to take the opportunity to check it because a lot of time had passed since I had last done so.

Name: Masaru

Race: Human (Age: 17)

Condition: Healthy

Skills: Magic Aptitude: Water, Healthiness, Longevity
Youth, Level 3 Spearmanship, Level 3 Robust
Disease Resistance, Poison Resistance, Level 3 Water Magic
Blessings: Slightly increased financial luck (maybe?)

"Huh?!"

I had tried to shut my mouth with my hands when I inadvertently made a noise out of surprise, but it was too late.

"Sai..."

Adonix-san had been fervently praying, but even he sounded a bit annoyed as well since his voice sounded quite deep when he scolded me, and I hastily stood up in response. "S-Sorry! I'll head out first!"

I dashed out of the temple before I checked my status display screen again. "Mm, yeah, there really is a new entry here. I don't remember seeing this before at all..."

I was curious about the voice that I had just heard in my head, but I was also curious about the new blessing in my status display screen since I hadn't seen it before. My status display screen was something that had been created by that "evil" god, and the same probably applied for things like levels and experience points. *Does that mean Advastlis-sama is the evil god that transported me to this world?* I hadn't looked carefully at the statue of Advastlis-sama inside of the temple, but it didn't really resemble his appearance. However, the person who had crafted the statue probably didn't know what Advastlis-sama actually looked like, so it sort of made sense to me.

"I gotta say, though, the text for this blessing makes it hard for me to tell if I really do have increased financial luck or not..."

My blessing was most likely a passive bonus from my Super Wealth skill. The skill itself had increased my amount of starting money, so it made sense to me for it to also have a passive effect. As for why I hadn't been able to see the blessing in my status display screen before, it was probably because I hadn't prayed at a temple up until now. Adonix-san and the others had probably made use of their free time to visit a temple to offer prayers, but this idea hadn't crossed my mind at all in the past.

"Financial luck, huh? Now that I think about it, the other guys mentioned that we've been lucky with the recent quests that we took on."

I wasn't sure if it was because of my blessing, but all of the quests that we had completed on our way to the dungeon city were quests that had provided us with decent rewards. We hadn't exactly earned a huge amount of money from those quests, but the rewards had been more than enough for us to earn a profit, unlike some quests. The others had told me before that it was fairly normal to come across a decent number of quests that would only pay enough to cover the amount of expenses accumulated over the days required to complete a quest, so it seemed like my blessing had actually helped me out quite a lot up until now.

"Maybe this blessing is somewhat effective? I'm glad if it actually is, but..."

I was somewhat happy about the fact that my Super Wealth skill had a hidden passive effect since I had lost all hope of it being a useful skill, but I still felt like the name of the skill wasn't very accurate.

"I'm kind of curious about my level and experience points, but I probably shouldn't care too much about this."

I had survived just fine up until now without worrying about things like levels or experience points, and doing reckless things as a result of being too obsessed with levels and experience points would be mistaking the means for the end.

"I'm lucky that I have good party members with me, after all. One downside is that it's a sausage fest party that's mostly filled with muscular men, but oh well."

The other guys had treated me as an equal even though I was much less experienced than them as an adventurer, so they were great party members. With all of that in mind, I shoved my thoughts about levels and experience points to the back of my mind and waited for the others to come out from the temple after they had finished their praying session.

The area near the entrance of the dungeon was much busier and more crowded than I had expected it to be. One of the first things that someone would see here was a huge building that was built to seal off the dungeon itself, so the only way to enter the dungeon was through the building. The building was managed by the Adventurers' Guild, so people had to receive permission from the guild if they wanted to enter the dungeon. There were also some buildings in the vicinity that seemed like their main customer base were the adventurers that were about to enter the dungeon and the ones that exited the dungeon, and such establishments included taverns, dining halls, weapon shops, and shops that sold miscellaneous goods and tools.

However, there was one establishment that seemed a bit different from the other ones since it had a signboard outside with the word "bathhouse" written on it. The first thing that popped up in my mind was a large public bathhouse, but the building wasn't very big, and when I asked the other guys about this, they told me that it was just a place where you could wash your body with a portable washtub that was filled with hot water. The inn that we were staying at had a similar facility inside of the building, but it seemed like there were some inns that would only provide cold water or a tiny amount of hot water in a small bucket. According to the other guys, the main people that would go to bathhouses were the people that stayed at such inns and the people that were dirty from exploring the dungeon and couldn't wait to get back to their inns. *Man, what a shame. I wanted to go to a bathhouse myself if there were hot baths available that I could chill and relax in for a while, but oh well.*

The next thing that stood out aside from the establishments was the number of people in the surroundings. There were a lot of people that were offering porter services for carrying the luggage of a party. All of those people were showing off their muscles to prove that they could carry a lot, but none of them were anywhere near as muscular as Adonix-san was since anyone that muscular

would probably be an adventurer as well. There were also some adventurers that were searching for other people to party up with them. They were probably looking to form a temporary party since exploring a dungeon solo wasn't easy, but I wasn't sure if it was actually possible to form a good party with strangers in this dungeon city. They would have to register as a party with their newfound members, so it seemed like it would be much more of a hassle. *Do temporary parties just give it a try near the shallow sections of the dungeon to see how it goes and only form parties for real if it works out? That would make sense to me, but it still seems like a hassle...*

As for the last thing that stood out to me, it was the people that were walking around with what looked like stacks of paper in their hands as they approached and talked to adventurers. I strained my ears to hear what they were talking about, and it seemed like those people were selling maps of the dungeon. One of them had tried to talk to us as well, but Lucas-san waved his hands to indicate that we had no intention of purchasing a map.

"We're not going to buy a map?" I asked.

"Mm. It's perfectly fine to earn money in the areas that have been mapped out, but as adventurers, it's more exciting to explore deeper, right? Also, it's worth practicing at the shallow sections of a dungeon to become able to map where we've explored ourselves," Adonix replied. "Thankfully for us, the dungeon here is a tunnel-type dungeon, so mapping work won't be too hard even for someone like me."

According to Adonix-san, tunnel-type dungeons were ones with stone passageways that would lead deeper down, and it was what I would think of first whenever I heard the word "dungeon" since such dungeons were fairly common in games back on Earth. There were other types of dungeons out there, such as cave-type dungeons and strange ones with outdoor-looking areas inside of the dungeon, such as forest-type and plains-type dungeons. On top of that, special types of dungeons existed as well, so it seemed like there were a lot of different dungeons out there in the world.

"Things might change in the future, but I have no intention of hiring a porter for now either," said Adonix. "We might end up in the red as a result, after all."

“Oh, yeah, it’s not like we can earn a lot of money right away since this is our first time exploring a dungeon,” I said.

“Exactly. We need to be careful with how we approach our dungeon adventures,” said Adonix. “Now then, let’s head insi—”

A guy suddenly showed up and blocked our path just as Adonix-san was about to head towards the building that led to the dungeon. He had a spear in one hand and was quite muscular, but not as much as the other guys in my party. The guy was probably an adventurer looking for other people to party up with, and he looked at me with disdain in his eyes before he turned away to talk to Adonix-san since Adonix-san was standing in the front.

“Hey, I’ll be more useful than this little weak dude, so—”

Adonix-san and the other three guys glared at him in silence.

“Um, sorry for bothering you.” The guy swiftly faded away and stopped bothering us.

Yeah, I’d give up too if these four guys silently glared at me like that since they can be really intimidating. However, it was a fact that I looked much weaker than my other party members. “I’m sorry that you guys had to cover for me...”

Some negative words had inadvertently spilled out of my mouth, but Marcos-san slapped me on my back in response, as if to cheer me up. “Ha ha ha, don’t worry about it! It’d be bad for us if you got recruited by some other party, after all!”

“Yeah, you don’t have to feel bad about this. You might not look like a strong spearman at first glance, but you’re much more important to us than that,” said Adonix. “Well, you’re stronger with the spear than you actually look, but yeah.”

“Being able to trust your other party members is important for exploring a dungeon, and you’re someone that’s trustworthy, Sai,” said Lucas.

“Don’t worry about your appearance, Sai,” said Tezas. “You’ll get bigger once you grow up and become an adult.”

Uh, I appreciate the sentiment, but I’m technically an adult in this world, Tezas-san. Besides, my growth period seems like it’s already over, since I haven’t

grown any taller over the last six months even though I have the Healthiness skill! Ugh, I just wanted a few extra centimeters! I'm so jealous of you and the other guys that you're all very tall!

However, I was an adult at heart, so there was only one way for me to respond. “Mm, thanks for cheering me up. All right, let’s head inside the dungeon.” I had forced myself to smile on the outside, but I was crying on the inside.

I gently pushed Adonix-san’s large back to urge him to get going as we entered the huge building that was managed by the Adventurers’ Guild, and the first thing that I saw was a sturdy door in the middle at the very back of the building. The door itself was wide open, and there were some guild staff in front of the door who were checking the credentials of the adventurers that wanted to enter the dungeon. We headed there as well and showed the guild staff our wooden tags and adventurer cards before we walked past the door, and the first thing that we saw was a staircase that led down to the dungeon.

“It’s much darker here than I expected it to be,” I said.

“Well, yeah, we don’t have many sources of light,” said Lucas.

There was no source of light inside of the dungeon, and the only things that we had to light up our surroundings were the lanterns that Lucas and I were holding. I felt like I had become used to the darkness to a certain extent since I had experienced what it was like to camp outside after being transported to this world, but I had finally realized that it wasn’t actually that dark outside since the stars were quite bright at night. As a result, I felt like it would be quite dangerous if we were attacked by monsters at the moment.

“Hmm, I guess we have to get used to this dimness first,” said Tezas.

“Yeah. I guess I’ll make use of this time to tell you about the main ways of earning money in the shallow sections of a dungeon, Sai,” said Lucas. “There are three main ways for earning money, and that’s through magicites, fur or skin, and meat. You can place most of the monsters in dungeons within one of those three categories, but it seems like there aren’t any recommended ones to aim for.”

According to Lucas-san, the monsters that had magicites as the main source

of money available from them were monsters that had nothing else that was valuable. Goblins were monsters under this category, and kevan kobolds were another type of monster under the same category.

“Most of the monsters that can be encountered in the shallow sections of dungeons are weak, so it’s easy to slay them, but their magicites aren’t worth much either,” said Lucas. “The benefit of slaying these monsters is that your luggage won’t increase that much since you only have to retrieve their magicites. However, it’s possible to encounter goblin leaders as well from time to time, so we need to be careful since they’re quite strong.”

“Goblin leaders, huh? Can you defeat such monsters with ease, Adonix-san?” I asked.

“If I fight them one on one, then yeah,” Adonix replied. “However, goblin leaders command other goblins, so that’s why we can’t let our guard down since they’re annoying to deal with.”

I hadn’t fought any goblin leaders before, but it seemed like they were quite dangerous since a careful person like Adonix-san had described these monsters as foes that we had to be on our guard when fighting. Based on my previous experiences, what this meant was that it wouldn’t be an issue under normal circumstances, and I felt quite confident in my assumption after I looked at the expressions that the other guys had on their faces.

“The type of monsters that we should retrieve the fur or skin from are night weasels and short horn deer,” said Lucas. “It seems like it’s more profitable to go after weasels if we can slay a lot of them, but they’re not monsters that you can encounter very often, so the deer are a better target. The meat from the deer can be sold for money as well, so each deer can fetch quite a decent amount in total.”

According to Lucas-san, each night weasel could fetch one gold coin, while each short horn deer could fetch three to four gold coins. However, you would have to bring back a few kilos of meat from those deer in order to earn that full amount of money, so the maximum number of short horn deer that a party could slay and bring back with them without a porter was about two or three deer. As for the night weasels, only their fur was worth money, so they were

worth much more in terms of weight per unit. The deer would be better if their meat was worth more, but people wouldn't pay that much for short horn deer meat since it was a type of meat with a peculiar taste to it.

"The type of monsters to retrieve the meat from for money are giant rats and giant bats. Giant rats can fetch a little bit less than one gold coin while giant bats can fetch about three to four gold coins," said Lucas. "Each bat is worth as much as short horn deer, but giant bats are more dangerous. They can attack you from the darkness without making a sound, so make sure to be on your guard against them."

According to Lucas-san, the taste of the meat from giant bats made them worth more than the meat from short horn deer, and the membranes of giant bats were considered as a delicacy, so they were the second-best source of money, with night weasels being number one in terms of efficiency per kill, but it seemed like the bats were quite dangerous as well.

"By the way, what was the meat that was served at the dining hall back at our inn?" I asked.

"Well, based on the price, it was probably rat meat," Lucas replied. "There's a possibility that it was deer meat, but the meat didn't have a weird smell to it, so it's unlikely. Oh yeah, you have to pay separately for this, but you can also order the membrane of giant bats to go with alcohol."

"I see..."

Rat meat wasn't enough to faze me after what I had experienced in this world up until now, but I definitely didn't expect for the meat that I had been eating earlier to be rat meat. *Does the membrane of giant bats actually taste good at all? I wonder if it's kind of similar to something like chicken skin.*

"I'm surprised you know so much, though, Lucas-san," I said. "We only arrived in this city yesterday, so..."

"Come on, Sai, did you think I was fully occupied with just drinking yesterday?" Lucas asked. "I made sure to gather information, of course."

"Nah, I had absolute trust in you this entire time, Lucas-san," I replied.

Sorry for lying, but I actually thought that you got really drunk since we hadn't

been to a town or city for quite a while. What about the oth—huh? Why are you guys looking away from me? “Uh, did any of you other guys gather any information?”

My question was met with silence. U-Uh, w-well, gathering information is Lucas-san’s role, so I guess it’s fine, mm.

“Now, then, I think we’ve all gotten used to the dimness by now,” said Lucas. “Let’s get going.”

Lucas-san shook his hands as if to shake off the awkward atmosphere and urged us to resume our exploration. The rest of us all nodded in response as we started to venture deeper into the dungeon.



Our exploration of the dungeon had turned out quite well. It wasn’t like we had been able to easily earn money since our lodging and food expenses along with the fee for entering the dungeon meant that we had to earn at least seven thousand Rea per day in order to break even, but my savings had slowly increased over time since our daily earnings had never dropped below that number. The best targets to aim for among the monsters we had encountered were the short horn deer that Lucas had recommended. The short horn deer were much larger than the deer that I’d had in mind, and they probably weighed around one hundred kilograms. They had short horns, as their names suggested, and weren’t very intimidating, but that didn’t mean they weren’t dangerous at all. It was possible to suffer a lethal injury if you were stabbed by their horns since those horns were quite sharp despite their short length, and the charging power of a short horn deer was quite fearsome as well due to their weight. In fact, I would probably get sent flying if one of them managed to charge and ram into me.

However, my party had someone reliable for the tank role in the form of Tezas-san, and he had been able to stop short horn deer in their tracks by using his large shield, while Marcos and I would use our sword and spear respectively to finish off the deer. As for Adonix-san, his greatsword was too powerful and would ruin the value of the deer, so he had nothing to do whenever we encountered some. On the other hand, his greatsword had been put to good

use against monsters like goblins and kevan kobolds, since only their magicites were worth any money. As for Lucas-san, he had been assigned the duty of dealing with swift monsters such as night weasels and giant bats. These duties and roles weren't fixed by any means, but our party as a whole was a well-balanced party. The main reason we had been able to earn a stable amount of money was thanks to how muscular the other guys were, however. It was quite difficult for someone like me to carry back the meat from one short horn deer by myself, but the other guys were capable of doing this with ease. Lucas-san was the least muscular guy among them, but even he had no trouble with this.

Parties that lacked muscular members probably had to either exit the dungeon after slaying just one short horn deer or hire a porter to carry the meat for their party. Another option for such parties was to merely hunt monsters to earn money from their magicites, but all of those options would make it hard to earn a decent amount of money on a constant basis from the shallow sections of the dungeon. Such parties would have to venture deeper into the dungeon in order to earn good money, but our party didn't have to take on that risk thanks to our muscular ratio, and we had been able to slowly explore the dungeon as a result. None of us were close to our final goal of getting married, but our main goal in this dungeon city was to earn money, so that wasn't an issue since we weren't here to look for a marriage partner. In any case, we were all quite happy since we had been able to earn money just fine, and the atmosphere of our party was quite cheerful. As a result, we had gathered at the dining hall of the inn that we were staying at as usual to celebrate after we had safely returned from a two-day trip inside of the dungeon.

“I kinda wish I could experience some warmth from time to time, however...”

I had muttered some minor complaints, but it seemed like Lucas-san had heard what I said and exhaled out a breath that smelled very alcoholic as he wrapped his arms around my shoulders and grinned at me. “Oh, do you wanna go and blow your load, Sai? I won't pay for you, but I can tag along if you want me to. You should have enough money saved up by now, right?”

“Uh, well, I don't think I've saved up enough yet,” I replied.

There were some cheap brothels out there, but places that offered special

services or options were quite expensive based on what I had been told before. Marcos-san had told me that the cheaper ones were still decent, but I didn't want to go to such places yet because I wanted my first time to be a special and memorable experience. I wasn't completely sure if losing your virginity at a brothel would qualify as something that would become a good memory, but I also wasn't patient enough to wait for an opportunity that could possibly never come up for me otherwise. With that in mind, I had been working hard to save money in order to become capable of affording to go to a high-end brothel, but the prices could vary a lot. Cheap brothels would only cost you the equivalent of one dinner, and the expensive ones would cost way more than what an ordinary citizen could afford from a month's worth of savings.

It seemed like officially sanctioned brothels would offer you a very good experience, but Adonix-san and the others had told me to avoid such places. According to them, such brothels were too "dangerous" for an amateur to try out, and virgins like me would get knocked out instantly. They had also told me that it was very addictive to the point that people would become absorbed with earning money just for the sake of being able to afford to go to one of those brothels again, and a lot of those people would end up spending all of their life savings and even taking on deep debt to continue their dreams. It seemed like this wasn't an issue for people of strong will since officially sanctioned brothels didn't use any dangerous drugs or anything like that, but I was someone that was aware of many examples of people back on Earth that had ruined their lives as a result of spending money on things such as gambling, gacha, and idol fandoms, so this wasn't something that I could casually try out. I wasn't confident enough in myself for things such as self-restraint, after all.

"Also, Lucas-san, can you stop making those movements with your hands?" I tried to tell Lucas-san to stop after he had started to make some lewd movements with his hands as he suggested the idea of going to a brothel. "I don't want people looking at us to get the wrong idea..."

"Oh, come on, it doesn't matter. There shouldn't be anyone around that cares." Lucas-san had an exasperated look on his face as he looked around our surroundings after he heard my response, but that look soon changed to a grin once more, as if he had noticed something. "Ah, are you worried about what

that girl might think of you?"

Lucas-san sneakily pointed at the female adventurer that I had seen during my first morning in the dungeon city, and it seemed like she was staying at the same inn as my party since I had seen her here quite often since then. I hadn't been able to see her face during our initial encounter, but she had a very cute face. She looked a bit like a stern person because of her slit eyes and the fact that I had never seen her smile at all, but she was still very charming despite all of that. As for her height, she wasn't very tall since she was around the same height as I was, and she didn't have an intimidating aura to her either. In fact, every single one of her movements lacked the typical roughness that was commonly found among adventurers, so she was a rare exemption. My eyes would always wander in her direction due to all of this, but...

"Nah, she probably doesn't even know that I exist," I said. "She stands out a lot, but I don't."

I was aware of her existence, but to her, I was probably just a random stranger. As a result, she probably wasn't paying attention to the actions of someone like me.

"Oh yeah, now that I think about it, she's always alone," I said.

Lucas-san seemed happy about the fact that he wasn't wrong about the theory that he had brought up in the past. "I told you that she has a complicated history or circumstances, right? It seems like she's a solo adventurer who doesn't hire a porter since she always enters the dungeon by herself."

"Did you go out of your way to investigate this, Lucas-san?" I asked.

I wasn't sure if it was because I had a slightly condemning tone to my voice, but Lucas-san shrugged in response to my question. "Nah, I just happened to come across this while gathering information for other things. So, do you want to know what kind of information I managed to gather?"

"Ugh." I paused in thought for a while before I squeezed out a conclusion. "Uh, yeah, sure..."

Prying into someone's private life wasn't a good thing, but curiosity had won

over my morals, so I listened to what Lucas-san had to tell me.

“Just to be clear, I didn’t go out of my way to confirm things, so take what I say with a grain of salt,” said Lucas. “First off, her name is Estelle. She looks like a warrior in light armor, but it seems she can use Fire Magic as well, so she’s a bit similar to you, Sai.”

“Fire Magic, huh? That sounds way more convenient and useful than my magic,” I said.

“Come on, you don’t have to put yourself down like that,” said Lucas. “Believe me, your Water Magic is essential for our dungeon exploration.”

“Thanks for the kind words, but...”

I hadn’t been aware of this before I was transported to this world, but Water Magic didn’t have many offensive spells, and the few that existed were mostly high-level spells. Due to this, my only current way of dealing damage to foes during battle was with my spear. I was fairly decent at this, but it was a fact that I lacked power behind my attacks compared to the other four guys in my party.

“No, seriously, your Water Magic has helped us out a lot,” said Lucas. “Being able to use as much water as we want when needed is really good. Gutting monsters without a source of water would be a pain in the ass, so yeah.”

Lucas-san had brought up a very good point that I was aware of since I had experienced what gutting was like myself. A specialized bag was required for gutting monsters, and you wouldn’t become too dirty from gutting once you were used to it, but that didn’t change the fact that our targets were monsters. We weren’t able to cleanly slay them all the time, and blood stains as a result of battles were fairly common as well, so the ability to wash off blood was very important for a long exploring session inside of the dungeon.

“Sure, the sheer firepower that Fire Magic offers is attractive as well, but that’s a completely different role,” said Lucas. “Besides, we all have different things that we’re good at, right? Okay, I’m gonna continue on, but I don’t have much left to tell you. She used to be a member of a party, but it seems like some internal problems occurred, so...”

According to Lucas-san, he had only happened to hear information about

Estelle while gathering information about other things, so he wasn't sure about the exact details, but it seemed like Estelle's party had disbanded as a result of some problems, and she was exploring the dungeon by herself now.

"Conflicts within a party, huh? I guess I'm lucky that I haven't encountered this kind of issue," I said.

"Yeah, that goes both ways. Honestly speaking, we were a bit uneasy about recruiting a new member," said Lucas. "Our party had the same members from the very beginning, after all. Well, until that bastard betrayed us, that is. Damn him!"

Lucas-san sounded quite sulky as he talked about the person that had left their party before I had joined, but I was aware of the fact that he and the others didn't actually think that guy was a traitor. A better way to phrase it was that they considered him as a traitor in terms of the fact that he had gotten married, but their friendship hadn't actually ended as a result of that.

"Didn't you guys all give him some money as a wedding present, though?" I asked.

"Huh? Did Ado tell you about this? Well, yeah, that's true, but it was just palimony to end things."

Lucas-san still sounded a bit spiteful, but it wasn't like it had been the separation of a couple, so he was probably just hiding his true feelings by using a word like palimony. I laughed once I had realized this, and then Lucas-san poured some alcohol into my cup.

"Whatever, man, forget about this! More importantly, chug some alcohol down!" Lucas exclaimed. "You need to get used to alcohol if you don't want to get looked down on by others as an adventurer! After all, you have the appearance of a kid, so you gotta bluff a bit!"

"Uh, okay, if you say so," I replied.

I felt like this was a form of harassment since Lucas-san was urging me to drink even though I didn't want to, but I went along with him and took a sip out of my cup. The drinks that were served at our inn didn't taste very good to me, but I hadn't gotten drunk from them before since it seemed like they were low-

alcohol drinks. On top of that, there were a lot of delicious snacks available to go along with the drinks, so I had tagged along with the other guys in my party for drinking sessions recently. I had ordered some giant bat membrane to eat as well since I was curious about it, and it had a very strong salty taste. However, it still tasted good, and I enjoyed the chewing sensation of it as well.

“Whew. We’re going to challenge the fourth floor of the dungeon tomorrow, right?” I asked.

“Yeah. Well, each floor of the dungeon in this city is very spacious and wide, and nobody knows what the lowest floor is, so we’re still at the early parts of the dungeon,” said Lucas.

“Mm. We haven’t been able to find any treasure chests either,” I said.

Treasure chests would sometimes spawn inside of dungeons, and these chests often had very valuable things inside of them. In fact, some of the potential loot was so valuable that a party who managed to obtain one would become rich enough for all of their members to live luxuriously for the rest of their lives. Our party had fully explored the first, second, and third floors so far in order to get used to the dungeon, but we hadn’t found any treasure chests at all, not even empty ones.

“My dude, only very lucky people can find treasure chests in the upper floors of a dungeon,” said Lucas. “Besides, even if we manage to find one, I heard that these kinds of treasure chests tend to have bad loot inside of them.”

According to Lucas-san, it was fairly common for adventurers to become happy whenever they found a treasure chest on a single-digit floor only to be disappointed when they opened it to find something like a rusty iron sword inside, so chests with good loot on these early floors were very rare.

“The chests with loot that’ll provide you riches for your entire life are something that only adventurers capable of reaching the deepest floors can find,” said Lucas. “We’re nowhere close to that yet.”

“What’s the deepest floor that adventurers have reached for the dungeon of this city again?” I asked. “If I recall correctly, it was the thirty-fifth floor, right?”

“That’s the official information, yeah,” Lucas replied. “It’s possible that there

are some parties out there that have explored deeper, however."

The only thing that adventurers could obtain from revealing the deepest floor they had explored was fame, but fame would also invite all sorts of trouble, so I had no idea what was more beneficial for the adventurers that had managed to reach the deep floors of the dungeon.

"Well, I guess this isn't going to be relevant to us for quite a while since we have a long road ahead of us," I said.

"You want to explore as deep as you can, though, right?" Lucas asked. "It's the only natural thing to aim for as a guy since we're here in a dungeon city!"

"Of course! Let's do our best together!" I exclaimed.

"Mm! All right, let's have a toast! Here's to success for our future endeavors!" Lucas exclaimed.

"And here's to success for all of us being able to get married in the future!" I exclaimed.

Lucas-san and I raised our cups and bumped them together. "Cheers!"



Our exploration of the dungeon had gone smoothly even after we had advanced to the fourth floor. However, one major difference was that our exploration sessions had been extended to a three-day trip each time. We had started to encounter monsters more often since there were fewer adventurers around, but the monsters at the fourth floor weren't any stronger than the ones before, so our battles had been as safe and steady as usual. On the other hand, the increased number of monsters also meant that the muscular guys in my party had to start being picky with what to carry back since there was an increase in the amount of materials that we had obtained from monsters. As a result, we had prioritized retrieving the most valuable materials and avoided battles by hiding from time to time as we ventured deeper into the dungeon, and we eventually arrived at the fifth floor after some time. The fifth floor was considered a turning point of this dungeon, and that was because this was the last floor that had the same monsters as the previous ones.

Stronger monsters would start to appear from the sixth floor onward, and

exploration trips would also start to become longer. It was up to adventurers whether they were going to venture farther into the dungeon or if they were going to compromise and be satisfied with earning a decent amount of money from the first five floors, so it was kind of like a test for adventurers to measure their ambition. Exploration of the first five floors could provide earnings that were much more than the average quest, so the choice of staying here wasn't exactly a bad one. In fact, it was a good choice for adventures that were already married. However, everyone in my party was single, including myself, so we had no intention of stopping here this early in the dungeon. As a result, our alliance of five guys that absolutely wanted to get married had agreed to venture forward without hesitating at all. About a day had passed since we had first arrived at the fifth floor, and we were discussing the idea of heading back out of the dungeon when the ground beneath me suddenly disappeared.

“Huh?”

I barely had some time to react with surprise before I felt a floating sensation and a painful blow to my butt. Before I could realize that this was because of a pitfall trap, Tezas-san’s shocked face disappeared from sight, and my body started to slide down some kind of slope.

“A pitfall trap?!”

I hastily tried to look for something on the nearby walls to grab, but there was nothing within reach of my hands. After that, I pressed down on the slope I was on with my palms and the soles of my feet in an attempt to stop sliding, but a trap that could be dealt with so easily would be a poor-quality one. Unfortunately for me, the trap that had made me fall was a good-quality one, so I wasn't really able to slow down my speed as my body continued to slide down the slope. In the end, all I could do was to hug the lantern I had in my hands tightly in order to protect it from being destroyed as I blazed through the long and dark slope like a roller coaster.



“What happened?!”

Adonix turned around as soon as he heard a voice from behind him, but all he saw was that Sai had disappeared. There was no trace of the pitfall trap that Sai

had fallen into, so he only discovered what had happened after Tezas started to explain the situation.

“Sai fell into a pitfall trap!” Tezas exclaimed.

“A pitfall trap?! Did you not notice it, Lucas?!”

“There’s no way I missed it, Ado! I’m certain of this! Ugh, how did this slip past me...?”

Lucas sounded very confident in himself as he refuted Adonix’s words, but it was a fact that Sai had fallen into a pitfall trap, and Lucas covered his forehead with his hands out of regret. As for Marcos, he crouched down around where Sai had fallen down and touched the ground, but he looked a bit confused from what he found.

“There’s no trace of a pitfall trap here,” said Marcos. “What kind of trap was this?”

“You’re sure that a hole opened up in the ground here, right, Tezas?” Adonix asked.

“Yeah, I’m absolutely sure,” Tezas replied. “Sai’s body slid down and disappeared in front of me before the ground returned to normal.”

“Ugh, so it was a magical pitfall trap?!” Lucas exclaimed. “I guess that explains why I didn’t notice the trap. Damn it!”

Lucas kicked the ground out of frustration, and Adonix placed his hands on Lucas’s shoulders to calm him down. “Put aside your regret for now, Lucas. Is there something we can do about this?”

“This magical pitfall didn’t react to us, so there’s a high chance that the trap was one that only reacts to mages,” Lucas replied. “With that in mind, it’s probably very hard—well, actually, I think it’s impossible for us to open this trap by ourselves.”

Adonix closed his eyes for a bit and growled to himself in a low voice after he heard how Lucas had corrected his wishful thinking for his analysis of the situation, and then he nodded in response to Lucas’s words before he opened his eyes again. “I see. All right, guys, let’s hurry up and head out of the

dungeon.”

“Huh?!” Tezas exclaimed. “Ado, are you telling us to abandon Sai?!”

“Calm down, Tezas. We’ve only managed to make it this far in the dungeon because of Sai’s Water Magic,” Adonix replied. “Do you really think we have enough remaining water and food left to search for him? He definitely fell to a floor deeper than this one, so keep in that mind.”

“Ugh...”

“Sai can provide water for himself, and he had some food on him along with the emergency rations that we had him carry. He should be able to survive for a few days off those supplies if he’s careful. Am I wrong?” Adonix looked around at the others to see if any of them had objections or other ideas, and then he nodded when none of them brought up anything. “All right. The first thing we need to do is to restock on our water and food supply, and we should also purchase as many dungeon maps as possible. Let’s head back.”



The most thrilling ride of my life had suddenly come to a stop as I felt a brief floating sensation before I landed on some ground, and I hastily held up my lantern as I observed my surroundings.

“Whew. I can’t say that was a very good ride, but at least I didn’t suffer any inju—”

A sharp object suddenly grazed past me as if to condemn my cockiness and pierced the ground. It was a long, thin object that I was quite familiar with: my spear.

“Yikes! There wasn’t a spear trap at the bottom of the pitfall trap, but I would be a laughingstock if my own spear killed me, ha ha!”

Only a third party would laugh at my situation if they heard it from someone else, though. I had a feeling that my spear was scolding me for letting go of it and protecting the lantern, but I was probably just imagining things.

“I’m pretty sure I would be dead if I lost my lantern.”

The only reason I had been able to properly land on my feet without breaking

them was because of the light that my lantern had provided me. Breaking the bones of my legs wouldn't have resulted in my death immediately, but it would have definitely brought me closer to death. On top of that, if I had no source of light to see my surroundings, then I would have most likely shuddered out of fear in the same place.

"So yeah, I'm counting on you from now on, buddy."

I muttered an excuse to my spear to justify my actions as I grabbed it with my hands and looked up from where I had landed. It seemed like the slope that I had fallen from was about five meters high, and I could see the exit of the slope, but climbing back to return to my original location wasn't a realistic option for me since I would probably have to climb even farther past the exit for this. I wasn't sure how long I had been sliding for since I was in a panic as a result of what had happened to me, but it definitely wasn't a distance that an amateur like me could climb, and attempting to do so without any climbing tools was basically a suicidal idea.

"I remember hearing about how stranded people shouldn't move from where they got stranded and should wait for rescue, but that probably doesn't apply to my situation..."

Adonix-san and the others were good and loyal people that probably wouldn't abandon me that easily, but it was a fact that I couldn't expect help from them right away. Things like rescue teams didn't exist in this world, and it was also pointless to expect help from strangers. In addition, I was an adventurer myself, so I was different from ordinary citizens that couldn't protect themselves.

"I should do my best to escape by myself, yeah. I'm kind of worried about my combat abilities, however."

I was capable of using magic, but my Water Magic wasn't really useful at all for offensive purposes. My spear was my only real source of damage, and the other guys had told me that I was decent at wielding a spear, but...

"The main issue is the quality of my spear. I would have bought a new one if I'd known this was going to happen to me..."

The spear I had wasn't a cheap one by any means, but the battles I had experienced so far had been safe thanks to the fact that my party had Tezas-san

as a tank that shielded us from danger. I wasn't sure if my spear or I would survive even if I could stop the charge of a short horn deer head-on, after all.

"I definitely need to flee from battles as much as possible while looking for a path back to the upper floors, yeah."

I started to check what I had on me after I was done planning what I had to do. There wasn't much water left in my water bag, but that wasn't an issue since I could use Water Magic. I had enough food to last for a few days, along with some emergency rations that the other guys had made me carry just in case. According to them, the rations tasted awful, but they were compact supplies that would provide enough energy for survival.

"I can probably make the oil for my lantern last for anywhere from ten to fifteen days if I'm frugal with it, right?"

Lucas-san and I were the ones who had held lanterns most of the time, but Adonix-san had made all of us carry lanterns just in case since he was a careful person, and he had also organized for us to evenly consume the oil for the lanterns. As a result, there was still plenty of oil left inside of the oil bottle that I had on me.

"I hope that I'll be lucky with monsters in a good way..."

I had hoped to encounter monsters that my party could earn a good amount of money from up until now, but I could only pray to Advastlis-sama that I wouldn't encounter any monsters now since my situation had changed.

"Please turn off my financial luck for now, Advastlis-sama!"

I don't want to encounter any strong monsters that provide valuable materials! Safety is more important to me right now since valuable materials are worthless if I can't bring them back with me! I dunno if he's capable of such things, but I really hope that Advastlis-sama doesn't make a rare monster appear in front of me on a whim!

"Man, I also would have bought some mapping tools if I'd known that this was going to happen to me."

The place that I had dropped down to seemed like a small room that only had one exit. As a result, I didn't need to worry about where to go from here, but

that wouldn't always be the case after I left this place. Based on my experiences with the previous dungeon floors and my memory, there was no way that I could make my way through the dungeon without hesitating as I looked for a path out.

"Well, I guess I have no choice but to search for a way out myself, so..."

I felt a sense of helplessness for the first time since I had been transported to this world, and I suppressed those feelings as I tried to walk through the passageway ahead of me without making any footstep sounds. There was no way I could avoid standing out due to the light of my lantern, but I couldn't advance without the light, and I would be at a disadvantage without it as well against monsters that could see in the dark.

A few minutes had passed since I had started walking when I suddenly heard a voice from the darkness ahead of me. "Who's there?!"

"U-Um, I'm not a suspicious person!"

My inadvertent response to the voice had been what a suspicious person would typically say. I hastily tacked on a "Please believe me!" afterward, but it was probably useless. I tried to think of an excuse as I looked for the person that I'd heard, and I eventually found a girl that was holding up a sword in her hands towards me, and she was standing at the edge of where the light of my lantern could reach.

"You're—"

I was about to say her name before I barely managed to stop myself. The girl was the solo female adventurer that was staying at The Independence, just like my party was. I knew that her name was Estelle from what Lucas-san had told me, but it would probably be very creepy if a guy that she didn't know suddenly called her by her name.

I wasn't sure how to start up a conversation with her, but she frowned in thought after she saw my face. "If I recall correctly, you're someone who stays at the same inn that I'm staying at, right?"

"Huh? Do you know who I am?" I asked.

"You stood out a lot, after all," Estelle replied.

It was kind of obvious why I knew about Estelle because a young female adventurer was very rare, and she stood out even more because she was a solo adventurer. In addition, there was no way that I wouldn't notice her since she was a cute girl. On the other hand, I was a normal guy that didn't have any defining qualities. I was probably quite young compared to most of the other adventurers that explored dungeons, but that in itself wasn't exactly rare by any means, so I was surprised that Estelle recognized my face. *Hold on, does that mean she happens to have special feelings for me?*

"It's because you looked like a kid surrounded by adults," said Estelle.

Yeah, I figured as much! I knew I was delusional about her having feelings for me, but I still feel a bit sad about this...

"I was curious about how a kid like you managed to join a party full of veteran adventurers," said Estelle. "What kind of deal did you make with them? Wait, don't tell me! You shouldn't offer yourself like that!"

Estelle blushed and shook her head as she imagined something, and I hastily raised my voice to refute her imagination. "It's not what you think it is! We're normal party members!" I had no idea what she had been imagining in her mind, and I didn't want to know either, but I heard a voice from the bottom of my heart that told me I absolutely had to deny her suspicions.

"Is that really the case?" Estelle asked. "Is there really no need for me to report to the authori—"

"There's no need for that at all! I'm actually useful to my party, so I'm not leeching off my other party members!" I exclaimed. "I am a mage, after all!"

"Oh, is that so? I guess even a kid can be useful if you're capable of using magic," said Estelle.

"I'm not a kid! Sure, I might look like one when compared to my other party members, but I'm seventeen years old!" I exclaimed.

"Huh? You're the same age as me?" Estelle asked. "You really look like someone younger, so..."

"Come on, I can't believe you're so rude!" I exclaimed. "Oh, um, can I come closer to you?"

I inadvertently rebutted Estelle's words when she opened her eyes wide out of surprise before I asked her a question. It was kind of awkward to continue talking at a distance, and I didn't want to raise my voice too much due to the possibility that monsters would notice us.

Estelle stared at my face and paused in thought for a bit before she nodded in response and lowered her sword. "Sure, I guess. However, I won't hold back if you try anything funny."

"Trust me, I won't. Besides, I'm probably much weaker than you," I said. "Okay, let me introduce myself. My name's Sai, and I'm a Rank 2 adventurer. I'm capable of using a spear and Water Magic, but I'm only capable of creating some water with my magic."

Estelle seemed to let her guard down a bit after she heard my self-introduction, and she smiled as she placed her right hand on her chest before she introduced herself in response. "In that case, let me introduce myself as well. My name's Estelle, and I'm a Rank 5 adventurer. I'm capable of using a sword and Fire Magic."

"Whoa, Rank 5? I'm really impressed that you've managed to reach such a high rank at the same age as me," I said.

"Luck played a part in this. Well, I can't really say I was lucky since I've had bad luck," said Estelle. "I got caught by a trap and fell down here, after all. Ha ha..."

Estelle had a melancholic expression on her face as she looked into the distance. Based on what Lucas-san had told me, she definitely didn't seem like a lucky person at all. However, it was a fact that she had overcome her bad luck and managed to achieve her current adventurer rank without dying up until now, so she was probably a strong person who wasn't that unlucky.

"Did you fall into a pitfall trap as well, Estelle?" I asked.

"Oh, I guess you did as well since you walked from that direction," said Estelle. "Yeah, a pitfall trap got me good. I really didn't expect to come across a trap like this."

"One of my other party members called Lucas didn't manage to notice the

pitfall trap either," I said. "I'm kind of confused why I was the only one that fell into a trap from my party, though. Maybe it was a trap that only reacts to mages and their mana."

"That might be the case. Rumors should have spread about such a dangerous trap since it's located at the upper floors of the dungeon, but the fact that I haven't heard any information about this probably means that there haven't been many people that got caught by this trap," said Estelle. "However, the trap managed to catch both of us, so we're really unlucky..."

Estelle sighed deeply at our bad luck, but I actually felt a bit relieved. "Honestly speaking, I'm glad that I bumped into you, Estelle. I wasn't sure if I would have been able to survive and escape the dungeon by myself. If you don't mind, will you party up with me until we get out of the dungeon?"

One of the reasons why I felt relieved was because there was a good chance that I could temporarily party up with a cute girl, but the biggest reason was the fact that I wouldn't have to fight by myself. I was capable of handling the monsters that could appear up to the fifth floor of the dungeon, but that was only if those battles were one-on-one. There were a lot of monsters that I couldn't defeat by myself if I were outnumbered, after all. On top of that, I wasn't sure how deep the pitfall trap was, but I was definitely at a floor that was deeper than the fifth one, so monsters here were probably way stronger than me. I wasn't carefree enough to believe that I could survive by myself. On the other hand, Estelle probably wasn't as nervous as I was since she was used to being solo on a regular basis, and there was a good chance that she would refuse to party up with someone she had met for the first time if she considered the risks of trusting a stranger. However, it would be foolish of me to not try asking, and I was prepared to cry or grovel on my knees to beg her for help even though I wasn't sure if those methods would work at all.

"I would normally say that I have no need for a burden that'll hold me back, but..."

It seemed like I had no choice but to grovel on my knees, and I was almost ready to do so while naked if it was necessary, but Estelle paused in thought for a bit before she continued her words. "The fact that you can create water would be beneficial for me. Securing water is the only issue that I can't deal

with by myself, after all.”

“Really?” I asked. “It looks like you don’t have that much luggage on you, but...”

The bag that Estelle had on her looked like it was much smaller than the one I had for carrying around my belongings. She was a solo adventurer that had been exploring the dungeon by herself, but a lot of supplies were needed for exploration such as food, water, and all sorts of tools. She hadn’t lit a lantern earlier, but there was no way that she didn’t have one on her. With all of that in mind, her bag looked like it was way too small to fit all of the necessities for dungeon exploration.

Estelle had probably noticed that I was looking at her bag, since she chuckled and tapped it lightly with her hands. “Yeah, there’s not much in here, but it can hold a lot since it’s a magic bag.”

“Huh? Seriously?” I asked. “That’s an expensive luxury good, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it is. However, my magic bag can’t hold too much luggage since it’s of average quality. I’m a solo adventurer, so I had to cut down on unnecessary things to make more space for materials from the dungeon to bring back with me,” said Estelle. “I had prepared more water compared to other supplies since it’s hard to secure and obtain water inside of the dungeon, but I still feel a bit uneasy about it in this current situation.”

“Do you have enough food on you?” I asked. “I can share some of mine if you don’t.”

“Don’t worry, I have enough, and I also prepared a decent amount of salt,” Estelle replied. “A lot of the monsters here in the dungeon are edible, and the fat from monsters can be used as another source of fuel for a lantern. I can probably survive for a few months by myself as long as I can obtain water.”

Estelle’s theory was perfectly logical, but it felt kind of weird to hear these kinds of words from someone like her that looked like a girl who had been raised by a rich family.

“Are you actually someone who’s very talented at survival, Estelle?” I asked.

A painful expression briefly appeared on Estelle’s face before she sighed and

laughed. “Well, let’s just say that I’ve had my fair share of troubles and hardships. I’m not weak enough to complain or whine in the face of adversity right now since I’ve experienced worse than this in the past.”

Uh, I honestly think our current circumstances qualify as enough to complain or whine about. I’m fairly sure that complaints would have leaked out of my mouth like a broken faucet as I tried to find a path out of this dungeon if I hadn’t bumped into you, so I really want you to party up with me to avoid that.

“So, Estelle, are you willing to party up with me? I’m a mere Rank 2 Adventurer that won’t be very reliable in battle, but I can fend for myself to a certain extent,” I said. “I’m not too confident in my ability to perform tasks that require physical labor, but I’ll do my absolute best, and I’ll create as much water as needed with my mana until it runs out. Does all of this sound good to you?”



I had tried to bring up the positive benefits for Estelle to party up with me, but I wasn't very confident about if my words were convincing enough for her. However, it seemed like my ability to create water with magic was attractive enough. Estelle paused in thought for a while before she lightly nodded and smiled as she held out her hand for a handshake. "Very well. Let's party up until we manage to get out of the dungeon. I'm counting on you, Sai."

"Thanks! I'm counting on you as well!" I exclaimed.

I felt very relieved by the warmth of Estelle's hands as I answered her handshake, and the only thing that my relaxed mind could think of was the fact that the last time I had shaken hands with a girl was back during elementary school.

To be continued...?

Afterword

Hello, I'm Itsuki Mizuho, and it's been a while. Thank you very much for purchasing Volume 5 of *To Another World... with Land Mines!* Yes, Volume 5. I really didn't think I was going to be able to make this volume happen, so it's all thanks to everyone that purchased this volume that this was possible, and I'm truly grateful for your support. As for whether Volume 6 will be released in the future, that depends on how sales go. It's time to purchase an additional copy for preservation and another for spreading the word! Well, I'm just joking, but yeah.

I believe that the people who've read this volume already and the people that haven't both know this from the cover, but this volume is very different from the web novel version. In fact, most of it is completely new content. I'm not saying that this is the reason, but there are relatively fewer pages in this volume compared to the previous ones. However, the number of words that this volume has is about the same as the number in Volume 1 to Volume 3. Volume 4 has a bit more words than the others, but the difference is less than ten percent.

On a side note, I swear this has nothing to do with the previous afterword when I wrote about how there were very few girls, but a few new girls have appeared in this volume! Yay! Well, one of them appears in a "different" form in most scenes, but still! You might be thinking that this doesn't increase the number of girls in the manga version, but the manga version has a slightly different plot, so look forward to seeing more scenes with Riva in the future. Let's hope that the manga version will continue to be serialized until Riva starts to show up. The ratio of girls to boys has tilted in favor of the girls in the manga version as of now, and there are some manga-only characters as well, so please check it out if you're interested.

As for the side story in this volume, the guy from the end of Volume 3 appears once again. In a way, his story is similar to the ones you'll find in a typical light nov—actually, maybe not. A young dude appearing with four other muscular

dudes isn't good at all for the purpose of sales since it's a completely different genre. Characters like these won't look very colorful or attractive in illustrations, so it's kind of like exploring an unknown field. A heroine character technically does show up, but she doesn't have many scenes, so I feel like this is a kind of story that would normally get rejected for a light novel. With that in mind, I'm really grateful that my editor lets me freely write what I want to do.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank Nekobyou Neko-san for your wonderful illustrations as usual along with the cute character designs for the new characters. I'd also like to thank my editor since this volume wouldn't have been released without your help, and I'm really grateful for this. I'm looking forward to our future endeavors together as well. In addition, I'd like to thank all of the readers for keeping up and reading to the end of this volume. I hope we'll be able to meet once again in the future.

Itsuki Mizuho

Once we had finished with our preparations, we headed out for our quest to slay bandits. The journey from Laffan to Kelg would take about three days with a horse-drawn carriage. The carriage itself wasn't a really comfortable ride, and that along with the idyllic scenery dampened our moods.

“We have to spend the next two days like this, huh?”

However, I heard Haruka's voice from inside of the carriage right after I sighed.

“Don't let your guard down, Nao. Bandits aren't the only things that we could get attacked by since there are monsters out there as well.”



To Another World...
with ~~LAND~~
5 MINES!





Sai

Estelle

I looked around the dining hall and saw a person that seemed to be in a similar situation.

That person looked around my age and was a rare female adventurer.

I couldn't see her face since I was sitting diagonally behind her, but her light purple shoulder length hair that was tied behind her stood out to me.

It seemed like she was about to turn around, so I hastily looked back at my plate and started to eat.



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To Another World...
with LAND
5 MINES!



**“Uh, Edith,
forgive me if I’m
wrong, but did you make
yourself look better
than you really are?”**

The silhouette of a girl appeared in the air next to Touya. She had silver hair with a tinge of blue to it, and it extended all the way down to her waist. Her body was slim and slender, and she was wearing a sky blue dress.

She looked very pretty and frail.

Yikes, I’m pretty sure I would have said yes to her right away if she had asked me for our help in that body.

Everyone was at a loss for words as a result of the phenomenon that had occurred in front of us, but Haruka was the first one among us to recover.

**“Thank you,
Haruka,” I said.**

“I-I...”

I hugged Haruka even tighter before she could say something back to me!

**“Nao, I think
you overdid it,”
said Touya.**

“Whoa...”

Upon impact, a huge pillar of flame erupted into the air, and some hot wind from that impact reached me and blew up my hair in the front even though I was standing a bit far away.



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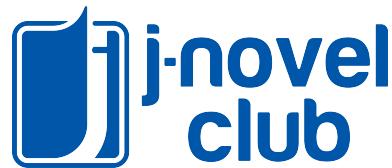
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To Another World... with Land Mines! Volume 5

by Itsuki Mizuho

Translated by Yen-Po Tseng Edited by Shakuzan

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