



Vol. 1

No One Else Knows
How to Change Jobs

From
Villainess
to
Healer

Author: Punichan
Illustrator: Yoh Hihara



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I've almost won!
[<“Holy Heal!”>]



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The Western Arsfaust Continent

Sacred Land of Erenzi

Paradise of
Erungoa (Dungeon)

Holy
Capital of Zille

Forest of Shuria

Farming Village

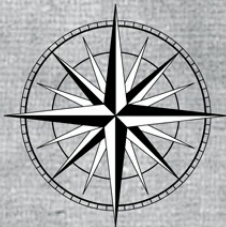
Port Town
of Tordente

Secret
Port

Traveler's Inn

The Royal
Capital Blume

Farblume Kingdom



Prologue

I'd used my PTO to take today off. Even though I'd gone to bed three hours earlier than usual last night, I slept in. Then, I enjoyed a leisurely breakfast of toast—from an expensive loaf I'd been looking forward to trying—and three scrambled eggs, accompanied by a cup of tea with plenty of sugar.

How sophisticated of me!

After savoring my breakfast, I got my cleaning and laundry out of the way so I'd have a clear schedule for the rest of the day.

"Turn off the company phone, and I'm all set!" I declared.

I was loafing around in bed when the time came at last—the scheduled end time of the most recent update. A new patch was being installed, introducing "Eden, the Furthest Village" to the game. Every update so far had been touted as the most challenging yet, but it never took more than a few months for the players to catalog the new items, enemies, and dungeons in the online encyclopedia. As a pretty well-known OG player—not to toot my own horn—I'd contributed my fair share to this endeavor.

"But rumor has it, this update is going to be a cut above the rest."

"Eden, the Furthest Village" was rumored to come with more lore on the goddess Flaudia, who was not some run-of-the-mill NPC but the most powerful Holy character in the entire game.

This game that was fully consuming my thoughts today was the MMO phenomenon *Reas Life Online*, or just *Reas* for short. *Reas* was the first ever open-world VR MMO, developed by the American and Japanese tag team of Zerorium Inc. and ONIGIRI Corporation. According to their PR, the game was created to "draw players out of everyday life and into a fantasy world they can enjoy to the fullest." *Reas* was now a smash hit all over the country.

Using the Reas Link—a set that came with a VR headset and gloves—the player could wander the vast open world of *Reas* and do, well, anything they

wanted. Some relaxed and enjoyed a simple lifestyle, while others fought monsters with swords and magic. There were many ways to play.

Everyone began their journey in *Reas* as a novice and had the option of switching to one of the basic jobs: Swordsman, Explorer, Hunter, Sorcerer, or Healer. By meeting certain requirements, players could also qualify for more specific jobs. There were combat jobs like Dark Mage, Warlock, or Ninja; industrial jobs like Chef, Craftsman, or Blacksmith; and support jobs like Helper or Bard. There were even unique jobs in the game that only one lucky player could claim.

What was more, there were so many things that remained undiscovered in *Reas* that new tips and tricks popped up on social media every day.

“How I’ve waited to see that beautiful log-in...screen...” Upon booting up *Reas*, I had the wind knocked out of my sails by the text “This update is taking longer than expected.” My spirits weren’t crushed, though. I’d guessed that this was going to happen yet again. And, yet again, there was no estimated time posted for when the update would end. This usually meant that I would be starved of *Reas* for another twelve hours or so.

“You thought I wasn’t prepared for this?! I took tomorrow off too for this very reason!” I crowed in triumph, still wearing my *Reas* Link headset.

And yet, I got my hopes up... Can't a girl dream?

Begrudgingly, I decided to at least rewatch the trailers in preparation. The *Reas* Link also let me browse the internet to access fandom sites and chat rooms, even when I wasn’t logged into the game.

“Oh? There’s a new video? I gotta watch it!” The newly published promotional video showed characters in combat within one of the new dungeons.

“Now, this is going to be really helpful.”

My job in *Reas* was Archbishop—an advanced healer—so I’d need to have a good grasp on how to deal with these new threats. If I got caught unprepared, the whole party could go down.

“Oof. These new monsters are brutal!”

I felt a sense of déjà vu, recalling how I'd reacted to the last promotional video featuring combat from the new update. This time, the video showed one of the two dungeons that would be accessible from Eden by boat.

A dark, ghostly figure in a dress smiled at the camera, twirling as it unleashed a wave of black fire that drained seventy percent of the HP of every player character in its path.

"Bru-tal...!"

It looked like most of the monsters in this dungeon would be Undead, many of which were completely immune to physical attacks and had decent magic resistance to boot. We weren't going to beat these things without a powerful arsenal. Maybe the best move would be to limit the number of close-range combatants and bring more magic wielders... It would also be fine to tread carefully on the first crawl and bring a lot of tanks. We might even need another healer in the party.

Choices, choices...

My usual party would be there when I logged in, so we'd probably poke our heads into the dungeons just to get a feel for them.

"Come on! I wanna play," I grumbled into my headset. I checked the chat rooms to find that practically none of my friends were logged in. Having read the writing on the wall that the update was still a long way off, they were probably enjoying their time doing whatever else they did for fun. But I knew that they would catch wind of it the second the update was over and log right in.

I took off the Reas Link and got out of bed. At this rate, I risked falling asleep and not waking up until nightfall. Of course, they'd probably be working on the update well into the evening hours, so I doubted that I'd miss the launch even if I slept the day away.

Unexpectedly, the copy of *Reas Love* on my shelf caught my eye. *Reas Love* was a dating sim spin-off born out of the immense popularity of *Reas*'s male NPCs. You didn't see that happening with MMOs too often. Since it took place in the same universe as *Reas*, I'd given it a shot, but between the two, I still preferred the MMO, hands down.

Even more than the engaging combat and vast array of jobs to choose from, my favorite aspect of *Reas* was how gorgeous the fantastical landscapes were! They weren't quite indistinguishable from reality, but this game had some of the best graphics I'd seen.

My obsession with *Reas* had begun when I'd suffered a foot injury back in my school days. Back then, I used to love running track. The injury didn't impede my daily life now, but I could no longer run full speed like I used to. That was why I felt so drawn to the world of *Reas*.

"If only I could see those views in real life... Too bad it's a video game, no matter how gorgeous it is." There might be majestic views like that in the far reaches of Earth, but this gamer was not physically equipped for roughing it in the vast wilderness IRL.

"Time for some coffee and forums, I think."

With the new video out, players would have more to talk about than just the delayed update. Although I expected no new information beyond what was shown in the video—Zerorium Inc. was particularly strict about preventing leaks—it would be fun just to discuss the new dungeon and enemies and explore different strategies we could take once the game was up and running.

Since I didn't own a coffee machine, I whipped up an instant coffee, humming to myself as I worked. *This would be perfect with a snack.*

"I thought I had some senbei, though." Some people might have been horrified by the suggestion, crying that coffee didn't go with rice crackers. If you asked me, things that tasted good on their own still tasted good no matter what drink or food you paired them with.

"Right here on the shelf... Oh!" As I reached for the senbei, I knocked the *Reas Love* case from its perch. I picked it up, feeling the urge to organize my shelf after my coffee break. I tossed the case onto my bed, where it landed on my Reas Link. "No! I didn't break it, did I...?" With a healthy sense of panic, I inspected my precious VR kit. "Thank goodness."

I shuddered to imagine what would have happened if I'd broken this sensitive piece of equipment. I'd draw the ire of all my online friends if I told them I couldn't log in for the new update because I'd broken my Reas Link. Worse yet,

a Reas Link set cost a whopping eighty-nine thousand yen.

Relieved and enjoying my senbei, I turned on my phone to check the *Reas* forums and found many comments advocating the formation of magic-heavy parties to take on the new dungeon.

“They’re not wrong, but a magic-only crawl gets so monotonous.”

Some physical attackers countered that they could still contribute in the new dungeons with the use of elemental weapons. Physical fighters would have to choose their equipment carefully because elemental weapons had a lower stat line than normal weapons. On the other hand, enchanting normal weapons throughout the dungeon would require spending a lot of items. That would be the pay-to-win method.

“Maybe we could just try everything that comes to mind.”

I had to consider my own role in the dungeon too. Different dungeons required different skills and items, which meant that I’d want to prepare those resources as soon as I logged in. My Storage was well stocked with most expendables, so I was tempted to pack extra stores of status-healing items in case we encountered some tricky monsters in the dungeon.

I continued waiting for the update to launch, mentally running simulations of what we’d have to face in those foreboding dungeons.

Memories of a Past Life

“Can’t you at least fake a smile while we’re attending a ball?” a low voice asked with a sigh.

When I flicked my eyes open, I found before me a familiar man with hair of sunshine gold. My instinct to cringe at the rude comment was overcome by a pounding headache that accompanied the questions gnawing at my mind.

Whose memories are these? Who am I now?

My headache turned into a thundering migraine, my breathing growing fast and shallow. Standing felt like an impossible task. I took a faltering step, finding nothing and no one to steady me.

“But you can fake an illness, apparently. You won’t get out of this so easily,” Blondie coldly remarked.

I bit my lip. *Can’t you see how much pain I’m in?! Why do I have to contend with your rudeness on top of that?* My eyes met the eyes of the bastard—Prince Ignacia. I recognized him instantly. The hottie with the sharp tongue was my fiancé and the principal love interest of a certain dating sim. While I took some deep breaths to steady my nerves, his flawless face twisted in disgust as if his fiancée’s face were the most revolting thing in the world.

Now that I’d calmed down a little, I was starting to understand the situation I was in. Apparently, I retained memories from both this world and my previous life on Earth. In this life, I was Charlotte Cocoriara, daughter to a duke in this kingdom of Farblume.

As Charlotte, I seldom expressed my emotions. Most people assumed that, as a young lady in high society, I had been trained to school my features. As it turned out, I just never bothered to exercise my facial muscles unless I was genuinely intrigued.

Tonight, my meticulously conditioned milk-tea blonde hair, which usually flowed down to my waist, was held up by a rose hairpin in a tastefully elegant

bun with one loose lock. My A-line, shoulderless dress was a burgundy that matched the ash red of my eyes and my rose hairpin. Black lace and jewels lined my décolletage, while fabric was gathered at the dress's waist and decorated with a ribbon rose, and the skirt was veiled with layers and layers of lace. My sleeves were in the shape of rose buds, complementing my short ivory-colored gloves. Knowing that I never would have had a chance to wear a dress like this on Earth, I suddenly felt out of place in it now.

Then, there was my upbringing as Charlotte. Long story short, the only things I had going for me were that my father was a duke and I was engaged to the crown prince, Ignacia. Our parents had arranged our marriage back when we were children, and now we were both sixteen and standing here at this fateful ball.

This is the worst. I sighed, careful not to let the prince see me do so. With my headache, memories of my previous life in Japan had flooded back to me, providing me a lot of insight into this world that I had apparently been reborn into. I was now a character in the story of a dating sim I had played in Japan. The kicker of it all was that I, Charlotte Cocoriara, was the villainess of the story. I couldn't even force out a self-pitying chuckle. Not that I held myself in such high regard as to think I should have been the main character, but did I really deserve to be reincarnated as the villainess?

"Are you going to remain silent all night?" the prince demanded.

"No, Your Highness. Forgive me." I finally regained the wherewithal to take in my surroundings—a ballroom. Chandeliers holding magic stones hung from the high, vaulted ceilings, illuminating the pillars along the walls etched with designs of flowers and vegetation. Numerous guests filled the expansive space, chatting and dancing and dining. Prince Ignacia and I were watching them from a dais, a step above the rest. It was safe to assume we were in the royal castle. I recognized the exact scene I was about to live out, and that wasn't a good thing.

Prince Ignacia Farblume was still standing beside me without a trace of enjoyment on his face. His dark blond hair was parted down the middle and tied in a ponytail that rested on his shoulder. He had light-blue eyes, but I wouldn't compare them to a clear sky or anything. They reminded me more of a cold,

hard glacier. He wore a navy blue jacket accented with light blue, and an indigo half cape that covered his right shoulder. When his mouth wasn't moving, he was a young man with pleasant enough features. However, the crown prince of Farblume—dubbed the “kingdom of flowers”—was head over heels for a certain lady who most certainly wasn't his fiancée.

What a piece of work, I thought. I only knew where his intentions lay because I had just regained my memories of playing the game. *After the ball Charlotte ends up...* I traced my memories for what was to become of me in this world and was relieved to remember that my future wasn't entirely hopeless. This dating sim wasn't the kind of game to kill off its villains or anything. Whether the player was successful in wooing the prince or not, Charlotte was always exiled from the kingdom but faced no other punishment. In other words, that much of my future was locked in. Exile did seem like a harsh enough punishment for a noble lady like Charlotte. While I would surely receive the bare minimum of accommodations, I could imagine how difficult it would be for me to live in a foreign country with no title and hardly any money...if I hadn't had all sorts of lucrative knowledge from my previous life!

Another thought came to mind. *That game had a feature that was pretty unique for a dating sim that—*

A girl cried out right next to me, derailing my train of thought.

“Huh?” I turned my head to find a delicate girl, the game's MC, tearfully staring at me.

What's going on? I wondered. Having freshly regained my memories, I was barely aware of who and where I was. *Can we hold the theatrics for a second?*

The MC—if I recalled, her default name was Emilia—wore a white dress brightly stained with red wine. It was clear to see that the contents of her glass had tragically found their way onto her attire. She must have approached to speak with Ignacia.

I restrained myself from groaning out loud. “Are you all right, Lady Emilia?”

Before she could respond, the prince placed himself between her and me as though I were about to beat her senseless. “How dare you throw wine at Emilia?”

“This dress was a gift from Prince Ignacia,” Emilia whimpered.

Come again? The look of astonishment on my face must have been a sight to behold. I hadn’t moved an inch from where I was standing, lost in my thoughts. Forget *throwing* wine on her; Emilia, the one who had been holding the wine in the first place, hadn’t so much as *bumped into* me. Still, in an attempt to maintain ladylike decorum, I strained my face to break my habitual look of apathy into a smile.

“We didn’t so much as touch—”

“I tire of your excuses, Charlotte. It’s obvious you’re enraged by my gifting of this dress to Emilia,” Ignacia interrupted, not letting me get a word in edgewise.

Patting myself on the back for *not* pointing out the prince’s scummy move of gifting a dress to a lady who wasn’t his fiancée, I shifted my focus to Emilia, trembling behind him, and her wavering emerald eyes. She was the very picture of submissive innocence, as long as she kept her mouth shut. The dark brown hair cascading to her waist was speckled with pearls that matched her off-shoulder, A-line dress. Decorative flowers adorned her waist too, and her skirt shifted to blue gray toward the hem, undoubtedly to match the prince’s blue garb.

Emilia was a commoner. One day, Prince Ignacia had just so happened to sneak out into town where he’d just so happened to get injured, and Emilia—who’d just so happened to be there too—had healed him with magic. Their love story had begun with all the contrivance you would expect from a dating sim.



I took deep, quiet breaths to calm myself down. My current situation was familiar to me...because I'd played it in the game. This scene happened near the end of a playthrough, where the MC has a little more wine than she bargained for; it was also when the villainess gets her comeuppance. My engagement to the prince was about to be revoked.

The eyes of the finely dressed nobles were pruned from their chatting and dancing and glued to me, some alight with curiosity and some with pity. More than anything, though, those eyes were brimming with the desperate desire to have nothing to do with us.

Prince Ignacia sighed loudly and proudly before meeting my eyes. "Perhaps I shouldn't have entertained this engagement for as long as I have," he said quietly without a hint of warmth in his voice. Every kind look and word of the prince's had been directed at Emilia tonight. He saw me as nothing more than an obstacle in his story of true love.

But what did I ever do to you? I wanted to demand. Before the memories of my previous life had come back to me, Charlotte Cocoriara had lived her life with grace and restraint unbecoming of an alleged villainess.

The Cocoriaras seldom partook in the politicking of high society's rival factions but maintained a friendship with the royal family. When Charlotte turned seven, she was engaged to Prince Ignacia to prevent the scales of power from tipping in favor of any particular faction of nobles. Overall, her family gave the prince no reason to despise Charlotte.

On the other hand, it was true that they trained Charlotte so relentlessly in preparation for her royal marriage that she almost never had time for enjoyment. Her days were marked by strings of tutors who taught her everything from proper etiquette and political customs to policies and even notable exports of foreign nations to aid in diplomacy. She had to mind her table manners at every meal, and her lady-in-waiting insisted on bathing her each night. Not until she was tucked into her bed alone could Charlotte have a moment to herself.

“I’m so tired...” Charlotte, seven years old, muttered to herself as she climbed into bed, relaxing her muscles for the first time that day. Studying, no matter the subject, always made her tense up. “But I think I can finish my book.” She was alone in her bedroom now, her lady-in-waiting having retired for the night.

She retrieved a picture book from the shelf and sat back on her bed. From the cover and the story so far, she had guessed that the hero would have to fight the dragon to rescue the princess. “Where was I...? ‘The hero crept up to the dragon and found the beast fast asleep.’ Wait... The dragon’s asleep? Well, you have to sleep when you’re tired.” This very tired lady, however, continued reading her book, forcing her eyes to stay open. “‘But just as the hero tried to pass the dragon, it woke up.’ Oh, no! ‘The hero and the dragon fought for a long time, until they called it a tie. Then the dragon told the hero that it only wanted to sleep peacefully and asked him not to disturb its bedchamber. The hero promised to let the dragon sleep and successfully rescued the princess.’ Thank goodness the princess and the dragon are all right!”

Charlotte collapsed upon her covers from the sense of accomplishment and relief that she had earned from finishing the story. Now she felt like she would dream of happy things. She held the book tight in her arms. “If a dragon ever kidnapped me...would Prince Ignacia come and rescue me?” she wondered.

Soon, she drifted off to sleep, her day coming to a close much like the rest of her days would over the next decade.

What a grueling childhood. Just thinking about the flashback I’d played through in the game made me want to cry. Charlotte was so busy training to be the perfect princess that she had no time to be a villainess. If memories of my life on Earth had come back to me during those times, I would have run away from home and left everything behind without a second thought.

Charlotte conducted herself properly in social situations but had never grown close enough to anyone to call them a friend. Compared to the life I’d lived in Japan, Charlotte’s was lonesome and suffocating. She’d never learned the meaning of fun. Her family was kind to her, but her engagement to the crown prince weighed heavier on her shoulders than anyone suspected. It wasn’t her fault that smiling never came naturally to her.

If only Ignacia understood her. He's too self-centered to put himself in her shoes, though. I couldn't help but imagine that if Ignacia ever inherited the crown, Farblume would crumble to the ground.

Still, Charlotte's life wasn't entirely miserable. There was one particular young lady whom Charlotte almost dared to call a friend. She understood that just because Charlotte didn't show her emotions, it didn't mean she didn't feel them. *What an angel,* I reminisced.

The truth was, Charlotte was made out to be a villainess solely because she was engaged to the prince. She was the "other woman" in someone else's love story.

Charlotte's taxing childhood had led to her—me—standing here. I wasn't too sure how this worked with me having memories of both lives, but I could sort that out later.

Prince Ignacia was still staring daggers at me. "You're a Dark Mage, are you not?"

"I am," I confirmed. It was true, after all.

In this dating sim, each character had a job—just like the ones that determined each player's combat style in the associated MMO. As I was the villainess of the dating sim, of course, mine had to be something as sinister sounding as Dark Mage. Dark Mages specialized in debuffing enemies, so they were very effective in combat and made for powerful allies. However, the prince and some other royals and nobles judged me more harshly because of the stigma of my job title and Skill.

Prince Ignacia scoffed at my response before lovingly pulling Emilia to him by her waist. "Emilia, on the other hand, is a kind and gracious Healer. Don't you see how much more fitting a job that is for my future queen?"

"You're too kind, Prince Ignacia," Emilia said bashfully.

I could only cringe at her and at Ignacia for choosing his companion based on their job.

“As a Dark Mage, perhaps you could...pray for world peace? Even a humorless wretch like you can do that much to serve this country.” The prince laughed, Emilia joining him.

I was speechless. *I know you're in love with Emilia, but do you have to be so vile to your fiancée?* Any illusions I might have had about the prince were now shattered.

“I have no use for a queen the people cannot love. Besides, Charlotte, you've secretly been tormenting poor Emilia all this time. Not only do I revoke our engagement, I exile you from this kingdom!”

“Your Highness, that's—”

“You will not get a chance to invent an excuse this time,” the prince cut me off.

This conversation was progressing just as I had watched it unfold in the game. Something that had always bugged me about this exchange was that even Prince Ignacia had no power to call off our engagement without proper counsel. Apparently, he didn't grasp the concept of a political marriage. He had a responsibility to marry me, regardless of how he felt about it. When I tried to point this out, the prince had obviously thought that I was going to protest the breaking of our engagement.

There's no use talking to him, I concluded. It has never once crossed this crown prince's mind that he might be wrong about anything.

With a slimy grin, the crown prince continued, “No matter what feelings you harbor for me, it's too late. Leave this kingdom.”

“As you wish,” I agreed.

“Protest all you want, my decision is— What?!” Ignacia went wide-eyed. The last thing he'd expected was for me to obey his order without a fight.

Beside him, Emilia watched me with a surprised expression that mirrored her love interest's.

“I-If you beg my forgiveness for your transgressions, I may consider making your punishment less severe...” Ignacia hedged.

“No, thank you. I’m leaving the kingdom,” I said.

“Wait, but... Charlotte, are you really...?” While Ignacia stammered, I turned on my heel and started for the exit, ignoring the prince’s calls for my attention.

As I walked through the ballroom, the guests—who’d all been spectating from afar—parted like the tide to let me through. Most of them were giving me dubious looks, showing their support for Ignacia. It was only natural that none of them wanted to make an enemy of the crown prince.

Like I just made an enemy of him, I realized.

Once I reached the doors, I turned around to take in the ballroom one last time. I had grown quite familiar with the place through my gameplay, and I doubted I’d ever return. “Goodbye” was all I said before walking through the doors.

As soon as they closed behind me, I broke into a run, paying no mind to the puzzled guards in the hall who were none the wiser about what had transpired in the ballroom.

I need to get out of here, I told myself.

The hallway stretched on and on, magical sconces placed at regular intervals lighting up the extravagant vases of flowers along the walls. After running for a bit, with my footsteps muted by the ruby-colored and floral-patterned carpet, I was feeling a little less anxious, although I had quickly run out of breath. Vowing to prioritize exercise over studies once I made it out of this kingdom, I kept up my pace. There was no time to rest.

Despite my high heels nearly taking me out a few times, I finally came to a stop before the carriages parked in their designated area. My presence alone caused a brief commotion among the coachmen, but I couldn’t spare the time to call for a carriage and wait for it at the front entrance like nobles normally did.

Trying to regain my breath, I lifted my head to the sky. My thundering heart swelled at the sight—an endless sea of stars, stars, stars! They were so much brighter than any I’d ever seen on Earth, the only source of light pollution being

the sparse magical streetlamps of the city. It was such a wondrous sight—incomparably more than anything I'd seen through my VR kit—that I felt a yearning to explore more of this world and see what other sights it had to offer. Before I knew it, tears were rolling down my face.

“Oh, a shooting star!”

The line in the sky vanished before I could think of a wish. In Japan, a shooting star was supposed to grant your wish if you could say it three times before the star disappeared. I chuckled as I realized how impossible of a task that was. The shooting star was there and gone before I'd said, “Oh.”

Oh, well...

“What would I have wished for anyway?” I wondered. Back in Japan, I'd spent all my free time playing video games, working a job I didn't like so I could fund my hobby. I had enjoyed going on hikes in the mountains until I hurt my leg. After my injury, I'd just search up picturesque places around the world online. Sometimes I'd buy a coffee-table book with pictures of places I could have gone to see in real life.

Growing up, Charlotte had liked to read picture books that told of thrilling adventures. In hindsight, she had always been fascinated by adventures because she'd known she could never go on one herself. *Maybe Charlotte and I aren't so different*, I thought.

I took a deep breath. The freshness of it—the smell of nature—brought a smile to my face. Looking up at the sky again, I noticed the reddish moon. It was always that color in this world, but now that my memories were back, I found it positively enchanting. Knowing the world of this game had so many more magical sights to offer, I felt my heart soar in anticipation.

“I can't wait to see more of this world...” Those stars were so spectacular that it made that ballroom and everything that had happened within it seem trivial. “You know what? I will see with my own eyes everything this world has to offer!” I vowed. Now that I was here—my humdrum life on Earth left behind—there was nothing holding me back from exploring the world of the game I had come to love.

“But first things first...” I quickly spotted the Cocoriara carriage. Its extremely

princess-y design of off-white coloring trimmed with white gold, coupled with its flower-shaped lantern, made it easily recognizable. “Are the horses ready? I’m leaving now!” I called out.

“What?! R-Right away, miss!” Though surprised that I had come here myself, the coachman obediently took the reins without question, and my bodyguards on horseback followed.

“Thank you! I want to go home. Now,” I said.

“Yes, miss.”

Now that I was officially exiled, I had no reason to stick around a moment longer. I’d have to figure out how to make it outside of this kingdom.

Peering out the window, I could see that we had already left the castle grounds behind.

“It’s all right,” I told myself. “I know the world of *Reas* better than anyone.” Now that I was no longer the crown prince’s fiancée, I was finally free.

Preparing for Exile

The Cocoriara residence was very close to the castle. Ten minutes in the carriage, and we'd already passed through the front gates of the estate. A few minutes later, the carriage was pulling up to the front of the main house. It was practically a castle in its own right, capped by burnt sienna shingles and framed by a meticulously manicured garden. Enough ground lights circled the house to illuminate the whole structure in the dark of night. As I climbed out of the carriage, servants held open the front door.

My clock is ticking! I reminded myself.

"Excuse me, I'm in a hurry!" I said to the perplexed servants as I ran past, making straight for my bedroom.

There, I began shoving cash, jewelry, and anything else I thought I could easily sell into a bag. Ditching my ball gown, which would be an ordeal to change in and out of alone, I threw on the most understated dress I owned...which was plenty extravagant by non-noble standards.

"Other clothes, I can figure out later," I muttered to myself. "What else do I need?" I took in the pearly-white bedroom furnished with sepia and mauve furniture: a lavish canopy bed, an ornately carved desk, a plush sofa... It was interesting just to examine their details. Since the game was set in a fantasy world, they weren't identical to furniture used in, say, medieval Europe back on Earth.

"No, I need to *hurry!*" I scolded myself and rerouted my train of thought. *Packing a few potions would make me feel better.*

Suddenly, my parents threw open the door and flew into the room.

"Did something happen, Lottie?" father asked. Only close family members called me Lottie.

"Where is Prince Ignacia?" mother added.

They went wide-eyed when they caught sight of me wearing a simple dress

and hurrying to pack a bag. It was no wonder. I would usually return much later from balls, escorted by the prince. I spared a brief thought for the crown prince, who, now that his pesky noble fiancée was out of the way, was sure to be spending a steamy night with Emilia.

Theodore and Angela Cocoriara—my parents—were both loyal and important players in the Farblume court, and I looked up to them for it. They'd truly believed it would better our kingdom when they'd decided to marry me off to Prince Ignacia. My father, whom I inherited my milk-tea hair from, was a 'roided-up—I mean, hulking—commander. My mother, back when she regularly attended them, had usually been considered the belle of the ball with her deep-ruby hair and absolute bombshell of a body. Even women had a hard time keeping their eyes off of her. In the comfort of their home, my parents now wore tasteful, matching sleeping gowns, a clear sign of their closeness.

I hesitated to tell them the truth but decided they'd find out soon enough. "Prince Ignacia revoked our engagement and exiled me. It breaks my heart to leave my dear family, but I will remove myself before my presence brings even more shame to our family name," I said, meaning every word.

There was no additional truth I could offer, since I had never tormented Emilia in any way, despite the prince's accusation. Besides, I didn't want to get into details and invite time-consuming questions.

Father was the first to respond. "Oh...? That princeling decided to break my Lottie's heart, did he?" Not bothering to hide his anger, he cracked his knuckles menacingly. If I were a stranger coming across him like this, I'd be cowering in a corner.

Mother sighed. "He is such a brat, isn't he?" Maybe she'd half expected this to happen. Mother always had a way of collecting all sorts of information.

"What are we waiting for?! Matthew, ready my horse!" Father bellowed for our butler. "Now!" He stormed out of the room like a frenzied bull.

"F-Father..." I tried and failed to call him back.

"There he goes again." Mother followed her husband out the door. He was probably on his way to gain an audience with the king.

After mulling over my options, I decided that there wasn't much I could do about them. If father was riding to the castle, there was no catching up to him. I doubted there were ten knights in the entire kingdom who could keep up with him. He might take a carriage instead, if mother was going with him, but...

"I should still move out." I had been exiled, after all, even if Prince Ignacia was obviously in the wrong for doing so. After my parents had what were sure to be a few choice words with the king, he might choose to veto my exile. Plotlines in the video game notwithstanding, I could probably mend the engagement if I wanted to. If I were Ignacia's mother, I'd be *groveling* for forgiveness. Of course, kings and queens didn't exactly grovel.

And I don't want to be engaged to him again. I can't be with him anymore, I had realized. So, I would leave the kingdom, just as Charlotte Cocoriara did in every playthrough of *Reas Love*—though, if this were a playthrough, the credits would be rolling already.

"But...my story doesn't end at the credits." I had the freedom to do anything I wanted, and what I wanted more than anything now...was adventure! I would see and experience everything this world had to offer. In a way that could have never been replicated in VR, I wanted to be immersed in the world I loved.

After I was exiled and forced out of my family home, my heart could not have been lighter. The red moon and stars in the sky looked like a shimmering bouquet, sent to me to celebrate my breaking free of the scripted life of an NPC in a dating sim.

Merely walking down the street was turning me giddy. I could have spent hours just relishing the sights and sounds that were now truly alive. The streets were paved with bright-red bricks and accented with a variety of flower beds. Locals and tourists thronged the streets, many of them window-shopping the array of preserved flowers the city was famous for.

"I'd leave the city now if I could. No coaches are running at this time of night, though," I muttered. My first thought had been to take a stagecoach, but there would be none available until morning. Using some of the cash I'd packed, I could get a room at an inn for the night, although my dress was conspicuous

enough that Ignacia might find me if he started a search.

What to do...? I pondered. With teetering drunks beginning to emerge from taverns, it was getting late for a woman to wander about alone. Although I could use Skills—special powers characters could wield in *Reas*—my level was too low to take on even a street thug empty-handed.

After walking for a while longer in search of a solution, I spotted a shopkeeper seeing a customer out of his armory. He reached for the sign propped by the door—he was about to close up shop.

“Wait!” I called. “I want to buy something!” This was my last chance to buy anything until morning. I’d been hoping to find an armory rather than a clothier because this would be the start of my new life as an adventurer. My heart danced at the thought of it. I was going to set off on a grand adventure to see everything and feel everything this world had to offer.

“*You* need something from my shop, miss? I was supposed to close up a while ago... Oh, well. As long as you don’t take too long,” the shopkeeper said. The customer who’d just left must have been a rather valued client, if he’d kept his business open past closing time for them.

“Thank you so much!” Relieved, I stepped into the armory.

Armories specialized in equipment for adventurers. A variety of leather and metal armor for frontline fighters, as well as cloaks for magic wielders, were on display. By the counter stood a display case of jewelry like rings and brooches. On cloud nine, I moved through the store. If I hadn’t barged in after hours, I would have closely inspected every item on display. Leashing my curiosity, I found what I’d come in for—the robes.

Are any of these from the game? I inspected them, wondering how much was different about this world from the video game version of *Reas Love*. For example, the interaction at the ball had been word for word from the video game. One of the selling points of *Reas Love* had been that it shared a world with *Reas Life Online* even though the gameplay differed. Now that I was truly in the world of *Reas*, I had to find out if I could do everything a player could do in *Reas Life Online*—even things that weren’t programmed into its dating sim spin-off.

Switching jobs, for example—players hadn't been able to change their characters' jobs in *Reas Love* like they could in *Reas* proper. Each job posed specific requirements, but none of them were all that difficult. Prince Ignacia's words at the ball replayed in my mind.

"As a Dark Mage, I could at least pray for world peace?" I repeated. "Then I'll become an Archbishop—an awakened job, leagues above a mere Healer." This wasn't a decision I made to spite Ignacia. I'd enjoyed playing as an Archbishop in *Reas*—though I had to admit that I would really enjoy rubbing it into the prince's face once I'd gotten the job.

No, I thought. One day, I'll smile at him and say, "What was your fiancée's job again? Oh, that's right: a Healer."

To switch jobs, I'd have to cross over to the Sacred Land of Erenzi that bordered Farblume. The two nations were in conflict, so Ignacia would hopefully take it personally when he received word of where I'd gone.

"Right. I need to pick a robe." I reached for one close to me. I recognized the Leather Robe and the Bunny's Flower Poncho on the rack among a couple of other robes that I didn't recognize, presumably designed by artisans of this world. Compared to the robes I'd seen in *Reas*, their stats were underwhelming.

"I hope they have that one robe for beginners... There it is!" Gleefully, I took it off the rack.

The Cat Cape was a black poncho adorned with two bells at the neck and a cat's paw-print embroidery on the chest. The hood was marked with two embroidered cat's eyes and topped with the robe's signature cat ears. Equipped with a three percent buff to Dexterity, the Cat Cape would help me dodge the attacks of weaker monsters and make my physical attacks a little faster. Now that I held it in my hand, though, the thought of wearing it in real life made me cringe a little.

"Did you decide?" The shopkeeper came over and gave me a curious look. "No one's bought that robe before. What's your job?"

"I'm...a Healer!" *Soon to be, anyway, if all goes according to plan*, I silently added.

He raised a brow at this. “That’s not a robe for a Healer.” There were other robes on the rack that buffed healing effects, which he was rifling through now.

I politely smiled and said, “No, thank you. I want this one. I’m low level so I’d rather be faster. I’ll hold off on buying a Healer’s robe until I gain a few levels.”

“Aha... The Cat Cape will let you jump higher too. Not a bad choice if you want to dodge attacks. I hadn’t thought of that,” the shopkeeper said, rather impressed.

In the game, the Cat Cape had been seen as a fashion item rather than a practical garment at launch. All it had taken was for one player to start using it during their early-game grinding for it to become popular. They were hilariously adorable when worn by massive, muscular fighters.

“Do you mind if I wear it out?” I asked. “And if you have anything I can wear under it, that would be great. I’m leaving town first thing tomorrow.”

“I’ve got a few.” He pointed to a shelf in a corner. “Over there.”

Dresses and undergarments in neutral colors lay folded upon the shelf. I chose a thin underdress and a thick off-white dress I could comfortably wear under the Cat Cape.

I walked out of the dressing room wearing my haul. Charlotte Cocoriara peered back at me from within the mirror, looking very cute and well put together. As embarrassing as the cat ears would be to wear around town, I supposed choosing function over fashion was a part of being a successful adventurer.

No, the ears are too mortifying, I decided. I’m never wearing the hood up in public.

“Looks good on you.” The shopkeeper smiled. “I’m glad you came in today.”

I was glad, too, that the cape was in excellent condition, as I’d expected it to be from a reputable shop. “Thank you. How much do I owe you?”

“Your total’s thirty-seven thousand liz.”

“Okay.”

Itemized, the Cat Cape accounted for thirty thousand liz, which was the same

price as it had been when I'd bought it from an NPC in *Reas*. It was a reasonable price, so it had come in really handy in my early game too. The more powerful items in the game were exclusive to drops from killing monsters and crafting, so you could buy them only from other players at a much higher price.

"Have a good night," the shopkeeper called as I walked out of the armory, having paid for my new wares.

Now I just had to find an inn to spend the night in and hire a carriage first thing in the morning to take me over the border to Erenzi, the mecca of support jobs.

After an early breakfast, I stopped by a weapons shop and picked up a cheap Iron Mace. I'd be using it later to level grind, but I wanted to get it now so I'd have a weapon just in case I encountered something en route to Erenzi, though I expected it to be totally safe.

As I used to type in the *Reas* chat and forums, "Even supporters want to clobber monsters once in a while!"

Soon, I was in a hired carriage, transfixed by the sweeping landscape outside the window. Green grass and wildflowers covered the plain that stretched beyond the horizon, inviting me to roll around in them. I'd never smelled such fragrant grass before, and my heart danced to the rolling of the carriage. Gone were the days of looking at spectacular sights through a VR kit or pictures in a coffee-table book.

Thank you, Prince Ignacia. Thank you so much for irrevocably breaking our engagement!

One large horse pulled the hooded carriage that I shared with a few others. It was composed of three rows of wooden benches that could each sit three adults across. The domed hood would keep us dry from a drizzle, at least. Compared to those in the streets of the capital, this carriage was smaller and less crowded.

We were rolling along the highway carved into the grassy plain. Smaller monsters occasionally poked their heads out of the grass as we passed, but they

were too weak to dare an attack. This route ran directly from Blume, the capital of Farblume, to Erenzi's border, which would be four maps over if I were to map out the journey in *Reas's* in-game Map feature. Five maps past the border lay the Holy Capital of Zille. Traveling in the game had always been seamless, though, with no loading screens or the like. In the game the journey had never taken too long, especially when I'd used Transportation Gates that teleported you from one Gate to another in the blink of an eye. Since I was unable to use the Gates, I'd planned to stay one night at a roadside inn and another at the next village.

Erenzi was the place to be for those with support jobs. In the capital, players could switch jobs to the basic Healer, the advanced Cleric, or the awakened Archbishop. Equipment and items designed for support jobs were abundantly available in all five of its settlements, including the village I planned to stay in. Naturally, many supporters made Erenzi their home base. I'd often used it as a base of operations myself.

Something I hadn't paid attention to while playing the game was the political tension between Farblume and Erenzi. There'd probably been a story beat in the MMO that explained the lore behind the tension, but I didn't remember it well. As Charlotte, I'd been told that Farblume was trying to break Erenzi's monopoly on support jobs. Farblume might have been irritated at Erenzi—a much smaller nation than Farblume—hosting a majority of supporters, but it was no monopoly. Most of them remained in Erenzi out of sheer convenience.

Farblume, on the other hand, was not a kind environment to supporters. It *was* a great location for Swordsmen, though. Many players had sought out its vast stock of HP potions and heavy armor.

“But those differences were created to balance the game. In real life, policies can be put in place to fix that,” I mused. I'd asked my carriage mates a few questions and found out that at least one country in this world was ruling differently than it had in the game. It was booming as a result, with people of all job types visiting or migrating there. Similar trade policies might have improved Farblume in much the same way. “We could have worked together to change Farblume for the better...” *Too late for that now*, I had to remind myself.

I tilted my face up toward the window and squinted at the bright-blue sky, taking in a deep breath as if I could air out my thoughts. How vast this world was, now that it was real. A day in *Reas* used to go by in an hour on Earth, so it felt like time was moving so slowly. I took another deep breath and relished the crisp air filling my lungs.

What a wonderful world!

The carriage pulled into Traveler's Inn, nestled on the border between Farblume and Erenzi. I'd spend the night here, and travel through Erenzi tomorrow. Although the inn's surroundings looked no different from the plains I'd ridden through all day, it was programmed with the same protection as a town or village, meaning no monsters. Vibrant grass and flowers created a colorful carpet surrounding the sizable inn, one smaller residence, a handful of food stalls, and several adventurers' tents. If you couldn't afford a room at the inn, you could pitch a tent in its yard. The inn even rented out tents to adventurers on a budget.

So, I had a choice before me. A room at the inn—which I could afford—would probably let me sleep better. But this was the very first night of my adventure. "I should get a tent, in the spirit of adventure," I decided. I wasn't going to shy away from things I wanted to try anymore.

What I'd thought was a wooden house next to the inn was more of a shed with a counter for renting tents. I joined the line of a few adventurers who were presumably on a budget. All sorts of camping gear were stowed behind the counter, from cookware and knapsacks to Firestarters—an item that did what its name suggested—and Fairy Jugs that purified water poured into them. They even had provisions like dried meat.

"I want them all," I blurted, even knowing I couldn't buy them all. Money was one issue, but the much greater problem was that I'd have to carry everything I bought. *If only I had an Inventory like I did in the game.* I wouldn't get my hands on one until I got to the Holy Capital of Zille, though. Once I did, I'd shop until I dropped.

The queue moved while I browsed their camping wares.

“A tent for one, please,” I said.

“Here you go. It’s one thousand liz for a package of tent rental, water, and rations. Just the rental would be five hundred,” the clerk explained.

“I’ll take the package.”

I took my tent and began to scout for a place to pitch it. The safest spot, I guessed, would be close to the inn or at least in a cluster of other adventurers’ tents.

“That might do,” I said, finding a fine spot under a tree about a hundred meters away from the inn. There was only enough room to pitch a one-person tent, so none of the group campers had taken it. Dropping my knapsack on the ground, I moved to set up my tent. I laid the thick mat on the ground, set up the central pole, and draped the roof from it. It was a little arduous, but it was simple enough for me to set up successfully by copying other campers. My tent was tan with red designs lining its edges, and it was just barely taller than me—around 170 centimeters, give or take.

“Let’s see how it looks inside...” I psyched myself up as I entered the tent. “Now this feels like an adventure!” I flopped onto the floor only for the hard earth under the tent to knock an “oof” out of me. I’d forgotten that the bottom of my tent was little more than a piece of fabric. A bedroll might be a worthy investment in the near future. I was starting to realize that to adventure through *Reas* for real, I’d need all sorts of supplies that had never even crossed my mind when I was playing the game.

“Wait, I have to cook dinner.” I forced myself to get up before I fell asleep. Outside the tent, I fashioned a fireplace out of rocks from the area and built a fire out of the firewood and Firestarter that had come with the tent rental. I placed the pot full of ingredients on top of the stack of rocks and let them boil.

How easy was that?

I quickly finished the soup of sausage and vegetables, softening the tough bread in it. “I could get used to camping like this.”

In the morning, I’d be successfully exiled from Farblume—a self-imposed exile, but the details weren’t important.

My carriage carried me through Erenzi to its capital, Zille. When I caught sight of the Holy Capital in the distance, I let out a cry in awe of it—for good reason. Not only was seeing my old *Reas* stomping grounds incredibly nostalgic, but the city was breathtaking. A grand cathedral crafted of crystal crowned the capital to the north, matched by a cathedral in the center of the city that was open to the public. This pair of majestic structures granted the entire city an aura of sanctitude.

Light-blue architecture gave the city a calming atmosphere too. While some called Zille “the sacred city,” others called it “the city of water.” Sunbeams refracted in a fountain springing from the roots of the Divine Tree, lighting the leaves of the sacred symbol in a rainbow of colors. The fountain never ran dry, watering the entire city through its aqueducts. The crystal clear water could be turned into Holy Water with the use of a Skill, so it was common to see players filling jugs and bottles with the stuff.

After soaking in the sight of the city, I huffed in satisfaction. There were more spots I wanted to see around the capital, but I had a long to-do list to get through first.

“First things first, I need to get a room—my base of operations.” At one of the villages en route here, I’d sold off the jewels I’d packed. Combined with the cash I’d brought, I had enough money to stay here comfortably for a while. Money wasn’t a concern right now, but I was already calculating my future expenses. Hence, the next item on my list: to register as an adventurer so I could start taking gigs. With so much to do, I would be a very busy woman for the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, flames of excitement roared in my heart, showing no sign of dwindling anytime soon.

Adventure Bracelet

After securing a place to stay in Zille, I found myself standing in a grassy field. This field—Holy Capital Entrance—was located directly outside of Zille’s southern gate and was populated with monsters that even beginners could take on.

“Look at that view!” I exclaimed. This was exactly what I wanted from *Reas*: the smell of the earth and the grass, the dizzyingly expansive sky. At last, I was standing on the precipice of my great adventure, my chest swelling with thoughts of all the places I’d go once my level was high enough.

Now...

I was about to begin the tutorial for *Reas*. More accurately, it was one of the tutorial quests that were available in the game. Though I understood enough about how *Reas* worked, I wanted the Adventure Bracelet that I would get at the end. Technically, I hadn’t started the quest yet, but there was nothing stopping me from working ahead and gathering the items needed to complete said quest, since I knew exactly what would be required of me.

Two types of monsters populated Holy Capital Entrance: Jiggly, an orange slime monster that jiggled, and Flower Bunny, a small rabbit with a flower growing from its head. A few types of plants—like Medicinal Herbs—could be harvested here too. In order to complete the tutorial quest, I’d need five Jiggly Jellies and three Bunny’s Flowers—which had a chance of dropping upon defeating each monster—as well as ten White Herbs, which I could harvest from the field itself.

A quick look over the field, and I immediately spotted Jigglies and Flower Bunnies.

“Let’s get started!” First, I set my sight on a Jiggly. I was level 1, so targeting the weaker of the two monsters was a natural choice.

When I stopped in front of it, the Jiggly...jiggled, letting out its cry, “Jiggly!” It

seemed to know that we were now engaged in combat. Too bad for the weakest monster in *Reas*, but I had no intention of going easy on it. With the simple motion of lifting my Iron Mace and bringing it down, the Jiggly splattered and disappeared. To be honest, the sight of it splattering was a little tough to stomach.

Sorry, buddy.

Once the Jiggly had been obliterated, all that was left behind was its drop item: a Jiggly Jelly. It was a sphere a little smaller than a ping-pong ball, inside a clear container, just like the jelly snacks I used to get in Japan. Eating a Jiggly Jelly recovered your HP a bit, so it was a great drop for newbies.

“And it’s a cheap snack.” As such, it had never made its way to the Cocoriara dinner table, but I’d been curious to try one ever since I’d overheard the servants talking about them.

Should I eat it? It looked and smelled familiar, just like a tangerine jelly snack. Yes, I’d need some for my quest, but it wouldn’t take me long to find more with its drop rate of ninety percent. “Here we go.” I popped it into my mouth, refreshed by the coolness and wobbliness of it. It’d been a while since I’d last had something sweet. “It’s delicious!” I moaned, letting the citrusy snack relax me from all of my recent stresses. *No wonder it’s so popular.*

“All right, let’s keep hunting!”

I continued obliterating Jigglies with one hit, stashing the Jiggly Jellies in my pack. Even when you had a magic-wielding job, the best strategy early game was to rely on blunt force.

“Jiggly...!” As yet another Jiggly was squashed into a burst of light, a short tune pinged in my mind. I jolted reflexively but soon recognized it as the level-up sound.

“So far, so good!” I’d have to wait to verify it, though. I couldn’t pull up my stat screen right now.

After seven squashed Jigglies, I had enough jellies for the quest, so I moved on to hunting for Bunny’s Flowers. Almost immediately, a Flower Bunny squeaked as it hopped in front of me.

Why did it have to be so cute? It looked like an ordinary rabbit on Earth, except for the flower—one of many possible colors—on its head, and protruding fangs that were presumably used to attack its enemies. It had never bothered me when playing the game, but it was hard to ignore the pang of guilt I felt over squashing small lovable creatures for real. Jiggles had been popular among the *Reas* community too. They'd even sold plushies of them. The adorable monster designs had been one of the reasons for *Reas's* success, but it was really testing my mental fortitude now.

Still, I couldn't be an adventurer if I refused to fight cute monsters. "I'm sorry, little bunny!" I lifted my weapon.

The Flower Bunny let out a sharp squeal.

One thing I really, really liked about this world was how when you defeated a monster, it disappeared without a trace, save for its drop item. There'd be nothing I could do with a bunny carcass, and it'd be too cumbersome to carry to whomever would pay for it. I took down a few more of them to gather the Bunny's Flowers I'd need. By then, I was desensitized to taking them out. The last item on the list, White Herbs, was growing all over the field, so it didn't take long for me to pluck the required ten bundles.

All in all, it had taken me about an hour to gather everything, which was faster than I'd expected. Now, I only had to head back to town and start the quest. Exhilarated by my humble adventure, I ran back with a pep in my step.

I have everything I need for the quest! I kept thinking, my steps bouncing with pride as I made for a red-roofed house at the edge of the capital, close to the south gate.

"The Adventure Begins," the tutorial quest I was about to start, was a quest that every player completed, even if it wasn't their first playthrough. This was because of the Adventure Bracelet they got as the reward. The quest was actually available at the capital of each kingdom in *Reas*.

I knocked on the door of the house as soon as I got there, and its owner immediately opened the door. She was a lady of about sixty with brown hair tied in a bun who had a sharp glare but treated new players kindly. "How can I

help you, young lady? It's not every day I have guests."

"Hello," I greeted her. "I'm looking for an Adventure Bracelet. Could you make me one?"

Her eyes narrowed. "Oh. Where did you hear about that? I didn't think anyone remembered it anymore. Come in."

"Thank you."

The room she showed me to was quaintly put together. Lacy white curtains and deep-green drapes framed the window, and a carpet of warm colors lined the floor. A table with a set of four chairs sat in its center, with a bookshelf nestled by the wall. Peeking through the doors on the other end, I could glimpse what must have been her kitchen and bedroom.

In the game, it hadn't been uncommon for players to traipse about the houses of NPCs, but I was sure I'd have the guards called on me if I did the same now. Even in the game, I'd sometimes forgotten that I was talking to a mere NPC because their conversational AI was so well programmed.

This takes me back. I took a sip of the tea offered to me and met the woman's inquisitive purple gaze.

"I'm Luminous. You are?"

"Sharon," I answered.

"That's a pretty name."

"Thank you."

I'd come up with the alias Sharon on my way here, when someone had asked for my name. I'd almost given them my real one but feared that news of the crown prince dumping his fiancée might have spread faster than I was traveling. Even if news hadn't arrived yet, my movements could be tracked later if I went around advertising my name. I figured Sharon was different enough from Charlotte.

If the prince ever started a search for me... I imagined that mother and father could handle that somehow, but it didn't hurt for me to take these precautions. I planned to send word to them once I settled down—not that I thought my

parents would worry since I'd explained my exile to them. If anything, I was worried about them going on a rampage through the royal castle. *Father can be hotheaded sometimes, but you didn't hear that from me.*

"Are you an adventurer?" Luminous asked.

"Not yet. I plan to register after this."

She nodded in approval. "That's a good idea. You can do a lot more once you have the bracelet on your arm. I can make you an Adventure Bracelet if you want...but there are a few things I need." A quest window appeared before me as she asked, "Can you handle it, Sharon? It won't be easy."

The Adventure Begins: Welcome to a world of boundless fantasy!

You'll want to get your hands on this bracelet before your first adventure.

Items Required: Jiggly Jelly x5 *Bunny's Flower* x3 White Herb x10

Despite Luminous hyping the task up—as many NPCs did when offering a quest—it wasn't too difficult at all, even for new players. Case in point: I'd already gathered everything. Feeling a little mischievous, I placed the items on her table: five Jiggly Jellies, three Bunny's Flowers, and ten bundles of White Herbs. "Here you go!" I proudly declared.

Luminous stared at the loot wide-eyed. "What...? You already have everything I was going to ask for."

"Are these enough?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"What a fascinating girl you are. This is plenty. Sit back and wait."

"Thank you!" I cheered.

Luminous reached for a Jiggly Jelly. "These are my favorite," she said, taking a bite from it. The Jiggly Jellies weren't an ingredient of the bracelet but what

Luminous liked to snack on while she worked.

After I read a book Luminous had lent me from her shelf for forty minutes or so, the craftswoman finally called, "It's done! Here's your Adventure Bracelet."

"Wow, thank you so much!"

The bracelet she'd placed on the table was a thin bangle with delicate designs that incorporated two magic stones; it was identical to its in-game design. That brought back a lot of memories. Every player had worn this bracelet, after all. I slid my left hand through the far-too-big bracelet, and it shrank to fit me perfectly. Any pieces carried over from *Reas* to this world must adjust to the wearer's size.

Luminous blinked at me. "You know how to use it?"

"I do! Thank you again, Luminous!"

She chuckled. "Good. Seeing you so happy with that makes it all worth it. I hope you go on grand adventures with that bracelet. I'm looking forward to hearing legends of them, Sharon."

"You can count on it! Thank you for making it for me on such short notice."

"Come back anytime you like," Luminous said with a smile.

I bid her farewell and walked out the door.

As I strolled down the street, I took a closer look at my Adventure Bracelet. Every player had to acquire one first thing, even if they didn't need the actual tutorial. With the Adventure Bracelet, I could open the Menu that contained several commands in the game: Stats, Titles, Skills, Map, Inventory, Guilds, Friends, Mail, and Camera.

Just like I had in the game, I lifted my left hand to my face to activate the bracelet. I wanted an overview first, so I commanded, "Uh... Menu!" Just like in the game, a window containing all sorts of information about me popped up.

Overview:

Name: Sharon (Charlotte Cocoriara)

Level: 3

Job: Dark Mage (Expert in buff/debuff magic. Weakens their enemies to give their allies an edge in battle.)

Titles:

Fiancée No More: +5% Resistance to attacks from Male enemies.

Skills:

Dark Blood: +20% Resistance to debuff effects.

Equipment:

Head: –

Body: Cat Cape (+3% Dexterity; Increased jump height)

Right Hand: Iron Mace (A simple iron-wrought mace)

Left Hand: –

Accessory: Adventure Bracelet (Enables the Menu)

Accessory: –

Feet: –

The commands Guilds, Friends, Mail, and Camera were grayed out—unfortunate, because those features were very useful.

“Nothing seems to be ami— *What* does that Title say?!”

I gaped at the Titles section. “*Fiancée No More*”? *What a miserable Title*. If I could, I would have renounced it then and there, but it was hard to ignore its benefit: a five percent buff to resistance against “male” enemies. Whether monsters were categorized into male and female, I didn’t know. Five percent was a significant boon, though. So, I decided to take it in stride. *Life’s easier if you see glasses as half full*, I told myself.

Proud of my shiny new bracelet, I began jogging to my next destination.

Now that I had an Adventure Bracelet in my possession, there was one more thing I had to do. With the bracelet equipped, I could start using the Transportation Gates that made long-distance travel a breeze. Each city had two Gates: one at its largest entrance and another at its center. Smaller locations like Traveler's Inn or any village had one Gate somewhere on their map. The only time-consuming part was having to register each Gate by touching it while having the Adventure Bracelet equipped. After that, I could jump between Gates in the blink of an eye, as long as I had them registered. Realizing you'd forgotten to register a Gate after leaving a city was one of the most devastating experiences in the game. Considering what Luminous had said about people not knowing about Adventure Bracelets, I had to wonder if people had forgotten about Transportation Gates too.

Zille's Transportation Gates were located by the south gate and in the central plaza. I was closer to the south gate, so I went there first. From the gate, a wide street led right up to the crystal cathedral. If the Camera function on the bracelet had been available, I would have snapped a bunch of pictures.

True to its title as a capital, there was always a lot of foot traffic in Zille. Merchants were constantly going in and out of the city gates, and I spotted a lot of adventurers leaving the city to embark on quests of their own. A guard station stood next to the large city gate.

"Now where's *the* Gate...?" I found it soon enough, very close to the city gate. Each Transportation Gate stood three meters high, allowing people to walk under it. An image of this world's creator-god was carved into one pillar, a large magic stone embedded into it as if the god held the stone in his hand. The arch held a lantern in its center and was engraved with circular designs, giving it a mystical air. To jump to another registered Gate, I'd only have to say the destination as I walked through. For example, if I wanted to jump back to this one, I would say "Zille, South Gate."

"Hmm..." I observed the Gate for a while and confirmed that no one was using it for its intended purpose. If anything, it looked like people considered it a fancy streetlamp. "They're missing out on such a convenient feature," I

muttered. I almost wanted to start spreading the good word, but I feared for Luminous's sanity if she suddenly found hundreds of people at her door demanding she make them bracelets. *I'll keep it my secret for now*, I decided.

"But I *will* register it." I reached out and touched the large magic stone. Just like that, I'd registered this Gate. As I traversed this world, my repertoire of destinations would quickly grow. "I wish I could have registered a Gate in Blume. Will I ever get to go back?" It wouldn't be easy for me to do so, after being exiled by the crown prince. There wasn't a shred of me that missed Ignacia, but I would be sad to not see any of the amazing sights Farblume offered.

Could I sneak back into the country? I wondered. *I feel like I could.*

"But first, there are plenty of sights to see in Erenzi," I reminded myself.

Personally, I'd never understood the significance some people placed on their homeland. It wasn't like I didn't feel fondly about where I'd grown up, but if there was a good reason to move my home, I'd do so without hesitating. Even if I lived in a place where my family had spent generations, I wouldn't give up my life to continue the tradition. Some might have thought me unfeeling for leaving Farblume without so much as a second thought. Until memories of my life in Japan had come back to me, though, I'd spent every day of my life learning and practicing whatever I was told would benefit my marriage and kingdom. It had been so dreary.

"So now, I'm going to live my life for me." Registering this Gate was just another step toward doing exactly that. As I registered more Gates, and as I raised my level, there would be more and more fields and dungeons I could experience and stronger monsters I could take out...even if I planned to switch to a support job. Once I switched jobs, I'd have to find some powerful allies. *When it comes to that, I'll have to let the chips fall where they may. Hopefully, I'll get lucky.*

Having done everything I'd wanted to do for the day, I took a nice, long stretch and began walking back to the inn.

Praying for a New Job

In this world, a person's job was seen as a representation of their natural aptitude—something set in stone. But I knew the way to change it.

“Let's go get me that job!” I declared to the world.

The day after Luminous crafted me the Adventure Bracelet, I wasted no time in making my way to Flaudia Cathedral, where I could change my job to Healer. If a player wanted to change their job to something else, they had to do so in a location specific to each job. This was why I had traveled to Zille in the first place.

After a twenty-minute walk from the inn, I was standing before Flaudia Cathedral, the ivory-colored cathedral in the center of the city. Crystalline windows sparkled along its walls, too high up for me to peek through them. I began walking up to its entrance, which was flanked by a pair of priests. Seeing as others walked in without acknowledging them, I wouldn't need their permission to enter the cathedral—it was open to the public as it had been in *Reas*. This was also where I could start quests specific to the Healer line or buy items tailored to Healers, so it wouldn't be my last time here. Today, though, I just wanted to switch jobs. Giving a quick nod to the priests as I passed them, I stepped into the cathedral.

“The ceiling is so high...” I gasped. Other visitors giggled good-naturedly, and I tucked my face behind my hands in embarrassment. I didn't regret expressing my awe, though. There was nothing wrong with being moved by the beauty of things in this world. And the cathedral was truly marvelous—so much more so than it had been in the game.

“Good thing is,” I muttered to myself, “I know exactly where to go after coming here so often in the game...” I halted my jolly saunter when I sensed a piercing pair of eyes on me. I turned to find a man in a ceremonial robe intently watching me.

Who is that...? I wondered, not recognizing him from either Charlotte's life or

from the game I'd played in my past life as Mitsuki Toyosato. *Not that I memorized every NPC or anything.* Judging by the gold embroidery and ornate accoutrements, he held an important position here. Why was he paying an ordinary adventurer any mind? *Maybe it's my outfit,* I considered. In this world, the Cat Cape was usually worn by Explorers and Hunters, who had no business setting foot in a place like this. *I shouldn't overstay my welcome.*

"What brings you to the cathedral today?" he asked before I could fast-walk past him.

"Uh..." I stammered. I hadn't expected him to *talk* to me.

What made this encounter awkward was the fact that I was still a Dark Mage. At Flaudia Cathedral, they worshipped their namesake, the goddess of light. L'yeh, the goddess of darkness, was worshiped at the Abbey. And boy, did these two churches butt heads a lot. One theory said that the goddesses themselves were constantly at war, but there hadn't been enough of their lore in *Reas* for me to know for sure.

I took some deep breaths and gave the man a smile. He had no reason to peg me as a Dark Mage, after all. Time to put my training in courtly pleasantries to good use. "I came to offer a prayer."

"Wonderful. Let me show you the way," the priest proposed, much to my surprise. I hadn't thought someone of his rank would bother with anything like this, especially after he'd glared at me like that.

Does he know I'm a Dark Mage? No, he can't... Can he? Pushing my paranoia aside, I only said, "Thank you."

"This is the Prayer Room," he said, standing at its door.

"Thank you for showing me," I said pleasantly.

"Of course. May you find your time here illuminating."

I scurried into the room as quickly as I dared. Luckily, the priest hadn't said a word to me as we'd walked through the cathedral halls, not until we'd reached the Prayer Room.

A crystalline skylight domed the room, where sunlight sprinkled throughout as if the space were blessed by Flaudia herself. Pews lined its marble floor, their backs to a pipe organ that filled an entire wall. Opposite the organ, separated from the front row of pews by a ruby red carpet, stood a statue of Flaudia, who was depicted with luscious, flowing hair and widespread wings.

“It’s majestic...” I breathed, stepping up to the statue.

Requirements for switching jobs varied depending on what job you wanted to switch into, but all of them required the Adventure Bracelet. Also, switching jobs reset your level and Skill Points, forcing you to grind all over again.

No skin off my nose. I haven’t ground levels yet. Nothing was holding me back from switching jobs and embarking on my wonderful new life as a Healer. The process for doing so was simple: offer a prayer to the statue of Flaudia within the Flaudia Cathedral in the Sacred Land of Erenzi.

A good number of people filled the pews, offering silent prayers to the goddess. I was becoming self-conscious as it occurred to me that I would have to give my prayer directly in front of the statue, kneeling on the ground. In the game, the action was commonplace; players frequently changed jobs. Now, I’d be put on the spot in this solemn place. I didn’t have the option of performing this ritual at night when there’d be less of a crowd either. The Prayer Room was only open during the day. Embarrassed as I was, it wasn’t worth the risk of breaking into the cathedral or anything. I couldn’t afford to make enemies of the cathedral staff.

“I just need to get through it...” I told myself, ignoring the color rising to my cheeks. Counting my breaths, I slowly knelt before Flaudia’s statue. A few eyes followed me from the pews, but they soon closed as the visitors returned to their own prayers. The priest stationed here didn’t reprimand me either. *Maybe some people choose to pray like this.* The thought let me breathe a little easier. After a few breaths, I recited the scripted job-switching prayer. “Flaudia, goddess of light, mistress of healing... I wish to become your kin, and I offer my prayer for the world.”

Suddenly, the statue began to glow, and murmurs bounced around the room as panic gnawed at me. *What? No, no, no... This isn’t good!* As sparkling light

began to envelop the statue, I racked my brain for how the job-switching ritual had gone down in the game. *That's right!* I recalled. *There was a visual effect. I didn't think anything of it back then...!* The murmurs grew louder, the priest's audible confusion adding to the cacophony. I wanted to bolt so badly, but the ritual wasn't over. Still kneeling, I now prayed for Flaudia to wrap this up as quickly as possible.



“You, who wish to become my kin,” a voice rang out in my mind. “I shall grant your wish, as you are pure of heart.”

Her crisp but gentle voice made me tremble—out of adoration or reverence for the goddess, I couldn’t tell. I’d never felt this kind of elation when playing the game. All I could discern was that switching jobs was indeed possible, just like it had been in *Reas*. I relaxed just a little, even as my heart thundered on.

“Traditionally, I require an offering to make you kin,” the clear voice continued in my mind, speaking the same lines as she had in the game. “Seeing as you bear the Adventure Bracelet, I shall make an exception.”

Relieved, I nodded in confirmation. Then, I couldn’t help but respond silently. “Thank you.”

“You are welcome,” Flaudia answered, the words turning me slack-jawed.

Despite now living in the world of *Reas*, I was still thunderstruck that I’d had a real conversation with a goddess. I’d always thought it was a one-way communication, almost like playing a recording. *The goddess is real*. The thought really began to sink in.

“We rarely manifest before humans,” Flaudia said. “Seldom do they wish for kinship as you do.” Apparently, I was experiencing something very rare and precious. The goddess added, her gentle voice shaded with a touch of loneliness, “I enjoyed this very much. Go with my blessing. Help heal this world.”

“I will,” I answered in my mind, and Flaudia’s blessing rained down like a shower of stars. My body glowed with its radiance for ten seconds or so until it faded. *That’s it*. I opened the Menu to confirm that I was now a Healer. Now that I’d gained the support job I wanted, the real work would begin. And that started with grinding levels and learning Skills.

I rose to my feet, turning to leave the Prayer Room...and found that all eyes in the space were glued to me, their emotions ranging from shock to admiration to fear. The priest who’d shown me to the Prayer Room was watching too, the one who’d scowled at me earlier. I pulled my hood down low as if I could disappear inside it.

Quickly, the once-silent Prayer Room filled with whispers.

“What was that...? A miracle?”

“Did you see how the statue of Flaudia glowed? Was that some sort of sign?”

“Who is that girl? Could she be the awakened...Archbishop?”

“What an incredible thing to bear witness to...!”

Overview:

Name: Sharon (Charlotte Cocoriara)

Level: 1

Job: Healer (Expert in healing magic. Supports allies with buffs and barriers.)

Titles:

Fiancée No More: +5% Resistance to attacks from Male enemies.

Flaudia's Blessing: Healing Skills are 10% more effective. / Reduce mana cost of healing Skills by 10%.

Skills:

Blessed Light: Turns clean water into Holy Water. / Item Required: Potion Bottle

Equipment:

Head: –

Body: Cat Cape (+3% Dexterity; increased jump height)

Right Hand: Iron Mace (A simple, iron-wrought mace)

Left Hand: –

Accessory: Adventure Bracelet (Enables the Menu)

Accessory: –

Feet: –

Those gathered in the Prayer Room voiced all sorts of conjecture, some sounding like they were going to start worshipping me. There really was nothing remarkable about me, though. I'd only just become a Healer—a level 1 Healer at that. Technically, I was the worst Healer in this world right now.

I didn't think I'd draw this much attention... What should I do? I can't just stand here. If I do, I'll be swarmed with questions. My mind raced in panic. I couldn't talk about switching jobs when it wasn't common knowledge in this world. Not that I wanted to prevent others from doing it—I just didn't want to cause chaos by spreading information without thinking it through. *This situation calls for...a tactical retreat!*

Faking the kind of laugh that repelled social interactions, I managed to snake through the crowd and out of the cathedral. *Thanks for the Dexterity boost, Cat Cape!*

Adventurer Registration

After successfully switching jobs, I practically ran from Flaudia Cathedral and headed to the Adventurer's Guild. The Guild stood a few blocks east of the central plaza, closer to the eastern gate of the city. On my way there, I made sure to register Zille's second Transportation Gate in the plaza, thus completing the set.

"There it is!" Even from afar, I could see how much the Guild—marked by a large sign displaying a sword, a wand, and a shield hanging above its doors—was bustling. That was where I would register and begin working as an official adventurer.

Most major cities in this world hosted a branch of the Adventurer's Guild, an organization unaffiliated with any kingdom. Its main purpose was to issue quests for adventurers. Quests could be submitted by anyone, from a private client to a king petitioning on behalf of his country. Common quests involved tasks like hunting specific monsters, gathering designated materials, guarding the client while traveling from city to city... Rumor had it that the Guild's registry of adventurers amounted to an army the size of a large kingdom's. I'd taken on plenty of quests in *Reas*, so I was very familiar with the process.

I pushed open the Guild's heavy wooden doors. "Wow..." The hustle and bustle of the place stoked the flame in my gamer's heart. *This is what adventure is all about!* Teeming with adventurers itching to take on a quest, the Guild branch was just as it had been in the game. The building was separated into three floors: the first floor had counters where adventurers could register, accept quests, or sell their loot, which accounted for the bulk of their interactions with the Guild; the second floor held a small archive room and a few conference rooms; the third floor was the Guildmaster's office, parlor, and the like.

"Where's the..." I looked around, soon finding five counters at the back, a short queue before each of them. Every counter offered all services, so I joined

the shortest line.

Then, a conversation between a couple of adventurers grabbed my attention.

“Did you hear? There was a miracle in the cathedral just now.”

“What miracle?”

“The Flaudia statue *lit up*.”

“Huh? How’s that even possible? Someone’s pulling your leg, dude.”

I drew in a sharp breath, discovering how fast news traveled...even though these adventurers didn’t seem to put too much faith in it. *Please don’t recognize me...*

As if my prayers had been answered, the counter before me quickly freed up. I eagerly walked up to it, careful not to look at the adventurers talking about the miracle. A quill and inkpot lay on the wooden counter that separated me from the receptionist, and a bookshelf and set of drawers carved with leaf and vine designs were built into the wall behind her, next to a door. Just taking in these details scratched my itch—it was all a part of the journey.

“Excuse me. I’d like to register myself as an adventurer,” I said to the receptionist, my heart pounding with excitement.

She smiled pleasantly and reached for a form on the shelf behind her. “Let’s get you started. My name is Prim, and I’ll be walking you through the process.”

“Thank you. I’m Sharon.”

Prim the receptionist was an elf. She had honey-colored eyes that shone with kindness, framed by light-green hair that curled past her shoulders. Prim looked a little older than me, so she might have been eighteen or nineteen. She wore the Guild’s uniform—a white blouse layered with thick black outerwear, which they must have been permitted to accessorize. A cute brooch with a chain adorned the breast of Prim’s uniform.

“Nice to meet you, Sharon. First, we need to assess your aptitudes. Place your hand on the Memory of Stars. It will show me your job and level.”

“Okay.” I placed my hand on what looked like a compass. It was a common item in the game that revealed the target’s job and level as Prim had explained,

except it only worked on those at level 50 or below. Under my palm, the two hands of the Memory of Stars moved.

“A level 1 Healer,” Prim read. “If that’s correct, I’ll go ahead and register you.”

“Yes, please,” I confirmed.

Prim left her seat, and I read through the contract she’d placed on the counter. It wasn’t an elaborate one—basically a wordy disclaimer that the Adventurer’s Guild wouldn’t be held liable if I were to die on one of their quests.

I would first be registered as F rank. The idea was to work your way up through E, D, C, B, A, and ultimately reach S rank at the top. A higher adventurer rank would allow me to crawl more dungeons, making it easier to grind levels and get my hands on better items.

Soon, Prim returned. “Your registration is complete. Here’s your Adventurer’s Card. Welcome to the Guild, Sharon. You’re now an adventurer.”

“Thank you.” The card I took from Prim was like a portable character profile that displayed my name, my level, my job, and information on my quests. It also doubled as an ID. Now, I could officially go on adventures as a Healer.

I was letting my mind wander, preparing to pick out my inaugural quest, when Prim added, “If you’re interested, there’s a fresh party looking for a Healer.”

“Wow!” I cried. How lucky to receive an invite like that at level 1. I was useless now, without any healing Skills, but it wouldn’t take long for that to change once I gained my first few levels. “I’d love to join them,” I answered. I’d been expecting to have to gain those levels by swinging my mace at monsters’ faces—alone. Going on a proper adventure with a party would be so much more fun!

“Really? That’s a relief.” Prim pointed across the room. “It’s that pair over there.”

Two teens—a few years younger than me, by the looks of it—stood by the quest board. Clearly, the boy was a Swordsman and the girl a Sorcerer.

The teens noticed and greeted Prim as she brought me to them. “Kent. Cocoa. Let me introduce Sharon. She’s a Healer.”

“You found a Healer?!” the boy said, beaming. “We were about to give up on it—we thought our levels were too low.”

“Oh, I’m so glad,” the girl chimed in.

Seeing their smiles brought out my own. “If you’ll have me. I won’t be much of a Healer at first.”

“Of course! Welcome to our party, Sharon! I’m Kent.”

“We’re low-levels ourselves. I’m Cocoa. Nice to meet you!”

“Nice to meet you,” I said to my new party mates.

Kent the Swordsman was a boy bursting with energy, his hair trimmed short with an undercut. His equipment was composed of bare essentials: a leather breastplate over his shirt and the basic Iron Sword on his belt. While it wasn’t a powerful weapon by any means, it was readily available for a reasonable price.

Cocoa the Sorcerer was the quieter of the pair, her hair tied in low pigtails. She carried a short staff for novices and wore an off-white robe. The Chapeau Magique on her head was a very useful piece in the early game, providing a three percent buff to her spells. I could have hugged her then and there for how happy she seemed to be to have me in her party. *Is this what having a little sister is like?* The only sibling I’d ever had was my older brother.

Kent and Cocoa told me that they’d been on the verge of starting a quest with just the two of them, stocking up on healing items in lieu of adding a Healer to their party. While items could heal injuries as well as healing magic, a Healer could also provide buffs that raised their allies’ stats temporarily—a nice option to have. At level 1, I couldn’t even cast Heal—the most basic of healing spells—but I would learn it soon.

“Then, let’s register our party and start a quest,” I suggested. Kent and Cocoa eagerly agreed.

We sought out Prim to do just that. Registering as a party would average out the EXP we earned during quests, distributing them evenly among us. There was one restriction, though: no two party members could be more than fifteen levels apart.

“A party registration. Right away!” Prim said and quickly finished the paperwork. Now we could complete quests together!

Our new party decided to meet back at the Guild in thirty minutes and dispersed to make whatever preparations we wanted to before setting out on our quest. I had already bought healing items on my way to Erenzi, and there wasn't anything else I needed, so I decided to peruse the quest board while I waited.

Show me some moneymakers... I willed it into the board. My pockets were still flush with the Cocoriara cash I'd taken with me, but that wouldn't last forever. Although I'd been careful about my spending, the money would go fast once I started buying decent equipment and single-use items.

“A lot of these quests are from the game,” I noted, recognizing many of them: everything from hunting quests issued by the Guild to personal requests like bodyguarding or herb harvesting, and even mundane tasks like personal shopping or working as a farmhand. All of them were relatively safe and quick but didn't pay too well. These were the grinding quests favored by new players.

“They have story quests too,” I realized. There were several storylines in *Reas* that allowed the player to learn more about its world. For example, I'd played a quest called “A Broken Dream” that involved the war between Farblume and Erenzi. While the player hadn't been called on to align with either side, it had been far from a heartwarming story.

I read the quests one by one until I reached the bottom corner of the board. “That's a big reward. We'd have to bring back...the Jewel of Lament?” I scratched my head at the quest, recognizing the name of the item but not remembering what it was for. I'd certainly never used the item myself—if I recalled correctly, it was just a quest item with no effect assigned to it. My curiosity piqued, I went to ask Prim about it.

“Oh, I know the one,” she said. “It's been there for a long time, but no one knows what the Jewel of Lament is.”

“I thought the paper looked worn.” I chuckled.

“It certainly is...” Prim's head drooped. Apparently, it wasn't the best look for the Guild to have a quest left incomplete for so long. “With a reward as high as

three million liz, we've had plenty of adventurers attempt to find it through research and exploring dungeons...to no avail."

"There's not much you can do without knowing where to find the jewel," I said.

"Exactly... If you ever come across it, you can always come back and accept the quest," Prim suggested.

Some quests, like hunting quests, had to be initiated beforehand for the adventurers to receive credit, but when it came to an item-retrieval quest that had no due date, like this one, it would be a lot easier to process the quest after obtaining the item.

"If I ever find it, you'll be the first to know," I promised.

By the time I finished chatting with Prim, Kent and Cocoa had returned, healing items in hand.

"Hey, Sharon," Kent called.

"We're all set!" Cocoa added.

Their eyes were glimmering with excitement for our first adventure—just as mine must have been.

We decided to take on two quests well suited for us beginners: a Medicinal Herb harvest and a Wolf hunt. A Wolf gave out more EXP than a Jiggly, but it was a bit too strong for me to take down on my own. With two allies, it would be much easier.

After submitting the quests to Prim, we left the Adventurer's Guild.

We walked about thirty minutes southeast from the city gate to reach the Forest of Shuria. It was a beautiful forest, where plenty of sunshine filtered through the canopy. Rich underbrush lined the ground, where I could already make out a few clusters of Medicinal Herbs. It was a great location to grind levels in. Once again, I was overcome by the view, now that I was seeing it in real life. Even this place, which wasn't too different from a lush forest on Earth, seemed mystical to me. I took some deep breaths.

“Are you nervous?” Kent chuckled.

“No. I just want to calm the elation I’m feeling at how beautiful this place is,” I answered honestly.

“O-Okay...” Kent seemed unsure of what to say. “What do you mean?”

“I never really left my house growing up, so I really enjoy seeing different places. That’s why I can’t wait to raise my level—so I can travel all over the world!” I explained.

“Oh, I get it! Yeah, me too! I want to go see all sorts of places!”

“Really? You’re speaking my language, Kent!” I cheered. Apparently, these sights were just as majestic to those native to this world.

Cocoa huffed out a laugh. “Are we going to spend the day talking at the edge of the forest, or are we going in?”

“Yeah, let’s go!” Kent said. “Okay. Like we talked about, I’ll go first. Then Sharon. Then Cocoa.”

“Got it!” Cocoa and I answered in unison.

We fell into our formation; this wasn’t something as sophisticated as a tactic, but it would serve us just fine while our levels were low. On our first quest, keeping things simple would let us fight more freely than trying to cover each other too rigidly. Drawing his sword, Kent led the way into the forest. Although I worried about his arm muscles tiring, it made me feel safer following him.

“Let’s get this quest rolling—a Wolf!” Kent shouted as a Wolf popped its head out of the bushes.

Frantically, I gripped my mace. *A real Wolf... It’s terrifying!* Fighting Jiggles and Flower Bunnies had truly been a walk-in-the-park tutorial by comparison. I might have mistaken the Wolf that stood as tall as my waist for a big dog...if not for its razor-sharp fangs and deep, intimidating growl.

Kent held up his sword and Cocoa began to activate her Skill with an incantation. Though they were rookies, they’d instantly gone into battle mode.

Growling more fiercely, the Wolf leaped at Kent, who parried its claws with his blade. “Easy!” he proclaimed.

With the time Kent bought, Cocoa finished her incantation. She raised her staff. “Here goes! Fireball!”

The spell found its mark, drawing an anguished yowl from the Wolf.

“All right!” Kent cheered.

But the Wolf stirred, trying to rise again. Clicking his tongue, Kent readied his sword once more. I was itching to help—so far, I’d been useless.

It’s now or never! I decided. “I’ve got it, Kent!”

“What?!” Kent watched me wide-eyed as I charged at the Wolf, mace in the air. He obviously hadn’t expected his new Healer to go clobber a Wolf. Even if I couldn’t support them with healing yet, I wanted to support them with blunt force.

“Take that!” As hard as I could, I slammed my Iron Mace onto the Wolf’s head. My blow finished the job, turning the Wolf into specks of light. Where it had stood, I found a Wolf Fang and a Pelt (Poor). Both could be sold at the Guild but not for much. Then, the familiar tune pinged twice in my head.

My level went up! Taking out the more intimidating Wolf had been well worth the effort—it had gained me two levels at once. Gaining a level also netted me a Skill Point, so now I was up to level 3 and had two Skill Points.

Using the Adventure Bracelet, I wasted no time in opening the Skill section of my Menu, which displayed a list of Skills I could now learn. At level 3, Healers had a few options: healing magic like the introductory Heal, buffs like Goddess’s Protection which raised Defense, attacks like Hammerfall, and stat increases like Boost Holy Element. Using Skills consumed mana, but I realized that my mana—as well as my HP—was no longer quantified like it had been in the game. I’d have to rely on how tired or magically drained I felt to gauge its level. I was a bit nervous about that, but I was sure I’d get used to it.

“Level 1 Heal and level 1 Strengthen,” I announced. While we still fought low-level monsters that didn’t deal as much damage, a level 1 Heal would recover more than enough HP. Strengthen, which buffed my allies’ stats, was a must-have when adventuring in a party. As I kept grinding levels, I’d learn more support Skills and level up my Heal Skill. Then, I’d switch to Cleric and, finally,

Archbishop. Hopefully, I'd be able to prove my worth as a supporter.

While I stood satisfied with my choice in Skills, I noticed Kent and Cocoa staring at me, confused.

"Aren't you a Healer?" Kent asked.

"I am, but I thought I'd whack them with weapons while my level is low."

"Okay...?" Kent conceded, obviously still confused. He seemed to recognize my logic, but he couldn't quite swallow that any Healer would actually fight this way.

It had been common practice among *Reas* players, though. "It's just temporary—until we raise our levels and can fight stronger enemies," I offered.

"Right... I can't cover you if you go running at a real threat," Kent said.

"I'm not going to be reckless. I like living."



“That’d be great.” Kent grinned. “Otherwise, a heart attack will take me down before a monster can.”

Cocoa looked between me and her staff, muttering, “Clobbering...” It *was* a lot of fun to play as a Sorcerer who could beat up monsters, even if it cost a small fortune to get all the gear together.

After we’d chatted for a few minutes, another Wolf emerged.

All right. This time, I’m going to stick to support, I decided. “Here we go. Strengthen!”

“Huh? What?! Whoa! I feel so light!” Kent exclaimed. “This one’s going to be too easy!” With a powerful leap, he rushed the Wolf, ready to cut it down. The Wolf was smart enough to jump out of the way...and land right where we wanted it.

“Roaring flames, stoke my power! Fireball!” Cocoa used her Skill at just the right moment, torching the monster. Kent followed up with a slash of his sword. It was great teamwork. Making its last stand, the Wolf dug its claws into Kent’s arm, then burst into light. The wound wasn’t too severe but deep enough to draw blood.

“Heal!” I quickly cast the healing spell, which closed the gash in no time. Even at level 1, Heal was plenty effective for small wounds like that.

Kent, for some reason, stared at me like I had two heads. “Wait... I thought your Skill was Strengthen— No, weren’t you level 1?”

“Yeah? My level went up to 3 after the first Wolf, so I have two Skills, Strengthen and Heal,” I said, wondering what was so shocking about that.

Now Cocoa mirrored Kent’s surprise, both of their stares burning a hole through me. *What’s going on?*

“You just said you’re level 3 now, right?” asked Kent.

“How did you learn *two* Skills?!” Cocoa added.

Come again? I stayed silent, trying to figure out the disconnect. Learning multiple Skills was entirely normal. Even NPCs in *Reas* had been able to use multiple Skills.

Seeing how lost I was, Cocoa tentatively began explaining. “Well... You have to level up one Skill at a time. Once you max it out, you’ll learn another Skill. That’s how it is normally...”

“You’re not even supposed to learn your first until about level 6,” Kent added.

“I see...?” I closed my eyes, still needing to work this all out. If what Cocoa and Kent said was accurate, adventurers of this world had no say in what Skills they learned. *That’s terribly inconvenient.* Then, I realized. *I used the Adventure Bracelet to learn those Skills. Those who don’t have the bracelet can only autolearn the default Skill!* I assumed that up to four Skill Points could be banked at a time, and any points exceeding that were automatically used to learn preset or random Skills; what an unexpected downside to not using the bracelet. *Thank goodness I got my Adventure Bracelet first thing!*

“Well, we still learn new Skills as we level up. Doesn’t change that much in the end,” Kent said.

“Fireball is the only Skill I can use now, but I’ll soon learn my next Elemental Skill!” Cocoa added.

Despite their initial shock, they didn’t seem too concerned about it. That was fine by me—I didn’t have a good explanation to offer if they’d pressed for one.

The Adventure Bracelet carries so much weight in this world. It’d be wise for me to keep in mind that most of my knowledge about this world came from my experience of playing *Reas*. I’d have to actively learn more about this world and correct other misconceptions I might have about how things worked.

After a few more easy battles, we met our quota of Wolves to hunt. Then, we moved on to our harvesting quest. It didn’t involve combat, so it almost felt like we were on a little field trip.

“Cocoa! Sharon! I found a Medicinal Herb!” Kent proudly announced.

“Really?!” Cocoa took his find, inspected it, and said, “Kent... This is another Poisonous Weed.”

“What?! *This* is a Poisonous Weed? Are you sure?”

Kent was really struggling with this quest, unable to discern Medicinal Herbs

from Poisonous Weeds even after several attempts.

“Kent was always too busy swinging a sword to ever practice foraging,” Cocoa explained to me before holding up the Poisonous Weed. “Medicinal Herbs have round leaves. Poisonous Weeds have serrated leaves with a darker underside. See?” she pointed out. “I told you all this before.”

My ears straining, I made a mental note of the differences between the two items which I hadn’t noticed before. *Your sacrifice won’t be in vain, Kent.*

“Where did you two meet?” I asked once Cocoa had finished her lecture, because they were cute together—I figured they had a story to tell.

“We’ve known each other all our lives,” Cocoa said.

“Really?” I said.

Together, they began telling me their story. They were from the Farming Village, a village three maps down from Zille. It had actually been one of my stops on my journey here—a quaint village teeming with animals which I’d wanted to revisit sometime.

“I’m fifteen, and she’s fourteen,” Kent said. “When I left to become an adventurer, she ‘had’ to come with. Like I can’t handle myself out here.”

“Only because I *knew* you couldn’t!” Cocoa cut in. “And you’ve proved me right—you can’t even pick out Medicinal Herbs!”

“So cute together,” I said.

“No, we’re not!” they insisted in perfect unison.

“Wow. You two are simpatico,” I said, applauding their harmony.

“No, we’re not!” they said, yet again, as one.

I laughed, happy to see them opening up toward me. Little moments like this were one of my favorite parts of adventuring.

“Sharon...” Cocoa grumbled, looking a little embarrassed. “Oh, a Medicinal Herb!” She pointed to the ground.

“Dang it! I’ll find more than you before— A Wolf!” Kent shouted.

A double encounter of Medicinal Herb and Wolf—now that we’d had plenty

of practice in coordinated combat, a lone Wolf was no match for us.

“Let’s go, team! Strengthen!” I cast.

“Roaring flames, stoke my power! Fireball!”

“Give me a chance to use my sword!”

Engaging in a healthy amount of friendly banter, we soon completed both of our quests. For our first time working as a party, we’d knocked it out of the park. By the end of the day, I’d reached level 12.

As we approached the city gate on foot, we saw that a crowd had formed at its base. There were always plenty of people at the city gates, but I’d rarely seen a commotion like this. As we looked at each other, equally confused, I picked up some voices from the crowd.

“The Hero’s party is here,” one said.

“No, a prince from a neighboring kingdom is here,” another cut in.

“Well, which is it?!” demanded the third.

A prince from a neighboring kingdom? Could it be the same prince who suggested a humorless wretch like me could at least pray for world peace? Just like that, my mood was soured. Leave it to him to ruin my sense of wonder and adventure. Doesn’t that mean he’s in enemy territory? I wondered. If Ignacia’s daring to visit a hostile kingdom now... My head started pounding.

“Sharon, are you all right?” Cocoa asked.

“Are you feeling too tired?” Kent joined in, concern lighting his eyes as well. If only Ignacia had possessed a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of their kindness...things might have turned out differently.

“No, I’m okay. Let’s go tell the Guild we finished our quests,” I said.

“Yeah!” Cocoa agreed enthusiastically.

“There’s no better feeling than finishing quests!” Kent chimed in.

Pushing the thoughts of my ex-fiancé away to the deep, deep recesses of my mind, I made my way to the Adventurer’s Guild alongside my friends.

The Hero's Party

"Welcome back! How was your first time working together?" Prim greeted us as soon as we walked into the Adventurer's Guild. By the look on her face, she'd been worried about us while we were out.

"It went very well," I answered. "Thank you for introducing us, Prim."

"Wonderful. Shall I process your completed quest?" Prim asked.

"Yes, please!" the three of us answered together.

We presented her with the Medicinal Herbs we'd collected and our Adventurer's Cards, which recorded what monsters we'd defeated. This was how Prim could verify that we'd hunted enough Wolves. The cards also displayed the holder's level and Skills. According to my party mates, this was how people without the Adventure Bracelet checked what level they were at.

"Twenty-three Wolves and five bunches of Medicinal Herbs," Prim announced. "Perfect. Here is your payout."

"Thank you," I said, accepting our hard-earned reward: twenty-six thousand liz for the Wolves and five thousand liz for the Medicinal Herbs. We'd decided beforehand that each of us would be reimbursed for any one-use items we used on the quests before splitting the rest of the pay evenly.

Kent and Cocoa stared at their cash, eyes gleaming with dreams.

"Wow! Let's go out for a feast!" Cocoa suggested.

"Meat! We need meat!" Kent said.

Oh, yeah. Nothing but meat will do for a celebration. I wondered what sort of cuisine we could get our hands on in this city. *Sirloin is great, but so are skewers. What if they have varieties of meat that didn't exist on Earth at all?!*

I was looking forward to sharing a nice meal with Kent and Cocoa when I heard a commotion at the entrance. I turned to find a party of four: three human women and a Cait Sith girl. They were all about my age but obviously

higher level, judging by their equipment and the way they carried themselves as they walked through the crowd.

Prim even gasped and muttered, “Is that really them...?” They must have been famous.

One of them, a woman with ruby red hair, addressed the adventurers there as a whole. “Excuse me. Is anyone here familiar with the dungeon Paradise of Erungoa?”

Hurried whispers broke out around the branch.

The Paradise of Erungoa was the dungeon where the Sage Erungoa had built his retirement manor. Erungoa had been quite the hermit, so he’d built all sorts of booby traps to prevent most people from reaching the end of the dungeon and knocking on his door. It was a long and winding dungeon that saw a steady flow of adventurers hoping to harvest the rare herbs in his manor’s back garden.

“There’s poisonous fog blocking our path two clicks in. We only need to find the switch to clear the fog...” the woman was saying. Even though the party seemed desperate, none of the other adventurers were speaking up. Even Prim just listened with a pinched brow.

What’s the big deal? Just tell them how to get through, I silently urged. It had taken the players of *Reas* a long time to figure that trap out. Some had powered through the fog, trying to continuously heal the poison, and others had tried to max out their resistance to poison before going in... None of it had worked. I’d struggled a lot on that obstacle myself.

“You can’t clear the fog. There’s another path hidden right next to it,” I blurted out, reminiscing about when I’d found out about that path. It wasn’t like I was trying to keep the information to myself anyway.

The woman who had been soliciting information went wide-eyed. “What...?!”

“It’s really hard to find.” I smiled. I myself had searched for a switch to deactivate that fog for hours. In the end, the fog had been nothing more than smoke and mirrors to conceal the real path forward.

Prim raised her voice from behind the counter. “How do you know that,

Sharon?! No one's gotten past that fog yet!"

Come again? My hand flew up to my mouth, covering it all too late. Apparently, there was much less information available to the public than there had been for the players of *Reas* back when I was playing the game. *What a stupid thing to say in a stupid place at a stupid time...* There was no point in calculating my next move—I'd better just make myself scarce.

"See you all—" Before I could finish my farewell, though, the ruby-haired woman grabbed me by the shoulder. *It was nice knowing you, world.* Even with the Dexterity boost from my Cat Cape, I couldn't move fast enough to escape her clutches. She was on another level.

"You must become our guide through the Paradise of Erungoa," she implored.

"We will make it worth your while, of course!"

"Um..." I hesitated. With Prince Ignacia on the prowl, I didn't exactly want to draw attention to myself...but that ship had just sailed. *Fine*, I decided. I *would* like to harvest the rare herbs there myself. Besides, the temptation of seeing Erungoa's Herb Garden was too great—it was sure to be a magical sight. "Okay. I'll guide you the best I can."

The ruby-haired woman beamed. "Thanks! And we haven't even introduced ourselves. I'm Frey—the Hero."

"Huh?" My brain seemed to freeze and crash for a moment. The last thing I'd expected was to meet the one and only Hero of this world. Unlike my dime-a-dozen Healer job, the Hero job was Unique. There was only one Hero in this entire world. That setting had carried over from the game. Even though *Reas* had become a worldwide phenomenon, the title of Hero could only be claimed by one player. Unique jobs had very particular requirements to obtain, so the methods to claim many unique jobs had never been unlocked—rumor had it, some unique jobs themselves had never been discovered by the players. Now everyone's reaction made sense. The conversation I'd overheard at the city gate had been foreshadowing—how funny.

"Don't treat me like my title means anything," the Hero continued. "Just call me Frey."

“I can do that,” I said. “I’m Sharon. Nice to meet you.”

“The pleasure’s mine!” Frey clasped my hand in a firm handshake.

Frey, the Hero, had piercing, bright-blue eyes. Her waist-long ruby hair was tied into a ponytail with a cute navy-blue ribbon—the Graceus Ribbon. Her upper body was protected by her Graceus Armor, which I recalled being very durable, with high resistance to Dark attacks. A waistcloth that matched her hair ribbon covered her from waist to knees, with her sword belt tied above it—displaying the Sacred Sword Graceus, a go-to weapon for many middle-game players. Acquiring Graceus in this world was extremely difficult, though, based on what I’d seen so far.

Frey called the other three members over. “Here’s my party.”

“My name is Luna, and I am a Wizard. I am glad to make your acquaintance.”

“Lina. Chaser. Luna’s my twin. Let’s have some fun together!”

“Meow, a new friend. My name is Torte. I’m the Helpurrrr.”



“Nice to meet you all,” I said with a pleasant smile, shaking the hands of the other members. To my relief, none of them looked at me like I’d be a burden, despite my obviously novice gear. On the other hand, as their guide who knew her way around the Paradise of Erungoa, I didn’t expect to be attacked by monsters for the most part.

Luna, the Wizard, wore her light-blue hair in a side ponytail on the right. I could see that, as the older twin, she was the calmer one, tranquility shining through even her amber eyes. Her blue robe was accented with light-blue accessories, with white leggings and blue ankle boots peeking out from underneath. She held the long Staff of Flower Dew, revealing her affinity for Water magic.

Lina, the Chaser, wore her blush-pink hair in a side ponytail on the left. She had the same amber eyes as her sister, but I could see fire in Lina’s. Her dark red gear consisted of a breastplate that prioritized mobility and a thick, short cape. Below her bare midriff she wore short shorts. From the dagger on her belt and the bow slung across her back, I could tell she had a varied arsenal of attacks. Chasers could serve as scouts on certain quests and were one of the must-have jobs for most parties.

Torte, the Helper, looked like a cute kitty cat walking on hind legs. This orange Cait Sith with black-tipped ears stood at about seventy centimeters tall. She was overall more cat than human, with fur covering her entire body except for her face. She wore a flowy off-white skirt and a jacket of burnt sienna and grass green. On her shoulders rested a big backpack, a frying pan hanging from it. Helper was an unusual job because they didn’t join in combat. They were a sort of porter-slash-cook that tended to the party’s needs during quests. In *Reas*, players could hire Helper NPCs to accompany them too.

Other than their lack of a Healer, the Hero’s party was well-balanced. I liked that they were all girls too—less drama.

“It’s too late to leave today,” Frey said. “Why don’t we depart tomorrow morning?”

“That’s fine with me,” I said, promising to meet them at the Guild branch in the morning.

“Whew,” I sighed as Frey’s party walked out of the branch. *Who would have expected that to happen?*

“Are you okay, Sharon?”

“Kent! I’m sorry,” I said. “It all happened so fast...”

Kent shook his head. “Don’t worry about it! Serving as a guide is an important task. You got this, Sharon!”

“We’ll be rooting for you!” Cocoa said.

“Thanks, you two!” I said, their kindness threatening to bring tears to my eyes. They say tears come easier with age, and I was pretty up there if I combined both lives. I was really touched by how supportive they were.

“What about the meat feast?” Kent said. “You need to get ready for tomorrow, don’t you?”

“Not really—” I started, my stomach luring me from responsibility and toward delicious meat...but then I realized. “No, there’s something super important I have to do.”

“That’s what I thought,” Kent said.

If I was going into the Paradise of Erungoa, there was one item I needed to pack a lot of. That shouldn’t be a problem if I went to the item shop immediately. “Sorry, guys. I’ll take a rain check on that dinner.”

“We’ll all go out once you’re back.”

“Thank you, Cocoa...! We’ll stuff our faces then!” I rushed out of the branch, ignoring the questioning look on Prim’s face.

I quickly made my way to the closest item shop, marked by its round yellow roof. The wooden sign above its door was carved with the design of a potion bottle. Item shops were where adventurers bought expendable items.

“Welcome,” the shopkeeper greeted me.

“Hello! I’d like to buy all the Jiggly Jellies you have. How many would that be?”

“My entire stock? You need that many?” he asked, standing to check his stock. Considering how popular of a snack they were, I was willing to bet he had a good number of them.

“Let’s see... Three hundred twenty. Are you sure you want them all?” he asked, showing me three cases of a hundred each, and the twenty individual jellies on his shelf.

Truth be told, I wanted a little more, but this would have to do. “I’ll take three hundred Jiggly Jellies, three each of Cursed Waters and Magic Stones, and ten Empty Potion Bottles, please.”

“You got it,” the shopkeeper said, putting the rest of my order on the counter.

Relieved that I’d managed to get what I needed, I paid for the wares and activated my bracelet’s Storage feature. As soon as I did, everything on the counter disappeared.

“Whoa, what happened?!” The shopkeeper started.

“It’s okay. I just put them all away,” I said.

“Oh, you have a Magic Bag. That’s got to be convenient.”

The shopkeeper’s comment reminded me that such an item existed in *Reas*. The Magic Bag could indeed store items, but not too many of them. It was what NPCs—not players—used for their Inventory. Players commonly stored frequently used items in the Bag within their Adventure Bracelet and kept their extras and other items they wouldn’t need all the time in Storage. This was because the Bag only had 100 slots, with each slot able to hold a single piece of equipment or up to 999 of the same item.

After the item shop, I found an isolated place in town. “Good, no one’s around.” I was standing behind a building in the northern part of the city, next to an aqueduct carrying the spring water from the Divine Tree. I’d come to this spot to make Holy Water. Using Blessed Light—the default Healer Skill—on clean water turned it into Holy Water, granted there was an Empty Potion Bottle to put it in.

“Hmm... I’d like to keep some of the bottles empty. Five Holy Waters should be enough,” I calculated, taking out one of the bottles I’d just procured and

uncorking it. I filled it with water from the aqueduct and clasped it with both hands, chanting, "Blessed Light." The bottle in my hand warmed for a moment, the water within it glimmering slightly. "It worked." The pretty, shimmering Holy Water brought a smile to my face.

The next day, as I double-checked my Skills and wares, I faced a conundrum: was I really going to wear the Cat Cape into a dungeon?

"It would be hard to get something better on such short notice..." I told myself. "It'll do." If I'd been joining their party as a supporter, I would have packed accordingly, but there wasn't much I'd need as a guide, especially when I already kept my items well organized, selling what I didn't need.

This was what my stats looked like.

Overview:

Name: Sharon (Charlotte Cocoriara)

Level: 12

Job: Healer (Expert in healing magic. Supports allies with buffs and barriers.)

Titles:

Fiancée No More: +5% Resistance to attacks from Male enemies.

Flaudia's Blessing: Healing Skills are 10% more effective. / Reduce mana cost of healing Skills by 50%.

Skills:

Blessed Light: Turns clean water into Holy Water. / Item Required: Potion Bottle

Heal (Level 3): Heals the target.

Regeneration (Level 3): Recovers HP every 10 seconds.

Strengthen (Level 5): Buffs physical strength (Attack, Defense, Dexterity).

Equipment:

Head: –

Body: Cat Cape (+3% Dexterity; Increased jump height)

Right Hand: Iron Mace (A simple, iron-wrought mace)

Left Hand: –

Accessory: Adventure Bracelet (Enables the Menu)

Accessory: –

Feet: –

Regeneration was a new Skill I'd learned. Automatically healing every ten seconds really came in handy after battles, or even during battles if my hands were too full to heal properly. Although I didn't expect to find many opportunities to use my Skills as a guide, I might be able to pull my weight somewhat.

Frey and her party were already there when I arrived at the Guild. A pot now dangled alongside the pan attached to Torte's backpack—I was pretty sure I could look forward to delicious meals in the dungeon.

Spotting me, Frey waved her hand in greeting. "Are you ready, Sharon?"

"Yes!" I was so ready to delve into my very first dungeon!

The Paradise of Erungoa

The Paradise of Erungoa lay two maps northeast of the Holy Capital of Zille. While it was easily accessible from the city, all of the booby traps made it a difficult dungeon for first-time crawlers to conquer. Although treacherous, the dungeon wasn't long—because the hermit Erungoa had needed to visit the city too, as legend had it.

“Ooh! So this is the Paradise of Erungoa!” I said in awe at the end of a brisk thirty-minute walk from the city. The entrance to the hermit's paradise looked like a natural cave mouth, but that was enough to get my blood pumping. *How often do you get to go into a cave? I can't help it if I get way too excited*, I silently told myself.

Frey chuckled at my excitement. “You like this dungeon, Sharon?”

“I love seeing places that are different, like this one. I want to travel and see all the beautiful sights this world has to offer!” I said.

“That's quite the dream!” Frey said. “But I know how you feel. I've traveled much throughout the lands, and there were many stunning sights along the way.”

“Right?” I couldn't reel in the smile that was almost hurting my cheeks—how unexpected to share this sentiment with her!

“So that's what your smile looks like,” Frey remarked. “It's cute.”

“What?!” I froze in my tracks. Talk about unexpected. To quote a certain crown prince, I was supposed to be “mirthless.”

“Well, I was very pushy when asking for your help yesterday. So I was... Well, I was worried that...” Frey trailed off.

I laughed out loud at the silliness of it. Behind her, Luna, Lina, and Torte were all looking guilty as well. Yes, I'd been surprised by the sudden request, but I didn't regret accepting it—there were things I wanted to get done for my own sake in the Paradise of Erungoa.

“I’m happy to be here,” I assured them. “Let’s beat this dungeon.”

“Well... Good! Thanks, Sharon!” Frey said.

“Let’s do this,” the twins said together.

“Thank you, Sharon,” Torte joined in.

The five of us shared a look and then lined up on the cusp of the dungeon.

“Then let’s get started. Our target today is to make it through the poison fog, at least.” Frey said. On her mark, we all stepped into the Paradise of Erungoa.

A short walk into the cave, and dirt and gravel were replaced by marble tiles. Lanterns on the walls lit up the corridor, making it easy for us to avoid inactive monsters as we marched through.

I cast Strengthen on all four of my party mates. As a novice level 12 Healer, I didn’t have enough mana to support us the whole way. This one activation had left me empty. My mana would slowly replenish on its own, but I also had a store of Mana Potions in case I needed a quick boost.

“Oh, Strengthen!” Frey noted. “Thanks, this will help! Even though our deal was only for you to show us the way...”

“Let me help,” I insisted. “Not that I can do much at level 12.”

“This is great,” Frey said. Luna, Lina, and Torte nodded in agreement.

“My backpack is pawsitively light!” Torte purred, her tail as straight as a flagpole, showing her excitement the same way house cats did.

“Okey dokey, I’ll scout the way!” Lina leaped in front of us, hopping left and right as she continued, avoiding what must be booby-trapped tiles.

Good. She memorized where to step. I sighed in relief.

Luna stepped up beside me. “Let’s follow suit,” she said. “Make sure to stay next to me at all times. If something happens, run away with Torte.”

“Okay,” I said.

After just a few steps, a Goblin holding an axe appeared in our path. My heart skipped a beat at my first encounter with a Goblin in this world. It wasn’t the

most intimidating of monsters, but I still tensed in anticipation. This green Goblin was a little taller than Torte. I'd be outmatched at my current level if I were fighting alone, but I doubted that the Hero's party would have to spare a second thought to dispatch it.

Frey immediately drew her sword and kicked off from the ground, closing the distance between her and the Goblin in barely a breath. I was on the verge of crying out in amazement when Lina's arrow whizzed past Frey and found its mark, turning the Goblin to gold dust and leaving Frey's sword to sever the air.

Frey loudly blew out a breath. "As long as we took it down..." And so, we were on our way again.

Soon, another trio of Goblins emerged. Without missing a beat, Frey ran forward and cut one down, followed by Lina slicing another with her dagger—when there were multiple enemies, Lina fought in the front.

"Grant me the breath of the coldest ice. Change your form and pierce my enemy. Icicle Arrow," Luna's incantation rang out. Several icicles materialized in the air before flying at the final Goblin and skewering it. All too easily, the three Goblins had been annihilated.

They're all powerful! I noticed that Frey and Lina each had a scratch on them—time for the Healer to show her stuff.

"Regeneration—Frey and Lina," I said. That would heal their scratches in no time.

I'd need more mana to cast Regeneration on all of us, so I settled for using the Skill on our fighters in the front. I planned to use Heal if something happened to us three in the back of the formation. Managing mana expenditure was quite the chore when you were low-level.

"You can use Regeneration too," Frey noted. "You're being too humble about your low level. This is wonderful."

"Especially for me when I need to scout ahead!" Lina said.

"I'm glad I could help," I said.

Mowing through the rest of the Goblins that barred our way, we steadily

progressed through the dungeon.

Soon enough, we came face-to-face with the poison fog. The walls were unnervingly pale and a pool of dark blue, green, and black swirled at our feet—it was suffocating to just look at. The long and tight corridor was marked by countless holes from top to bottom that were ready to spray the poisonous gas. Not even the most agile acrobat could progress through here without triggering the booby trap. Even if you pushed through, continuously healing along the way, the gas at the end of the tunnel was lethal, draining your HP too quickly for any method of healing to make up for it.

It's a pretty sadistic trap, I realized.

Lina was looking all around the corridor, grumbling. “I don’t see any other path...” Perhaps her pride was a little wounded that she, the Chaser, hadn’t found the way through. It wasn’t her fault, though. The poison gas trap had killed more players than any other booby trap in the Paradise of Erungoa. I stepped ten meters back from the edge of the poison tunnel and touched the wall with my right hand.

“That’s where it is? I did check those walls before,” Lina said.

“Yeah... It doesn’t open right away,” I said.

“What?”

To trigger this particular hidden corridor, you had to touch the wall...for five straight minutes. Small wonder no one had figured this out. The *Reas* community had only discovered this because a player had happened to lean on this exact spot for five minutes. There had been a huge backlash at the time over the wildly obscure solution.

“In five minutes, a new path will appear,” I proudly explained.

“No way!” Lina shouted.

“I don’t think we could have...ever figured that out,” Frey said.

“Five minutes... That’s a long time,” said Luna.

“I had meow idea...” cried Torte.

They were all grumbling, much like the *Reas* players had. While I sympathized with them, I couldn't help but chuckle at their all-too-familiar disappointment.

Five minutes later, the hidden corridor materialized.

"There it is!" Frey said.

"It's real!" Lina said.

"We can finally proceed," said Luna.

"Ameowzing..."

As the party gleefully stepped onto the secret path, I was reminded of the treasure chest hidden within it. There were two types of treasure chests in *Reas*: those that never replenished once opened and those that did after a certain amount of time. Naturally, the finite chests contained much rarer items.

We have to open that chest, I resolved. The question was, did people of this world know about treasure chests? Some treasure chests weren't hidden at all, so it wouldn't surprise me if they were common knowledge.

We'd been walking for a while as I contemplated the answer to my question, when Lina let out an exclamation. "There's a treasure chest!"

This one was a recurring treasure chest, nestled in an indent along the corridor wall. In Erungoa's manor lay the other chest in this dungeon—a finite one. Recurring treasure chests mostly contained one-use items, coins, and raw materials, with the occasional rare item sprinkled in. There had been a theory going around among players that suggested the contents of a chest became more lavish the longer it sat unopened.

If no one's beaten this dungeon, the treasure chest in the manor could still be there. The possibility glimmered in my chest.

"How lucky for us to find a treasure chest!" Frey said.

"I wonder what's in it," said Luna.

"Ameowzing! Dungeon treasure chests are very difficult to find!"

Clearly, the existence of treasure chests was well-known. The party gleefully ran up to the chest, and I followed suit—this was my first treasure chest in this

world. It was just a wooden chest with simple carvings, but its telltale shape alone gave me butterflies. I peered over Frey's shoulder as she cracked it open. When the lid lifted, bright light shot out of the chest. This only happened when there was a rare item inside!

"It lit up!" Frey said.

"What's inside?! I'm the one who found it, you know!" Lina reminded us.

Everyone was staring at the chest with anticipation. I leaned forward as much as I could, placing a hand on Frey's shoulder. The chest finally revealed its loot: coins, potions, a dagger, and an item I'd never seen before.

What is that? I wondered. *Reas* had innumerable items, from very important quest items to random junk that didn't even serve a purpose. It was very rare for me to come across an unfamiliar item. Either it was an obscure and useless junk item or an item so rare and valuable that even I'd never had the chance to see one in my long career of playing *Reas*.

"A dagger! Money, potions... What's this?" Lina curiously took up the mystery item. It looked like a fragment of a stone relief—a fragment too small for me to guess what the whole picture would have been.

The others inspected the fragment with frowns for a moment before shaking their heads.

"Who knows...?" Frey said.

"I've never seen that before," said Luna.

"It looks dirty and old," Torte said.

None of us could figure it out. Frey seemed to lose interest in the tablet with no discernible purpose and lifted the dagger instead. "Torte will hold on to the potions and coins."

"My purrleasure."

"As for the dagger..." Frey turned to me. "Sharon. Would you mind if I gave the dagger to Lina?"

"What?" *Why would you need my permission?*

“Normally, we divide our loot after leaving the dungeon, but Lina’s the only one of us who can wield a dagger. This is a fine weapon by the looks of it, and it could aid us in beating the dungeon,” Frey explained.

Of course. There was no reason not to make good use of a better weapon. “I don’t mind.”

Frey beamed. “Good. Thanks!”

“Wait. It almost sounds like I’ll be getting a share of the items we find,” I said.

“Naturally,” Frey said without hesitating.

“Naturally?” I blinked a few times. “I’m just the guide.”

“You’re also our Healer. That’s a good enough reason for you to get an equal share of loot,” said Frey.

Frey’s... I thought about how I’d describe her. *A good person. Just a good person.* Normally, guides or porters hired on by a party were only entitled to the set fee they’d agreed upon. It was unheard of for a party to split their loot with one...but I certainly had no reason to turn down her generosity.

“Use this, Lina.” Frey handed her the dagger.

“Okey dokey. Thanks, Sharon,” Lina said.

“No worries,” I said.

Lina drew the dagger from its sheath, closely inspecting its slender pale-red blade. A colored blade was the sign of an elemental enchantment—in this case, Fire.

“An elemental dagger?! These are super rare!” Lina exclaimed.

“Incredible!” Frey chimed in.

Meanwhile, I was shocked by their reaction. Sure, elemental weapons were handy, but what she was holding was just a Steel Dagger (Fire) that a low-level Blacksmith could craft. In fact, the Glinting Daggers currently on Lina’s belt were faster and more powerful. *No sense in ruining their joy, though.* Any Fire weapon would be pretty effective against Earth monsters.

We kept laboring on, taking out monsters as they appeared, until we finally

arrived at Erungoa's manor. We'd moved pretty fast, just as I'd expected of the Hero's party. Quietly, I cast Heal on my own feet.

Luna dropped to the ground, panting. "I'm burned-out..."

"I'm pawsitively tired..." Torte said, lowering her big backpack beside her.

Good, I thought with relief. *I'm not the only one exhausted.* "Heal—Luna and Torte."

"Thanks, Sharon," said Lina.

"That feels wonder-fur!"

"No problem."

As they rose to their feet again, Frey took in the building ahead of us. "That's Erungoa's manor."

I followed her gaze. "Wow, what incredible architecture! This makes the trek worth it!"

Erungoa's manor was a classy brick house lined with vines running up its walls. Rare herbs could be found in the garden behind the manor, and various magic items filled the manor itself, which was about half the size of a football field. A gated fence circled its perimeter. I'd never thought I'd see it for real. Even on Earth, there weren't too many houses this majestic. *Another tick off the list of every gorgeous sight in this world.*

"Let's go!" Frey marched up to the gate, reaching for the handle.

"Wait, you can't open it yet!" I called out. The dungeon had been chock-full of booby traps. Why would the manor gate be any different? "You have to knock —"

"Sorry. Too late," Frey said as some Specters materialized—five of them, actually.

Specters—floating, wobbling spirits wearing cloaks and holding scythes—were completely immune to physical attacks. They weren't invincible but were still an annoying enemy to face. They could only be damaged with magic or an elemental weapon. Frey's Graceus didn't have an element, so it was useless here. The dagger from the treasure chest would work, though.

“Strengthen. Regeneration!” I cast.

“After me!” Frey shouted, leaping at the ghost with her sword raised. Apparently, she didn’t know about the Specters’ immunity.

“Wait—” I tried to say, as Frey’s sword swam through a Specter without impact. Just as it did, the Specter’s scythe nicked Frey’s arm.

“Frey’s attack didn’t do anything?!” Lina shouted in surprise as she and Frey put distance between them and the Specters. They were rattled even more so because the Specter’s attack had affected Frey. These ethereal monsters weren’t too common, but they were definitely beatable with the right strategy!

I turned to the confused twins. “Lina! Block their attacks with your new dagger. Luna! Attack them with magic!”

“With the dagger?! O-Okay!”

“Got it!”

Lina and Luna jumped into action. Lina rushed one of the Specters with great speed, thanks to Boost Dexterity, the Chaser’s passive Skill. A clang sounded as she successfully blocked the Specter’s scythe.

“Roaring flames, stoke my power! Fireball!” Luna shouted, her spell finding its mark. “Magic does work... Then...thousand frozen blades, dance to my voice and shred my enemies! Coldest Blizzard!”

An AOE attack! I recognized her spell—a mid-level Ice Skill. It created a blizzard that blasted ten meters in the direction of the caster’s choosing, damaging enemies in its path. It must have taken Luna a long time to acquire that Skill without the skill choice awarded by the Adventure Bracelet.

Recognizing that elemental attacks had an effect on them, Lina quickly took out another Specter with her dagger. Three more to go.

“What am I supposed to do?!” Frey asked, gritting her teeth. “I don’t have any elemental weapons!” She watched Lina dance around the monsters like she couldn’t stand to be left out of the fun.

If only the Hero had an Elemental Skill, I thought. Unfortunately, no one had ever become the Hero in *Reas* while I was playing it. While it was possible that

someone had but had never shared that information, if I—an obsessive OG player, if I did say so myself—didn't know about them, it was much more likely we'd never had a Hero. I'd been friends with quite a few of the other players with unique jobs, and we'd often formed parties.

While I was reminiscing about my *Reas* days, all the Specters were defeated. Lina and Luna had shown their strength and twin teamwork.

Frey picked up the Specters' dropped Jewel Fragment and returned, obviously sulking about missing out on the fight. "Thanks, Lina, Luna. I wouldn't have stood a chance on my own..."

"Thank Sharon, who told me to use magic. Without her, I would have been frozen, unsure of what to do," Luna said.

I was just the one who'd given the advice, though. Luna and Lina had done the fighting. "There's no need for that," I chuckled.

Frey shook her head. "Oh yes, there is. Information is as valuable a weapon as any other. Besides, I was the one who caused this mess. I thought we'd made it and I let my guard down. I'm sorry!" Frey apologized, apparently disappointed in herself after realizing that the encounter could have been avoided if she'd followed my instructions.

"That's all right," I said. "This party can take on any monster."

"Still, we aren't familiar with this dungeon. There's no such thing as too much caution," Frey asserted.

Then, it hit me. I knew how strong Frey and her party were, so the Specters hadn't fazed me. But this was their first time in this dungeon—their first time facing enemies like this. And, unlike my *Reas* character, there was no save file to load if any of them died.

Maybe I've been taking the dangers in this world too lightly.

"That's true," I said. "I should have shared that information before we left. I'm sorry."

"No, I should have checked with the party before acting. We'll both be more careful," Frey offered.

“Okay,” I agreed, mulling over tips on the Paradise of Erungoa that I could share. “From here on out, we’ll be fine. As far as I know, there are no more booby traps, so we’ll have easy passage. Even though we’re still in the dungeon, the manor was where Erungoa lived out his last days. It’s just a house, with beds to rest in and everything.”

“Good!” Frey said.

There were a few hidden mechanisms players had used to obtain items, though. Talking about a treasure chest that had never been discovered in this world would have been too suspicious, though, so I kept that tidbit to myself.

Reset Skill Potion

At about noon, we stepped into Erungoa's manor. Considering we'd left Zille around dawn, we'd made pretty decent time. The interior of the brick-built manor was coordinated with warm, soothing colors. Even though the house hadn't been occupied since Erungoa's death, a fire still crackled in the fireplace, keeping the foyer warm. The room was clean too, apparently maintained by some sort of cleansing spell.

The Hero's party gaped at the manor's condition.

"Are you sure there isn't anyone living here?" Frey asked.

"I don't sense anyone..." Lina answered unconvincingly—she was still looking around the place like she expected someone to greet us.

"You're sure we're purrrfectly safe, Sharon?"

"I am. Erungoa's barrier shields his home from monsters," I said.

"Pawsome. I'll make sure we can relax." Torte shrugged her big backpack off and began cooking at the fireplace. I tried telling her that this house had a kitchen, but she insisted on using the fireplace. It was best to keep us all in the same room instead of splitting up in this unfamiliar location.

"Even after death, he kept his manor immaculate," Luna said, scanning the bookshelves that lined the walls. "He was an incredible magic wielder." Luna, who'd remained so calm on our trek here, muttered excitedly every time she spotted a title related to magic.

Frey and Lina were pursuing their own curiosity, investigating the furniture and decor in the room. At least they wouldn't trigger any traps here.

What do I want to accomplish in the Paradise of Erungoa? I considered. I couldn't leave without the items in the manor, and I'd love to harvest the herb garden out back. *My to-do list is growing.* Then it occurred to me that I'd never asked what Frey's party had come here for. I didn't really need to know as their guide, but now I wanted to get a grasp on how long we'd have to spend here to

accomplish their goals and mine.

“What did you want to come here for?” I asked.

“This is going to be hard to believe... We heard that we could find the legendary herb here,” Frey said.

“Oh, in the back garden,” I said.

“You know about it?!” Frey ran up and crowded so close to me that our noses nearly touched.

I took a step back from her intensity. “Not a lot. Only that there is an herb garden. What is this legendary herb called?”

“We...don’t know,” she admitted, rather sheepishly. “As the rumor goes, if the legendary herb is anywhere, it’s here.”

I crossed my arms in contemplation. “I see.” There were a few herbs in the garden that I’d memorized, and the one Frey was looking for was most likely Paradise Dew—its description contained the phrase “legendary herb.” *Or we could gather some of every herb we find*, I thought. “Then let’s go back there after our break,” I said. “After that, you’d be ready to leave the dungeon?”

“That was our plan. Thank you, Sharon.” Frey beamed.

After some time, I noticed that a delicious aroma had permeated the foyer.

“Bon apurrtite!” Torte announced, bringing our dinner over.

“Cheese fondue?!” I blurted in disbelief. I’d never expected to enjoy fondue in a dungeon!

Torte set up a small pot full of melted cheese, with bite-size beef, sausage, vegetables, and bread beside it, ready for dipping. There was plenty of food presented to us in a delightful spread.

“Thank you, Torte!” we all said and dug right in.

I started by dipping a slice of bread into the cheese and taking a bite. The rich cheesiness filled my mouth, melting the tension out of my muscles. “So delicious!”

Torte smiled at my compliment. “Meowonderful.”

“Torte cooks the best food in the world!” Frey bragged, exclaiming, “So good!” after every other bite she scarfed down. True to character, she ate mostly meat while ignoring the veggies and bread. As a swordswoman, she must have needed the protein.

“I can’t even finish my share,” Luna said. “Lina always eats what I can’t.”

“You make me sound like a glutton!” Lina protested. “I blame Torte for cooking such delicious food!”

I chuckled because Lina was practically admitting that she *did* eat a lot.

Although our break was brief, I thoroughly enjoyed the good food and good company.

Erungoa had turned his backyard into an herb garden. It contained plenty of rare species that were valuable resources for crafting potions and other items. This also meant that the herbs sold for a pretty penny. Many players had frequented the herb garden to make a quick buck. These herbs had also helped to line my pockets in *Reas* a few times.

“Wow, this is incredible! It’s like I stepped into a picture book!” One look at the garden, and I was over the moon. No botanical garden on Earth could match the variety found here.

The garden was organized into neat garden beds, growing everything from the basic Medicinal Herb to several extremely rare plants, flowers that sang, grass that thrived on mana instead of sunlight, and even a series of aquatic plants growing in a pond. The tallest trees in the garden grew taller than the manor itself.

I’m so glad I saw it in real life! The more I saw of this world, the more I wanted to explore: Arcadia, renowned in *Reas* for its beauty; the Undersea Tunnel map; dungeons like the Dragon’s Den and the Ifrit’s Oasis. Frustratingly, my level was nowhere near high enough to brave those locations. There were even more dangerous dungeons that I could only go into with the help of strong party members. The road ahead would be challenging but rewarding.

“Incredible. These herbs are all of great quality...!” Luna said.

“Really?! They’ll help meowy sister?!”

“They should,” Luna answered.

Torte’s sister? She must be whom the Paradise Dew is for, I realized. This is the most important quest I’ve ever been on! I will find it!

“Luna, can you tell which one it is?” Frey asked.

“Not yet... These are all rare and high-quality herbs. Maybe taking back each one is the best we can do...”

While we could pack every type of herb, it would take us ages to scour the expansive garden. As I scanned the garden beds, I could practically hear the enthusiasm draining from the others. They must have been very desperate to have hired a low-level rookie like me as their guide.

There it is. I sighed in relief, having spotted the target. Pointing at it, I called to my party mates. “The light-blue herb right there is Paradise Dew.”

“What?” Frey slowly looked back and forth between the herb and me. “Sharon, how...?”

How did I know that? I silently finished for her, grinning at Frey’s surprise.

All the knowledge I had about this world came from my gameplay of *Reas*, and that included some things that no one else in this world knew. Maybe it wasn’t too wise to share this knowledge with others, but what else was I supposed to do when my new friends were in trouble? I quite liked them and wanted to help.

I considered how to explain, but knowing I had a high possibility of digging myself a hole I couldn’t get out of, I chose to give Frey a nonanswer and move us along. “I just know my way around herbs. Let’s go pick them!”

“R-Right!” Frey said, clearly swallowing other questions she had. She rushed to join Luna in harvesting the Paradise Dew, roots and all. They were carefully digging up chunks of dirt with each one and handing them to Torte to bag them.

Paradise Dew was an item exclusive to the Paradise of Erungoa. Its pale-blue leaves and blue-fading-to-white petals retained a lot of water that could be

used not only to create all sorts of healing items like HP Potions, Cure-Alls, and Cold Medicine but also to add special effects to weapons and armor. Whatever ailed Torte's sister, Paradise Dew could probably be used to make something that would heal her.

I left them to their careful harvesting and began collecting items for my own use. I started with a few Paradise Dew for myself, then some Rainbow Herbs and the elemental flowers: Earth Flowers, Wind Flowers, Fire Flowers, and Water Flowers. These I had a particular use in mind for. There was one more thing I couldn't leave this garden without. I took out the large bag I'd prepared and started shoveling the stuff in. The bag would be super heavy when it was full, but that wasn't a problem when I had my Storage feature, courtesy of the Adventure Bracelet.

I was working away when I sensed the attention of the others. "Sharon...?" they all tentatively called.

"Yes?"

"What are you doing?" Frey asked, the whole group watching me incredulously.

"Well, I'm packing some dirt!"

"Why would you want dirt...?" Frey asked.

"There aren't even herbs in there? Won't that just be dead weight?" Luna added in disbelief.

I shook my head at them dramatically as if to call them amateurs. "There's no way that herbs of this quality grow in ordinary soil." In fact, it had been just about the best-quality gardening soil you could get your hands on in *Reas*. At one point, I'd been worried that the garden would run out of dirt eventually with all the players who'd come to the Paradise of Erungoa looting the soil. My concern had soon faded, though, because the amount of soil in the garden had remained constant no matter how many players pillaged it. Technically, it had been possible for a player to craft soil of even higher quality, but that took too much effort for any player who wasn't a full-time gardener in the game.

My party mates were jolted into action by this revelation.

“Do you have a large bag, Torte?! Let’s take some with us!” Frey declared.

“Purrrright here!”

Torte whipped out a large bag, and Frey began ferociously shoveling dirt into it with a roar of determination. *Look at that power...! She didn’t earn the Hero job for nothing!*

While I silently cheered Frey on, Torte stepped up next to me. “Sharon, if you like...I’d love for you to come visit the Cait Sith village.”

“What...?!” The sudden invitation took me completely by surprise. In *Reas*, the Cait Sith village had been legendary—and only accessible during certain quests. Most players had thought it was a map only implemented during those quests.

It’s real! Not a quest-only map! This is a major breakthrough! I need to message all my friends and— I stopped. I’d forgotten that I was here as Charlotte. When I’d been playing the game as Mitsuki, reaching out to my friends had been as easy as activating the Friends feature through the Adventure Bracelet. Now, that feature wasn’t available.

Torte’s burnt-yellow eyes stared at me full of concern that I hadn’t given her an answer yet. “How would you feline about—”

“I’d love to go!” I said, showing my enthusiasm to soothe any doubts Torte might have had. *Forgive me, friends. I need to experience the Cait Sith village without you.*

“This should do it for now.” Frey stacked the bags of herbs and dirt. It looked like they had quite a haul. Above us, the setting sun had begun to turn the sky a bright orange. “We would like to rest for the night and leave early tomorrow morning...” Frey turned to me. “Would that be all right, Sharon? I know we pushed you a lot on the way here.”

“I’m fine with that,” I reassured her with a smile. True, there’d been few breaks on the trek here, but my healing magic kept me from getting too tired and healed any blisters I got on my feet.

“I can’t thank you enough,” Frey said, her sincere gratitude evident in her

eyes.

“You don’t have to say that! Seriously, I’m okay. You hired me as a guide, so I’m going to follow your schedule as much as I can!” I said.

“Still... Thank you,” Frey said again.

I already knew that they wanted to bring their Paradise Dew back as quickly as possible. Frey had only suggested spending the night here out of concern for the less athletic members of the party: Luna and me. On her own, Frey could have easily gotten here and back to the city in a single day. So, I was left feeling grateful for Frey’s consideration.

That night, we each retired to our preassigned bedroom on the second floor of Erungoa’s manor. The others were already asleep, probably.

“Before I get that sleep I need...” I decided to sneak out of my room and explore the manor. After we’d spent most of our time collecting herbs and dirt in the garden, it was easy to forget that we were still in a dungeon. And what did every dungeon have? A final boss. “There’s a boss monster in the basement—the Ghost of Erungoa.” The ghost wasn’t too powerful, but it had a wide arsenal of attacks. Taking it out without prior knowledge of its attacks was close to impossible. *With* that knowledge, though, it was solo-able. “It’ll be tough with my current level, but if I use this place to my advantage...” I psyched myself up.

I made my way to the storeroom on the first floor and activated the hidden switch on the wall, revealing stairs leading down to the basement. But I wasn’t about to walk right up to the final boss. Solo-able the ghost might have been, but not by a Healer dedicating her Skill Points to supporting her party—I had exactly zero attacking Skills. All of the healing in the world would do me no good if I couldn’t damage the enemy. At best, I would be trapped in the nightmare of a perpetual battle.

There was a hallway at the end of the descending staircase, lined with several rooms. One of the wooden doors was marked with the design of a potion. I walked up to that door and set foot into my first destination—Erungoa’s Apothecary. Incredibly, anyone could craft items here! Alchemists were the

best at potion making, but any job could do it with the right tools. This room had been a popular destination among *Reas* players looking to craft some potions. Without the Skills of an Alchemist, though, you could only craft simple potions reliably—luckily, that was all I needed.

A large worktable occupied the room, topped with a whole set of potion-making equipment: a scale, a cauldron, and a mortar and pestle. Unlike in the game, I was able to pick up volumes from the bookshelf too, though I had no time to read them now. This place might be worth another visit once I raised my level.

“All the tools are here, and I picked everything I need from the garden!” I proudly declared, taking said ingredients from my Storage and laying them out on the worktable. “Time to make some Reset Skill Potions!”

The Reset Skill Potion was a pretty simple item to craft, as long as there were tools and a worktable available. On the downside, it required a decent number of ingredients that were arduous to find. In *Reas*, there had been a player who’d taken advantage of that, camping out in the same location all the time to sell this potion. They’d charged as much as a mid-game weapon, making it a little expensive for new (or poor) players. It could definitely be worth the price, though. The list of required ingredients included Paradise Dew, Rainbow Herb, Earth Flower, Wind Flower, Fire Flower, Water Flower, Holy Water, Cursed Water, Mana Herb, a Magic Stone, an Empty Potion Bottle, and one hundred Jiggly Jellies. Out of the twelve different ingredients, I’d purchased anything I couldn’t get in the herb garden beforehand.

“Everything’s ready to go.” I stared at the series of tools and ingredients I’d spread out. Crafting potions had been so easy in the game—I’d just had to press the “Craft” button—but now? I waited, but... “No button to press.” Just like that, my hopes were dashed. “Oh well. I do know the recipe... Let’s give it a shot,” I encouraged myself. While the crafting had been automatic, *Reas* had played out every step of the process.

The tools I’d need were Erungoa’s Cauldron, a magical item called Phoenix Hatchling Ember used to start a fire, and Ludia’s Stirring Spoon, used to mix items into the Cauldron. All of them were readily available here.

First, I needed to light the Phoenix Hatchling Ember, but using magic items was a familiar process for Charlotte, so there was no problem there. I'd be using the item like a gas burner, but it looked nothing like one. Crystal wings enveloped a small roaring flame. When I put the pot over it, the pot floated above the item.

"Wow! How does it float like that...?" It was a simple thing, but this was a phenomenon reserved for a world of magic. My heart fluttering at the clear evidence of otherworldly magic, I took in the ember from all angles. Despite the fire within, I couldn't really tell if the item itself was burning hot. I carefully reached out with my hand, but all I felt was a subtle warmth. *Could I touch it?* my wicked curiosity whispered. I poked the wings of the item...and they weren't hot at all. I placed my finger back on it, leaving it there for longer and letting the warmth seep into me. "That's so fascinating!" I said. "Then maybe this fire won't be—hot!" I shouted, feeling the burning heat of the little fire within the item. I'd let my curiosity bring my guard down.

I went over to a sink—another magical item—with running water and cooled my finger, letting out a sigh. *That was my last distraction,* I resolved. *I should get on with what I came down here for.* Feeling a little strange about it, I began tossing items into the cauldron in order of least rare to rarest, starting with the Jiggly Jellies. *Next will come the Magic Stone, the Mana Herb...*

How long should I wait before putting in the next one? I wondered, stirring the jellies. When the jellies were all melted and had boiled down to half of their original volume, the cauldron flashed bright.

"Whoa!" That must have been the indicator to put the next item in. I tossed in the Magic Stone and kept stirring, then continued down the list every time the cauldron lit up... Stirring all of these ingredients for this long was giving me a bit of a workout.

Once I'd gone through the others, I needed to put in the rare items: the Rainbow Herb and Paradise Dew I'd gathered in the garden today. They were rare because it was a bit of a trek to get this far, but any adventurers of a decent level could come down here and get their hands on them if time wasn't an object.

When I added the Rainbow Herb to the cauldron, the concoction glowed in every color of the rainbow—just for a moment before it flashed brightly again. *I could have watched that rainbow swirl for a while.* Finally, I added Paradise Dew, and the cauldron began to smoke.

“What?” I panicked at this new reaction. *Did I mess it up somehow?* Despite my concern, I couldn’t stop stirring it. I kept mixing and mixing, praying for this to work. Suddenly, the cauldron flashed even brighter than before. “Wh-What...? Is it done?” I warily peeked into the cauldron to find a lone Reset Skill Potion sitting on the dry bottom, automatically bottled. That was strange yet convenient. “I did it! But...” I stared at the bottle containing a dark-blue liquid that looked rather disgusting. Before passing any judgment, though, I popped the cork of the vial and lifted it to my nose, kind of expecting to smell the pleasant citrus aroma of the Jiggly Jellies. Despite dumping a hundred of them into the potion, it smelled nothing like citrus—only like muddy grass. *Yep... This isn’t going to go down easy,* I realized. “But I have to drink it. To defeat the boss... Bottoms up!”



I pinched my nose to lessen the blow and chugged the entire bottle. “So...bitter!” Tears welled in my eyes. It tasted as bad as I’d feared it would. A coppery tang coated my tongue, and my throat burned. The Reset Skill Potion would definitely not have been approved by the FDA as a beverage. I chased it down with water, and panted like a dog to try and air out my mouth.

Once I’d survived that ordeal, I activated the bracelet to double-check my Skills. “Open Menu—Skills!”

The Reset Skill Potion had been effective, at least. All of my Skills had been reverted to Skill Points, giving me eleven points to play with. “I can keep the supporting Skills at a minimum and maximize my damage output...” I didn’t need much time to redistribute the points because I’d planned out what to get. Since I could dodge the boss’s attacks for the most part and didn’t plan on taking damage, I wouldn’t need Heal any higher than level 1. Strengthen was an invaluable Skill, mostly because it boosted my speed and would allow me to navigate around the boss. Goddess’s Protection and the barrier against physical attacks it provided me were equally invaluable. Then there was Holy Heal, the attacking Skill of the Healer line. Despite having the word “heal” in its name, this Skill was only for damaging Undead monsters; its effectiveness was multiplied by the passive Boost Holy Element.

“Still, I’m in for the long haul.” With my pitiful level and low Attack stat, it would take me a while to take the boss down, although it couldn’t take me out too easily either. This would be a battle of attrition, whittling down the boss’s health while I healed and protected myself. I took a few deep breaths.

Time to take on the Ghost of Erungoa.

Overview:

Name: Sharon (Charlotte Cocoriara)

Level: 12

Job: Healer (Expert in healing magic. Supports allies with buffs and barriers.)

Titles:

Fiancée No More: +5% Resistance to attacks from Male enemies.

Flaudia's Blessing: Healing Skills are 10% more effective. / Reduce mana cost of healing Skills by 50%.

Skills:

Blessed Light: Turns clean water into Holy Water. / Item Required: Potion Bottle

Goddess's Protection (Level 3): Creates a barrier around the target.

Heal (Level 1): Heals the target.

Holy Heal (Level 5): Damages an Undead enemy.

Strengthen (Level 1): Buffs physical strength (Attack, Defense, Dexterity).

Boost Holy Element (Level 1): Boosts the user's holiness.

Bag:

Potion: 10

Holy Water: 4

Empty Potion Bottle: 4

Mana Potion: 10

Firestarter: 2

Equipment:

Head: –

Body: Cat Cape (+3% Dexterity; increased jump height)

Right Hand: Iron Mace (A simple iron-wrought mace)

Left Hand: –

Accessory: Adventure Bracelet (Enables the Menu)

Accessory: –

Feet: –

The Ghost of Erungoa Appeared!

I left the apothecary and made for the door at the end of the hall, beyond which awaited the dungeon's boss: the Ghost of Erungoa. According to the lore, Erungoa had met his demise before he could complete his life's work—mastering potion making—and had become a monster out of his sense of regret.

Unlike the other rooms, the boss room was marked with an imposing steel door. I heard myself gulp in anticipation. Slowly, I reached for the handle and opened the door. As it loudly creaked open, I kept my eyes focused forward. *This boss doesn't attack right off the bat...I think.* The room was about the size of a basketball court, with the Ghost of Erungoa standing a little beyond the center of the room, looking pretty formidable in his solemn silence. Black mist swirled around the master of the manor, his bright-red eyes and diadem sharpening his ashen face. A hand barely sticking out of the billowing robe held the staff that had killed countless players.

With a determined exhale, I took a step forward. The ghost shifted, seeming to recognize me as an enemy. For me to take him down at level 12, I'd have to play the long game: slowly wearing him down while flawlessly parrying his every attack. With my pitiful Attack and the boss's monstrous HP, I had no other option. I'd try my best to tip the scales, though.

Let's dance. "Strengthen. Goddess's Protection." I buffed myself and charged at Erungoa—I needed to put a dent in his HP with my first blow! "Holy Heal!"

"Gaah!" Erungoa let out an ethereal wail.

"Yes! It works!" Healer—one; Erungoa—zero. I'd known this attack would work in theory, but I'd been nervous until I'd finally tested it. Holy Heal was a Skill only effective against Undead monsters—the opposite of the Heal I applied to allies.

However, Erungoa didn't falter and glared right at me. Lifting his staff, he began an unintelligible incantation.

Three, two, one... Now! Watching for the moment Erungoa moved his arm, I jumped to the right. A trail of fire scorched the spot where I'd been standing. "It'll take five minutes for that fire to die out," I reminded myself. "He'll cast that spell once every minute. Be careful not to get trapped."

The continuous spell could be more dangerous than it looked, cornering any player who hadn't been mindful of their position. This was what had killed most players on their first attempt at Erungoa. He only attacked from a distance with magic, so you could avoid getting killed out of nowhere with proper prep. The trickiest part was dodging his normal attacks that didn't have a set pattern for where they would hit. I'd cast Strengthen on myself for the speed boost I needed to watch for and dodge his attacks.

I dodged his normal attack—a ball of flame—and immediately counterattacked. "Holy Heal!" Erungoa always became immobile after an attack: for one second after a normal attack, and for two seconds after using a Skill attack. Those were my openings to whittle Erungoa down.

After I dodged a few normal attacks, another line of fire shot across the room. Casting a fresh Strengthen on myself, I backed up against the wall and took the opportunity to drink a Mana Potion.

"There we go!" I easily dodged the next Skill attack—a whirlwind coming for my head—by crouching to the ground. But that left me unable to avoid the next Fireball by a heartbeat, the spell triggering Goddess's Protection on impact. My heart was thrashing against my chest.

No damage from that one, thanks to the barrier. I need to reapply it, fast. I continued dodging Erungoa's attacks and firing off Holy Heal every chance I got. The next time Erungoa raised his staff, I bolted next to the line of fire in the center of the room. If I could consolidate the flame lines in the center, I'd be free to move around the edges of the room.

Another dodge, attack, and reapplication of my buffs later, I roughly calculated how much longer I'd be in battle. *If he goes down after another hour, I'll take it.* Then, Erungoa stuck his staff into the ground. "Oh, no! That's the big one...!" I rushed to the walls, putting as much distance between us as possible. There was no hiding from this attack that was about to spew fire in all

directions. I wasn't strong enough to keep taking hits, though. At best, I could take one Fireball and live. *The instant Goddess's Protection activates, I'm casting it again.* I took a deep breath in, focusing my mind.

"Devastate those who bar my way... Scorching Instruments!" Erungoa bellowed, sending flame-coated potion-making tools in all directions.

Forcing my trembling body into action, I dove out of the way of the first projectile, but the second triggered my barrier almost immediately. "Goddess's Protection! It's okay... This is still manageable." I evaded the next instrument but lost my balance in the process. Another impact forced me to reactivate Goddess's Protection yet again.

This isn't good! One of them will break through...! I forced myself off the ground to dodge the next one, which happened to be two flying at me consecutively—the first broke my barrier and the second pierced my arm. I cried out from the sharp pain, biting down on my tears. Another hit, and I'd be a goner. Gritting my teeth, I cast Goddess's Protection again. I cast Heal on myself as I sprinted across the room. I was losing my breath, and suddenly it felt impossible to keep this up for another hour.

If only there was a better way to attack... There hadn't been one in *Reas*, as far as I knew. "But this isn't a game... It is, but it isn't!" This was real life. Staying determined, I racked my brain for a way to turn the tide.

Soon, Erungoa's Scorching Instruments came to an end. My relief was short-lived as the ghost produced a vial from his cloak.

"No..." I could feel my blood run cold. That was a potion. One swig, and it would negate every attack I'd made so far. I had to stop Erungoa from drinking it, no matter what. *But how?* The only way to break the vial in his hand was to hit him with a physical attack before he drank it. With my Iron Mace, I could do that just fine...if I could get close to him—and that was a big if. "But if I don't, he'll heal! Goddess's Protection. Strengthen." Just as I reapplied my Skills and made a dash for the ghost, an idea crossed my mind—Holy Water. The description of Holy Water, which I had a few bottles of, was something like "It has the power to annihilate evil but will merely damage strong enemies." No player had used items on an enemy, though, so that line of text had always

gotten glossed over. *Now that it's real, can't I pour Holy Water on Erungoa?* I wondered. I took out a bottle of it using my bracelet and read its description: "Blessed water with the power to annihilate evil. Purity: Low." That was almost verbatim what I recalled the in-game description having been. There was no telling what would happen, but it was worth a try.

"But first, I need to smash that vial!" I swung at Erungoa, just as he lifted the vial to his mouth. Pathetic as it might have been, that was still a physical attack—the vial shattered in his hand. *I did it!*

"Curse...you...!" Erungoa immediately lifted his staff, poised to shoot another line of fire.

I was in a terrible position at the moment. Backing away would result in a direct hit. Even if I moved to either side, Erungoa was well positioned to adjust the direction of his attack to whichever way I went. Holding the bottle of Holy Water tight, I pushed off the ground with all my strength to put some distance between us...and I was suddenly airborne.

"What...?" Before I knew it, I was above Erungoa. "Oh, the Cat Cape!" I realized. The Dexterity buff was definitely the main feature of the robe, but it did also say that it would make me jump higher—like a cat. What had just been a flavorful line of text in the game could save my life in this world. Uncorking the bottle, I dumped the Holy Water onto Erungoa. *Please work!* I prayed as I watched the liquid rain down upon the ghost.

There was some kind of effect for sure, considering how Erungoa screamed in pain. A light-blue circle appeared before Erungoa's chest and faded out as it descended. "A Defense debuff!" I exclaimed. On further inspection, the Holy Water had damaged Erungoa—*was* damaging Erungoa, judging by the series of painful groans coming from the ghost. *This may end much sooner than I thought.*

"Holy Heal!" After another blast, I flexed my legs and jumped far back so I could reapply my buffs, Heal, and drink a Mana Potion. It didn't give me any reprieve from his attack, though—I had to desperately dodge another Skill attack. Then, Erungoa began spinning his staff above his head, the gem in his diadem shining. "His HP's under ten percent!" The Holy Water had been more

effective than I'd thought, but its effect had run out by now.

I've almost won! But I can't let my guard down. I carefully observed Erungoa. Once he was damaged below ten percent HP, he whirled his staff to create a vortex of air around himself, negating all close-range attacks—I'd need to finish him off from a distance.

Firing a Holy Heal, I took out another Holy Water and jumped high into the air before pouring it onto him and—

“Holy Heal!”

Erungoa's eerie scream echoed throughout the room, almost making me cover my ears. He soon turned into a burst of light and vanished with a clank. Then, five pings sounded. “I leveled up!” Five levels at once, too, which was the maximum number of levels you could gain in one go. The Ghost of Erungoa had been well above my pay grade. “Too bad it's capped at five levels at a time, but it's still great progress.”

I walked over and inspected Erungoa's drops: the Staff of Bloom that Erungoa had treasured in life and in death, a plain old Medicinal Herb, and the Jewel of Lament. “I was hoping for a Rainbow Crystal, but the staff is a great score on its own.” The Staff of Bloom would grant a three percent buff to my healing Skills and a ten percent buff to my Holy element. This would be more than serviceable until the mid-game—which meant that it was time for me to bid my Iron Mace farewell. My gear was starting to resemble that of a full-time Healer.

What was more, a treasure chest was waiting for me—a treasure chest that would never reappear after I opened it. Surely, I'd get a pass for being carried away a little. “Treasure chest, treasure chest, my treasure chest...” I hummed along, practically skipping across the room and into a small secret study. Unfortunately for poor Erungoa, every player in *Reas* had known about his hideaway.

Bookshelves lined every wall of the study, holding some eye-catching volumes, like Erungoa's diaries. A writing desk stood at the center, with many wooden boxes containing magic items stacked on the floor.

Are these free for the taking? I wondered. Was it really stealing when the owner was dead? And when I'd just vanquished the ghost of said owner? “It's a

tough call... But first, the treasure chest.” The treasure chest lay on the writing desk in plain sight. Painted red and fitted with gold, the never-before-discovered treasure chest seemed to command the room, unlike the wooden treasure chests that reappeared infinitely.

“These treasure chests always get my heart pumping...” I muttered, carefully opening the chest. A bright burst of light—the indication of a rare item—spilled into the dim room like a glorious sunrise. “That’s...the Robe of Compassion.” I lifted the neatly folded robe and found beneath it the Boots of Compassion and Hairpin of Compassion. With buffs to healing Skills, this set was highly useful to supporters.

I changed into them on the spot. As soon as I put my arms through the sleeves, the robe automatically tailored itself to me, falling upon my shoulders in a comfortable fit. The off-white robe was accented with wine red around the sleeves and on the underblouse. A chain wrapped from its chest to the back, a patch of vermilion stretching from under the chest to halfway down the skirt that reached below my knees. The boots were a dark red too, making the outfit feel slimming. The hairpin was an ornate one decorated with a red gem and white lace, which I ended up pinning at my temple.

The hairpin granted a five percent buff to healing Skills, a three percent buff to Physical Defense, and a three percent Resistance to all elements. The robe also granted a five percent buff to healing Skills, as well as a three percent buff to Magic Defense. The boots provided another five percent buff to healing Skills and a three percent buff to Physical Defense. On top of that, equipping all three items of the Compassion Set granted another fifteen percent boost to healing Skills, a five percent boost each to Physical and Magical Defense, and even a ten percent discount on mana when using Skills.



The Compassion Set and the Staff of Bloom combined made my Heal spell thirty-three percent more effective! *Incredible!* This was equipment I could carry with me for a while—a long while—without having to worry about trading up.

“These made it all worth it,” I said, taking one of the magical items left in the room that looked quite useful. I had no use for the other items at the moment, so I could always come back here if I needed them. *Then, I’ll get to see Erungoa’s Herb Garden again.* Was it just an excuse to come back here? Maybe.

I walked out of the boss room, grinning like a fool...then remembered. “I have to reset my Skills again...” It had completely slipped my mind. I was *not* looking forward to drinking another bottle of that bitter and suffocating Reset Skill Potion...but I had no choice. Since I had two Holy Waters left, I made two Reset Skill Potions so I could keep one as a backup.

Later, I wetted my pillow with tears from how horrendous the potion tasted, finding escape from the taste in blissful sleep.

Overview:

Name: Sharon (Charlotte Cocoriara)

Level: 17

Job: Healer (Expert in healing magic. Supports allies with buffs and barriers.)

Titles:

Fiancée No More: +5% Resistance to attacks from Male enemies.

Flaudia’s Blessing: Healing Skills are 10% more effective. / Reduce mana cost of healing Skills by 50%.

Skills:

Blessed Light: Turns clean water into Holy Water. / Item

Required: Potion Bottle

Mana Rations (Level 1): Recovers mana every 30 seconds.

Heal (Level 3): Heals the target.

Strengthen (Level 5): Buffs physical strength (Attack, Defense, Dexterity).

Wide Heal (Level 1): Heals all targets within a 7-meter radius of the user.

Goddess's Smite: Doubles the damage of the next attack used.

Regeneration (Level 2): Recovers HP every 10 seconds.

Goddess's Protection (Level 3): Creates a barrier around the target.

Equipment:

Head: Hairpin of Compassion (+5% Healing +3% *Physical Defense* +3% Resistance to all elements)

Body: Robe of Compassion (+5% Healing / +3% *Magical Defense*)

Right Hand: Staff of Bloom (+3% Healing / +10% *Holy element*)

Left Hand: –

Accessory: Adventure Bracelet (Enables the Menu)

Accessory: –

Feet: Boots of Compassion (+5% Healing / +3% *Physical Defense*)

Bonus: Compassion Set 3/3 (+15% Healing +5% *Physical Defense* +5% *Magical Defense* / -10% Mana cost for Skills)

Early Morning Gardening

“What a beautiful morning!” Having woken up surprisingly early, I’d come back out to Erungoa’s Herb Garden to make good use of my time. Something here had caught my attention yesterday.

“There it is.” Planters of white plaster stood unused in the corner of the garden. The plaster was far from pristine, but the faded white gave a charming contour to their engraved designs. “Ladies and gentlemen... Let’s grow some herbs in here with Erungoa’s Garden Soil!” I cheered, complete with applause. *What am I doing, all alone in the garden?* The sobering thought hit me. *What waking up early does to your mind...*

There were three empty planters about thirty centimeters tall and fifty centimeters wide. “These could each hold several herbs. With Erungoa’s special soil, I could even grow Paradise Dew away from this garden—what an exploit!” Of course, I’d have to carry the planters around to pull that off. Without the Storage feature on my bracelet, I wouldn’t have even tried it.

I scanned the garden in search of any tools...and found one! I hummed an upbeat tune imagining a pop-up window that read “You found a white shovel!”

“Now I can fill the planters,” I said, digging up a patch of dirt near the pond, keeping my bag of soil from yesterday untouched. The soil by the pond was damper and full of nutrients that encouraged plant growth.

Once the planters were full of soil, I began planting them. In the first, I only planted Paradise Dew. I filled the decently sized planter with seven of the herbs, spacing them out more than enough to encourage growth. Once they were settled, I topped off the planter with more soil and took a step back. “Wow, they’re so beautiful!” I exclaimed, watching the morning sun shimmer on the dewy flowers.

“The next one’s for the elemental flowers! Those vibrant colors will look so cute together,” I announced. The Fire Flower let out a soft crackling sound if you put your ear up to it, and it gave off a little bit of warmth. The Earth Flower

had glittering mineral petals. The Wind Flower fluttered with the slightest flow of air, so it could come in clutch when exploring caves. The Water Flower stayed a bud until the last day of its life cycle, retaining drinkable water in it until it bloomed or was plucked. I divided the circular planter into four even wedges, planting the four elemental flowers symmetrically. To be honest, I could spend all day staring at the vibrant arrangement of these magical flowers. “What a sight for sore eyes...” And what a wonderful morning it was. Waking up early in real life used to be the worst. In this world, I could rise with the sun every single day.

“As for the final planter... Ta-da! Rainbow Herbs! And maybe another plant, if I can find a good one...” I searched the garden again, considering the tall grass, shimmering moss, and even carnivorous plants feasting on bugs that landed on them. *It’s a no go on the meat-eating plant*, I decided. *It just looks scary—like it’s going to bite off my finger.*

Suddenly, I heard...singing? “*Weary eyes fall from the sky, longing for the sprawling land...*” I recognized the song too. *That’s the theme song of Reas!* The voices were in stunning harmony—creating literal music to my ears. *Who’s singing?* Not Frey’s party—that much was clear. I turned around, wondering if another group of adventurers had arrived, but found no one.

“Weird,” I muttered. “I can still hear the— Oh!” I started when I found the source of the singing: a flower called Angelic Melody. I’d forgotten that they grew here. Angelic Melody was a flower that pleased both the eyes and ears. Its petals—or “wings”—were long and pearly white, while its stems and leaves were as clear as blown glass. Occasionally, air flowed from the roots up to the flower like it was breathing. What made this flower resemble an angel the most, however, was the golden halo floating in the air above it.

“Perfect. I’ll plant the Angelic Melody with the Rainbow Herbs. It’s like a little angel singing under a rainbow!” I got to work right away, planting the Rainbow Herb, which earned its name for the way light reflected off of its petals. “And I just have to...replant the little angel.” *But how?* Cold sweat trickled down my back as I imagined uprooting the singing flower—and cutting off the lovely song forever.

“*Let me follow your dream...*” The Angelic Melody continued singing the

theme song.

“You can sing, but you can’t talk, right?” I asked the flower, just in case. I also waved my hand above it, just to be sure it didn’t have sight either. *What a strange flower.* “Oh! I can just replant it with a chunk of soil!” I realized. I was using the same soil in the planter anyway. Using the shovel, I carefully dug around the thirty-centimeter-tall flower, making sure not to damage any roots.

Fifteen minutes later, I finally dug up the angel in its clump of soil, still happily singing. I sighed in great relief. “Thank goodness!”

The shimmering rainbow and angel looked magical in their planter together. Although I didn’t have a use for them yet, I’d keep them securely stored until I could use them to craft some important items. After placing the three populated planters in Storage, I stretched and loosened my back, sore from doing all the planting while crouched over. “Heal.” I cast the spell on my back, which soothed my pain like—well—magic. “That’s the stuff...” I groaned. *If only I could have done this when I was working in Japan,* I started to think, then reconsidered. *But sometimes, the lack of healing magic was the only thing stopping me from slaving away even more for that job.*

Then, I turned my attention to the pond. “I wonder what it looks like underwater.” Back in the game, I could walk up to the pond and automatically harvest the underwater flowers. Now that it was real, could I dive down and see those flowers with my own eyes?

“I have to dive in...!” I told myself. A world I hadn’t even seen through my VR goggles awaited me right under the surface! What was stopping me from exploring a mystical world I could access in one second flat? Absolutely nothing! “Sharon’s going in...” I announced, pinching my nose and breathing in a lungful of air before diving into the pond.

It’s deeper than I thought! Honestly, I hadn’t expected my head to go underwater at all—I’d even thought the pond, no larger than five meters across, might have been as shallow as a kiddie pool. Now, I was completely submerged and still sinking.

Something tickled my cheek. My mouth flew open in surprise, letting air bubbles escape before I could cover it with my hands. Reining in my terror, I

opened my eyes to find a fish with an enormous dress-like fin three times the size of the rest of its body swimming before me. The fin must have brushed my face. *I've never seen a fish like this. Maybe it's a species that wasn't in Reas at all.* The fish now fluttered through the underwater vegetation, the grass and flowers faintly glowing as if the fish's fin had marked them with light-up paint.

"Wait—" I tried to say, despite being underwater. Having expelled all the air in my lungs, I made a frantic ascent to the surface, stuck my head out, and took a deep breath in. "I—thought I was dead." I pushed myself up onto shore with a grunt. Even though I'd been underwater for less than a minute, I was happy to have seen such a beautiful creature. "What is that fish anyway? The glowing stuff...looked like mana. A fish that releases mana?" Had I encountered a swimming Mana Potion?

I wrung water from my robe and realized I'd have to dry it somehow. Judging by the appetizing aroma wafting from the manor's chimney, Torte was cooking breakfast. "I can't sit at the breakfast table soaking wet... Oh, I know!" I produced an item from my Bag—a magical item called a Pristine Ring that I had taken from Erungoa's office. Normally, I could easily hold the ring in my palm, but it became the size of a toy hoop when I tossed it above my head. When I stepped through the hoop—presto! Every speck of dirt on me vanished. "Wow. It completely dried me too!" *Who needs a washer and dryer?* As it cleaned the user and anything they were wearing, the Pristine Ring was an incredibly convenient item, especially for someone as lazy—I mean, as *busy* as myself. Camping would be a lot more comfortable with this too. Getting my hands on this decently rare item so early was a real stroke of luck. *Thanks, Erungoa, I thought. Sorry I killed you...even if you were already dead.*

"I probably shouldn't show it off, though." The entire world would want to get their hands on something this convenient. Personally, I would have given up my life savings for it. *I won't even show it to Frey and the others. Not yet.* It wasn't that I didn't trust them—they were all wonderful people, but we'd only met each other two days ago. If I had the opportunity to spend more time with them in the future, maybe I'd share more information with them.

"Nothing is better than a good breakfast after a good morning's work!" Following the delicious smell, I ran back to the manor.

Return and Cash-Out

“What are those?” Frey asked me, wide-eyed. “They look to be of excellent quality.” She stared at my Compassion Set and Staff of Bloom.

I thought about my response for a moment. “I found them in the closet of the room I slept in.” There was no way I could tell them about the boss in the basement or the treasure chest that would never reappear. For one thing, they’d be terribly confused by all the new information I’d have to disclose, and worst-case scenario, they’d challenge the Ghost of Erungoa and all die.

“Is that...okay?” Frey asked herself. “Well, the owner is long dead... And we’re in a dungeon. It should be acceptable to keep what we find...” She’d answered her own question.

“They suit you well, Sharon.”

“Thank you, Luna.”

Luna brushed her fingers over my robe and muttered, “Maybe I should look for another one.” Judging by the sparkle in her eyes, she was ready to immediately do just that.

Having watched this interaction, Lina shouted, “Finders keepers!” and sprinted away.

“Not fair!” Frey bolted right after her, followed by Luna.

Unfortunately for them, I doubted they’d find anything comparable to my score from last night. After all three of them had left the room, I turned to Torte. “It smells delicious,” I said.

“Breakfast is almeowst ready. How long will they be?”

“Uh... Probably a while,” I said, guilty that I’d put more on Torte’s figurative plate.

“Meow well,” Torte simply said and finished up at the hearth. “We’ll eat furrst.”

Torte had made us pumpernickel toast, vegetable soup, and scrambled eggs. The warm soup in particular soothed my soul. *So good.*

“Did you sleep meowell?” she asked.

“As soon as my head hit the pillow, I was out,” I said.

“Meowonderful. Some people become too nervous to sleep in a dungeon.” Torte had been worried about me.

“Thank you,” I said. “That wasn’t my case at all. How about you?”

“The bed was so fluffy, and no one needed to take watch like we do when we camp. It was purrfectly relaxing! I wish all dungeons were like this.” Torte smiled. If every dungeon had a sort of guest house in it, that *would* be awesome.

As I slid my soft scrambled eggs onto my toast and took a bite, I noticed Torte’s backpack leaning against the wall. *It must be a lot of work to carry that everywhere*, I imagined. Since Torte’s job was Helper, she probably had the passive Heavy Lifter Skill activated. But even if she did, the backpack looked terribly cumbersome. “Isn’t it hard carrying that backpack around?” I asked.

“Not with meowy handy Heavy Lifter Skill! But it’s a little annoying that I can’t squeeze through tight spaces. Everything in there is impawtant,” Torte said. Even I could tell with one look that she’d taken great care of that backpack through so many adventures. “It is a Meowgic Bag,” she added.

“Wait, really?!” From how packed to the brim it was, I’d always assumed it was a normal backpack. In hindsight, though, even that backpack could never fit the luggage of four women without magic.

“Meowst people don’t think so, because it’s so big. Your Magic Bag must have a lot of cat-pacity,” Torte said.

“I was lucky to have the chance to get it,” I said. “I can’t live without it now.”

“Must be meowonderful.”

Even though my Bag and Storage features were highly unique in this world, I still enjoyed hearing what Torte had to say on the subject of Magic Bags.

Shortly after Torte and I finished our breakfast, Frey and the twins returned

from looting—I mean, exploring—the manor, carrying some one-use items in their hands.

“No weapons or armor, but we found a few healing items! Let’s cash these out later,” Frey said.

“Isn’t it fun to rummage through other people’s drawers?!”

“Don’t do it outside of dungeons, Lina,” Luna reminded her.

I was fully in Lina’s corner, though. Who didn’t walk into every house to check every drawer and break every jar when playing an RPG?

“I know!” Lina said. “What did you find, Luna?”

“Nothing spectacular, but plenty of Mana Potions. I can’t have too many of these to fuel my spells.”

“Same with me,” Frey said. “I was hoping for something a little more worthwhile.”

The trio handed their items over to Torte.

“I’ll keep them purrfectly safe.”

“Thanks.”

Apparently, the items they’d gathered were going to be split evenly among the party.

Wait a minute. “Do the items I’ve found go into the party’s pool...?” I asked, terrified of the answer.

Frey shook her head. “No. Anything you find during your own time isn’t shared with the party. Right now, during breakfast, we’re acting as a party. When we do, we share anything we find.”

“I see...” Frey’s party seemed to have well-structured rules about the loot they found. Anything found while someone was off the clock was theirs to keep, but anything found while working as a party, even if they weren’t physically together, became shared property. Much to my relief, I could keep everything I’d worked hard to acquire last night.

After that, I waited for them to finish breakfast and we left the dungeon

together. Having a furnished bedroom had definitely made my first overnight crawl more comfortable.

Back at the Adventurer's Guild, Prim spotted me as soon as we walked in. "Sharon?!" Relief flooded her eyes. "You made it back."

"Yes, just now." I added that I wasn't injured, which seemed to quell any worry Prim might have had left.

I chuckled, putting myself in her shoes. I would have been worried too if a novice adventurer—as a mere guide or not—headed into a never-before-completed dungeon before the ink on her registration papers could dry.

Frey wrapped her arm around my shoulder and said, "Sharon helped us get what we were after. I think she should be at a higher rank."

"R-Right!" Prim answered. "I'll bring it to the Guildmaster's attention."

"That would be best," Frey said, discussing ranking me up as if I weren't there—not that I minded that.

"Sharon!" Someone else called my name.

"Oh! Kent! Cocoa!" I turned to find my two party mates I'd had to leave hanging while I guided Frey's party. Even though I'd told them that it wouldn't take too long, they must have not known what to do in the meantime. "Sorry, guys. We'd just formed a party, and I—"

"You went into a dungeon with *the Hero's party*! It's incredible!" Kent's eyes lit up with admiration—the type you'd expect to see in a boy who would do anything to be just like the Hero.

Cocoa nodded in agreement. "We haven't been to a dungeon yet... How was it?!"

"There were set paths crowded with monsters, so there wasn't as much space to escape to, like we have in the field—on a plain or in the woods. It'd be best to grind some levels before going in," I said, explaining the differences.

Kent and Cocoa turned to each other, discussing how they could train and be ready for a dungeon soon. A clear goal would do them good.

“Sharon, are you ready to divvy up our finds?” Frey asked.

“I’ll be right there.” I told my party mates that I’d see them later and followed Frey up the stairs.

She’d booked a meeting room on the second floor where we would sort out how to split the items from the dungeon. Then, they would pay me for my guidance separately.

Frey began. “Lina has the elemental dagger. The other items—”

“Gato them right here.” Torte began whipping items out of her backpack. Most of our loot was drop items from monsters, so Torte only took out notable items and gave us a count of the more common drops. All in all, we had a decent number of drops from the Goblins, Wolves, and Jiggles common in the dungeon, two Jewel Fragments from the Specters that had guarded the gates, as well as the items from the treasure chest: ten HP Potions, three hundred thousand liz in cash, and the mysterious relief fragment.

“We usually have the Guild buy out the drop items, but don’t hesitate to ask if you want any of it. We’ll sort it out,” Frey offered.

“Okay.” I took in the items again. I had no use for the common drops, so having those in cash would help me out too. The Jewel Fragments were useless to me, but the relief fragment caught my attention. This was an item I knew nothing about—except that the treasure chest had lit up when we opened it. Chests sometimes contained garbage items, but the light was an indicator of a rare item. There’d only been four items in that chest: coins, HP Potions, the Steel Dagger (Fire), and the fragment. Lina was very happy with the dagger, but to me that was far from a rare item—just a useful item for beginners—so that couldn’t have been why the chest had lit up. Cash or HP Potions wouldn’t trigger that effect either. Maybe if there had been a gicaliz in there the cash could cause it, but I’d never even heard of a chest containing that much. There was only one conclusion—the fragment was the rare item.

I considered how I could walk away with it. “I certainly don’t need the dagger, and I’m well stocked on potions. You’re already paying me, so…” I started, emphasizing that I was in no way hurting for money. The others were following my line of thought so far. “Could I have that fragment? As a memento of going

into a dungeon with the Hero's party?"

"What?" the four asked in unison. Surprised by my request, they also stared at the fragment in question.

"Hmm... I doubt this piece is worth very much," Frey said, twisting her brows.

"I agree. That won't be fair for Sharon," said Luna.

They won't be happy if I take too little. "Then, you can add on however much cash you think is fair. But the fragment has to be pretty valuable, right? Since it was in a treasure chest..." I offered.

"Actually... Treasure chests often contain useless items," Frey said.

"Really?" *Strange.* Most items found in treasure chests could be used in one way or another. There were Demon Fangs and Prism Marbles that could be used by Blacksmiths to craft weapons or Spices frequently used by Chefs, to name a few examples.

Hearing this, Frey said, "I've seen multicolored glass marbles and some pieces of ore... I found something that looked like monster parts, but none of the Blacksmiths I showed it to knew what to do with it."

The Prism Marble's a great item! I wanted to shout. Once again, I was reminded of how little information was available to people in this world compared to the *Reas* player base. Since everyone's Skills were autoselected, maybe there weren't too many Blacksmiths or Craftsmen who knew what to do with rarer items. *What a shame.* "I didn't know that," I said.

We easily settled on our shares after that. In addition to the relief fragment, they would pay me the fee we'd agreed on beforehand, plus an amount equal to each person's share of items. As for the herbs taken from the garden, I politely declined to take any share of their harvest—Torte's sister might need more of them than expected—hoping they would accept me keeping my own share...because I'd used a good chunk of it to craft Reset Skill Potions.

"Thank you," I said.

"We owe *you* thanks," said Frey. "You were an amazing help to us."

"That's right. Thank you very meowch!"

“Scouting was really easy, thanks to your Regeneration,” Lina said.

“We had a lot of fun,” Luna added.

They were all smiling at me, making me very glad that I’d been able to help. “Please. You helped me so much in the dungeon.”

Then, Frey handed me my share. As soon as my fingers touched the relief fragment, a window appeared before my eyes. *What the...?* I stood there speechless, staring at the title of the quest that showed on the window.

Ascension of the Holy Maiden (unique job): In remembrance of the ruin, the Holy Maiden wept.

You, who hold the Ancient Memory of the Cathedral, restore peace to this world.

Holy Maiden?

Holy Maiden was a unique job at the pinnacle of support jobs, and it was reserved for only one player. As legend had it, the merciful prayer of the Holy Maiden cured all ailments and created a sacred domain no hostile entities could defile. Up until the last time I’d played *Reas*, no one had figured out how to get the job, despite more than 120,000 users playing the game in Japan alone. This was the last way I’d expected to find out anything about it.

I took in quiet, deep breaths so Frey and the others wouldn’t think something was amiss. Out of the blue it might have been, but I was ecstatic that I’d been presented with the Holy Maiden quest of all things. What would it feel like—I wondered—to look a certain prince who’d called me a mirthless woman in the eye as a Holy Maiden and ask, “Your fiancée is still a mere Healer?” with the smuggest smile I could muster? *Would that be too petty?*

“What’s the matter, Sharon?” Frey asked from the meeting-room doorway. Now that we’d settled our division of loot, they were heading back downstairs.

“What? Oh, nothing,” I said. This would be the end of our temporary party. Although those two short days had flown by, I’d had a lot of fun and they’d helped me out a bunch too. *I’d love to form a party with them again, if we ever*

get a chance to— Then, I remembered. Torte had invited me to come with her to the Cait Sith village. And I was dying to go—I couldn't let us go our separate ways just like that.

So, I followed the Hero's party down the stairs. "What are you going to do now?"

"We need to deliver the herbs we harvested," Frey said, without mentioning where.

"Can't we take Sharon with us?" Torte purred.

"Sharon? I don't mind, but... Are you sure? Your hometown isn't too kind to outsiders, is it?" Frey asked.

Torte's expression dampened, my spirits sinking with it. There would be no warm welcome for me at the Cait Sith village. I recalled the specific quest that had taken me, as a player, to the Cait Sith village before—it involved finding a lost Cait Sith child and bringing her home...only for her mother to accuse the player of kidnapping the youngling. Torte's concerns were warranted if the Cait Sith village remained the same as it had been in the game.

"Torte, I'm honored that you invited me...but if I'm going to cause you any stress, I'll visit some other time." There was no rush for me to go. One thing I wanted Torte to believe, though, was that I *would* be visiting the Cait Sith village and enjoying its splendor, sooner or later.

Torte looked even more dejected at this. "There's a reason I asked you to come with me meow... I have a sister. Her name is Tarte." Then, she went on to tell me about her sister. Tarte had always been sickly, often coming down with fevers that would keep her in bed for days at a time. Once Torte had joined Frey's party, she'd been on the lookout for potions and herbs to help her sister. Just when Tarte's condition had worsened to the point of threatening her life, the party had caught wind of the legendary herb in the Paradise of Erungoa, which had led to our hurried quest. Could the Hero's party be any more wholesome? It certainly tugged on my heartstrings. My family, both Mitsuki's—whom I could never see again—and Charlotte's, was dear to me.

"You knew so meowch about herbs that I thought you could figure out what's wrong with Tarte... I'm sorry. I don't mean to take advantage of you," Torte

said.

“Think of it as me repaying you for those delicious meals. I’d be happy to help as much as I can,” I said. “But I’m not a doctor, so I don’t think I could diagnose her or anything...”

“Any help would be great. Thank you so meowch.” Torte smiled, drawing one from my lips too.

For my benefit, they set aside three hours to get ready and meet at the city’s south gate. I’d have to report my completed quest and shop for supplies I’d need for my next journey. There was a lot to do.

I walked down to the first floor and found Kent and Cocoa reading the quest board. When I called out to them, they smiled and waved back. I explained my plan to rejoin the Hero’s party in three hours’ time.

“Wait, I thought you were just going to show them through that dungeon!” Kent said in surprise—never had he expected me to join the Hero’s party on another adventure.

“But isn’t that incredible? She’s a part of the Hero’s party,” Cocoa said.

“Yeah, of course, but—”

“No, no, no...” I quickly denied. I was only going with them to see Torte’s sister and definitely not joining the Hero’s party in any permanent fashion. “This shouldn’t take too long either. I’ll be back soon.”

“I get it now! For a minute there, I thought you were going to be some sort of legend and never give us a second thought!” Kent said, blowing out a breath in relief.

Frey and the others had been very down-to-earth with me, but it was clear that most people didn’t see them that way, possibly because there weren’t too many adventurers at their level. The majority of the adventurers in the Guild were wearing novice or mid-tier equipment at best. Considering how the Paradise of Erungoa hadn’t been conquered before, it seemed like many of the dungeons remained unknown to the adventurer community. While I savored the splendor of this world, I could look into that discrepancy.

Cocoa timidly asked, “When you come back, will you form a party with us again?”

“Of course. There are a lot of places I want to go to, so I don’t think I can form a Permanent Party,” I said a little guiltily. “After Prim introduced us and everything... I’m sorry.”

“Nothing you have to be sorry about,” Kent said. “You shouldn’t decide on a Permanent Party until you go on a lot of quests together anyway. Prioritizing your own goals is the right call.”

“I’ve never heard Kent speak so much sense before...!” Cocoa said, and her surprise was mirrored in me. Kent didn’t seem so much like a little boy anymore.

“I’ve been learning all sorts of things! I’m going to show my parents I can hack it as an adventurer!”

“You *were* talking to a bunch of them here,” Cocoa said and told me how Kent had gone around asking seasoned adventurers for tricks of the trade or what had made them decide to form a party together. From the way he talked about it, Kent was motivated to become a better adventurer, not just to prove his parents wrong but to protect Cocoa, who’d followed him here. *Way to go, Kent!*

In the end, I was thankful they were willing to form a party with me again. I might’ve grown after defeating the Ghost of Erungoa, but many adventurers wouldn’t team up with a level 17. I didn’t know what level Frey and the others were, but there was enough of a difference between mine and theirs that we hadn’t been able to split EXP.

“Are you two taking any quests?” I asked, the quest board catching my eye.

Kent held up the one he’d picked out—a harvesting quest. “We want to build a solid foundation first. Mixing up Medicinal Herbs and Poisonous Weeds isn’t even funny. Flower Bunnies are bound to pop up, so I’ll train myself by taking them out.”

“Then I won’t keep you,” I said. “I’ll stop by the Guild when I get back. If you’re not here, I’ll leave a message with Prim. Good luck!”

“See ya!” Kent answered.

“Stay safe, Sharon!” Cocoa added.

I watched them head to the counter and I turned to leave—when I spotted the quest on the corner of the board asking for the Jewel of Lament. Despite the astronomical three-million-liz reward, no one had gotten their hands on the mysterious item...until the Ghost of Erungoa had dropped it when I defeated it. When I’d first seen the quest, I had felt like I recognized it but hadn’t been able to place my finger on where the item had been available in the game. Then, after everything in the Paradise of Erungoa, I’d forgotten about the quest until now.

What should I do? The paper in my hand showed its age. Surely, whoever wanted the Jewel of Lament this badly wanted it ASAP. “But I only have three hours...” I muttered. On top of packing for my trip to the Cait Sith village, I wanted to stop by Flaudia Cathedral to look for clues about the Holy Maiden quest—I didn’t have enough time. It’d be easy if all I had to do was hand over the jewel and take the reward, but I didn’t want to waste time answering questions. *Okay. I’ll turn it in after I come back from the Cait Sith village,* I told myself.

I turned my back to the quest board, only to find Prim standing there. “Sharon... Don’t tell me you found it.”

“Uh...” I hesitated. My Cait Sith adventure and the Holy Maiden quest were way more important to me than becoming a millionaire right now.

“Well, for now I’ll process the guide quest you did for Frey,” she said.

“Oh, of course,” I answered, remembering how Frey had recommended that the Guild raise my rank. A higher rank meant the Guild would trust me with more difficult quests, and I’d have a better chance of obtaining permissions to enter forbidden areas.

“Let me show you to the third floor.” Prim took me right past the counter where I’d thought I’d get this report over with. In hindsight, it was only natural for her to show me to a separate room—I’d guided the Hero’s party through a previously unconquered dungeon. The only rooms on the third floor, though, were the Guildmaster’s office and parlor.

Finishing Quests and Ranking Up

I was shown to the parlor on the third floor of the Guild branch, where a man awaited me.

“Welcome. I’m Reuven, the Guildmaster.”

“I’m Sharon...an adventurer. Nice to meet you.”

Even though I’d expected to owe someone an explanation, I was surprised to come face-to-face with the Guildmaster himself.

Reuven, the Guildmaster of the Zille branch, was quite the silver fox. He seemed about fifty, with shining gray hair. A scar marked him from his cheek down to his neck, which he didn’t try to hide. His bulky, muscled frame showed that he kept up with his training, though the amusement in his blue eyes kept him from being too imposing, especially in his relatively casual dress with a black cape slung over his left shoulder.

As I took the seat Reuven offered, Prim began to pour tea for us.

“I appreciate your time, especially when you have little of it today. Frey’s told me a little bit about what happened in that dungeon,” Reuven said.

“I see.” She must have done so while I was speaking with Kent and Cocoa.

Frey had also shared with him information on the monsters and traps in the dungeon and promised to return for more detailed descriptions of the dungeon’s structure. Reuven had called me up to ask how I’d known my way around the Paradise of Erungoa so well. He must have been baffled that a rookie adventurer had intel on the dungeon still unknown to the Guild—and didn’t even try to keep it to herself.

What should I say? I thought for a moment before saying, “Someone passed the information along to me.” It wasn’t a lie, since I wasn’t the one who’d personally solved that puzzle in *Reas*.

“Who?” Reuven asked, his gaze sharpened with curiosity.

Who? I don't remember their username. I gave him a little smile and shook my head. "They wouldn't want me sharing their name, I think. I'm not required to divulge any information, am I?" When I'd registered as an adventurer, I'd gone over the fine print. The last thing I wanted was to be tied down by some contract with a Guild when I'd gone through the trouble of having my engagement broken and being exiled from my country to gain my freedom. If there was an emergency, I wouldn't mind helping the Guild in any way I could, though.

The Guildmaster scratched his head and blew out a breath. "You're not going to make it easy, are you?"

"Reuven!" Prim chastised him.

Reuven only laughed, then changed the subject. "About your rank..."

Although I was relieved that he wasn't going to try and pry information out of me, I'd be keeping my guard up around this guy. Currently, my Guild rank was the lowest possible, F. A player normally ranked up to E after five or ten quests. Even though I'd only completed a few quests so far, Reuven might have been willing to make an exception and rank me up sooner. I could only hope.

Stroking his chin, Reuven contemplated for a while. "Okay," he finally said. "You're now D rank, Sharon."

"What?!" I stared at him wide-eyed. It had never occurred to me that I'd *skip* a rank!

The Guildmaster continued, "You could easily be C rank... No one just *has* intel on a dungeon that has no record of being conquered. If we're talking just reconnaissance skills, you're on par with the B-ranks." He added that he couldn't raise my rank that far when I was only a level 17. Even if he did, I wouldn't be able to keep up with the other B-ranks. "So, I got a deal for you. Tell me what else you know, and I'll bump you to C rank."

"Quid pro quo?" I said. *But what's in it for me?* Reuven was dangling another boost in rank like it was a prize, but my rank would go up naturally as I did more adventurer stuff. Besides, I needed to learn more about this world before relinquishing some of the information I had. I countered Reuven's intense stare with a disarming smile. As a former lady of high society, I'd survived my fair

share of standoffs like this. “Unfortunately, that’s all I know. It’s a shame I won’t walk out as a C-rank today, but I’ll earn it on my own soon enough.”

“All right,” the Guildmaster conceded, seeing that I wouldn’t budge. Finally, the business of my guiding quest was settled. My relief was short-lived, though—Prim produced the sun-aged quest paper.

Reuven took it, glancing between the paper and me. “As for the Jewel of Lament... Do you have it? The bishop recently sent word from the cathedral inquiring whether anyone had made progress on it—”

“Yes. I’ll turn it in,” I said immediately, my change in tune surprising both Reuven and Prim. Now that I knew it was the bishop who had issued that quest, I wasn’t going to hold off on my chance to make a good first impression—I’d been planning to stop by the cathedral for the Holy Maiden quest anyway.

“A-All right... That’s great to hear, but where did you find it?” Reuven asked.

“Somewhere in the Paradise of Erungoa,” I hedged. “That’s all I’ll say.”

“I see. Even that intel alone helps the Guild. I appreciate it.”

“Of course,” I said, relieved again that Reuven wasn’t pressing for answers. “I don’t have too much time until I need to meet up with Frey and her party, but I’m a Healer, so I would love to meet the bishop. I was going to the cathedral after this to offer a prayer anyway...”

“Do you want to deliver it to the bishop yourself, then?” the Guildmaster suggested, as I’d hoped. “We’d be happy to do it for you, if you’d rather not.”

I quickly agreed to deliver the Jewel of Lament personally. It would have been ideal if I could sit down with the bishop and enjoy a conversation or two, but an introduction alone was a great opportunity. Without the Guild setting up a meeting for us, it would have been tricky for me to meet the bishop at all.

Not much time had passed since my last visit to Flaudia Cathedral, but my crawl through the Paradise of Erungoa had been so eventful that it felt like coming home after a week abroad. Just like last time, I stood before the cathedral and admired its beauty. A pair of visitors walked by as I gazed up at it.

“I’ve been praying in the cathedral every day, but I still haven’t seen it.”

“I’m sorry. No description of that miracle could do it justice...”

What are they talking about? I continued eavesdropping.

“If she ever returns, we’ll recognize her right away in her hood with cat ears.”

“Right...”

My heart skipped a beat. *I* was the star of their gossip. Apparently, the sight of me switching jobs had been majestic enough that people were frequenting the cathedral in hopes of seeing it again. I hesitated to enter the cathedral after that, but I reassured myself that I wouldn’t be recognized without the Cat Cape. Still, I made sure to keep my head down and walk into the cathedral as inconspicuously as possible.

“Hopefully, I’ll find a clue to progress the Holy Maiden quest,” I muttered, walking down the hallway with the relief fragment—Ancient Memory of the Cathedral—in hand. The only lead I had to go on was that it had the word “cathedral” in its name.

Maybe it will react to something in here, I hoped. Back in the game, you could walk around the cathedral as you pleased. Now, wandering into an area roped off for the clergy would get me kicked out. “My best bet might be the statue of Flaudia,” I muttered—the same one that had spoken to me when I became a Healer. Somehow, the statue provided a connection to the goddess herself.

Soon, I arrived at the Prayer Room where the statue stood, but nothing happened to the fragment. I even tried touching the statue...and zilch. *I guess I’m off the mark,* I thought. With my appointment with Frey’s party fast approaching, I had to turn in the Jewel of Lament and be on my way—a priest or priestess by the entrance would take me to the bishop. I turned around to leave the Prayer Room and found someone standing right there.

“Offering a prayer?” asked the same priest who’d glared at me the last time. He had black hair that reminded me of being back in Japan, but his amethyst eyes were unsettling—like they saw right through me.

The last person I wanted to see! With a forced smile, I affirmed it. “Yes, I just finished. Please excuse me.”

“Is that so...? May Flaudia bless you.”

“Thank you.” I curtsied elegantly, pinching up the hem of my robe, and left the Prayer Room and the unsettling priest behind.

So why is he sitting right there? I thought to myself a few minutes later. After walking out of the Prayer Room, I’d gone to the front of the cathedral and told the priestess there that I was here to complete a quest. She’d shown me to this room, where she’d said the bishop would meet me—and there sat the priest with amethyst eyes.

Once the priestess set refreshments on the table and retired from the room, he introduced himself. “My name is Leroy. Thank you for taking on this quest.”

“Sharon, adventurer,” I said simply.

“May I?” Leroy urged, gesturing with his hand.

I obliged, wanting to get this over with, and placed the Jewel of Lament on the coffee table between us. I’d already removed it from my Storage in preparation. The spherical jewel the size of a baseball was faintly glowing—it would make for a pretty decoration on any desk.

Something flickered in Leroy’s eyes before he reached for it. “So this is it... How mesmerizing,” he said. After taking in the jewel for some time, he finally said, “Thank you for delivering it.”

Just like that, I’d officially turned in the quest item. All that was left to do was to report my delivery to the Guild, but I could do that at a later date. “I’ll be on my way then—” I quickly turned my back to leave.

“You’re not wearing cat ears today,” Leroy said.



That hit me like a blow. It was no surprise he recognized me, though, considering he'd gotten a good look at me when he showed me to the Prayer Room the first time. "I just updated my gear, now that I'm a higher level," I said. "I am a Healer, after all." Dexterity was less important now. I'd be healing my friends left and right from here on out!

"When I first saw you, I never would have expected you to serve Flaudia. Much to my amazement, not only were you really a Healer, but your prayer drew forth that blessed light. If you have the time, I would love to speak to you further," Leroy said.

"I'd love to, but I'm meeting up with someone to leave the city right after this." Now that I'd met with the Guildmaster and arrived here, I had less than an hour left until I was due to meet Frey—not that I'd want to stay and talk to Leroy, even if I had the time.

"I see... Then I will not attempt to persuade you to stay. I look forward to seeing you again."

"If the opportunity arises," I said by way of excusing myself and hurried out of the room, declining Leroy's offer to walk me out. I had to get away from his gaze as quickly as possible.

What's with that guy?! I wondered. The look Leroy had kept giving me definitely wasn't friendly. *But was it malicious?* I couldn't be sure. Although his eyes had pierced like daggers, it hadn't felt like he'd wanted to harm me or anything. It was just creepy that I couldn't tell what he was thinking.

After turning a corner in the hall, I eased my pace and let out a breath. Feeling tension leave my body, I reached for the fragment in my pocket. *Too bad I didn't find out anything more about this,* I thought, just as I saw that the fragment in my hand was glowing. "What?!" I blurted, then clapped my hand over my mouth—the few priestesses in the hall had given me a disapproving look for raising my voice in the temple.

Calm down. Deep breaths, I told myself, then read the new information from the Ancient Memory of the Cathedral.

Ascension of the Holy Maiden (unique job): It is not the Holy Maiden alone who mourns the ruin.

Offer counsel to the Lamenter of Young Hope for assistance in seeking the first step toward resolution.

“When did it start glowing? I didn’t even realize...” I wasn’t sure whether to be disappointed that I hadn’t seen what triggered the change or to be relieved that it hadn’t started glowing in Leroy’s presence.

Once I read the new information, the fragment stopped glowing. The next step in the quest was to help a particular person. “Whoever this Lamenter of Young Hope is, I had to have gotten close to them for the quest to progress,” I figured. The fragment hadn’t been lit up when I’d checked it by Flaudia’s statue, which meant that I’d met the Lamenter after that.

As the realization hit, I bit back a groan. Obviously, it had to be Leroy. There was a nonzero chance it was someone else I’d passed in the halls, but I doubted some generic NPC would play such a vital role in the quest for a unique job. Not only was Leroy the bishop, he had the presence of an important quest NPC. My gut was telling me that he was the one.

Maybe his invitation to stay and talk was a setup for the next step of the quest, I thought. After returning from the Cait Sith village, I’d have to see Leroy again. With that thought weighing on my shoulders, I left the cathedral.

Hurry Up and Pack

I could hardly believe that it had been less than a week since Prince Ignacia had broken our engagement. So much had happened, despite my initial plan to take the scenic routes and enjoy the sights of this world at my leisure. Still, I couldn't deny that I was having much more fun than I ever had before.

"I need to hurry up and pack!" I reminded myself. There was little time left after the unexpected meetings at the Adventurer's Guild and Flaudia Cathedral.

"Hi!" I called a greeting as I threw open the door to the inn.

The middle-aged woman behind the counter returned, "Welcome back. You were at that job that popped up, right? Did you eat already?"

"Actually, now I'm leaving the city right away... I'm sorry but I need to cancel my room. Here's the key," I said.

"Oh, you're keeping busy," said the woman, who was the innkeeper of Crescent Inn, which had been serving as my base of operations. The friendly and down-to-earth innkeeper always took great care of me. At a reasonable price of three thousand liz for a night's stay—with breakfast included—Crescent Inn was a popular lodging for adventurers.

"I know!" the innkeeper exclaimed as soon as she took my key. "Wait here."

"What?"

She went to the room next to the reception, the dining room, and came right back with a basket smelling of fresh-baked bread.

Sandwiches! The appetizing aroma had my stomach growling loudly, as if on cue. "Uh..." *How could I have let this happen?!* I berated myself, my hand covering my face, embarrassment doubling me over.

The innkeeper was completely unbothered as she burst out laughing. "You stayed out last night, though you paid me for a room and a meal. Why don't you take your meal on the road?"

“Thank you!” I’d only gotten a few chances to eat her delicious cooking, so I was grateful for a chance to eat more of it. Stowing the bread basket in my Bag, I turned back to the innkeeper. “And thank you for being so good to me, even just for a few days. Once things settle down, I will be back,” I promised.

“I’m looking forward to it. Stay safe.”

“I will!” I said and left the inn.

After paying off the inn, I needed to stock up on items—and stock up I would. Time didn’t flow inside my Magic Bag and Storage, so there was no worry of anything spoiling. *Especially since I can afford it now.*

I made my way to the item shop near the central plaza and walked through its door. “Hello!”

“Welco— Oh, it’s you. The girl who bought armfuls of Jiggly Jellies,” the shopkeeper said by way of greeting. *What a weird thing to be remembered for.*

“Thank you for that,” I said, quickly scanning the various products lining the shelves of the shop, which was the size of a large bedroom. “Um... I want a lot of Firestarters, of course. Oh, you have Fairy Jugs too! Definitely some healing items... Oh, I need to get some Memory of Stardust!”

All of them were solid choices. Fairy Jugs that purified water could come in very handy later. These were a luxury I couldn’t afford to buy or carry around before I’d gotten myself a Magic Bag and a lot of extra coins in my pocket, but I could buy as many as the shop had today. Memory of Stardust was the one-use version of the Memory of Stars that Prim used in the Guild—a simple monocle that would allow me to see a target’s level (as long as it was 50 or lower) and job. Back in the game, there really hadn’t been any realistic restrictions on how many items a shop could provide, so I had to remind myself that this very real item shop didn’t have an infinite stock of everything in the back.

How many could I buy without him doubting my intentions? I wondered. I’d thought three hundred Jiggly Jellies was a tame number, but here I was, instantly recognized by the shopkeeper. Buying fewer this time seemed prudent. *Would a hundred still be too many?*

“What are you looking for?” the shopkeeper asked, reading my indecision.

With how little time I had, I felt like I should accept his help.

“I’m about to leave town for a while, and I wanted to stock up on some items...” I explained.

“Oh, I see. Are these what you want?” he asked, indicating the series of items I’d picked out. “Three Firestarters should be— That’s right. You have a Magic Bag. Want to pick up some extras?” I confirmed that I wanted to take as many of them with me as I could. “Then you could take ten or twenty each, easy. Do you need a Farseer?”

“Yes!” I immediately said. Farseers were glasses that worked like binoculars—very convenient for scanning the distance while keeping both hands free. That would let me enjoy the views of this world even more!

“For healing...” the shopkeeper continued, “I’ve got HP Potions and Mana Potions, as well as Star Potions and Star Mana Potions that are more effective... There’re also Antidote Potions.”

“I’ll take some of all five,” I said. Just as Star Potions were more potent than regular HP Potions, Moon Potions were more effective than Star Potions, and Sun Potions even more so than Moon Potions. Considering how many levels I was about to gain, it was about time I upgraded my primary stock to Star Potions.

“Here you go,” the shopkeeper said, placing my newly purchased wares in tall stacks on the counter—it was spectacular.

I’d bought twenty each of the five different potions, Farseers, Fairy Jugs, and Firestarters. I’d asked for the shop’s entire stock of Memory of Stardust, which came out to fifty. Last of all, I’d requested one hundred Empty Potion Bottles and some extra rations and water for the road.

“Maybe I should have asked before you paid, but are you sure that’s all going to fit?” the shopkeeper asked.

“No problem.” I stowed all of it in my Storage, which had so much capacity that I could have bought out the whole store several times over. A large inventory was truly OP. I couldn’t live without my bracelet anymore.

“That’s one heck of a bag. To think it holds all that and more... Come back and

shop here anytime,” he said with a grin.

“Thanks for your help!” I said and left the shop to find that I only had five minutes until I was due at the south gate. “Oh no... I lost track of time!” Even if I ran at top speed, I wouldn’t make it there in time. In my panic, I suddenly remembered the solution. “Right. The Transportation Gates.” The central plaza and its Gate were just down the road—the shortcut would get me there in time. Still, I’d be cutting it close.

“Run, run, run!” I pushed myself, sprinting to the Gate in the plaza. As I started panting to regain my breath, I could smell the violently delicious aroma of the food stalls lining the bustling plaza. “Ahh, that smells so good!” My taste buds would have to be disappointed, though—I had no time to stop at any of the stalls.

I stood before the Gate and announced my destination, as required to activate it. “Destination—the Holy Capital of Zille, South Gate!” Then, I stepped through the arches. Even though I could only see the other half of the plaza on the Gate’s other side, once I stepped through it, my vision blurred and rippled like I was walking through a vertical water surface—and I was suddenly standing by the southern entrance to the city. “Wow...!” This was my first time using a Gate since my reincarnation, and it was even more convenient than it had been as a game mechanic. I’d have to remember to register every Gate I came across.

“Oh, it’s almost time!” I realized, going into a full-fledged sprint despite saving time with the Transportation Gate.

Power of the Cait Sith

“I’m sorry...I kept you...waiting...!” I wheezed, having sprinted up to Frey, Luna, Lina, and Torte, who were all waiting by the southern gate, ready to depart.

Frey chuckled. “Don’t be. You even had a meeting with the Guildmaster. I wish we could rest today and leave tomorrow, but—”

“I know we need to see Torte’s sister as soon as we can. I’ll be fine in a minute,” I said. We had to deliver the Paradise Dew we’d harvested from Erungoa’s Herb Garden to Torte’s sick sister.

“Thank mew,” Torte trilled with a smile.

Then, Frey outlined the journey for me. “We’ll head south and spend a night in the Farming Village, then catch a ship to Torte’s village from a port farther south. If we’re delayed on the way, we’ll stay at the Port Town of Tordente for the night and take the first ship the following morning.”

“Got it,” I said.

The Cait Sith village is on an island, I realized. Recalling the world map of *Reas*, south from here lay a location called Secret Port. So many players had combed through that area but none had discovered what the port’s secret was. I’d never expected it to give passage to the Cait Sith village.

After that quick briefing, we left the city through the southern gates, entering the area called Holy Capital Entrance where you could encounter weak monsters like Jiggies and Flower Bunnies. I was expecting us to keep walking due south, but Frey led us a little ways west until we came to a stable.

The stable stood amid spacious paddocks that comfortably hosted all sorts of horses, from a sparkly white one that looked like it belonged to Prince Charming, to a stout dark Clydesdale that could easily carry three grown men on its back.

“Can you ride, Sharon?” Frey asked.

“Um...” I wasn’t sure. In *Reas*, I’d often ridden on horseback, but as Charlotte, I’d only ever ridden in a carriage. Nervous sweat trickled down my back. “I hope so...?”

“Then you’re riding with me,” Frey decided. There was no time to waste by taking a chance on my untested riding abilities.

“That would be great,” I said, gratefully accepting her offer.

One of the several modes of transportation in this world was to ride on the back of a creature. A horse was the most accessible option, especially because they could be rented outside cities and villages like this. Some adventurers could summon their own mounts, which included all sorts of animals. Some even rode a monster, like a Pegasus or a Thunderbird. Thanks to magical bonds formed by contracts with their riders, these mounts were perfectly tame.

Once Frey had decided on our riding arrangement, Torte went into the stable to rent our horses. Frey and I would ride one, Luna and Torte another, and Lina would ride on her own to remain agile.

I rode behind Frey on a stocky dark horse that had an appraising glare. Despite the sharp look in its eye, it carried both of us on its back like we weighed nothing, which made me feel secure. Getting my hands on summoning items had been on my to-do list, but it seemed learning to ride on horseback would have to come first.

We rode for the rest of the day, enjoying the refreshing wind on our faces. After several hours on horseback and a few breaks, during which I enjoyed the innkeeper’s sandwiches, we arrived at the Farming Village where we’d be spending the night...and heard the ground rumbling.

We all looked at each other in apprehension. The Farming Village had been perfectly peaceful when I’d spent the night on my way to Zille. In particular, I remembered seeing vast herds of farm animals in the large ranches that supported the village’s export of meat and eggs. Now, the pastures were empty and the cows were nowhere to be seen.

“The fence is broken!” I realized.

“There’s been a bovine breakout.” Frey pointed toward the distance, where a herd of cows thundered across the plain, unbound by any fencing.

That explains the rumbling...but there’s nothing we can do about that. We dismounted by the stable at the village’s entrance, planning to have them keep our horses, only to find no one manning it.

“Everyone’s chasing after the cows,” Lina said from atop a tree.

“You can see from there?” I asked.

“Just about.” Lina squinted at the dust cloud in the distance, where the cows were running wild.

“We won’t be able to check into our inn,” Luna said.

“Meowhat are we going to do?” Torte went to tie our horses to the tree Lina was in while Luna took a seat on a bench nearby.

“We have an early morning. Let’s help them,” Frey suggested.

“Help them...wrangle those cows?” I asked, wondering how. *Do most people in this world know their way around livestock, somehow?*

“Torte!” Frey called, interrupting my pondering.

“You can count on meow!” Torte set her backpack down and turned to Luna. “Keep an eye on this fur me, please.”

“Come along with Lina,” Frey told me. “There could be injuries.”

“G-Got it!” I answered.

“Okey dokey,” Lina said.

Watching Frey and Torte run toward the thundering dust cloud, I asked Lina, “How are they going to corral those cows?”

“What? I don’t know,” Lina said.

“What...?” I looked to Luna for an answer, but she shook her head. Apparently, no one knew how Frey was going to contain the livestock.

Let’s see what she does, I thought, using a Farseer to watch Frey and Torte. “I hope they’ll be okay...” Frey stood in the path of the stampede and raised her

sword. *Wait—she raised her sword?! I thought she was going to herd the cows without killing them.* If Frey were to use that sword, the entire herd would be turned into cuts of steak.

“Luna! Lina! This is bad!” I said frantically.

Luna gasped. “Did she take Torte with her to cook the beef on the spot?!”

“What?!” Lina and I cried in unison, our faces gone equally pale.

“Sharon, let’s catch up to Frey!” Lina suggested.

“Got it!” Just as we were about to sprint over to her, Frey swung her sword toward the oncoming cows, though there was too much distance between her and the front of the herd. Her blade wouldn’t make contact, not by a long shot—which showed me Frey’s intention. The powerful gust of wind from Frey’s swing knocked over cow after charging cow.

This isn’t the picturesque Farming Village I remember, I thought. A handsome girl like Frey holding her sword in a fighting stance amid the rolling plains of rustling grass *was* picturesque, but the hundred-plus cows knocked out around her were nothing short of a horror movie scene.

“Frey! Are you all right?” I asked, as Lina and I caught up to Frey and Torte.

“Of course,” the Hero said.

Villagers had gathered around her, thanking Frey for stopping the stampede. According to them, butchering the cows while they had the chance was preferable to having them charge through the village and cause some serious damage.

“Can you heal the cows, Sharon?” Frey asked. “If you get short on mana, I have some potions.”

“Heal...cows? I’ve never tried it before...but I’ll see what I can do,” I said. Frey knocking down the cows like bowling pins had startled me at first, but apparently she had counted on me healing them afterward... *I almost called her a meathead in my mind—I’m retracting that.*

The villagers swarmed me this time, buzzing with words of thanks and

anticipation.

“You’re going to heal them...?!”

“We won’t lose the cows! That’s great!”

“Thank you, miss!”

“I’ve never done this before,” I emphasized. “So there’s no telling whether they’ll be okay! Just a minute...” I was really feeling the pressure of the crowd’s expectations. I wanted to help the cows of my own volition too, of course, but I’d never cast any of my Skills on a cow before.

They’ll be okay, I told myself. I can do this...probably. My heart is beating so fast.

I took deep breaths to slow it. Using Heal on every cow individually would be an ordeal, so I’d cast an AOE Skill. When I’d leveled up from defeating the Ghost of Erungoa, I’d acquired just the Skill for this. I raised my Staff of Bloom high, concentrating on widening the area as much as possible.

Please help the cows recover. “Wide Heal.” When I cast my Skill, a faint light shot up from the tip of my wand and began to rain down on the area I’d selected. Shimmers of light enveloped the cows, healing any injuries they had sustained.



“Wow... You healed my wound.”

“Me too! I hit my knee yesterday, and it’s not hurting anymore!”

The villagers were cheering. Apparently, the AOE Skill had healed the humans along with the cows.

“Even the Cleric couldn’t heal my wound, and now I don’t even have a scar!” a villager said.

“What?! Her healing’s better than a Cleric’s?” another chimed in.

The villagers were starting to talk *a lot* about me and my Skill. I took a step back from the crowd and saw the cows beginning to rise—it had worked.

“Thanks, Sharon. I didn’t expect you to cast Wide Heal,” Frey said.

“That was incredible! You certainly make up for your lack of level with how well you use your Skill,” Lina said.

I only chuckled, not wanting to get into why my magic was so effective. With how many buffs I was getting from my equipment, I could probably outheal most Clerics in this world, who didn’t have the game knowledge of *Reas*. “Won’t the cows run away again?” I asked. All the cows were still outside the broken fence.

“Leave it to meow!” Torte trotted over to one of the cows, petted its head, and loudly meowed. The cow mooed in response. “Hm... Gato it. You started running beclawse you were in pain, and the others followed you. You’re okay meow—Sharon healed you! The sun is setting soon, so you should all go home.” Torte wove through the herd of cows, saying, “It’s time to go to bed! It’s time to get some rest!”

Mooing to each other, the cows began stomping their way back to the pasture, with no hint of aggression in them. Apparently, Wide Heal had taken care of whatever injury had caused the cow to run away in the first place.

“Torte can talk to cows?” I muttered.

“It’s a special ability of the Cait Sith,” Frey answered. “Not all Cait Sith can communicate with animals, though. No one knows why some can and others can’t.”

“So, basically, Torte’s awesome,” I said.

“Exactly.”

The ability of some Cait Sith to speak to animals had never been discovered during my time playing *Reas*. Was it a species-specific Skill? Or a certain Title Torte and other Cait Sith had earned? I couldn’t wait to find out more about this, adding yet another thing to look forward to in the Cait Sith village.

Once all the cows had safely returned to their pasture, the whole village threw a welcoming party for us. They were going to fix the fence during the night. Even after running around chasing cows through the whole village, everyone was still surprisingly energized! In a Farming Village, I supposed most people were used to manual labor.

Now, a huge bonfire blazed in a field, encircled by villagers engaged in a traditional dance. From when I’d seen it back in *Reas*, I remembered that it was some sort of ritual to wish for the health and longevity of their livestock.

I took a bite from the beef skewer in my hand, moaning at how tasty it was—I could put away dozens of these, easy. “I almost want to pack them away in my Magic Bag.” The ability to keep hot food in there was a subtle game changer. I’d been in too much of a rush when we’d left Zille, but I hoped to pack some hot soup or something the next time I had a chance.

“How do you like it?” a woman asked.

Hurrying to chew and swallow the bite, I answered, “It’s delicious!”

“Sorry,” the woman said, handing me some fruit-infused water.

“Mm. This is so good too. Thank you, uh…” *Who am I talking to?*

With a chuckle, the woman introduced herself. “I didn’t mean to startle you. My name is Lulua.”

“No, that’s okay. I’m Sharon.”

Her name had a familiar ring to it, I thought, observing the gentle-mannered woman who had her long dark-brown hair bound in a tail starting at her waist. I was pretty sure I hadn’t met her before, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that I

had. *Maybe I saw her when I spent the night here before?*

“You’re an adventurer, aren’t you?” Lulua asked.

“I am. Unlike the others, I’m still new at it... We traveled here from Zille.”

“From Zille... Do you know Cocoa and Kent? They’re both adventurers about your age. That’s what I wanted to ask you, actually,” said Lulua.

She looks like Cocoa! I realized. That explained why she looked familiar. “I do,” I said and watched Lulua’s face light up. Cocoa and Kent had said that they’d practically run away from home to become adventurers—Lulua must have been worried about them. “I formed a party with them. Cocoa and Kent plan carefully before they hunt, and they have a solid foundation in basic skills. They’re working hard at it.”

“You formed a party with Cocoa? Well, I sure am glad I decided to talk to you. I hardly expected you to have even heard of them. She writes me regularly, but I know adventuring comes with the risk of injury...or worse,” Lulua said. She also explained that the peaceful Farming Village saw fewer kids grow up to be adventurers than other places because they always needed extra farmhands, and each farm was usually inherited from generation to generation. In other words, most kids grew up helping out on the farm.

I grinned, relieved that Cocoa at least was corresponding with her family. Those letters must have been reassuring to her parents. *Yet here I am, not having written a word to my own parents.* Shaking off that thought, I decided to tell Lulua about the quest I’d gone on with Cocoa and Kent. “We hunted Wolves and picked Medicinal Herbs. Cocoa’s fire magic was a powerful weapon that came in really handy when taking down Wolves! She was a master at finding and harvesting Medicinal Herbs too. I learned valuable techniques from her.”

“Cocoa fought Wolves?! I can’t believe it...” Lulua said, amazed by the news. I decided this wasn’t the time to mention Kent picking Poisonous Weeds instead of Medicinal Herbs. “Was she hurt at all?”

“We all had potions, and I healed them as we went. Injury is part of the job for adventurers but they know how to prepare themselves for it,” I said.

“Okay... That’s the best I could hope for, I suppose.” Lulua gave me a smile,

although she still looked a little concerned. “Oh! Do you mind if I call over Molly, Kent’s mother? She’s been huffing and puffing over him not writing her once since leaving.”

“Um...” I hesitated. Just from Lulua’s description, I quickly imagined Kent’s mother—a fast-talking woman who had to have a hundred questions about her son. What kind of person would I have to be to deny her that? I wanted to oblige her as much as possible, although I didn’t want to stay up for hours when I had an early morning tomorrow. “There isn’t too much I could tell her, but I’d be happy to share what I know.”

“Thank you, Sharon!” She turned. “Molly! Molly, come here now! Sharon here knows Kent!”

“What?!” A portly woman zoomed over. This was someone who could talk unassisted for hours—I was sure of that.

Once Molly joined us, I started over the story of our quest together. They even offered me drinks later on, but I had to excuse myself after a while to get some rest—we would be leaving on horseback bright and early.

Casting Off!

After spending the night in the Farming Village, we left for the Secret Port. We only needed to continue south on the highway, make a short turn westward, then keep south again. With how fast we were urging our horses, it would only take us a few hours.

“I love feeling the wind!” I cheered, holding on to Frey’s waist.

“You should learn to ride, Sharon,” Frey said.

“I will, once I’m back in Zille. Being able to ride a horse makes a world of difference. I can’t wait to ride my own horse and see all sorts of sights!”

“Great idea!”

Just the thought of roaming these fields on horseback, and eventually soaring through the skies on the back of an avian monster I could summon, got me excited for my future here.

A few hours later, I was still humming along and enjoying the view when Frey announced that we were close to our destination. A town stood to the right of us in the distance and a small dock on the water straight ahead.

“Just in case, can you scope it out for us, Lina?” Frey asked.

“Got it!” Lina answered and sped off.

Before we could catch up to her, Lina had turned back and met us head-on, having scouted ahead with the efficiency I’d come to expect from the spearhead of the Hero’s party. The look on her face signaled trouble ahead, even though I didn’t recall any dangerous monsters that roamed this area. The strongest one was a miniboss called Mother Duckgoose, but even that monster could be one-shotted by a decent Skill back in the game.

“How does it look, Lina?” Frey asked.

“Bad timing. There’s a Mother Duckgoose right nearby,” Lina said.

Another difference between Reas and this world. Apparently, the Mother

Duckgoose was a considerable threat in this world. An encounter with one could be tricky because the ducklings multiplied the longer the battle went on.

“Well... If we’re lucky, we’ll get some Duckgoose meat to bring Tarte,” Frey decided and urged our horse on, followed by the others. The sun was still high in the sky, so we’d have ample light for battle. I buffed our entire party as we rode.

Soon, we spotted the Duckgoose—a monster I couldn’t help but find a little cute with its fluffy white feathers, yellow beak, and curly cowlick. It even had a bow tie and a fancy walking stick. Several ducklings followed the Duckgoose. Some players had theorized they were supposed to be the Duckgoose’s subordinates rather than offspring because the Duckgoose would summon more and more of them and delegate the battling to the little monsters.

We need to end this fast if we don’t want to take on dozens of ducklings!

“Let’s attack now!” I shouted. “Make it count, Frey! Goddess’s Smite!”

“What is that Skill?! I feel power surging through me...!” Frey’s eyes widened like she couldn’t believe her own strength. This Skill was a branch-off that could be acquired after raising Strengthen to level 5. It doubled the power of the next attack—the perfect Skill for setting up an OHKO.

When we reached the Duckgoose, Frey said, “Got it,” and leaped off of our horse.

“What?” I scrambled for the reins, unprepared to be left alone atop a galloping horse—I’d gotten used to cozily riding behind Frey! “No, no, no, no...! Horse! Stop!” *Do I pull on the reins?!* I did exactly that, and the horse reared up, neighing in protest. I yelped, clinging to the reins for dear life. Personally, I thought I deserved a pat on the back for keeping myself from getting thrown off—even if I couldn’t stop the bucking horse.

As tears welled in my eyes, Frey returned to me. “Thanks for holding on,” she said, elegantly remounting behind me and halting the horse with a precise tug of the reins. I couldn’t lie—it was really cool. “Sorry about that. Are you all right?”

“At least I stayed on,” I laughed, and Frey nodded in approval.

By the time we dismounted, the Duckgoose was gone. Torte was gathering drop items, so the Duckgoose must have been defeated while I was floundering on the horse.

“Purray! Duckgoose meat is a wonderful feast!” Torte purred.

“How exciting,” Frey said.

Torte finished stashing the items in her backpack, looking perfectly pleased. *Duckgoose meat...* Anticipation and guilt clashed in my heart. *Should I try it?*

After a more relaxing ride, the sound of waves washing on a shore began to reach us—and there it was: the ocean stretching over the horizon.

“It’s so pretty!” The seawater here was of crystal clear aquamarine, sparkling with sunlight. Here and there, fish jumped out of the water, making splashes. Bits of coral and seashell were scattered along the white beach, which was inhabited by a variety of crab monsters.

“We’ll return our meownts now,” Torte said.

“Right,” we all confirmed. We dismounted and activated the Guidepost magical items—these would allow the horses to find their way back to their stable, much to the convenience of horse renters like us.

“Thanks, horsey,” I said.

The horse whinnied as if to answer my salutation and galloped off in the direction we had come from.

“Now, we find pawssage to my village,” Torte announced.

Finally, we were sailing to the Cait Sith village! There was no dock to be found, though.

“It’s this meoway.” Torte began walking while I was still trying to spot the Secret Port.

We walked along the beach for about thirty minutes until we came to a sea cave. I remembered the place from *Reas*, and I wasn’t a fan because it was filled with bat and sea-roach monsters. As I recoiled from the cave mouth, trying to bottle up my disgust, Torte walked right past the cave.

There's nothing past this cave, I thought but followed her anyway. A few steps away from the cave mouth, Torte crouched down beside a certain section of the rocks that formed the cave. I curiously peered over her shoulder and saw a cat-paw-shaped indent in the rock. *No wonder no one noticed this before!*

Torte pulled off a glove and matched her paw to the indent. With a deep rumbling, a rock about a meter tall slid aside to reveal a narrow entrance everyone in our party but Torte would have to hunch over to fit into.

“Follow meow,” Torte said, stepping into the tiny opening.

I took a deep breath and turned toward the ocean before following her in. Out in the distant blue-green sea, I discerned the faint silhouette of an island. My heart swelled as I wondered what stunning sights I'd see in the Cait Sith village.

When I stepped into the small cave beyond the opening, I noticed another paw-shaped indent on its inner wall. Once we were all inside, Torte placed her paw on the indent to shut the entrance behind us—this explained why the Cait Sith village remained so well hidden. Combine that with the scarcity of Cait Sith compared to other species, and it was no wonder I'd rarely seen any, even in big cities.

“We need to meowalk for a while.” Torte led the way, which meant there were no monsters in here. She hopped along the rocky path, steadily taking us deeper into the cave, passing cracks in the cave wall here and there that let shafts of sunlight in. It reminded me of the time I'd visited a cavern on Earth—it was kind of fun.

After walking for ten minutes, Torte trilled, “It's right up there,” and trotted ahead. Frey followed her, then Lina, Luna, and me at the rear.

“We'll take a boat,” Frey told me. “You'll love the feel of ocean spray.”

As we stepped forward, the smell of the sea intensified. “Wow! The water's sparkling!” I exclaimed.

Luna chuckled. “Beautiful, isn't it? I was speechless the first time I saw it.”

“Yes, of course! This scenery is a must-include for any coffee-table book!”

Luna tilted her head—my sentence wouldn't have made sense to someone who didn't know what a camera was. One day, though, I'd love to publish something like *Sharon's Most Stunning Views of "Reas."* Back in the game, I could take photos and even videos! If only those features on the Adventure Bracelet weren't disabled...

At the end of the narrow cave awaited a small inlet separated from the outside world by sheer cliffs. The white-sand beach was spotted with larger rocks that served as hiding places for hermit crabs. Healthy patches of seaweed and schools of tiny fish filled the water, and an alcove in one of the walls hid a boat facing the rocky tunnel that would lead us back out to sea.

Torte began tugging the boat, trilling with the effort.

"We'll help!" I said and rushed over to do so.

The boat was barely big enough to fit all five of us, which made me seriously concerned that we were going to capsize.

"I'll use my mana," Luna said and activated a magical item at the stern. Metal reinforcements caged the wooden planks, and a sail marked with a paw-print design fluttered upon the mast. Now it felt like a ship sturdy enough to sail us across. Magical items really were something else.

"Thanks. I'll row us out of here!" Frey said.

"I'll steer from the tail end," Torte volunteered.

Frey grabbed the oars that looked like elongated paws and began rowing with the full might of the Hero's strength.

"We're moving," I blurted as the ship left the sand. The initial bump had almost unseated me, but I regained my posture in no time. We sailed over the waves, out of the inlet, and through the tunnel, until we'd nearly reached the vast, open sea.

"Wait, that's a rare material!" I shouted.

"What?!" Frey responded, following my gaze upward.

Hidden among some vegetation, there were Cat's Eyes on the rocky ceiling. A Cat's Eye could be used in goggles to give the wearer night vision or in boots to

let the wearer jump higher. In short, it gave a physical boost modeled after the abilities of the Cait Sith.

The Cat's Eye had also been a component of the elusive reincarnation system. While *Reas* players could only choose to play as a human initially, their characters could reincarnate as another species if they met certain conditions and held a specific item. Those conditions were so hard to achieve, and the items so rare, that reincarnation was a privilege only a small selection of players had received. In the game, Cat's Eye had been obtainable through a random drop that would occur during a difficult quest regarding the Cait Sith.

"Stop the boat, Torte!" Frey commanded.

"Ships can't pause like that!"

"What?! Then I have no choice...!" As if she couldn't stand to let a rare item out of her sight, Frey jumped from the boat still propelled by the momentum of her rowing.

"Wait—Frey?!" I shouted.

"It's all right," Lina laughed. "She always pulls things like that. Get used to it, or it's going to be exhausting...for you."

Noted. "Well, uh... Strengthen!"

Frey roared in exhilaration. "I feel so light!" She grabbed onto the rock wall and began climbing at an astonishing speed. "Which one's the rare item?!" she shouted, beginning to pull out the vegetation without waiting for an answer.

Quickly, I pointed at an orange mineral peeking out. "There! The ones that look like cats' eyes!"

"This one?!" Frey reached out to grab one, but, of course, the mineral didn't budge.

That's right, I realized, you need a Pickaxe to mine a mineral. And I'd made Frey jump into the water for nothing. Guilt threatened to rush me, until Frey just used her sword to pry the Cat's Eyes off of the wall in another display of her unique strength.

"I got it! Five of them, at that! One for each of us!" Frey announced,

swimming back to us with an ear-to-ear smile.

I couldn't help but smile back at Frey, who'd gotten as excited as a kid with a fistful of candy. When she climbed on board, Frey wrung out her waterlogged clothes and shook her head like a dog to dry her hair.

"Frey!" Luna chastised as she was sprayed with droplets.

"Oh, sorry! It's a clear day, though. You'll dry soon enough," Frey said.

"Fine..." Luna chuckled in resignation as she took her Cat's Eye and raised it to the sky to inspect it.

"It's beautiful," Frey remarked as she observed it. "I can see the cat's eye."

"We have treasure already. What a lucky start to our voyage!" Lina chimed in.

Once Frey had wrung most of the seawater from her clothes, Torte produced a magical item that looked a lot like a blow-dryer and started drying Frey's clothes completely. The way Torte's bag seemed to hold a little bit of everything, I was starting to wonder what the inside of it looked like.

"Here's yours, Sharon," Frey offered. "It is a beautiful stone, but what's it for?"

"Thank you. I heard it's a material for smithing."

"Smithing," Frey repeated. "We should mention it the next time we want new gear." Deciding that it wouldn't be of immediate use, Frey tucked hers away in her bag. It was a rare and brilliant stone, but Frey probably wasn't interested in jewels and the like.

Happy with this rare find, I stored my Cat's Eye in my Storage. It still looked sparse compared to how my inventory had looked in the game, but I was looking forward to filling it up again. Secretly, I activated the Menu and checked over my stats once more. My level was still low, but I'd daresay I was off to a pretty good start.

"Now, we truly set sail!" Frey declared as the ship picked up speed and sailed out into the open sea.

Overview:

Name: Sharon (Charlotte Cocoriara)

Level: 17

Job: Healer (Expert in healing magic. Supports allies with buffs and barriers.)

Titles:

Fiancée No More: +5% Resistance to attacks from Male enemies.

Flaudia's Blessing: Healing Skills are 10% more effective. / Reduce mana cost of healing Skills by 50%.

Skills:

Blessed Light: Turns clean water into Holy Water. / Item Required: Potion Bottle

Mana Rations (Level 1): Recovers mana every 30 seconds.

Heal (Level 3): Heals the target.

Strengthen (Level 5): Buffs physical strength (Attack, Defense, Dexterity).

Wide Heal (Level 1): Heals all targets within a 7-meter radius of the user.

Goddess's Smite: Doubles the damage of the next attack used.

Regeneration (Level 2): Recovers HP every 10 seconds.

Goddess's Protection (Level 3): Creates a barrier around the target.

Equipment:

Head: Hairpin of Compassion (+5% Healing +3% *Physical Defense* +3% Resistance to all elements)

Body: Robe of Compassion (+5% Healing / +3% Magical Defense)

Right Hand: Staff of Bloom (+3% Healing / +10% Holy element)

Left Hand: –

Accessory: Adventure Bracelet (Enables the Menu)

Accessory: –

Feet: Boots of Compassion (+5% Healing / +3% Physical Defense)

Bonus: Compassion Set 3/3 (+15% Healing +5% *Physical Defense* +5% Magical Defense / -10% Mana cost for Skills)

Epilogue

Sitting all alone in this room, I couldn't help but sigh. "I'm so bored..." I should have been out on the town, sightseeing with my dear Prince Ignacia.

He had broken off his engagement to Lady Charlotte at the ball the other night. Not only that, he'd confronted her about her bullying of me—for things like splashing wine on my dress or refusing to let me into the castle after I'd walked all the way up to its gates. I was sure Lady Charlotte was also responsible for the best dress designer in the capital refusing to sell me a dress. What a horrible, cruel woman she was. Now that I was engaged to Prince Ignacia at last, I had hoped to blissfully enjoy our new relationship by his side.

"Why are we in Erenzi, of all places?!" Channeling my anger, I threw a sofa cushion against the wall, the soft thud causing something murky to curdle inside me.

I took yet another look around my room at one of the inns in the Holy Capital of Zille. A coffee table and couch sat near the door, with a bed and dresser situated on the other end of the room. Although the room was decently spacious, the furniture was far from luxurious. Even this inn, considered premium lodging in this city, did not match my new status. I was no longer Emilia the common girl, now that Prince Ignacia and I were set to marry.

And I would have thought that the crown prince and his new fiancée might have been afforded better accommodations, but life wasn't as easy as all that. Prince Ignacia had told me that, outside the borders of Farblume, he couldn't wield the influence of his title too openly. I was all alone in the room now, with the prince out on business. The royal guard Zeno stood outside the door, but there wasn't much I wanted to discuss with him, and he never started conversations with me either.

"What will he do once he finds Lady Charlotte anyway?" I wondered aloud. "He said he wanted a genuine apology out of her..." Wouldn't it have been better for us to stay in the castle?

Prince Ignacia had taken a few guards with him to search for her, but they hadn't found a solid lead yet. He'd brought us all the way to Zille with nothing to go on except a tip about a woman who *might* have been Charlotte. He'd even suggested that I stay back in the castle alone—never! “I'm getting stir-crazy in here. Maybe I'll go sightseeing on my own.” Since checking into the inn, I hadn't taken one step outside of it.

I opened the door to the hall and told Zeno that I wanted to go out into town.

As I walked the streets of the city, Zeno followed one step behind me. He was a muscular guard with naturally silver hair and a pretty face who had served as Prince Ignacia's guard for years. If I could persuade anyone, it would be him. Since I'd ridden up to the inn in the carriage when we first arrived, this was the first time I was met with a clear view of the city. I could have seen it from the window of my room, if I'd had any interest in doing so.

“There are aqueducts throughout the city. How convenient,” I blurted. In Farblume, I'd always had to bring water up from the neighborhood well. “Not that I'm interested in such things,” I said, transferring my attention to other parts of the city. Shops lined the neatly paved street. Their windows held dresses and shoes of the latest fashion and cakes I couldn't believe were edible because they were so intricately decorated.

Having more fun than I'd expected on this outing, I decided to ask Zeno what he knew about Zille.

“Zille's Divine Tree stands by the crystal cathedral in the city center. It blesses the water in the aqueducts,” he said.

“Divine Tree? Is divinity prevalent in the city?” I asked.

“Yes. Flaudia Cathedral is here and is frequented by the many Healers and Clerics of this country.” Zeno pointed at the cathedral in the distance.

Many Healers? I didn't know how to feel about that. There weren't many Healers in Farblume, which hosted a plethora of Swordsmen and Knights. That was what made me special.

“Let's go to the cathedral,” I said.

“Well... You may want to speak to His Highness before doing so,” Zeno said,

making me pinch my brows at him—he was the one who'd mentioned the cathedral in the first place! Quickly, Zeno explained his refusal. "Well, you may recall that Farblume and Erenzi are in conflict. Strolling through the streets is one thing, but if we were in the cathedral... I may not be able to protect you if something unthinkable were to happen. Let us keep to the streets," Zeno said.

Considering that I wasn't of noble birth, I doubted my face or even name would be recognized so easily in a foreign land—was it really so dangerous to visit the cathedral?

"Who would possibly consider us emissaries for their enemy dressed like this?" I challenged, indicating Zeno, who'd forgone his guard uniform for what looked like an ordinary adventurer's outfit. "Just for a quick look!" I pushed.

"But..."

"Besides, I may discover how to become a Cleric!"

"Well..." Zeno was on the edge of giving in. He knew how invaluable Healers—and even more so the higher-level Clerics—were to royal guards.

"Please?" I crooned, painting a hint of a blush on Zeno's cheeks and pushing him over that edge.

Flaudia Cathedral greeted me with towering solemnity, allowing me a peek into its sparkling interior and high ceilings. "Wow..." I breathed.

"I feel like a fish out of water..." Zeno muttered, his eyes on the traffic going in and out of the cathedral. The majority of them wore robes, priests and priestesses and visitors alike. I blended in better with my simple dress.

"You may have a point. It should be safe inside—wait out here for me. Once I've walked through the cathedral, I'll come out and inform you," I said.

"Thank you." Zeno stood at his post as I walked away and through the open doors of the cathedral.

Directly inside stood a reception area with a counter and bulletin board. The receptionist seemed to be there to receive questions and donations. I wanted to ask how to become a Cleric, but it was too crowded—I'd ask on the way out.

As I started down the hall, I heard an excited voice ahead.

“I did it. I prayed in front of Flaudia’s statue today.”

“Oh! And how did it go? Did Flaudia speak to you?”

“Unfortunately not... But I did feel closer to Flaudia, somehow.”

I kept listening and learned that a woman had been blessed by the shimmering image of the goddess in the Prayer Room. *That sounds like just the sort of thing meant to happen to me.*

When I stepped into the Prayer Room, I did spot a few people praying directly in front of the statue. I didn’t see the point of kneeling and dirtying my dress when there were perfectly suitable pews lining the room. I claimed one of those seats and took a breath. *If only praying to that statue would make me a Cleric...*

After staring at Flaudia’s likeness for a while, I called to a priestess who’d walked by my seat, hoping to ask her how to become a Cleric.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

“It’s my first time in the cathedral,” I said. “I was hoping to ask you a few questions, if you don’t mind.”

“I’d be happy to answer them,” the priestess said with genuine hospitality. “The Flaudia Cathedral is dedicated to the goddess Flaudia. Each day, we receive many visitors offering their prayers to her. The majority of them are Healers or have jobs along that line, but plenty of others visit us too.”

“Along the Healer line... Clerics, you mean?” I asked, eager to jump on the subject.

“For one,” the priestess agreed. “Healers who follow Flaudia can become Clerics, then Archbishops, while Priests and Priestesses can become Shamans.”

“Archbishop? Shaman?” Those were jobs I’d never heard of. Prince Ignacia had always praised me for being a Healer—it was shocking that there was yet another job above Cleric.

“Archbishop and Shaman are both awakened jobs. It is said that devotion to Flaudia, as well as raising one’s level, will allow us to move up from one job to the next.”

“Raise my level...” I repeated, losing all hope. I’d never thought about raising

my own level because I'd always have guards to protect me. There had to be another way.

"Day after day, we serve Flaudia in the hopes of achieving an awakened job. While we do, we await the emergence of the Holy Maiden prophesied to enact Flaudia's will upon the world."

"Holy Maiden...?" That was another job I hadn't known existed, though I recognized the phrase from several storybooks I'd read in my youth. They depicted the Holy Maiden as a restorer of peace. If there really was such a job, the legendary title belonged to me—the future queen of Farblume. Forget becoming a Cleric; I just had to become a Holy Maiden. Right as I was about to ask the priestess how I could become a Holy Maiden, the loud clanging of the bells rang through the cathedral, making me scowl.

"The cathedral is now closed for visitors. Thank you for visiting, and we hope you will come back to offer your prayers again," the priestess said, walking away before I could stop her.

"What...?" I had no choice but to leave the Prayer Room, disappointed that I was still a Healer when I'd thought I would be walking out of the cathedral a Holy Maiden today.

"Did you enjoy the cathedral?" Zeno greeted me when I exited its doors.

"The cathedral's closed for the day—I couldn't ask the most important question," I explained.

"Then, you should return another day," said Zeno.

"I will." As much as I hated to leave, there was nothing more I could do. Next time, I'd make sure to visit earlier in the day. *Or perhaps they wouldn't be so dismissive if I brought Prince Ignacia with me?* The thought made my heart a little lighter as we walked back to the inn.

"Where have you been, Emilia?!" Prince Ignacia greeted me tersely as I walked in.

"I walked to the cathedral with Zeno... What is wrong?" I asked, already

expecting the answer from his sour disposition—he still hadn't found Lady Charlotte. In an attempt to cheer him up, I decided to share my new aspiration with him. "May we have some privacy, Your Highness?"

"What?" Prince Ignacia furrowed his brow. Neither of us had ever made a request like this when we had company.

Still, he deserved to know before anyone else. "Please," I insisted.

"All right." Prince Ignacia turned to the four guards in the room, including Zeno. "Return to your own rooms and get some rest."

The guards obeyed, clearly holding their tongues about something.

Soon, Prince Ignacia and I were alone in the quiet room. I sat next to him on the sofa, close enough for our shoulders and thighs to touch, taking advantage of the absence of guards who would have reprimanded us for it.

"Emilia...?"

"There's something I set my mind to after visiting the cathedral," I said.

"And what is that?"

With pride, I answered him. "I decided to become a Holy Maiden. That way, I can help you even more."

"Holy Maiden? I thought that was a job only found in fairy tales..."

"I did too," I said. Prince Ignacia had apparently had no idea it was real either. "A priestess in the cathedral told me about it, although we ran out of time before I could ask her more..."

"If you become the Holy Maiden, perhaps Farblume could rule Erenzi."

"What?" I hadn't expected him to react that way, but that only showed he had faith in how much influence I would have. Something more powerful than I'd ever felt thundered in my heart. "I will become the Holy Maiden! It will be all for you," I promised.

"Wonderful." Prince Ignacia smiled, and happiness bloomed in my chest. With him by my side, I felt like I could do absolutely anything.

Side Story: Our Daughter in Danger (Theodore Cocoriara)

This was an absolute outrage. That princeling had betrayed my precious little daughter for the last time. Charlotte had returned early from the ball and informed us that he had not only broken off their engagement but sentenced her to exile. Apparently, Ignacia had gone mad!

“Whom are you trying to scare off?” my wife said, placing her fair, slender fingertip on my brow—her way of telling me to calm down.

Calming down wasn't so easy considering the circumstances. “He broke up with and *exiled* poor Lottie! There's no forgiving that. What's gotten into that princeling?” What father would not rage at his daughter being treated with such disrespect?

“And what's wrong with that?” My wife smiled.

“Huh?” My face must have looked really stupid, but that didn't matter right now—there was no softening the face I was born with. How could she be so dismissive when our daughter was in danger? “Don't you understand, Anne?! Not only has he broken off the engagement—”

“She doesn't need the prince, Theodore. That is what I mean,” she said with an icy tone that belied her smile. The air in the carriage seemed to turn cold for a moment.

“If a royal heard you, they could claim *lèse-majesté*,” I warned.

“Are you a royal, Theodore? Is our own coachman?” Her mouth formed a smile again. “Don't underestimate me, dear.”

I took a deep breath, now that Anne had calmed my nerves somewhat. A glance out the carriage window showed that we'd just arrived at the castle, where I would have a few words to say about how my daughter had been treated.

I led Anne by the arm toward the castle and its lively music. Despite the debacle that had occurred, the ball was apparently in full swing. *What to do...?* “His Majesty rarely attends balls, so it won’t be necessary to visit the ballroom—unless it’s to give the prince a piece of my mind if he is still there.”

Anne shook her head. “Don’t be ridiculous. One strike from you would leave a hole in the prince’s middle.”

“No, no, that won’t be...” Even I wouldn’t punch a hole into the prince...probably.

We’d just decided to avoid the ball and go straight to the king when Ignacia came walking down the hall with a lady at his side. So, he’d been at the ball with another woman. My fist itched, and I was looking to scratch it with the prince’s face.

“My!” Anne exclaimed, stepping between me and Ignacia before I could so much as flex my fist. Instead, I let my arms fall and watched.

“Commander. Lady Cocoriara. It’s been too long,” the princeling greeted us.

“Indeed, Your Highness,” Anne answered with her beautiful smile that contrasted with the sour look on the prince’s face.

“Yes” was all I could manage to say. Although it risked the prince taking my curtness as an insult, my position as his trainer in swordcraft allowed me some leeway when it came to conversational conventions.

“I was sure I wouldn’t have the chance to see Your Highness tonight,” Anne said. “How odd that we’ve run into each other. Are you enjoying the ball?”

“Y-Yes, very much so.” The prince smiled awkwardly.

“You are?” Anne asked, saccharine sweet. “Charlotte has already come home. How unexpected that Your Highness can enjoy this night so much even bereft of a fiancée.”

“I...have already spoken to Charlotte. His Majesty will send word of those developments at a later date,” Ignacia said.

“Then let us wait for his word on the matter,” Anne said nonchalantly, calling the prince’s bluff. I couldn’t imagine that the prince had broken his engagement

with Lottie and punished her so severely with the king's permission. Even if His Majesty were to back Ignacia on his decision, he would have spoken to me about it first—I'd built at least that much trust between us.

"Um... That sort of accusation isn't called for," interrupted the lady in a modest coral-colored dress. "His Highness was only keeping me company on my way to change out of my wine-soaked dress. So I don't think—"

"We are on our way to speak to His Majesty, in fact. Excuse us, Your Highness," Anne said without so much as a glance at his companion.

No one but a royal would have dared to speak to a duchess in that manner, without even introducing herself first. Even a royal would have chosen to show more decorum.

"Uh... Your Highness?" The lady turned to the prince.

"Yes, Emilia." Ignacia stepped between his companion and Anne. "Have you forgotten your manners, Duchess Cocoriara, to ignore her so completely?"

I might have been as tactless as they came in high society, but even I knew the prince had misstepped—badly.

"If we are on the topic of manners, shall we discuss how disrespectful it is to speak to someone of higher standing not only without permission but also without introduction?" Anne countered, making the girl tremble. Her eyes, which had turned to the prince for help, now shook with fear.

The prince's eyes had widened. He was clearly taken aback by Anne's retort. "Yes, an introduction is certainly in order. This is Emilia, my f—"

"Oh, if it isn't Anne!" A bright voice rang through the hall.

"Belle!" Anne turned, cheerfully running over to her friend.

"M-Mother..." the prince ground out.

Queen Belltiana was walking up the hall. She and Anne had been close friends for decades, and they still frequently met for tea—or gossip.

"We were just on our way to see you," Anne said. "I hate to bother you so late..."

“I should welcome your company in the dead of night, Anne. Don’t you concern yourself with what time you choose to call on your friend,” the queen reassured her. “Shall we?”

“Let’s,” Anne answered, and the pair started down the hall shoulder to shoulder.

That left me trailing them a few steps behind, abandoning the dumbstruck prince. *Sorry, princeling, it’s out of my hands now... Wait a minute. What am I feeling sorry for this fool for?* The princeling had a whole lot worse coming his way, if I had any say in it.

“Mother, wait—”

“I had been rather looking forward to calling Charlotte my daughter. For one, she’s adorable. And I know not where else to find a lady as well educated and well-mannered as she... A pity you didn’t match up to her, Ignacia,” Belltiana said, casually but unmistakably calling her son a failure.

“Wha—?!” The prince froze, his companion nervously clinging to his arm.

“Charlotte is my pride and joy,” Anne chimed in. “But whom would *you* choose as the future queen? Finding an eligible lady with the proper education for His Highness this late in the game could be tricky...” Anne suggested, and I agreed.

Most well-educated ladies of suitable age for the prince were already engaged to other gentlemen. Some noble-born girls in the countryside might still be unattached, but the odds of them having received the caliber of education expected of a future queen was very slim. Hard work and determination alone did not turn a lady into a queen. We, the royal guards, did not risk our lives for those unworthy of the throne.

“I suppose so...” the queen agreed. “Finding a lady like that in Farblume may prove impossible. Perhaps I need to look for a good match beyond our borders.”

“What a wonderful idea. Establishing friendly foreign relations is a critical role for a royal, is it not?” Anne answered, the two of them mapping out the prince’s future in a matter of a few words, speaking as if it were all but settled that the

prince would marry into foreign royalty.

Even Ignacia wouldn't stand for that, apparently. "Mother! That isn't what I want!"

"Then show me your worth," the queen declared, silencing the crown prince with the gravity of her words—the questioning of his worthiness to take the throne. She turned and faced her son. "Ignacia. Have you ever considered what Charlotte is worth? She was raised to be queen. Not only did you lose the most eligible and well-educated lady in Farblume, you also lost the backing of Duke and Duchess Cocoriara."

"B-But...the duchess is very close...to you..." Ignacia's voice dwindled until it was barely audible. Clearly, he hadn't realized how incredible Lottie was. I bit back some choice words I wanted to throw his way, remembering how Lottie always chose her studies over playing with friends, despite her youth.

"Indeed, *I* am close to Anne. Not you," Belltiana said. "Do not mistake the matter."

I grunted my agreement. A king had to forge his own alliances—not inherit them from his parents.

"Yes..." the prince answered feebly. His eyes wobbled for a moment before he excused himself and his companion.

"How annoying," I sighed.

"You mustn't be so blunt," Anne said. Compared to her and Belltiana, I thought I was remarkably restrained.

"I apologize for my fool of a son... Duke Cocoriara, Anne, it's my fault for not raising the boy properly. I really am sorry."

"Belle. Please don't apologize," said Anne.

"Yes," I added. "His Highness is in much hotter water than we are. He won't find the throne so easy to inherit without our support."

Queen Belltiana had two younger children: a boy and a girl. While Ignacia was crown prince, his siblings were legitimate heirs who could snatch the throne out of nowhere depending on the power balance of the nobles backing each heir.

“You both spoil me,” the queen said. “But thank you. I’ll blame Ignacia for the breakup and give Charlotte a clean state. Of course, I’ll revoke this exile nonsense—”

“Oh,” Anne and I said at the same time, remembering how Charlotte had been acting when we’d last seen her. She’d been hurriedly packing, eager to leave. Although she’d seemed the picture of a lady whose heart had been broken, I hadn’t missed the hint of freedom sparkling in her eyes.

“It may be too late for that,” I said.

“My!” The queen laughed with pure amusement. “Charlotte has completely outplayed my son, then... What a pity,” she said without a shred of pity for her son, “that Ignacia has already exiled Charlotte without approval from His Majesty...”

I would have loved to speak to the king, but the hour was late.

The queen smiled. “Let’s speak to Ignacia again tomorrow and notify His Majesty in another day or so.”

“That would be best, I think. It’s important to get our facts straight. Let’s plan to tell His Majesty about this in three days,” Anne said. “Why don’t you come over to our house the day after tomorrow? We can sort out what information His Majesty would appreciate the most.”

“Brilliant idea,” the queen said.

The resilience of women, I marveled, realizing that the pair intended to buy enough time for Lottie to make it out of the country. How lucky that we’d run into Queen Belltiana before we saw the king. I blew out a breath—all I could do was wish Lottie a safe journey. She must have just left the house by now.

A few days had passed since Lottie had left our house. Even though I’d expected it, my heart had still broken when I’d returned to the house the night of the fateful ball to find that Lottie was long gone. It would surely be a wonderful adventure for her, but that didn’t quell the concern gurgling in my stomach.

“Matthew! Are there any letters from Lottie today?!”

“No, sir...”

“Oh...” My head drooped. I felt literally sick with worry for Lottie’s sake.

“It’s only been a few days,” Matthew, the butler, reminded me. “Miss Charlotte knows how to take care of herself. Let us put our faith in her and wait for her to write.”

“You’re right,” I relented. I knew he was right, of course. Still, I felt this burning urge to go running after Lottie. If she needed something, I could provide it! If she became homesick, I could bring her home right away!

“Dear?” Anne walked in just as I stood to run out of the living room.

“Anne...?” I stammered, finding it hard to meet her inquisitive glare. “Uh, I just thought...Lottie might be homesick,” I hedged.

“She’ll be fine. We’ve raised her to be stronger than that,” Anne said.

“B-But...she’s only a girl. Her arms are as thin as twigs—I was always worried I’d snap them if I hugged her too tight.” What if she were to be accosted by unsavory men? Lottie couldn’t fight them off—the thought was ridiculous. I was so concerned for her safety that I’d only eaten half of my usual diet these past few days.

“She’s all right. She made it safely into Erenzi.”

“Huh?” I stared at my wife, uncomprehending. “Into Erenzi? Wait, who? Lottie? Why would she go into Erenzi?” How did Anne know where Lottie was? Instead of forming that question, my mouth flapped open and closed.

“I’m not having her *followed*,” Anne explained. “I was told by an adventurer who happened to wander our way.”

“Is that so...?” I relented, knowing in my gut that it was no coincidence. Most likely, one of our spies had spotted Lottie on their way back from Erenzi and let Anne know... Whoever that spy was, I would need to ask them *nicely* why they hadn’t spoken to me directly—I was the head of the household and commander of the Order of Knights! But now, my curiosity burned. “Why Erenzi? It’s dangerous to venture into enemy territory. I would have guessed she went the

opposite way, to the Laureldite Republic in the eastern desert.”

“I was curious about that myself, but she knows what she’s doing. She’s much more aware of international politics than Prince Ignacia, at least,” Anne said.

“Of course...” I said. I wouldn’t hold it against the prince too much that his knowledge was inferior to Lottie’s in many ways—Lottie was just too smart. In hindsight, maybe her education had been a bit excessive. Although, I also knew that we’d had to push her so that she could one day wear the queen’s crown and stand as an equal to the king, not merely his consort. I could only hope that any part of her education would serve her well now. “Now that she’s there, we...shouldn’t keep Erenzi as an enemy anymore,” I said. If conflict between our nations were to escalate to war, Lottie could be in danger behind enemy lines. That, I couldn’t live with. “We need an audience with His Majesty immediately so we can suggest that we surrender ourselves as Erenzi territory. That should make Erenzi somewhat safer for Lottie.”

“Come now, dear. What a shortsighted idea for the commander of the Order of Knights to entertain,” Anne said, halting me before I could bolt out of the room. She smiled with all the confidence in the world, and I nearly fell for her all over again. “Let’s wait for Lottie to write. We can decide what to do after that.”

“You’re right...” I relented, feeling my nerves settle. I took Anne by the arm and sat on the sofa. A cup of tea would do wonders to calm me. I leaned back into the sofa and took what felt like my first full breath in days. *Please, Lottie. Write to us soon...*

Side Story: A World of New Adventures (Cocoa)

Mornings started early in my Farming Village. By the time the sun rose, livestock were already being tended to, cows were being milked, and eggs were being collected so we could sell them in the closest town. Finding chicken eggs was easy for me, but I wasn't so comfortable with the towering, powerful cows.

The open range let the cattle graze on their own instead of us having to feed them, but corralling them back into their stalls and away from all that delicious grass was hard work.

One day, when I returned with a basket full of eggs, mom called me over. "Cocoa, take some eggs over to Kent's, won't you?"

"Okay." I kept ten or so eggs in my basket and left the house.

Kent was a boy one year older than me, meaning he was currently fifteen. He was my neighbor and lifelong friend.

After a few minutes' walk, I came to Kent's front door. Just as I raised my hand to knock, Kent happened to open the door. It was rare for Kent to be up early. He'd always said he made up for sleeping in by working extra at night.

"Good morning, Kent. I brought you eggs."

"Oh, yeah... Thanks. I gotta leave right away. Can you put them on the table?" he asked.

"What?" I blinked at Kent's mumbling. My intuition told me that he was hiding something. No doubt about it. "Did you break one of your mom's precious flower vases again? If you're too scared to own up to it, I'll apologize with you."

Just the other day, Kent had smashed a treasured vase. I'd been able to hear his mom yelling from my house, so the whole village was bound to know about it. If he'd done it again, I could only imagine the wrath his mom would bring down.

“Nothing like that! I got something to do, all right? I’m going!”

“What?”

Kent darted past me, leaving me wondering what felt off about him this morning—he wasn’t acting himself. Was it the way he walked? The way he smelled? “Kent, where are you going?” I called—then I saw it. “Oh!” The sword on his belt: he never carried around anything like that, and he was even wearing a little leather chestplate, like he was a novice adventurer.

Kent always said he wanted to be an adventurer. Memories from our childhood made me realize that he was leaving to do exactly that, without telling his family. Shortly before the broken vase incident, I’d heard his mom yelling, “Adventuring?! You’re dreaming if you think I’d let you get into a dangerous business like that!”

He was going to leave without saying anything so his family couldn’t talk him out of it. *Should I stop him?* I considered it. I wanted Kent to chase his dream, but... *But what?* Then, something settled in my heart. Before I could think about it, I called out to him. “I’m going with you!”

“What?!” Kent shouted, wide-eyed. I didn’t think I’d ever seen him that surprised.

I set the basket of eggs on the table and scribbled on a nearby piece of paper: “We’re going to be adventurers! —Kent and Cocoa.”

“There we go!” I said, wiping my brow with satisfaction.

“No, no, no, no, no!” Kent shook his head furiously. “What was that for, dummy?!”

“Hmph! You really think you’d make it on your own? It’ll be so much better if I go with you! And your mom will be worried if you leave without telling her,” I insisted. From what I’d heard, adventurers normally took on quests in a party that involved frontline attackers, distance attackers, and supporters. Otherwise, they wouldn’t stand a chance against the more powerful monsters. There were supposedly a few legendary adventurers out there that did everything solo, but they were few and far between.

“I can cook some dishes, and if you’re fighting with your sword, I can fight

from afar. We can take down monsters together!” I couldn’t fight yet, but a traveler had once told me that I could become a Sorcerer if I got a staff—then I could learn magic Skills. There were plenty of things still undiscovered about the Sorcerer job, but that gave me hope...kind of. I glared at Kent with my best “I’m not backing down” eyes.

After a few moments, he shrugged. “All right, then.” He turned to walk, and I jogged after him. His back seemed a little relaxed, somehow.

“Let’s go!” I said.

Sometimes, Kent acted braver than he felt. He’d been on the fence about his decision. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been leaving while everyone was out working in the field. He’d probably been counting on me delivering him eggs like I always did.

“We got this, Kent!” I shouted, running past him.

“Huh? Yeah, of course we do!” After standing surprised for a second, he ran after me with the same excitement.

“You got this, Kent!” I cheered.

“Yeah!” He charged at the Jiggly, raising his drawn sword in his right hand, ready to slice the Jiggly in half.

I wish I could use magic, I thought for the hundredth time.

A few days had passed since Kent and I had left our village. We’d registered at the Adventurer’s Guild and begun taking on quests—the easiest ones, like hunting Jiggies and Flower Bunnies.

We hunted in the field south of Zille, where only weak monsters appeared. Some part of me had also calculated that there was enough traffic nearby that I could call for help if we really needed it.

“Here we go!” Kent swung his sword through the Jiggly, which turned into light. I still hadn’t gotten used to the bizarre phenomenon—cattle didn’t disappear like that when they died, only monsters. “How’s your level, Cocoa?”

“Um... Oh, I’m level 6 now! Yay!”

“Yes!” Kent cheered with me.

We could check our own levels with the Adventurer’s Cards that also listed the Skills we learned. “Oh, I learned Fire Arrow!” Overjoyed, I held my card tight against my chest. Even though my job had been Sorcerer for days, I hadn’t been able to cast a single spell—because an adventurer acquired their first Skill at level 6.

“That’s a great Skill!” Kent said. “Give it a shot.”

“Okay! I just need an enemy to... There. Fire Arrow!” I used my Skill while targeting a Flower Bunny in the bush...but my spell hadn’t taken it out in one shot. The monster lay twitching on the ground.

“Not one-shotting them yet,” Kent said, delivering the death blow.

Just as he did, I heard something hit the ground by my feet. “What? Oh!”

“What’s wrong, Cocoa...? Your staff!”

The head of my staff had broken clean off. It was just a cheap staff a traveling merchant had sold me, made from nearly worthless lumber. Even though I’d been warned it wasn’t durable, I hadn’t thought it’d break this soon. *Was it because I used Fire magic...?* I wondered, staring at my broken weapon.

“It’s okay!” Kent said cheerfully. “We can handle these hunts now, even if it’s just hunting Flower Bunnies. Let’s buy you a new staff!”

“Are you sure...? Even the cheapest one won’t be cheap.” Not having a staff was a problem, but was it worse than not having money? Instantly, I was mentally counting the coins I had—it might not be enough for a new staff.

“We don’t have a lot of money yet...” Kent agreed. “But if we eat frugally, we can budget for a staff. My sword will keep me going for a while! Besides, we’ll hunt faster if you have a working staff, and that will make us more money!”

A new staff could mean more powerful magic that could one-shot Flower Bunnies, making our hunts a lot easier. “Okay! I’ll work on our budget.”

“Perfect!”

So, we headed to the weapon shop after we finished our quest.

I'd been willing to eat nothing but grass for a while when I walked into the weapon shop, but there had just happened to be another Sorcerer looking to upgrade their staff who sold me theirs for a bargain.

It was called the Novice Staff, meant for the greenest of Sorcerers, but it was a great improvement on the carved piece of wood I'd bought from the traveling merchant.

"How lucky was that, Cocoa?" Kent said.

"Yeah. I would like to pick out my own staff one day... But it's a little too expensive for us right now," I said, looking at the price tags of the more powerful wands that cost at least ten times our entire savings. There were still a lot of quests and a lot of hard work between me and one of those.

When we're stronger, I promised myself, we'll come back and we'll both get brand-new weapons.

"How useless am I...?" Kent muttered to himself. "Sharon has perfect Skills as a supporter and knows everything an adventurer would want to know. She's guiding the Hero's party through a dungeon as we speak! H-How is she doing that...?!"

"You're working really hard already," I said, trying to lick his wounds.

Still, Kent sat with his forehead flat on the desk. "How can I get stronger?" he kept muttering.

He might need some time to process.

After leaving the Farming Village, we'd decided to work based out of the Holy Capital of Zille—I was familiar with the city after coming to sell eggs here so often. We were in an inn that allowed long-term stays, famous for their low, low rate of two thousand liz per night with breakfast included. On the other hand, it wasn't in the best location—far from the gates and the Adventurer's Guild. The room was furnished with a desk, chair, and bed, and it was on a side of the building that didn't get much sun. At least it had a separately charged laundry service. The room wasn't spacious by any means, but since we basically only came back to the room to sleep, it wasn't all that bad.

We'd been hard at work, taking on quest after quest. Yesterday, we'd formed a party with Sharon, an incredible Healer. Even though adventurers weren't supposed to learn a Skill until they hit level 6, Sharon had learned a new Skill when she reached level 3. Sharon had laughed it off, asking what difference a few levels made—a lot of difference, if you asked me. If I had learned Fire Arrow at level 2, our first hunts would have gone much easier. Sorcerers were useless without magic, after all. Without Kent, I would have seriously struggled to raise my level.

We could use a break, I thought and moved to pour us some tea when Kent jolted upright.

“Will we form a party with Sharon again?” he asked.

“What?” I hadn't thought about that. “We didn't even establish if this was a onetime thing or not. I meant to bring that up when we were cashing out at the Guild.”

“Right... Do you think she's joining the Hero's party?!” Kent asked.

“You're jumping to conclusions,” I said. “*Not going to happen.*” Our levels and Sharon's were close, which made it easier to form a party. Every member in a party had to be within fifteen levels of each other to evenly spread EXP. “The Hero's party will be too strong for Sharon to gain any levels by joining their party.”

“Oh, right,” Kent sighed in relief.

That should have been the case, anyway. Some part of me begged to differ, though. This was Sharon we were talking about—anything could happen. Even though we'd only formed a party for a day, I'd seen how perfectly she'd supported us both, healing and buffing us exactly when we needed it. Another Healer we'd worked with before had stopped healing us early into the quest, claiming she'd run out of mana. Sharon had kept up her Heals and Strengthens throughout the quest. The few levels I had on Sharon felt so meaningless when I compared how effective I could be to how she'd been.

“It's okay. I'll be okay,” I said, more to myself than to Kent.

“What is?” Kent asked.

“I just want to form a party with Sharon again.”

“Yeah... Then let’s train! We should do more quests and get stronger before Sharon comes back!” Kent suggested.

“Great idea!” I said. I wasn’t naive enough to think Sharon would always be in a party with us, but I wanted to go on a few more adventures with someone so extraordinary. When I thought of going adventuring with Sharon again, I felt the same feeling I had when I’d first left the village with Kent.

The next day, we returned once more to the Adventurer’s Guild situated near the center of the city. There were plenty of people going in and out at all times of the day. Five counters lined the interior, where adventurers started and finished quests, flanked by a board full of quests waiting to be taken up. For the most part, quests were first come, first served, so coming to the Guild early was a necessity if we wanted dibs on the best quests. Of course, we were still too green to be picky about what quests we took, but one day...

“What should we do today?” Kent asked.

“They have some more harvesting quests.”

“Kent. Cocoa,” someone called from behind us.

“Oh. Good morning, Prim,” I greeted the familiar receptionist who’d helped us out on many occasions and had even introduced us to Sharon.

“Good morning,” Prim answered. “Can I have a little bit of your time?”

Kent and I shared a look. “Sure,” I said, and we followed her up to the counter where a male worker I’d never met before waited for us.

Who is that? I wondered. He was a middle-aged man with silver hair and blue eyes, a prominent scar marking his cheek down to his neck. His physique made him seem more like an adventurer than a member of the branch’s staff. Even I could tell that the black cape draped across one of his shoulders was of very fine quality.

“What do you think this is about?” Kent whispered.

“I don’t know...” I whispered back. I was just as in the dark as he was.

“Oh, sorry,” said the man with the scar. “No need to be nervous. I’m Reuven, the Guildmaster.”

“Guildmaster?!” Kent and I repeated together. Rumor had it, the master of this Guild branch was one of the best Swordsmen—ever.

I glanced to my side and saw Kent’s eyes sparkle with admiration. Ever since he’d heard about the Guildmaster’s prowess with the sword, he’d been harboring a bit of a celebrity crush.

“I want to ask you about Sharon, whom you formed a party with. What can you tell me about her?” he asked.

“Sharon...” we said in unison again, and I expected we’d say the next part in unison too. “We could ask you the same thing.”

Called it.

Kent stared at me, surprised by how perfectly we were in sync. “Right?” he laughed. “We only formed a party with her once, so we barely know anything about her. The Hero’s party required her as soon as we came back from our first quest together.”

“Is that so? Prim said she only knew as much as Sharon had shared on her registration papers, so I was hoping you would know more after forming a party with her... Oh, well,” Reuven said.

“What did you want to know about Sharon?” Kent asked.

“She volunteered to show them through the Paradise of Erungoa, didn’t she? Information about unconquered dungeons is usually very scarce—we hadn’t even heard a rumor of anyone beating that dungeon,” said the Guildmaster.

So he wanted to know what Sharon knew about the dungeon or at least how she’d gotten that intel.

“She surprised us too,” Kent admitted. “We only worked a Wolf hunt and Medicinal Herb-gathering quest with her. For being at level 1, she was so good at support... So much more helpful than the other Healer we worked with once. She never let us go without Strengthen and always healed us as soon as we were hurt. She’s supposed to be a new adventurer just like us, but I was so

impressed...!” Kent rattled on, his speech growing faster and faster.

I nodded along in support of all his points. “Sharon really is incredible—what’s wrong?” I asked, seeing how Reuven and Prim were both looking at us with their eyes widened. *Did Kent say anything out of turn? We’d only gushed about Sharon’s abilities.*

Hand on his mouth, the Guildmaster contemplated, before saying, “Strengthen *and* Heal? There’s no way she learned both those Skills after registering as a level 1 that morning. No matter which Skill she learned first, both Heal and Strengthen go up to level 10. She’s a level 21 at a minimum...”

The Guildmaster was right—I hadn’t thought about that before. Normally, we couldn’t learn new Skills unless we maxed out the previous Skill we’d learned. That was why I still only knew how to cast Fire Arrow.

The atmosphere of the room shifted, weighing us down with the gravity of the situation. Had we said something we weren’t supposed to? Even though Sharon had used her Skills perfectly, she hadn’t known too much about Skills in general.

While I hesitated to say anything else, Kent spoke up, trembling ever so slightly. “Well, we only formed a party once, but she’s a great person and a talented Healer, so, what I’m trying to say is...” Kent trailed off, trying desperately to defend Sharon.

I felt the same way. “Sharon’s not someone dangerous to the Guild, even though she may bludgeon Wolves—”

“Bludgeon Wolves?!” The Guildmaster burst out laughing. “What a picture!”—the picture of a Healer clobbering a Wolf, that was. “Ahh... My stomach hurts. A *Healer* bludgeoned a Wolf to death?”

“She just finished it off!” I protested.

“Finished it off—!” The Guildmaster fell further into his fit of hilarity.

“What do we do, Kent...?” I whispered, unsure of what more to say.

“What is there to say?” he answered.

Soon enough, Prim said, “I apologize.” She was holding back laughter of her

own. “We didn’t intend to frighten you. The Guildmaster’s face must be to blame,” she joked.

“Hey!” Reuven proclaimed. “My face isn’t *that* scary!” He said it with a certain childishness. Then he cleared his throat. “Anyhoo, sorry to have startled you. At least I now know that Sharon is a strange person—an exceptionally powerful Healer who resorted to smashing Wolves with her club.”

I stared at Reuven, unable to dispute any observation the Guildmaster had made. “Um... What will you do with Sharon?” I finally asked.

“Nothing.” The Guildmaster waved us off. “The Guild has no authority to do anything to adventurers. The only thing I can do is ask her how she knows about the unconquered dungeon. Just to be clear, I wouldn’t force anyone to give us information. Keeping secrets to yourself can be a way for some adventurers to stash a weapon to be used later,” he said reassuringly.

“I see. That does make us feel better,” I said.

“Sorry to keep you,” Reuven said. “You’re free to go.”

“Yes, sir,” we said together again.

I was just relieved that we hadn’t been forced to sell Sharon out to the Guildmaster or anything.

Soon, we found ourselves back at the quest board.

“She’s gained the respect of the Guildmaster too... Sharon’s incredible!” Kent said.

“Oh, yeah,” I agreed.

“Something that will get us as strong as Sharon...” Kent muttered, staring at the board as if to bore a hole into it.

“No matter how many times you look, there’re only so many we can handle as F-ranks,” I pointed out.

“Well... What’s the harm in dreaming?”

“I think it would be better to complete the quests we can and build our reputation as adventurers instead of pushing ourselves and taking a quest we

don't know we can finish. Slowly but surely, we'll make sure we can do more things. If we keep it up, that should make us valuable adventurers on its own," I explained. Rather than diving into impossible challenges, it was more important to build a solid foundation.

"You're right," Kent said. "Let's get started, then."

"Yeah."

After rushing out of our village to become adventurers, we now had a clear goal that would drive us to work hard, slowly but steadily.



Vol. 1

No One Else Knows
How to Change Jobs

From
Villainess
to
Healer

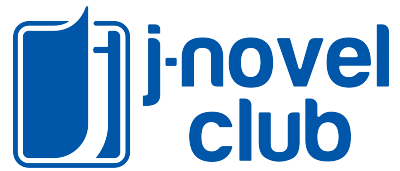
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I've almost won!
[<“Holy Heal!”>]





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From Villainess to Healer: Volume 1

by Punichan

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