

WRITTEN BY
Kumanano

ILLUSTRATED BY
029

19
novel



**KUMA
KUMA
KUMA
BEAR**

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029



Seven Seas Entertainment

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Illustrated by 029

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Name: Yuna
Age: 15
Gender: Female

► Yuna's Status_

► **BEAR HOOD (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Can see the effects of weapons and tools through the beary good eyes of the hood.

► **BLACK BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Attack glove, increases power based on the user's level. Can summon the black bear Kumayuru.

► **WHITE BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Defense glove, increases defense based on the user's level. Can summon the white bear Kumakyu.

► **BLACK AND WHITE BEAR CLOTHES (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Appears to be a onesie. Reversible.
Front: Black Bear Clothes
Increases physical and magic resistance based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.
Reverse: White Bear Clothes
Automatically restores health and mana while worn.
Restoration amount and speed is based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.

► **BLACK BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
► **WHITE BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Increases speed based on the user's level.
Prevents fatigue walking long distances based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.

► **BEAR UNDERWEAR (NONTRANSFERABLE)**
Won't get dirty no matter how much they're used.
An excellent item that won't retain sweat or smells.
Will grow with the user.



◀ **KUMAYURU (CUB FORM)**
▼ **KUMAKYU**



► **BEAR SUMMONS**
Can be summoned from the bear gloves.
Can be changed into cub forms.

Skills

► FANTASY WORLD LANGUAGE

The fantasy world's language will sound like Japanese. Spoken words are conveyed to the other party in the fantasy world language.

► FANTASY WORLD LITERACY

The ability to read the fantasy world writing. Written words become the fantasy world's words.

► BEAR EXTRADIMENSIONAL STORAGE

The white bear's mouth opens into infinite space. It can hold (eat) anything.

However, it cannot hold (eat) living things.

Time will stop for objects that are inside of it.

Anything that is put into the extradimensional storage can be pulled out at any time.

► BEAR IDENTIFICATION

By looking through the bear eyes on the Bear Clothes' hood, one can see the effects of a weapon or tool.

Doesn't work without wearing the hood.

► BEAR DETECTION

Using the wild abilities of bears, can detect monsters or people.

► BEAR MAP 2.0

Any area looked at by the bear eyes can be made into a map.

► BEAR SUMMONING

Bears can be summoned from the bear gloves.

A black bear can be summoned from the black glove.

A white bear can be summoned from the white glove.

Summons, Beast Cubification: The bear summons can be transformed into bear cubs.

► BEAR TRANSPORTER GATE

By setting up a gate, can move between gates.

When more than three gates are in place, can travel to a location by picturing it.

This gate can only be opened with the bear hand.

► BEAR PHONE

Can have long-distance conversations with others.

Phone persists until caster dispels it. Physically indestructible.

Can call people a bear phone is given to by picturing the person.

Incoming call is announced by the sound of a bear's cry.

By using mana to turn the phone on or off, user can make calls.

► BEAR WATER WALKING

Gain the ability to traverse water.

Summons gain the ability to travel on water.

► BEAR TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION

You can call your summoned beasts from a distance.

Magic

► BEAR LIGHT

Mana collected in the bear glove creates a light in the shape of a bear.

► BEAR PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENT

Routing mana through the bear gear allows for physical enhancement.

► BEAR FIRE MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use fire elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WATER MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use water elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WIND MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use wind elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR EARTH MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use earth elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR ELECTRICITY MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use electricity elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR HEALING MAGIC

Can give treatment by means of the bear's kind heart.

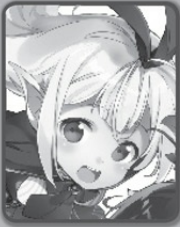
CRIMONIA



FINA

A ten-year-old girl. The first person Yuna met when she came to the other world. Yuna saved her mother. She harvests the monsters Yuna defeats. Yuna likes bringing her along.

ELF VILLAGE



LUIMIN

Sanya's little sister. Yuna helped her when she collapsed in front of the bear house in the capital. Very polite but can be clumsy.



MUMULUTE

Sanya and Luimin's grandfather. Head of the elves' village. Was once an active adventurer.

LAND OF WA



SHINOBU

A ninja girl the same age as Yuna and an excellent adventurer in her own right. Can get carried away easily but is resolute when it comes to saving her country.



SAKURA

A priestess from the Land of Wa. She can see the future in her dreams and sees Yuna rescue her country from the orochi, a giant snake-headed monster. She believes Yuna is their ray of hope.



KAGARI

Possibly a fox yokai, and one who has lived for a long time. She sealed the orochi away with Mumolute long ago and has continued to protect the area.



JYUBEI

Shinobu's master and a powerful military commander in the Land of Wa. Worked with Shinobu to trick Yuna and test her strength.

SUO

King of the Land of Wa and Sakura's uncle. As the ruler of a nation, he carries the weight of his responsibility with dignity.



Chapter 491:

The Bear Discusses the Past

AFTER COMING TO THE Land of Wa, I met Shinobu, a girl dressed like a ninja, and she asked me to help her get revenge for her father. Shinobu tried to battle Jyubei, her father's sworn enemy. When she lost, I defeated the man in her place. But that whole fight had been a sham. It was all a test to see whether I had the power to save the Land of Wa.

When I asked why she'd done all that, she told me there was a person in the Land of Wa with the power of prophetic dreams, and that that person had predicted I would be the country's only hope. They set me up to fight Mr. Jyubei, one of the most powerful people in the country, to make sure I was up to the task.

I was upset they'd tested me, at first, but I realized a girl in a bear onesie didn't exactly look like savior material. Since Shinobu seemed so genuinely serious about it when she begged me for help, I decided to meet Sakura, the person who could see the future. Sakura, who ended up being a young girl around Fina's age, told me everything. There was a powerful snake monster called the orochi sealed away in the Land of Wa, and that seal was about to break. They needed help putting it back. Sakura had seen herself die in her prophetic dreams multiple times. In those dreams, she would see a person, aglow with warm light, ride in on a beast and save her.

I couldn't just ignore a young girl asking for my help. I decided to help her, under some conditions—namely, that I'd be allowed to make a break for it if I realized it was too much for me. I mean, even I'm not all-powerful. Some things even I can't do. Plus, I'm no hero, you know?

After that, Sakura, Shinobu, and I headed over to Linesu Island, where the

oroichi had been sealed away hundreds of years ago. A fox woman lived on that island and had been protecting the seal for hundreds of years. Her name was Kagari. She was a full-grown woman with overflowing sex appeal (and breasts to boot).

Ms. Kagari told me that she'd helped seal the oroichi in the past, alongside an elf named Mumulute and some other adventurers. She told me that if I could bring Mumulute to her, she would acknowledge me as the light of hope. I happened to know an elf adventurer with exactly that name.

When she told me all of that, a part of me wondered if my role as the light of hope was actually just to bring Mr. Mumulute over to the Land of Wa. As far as I was aware, I was the only person capable of doing something like that.

I used my bear gate to instantly transport Mr. Mumulute and his granddaughter Luimin with me to the Land of Wa. Ms. Kagari started crying, celebrating, and thanking him, and Mr. Mumulute seemed kind of embarrassed for his granddaughter to witness someone making such a fuss over him.

"Well then, I would like you to inspect the seal, Mumulute. Now, all of you come with me," Ms. Kagari said as she led us out of the building.

"Are we in the woods?" Mr. Mumulute asked as soon as we were outside. He looked around. The area directly around the building had been cleared, but trees were growing thick everywhere else, so I guess it was a forest.

"Tis the same island where you sealed the oroichi," Ms. Kagari said, and that was enough for Mr. Mumulute to get the situation.

"I see. So we can battle it here on this island without endangering any towns?"

"Unfortunately, I think we are past that point." Ms. Kagari recounted how she'd modified his barrier to keep men out. "And, well, it seems that undoing the barrier I created atop your seal will undo the seal itself."

“If we need to battle the orochi anyway, is that a problem?” I figured we could go collect all the powerful men we could find. That way, we’d have more fighters on our side.

“’Tis not that simple, I’m afraid. Though the seal has weakened, battling the orochi with or without its seal could make the difference between night and day. Should we fail, the orochi would move on to the populous towns. There would be an untold number of casualties. The fear that’d sweep across Wa would feed the monster and make it all the more powerful. Removing the seal would make things much worse, even if it allowed us to bring additional fighters here.”

I guess Ms. Kagari had a point. I had no idea how much the seal did, but if, for instance, it cut the orochi’s power in half or anything like that, we’d need a lot more people to make up for losing it. But we cut our potential fighters by half *anyway* since we could only bring women to the fight. If we undid the seal, the men would be able to fight, but we’d be up against the orochi at full power. Both methods had pros and cons.

“So we shall battle the orochi while it remains sealed. If we are unable to handle it, we shall release its seal.”

“But why did you put up a barrier like that in the first place...?” Mr. Mumulute looked at Ms. Kagari for answers.

“Shinobu, please put your hands over Sakura’s ears and find a spot where you cannot hear...”

“Gotcha,” Shinobu said.

“Huh? Lady Kagari?” Sakura said. “Shinobu, why are you doing this?”

Just as Ms. Kagari had asked, Shinobu took Sakura’s hand, tugged her a short distance away, and held her hands over her ears. Once Ms. Kagari was certain they were far enough away, she began to speak.

“At the time, it was known I resided on this island. As you are aware, my

beauty is unrivaled.”

Ms. Kagari struck a seductive pose. She really was gorgeous. She had curves in all the right places, and in great proportions. This was how I’d look in a few years.

“They would arrive deep in the night upon the island. It was an unending stream of men attempting to enter my bed.”

“You could have gotten yourself a guard?”

“Yes. Even the guard attempted to pounce upon me.”

I remembered how Ms. Kagari had been dressed when we’d first met. If she’d shown up in front of a guy that close to naked, I could see him mistaking it for an advance.

“And should conflict arise on this island, or enough people with ill intent set foot on its shores, there is a possibility the accumulation of negative emotion would cause the seal to break.”

“You have a point. I can’t believe the king at the time allowed that.”

They had to have known that they’d end up needing every person they could get to fight—including the men—if the worst happened.

“Of course he did. There was, however, a certain incident that occurred that led to the barrier being set.”

“And what was that?”

“The king’s younger brother attempted treason. He had little support, but great ambition. Though he attempted to kill his elder brother, each of his schemes ended in failure.”

Right. Stuff like that tended to happen in a country with a long history.

“Then he was to be executed for his treason, but he planned to undo the seal on the orochi to kill his brother and bring the country down along with him. His followers made their way to the island. They caused quite a mess.”

Ms. Kagari was deep in the mists of memory. Guess the king's brother had been pretty desperate? Guys like that were the worst sort of trouble. I almost wished I could go back and tell him to just kill himself, if he wanted to die so badly. Leave everyone else out of it.

"And so, the former king allowed me to set a barrier to keep men out of the island."

"How did you manage to make it only work on men?"

"Men and women have different mana. I simply use that to separate them at the barrier. Some women have mana more like a man's, but it would not have been a problem if they were unable to enter the island. The opposite can also be true; however, 'tis also rare."

Right, she was isolated, so it didn't worry her if some people couldn't get to her. Ms. Kagari had said she didn't get visitors or helpers here often, either.

"Can I take my hands off her ears?" Shinobu asked, to make sure we were done talking.

"Yes, that is fine. It was not a topic fit for children, I must say."

Once she had Ms. Kagari's permission, Shinobu took her hands off of Sakura's ears.

"Ugh...what was that all about? Why did you only leave me out?"

Well, we couldn't exactly discuss men sneaking into a woman's bedroom at night in front of a little kid. What if she started to ask questions? There was no explaining that in a way a little kid could understand.

"Once you are grown up, I shall tell you. For now, forgive us for leaving you out."

"Grown up? But you let Lady Yuna and the others listen?"

"Well, these three are nearly adults, I'd say," Ms. Kagari said as she averted her eyes slightly.

“Ugh! That’s unfair.” Sakura pouted, seeming unconvinced. “Okay. But you *have* to tell me when I’m grown up, okay?”

Chapter 492:

The Bear Checks Out the Location of the Seal

MS. KAGARI AND MR. MUMULUTE told us more as we headed into the woods. No one else was around, so it was super quiet. The scenery was also peaceful, to the point where I started to doubt a giant monster like the orochi could actually be sealed here. That said...I couldn't hear any birds. I started to think that maybe they'd sensed the danger and got the heck out of there.

"So, anyway, where are we headed?"

"To the place where the orochi's head is sealed," Ms. Kagari said. "The beast's four heads and its body are sealed on this island."

"So there are five seals?"

"It was an ordeal to seal them. Had Mumulute and the others not helped us, the whole country would have fallen. They risked their lives to weaken the orochi, and that was the only way."

"It wasn't just us," Mumulute added. "Plenty of other people fought."

"Quite right," Ms. Kagari said. "And many perished in the battle."

The two of them seemed lost in the memory. The battle must have been much worse than anything I could imagine.

"Lady Kagari..." Sakura said, seeming worried.

"'Tis all in the past. Don't worry about it."

Maybe she'd lost someone important to her during the battle. I really couldn't stand things getting so heavy, so I changed the subject.

"Come to think of it, you were maintaining the seals, weren't you, Ms. Kagari? Did you notice the seals weakening before Sakura's dream?"

If memory served me right, they didn't realize anything was wrong until

Sakura's prophetic dream. It was only after that that they'd checked the island and realized the seal was weakening. I had trouble imagining Ms. Kagari hadn't noticed. She was supposed to be keeping a watch on things, wasn't she?

"Well..."

"Well?"

"I was asleep," Ms. Kagari said as she turned away.

"You were asleep?"

"Um, so Lady Kagari has periods when she sleeps for a very long time."

"I am a fox, not a human. I am able to sleep in long stretches, and in doing so, also stay conscious for several days at a time. This time, I overindulged in my liquor and slumbered for a month."

A whole month? Uh, even to me, that sounded like oversleeping. And how could she drink herself silly when she was supposed to be maintaining the barrier?

"And when we arrived, she asked us to wake her up in another month."

Another month? How much did this woman sleep?! Apparently she'd even slept for several years in the past. Should *she* be watching the barrier?

"I cannot speak for others, but I may have also been lulled into a sense of ease by the long peace."

Well, nothing had happened in centuries. Maybe that wasn't that ridiculous.

"I convinced myself this peace would last forever."

I guess that dream was over now.

After we'd been walking for a while, I caught sight of a shrine that looked just like the one Ms. Kagari lived in.

"One of the orochi's heads is sealed here."

Ms. Kagari opened the door and headed inside, then touched a mana gem

buried in the wall. The interior lit up, showing us to be within a large, empty space.

“This way.”

We followed Ms. Kagari to the middle of the room, where there was a staircase.

“Sakura, Shinobu...” Ms. Kagari said their names, then thought for a while before turning to Luimin too. “And Luimin, you three shall wait here.”

“Why? You didn’t tell us we had to last time we came here.”

“The situation has changed. ’Tis an unpleasant sight. In truth, I am reluctant to show the bear girl, but if she will fight the orochi, she should witness it.”

I didn’t want to go look at something gross, either, but this was no time to chicken out.

“Shinobu, you keep an eye on Sakura and Luimin to ensure they stay put.”

“Kumayuru and Kumakyu, you keep an eye on them too, please.”

I wasn’t so sure about tasking Shinobu with something like that all alone, so I asked my bears to help. They both crooned at us.

We left the kids behind and Ms. Kagari, Ms. Mumulute, and I forged ahead down the stairs. Once we’d gotten to the bottom, another large chasm opened under us.

“This is the tunnel they dug, then,” Mr. Mumulute said. His eyes unfocused, like he was looking into the past. Maybe one of his adventurer pals had dug the hole?

Ms. Kagari walked to the middle of the space and touched something in the ground that looked like a mana gem. A giant magic circle appeared on the ground. It was huge—tens of meters across.

The circle started to glow a reddish-black color, then flickered. What a gross color!

“Yeah, this really isn’t pleasant to see,” I said.

As we were watching the circle, it seemed to start to move. Wait, how though? I thought I was just imagining it at first, but no. The large black circle in the middle had shifted. I went on guard.

“Is there something in it?”

Ms. Kagari immediately had an answer, “‘Tis the orochi’s eye. When I visit it, it seems to glare at me.”

The orochi’s eye? The eyeball swam around us, *watching*. Now that I knew what it was, I felt even more nauseated. I agreed with her decision not to show the others. They might end up too scared to go to the bathroom on their own in the middle of the night if they saw this.

The eye swiveled and focused on one point. If I wasn’t just imagining it, the thing was looking at Mr. Mumulute. As Ms. Kagari fed some mana into the mana gem, the orochi’s eye slowly closed.

“It’s almost at its limit,” she said. “I imbue it with mana every day, but I expect the seal to break any day now.”

Okay. But if that thing was just its eyeball, just how big was this thing?

“Let me take a look around,” Mr. Mumulute said, and approached the magic circle.

“Careful not to rile it up.”

Mr. Mumulute walked over the top of the circle, occasionally tapping it. He did that a few times.

“It’s in a terrible state. We won’t be able to keep it at bay in this state.”

“I am impressed it has held up for several centuries, as it is. We left it alone all this time instead of using the long peace to try and find another solution, and now we’re paying the price.”

“It makes me feel ashamed to hear you say that. I’ve also been living within a

barrier. The little miss here saved me.”

Well, in Mr. Mumulute’s case, it wasn’t like a monster had suddenly awakened after being sealed away. Some monsters had just snuck into an area they were supposed to be sealed off from. I kind of doubted they could have done much else to address the issue.

“We cannot keep the peace by sitting idly. Knights and soldiers train to keep the peace and protect us from the dangers of monsters. We must do so as well.”

“But a threat as big as the orochi can’t be completely prepared for, right?”

“We had enough time to think of a way. The people of the Land of Wa failed to do so. I suppose I was not thinking, either, when I created another barrier to keep all men away.”

She did have a point. A few centuries of life was enough time to think things through a little more, huh?

“But at the same time, a few hundred years is enough time to forget about the orochi altogether. Newer generations no longer remembered what it was like to battle the monster, and it began to seem less dangerous.”

I knew I wouldn’t really get it if someone told me about a battle I hadn’t been around for. I’d know, like, *rationaly* that it was bad, but I wouldn’t be able to feel their fear or suffering in my gut. To me, the Warring States period of Japan might as well be a fairy tale or a fantasy movie.

“This has happened because the Land of Wa grew lax, and I did as I liked without care for the consequences. We created this mess, and have invited this disaster on ourselves. I wish I could have warned my past self not to be so foolish.”

She shouldn’t be so hard on herself. If I’d been in the same situation as Ms. Kagari, I would’ve tried to keep people away too. I mean, my bear houses kind of had that kind of setup already.

“I don’t think that’s true,” I said. “It’s important to protect yourself too. You didn’t consider moving into the castle, though?”

“Even if I helped defeat the orochi, I am still a centuries-old fox. I cannot live alongside humans. Only a select few are even aware of my existence. If I stay too long at the castle, people will begin to think it odd—and I much prefer being on my own, as it is.”

Ah, so she was a shut-in! Just like me.

“So, Mr. Mumulute, do you think there’s anything we can do about this?” I asked as I listened to them inspect the magic circle.

“Just as you said, Kagari, the seal and barrier are complexly intertwined. If we undo the barrier, the entire seal would be undone. They are linked.”

“Is there a way to undo one seal at a time? If we can limit the scope of the battles, we might be able to manage.”

“There is a method to do that, but I must see the location of the other seals before determining that.”

“Mumulute, I’ve caused so much trouble for you. I’m sorry,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Don’t worry about it. We’ve fought side by side, haven’t we? I intend to do what’s within my abilities to help.”

“Thank you.” Ms. Kagari smiled.

Excuse me, I’m still here, I wanted to say. But I guessed I shouldn’t butt in.

After we finished checking on the seal, we all headed up the stairs and returned to Sakura and the others. The three of them were all resting, leaning against my two bears.

After that, we headed out to check on the underground seals on the orochi’s other heads.

“That leaves just one head and its body to check, then.”

“Oh, Master Mumulute, what do you make of the situation?”

“It’s only a matter of time until the seals break,” he said.

“So it’s true, then.”

“But I’m still impressed they lasted as long as they have. And that Kagari protected this land on her own. You accomplished something great by allowing no others to set foot here. Had you not created your barrier, the seals likely would have broken much sooner.”

I guess putting up the barrier *had* been the right thing to do. At the same time, if they’d been able to gather a ton of people to fight the orochi, maybe they could have beaten it instead of putting it off for this long. All I could do was theorize. It wasn’t like I’d ever know for sure.

“In order to reseal it, we will need to weaken the orochi. I’ve discussed this with Kagari, but we are thinking of handling its heads one at a time.”

“Do you think that really will be possible?”

“If we temporarily strengthen all the other seals, it may well be. However, even a single head is powerful. It all rests on how many people of suitable prowess we can recruit to help.”

“Shinobu, how does that effort fare?” Ms. Kagari asked.

Everyone looked at Shinobu, who’d be the best informed on that kind of thing.

“Well, if the seal breaks, we’ve got soldiers gathered near the harbor, but...” Shinobu gave an awkward glance at Sakura.

“What is it?”

“If the orochi fully recovers its strength, our plan is to put a buncha mages on a boat an’ lead the orochi away from land.”

“And then to attack it from the ship?”

“No, all they’d do is lead the orochi away from the country.”

So their plan was to draw it away, huh?

“But if they do that, what happens to the people on the ship...?”

“They don’t figure they’ll be goin’ home. And they won’t be makin’ an escape, either. One hit from the orochi and the ship will go right down.”

And if it went after them once the ship was overturned...

“So they plan to stake their lives on this,” Ms. Kagari commented.

“But no one informed me...”

“No one wanted to worry you, Lady Sakura. It didn’t change your prophecies. So His Highness doesn’t think it would work, but some people are still saying we need a backup plan.”

I guess they couldn’t tell if it’d work unless they tried it. If they didn’t, the country was doomed for sure.

“We wouldn’t want it to come to that.”

“If we fail, the orochi would come right on back to the Land of Wa.”

If Sakura’s prophecies were right, there was little hope for success.

“If we let the orochi escape, there’s a chance it could move on to other countries,” Sakura said. “We would be forcing another country to deal with a problem it was our responsibility to stand against here.”

“I understand how you feel, Sakura, but a country’s leaders must prioritize its interests over those of other nations. If Suo must take that action, you cannot blame him,” Ms. Kagari told her.

“...”

Everyone wanted to be safe, but a king had to think about what was best for his country. Even if that meant creating issues for other nations. I knew that, but I didn’t know how to *feel* about it.

“And that is why we will strive to make sure he will not *need* to make that decision,” Ms. Kagari said, placing a hand on Sakura’s downcast head.

“Yes,” Sakura replied as she lifted her chin again.

It’d be real bad if the orochi ended up in Mileela. I guess we’d have to defeat it here, then.

Chapter 493:

The Bear Feels Signs the Orochi Is Awakening

WE FINISHED CHECKING on the fifth seal. Given how far apart each one was, the orochi was pretty big. Maybe even on the scale of the kraken.

“So, Mumulute, do you believe we will be able to temporarily strengthen the seals?” Ms. Kagari asked Mr. Mumulute once he finished checking all the seals.

“If we set up magic circles and have enough mana gems, it should be possible. However, I’m not sure how much time it would really give us.”

“Ha ha. If it increases our chances even a little, that’s enough. Now we simply pray and see how much grace this buys us.”

She was right that doing nothing would ensure our defeat. If we could just keep it sealed for a little longer, we had a chance to prepare.

“I’ll go back to the village and start getting ready. Miss, could I get your help with that?”

I didn’t have an issue with that. Everyone present knew about my bear gate, so I didn’t need to hide it. I pulled it out and opened it up to the elves’ village.

“Well, I’m off,” Mr. Mumulute said.

“And I am counting on you.”

“Since I’d just get in the way here, I’ll go back with my grandfather and help him,” Luimin said and headed to the gate with Mr. Mumulute.

Right then, Sakura spoke up.

“Miss Luimin, I’m so very happy to have met you. So, um, please come back, won’t you?” Luimin glanced at me.

“Right... Once this whole business with the orochi dies down, I’ll bring Luimin back.”

Sakura seemed happy about that.

“Luimin, I’m going to close the door gate for now, so let me know once you’re done.”

“All right.”

Mr. Mumulute headed through the gate first, followed by Luimin, but only after she waved Sakura goodbye. Sakura waved back. Once they passed through and I closed the door, I put away my gate.

“What a curious doorway.”

“Indeed,” Ms. Kagari said. “I would want one myself, if I could only use it.”

“I’m the only one it works for,” I reminded her. Though, more accurately, it would only work for my bear puppets.

“Well, then wouldn’t it be possible to just leave the door open?”

“It’d use up my mana, so no.”

“I’m sure something such as that would consume quite a bit as well,” Ms. Kagari said.

“That’s a shame,” Shinobu said.

It didn’t, actually. Still wasn’t like I could leave the gate open indefinitely, though.

“Then shall we begin our own preparations? Shinobu, take Sakura back with you. Tell Suo what has happened.”

“All right. But what should I tell His Majesty? That Mr. Mumulute is creating a stronger barrier? But that gate he used to come here is a secret, isn’t it? I can’t explain Mr. Mumulute being here. If I talk about the gate, I’ll end up dead.”

“You do have a point,” Ms. Kagari said, looking at where my gate had just been.

We really did need to update the king, though, and tell him when the fight would start so we could talk about who else could join us. It wasn’t like the four

of us could decide the strategy all on our own. The whole country was at stake. We needed to know who'd be fighting with us and how powerful they were. I didn't mind helping, but if I was going to drag anyone down, then it might be better if I wasn't around for the battle. I didn't want to watch anyone die, but I couldn't do this by myself.

In the worst case, maybe we would need to draw it away from the country with a boat. Then maybe it'd head over to undeveloped lands where nobody lived.

"Simply inform him Mumulute just so happened to pass this way."

I guess Ms. Kagari couldn't be bothered with thinking up an excuse. But thinking about it, the contract magic really did make it difficult to explain Mr. Mumulute's presence.

"The bear girl came to the nation by happenstance as well, after all. Why would it be a problem to have just one more coincidence? Simply tell him that Mumulute wished to see a peerless beauty such as myself after all these centuries."

Ms. Kagari *was* pretty, but it was a little strange to hear her say it herself. A ton of people had probably told her that, though. Not like that would ever happen to me.

I compared my boobs to Ms. Kagari's. Yeah, men probably preferred them bigger, like hers.

"If he asks me about it, I'll be relyin' on you to explain it, Lady Kagari."

"Only inform Suo about Mumulute. Say whatever you need to, and it should work. I know one or two hundred of his weaknesses, so you needn't worry about anything else."

Wait—that wasn't very reassuring. And one or two hundred weaknesses? That was way too many for any king to have. Then again, if she'd known him since he was little, I guess that gave her a big advantage.

Shinobu and Sakura were going to head back, but I worried about whether Shinobu would be able to explain things.

“Okay, I’ll take you over.”

We’d come here on my bears. I needed to take them back, of course.

“I’m sorry for imposing.”

We still had time until Mr. Mumulute would be back. Even if I waited until after I heard back from Luimin, I’d still have plenty of time.

“I’ll take Sakura back and come right back here.”

“What a curious young girl you are,” Ms. Kagari said. “And with such a strange outfit too.”

“Ms. Kagari, considering how you look like a fox, I’d prefer if you didn’t comment on my appearance.”

“However, unlike you, I am a real fox.”

Her ears pricked up. My bears both crooned. They seemed to be protesting.

“I never claimed you two weren’t bears,” Ms. Kagari said.

Everyone laughed at that. No one would ever deny my bears weren’t real bears.

“Ha ha. Well, shall we go?”

“I shall accompany you halfway there,” Ms. Kagari offered.

Sakura and Shinobu got on Kumakyu, and I got on Kumayuru with Ms. Kagari.

“How pleasant it is to ride this bear,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Cwoon.”

“What is it?”

“My bear says, ‘Of course!’”

“What cheek! I do believe you could not compete with my own tail in

softness.” Ms. Kagari’s tail swayed as she said that.

“Cwoon.”

“What was that?”

“Cwoon.”

“No, I believe mine is better,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Cwoon.”

As I listened to their argument, we headed off to the shoreline. Then, once we caught sight of it, my bears looked over at the ocean and crooned to alert us about something.

“What is it?!” Sakura shouted in surprise at Kumakyu. Seeing my bears’ reactions, I immediately used my detection skill.

Volkrows?

I saw signals for them using my skill. And that wasn’t all—I even saw wyverns. I’d fought wyverns on Talgwei. Did this world seriously have that many of them? But then something else surprised me even more.

What? I saw a signal for an orochi blinking on and off. As soon as it showed up, it’d blink away and come back again. Was that because it was sealed away? Or...was the seal failing?

I didn’t have any way of checking and I sure didn’t have time to think about it either.

“Esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru, is something the matter?”

“Monsters are coming,” I said.

“What?” Ms. Kagari asked.

They weren’t headed our way, but it looked like they were gathering together somewhere.

“That direction is...”

Was that the location the orochi was sealed? I turned to look in that direction. They really were headed there.

“Ms. Kagari, just to make sure, when the orochi appeared before, did a lot of monsters gather around it?”

“Indeed, other monsters did appear. ’Twas almost as though the orochi drew them in.”

Maybe it was calling the monsters over so it could eat them?

“What is it?”

“The monsters are going toward the seals.”

“What?!”

To make matters worse, it wasn’t just one seal they were headed to. I had a bad feeling about this.

I needed to head over to the monsters to slay them right away, but I couldn’t leave Sakura here. I could ask Kumakyu to take her to the mainland, but if they were attacked on the ocean, it’d be dangerous. My bear wouldn’t be able to fight with someone on their back.

The solution was obvious. The safest place for her was through the bear gate.

“Sakura, I want you to go to Luimin through the gate.”

I pulled out the bear gate again and opened it to the elven village.

“Lady Yuna?” Sakura seemed confused by how sudden this was.

“Once the monsters are dead and it’s safe, I’ll come back to get you. I’m sorry, but you need to do this for now.”

I pushed Sakura through the gate.

“What about Shinobu?”

“I’ll help Yuna out. Sounds like the monsters are headin’ to the seals right now. If they are, the more people around, the better.”

And so, we only sent Sakura through the gate.

“I’ll ask Luimin to come get you, so don’t move after you go through the gate.”

“A-all right. Please don’t do anything dangerous, everyone.”

Sakura seemed to have understood she would just get in our way if she stayed, so she didn’t ask to stick around.

I closed the door and pulled out my bear phone to call Luimin. She came on immediately.

“Yuna?”

“Luimin, I sent Sakura over to you, so please meet up with her.”

“Did something happen?”

“Monsters have started gathering here. I sent Sakura over there, so she’ll be safe.”

“The monsters what?!”

“I think it might be a sign the seal is breaking, so tell Mr. Mumulute to hurry.”

“Got it.”

I hung up.

“So, girl, do you know what the monsters are doing then?”

“It looks like they’re gathering around the first seal we visited.”

There were others around the other seals, but not as many.

“And yet we just used mana to quell the orochi there... We must hurry!”

Ms. Kagari and I headed off on Kumayuru while Shinobu rode Kumakyu.

“My word. I thought we could make something of this with Mumulute here, and now monsters are gathering.”

“But thanks to Yuna, we noticed them right away and we got Lady Sakura to

safety. We just gotta stop the monsters from attacking right now. Then Mr. Mumulute can strengthen the seals.”

“Yes, quite right,” Ms. Kagari said. “We simply need to slay the monsters.”

Just focus on taking down the monsters. Then Mr. Mumulute would come and strengthen the seals, and we could fight the orochi’s heads one by one.

Chapter 494: The Bear Protects the Seals

AS WE WERE HEADED toward the seals, Ms. Kagari looked overhead and shouted, “Are those wyverns?”

The monsters were revolving around in the air as though they were searching for something.

“And it’s not just one of ’em either,” Shinobu said.

I counted at least ten via my detection skill.

“What are those little black bird ones?” Shinobu asked.

“Those seem to be volkrows,” Ms. Kagari answered.

To the naked human eye, they just looked like crows at this distance. It seemed Ms. Kagari could make them out clearly, though. Maybe foxes had good eyes? Or maybe that was just because she was Ms. Kagari?

“There’s a lot of them,” Shinobu said.

I had no idea where these volkrows were coming from, but they were gathering on the island. There were too many to count, even with the aid of my detection skill.

“It looks like they’re fighting with the wyvern,” Shinobu said.

It did kind of look like they were fighting in the sky above an area where the orochi’s head was sealed.

“Cwoon.”

Kumayuru and Kumakyu both stopped.

“What is it? What say the bears?”

“They say the monsters are gathering at each of the seals, so which one

should we go to?”

“All five of them?!”

“Looks like just to the four spots where the heads are.”

I checked using my detection skill. They weren’t anywhere near where the body was sealed.

“They may indeed be a meal for the orochi,” Ms. Kagari said.

I agreed with that. I could completely imagine the orochi gathering up all these monsters for a snack.

“Even if they are its food, it’s not like it can eat ’em when it’s still sealed.”

“The seal may be close to breaking.”

The seals hadn’t started to break because I came to the Land of Wa, right? For a moment, that thought crossed my mind, but Ms. Kagari had another theory.

“This may well be Mumulute’s influence. It seemed as though the orochi’s eyes were watching Mumulute as he checked on each of the seals.”

I shuddered as I remembered those creepy eyes.

“The orochi may have reacted to the presence of Mumulute’s mana. The very same person who once sealed it just reappeared before it, after all. It may be - raging behind its seal. Perhaps that caused the seal to weaken and allowed it to call upon the monsters.”

That was Ms. Kagari’s theory. I could believe it. The creature had been trapped by the same mana for years and years—it wasn’t farfetched to think it could have recognized that mana in Mr. Mumulute.

“Does that mean that the monsters wouldn’t have gathered if Mr. Mumulute hadn’t come here?!” Shinobu asked.

“That I do not know. It seems the seal is bound to break, sooner or later. This simply means the inevitable will happen sooner.”

“You make it sound so simple, but we haven’t prepared at all yet!”

“Had Mumulute not come, we would not have spoken about strengthening the seal. We would have been unprepared, even in his absence. All we must do is fight off the monsters to protect the seals, then have Mumulute strengthen them once he can.”

She made it sound simpler than it was, but she was right. If Mr. Mumulute had never come here, we never would have talked about strengthening the seals. All we could have done was wait for the seals to break. Thanks to Mr. Mumulute, we had a plan.

It was better that he’d come, but now we had to deal with a huge downside. To reap any benefits from this plan, though, we needed to slay the wyverns and volkrows and protect the seals.

“Four seals is quite a large job. And we have only the three of us.”

Ms. Kagari looked at me and Shinobu. She had no idea how strong I might be, but she was counting me anyway, maybe because she really believed Sakura and Mr. Mumulute.

“You mean we’re fighting the monsters on our own?”

Shinobu looked uneasy.

“If we do not, the seals will be undone and the orochi will revive.”

“I know, but can we really handle four of them? Even if one person handles each seal, we only have three people.”

“Yes, that indeed is a problem. However, we must act quickly. We’ll simply have to run to the fourth seal after finishing the ones we’re initially tackling.”

My bears crooned. They were responding to what we were saying—telling us to leave it to them.

“What is it?”

“They say they’re ready to fight,” I translated.

If Kumayuru and Kumakyu counted as one, then we could protect all four

seals. The monsters were volkrows and wyverns. Kumayuru had fought them in the past, so my bears could handle them. I didn't like the idea of leaving them on their own, but we needed to do anything we could to stop the orochi from reviving.

"My bears and I will take the two on the right," I said. That way, I'd be close enough to run right over if they got hurt.

"You're going to have your bears fight?"

"They should be able to handle normal monsters."

"Normal? You realize these are wyverns?" Shinobu said.

"I've fought wyverns before. They should be able to buy us some time. And I'll run over to them as soon as I'm done with mine." I just needed to take down my monsters and then join my bears right after.

"We are wasting time. If these bears can fight, then so be it. Let us move," Ms. Kagari said.

"Right. It's not like gabbin's gonna get us more people. We gotta fight these monsters off as soon as we can. I'll take the leftmost one."

Shinobu leapt off of Kumakyu and ran, with ridiculous speed, over to her spot. She really did look like a ninja when she did that.

"Then I shall take the one that remains, which seems to be the second to the left. Kumayuru and Kumakyu, was it? I shall come to you once I am done, so do not put yourselves in harm's way."

Ms. Kagari took off too. I saw her tail wagging under her clothes.

"Kumayuru and Kumakyu, You're up against wyverns and volkrows. Make sure to keep away from the poison in the volkrows' beaks. And wyverns have sharp claws too. Work together to fight them."

They both crooned at me.

"And also..."

While I worried over them, Kumayuru and Kumakyu's ribbons around their necks started to glow. It was almost like they were telling me they'd be all right because they had the bearyllium.

"I know you two are stronger now, but you can't push yourselves too hard."

They both crooned at me. That sounded a lot like a "We know." I felt like a parent fussing over her kids.

"Once I'm done with my monsters, I'll run right over to you."

They both crooned once more, then ran off together. Finally, I dashed toward the seal that was my responsibility.

I'd said I would run over to my bears as soon as I was done, but I'd actually gone for the largest group of monsters. I had a clear view of them in my detection skill, so I could make a beeline for it. I had no idea how strong Shinobu or Ms. Kagari were, so it wasn't like I could force them to take this spot on, so I took it instead.

Once I got to the seal, I found a ton of volkrows and wyvern hovering in the air around the seal. I'd chosen to take on this spot, but it still felt like I'd drawn the shortest straw.

When I arrived, the volkrows opened their distinctive red beaks and started to crow. When the dozen or so of them all cried out at once, it was pretty loud.

I hurled an air blade at them to shut them up, and that was how the battle started.

Once the volkrows knew I was an enemy, they started their attack. Then even the wyverns joined in. There were four of those in total.

Since I couldn't destroy the building or risk undoing the seal, I stuck to hurling air blades, then withdrawing to pull them away. But of course, the monsters wouldn't leave the building. Even when I did manage to draw some away, the

volkrows and wyverns would start a turf war over the building, and they'd head right back. I was glad they weren't free to fly as they pleased, but it was still a pain to deal with them. I kind of wanted to knock them all out at once with some ginormous magical spell, but I couldn't without potentially destroying the building and seal.

I steadily got rid of the volkrows using air blades as they came to the building, but the wyverns were flapping their wings behind the volkrows and shooting off their own air blades too. They were attacking both me and the volkrows.

I used earth magic to create a wall to defend myself. I couldn't see them past the wall, but I heard the volkrows thud to the ground. I gripped my bear knives and leapt out to their side.

The wyverns aimed more air blades at me. I dodged to the right and left as the blades carved marks into the ground. While I dodged, I got up close to the wyverns. The one I was close to tried to run, but as it flapped its wings, I poured mana into my knives and sliced through its neck. The monster collapsed to the ground.

Well, one down...

Just as I thought that, the fight between the volkrows and wyverns near the building kicked off. One of the wyverns hit and destroyed part of the building.

"Hey!"

I unleashed an air shot to get the wyvern away, but another one took the place of the volkrows. It flew right above the roof, roaring as though declaring the spot as its own.

Chapter 495: Each of Their Battles

SHINOBU'S BATTLE

AFTER LEAVING YUNA and the others, I ran.

I didn't ever imagine something like this could happen after getting to the island. We'd come here across the ocean on Yuna's bears. Since we promised we wouldn't tell anybody else about her bears being able to run on water, we'd only told His Majesty that we were coming here.

I stopped in my tracks, grabbed some paper and a writing utensil, then wrote a short note: "Monsters attacking island. Seal may break."

Then I summoned Piisuke, my bird, in my hand. Like Hayatemaru, Piisuke was my small summon.

I rolled up the paper and put it into a small tube tied around Piisuke's neck.

"Careful of monsters as you go."

Piisuke let out a chirp that sounded a lot like a "pii" and flew off.

After making sure Piisuke was on his way, I ran even faster to make up for the time I lost writing the letter.

Once I was in front of the building where the seal was, I saw the volkrows circling above it. It looked almost like they were trying to find a way into the building.

I tried searching for wyverns, but I didn't see any around. Why? I didn't have to think for too long. It was obvious that Yuna had caused this.

Kumayuru and Kumakyu had sensed the monster attack, and they'd

communicated that to Yuna. If they could tell which monsters were around, it'd make sense if they had told her no wyverns were around here. Yuna must have taken the areas with more wyverns. That must have been why she'd taken the two seals to the right side.

"Haah..." All I could manage was a sigh.

It wasn't even her country that was in peril! If she'd run away, no one would have blamed her. I couldn't believe that she'd taken the most dangerous location.

The first time I'd seen Yuna, I'd been surprised. There was her outfit, yeah, but also how she'd been riding on bears that were running on top of the ocean's waves. At first, I couldn't be sure she was the light of hope that could defeat the mythical orochi. But she was strong, despite being dressed like a cute bear. She'd won in a fight against my teacher, who I stood no chance against.

I'd been training since I was young. People told me I had talent, and I believed myself powerful, but there was always someone better. I'd never been able to defeat my teacher before, and there were people even stronger than him. I'd been sure that I wouldn't lose to a girl my age. When I saw Yuna and my teacher fight, I realized how weak I really was. She was vastly better at handling her weapons and magic than me.

Yuna had also seen the fight between me and my teacher, which meant she knew how powerful I was. That must have been why she chose the spot with the most monsters for herself.

No one had told her to. She'd just done it like it was the natural thing to do.

She was a mysterious girl in a cute bear suit. Yuna had told me her secrets because it'd help defeat the orochi. She had a magical tool that allowed her to talk with people far away, and one that let her move from one spot to another in an instant. Of course, she couldn't share those secrets lightly. That was why she'd made us use contract magic. I wondered what she would have done if I'd

said no to the contract or had run away.

Lady Sakura was a good person. She wouldn't have talked, with or without a contract. Lady Kagari wasn't the kind of person who'd repay the favor Yuna had done her by bringing Mr. Mumulute here with betrayal.

As for me? I'd done the worst thing I could have to her. I'd secretly investigated Yuna, tested her, tricked her, then made her do my bidding. But she hadn't been upset at me. I couldn't betray her again. Not now.

I reached into my robe and pulled out a dagger. After taking a big breath, I ran toward the volkrows. Even though I had the easiest seal to deal with, that didn't mean I could slack off. I'd finish them off as quick as I could, then head to the next spot. Then I'd go help Yuna.

Using the fencing around the building, I leapt onto the roof. The moment I was up there, the volkrows grew agitated. I had to finish this quickly.

I poured mana into my dagger and swung it. That was how I unleashed wind blades that sailed toward the volkrows. Using a weapon made using this type of magic easier, since it helped visualize the image of the wind blades. It made them sharper too.

That was why I'd been impressed to see Yuna using her hands to do the same thing. Her air blades were also a lot sharper and quicker. That was how much better she was than me. I'd never reach her level. There was no point in getting jealous—some people were just geniuses, and that was just how it was. It didn't matter if I wasn't the best. I had to fight with everything I had.

I unleashed another air blade from my dagger and took down the volkrows.

KUMAYURU AND KUMAKYU'S BATTLE

AROUND THE TIME that Yuna had reached the orochi's seal, Kumayuru and

Kumakyu had gotten to theirs.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

They cried out to each other at the same time. It seemed that they’d been competing over who could reach the seal first in order to help Yuna.

Alas, no one had been there to watch them, so they had no way of knowing who’d arrived first. They started to bicker with each other, trying to convince the other that they’d been the one to arrive first.

This wasn’t the time to fight over something so trivial! A wyvern was eating a volkrow right before their very eyes. When they looked up, another volkrow was being menaced by a wyvern.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

The two bears scowled. The command they’d received from Yuna was to protect the seal in the building from the wyverns and volkrows, but also not to do anything dangerous. They both understood that if they got hurt, Yuna would be upset. They both were very careful not to get injured.

As the bears crept up on the wyvern, which was enjoying its meal, the monster raised its head and roared. It was upset to have its meal disturbed. The bears themselves, not upset, just crooned in protest at the noise.

After swallowing the volkrow meat, the wyvern took a step toward the bears and opened its maw wide, as though it’d just found its next prey.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

The bears braced their back legs and prepared for battle.

The wyvern flapped its wings and took to the air, started to circle the bears, and suddenly flew at them. Its sharp claws raked toward the bears, who split to

the right and left to avoid the charge. Once the wyvern was closer to the ground, the bears both attacked it. But the wyvern immediately flapped its wings to dodge.

“Cwoon.”

Kumayuru looked upset watching the wyvern in the sky.

While Kumayuru was stuck on the ground, unable to do anything about the wyvern flying high in the sky, several volkrows assaulted the bear.

“Cwoon!”

Kumayuru waved their arms and opened their mouth threateningly to menace the approaching volkrows away.

“Cwoon!”

Despite pleading for help, Kumayuru saw that Kumakyu was already fighting another wyvern.

“Cwoon!”

When Kumayuru braced themselves, the bearyllium in their ribbon began to glow. When they brought down their paw, several wind blades flew from their claws and sliced through the volkrows. Then Kumayuru immediately headed to help Kumakyu with the wyvern. As though to get in the bear’s way, the wyvern that had flown into the sky came back to attack Kumayuru again.

“Cwoon!”

They were each facing off against a wyvern now, with the volkrows circling around them in the background. The bears kept an eye on the volkrows as they took on their main foes.

“Cwoon!”

“Cwoon!”

When Kumayuru cried out, Kumakyu answered. Then they each swiped at the wyverns with wind blades from their claws.

Their battles truly began.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

Kumayuru swerved to the right and left to draw the attention of the wyvern as Kumakyu circled around to avoid Kumayuru’s path. The two bears continued to fight while keeping out of each other’s way. Then at some point, the two bears reconvened. They were rump to rump as they covered each other’s backs.

The two wyverns circled above the bears. They were biding their time. While Kumayuru and Kumakyu watched, the wyvern flew down to attack from above. The bears faced the wyverns down.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

Their ribbons glowed. The bearyllium contained inside could increase their physical abilities. Kumayuru and Kumakyu ran toward the wyverns, and when they collided, their sharp claws met those of the wyverns’. Kumayuru and Kumakyu managed to graze the two monsters and draw blood. The wyverns screeched out in anger.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

The two bears didn’t stop their attacks. This was their chance! They needed to attack now that the wyverns were on the ground with them. The moment they tried, however, they heard something crumble from behind them.

A volkrow had broken through one wall of the building. The bears needed to protect the seal within that building.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

The two bears talked it over. Yuna had asked them to protect the seal and the

building that contained it, but she'd also asked them to fight the monsters.

They decided on their priorities.

"Cwoon."

"Cwoon."

Kumakyu ran to the building. Kumayuru stood in front of the wyverns as though protecting Kumakyu's back. Kumakyu protected the building from the volkrows while Kumayuru kept the wyverns occupied.

After taking down the volkrow that was trying to break into the building, Kumakyu leapt onto the roof to fight the ones up above the building. But the volkrows escaped into the air.

"Cwoon."

The volkrows that escaped started to circle the building overhead. Kumakyu waved their arm and let an air blade loose from their claws to protect the building.

While Kumakyu was protecting the building, the battle between Kumayuru and the wyverns heated up again.

The wyverns attacked from above as Kumayuru waited on the ground.

"Cwoon," Kumayuru crooned out to the wyverns.

Then the monsters flapped their wings and flew into the air. Meanwhile, Kumayuru ran across the ground to chase after the escaping wyverns. Kumayuru turned around and leapt at the wyverns they were chasing. Then Kumayuru aimed for them and swiped with their claws.

Even though it looked like a perfect hit, the monsters suddenly flapped their wings and headed farther up into the sky. At the very last moment, Kumayuru's attack missed them.

"Cwoon." The bear landed on the ground, disappointed.

Next, the bear poured mana into their paw and swiped at the wyverns hovering above with a wind blade. The wyverns just dodged it. Kumayuru was undeterred, however, and swiped over and over again with more blades.

As the monsters attempted to escape from those, something white attacked them from behind.

“Cwoon.”

Kumakyu had used the roof as a launching point to leap at the wyverns and attack them. Kumayuru had been guiding the monsters with their air blades toward the building. There, Kumakyu had been waiting to attack from the roof. They had slashed through a wyvern’s wings.

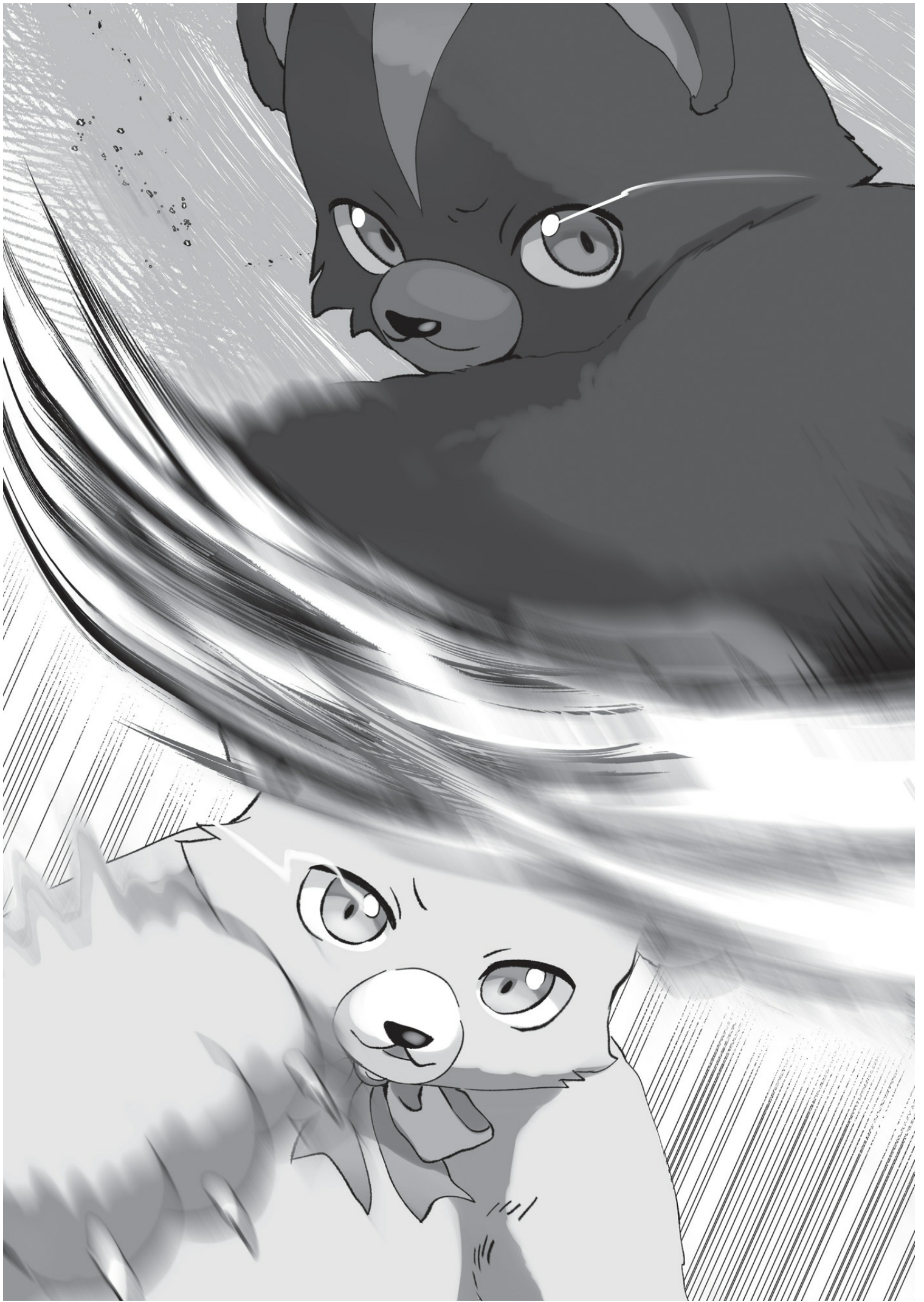
The wyvern fell to the ground. When it tried to get back up, Kumayuru plunged their claws into its neck.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

The bears had used teamwork to defeat their foe.

Now they only had to fight the remaining wyvern and the volkrows. The two bears had the advantage now. Meanwhile, Kagari had also arrived at the building of her seal.



I NEEDED TO FINISH this quickly and go to the bears. I worried for Shinobu and the bear girl, but the two bears seemed the most vulnerable. I did not know how powerful the bear girl was, but Mumulte trusted in her ability to battle. Though she dressed oddly, Shinobu and Sakura both acknowledged her abilities.

I already knew Shinobu. Though she was somewhat flippant, at her core, the girl is of earnest character. As Jyubei's pupil, she also was powerful in her own right. Though I could not say she was a top-class fighter, considering her youth, she was powerful enough. I could leave her to fight a wyvern on her own. The only concern was how many she would be facing. If there were too many, the worst could possibly come to pass.

I could say the same as well of the bears and the bear girl. I felt anxious for all of them. I thought I must defeat these monsters quickly and make haste to go to my companions.

A murder of volkrows was circling the building I was charged to protect, and above them, I found two wyverns.

"First I will deal with these volkrows that are in the way."

One of the monsters swooped toward me.

"Kagaribi—Kagari fire!"

I created a ball of fire through the mana I accumulated in my hand and sent it flying at the monster. As the fire engulfed the volkrow, it screeched and fell to the ground.

The other volkrows turned to me in response.

"I'll turn all of you into grilled meat, so come!"

I took them down one by one as they attacked me. This worked out for the best, as it took them away from the building and brought them straight to me. I

could not use fire near the building, after all.

Then, in the middle of my battle, another large bird-like creature swooped down from above and began to eat the volkrows I'd already defeated. The second wyvern also followed and landed on the ground.

"Kagaribi!"

I attempted to attack the wyvern that was eating, but it blocked me with its wing. The wyvern let out a cry and turned to me. It seemed that it hadn't appreciated the interruption to its meal. Well, I felt much the same when I was distracted from my drinking, so I understood its protestations. Regardless, I was still obliged to interrupt.

The wyvern abandoned the volkrows, then spread and flapped its wings. It sent blades of wind flying toward me. I dodged. I attempted to attack it with more fire, but the flames were rendered harmless by the thick skin of its wings. Yes, I suppose I couldn't expect this to be as easy as the volkrows.

I wished to preserve my strength, considering the impending threat of the orochi, however, if I held back here and allowed the building to be destroyed, and thus the seal, that would be a great disaster.

And this would not end simply after defeating these monsters. The bear girl, Kumayuru and Kumakyu, and Shinobu were also fighting as well. If even one seal broke, that would spell the end.

I braced myself. My clothing rustled, and a second, new tail appeared from under my clothes.

"Whew...fighting for the first time in a blue moon has tired me out."

I swished my tail to make sure nothing was wrong with it.

"Well, shall we continue where we left off?"

I TOOK DOWN THE REST of the volkrows and finished up. We'd been fighting in close quarters, so I had volkrow blood all over me.

"It's over."

I didn't know whether to stay and protect this area or to go and support the others. I'd been planning to go to the others from the start, but as I fought, the volkrows had continued to gather. And there was a chance other types of monsters would appear too.

I needed to make a decision soon.

I climbed up a tall tree nearby and checked my surroundings. I looked in Yuna's direction and saw several wyverns flying around. As I'd suspected—she definitely had the most monsters to deal with. I could see wyverns flying above where the bears and Lady Kagari were, too.

I couldn't decide whether to stay here, or prepare for more monsters to come. But soon enough, the decision was made for me. I saw three wyverns flying over the ocean in my direction. It didn't seem like they intended to give me a break.

As they soared toward me, I hoped internally they would pass by. Was that terrible of me? It wasn't like I could do anything about it if they *did* pass me by.

I stood on the very top of the roof, and the wyverns descended on me. I couldn't tell if they were coming toward me because they happened to spot me or if they'd been called to the orochi's seal like the other ones.

"Three of them, huh..."

As they closed in, I realized how big they really were. It seemed like I was in for some trouble.

What were the chances someone would come to my rescue? Based on what I'd seen from the tree, that seemed impossible. I needed to put my life on the

line to protect the seal.

I gripped my daggers.

YUNA'S BATTLE

I FOUGHT OFF THE VOLKROWS and wyverns, one after the other. I wanted to get this over with quickly so I could head over to my bears.

I unleashed my wind magic on the volkrows, which sliced them up and toppled them to the ground. During that time, I also attacked the wyverns to get their attention. I needed to protect the building, at least.

As the wyverns started to attack me too, I pulled my mithril knives out of my bear storage. I dodged a wyvern's sharp claws and sliced through its wing. That engaged it, so I created an earth wall with magic right away and blocked its retaliatory attack. Then I skewered it with ice arrows.

One after the other, I took them on. I had to do this fast so I could get to my bears. I was a little worried about them, but if they worked together, they should be more than a match for a wyvern. The only issue was how *many* volkrows and wyverns they'd have to face.

I used my detection skill every once in a while to check—but now that I thought about it, I should have given everyone bear phones. They were all under contract magic anyway, so why not? They would've been able to tell me if something happened right away if I'd just done that.

When the monsters had appeared, I'd just been thinking about protecting the seals and defeating the monsters. It all happened too quickly to strategize.

I kept using my detection skill whenever I had a spare moment, I saw that the monsters in each location were decreasing steadily.

The wyverns at Kumayuru and Kumakyu's building had disappeared. They were probably working together really well.

The monsters in Ms. Kagari's direction were also being picked off. She'd fought against the orochi with Mr. Mumulute in the past. I hadn't seen a lot of powerful people fight before, so I kind of wished I could have seen Ms. Kagari in action.

Then there was the last location. The spot where Shinobu had headed. A lot of volkrows had been there, but not any wyverns. When I checked it now, I saw new wyvern signals.

I'd seen Shinobu's abilities when she'd fought Mr. Jyubei. She was strong for sure, and nothing like the guy—Debo-whatever-it-was—who'd tried to fight me in Crimonia. I didn't know whether she was powerful enough to fight a wyvern, though. If I was worried about anyone, it would be Shinobu.

But if I wanted to help her, I had to defeat the monsters around me first. I just wished they'd stop gathering at the building.

I hurled more air shots at volkrows that were trying to get into the building, drawing them away from the seal, before finishing them off with bear magic. No time to worry about everyone else. I needed to focus on protecting my building.

Chapter 496: Sakura Helps Out

THE ESTEEMED Kumakyu and Kumayuru were crying out.

Apparently, monsters were coming toward the island, and they were headed toward the orochi's seals. Since I would be in danger, Lady Yuna told me to go through her wondrous door to Miss Luimin. In other words, she wanted me to leave everyone behind to go to safety.

Lady Yuna, Lady Kagari, and Shinobu were going to stay behind to protect the seals from the monsters. They were planning to fight. I wasn't strong enough to help them, so I understood that I would just be a burden if I stayed on the island. Even though I wanted to stay, I swallowed my protests. I couldn't help, even if I stayed.

I went through the door that Lady Yuna brought out. She smiled at me and told me not to worry, then slowly closed the door in front of me. I was the only one who got to run away to safety.

Miss Luimin and Lord Mumulute lived here. I was surrounded by a forest and could see a tall mountain. It was quiet. No one was around.

I felt so helpless.

I stared at the door. Lady Yuna and the others were beyond it, but they were far away, and I couldn't get there on my own two feet.

If anything happened to Lady Yuna, the door would never open again. I might not ever get to return to my home country. No—that isn't quite right. If anything happened to Lady Yuna, my country probably would be gone entirely.

The anxiety gnawed at me.

I hoped everyone was all right.

Then, while I was waiting in front of the door, I heard a horse galloping toward me.

“Saku!”

“Miss Luimin!”

Miss Luimin appeared on a horse. She got off the horse and came over to me.

“Saku, are you okay?”

I felt relieved when I saw her.

“Yes, I’m all right. I came here before the monsters appeared.”

“You did? Well, you’re okay now. If you’re here, then you’re safe.”

“Everyone else stayed behind to protect the orochi’s seals, and I was the only one who ran away...”

I was frustrated that I couldn’t do anything.

“You can leave the fighting to Yuna. She dresses cute, but she’s really strong,” Miss Luimin said very gently. I hung my head.

“You’re right. But I can’t help but wish I could fight too. It’s so hard being somewhere safe while everyone else is fighting.”

I was just a helpless little child. If I were an adult, maybe I could have helped fight with everyone. I was so frustrated that I didn’t have any power to do anything at all.

While I was worrying to myself, Miss Luimin narrowed her eyes and asked me, “Um, Saku, you are the age you look, right?”

I didn’t know what she meant.

“I’m going to be ten this year.”

“Right.”

“Is something the matter?”

“You don’t act like a little kid, so I thought maybe you were older than you

look.”

“I don’t act like a little kid?”

Everyone around me said I was one.

“Yeah. You think like an adult. I think kids are allowed to depend on the adults. My grandfather always says that protecting the kids is an adult’s job. I’m not sure which one Yuna is, though.”

Miss Luimin smiled.

“Then that applies to Shinobu too.”

I didn’t think either of them were kids...but they also weren’t adults. But the two of them could protect themselves, and I couldn’t. They could protect others, too.

“I wish I could fight too, though. I wish I had the power to protect everyone.”

Even if I did have power, I had no idea whether I could face monsters. If I did, I didn’t know whether I would shiver and freeze on the spot. I wondered if Lady Yuna and Shinobu were scared when they fought.

“I feel the same way. Something terrible happened in my village too, and I couldn’t do anything.”

“That happened to you, too?”

“Yeah, that’s right. My grandfather and Yuna fought, but I had to stay inside my house. I can’t fight like Yuna. That’s why I’m going to help out my grandfather this time. You should just focus on what you’re capable of too, Saku.”

“Miss Luimin...”

She offered me her hand.

What would I do? If I did nothing, I couldn’t save anyone. If I did something, even something small that I was capable of, maybe I could help.

I took Miss Luimin’s hand.

“Yes.”

I couldn't fight.

“Miss Luimin, I'd like to help Lord Mumulute, please.”

“Sure! Let's go to my grandfather.”

I had no idea what I could help Lord Mumulute with, but I preferred doing whatever I could over waiting for Lady Yuna and the others while doing nothing.

“We're in a bit of a hurry, so hold on tight.”

“Yes.”

I got on the horse with Miss Luimin and held onto her from behind. While I did that, Miss Luimin made the horse start galloping. I held on tightly to make sure I wasn't going to fall off.

After a while, we were inside a village and stopped in front of a house.

“We're here.”

I slowly got off the horse. I lost my balance a little.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, I'm fine.”

So this was the village where Miss Luimin lived. It was nothing like my home. The villagers were staring at us, the buildings looked different, and everyone was dressed differently. I truly was in another country.

“Saku, over here.”

While I was looking around, Miss Luimin called me over. She was in front of the entrance to the house.

I didn't have time to look around right now. I headed over to Miss Luimin.

“Whose house is this?”

“It’s my grandfather’s. He’s in here, so come with me.”

She went into the house. I followed after her.

“Pardon the intrusion,” I said before going inside.

It was different from the home I lived in. It looked wondrous.

I walked behind Miss Luimin through the hallway, and then we came upon two flights of stairs. One went up, and the other went down. Miss Luimin went down the stairs.

When we reached the bottom, there was a huge room. Lord Mumulte was in there.

“We’re back, Grandfather.”

“Excuse me,” I said. Lord Mumulte looked at us as we came in.

“I heard monsters appeared. Is that true?”

“Yes, the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru noticed them and so Lady Yuna and the others stayed behind to fight them. It was too dangerous for me, so they told me to run away.”

“I see. That’s for the best with monsters around. The less they have to worry about, the better.”

When he said that, my chest squeezed. I really was powerless and useless.

“Grandfather, maybe you could put it a little less bluntly.”

“Protecting others while fighting is terribly difficult. Even if you had taken shelter somewhere safe on the island, they would have been worried you were being attacked the entire time. That’s how a fight is when there’s something that needs protecting.”

“I guess you have a point...”

“Miss Luimin, it’s okay,” I said. “I understand. That’s why I agreed to come here.”

I wanted to decrease the burden on the others, even by a little. That was all I could do for now.

“Oh, Saku...”

“So, monsters have gathered on the island... We need to hurry then,” Lord Mumulute said.

“Lord Mumulute, do you think the seals really will break, then?”

“It’s probable they will. I can’t think of any other reason why monsters would start gathering.”

When Lord Mumulute said that, the threat of the orochi became all the more frighteningly real. My heart quickened. I was scared of dying, but I also really didn’t want to see everyone else die. I didn’t want my miserable dreams to become real.

“Grandfather, should we check in with Yuna about the current situation?”

Miss Luimin was holding a doll in the shape of a bear. This was a magical device that allowed you to talk to people far, far away.

“Well, she’s probably fighting with monsters right now. We’d just inconvenience her. If anything happens, she’ll probably contact us. We should go as fast as we can to figure out a way to strengthen the seals.”

He was right. If we talked to Lady Yuna while she was fighting, we would just be interrupting her.

“Lord Mumulute, is there anything at all I can do? I’d like to go back as quickly as possible. I’ll do anything you need, so just tell me.”

“Then why don’t you clean those carpets over there?”

I saw a whole bunch of carpets spread out where Lord Mumulute was looking. They had pretty drawings all over them.

“I’m looking for a carpet with a seal-strengthening circle on it.”

Apparently, these were all magic circles. I had no idea there could be so many.

Lord Mumulute had to find the right one amid the pile, which seemed like a very difficult job.

“Saku, why don’t you clean up those ones over there? Once you have them rolled up, set them in the empty rack.”

“Okay.”

I followed Miss Luimin’s instructions, rolling up the carpets with the pretty drawings and putting them away on the rack. I rolled up the small ones on my own and worked with Miss Luimin to roll up the bigger ones.

“Grandfather, you haven’t found it yet?”

Lord Mumulute was unrolling each carpet and murmuring things to himself like, “No,” and “Not this one.” Then he would pick a new carpet.

“I made it a while ago, you see,” he said.

“Really? If you’d just kept them organized, we never would have had this problem.”

He had a lot of shelves in the room and many carpets, too.

“Well, I don’t exactly use magic circles on a regular basis. Of course I’m going to forget where I put them.”

“That’s why I said you should’ve organized them to start with. If only you had written the names of the circles on the carpets...”

She was right. Since the names weren’t written on any of them, we couldn’t tell what kind of magic circle they were. I couldn’t help but agree with Miss Luimin. The orochi could come back at any moment. I really felt like we were in a rush, and this was a terrible time for disorganization.

“I know, I know. I was planning on doing that sometime.”

“You’ve said that so many times without actually doing anything, though.”

“I was thinking I’d do it in a few years.”

“I’ll help you next time, so let’s do it earlier than that.”

“All right, all right. But right now, we need to focus on finding the right magic circle. I don’t have anywhere to spread the carpets out. Come now, clean them up faster.”

“Grandfather...” Miss Luimin complained as she put away the carpets.

“A few years from now...?”

That made me start contemplating the future. I wondered what would happen with the orochi. I wondered what would happen to my country. And I wondered about myself too... If anything happened to Lady Yuna, I’d never be able to return to my homeland.

It made me anxious.

“Saku, what’s wrong?” Miss Luimin asked me when she noticed I’d stopped.

“Oh, I was just thinking about what would happen a few years from now. About what would happen to the Land of Wa if we can’t seal the orochi again...”

“It’ll be fine. Yuna is here, after all.” Miss Luimin tried to cheer me up.

“You really believe in Lady Yuna.”

“Yeah. She’s super strong and I’m sure she could beat an orochi.”

She was the ray of hope I’d seen so many times in my dreams. I decided to believe in Lady Yuna too.

“And Grandfather will do something about it too.”

“I’ll do what I can. I’m not going to tell you to rest easy, but I think there’s hope.”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

I started to get to work again.

“What do you want to do in the future?” Miss Luimin asked me.

“What do you mean?”

Would I still be a priestess? In a short space of time, I’d met Lady Yuna, Miss

Luimin, and gone through that strange door too. I'd had so many new experiences.

"Oh. I'm not sure when, but I'd like to travel the world."

That was the first idea that came to me, but I'd need to become stronger to make that happen. My weakness was my biggest obstacle.

"But I can't fight, so maybe it's impossible."

I was only ten. Maybe if Shinobu taught me, I could become stronger?

"In that case, I'll join you."

"You will?"

"I'm going to work hard to become strong so I can protect you until you grow up, Saku."

"I-I'll work hard too and practice my magic."

I'd need to have magical talent in the first place to do that, though... Apparently, my dad couldn't use magic, but my mom could. Since I had her blood, I was sure I could use it, too. My uncle also always told me I was like my mother.

If I could use magic, maybe I *could* travel the world with Miss Luimin. But it would probably take at least five years until we could do that.

"Miss Luimin, would you wait five years for me?"

"Yeah. I'd wait ten or even a hundred."

Um, I would be dead in a hundred years though.

"But we need to defeat the orochi first."

"Yes."

I needed to do all I could now to create hope for the future.

We finally found the right magic circle, but there was a problem.

We spread the carpet on the ground.

“Will this really work?”

“It’s a simple one, but it should do the trick. The only issue is that we have to continually pour mana into it.”

Apparently, keeping the mana circle working required a continuous supply of mana. Lord Mumulute told us that if we gathered several mages, we might be able to buy ourselves more time.

“I’m sorry, but we can’t have the villagers help. I can’t allow them to be put in danger.”

“Yes, I understand.”

They had nothing to do with my homeland. I couldn’t take them to a place where they might die. This was our country’s problem.

“I think that my uncle will be able to gather mages, so it should be okay.”

“I will help as much as I can myself, though,” Lord Mumulute said.

“Thank you, Lord Mumulute.”

Now we had hope. We could temporarily strengthen the seals and defeat the orochi’s heads one by one to save the country.

“There is one problem.”

“What is that?”

“I only have three magic circles to strengthen the seals.”

There were five seals on the orochi when all its heads and its body were included. Would it be enough to seal three of its heads and fight the last one?

But then Lord Mumulute said that wasn’t the main concern. “We need to stop it from drawing mana from its body, or the heads will come back. No matter how powerful we make the seals on the heads, we wouldn’t be able to hold it back with any amount of human mana.”

“Then we need to seal the body and the other heads together?”

“Yes, that’s what it means.”

“But we only have three circles.”

We needed one more. Otherwise, we would need to fight two heads at once.

“Sakura, you said you were the king’s niece?”

“Yes, but I’m a priestess at the moment.”

“That’s all right. We just need you to be able to pass along a message to the king.”

“I can do that.”

“Then I’ll teach you how to use this magic circle just in case.”

“Me?! But I know nothing about magic circles.”

“It’s not hard, so you’ll do fine. If anything happens to me, then you’ll need to tell the ruler of the country what we did here. You want to help, don’t you?”

“...”

He wanted to teach me, just in case something bad happened. I remembered what I’d seen in my dreams. I remembered seeing everyone die.

We didn’t know whether we’d be able to defeat the orochi yet. Something bad *might* still happen. When I met Lady Yuna and Lord Mumulute, some part of me felt relieved. Was I wrong?

“All right. Please teach me.” I didn’t want to regret not trying.

Lord Mumulute spread the carpet on the ground and set a mana gem as big as my hand on top of it.

“It needs such a large mana gem?” It was larger than any normal ones.

“I’ll bill you for it.”

“Okay, I will make sure to tell His Majesty. And if His Majesty refuses to give them back, I will pay you back for them myself.”

I would pay him with the entire fortune my parents had left me if I needed to. If that wasn't enough, I would simply need to find employment.

Lord Mumulute laughed.

"That was a joke. I don't need payment."

"But..."

"I'm cleaning up a past mess. Don't worry about it. I'm just grateful that I could see Kagari."

Lord Mumulute gently placed his hand on my head.

"Lord Mumulute..."

"We don't have time, so make sure you remember everything."

"Yes."

Then he showed me how to use the magic circle. Miss Luimin was watching us as she put away the carpets beside us.

It was easier than I expected, so he only needed to show me once. The issue was that it needed mana. Just like Lord Mumulute had said, you needed to give it continuous mana, so if we wanted to use it for several days, we'd need many people with lots of mana. Still, I was starting to feel hopeful.

We put away Lord Mumulute's carpets into an item bag.

"Well, let's hurry over to Kagari and the others."

Once we finished preparing, we left the house and went to one of the doors we could use to travel back.

Chapter 497:

Shinobu's Life and Death Battle

“HUFF, HUFF...”

I sliced off a wyvern's wing, sending the monster falling to the ground. I wanted to kill it, but another wyvern got in my way.

One flew in the sky and the other glowered at me with the one good eye I'd left it. It growled.

“Don't be so upset, will ya?”

Well, I guess it only had two options after I'd smashed its eye: get angry or run away. I'd been hoping for the latter option personally, but here it was—staring at me, positively furious.

I gripped my bloodstained dagger.

“This is gonna be tough.”

I thought I could handle one, but with three of them coming for me at once, along with volkrows, it was a

difficult battle on my own. I'd avoided their attacks, so I wasn't horribly wounded, but I sure was bleeding all over the place.

At first, I'd dodged their attacks without any issue, but now I could barely manage. I'd run and run and jumped high in the air countless times, and it had drained my stamina. I wished I could rest, but these guys weren't letting me.

It was wearing me down. While I was casting my spells and blocking their attacks, I'd used up a ton of mana.

“I should've trained a little harder.”

There was no use regretting it now. I decided that I'd put some serious effort into training if I survived this. In order to do that, I'd need to fight off all the

monsters around and protect the seal.

“I wonder if it’s futile to hope for help.”

At first, I entertained the thought of Lady Kagari or Yuna coming to my rescue. Then I realized they were both fighting just like I was and that it’d be hard for them to abandon their posts. I couldn’t give up when everyone else was still fighting, though. I already owed Yuna for saving my life once.

“Guess I’ll keep working at this a little more.”

I pulled some kunai out of my robe and poured mana into them. Then I ran toward the injured wyvern’s bad eye. I knew from fighting my teacher that attacking from a blind spot was effective in these circumstances.

I threw some kunai at the wyvern. It flapped its wing and made a few of them fall to the ground, but it couldn’t protect itself from all of them, and a few stabbed into it. That didn’t stop the wyvern, though.

“C’mon! Just go down already.”

I sent a wind spell flying at the one-eyed wyvern, trying to keep it in check, when I felt an impact from behind.

Wait, what?!

I felt a pang run through my left shoulder and realized immediately what had happened. I’d been attacked by a flying wyvern from behind.

The wyvern in front of me had taken up too much of my attention, and I hadn’t been looking at the sky. I wanted to hit myself upside the head for letting myself get distracted, even temporarily.

The creature, which still gripped my shoulders, started pulling me up into the air. This was real bad. I tried to flail, but its claws dug into me, preventing escape. When I struggled, I felt pain shoot through me. At least the chainmail I was wearing kept it from fully embedding its claws in my shoulder.

The wyvern’s grip tightened around me. I gritted my teeth and tried to endure it.



“Y-You can’t grip a dainty young girl’s shoulder like that! You’re supposed to gently embrace a maiden, you know. You’re not gonna be popular with the ladies this way.”

I had no idea whether the thing was a boy or a girl, but it could do with a lesson.

I used the dagger in my right hand to slice into the wyvern’s leg as it gripped my shoulder. It cried out and loosened its grip. When I felt myself starting to fall, I grabbed its leg and stretched my hand out to plunge my dagger right into its undefended breast. It started to really flail then, and I lost my grip on its leg.

I was even higher than the building and I was plunging right down. I righted myself out and, before I could reach the ground, cast a wind spell to soften my fall.

“Ugh.”

The impact made another shooting pain run through my left shoulder, where the wyvern had dug in its talons.

It hurt.

The injured wyvern was trying to get away from me now, though. I couldn’t celebrate quite yet. The one-winged wyvern on the ground raced toward me like I was its next meal.

They just kept right on coming. Wish they’d give me a little break.

My feet felt like lead weights, but I managed to brace myself and position my dagger for contact. The wyvern stuck out its long neck and opened its maw wide. But I so happened to dodge right in the nick of time and whipped my dagger around to slice right through the thing’s windpipe. I managed to cut its throat, but that didn’t mean I avoided its charge completely. It sent me flying and I rolled around along the ground.

I hurt all over.

At least this meant that I only needed to deal with the one-eyed wyvern,

though.

I tried to stand up to fight, but I couldn't manage to get my limbs to obey me. My legs quivered. I pounded on my legs with my heavy arms to stop the shaking.

I just needed them to function a little longer.

I tried to brace my legs again and managed to stand. The problem was, even though I was upright, that didn't mean my legs could do anything more than that. I couldn't walk, much less run.

I hit my knees again and again. My legs started to regain their strength. Just a little more...

I wiped the sweat rolling down my forehead. When I looked at my hands, I realized they were bright red. I'd gained another cut when the wyvern had sent me flying, but I didn't have the time to treat it.

I wiped the blood from my forehead again and looked up at the one-eyed wyvern that was still flying overhead. It was circling right over the building. I guess it was after the seal.

I wished it would've just gone away, but it didn't show any signs it would. If it could just stay in the air, that'd be great, but my prayers didn't reach it. The wyvern dived toward the building.

I forced my body to run as it screamed at me in pain. I couldn't let it destroy the building.

I poured mana into my dagger as I let a blade made of wind loose. It wasn't all that powerful, but it did hit the wyvern. That made the monster switch targets from the building to me.

Luring a wyvern away with my own life was kind of a silly move, now that I thought about it. I didn't have any mana left. I braced my legs and held my dagger.

This was it.

I met with the wyvern head on and I stabbed my dagger through its other eye. Now it'd lost both eyeballs.

The wyvern started to flail and tried to take a bite right from my arm. I gathered the very last of my mana in my dagger and sliced through the wyvern's mouth.

This had to be it. I'd defeated it.

But the wyvern, which had been plummeting down at me from the sky, had lost no momentum in death. It sent me flying, and I bounced off the ground.

I landed facing up. The sky was so blue.

I couldn't move an inch, but despite that, I'd protected the seal.

"I can rest now, can't I?"

As soon as I was about to close my eyes, I saw two dark shadows pass over me. New wyverns...

I could only wish it was a dream. I wished I could have ignored them and closed my eyes right then. But that wasn't an option. If the seal broke, that would be the end.

We'd brought Yuna and Mr. Mumulute over, and we were just about to finish getting together what we needed to fight the orochi. I could see hope on the horizon. I needed to protect the seal until Mr. Mumulute could make it back. Everyone else was fighting to do the same, so I couldn't let myself be defeated now.

I tried to move, but my entire body screamed in pain. I could barely even grip my dagger. I rolled over so I was facing the ground, then pushed myself up and got up.

The wyverns landed. One was near me and the other one was on the building where the seal was, but it took all I had to keep myself standing. I didn't even have the strength to fight a wyvern.

All I could do was helplessly watch as one of the wyverns destroyed the building and made its way inside. Meanwhile, the other one started its attack.

I hadn't been able to protect the seal. I guess this was all I'd amounted to. It was a short life, but I'd enjoyed it. This would be my only regret.

Lady Sakura, I'm sorry.

The wyvern loomed in over me. I closed my eyes, deciding to embrace it.

In that moment, I heard the sound of a collision. At the same time, I staggered. I couldn't stand anymore, but I realized that I wasn't actually falling. Something was holding me up.

"Are you okay, Shinobu?"

When I opened my eyes, I saw a face staring into mine—the girl I was staring at was wearing a cute bear outfit.

Chapter 498:

The Bear Heads over to Each Building Housing the Seals

I DODGED THE WYVERN as it tried to assault me from the skies and countered with bear wind magic. The bear-claw shaped blades of wind clashed with the wyvern, shredding it to pieces, which sent the wyvern sailing down to the ground.

“Whew.”

With that, I’d killed all the wyverns that had come to the seal I was in charge of.

It was too much work trying to fight the monsters while protecting the seal in the building, but once I lured them away, I could beat all of them, no problem. While I tried battling the wyverns, the volkrows would try to sneak in toward the seal. If I took on volkrows, the wyverns would try wrecking the entire building. It was such a chore. I wished more than a few times that I had my bears with me.

Anyway, I finished up the last few volkrows really quick and then I was done getting rid of all the monsters that had come to the building. When I inspected the building, I found out it was damaged pretty much all over.

“This is totally not my fault, though.”

Okay, maybe I damaged one little section of the building with my magic, but that was it. Most of it had been the monsters. I mean, collateral damage is totally a normal thing that happens during battles. Anyway, I protected the orochi’s seal, so this seemed like a win to me. I checked to make sure there weren’t any other monsters around and then headed over to my bears, who were the closest.

As I used my detection skill, I noticed a wyvern was still around, along with some volkrows. They were steadily disappearing, though. If I ran over, we’d be

able to take care of them all right away. I just hoped that my bears weren't hurt.

I arrived at the building right as they were cornering the wyvern.

"Cwoon."

"Cwoon."

The monster was flapping its wings and trying to escape, but Kumakyu leapt toward it—and didn't make it. The wyvern started to escape to the skies.

The moment that I thought the monster had escaped, Kumayuru ran up onto the building and propelled themselves right into the air at the wyvern. Since Kumakyu was distracting it, the wyvern hadn't even noticed Kumayuru behind it.

"Cwoon."

Then Kumayuru used their sharp claws to tear through the monster. The wyvern hit the ground; its wings clipped. It tried to get up and escape, but Kumakyu finished it off before it could. It breathed its last and fell down. Meanwhile, Kumayuru made a clean landing.

My two bears rubbed against each other like they were celebrating their victory. Looks like they had some good teamwork going. That made me smile.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu."

When I called out to them, they finally realized I was there and ran over.

"You two did great. You didn't get hurt?" I asked them as I patted their heads.

It didn't seem like they'd gotten injured, but I wouldn't be able to tell if they'd broken a bone or had an internal injury.

My bears both crooned to tell me they were fine. They were safe, and I was glad.

Since they seemed to want head pats, I gave them some, but the battle wasn't over yet.

“There are still volkrows around,” I told them. “I’ll help out, so let’s go fight them together.”

They both crooned. After that, they headed off to fight the volkrows, and my bears seemed to compete with each other to see how many they could beat.

Wait a sec... But weren’t they getting along just a moment ago?

I headed off after my bears to help them with the volkrows. Together, we took care of the monsters that had come to attack the seal.

Before I headed off to the next location, I had Kumayuru stay put to protect the building in case other monsters appeared, and Kumakyu head over to the building I’d been at.

“Okay, I’m leaving things in your paws. Don’t put yourselves in harm’s way, though.”

They both crooned.

Kumayuru ran off to the seal I’d been protecting and Kumakyu stuck around here. They sure were energetic.

I headed off to the seal closest to me.

I used my detection skill as I went, finding monsters at both Shinobu’s and Ms. Kagari’s locations. Ms. Kagari was closest to me, so I headed to her first. If she was fine, then I planned to head right over to Shinobu.

It didn’t take long for me to reach her.

“Take that! Freeze! Freeze!”

Icy wind flowed out of Ms. Kagari’s hands and assaulted the wyverns. The monsters were blocking it by holding their wings closed in front of them.

“Then how do you like this?!”

Ms. Kagari threw something that looked a lot like a fireball at a wyvern. It stuck to the monster and its wings caught fire. The wyvern flapped in an

attempt to extinguish the flames, but the fireball seemed to have some sticking power. It kept blazing. Ms. Kagari kept throwing fireballs at it and wouldn't let the flames go out no matter how hard the wyvern tried to extinguish them. Its sturdy wings started to show cracks.

I see. So she was hurting it with the temperature differential. First, she cooled down its wings so they'd contract, and now she was making them expand again with the fireballs.

The wyvern, unable to take it anymore, spread its wings wide to try and escape.

"I will not allow you to leave!"

Ms. Kagari raised her arms and created a gigantic fireball. Then she threw it at the wyvern. The monster, engulfed in flames, cried out before falling.

She was strong. If I had to guess, her flames were probably as powerful as my bear flames.

Ms. Kagari noticed me.

"Oh? You were watching?"

"Yeah, just a little while."

"Then you would have done well to lend me a hand."

"It didn't seem like you needed it."

"That is not true in the slightest! We must fight the orochi, so we should conserve as much mana as possible."

True enough—I was probably going to change into my white bear onesie and rest after the battle. We hadn't used all that much mana yet though, so it'd probably be fine. Also, if Shinobu saw my white bear onesie, she'd probably laugh at me.

"So, if you are here, I take it you have already handled your seal?"

"Yeah, mine and also Kumayuru and Kumakyu's."

“I see. You truly are strong, despite how you look. Sakura said you are our ray of hope. Perhaps she was not wrong.”

“So, just to be sure, can I leave you to cover this spot?”

I saw volkrows flying in the air.

“’Tis fine. You may go to Shinobu.”

Right as I was about to leave, I remembered something.

“Ms. Kagari, take this.”

I offered a bear phone to Ms. Kagari.

“Ah, yes. This is a magical device you used to communicate with others while at a distance?”

“If anything comes up, I’ll contact you through this, so could you keep hold of it?”

“Could I speak with Mumulute too?”

Ms. Kagari stared at the bear phone.

“That device only works to talk to me.”

“Is that so?”

Ms. Kagari seemed disappointed. Was she really that attached to Mr. Mumulute? Anyway, I explained how it worked.

“If anything happens to my bears, I’ll tell you, so run over to them.” If I couldn’t leave Shinobu’s side, I’d have Ms. Kagari head over instead. “If anything happens on your end, you can call me too,” I told her.

“All right. Then I shall be grateful to use this. You may also leave your bears in my care. I shall protect them should anything come to pass.”

There was one more question I had for her before I left for Shinobu.

“Ms. Kagari, do you have an extra tail?”

It had been bothering me since I saw her. She seemed to have three.

“You are not the only one with secrets. You should neither ask after a damsel’s secrets nor share them with others.”

Maybe she powered up when she had more tails? And maybe she could grow as many as nine? I was reminded of a nine-tailed fox, a type of greater yokai in Japanese myths.

“Now, never mind these trifles. You should go to Shinobu. I worry for her.”

I suppose she was right. I left Ms. Kagari to manage this location and my bears, and finally headed off to Shinobu.

As I ran, I used my detection skill. I saw two wyverns, but Shinobu’s signal wasn’t moving. Was she waiting for something? *C’mon, Shinobu, move*. No matter how much I urged her on in my mind, she stayed motionless.

I ran as fast as I could. Since we weren’t all that far away, it only took me minutes to get there.

Once I got to the building, I saw Shinobu staggering to stand up. She was covered in wounds, bleeding, with more blood dripping off the tip of the knife she carried.

I checked on the wyverns and saw two coming down from the sky. One was headed to the building, while the other was going for Shinobu.

I couldn’t reach both in time. I moved before I could think.

I dashed off toward Shinobu and the wyvern descending on her, then gave it a bear kick—in other words, a flying kick. That sent the wyvern spinning through the air.

“Are you okay, Shinobu?”

I held Shinobu up as she nearly collapsed on me.

“Yuna?” Her eyes were hollow as they stared back at me.

I held onto her shoulders so she wouldn’t fall over. “I’m glad I made it in

time.”

“But the building—the wyvern.”

Shinobu cocked her head to the side and looked at the building.

“I know.”

I’d seen the other wyvern heading toward the building.

“You’re not protecting me instead of the seal, are you?”

“...”

I’d dropkicked the wyvern going after Shinobu, instead of the one headed toward the building. Shinobu had been powerless as the wyvern descended on her. I couldn’t save both.

“Yuna, you made the wrong choice. Protecting the seal is more important than my life.”

Sure, the leadership of the country might choose to protect the seal over one person because they’d be protecting the lives of many. But I wasn’t the king.

“I’m free to choose what I want to protect,” I told her.

The wyvern inside the building was making a racket. I should have taken care of it as soon as I could, but it was probably too late—the wyvern I’d just dropkicked was starting to get up. If I left Shinobu alone, it would attack her again for sure. I didn’t have time to think it over.

“Leave the rest to me,” I said.

I tried to sound as gentle as I could, so she’d feel less stressed.

“I’m sorry...don’t worry about me. Just fight.”

Shinobu closed her eyes and slumped over.

“Sh-Shinobu?!”

She didn’t respond, but she was still breathing. I guess she’d just fainted. I wish she hadn’t scared me like that. I thought for just a second that she’d died.

Shinobu was looking pretty bad. Her left shoulder in particular was really bloody and she had a ton of cuts all over her face. I wanted to heal her as soon as I could, but the wyvern I'd kicked was growling and glaring at me.

"I'll get to you soon, so stop rushing me, all right?"

It wasn't like a monster was going to understand me, of course. The wyvern spread its wings wide and sent blades of wind flying at me. I created an earth wall to block it.

"Okay. I'll go fight it off, so you just rest."

I slowly set Shinobu on the ground to sleep, then I insta-killed the growling wyvern with bear magic and my mithril knives.

No more messing around.

Chapter 499:

The Bear Contacts Mr. Mumulute

BY THE TIME I took down the wyvern that had been trying to attack Shinobu, the nearby building had collapsed under the other wyvern's onslaught. This was all my fault. If I'd just finished the monsters in my location sooner, this wouldn't have happened. I shouldn't have spent time chitchatting with my bears. I should have left Ms. Kagari without giving her the bear phone. Maybe then I would have been able to protect the seal.

No—I should have just given Ms. Kagari and Shinobu bear phones from the start, to keep this from happening. I should've thought before I'd acted. This was *all* my fault.

The building that contained the seal Shinobu had risked her life to protect was destroyed, and now a wyvern was doing who-knows-what inside. I didn't know if I could make it in time, but I couldn't just let it stay in there.

"Just wait a little longer," I told Shinobu, who was still unconscious, before running into the building. It was partially destroyed, but I still headed inside. The floor was caving in, and the wyvern was in the basement. It was like it was being sucked into the magic circle, where it was rampaging as it resisted. That circle was what Shinobu had risked her life for. I couldn't let a monster mess it up.

I jumped into the basement and used my bear magic and mithril knife to engage the wyvern. It fell over, soaking the circle with its blood, which seeped into the ground. The magic circle flickered reddish-black and the eye below it started to swivel. The eye opened wide, the ground shook, and the ceiling started to crumble.

I'd failed to protect the seal.

I escaped the building right away, grabbed Shinobu from the ground, and ran.

Once I was far from the building where the orochi was sealed, I set Shinobu down on the ground.

There was a hole in her clothes on her right shoulder, which oozed blood. I cut away her clothes with a knife to find she was wearing chainmail. That must have saved her life. I healed the cut on her left shoulder from over the chainmail to stop the bleeding, ensuring she wouldn't die from blood loss, at least. I also treated her other bleeding cuts.

Shinobu didn't have OP powers. She was just a normal girl, and she'd still beaten a wyvern even while hurt. It was amazing she could defeat a wyvern at her age. If she became stronger, then she'd become someone to reckon with eventually. She was probably what you'd call a prodigy.

Finally, I put my bear puppet on her face and healed her scrapes and wiped the blood away. She was clean now.

Right as I finished treating Shinobu, I felt a huge tremor. It was the largest one so far. The orochi's resuscitation was just a question of when, now.

I hoped everyone else was okay. I pulled out my bear phone and called Ms. Kagari.

"What is happening?! What was that shaking?! Has the orochi revived?"

As soon as I called her, I heard Ms. Kagari's voice.

"Sorry. I didn't make it. Shinobu's alive, but the seal still broke. I think it's only a matter of time until it revives."

"What?!"

I felt another tremor. It could happen at any moment.

"Is Shinobu all right?!"

"She's injured, but she's okay."

I'd already healed the worst wounds. If I didn't jostle her around, her wounds probably wouldn't reopen.

“So she is...”

She sounded relieved. Ms. Kagari had been worried about Shinobu, too.

“And what of Mumulute? Is he not back yet?”

Oh, right. If he came in time to strengthen the seals, maybe we could push it back.

“I’ll check right now.”

I hung up and called Luimin’s phone.

“Yuna?”

“Luimin, how are things over there?”

“We’ve finished preparations and are about to head your way.”

“Then come as quickly as you can! One of the seals has broken. I think the orochi is trying to revive.”

“...!”

After I explained things to her, I didn’t hear her voice on the other end, but I did hear her gasp of surprise.

“Lady Yuna! Is everyone all right?!”

I heard Sakura on the other end. She must have been listening.

“Ms. Kagari, Kumayuru, and Kumakyu are okay.”

“What about Shinobu?”

“She got hurt while fighting wyverns and she’s unconscious now, but she’s okay.”

“Shinobu got hurt...?”

She seemed nervous at first, but when I told her that Shinobu was fine, I could sense her relief.

“Miss, only one seal has broken, is that right?”

“Yeah.”

“Then we’ll strengthen the other seals. I’ll head over now, so please open the door.”

“All right. Come as soon as you can.”

I hung up, lifted Shinobu, and left the area. The ground kept shaking, the newest tremors mighty enough to split the ground. I hoped we had a little time until the orochi broke free. *Please*, I prayed.

I pulled out a bear gate and opened the door leading to the elvish woods. Then I called Ms. Kagari again.

“Mr. Mumulute is on his way over now.”

“All right. Then I shall head over to you as well.”

I told her that I’d left the building and launched light in the air using magic to show Ms. Kagari where I was. Then, eventually, I saw Mr. Mumulute, Luimin, and Sakura ride in on a horse.

“Shinobu!”

Sakura noticed Shinobu on the ground and ran over.

“I mentioned earlier, but she’s just unconscious.”

“But she’s covered in so much blood!” She seemed to be panicking over Shinobu’s bloody and torn clothing.

“I already gave her first aid, so she’s okay.”

“Are you sure?”

Sakura held Shinobu’s hand and looked relieved.

In that moment, the ground trembled again. It was another strong one.

“We’re rocking.”

Luimin lost her balance.

Right then, I caught sight of Ms. Kagari coming over, her tail lashing as she

came.

“What? You’re back, Mumulute?”

“I just arrived.”

“How goes the process to strengthen the barrier?”

“I’ve made the preparations. But there was one problem. We can only strengthen three of the seals.”

“Only three?”

Five seals were on the orochi in total, including the one on its body. We could only hold back three of its heads.

“Um, if there are four heads, then we could just strengthen the seals of the other three?”

“We must keep the body sealed. If one head revives, the others will too, through its body. We must keep the body sealed, no matter what. If there were more time, I might have been able to prepare what we needed to strengthen another one.”

“Time is what we do not have! It seems at the worst, we will need to face two heads at once.”

“I didn’t think that the seals would break so soon.”

“Sorry.”

It was all my fault. I could have done more.

“You are not to blame. Time was running out for us as it was.”

“And we have one other problem too.”

“What would that be?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“The magic circles require a continuous flow of mana to remain active, but we don’t have enough people.”

Only Mr. Mumulute, Ms. Kagari, and I were here. If all of us were handling the

magic circles, then we wouldn't be able to help when the orochi revived.

"Why would you prepare such useless magic circles?"

"I did say it was only temporary. I thought we could do it if we just had a few mages from this country."

If we'd just had a few days—no, even just one day—we could have asked the king to bring together mages for us. We didn't have that luxury now.

As we were talking, the ground shook. The tremors were steadily deepening. It could happen at any moment.

I could have also gathered mages from other countries, but I'd need to explain the situation and that it would endanger their lives. We couldn't ask the elves. This wasn't their fight. We couldn't ask the adventurers in Crimonia to help either.

If only Shinobu were awake. I looked at Shinobu, who had protected the barrier until the very end. She was injured and unconscious now. I couldn't force her to push past her limits.

"I hate to ask this, but I do believe we will require you to manage one location, Mumulute."

"Yes, that was what I was planning."

"But now there are two more..." Ms. Kagari said.

Sakura, who had been silently listening until now, leveled a serious look at us all. "I can go to one," she said.

Chapter 500: The Bear Keeps Watch

“S_{AKURA?}”

Everyone’s eyes darted over to Sakura when she spoke up.

“Lord Mumulute taught me how to use the magic circle, so I understand it. My mana should be able to activate it.”

“Wait. He said that we must continually supply it with mana. You are still a child. Should you force yourself to give your mana to it, you may lose the ability to use magic entirely.”

Noa once told me that kids could use a little mana to activate magical devices, but if they used a lot or cast a big spell, it would affect them once they grew up. That was why kids were never mages in this world.

Still, Sakura slowly nodded in response.

“If it will save my country, I am ready to lose my magic. The choice between my country and my magic is no choice at all,” Sakura answered Mr. Mumulute. Her eyes were serious.

Mr. Mumulute couldn’t just okay that decision—he barely even knew her. But if Ms. Kagari, Mr. Mumulute, and I were preoccupied with the seals, no one would be there to fight the orochi. I could understand why Sakura would say what she did, but I didn’t want to put her in harm’s way either.

We could call on other mages, but the fastest people to ask would be the elves in the village. I didn’t know what would happen to Mr. Mumulute or Luimin if they had to explain the bear gate. Most importantly, we couldn’t put the elves in harm’s way when this had nothing to do with them. Mr. Mumulute probably wouldn’t allow it either.

Also, after hearing about the threat of the orochi, who would even agree?

Even if some did, their friends and family would probably try to stop them. We didn't have the time to argue, and we couldn't lose Mr. Mumulute right now.

Mr. Mumulute had no idea how to respond. After regarding Sakura for a while, Ms. Kagari spoke up.

"Are you sure, Sakura? If you stay here, you may face death."

"Yes. I can't run away to safety when there's something I can do. I can't fight the orochi, but I can help delay its revival."

"Oh, Sakura..."

"Please don't come to save me if I'm in danger. I don't want to burden anyone. I'll try to help the seal last for a little longer, so please handle the orochi."

Sakura bowed her head. Ms. Kagari could only bite her lip. Sakura would be at ground zero of the orochi's revival—not to mention all the monsters drawn to this place that might come for her.

Ms. Kagari understood all of that when she made her call.

"All right. Then we shall leave one seal to Sakura."

"Lady Kagari..."

Ms. Kagari knew Sakura the best and made the decision. The rest of us couldn't say anything more about it. Even I had no idea what the right decision was. We didn't have time to think longer. The ground had been shaking nonstop since earlier, and the orochi could revive at any moment.

"Miss Luimin, I'm not sure if I can fulfill that promise, but if I survive and can still use magic, then please invite me along again."

I had no idea what she meant, but Sakura was smiling as she said that to Luimin. Luimin seemed at a loss for words.

"Miss Luimin, I'm glad we met."

"Oh, Saku..."

It looked like Luimin had no idea how to respond. She tried to say something but then stopped, like she had no idea what the right thing was to say in this situation.

“Yuna, sorry, but I’ll need you to strengthen the final seal.”

“But who will fight the orochi?”

“I cannot ask you to do the most dangerous job at all when you are not even from this country,” Ms. Kagari said. “By strengthening the seal alone, you’ve already done enough.”

She was right that one of us would need to strengthen the last seal.

I had no idea how strong Ms. Kagari was, but I didn’t think she could fight the orochi. If she could, then she would have beaten it the first time around. That didn’t mean *I* could beat it, of course, but I was less likely to die, since I had my bear gear.

“I...”

...*will fight the orochi*, was what I wanted to say, but I was cut off.

“Wait,” Luimin spoke up. All of us turned to look at her. She seemed determined to do something.



“What is it? We do not have time at present, so you should return to your own home. This place will become a battlefield,” Ms. Kagari said.

“I-I’ll help too. You just need one more person who can use mana, right?”

“Miss Luimin!”

“What are you saying?!” Mr. Mumulute seemed shocked.

“Grandfather, you don’t have the time to explain the magic circle to Yuna right now. I heard you explain it to Saku earlier though, so I can handle the last seal.”

“Luimin...”

Luimin wasn’t suggesting that she take Sakura’s place then. She’d be handling one of the other seals. Right now, what we needed were people at the circles to feed them mana. Luimin understood that.

“Miss Luimin, you can’t. It’s too dangerous.”

“If the two of us handle the seals, then you can go with Ms. Kagari to fight the orochi together. That’ll increase your chances of winning.”

“Miss Luimin...”

“Grandfather, please. Let me help!”

Mr. Mumulute stared at Luimin.

“No. Go home.”

I agreed with Mr. Mumulute, of course. We couldn’t expose Luimin to danger. Unlike Mr. Mumulute, Luimin wasn’t tied to the Land of Wa at all.

“Grandfather! I came here at first just to help Yuna, but I know Saku now, and she’s in danger. I couldn’t run away to safety by myself!”

Luimin grabbed Mr. Mumulute’s clothes in an effort to convince him. I’d introduced Luimin and Sakura to each other, and now it seemed they’d ended up forming a bond.

“Luimin...”

“And even if Ms. Kagari or Yuna told you to go home, you wouldn’t, would you?”

“But...”

The ground quaked. It was steadily getting stronger. We were running out of time to talk.

“Grandfather, please. Let me help too.”

“Mumulute, we have no time to argue. I know not how difficult this may be for you, but you must decide now. If I am allowed an opinion, it would help us if she were to stay.”

The ground started trembling even more. This was the biggest quake so far.

“Grandfather!”

Mr. Mumulute looked like he was really struggling to decide.

“Luimin, promise me this. If it gets dangerous, you’ll run immediately.”

“Grandfather... Yes, okay. If it seems too dangerous, I’ll run away.”

That was probably the best decision in this situation. If Luimin and Sakura wanted to help, all I could do was support them.

I called Kumayuru and Kumakyu over.

“I’m sorry. I’ve exposed even your grandchild to danger.”

“Luimin decided this for herself. You both have item bags, right?”

“Yes.”

“Yeah.”

Mr. Mumulute pulled carpets and small pouches from his bag that he handed to the two. They put the items away in their own bags.

“I’ll go to the body, so you both handle the heads.”

“All right.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll leave the door open, so if worst comes to worst, you can flee through that. I don’t think the orochi will be able to get through it.” Its body was too big, after all. The two of them nodded.

As we all prepared to head out, I looked at Shinobu, who was still unconscious on the ground. We couldn’t leave her here, or she’d be in danger.

“Should we put her down inside the gate?”

“She’ll be fine. I’ll have someone I trust look after her.”

I pulled out my bear phone. I got an answer before too long.

“Yuna?”

“Fina, sorry, but could you head over to my house right away?”

“Huh? What happened?”

“Sorry, I don’t have the time to explain. I’m leaving someone in front of the gate, so could you look after her? Her clothes are bloody, but I healed her, so she should be fine.”

“Yuna?”

“If anything happens, let me know.”

“Yuna!”

Fina was saying something else, but I had no time to explain.

I closed the bear gate and connected it to my bear house in Crimonia. Then I carried Shinobu in my arms through it and laid her down in my bear house, making sure the door to the house was unlocked for Fina to come in. Once Fina arrived, she could look after Shinobu.

I closed the door and opened the door again to the elvish woods.

“Lady Yuna, who were you speaking with?”

“The girl I trust the most. You don’t need to worry about Shinobu now.”

“All right.”

I didn’t want Sakura to worry, so I just tried to sound reassuring.

We were ready—just as the biggest tremor yet hit us. Until now, the tremors had subsided right away...but this one didn’t let up. It steadily grew stronger.

Luimin and Sakura almost lost their balance. Right then, my bears dashed in and held them steady.

“Kumayuru!”

“The esteemed Kumakyu!”

They held on fast to my bears and stayed upright, but the tremor just kept going. At the same time, we heard a rumble. It felt like something was coming out of the ground. I used my detection skill. I could see one part of the orochi on it.

The ground rumbled loudly, and I heard the trees shaking from far off. The loudest of the sounds came from the ground. Even from this distance, I could see something huge towering over us.

“Is that the orochi...?”

It was as tall as a building, and it was quivering. So, so big.

“So that’s the orochi...”

“It’s huge.”

“I wished to never see it again.”

“Agreed.”

No kidding. I doubted anyone would want a reunion with this thing.

“Both of you, get away.”

“Okay...”

“Uh-huh...”

Sakura and Luimin both answered as they stared at the orochi. I thought I saw their hands trembling. They were headed to places where the orochi's other heads were sealed. Of course they were terrified.

"Kumayuru and Kumakyu, keep an eye on the two of them. If something happens, take them through the gate to run away."

They both crooned at us.

If Sakura or Luimin didn't run on their own when they saw danger approaching, my bears would drag them away. They'd also protect the girls from approaching monsters. Luimin climbed on Kumayuru and Sakura took Kumakyu.

"Okay, we're going!"

"We'll be off."

They dashed away.

"Okay, then I'll head over too," Mr. Mumulute said. "Do not overexert yourselves."

"Just leave it to us. We shall weaken it."

"But we can also just slay it, right?"

"Ha ha. That would be ideal, indeed. The way you say that, it sounds like you think you might just be able to do so." Mr. Mumulute laughed again and started off running.

"Well then, shall we go as well?" Ms. Kagari said.

We started running toward the orochi's revived head.

Chapter 501:

The Bear's Fight Against the Orochi Begins

MS. KAGARI AND I headed over to the orochi head that had revived.

"We must defeat the head and keep it away from the other seals. Do not aim for the body but for the head."

"Not the body?"

I knew the heads were the weak points, of course, but I'd thought the body was immobile and embedded in the ground, leaving us free to attack it as much as we wanted. Sort of like a really big snake that couldn't get its body out of a hole.

"Tis impossible. Its skin is strengthened through mana. You might be able to hurt it somewhat, but the hide is too thick to truly wound it."

"Would it be impossible even with mithril weapons?"

"Even if we can pierce it, its skin is too thick to allow us to get far without a great deal of labor. And its great amount of mana would allow it to heal. Should we fail, the skin would heal immediately, trapping our weapons within it."

Wait, what? That was so OP. Having regen was always kind of OP. Characters with regen or healing were great to have as allies in video games, but made terrible enemies. If it healed just as we were about to defeat it, I would be so done. Nothing could be more stressful. In fact, I'm pretty sure it was against the law for enemies to use healing abilities. Totally illegal.

"How did you defeat it last time?" It wouldn't be so bad to use the past fight as a reference.

"We held it back through sheer numbers. Most of us formed a united front to attack it. We would continue to charge even as it healed itself, over and over again. Even the orochi has a limited amount of mana. As we continued to fight

it, it lost its ability to heal itself as quickly. Then, Mumulute and the other adventurers were able to seal one of its heads. Using the same method, we sealed the rest of its heads and, finally, its body. However, we made countless sacrifices to do that. Had Mumulute and his party not been there, I do not know what would have become of us.”

Mr. Mumulute and his party must have been amazing. They’d even figured out the pyramid in the desert. He didn’t look all that impressive right now, but maybe he’d been pretty cool in the past.

“I cannot express enough gratitude for Mumulute’s presence, truly.”

“But if you got it to that point, couldn’t you have finished it off?” If they had, they wouldn’t be dealing with this now.

“We were at our limit. Many had lost their lives, and very few remained. We could only just manage to seal it away.”

They’d just barely won. I couldn’t blame them for not finishing it when they’d staked their lives on the battle. Only people who had been there could judge them.

“So, we just need to attack its head and use up its mana, then?”

“It sounds simple. However, its head is the most dangerous place to be. If we are eaten, that is the end of it, and its attacks are fearsome. If you allow yourself to be attacked, assume that you will perish.”

I didn’t intend to get hit, but I kind of wondered if I’d be okay, what with my bear gear and all. Then again, I was starting to let my guard down. I adjusted my mindset. I needed to be more cautious.

“Also, what kinds of attacks do the heads use? You said there’s a fire one? And water, wind, and rock?”

From what I’d heard, the orochi could use all those elements. Since Ms. Kagari had fought it before, she’d know which head was sealed where. Or at least, so I’d thought.

“Sorry. I have already forgotten, as it has been some centuries.” She really did seem regretful.

It would’ve helped to have known, but I could just fight it to find out.

We got close to the orochi’s head.

The orochi had coiled itself with its head stretched out, but it wasn’t moving. It was even bigger than the black viper I’d fought before. It also had three other heads, each possessing its own elemental powers. The black viper seemed cute in comparison.

“It’s not moving right now. Should we wait until it does?”

I wanted to draw first blood, but Mr. Mumulute and the others were still working on the seals right now. If we attacked and the orochi started to struggle, then the other seals might break, undoing any effort they’d already put in.

“Yes. It has just woken, so it likely will be slow to move. And Mumulute and the others will need time to seal it as well.”

So Ms. Kagari and I were in agreement. But then the situation changed, and we had to change our plans with it.

“No, it appears we do not have that time, after all.”

The orochi’s black body was starting to burn red.

“So this is the fire part of the orochi!”

The orochi’s body was now engulfed in flames.

“If you approach it, you will be burned by the flames. Be careful.”

The trees around us started to catch as well. Ms. Kagari summoned up water using magic and doused herself in it.

“What magic do you specialize in?! If you can use water magic, then cover yourself in it. It may ease the heat some. Although it will likely be turned into

steam, 'tis better than nothing.”

“I can cast most magic. My clothes also have heat resistance, so I’m okay.” It was built into the bear protective gear.

“That is reassuring to know. Now, we will start our assault.”

The orochi reared its head and looked at me and Ms. Kagari. It was that same eye that’d been moving around in the seal.

The monster brought its head down like a hammer, trying to crush us under it. Ms. Kagari and I got moving. I heard a huge crash as the orochi’s head smashed right into the ground where we’d been. Ms. Kagari hurled an orb of water off and I used a water arrow. Both hit the orochi but didn’t seem to do any damage.

“Fire more magic! It is weak to water. That is why it creates flames, but the more it creates, the more mana it must use!” Ms. Kagari said as she lobbed more water at the orochi, but the moment it hit, it evaporated away. Just like Ms. Kagari said, our attacks seemed to upset the orochi. More flames rose from where she’d hit it.

I couldn’t let her do all the work, so I lobbed another water spell at the orochi from its blind spot. It briefly doused the flames directly atop the orochi’s head, but they almost immediately reignited, hot as ever.

People from the past had risked their lives to fight this thing. I understood why it’d taken all they had just to seal it away. But this time, we needed to defeat it once and for all. They hadn’t been able to do it in the past, but maybe I could.

I ran in front of the orochi. It opened its mouth wide and tried to breathe flames. I timed it exactly to release flame bears.

If we couldn’t hurt it from the outside, then we just needed to get its insides.

“Go!”

The bears headed right into the orochi’s mouth. The orochi closed its maw,

and I triumphantly imagined it burning from the inside out. Instead, it opened its mouth again and breathed flames directly at me.

Did it just eat my flame bears?!

I immediately twisted around and dodged the flames. The fire raged by, right over where I'd just been. The moment I thought I was out of the way, the orochi moved its head sideways to follow me. I was in the air, engulfed in flames!

"Young maiden!"

I landed back down on the ground.

"That was close."

I really thought I was a goner back there. Good thing I had my trusty bear gear.

"Young maiden, are you all right?"

Ms. Kagari was looking at me with wonder.

"I'm fine," I said.

"You were aflame!"

"My clothes can protect me from measly fire attacks like that."

Then again, I'd been pretty terrified just now. That was my first time being totally on fire.

"Even if your clothes have heat resistance, this seems far from ordinary."

I agreed, actually, but I'd gotten these clothes from a god, so that was just how they were. But I'd learned something: I couldn't scorch the orochi from the inside. If we weren't facing the fire head specifically, we might have been able to use that tactic successfully. Serious bad luck!

Chapter 502: Sakura Reinforces the Seal

I PARTED WAYS WITH Miss Luimin and rode to the building of the seal on the esteemed Kumakyu.

We had dragged Miss Luimin into this, even though she had nothing to do with the danger facing us. I felt so guilty. And it wasn't just Miss Luimin, either. Lady Yuna and Lord Mumulute—even the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru—were part of this now. So many people who weren't from our country were risking their lives to help defeat the orochi.

Would I ever be able to repay them? Never mind that—would we even survive for me to attempt to make recompense?

While I worried, I heard a tremor from behind me. The esteemed Kumakyu came to a halt and looked behind us too. We saw the giant orochi there, rising. So that was what it looked like...

It was so massive. We were far away from it, but I could still see how big it was.

The people of the past had risked their lives to fight it and seal it away, even though it was so very big. And now Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari were charging in to fight it all alone.

Would we be able to do this? I was so frightened that I could hardly move.

"Cwoon."

The esteemed Kumakyu crooned at me.

"Please don't worry."

I was scared, but I didn't want to worry the esteemed Kumakyu, so I gave the bear a pat on the head.

We had Lady Kagari with us, and Lord Mumulute, who sealed the orochi away in the past. Also, we had Lady Yuna, the ray of hope from my dreams. I was sure that we would be able to get through this.

But we couldn't be the only ones. We needed the help of His Majesty and the subjects. I wished I could tell His Majesty about the situation, but we had no way to report to him. We could not use Lady Yuna's door or her magical device to talk to people far away.

If Shinobu were here, we could have spoken to His Majesty, but she fainted after fighting the monsters to protect the seal.

"I'm the only one here. I need to do what I can right now."

"Cwoon."

It felt like the esteemed Kumakyu was telling me they were here with me too. So I said, "You're right, you are here, Esteemed Kumakyu." That seemed to make them happy.

"Let's hurry as quick as we can," I said, and then we started dashing off.

Thanks to the esteemed Kumakyu, we reached the building with the seal right away.

The building was a little damaged. I could see that Lady Yuna and the others risked their lives to fight to protect this place. Scars from the battle pocked the structure and the ground around it. I also saw dead monsters that looked like birds. It was my first time seeing them, but from what I have heard, I guessed they were volkrows. And it wasn't just volkrows—dead wyverns littered the ground, too.

They were all so large. I still felt frightened, even though I knew they were dead.

"Craw!"

I heard a sound from above. When I looked up, I saw a black bird circling above. It was a volkrow!

I dismounted the esteemed Kumakyu, opened the door, and ran away. The esteemed Kumakyu didn't come with me, though.

"Esteemed Kumakyu? Please come in, hurry."

If we didn't close the door soon, the volkrow might follow us in.

"Cwoon."

The esteemed Kumakyu walked away from the door.

Where were they going?

I followed the esteemed Kumakyu out and saw them following after the volkrow. I understood immediately. The esteemed Kumakyu was going to slay the volkrow.

"Oh, esteemed Kumakyu..."

They were nobly protecting me and the seal as Lady Yuna had asked them. Then I needed to do my duty, too.

"Esteemed Kumakyu, I'm counting on you."

I left the monster to them and went back into the building so I could go to the basement where the magic circle was. Once I got there, I found it—a giant magic circle. It was blackish red and very eerie. I'd seen it many times in the past, but it had never looked so ominous before.

I stood in front of the circle. Right then, the patterns on the floor moved. I put myself on guard. When I looked very closely, I saw something like an eye swivel inside of it.

That had to be the orochi's eye...

I felt frightened. So that was why Ms. Kagari hadn't let me go inside. If the orochi revived here, then I would perish.

My legs trembled, but I reminded myself that Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari were fighting the orochi. I couldn't let myself become too frightened and run away here. I'd volunteered myself. I headed to the center of the magic circle.

There were mana gems embedded in the center of the circle. I laid the carpet Lord Mumulute had given me over those, recalling what Lord Mumulute had taught me. I needed to place the gems he'd also given me over the same spot on the carpet.

While I did that, the orochi's eye stared right at me. It was so scary. But I was the only one who could protect this seal.

I slapped my face with my hands to give myself more courage. I needed to protect the seal for the sake of everyone fighting. Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari needed me.

I placed the mana gems I'd gotten from Lord Mumulute on top of the carpet.

"Here and here and here."

This looked right. I'd arranged the gems on the carpet.

"Whew...hwoo..."

I took deep breaths and placed my hand on the magic circle on the carpet.

Please... Please work.

I poured my mana into it. I could feel it flowing from inside of me into the circle. The mana gems and the circle started to glow too.

I only gave it a small amount of mana. According to Lord Mumulute, it needed to be continuous, so giving it a lot of mana all at once wouldn't help. He said that if the seal seemed like it was about to break, only then would I need to give it a lot of mana.

I could see the eye below the seal growing slower, then stopping. I'd done it! It was reinforced!

The orochi killed lots of people in the past. If it fully revived, the only thing left for us would be despair. What I saw in my dreams would come to pass. I was afraid, and I didn't want to see anyone die.

Lady Yuna, Lady Kagari...

I heard something hit the ground over and over again as the ground quivered. The orochi was struggling. If they were hit with the orochi's giant body, Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari would surely perish.

I hoped they wouldn't die.

At that moment, all I could do was pray.

Chapter 503:

The King Makes a Move

YESTERDAY, I MET with the maiden dressed as a bear that Sakura claimed was our ray of hope from her dreams. I could not understand what it meant when I received the report—dressed as a *bear*?—however, she was exactly as described.

According to the report, she was fifteen. That was nearly the same age as my own daughter. She did not seem strong enough to defeat Jyubei if I judged her only by her looks. I was surprised Shinobu had been able to recognize this girl was the hope that Sakura described. Had I not received the report of her battle against Jyubei, I likely would not have believed it myself.

To test this maiden's power, we had her fight Jyubei. He was one of the strongest people in our nation. Few could defeat him. Even if he had held back out of consideration for her youth, I did not expect that she would still be able to defeat him.

However, the maiden had won. This was a most pleasant miscalculation on my part. Sakura's words had been proven. Once the most strident objectors heard it, they could only fall into silence. No one could speak against this now.

I felt apologetic for testing the maiden. If we had any misstep, our hope would have disappeared. However, she accepted my apology and also agreed to battle the orochi.

I felt ashamed for needing to entrust the future of the country to her.

In order to introduce the maiden to Kagari, Shinobu said that the three of them would travel to the island of Linesu. It seemed they would ride atop the ocean on bears—which meant the first report I had received regarding the maiden's method of travel had been true. The maiden had ridden over the

surface of the ocean on a bear. At first, I had thought the bear had been with her upon a ship, but no—truly, the bear had run on water.

Still, what else could I have thought? Who wouldn't believe they had misunderstood? No one would take such words at face value, and yet, it seemed they were true.

So when Sakura invited the maiden to the island, they traveled by means of the bears. Shinobu asked me to keep this extraordinary method of travel secret for the time being. But who in the world would I tell? If I should tell my vassals a bear had crossed the ocean over the waves, they would think I had lost my wits. In fact, I could hardly believe my own ears.

In any case, I intended to keep this secret. If, as Sakura said, this maiden was our hope, I could not upset her. No matter how minuscule the hope, if it could save our country, I would hold fast to it.

However, I had to admit I wished I could have witnessed the bear running across the ocean for myself.

They were likely meeting with Kagari on Linesu even now. Kagari had protected our country for many long years. She had saved us when we were in danger. She was a fox who had lived for centuries, and she hadn't changed in as many years, so few knew she existed. As she had perpetual youth, that also invited trouble. That was also the reason she had set a barrier to prevent men from entering the island.

As I had known her since my youth, she was something of an older sister or mother to me. Though she also knew too much about me, which was itself trouble. I was often outmaneuvered by Kagari for this reason.

My concern now was whether she would believe the maiden dressed as a bear. And so, though she would likely be in danger, I gave my permission to allow Sakura to enter the island with them. Just as she had known me since my birth, Kagari knew Sakura as well. She would listen to what the girl had to say.

Though I worried for them, I needed to progress with the plan to face the Orochi. I thought over the strategy as I worked when I received a message. It seemed that monsters had appeared along the roads.

At first, I wondered why anyone would report such a routine thing to me, but there were more than usual. I had also received word that the Adventurers' Guild wished for me to dispatch soldiers. I ordered this to be done and informed them that any news was to be brought to me at once.

I felt a sense of foreboding. Why had monsters gathered at a time like this?

After receiving the report, I kept about my work for a time until a small bird appeared from my open window. The white bird flitted about the room until it stopped to perch upon my offered hand. This was Shinobu's messenger bird. I found a small tube around its neck.

What was this? I was sure that Shinobu was with Sakura and the bear maiden for their meeting with Kagari. Had something happened? For a moment, I - almost believed that Kagari must have done something terrible to the bear maiden.

I quickly took the paper from the tube. It contained a short message: "Monsters attacking island. Seal may break."

I had been mistaken. The situation was far worse than I had anticipated. The monsters were gathering. I remembered the earlier report. I could only think of one thing—so that had been the cause of it all!

I stood from my seat and ordered for all the vassals to gather at once. At that moment, another messenger arrived. The commander of the forces we had dispatched earlier to slay the monsters was requesting reinforcements. It seemed more monsters had appeared.

I pulled out a map and inspected the area where the monsters had appeared. It seemed that they were in fact migrating from near Linesu. It was likely that

the same was occurring on the other islands. No—I knew it was, without a doubt.

“The area around Linesu is the most dangerous.”

“What do you mean, Your Majesty?”

“I have received a message from Shinobu, who is on Linesu. It seems monsters have gathered on the island.”

“It can’t be what we suspected...”

The others had also guessed the same as I had.

“It is said that a great many monsters appeared in the past as well when the orochi appeared. These monsters gathering once more is a sign it has happened once more.”

They all stirred once I said this.

“We must check in with each of the islands at once, and we must rush to prepare the soldiers.”

I issued orders to protect the entrances to the towns and to guarantee the safety of the roads. Some were still traveling and hadn’t yet had time to take shelter. Our priority was to protect the people. I also issued orders for each village to not allow anyone outside.

“And send the woman you have gathered to fight the orochi to Linesu.”

I did not know whether they could help if the orochi had revived, but we could not use men in any case. At least I could have them bring Sakura back. My sister had left Sakura in my care.

“What shall we do with the mages?”

“The orochi hasn’t revived yet. We should prioritize protecting the people from the monsters for now. Have them go slay the monsters.”

Confound it all! I’d thought we had a few more days. I had planned to decide based upon what Kagari thought of the maiden. Kagari’s opinion was of utmost

importance in this matter, and for that reason, what came next depended on her.

Oh, Kagari. Did she believe the maiden was our hope? Or had she felt nothing? Even if I had wanted to ask her, I could not anymore. I needed to slay the monsters that were gathering now.

I informed the others I would leave the castle and town in the hands of another, as I would go to the harbor.

“Your Majesty, you should stay in the castle.”

“You can all handle the monsters. If the orochi revives, there will be chaos on the ground. What else could I do but go to the forefront?”

“But...”

“I know,” I said. “I will not put myself in danger’s way. If the worst comes to pass, I will simply issue orders. Preserve as many soldiers and mages as you can. However, send them out without reserve when the people are in danger. I entrust you fully with the monsters. Should you find yourself in an emergency, then send a messenger to the harbor.”

“Understood. I shall do as Your Majesty orders.”

After I issued my orders, I headed to the harbor.

“Once the ship is ready, we will leave.”

The harbors were at work preparing for departures. Soon, the preparations would be done, and we would board. I could see the island from here, but I did not know the situation there.

We finished readying the ship and left for Linesu. Our vessel steadily moved forward.

“Your Majesty! It’s the island!”

The soldier who had been keeping an eye on the island began to cry out in

fear. He could not articulate himself.

I peered at the island through the telescope I carried. I saw smoke rising from the island, then flames as well. Then, I saw something large moving.

What was that? It had a long neck. The orochi... The orochi had revived.

Shinobu, Sakura, Kagari, and the bear maiden were all on the island. What had happened? Was Sakura safe?

“Take the ship close to the island.”

“But Your Majesty!”

“I simply want to see it.”

I could not enter the island, nor could the men with me, but we could approach the wharf.

As we approached, we could see more of the situation. I used the telescope to look closer. I could see the orochi—it was a massive snake head enveloped in flames. And I saw some small things moving around it. They were Kagari and Yuna.

Were they fighting?! What had become of Shinobu and Sakura?

All I could assume was that the two of them were fighting while Shinobu took Sakura to safety. But was anywhere safe on the island when the orochi had revived? I could only see a single head so far. If only one of its heads had come back, perhaps there was still hope.

First, I needed to bring Sakura to safety.

“Messenger, tell the ship that has the women on it to head to Linesu’s wharf. Our priority is Sakura’s safety. Once they have guaranteed that, they will battle the orochi! Give them my orders!”

My orders were dispatched immediately, but the other ship did not move. What were they doing?! If they did not move quickly, Sakura would die.

I caught sight of a small bird flying toward us. The messenger took it and

checked it.

“Your Majesty!”

“What?!”

“They are so frightened after seeing the orochi, they will not go to the island.”

“What are they saying?”

The messenger’s face stiffened when I shouted. He seemed at a loss. I knew that I was simply venting my anger on him, but after all their complaints, this was what happened once we gathered the people to fight?

Sakura’s hope—the maiden dressed as a bear—was fighting out there.

“A new order then! Gather mages at the harbor.”

That was our only choice now. In the worst case, we would need to sacrifice the mages and lure the orochi away from the country.

Chapter 504:
The Bear Girl Fights the Orochi
Part 1

THE OROCHI'S BODY was red-hot and lighting the nearby grass on fire.

"Confound it all! This is sweltering."

Ms. Kagari summoned a ton of water. She made it rise above her and doused herself with it. Her clothes went kind of see-through, which was a little risqué—probably because of the boobs. I looked at my own. Maybe after a few centuries went by, I'd fill out like Ms. Kagari?

"Young maiden, are you sure you are not too hot in that getup?!"

Au contraire. I was actually completely cool because of my so-called getup. I actually felt pretty comfortable.

"It's made from special cloth, so I'm okay."

"I see. 'Tis fine, then. However, seeing you dressed in that way makes me feel too warm."

I couldn't take it off just because of that, though. I'd actually die if I took my bear gear off. It was the only reason I could fight.

"Also, Ms. Kagari, do you know if there's any magic we can use other than water that would make it use up its mana?"

I hadn't been able to destroy the orochi from the inside using my flame bears.

"Hmm," Ms. Kagari said. "It would be easy to defeat if we could toss it into the sea."

We couldn't do that if we couldn't move its body, though.

"Then should we revive the other parts of the orochi?"

"Ha ha, you jest. If you do that, we may need to fight the water head in the

ocean, which would be worse. We cannot fight on the water. And if a ship is hit by the orochi's attack, it would sink. We would be weakened if we were above the water."

That thought had crossed my mind when I battled the kraken. If a big enough wave rocked the boat, it might sink the entire vessel. Fighting a monster in the ocean was dangerous. Thinking about it, the king's plan to lure the orochi away with mages on a ship was dangerous. If they sailed in the other direction, they'd need to keep luring the orochi away and wouldn't be able to return to the Land of Wa. Any of the mages and crew on the ship would end up dead for sure. I knew I couldn't let them go through with it.

"Then I guess our only option is to work hard and defeat it here."

"'Tis right. If we defeat it here, we will have no further problems."

Ms. Kagari and I smiled.

"Okay, let's get to it."

I didn't know a good way to beat the fire head of the orochi. My only option was to fight it like I normally would.

We both started running. I leapt high and got really close to the orochi's head, then launched an orb of water at the flames there. The orb evaporated the moment it hit its head. It was kind of like throwing water on a hot frying pan.

Ms. Kagari also blasted it with a stream of water, but it didn't seem to be hurting the orochi. Wasn't fire supposed to be weak against water?

Just to see if it'd work, I tried using a bear air blade on the orochi, but that made the flames blaze up even more. Next, I tried making a giant boulder to throw at it. It hit the orochi's head but bounced right off.

Hmm. Guess physically attacking it wouldn't work. I tried a block of ice, but it also bounced away, like the rock.

"Its skin has been strengthened through mana. The same is true of its head. Aim for its eyes and mouth!" Ms. Kagari said.

I tried, but the orochi wasn't exactly cooperative. It was hard as a marble statue, but statues didn't move. The head wound and snapped to attack us. It was also dozens of meters above my head, so I needed to jump to make my own attacks.

The monster rammed its head into the ground to attack us and slithered around. Because it was so big, whenever it did that, the trees also took a beating. They bent away from us, the forest rippling like a wave was passing over it. We couldn't even get near the orochi when it was doing that.

If we were on flat ground, we might have been able to fight a little better, but there was practically a jungle around us. Linesu wasn't just a giant flat island, after all. Our only choice was to accept the battlefield we were in and fight.

I made a giant blob of water shaped like a bear that was about as big as my actual bears and timed my throw. The water bear hit the orochi on the head, started to boil, then lost its form and burst. The orochi shook it off like it was irritated, and the flames in the spot I'd hit weakened. It seemed like I'd hurt it, but that had been far from a fatal wound.

My last resort might be electricity magic at this point. I used my mana to make a bear made from lightning. It crackled as I made a gale around it and shot it off. It hit the orochi, dislodging some of the monster's skin. Now we're talking!

But then the spot I'd damaged was engulfed in flames and healed. Wait, seriously? That was too quick. I couldn't even hurt it much with electricity magic. Just how tough was this thing? Or was that mana resistance?

I'd seen some opponents you couldn't use magic on in the game too, but I couldn't hurt the orochi at all. It was like a game that was impossible to beat.

"Lightning magic? How very rare."

Ms. Kagari knew what kind of spell I'd cast right away. I hadn't seen any mages using electricity magic so far, but Ms. Kagari seemed to know about lightning magic.

“Ms. Kagari, do you have any special hidden moves or anything?”

She was a centuries-old great fox, after all. It'd make sense if she had two or three special moves up her sleeve. Just like how her tails multiplied—she had three I could see right now.

“I do, but I will not use it now. If I do, I will not be able to move.”

Okay, so it was one of those. When I used all my mana, I couldn't move anymore either, because I'd feel so tired. I remembered when I'd fought the kraken. Plus the orochi had four heads. If she used up all her power on fighting just one, we'd still have three to go. If I could, I'd just fight off all three on my own, but I couldn't promise that. Just the fire head was already trouble enough.

Well, what to do...?

The best way to deal with it would be to throw it into the ocean, but I couldn't do that to just one head alone. I didn't think I could move it myself, anyway. We couldn't destroy it from the inside out—it'd just heal itself. It was the worst kind of opponent. I couldn't just run away, though.

First, we needed to do something about the flames around it.

“Ms. Kagari, I'm going to use a big move, so keep your distance.”

“All right.”

Ms. Kagari just did as I said without asking why. I was kind of flattered she trusted me so much. She was really counting on me.

I gathered mana in my bear puppet and started running toward the orochi.

“Young maiden!”

I felt the heat gusting around me, but that didn't affect me in my bear gear. I thrust out my bear puppet with the mana gathered in it and created a huge stream of water. It turned into a current that coiled around the orochi. Then the current itself started to spin. This was a water tornado. The water swirled around, assaulting the flaming orochi.

When I made a really big tornado from wind during the whole sacred tree stuff, it'd used up a ton of my mana. I hadn't wanted to use this because of that, but this wasn't the time for hesitation.

The water tornado wrapped around the fire orochi and the flames around it disappeared. Okay, the flames were out.

"Young maiden! You did wonderfully!"

Ms. Kagari ran past me from behind toward the orochi. Then just as she tried to attack it, the orochi started blazing up again.

"Hey!"

How could it heal so soon after I put out the flames?!

The flames had disappeared for only a moment, then reignited right away. The orochi raised its head and swung it to sweep away anything from under it. And that wasn't all—huge, blazing trees fell around us, as if trying to attack us too. I dodged to the side, but I couldn't avoid them that way. We both leaped up.

"My tails will catch on fire at this rate."

Ms. Kagari tried to summon water as she dodged, but it all evaporated right away.

"It seems the orochi had more mana in its reserves than we bargained for."

"You mean those flames are mana?"

"As I said in the beginning, its body is enveloped in mana."

She told me that was why its skin was so hard.

"Mana covers the orochi's entire body to strengthen its skin and create the flames."

"Is that the case for the other heads?"

"Exactly right."

This sounded like a whole lot more work than I'd expected.

The orochi raised its head in indignation, opened its mouth and breathed flames. We dodged, but the trees around us burned.

"This is terrible. Not that direction!" Ms. Kagari shouted.

The orochi had breathed fire at another building that was holding its seal. The fire hit it and the building burst into flames. This was the next building over. Luimin and Sakura wouldn't be in there. If they had, they would have been in trouble.

"Young maiden! I shall leave the orochi to you. I will go to the building."

Ms. Kagari started to run over. I wasn't exactly sure what to do, though.

I used another water tornado to get the orochi to quiet down. It swirled around the orochi and put out the flames again, which halted the orochi's flame breath. It started rubbing its head on the ground to get rid of the tornado, crying out, before catching on fire again.

C'mon! It was way too powerful. How were we supposed to defeat it?

The fact that I couldn't attack its insides was something I really hadn't been expecting. It was my fault for being naive enough to think that I could fight any large monster with my bear flames, though. If only this hadn't been the fire head! I bet it would have worked.

The orochi was furious now and growled before taking another massive, fiery breath. The flames flew toward me. I protected myself using wind magic, but my surroundings were engulfed. I created water and put those out.

At this rate, things would start getting rocky. If this became a battle of mana, then the one with less mana would lose.

While I was trying to think of what to do, the ground shook.

What was that? It didn't feel like it was coming from the snake head. Was another head reviving?! At this rate, we'd need to face two orochi heads at once. We didn't have the time! How long did we have until it revived?! What

could I do? How would I be able to defeat the fire head?

Its head was hard. I couldn't destroy it from the inside. I couldn't hurt it by flinging rocks at it. Wind didn't work. Water only annoyed it. Maybe electricity magic really was my only shot?

I tried to wrack my brain. The ground kept shaking. The orochi breathed fire. I dodged as I thought.

What did I need to destroy to beat it? Its heart? Its mana gem? But where were they? The body?

While I was thinking, the tremors grew stronger, the ground split, and the second head slowly rose from the ground.

The second head...

"I'm sorry. I could not stop it from reviving," Ms. Kagari said to me as she came back.

It wasn't like it was her fault. It was going to revive the moment the flames hit the building. We should have stopped it from breathing fire in the first place.

Since the new head had only just revived, I hoped it'd stay calm for a while. But as soon as I thought that, the air started to move.

What?

I immediately realized what was happening. The newest orochi head was gathering wind around its body.

"So we have the wind orochi. This is a most terrible combination. If only it had been the water head, it would have been less compatible with the fire head."

I almost snapped that maybe she should have remembered which head was sealed where, then.

The two orochi heads towered in front of us.

Chapter 505:

The Bear Girl Fights the Orochi

Part 2

NOW THAT THE FIRE AND WIND heads of the orochi were both revived, it was blazing and gusting. The fire was burning even more intensely because of the wind, which meant that the flames around the fire head were being fed by the wind head.

So some of the heads hurt each other and others strengthened each other. I wondered what would happen if the other two heads revived too. Just imagining it was terrifying.

“What a disaster.”

“It’d be good if we could just break the mana gems,” I said. Those should have been somewhere in the heads.

“If we could, this would not be so difficult.”

It was still weird that it had so many elements it could use. Since it could use fire and wind, it’d need those mana gems, and an elementless gem.

Maybe it was using an elementless gem to convert mana? If we broke that, it would lose its source of mana and be unable to regenerate. Then we could break the fire mana gem and put out those flames.

On the other hand, if we resuscitated its body, then we might end up having to fight off four heads. If it ran off into the sea, then we’d have no way to fight it anymore. There were pros to that strategy, but too many cons.

“Maybe we should let it revive and then fight the body and break its mana gem?”

I couldn’t help but suggest it. I had no idea how hard the orochi’s body was, but I felt like we’d waste less mana by fighting the body instead of the heads.

But then Kagari told me something shocking.

“It not only has a gem in its body, but also in each of its heads.”

“It has gems in its heads? How do you know that?”

“We learned of it the last time we fought it. Mumulute and I determined from the mana circulation and the elemental mana that it has them in each of its heads.”

Well, I guess I’d assumed wrong. Wolves, tigerwolves, and scorpions all had gems in the center of their bodies. That was why I’d been convinced gems were always on the inside of monsters. I hadn’t seen the black viper being butchered, so I had no idea where its gem was.

“So, are there four gems in all?”

If it had four huge gems, that explained how strong it was. If they were all as big as the kraken, then it’d be four times as powerful. Considering that, its regeneration abilities suddenly made sense. I remembered how the kraken had regenerated even after I cut off its tentacles.

“No, the orochi has another gem in its body, so it has five.”

“*Five...?*”

“Mumulute’s seal on its body holds back the mana gem’s power. ’Tis why we created five seals.”

So that was why.

“The mana gem in its body supplies mana to each of its heads. That is why we must not allow the body’s seal to be undone. If the body is able to supply mana to the heads, they will be even more difficult to defeat.”

No wonder Ms. Kagari couldn’t take down the barrier that was keeping men out if doing so would also take out the seal on the orochi’s body. If the orochi became even stronger, then we really wouldn’t be able to fight it at all. But if it had mana gems in its heads, that changed things.

“Then what if we break the mana gems in its heads...?”

“As Mumulute is holding back its body, it should not be able to receive mana from anywhere else. They should no longer be able to move.”

Looked like that was our best hope.

“Why are you smiling?”

I hadn’t even known I was.

“Well, all we have to do is break the gem in its head to defeat it, right?”

“It sounds simple, however, its head is surrounded by fire, so we cannot approach it. If we do, we may be burned alive. The same applies to the wind head. If we approach it, we may not simply end up injured. It could tear our bodies apart. And you saw it as well, did you not? Even if we are able to hurt it in the slightest, it will regenerate quickly.”

“I’ve got an idea.”

I’d picked up a couple things from watching the fight. We just needed to attack its weakness to win. The issue was whether we could do the same thing with the wind head. I was pretty sure now that we could beat the fire head.

“Well! Let’s slay this orochi!”

I stood at my full height and started stretching to loosen myself up.

“Are you a fool? Why would you risk your life for another country? You could run and no one would complain.”

“Hmm, you have a point, but now we’ve gotten to know each other—and Shinobu, and Sakura, too. I can’t ditch you.”

And because I’d come here, Mr. Mumulute was now involved. Even Luimin was in danger. If I hadn’t come here, Mr. Mumulute wouldn’t have even known this was happening.

If I hadn’t come, they would have had no hope of defeating the orochi. Now that I was here, my fate was tied with theirs. I needed Mr. Mumulute. Luimin

had volunteered to stay, but really it was all my fault. I'd called Luimin on the bear phone and had her meet Sakura, and because of that, they'd formed a bond.

"And I have my doorway, so I can run whenever I need to."

"Yes, that's right. Please let me escape with you if the worst should happen."

Despite her words, I was pretty sure Ms. Kagari would never run away. If she were going to, she would have a long time ago.

"Well then, young maiden, how shall we defeat the orochi? You must have an idea?"

"There's something I've been wanting to try. I want to destroy the fire head, so if you could distract the wind head, that'd help me a ton."

"All right. I can take that role."

I didn't even need to explain any further before she accepted.

Ms. Kagari offered me her fist.

"You offer your fist as well. We do this when making promises."

They had things like that here? We bumped fists.

"This is kind of embarrassing."

"I feel the same. I have no idea who could have come up with such a gesture."

Then we ran off to take on our heads. I headed into the blazing fire and Ms. Kagari headed into the gusting gale. If I hadn't had my bear gear, I probably would have been burning, but it felt totally comfortable.

I didn't feel so great about all the vegetation burning around me, though. If you needed to burn wood to live, that was one thing, but I didn't like burning stuff just to destroy things.

I went counterclockwise around the orochi and waited for the right timing. I looked over at Ms. Kagari and saw that she was attacking her head to lead it away from the fire head. If she went too far in that direction, she'd lead it to the

buildings where Luimin and Sakura were.



It didn't seem like I had a ton of time to spend with the fire head. I ran and used bear water magic to attack the fire head to get its attention.

Come on, look at me.

I hit the orochi's face with bear water. It looked annoyed and turned. It was paying attention now. I timed it just right to jump right into the orochi's face.

"Young maiden!" Ms. Kagari yelled as she fought the wind orochi.

Did she really have time to watch me? Right as I thought that, I hit the orochi's face. If I hadn't had my bear clothes, I would have been burned by touching it. No, worse—I would be dead.

The orochi opened its mouth wide and gathered mana. Then the mana turned into red raging flames. I wouldn't let it do this. I stretched out my arm and created a gigantic bear rock in its mouth. All I had to do was seal the fire at its source.

To use magic, you had to gather mana in the spot where you'd use it. So you'd gather mana in your hands, or your feet, if that's where you wanted to release the spell. The orochi was releasing mana from its whole body to make its flames. But there was one other spot where it gathered mana. That was its mouth, where it breathed fire from.

I threw the bear rock into the orochi's mouth. Monsters always made fire inside their bodies to breathe it. In the game, they had a fire sac or water sac or lightning sac—something where they created it. But this snake wasn't creating its fire *inside* its body. It was changing mana into fire. Whenever it breathed fire, it gathered mana in its mouth and then released the flames. Therefore, blocked mouth equaled no fire.

It tried to close its mouth, but my rock bear was getting in the way. It started shaking its head side to side in order to loosen the rock bear, but I grabbed it and held it in place. Now the orochi was trying to hit its head against the ground to get the rock bear out of its mouth. Before it could make contact, I got off.

It rammed its head a few times against the ground, but it couldn't get the rock out or break it—but it sure looked painful. It opened its mouth wider and tried to swallow the bear but couldn't. Then it tried to crush the bear in its mouth but that didn't work either.

Then, to deal the final blow, I pushed the bear harder into the orochi's mouth. Back when I'd faced the kraken, I made my stone bears using the earth at the bottom of the ocean. I could make them even when they were far away from me. Still, I couldn't make something where my mana couldn't reach. It seemed like the orochi's mana was blocking mine, so I had to get near it to do this.

I touched the bear in its mouth and poured mana into it. It became bigger and the orochi's mouth opened wider with it—even though I'm sure the orochi was already opening its mouth as wide as it could go.

The orochi started to shake its head. It seemed painful. I held on tight to the bear so I wouldn't fall off. The orochi released even more fire from its body in an attempt to burn me, but my bear gear blocked the flames. I poured even more mana into the bear and made it even larger. I could hear the orochi crying out from a gap around the bear. I didn't stop, though.

Part of the orochi's mouth was starting to rip, but I didn't stop making the bear larger. In the end, the orochi's jaw was ravaged...and it was a lot grosser than I expected.

Once its jaw was destroyed, the orochi crashed into the ground with a huge sound. The bear stone, now loose, also tumbled out like a boulder.

Good thing you got it out, I started to say, but right then, the orochi's jaw was enveloped in flames and started to regenerate.

Hey! It was going to heal again after all the work I'd done? Well, I wasn't going to let it. I used my bear water to put out the flames and stop the healing process. It looked like its flame magic healed it. Since I'd put the flames out, it couldn't generate anymore...but then the flames just ignited again, starting the whole process back over.

“Not gonna happen,” I said.

I gathered mana in my hand. Once I had lightning built up, I formed it into the shape of a bear, formed some wind around it, and lobbed it at the orochi's head. The head was completely destroyed, and something big and red flew out of it.

The orochi's snake-like neck slowed and fell to the ground. Then it stopped moving entirely. The fire head wasn't regenerating.

I headed over to check on the red thing that had come out of the orochi's head. A red mana gem lay on the ground. The orochi hadn't been able to regenerate anymore because it lost its gem that was the source of its mana. Since Mr. Mumulute was keeping its body in check, its additional mana supply must have been cut off from there.

Anyway, I'd beaten the fire head. One down. I put the fire mana gem into my bear storage for the time being so it couldn't be used for more regeneration. It felt like if I left it lying here, the bits of viscera would collect and reform, like something straight from an anime or a manga. Either way, better to collect it now than regret it later.

Chapter 506: The Bear Finds Out Ms. Kagari's Secret

“YOUNG MAIDEN!”

Ms. Kagari, who'd been handling the wind head, ran into its blind spot and dashed over to me.

“You did not hurt yourself by leaping into those flames?! Did you burn yourself?!”

She felt my face and body, trying to check for any injuries.

“My clothes are made from special fabric, so they can protect me from little flames like that.”

“Little?! What kind of fabric is that made from?! I was about to abandon hope when you went into the flames.”

Apparently, I'd worried her.

“Did you truly defeat it?”

“You can see for yourself.”

Ms. Kagari looked at the destroyed head and the rock bear on the ground.

“I cannot believe it. You defeated it entirely. You did not have to weaken it and then retreat as I did.”

The issue now was the wind orochi. It had wind all over its head and its body. If we went near it, I wouldn't get cut up thanks to the bear gear, but I'd definitely be blown away.

“I did not think you would truly defeat the fire head. Now, there are three left. Do you have a way to defeat the wind head as well?”

Ms. Kagari was staring at the orochi. I wasn't sure if it was because it'd lost Ms. Kagari or if it was because the fire head was down, but the wind head had

stopped moving. Only the gusts still whipping around it were animated. The greenery around, set alight by the fire orochi, burned faster because of that wind, though.

I was worried that the fire might've moved to Luimin or Sakura's buildings, but I knew my bears would get them out of there if that happened.

"Since I need to get near the head to use this method, I don't think it'll work because of the wind."

My bear gear was only good for protection, but it wasn't like I was completely invincible. I wouldn't feel the impact, but it didn't entirely negate a blow. In other words, the orochi could send me flying.

"If only we had a way to stop the wind..."

Based on what I'd seen of Ms. Kagari's fight with it, any half-hearted attacks would be bounced off by the wind. My flame bears and lightning bears might hurt it, but it'd be bad if my bears were integrated into it and then turned against us. It might turn the tornado into a fire tornado or lightning tornado.

When I thought about its regenerative abilities, I realized we were unlikely to be able to defeat it. If we wanted to take it down, we needed to do it from the inside.

"I see. Then what of the rock head and water head?"

The rock head just sounded like it would be hard. It seemed like I'd be able to defeat it the same way as the fire head, and I could probably also destroy it from the inside. And electricity seemed like it'd work on the water head, or I could boil it with a flame bear. Unlike the wind head, I had ways of dealing with the others.

"I think those ones will be fine."

"Ha ha. I can only laugh when you say that about an orochi."

"I'm not joking, though," I replied.

"After seeing your fight against the fire head, I understand. If you say as

much, then I am sure you are capable of defeating them. And if you have no way of defeating the wind head, then I shall fight it. May I leave the rest to you? If I engage this head, I do not think I will be able to fight any longer.”

I guess she was referring to her secret move she mentioned at the start? I sure hoped I’d get to see it. Was it a huge magical spell? Maybe a transformation? I kind of hoped she’d transform into a fox. Maybe she’d be soft in a different way from my bears.

“Once I use this ability, I will be unable to aid you in combat. I will not even be able to serve as a diversion. You shall have to assume I will be as good as not present.”

“Not present? You’re not going to die or anything, right?”

If she’d die, I wouldn’t let her use it. It was possible that I just hadn’t thought of a good way to fight it yet, but there was still hope.

I didn’t like tales of self-sacrifice. Of course, I did get emotional about them, and they could make me cry, but not in a good way—it just made me sad. Even in cases where there was no rescuing someone, I preferred happy endings.

“Ha ha. ’Tis fine. I will not die. However, I will be powerless, so if the orochi flails, I may die then.”

“You really won’t die from the power you use, though?”

“I promise I will not. I will not die.” Ms. Kagari looked me in the eyes and said, clearly, “If you fight the other orochi heads, then I will not die.”

“Then once you defeat the wind head, I’ll defeat the rest of the heads.”

“Will you? In that case, I will entrust you with all of them. If you cannot, then I shall follow after you, so do not worry.”

Wait, into death? If I couldn’t, I’d just run away, personally.

Unaware of what I was thinking, Ms. Kagari started to brace herself.

“Move away. Do not come near me.”

Ms. Kagari's backside swelled, and something wriggled around. A new tail popped out from under her clothes.

Whoa! So when she got more tails, she powered up?! Apparently, she had more than two spare tails.

"Young maiden, please do not be afraid of my appearance."

Ms. Kagari loosened her obi sash around her waist and pulled off her clothes, then threw them at me. Her body glowed silver and she started to transform. Her face became pointed, her arms and legs became more beastlike, and her body itself wreathed itself in silver fur.

"A fox..."

She'd turned into a nine-tailed fox—just like in Japanese legends, I couldn't help but think. A full-blown silver fox with nine tails. This form was also gorgeous.

Then she started to grow larger. She was about as big as Kumakyu or Kumayuru. Apparently, her secret move was that she could turn into a real fox.

Once fully transformed, Ms. Kagari leaped up as if she were flying. The wind orochi saw her in her fox form and sent gusts of wind at her, but she somersaulted through the air to avoid it.

"She's actually flying..."

I'd already been surprised by the transformation, but this—she could fly!

Ms. Kagari flew around the orochi and dodged its attacks as she observed it. Then she breathed a fireball from her mouth. That hit the orochi, but it was blasted away. The gale gusting around it really meant trouble. Then she flew all around the orochi, observing it more.

If only I could fly around too, fighting would be so much easier. If I could fly *and* wear a bear onesie, that might be too surreal even for me, though.

Kagari spat more fireballs and slowly approached the orochi. It opened its maw wide and stretched its head to try to bite her, but Ms. Kagari evaded.

Then, as though she'd timed it, she bit down on the orochi's head.

The orochi tried to shake her off, but Ms. Kagari wasn't letting go. Actually, she bit down even harder. The wind started to slice her up, and I saw her start bleeding. Still, she dug her claws in and kept hold of the orochi.

This wasn't good. Any longer and she'd be in danger. But then her body started to glow.

Was that mana? Wind formed around her body. Her own wind blocked the orochi's gusts and protected her.

It hadn't occurred to me, but anyone could have thought of it. At the same time, you had to be as powerful or more for it to work. And it wasn't easy to face an orochi. As though to prove that, the orochi's gale grew stronger. The wind around Ms. Kagari grew in reply. The orochi strengthened its gusts even more, whipping the surrounding areas with whirlwinds.

At this rate, she wouldn't be able to approach it. She must have known that if she let go, she wouldn't get another chance, so she held on tight.

The orochi bashed its head into the ground over and over again, but Ms. Kagari still wouldn't let go. Any longer and she'd be in danger.

"Ms. Kagari!"

I knew she couldn't hear me, but I shouted anyway. She still looked over at me. The gusts around her grew, and they started to cut into the orochi's head. It looked like it was in pain.

She was holding on so tight, I could see her gums showing. She was going to do something now. She bore down even harder and bit through the orochi's face.

The orochi's gales subsided. When Ms. Kagari sensed the fight was drawing to a close, she bit down and down again and again. The orochi tried to heal the spots she'd taken chunks out of by sending gusts of wind there to regenerate, but Ms. Kagari was blocking them with her own gusts.

If the wind was what had the mana that regenerated the orochi, all she needed to do was block it. I knew that, but it wasn't easy.

She squeezed out the last of her strength to bite the orochi and fire flared out from her mouth. As the wind she created whipped around her, she summoned fire.

She spewed the fire right into the orochi itself. The orochi writhed in pain and flailed its head over and over in an attempt to get her off. She kept a tight hold on it with her mouth and wasn't letting go. She breathed more fire at it.

"Urghh!"

It still wasn't dead yet even after all that?! But the orochi was in a lot of pain, and it was shaking its head side to side in an attempt to get her off. She didn't let go even then.

The orochi's gale was starting to cut into Ms. Kagari. Blood dripped to the ground, but she still didn't let go. This really wasn't working. She'd end up dead at this rate.

"I'll handle the rest of the battle!"

I had no idea if she'd heard me, but I saw her flames grow larger as she growled and then it all exploded.

"Ms. Kagari!"

The gale around the orochi subsided and both the orochi and Ms. Kagari fell down.

I ran over to Ms. Kagari.

"Ms. Kagari!"

She'd fallen near the orochi's head, but she was still moving. The orochi was too, though. It was trying to regenerate by summoning up its wind.

No way. Ms. Kagari had risked her life to fight it, but it could still regenerate.

When I tried to attack it, Ms. Kagari got back up and thrust her snout into the

wounded orochi's head. She seemed to use the last of her strength to pull her snout out along with a gigantic green mana gem. It flew out of her mouth, flung off into the air and landed near me. The wind around the orochi disappeared.

After she was sure that the orochi wouldn't regenerate, she breathed fire all over the areas she'd bitten through on the orochi. The orochi crashed down like a toy that had run out of battery.

We'd defeated the wind head.

I took the gem in front of me and ran over to Ms. Kagari. She was wounded all over.

"Ms. Kagari, are you okay?!"

"I am fine."

She was so bloody, though...

"However, I have no strength left to fight."

"That's fine. I'll fight the rest."

"Ha ha. I am sorry for burdening you with that," Ms. Kagari said as her body shrunk down into the size of a fox cub, then turned into a small girl about as big as Princess Flora. Her nine tails turned into one.

Blood was still running down her face though, even in that form. I gently touched her and healed her wounds for her. Then I pulled out a handkerchief and wiped the blood off of her. Her face was clean again.

"My wounds have disappeared?"

"It's just first aid, so don't move around too much."

The cuts were closed, but they might open again if she moved.

"No, this is more than enough."

Ms. Kagari got up and scowled slightly.

"I am sorry, but would you also return my clothes?"



She wasn't wearing a single scrap of clothing. I handed her the clothes I was holding, and she started to dress. They didn't fit her anymore, so they were extremely loose around her body. Well, she used to fill it out with her...assets, and now she was tiny. Of course they didn't fit.

"Are you going to change back?" And should I drop the "Ms." from her name at this point, considering how tiny she was?

"I will with time. However, as I have no mana, I cannot fight." She seemed apologetic.

"You kept your promise, so it's time for me to fulfill mine."

Now only the rock and water heads were left. The flame and wind heads were no longer threats.

"Ms. Kagari, you can rest."

Something about this was unsettling. Just earlier, she was a beautiful woman with a bounteous bosom and now she was a young but still cute girl.

I casually placed my hand on her head.

"Why have you done this?"

"I dunno, just felt right?"

"I may appear youthful, but I am still your elder."

I knew that, but still, appearances counted for something. I had no idea how many times I'd told myself something like that in the past.

"I'll fight the rest of the heads, so you take refuge somewhere far away."

"I shall. I would be nothing but a burden to you in this state. I cannot even run away. I shall go to Mumulute," Ms. Kagari said, then she lifted her trailing hem and scuttled off to Mr. Mumulute's building.

Meanwhile, I headed to the closest building.

Chapter 507:

The Bear Girl Fights the Rock Orochi

I KNEW SAKURA AND LUIMIN had to be waiting for me. I ran. If I delayed even a bit, I might end up regretting it later.

I headed to the closest building. It was half collapsed and there were more dead volkrows around it. I quickly headed into the building and down the stairs. In the center of the seal in the basement, I saw Luimin leaning against Kumayuru.

Kumayuru turned to me when they noticed me.

“Cwoon.”

“Kumayuru, what’s wrong?”

Luimin also turned to follow Kumayuru’s gaze.

“Yuna...?”

She looked so tired, and her eyes seemed unfocused.

“Luimin, are you okay?”

I ran over to her.

“Yes, we were in a little danger, but we made it through somehow. So, how is it outside? It’s gotten quieter.”

“We defeated the fire and wind heads.”

“Did you really? I’m glad.”

She gave me a tired smile. It seemed like she’d used up a lot of mana.

“I’m going to defeat the one here next, so you can stop using mana.”

“What about Saku?”

“I’ll head to her after this one.”

“Then you should go to her first. I can do this for a little longer.”

I was worried about Sakura too, but Luimin seemed at her limit.

“I’ll defeat it really fast, so it’ll be okay. The more we talk, the slower I’ll be getting to Sakura.”

We couldn’t prioritize one person over another. It’d take less time to defeat the head in Luimin’s location than it would take to head to Sakura and back.

Luimin looked at me, then the seal.

“All right... We’re counting on you, Yuna.”

Luimin pulled her hand from the circle, then immediately toppled, like a toy robot whose batteries had died. I grabbed her to keep her from falling over entirely.

“Yeah, leave the rest to me.”

I picked up Luimin and put her on Kumayuru’s back.

“Kumayuru, please watch over her.”

“Cwoon.”

Kumayuru headed up the stairs and outside.

“Well, time to break the seal and battle the orochi.”

I put the carpet on the circle into my bear storage. Then I released bear wind magic on the circle underneath, cutting it apart, and ran right up the stairs and out of the building.

“Yuna!”

Luimin was right outside.

“The seal is broken, so you should run away with Kumayuru, Luimin.”

The ground started to shake when I told her that, and the building started to fall. We all rushed away from the building. The ground groaned and puckered up as the orochi’s long neck slithered out. Its scales looked like rock...so this was

the rock head.

“Yuna... Are you going to fight it alone?”

“It’ll be fine. It’s dangerous, though, so you two should move away.”

As I told Kumayuru and Luimin that, I started running toward the rock head. I tried to use a flame bear, but the skin just turned red, and I didn’t get any other reaction. I tried a bear blade of air, but it barely left a scratch. It looked like mana had made it pretty tough.

In that case, I just needed to destroy it from the inside like the first one. I used wind magic and drew the orochi toward me. I couldn’t let it get near the buildings Sakura or Mr. Mumulute were in.

I was using bear wind magic, but whenever I scratched the scales, the orochi healed right away. It really should have been against the rules for it to be able to heal like that.

The orochi gathered mana in its mouth that it turned into rock and threw at me. All of the rocks that it lobbed in quick succession were even larger than I was. I ran to the right and left and dodged them.

When the rocks collided with the ground, they were deafening. If it hit a person, they’d be dead for sure. Lots of people had probably been crushed under these rocks in the past. And it wasn’t just the rocks—the fire head would have burned them and the wind head would have slashed them up. A ton of people had probably been killed by these heads.

I wasn’t going to be so presumptuous as to claim I was getting revenge, but there was Sakura, Shinobu, and the girl at the inn, Konoha. And the granny who sold me the tatami mats, the guy who made me candy, and the person at the unagi restaurant. I just hoped that the people living right now wouldn’t have to be afraid of the orochi, that they’d be able to live peacefully.

Maybe the orochi had been killing people just to survive too. I wasn’t really sympathetic toward that, though.

I ran up a giant tree to jump up right in front of the orochi.

“Sorry, but Sakura’s waiting, so I need to beat you fast.”

I flew at the orochi. Unlike the fire and wind ones, it had nothing around its head. It wasn’t even scary compared to the two others.

I ran up the orochi’s neck up to the top of its head. It couldn’t attack me from this up close. It tried to shake me off, but I leaped up higher. It opened its mouth wide and created another rock. I timed things to create a ton of flame bears in front of myself.

“Go!”

I raised my hand and the bears marched right into the orochi’s mouth. They headed right down its gullet and started roaming all over the place. The orochi tried to cough them out, but it couldn’t. It started to hit its body against the ground when it couldn’t stand it anymore, but it couldn’t die, because it kept on regenerating.

The bears were still inside it, burning it from the inside out, even as it healed itself.

Finally, it collapsed. Its burned mouth didn’t regenerate this time. It looked like it wouldn’t be coming back now.

I approached the head.

“Sorry, but I have to take you down.”

I poured some mana into a spot that was open in its mouth and created a rock bear. This got bigger and bigger, opening the orochi’s mouth wider and wider. Then the rock bear destroyed the orochi’s head.

When the rock bear fell away, the orochi’s large brown mana gem came with it. I put it away into my bear storage. Now it couldn’t come back. It was well and truly dead.

But we weren't done yet. I needed to hurry over to Sakura.

When I started running, Kumayuru and Luimin came running up beside me.

"Luimin? Why are you still here?"

"I couldn't leave you here on your own, so I asked Kumayuru to stick around close to you. And then I saw you defeat the orochi."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yes. I rested a little, so I feel better."

She seemed exhausted when she was at the seal, but now she was looking a little better.

"I'm going to Sakura now, though, so it'll be dangerous."

"I'm worried about her, so I want to go too. I'll take her right away and make sure we don't get in your way."

We didn't have time to argue right now. Also, if I could leave Sakura with her, I'd feel less anxious.

"Okay, then you can take care of Sakura."

"Yes."

I jumped on Kumayuru too and we headed off to the building Sakura was protecting.

Chapter 508:

Sakura Cries

SINCE I STARTED reinforcing the seal, the ground shook many times—and violently. I was so frightened I could feel the anxiety like a crushing weight. Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari were probably in the middle of battle. Thinking about how everyone might be dead once I came out made me shiver.

The ground shook again. When the ground shook, the reddish-black eye would open and close.

Please... Please don't wake yet.

I gave it more mana. I couldn't give it all my mana at once. It needed to last, so I had to pour mana in slowly and steadily. Of course, if I gave it more mana, the seal would strengthen more, but if I tried that, my mana would be gone far too quickly. What was important was to give it mana the whole time.

I had no idea how long had passed. It may have been several minutes, several dozen, or even several hours. Regardless, it felt long.

Oh, Lady Yuna, Lady Kagari, Miss Luimin, the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru, and Lord Mumulute. I wondered if they were all fine.

I hoped they were, I prayed. I wanted to see everyone...

My heart felt like it was about to be crushed by the anxiety as the ground trembled like it never had before.

“What?!”

I could hear the grinding of the quaking earth even from here. It was the largest so far.

“No, it can't be!”

I started to feel like something awful had happened. Then I heard a sound as though something had come out of the ground. The seal must have broken. The orochi must have revived!

As though to prove that, the seal began to flicker reddish-black and as I heard a resounding thud, the orochi's eye opened wide.

No!

I fed the circle more mana.

Not yet. Please... Please sleep.

The orochi looked as though it were furious and in pain. I gave it more mana.

Please... Please stay quiet.

I felt my mana being sapped away. If I gave it any more, I wouldn't have any left and wouldn't be able to hold it. But if the orochi revived, that would be the end of us.

Please, please don't wake up yet.

As though my prayers had been answered, its eye slowly closed. But I had used so much of my mana. I felt exhausted. I wouldn't be able to last much longer.

If I had been just a little more grown up, if only others had been here too... I took a deep breath and poured in another trickle of mana.

Please... Just a little longer.

After I heard it slithering out of the earth, the number of tremors started to come more frequently. The buildings shook. Part of the ceiling fell down. But I could not leave this place.

Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari must have been battling the orochi even now. If even this seal broke, then their chances of winning would be reduced to nothing.

The tiredness steadily spread throughout my body. I wouldn't be able to last much longer. The ground shook again like it was trying to drive me into a corner. Whenever the tremors happened, the circle would react.

Not yet. Please... Please don't move more.

I prayed for the orochi outside to stop. But my prayers weren't answered. I heard an even larger sound and the ground quivered, and part of the building fell. It fell on top of the circle. Then the orochi's eye opened.

"No!"

I gave it more mana. I kept going... And going... I was close to losing consciousness, but I couldn't stop now. I squeezed out the last dregs I had.

Please... Stop!

The orochi's eye slowly closed. I felt relieved, but I almost fell over. When I was about to fall over, I leaned onto the wall and just barely kept myself up. I didn't remember a wall being here, though. And I was in the center of the room.

My bleary eyes found a white, soft wall.

"Cwoon."

"Esteemed Kumakyu?"

They were holding me up. The esteemed Kumakyu was so soft and felt so comfortable. I felt so very relieved.

"Thank you," I said.

I leaned into them and kept using my mana. I felt like something warm was flowing into me. I thought I could keep going a little longer.



After that, I heard something hit the ground several times and then a tremor, then just as suddenly, silence. I wondered what had happened.

I couldn't check that right now, though. I was steadily losing consciousness.

"Cwoon."

The esteemed Kumakyu was gently holding me.

"I-I'm okay."

I tried to stay conscious. I couldn't pass out now. I tried to use more mana, but it wouldn't come out. I didn't have any more left.

"I ran out of mana. Please run away."

"Cwoon."

The esteemed Kumakyu crooned quietly and gently held me.

"Thank you. You've done enough. Please save Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari."

Lady Yuna, Lady Kagari, I'm sorry... I'm sorry, Miss Luimin, for not fulfilling my promise.

When I tried to close my eyes, I heard someone call to me.

"Are you okay, Sakura?"

I tried blearily looking where the voice had come from and saw Lady Yuna at the broken stairs along with Miss Luimin, who was riding on the esteemed Kumayuru.

"Lady...Yuna?"

She ran over to me.

"I'm sorry we took so long. You're okay now."

What did she mean by that?

"Sakura, you can let go now."

Lady Yuna took my hands away from the circle. I had no mana left, but I'd still

had my hands on the circle.

I let out a little breath of air. Then I asked Lady Yuna, “What do you mean that it’s okay?”

“I mean just that. We defeated three of the heads, so the last one is yours.”

She defeated them? The last one? I didn’t understand what Lady Yuna was saying.

“Saku, Yuna defeated the orochi heads, so we’re okay,” Miss Luimin said in a cheerful voice. I slowly comprehended.

“Really? Are you really sure you defeated it?” I asked very quietly.

“You can see with your own eyes later. But we need to defeat the last one first, so you two go somewhere safe.”

Lady Yuna picked me up and set me on the esteemed Kumakyu’s back. She ordered her bears to take me and Miss Luimin away. Once we were up the stairs, Lady Yuna used magic on the seal.

The ground shook again, just like I’d felt before. I heard the very earth groan, and then lift up. The orochi was coming out. It was so big...

The monster cried out, as if it was angry. Water formed all over its body and began to shower everywhere.

The orochi had revived.

Could Lady Yuna really defeat something so big? I felt frightened. But Lady Yuna didn’t look scared at all as she stared the orochi down.

“Lady Yuna...”

“It’s too dangerous here. The two of you need to leave.”

“...”

I had no idea what to say. “Please be careful.” “Please do the best you can.” “Please don’t overdo it.” There were so many words I wanted to say, but I couldn’t get any of them out. Lady Yuna would be fighting the orochi that had

killed so many people.

“You don’t have to be so worried.”

Lady Yuna smiled at me to try to ease my anxiety.

“But don’t leave Kumayuru’s or Kumakyu’s sides. And you two watch over them, Kumakyu, Kumayuru.”

They both crooned at us. The esteemed bears seemed to be answering Lady Yuna.

“Okay, I’m going to go take it down now.”

Lady Yuna headed over toward the orochi like she was taking a walk. The rest looked like a dream. Lady Yuna had something golden around her black bear puppet that she unleashed on the orochi. I heard a terrific sound and the water head of the orochi stopped moving.

Then she created several large bears made of flames and those gathered all around the orochi. The water started to boil. I was so shocked.

Then finally, she put a large bear statue inside the orochi’s mouth, and the orochi’s jaw split. I didn’t understand what was happening. No one would have believed me if I had described this battle to them.

“All finished,” Lady Yuna said.

She said it casually and cheerfully, like she was just back from a walk.

“You’re amazing, Yuna,” Miss Luimin said loudly beside me.

I stared at them both and Lady Yuna looked back at me.

“S-Sakura, what’s wrong?”

“Saku?”

They were both looking at me in surprise. Why were they asking me that?

“Do you hurt somewhere? Are you not feeling well?”

Lady Yuna looked worried.

“No, I’m not hurt, and I’m feeling all right.”

“Then why are you crying?”

I brought my hands to my eyes and felt that they were wet. I supposed I was. When I realized that, I couldn’t stop.

“Lady Yuna...”

I got off of the esteemed Kumakyu and ran over to Lady Yuna, but my legs started to give out partway. When I was about to fall, Lady Yuna ran to me and caught me.

“Are you sure?”

“Urgghh, Lady Yuna...”

I couldn’t stop crying. We really defeated the orochi.

“Come on. If you cry, you’ll mess up your adorable face.”

Lady Yuna wiped my face with a handkerchief.

“Hng, thank you.”

I couldn’t stop crying. Lady Yuna still smiled and wiped my tears for me.

“You did really good,” Lady Yuna said as she gently patted my head.

“All right, let’s head over to Mr. Mumulute and Ms. Kagari now.”

“Yes!”

Chapter 509:

The Bear Fights the Revived Orochi

IT WAS OVER. The body was still left, but we'd destroyed all the heads. That meant it was over, right? If it didn't have a head, it couldn't actually be alive?

There was a chance it'd regenerate, but I'd already taken all the mana gems from the heads and put them into my bear storage. If there was another gem in its body, then I couldn't be sure it wouldn't regenerate, but I had no idea what would really happen. I could only ask Mr. Mumulute and Ms. Kagari what they thought.

I got onto Kumakyu with Sakura, and we headed off toward them.

"Miss Luimin, were you okay? You weren't hurt?" Sakura asked Luimin, who was riding on Kumayuru next to us.

"Kumayuru protected me, so I was fine."

Luimin stretched out her hand to give my bear a pat on the head.

"Cwoon."

Kumayuru gave her a happy cry.

"The esteemed Kumakyu also protected me."

"Cwoon."

Kumakyu gave a happy cry of their own. My bears had done a great job protecting them.

"You two worked way too hard, though," I said. "I told you both to run if it got too dangerous."

They'd both stuck around the seals, even when the buildings had been falling down around them.

"We couldn't run while you and Ms. Kagari were fighting."

“And I couldn’t fight, so all I could do was give mana to the circle.”

I understood how they felt, but I wished they would value their lives more.

“Also, Lady Yuna, is Lady Kagari okay?”

After hearing Luimin talk, Sakura looked over her shoulder at me.

“Well...”

I turned my eyes away. I had no idea whether to tell her about Ms. Kagari turning into a giant fox or how she’d become a little girl.

Sakura jumped into the silence, alarmed. “D-did something happen to Lady Kagari?!”

“Sorry, but I can’t be the one to tell you.”

Sakura’s eyes started filling with tears.

“Uh, what’s wrong?”

I was surprised when Sakura burst into tears. Why was she crying?

“I thought of Lady Kagari as like my older sister, or like my mother. But...”

“Oh, you’ve gotten the wrong idea. Ms. Kagari is alive.”

Sakura raised her head in surprise.

“Really?! Then is Lady Kagari okay?”

Sakura wiped her tears away and looked relieved.

“You said you couldn’t tell me, so...”

“Oh, you thought I was saying she was dead?”

“Yes...”

Oh, right. I did phrase it kinda weird.

“She doesn’t have any major injuries, so she’s okay. But she used too much mana and can’t fight anymore.”

Also, she turned into a little girl...

“Oh, good. But whyever won’t you tell me what happened to her?”

“Sorry, I think you’ll need to see for yourself.”

It’d be easier if she saw it than if I explained it to her. Even if I told her, she might not believe me.

“Okay. I understand...”

Sakura seemed like she wanted to ask more questions, but she nodded.

My bears got us all the way over to Mr. Mumulute. Once I caught sight of the building, I spotted a little girl standing in front of it.

“Yuna, who is that little girl?”

“There’s a little girl? How did she get to the island?” Luimin and Sakura both seemed confused.

Right. If they had known this could happen to Ms. Kagari, they probably wouldn’t have needed an explanation.

We headed over to the girl on my bears.

“Young maiden, you have done well.”

She ran over to us. It felt weird having her call me “young maiden,” considering how she looked. She was still wearing her usual clothes, which were now baggy. She probably didn’t have clothes to fit her now to change into.

“It seems Sakura and Luimin are both fine. I’m glad.”

She touched them both. The two of them looked incredibly confused by the interaction. It seemed like Sakura hadn’t seen Ms. Kagari like this before either.

“Um, are you Lady Kagari?”

“What?! Ms. Kagari?!”

Both Sakura and Luimin commented. Ms. Kagari looked at herself after that reaction from the two of them.

“There is a reason I look like this,” she said.

“Then you really are Lady Kagari?”

“Yes, ’tis I.”

“I’m so glad you’re safe.”

Sakura hugged Ms. Kagari.

“I am simply glad you are safe.”

Ms. Kagari wrapped an arm around Sakura and held her close. If Ms. Kagari had been in her adult form, they would have looked like a mother and daughter, and it would have been a heartwarming scene, but now that she was small, it looked a little odd. They shouldn’t have to care about that, though.

“However, I am astonished you have defeated all four heads.”

“You took care of one, though, Ms. Kagari,” I said. “Thanks to you, I was able to defeat the others.”

“No, I should be the one to thank you.”

“But it’s still not over yet.”

The heads were defeated but the body still wasn’t. We wouldn’t know what would happen until we unsealed the body. Normally, living things couldn’t live without a head, but the orochi had a significant chance of reviving.

“Yes, that’s right. Let us go to Mumulute,” Ms. Kagari said. She seemed to have trouble walking, so she got onto Kumayuru.

We headed into the building and to Mr. Mumulute in the basement. He was holding his hands to the magic circle and giving it mana like everyone else had been.

“Grandfather!” Luimin yelled and ran over to him. Ms. Mumulute finally realized we were there.

“Miss? Did you defeat them all? The orochi has been less responsive.”

“Yeah, thanks to Luimin and Sakura’s hard work.”

“You truly are amazing—just as you were when handling the sacred tree. Looks like the barrier I prepared to keep it sealed is no longer necessary.” Apparently, he’d also prepared to reseal the orochi.

“Um, but Lady Yuna defeated all the orochi’s heads. That means this is over, right?” Sakura asked Mr. Mumulute, who still hadn’t let go of the magic circle.

“It’s not exactly done yet.”

Sakura seemed shocked.

“We have two options. One is to seal the orochi’s body as it is.”

“Seal it? But didn’t Lady Yuna already defeat it?”

“Yes, she defeated its heads, but the body still lives. If the seal breaks, it will likely begin to move again.”

I thought that it was over, but it seemed like it really wouldn’t be that simple. I wished it had been.

“And what’s the other option?”

“That’s obvious. We break the seal and defeat the body.”

Right. Sounded simple enough.

“Okay, let’s do it,” I said.

“Lady Yuna?!”

Sakura looked surprised by my decision.

“Lady Yuna, you’re going to fight again?”

“If I can defeat it, then everyone in the country can rest easy. And Mr. Mumulute can go back to his village without regrets.”

That was the whole reason Mr. Mumulute had come here. It still seemed like he’d forgotten all about the orochi until I’d told him about it, somehow. I wasn’t going to press him about it.

“You’re right. In a few hundred years, it might gather enough mana to revive

again. By then, we might be gone.”

“We cannot allow our descendants to endure the same ordeal as us. Yuna, can we count upon you?”

Ms. Kagari looked at me.

“Lady Kagari, I understand how you feel, but we cannot ask Lady Yuna to fight more than she already has...”

“Sakura, don’t worry about it. It wouldn’t sit right with me if I didn’t try to fight it when I could have.”

We were already here, so best to end it here. I didn’t want any regrets.

“Yuna, I am sorry we must rely upon you until the very end. Please defeat the orochi for us so we can put this chapter behind us.”

Ms. Kagari bowed her head deep and low to me.

“So we can break the orochi’s body seal then?” Mr. Mumulute asked to be fully sure. He looked at Ms. Kagari and Sakura.

“As long as Yuna allows it, then please.”

“Lady Yuna...”

“Young maiden, do you need a break?”

Everyone looked at me.

“I can keep this up for a while, so you can rest if you need to.”

Mr. Mumulute had way more mana than Luimin and Sakura, of course.

“I’ll be fine. Let’s get this over with and go home.”

Also, I didn’t want to spend too long here and have to deal with other people witnessing all this. Now that we’d gotten to this point, I’d rather defeat it and finish this.

“What would you like to do, Kagari, Sakura? If you’d like to escape the island, we have time for that.”

“I could not flee after coming all this way,” Ms. Kagari said. “I intend to stay here and see it through to the end.”

“I’ll stay as well. I want to see this through.”

“And I’ll stay too, of course.”

Even Luimin, who I was convinced would be ready to go home, was saying she’d stay. It would be kind of awkward to make her go back, but we needed to make sure they were all safe.

“You three can’t fight, so you have to stick by Kumayuru and Kumakyu.”

I needed to have some safety measures in place, at least. Luimin got on Kumayuru and Sakura and Ms. Kagari got on Kumakyu.

“Then I shall break the circle.”

Mr. Mumulute pulled his hand from the circle on the carpet and unleashed wind magic on the circle.

“We need to get out fast.”

We all got out of the building and moved away from it. The ground started to shake after a while, repeatedly. It fissured, and something large and snakelike rose from the ground. It was the body of a snake, which circled around in large coils as it started to move.

Then, once it rose all the way up, they emerged, rearing up to face us: all four heads.

“No... But Lady Yuna defeated them...”

Sakura looked hopeless as she stared at the orochi.

The mana gem in its body—that was the one thing I could think of. I hadn’t thought it had enough power to revive the four heads.

The only blessing was that the heads didn’t have their elemental powers. Looks like I’d had the right idea taking the gems, then. If it didn’t have its elemental powers, it was just a huge snake with four heads.

All right. I could handle that.

“However, I see no fire nor wind around it,” Ms. Kagari said.

“That’s because I grabbed all the mana gems from its heads.”

If I hadn’t, there was no telling what would have happened. Maybe it would have absorbed the gems and revived fully. I was super relieved I’d made sure to retrieve them.

“Miss, are you sure you will be fine alone? I could help, you know,” Mr. Mumulute said as he looked at the orochi.

“Mr. Mumulute, you stay with the three of them. If that’s all the orochi has, I can handle it alone.”

“All it has?”

Sakura didn’t seem to believe I’d said that.

“I’m going to go and take it down before it starts going on the move.”

I ran at it. It had just revived, so the orochi was still slow to move.

I arrived at its coiled body and started running up it. It didn’t have its flames, wind, or water now, so it was just a regular old snake.

I jumped near the orochi’s heads and all four of them turned to me. It opened its mouth wide and lunged for me. If it wanted to eat me so bad, then so be it. I created four flame bears for each of its mouths and hurled them in.

The orochi looked like it was in pain with four bears in its mouths. It flailed its body against the ground over and over again. It opened its mouth wide and tried to cough out the fire bear, but it couldn’t. When it did that, I threw in two or three more bears when it widened its jaws. They burned it from the inside, going deeper into its throat and its body. When the bears passed through a body part, it’d glow red, so I could see them even from outside.

Then the orochi’s heads fell to the ground and it stopped moving—its regeneration just couldn’t keep up.

Chapter 510:

Fina Nurses Shinobu

WHILE I WAS AT HOME, a bear figurine started to croon. This figurine lets me talk to Yuna even when she's far away. It's a magical device called a bear phone.

I gave it a little mana to activate it and Yuna told me to go to an unconscious person who would be in front of the transportation gate. She asked me to take care of them.

I asked her to explain it to me, but she seemed rushed and couldn't tell me more. I'm not sure why this was happening, but I hurried over to Yuna's house.

I got to her bear-shaped house, and I steadied my breath before I opened the door. She told me that someone would be in front of the bear gate.

I went to the room where the gate was. When I opened the door to the room, I saw a girl in strange clothes lying on the ground. I ran over to her really fast. She had blood all over her clothes. Her left shoulder looked horrible. I saw that her clothes had been torn, too.

I had no idea what to do! Was I supposed to call a doctor? I panicked but then I remembered what Yuna had said. She had blood on her clothes, but she wasn't injured, just unconscious. I remembered how Yuna had once healed me when I cut my hand on my knife while butchering something.

I took a deep breath and flipped up part of the torn fabric on the girl's left shoulder. I saw something that looked like stitched iron under it. Gosh, wasn't that heavy?

I tried to look under the iron. She should have been bleeding, but I didn't see any cuts. I think Yuna must have healed her. She didn't seem to need a doctor, but she was unconscious, so I couldn't leave her alone. I really wanted to take

her to the bed, but I couldn't do that by myself.

I went outside and brought a pillow for her head and a blanket so she wouldn't get cold. Then I got a bucket of warm water and a towel to wipe away the grime on her face.

I put the pillow under her head so she would feel more comfortable. She looked like she was in pain, so I loosened her clothes. I really wanted to take the metal off of her, but it didn't seem like I could. I'd never seen clothes like this on anyone before. I wondered where she was from?

I saw that she had lots of scratches and bits of blood all over under her clothes, so I dampened the towel I'd brought and wiped her face, arms, and hands. I was surprised to see how ragged and bloody her clothes were, but glad her wounds weren't bad. She just had little scrapes.

Once I finished cleaning her, I pulled the blanket over her.

Had Yuna been with this girl? If this girl was this hurt, then maybe Yuna was also in danger? I knew Yuna was strong, but seeing this girl, I felt nervous.

I really wanted to talk to Yuna right away, but she sounded panicked. I knew I couldn't just call her if the girl she'd brought here was this bad. If she was fighting something, I'd just be getting in her way.

"Ugh, Lady Sakura..."

The girl groaned. I wiped the sweat off her forehead. I wet the towel again and set it on her forehead.

I hoped Yuna was okay.

I didn't know what else to do. Hours passed by. After a while, the girl started to move around.



“Urgh. Where am I?”

The girl woke up. She also tried to get up.

“You should lie down a little longer.”

When I talked to her, the girl jumped to her feet in surprise and scrambled away from me. She seemed ready to fight, but she was holding her shoulder.

“Ugh.”

I remembered that my hand still hurt even after the wound was closed.

“The wound is closed, but please don’t push yourself.”

Even when I told her that, the girl still didn’t seem to relax.

“It hurts a little, but I don’t have a wound there.”

She was looking at her bloody clothes.

“Did Yuna do this?” the girl said in a small voice.

So she did know Yuna.

“Um, so who are you?” she asked but still seemed cautious.

“I’m Fina. Yuna asked me to look after you.”

The girl looked at where she had been sleeping. That was where the blanket, pillow, and bucket of water were.

“You know Yuna?”

“Yes,” I said and then she relaxed. I was glad she believed me.

“So, where is Yuna? And where are we?”

“This is Yuna’s house,” I told her. “I’m not sure where Yuna is.”

“Her house?”

Hmm, could I tell her about the gate? The gate we used for transportation was supposed to be a secret. But she’d seen it already, so maybe it was okay.

“Did I go through that doorway, by any chance?”

“Do you already know about the doorway?”

The girl nodded.

“I can’t talk specifics since I promised Yuna I wouldn’t, but it seems like you already know about it by the way you talk?”

“Yes, Yuna called me and asked me to look after the girl in front of the gate.”

“Did she tell you how Lady Sakura and Lady Kagari are?”

She started to straighten out her bloody and dirty clothes as she asked me questions.

“I don’t know about them.” I shook my head. I’d never even heard their names.

“You said your name was Fina? Can you open this doorway, Fina?”

“I can’t.” Only Yuna could.

“I just gotta ask one more thing. You said you heard from Yuna, right? Can we call her from our side too? Can we talk with her?”

She was asking in a roundabout way. If she knew about the doorway, maybe she knew about the bear phones too?

“Well...”

I didn’t know what to do.

“Please. Please call on Yuna, if you can. I gotta go back as soon as possible.”

She sat down, put her hands on the ground, and bowed her head low.

“Please,” she said.

“Um, uh, please lift your head.”

She wouldn’t. She was really serious. It seemed it was really important she go back, despite being really injured. Yuna *had* told me I could get in contact if anything happened.

“Okay, I’ll call her, so please lift your head.”

“Th-thank you.”

She bowed her head and then did it again.

“Um, could I ask what your name is?”

“It’s Shinobu.”

“Well, Miss Shinobu, please have some water while you wait.”

She looked at the cup of water I offered her.

“Thank you.”

“I’ll talk to Yuna. Please don’t leave this room.” I wasn’t sure how much I could tell her, so I asked her to stay put.

Miss Shinobu said, “All right.” Then she drank the water. It seemed like she was really thirsty. She finished the cup right away.

I left the room and took my bear phone out. Then I thought about Yuna as I poured mana into it.

Yuna, Yuna...

After a while, I heard a “*Hello?*” over the phone. It was Yuna’s voice.

“This is Fina.”

“Fina? Did something happen?”

She sounded bright and cheery on the phone. Had she forgotten?

“Um, Miss Shinobu woke up.”

“Oh...”

She just sounded surprised. She’d definitely forgotten. I felt silly for being so worried, but also glad it seemed nothing bad had happened.

“So, is Shinobu doing okay?”

“Yes, it looks like it. She seems to want to go back to you.”

"Oh, uhh, sure. Okay. Then I'll open the door in a little bit, so just hold tight."

"All right."

I put away my bear phone and went back to the room Miss Shinobu was in.

"How did it go?!" As soon as I got into the room, she questioned me.

"She said she'll open the door soon."

"I see. Good. Did Yuna say anything else?"

"No, she didn't." I didn't tell her that it seemed like Yuna had forgotten her.

I looked at the water pitcher and saw it was empty. I guess she was thirsty.

"We still have time, so I'll bring more water."

Miss Shinobu also finished the water I brought her after that.

Chapter 511: The Bear Wants to Go Home but Can't

THE OROCHI FELL.

I was pretty sure it was dead, but it'd probably be for the best if I took its mana gem. I couldn't let my guard down, considering how tenacious it was. But the orochi was huge, and it would probably be hard to find its gem without properly butchering the thing.

"Mr. Mumulute, do you know where its gem is?"

"Let's check."

"I shall help."

Mr. Mumulute and Ms. Kagari headed over to the orochi on Kumayuru.

"Kumayuru, a little more to the right."

"Cwoon."

Ms. Kagari was giving Kumayuru commands.

"Around here?"

"Right."

Ms. Kagari and Mr. Mumulute checked over the orochi's body. I could hear them happily chatting away.

"Kagari, move away a tad."

Mr. Mumulute pulled out a knife and started cutting into the orochi like he'd found the gem.

"I think it should be around here."

He thrust his hand in and searched for the gem.

"Come now, put some elbow grease into it."

“If you have the time to talk, you could help instead of simply watching.”

“In this form, I could not possibly help. Come now. Search for it properly.”

While I watched them and waited, Mr. Mumulute pulled his hand out to reveal a giant colorless stone. “I’ve found it.”

It looked a little bigger than the ones in the orochi’s heads.

“Now we can rest easy.”

“With this, is it truly over?”

Sakura gazed at the mana gem, looking relieved once more.

“Without its gem, it cannot regenerate. With this, ’tis all over.”

“You won’t have anything to cry about anymore, Sakura.”

“You tease me so much, Lady Yuna.”

“I’m terrible at dealing with people when they cry. I’d rather you be happy.”

“All right. I will be.”

I could see some faint tears in Sakura’s eyes, but she smiled and it seemed genuine. With this, we’d avoided the prophecy. She wouldn’t see herself die in her dreams anymore. It’d been a lot of work, but thinking about how I’d saved a little girl made it all worthwhile.

“Looks like my job here is done,” Mr. Mumulute said. “Let’s go home, Luimin.”

He handed the mana gem over to Ms. Kagari. Maybe it’d be good if I handed over the ones I had, too?

“Stop right there. You think I’ll allow you to run away again?”

“I’m not running from anything. They’ll be surprised to see someone who isn’t supposed to be here on this island.”

Mr. Mumulute had a point. It was supposed to be impossible for him to be there.

“But Lord Mumulute, we haven’t thanked you yet. Please don’t go home yet.”

“All I did was buy time prior to the orochi’s revival. The girl is the one who defeated it.”

“Lady Yuna may have defeated the orochi, but that was only possible because of your and Miss Luimin’s help.”

It was true. If the orochi had fully revived, I might not have been able to defeat it. And we might have had more casualties. It was only thanks to Mr. Mumulute strengthening the seals that we were able to fight them one at a time.

I had no idea whose side to be on. I got how Sakura felt, of course. She couldn’t let someone go home without thanking them for saving their lives and fighting alongside them. But I also understood that Mr. Mumulute didn’t want any unnecessary fuss over him. If I were in Sakura’s position, I’d stop him and if I were in Mr. Mumulute’s, I’d want to go home.

“I didn’t help just to have you pay me back. I just took care of some business I left unfinished, so you don’t need to think about thanking me.”

Mr. Mumulute patted Sakura on the head gently. Now Sakura had no idea how to respond.

“I understand what you have said, but Mumulute, I will not allow you to escape this time.”

Just when I thought Sakura had been convinced into letting them leave, Ms. Kagari interjected again.

“Do you have any idea how difficult it was for me after you left?”

“Kagari...”

Wasn’t escaping that the whole reason he wanted to go home, though?

“As I said before, we can simply tell others you happened to pass by the island. Without you, we cannot explain how we defeated it.”

“I don’t think you need much of an explanation for how the seals were strengthened.” Mr. Mumulute seemed like he didn’t want to deal with it.

“I think it makes the most sense to say that Ms. Kagari defeated it. Like, we could just say she transformed into a giant fox and fought it off, since I’m going home too.”

I decided to join Mr. Mumulute’s cause. If he ended up staying, I’d have to too, after all. They were clearly going to make a whole deal out of slaying the orochi. I’d helped because Sakura had asked me, but I didn’t want the credit.

“Wait! Do you intend to also push this all upon me so that you can simply disappear?! I won’t allow you to escape!”

Ms. Kagari grabbed Mr. Mumulute’s and my clothes. I guess she wasn’t going to let us leave then. I couldn’t brush off her little hand though. She was originally much larger than me, but I had no idea how to deal with her when she was tiny.

While I was thinking over what to do, I heard crooning coming from my white bear puppet. It was my bear phone. I pulled my phone out of storage.

“Hello?”

“This is Fina.”

“Fina? Did something happen?”

I was in the middle of something. If it wasn’t a big deal, then I’d just call her back later, but I didn’t expect what Fina said next.

“Um, Miss Shinobu woke up.”

“Oh...”

I’d completely forgotten about her. Everyone else only seemed to recall Shinobu right as her name was mentioned, so apparently, I hadn’t been the only one. I mean, the orochi had kind of revived, and we’d all been really busy... We’d talked about what we would do after defeating the orochi, and I’d maybe just kinda forgotten she existed for a little bit.

“So, is Shinobu doing okay?” I asked so that Fina wouldn’t realize I’d

forgotten, all smooth about it.

“Yes, it looks like it. She seems to want to go back to you.”

Right. She’s just woken up in a strange room—of course she’d wonder what was going on over here. She had no idea what’d happened after she lost consciousness.

Still, was running back to where the orochi was really the first thing that crossed her mind? Was she thinking of the country, or of Sakura? No, I didn’t even need to ask. It was Sakura she was worried about.

“Oh, uhh, sure. Okay. Then I’ll open the door in a little bit, so just hold tight.”

“All right...”

I put away my phone once I was done talking to Fina.

“So, I’m going to go get Shinobu, so how about we go to the doorway?”

I could bring out another door, but I didn’t want to have a ton of them just sitting out. I decided I’d also retrieve the door while I was at it.

Ms. Kagari got on Kumayuru and Sakura rode on Kumakyu. Luimin, Mr. Mumulute, and I walked.

“I forgot about Shinobu entirely,” Ms. Kagari said. No one could say that they hadn’t.

“Do you think she’s mad?”

“I doubt it. We just moved her to a safe location after she lost consciousness.”

And Fina hadn’t mentioned that Shinobu was upset. It seemed more like she was antsy to know what had happened.

We got to the bear gate. I’d kept it open so that we could escape to the elven woods. I tried to walk right through with Mr. Mumulute and Luimin. Ms. Kagari jumped off Kumayuru and blocked us, though.

“Wait. Why are you attempting to return home? Young maiden, please close the gate so Mumulute cannot escape.”

“Why would she close the gate when it’s already open?”

“Then we shall compromise, and I will enter first. You will need to go to Shinobu as it is.”

“And you must stay as well, young maiden.”

Apparently, I wasn’t getting out of this either.

“Anyway, let’s get Shinobu back here for now. I’m sure she’s waiting right in front of the door.”

“Quite right,” Ms. Kagari said.

I closed the door to the elven woods then opened the door to my home in Crimonia and found Shinobu there. It looked like she’d been waiting, and Fina was next to her.

“Are you all right, Lady Sakura? How did things go? What happened to the wyverns? And the orochi?”

As soon as the door opened, Shinobu came right through the door up to Sakura.

“Shinobu, please calm down. Everything is over.”

Shinobu’s mouth hung open when Sakura said that. She stared at Sakura and didn’t seem to know what to make of it.

“Lady Sakura, you mean...?”

“Lord Mumulute reinforced the seals. Then Lady Yuna and Lady Kagari defeated the orochi together.”

“Really?”

Shinobu looked between me and the young girl. Then she finally seemed to realize Ms. Kagari was there.

“Um, Lady Kagari? Is that you?”

“It is.”

Shinobu crouched and looked the young girl in the eyes.

“You sure are adorable. Why do you look like that?”

“I used too much strength in our fight against the orochi. There is nothing else to say about it.”

“You’re so cute.”

Shinobu hugged Ms. Kagari.

“Ahh, Shinobu. That isn’t fair. I’ve been restraining myself, but you went and hugged her first!”

Apparently, Sakura had been trying to hold back all this time. Now, she also attached herself to Ms. Kagari.

“Stop that. Away from me, the both of you. I am much older than you girls. Do not treat me like a child.”

She shoved them away in irritation, but I kind of doubted we could think of her as an adult. Appearances were important, after all. No matter how strong I was, people never thought I could be powerful in my bear onesie. People couldn’t help but make assumptions about a person’s age based on their height. Experience told me so. Of course they treated her like she was a little kid.

“Yuna, what’s going on?”

While I was watching the three of them, Fina came over to me. Apparently she’d come in through the bear gate too. Well, I’d left it open, and I asked her to nurse Shinobu, so of course she’d want to know what was going on.

“Lady Yuna, who is this?”

Everyone looked at Fina.

“This is Fina, the person who saved my life,” I said.

“Saved your life...?”

Everyone looked surprised.

“Is she really strong too?” Shinobu asked.

“She hardly looks it. But we cannot judge a book by its cover.”

Everyone looked at Fina in wonder.

“I-I’m not strong. I can’t fight.” Fina denied it all. “Yuna! That’s why I asked you to please stop introducing me like that.” Fina puffed up her cheeks and fumed. Oh, right! Of course. I’d forgotten. Fina flailed her arms at me, bopping at me. Of course, it didn’t hurt.

“Fina, it’s been a long time,” Luimin said as Fina was still pummeling me.

“Luimin?! And your grandfather?!”

Fina finally noticed the two elves.

“It’s been quite a long time.”

“What are you both doing here?” She seemed really surprised.

“Mr. Mumulute and Luimin helped out a little.”

“Um, you know Miss Luimin?”

“Yes, she came with Yuna to our village a bit ago.”

“I’m Fina. I live in the same town as Yuna.”

“I’m Sakura. It’s nice to meet you.”

Everyone made their introductions.

Chapter 512:

The Bear Explains Things to Fina and Shinobu

“ARE YOU OKAY, Shinobu?”

“I hurt a little, but I’m fine.” Shinobu inspected her bloody clothes. “Did you heal me, Yuna?”

“A little. You were bleeding a lot, but I just sealed the wound. You shouldn’t force yourself to move much.”

“Thank you.”

Once we checked that we were both fine, I started recounting the battle to Fina and Shinobu. I talked about the giant orochi that we had to slay in the Land of Wa, how the wyverns had appeared, and how Shinobu had gotten hurt in the battle. Then I told them about getting Mr. Mumulute and Luimin’s help to defeat the orochi.

“So I was asleep through all of that? And even Luimin and Lady Sakura were exposed ta danger! I can’t believe I was unconscious through that.” Shinobu looked a little down.

“That isn’t the case at all. Do you realize how much you did? Thank you, Shinobu. For everything.”

“Oh, Lady Sakura...”

Fina asked in a quiet voice after observing the two of them, “Yuna, what kind of person is Saku?”

“Um, you wouldn’t happen to know what a priestess is? Umm. Sakura’s mom used to be royalty and Shinobu serves Sakura.”

I had no idea what Shinobu’s official position was, but it seemed that way to me.

“Royalty?”

Fina looked at Sakura with surprise. Sakura looked over at us when she noticed us staring.

“Lady Fina, thank you so very much for watching over Shinobu. Because you looked after her, we were able to fight the orochi without worrying about her.”

Sakura took Fina’s hands as she thanked her. Fina suddenly panicked when she heard “lady” attached to her name. She waved her hands and tried to correct Sakura. “Y-you can just call me Fina. I’m not anyone important, so please call me Fina.”

“Then I shall call you Fina. Please call me Sakura.”

“Um, Lady Sakura?”

Since I’d told Fina her mom had been royalty, Fina started calling Sakura by a title too.

“As you are a friend of Lady Yuna’s, please call me Sakura.”

“Um, well...”

Fina looked over at me for help. Even though Sakura was formerly royal, it didn’t seem Fina could bring herself to just call her by her name.

“I think she doesn’t want to just use your plain name because you’re former royalty. Is there something else she can call you?”

“Though my uncle is the king, I am not royalty. I’m a commoner, just like you, Fina.”

I didn’t really know the details, but apparently her mom had married out of the family into a family of commoners. Sakura was living as a priestess now, but she was still royalty as far as Fina was concerned.

“If you can’t simply call me by my regular name, why not call me Saku? That’s what Luimin calls me.”

She really did. Using a nickname wasn’t really something you’d do with

someone of higher status, but I supposed using a nickname would make it seem less like she was forgetting to use a title, and they were both kids. Anyway, it was probably better not to think too deeply about it.

“Saku? All right, if you’re all right with me calling you that.”

“If you would be fine with it, then please do call me that.” Sakura looked a little happy.

Shinobu said that she wanted to see the orochi, so I put away the bear gate and headed back to its body.

Mr. Mumulute and I had lost our chance to escape home.

“I can’t believe it even now that I’m seeing it with my own eyes,” Shinobu said. “I can’t believe the legendary orochi was actually killed.”

“It’s so big. Did you really fight this big monster with Luimin, Yuna?” Fina asked as she looked up at the immobile orochi.

“Yeah, it just kind of happened,” I said.

“I didn’t fight. I just gave the magic circle mana to help my grandfather.”

Luimin acted like she’d barely contributed, but she’d been the closest to the wind orochi, and the building she was in had partially fallen in during the battle, putting her in danger.

“No, if Miss Luimin hadn’t helped, we would have really been in trouble. I’m grateful that you continued to supply mana to the circle even while it was dangerous.”

Sakura seemed to have had the same idea as me, though.

“I haven’t done enough to warrant such thanks. All I did was give the circle mana.”

“No, I know because I was also supplying mana to a circle. The ground shook so many times and there were so many loud noises outside. I was so afraid of being alone while I was giving it my mana. I was so anxious! If the esteemed

Kumakyu weren't there, I would have been so afraid it would have crushed me. Maybe I'm just a weak-hearted person."

"Yeah, I could only do my part because Kumayuru was there with me. So I understand how you feel, Sakura."

Kumayuru and Kumakyu both happily crooned. They'd done their parts so well. Once we were home, I needed to thank them. Maybe we'd take a bath together and I'd wash them and give them honey.

Shinobu approached the orochi to check on it.

"It won't move, right?"

"It's fine. We took the mana gem already, so it's not alive anymore. It can't revive."

"I'm surprised Yuna and Lady Kagari won against a monster this huge, though. Was it weak?"

"What are you trying to say? Of course it was powerful. The orochi burned down the trees and sliced through them with the gale that surrounded it. The head of stone spewed boulders through its mouth and the water head downed the trees with its blasts. The island is also severely damaged."

Thanks to the water head, the burning trees had been extinguished, but even that had damaged the island. The spots where the orochi had been and attacked were all in a horrible state.

"You defeated them through your own strength. At first, I could not believe such a young girl could be our ray of hope, but you are. Without a doubt."

"Yes, you really are, Lady Yuna."

"Aw, I wish I'd gotten t'see you fight."

Well, she was unconscious, so we couldn't have done anything about that.

I looked over at Fina to see she was still looking at the orochi. She wasn't thinking of harvesting from it, was she?

“Fina, do you want to do a harvest?”

“Huh? A harvest?”

“You haven’t done one on an orochi before, right?”

“I haven’t. I don’t think Dad has either. I don’t think I could do one on something so big.”

“Has an orochi been harvested from before to begin with? I doubt one has.”

This world was vast—there might be multiple orochis in it. Actually, maybe defeating one would make another appear somewhere else? The thought alone was enough to bring down my mood. Actually, now that I *was* thinking about it, the orochi was kind of like the black viper.

“If you want, I can ask to have it.”

I could probably have one head at least, but Fina said no thank you. Apparently she didn’t want it as a souvenir. I didn’t need a snake, so I guess I’d just leave it here too then. I would have wanted it if it had a pelt like Ms. Kagari’s fluffy tail.

“Why are you looking so intensely at my tail?”

Ack! She’d noticed.

“So, can we go home now? It’s almost time for dinner.”

“Oh, I need to help Mom too.”

Mr. Mumulute and Luimin were making their excuses. They probably hadn’t mentioned anything about fighting an orochi, so if they didn’t get home, they’d worry their family.

“Well then, Fina, guess we should head home too.”

“As I said, you may not go home. If you go home, I will have trouble on my hands. And I shall not let you escape either. If you would like to go home, then I shall accompany you.”

Ms. Kagari seemed mad. She looked just like a kid having a tantrum. I thought

we'd be able to make our excuses and head home like we were leaving after a casual visit, but apparently not.

"No. Lady Kagari, if you leave, then what will we do?!"

She was right—we couldn't leave the whole burden on Sakura.

"Then would you like to go with me, Sakura?" Ms. Kagari said as though she'd come up with a brilliant idea.

"What are you talking about?" Shinobu said.

I guess one person—or rather two, after Fina was counted—had no idea what we were talking about. I told Shinobu how Mr. Mumulute and I wanted to just go home.

"Oh, if you do, we'd be in trouble. The king would be upset. Especially at me." Apparently, Shinobu was the only one the king could get away with telling off.

"Oh, I know. We could just say that you fought off the orochi, Shinobu."

"What?! Why would we do that?!"

"You'd be a hero then. And popular. I'll even throw in the orochi's body! A limited-time offer, so call now!"

I tried to give her a whole sales pitch.

"No, thank you! I don't want to become a hero. I'm my master's shadow. I can't bring attention to myself."

She sounded a whole lot like a ninja when she put it that way. After bringing so much attention to herself, *now* she needed to be someone's shadow?

Ms. Kagari piped up. "You do have a point. If we say Shinobu battled it, then that would tie this up neatly."

"What? Lady Kagari, you're joining in on this? I just lost consciousness. By the time I woke up, everything was over. I couldn't even explain how it was defeated!"

"Then we will simply need to synchronize our stories," Ms. Kagari said.

“No! I won’t! Absolutely not!”

Some people wanted glory, but apparently not Shinobu. Well, she wouldn’t be able to keep up a lie if defeating the orochi was far outside of her power.

“Yes, well, then... Then I think our only option is to have Suo make a magical contract so we may tell him everything.”

“A magic contract with His Majesty?”

“Ha ha. I know his weaknesses, so I can make it possible. You and Mumulute would agree to that, would you not, Yuna? We can make him promise not to make this larger than it needs to be. So please stay a while.”

A contract with the king? If we had one, then I’d be able to stop him from talking about a lot of things. But...he was also the king. I really doubted he’d make a dangerous contract.

“What if he refuses?”

“Then I will also leave this country.”

“Lady Kagari!”

“I have no reason to stay any longer.”

“But...”

“So this depends entirely on Suo. Come now, Shinobu, contact him.”

“Please wait. I actually already sent a message with Piisuke before the fight against the monsters, so I can’t do it immediately.”

Shinobu pulled something out of her pocket. She put it up to her lips and blew. Was it a whistle?

“Piisuke should come back after a while. Then I can send a message to His Majesty.”

“What’s a Piisuke?”

“That would be the name of Shinobu’s bird.”

Ah. Apparently, that had been a bird whistle.

After a while, a small yellow bird appeared. Shinobu offered it a hand, and it perched on her.

“Good job coming back to me.”

Shinobu gently stroked the bird’s head.

“It’s cute.”

Fina was looking at the bird.

“Would you like to pet him?”

“Can I really?”

“You helped me, so you can. Could you hold him while I write the letter?”

Shinobu held her hand out to Fina and the bird hopped onto her. She stroked the bird with her pinky, and the bird happily squinted. Fina seemed happy.

Was I imagining it, or had my bears also crowded up around Fina? They didn’t need to compete with the bird—they were cute too.

“So, should I just write asking for His Majesty to come to the island?”

Shinobu held a small scrap of paper and a pen.

“Yes, because if we go to the castle, we may cause a commotion. Ask him to meet us at the island’s wharf.”

Shinobu wrote down what Ms. Kagari had told her.

“But can the king enter the island?”

I mean, he was the king. It wasn’t like he could just go anywhere when someone asked him to.

“If he refuses, we will leave everything on Shinobu’s shoulders and leave this land.”

When Ms. Kagari said that, Shinobu started writing some sort of addendum to the note she'd already made. Then she rolled the paper up and put it into a tube around the neck of the bird on Fina's hand.

"Okay, I'm counting on you," Shinobu said, and the bird flew off. Fina stared at the bird until it disappeared off.

"Do you think it'll reach him?"

"As long as His Majesty has the mana gem, he will."

"A mana gem?"

Apparently, the bird had a small gem on its neck and the king had a piece of it. The bird would follow the mana to the other part of the gem.

"So if I change the tube on Piisuke's neck, he'll head somewhere else."

"I have one of those."

Sakura pulled a necklace out of her clothes and showed us. A small gem was on the end of the necklace.

"Wow."

"It ain't easy, though. You gotta train 'em as you raise 'em, right from when they're just chicks, to react to mana."

This applied to all animals, but teaching them how to communicate was difficult. I hadn't needed to teach my bears, though, since they understood me from the start.

"How far can he reach?"

"Not too far, but the castle's in his range."

That made sense. He probably couldn't manage to get to Crimonia from here. By comparison, Sanya's summon was amazing—much larger, and more like a falcon. I felt sorry for Piisuke in comparison.

"Then shall we head to the wharf as well?"

“The wharf?”

“This island only has a single wharf. He will likely come if we wait there.”

“But wouldn’t they be able to see us on the ship?”

And he might not come alone. He’d need crew and guards. There’d be so many people. If they saw us, then we wouldn’t be able to say we had nothing to do with this.

“I’m sure Mr. Mumulute doesn’t want a fuss made over him.”

“Of course.”

Everyone went silent. One person spoke up.

“Then why not use Yuna’s house? If we talk there, no one will know what we all said.”

Luimin was on to something.

“Lady Yuna’s house?”

Sakura seemed a little confused.

“It’s a house shaped like a bear. It’s really cute.”

Sakura looked even more confused when Luimin explained it like that.

“Do you know about it, Fina?”

“Um, yes. It’s a very cute bear house.”

She was just repeating Luimin. I guess it was hard to describe beyond that.

“A bear house? I’d like to see it, Lady Yuna.”

Sakura seemed hesitant to ask. I’d be embarrassed to talk to a king in one of my bear houses, though.

“What? You have a house we may enter? Then we may be able to escape the eyes of others.”

Wait, was this the plan, now? Ugh. Well, it wasn’t like we could talk on the

wharf in the open with everyone overhearing. After I thought about it, it did seem like the best option.

“If you laugh, I’ll be mad.”

I looked at Shinobu.

“Why are you looking at me?”

“Because you seem the most likely to laugh.”

“I wouldn’t. Don’t you trust m—”

“Nope.”

“How could you!”

My response was so fast that Shinobu actually started to sulk. I was pretty sure a certain fox was laughing at Shinobu, but I set that aside.

Ms. Kagari rode on Kumayuru, Sakura rode on Kumakyu, and the rest of us walked.

Chapter 513: The King Heads to the Island

THE OROCHI—the monster sealed on the island of Linesu—had revived. It was engulfed in flames and breathed fire from its maw, breathing such intense flames that it mowed down the forest before it. All on the ship were speechless as they watched. We were far away, yet we could still feel its massive scale.

Was Sakura all right?! She had ridden there upon a bear over the sea. Did that mean she had escaped safely? And what of Kagari? And the bear maiden?

I hadn't expected it to revive so soon. In my heart, I'd still felt hope, but that was now shattered.

"Your Majesty! There are people fighting the orochi!" the captain of the ship cried out.

I looked through the telescope I carried. I could not have seen them with my eyes, but I noticed two humanoid figures moving near the orochi.

One was Kagari, and the other black one must have been the maiden! I recalled the black bear outfit she wore. The two of them were fighting the orochi. I felt relieved they were safe, but what had happened to Sakura and Shinobu? Had they run away?

"Can you take the ship to the island?"

"You mean to the orochi?"

"Sakura is on the island. Once we retrieve her, we will leave immediately."

"I can try, but if it can't be done, then please allow us to retreat."

The captain knew Sakura as well and so accepted my reckless order.

"All right. I promise that will be allowed."

The captain answered me and ordered the ship to be steered to the island. It

started to head toward Linesu.

As the ship progressed, we felt a strong gust assault us. The boat rocked, and I quickly grabbed the deck's railing.

"Your Majesty!"

"It's fine. Now, tell me. What happened?!"

"It was the orochi. The wind head has appeared," the lookout shouted.

When I lifted my head, I did indeed see a new head revived on the island. A gale wrapped around its form and sent trees flying. Now we had both the fire and wind heads to reckon with.

"Your Majesty, we cannot approach any closer."

The gale whipped up the waves and battered the sails. The ship began to violently rock.

"No!"

"The vessel will sink at this rate."

But Sakura and Shinobu were on the island, as well as those who were fighting the orochi. Was I powerless? Was I unable to even save my sister's daughter?

The ship rocked again and tilted. We all had to cling to the rail with all we had. I could not allow my dear vassals to die because of my stubbornness.

"We will leave at once."

I am sorry, Sakura, Kagari, Shinobu. Finally, the maiden dressed as a bear came to my mind. *Yuna, I leave Sakura in your hands.*

We crossed the surging waves until the wind no longer disturbed us.

I checked the island but found no sign of the fire head. Even through the

telescope, I could not find it. I had no idea what this meant, but all I could see was the wind head.

Something was flying around the head.

The lookout who also watched the scene through a telescope saw what I saw and cried out, surprised, “A great fox is fighting the orochi!”

There was a legend that a fox had fought the orochi in the past. And now a fox flew in the air near the orochi’s wind head. It was Kagari—I knew she could transform into a fox. Only a few members of the royal family knew this.

Maybe Kagari had defeated the fire head.

The battle waged on and Kagari fought alone. I saw no sign of Yuna. Perhaps she had perished because of the fire head.

The fox bit into the orochi’s head. This made it shake and ram itself into the ground, yet the fox refused to let go.

Kagari, please do not push yourself too hard. If you die, whatever will I do?
She had always said she wanted to be released from her duty. I had been unable to grant that wish, even after taking the throne.

Kagari, please do not die.

As though she were using the last of her strength, she glowed, then pulled a piece of the orochi’s head away. The orochi fell to the ground.

“...”

It did not come back up. Had she truly defeated it?

“Your Majesty! The wind head has disappeared!”

“I see it.”

The crew on deck cheered. No matter how long we waited, neither of the heads reappeared. It appeared to have truly been defeated.

However, our joy did not last long. The rock head appeared, and we all fell back into despair. However, just as soon as it appeared, the rock head fell, replaced by the water head. Even that quickly vanished. Because we were too far, we could not make it out clearly, but something black was near the heads.

The crew could not have known, but this must have been Yuna. I was relieved to know she was safe. She had not been there for the wind head, but she must have defeated the rock and water heads.

Had all the heads truly been defeated? If they had, then the country was saved—*by our ray of hope*. I recalled Sakura's words.

"Your Highness, do you believe the orochi has been defeated?"

"I do not know."

"Your Majesty, what should we do now?"

If they defeated the orochi, then we needed to go help the four of them. They would be injured from the battle. Even though there was a barrier around the island to keep men away, we could go to the harbor of Linesu. As long as they made it there, we could take them into our care.

"Take the ship close to the island."

We changed the course of the sail and headed to Linesu when the lookout shouted, "Your Majesty, it's the orochi. It's appeared again."

"What?!"

I started to question him, but then I saw the orochi's four towering heads with my own naked eyes.

According to the legends, it had the power to regenerate. So had the two not been able to defeat it?

"Your Majesty, we must flee. The orochi has fully revived. If it notices our vessel and comes for us, we would be as good as inviting it to the rest of the nation. We must withdraw before it sees us. Please give us the order."

I understood this, that if it saw our vessel, we could never return home. And we could not go to the island.

“Return to the harbor...”

Kagari, Sakura, Shinobu, Yuna, I am sorry.

We returned to the national port. Not a single vessel was out at sea. We could not lure the orochi to us. I could not send out a ship to even help them. Even if I could save them, the orochi would follow the ship, and they could never return to the country.

However, perhaps it was only a matter of time. The orochi might cross the ocean and come to our nation regardless.

In Sakura’s dream, many of our people perished. It would come to the nation without a doubt, and then our only option would be to gather mages and have them attack the orochi. There would be sacrifices. That was our only way to draw the orochi away from the nation.

As I thought over our next plan, a messenger arrived.

“We have successfully killed the monsters that appeared from the forests. The other monsters escaped back into the forest.”

“All right.”

Now, once the mages returned, I would have to give the order for them to board a ship and die for their country. Just days ago, I had already told them the plan, but I felt heavy giving the order to die. However, if all went well, my children would never have to give this order. I could spare them that.

I waited for the mages to arrive and prepared the ship when a bird flitted above my head.

Was this Shinobu’s bird? Was Shinobu alive? I held out my hand.

Perch! Quickly, now.

The bird circled my head several times until it finally came to rest on me. I fiddled with the lid to the tube on its neck, trying to open it quickly. Once it was open, a small rolled note tumbled out. I quickly unfurled it.

“Huh?”

I couldn’t help but let out a strange sound. Those around me began to react.

“Your Majesty, what is the matter?”

“We will depart aboard the ship once more.”

“However—”

“You needn’t be worried.”

I gave the order and read the parchment again.

“Orochi is slain. All safe. Lady Kagari and Yuna ask His Highness to come to the wharf of Linesu island for an important conversation regarding the orochi’s slaying. If you do not come, I’m going to be in trouble!”

The orochi was slain? *The* orochi? Was this true?

I did not fully doubt it, but I also could not believe it. I could only learn the full truth of it by sailing to Linesu.

I had the soldiers wait on standby and belayed the order to have the mages board the boat before sending our vessel off once more.

But what would we speak about? We could speak in the castle if that was what they desired. And why had Shinobu written that final sentence? I could not understand how this would trouble Shinobu at all.

Chapter 514:

The Bear Takes a Break

WE GOT TO THE WHARF. The visibility here was great—with nothing but ocean around, anyone would notice a building once they were here.

“Would this work?”

“It would.”

After Ms. Kagari confirmed it, I brought out my bear house near the wharf. Everyone reacted to the house.

“I-it’s so adorable.”

Sakura’s eyes glittered as she looked at it.

“Is that a bear? A fox would be more endearing.”

My bears crooned in protest. They beat me to it.

“You are both adorable yourselves, of course,” Ms. Kagari said. “However, a fox is much more adorable. Bears take second place. I am afraid my opinion is set in stone.”

My bears crooned again, trying to convince her that bears were the best, but Ms. Kagari would never give up first place. I decided to stay out of it.

“Wait, the house’s shape aside, there’s something off about your item bag, Yuna. How could it fit such a big house?” Shinobu asked.

“She is Lady Yuna. Why would you be surprised now? You know Lady Yuna’s secrets too, Shinobu. Now you just know one more.”

“I guess... Maybe I’m the odd one?”

No one answered her on that point.

“Come now. Let us enter and wait until Suo arrives.”

I thought Ms. Kagari would laugh, but she just headed straight into the bear house. I ushered everyone else in too.

“Slightly small, but this will do,” Ms. Kagari said. Compared to the building she was staying in, sure, I guess.

“Yuna, Piisuke might come back, so can I open a window?”

“I don’t mind.”

“Do you think His Majesty really will come?”

“I am sure he will,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Also, Yuna, would ya let me borrow a room?”

“A room?”

“I’d sure like to change. I don’t wanna see His Majesty in these clothes.”

Shinobu was bloody and I’d needed to cut through her clothes with a knife to fix her wounds. She was a mess.

“He would not fuss over such matters,” Ms. Kagari said.

“He might not, but the battle is over, so I’d rather get comfortable.”

“Okay, there’s a bath in the back, so you can change there. Fina, could you show her?”

“Yes.”

“That would be great. Right then, I’m gonna use some of your water.”

Fina took Shinobu over to the bath.

“Okay, I’ll go brew some tea, so you can all sit.”

There was a table in the room and four sofas around it that could each seat three people. Ms. Kagari jumped onto one and Sakura sat next to her. Mr. Mumulute and Luimin sat on another sofa together.

I headed to the kitchen and made some sacred tea tree. Everyone other than Fina was exhausted and drained of mana. Sacred tree tea would be the best

thing to treat that. I decided cold tea would be more refreshing than hot, so I put some ice cubes in and brought it out to everyone.

“Is this sacred tree tea?”

Mr. Mumulute noticed immediately after a sip.

“Well, everyone’s tired.”

“You’re right. This is the best way to treat fatigue.”

Mr. Mumulute drank all of his tea right away. Everyone else followed his lead. I guess they were all thirsty. I brought out more.

“I can hardly believe we were fighting the orochi earlier.”

“Are you okay, Sakura? If you’re tired, you can use a bed to sleep on.”

“I’m okay. If I sleep, I don’t think I would wake up for the meeting if I did. I’ll wait until Uncle arrives.”

“Don’t push yourself.”

“I won’t.”

Now that the nerves of battle had worn off, everyone was feeling how tired they were. Ms. Kagari held her cup with her little hands and sipped the tea as she leaned into the sofa. Next to her, Sakura sat with her legs folded under her as she drank.

After a while, Shinobu came out, freshly changed, with Fina. I guess she’d had a spare change of clothes with her. It looked just like her original outfit, but clean.

“I feel so much better.”

“I got some tea ready, so you two sit too.”

“Thank you.”

They both sat and had their tea.

“If any of you are hungry, I’ll bring out something to eat.”

“No, I’m fine. I think if I eat, I’ll fall asleep.”

“I feel the same,” said Ms. Kagari. “I would much prefer to sleep alongside Sakura than to eat.”

“Me too,” Shinobu said.

“I’m okay.”

“I do not need anything to eat either.”

No lunch for us, then.

We all tried to talk to keep ourselves awake. Fina, Luimin, and Sakura were talking. Mr. Mumulte and Ms. Kagari talked too, while I talked with Shinobu. She was thanking me and asking me how I’d gotten so powerful. I answered the questions I could, but when I couldn’t, I sipped tea to avoid answering.

While we were talking, Shinobu’s bird came back through the window.

“Has Uncle written back?”

Shinobu showed the short letter to Sakura. “He just wrote, ‘Coming.’”

“That seems very much like Uncle.”

“I’ll go prep for his arrival. Everyone else, please rest.”

Shinobu must have been tired, but she still insisted.

“Shinobu, I’m sorry you have to do that.”

“Please don’t worry about it. I was unconscious, so I’ve had my rest.”

She was injured, though, so she had to be exhausted. Even though I’d healed the wounds over, they still had to hurt, and she still suffered a lot of blood loss. She was trying to hide it from us.

I doubted she would rest if I asked her again, so I at least had her drink some chilled tea before going outside. She gulped it down, thanked me, and left.

Then we all stopped talking because we were so exhausted. We started

nodding off as we waited when we heard Shinobu's voice from outside.

"The ship is here."

"It's finally here? If it was even a little later, I would have fallen asleep."

"Me too."

Everyone other than Fina seemed exhausted.

I stood up from the sofa and looked out the window to see a large ship.

Chapter 515: The Bear Talks with the King

THE KING OF THE Land of Wa, Suo, came into the house with Shinobu. Inside, he stared all around the room like he was taking in a curiosity. Ms. Kagari told him to sit down.

“Stop gawking like a fool and take your seat.”

He did as she told him and sat down in front of her on the sofa.

“I’d like to know what happened to the orochi, but would you explain our present company and location to me?”

The king looked at all of us. Well, of course he was wondering about the strangers in the room. He looked at Ms. Kagari with particular curiosity.

“Are you Kagari?”

“I am still cute even in my small form, am I not?”

She smiled, half-buried in her loose clothes. The king sighed.

“I simply used too much of my power while fighting the orochi. That is all. It was a powerful foe, after all.”

“I see. And there are strangers here among us?”

He looked at Mr. Mumulute, Luimin, and Fina. Fina shrunk down under his eyes.

“Don’t give Fina such a scary look.”

“What scary look? I am sorry if my gaze is frightening.”

“I-I’m okay.” Fina still hid behind my back, though.

“Now, will you explain the situation?”

“It depends upon you whether we offer an explanation,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Upon me?”

“First, you must create a magical contract with the bear maiden. It will protect her secrets. Unless you do so, we cannot tell you.”

The king looked at me dubiously.

“She is a maiden of many secrets. We cannot explain why these people are here or how the orochi was defeated otherwise.”

The king gave Mr. Mumulute and Luimin a glance before looking back at Ms. Kagari.

“And why is that?”

“We have all already made a contract to protect her secrets. Should we tell them, we will all die.”

Ms. Kagari looked at Mr. Mumulute and Luimin as well.

“’Tis why we cannot explain, unless it is to one with the same contract. If you do not wish for details, then we can speak of some things, but I do not believe we can tell you most of what has occurred.”

“You’d die? And Sakura, Shinobu, you made the same contract?”

The king scowled.

“Yes, we entered into a contract,” Sakura said.

“Yes, I as well.”

“Kagari! How could you allow Sakura to form a contract which may kill her? What if she made an innocent error?!”

The king was very mad at Kagari.

“Uncle, please do not be upset. As long as we do not speak of it, we will not die. Nor would we die immediately if we broke the contract, either. The spell makes it so that we would start laughing if we were to try talking. But if we did attempt to continue, we would die.”

“So you won’t die instantly?”

“That is right. As long as we do not tell others Lady Yuna’s secrets, we will be fine. And if we do make a mistake, we will not die immediately.”

The king seemed a little less angry after that. Well, she was like a daughter to him. It was hardly surprising that he’d be worried about her signing a contract that could kill her.

Fina looked confused. Right, she hadn’t made a contract with me. She had no idea what this was all about. Nobody but Fina could talk about the bear gate without breaking some kind of contract.

“Is the secret that important?”

“Yes, and it cannot be allowed to get out. I signed the contract understanding that, so I cannot tell you what the secret is.”

“And what if I said to cancel the contract?”

Sakura shook her head.

“Lady Yuna only revealed the secret in order to slay the orochi. I cannot betray her after that. And I see this as a connection to Lady Yuna I would not like to break.”

“And I as well,” Ms. Kagari said. “She has done something great for us. I could not do something so selfish as to cancel the contract after she slew the orochi. As Sakura has said, we will be fine as long as we do not speak of it.”

“Yuna saved my life. I couldn’t betray her,” Shinobu said.

The king scowled at them and all three of them stared right back at him in the eyes.

“So let me get this straight. As long as you do not talk about Yuna’s secret, you won’t die?”

“I can assure you of that,” Mr. Mumulute spoke up in Ms. Kagari’s place.

“And you really defeated the orochi? You didn’t seal it back away?”

“Yes, ’tis slain. Once the orochi revived, the barrier I set to keep men away should have been broken as well. You may see for yourself,” Ms. Kagari said.

“All right, then. I’ll accept the contract,” the king replied.

“Are you certain?”

“We’ve known each other since I was born. If you believe it’s necessary, then that means it must be. Let’s get this over with quickly.”

“I know it’s weird of me to question you, but are you really sure?”

“Do you wish for your secret to be shared, young maiden?”

I shook my head. “I don’t want anyone to talk about it if possible.”

“Then you should let me sign your contract. As the king, I must know everything. Even if it requires a life-threatening contract.”

“I feel like a king isn’t supposed to risk his life like that, though.”

“I won’t die as long as I do not talk, correct?”

“That is true...”

“Then I see no problem. Let us hasten with the preparations.”

Mr. Mumulute brought out a carpet with a magic circle drawn on it from his item bag and unfurled it on the floor. He had the king place his hand on the circle, and I placed my hand on it too. We made the contract.

“You’ll protect my secrets.”

The contract glowed bright and was sealed.

“Now...where shall we begin?” Ms. Kagari said.

“All of it. Tell me all of it.”

Ms. Kagari started at the beginning. She told him that Mr. Mumulute was the elf who had helped her seal the orochi initially, and that I was friends with him. Then she explained that I’d brought Mr. Mumulute to the island to help us.

“Wait, I don’t understand. You mean this is the elf who helped you hundreds

of years ago to seal the orochi?”

He looked at Mr. Mumulute.

“I have told you of him, and of the adventurers who helped me seal the orochi.”

“Yes, that’s true. You’ve told me the tale many times, since I was a boy.”

“Mumulute was one of the adventurers who helped.”

He looked at Mr. Mumulute in disbelief.

“All right, so the bear maiden is friends with the hero of centuries ago. That I’ll accept. But how did she bring him here? According to what you’ve said, there wouldn’t have been time to bring him all the way here. I heard nothing of her being accompanied by an elf.”

The king looked at Shinobu.

“That’s right. Yuna came alone.”

“So how is he here now?”

Ms. Kagari looked at me. The king had formed a contract, so I decided to fulfill my promise.

“This is a secret, so please don’t tell anyone.”

I pulled out a bear gate.

“What is this?”

“It’s a type of magical device that can connect two doorways. If the other one is set in another location, then we can travel to that place.”

“Magical devices are capable of that?”

I stopped him from saying anything more and opened the gate. It opened to the elven woods, so he could see the forest beyond. He gawked in disbelief.

“She used this to bring Mumulute here. That is his granddaughter, and she came to also help stop the orochi’s revival.”

When he glanced at Luimin suddenly, she bobbed her head.

“We had Mumulute strengthen the barriers so we could revive the orochi’s heads one at a time in order for the bear maiden and I to defeat them. However, I only defeated the wind head. The maiden defeated the fire, rock, and water heads.”

“Wait, in that order? I saw the fire, wind, rock, and water heads disappear in that order, but then we saw all four of the orochi’s heads revived in the end.”

Oh, he probably meant when the orochi’s whole body revived. But it didn’t have any fire or wind, so they were just regular snake heads.

“You were watching?”

“From the ship. I saw you transform into a fox and battle the orochi as well.”

Ms. Kagari started to explain what the king had seen. She told him we’d defeated each of the elemental heads, then had removed the barrier on the body to fight the entire orochi after all its heads had revived. She also told him I’d defeated the revived orochi.

The king listened in disbelief.

“And what of the orochi’s mana gems?”

As proof, Ms. Kagari placed the colorless gem she’d gotten off the orochi’s body on the table. Did this mean I needed to take mine out too?

“We also retrieved the other gems from each of its heads.”

Ms. Kagari looked at me, so I begrudgingly pulled out all four other gems. He looked from me to them, gobsmacked.

“Was the orochi weak?”

“You think any monster with such large gems could be weak? You think it was weak after all the people we lost in the past prior to its sealing?”

Ms. Kagari seemed upset by the king’s question. Her tone was becoming very firm. Naturally, she would be mad about him calling such a difficult-to-deal-with

monster weak when he hadn't even fought it himself.

"Sorry. I simply couldn't believe it."

The king rose up and bowed his head.

"As the king of this nation, I would like to formally thank you. I am grateful you have saved our country."

"I simply fulfilled my duties," Ms. Kagari said.

"I also just did what I could," I said.

"And I finished a job I left undone," replied Mr. Mumulute.

"Thank you." Nonetheless, he expressed his gratitude again.

He looked around the room again and then his eyes settled on Fina next to me.

"And who is this girl? She does not seem to be an elf."

"This is Fina. Before the orochi revived, wyverns and volkrows attacked, and Shinobu got injured in battle. While we were fighting the orochi, she looked after Shinobu, who was unconscious."

I explained about Fina.

"Hello. I'm Fina."

She bobbed her head slightly. The king glanced at her, then looked at Shinobu.

"Shinobu, are you hurt?"

Shinobu had changed, so she didn't look like she was injured. I'd fixed up her shoulder wound and the ones on her face, so she didn't have any large injuries left, as far as I knew.

"I'm a tad sore, but I'm okay. My clothes ended up tattered from the fight, but I changed." Shinobu pinched at her clothes by way of illustration.

“I see. As long as you were not gravely injured, then. I would hate to trouble you so, as I have already caused you enough difficulty.”

Well, they had been really bad injuries...

“It simply means that I wasn’t strong enough,” she said. That wasn’t fair, though. We hadn’t had enough people. Even my *bears* had had to fight.

“So the wyverns and volkrows were brought to the island by the orochi. So that was the reason for their appearance.”

“Did something else happen?”

Then the king told us that monsters had come out of the woodwork heading to the island.

“Because of that, we were too late to mobilize, and I could not gather the mages.”

“Come to think of it, what happened to the women who were going to fight the orochi with us? They never appeared on the island. Had they, the battle would have been much easier,” Ms. Kagari said, which reminded me. Yeah, I think they *had* mentioned we’d be getting backup. Just like Ms. Kagari was saying, if they’d come, then we wouldn’t have needed to make Sakura and Luimin work so hard.

The king seemed unsure about what to say when he replied, “Their ship did approach the island, however, once they saw the orochi, they lost the will to fight. They refused to go to the island.”

“What?” How useless!

“Well, those left with a will to fight after seeing the orochi must be fools.” Ms. Kagari said. Wait, was that a jab at me? She continued, “That, or they must be strong enough to know they can defeat it.”

Ms. Kagari looked at me after saying that. Whew. Being strong was better than being a fool, for sure.

“Is that your true assessment, Kagari?” asked the king.

“I could hardly believe it myself even after I witnessed it. You would not understand, as you did not see her fight.”

“Wish I coulda seen,” Shinobu said. She shouldn’t blame herself. She had been unconscious at my house until the fight was over, so it wasn’t possible.

“Now, we have a request. Please do not make our involvement in the slaying public.”

“Why not? You really did defeat the orochi. There’s no need to hide it.”

“We do not want to deal with the fuss, and we do not want to stand out. We could put it many ways, but that is the gist of it. I would like to live a relaxed life. We all feel this way.”

Ms. Kagari looked at the rest of us. Mr. Mumulute and I nodded.

“But would anyone accept that the orochi was slain if no hero is named as the victor?”

“If that will not work, then say Shinobu slew it.”

“Seriously? Why would you do somethin’ like that to me? I don’t want that!” Shinobu shouted.

We all looked at her and laughed.

“I see. I do not know how we will explain it, but I will attempt to do what I can.”

“Really?”

“But are you sure you want this? You saved our country. We could welcome you all as heroes.” He looked at each of us.

“No, thank you.”

“I do not need it either,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Nor I,” Mr. Mumulute said.

“I won’t either.”

“I only helped a little.”

“I never even fought the orochi in the first place,” Shinobu said.

Everyone except Fina gave their replies.

“At least allow me to thank you for slaying the orochi.”

“I do not require money. I simply wish for a relaxed life. Oh, but I would not mind payment that I may spend on drink.”

“Don’t ask me for alcohol when you look that young! So, Mumulute, please allow me to thank you for the past as well. Tell me what you want. Is there anything you’d like?”

“I only finished a job I left undone, and it was the girl who defeated it in the end. If you truly would like to thank me, please allow my granddaughter to visit young Sakura, if she wishes to.”

Mr. Mumulute set his hand on Luimin, who was next to him.

“Uncle, I’d like to see Miss Luimin in the future as well.”

“All right. I’ll allow it.”

Both Luimin and Sakura looked excited about that.

“So, Yuna, you said yesterday when we met that you didn’t seek coin or status, but you would make a request once you slew the orochi.”

So he remembered. I’d been thinking of asking for a house with a hot spring.

“What wish would you like me to fulfill? What can I do for someone who seeks neither status nor wealth?”

“Um, I think I want some land to build a house on.”

“Land, you say?”

“About the stuff we talked about regarding Mr. Mumulute—I want to set up one of those gates in a house. Without it, I can’t come as I please.”

A bear gate. Setting one up was my priority. I wanted a place with a hot

spring, if possible.

“A house? You don’t mean a bear house?”

“I’d prefer a location where it wouldn’t stand out. A regular house would be great, but I’d like one with a hot spring in that case.”

“So either land you can build a bear house on or one with a hot spring. All right. I will look into finding a good location.”

Maybe I could even make a gate in a house with a hot spring.

“Do you want anything else?”

“You’ve already made a contract with me, so that’s more than enough. I’d be really thankful if you could cover for me if I used my gate to come here in the future.”

“All right. If you would like anything else, simply say the word.”

If he simply kept the gates secret, that was enough. Then I could come see Sakura, and Sakura could come to visit the elves’ village.

Chapter 516: The Bear Goes Back to Crimonia

“U_{M, YUNA}, what is a hot spring?”

While I was thinking about the house I’d build in the Land of Wa, Luimin asked me a question. Apparently she hadn’t encountered one before.

“It’s when hot water comes out from the ground.”

“Hot water from the ground? Not just regular water?”

“No, it’s hot. It’s like a natural bath. It helps with fatigue, and it’s good for your health.”

Of course, there were tons of different types of hot springs, so that wasn’t true for all of them, but it was a good summary. A little voice in my head told me I could just wear my white bear onesie to help with fatigue, but hot springs were special. You needed baths—and hot springs—to help with mental fatigue.

“Hot water from the ground...”

Luimin was starting to think about something. It seemed like she was curious now.

“Then once things settle down, want to go to one?”

We could stay at Konoha’s place again. If the king gave me a house with a hot spring, we could just stay there.

“Will you really?”

“Yeah. Of course. And I’ll take Fina too.”

The two seemed really happy about that.

“Looks like we’re done talking. We’ll need to start heading home soon. Would you mind opening the door for us?”

Mr. Mumulute stood up and Luimin followed him.

“Thank you, Mr. Mumulute.”

“I should be the one to thank you. I’m glad I didn’t let part of your past go unfinished.”

Even though the truth was that he’d just forgotten about it...

“Miss Luimin, please come back anytime. We’ll welcome you back.”

“Yes, I will. For sure.”

“And then tell me about the elves’ village when you do.”

“I’d like you to tell me about your country as well.”

“Yes, let’s talk together.”

They both smiled.

“Mumulute, you have helped us greatly.”

“Don’t worry about it. Besides, the bear girl was the key person in this. I hardly did anything.”

“She truly is amazing,” Ms. Kagari said. “She practically fought the orochi on her own.”

It wasn’t just me, though. I never would have been able to defeat it that easily if it had been the entire orochi I was up against. Just imagining it, I knew it would’ve been really hard to fight. Mr. Mumulute, Luimin, and Sakura held it back from fully reviving, so Ms. Kagari was able to fight the wind head of the orochi, which I didn’t know how to defeat.

“And please come see us as well with your granddaughter. Or I could visit you instead. Then you should do well to prepare drink,” Ms. Kagari said.

She meant that she was going to use my bear gate then? Well, I guess that’d be fine, if I had nothing else to do.

Once I opened my gate, Mr. Mumulute headed in first, and Luimin waved her

hand as she went in after. Sakura and Fina also waved.

“I’ll get the gate later, so don’t worry about it.”

Then I closed the door.

“Well then, Fina. Guess we should head home too.”

“What? You are going home as well?”

“I’m afraid we’ll get roped into something else if we stay. Besides, you’ve all got a lot to do after the orochi stuff.”

“About that—may we keep the mana gems?”

The king looked at the orochi’s gems on the table.

“We would like to borrow them as proof of the orochi’s slaying. If you would be willing to give them to us, we would compensate you appropriately, of course.”

The green gem was Ms. Kagari’s, but the others were mine since I’d slain the orochi. I understood why the king wanted them. The orochi had tried to destroy their kingdom in the past, and Ms. Kagari had protected the seals for a long time. These were the gems from that monster they’d fought so long to keep at bay. Of course the country would want them.

“You do not have to answer us right away, of course. If you do not want to give them to us, then we’ll return them, but please allow us to borrow them.”

“Okay, I’ll give them to you.”

They all seemed shocked.

“Lady Yuna, are you really sure? This is proof you slew the orochi.”

“I don’t want people to know I did it, though, so it’s okay.”

As a former gamer, I kind of still wanted the gems since they looked valuable. Still, I believed it was right for this country to have the gems rather than me.

“Are you really sure?”

“Yeah. So make sure to keep your promise.”

“Yes, of course I will.”

I ended up negotiating to get part of the orochi to make up for it. Just getting to have a bit of it was enough for me.

“When will you come back here, Yuna? I’d like to have it prepared by then.”

“You’re going to be busy for a while, aren’t you? I’ll come back once that’s settled down.”

“But how will we tell you it has calmed down? A bird couldn’t travel that distance.”

I’d feel bad if they had that little bird fly all the way to Crimonia. I thought for a little and looked at Sakura.

“Sakura, here.”

I handed her a bear phone.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. You can’t call Luimin directly, but you can get in touch with me. If anything happens, just let me know.”

“Yes, I will.”

Sakura happily held the bear phone in her small hands.

“What’s that bear thing?”

“It’s a magical device that lets you talk with people who are far away. If Sakura tells me when the orochi is cleaned up, I’ll come back.”

I might come back before then, but we’d have to see.

“Magical devices are capable of that?!”

The king reached a hand out to the bear phone that Sakura held, but she pulled it close to her chest to protect it.

“Please don’t take it away from Sakura,” I warned him, then whispered to

Sakura how to use the phone. I also told her to keep how it worked a secret from the king.

My eye passed over the bear gate in the room, and I thought of something. “Also, Ms. Kagari, Is there a spot I can put my gateway on this island where it won’t stand out too much? I’d like to put one up temporarily,” I asked.

“You may place one within my home. No one will enter except those who come for my care, and I believe no one will come for some time due to the commotion we have had. Suo, please inform them that they do not need to look after me for some time.”

“What? Are you staying on the island?”

“If I board a ship now, it will cause a commotion.”

“So we’ll take Sakura home on the boat. What about you?” the king asked Shinobu.

“You’ll send a scouting group right on over to the island later, won’t you? Does that mean I gotta stick around?”

“Are you sure you don’t need to rest?”

“I’d like that, sure, but Lady Kagari looks so cute. And you gotta have someone t’show the others around.”

“It would help greatly if you stay here.”

“Oh, but I’d like a long vacation after this, if possible. I do wanna rest *eventually*.”

“All right. You may rest as long as you like.”

“I’ll hold ya to it.” Shinobu seemed giddy about getting a break.

“Well, I’ll be off,” the king said. “Yuna, you helped us greatly. No gratitude could repay you. I would like to formally say as the king of this nation: Thank you.”

He looked directly at me as he said it, then left the bear house.

“Lady Yuna, thank you so very much. You truly are our ray of hope. I’m so glad I met you.”

My bears both crooned in reply. It was like they were asking where their thank you was from Sakura. Sakura understood what they wanted and hugged them both.

“You both were also our hope too, of course. Thank you very much.”

They crooned.

Then Sakura ran after King Suo out of the house. I watched from a gap in the window until their ship left the island.

“Well, I’m going to put away the house now.”

I had everyone get out, then put the house away.

“I’m gonna go look at the orochi again before the ship arrives. Yuna, thank you very much. I’m so grateful you saved Lady Sakura.”

Shinobu bowed deeply. I was just glad I could make Sakura’s nightmares go away. Hopefully, this meant she could finally get a good night’s rest.

“Okay, I’ll be back sometime.”

“We’ll be waiting,” Shinobu said. “And thank you too, Fina.”

“Oh, no, I’m just glad you weren’t badly hurt.”

“And thank you, Kumayuru and Kumakyu,” Shinobu said.

They both crooned. They seemed happy.

Shinobu thanked everyone, then ran into the woods. The rest of us headed over to Ms. Kagari’s house to set up the bear gate.

“Oh no...”

“What?! My entire house is broken!”

Ms. Kagari apparently had no house to go back to anymore.

Well, this had been a battleground. It had breathed fire, made gusting gales,

spat rocks, and spewed water. I wasn't shocked that one of those things had hit Ms. Kagari's house. An entire tree was sticking out right from the middle of the wreckage. It seemed like a tree had been cut down by the orochi's wind and blown right into it. She was probably lucky that it hadn't burned down.

"My house..."

Ms. Kagari seemed pretty devastated. Anyone would be, after their house was destroyed.

"I will need to have Suo build a new house for me."

"Are you still going to live here even though the orochi is gone, Ms. Kagari?"

"...!"

Ms. Kagari seemed surprised when I asked her that.

"I have lived here so long, I never gave it thought. But you are right. I have no reason to stay," Ms. Kagari said as she looked at her half-demolished house.

I wondered if she planned to live with Sakura then.

"It looks like I can't set the bear gate here. Do you know if there's another place I can use?"

"It will be the same no matter where we go. I believe you could set it anywhere and it would make no difference."

Maybe it would make sense to go to town and look for a place to set up a gate there? No, I wanted to rest actually. I pulled out a gate near the destroyed building. Then I used earth magic to surround everything and created a makeshift hiding spot for my gate.

"Okay, Ms. Kagari, we're going home."

"Wait. You do not intend to leave a young girl such as myself all alone in a place such as this?"

Ms. Kagari held on to Kumayuru and showed no sign of getting off. Even though she looked young, I knew she was actually an adult—hundreds of years

old, in fact. She couldn't trick me.

"We're not leaving you alone. You could ask Shinobu to have someone take you back? And there's the ship coming in to check on the orochi too. You could go to the castle or to Sakura."

"I could not go to the castle dressed like this! Some know who I am and would think differently of me. Well, it seems my only option is to stay at your abode."

"Why would you assume that?"

"You intend to abandon me after we fought together?"

"Do you want me to call Sakura?"

I pulled out my bear phone.

"She may be sleeping upon the ship now. Do you intend to wake her?"

It had seemed like Sakura was sleepy when she'd left with the king. When I remembered that, I couldn't bring myself to call her.

"And she may not be able to use that magical device within the ship. You do not want anyone to learn of it, do you?" These were some aggressive tactics she was using! "If a monster appears, why, I may perish."

Hm. She was right that she was powerless right now.

"Yuna, I feel bad for little Kagari."

Now Fina was tugging at my sleeve.

"We can't leave a little girl in a place like this."

"Oh, yes. Fina, was it? You are so very kind."

Now that I thought about it, Fina had no idea what Ms. Kagari normally looked like. To Fina, it must have looked like I was abandoning an actual little kid.

"Fina, Ms. Kagari may look like a little girl, but she's actually an adult. Don't let her trick you."

“An adult?”

Fina looked at Ms. Kagari and seemed confused.

No one would assume that she'd de-aged just by looking at her. She was technically super old, though. I wondered—wait, did aging work for her the way it did for us? If she actually lived for ten thousand years and was only a few hundred years old, did that make her a kid? Then again, there were also monsters that matured into adults within a year. Hm. Thinking about it that way, I didn't really know what made someone a kid or an adult. On yet a third hand, I'd seen those boobs, and they definitely belonged to an adult.

“Though I was once an adult, I only have the abilities of a child now. I will cry if I must.”

Ms. Kagari started to pretend to get sniffly.

I sighed. I was tired, and I just wanted to get home to Crimonia to rest.

“Only for a little while,” I said.

Then I took Ms. Kagari and Fina, who were riding my bears, and headed through the gate to Crimonia.

“Um, Yuna, can I go home?”

“Yeah, thanks for today. You were a real lifesaver.” I patted her on the head, which seemed to please her.

“Okay, little Kagari, see you later.”

“Thank you for your help.”

Then Fina left.

“Yuna, I am in need of a bed. I cannot help how tired I am, I'm afraid.”

Ms. Kagari seemed like she was about to fall asleep right on Kumayuru. I guess this had tuckered her out too.

Well, she'd fought wyverns and the orochi, and she'd had to use her special fox-transformation power. It wasn't surprising that she was so tired.

I took her to a bedroom.

“Okay, come on. Get off of Kumayuru.”

I took her to bed and set her down. She started snoring right away. She hadn’t been too fussy—apparently, she’d been at her limit. Kumayuru and I quietly left the room.

Then for the first time in a while, I came back to my room. After changing into my white bear onesie, I picked up my cubified bears and went to sleep.

Extra Story:
Historical Chronicles: Kagari
Part 1

I KNOW NOT WHERE I come from, nor how I came to be.

When I gained consciousness, I was alone. I could speak, so perhaps I had been raised by humans, but there was something about me that made me sure I was not human myself. I had ears and a tail like a fox's, and my growth was slow. I lived longer than all those around me.

I could hide my ears and tails, and so I took on the name of Kagari—a name I had been called in my dreams. I lived among the humans. Sometimes, I would lend a hand with growing crops, work with a merchant, or fight monsters for coin.

However, because I never aged, I could not live in one place for long. After living in a place for some time, I would need to leave. I did this again and again.

Then I came upon a boy who fought monsters. He claimed he wanted to protect the weak. How entirely foolish! Such words were meaningless when they came from someone so weak himself. To protect others, one needed to become strong, and this boy—he was someone to *be* protected. Unfit to protect.

However, the boy then declared he needed to become more powerful. As he seemed dedicated enough to his cause to put himself in harm's, I took it upon myself to look after him.

I taught the boy how to do battle, just as I had learned to do for my survival. I showed him how to use weapons, trained him in magic, how to fight monsters—and also humans. I taught him not just how to protect others, but also how to protect himself. If he could not protect himself, then it was presumptuous to think he could protect others.

“Even if you cannot protect the weak now, simply protect the next person you can. If you die here, you will never protect anyone again. Think of all the other people you may have protected in the future. Think of all the weak people you will go on to meet. When you speak of protecting others, do you only mean those currently within your field of vision? Are you satisfied with only protecting one person?”

The boy grew silent when I said that.

“No one person can protect everyone. You must see that. Gauge your own strength, gauge that of your opponent, gauge the difference between you. If you abhor being unable to protect someone, then you must simply become stronger. Use your wits. Fighting is not the only way to protect others.”

Running was a way to do that, too. Defeating foes was not the same as protecting others. I taught the boy not only how to fight, but also all the ways I had learned to protect others in my long life. Several years passed by, and the boy’s face lost its immaturity as he grew into an adult. No matter how long it had been, however, he remained the very same boy to me.

We finished our planned training for the day. While I was considering how I would need to leave that land soon, the boy looked at me as though he had something to say.

“What is it?”

“Kagari, I might not be able to come here anymore. I have a secret I’ve been keeping from you,” the boy said, his face grim.

“Is it that you are the son of the king?”

The boy looked surprised.

“I knew that from the start.”

Whenever training ended, we would part ways, but he would never go with me. One day, worried for him, I followed him as he returned home. That was

when he entered the castle. On investigating, I discovered he was the son of the king. I kept my discovery secret afterward. If he did not wish to tell me, I chose not to ask. I had my own secrets as well, after all.

“You knew?”

“Yes.”

“I studied the sword and magic, but I learned about politics too. Now I will join my father and be by his side so I may learn from him.”

“Many things cannot be learned from a desk, yes,” I said.

“I need to protect the people of this country.”

Though before, he had only spoken of protecting the weak, he now spoke of his citizens.

“I see. I will be lonely from here on, but there is nothing to be done.”

Perhaps it was time for me to leave, as well. I had been in this place for too long.

“I want you to come with me to the castle, Kagari.”

“What?”

I had not expected him to say such a thing to me.

“You are not telling me you fell in love with me?”

The boy laughed and shook his head.

“I think of you as like a big sister. When I do the wrong thing, you set me right, and you praise me when I get it right from the start. No one in the castle will tell me when I’ve done something wrong. They only praise me, no matter what I do. I want you to show me the right path to take.”

He’d always told me he wanted to protect the weak, and I had rebuked him, telling him to be realistic. I was pleased he asked this of me, but it was impossible.

I shook my head.

“It is not within my power. And I must leave this place soon. You would do well to become a wonderful king.”

I tousled his hair. When I had first met him, I had been taller. Now, he was larger than me.

“Kagari, you’re not going to tell me your secret, even in the final moment?”

“...?!”

“You haven’t changed since I first met you. I thought you were pretty, but no matter how much I aged, you never did.”

“So you noticed.”

I had looked like an eighteen-year-old woman since meeting the boy. Enough time had passed that the boy could now be said to be a young man, but I had never changed.

“Of course I have. That’s why you always wear a hood in public, isn’t it?”

When we walked through the streets, I always avoided drawing attention to myself. If people came to recognize me, it was more likely someone would notice I never aged. So I never grew close to anyone, restricting myself to acquaintances at best. I had always assumed the boy would ask me about it when we parted ways.

“I did not want you to hate me,” I told him.

“Are you kidding me?! How could I ever hate you? To my last breath, I could never hate you. Is that what you thought of me?”

He was genuinely upset. It made me happy to see that, and yet, I doubted it was the truth. My secret was no simple thing. If he knew the truth, he would feel uneasy around me, and distance himself from me. I was sure of it.

“Thank you. I am happy to hear you say that. I shall tell you who I truly am before we part.”

I checked our surroundings in the woods we were in, then created earth walls to surround us. Then I turned my back to the boy and began to disrobe.

“What do you think you’re doing?!”

The boy closed his eyes and seemed embarrassed.

“You must look,” I told him.

I showed him my fox ears and my long tails. The boy looked at me through the gaps between his fingers.

“You have ears and tails...”

“I am not human. I am a fox, so I cannot do as you ask.”

I, a monster, could not go with the boy to the castle.

“Are they real...?”

I twitched both my ears and my tails.

“Now you see. This is why I cannot accompany you.”

He bit his lip. I wished he would give up on me and also that he would stop me from leaving. If he could abandon me, I could leave the country. However, that was not what the boy said to me.

“I don’t care about that. Stay by my side and support me.”

I was overjoyed he would say such a thing, despite knowing what I was.

“I live longer than any human. If I stay in one place, others will begin to think something is strange about me, as well.” I had revealed myself to many others in the past, but all of them had called me a beast, a monster.

“We can just hide that. If anyone begins to suspect anything, then I’ll deal with it. Kagari, you’re one of the weak, and I’m here to protect you.”

He said the same thing when we had met.

“If you do anything wrong, I will not hesitate to scold you.”

“I know.”

“If you do not listen to me, I will leave.”

“Yes.”

I turned around.

“All right, then. Then I will live in your care for some time,” I told the boy.

He averted his eyes and told me to re-dress. In that moment, he seemed to still be a child.

Several years had passed since then.

He no longer showed any trace of the childishness he once had when we first met. He had surpassed me in physical age and had become a wonderful adult. He became the king in place of his father, who had grown sickly. He married and had children.

Though I had no shortage of suitors, considering my beauty, I did not marry. I couldn't, of course, as I was a fox. However, many had grown suspicious of me since I'd come to the castle. I had overstayed my time here.

“You remain as beautiful as always, no matter how many years pass.”

“Tell me your secret, won't you?”

Perhaps they only spoke out of simple jealousy—but still, I realized I would have to depart.

“You're leaving?”

“Yes.”

In addition, I had started to feel unwell. I was incredibly drowsy. I had once slept for an extended amount of time in the past, and this felt the same.

“I must find somewhere to sleep. And others have begun to suspect that I do not age. It is about time.”

“I understand. But I can't let you leave me while you're sleeping. I also know

people have begun to suspect you.”

“Then...” I said.

“I will prepare a house for you in the castle town, and I will post someone I trust to watch over you. If you must leave, then at least wait until after you wake once more.”

“All right. Then I shall accept your kindness.” It was necessary, as I did need somewhere safe to sleep.

I moved into a rather large estate and was given a tight-lipped maid. I slept in that house, waking several times a year, only to immediately fall asleep again. This lasted many years.

When I fully woke, the boy was battling an illness, and he did not have long to live. I wish he had woken me, or he could have told me during the brief periods I was awake.

“I didn’t want to worry you.”

“You fool.”

With his last words to me, he asked me to look after the country and his son. Why did he insist on tying me down? However, I promised the boy I would do this for him, and I protected the country he had built up.

Extra Story:
Historical Chronicles: Kagari
Part 2

SEVERAL YEARS HAD PASSED since I began to help the son of the dead boy. He took his father's legacy upon himself and set to work making the kingdom as magnificent as it could be.

I became an advisor and a priestess, so I moved to live away from the castle. This was necessary to hide my eternal youth. The vassals who had served the previous king knew of me and helped keep me hidden. The youths who made their way to the castle now did not know of me.

The fact that my appearance did not change, even with the passage of many years, was bound to cause the same problems as it had last time. To prevent this, I became a priestess, and hid knowledge of my existence from all but a handful of people.

I was a priestess only in name. I had no spiritual duties. If I did not continue to stay active, I would begin to feel lethargic, so I stealthily made my way to the Adventurers' Guild at times. There, I found some rather amusing adventurers.

The party was comprised of an elf, a dwarf, and two humans. They had been traveling all over the world on their adventures and happened upon the Land of Wa by ship, so they were new to the area. It seemed they had no particular goal in mind, but were simply traveling as they liked.

They regaled me with tales of all the countries they had visited so far, making me grow jealous of their travels. Once I came to know them, I visited the guild daily. It did not take long for me to be won over by their charm.

During the short time they were in the country, I sometimes joined their party temporarily.

"You're so powerful, Kagari."

“You are as well,” I said. “But more importantly, you have experience in battle, and you fight well together. I wish other adventurers would learn from your example.” This party was far stronger than any other adventurers I had met so far.

“It seems like you’re not used to fighting with a party, Kagari.”

“I always fought alone,” I said. I did not know how to time my actions to avoid getting in my comrades’ way, which made me of little use to them.

“It’s easier if you have others to fight alongside you and to protect your back.”

I had thought that once before as well, but I was a fox and a monster. Even if I joined others, they would eventually grow old. The boy who had become king had taken a wife, had a child, and died an old man.

Though illness had taken him from me, our parting was still just as painful. I would have to say goodbye to others in the same way. This was why I had become a priestess and stayed isolated. Though we were different species, elves lived long lives as well, and I could not help but wonder whether he felt sad to part with them, so I asked him about it too.

“Parting makes me forlorn. But if I feel that way, it’s only because I enjoyed the time I was able to spend with them. I don’t want to lose out on the joy of life just to avoid feeling lonely. If I can smile even when we say goodbye, then that can become a good memory, too.”

I had been so afraid of the loneliness that would visit me upon our parting that I had avoided humans. And there was also the fact I could not explain myself, as I was not an elf. I was afraid even my friends would also call me a monster. Perhaps I had used the partings as an excuse to simply avoid that.

The party was leaving in a few days’ time. Perhaps I could share my secret with them, at that time. If they called me a monster, I would never have to see them again, but if they accepted me and my true nature, perhaps our parting could become a reason for us all to smile. Perhaps, as the elf said, it could become a happy memory.

And so I revealed my true self to them. They were all curious, but none of them seemed disgusted. In fact, they seemed moved. The human woman patted my ears and tails as the men watched on with jealousy. I would never allow men to fondle me, of course, but they looked so jealous of her that I allowed them to touch my ears just a bit. Despite their fascination, none of them seemed to consider me a monster.

I'd never thought that being accepted like this would make me this happy.

I thought that the days would continue to be just as joyous, but the happiness didn't last long. The day that the adventurers would leave the Land of Wa was approaching. Though I felt lonely, the memory would be a happy one, without a doubt. Though I did not want to part ways, I stayed with the adventurers until the time that we must inevitably arrived.

While we were together, we received an emergency notice from the guild. This country was made up of four islands. A gigantic monster had appeared on one island and destroyed the town there. In order to see what had happened for myself, I rushed straight over to the place the monster had appeared.

The town was in a tragic state. The houses had crumbled and burned down, and people were lying on the ground. However, the monster that had caused all this mayhem remained there.

It was a gigantic snake with four heads. Each of their heads was engulfed in an element—fire, water, wind, and rock. The monster they had spoken about was an orochi.

The head with fire breathed it on the buildings and set them aflame, killing the people inside. Another head would spit water, destroying buildings and drowning people. The third head could spit rocks to destroy buildings and crush its victims. The last head used a gale to break up buildings and slice people to pieces.

The orochi destroyed the town the boy had worked so hard to build up and

killed the people he had worked so hard to protect. I couldn't hold back my anger, and I acted before I could think.

"How dare you? Leave this country at once!"

But my shouts did not reach the monster.

When I attempted to douse the orochi's head of fire in water, the head of water stopped me, and when I attacked the head of water with a gale, the head of wind interrupted me. Even when I attacked the head of wind, the gale surrounding its head obstructed me, so my attack never reached it. The head of rock was so sturdy that all magic I used on it would bounce away. This wasn't the type of monster any human could defeat. All a human would be able to do was run.

Even though the boy had asked me to protect the country, I was helpless. Powerless, I ran for the castle to report to the young king the boy had left behind.

The king had already heard the news and was working to handle it. He had ordered his people to evacuate, prioritizing safety, but the orochi destroyed one town after another. The situation worsened as other monsters began to gather around the orochi, almost as though it were calling them.

Because of the monsters, the people had no place to run and were slain. Others went to save them, but many of them simply were killed as well.

Though some people were able to escape, the orochi slowly but surely pursued them. It tracked the people from town to town, and even crossed the sea after those who escaped from the island by ship. If we allowed this to continue, every town on every island would soon be destroyed—and it wouldn't end there. The orochi likely wouldn't leave the Land of Wa until the country had been erased from the map.

The young king was distressed, but no solution presented itself. I had no answers, myself. I slipped away from the castle and headed to the Adventurers' Guild.

The guild was in an uproar. It had been inundated with quests from the townspeople to save their acquaintances in other towns, but they couldn't even send ships over to get adventurers to them. If they encountered the orochi in transit, they would only put their own lives at risk.

I looked around the guild as I thought of the four adventurers. I regretted that we had not properly said goodbye, but I didn't want them to see my face when I was about to die, so maybe this was for the best.

I assumed staying would be useless and turned to leave the guild.

"Kagari?"

I heard someone call to me—someone who shouldn't have been there. Were they really here?

I turned around and saw the adventurers who had fought with me, though it'd only been a tiny sliver of my very long life.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. "Why haven't you fled? If you'd left then, you could have taken a merchant ship out."

Most of the merchant ships had already left. Only government ships and fishing vessels remained. I doubted there were any ships going to other countries at this point, and in any case, no vessels were permitted to launch right now.

"Why? We couldn't just leave you behind and escape by ourselves." The other members of the party nodded.

"Are you fools?"

"Don't look down on an adventurer's calling! We do dangerous work."

"So, what's happening?"

I told them what I knew about the orochi.

"Looks like this is huge."

"No human could defeat a monster like that."

“If you say that, Kagari, I’d believe it.”

“You should have escaped rather than worrying about me,” I said.

“We were in a party together, even though it was for a short time. We couldn’t abandon one of our own.”

I was happy to hear that, but I still wished they’d run. “But even if you stayed, you couldn’t defeat it.” It wasn’t a monster that any human could defeat.

“If we can’t defeat it, then our only option is to seal it away,” the elf proposed. It was an absurd suggestion.

“Seal it? As if that were possible!”

“If you’re asking whether it’s *possible*, it is. However, there are many requirements.”

“What? What are they?!” I questioned the elf, desperate for any possibility.

“First, the monster must be weakened. Then, we need a wide-open place where people never go. It’s said monsters feed on miasma and negative energy. Even if we were to seal it, people visiting the area could cause their negative emotions to erode the seal.”

I lapsed into thought. Somewhere no one would visit. The small island at the center of the Land of Wa! I brought out a map of the Land of Wa. The island was abandoned, and few people visited. I could ask the king to forbid anyone from entering the space.

“But how will we get the orochi to the island? And how will we weaken it?”

“Should we ask the kingdom’s army to help?”

There were still soldiers and mages in the castle, but I couldn’t make the decision to mobilize them alone.

“Or shall we fight it on our own?”

“If you could, then you would become heroes.”

The adventurers laughed. It spoke to their strength and resolve that they

could still smile, even at a time like this.

“We cannot handle this alone,” I said. “We do not have enough people.”

If we were to fight the orochi, we would need quite a few people to help. At minimum, we would need four military units to fight those heads. We would need to cooperate to fight all the heads at once.

“We need brave and powerful people who can fight the orochi without running when they see it.”

Our only option was to negotiate with the king. As I was considering that, someone addressed me from behind.

“What are you talking about? We’ve got people who are brave and powerful —us.”

I turned around to see a large group of adventurers stood behind us.

“What? Why are you all here?”

“We’d like to join in too.”

“Yeah.”

Once one person spoke up, the other adventurers nodded along.

“You were listening?”

“Well, with you shouting so loudly about sealing the something away, of course we’d be curious.”

“Do you understand what this means? We would fight the orochi. A gigantic monster. You have no hope of surviving this battle.”

“Our family and friends live in this country. It’s our job as adventurers to protect what’s precious to us from dangerous monsters.”

The other adventurers nodded along with the man.

I was so happy. I had not been the only one ready to risk my life to protect this country.

“Thank you.” I bowed my head deep and low.

Extra Story:
Historical Chronicles: Kagari
Part 3

THE ELF TOLD the adventurers and me about the seal.

First, it seemed that sealing the power of the mana gem within its body was most important. In order to do that, however, we needed to find the location of the gem in the orochi's body. We would seal its body after the mana gem was weakened.

So, the plan: First, we'd lure the orochi to the small island. Then we needed to find the mana gem in the orochi's body and weaken the orochi itself. Then we would seal the orochi once it was weak.

"In order to bring the orochi to the island, we would simply need to set out a boat with many passengers to lure it away."

"So we would be risking our lives."

"Our only way of determining the location of its mana gem is by seeing it from up close."

The adventurers asked if we knew where the gem might be. Luckily, the elf knew its general location.

"So our job is to weaken the orochi?"

"Sounds easy enough."

The adventurers laughed. They all knew very well it wasn't easy at all. I suppose they needed to stay optimistic to keep from being crushed by the pressure.

"The orochi has four heads. They are each imbued with an element: fire, water, wind, and rock. Think of a way to handle each of them."

“And what about you, Kagari?”

“I could not allow the adventurers to fight on their own. I will inform the king, soldiers, and mages.”

I left the guild and headed to the castle.

At the castle, a plan had been proposed to abandon the country and run. How could the country’s leaders plan to run when the people and adventurers planned to fight?

“You cannot be serious!” I shouted. “If you flee, we will not pursue you. However, I shall not allow any who run to return to the country in the future!” I turned to the young king. “Do you plan to run as well?!”

The king shook his head.

“I will stay. I will die for my country.”

I felt relieved after hearing that. He truly did share blood with the noble boy I’d trained.

“Over my dead body,” I replied. “I will fight until my last breath.”

I turned and chased all those who wished to run from the room. Over half remained.

“Are you sure you do not wish to leave?”

The youths had left. Those who remained were mostly older.

“As old as we are, we may do nothing more than hold you back. But you have been with us since the previous generation, Lady Kagari, and we will remain with you until we die.”

“I appreciate this. Had you also left, it would have hurt the soldiers’ morale as well. I am sure the people will feel much better if they see your faces.”

“If our wrinkled faces can help, then we’ll make good use of them.” The people would recognize them as their venerable elders, so it was fitting.

I looked at the king.

“Command the soldiers and mages to fight. Many will perish, and it is your duty to hold what you see in your heart. Unfortunately, that is what it means to be king. Do not look away. If you do, they will all die fighting the orochi.”

“I will remember them until the day I die...”

The king nodded.

It seems your son has become a great ruler.

I could not allow a good king to die. I would make sure he lived, for the sake of the country’s future.

While we prepared, we told the townspeople in the vicinity of the orochi to hide and stay still. We had realized the orochi only reacted when people brought attention to themselves. Perhaps it considered people no better than worms—just as humans themselves disregarded the insects that ran across the ground. When many people gathered in one place, however, the orochi was drawn to them.

But people could stay still in one place for only so long. Humans needed to eat and drink to survive. We could bring them food and water, but not enough for everyone. If we did not make haste, the remaining people would perish. Most importantly, being in such close vicinity to the orochi was mentally taxing. And there were children to think of. We had to hurry.

We made the final checks. We determined who would lure the orochi away. Some were stationed on the island to fight the orochi, and then there were those who would learn how to create the seals.

As the elf wanted to see the orochi himself, we would travel to do so.

“We cannot use a ship.”

“Then what do we do?”

“I will take him. Please do not be surprised, if you can,” I said, then turned my back to the elf. My fox ears appeared from my head and my tails as well. My body transformed into a large fox.

“A fox...”

“Do not say anything. Simply sit on my back.”

The elf did as I told him.

“Make sure to hold on to me tightly, so you do not fall.”

With the elf astride me, I crossed the ocean until we were close to the town where the orochi currently rampaged.

“So that is the orochi... It really is big.”

We could see how large it was, even from far away.

“Are you frightened?”

“It would be a lie if I said I wasn’t frightened, but I can’t back down now. I don’t see the elements around it that you mentioned right now.”

“If we attack it, it will summon them.”

I had once believed I had an opportunity and attacked it, but it immediately reacted, and the elemental powers appeared.

“So, each of the heads has an elemental attribute?”

“What’s wrong?”

“We can’t assume that it has only one mana gem.”

“I’ve never heard of a monster with multiple mana gems.”

“There have been some in the past that had two.”

“I see.”

“I’d like to attack it and see for myself.”

“Stop it. The townspeople are still in hiding. If we must attack it, we will wait until the day of the plan.”

“I know... However, we should prepare multiple plans just in case.”

We proceeded with our preparations, until finally, the day we had planned for arrived.

Whether we won or lost, this would be the final battle. Once the battle was over, there would be no second chance. I needed to win no matter what.

“Well, I shall go now.”

I left for the town where the orochi was on my own. I had taken the duty of luring the orochi to the small island. That was the best way to do this without unnecessary casualties. If we lured it with a ship and that ship was destroyed, then all the people on it would be lost as well. It would be best for me to act as bait, since I could fly. Meanwhile, the others could prepare for the battle.

When I arrived at the town, the orochi was in the center, acting as though it owned the place. To keep the orochi from noticing the townspeople, we crept from house to house and informed them of the plan and to avoid the path we'd be leading the orochi on. The adventurers did this, risking their lives.

I cast a large-scale spell on the orochi. This was the decisive battle. I hit it directly, but each of the orochi's heads immediately activated their elemental powers. Just as the elf had said, it likely did have multiple mana gems. But where were they?

My role was to lure away the orochi and to bring it to the small island, but it did not stop there. We needed to find the location of its gems. If the orochi used its mana, its gems would react.

I used a spell that elf had taught me to look for its gems. Then I attacked the orochi. When it breathed fire, I saw a reaction in the middle of its head. Each of

the heads did the same, so there were four gems in all. Much worse, the reactions to the spell were intense. When I had tried this with other monsters, I hadn't seen such a reaction. It was ten, maybe even a hundred times stronger than the other monsters.

The orochi began to move. It flattened buildings as it followed me.

"That's right, chase me!"

I led the orochi toward the small island.

Yes, come to me.

The orochi was in the ocean now. Its flames disappeared, but its water attribute increased. It was even more powerful than it had been on land. The ocean was rough and choppy from the gale it released. Whenever it moved, large waves crashed around it.

Though the orochi's fire attribute had weakened and we had considered fighting it in the ocean, that proposal had been rejected. If we did that, the ship would simply sink.

Its head was spraying water toward me. I dodged. As I did, we arrived at the island where we would seal the orochi. Once I arrived, I told the others, who were already waiting for us, about where the mana gems were.

"I thought so."

"How troublesome."

"No, it's not. It's better to have four mana gems that we can take care of one at a time rather than one strong gem," the elf said.

It was true that defeating four weaker things would be easier than defeating one strong one.

We fought the orochi just as planned. The adventurers, soldiers, and mages

each launched into combat. Those who could use magic were mostly deployed against the heads, while the melee fighters took the body. As everyone attacked the orochi at once, it used mana to regenerate, which used up its strength. Every stab wound required mana to heal it.

Though our fighters began to fall, the orochi was steadily weakened. Corpses piled everywhere. In the midst of all the fighting, we had an unexpected revelation.

“There’s one more mana gem?” the elf suddenly exclaimed.

It seemed there was another gem in the center of its body. Apparently, in addition to its heads, a mana gem was supplying power from its body as well.

“So you mean we cannot defeat its heads one at a time?”

“We must. We simply need to make it use the gem in its body to supply power to other parts of it. We’ll attack its body harder and force it to use its body’s mana gem to regenerate it.”

“But we don’t have people able to fight it anymore.”

We could barely manage to fight it now. The ones fighting fell, and the mages ran out of mana. We had lost our power to fight.

But as I said that, someone spoke up behind me, “In that case, we will do it.”

Someone unexpected stood behind me: the young king.

“I have brought people who can fight with me.”

The castle still had soldiers and mages who could fight. He had brought more people with him.

“Why did you come here?!”

“If we lose here, they will die regardless. I think it better to try, even if our chances are slim, than to let any fighting power go to waste.”

The king was right. We could only be thankful for the fresh reinforcements.

“I am grateful. That is a great help.”

“I think this is the first time you’ve ever thanked me, Kagari.” The young king laughed.

“But you must stay in a safe location. You will be the last to die. If you die, it will affect morale. Even if we could win the battle, we might lose if the troops are dispirited.”

“I know that. I may be nothing but a figurehead, but I am still the king. I won’t cause any trouble for you.”

“No, you are a fine ruler.”

I remembered the boy who had said he wanted to protect the weak. *Your son became a wonderful king, dear friend.* That was why I couldn’t let him die here.

With our new troops, we started the battle with the orochi again.

“Just die already!”

One of the heads had finally been defeated. It was still trying to move, but the dwarf had created a giant hole in the ground. The head fell into the hole, and the mages didn’t hesitate to bury it.

Then the elf ran over next and drew a magic circle on the ground. It glowed and disappeared.

“We’ve sealed one.”

However, as long as the other heads were moving, there was a chance that the seal would break, so we had to continuously feed it mana. The mages took on that role for the elf. No matter how dangerous it was, none of us could leave now.

One by one, we weakened the orochi’s heads and sealed them, until only one remained. We had made many sacrifices but had made it this far thanks to them. People had fallen everywhere, but we couldn’t do anything to help them

now. All we could do was to keep fighting. We needed to go on for the sake of the others who had fallen. I had to continue, even if others called me a monster.

I transformed into my gigantic fox form and fought the orochi.

Although everyone was surprised, the elves and the rest of his party cried out that I was the nation's guardian beast. Thanks to that, everyone was revitalized. I had never thought my form would hearten others in this way.

Everyone used the last of their strength to defeat the orochi's heads one by one. There was only one left.

"This is the last one," I said.

I focused a spell on the orochi. The last orochi head fell.

"Now!"

The elf created the seal, and with that, we finally sealed the orochi's body. It was over.

I could not say we had won. Many had died, many had been injured, and none had come out unscathed.

Regardless, those who had survived cried out in joy and collapsed into sobs for those who had lost their lives. Everyone was too tired to take another step, let alone fight any longer.

It took everything we had to seal the creature away. But we had protected the country.

Once things had settled down, and we'd cleaned up mess left in the battle's wake, there remained four adventurer heroes. They had been in the thick of combat all through the fight. If not for them, we might have given up before we even tried.

"We have four heroes, then," I said to myself.

“There are five,” the king corrected me.

“You do not need to count me among them.”

“You saved many soldiers. Some even see you as a deity.”

“And yet I am a monstrous fox.”

“No monster is as beautiful as you.”

“You are so young! I see you’ve grown up enough to say adult things.”

“How old do you take me for? I’m a father now. You cannot treat me as a child forever.”

“You’re right. You are a fine ruler.”

“Do you really intend to live on that island?”

“Someone needs to protect it. Many people have realized what I am. So, I will hide myself there for some time.”

I had used my fox form to fight at the fullest extent of my power. Word of me had spread.

“No one thinks you are a monster.”

“I know that. But I want to live a quiet life for a while.”

Even after the fighting ended, no one asked for my true identity. Nor did they ignore me. They greeted me as was proper, and though they still gave me strange looks, it did not feel unpleasant.

When reconstruction began in the town, we were to have a parade. The four adventurers and I were to be touted as heroes for our pivotal role in battling the orochi. We were to travel the country with the soldiers and mages who fought as well. That was how it should have been...

“You cannot find them anywhere?”

“That’s right. They’re nowhere to be found.”

“I was asked to give this letter to you, Lady Kagari.”

A maid handed me the missive. The letter was from the four adventurers, informing me that they had left the country.

We are not heroes. We're just adventurers, so we've gone off to more adventures. Thank you, Kagari. This was fun.

They'd each written down their thoughts in the letter.

I'd already told them that I would guard the orochi's seal, but they'd likely been afraid my resolve would crumble if they told me they would be leaving. I'd known they had to leave eventually, but why had they thrust the full brunt of being the “hero” upon me? Why did I have to bear that burden alone? They could have waited until after the parade!

In the end, I could not escape my plight. And so, I toured the country as the sole hero of the battle.

Afterword

I'M KUMANANO. Thank you for picking up Volume 19 of *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear*—the second half of the Land of Wa arc.

Yuna brings Mumulute, former hero of the Land of Wa, back to his old stomping ground, where they fight the orochi with Kagari. Of course, it's not just the three of them. Sakura, Shinobu, and Luimin—who tagged along with Mumulute—each help with the battle in their own way.

And so, the battle at the Land of Wa draws to a close. In the next volume, Yuna will start on a new adventure, and we'll cover the aftermath of what happened in the Land of Wa. Please look forward to it.

About the second season of the anime—I think there will be an announcement soon. I helped as much as I could, being the humble author of the work. While looking over the scenarios that they'd come up with, the hardest part was deciding what to delete. Unlike in the novels, we can't include everything. I really wish we could adapt it all into the anime, but it's just not possible, so I reluctantly remove things to make the stories a little shorter.

Still, whenever I watch the anime, I'm reminded of all the stories that were cut from the novels. It's really difficult to decide what stays and what goes. I think the parts we really couldn't cut were the places where someone wouldn't understand what was going on in the story if they didn't read the original. I don't want that to happen. I try to avoid that as much as possible! I really hope that you're looking forward to the second season, since it'll be coming out soon.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who strived to get this book out. Thank you for your wonderful illustrations, 029—thank you so much for drawing another pair of cute girls. Thank you to my editor, whom I'm always relying on. To the

many people who were involved in the publishing of *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear*, Volume 19, thank you.

I'm grateful for the readers who have read along thus far. Let's meet again in Volume 20!

KUMANANO — ON A DAY IN OCTOBER, 2022



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