

RVing My Way into Exile with My Beloved Cat

This Villainess Is Trippin'

3



Author • Punichan
Illustrator • Canarinu

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My Beloved Cat

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"Huh?! This is so good!"

Today's camping meal:
A nostalgic meal of rice and tonjiru!

"Mmm, yummy."



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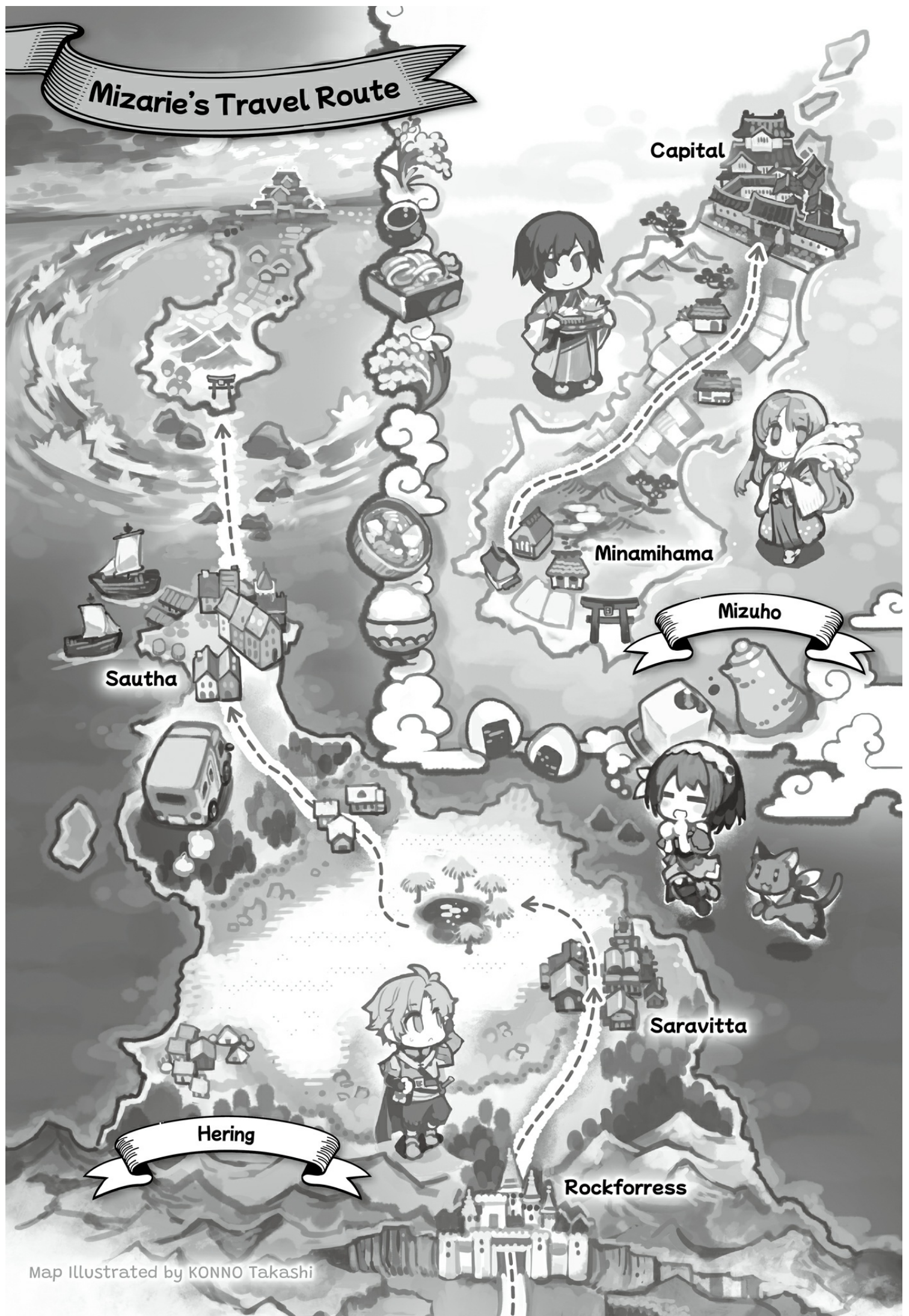


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Traveling to a New Town: Rockforress

Pigs in a Blanket

The sun sparkled, illuminating the clear blue sky, and a gentle breeze blew across the grasslands. It felt like I was truly adventuring, which was exciting, but there was just one thing that still made my heart pound with anxiety, no matter how much experience I'd gotten.

"Let's do this, Ohagi!"

"Mrau!"

After I signaled to Ohagi, we took care of the two slimes that had appeared before us. Each of us was supposed to take down one—I had my dagger, and Ohagi had her claws. Though monsters had intimidated me at first, I'd gotten used to my life as an adventurer...at least I'd felt that way. *But I'm still pretty nervous!*

I picked up the items the slimes had dropped while letting out an exhale of accomplishment.

I, Mizarie, was a former villainess turned adventurer. My former fiancé, the crown prince, had broken off our engagement and sentenced me to exile. Having had a terrible relationship with my own family as well, I had fled the kingdom—in other words, I'd gone through a self-exile.

I'd had no experience as an adventurer, so I'd had plenty of worries and difficulties in the beginning, including finding a source of income. But now I was having the time of my life. After all, I wasn't alone in this! I was traveling with my beloved black cat, Ohagi, and Raoul, another adventurer. On top of that, I even had an RV!

This RV of mine was parked not too far from where we were, and it was a

legitimate Class C vehicle. The body was a moss green with an illustrated logo of a cat, all of which was accented by a white door with a circular window.

The RV was more than a vehicle with a cute exterior. The living area included not only the standards like a table and seating, but there was a kitchen, a bath, and a bedroom. From how big it looked on the outside, the interior was surprisingly spacious. I was constantly impressed with and grateful for how well everything went when it came to an RV produced by a magic-based skill.

Yes, I summoned this RV through my skill, and I was able to drive it around as I pleased! Of course, it was able to handle flat areas like main roads and grasslands, but it could even handle zooming up mountains and through dungeons—it was an incredibly exceptional RV. On top of all of that, it could run over—I mean, it could ram into monsters and take them down!

After we'd taken down a bunch of monsters with the RV, our levels had actually increased a ton as well. Since using the RV meant I was using my skill to take down monsters, we got experience from it, which seemed to have led to an increase in our levels. Because of that, even though it made me nervous to fight one, there was no possibility of me losing to a slime.

“The fire's ready, Mizarie.”

“Thanks, Raoul!” I turned around upon hearing his voice, and Ohagi jumped up onto my shoulder.

I scratched her chin with tickling motions, which she happily responded to with a “Mre-reow.”

Raoul, my adventuring companion, was the one who'd prepared a fire for us. He was a kind young man with orangey brown hair and amber eyes, and he was a first-class adventurer. He was also the one who'd taught me how to move around and use a dagger for adventuring purposes.

The black cat who'd jumped onto my shoulder and fought the slimes with me earlier was Ohagi. I'd taken care of her back when I was still a villainess, and she'd become my family. Ohagi had been so small, but she had eaten a lot and

was growing at a healthy rate. Ohagi was now a proper member of our adventuring party, and she was even an expert when it came to sniffing out mimics.

“Okay then...what do you want to have for lunch?” Raoul asked. “You’ve been driving, so I can prepare something.”

“It’s okay, I’ll make lunch! We’ll probably get to town before sunset, so we should be able to take it easy today.”

“Got it.”

I placed my personal chair beside the fire and began preparing lunch. Raoul then gathered branches to use as firewood while he checked if there were any other monsters in the area.

“I’ll be nearby, so shout if anything happens,” he said.

“Mau!”

“Okay!” I said.

It seemed that Ohagi was going to follow Raoul. She jumped off my shoulder and ran after him. I waved goodbye to them and psyched myself up to prepare the meal.

“All right then, let’s do this!”

Since we were going to take it easy and spend the night in town for the first time in a while, I decided on making something simple for lunch. I brought out some sausages and a sheet of puff pastry, which I’d prepared yesterday.

First, I skewered the sausages onto some branches I’d carved down. Using the branches as skewers made it seem like we were enjoying everything nature had to offer, which I liked. *It’s not something you’d do in your day-to-day life—that’s what’s so good about it.*

I then rolled out the puff pastry into a thin layer, which I wrapped around the skewers in a spiral.

“After wrapping the pastry around it, it’s time to grill it over the campfire!”

I then stuck the dough-wrapped branches into the ground. After a bit of waiting, the delicious pastries would be ready.

“Mmm, the smell of the butter in the puff pastry is really making me hungry... The time waiting for these to finish grilling is the hardest part.” There was no doubt that the sausage inside was going to come out snappy and juicy. “It’s easy to make, but making it with a campfire really adds to the camping vibe, which is exciting.”

I was probably the number one lover of campfires in this world. I loved the time spent listening to the crackling of the fire, watching the red flames sway gently, and adding in firewood now and then to stoke the fire. I couldn’t help but feel spellbound by the fire.

I remembered how back in my previous life, when I was a corporate slave, I’d unwind by watching videos of campfires or people camping. I’d always wanted to light my own campfire, but I’d never expected that would come true after being reincarnated...

Such thoughts ran through my mind as I blankly stared at the fire, but then, I suddenly remembered something.

“Right, I should make something else!”

Just some sausages wrapped in puff pastry wasn’t going to be enough food. Since the pigs in a blanket covered meat and bread, it would probably be good to make something with vegetables.

“We’ll get to town in the evening, so I can use stuff up without any worry.”

When we were traveling between towns or dungeon crawling, we needed to be careful about managing the ingredients we had in stock. It would be bad if we ate everything when we couldn’t stock back up!

I headed inside the RV to the kitchen and checked the fridge.

“Looks like we have half a head of cabbage, a third of an onion, and half a carrot left. Also a little bit of lemon...” It looked like it would be fine to use everything up.

I can cut up some of the cabbage along with the onion and carrot to make a vegetable soup. I could use up the rest of the cabbage by throwing it into a skillet and turning it into a cabbage steak. That sounds good.

I did the prep work in the kitchen and finished cooking outside on the campfire, as usual. If we had a fire going, it was definitely better to have a meal prepared using it!

As I simmered the soup, I heard the pleasant sound of the cabbage searing. Preparing camp foods like this while surrounded by nature was so much fun, but because of the setting, there were lots of things to worry about as well.

“If I had some ponzu, I could make a bright sauce to go with things, but I don’t have any, so... Oh! Maybe I could do a refreshing lemon-based sauce?”

I would normally use lemon on grilled meat or to add some brightness to a dish, but since it was the start of summer, it was the perfect time of year to use it in a sauce.

“I think something simple would be good, like mixing it with olive oil and salt...” I juiced the lemon and mixed some olive oil into it. Once it was combined, I added a pinch of salt and some basil. “Yeah, that looks good!”

Just as I finished preparing the easy lemon sauce, Raoul and Ohagi returned.

“Smells good,” Raoul said, his hands full with firewood.

“Welcome back, you two.”

“Thanks.”

“Mau!”

“You’re just in time. Lunch is ready.”

Ohagi was having poached chicken, which I had stocked and reheated using the microwave. Raoul and I were having the grilled pigs in a blanket, soup which I’d put into bowls, and—right from the skillet—the cabbage steak, which I poured the lemon sauce over.

Raoul sat down on a boulder near the fire, and we both put our hands together.

“Time to dig in!” we said in unison.

“Mrow!”

Raoul and I both went for the pigs in a blanket first. Since they were staked into the ground while being grilled, we could each just grab it ourselves.

Mmm, it smells so good. I’m already salivating. Okay, let’s try this thing... Just then, I heard the pleasant sound of something crunchy.

“Mmm, this is really good!” Raoul exclaimed. “I love the texture of the pastry, but the sausage inside is also super juicy!”

“Hee hee, it’s good, isn’t it? I used puff pastry for the outside. Regular bread is good too, but it’s nice to have something like this too.” With that, I took a bite of the dough-wrapped sausage, which made a crunchy sound. I loved the chewy texture of bread, but puff pastry was great too. “The buttery aroma is also wonderful.”

“I could probably eat a hundred of these,” Raoul said.

Ohagi was also enthusiastically devouring her meal with a satisfied “Mrow mrow!”

“The vegetable soup is good too, but I really like the *oomph* that the grilled cabbage has. Is this...lemon? It makes it really refreshing.”

“It’s a mixture of lemon and olive oil. It’s been hot recently, so I thought adding a sauce like this would give it a brighter flavor.”

The foods in this world were generally quite rich and heavy. Perhaps that was why I inexplicably craved acidic sauces from time to time.

Raoul continued gobbling up the meal, exclaiming, “It’s delicious!” Just watching him enjoy the food made it worth cooking.

I finished my meal as well, then stretched my limbs out. *Ah, a nice breeze and the blue skies that come after spring...*

“I want to just drift off into a nap.”

“I get that,” Raoul said, completely agreeing.

“But, if I nap now, I don’t know if we’ll get to town before nighttime, so I’ll

work a little harder!”

And so, I drove the RV, heading for town.

I hummed a tune as I sped down the road in the RV. Our destination was a town called Rockforress. It was a town on the border shared with the neighboring Kingdom of Hering. According to Raoul, it was always bustling.

Raoul was in the living area with Ohagi, looking over the items dropped by monsters that we planned to sell once we got to town.

“I’m excited to visit a new town,” I said to myself with a hum. I couldn’t help but be excited, not when I now had a grand goal.

This goal was to eat rice—to eat Japanese food!

This world of the otome game *The Girl of Light and the Evil Forest* that I, a former Japanese person, had reincarnated into was set in a Europe-esque fantasy land. In the game, there hadn’t been a land based on Japan. Because of that, I’d dreamed of having Japanese ingredients like rice or soy sauce while knowing they would be difficult to obtain, but I’d finally discovered them!

I’d met an adventurer in the Spirit’s Dungeon who’d thanked me for a meal by gifting me...rice! My excitement at the time had probably shocked Raoul and the others, but I had just been that starved for rice.

That adventurer had eaten rice frequently in their homeland, but had been inexperienced with cooking and unable to prepare the rice properly. And so, the rice had been gifted to me, someone who loved cooking.

Because of that experience, I’d had a huge craving for Japanese food.

“I know I was *really* excited, but I still can’t believe that I forgot to get the name of his homeland... That was a big mistake.” What a fool I’d been.

Despite that, I *did* know that his homeland was east of where we were, so I’d just been headed east since then. It was apparently quite far away, but the standard modes of transportation in this world were carriages, horses, and walking. Since I had an RV, the pace I was able to travel at was—in comparison

—like night and day.

“I’m sure we’ll get to the eastern kingdom soon,” I told myself. I continued driving, staying optimistic, and eventually a town came into view. “Oh, that’s the border town, Rockforress!”

There was a mountain right next to the town, which served as the border between the two kingdoms. One side had a rocky surface, while the other was covered in trees.

“What an interesting mountain,” I remarked.

Raoul heard me and made his way up front from the living area.

“Oh, can you see Rockforress?”

“Yeah. We should get out of the RV and travel by foot soon.”

“Sounds good,” Raoul said, nodding.

I wasn’t necessarily hiding my skill, but because being able to summon an RV was rare, I was careful not to have it out near towns. It wouldn’t be a good time if someone malicious decided to target me.

“I wonder what kind of outdoor goods Rockforress will have,” I said, my desires spilling out.

Raoul chuckled. “You’re always looking forward to the same thing. I’ve heard that Rockforress has high-quality ore and lumber, so there’s a lot of craftwork.”

“I see. Sounds like there’s a lot to look forward to.”

Lumber called to mind desks, chairs, and tableware. Ore would mean I could possibly buy knives and skewers. *Man, I’m so excited!*



And so, we arrived at the town of Rockforress!

The outer walls of Rockforress were made of stone, and the edge of the walls continued directly into the rocky mountain, which was unusual. The town was full of sturdy-looking buildings, which were probably built out of both ore and lumber. This town could probably withstand a monster attack or natural

disaster.

What was really unique was that the houses had decorative stained glass windows in addition to the standard windows. Various colors of glass were put together, which instantly brightened the clunky stone buildings.

It was a hardy but chic-looking town, and it seemed like it would be a fun place to go sightseeing.

“Wow, it’s got a different flavor from the other towns we’ve been to. I like it.”

“It’s my first time here, but it looks like a fun place.”

“Mreow mreow.”

Raoul and Ohagi both looked very curious as they scanned the town.

“Oh, right. We should first sell our items at the adventurer’s guild. After that, we’ll get a room at an inn, then eat.”

“Okay!”

Since we were adventurers, we made our living by selling the items that we got from hunting monsters or accepting jobs from the adventurer’s guild. *It would be nice if there were jobs that would have us heading east*, I thought as we headed to the guild.

We sold the items dropped by wolves and slimes and accepted new hunting jobs. With that, we had our travel funds secured for the moment.

The monsters we were requested to hunt were mine wolves. They apparently lived in the area. Their bodies were hard, so they required a certain amount of strength to take down.

“All right...! We’ll have to work hard adventuring!”

“Since you’ve gotten used to battling monsters, maybe it would be good for you to try fighting outside of the RV.”

“What?!” Raoul’s words made it feel like my heart had stopped.

I had been using my skill, the RV, to run ov— No, to ram into monsters, so I

didn't have much experience fighting on my own with a weapon. *Still, I'm going to be living as an adventurer. I might need to take a path too narrow for my RV. It would be troublesome if we couldn't push forward because a monster popped out and I was too scared to fight.*

"I-I'll try my best...!" I said, tightening my hand into a fist.

"Mrrmrow!"

"Yeah, let's do our best!"

Ohagi and Raoul cheered me on. That gave me some relief, but my heart continued pounding for a bit. *I mean, a mine wolf sounds so strong...!*

The corners of my mouth unconsciously turned up at the delicious aroma of meat sizzling. Sitting in front of me was a thick steak smothered in garlic. There was also a mushroom potato salad, hand pies filled with beef and vegetables, oxtail soup, and some cold fruit-infused water.

After leaving the guild, we had gotten rooms at an inn and headed to the dining hall. *Camp meals are great, but I love eating out at restaurants too!*

"Ah, it smells so delicious! It's nice to eat out every once in a while."

"I know we have a kitchen in the RV, but our ingredients are limited, so we have restrictions on what we can make."

"Yeah, exactly. I'd like to try thinking of ways we can expand on what we can make, but I'm more excited about eating right now," I said, putting my hands together. "Thanks for the food!" Then I dug in.

I took a big bite of the steak, which was incredibly juicy with a great, meaty texture. While a thick piece of meat was difficult to cook with a campfire and maybe wasn't too practical, it was like one of those grand ideals in food. *Maybe if I take my time to cook it slowly, it would be okay?*

"What's wrong?" Raoul asked as I sat there, thoughts on cooking running through my mind.

"I was just thinking it would be nice if we could cook a wider variety of dishes."

“I think what you make is already plenty delicious. Are you trying to evolve your cooking even more?”

“Of course! Not only do I want more cooking utensils, but I want to have more spices and condiments too.”

“I see...” Raoul seemed impressed. “I wonder if there’s some way I could contribute.” Raoul always went along with my camping-driven desires, which was incredibly kind of him.

“For now, I want to find that eastern kingdom so I can get rice and other ingredients...”

“Let’s try asking about it around town tomorrow. There might be someone who knows of it.”

“Yeah,” I said with an enthusiastic nod. *I have to eat up so I can go gather information tomorrow!* I thought as I chowed down on more meat.



“An eastern kingdom? I’m sorry, I don’t think I know of it.”

“Rice? I’ve never heard of that.”

“A black condiment? Is that safe to eat?”

It was the next day, and Ohagi was riding on my head as we tried asking around town, but things weren’t going well.

“Hm...” I was already close to giving up.

“Well, first of all,” Raoul began with a wry chuckle, “all we know is that it’s east from here, and it’s probably not called ‘the eastern kingdom.’”

“Exactly!” Yes, that was our problem.

All we had to go on was that it was a country located east of where we were, and that they had rice. But the information network of this world wasn’t that developed, so it was difficult to learn anything about faraway places.

However, I feel like this mystery country probably has traditional Japanese elements to it... Like, maybe they use katanas, or they wear kimono. Maybe we’ll start to see things like that the farther east we go...

As I thought about what to do, a different question popped into my mind: Why was this country so unknown?

“Hey, I know it’s probably far from here, but it’s not like there’s no way to get there probably, right? I wonder why it’s so unknown.”

“That’s a good point. Even if they’re far away, you usually hear about large towns... Oh! Maybe it’s not just that it’s far, but it’s also hard to get to? That’s probably why people haven’t heard about rice and things like that. If we add on that it’s difficult to travel to, we might get more information.”

“That makes sense! You’re a genius, Raoul!”

If we asked about a location that was so secluded that there wasn’t too much information on it, and that it was difficult to get to, we might have a chance.

“They didn’t have any information when we asked yesterday, but it might be good to check with the guild again.”

“Yeah, let’s ask the guild right away!”

I could see the light at the end of the tunnel on my journey to rice—or this eastern kingdom at the very least—and I instantly felt more pep in my step.

“A kingdom located east of here that’s difficult to get to?” the clerk at the adventurer’s guild asked. She immediately pulled out a map of the area.

The map had the town of Rockforress along with the surrounding rocky mountain, as well as towns and villages toward the top, but there was no eastern kingdom listed.

“Let’s see... In that case, it may be somewhere past the desert.”

“There are towns past the desert?” I asked, leaning over the counter to get a good look at the map.

If you went past Rockforress, where we currently were, you would enter the neighboring Kingdom of Hering. If you traveled north from the border, there would be villages and towns, but even farther north was a desert. The map didn’t include locations that were beyond the desert. The desert seemed to horizontally divide the land, so it wasn’t unusual for the map to be cut off there.

“Wouldn’t it be difficult to travel across such an expansive desert?” Raoul asked, pointing out the possible issue with a serious look as he read the map.

Traveling across the desert could probably take several days, or even more if we weren’t traveling efficiently. Not only that, but it would be hot during the day, and the temperatures would drop drastically at night. Saying that it would be difficult for a novice to travel across the desert would be an understatement...

The clerk then pointed to the western side of the desert. “This area has the least amount of desert, so it would be a detour in terms of getting through the desert, but most people take this route. You’ll get lost if you enter the desert through the town of Saravitta, so please don’t make that mistake.”

“Oh, so the desert part is over quickly if you travel through the western side.”

“Yes. However, even if you travel on camelback, it will take at least a day. There are sandstorms as well, so even if you have an experienced guide, the trip will take a minimum of two days.”

“Oh my...” The desert sounded terrifying, and I gulped. *I never visited a desert ever in my past life... I’ve never even been to the Tottori Sand Dunes. I don’t even know if we can drive through the desert in my RV.*

“So, this desert is the place that’s difficult to get to?”

“No, it’s not the desert...”

“What?”

I’d asked thinking that the eastern kingdom was just past the desert, but that didn’t seem to be the case.

“There *are* towns and villages past the desert,” the clerk clarified. “There’s a village called Sautha at the very north of the area. There’s a remote island that you can visit from there called Mizuho. That is the place that is difficult to get to.”

“Mizuho?! *And* it’s a remote island?!” I’d unintentionally yelled upon hearing the unexpected name.

Mizuho was an island country that was northwest of Rockforress. There wasn't much exchange between Mizuho and its neighboring kingdoms because it was incredibly difficult to get there. You had to travel across a desert, then venture overseas. They were both difficult trips to make, so it wasn't a place you could visit with half-hearted resolve.

Mizuho is an ancient name of Japan, right...? It felt strange that Mizuho even existed in this European medieval fantasy setting, but it didn't seem too unusual if I thought of it as the developers of the game having some fun. But a country based on Japan meant there would be access to rice, so I had high hopes for this country known as Mizuho.

"Me-zoo-hoe... That's an interesting name for a country."

"Yeah. I'm sure their culture will be nothing like we've seen before, so I'm excited!" I said with a smile.

"Mrow!"

"I agree," Raoul said, smiling back at me. Ohagi also had a cute smile.

"It seems like it would be a lengthy, difficult trip by horse and carriage, but it probably won't take that long with the RV. We can decide whether we think we can cross the desert once we get there."

"Even if we have to take a detour, it would take anywhere from a handful to maybe ten days, right? That doesn't sound bad at all."

"Let's just pray that we don't have any accidents," I said.

"Mrrmrow."

Now that we had Mizuho as our destination, we decided to depart in a few days. The time until then was going to be spent recovering from our travels up to this point, and going shopping.

"Even experienced travelers get lost in the desert," the clerk said. "Please be careful."

"Of course. Thanks for all your help!"

After obtaining information about the eastern kingdom—about Mizuho—I was on cloud nine. I felt as light as a feather walking back to the inn from the guild.

“Do you have a moment, Mizarie?” Raoul asked, stopping me before I headed to my room.

“Hm? What’s up?”

“I don’t really want to discuss it in the hallway...”

“Can we talk in my room, then?”

“Sure.”

I wonder what’s wrong, I thought, tilting my head as I invited Raoul inside. I prepared some drinks so we could have a chat. Just then, Raoul placed a bag onto the desk, which jingled as he set it down.

“Money...?” I stared intently at Raoul, wondering what was going on.

“Have you forgotten?” he asked with a sigh, giving me a look of suspicion.

Huh...? What? Huh?

“Oh, I see! It’s the money for the potion!” I finally remembered at the last moment, and I clapped my hands together.

The money for the potion related to something from back when Raoul and I had first met. He had been attacked by a leaf goblin and was on the brink of death when I’d found him, and I’d used an expert’s potion to save him.

I’d told him that there was no need for him to pay me back, but Raoul absolutely refused. He’d been traveling with me until now under the condition that he’d be my bodyguard until he finished paying me back. It should be noted that someone could live very comfortably for six months off of the cost of an expert’s potion.

“Of course not, I totally didn’t forget!” I said in a surely convincing tone with a chuckle.

Raoul shrugged. “At first, I was worried about how long it would take to pay you back, but thanks to your unconventional skill, it took no time! I know we made a lot in the Spirit’s Dungeon, but I didn’t think I’d finish paying you back this quickly...”

“A dungeon with a spirit sure is generous,” I said. The jobs we’d accepted and the dropped items we’d sold from the Spirit’s Dungeon had come out to a lot of money, so he had been able to save up in no time.

“More than the dungeon, it’s thanks to *you*, okay? It wouldn’t have been so easy if I’d been on my own, so I want you to get that through your head.” Raoul had to emphasize that it was the RV’s exceptionality that had made clearing the dungeon and hunting so easy.

Well, yeah. I know. I’m well aware... I quickly nodded back and checked the contents of the bag.

“Payment received! Thanks, Raoul.”

“I should be the one thanking you. Not only did you save me, but you even healed my injury at the Spirit’s Dungeon. I’m back to full health.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” I said with a smile.

Raoul then gave me a serious look. “I just wanted to say again that I’m really grateful. If you hadn’t helped me, I probably would’ve died.”

“Oh...! It’s no big deal. I’m just glad you’re okay,” I said, shaking my head.

Raoul seemed like he wasn’t nervous anymore, and he gave me a gentle smile.

Just then, I realized something: There was no reason for Raoul to be traveling with me anymore. I had initially set out on my journey planning to travel with Ohagi, so I’d just be going back to my original plan. I would be lying if I said that I wasn’t sad, but Raoul had his own life and his own plans as an adventurer. He didn’t need to travel with me anymore.

The sudden anticipation of splitting up made my heart instantly feel heavy. *Raoul taught me a lot about adventuring, so I should probably get him a gift.*

“Mizarie?”

“Huh? Oh, sorry. I was just so surprised because it’s such a large amount.”

I’d been looking down, getting sentimental all on my own, and that had made Raoul worry. I waved it off and smiled after coming up with some kind of excuse. “I’m okay!” It *was* true that there was a lot of money.

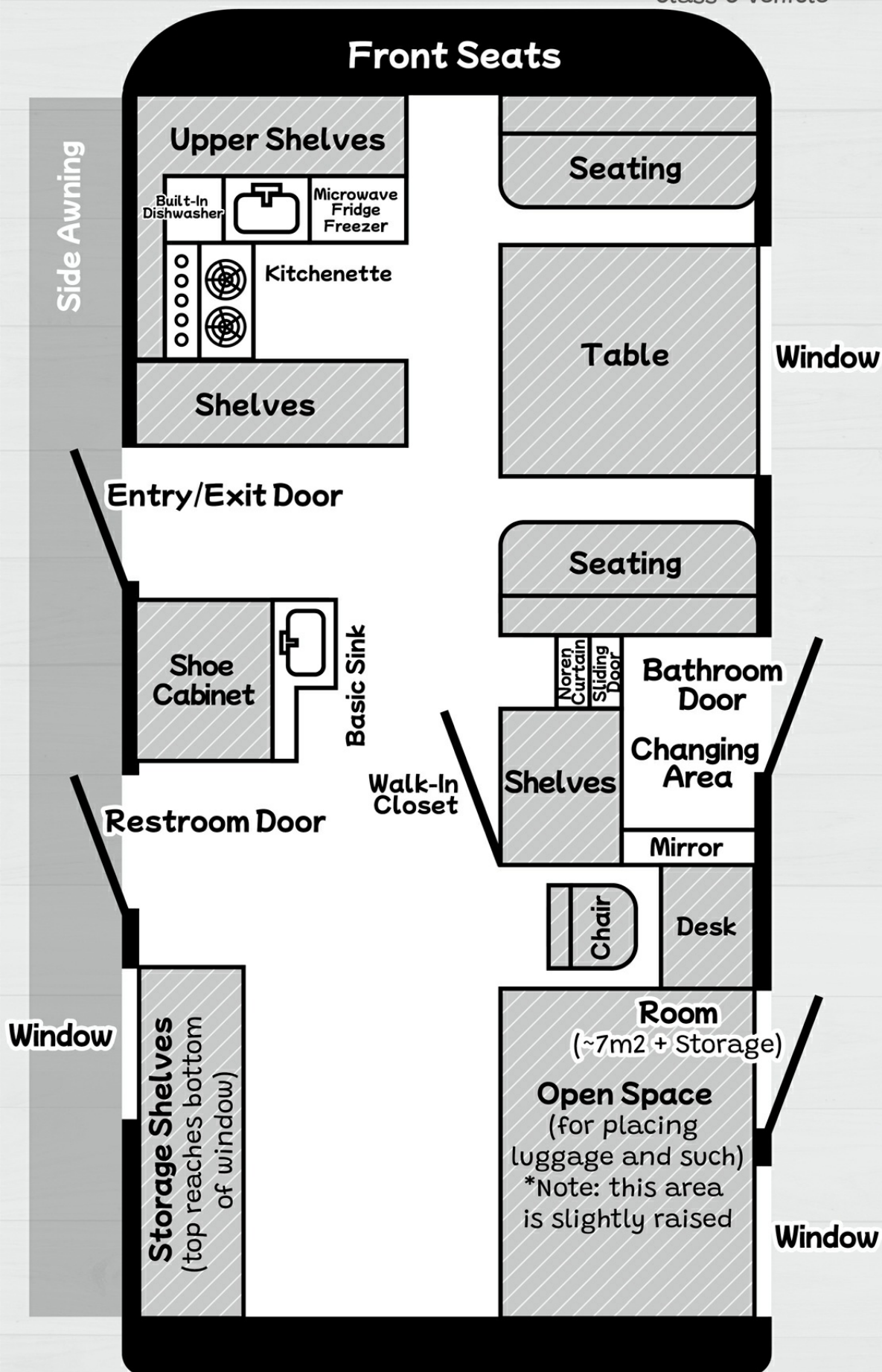
“It sure is. You can store it with the guild, but I think for you it would be safe in your RV.”

“Yeah, I’ll do that.”

Only those I’d approved could enter the RV, so there was no concern about my money being stolen. Since it was a skill, the entire RV could be stored when I wasn’t using it.

It was too much money to leave at the inn or walk around town with, so I had Raoul go with me to put the money in my RV.

Lv17
Version:
Class C Vehicle



The Gift

It was the next day. I woke up at the inn and got ready, putting on the dress I'd purchased before. I was planning on spending the day sightseeing. There was a portion of the rocky side of the mountain that had been turned into a store, giving Rockforress its own unique charm.

"I want to find a gift for Raoul too..."

Just then, there was a knock on my door.

"Are you awake?" Raoul asked from the other side.

"Good morning, Raoul."

"Morning, Mizarie. Sorry to leave you alone, but I have some plans today." Raoul sounded like he felt bad, perhaps because he didn't go out on his own very much. There wasn't anything wrong with everyone doing their own thing, though.

"Got it!"

"I'll be back at night, so let's have dinner together," Raoul said before immediately taking off.

"Okay, stay safe," I said, waving goodbye. Raoul turned around and waved back. Since he was leaving first thing in the morning, he probably had an important errand to run. "Hm... We're always together so I've never thought about him doing stuff on his own."

"Mau."

I'd been thinking about how I might buy Raoul a gift in secret, so it actually had worked out perfectly. Ohagi then jumped onto my shoulder.

"It's just the two of us today," I said with a wry chuckle. "It's been a while, hasn't it?"

After having breakfast at the inn, Ohagi and I headed out into town. I could

hear the sound of something clanging in the distance. It seemed that there were workers mining for ore.

“Let’s check out the town first.”

“Mrrrm!”

Hearing Ohagi’s energetic response got me excited as well.

The main street was lined with many stalls, and there were markets on both the east and west sides of town. It looked like the market was going to be the best place to go for stocking up before we headed out.

The stalls had wares like accessories with gemstones, and craftworks made out of stone and lumber. Aside from those categories, most of the items sold were tableware. There were couples happily picking out items together at the shops that sold accessories, but you could also see merchants stocking their stalls beside them.

What caught my eye out of everything there was a stall that sold serving platters.

“Wow, serving platters sure do have a lot of visual impact...”

The serving platters were made of various materials, such as earthenware and stained glass. The elegant-looking plates sparkled. They would definitely provide a beautiful background for any dish you served on them.

There were several designs on the platters as well, including those that had flower patterns made from stained glass, or those made out of a combination of all different colors of glass randomly sprinkled throughout the plate.

I bet serving food on one of these would make it several times more delicious. They’re all so cute, it’s hard to decide on one...

I stood there, agonizing over which to get, and the shopkeeper called out to me.

“All of our items are top quality, so they’re popular to give as gifts as well.”

“That makes sense! I don’t usually see stained glass in other towns, so these

dishes are unique to this town. I think they're lovely."

"I see you understand," the shopkeeper said, chuckling. He seemed happy that I'd complimented the platters.

Maybe I should get some...

I had the money that I'd gotten from clearing the Spirit's Dungeon, completing hunting jobs, and selling the items dropped by monsters, so I was financially doing pretty well. Though these platters could be used on a regular basis, it would be nice to have a few for a special occasion, like if we were having people join us for our camp meals. It wasn't uncommon to have a meal with other travelers and adventurers you met along the way.

"All right, I'll get three—no, two platters!"

"Got it, thanks for your support!"

I'd only noticed it after I'd said I would buy them, but the platters cost a pretty good price—they were each ten thousand rooks...

I picked one platter with pink flowers that looked like cherry blossoms painted on, as well as one with a cat illustrated on it. The white cat on the plate looked like it was Ohagi's counterpart, which was adorable.

"Look, Ohagi. It's a platter with a cat on it. Isn't it cute?"

"Mre-reow!" Perhaps Ohagi could tell what the illustration on the plate was, because she rubbed her head against it when I showed it to her. *I should use this for our next camp meal!*

"Oh, right! I was supposed to be looking for a gift!"

"Mrow."

I left the stall and decided to check out a different street, looking for something that might be nice.

"What to get as a gift..."

"Mau mau."

As I walked down the main street, I thought about what to do. I'd never

gotten someone a gift since I'd reincarnated into this world, so I wasn't quite sure what would be good to get.

I personally would be excited if I was gifted camping items... Like, if I got a huge pot as a gift, I'd be bouncing off the walls! But I don't think Raoul would get that excited over camping items...

"Since he's an adventurer, maybe he'd like recovery items or equipment? But he might have specific qualities he wants in items like that."

He probably already had specific things he liked using on a regular basis, and how something felt was important when it came to buying equipment. On top of that, a novice adventurer like me probably wouldn't pick something that great. I could imagine Raoul using gifted equipment that wasn't so great because he was trying to be nice. *That would be bad!*

"In that case, I guess everyday items would be good... Oh, but if we go our separate ways, he won't be able to leave it in the RV, so I can't get him anything heavy or anything that'll take up too much space... This is difficult, Ohagi."

"Mreeew..."

Perhaps it was because my own voice sounded gloomy, but Ohagi seemed dispirited as well. As I walked around, wondering what to do, a jewelry store caught my eye.

"Oh, this is..." My attention was captured by an accessory on display in the shop window. "It's a protection amulet made out of ore from Rockforress!"

"Mau?"

"Oh, you've probably never heard of it, Ohagi. This ore can only be mined in Rockforress. It's currently sold as a little charm for protection, but in the game, equipping it would raise your defense points."

The only thing was, it only slightly increased your defense, so in the actual world it would probably be difficult to feel its effects. Because of that, it was sold as a charm or amulet.

I decided to check the price of the necklace on display. "Wait, it's thirteen thousand rooks?! That's so cheap!" It was so cheap that I'd unintentionally

raised my voice, so I quickly covered my mouth with my hand. Others walking down the street stared at me, which was a bit embarrassing.

This ore costs five times that if you buy it in the Royal Capital...!

Though I was shocked, the town of Rockforress was quite far from the Royal Capital of the Kingdom of Richard, where I used to live. Since this world had limited modes of transportation, there were probably difficulties when it came to transporting items.

“This amulet might be the perfect gift.” *I’m going to find one that’ll suit Raoul!* With my spirits high, I entered the shop.

The store was full of various accessories, all with various colors of gemstones. The flooring was a chic stone tile, and the walls were made of wood. There were stands made out of a dark, almost black, ore; the accessories were displayed on top.

The employee was in a simple suit, and most of the other customers were classy-looking older women. Because it was an actual store and not a stall out on the street, this shop seemed to be geared toward people who wanted to take their time and shop.

I couldn’t help but stare at the polished interior of the store. One corner of it was a special section for amulets made using the Rockforress ore. Rockforress amulets came in all sorts of accessory types such as necklaces, rings, clip-on earrings, bracelets, and brooches. With all the options I had, I would surely be able to find something that was perfect for Raoul.

“Aren’t they pretty, Ohagi?”

“Mau.”

I wonder what color would look good on Raoul, I thought as I looked through the Rockforress ore accessories. He usually wore white clothes that were paired with shades of brown. A deep green was usually the accent color to his outfits, so he had a relatively neutral-colored wardrobe.

“Oh, this color might be good!”

A red Rockforress ore had caught my eye. I thought it would look good and complement Raoul's laid-back nature.

"Next, I have to decide what kind of accessory I want it as. Since he uses a sword, wearing a ring might be awkward. He wears gloves, so a bracelet might not be great either. In that case, maybe a necklace would be best."

A clip-on earring could fall off while he was fighting, and most brooches were designed with women in mind.

"Okay then, let's go with a necklace!"

"Mreow!" It seemed that Ohagi liked the necklace I'd chosen as well.

"Excuse me, I'd like to buy this! Could you gift wrap it?"

After purchasing the red Rockforress ore necklace, I left the shop.

I wanted to give Raoul his gift as soon as I got back to the inn, but he hadn't returned yet.

"I wonder where he is..."

We'd made plans to eat dinner together, so he probably wasn't going to be too late, but I couldn't help but worry since we'd both never been to this town before.

Just then, Ohagi, who'd been sitting by my feet, called out to me. "Mreow mreow." It sounded like she was hungry.

"That's right, it's time for your dinner, isn't it?"

I pulled out the poached chicken I had prepared for her and served it on her plate. I'd borrowed the inn's kitchen for a little bit in the morning to make her chicken ahead of time.

Ohagi began devouring her meal, her tail wiggling to signal that it was delicious. *I'm happy too, Ohagi! I love watching you enjoy your food!*

As I was watching Ohagi eat with a smile on my face, there was a knock on my door.

"Are you back, Mizarie? It's me, Raoul."

“Oh, welcome back, Raoul— Wait, what is that?”

I opened the door right as I heard his voice and saw that Raoul was carrying something quite large. It was made of wood, and it looked like a box with handles. I couldn't help but stare, only snapping back to attention when Raoul asked, “Can I put this down?”

“Of course! What would be good? Maybe you can put it on the desk?”

I moved out of the way and invited Raoul inside, and he nodded as he placed the item down on top of the desk. Ohagi, who'd just finished her dinner, jumped onto the desk, full of curiosity. She started sniffing the item that Raoul had brought with him.

“What is this, Raoul...?” I asked, my head tilting in confusion.

Raoul sounded a bit bashful as he began to explain. “You've done so much for me, Mizarie. You were even patient with me about paying you back for the potion. I made it as a thank-you gift.”

“What?!” To my surprise, it was a present for me. I was so shocked that I kept looking back and forth between Raoul and the wooden box.

Raoul then bashfully placed his hand on top of the wooden box. “This is an outdoor item I came up with... Well, you'd call it a ‘camping item.’”

“Please explain.” The moment I heard the words “camping item,” I was hooked and wanted to know more.

Raoul cleared his throat, then he began to explain. “I don't know if it's what you wanted, but I made something I thought would be nice to have.”

Raoul took off the lid of the wooden box, and it was filled with spice jars. There was also a shelf that was about as deep as half of the entire box. It looked like small items could be stored there.

It had plenty of depth, so if you placed the box vertically, it could store a cutting board. If you looked closely, you'd find that it even had spaces carved out to store knives.

On top of all of that, the bottom of the wooden box was a drawer that could

store plates and cutlery. That wasn't the only creative element, though—the outside of the box had iron hooks that you could hang cups off of.

The box had handles as well. It looked like it would be quite heavy, but it was something that you wouldn't walk around with, so that wasn't really a concern.

Wh-Whoaaaaa!

"You're so skilled, Raoul!"

"My dad was the village carpenter, so I learned a lot from him when I was younger."

"Woow! That's awesome!" I wasn't good with these kinds of DIY projects, so I had a lot of respect for people who could build things. "I've been really, *really* wanting something like this! Ah, it's so nice! What should I put in it? There are some spice jars already... Are these salt and pepper?"

There were five perfectly sized jars already in the storage box. Three had already been filled.

"I just filled the ones you use often. There's sugar, salt, and pepper."

"Whoa, I *do* use those a lot! Thanks!" I threw myself onto the wooden box, hugging and rubbing my cheek against it. "Ah, it smells wonderful. Starting today, you'll be my buddy...!"

I feel like I've seen something like this in camping videos from my previous life. I think they were called toolboxes too, but I liked the other word for them; it was an old-timey name people used for them.

"Oh, I remember now! Okamochi! It's a camping okamochi!" I felt good now that I'd remembered, but Raoul was confused by the term he'd never heard before.

"Okamochi? What's that?"

"Um, it's hard to explain... My homeland has a box called okamochi, and it's used for camping as well. You can put spices in it, of course, but you can also store cooking utensils."

"I see," Raoul said, nodding once he understood the name I'd used for the

wooden box. “I wasn’t sure what to call it, so it’s nice to have a term for it. I’m glad you like it.”

“Yeah, I’ll treasure it! Thank you, Raoul!”

“You’re welcome. I’m sure it could be improved on, so let me know if you find anything inconvenient while using it.”

“You’ll even provide follow-up support...?! You’re an angel...”

I’d always been storing my spices and condiments in a box, but I could use the okamochi from now on. I could have two sets of spices—one for the kitchen in the RV, and one for storing outdoors. I was already excited.

“Oh, that’s right!”

“Hm?”

“Mau?”

I’d gotten sidetracked thinking about all the things I could do with the okamochi that I’d almost forgotten about my gift for Raoul. *That was close.*

I rushed to grab the Rockforress ore necklace I’d bought during the day out of my bag. It was inside a small cloth bag and tied with a ribbon.

“I actually had a gift prepared for you too.”

“What?! For *me*?!”

“Yeah. I’m shocked that you were planning the same thing,” I said, bashfully handing Raoul his gift.

“Um, thank you... Is it okay if I open it?”

“Of course! I hope you’ll like it...”

Raoul slowly undid the ribbon and pulled out the necklace from the bag.

“Is this...a necklace with Rockforress ore?”

“Yup! Since you’re an adventurer, I thought an amulet would be nice.” It would provide a small increase to his defense stats, but that wasn’t something known to people in this world, so I didn’t bring it up.

“I love it. Thank you, Mizarie.”

“You’re welcome.” I was relieved that he liked it.

Raoul put the necklace on right away. “How does it look?” he asked, looking at Ohagi and me.

“It looks good! I knew red would suit you.”



“It’s a little embarrassing to wear a necklace, but it’s nice... Why did you get me a gift? Mine at least is to thank you for the potion, but...” Raoul seemed to feel bad that there wasn’t any reason for him to get a gift.

From my perspective, Raoul had been helping me constantly, so I thought it would even have been fine to gift him something just to show my appreciation.

“It’s a parting gift,” I said, doing my best to smile and not feel sad.

“A parting gift...?”

“Yeah. You’ve finished paying me back for the potion, so I figured that our party would split up now.” Just going our separate ways would be too sad, so I’d wanted to give him a memorable gift.

Ah, I’m going to be so lonely. We’d built fires together, gone fishing, and cooked together. Camping on my own was fun too, but there was so much more you could do with another person. It was easier to set up the tarp with Raoul there, and we could even take turns preparing meals.

The most helpful thing about having him was that he taught me the best practices of being an adventurer and how to fight. Raoul had been kind to me after I was exiled, and I had nothing but gratitude for him.

I stood there, feeling sentimental, and Raoul suddenly said something completely unexpected.

“I had no intention of splitting up our party...”

“What?!” I responded after a long pause. My eyes widened in shock. I’d never expected him to say such a thing. Sure, I’d thought it would be nice if we stayed together, but I’d thought that would never happen.

Raoul seemed a little unhappy at my shock. “I mean, I want to visit Mizuho too...”

“Well, I thought that you just wanted to tag along until we got there, not keep traveling together...”

“Of course not!” Raoul objected wholeheartedly.

I let out a huge sigh of relief—like I was exhaling out all my anxiety. I felt my

entire body relax.

“I already consider us to be a real party,” Raoul said directly with a serious look in his eyes. I could tell he wasn’t joking.

“Raoul...” *He’s really going to stay in a party with me...* I sighed. “So, I guess you’ll be staying.” I was so happy that a silly grin spread across my face, and Raoul smiled back. “Well then, I look forward to our continued travels, Raoul.”

“Yeah, me too, Mizarie.”

“Mrow!”

“You too, Ohagi!” Raoul and I both responded.

I’d thought we’d be going our own ways, but it seemed that our adventures would continue...no, if anything, they were just beginning!

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The next day, Raoul, Ohagi, and I headed into town to go shopping. We needed to buy groceries before departing for Mizuho. This was something we always did, and we usually stocked up on foods like meat and vegetables. But that wouldn’t be all for this particular trip.

We walked through the bustling streets, and I voiced my goals for our next journey.

“Let’s grow plants in the RV!”

“If we can grow vegetables, we won’t have to worry about dying of starvation.”

“Mreow mreow.” Ohagi was on Raoul’s head, listening to our conversation.

If we could grow vegetables in the RV, we would be able to eat fresh produce even if we were in a dungeon or far from a town. As we were adventurers, our bodies were how we made money, so I thought that was quite important. It was an idea I’d had after hearing Fifia, who had traveled with us in the Spirit’s Dungeon, lecture us about how important eating properly was.

I was also excited for this new challenge, and I turned to Raoul, having just remembered something.

“Have you ever grown vegetables, Raoul? I’ve only grown tomatoes before...”

Though I mentioned I had experience with tomatoes, it was just a part of my class in elementary school during my past life, where we grew some on the campus. To be honest, I had close to no specialized knowledge about growing produce.

“I’m from the countryside and have a lot of siblings, so we had a huge field where we grew a bunch of stuff.”

I know I’m in a party with him, but I actually don’t know that much about Raoul. It’s fun to hear about his background.

“That makes sense. You probably need a lot of food if you have such a big family. How many siblings do you have?”

“I have three older sisters and two older brothers. I’m the youngest.”

“Your family had six kids?! Wow!” *What a big family!* “That sounds like it would’ve been lively and fun.” I didn’t have a great family after being reincarnated into this world, so that was how I’d felt, but Raoul’s face clouded over.

“Well, having a large family *is* fun, but we were in the countryside... It’s not like we had knights or soldiers like they do in the Royal Capital or other large towns, so there were a lot of difficulties.”

“I see... I guess in a village, you’d be in danger if monsters appeared.” I’d said it sounded fun without thinking about it too much, but living in the countryside probably had its own hardships. Perhaps such circumstances had been what led Raoul to choose the path of becoming an adventurer.

Things had gotten a little less cheery, but fortunately we had arrived at the store. A general store carried what we were looking for—the kind of seedlings for planting in a small garden.

“So, next is deciding what we’ll grow,” Raoul said.

“Since you’re experienced, I feel like we could choose anything.”

“Don’t get your hopes too high,” Raoul said with a nervous chuckle as he

looked at the options.

Though they were sold as seedlings, many of them had grown a bit since it was early summer. *With how grown these are, we might be able to harvest them pretty soon.*

“There are tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, okra, squash... There are so many possibilities.” Raoul compared the different seedlings. “They all seem like good options.”

“Can we choose any of them?”

“Yeah. Since they’re all seedlings, I think none of them would be too difficult to grow.”

In that case, the amount of space needed would be the main issue to consider. Though my RV had leveled up, it wasn’t that spacious. We probably couldn’t raise too many varieties of produce.

“Oh!” I thought for a while before coming up with something. “What if we each pick a vegetable, and grow two types?”

“I like that idea!”

Since Raoul had agreed, I quickly grabbed a tomato seedling. When considering the color balance of a dish, tomatoes were great! They also were good raw, grilled, and boiled. They were an easy but exceptional ingredient.

“You chose so quickly!” Raoul exclaimed. “Okay then, I guess I’ll go with...this one.” Raoul thought for a bit before deciding on an okra seedling.

Okra could be easily steamed in the microwave, and I also liked their slimy texture. I nodded, thinking he’d made a good choice.

“Do you like okra?” I asked.

“Not in particular, but they grow quickly. We could harvest a bunch of them, so I think it’ll be valuable to have while dungeon crawling.”

“That makes sense...!”

Raoul explained how vegetables like squash that we couldn’t harvest as much of wouldn’t be great for our first attempt. I hadn’t considered the speed of

growth and how much we could harvest, but if we were gardening to have food while dungeon crawling, those were definitely important factors to consider.

In that case, tomatoes are also perfect!

“Okay then, it’s decided! Our first RV garden will have tomatoes and okra!”

“Yeah!”

“Mrow!”

We bought three of each type of seedling, along with pots to plant them in and a watering can. *We’re going to eat fresh vegetables we grew ourselves while camping. I’m so excited!*

RV Gardening

“RV Summon!” I exclaimed. The RV then appeared.

We were a thirty-minute walk outside of town, in an open, grassy field in the Kingdom of Hering. This was where we were going to board the RV and start our journey to Mizuho.

First, I carried in all the groceries and such we’d bought through the back door of the living area. I put various ingredients into the fridge, then I split up the meat into smaller portions before freezing them. I’d usually be done prepping at this point and be ready to head out, but there was more to do today.

“All right, it’s time for gardening in the RV!”

That’s right—I’m going to plant the tomatoes and okra. I’ll find a spot for them in the RV, and set up a garden space. Man, I’m so excited!

“All right then, let’s get started... Wait, what should I do for the soil?”

“Huh?”

I’d bought fertilizer, but I’d forgotten to purchase potting soil. I scratched my head, wondering what I should do, and Raoul looked at me, confused.

“What are you talking about? There’s soil all around us.”

“Oh, that’s what you were planning on...? Will they grow properly with just any old soil?”

I’d heard before that soil was important when growing vegetables. Sure, they would probably grow regardless of the soil we used, but I was worried whether they’d grow into delicious produce.

I had a concerned look on my face, and Raoul laughed.

“I think it’s fine. Some of the earth’s mana will probably be in that soil, and we bought fertilizer too. I think they’ll grow into yummy vegetables.”

“Okay, that’s good.” I felt a little relieved thanks to Raoul’s explanation.

The earth had natural mana in it, so rare herbs grew more easily in areas with more mana in the soil.

“I wonder what soil will work the best,” I said as I got out of the RV, inspecting the nearby ground.

Since we were in a grassy field, there were plants all around us. But because I had a choice, I wanted to take soil from an area abundant with grass and flowers.

“Hm... Oh, maybe the area by that tree would be good!”

“Mrow.”

I found a good-looking spot and ran toward it, and Ohagi followed me. There was a tree taller than I was, and there were lots of small colorful flowers growing at its base. *This soil is probably good. I’m just guessing, though.*

“Oh, that looks like good soil,” Raoul said.

“Really? I feel better hearing you say that.” I suddenly felt motivated, and I began scooping up soil with a shovel.

“It’s soft and easy to dig up.”

“Okay then, first let’s add a little soil.”

“Got it.”

Raoul held the pot in place, and I put the soil in. After that, I placed the seedling we’d bought inside, then covered its roots with more soil. After that, I added a branch for support and tied it to the stem of the seedling so it wouldn’t fall over.

The tomato seedlings had a bright green color, and they were flowering. It probably wouldn’t take too long before we’d be able to harvest some tomatoes. The okra seedlings weren’t flowering yet, but the stalks were firm and I felt that we’d be able to get a good amount of okra from them.

“Hee hee, I’m excited to harvest some vegetables. I wonder what I should make.”

Tomatoes would be nice even as a light snack, and the okra could make a

good topping for soba noodles. *Wait, I don't even know if they have soba in this world! I guess I'll have to pray that they have soba in Mizuho.*

"Everything you make is good, so I'm looking forward to it," Raoul said as I stood there, worrying about future prospects for ingredients.

"I have high hopes for your cooking too," I said.

"Ha ha, I'll do my best to meet those expectations." Raoul was in charge of making breakfast, and it seemed he already had some ideas. "The vegetables could be good in salads or sandwiches."

All right, I'm going to make delicious dishes too!

We placed the potted plants near the back of the RV, on the right side looking from the driver's seat. The left side was for Raoul's personal use.

"All right then. Let's set out for Mizuho," I announced.

"Yeah."

"Mrow!"

I headed to the driver's seat, and Raoul sat in the passenger seat. I saw that Ohagi had taken her place between our seats, so it was time to head out! *Actually, I need to set our destination in the navigation system before we go.*

"Let's see, set destination to Mizuho..."

The RV had a dashboard, which included a navigation system. By sliding my finger across the screen, I could view areas far past our current location.

If you looked at the map, it seemed that there were several villages and towns on the way to Mizuho from our current location. *Well, there's no need to stop by all of them.*

"In terms of large towns, there's Saravitta right before we enter the desert. Oh, it looks like there's a giant oasis in the desert too. I want to stop by there."

"You can figure out how to get to the oasis?! That's crazy..."

I chuckled and nodded in response to Raoul.

It looked like the desert past the town of Saravitta was going to be very difficult to cross. The adventurer's guild had mentioned that it would be better

to hire a guide and travel through the left edge—the western side—because there was the least amount of desert in that area.

In other words, because everyone passed through the desert on its western side, there wasn't much information about other parts of it. Taking this route would add distance to our trip, and we'd probably deal with sandstorms everywhere. With those things in mind, though it was a detour, the western route was probably the safest.

Having a navigation system is like a cheat code in this world...

"There's a small town past the desert, then there's two villages farther north... The island farther up from there is Mizuho!" My eyes glimmered with excitement. "All right, let's set the navigation for Mizuho...wait, no, for Saravitta!"

Our next stop was going to be Saravitta. Not only did we want to stop there to gather information before crossing the desert, but it would take us two to three days just to get there, so we would need to stock up on food before entering the desert. I was about to start driving when Raoul pointed something else out.

"We also need to hunt monsters."

"Oh, that's right!"

"Did you forget? I'm excited for Mizuho too, but we also have our work as adventurers," Raoul said with a chuckle.

I felt my face turn red. "I didn't forget. I just wasn't thinking that carefully... You're talking about the job we accepted at the adventurer's guild to hunt mine wolves, right? Since they're called mine wolves, they're probably near the mines, right...?"

This area had lots of mines, and many people worked in them. Because of that, the jobs to hunt monsters in those areas paid a little better than others.

I looked at the blue dots on the navigation system and confirmed where the mine wolves were. The blue dots on the navigation system indicated monsters, while the red dots indicated people.

"Oh, there's a mine to the right of here with a lot of mine wolves in the area."

“Okay, let’s go hunting there, then head to Saravitta.”

“Yeah.”

“Mau!”

We set out in the RV, headed for the mine wolves.

Hunting Mine Wolves

After driving for a bit, I heard a clanging. It was the sound of the mines. The scenery around us changed from grassy fields to rocky terrain, and the RV began rattling around.

"It's pretty bumpy here," Raoul said. "I think we'll be seeing mine wolves soon."

"Yeah!"

"Mre-reow!"

As the sounds grew louder, we were getting closer to the blue dots on the map.

"I'm sure the miners can't relax and focus on their work with monsters around," I said. "Let's do our best!"

Perhaps I'd jinxed it by psyching us up, but the mine wolves appeared right away. Their skins were partially made of minerals, which looked like patterns. They had a sharp look in their ruby red eyes. Though there were individual differences between each wolf, they generally had two to three horns sprouting from the center of their foreheads and along their backs.

They look strong! I was screaming internally while profusely sweating over the fact that I had to take down those powerful-looking monsters. It was terrifying enough to fight one on my own, but looking ahead of us, I could see that there were roughly seven mine wolves.

"There are so many! It's too many, Raoul!"

"Hm, you're not wrong that it might be a bit much for you to handle."

"A bit? More like a lot much!" I said with a completely frozen look.

"Y-Yeah, you're right," Raoul said, nervously chuckling after seeing how

mortified I was. He then smacked his hand in the palm of the other as if a light bulb had turned on in his head. “In that case, why don’t we take some down with the RV? If there are fewer of them, it’ll be easier for me to provide backup while you fight.”

“That’s it!” I was completely on board with Raoul’s idea, and I slammed on the gas pedal. Taking down monsters with the RV meant we’d be running them ov— No, we’d be ramming into them and sending them flying. I’d taken down plenty of monsters in the Spirit’s Dungeon using the RV, so this was something I could handle. “Raaagh!”

With a battle cry to raise my spirits, I sped forward and let the RV handle the mine wolves. Since they were monsters, they turned into particles of light and disappeared, leaving only items behind.

After the mine wolves disappeared, their horns, which were ores, dropped. I continued speeding forward until there was a single mine wolf left.

“I didn’t think you’d only leave one to fight...” Raoul sounded a bit exasperated, but I decided to act like I hadn’t heard him. It was a bit reckless for him to make me fight more than a single wolf.

Just then, I heard the chime of the dashboard.

“Oh, I leveled up!”

“Whoa!”

“Mrow!”

Whenever my skill leveled up, I could check the details of what got upgraded on the dashboard. I quickly went through the menu to see what came with this level-up.

<You’ve leveled up! Current Level: 18>

Level 18 Bunk Beds Installed

“Bunk beds?!” I exclaimed. Shocked, I quickly turned around to look at the living area behind us. *Where did the bunk beds get installed?*

“Hold on.” I was restless, eager to go check them out, but Raoul grabbed my shoulder and stopped me. “I’m really curious too, but we need to take down the mine wolf first. I also want to collect the dropped items.”

“Mreow mreow.”

“Urgh... You’re right. Let’s take care of the monster first.”

With both Raoul and Ohagi stopping me, I had no choice. My shoulders dropped as I stepped out of the RV.

“Aaagh!” I screamed. I’d gotten out of the RV without thinking, completely forgetting that there was a wolf outside! My nervous sweating got even worse than before, and I began begging Raoul for help. “Raoul! Raoul!!!”

The mine wolf was just watching me and hadn’t attacked yet, but surely that wouldn’t last forever.

“Ohagi, you can’t come out, no matter what! Okay?! Wait inside the RV!”

“*Hiss!*” After hearing my words, Ohagi began intimidating the mine wolf from inside the RV. She probably instinctively knew that it wouldn’t be good to get involved.

I’m so glad it didn’t immediately attack me!!!

“Get your dagger out, Mizarie!” Raoul yelled.

“Whoa! O-Okay!” I quickly unsheathed the dagger on my waist and took a battle stance.

“There’s an enemy right in front of you, so you’ve got to have your weapon prepared...”

“I-I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking...” I knew it wasn’t a mistake that could be excused like that, but there was no use dwelling on something that had already happened.

I hadn’t been too concerned when I was looking from the driver’s seat, but now that I was standing in front of it, the mine wolf’s size was overwhelming. It was about a meter tall and roughly ten times as vicious as the most vicious large dog you could imagine.

“I’m really scared, Raoul! I don’t think I can fight it...”

“Gragh!” the wolf snarled.

“Huh?!”

Perhaps the mine wolf perceived me as prey, because the moment I voiced my cowardice—full of fear—the monster began charging me, quickly closing the distance between us. *Was this a staring contest?! Was I not supposed to look away?!*

As the mine wolf ran toward me, I felt like I was seeing it in slow motion. I quickly brought the dagger forward, and it hit the mine wolf’s claw. I had managed to block its attack, and the mine wolf jumped backward.

Whoa, I was able to block an attack!

“The wolf is recoiling, Mizarie! Go right into an attack!”

“Right now?! Urgh...raaagh!” I charged the mine wolf and swung my dagger up, but the monster wasn’t that dumb. It jumped to the side and dodged my attack.

However, my eyes had been able to easily see it move to the side. *Wow, I can see the wolf’s movements. I can tell what it’s doing.* I redirected the dagger I’d swung down to the side and up, landing the attack on the mine wolf and taking it down.

“I did it...and in one hit to boot?!”

“You did it!” Raoul cheered.

Though I’d feverishly fought with everything I had, I still couldn’t believe that I’d taken down the mine wolf so easily, and I couldn’t hide that shock. I stood there in a daze, impressed with myself, and Raoul grinned.

“You’ve taken a bunch of monsters down with your RV, so your own level has naturally gone up too.”

“Yeah, of course. That makes sense.”

Since this world was one of an otome game, levels as a concept existed, but they weren’t a fully fleshed-out system. Because of that, the only way to tell

that you'd gotten stronger was to actually fight and feel the difference for yourself.

In the spot where the mine wolf had turned into particles of light and disappeared, a horn was left behind. I picked it up before I struck a pose for victory.

"All right, hunting job completed!"

Now that we'd taken down the mine wolves, it was time to head out! Well, actually, we decided to first check out the upgrade from the most recent level-up. *These level-ups are the most exciting.*

"All right, where did these bunk beds get installed?"

I entered the living area and saw that the bunk beds had been installed toward the back of the RV. Since the front area was a living space with a kitchen and table, it was logical to consider the back a sleeping area.

The bunk beds were made of wood, installed with just mattresses included. It looked like they could be slept in right away. In order to provide privacy, each bunk bed had its own curtain. Despite this being a feature of my skill, somehow it was a really considerate addition, and I couldn't help but be impressed.

There was a ladder for climbing up to the top bunk, and instead of having only the roof of the RV to look at, there was a skylight there that allowed for natural light.

"Wow, this is great! I've always loved bunk beds! It's like a little fort when you shut the curtains." I couldn't contain my excitement.

"Huh?" Raoul mumbled. "Didn't you have the vegetables here?"

"Oh!" He was right. I panicked, wondering where the vegetables had gone, while Ohagi had easily climbed up to the top bunk.

"Mrow!" Ohagi was trying to point something out, so I quickly climbed up the ladder.

After climbing up just two steps on the ladder, I could peek into the top bunk, where I saw the pots of the vegetables we'd planted lined up on the bed.

“Phew, the veggies are safe!” I let out a sigh of relief, and Raoul stood on his toes to peek over.

“Oh, you’re right,” Raoul chuckled. “With the window on the ceiling, it might actually be the perfect spot for the veggies.”

“You’re right! Let’s use this space for the vegetables!”

I decided to go with Raoul’s idea, and the top bunk was now our RV gardening space.

“Oh, but we won’t need the mattress, then.” There was a thin mattress on both bunks, so the pots were sitting on top of one. I wanted to avoid getting the mattress dirty, and it was also a less stable surface for the pots to be on.

I quickly removed the mattress and placed the pots directly on the bed frame, which was flat, making it less likely for the pots to fall over.

I thought about what to do with the extra mattress, and I tried layering it over the mattress on the bottom bunk. It would probably be more comfortable than using a single thin mattress. Probably.

“How’s that, Raoul?”

“Looks good. It feels soft and comfortable to sleep in.”

“Mrrrm.”

Raoul reached out and touched the mattress, and Ohagi was happily rolling around on top of it.

“I was thinking about having this be your space. What do you think?”

“What? Are you sure?”

“Of course. It’ll be easier than converting the table into a bed each night, and I also think it’ll be more comfortable to sleep here.”

“Then I’ll gratefully take you up on that. Thanks.”

Now that Raoul had a proper place to sleep, the RV was really coming together as a living space.

“Now that we’ve checked out the bunk beds, let’s set out for Saravitta.”

“Yeah,” Raoul agreed.

He and I were about to head to the front seats until I noticed that I didn’t hear Ohagi. I looked at the bed, wondering where she was, and found her sound asleep.

“I guess it’s nap time.”

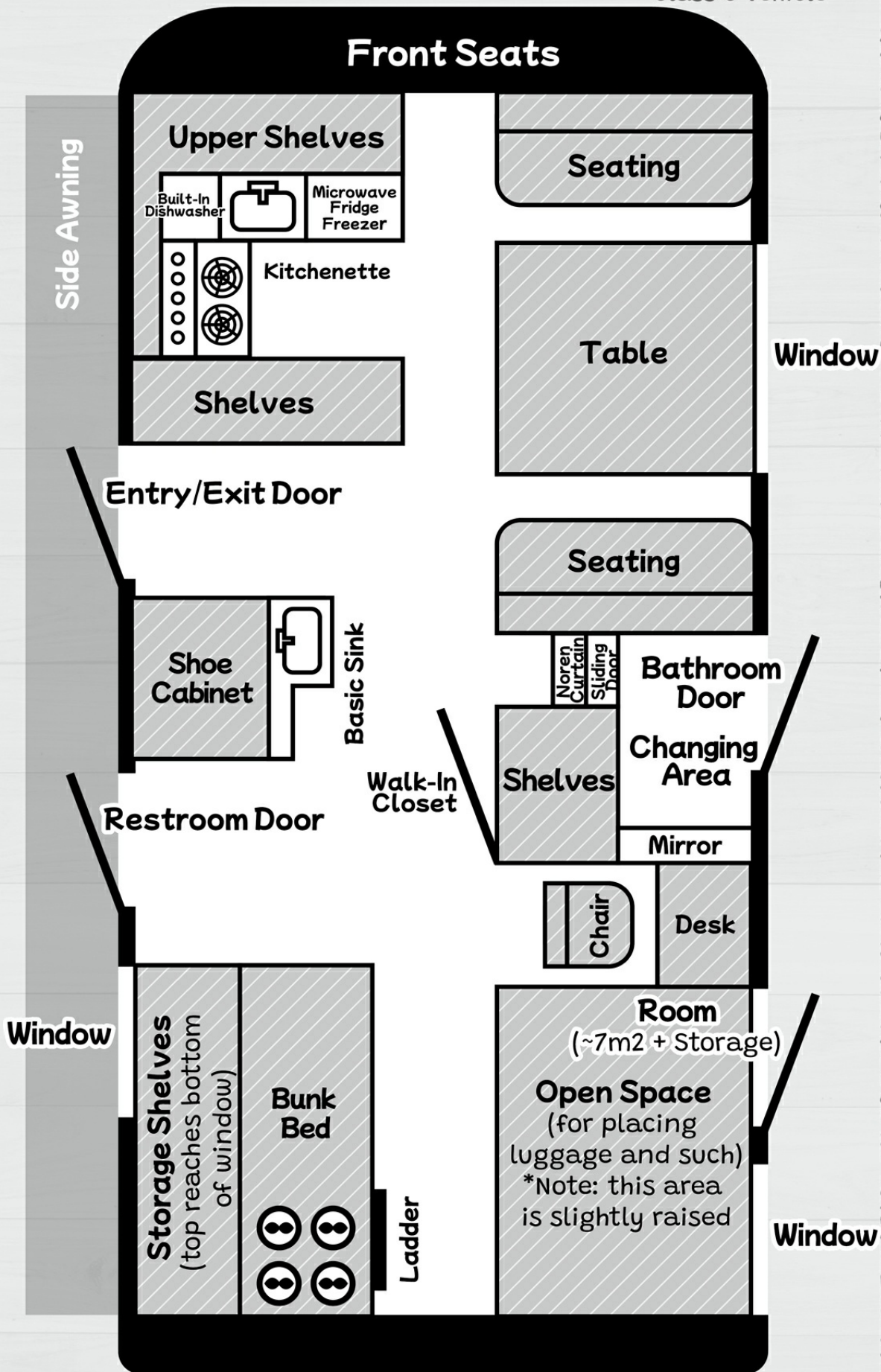
“Let’s let her sleep,” Raoul said.

“Yeah, I’ll have to drive carefully so I don’t wake her up.”

He and I both giggled as we quietly walked away from the bunk beds.

R V Floor Plan

Lv18
Version:
Class C Vehicle



Hot Stone Cooking

Bacon and Sunny-Side Up Eggs

We continued driving and sleeping in the RV for about three days before we finally arrived at the town of Saravitta, which was located right before the desert.

“I know we have the RV, but we’re going to be crossing a desert. Should we get some thick cloaks or something?”

“That’s a good point. We might need to leave the RV for one reason or another, so it’ll be good to have things prepared,” Raoul said.

Our discussion continued as we headed into town.

The town of Saravitta had streets lined with colorful tiles, which seemed to be a local craft in this area.

Various towns and villages had specialty items they produced, so it was a lot of fun to visit a new place for the first time. There were always new things to discover and people to meet. These kinds of experiences were another aspect that made traveling fun.

There were various workshops where tiles were being fired. Because the desert was so close, the breeze would occasionally carry specks of sand with it. Many people were dressed in thick cloaks to protect themselves from the sand.

I think we’ll definitely need to get our hands on those cloaks...

“Hey, Mizarie. Let’s head to the guild and report that the hunting job is completed. We can also get information about the desert.”

“Yeah,” I said, nodding.

“Mreow!”

We first headed to the adventurer’s guild.

Adventurer's guilds were always in buildings that had exteriors that matched the town aesthetically, but the interiors were all built exactly the same. Even the adventurers looked pretty much the same, aside from the extra equipment they had on to face the desert.

Now familiar with this process, I headed to a clerk's desk and asked them to process the job we'd completed.

"Congratulations on completing the job."

"Thank you," Raoul and I responded in unison.

The clerk quickly prepared our reward, and our report was over in a snap. *All right, let's get into the main topic for today.*

"We'd like to head to the desert ahead of here. Do you have any information you could share with us, like a map of the desert or reports on what kind of monsters appear there?"

"What?" The clerk's eyes widened with shock. "I cannot recommend entering the desert from here. If you head west, there is a village where you can hire a guide and rent camels. That is generally how people cross the desert."

"Oh..."

It was the same explanation we'd gotten at the adventurer's guild in Rockforress. I'd hoped that there would be even a small amount of additional information, but there didn't seem to be any. I figured that we'd hit a wall, but Raoul asked another question.

"Does that mean that no one enters the desert from here?"

"At times, there are adventurers who enter from here thinking that they might stumble across something incredible, since most people don't traverse through the desert—but most of them do not return. There is a place right before the desert where hunting jobs are requested, so you can visit that area. But most do not try to cross the desert from there."

"That sounds scary..." I couldn't help but tremble when I heard that some people didn't return.

“The monsters that appear in the desert are sand dolls, scorpions, sand tombs, and worms. Since you two have quite high ranks, I don’t think you will have any trouble fighting them. Though, please do be careful of the sand tombs’ traps.”

“Thank you.”

The sand tombs that the clerk had specifically cautioned us about were monsters that were hidden underneath the desert sand, and would drag their enemies down below. A concave spot in the desert was usually a sand tomb trap, so we would probably be fine as long as we avoided those.

I’ll need to be mindful of the blue dots on the map... I might miss them on my own, so I’ll definitely need Raoul sitting in the passenger seat and keeping an eye on the map.

After getting information from the adventurer’s guild, we purchased some thick cloaks, stocked up on food, then left the town.



After driving about thirty minutes from Saravitta, we reached the entrance to the desert.

We stepped out of the RV and inspected the area, and I felt the sun shining down. The desert heat was getting to me. It wasn’t very humid, so it was at least tolerable in that it was a dry heat, but it was still *hot*.

I scooped up some of the silky sand, and it burned more than I’d expected. “Hot!” I exclaimed as I threw the sand back down. It was perhaps worse than walking on concrete barefoot in the middle of summer.

It seemed like my skin was going to dry out quickly, and I could feel that this wasn’t going to be an area I could face with a cheap parasol.

“Mreeew,” Ohagi whined with a displeased grimace as she jumped onto my shoulder. The heat from the desert was more uncomfortable the closer you were to the ground, so it was probably intolerable for Ohagi.

I've gotten a lot stronger as an adventurer, but I'm confident I would die if I had to walk through this.

"I'm so glad the RV has air-conditioning. Even if we had decided to take the western route, this heat would be crazy."

"You said it," Raoul said. "I'm grateful for your RV."

We'd explored the desert long enough, so we got back in the RV and headed out.

I set our next destination to the large oasis in the middle of the desert. I'd asked Raoul if we could stop by there since I wanted to take the opportunity to visit an oasis. I'd only ever seen them in stories. Raoul also seemed curious, and immediately approved.

"Whoa, it's pretty hard to drive through the desert..." It felt like the tires were going to come off in the deep divots in the sand. I had no choice but to keep my cool and drive carefully and slowly.

It might take a few more days than I anticipated to cross the desert... Now that I think about it, there were vehicles that were better for crossing deserts in my past life.

If the RV had to be categorized as one or the other, it would definitely be considered a vehicle *not* meant for the desert.

My extra-cautious driving seemed to make Raoul more attentive to our surroundings than usual. Of course, the desert wasn't something we saw every day, but he was also on the lookout for monsters.

"We've never driven through sand like this before, have we?" Raoul remarked.

"Yeah. Since there are monsters here, I'm a little nervous."

"We're probably fine," Raoul said in a casual manner. "We've even driven through the dungeon in this RV. Compared to that, the desert is nothing... This might just be me, but I feel like the RV is getting sturdier each time you level up."

“What? Really?” My eyes widened with shock upon hearing that. I knew that the facilities would be upgraded with each level-up, but there hadn’t been anything stating that it would become more armored.

“I can’t say for sure, but I feel like the scratches on the RV when you hit boulders or walls have gotten smaller, and there’s more stability while it’s being driven.”

“I see!”

There were no issues when driving through expanses like grasslands, but I’d totally banged up...well, that was a bit of an exaggeration, but I did get some scratches and such on my RV. I hadn’t paid much attention to the damage until now because it had gotten fixed every time I’d leveled up, but it would be nice if my RV had been getting sturdier.

I have to work harder to level it up even more... Also, I might’ve just gotten better at driving too.

“Oh, Mizarie. There’s a monster straight up ahead, so you might want to drive a bit more to the right.”

“Got it.” I followed Raoul’s instructions and veered to the right. He was checking where monsters were, both visually through the windows and on the map, and we’d decided that we’d be avoiding all of the monsters in the desert.

While it was possible to use the RV to take down the monsters, we were driving across sand; it would be terrible if something were to happen and we ended up flipping over.

“All right, let’s keep going!”

“Yeah!” Raoul cheered.

“Mrow!”

I continued to avoid the monsters, following Raoul’s instructions, and we carefully progressed through the desert.

“I think we should rest around here tonight,” Raoul said, looking up at the sky.

“You want to stop already?”

“I’ve heard that desert nights can be tough, and it’s best not to push our luck in an unfamiliar environment. That’s one of the iron laws of adventuring.”

“That’s true.” It wasn’t even night yet, but deserts got cold in the evening and there were risks with driving in the dark, so I was on board with Raoul’s suggestion. “I wonder if there’s a good spot to park the RV.” It would be nice if there were a large boulder or something we could use to keep us safe from any sandstorms. I scanned the area, looking for such a spot, and finally found it. “Hey, Raoul. What do you think about parking behind that boulder?”

“Oh, that sounds good.”

I’d found a spot that had a cluster of several large boulders. There was a bit of a cavity between the boulders, so I could use it like a parking spot.

I parked the RV and stretched out. I felt tenser than usual. *It sure is nerve-racking to drive in an unfamiliar area.*

“We could just head to the living area and relax, but do you want to step out for a moment? We can’t light a fire, but... Oh!”

“Something wrong, Mizarie?”

I’d clapped my hands together upon remembering something, and Raoul tilted his head in confusion.

“There’s something I want to try doing...maybe! Let’s head outside with some eggs!”

“Eggs...?”

I ignored Raoul’s confusion and pulled some eggs out of the fridge.

We donned the cloaks we’d just purchased and headed outside. Ohagi was on my shoulder, but I wasn’t sure if she was okay with the heat. I checked on her and saw that she seemed calmer than I’d expected. *Were cats originally from the desert...? Maybe they have a high tolerance for heat.*

“Don’t push yourself, Ohagi.”

“Mrow.”

I looked at the rocky area right beside the RV and found a boulder that was about hip height. It had a relatively flat top that looked like it would be easy to use.

I cautiously touched it with the tip of my finger, and it was incredibly hot. I reflexively shouted, “Hot!” *Desert boulders are no joke.*

Raoul saw and ran over to me in a panic. “What are you doing, Mizarie?! Didn’t the same thing happen earlier with the sand?!”

“Yes...but I wanted to check something.”

“Check what?” Raoul shrugged, completely confused, but this was an important matter.

I picked up the egg I’d brought out from the RV and cracked it open onto the boulder, and it immediately began sizzling, the whites setting as it transformed into a sunny-side up egg.

“Whoa, it really cooked!”

“Oh, you used the boulder in place of a frying pan.” Raoul finally understood.

“I wanted to try it at least once.” I’d seen videos in my past life titled “I tried cooking on an XYZ,” so I’d been wanting to try it myself for a while. The closest surface I’d had to use was the hood of a car on a hot summer day.

“Isn’t the rock dirty...?” Raoul pointed out.

“That was...something I hadn’t considered.”

Though the boulder looked clean at first glance, this desert was a habitat for monsters. It probably wasn’t very sanitary.

“Hm... What if you use a skillet on top of the boulder?”

“That sounds good! You’re a genius, Raoul!”

I decided to add to this experience and brought out some bacon from the fridge. Then I placed it in the skillet along with the eggs, and tried to cook all of that on the boulder.

The contents of the skillet began to sizzle, and immediately the delicious aroma of bacon wafted over, mercilessly whetting my appetite. *I could get used*

to this!

“How do you want to eat this when it’s ready?” Raoul asked. “It looks good on its own, but we could put it on bread too.”

“Oh, that sounds wonderful,” I said.

“I’ll go prepare the bread, then.”

“Thanks!”

Raoul returned to the RV and brought out some bread he’d sliced. He’d even brought out some lettuce to put on the bread. *Gosh, Raoul always knows what to do!*

I took the bread from him and decided that since we were already cooking, I might as well toast the bread on the boulder as well. I prepared another skillet, placed the bread in it, and immediately the toasty aroma of the bread filled the air.

“Wow, that smells amazing,” Raoul said.

“Yeah!”

We then combined our toast with lettuce, bacon, and the sunny-side up eggs. Our meal was complete.

The tasty aroma made me want to dig in right away, but I couldn’t relax and enjoy the meal under the blazing sun. *To be honest, I’m already drenched with sweat!* We quickly retreated back into the RV.

“Let’s dig in!” Raoul and I both exclaimed.

“Mrow!”

I prepared some chicken for Ohagi, and Raoul and I impatiently chomped down on our egg-topped toasts. The bread was well toasted, and it was delicious.

“Mmm, the yolk is still runny! It’s so good!”

“The bacon takes it to a whole different level,” Raoul remarked.

“Yeah! I thought the desert would just be a hot, difficult place to get through, but this kind of stuff is nice.”

It was a bit unfortunate that we couldn't light fires in the desert, but using different cooking methods every now and then was nice.

"The bath's open, Raoul... Wait. Huh?" I'd taken a bath after eating, and was thinking about heading to bed early, but I'd realized that Raoul and Ohagi were gone. "I wonder where they are. I don't see Raoul's shoes, so maybe they're outside."

There hadn't been any dangers when we headed outside to cook, but things could be different at night. I began to get worried, and I quickly flung the door open as I shouted for them.

"Raoul?! Ohagi?!"

"Oh, Mizarie. You done bathing?"

"Mrow."

Once I stepped outside, I found Raoul wearing his cloak, sitting on a boulder with Ohagi while they looked up at the stars. The desert was cool at night, unlike during the day.

I rubbed my arms to warm myself up as I responded to Raoul. "I got worried because you guys were gone when I finished."

"Oh, sorry. I was going to come back right away after checking what it was like at night, but it's just incredible," Raoul said, pointing up at the sky. I followed his finger and looked up.

I immediately gasped at the sight. "Wow, the sky is full of stars..."

"Right?"

"Mrow mrow!"

The nightscape was so beautiful that I'd instantly forgotten about how cold it was. This view felt like one of the world's treasures. As I stared at the sparkling stars, I felt more hopeful for our future travels.

"I thought the desert was nothing but pain, but there's so much to enjoy, like cooking with boulders, and seeing incredible night skies."

“Yeah, I agree,” Raoul said.

“Mau.”

I wanted to just spend the whole night staring at the stars with them. But in spite of my desires, my body felt the chilly air, and I ended up sneezing loudly. *Urgh, that was so embarrassing!*

“Right, you just got out of the bath.”

“Ha ha... Huh?” Raoul draped his cloak over my shoulders, worried that I’d get too cold after having been in the bathtub. Since Raoul had been using it, the cloak was still warm. “Th-Thanks,” I said.

“N-No problem...” Raoul turned bashful after I’d gotten embarrassed for some reason. “Um, it’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. I’m glad I got to see it. I hope we can see a lot more things like this.”

“Me too,” Raoul said, nodding happily, which made me happy as well.

There are probably a bunch more sights to see and delicious foods to have in this world... Though this trip had begun as a result of me being exiled, thanks to Raoul and Ohagi, it had become something incredibly fun. *I hope every day is this great,* I thought, wishing that upon the stars.



The following day, we had clear skies. The blazing heat stung my face as I drove through the desert. Thanks to the map, we hadn’t encountered any monsters.

After we drove for a few hours, something that wasn’t sand or rock came into view—it was green.

“Raoul! Ohagi! It’s the oasis!”

“Whoa!” Raoul exclaimed. “It’s a blessing of the desert!”

“Mrrmrow!”

Raoul and Ohagi both leaned forward like they were going to press their faces against the windshield as they excitedly looked toward the oasis. I immediately parked the RV beside the oasis and made sure there weren’t monsters around

us before stepping out.

The oasis in the middle of the desert was about half the size of an elementary school courtyard. There was soft grass growing on the ground, and there were even banana trees. Several varieties of trees had vines wrapped around them, which gave off a strong natural feel to the area.

In the middle was water—an incredibly valuable resource in the desert. It was pouring like a fountain, and the pool was almost like a small spring. The edge of the water was lush with colorful flowers, and it looked like a symbol of how rich the oasis was.

“Woow!” I exclaimed. At the same time, Ohagi jumped onto the ground and began running around.

“Mrrrmrow!”

Ohagi ran across the grass and headed to the spring, where she splashed around with her front paws and played in the water.

Maybe she's been feeling cooped up since we've been in the RV for a while... We've made it halfway through the desert, though, so I'll let Ohagi play as much as she wants in the oasis.

I pulled out the decorative string I used as a toy for Ohagi and wiggled it around. Ohagi immediately went into hunter mode and began wiggling her tail.

She was about to pounce on the string, so I gracefully dodged her and spun in place with the string still in hand. Ohagi began chasing the toy and ran around me in circles.

“Are you having fun, Ohagi?”

“Mrow, mrow!”

Ohagi was so energetic and playful that I was having trouble keeping up with her. Raoul was looking at me restlessly, and finally held his hand up.

“I want to play too!”

“Sure, go for it,” I said, handing Raoul the string as I took the opportunity to

rest. *Ohagi has endless energy...*

I sat nearby to take a break and removed my shoes. I then dipped my feet in the spring. The cool water was so nice that I couldn't help but let out a sound of pleasure.

"It feels so good..."

I then fell backward, and the soft grass caught me. *I feel like I'd have an incredible nap if I fell asleep like this.* Despite how it felt, the blazing sun quickly started stinging me with heat again.

The oasis spring was cool and felt great, and the trees provided a bit of shade, but it was still just as hot as the rest of the desert.

"Maaau!"

I turned around after hearing Ohagi having fun, and saw Raoul twirling the string around at lightning speed. Ohagi was incredible for being able to keep up, but I was also impressed with how Raoul wasn't out of breath after moving like that.

"Can you jump this high, Ohagi?"

"Mreow!"

Raoul raised the string to head height, but Ohagi was able to jump up without any problem, and she smacked the string.

"Whoa, Ohagi! Good jump!"

Ohagi was probably the most agile cat in the entire world.



When Ohagi was eventually out of breath, she came over to me, completely exhausted.

“Mau...” she mewed between pants.

“Looks like someone tired themselves out playing. Let’s rest together.” I petted Ohagi’s head, and she nuzzled into my hand. Once she caught her breath, she flopped onto her back. Of course, I took the opportunity to rub her tummy.

“I’m going to rest too,” Raoul said.

“You two played a lot,” I remarked.

“It was fun.” Raoul gave a satisfied smile, and he followed suit, removing his shoes and dipping his feet in the water. He let out the same exhale of pleasure as I’d done earlier. It seemed that no one could resist how good the water felt.

“This oasis is so great. It feels like a waste that no one knows about it.” *I wonder if I could make a map of it and sell it to the adventurer’s guild.*

“The oasis is great as a rest stop, but the road to get here is too treacherous. We’re fine because we have your RV, but most people are on foot or camelback.”

“Right, that’s fair.”

It was impossible for others to completely avoid running into monsters like we were doing, so it was necessary for them to fight monsters along the way. On top of that, if you weren’t constantly checking what direction you were headed in, you would get lost in the blink of an eye. While there were some large boulders speckled throughout the landscape, there weren’t a lot of landmarks, so it would be difficult to create a map of the area.

“I guess there’s nothing I can do about it with my current skills...”

“Yeah. Let’s become even higher-level adventurers and think about it once we have a solution.”

“Okay,” I said, nodding. I felt a bit bad about it, but we’d be keeping this oasis to ourselves.



After that, we finally got through the desert in about three days, and we reached the next town. We stopped there just to stock up on food, then set out for the northernmost village on this continent: Sautha.

“The island to the northeast of Sautha is Mizuho... I wonder if there’s a ship that goes between the two.”

“The guild didn’t have a lot of information on Sautha, so we have no choice but to go to the village and see for ourselves,” Raoul said.

I checked the map on the dashboard and saw that there were several islets between the coasts of Sautha and Mizuho. If we couldn’t head to Mizuho directly, we might be traveling between the islets to get there.

“There’s a lot to think about, but I’m still most excited for the food! Bring on the Mizuho cuisine!”

“I can’t wait to eat rice again.” Raoul had enjoyed the rice he’d had before—the garlic-and-steak rice—and he was excited for the Japanese-style food.

“Me too! There are all sorts of ways to prepare rice, so look forward to it!”

Cooked rice was delicious on its own, but mushroom rice, chestnut rice, and snapper rice were all amazingly delicious rice dishes. There was also one other thing that I was excited for.

“It’s actually my first time seeing the ocean.”

“Me too!” Raoul exclaimed. “It’s like a giant lake, right?”

“I’m not sure about that,” I said, tilting my head. I’d naturally been to the beach in my previous life, but it was difficult to explain what the ocean was when put on the spot. “Hm... It’s like a giant salty lake, I guess?” I’d given up on trying to explain, and Raoul just became confused. “Oh, why don’t we drive along the coast? It’ll be a bit of a detour, but I think the views will be great.”

“That sounds good!”

“Mau!”

I thought I’d come up with quite the nice suggestion, so I set the navigation to

take us along the coast. Now we'd be able to have ocean views on the road to Sautha.

I'm excited to see the ocean for the first time in this world.

I followed the route set by the navigation system. After two hours of driving, the ocean came into view on the right side.

"Raoul! Ohagi! It's the ocean!"

"Whoa, it looks incredible!"

"Mrow!"

I'd thought it might be difficult to see from the passenger seat, but because there wasn't anything in the way, we had a great view.

The sunlight was reflecting off the water, and the ocean was sparkling. The water was a clear emerald green, and there were even white sand beaches. It looked like a tropical resort.

"So, we're going to cross this ocean and go to Mizuho... I'm getting excited."

"Yeah. All right, I'm going to floor it!"

"Hey, be careful, okay?!"

I laughed in response to Raoul as I accelerated and continued driving toward Sautha.

The Full Moon Path

After driving along the coast of the Kingdom of Hering, we arrived at the village of Sautha, which had a thriving fishing industry.

I'd started my adventure in the Kingdom of Richard before traveling through Seawell, and now I was visiting my third kingdom. Mizuho was going to be the fourth nation I would visit, which made me acknowledge that I'd been traveling at quite the intense pace. *Maybe trying to go around the entire world isn't such a crazy dream...*

The air in Sautha smelled like the sea. Many of the buildings had red-tile roofs, which gave the architecture a unified aesthetic. There were several piers constructed, and many small boats as well. It seemed like they didn't go too far out to sea and just fished close to land. Children apparently dove for clams while playing in the ocean, which they'd bring back to each of their homes for dinner.

"It's rare for travelers to visit our village."

"We have some delicious fish here, so make yourselves at home."

Though they were surprised by our arrival, the villagers gave us a warm welcome, which I was grateful for.

"What an idyllic village," I remarked.

"It's kind of calming," Raoul said, agreeing. "The people here are kind too."

"Mreow."

"I guess we should first rest up, then we can do some sightseeing."

"Sounds good. We need to also ask if they have any ships going to Mizuho."

There was no adventurer's guild in Sautha, so we would need to ask around at the dining halls and inns, as well as question villagers for information.

A passerby let us know that the village had just one dining hall, which also

provided lodging, so we headed there.

I'd thought that things were going smoothly, but that ended quickly.

"What?! You want to go to *Mizuho*?! That's impossible—I wouldn't recommend trying!"

"Huh?!" Raoul and I both exclaimed.

"Mau?"

We'd asked about Mizuho at the dining hall and inn, only for our wishes to be treated as absurd. It was a quaint establishment with a dining hall on the first floor and a handful of rooms rented out on the second floor. The full-figured owner had been the one telling us about Mizuho.

"Why not?" I asked, curious as to why we couldn't go. "Is it because there aren't any ships going there?"

"That's not the problem," she said, shaking her head. "The currents between here and Mizuho swirl violently, so ships can't cross the waters. Even if you took a large ship, it would just sink."

"The currents, I see..." I figured that these "swirls" were something along the lines of whirlpools, which would make sense as to why we couldn't travel by sea. It would be no joke if we tried, only for our ship to sink.

But there must be some amount of contact, right?

The adventurer we'd met in the Spirit's Dungeon was likely from Mizuho, so there had to be a way to travel there.

"Do the villagers here ever go to Mizuho?"

"Us? It's not that we don't go; it's that we can't! They have some rare seasonings and ingredients, but they don't have anything we *need*."

"I see..." It seemed that there wasn't much exchange between Sautha and Mizuho.

"Why do you want to go to Mizuho?" the owner asked.

"Mainly for the rare seasonings you were talking about." I also wanted to go

sightseeing, but my main objective was to get my hands on Japanese food.

“Oh, that makes sense. Their food definitely has a flavor profile that’s loved by some people. There are people here that enjoy it as well.”

“Even if there isn’t much travel between the two, do you have access to their ingredients?” It was possible that they had similar produce or condiments due to the fact that their geographical closeness probably gave them similar weather. I’d asked with a hopeful look, but the owner just shrugged.

“We can’t go to Mizuho, but sometimes people from Mizuho come over here. When they come, they bring over any extra items they have and sell them to us, so they’re hard to get your hands on even in this village.”

“Is that so...” In that case, it was going to be difficult to get my hands on seasonings in this village. I started thinking silently, and Raoul spoke up.

“How do people come here from Mizuho? From what you said, it sounds like people *do* visit this village.”

I’d been curious about that as well. If people could visit this village from Mizuho, it wouldn’t be impossible to go there instead. *Is there some special way to get there?*

“Yeah, there are visitors sometimes, but everyone who visits is experienced with traveling here.”

“Does that mean you can’t come here without knowing how?”

“The waters between Mizuho and our village recede at night during a full moon, so they take that path to get here.”

The unexpected route made my eyes widen with surprise. *What? That sounds like we could get to Mizuho!* The owner saw that my face was beaming with anticipation and dropped some important information.

“It takes three days on foot,” she said. “Since the path only appears at night during a full moon, you would have to get to a nearby islet first and wait for the next full moon to continue the journey.”

“What? That sounds like so much work.”

A full moon only occurred once a month, which meant that one would have to

spend the months between full moons on what were basically floating rocks in the ocean.

“That sounds so brutal!” I exclaimed.

“Right? It’s not impossible, but us regular folks can’t make that trip,” she said with a firm nod, satisfied that I’d understood.

Hm, but it’s only three days on foot, right?

“That would be no trouble with the RV,” I said.

“I agree,” Raoul said, nodding in agreement.

“Mreow.”

“Oh my,” the owner said when she saw Raoul and me grinning at each other. “Did you two come up with some great plan?”

“My skill is specialized in transportation, so I believe we can get to Mizuho in one night.”

“A skill used for transportation? You’ve got something pretty impressive. The next full moon is in three days, so be careful if you’re going to try going there.” It appeared that transportation-based skills were rare, just as I’d thought, and the owner was pretty impressed. “I’ll be waiting to hear tales of your travels.”

“Of course!”

The owner then told us we could leave from the bay by the harbor in the northern part of town.

Now that we knew how to get to Mizuho, we stayed in the dining hall and enjoyed some freshly grilled seafood.

“Getting to eat all this fresh seafood is amazing!”

“It’s delicious!”

“Mreow-reow-reow!”

We ate some clams that had been grilled over charcoal with salt, and Ohagi was enjoying some boiled fish. Everything was so delicious that I ended up buying some items like fish, clams, and shrimp from the fisher.

Three days had passed since we'd arrived in Sautha. After taking a long nap, we made our way to the bay on the night of the full moon. No one else was there, and all I could hear was the sound of the waves.

The bay that the inn owner had told us about was rocky, and I could see fish swimming, as well as coral. The moon was the only source of light we had at the moment, but this area was probably beautiful during the day.

I looked straight ahead and saw an island. That was probably Mizuho. The island was surrounded by several islets, and offshore I could see whirlpools even with the naked eye. *Yeah, it would be totally reckless to try and travel by sea through this area.* The word "sink" crossed my mind and made me shiver.

"It's strange that a path appears only on the night of a full moon," Raoul said.

I nodded in agreement. "I'm sure it relates to the turning of the tides, but it only occurs at night during a full moon, so maybe it's caused by nature, like the mana levels in the ocean or something."

Though this world was my reality, it was originally the setting of a video game. There were plenty of things that couldn't be explained scientifically and were just explained away without reasons. If this weren't the case, then there would have to be an actual reason why items would drop when a monster was defeated.

As I felt the breeze and stared at the water, I realized that the sound of the waves had changed. The gentle crashing grew loud in an instant before the water pulled away. Fish leaped between the pools of water, and the sea parted as if it were following the light of the full moon.

"Wow..."

"What is this?"

"Mreow..."

This was what it felt like to be speechless. I held my breath and stared at the path that had appeared before us, stunned. My gaze followed the line of wet sand, and though I couldn't see the end of the path, it was definitely leading to

Mizuho.



“Oh, we need to get going already! The path only appears during nighttime, right?” Raoul pointed out.

“You’re right!” We needed to get to Mizuho while the path was open, otherwise we would be swallowed by the ocean. *“RV Summon!”*

I got into the driver’s seat and checked the map, just in case. It had changed as well, and it was displaying our current location: the path in the sea.

“Is there anything it can’t do?!” I exclaimed. *Please forgive my joke; I just had to.*

“It really looks like it’s a straight path leading there. There aren’t any monsters, so we’ll just be racing against time.”

“Yeah. All right, let’s head out right away.”

Raoul and Ohagi were looking at the map with me from the passenger seat, which reassured me as I stepped on the gas pedal. The RV took off with a slow *vroom*.

The full moon path was very one-note. Every now and then, there were boulders and large coral, but the path was wide enough to fit two lanes, so it was easy to avoid any obstacles even in a vehicle as large as the RV.

Raoul was watching the map for me as well, but there wasn’t much for him to do. It seemed that Ohagi also had time on her paws, and she’d fallen asleep on Raoul’s lap.

“I was wondering, why are you traveling, Mizarie?” Raoul said out of nowhere, perhaps thinking that he needed to spice things up by starting a casual conversation. “I think it’s great that you’ve become an adventurer, but it seemed like you were a sheltered rich girl or something.”

“What? Me?” I’d been exiled as a villainess, which led to me becoming an adventurer. I hadn’t contacted my family since then, but I was probably a commoner now, since I’d been exiled. “Hmm...” *It would be fine to tell Raoul about my past, including the part where I was an aristocrat. We’re officially in a party together now, and I trust him.* “The thing is, it’s not a fun story,” I said

with a wry smile. “You seem like you get along with your family.” Raoul nodded in response. “My family, well...they never really liked me. I have black hair, you know? They didn’t like that very much.”

“Your black hair? Is that because they were worried about you being a dark magic user? That’s something only some aristocrats would care about these days—” Raoul stopped there, suddenly realizing something. He thought for a bit before mumbling, “Of course.” *Yeah, it’s probably obvious seeing how unfamiliar I am with living like a regular person.*

“Yeah, I was born into nobility. I was disowned...or rather, I should say that I cut off contact with them? Well, either way, I ended up exiled from my kingdom, which led me here.”

“You were exiled?!” My past had a little more to it than just breaking contact with my family, which made Raoul exclaim with surprise.

That’s fair. Leaving your home and being exiled are on two totally different levels. Usually, only criminals are exiled.

It wasn’t the most appropriate topic to discuss while on a drive, but I told Raoul about my past. He listened silently, his hands balling into fists on his lap.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Raoul said.

“Ha ha, maybe... I think what upset me the most was when they said Ohagi was bad luck because she’s a black cat.”

“That’s awful too,” he said, gently petting Ohagi, who was sleeping on his lap.

Ohagi had been my only friend.

“Well, that’s basically why I’m traveling. I have nothing tying me to my kingdom or my family. The only concern I have is possibly causing you trouble...”

I had no intentions of going anywhere near my home country, the Kingdom of Richard, but I couldn’t say for sure that there would never be any contact. *I did get held up at the border before.*

“You would never cause me trouble!”

“Raoul... Thank you.” I couldn’t help but smile, touched by his immediate

response. "I'm pretty sure it's impossible for them to catch up to us since we're traveling by RV, so I think we're fine."

"That's fair. If anything, I'd like to see someone try and keep up with you."

We both laughed.

"Oh! I see the entrance to Mizuho!" I exclaimed.

"Whoa! Wait...what is that red thing? Is that the entrance?"

"It's a torii." *I never thought I'd be seeing a traditional Japanese gate in this world.* "It's a religious thing, and it's said that the area past a torii is a god's domain. That means that Mizuho may be a sacred land."

"Huh, I see..."

"Though some places definitely build them just as a symbolic structure, so they aren't always a religious thing." I'd tried explaining what it was, but I wasn't particularly knowledgeable on torii gates.

I continued driving for a bit more, and before I knew it, we had gotten closer to the torii. The torii was perfectly sized to the width of the full moon path, to the point that it looked as if this path had been created by the gate. The bottom portion of the gate that was usually submerged in the sea was covered in coral and barnacles, but the rest of it had a glossy sheen to it. Thanks to the light from the full moon, it looked even more beautiful.

"It's incredible, but I feel kind of nervous about passing through the gate. I don't even know if it's okay to pass through it with the RV." *It feels kind of sacrilegious somehow...*

"I think it's fine, since it's your skill."

"That's true, but...no, let's get out and walk through it!"

Perhaps it didn't matter in this world because it was my skill, but as someone who'd lived in Japan before, I just didn't feel right passing through it in the RV. Raoul didn't seem to mind either way, and he immediately got out. Ohagi woke up as well and climbed onto his shoulder.

The first thing I felt when I stepped out was the chilly air.

“Oh, right. It may be summer, but we’re basically in the ocean.” It seemed that the temperature here was a bit lower than on land. I slowly walked forward and looked up at the gate. “Wow, it’s amazing... It’s kind of overwhelming.”

I’d visited shrines before during school trips, but I’d never visited them after I’d become a working adult. After looking up at the gate for a bit, I felt compelled to take a bow. I then passed through the gate and stepped foot into Mizuho.

The Long-Awaited Land of Mizuho

A Nostalgic Meal of Rice and Tonjiru

We passed through the gate, and as soon as we were on land, the sound of the waves grew louder. I turned around and saw that the sea level was rising before my eyes, and the full moon path had disappeared in the blink of an eye, the sea returning to its original form. At the same time, I saw the sun slowly rising in the eastern sky.

“It’s sunrise...”

“It’s beautiful,” Raoul said.

“Mrrrm.”

The sparkling sunlight reflected off the water, which made for a magnificent sight. The torii looked even more beautiful in the morning light, and it made the fact that we’d arrived in Mizuho feel even more real.

After watching the sunrise for a bit, I took a deep breath. “We somehow made it to Mizuho,” I said with an exhale.

“Yeah, but it wasn’t too difficult thanks to the RV,” Raoul said, chuckling.

“That’s true,” I said, laughing along with him. “For now, we’re finally in Mizuho! There’s so much for us to enjoy! Like rice!”

“Right on!”

“Mreow!”

We all exclaimed with joy, then turned to look at the country of Mizuho. *This wasn’t an area in the game, so I’m excited to see what it’s like!*

Mizuho was a very idyllic region with many rice paddies and fields. They didn’t look ready for harvest yet, but I couldn’t help but notice the stalks of rice swaying in the wind. I was overjoyed at seeing that there was definitely rice

here.

“Raoul, there’s rice! They have rice!”

“Huh? Where?”

Raoul only knew of rice in its white, milled, and polished form, so he couldn’t immediately tell that the stalks were rice. *I guess it can be hard to imagine how rice looks when it grows.* I gave Raoul a simple explanation of how rice was processed.

“You sure know a lot,” Raoul said, impressed.

Past the paddies and fields was a village.

“I’d like to go to the village, but we might be disturbing them since it’s so early,” Raoul said. “What do you think about resting for a bit before we head over there? You must be tired after driving all night, right?”

“Yeah, that sounds like a good idea,” I said, nodding in agreement to his suggestion. I summoned the RV off the side of the road and we slept for a bit.

I suddenly woke up to the sound of a sparrow chirping. It was the first time I’d heard a sparrow in this world, and it filled me with a sense of nostalgia.

I looked outside and saw that the sun was high in the sky. It was probably past noon.

“I don’t think I’ve slept past noon for a while. I guess it was inevitable since I drove all night.”

“Mreow mreow.”

“Good morning, Ohagi.”

I got up and left my room, and I saw that Raoul was holding back a yawn as he was opening the curtains and exiting his bunk. We watered the vegetables and had a simple breakfast before heading out.

“Since it’s an island nation, there probably aren’t very many travelers who visit like us. I’m starting to get nervous...!”

I'd been excited about rice, but now that we were heading to the village, my heart began to race. *What if they're unhappy with outsiders being here?*

"It'll probably be fine," Raoul said casually as I stood there, my anxiety rising. "I've been to all sorts of villages, but they were never so closed off. If anything, they usually crowd me, asking to hear about other places."

"Oh, so travelers are seen as entertaining?"

"Yeah, exactly. Especially with younger people—a lot of times they're interested in venturing into the outside world, so they have a lot of questions." According to Raoul, there had been a lot of young people like that, especially since he was someone who'd left his home village to go adventuring, so he understood how they felt very well.

That's right, Raoul's a young country boy who dreamed of visiting big cities! That thought made me smile.

We made it to the entrance of the village, where there was a wooden pillar that said "Minamihama Village." The buildings dotting the village terrain were built exactly like traditional Japanese homes. There was distance between each building, making this village more spacious than the other villages and towns we'd visited before. Each home also had a large yard.

It looks exactly like the countryside in Japan...

There was a lot of space between neighbors, and there weren't many shops. It was possible that the villagers traded with each other. *I never would've expected to see the Japanese countryside in a fantasy otome game.* The people walking around were dressed in kimono and zori sandals. It was the middle of the day, so some people were resting while others were busy at work.

Raoul's mouth gaped when he saw the people walking around.

"I've never seen clothing like that before," he said, looking around curiously as he entered the village with no hesitation.

The place was immediately buzzing. The villagers were quite shocked at seeing us appear from nowhere.

“What?! Did you come here from Sautha?”

“Oh, yes,” I responded. “We just arrived today.”

The villagers began gathering around us. There was no sign of displeasure on their faces, and I could tell they were all welcoming. *I’m so glad...* I let out a sigh of relief and began talking to them.

“Why did you come *here* of all places?” someone asked.

“Wasn’t it difficult to get here?” another villager chimed in.

“I actually came here because I want rice. I’d like to buy any other seasonings and such if you have them as well. You see, I love cooking...” I’d ended up making food my main reason for being here, but it was true so it couldn’t be helped.

“Oh, yeah,” a villager said in an understanding manner. “We do get people once in a while who want our produce.”

“Really?!” I got excited. I hadn’t expected there to be others who enjoyed Japanese food.

It also seemed that there would be no problem with buying produce. I would love it if they could sell me a lot, but considering the fact that they needed stock to feed the village, it might be difficult to purchase things in bulk.

Maybe I just have to come here on a regular basis...?

As such thoughts ran through my mind, an adorable girl dressed in a pink kimono made her way toward us. Once the other villagers saw her, they made way for her approach.

“Welcome, travelers. My name is Tsumugi. I am the daughter of Minamihama’s chief. We do not have any inns in this village, but we would love for you to stay with us.”

“Thank you very much. I’m Mizarie, and I’m an adventurer. This little one is Ohagi.”

“My name is Raoul. Thank you very much for your consideration.”

Tsumugi, the girl from Minamihama Village, was a gentle, kind girl, who looked to be in her teens. She had long, dusty-pink hair, with a single lock of it tied off on the side of her head, decorated with a flower accessory. She had a pastel pink kimono, and a haori jacket that was a deeper shade of pink with a pattern of petals scattered across it.

“My house is the farthest one in the village. It is right in front of that mountain over there, and it takes about twenty minutes to walk there. I would love to give you a tour of the village.”

“You don’t mind?” I asked.

“Of course not,” Tsumugi said.

The village was quite large, and I couldn’t tell what shops were located where. Tsumugi’s suggestion was very helpful for us. Raoul and I looked at each other before looking back at her, and we responded in unison.

“Thank you!”

Tsumugi smiled at me as we walked through the village.

“You mentioned that you wanted to shop, Mizarie. There aren’t many, but I could start by showing you where the stores are.”

“Please do!” I exclaimed enthusiastically. “Thank you!”

“Very well,” Tsumugi said with a giggle. “However, I should warn you that aside from food establishments, we only have two shops. There is the ironmonger’s and a shop that sells food and general items. There are other items that are sold by people who do not have a shop, but instead they walk around the village selling their goods. Oh, just like that...”

I looked in the direction Tsumugi was pointing at, and saw a man with a barrel walking around as he called out, “Get your tofu here!”

A woman immediately came out of one of the houses and bought some.

“Two blocks, please!” the woman said.

“Wow, you can even buy tofu!” I exclaimed.

The only problem was that you had to have your own container, so I couldn't buy any at the moment. Tofu didn't last for very long, so rather than buying some for the future, it was probably best to enjoy it while we were here.

I had perhaps been staring at the tofu for a while, because Raoul gave me a confused look.

"Do you want some?"

"Of course I do! I want it really badly!" *I want it in miso soup, or just to eat on its own with some soy sauce... Both options sound great!*

I stared with disappointment at the tofu, and Tsumugi seemed a bit worried about me as she made a suggestion.

"If you are planning to eat it right away, you can borrow a container to purchase some. I can return the container for you later as well."

"What?! Would that really be all right?!" My enthusiasm seemed to overwhelm Tsumugi, but she just smiled in response.

"Hello, Jiro. Could I have some tofu, please?"

"Oh, Tsumugi. Are you running errands? Those are some unfamiliar faces."

"They're travelers. This is Mizarie, Raoul, and Ohagi. Mizarie here would like to try some tofu. Could I borrow a container for her as well?"

"Wow, travelers! What a rare sight! Yes, of course you can."

The man selling tofu was named Jiro. He put a block of tofu into a shallow bowl and handed it over to me. The tofu was cut into a square, and it was smooth even on its cut edges. It looked absolutely scrumptious.

"Wow, thank you! How much is it?"

"You don't see a lot of travelers coming through here, so don't worry about it. I'll be looking forward to the banquet tonight!"

"What? Huh? What?" I was completely baffled, not having expected that it would be free.

"I'd like some tofu too!" another woman called over, and Jiro just vanished like the wind.

“I’m grateful for the tofu, but was it really okay to take it for free?” I asked.

“Also, what’s this banquet he mentioned?” Raoul added.

“Oh, right!” Tsumugi said. “It’s rare for us to have visitors in the village, so we always hold a banquet on the night that guests arrive. It’s a night of rowdy merrymaking, and it’s a bit of a mess,” Tsumugi said with a jovial giggle.

At first, I felt bad that they would go through the trouble of holding a banquet for us, but perhaps it was like a festival or form of entertainment that the villagers didn’t often experience because of their lack of contact with the rest of the world. Thinking of it like that made me feel worse about refusing the party.

“In that case, I would love to join in. Thank you.”

“Please do!”

It was decided that we’d be at the banquet tonight, but since we now had plans, I wanted to enjoy the tofu before then.

“I’d like to prepare this tofu, so could you show me where the shop is? I’d like some other ingredients as well.”

“Right this way.”

The shop and ironmonger’s were right next to each other.

“This must make shopping easy; that’s nice.”

The shop carried groceries as well as other general goods. The ironmonger’s sold hardware such as pots, knives, and farming tools.

“Oh! They have mess tins!”

The mess tins located near the entrance of the ironmonger’s caught my eye, and I shoved the tofu into Raoul’s hands and ran over to them.

“Wait, what? A ‘mest in’?”

I could cook some delicious rice over a campfire with a mess tin! I have no choice but to buy one!

“Excuse me! I’d like to buy a mess tin! Make that two!”

I burst into the ironmonger's, and the woman manning the store stared at me, her eyes wide with surprise. *Yeah, of course she's surprised that a stranger just barged into her shop. I'm sorry...*

"Um, are you a traveler? You said two mess tins, right?"

"Yes. I'm Mizarie. I just got here today."

"I see," she said, nodding as she brought out two mess tins from the back. "They're three thousand rooks each, so that'll be six thousand rooks."

"Okay." I immediately took out my money and paid for them. Since this was the world of a video game, the currency was universal everywhere. *I'm so glad they don't have their own unique currency.*

Ba-ba-ba-bum!

You have obtained two mess tins!

"Now we'll be able to have delicious rice!" I said, spinning around with the mess tins in hand. Raoul and Tsumugi, who'd followed after me, laughed.

"Are those *that* amazing?"

"Yeah! All that's left is to buy some rice and cook it in these!"

"Well then, let's head to the shop," Tsumugi said while giggling. "They sell rice there as well."

"Okay!"

I was a bit embarrassed that she was laughing, but the joy I felt for my purchase was stronger. I nodded with a beaming smile.

Aside from rice, the shop sold foods such as seasonal produce and meat, as well as general items like tableware and zori sandals. It was your standard general store.

Along with the rice I so obviously wanted, they had other items I was hoping for as well, like miso, soy sauce, and tea leaves.

“I’ll be waiting with the tofu, so why don’t you just buy the things you’ll need right now?”

“Thanks, Raoul.”

I headed into the store and greeted the shopkeeper.

“Hello.”

“I’m coming,” an elderly man said as he popped out from the back of the store. “Oh, what an unusual customer. Did you come here from Sautha?”

“Yes. I was gifted some rice before, and I came here wanting more.”

“Oh my, that’s incredible. I’m sure it was hard to cross the seas,” the man said. “Take all the time you need,” he said, grinning from ear to ear.

“Thank you very much.” What I needed first was, of course, rice! “Wow, this is amazing! You sell them in bales?!”

“You can also buy it by the kilogram.”

“I see. For now, I’d like to buy a kilogram of rice, soy sauce, mirin, and...” As I listed out what I wanted, the owner began preparing the items for me. “Also, some tea leaves.”

“Oh, tea leaves. If you don’t mind waiting a few days, the summer tea leaves will be harvested soon. It would be great if you could try that tea.”

“The new harvest?! Of course I’ll wait!” According to the man, they grew tea leaves in this village, and they were famous for it. I definitely had to come back in a few days to buy some.

“Okay, I think that should be— Oh, chawans!” A ceramic chawan bowl had caught my eye. I’d seen similarly shaped bowls until now, but I’d never seen one that was made specifically for rice—like a chawan—for sale. But now, I’d finally found one!

“I have to buy this,” I said to myself, picking up four bowls for myself, Raoul, and some extras. They were charming and had a cherry blossom pattern.

“I’m glad to see someone so happy about them. It would definitely be good to have chawans if you’re going to be eating rice.”

“I agree!” I said, nodding. Aside from the rice, I purchased some seasonings and condiments, along with some seasonal produce and pork, then I finished shopping.

Raoul was surprised that I’d bought so much, but all this was the minimum number of things I needed.

“Um, you need somewhere to cook, right?” Tsumugi asked. “You can borrow our kitchen.”

“Oh, I’m just going to cook over a fire, so I’ll be fine.”

Tsumugi seemed confused upon seeing how many things Raoul and I had. Considering how put together she was, Tsumugi was probably someone who was taught that cooking was meant to be done in the kitchen. *Well, that’s what everyone is usually taught.*

“We’re adventurers, so we eat outside fairly often.”

“Oh my, is that so...”

I wasn’t sure if it would be good to invite Tsumugi to eat our camp meals with us. It was possible that she could be scolded by her family for doing something improper. *For now, it would probably be best to thank her and split up.*

“Thank you for showing us where the shops are. I’ll come by later to return the tofu container.”

“It was my pleasure. Please let me know if you need anything at any time. I will be waiting with your room prepared, so please do not hesitate to stay with us.”

“Thank you very much,” Raoul and I responded.

After seeing her off, we made our way to the edge of the village. I was going to summon my RV here and make us a late lunch!

While I did the prep work in the RV that I’d summoned, Raoul was lighting a fire.

“First, let’s make some rice!”

I propped up some thick branches and hung the mess tin from them. I first used a strong heat, and once the contents were boiling, all I had to do was let it sit over a low fire.

It was difficult to adjust the heat of a campfire, but I just needed to boil the mess tins quickly before letting them sit, so the rest wasn't too difficult. I gave Raoul a quick rundown of how to use the mess tins to cook rice.

"I think even I could handle that," he said, nodding along.

"Yeah. I want to buy lots of rice to bring back with us, so I'd love it if you learned how to cook it too! It might not work out at first, but let's try a bunch of methods and figure out our favorite way to cook it!"

"Favorite way...?" Raoul tilted his head in confusion.

"Rice can be cooked in different ways and in different textures depending on how much water you use or the method that you use. You can cook it softer or harder. Small adjustments can completely change how it cooks."

"Wow, there's a lot to this dish."

"Yup, that's right." That was why finding out how you liked your rice was one way to enjoy it. "Let's make some delicious rice together!"

"Yeah, leave it to me!"

Raoul's confident response made me feel that I could possibly be having rice for breakfast in the near future, and the corners of my mouth turned up.

"There's nothing else to do for the rice since we just need to let it sit over the fire, but would you mind keeping an eye on it since it's the first time we're cooking it? I'll be making another dish."

"Got it."

"I'll be using green onions, so you wait over here with Raoul, Ohagi."

"Mreow!"

After hearing their energetic responses, I headed back into the RV.

I placed a pot on the RV's induction burner and began cooking. I was

preparing tonjiru, a miso-based soup full of pork and vegetables that was the perfect, hearty pairing for rice. I was going to fill it with plenty of ingredients, including the tofu I'd purchased earlier.

I couldn't help but hum, delighted that I was using Japanese ingredients for the first time in a long while.

"First I'll be using the bonito flakes I bought at the shop!" I'd almost lost my mind when I found them, but I did my best to remain calm. I was going to make a broth out of the bonito flakes, which would add depth to the flavor of the soup.

After passing the broth through a sieve and transferring it to a separate bowl, I heated up some oil and began sautéing the pork. Once the pork was cooked through, I added various ingredients that I'd bought earlier such as carrots, burdock root, green beans, green onions, and konjac. After sautéing everything together, I added the broth from earlier along with the tofu, and seasoned the whole soup with some miso. The whole thing was done now.

I took a sip from the ladle to taste it, and I let out a reflexive "Mmm!" I couldn't help myself. "It's delicious!" It had turned out so good that I could honestly have just downed the entire pot, but if I were to do that, Raoul would have been upset. *I have to wait, just a bit more... Ah, but I'm finally getting to have miso soup again. Maybe just another taste... No, patience, Mizarie.*

I quickly prepared Ohagi's chicken, then I brought out two bowls of the tonjiru for Raoul and myself.

"Thanks for waiting! How does the rice look?"

"It started bubbling so I lowered the heat and I've been watching it. I wonder how it's doing."

"I think the timing is perfect."

I had Raoul grab the mess tin and I opened the lid. A puff of steam came out, and the aroma of freshly cooked rice filled my nostrils. *Ah, this is some exquisite white rice!*

"Wow, this smells great. The garlic-and-steak rice from before was good too,

but it looks delicious on its own.”

“Exactly!” I exclaimed. “Since we used the mess tin to cook the rice, there’s some crispy rice on the bottom as well. White rice is great, but the crispy stuff is amazing.” I was in a daze just thinking about it.

“Aren’t we going to eat it?” Raoul said with a chuckle. *He’s right, I need to snap out of it.*

“We should chow down right away!”

“Yeah.”

“Mrow!”

I split the rice in half and served it in the chawan bowls I’d bought earlier. I placed some chicken and a bowl of water in front of Ohagi. *Ah, I feel so happy seeing a chawan bowl filled with rice!*

“Let’s dig in!” Raoul and I called out.

“Mrow!”

Of course, Ohagi was the first to start devouring her meal. I took a bite of the freshly prepared rice as I watched her happily chow down. The rice grew sweeter and sweeter as I chewed, and I was filled with happiness.

“Mmm, yummy.” As I enjoyed the plain rice, Raoul went in the opposite direction and took a sip of the tonjiru.

“Huh?!” he exclaimed, his eyes wide with shock. “This is so good!” He slurped down the tonjiru with an extremely satisfied look. He then used a spoon to eat the other ingredients in the soup. “I definitely want more of this!”

Hearing that made me happy. There was more back in the RV, so I wanted him to have seconds and thirds and enjoy it.

“The white stuff...tofu, was it? It’s soaked up the soup and it’s really good.”

“Right?! Tofu is so awesome! There are plenty of other dishes it’s good in, so I’ll buy some more from Jiro and make a bunch of different things!”

“Ooh, I’m looking forward to that.”

I had some of the tonjiru as well. The vegetables had soaked up the soup and

were quite delectable. The broth had a strong flavor as well, and I could have eaten countless bowls of the soup on its own. *This would be really good as a midnight snack.*

Now that we were in Mizuho, I had a wider variety of dishes I could make. I'd decided on tonjiru for our meal today, and next I wanted to make miso soup. I also wanted to grill some fish and eat it with grated daikon and soy sauce. I also really wanted tamago kake gohan, a dish consisting of a raw egg mixed into hot rice with some seasonings, but I wasn't sure if the raw eggs in this world were safe to eat. Either way, I could dream bigger now.

"Is this the crispy rice you mentioned earlier?"

"Yeah! You can't keep the bottom from getting too hot when you cook rice in a mess tin, so it gets a little overdone, but that's actually what makes it so good!"

"Huh..." Raoul didn't seem convinced by my enthusiasm, but he nevertheless took a bite. "*Oh*—I was thinking it couldn't be too special because it just looks burnt, but it's harder and yummy. It's interesting that it changes so much by burning it a little."

"I'm so glad you like it." I enjoyed some of the crispy rice as well, which reaffirmed my belief that crispy rice was one of the best things in the world. *Wait! If Raoul likes crispy rice too, we might end up fighting over who gets it...!* Only a small amount of rice got crispy while cooking it, so battle was perhaps inevitable.

As I sat there thinking about crispy rice, someone pawed at me. It was Ohagi.

"Mreow mrow."

"Hm? Oh, you finished eating? You cleaned your plate, good girl!" I said, petting her head. Ohagi happily meowed in response.

"So, what do you want to do after this, Mizarie? Looking at the map, there's a large town to the east."

"Yeah! I definitely want to go there!"

According to the navigation system's map, Mizuho only had one village and

one town. There was the village of Minamihama, where we currently were, and the capital. Minamihama was on the westernmost edge of the island nation, and the capital was on the east coast. There were several small settlements along the way, but nothing large enough to call a village. The rest of the island was filled with nature, and the entire nation was about the size of mainland Okinawa.

Regardless of where we visited, we'd only be able to return to Sautha in a month during the next full moon. It was best that we leisurely explored Mizuho while enjoying Japanese food.

"They're holding a banquet for us tonight, right?" Raoul said. "Then the earliest we'll probably be leaving will be tomorrow."

"Yeah, we did some shopping, so I think it would be best to go sightseeing around the country while making our way to the capital," I replied. "We can ask Tsumugi about it later."

"Sounds good."

For now, we decided to set out tomorrow, and continued to enjoy the rest of the tonjiru and rice.

The Welcome Banquet

Tsumugi's home, which was the village chief's residence, had a mountain in its backyard. There was a path to climb up the mountain behind the house, and beside that path was a natural spring that trickled water. It was an idyllic village with beautiful natural surroundings.

This was the village chief's residence, so perhaps it should've been expected—but Tsumugi's home was a manor, and the largest residence in the village. The main residence had an impressive tiled roof, and there was even an annex and storehouse on the premises. I even saw women hard at work who appeared to be the help.

The banquet that Tsumugi had mentioned was being set up in the courtyard. Since the entire village was participating in the festivities, we wouldn't all fit inside the house. There were several large tables lined up with tons of food laid out on top. There was even a dish that made use of an entire bird, and it was clear that they were welcoming us.

"Wow..." Raoul remarked as he turned toward me.

"I kind of feel bad that they're doing so much for us," I said, looking back at him.

Tsumugi noticed us checking out the preparations and made her way toward us with a young man at her side.

"Mizarie! Raoul! Ohagi!"

"Tsumugi! I'm looking forward to tonight. And I have to admit, I'm pretty surprised too—it looks like the banquet is going to be much larger than I'd expected. Is it really all right for you to be doing all this?" I then suggested that we contribute something as well, but Tsumugi just giggled and shook her head.

"We just want a reason to get rowdy and have fun, so it's all right," she explained.

“That’s right,” the young man said. “The men will be boisterously drinking until the sun is up,” he added, explaining what these banquets were usually like.

I wonder who he is. He seemed to notice my questioning gaze.

“My apologies,” the young man said. “I’m Souichi. The owner of the soba shop here in this village is my father.”

“Soba?!” I couldn’t help myself and yelped at the mention of soba. I quickly introduced myself. “I’m Mizarie, an adventurer. I’m sorry for how I reacted. I’ve just been wanting to eat soba...”

“I’m Raoul, and I’m also an adventurer.”

“Mre-reow.”

“This little one is Ohagi.”

I shared my passion for soba as I introduced Ohagi as well.

Minamihama Village had a soba shop, and Souichi was the owner’s son. He had soft blue eyes and straight black hair that made him seem kind. He looked like he was a little older than Tsumugi and likely in his late teens. The gray kimono he wore possibly added to the gentle impression he gave.

Souichi looked at us, impressed. “We rarely get travelers here. There are some younger people who travel to Sautha from our village every once in a while, but not many people want to travel all the way to an island nation.”

“Oh, well, I came here looking for food.” I explained how we’d been gifted some rice by an adventurer, and how we’d come here looking for more.

“Your tenacity is incredible...”

“Ha ha...”

Souichi seemed really surprised, but it was only natural. After he laughed, he turned to look at the banquet venue.

“In that case, we’ve brought some soba to the celebration as well, so please enjoy some. If you like it, I can give you some.”

“Really?! I would love that!” My enthusiastic response left Souichi surprised

once again.

Yay, now I've got soba!

"Today is a bit special. We are joined by adventurers who have traveled here to Minamihama Village! We have Mizarie, Raoul, and Ohagi the cat."

"It's nice to meet you all. I'm Mizarie. Thank you very much for preparing such a lovely event."

"I'm Raoul. I'm visiting towns all over while adventuring."

"Mau."

Raoul, Ohagi, and I were standing beside Tsumugi's father, the village chief, as we gave a short introduction of who we were.

There were over two hundred villagers gathered, so I couldn't help but feel nervous. I prayed for this greeting to end as soon as possible while I strained to maintain a smile. Just then, the village chief stepped forward.

"It's been a while since we've had guests. Let's have them thoroughly enjoy this banquet and our hospitality!"

"Whoo!" the villagers cheered.

The village chief then announced that the banquet had begun.

"Hey, where did you come here from? I can't believe you took the full moon path to get here—that's incredible! It was probably really difficult, right?"

"How many months did it take to get here?"

"My older brother went to Sautha. I hope he's doing well."

"People from outside wear interesting clothes. What peculiarly made pieces..."

"I've heard there are tons of good-looking people outside of Mizuho!"

Once the banquet began, the villagers bombarded us with questions. They wanted to know about life outside this country, and they asked about what other places were like and what sorts of clothes people wore. There was a lot

they wanted to know.

“We crossed the desert and came here from Sautha using the full moon path.”

“Wow!” several villagers exclaimed.

It was the relatively young villagers who were most interested in the outside world. I told the girls about fashionable clothes like dresses, and Raoul told the boys stories of his adventures. Everyone was so excited as they listened, and they seemed to enjoy talking to us.

“I’m actually interested in the food from this country,” I said.

“What? *Our* food? From what you’ve told us, I think the outside world sounds like a lot more fun.”

“Delicious food is better than the alternative, but... Oh, have you tried *that* yet?” one villager said, turning their attention to the mountain behind the village chief’s home.

“What are you referring to?” I asked. Since they were looking at the mountain, it was probably something that could be harvested there. That brought to mind things like matsutake mushrooms, mountain yam, and various foraged vegetables. All the options sounded appetizing, so I wanted the opportunity to try them.

“That’s a surprise,” the villager said. “You should have Tsumugi take you to it tomorrow, since the mountain is dangerous at night.”

“That’s fair. I’ll do that.”

“That sounds good!” another villager exclaimed. “They say that it isn’t found outside of Mizuho, so I’m sure it’ll surprise you, Mizarie!”

I still had no idea what “it” was, but I had another thing to look forward to tomorrow. *I should ask Tsumugi about it before we leave.*

After somehow handling the barrage of questions from the villagers, Raoul and I finally made it to the food. My main target was the soba that Souichi had mentioned.

“There are a bunch of dishes I’ve never seen before,” Raoul said as he scanned the table, trying to decide what he wanted to try.

There were a variety of plates, including simple rice balls, pickles, braised meat and vegetables, braised fish, and tempura.

“I wonder which I should try,” Raoul said, sounding excited as he looked over his options.

As for myself, I wanted to try a little bit of everything. *You want me to choose just one when I haven’t had Japanese food in so long? There’s no way I could!*

Just then, Tsumugi and Souichi came up to us. In their hands was a tray of cold soba.

“I wanted you to try it so I brought some over, Mizarie. Would you like to try some with tempura?”

“I think that would be amazing...” I said, putting my hands together and bowing.

“Please have some as well, Raoul.”

“Thank you.”

Raoul and I found some open seats nearby and immediately dug into the cold soba. I picked up the soba with the chopsticks that were included on the tray, lightly dipped them into the accompanying sauce, and then I slurped them up, enjoying the noodles in one bite. Raoul watched the whole thing with a confused face.

“*That’s* how you eat this?!”

“This is how soba is eaten... Wait, you probably don’t know how to use chopsticks.” The utensils we typically used were forks, spoons, and sometimes knives. Chopsticks weren’t used in the local culture, so Raoul had been confused.

“You use these chopsticks to grab the food. You hold them like this.” I held the chopsticks in my right hand and showed Raoul how to use them, but it wasn’t so easy for him to figure out.

“Huh? What? Huh? Like this...?” Raoul struggled as he managed to hold them,

but unfortunately, he wasn't able to scoop up the soba.

“No, no, you put your index finger here, and... Yeah, like that!”



“I did it! All right!” After successfully holding the chopsticks, Raoul picked up some soba and brought it up to his mouth. Just as he was about to take a bite, the soba slipped out from between the chopsticks.

“Don’t worry, you got this.”

“Darn... I’ll definitely get good at this!” Raoul seemed fired up and was determined to figure out how to use chopsticks.

“Chopsticks are really versatile, so they might even become your favorite utensil once you get the hang of them,” I said. “Not only can you use them with noodles, but you can pick up side dishes too, like this.” I picked up the tempura and dipped it into the salt it was served with before taking a bite.

“Wow...” Raoul mumbled as he watched me do all of that. “I can do it too...!” Raoul brought his face as close as possible to the cup of dipping sauce and used the chopsticks like a fork to slurp up the soba. “Whoa! This is so good! It’s so refreshing and light.” It seemed Raoul enjoyed the soba.

We looked at each other, nodding in agreement about the deliciousness, and we asked Souichi to please sell us some soba. *We can add soba noodles to the rotation of camp foods!*

At the same time, Raoul was desperate to figure out how to use chopsticks. “I’m going to buy some at the shop and use them regularly!”

“What a great idea!” I was on board for that. I nodded enthusiastically in response, and we decided to go buy some right away the next day.



The following day, we asked Tsumugi to show us around once again. We had two goals today. The first was finding out what that thing on the mountain was. It sounded like it was a surprising type of food, so I was excited. The second was obtaining some soba from Souichi’s family soba business.

“Were you able to sleep last night? I’m sure my father and the others were celebrating well into the night... I figured it must have been noisy.”

“It was no problem,” I said.

Tsumugi looked like she really felt bad. “They’re always like that,” she explained.

While it was true that I was surprised at how much I’d heard of their rowdy celebration, it had sounded like they were having fun; and it was part of a banquet to welcome us, so I had no complaints.

“I’m glad you were able to sleep,” Tsumugi said. “You’re interested in the ingredients from the mountain, right? It’s managed by my family.”

We made our way behind the manor, and water was trickling from what seemed to be a natural spring.

“That water looks so clear.”

“Yes, this water is the village’s pride. We even use it for cooking.”

“That sounds nice.”

There was a wooden plank laid out beside the spring, which looked to be a path. Tsumugi led the way, and I followed with Ohagi on my shoulder, and Raoul trailed after us. The weather was nice, but it was made even more comfortable by the shade provided by the tree leaves.

“It’s such a quiet forest,” I remarked. “I feel so calm.” It felt like a nice place to escape the heat in the summer.

Tsumugi nodded. “It is. There aren’t any monsters on this mountain, so it’s a great place for children to play as well.”

“What?! There aren’t any monsters?! That’s incredible...”

Though they spawned more in certain areas and less in others, monsters existed everywhere. It was common for only weaker monsters to live in areas like grasslands, but I’d never heard of a place like a mountain or a forest with no monsters. Raoul seemed to think the same thing and was also surprised by Tsumugi’s statement.

“Does that mean that there’s actually a really strong monster here...?” Raoul wondered.

I gasped. If there was an ultimate monster, weaker monsters wouldn’t come near the mountain. Raoul’s theory made me sweat with anxiety.

“That’s not the case,” Tsumugi said in a calm voice. “A guardian spirit lives in this mountain. The guardian spirit is protecting this mountain, so monsters don’t appear here.”

“Wow, a guardian spirit.” *I wonder if that’s like a god. Now that I think about it, Japanese people do say that gods live in the mountains and things like that.*

I quickly understood and nodded, while Raoul seemed like he’d learned something new as he let out a “Huh.”

“In this place protected by the guardian spirit, we grow...wasabi,” Tsumugi said, spreading her arms out, gesturing to a field with clear water and plenty of wasabi growing.

“Wasabi?!”

The path alongside the natural spring had gradually turned into a field, and impressive green leaves covered the entire area. The wasabi harvested here was probably incredible. The still water was crystal clear, and I could tell that the field was well maintained. Perhaps this area didn’t get much rain either.

“Wasabi?” Raoul asked.

“Mau?”

Though I was over the moon, Raoul and Ohagi were just tilting their heads in confusion. The only spicy ingredients I’d found until now were peppers, so wasabi was incredibly rare. I hadn’t expected to be able to taste it again in this world.

“Oh, have you heard of it?”

“I have!”

I very much wanted some. Wasabi was a great aromatic. I wanted to eat it with soba and sashimi. It was an ingredient that made me dream even bigger.

“Very well,” Tsumugi said with a giggle. “Then I will prepare some as a gift for you. Please enjoy it.”

“Really?! Thank you very much!”

“Thank you?” Raoul added.

“Mreow?”

I was going to have Raoul thoroughly enjoy the wasabi later. I promised him that I’d cook with it.

After finding out that the mysterious ingredient was wasabi, we were then guided to the soba shop run by Souichi’s family. There were five counter seats, and four tables with four places each, along with floor seating. The shop had a calm atmosphere.

“Hello,” Tsumugi said, entering first.

Souichi, who was helping out, beamed with excitement. “Tsumugi! Oh, hello, Mizarie, Raoul.”

“Hello,” I greeted. “I wanted soba so I stopped by.”

“The soba from yesterday was delicious,” Raoul said.

Our compliments made Souichi laugh bashfully. “I’m glad to hear that.” He quickly prepared some soba and udon for us. “We don’t sell it in our shop, but we have some udon that we eat at home. Please take some with you, if you’d like.”

“Wow, I’d love to! Thank you so much!” I was already more than happy about the soba, but we’d even gotten our hands on some udon. *I’ll definitely have to hold a taste-testing contest later to compare them.*

“You should take some too, Tsumugi.”

“What? But...”

“Actually, I made this one myself.” Souichi then bashfully added, “I think this batch came out pretty well. I’m confident about this one!”

“I’ll enjoy it for dinner, then. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. You eating my food makes me the happiest, Tsumugi.”

They were both smiling at each other, which made me curious about their relationship. I had a hunch about them. *There’s nothing more beautiful than “getting along.”*

I grinned at the two of them, which made Tsumugi exclaim, “Let’s get going!” Her face was red, so she must have felt embarrassed.

“You’ll be leaving the village soon, right, Mizarie?”

“Yes, we’re thinking of going sightseeing while exploring the island. Right, Raoul? Ohagi?”

“Yeah, I want to explore all over.”

“Mreooow.”

Tsumugi nodded and began explaining the areas outside of Minamihama Village. “The capital is located on the easternmost coast of Mizuho. It’s very lively, so please visit it if you can. There aren’t any villages on the way there, but there are many settlements. Please be prepared, as there are no shops along the way.”

“Understood.”

I’d already known this from checking the map in the RV, but just as I’d expected, there were no villages or towns on the way to the capital. However, the island wasn’t too large, and I could buy food supplies at the shop in this village. Even if there weren’t shops on the way, we probably wouldn’t have any issues.

Souichi and Tsumugi saw us off, and we departed for the capital.

Comparing Soba and Udon

We left Minamihama and headed east in the RV. The scenery was an unchanging idyllic countryside, and we sometimes saw animals passing by. *Is that a tanuki or a raccoon?*

“Oh, there’s a fox!” I reflexively exclaimed upon seeing a fox pop its head out on the countryside path.

“I’ve never seen a fox before,” Raoul said. “It’s pretty cute.”

“Yeah. They have similar ears to cats, which feels like it multiplies their cuteness!” As a cat person, I could easily be converted into a fan of foxes.

We continued discussing the animals we saw on the road, and eventually we reached the first settlement. The place was made of fewer than ten residences with paddies and fields nearby. A little farther down there was a chicken coop and cow shed. Though the scale was small, it was clear that they both farmed and kept livestock.

We had no plans on stopping by the settlement, so I checked that there were no people near us on the map while quietly passing by.

After about three hours of driving, we entered a grassy field and I parked the RV. It was a good time to take a break and have lunch.

“What do you want to do for lunch?” Raoul asked. “I don’t mind making something.”

“Why don’t we have the soba and udon Souichi gave us and compare them?!” I was bursting with excitement at the idea.

“I like that idea!” Raoul said, immediately agreeing with a nod.

“I think we can harvest our vegetables soon too. If the okra looks ready, I want to use it with the soba.”

“Got it. I’ll go check on them.” Raoul headed over to the gardening area.

“While you do that, I’ll prepare the soba and udon!”

“Mau!”

I took out the soba and udon that was in the kitchen, and the aroma of the soba immediately filled the air. The soba was cut evenly—I could see why Souichi was proud of this batch.

I brought a pot of water to a boil, and Raoul returned to the kitchen with okra and tomatoes. It seemed like both had been perfectly ready to be harvested.

“Ta-da! Our RV gardening was a big success!”

“Whoa, they look great! I guess buying seedlings was a good move.”

“Yeah. If you try to start with seeds, not only will it be harder, but it’ll take longer too, so it’s a lot of work,” Raoul said, nodding to himself. “How should I prepare these?”

“The okra will be boiled, then sliced. I want to use the tomato raw. Can you dice it?”

“Leave it to me.”

As I worked on preparing the soba and udon, Raoul prepared the okra and tomatoes. Cooking together made us more efficient, and the food would be ready in less time—there was nothing but benefits. *I think I’ll do a cold soba and a warm udon with egg drop soup.*

“Raoul, could you finely chop the scallions?”

“Got it!”

“Let’s also serve the wasabi with the soba.” Since we’d gotten our hands on fresh wasabi, it would be a waste to not use it here. I eagerly pulled out everything I needed from the fridge.

“Should I chop up the wasabi too?” Raoul didn’t know how wasabi was used, so he reached out for it, asking, “Should I dice it?” He was about to chop it up like any other vegetable.

Tsumugi had gifted us a grater plate along with the wasabi, so I handed it to Raoul. “You don’t chop wasabi; you grate it.”

“I see, so you don’t bite into it. Got it,” Raoul said as he washed the wasabi before beginning to grate it. Immediately, he groaned and turned away from the wasabi. “What’s this smell?! It’s stinging me deep in my nostrils! Is it rotten?!”

Raoul was taking heavy damage from the first scent of wasabi he’d ever experienced. There were tears forming in the corners of his eyes, and I could tell that he had absolutely no tolerance for the wasabi yet.

I laughed while picking up the wasabi and took over grating it. “This is what’s so good about it.” *Ah, it smells so fresh!*

The fresh wasabi was nothing like what came in the tubes at the grocery store in my previous life. I was so excited to eat soba with this wasabi. I finished grating it with a dreamy look, and Raoul was staring at me with disbelief.

“Are we really going to eat that? Oh, is it one of those things that taste good once you cook it...?”

“Wasabi is eaten raw. Want to try it?”

“Huh? Just like that? Well, um, I don’t know...”

Raoul was usually enthusiastic when I offered him something to try, but his hesitation was obvious. It was kind of funny, and I put a little bit of wasabi onto a spoon and handed it to him. *I just want him to taste a little bit, you know?*

“There are a lot of little kids that don’t like it, but most adults enjoy it.”

“Really...?”

“If you don’t think you can handle it, there’s no need to force yourself.”

Raoul accepted the spoon and sniffed the wasabi, thinking about what he should do. As he took his time, I finished preparing the soba and udon I’d boiled.

For the cold soba, I topped it with okra and tomato, then finished it off with an egg yolk in the middle. I served my portion with a little bit of wasabi on the side, which would be complete with the sauce that was chilling in the fridge.

Then I poured a beaten egg into the udon, and portioned the noodles into

bowls. I finished by garnishing them with the scallions.

As for Ohagi, she was having chicken as usual.

“All right, food is ready!” *All that’s left is whether Raoul’s having wasabi or not...* I turned to look at Raoul, and he was still in a staring contest with the spoon of wasabi. “Lunch is ready, Raoul.”

“Huh? Already?! Darn it... A man needs to have courage!” With that exclamation, Raoul chomped down on the spoon. He then let out an indescribable sound and crouched down on the ground.

Hm. It might’ve been too soon for him to try wasabi on its own.

“Let’s dig in!” we called out.

“Mau!”

Raoul had recovered from the wasabi, so it was time to have lunch and compare the soba and udon. We had the cold soba with okra and tomato, and the udon in egg drop soup. Raoul had ended up declining the wasabi while on the verge of tears. It was unfortunate.

I saw the steam rising off the bowl of udon, and I decided to dig in right away. *It’s been a while since I’ve had udon!* I slurped up the udon, and my entire mouth was filled with the bouncy, chewy texture of the noodles. It was pure bliss. It reminded me of how I had often eaten this dish in my previous life as a late-night snack. I liked soba too, but I actually preferred udon.

“It’s yummy!”

“Mauuu.”

Ohagi and I were both digging into our food, but Raoul was carefully grabbing the soba with his chopsticks. I was surprised at how much he’d improved since yesterday. I decided to compliment his efforts after seeing how skillfully he was eating the soba.

“You’re getting good at using them. You’ll master them in no time!”

“I’ve been practicing in my mind,” he said with a proud chuckle and grin.

Raoul was probably the only person who could improve this much just using their imagination—it was probably a victory due to his talents and sensibilities.

The soba today had okra in it, which added a slimy texture, but Raoul seemed to enjoy it.

“This is good!” he said, finishing it in the blink of an eye. “What a versatile ingredient. You can top it with anything!”

“Yeah, you can even warm it up like the udon in the winter.” There were countless different ways to eat soba.

Raoul was impressed, and he took a bite of the udon as well. The simple flavoring and chewy texture made him smile. “This is good too, but I think I prefer the soba.”

“What? I prefer udon!”

“You think udon is better when soba tastes *this* good?!” Shocked by my statement, Raoul looked back and forth between the bowls of soba and udon. “Soba is definitely better...” he mumbled. He must’ve liked it a lot. “But it would be nice to have it with the tempura from yesterday. That stuff was so crispy and good. It was even better in the soba dipping sauce.”

“Oh yeah, tempura soba tastes great. Tempura goes well with udon too, though! Let’s try it sometime!”

“So, tempura is versatile too... How do you get it so crispy? I’d love to know how it’s made.”

There were fried dishes like whole fried pieces of meat, but tempura was a first in this world. It was probably unique to Mizuho.

“Don’t worry, I know how to make it! We can make some using seasonal vegetables.”

“Ooh, that’s great! I’m looking forward to it.”

I’d bought some tempura batter mix at the shop in Minamihama, so it would be nice to prepare when we had a chance to take our time cooking.

We continued eating, discussing what we found delicious about soba and udon until lunch came to an end.

The Capital of Mizuho

After finishing lunch, we set off once more. We passed roughly four settlements before an impressive outer wall came into view.

“Is that the capital?!”

“Mau?!”

“Wow, it looks incredible!”

There was a moat in front of the outer wall, and water was flowing through it. A drawbridge from the capital’s side was lowered over the moat so that people could pass over it. Past that was a Japanese-style castle similar to the ones I’d seen in my previous life.

I’d visited castles before, but this was the first time I’d seen one that people were actually living in and using, which felt strange. *It’s like I traveled back in time.*

There were guards on either side of the drawbridge, inspecting the people passing through. Because it was the capital, the town buildings and the homes were built differently than those in Minamihama. *We’ll be able to get in, right...?*

I hadn’t had trouble traveling between countries until now, but Mizuho’s culture was very different from the kingdoms I’d been in, which made me a bit nervous.

“At the very least, they’ll be suspicious if we go in with the RV, so let’s walk there,” Raoul said.

“Okay,” I said, nodding in agreement.

“Mau!”

We got out of the RV somewhere the guards couldn’t see us, and we walked the rest of the way.

“Hold it!”

“Your clothes are unfamiliar. Where did you come from?”

Oh no, they're suspicious— Wait, they're samurai!

The two guards both wore their hair in chonmage, a traditional Japanese topknot. As they glared at us, their hands were on the katanas they wore on their hips. It was obvious that they thought we were suspicious.

“We’re travelers!” Raoul immediately said, holding his hands up. He was holding them up to show that we weren’t enemies. “We took the full moon path from Sautha and arrived in Minamihama, then we came here.”

“What?! You traveled that dangerous full moon path? That’s incredible.”

It seemed that everyone in this country knew about the full moon path, and the guards’ gazes had completely changed. They were now looking at us with admiration.

One of the guards, who looked to be in his late thirties, even said, “I wanted to travel outside the kingdom too, when I was young...”

I’d thought that it would be difficult to get through to the guards, but hearing that, I immediately felt an affinity with him.

“Outsiders aren’t forbidden from entering the capital, but there is a toll. It’s ten thousand rooks per person, no cost for your cat. What would you like to do?”

“It costs that much?!” Raoul exclaimed.



There were some towns that would charge a toll, but most of them were less than a thousand rooks. With that perspective in mind, ten thousand rooks was an incredibly steep fee. *Still, it's not like we're going to turn back after coming all this way.*

I pulled out ten thousand rooks from my wallet and handed it to the guard. Raoul did the same, handing over ten thousand rooks. Ohagi adorably greeted them with a “Mreooow.”

Sooo cute!

“Your cat is very friendly.” It seemed that the guard was smitten with Ohagi, but that didn’t get us a discount on our toll. “I’ve received the twenty thousand rooks. Please enjoy our capital.”

“Let me give you a quick rundown. As soon as you enter, there’s a large building to the right—that’s the adventurer’s guild. There’s a luxury inn near the mountain on the left side. There, you can enjoy the hot springs, which are our capital’s pride.”

“Thank you very much,” Raoul said.

“You have hot springs here? That’s amazing—I’ll definitely visit them!”

After getting an overview of the main attractions here, we stepped foot into the capital.

Before me was a townscape just like those of the Edo period that I’d read about.

“Wooow, it’s incredible,” I remarked.

“I thought the houses in Minamihama were unique, but these are more impressive.”

“Maaau.”

We voiced our amazement as we walked through the Edo-like capital.

Once you entered, there was a large street, and if you went straight, you

would hit the castle. It wasn't a European castle, but a traditional Japanese-style castle.

There were all sorts of shops lining the street, and the signs were written to be read right to left. The alphabet they used was the common language used in this whole world, so it felt strange.

The capital was bustling with kimono-wearing people living their lives, and it was a vibrant town. The scale of the capital was over ten times that of Minamihama. We probably couldn't have explored all of it in just a day or two.

There were fewer people with chonmages than I'd expected, but seeing that those who had the topknot also had swords, it was perhaps a hairstyle only allowed for soldiers. *Souichi and the other men in Minamihama didn't wear topknots either.*

I looked around excitedly as we walked down the street, and I noticed that a lot of people were staring at us.

"Oh, right. We probably stand out in these clothes."

"There are a lot more people here than in Minamihama... Since we're here, why don't we try buying clothes from this country?"

"I like that idea!" I said, immediately agreeing. We entered a nearby clothing shop.

The clothing shop was a classy store with an earthen floor at the entrance and colorful rolls of fabric decorating the walls. There was everything from vibrant designs to muted tones, and it seemed that anyone of any age could find a fabric that would fit them.

"Welcome. Oh, those are some unusual clothes. Did you come from Hering?"

"Hello. We're not from Hering, but we passed through there to come here."

Perhaps it was because she ran a clothing store, but the owner seemed to have some knowledge about other kingdoms.

"We were looking for some clothes that would help us fit in around here..." I explained while looking around the shop. The walls were lined with just rolls of

fabric, and I didn't see a single premade kimono. If we were going to have something made from scratch, it would take too long and wouldn't be viable for us.

This shop is along the main street, so maybe it's a premium store. I'd entered the first shop that had caught my eye without thinking, but I might have made a mistake. I was worried about what to do, but the owner just smiled at me.

"You're all right. We only have a few, but we have some ready-to-wear items as well. What do you think about this kimono for you, and this one for your friend?"

The owner picked out a muted light-blue kimono with plum flowers and branches. It was a classy piece. The kimono she'd picked out for Raoul had no design, but it was a dark blue close to black that wasn't too loud. Both kimono looked very lovely.

"I wonder if it'll look good on me," Raoul said with a worried look as he stared at the kimono.

"That's fair," I said. "It's hard when you're not used to wearing something." Even as a former Japanese person, I'd only worn a kimono a handful of times. I'd worn a yukata to a summer festival when I was a student, a furisode at my coming-of-age ceremony, and a hakama at my university graduation. I'd worn traditional Japanese clothing much less than I'd thought. *Since I have black hair, I don't think it'll look too weird on me...*

"Can we try them on here?"

"Of course. I can even give you a discount if you let me take a look at the foreign clothes you're wearing right now."

"What? Really?" I immediately agreed to the unexpected offer for a discount.

The owner seemed to be curious about things like how the pieces were constructed and what kind of fabric was used. She mentioned that if she was successful in studying them, she would want to incorporate design elements into a kimono and make something new.

"Since kimono haven't changed for decades, I'd love to put out a new design in our store."

“That’s a lovely idea.” Maybe there will be some fantasy-style clothes with traditional Japanese elements coming out of Mizuho in the future. I’m excited for that.

A clerk helped both Raoul and me put on the kimono, and they prepared a red scarf with a white plum blossom pattern for Ohagi.

“Oooh!”

“Mau.”

Raoul, Ohagi, and I all exclaimed with delight.

“Wow, Mizarie. You look great.”

“Really? Thank you.”

“Ohagi looks cute too.”

“Mreow.”

Raoul began complimenting us as he clapped.

“You look handsome too, Raoul. You look more mature.”

“Really? Thanks. It feels a little strange, like there’s a lot of air passing over my legs.” Raoul kept restlessly moving his legs around. He seemed a little concerned that the only thing keeping the front of the kimono closed was the obi belt.

“It can’t be helped—that’s just what a kimono is,” I explained. “I like it a lot, but what do you think, Raoul?” He slowly spun in front of a mirror, inspecting himself from head to toe. I clapped and complimented him back. “Nice, looking good!”

“All right, I’ll get this one too!” Raoul said. I thought we were done because we’d decided on kimono, but Raoul had another question. “What about your hair?” he asked. “Most of the women we saw in town had a hair accessory that matched their outfits.”

“Now that you mention it, they did.” It was perhaps better to have something.

“How about an accessory made using tsumami zaiku?” A clerk immediately

brought out a cloth hair accessory made using the traditional Japanese craft of tsumami zaiku, and I nodded.

“Yes, please.” Since we were here, I figured I might as well indulge a little bit. The clerk then placed the accessory above my left ear.

“Whoa, that looks really good!” Raoul exclaimed.

“Thanks.” His direct compliment made me feel a little embarrassed, but the accessory *was* cute, and I liked it as well.

We showed the owner of the shop our own clothes and got the previously mentioned discount, then left in our kimono.

After leaving the clothing shop, we easily fit into the capital. Not everyone from Mizuho had black hair, since this was still a fantasy-based world—so there were blond people wearing kimono, and even soldiers in medieval armor with chonmage. *It feels like a Japanese period film, but in a fantasy setting.* The two aesthetics added to the fun, and we began exploring the capital.

Just looking at the stores that sold cute, traditional Japanese accessories was fun for window-shopping. *These would be perfect for gifts to bring back.*

“Oh! Do you ever visit your hometown, Raoul? I’m sure they’d enjoy a gift you got here.” I’d never seen these traditional Japanese accessories in other kingdoms, so they were surely a rare item.

“Now that you mention it, I haven’t visited in a while...”

“How long has it been?”

“I left my village when I was fifteen, so it’s been four years.” Raoul was currently nineteen, so in other words he’d never visited since he left.

“They must be worried if it’s been that long. Have you written them letters?” Though I felt I was meddling, I couldn’t help but ask.

“I send letters sometimes, but since I’m traveling, the communication is one-sided... I make sure to write them at least once a year.”

“I see. I’m sure it’s nice to get a letter, but I think they’d enjoy it even more if you showed up in person.”

Raoul seemed a little uncomfortable upon hearing my suggestion. Perhaps there was some reason why it was difficult for him to visit his home. *Maybe he doesn't want to go back until he gets his hands on a legendary sword or becomes an S-Rank adventurer. Those are the sorts of ideals men have, right? It's kind of nice.*

Raoul's next words were the complete opposite of what I'd been thinking. "Well, my family tried to stop me when I set out to travel, saying that becoming an adventurer is dangerous. It'd be kind of awkward to visit them."

"You should definitely see them!" *Your family's probably really worried, Raoul!*

"Y-You think so?" Raoul said, hesitating when he saw how I immediately reacted. *Of course I do!* "The only thing is, I thought it would be nice if I waited until I was a lot stronger and could return with a ton of gifts... I thought they might enjoy that more..."

"You're trailing off, Raoul," I said with a wry laugh. I decided to make a suggestion. "Why don't we try visiting your village after we leave Mizuho? We can level up along the way and buy a bunch of gifts. I'm sure they'll be happy to see you."

"Yeah, that sounds good... Thanks, Mizarie. I'll pick out gifts for everyone." Raoul looked like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders, and he began picking out gifts for his family at the accessory shop. "I have to get something for dad, mom, my sisters, and my brothers, so... Oh, but all the accessories here are for women."

The shop was filled with hair accessories made using tsumami zaiku, along with other items. Raoul picked various things up, wondering what might be good. He appeared to start by buying gifts for his mother and sisters. Watching Raoul pick items out with a serious look in his eyes made it clear how much he loved his family.

"There are a lot of types of hair ties, so it might be good to get a couple," I pointed out. "If they use them regularly, they'll definitely use them up."

"That's a good point. If my sisters have had kids, I can give them some too."

Hearing Raoul's words, I realized that it was definitely possible that his family had grown in the four years he'd been away.

"In that case, maybe they'll enjoy having a few with flowers on them, along with the simple ones."

"Right. I'm glad I have your advice; it's really helpful." Raoul picked up all sorts of hair ties, picking them out excitedly.

Since we could store everything in the RV, Raoul also picked out a tsumami zaiku hair accessory and storage box for each person, along with a few extra hair ties.

The next shop that caught our eye was a brewery.

"Hey, does your dad drink, or your brothers? The alcohol from the capital is probably rare."

"Even the alcohol is different here? My dad loves drinking—he has a drink every night. One of my brothers gets drunk right away and starts laughing a lot. He drinks often too." It seemed that the men in Raoul's family liked drinking. We quickly decided on alcohol as a gift, and Raoul picked out a few bottles of what looked similar to Japanese sake.

"That was quick."

"It's hard to know what someone will like without drinking, so I got a few different bottles. I hope at least one of them will be something they like..."

"Oh, that's true. People have preferences when it comes to alcohol."

The alcohol sold here in the capital was a specialty item that his family would probably have to try to know whether they'd like it or not. Alcohol was permitted at twenty in this world, so Raoul couldn't taste test it before buying it either. Since this world was one of an otome game, rules irrelevant to the plot were in line with Japanese laws.

Since Raoul had bought a lot, we decided to store everything in the RV, but I stopped in my tracks.

“Wait, if we leave and come back, we’ll probably have to pay the toll again!”

“Oh, right! We might be okay on our funds, but it would definitely be better to keep our spending low. It’s not like we can’t carry what we’ve got, so why don’t we leave it in a room at an inn?”

“That sounds good! Let’s go to the inn that the guard told us about.”

“Yeah.”

“Mau!”

After we finished shopping, we headed to the inn we’d been told about.

Exciting Luxury Hot Spring Inn

The area had grown dim while we were shopping. We weren't familiar with the area yet, so it was for the best that we headed to the inn sooner rather than later. Raoul and I briskly marched forward and saw a light ahead of us.

"Hm? Why is it suddenly bright... Wait, what's that building?"

"Whoa!" I exclaimed. "Wow... It's a luxury hot spring inn!"

The building that had appeared before us looked luxurious and gorgeous. There were paper lanterns lining the front and sides of the inn's lot, illuminating the surrounding area. At the front entrance, there were employees welcoming their classy guests.

Steam rose from the river running in front of the inn—they had water from the hot springs flowing in the area. It was like the bathhouse from a certain animated movie.

We made our way to the entrance and were greeted by an employee.

"Welcome," they said as they volunteered to show us around. "Do you have a reservation with us?"

"No, we haven't made any reservations. Are you fully booked tonight?"

Though it was a bit too late for regrets, I wished I had made lodging arrangements as soon as we'd arrived. Since Mizuho was an island nation with very few villages and settlements aside from the capital, I hadn't considered the possibility that the inn would be busy.

Raoul and I looked at each other as if to say we'd made a mistake. *It's such a gorgeous inn, so I can see why people who live in the capital would want to stay here too. They have hot springs too, so some people might want to come to recuperate.*

“Is that so,” the employee said with a smile. “Though there aren’t many, we do have some rooms prepared for walk-in guests. I’ll go confirm what’s available right away.”

“Really?! Thank you!”

The lobby of the inn had an elegant red carpet sprawled out. There were many guests dressed in the same yukata, so this inn probably rented yukata out for guests to wear while using the facilities. Wearing the provided rental yukata was one of the joys of staying at a hot spring inn.

We were guided to the check-in counter and informed that they still had a room available, and I let out a sigh of relief.

“I’m so glad that our last room is for two people. Let me show you there right away.”

“What?!” Raoul and I both exclaimed. We’d always gotten separate rooms when staying at an inn, so we had no plans for sharing a room. *Well, we do spend time in the same space together when we’re in the RV, but...staying in the same room together when we’re staying in town is kind of different, no?! I* couldn’t help but feel flustered.

Raoul saw that I was troubled and asked, “Are there any other inns around?”

“Our inn is the only lodging in the capital. We don’t get very many guests from outside.”

“Right, of course,” Raoul said, hanging his head before whispering into my ear. “I’ll just sleep outdoors, so you stay at the inn, Mizarie.”

“What?! No, I’ll sleep outdoors! I’ll be safe since I’ll have the RV.”

“You’d have to leave the capital to use the RV.”

It seemed that Raoul was planning to find a place to spend the night within the capital. Otherwise, he would have to pay the toll again. I immediately shook my head.

“I can’t allow that. I could never leave you behind at night in a town we’re visiting for the first time!”

“Wouldn’t it be worse to leave you outdoors, though?” Raoul spoke as if he

were trying to calm me down and convince me.

“Hrm...” I groaned as I racked my brain for some genius idea, but...there was only one solution to this dilemma.

“All right, let’s stay in the same room together. It’s better than either one of us staying outdoors, and we didn’t sleep in separate rooms until the RV leveled up, so it’s nothing new.”

“What, Mizarie?!”

“It’ll be fine!” I kept telling myself that it was no different from how we lived in the RV. “We don’t mind the shared room. We’d like to take it.”

“Very well. Let me take you there.”

As we walked to our room, the employee gave us an overview of the inn.

“Our inn is a historical building that has been in operation for one hundred thirty-six years. The hot springs are known for their benefits for skin, but we have many guests who use them for healing and recuperating. Each room has its own private bath, and the fifth floor has the public bath. I hope you will enjoy them both.”

“Wow, I can’t believe each room has its own hot spring,” I remarked.

“We have many guests who want to take their time relaxing, so we have them in every room.”

Since this was a luxury hot spring inn, it was very different from the inns we usually stayed at as adventurers. We would be able to take our time and soak in a hot spring—what a luxury that was.

From a large window at the rear side of the building, we could see warm-toned lights on the mountain. It appeared that the mountain was also decorated with paper lanterns, and the window provided a way to view that scenery. We continued walking down the hallway while enjoying that view, and we were led to a room on the third floor.

“Please use this room. If you need anything, let us know using the magical instrument.”

“Understood. Thank you for showing us the way,” I said.

The employee bowed before leaving.

The room we were taken to was a Japanese-style room roughly eighteen square meters in size. To the immediate left of the entrance was a restroom and sink, and there was a window at the back of the room. Beyond that window was a private bath. There was a decorative scroll and flowers, and it was all very tasteful. We could also see the mountains decorated with lanterns from our room, and the scenery was lovely.

“This room is incredible... Oh, this must be the private bath!” Raoul scanned the room as he headed in, and was now looking out the window. There was a door next to the window that allowed access to the outside.

I didn’t hesitate to open the door and take a step outside.

“So the balcony is a hot spring... Wow, what a great view!”

“Mre-reow.”

The private bath had fresh water constantly filling the tub, and it was ready to use immediately.

“We took a bath together at the hot spring in the forest, remember?”

“Maaau,” Ohagi responded happily. Perhaps she remembered our last bath.

“Why don’t you two use it first?” Raoul said.

“What? Are you sure?”

“Yeah. Take your time and enjoy it.”

I decided to take Raoul up on his offer and enjoy the bath first with Ohagi. I grabbed towels and a yukata from the dresser in the room and headed out to the balcony, where there was a screen and shelves. The window also had a curtain that could be drawn from the outside.

It looks like I can rest easy while I bathe. Wait, no, I didn’t mean that Raoul would peep, nor did I think he would!

“Mreow mreow!”

“Ah! Wait, Ohagi!” I was dragging my feet while she happily ran off toward the hot spring. It was commonly said that cats didn’t like water, but Ohagi quite enjoyed it. It probably helped that we were outside a lot, and as a result, I would wash her often.

“Mraw.”

“Hey! I have to wash you first!”

“Mrrmrow!”

Ohagi had jumped into the milky white waters of the hot spring. Although she was enjoying herself, I quickly scooped her up and washed her with soap. We’d been out and about today like usual, so it was necessary to wash her before soaking in the hot spring.

“You’re such a good girl for letting me wash you, Ohagi.”

“Mraw.”

I washed her with circular massaging motions, and Ohagi immediately began purring with a relaxed expression. *I feel like a skilled masseuse.*

“Is any area in particular bothering you, miss?” I couldn’t help myself from playing spa. “Okay, I think you’re clean now. I’m going to rinse you off.”

“Mrau.”

I carefully rinsed off all the suds from Ohagi, and she was done. I washed my own body, then Ohagi and I got into the hot spring.

“Ah, that feels so good!”

“Mrooow.”

Ohagi’s voice overlapped with mine. I couldn’t tell what she was saying, but it was definitely along the lines of “That’s the stuff.”

I was up to my shoulders in the milky white water, and I splashed some onto my face. I was surely going to be as smooth as an egg upon getting out.

“Oh, the sky is filled with stars.” I’d been focusing on the lanterns on the mountain, but the night sky was a breathtaking view as well. *I want to just stay*

here forever... Such dreams of luxury filled my mind as I thoroughly enjoyed the bath.

“I’m done, Raoul. Thanks for letting me go first.”

“Mreeew.”

“Y-Yeah, sure...”

“What’s wrong?”

I’d called out to Raoul after finishing my bath, but he was acting a bit strange.

“Nothing, I’m just not used to seeing you dressed like that...”

“Oh, yeah. This is the yukata for wearing inside the inn. Isn’t it cute?” I spun around.

“Yeah,” Raoul nodded. There was one for men too, so I was looking forward to seeing Raoul in the yukata.

“I-I’m going to go take a bath now!”

“Yeah, take your time and enjoy it.” After seeing Raoul off, I turned to Ohagi. “That was a nice bath.” There was a handheld fan on top of a shelf, so I used it to cool off. “Ah, the air feels so nice. Come over here, Ohagi.”

“Mreooow.” Ohagi was still warm from the bath, so she seemed to enjoy the air as well.

“All that’s left is to eat dinner and sleep.” *Sleep...* “I ended up having us in the same room, but I wonder if it was a mistake. Raoul seemed pretty troubled...” Still, I couldn’t just kick Raoul out at night, and I had no intentions of going back on my decision. “I know it’s a little too late, but I’m starting to feel nervous... What should I do, Ohagi?” I was unable to hide my agony.

Just then, I heard a knock on the door.

“Excuse me. I’ve come to prepare your meal.”

“Oh, welcome in!”

One of the things I was anticipating tonight had arrived: our meal at the luxury inn. My nervousness transformed into excitement with the arrival of

food. *Just how easily swayed am I?!*

The dinner prepared for us was incredibly extravagant. There were all sorts of sashimi, including lobster and grilled fish. There were personal-sized pots with sukiyaki, a type of hot pot dish. On top of that, there was tempura, seasonal vegetables, a variety of small plates with different side dishes, steak, and kamameshi, a rice dish with various ingredients mixed into it. For Ohagi, there was chicken and fish prepared and garnished with bonito flakes. It was a dinner befitting the luxurious inn.

The server immediately left the room after setting the table, mentioning that they would be back in two hours to clean up. With perfect timing, Raoul finished up his bath.

“Whoa! There’s so much food! I’ve never seen such an extravagant spread... There are so many different dishes!”

“I know how you feel. Luxury inns have so much variety!”

Raoul sat across from me, his eyes glimmering with anticipation. “It looks so good.”



I felt silly for feeling nervous earlier. We'd been living together in the RV, so spending the night at a hot spring inn together was no big deal.

"Let's dig in before it gets cold," I said.

"Yeah."

"Mreow!"

Now that we were on the same page, we put our hands together to show our thanks for the meal.

"Let's eat!" Raoul and I exclaimed before we dug in.

"Oh, there was wasabi hiding in here...!" Raoul was using chopsticks; he was quite used to them now, but he had stopped in his tracks when he was about to grab some sashimi. What had stopped him was the wasabi served with it.

"It tastes really good to put some wasabi on the sashimi before dipping it in soy sauce."

"Really...?" Raoul was seriously struggling with whether he was going to eat the wasabi or not.

"It tastes good without it too, so I think it would be fine to eat it on its own."

My words made him light up with hope, but he immediately shook his head. "No, I don't think it would be good if I can't eat it at all, so I'll try it a little at a time." With that, Raoul took just a tiny bit of wasabi and put it onto the sashimi, then ate it. He held his head as it stung him, but eventually he happily exclaimed, "I ate it!"

I enjoyed the sashimi as well, while also digging into the kamameshi.

"Wow, it has so many things in it!" The rice was filled with chicken, shiitake mushrooms, carrots, burdock root, and bamboo shoots. The rice had soaked up the flavor of the ingredients, making it incredibly delicious.

"Wow, that looks impressive." Raoul was surprised that there were so many ingredients that tasted good with rice. He scooped some of the rice from his pot and into a bowl, and then he exclaimed, "Oh, there's crispy rice on the bottom

too!" It was pretty cute.

"We can probably make something similar in the mess tins, so let's make all sorts of rice dishes!"

"That sounds great! I'm looking forward to it." Raoul smiled as he stuffed his face with rice, and I couldn't help but smile back.

We continued to enjoy our extravagant meal while talking about Japanese food and what we would want to make in the future.

"Please have a restful night."

"Thank you very much."

As soon as we finished eating, the dishes were cleared and two futons were prepared for us. I'd been so focused on the delicious food that I'd relaxed. With the futons laid out now, I couldn't help but be nervous. It seemed that Raoul was feeling a bit awkward as well. *I think he's been drinking tea nonstop...*

"M-Mizarie, I know what you said, but I think I should just leave—"

"No, that's dangerous. The capital seems pretty safe, but we don't live here, and we have no idea if we can handle things if something were to happen."

It was very possible that there were drunkards roaming the streets at night, making the town more dangerous. Of course, I was aware that Raoul was strong, but that wasn't the issue here.

Man, my heart is pounding. I'm pretty sure I was calmer when my engagement was broken off.

"I-I think it's best to just go to bed in situations like this!" I exclaimed.

"Y-Yeah, that's a good point! You're probably tired from all the driving!"

"Let's sleep!" *In the end, it's best to just sleep!*

And so, we got under the blankets of our futons—but the inn worker had placed the futons right next to each other, perhaps trying to be considerate. As a result, Raoul's fingers grazed mine when I turned around.

We both gasped, and I quickly pulled my hand away and pressed it against my

chest. I could feel my heart beating loudly. *That was so embarrassing...*

“Mizarie.”

“Raoul...” Hearing my name, I looked at him. He had a serious look in his eyes that was slightly bashful and troubled at the same time. He remained silent for a while, which made me worry that Raoul could hear how loudly my heart was pounding. “Um...” *I need to find something to talk about.* Despite that, I couldn’t think of anything good to say. *What should I do...?*

The next moment...

“Mre-reow.” Ohagi curled up between our futons.

We both fell silent, our eyes wide with surprise at Ohagi’s sudden appearance.

“Mau?”

“Yeah, you’re sleeping with us too, Ohagi,” I said with a chuckle.

“I forgot that there were three of us, not two,” Raoul said, laughing back.

Ohagi yawned loudly and immediately curled up to sleep. Raoul and I looked at each other before turning away. *That’s right—Ohagi’s here, so there’s no reason to be nervous!*

“Good night, Raoul, Ohagi.”

“Yeah, good night, Mizarie, Ohagi.”

“Mreooow.”

After that, we drifted off to sleep.

A Break at the Beach

Grilled Sazae and Clams

The day after our stay in the luxury hot spring inn, we shopped in the capital before returning to the RV. We bought things like ceramic tableware and Japanese ingredients, including seasonings and condiments. I wanted a rice plant as well, but I gave up, realizing that growing rice in our RV garden was impossible.

Even if we harvested rice in the RV, it would only be enough to fill one bowl of rice...

“Are you really satisfied?” Raoul asked as we were putting away the things we’d bought. “We came all this way for the capital, but we didn’t stay that long.”

“Well, I bought everything I wanted, so I’m fine. If anything, we left because I bought too many things. Didn’t you want to explore the capital more?” I felt bad that we had to cut our stay short because of me.

Raoul just laughed. “Ha ha, I’m fine. I even got gifts for my family... Also, staying at that inn for more than one night would be tough...”

“Yeah...”

To our surprise, that luxury hot spring inn cost a hundred thousand rooks per person per night. *We paid at checkout, but I nearly screamed, “Did we get a suite or something?!”*

Though we’d made a lot in the Spirit’s Dungeon, we would go bankrupt if we kept spending such large amounts per night.

“Well, I like camping anyways, so it’s fine. Next time, we’ll save up and become really wealthy before spending multiple nights here.”

“That sounds fun. We can spend extravagantly and enjoy ourselves.”

“Mreow!”

Laughing while we joked, we took off in the RV.

We drove along the idyllic countryside roads, heading back to Minamihama, when the dashboard chimed. It was the sound of a level-up.

“Yay, I leveled up!”

“Ooh, how did the RV improve this time?”

Perhaps it was because my level had gotten decently high, but it felt like there was more time between my level-ups. It seemed that just driving wasn’t enough, and I would have to take down monsters or travel dangerous terrain if I wanted to gain experience.

I parked the RV and went through the menu to view the details of the level-up.

<You’ve leveled up! Current Level: 19>

Level 19 Linked Monitor Installed

“A linked monitor?” I tilted my head, wondering what the monitor could be linked to.

“Maybe it would be best to just head to the living area,” Raoul suggested.

“That’s fair.”

We headed there, and it was time for our usual game of “spot the change.” I was about to start by scanning the space from left to right, but I immediately found it. It was perhaps the fastest I’d ever discovered an upgrade.

On the left side, with the front seats behind us, there was a monitor installed on the wall where the table was. It was under the circular window, and looked to be a roughly twelve-inch monitor.

The screen showed the view from the front seats, and there was a picture-in-

picture display of the dashboard screen in the bottom right corner. Using this, someone in the living area could see where we were from the driver's point of view, or what the current situation was.

"As usual, the RV is incredible."

"Yeah. I really like that you can see what's going on out front from here."

We could use the monitor to look at the map while eating at the table, so we would know immediately if a person or monster was getting close to the RV.

"It would be nice if the map was bigger, though," Raoul remarked.

"I agree. Oh, maybe it's a touch screen..." I touched the picture-in-picture map on the screen, and it switched places with the view from the front seats. The map was now the main display, while the outside view was a small picture-in-picture display in the bottom corner.

"You can switch them by touching it?! This is neat!"

"It's nice that you can make the map bigger—it makes it easier to see. Oh, you can move the map around by swiping the screen."

This map was going to be very useful. We could talk about our next destination while eating meals, and it would be easier to figure out when it would be good to take a break.

"It looks like we're close to the first settlement outside the capital. Let's find a place to spend the night, and tomorrow we can head back to Minamihama."

"Okay."

I immediately put the newly installed monitor to use and checked how far we were from Minamihama. If we headed straight for the village, we could get there today, but one of the joys of traveling was taking detours and leisurely making our way around.



The southern coast of Mizuho had beaches, and the sunlight reflected off the beautiful sand, making it sparkle. There were several piers along the coast with boats tied to them. They were probably used for fishing. There were either

settlements nearby, or people had lived near the area in the past.

Since we were here, we took the opportunity to drive to the beach in the RV, getting up close to the ocean.

I slowly stepped onto the sand with Ohagi in my arms, while Raoul took a giant step forward.

“Wow!” Raoul immediately exclaimed once his feet hit the sand, and he excitedly ran across it.

“The sand is so soft and pretty, but the sun is shining so brightly. I feel like I’m going to get a sunburn!” *I really miss sunscreen during this time of year!*

After traveling across a desert and now visiting a beach, I’d recently been concerned about all the sunlight. Raoul laughed after hearing what I’d said.

“It must be tough being a woman, having to worry about things like that.” *Men have to worry about getting burnt too, Raoul.*

“Even men have to take care of themselves, otherwise you’ll get a bunch of spots on your face!”

“What?! I wouldn’t want that!” Raoul got flustered, and this time I laughed.

“Mau, mrow!”

“Oh, you must be interested in the sand too,” I said to Ohagi. “This area is hot, though, so let’s go up to the water.” I quickly headed up to where the waves met the sand and put Ohagi down while cautioning her. “You can’t go into the water, okay?”

“Mau!”

“Good response! Good girl, Ohagi! So cute!”

I followed suit and took off my shoes, feeling the hot sand on my feet as I stepped onto the shoreline. A wave slowly crashed into the sand, then the sand below my feet pulled away. The sensation made me feel tingly. Ohagi was surprised by the whole thing, and jumped up.

“Ha ha, it’s not something you can get used to,” I remarked.

“Mreow mreooow!” Ohagi seemed a bit upset, but even that was adorable.

“Hey, no fair. I’m going into the water too!” Raoul took off his shoes and tossed them aside, joining us. The water washed over his feet, and he laughed as that tingly sensation made him shout “Whoa!” He seemed like he was having a lot of fun. “The beach is great. What happens if you go farther in?”

“The waves get stronger the farther out you go, so it’s dangerous. It’ll get deep really quickly too.”

It was currently low tide so things were fine, but swimming offshore in our clothes would be reckless.

“That makes sense,” Raoul said.

After we played at the shoreline for a while, someone called out to us.

“Hey!” It seemed like it was a resident of a nearby settlement. The stranger was a middle-aged man with a basket at his hip. He looked to be on his way home from fishing. “What are you doing here?”

“We just came to this country, so we’re traveling all around!” Raoul answered loudly.

“I see, I see,” the man said, nodding. He then made his way toward us. “So, you’re travelers. Let me treat you to a nice meal, since you came all the way here.”

“Huh?” The man waved us closer and showed us the contents of his basket. Inside were large sazae, a type of sea snail, and clams. “Wow, they look delicious!”

“You have good taste, miss. Grilling these and having them with some sake is the best. Just wait a bit; I’ll grill them up right away.”

The man immediately left the shoreline and headed to an area with foliage, then piled up some rocks. He placed a grill net on top, and before I knew it, he’d created a seaside grill.

I was surprised by how skilled he was, but that was short-lived—he immediately began grilling the clams, and my stomach growled. Both sazae and

clams tasted incredible when grilled and drizzled with a little bit of soy sauce.

“Everyone in this country is so nice,” Raoul remarked.

“Yeah, they hear we’re travelers and are immediately welcoming. I’m sure they’re curious about the outside world, but it’s not easy to be friendly like that.”

We wiped off our feet and put our shoes back on before joining the man.

“Wow, dungeons, huh? That’s a dream come true.”

We’d told the man about our adventures, and he was listening and having fun. We’d talked about the Spirit’s Dungeon, keeping quiet about the spirit while sharing stories about the monsters, what it was like, and the campsite of the groups trying to clear the dungeon.

“I tried traveling the full moon path when I was younger, but it didn’t work out.”

“Is that so...”

“It’s just a funny story now,” he said, drizzling soy sauce on the sazae and clams that were close to done. “They’ll be ready soon,” he said, looking at us.

“It smells so good... Are you sure it’s all right for us to have some?”

“I had fun listening to your stories. I have a stable life here, but it’s always the same, unchanging.” It seemed that the man really enjoyed talking to us.

He used a bamboo skewer to pry open the sazae shells. The moment the meat popped out, Raoul exclaimed, “Whoa!”

“Ha ha, is this your first time seeing sazae?” the man asked.

“I’m sorry...”

“It’s fine, some people in the settlement don’t like it either.”

Yeah, sazae are pretty grotesque in appearance. On top of that, the dark parts are bitter, so I feel like there are a lot of people who don’t like sazae grilled like this. I actually prefer it as sashimi.

“What do you want to do?” the man asked. “You want to sit this one out?”

Raoul looked at the sazae that the man held out to him and gulped. “No, I’ll take some!”

“Me too!” I chimed in.

Maybe the man went with the sazae first so the clams could be a palate cleanser, I thought while eating the sazae in one bite. The innards were bitter, but they were meaty, chewy, and delicious. I think I’ve heard before that sazae come in cream-colored and green varieties because different sexes are different colors. I think the green ones were more bitter. I glanced over at Raoul’s, and his portion was green. *Good luck, Raoul!*

“Be a man!” Raoul shouted at himself as he ate the entire thing in one bite, just like I did. He chewed thoroughly and seemed to not enjoy it for a moment, but his expression immediately changed as if to say it wasn’t as bad as he’d expected. “It was a little bitter, but that bitterness was actually a nice accent. It was good!”

“Oh, you understand its deliciousness too?”

“I do!”

Raoul didn’t enjoy wasabi, but it seemed the bitterness of sazae was no issue for him. Now that he’d enjoyed the sazae, he had his eyes on the clams next. These clams were available outside of Mizuho, so Raoul had probably eaten them before.

“I’m familiar with those ones, but I’ve never had them with soy sauce before.”

“These clams are the best with soy sauce,” the man said. He’d drizzled on just the slightest amount of soy sauce, so I was sure that it was the perfect amount to bring out the clams’ flavor.

“I’m digging in!” Raoul said while grabbing the clam with his bamboo skewer before popping it into his mouth. I followed suit.

“Mmm, that’s so good!” we both exclaimed in unison.

The clams were so hot that I had to blow out a puff of air to cool them down in my mouth, but their savory flavor had been concentrated, and I wanted to keep chewing on them. *Ah, this is insanely good...*

“These are really good too!” I exclaimed.

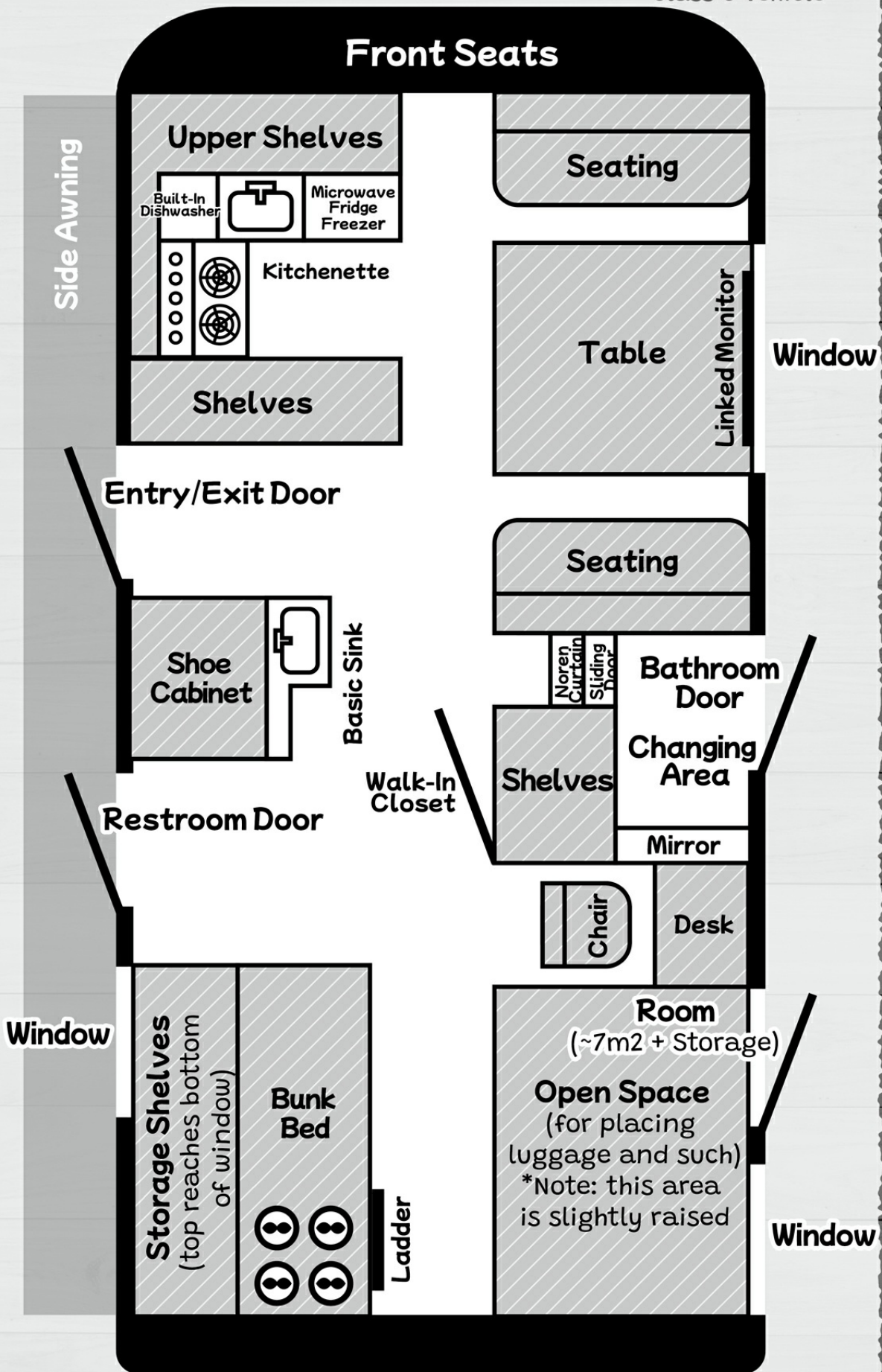
“Ha ha, I’m glad you’re enjoying them,” the man said with a laugh.

We chatted as we ate, and before we knew it, the sun was setting. The man had to return to his settlement, so he headed home. He’d offered us a place to sleep, but I wanted to enjoy the RV as well, so I politely declined.

We were going to rest for the remainder of the day and head out for Minamihama tomorrow. At this time, we couldn’t even imagine the troubles that would be waiting for us in the village of Minamihama...

RV Floor Plan

Lv19
Version:
Class C Vehicle



What Happened at Night

“Welcome back, Mizarie, Raoul. How was the capital?” Souichi welcomed us back upon our return to Minamihama Village. He had been out delivering soba, and he was carrying an okamochi with him near the village entrance.

“The capital was incredible!” I said.

“I got some gifts for my family and enjoyed myself,” Raoul responded.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Souichi said with a smile when he heard how our trip went.

“Raoul, that thing Souichi is holding is an okamochi,” I pointed out.

“What? *That’s* an okamochi? Hmm...now that I’m looking at it, it does seem similar to the one I made.”

“Would you like to take a look?” Souichi asked, noticing we were looking at his okamochi. He opened it up and showed us the inside. There was a wooden plank in the middle, creating two levels in the box. He explained that he placed the soba there to make deliveries.

“It’s a pretty simple construction, but it’s a good reference. Thank you.”

“I’m glad I could help. Do you have one yourself?”

“Mizarie likes cooking, so I made a similar box for her to put seasonings and things in. I have some experience with woodworking.” Raoul explained as we walked through the village, and Souichi nodded in response.

“I’m pretty clumsy, so I’m jealous that you can make things yourself.”

“Really? I think you’re more respectable, being able to make soba.”

Raoul was completely smitten with those noodles, so Souichi had become a person he respected since he could make his own soba.

We talked to Souichi as we walked and eventually reached Tsumugi’s home—

in other words, the village chief's home. We hadn't decided whether we would spend the night here or not; but we went there because we felt it was necessary to greet them since we'd returned. The village chief had popped out at just the right moment.

"Welcome back!" he greeted us. "You're already back from the capital?"

"Yes, we had a very good time."

"I'm glad to hear that," the village chief said with a joyful smile upon hearing that we were able to enjoy our trip. "By the way, how long are you two planning to stay here?"

"Oh...we hadn't given it much thought, but I think it would be until the next time the full moon path appears?" I responded with a question as I turned to check with Raoul. Though I'd said until the next appearance of the full moon path, that was once a month, and there were quite a few more days until the next full moon. It would be impolite to try and stay for that long.

"I think that's fine too, but there's a lot of time until then..." Raoul said.

It might be nice to just stop by every now and then to buy food, and camp nearby.

"Why don't we explore more of the island?" Raoul suggested. "I enjoyed the views while heading to the capital, but it might also be fun to travel along the coast from south to north, fishing along the way."

"That's a great idea." Not only that, but it was summer. We didn't have swimsuits, but dipping our toes in the water and playing in the ocean sounded nice.

The village chief seemed quite surprised by our conversation. "I could understand Raoul doing all of that, but you're a girl, Mizarie. There's no need to push yourself, just stay at our home. There's no need for children to hesitate on our offer."

"No, I'm not hesitating. I love adventuring, and that's how I've lived until now, as an adventurer."

"Still..." Though I'd insisted it was not an issue, I still seemed like a child to the

village chief, and he was worried. *He's so kind to be worried about an outsider like me.*

"Your thoughts are more than enough, thank you."

"I see... I'm sorry for being so pushy while knowing you're an adventurer."

"No, no! I appreciate your consideration!" I said, shaking my head.

The village chief smiled. "By the way, how were things outside the village? How was the weather in the capital?"

"Fortunately, it was sunny the entire time. It was really comfortable, which was great for us."

"I'm glad to hear that..."

We let the village chief know that we'd be taking care of our lodging from tonight onward while continuing to shop in the village.

"By the way, is Tsumugi here?" I asked. "I haven't seen her since we got back, so I wanted to say hello..." I peeked into the estate as I asked.

"She's out right now," the village chief said. "She has some business to take care of, so she won't be back for a while. And after you came all this way... I apologize."

"So that's the deal, huh...?" I murmured. "I hope we can see her before the next full moon."

The village chief wore a strained look as he shook his head. It seemed that she wasn't in the village and had ventured out somewhere. *Seems like she'll be gone for a while. I wonder if she's in the capital or a distant settlement? I could've given her a ride in the RV to thank her for everything she'd done if I knew about it,* I thought, my shoulders drooping with disappointment.

"It's unfortunate that we didn't get to see Tsumugi, but we'll be on our way now. We'll do some shopping and explore the outskirts of the village before finding somewhere to settle for the night."

"Thank you for coming all this way. Feel free to rely on us if you ever need anything."

“Thank you,” Raoul and I said in unison.

“Mau!”

We’d finished our greetings, so we left the village chief’s house.

“It’s too bad we didn’t get to see Tsumugi,” Raoul remarked.

“Yeah. I wanted to thank her for the delicious wasabi...” I’d also wanted to ask if I could buy some.

“Really...? I think I’ve had enough wasabi. A little bit is fine, but...I can’t believe you can eat that stuff, Mizarie.”

“You can’t handle wasabi, Raoul?” Souichi asked, chuckling at the upset look on Raoul’s face. “You’re like a little kid.”

“What? Actually, I feel like Mizarie’s said something similar to me before... Darn it, I guess I’ll train for it a little more...” Raoul seemed motivated to get over his dislike for the ingredient.

I don’t think he needs to like wasabi or anything. Sure, if he didn’t like all vegetables, that would be something worth fussing over, but it’s nothing that bad.

“Hey, can we take a look at the wasabi on the mountain?” Raoul asked. “Maybe seeing them growing will make them taste better to me.”

“Sure.”

Souichi led us to the spot we’d visited the other day where wasabi was grown. Water slowly trickled out of the natural spring, and the large wasabi leaves caught my eye. *Huh? It looks a little different from last time?* Something felt off, but there was nothing obviously different. Perhaps I was mistaken.

“Hm, seeing wasabi like this is fine, but it gets me in the nose once it’s grated...”

“You’ll just have to get used to it,” Souichi said.

“How did you get over your dislike for it?” I asked.

“For me, it was an ingredient I was familiar with growing up, so I slowly got

used to its spiciness. First, I would take the smallest amount and put it into dishes. Cooking it will make it sting less than eating it raw.”

“I might be able to eat it like that... I’ll try it out, thank you! Then my mind’s made up—today’s dinner will be with a tiny bit of wasabi!” Raoul was on fire, ready to train to get over wasabi and prepared to start that tonight. *Hm, in that case, maybe wasabi chazuke would be a good dish. I could buy some salmon at the shops and grill it. They also sold nori, so I could slice that up and top it to make an easy chazuke.*

“All right, I’ll do my best to help you get over your dislike of wasabi!”

“Thanks, Mizarie!”

As we got excited, Souichi looked at us enviously.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“You know how the village chief said that Tsumugi was out? I actually hadn’t heard anything about that...”

“What, really?” Tsumugi and Souichi seemed close, so it was surprising that Tsumugi would leave for an extended period of time without saying anything. “I thought you two were a couple,” I said in a joking manner. *But if she didn’t tell him about being away for a long time, then they probably aren’t.*

Souichi covered his face and let out a sound of embarrassment. “H-How did you figure out that Tsumugi and I are a couple?!” It seemed I had been correct after all.

“I mean, from the way you were acting, I guess.”

“I didn’t know that,” Raoul said. “In that case, she wouldn’t go away for a while without saying anything, would she?”

“You think so too...?” Souichi seemed troubled by the fact that she hadn’t told him anything. He still wasn’t sure why she’d left. I’d be worried too if I were in his shoes.

“Hm... He might not tell us because we’re outsiders, but the village chief might tell *you* what’s going on if you ask him, Souichi.”

“I don’t think so... He hasn’t accepted me as her partner.”

“What...?” The heavy revelation left me lost on how to respond, so I turned to Raoul, who looked just as lost as I was.

“The village chief wants Tsumugi to marry someone powerful from the capital. He doesn’t think the son of a soba maker like me deserves her.”

“What?!” Raoul and I exclaimed in unison. We were both shocked because the village chief seemed very kind, not like someone who’d say something like that.

At the same time, I couldn’t help but think about how, as a father, he would want his daughter to marry into a good family, or that as the village chief, he might have to create a relationship between the village and the capital. *It’s not easy being born into power...*

“But I’ll go ask about it, since I’m worried about Tsumugi. Sorry for venting to you two...”

“You have nothing to apologize for! Please let us know if you find out anything about Tsumugi,” I said.

“We want to see her before we leave too,” Raoul added.

“Of course.”

After cheering Souichi on, we left Minamihama Village.

I summoned the RV and set up camp in a spot roughly ten minutes by foot from Minamihama Village. It was close to the coast so we could fish easily, and we’d even gotten permission from the village chief to forage in the mountains. We had plenty of time until the next full moon, so we were planning to spend our time leisurely.



I heard the sound of something shaking and ringing, and I was slowly waking up.

“Hm...?” The faint sound was mysterious.

I stepped out of my room into the RV’s living area, and the sound grew louder. I could tell why right away: I could hear it through the speakers in the

tableside monitor.

It was the middle of the night—one could say it was the witching hour. I stared at the monitor and saw a light in the distance. The orange glow was the same as the paper lanterns I'd seen at the luxury hot spring inn.

"Lanterns at this time of night...?"

"Mreeew...?"

"Oh, sorry, Ohagi. I didn't mean to wake you."

Ohagi jumped onto my shoulder so I pet her. She rubbed her head against my cheek.

"Mizarie...? What's wrong?"

"Oh, Raoul. There's something going on outside."

"Outside...?"

When I responded in a troubled tone, Raoul instantly snapped awake from his sleepy state and came over with a serious look.

"What's going on?" he asked. Then he quieted down and listened to the sounds. "Is that...a bell?"

"It's coming from outside. Look, you can see the light of lanterns too."

"That's Minamihama, right?"

"Yeah, but we haven't heard about any banquets or festivals..." There was no reason that the village chief wouldn't have invited us if there was a banquet, and Souichi would've informed us of one too. The glow of the lanterns in the darkness was slightly unsettling, and I felt a chill even though it was summer.

"Do you think it has something to do with Tsumugi not being here...?" I asked.

"Souichi didn't know about Tsumugi's whereabouts, so it's a bit suspicious."

Raoul and I grew nervous and headed to the village on foot to check things out.

The sound of the bells grew louder as we got closer to the village, and it was

all very creepy. The unsettling atmosphere was probably because it was the only sound we could hear—there were no voices or any other noises.

“If it was a festival, it would be livelier,” I remarked.

“Yeah, this almost feels like a ritual...”

I nodded in agreement. “But a ritual for what?”

We hid behind buildings as we watched. A tough-looking man leading the way was carrying a palanquin, and he made his way toward the mountain behind the village chief’s home. The bells on the palanquin seemed to be behind the ringing, and we could hear the sound now coming from the mountain.

I’ve got nothing but bad feelings about a palanquin being carried to the mountain this late at night! I felt myself nervously sweat as I thought about what to do.

“I wonder what’s in that palanquin,” Raoul remarked. “It was big enough to fit a person...”

I fell silent. It seemed that Raoul and I were thinking the same thing.

“But, but, what are they doing, bringing someone to the mountain in the middle of the night? Are they sacrificing them to that guardian spirit in the mountain that Tsumugi was talking about...?”

“Sacrificing? No way... The villagers were all good people...”

“They were, right? There’s no way, right...? But the village chief said Tsumugi wouldn’t be back even when it was time for us to leave...” The thought that it could be Tsumugi in the palanquin entered my mind, and the same seemed to happen for Raoul. We both instantly turned pale. “What do we do if it’s Tsumugi in there?!”

“For now, all we can do is go after them!”

We made a decision in whispers and were about to leave. Just then, we heard a muffled sound. Raoul immediately stepped in front of me and protected me.

“Nnngh...!” We both braced ourselves, wondering what the sound could be. It seemed to be coming from behind a nearby residence.

“Quiet, Mizarie,” Raoul said.

“Y-Yeah...” *Though, it also sounds like it could be someone crying for help...*

Raoul and I looked at each other and nodded in agreement, deciding to check out the voice.

“Souichi?!” we both exclaimed upon peeking behind the residence. Souichi was tied up with rope, wriggling around like a caterpillar while crying for help. I quickly removed the towel placed over his mouth, and Raoul cut the rope with his sword, freeing him.

“Are you all right?” Raoul asked.

Souichi panted, catching his breath. “You saved me. Thank you both.”

“Of course, but what is happening? Everything was fine when we were in the village during the day.”

“Mreow.” Ohagi also seemed worried as she looked at Souichi.

Souichi balled his hand into a tight fist and shared with us what he knew. “After you two left, I went back to the village chief to ask where Tsumugi was, but he wouldn’t tell me... I thought about visiting every day until he told me, but then at night, when the entire village is usually asleep, the adults started moving around.”

Souichi had been surprised because nothing like that had happened before. He had been able to take notice of the strange occurrence because he hadn’t been able to sleep, too worried about Tsumugi.

“I usually sleep like a log, so my mother and father were surprised when I woke up and asked what was happening. They wouldn’t tell me what was going on, though... They said that it was an important ritual that only the adults participated in, so I was to stay home.”

Their behavior had been nothing but suspicious, and the bad feeling within me grew.

“So I sneaked a glance and saw Tsumugi in the palanquin. They said she was outside the village, but she’s here, which is strange. I could immediately tell that

the village chief lied for some bad reason. I rushed toward the palanquin right away, trying to get Tsumugi back, but... Well, you saw.”

“They got you, huh?”

“Yes...”

It seemed that Souichi was the type to act before thinking.

“So you didn’t find out what the ritual is, right?” I asked.

“But it warranted tying up Souichi, so it can’t be a good ritual,” Raoul pointed out.

Souichi and I both gasped.

“That’s right, I need to save her quickly... Who knows what will happen to Tsumugi. I’m going after her! I need to go, or else I’ll lose sight of them!”

Souichi was about to run off in a panic, so Raoul and I quickly reached out and grabbed his kimono sleeves. That made Souichi trip, but we’d stopped him from taking off half-cocked, so all was well. I took a small breath before suggesting a plan to save Tsumugi.

“We can save Tsumugi right away with my RV.”

“Huh...?”

What Lives in the Mountain

I didn't care that we were in the village. There were more important matters at hand.

"*RV Summon!*" With the sound of my voice, the RV immediately appeared beside me. After seeing that, Souichi stared in shock, his eyes round and wide.

"Huh, what is this...?"

"It's my skill. I'll add you right away, so get in, Souichi!"

As I climbed into the driver's seat, Raoul opened the door to the living area. I immediately registered Souichi, so it wouldn't take too long for him to be able to board.

I glanced at the map as I headed to the mountain behind the village chief's home.

"I know that Tsumugi was taken for a ritual, but I wonder what the ritual is..." I wondered aloud.

There were all kinds of rituals, ranging from a shrine maiden just praying to one selling their soul to the devil. That wide range of events could all be described as rituals.

"The palanquin carrying Tsumugi was brought to the mountain, right?"

I checked the mountain on the map and saw three red dots moving at an incredible speed. It was probably the two men carrying the palanquin and Tsumugi, who was inside. *Considering their speed, I wonder if they have Physical Fortification. Either way, we need to be quick, or else the ritual might start.*

I knew that any damage the RV took would be fixed when leveling up, so I drove right into the animal-made paths.

The paths traveled by animals were littered with exposed tree roots, stones,

and boulders, and there were some muddy areas as well. Not only that, but there were trees growing all around, so I had to drive between them. It was one difficulty after another. I mercilessly slammed into trees as I sped up the mountain.

“Wow, you aren’t holding back, Mizarie!” Raoul said, poking his head out from the living area.

“I don’t want us to get there too late!” I said, showing my desperation.

Souichi also poked his head out from the back. “This is an incredible skill! I didn’t think we’d be able to travel up the mountain so quickly.” He seemed to think that we would catch up right away, but reality wasn’t so simple.

“I think the people transporting Tsumugi have *Physical Fortification*, or a similar skill. They’re moving incredibly quickly.”

“Darn, they must be from the village’s defense group...” That seemed to be unexpected for Souichi, and he bit his lip.

“I’m going as fast as I can, so just pray that we get there in time... Oh, two of the red dots are turning around.”

“What?! What are the red dots?!”

“I think they’re the people who were carrying the palanquin. They probably know the details of this ritual, so let’s catch them and ask them about it.”

It looked like they were traveling a different path to return, and they were veering right as they came down the mountain. That alternate route was exactly where I was headed, so it was convenient. *But it might be hard to catch them if they’re using Physical Fortification. Maybe it would be good to come up with a plan.*

Just as that thought crossed my mind, I heard Souichi call out, “There they are!” I unconsciously tightened my grip on the steering wheel. *For now, let’s try to catch one of them.*

I waited for them to get closer before turning on my high beams, which made the men cover their eyes as they yelled, “Whoa!”

I immediately braked and Souichi jumped out of the RV, katana in hand.

“What are you planning to do to Tsumugi?!” he yelled.

“Souichi?!” the men exclaimed. They probably hadn’t thought it was possible for anyone to chase after them.

Souichi held his katana out as he got closer to them, and the men raised their hands to show they had no intentions of fighting him.

“Please stop.”

“Explain yourselves. What are you up to?” Souichi’s voice carried a tone of anger, and the two men gulped.

“No, we weren’t, um...” one man stammered.

“It was for the sake of the village!” the other responded.

“Y-Yeah! We were just doing it for the village, so you have no right to criticize us!” the first man exclaimed. “We just had a kid, so we had to do it!”

The men claimed that they were just following orders and that they hadn’t done anything wrong. But that didn’t change the fact that they were the ones who’d gotten their hands dirty, so understandably, Souichi’s anger hadn’t subsided.

Souichi took one step, then another, getting closer...

“The guardian spirit needs to eat *someone*! In that case, what’s wrong with taking Tsumugi, who volunteered herself?!”

“Eat someone...?”

“Souichi, get in!” I called out.

“Come on, we’re going!” Raoul yelled.

Once I heard the unsettling words that the guardian spirit would eat someone, my body and mouth reflexively took action. *We need to move quickly, or we won’t make it in time.* Right as I slammed down on the gas, Raoul carried Souichi and leaped into the RV. Right now, it was more important that we save Tsumugi, not get an explanation from these men.

“The guardian spirit will eat someone?! What was he talking about?!” I could hear Souichi’s defeated response to the news.

The red dot showing where Tsumugi was appeared near the peak of the mountain. I spared no thought for my passengers and raced up the mountain at full speed. I needed to get to Tsumugi as soon as possible, or else something terrible would happen.

It was difficult to drive while checking the map, so Raoul was giving directions.

“Hey, Mizarie...”

“Hm?”

“Blue dots on the map are monsters, right?” Raoul asked.

I wondered why he was asking that, but I nodded and responded, “That’s right! But it’s possible that it’s something other than a monster, so I can’t say it’s a monster for sure. It might be a rabid animal. If it’s a blue dot, there’s probably no issue with running it over with the RV...”

“Then this is bad! A blue dot is getting close to the red dot we think is Tsumugi!”

“What?!” I slammed down on the gas in a panic, and the RV made a sound as a patch of mud caught a tire. *Ugh, darn you, natural spring water!* All the patches of mud were probably a result of the fresh water.

This was no time to be complaining, though, so I drove at full speed. Perhaps because I had thrown caution to the wind as I drove, I ended up driving onto a giant boulder, which sent the RV flying.

“Huh? What? Huh? What? Huh?!”

The unbelievable turn of events instantly made my entire body damp with sweat. First came the indescribable sensation of floating, which was immediately followed by the impact of falling. I couldn’t help but let out a pitiful “Agh!” I’d had my foot on the gas nonstop, so the RV continued moving forward.

I flew through the sky in the RV...!

It was now revealed that driving over a boulder at high speed could make us fly, but it was bad for my heart so I never wanted to do it again. *Well, we*

weren't actually flying, technically speaking.

"Are you all right, Mizarie?!"

"Are *you* guys okay?" I asked back.

"Maaau!"

More than Raoul or me, who'd had seat belts on, I was worried about Souichi, who was probably in a hundred times more danger than us.

"It was just a small sway back here."

"What?!"

To my disbelief, the impact of my driving had been softened in the living area. That was probably because this RV was created by my skill. For now, I let out a sigh of relief, glad that no one was hurt and my tableware and other small items were fine.

"All right, the mark is right in front of us!" Raoul called out.

"Tsumugi! Oh no!"

The moment I heard Raoul's and Souichi's voices, Tsumugi came into view. There was a cave with a large entrance, and an empty palanquin in front of it. One step inside the cave was Tsumugi, staring at us on her knees, her eyes wide with surprise.

But behind her was a giant serpent, its large mouth wide open. Its wicked-looking red tongue stuck out, and it seemed as if it were going to eat Tsumugi at any moment.

"I won't let you!" I exclaimed. Without thinking, I drove onto a boulder in front of the cave and forgot all about how I'd thought I would never do this again, sending the RV flying once more. I would land, of course, on the giant serpent monster.

"Crouch down, Tsumugi!" I yelled, sticking my head out of the window.

"Huh? Oh!" Tsumugi heard me, and then protected her head as she crouched down on the spot.

The RV leaped over Tsumugi and landed on the giant serpent's head. Though I

hadn't calculated landing in such a perfect spot, I was still going to take credit for it—that went exactly as I'd "planned"!

The RV had landed on the giant serpent's head, and the tires screeched as they left marks on its face.

The giant serpent that had tried to eat Tsumugi was gray. It had sharp red eyes and was probably two meters wide. Since it was peeking out of the cave, I couldn't tell how long the entire thing was, but it was probably easily over ten meters in length, considering how wide it was.

The RV finally landed on the ground, and Souichi rushed over to Tsumugi's side.

"Are you okay, Tsumugi?! It's dangerous here; let's go home right awa—"

"No!"

"Tsumugi?"

Souichi tried to grab Tsumugi's arm and lead her home, but Tsumugi herself rejected him.

"B-But you'll get eaten by the serpent!"

"It's not a serpent. It's the guardian spirit of the mountain. I'm sorry for sacrificing myself without saying anything, Souichi, but I had no other choice."

It seemed that Tsumugi's mind was made up—she wanted to be eaten by the giant serpent. *So I guess those men were telling the truth...?*

Along with Raoul and Ohagi, I exited the RV and headed over to Tsumugi. The giant serpent that Tsumugi had referred to as the guardian spirit had been knocked unconscious after being run over by the RV.

"Tsumugi, could you tell us a bit more?" I asked.

"Mizarie, Raoul!" Tsumugi gasped, her eyes wide with surprise. She then began to explain, the words slowly spilling out. "I'm sure Souichi has noticed already, but it hasn't rained in over a month..."

"Now that you mention it, it hasn't," Souichi remarked. "Not even during the rainy season..."

Upon hearing Tsumugi's words, I thought back to how the village had seemed. *Oh, I see. The natural spring in the mountain seemed different because there was less water. It was so clear, like there was no cloudiness from rainwater being mixed in. Does that mean she's sacrificing herself so it'll rain...?*

Whether it would rain had to do with the laws of nature, and I couldn't imagine some snake controlling the weather.

"In exchange for making it rain, I was going to give myself to the guardian spirit... That was the sacrifice I was making. I heard that the same thing was done several decades ago."

"Still—you don't have to sacrifice yourself?!" I exclaimed.

Tsumugi limply shook her head. "This is something only a handful of adults in the village know. Long ago, when the same thing happened, the village was firmly against sacrificing anyone. After that, the guardian spirit snatched one of the young children in the village..."

We all gasped, and I placed my hand over my mouth. Kidnapping a child from the village because they didn't offer a sacrifice was horrible. With her kindness, there was no way Tsumugi could let that happen.

Though we hadn't defeated the serpent, I tightened my hand into a fist, feeling grim. What was the best thing to do here?

Souichi immediately provided an answer.

"Even so, it doesn't mean that you have to become the sacrifice!" he shouted.

"I can't let a dear villager be sacrificed instead!" Tsumugi shouted back.

It seemed that neither Souichi nor Tsumugi was going to budge. Souichi wanted to prioritize Tsumugi over the village, while Tsumugi cared more for the village than herself.

It's not like anyone's at fault, so it's a difficult situation. As I was an outsider, it didn't seem like I should butt in. I watched the two of them go back and forth on whether Tsumugi should leave, then I turned to search for Raoul. He was staring at the unconscious giant serpent, his hand still over the sword on his hip.

“Raoul, that’s dangerous. We don’t know when it might wake up.” If he stood too close, the giant serpent might attack in the blink of an eye upon waking up. *Well, if it’s a kind guardian spirit, then maybe it won’t, but that thing facing Tsumugi...it was definitely a villain, right?*

It felt like what we’d seen earlier was enough evidence to take down the giant serpent, but Tsumugi probably wouldn’t be okay with that since she believed it to be the guardian spirit.

As such thoughts crossed my mind, Raoul clapped his hands together as if he’d realized something.

“I knew it. I thought I’d seen this giant serpent somewhere before. It’s a gray boulder snake. It’s a rare snake, and I’ve heard that it releases a pheromone-like substance that other monsters don’t like.”

“What?!”

Raoul knows what the giant serpent is?! That means it’s definitely a monster. This is no guardian spirit of the mountain, and it probably can’t make it rain.

Once Tsumugi and Souichi heard us, they glanced over with looks of shock.

“All right, let’s finish it off while we can!” I suggested. Suddenly, I heard a creaking sound. I turned to see that the giant serpent—the gray boulder snake—was squeezing the RV with its body.

“Aaah! My RV!” I panicked at the unexpected attack from the gray boulder snake. I usually drove the RV and used it to ram into monsters, so I hadn’t anticipated such an attack.

I’d heard that snakes were incredibly strong, but on top of that, the gray boulder snake was a monster. *My RV’s going to be crushed at this rate!*

“Weeeh, what do I do, Raoul?!” I cried.

“Put away the RV for now, Mizarie!”

“Oh, right!” I used my skill to make the RV disappear, then resummoned it beside me. The body of the vehicle was a bit bent up, but it was safe. Since the object it had been squeezing had suddenly disappeared, the gray boulder snake wobbled.

“I’m so glad...! Everyone, get in, quickly!” But before I could climb into the driver’s seat, the gray boulder snake attacked! Raoul stopped the attack with his sword.

“I’ll buy us time, so get in!” Raoul exclaimed.

“O-Okay! Hurry, Souichi, Tsumugi!”

I climbed into the driver’s seat while Ohagi, Souichi, and Tsumugi got into the living area. As we boarded the RV, Raoul was desperately blocking the gray boulder snake’s attacks, but because of its size, he was having a hard time. *The snake won’t let up, and Raoul can’t get into the RV...*

I thought about what was the best thing to do, and the possibly brilliant idea of just defeating the gray boulder snake popped into my mind. “I’ll run over the gray boulder snake without hitting Raoul...!”

I took a deep breath to calm myself down and looked straight ahead. Whenever I used the RV to take down monsters, Raoul was always by my side, which was why I was able to calmly take them down. *I didn’t think I would be this nervous without Raoul next to me.*

“Phew, it’s okay, I can do this. I’ve defeated a bunch of monsters with Raoul until now.” I steeled myself and pressed down on the gas, slowly accelerating, heading straight for the gray boulder snake to ram it!

“Dodge, Raoul!”

“Huh?!” The unexpected order from me made Raoul panic, but he knew all about me using the RV to ram into monsters. He immediately leaped to the side and cleared the area in front of the gray boulder snake.

“I can do this!” I exclaimed, pressing the gas harder as I drove straight into the gray boulder snake! I heard a scream, but I didn’t know whose voice it was—it was probably everyone.



The RV successfully rammed into the gray boulder snake's head, landing its second attack on the serpent.

"All right!" My mission of ramming into only the gray boulder snake without running Raoul over had been a success.

I quickly turned the steering wheel and made a U-turn. The gray boulder snake turned into particles of light and disappeared. *I knew it. It wasn't a guardian spirit, but a monster...*

Just as I let out a sigh of relief, I heard a chime from the dashboard, signaling a level-up. But this was no time to be checking the level-up.

I quickly got out of the RV and ran over to Raoul. "Are you okay?!"

"Mizarie! I don't have a single scratch on me; I'm fine. How about you? You rammed into the gray boulder snake on your own! I'm so impressed!"

"I wasn't thinking at all..." If I was completely honest, I was so exhausted that I wanted to just collapse on the spot.

"Oh, there's a dusty pink scale; it dropped where the gray boulder snake was. We can use this for equipment, so we should talk to a blacksmith about it."

"I see. And it's a pretty scale too."

The grayish pink scale was so beautiful it didn't seem to fit the gray boulder snake. As I stood there staring at the scale, Souichi, Tsumugi, and Ohagi exited the RV. Ohagi jumped up to my shoulder and rubbed her head against my cheek, as if to thank me for my hard work.

"I didn't think you could take down the giant serpent. That was incredible, Mizarie. You've saved Tsumugi too! Thank you so much!" Souichi exclaimed.

"Souichi! But now the rain..."

Souichi was beaming, but Tsumugi's expression was cloudy and gloomy. I didn't like that we couldn't be happy that everything was settled after taking down a monster. I thought about what could be done, then heard a young voice coming from the cave.

"Are you the ones who saved me?" the voice asked.

“What?” all of us exclaimed in shock at the unexpected voice of another party, who was a child. *Could there have been another sacrifice that was brought here before Tsumugi?* I thought as I looked at Tsumugi and the others, but they all shook their heads, unfamiliar with the voice.

It isn't a child from the village...?

Not understanding what was happening, I felt my guard drop. Raoul then figured out where the voice had come from and yelled, “Over there!” I turned and saw a small strange-looking child.

There was a boy with yellow-green eyes holding a large leaf. He was about a meter tall, and shaped like a person. I described it as such because he was floating in the air. It was obvious that he wasn't human.

His clothes were a mixture of Japanese elements and fantasy-like styles, similar to a creature like a tengu. He had two large pom-poms fixed to the front of his top, which was adorable; and he was wearing tall geta sandals.

“Phew... Thank you for getting rid of that snake. There was a disgusting smell, and I couldn't come out.” That smell was probably the pheromone that Raoul had mentioned, which kept other monsters away. “Now I can finally watch over the village and mountain like I used to!” The boy then waved the leaf in the air, and a black fog rolled in—rain clouds.

“This mountain is about to dry out. It would be a waste because of its beautiful water source...” As the boy spoke with a sad tone, rain began pouring.

It was rain that was needed, but I didn't think it would rain just with a wave of the boy's leaf. *Who is he?*

Tsumugi stepped forward, knelt, and then asked her own question as if she'd known the one on my mind. “I am Tsumugi, from Minamihama Village. If I may ask, are you the mountain's guardian spirit?”

“Yes, 'tis I!”

Raoul, Souichi, and I all gasped. Unlike the “spirit” from earlier, considering that he'd made it rain and had a mysterious aura to him, he was probably the

real guardian spirit. *Actually, it feels like there's something in the air—like the power coming off of the boy, the mountain guardian.*

“I’ve been protecting this mountain for a long time, but that snake started living here one day. It was so smelly that I couldn’t deal with it, so I was having trouble. Thank you for defeating it; you did well!”

The smell of the gray boulder snake’s pheromones was too much for even the guardian spirit. *I can’t believe it made a spirit stay away. How frightening.*

“Well then, the mountain should return to normal in a few days. Farewell, humans!”

With that, wind enveloped the guardian spirit, and he disappeared. I blinked my eyes at the sudden disappearance, wondering if everything that happened had been real. Though the question was on my mind, the continuing rain was proof that it was all real.

“Um... Since things with the spirit are resolved, should we go back to the village?” I asked.

Tsumugi and Souichi both stood there silently.

Yeah, I get it. Tsumugi might have volunteered, but she might not want to return to a village that would sacrifice one of their own. Even if she returned, things would probably be awkward with the villagers.

“We took down the gray boulder snake, but the real guardian spirit is back, so I think there are no problems there. It’s even raining now.” I thought things would be fine, but Raoul had a difficult look on his face.

“In that case, wouldn’t the villagers think that Tsumugi was eaten?”

“Oh, right...” *Maybe that isn’t so bad, but still, what do we do?*

Souichi then looked at Tsumugi, determination in his eyes. “I still have a lot to learn, and I’m not that strong. But I know you better than anyone, and I’m the person who wants to protect you the most. I can’t make an irresponsible promise, like promising to make you happy, but I’m the happiest when I’m with you, so... Let’s leave the village together! Will you marry me?”

“Souichi...” Tsumugi’s eyes welled up with tears. She was trying to find the words, wanting to respond right away because she was so happy, but she was at a loss. That was probably because she was so moved. As if to respond in a different way, she ran toward him, stumbling, and hugged Souichi.

“Tsumugi!” he exclaimed.

“Souichi!” she called back.

They both hugged each other tightly, and at that moment, rain stopped in the area just around those two.

“Huh...?” they both reacted. It was so sudden that they looked up in confusion. There was a hole in the rain cloud right above them, with the morning sun shining through.

“Looks like the guardian spirit of the mountain is congratulating them,” I remarked.

“Yeah. I’m sure the two of them will be fine,” Raoul said.

“Mau!”



To Our Next Destination!

Hearty Onigiri and Tofu Miso Soup

Tsumugi made much nicer-looking onigiri, Japanese rice balls, than I did. Not only did she add a lot of filling to each one, but after wrapping them with a large nori sheet, she would add a little bit of the filling on top so it was clear what filling that particular onigiri had, which was just genius.

As for fillings, we had pickled plums, kombu, ikura, and grilled salmon. They all looked delicious, and I wanted to try every type. I had Tsumugi line up the onigiri on the serving plate I'd bought in Rockforress. The beautiful plate made the food seem even more delicious.

We were currently in the northern mountains of Mizuho. Our group included Raoul, Ohagi, Tsumugi, Souichi, and me. After Souichi's successful proposal, we hadn't returned to Minamihama Village. Not only was it uncomfortable to return, but Souichi had furiously exclaimed, "I can't forgive a village that would so easily sacrifice Tsumugi!"

Tsumugi had managed to calm him down somehow, but things were still difficult. Souichi was generally mild-mannered, but he had a low tolerance for things that terribly affected Tsumugi. But Tsumugi still worried for the village, so she'd secretly sent out a letter to inform them that the serpent was gone.

And that was why we were secretly living here until the next full moon path appeared. We'd all gotten a lot closer and familiar with each other, no longer concerned with formalities when conversing.

"I've prepared the pickles," Raoul said.

"I've also got the miso soup ready," Souichi said.

The two brought out the dishes they'd prepped in the RV and placed them on

the table. We'd bought the pickles from someone in a settlement, and the miso soup was something I'd made ahead of time with tofu and wakame.

"The onigiri will be ready soon," Tsumugi said.

"It looks really good! I hope you're excited," I said proudly.

"I'm starving," Raoul said as he sat down.

Though it was only for a limited time, we were traveling with more companions now, so taking care of chores had gotten a lot easier. And while our living space had gotten a bit cramped compared to before, it was more than enough for the four of us and Ohagi to comfortably live in.

"Let's dig in!" we all cheered.

"Mau!"

I first grabbed the ikura—salmon roe—and onigiri. Tsumugi had cured the ikura in soy sauce, so it was perfectly seasoned. I hadn't seen ikura in this world until now, so it was probably a cultural food in Mizuho.

I stuffed my face, and I felt the bursting sensation of each fish egg as my mouth was filled with its rich flavor. "It's so good!" Raoul yelled after inhaling a grilled salmon onigiri. "I could eat hundreds of these!"

"I'm glad you like it," Tsumugi said with a smile.

"She's *my* wife!" Souichi needlessly exclaimed without missing a beat.

"Don't worry, I know!" Raoul insisted. "Man, this tofu is so good too. I want to eat this miso soup every day," he added, praising the soup I'd made.

"Oh my!" Tsumugi gasped, blushing. Souichi, who was sitting beside her, started grinning at Raoul.

"Hm? What is it?" Raoul seemed confused.

"Asking someone to make you miso soup every day is a common way to propose to someone in this country."

"What?!"

Oh right, that was a thing back in Japan. There was no way that Raoul would have known that, but for some reason his ears had turned bright red.

“We don’t have miso soup where I come from!” he insisted. His words were unconvincing, and I found myself blushing too.



It was once again a full moon. We were in the RV, on standby near the torii gate where the full moon path would appear. The sea would part soon.

Raoul and I were sitting up front, sneaking glances back at the living area as we whispered to each other.

“Is it really all right to take Tsumugi and Souichi with us without stopping by the village?”

“I know they tried to sacrifice her, but Tsumugi volunteered, and I’m sure the villagers were desperate...”

The two of us agonized over what to do. It was easy to take Tsumugi and Souichi with us, but it would be difficult for them to return to Mizuho on their own. It was only easy to travel because of my RV.

Maybe it would be good to check on the village after a few months have passed and they’ve had some time to think...or would that be too much?

As such thoughts swam through my mind, I saw a shadow of someone, cast by the light of the full moon.

“Oh, it’s the village chief!” I exclaimed without thinking upon realizing it was someone I knew.

“What?!” Tsumugi exclaimed, surprised.

“What do you want to do?” I asked her.

Tsumugi popped in up front, a confused look on her face. Raoul let her take the passenger seat and moved back into the living area. The village chief seemed to notice that Tsumugi was up front. He was too far away to see clearly, but it seemed like he was tearing up.

“I volunteered myself as a sacrifice, because I wanted to protect the village.”

“I know.”

“My father didn’t object.”

“He probably had to make a decision as the chief of the village.”

“Yes, but...I know I volunteered, but there might have been a part of me who wanted my father to stop me. It’s selfish, I know.”

“Tsumugi...” I hugged her. “That’s not true. It’s really hard to have to consider an entire village. And it’s not something that one could easily make a decision about. If I were in your shoes, I would’ve run away. I wouldn’t want to sacrifice myself like that.” Tsumugi had a lot of courage for trying to handle such a crisis. “It’s really hard to make a decision when you love your family, but you’re also responsible for an entire village. Both are really important.”

“Yes, they are...” Large teardrops poured down Tsumugi’s face, and at the same time, the sea parted and the full moon path appeared. There was still time for Tsumugi to return to the village. The guardian spirit had also returned, so the village chief might accept her marriage to Souichi. “Let’s go, Mizarie.”

“What?” I responded, dumbstruck. “Wait, hold on, the chief came to get you.” *Isn’t this supposed to be where they come to an understanding and return home?*

“No, I still have a lot of growing to do, so I’m going to leave the village for a bit. I’m sure the villagers are also unsure of how to deal with me after they agreed to sacrifice me. I’d like to rethink things once I’ve grown a bit more.”

“I see. If that’s your decision, I’ll follow it.”

As someone who’d cut ties with my own family, I probably couldn’t convince her otherwise.

Still in the passenger seat, Tsumugi bowed to the village chief. The chief bowed back. It was like she was saying, “I’m off,” and he was saying, “See you.”

“Let’s head out, then,” I said, and we quietly took off.

After speeding down the full moon path, we’d returned to Sautha. I hadn’t had to drive through the night this time, so I’d gotten some sleep on the way. That was because when I leveled up after taking down the gray boulder snake,

the RV had gained the ability to self-drive! However, I couldn't use the self-driving feature just anywhere—it had to be somewhere I'd driven before, so it had limited use.

Still, it was incredibly valuable on the full moon path, where I would've had to drive all night. I could use the self-driving mode on any future visits to Mizuho as well, so we were guaranteed smooth travels.

“Are you sure you're fine in Sautha? We can take you to a bigger town if you want.”

“It's fine. If someone from the village visits, we'll be able to ask them about how things are going there.” It seemed that she wasn't ready to return yet, but she hoped someone would visit so she could ask about the village, and also have them let the village know how she was doing.

“You might have to wait a long time for that to happen, though. Want me to go visit during the next full moon?”

“No, part of this is a punishment for our naivete. We were fools for believing a monster was the guardian spirit. We can't just be forgiven that easily, or take shortcuts. Your kindness is more than enough.” Tsumugi smiled, her resolve strong.

“Okay,” I said, nodding. That was all I could say back.

Tsumugi seemed slightly down, and Souichi gently embraced her shoulder as he looked at us.

“Thank you so much, Mizarie, Raoul. You two saved us, and Ohagi's cuteness helped Tsumugi take her mind off things after we left the village. We'll start a soba shop or something, and the two of us will settle down.”

“I see, that sounds nice. Your soba's good, so I think it's a great idea.” Raoul promised Souichi that he'd visit again to eat his soba. I enjoyed Souichi's soba as well, so him opening a soba shop was great news. I would of course come to eat at his restaurant, but I also hoped he'd sell me some.

“All right then, we have our next destination to get to, so we'll be heading out.”

“Of course, thank you very much,” Tsumugi said.

I wanted to stay here until the two of them had gotten settled, but Tsumugi had said, “Don’t baby us!” *Well, they have each other, so maybe they’ll be fine.*

“Thank you too, Ohagi. I had fun playing with you,” Tsumugi added.

“Mreow.” Ohagi pressed her nose against Tsumugi’s. It was a cat’s way of greeting someone.

“Until we meet again!” I called out.

“We’ll definitely come to eat your soba, so good luck!” Raoul said.

“Mau!”

“Thank you! Let’s meet again, Mizarie, Raoul!” Tsumugi said.

“Now that we’re family, I’ll do my very best to protect Tsumugi!” Souichi promised. “You two be careful on the road, okay?”

As the sun began to rise in Sautha, we parted ways and headed for our next destination: Raoul’s homeland. I wasn’t sure if it was the goodbyes or the sunrise, but I felt my eyes get teary.

Raoul's Homeland

We drove from Sautha to the western region of the Kingdom of Seawell. This was where Raoul was from.

"Man, it's been so long. I'm nervous," Raoul said with a groan.

"You're just going home, though."

"Mreow?"

I looked at the map and saw that we were close to Raoul's home, the village of Leafalak.

"We'll be there soon," I pointed out.

"I know, I know, but...!"

It was funny to see Raoul groaning, and I couldn't help but giggle. "Come on, let's get out of the RV and walk the rest of the way. There are all those gifts you got for everyone in the capital of Mizuho, right?"

"Right..." Raoul nodded as if he'd made a momentous decision.

Leafalak was an idyllic village that you could say was overabundant with nature. There were walls surrounding the village for protection, which were covered in vines and looked straight out of a fairy tale.

There were several houses made of wood, and flower beds in the village decorated with adorable flowers. It was far from a city, but it seemed like a place where you could live a calm, full life.

Raoul had been agonizing about returning, but it was a very nice village. Once we got close to the entrance, a young man nearby yelled out, "Raoul?!" He seemed to be a member of the village's defense forces.

"You could've let us know that you were coming home! Mom and everyone else have been so worried! All you do is write us once a year."

“Oh, yeah, sorry...” Raoul was overwhelmed by the talkative young man. *Is he a member of Raoul’s family?*

I was taking in the unfamiliar sight, wondering if this was what a homecoming was like, and the young man’s eyes met mine.

“I can’t believe you’re finally visiting home just to announce your marriage!”

I gasped and blinked at the unexpected statement.

“You’re wrong!” Raoul immediately denied, his face red.

“Come on,” the man teased him, which didn’t happen often.

“Right, I haven’t introduced you yet. This is my second oldest brother.”

“I’m Mizarie, and this is Ohagi. Raoul and I are in a party together as adventurers.”

“Mreow.”

“Oh, so you’re an adventurer friend. I’m Raoul’s older brother, Rael.” We shook each other’s hands, then Rael said, “Let’s go home, then.” He walked off.

I think Raoul’s family is going to be intense...!

“Oh my gosh, are you Raoul’s girlfriend?!” several women screamed.

“No, I’m just an adventurer. We’re in a party together.”

The moment we arrived at Raoul’s family home, I was surrounded by women. Raoul’s family consisted of his father and mother, his eldest sister, his second eldest sister, his eldest brother, his second brother, his third eldest sister, and Raoul—a total of eight people. His family was very lively, and I could tell that they doted on him.

“You’re causing her trouble!” Raoul scolded.

“But I can’t help it, I’m curious!” one sister insisted.

“Why did you decide to form a party with Raoul?” another asked.

“I know how he might seem, but my little brother is surprisingly capable!” the third said.

“Are you two going to stay here and live in the village?” his mother asked.

Raoul sighed at the women’s merciless barrage of questions. It seemed that he couldn’t keep up.

I chuckled and began to explain what had brought us here. “Raoul said he wasn’t getting in touch with his family that often, so I thought it would be good for him to show his face. I hadn’t been in this area before either, so it would be nice if we could explore...”

“I see. We’ve been worried, so I’m glad you brought him here. Thank you, Mizarie,” his mother said.

“No need to thank me...”

It seemed that Raoul’s mother was especially worried, and she was extremely grateful. *But it is a little embarrassing to be called his girlfriend! Raoul and I aren’t like that yet...*

“Ugh, guys, please!” Raoul shouted. “Don’t cause too much trouble for Mizarie! Here, I have something for you.”

“A gift?!” everyone exclaimed at once as Raoul brought out the gifts he’d bought.

Just as we’d expected, the items from Mizuho were rare, and they all happily raved about their gifts, which put a content smile on Raoul’s face.

I made my way to his side and whispered, “I’m glad they liked the gifts.”

“Yeah, thanks to you, Mizarie.”

“I didn’t do anything.” Everyone was happy because Raoul had done his best picking out their gifts.

“Is there nothing for us?!” Raoul’s brothers said, walking up to him. Their eyes were glimmering with anticipation. They seemed like they genuinely wanted gifts from the big city as well.

“I got presents for you too. This is some alcohol; it’s called Mizuho sake. I don’t know if you’ll like it, but...”

“Ooh, we’re having a party tonight!”

“Let’s have a feast tonight, mom!”

“Sure, sure.”

It was just past noon, but it seemed that a party was on everyone’s minds. Things had instantly become busy with trips to go buy some snacks to go with the drinks and preparing food. Raoul seemed exasperated with everyone.

“Good grief,” he mumbled to himself, but he seemed a little happy too.

“Hey, Mizarie. It’s not like I can relax here, so want to go on a walk or something?” Raoul asked.

“Sure! I want to see the village you grew up in.”

“It’s nothing special,” he said with a wry chuckle, ready to guide me around. I smiled and followed after him.

At the very back of the village was a large tree, where a handmade swing was hanging off a thick branch. It looked like an area where children played.

“I didn’t know this swing was still here,” Raoul said.

“Has it been here for a long time?”

“Yeah. My dad made it for us when I was little.”

“Right, you said your dad’s a carpenter.”

Raoul grabbed the rope of the swing, and Ohagi jumped onto the seat. She seemed to be curious about the swaying object.

“Whoa, good job, Ohagi.”

“Mau!”

Raoul gently pushed the swing with his hands, and Ohagi let out a surprised meow but seemed to be having fun.

“Speaking of your dad, he wasn’t there,” I remarked.

“He’s probably out working,” Raoul said. “I think he’ll be home before dinner, but— Wait, dad?!”

Raoul was looking behind me, shocked, so I turned around and saw a

muscular man standing there. His orangish hair was the same color as Raoul's.

"You're finally back, Raoul."

"Yeah..."

After that short exchange, the two men fell silent. *It doesn't seem like they're emotional since it's been a while...* I realized that I was starting to nervously sweat. I thought it wasn't good to let the silence continue, so I faced Raoul's father.

"It's nice to meet you! I'm Mizarie. I'm an adventurer in a party with Raoul."

"You're not his wife?"

"I-I'm not his wife." *Does everyone in his family want me to be married to him that badly?!* I couldn't help but blush.

All three of us had now fallen silent. The first to break the second silence was Raoul's father.

"Your mom was really worried about you, but from the looks of it, you must be planning to leave the village again."

"Yeah. I just stopped by to show my face. Not to toot my own horn, but I've gotten stronger. Also, I now have the goal of traveling all over the world." When Raoul spoke of the future, his eyes were full of hope, sparkling. I was happy that my goal of wanting to explore the world had become Raoul's goal as well.

Raoul's father looked a bit surprised to hear what he'd said. "I thought you were a spoiled child, but it seems you've grown."

"It's already been four years since I left. A lot has happened." Raoul explained how he'd been bad at taking down monsters in the beginning, but he'd registered with the adventurer's guild and worked his way up, starting with hunting jobs that targeted weaker monsters. "Now I can protect the family from a monster attack. I've gotten strong enough," he said, balling his hand into a fist.

So Raoul became an adventurer because he wanted the strength to protect his family from monsters.

"There's no point in being that strong if you aren't here," his father said.

“W-Well...” Raoul couldn’t respond to the fair point his father had made.

Even if he’s strong enough, he wouldn’t be able to help during an attack if he’s not by his family’s side. I couldn’t help but chuckle nervously at the contradiction. Still, I thought it was good that he had a reason aside from protecting his family to continue adventuring.

As Raoul continued to struggle to find his words, his father laughed.

“I understand. Your mother was attacked by a monster once before, but there are rarely monsters near the village. Even if you aren’t here, as the head of the household, it’s my job to protect the family.” Raoul’s father then walked up to Raoul and patted his head. “Also...” His father turned to look at me and smiled.

“Hm?”

“No, it’s nothing. It’s fine if you head out to adventure again, but you two should show your faces every once in a while. Everyone will be happy to see you.”

“Mau.”

“What? Sure, you can come too. We’ll have some milk prepared for you.”

“Mrow!”

It seemed that he’d welcomed Ohagi as well, and I felt myself smile.

Raoul’s father had been on a break, so he’d returned to work. Since we were having a party tonight, he would be coming home early. I was sitting on the swing with Ohagi on my lap as I looked up at Raoul.

“Your father respects you. He seems like a good dad.”

“Yeah... Also, I’m so sorry, Mizarie.”

“Sorry?” I tilted my head, confused by the sudden apology. I couldn’t think of any reason he would have to apologize to me.

“Even my father was calling you my wife... As you can tell, this is the countryside, so people immediately jump to marriage and stuff,” Raoul said, scratching his head. “Ugh...”

“Oh, I see...” Once I thought about it, I could see why his family had misunderstood. Their son, who was of age, had come home after years away with a woman. *Maybe it was reckless of me to tag along.*

“No worries. I’m also sorry for just tagging along without thinking. I’m causing you trouble.”

“That’s not true,” Raoul immediately said, objecting to my slightly self-deprecating statement.

“Raoul...”

“Um, well, the party will be soon, so let’s look around the village a little more and head back. Come on.”

“Okay...”

Raoul held out his hand, so I took it and got up from the swing. Ohagi skillfully climbed up my shoulder and onto my head.

“While we’re here, want to visit the only item shop in the village? They sell seasonings and stuff too, so they might have something you’re interested in.”

“S-Sure.” I was fine when I’d taken his hand, but I’d missed the right moment to let go, so I began walking while still holding his hand. *I think Raoul is just holding mine back unconsciously and hasn’t realized that we’re still holding hands.*

I fell silent. My heart was racing, but I couldn’t help but think this sort of thing was nice.

There was no way for me to know that by the next day, it would spread to the entire village that we were walking around holding hands.

Afterword

Hello. I'm Puni. Thank you for picking up the third volume of *RVing My Way into Exile with My Beloved Cat: This Villainess Is Trippin'*.

This volume was once again filled with food, and I dreamed about taking a vacation to a hot spring and got hungry as I wrote it, LOL. Now that I think about it, I haven't been to a hot spring in a long time... I'd like to visit one in the winter, once things have settled down.

This volume featured a great adventure in the country of Mizuho, which was the homeland of an adventurer they met in the second volume. There were all sorts of ingredients that stimulated Mizarie's desires.

Though it's nice to have camp meals that are easy to put together, it's also fun to have more complex dishes. I'm jealous of Raoul, since he gets to eat Mizarie's cooking.

Also, the romantic side of Mizarie and Raoul's relationship was progressed a bit (only just a little bit, though). I realized how close they were getting while writing the side story, and I enjoyed writing it. Maybe it won't be that long until they become an item...?! (Is that true...?!) To Canarinu, the illustrator of this book, the two of them looked very cute-slash-handsome in their kimono, and the moment I saw the illustration, I let out a strange sound, LOL. The food also looked incredibly delicious, and I'm starving. Thank you for the lovely illustrations!

To KONNO Takashi, who was in charge of illustrating the map, I personally love the atmosphere of the moon path heading for Mizuho. The oasis in the middle of the desert and the other small drawings like the foods of Mizuho were also adorable. Thank you so much!

To Abe-san and Fujiwara-san—who were in charge of this project—as usual, you helped me so much with this volume as well! Thank you so much!

Finally, to everyone who was involved with the creation of this volume, and to

all the readers, I thank you. I hope you were able to enjoy this book.









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RVing My Way into Exile with My Beloved Cat: This Villainess Is Trippin'
Volume 3

by Punichan

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