

WRITTEN BY
Kumanano

ILLUSTRATED BY
029

20
novel



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Afterword.....

KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR



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Kumanano

ILLUSTRATED BY
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.



SHURI

Seven years old and little sister of Fina. An admirable young girl who sticks close to her mother, Tiermina, and helps her with the Bear's Lounge. Loves bears.



TIERMINA

Fina and Shuri's mother. Yuna cured her illness. After that, she married Gentz. Yuna entrusts the accounting work, among other things, of the Bear's Dining Room and Bear's Lounge to her.



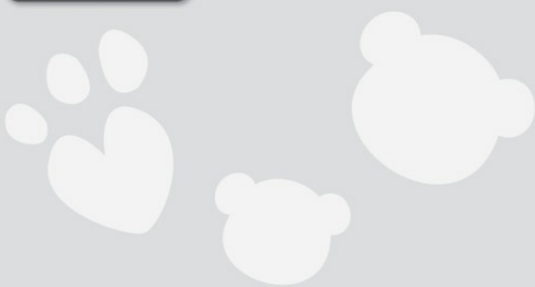
NOIR FOCHROSÉ

Nicknamed Noa. Ten years old. Second daughter of the Fochrosé family. A cheerful girl who loves bears.



CLIFF FOCHROSÉ

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



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.



CAPITAL



ELLELAURA FOCHROSÉ

Noa and Shia's mother. Thirty-five years old. Ordinarily lives in the capital and works for the king. Is very well connected and helps Yuna with a lot of things but can be a bit pushy.



SHIA FOCHROSÉ

Noa's older sister. Fifteen years old. A little strong-minded and wears her hair in pigtails. Goes to the capital's academy. Her grades are excellent, but she has room for improvement.



PRINCESS FLORA

Elfanica Kingdom's princess. Calls Yuna "Bear." Yuna likes her and gives her picture books and stuffed animals as presents.



TEILIA

Elfanica Kingdom's princess. Flora's older sister. Shia's classmate at the academy. Was looking forward to meeting Yuna after Princess Flora told her all about "Bear."

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 Mumulute 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 517:

The Bear Returns to the Land of Wa

AFTER SLAYING THE OROCHI in the Land of Wa, I returned to Crimonia. Ms. Kagari's house had been destroyed during the battle, so she was staying with me for now.

I'd been afraid she might cause a stir in Crimonia, but she turned out to be a quiet houseguest. She did make a fuss about sleeping on tatami mats her first night, so I set up a room in my bear house for her and laid out a Japanese sleeping futon. When mealtime came around, she'd tell me she was hungry, but eat whatever I made for her without complaint. Then she'd go right to sleep.

That became our pattern. She'd shrunk after fighting the orochi because she used up too much power. Maybe that explained her behavior?

When I was on my own, I took my time visiting my shops and the orphanage.

"I'm back," I told Tiermina, to which she replied, "You went somewhere?" I'd told Fina that I was in the Land of Wa, but I had apparently forgotten to tell Tiermina. Well, I hadn't been gone that long. I guess she didn't notice.

While I was away, I'd spotted the Land of Wa from Talgwei's back, soaked in a hot spring, bought tatami mats, and even accepted a slaying quest from an adventurer guild to dispatch some kamaitachi. I'd also met Shinobu, Mr. Jyubei, Sakura, and Ms. Kagari—and then battled the orochi. I might not have been gone long, but boy, had I been *busy*.

While I was hard at work in the Land of Wa, the kids—all clad in their bear uniforms—had been toiling away in the bakery at Crimonia, too. So had the kids who were taking care of the kokekkos at the orphanage. Life went on.

I loved the quiet life.

My bear phone had gotten an upgrade, probably because I'd defeated the orochi. It was now one of those string phones—which didn't sound much like an upgrade when I put it that way, but meant anyone who had a bear phone could talk to each other. I could be in Crimonia but talk to Luimin while she was at the elven village, and also talk to Sakura in the Land of Wa at the same time. If I acted as a relay, they could talk to each other. They'd still need me to be present, so it seemed a little pointless, but they seemed really happy they could talk to one another.

I'd also acquired a new skill—though I wasn't sure when I'd be able to use it, given it was called Bear Underwater Swimming. I hadn't tried it out, but apparently it allowed me to swim in my bear suit. Could be an omen that an underwater battle was coming.

I decided I'd avoid water just in case. I didn't really want to activate an underwater battle event. It was pretty hard to resist trying it out, though.

A few days went by. Then Sakura called, asking me to come back to the Land of Wa.

"Ms. Kagari, I'm headed back to the Land of Wa. Is that okay with you?"

Ms. Kagari was still in her chibi form. We'd gotten her a set of Land of Wa kids' clothes and she was wearing those now.

"'Tis not an issue. I had plenty of rest, thanks to you."

I was glad to hear it.

The next day, we headed back to the Land of Wa. We got to Linesu, the island where we'd fought the orochi. I moved over the earth that I'd magically manipulated to hide the bear gate and we headed out into the open.

"I can hardly believe we are truly in the Land of Wa after simply traveling through a gate," Ms. Kagari said. "I feel almost as though we might have been here the entire time."

Ms. Kagari hadn't left the house in days, since she'd been focused on recuperating. But I knew she'd seen out the window and at least knew we hadn't been in the Land of Wa.

"We've been waiting for you, Lady Yuma, and the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru."

I saw Sakura right as I walked out of the gate. Shinobu and King Suo were with her too, both looking a bit worse for wear. Meanwhile, Sakura looked right as rain.

"It seems Lady Kagari still hasn't changed back." Sakura looked at Ms. Kagari, who was still tiny.

"I've regained my mana and strength, but I cannot seem to return to my original size. Perhaps it's the curse of the bears."

"Don't accuse me of cursing you for no reason."

"I never said *you* cursed me. Or do you believe yourself to truly be a bear?"

"...!"

I was at a loss for words for a second. I'd as good as admitted to being a bear. I couldn't deny it, but I didn't want to give her the satisfaction of confirming it.

I retorted, "In that case, it'd be the fox's curse. Since you turned into a little kid after you transformed into a giant fox."

"Hrmm." Now Ms. Kagari didn't know what to say.

Great power came with its downsides. I'd gotten my powers in exchange for having to wear a bear onesie, for example. I'd also had to abandon my sense of pride. Well, I hadn't abandoned it entirely. I had some left, right?

Either way, I wasn't as embarrassed as I used to be, that was for sure. That was a good thing, right?

"Kagari, are you sure you're all right?"

"I had plenty of rest, so I am no longer tired. And I feel in good physical

condition.”

The king looked relieved. Was he worried about her?

“How are things faring here?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“Things have settled, and our days have gone back to normal.”

“And the orochi?”

The plan had been to hide the fact that we’d defeated the orochi.

“So about that. The rumors have gone in a weird direction,” Shinobu said.

“What does that mean?”

“Legend has it that a giant fox fought alongside us humans to defeat the orochi when it first appeared. Now, rumor has it that the fox came back and defeated the orochi for us.”

Not baseless. Ms. Kagari really had turned into a giant fox to fight.

“We’ve issued a gag order on those who witnessed the battle, but people saw a giant fox fighting the orochi. That’s part of why the rumor is spreading.”

“So we decided to go on and make use of it,” Shinobu said.

“In other words, you are pretending that I defeated the orochi?”

The king shook his head.

“Not you—the giant fox. Only a few people, including myself, are aware that you are capable of transforming, Kagari. Your human form isn’t connected to the fox’s reputation.”

Unless someone knew Ms. Kagari was a fox, no one would be the wiser.

“I’d like to confirm that you’re all right with this, Yuna. We could still announce that you were the one who defeated the orochi.”

I shook my head.

“It’s fine. I didn’t fight the orochi to become a hero. I just wanted to save a young girl.”

I looked at Sakura. She'd seen herself dying in her dreams over and over again. Even though they were dreams, I was pretty sure they had to be much worse than I could even imagine. She'd seen herself and the people she loved die in them.

"Lady Yuna..."

"Besides, I don't like drawing attention."

"Those words are hardly convincing, coming from you in that getup," Ms. Kagari said. Everyone nodded along with her.

Geez, I wasn't dressed like a bear because I *liked* it. I couldn't fight unless I dressed like this.

"As long as this is what you truly desire," Ms. Kagari said. "I'm not certain I like this plan to make me out to be the orochi's conqueror, however."

"It'll be all right," Shinobu said. "Since people also believe a bear fought it too."

"What does that mean?"

"There were giant bear-shaped boulders all over the battlefield. Sound familiar, Yuna?"

"Bear-shaped boulders..." It started to all come back to me. "Ohh..."

I'd used those to destroy the orochi's heads, and then I'd left them behind. I'd forgotten all about them.

"Then people know about me?"



“Just that a bear was involved. So rumor has it that it wasn’t just the giant fox fighting, but a bear too,” Shinobu said.

“There was already a rumor going around that a special fox lives on this island. Now, with the bear boulders all around the orochi heads when people went to go see them, they’re also saying a bear god might’ve lived on this island all along.”

“What? No, the only one on this island was me.” Ms. Kagari glared at Suo.

“There’s nothing we can do about it. The island’s gotten itself a reputation for being mysterious, because no one’s been able to visit it for so long. Can’t blame people for getting the wrong idea after traveling here for the first time and seeing all these bear statues.”

“I do not like anyone assuming I defeated the orochi. However, I cannot accept them believing a bear lived on this island all along.”

Ms. Kagari had protected this place for years and years, and she was a fox. I could understand why she was so upset that she’d been replaced with a bear god in other people’s minds.

“Sorry, I forgot to clean up after myself. I’ll get those out of your way,” I said.

“It’s too late for that. Having the boulders disappear now would cause its own set of issues. I’d like to know what you’d think of us making use of the rumors to say a giant fox and a bear defeated the orochi. Would you be fine with that? I’d like your permission to proceed.”

“Would anyone actually believe that?”

“They already do. And if I, the king, were to proclaim it to be true, then true it shall be. If I deny it, then we would need to find a new explanation instead.”

Everyone would be wondering who had defeated the orochi, considering they’d seen it wreak havoc with their own two eyes. That was just how people were.

“I’m fine as long as people don’t know I defeated the orochi.” It’d be a pain if

people stopped me on the street.

“I have no objection to this. I would not want to be worshipped when I am simply in town for a drink,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Just don’t go to town expecting a drink in that form.” It wasn’t like anyone was going to serve a little kid liquor.

After we finished talking, we settled on announcing that the giant fox and a bear she was closely acquainted with defeated the orochi. Maybe that’d make for good picture book material? All right, that was what I was going to draw next.

Chapter 518: The Bear Obtains a Mysterious Item

IT WAS DECIDED THE KING would say the orochi was defeated by the fox from the legends and a bear.

“I was thinking that, with your permission, we might make some fox statues to join the bear statues.”

“Will you be able to make them in time if you start now?”

“It isn’t as though anyone has scouted the entire island yet, so it shouldn’t be an issue to create them now.”

“No one’s been able to set foot on the island till now, after all,” Shinobu said.

“I’d like to ask you to make the fox statues, Kagari.”

“You are asking me to make these on my own?”

“If we ask sculptors or mages to make them, we cannot guarantee it will stay secret.”

Guess he had a point. If Ms. Kagari made them herself, it’d stay secret, but if the king outsourced the job, the workers might end up leaking the information accidentally.

“At this rate, the people are going to assume a bear lived on this island all along instead of a fox. They might even end up retroactively turning *you* into a bear.”

“I would not want that,” Ms. Kagari said.

Ms. Kagari didn’t seem to want the fox folklore to be attributed to a bear, so she’d stepped up to make the fox statues.

“So, where shall I make the statues?” she asked.

“I want them all over. Let’s start in front of this house. Especially since this is

where you lived.”

We headed over to the front of Ms. Kagari’s house, which had been destroyed.

“Ms. Kagari, are you sure you have enough mana?”

“’Tis fine. The issue is whether I can make a decent-looking statue,” she said, then used her magic to make the statue.

“This is...”

It wasn’t a realistic fox. It was all cartoonified.

“It’s cute.”

Sakura ran over to it and looked at the statue, which was larger than her.

“I made sure it would match your bears,” Ms. Kagari said.

She made it sound easy, but I was pretty sure she’d only seen my bear statues once. I was impressed she could make hers match mine. Magic *was* all about imagination, and Ms. Kagari probably had a good one.

“I believe the fox statues are much more winsome,” Ms. Kagari commented, admiring her own handiwork (and self-portrait). At that point, Kumayuru and Kumakyu, who hadn’t made a peep until now, started to croon in protest.

“I do believe these long ears and tail are superior to any bear’s,” Ms. Kagari continued.

My bears crooned another rebuttal. I thought small ears and a small tail looked cuter, myself.

“Sakura, Shinobu, you agree, don’t you? Foxes are superior in cuteness, yes?”

Okay, now she was bringing others into it. Sakura and Shinobu seemed stuck in the middle as they looked between Ms. Kagari and my bears.

“Um, I think both are cute.”

“Well, that’s a tough question. I couldn’t compare them,” Shinobu said.

That didn't seem to appease either the fox or the bears. They all started to speak up.

"Traitor!"

My bears also crooned.

"I do! I couldn't possibly choose one or the other."

"That's right. Lady Kagari, you're an adult, so you gotta be more mature than the little bears."

"I am currently a child as well! And though these bears may appear to be cubs, they are large in their true forms."

My bears crooned some more.

They kept arguing for a while, not really getting anywhere. Of course, if I had to choose, I'd put in a vote for the bears.

Even though they'd argued, Ms. Kagari rode on top of Kumayuru when we headed out.

"I do believe that you have me beaten as a mount," Ms. Kagari said with chagrin as she lounged on Kumayuru. My bear crooned proudly.

I couldn't really tell whether they got along or not. I mean, you couldn't normally ride on top of foxes. I guess it would be possible to ride on Ms. Kagari if she were in her transformed state. It'd be fun to fly around in the air if I ever got the chance.

We went on to place other cartoonified statues all over the island. With all these foxes, we wouldn't have to worry about anyone thinking this was a bear island anymore. They had me make a couple more bear statues, too.

Then we got to a spot where one of the orochi heads had fallen.

"Looks like the orochi has been butchered already."

I could see traces of the fight that had taken place, but the orochi itself was nowhere to be seen.

“Indeed it has. It shouldn’t be able to revive now.”

“Do you think you’ll be able to use the orochi for something?”

“The skin will be the most useful. It’s lighter than metal, but very tough, so we can use it in many ways.”

“What about the meat?”

“I’m unsure. It may very well be toxic. We plan to look into it.”

They had no prior experience with creatures of the sort to draw on, so they needed to figure it out now.

“Oh, right. What about the portion that you were holding on to for me?”

I’d given them the mana gems, but I wanted to have some materials from the orochi.

“It is untouched. Please take as much as you would like.”

I didn’t need it all, so we agreed that I’d take a little of it.

We continued our circuit of the island so Ms. Kagari and I could make more statues.

“Will this do? I feel exhausted.”

Ms. Kagari was slumped over on top of Kumayuru.

“Sorry for asking this when you’re tired, but there was something I wanted you to see, Kagari. Humor me a while longer.”

“Something you want me to see?”

“It’ll be faster if you see it.”

The king started walking off. He brought us to the spot where Mr. Mumulute had strengthened the orochi’s seal. The building, which had been damaged

when the orochi revived, looked in bad shape.

“This way.”

The king headed to the back of the building. The ground had caved in, leaving a gigantic hole. The king started climbing down into it.

“Sakura, you should be okay as long as you keep a tight hold on Kumakyu.”

“Okay.”

We followed after him.

“Kagari, look at this. Do you know what it is?”

The king pointed at something that was about as big as a person’s head. It kind of looked like a rainbow-colored haze. Or maybe a cloud? Smoke? A mini aura? Anyway, whatever it was, it was hanging in the air.

“What is this?”

“What could it be? It’s pretty.”

Ms. Kagari got off of Kumayuru and approached the rainbow cloud.

“What do you make of it?”

“Have you touched it?”

“Two people have come to see what it is, but nothing happened.”

Ms. Kagari tried touching it, but nothing happened.

“I do not feel anything. Did magic work?”

“We haven’t tried. I wanted to check with you, so we haven’t tried to do anything yet.”

“I see.”

Ms. Kagari gathered mana in her hand, created a small breeze, and launched it at the cloud. The cloud didn’t even quiver and just hung there.

“It rather looks similar to a mass of mana. Alas, I do not know what it is,” Ms.

Kagari said.

It was a weird phenomenon.

“Could I touch it too?” I asked out of curiosity.

“I do not believe it to be dangerous, but you should be careful,” Ms. Kagari said.

Even if it were a little dangerous, I’d probably be fine with my bear gloves. I stuck my black bear hand into the cloud, and it started to glow. Then it started to gather into my bear puppet. The cloud disappeared as it condensed, and I was left with a sphere about as big as a baseball in my bear puppet.

“What is it? What did you do?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“Nothing. I just stuck my hand in.”

I really hadn’t done anything. I’d just stuck my puppet in there and that was all. I hadn’t even used any magic.

I showed the sphere in my hand to everyone.

“It’s pretty.”

“Perhaps that is a crystal. May I?”

Ms. Kagari held out her hand, so I placed the crystal on her palm. When I let go of the sphere, it dropped down toward her little hand, but then went right through it and dropped to the ground.

We both froze.

I was pretty sure I’d just seen it go straight through her hand. She must have seen the same thing, since she was staring at her palm and at the crystal on the ground. She crouched and tried to touch the crystal, but she couldn’t even pick it up. Her hand went right through it.

“What is this? I cannot pick it up,” she said.

Since it could be dangerous, we couldn’t let the king or Sakura pick it up. We had Shinobu try, but her hand also passed through it. I could pick it up fine,

though.

“Why are you the only one able to touch it?”

I could only assume it had to do with my bear puppet and my abilities. I was curious about the sphere, so I used my bear observation skill.

Bear Guidepost

Use unknown

A bear guidepost? This had to be an item designed for me.

“Young maiden, what is going on?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“I’m not sure but I think this is something I need.” That was how I interpreted it, anyway. “Could I keep this?”

The king thought for a bit before he said anything. “All right...”

“Are you sure?”

“It seems no one else can touch it. Other people can’t take it, even if they want to. If you are the only one who can hold it, then it belongs with you.”

“Indeed, quite right. Regardless of the reason why, ’tis no point in keeping it here if it is not with you,” Ms. Kagari agreed.

“And you were the one to defeat the orochi. As it appeared where you defeated the monster, it’s rightfully yours.”

I gratefully put it away in my bear storage. What was a bear guidepost supposed to even be? Based on the name, maybe it was supposed to lead me somewhere? I really didn’t want to get dragged into something troublesome, but it seemed I might have no choice.

Also...wasn’t this where the orochi’s tail had been? In the Japanese myth of the orochi, a sword came out of its tail. A sword would have been cooler than

this.

Chapter 519: The Bear Receives Thank-Yous

“YUNA, WE HAVE FOUND a good house for you to thank you for your deeds, as promised. Would you like to see it? You may reject it if it is not to your liking.”

“You already got one prepared for me?” I didn’t think he would get it ready while he was still busy trying to clean up the orochi.

“I’d be a poor king if I were incapable of repaying my debts.”

“And what of my liquor?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“I’ll have that prepared when you’re back in your previous form. As I have said, time and time again, I cannot give you a drink while you are in that form.”

Ms. Kagari looked the same age as Sakura and Fina, now. I couldn’t tell if she just *looked* young, but if she was

also physically a kid, then it probably wouldn’t be good to give her alcohol right now.

“When will that be? Recall that I am much older than you.”

“The problem is how you *look*. And I have no idea when you’ll be back to normal.”

“Hmph,” Ms. Kagari pouted.

She looked just like a kid having a tantrum. Appearances really did matter, and seeing Ms. Kagari like this only drove that home. She eventually gave up, but only reluctantly.

“So, your bears are capable of running across the water?”

The king glanced over at my bears.

“Yeah.” I nodded, since I knew Shinobu had already reported that to him.

“If we take you to the boat, explaining you will only cause trouble. I’m sorry, but could you meet us there instead with Kagari?”

He had a point. The only people who had stepped onto the island from the boat were him, Sakura, and Shinobu. Even if I recalled my bears, the crew would think it was weird if Ms. Kagari and I showed up with them.

I understood what he was saying. We decided on the spot where we would meet.

“I wish I could ride Kumakyu back too.”

“That would raise suspicions, considering you got off of the ship here. They’ll believe that I left you here,” the king said.

Once someone got to the island, the only way back was by boat. We couldn’t say that she’d gone home using another route. It wasn’t going to fly.

“Esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru, we will part ways for a bit.”

Sakura hugged Kumayuru and Kumakyu. They both crooned. It wasn’t like they were never going to see each other again. Sakura seemed like she didn’t want to leave them behind.

After that, the king and Shinobu headed to the wharf. I put away my bear gate and headed in the opposite direction of everyone. Then Ms. Kagari and I mounted my bears, and we leaped out on the water and were on our way.

“They truly can walk on water,” Ms. Kagari muttered.

“Well, you can fly through the air, so you don’t even need to run across the water,” I said.

Personally, I’d rather be able to fly than walk on water. If you could do that, you could get to more places. It seemed pretty useful. Then again, hoping for something you had no way of getting wasn’t going to do me any good.

“Sometimes I feel like my bears are outdoing me.”

They crooned proudly in response.

“Then try to fly,” Ms. Kagari said.

They both crooned at us.

“Okay, okay, don’t fight. Both skills are impressive.”

I tried to mediate for them. I thought that they’d just made up.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu, speed up!”

The bears crooned in acknowledgment, followed my order, and ran even faster across the ocean.

We arrived at our meeting location. It was a road that was a little ways away from the castle. Ms. Kagari seemed to be getting comfortable riding on top of Kumayuru. They were just arguing earlier though. She still seemed tired. She wasn’t back to usual at all.

After waiting a while, I saw Shinobu and Sakura riding a horse (probably Hayatemaru) and the king and also Jyubei.

“Sorry for that wait,” Shinobu said.

“Lady Yuna, I’m so sorry we’re late,” Sakura said.

“I wasn’t waiting all that long,” I said.

I looked over at Mr. Jyubei.

“You came too?” I asked.

“I was tasked to act as their escort by His Majesty.”

“When Shinobu tried to act as our guard on her own, we were stopped from leaving the capital. So we had to ask Jyubei to help. He already knows you, as it is.”

Mr. Jyubei got off the horse and headed over to Ms. Kagari, who was on top of Kumayuru.

“Are you really Lady Kagari?”

“‘Tis me.”

“I’m very sorry. I couldn’t protect you.”

“That is not your fault. And a man such as yourself could not have entered the island as it is. You needn’t worry yourself about that.”

“Yes.”

After they finished talking, Mr. Jyubei looked over at me.

“So you were still in the country? When I asked His Majesty and Shinobu about your whereabouts, they wouldn’t answer me. I was concerned.”

“He was worried about you, Yuna,” Shinobu said. “I couldn’t say nothin’, since His Majesty told us not to.”

“Since that was a secret.”

She had a magical contract with me, so she had to keep my bear gate secret.

“I’m glad you weren’t hurt. Please allow me to thank you for saving my country. You have my deepest gratitude.”

Mr. Jyubei knew that I’d fought the orochi and beaten it. The contract I’d made with Shinobu had been to protect my secrets—in other words, just my bear abilities, such as the bear gate and bear phone. It didn’t include fighting the orochi.

I dismounted Kumakyu, telling Mr. Jyubei, “I’m glad I could help.”

“I saw the orochi after it was defeated. I was surprised a girl like you was able to defeat such a big monster. Lady Sakura spoke the truth. I’m so sorry for testing you earlier.”

“It wasn’t like you *wanted* to do it. Someone ordered you to,” I said and glanced at the king.

“That was simply the only way to quiet the people who refused to acknowledge you.”

I understood, but I didn’t feel good about it.

“Was the orochi powerful? It seems only Lady Sakura witnessed the battle, so I couldn’t ask about it.”

“It was. I think you would have helped make it a piece of cake if you’d been there, Mr. Jyubei.”

“That’s not true in the slightest. I would have just held you back.”

But Mr. Jyubei was strong. The orochi aside, it would have really helped us if he’d been there when the wyverns and volkrows had come. Shinobu wouldn’t have gotten hurt, and Sakura wouldn’t have been put in danger. And if he could have used his mana to feed the seal on the magic circle, then Sakura wouldn’t have had to push herself so far.

“And I am grateful you saved Shinobu, Lady Sakura, and Lady Kagari.”

Jyubei lowered his head slightly.

It made me feel itchy when people actually got all serious like that while thanking me.

“I’m glad I could help,” I said.

Mr. Jyubei smiled and headed back to the king’s side.

We headed to a location where there was a hot spring. Sakura rode on Kumakyu with Ms. Kagari, exactly as we’d agreed on before. I couldn’t help but notice that Hayatemaru looked a little lonely. I wished I could help with that, but there wasn’t much I could do.

“So, where are we going? I thought it would be a town.”

We were heading away from the streets near the castle.

“It’s outside the town, but not very far.”

“I think you’ll be surprised when you see it,” Shinobu said teasingly.

I looked over at Sakura for a clue and she just murmured, “It’s a secret.”

“Ms. Kagari, do you know where we’re headed?”

“How would I when I have been with you this entire time?”

She had a point. She’d been with me the last few days and hadn’t left my side since we made it back here. There was no way she’d know.

I wondered where they were taking me?

We kept going until a wooded area came into sight. Maybe this was it? A bear house wouldn’t be as noticeable among the trees, for sure. Wait—were they abandoning me in the woods?

“You don’t mean to say you’re giving the young maiden that land?” Ms. Kagari seemed to have realized where we were going.

“Ms. Kagari, do you know what’s up ahead?”

“As long as my memory hasn’t failed me.”

“Yes, Lady Kagari. But please don’t tell her,” Shinobu said.

I guess it must have been something impressive. We kept heading forward.

“Could you tell me soon?” I said.

“It’s a secret.”

“We’ve gotta keep it a secret.”

“You’ll see when we get there.”

“If you do not want it, then perhaps I shall take it.”

“...”

Ms. Kagari was being a little weird about it, but I was getting the message that they just weren’t going to tell me until we got there. Well, if they said I’d understand once I saw it, then I guess I just had to trust them. If I didn’t like it, then I could just reject it.

We kept heading into the woods, which had a proper road leading through them. I caught a glimpse of a sign that said, “No entry past this point.” It had

the king's seal on it, so it must have been guarding something.

Soon, a large house came into view. We headed through its gate and arrived at the front of the estate.

"I thought as much," Ms. Kagari said.

"Don't tell me this mansion is a present to me?"

"What? You don't like it? I think you should wait until you see inside before deciding."

"No, no, this is too big."

It was about the same size as Cliff's mansion. It was a three-story Japanese-style house. It was practically a hot spring resort.

"You saved the country from the orochi without any loss of life or damage to property, and you also gave us the orochi's mana gems and materials. Even just taking the cost of the damage if the orochi had made it to the country into account, this isn't nearly enough."

"I was also surprised when I first heard what happened. But you defeated the orochi, Lady Yuna, and saved the country. Thinking about it that way, I think this gift isn't odd at all."

"Indeed, 'tis so. Considering the orochi may very well have attacked a town, this is small in comparison."

The three of them made it seem like giving a mansion to someone was totally normal.

Sure, I did give them the orochi's mana gems, and they'd get money from selling the orochi materials. Compared to the damage the orochi could have done if it'd gotten off the island, maybe a mansion was a drop in the bucket.

It still felt way too big, though. I mean, this thing was three stories tall.

"Why is there a mansion here in the first place?"

"I built it so I could take advantage of the hot springs here. As such, it is a

royal estate, meaning no one will trespass here. It also is a natural hot spring, just as you hoped.”

A giant mansion with a hot spring that never had any visitors... Whew! How could anything be that perfect?

“Using your bears, it should be easy for you to travel to and from the town, so that shouldn’t be an issue.”

As long as I had my bears, that would be true. Sure, no one would see me travel by bear gate, even if I had a house in town. If someone saw a girl in a bear suit walk out of an abandoned house, they’d feel like they were losing it. That was one worry I could cross off my list if I had a place like this.

“Why did you build this all the way out here? Just for a hot spring?” There were hot springs in the town too.

“Lady Yuna, you’ll see once you go inside,” Sakura said meaningfully. Was there more to this place?

She pulled me into the house.

Chapter 520: The Bear Goes into the Mansion

WE OPENED THE GIANT door to the mansion and entered a spacious hall. There were a set of stairs ahead of us, and hallways leading to the right and left. The place sure was big. Ms. Kagari seemed to have memories of the place.

“Ms. Kagari, you seemed to already know about this place. Have you been here before?”

“Indeed, many a time. Just as Suo has said, the springs here are most enjoyable.”

I was looking forward to it. I wondered what sort of health benefits this hot spring might have? Not that I had the scientific know-how to figure that out, of course. I’d heard about hot springs that were good for the skin or for joints, and places that could cure diseases and stuff, but I’d be happy if it just helped with fatigue and felt nice to soak in.

Could it have the same effect as my white bear clothes...? No way. Hot springs were an entirely different thing, though baths *could* heal you in both body and soul.

“Ms. Kagari, you weren’t stuck on that island all the time, were you?”

“Of course not. I would sometimes steal away to go traveling, and there were times when I slept for several years.”

Like she was hibernating or something? But foxes didn’t hibernate, did they? Bears were the ones who hibernated.

“You would come to town for a drink, as I remember,” the king said.

“Only because you brought me so little to drink on the island.”

“I brought you plenty. You simply drink too much.”

Apparently, Ms. Kagari was a heavy drinker. I didn't really need alcohol, but I missed juice and soda. Ah, soda and chips—the *best* combo. I could make potato chips, but not soda.

“Lady Yuna, please come this way.”

While I was dreaming about soda, Sakura called me from the top of the stairs. She was upstairs with Shinobu.

“Jyubei, I'm sorry, but please wait here.”

“But—”

“We'll be indoors, so it should be fine. And Yuna will be with us. She defeated the orochi, after all. Or do you think Yuna would attack me?”

Mr. Jyubei looked at me. Then he turned back to the king.

“No...”

“Then please keep watch from here.”

“As you wish.”

I was betting there was something up there he didn't want Mr. Jyubei to know. It felt a bit much to leave him behind, though. The king really should keep his guard with him.

We left Mr. Jyubei behind and headed up the stairs to Sakura and Shinobu. Ms. Kagari was still on Kumakyu.

“Lady Yuna, this way.”

“I'm coming.”

Sakura was excitedly waving at us from the top of the stairs. When he saw her, the king slid up beside me and commented, “Sakura is finally smiling again. I am grateful.”

“I'm happy that she's doing better too,” I said.

When I'd first met her, she'd seemed both sad and older than her years, like

she was beset on all sides by danger. When she found out the orochi was gone, she'd cried. I was happy she was smiling now, too.

"It's too bad you're not a man, Yuna. If you had been, then you could have married Sakura."

"Indeed. Had she been, I would entrust Sakura to her without worry," Ms. Kagari said.

I couldn't believe what the two of them were saying.

"Well, I'm a girl...and Sakura's too young to be engaged."

"I must find her a good fiancé, as my late sister would have wanted. I want Sakura to be happy. It would be best to find her someone as soon as possible."

"I want that for her as well," Ms. Kagari said.

I guess they were kind of like her guardians, in a sense.

"I'm just going to say that I don't think you should force it. Let Sakura choose for herself."

Her mom used to be part of the royal family, after all. Even if she was gone now, she still had close contact with the king. I had no idea how much freedom she had to choose a partner, but now that I'd gotten to know her, I wanted her to be happy. I was sure the king felt the same way, so I doubted he would actually force her to marry anyone.

The issue was whether *Sakura* would say no. She seemed like she would agree to marry anyone the king brought her. I really hoped she would choose her partner for herself.

Still, marriage... I guess Fina, Shuri, and Noa would get married once they got older. I felt a little lonely thinking about it. Well, Anz and Karin would probably get married before them, though.

"I know. That's why I said I wished you were a man."

Unfortunately, I very much wasn't. I couldn't marry Sakura. I wasn't even

interested in boys! I was going to die a spinster.

Right then, my bears crooned to remind me they were there. Wow, psychic moment!

“You’re right. I’ve got you two,” I said. They both crooned again.

Ms. Kagari, who was still riding Kumayuru, seemed confused by the exchange. She tilted her head.

“Lady Yuna,” Sakura called.

“I’m coming.”

We pulled off our shoes and headed over to Sakura and Shinobu. Explaining my bear shoes to them seemed like a pain, so I just put them away in my bear storage.

“You’re so slow. What were you talking about?” Sakura asked us after we’d taken our time walking up the stairs and talking. We couldn’t tell her that we talked about her future husband, so we just smiled and waved it off.

Sakura and Shinobu led us to the third floor and down a hallway.

“Lady Yuna, this way.”

Apparently, she wanted to show me something. She opened a door and headed inside, and I followed her lead.

The room was covered in tatami mats. Walking barefoot over them, I couldn’t help but revel in the reminder of how nice tatami felt. They just had this indescribable springiness to them. I’d laid out some tatami in one room of my bear house for Ms. Kagari. Maybe I could sleep there after she was gone.

“Lady Yuna, please come this way,” Sakura called me again.

She was next to a window. I headed over to her.

“This is...”

When I looked out the window, I saw the deep green woods around us, and a blue lake spread out ahead. It was beautifully nestled in the large forest.

“Lady Yuna, isn’t the scenery beautiful?”

Apparently, Sakura wanted me to see this view.

“Yeah, it’s really pretty,” I said.

Since I’d spent all my time holed up indoors, I hadn’t seen a real lake in person. On TV and computer screens, sure, but not in person. This was something else.

Sakura opened the window, and I pulled off my bear hood. The breeze in my hair felt nice.

Sakura and Shinobu were staring at me.

“Yuna, I knew you were cute, but I had no idea you were beautiful,” Shinobu said.

“Why’d you suddenly say that? You’re not going to get anything out of me through flattery.”

Maybe she was saying that so she could use the estate or something. She didn’t need to. I would’ve let her stay here anyway. She’d need to clean up after herself if she did, though.

“I think you’re beautiful too,” Sakura said.

Now even Sakura was joining in.

“I think you’ll be a lot more beautiful when you grow up, Sakura. You’re already so cute.”

I was sure she’d grow into a beautiful woman. Unlike me, she’d be able to find a husband easily. I just hoped she wouldn’t end up being bamboozled by some weird dude.

They kept on saying nonsense about how I was pretty, so I pulled my hood back on.

“The view is always amazing, no matter how many times I see it.”

The lake spread out before our eyes. I’d seen and done so much ever since I

came to this world. I was grateful for my travels, because every once in a while, they meant I got to see something like this. Most of all, since I had the bear gate, I could get home easily.

“So? Do you like it?”

“I do, now that you mention it, but...”

I hadn’t seen the hot springs or the other rooms yet.

“The previous king enjoyed this scenery as well,” Ms. Kagari said, seeming nostalgic as she looked over the scene from the top of Kumayuru. I guess this place held memories for her.

“Are you sure I can have this place? I have my bear house, so if you just let me borrow a nook or cranny somewhere, I could set that up instead. Even if you give me this amazing house, I can’t use it that often.”

Personally, I kind of preferred just setting up a bear house somewhere discreet.

“That would hardly serve to thank you. Do you still not understand what an amazing thing you did?”

“I understand. I saved Sakura from some nightmares.”

“No, you saved our country.”

I’d said it partially as a joke, but her reply was serious. But I’d actually felt bad for Sakura, and that was mostly why I’d done it. If she’d been an unpleasant girl or if the king a bossy man, I might’ve turned a blind eye to their problems and headed right back to Crimonia.

Well, I guess I might still had done it for rice and food from the Land of Wa. If the country had disappeared, it would’ve been a loss to the whole world.

“If you do not want it, perhaps I shall take up residence here.”

“Ms. Kagari?”

“Someone ought to live here, don’t you think?”

Well, if no one lived in it, the house would fall into disrepair. It didn't sound like a bad proposal.

"That'd help a lot if you lived here," I said. "Are you really going to live out here in the middle of nowhere, though?"

"I lived upon that island for over a century. I prefer being on my own."

I guess she had a point. I couldn't say anything else to that. Plus Ms. Kagari knew about the bear gate, so that wouldn't pose any problems either.

"And this place is close to the town. Suzuran will be able to come here more easily than to the island."

Suzuran was probably the person who took care of Ms. Kagari. If she had someone to look after her, I guess I wouldn't have to worry. I just needed to make sure I didn't run into Suzuran.

"I will come to visit you, Lady Kagari. Then you won't be lonely. I won't need a boat, so it should be easy to make my way here."

She was right. It'd be easier to visit this place than the island.

"You must bring me a drink when you come," Ms. Kagari said.

"Don't ask Sakura to carry your alcohol!"

"Then I'll ferry it instead, so let me stay here sometimes," Shinobu said.

"I welcome the drink, but you should ask Yuna whether you can stay here."

"Sure, as long as you clean up," I said.

I got the feeling she'd be holed up in a room that reeked of alcohol next time I stopped by, so I wanted that cleaned up, at least.

"You seem like you're only ever strict toward me, Yuna," Shinobu said.

"You can live here, if you want," I offered.

"No, thank you. I wouldn't want to live in the middle of nowhere like this. Visiting is enough for me."

I agreed. This was great for the occasional visit, but it wasn't homey. I was used to my bear houses, so I didn't want to live in such a big mansion. Besides, it was hard to beat for keeping out thieves.

Chapter 521: The Bear Looks at Rooms

“I THOUGHT YOU WOULD prefer a home closer to the castle, but if this is what you prefer, then I will inform Suzuran.”

“Much obliged,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Also, this is for you, Yuna.”

King Suo offered me a card, which I took. The front of the card had my name on it and something that looked like a family crest. It was the same one that I saw on the way into the manor.

“What is this?”

“It’s something like a guild card. As you have this, you should be able to enter towns dressed any way you would like without anyone asking you questions.” The king wasn’t looking me in the eye.

“Why are you staring at my clothes while you say that?”

“Yuna, here you go.”

Shinobu immediately thrust a hand mirror at me.

“And why are you putting a mirror in front of me now?”

I pushed the mirror back at her. I already knew I was dressed in my bear onesie, thank you very much.

“This is the same as having the royalty vouch for your standing, so no one will question you when you attempt to enter a town or the castle.”

I’d stand out no matter where I went. People would always stare and ask questions.

“I’ve got one too, as it so happens,” Shinobu said, showing off her own card. Did she need one because she was a ninja?

“I’ve given one to Shinobu because I have her travel on my behalf.”

“Thank you. Then I’ll be glad to use this.”

I didn’t have a reason to refuse it. It was better having the royal family’s backing than not, especially with how much power they had here. I’d probably get into trouble if I used it too much, so I decided to be careful about when I did.

“All right. Now, imbue the card with some of your mana to complete the registration process.”

I did as I was told.

“Now this card is fully yours, Yuna. You can use it the same way you would a guild card. And please give this card to that elven girl as well.”

The king handed me another card. It had Luimin’s name on it.

“She should be able to use this to enter towns. I’ll set things up so she may visit Sakura by simply showing it.”

“Uncle?!” Sakura looked at the king in surprise.

“I promised this to Mumulute. Consider this my permission for the elven girl to see Sakura whenever she would like.”

Now that he mentioned it, that was what Mumulute had asked for. Since Sakura lived in a manor with priestesses, it wasn’t like we could suddenly show up out of the blue to see her. There was always a chance they would’ve just refused her at the door if she had tried.

“So long as she has this, Mumulute’s granddaughter will be able to see Sakura.”

I guess they’d been thinking of Luimin the whole time.

“Thank you. I’ll give this to her. Is it possible to get one of these for someone else, too?”

“How do you mean?”

“I might bring along Fina, who you met before. It would be nice to have a card for her.”

“I see. Then I shall prepare one.”

“Then please prepare one for Mumulute as well. Should he need to pay a visit for another incident, then he will surely require one,” Ms. Kagari said.

“All right, then I shall. If you need any other cards, simply say the word and I shall prepare them.”

“Are you sure?”

“I would not mind. I doubt you would have any ill intentions. And few know of your door, I’m sure.”

The only other people who knew were Fina’s mom, Tiermina, and her sister, Shuri. It really was classified info.

“What should I do if I bring other people around?”

I might bring around Shuri at some point.

“You should be able to bring a few people with you. If they require cards, allow me to prepare some for them.”

Sounded good to me.

“Well, I must get back to my work soon. I had hoped that I could invite you to the castle for a meal, though.”

“Please don’t worry about it. I’m sure you’re very busy.”

“Pardon me,” the king said before looking over at Ms. Kagari.

“Kagari, I leave the rest to you. I will have Suzuran come to you tomorrow. Will you fare all right without a meal?”

“You needn’t worry about me. I will fare fine without a meal for a day. Should I find it necessary, I shall go into town.”

Next, King Suo looked at Sakura.

“Sakura, would you like to accompany me back?”

“I would like to talk to Lady Yuna more, if possible.”

“I see. Shinobu, please watch over Sakura.”

“I will take responsibility for delivering her home.”

The king left the room on his own, so we all watched him leave.

“Are you sure he should let me have such a big manor?”

“I’m sure it is fine,” Ms. Kagari said. “After all you have done, you should take it. Do not worry. I shall use it while you are away.”

“Yeah, I’m counting on it.”

“Really? I believe most people would not want someone else to live in their home.”

Ms. Kagari looked unconvinced. Apparently, she hadn’t expected my reply.

“I’d actually feel better if you lived here. It’s not like you’d break anything.” Buildings go into disrepair when no one lives in them, actually.

“I would not. But I will not clean it.”

Well, Suzuran or whoever it was who took care of Ms. Kagari would do that.

“Well, if it gets too messy, I’ll have Shinobu clean for me.”

“Why me? Though I suppose I wouldn’t mind if it’s only occasionally.”

“Then I will help too.” Sakura smiled.

“Well, I wish I could go to the hot spring first, but I think I should go check out the rooms to set up the gate first.”

“Then I’ll take you there,” Sakura said as she pulled on my bear puppet and started walking.

All the rooms on the third floor were outfitted with tatami, just like a traditional Japanese hotel. They were all giant too, just like the kinds of rooms I’d see in manga and anime when characters went on school trips to hotels.

Was this the king's room?

"It's rather empty."

Ms. Kagari agreed.

For sure. It kind of felt like moving into a completely empty space. I thought there'd be a hanging scroll or something around, but it was a clean slate.

"We cleaned out all the stuff you wouldn't need," Shinobu said. "These sliding screen doors had the imperial crest on them, but we removed those."

"Really?"

"Well, this is your place now, so we removed anything related to the royal family," Shinobu explained.

Ahh. Changing the doors was a little overboard, in my opinion.

"How do you know all of that, Shinobu?"

"Hee hee, I know everything. But the reason why I know is a secret," she said, as though she were insinuating something important.

Apparently, she knew everything that went on because she was a ninja. I was glad I'd made her make a contract with me using magic. Ninjas are good at collecting information. Supposedly, historical ninjas were skilled in espionage.

"Shinobu came here with me earlier, so that's who she knows."

Sakura gave everything away, though.

"Hey! Why did you tell her? You've ruined the air of mystery I created for myself."

Ah, the real reason wasn't as interesting as I expected. Still though, I was glad there wasn't stuff in the rooms. If they'd left things around, I wouldn't have been able to bring myself to throw any of it out. Especially if I knew the person the things previously belonged to.

So what would I have done if the furniture were uncool? And I wouldn't mind using bedding Sakura had used, but the king? Bleh.

“Is something the matter?” Sakura asked while I was thinking.

“I was just thinking that I’d need to prep a lot of things since the place is empty,” I said.

Well, it wasn’t like I’d be living here, so I just needed the bare minimum. Besides, everything I needed was in my bear storage.

We headed further in, checking out the rooms as we went. What...was this? A curtain labeled “hot spring” hung at the entrance.

“Can we bathe here?”

“Yes, you may. We wanted to show it to you last, but it was on this floor, so we ended up here.”

I opened the door to reveal a changing room. The back of the changing room had a wooden wall.

“One moment, please.”

Sakura lightly made her way over to the wall.

“I’ll help out too,” Shinobu said.

The two of them started doing something to the wall, but it started sliding, so I immediately changed my idea of it to “door.” It slid away to the right and the left, revealing an open-air bath. The spring water was steaming and surrounded by rock.

“’Tis as large as I remember it.”

“The scenery you can see from the bath is beautiful.”

I could imagine how pretty it would be to see the night sky while bathing. It was gorgeous in the daylight too though. I got a little closer and caught sight of the lake surrounded by trees.

“I should like to drink as I bathe,” Ms. Kagari said.

“We haven’t got anything to drink, but you can still take a bath,” Shinobu told her.

Bath water dribbled out of a bamboo pipe. I wondered if it was free flowing instead of pumped water.

“I am ill prepared. Perhaps I will try it later.”

“Then how about we all bathe after looking at the whole manor?”

I wanted to use the hot spring too.

“Are you sure?”

“Am I allowed in too?” Shinobu asked.

“Sure.”

“Then may we call Miss Luimin too?”

“Then we’ll need to call in Fina,” Shinobu added.

Once the new manor’d been inspected, it’d be bath time. I needed to set up the bear gate to get Luimin anyway. I could have just set one up anywhere, but I wanted to check out the entire place first.

Chapter 522:

The Bear Calls Fina and the Others

WE LEFT THE HOT spring and walked around the rest of the manor. Since we'd finished with the third floor, we headed to the second.

"The second floor is the servants' quarters."

"This is where the chefs and guards would stay when His Majesty would come," Shinobu explained. "I would stay here too."

"It looks just as nice as the third floor."

It seemed like Sakura had stayed here before, so I wondered which floor she would use. Based on how King Suo treated her, my guess was the third floor. I kind of wondered what the rest of the royal family was like.

The rooms on the second floor weren't as big as the ones on the first, but there were a lot more of them. A few of them were six tatami rooms. They looked about the right size for a guard or servant to live in. The second floor also had its own hot spring.

Since we'd finished with the second floor, we headed to the first. The kitchen and storage room were on the first floor. I should have expected it by now, but the storage room was empty too. I mean, not that I wanted it to be full.

The first floor had a hot spring for the servants to use, too. I guess the one on the top floor was for the royal family's exclusive use then.

After checking out the building, I chose the room I'd use and set up a bear gate there. I considered setting it up in the storage room, but it would be a lot more convenient on the third floor so I could use the hot spring.

"I'll make this my room then."

I picked out the room I wanted.

“You don’t want the largest room? I thought you’d prefer that,” Ms. Kagari said.

“This is big enough for me.”

It was over ten tatami mats big, more than enough room for a person, plus I wasn’t going to be living here full time anyway.

“You can use the big room, Ms. Kagari.”

That might have been the king’s room.

“Are you sure? Then I shall gratefully make use of that room.”

I pulled out a bear gate to set up along the wall.

“What a curious idea it is to think this door connects to another land altogether,” Ms. Kagari said as she looked at the gate.

“You went to Lady Yuna’s house, didn’t you, Lady Kagari? What was the town there like?” Sakura casually asked.

Ms. Kagari couldn’t give her an answer, though. “I never saw it...” she said in a small voice.

“Ms. Kagari was so tired after the fight with the orochi that she slept the entire time.”

I’d come to her rescue, feeling bad for her. In the days since, every ounce of her energy had been devoted to recovering. She woke up, ate, and went back to sleep. I’d set up a Japanese-style room for her, but she hardly seemed to notice, since all she did was sleep.

“I see. I’m sorry.”

“No, you needn’t worry about that. I had simply exhausted my mana and stamina—and, it seems, was mentally drained as well. I couldn’t get enough sleep, perhaps because it was the first time in a while that I’d been able to rest in such peace of mind. For whatever reason, her home felt warm and secure to me.”

She obviously felt the power of my bear house.

“Then are you feeling better, physically?”

“That I am.”

Ms. Kagari smiled so that Sakura wouldn't worry about her. Other than still being in her chibi form, she seemed fine.

“I think next time, I will take the opportunity to do some sightseeing,” Ms. Kagari said.

“I'd like to see it too,” Sakura chimed in.

“Then I'll take you next time, too.”

“Really?! I'll look forward to it ever so much.”

Sakura smiled happily. Shinobu was watching all of us. I slowly averted my eyes.

“Why are you looking away?”

“I wasn't.”

“You're lying. I can see you.”

“Okay, it's because I'm not bringing you along.”

“Wh-why wouldn't you bring me?!”

“Because I think you'd do something you shouldn't.”

“This is bullying! You're being a despot! It's discrimination, I tell you!”

Shinobu started to pretend to cry, but I ignored her. It wasn't that I minded taking her along, really, but I knew for sure that she'd laugh if she saw my shop and restaurant...which made me kind of not want to.

While I was thinking about that, Ms. Kagari started talking again.

“I do feel rather peckish.”

Hadn't she just said she'd be fine if she didn't eat for a day? Well, I had tons

of food in my bear storage. And we had a kitchen, so I could whip something up if necessary, too.

But we had a lake right there...

“All right, how about we have a barbecue at the lake?”

I flung open the windows and looked over the sparkling water. I’d planned to hike down there to get a closer look at the lake later, so why not just go now and make a meal out of it?

It was kind of weird, now that I thought about it—a former shut-in like me, planning an outdoor barbecue. Personal growth from all my time here?

“A barbecue?”

“What is that?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“It’s when you grill food outside and eat together.”

“Oh, that sounds like a wonderful pastime,” Ms. Kagari said.

“But where will we find food to grill?”

“Shinobu, make your way to the town for us,” Ms. Kagari said. “Off you go now.”

“Huh? Just me on my own? We should use Yuna’s gate, in that case! That would be a lot faster.”

“I’ve got food, so we’re covered.”

I had utensils in my bear storage too.

“Um, in that case, may we ask Luimin and Fina to join us? I know we were planning to invite them to the hot spring, but I think it wouldn’t be terribly nice to have them over after we’re done eating,” Sakura said. She was right. It would be no trouble at all to just call them over now.

“You’re right. I’ll ask Luimin and Fina if they want to come.”

I pulled out my bear phone and imbued it with a little mana to call Luimin.

After a moment, I heard her voice through the phone.

"Yuna?"

"Luimin, have you had lunch yet?"

"Why are you asking out of the blue? I haven't."

"In that case, we're all eating over here. Can you come by?"

"Come by where?"

"To the Land of Wa. I'm back here."

"Come to think of it, you did say you'd go back once things settled down over there."

"Yeah, so now I'm with Sakura and the others and we're about to eat."

"So I can come too?"

"Yeah, and I'm thinking of inviting Fina too."

"Okay. I did want to see Saku."

"All right, then bring mushrooms with you."

"Mushrooms? All right."

"Yeah, pick some yummy ones."

You had to have mushrooms at a barbecue, so I was going to have her deal with that if she was headed here. It wouldn't be good for us if we ate nothing but protein.

"Once you're near the gate, let me know."

I hung up and called Fina next.

"Yuna?"

"Are you free right now?"

"Yes, I am."

"Yuna?"

I heard Shuri's voice in the background. Apparently, they were together.

"Did you eat already?"

"No, not yet."

"Then can you come by my house right now?"

"Oh, Yuna dear? Did you need something from Fina?"

This time I heard Tiermina's voice.

"Yeah, I was thinking of having food with her. Did you already make something?"

"Hee hee. Not yet, so it's fine. Fina, off you go then."

Looks like I had permission to borrow Fina.

"I wanna go too!" Shuri shouted.

I pulled my face away from my phone, then asked everyone else, "Would you be okay with Fina's little sister tagging along?"

"I do not mind," Ms. Kagari said. "But does she know of your gate?"

"Yeah, she does," I said.

"Then it is no trouble," Ms. Kagari said.

"I'm fine with it too."

"And me."

I brought my phone back to my ear.

"Shuri can come too. Also, Tiermina, this might run late, so would it be okay if they needed to stay over at my place?"

"I know they're in good hands with you. But I'll have you take responsibility for anything that might happen to her, of course!"

I heard a whine of *"Mom!"* followed by the sound of someone being playfully pummeled on the other side of the phone.

“Ha ha, well, I leave them in your care, Yuna.”

“Ugh... We’re heading over now, Yuna.”

“Okay, I’ll be waiting. By the way, could you stop by Anz’s restaurant and grab some shellfish? Get some big sea snails. A whole bunch of them, if you don’t mind.”

Since we were already doing a barbecue, I figured we might as well have some shellfish.

And with that, we were all set.

Just as I got done talking to Fina, my bear phone went off again.

“I’m nearby,” Luimin said.

I connected my bear gate to the elven woods and headed over to get Luimin, passing the sacred tree before I set up a new bear gate right outside the area, as I always did. This was getting to be a chore. Maybe it would be better to set up a gate outside the sacred tree’s barrier?

“Oh, Luimin, take off your shoes,” I told her before we went through the gate.

“Oh, sure.” She quickly pulled off her shoes and headed through.

Shoes were forbidden in the manor. I could keep my bear shoes on, since they never got dirty, but maybe it’d make sense to set up a shoe cubby for people like Fina and Luimin?

It would’ve been more convenient to set up the bear gate at the front door, but the hot spring was on the third floor, and it was going to require a lot of awkward explanations if anyone else came by. Not to mention I didn’t want to open the door and come face-to-face with Ms. Kagari’s helper. Well, I’d think about all that later.

“Miss Luimin, it’s nice to see you.”

“Saku! It’s been a while.”

Luimin and Sakura both seemed happy to see each other.

“Are you okay now?”

“Yes, I was so tired that I slept a long time. I’m fine now.” Sakura raised both arms to show just how healthy she was.

“Ha ha, that’s good.”

“Were you all right too, Luimin?”

“I’m fine.”

Luimin mimicked Sakura and raised her arms in the air too.

“Um, so where exactly are we?” Luimin looked around the room, holding her shoes.

“We’re in the Land of Wa, in a manor that they gifted me.”

“You have a whole manor?”

“Yeah, basically. They said it was a thank-you for earlier, so I couldn’t exactly reject it.”

While Luimin was practically hanging out the window and gawking at the view, my bear phone went off. I brought Fina and Shuri through the bear gate into the Land of Wa.

“Yuna, where are we?”

“This is a faraway place called the Land of Wa.”

Shuri looked around the room, then stared at Ms. Kagari and the others.

“Are you Fina’s younger sister?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“You sure are cute,” Shinobu said.

“She looks so much like Fina,” Sakura said.

They all looked back at Shuri, which made Shuri hide behind Fina.

“Who are you?”

“I am Kagari. I am a friend of Yuna, and I helped her fight a monster.”

Ms. Kagari puffed out her chest as she introduced herself. She was telling the truth, but Shuri seemed awfully surprised to hear that Ms. Kagari, who looked even smaller than her, had fought off a monster.

“I am Sakura. Lady Yuna saved my life.”

Sakura clasped her hands together in front of her and gave Shuri a small bow. A much more polite self-introduction.

“I’m Shinobu. I’m Yuna’s slave.”

I gave her a punch for that.

“Ouch!”

“Shinobu is another friend. Don’t mind her.”

“You’re so mean!” said the one who started it.

“Um, I’m Luimin. I’m Yuna’s and Fina’s friend.”

Luimin cheerfully introduced herself. Come to think of it, wasn’t this the first time Luimin and Shuri were meeting? Fina had met Luimin already, so I basically felt like Shuri had too.

“Shuri, you need to say hi, too.”

Fina gave Shuri a light push, making her step forward.

“I’m Shuri. I’m Fina’s sister.”

She held onto Fina’s hand the entire time she was introducing herself.

“Yuna is...”

Shuri looked at me like she wasn’t sure what to say next. Apparently, she was trying to figure out what I was to her and drawing a blank. It was going to be kind of hard to explain our relationship... I suppose she was the little sister of the person I owed my life to? But if I said that, then Fina would get upset at me, so I decided to hold my tongue.

“Shuri is kind of like a little sister to me, just like Fina.”

Both Fina and Shuri seemed happy to hear that.

Chapter 523:

The Bear Has a Barbecue

“SO, YUNA, ARE WE going to eat here?”

“No, not here. Over there.”

I pointed out the window. Fina and Shuri looked out too.

“Whoa!”

“That’s amazing.”

“It’s so high up.”

They leaned out of the window to get a better view of the scene that spread out below us. The lake stretched out into the forest. It wasn’t anything they’d see in Crimonia.

“We’re eating at the lake over there?”

“Yeah, isn’t it pretty? Okay, we’ve got everyone, so let’s get going.”

We made our way down to the lake. It seemed like the king might’ve also visited, since there was already a paved road set up that made our trek smoother.

“So Fina, Shuri, you two know about Yuna’s secrets?” Shinobu asked the two girls who walked ahead of us.

“I owe Fina my life. She’s done so much for me,” I said.

“Uhh, Yuna...you were the one who saved *me*,” Fina said. “You’re always doing things for me. You’ve helped me so much.”

Fina turned around to face us as she spoke to us. She was the one who’d helped me make it to the nearest town when I was first lost in this world, and also the person who’d helped me acclimate to it. If Fina hadn’t been around, I’d never have figured this place out. That was why I was so grateful to Fina, in the

same way she felt indebted to me.

Once we got closer to the lake, Shuri took off running toward it. "It's a lake!"

"Don't run! It's dangerous!" Fina ran off after Shuri.

"Children always have so much energy," Ms. Kagari said from Kumayuru's back. "Such things grow rarer with age."

"They really are rambunctious," Sakura also commented from her perch on top of Kumakyu. Both she and Ms. Kagari watched Fina and Shuri.

Ms. Kagari looked the youngest out of everyone, and Sakura was also a kid. If I said that out loud, I felt like I'd be losing the game.

Then again, Ms. Kagari was an actual adult and Sakura acted old for her age. From their perspective, maybe Fina and Shuri still seemed like children. Seeing them myself, I couldn't help but agree. Kids sure did have a lot of energy.

Once Fina and Shuri made it to the lake, they clambered onto the pier. Wow, it even had a pier? I could go fishing...maybe. I'd never really picked up that particular hobby, so it was unlikely I'd start now.

"It's so pretty," I said.

The sun reflected off the water and glittered. I guess I could try out my new Bear Underwater Swimming skill here...but maybe later. It'd just make everyone flip out if I tried it in front of them.

"The sunlight is rather bright," Ms. Kagari commented.

She was right. It stung.

"Then shall we go to the shade over that way?" Sakura asked. She looked a little overheated. It *was* a hot day, I suppose. I didn't feel the weather like everyone else because of my onesie.

We headed over to the shade of a large tree near the lake, just like Sakura had suggested.

“All right. I’ll get the barbecue ready, so the rest of you can just hang out and have fun,” I said to everyone else. I pulled a giant table out of my bear storage and started to set that up with all the ingredients.

“I’ll help.” Fina came back from the pier.

“Me too,” Shinobu offered.

“Um, I’d like to help as well if there’s anything I can do.”

“Same here.”

“I’ll help!”

Sakura, Luimin, and Shuri also offered to chip in.

“Then I shall wait atop Kumayuru until everything is done,” Ms. Kagari said.

I guess one person in the group wasn’t a helper. Ms. Kagari lazed around on top of Kumayuru, just like she said she would.

“Uh, then let’s split this up.”

I left watching Ms. Kagari to Kumayuru, and I focused on the food on the table.

“Can you cut the meat into pieces about this big, Fina?”

I had her carve the giant lumps of meat into more edible sizes. Fina seemed like the best person for the job when it came to butchering things. I prepped a bunch of different kinds for her—pork, poultry, beef, and wolf—then let her have at it.

“All right!” She started to slice away like she’d been training for this all her life.

“Shinobu, can you start a fire?”

“Understood.”

“Luimin, did you bring those mushrooms?”

“Gottem,” she said as she pulled them out of her item bag.

“All right, then I’ll leave getting those ready to you. Once you’re done with that, then help me over here.”

“Right.”

After I gave those three their orders, I saw Sakura and Shuri had been waiting their turn.

“Um, and you two...just watch.”

“Aww.”

“But I wanna help!”

They both started to protest, but I had no jobs left for them. Ideally, they should have gone and played. But they both seemed to want something to do, so I tried to think of something.

“In that case, Shuri, you put the meat that Fina cut on a plate and bring it to this table. And Sakura, you can take the veggies I slice up to Shinobu.”

Having figured out something I could ask them to do, I got to work cutting up the veggies. We had carrots, kabocha pumpkin, corn, cabbage, green onions, bamboo shoots, and eggplant. I could buy things and put them in my bear storage so they wouldn’t rot, so I conveniently had access to things that weren’t in season.

“Yuna, you’re so good at this,” Sakura said as she watched me and Fina do the chopping and cutting.

It wasn’t hard. Just cutting veggies.

“Um, I’ve never even held a knife before,” she added.

Well, she was a kid, after all, and also a former member of the royal family, so that was just how things were for her. Shuri was still too young to hold a knife, but she knew how to butcher monsters just because of her family’s profession.

Fina, Luimin, and I chopped up more and more of the food. Eventually, we finished.

“There are so many ingredients, huh,” Shinobu said as she minded the fire.

“I think more variety will mean more fun. Besides, eating only meat isn’t good for you.”

Once we were done getting the ingredients together, we started grilling them. First, I put the veggies on the griddle. Then once I was done with that, I put the meat on at the end.

“That looks rather tasty,” Ms. Kagari said.

She was ready with her plate and some chopsticks.

“I have salt and pepper for the seasonings, so help yourself.”

“I thought this might happen, so I have just the thing,” Shinobu pulled a small white bottle out of the item bag in her inner pocket.

“Wait, is that what I think it is?”

“It’s my secret stash of tare sauce. The same kind we had when we ate all that meat before, Yuna.”

“Why do you carry that around with you?”

“I bought some, naturally.”

I’d been planning to buy some in bulk, but so much stuff had happened that I hadn’t gotten the chance; I figured I’d just buy some later, once I had the time.

We each took our plates and started eating the grilled veggies and meat.

“All of the barbecue meat is so tasty.”

Ms. Kagari wasn’t eating any vegetables at all.

“Don’t just eat meat. If you don’t eat your veggies, you won’t grow.”

“I believe that is not a problem, as I am more grown than you.”

It didn’t sound all that convincing coming from chibi Ms. Kagari, but I remembered what she’d looked like before. She really had been bigger than me—and that applied to both her stature and boob size. Well, gimme a few years,

and I'll catch up.

I had to agree with Ms. Kagari—the barbecue was all really good. Plus we had a nice view, and the air was so clean.

“Are the rest of you liking this?”

“Yes, it's very good.”

“That's because of the tare sauce I brought with me.”

The sweet and salty sauce really hit the spot.

“And the mushrooms Miss Luimin brought are delicious as well.”

“I'm glad to hear you say that.”

When I looked over at Fina and Shuri, I saw that Shuri was nibbling away at an ear of corn like a little squirrel. She'd seemed surprised to see the corn at first, but now it looked like she was enjoying it. I bet popcorn would be a big hit, too.

“Oh no. Shuri, you got it all over your mouth.”

Fina started wiping Shuri's mouth with a handkerchief. The cutest sight.

The barbecue was a hit. I was glad that I'd proposed it. I piled the grilled veggies and meat on a plate and brought them over to my bears.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu, careful, since it's hot.”

They dug in, clearly enjoying the food too. Before long, everyone else joined in on feeding my bears. Uh, maybe it'd be better if they were in their cub forms? So they'd eat less? I miniaturized my bears, and everyone kept passing them the food. It was really endearing.

After that, we also grilled up the shellfish that Fina had brought and ate it with soy sauce. Yup, delicious. The whole party seemed really satisfied.

Ms. Kagari and Shuri both fell over on the carpet we were using as a picnic blanket.

“I could not eat another bite,” Ms. Kagari said.

“I’m so full, it hurts.”

It sounded to me like they’d overeaten. They’d be fine with some rest though.

Once the impromptu barbecue was done, I started cleaning up the cooking utensils and plates. Fina, Shinobu, and Sakura helped, so it went by quick.

After that, we had a post-meal rest. As Shuri held Kumakyu, she asked, “Yuna, it’s hot, so can we swim?”

It seemed like her tummy ache was gone. Were we allowed to swim in the lake, though? And she might be a little less toasty if she stopped clinging to Kumakyu. Then again, everyone seemed to be overheating. Thanks to my bear onesie regulating temperatures for me, I kept forgetting it was still summer. I wasn’t even hot during the nights, because I wore my bear onesie almost 24/7. It just wasn’t something I thought about.

“The lake isn’t dangerous, is it?”

I checked using my detection skill, but I didn’t see any monsters in the water. There could be other stuff around, so I’d asked Sakura and Shinobu anyway.

“It should be fine. I’ve swum in there too. Actually, I haven’t yet been in the water this year.”

I was a little worried about them drowning, but maybe things would be fine if Kumayuru and Kumakyu were with them.

“You can swim, but you don’t have a swimsuit. Do you want to go home to get it?”

“Actually, I have them,” Fina said.

“Why do you carry that around with you?”

“The item bag you gave me can fit so many things, so I put a lot of stuff into it.”

I’d gotten the item bag when I defeated the bandits before. It wasn’t as good as my bear storage, but it could easily hold some swimsuits.

Fina pulled out her and Shuri's swimsuits.

"Okay, I'm going to pull out my house, so go change."

I pulled out the bear house and deposited it in a clearing. It would be faster than going back to the estate to change. Even though we were all women here, I couldn't let them change outside.

"Well then, Lady Sakura, would you like ta swim too?"

"But I have nothing to swim in."

"I thought this might happen. I brought something."

Apparently, the Land of Wa had swimsuits too—which made sense, considering they were near the ocean. Shinobu reached into her clothes and pulled out two such swimsuits. I knew she had an item bag built in there, but whenever she pulled stuff out, it felt like she just had stuff hiding in her clothes. It was kinda awkward to watch.

Sakura and Shinobu headed into the bear house to change too.

Me? I wasn't swimming, of course, so I didn't need to change.

Chapter 524:

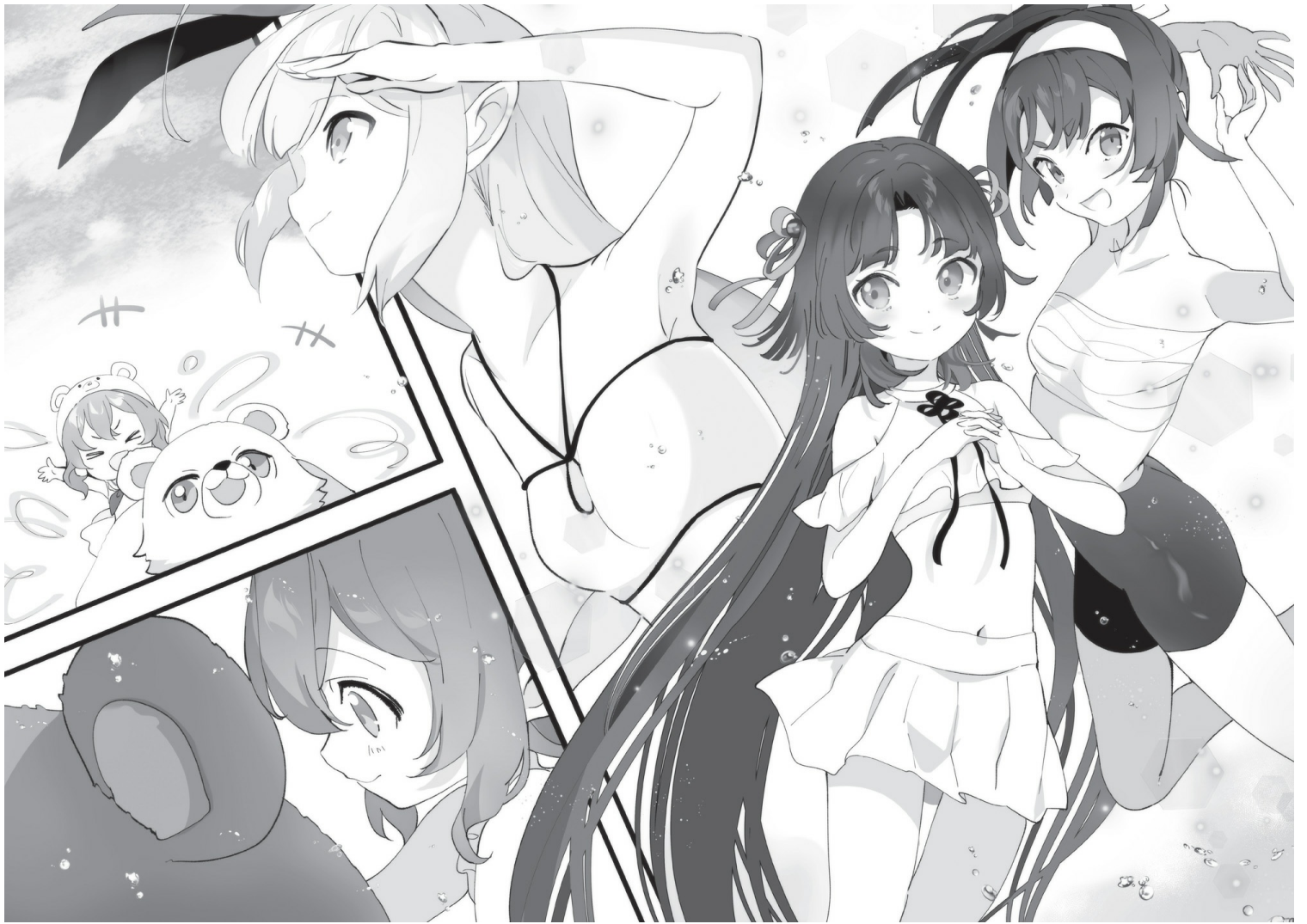
The Bear Plays in the Lake

ALL FIVE OF THEM came out of the bear house in their swimsuits.

Shuri had on the frilly white one-piece swimsuit she'd worn when we went to the beach before. Fina was also wearing her swimsuit, which was a frilly white bikini. Luimin wore a black-and-white bikini that I lent her. Sakura had a neat white swimsuit.

As for Shinobu...she was wearing what seemed to be a piece of cloth bound around her chest. Did that really qualify as a swimsuit...? Also, everyone seemed to be wearing white swimsuits. Well, except for Luimin's suit, which had a little black.

"Yuna, can you make Kumayuru and Kumakyu bigger?"



It was kind of pitiful that Kumayuru and Kumakyu had to be small when they ate and then big when they were going to swim. I returned them to their original size, and Shuri climbed onto Kumakyu's back.

"Um, Shuri, may I also ride upon the esteemed Kumakyu?" Sakura asked Shuri.

Shuri smiled and replied, "Yeah, you can."

Sakura got on behind Shuri. Apparently, they were both on Team Kumakyu. Shuri had said she liked the white bear in the picture book I'd drawn, and she'd always liked Kumakyu more. It seemed Sakura did too. Kumakyu was just that popular.

It wasn't like Kumayuru was *unpopular*, mind you. Fina and Luimin were riding them.

Kumayuru and Kumakyu ran off, carrying all four girls, and jumped toward the lake. There was a giant splash.

"Do it again," I heard Shuri say.

Sakura was also yelling, "You want to do it again?!"

"Don't do anything dangerous," Fina said.

Luimin smiled. Everyone was having fun as they played. They were probably safe from any drowning risks with Kumayuru and Kumakyu around, and Shinobu was also watching them from the side, which made me feel better about it.

They invited me, but I politely declined. I really just couldn't get used to wearing a swimsuit.

"It must be nice being young and full of energy."

Ms. Kagari was sitting on a chair and watching the others play. They split up and started to race.

"You're right. The youth are so full of energy," I said. They radiated it. It almost hurt to look at them.

“What are you saying? You are a child too.”

“Don’t tell me I’m a child when you look like that,” I said. Ms. Kagari looked super young.

“I am an adult internally, so I may say it.”

Even if she was an adult on the inside and a kid on the outside, this wasn’t a certain detective anime. To be more accurate: Wasn’t Ms. Kagari a granny? Not that I could say that out loud. I had no idea what she might do to me later.

“Though, there is a possibility that you look younger than you are as well. Perhaps you are as old as me? In that case, I would understand your magical prowess.”

What was this little girl saying?

“I’ve only been alive for fifteen years. Unlike a certain fox.”

“I thought I was getting closer to uncovering your secret, but it seems I was wrong. Fifteen, hmm? You seem rather small, considering.”

Wait, where was she looking when she said that? I was wearing my onesie, so most of me was hidden from view. She had to be talking about my height, right?

I’d fill out just like a model in a few years. Just you watch.

As the two of us watched all the kids play in the water, Shinobu came up to us, dripping wet.

“Ahh, everyone’s so full of energy.”

She drank an entire cup of water in one go.

“Yuna, could I ask you a question?”

“As long as it’s not a weird one.”

“It’s nothing weird. What is that tail thing that Shuri has?”

I remembered now. Shuri had a round white tail on her swimsuit. That was a

bear tail.

“No comment,” I said.

“Aw, come on. Please tell me,” she smiled and said. She was asking even though she knew exactly what it was. I ignored Shinobu and looked at the others at the lake.

“Kumakyu, run across the water!”

“Cwoom.”

Shuri asked several times, knowing that my bears could run across water. Kumakyu gladly showed off that trick for her. On the other hand, Fina and Luimin were lounging on Kumayuru, who was partially submerged in the water.

“I can’t let Kumakyu beat me,” Shinobu said and ran down the pier and right onto the lake’s surface.

I couldn’t believe my eyes. Shinobu was running across the water.

“What do you think? I can do that too. I’m gonna win!”

Shinobu ran by Kumakyu’s side across the lake.

“Shinobu, you’re amazing!”

“I didn’t know you could do that, Shinobu.”

“It’s a secret art,” Shinobu replied.

Did that make it a ninja skill?

“The trick is movin’ both your legs very fast. You raise your foot before it can sink.”

It sounded straight out of a manga or anime. But it wasn’t physically possible. I mean, if you thought about it, if you took a step into the water, you’d just sink right down. But Shinobu was doing it... I wondered if she was using magic.

“But if I stop moving my legs...”

The moment Shinobu stopped moving, I heard a loud splash and saw her fall

straight into the water.

Was I wrong? I'd been convinced that she was imbuing her legs with mana to increase her buoyancy or something. If running on top of the water wasn't something normal people could do, then Shinobu was doing something amazing. She could run right across a river like that.

I thought she was amazing for being able to do that using her own abilities, unlike me and my OP onesie powers.

After they were all done playing, everyone piled up against Kumayuru and Kumakyu to take a nap under the shade of the tree. They looked like they were really enjoying themselves.

For some reason, Ms. Kagari also joined them, even though she hadn't been playing in the lake. She must not have been all the way back to 100 percent yet.

Shinobu and I covered them with towels so they wouldn't catch colds.

"You're not tired, Shinobu?"

"This is nothing. Compared to my job, it's child's play."

Well, she was a ninja, after all.

"Actually, I know you were playing with everyone, but are your wounds okay?"

"It stings a bit if I move too much, but thanks to a certain someone, I'm fine."

Shinobu rotated her left shoulder to show it was better.

"I used salve on the other wounds, so they've healed."

I was glad to hear that. I didn't see anything that would leave scars. I'd only fixed up her face and shoulder, but she seemed fine. It had been such a shock to see her covered in blood back then.

"Yuna, I'm really grateful."

“Why’re you suddenly saying that?”

“It’s been a long time since I saw Lady Sakura having so much fun. Fina and Shuri are good kids too,” Shinobu said. She smiled, watching everyone leaning against Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

“They’re both just as hard workers as Sakura,” I said.

I looked at Fina, who was leaning against Kumayuru. I’d had lots of fun thanks to Fina being around. I was so happy that someone just looked up to me like that. Seeing how hard she worked made me want to help her.

And Luimin was a good kid too, of course.

After we finished dinner that night, Shuri and Luimin were rolling around on top of the tatami mats. We’d taken a break after our meal earlier, so even though Shuri would normally have been sleepy after eating, her afternoon nap had left her with lots of energy.

I could understand why she was rolling around on the tatami too. It felt nice, after all.

“Can we really stay over here?” Fina asked as she sat on a floor cushion.

“No one else is here, so don’t worry about it.”

I’d already told their mom that they might stay overnight, so we were all set. Luimin had gone to the elven village to tell her grandfather she was staying over, then come back.

“Well, how about we go to the hot spring soon?”

“Yuna, what’s a hot spring?” Shuri stopped rolling around to ask her question.

“It’s basically a bath that uses hot water from underground.”

Shuri didn’t seem to understand. She tilted her head.

“Umm, is there really hot water underground?”

I'd also explained it to Luimin, but she still didn't seem to believe me.

"Normally, underground water is cold, but there's hot water in some spots."

She probably wouldn't understand it if I started talking about geography, volcanos and magma and water currents and stuff, so I just kept it simple.

Shuri and Luimin still seemed unconvinced.

"Your knowledge is extensive," Ms. Kagari said. "Most people would not believe anyone who claimed hot water was produced underground."

It wasn't like anyone was educating them about the Earth's crust. If someone hasn't seen hot water spouting up from the ground, then they just wouldn't know any better. TV and the internet didn't exist either. There was no way for them to get the information. I was in a similar boat when it came to this world. I didn't have any way to look up cuisines, cultures, anything like that. If they hadn't seen a hot spring before, of course they wouldn't know anything about them.

We headed to the hot spring on the third floor. We went through the curtain that said "hot water" on it and headed into the changing room.

"First, take off your clothes in here."

"Huh? Where's the bath?"

Shuri looked all around. We couldn't see the hot spring because of the wooden doors.

"I'll open it up right now."

Shinobu pulled the sliding doors open.

"Wow! This is amazing! The bath is outside," Shuri yelled. When Fina and Luimin heard that, they headed to the sliding doors too.

"It really is amazing."

"It's a giant bath."

“Come on, you need to undress to go in.”

Shuri immediately started to pull off her clothes. Everyone else followed suit. I took off my bear onesie too.

“Your hair is so long, Yuna! And you’re so pretty. It’s such a waste for you to dress like that.”

“You’re so pretty, Lady Yuna.”

Shinobu and Sakura were flattering me. Shinobu probably just had bad eyes, while Sakura was predisposed to like me because I’d defeated the orochi. Sakura was going to grow up to be a beauty, I could tell, and Shinobu was pretty too.

“If you just dressed normally, you’d be so popular with the guys,” Shinobu said.

In other words, she meant I wasn’t popular because I was wearing my bear onesie. Uh, that was a good thing. I couldn’t imagine myself dressing nicely and going on dates with guys. I also didn’t need any of that.

“I think you’d be more popular than me, Shinobu.”

Unlike me, Shinobu was very fit. I grabbed her upper arm and squeezed. I could tell she’d been working out—*my* arm was all flabby by comparison. Shinobu also had *abs*. She was on a completely different level. Actually working out really made a difference, huh?

“Why are you grabbing my arm? And why do you look so down?”

“I was just thinking about how pretty your face and body is.”

It just sounded like flattery when someone as pretty as Shinobu was saying it. If I’d had my bear puppets, I would have erected a mirror in front of her.

“You’re pretty, but you don’t work out. How are you still so strong? It’s so weird,” Shinobu said.

I wish she wouldn’t scrutinize me like that. I hid my body with a towel.

“Oh, stop fooling around. Let’s go.” Ms. Kagari’s voice snapped me to attention, and I realized everyone was waiting. “Yuna, hurry.”

Chapter 525: The Bear Goes into the Hot Spring

SHURI LED US OUT of the changing room and to the outdoor bath after we undressed.

I'd seen it earlier, but I was reminded of how big it was. I was sure we'd be able to easily fit everyone in.

Shuri seemed ready to get into the hot tub, but Fina held her back.

"You need to wash off first. Come over here, and I'll wash your back."

Fina led Shuri over to the washing area. Luimin watched that, then said to Sakura, "I'll help you wash up, Saku."

"Then I shall help you in return, Miss Luimin."

Sakura and Luimin headed off.

"Well, in that case, I'll help you, Lady Kagari."

Shinobu inserted her hands under Ms. Kagari's armpits and lifted her up.

"Do not treat me as though I am a child!"

"I would never. Please don't struggle."

Shinobu dragged Ms. Kagari away, who was definitely struggling.

Which meant I was on my own. I felt lonely, but just as I was about to go wash up, I realized that I wasn't really alone. Kumayuru and Kumakyu, still in their cub forms, were nuzzling me. Right. I had my bears.

I took them over to the washing area. I decided to give them a bath. When I used the sudsy soap, they ended up comically covered in bubbles. Shuri and Sakura started shouting when they saw them.

"Hey! I want to help wash Kumayuru and Kumakyu too!"

“Your esteemed bears allowed me to ride them so many times. I’d like to help wash them to thank them.”

But then Fina and Luimin stopped them.

“Shuri, you need to wash yourself first.”

“You too, Saku.”

They both ended up back in their spots after Fina and Luimin told them off.

“Uh... Please hurry and finish washing me.”

“Miss Luimin, I’m sorry.”

After they were clean, they helped scrub Fina’s and Luimin’s backs. Then they started washing Kumakyu next to me. I’d already finished giving Kumakyu a scrub, but they wanted a turn. Kumakyu didn’t object and just let them.

“Kumakyu, you’re so fluffy!”

“Thank you for allowing us to ride on you all the time, esteemed Kumakyu.”

They both seemed like they were having fun. While Kumayuru was relaxing, Luimin came over.

“In that case, I’ll wash Kumayuru. You let me ride you today, after all. It was a lot of fun. Thank you for what you did at the elves’ village too.”

Then Luimin also started washing Kumayuru. Kumayuru got a second bath, too.

“Yuna, I’ll wash your back.” While I was washing up, Fina came over behind me.

Then everyone else wanted a go at washing me. Then they were all surrounding me even though I’d been abandoned earlier. Even if they all wanted to help me, there was only one of me.

“I’m fine, so just wash Kumayuru and Kumakyu. We should get into the bath soon before we catch colds.”

I used the old bait and switch to get away from everyone by offering them my bears. I thought I'd feel lonely left by myself, but all this attention would turn me back into a hermit.

After my bears were done with their baths, Shuri, Sakura, and Luimin headed over to the hot spring with them. Also Ms. Kagari helped wash Kumayuru a little too. I guess that was her way of saying thank you?

"Yuna, there aren't any bears," Shuri said over her shoulder as she too headed for the hot spring.

I didn't know what she was talking about, but when I looked over, I saw that she was staring at the bamboo pipe of the bath.

Right. My houses and the bath at the orphanage all featured bears in their baths, and the hot water poured out of their mouths. That was probably what Shuri meant.

"I didn't make this bath," I said.

All I had to do to fix it, though, was create a bear, so that the bamboo pipe was its mouth. It would be easy to do using magic. I'd think about that later. I didn't have my bear puppets right now, however, so I couldn't do it right then. During times like these, it was pretty inconvenient not to be able to use magic.

Shuri headed over to the bamboo pipe and stuck her hand in the hot water.

"It's hot. I can't get in."

"Shuri, the very last bath will be less hot, so I think you can handle that one."

Sakura pointed over at it. Shuri headed over there and tested it.

"You're right. It's not hot."

It seemed like Sakura was right. Shuri headed into the bath. Sakura, Luimin, and Fina followed her.

"Hee hee, they're all just kiddos," Shinobu said while watching everyone get into the coolest bath. She smiled. Then, as though she was trying to show off

that she was more mature, she got into the hottest bath right next to the bamboo pipe.

“Isn’t it hot, Shinobu?”

“Ha ha, this is fine. I’ve trained for it.”

I had no idea if she was just pretending or what, but Shinobu sunk into the hot water. It didn’t seem to bother her.

Also, how does one train for a hot spring? Did that mean she exposed herself to heat a ton so she could stand the hot spring? Or did she just mean that she was used to soaking in hot springs?

“I think I may go to the coolest bath,” Ms. Kagari said.

After comparing Shinobu and the others, Ms. Kagari headed off to join Shuri’s group.

“You’re a little kid too, Lady Kagari.”

“I do not like the heat,” Ms. Kagari replied.

As for me? I went for the low-temperature bath too. I wasn’t that good with hot temperatures. I was the type of person who preferred spending longer in a lower-temp bath.

When I headed to the cool bath, Kumayuru and Kumakyu also ended up coming with me as a matter of course. All of us were there except Shinobu.

“Urgh. I feel so lonely.”

“We are in the children’s bath. Adults are not allowed,” Ms. Kagari said.

“How could you!”

Ms. Kagari was still peeved about how Shinobu had treated her like a kid earlier. Shinobu pouted. Everyone else smiled.

“The stars are pretty tonight.”

The entire night sky spread out over us while we sat in the outdoor bath. I

was glad that the weather was nice.

“Yeah, it’s beautiful. Saku, thank you for inviting me over,” Luimin said.

“I’m happy that you’re happy.”

The sky was pretty in town, but you just couldn’t see all the stars like this. Since we didn’t have a single light on around here, the stars were beautiful. I could see the moon, just like on Earth. The moon reflected off the lake, which made it seem ethereal and beautiful.

Everyone leaned against the side of the bath and looked up at the sky. It was pretty luxurious to be able to see the stars while soaking in a hot spring. It’d be nice to come back here for baths.

All stretched out together, we proceeded to stargaze.

“Oh, a shooting star,” Sakura said.

Since we were all already looking up at the sky, everyone saw the shooting star.

“In my country, seeing a shooting star is supposed to be good luck.”

“Really?”

“Yes, but I’ve already had good luck. I met all of you because I met Lady Yuna,” Sakura said without a trace of embarrassment.

“Right. I think I was lucky to meet Yuna, too.”

“Yes. I’m definitely lucky because I met her,” Fina said.

“Me too!”

Everyone else agreed with Sakura.

“Indeed,” Ms. Kagari said. “Had the young maiden not been here, I would not have seen Mumulute again. We cannot know what would have befallen us had he not arrived. ’Tis a blessing.”

“Right. Who knows what woulda happened ta the country if Yuna hadn’t been

around.”

I just couldn’t bring myself to say, “I was lucky to have met you all,” right then. It was just too embarrassing. I just couldn’t say it.

“Ha ha. It feels as though meeting Lady Yuna brought more blessings than the shooting star.”

“She’s a lucky bear!” Shuri shouted.

“Yes, she really is.”

Everyone burst out laughing.

“Foxes are lucky as well, you know,” Ms. Kagari said.

I mean, foxes in my old world were worshipped as deities of grain and agriculture. Foxes ranked above bears, when it came down to it. I’d never heard of bears being deified.

Was there a bear god in this world? I looked over at my bears, who seemed to be enjoying their time soaking in the bath. Were they gods...?

After we finished enjoying the night sky and our dip in the spring, we got out.

I wrapped myself in a huge towel, then pulled out two hair dryers from my bear puppet and gave one to Fina. Then I got two chairs that were already in position and sat in one.

“Who was first today?”

Kumayuru came forward.

“Ah, your turn?”

I set Kumayuru on the other chair and wrapped my bear in a towel before getting out the hair dryer and drying off Kumayuru. I could have just recalled my bears and summoned them again to instantly dry them, but I wanted to thank them, so I would wash, dry, and brush them instead.

“What is that?”

“It’s a magical device that uses a fire mana gem and a wind gem to dry hair.”

I aimed the jet of air away from Kumayuru toward Shinobu.

“It’s warm.”

“You use it to dry off your hair.”

I pointed the dryer back at Kumayuru, who seemed to enjoy it.

“That looks rather useful. Allow me to use it too,” Ms. Kagari said.

I pulled out another hair dryer.

“I only have three, so take turns.”

Shinobu took it and started to dry Sakura’s and Ms. Kagari’s hair. Sakura had long black hair. Ms. Kagari had long golden hair. Shinobu’s hair was usually tied up, but it was also long when it was down. It seemed like it would take a while to dry everyone off.

Fina and Shuri only had hair about down to their shoulders. Luimin’s light-green hair was long though. Fina, Shuri, and Luimin shared a hair dryer.

I kept drying off Kumayuru while watching everyone else.

“Okay, all done. You next, Kumakyu.”

I had Kumayuru get off the chair and Kumakyu take their place to get dried off next. Shuri and Sakura seemed like they wanted to help, but I finished before they were done drying themselves off. Finally, I dried my own hair and put my bear onesie back on.

“Lady Yuna, what is that outfit?” I only realized after Sakura pointed it out. I’d put on my bear onesie with the white side facing out, just from habit.

“You’re the same color as the esteemed Kumakyu,” she said with a warm look in her eyes.

Chapter 526: The Bear Sleeps

ONCE I WAS DONE with the hot spring, I headed back to my room.

“I’ll set up the sheets,” Shinobu said.

“There are sheets?”

I was planning to bring some out from my bear storage.

“We do. Originally, His Majesty used this hot spring. There are tons since the servants and guests stayed here. They’re all clean, so it’ll be fine.”

They’d even thought of that for me. But, uh, none of these had been used, right? Not by the king, I hoped.

We each set up our own Japanese-style floor bedding. Setting up our sheets so we were all sleeping in the same room kind of felt like going on a class trip. (Even though I’d never been on one before.)

“What will you do, Lady Kagari? Do you want to sleep alone?”

“No, I do not mind sleeping with everyone for one day.”

“Are you lonely?” Shinobu asked as she grinned. Was it revenge for the hot spring stuff?

“I am not like you. Of course I do not feel lonely. I simply wish to spend time with Sakura because she is here. If you wish to sleep in that room, you may go sleep there alone.”

“No thank you. I don’t want to be alone like I was in the hot spring.”

Guess she really had been lonely.

After we finished setting up the beds, Shuri and Luimin seemed sleepy. Shuri

was the youngest, after all, and Luimin was an elf used to forest life. It was probably normal for them both to sleep early.

We had light gems to use in place of electricity, but we hadn't gotten into the bath until it was already past sunset, and it was getting late. Normally, they'd probably be asleep by now.

"Fina, bring out Kumakyu?" Shuri asked as she let out a little yawn.

Kumakyu tilted their head next to me after hearing their name. They looked at me, as if trying to say they were already here.

"One sec."

Fina seemed to understand what Shuri was asking for. She got out her item bag and pulled out something white.

"Kumakyu..."

It was the Kumakyu stuffed animal. Shuri hugged the bear stuffed animal, collapsed right on top of her bed, and started snoring. That was quick! Like, instantaneous. I guess she just couldn't keep going anymore.

Fina covered her with a blanket so she wouldn't catch a cold.

"You brought a stuffed animal with you?"

"Yes, since I knew we might stay the night. Shuri sleeps really well when she has it with her," Fina said as she pulled out a Kumayuru stuffed animal and set it on her bed. She had one of her own. It looked like they were really taking good care of them.

"Lady Yuna, are those dolls of the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru that Shuri and Fina have?" Sakura asked as she looked at their stuffed animals.

"They look just like Kumayuru and Kumakyu," Luimin also said, opening her bleary eyes.

"They're bear stuffed animals," I said. "Or bear dolls. They were made to look like Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

I had no idea what to call them in the Land of Wa. I wondered if they'd understand what a stuffed animal was. Maybe the auto-translation skill would handle it?

"They're stuffed animals? They're cute."

Sakura looked at the Kumakyu teddy bear that Shuri was holding. I'd seen this look before.

"You want one?"

"Um, uh...yes," Sakura said, looking down and seeming embarrassed.

I smiled, pulled out a pair of stuffed animals, and held them out to Sakura.

"May I really have them?"

"Yeah. But make sure they stick together. It'd be sad to separate Kumakyu and Kumayuru, even if they're stuffed animals."

Sakura liked Kumakyu, and I was sure she'd take the Kumakyu stuffed animal if given a choice. That was why I'd much rather give her both.

Sakura took them and hugged them.

"They're so soft!"

"Make sure to take care of them."

"Yes, I'll treasure them for the rest of my life."

She giddily hugged them again. I was happy that she liked her present.

"They look just like your esteemed bears. Did you make them, Lady Yuna?"

"I had a friend make them." Sherry, an orphan who was good at sewing, had made them.

Sakura placed them on her lap and petted their heads. I noticed someone watching her with an envious look.

"Yuna, it's unfair if you give everyone else bears. I'd like stuffed bears too."

"You would, Luimin? But you know they're just stuffed animals?"

“Am I not allowed to have stuffed animals?”

“No, but...”

“Then I’d like my own bears too.”

If I gave her bears, the elves’ village would, like, try to deify them, right? It felt surreal just imagining bear stuffed animals propped up at an altar. It was probably just an overactive imagination on my part. I pulled out another set of bear stuffed animals from my bear storage.

“Wow, thank you! I’ll take good care of them.”

Luimin smiled as she clutched the bear stuffed animals.

“Sure is nice having stuffed animals. Wish I could have one.”

“You can’t have one, Shinobu,” I said.

“Why not?!”

“I feel like you’d use them as target practice for your knives or kunai.”

I didn’t want to see the stuffed animals full of holes.

“I wouldn’t do that. What kind of person do you take me for?!”

“You seem kind of shady...”

“Th-that’s so mean!”

She acted like she was shocked, but her reaction seemed a little suspicious. Or was I imagining it?

“Must you make such a fuss about bears, bears, and more bears all the time?”

While we were getting worked up about the stuffed animals, Ms. Kagari had been pouting.

“And foxes are much more charming than any bear. We have the softest tails and ears—much softer than a bear’s.”

Ms. Kagari showed off her ears and tail, which she’d been hiding until then. My bears both crooned at us, then turned around, brandishing their tails at Ms.

Kagari as if in rebuttal.

“Ha ha, I could never allow myself to be bested by such tiny tails.”

They were starting up their little rivalry again. They were both cute! They didn’t need to fight!

“Lady Kagari, foxes are cute too. Let’s make cute fox stuffed animals sometime.”

“I think they’re cute too.”

“We gotta go find a skilled artisan to make one.”

Maybe Sherry could make one? That would be tricky to do without something to base it on, though.

“I-I never requested you make such a thing.”

I could see her tail wagging, despite that. Apparently, the suggestion made her happy. *This fox is such a tsundere.*

“Did you make those to try to appear cuter?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“Of course not!”

What was this girl saying?

“But you wear those clothes and have that house. You have Kumayuru and Kumakyu, and you’ve even had these stuffed animals made. It seems to me like you’ve done it all for your ego.”

I could see why they might think that...but that wasn’t why I’d done all this.

“I have the blessing of the bears. That’s why I wear these clothes. You must have the blessing of the fox or something too, right?”

“I suppose. Then are you able to transform into a bear?”

“Of course not.”

Ms. Kagari looked a little disappointed. Why? Had she thought I was like her?

Actually, what even *was* Ms. Kagari? Was she a fox spirit?

Everyone with a stuffed animal seemed sleepy, so we turned off the lights and went to bed. I guess they were all wiped out from playing and how nice the hot spring had been, because we didn't talk, but were out like lights. In the quiet of the room, I heard Shuri occasionally murmur something cute in her sleep.

I fell asleep too, cuddled up with Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

Chapter 527: The Bear Heads to Town

I WOKE TO THE sound of someone talking. When I opened my eyes, I saw Sakura and Luimin talking.

“Lady Yuna, good morning.”

“Yuna, good morning.”

“Morning. You two are up early,” I greeted them, rubbing my eyes.

“I usually wake early.”

“Me too.”

Sakura seemed like a rule follower, and Luimin lived in a forest. Both of which meant rising bright and early.

I looked at all the bedding. Shuri was still holding the Kumakyu stuffed animal and Ms. Kagari was hugging her pillow.

“Huh? Where’s Fina?”

I couldn’t see Kumayuru, either. Kumakyu was in Sakura’s arms.

“Fina went for a walk outside.”

“You don’t mean she went alone?”

“The esteemed Kumakyu and Shinobu went with her, so she should be okay.”

She was right. Shinobu wasn’t here either.

“You two didn’t go?”

“I was still asleep.”

How early did Fina wake up, if she rose earlier than Luimin?

“I was awake, but I worried that if Fina and I both left, everyone would worry.

So I stayed behind.”

She was right. I would have been worried to find them both gone. I might even have thought Shinobu had kidnapped them.

“But I didn’t want to leave Fina unsupervised, so I asked Shinobu to go with her, since she was awake too.”

I guess Shinobu was an early riser too. Actually, she seemed like the type who would wake at the slightest sound.

“And the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru woke up. I think they talked, and Kumayuru went with Fina.”

Maybe Kumayuru had gone with her because I always asked them to keep an eye on her. I wish I could have seen my bears talking. They barely ever did that. Anyway, if Kumayuru was with her, I had nothing to worry about.

“You’re so worried about Fina, Lady Yuna.”

“Well, I’m sort of looking after her.”

“I’m jealous that you’re worried about Fina.”

“I worry about you too, Sakura.”

Sakura seemed surprised by that.

“I think I understand why everyone likes you, Lady Yuna.”

“Yuna is so cool, isn’t she?” Luimin joined in on praising me.

“Yes.”

“Even dressed like this? As a bear?”

I pinched doubtfully at the white bear one I wore. I felt like they might need to get their eyes checked out if they thought *this* was cool. Maybe a healing spell might help.

“Ha ha. It’s how you act and talk. You’re cool on the inside, Lady Yuna. If you were a man, I would have married you.”

“I’m a girl, though, just so you know,” I said.

“Yes, and it’s such a shame.”

She didn’t seem serious, but she smiled at me.

After that, I changed into my black bear onesie and woke up Shuri and Ms. Kagari, who were both still half asleep. I heard Shuri say, “Just a little longer, Fina,” and Ms. Kagari say, “Just three more years.”

We roused them anyway.

Around the time we finished cleaning up the bedding, Fina came back with Shinobu, who was holding Kumayuru.

“Welcome back. How was your walk?”

“It was nice in the woods. And the lake was gorgeous!”

Apparently, they’d walked all the way to the lake.

“It’s no fair, Fina. I wanted to go too.”

While Fina talked about her walk, Shuri pouted when she realized she’d been left behind. I felt the same. If they were going to go take a stroll, I wished they would’ve woken me.

“Sorry. It just looked so nice outside, and then Shinobu said she would go with me.”

“That’s because you’re an important guest. And Kumayuru came along to guard us.”

“Cwoom.”

“Thank you, Shinobu. And you too, Kumayuru.”

I patted the head of Kumayuru, who was still in Fina’s arms.

“So, how about breakfast? I can get bread ready if that works.”

“That would work, but we could swing on by the town while we’re here. My

treat,” Shinobu said.

“Well, well. Someone’s loaded.”

“I got a large reward for what we did.”

“So you took the money.”

“Any normal person would. You two are the odd ones for not taking any, Yuna and Lady Kagari.”

I got a whole house instead of money, which felt like a better deal. That said, more money was never a bad thing. Shinobu had the right idea. She’d risked her life in that battle, and she more than deserved the reward money.

We decided to head to town for breakfast, but Ms. Kagari decided to stay behind.

“Suzuran should be coming today, and I would feel terrible leaving her to find this place empty. I will use this opportunity to get some more sleep. You may all go without me.”

And so, we left her and headed out.

“Oh, I know. Since we’re going to town, you take this, Luimin.”

I pulled out the cards that the king had given me.

“Is this a guild card?”

“Kind of. His Majesty said that they’d act as transit permits. You’ll be able to go into town and see Sakura with this.”

“If you show it to the gatekeeper where I live, they should allow you inside. We promised this to Lord Mumulute. Please come see me whenever you would like, Miss Luimin.”

“Okay! I will.”

After Luimin imbued the card with mana, it became hers. Shuri grabbed onto my clothes after seeing that.

“Yuna, what about me? Will I be able to go into the town without a card?” she asked anxiously.

“You and Fina don’t have cards, but you should be fine as long as you stick with me.”

“Really? Okay, good.”

“You can’t wander off though, okay?”

“Okay!”

Luimin and I rode on Kumayuru, while Shuri, Fina, and Sakura rode on Kumakyu. Sakura was in front, then Shuri, then Fina.

“Kumakyu, are you sure you can hold three people?”

“Cwoom.”

I’m okay, my bear seemed to say. If Kumakyu could carry two adults, they could carry three kids—and sure enough, they got up just fine with the three of them on.

“All right. Let’s go,” Shinobu said.

Shinobu led the group on Hayatemaru, and we headed to the town where the castle would be.

“What? So we don’t get to eat with you, Saku?”

“I’m sorry. I need to go home first...but I am free in the afternoon, so I can spend time with you then.”

Sakura had told us she wouldn’t be joining us for breakfast on the way over.

“In that case, shouldn’t we have eaten together at the house?”

“I didn’t want to spoil the mood. I’m sorry.”

We had only found out after we were already on the road. Apparently, Sakura had something to do. She was probably trying to be thoughtful, but this was too

bad. She hadn't told Shinobu either—Shinobu probably wouldn't have proposed going to town, if she had.

She did say we could meet up again in the afternoon, so we decided to do that.

After a while, we caught sight of the town's entrance.

"Shinobu, can we go inside on Kumayuru and Kumakyu as long as we have the cards?"

"Umm, I think they would allow us in without saying anything with the cards, but they'd probably be pretty shocked."

It'd be trouble up until we showed off our cards then.

"Should we walk from here?"

"I think so, if we don't wanna cause a ruckus."

I unsummoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu in front of the gate and we proceeded on foot. We approached the gate—a party of all girls, six in total, including one dressed in a bear suit. The guard stared at us, looking not suspicious so much as just curious.

"You're sure we'll be fine as long as we show off the cards?" Luimin asked anxiously.

"Yeah. While you're in this country, having that card means you're an important person. No one's lookin' to make an important person angry, so they should let us through no problem," Shinobu said.

"Sounds like something that could also paint a target on your back and attract weirdos."

"Well, I can't say that's not possible—but as long as you don't go showing it off, you should be fine."

The guards were giving us hard looks by the time we made it to the gate. I held the card I'd gotten from the king in my bear puppet's mouth, silently

showing it to them. The guard I was showing it to looked surprised for a second, glancing between the card and me—but said nothing, just as we'd expected.

Luimin displayed her card too, and they said nothing to her either. When Sakura and Shinobu also produced their cards, the guard seemed surprised but said, "Welcome. Please make your way through."

As we went through, Fina and Shuri asked if they were allowed in, and even though they looked worried, the guard said nothing. It was like showing off one of those traditional seal cases in ancient Japan. I guess these cards were pretty special.

"Wow!"

Once we were in town, Shuri, Fina, and Luimin looked all around. Everything here was new to them, the buildings and clothes so different from those in Crimonia.

As Shuri was looking around, her eyes stopped on something.

"Yuna, what's that big thing?"

She was pointing up ahead to where the castle sat.

"That's the castle."

"What? Nuh-uh. That can't be a castle."

The castles Shuri was familiar with looked like where Lady Flora lived. The Japanese style of architecture confused her. To Shuri, it was probably just a strange-looking building.

"That's a castle too," I said. "Castles look different depending on the country."

"Really?"

"Look, everyone's dressed differently from the people in Crimonia too."

I looked around at the scene around me. Everything was different from Crimonia.

“Yeah, it’s different.”

“Do you know what ‘culture’ is? Umm, I wonder how to explain this... It’s like the path that’s been taken by the people living in a place.”

While I was trying to figure that out, Fina jumped in.

“Uh, Shuri, Yuna, Miss Luimin, and Saku all have different clothes on, right? That’s because they all come from different places. You don’t see clothes like theirs in Crimonia, right? It’s different based on the country and town.”

Even if she’d seen Luimin’s clothes before, she wouldn’t have seen anyone dressed like me or Sakura. Every country had wended its own unique way through history, making it different from other nations in a number of ways.

Shuri seemed to understand. She nodded.

I had a correction to make, though. Even in my hometown, nobody walked around in a onesie like this. They’d be pajamas at best, or something that you’d wear at a specific kind of event. Nobody dressed like me.

But saying that would lead to a lot of exhaustive explanations, so I swallowed my words.

“I understand how Shuri feels. Your towns and castles are nothing like the elven village, so I was surprised when I first saw them. I had no idea things could vary this much by country.”

“So it’s different then? I’ve never been to another country, so I thought this was what it was like everywhere.”

It was difficult for people to know about things unless they’d encountered them before. Since I’d had books, TV, and the internet, I’d gotten a view into stuff without ever visiting other places. That was difficult for the people in this world. So it wasn’t like they could help but think that things they’d never encountered before were strange.

Chapter 528:

The Bear Eats Breakfast

SO WE COULD SEND Sakura off to where she needed to go, we brought her to her house.

“Lady Sakura!” the guard at the gate said when he noticed us.

“Thank you for your work,” Sakura very gently said.

“I had heard you would be staying out?”

“I’m sorry for worrying you.”

“Not at all. I was informed you would be with Master Shinobu.”

The guard looked at us behind Sakura.

“Are you the bear from before?”

Apparently, he recognized me. I didn’t remember him, but he had probably been here the first time Shinobu took me to this place.

“Are you all guests of Lady Sakura?”

“Yes. They’re all her guests,” Shinobu said.

“Everyone will come back later, so please allow them in then. All right. I hope you all enjoy yourselves. Shinobu, please take good care of them.”

“All right. I’ll show them around.”

After Sakura headed into the house and we left, we headed to breakfast. Ever since I got into town, people had been staring at me. They still were.

“Sakura’s house was big,” Shuri commented.

“It’s not just her house. All the priestesses live there.”

“The priestesses?”

Shuri tilted her head. It seemed like she hadn't heard the word before. That was another cultural difference... I didn't necessarily know what was considered a given in other countries either. It was one thing to understand culture, and another to explain it to someone else.

"Umm, I guess it's like her workplace? Other people doing the same work as Sakura live there." I tried to break it down into simple terms.

"What is a priestess?" It was Luimin's turn to ask questions.

"You should ask Shinobu instead of me."

It wasn't like everything that was true in my original world would necessarily apply to the Land of Wa.

"Umm, it's difficult to explain," Shinobu said. "They serve gods, I guess? And Lady Sakura's job's got somethin' to do with that. She has to do all these rituals."

"Rituals?" Luimin tilted her head to the side.

"Especially ones related to crops. She basically says thank you for them. And she also has to pass down stories from the past."

"That sounds like a tough job."

It really did.

"Lady Kagari used to be there too."

"Really?"

Was that why Sakura and Kagari were so close?

It seemed like Shuri and Luimin understood from Shinobu's explanation. They nodded.

"So, where are we eating?"

I was starting to feel peckish. I wanted something to eat.

"Right. I was thinking we could go to this place I like and eat light, then

wander around the town picking things up ta eat.”

“Okay, I’m just going to say this ahead of time, but I won’t eat anything weird.”

“Why would you assume we’d eat something weird? Lady Sakura enjoys the food, so it’s not weird.”

“Even if Sakura eats bugs, I’m not eating them,” I said.

They could eat locusts if they wanted, but not me. I just couldn’t deal with bugs. They could be the tastiest thing in the world, and nope. Not even a bite.

“Do you wanna eat bugs then?”

“Did you listen to anything I said? If you bring me to a place like that, I’ll throw a fit. I’d destroy the restaurant, even. You’d die, Shinobu.”

“Please don’t kill me off. There won’t be any bugs, so you’ll be fine.”

Shinobu seemed to have a suspicious look on her face, so I couldn’t let my guard down.

“None of you have anything you can’t eat, right?” Shinobu asked.

“I don’t want any bugs.”

“Me neither.”

“Not me.”

It seemed like the others in our group were on the same page as me. I was glad I had friends. With everyone in agreement, I felt pretty safe Shinobu wouldn’t take us somewhere weird.

We ended up heading to an ordinary looking place that did set meals. Shinobu led us into the establishment, which was a lot bigger on the inside than I expected. There were about ten tables, and seats at the counter too.

I didn’t see anyone around though. Maybe this was a sort of hole-in-the-wall

joint that wasn't too popular? Who could say.

"Good timing. They've got empty seats."

"Oh, Shinobu, welcome."

While I was worrying, a middle-aged woman in an apron with a triangular bandana on her head came over from behind the counter. Since she knew Shinobu's name, she must have been a regular.

"We have no customers right now because everyone's at work."

"Did you hear us?" Shinobu asked.

"I try to keep an ear open when customers come around. You have some cuties with you today! Are they your girlfriends, Shinobu? My, you're popular with the ladies."

"Of course not. They're friends. They all just came here for breakfast."

"That so? I've never seen clothes like that before."

She looked each of us in the eye, coming to a stop on me.

"Are you supposed to be a bear? I've never seen anyone dressed like you before."

It'd be surprising if she *had* seen someone like me before, so I wasn't sure why she said anything.

"She prefers it if you don't ask about her clothes," Shinobu said.

"So she's got her reasons?"

"She does."

"Then I won't ask. Take any seat you like."

We got a seat right in the back.

"Are you popular with the ladies, Shinobu?" Shuri innocently asked as she got to her seat.

"Not really. She just likes to joke, is all."

“Oh, I never joke,” said the woman, who had been listening. “Shinobu is stronger than most adventurers around and she’s reliable. That’s why the girls like her. She saves any girl who’s being messed with by a man, so plenty of girls adore her. If she was a man, then she’d be the talk of the town.”

I felt like I’d heard that line somewhere before.

“Please don’t say anythin’ weird to them... We just came here to eat. If you’re gonna gossip, we’ll leave.”

Shinobu forced an end to the conversation. I was hoping I’d get more material to tease her with. Oh well.

“All right, all right, let me take your orders before you go running off. What’ll you have?”

Before I could ask what she had, Shinobu was already answering.

“The usual morning set meal for everyone at the table, please.”

“Coming right up. It’ll be just a little bit.”

After getting her order, the lady headed behind the counter. If we were getting a set, that meant we shouldn’t get anything weird.

“Do you come here often, Shinobu?”

“I come here because it’s cheap, quick, and good.”

I could already hear someone getting right to cooking in the kitchen, just like Shinobu had said. Looked like a middle-aged man. Was this the husband?

In what felt like no time at all, dishes were being set out on the table. They really were quick. We had miso soup, seaweed, natto—fermented soybeans—and grilled fish. The fish was salmon, and the miso soup was simple, with wakame seaweed and tofu. A normal breakfast for the Land of Wa.

“Okay, let’s eat,” Shinobu said.

“Thank you!” everyone chimed in at the same time.

I dribbled soy sauce on the natto and started stirring it. It looked sticky—just

how I liked it. It'd been a while since I'd eaten natto, and it was so good. I was the only one who was into it, though.

"Ick! It's so sticky and looks so gross."

Shuri stopped in the middle of stirring it the same way I had.

Luimin made a face as she brought the natto up to her nose. "Oh, it smells!"

They both pushed their natto away. Fina held her bowl and looked conflicted.

Right. Anyone who hadn't seen natto before would think it was weird.

"Um, are you sure these beans are good? They're sticky and smell bad,"

Luimin awkwardly said to Shinobu as she peered at the natto.

"Yeah, they're fermented," Shinobu replied.

"They're rotten?!"

Flabbergasted, they turned away from the natto.

"But it's edible, don't worry," Shinobu said, but the three of them looked uneasy.

"It's all right. They're not actually rotten. They're just fermented, so they're edible."

As I was explaining, I put some natto on top of my rice and ate it. Gosh, I missed this taste. It was delicious.

"Oh, Yuna..."

"Yuna..."

"Yuna, you okay?"

All three of them looked at me in worry.

"I heard that people in other countries don't eat natto, and that a lot of them don't like it," Shinobu said.

"It's not that they don't eat it, they don't even have access to it. That's why people are freaked out by it the first time they see it."

I'd never seen it before outside the Land of Wa.

"I'm sorry. I completely forgot about that. You can give it to me if you want," Shinobu said, looking very apologetic.

Well, if you ate something regularly in your country, you wouldn't necessarily be able to tell if people from another country could handle it.

"I'll take some too. That's a lot for one person."

"That'll be real helpful, Yuna. But are you sure you can eat it?"

"I'm all right. We had this in my hometown too. I haven't had it in a while, so I'm actually happy to eat it."

"I'm glad."

She actually did seem happy. I'd have felt bad for her if no one ate the natto.

I took Shuri's bowl.

"Is it actually good?" she asked.

"Hmm, well... People who don't like it just don't. You don't need to force yourself to eat it."

I'd heard people in Kansai didn't like natto much. It was natural to be afraid to try something new if you weren't familiar with it. Like how I wouldn't eat bugs even if they tasted good. We'd grown up in different environments, so that was just how it was.

"Well, I'll take Luimin's portion then."

"Thank you," Luimin said as she offered the bowl to Shinobu.

"What about you, Fina?"

"I'll try it..."

"You don't have to," Shinobu said.

"No, I couldn't waste food."

"I'll eat it, so it won't go to waste," I told her.

“But...”

Fina was staring at the natto. She was frowning a little. I bet the smell was getting to her.

“Then how about you try a bite, and if it’s bad, I’ll take it?”

Once I said that, Fina put a bite-sized amount on top of her rice and held her breath as she took a bite. She carefully chewed and swallowed.

“What do you think?”

“Fina?”

“Fina?”

Me, Shuri, and Luimin watched her with worry.

“The beans are very soft, and they taste very interesting with soy sauce.”

“How does it taste?”

“They don’t taste bad.”

Shinobu seemed relieved. I was too, of course.

“Then I’ll take the rest.”

“No, I’ll eat it.”

“Don’t just do it on my account.”

“I’m not.”

Then Fina poured the rest of the natto onto her rice and started eating. Once Shuri saw that, she chimed in too. “I’ll try it.”

She took back the bowl that I’d taken from her, mixed up the natto, and put it on her rice. She screwed her eyes shut just like Fina as she took a bite.

“It’s sticky. And smelly.”

Well, that was just how natto was. I’d never tried it before, but I’ve heard sun-dried kusaya fish was smelly and very tasty. Maybe the Land of Wa had kusaya

too? Not like I was going to go hunt it down to eat it, or anything.

In the end, everyone ended up eating their natto, and we finished our meal.

“The fish was good, too.”

“I’m real glad to hear you say that.”

I wondered if I could find natto for sale anywhere? I could pick some up and take it with me... I did find myself just hankering for it sometimes.

Chapter 529:

The Bear Walks through the Town with Fina and the Others

AFTER OUR MEAL, we walked through the town together.

“So, I guess you’re popular with the ladies, Shinobu.”

“Please don’t. Actually, don’t you have any boys who like you?”

“Do you really think I do?”

I showed off my bear onesie to her. She immediately got what I was getting at.

“Sorry. I think you’d be a heartbreaker if you just wore regular clothes. Don’t you all think so too?”

“Yes, Yuna is pretty, so I think boys would like her.”

“Yeah, Yuna is cute.”

“She’s prettier than my sister, so I think some men would try to talk to her.”

They were all flattering me now—especially Luimin with that last comment. I couldn’t compete with Sanya—not with her pretty face and perfect figure. She was beautiful, because that was just how elves were.

“Okay, I appreciate the compliments, but all three of you are cuter than me.” They would all be way more popular than I ever was.

I cut the conversation short so we could continue with our walk. Whenever Shuri found something interesting, she’d try to run off, so I kept seeing Fina yell to stop her. Now, Fina was holding Shuri’s hand so she couldn’t run off on her own. I couldn’t help but smile seeing them hold hands.

“Yuna, what’s that?”

Shuri was looking at a banner that had a drawing of dango on it.

“That’s a dango shop.”

Since Shuri really wanted some, we ended up going to the place. We’d just eaten, but we would probably be fine eating one each. When I tried to pay, Shinobu beat me to it. I let her this time.

“It’s soft.”

“The colors are pretty.”

These were pink, white, and green.

“They’re each flavored differently too.”

My memories were hazy, but I thought pink was for plum, white was sweetened mochi, and green was mugwort. If I were wrong or it was different in this world, I’d feel embarrassed, so I pretended not to know. All that mattered was the taste, anyway.

Once we left the dango shop, Shuri said she was hot, so we decided to get shaved ice.

“It’s so cold, and tastes so good.”

“So you take ice and shave it to eat it?”

Wait, was this the first time Luimin had had shaved ice? Even Crimonia had shaved ice. I’d heard they drizzled honey on it. Here, they had matcha and some sort of sweet honey-like syrup?

“Do you all like it?”

“Yeah.”

“Yes.”

“But Miss Shinobu, are you sure about this?”

Shinobu had paid for the shaved ice too. Just like Shinobu had said, she was paying for everything.

“Please don’t worry about it. You saved us, so see it as a way for me to say

thank you.”

“But I didn’t do anything...”

Shuri stopped eating when she heard Shinobu say that. Shinobu panicked when she saw Shuri’s forlorn face.

“Y-you and Fina are like my little sisters. And you’re also important friends of Yuna’s! So don’t worry. Please eat.”

“That’s right. Don’t worry and just eat up, Shuri. Shinobu is nice, so she’ll buy you anything.”

I glanced at Shinobu.

“Th-that’s right. Please eat as much as you’d like.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. If Shinobu weren’t paying, I would be. You always help me so much, after all, Shuri.”

I gave her a pat on the head with my bear puppet.

“Okay. Thank you, Yuna.”

Shuri started eating her shaved ice again.

“Yuna, it’s unfair that you claimed all the credit for yourself.”

That was Shinobu’s own fault for saying she was thanking Fina and Luimin and leaving Shuri out. She should be careful with her words.

After we finished our shaved ice, we went around the other shops.

“Those clothes are pretty,” Fina said as she sighed over the kimono.

I kind of wanted to see everyone in kimono. I said I’d buy them clothes but when Fina saw the price, she shook her head. I ended up not being able to buy them for Shuri or Luimin either. Bummer. I mean, I was no Ellelaura, but I wanted to dress Fina up like a doll.

We walked around while taking in the sights around town until I heard a dinging sound from somewhere. Fina seemed to have heard it too.

“That’s a pretty sound.”

“Where is it?”

“I heard it from that way,” Luimin said while pointing at a stall where some wind chimes hung.

It had tons of other wind chimes too. Whenever the wind blew, the chimes would ding, and the sound would travel in our direction.

“Wind chimes!” I said at the same time as Shinobu.

“Wind chimes?” Luimin seemed confused.

“They’re made from glass, and they make a sound when the wind blows.”

“How do you know so much about them, Yuna?” Shinobu asked. “You knew about natto and could eat it without a problem. Did you come from this country?”

“No, but I did come from a place that’s similar. There’s a faraway country that’s like this place.”

“Like the Land of Wa? Really?”

“Yeah, kind of.”

I nodded and tried to keep it vague. I couldn’t tell her it was in another world.

So, I tried to make things blow over by saying, “Let’s go check that place out.” Then I got everyone to go over to the wind chimes.

“You cute girls over there, what do you think? Don’t they sound nice?” the man selling the wind chimes said.

The wind chimes did sound pretty, just like the man said.

“Fina,” Shuri said. She seemed like she wanted one. Fina didn’t seem to know what to do. Fina had her act together more than me when it came to things like

this.

“You, the one in the cute bear outfit, what do you think?”

He didn’t seem to care what I was wearing as long as he could make a sale. This guy was a real merchant.

I looked at the wind chimes. They were made from glass and had all sorts of designs drawn on them. They were all pretty too. Fina, Shuri, and Luimin’s eyes seemed to glitter at the sight.

“Shuri, which one do you want?”

“Really?!”

Shuri seemed happy. I couldn’t win against that smile. Next to her, Fina was looking at me.

“Yuna, please don’t spoil Shuri that much...”

I knew that was exactly what I was doing, but they were both such good kids that I wanted to buy them something.

“It’s not really for Shuri. It’ll be Tiermina’s present. She’s always been there to help me, and I want to give it to her as a thank-you.”

Fina wouldn’t object now.

“So you two choose one.”

Fina thought about it for a while, then said, “All right.” She seemed to have a lot of fun once she started looking at the chimes with Shuri.

“Luimin, you choose one for your house too.”

“Can I really have one too?”

“You and Mr. Mumulute helped me plenty too.”

In the end, I was the one who had dragged them into this. Mr. Mumulute seemed to be grateful I’d involved him, but I still had exposed Luimin to danger. Well, even if I said that, I doubted Mr. Mumulute would take a gift. He probably

wouldn't mind a small wind chime if I said it was a souvenir.

"I'll pay," Shinobu said. "Fina helped me when I was injured, and Mr. Mumulute never took repayment."

"My grandfather said that I can see Saku, but I'm not allowed to accept any thank-you gifts."

Luimin waved her hands around dramatically and refused Shinobu's proposal.

"You already treated us to food, Shinobu. Since this is a souvenir, I'll pay this time. You're okay with accepting something from me, right, Luimin?"

"I'm not sure?"

"If he says anything, just tell him I forced it on you."

Once I said that, Luimin just said, "Thank you," and started picking out a chime. I guess she really had wanted one.

"Shuri, what do you think about this one?"

"Aww, but this one is better."

"It is nice..."

"Maybe I'll get this one?"

"If there was a bear, I'd get it!" Shuri said.

Uh, there was no way there'd be a bear in there. The wind chimes had pretty patterns in greens, blues, and other similarly tranquil colors. Some had animals on them, but unfortunately, no bears.

"It's unfair, Yuna," Shinobu said while watching the others having a high time choosing their wind chimes. "I just wanted to show them some hospitality. And His Majesty and Lady Sakura asked me to do this, too."

"What else was I going to do? None of them will take a thank-you from you."

"I know, but..."

I understood how Shinobu felt. Fina had taken care of her when she was

injured, and Luimin had been exposed to danger helping with the orochi slaying. She couldn't do anything to pay them back. Meanwhile, I'd shamelessly received an estate, complete with a hot spring.

That was why I ended up buying the souvenirs.

"Fina, choose ones for the orphanage and my shops too."

While Fina did that, I started scoping ones out for Noa and Lady Flora. I considered getting one for Ms. Kagari too, since she was at home watching the estate. I watched the wind chimes. There really were all kinds. I had no idea which to pick.

Hm, what would be the best? I looked through the chimes with the others.

"How about this?"

I settled on a see-through glass chime decorated with a red flower for Lady Flora and one with a blue fish for Noa. Then I also picked one out for myself.

Ms. Kagari's had a fox drawn on it. Well, as soon as I saw it, I knew it was the only one. They had no bears, but they did have foxes.

Then Fina and Shuri finished picking.

Luimin chose a green chime. It had a beautiful pattern on it that looked like waves, which'd really harmonize with the elves' village. Apparently, they'd gotten similar ones.

The one that Fina and Shuri had chosen for Tiermina was a light blue wind chime. It had patterns on it. The one for the Bear's Lounge had a blue bird on it. Based on their conversation, that was because of the kokekkos. They'd gotten one with a goldfish on it for Anz's restaurant, the Bear Dining Room. I guess they'd gotten it to tie in with the fish, so goldfish were a thing in this world. They'd picked out several with flowers for the orphanage. Since the orphanage was large, I wanted to make sure they could split them among the boys and girls.

We finished picking out all the wind chimes.

“Thanks,” the man said. “So, want these in boxes? That’ll be a separate fee.”

I wondered if this guy was the stingiest guy in this world. Putting these into boxes should just be a given. My response was a given:

“Please box them all up.”

They wouldn’t break as easily in boxes and the boxes were a good way of storing them. And it’d be better to have a box when giving them out as presents.

The man carefully placed each one into wooden boxes.

“Here’s the payment.”

“Thank you, cute bear girl.”

The man happily took my money, and I packed everything in my bear box.

Chapter 530: The Bear Wears Japanese Clothes

WE BOUGHT WIND CHIMES, watched a street performance, and returned to the estate where Sakura lived. The guard was standing in front of the gate.

“Thank you for your work.”

“And you as well, Master Shinobu. Please come in.”

We’d met him earlier and Sakura had said to let us in, so we didn’t need to use our cards. We each bowed as we passed through.

“Um, normally we would need to show the card you gave me to see Saku, right, Yuna?” Luimin asked.

“If you need ta come alone, then you just need ta show it. The guards might not recognize you if they switch.”

Even if we were able to travel through today without showing our cards, that wouldn’t necessarily be true tomorrow.

We headed straight into the building and to Sakura’s room.

“Lady Sakura, we’re back.”

“Please come in.”

When we entered, Sakura was sitting on a floor cushion next to the wall and writing something. She turned around.

“Is that your work?”

“No, it’s all right. Did you have fun in town?”

“Yeah, we saw lots of new things. It was fun,” Luimin said, smiling.

“Where did you go?”

We told her about all the things we had seen and eaten.

“It was so smelly.”

“Ha ha. Do you mean natto? It does have a unique smell. Some people might not like it if they’re trying it for the first time.”

“Do you eat it, Saku?”

“Yes, I do.”

Well, she grew up with it, so of course she could eat it.

Then Luimin and Shuri told her about the things in town. Fina just watched by my side and smiled.

“And then Yuna bought something that makes a very pretty noise.”

“A pretty noise?”

Sakura didn’t seem to understand what Luimin was getting at.

“It was a wind chime. We don’t have those in the country we came from,” I told her.

“Oh, we didn’t buy one for Saku,” Luimin remembered. She looked glum.

“Ha ha. Don’t worry. I have a wind chime already. Since we’ve been talking about it, I feel like hearing a wind chime. I’ll put mine up later.”

Then we told her about the shaved ice and the other things we’d seen. Sakura happily listened. She really was so grown up for a young girl. She was mentally mature, but in a different way from Fina.

“You went to all kinds of places. I’d like to visit the place you live too someday.”

“We’ll invite you sometime.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

It’d be nice to take Sakura to Crimonia or the elves’ village sometime. She technically had been at the elves’ village once before, but that was when the orochi was reviving and we were panicking. And she’d told me that all she’d

done was help out Mr. Mumulute.

“We also looked at clothes. The clothes here look pretty, but they seem hard to move in,” Luimin said like she’d just remembered.

Japanese-style clothes cover you all the way to your toes. Plus the sleeves were long, so that made it hard to move your arms. The obis around the waist looked really constricting. If your stomach was bloating, it seemed like it would be painful.

On the other hand, elvish clothes looked like they kept things light and like mobility was important. Considering how much more cumbersome my getup must have looked than Japanese-style clothes, I figured it’d be best for me not to say anything.

“I wish I could have tried one on though.”

“I said I’d buy one for you. You all said no.”

I looked over at Fina.

“You can’t buy such expensive clothes for us. And even if you did, we wouldn’t have any opportunity to wear them, so it’d be a waste of money.”

Well, I could understand that. Fina and I hadn’t worn the dresses that we’d gotten from Noa for Misa’s birthday party either. Even if I bought them clothes, they’d never get to wear them. If she thought it was a waste, I couldn’t really do anything about that.

“I agree with Fina. I couldn’t let you buy something so expensive for me.”

“I like food more than clothes.”

Luimin and Shuri shared their opinions too.

“But I wanted to see you all dressed up.”

I really did.

“Then would you like to borrow mine?”

Sakura looked at Fina and the others.

“I think that Fina could fit in mine. I have some clothes from when I was small for Shuri. Miss Luimin is bigger than me, but I think they might still fit.”

Sakura nodded as though she was checking to confirm it.

“We have other people’s clothes around as well, so I can prepare them for everyone.”

Wait, was she going to have all of us wear kimono? I did want the other three to try them on, but not me.

“Ha ha. I’ll prepare some clothes for you too, Lady Yuna. Don’t worry,” Sakura smiled. I guess it was obvious from my face.

“I’m okay though...”

“Shinobu, would you please prepare kimono for everyone?”

“As you wish.”

Shinobu got up and dashed out of the room just like a ninja. Sakura slowly followed after her. Wait, did that mean I really was going to have to change too?

After a while, they brought in a bunch of wicker boxes. Different people kept bringing in new ones, which seemed to shock everyone else.

“All right. Let’s check what’s inside.”

Sakura opened the lid of one wicker box that was near her.

“I wonder which would look good on you.”

She seemed to be enjoying this as she looked through the box.

“Please let me know if you prefer a specific color.”

The others couldn’t run away after seeing how happy Sakura was, so they ended up letting her dress them up like dolls.

As for me? I tried to run actually, but I didn’t manage to do it. I had no place to run anyway, and I couldn’t abandon the others here. I ended up going along

with it too and dressing up. At least this time I wouldn't be in front of people like when I dressed up for Misa's birthday party. I didn't feel as repulsed by the idea as I had. If they were going to have me wear a kimono and walk around town, I would've made a bigger deal out of it.

"I think this would look good on you, Lady Yuna."

Sakura showed off a black kimono with a bright white and red flower design.

"I'll try one on later," I said.

"I'll only wear one if Yuna wears one."

"I want to see Yuna dressed up."

"I'll only dress up if Yuna does too."

"See, everyone wants you to. So please take off your bear clothes."

Everyone was staring at me. Apparently, I was going to be the first sacrifice. This was the price I had to pay in order to see everyone else in kimono. If I said I wouldn't do it, there was a chance that Fina and the others would back out.

I gave up and summoned my bears just in case before taking off my bear onesie. Then I went ahead and let them dress me in a kimono just like Sakura had asked. They tied up my long hair and put some accessories in it.

"You're so pretty, Lady Yuna."

"You look so good, Yuna."

"Your hair is so pretty."

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, isn't Yuna pretty?"

My bears both crooned in response. Et tu, Kumayuru and Kumakyu?

"You're strong, cute, pretty, and nice. You'll end up making all the girls hate you at some point."

"I'm not that nice, and I'm not pretty or cute either."

I'd never been popular before. I just kinda did my thing, and the only reason I

was strong was because I had my bear gear.

“Try saying that after you see yourself in the mirror,” Shinobu said.

She dragged me over to look at myself. I wasn't even focused on how the clothes looked on me because I was so embarrassed. Why did I feel embarrassed in a different way from when I wore my bear suit? What would I feel normal about wearing, anyway? Dresses embarrassed me, and I was pretty sure that wearing the standard clothes of this world would make me feel awkward too.

After Sakura and Shinobu were done with us, all of us were in kimono. Since Fina and Shuri were siblings, they both ended up in matching red kimono. Luimin was in light green, I guess to match her hair. Shinobu changed from her ninja outfit to an indigo kimono and looked even more embarrassed than me. Sakura also changed into a cherry-blossom pink kimono to match her name.

“You all look pretty.”

Yeah, including Sakura. If we had a camera, I would have taken a picture. I didn't have a digital camera or even a phone or a film camera. I kind of wish I had a bear skill for this, like bear photography or something. Like, one that would let me copy what I saw onto paper. If I just had that, I'd have an actual image of Fina and the others forever. Then I could've shown Tiermina how cute her daughters looked. The god that brought me to this world sure wasn't all that accommodating of my actual needs.

Since we couldn't take a picture, maybe we could draw one instead?

“Fina, Shuri, come over here and sit on the floor cushions.”

I checked out the cushions in front of me.

“Oh, uh, okay.”

“Uh-huh.”

Fina and Shuri plunked themselves right down. I pulled out some paper and a drawing utensil.

“Don’t move for a bit.”

“Are you drawing us?!”

“You wanna draw us?”

“Yeah, so don’t move.”

“That’s too embarrassing! Please don’t!”

Even though I’d asked her not to move, Fina reached out toward the paper I was holding.

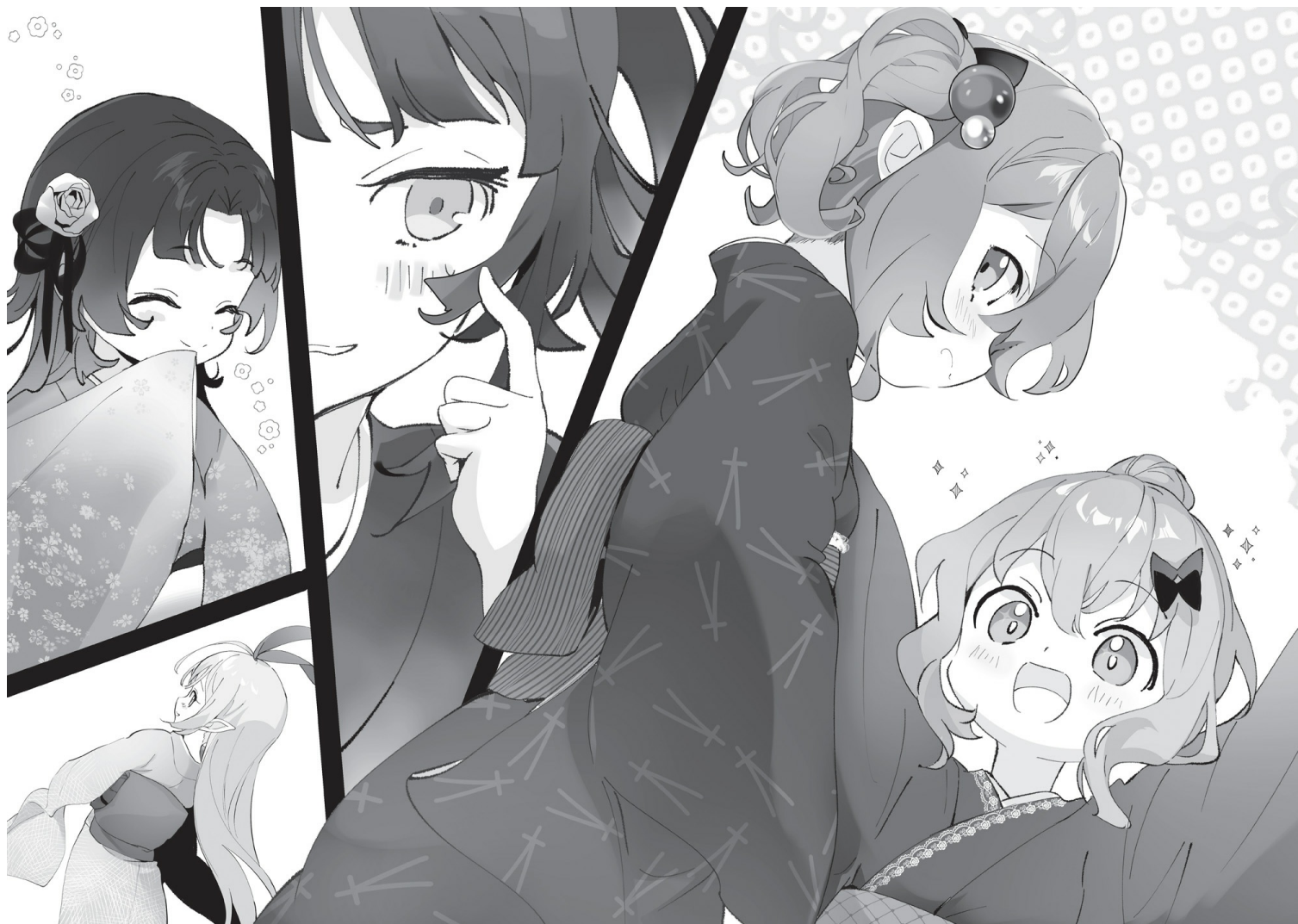
“I want to show it to Tiermina, so don’t move.”

I pushed Fina away and had her sit back down.

“Shuri, hold Fina’s hand so she can’t run away.”

“Okay. You can’t move, Fina.”

Shuri held Fina’s hand. Fina didn’t try to shake off Shuri.



I started to get to work drawing while Fina was sitting still.

“Agh, I feel so embarrassed.”

Fina looked down and blushed.

“Fina, don’t move. Lift your face back up.”

She did that, but she still looked embarrassed. The better the model, the easier it was to draw. They were such good sisters.

It was difficult to get the kimono right, though. The pen I had was black, though, so I wouldn’t need to color anything in. That made things easier.

Everyone else stood behind me as I drew.

“Lady Yuna, you’re so good at this.”

“You can even draw?”

“Wow, you really are so good.”

They were all praising me.

“I’m not that good,” I said. It was just a hobby.

“Yes, you are. You’re very good.”

“Right, I can’t draw.”

“I’ve had ta draw people based on description, so I can draw a little,” Shinobu said.

Ah, so I’d found the artist behind the wanted poster of Jyubei, I bet.

“Lady Yuna, would you draw us too?”

“And me!”

“Yeah, that’s fine by me.”

I finished drawing Fina (who looked embarrassed in the drawing too), then got to work drawing Sakura and Luimin. Then I drew Sakura and Shuri with Kumakyu, and Kumayuru with Fina and Luimin, and Shinobu with Sakura.

Finally, I drew all of them together with my bears.

I hadn't drawn portraits in a while, but it was fun.

Chapter 531:

Suzuran Goes to See Lady Kagari

I AM SUZURAN, the person tasked with looking after Lady Kagari. I was originally a priestess. Lady Kagari is so very beautiful, especially with her long golden hair, and she has been since the moment I first met her as a young girl. I could not believe it when I was told she had lived for hundreds of years, but as I saw Lady Kagari never age, I knew it to be true.

There is a legend that the orochi is sealed away on the island of Linesu. The orochi wrought calamity and killed many people. It is said that a fox sealed the orochi away and is watching over it now.

I grew up with that story. I had believed the fox to be a god. However, a fox truly had been watching over the seal for many long years, and that was Lady Kagari. I was surprised the first time I heard of it, but once I saw Lady Kagari's ears and tail, I believed.

I was headed to the island of Linesu to take care of Lady Kagari today.

There is a boat for my sole use, and I would always disembark onto the island alone. Then I went to the house Lady Kagari lived in. Only one road leads through the forest, and I have walked it too many times to count.

Normally, Lady Kagari is glad to see me, but today she seemed to be acting oddly. She seemed absentminded, even as I spoke to her. I tried talking to her again and again, until she told me not to come back to the island for some time. I was surprised to hear this. I asked her why. If she did not like something I was doing, I preferred it if she told me. I would address my flaws.

What she said surprised me. It seemed that the orochi's seal would possibly break and she did not want me in danger.

She drank as she said this, so I thought she said it in jest, but it seemed she was telling the truth. She did not have the look on her face she normally would while telling a joke. It felt real.

I returned from the island and soon after His Majesty told me not to go to the island again. Would the orochi truly come back? I was worried for Lady Kagari, but I had no permission to travel there. All I could do was wait.

Then one day, while I was working, a great number of monsters appeared outside of town, and the citizens were forbidden from going outside. Many soldiers marched out from the town. Everyone was anxious. I'd never encountered such a thing before. I was sure that we would be fine.

After the soldiers were dispatched, some time passed, and I happened to overhear a soldier talking. I heard the words, "The orochi is back."

I attempted to eavesdrop, but it seemed the soldiers were not allowed to discuss the news, as an officer immediately silenced them.

The orochi had revived. Those words kept repeating in my head. How fared Lady Kagari? The anxiety was oppressive.

We weren't allowed outside, but I used my connections that helped me get to the island and arrived at the port. It was in chaos. So many people and carriages were attempting to leave the towns.

I had gotten all the way here, but I had no way of getting to the island. As I worried about Lady Kagari, I heard that the orochi had been slain and that the king was going to Linesu.

Was it truly dead? And what of Lady Kagari...? I hoped she was somehow whole.

As I watched the ocean, I saw His Majesty's ship return. People gathered around the ship to see what had happened on Linesu.

I was among the crowd as I approached the ship. His Majesty disembarked.

He held Lady Sakura in his arms. But why was Lady Sakura there?

I took a step forward and His Majesty noticed me.

“Suzuran?”

“Your Majesty, did the orochi truly revive?”

“Indeed, it did. But it has been slain.”

A cheer burst out as His Majesty said this.

“And what of Lady Sakura?”

“She went to Linesu to see Kagari.”

I hadn’t known.

“Is she all right?”

“She is tired and asleep. Please look after her.”

“Oh, yes.”

As soon as I took Lady Sakura, he began to walk away.

“Um, and Lady Kagari?” I leaned forward and asked.

“You needn’t worry. Kagari is safe. She’s still on the island.”

Oh, good...

“Though...” His Majesty hesitated.

“Did something happen?” I asked.

The king seemed troubled. “I can’t go into specifics. You should ask Kagari when you see her.”

After saying this, he left.

Perhaps she was injured? But it was enough to know that she was safe. I bowed to him as he left and, after arranging a carriage, took Lady Sakura to the estate. I wondered if she knew more.

The next day, Lady Sakura woke up. I asked her if she knew what had happened to Lady Kagari.

“Lady Sakura, do you know anything of what became of Lady Kagari?”

“I...cannot tell you myself. I think you will see when you encounter her again. Could you wait for a little longer?”

It seemed Lady Sakura knew something. It seemed she could not tell me herself.

“She is safe, so you needn’t worry.”

Lady Sakura seemed to be attempting to reassure me. She then asked me about Linesu and what had happened while she had been unconscious. Lady Sakura quietly listened and nodded along as I spoke.

I requested a boat to Linesu multiple times, but I was never given permission.

Everyone was able to enter Linesu now. Before, only women had been able to enter, but once the orochi revived and the seal broke, anyone could go. Because monsters could be on the island, no one was allowed on it unless they could protect themselves.

I hoped I would be able to see Lady Kagari soon. I hoped she was well.

I still had no idea what had happened to her, and days had passed. Then His Majesty called upon me. I thought I would finally get to her, so I rushed to him. I took deep breaths to settle my racing heart.

“It is Suzuran,” I said.

I received His Majesty’s permission to enter the room. Once I was inside, I saw only His Majesty was present. It seemed he had cleared the room.

“So you’ve come,” he said.

“Yes, what happened to Lady Kagari?” I clasped my hands together and tried to keep my voice down. “Is she truly safe?”

If she had fought the Orochi, there was a chance she had been injured.

His Majesty seemed not to know what to say.

“She is not hurt... I can’t explain her situation myself. You need to see Kagari for the details and ask her.”

He seemed to have trouble telling me this. Lady Sakura had said the same. Could they truly not speak of it? If she were not hurt, then why could they not tell me? I simply could not think of any reason for it.

“All right. Then may I have permission to enter Linesu?”

“Kagari is not on the island anymore. She is currently at the estate at Towa Lake. You have been there, hadn’t you?”

“Yes, I’ve gone with Lady Kagari while attending to her.”

There was an estate near the lake as well as a hot spring where His Majesty could recuperate. At times, Lady Kagari would use it as well.

“Kagari is over there.”

“Then I will go now.” If I went then, I’d make it by night. As I was about to run out the door, he stopped me.

“Wait. If you go, then make it tomorrow.”

“Why would that be?”

“Kagari asked. She wants preparations to be made, so go tomorrow.”

“Understood. Then what shall I prepare?”

“Assume there is nothing there.”

I wanted to see Lady Kagari as soon as I could, but if I were to believe His Majesty, I would have much to collect. In that case, it would be best if I were fully prepared before going. I thanked him and left the room.

I was happy that Lady Kagari was safe. I gathered all the things she would need. She was likely hungry, so I prepared food and drink, and I believed she

would likely need clothes as well. I began to think of what she'd require.

I hoped to see her soon.

Early the next morning, I loaded everything she would need on a carriage and left. While I was going, I saw children who seemed to be riding bears. No. I was certain it was my imagination.

After some time, I arrived at Lake Towa's estate. Lady Kagari was there. I placed my hand on the door.

"It's open."

When I entered, the place was deathly quiet.

"Lady Kagari, are you in?" I asked in the softest voice from the front door.

I wondered where she could be. The first floor was the kitchen and where the storage was, so she likely would not be here.

I climbed the stairs to the second floor. This floor was filled with many rooms. She might be here. Just as I thought that, I heard someone say, "I was famished!"

It was Lady Kagari's voice. I ran up the stairs.

"I should have gone with them. When is Suzuran coming?"

I heard her from the other room. The door was open, so her voice was unmuffled.

"I am sorry I was late, Lady Kagari."

When I entered the room, I found...no Lady Kagari. Instead, I encountered a small girl with golden hair.

"Suzuran?" the girl said my name.

How did she know my name? I approached her. She was very beautiful. She seemed somehow familiar to me.

“Suzuran, I was waiting for you. Make me something, would you?”

“You know who I am?”

“What are you saying?”

The girl looked at me dubiously. I looked her over carefully. Her beautiful golden hair, her face... Wait, was it possible?

“Are you Lady Kagari’s daughter?!”

“...!”

The girl looked surprised at this.

“I hadn’t known that Lady Kagari had such an adorable daughter.”

Why hadn’t she told me? I picked her up. She was so very light, and absolutely precious!

“Um, what is your name? And where is your mother? I came here to see her.”

As I spoke to her, the girl raised her arm and smacked me upside the head.

“What nonsense are you quibbling about?! I am Kagari. Have you holes for eyes?”

She hit my head lightly again.

“Lady Kagari?”

I looked at the girl in my arms again.

“Yes, I am Kagari. I used too much mana while battling the orochi and ended up in this form.”

I could hardly believe it. I’d never heard of anyone turning into a child from using too much mana.

“Are you really Lady Kagari?”

“If I tell you something only I know, will you believe me? Such as when you ruined a meal and cried when you were lost in the woods?”

“But the only one who knows about that is...”

“Me.”

“You truly are Lady Kagari!”

“Did I not say earlier?”

I began to cry. The moment I realized Lady Kagari was right before me, I started to sob.

“I’m so glad you’re alive.”

“Did I worry you?”

Lady Kagari placed a hand on my head.

“Oh, Lady Kagari.”

I held Lady Kagari’s small form in my arms. She was alive. As I held her, her stomach gurgled ever so faintly. We looked at each other and then grinned.

I understood now why His Majesty and Lady Sakura had refused to explain the situation to me. No one would believe this if they tried. I could hardly believe it even though I had witnessed it.

“Then I’ll make you something now.”

I decided I would make her rice wrapped in fried tofu—inari, her favorite—but I wondered if she would wait until I had finished.

I went to the carriage outside.

Chapter 532:

The Bear Shows Off a Picture Book

SINCE KIMONO WERE HOT and difficult to move in, we changed back into our regular clothes once we were satisfied with them.

My bear clothes made me feel more at home, for sure. The plush feel of it against my skin, the perfectly temperature-controlled interior that seemed impossible for a onesie... But once I got to that part of my thought, the gears in my head ground to a stop.

Uh, if I was comfortable in my bear suit...was this the end for me? I'd never be able to get back to when I used to be pure of heart and embarrassed about my bear onesie...

I fell to my knees and wallowed.

"Lady Yuna, is something the matter?"

"Nah, it's nothing," I said, somehow managing to squeeze out the strength to stand up. If I just didn't mind how my clothes looked, they were the best outfit ever.

After I finished changing, I gave everyone their pictures.

"Thank you. I'll treasure it."

"I'll put it up in my room, too."

The pictures had them in different poses, but each was of them together. Well, anyone would be too embarrassed to put up a picture of just themselves in their room, but it wasn't so embarrassing if you were with friends.

If they were happy with them, then it was worth drawing them.

"If only I were as good at drawing as Lady Yuna, I would draw everyone too," Sakura murmured as she looked at her drawing.

“If you draw a lot, then you’ll get better.”

“That’s something people only say when they’re good at drawing. Some people never get any better no matter how much they try,” Shinobu said.

“Sakura still is young, so she has time. People mature and grow.”

Even if you did nothing, your body would still age, but if you didn’t try to learn more, you’d never become more knowledgeable. You wouldn’t be able to improve your skills. Still, Shinobu was right. People had their strengths and weaknesses, and they would improve at different speeds. If some people could make improvements in leaps and bounds in no time at all, others would need double the time to make any progress. Honestly, motivation was the great equalizer.

“Shinobu, you didn’t start out that strong either, right?”

“That’s true, but I feel like you can do anything, Yuna.”

“I can’t do anything. I was bad at first too.”

Everyone starts as a beginner. Only a few people started out good at something. I was pretty good at drawing, but it takes me a lot of time to become good at something I start out bad at. The thing I knew for certain though, was that you couldn’t get anywhere if you didn’t practice.

“Really? What do you think, Fina?” Shinobu asked.

Fina thought for a bit.

“I’m not sure about how Yuna was in the past, but she’s strong, and a good cook, and kind. I think she can do anything.”

“Fina?”

“But she can’t harvest from monsters.”

“Really?”

I just couldn’t do it. I had no motivation to try either, so I wasn’t going to get any better.

“People have things they’re good at, and things they’re not. Fina’s the best person for the job anyway.”

“Yuna.” Fina seemed touched.

“But if you want to become better at drawing, you’ll need to practice, Sakura.”

“Of course. If I don’t try and just give up, then I’ll never improve.”

“You were working hard to save the country, so just keep going with that spirit, Sakura.”

“Okay. I’ll try to draw, and I won’t give up.”

“I’ll be your model for you,” Shinobu said.

Just when I thought we’d finished, Shuri dropped a bombshell.

“Once I get good at drawing, I wanna draw a picture book like Yuna.”

“A picture book?” Sakura said.

“Yeah. It’s a bear picture book.”

Fina tried to cover Shuri’s mouth in a panic, but she was too late.

“Wait, you drew a picture book, Lady Yuna?”

I gave in.

“Um, I drew it for a kid I know.” The kid just so happened to be a princess.

“I’d like to see it,” Sakura said.

Ugh, I knew this would happen.

“It’s nothing special. It’s just something for kids. I don’t think you would like it much, actually.”

“But I am a child,” Sakura said, sulking a little.

Oh! Right.

“Yuna, I want to see, too. I’ve heard about it from my sister, but I haven’t

seen it for myself.”

Now even Luimin was saying that. Actually, Luimin would have known about the picture book from the bracelet incident. I didn’t remember ever showing it to her.

“Right. I’d like ta see it too.”

Shinobu was also in on it.

“Lady Yuna, could you show us the book?”

Sakura gave me puppy-dog eyes. I didn’t mind, but Fina might be embarrassed. I looked over and she did seem a little put off as she held her hand over Shuri’s mouth.

“Um, I don’t have it...”

I was going to pretend I didn’t have it on me.

“Then we can use the gate ta go get it, can’t we?”

“I gave it to the girl.”

Technically, that wasn’t a lie. I’d given the original to Lady Flora.

“Really?” Sakura looked sad.

“Ugh.”

I just wasn’t really good at handling crying children, but I knew I didn’t want my picture book to spread around the Land of Wa, too...

“Haah... All right.” I gave in. I just couldn’t win against a crying kid.

When I gave in, Fina did too. She let go of Shuri’s mouth. When I saw that, I pulled out a picture book from my bear storage and handed that to Sakura.

“The girl and bear look so cute.”

Luimin and Shinobu sat down next to Sakura to look at the book.

“Did you draw this, Yuna?”

“You’re good,” Shinobu said.

The three of them started reading the book.

“The poor girl.” “The wolves are attacking her!” “Look, the bear is here!” “I’m glad that the bear saved her.” “Oh good, she got the herbs.” “The bear isn’t allowed into town!” “She has to say bye to the bear.” “I’m glad she got the herbs to her mom.”

I wasn’t as bashful as Fina, but seeing the book I’d drawn being read in front of me made me feel a little embarrassed.

After Sakura finished the first one, she read the second and third volumes. She kept saying all her opinions out loud, which made both me and Fina embarrassed.

“Lady Yuna, are there any more?”

“I’ve only written up to Volume Three.”

I couldn’t give her a book I didn’t have yet.

“That’s a shame. I want to know what happened to the girl in the new town.”

I hadn’t even thought of that yet, so even I had no idea.

“At first, it seemed a sad story, but I’m glad that the girl is happy now that the bear is with her.”

“Also, I was wondering, but are these siblings based on Fina and Shuri?” Shinobu asked.

I knew it. It was obvious.

“I’m surprised you figured it out.”

“It looks like them,” Shinobu said. “You’re good at capturing the essence of people. But these drawings look cuter than the ones you drew of us earlier.”

“That’s because these books are for kids.”

“I’ve never seen books this cute before.”

Sakura clutched the books. She didn't seem to be making a move to return any of them.

"Do you want a set?"

"Yes... I do. The girl is just trying her best to live, and the bear wants to help her. It feels almost like me."

Sakura caressed the book and looked at me. It seemed like she knew I was the bear too.

"You can have those books."

"Really?!"

"Yeah, but don't show it to too many people. Fina will be embarrassed." Not to mention me!

I didn't want another replay of the book reproduction incident at the royal capital. But because that had happened, I'd gotten duplicates for the orphanage and for Retbelle's granddaughter, which had made all the kids happy. I was happy to make them happy, but I didn't want these books becoming a big deal.

"Please don't tell anyone I'm the girl in the book," Fina said.

"Even if we did, no one would know you," Shinobu said.

I suppose she was right. It wasn't like anyone else in the Land of Wa would know Fina, even if she was the model for the character.

"It's still embarrassing."

"All right. I won't tell anyone else. I promise," Sakura said.

I ended up giving the books to Sakura. Luimin wanted her own set, so I gave her one too.

"Thank you. I'll treasure it."

Now the bear picture books had made their way to the Land of Wa and the elves' village. I felt like I was digging my own grave, but that couldn't be right. I was still happy that someone liked my books.

“Can’t I have one too?”

“If I give you one, I feel like it’d start being passed around, and I’d come back to find more copies around.”

“I wouldn’t do that.”

If I gave one set to Sakura, she could read it whenever she wanted anyway. Everyone at the orphanage shared the books too, so it was enough to give the books to Sakura.

I told them not to make copies, just in case.

Chapter 533: The Bear Goes Back to Crimonia

AFTER GIVING AWAY THE BOOKS, we talked for a while and then noticed when it started to get dark outside.

“We should be getting home soon.”

I told Sakura and the others that we were leaving.

“You’re going home? You could stay over?”

“If we stay too long, then Fina and Shuri’s parents will worry.”

Then again, when I’d brought them to the royal capital and the dwarves’ town, Tiermina had just let us go. This time, I’d taken Fina and Shuri without explaining anything. Gentz might also be worried.

Even if Mr. Mumulute knew about the bear gate, he couldn’t cover for Luimin not coming home for multiple nights.

“We have to go home today.”

When I stood up from the floor cushion, I heard my white bear puppet start to croon. It was my bear phone. Who was it? I was sure that everyone who had a phone was already gathered here...except for one person.

I pulled my phone out of my bear storage and imbued it with some mana.

“Oh, is that you, Yuna?”

It was Ms. Kagari, just like I’d thought. I’d given her a phone in case something happened during the battle with the orochi. Since I’d never asked for it back, she still had it.

“Ms. Kagari, is something wrong?”

“Sorry, could you wait to come back until tomorrow?”

“Why?”

“Suzuran is here, and she wants to stay the night. If she sees you, it’ll be trouble, won’t it? She’s promised to go home tomorrow. So stay there until tomorrow, if you could? If you need money, then simply ask Suo. Suzuran is back. I need to go.”

Ms. Kagari hung up the phone.

“Yuna, what is it?”

I could create multiple bear gates, so it wasn’t a huge inconvenience. Even if we didn’t go back to the estate, I could still take us home. After we talked it over, we decided to go.

I pulled out a bear gate. First, I took Luimin back.

“Oh, I know. Saku, take this.”

Luimin pulled a cloth bag out of her item bag with both her hands.

“What is this?”

“These are tea leaves for tea from the village where I live.”

“Is that from the sacred tree?” I asked, and Luimin nodded. Then she looked back at Sakura.

“Saku, you used your mana to save us.”

“Yes, but I don’t regret it. If the same thing happened again, I would make the same decision.”

If you used too much mana as a kid, you could lose the ability to use magic. Sakura had overdrawn her mana to protect the barrier around the orochi. She might’ve lost her ability to use magic.

“These are tea leaves from the mana tree that has protected our elves’ village for years. It should replenish your mana. Grandfather said that if you drink this, you might still be able to use magic.”

“Do you really think so?”

As she listened to Luimin, Sakura started to tear up.

“I did promise. We need to have our trip together.”

“Yes, we did promise.”

Right, they had.

“This might work, so try it. Even if you can’t use magic, I’ll protect you, so it’ll be fine.”

“Miss Luimin...”

“That means I’ll need to become strong, too.”

“I’ll drink it.”

“But don’t drink too much.”

“Yes.”

Luimin and Sakura made a promise.

I didn’t know what the sacred tree was capable of, but I prayed that it could do something. No matter what happened, I figured they would be fine.

Luimin went through the gate.

“Miss Luimin, please come back, okay.”

“Yes, I will. See you later, Fina and Shuri. Thank you for everything, Shinobu.”

“You’re welcome to come back anytime.”

Everyone said bye to Luimin. Since I couldn’t keep the door open forever, I closed it. I needed to remember to go back and get the gate Luimin had come through though. Then I opened a gate to Crimonia.

“Are you sure you’re okay going home on your own?”

“We’re okay. Thank you for inviting us, Yuna. It was fun.”

“Uh-huh, it was.”

I handed them the picture of them in kimono I’d drawn of them.

“Are we showing Mom?”

“Well, we do have them now, so...”

I was sure that Tiermina would want to see how cute they’d been. Fina looked so embarrassed in the drawing, but Shuri seemed to be having fun. They were even holding hands. In actuality, Shuri was only holding her hand in the picture to keep Fina from running away, but if you didn’t know, it looked like they wanted to keep each other close.

“Then I’ll go home tomorrow.”

“Okay. Saku, Shinobu, thank you for everything.”

“Come back again, okay?”

“We’ll be waiting,” Shinobu said.

Fina and Shuri also left through the gate and headed into my bear house in Crimonia.

“Lady Yuna, what will you do?”

“I’ll spend a night here and go home tomorrow. I can’t go home and leave a door in your room.”

I recalled the bear gate.

“In that case, please stay here.”

I’d been thinking of going to the inn with the hot spring again, but I decided to take Sakura up on her offer.

Then Sakura played with Kumayuru and Kumakyu until dinner.

We had Japanese-style food for dinner and then set up two groups of bedding in Sakura’s room. We all sat on top of the bedding and cuddled the bears.

“I’ll turn off the light now.”

Sakura stood up and touched the mana gem on the wall. The light on the ceiling turned off. We held Kumayuru and Kumakyu in our arms and crawled

under the covers.

“Lady Yuna, good night.”

“Night.”

It was quiet for a while.

“Lady Yuna, are you awake?”

“I am. Trouble sleeping?”

“Can we talk for a bit?”

“Yeah, it’s fine by me.”

“Lady Yuna, I want to thank you again. Thank you for saving our country.”

“You’ve already thanked me plenty.”

“But all I can do is thank you with my words.”

“That’s more than enough for me.”

Some people in this world weren’t even capable of saying thank you.

“Yes, but...”

“No more thanking me.”

I couldn’t have her keep thanking me like this, so I put a stop to it. Then I asked her something that had been bothering me.

“Have you seen any dreams of the future?”

“No, I don’t think so. When I have dreams, they’re all good ones. Like playing with you, or going out with Shinobu, or having fun with my work.”

“I hope that’s your future.”

“Yes.”

It would be better if she didn’t have prophetic dreams. They could be useful. It might save a few lives, but some tragedies are unavoidable. That power was too weighty for Sakura to have. I wanted kids like Fina to be happy.

Then I talked with Sakura until she fell asleep.

The next day, we had breakfast, and as I was going back to the estate, I ran into Shinobu.

“These are the cards that you asked for yesterday, Yuna.”

She showed me two cards. They’d already made them when I’d only asked for them yesterday.

“Thank you. I’ll give these to Fina and Mr. Mumulute.” I put the cards into my bear storage. “Okay, I’ll head home too now.”

“Lady Yuna, please come back sometime.”

“I mean, I *did* get an estate with a hot spring. I’ve got to use it. I’ll be back.” It would be easy to get back here to take a dip in the hot spring because I had the bear gate.

“We’ll be waiting.”

“Yuna, I still want ta show you around ta a ton of places, so you have ta come back.”

“I will. I’ll count on you to treat me again when I do.”

“Sure.” It was supposed to be a joke, and she took it completely serious.

“Uh, normally people would be upset about that.”

“I’ll just ask His Majesty ta compensate me for what I spend on you, so don’t worry.”

“You can’t do that.”

“Just like Lady Kagari said, we have no idea how bad the damage would have been if the orochi got ta a populated area. It would have cost money ta rebuild if it destroyed any houses. If people had have gotten injured, they wouldn’t have been able ta work. In the worst case, they would’ve died. Treating you is nothing.”

I guess she had a point. But if they were going to pay using the county's money, then I didn't really want that. I'd only said it as a joke.

It wasn't like I needed money. I also had the tolls coming in from the tunnel connecting Mileela and Crimonia, plus the income from my businesses and the kokekko. Strictly speaking, I didn't need a job.

"Anyway, that was a joke. I'd still be happy if you showed me around though."

"Then I will accompany you."

After I thanked them both, I left.

They tried to show me off to the town outskirts, but I turned them down. I was sure they'd try to come with me to Ms. Kagari otherwise.

Once I was outside town, I summoned Kumayuru and headed to Ms. Kagari.

I got back to my estate without incident.

"Ms. Kagari, I'm back."

"So you are."

She had bedding spread out in a large room and was drinking liquor while lying down like she'd done it plenty of times before.

I saw a cask near her that looked small enough for a woman to carry. She was a kid, though. Was she allowed to drink alcohol? It just didn't look right.

"Are you the only one here?"

"Fina and the others went home already."

"I see. I hoped to hear more about Mumulute from his granddaughter."

"I'll bring her back sometime. So, was it Ms. Suzuran? Did she go home?" I checked using my detection skill before I came home, so I knew that Ms. Kagari was here alone. I asked anyway just to be polite.

"Yes. She wanted to spend several more days here, but I sent her off with

directions to collect other necessities.”

“She seems to be really worried about you.”

I only knew her name, but I knew that she cared about Ms. Kagari. It’d be nice to meet her sometime.

“She believed me to be my own child and picked me up when she saw me.”

Well, there was no helping that. No one would have expected Ms. Kagari to turn into a child, and it was a pretty natural conclusion given how she looked.

“So, what shall you do?”

“I was thinking of going home. You won’t be lonely if I do?”

“What are you trying to say? I have lived longer than any other. I have experienced a fair share of goodbyes. I am not lonely.”

She didn’t like goodbyes. She was alone on the island and wouldn’t go to the castle. She’d probably said goodbye to tons of people by now. It had probably meant a lot of sadness. I couldn’t even fathom what she’d been through, but I did understand what it was like to be lonely.

“If you want to live in the elves’ village, just let me know. I think you’d be able to live alongside them.”

“...”

Ms. Kagari looked at me with surprise. Unlike us humans, elves lived a long time. If she was going to live anywhere, the best place for her would be the elves, who would live a while.

“I am grateful for the offer. However, there are those who would miss me here.”

She had a faraway look in her eyes as she stared out the window.

There was Ms. Suzuran, who cared for Ms. Kagari, and Sakura, who looked up to her like a daughter or little sister. And then the king she had known for so long. I guess she couldn’t leave this place.

I put up the wind chime that Fina and the others had chosen in the window.

“A wind chime?”

“Everyone helped pick it out.”

It dinged in the breeze. I listened to the sound of the chime and talked with Ms. Kagari until I headed home.

Chapter 534:

The Bear Draws Volume Four of the Picture Books

AFTER GETTING BACK from the Land of Wa, I headed to Tiermina since I'd taken her daughters with me earlier. I wanted to apologize too, since I'd basically grabbed Fina out of nowhere. Tiermina didn't seem upset and told me that she trusted me. The only issue was that Gentz had been lonely without his daughters around for two days and a night.

"Thank you for the beautiful picture."

She seemed to like the picture of Fina and Shuri in their kimono that I'd drawn for her. Gentz was disappointed that he hadn't seen them. They looked much cuter in real life than in my drawing, so I couldn't blame him. We told Gentz that I dressed them in clothes I'd had ordered from the Land of Wa.

I got permission to borrow Fina again from her mom. She told us we were free to do whatever we wanted, like usual.

"Are you drawing a picture book, Yuna?"

I had paper and writing utensils set up on a table. When I gave Sakura the picture books the day before, I started to feel like writing another one. Lady Flora was also probably waiting for me to write another one, so I needed to sit down and knock it out.

The last time I'd drawn a picture book was when I went to the academy festival. After that, I'd made a trip to the desert, gone to Mileela with everyone on a trip, and visited the dwarves' town and the Land of Wa. If I didn't draw when I had the time, a lazy person like me would never make another book. I called Fina over to sit for me.

"What happens after the girl moves to the town?"

In the book, after the mother gets better, she and her daughters move to a

new town. I decided to start the book off at the point where the girl starts her new life.

“So this is what I was thinking.”

I quickly explained the book’s plot to Fina.

PICTURE BOOK: THE BEAR AND THE GIRL, VOLUME 4

The girl and her family reached the new town. They each carried bears in their arms. The girl carried the small bear, and the sister carried the small white bear. The mother carried the small black bear.

“Mom, where are we going?”

The girl was anxious about the new town. She hugged the bear in her arms tighter than ever. Her mom said they would go to the Adventurer Guild. That was where heroes who defeated monsters and used magic gathered. The girl was afraid of the guild because of how frightening the adults there were.

The family arrived at the Adventurer Guild. It was a very big building. Adventurers carrying swords were walking in and out of the guild.

The girl and her little sister were both very nervous, but their mom smiled at them. That made the sisters feel a little better. They all went into the guild together.

Inside the building, they saw lots of scary people with swords and weapons. All of them looked at the girl and her family.

“A bear?” “A bear?” “Bear?” “Is that a bear?”

They were all looking at the bears they were holding. The little sister was scared and hid behind their mom, but the girl held the bear tighter and didn’t give in to the stares. She stood in front of her mom to protect her family.

Their mom put her hand on the girl's head and smiled gently. "It's okay," she said.

Then the mom went to the counter and asked for someone by name. The woman at the counter looked surprised to see the bears, but she went to find the person.

After a while, a large man appeared. He seemed very happy to see their mom again. He led them to a room in the back. The man was the leader of the guild, the guild master. He looked at the bears they were carrying.

"Are those bears?"

Their mother asked him to let them live in the town with their bears. The bears had saved their lives. The guild master had to think about it.

"Bears make me so nostalgic," he said.

He reached out to pat the bear in the girl's hands on the head. Then the bear opened its mouth.

"I'm surprised a crybaby adventurer became a guild master."

The guild master was surprised that the bear had talked.

"Are you the bear I knew?"

"It's been a very long time," said the bear, "since I've seen the wet-pants adventurer."

The moment the bear said that, the guild master turned pale.

"Do you still wet your pants?"

The guild master tried to silence the bear, but he couldn't.

"So you are the bear from the forest."

The bear and guild master knew each other. Thanks to that, the bears got to live with the girl and her family.

“You’ve sure gotten cuter,” the guild master said, trying to pat the bear on the head.

The bear tried to bite him, but the guild master dodged the bear’s mouth. Then the guild master laughed, and the bear looked disappointed. It was so strange that the girl laughed.

Their mom got a job at the Adventurer Guild.

The girl and her sister would play at the guild while their mom worked.

“Don’t any of you dare hurt this girl or this bear. If you do, then I’ll take your adventurer cards away.”

The guild master introduced them and said that to the adventurers. All of the adventurers were surprised, but they agreed not to hurt them. The black bear was with their mom, and the white bear was with the little sister, and the girl had her bear, too. Since the mom couldn’t work very long hours, the girl and her sister helped with monster-harvesting work. She became known as the girl with the bear in the Adventurer Guild.

Then one day, the bear asked the girl to go to the woods, so they took a walk to the nearby forest. The bear grew back to their original size and let the girl ride them. They ran through a field and through the woods. The bear was very fast. Then, after running through the forest, they ran along a road until the bear stopped.

“There are monsters.”

The girl was nervous when the bear told her this. The bear ran more slowly. The girl saw several wolves.

“There are people.”

There was a wagon near the monsters. A man with a rod was nearby trying to protect the wagon.

“Get away!” the man yelled at the wolves and swung his rod.

When they looked closely, someone who looked like a mom was protecting a little kid.

The wolves growled and tried to attack the mother and child near the wagon. The mother held her child very close.

The girl remembered when her mom protected her on their way to the town. The girl wanted to protect the family, but she didn't have the strength to.

"Bear, please save them!" The bear would be in danger, but the only thing the girl could do was ask the bear for help.

The bear understood how the girl felt and ran to the carriage. The bear growled at the wolves and in response, the wolves tried to attack the bear. The bear growled even more to intimidate them, and the wolves all ran away. The girl was very relieved.

"Are you all right?" the girl asked the family that had been attacked.

"A bear!"

The father pointed his rod at the bear. The girl explained that the bear wasn't dangerous. Once the father understood, he put down his rod. Then he said thank you to the girl.

The family was apparently delivering fruit to the town, but the wagon got stuck in a rut, and they were surrounded by the wolves and couldn't escape.

The father looked at the wagon and seemed unsure. The horses tried to pull the wagon, but it wouldn't budge out of the rut.

"Bear..."

The girl asked the bear for help, so the bear went behind the wagon. Then the bear pushed the wagon from behind and it got out of the rut. Now the wagon could move.

The father thanked them again and gave the girl fruit. The girl smiled because

she had something for her mom and sister, who were still at the guild.

On another day, a little while later, word in the Adventurer Guild spread that the girl and the bear had saved the family. The family had come to town and asked about the bear. Since the guild master had told the guild that the bear could get bigger, the adventurers knew that the family was talking about the bear. The mother was upset at the girl for doing something so dangerous.

A few days later, the guild master asked the girl to come to the guild.

He had a quest for the girl. The girl was very confused as she held her bear. The girl wasn't an adventurer. Normally only adventurers took quests. The girl was even more surprised when the guild master told her the quest.

The most important person in town, the feudal lord, had made the quest. The guild master said that it was safe for the girl to go. She was told to take the bear with her.

"I'm counting on you," he said.

She felt safe with the bear. The guild master tried to reach out to the bear, but the bear tried to bite him. He dodged the bear again.

Her mom was worried after hearing everything but because of what the guild master said, she let the girl go.

The girl went with the bear to the feudal lord's house. The house was very big, and the girl stood there looking at it for a long time.

"It's ginormous."

The girl wanted to go home, but then another small little girl opened the gate and peeked her head out.

"A bear?!"

A girl with golden hair wearing very pretty clothes came out of the gate. To the girl, the other little girl looked like a princess.

The golden-haired girl asked, "Adventurer, is this your bear?"

The girl didn't know what the golden-haired girl was asking at first. After talking about it for a while, the girl found out that the golden-haired girl thought she had fought off monsters using a bear. The girl wasn't an adventurer and just happened to come across the monsters on a walk. She explained that all she had done was ask the bear to chase the monsters away. She hadn't done anything herself.

Then she said that she had been called to the house. Then the golden-haired girl told the girl that she had called them there. The golden-haired girl wanted to meet the bear and the girl everyone had been talking about.

The girl was invited inside, and they talked all about the bear. They had a very fun time together and became fast friends. The Bear and the Girl, Volume 4.
The end.

Chapter 535:

The Bear Finishes Drawing a Picture Book

I DREW A PICTURE BOOK. The girl's family relied on the guild master for help.

"The person they knew wasn't Dad?" Fina asked.

"They need permission from the top person around to keep the bears, so I thought this would work better."

I didn't want to make this a book about bears being discriminated against, so it was time for an authority figure to join the story. Sorry, Gentz, but you just have no power.

"Right, Dad couldn't help them."

Aw, I didn't want her to say that. I started to feel bad for Gentz. Still, I'd made my decision because I thought the same thing, so I couldn't argue against it now. Besides, the reason why Tiermina would know the guild master was because she used to be an adventurer.

"Also you made the guild master wet his pants."

Fina laughed because of what the bear said in the book.

"I wanted to give him a weakness, but the real guild master hasn't peed himself."

I had to protect the actual guild master's honor. I didn't know anything about the guild master's past, so I had the guild master help out the girl's family.

"So their mom works at the Adventurer Guild."

"The orphans and kokekko don't exist in the book, after all. You actually worked at the Adventurer Guild, so I wanted it to match that."

I'd been thinking of having the bear lead the girl to kokekko in the woods, but that would mean adding in the Merchant Guild. I felt like the girl would end up

getting harassed for starting a business without permission, so I ended up trashing that idea. It wouldn't be fun to write a story like that.

Besides, if I went too far from real life events, it'd make thinking up new volumes difficult. If it seemed appropriate to add in the orphanage's story and the kokekko, then I could draw them then.

"So the girl also harvests from monsters?"

Since the mom works at the guild so often, the girls also end up helping out by doing harvesting work.

"That's because I modeled the girl after you."

"Ugh..."

Fina looked embarrassed, but what could I do? The girl was Fina, and the bear was me.

"So the girl walks around outside town?"

"I wanted the girl who'd be Noa to show up in this volume. I'd need the bear to do something for that to happen."

In actuality, I'd defeated a ton of monsters, then Cliff and Noa had heard about it, and they'd invited me over. That was how I met Noa. Anyway, in order to have the girl in the book meet the daughter of the feudal lord, I had the girl and the bear stand up to some monsters, just to simplify things.

"So the girl isn't going to be an adventurer like you then?"

Fina looked a little disappointed. Was that what she wanted be to when she grew up?

"She's young and isn't strong by herself."

I was also pretty powerless. If I didn't have my bear gear, I would be utterly useless in battle. If the girl didn't have the bear with her, then she wasn't useful in battle either. Still, the thought of making her a bear-taming adventurer had crossed my mind. When I thought about it more though, I felt like the girl's

mother wouldn't give permission for that, so I decided not to go the adventurer route. Plus personally, I wasn't actually doing a ton of adventurer activities in real life.

I ended up reusing another scene of someone getting attacked on the road.

"Is the family in the wagon supposed to be the family we came across on the way to Lady Misa's birthday party?"

"I'm surprised you figured it out."

I was drawing from life experiences for the book. I thought that would make thinking up the story easier.

"The wagon got stuck in a rut, just like in real life."

Fina had realized it because she'd been there too. Anyone else reading wouldn't know about that.

Then the bear and the girl save the family from the monsters that attack them.

"The girl isn't running away."

"That's because I want readers of the book to want to help people in need, too."

I wanted the kids who read the book to help other people out when they got into situations where they could lend someone a hand. That was what made me draw the book like this. When the girl was attacked, her mom protected her from the monsters and the bear saved them. If a kid was offered a helping hand when they were down, they'd offer a hand to others too.

People who were helped would help others. It was important to want to help people in need rather than ignore the problems of the world, at least when it was within their abilities. You shouldn't try to do things that you weren't actually capable of. Even if adventurers helped someone being attacked by monsters, that person couldn't necessarily take down monsters themselves. It was still important to call for help and not to give up on people.

So, the girl in the book realizes she can't save them herself and asks the bear to help her.

After that, word spreads that the bear and girl fought (or shooed off) the monsters. The feudal lord's daughter hears about it.

"It's Lady Noa."

"She asked to be put in the book."

After a while, the girl is called in by the guild master and goes to the feudal lord's house. This was something I'd experienced, too. Back then, my presence had been demanded by nobility, so it wasn't all a good memory. If I hadn't gone, then I never would have met Noa. I felt nostalgic remembering it now.

That had also made Noa fall in love with bears. It kinda ruined her life if you thought about it, although I couldn't blame myself for that.

Then the girl who's meant to be Noa shows up in the book. She's a girl with long, golden hair.

"Hee hee. Noa looks so cute in the book."

Cliff had been there too, but it was too much of a bother to draw him, so I cut him out. The issue was Ellelaura. I felt like I could have had her live with them, but I just introduced the girl modeled after Noa for now.

The protagonist girl becomes friends with the noble girl with the help of the bear. This was because I wanted people to become friends regardless of status, just like Fina and Noa were.

I ended the book with a drawing of the girls and the bear enjoying themselves.

"The girl and Lady Noa are smiling."

The two girls were smiling with the bear in between them. I finished drawing

the last bit, and then the book was complete.

“I’m beat.”

“Thank you for your work,” Fina said as she offered me tea.

“This is good,” I said.

Fina seemed happy to hear me say that.

“You are so good at drawing, Yuna,” she said.

“Like I said to Sakura, it’s about practice. You learned how to harvest after practicing a lot too. It’s the same thing.”

Everyone was bad in the beginning. Well, some geniuses could get things done on their first try, but you couldn’t bank on that yourself.

“You’re an amazing adventurer, Yuna, and you can cook, and you can draw, and you help people in need. You’re amazing.”

“That’s only because I’m a little more grown than you, Fina. I’ve been cooking since I was young, and I drew whenever I was bored. Besides, you’re so young but you can do all sorts of chores.”

“That’s because Mom was sick.”

“Yeah, so you’re a great kid,” I said.

I’d learned how to fight through games, but I’d only gotten my mana from a god. And it wasn’t like I did as much people-saving as Fina thought. I only saved people I saw who I wanted to help. I wasn’t a good person like Fina was.

I just had more money than other people and some knowledge about cooking, and I could use magic and fight a little. I was lucky I could help so much—that’s all.

The royalty and the nobility could save way more people than me, and Fina had saved me when I met her. If I hadn’t met a nice girl like Fina, then I might have ended up a twisted person when I got to this world. I reached out to pat Fina on the head.

“What is this for?”

“I dunno, just felt right?”

Fina didn’t understand what was running through my mind, and I could practically see the question mark form over her head.

Chapter 536:

The Bear Brings Gifts from the Land of Wa

TO THANK FINA FOR HELPING me make my picture book, I gave her some candy. It was the artisanal candy I'd bought in the Land of Wa. I'd bought it after fighting the orochi and hadn't done anything with it since then.

I opened the tiered box that had the candy in it. It had all sorts of different colors of candy in different shapes. There were butterflies, birds, and fish in red, blue, and yellow, and animals in brown and stuff.

"It's so pretty. Are these candies?"

"They're artisanal candies, and they're sweet. You can pick the one you like."

"There's fish and fruit and animals and birds..."

"I can't believe that these are candies."

I agreed. It wasn't easy to learn how to make candy like this. The same applied to making a picture book like I had or Fina's harvesting abilities. None of those things could be learned overnight.

Fina looked into the box.

"What about these, Yuna?"

Fina was looking at a candy that was in the shape of a girl wearing a bear onesie.

"A little old man made it for me. Do you want to eat it?"

Fina shook her head.

"I don't think I could eat you..." Fina said as she selected a yellow chick from the box. I was sure she'd take the bear, though.

"Try licking it."

Fina licked it a few times.

“It’s sweet.”

She seemed to be enjoying the candy. The chick lost more and more of its shape as she licked. After a while, it was gone.

“It was good, but I’m a little sad.”

I felt the same, but that was just how candy worked. Even the nicest food was made to disappear. The best way to eat stuff was to be grateful to the person who made it as you ate it. If she thought the candy was pretty, I’m sure the man who had made it would be happy.

After that, I had Fina pick some others out for her family too.

“Pick some for Shuri, Tiermina, and Gentz,” I said.

“It’s so hard to decide. But I think Shuri would want a bear. And Mom and Dad would want these.”

She picked out an apple and a strawberry for Tiermina and Gentz.

“Then this one will be yours, Fina.”

I pulled out a bear and handed it to her.

“But I just had one.”

“That one was a thank-you for helping me with the book. It would be sad if you were the only one without one to eat. You should eat them with everyone.”

“Thank you.”

Fina seemed happy when she took the bear candy.

When I brought out something for her to put them in, she placed them carefully inside.

I headed out early in the morning when my businesses were closed to give out souvenirs I’d gotten in the Land of Wa.

First, I went to the Bear's Lounge. Morin and Karin were on the second floor. Nerin, who was one of their relatives, also lived with them.

"Yuna, good morning."

"Good morning."

Karin and Nerin greeted me when I got there. Morin was out at the market, so she wasn't in. For the time being, I decided to give Karin and Nerin their gifts.

"These are some souvenirs."

I handed Karin a small box with a wind chime in it. Karin took the box and opened it. Nerin, who was next to her, looked at it too.

"How pretty."

Fina and Shuri had picked one with a bird drawn on it.

"What is this?"

Nerin looked at it in wonder.

"Pick it up by the string on the top."

Karin did exactly that and pulled the wind chime out of the box. It made a tinkling sound as she did that.

"It's called a wind chime, and it makes a nice sound."

I figured it would be faster for them to hear it than for me to explain it. I created a light breeze using wind magic as Karin held it. The wind chime rang several times.

"What a pretty sound."

"The glass is see-through and pretty."

Karin and Nerin stared at the chime.

"It'll ring from the wind making it flutter, so put it by the window."

"Thank you, Yuna. I'll be sure to put this up."

“But is there only one?” Nerin asked as she looked at the chime.

“I have a few, but if you put up too many, it’ll just be noisy. I think one should be enough for the bakery.”

“I see.”

They started talking about where to put the chime.

“Make sure no one steals it.” Some customers had tried to take home the bear decorations.

“Oh, right. We’ll need to be careful.”

“Maybe we should talk to Auntie Morin?”

Karin and Nerin happily watched the chimes in the breeze. I was glad that they liked them. Then I pulled out another souvenir.

“And take something you like from here too.”

It was the box with the artisanal candies.

“These are pretty, too! Are they for decoration?”

“These are artisanal candies, and you lick them. They’re sweet and delicious.”

“They’re edible?”

“But why is there one of you, Yuna?”

They were looking at the one of a girl wearing a bear onesie. Well, yeah, I guess that had to be me, huh?

“He made it after seeing me.”

Karin and Nerin looked at the candy in wonder, but they didn’t pick it. Instead, they took flower candies. Karin took a red one and Nerin had a yellow one. They both marveled at the candy before starting to lick it.

“It’s sweet. I had no idea candy like this existed. You’re not going to sell this at the shop, are you...?”

“No, I wouldn’t ask for that.”

Karin seemed relieved. They were supposed to be a bakery, but they also sold pizza, potato chips, and cakes now. Not even I was ready to add artisanal candies to the menu. Besides, they weren't easy to make—you really needed an expert to do it.

“I just bought them while I was out and about. I thought they looked pretty unique.”

“I've never even seen these in the royal capital.”

“I haven't seen them in the town I live in either.”

Well they were from the Land of Wa, after all. Maybe they were in a shop somewhere, but it was probably hard to find them in this country.

“Also, it takes a person with special skill to make them. We wouldn't sell them all that easily.”

After I had them pick out something for Morin, I headed off to Anz where she lived at the Bear Dining Room.

“Huh? Yuna, are you here for breakfast? Would you like me to make you something?” Anz asked as soon as she saw me.

I made my own food and ate bread from my bear storage, so I was sure I rarely came here to eat.

“Nah, it's fine. I just had some gifts for you that I wanted to hand out. Is everyone here?”

“Yes, Forne and Bettie are relaxing in their rooms, I think, and Seno is probably still asleep.”

It wasn't really all that early anymore, so she probably should have been awake by now.

“Seno has taken to snoozing in.”

The restaurant was on break, just like the bakery. I liked a good lie-in as much

as anyone, but did she really want to sleep her day away? She was young, too. She could've used her day off for all sorts of things, like going out or going on dates and stuff.

I wondered if Anz was dating anyone yet. Deigha, Anz's dad, had asked me to find her someone to marry.

"What is it?" she asked. I guess she noticed me staring at her face.

"You're not going out anywhere on your day off?"

"Of course I will. There are so many ingredients here that Mileela doesn't have, so I'm going to walk around Crimonia."

Her eyes were glittering. Oof, a lost cause. Sorry, Deigha. There was no way I'd be able to find her someone to marry if she was this kind of nerd.

We'd need to be patient about it to get her married. Also, I needed her at the restaurant. She couldn't just run off to start a family.

"So, would you like me to gather everyone?"

"No, it's fine. You can give these to them."

I offered her the box with the wind chime in it, which Anz took.

"Can I open this?"

"Sure."

Anz opened it to reveal the wind chime painted with a goldfish inside.

"Oh!"

"You know what it is?"

"Yes, they're from the Land of Wa, aren't they? I've seen merchants selling them. Did you buy this from Mileela?"

"Well, something like that..."

I averted my eyes. I couldn't exactly tell her I'd taken a quick trip to the Land of Wa to buy it.

“They make such pretty sounds. They’re expensive, so I’ve never been able to buy one. Are you sure I can have something this nice?”

This one wasn’t all that pricey, since I’d bought it directly from the Land of Wa, but I couldn’t tell her that.

“Please don’t worry about it. You all work so hard that I wanted to thank you.”

“Thank you. I’ll gladly take it, then.” Anz looked happily at the wind chime.

“I also bought these, so choose one for each of you.”

I pulled out the box filled with candies.

“What is this?”

It seemed she didn’t know what artisanal candy was. I told her.

“Candy? But that’s a fish. And fruit, and animals. And this one is...”

She looked at a certain candy. It was the girl in the bear onesie, of course.

“You made yourself into a candy?”

Uh, it could have been anyone in a bear onesie, actually.

“Just ignore that. Do you want it?”

“No, I’m not so sure about that...” Anz said, then looked at the other candy.

She picked out five of them, including one for herself. A fish, a flower, a bird, a butterfly, and one that looked a little like a wolf—all different.

“I want to make sure there’s a variety left for the others.”

Made sense to me!

After I left the Bear Dining Room, I headed to the orphanage.

When I got there, the older kids were looking after the kokekko. I headed into the orphanage so I wouldn’t disturb them and went to the room where the

headmistress was.

“Ms. Yuna, welcome.”

She was taking care of the young kids. They were all sleeping against her because they felt safe with her.

“What has brought you here today?”

“I went out on a trip, so I brought back some souvenirs.”

“Thank you for everything you do for us. You’re always so generous to us.”

“Oh, that’s not true. You’re the one being generous taking care of the kids, and they’re also working hard.”

“That’s all thanks to what you’ve done.”

It made me feel embarrassed, so I cut the conversation short and pulled out a small box with a wind chime from my bear storage. I opened it and showed it to the headmistress.

“Please put this up near a window. It’ll make pretty sounds when the wind blows. It’s very soothing on hot days.”

I pulled the wind chime out of the box and let it ring.

“What a pretty sound.”

“I’m glad you like it. I’ve brought a few, so please put them up.” I’d bought several for the orphanage.

“The children will love these too. Thank you.”

I put the chime back into the box and handed it to her.

I also left behind some candy for the kids, the headmistress, Liz, and Neaf, and asked the headmistress to distribute everything. There were some kids who weren’t done with work yet, and some who were napping, after all. I was sure the headmistress would know how to do it without fights breaking out.

She was looking at the candy with curiosity. I guess she didn’t think it was

edible, either. Also, since I knew giving them bear candies would cause fights over who got one, I hadn't included any of those. The girl in the bear onesie was absent from the selection, too.

After I left the orphanage, I went to Noa. When I got there, the maid, Lala, led me to Noa's room.

"Yuna! Welcome!"

As soon as I entered, Noa giddily ran up to me. She had the Kumayuru and Kumakyu stuffed animals in her room. Next to them were the picture books. It was kind of like a merch shrine.

"What's brought you here today?"

"I brought back some souvenirs from a recent trip."

"You did?"

I gave her a box with a wind chime.

"Thank you. May I open it?"

"Yeah. I hope you like it."

"I'd love anything from you," she said, but then a handful of seconds passed by...

"Why doesn't it have a bear on it?!"

It had a blue fish on it instead.

"I wish it had a bear. Please paint one for me!"

"Hey, no demands." Then again, if I had a plain wind chime, I actually could paint on it. I mean, just a little glass-painting was no big deal. I could do that.

"I guess you don't want this, since it's not a bear?"

When I tried to take the wind chime away, Noa held it close to her chest, box and all. "Oh no, I do. I beg your pardon for being so willful. Lala, please put this

up by the window.”

“As you wish.”

Lala brought a stepstool in and hung the wind chime over the window. A breeze blew in and made it ding beautifully.

“What a pretty sound.”

“It would have been amazing if it had been a bear chime.”

She was ruined. It was my fault.

“Pick out your favorite one of these too.”

I pulled out the box filled with candies. I’d emptied a lot of it, but it still had some designs left.

“There are bears! And one of you! May I have both?”

That was a first.

“Just one.”

“Urgh. Then I’ll take a bear.” She took the regular bear. “Now, where shall I display this...”

“You’re supposed to eat it.”

“That would be such a waste. I couldn’t.”

“Then I’ll take it back home.”

I couldn’t bear seeing her put it in her bear shrine.

“You’re so mean, Yuna.”

“I’m not trying to be. But it’s candy, so you should eat it.”

I watched her to make sure she actually did so.

“It was very good, but the bear is gone.” She looked disappointed, but that was what candy was meant for—eating.

I also gave one to Lala, who said the same thing as Noa. After that, I

presented Noa with one more thing, though this wasn't something for her to keep. For a change of pace, I pulled out the new book.

"I drew another picture book, so I wanted you to see."

"A picture book!"

"Yeah. But I need to give it to Lady Flora, so you can't have this copy. It's just for looking at."

"That's all right. But you will be duplicating it, won't you?"

"That's what I'm planning."

I wanted to give copies to the orphans, and planned to ask ElleLaura to help with that.

"Then may I have one?"

Well, I knew she'd say that. I promised to give her one, and then I showed her the book I'd drawn with Fina.

Noa flipped through the pages. When the noble girl appeared, she stopped.

"Is this noble girl me?"

"You did say you wanted to be in the book. Do you not like it?"

Noa shook her head. "No, I am. I'm so happy."

She read all the way to the end, looking delighted all the while.

"So she became friends with the girl?"

"Well, you and Fina actually are friends in real life."

She only beamed brighter when I said that.

Chapter 537:

The Bear Makes Popcorn

WOULD THIS WORK?

I looked at the corn kernels I'd left to dry. They were from Talgwei's island. They felt hard to the touch, so I assumed that they were dry.

I got a frying pan ready, started a fire, and spread some oil in the pan. Then I poured in the dry corn kernels. This first time would be a trial run, so I didn't put that much in.

The kernels started to tumble around lightly in the pan. If things went as planned, they'd burst, and we'd have popcorn. That said, you couldn't use just *any* corn to make popcorn, and I had no idea if this was the right kind...

I waited in front of the frying pan to see if they'd pop. As I was watching them, I realized I shouldn't have been just staring—I'd forgotten the lid!

I quickly set it on the pan. The corn was going to go flying once it popped—because of the moisture on the inside or something, if I remembered right. If I didn't keep it covered, and this *was* the kind of corn that could make popcorn, I'd have a mess on my hands.

I was disappointed that I couldn't see the moment the corn popped, though. Food stalls made glass barriers to keep the kernels in. Maybe I should've done something similar.

As I was thinking about that, I heard a popping sound come from inside the pan. Then after one went off, I heard a succession of pops. *Pop!* I kept hearing it again and again. Wow. I was happy that this seemed like the right kind of corn.

I kept hearing *pop, pop, pop*. It seemed like it was going great. I tried to keep myself from opening the lid to check it out. If I opened it, there would be a disaster popping off all over the room.

I shifted the pan a little and waited for the popping to die down. After a while, it did. I turned off the flame and slowly opened the lid.

Wow, it was done. Not all of the kernels had popped, but I saw the familiar white shapes of popcorn inside. I sprinkled some salt over it and put it on a plate.

Okay, let's see how it tastes... I grabbed a few pieces and popped them into my mouth.

“Hot!”

I hadn't noticed, since I'd used my bear puppet hand, but it was too hot and burned my mouth. It tasted just like regular popcorn, though. I was a little more careful as I ate another piece. Gosh, this took me back.

Now I had another thing after potato chips to snack on. If I just had a Coke and a TV, then this would be great. Oh, and some anime! It would be the perfect day. If I'd even just had some manga or novels, I could go back to being a shut-in. Oh well.

I was just glad I'd done a good job making it. I popped another piece into my mouth, thinking about how I could flavor it with curry or cheese. I had soy sauce, so I could do soy sauce–butter flavor too. I tried to remember all the snack packaging from my old world, contemplating all the kinds of flavored popcorn I could make with the kernels I still had left.

I decided to summon Fina over to be a taste-tester. I pulled out my summoning tool: the bear phone.

“Hey, Fina. Are you free right now? Yeah, I'll be waiting. Come by soon.”

My bear phone was so handy. Even though I'd had a phone in my old world, I'd never really called people up on it. Since coming here, though, it'd been repeatedly useful for talking to people who were far away.

I decided to make more popcorn before Fina got here. While I was taking my time doing that, Fina came in. She was out of breath.

“Y-Yuna, what is that?”

She didn’t need to run all the way over here... I handed her a towel, since her face was all sweaty.

“I made some snacks, so I wanted you to try them.”

“Uh, then please tell me next time. It sounded really urgent.”

Really? Well...maybe it had come off that way.

I had Fina sit down and served her some chilled fruit juice. She drank that and calmed down. I placed some popcorn in front of her on a plate.

“What is this?” she asked. She wouldn’t know, considering it was her first time seeing it.

“It’s a snack called popcorn. I made all sorts of flavors, so try some.”

“Um, where’s the spoon?”

“What spoon?”

“Oh, so a fork?”

I never thought she’d ask for utensils to eat popcorn. I guess anyone who hadn’t tried it would assume they were essential. I mean, your fingers would end up gross from eating popcorn, just like with potato chips. Some people used chopsticks to avoid that, but I’d never heard of anyone trying that with a spoon or a fork.

“You can eat it with your hands, just like chips.”

Fina looked at her hands, then picked up a piece of popcorn and put it in her mouth.

“What do you think?”

“It tastes like salt.”

Right. Popcorn didn’t have much of a taste by itself.

“But it’s soft and feels interesting. But some of it is hard too.”

Oh, right. Sometimes the outside shell was hard.

“I tried flavoring it in different ways, so try these out.”

I had curry, soy sauce, and cheese flavors.

“They’re all good.”

“I’m glad.”

“What is this made of?”

“Corn. You’ve had it before.”

I pulled out the corn we’d collected on Talgwei and put it on the table.

“Yes, it was very good when it was boiled. And we had it at the barbecue at the Land of Wa.”

“Well, it’s a slightly different type from those ears. I had to dry the corn to make this.”



I showed her the dried kernels. She touched them.

“They’re very hard. These turn into those soft, white things?”

People believe what they see. So I started making popcorn right in front of Fina. I added oil to a heated pan and added the kernels of corn. Then I put on the lid.

After a while, we heard a pop. Fina startled. She flinched with every successive pop. I couldn’t help but laugh as I watched her face.

“Yuna, that’s so loud. Is everything okay?!”

“It’s fine. If I pull off the lid, it’d actually be bad.”

I wished I could have used a glass lid to show her the inside. If I wanted to do a demonstration, maybe I could do it with a single kernel?

The sounds died down and I opened the lid. The kernels had disappeared and were replaced with white popcorn.

Fina looked at the inside of the pan in wonder.

“I’ll just put in a little this time, so watch.”

I emptied the popcorn into a bowl and added three kernels to the frypan. This time I didn’t put the lid back on. After a while, we heard a pop, and the popcorn flew out of the pan onto the kitchen floor.

“That’s why it needs a lid.”

“Those hard things turn into that? That’s so weird.” Fina looked at the popcorn in wonder.

I had her take some home for Shuri, who hadn’t been able to come. I didn’t mind if Tiermina and Gentz had some too, of course, but I did tell her this: “Tell Tiermina I’m not necessarily going to serve this at the shops, okay?”

Tiermina was always worried about whether any new food would become part of the menu, so I wanted Fina to pass on that message. If I gave them more work, the kids would have a heck of a time, and I got the feeling that popcorn

would make the bakery go in a weird direction. If I was going to sell this, it'd work best in a food stand at a school festival.

The day after I made the popcorn, I used my bear gate to go to the royal capital to give Lady Flora souvenirs from the Land of Wa and the picture book.

Since I'd gone to the capital before going to the Land of Wa, it hadn't been all that many days since I'd last been there. It still felt nostalgic. I guess it'd felt so long because being in the Land of Wa had been so eventful.

I'd been thinking this over since getting back to Crimonia, but the culture, buildings, and clothes were all so different. The Land of Wa was like Kyoto, but this place felt like something from a video game set in Europe.

There was something the Land of Wa and the royal capital had in common, and that was this...

"A bear?" "A bear?" "Bear?" "A bear?" That's what people said when they saw me.

Gawking at bear onesies was universal. I wish that weren't something the countries had in common. I didn't want to be in a place where everyone around me was wearing onesies either, though. I pulled my bear hood over my face and tried to ignore the stares as I headed to the castle.

When I got to the gate of the castle, I called out to a soldier, like usual. "I'm here to see Lady Flora. Is that okay?"

One of the soldiers gave me permission and another one went running off. Same old, same old. I had the artisanal candies to share this time, but what were they going to do if I hadn't brought anything to eat?

While I thought that over, I headed straight to Lady Flora's room. Everyone who passed me on the way gave me little bows. Once I got to the door, I knocked and called in, "It's Yuna. May I come in?"

"Yuna?!"

I heard the sound of someone running. Then the door flew open, but the person who stood there wasn't Lady Flora, or even Ange.

"Teilia?"

Instead, I saw the person I'd met at the academy festival. Teilia was Lady Flora's older sister, and the king's other daughter. Another princess.

"Come in, Yuna."

"Why are you in Lady Flora's room?"

Teilia was a princess, but she let me call her by just her first name without any titles. She insisted, actually, so I didn't have much choice.

"I stopped by my sister's room to spend time with her. Did you come to see Flora?"

"I had a gift for her."

"You really coddle Flora, you know."

"I don't do that," I said as I headed into the room.

"Bear!"

Once I was inside, Lady Flora ran over to me when she saw me. She hugged my soft tummy. Or, correction—she hugged my bear onesie's soft tummy. My stomach was way tighter than my onesie's flabby one. I patted her head.

"Have you been doing well?"

It'd only been two weeks since I'd last seen her.

"Yeah!"

Lady Flora gave me an energetic reply. She was carrying her Kumakyu stuffed animal. I was happy to see her playing with it.

"Madame Yuna, welcome," Ange said. *Guess she's here too.*

"Pardon the intrusion."

"It's no intrusion at all. You're very welcome, as Lady Flora is always happy to

see you. I will leave Lady Flora with you while I go prepare some tea.”

Ange lightly bobbed her head as she left to prepare the tea. I took Lady Flora to a chair. Teilia followed right after us.

“Flora really does like you. Flora, do you like Yuna?”

“Yeah. I love the bear.”

It was a little embarrassing to hear her say it so directly. Something told me she wouldn’t still be saying that if I took off my bear suit—like loving a mascot, but not the person inside. Kind of a bummer to think of it like that.

“So, what did you bring this time?”

“The next volume of the picture book and some rare things I got while I was out in a faraway place.”

I was planning on giving them the artisanal candies and a wind chime in addition to the book.

“A pik-ture book?!”

Lady Flora reacted to that. I guess she’d been looking forward to the next installment.

“Far away? Did you go somewhere?”

“Just for a bit.”

I couldn’t say I’d gone to the Land of Wa, so I kept it ambiguous.

“Actually, how have you been, Teilia? How is the academy?”

“We’re on break.”

Ah, that was why she wasn’t in her uniform. She wasn’t wearing ordinary clothes either, though. Her outfit wasn’t exactly formal, but stately enough to make her look regal. I supposed princesses couldn’t just dress like normal people did.

I’d planned on handing off the book first, but I’d be sad if the wind chime got

ignored because everyone was too focused on the book, so I switched the order. I pulled the small box containing the wind chime out of my bear storage. Lady Flora tilted her head slightly and asked, "Is the pik-ture book in there?"

"It's not in here," I said.

I lifted the top off the box to reveal a translucent wind chime with a red flower painted on it. Lady Flora stood on her tiptoes to peer at it.

"What is this?"

"It's called a wind chime, and it makes a sound when the wind moves it."

I pulled the wind chime out and swayed it a bit so it made a sound. It started to ding.

"That's a pwetty sound."

"If you put it up by a window, the breeze will jostle it and it'll make a sound."

I shook it again.

"It really is such a pretty sound. Do you have one for me too?"

Teilia looked at me expectantly.

"...I don't."

I turned away. I hadn't actually thought about getting her one, so I couldn't do anything now.

"You really do coddle Flora, Yuna."

I ignored Teilia and said to Ange, who was bringing over tea, "Ange, could you put this up by a window in this room later? If it's too loud, you can take it down."

If the wind was too strong, it'd get annoying. A gentle breeze was perfect, though.

"Yes, I will."

I'd told her she could do it later, but she started on the task immediately. She

brought a chair to the window and stood on top of it to put up the wind chime. Since it was indoors, it would only sound when the window was open.

All of us watched the wind chime. It swayed and made dinging sounds in the breeze. It really felt like summer. It was very much a thing from Japanese summer, and I guess that made me truly Japanese.

Whenever the breeze blew by and made the wind chime ding, Lady Flora would get excited. We sipped on the tea that Ange poured as we listened to the wind chime. Then I pulled out another souvenir from the Land of Wa.

“What’s in there?”

“Candy,” I answered Teilia.

“Ha ha. I finally get to eat one of your gifts, Yuna. You always come when I’m out.”

Teilia was a student. A lot of the time when I stopped by, she’d be at school. I couldn’t help that I missed her.

I opened the top of the lid to the candies and showed off the different shapes. I’d given a lot to the orphanage, but I’d bought out the entire cart. I still had plenty.

Teilia and Lady Flora peeked into the box.

“How pretty!”

“Wow! There’s flowers and birds!” Lady Flora said.

“There are fruit and fish too. Are these edible?”

“Yeah, they’re a kind of sugar candy. You lick it to eat it, and they’re nice and sweet.”

I pulled one out of the box. It was the bear onesie one. I was a little embarrassed, but I gave it to Lady Flora.

“It’s a bear.”

“It’s shaped like Yuna.”

“Well, it’s based off of me.”

“Isn’t that nice, Flora?”

But Lady Flora only held the candy in her hand and stared at it.

“What’s wrong?”

“I eat the bear?”

“It is candy.”

Hm. I bet she felt the same as Noa.

“Will it go away if I eat it?”

“Yes, it would.”

“Uhh, I won’t eat it.”

She gave it back to me.

“Huh. I might.”

“No! You can’t eat bear!” When Teilia tried to take the candy, Lady Flora yelled.

“Okay, okay. Don’t shout. I won’t eat it.”

“Weally?”

“Yes, really.”

I was a little happy that everyone felt bad about eating me.

“Okay, you two choose what you’d like,” I said, and Teilia picked out a red flower.

“Here, Lady Flora.”

I held the box in front of her. She made grumbling sounds, then took the same kind of flower as Teilia. Did she want the same thing as her sister? It was blue.

Lady Flora popped it right into her mouth.

“It’s sweet,” she said, all smiles.

“They really are pretty. I almost feel bad eating them.”

“They’re food, so if you don’t eat them, they’d be going to waste.” If you didn’t eat them, that’d be an insult to the artisan.

Teilia popped the candy into her mouth, too, and said the same thing as Lady Flora. They really were sisters.

“Ange, please have one.”

“Are you sure?”

“You can eat it later if you can’t eat it now. And please take one for your kid, too.”

“Thank you.”

Ange seemed apologetic but happy. I handed off some for Zelef too. I also asked her to tell him I had no recipe for this. It wasn’t like I’d made it. I didn’t want him asking for a recipe later.

I took one too and was licking it when there was a knock at the door. It was His Majesty, here as usual. The queen was next to him. I started to really worry for the country. The wind chime dinged in the breeze.

“What? What is that sound?”

“It’s Yuna’s gift.”

Teilia looked over at the hanging wind chime. As the wind blew past, it kept ringing.

“What a nice sound.”

“It’s made to be pleasant.”

As we listened to the wind chime, the king and queen took seats. Then they looked at the box on the table.

“Looks like we made it?”

The king scowled as he peered into the box.

“What is this? Flowers and fish? Animals and fruit?”

“They’re artisanal sweets. They’re sort of sugar candies.”

I gave them the same explanation I had Teilia. That was the only one I had.

“They’re sooo sweet and good!” Lady Flora said, and smiled.

“You can pick out the ones you want. There are all sorts of shapes and colors, but they all taste the same.”

The king and queen hesitantly picked up the candies.

“It looks so beautiful.”

“There are bears too.”

“Oh, this girl is dressed like a bear.”

They inspected the bears, and then the girl in the bear onesie.

“Are you sure these are candies? You’re not trying to pull my leg, are you?”
They didn’t seem to believe that they were edible, because the candy was so pretty.

“You’ll see if you try it.”

The king took a bird candy and gave it a dubious look.

“Oh, it is good. It’s sweet, just like sugar candy.”

While the king was hesitating, the queen had already started eating hers.
When the king saw that, he started eating too.

Chapter 538:

The Bear Heads to the Capital

THE KING, THE QUEEN, and Teilia didn't even hesitate to reach for a second candy. I didn't mind, since I still had some left, but I didn't think it'd be good for them to get a ton of sugar in a day, so I put away the box. The king looked disappointed, but adults needed to be careful about their sugar intake.

I watched Lady Flora finish her candy, then pulled the picture book from my bear storage.

"This is the new picture book."

I offered the book to her, and Lady Flora happily took it.

"Thank you, bear." She smiled in satisfaction and started reading.

"Is this another bear book?" Teilia stood up from her seat and made her way to Lady Flora.

"Flora, can I see for a bit?"

Teilia reached for it, but Lady Flora protected it.

"You can't take it!"

"Just for a little?"

"No!"

"Then let me look at it with you?"

Lady Flora looked between the book and her sister.

"Yeah, okay."

Teilia patted Lady Flora's head and brought a chair to sit next to her sister. They started paging through the book together. They were such good sisters.

"Ad-ven-chewer?" Lady Flora murmured.

It seemed she didn't know what an adventurer was.

"Uh, they're people who fight monsters," Teilia told her.

The concept was a little advanced for Lady Flora. Even Teilia's explanation didn't seem to get through. Teilia thought for a bit, and then seemed to have an idea.

"They're like the knights who protect you."

"Knights?"

"Yeah, the knights."

"They fight."

After all of that, it seemed like Lady Flora understood. Sometimes kids needed a little more help to understand when they were young. Well, people who were reading with them could tell them anyway.

After that, Lady Flora asked Teilia questions as they read.

"Ange, please have Ellelaura copy this later."

"Yes, I will inform her."

Ange seemed happy as she poured another cup of tea. Looked like Ange wanted the book too.

"Actually, where is Ellelaura?"

Normally she was with the king, but not today.

"She's at work. I think she should be outside today."

So she actually was working. I guess sometimes pigs did fly, and hell was pretty chilly this time of year. If she wasn't going, then it'd probably be best if I got some candy ready for her. I didn't want her complaining later.

The king went back to work once he was done eating, and the queen seemed to have something to do too. They both left the room. Ange took the candy and

headed to Zelef.

Lady Flora and Teilia asked me to summon my bears, so I did in their normal size. They both latched onto my bears' stomachs.

"It's soft. I'm in heaven."

Teilia buried her face in Kumayuru's stomach. Lady Flora copied her and did the same to Kumakyu. It was nice that the room was big enough to summon both Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

"I want to walk around with them in the castle," Lady Flora said.

Teilia shot her down. "That'll cause a commotion, so you can't."

"Uh, yeah, the knights might attack them if they see them, and that wouldn't be good."

"Attack the bears?"

"That might happen if we go outside with them."

"You can't go outside, okay?"

Lady Flora hugged Kumakyu after her sister explained. My bears weren't going anywhere. Kumakyu crooned and gently patted Lady Flora on the head.

"I was so surprised the bear was so tame, but I'm even more surprised that they seem to understand language. Kumayuru, would you let me ride you?" Teilia asked.

Kumayuru sat down for her, so it would be easier to get on.

"Thank you."

Teilia got onto Kumayuru's back.

"No fair! Me too."

Kumakyu also leaned down for Lady Flora. Lady Flora tried to get on, but Kumakyu was too tall for her, even when sitting down.

I grabbed Lady Flora and gave her a boost.

“Thank you, bear.”

They rode around the room on my bears. I didn't have any plans in particular, so I just spent a lazy day with them.

After a while, Lady Flora was tired from playing and fell asleep right on top of Kumakyu. Ange was back, so she picked Lady Flora up and took her to bed.

“Bear...”

She was talking in her sleep. I wondered if she meant me? Or maybe Kumakyu?

After Lady Flora was on the bed, Ange set the Kumakyu stuffed animal next to her, and Lady Flora took it while still unconscious. She looked so happy.

“All right. I'm going home,” I said.

“Thank you for today, Yuna. Come back again when I'm around.”

“Well, if the timing works out. Can you tell Lady Flora that I'll be back?”

“She might cry if you and your bears are gone when she wakes up.”

“It'll be fine. That's why she has her stuffed animal.”



Lady Flora hugged her Kumakyu.

After I said goodbye to Teilia, I left the castle.

I still had time. Since the academy had a day off, Shia would be at home if she wasn't out. I had a wind chime and some candy for her too, so I decided to go see her. If she wasn't home, I'd just hand things off to the maid, Surilina. I also needed to give Ellelaura her presents. I didn't want to deal with her complaints later.

Once I got to Ellelaura's estate, their maid, Surilina, came to greet me.

"Is Shia in?"

"Yes, she is in the garden today."

Surilina took me to the flower bed.

"Yuna, you're here?"

Shia seemed happy when she turned around and saw me. Also notable was that she had dirt on her face.

"What were you doing?"

"I was fixing up the flower bed."

"I planned to do the chore on my own," Surilina said, "but Lady Shia was kind enough to offer help."

"I don't have school, so I want to help out."

She'd pulled up the weeds, leaving just the pretty flowers. I'd never heard of a noble girl helping out with gardening in any manga or novels I'd read.

"Is this the flower bed I helped make?" I'd done that once with Surilina when I visited for the king's birthday festival. The same plants seemed to be blooming in it now.

"Yes! The flowers are blooming beautifully." Surilina grinned.

“That’s because you worked so hard to tend to them,” I told Surilina.

“And you also talked to them every day,” Shia added.

Surilina seemed a little embarrassed when we both praised her.

“I’ll prepare tea, so let’s go inside. Please wash your face and hands before you return to your room, Shia.”

Shia felt her face and rubbed at the dirt. It just smudged. Surilina and I both laughed.

I sat down in a chair after being led into the house and Shia came into the room.

“Ah, I’m so tired.”

She sat down. Her face was clean and very pretty.

“Thank you for your help today, Lady Shia. Thanks to you, the chores were done quickly.”

Surilina poured the tea as she talked.

“It was fun for me too.”

Shia was a nice girl, just like Noa. She seemed thirsty and drank the tea that Surilina poured right away.

“Tea after working is so good. So, what’s brought you here today, Yuna? Did you need something? You can come anytime you would like, even if you don’t, of course.”

Noa had told me something similar before. Sisters!

“Why are you smiling like that?”

“It’s nothing,” I told Shia. “I just have some gifts for you.”

First, I pulled out the small box containing the wind chime.

“What is it?”

“It’s called a wind chime, and it makes a nice sound.”

I gave her the same explanation I’d given Teilia. I’d let her think about where she wanted to put it later and just set it up in the window of that room for the time being. We opened the window, and when a breeze passed by, the wind chime started to ring.

“What a pretty sound.”

“It might get too noisy if the wind is too strong,” I said, “but if there’s a gentle breeze, it’s just right.”

Today was perfect for a wind chime, so it rang prettily. Shia and Surilina quietly listened.

“I also bought these from the same town. They’re edible.”

I pulled out the box of artisanal candy from my bear storage.

“You can eat those?”

“They’re candy. I think this might be perfect, after all that work you put in at the flower bed.”

Sweets were great when you were tired. I pulled off the box’s lid. There weren’t as many now, but I still had some left. I’d buy more the next time I was in the Land of Wa.

“Really? Are you sure this is candy?” Shia peered into the box and reacted in the same way as everyone else.

“Yeah. They all taste the same, so just pick one you like.”

Shia looked at the candy in curiosity and took a rabbit-shaped one.

“It’s so pretty, I almost feel like it’s a waste eating it.”

“Please have one too, Surilina.”

I tried giving her one too.

“Then I will take you up on the offer.”

Surilina took a seat and made the same face Noa had before picking a red flower. Then they both popped the candies into their mouths.

“These are so good.”

“Yes, they’re sweet and delicious.”

“You’ve got a sweet tooth, Yuna.”

“You think so?” That didn’t sound like me.

“Well, you also showed us how to make cotton candy at the festival, and there’s the pudding and cake.”

Okay, now that she mentioned it, I did make a lot of sweets. But I also made chips and popcorn too. In order to prove it, I pulled out the popcorn.

“What is this?”

“It’s called popcorn. This isn’t sweet.”

“Um, so I just pick it up and eat it?”

As a noble lady, Shia seemed resistant to eating with her hands.

“Yeah, normally, you’d pick it up to eat it, but it’s a little sticky.”

“Lady Shia, shall I bring a spoon?”

“I can eat it like this.”

Shia reached for the popcorn and grabbed a few pieces.

“It’s salty and soft. Did you make this too, Yuna?”

“I didn’t make the candies, but I did make this.”

“There are so many foods that I don’t know about.”

Shia and Surilina listened to the sound of the wind chime and ate the candy and popcorn. It was all a big hit.

I made sure not to forget to give some candy to Surilina for Ellelaura. If I didn’t, she’d complain, and I didn’t want to deal with that.

Chapter 539:

The Bear Goes to See Shia

“I WOULDN’T HAVE BEEN IN the capital next week, so I’m glad you came today.”

As Shia ate the candy and popcorn, she said something similar to Teilia. It was difficult for me to time my visit exactly when they had a break from school, since I just did things whenever I felt like it. What was special about next week?

“Is something happening next week?”

“I’m going to Yufaria, so I won’t be around here for a while.”

The town of Yufaria? I kind of felt like I’d heard about the place. I couldn’t quite place it.

“What are you going there for?”

“I’m going to the campus there since they’re having a magic exchange event. Students from both schools will show off what we can do by competing against each other. I was selected as a representative.”

“An exchange with another school? I didn’t know that was a thing.”

“If I lose, then I’ll work harder for next year. If I win, then I’ll try to win again next year too. None of us can stand to lose, since this has been a tradition passed down by previous students for a long time.”

In manga and stuff, neighboring schools sometimes had showdowns with each other when they put on sports or culture festivals. I wondered if it was something like that.

“You must be pretty amazing if you were selected as a representative for that, Shia.”

“I might have been chosen because I’m a noble, though.”

“That isn’t the case at all. We all know how much you practiced, Lady Shia. You were selected because of your merits,” Surilina said as she listened to us.

“But if Yuna had been going to school, I’m sure she would have been selected.”

Unfortunately, I wasn’t a student.

“So, I think I’ve heard of Yufaria before.” It just wouldn’t stop nagging me from a corner of my mind.

“Maybe because of back then?”

“Back when?”

Uh, when? I tilted my head to the side quizzically.

“Remember, Yuna, back when we went to the beach, when you had the group trip to Mileela?”

I’d taken Fina, Noa, and all the orphans on an employee trip to Mileela. Shia had come too. But how was that relevant to Yufaria?

“You don’t remember? When you invited Rulina and we talked about swimsuits, she said that she had one because she’d gone to Yufaria.”

Plonk. I clapped my bear puppets together as I remembered. Right, that was a conversation we’d had. I’d worried about what to do for Rulina’s swimsuit, but she’d already been to a town with a lake and bought one there. She said the town was called Yufaria. That was why I kind of remembered hearing about it before.

“I’m surprised you remembered all of that, Shia.”

“Well, we rode on your bear golem. It left a lasting impression, so I remember the conversation,” Shia said as she smiled. Still, great recall.

“So you have an event, then. Sounds like fun.”

In a manga, this would’ve been an inter-school competition or something. Or a battle between clubs, or sports teams.

“I’m looking forward to going to Yufaria, but everyone’s putting a lot of pressure on me. Would you like to participate too?”

“I’m not a student, though.”

“You can just wear the uniform I gave you at the academy festival.”

True, I still had that in my bear storage.

“We’d get in trouble with the other students and the teachers.”

“They won’t mind if they see how strong you are.”

Unfortunately, it wasn’t me that was strong. That was all the bear gear. If I didn’t have that, I couldn’t even use magic.

“Sorry, but I’m going to have to turn you down.”

“That’s a shame. If you’d been part of it, we would have won for sure.”

“You’ll need to do the legwork to make it happen without me, then.”

Shia gave me an awkward smile. It was still a competition between schools, so I couldn’t blame her for being worried.

“Could I go to cheer you on?”

“To cheer me on?”

I doubted there were many students as good with magic as Shia was, but it would be interesting to see what others my age could do, at least this once. I’d seen some magic at the academy festival, but none of it involved combat.

“Oh, I know. How about I bring Noa too? Then it might motivate her, right? Actually, would we even be allowed to watch in the first place?”

You usually couldn’t attend sports festivals in Japan unless you were directly related to the school. There would be no point if Noa was allowed in as family, but I wasn’t. If it was like the academy festival, where normal people were allowed in, on the other hand, then I’d be able to go.

“Anyone who’s a student or who has a connection with one can go, so I can

invite you in.”

“Then maybe I’ll go.”

Lately, Fina was the only one who I’d been taking with me everywhere. If I didn’t use opportunities like this, I’d never get to bring Noa with me places. Noa and Shia probably would want to see each other too.

“Wouldn’t it be a lot of work to bring Noa from Crimonia?”

“I have my bears, so it’ll be fine. And Noa’s generally a good girl who listens.”

If I told her she wasn’t allowed to do something, she’d pout but she’d still listen. She wouldn’t start throwing a tantrum or anything. But she would go rogue when it came to bears.

“Then if Noa can come, please tell her to remember her swimsuit.”

“We’ll be able to swim?”

“Yes, I think we still will. I’ve heard that everyone goes out for a swim after the gathering is over each year.”

“Is this your first time?”

“Yes, that’s why I’m so nervous.”

Well, it was probably more common to be nervous during a tournament than not. Most people going to other places they weren’t familiar with would be nervous about that too.

“I wonder if Father will allow Noa to go. Shall I ask Mother?”

“Umm, I’m proposing it, so I’ll ask, and I don’t want to owe Ellelaura a favor. That seems like it could lead to trouble later.”

“Uh, I can’t deny that. Then I’ll write Father a letter, so could you give that to him? I think he might be more likely to say yes then.”

“I think that Cliff would like a letter from you more than Ellelaura anyway.”

“Do you think so?”

“Fathers usually love their daughters.” My dad wasn’t like that, but I was pretty sure most fathers spoiled their daughters.

“He was worried about men going up to Noa during the academy festival too. I think it’ll work if you write something nice to him.” If Ellelaura was the stick, then Shia was the carrot.

“All right. I’ll go to my room and write a letter, so please wait a bit. Surilina, please tell Yuna how to get to Yufaria.”

Shia left the room. Surilina gave me directions.

“Oh, it’s in the opposite direction from the capital,” I said. I had no idea how accurate the map was, but it didn’t look much farther from the capital than Crimonia. There was also a road that led there, so we wouldn’t get lost.

“Yes, so it may take some time.”

“I have my bears, so it should be okay.”

“Of course. You have come to the capital several times before on them, after all.”

That was actually thanks to my bear gate. It would be easier if I just let Noa in on the bear gate secret too, but I think she’d be happy to ride on my bears again.

After I talked with Surilina for a while, Shia came back.

“Yuna, thank you for waiting. Please give this to Father. I’m not sure how much it will help, though.”

“Sorry in advance if it doesn’t work out.”

“Please come see me, even if Noa can’t come. I’d still be happy if only you came.”

I could take Fina with me if that happened, but I’d just dragged her with me to the Land of Wa, so probably best to give her some time.

Shia went on to tell me when the gathering would be taking place.

“If I could have left with you from the capital, I could have ridden on your bears. That’s too bad.”

“But aren’t you going with other students? They would be scared if they saw Kumayuru and Kumakyu, so I couldn’t do that anyway.”

Shia also asked me to meet her at the capital so we could leave together, but I said no to that too. I didn’t want to deal with all the fuss. It’d just put me on the spot too. I wouldn’t mind taking just Shia, but I wasn’t going to travel with people I didn’t know. I couldn’t use my bear house, and it’d just wear on me.

Then they told me more about Yufaria and Shia told me where to meet her.

“I look forward to seeing you and Noa.”

“I’ll try my best to get Cliff’s permission.”

If Noa was being good, I was optimistic Cliff would say yes.

Chapter 540:

The Bear Hears about Shia's Exchange Gathering

THE DAY AFTER I GOT BACK from the capital, I went over to Noa to invite her to Shia's exchange gathering in Yufaria.

"What are you here for today, Yuna? Are you here to spend time with me? Would you like to go out? We could ride outside on Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

When I came, Noa seemed excited.

"How are your studies going?"

"I've kept up with them, so it's been all right."

"That's good. I have a sort of present for you since you've been good—or rather an invitation. The academy in the capital is having a magic competition with the school in Yufaria. It seems like Shia will be part of it. Would you like to go?"

Noa didn't even hesitate and shouted her reply. "Let's go! I'd love to."

"In that case, we'll need permission from Cliff."

"I'll ask Father."

Noa headed right out to Cliff.

"Are you sure he's not working? Can we really bother him?"

"It'll be okay."

"Then how about I ask with you?"

"Will you really?"

"Well, I did propose it, after all."

I'd also told Shia that I'd bring Noa. And I had the letter from Shia to Cliff, so things would go better if I came with her. We headed to Cliff's office together,

and Noa knocked on the door and entered once she got permission to go in.

“What are you doing here, Yuna?”

He seemed peeved to see me. I wondered why.

“I had a favor to ask for.”

“Father, may I go to support Shia with Yuna?”

“Support Shia for what?”

Cliff had no idea what was going on. I told him about the event.

“Oh, that.” It seemed he understood now.

“Father, I’d like to go. I’d like to cheer on Shia.”

“I have a letter from Shia too.”

“From Shia? Not Ellelaura?”

“Shia and I are asking for permission this time,” I said.

I handed the letter to Cliff. He took it and read it. His eyes became gentler. He really seemed happy to receive a letter from his daughter.

“All right. You may.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure Shia will be more motivated with Noa around.”

“Thank you, Father!” Noa smiled.

“And there is no simple way to get her to Yufaria, since it’s so far. If you took her, it would be better for Noa.”

Yeah, it was close enough to travel to from the capital, but from Crimonia, it was likely a difficult journey by carriage.

“Yufaria is the place with the lake, isn’t it?”

“Do you know about it?”

“Shia told me a little. She said not to forget your swimsuit.”

“You can have your fun, but don’t forget to look around and learn from seeing a new town,” Cliff said.

“I will.”

“And don’t forget to cheer on Shia.”

“Why, of course.”

Once we had Cliff’s permission, we headed to Noa’s room and decided on the day we would leave.

“Do you want to see Ellelaura in the capital?” That would change when we would need to leave.

“You mean, Mother?”

“If we leave early, we should be able to see her.”

We weren’t using my bear gate, so we’d need to ride on Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

“Could we see her on the way back instead? If we go on the way home, we won’t need to worry about the time. And we’d be able to tell her about how the competition went.”

She was right. Stopping there first would make timing difficult. If we tried doing that, we might miss her while she was out for work. On the way back, we could just wait at her house.

“You’re right. Then let’s stop by the capital on the way home and go straight to Yufaria on the way there.”

“Yes.”

We calculated how much time it’d take to get to Yufaria and figured out which day to leave.

“Are you sure we’ll make it if we leave that late?”

“We should be fine with Kumayuru and Kumakyu.”

Noa was asking based on the last time we'd gone to the capital together. This time, we were only traveling with just the two of us, so we'd be able to get to the capital much faster.

"I wouldn't mind taking our time on Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

"We could, but trying to make the trip efficient on time is just one of the fundamentals of travel."

No bear gate for me this time. We'd go on my bears to keep that top secret.

"I get to have you and Kumayuru and Kumakyu all to myself this time."

Hmm. It wasn't like anyone owned me, and my bears were mine.

Several days later, Noa and I rode on Kumayuru out toward Yufaria. It was the same route we used to go to the capital.

"Yuna, isn't Kumayuru going a little fast?"

She was right.

"Kumayuru has a sort of power-up item thing, and that's letting them go faster for longer."

My bears had gotten a power-up from the bearyllium, so they were more resilient, faster, more powerful, and all kinds of other stuff.

"I had no idea such a thing existed."

"But I don't want them running the whole way, so we'll switch to Kumakyu partway."

That way we wouldn't need to rest as much. While Kumayuru was running, Kumakyu would rest, and vice versa, but Kumayuru never showed any sign of getting tired, no matter how far we went.

"Kumayuru, are you okay?" I asked. My bear went even faster to show they were doing fine.

I forced my bear to switch. Actually, if I didn't, Kumakyu would end up sulking. Kumakyu let us get on and then took off. We had some quick leg-stretching breaks, but my bears ran the whole way until we got to the capital just before evening.

"I can hardly believe it. It only took a day—actually just half a day."

"If we go into the capital, we'll just lose time, so let's keep going."

If we stayed at Ellelaura's house or my house in the capital, we'd just end up delaying our time when we'd start leaving again. Also, we'd decided to see Ellelaura on the way home, so we decided to pass by the capital without stopping.

Since it was close to evening, there weren't a lot of people around the outskirts, and we could just run on Kumakyu without worrying.

We got a little ways out from the capital, then I put up my bear house somewhere off from the road, and we spent the night camping. If we kept going, we'd be able to get there by tomorrow.

"Yuna, I think I see how you get to the capital so easily. You just leave in the morning and get there before evening. I can't believe it."

My bears were very fast. They could just travel at a completely different pace from a carriage or a wagon, and they'd gotten power-ups from the bearyllium on top of that. But usually, I was just using my bear gates.

We took baths and ate, then went to our rooms.

"We'll leave early tomorrow, so sleep early."

"I want to sleep with you."

"With me?"

"Yes, I want to hear more about you."

I'd thought that she just wanted to sleep with my bears, but apparently not

this time. I led her to my room. Since my bears would sleep with me, my bed was big, and we could all fit.

“Hee hee. They’re so cute.”

Noa held Kumayuru in cub form and fell onto the bed. Kumakyu came over to me, so I hugged them.

“So, what did you want to ask?”

“It seems like you’ve traveled all over.”

“Yeah, I guess I have.” Some I had to keep secret.

“I’d like you to tell me about them.”

Hmm, what could I say? I thought about it for a bit and told her about going to the elves’ village. I told her about meeting Luimin, who was the little sister of Sanya, the guild master in the capital, and how Sanya had needed to go back home to the elves’ village because the barrier was weakening, so I’d gone too. Then I described the giant sacred tree there. I told her how the tea Cliff liked to drink had been made from leaves of the sacred tree.

Noa had been excitedly listening at first, but right as I was about to finish, she started to quietly snore with Kumayuru still in her arms. I pulled a blanket over her to ward off a cold.

“Night,” I whispered before going to sleep.

Chapter 541: The Bear Goes to See Noa

THE DAY AFTER I GOT BACK from the capital, I went over to Noa to invite her to Shia's exchange gathering in Yufaria.

"What are you here for today, Yuna? Are you here to spend time with me? Would you like to go out? We could ride outside on Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

When I came, Noa seemed excited.

"How are your studies going?"

"I've kept up with them, so it's been all right."

"That's good. I have a sort of present for you since you've been good—or rather an invitation. The academy in the capital is having a magic competition with the school in Yufaria. It seems like Shia will be part of it. Would you like to go?"

Noa didn't even hesitate and shouted her reply. "Let's go! I'd love to."

"In that case, we'll need permission from Cliff."

"I'll ask Father."

Noa headed right out to Cliff.

"Are you sure he's not working? Can we really bother him?"

"It'll be okay."

"Then how about I ask with you?"

"Will you really?"

"Well, I did propose it, after all."

I'd also told Shia that I'd bring Noa. And I had the letter from Shia to Cliff, so things would go better if I came with her. We headed to Cliff's office together,

and Noa knocked on the door and entered once she got permission to go in.

“What are you doing here, Yuna?”

He seemed peeved to see me. I wondered why.

“I had a favor to ask for.”

“Father, may I go to support Shia with Yuna?”

“Support Shia for what?”

Cliff had no idea what was going on. I told him about the event.

“Oh, that.” It seemed he understood now.

“Father, I’d like to go. I’d like to cheer on Shia.”

“I have a letter from Shia too.”

“From Shia? Not Ellelaura?”

“Shia and I are asking for permission this time,” I said.

I handed the letter to Cliff. He took it and read it. His eyes became gentler. He really seemed happy to receive a letter from his daughter.

“All right. You may.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure Shia will be more motivated with Noa around.”

“Thank you, Father!” Noa smiled.

“And there is no simple way to get her to Yufaria, since it’s so far. If you took her, it would be better for Noa.”

Yeah, it was close enough to travel to from the capital, but from Crimonia, it was likely a difficult journey by carriage.

“Yufaria is the place with the lake, isn’t it?”

“Do you know about it?”

“Shia told me a little. She said not to forget your swimsuit.”

“You can have your fun, but don’t forget to look around and learn from seeing a new town,” Cliff said.

“I will.”

“And don’t forget to cheer on Shia.”

“Why, of course.”

Once we had Cliff’s permission, we headed to Noa’s room and decided on the day we would leave.

“Do you want to see ElleLaura in the capital?” That would change when we would need to leave.

“You mean, Mother?”

“If we leave early, we should be able to see her.”

We weren’t using my bear gate, so we’d need to ride on Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

“Could we see her on the way back instead? If we go on the way home, we won’t need to worry about the time. And we’d be able to tell her about how the competition went.”

She was right. Stopping there first would make timing difficult. If we tried doing that, we might miss her while she was out for work. On the way back, we could just wait at her house.

“You’re right. Then let’s stop by the capital on the way home and go straight to Yufaria on the way there.”

“Yes.”

We calculated how much time it’d take to get to Yufaria and figured out which day to leave.

“Are you sure we’ll make it if we leave that late?”

“We should be fine with Kumayuru and Kumakyu.”

Noa was asking based on the last time we'd gone to the capital together. This time, we were only traveling with just the two of us, so we'd be able to get to the capital much faster.

"I wouldn't mind taking our time on Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

"We could, but trying to make the trip efficient on time is just one of the fundamentals of travel."

No bear gate for me this time. We'd go on my bears to keep that top secret.

"I get to have you and Kumayuru and Kumakyu all to myself this time."

Hmm. It wasn't like anyone owned me, and my bears were mine.

Several days later, Noa and I rode on Kumayuru out toward Yufaria. It was the same route we used to go to the capital.

"Yuna, isn't Kumayuru going a little fast?"

She was right.

"Kumayuru has a sort of power-up item thing, and that's letting them go faster for longer."

My bears had gotten a power-up from the bearyllium, so they were more resilient, faster, more powerful, and all kinds of other stuff.

"I had no idea such a thing existed."

"But I don't want them running the whole way, so we'll switch to Kumakyu partway."

That way we wouldn't need to rest as much. While Kumayuru was running, Kumakyu would rest, and vice versa, but Kumayuru never showed any sign of getting tired, no matter how far we went.

"Kumayuru, are you okay?" I asked. My bear went even faster to show they were doing fine.

I forced my bear to switch. Actually, if I didn't, Kumakyu would end up sulking. Kumakyu let us get on and then took off. We had some quick leg-stretching breaks, but my bears ran the whole way until we got to the capital just before evening.

"I can hardly believe it. It only took a day—actually just half a day."

"If we go into the capital, we'll just lose time, so let's keep going."

If we stayed at Ellelaura's house or my house in the capital, we'd just end up delaying our time when we'd start leaving again. Also, we'd decided to see Ellelaura on the way home, so we decided to pass by the capital without stopping.

Since it was close to evening, there weren't a lot of people around the outskirts, and we could just run on Kumakyu without worrying.

We got a little ways out from the capital, then I put up my bear house somewhere off from the road, and we spent the night camping. If we kept going, we'd be able to get there by tomorrow.

"Yuna, I think I see how you get to the capital so easily. You just leave in the morning and get there before evening. I can't believe it."

My bears were very fast. They could just travel at a completely different pace from a carriage or a wagon, and they'd gotten power-ups from the bearyllium on top of that. But usually, I was just using my bear gates.

We took baths and ate, then went to our rooms.

"We'll leave early tomorrow, so sleep early."

"I want to sleep with you."

"With me?"

"Yes, I want to hear more about you."

I'd thought that she just wanted to sleep with my bears, but apparently not

this time. I led her to my room. Since my bears would sleep with me, my bed was big, and we could all fit.

“Hee hee. They’re so cute.”

Noa held Kumayuru in cub form and fell onto the bed. Kumakyu came over to me, so I hugged them.

“So, what did you want to ask?”

“It seems like you’ve traveled all over.”

“Yeah, I guess I have.” Some I had to keep secret.

“I’d like you to tell me about them.”

Hmm, what could I say? I thought about it for a bit and told her about going to the elves’ village. I told her about meeting Luimin, who was the little sister of Sanya, the guild master in the capital, and how Sanya had needed to go back home to the elves’ village because the barrier was weakening, so I’d gone too. Then I described the giant sacred tree there. I told her how the tea Cliff liked to drink had been made from leaves of the sacred tree.

Noa had been excitedly listening at first, but right as I was about to finish, she started to quietly snore with Kumayuru still in her arms. I pulled a blanket over her to ward off a cold.

“Night,” I whispered before going to sleep.

Chapter 542:

The Bear Enters Yufaria

“UGH, I’M SO SLEEPY.”

Noa held on to Kumayuru, who was in their cub form, and yawned.

“Come on, wash your face. We need to eat.”

“Okaaay!”

We had a light breakfast, then started heading out toward Yufaria. We rode on my bears again, taking turns with each of them.

“So we just need to go down this path, right?”

I was using my bear map as we traveled, but the only areas I had mapped were the ones I’d seen through my bear hood. I hadn’t been to Yufaria before, so it wasn’t on the map.

I asked Kumayuru, “Can you head toward Yufaria?” but my bear had given me a forlorn croon in reply.

I should have known better. It wasn’t like Kumayuru and Kumakyu would know where something was when they’d never been there before. I’d hoped that giving them the bearyllium might’ve given them new power-ups like that, but apparently not.

“Oh, Yuna. There’s a bulletin board!”

As we headed down the road, we came across planks that spelled out the names of towns and villages at a crossroad. We dismounted Kumayuru and checked out the sign.

“So Yufaria is that way.”

I was glad I hadn’t gotten it totally wrong. I’d tried to take a shortcut before and that had gotten me lost in the woods. This time, I’d listened to Surilina, so it

seemed like we were on track. As they say, slow and steady wins the race.

“Looks like we’ll make it today as long as nothing else happens.”

I didn’t need any unexpected plot twists. I just wanted to get there without any drama.

“We just left Crimonia yesterday. I can’t believe it.”

“It’s all thanks to Kumayuru and Kumakyu.” I patted Kumayuru.

“Aww, I wish I had a Kumayuru and Kumakyu.” Noa hugged my bear.

“Come on, don’t be ridiculous. Let’s go.”

“Okay!”

I set Noa on Kumayuru and we headed off.

Kumayuru crooned and went off the path. We didn’t want to scare anyone, so they’d practiced for this kind of thing.

“Looks like adventurers again.”

We saw several people dressed like adventurers from afar. I hadn’t been paying attention to them before, but now that I thought about it, we’d seen a lot of adventurers coming by.

“Perhaps they are going to the capital?”

We hadn’t stopped by the capital, so I didn’t know why they were headed in that direction. Would Sanya have known something? We couldn’t exactly go back to the capital now, so I decided I’d just use my bear gate if something strange happened that I needed to ask about. I wasn’t worried right now though, so we started heading off to Yufaria again.

After traveling for a while, we caught sight of a town. It looked like we’d reached our destination without any problems.

“So that’s Yufaria... It’s beautiful,” Noa said as she looked at the town from a hill. A lake was in the middle of the town and the buildings spread out from around it. Four roads from each cardinal direction led to the lake, and each of

these was crossed by four other roads, which meant eight large roads all converged on the lake.

Just as Noa had said, the town was beautiful from here. It was nice when places built the roads first, then the buildings. Otherwise, if the houses were built wherever, the place would end up like a maze, and it wouldn't look all that aesthetically pleasing. If they ever went to war, I felt like the enemy would be able to get the lay of the land easily.

"Yuna, let's hurry."

While I was looking out at the town, Noa shook me.

"Right. We need to find an inn to stay in."

It wasn't sunset yet, but it'd be better to get a place to stay early. The later it became, the more likely the inns would fill up. Kumayuru dashed off toward Yufaria again.

Normally, I was careful, but I'd gotten into such a habit of going right up to the gate with my bears in Crimonia that I forgot to get off and walk this time. The guard seemed flabbergasted when he saw us ride up on Kumayuru.

"What?! Is that a bear?!"

I panicked and got off of Kumayuru, then stood in front of my bear.

"This bear isn't dangerous, so it's okay," I started to explain to the guard.

"Are you sure?"

"Kumayuru wouldn't attack anyone," Noa said, pouting from on top of Kumayuru as she defended my bear.

The guard seemed convinced after seeing the two of us hug Kumayuru. I thought we'd be able to head into town if I just recalled my bear, but apparently it wouldn't be that easy.

The most senior person there came out to see us. They herded us to the break room—or, rather, interrogation room.

Noa, who was fuming by now thanks to this treatment, revealed she was a noble. Since I was her guard, I also showed off the knife with the coat of arms on it that Ellelaura had given me when I'd slayed the golems. I also showed them my guild card. They were already shocked by the knife, but the C rank on my card seemed to shock them more.

"Thank you, Noa. That really helped."

"They were terrible! Kumayuru isn't a threat, but they still looked at us that way."

"Well, Kumayuru is a bear, after all."

The guards all knew about Kumayuru and Kumakyu in Crimonia, so they were allowed in and out of the gate without issue there. I was usually careful when visiting a new town, but I'd been enjoying the view too much and let it slip my mind.

"It makes me happy to see you defend us."

"Of course I would," Noa said. "It was all for Kumayuru's sake. I didn't want to use my identity to force things along, but I couldn't stand it when they looked at you and Kumayuru like that."

Thanks to Noa, we got into town with minimal friction. I didn't want her to become arrogant because she had the power of an aristocrat behind her, but she needed to know when to use it. I was happy that she'd used it to help out Kumayuru. It was also good to know that the knife Ellelaura had given me was useful.

Still, whenever I came to a new town, I'd need to remember to recall my bears in a place where no one could see.

"Well, it's their job, so they have to do it, and they didn't do anything to us. No need to pout. Let's get to the inn."

Once we were released at the entrance, we'd asked for directions to an inn. Once they knew that Noa was a noble, they'd changed their tune and had given

them to us.

I'd asked them for a place where nobles would stay and told them the price didn't matter. The inn they recommended was pretty close to us. If we went through the gate, we'd apparently find it on the main road.

We'd thanked them, but as we'd tried to leave, they stopped us. They'd told us they would prepare a carriage, since they couldn't have a noble like Noa walk on the road. Noa had rejected that idea.

"Ugh, we could have ridden the carriage," I said as I felt the eyes of everyone around on me. This song and dance always happened whenever we arrived at a new town.

"A bear?" "A bear?" "Bear?" "That a bear?"

A carriage would have hidden me.

"Yes, well, we never get stared at like this when I walk with you in Crimonia, so I forgot this would happen." Noa seemed to have noticed too. "But I wanted to walk around myself and see the town."

Noa had been looking around her since we started walking. Just as Cliff had told her, maybe she was inspecting towns other than Crimonia.

"Just ignore it. We're going to walk around tomorrow anyway, so it'll happen again."

People would definitely stare if we were out and about. There was no point in letting it bother us now.

We got to the inn under the scrutinizing eyes of the townspeople.

"It's huge."

The inn the guards had told us about was indeed large and imposing. It looked just like a place where the wealthy would stay. I felt like it'd be expensive. They probably had good security, and as long as I was with Noa, who was a noble, it'd be better to stay in a place like this, even if it was expensive.

We headed inside to find wealthy-looking merchants inside. I didn't see any adventurers. I headed to a woman at the front desk. She seemed surprised when she saw me. That was normal, though, so I just talked to her without minding it.

"Excuse me. I'd like a room for two."

"Um, and your parents?"

She looked concerned, but she wasn't reacting to my outfit anymore at least. Looked like she had good training. I was impressed that she could give any customer (even if they were wearing a bear suit) good customer service.

"It's just the two of us," I said.

"The price here is higher than at other inns..."

She seemed uncomfortable at having to tell me this. Well, we were two girls—one of us was a child, while the other was a bear. I guess she didn't know what to do with us. I had a good feeling about her, though, since she hadn't tried to turn us away.

"How much is a night?"

She thought for a moment, then answered,

"For two, this would be the total."

It was about five times the price of a normal hotel. I could see why she didn't expect children to be able to afford it.

"The price doesn't matter to me, so could you get us a room?"

I pulled the money from my bear storage, and Noa chimed in, "Yuna, my father gave me the money. I will pay."

"You're a kid. You shouldn't worry about money."

"But..."

"I'll ask Cliff to repay me once we're back, so don't worry about it." I knew the money Noa had was technically Cliff's, but I couldn't bring myself to take it.

“The thought is enough.”

That seemed to convince her, and she didn't press it.

I paid for a few nights. The woman at the desk looked surprised for a moment, then immediately went into hostess mode, leading us to our room. She kept stealing glances at me, clearly still interested in my outfit, but didn't ask any questions.

If I came to this town again, I decided, I'd stay at this inn.

“Are you going out after this?”

“No, we'll be resting today.”

“In that case, we will bring you your meal at dinnertime.”

She showed us to the room, then bowed her head and retreated.

It was larger than a normal inn and spacious, with larger beds. Two of them, in fact. The other furniture, like the tables and chairs, also looked expensive. I also saw a door, and it seemed like there was another room too.

Noa started inspecting the place. I guess she hadn't been at inns often.

“Yuna, there's a bath.”

Noa opened a door in the room. Apparently, the door didn't lead to another room but to the bath. The Land of Wa's inn had had a bath too, but this place seemed to have one because of the price.

I sat down on the bed and summoned my bears so we could rest. I wanted them there just in case there was danger around. When you're asleep, you can't defend yourself. I also wanted to be nice to Kumayuru and Kumakyu, who had run all the way to Yufaria. I hugged my bears, who were on either side of me. Noa came in as I was thanking them.

“Aw, Yuna, that's so unfair.”

Noa sat down next to me after she'd toured the room. She hugged Kumayuru,

then thanked both bears, like I had.

“So we’ll walk around the town tomorrow, Yuna?”

“Yeah. We have some time until we need to meet up with Shia.”

Shia should already be in Yufaria. We would meet her in front of the academy.

“So then we’ll stroll around town until it’s time? I’m looking forward to it.”

“That’s right. I’d like to see the lake too.”

“Yes.”

While I was talking with Noa about tomorrow, my bears raised their heads and crooned at us. At the same time, we heard a knock at the door.

“Your dinner is ready.”

I had my bears hide, then opened the door. A girl came in with a pushcart that had our meals on it.

“Please eat while it’s still warm. Once you are done, please place the cart in front of your door. I will come to retrieve it later.”

Having said that, she left.

“It looks so good.”

“Well, let’s eat before it gets cold.”

We finished our meal, had a bath, and then went to lie down on the bed. Kumayuru in their small bear form stayed with Noa on her bed, and Kumakyu was on mine.

“Actually, I think I fell asleep while we were talking yesterday,” Noa said.

She told me the point when she had fallen asleep and asked me to continue from there, so I talked to her about the elves’ village.

It seemed she’d been tired from the trip, because I heard her snoring right away.

Good night, I told her mentally, and fell asleep too.

Extra Story:
Sakura Goes to See the King

DURING THE FIGHT AGAINST THE orochi, I was able to use my mana. Afterward, I was so very tired that I could hardly move. I rested a while, and slowly, I started to get better.

“Are you all right, Shinobu?”

She was in a wagon with me. My uncle, the king, had called me, so Shinobu was coming with me to the castle.

“It hurts when I move too much, but I’m fine,” she said.

She rotated her arm and winced a little. A wyvern had grabbed Shinobu while she was fighting, which was how she had gotten injured. Lady Yuna had healed her. Shinobu said she had been prepared to have a scar, but the healer had told her she wouldn’t, and that it would stop hurting after a while. I was thankful for that.

After we waited in a drawing room, my uncle arrived. He seemed somewhat tired.

“Sorry to make you wait,” he said.

“Uncle, are you all right?”

“You needn’t be worried.”

“In that case, what did you call me here for today?”

“Things have settled here. I’d like you to contact Yuna and Kagari.”

It seemed Lady Kagari was in the town where Lady Yuna lived. I was surprised when I learned of this and envious. I wanted to visit Lady Yuna’s town, too, but I could not ask for that when it would cause so much trouble.

“All right. I will do so once I am home. What happened to the orochi?”

“If you mean the harvest, it’s mostly done.”

“I heard that there have been strange developments regarding its slaying.”

“Oh, all of that?”

My uncle looked troubled.

“After the orochi’s slaying and once Yuna and Kagari were off the island, we started scouting Linesu.”

“Yes, I heard.”

They needed to harvest the orochi’s remains and check whether the barrier was gone, whether men could enter, and if there were any other monsters on the island.

“So I led them to the orochi,” Shinobu said, “and I saw all sorts of bear statues around.”

Apparently, Shinobu had helped despite being injured. I was shocked into silence. She said that she would get a long break once that was over.

“We’ve had trouble because of the bear statues.”

I remembered those now. When Lady Yuna had fought the orochi, she put those into their mouths to defeat them.

“Those statues are issues?”

“Since we found bear statues where the orochi was slayed, it’s started to spread that there was a bear instead of a fox living on the island.”

Uncle looked worried. Until now, everyone had passed down the story that a fox lived on Linesu. That was true, since it was Lady Kagari that they were talking about, but only a few people had been able to enter Linesu until this point. They had found bear statues next to the slayed orochi, so it made sense that they would believe a bear god lived there instead.

“But the one who watched over the orochi’s seals until now was Kagari, and she is a fox. The bear statues have started all sorts of rumors.”

“You haven’t denied the rumors?”

“Kagari doesn’t want us telling others that she slayed the orochi on her own, remember?”

“Yes.”

Lady Kagari had said she didn’t want to stand out, so she didn’t want anyone to say that she had slayed the orochi.

“And Yuna said the same.”

“The other issue is that people witnessed a fox fighting the orochi. So those who saw the battle and those who scouted Linesu are divided.”

“In other words, they’ve split into fox and bear factions,” Shinobu said while smiling.

So that’s what had been happening.

“Until now, Kagari was most certainly the one who did the work of watching the orochi’s seal, but Yuna slayed the orochi. They’re technically both correct.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

“What do you intend to do, Uncle?”

With a word, my uncle could silence one side. He hadn’t done so.

“We’ll determine what to do once they come back. If they’ve changed their minds and want to be the heroes who defeated the orochi, then that’s what I’ll make them.”

“They likely will say no.”

“They said they don’t want to stand out, even though they both look the way they do,” Shinobu said.

Lady Kagari was very pretty. She always hid them, but she also had a fox tail and ears. Even though Lady Yuna said she didn’t want to stand out, she dressed like a bear. She had her esteemed bears with her too, so I thought she actually rather enjoyed it.

“Did you call me here in order to tell me about this?”

“Yes, that’s the primary reason. I could have asked Shinobu instead, but we’ve completed it, so I’d like to show it to you too.”

“...?”

Uncle informed me we would be going somewhere else, so we left the room with him.

“Where are you going?”

“You’ll know once we’re there,” Uncle said as he made his way to the front of a room.

Unlike the other doors, these seemed very sturdy. Uncle touched the mana gem on the door and opened it. The gem was likely a lock, which Uncle could open by using his mana.

We made our way into the room, which had no windows. I saw five altars deep within it. Each altar held a large mana gem. Each was a different color: red, blue, green, brown, and colorless.

“Are these the orochi’s mana gems?”

They must have been the ones Lady Yuna had carried with her.

“Yes. Even if Kagari and Yuna don’t wish us to tell anyone they slayed the orochi, the royalty of this country will never forget that they saved us.”

“It’s true, Lady Kagari and Lady Yuna saved our country. Even if they say we must forget their deeds, we never shall.”

“So we created this place to ensure they are never forgotten.”

It seemed only the royal family could enter the room.

“Am I allowed to be in here?”

“The priestesses have also supported Kagari for generations and generations.” Some of the priestesses also knew of Lady Kagari.

“I plan to have the royal family and priestesses pass down the existence of this place for generations.”

“So you wanted me here because of that?”

“Yes.”

“Uh, should I be in here?” Shinobu seemed to panic as she listened to us.

“What are you talking about? You know all the events of this incident. How many others know what you know? There’s no point in worrying about that now.”

“I know that the ship has sailed, but this place is top secret, isn’t it?”

Well, we couldn’t say that Lady Kagari was a fox, and Lady Yuna had secrets too. If we spoke about Lady Yuna’s door, we would also die of laughter. That was a secret for certain.

“Right. So just remember that I won’t easily allow you out of my service.”

“That’s so unfair!”

Shinobu pretended to cry, but Uncle ignored her.

“These do look so large, seeing them again.”

I looked at the orochi’s mana gems. Each of the five were as large as my head.

“The monster had mana gems that were this large, and five of them too. I can only imagine how powerful it was.”

“I’m so sad I didn’t get to see them fight.”

Shinobu had fainted after fighting wyverns, so she hadn’t seen the fight with the orochi.

“Then that means Sakura is the only witness.”

It was true. Not counting Lady Kagari or Lady Yuna, who fought, the only ones who had seen the battle were Miss Luimin, Lord Mumulte, and me. Not including Miss Luimin or Lord Mumulte, who were not citizens of our country, I

was the only one left.

“Then we really must pass it down.”

“If Yuna or Lady Kagari knew, they’d hate it,” Shinobu said.

“We must include Mumulute and his granddaughter Luimin in what we pass down.”

Without their help, even Lady Yuna might not have been able to defeat the orochi.

“We will make sure your deeds are passed down, too.”

“Me?”

“You used your mana to keep the orochi’s seal in place.”

Uncle seemed regretful that I’d had to push myself to use mana to strengthen the orochi’s seal.

“Uncle, even if I lose my mana in the future, I don’t regret any of it. Even if it had cost my life, I still would have done it.”

Even if I had forfeited my mana and my life, I wouldn’t have hesitated to save the country.

“Oh, Sakura...”

Uncle came over to me and hugged me.

“Uncle?”

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Uncle, I will say it as many times as I need to. I didn’t regret it. I won’t come to regret it in the future, either.”

He gave me another gentle hug. If my father had still been here, maybe he would have given me a hug like this too.

Shinobu’s name would be passed down as well. Even though Shinobu said she didn’t want that, she was overruled. If my name had to make it into the pages

of history, of course I'd drag Shinobu's with me.

Extra Story: Shinobu Relaxes

I RAN AS I THREW my kunai at a dummy. As it hit my target, I kept running and used wind magic to slice up the dummy next.

The difference in skill between me and Yuna was big. I wished I could have seen Yuna's fight against the orochi. I wanted to know what I was lacking.

I ran at another dummy. I imbued a knife with mana and sliced through a hardened dummy. My style of fighting was to use quick projectiles, magic, and knives to take down my enemies.

"Whew."

I wiped away the sweat as I approached the sliced-up dummy. I imbued the mana gem behind it with more mana, and it reverted back to its original form.

This was a practice dummy. You could set it back up for use again with just some mana. It was made from dirt, so as long as it had mana in its gem, it could revert as many times as needed.

"Shinobu."

I turned toward the person who had called my name and saw my teacher, Jyubei.

"Sir."

"I thought you were on vacation?"

I'd had to do a lot of stuff to help deal with the orochi after it was slayed, but work settled down after a while and His Majesty had given me a break, just as promised.

"I am on my vacation," I said. That was why no one could complain that I was training with my weapons. I was on my own time.

“Then you need to rest. You must still be tired.”

“I’m fine. I didn’t actually fight the orochi.” I really hadn’t. I was useless.

“But you were injured while fighting wyverns.”

Yep, and badly. Thanks to Yuna, I was basically good as new. I got a little twinge whenever I threw my kunai, but I’d felt that kinda pain plenty of times before. It wasn’t an actual injury at this point.

“I’m fine.”

“You still don’t need to train this much.”

Sweat ran down my forehead and the rest of my body. The sweat dripped from my face into the dust.

“Just how long have you been doing this?”

I’d started early in the morning. It was the afternoon now.

“I’m weak. That’s why I gotta train.”

“You’re already strong enough. Few of the soldiers could win against you.”

“But that’s not enough. If I were stronger, then Lady Sakura wouldn’t be in danger.”

I’d gotten injured when fighting the wyverns and had needed Yuna to save me. I lost consciousness, and Yuna used a strange gate to take me to a safe place to sleep. Even though everyone risked their lives to fight.

That wasn’t all. Lady Sakura, as well as Mr. Mumulute and Luimin, who weren’t even citizens of our country, had had to put themselves in danger too. All because I was weak.

“Don’t compare yourself to her. No one can win against her. I doubt anyone in our country could stand by her side.”

No one could defeat the orochi. I knew that. Yuna’s powers had just dazzled me, maybe because I’d never thought humans could ever be so strong.

“Like I said before, she’s special. The amount of mana she has, how she handles her weapons... It must be the result of dedicated study. She never let her skill make her arrogant.”

She didn’t rest on her laurels or skip out on training. I knew lots of conceited people who were beaten by others who had less talent but worked hard.

“Sir...”

“I know because I fought her. She’s at a level I will never reach, no matter how many years I train for. She knows how to move, has insight, and possesses an incredible amount of mana. And she’s so young! I can’t best her in any of those aspects.”

“...”

“Like I said before, she’s fought to the death countless times. That’s why she can discern exactly how far she can go before she’s at the edge.”

“You mean Yuna’s been close to dying a lot?”

“It’s not easy to gauge how close you can get to your enemy.”

To know whether the swing of your sword would reach your opponent, you needed to embed the feeling into your body.

“And then there’s her sense of judgment. When people risk their lives in battle, it gets difficult for them to push their bodies to their limits. Their sense of judgment grows dull. With every move, they gotta think about how to protect themselves. They need to judge whether they can take another step forward. Whether their opponent’s sword will reach them. And the only way you can learn to judge that is through experience.”

“I wonder how many people Yuna has saved until now.”

The battle against the orochi had been dangerous. Any other person would have refused to do it. None of this had anything to do with her. Some people might do it for money, but Yuna hadn’t accepted any. She’d even let us have the orochi’s mana gems, which were valuable.

Yuna had nothing to gain from helping us. All I could think about was how she said she'd done it so Sakura would smile again. She was a kind girl. Even though she was powerful, she wasn't arrogant. She didn't even show it off.

She loved bears.

"I'm no match for her, but I won't give up, sir. I'll catch up to Yuna someday."

"Then I'll accompany you on every step."

I was grateful for that. I readied my knife.

The day after I practiced with my teacher, I went to Lady Kagari.

"Have you nothing better to do?" she asked.

"Nope, because His Majesty granted me a vacation."

Lady Kagari was lounging by a window and sipping her liquor while looking outside.

"You're still not back to normal."

She was still in her child form.

"I likely will revert sometime. The orochi is no longer here. I may pass my time at leisure."

Lady Kagari took another sip.

"Now, what was it you wanted?"

"So, you saw the orochi's slaying to the very end, didn't you?"

"Quite right."

"Was Yuna strong?"

"You came all the way here to ask that?"

"..."

"She is incomparable."

She was saying the same stuff as my teacher.

“Her natural-born mana, for example. But one cannot fight simply by having mana. If one cannot apply one’s abilities practically, then ’tis a waste.”

You could say that about anything. A brilliant mage wouldn’t be able to become a first-class swordsman. A gifted swordsman wouldn’t necessarily become a first-class mage.

“Only by perfecting talent may one’s abilities truly bloom. Yuna is the epitome of that.”

“ ... ”

“And she is pure of heart and therefore does not fall prey to her own conceit. She uses her abilities for others. ’Tis something the average person is incapable of.”

When people had power, they would become arrogant and start looking down on others.

“So I’ll never catch up ta Yuna?”

“An impossible task for any.”

“Even you?”

“All I may do is stay by her side and give her assistance. I am sure she has some weaknesses as well. I can help her through that at least.”

“Then what is Yuna bad at that you’re good at, Lady Kagari?”

“Flying, I would say. She cannot do that, but I am capable of it.”

I couldn’t fly either.

“Is there anything that I can do that she can’t?” I asked.

“How would I know? I do not know all there is to know about her. Is that the true reason why you came here? To ask me that?”

“No, I wanted to talk ta you about it, but I’m also here ta rest. My shoulder

hurts a little from practicing with my teacher, so I was planning ta use the hot spring.”

While I practiced, I’d felt a shooting pain go through my shoulder. He told me we were putting a pause on all training until I was fully healed, so I’d come to Lady Kagari to rest up alongside her. I’d wanted to talk to her about Yuna anyway, so this was the perfect spot for it.

“I see. So you are here for the therapeutic effects. But how long will you stay?”

“Until my break is over.”

“This is no inn, you know.”

“Yuna said that I could use it when I wanted when she stopped by before. And she told me ta visit so you wouldn’t get lonely.”

“I am not lonely when I am alone.”

“Well, that’s what she said, so it’ll be nice ta share the house with you for a while.”

“Did you even listen to me?” Lady Kagari sighed. “Do as you wish... However, you must cook and clean.”

“I’ll even wash your back for you.”

“’Tis unnecessary.”

I soaked my shoulder in the hot spring and healed up for next time.

Afterword

I'M KUMANANO. Thank you for picking up *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear's* twentieth volume.

We've already reached the twentieth-volume milestone. The first volume went on sale in May of 2015. It took eight years for the twentieth volume to come. I never imagined it would last this long. I have no idea how to thank the publisher and my readers.

This volume is about the Land of Wa after the orochi has been defeated and about the magic gathering at Shia's school. And Noa's also tagging along! In the next volume, Yuna observes the gathering. I hope that you look forward to seeing what kind of trouble she gets herself into.

The twentieth volume also has two-page illustrations. Normally, they're only on one page, but I wanted to see everyone in their swimsuits and kimono, so I requested a little change. I was very happy when the publisher and 029 obliged.

Around the time this volume is published, Season Two of the anime *Kuma Kuma Bear: Bear Punch!* should be ending. It feels very weird to see something I created animated on the TV. I was so happy to see Yuna and Fina in their nice dresses in the second season. What did all of you think after seeing them? The animation team was kind enough to let me help with this season of the anime as well. It was a lot of work, but it was fun.

The anime is ending, but the novels and the manga are still going to go on for a long while. I hope that you continue to follow them.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who strived to get this book out.

Thank you for drawing such wonderful illustrations, 029.

I'm always relying on my editor as well. To the many people who were involved in the publishing of *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear Volume 20*, thank you.

I'm grateful for the readers who have read along thus far.

Let's meet again in the twenty-first volume!

KUMANANO—ON A DAY IN AUGUST, 2023



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