

Copyright

I Got a Cheat Skill in Another World and Became Unrivaled in the Real World, Too

Miku

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ISEKAI DE CHEAT SKILL WO TE NI SHITA ORE WA, GENJITSU SEKAI WOMO MUSO SURU, Volume 4 *LEVEL UP WA JINSEI WO KAETA*

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Prologue

The Weald was still shrouded in mystery.

It was in this peculiar place where Yuuya's master, the white rabbit, was confronting a certain monster.

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"....."

"Grrrrr..."
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The rabbit was squaring off against a powerful-looking beast that could only be found in the very depths of the forest. A monster known as a Guardian Lion.

Yet, as strong as it was, the Guardian Lion dared not move a muscle in front of him.

It knew that the moment it so much as twitched, the rabbit would destroy it in an instant.

While the monster seemed so desperate to escape, the rabbit looked as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"Hmph... Usually, I could strike you down with one kick, but—"

The rabbit looked at his right paw.

At that very instant, a ball of water appeared above it.

"I wonder what will happen if I only use magic this time..."

"Graaaaaaaagh!"

While the rabbit was focused on his right paw, the Guardian Lion seized its chance and lunged at him.

Where the Guardian Lion had previously stood, a large crater was all that remained. The winds generated by the sheer speed of the monster had mowed down the Black Ironwoods that surrounded the pair.

The Guardian Lion was sure it had slain the rabbit with one mighty blow.

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But...
"Hmph."
"Grah?"
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The rabbit nimbly sprang aside to dodge the attack and launched straight into his counterattack, pushing the ball of water he had generated in his paw into the Guardian Lion's back.

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"—Fall before me."
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The ball of water in the rabbit's paw had only been small, but the moment it made contact with the beast, it turned into a giant mass of liquid several tons in volume. The monster crumpled to the ground, just as the rabbit said it would.

Having defeated a Guardian Lion in one hit, the rabbit landed, but he cocked his head as though dissatisfied.

"Hmm...that is all I could do...? Perhaps I do not have enough mana... I was hoping to cast something more powerful. Something like he would."

As Yuuya found himself more and more embroiled in the problems of the Kingdom of Arselia, the rabbit had been continuing his training out in the Weald and practicing hard to produce satisfactory results.

It went without saying that he was practicing more than magic—he hadn't neglected his kicks—and he spent a lot of time thinking about what to teach Yuuya next.

"Sigh...Well, there is not much I can do about my mana, being a mere rabbit..."

The rabbit lamented this truth with a hint of sadness in his tone. It was at that moment, just as he began to resume the search for a new training partner to practice on, when—"...?!"

The rabbit jumped straight up into the air.

As he did, something sharp flew at lightning speed, piercing through the space where he had just been standing.

[&]quot;Graaaaaahhhh!"

The rabbit created a foothold in the air, righted himself, and landed safely back on the ground. Then he scanned the area warily.

"You have some nerve to pick a fight with me. Show yourself."

"…"

As if obeying the rabbit's orders, a lone young girl appeared.

Her skin was pale and smooth, her hair as white as snow. She was clad in a sleeveless white dress, her expression void of emotion.

Her gray, mysterious eyes were fixed coldly on the rabbit.

"Who are you? ... And why did you attack me all of a sudden?"

The girl did not answer.

Instead, without any sign of her animosity abating, she narrowed her eyes at the rabbit.

"…"

"...It looks like you aren't in the mood to talk. Then I shall just have to pry that information out of you some other way...!"

In a flash, the rabbit closed in on the girl.

"Hyah!"

With minimal movement, the rabbit aimed a kick straight at her. It was a single great kick, and the rabbit didn't hold back.

Even Yuuya couldn't take a full-force kick from the rabbit yet. Why would the girl be any different?

And yet...

"-Slow."

"?!"

The girl dodged with ease.

The might of the rabbit's kick was so great that it blasted away the trees that surrounded the spot where the girl had just stood.

The rabbit's eyes widened slightly when the girl evaded him.

"So, you can follow my movements, can you...?"

""

While the rabbit put some distance between himself and his opponent, the girl looked as emotionless as ever.

"Still not talking, hmm? ... What, then? Are you going to try landing a blow on a Deity like me? Could it be that you have come to make some sort of name for yourself?"

"No. I come with a proposal."

"A proposal...?"

Taken aback by the unexpected answer, the rabbit slowly tilted his head. Why did this girl come all the way here?

Ignoring the rabbit's confusion, the girl continued matter-of-factly.

"I'm going to destroy it all. Everything in this world. There's no point in trying to protect a world that cannot be saved."

"What?"

"That's why I need your help. To destroy the world."

"I don't understand..."

The dumbfounded rabbit sighed and looked straight at the girl.

"Cannot be saved? That does not sound like your decision to make. I am satisfied with it, so don't come asking me to get involved in your selfish goals. What is all of this about anyway? And more importantly...who are you?"

"Silence. If you intend to refuse, then all that awaits you is death. Anything I don't need, I make disappear. Including you."

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"Spit it out, girl...!"
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The rabbit once again launched himself at the girl. As he once again attempted to land a blow, he felt a shiver run down his spine and turned toward the source of the sensation.

That's when something suddenly fell between him and the girl.

As it crashed to the ground, the earth collapsed in on itself, changing the very geography of the surrounding area.

The rabbit righted himself in the air, scanned for what had smashed into the ground below, and gasped.

```
"An arrow?!"

"This is the end."
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After the girl's curt words came a noise that sounded like multiple objects slicing through the air.

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"That sounds like—"
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Searching for the source of the noise, the rabbit soon realized that he could hear it coming from all directions.

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And then—
"?!"
—suddenly a huge swarm of arrows flew toward him.
"Cage of Arrows!"
"...?! That skill...!"
```

The rabbit had heard that skill's name before.

But the arrows came so fast that there was no time to question anything.

Each and every arrow looked powerful enough to kill, but if the rabbit could fully utilize the might in his ears and legs, then he might be able to endure the onslaught.

Yet with the incessant rain of arrows, he knew it was only a matter of time until he fell.

```
—Or at least it would have been.
"Hah!"
"...! Magic?!"
```

As the rabbit beat away all the arrows, he summoned a ball of wind in his palm.

He threw it at the ground as hard as he could, causing the compressed air to explode and blow all the approaching arrows away.

Having successfully avoided the attack, the rabbit cracked his neck.

"Cage of Arrows... That special technique that can anticipate your foe's movements and release arrows timed to attack them from all sides...? How do you know it? That technique belongs to the Deity of Arrows. How can you—"

"Very strange. The Deity of Kicks. The Deity of Ears. He shouldn't be able to use magic. But he did. The very same."

"The very same? I am in the midst of receiving training from Yuuya... But that is beside the point. How are you able to use that technique?"

"Yuuya...? Oh. Uncertain variable confirmed. Switching primary target. Training a Deity. Threat level high. Retreat temporarily."

"What? What are you saying—?"

"We're done here. I'll leave killing you until after I've gotten rid of this Yuuya person."

"And why would I let you get away with that...?!"

That time, the rabbit conjured two masses of compressed water instead of air in his palms, and attempted to hit the girl with another mighty kick so she couldn't get away. That's when he heard the familiar sound of objects slicing through wind again.

"Gah...!"

"Too bad. The arrows still want to play."

"Dammit!"

While there weren't as many arrows flying toward him as when the girl used her Cage of Arrows technique, there were enough to prevent the rabbit from drawing close. He couldn't help but scream.

"...?! You... Just how many steps ahead of me are you?!"

Still, the rabbit was steadily gaining on the girl and would soon be in attack range.

But...

"Unexpected. In that case...I have no other choice... I won't be able to escape at this rate. Time to play my trump card."

"Huh?!"

Black mist erupted from the girl's body.

"That power... Is this the aura of a Demon?!"

The rabbit had felt such power before.

It was a power possessed only by the archenemies of the Deities—the Demons.

Now that she had used the power of the Demons, the rabbit became even more confused.

Because somehow this girl could conjure the aura of a Demon yet was also able to use the techniques of the Deity of Arrows.

As the black mist gushed out, the girl put distance between herself and the rabbit with frightening speed.

"...Retreating. There is nothing useful for me here."

"Hey!"

As the rabbit struggled with the remaining arrows, the girl disappeared into the forest.

After dealing with the last of the arrows and somehow coming away unscathed, the rabbit turned to face the direction where the girl seemed to have vanished.

"...Dammit. It seems like I cannot even sense her presence anymore."

Unable to tell which way the girl had gone, the rabbit scoured the surrounding area for a while longer but was eventually forced to put an end to his search.

"...Who was she?"



Having calmed down a little, the rabbit pondered the girl's possible identity.

"There is no doubt about it. The technique that girl used was the one that the Deity of Arrows used long ago... Even the name of the technique sounded the same."

No matter how long the rabbit tried to piece together all the information he had, he still couldn't figure out who the girl was.

"Now that I think about it, I have not seen the Deity of Arrows for decades...but if I want answers, the easiest thing to do would be to speak with him directly. I just wish I knew where to find him..."

The simplest explanation for the girl's use of the Deity of Arrows's techniques was that she was his successor. But then why would she attack the rabbit?

Then again, if she was a Demon, what reason would she have to learn the Deity of Arrows's techniques in the first place?

...A proposal, hmm...?

What remained most confusing to the rabbit was why the girl had asked him to aid her in such an intolerable objective after she began attacking him.

How could she ask such a thing of him? Of one bestowed with the title of Deity and tasked with guardianship of the world?

"I wonder if the Deity of Arrows has gone mad or something...? No, of all the Deities... But as for the others... I would not put it past the Deity of Fists..."

The more the rabbit thought about it, the more possibilities ran through his head, but none of them helped him identify the girl.

—And yet he did come to understand one thing.

"I may have let her get away...but I mustn't let this go."

Whatever the case, this girl knew the techniques of a Deity, had the power of the Demons, and was actively working to destroy the world. The rabbit had to do something to stop her.

He looked up at the sky and narrowed his eyes.

"...I have to teach more of my techniques to Yuuya. Even if he doesn't become

a Deity, he still needs to be able to stand up to any opponent..."

After encountering the girl, the rabbit decided to reconsider what he would be teaching his apprentice.

And with that, he set off into the depths of the Weald in search of another monster to test out his magic on, so that he, too, could start to master his new powers.

CHAPTER 1

The Adventurer's Guild

I—Yuuya Tenjou—traveled all the way to the capital of the Kingdom of Arselia and had an audience with its ruler and the father of Princess Lexia, King Arnold.

During our meeting, I gifted Lexia a Futon of Supreme Bliss. Unfortunately, the gifting of bedroom furniture to a member of the opposite sex is seen as a marriage proposal here, so the king was not very happy.

But while I was cowering in the face of King Arnold's rage, the audience was rudely interrupted by attackers.

The intruders used a strange object to seal the magical powers of the king's closest bodyguards. Furthermore, they erected a barrier around the room we had been meeting in to make it impossible to call for reinforcements.

I don't know why, but they weren't just targeting King Arnold with this assault. They went after Lexia and the others, too.

I may have been an outsider, but someone needed to put a stop to it, so I knocked them all out... That's when we discovered that one of the assailants was carrying something that bore the prince's coat of arms. In that moment, it became clear that the scuffle we had just won was a part of his plans.

Once Arnold learned the truth, he fled to his chambers. Then Owen asked me to help them end the prince's rebellion, but...it was really a request to help protect Lexia. So, of course, I accepted.

Now all the palace's soldiers are busy rushing around the castle trying to capture the prince, but I'm still not allowed to come and go as I please—I'm an outsider, after all. If I was to do something that roused suspicion, we'd have a big problem on our hands.

While I'm worrying about whether there's anything I can really do to help, Lexia comes up with an idea.

"How about I show you around the capital?"

"Huh?"

I blurt out a surprised sound when she makes this unexpected suggestion, but Lexia's eyes light up.

"You haven't been able to see very much since you arrived here, have you? I'll show you around!"

"Hey, Lexia. Do you really think that's going to fly in this situation?"

Luna, the ex-assassin, asks her in exasperation, but Lexia remains unfazed.

"It'll be fine. It's not like any of us can do anything just sitting around here. We're just getting in everyone's way."

"It's not your place to decide that, though. That's for the soldiers to say."

"Then why don't I ask one? Owen, is it okay if I show Yuuya around the city for a while?"

Lexia throws the question to Owen, who is standing guard close by. The soldier reacts by putting his hands to his head like he's trying to suppress an annoying headache.

"Your Highness... I echo Luna's sentiments. What on Earth would possess you to think that would be an acceptable idea...?"

"I don't think I'm asking anything too outlandish. I mean...we know my brother is the person behind the attack on the palace."

Lexia's expression darkens as she acknowledges that it was her own kin who attempted to take her life.

"Besides, now that we know he was the one who planned it all, everyone's on high alert, right? I'm sure my brother anticipated that, too. I bet he was hoping to wipe us all out in the first attack because he must have known how much more difficult a second attempt would be. But thanks to Yuuya, his plan was well and truly sunk. And in even worse news for him, we know he's the culprit. His back is to the wall now, and even if he were to try something stupid, he doesn't have the manpower... I guess he could try and rally others from outside, but I doubt he'd have much luck while the assassination attempt is still so fresh in everyone's minds."

"Yes, but..."

"Now that it has come this far, the rest should be easy, right? I don't think there's any need to worry about him sending assassins our way anymore. He can't even send out subordinates to scout for information. If any of them were followed, then we'd find out where my brother is hiding. So even if we do go into town, it's not as if that intel is going to find its way back to him. And if he were to resort to using assassins, it'd be better to be outside the castle walls. If I were him, the palace would be the first place I'd send them. Wouldn't you?"

"Princess Lexia... I know that you're just saying all that so you can go out."

"Of course I am."

Lexia answers without hesitation, chest puffed out and proud. But I wonder if she's pushing her luck a little.

"I'm sure that Sir Yuuya would very much like to take a look around the capital, too, right?"

"I...I guess so."

I did come all the way here. It would be nice to see some of the sights.

"Right? That's why I think we—"

"Why don't we just leave Lexia here, then? I can show you around instead, Yuuya."

Luna suddenly cuts Lexia off midsentence.

"Hey!"

"Whatever the reason, it's not good for the royal family to so carelessly leave the safety of the castle. No matter how low the possibility that assassins have been dispatched, a castle surrounded by guards is still the safest place for you, so you stay and wait inside the palace nice and secure until we get back." "How could I possibly permit such a thing. Need I remind you that you're my bodyguard?"

"That's what you employ Owen over there for, too."

"Grrr! As if I'd allow you! You just want to have Sir Yuuya all to yourself, don't you?!"

"N-no way! I'm just doing my duty. Yeah, that's it."

"Liar!"

"Ummm..."

The squabble keeps heating up, not even allowing me to get in a word edgewise.

But...

"In that case, I shall show you around the capital, Lord Yuuya. If both Lexia and Luna remain here, then that solves everybody's problem."

""Absolutely not!""

I was thinking along the same lines as Owen, but both girls protest the idea in the same breath. I can't tell whether they're each other's friend or foe sometimes...

Owen sighs as though he, too, had expected this reaction.

"Sigh... Fine. Then the three of us, Princess Lexia, Luna, and I, shall escort Lord Yuuya."

"You're not required, Owen."

"I'm sorry, but I must insist. I am your bodyguard, Your Highness. And that doesn't change even if you are with Luna."

"Ugh..."

"Anyway, I'll be protecting you from nearby. Since you'll have Luna right there by your side, I can guard you at a distance. Does that suit you better?"

"In that case, I...would rather you didn't, but I suppose it's okay."

"If there's no other way, then I guess we could let him tag along."

"This isn't right... Why do I have to sit and listen to you talking down to me even though I've been doing this job for far longer than you have...?"

Their frosty attitudes make Owen put his head in his hand defeatedly. Hang in there, Owen.

"Then let's hurry, Sir Yuuya!"

Lexia pulls me by the arm and drags me out into the capital.

* * *

"Come on, Sir Yuuya! Let's go the jewelry store!"

"Yuuya. Why don't we head to the blacksmith's over there instead?"

"Uhh..."

While I'm happy to leave the castle grounds and venture into the city, there's nowhere in particular I want to go, so I'm leaving that all up to Lexia and Luna. The problem is the two of them want to go to different places.

When we go to the jeweler's, I don't understand what anything is worth, and I certainly don't have the cash to buy anything expensive... Although, if I keep selling black peppercorns, then I might be able to afford something someday.

And as for the blacksmith's, I'm already satisfied with the weapons I inherited from the sage and with my Bloodstained Ogre armor that the Bloody Ogre dropped...

And with Owen guarding us from a distance, there's nothing he can do to save me from this situation, either.

Even worse, now I have Lexia and Luna both hanging off an arm, and I can feel their chests pressing against me...!

Trying to distract myself from the sensation of their boobs against my arms, I attempt to stop the girls from arguing, but it's no good. It's just chaos.

As we walk through the town with me sandwiched between the bickering girls, we naturally draw a lot of attention. No one outright stares at us, but they do flash us a few glances.

"H-hey... Doesn't that man there seem like some sort of nobleman from

somewhere?"

"Yeah... He's got looks, grace—that's one fine man."

"Ugh! Two beautiful girls hanging off his arms... God dammit!"

"Maybe it's his handsome features? Maybe it's his money? ... Maybe it's both?"

I can feel people staring at us, but none of their gazes seem to be malicious in any way, so I probably don't need to worry about them. No doubt, Owen would notice if we were in danger, and I'm sure Night wouldn't miss a thing, either. He knew we were being attacked back in the palace even before we did. And Akatsuki would...well, uh...

Anyway, ever since we left the castle, I've realized that even though she is a princess, no one seems to have noticed Lexia at all. No one has so much as stared.

It's probably down to the fact that when we decided to go into the capital, she made sure to change out of her fine clothes and go for a plainer look to blend in better.

That said, if you look closely, you can see that the clothes she is wearing are more luxurious than the stiff clothing of the townsfolk and must be made from nicer materials.

That's just how so-called high-ranking individuals pretend to look like commoners.

I've only ever seen anyone do it in the movie *Roman Holiday*, but Lexia hasn't been discovered yet, so I wonder if she does this quite a lot.

I'm bowing my head a little to those around us to apologize for all the noise, when a certain building comes into view.

The front of the wooden building is decorated with a sign featuring a sword and shield. It looks similar to the guild building I visited before I got here.

Thanks to the saloon-style doors, the scent from inside the building wafts all the way to my nostrils. It smells of alcohol. Is this place a bar? That sign would be a bit weird for a bar, but...

Luna picks up on how I'm staring at the building and fills in the blanks for me.

"What's the matter? Don't tell me that you're interested in becoming an adventurer, Yuuya?"

"An adventurer?"

"Yeah. That's the Adventurer's Guild that you're staring at."

"Oh...!"

So, this is the Adventurer's Guild? I have no idea what kind of place it is, though. It was simple enough to understand that the Merchant's Guild is for merchants, but I'm way less informed on adventurers. I don't even know what kind of work they really do. I got a brief explanation when I invited Lexia and the others to my place for the first time, but outside of killing monsters, I really have no idea.

As I stare curiously at the building, Luna asks me a question.

"...Do you want to go inside?"

"I'm kind of intrigued. I signed up with a merchant's guild on the way to Montress, but when it comes down to it, I'd say I'm slightly better suited to fighting monsters than selling things..."

It's not like I love fighting or anything like that, but defeating monsters serves a purpose as a kind of training for me. It gives me the power I need to keep on living in this world. And between selling and fighting, I just so happen to be better at fighting.

By the time I finish my sentence, both Lexia and Luna have strange expressions on their faces for some reason.

"...Ummm, are you kidding? A man who lives in the Weald says that he's 'slightly better suited to fighting monsters'?"

"Sir Yuuya... If you say someone at your level is only slightly better at fighting... well, I pray for anyone who crosses you..."

"Huh?"

I wonder if they have a point. That said, the only time I've ever faced off

against other humans is when we got attacked in the palace and when I fought Luna. I've never really been the type to enjoy a fight like that.

When it comes down to it, I'm just fighting to get strong enough to survive, I don't find any joy in it. If anything, I just want Night and everyone else I know to be able to live in peace.

Apart from that, I'm still undergoing Master Rabbit's training, and I still have issues when it comes to using magic in battles.

"Well, whatever. Since we're here, why don't you go and sign up as an adventurer as well?"

"Really?"

"A guild card from a merchant's guild serves well enough as identification, but if you're looking to deal in dropped monster materials or you want to take on a request for some spare change, it's easier to do that at the Adventurer's Guild. Adventurers are pretty much free to do what they want."

"I see..."

I nod along to Luna's explanation and see that Lexia's eyes have lit up in agreement.

"That's a great idea! I can picture you now as a swashbuckling adventurer, Sir Yuuya."

"I'm not even registered yet..."

I'm not sure that I'm cut out for any of that stuff, though. If I'm going to do anything for money, then I'd prefer it to not be so dangerous.

"Hmm... Then let's join up together! Then you and I can take on requests as a team!"

"Hey, you can't be serious, Luna! You're not allowed!"

"Why not?"

"Because you're my bodyguard!"

"That doesn't mean that I have to be with you *all* the time. I want to find other ways to make money, too."

Luna explains herself to Lexia before turning back to me.

"Right then, Yuuya. Let's get ourselves signed up, shall we?"

"Hey, wait a minuuute!"

With a triumphant look on her face, Luna heads into the building, dragging Lexia along as the princess tries to stop her.

Speechless, I watch them walk away, then I turn my attention to Night and Akatsuki.

"...I guess we should go, too, then."

"Woof."

"Oink."

As we pass through the saloon-style doors, following close behind Luna and Lexia, I see something that resembles a bar to the right, where several men and women are drinking and talking.

Straight ahead, there appears to be some kind of reception desk where people clad in armor and armed with weapons are filling out paperwork.

On the left is a notice board packed with different pieces of paper.

The moment we walk inside the building, I immediately feel many pairs of eyes on me. It kind of feels like they're trying to size me up and get a measure of how strong I am. They might even be using their Appraise skills on me. But I've already activated my Concealment skill to hide my stats, so...I think it'll be okay. Hopefully.

Though I'm still conscious of the stares, I can't help but look around this place in awe at how different it feels from the Merchant's Guild. That's when Luna calls over to me.

"Hey, Yuuya. We're over here!"

"How many times do I have to say it?! You can't sign up, Luna! Don't you get that yet?!"

"Come on, let's get registered."

"Listen to meee!"

Luna is smiling my way without even a passing glance at Lexia.

My smile is a little tense as I walk over to them, but then I suddenly realize that Owen is no longer with us.

"Huh? Is Owen outside?"

"Oh, I'd imagine so. Knights and adventurers are like oil and water. Knights like rules and regulations whereas adventurers yearn for freedom... And some adventurers can be a little funny about knights. Plus, he'd stand out like a sore thumb."

"Yeah, but are you sure that's okay? What about protecting Lexia...?"

"I'm enough to protect Lexia. There's no problem there."

"Wait a second! I have a problem! It's called you're not allowed to sign up!"

"Anyway, we'd better get registered."

"You can't just ignore me like that!"

Despite the fact that Luna and Lexia had such a complicated relationship at first, having been assassin and target, they seem to be getting along great now. It's such a relief.

That said, we're probably annoying everyone around here by causing such a ruckus, so we head for the reception desk.

Behind the desk sits a red-eyed woman with her hair neatly tied back. Her brown clothes resemble some kind of uniform.

"Excuse me, we'd like to register..."

"Hmm? Y-yes! A registration. Who will be signing up today...?"

"I will."

"Nooo!"

Despite being right in front of the desk, Lexia still won't stop complaining. Seemingly fed up, Luna begins to admonish her.

"Look... Can you just quit it? As I said before, I'm not your bodyguard every single hour of every single day. What are you going to do? Take away my days

off?"

"N-no, but..."

"Besides, I'm losing my edge just protecting you. Being an adventurer might help prevent that from becoming a serious issue down the line. And even though I'd like to take on missions with Yuuya...he's busy. It's not like it's going to be easy to do jobs together."

"...Are you sure?"

After hearing what Luna has to say, Lexia turns to me, but...what am I supposed to tell her? There's nothing that I can say to her, so I've just been silent this whole time...

I look at Luna, unsure of what to do, but Luna simply stares back as if to say *Just nod*. I-is that it...?

"Well...I was only able to come all the way to the capital because I finally found a small amount of spare time, so what Luna is saying is true. As soon as this rebellion is put down, I'll have to go straight back home anyway..."

"Oh..."

When Lexia heard from Luna that there wouldn't be many times that we'd get to work together, she seemed relieved, but now that she knows I'm going to have to return home when the trouble here is taken care of, her expression clouded over again. I guess it always has to be like this... I am a high school student after all.

"Ahem...?"

"Oh, sorry! I'd like to register today along with my friend here," I tell the woman behind the desk, who has been watching us bewildered and flustered.

The woman takes out two pieces of paper. The paper is slightly rough, just like the paper I wrote on back at the Merchant's Guild, and looks hard to write on. If these forms are so widespread, I guess they have their own ways of copying paper, too.

"Then you two will need to fill out the fields on this form here."

"Okay... Oh, wait. What should I do about these two? I know they're

monsters, but do I need to register them, too?"

"Woof."

"Oink."

I pick Night and Akatsuki up and show them to the woman behind the desk.

I wonder if I should really lump Night and Akatsuki in with other monsters. They seem to be way smarter than any monster I've encountered so far, and Akatsuki in particular has never shown a hint of malice or hostility from the moment I met him...

The receptionist looks at Night and Akatsuki in surprise for a second before smiling warmly.

"No, you only have to register yourself."

"I see. Thank you."

I start to fill in the form and realize that the questions are similar to those that were on the form I had to fill out in the Merchant's Guild.

Adventuring seems to be a riskier business, though, so this form also asks what weapons I can use and for my magic's elemental attribute. I wonder if they try to match you up with the missions that suit you in particular? Still...

...Elemental attribute? Can't you do most things with magic as long as you have the imagination and mana for them? The book I received from the sage said that imagination and mana are what are important. It didn't really mention anything about elements.

I've been teaching the rabbit magic in the same way the sage taught me, so the rabbit can use lots of different types of magic without being constrained to one element as well. Although it does still depend on the amount of mana available and the size of his imagination, too...

Luckily, I can use magic without putting too much thought into it thanks to the mana pathways I inherited from the sage and my mana increases each time I level up. I'm so grateful for that man.

Still, looking at this form, it seems like elemental attributes are a normal concept in places like this.

Yeah...there's definitely a discrepancy with the kinds of concepts that the sage thought about.

Which means that it might be a big deal if I wrote all elements or something.

Maybe I should go with something a little less conspicuous.

I guess I could put down water and fire. Maybe wind, too...?

If there's such thing as a "space element," then that would apply, too, being as I can use teleportation magic, but that would probably cause as much trouble as if I wrote *everything*. In any case, Lexia warned me that I shouldn't tell anyone else that I'm capable of that. It'd definitely cause problems if other people knew.

The reason I'm choosing water, fire, and wind is because they don't stand out so much, and I actually use them quite a lot.

I can use fire magic when camping and water magic when I'm thirsty and I need something to drink. The other benefit of water magic is that I can use it in places like forests without having to worry about my surroundings.

Wind is invisible, which makes it really useful to attack with.

As I continue to fill out the form, my hand stops at a certain question.

"Excuse me, but what does 'Amount of Mana' mean?"

I cock my head at a term I've never heard before and ask the receptionist about it, who politely answers.

"Oh yes. That field requires you both to write down the amount of mana you have. There are some missions for which we recommend adventurers with larger mana reserves..."

"I see..."

But what am I supposed to write?

Should I just put down my mana stat?

As I worry about what figure to enter, the receptionist pulls out a clear crystal from under the desk.

"I'll measure your mana using this crystal."

"Can't I just put down the value of my mana stat?"

"While that might indeed be a way of denoting your mana reserves, adventurers in general prefer to play their cards closer to their chests, so we use this magical tool here that changes color depending on the amount of mana you have instead. That way our members can keep the exact amount of mana they have a secret."

It looks like Luna is going to be the first to have her mana measured. She puts her hands on the crystal.

The crystal flashes yellow.

"Great, that means that you're a yellow."

"Well, I was never that good at magic anyway."

Luna doesn't seem to be too bothered, but...I wonder what level that is.

"Now it's your turn."

I know that it's going to give me a color, but I have no idea which colors are good and which ones are bad.

I think about asking, but the receptionist is already ready and waiting, so I just put my hands on the crystal.

CRACK!

uuu

The crystal shatters.

An uncomfortable silence descends.

Wait a minute. I know it broke, but...was that my fault? Are they gonna want compensation?!

To be honest, I don't know what's going on, but no matter how you look at it, I'm pretty sure I'm the one who smashed it.

Which means I'm probably going to have to pay for breaking it... That isn't good. What if I don't have enough money on me?!

While I'm wondering if I'm going to have to sell way more peppercorns, the

receptionist promptly pulls herself together.

"Th-that made me jump... To think you have enough mana to shatter the crystal..."

The receptionist's voice wavers. Luna looks completely dumbfounded.

"Sigh... I know that crazy things tend to happen when you're around, Yuuya, but...this?"

"That's incredible, Sir Yuuya! You broke a Mana Crystal! Only the most legendary elves are supposed to be capable of something like that!"

For some reason, even though I broke the crystal, Lexia's eyes have lit up, and the receptionist doesn't seem angry at all.

"Huh? U-ummm... Should I pay for that or something...?"

I ask nervously, but the receptionist smiles and shakes her head.

"No, that won't be necessary. I know you didn't mean to..."

Th-thank goodness!

It looks like I won't have to pay anything.

"Still, that was very impressive. This is the first time I've ever seen someone shatter the crystal..." The receptionist says with a slight grimace.

I'm very relieved. I'm glad that I won't have to pay any compensation, but still, it's just another thing that tells me I'm not normal. All I had to do was put my hands on the crystal. It's like I just can't help myself...



Setting the accident aside, I finish writing out my answers to the questions on the application form using a quill—which I'm not used to using—and hand my form to the receptionist.

Luna seems to have finished a little more quickly than I did and is already submitting her form.

"I'm done."

"Thank you...Luna. That's all the paperwork done. Now there's just one more check left to perform. Can you use any other weapons apart from the 'threads' you noted down on your application?"

"Hmm? Are 'threads' a problem?"

"No, there's no issue with what you wrote down, but it's not very often we see people who use threads as their weapon. It makes it slightly more difficult to tell if a job for which you have been specially requested is appropriate or not."

"I see... Unfortunately, I can't really use any other weapons. If pushed, I guess I can use my fists and daggers, but...I can use my threads for pretty much everything. I don't see myself having any major problems on a designated mission or any other mission for that matter. Besides, I'm sure there's no rule saying that I have to take on a mission that I've been requested for, is there?"

"That much is true. Although it's quite difficult to refuse urgent missions or when the fate of a country is on the line..."

"In those cases, acceptance and refusal is a whole different question."

"I agree."

"Then there's no problem. If I'm too busy, I will just say no."

"Understood. Then I'll progress your registration on to the next stage." The receptionist nods, places the application to one side and takes mine.

"Okay...Yuuya. Let's see here... Huh?! Y-you can use three elemental attributes?!"

"Yeah... Is that weird?"

"I—I don't know if I would say that it's weird, but...I would say that's only usually possible in fairy tales and storybooks!"

Th-that was a close one... I'm so glad now that I didn't write "All elements..."

I feel so relieved, but Luna is looking at me reproachfully.

"...Yuuya. It takes a lot of talent to be able to use elemental magic. It's not like learning non-elemental magic or everyday magic. So for you to know three is..."

"Amazing! That's Sir Yuuya for you!"

While Luna looks surprised, Lexia stares at me with bright eyes... It's not me who's the amazing one, though. It's all down to the mana pathways I inherited from the sage... Apart from that, I only put down three because it seemed like the best thing to do at the time. In reality, as long as I have the mana and imagination for it, I think my magic is almost limitless...

"Ahem. My apologies for losing my composure. The magic part of your application is all fine... Well, maybe not 'fine,' but this is nothing more than self-declaration, so..."

"Sigh..."

In other words, if I'm lying, I'm sure to get my comeuppance at some point. I'll have to be careful. Not that I've even told any lies.

"So, am I right in understanding that you mainly fight with spears and swords?"

"Yes, that's right."

Those are the weapons I think I use most.

After I nod, the receptionist heads over to a strange-looking machine that resembles a copier and sets my and Luna's application forms inside.

At the press of a button, the forms disappear, and two metal plates come out of the contraption.

I wonder if the Merchant's Guild used the same machine to make my guild card there as well.

"...Here you go. Guild cards for Yuuya and Luna. Since you've only just signed

up, both of you are starting from the lowest rank, F-rank. F-rank adventurers can take on F-rank missions and missions from the next rank up... E-rank in your cases. If you want to rank up, you'll need to be promoted at the discretion of the guild, for which we'll take into account both the number of missions you have completed and your behavior within the guild. There is no specified number of missions that you have to hit."

"...So it's pretty much the same as the Guild of Darkness, then..."

Luna mutters beside me. Sounds like even the Guild of Darkness has ranks...

The receptionist doesn't seem to have heard Luna and continues speaking without even batting an eye.

"Do you have any questions so far?"

"Ummm, yeah, about quotas and things...are there any rules that say you have to take on a certain number of jobs?"

"Not really. Some people just join the Adventurer's Guild to get some identification, so it's up to you whether you decide to take on a mission or not."

That's a relief.

If there was some kind of quota, I'd have to take missions on quite a lot. And for someone like me, who wants to enjoy adventuring through this world while continuing school in the real world, that'd be pretty tough.

"Let me tell you more about the mission system. We expect you to collect the amount of gatherable materials as listed in the mission brief, but if you manage to bring back more, we will pay you a bonus. That said, if you happen to find somewhere with an abundance of what you have been asked to gather, you need to be careful not to overharvest. If you remove all the plants from a certain area for instance, they may not grow back..."

Hmm...so if we gather a lot, then we can earn lots of money, but if we gather too much, it'll be a problem. So we have to be careful.

After that, the receptionist tells us some more basic information, like how we have to present a part of the monster we've been asked to kill when we carry out combat missions. Although, I guess even if we don't bring a part of the

monster home, the information will still be recorded on guild cards, so we can't exactly fake anything. I'm not sure how that works, though.

"Now...lastly, you should be aware that the Adventurer's Guild does not interfere in quarrels between adventurers. Please remember that."

"Huh? Oh, okay."

Quarrels...? Does she mean fights?

I'm not completely sure, but I don't want to fight anyone, so I just nod obediently.

"Oh, and I forgot to mention. My name is Emilia. I'm sorry to have to give you such a long-winded explanation, but we're very happy to welcome you both to the guild," the receptionist—Emilia—says with a smile.

Now that we've finished signing up, we move away from the desk and begin to talk among ourselves.

"So, what do we do now? Since we're here, why don't we pick up a mission...?"

"Huh? Really? But Lexia and Owen volunteered to show me around town..."

"It's fine! I aways wanted to make my adventurer debut, too!" Lexia assured me.

"I don't think so. You haven't registered."

"Who cares? I still feel like an adventurer!"

Feelings and adventurer debuts are all well and good, but...I'm not sure Owen is going to be very happy to hear what his princess is planning.

I'm still worried about it, but Lexia's enthusiasm pushes the thought to the back of my mind, and we decide to accept a mission in the end.

"Hmm... There are so many different types of missions to choose from."

"Yeah, but since we only just registered, there's probably only a few we can actually do."

It's just as Luna surmised. Most of the missions that we can accept are things like helping out the townsfolk or taking down a monster I've never heard of.

Lexia is staring at the same notice board beside me with surprise.

"Wow... I wonder if adventurers are asked to help with this many jobs every single day."

"Probably. My old guild, the Guild of Darkness, operated along the same system as the designated missions they have here, so it feels nice and fresh to be able to look through the jobs on a notice board and just choose the ones I want."

I have no idea what the Guild of Darkness is like or why they exist, but from everything that I've heard about them from Luna, they seem to be a well-organized group.

After the three of us look at the board a little longer, we suddenly hear a voice call out from behind us.

"You there."

"Huh?"

When we turn around, a woman dressed like a witch with flushed cheeks is standing there. She's wearing the black hat, the black dress, everything.

But her clothes are also kinda...seductive. The dress is very open around the chest area, so I'm not sure where to look.

Plus...she reeks of alcohol. She's probably quite drunk.

As I consider her appearance, Luna stands between us.

"What's the matter? Do you have business with us?"

"Hmph, you don't have to be so cautious. I just spotted a fine-looking young man and thought I'd take the opportunity to say hi."

"S-stop right there! Sir Yuuya is mine!" Lexia pipes up.

"No, I don't think I'm quite yours..."

I'm pretty sure that I turned down her marriage proposal...right? Sometimes, I'm not so sure.

While I worry about Lexia, the witch slips past Luna and approaches me.

She grabs my arm and clamps it against her chest.

"Mmm! The more I gaze at you, the finer you look. So, how about it? You wanna...?"

"Uhh...?!"

"H-hey! Get away from Sir Yuuya this instant!"

"Oh, come on. I'm not hurting anyone. You wouldn't want to refuse me and make a girl upset, would you?"

"...I don't know who you are, but it seems like you might have had too much to drink."

An irate-looking Luna grabs the witch's hand and wrenches her away from me. S-saved at last...

The witch doesn't seem very discouraged, though, and simply laughs, looking at me like a predator at their prey.

"You must forgive me. I'm an adventurer, too, you see, and when I see a strong man, I just have to get close to him."

"Huh?"

"I saw what happened when you signed up to the guild. Both you, girl, and that gorgeous young man were amazing. I just thought that maybe if we could be friends, we could help out one another someday."

"Hmm..."

I've only just become an adventurer, so I have no idea what's going on, but Luna appears to understand what the witch wants and groans.

The witch's smile only grows at the sight of Luna's discomfort.

"I supposed I'd better introduce myself... My name is Glenna. I won't impose more than I already have today, but if the opportunity arises, I'd love to take on a mission together."

And with that, the woman dressed like a witch—Glenna—leaves us in peace.

I watch her walk away, then turn to Night and Akatsuki.

"It's hardly like we're as strong as she's making out. We still have a way to go yet."

"Woof?"

"Oink."

Night cocks his head, and Akatsuki looks back at me with a weird expression on his face for some reason. Why, though? Luna's looking at me with the same expression as Akatsuki.

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"...Come on, Yuuya..."

"Huh?"
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"...Nothing. Let's just chalk it up to you being you..."

"Who cares?! We have bigger problems now...that woman is targeting poor Sir Yuuya! Should I have signed up as an adventurer so that I can protect him from that woman, too?!"

"No. Glenna may be a problem, but...if we let you even more off your leash, we're going to give Owen a heart attack."

Lexia pouts, brushing off Luna's admonishment, but...I don't think it's a good idea, either. It's very unfair to Owen.

"Hmm... Fine. Then let's at least choose a job that I can help with as well! There was something about picking medicinal herbs on the notice board! Even if I'm not a legitimate adventurer, I can still help with something like that, right?"

"I don't mind, but...you'll have to persuade Owen on your own."

"Of course!"

...I'm so sorry, Owen. I don't think there's any stopping this...

All I can do is profusely apologize in my head to the knight who seems condemned to always look after the two headstrong girls.

* * *

After the chat with Glenna, we decide to go along with Lexia's whim and take

a job picking medicinal herbs. Once we're done with all the paperwork at the desk, we head out of the capital.

Sure enough, Owen isn't thrilled by the idea of Lexia taking part in our mission, but he relents to her determination and eventually approves... Sorry for always putting you through this, Owen.

"Since Lord Yuuya will be accompanying you, I don't foresee any problems."

...Owen seems to trust me for some reason, and since I've already caused him so much trouble, I feel like it's a trust that I need to live up to.

It sounds like medicinal herbs grow everywhere once you leave town, so it shouldn't be hard to find them.

That said, I'd never seen any herb other than the Herb of Complete Healing, so I had to be shown a sample back at the reception desk, and...I still have no idea how it's different from the normal grasses that also grow outside. It looks similar to the Herb of Complete Healing as well.

Luckily, I can use my Identify skill to be sure of what's what, and Luna seems to be familiar with medicinal herbs, so there's probably no need to worry.

Actually, Lexia, Luna, and I had discussed taking on a mission where we would kill a really easy monster, but Owen was dead set against it.

Plus, when I looked at the notice board, I realized that the job notices asking for medicinal herbs had obviously been up there for a long time. When I asked why, I was told it was much easier to make money by hunting weaker species of slimes and goblins.

The picture of slimes and goblins I have in my head is of those that live in the Weald, so I don't see them as particularly weak. But if you think about how you can exchange the items dropped by fallen monsters for even more money, then the combat quests become far more lucrative.

Maybe that's why we decided to stick with our mission. We were told that since so few herbs are being harvested, stocks are beginning to run dry. Which spells trouble if there's ever a disaster or emergency. So we decided to take this mission on after all.

Besides, I'm not exactly hurting for cash at the moment, and Lexia seemed concerned by the low stocks and wanted to help. Luna just didn't seem to have any particular objection.

We've been asked to harvest ten plants, but if we can harvest more, then we'll get a tidy bonus, too.

That said, if we uproot all the surrounding herbs to try and get the bonus, we'll be hit with a fine the moment the Adventurer's Guild realizes. If we pick so many they don't ever grow back, that's just causing more trouble for everyone. Luckily, medicinal herbs seem to be so widespread that it would be almost impossible to pick them all, and even more than that, they're renowned for their vitality and will spring back up again if left alone for a while, so we don't need to worry too much...

As we leave the city, a nice breeze blows.

"Mmm... That feels so good."

"...Yeah. I never had the time to be able to fully enjoy the breeze before...but now that I do, it feels so nice."

"Same here. Lately, I'm always on official duties or stuck inside the castle, so it feels invigorating to breathe the fresh air... It's nice when I go out shopping in the town as well, but I like this, too!"

"Your Highness. Could you please settle down a bit? I don't want you running around too much with things as they currently stand..."

Owen sighs as he reminds Lexia of the danger she's in.

"I know, I know. But once things have settled down, then it might be nice to go and eat outside on a day like this!"

Lexia looks at the rest of us and smiles.

I agree. The temperature is just right, and the air is nice and clear. It's the perfect weather for a picnic. Although we'd probably have to be on the lookout for monsters and things.

We reach a field close to the town and look around as we try to remember what the herb that Emilia showed us looks like.

"Hmm... Oh! Is that it?"

We quickly find something that resembles what we're looking for, and I activate my Identify skill.

Herb of Healing—A plant known in this world as a "medicinal herb." This herb is mostly used as an ingredient in recovery medicines. It can also be crushed into a powder and applied to scratches and scrapes. They are most effective when picked with the utmost care so as not to damage their roots.

Hmm...this is definitely a medicinal herb, but it seems like it has an official name, too.

And thanks to my Identify skill, we even know the proper way to pick them.

As I gently dig up the soil with my hands, Lexia peeks at what I'm doing from beside me.

"Ohhh...so that's how you pick herbs!"

"It's not difficult to pick herbs. But I heard somewhere that it's best to pick them while causing as little damage to the roots as possible. That's one of the reasons why Yuuya is being so gentle."

"So then I should imitate what Sir Yuuya is doing and pick as many as I can, right?!"

"Hey, have you already forgotten what Emilia said? We're not supposed to pick too many."

"Exactly. The plants themselves have a lot of vitality and are extremely fertile, so as long as we leave a few clumps of them with their roots intact, they should grow back in a few days, but..."

"Okay, I get it! ...But just picking herbs is so boring. Luna! How about a competition?!"

"Huh?"

Luna is surprised by Lexia's sudden proposal.

"And Sir Yuuya can be the judge!"

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"What?"
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Now she's involving me, too?

Lexia ignores our surprise and starts running.

"The winner gets to spend a whole day alone with Sir Yuuya! On your marks, get set, go!"

"H-hey, Lexia! Sigh... Yuuya. I'm going after Lexia. Can you follow once you've picked the ten plants? ...Tch. I can't believe she started when I wasn't ready...!" Luna says, trying to keep her cool before running off in Lexia's direction.

That's fine, but...why is the prize a day alone with me? What about my feelings?

As I watch them run off in disbelief, they eventually disappear, so I turn to Night and Akatsuki at my feet.

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"...So, are you two going to help me?"
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"Woof?"

"Oink."

"This is the medicinal herb I need...so if you find anything that looks like this, you let me know, okay?"

"Woof."

"Oink."

Both Night and Akatsuki take a sniff of the herb and head off in separate directions.

After I watch them head out on their respective searches, I also start to look for more herbs and pick a few when I find a patch nearby.

It may be mundane, but I kinda like this sort of work. I don't have to think too much.

After looking for a while, I hear a soft bark from Night.

"Woof!"

"Oh, have you found something?"

I walk over to Night and see something growing there that resembles a medicinal herb.

Something about it seems different, though, so I activate my Identify skill.

Herb of Magical Healing—A plant that resembles a medicinal herb. Instead of healing injuries, this herb restores mana. It is mostly used as an ingredient in mana recovery medicine. Even when it is just placed on the tongue, a small amount of mana is restored. This plant is picked the same way as medicinal herbs.

It looks like this herb isn't quite the herb that we're looking for.

"Close, but no cigar! This is something different."

"Whine..."

"Don't feel too bad. We can still use it."

"Woof."

I gently stroke Night, who's whining sadly over his mistake.

Once Night is feeling better, we start to pick Herbs of Magical Healing together. That's when we hear Akatsuki call out.

"Oink! Oink, oink!"

"Hmm? Has Akatsuki found something, too?"

I rush over to Akatsuki's side and peer down at the herb he's found.

".....Huh?"

I don't know what to say.

"Uhh...Akatsuki? You did hear me say that we're looking for *medicinal herbs*, didn't you?"

"Oink."

"So, what are these?"

"Oink!"

Akatsuki points with his hoof as if to say Medicinal herbs!

I decide to use my Identify skill just in case.

Herb of Certain Death—This plant must never be eaten. Once consumed, death follows swiftly. While this plant may be tolerated by those with poison resistance and poison negation skills, it's doubtful that it's actively enjoyed when eaten. If prepared correctly and mixed with the right ingredients, this plant turns into an antidote. When picking, only the leaves are required.

So it isn't what we're looking for after all.

Something seems strange, though. Even though we're surrounded by green all around, this plant, and this plant alone, is purple. It even has red and yellow spots.

As though its colors are warning people not to eat it.

"Akatsuki. Do you really think these are medicinal herbs?"

"Oink."

"Okay. You just stay put for now."

"Oink?!"

Akatsuki seems genuinely surprised by my reaction.

I guess if we had the right ingredients and knew the right method, we could make an antidote, but there's no way anyone could call this thing a medicinal herb.

It would be a waste to just leave it here after Akatsuki put so much effort into finding it, though, so I decided to pick a few leaves anyway.

I manage to pick a few more types of medicinal herbs, but there are no large colonies of any particular species here, so I can't pick any in bulk.

After a while, Lexia, who has been picking herbs elsewhere, comes running back over to me.

"Sir Yuuya! Look! Look!"

Lexia is clutching some plants in her hands that kind of look like medicinal herbs, but...she's covered in mud. What the hell happened?

While I stand there looking confused at a muddy Lexia, Luna comes running up behind her, completely out of breath.

"Hey, Lexia. Settle down... Sometimes I wonder if you really are a princess. You're not ladylike in the slightest..."

"How rude. I respectfully fulfill my duties as a member of the royal family, and my manners perfectly befit someone of my stature, thank you very much! Although all this mud doesn't befit an adventurer at all!"

"I have to wonder what you picture in your head when you think of an adventurer..."

"Ummm...aren't people going to be mad at you for getting so muddy?"

She's so covered in mud and dirt that if someone told me that she'd taken a dive headfirst into a puddle, I'd believe them.

"Who knows? Maybe it'll be okay! It's not like I'm wearing a nice dress or anything!"

Owen...I'm so sorry.

—In the end, both Lexia and Luna picked the same number of plants, so nobody won the right to spend a day with Yuuya alone.

As Yuuya took on a new mission in the other world, Kaori Houjou sat in her bedroom preparing for her next classes like she always did.

After studying in silence for some time, the schoolgirl found a good place to take a break, put down her pen, and stretched.

"Hmm...I'm still finding English and classical literature so difficult..."

Kaori's studies today only reinforced that feeling. Suddenly, the calendar caught her eye.

"Oh, that's right...the midterms are coming up soon..."

As Kaori absentmindedly pondered over the tests, Yuuya's face swam into her

mind.

At the same time, she remembered what had happened on the way home after the tournament— "...!"

Kaori's face suddenly turned red. She got up from the chair and flopped down on her bed, agonizing over a certain question.

"...What is it that I want exactly...?"

She thought back to the day of the tournament.

Her own clumsiness had led to the injury of her tennis partner. When she was down and upset about it, Yuuya gallantly came to her rescue.

Kaori was attracted to her schoolmate who had saved her time and again, but...she was also confused by those new feelings.

That's why, after the tournament, she was unable to hold back any longer and planted a soft kiss on Yuuya's cheek. Ever since she came home that day, she had been pining and wallowing.

But despite the fact that she had made it this far without any experience in love, Kaori knew how she felt about Yuuya.

"...Yuuya, I..."

That's all she could manage to say before her cheeks burned again, and she buried her face in her sheets.

Although Kaori managed to eventually calm herself down, she was soon worrying again.

"Yuuya is so amazing...so maybe he already has a...and even if he doesn't, there are so many other girls who..."

Even though Kaori had just felt so happy, her heart quickly began to sink.

"B-but I don't want to give up on him... What should I do...?"

The moment that Kaori began to think about how she could get closer to Yuuya without him being stolen away by another girl, she felt her eyes flit once again to the calendar.

"...Ah!"

Kaori realized something and jumped up to her feet.

"Th-that's it! What if I asked Yuuya to study for the midterms with me?!"

All alone in her room, Kaori started to mutter questions to herself.

While Kaori wasn't usually the type to do that, her musings eventually assembled themselves into quite a good plan.

"If that's what I'm going to do, then...I'd better ask him next time I see him!" Imagining all the possibilities, Kaori returned to her desk.

—And with that, Kaori got back to studying to prepare for when she and Yuuya would study for the tests together.

CHAPTER 2

A Mysterious Attacker

Now that we've finished our herb-picking mission and have arrived back at the castle, things feel different than they did before. As if a new sense of panic has descended over the grounds.

"I wonder what happened."

"No idea..."

Luna and I both cock our heads in bewilderment as one soldier who noticed our group's return comes dashing over and whispers into Owen's ear.

Owen frowns for a moment, then sighs and turns to Lexia.

"—Your Highness. It appears that your brother has been located."

"...Oh."

It seems they've finally found the prince. Lexia's expression darkens.

After regarding the princess with concern, Owen turns to me.

"Ahem... Lord Yuuya."

"Yes?"

"If it is not too much trouble, I would appreciate your assistance once again."

"Huh?"

"I hate to seem so spineless, but we were taken so much by surprise during the last attack on His Majesty that the prince's assassins managed to use an item to prevent our guards from using magic before we even had a chance to stop them. Each of those assassins was extremely skilled, too. Therefore, when we attempt to capture the prince this time, I am worried that something unexpected will happen and we'll be rendered ineffective again. We cannot allow the prince to escape. That must be avoided at all costs. So, please. Would you help us once more?"

"Th-there's no need to persuade me! If you would like me to help, then I will!"

"...You have my gratitude," Owen says, bowing deeply to me.

Then, led by the rest of the soldiers, we head to where the prince is believed to be hiding.

However, Lexia must not be put in harm's way, so she has to stay in the castle. Naturally, her guard, Luna, remains by her side.

The destination that the soldiers lead us to isn't anywhere within the castle grounds, but a small house outside town.

"This is...?"

One of the soldiers who guided us here sees the surprise on my face and begins to explain.

"...We didn't know about this place, but apparently His Majesty had this home built for the prince."

"What?"

"It seems like the prince was secluded out here. This is the first time we've seen this place, too, but...His Majesty told us that this would likely be where the prince is hiding if he was going to hide anywhere. And when we investigated, he turned out to be right."

"Uhhh... The prince was isolated here? That surprises me, but...what about the rest? Is it okay I know all this...?"

"...Normally, it wouldn't be, but what with the emergency situation we have on our hands right now, even we've been informed..."

"I see..."

Being secluded means that there are barely any people around, and the area is deserted. I guess people don't usually live around here. But why was he

hidden away in the first place? He's a prince, isn't he?

As we enter the cabin, my mind still racing with questions, other soldiers are already inside surrounding a single man.

Even in the eyes of someone like me who isn't very familiar with this world, the man is dressed finely. What sticks out the most, though, is the mask that he's wearing.

I know the man in front of me is the prince because of the situation I find myself in, but...I can't help but be taken aback by his appearance.

"It's over, Your Highness. Please surrender peacefully."

"Be quiet, be quiet, BE QUIET! Who do you think you are speaking to?!"

"Your Highness..."

"DON'T come any closer!"

"Ah!"

The soldiers who had encircled and trapped the prince can't approach him because of the knife the prince is waving.

"If you come any closer, I'll kill myself!"

"But..."

"It's not like anybody gives a damn about someone like me anyway! Who would mourn me?!"

I'm surprised to hear those words come out the mouth of a prince.

He's a prince, isn't he? So why wouldn't anyone be upset if he died?

At the very least, Lexia and her family seem sad about what has happened.

I absentmindedly look around at the people in the room, including at Owen. Everyone looks like they have the same mixed feelings for some reason. Why?

The prince sneers as if he too sees how all the soldiers are reacting.

"What's this? No rebuttal? You probably all think that a tumor like me is better off dead, don't you? Well then, you'll all see your wish granted...!"

"Your Highness!"

The prince aims the knife at his neck and begins to swing. Holy shit...! Does he really intend to kill himself?!

"Night! Bite that man's arm and stop him from moving!"

"Woof!"

Night acknowledges my command, closes in at lightning speed, and bites down on the arm holding the knife.

"Argh?!"

The force of Night's jump and bite not only sends the prince's arm flying off course, but also makes him drop the knife in pain.

"Ah! Now!"

Owen seizes his chance and barks an order. The soldiers all go to restrain the prince at once.

Panicking, the prince tries to grab the knife, but Night is in the way, and the soldiers who were already standing close by successfully restrain him.

After a job well done, Night struts back to my side, chest puffed out with pride.

"Woof."

"Thanks, Night. You were a big help!"

"Woof!"

"Oink, oink!"

As I give Night a few pets, Akatsuki also starts petting him condescendingly with his hoof for some reason. Hey, why are you acting so high and mighty when you didn't do anything? Not that I did anything, either.

But Night doesn't seem particularly bothered by it. In fact, he seems happy to be stroked by Akatsuki and me. How cute!

"L-let me go! Who do you think you're dealing with here?!"

"Please stop, Your Highness."

"This is a command from His Majesty."

As though we've almost forgotten that the prince has been captured, a relaxed atmosphere hangs over Night, Akatsuki and me. That's when Owen approaches, a forced smile on his face.

```
"Lord Yuuya."

"Huh? O-oh! Sorry! We were just..."

"It's okay... I can see that you're a very close team."

"Yeah...they're my beloved family."

"Woof."

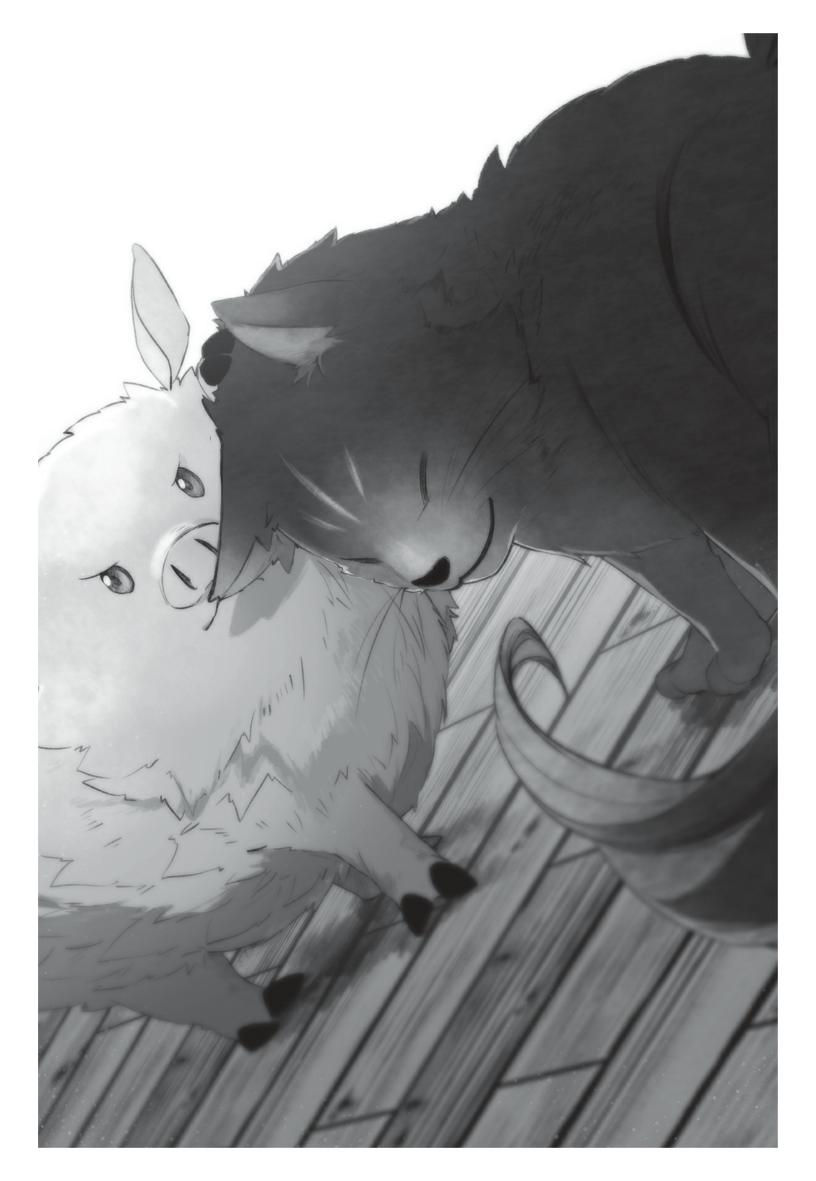
"Oink."
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Both Night and Akatsuki nod in agreement.

Owen smiles softly at us and nods but soon reverts to a more serious expression.

"It's all thanks to you, Lord Yuuya, and that family of yours, that we were able to capture the prince. You have my deepest gratitude."

"D-don't mention it! I'm just glad we could be of service!"



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"...Thank you. Now then, we shall get the prince ready for—"
Owen is suddenly interrupted.

"...! Woof!"

Night cuts off Owen with panicked barking.

And then—

"Wha—?!"
```

"Oof!"

"Gah!"

Something smashes through the window and flies into the middle of the hideout.

As it crashes into the space between the prince and the soldiers, the force of the impact reverberates around the room.

It's so strong that the soldiers are flung against the wall.

"O-oh! So you did come after all!"

Owen and I are rushing to get ready to face this sudden attack when the prince begins to laugh happily.

That's when a figure climbs in through the smashed window.

"Assessment of situation...complete. You have failed."

"Huh?"

The intruder has pale skin and white hair. She has mysterious gray eyes and something robotic about her.

I was surprised enough by the sudden intrusion, but it's more surprising that it's a girl.

She's so beautiful that you could mistake her for something artificial created in a lab.

"Who the hell are you...?"

Owen draws his sword and stands ready to fight the girl, but she doesn't even

look at him. She just keeps her stare fixed on the prince.

"Failure. You are no longer required."

"Wh-what did you just say?! Don't tell me that you're planning on deserting me now?! When it comes down to it, you Guild of Darkness people have always been weak, that's why—!"

"Negative. It is purely a lack of planning on your part. And bad luck. That is all."

"Wh-what?! You were promised a prized position for ensuring my ascension to the throne!"

The prince is enraged by the girl's words, but she doesn't seem to care in the slightest.

"False. That was a lie to motivate you to act. Regarding the actual plan, the objective was to install you as a puppet king of this country. You were to instigate multiple wars and fight until you all killed one another."

"But ...! But ...!"

"However, you failed. And now you are superfluous. You are not even beneficial as my pawn. So you will be eliminated."

The prince is searching for a retort, but it seems nothing comes to mind, and his lips simply flap open and shut.

...But even more important than that, from the sound of their conversation, could this girl be associated with the Guild of Darkness? I thought I heard some other malicious stuff...but maybe it was my imagination. I can't hear very well from over here...

I have no idea what this girl is like, but the fact that Night couldn't sense her presence until the very moment she appeared has set my alarm bells ringing.

Night is far better at detecting the presence of others than I am, so to be able to avoid his keen senses is nothing less than...extraordinary.

I get an ominous feeling, and then the girl suddenly takes out a knife and brandishes it at the prince!

"It's over. Die."

"N-nooooo! S-somebody!!!"

We all rush to intervene, but Owen gets there first.

"Your Highness!"

Owen attacks the girl's exposed and defenseless back with one mighty hit.

There's no way that it hasn't made contact—or so we thought.

"Huh ... ? Gah?!"

At that very moment something bursts through the shattered window again, bouncing off Owen's sword and changing its trajectory.

Owen uses the force of the impact to put some space between him and the girl.

The thing that redirected his swing sticks straight into the wall, and it finally becomes clear what we are looking at.

"...An arrow?"

The item that came flying through the window is actually an arrow.

Akatsuki approaches the arrow, picks it up with his mouth, and brings it back over to me.

"Oink!"

"Huh? Oh, thank you... But don't get so close next time. It could be dangerous!"

"Oink?"

I thank Akatsuki without a second thought but then realize he went and carelessly retrieved the arrow even though we don't know anything about our enemy. We would have been in trouble if she had done something nasty to the projectiles.

That said, I wonder whether, if we knew more about the arrow, we'd get closer to finding out who this girl really is. So I take it and cautiously use my Identify skill on it...

"Huh?"

My Identify skill indicates that it's a normal, everyday arrow.

It's not even as if the arrowhead or anything is made out of a special material, or it's had some kind of effect placed on it.

It literally is just a plain old arrow.

Which begs the questions of how it was strong enough to fly through the glass of the window and how it was strong enough to knock Owen's sword swing off course.

Apart from that, the attack came from outside, even though the girl is standing in this room. Which means she must have an accomplice.

Owen appears to have reached the same conclusion and is glaring outside with a stern look on his face.

"You... Who are you? What do you want?!"

"Unnecessary. I am under no obligation to respond."

"What ... ?! You ...!"

Owen lunges for the girl again, but every time he does, arrows fly in from outside and prevent him from getting too close.

I move to help Owen, too, but once again, the arrows block me.

"Dammit! That other bastard hiding outside is so annoying...!"

"Another?"

Owen can't help but mutter in frustration, but the girl hears and turns this way for the first time since she arrived.

"Negative. I am alone. It's all me."

"Huh?"

Owen and I are completely taken aback.

The orchestrator of these attacks...is the girl in front of us? I don't understand. She doesn't even move like she's attacking.

"Rubbish! Do you think you can fool us all with such blatant lies?! I'm going to

make you spill your guts out about what you have planned...!"

"—A step to the right. A slash from the left."

At the very moment Owen launches a new attack, the girl utters a strange phrase.

But I soon come to see the meaning behind it.

Because just as she utters those words, Owen makes the exact same movements.

That's when arrows come flying through the window again as if to block them and change the swing of Owen's blade.

The girl's gray eyes that shine mysteriously and emotionlessly turn toward us.

"—I have foresight. All I do is place arrows where I will require them."

"What...are you talking about ...?"

"My objective. I no longer have any interest in this man anymore. Because I will deal with all who stand here."

"What?!"

"My final objective. To kill all humans. As eligible targets, you shall die first."

Unable to understand what the girl—who is ignoring Owen's questions—is talking about, all I can do is stand there dumbstruck.

Despite my shock at her extreme motivations, arrows begin to rain down from everywhere. From the doors and windows and through the walls and roof itself.

"Impossible. There is nowhere to run. I simply toyed with you until all arrows were in place. Good-bye."

The girl's words still don't make sense and as we stand there unable to process what is about to happen, the arrows fly thick and fast toward us and the entire building. What is she still doing here, though?! Does she have some way to avoid getting hurt or something? What kind of person is this?!

Night, Akatsuki, Owen, and I may yet be able to wriggle our way out of this situation, but it's probably too late for the prince and the soldiers that were

knocked out during the first attack.

That's why we have to do something...

How the hell do we get ourselves out of this one?!

The sage's weapons are useless here! I could probably use them to get myself out of this situation, but I can't protect this many people.

That means I might have to use magic, but I don't think I can cast anything with fire, water, or lightning here. If I try and use fire to stop the arrows, I might burn them all in one go, but I'll burn this house and us down with them at the same time.

In that case...!

It hasn't even been a few seconds yet since the girl launched her attack, but my brain is working at full throttle trying to figure out how we can escape this mess.

Then, at the last possible second, I think "screw it" and activate my magic.

In my mind's eye, I picture a dome-shaped barrier of wind that makes all the arrows fall harmlessly to the ground.

As a result, a dome begins to form and spread throughout the building with me at the center, before unleashing a ferocious wind.

The wind is so strong that the unconscious soldiers, and even the prince, roll along the floor, and Owen and the others are forced to stand firm, desperately trying to withstand the powerful gusts.

But the mysterious girl isn't even bothering to stand her ground. All she does is shield her face with her hand. That's how I can tell that she's stronger than all of us.

By the time the winds eventually subside, all the arrows that were hurtling toward us are now scattered on the floor.

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"Lord Yuuya, we're saved..."
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"Yuuya...?"

With the arrows safely on the ground, we're out of the woods for the

moment. It seems this turn of events was something that the girl never anticipated as she stares with eyes wide in surprise.

Owen seizes the moment and successfully recovers the prince, who had luckily been wrestled away from the girl by the wind.

At the same time, Night and Akatsuki get to work rousing the unconscious soldiers and guiding them away from the girl as well.

The soldiers got knocked out during the girl's first attack, but apart from that, they don't appear to be injured, which is a huge relief.

Having achieved what we wanted, we now have only one thing left to do: Deal with the girl.

"Give yourself up and surrender," Owen demands, the tip of his sword pointed directly at her. But for some reason, I'm the one she's staring at.

"Question. Are you Yuuya?"

"Huh? Y-yes."

"Why would you just answer her like that?!"

"Oh, but..."

Owen interjects when I answer her question. I couldn't help it, though, it was an automatic response. All I did was reply when she asked my name!

That said, how *does* she know my name? Have I met her before...? No way. I don't think I would forget meeting someone like her.

The more I think about it, the more confused I get, but now's not the time for that as Owen and I ready ourselves and I remove the Absolute Spear from my Item Box. Night and Akatsuki also fix their gazes upon her warily.

But—

"Fortunate. I encountered Yuuya. Unfortunate. I have exhausted my supply of arrows."

"What?"

I ask absentmindedly, and the girl's face contorts.

"...This was completely unexpected. If he's this strong, then I will need to use my Demon powers. But...I do not have the mana. All because of that last battle."

The girl is muttering to herself quietly enough so that we can't hear and eventually looks over at us and nods.

"There is no other way. Temporarily retreating. Good-bye."

"Huh?! Why would you think that we'd ever let you leave so easily...?!"

"Prepared. Now sufficient."

The moment that she finishes speaking, an arrow launches at Owen as he attempts to pursue her.

Then more arrows come flying down to impede anyone going after her, so Night, Akatsuki, and I can't get any closer.

"So you aren't out of arrows after all...?!"

"Foolish question. I anticipate many possible situations. This time I shall withdraw. Good-bye."

The girl puts a foot on the window ledge that she first came through and escapes from the building.

Once we've finished defending ourselves from the rest of the arrows, we rush after her, but she's already long gone, and even Night can no longer pick up her trail.

"Ugh... She got away..."

"I wonder who she was...?"

"I don't know...but that strength...is not normal. Judging by her conversation with His Highness, she's likely affiliated with the Guild of Darkness, but...I can't believe they have someone *that* powerful in their employ. It looks like we're going to have to be even more wary of them... Darn it. The chance to get rid of it once and for all has never felt further away. If they have such strong members, then we can't go acting recklessly."

I guess they are going to have to move more carefully now that we know

someone like that girl is involved. What's more, it seems like the reason the girl retreated was because she ran out of arrows, so it looked like she may have cut some corners. She never even had a bow in her hands. If she'd had one, then maybe things wouldn't have turned out the way they did this time. I'm kind of grateful for that.

...I always thought that Master Rabbit was strong, but she's almost at the same level. It's just like Master Rabbit said. Unless I train, I won't be able to defend that which I wish to protect.

I visualize that girl who attacked us and once again realize that I need to get stronger.

"...But first, let's head back."

Now that the attack by the mysterious girl is over, we secure the prince as planned and return to the castle.

CHAPTER 3 Reconciliation

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"Sir Yuuya! Are you all right?!"
"Yuuya, are you okay?!"
"Y-yeah..."
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Having fended off the mysterious girl's attack and successfully captured the prince, I wait in a palace drawing room alongside Lexia, Luna, and Owen.

After I was inundated with questions by Lexia and the others as soon as I got back, the conversation quickly turned to what happened when we went to catch the prince.

Thanks to that, both the girls are worrying over me.

"It seems like your opponent wasn't being serious this time..."

"Yeah..."

"...I can't believe that there's anyone out there stronger than you, Sir Yuuya..."

"Really? I'm not that strong..."

""Yes, you are!""

"Why?!"

It's so strange. I'm not lying, so...they didn't have to both deny it at once. It's beings like Master Rabbit and his kind who are the real powerful ones.

"In any case, I'm glad you're okay."

"I suppose all of the hustle and bustle around the castle is due to that girl..."

It's just as Luna says. The castle is once again in a panic.

This is the second attack on the royal family, and now that discussions about dealing with the prince are to commence in a palace that is already extremely on edge, people are hurrying about trying to prepare.

The soldiers who lost consciousness after getting attacked by the girl have also woken up and, since there appears to be no lasting damage, they have returned to work. I hope it isn't too soon for them.

Furthermore, while it's true that the prince did attack Lexia, he *is* a member of the royal family and King Arnold's son.

It might not be quite because of that, but the soldiers mustn't mistreat the prince in any way, so there's a lot of fretting among them.

Not to get off track, but when Lexia went to see the prince once he had been captured, he began to get violent again. Luckily, he was no match for Owen or the guards and was quickly subdued.

...That said, I wonder why the prince was wearing a mask? I haven't had an opportunity to see underneath, but both Owen and Lexia said there's no doubt the man underneath is the prince...

Luna seems to harbor the same questions as I do, but neither of us has heard a suitable explanation. Hmm... It kind of bothers me.

As I ponder the masked man, Owen shifts his gaze toward me.

"My apologies, Lord Yuuya, but I would like for you to be involved in the decision of what we are going to do about the prince..."

"Huh? If there's anything that I can help with, then all you need to do is ask, but...I'm an outsider. A-are you sure about this?"

I don't know whether I really should be at such a serious meeting. It's not like King Arnold has the most favorable impression of me at the moment...

Owen nods.

"I don't think there will be another attack so soon after the last one, but the prince may still have something up his sleeve. Or the Guild of Darkness—that the prince and that girl have both now been connected to—may attempt

something..."

As soon as she hears the words *Guild of Darkness*, Luna's eyebrows twitch, but judging by the fact she's not refuting anything, it seems like she also thinks there might be a possibility of that happening.

Besides, even if that girl from before doesn't come back, the guild could still attack. Things could get messy.

"That's why I would like you there to stand guard for both King Arnold and Princess Lexia. Of course, the same invitation extends to Lord Night and Lord Akatsuki. Especially as Lord Night has saved us so many times."

"Woof."

"Oink."

Night nods in acknowledgement. Beside him, Akatsuki is proudly puffing out his chest and raising his front leg as if to say *You can count on me*, despite not really doing anything. I guess it's cute, though.

Looking back, Night was the first to notice when Luna launched her assault on Lexia and when the men in black cloaks made an attempt on Arnold's life. He was even the first to react when that girl ambushed us at the hideout. His senses and ability to detect the presence of others far outclass mine.

"In that case...sure."

"Thank you. Normally, our kingdom's business would need to be dealt with internally, but..." Owen says apologetically.

Lexia is standing next to him. A sad expression has been on her face this entire time.

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"Reigar..."

"Lexia? Ummm...are you okay?"

"Hmm? Oh... Yeah, I'm fine. Don't worry about me, Sir Yuuya."

"....."
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She might say that she's fine, but the look on Lexia's face is still clouded over. I'd probably feel the same if one of my relatives tried to kill me, too, though...

In the end, Lexia never does cheer up, and once the preparations are done, we head to the audience chamber.

When we reach the chamber, Arnold is already seated upon his throne...but his expression is cold.

It isn't aimed at me, though. He's just staring blankly into space.

Beside Arnold stand several important-looking elders, and the path to the throne is lined on both sides with people who look just as distinguished, rather than the knights who were present before. I might be making assumptions here, but I'd wager they're the kingdom's nobility. They don't look like soldiers or knights in the slightest... Unless they were placed here like this to get people to let their guard down... I would definitely fall into that trap.

That's when—

"—Your Majesty. I have brought His Highness for you."

""

A soldier enters the room and announces the arrival.

But the king remains silent. His facial expression doesn't change a bit.

The soldier seems confused about what to do next, so Owen steps in.

"...Thank you. Please escort him to the king."

"Y-yes, Sir!"

After a moment...a bound man is brought forward.

"Huh?!"

When I get a good look at him, my eyes widen in shock.

But I don't think that I'm the only one surprised here because Luna is looking at him in the same way.

On the other hand, Arnold doesn't so much as twitch, and Lexia...only looks dejected.

Prince Reigar's face—is completely burned.

While you can see his eyes, nose, and mouth, the skin on his face is raw, and judging by the state of the parts of his arms and legs that can be seen, it looks like his entire body is covered in burns.

I stand there speechless at the unexpected state of the prince, but it seems like Lexia, Owen, and King Arnold already knew about it. They just seem sad.

I would never have guessed that the face under the mask would be so horrifically scarred. Neither Luna nor I know what to say.

...He wore that mask to hide his scars.

After he's led to Arnold by the soldiers, he's forced onto his knees.

Silence descends over the room for a short while before the king softly begins to speak.

"—Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"Anything to say...?"

The prince's face contorts unpleasantly, eyes widen in anger, and he screams at the king.

"Look at me! You're asking me now if I have anything to say, Father?!"

"…"

"Why do you avert your eyes? Why won't you look at me? I'm your son."

"…"

"Reigar..."

Lexia softly murmurs the name of the prince who is glaring at the king with such intensity, and his fiery gaze snaps toward her.

"Hey, Lexia. Why are you looking at me like that? Do you feel sorry for me? Huh?!"

"...!"

"And whose fault do you think it is that I ended up this way?! Everything...everything that has happened to me is because of you!"

The prince is glaring at Lexia like he's about to explode.

"It's because of you...because your mana went out of control that I ended up this way in the first place!"

"Don't be ridiculous! Your wounds healed! Any aftereffects, too..."

"Yes, they did. They completely healed. No injuries, no aftereffects, no nothing. There wasn't a single scratch on me. Yet after I got exposed to Lexia's huge mana reserves, my body never felt the same ever again! It was like being exposed to a torrent of pure destructive energy...and the sensation never goes away! All the healers tell me it's because your mana got inside of me! How could I not want to destroy everything around me in the end? If I didn't, I'd have gone insane! But those impulses aren't the kind of thing that can be satisfied so easily. No, eventually they turned back onto me. And now look! It's only by ruining my own body I've finally managed to satiate them. Do you understand? I may have done this to myself, but it isn't my fault. It's your fault, Lexia! That's why... That's why if you were never born, then..."

"Reigar... You..."

"What, Father?! You knew all about it, didn't you? About my suffering! Yet you never tried to rescue me from it!"

"You're wrong! I saw how you changed after the accident. But I couldn't do anything! There was nothing any of us could do about what plagued you."

"So, you sent me into isolation?! I suppose you didn't want anyone else finding out that the first prince had gone insane!"

"...Reigar."

"Urgh...that look just makes things worse. How come they covered for the person who did this to me but never once tried to help me?!"

The prince—Reigar—is glaring at both Lexia and King Arnold...but his eyes are also glistening with tears.

...It seems like Lexia had a lot to do with how Reigar ended up this way.

And King Arnold hid him away. So that no other kingdom could capitalize on what had happened to the prince.

"Why...? Why are you doing this...?"

Arnold ends up almost choking his words out, but Reigar continues to glare.

"Why? There's only one reason. I just couldn't help wanting to kill the half-breed sister that introduced me to this hell...! At least it's better than what you two did to me. At least her suffering would have been over quickly!"

"…"

"It's your fault that I ended up this way. I summoned the best healers in the kingdom, but they could never rid me of my impulses nor return my body back to normal. Do you understand that yet? This pain is all because of you!"

"I also tried to get you help! But there was nothing we could do!"

"Yes, that's right. That's why I asked you to just put me out of my misery. Death would have been better than another second of this suffering!"

"Yes, but...!"

"But you couldn't kill me in the end! All because of some stupid sense of duty you have to the royal family! You made me live through hell! Then you sent me away like you couldn't bear to look at me!"

"Your destructive impulses were getting too dangerous! That's why!"

"Which is exactly why I begged you to kill me."

"But..."

"But it's too late now. I despise you and Lexia both. That's why I planned all this. I decided that if you weren't going to kill me, then I'd kill you! Do you understand now why I did what I did? Anything I missed?!"

"...Reigar, you..."

Arnold closes his eyes as if he's feeling regret.

"...Did my decision really cause you so much pain...?"

"Isn't it a little late for remorse? I don't need your pity. I just want you to heal these scars. The ones left behind by the destructive impulses that plague me! But you can't, can you? So get it over with and kill me. I don't want to live anymore."

Reigar leaves it at that and sits down obediently on the floor.

But neither Arnold nor Lexia has anything they can say to him.

The nobles around the room are awkwardly averting their eyes.

...Hmm, I don't know the specifics, but it sounds like there was some sort of incident with Lexia's mana a long time ago, and that led to Reigar's injuries. And those injuries are causing this whole mess.

I timidly raise my hand.

"Ummm..."

"You..."

Arnold looks at me as if he's only just noticed that I'm here, and his eyes widen slightly in surprise. Ummm... Is that how little he's interested in me...? That said, I think he's been pretty zoned out from his surroundings ever since this conversation first began.

Lexia and the others also seem kind of surprised that I put my hand up, and King Arnold frowns angrily.

"...What is it? Outsiders shouldn't be butting in."

"Uh, it's just that...I fully understand that I'm an outsider, but...there's something that I'd like to try."

"Something you'd like to try...?"

As everyone else stands confused, I take an Herb of Complete Healing Juice out of my Item Box and approach the prince.

"H-hey! Don't come any closer!"

"There's no need to be afraid."

"Oh yeah, like I'm going to believe that?! What's that in your hand?!"

I see Lexia and the others, as well as King Arnold, looking unsure of what is happening as Reigar struggles against the soldiers and his bonds to try and get away from me. I wish he knew that he didn't have to be that scared.

As I draw nearer to Reigar, I hold out the Herb of Complete Healing Juice in

my hand toward him.

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"What is that...? What is that liquid?!"
"Okay, here we go."
"Huh? L-Lord Yuuya?!"
```

I steady Reigar's head as he tries to turn away and make him drink the Herb of Complete Healing Juice.

Owen pulls himself together and desperately calls my name, but by that time, I've already made Reigar drink.

While Reigar rejects the juice at first, I've shoved it right into his mouth, so he can't spit it out, and he reflexively swallows it.

```
That's when—

"""Huh?"""

"What's happening?!"
```

In the blink of an eye, Reigar's burned skin has cleared up and healed until the scars are no longer visible.

When he was scarred, I could hardly make out his facial features, but now that he's back to normal, he looks every bit as regal as you'd expect a prince to be.

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"P-Prince Reigar...your face..."
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Dumbfounded, one of the soldiers somehow manages to say something about what just happened.

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"My...face...?"
```

The soldier is pointing out the last part of Reigar's body that the prince would normally want brought up, but as his face contorts in anger, he instinctively touches it...and freezes.

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".....Huh?"
```

He touches his face over and over again to make sure of what he's feeling and shakes his head in disbelief.

"I-it's impossible... This can't be... My scars... My burns... I was told they'd never heal..."

"Uhh...to be honest, I still don't really know the full story here, but I figured that those injuries were the main cause of all this strife, so I just wondered what would happen if I healed you... Maybe I was overstepping boundaries, though?"

"""Whaaaaat?!"""

The onlookers begin to yell. King Arnold rises from his throne and rounds on me.

"You...! What did you do?! Why did you do that...to my son's face...?!"

"Wh-why...? It's like I said. I thought I'd take away the reason why Reigar felt like he had to stage a rebellion in the first place... I happened to have the perfect medicine on hand, so I figured that it couldn't hurt."

"The perfect medicine?!"

King Arnold's eyes are bulging as if I'm talking nonsense.

"It's impossible. It cannot be done! Nobody who examined Reigar's injuries was ever able to treat them. Not even the best healers our kingdom had to offer! And you say you healed him not with recovery magic but with recovery medicine?! It must have been a damn special medicine in that case! Now, what did you use?! Was it something you shouldn't be?!"

"No, no, nothing like that! I just used an Herb of Complete Healing—"

"A-an Herb of Complete Healing?!"

Unable to contain his shock, King Arnold lets out an astonished cry.

And it's not just the king. Reigar seems to have also been rendered speechless.

"H-hey... Did he just say Herb of Complete Healing?"

"Y-you must have been imagining things."

"Yes. He must be talking about something else. The Herb of Complete Healing is a myth."

"Who even is that man...?"

The room begins buzzing like no one can believe what they're hearing.

"H-he can't be right... The Herb of Complete Healing is nothing but a legend..."

"Uhhh...I have another if you'd like to see for yourselves?"

"Another?!"

I take another Herb of Complete Healing Juice out of my Item Box and give it to the king, whose hands are shaking. He then passes it on to one of his soldiers.

After a while, it seems like the soldier has finished using his Appraise skill on the juice. He's pale in the face as he hands it back to King Arnold with the same trembling hands.

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"Y-Your Majesty... I-it's...real..."
"""
```

Silence blankets the room.

...Now that I think about it, the description for the Herb of Complete Healing did say "The herbs are so hard to find, they are nearly mythical in rarity." I never thought that they would be so uncommon that they actually are considered mythical, though.

The color has drained out of King Arnold's face at this revelation, and he returns the juice to me in shock.

"Y-you...let me drink something so precious and rare...?" Reigar mutters, looking a little out of sorts himself.

H-huh? He did want his burns healed...didn't he? What if I was meddling where I wasn't wanted?

Ignoring my obvious worries, the pale-faced king looks toward Owen.

"O-Owen... Did you know about this ...?"

"N-no... This is the first time I'm hearing about it, too..."

"Huh? Did I never get a chance to mention it?"

"...Yuuya. If you drop a bombshell like this, this is the reaction that you're going to get..."

Luna is looking at me in disbelief. I-is it? Well, I guess when you think about how it can cure anything but death, it is pretty amazing.

"Yeah, but don't you remember that I gave you some when I first met you, too..."

"Th-that medicine was an Herb of Complete Healing as well?"

Luna staggers when she realizes that she once drank the same thing that I just gave to Reigar.

"L-Luna, get a hold of yourself!"

"...You gave something that valuable to someone like me, too ...?"

"Come on! Isn't it a bit late now to start realizing how awesome Yuuya is?! It's thanks to what he did back then that you're still alive in the first place!"

"...That's true. His reckless use of rare items did save me."

"Oh? What a roundabout kind of put-down."

I wish people wouldn't act so weird about the Herb of Complete Healing. It completely heals all wounds. It's super convenient.

It looks like King Arnold has calmed down a little now. His attitude has softened by the time he asks me another question.

"You... Lord Yuuya, you used such a prized possession on my son...?"

"'Prized' might be going a bit far... My garden is overrun with the stuff, so..."

"""Overrun?!"""

"Damn you. I just can't fathom you, Lord Yuuya."

As the astonished chatter in the room begins to start up again, King Arnold laughs exhaustedly.

"Anyway, now that your wounds have healed...how do you feel, Prince Reigar?"

"H-how do I feel?"

"Yeah. I'm still a little fuzzy on the circumstances, but I figure that if you wanted to hurt Lexia because she was related to injuries you sustained, then you should be feeling a little better about her now that they're gone..."

I get it, though. I was bullied before. Even though his external injuries have healed, Reigar has been avoided and looked upon as freakish by strangers for a long time now, so I doubt that he's over that emotional trauma yet.

Plus, he didn't receive those looks because he had some kind of normal injury or illness. They were because of self-inflected wounds caused by his own destructive impulses that he had developed after receiving an extraordinary dose of someone else's mana. There was nothing he could have done about it.

Still, even if it's only the self-inflicted external wounds that are gone, I hope he can at least find some peace.

"B-but why...? I don't understand... Why would you give something like that to me...?!"

A confused Reigar keeps touching his face as though he still can't believe what happened. I guess that's only natural when your wounds disappear so quickly.

But it at least looks like the problem of Reigar has been solved for now.

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"How do you feel, then?"
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"…"

Reigar slowly removes his hands from his face and looks to the floor.

"...Well, it's just as you said. The wounds have healed. But I fear it's too late. I've...committed something that cannot be undone. And even though my self-destructive impulses and wounds have disappeared, that doesn't change what I did. It's just too late."

```
"My son..."
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"Reigar..."

King Arnold and Lexia both watch Reigar with pained expressions on their faces as he admonishes himself derisively.

But then the look on Lexia's face suddenly changes. It's like she just realized

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"Father."

"Hmm? Yes, Lexia...?"

"Can you tell me something? What is the gravest crime that my brother is accused of?"

"That would be targeting you of course, but..."

"In that case, all is forgiven."

"Huh?!"

It's not just all the poblemen in the room, but the king and Reigar too, who
```

It's not just all the noblemen in the room, but the king and Reigar too, who are surprised by Lexia's outburst.

But Lexia, who had been the victim, is resolute.

"If my brother's crime is that he targeted me, then I forgive him. That should absolve him of his sins, shouldn't it?"

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"But..."
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"It's not as simple as that, Lexia! I..."

"Yes, it is," Lexia says bluntly as she looks around the room.

"I'm the injured party here, so my feelings must count for something, mustn't they?"

"But...Reigar enlisted the Guild of Darkness..."

"Oh? Well, my bodyguard, Luna, also happens to be an ex-member of the Guild of Darkness. So?"

"Yes, but in that case you forced us to..."

"Besides! Don't we share a part of the blame for leaving the Guild of Darkness to fester? And when you think about why my brother wanted me dead...in the end, isn't that because we all fostered an environment that actively encouraged those feelings?"

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"P-perhaps, but..."
```

"Come on now! Let's cut all the excuses! I'm telling you that I forgive him. So

that should be that! Right, Father?!"

"Y-yes!"

Overpowered by Lexia's stubbornness, King Arnold straightens and replies... Hmm, isn't it supposed to be Arnold in charge here and not the other way around?

However, the other noblemen gathered in the room can't seem to forgive the prince so easily and are clamoring to plead their cases to Lexia.

"P-Princess! You can't do that! If you forgive His Highness today, you'll end up having to allow exceptions among the other criminals! What's more, His Highness is already working with the Guild of Darkness—"

"Why can't special exceptions be allowed? It just means that there are extenuating circumstances, doesn't it? If there weren't, then an exception wouldn't be granted in the first place. And if being affiliated with the Guild of Darkness is such a crime, then you'll need to kill me, too," Luna added.

"...Lexia. It's one thing for your employee to spout such nonsense, but don't let her speak to me like that."

Luna sighs deeply and smiles like she finds something funny.

"L-look, Lexia...you may have also been targeted, but so was I, so..."

"That was your fault, though. Just as it was my fault, that I ended up being attacked. Understand?"

```
"Ugh..."

"Un-der-stand?"

"......Fine."
```

Maybe Arnold is soft when it comes to Lexia. Although this time I wonder if it was just Lexia being so pushy...?

Reigar watches on unable to believe what he's hearing.

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"L-Lexia..."
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"Are you happy with that, Reigar?"

"Yes, but...I tried to..."

"Let's promise not to talk about that anymore, okay? Besides...I'd like to focus on just becoming friends again."

"Lexia..."

Reigar quietly sheds some tears over what his sister has said.



CHAPTER 4

Sharers of Secrets

"—Reigar. We're going to seize your land, so that will be punishment for what happened this time."

"...Huh?!"

Lexia's impassioned speech may have spared Reigar the death sentence, but...that doesn't completely negate the fact that he attacked a member of the royal family, the reigning monarch no less, so all the territories in his possession are being confiscated.

Nobody lives on the lands given to Reigar, and they're treated more like grounds for his vacation home anyway, so even if they're taken away, it's not such a hard blow to him.

...Still it takes some nerve to take away territory that already has a villa built on it.

Now that Reigar's fate has been decided, the other noblemen have left, leaving just Night, Akatsuki, Lexia, Luna, Owen, Reigar, and me in the room with the king.

As I worry about whether keeping me here means that there's some kind of problem, King Arnold addresses me with a serious look on his face.

"Lord Yuuya. You...saved the day. I thank you from the bottom of my heart...!"

Without even hesitating, the king bows his head to me... Huh?!

"I-it was nothing! Please don't feel like you have to bow! I just happened to be in the right place at the right time...!"

"That's not true. Even though I treated you so unkindly...you still did something extraordinary for my family. You have my deepest gratitude for that."

"I'd like you to let me thank you, too. Those wounds that I thought I'd be stuck with forever have gone... Thank you so very much."

Even Reigar thanks me with the same expression as his father. U-ummm...

"I'm...just glad that I could be of service."

"You weren't just of service! Thanks to you, I managed to get a little closer to my brother again."

"I-it's okay..."

"...How about we stop with the thank-yous there. Yuuya looks so awkward and confused that he doesn't know what to say."

After Lexia thanks me as well, I have no idea what to do. Luckily, Luna is on hand to explain how it's making me feel. She read me like a book.

Thanks to Luna, King Arnold lifts his head. That's a relief.

The king then looks at me.

"Now then, I'll have to see that you're rewarded for what you did today."

"No, don't worry about it! I didn't do what I did for any kind of reward, so it's okay...!"

It really was just because I happened to be able to help. It's not like I did seeking something in return.

Owen laughs wryly at me.

"Lord Yuuya... We can't be so dismissive."

"Huh?"

"You healed His Highness's wounds. And thanks to you, we were also able to apprehend the assassins he used. Now all the noblemen who attended today know that. So, if we don't give you anything in return, what do you think they're going to start to believe? They'll start to believe that no matter how much hard work they put in for this kingdom, there will never be any reward for them

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here."
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"What?!"
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When I think how not accepting it could lead to some disgruntled loose-tongued noblemen, it becomes a lot harder to refuse... Personally, I don't need a reward, I just happened to be able to help.

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"...Okay."
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"Hmm. So you will accept a reward? Then what shall we give you...?"

"I know! I know! What about me?!"

""Absolutely not!""

"But why?!"

Lexia suddenly puts up her hand and proposes something crazy, something that King Arnold and Luna quickly shut down.

"He could marry me. Isn't that a good enough reward?"

"You think being married to you would be a reward? Good joke."

"Hey, Luna! What's that supposed to mean?"

Lexia pouts like she's annoyed, and Luna snorts.

"I meant it how it sounded. If someone got married to you, they'd automatically become a member of the royal family."

"Yes, they would. Would that be so bad?"

"Hmm, I wonder. What do you think, Yuuya?"

"Huh?! Uh, ummm... I'd rather not..."

"What? Whyyy?!"

Lexia starts freaking out when she hears my thoughts about that... Sorry, Lexia. But when you ask a guy like me who has never had a girlfriend before if I'd marry you, I don't know what to do. Plus, I'm just a commoner, I'm not sure that I could deal with royal life. Especially from a psychological perspective.

Owen nods at my response and comes to my rescue.

"Hmph. Besides, Lord Yuuya is likely either a nobleman or a royal family member from another kingdom. Marrying a person of a different land is not such an easy thing to achieve."

Huh? I'm pretty sure that I've told everyone that I'm not a nobleman before, so why do people still think I am? Look at Reigar and King Arnold! They're both nodding along like "That's very true."

"Ohhh... B-but even if we did get married, it'd be me who would be the bride. I don't think a marriage between us would affect Yuuya's country or standing that much, would it?"

"Oh, I see where you're coming from, Lexia. In that case, what would make you such a good wife?"

"Huh?"

"Cooking, cleaning, laundry... Can you do any of those things?"

"I—I could just get the maid to do that stuff."

"I see. So you're not cut out for it after all."

"What, whyyy?!"

Lexia may have seemed so cool and regal when we were discussing what to do about Reigar, but now she's getting teased by everyone.

Luna ignores Lexia's shrieks and turns to King Arnold.

"So how about you let me become Yuuya's bride as his reward instead?"

"Huh?!"

"H-hang on a second, Luna! You can't! You can't! You just caaan't!"

As Lexia stands rooted to the spot in shock, Luna looks at her triumphantly.

"I'm not like you, Lexia. I'm an orphan with no status to speak of. So I can get married to anyone I want, no matter where they come from. Plus, I'm great at housework. Whatever way you try to spin it, I'm way more suited to being Yuuya's wife than you ever will be, right?"

"A-and what about being my bodyguard?!"

"Thank you for everything until now."

"Like I'd ever let you quit like that!"

I think that you're probably right about that, Luna. But why is talk of marriage even being brought up as part of my reward? Of course it makes me happy to hear them fight over me, but...that's definitely something that needs to be taken more slowly... And what's so great about me anyway? There's probably someone with a status more worthy of Lexia out there... And as for Luna, she's beautiful. She could find a way better guy than me...

As I wonder, I suddenly notice that both Lexia and Luna are staring at me suspiciously.

"...There's something that I've been wondering, Luna. Did it or did it not seem that Sir Yuuya's mind was drifting off...elsewhere...?"

"...What a coincidence. I was just feeling the exact same thing."

Huh? Are they reading my mind...?!

I don't know why, but both Luna and Lexia continue to glare.

Th-this is weird... I didn't even say anything, yet...

As the girls continue ribbing me in front of King Arnold and the others, Prince Reigar slowly lifts up his hand.

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"Ummm...Father?"

"Hmm? What's the matter?"

"About this reward..."

"Oh?"
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King Arnold curiously raises an eyebrow. Prince Reigar stands up and whispers into his ear.

"Why don't you just give him the vacation home and lands you just took from me?"

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"What?"
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"...Lord Yuuya has some very precious skills and items. Would it not be better

that he is encouraged to stay here rather than go to a different kingdom with them?"

"That's true..."

"If you gave him my lands ,then at least he would feel a stronger connection with our kingdom..."

"Hmm... It's a good idea, but maybe not quite enough."

"Then how about you confer a title on him, too? I think he has earned that much."

"You aren't wrong, but the other noblemen will probably have something to say about it. Anyway, he already belongs among another kingdom's nobility."

"But if he's made a knight, it's more symbolic than anything else, so there shouldn't be any problems. Unlike the other noblemen, there would be no salary provided by the kingdom, but he would still be treated as a member of the upper classes..."

"Hmm..."

I can't hear what the two men are talking about as they whisper, but I catch King Arnold nodding sternly a few times.

And then—

"Hmph. A reward has been decided. Lord Yuuya shall receive the lands that were seized from Reigar."

"Huh?!"

"In addition, Lord Yuuya shall be made a knight of this kingdom."

"Excuse me?!"

It's not just me that's shocked by this unexpected turn of events. Lexia and Luna are equally surprised, but for some reason, Owen just nods and accepts it.

Uhhh... They're giving me land? Huh? And a title?!

King Arnold ignores the fact that I'm still too shocked to process what just happened and carries on talking.

"None of our people live on the lands that Reigar held, so you can view it as a retreat. That is why I believe it may be the perfect reward for you."

"O-oh... B-but what am I supposed to do with them?"

"Lord Yuuya. There is no need to worry. The land simply holds a house that I had built and faces the sea. Just as my father says, all you need to do is look at it like you have just received a new vacation home."

"Sigh...B-But then there's this knighthood business, too..."

"Oh, we just wanted to sweeten the deal, so we thought it would be best to bestow you with a title as well. But again, I do not want you to worry. We are simply making you a knight. It's symbolic. It's something we bestow to those who have done a great service for the Kingdom of Arselia. Even though this does make you nobility, it does not incur any obligations, so you should be all right."

Well, looks like I've got land and a knighthood now. I can't really believe it.

While it still doesn't feel real to have a new house and title, it's a heck of a lot less troublesome than all the marriage talk I was hearing from Lexia and Luna before. Plus, if anything were to happen in the real world, I can come and live here full-time now... Not that I'm planning for anything that might have that result, right?

Even cooler, it looks like I'm actually a nobleman in this kingdom now, even though I don't have any duties or obligations.

"Saving our first prince was a great service. That's why I would like you to accept these lands and titles."

"I-in that case..."

When he puts it like, I just don't know what to say.

"Hmph... Fine. If he can't marry me, then..."

"It's a shame, but it's the best solution."

"...You're right. And if I remember correctly, my brother's lands are spectacular... So, in a sense, it's..."

Both Lexia and Luna seem kind of disappointed, but they accept the decision... Hey, wait! Isn't this supposed to be my reward? Why are they disappointed? And Lexia, what are you plotting now? Is everything going to be okay?

Even King Arnold is holding his head like he has a headache while he listens to Lexia and Luna complain. Eventually, he rights himself and turns toward me.

"Now, I would very much like to show you your new lands, Lord Yuuya, but...do you have enough time left?"

"Huh? Oh, that's right... If the lands are far away, then I might not be able to make it..."

"Huh?! Sir Yuuya?! Don't tell me that you're leaving us already!"

"Y-yeah. I didn't have much time to stay here in the first place..."

"What?!"

Lexia is obviously put out. It makes me happy to know that she enjoys hanging out with me so much, but this is just how things are. Once vacation is over, it's back to school for me, so I have to go.

"I'm sorry."

"Hmph. Then there's no helping it. I'll show you to your new lands the next time you have enough time to visit the castle. We'll manage the land on your behalf in the meantime, so please do not fret about that."

"Thank you very much."

"Sir Yuuya! You're still going to be staying the night, though, aren't you?!"

"Huh? Well...I guess so. If I can find somewhere to stay anyway..."

"Why don't you stay here?! We have plenty of space and lots of empty rooms you can use!"

"...Lexia. Even if that is true, you don't have to say it like that... It is unbecoming of a member of the royal family..."

"Oh, well, I don't really care about things like that. It's not like me acting like a lady is going to earn the kingdom more money or help our people out of

poverty or anything."

Surprised by the overly matter-of-fact approach of his daughter, King Arnold sighs deeply.

"Sigh... I'm starting to wonder if it would have been better to marry you off to Lord Yuuya here after all..."

"Oh? Then why don't you do it?!"

"No, I cannot go back on my decision now. Lord Yuuya. You may stay in the castle tonight as my daughter offered. We would be honored to host you."

"O-okay..."

—And that's how Night, Akatsuki and I end up staying in a castle at the grace of His Majesty.

* * *

"It feels like the other day took a lot out of me..."

"Woof?"

"Oink."

After staying a night in the castle, I managed to persuade Lexia and the others not to follow me home and successfully arrived at my house in the real world...but I still feel on edge from my time there.

First, the food I was served was so luxurious that I didn't know how to eat it, so I was a nervous wreck throughout the whole meal. Then when I tried to take a bath, the maids got in with me to help scrub my back. And boy was it a chore to try and stop them...

It took me but a day to realize how hard being a royal is and that I am definitely not suited to that lifestyle.

"Then Lexia and Luna kept turning up uninvited, and it got a little wearisome trying to keep them away..."

Somehow, I managed to keep them at bay and eventually made it to bed, but...yeah. I was so convinced that something else was going to happen that night that I couldn't fall asleep at all. Man, that next morning was rough.

I did manage to make it through a very formal breakfast, though, before finally returning to my world.

Ahh... Sleeping in my own bed was the best. I could finally feel myself drifting away.

That's when I suddenly remember Lexia's parting words to me: "Sir Yuuya! Since you came to visit me this time, I'll return the favor at your house next time!"

"Huh?"

"Idiot. Don't you understand how hard it is to get to Yuuya's place?"

"Oh? Don't you want to see him, too, Luna?"

"Th-that's not what I'm saying!"

"It'll be fine. You and Owen can get some special training done!"

"I'm not sure 'special training' would be the words I use to describe a trip through that place!"

There went Lexia inviting herself to my house again... I'm not sure how that would end, though. Luna might have trained in the Weald with me for a while, but the journey would probably be tough on Owen and his men, right...? And I'm not sure that it's okay to let the princess of Arselia subject herself to a place as dangerous as that forest... Not that I wouldn't welcome her if she did come.

Anyway, school starts again today, so I'd better get my head on straight.

"All right, Night and Akatsuki. I'm heading out now."

"Woof!"

"Oink!"

I say good-bye to them both and step out the door.

* * *

"The midterms are almost upon us now. Have you all been studying hard?"

"Gaaaah! Don't mention the M-word!"

"O-of course I have! The prince of exam prep has no blind spots! ... At least he wishes he didn't!"

When Ms. Sawada starts talking about the midterms during our first homeroom back from vacation, Kaede and Akira react so obviously. N-neither of them has studied at all, have they...?

Now that we're well and truly getting into the midterm period, people are taking a break from club activities and have way less time to hang out after school. Kaede and Akira better get down to studying soon, or they'll definitely be in trouble...

As I sit there watching them, Shingo and Ryou are also staring at them in disbelief as they approach me.

"If Akira and Kaede studied regularly, then they wouldn't be in this mess..."

"A-a-ha-ha-ha... Neither of them is ever very good at it..."

"It sure seems that way... How is studying going for you guys?"

"I think it's going okay. I'm making sure to study properly for the tests."

"M-me too. I've started studying for the midterms a-as well as doing my normal class reviews."

When I look around the room, it doesn't look like anyone else is panicking, so I guess it is just Kaede and Akira who'll be in trouble if they don't get a move on.

Ryou and Shingo are going home and studying for the test tonight, but they both have somewhere to be first and head home before I do.

"These will be my first tests since I started coming to this school... I wonder what they'll be like...?"

I do the usual prep and review for all my classes, but I'm still anxious. I'm particularly bad at math and physics. They're pretty hard. When I level up, it's not like I suddenly know more than before. My thinking speed definitely picks up, though, so I can process things better.

As I wander home worrying about my upcoming tests, someone suddenly calls my name.

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"Oh? Yuuya?"

"Huh? Ah, Kaori!"

It's Kaori, the academy principal's daughter.

She comes running up to me and tilts her head curiously.

"Are you all alone today?"

"Yeah. Ryou and Shingo both had places to be."
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We make some small talk for a while, but the topic soon turns to the midterms.

"—The midterms are coming up soon, but I suck at math and stuff."

"Really... So even you have things that you're not very good at?"

"Huh? D-do I really look like someone who doesn't?"

"Yes. From my perspective, it's like you can do anything."

"Seriously..."

"I see..."

I'm kind of amazed to find out that Kaori has that impression of me. Is that what she really thinks?

I'm not quite as infallible as she seems to think I am, though. I'm not smart enough to be able to get a good score on tests without studying.

"I'm not very good at English and classical literature..."

"You aren't?"

That's a surprise. I thought that Kaori was the perfect student... I guess we were both wrong.

As I muse upon that fact, Kaori looks like she's realized something and suddenly starts to fidget beside me.

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"Huh? What's wrong?"
```

"Ahh?! No, it's just that..."

I cock my head curiously while Kaori begins to act increasingly suspiciously.

Eventually, she seems to come to a decision and looks at me.

```
"Y-Yuuya!"

"Y-yeah?!"

"—Will you study for the tests together with me?!"

"Huh?"
```

She had such a serious expression on her face that I thought she was going to say something else...

```
"Ummm... Study for the tests?"
```

"That's right! I'm good at math, so I think I can help tutor you!"

"Th-that would be a big help. I can probably teach you English and classical literature in return..."

"Then do you want to?!"

"S-sure."

Kaori has gradually gotten closer and closer during our conversation until she's looking right up at me from below... She's so close that I can feel her ch-chest right against mine...!

```
"K-Kaori... You're a bit close..."
```

"Huh? ... Agh! I-I'm so sorry!"

Kaori's face flushes red as she jumps away and peeks back at me.

"So...how about it...then?"

"Erm... Okay. Let's do it."

We might as well, so I bow my head in front of Kaori, and her eyes light up.



```
"G-great! If it's okay with you...can we study at your place...?"

"Huh?"

I stop in my tracks.

"My...place...?"

"Yes. Would you...prefer not to?"

"N-no! It's fine!"
```

I just thought for sure that we'd be studying in a library or something, but at my house...?

To be fair, the only thing that I have lying around my house that I wouldn't want Kaori to see is the Door to a Different World...so there shouldn't be a problem.

"Then let's begin studying together tomorrow!"

—In the end, we decide to study at my place the following day and then head our separate ways.

* * *

"—Oh, you should use this formula here."

"I-I see..."

The next day.

As arranged, Kaori has come over to my place, and we've started to study for the tests.

She seems just as crappy at English and classical literature as she said she was, but she's really good at teaching math in a way that even I can understand, so her presence is paying off big time. I'm starting to feel better about the tests already.

"Nice one, Kaori... I'm so bad at math, this is a huge help."

"D-don't mention it! You're doing the same for me... Your skill in English and classic literature is amazing!"

```
"Th-thanks."

It's all down to my Comprehend Languages skill, though.

"Woof?"

"Oink."
```

As I think that, both Night and Akatsuki look at me confused. That's right. It's probably the same skill that helps me understand what they're saying, too.

—We continue studying, tutoring the other in the subjects we know better as we go.

While I've invited Lexia and the others back to my house in the other world before, this is the first time I've ever invited a girl back to my place in the real world, so I'm a little nervous. But thanks to Night and Akatsuki, that feeling has been gradually fading away.

After studying for a while, we decide to take a break. Kaori stretches out and pets Night, who's been relaxing nearby.

"Hmm...I knew about Night, but it looks like you have a new addition to the family as well."

```
"Yeah. He's a very recent addition actually."
```

"Oh...? Well then, it's very nice to formally meet you, Akatsuki."

"Oink!"

Akatsuki lifts a front leg as a casual hello while he's being petted.

"Oh, excuse me, but...can I borrow your bathroom by any chance?"

"Huh? Oh, sure."

Kaori seems a bit embarrassed to ask, so as soon as I say it's okay, she leaves the room.

The room that we're studying in is a reception room with a tatami mat floor. I don't usually use it, but it's pretty convenient for this kind of thing. In fact, my place is quite big, so I have a few rooms I don't normally use.

As the three of us wait for Kaori to return, I suddenly realize something.

"Oh! Now that I think about it, I never told Kaori where the bathroom is!"

As I rush out of the room after her, my eyes are quickly drawn to the Door to a Different World.

The door is in front of a broken wall, which still hasn't been repaired yet, so people who see it for the first time might try and go through it.

Fearing the worst, I head through and— Kaori is standing in front of the Door to a Different World in shock.

What's worse is that the door is open, so she can see through to my house in that world...the other world.

"Err...ummm...so..."

Having never expected that Kaori would find the Door to a Different World, I can't think of anything to say.

Kaori starts with surprise and looks at me apologetically.

"Oh! Ummm...I'm so sorry! I couldn't find the bathroom, and I just happened across this door here, and...it felt like something was calling me, so I..."

"Uhhh..."

It doesn't bother me that Kaori wandered into that room, but the fact she opened the Door to a Different World poses a problem.

The effect of the door means that people can't just walk through it willy-nilly, but it also means that they're confronted with an impossible reality of being able to see the other side of the open door but not walk through it.

After I worry about what I should say for a while...I decide to go with the truth.

For one, I'm not embarrassed or anything by the door, and on top of that, it's probably harder to come up with a convincing lie at this point.

Hesitantly, I confess everything to Kaori.

"Look... You might not believe me, but that door...is connected to another world."

"A-another world...?"

```
"See here..."
```

As I walk through the doorway, Kaori's eyes grow wider in surprise.

"When I opened the door and saw what was on the other side...I also tried to step through, but it wouldn't let me..."

"That's because it only lets through people that I allow."

```
"O-oh, right..."
```

Standing there in amazement, Kaori finally manages to squeeze out a question.

"Ummm... When you say 'another world,' what do you mean by that...?"

"I mean it how it sounds. It's another world that's not the Earth."

"It's not the Earth?"

"Nope. They have magic and things in the other world. Even I've learned to wield it."

```
"Magic?"
```

Kaori is still standing there dumbfounded as I conjure a mass of water in my palm right in front of her.

```
"What the ...?"
```

"Like this. You can do all kinds of things here that you can't do on Earth."

"I-is that...real...?"

"Wanna touch it?"

"Y-yes..."

Kaori cautiously reaches toward the ball of water I'm holding out and looks at me surprised for the umpteenth time.

```
"I-it really is water..."
```

"I've learned so many things like this that would be impossible back on Earth. That's why I was able to save you and the rest of our friends when those delinquents paid our school a visit and when the department store caught fire."

"…"

Kaori is in such shock from the barrage of craziness I just unleashed on her that her pupils are like pinpoints, but then it's almost like she remembers something as her cheeks begin to flush and she eventually asks me something.

"Ummm... I'm sorry. I have so many questions, but first...could you tell me where the bathroom is...?"

"Oh."

I quickly point her in the right direction.

* * *

"Wow... This place really is different from our world..."

After coming back from the bathroom, Kaori insists that she wants to visit the other world right away, so we walk through the door together.

Night and Akatsuki follow us through, and now we're relaxing at my house there.

"—So, are Night and Akatsuki from this world, then?"

"Yeah. Night is from a species of wolf called Black Fenrir and Akatsuki is a kind of pig called a...Meng Huai? ...I think."

"Woof."

"Oink? Oink, oink!"

Night nods his head, but Akatsuki seems annoyed by the fact that I'm so unsure about what he is that he's stomping his little feet on the floor. I-I'm sorry, okay? But I'd never heard of a Meng Huai before, and to be honest, I can't even tell if he's more of a pig or a wild boar... Although it seems he's more likely to be a kind of pig...

Kaori seems surprised at Akatsuki's reaction. Especially as he seemed to react to my words.

"Wow... They really are of this world... It's not normal to be able to communicate so well between species where we're from..."

```
"Oh...I guess so..."
```

"Yeah... But now that I know what Night really is, maybe you should stop taking him for walks back home..."

```
"Huh?"
```

"The more people on Earth see him, the more likely they are to realize that he's a wolf. And I bet most people have never seen a pig so beautiful and red before, right?"

```
"That's true..."
```

Although I'd like for Night and Akatsuki to spend time on Earth without any restrictions. Just like I've had so many adventures in this world, I want them to see everything in mine and hopefully make some good memories themselves.

I guess when I think about the quality of the air back home, I do worry about staying there with them for too long, though...

Kaori inhales deeply as if she was thinking about the exact same thing.

```
"...Ahh. The air is so pure here."
```

"If you look out the window, you'll see that we're in the middle of a forest, so... Plus, there are no emissions from cars or anything here, either."

"It feels weird to be in a world without cars... Plus, I know that there's no forest around your house in our city, so we really must be in a different world entirely, huh?"

Kaori smiles wryly, but the next second, a translucent panel suddenly pops up in front of her.

```
"Argh! Wh-what's this?"
```

"Ah! That's...!"

Kaori looks surprised by the message but soon starts reading.

```
""Titles: 'Stranger from a Different World...'"
```

"In this world, we have the concept of stats, so different character parameters are assigned a value. Your titles are a part of your stats, and all these bits of information can have lots of different effects..." "I—I see... It really is completely different from Earth here... Stats, huh ...?!"

As Kaori keeps muttering the world *stats*, the next message that pops up shows exactly that.

"Th-this is..."

"Those are your stats here."

"Ummm...Yuuya? Can you look at them with me?"

"Huh? I can, but...are you sure you want me to see them?"

"Yes. I don't know what any of them mean otherwise..."

Kaori says it's okay, so I take a look.

Kaori Houjou

Occupation: None, Level: 1, Mana: 10, Attack: 10, Defense: 10,

Agility: 10, Intelligence: 10, Luck: 100, BP: 0

Skills: None Titles: Stranger from a Different World "Wow..."

"H-how are they?"

Kaori asks anxiously, but...whichever way you look at it, she's stronger than I was when I first came here. Although I did have a few skills as well...

"Huh... You're stronger than I was when I first got here."

"I—I am?"

"I was a small fry once, too, you know..."

I may have been training with Master Rabbit and honing my physical strength lately, but when I first came here, I was too weak and feeble to even pick up one of my weapons.

As I reminisce on the past, I open up and tell Kaori a little more about my story.

"...Just as you've heard here today, the first time I came to this world, I leveled up."

"Huh?"

"And for some reason, it made me lose weight and look different... I guess what I'm trying to say is that I cheated in life."

"Cheated?"

"Everyone notices me now, but the real me isn't as amazing as some people may think. So—"

"That's not true!"

"What?"

"You haven't changed at all, Yuuya. Not in all the time since you first rescued me..."

"Y-yeah, but, my appearance has done a complete one-eighty since then..."

"I've been watching you since the day we met!"

"Huh?!"

I stand there in shock at what Kaori just admitted.

"It doesn't matter what you look like. Even if you received some kind of special power in this world, you haven't changed at all. Okay?"

"But..."

"...Sure, you might have acquired special powers here. But you always used those powers to save me. Ever since the first day I met you... You've saved me so many times."

"…"

"So please don't belittle yourself like that anymore."

"...Sorry." I apologize to Kaori.

But I'm happier than anything else. I'm glad that she said I haven't changed. And that she's been watching over me...

"Ummm... Thank you."

"Don't mention it. I just spoke the truth."

I can't stop looking at Kaori as she smiles.

But then her face suddenly turns pink and flustered.

"Ah, u-ummm, since we're here in a place with such clear air, why don't we continue our studies?!"

"S-sounds good! I have a desk here, so...let's do it. I'll go and grab the books and things."

Before I have the chance to go and collect our things, Kaori's eyes turn to a certain spot in the room.

"Ummm, Yuuya. What's that over there...?"

"Huh?"

I follow her gaze and arrive at my Bloodstained Ogre armor.

"Uhh... That's what I wear when I'm out and about in this world..."

"It is? I want to see it!"

"Y-you do? Then I'll change into it before I come back."

I indulge Kaori's request and head back to my house on Earth to pick up my stuff and change into my armor.

* * *

"Hmm..."

I look around the house.

When I first found the door that leads to this world and opened it, I thought I was looking at a hyper-realistic painting or something, but then I felt the faintest breeze coming through from beyond the threshold.

When I tried to reach out and touch it, I felt a strange feeling in my fingertips and an enormous sense of confusion.

When Yuuya found me and told me the truth about that room...I was so shocked. But happy, too.

Because he had trusted me with such a great secret... Although, I suppose if I

were in the same position as Yuuya, I would have found it too difficult to explain away as well...

Then as he taught me more about this world and the extraordinary things they have here, like magic, I'm almost ashamed to admit that it made me feel excited.

And then I found out that he had used the powers he acquired here to save me.

But he also talked like who he is now isn't the real him. As if he's just like that because of leveling up here.

But from my point of view, nothing has changed.

Yuuya is always saving me. And that's all there is to it.

"...I wonder if this means that we've grown a little closer now?"

I wonder before I'm suddenly distracted by an urge to go and see the garden.

When I get outside, there's a small field. I wonder what he's growing out here. Maybe it's some vegetables native to this world.

Wow... Standing here, it really does feel like I'm on a whole different planet.

The air out in the garden tastes just as clean as the air in the house.

The entire abode is concealed by trees that I've never seen before in my life. Wherever I look, I can tell that I'm not on Earth anymore.

"I can't believe a place like this really exists...," I unconsciously say out loud as I scan my surroundings. That's when my attention is abruptly drawn to a strange black mass on the other side of the garden fence.

"What's that ...?"

It looks like it's jiggling. It's so cute.

I can't take my eyes off it, and before I know it, I'm edging closer.

"Wh-what are you?"

That's when the mass makes a giant leap on the other side of the fence!

"A-are you alive?"

I can hardly believe my eyes, but the strange black thing I'm looking at is moving like it has a mind of its own.

It looks so adorable that I'm already crossing the fence to take an even closer look.

```
"Hello there. What are you—"
"—Kaori!"
"Huh?"
```

The moment I suddenly hear Yuuya's panicked voice behind me, the cute black jiggling creature...instantly balloons in size before my very eyes until it looks like the mouth of a monster and threatens to swallow me.

```
"Agh...!"
```

I can't move. All I can do is stand here rooted to the spot in shock when—"Hyaaah!"

—Yuuya appears dressed in the armor I saw back in the house instead of his usual school uniform and...scoops me up bridal-style into his arms. Then he kicks the black monster so hard that it goes flying.

As I watch in amazement, Yuuya turns to me in a panic.

```
"Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

"I-I'm fine..."

"Good... I've just gotta wrap this up. Can you wait here a second?"

"Huh?"

"Night. Akatsuki. I'm leaving you guys to protect Kaori."

"Woof!"

"Oink!"
```

Yuuya puts me down gently on the ground and gives Night and Akatsuki their orders. But the moment I leave Yuuya's arms, I feel kind of lonely. I-if only I could have stayed there longer... N-no, never mind.

As I stand there shamelessly longing for Yuuya's touch, several more black

blobs emerge from the bushes. It looks like the first one wasn't alone.

"Wh-what the ...?"

"I'm sorry, I should have warned you when we got here... This world isn't like Earth. It's full of monsters that would gladly kill you in a heartbeat."

"K-kill...?"

"Yeah. And to make matters worse, my house is built in the middle of a place particularly well-known for how strong its monsters are... I should have told you before this could happen."

Yuuya shoots me an apologetic look and quickly turns to the rest of the monsters.

"Anyway... I'll be right back," he says, drawing a spear out of thin air.

The black blobs seem to have been watching and waiting to see what would happen ever since Yuuya got here, but all of a sudden, they decide to attack.

They're so fast that I would never have been able to avoid them all and so powerful that the moment they crash to the ground, they leave craters in their wake.

And yet...

"Hah!"

Yuuya blocks one's assault with ease and parries it to diminish the strength of the attack, before immediately moving on to the next monster and unleashing a roundhouse kick.

Yuuya's power is truly awesome to behold, and after a little while, black blobs are flying everywhere.

Yuuya easily overpowers the rest of the black blobs single-handedly and eventually defeats them all.

Then, once the battle is over, the carcasses transform into motes of light and all that's left behind are several strange-looking objects on the ground.

...So, this is Yuuya's true power.

Having just witnessed what he's capable of, it brings home just how much he

must have been suppressing his strength at school.

As Yuuya's weapon disappears into thin air, I stand there in awe. Night and Akatsuki, who are still tasked with protecting me, look up at me worriedly.

```
"Whine..."
```

"Oink?"

"...Sorry, I was just a little startled. I'm fine. Thank you for worrying about me, though."

"Woof!"

"Oink!"

I'm petting both of them to say thanks, when Yuuya approaches with an awkward look on his face.

He starts to speak to me as though he's resolved himself to something.

"Even though everything I do is so that I can survive in this world, don't you think I'm...weird...for being able to kill these monsters so easily?"

Seeing his sad smile when he asks makes me feel like something's snapped inside of me, and I end up shouting.

"Why in the world would I think such a thing?!"

"…<u>!</u>"

Yuuya's eyes are wide open in what seems to be shock at my outburst.

Seeing him like that calms me down a little, so I continue talking.

"...Yuuya, you've saved me so many times. That's all I care about."

"Oh..."

"You haven't changed at all. Not since the day I first met you."

"...Thank you."

When I reiterate that, Yuuya shows me a shy smile.

"...Well, I guess we should go back to the house now. It's dangerous to stay out here too long."

Yuuya speaks cheerfully to forcibly change the subject. That's when I ask something that just pops into my mind.

"Now that you mention it... Is it not a problem that your house is built in such a dangerous place? Don't those monster things try to get in sometimes...?"

"There's no need to worry about that. The person who used to live in this house was extremely powerful and made it so that no monster could ever cross the fence and enter the garden, and I'm not sure, but I think it also applies to anyone else who holds malicious thoughts toward me. They probably can't enter, either."

"Wow... Then the security is even tighter than that of the systems we use back home..."

There's always someone from the security company posted at my house, so I'd say that we're more secure than other people, but it's not perfect.

But if what Yuuya is saying is true and we had the same in Japan, then there's no way that security companies would survive.

Once again, I'm struck by how different this world is with its skills and its magic.

"By the way... That get-up really suits you!"

"Y-you think so? Thank you. Like I said before, this is what I wear when I'm fighting monsters here and stuff. It really is dangerous."

"Ummm...Yuuya? Do you often get into fights like that...?"

Yuuya shoots me an awkward smile.

"I suppose I do. When you go out into this world, you need to be capable of a certain level of self-defense. Besides...when I see someone in a situation like you were in when we first met and I can't do anything...that's hard."

"...It is?"

Yuuya says that he couldn't do anything, but the fact that he still took the initiative and did something in the first place makes me happy. But even if he says that...I still get the feeling that he's the kind of man who's always looking for a way to be the best he can be.

Just then, Yuuya shoots me an awkward smile like he just remembered something.

"Ummm...by the way...I know this is a lot to ask, but...please don't tell anyone else about this place."

"Hmm? S-so it's a secret that...we're just going to keep between us?"

"I...guess so."

I can't stop myself from grinning at what he's asking.

"Okay, then! My lips are sealed!"

"R-really?"

"Yes! ... Now that we share a secret like this... you could say that our relationship is kind of special, couldn't you...?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, don't mind me! Okay!"

"R-right... Anyway, let's head back home for now. We still have to study for the test, remember?"

"...Yes, let's!"

—And that's how I stumbled upon a secret of Yuuya's...and managed to get just a little bit closer to him.

CHAPTER 5

Kaori and Lexia

A few days have passed since Kaori found out about the other world.

We've continued to study for midterms, but something has definitely changed between us.

Namely, Kaori is always insisting that we study at my house over there.

It's not as if she doesn't like my place in Japan. It's just that she likes studying where the air is purer. It seems to help clear her head.

From my perspective, Kaori knows about the other world now, so I don't have a particular reason to refuse. That's where we've decided to study today.

Since she's a special guest, I offer her some food I've made using ingredients grown in this world, and she devours it happily.

As an aside, the ingredients that I've chosen are types that boost your stats, and while Kaori's stats have gone up as a result, it doesn't look like she got any experience points yet from our group fight with the Hell Slimes, so she is still at level 1.

...I really don't understand how the experience points concept works.

Though someone normally wouldn't experience getting attacked by a horde of Hell Slimes, for some reason, that event hasn't been converted into experience points.

If experience points could only be earned by fighting something directly and winning, then how would anyone ever level up?

Fortunately for me, I had the sage's weapons to help me defeat monsters hundreds of times my level and stats when I was starting out. It makes me

realize how lucky I was.

But those weapons, while not exactly for my exclusive use, were contracted out to me specifically, so I can't lend them to anyone. If Kaori wants to raise her stats here, then it looks like we'll have to find some low-level monsters first.

More importantly, though, I don't think that killing a living creature is ever a good experience. If I had my way, she'd be able to spend time here peacefully...

Even though she's only level 1, she ate some stat-boosting food at my place, which increased her stats to the point where she's superhumanly strong on Earth.

When we got back home afterward, Kaori was able to pick up even the heaviest stuff with ease. She was pretty shocked by that...so the first piece of advice I had to give her was to not make her new strength too obvious to others. I'm not one to talk, though, seeing as I'm not very good at hiding or explaining away my own strength...

We begin to wrap our studies up at my house in the other world and take a well-deserved break.

"Mmm! The air really does taste good!"

"Yeah. You get used to it when you spend a long time here, but then when I return to Earth, I always end up grimacing a little."

"I totally understand! It smells smoky."

As we talk and laugh about the air back on Earth, Kaori eventually gets a little fidgety.

"Hmm? What's the matter?"

"Huh? Oh, um, it's just that..."

At first she seems hesitant to spit it out, but then she looks at me resolutely.

"Yuuya. Could you show me around this world sometime?"

"What?"

I wasn't expecting her to ask that, so I'm a little taken aback, but Kaori just looks straight at me.

"For one, I want to know more about this world...and I also want to see what you've seen here."

```
"But..."

"Don't you want to...?"

"Uhh..."
```

I stumble over my words as I look down at her. She's peering back up at me anxiously.

...The more I think about it, the more I realize how natural that desire is. After stumbling into an unknown world, of course she'd want to see more.

```
It's just that...

"...It might be a bit difficult."

"But...why?"
```

"There are so many monsters in this world, like the ones that attacked you the other day. And even if you go to a town, it's not as safe as it is in Japan."

We faced a lot of attacks in Montress, and it's also home to dangerous organizations like the Guild of Darkness.

"I really want to take you places, but I don't think I'm strong enough to guarantee that I'll definitely be able to protect you."

"So you're not that strong here?"

"Yeah, I still have a ways to go."

There are lots of people here who I can't match up to. Master Rabbit is one. The weird girl from the other day is another.

There are even monsters deep within the Weald that I can't fight head-on.

Kaori pouts a little in disappointment.

```
"Hmm... In that case, I understand..."
```

"I'm really sorry."

"...But when you do feel strong enough, do you promise to take me then?"

"Of course!"

"Then I'll forgive you this time," Kaori says with a small smile.

"Well, if we can't go and look around outside, why don't we just stick to the garden?"

"I can do that."

"Then let's go!"

I grant Kaori's wish, and we head outside.

"Whenever I come outside, I think about how curious this place is. Even the trees are different... By the way, what are you growing in that field over there?"

"Those are some of the vegetables from this world that I cooked for you the other day. They increase your stats. They won't increase them endlessly, but I thought they'd be helpful since it's hard for someone like you to level up quickly."

"I was so shocked when I got home! I calmed down once you explained it to me, but...to be honest, even though I know I need to keep my new strength on the down-low, it's kind of funny to think I have the strength of a manga character or something."

"I'm glad to hear you're okay with it. I also have a medicinal herb called the Herb of Complete Healing growing over here..."

"A...medicinal herb?"

"Yeah. You want to know why it's so amazing? Apparently, it can heal any wound."

"A-any wound?"

"Yep. So, say you lost your arm in an accident, if you took this, it would grow back."

"G-grow back...?"

Kaori's face pales as if she's just imagined the whole scenario in her head. I've had so many hands and arms cut off since I've been fighting monsters here that it doesn't affect me anymore, but I guess it's a disturbing image for other

people.

"And supposedly it heals not only wounds, but sickness, too. It can probably heal anything short of death."

"......" Kaori listens silently as I explain the Herb of Complete Healing. Then she says, "...If something like that really exists, then surely everybody is trying to get their hands on it... If they have that herb, any incurable disease could be eradicated, right?"

"I guess..."

"Its properties totally outmatch the medical technology in our world..."

It's true. The effect of the Herb of Complete Healing is insane. But I always just took it as a given because it was grown by the sage. I never thought about it any more deeply than that.

I really have to stock up on recovery items. If I don't have any and something happens when I'm out exploring the Weald and rest of the world, I'll be in trouble.

As I get lost in thought, Kaori stares out over the field with a stern look on her face.

"Ummm...Yuuya? I'm sure you already know this well, but all the plants, concepts, and items you have here would be extremely dangerous back on Earth."

".....Yeah."

"I saw your spear appear out of and disappear into thin air. I take it that's something unique to this world as well?"

"It is. It's a skill called Item Box..."

"I don't know how much you can store with that skill, but if there's no limit, just think about how that would contradict everything we know on Earth."

"…"

"And when it comes to magic...I think that's really serious. If Japan or any other country found out about it...I doubt the result would be good."

Kaori is right. If magic ever made it back to Earth, it would only be a matter of time before it was harnessed for war.

Lexia had also said something similar about my teleportation magic.

Personally, I'd only ever use it to travel to faraway places in a flash and to make sure I'm on time for school, but on an intranational level, I can't see it being put to use well.

I guess the world doesn't always work the way you want it to.

"...Well, I'm satisfied for now. Shall we go back inside?"

Kaori turns to go back inside, looking embarrassed that our conversation ended up being a lot more serious than either of us had expected it to, when...

"—Sir Yuuuuuuya!"

"Huh?" A sound of surprise escapes me, and I turn around.

"It's me! I'm here!"

"Why don't you try putting yourself in our shoes if you're going to force us to cater to your whims! Dammit! Just how many spare lives do you think we have to protect you with...?!"

"God, my head hurts..."

Suddenly, I spot Lexia running toward the house. Behind her, Luna and Owen are desperately fighting the monsters on their tail. It looks like a horde of Goblin Elites.

Kaori looks at me, confused by what's happening. I shoot her a look back.

That's when Luna notices us.

"H-hey, Yuuya! A little hand here?! ... And who's she?!"

"Come on, now's not the time for that, is it?! If we get distracted, we'll be goblin food!"

"Feed them yourself. I'm too busy!"

"Ahh, my stomach really hurts! Gah! And I'm trying my hardest to hold them back here...!"

"Things aren't exactly that different for me, either! If you have any complaints, try delivering them to our idiot princess over there!"

Owen seems to be having as tough a time of it as usual. I-is he okay? Maybe I should pick him up some head and stomach medicine from Earth at some point.

I space out a bit as I think about how I need to go to the pharmacy soon anyway, but then Lexia calls out to me.

"Sirrrr Yuuyaaaaaa! Who's that giiiiiirl?!"

".....Ummm, Yuuya? Who are these people?"

This situation seems like it's going to get annoying, and I find myself looking up at the sky.

"Sigh... Um, is it okay if I go help them out?"

"Huh? Er, y-yes. It looks like they're in trouble..."

"Thanks... Night. Akatsuki. I'm sure she'll be fine, but I want you to stay here and look after Kaori."

"Woof!"

"Oink!"

Smiling at their enthusiastic responses, I quickly change into my Bloodstained Ogre armor and run toward the battle.

"Hah!"

I aim for the forehead of the Goblin Elite that's closest to Lexia and, with minimal movement, unleash a kick so hard that I smash its face in.

Unable to slow my momentum, I run my foot through a Goblin Elite closer to Luna and pivot on it to throw a roundhouse kick into the Goblin Elite that's harassing Owen.

I've never been able to move as smoothly as this before, but thanks to my training with Master Rabbit, I can chain together an entire attack and smoothly transition between kicks.

Now that I've joined the fray, the number of Goblin Elites is decreasing, so Luna and Owen are both successfully slaying their own opponents.

Once we've managed to kill them all, Owen breathes a sigh of relief.

"Phew... You saved our skins there, Lord Yuuya."

"I-it's no problem, but...what happened? Why have you come all the way to such a dangerous place...?"

It's not like I've been ordered back to the capital, so why did they come all this way?

Luna seems to have guessed what I'm wondering and is looking at me exasperatedly.

"What did you expect, Yuuya? Lexia told you she was going to visit your house, didn't she? Or are we not supposed to turn up without any particular business with you?"

"What? No, that's not it at all..."

"Then what's the problem? It may have been Lexia who suggested it, but I...ummm...wanted to see you, too."

I see Luna getting flushed as she admits she wanted to see me and am reminded of the time she kissed me. Now it's my turn to go red.

I try to hide my expression by asking Luna a question.

"B-by the way, it's amazing that you got all the way here by yourselves. Didn't you run into any more trouble?"

"Yeah... But Lexia is so selfish that we've actually gotten a little stronger lately."

"I-I see..."

When I can't help but smile wryly at Luna's far-sighted view of the situation, she points at something.

"The better question is...what are you going to do about that?"

"Huh?"

I follow Luna's finger to find...Lexia, who seems to have jumped the fence and made it to the garden, where she's silently confronting Kaori. Wh-what's with this atmosphere all of a sudden...?



I quickly get Owen and the others to join us back at the house, but Lexia and Kaori don't seem to notice us at all and continue to stand there and stare at each other in silence.

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"...."
"
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I look at Owen to see if he can help clue me in on what this might be all about, but he has his eyes closed as if to say it's nothing to do with him. To be fair, though, he does already suffer Lexia enough...

Next, I turn to Luna. But she's glaring at me for some reason. What? Why?

No matter where I look, it doesn't seem like anyone is willing to do anything, and when I'm finally at a complete loss about what I should do, Lexia slowly opens her mouth.

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"...What's your name?"

"...I'm Kaori Houjou. And...you are?"
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"...My name is Lexia von Arselia. I see... Since you don't know who I am, that means you must be from the same land as Sir Yuuya..."

As I wait to see how it goes now that they know each other's names, they both suddenly turn to me.

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"By the way, Yuuya—"
"By the way, Sir Yuuya—"
""Who is she to you?!""
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* * *

The first thing I do is have them come inside, get them some drinks, and sit them down.

In the meantime, Kaori has introduced herself to both Luna and Owen, so all that I need to do now is answer Kaori and Lexia's question, but...

Both of them—no, all three of them, including Luna—are giving me dirty looks, which is making me pretty uncomfortable as I begin to explain.

"Ummm... So first up, Kaori is my friend."

Kaori looks a little annoyed when I say that, but Lexia and Luna on the other hand look relieved.

"Huh? I-is that all?"

"Everything else is a bit harder to explain..."

Kaori is looking at me suspiciously because I'm acting so hesitantly, so I stealthily whisper something in her ear.

"Um...I haven't told Lexia and the others about our world yet."

"What?"

"They seem to think I'm just from some foreign land..."

"I—I see..."

It's probably also because we were talking about how the techniques and skills in this world would be so much more dangerous on Earth before the others showed up, but she seems to understand why I haven't told them that I'm from another world yet.

"B-but still... A 'friend'...?"

"What did you say?"

"O-oh, nothing!"

I thought I heard Kaori mutter something beside me, but...if she says it's nothing, then it must have been nothing.

"Now, about Lexia and the others... Lexia is the first princess of a kingdom called Arselia."

"What?!"

Kaori's eyes are wide as saucers. It's not like her reaction is unexpected, though. How many times do you come across a princess?

"And Luna and Owen are her bodyguards."

"A princess...and her bodyguards..."

I know that she was probably surprised to meet a princess, but Kaori has her

own bodyguards back on Earth, too, so that shouldn't be too strange for her. Although, admittedly, hers aren't knights.

...Yeah, the more I think about it, the more I see how Kaori and I were already living in two separate worlds. It's quite amazing to be able to say you have bodyguards back on Earth...

As I remember just how much of a rich girl Kaori really is, she snaps out of being so awestruck and asks a question.

"S-so how exactly did you meet royalty like Princess Lexia, Yuuya?"

"Oh, you can just call me Lexia. And you, Kaori... You're the same age as Yuuya, aren't you? So then I'll just call you Kaori, too!"

"Huh? Are you...sure that a first-name basis is okay?"

It seems like Kaori has fallen victim to the usual Lexia pushiness, too, but Lexia is smiling.

"Of course! I already said it was!"

"...Your Highness. That's fine at times like this, but if you act this way during public duties..."

"Well, we're not doing public duties, we're here, so it doesn't matter right now, does it?"

"...I suppose so."

Hang in there, Owen.

"Well, if you're going to call Lexia by her first name, you can just call me Luna."

"U-ummm..."

Kaori looks at me as if asking me what to do.

"Uhhh... They're telling you themselves that it's okay, so there shouldn't be a problem with that, should there?"

"I—I know, but... I'm sorry. Please excuse me for addressing you so casually from here on out, Lexia, Luna."

Kaori is polite to a fault, so even if the others tell her that she doesn't need to address them so respectfully, it's difficult for her to be so informal. Lexia seems to have caught on to that fact and is nodding with a wry smile.

"Going back to how Sir Yuuya and I first met... Well, I was once attacked by a group of assassins, and I happened to run into this forest to escape."

"A-assassins?"

Kaori is instantly taken aback by a word that she would never normally hear back home in Japan.

"Yes, but they were all killed by the monsters that infest this place. And just as I thought I was about to meet the same fate...Sir Yuuya rescued me!"

Lexia tells the tale with a twinkle in her eyes. I feel really embarrassed hearing it again.

"After that, I couldn't contain myself and just had to come back out here to see him again and propose!"

"P-propose?!"

Oh no. This is awkward. Things are about to get complicated.

As expected, Kaori looks shocked at what Lexia just told her and simply stares at me speechless.

"Y-Yuuya... You got proposed to ...?"

"I did, but...I'm sure that I refused! I had no idea who Lexia really was at the time, for one!"

"I—I see..."

"Not that I've given up on him, though!"

Lexia is holding her head high with pride for some reason. I seriously have no idea what she sees in me...

Next, it's Luna's turn to talk.

"Just to butt in about myself here, but at that time, I was one of the assassins hired to kill her."

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"Wait...whaaat?!"
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Kaori receives yet another shock. I'm not surprised, though. Here is an exassassin hanging out with her ex-target. It's pretty crazy stuff.

"So, when I undertook that job, I came to this forest to scout it out a little bit, but...then I was also attacked by monsters, and when I finally started to give up hope of getting out alive, Yuuya rescued me, too. After that, a lot of things happened, I guess, and the story gets quite convoluted, so I'll leave it there for now."

"...This world is amazing..."

That's all Kaori can say after hearing so many things that she'd never heard on Earth.

I shoot an awkward smile at her when Lexia gets up suddenly.

"Anyway, Sir Yuuya!"

"Yes?"

"Can you set up your bath set, please?"

".....Huh?"

I'm too stunned by the sudden request to do anything other than reply dumbly...

"Uhhh... Is that why you came here today?"

"No. But we worked up quite a sweat getting here, and now we're caked with mud, so..."

"Seriously...I feel disgusting covered in so much sweat and grime after you dragged us all the way out here."

"O-okay..."

Luna nods along like they really did have a hard journey fighting through the Weald, so I guess I don't have a choice.

Kaori tilts her head curiously. This is the first she's heard about the bath set I have.

"Your...bath set?"

"That's right! And since you're here, why don't you join us, Kaori?"

"What, me?!"

Kaori can't quite believe that they're asking her, but it seems like something that Lexia and Luna have decided is going to happen, so without a reason to object, I start to prepare the baths.

"Oh, Sir Yuuya. I know you refused my invitation last time, but how about you join us today?"

"Guh!"

Once I finish getting the baths ready, Lexia casually invites me to join them like she did before.

My initial reaction is a very sharp spike in blood pressure from stress, which Kaori seems to pick up on, and she starts to turn red.

'Wh-what?! Y-you're getting in, too?"

"That's right. Does that bother you?" Lexia prods.

"...Why wouldn't it bother her? Sometimes, I have to ask myself what's wrong with that brain of yours..."

"How rude! My brain is completely normal, thank you very much!"

Hmm...I'm not so sure about that...

I can't say that last part out loud, but thankfully, Lexia gives up on trying to get me to join them, and the three girls head off to the bath together.

* * *

"I-it really is a bath..."

Now that I'm undressed, I stand at the edge of the steaming hot bath, genuinely surprised.

At first, I thought that we'd be getting into a bath built into the house or something, but it seems they were actually talking about a set of portable baths, one of the drop items that Yuuya had explained to me earlier.

I don't understand why they wanted us to bathe together, but what confuses me more is how you can have a portable bath set. How are you supposed to carry this thing around?

—Just as I had wondered that very thing, Yuuya removed something rectangular from his Item Box, laid it out on the floor, and poof! The baths were ready to be used.

I had no words.

This world just flips so many concepts that I thought were set in stone on their head that I'm surprised by something or other nearly all the time.

And yet...I still feel so nervous about taking a bath with these people...even though they're both girls.

As I wait, not quite sure why I feel the way I do, Lexia and Luna finish getting ready and approach me.

After we rinse our bodies, it's finally time to get in— "Ahh...!"

The water feels so good that I can't help but sigh.

Lexia and Luna both have contented smiles on their faces as if they're enjoying the water, too.

"Ooh... It feels so good."

"Yeah... Yuuya's baths never disappoint..."

Judging by what they are saying, it sounds like both girls have used these baths before after getting rescued by Yuuya.

I'm sure it's nothing, but if they bathed with Yuuya, then... No, I'm sure it is nothing, right?

I know that Lexia invited him to join us earlier, but...going by his reaction, I'm sure he hasn't.

Having heard both of their stories about how they met Yuuya, it makes me happy to know that he's no different in this world.

It's like no matter who's in trouble, he'll always try to save them...

I wonder if that's what first attracted Lexia to him.

And me too—

"—So, what about you, Kaori?"

"Huh?"

I react to Lexia's sudden question with little more than a noise. Aren't I being rude here...? She is a princess after all...

I've met important people through my father before, but I've never had the chance to meet a real-life princess, so I can't help but wonder.

But Lexia doesn't seem to particularly mind and looks straight at me.

"Like I said, what do you think, Kaori?"

"Ummm...about what?"

"About Sir Yuuya of course!"

"Oh!"

I never thought she'd just come out with it and ask like that. I have no idea what to tell her.

"I—I...ummm..."

"You don't need to hide anything. I just want to know how you really feel."

Lexia's hard stare is daring me to lie, but I can't tear my eyes away from hers.

"...I like Yuuya. Ever since I first met him, I've become more and more attracted to his kindness."

"…"

"He's never wavered in saving me no matter how many times I've needed it...and before I knew it, I began to feel things that I've never felt before... And I think those feelings are love..."

Thanks to a little encouragement from Lexia, I'm finally able to calmly analyze my own emotions.

I do love Yuuya.

Seeing as I'd never felt like this before, I was confused at first, but now I've accepted my feelings...and while I am a little embarrassed, there's also a large

part of me that is relieved.

Lexia listens and nods.

"I understand... Luna is the same, but I don't understand why everyone wants to hide how they feel. Why can't we all just be honest and say that we like him?"

"...Yeah, but I think you're a little too honest sometimes."

"And what's wrong with that? You shouldn't be afraid to show positive emotion. If you don't, then your partner may never realize how you feel."

"That...might be true, but..."

"Ummm... Going by what Lexia said, I assume that you like Yuuya, too, Luna...?"

"Oh.....y-yeah."

Luna looks so adorable as her cheeks start to tinge pink and she awkwardly looks away.

"Well, I don't mind. Even if I know that you have feelings for Yuuya, too, that's not going to change anything for me!"

"Huh?"

"Didn't I tell you? I proposed to Sir Yuuya. And I haven't given up on him!"

"Whaaat?! But isn't it a little early to think about getting married...?"

"Oh, is that considered early in the land where you and Sir Yuuya are from? In this kingdom, it's totally normal for people to start getting married around this age."

Oh wow.

I suppose we would be just about old enough to get married on Earth, but Yuuya isn't even eighteen yet.

Then again, that's just the rules back on Earth...or rather in Japan...so maybe it's different here?

Lexia carries on, oblivious to my confusion.

"That's why I'll never give up on Sir Yuuya! And I don't intend on losing to you or Luna, either!"

"Is that so? Because from where I'm standing, I'd say I'm in the lead."

"Grr! That's only because Owen wouldn't stop the carriage for me!"

"And putting this sorry princess aside...that leaves you as my biggest obstacle, Kaori."

"What?"

"You're from the same place as Yuuya, and from what I can tell based on what you've told us, you know sides to Yuuya that we don't."

"Huh?! Th-that's right! You have an advantage over us, Kaori! Which means that...I am the one lagging behind!"

I don't know what standard Lexia is basing that on because I would say the fact that she's already proposed to Yuuya proves otherwise. Besides, I've only just begun to honestly accept my feelings, so when I hear about how Lexia has been so direct and forward with hers, I can't help but be impressed.

As I think over that, Lexia thrusts her finger at Luna and me.

"Fine! But don't expect things to stay as they are for long! I'm going to be the first one to marry Sir Yuuya, so you'd better be ready for that!"

"Hmph, I'll just pull in front again before you know it."

Luna has had a fearless smile on her face the whole time, but I feel like something's weird about what Lexia just said.

"U-ummm... What do you mean by 'first'?"

Usually if you get married to someone, there is no first or second...

Luna and Lexia glance at one another blankly.

"A-are you telling me that...you can't marry multiple people where you're from?"

"Yes... Huh? Can you?"

"Yeah. It's very common actually."

"That's so interesting. It's so much fun to find out that there are cultural differences even in things like that!"

Lexia and Luna both look very curious to find out more, but to someone like me who grew up in Japan, I can't quite believe it.

"So, does that mean that...one man can have multiple wives?"

"Yeah, and the other way around as well. It's particularly prevalent in families like the royal family and the rest of the upper classes."

"Even my father has wives other than my mother. The female leaders of noble houses have lots of husbands, too."

I'm honestly shocked to hear what Lexia and Luna have to say, but when I hear them explain in terms of the royal family and other noble houses, I calm down a little.

Those people need to marry multiple men and women to ensure that they have heirs to carry on the family name.

But...

"Err...I can understand why the royal family and other nobles partake in that practice, but surely the idea isn't popular with common people, right...?"

"Well, it is uncommon to meet someone like that with multiple husbands or wives, but only because it's not economically feasible. If people have the money, they tend to get married to multiple partners. Wealthy merchants are a good example of that. Yuuya wouldn't have any problems, either. He can make a lot of money from the materials that the monsters in this forest drop and probably a fair bit from his job as an adventurer."



"Plus, he'll be marrying into the royal family. So there are no issues there!"

My head is starting to hurt from all the information about this world that Lexia and Luna are cramming into it.

I'm sure there are countries on Earth that allow polygamy, but Japan isn't one of them, so when I think about this concept being applied to Yuuya...

As I sit there and process the shock, Lexia cheerfully changes the subject.

"Well, that's all in the future for now! I have to get Sir Yuuya to actually fall in love with me first!"

"That's true."

"Now, I'd like to hear everything you know about Sir Yuuya, Kaori."

"What? Wh-what I know about Yuuya?"

"Yes! Since we're all here, then do you want to trade knowledge?! What about all the things we know about Sir Yuuya that you don't?"

"O-of course I do!"

I suppose I don't know much about what Yuuya has gotten up to in this world, so I'd like to find out.

Lexia smiles happily at my reaction, so the three of us, including Luna, begin to talk all about Yuuya.

It's been such a long time since I've been able to chat like this with girls my own age, and by the time we're ready to leave the bath, we're already fast friends.

* * *

While Lexia, Luna, and Kaori chatted in the bath, Owen was attempting to gather information about Yuuya and his companions.

Now that a girl called Kaori had suddenly appeared, the number of things he needed to investigate had increased. Owen had a lot more to puzzle over.

That said, Yuuya and Kaori seemed to have several things in common, so that could be useful for gathering intel.

Their hair and eyes are the same color, but their facial features don't look at all alike...which means that they're unlikely to be siblings and may indeed just be friends. In that case, perhaps Lord Yuuya and Lady Kaori are both from royalty or the upper classes...

Yet there was as little information available as always. Therefore, Owen was arriving at one misunderstanding after another. As the number of things he would need to report on when he arrived back in the capital increased, so did his headache.

Owen was hoping to be able to gather a little more intel on Yuuya this visit and report back to King Arnold.

Back when the king was attacked by Reigar, the assassins that had been hired to carry out the hit were quite skilled, yet Yuuya had been able to take down each one of them with ease. He also possessed a number of legendary items.

It would not be prudent to allow a kingdom home to those kinds of people, or any other similar individual, to go unchecked, and Arnold had already said that if it was possible, he'd prefer that Yuuya stay within the Kingdom of Arselia.

If Yuuya relinquished his old kingdom and became a citizen of Arselia, that would be a major boon for them.

In fact, there was no doubt that the power and legendary items that Yuuya possessed would have a great impact on any future diplomatic matters.

However, Owen and Arnold had seen but a taste of Yuuya's actual power, so there was no telling what their reaction would be if they found out about his teleportation magic, too.

The best course of action would not just be to get Yuuya on our side but for him to marry Princess Lexia as well and for trade relations with his kingdom to commence, but...His Majesty is hesitant. Although he has lost a lot of his ill will toward the boy ever since what happened with Reigar...

Yuuya had risen high in King Arnold's estimation ever since he cured Reigar, who the king himself had all but given up on.

That alone was a great feat, but it didn't seem as if Yuuya was aware of that.

While the king wasn't interested in his beloved daughter's affections for Yuuya, he did often find himself contemplating Yuuya's power.

As the head of state, he longed to build a connection with Yuuya, but as a parent, that didn't mean he wanted to hand his daughter over.

Still, the object of Lexia's affection was refusing her proposal, so there was no need to rush things to a conclusion one way or the other.

But now a new uncertainty had been added to the mix in the form of Kaori, and the contest for Yuuya's heart had grown a lot more complex.

Yet...

Owen shifted his focus to Night and Akatsuki, who were relaxing nearby.

"Woof?"

"Oink?"

Both cocked their heads curiously in response.

I've only ever been briefly introduced to them, but...these two are a part of Yuuya's family now. Yet whichever way you look at it, neither of them seem particularly normal..., Owen thought as he took a good, long look at them.

Is Lord Night...a dog...? No. A wolf, then. But I don't think there are that many species of black wolves... The most famous is the Black Fang, of course, but that's D-class. There's no way something like that would be able to put up a fight in the Weald. Apart from that, the Shadow Wolf and the Murder Claw spring to mind, but...they're too weak to survive out here, either. The fact that Night is even better than Lord Yuuya at detecting enemies, too, means that he can't be any of the usual species, so that leaves—

A name finally popped into Owen's head.

At that very moment, Owen began to feel sweat drip down his brow.

Th-there's no way he could be...a legendary Black Fenrir...could he? A species even stronger than the normal Fenrir, the divine wolves themselves, and that had crushed the old big three kingdoms to dust at the height of their prosperity in a single night...?

Owen looked back at Night, but all the pup did was cock his head adorably.

It can't be. It just can't. There is absolutely no way. Besides, the legends state that the Black Fenrir is so large that it can swallow an entire town in one bite. Lord Night is far too small for that. He's probably just a species unique to the Weald that we've never seen before. But then when it comes to Lord Akatsuki...

Then Owen shifted his focus to Akatsuki, who didn't seem to care very much as he simply showed Owen his belly and rolled around slovenly on the floor.

...Hmm. This one is definitely a little pig. That red fur is certainly unusual, but...he doesn't seem particularly special in any other way. I've never seen him fight like Night, so he's probably not very useful in battle.

Owen decided that there wasn't much point in thinking anymore about Akatsuki.

—In the end, Owen was unable to uncover any important information, and all he could do was keep racking his brain to try and find something. Anything.

* * *

"Whew... that was some nice water."

"Yeah... I expected nothing less."

"This is amazing... I didn't expect to feel so good getting out of the bath..."

Now that they've finished bathing, the three girls return chattering happily.

...Wow. Before they took their bath, they were a little cold with one another, but now it looks like they're the best of friends.

I ask Kaori what she thought about my baths after using them for the very first time.

"How were the baths, Kaori?"

"They were amazing! My skin feels so smooth, but what's more than that...

It's like I can feel power emanating from the very core of my body."

I can tell from her gleaming eyes that she is satisfied.

"Good. That item seems to have a lot of effects."

"The items in this world are incredible... Plus, you can carry those baths around with you, can't you?"

"Yeah. So you can take a bath wherever you want. Plus, the baths have a feature that makes it so other people can't see you bathing. You don't have to worry about privacy or anything. Although I guess you still have to carefully choose where to set up the baths, in some respects."

"They're still amazing, though!"

As I shyly smile at the fact that Kaori is even more satisfied than I expected her to be, I ask Lexia and Luna some questions, too.

"By the way, why did you guys come here today? After introducing Kaori and setting up the baths, I totally forgot..."

"Oh, no particular reason."

"Huh?"

I freeze.

But Lexia holds her head high and doesn't seem bothered in the slightest.

"I wanted to see you, so I came to see you!"

"...I wanted to see you, too, Yuuya, but there's a time and a place...and this princess doesn't seem to care about any of that... Anyway, just put yourself in our shoes after getting dragged all the way out here..."

"Y-yeah, I guess this place is pretty dangerous, but...wait! Hold on a minute. Uhhh... Did you tell King Arnold that you were coming...?"

"I couldn't be bothered with all of that."

That's not good...!

He's gonna get so angry with me again...!

I can feel myself begin to worry when Owen sighs and explains something to me.

"Don't worry, Lord Yuuya. I notified the king where we were going."

"Oh, thank God for that..."

No, seriously.

But if they haven't come for any particular reason, aren't they just going to get bored...?

I feel bad since they came all the way here, but there's something I need to tell them.

"Look, I'm really sorry, but I have something I need to do tomorrow..."

And by that, I mean I've got to go to school. The midterms are so close now.

"Oh, you do? And Kaori, too?"

"Yes, me too..."

"Aww...I really want to know what it is that you're both doing, but...we came here without giving you any notice, so we can't be too disappointed that you won't be home."

Lexia does look a little disappointed, but she seems to accept it.

"In that case, we should leave soon. If I'm away for too long, my father will be angry!"

"No, I bet he's already pissed that you sneaked out without telling him..."

Luna makes a sound argument, but Lexia doesn't seem to care. I always wondered how those two would be together from the standpoint of her status as an ex-assassin, but it looks like they work together well.

As soon as Lexia declares that they're going to head home, Kaori looks sad.

"I understand, but...it feels sad to say good-bye..."

"Aww, but it's not like we're saying good-bye forever, so there's no need to get so upset! We could even meet here at the same time tomorrow."

"Your Highness. Your schedule is full of public duties starting tomorrow."

"What?"

Just a few seconds ago, Lexia had been so cheerful and full of life, but as soon as Owen mentions public duties, her face freezes over.

"Y-you're kidding, right?"

"I am not. And when you're assigned public duties, you won't be allowed to act so selfishly. I recommended you especially for these appointments."

"But Oweeeeen!"

Lexia is glaring at Owen like she's some kind of ogre. I-it's terrifying...

But Owen simply looks back at her unperturbed.

"You've had free rein lately, so from tomorrow, you're going to put in some work."

"I—I don't want to!"

"It doesn't matter. As far as I know, you shall be participating in the next high society event, as well as a meal with some people from our neighboring kingdom, Rowness. Then there shall be a tour of the provincial towns that you were unable to visit last time."

"N-noooooo!"

Lexia collapses into a heap on the floor. It seems like being a royal is hard work after all...

But hearing all this simply cements in my mind that Lexia really is a princess and we live in two totally separate worlds.

Next to Lexia, Luna sighs in exasperation.

"Sigh...I don't want to go, either—anything but that. But since I work for you, I have to..."

Lexia suddenly gets her spark back as if she heard Luna's remarks.

"L-Luna! See! You'll be with me, won't you?! Won't you hate that? All those dinners and social events are so annoying!"

"They are, but I'm just your bodyguard. At least I don't have to bother with all that tedious small talk."

"T-traitooor!"

It doesn't look like Lexia has any allies left to turn to. But please don't look at me with those eyes. It's not like I can do anything.

"Aww... I—I guess there's no getting out of it...but I promise I'll finish up my duties as quickly as possible so I can come back here again!"

"Yes, yes, that's right..."

"I don't like that condescending tone, Owen!"

Lexia snaps at Owen and then turns back toward us.

"I wish it didn't have to be this way, but this is good-bye for now."

"Okay. Should I escort you to the edge of the Weald?"

"Thanks, but we'll be fine. It'll be good for Luna and Owen to get some training in on the way out!"

"Y-you...!"

Luna's and Owen's eyes are wide in shock. A-are they going to be okay?

I'm sure they will be. If they encounter any monsters on the outskirts of the forest, I know that Luna will be able to deal with them.

"Anyway, Kaori! Let's see each other again soon!"

"Let's! I can't wait to hear more about what we talked about today!"

—And with that, Lexia, Luna, and Owen head back to Montress.

I also send Night after them to watch from the shadows and make sure they get out of the forest without any problems.

As I watch him leave, I hear Kaori mutter something.

"They've gone..."

"Yeah..."

"...Lexia and the others are such nice people. I had so much fun with them."

"You did? I'm just glad that you all got along."

Things seemed a little tense at first, so I'd been worried about what would happen.

My smile is unconsciously forced, but I ask something that suddenly comes to mind.

"Now that I think about it, you guys were very friendly toward the end. What did you talk about in the baths?"

Kaori teasingly looks up at me through her eyelashes and smiles.

".....It's a secret!"

CHAPTER 6

Reunion with the Mysterious Girl

A few days have passed since Kaori met Lexia and the others.

"Whew...maybe I should end my studying here for today."

"Woof?"

As I stretch out, Night looks up at me and cocks his head.

Now that I think about it, I've been so preoccupied with studying that I haven't had much time for Night or Akatsuki...

"...All right. Maybe we can go for a walk today, then."

"Woof?"

"Oink."

Night and Akatsuki both look at me with expressions as if to say *Are you sure?* But their eyes are bright and gleaming. When they look at me like that, it just makes me want to go even more.

"It's fine. No matter where we go, we can get home in an instant with my teleportation magic."

"Woof!"

At once, Night grabs my Adventurer's Guild card from my room with his mouth and spits it out at my feet.

"Woof!"

"Oh, that's right. I signed up with those guys... Do you want to take on a job?"

"Woof." Night nods enthusiastically.

"Okay...then let's pick up an assignment at the Adventurer's Guild today!"

"Woof!"

"Oink!"

I smile at them both looking so cheerful and immediately prepare to leave for Montress with them.

I think it'll be a bit weird if I teleport right into the center of town, though, so I decide to send us to somewhere a little farther out and deserted.

Once we get there, we head straight for town and, after gaining entry without any problems, toward the Adventurer's Guild.

If I had more time, it would have been nice to stroll around the capital, but our main objective for this trip is to pick a job at the guild. I can do my sightseeing once the tests are over.

As we make our way toward the guild, I spot someone walking toward the guild from the opposite direction.

"Huh? Yuuya?"

"Oh, Luna!"

Somehow, we run into Luna near the Adventurer's Guild.

"Why are you here? I thought you said you were busy... Have you finished what it is you were doing?"

"No, not yet. But I needed to take a breather, so we came here to take a job from the guild. Plus, it's easy to use teleportation magic to get around quickly, so..."

"...No, only you can use teleportation magic to do that, so don't make it sound so simple..."

"I know."

Lexia has been warning me about the dangers of using my teleportation magic, too.

There's something I want to know as well, though.

"So why are you here, Luna? Aren't you supposed to be guarding Lexia?"

"Oh yeah, it looks like Owen will be enough security for today, so they let me have the day off. I wanted to stretch my legs a little as well, so...I decided to take a walk through town."

"Oh...then why don't you come to the Adventurer's Guild with us?"

"Huh?"

Luna seems surprised by my suggestion.

"Oh, uhhh...are you sure you don't mind?"

"Of course not! Fighting monsters together again will be just like old times. Right?"

"Woof!"

"Oink!"

Night and Akatsuki seem in favor of Luna coming with us and snuggle up against her legs. They're both so cute!

Luna looks down at the pair and smiles.

"R-really...? I never thought in a million years we'd actually be able to go on a job, just the two of us... D-does that make this a date...?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, n-nothing! Anyway, let's look for something easygoing."

Luna leads us over to the notice board. We look over the requests, but the only ones available for our rank are super easy. Things like the herb-picking job from last time, delivering goods, weeding... Nothing more than odd jobs.

As she glances over the notice board, Luna's eyes are drawn to a certain ad.

"Yuuya, what about this one?"

"Hmm?"

Pinned to the board is a paper entitled "Monster Survey of the Capital's Outskirts."

"Oh, that looks interesting. But are there any places on the outskirts where

you can even find monsters?"

"Yeah. There are a few forests nearby, so we'd probably be surveying those."

"Oh, right..."

It doesn't seem like there are any other interesting jobs, so we decide to take on the job that Luna recommended.

Emilia is behind the desk, so we ask her to take care of the paperwork and for a few more details.

"So, this survey of the capital outskirts... What is it exactly that we're supposed to do?"

"Oh, you don't have to think too hard about it. Even if it's only one species, we'd just like you to search out monsters on the outskirts of the town, and that's it."

"That sounds even easier than I first thought."

"I know. This job is always posted up on the notice board, so other adventurers often take it on, too. Are you sure that this is the one you want to do?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then I'll get everything processed."

Emilia finishes up the paperwork for us, and then we teleport to the outskirts of the town.

* * *

"Hum, hum hummm!"

"Someone's in a good mood."

Once Emilia has sorted everything out for us and we've left the city, Luna begins to hum to herself.

But the moment I point it out, her cheeks flush with embarrassment.

"Y-you think so? ...Well, I suppose...it's because we're together, just the two of us, and..."

```
"Oh, right...yeah."
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Luna's reaction is making me blush now, too.

But I guess this is the first time it's just been me and Luna since we were training together. I know that Night and Akatsuki are here, too, but in terms of people, we're all alone.

Although I've been training ever since then, just with Master Rabbit instead.

We're both still pink as we reach our destination, a forest on the outskirts of Montress.

I don't feel the same ominous feeling that I get from the Weald, though.

Having arrived, we brace ourselves for the job ahead.

"All right, let's find ourselves a—"

At the very moment I begin to speak, I hear something.

"Argggh!"

""Huh?!"" Luna and I look at each other, startled by the sound of a woman's scream coming from somewhere in the woods.

"What was that...?"

"I don't know, but it was close..."

"Dammit! Night! Can you tell where that scream came from?!"

".....Woof!"

Night pricks his ears and sniffs the air before giving a small bark and running off into the tree line.

"All right, let's go!"

"Yeah!"

We chase after Night, straight into the forest.

But we don't have to go very far before we discover the owner of the scream.

"Th-this wolf..."

"Grrr..."

I'm surprised to find Glenna, the woman who had introduced herself back when we signed up at the Adventurer's Guild, in a heap on the ground with her back against a tree. Night is standing in front of her, seemingly on edge about something.

```
"Are you okay?!"

"Y-you're...!"

"I don't know what happened to you, but we have to get you out of—"

"W-we can't! Watch out!"

"Woof!"

"What the—?!"
```

At the very moment I try to get Glenna to run away, a fierce attack suddenly comes hurtling toward me out of nowhere.

Without even thinking, I grab my Absolute Spear to stave off the assault and throw it in the direction of where the attack came from.

```
That's when...

"Keeeeeh!"

"Wh-what the hell are they?!"

"Yuuya, those are Assassin Chameleons!"

"Chameleons?!"
```

I hurriedly scan the area for any signs of life and can definitely sense the presence of living creatures. It feels like they're trying to surround us.

I look around the surrounding forest to protect Glenna as Luna fills me in on the details of what we're facing.

"Assassin Chameleons are B-class monsters. They tend to launch attacks after camouflaging themselves against their environment, just like they're doing now."

```
"I see..."
```

These are the first monsters that I've fought outside of the Weald, but their

class is higher than I thought it would be. I wonder if this is normal.

In any case, their camouflage ability is pretty annoying. Even I can see that.

But we know about it now, and that just means we'll have to fight while making sure that none of the invisible presences can escape.

I call out to Glenna, who's looking at me dumbfounded.

"...First, we're going to take care of these monsters. Luna!"

"I know..."

Luna skillfully manipulates the threads in her hands and quickly casts them out across the surrounding area.

Each of the threads hews into the trees and damages the Assassin Chameleons that aren't able to avoid them, forcing them to reveal themselves.

"Keyaaaaah!"

"Kukkeeeee!"

The Assassin Chameleons have a strange-sounding cry, a green two-meterlong body, and two big, yellow eyes framed by two impressive horns that protrude from their foreheads.

Now that we can see them, I can start to fight them, too.

"Hyaaah!"

I aim for the neck of one of the rampaging Assassin Chameleons that has taken a hit from Luna's threads, quickly switch out my Absolute Spear for my Omnisword and slice right through it.

"Ku-kukeee!"

"Keeeeh!"

The surviving Assassin Chameleons immediately turn on their heels and quickly scatter back into the forest. I guess they're going to get away.

I'm still surprised by my first experience of a monster running away from me when Luna arrives at my side.

"As you might have guessed from their name, Assassin Chameleons are very

good at ambushing people. But if they come up against someone who can defend against surprise attacks or who they're not sure about, they tend to run away."

"O-oh..."

While I stand there astonished by a monster ecosystem that I still don't understand, Glenna is staring at me with eyes as wide as saucers.

"W-wow...," she says, impressed.

I leave Glenna to Night and Akatsuki and go to retrieve the drop items left behind by the Assassin Chameleon.

At first glance, they're all things I've never seen before, so I want to sit and check them out properly, but...Glenna is still here, so now isn't really the time.

"Sorry, but I'd like to get out of here right away."

"O-okay."

We leave the forest quickly, only taking time to catch our breath once we're out.

"Pant...You saved my life back there. Thank you."

"I-it's nothing. I'm just glad we could save you."

"I never thought I'd run into a gang of Assassin Chameleons out here, though... Anyway, I'm still alive because of you, so I must reward you somehow."

"R-reward me?"

Glenna grabs my arm for some reason and presses it right into her bosom. Uh, excuse me?!

"How about you drop by my place sometime...like tonight? I could give you your reward there."

"M-my reward?"

"That's right. Something only I can—"

"—Aren't you forgetting about someone?"

As I'm panicking about how to deal with Glenna, Luna frees my arm from the adventurer's chest.

Glenna simply glares back at her.

"If you have a reward for Yuuya, then you should have a reward for me, too."

"Ummm...Luna?"

As I nervously address Luna, a wry smile appears on Glenna's face.



"Oh my, that's unfortunate. I don't swing that way... Anyway, I've had quite enough for today, so I'm going home. I really am very tired."

"Should we escort you back?"

When I abruptly suggest that we see her home safely, Glenna smiles.

"That's very kind of you, but I'll be fine. Besides...if I stay any longer, that girl is going to become scarier than any damn monster."

"Huh?"

When I follow Glenna's gaze, I see Luna staring back at us and looking distinctly bad-tempered.

"Wh-what's the matter?"

"...Nothing."

"Judging by your expression, it doesn't look like nothing..."

I ask a few more times, but that's the only answer that Luna gives.

In the end, Glenna thanks us both once more and heads home alone. We, on the other hand, get back to what we came here to do and explore the forest.

* * *

It's been a few days since Luna and I rescued Glenna.

But I completely forgot to look over the items the Assassin Chameleons dropped, so I decide that now is a good time to check them out.

I received the following:

Color-changing Skin of the Assassin Chameleon—The skin of an Assassin Chameleon. This skin is extremely flexible and can be processed in many ways. Depending on how it is processed, the skin changes color. Since the skin comes from a B-class monster, it has quite a high defense level. This material is coveted by those who trade in armor and clothing as an item that should be worked with at least once in a lifetime.

Cloak of Concealment—A drop item from an Assassin Chameleon.

The wearer of this cloak can conceal their form. They can also choose to be visible to select people while wearing it. However, the wearing of this cloak does not protect the wearer from all detection, and if they are detected once, they will be visible to that foe even if they try using the cloak again and will have to temporarily hide themselves elsewhere to escape their target's notice.

Equipment-changing Bangle—A drop item from an Assassin Chameleon. This bangle allows the wearer to instantaneously equip any item assigned to it.

The monster also dropped a Magic Stone: B, but those other items were more important.

The Color-changing Skin of the Assassin Chameleon is a strange, rubbery substance that changes color slightly in the light, but at the moment, I have no plans or means of processing it into anything, so I'm going to exchange it for money at the Door to a Different World, like I did with the Bloody Ogre materials.

As for the Cloak of Concealment, the first thing I think is that I probably don't need it because I have my One with Nature skill. But then again, if I suddenly become unable to use my One with Nature skill or I come across an enemy that can see through all that, it would be nice to be able to pull the wool over their eyes and hide myself. I haven't come across anyone like that yet, but it never hurts to be prepared.

Then there's the Equipment-changing Bangle... That seems to be the most useful thing I picked up.

I assign my Bloodstained Ogre armor and the normal clothes that the sage left behind for me to the bangle, so I can switch between the two in an instant.

I've only got my Bloodstained Ogre armor at the moment, but if I acquire any more, this is going to come in so handy for switching between them.

While I've been spending a lot of quality time like that guild request in the other world, back on Earth, the midterms finally ended yesterday, and now we're just waiting for them to be graded... I'm actually pretty confident for once.

"How did the midterms go for you guys?"

"Same as usual for me. I don't think they were so bad, though."

"I—I think I did quite well."

It seems like neither Ryou nor Shingo had any particular problems, but when I see Akira and Kaede looking so frazzled...I'm a little worried. If they have to take any makeup exams, I think I'll help them study next time.

I used to flunk anything to do with math, but this time I had a fantastic helper in Kaori. She saved my ass.

Thanks to her, I understood way more of the math test than I usually do, and because I helped her with the English and classical literature exams as well, I was able to answer those questions in more depth, too.

The thing is...now that tests are over, so are my study sessions with her.

"...I feel kind of lonely now."

Kaori came over to my place every day after school during the exams, so I can't help but feel that way now that I've got nobody coming over.

Plus...

"It was pretty fun..."

Ever since she stumbled upon the other world, Kaori has strangely been on my mind a lot.

I guess the main reason is because she still accepts me even though she found out the truth.

It made me so happy to hear her say that I'm still the same Yuuya she's always known, even after she saw my appearance change so drastically and how callously I slay monsters.

I always thought that Kaori was an amazing person, but...ever since then, I've known it in my heart as well.

...Still, affection from someone like me would just trouble her. There's probably somebody much more suited to her out there.

Maybe I shouldn't think this way, but after so many years of rejection, I don't

have much self-confidence.

I think I've been feeling that way a lot less than before, but...it never really stops.

"Argh...this is no good! I've gotta do something with myself."

Whenever I feel depressed lately, I move my body in some way.

Sometimes I just practice what Master Rabbit taught me, other times I try to recreate the moves described in all the books that I found in the library I wandered into just after I first crossed through the Door to a Different World. Whatever it is, I just make sure that I'm moving my body.

When I head out into the garden accompanied by Night and Akatsuki, I blurt out a thought that just occurred to me.

"Now that I think about it, we haven't seen Master Rabbit in a while, have we?"

"Woof?"

"Oink."

Night and Akatsuki nod as if they've realized the same.

Well, I guess I'm not worried too much about whether someone like him is in danger or not, but I do wonder where he is.

That's when the girl who appeared when we apprehended Reigar pops back into my head, too.

"... I wonder if Master Rabbit knows anything about her."

That incredible strength of hers was not normal.

I've had more confidence in my own strength lately, but after seeing her, it crumbled into dust. I guess this is a big, big pond after all.

"Let's keep on getting stronger at our own pace."

"Woof!"

"Oink..."

Night gives a cheerful nod, but Akatsuki waves his front hoof in front of him as

though he's not very bothered. Well...I guess Akatsuki isn't exactly the battle type.

Besides, even if I say that we'll get stronger, if we carry on as we are, nothing's going to change.

That's why we need to devise something that we can do ourselves other than the training with Master Rabbit, but...

"If, out of everything we can do right now, there's a way to get stronger, it's probably working on combining our magic with our close-combat abilities."

"Woof?"

"Oink."

Night is listening carefully and cocking his head cutely, but Akatsuki is lying sprawled out on the ground as if he doesn't care at all. Ha, it's cute. And I guess that's fine for Akatsuki.

I collect myself and explain my thoughts to Night.

"Think about it. Right now we either fight close range with weapons or we just use magic, right?"

"Woof."

"So, what if we were able to combine them?"

"Woof?"

At the moment, whenever we fight using our bodies or weapons, we don't have the mental capacity to think about incorporating other elements like magic into our strategy.

That's probably why we have so few attack variations.

For now, I have a lot of weapons passed down from the sage, so I can fight while switching them out, but Night can't.

Besides, I'm not sure whether one actually exists or not, but one day we could end up having to fight an enemy who can switch between magic and physical resistance.

And at this rate, if we did fight an enemy like that, we'd be toast the moment

they switched.

Putting all that aside, if we combine magical and weapon-based attacks, there's no doubt that they'll take a lot more steps to perform properly.

Not that I think they'll be easy to combine in the first place.

While I can imagine things like unleashing magic on the spot an enemy dives to when they're evading a physical attack, actually performing that is completely out of the question for me at present.

That's why I've decided to change how I approach this problem.

"All of the sage's weapons are extremely powerful as they are now, right?"

"Woof."

"But...I wonder if we can make them even stronger?"

"Woof?!"

I thought he might have that reaction.

"Take the Absolute Spear for example... Wouldn't it be much more formidable wrapped in lightning?"

I remove the Absolute Spear from the Item Box and show Night as I try to explain my thoughts to him.

Night's eyes widen.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that I want to incorporate magic into my weapons.

If that were possible then we'd be able to defeat enemies like the Wraith with physical weapons, too.

"Look."

I hold the Absolute Spear out in front of me and close my eyes.

In my mind's eye, I picture the spear clad in lightning.

"Infuse Magic."

A bolt of lightning suddenly descends from the sky.

It strikes the Absolute Spear dead on and electrifies it.

Night and I stand there staring at it in shock.

```
"I—I did it..."
```

"Woof..."

As I begin to swing the Absolute Spear around to see what will happen, it leaves a little trail of lightning behind it. Somehow, it also feels like I can wield it even faster than before.

"D-don't tell me..."

To test if what I suspect is true, I casually throw the spear at a tree outside of the garden.

CRAAAACK!

Me, Night, and Akatsuki—who had been lying lazily on the ground—watch in awe.

Somehow, the spear not only flew so fast that I couldn't even see it with the naked eye, but the moment it made contact with the tree, it pierced straight through the trunk, and a bolt of lightning also struck down from the sky.

Carbonized in seconds, the tree didn't even have time to burn.

While we stand looking on astonished at the sheer power of the magic-infused weapon, the Absolute Spear returns to my hand.

What's more, the electricity coursing through the recently returned spear hasn't dissipated in the slightest, and it's still making crackling sounds. Th-that's pretty scary...

"So, just now I...imagined this weapon with lightning running through it. I wonder what'll happen if I imagine water or flames instead?"

I try infusing my Absolute Spear with every magical element that I can possibly think of and...

"Hmm... It works with some elements but not others."

I succeeded in infusing it with flames, but when I tried with water it was a disaster.

It's probably just a problem with my imagination.

I can easily envisage a spear clad in flames, but it's a little harder to imagine water.

I also managed to infuse it with wind, but earth was another no-go.

Then after coming this far, I'm struck by an idea.

—What if I combine multiple elements?

Unable to quell my curiosity, I give it a try, and...I do it.

```
"H-holy..."
```

"Woof..."

"Oink."

Night and Akatsuki both stare awestruck at the Absolute Spear in my hand, looking like they want to pull back a little.

Maybe it's because the spear doesn't look like it usually does. It's wrapped in a whirlwind of flames, and electricity courses all around it.

But somehow, it doesn't even feel hot to me.

"...I wonder what would happen if I threw this thing...?"

I'd love to try it, but when I think of the damage it did when it was only infused with lightning, I worry about what kind of catastrophe I would cause if I threw this at a tree as well.

```
"Th-this isn't something that I can just throw around lightly..."
```

```
"Woof..."
```

"Oink."

Night and Akatsuki vigorously nod as if to tell me that they completely agree.

But this doesn't solve my problem of combining magic with close combat. Although I bet I could at least fool people with it.

Of course, the ideal result would be for me to be able to weave magic into my weapon in a balanced way.

But I don't have the experience or magical proficiency to do that yet, so my experiments this time are but a stepping stone to that...

"But I was more successful than I thought I'd be."

"Woof!"

Night's eyes gleam as he nods. Then he performs a little experiment of his own and begins to test whether he can infuse lightning with his own weapons, namely, his claws.

That's when...

"W...woof!"

"Wow!"

A bolt strikes Night's claws and seems to electrify them.

Then Night springs into a run. He bounds forward fast as lightning and slashes at a tree on the other side of the fence.

At the moment of impact, lightning strikes just like it did when I threw the Absolute Spear.

I don't know what principle is at work here, but for some reason, lightning always strikes straight down from the heavens.

Could it be possible that since my Absolute Spear and Night's claws are infused with lightning, they're acting as a kind of receptor...like a lightning rod? I still don't get it, though.

As I pet Night, who's nuzzling up to me as though asking me to praise him for a job well done, an amazing thought flashes into my head.

It's actually something that I thought about once I saw Night move after his claws were infused with lightning, but...

```
"...Hey, Night."
```

"Woof?"

"Don't you think it would be cool if...we could move as fast as Master Rabbit?"

"Woof?!"

Night is looking at me with eyes as surprised as before. I know he thinks it would be very cool.

Master Rabbit boasts immense power in his legs, to the point that he's known as the Deity of Kicks.

That's why he has such incredible speed and why I can't visually keep up with his movements, but...now I've suddenly taken my first step into that domain, too.

When you think about it normally, my stats are much lower than Master Rabbit's, so it's impossible for me to match his pace.

But I wonder if that would still be the case if I harnessed the power of magic.

It's just as the sage said: Magic is just a manifestation of your imagination.

And I happen to have the mana pathways passed down from that man.

"Let's see, shall we?" I say as I close my eyes and focus the image in my mind.

The image is the one I just saw of Night infused with lightning.

So I try swapping out Night for myself.

It was only Night's claws that were infused with lightning earlier, but he moved faster than I've ever seen him move before, and it's clear that was down to the effect of the electricity running through his body.

That's why I wondered what would happen if I was infused with lightning myself, rather than the Absolute Spear.

```
As a result—
"I—I did it..."
"Woof..."
"Oink."
```

I can feel the electricity coursing through my body, making my armor glow

pale white.

"N-no, wait. I don't actually know if I've succeeded yet. I have to actually try and move first—"

The moment I take a single step forward, I leave everything behind.

".....Huh?"

Everything around me instantly changes, and my eyes open wide in shock.

Wh-what just happened? I thought I was only taking one step forward, but...

As the thought strikes me, I get an odd feeling and cautiously look behind me

"S-seriously...?"

I seem to have left a path in my wake.

The path is burned black, and some areas are still lit with an electric afterglow.

"...I moved this far just by taking one step?"

Strangely calm about the surreal scene behind me, I check my location with my Map skill and can't help but mutter to myself.

With just one step, in a split second, I've left the garden and made it all the way to the entrance to the Weald? I can't even believe I'm saying that.

There's no way I could move so far in just one step and at such a crazy speed, too.

Maybe if I were Master Rabbit...that wouldn't be so inconceivable, but for someone like me as I am now, it should be impossible.

But I did it. And I don't understand how.

As I stand there dumbstruck, I can still feel electricity in my body, so I decide to go back home the same way.

Then...

"...I can't believe it."

"Woof?!"

"Oink!"

I once again cover a huge distance in a second, ending back at the spot I started from.

Night and Akatsuki stare in shock at my sudden reappearance.

I already suspected it before, but it looks like infusing myself with lightning does increase my speed after all.

But it requires control...I'll have to practice a lot.

Ending up in some unknown place seconds after taking a single step is no laughing matter.

"Still...that was dangerous. I'm lucky I didn't end up damaging my house or my fence... I could have ended up colliding with the side of my home."

It's a little late now, but I regret acting so recklessly.

The skill is still amazing, though.

And once I do master it, I have no doubt that it's going to be a big help to me.

"Well, now that's decided, let's get training!"

"Woof!"

"Oink."

It looks like Night and Akatsuki will both be joining me this time.

I want to start right away, but first I decide that we should move somewhere else.

To do that, I release the Infuse Magic skill I activated on my body. If I don't, then I might end up on the edge of the forest again.

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"All right, now—"
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"...! Growl..."

"Huh? Night?"

Just as we're about to begin, Night suddenly starts snarling.

Akatsuki and I stand there wondering what happened— But then I sense

something behind us that fills me with a creeping terror.

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"Argh!"
```

I hurriedly scoop up Night and Akatsuki and dive out of the way.

```
"That's...!"
```

I look back to see a dust cloud emanating from the place where we were just standing.

As I stare at the damage warily, a voice rings out from above.

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"—Unexpected. To dodge such an attack..."
```

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"You're..."
```

I look up and see the mysterious girl who appeared when we captured Reigar leisurely lingering on top of a tree.

When I look closely, I see a silver bow in her hands that she didn't have last time.

Night snarls at the girl, and even Akatsuki is looking at her uncharacteristically sternly. I wonder what's up with him?

I'm puzzled by Akatsuki's behavior, but still I cover him with the Cloak of Concealment I just acquired to hide the companion with the least battle strength.

Then, still on my guard, I ask the girl a question.

"Who the hell are you? And why do you keep attacking us?"

```
"…"
```

The girl remains silent and offers no answer, but the next moment, I feel a chill run down my spine.

```
"Huh?!"
```

I instinctively drop down to the ground and swing my Absolute Spear up to where I feel it cut something down.

It's an arrow, exactly like the ones from when we were attacked near the capital.

"...Arrows are suddenly flying everywhere like they were before. But the fact that they're all aimed at me tells me I'm connected to all this somehow."

"—Affirmative."

It may have been but a single word, but that's the first time she's responded to me so far.

And then—

"I am sure. You will not be defeated solely by the arrows shot in advance."

"Shot in advance...?"

This girl said a lot of weird stuff before about seeing the future and things, but...could these arrows that are coming for us be ones she set up before revealing herself?

If they are, then I have no idea what kind of skill she's using.

And the fact that she's capable of something like that means she definitely has strength on par with Master Rabbit.

"Seriously..."

That might be the only word coming out of my mouth lately, but what else am I supposed to say?

And now she appears just as I've come up with a way to catch up to Master Rabbit slightly in terms of strength, but I don't know how to control it yet...

"Guess there's no time for a rehearsal, then."

"Woof!"

Night also prepares for battle as if expecting the worst.

"...I'll ask you once more. Why are you targeting us?"

"Danger. You may hinder my plans. And simply, revenge."

"Revenge...?"

All I can do is cock my head in confusion.

Revenge...? Have I met this girl somewhere before?

I don't remember her, but she must already hate me if she wants something like revenge, right?

No matter how much I think about it, I don't remember ever meeting this girl before or having done something worthy of revenge in the first place. Could it be that she wants revenge for me blocking all her arrows last time we met...? What else was I supposed to do? We would have died otherwise.

Whatever the reason, it seems like she's never going to give me a clear answer, so I ready my Absolute Spear.

But the Infuse Magic effect on my spear has already worn off. There's no helping it, though, with such little practice and training.

"...I don't understand why you want me dead, but maybe you'll answer me when I beat you."

"Impossible. You are no match for me at your current power level."

"And how the hell...would you know?!"

I hurl my Absolute Spear straight at her, but she just reacts by tilting her head and sidestepping out of the way.

But the Absolute Spear is relentless and doesn't give up until it finds its target. Soon enough, it changes course and takes aim at her back.

"Unexpected. It hunts."

"And don't forget about us!"

"Woof!"

While the girl is distracted by the Absolute Spear closing in on her from behind, Night and I attack from the front. I swing down my Omnisword, and Night swipes with his claws.

But...

"Slow."

The girl utters a single word. Receiving the blow from the Absolute Spear with her silver bow, she redirects the spear with the same momentum back at Night and me as we attack.

"Guh?!"

I panic for a second as the Absolute Spear that I threw so hard comes flying back toward me, but I soon collect myself and dodge the attack. As it flies past, I grab it by the handle and shove it back into my Item Box.

The movement of the spear leaves my body slightly vulnerable, but I utilize that motion to swing the Omnisword in my hand down on the girl.

But she dodges even that attack with ease.

Unluckily for her, Night is waiting.

"Woof!"

Night launches an attack at lightning speed, but the girl stops it with her bow without even turning around.

"What?!"

"I understand. You are dangerous, but...this is your limit."

"Yelp?!"

"Night!"

Having blocked Night's attack, it seems as if the girl gives him but the slightest push, yet he goes flying forcefully into the air.

But Night still manages to right himself, snarling back at the girl as soon as he lands on the ground.

...We've only been fighting for a few seconds, but it's already enough to make me feel like I want out. This girl is terrifyingly powerful.

"It is hopeless. There is no reason to fight any longer. I will end it."

"What?"

The girl readies her bow.

An arrow identical to the ones that came flying at us before materializes in her hand... Could she be storing those using a skill similar to my Item Box?

As I try to figure out what kind of attack is coming next—

Something almost miraculous happens.

My body starts moving according to pure instinct rather than reflex.

The moment I jump out of the way, I feel a powerful impact.

"Gah?!"

"Woof?!"

"Stay back!"

Night barks and attempts to approach, but I stop him.

My body is blown back with tremendous force after getting just grazed by the arrow.

As I fly helplessly through the air, more arrows come speeding toward me as if they're chasing me.

These attacks are completely different from earlier ones. I can't keep up with where all the arrows are coming from.

All I hear is the sound of a reverberating bowstring.

And by the time I hear that, an arrow is already right in front of me.

Even though I'm focusing hard, I can't see the girl's attacks at all.

I ready my Omnisword to use as a shield against the pursuing arrows, but a single hit sends me flying once again.

"Argh!"

I try to dodge, but I just don't have time before another arrow comes flying after me.

Whichever way you look at it, if I don't even have time to defend myself, I certainly don't have time to dodge.

If this keeps up—I'll die.

It feels like death is near. Something I haven't felt since I first came to this world.

Before I came here, that overwhelming feeling would've consumed me. That meant death in this world. I would've been so scared that I couldn't move.

But strangely, now, my body doesn't freeze up in the slightest.

In fact, in the face of that fear...I feel defiance taking root within me instead.

"Aaahhhhhhh!"

"Wha--?!"

I put aside my previous concerns about being unable to control it and deploy Infuse Magic with lightning.

In that moment, everything around me slows down.

That didn't happen the first time I used Infuse Magic.

But somehow, I can understand why it would this time.

When I first used Infuse Magic in training, the lightning only affected my muscle strength.

But now that effect has spread to both my eyes and brain.

...I didn't think I would be able to do anything like this so soon, but maybe because of my fight-or-flight response—I know that if I don't use it here, I'll die —my body instinctively activated it to avoid danger.

Plus, when I look carefully, the lightning that coursed through me during the first time was pale white, but now it's a silver color. So it seems it's not just my thinking that's gotten faster, but my lightning itself has gotten stronger, too.

But it's thanks to my new quick thinking that I see the arrow inching toward me slowly and successfully move out of the way.

After I dodge the arrow, the speed of everything around me returns to normal, and the place I had just been standing is sprayed with more arrows like they had come from a machine gun.

"What?!"

The girl is looking at me wide-eyed.

"Confused. The attack should have hit. Why?"

She can't quite seem to believe how I moved from one place to another instantly and is having trouble hiding her unease.

But I don't intend to let this chance slip through my fingers.

"Night!"

"Woof!"

Just by calling his name, I convey what I'm thinking to Night, and he infuses his entire body with lightning just like me.

Then we run.

"Huh?! They're fast!"

The girl looks astounded by how much our speed has increased.

I couldn't control my movements before, but now that it's do-or-die, somehow I can.

"Hyaaah!"

"Snarl!"

Night and I strike at her from both sides, but the girl jumps straight up.

"Hmph."

Using the force of her jump to ascend far above our heads, she twists her body midair and releases several arrows at godlike speed.

But now that we've used Infuse Magic, that won't work on us anymore.

"Hyaaah!"

"Snarl!"

Night and I stop on the spot and thrust ourselves upward toward the girl.

The arrows, of course, are still hurtling toward us, but we weave through them.

And when there are any arrows we can't avoid, we plow through by slicing them out of the air.

"How about this?!"

"Ah!"

I charge into her chest and twist my body around to release a kick to send her

flying even farther up into the sky. The girl can't dodge fast enough and attempts to use her bow as a shield to block my attack.

She doesn't redirect the impact, though, and continues to fly higher and higher into the air. Night has already guessed my plan of attack and is positioned above her, ready and waiting. He rolls forward and sends one of the kick techniques he inherited from Master Rabbit straight into the girl.

Although she reacts to Night's attack, she puts all her energy into blocking it with her bow like she did with mine and simply slams back into the ground.

The impact is violent, and plumes of dust are sent billowing up into the air.

"…"

As Night lands beside me, he's cautiously watching the dust just like I am.

...It felt like the impact wasn't redirected anywhere, and she hit the ground full force, but...

An air of nervousness descends over us, and we hear the same almost inhuman voice from beyond the dust and debris. Just like the first time we met her.

```
"—Unexpected."

"Argh!"

"Woof..."
```

Then the dust clears, and Night and I stand dumbfounded at the calm, yet injured, form of the girl.

Y-you mean after all that...she's still standing...?!

Maybe it's purely because of the difference in our stats, but despite the damage she took from our full-powered attacks, she's standing strong.

The girl ignores our shocked stares and begins to speak.

"Confirmed. You are a threat. Time to get rid of you."

"What are -?"

The moment I begin to speak, the girl readies her bow again.

"Master... Please lend me your power..."

Unlike before, as the girl mutters something, the arrow in her hand transforms into a golden arrow I haven't seen before and glitters palely.

Once we see her arrow change, we become more vigilant.

But...

"There is nothing you can do anymore," She says, releasing the arrow.

But the arrow is slower than we were prepared for. In fact, the arrows the girl had sent flying our way at the beginning were faster than this one.

Ignoring my and Night's confusion, the girl continues to make movements.

Her arms seem to flow from releasing the arrow to releasing another arrow so quickly that it's almost instantaneous... This time it's one of the same wooden arrows she has been using from the beginning.

Once released, it seems to fly the exact same path as the first arrow, eventually catching up to it.

It rams straight into the nock of the golden arrow and shatters.

That causes the rammed golden arrow to suddenly accelerate to a speed far greater than we'd even dared to imagine.

"Huh?!"

My cognitive and visual abilities should be enhanced right now because I used Infuse Magic, but I still can't keep up with the arrow's speed.

But I can still predict the arrow's trajectory from before it accelerated, and as soon as I twist my neck away, the arrow grazes my cheek.

As I have managed to mostly dodge the arrow, it slams into a tree behind me. But it keeps on going with the same force, piercing through tree after tree after tree.

"Argh...!"

The arrows don't just stop at one.

Once I manage to twist my body back from my dodging position to look in the

direction of the girl again, I can see that there are already more arrows heading toward me...dozens, if not hundreds of them.

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"No way..."
```

I don't want it to be true, but the storm of arrows before me is unmistakably real.

```
"Night, keep dodging...!"
```

"Woof!"

We determine the trajectories of the arrows from their initial paths and do all we can to keep dodging.

At once, I activate the same wind magic I used last time we fought her, but it can't completely neutralize an attack of such power, and in the end, Night and I just have to keep moving.

But we can't keep dodging forever, and while the injuries we're taking may be small, they are accumulating fast.

"Dammit! At this rate..."

I can't think of a strategy to get us out of this mess.

We have no choice but to continue evading, but then the storm of arrows suddenly just stops.

```
"What the --?"
```

But it's nothing more than an omen of another more powerful attack to come.

At that precise second, I catch a glimpse of the girl drawing her bow so hard that I can hear it from a short distance away.

And then—

"Comet."

—An arrow surges forward gouging huge pieces out of the surrounding trees and ground.

Compared to all the other arrows, this one is on a completely different level.

We've somehow managed to dodge the arrows that have been shot at us so far, but the thing currently hurtling toward us is something that I know is going to hit its mark.

It's such an overwhelmingly powerful attack that I just know it to be true.

As I stand there slack-jawed, simply watching the arrow barrel toward us, I think about whether there's anything I can do to at least get Night and Akatsuki out of its path.

But the despair that's about to bear down upon us won't allow it, and as we prepare for the girl's attack to swallow us up...that's when...

"Sky Gallop."

"What the -?!"

...something white suddenly hurls itself between us and the arrow that's destroying everything in its path.

It crouches until its body is grazing the ground, and then, just at the moment of contact, it jumps straight up.

Then, using that momentum, the white thing...is surprisingly able to kick away the arrow.

The arrow is smashed to smithereens, and its splinters rain down upon the forest.

The splinters hit the ground hard enough to cause permanent damage, but for some reason we're unhurt.

Night and I are standing there dumbfounded by what has just unfolded when the white thing turns its attention our way.

"My apologies for being late."

"M-Master Rabbit!"

The one who's saved us from certain doom is none other than Master Rabbit!

Master Rabbit notices our bodies are coursing with electricity and smiles as if he finds something funny.

"Oh...what an interesting idea. That concept is an inspiration to all students of

magic such as I. Do you mind if I borrow it?"

"G-go ahead! ...But now's not the time for that!"

I may have responded honestly to Master Rabbit's request, but now really isn't the time for trading new techniques. Besides, if Master Rabbit masters Infuse Magic, then the distance between our strength will just grow even further, won't it?

As I think about our current predicament and the disappointing reality of the way things are, Master Rabbit turns his gaze to the mysterious girl.



```
"So, we meet again—Yuti."

"Huh?"

"Ah?! Why do you know my name...?"

I'm also surprised by that.
```

Could she be...a friend of Master Rabbit's? But then why would she attack us? Master Rabbit snorts.

"Hmph. You piqued my interest when you attacked me, so I undertook an investigation into who you may be. As a result, I came to understand something... You're the successor to the Deity of Arrows, aren't you?"

```
"Huh?!"
"....."
```

The girl named Yuti answers Master Rabbit's question with silence. And that sure looks to me like she's confirming what Master Rabbit suspects.

Hang on, didn't Master Rabbit say that she's the successor to the Deity of Arrows just now? So this girl is actually like me? An apprentice to a Deity?

But that makes things even more confusing. Aren't the Deities supposed to protect the world from Demons? From the embodiments of the world's negative emotions? Then why is she attacking me? Wait, does that mean that I'm a Demon? Because I'm from another world? But if that were true, I'm sure Master Rabbit would have dealt with me already.

My master ignores his increasingly confused apprentice and continues talking.

"I haven't seen him in a long time, but...I never believed him to be slain."

"Tch!"

Yuti glares at Master Rabbit intensely for that remark and throws a look of hatred at me.

"...I am taking vengeance for my master. I will have his revenge on this world."

"Do you believe that is what he would truly desire?"

"Silence. What would you understand? Someone like you who does nothing unless the Demons appear?"

The personality she has portrayed until now falters with the raw emotion in her voice.

"He's different. My master isn't like you. He always protected humans. Yet despite that...despite that! He was betrayed. Betrayed by fellow humans. They forgot all that he did for them. Then they killed him."

I can't hide my surprise about what the girl just said.

I'm not sure about the specifics from this one small conversation, but her master...must have been another Deity, right? Yet someone that powerful was killed by normal people.

Unlike me, Master Rabbit isn't shocked. There's just a sad expression on his face.

"...He probably didn't even put up a fight. Even if the humans he protected decided that they no longer required him, he would have quietly accepted that."

"…"

"But, even if that is the case, us Deities must still protect the world from Demons. That is our mission and our contract with this planet. We are not permitted to break that contract and use our powers to harm the world like a Demon would..."

"And? I inherited my master's skills, but I did not inherit his position as Deity of Arrows. I have no such contract."

"Splitting hairs like that will not work."

"I care not. If you do, then why don't you stop me? Yet it's impossible—because all of you will die here."

"Hey! Don't stand idly by! She's coming!"

"Wh-what?! But what are we supposed to do?!"

"Does it look like I have time to fully explain to you?!"

"I—I know, but!"

When Yuti releases another attack like before, there's nothing we can do about it.

But as though Master Rabbit guesses my anxieties, he shouts out a simplified strategy.

"I shall block the big attacks. So you must do something about the girl!"

"That's crazy!"

"Maybe so, but it must be done. With that attitude, you will never be able to face a Demon."

"Not that I'd ever want to, though!"

Of course, I'd like enough power to be able to deal with a Demon so that I can continue to live peacefully in this world, but that's not such an easy feat to achieve.

And if possible, I think I'd prefer not to come across a Demon in the first place.

But Master Rabbit doesn't seem like he intends to change course at all and charges in alone.

"Argh, dammit! We follow the rabbit!"

"Woof!"

We quickly use our Infuse Magic and run full speed toward Yuti as she swiftly unleashes a barrage of arrows as if to warn us not to get close. When is she going to run out of those things?!

Wanting nothing more than to just ask her how many she has left amid the relentless waves of projectiles, we face them head on and weave through. When waves do come that we can't react to in time, Master Rabbit blocks them for us, and eventually we successfully manage to close the distance.

"Hyaaah!"

"Snarl!"

I don't know if she knows what my Omnisword can do, but she deftly redirects its impact and blocks Night's claws with her silver bow.

"Hey! That's not going to help your training! Use your legs!"

"You're still thinking about training in this situation?"

"Of course I am!"

I'm not sure his reply is as typical as he's making out, but if I don't start using my legs here, I'm worried what might happen, so I do as the rabbit says and fight with just my kicks.

But the battle still rages on until Yuti abruptly jumps far away and secures some space.

She pulls back as hard as she can on her bowstring just like she did in the moments before Master Rabbit arrived.

"Shit!"

I desperately attempt to get close enough to stop her, but suddenly, I'm being assaulted by wooden arrows on all sides, even though she shouldn't have shot any.

"What the -?!"

"Hmph. She likely released some arrows in the surrounding area in advance, covering her tracks with her other attacks. All of which were to begin heading straight for us at a precisely calculated time."

"C-calculated time... But then how is she able to aim at me like this?!"

"At best, I can only rationalize it as...because the Deity of Arrows could do the same."

"That still doesn't make sense!"

I don't understand! How can she shoot them in advance and *then* attack with them?

I can't stop myself from shouting out my frustration as I run straight for Yuti again alongside Master Rabbit when he says something else just as crazy.

```
"Now, Yuuya."
```

"Yeah?!"

"Did you see the technique I used when I first arrived?"

"Huh?"

The technique he used when he first arrived...? The one when he jumped straight up from down low on the ground and shattered that powerful arrow to splinters?

I tilt my head, unsure where the rabbit is going with this, but he just looks at me with a smirk.

"First, you're going to stop the arrows with that attack. And then I shall prevent that young lady from moving."

"No way, no way! That's not going to work!"

"Yes it will, so do it. Night, you are with me... Now go!"

"Wait! Whaaat?!"

You can't just tell me to do something and then magically expect it to just work out!

Without even giving me the opportunity to voice my complaints, Master Rabbit runs forward at a speed that I can't keep up with despite the lightning still coursing through me. So I still can't beat him in a race even with Infuse Magic, huh?!

As soon as Master Rabbit accelerates, the girl draws her bow and releases another arrow!

It's just like the one before, hurtling straight for me like a kind of tornado that hacks up the surrounding trees and gouges long trenches in the ground.

There's no dodging or blocking it now, so in the end, I've got no choice but to move exactly like Master Rabbit told me to.

"Dammit! Now I have to do it!"

I desperately try to remember the movement that Master Rabbit made.

I think it was getting low to the ground and then releasing power all in one, right?

I don't crouch down like Master Rabbit did but instead try to make my body

as compact as I can while twisting and focusing my power.

Then, the moment Yuti's attack makes contact, I release all my energy in an explosion of strength.

```
"Aaaaaaaargh!"
```

I launch my body off the floor, twisting like a vortex, entrusting my body to the flow of power, and kick the arrowhead.

The rotational power of my kick successfully smashes it into pieces.

...I may not have had time to rehearse that move, but a lot of the books I read from the secondhand bookstore just after I first came through the Door to a Different World talked about spirals, so that's what I remembered. The book on learning how to use a spear also mentioned envisioning spirals, so maybe that concept is a quintessential aspect of martial arts. In some of the books I bought, it said weird stuff about spirals expressing the whole of creation or something, too.

Anyway, I never thought I'd be able to do anything like that today, and as I think about all the things I had no time to rehearse but still managed to pull off, I safely land on the ground.

```
"H-How could you?!"

"—Now it's over."

"No—"
```

As Yuti watches me pulverize her arrowhead in disbelief, Master Rabbit seizes the opportunity and charges right into her, unleashing a kick of even greater power than the one I just unleashed on the arrowhead. Wow... It's kinda disheartening to see him best my strength so easily.

The kick sends Yuti flying through several trees, the force snapping the trunks in half as she goes, until she finally smacks against one last tree and falls to the ground.

That was one mighty kick. I wonder if she's okay? If it had been me on the receiving end, I doubt I would still be alive to tell the tale...

Master Rabbit and I cautiously approach the girl on the ground and look down

at her. She's badly beaten up, but still awake. I-incredible...

```
"Huff...huff..."

"...Now, then. Will you talk?"

"Huh?"
```

I cock my head, confused by what Master Rabbit is asking her. He wants her to talk...? About what?

"...Oh! That's right! It seems like she's connected to the Guild of Darkness in some way, so we should interrogate her about that."

```
"No, I don't want to talk about that."

"Huh?"
```

Not about that...? I mean, I can see why Master Rabbit might not concern himself with something like that, but it's important to me.

Yet when I look at Master Rabbit's face, it seems like Yuti might be hiding something far more serious.

That's when—

"You... When did you acquire the power of the Demons?"

"What?!"

I stand there in shock.

"It has...nothing to do with you...!"

"It has everything to do with me. I'm a Deity, the Deity of Kicks. I must fight against the Demons to protect this world."

"I don't care...! Why? What value do you see in those that murdered my master? They poison the land, they multiply endlessly, and they are forever fighting pettily among themselves. The answer is that they don't have any value."

"Their value is not for you to decide. Neither is it for I."

Master Rabbit is cold in his replies, but if it were me, I wouldn't know what to say to her.

Her master was killed by us humans. Yet he always protected us.

If I were in the same position...I don't think I could forgive them, either.

Yuti is disorientated but drags herself to her feet and glares at us, channeling all her rage into it.

"You're the ones who seem to determine the value. I'm the one who will destroy it...!"

"Whoa?!"

"Guh?! So I was right...!"

Suddenly, I feel a domineering aura of intimidation emanating from her.

A black mist-like substance begins to pour out of her body.

"M-Master?! It looks like something weird is coming out of her..."

"...Commit it to memory. That's part of the aura of a Demon."

"It is? One part?!"

"That's correct. This girl is a type of divine being who has acquired the power of Demons."

"A—a divine being...?"

"Well, more like a Devil to be precise."

We're exposed to such a formidable aura that it's getting hard to even stand here. According to Master Rabbit, this is just a part of a Demon aura.

The aura is also causing Night to tremble nearby, his tail drooping down behind him.

"Aaaaaargh!"

When Yuti shrieks, her whole body is infused with the black mist, and she rushes our way!

"Gah?!"

I immediately grab my Omnisword and prepare to defend against her attack, but her attack is so powerful it somehow bypasses defense. Blood spurts out of my mouth.

```
"Yuuya!"
"—You. Die...!"
"Guh?!"
```

The beautiful gray eyes she had when I first encountered her have turned bright red, and as soon as she makes contact with Master Rabbit, moving like a crazed beast, she hits him with all her might.

Master Rabbit immediately defends himself, but the shock wave from the impact she made travels even as far as where I'm standing after being thrown backward.

```
"O-oww..."

"Woof! Woof!"
```

Night dashes over to my side. I pet him to reassure him that I'm okay. I open up my Item Box, grab an Herb of Complete Healing Juice and down it in one go.

Then I run over to my master, only to stare dumbfounded as Yuti fights him, the Deity of Kicks, as an equal in close combat.

Hey, wait a sec... That girl's master was the Deity of Arrows, so that should mean that arrows are her specialty, right? I mean, she was fighting with a bow until just a while ago! So then why is she on par with Master Rabbit in a fight like this...?!

Even though I've just been standing here staring, I soon snap back to my senses and call out to Master Rabbit.

"M-Master! Wh-what should we do now?!"

"Don't ask me! I have enough on my plate! But there is one thing I now understand...this girl isn't a real Demon!"

```
"Huh?!"
```

So she has the power of a Demon, but she isn't one really? What does that even mean?! You need to explain it a bit simpler for me...!

I'm sure that Master Rabbit isn't reading my mind or anything, but he starts to explain himself as he fights.

"This girl...for some reason only has the power of a Demon. She isn't one herself! So I believe the strength she is drawing upon now shall eventually run out, but...I don't know when that shall be."

```
"S-seriously..."
```

"However, if we do something about her Demon powers, then we should be able to restrain her slightly! That's why I have to keep fighting until that power is exhausted. It's all a question of whether I can last as long as that or not...!"

Why'd you have to go and say something so ominous?! If even my master can't stop her, then what are we supposed to be able to do?!

But as I watch Master Rabbit continue to fight on even footing with Yuti, I realize something horrible.

Even if Night and I want to help, we can't be clumsy and just get in Master Rabbit's way.

All we can do is watch and wait... At least that's what I thought.

"Oink."

"Huh? A-Akatsuki?!"

Akatsuki, who had been hidden under my Cloak of Concealment, is suddenly by my feet.

"Hey, Akatsuki! It's dangerous here, so get back under the cloak!"

"Woof! Woof!"

Night and I desperately try to persuade the little pig, but he just shakes his head.

"Oink. Oink, oink."

"What?"

Akatsuki looks on sternly at Yuti as she continues to fight Master Rabbit.

And then—

"Oink....."

"Huh?! Wh-what the—?!"

A pale white light begins to emanate from Akatsuki's body and permeates our surroundings.

White lights also descend from the sky, fluttering to the ground like snow.

This is... It's Akatsuki's Holy Sanctuary skill! But it's even more awe-inspiring than usual.

Just as I begin to wonder whether Akatsuki is doing this to heal our and Master Rabbit's injuries...I start to sense that Yuti's movements have become a little sluggish.

```
"What...? I—I can't use my power...?!"
```

The black mist that had been erupting from Yuti's body disperses the moment that the light from Akatsuki's Holy Sanctuary skill touches it.

Master Rabbit also senses what's happening to Yuti amid their battle and turns to look at Akatsuki with a shocked expression on his face.

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"Could it be...that you are no ordinary pig?!"
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"Oink?! Oink, oink!"
```

Akatsuki seems to take offense at the rabbit's remarks and stomps his hooves. I'm sorry, Akatsuki, but for a moment, I had the same question.

Yet it seems that Master Rabbit's surprise is different from mine. Maybe he had that reaction because he knows something about Akatsuki's species that I don't. I wonder what it could be.

There are so many things that I want to ask Akatsuki and my master right now, but first we need to deal with Yuti. The rabbit soon takes advantage of Yuti's inhibited movements and charges straight at her.

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"Ugh?!"

"—Sleep now!"

"Gah?!"
```

Yuti is once again sent flying into the air, and by the time she hits the ground again with a thud, she's out cold.

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"Phew...I was almost breaking into a cold sweat."
```

After checking that Yuti is definitely out for the count, Master Rabbit breathes a sigh of relief.

Then he quickly turns his attention to the pig who suppressed her black mist.

"...I had no idea that you had that power within you..."

"Ummm...Master? Do you know something about Akatsuki's powers?"

"Of course I do. I explained to you before why both the Demons and Deities were born into this world, did I not?"

"Y-yeah. You said something like the Demons were a manifestation of all the negative energy created by the living creatures of this world and that Deities were the world's method of self-purification, its way to exterminate those Demons that harm it..."

"Exactly. What I did not explain to you was that there are several other creatures that exist in this world other than us Deities that also fulfill a role in the planet's self-purification. That pig is one of them."

"What?!"

"Oink!"

I unconsciously shift my attention to Akatsuki, who meets my gaze with a proud puffed-out chest. A-aww how sweet! ...Or are you?!

The first time that Akatsuki used his Holy Sanctuary skill for me, I guess it did feel like he wasn't only healing my wounds, but also purifying the entire area.



But to think that it can also purify the aura of a Demon...

"Uhh... Are there lots of creatures like Akatsuki out there?"

"No, these creatures are still mostly shrouded in mystery... They are entirely different from us Deities. We receive our titles from the planet in recognition that we have cultivated the strength to fight the Demons as a result of our own intensive efforts. Those like this pig, on the other hand, are born with the power to fight the Demons. If we are self-made, then they are an act of nature."

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"I—I see..."
```

It looks like Akatsuki is more amazing than I could have ever thought possible.

Up until this point, Akatsuki has never directly fought anything, but his Holy Sanctuary skill has come in quite handy. It's really useful if you don't have time to drink an Herb of Complete Healing Juice or you have a lot of injured people to treat at once.

But now we know that it's even more powerful than that...

I guess this is what Holy Sanctuary is really supposed to be used for.

"But...if Akatsuki is such a creature, then I am even less sure of what species he could be. The more I think about it, the more I realize that I've never come across a pig that looks like him before..."

"Oink."

"I'm similarly unsure about Night. I can think of a few possible species from his color, but none of them would be able to achieve the same battle strength as him..."

Master stares questioningly at Night and Akatsuki. Now that I think about it, I guess I haven't ever told him what species they are.

"Ummm...Akatsuki is a Meng Huai, and Night is a Black Fenrir.

<u>"___</u>"

As soon as he hears the names of their species, Master Rabbit freezes on the spot.

".....What did you say?"

"Huh? I told you that they're a Meng Huai and a Black Fenrir."
"....."

The rabbit falls silent. Did I say something weird?

"Then I have definitely never heard of Akatsuki's species, but...I never thought I would meet a legendary creature like a Black Fenrir in such circumstances... And with such strength despite being but a pup. I wonder what you will be like when you grow up... Frightening to behold, I'd wager."

"Uh, Master ...?"

"...It is nothing. You have grown much more than I initially gave you credit for.

Just in time for my new training regimen."

"Huh?"

"Rejoice. Things are about to become even tougher from here on out."

"Wh-whaaaat...?"

The one-on-one and practical training sessions with Master Rabbit are already tough enough.

To think they're about to become even more grueling...

As I cringe at the thought of a training regimen that's even stricter than it already was, Master Rabbit turns his attention to the unconscious Yuti.

"Now, what shall we do with this one...?" The rabbit asks, looking at me. "Shall I leave her with you?"

"Huh?!"

That's all Master Rabbit says before he turns his back to me.

"I have tired myself out today, so I'm going home."

"What? But wait...! Huh?! Aren't you going to take care of her? This girl's a Demon, isn't she?!"

"It will be all right. She does not hold that power any longer."

"Yeah, but don't you have more of a connection to her?!"

"Hmph. Aren't you supposed to be far better at looking after girls than I am?"

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"I swear that's not true!"

"Good-bye."

"Hey, Master! Maaaster!"
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Master Rabbit ignores my concerns and jumps into the air before using it as a foothold to propel himself through the sky at top speed.

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The three of us blankly watch him fly away before eventually turning to one another.

Then we look down at Yuti's unconscious body.

"...Seriously, what are we supposed to do about her...?"

"Woof..."

"Oink..."

—Unable to just leave her here in the forest, in the end, I heft Yuti up onto my back and take her home with us.

Epilogue

—Dense clouds of negativity float around the World's Landfill.

It's a place where no plants or animals grow. Nothing but a barren wasteland.

Yet in this land of death, three shadows appeared.

All three were covered in so much black mist that their true identities were undeterminable, and their voices were so ambiguous that one could tell neither age nor sex.

Of the three shadows, one began to speak.

"—It seems as if one of our pawns has been removed from the board."

"Oh? Incredible. Wasn't that girl an apprentice to a Deity or something? Was she killed?"

"Who knows. All we can say for sure is that I can no longer sense the presence of the power we bestowed upon her."

"I see...which would indicate world self-purification, would it not? That's troublesome indeed."

"Oh? I wonder if that's true. Could she not have simply been too weak?"

"Well...regarding that, I cannot say one way or the other. But at the very least, she was in possession of the skills of a Deity and a fragment of our power, too. Besides, she possessed enough of her own negative emotions to accept our power, so I doubt she disposed of our power herself."

"Which means that she must have been defeated by a Deity or our power must have been purified some other way."

"How annoying! The only reason we are here in the first place is because that kind of world exists."

"Now, now, no need to sulk. Our poison is steadily eating away at it. Several

Deities have fallen to us so far."

"Ah-ha-ha-ha! It's gloriously ironic to think about! How we turned the very beings who were born to protect the world from us into its own enemies! I love it!"

"Well, they are Deities, after all. Their strength is of no importance, but...it's better to utilize them than not."

"Now, let's not be too careless, shall we? Alone, they are weak, but when they gather in groups, they can be quite bothersome. And remember, those Deities have slain many of us Demons over the years."

"I don't think we have to worry about that too much. It was a very long time ago when the rest of the Demons were destroyed. It's said that was all down to a single human of incredible strength, but another like him is unlikely to be born again anytime soon."

"That's right. And that man was nothing but a normal, everyday human. He doesn't live among us anymore."

"That may be true... And what of the others?"

"Hmm? Everyone else is busy either corrupting the Deities or luring the humans, like those in the Guild of Darkness, into our game."

"Sigh...I don't wish for anyone to act too conspicuously. If we do too much, the other Deities who haven't surrendered to us yet will get wind of it."

"Impossible. We've already put our plan to destroy the world into action. You're unusually cautious today."

"I suppose I am... In any case, we must disappear. And even though it's an annoyance, I would like to check on our little pawn."

"Huh? Can't we just leave her down there? She's probably dead anyway."

"Yes, but...just in case. If she's still alive, then you know what will happen. And if she is dead, her corpse may still be of some use. She would be a rare specimen indeed. There is value in retrieving her."

"Hmm...Fine. Well, I'm going to go take a nap."

"You have the right idea. I'm not that interested in Deities anyway, so perhaps I will go rest, too."

Each of the three gathered shadows melted into the air, each leaving a black mist behind in their wake, and vanished.

—The World's Wasteland was silent once again.

* * *

"...I wonder if she's okay?"

"Woof?"

"Oink."

It has been a few days since we were forced to bring the unconscious Yuti back to my house. As I look at her, still lying there out cold, I can't help but ask Night and Akatsuki if they think she'll be all right.

Night's cocking his head, just as unsure as I am, but Akatsuki is looking awfully proud of himself. Like it just goes to show how powerful his Holy Sanctuary skill is.

To be honest, though, what I'm worried about the most is when the girl sleeping in front of us finally wakes up. What if she tries to attack us again?

Now that we have Akatsuki's Holy Sanctuary, we should be okay, but...

Still, it bothers me, so I've stashed her only weapon, her bow, back in my house on Earth. No one can pass through the Door to a Different World without my approval, so she won't be able to recover it from there.

After we watch over her awhile longer, she opens her eyes!

"Hnnn... Oh... This is...?"

"Oh! Y-you're awa—"

"Huh?!"

"Whoa?!"

The moment I say a single word to Yuti, she gets up so fast that you never would have known that she had just been unconscious for days and moves to

ready her bow.

That's when she realizes her beloved bow is gone.

"Huh?! My bow...!"

"Huh? Are you still going to fight even if you don't have it?!"

Yuti materializes an arrow in her hand and charges into an attack, brandishing the arrow underhand.

But there's no black mist this time, and since she's only just regained consciousness, I dodge her attacks with ease.

...Back when she did have that black mist pouring out of her, she was on par with Master Rabbit, but now it seems like she might actually be pretty bad at close combat.

In any case, I don't want her to be able to continue attacking me, so I quickly restrain both of her arms.

But Yuti struggles violently against me in an attempt to escape.

"Give me back my bow!"

"And if I do? Won't you just attack me again?!"

"I'll attack you again even if you don't!"

"That'll work out even worse for you!"

Even though she's already attacking me without it.

And although she might not be the best at close combat, she's still the apprentice of a Deity.

Plus, she's very strong. She probably has even higher stats than I do.

That's why I'm trying my best to immobilize her, but she's struggling against me a lot, resulting in a desperate tussle.

As I try my hardest not to lose, despite being on the losing side of things, the door to my house suddenly swings open.

"Pardon me for the intrusion."

"Huh?!"

"Oh, Master! Please! I need your help!"

I beg Master Rabbit for help as soon as he enters the door, but he just looks at me with a sneer.

"Hmph. Immobilize her already."

"Don't you think you're asking for the impossible here?"

"...I won't let your complacency continue! I'm going to kill you, then him."

Yuti is grappling with me as hard as she can but shoots a look of intense hatred at Master Rabbit, too.

But-

"Oh? You're planning to kill me even though it was the Demons who deceived you?"

"What?"

All the strength suddenly leaves Yuti's grip on me.

Master Rabbit continues to stare straight at her.

"I've been doing some digging since we last met. Into the Deity of Arrows, the resurgence of the Demons. As well as...into the humans who killed your master."

"But! ...Then you will understand. I was not deceived by the Demons. It was the humans. They betrayed him..."

"And if that betrayal was set in motion by the Demons to begin with?"

"But—"

Yuti looks taken aback by Master Rabbit's words.

Should I even be listening to this?

Ignoring me and my feelings, Master Rabbit continues.

"...The Demons duped the humans who your master had been protecting and made them kill him."

"I don't..."

"The people the Deity of Arrows had always protected were taken hostage.

Then the Demons made him decide whether the Deity of Arrows would die or the people he had always protected would die in his stead.

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"What...?"
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"But then..."

As we stand there speechless after hearing the Demons' demand, Master Rabbit grimaces.

"...Of course, the Deity of Arrows chose the life of the people he had protected.

And he accepted that he would die by their hands."

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"But..."
```

Master Rabbit continues addressing Yuti, who's astonished and taking the news much worse than I am.

"But that wasn't the end to the Demons' wickedness. After they made the humans kill your master...the Demons killed them, too."

```
"Huh?"
```

"____"

So the Deity of Arrows threw away his life to protect those people?

"S-so, then...why did...my master...have to...?"

" "

Master Rabbit doesn't answer. No, maybe he can't answer.

Yuti begins to speak haltingly.

"...My master...my master always protected humans. Even before it became his job as a Deity, he always protected them. I was so proud of him. But then one day, all of a sudden, the humans he had always protected attacked us. They said they would take my master captive. And then he was taken away. Somewhere I don't know. I tried to stop them. But my master would not allow it. I tried to kill them to prevent him from being taken. But my master stopped it. He said he would be all right...but then he never came home. He was killed in cold blood. My kind master couldn't hurt a single human right up until the end. Because he was a Deity. No. Because he was kind and gentle. But I am not kind.

I'll never forgive the humans who killed my master— Yet if it was not only humans involved, but Demons, too..."

Yuti stares at the palms of her hands, casts her eyes down, and mutters a few words.

"...I'm sorry. Please leave me alone."

"O-okay..."

After hearing Yuti's story, there's no way I can refuse her request.

We leave Yuti alone in the room and exit into the garden. Master Rabbit stares right at me.

"...Even if he was not as strong as the Demons, the Deity of Arrows had strength that far surpassed his own species. There is no way a normal human could have killed someone like him. My guess is that the Demons killed the humans right in front of the Deity of Arrows as he lay slowly dying..."

"You think so?!"

"The Demons are that kind of being. A negative mass of all the maliciousness that exists in this world. You would do well to remember that."

"R-remember that...?"

Even if I'm told that, there's not much that I can do.

The only thing I'm capable of right now is continuing my training in the Weald like I'm supposed to.

As I worry about that, Master Rabbit looks at me incredulously.

"Hey, why are you acting so carefree?"

"Huh?"

"The Demons may yet come to recover Yuti. She is valuable to them as someone who inherited the power of a Deity but did not become one. She has probably become a target for them now... And you, Yuuya. You are very much the same. That means that you are likely to get embroiled in the battle against the Demons whether you want to or not."

"Wh-what?!"

I don't know what to say to the rabbit's unwelcome words.

"...In any case, just bear that in mind. And Yuti is still young. You must look after her. Understand?"

"Y-yeah..."

It looks like I don't have the right to refuse, whatever the case.

And that's how I became a playing piece in the great war between the Deities and the Demons.

Afterword

Thank you for picking up yet another of my books.

This is the author, Miku.

How did you like Volume 4? As our hero, Yuuya, gets entangled in problem after problem in the other world, he's dealing with everything around him in his own way, like usual.

But how is he going to keep fighting against ever more powerful enemies like the Divine Beasts and the Fallen Divine Beings?

Even I don't know that yet.

This volume is packed with other significant events as well, like the first appearance of Yuti, and Kaori's discovery of the other world.

I think you should pay close attention not only to how the relationship between Yuuya and Yuti will change going forward, but more importantly how the discovery of the other world will impact Yuuya's friendship with Kaori.

Other than Yuti and Kaori, you should also look forward to seeing how things change between Yuuya and the other girls in this story, like Lexia and Luna.

Right now, even I can't foresee how things are going to play out. I too wonder what will happen in the end.

While this volume focused on a lot of character relationships, I was unfortunately unable to include a new overpowered item in the Daily Necessities series. Hopefully I'll able to think of something fun for future volumes.

I keep thinking up so many new things I want to do and interesting new items, but the problem is always weaving them naturally into the story.

My usual problem is that I tend to get really into writing and am too happy leaving all these things for future-me to sort out. While that means I end up

with a lot of regrets, I enjoy the writing process, so I don't like getting bogged down with it all. I'm pretty sure it's going to be a habit for life, though, much to the annoyance of my editors...

But it's thanks to them that I can keep on writing so freely, which I'm very grateful for.

This series is also getting serialized in manga form on ComicWalker.

Manga can offer lots of unique things that novels can't, so please give it a read if you have the chance.

Now, there are a few people I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart. I'd like to thank my editors for always being there to discuss the story with me while allowing me to write the story that I want. I'd like to thank Rein Kuwashima as always for drawing such beautiful illustrations, including some new characters this time. And more than anyone, I'd like to thank you, the reader, from the bottom of my heart for picking up this book and taking an interest.

Thank you so very much.

Until next time!

Miku

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