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Supana Onikage

Illustrator: Youta

*Lazy
Dungeon
Master*

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"THERE ARE
REASONS
FOR THIS!
GOOD
REASONS!"

Apprentice Witch
NERUNEH

"S-SIR WATARU?!
WHAT HAS GOTTEN
INTO YOU?!"

"I'M NOT MAD
OR ANYTHING,
OKAY?"

Hero of Debt
WATARU

The Princess's Body Double (?)
EMMYMEPHY



"AWWW, GEEZ.
I WOULD'VE DONE
THIS NO PROB
IF HE JUST ASKED,
NO NEED
FOR ALL THIS
GETTING ME
DRUNK
BUSINESS."

HER FIRST TIME AS
A DAKIMAKURA?!

Big Eater
ICHIKA



"KNOW THE
WRATH OF A
GODDESS!"

(Wannabe) Goddess of the Pond

DINNE

"I'VE GOT A
GOOD IDEA."

Dungeon Master

KEIMA
MASUDA

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Prologue

The stage was set in the imperial capital of the Laverio Empire, where winter was fading and spring was approaching. There stood a mansion belonging to the noble and most ancient house of Orkluv, and on this day it was being visited by a lone Hero. It was an honorable Hero stout of heart, treasured throughout the empire both for his good deeds and his strength that put him in the top one hundred strongest warriors in the entire Empire. His name was Wataru.

“Welcome, Wataru.”

“It is good to see you again, Dyne.”

Dyne Orkluv, the head of the elven house Orkluv, welcomed Wataru to his home. Dyne was a warrior noble who bore the long ears emblematic of his race, and his feats in battle earned him a title spoken in whispers across all the empire: The King of Beasts. The title, of course, was inspired by the sight of him charging into battle accompanied by his summoned beasts. It was commonplace for babies to be named Dyne in honor of his accomplishments. He was also one of the relatively few that Wataru recognized as his superior.

...Incidentally, Wataru was not visiting Dyne to be entertained as a Hero, nor had Dyne summoned Wataru merely to meet him. It was just their work that brought them together. In order to pay back the two-thousand-three-hundred gold coin debt—the equivalent of two-billion-three-hundred-million yen in Japan—that a certain town chief had over him, Wataru was taking work directly from both the founder of the Empire and the head of the entire Adventurer’s Guild, Haku Laverio. This visit was regarding one such job.

“So, I have heard that the forces acting against the princess are growing in strength and numbers.”

“Yes. It was just the other day Lady Haku rushed to my home and left with the Divine Mattress. There are quite a few individuals throwing a fuss over that... Good grief, what miserable fellows.” Indeed, it all happened a few days ago. Haku, looking to be in a blood curdling panic, ordered Dyne Orkluv to relinquish

the Divine Mattress to her. As her retainer, Dyne Orkluv accepted the demand and provided the Divine Mattress guarded by his family at once.

It seemed that Haku had still not returned, and a faction of nobles were declaring her actions to be tyranny despite the fact that the Divine Mattress had merely been entrusted to the Orkluv house for protection, not granted as a boon. And despite the fact that Dyne Orkluv himself felt no ill will from it, knowing that he had been protecting the mattress for precisely this kind of emergency.

“Sounds rough.”

“Very. I would like to crush them all as traitors to the Empire, but alas. Politics are tedious precisely because one cannot do that. Haku is technically entrusting the Empire to Emperor Lionel, after all.” But still, in the Empire it was never odd for those protesting the decisions of Haku Laverio to be eliminated. Only essential figures could complain and keep their lives.

“We have gotten off topic. You are here on Haku’s orders, I understand.”

“Yes. I was told to ‘bring Emmymephy’ with me on my next job.” His next job being traveling to Goren to give Keima a noble title for taming a Dragon.

Now, about Emmymephy. Her full name was Emmymephy Laverio. She was the beloved daughter of the current emperor, Lionel Laverio, and in situations like this, being told to bring her on a job did not mean exactly what it sounded like. It meant bring someone with the name Emmymephy—in other words, there was an implicit understanding that he was to bring her body double.

“Very well. I will bring out the body double at once.” Dyne Orkluv clapped his hands twice, and a lone girl who had been waiting in a nearby room entered.

“I have arrived. Sir Wataru, I will be in your most honorable care.” The girl was wearing a simple dress designed for freedom of movement. She had bright red eyes that resembled Haku’s and exuded a high class noble’s aura from every inch of her body. Her light blue hair, the color of clear water, was braided behind her head. She looked exactly like Emmymephy Laverio, and...

“...Uh. Dyne?”

“Listen, Wataru. There are extremely high level politics in play behind this

decision. Indeed, this is a political decision, and you have no authority in such matters. In short, be silent. Understood?”

...It wasn't the body double. She couldn't fool Wataru's eyes. Before him stood Emmymephy Laverio herself.

There was no mistaking it. He had met Emmymephy many times before, and more than anything else, her actual body double was Shikna Orkluv—the daughter of Dyne Orkluv, and an elf. They were of similar height, but their hair color, eye color, and even the shape of their ears were all different. Shikna could serve as Emmymephy's body double despite those many differences because she had the natural beauty of an elf, and used a magical potion to change her hair and eye colors when on duty. There was a special potion brewed for that specific purpose.

There was also the strategy of confusing pursuers by having the body double flee in her own colors rather than those of the true princess. At those times it was important to look more real than the real thing—in other words, Emmymephy's body double was not expected to look like her, but rather to have captivating beauty visible at a glance. Wataru knew that if not for her elven beauty, a problem child like Shikna Orkluv would never be tasked with serving as a body double. Emmymephy's ancestor Haku was rumored to be a High Elf, so an elf with seemingly everlasting youth and beauty appeared more like a princess than the actual princess.

“...Er, but I mean. This is actually Princess Mephy.”

“I know how you feel, but don't say anything. Keep all your concerns to yourself. Silence your tongue. And... between you and I, this has Lady Haku's direct approval.”

“That's right, I say. The First Empress said she's fine with it. The royal will decrees that I am just a body double,” declared Emmymephy while puffing out her washboard chest that did not resemble Haku's whatsoever. Neither Dyne Orkluv nor Wataru could refute a declaration like that. They weren't allowed to, status-wise. And really, if Haku was sanctioning this, then she had some goal in mind with sending the real Emmymephy with Wataru.

“Dyne, I...”

“Wataru, say nothing. I already know.” Dyne Orkluv gave Wataru’s back a supportive slap before sighing. His feelings about matched Wataru’s.

“Incidentally, while on the job, treat her as a body double doing her job as a body double,” he continued, which confused Wataru.

“I can’t just treat her like who she actually is? Now I’m getting really confused.”

“This is something I suggested myself. You have a higher status than a body double, so you will be more capable of keeping her under control.”

“...Ahhh. I see, thank you.” Wataru gave him a handshake, full of gratitude.

“...Though do not go so far that you will be punished later.”

“It’ll be fine, as long as the princess doesn’t do anything crazy.”

“You have my prayers. Good luck.”

“.....” Even with his {Ultra Good Fortune} skill, Wataru’s faith trembled a little. “Errrm, anyway, where’s her usual body double? Is Shikna going to take the princess’s place in the imperial capital?”

“I would... rather not put her in the public eye. She is, ah, somewhat of an embarrassment, perhaps. What say I send her along with you as a maid? A fine woman to take care of the princess’s needs.”

“No need, I say!” Emmymephy declared. “I, as royalty... or rather, as one trained to appear as royalty, I have studied the art of ‘camping’ and ‘country living.’”

“...Well, you heard her.” The founding emperor of the Laverio Empire was originally an adventurer, so all members of the royal family were taught how to survive outside on their own. Of course, they were also taught to fight. Somewhat.

“I am no match for Sir Wataru, but I am still quite the fighter!”

“Of course.” Emmymephy was grinning with confidence, but she could beat a couple of Goblins at best, putting her on the same level as a D-Rank adventurer on a good day. She didn’t even come close to Wataru—though really, Wataru was the strange one for being able to duke it out with Dragons. “Well... I’ll be

fine as long as you don't put yourself in danger."

"Naturally! You can count on me!"

"Please flee to a safe place when necessary, Princess Mephy."

"Teehee! Naturally, I say!" Emmymephy beamed a smile, to which Wataru scratched his head. That was a smile that had no intention of listening to him.

Chapter 1

It was almost spring, but Goren was still riding the high it had reached during all that Dragon business. Which is to say, even after the Dragon left (as part of the trick), nobody really left. A ton of the adventurers were still there, and some of them even wanted to become villagers themselves. So much so that the Guild was posting forest logging quests to clear space for expansion. *Sweet Christ, why is this happening?*

And so, I hid myself with {Ultra Transformation} to go around asking people why they were sticking around in Goren. The results won't shock you.

Third most common answer: Beddhism.

“Cause I really like Beddhism. They let you read books if you join, y’know. It’s great.” —Villager

“Some real nice people teach you to read there. Even I know my letters now.” —New Adventurer

“The church here is so filled with nice people I just end up spending all my time there.” —Tsia City Resident

“The nuns are cute as heck.” —Farming Villager

“I heard Beddhist weddings are wonderful.” —Woman Adventurer

Second most common answer: Work or Business.

“It’s easy to go to both Tsia and Pavella from here. There’s always carriages going to Tsia, for instance.” —Traveling Merchant

“There’s a lot of unique stuff from here that sells really well, like that ‘sake’ stuff. It’s nice that there are high quality Iron Golems in the dungeon to hunt, too.” —Merchant with a Carriage

“Thanks to the tunnel putting Tsia and Pavella closer together, I’m making

tons of money.” —Merchant

“I got hired by the Dyne Company, so yeah. This town’s a real comfy place to be.” —Part-Time Merchant

“I think the strange foods here will be elucidating for me. The purin in particular was something else.” —Chef

“We came here looking for rice. We’re actually spies from Wakoku, so.” —Part-Timer at the Bar

Most common answer: The Dungeon.

“This town’s perfect for dungeon spelunking. There’s the beginner-friendly [Cave of Greed] right around the corner, and veterans can head to the nearby [Flame Caverns] without much trouble. What more could you ask for? There’s the Tsia Dungeon too, if you don’t mind walking the distance. This place is great.” —B-Rank Adventurer

“I heard there was a place that would pay you just for sleeping. How could I not go?” —D-Rank Adventurer

“I’m just here to see a newly-born dungeon grow.” —Dungeonologist

“The beer from this dungeon tastes fuckin’ great. Wouldn’t be wrong to say I’m just here for that sake stuff.” —Beer-Loving Adventurer

“Iron Golems are just a good source of money, y’know?” —C-Rank Adventurer

Bonus answers: Stuff About Me.

“What could be safer than a town with a chief that fought off a Dragon? Ain’t no other towns like that around. Not even Tsia’s archduke could do that, I think.” —Villager Applicant

“I just wanted to meet the Beddhist pope. Are you a Beddhist too, mister?” —Beddhist Disciple

“I heard that the onsen inn run by the Goren pope was something else. And it sure is! I’m staying the night again.” —Inn Customer

“All the workers in the town chief’s inn are super cute. I hope the town chief dies. Don’t you agree?” —Villager

“I heard the town chief here gives land and seeds to anyone who settles down here.” —Farmer Applicant

“Word is that the town chief is a young, single man. I’m gonna make him mine.” —Single Woman

“People told me that the town chief’s friends with Wataru the Hero. I was hoping he could put in a good word for me.” —Person Who Wants to Serve Wataru

“I heard he’s a Dragon-slaying legend. Hope I can wrangle him into giving me a training session one day.” —Warrior

“I used to live in Tsia’s slum, y’know, but she changed everything. Right now I’m on a journey in search of Her. My soulmate.” —Thuggish Guy

...Yeah, those were pretty awkward. Especially that last guy. I’m not sure how he sniffed out that I’m the one who destroyed the slums, but I don’t know about any of that soulmate junk.

I-I mean, I did call that section just a bonus, but there were a lot of answers about me. Maybe things would cool down if I left Goren for a bit. Luckily, I do need to go to the imperial capital to be decorated for my feats or whatever. Surely this Dragon era of Goren’s history will all be over by the time I get back. Surely. Please.

In truth, the best way to deal with surges of activity was to maintain your silence and do nothing. Humans are troubled creatures that soon get bored of things that don’t react to them.

So that was why I went back to sleep after waking up in the still-cold morning. With all the fuss outside, I didn’t want to leave my room if I didn’t have to. And, well, if that meant I had an excuse to chill in my room all day, that was fine with me.

As a nice bonus, I told the church to learn to handle mass without me since I would be leaving town soon, which meant Rei the High Priestess and the

Succubi nuns were taking care of all that for me. Kinue and the Silkies were handling the Dancing Doll Inn, while Neruneh and Elulu managed the dungeon. *They can make do with all the Golems I put in stock ahead of time. I believe in them. I truly do.*

It was hard to deny that the town's defenses would be hurt by my party and Gozou's leaving, but, well, not many people out there would attack a town with an Adventurer's Guild office. Even if a group of bandits or something did attack, pretty much everyone in town was an adventurer. There was a lot of firepower waiting to go off. They'd be safe even if monsters started overflowing from the dungeon. Though I could guarantee that wouldn't happen.

In short, my current job was to entrust all the work to my subordinates and watch over them warmly. Doing nothing was my actual job! And so, with Niku as my dakimakura (having taken no shifts in work anywhere), I went to go back to sleep yet again.

"Keima! Keima! KEEEEIIMA! I know you're awaaake! I'm coming insiiide!" Rokuko burst into my room.

"...What's up?"

"I just got word from Core 219 that Wataru's at Tsia."

"Oh, alright. Guess he'll be coming here the day after tomorrow or so."

"Niku, be sure to get all your stuff together, okay? Like Kinue's hamburgers and stuff."

Niku gave a nod. *The good thing about {Storage} is that since time stops inside of it, you can eat freshly cooked food whenever you want it.*

Incidentally, Rokuko would be tagging along with us to the imperial capital. It may seem weird that she would be joining us when she hadn't participated in the Dragon hunt, but consider Haku's tastes. Yeah, all that confusion just goes away. *Gozou and Roppe are coming too, I guess. Better give them a heads up too.*

"Don't forget to bring a lot of DP so we don't run out," added Rokuko.

"Good point. We can just stealthily use DP to get whatever we need,

whenever we need it.”

“It’s not heavy or anything either, so yeah, we can go wild. DP sure is strange, isn’t it?” Rokuko found physical DP weird, but to me it was just like batteries. “We need to leave some for the dungeon, but the Core we leave here will just keep building up more DP, so... Right. Let’s bring 500,000 DP between the two of us. Surely we won’t run out with that much.” *500,000 DP, huh? Sure going all-out here.*

“...Ahahaha, I never thought I’d have so much DP I could talk about storing it like this. I sure have grown, huh!” It was true that she was a far cry from how she used to be, with both an empty DP store and an empty head. I nodded without saying anything. 500,000 actually was enough to build an entirely new dungeon from the ground up somewhere, after all.

“Wait, why did Core 219 contact you anyway?”

“Hm? I mean, I went ahead and made it so we could contact each other easier. You know that, um, meeting room you made with Core 112? I made something Core 219 calls a salon to mimic that. I just finished it recently.” *When the...?* I checked my map and saw that indeed, there was a room built in between Tsia and Goren. It was locked off in solid matter just like my meeting room, such that it could only be entered through dungeon functions.

I took a closer look on the monitor and saw that one wall was the familiar rocky face of the [Cave of Greed], one wall was covered in vines like the [Garden of Light], and one wall was made of red surface rock like the [Flame Caverns].

“It’s connected to the [Flame Caverns] too?”

“Uh-huh, I wanna drink tea with Redra too. Core 219 loved it. Ahem. There’s nothing more dramatic and fashionable than a tea party with a legendary Dragon! My muse sings at the very thought, she said.”

“Ahhh, I see, I see. Just be careful not to end up owing her any favors,” I said, to which Rokuko smiled and said she had actually made Core 219 owe her some favors. *Man, this girl sure has a head on her shoulders now, huh? It’s nice to have someone I can actually count on.*

“Anyway, I’m off to tell Ichika to get ready too.”

“Alright. Later.”

“Later!” Rokuko left my room with a nice smile. *You should get ready too, Ichika. Oh? You’ve already started packing. Good girl. Have a head pat.*

Out of nowhere, Rokuko stuck her head back in my room. “Keima. I forgot to ask, but which do you like the most? Red, black, or white?”

“Huh? Uhhh... Black, I guess?”

“...Isn’t that a little bold?” *What is she talking about? I can’t let myself think about it. As a man, that is not for me to know. Probably.*

So, the next day, Wataru came. I welcomed him in the parlor of my chief residence. I had Neruneh guide him in like I always did to butter him up, but...

“...N-Nice to see you again, Keima.”

“Yeah, thanks for coming Wat— Who’s that with you?” Wataru had a girl with him today. It was my first time seeing her, so I could assume she was Wataru’s associate. She had loosely bound light blue hair the color of clear water, and bright red eyes that reminded me of someone I couldn’t place. *Did Wataru finally get a girlfriend? Maybe I shouldn’t have sent Neruneh to honey trap him, then.*

Neruneh stood behind me like a maid after guiding Wataru. Which naturally meant that we all ended up facing each other. *This is kind of awkward.*

“Errr, so.” Wataru, glancing in Neruneh’s direction, forced a twitchy smile onto his face and guided his companion to step forward. “Let me introduce you two. Keima, this is Princess Emmymephy.”

“...Huh?” *Princess? Like, the imperial princess? Did I hear that right?*

“Took you long enough, Sir Wataru. That is correct! I say, I am Emmymephy, the first princess and heiress apparent of the Laverio Empire. You can call me Mephy!” *Oh shit, it’s a princess. She said so herself. There is no way she won’t end up being a huge pain in the ass.*

“Well. I’m Keima, town chief of Goren. Nice to meet you.”

“...Wowee! You gave an awful grimace just like Sir Wataru said you would!”
Oh, I let it show on my face? That’s no good.

“Wait, what the hell have you been telling her, Wataru?”

“Oh, just that you hate politics and stuff, and that if she introduced herself as the princess you would grimace and consider her a huge pain in the ass.”

“Wow. You sure know me well, Wataru. So why’d you bring her?”

“Hahaha! You’re being rude to the princess, y’know. A member of the imperial family being sent to get people for their award ceremonies adds weight to the whole affair, or something. It was an order from Haku. Ahhh, but uh, between you and me... this is actually her body double.”

“Yes, yes. I’m a body double, so worry not! Relax and call me Mephy!”

A body double. Yeah, I guess there’d be no need to send the actual princess on business like this.

“And I will follow Sir Wataru’s example in calling you Keima! Is that all well and good?”

“Errr, sure, yeah. Call me what you wish, Princess Emmymephy.”

“Call me Mephy. It’s best to distinguish me from the real thing, no?” *Doesn’t matter to me. I’m gonna call you both Emmymephy. I don’t want to get close to either of you. Also, wouldn’t it be bad to distinguish between the real thing and her body double...?*

“Keima,” began Wataru. “You’ll be better off just giving her what she wants. Otherwise, she’ll be pestering you about her name the whole way to the imperial capital.”

“Gah, seriously?” *Right, right. Her coming to get me means she’ll be with me the whole way there. Man, what a pain.*

“Fine. Understood, Princess Mephy.”

“There we go. That’s better.” Emmymephy grinned, which reminded me of Maiodore, the archduke of Tsia’s daughter. *Maybe all nobles are like this...? Or wait, I guess she’s royalty, not nobility. Actually, as a body double she’s probably a noble’s daughter. Or maybe a commoner raised just for this purpose? Alright,*

time to stop thinking about this. She's a princess and nothing more.

There wasn't much point in talking while standing, so everyone but Neruneh finally sat down on the sofas.

"Wow! I say, it's so fluffy and soft. I'm surprised a tiny town like this has sofas!" Emmymephy excitedly patted down it down. She seemed too tall to be a child, but maybe she wasn't the type to act like she looked.

"Hey, Wataru. Is the actual princess like this too?"

"Yep. She sure is. This body double is a lot, LOT like her. So much so you may as well think of her as the actual princess, really," said Wataru while casually avoiding eye contact. *Yeaah, something's up here. And it looks like Wataru wants me to notice what's up, so I'm just going to not think about it. Figuring stuff out usually leads to more work. Curiosity killed the cat, as they say.*

"Anyway, everyone here is all packed. When are we leaving?"

"What?!"

"Huh? Is there a problem?" I blinked in surprise at Wataru's stunned expression.

"No, I just thought that you hadn't packed and would get all stubborn again about not going."

"Of course not. I said I'm gonna go, so I packed ahead of time. Why wouldn't I?"

"...Yeah, I guess you do keep your promises, Keima. Right." Wataru nodded.

"Alright, wanna get going already? I don't mind leaving right away. Gozou and the others all said they would be ready to leave as soon as you got there, Wataru."

Wataru shook his head. "At least let us rest a night. We're tired from our long journey."

"Yeah, that's fair. You can stay for more than one night if you really want, but... Princess Mephy is royalty, body double or not. She'll be staying in the grand suite, I presume?"

“The grand suite! The First Empress told me all about how wonderful the grand suite is here!”

I had asked Wataru about the suite, but it was Mephy who beamed a smile.

“...The First Empress?”

“Oh. That refers to the founder and First Empress of the Laverio Empire, Haku Laverio.” *Right. Haku made the Empire, how could I forget?*

“Anyway, I figure that Princess Mephy can have the suite and you can stay in a normal room like always, Wataru. Can you cover the costs?”

“Princess Mephy will be covering her own room, so that’s fine. This bag has a hundred and thirty golds, enough for this month’s payment and everything else. If it’s not enough, ask for more at the capital.” Wataru took out a bag full of gold coins, which I accepted. It was as heavy as every bag filled with coins was.

“Roger. Those thirty extra coins will cover a night’s stay plus dinner.” I didn’t even need to count the coins, considering Wataru’s honest streak. Worst come to worst, I could just have a Register Golem count them later.

“One night’s stay? For a hundred and thirty golds?”

“Oh, a hundred of those coins are for Wataru’s debt. The meal and board are thirty golds.”

“...Sir Wataru, you borrowed money?!”

“Ah, hahaha... Kind of. I lost a lot in gambling.” Wataru gave a pained smile.

“What? You, the Hero of Good Fortune, lost in gambling?”

“That was the day I learned that my {Ultra Good Fortune} is never a guarantee. Really, you could say it was lucky that I learned that in a safe place.”

“...By the way, how much did you lose? Perhaps I could cover it for you.”

“Two thousand and three hundred golds overall.”

“Two thousand...?! That’s more than even I could easily cover!”

“Ahaha, well, I’ve already paid back half of it, and this is something I really need to handle myself, so don’t worry about it. I appreciate your willingness to help.”

“R-Really? I say, you truly are stout of heart, Sir Wataru.” *Yeah, Wataru just wants an excuse to come to town and visit Neruneh. Which is something I still don’t get. What does he see in Neruneh when she’s basically a stone cold bitch to him all the time? He must be a huge masochist.*

“Anyway, we’ll deliver the A-Rank dinner that Haku prefers to your suite, Princess Mephy. You can do whatever you want in your own room, Wataru.”

“Wait, you will be able to deliver a dinner for us on the day that we arrive, with no prior warning?”

“Uh, well. We are used to dealing with Haku coming whenever she wants.”

“What professionals! The royal will decrees that you are absolutely splendid!”

We’re honored by your praise, and all that. It actually would be pretty expensive to have the food ready to prepare and serve at all times. Hence the price. Though in our case, we can just buy it with DP in a snap.

“...By the way, Wataru... are you okay with this?”

“Well, if I had the money to stay in the suite, I would just use it to pay back my debt.”

I shook my head. “Not that.”

“Huh? Oooh... Er, ah, Neruneh?” Upon noticing my look, Wataru spoke to Neruneh. She was smiling her usual smile while standing behind me. She didn’t respond. Apparently she needed my permission to speak when serving as a maid and standing behind me.

“You can talk if you want to, Neruneh.”

“Mmmmmm, no thaaanks. I don’t think there’s anything to talk abooout.”

“I’m sorry! There are reasons for this, good reasons!” Wataru bowed his head so hard he basically smashed it against the table.

“What in the?! S-Sir Wataru, what has gotten into you?! Keima, the royal will decrees that you explain what you did!” Emmymephy panicked at Wataru’s sudden apology.

“Princess Mephy. This is my fault. Please don’t interfere.”

“But that can’t be! You are the pride of our empire, a true Hero! Surely you are not at fault!”

“Right, right. How could Wataru the Hero, the pride of the Empire, be at fault? I’m sure Neruneh will forgive you. Hahaha.”

“Master. There’s nothing to forgiiive. I’m not mad or anythiiiing.”

Yeaah, I can guess that Neruneh really doesn’t care at all. Honestly, I’m starting to feel real bad for Wataru.

“At least give me an opportunity to explain myself! By which I mean, would you care to have dinner together?”

“B-Rank.”

“Uh.”

“A B-Rank meaaal, for fifty silveers.”

“R-Right! Consider it on me!”

“What about yooours? We’re eating together, riiight?”

“...Okay, I’ll get a B-Rank too.”

“Masteeer, I got you two B-Rank meeeaaals.” Two fifty silver B-Rank meals equated to one gold coin. A pretty expensive dinner that, in Japanese terms, cost one million yen. *Though it’s actually just a basic sirloin steak.*

As I took the gold coin from Wataru, Emmymephy timidly addressed him. “U-Um. Sir Wataru.”

“Yes, Princess Mephy?”

“...Um, I say, what exactly is going on here?”

“Errr, well. Put simply, I’m making things up to her. I don’t want her to dislike me.”

“I say, is there anyone in the Empire foolish enough to dislike you, Sir Wataru?” Emmymephy was talking kind of strangely, just as strange as her quirk of saying “I say” all the time.

“Well, I’m just human, you know. Some people just won’t like me.”

“I could understand a villain or an enemy from an opposing state disliking you, but... Erm, I say, this is just a maid! How could she feel anything but awe and reverence for you?”

“What I can say, that’s Goren for you. To the people here I’m basically just a normal citizen,” said Wataru with a kind of shy laugh that shocked Emmymephy to the bone.

“...The royal will decrees that I say this, Sir Wataru, but this is you we’re talking about. I say, you’re among the top one hundred strongest fighters in the Empire, if not the top ten on a particularly ferocious day. Yet they would treat you as a normal citizen...?”

“Oh, Keima’s stronger than me.”

“I say?!” Now Emmymephy looked at me with utter shock.

“Hahaha, no way could I be stronger than a Hero. Wataru’s just messing around. Am I right, bud?”

“I mean, it’s just a fact that I’ve never beaten you once, Keima. I even lost to you in a fist fight during all the Dragon business that started all this, remember? You should know about that, Princess Mephy, since it was in the report.”

“I-I remember the report. Which reminds me! I say, Keima is the legend that tamed a Dragon!”

Oh right, that’s the story we went with... crap. This is all Wataru’s fault for not taking all the credit for defeating the Dragon.

Suddenly, a realization hit me. “Heeey, Wataru. You say you’re gonna eat dinner with Neruneh, but doesn’t that mean Princess Mephy’s going to have to eat alone?”

“Huh? Oh! Er...”

“I say, Keima is right. The royal will decrees that I will not be eating the First Empress’s beloved dinner alone!”

“Alright, Wataru. I’ll bring your food to the grand suite so you can eat with her. Neruneh’s too, of course.”

“Uh, er. Thank you...?”

I had said all that to be kind, but Neruneh's eyes suddenly shone. "Aaah, but then Princess Mephy would be the only one eating something different, riiight? I think we should all eat the same thiiiing. Right, Princeeeess?"

"That's true. But I would like to eat the dinner that the First Empress approves of so highly."

"Weeeell, there's only one answer to that, isn't theeere?" Neruneh looked at Wataru with a smile.

"....."

"One answeeeer."

"...Keima, cancel the B-Ranks. I'll be ordering two A-Ranks," said Wataru while holding out nine golds.

"...Uh, man. Y'know what, I'll cover Neruneh's meal for you."

"Thank you! Thank you so much!" he said as I took just four of the golds.

"...Spineleeess? Good for nothiiiing?"

"...Keimaaa!"

Don't tease him too much, Neruneh. If Wataru's spineless and good for nothing, pretty much everyone in the Empire is good for nothing. Seriously.

Thus, it was decided that we would wait a night, then leave in the morning.

Oh, and by the way.

"I say, I am Emmymephy Laverio. The royal will decrees that you call me Mephy, please!"

"Oh, okay. Nice to meet you, Mephy. I'm Rokuko."

Rokuko and Emmymephy's first meeting ended without any fuss. In fact, Rokuko was so unfazed that Emmymephy actually looked surprised.

"I say, I am the imperial princess of the Laverio Empire."

"I can tell that much from your last name. Right, Keima? It's obvious."

Rokuko was so unfazed that Emmymephy had directly stated her status. But

Rokuko kept going without blinking. *Er, couldn't you be at least a little more respectful? This is a princess we're talking about (body double or not), so... Though I guess Rokuko's actually higher status since she's the little sister of the First Empress.* Niku and Ichika were similarly casual about the whole affair, bowing a bit and introducing themselves.

There Gozou and Roppe came, introducing themselves as politely as they could while apologizing for not being too familiar with fancy words and all that. They definitely were the most polite of the bunch.

"...Sir Wataru, I say, is this town mad?"

"That's Goren for you." Wataru responded to Emmymephy's baffled head tilt with a nice smile.

"Whoa there, Wataru. If you want to be treated a certain way, all you gotta do is give us some advance notice. We're capable of adjusting to the needs of our guests."

"What other town chief would be so open about that kinda thing? See what I mean, Princess Mephy?"

"I say, Dragon-conquering legends certainly are in a league of their own..."

In any case, we were all gathered. Me, Rokuko, Niku, and Ichika from the Dancing Doll Inn. Gozou, Roppe, and Wataru from Team Bacchus. Add on Princess Emmymephy the royal body double to that, and all eight members of our journey were gathered.

"Let's get this show on the road, then." *Eight people sure is a lot,* I thought to myself just as someone came to see us off. It was Maiodore wearing a backpack for some reason, along with her maid.

"Kuro! I'm coming with you!" She said before clinging to Niku's arm, her long drill-tipped hairs swaying like always. Uninvited ninth and tenth members to our party.

Y'know, Maiodore sure did fall completely in love with Niku at some point. What'd you do, Niku? Hm? You don't remember? Must be some quirk of the nobility. Maybe they're built to fall in love with whatever fiancée they spend enough time around. Someone please present this situation to academia as

evidence of nobles surviving the political marriage hellscape they live in through optimism and adapting to their surroundings.

“I cannot wait to tour the capital with you, Kuro.”

“...Master.” Niku looked up at me, not sure what to do.

“Uhhh, well. Mai, sorry, but you have to sit this one out. Actually, please go back to Tsia while we’re not around.”

“Surely you jest, Keima. It is only natural that I would travel with my fiancée. And despite appearances, I am quite used to traveling.”

“Please understand that I won’t be able to take responsibility if anything happens to you.”

“Hrmph. Responsibility this, responsibility that. You adults are always talking about responsibility.” The fact that Mai acted like a child only when convenient to her, talking about her fiancée and acting like an adult all the other times, showed that she was well on her way to being a proper noble despite her youth. “Kuro, you will protect me, won’t you?”

“No. I will be protecting Master. Please don’t interfere.”

“...I love how dedicated to your work you are, Kuro!” *Yeah, she’s a goner. This is just like Wataru and Neruneh. Everything mean they do is just fuel for the fire of their love. It all seems wonderful to them.*

I looked to her maid for help. “Errr, Sheena. While we’re gone, could you...?”

“Fear not. I will take Lady Maiodore back to her home in Tsia,” replied her maid, which was a big relief to me.

But it was there that Emmymephy, with a mischievous smile on her face, spoke to Maiodore. “Excuse me, little one. I would like to be on my way soon. Would you be so kind as to give it a rest already?”

“...Ah, um, my apologies. I am Maiodore Tsia, daughter of Tsia’s archduke. May I ask your name?” Maiodore gave the crisp, polite greeting of a noble.

“Oh my, I say, you are quite the cultured little girl. I am Emmymephy Laverio. It is good to meet you.”

“Ngbwuuuh?! P-Princess L-Laverio?!” squeaked Maiodore in a shocked voice as she bowed her head deeply. It seemed that had been enough for her to realize she was speaking to Emmymephy, the imperial princess, though it wouldn’t be too hard for anyone to guess that after hearing someone address themselves using the Laverio Empire’s name. At most someone would question whether they were speaking to a fake or the real thing. Technically she was a fake since she was just a body double, but Wataru the Hero being with her was enough to remove all doubt.

“I-I truly apologize for my unsightly behavior.”

“Worry not, I say. You may lift your head. I would hate for your cute hair to come undone,” she said gently to Maiodore before beaming a smug grin at me that yelled “See? This is how people normally react, I say!” *Sure, but I don’t care.*

“Mephy. We don’t really have time to play around. Can we go now?”

“...I say, Rokuko, you are bold to be so impolite to me. But I can’t deny how refreshing it is.”

Rokuko was being even more rude to Emmymephy than I was, maybe because she considered them friends already. And it seemed like Emmymephy was kind of happy about that. *Yeaah, yet another case just like Wataru. What, are all noble women infected by the Wataru masochism disease? Actually, I feel like I’ve seen something like this before...*

“...Rokuko treats Princess Mephy just like you treat me, Keima,” said Wataru. *Ah, there it is.* All the puzzle pieces came right together.

“Farewell then, Maiodore. The royal will decrees that we will meet again, hopefully.”

“I-Indeed! I pray that you will have a safe journey!”

“Hold up, you two. Mai can come with us to Tsia. We’re borrowing our carriage from Bonodore anyway, remember?” Rokuko barged into their exchange.

“R-Rokuko...!” Maiodore looked kinda sick, with her eyes begging Rokuko to read the mood, but all that went over Rokuko’s head.

“We borrowed them because you would rather ride in a noble’s carriage than one for commoners, right? Weren’t you planning to use one to go back to Tsia yourself? Just come with us.”

“Wh-Why did you say that, Rokukoooo?! Aaah, my plan to ask for a souvenir in return for being refused is in ruins now...!” It seemed that Maiodore asking to come along was an act all from the beginning. What an actress. That kinda bare-faced lying and manipulation was exactly what I would expect from a noble.

“We were about to leave without you getting an opportunity to ask. And you don’t need to pull any tricks like that. Niku won’t mind bringing you back a souvenir if you ask. Right, Niku?”

“Um... Right. I don’t mind.”

“It’s a promise! I’ll treasure a souvenir from you for the rest of my life, now and forever more! Please pick something that will last! I have a request! Pick a set of matching things so we can be connected!”

“O-Okay.” Niku nodded, overwhelmed. *Also, Rokuko didn’t hesitate to call her Niku, but I hope she’ll be willing to call her Kuro during this trip. I’m sure it’ll be a pain in the neck if she doesn’t.*

“Well, you can talk about that on our way to Tsia. The carriage should be leaving soon. Let’s hurry,” said Rokuko before heading off for the carriage.

“Um, okay. I suppose I will tag along then... Is that acceptable?”

“The royal will decrees that it is.” With Emmymephy’s approval, Maiodore put her backpack back on. She and her maid would be accompanying us to Tsia.

“Hey, look, the town chief and everyone is leaving. Glory be to the true Hero of Goren!”

“Bring us back some stuff! We’ll be praying for you, man. Oyasuminasai!”

“Oh, who’s that girl with them? A guide to the capital? Bye!”

We left Goren with the nearby villagers casually seeing us off.

The lengthy carriage—a stagecoach, really—bumped along the road. Apparently this amount of bumpiness was on the low side, since it was traveling

at a slow pace. I would definitely get sick if I rode in this thing for too long. For now, we were stuck with it until Tsia.

...Most of us were only carrying what we had on our backs. Rokuko only had a single trunk. Thanks to the {Storage} spell in this world, you didn't need to bring a lot of luggage for a long journey. Well, it was technically a rare skill to have, but six out of the eight people here knew it. I was being generous since if one member of a party knew it the whole party technically did, and since Maiodore and her maid both knew it, the numbers shot up to make us one abnormal party. At a glance, nobody would think we were on our way to the distant capital. Incidentally, Wataru was storing Gozou and Roppe's stuff.

Though you don't need changes of clothes in this world thanks to {Purification}. This sure does feel like a journey in a fantasy world.

"Hey, Keima. Uhhh, y'know, how's, uh, how's Salamander doing?" asked Gozou, maybe trying to break the ice a little.

"Huh? Oh. He's fine. Why do you ask?"

"I, uh, I was just kinda curious about how he, er, comes when you call him," he continued. I blinked in confusion. "How's it work? Do you send a letter?"

"Huh? No, there's like a contract thing. Remember the paper he had in the [Flame Caverns]?" *Oh right, that's the story I went with.*

"The truth is, he was already in Tsia Mountain. Turns out that he likes the heat there."

"That so?"

"Yup. He spends most of his time just lazing about in the [Flame Caverns]." I went ahead and made it public that Ittetsu was a lazing-about Salamander... a Lazamander. *I mean, even his daughter Igni thinks that, so what's the problem?*

"Huh. Guess that's how you and him became fast friends. Guess Beddhism is the key to everything, huh?"

"Dunno." *Still, Gozou's more interested in Salamander than the imperial princess, huh? Guess I might be the same way, really.*

Incidentally, said imperial princess was talking with Rokuko and Maiodore,

plus Niku, about something. *What, is Maiodore talking about their engagement? She sure is jabbering on and on. Is there that much to talk about? Also, Maiodore sure seems used to the rocky carriage. A lot more than I am. But yeah, anyway.* Thus began our journey to the capital.

* * *

We arrived at Tsia without anything in particular happening to the carriage. *To think it only took two hours... Back in the day it took me six hours to run to Tsia from the dungeon. I'm guessing a fast horse during daytime could make the trip in less than an hour.*

"But man, even just riding a carriage sure takes a lot out of you. That was exhausting." To some degree I regretted not throwing caution to the wind and busting out my handmade Golem Carriage.

"Ahaha, carriages for nobles aren't so bad. We can borrow a good one from Bonodore on our way back from Tsia," said Wataru.

"I'd like one good enough to sleep in, thanks." I would much rather have Wataru carry me than ride that carriage again. Sheesh.

"But ye know, I never thought we'd get inside for free without any body searches thanks to Maiodore. That's a noble for ye. Er, I mean, we're honored by yer presence, m'lady?"

Maiodore laughed off Gozou's change in tone. "Ahaha. No need to put on airs, Gozou. It really just means that guests we invite into our home need not pay. Both nobles and commoners can understand that, I believe."

"Riiight," said Rokuko. "Mai's the daughter of Tsia's archduke. That sure is convenient."

"I say, just who in the world is Rokuko? I am dying to know, for not many could dismiss the daughter of an archduke as being merely convenient. Not even I would do that." *Glad that Rokuko and Emmymephy are getting along well. Also, Rokuko, you're being way too arrogant. Where do you get off on being more arrogant than the imperial princess('s body double)?*

"By the way, Gozou. Nobles have to pay the entrance fee too. Even I have to pay, yup!"

“Oh, right, Wataru’s a Hero. That means he’s a noble too. I totally forgot,” chimed in Rokuko. *Though really, putting all that aside, the Adventurer’s Guild paid out money to cover our entrance fees and all that already. That’s the kind of VIP treatment you get when Haku herself summons you.*

“Sigh. I wanted to spend more time with you, Kuro,” said Maiodore with an exaggerated sigh.

“...The archduke’s mansion is just up ahead. You should get ready to leave.”

“Fear not, Kuro. I shall leave such matters to my maid, so that I can stay by your side for as long as possible.”

We rode in a guarded carriage on the way to the archduke’s mansion. Once there, Bonodore Tsia himself welcomed us.

“Keima, Rokuko! It is good to see you after so long. I congratulate you on your accomplishments. Wataru, Princess Mephy. It is good to see you both again as well. Mai, have you been doing well?”

I wonder why he greeted Rokuko and me first? Maybe there’s some meaning to that. Though given that he greeted Mai after Wataru and Emmymephy, maybe he was just going in order of the people who were looking after his daughter. Hmm... I wonder if he knows that’s Emmymephy’s body double. If he prioritized us despite thinking she’s the real thing... Eh, never mind. Nothing good will come of endless theorycrafting when I’m just guessing here. Not like I know much about noble culture anyway.

“Yes, father. I believe I have grown much closer with my fiancée, Kuro.”

“I see, I see! You have even begun to address the honorable Kuroinu with a pet nickname, I see! Ahaha, it sure is nice to see our kids grow together, eh, Keima?”

“Hahaha... Well, I’m just glad I got her back to you safely.” I didn’t really get what he was implying there, so I just brushed it off with a change in subject.

“Er, Keima, are Kuro and Maiodore really engaged?” asked Wataru after all this time for some reason.

“Huh? Yeah, of course.”

“I’ve been meaning to ask, but when did Kuro stop being a slave? It looks like she’s still wearing her collar.”

“She never stopped.”

“...Then why is she engaged to a noble’s daughter?”

I went ahead and gave Wataru an ambiguous answer. Even I didn’t really know how it happened.

“There are complicated forces at work here,” I said in a monotone.

“C-Complicated forces, huh?”

“Everyone, a moment please. I must temporarily take my leave now, but please use my family’s carriages and drivers for the rest of your journey. I can promise that the ride will be much more comfortable for you, Keima.”

“Indeed. Each of our carriages are as comfortable as can be.” And so, it came to pass that we borrowed one of the Tsia family carriages. Though judging from that conversation earlier, Rokuko and Maiodore had already organized that ahead of time.

Bonodore and Maiodore guided us to the location where the carriages were parked. There were four of them— two wooden box-shaped carriages and two canopied wagons. One of the sizable box-shaped carriages looked kind of like a house with wheels, while the other was smaller and looked like a treasure chest with wheels. All of the carriages had the Tsia family crest emblazoned onto their side.

“Wow, these carriages are all so nice!” exclaimed Wataru. “They probably won’t be shaky at all... Ooh, and is it just me, or were these made by the Hero Workshop?”

“You have good eyes, Wataru. These carriages are engraved with magic circles that induce floating and pushing, which lessens the load on the horses.” By the sound of that I could guess that a Hero had tried recreating a car’s suspension system by having the carriage not touch the ground. But more importantly... *They all have crests on them, huh?* The Tsia family crest. Hmm.

I glanced at Bonodore after looking at the crests, which he noticed. “Now,

now, Keima. No need to be humble or anything of the like. It is only natural that I would do this much for my daughter's fiancée."

"...Couldn't we borrow a carriage without a crest on it? I feel like they might cause some problems down the line."

"I would imagine you'd face more problems without the crests. Though if you insist, I can provide some without them." *More problems without the crests...? I wonder what he means by that. I'm thinking about bandits attacking us on the road,* I thought, at which point Wataru popped in.

"Er, Lord Bonodore. We would like a canopied crest wagon, please! Keima, you really want a canopied wagon for a journey like this, trust me."

"Truly?" asked Bonodore. "In that case, I will prepare a canopied wagon. Does that sound quite alright, Keima?"

"Uh, sure. I don't know much about carriages, so I'll just leave it to you two." *A journey on a canopied carriage, huh? Reminds me of a certain RPG. I can already imagine monsters we defeat getting back up and joining us as party members. That said...*

"Hey, Wataru. Why'd you ask for one with a crest?"

"Goren is close to Tsia, isn't it? You want to make your connection to Lord Bonodore clear to everyone watching. There will be more nobles than you can count rushing to form a friendship with the heroes who defeated a Dragon." *Ah. The crest is there to ward off interference from other nobles. I see, I wasn't thinking from a political perspective.*

"That sounds like a pain. I'm already getting my fill of nobles from Bonodore."

"Exactly. You'll be better off just borrowing a carriage with a crest." *Haaah. What a pain... Guess I don't have a choice, though.*

"Keima. Would you care to come inside for tea while the driver and horses are being prepared? I must inform you of important matters regarding the lending of this carriage. Your companions may join you," said Bonodore while looking at me with a smile.

"Aaah, the royal will decrees that I shall talk with Maiodore instead."

“The Guild actually asked me to deliver some paperwork elsewhere. I might as well take this opportunity to go and grab a delivery quest from the guild.”

“Bro, count me in. You’re gonna need one of Keima’s party members to make it a dual quest for both of us, yeah?”

“Uhhh, I’m gonna go prepare a bit more fer the journey. Keima, ye can handle this.”

“I’m gonna go buy some beer with Gozou. Seems like this carriage will have a lotta space for it. Wataru, go ahead and take the quest in the name of team Bacchus.”

Everyone scattered like baby spiders, and before I knew it I was almost the only one there. Rokuko and Niku alone stayed behind with me. *Seems like everyone else ran away so they wouldn’t have to deal with this political stuff. Yeaah.*

“...Well, let’s go in and have some tea, Keima. We might as well, hm?”

“Yep...”

Incidentally, after telling me what I needed to know about borrowing the carriage, he taught me a surprising amount about the rules of noble society and what manners I needed to show. It was a more productive discussion than I had expected.

* * *

The carriage was fully prepared while the archduke was teaching me what I would need to know, so we went ahead and carried our slight amount of luggage over. We took stuff that would be fine suffering the passage of time out of our {Storage} and stashed it in the carriage’s storage space beneath the floorboards. That let us put more food and such into the time-frozen {Storage}.

Also, about eighty percent of the stuff we stashed seemed to be beer that Gozou and Roppe bought. *They even went and bought a whole barrel of beer. The mad lads.*

It was finally time to leave.

“Everyone, please do be careful. I hope to see you again soon, Kuro... Mmm.”

“Mm. Okay, bye.”

Whoa, she gave Niku a goodbye kiss on the cheek... Not bad, Maiodore. You're pulling off what not even Rokuko could manage. Guess that's what a noble upbringing does for you.



“Bwuh?! Y-You’re bold, Mai.”

“Ahaha. If that much is beyond you, Rokuko, then Keima will surely be stolen away from you.”

“I-It’ll be fine! Keima and I are bound together until death do us part! It... It’ll be fine, right?” *Yeah, totally. Probably.*

“Mmm? I say, Rokuko, it may not be fine at all! Keima is now a warrior of legend who defeated a Dragon, after all. He will be endlessly popular with the ladies when he arrives at the imperial capital!”

“That won’t change anything, Mephy. Keima will still belong to me. And I’ll still belong to him. Right, Keima?” asked Rokuko while flashing the red ring (on her left ring finger) at me.

“...Yeah? Definitely?”

“Why the question marks?!” *Bonodore’s right there, and this is still part of Core 219’s dungeon territory. I can’t say anything too extreme or it might go straight to Haku.*

And so, we left Tsia. All I did was drink tea with Bonodore, but well, I could go to Tsia whenever I wanted. No need to make a big event out of it.

...But what waited ahead would be mostly new to me. A journey across lands unseen. *Man, kinda crazy that I went to a whole new world and haven’t gone on a journey yet.*

“Hey, Wataru. How far away is the next city?”

“Probably about five days by carriage.”

“...That’s pretty far away.” *Well, at least this noble’s carriage won’t bounce all over the place. I’ll take the time to chill for a bit.*

* * *

So yeah, it was a five-day journey by carriage to the next city. Our carriage advanced down the road, passing through endless plains. To the far right of the road we could see forests, and to the far left we could see mountains. It was a different mountain range from the one Tsia Mountain was a part of.

...To be honest, I was bored of the unchanging scenery. I couldn't even get some shut-eye, since there were too many people in the carriage for me to lay down. Maybe I should have asked him to lend us another carriage. *Meh, guess I'll just try to sleep while sitting.*

"Hey, Ichika. What's the name of the next city we're going to? I just realized I never asked that."

"Next stop's gonna be Mikan. It's right in the middle of these grassy plains, so they've got tons of sheep and that kinda junk."

"Sheep, huh...? Alright. We shall feast on lamb tonight, my friends."

"Dude, they're there for the wool. Though sometimes they get eaten too. Also, they kinda get some farming done, though not as much as Tsia. What else are they gonna do with all this land, y'know?" *Interesting.*

"Anyway, point being, traveling by carriage is boring as hell."

"Master, y'know we're in a noble's carriage traveling on a flat road, right? Think back to that hella poverty carriage we were just in. Those shake so bad it'll make your ass feel like it's breaking, and people not used to that junk will start vomiting buckets eventually. What I'm sayin' is, being bored is a luxury in carriages."

"Yeaah, the motion sickness is pretty bad. I would hate to ride one of those for days at a time."

"Right, right. We're only not miserable right now cause the carriage's been modified not to shake."

"Hey, hey, mind if I interject for a moment?" Wataru asked cheerily, forcing himself into my conversation with Ichika. "This carriage actually has a suspension system on it."

"Wow, a suspension system. Uuuh... Is that the shake-stopping modification Ichika was talking about?"

"...Yes. You can contain the shaking by putting the right sized springs between parts. They're produced in the capital's Hero Workshop." *Whew, that was close. Wataru was trying to casually bait me into revealing I'm a Hero. And here I*

thought he had given up on that theory already.

“This carriage also uses magic circles to add a magical suspension system that could never be possible in Japan! It looks like a normal canopied carriage on the outside, but it’s actually the stunning result of science and magic being fused into one!” He was getting a little too excited about it, but at least now I knew that Wataru liked gimmicky inventions like this.

“Gonna change the topic here, but... How do you travel to Goren, Wataru? By carriage? Or {Teleport}?”

“Nah, no way, I can’t use {Teleport} that casually. Only Haku and her party can just bust out a {Teleport} at the drop of a hat. I want to learn the spell too, but the scroll for it is incredibly rare. Which means, yes, I travel by horse usually. I leave the horse at Tsia, then walk the rest of the way. Though this time I traveled by carriage since Princess Mephy was with me.” *I wonder if Wataru’s walking would be faster than a horse. I feel like it just might be.*

“...Wait. So where’d you leave it this time, then?”

“Oh, I actually rent my horses from the Adventurer’s Guild. It’s convenient since I can just leave them with the Guild in whichever city I go to. Not to mention that swapping horses at every city is better for not exhausting them.”

“Neat.”

“Which reminds me, how did you first get to Goren? Before you started building the town there, that is.”

“...I walked.” *The actual answer is Rokuko summoned me there with the 1,000 DP gacha, but well. I didn’t ride on anything on the way there, so you could say I spiritually walked there. I didn’t lie.*

“And Ichika?”

“I rode a slave carriage to Tsia, duh. Master bought me there, and you know the rest of my totally tragic yet inspiring life story.”

“Oh yeah, that explains your dudebro Pavella accent. What illegal stuff did you do over there?”

“Mmm, I just went kiiinda overboard in the capital. Y’know, you borrow a

little too much money, pull a little nonsense, and the next thing you know there's a collar on your neck."

"Ah, you're a debt slave. Guess you're planning to buy your freedom back from the reward money you're about to get?"

"Nah, no way. I'm never gonna quit being Master's slave, nuh-uh. You gotta feel me on this, Wataru. You know how baller that inn is. Hardly even feels like I'm a slave when I'm working over there."

"Yeah, I can see that. Keima's place sure is nice."

"Heck yeah it is. Also, the truth is, I'm not actually a debt slave." *Wait, really?*

"Then what kind of slave are you?"

"A convict slave, actually. Kinda messed up big time," she said without a pause. *She said she "pulled some nonsense," but now I wonder what that nonsense actually was.*

"...You know how I mentioned I was on a lotta people's bad side? They led me into a trap. I'm innocent, but y'know, nobody's gonna listen to something like that." *Oh yeah, I feel like she mentioned that when I bought her... Wait. I wonder what kind of slave Niku is, then. I doubt she's a debt slave, so maybe a convict slave? She was being dragged around by bandits.*

"Niku's gotta be an illegal slave, considering her past and all. She's probably on the record as a war slave. The kind that get caught in wars and all that. Whenever people kidnap kids to turn 'em into slaves, they usually roll with that."

"Ahhh, yeah, a lot of adventurers love to have war slaves. I've never used one myself, though." It seemed that male war slaves were the ones that adventurers used as meat shields and the like. The regularly occurring wars kept their numbers up, apparently. *The Laverio Empire sure is a harsh place, huh?*

"You know," continued Wataru, "I think it's way too hard for slaves to earn back their freedom in this world. Anyone that's not a contract slave is pretty much stuck there forever most of the time."

"Right, contract slaves. Those really exist?"

“Yeah. Those are the ones who sign contracts with explicit terms decided ahead of time. There are lover contracts too, by the way.” The terms varied, like a time limit, establishing a payment, and having the contract end if the master died, just to name a few. *Hmm, putting aside Ichika for now, maybe I should shift Niku over to a contract slave? I could set it up so she gets passed to Rokuko if I die.*

...But that shouldn't be a problem for a while, so no need to rush it. I couldn't add a condition like "Don't talk about the dungeon to other people" without the slaver conducting the change figuring out our secrets, after all. I feel like that condition would be pretty important to have, efficiency wise. I could ask Haku to do the deed, but I'm actually terrified of owing her favors.

“Actually, why do I know more about slaves when you're the one who has two of them, Keima? Didn't you have all this explained to you when buying Ichika?”

“...Uh, well. I figure that's because you're actually a pervert on the inside and did a lot of research on how to get sex slaves.”

“No! No way! That's definitely not true, no. I was just thinking that an S-Rank adventurer should know these kinds of things, like, it's just common knowledge, it's stuff everyone should know, alright?” *Yeah, judging by that panic, I am right on the money.*

“Don't worry, I won't tell Neruneh about this.”

“...Strange. I haven't done anything wrong, but I feel like I should thank you for some reason. Thank you.”

Still, there sure is a lot more to slaves than I first thought... I glanced at Niku. Rokuko was hugging her while patting her ears and fluffy tail. Roppe and Emmymephy were watching on with a smile. Hmm... I feel like I remember Ichika saying something about beastkin tails being equivalent to human boobs. In other words, I am witnessing an extremely yuri scene right now.

I made eye contact with Niku. Her expression was flat, but I knew her well enough to see the conflict in her eyes. She wasn't sure what she should do.

Well... Skinship is an important part of friendship. I prayed for her success in

battle.

“Keima,” asked Wataru, interrupting my thoughts. “Is your tamed monster going to be okay without you feeding it?”

“Huh...? Oh, that thing.” For a second I’d had no idea what Wataru was referencing, but then I remembered I had told him the Jelly holding the sign deep in the dungeon was a monster I had tamed. “The Jelly, right. Don’t worry, I got someone else to feed it for me while I’m gone.”

“...Huh? But it’s as deep into the dungeon as you can go.”

“So what?”

“Er. Is that someone a super skilled adventurer? Is anyone that skilled still in Goren?”

“It’s someone you know, Wataru. I can always count on Narikin to help me out in a pinch.”

“Uh...” *What? It’s Narikin, the mysterious adventurer. Why do you look so confused, Wataru?*

“Heeey, we’ve got some monsters out front. They’re small fries. What’re we gonna do? Go hunt them?” asked Gozou, who was keeping watch beside the driver. Wataru hopped to the front of the wagon with a single step. Seemed that he had finished his questioning.

“Yep, those sure are small fries. I’ll go hunt them to keep the roads safe, anyway. We can use the opportunity to take a toilet break.”

“I-I’ll go,” said Niku.

“Oh. Bye bye, Niku. Let’s continue this later.”

“I think I’m gonna go too, then. Gozou! Stop the cart,” yelled Roppe.

Everyone was completely on board with stopping for a toilet break despite there being monsters. *They’re pretty chill about all this. Must be some really weak monsters like Goblins or something.*

“They’re just Orcs, Keima. Five of them. About as small fry as you can get.” Wataru was being pretty casual about it, but were orcs really small fries?

Maybe they were to Heroes.

“This is the first time I’m seeing Orcs. How strong are they?”

“In terms of extermination quest difficulty, they’re a bit beneath Iron Golems. A party of newbie adventurers will always wanna run from them, but I wouldn’t lose even if a hundred of them came at me at once. I can beat Dragons, after all.”

“Yeah, I guess they are small fries compared to Dragons.” Niku could take them all on herself if they were a little weaker than Iron Golems. Though we’d probably have to leave it to Wataru if there were a hundred of them.

“The royal will decrees that I shall go as well. I could never sit still while my cute little Kuro risks herself outside!”

“...Ah, Princess Mephy, please stay seated.”

“But why?! I say, I can fight just as well as any of you!”

She may have been a body double, but we still couldn’t let an imperial princess fight on the front lines. I could understand Wataru’s point. Heck, I could agree with him.

“Okay, let’s go get this over with.”

“Alright. Kuro, you can handle this, yeah?”

“Yes.”

“Heck yeah! Orc meat’s back on the menu, my dudes. Let’s do this thing!”
Wait, Ichika, you eat orcs...? Pig-faced or not, they’re bipedal humanoids, y’know? Wait, now that I think about it, I ate Red Minotaur meat that Igni cooked for me. That stuff tasted great.

“Orc meat tastes great, Keima. It’s like pork.”

“Yeah dude, it’s even better than boar meat.”

Hmm... Yeah, now I’m a little hungry too. Let’s get this hunt done.

Incidentally, Niku and Wataru knocked it out of the park so hard there wasn’t anything for me to do. Nothing tastier than cooked Orc meat I didn’t have to work to get. *Though, to be fair, I guarded our back from any ambushes. None*

came, but I did! It's true.

* * *

With all that happening, we reached the next city after Tsia, known as Mikan. It wasn't as big as Tsia, but it was still a sizable city surrounded by a towering wall. It was also surrounded by farms, and one could see sheep and shepherds dotting the fields.

"That was a long road... I thought I'd be able to sleep in the carriage, but too much stuff kept happening."

"There are a lot of monsters that show up on these roads. I thought there might be some bandits, but nothing that interesting showed up this time." Apparently, when you had a carriage with a noble crest emblazoned onto it, only bandits very confident in their skills would dare attack. That was understandable, since not many people wanted to be on the bad side of nobles.

"Too bad. I thought we might be able to bait them out by taking a single carriage and having no guards following behind."

"Wait, was that part of your plan?"

"Bandits are good prey. You get money whether you kill them or capture them. You won't find easier money around these parts." *Man, Wataru sure has adjusted to this world's way of life. Would definitely be hard to go back to Japan with that kind of mindset.*

"By the way, we sure slept on the road a lot, huh? I thought there'd normally be a bunch of smaller towns for us to stay in. Like farm town inns, or something."

Gozou took it upon himself to answer my question. "Farm town inns? Those exist, but yer only gonna find 'em in places without so many damn monsters. They'd be run over in a day out here."

"...What about all the towns close to Tsia?"

"Tsia's frontier land. Ye could say it's standin' on the line between society and nature. Not to mention, with so many towns with inns this close there'd be less guard quests, and a lotta adventurers put outta decent work." *Guess that's one*

way of looking at it.

Personally, the fact it was hard to sleep outside and we had to keep getting up for night watch made me regret ever going on this journey. Yeah... Wait. Aren't I technically hiring Wataru as a guard? I could probably have just left all of that to him and slept more... Ehhhh... Well, whatever. At least I got to hear some cool stuff from the driver. Like how he feeds the horses on nearby grass, and when there's a faction war among carriage drivers over whether they should use {Call Fodder} to make some or {Grow Weed} to grow some feed when there isn't any grass. There was also the stuff about how any animal used to pull carriages can be called horses, probably due to them initially being called horse-drawn carriages. Yeah, I lied, all of that was boring and not cool at all.

"C'mon, dudes, let's get our sweet asses to that city. I'm dying of hunger over here."

"Heh, save all the food begging fer Keima, Ichika. Anyway, we should use the noble's gate if we wanna get in fast. Guess we'll be fine using it since we're gonna be B-Rankers soon, eh, Roppe?"

"Oh, but that gate has a higher entry fee," noted Wataru. "That fee won't be covered by most normal quests, so I usually stick to using the commoner's gate."

"...Being able to choose is what makes being a noble adventurer so great. Ye can even leave at night, yeah?"

In the end, Ichika was so hungry that we went through the noble's gate for speed purposes. The search was over in no time, and our entry to the city was as smooth as Maiodore said it would be.

Within Mikan's walls, it felt a lot more like a quiet farming town than Tsia. The buildings and walls themselves weren't that different, but there was more space between them. There were also so fewer people that it made me question if this really was closer to the capital. Though there were still plenty of people.

"Livestock needs a fair amount of space, which means there's less room for people. Tsia has a higher population than Mikan thanks to that. Also, I heard a lot more people used to live here when the parchment industry was in full

swing, but the demand for parchment plummeted when the Hero Workshop developed paper. Most of the craftsmen who lived here moved elsewhere, too. Nowadays the demand for it can be met without using Restoration to make more.” *Interesting. That explains where there’s a lot of land but not so many people. Also, holy shit, peeling off sheep skin to make parchment then using Restoration magic to heal their skin and peel it off again is actual torture. This world was not kind to sheep.*

“Let’s go to the Adventurer’s Guild first. Driver, you know where to go.”

The carriage set off, and we could see food stands here and there.

“Oh lookie, some salad roll stands. That’s a Mikan classic.”

“Salad rolls? What’re they like?”

“They bake a thin slice of wheat flour, then roll up sliced veggies and lamb in it.” *That sounds simple but delicious. That sounds like a spring roll, or I guess more like a vegetable crepe? Though wait, I’ve heard those are sometimes called shish kebabs. This must be the word of Ishidaka the Hero.*

“I want to try some,” said Rokuko. “Go buy me some, Keima! I’ll pay! I really want to try some lamb skewers too.”

“The royal will decrees that you take my money and buy some for me as well. Oh, though I would like just the salad rolls.”

“Dudes, I got this. Always count on Ichika when you need to buy some grub.”

“I want to try lamb skewers,” said Niku.

“Mind grabbing me some too? Lamb’s good with beer. Oh, and Kuro, you’ll need to eat vegetables if you want to grow.”

All the girls lightened up over the prospect of eating lamb. *Are you really fine with having standards like that, girls?*

“...Yeah, yeah, you can all have some, but later. We’ve gotta go to the guild first. Dropping by a humble food stand in a crest emblazoned carriage might cause some problems.” Bonodore had made the importance of maintaining a noble image while using the carriage clear.

Also, I wanted to get to our inn as soon as possible. I had spent four nights

sleeping outside... The girls slept inside the carriage while we guys made tents outside. I was about ready to sleep in an actual room again. I was in the same tent as Wataru, Gozou, and the driver, which meant there hadn't been enough space to bust out my futon. The sleeping bags we had were from the dungeon and thus high quality Japanese goods, but that didn't help when I got woken up for the night watch. *Sheesh, I'm gonna use my futon tonight if it kills me. Also, with Niku as my dakimakura.*

"Wataru, let's stay in this city for about two days. I want to catch up on my sleep."

"Don't worry, that's the plan. We gotta stock up on supplies." *Perfect. I won't be leaving my inn room at all tomorrow, then.*

Incidentally, Wataru would be paying for Emmymephy's room. He was covering all her costs on the way to the capital. *Wait... Hold on a second. If we're going to the capital because Haku ordered us to, why do any of us have to pay to travel there at all?*

"...Being capable of traveling to the capital on your own is an important duty of nobles, apparently."

"Oh, it's that kind of political thing." *I guess any adventurer strong enough to be a noble won't have need to pay for guards or anything. It costs less from them to go to the noble. Doubly so for battle hardened warriors that took down a Dragon like us.*

Anyway, it wasn't long before we reached the Adventurer's Guild. It was actually pretty busy.

"A lot of adventurers come here for extermination quests, since there's always a lot of monsters going after the livestock."

"Ahhh, I can see that."

"We'll go store the carriage with them. You can go report that we've arrived. Oh, and here's the packages I took a quest to deliver."

"Roger. And... Wait. Where's Rokuko and Ichika? Also, Princess Mephy." They had all vanished without me noticing. For a second I wondered if they had gotten lost, but then I realized that was pretty unlikely since we had all arrived

here by carriage together.

“They saw a stand nearby and went off to buy food. They should be back soon.”

“...Eh, I guess they’ll be fine with Ichika around. Alright, Niku, help me carry the stuff.”

“Okay.”

I took the packages from Wataru and went into the guild with Niku. The moment we were inside, I felt people giving us appraising looks.

“Uhhh, where’s the counter for delivery quests? I’ve got some packages.”

“Oh, over here. Welcome to Mikan’s Adventurer Guild.” A receptionist-looking lady guided us to the counter without issue.

“Alright, this and this. Have a look.”

“Okay. Let’s se— Ah?! Um, ah, ummm, Wata— Mmm, nmm. These are indeed the packages. Shall I equally distribute the reward to all those who participated?”

“Yeah, sure.” She faltered kind of hard there for a second, but we got the delivery over and done with in no time at all. At which point Wataru entered the guild. A hush fell over the room.

“Huh? Wow, looks like you’re fine.”

“Whaddaya mean by that? Did you think I’d start a fight delivering these or something?”

“Oh, no. It’s just that when I first went to this guy, a bunch of people ganged up on me saying they’d help me with questing for a fee. I really think it’s because we Japanese people kinda have baby faces compared to rough and tough adventurers here. Isn’t that right, Bor?”

“I-I, er, a-apologize for my rudeness, a-and not realizing that you were a Hero.” The muscular adventurer that Wataru had called out to averted his gaze awkwardly. It seemed he had tried to scam an easy target only to realize it was an S-Rank adventurer. *He must have been a real jerk for kindly ol’ Wataru to drag him through the mud like this.*

“If he had tried that again he’d already be realizing his mistake. I’m guessing he learned not to mess with black-haired adventurers? Either way, thanks to you I finished my quest without getting hassled.”

“Good to hear. You’re lucky you didn’t go after him, Bor. I’ve fought this guy several times now and haven’t won a single time.”

“Wha?! He’s stronger than a Hero?!” *I mean, we’ve fought in rigged gambling matches and duels with handicaps, but never for real. He’s not calling me strong in that way.*

“Not to mention, these two challenged a Flame Dragon and managed to capture it without getting a scratch on them.”

“He brought a kid with him to fight a disaster class A-Rank monster?!” *He’s referring to our beer plot with Igni before she went crazy. Although true, that was all a farce we could only pull off thanks to the Flame Dragon being Ittetsu’s daughter, so...*

“Hey, Wataru, quit it. You know I don’t like this kind of attention.”

“Nothing wrong with a change of pace. Not like you ever leave your home base anyway.” Judging by the fact he wasn’t using my name or saying the name Goren, I could tell Wataru was being considerate while having his fun. And Niku seemed happy with the attention I was getting, too. Her tail was swinging.

“...By the way, this little girl’s waaay stronger than me.”

“M-Master?”

“A loli stronger than the guy who’s stronger than the Hero?”

I pushed Niku forward a bit. Looking worried, she pointed at Wataru.

“Um... H-He’s stronger than me.”

“A Hero that’s stronger than the loli who’s stronger than the guy who’s stronger than a Hero!” *These guys sure have a good sense of humor.*

“Ahaha, now that it’s looped, who knows who’s strongest anymore?” Wataru laughed, in a good mood.

“Heh. Yeah, sorry about all this. My companion sure gave you a hard time.

Lemme buy you a drink.”

“Oh? Did you hear that, Bor? My pal’s gonna buy you a drink.”

“R-Right, thank you! I’ll appreciate every drop!” The adventurer swung his head down in a bow. I slid a large silver (worth ten coppers) over the Guild’s built-in bar and ordered a drink for the guy. *Anyway, with that out of the way... Uh... What were we doing again?*

“While we’re here, let’s see what delivery quests we can take to our next destination. Though we’ll have to take them the day after tomorrow when we leave.”

“Huh? Why bother with that?”

“It’s better than taking the packages to the inn room and risk losing them before we leave. And if someone else wants to take them, that’s no real sweat off our backs. There’s pretty much no reason for us to take the quests now.” *Good point. Not like any of us are dying for money... except Wataru and his debt, I guess.*

Anyway, I wonder what kind of quests they have here? I took a look at the billboard. Most of the good quests were gone thanks to the morning rush, but I could still learn the general trends from the ones that were left.

Hmm... There sure are a lot of extermination quests here. I don’t see many gathering quests, and most of these quests are D-Rank or above. The only ones that are E-Rank or below are stuff inside of town.

“Tsia has herb gathering quests for beginners, but since this city is surrounded by grassy plains for livestock, quests like that would make adventurers travel all the way to the forest. That’s dangerous enough that only once people hit C-Rank and get some experience do they start taking forest quests. Adventurers starting out here either go all the way to Tsia or stick to quests inside the city,” explained Wataru. Apparently there used to be towns near here, but once Tsia broke new ground, all the people either moved there or moved into Mikan, leaving their old homes to vanish.

While we talked, the receptionist came over to us holding a quest slip.

“U-Um, S-Sir Wataru. We would be honored if you would grace us by

accepting this quest.”

“Oh, what kind of quest is it? Hopefully it’s one I can finish in a day.” Wataru took the slip and looked over it. “An extermination quest, huh? Shouldn’t be too hard. Keima, want to come with?”

“Nah, I’m gonna be sleeping in my room. You can bring anyone who does want to go.”

Incidentally, I looked at the quest and saw that it was an extermination quest for an Elk Bear. Apparently those were bears with elk horns growing out of their heads. The Elk Bear in question was larger than a normal one, and several C-Rankers had already failed to take it down. The reward was one gold coin. That sounded like a lot considering it was equivalent to one million yen, but it would drop down fast as you split it with every party member that pitched in to help.

“Actually, you should go on your own. I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“Aww. C’mon, let’s go together. It’d be boring if I went alone.”

“No thanks. I told you I wanted to catch up on my sleep, didn’t I?”

Wataru frowned, puffing out a cheek for some reason.

“Anyway, I’m going to the inn. Got any recommendations?”

“There’s a good one called the Ripened Fruit nearby. You’ll be fine there. Oh, and sure, I’ll take the quest. I’ll be back with some partners later.”

“U-Understood! Thank you very much!”

He took the quest anyway. Truly a Hero, always willing to take a quest to help other people.

We left the guild with the head-bobbing receptionist seeing us off. The second we were out, we met up with the Rokuko squad, all carrying food.

“You sure took your time in there. Oh, want a salad roll? I have lamb skewers too, you know, like sheep.”

“...Yeah, sure. But don’t wander around so much. We’re new here and there’s a lot we don’t know.”

“I’m fine, Ichika and Roppe are here with me. This isn’t their first time here.”

“I say, it’s my second time being here!” said Emmymephy while biting on a salad roll, but Rokuko just said “Sure, sure” while wiping off meat juice from her cheek. *Yeah, I guess Team Bacchus are pretty experienced, and Ichika was a C-Rank adventurer before being enslaved. They should be fine as bodyguards slash guides in more peaceful towns like this.*

“I’m going to go on an Elk Bear quest tomorrow, anyone want to come? Keima’s ducking out this time.”

“Count me out. I gotta start chugging beer.”

“Same. I’ll be sticking with Gozou. We can meet up afterward.”

“Awww. I’ll be the only one from Team Bacchus going, then.” Wataru slumped over after both Gozou and Roppe had turned him down in quick succession.

“Sh-Shall I go, then? I-I believe I would like to!” Emmymephy rose a hand and jumped in place to make her position known.

“Err, I appreciate the thought, but... Actually, alright. Sure. Feel free to join me, Princess Mephy.” *Wait, you’re really gonna let Emmymephy go? That seems kind of bad. But, well... I guess it’s better than leaving her alone and risking whatever comes from that?*

“I want to keep looking around town,” said Rokuko. “Keima, want to join me?”

“Nah, I’m gonna sleep in the inn. Niku’s gonna be my dakimakura too, so bring Ichika if you go looking around.”

“Grr...”

In conclusion, none of my party were going with Wata—

“Okay, Niku, I’ll be Keima’s dakimakura instead. You go help with the Elk Bear quest,” Rokuko said.

“...Master.” Niku looked at me. *Yeah, I can see in her eyes that she wants to go hunting. Her dog girl hunter instincts must be aching.*

“Ahhh... Niku, you can go hunting if you want to. May as well take this opportunity to learn from a Hero.”

“Ah! Okay. I’ll go, then.”

“Alrighty, dudes, I’ll go cook us some dinner with the driver then.”

Thus was the schedule of my party settled. Niku must have really wanted to go hunting. Her tail was wagging like crazy. Though it drooped whenever she looked my way. *Don’t worry, I’m not mad. Go and have your fun.*

“Okay, that means I’ll be your dakimakura tomorrow, Keima!”

“...Ehhh, actually, don’t worry about it. I don’t need a dakimakura. You can go with Ichika and the others if you want to look around town.”

“Um, well. That was just an excuse I made up to go on a date with you, I don’t actually want to see it that much. So, um, d-dakimakura! Let’s go with the dakimakura plan!” said Rokuko with her cheeks bright red. *Yeaaaaah, Haku’s going to kill me once we reach the capital.*



“Hey, Wataru. What are you grinning about?”

“Oh, nothing. I was just thinking about how I’ll need to report this to Haku.”

“You want me to die, is that how it is?! Monster!”

“Don’t worry. You won’t die, she’ll just have more work for you to do.”

I sure hope I just have more work to do. I don’t want my new job to be getting my head removed from my neck and my torso cut in two.

“Wait, ye really haven’t married Rokuko yet, Keima? Ye gotta get on that already.”

“Yeah? Well what about you and Roppe, huh? Huh, Gozou? What, nothing to say now?”

“Ahhh, er, well, ye know. There’s timing for these things. Right.”

Gozou tried to tease me, so I countered with lethal force. “No better time than when you both turn B-Rank if you ask me. You guys want a Beddhist wedding, right?”

“Keima. You and I can get married whenever we want, remember? Just say the word when you think the timing’s right.”

“...I’ll think about it.” Sadly, I was caught in the crossfire of my own lethal blow, thereby killing two bachelors with one punch.

Anyway, Rokuko actually came to my room the next day, and after some intense mental debate I decided I really couldn’t risk embracing her as a dakimakura. We were pretty far from Tsia, but the Laverio Empire was built on dungeons. Every big city in the entire Empire had a dungeon nearby. In other words, Mikan too was the territory of another dungeon. I couldn’t act carelessly. Anything I did would be leaked straight to Haku.

Though, when she asked if she could stay in my room even without being my dakimakura, I went ahead and said sure. *Surely there’s nothing interesting about being in the same room as me while I’m sleeping, though...* (I thought with a thousand yard stare).

* * *

Alright. Having slept an entire day and caught up on my rest, it was time to leave Mikan. I honestly could have used some more sleep, but given that I had finally been able to use my futon and sleep with Niku as my dakimakura (once she got back from hunting Elk Bears), I couldn't complain. It had been like sleeping at home again, if only for a single night.

Incidentally, on that second night we had Elk Bear stew. *Man, fresh bear meat sure does have a wild taste! And since we sold the leftover meat to the guild, we got some pretty pennies for it too.*

"By the way, shouldn't we have greeted the local archduke or something?"

"Nah," replied Wataru. "I don't know the archduke here well enough for that."

According to him, just using the noble's entrance and dropping by the guild was enough for the archduke to have received a report of our arrival. The fact he didn't approach us himself meant he didn't particularly care to see us. On top of that, if we had gone to see him without being summoned, it would have been like openly saying we were of lower status than him, which would make him look down on us as weak. Especially considering the Tsia family was involved thanks to the Tsia family crest on our carriage. *Yeah, to sum all that up: Nobles are a pain to deal with.*

"But hey, Wataru. You're actually a big deal Hero, huh?"

"Yes? What'd you think I was?"

"A Hero, but y'know, not a big deal."

"All Heroes are big deals."

And now I know how true that is. Wataru at least never felt like anyone that special to me. He's in tune with the common folk, or something?

"To be honest, only people in Goren stay casual with me once they learn I'm a Hero."

"What, Wataru, you want us to be uber polite? My sincerest apologies, oh honorable Hero."

"Pff." Wataru laughed. *What're you grinning about, huh?*

“My bad, sorry. It just sounded so bizarre to hear you say that.”

“Rude. I know how to be polite to visitors.”

“Now that you mention it, I guess that’s true...? Well, one of your good points is knowing the right ways to deal with the right people.”

“Heck yeah, time to brag about a great Hero praising me. Heeey, Rokuko. Wataru gave me a compliment. Pretty awesome, huh?”

“Oh? That’s nice. What for?” Rokuko casually played along with our jokes.

“See? Your compliments mean nothing to me or anything. Nothing.”

“That’s true for Goren people, anyway.” Wataru gave an amused smile.

“Anyway, make sure you’re not forgetting anything. The next town is three days away. This time we’re going down a safe route, so we’ll be dropping by the inns you wanted so much.”

“Oh, so no more camping outside, huh...? Nice. But wait... What do you mean ‘this time’ we’re going down a safe route?”

Wataru ignored my question. “Has anyone seen the driver, by the way?”

“Wataru. Bud. Pal. Are you telling me there was a route to Mikan that had inns?”

“Ahaha, whatever are you talking about?”

After executing some interrogation techniques, I learned that the forest we had been traveling alongside the entire time was called Hell’s Forest. The road by it was the shortest route, but there was another route through the mountains that was much more safe. It would have taken twice as long, but there were inns along the way.

So that’s why Orcs that can just barely be beaten by a C-Rank party showed up along the way! I knew that was strange! You’ve got balls acting out of character and tricking me like that, Wataru!

Side Chapter — Elk Bear Extermination Quest

Elk Bears. As their name implied, they were bears with elk antlers. Wataru, being from Japan, was reminded of jackalopes—squirrels and rabbits with antlers. For a second he wondered if their horns grew out and were replaced once a year just like actual elk horns, but soon decided it didn't matter and began his journey to the forest.

With him were his two companions on this quest: Niku Kuroinu and Emmymephy Laverio.

Emmymephy was, to be honest, on the level of a D-Rank adventurer at best. Not even her enthusiasm was enough to stop her from being dead weight and nothing more. However, it was Wataru's job to protect her, and he could do that better with her nearby than by leaving her alone in town. At most he was hoping she would lighten their spirits during the quest.

Niku looked like a defenseless little girl, but she had the speed and dexterity of a beastkin, not to mention absurd strength nobody could predict from looking at her. It would be fair to say that she was perfect, outside of the stigma her slave name carried. She would be providing significant firepower to the part.

"Okay, how should we go about hunting for the Elk Bear? Whoever finds it first can just kill it," said Wataru casually, but Emmymephy shook her head.

"Oh no no, Sir Wataru. Kuro and I have no intention of sparring with an Elk Bear by our lonesome. I say, isn't that right, dear Kuro?"

"Hm? I don't think so. With hunting it's first come, first served."

"Now, now, no need to push yourself, Kuro. Elk Bears are quite strong, and if I can't beat them, a cute little girl such as yourself has no hope in the world. I say, we should just leave the hunting to Sir Wataru and focus on support."

Emmymephy shook her head with exasperation as Niku tilted her head.

Surprisingly enough, Emmymephy understood her own strength and had no

delusions about what she could and couldn't do. However, that didn't mean she understood Niku's strength.

"Okay. Let's stick together for now."

"Oh! Kuro, I say, could you sniff them out for us? I hear beastkin have quite the strong noses!"

"No, I don't know what they smell like."

"Drat! What a shame."

"Wait..." said Wataru. "That means you could if you knew what it smelled like, right? Hmm... Oh! Kuro, could you go toward the nearest animal you smell? I'm sure you can distinguish animal smells."

Niku nodded, then guided the other two through the forest. She sometimes sniffed the air before making sudden turns or continuing straight onward. Eventually they found her target: an Orc, not an Elk Boar. Wataru cleanly cut its head off, and Niku sliced off its tail to give to the guild for money.

"An Orc, huh."

"I say, even finding an Orc in this forest is quite impressive! I shall cut off proof from the next monster we find." Emmymephy patted Niku's head. Niku looked at Wataru with a blank expression.

"...Should we bait the bear with the scent of blood?"

"Oh, there's an idea. Elk Bears are omnivores, and this one's already learned the taste of human flesh."

"Wait, they eat humans? I say, have people died?"

"Almost. Someone had their arm ripped off in a fight. Their life as an adventurer would be over if they didn't have strong connections to the church... Oh, I guess Keima is the pope of the Beddhist Church, so maybe he can use some high level Restoration magic?" asked Wataru, which reminded Niku that Keima had previously made Golem limbs to replace lost limbs. But that was a secret, so she decided not to mention it.

"Master can use {Healing}, but I don't know how much he can heal with it."

“I’ll have to ask Keima when we get back, then. Let’s pretend he’ll give an honest answer.”

They cut their conversation short. There were large claw marks in a tree near where they had taken down the Orc. The Elk Bear was marking its territory. The party concluded that they were one step away from entering said territory, and so decided to leave the Orc corpse be and wait nearby.

After some waiting, a Great Boar about two meters long came sniffing out of the bushing, having apparently been attracted by the smell.

“Oh, looks like our bait caught the wrong fish. Let’s get him out of here.”

“Wait, I shall hunt this one! The royal will decrees that you preserve your strength, Sir Wataru. Now! Come at me, foul Great Boar!” Emmymephy emerged in front of the Great Boar and challenged it, considering now to be the time to show her worth. Both Niku and Wataru shook their heads, knowing she should have attacked it with the element of surprise, but given her confidence they decided to just watch on. Wataru could easily save her if things got bad, so as far as he was concerned this was a good opportunity for her to learn.

The Great Boar, falling for the taunt, charged at Emmymephy. She reacted immediately by blasting out magic.

“...■■■, ■■■■■■■■■■— {Stone Pyre}!”

With a thunk, a slanted stone spike sprouted from the ground, facing the charging boar. This was a spell she had been taught to fend off charging thugs if she were ever attacked in the street.

The Great Boar, unable to stop its charge, was pierced head-on by the spike—however, the ten centimeter wide spike could not withstand the weight of the Great Boar’s body and snapped, allowing the charge to continue.

“I say...?” Emmymephy was stunned. The Great Boar was right in front of her eyes. *It’s going to crush me*, she thought, moments before the boar was suddenly blasted away from the side.

“There we go. Nice work, Princess Mephy.” Wataru had forcibly changed the direction of its charge by hitting it from the side.

“Th-Thank you, Sir Wataru.” Emmymephy sighed in relief. Then, she tilted her head. “Sir Wataru, should {Stone Pyres} break so easily?”

“Hm? I dunno. It’s not a spell I know, so... Maybe that boar was just too big of a monster?”

“Hmm. Well, never mind, then.” Emmymephy decided not to think too hard about it since all was well.

Putting that aside, Niku retrieved the boar’s nose, their second prize of the day. It was a bit damaged from the spike, but well, it wasn’t anything too bad.

“This is a lot of meat... We should eat it.”

“Yeah, I’ll grab it to bring back with us. Whatever we don’t eat, we can sell.”

Wataru stuck the Great Boar into {Storage}. The sheer amount of the meat filled his {Storage} to the brim. He had to wonder if he would be able to carry the Orc and the Elk Bear they were hunting back. He had already confirmed that Niku and Emmymephy had {Storage} of their own, but if they hunted a fourth thing they might need to come back to get all the meat.

“Nnn. I smell something coming,” said Niku while sniffing the air.

“Oh, good. Seems to be the Elk Bear we’re hunting.”

This time the monster they were actually looking for arrived. It was a bear with elk antlers standing on both feet, reaching up to a towering three meters. Considering that a normal Elk Bear was anywhere from one and a half meters to two meters, this one was big enough to be called an entirely different species.

“I-I say, it’s enormous!”

“The receptionist did say it was bigger than normal ones. Can’t say I’m too surprised. I’ll take care of th— Ah.”

Before Wataru could ready his sword, Niku had leapt into the air. She kicked off a tree and raced up the Elk Bear’s body before sliding her Golem Knife out of its hip sheath and stabbing it through its neck. The rapidly vibrating Golem Knife ripped right through its hardened pelt and throat muscles, rendering it unable to breathe. She then gave the knife a push, lopping the bear’s head right off.

Her work was so fast that the Elk Bear, which had considered all three of

them prey to be easily devoured, couldn't even react. Its head was off before it could understand what was happening. In the end it collapsed with a crash onto the rotten leaves scattered across the forest ground, having not even been given the opportunity to let out a blood-soaked roar.

"...Kuro?! I say, what are you doing?!"

"I told you. First come, first served." Niku, covered in blood that had sprayed from the bear's neck, stood beside the prone bear and tilted her head.

"Ahaha, now that was new. Never seen a surprise attack from the front before."

"I was the only one who hadn't done anything yet. It was a good opportunity," explained Niku while Wataru cast {Purification} on her. She stashed the Elk Bear's corpse into her {Storage} as if nothing had happened—and since the Elk Bear hadn't been able to react, it was fair to say that nothing really had happened. Sadly, the head didn't quite seem to fit.

"We can just bring that back with us. Okay, Princess Mephy, could I ask you to put the Orc into your {Storage}?"

"Um, ah, certainly." Emmymephy put the Orc's corpse into {Storage}.

And so, the Elk Bear quest was completed with little fanfare.

"...The bear meat was weak," observed Niku.

"O-Oh yes, I forgot that you were among the brave warriors that defeated the Dragon, Kuro... I knew that you were strong, but I say, not this strong."

"Wait, you didn't see her fight on the way here? But man... You really are more of an assassin than a warrior, huh, Kuro? I didn't think you could take out a bear in one shot with a knife, even with a blade that long. Consider me impressed."

As an irrelevant aside, when they sold the Elk Bear corpse to the guild, Wataru said "It was actually this girl that killed it. And in one blow, too." and everyone yelled out "Of course she did! She's the loli that's stronger than the guy who's stronger than a Hero!" in reply.

Chapter 2

We were on our way to the second inn we would be staying at after leaving Mikan. The area was rocky, leaving shadows everywhere and making it harder to progress, but as an important city road it was safer than the one we had traveled along last time.

...That inn we stayed at last night was pretty good. We each got our own room, and man is having a room better than sleeping in a tent outside. There was no point in repeatedly crying over spilled milk, but I really wished that Wataru would have discussed the routes with me ahead of time. Curse you, Wataru. You better not say you picked the short route just because you wanted to camp outside.

We stopped for a toilet break. There was no better place considering all the shade and the lack of monsters. Soon our break turned into us stopping entirely for lunch.

“Whew...”

Humans, as living creatures, all were bound by the rules of nature. When it called, we had to answer, and I was no exception. Rokuko, as a dungeon core, was an exception.

“I say, Keima, do you have a mo— Oh, excuse me.”

“.....”

Emmymephy turned around... or at least, I thought she would, but in reality all she did was take a few steps back. “I will wait here. Tell me when you are finished.”

“.....Uh, it’s kinda hard to do this when you’re watching. And by hard I mean I just don’t want to do it at all.”

“Oh my. You’re quite the sensitive type.”

I went ahead and zipped up. Since we were eating lunch here, I had plenty of

time to pee later.

“So, Princess Mephy. What did you want to talk to me about?”

“Ah, well, nothing in particular. I just felt that we hadn’t talked much at all during this journey. It felt silly to come all this way to see you and then not talk, so here I am.” *I see. Wait... What?*

“You came here to see me?”

“Oh, did I not say? You are in the running to be engaged to me. I discussed the matter with a minister, since I wanted to know what kind of person you are. There, they suggested that I pretend to be my body double and accompany Wataru on his journey to you. Indeed! I am no body double, I am the princess herself!”

...Man, she sure just dropped a lot of shocking revelations. I forced a grin onto my face and played dumb. “Sorry, what was that? I couldn’t hear you.”

“I am the real princess pretending to be my body double, and you are one potential suitor of mine.”

“...Dang, my ears just aren’t working today.”

“I am the real princess pretending to be my body double, and you are one potential suitor of mine.”

“Sorry! Couldn’t hear you!”

“I say, it’s obvious you are lying.”

“Er, sorry, I was just joking around. Man, what a surprise.”

“.....”

I’d tried my hardest to pretend I hadn’t heard her. But Emmymephy sure was a stubborn one.

“.....”

“Please don’t glare at me so hard, Princess Mephy.”

“I say, your avoidance went too far there. And by saying ‘I was just joking around,’ you have confirmed you heard me.” *Crap! I dug my own grave!*

“...Okay, okay. Besides you being the real princess, what’s all this about an engagement?”

“Not even I understand it fully, to be honest.”

Why am I in the running to be engaged to her? Yeah, that’s a question with only one answer: Haku’s meddling.

“In any case, I decided it would be best to judge you with my own eyes and ears. In the past I have summoned famous adventurers to engage in lively conversation with them.”

“Interesting. So you’re traveling around and meeting your potential partners one by one?”

“Not one by one, all at once. The other candidates are Sir Wataru and Gozou.”
Come again?

“...Wataru I can understand, but why Gozou?”

“Well, my father publicly declared that he would not hand me over to any weak excuse for a man, and then followed that up by saying any suitor would have to defeat a Dragon first. Which brings us to now, with living legends having defeated a Dragon.”

“Me, Gozou, and Wataru. So all three of us are in the running for being engaged to you, huh?”

“Indeed! Oh, and I say, keep this a secret from the two of them.”

“Why did you tell me, then?”

“I know you have Rokuko, Keima. If you end up engaged to me, I would be stealing you away from my dear friend Rokuko. I would not like that at all.”

“R-Right. Makes sense?”

“Gozou and Roppe seem close as well, and it seems that even Sir Wataru has fallen for a woman in Goren. In short, all of you are not ideal partners for me to marry.”

“...Okay, you lost me again.”

“I want to discuss this with everyone! And so I first broke the news to you, the

most reliable-looking of the three!”

“Honestly, I don’t like how you looked at me and thought ‘Yes, this guy is someone I can rely on.’”

“Judging by how you three interact, you seem to be something of a leader to them.”

“Ahhh... That’s a misunderstanding. Wataru’s the top dog here.”

“I seem to recall that Sir Wataru is in the middle of repaying a two-thousand-three-hundred gold debt to you, Keima. He is literally indebted to you right now.” *Ngh! That’s completely true!*

“...What do we do, then?”

“That is what I’m here to talk about.”

“Oh, my bad, I slipped up there. What do you want to do, Princess Mephy?”

“Me?” asked Emmymephy before falling into thought. After a pause, she continued. “I would like to marry none of you, so that I may remain friends with Rokuko, Roppe, Kuro, and Ichika. I feel there is still some distance between us, but such is the fate of an imperial princess. Some gaps in status can be overcome. Except by Rokuko, but I truly do not understand how she manages it.”

Emmymephy tilted her head in confusion, but if Haku wasn’t saying anything about it then it wasn’t my place to either. *I’ll just keep quiet about it.*

“Uhhh. In that case, turn us all down. You can just keep your prospects open for the future.”

“Would that be the right thing to do?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“A solid point. At most, I would be at risk of never marrying in my prime.”

“You’ll just have to ask the emperor to let someone marry you before you’re too old for it. It’s not like he hates you or anything, right? He wants the best for you.” *It was the emperor who started all this about only giving his daughter to a man strong enough to beat a Dragon, after all.*

“Very well! I say, I shall discuss this with Father once we arrive at the imperial capital.”

“That would be wise.”

Emmymephy beamed a nice smile, her worries having been solved. *You’re welcome.*

“...By the way, should you have told me that you’re the actual princess?”

“It is quite alright. I now know you are not the type to be influenced by status. Such is the value of seeing things with your own eyes!” declared Emmymephy with a grin. “All this body double business is just so that archdukes and other town chiefs won’t be compelled to welcome us.”

I guess Wataru was hinting at this when he introduced her to me so I would notice this sooner. Yeah, he basically was saying “She’s the real thing, this is all liies” with his attitude.

“Incidentally, this also served the purpose of allowing Sir Wataru to be my only guard!”

“Man... You shouldn’t have. If you had a bunch more guards, we could’ve left night watch to them.”

“I say, camping outside with friends was fun! And let me assure you, had I brought with me my usual assortment of guards and maids, this journey would have been even more difficult for us all.”

“...How so, specifically?” I asked. Emmymephy grimaced, annoyed, while thinking over all the problems they gave her.

“The guards must be instructed before every move, they shout during the march, and they make a fuss every meal. Traveling takes twice as long thanks to so many of them being on foot, and the large number of them often precludes the use of an inn. They also ensure that we are forced into visitations with the archdukes of the regional capitals we visit. We have to participate in late evening dinners with local nobles, and although they serve delicious food, we are so busy performing greetings from beginning to end that there is no time to eat. But for those greetings I have to change into an elaborate dress, which needs to be new so I would have to order it ahead of time, and all manner of

such things leads to a packed schedule. Incidentally, for safety purposes I am not told my entire schedule, and as they inform me of what I must do it feels entirely like I am being dragged around everywhere through no volition of my own.”

...Yeah, that sounds like a pain. I can understand why she doesn't want to travel with her normal guards.

“I understand it is necessary, but it is certainly not something I want to deal with on a short trip like this. Which necessitated that I act as a body double... So? Do you see that my hand was forced?”

“Yeah, you really had no choice here. I feel you.”

“I say, it felt incredible to just wander off with friends and buy whatever food we wanted.”

“Yep, yep.” In other words, her acting as a body double was synonymous with her going incognito. She was incognito despite publicly declaring that she was herself, which was really a perfect combo.

“...That doesn't anger you?”

“Why would it?”

“...I say, that attitude is why I've taken a shine to you, Keima! Also, you are already being quite casual with me, but feel free to forget my status entirely and talk to me as Sir Wataru does.” Emmymephy seemed pretty happy for some reason. *Well, I'll consider being even less polite, somehow.*

“By the way, I still need to pee. Can you leave now?” I asked, since the conversation seemed to have come to a close.

“Oh, excuse me. I say, you are just as reliable as Sir Wataru said you were. I would not mind having you as my prime minister!”

“I will never, ever accept a position that requires as much work as that does.”

“Ahahaha!”

Good grief.

In any case, after seeing Emmymephy I finally got back to peeing.

Our lunch was shabu-shabu from a Great Boar that Emmymephy supposedly killed. Shabu-shabu was one recipe that Ishidaka the Hero, the God of Food, had spread through the world. *There was a lot of scum, but the meal itself tasted fantastic.*

* * *

Donsama was a river city, and the second large city we visited since leaving Tsia. We saw the long line of carriages waiting to be checked and thus elected to enter speedily through the gate for nobles, and inside we found a row of brick buildings just like you would find anywhere else. Brick buildings really were common all over the empire.

Also, unlike Mikan, Donsama had a population density equivalent to Tsia. It was apparently an important location for travel and transportation. There were roads branching off from the city in a Y shape, leading to Tsia, the imperial capital, and Pavella, respectively. Up until a tunnel had been drilled through Tsia Mountain, passing by here was the shortest route to Pavella when traveling safely.

“By the way, Wataru. Why is this called a river city?”

“There’s a river splitting it in two. There’s North Donsama and South Donsama, together forming Donsama. When combined, the city’s a little smaller than Tsia.”

“It’s split in two, huh? Neat.”

We had entered through the north gate to North Donsama, and would be leaving through South Donsama’s south gate to the imperial capital. There were ferries to take people across the river.

“Ferries...? They don’t have any bridges?”

“There are several reasons for that. The north and south aren’t on the greatest terms, the monsters in the river get in the way of construction, bridges would leave all the ferry owners out of work, they would get in the way of the river flow, and so on.” *Well, no problem. We can just use the ferries instead.*

“What’s different between the north and south sides of the city?”

“From my perspective, not much. But to the actual people who live here, everything.” To elaborate on just how bad their relationship was, when a southerner wanted to go to the north or a northerner wanted to go to the south, they’d have to tell a story shitting on the side they lived in before being allowed across. *What the hell?*

“Incidentally, there’s an Adventurer’s Guild building in both the north and south of town. Let’s drop by the northern one today.”

In any case, we were staying in town for two nights again. The plan was to spend one night in North Donsama, then one night in South Donsama before leaving for the imperial capital. *But I guess we have to drop by the Guild twice since there’s two in this town. Whatever, I’ll leave all the details to Wataru.*

“Hey, Ichika,” said Rokuko. “What’s good to eat here?”

“The grilled fish, duh. Gonna be real with ya, there’s not much else to eat here but fish from the river.”

“Perfect! Rokuko, Ichika, let us go acquire some at once!”

“Nooope. We’re getting the carriage to the Guild first.”

Ichika was the same as ever, but it looked like Rokuko and Mephy had both gotten pretty invested in food. I seemed to recall that Dungeon Cores didn’t need to eat, but I guess that ship sailed when she fell in love with melon rolls. *It’s more about entertainment for her than anything, anyway. Mephy seems to just like commoner food.*

Also, she didn’t join the conversation, but Niku was listening with a wagging tail. That was our girl, liking not only normal meat but fish as well. Though I guess distinguishing between “normal” meat and fish is kinda weird.

“Oh, this time we’re storing the carriage with the inn. Though we’re still going to the guild to make our quest deliveries and such.”

“Yep. Ye can take us on to the guild, Gasho.” That was the name of our driver. He and Gozou had become fast friends during the journey.

Anyway, the moment we arrived at the guild, Ichika, Rokuko, and Emmymephy left. *Sure, that’s fine. I kinda wanted them to help carry all the*

quest items, but no problem. Just buy some fish for us too, alright...? Alright?

Wataru and Gozou got the quest items from beneath the carriage floorboards alongside a barrel of beer stashed down there, then entered the guild. Roppe, Niku, and I followed with boxes. I didn't know what was in them, but given that we could be a little rough with them there probably wasn't anything fragile in them. The fact there were so many delivery quests to this place surely had to do with how much traffic Donsama had.

"And these are the quest items. Everything's been delivered safe and sound."

"Indeed. Thank you for your hard work, Wataru."

"We'll be going to the south of town tomorrow, then we're leaving for the capital. If you have any deliveries for us..."

"In that case..."

The receptionist took all the delivery quest items and handed over a small wooden box, which Wataru put into his {Storage}.

Incidentally, you could usually bet on a fight breaking out if an adventurer from the north Guild went to the south part of town, and likewise for southern adventurers going to the north. That didn't have anything to do with travelers or adventurers from other towns, but thanks to the situation delivery quests here paid out a bit more for how short distance they were. *I don't really get why guild employees don't just do the deliveries themselves, but alright.*

"You're snapping the quests right up this time, huh?"

"Deliveries between the north and south of Donsama usually don't take up too much space. Anything going to the imperial capital will be put in the southern guild, and anything we get here can be safely put in {Storage}. This way we'll be able to go south tomorrow morning without dropping by here again," said Wataru with a laugh.

He wasn't asked to do any extermination quests this time. *Makes sense, we're staying here for two nights and three days, but the second day crossing the river.*

"Wait, are we actually going to be spending the whole second day crossing

the river? Is it that wide, or what?”

“It’s fifteen meters deep and a hundred meters wide. Honestly, it’s wide enough to just run and jump over.”

“One hundred meters wide, huh?” Yeah, no chance of me running and jumping that. He’s gotta be jumping... Though actually, I remember there being festivals in Japan where people ran over reed mats placed on a river. Maybe it’s something like that. There’s not any rice in this world, but there are reed mats. And tatami mats, too.

“...Can I try?” asked Niku.

“No need to push yourself. Pretty sure most people can’t cross it like that.”

“I dunno about that. Right, Roppe?” said Wataru.

“I could only manage ten meters the last time I tried. How about you, Gozou?”

“Ye think I could jump the river? My jump only got me three meters.” You actually tried it? And wow, Roppe, you made it ten meters? I guess adventurers are pretty athletic. And I see Niku’s wagging her tail with excitement over seeing how far she’ll be able to jump.

“Do they let people try to jump over the river all the time?”

“Yep, all the time. Want to try yourself, Keima?”

“Nah, I’m good. I’m just saying you should be there to save Kuro if she gets close to drowning.”

“Sure. But just saying, it’s good in a pinch to know the limits of what your body can do. In other words, you should try it too, Keima!”

His logic was sound, but I didn’t feel like doing any exercise I didn’t have to. I had no confidence in jumping any further than Gozou did.

We left the Guild just as Rokuko and the others were coming back from their shopping.

“Good work, Keima. Here’s your fish.”

“I say, it’s salted fish!”

Rokuko and Emmymephy began distributing the food, starting with me. It was trout-esque river fish cooked on skewers. There was a full fish on each skewer, and they'd had salt sprinkled on them before being cooked.

"Oh, some trout. Thanks, girls. This goes great with beer."

"I like them too," said Wataru. "With food, sometimes simple is best. Salt is pretty cheap here since merchants from Pavella pass by all the time."

Oh, they're called trout here too. Guess this is the same deal as the apple business. They're slightly different when you dig down, but the auto translator just reuses the same name. Or something.

"I say, Ichika is something else. She acquired this fish for astoundingly cheap by taunting the cooks and saying they were much cheaper in the south. She must have been taught by Rokuko."

"Oh, that's how you bartered for them? Not bad, Ichika."

"Yeah dudes, this city's hella famous for the north and south hating each other. Manipulating these peeps is easy as heck." Ichika puffed out her sizable chest with pride at Emmymephy's and Wataru's praise. Boing boing.

"Are you going to eat your fish intestines, Princess Mephy? They're the bitter parts inside the stomach area."

"...Ngh, I don't like bitter stuff."

"Can I have them, then? They go great with beer."

"Of course! I say, the trout would surely prefer for its intestines to be eaten by someone who appreciates them!" exclaimed Emmymephy while handing over the intestines of her fish to Wataru.

"...Keima. Why don't we share some of our fish too? I want to eat the top part of yours."

"No. Anyway... These trout are pretty big, huh?"

"You think so? They're smaller than the fish some inns serve."

That's because inns serve fish from the ocean by Pavella. Of course trout are gonna be small if you compare them to sturgeon or whatever. These are big for

trout.

“Anyway, Ichika, every single chef at those stands grimaced when they saw you. That seemed to help move things along, but what, did you do something to them?”

“Mmm. Well, kinda, way back when.”

She did? I guess the legend of the food demon is well known here too.

After finishing the trout, we headed to today's inn.

“We're staying at the Northern Hero's Inn tonight. It's run by Ortega, a famous guy called the Hero of North Donsama. It's a nice inn. Also, tomorrow night we'll be staying at the Southern Hero's Inn, which was built by Ortega's son after they had a falling out.”

“Father and son split by the river, huh? I gotta ask. Why'd they choose opposite sides of the river?”

“I think the inertia of the fight just carried things in that direction. I dunno the details. If you're curious, you can just ask Ortega while we're there.”

“Nah, I'm not that curious.” *Why should a traveler like me get involved in a family dispute while passing by? Dealing with them sounds like a pain in the ass, and I'm not about to jump on that spike myself. They can solve this themselves. I'm not the protagonist of a JRPG who gets off by sticking his head into every problem he comes across.*

“Dang, and here I thought you'd solve their problems in the blink of an eye.”

“Wataru. Is this a quest you took?”

“...Er, just consider this a quest I'm giving you myself!”

“Which means I have the right to refuse. And so I do. Pass.”

“Whaaat?! But the conversation was leading to you taking it!” *I make my own rules, bud. What you're talking about is peer pressure, and it ain't cool.*

“Th-There's a reward in it for you, okay?”

“I'll consider it if the reward's two thousand and three hundred golds.”

“What family dispute quest would have a reward comparable to the budget of

a small country...?” muttered Wataru.

“Anyway, at least get the quest from the two themselves saying they want to make amends. Trying to butt in from the side when neither of them want it would be pretty obnoxious. So yeah, get the quest from both of them and I’ll take it for just a single gold.”

“Got it! Wait... That’d only happen if they both already really want to make up with each other, which would make the job incredibly easy!” *Dang, he noticed.*

“But really, they’re probably just pretending to fight for sales reasons.”

“Huh?”

“The north and south hate each other, but the family wants an inn on both sides for business reasons. They’d be torn apart if they were the only ones on either side being all friendly, right? So they show off a fake fight and use that as an excuse to secure businesses in both sides of town.”

“That thought didn’t even occur to me...” said Wataru, falling silent in thought. *Well, it’s just a guess on my part, but anyway. No need to remind him of that.*

Of course, we arrived at the Northern Hero’s Inn without any of Wataru’s questing complicating things. After some rest it was time for dinner. This inn had a dining area just like the Dancing Doll Inn, and according to Wataru the food was pretty good.

“So, what’s for dinner today?”

“Porridge.”

“Riiight...”

He had replied as if the answer was obvious. That didn’t really tell me what I wanted to know, so I whispered to Ichika.

“Hey, Ichika, what’s porridge?”

“Wha? Ooooh, right. You’ve basically never left Tsia before.”

According to Ichika, it was grain boiled in milk. Sometimes dried fruit was added to it.

“Interesting. Milk, huh?” *And dried fruit to add some sweetness. The rolls and galettes we had were a lot more heavy than this.*

“What do you think about this porridge stuff, Ichika?”

“Mmm, gotta say, it depends on the place. Some stores serve some real crappy porridge.” The good places maintained a balance between the milk’s natural sweetness and the sweetness of the grain, but the bad places had porridge that was basically like water, or smelled bad enough it was miserable to eat.

“...Just sayin’, all cold porridge tastes like garbo! It’s basically Goblin food at that point.”

Neat. I’ve never had it myself, but if Ichika says that it must be true.

“Huh. Porridge, eh? Wataru, ye mind if I just eat bread instead? I can’t say I like sweet stuff all that much.”

“It’s fine with me, to be honest.”

Gozou didn’t seem to like porridge much. Roppe on the other hand did. Hmm.

“Don’t worry! The porridge here is boiled with water and is salted for flavor! It goes great with the fish. And beer!”

“Oh?! Well why didn’t ye say so? Sounds great!”

“Looking forward to it! Oh, is this one of the places that lets you bring your own beer? I’ll go stop by the carriage for a second.”

Hmmm. Salty porridge, huh? That’s a shame, I was looking forward to the sweet stuff. Maybe I’ll get a chance to eat it elsewhere?

The porridge reminded me of classic Japanese rice gruel, which explained why Wataru liked it. This was probably yet another substitute filling the gap that the lack of rice left in our souls. *Oh, and looks like Team Bacchus is going all out with the beer. For all his complaining, Gozou sure polished off his bowl. Must be thanks to the salt. Though uh... I guess he would probably eat anything as long as he gets to drink his beer.*

“I say, Rokuko, what is that?”

“You want to try one, Mephy? I have them stashed in my {Storage}.”

Rokuko, on the other hand, was eating her melon rolls. I could guess that she didn't like her porridge much. Niku was eating hers normally. Her languid tail conveyed that she didn't find it particularly good or particularly bad. As for me, well, I liked it more than I didn't.

...Incidentally, our leftovers were gracefully devoured by local food demon Ichika. Before they cooled down, of course.

* * *

The next day, we headed to the river on our way to South Donsama. Wataru had been entirely correct when he described it as a perfectly straight river one hundred meters wide. There was a dock for boats about two meters down some stairs, and that's where the ferries were. Some of them were wide and flat for carriages.

But we didn't go to the ferries.

“Okay, let's cross the river.”

“Hold on, hold on, hold on.” I didn't like the smile on Wataru's face.

“Yeah, Keima?”

“I get crossing the river, but what's all this about running over it?”

“That's what this town is famous for! Jumping and running right over the river!”

Indeed. Wataru had guided us to where people challenged themselves in the river running competition.

“...Y'know, it doesn't look like there's anything in the water to step on.”

“Of course not. That would get in the way of boats going up and down the river.”

On top of that, there weren't even rocks to jump on or anything. You literally were jumping into the river and trying to run the rest of the way across. It was madness, and it was what Donsama was known for.

...As hard as it was to believe, there were several people running across the

river right in front of us. Some of them even got five entire steps across.

It seemed that Wataru was famous as someone who had completed the challenge, and all the challengers nearby called out to him, saying things like “Sir Wataru! Please teach me your secrets!”, “Yo! Are we gonna get to see another one of your crazy runs, teach?”, and “Are those your disciples, Sir Wataru?”

Incidentally, the challenge had been completed by an entire two digits number of people, including Wataru. The fact that many people could run across a one hundred meter river on their bare feet reminded me once again just how insane the humans of this world were. *Oh, wait, Wataru’s Japanese.*

“Okay, Keima, give it a shot.” Not a chance. I’m not even gonna try to run on top of a river. We humans are land creatures; we weren’t built to run on rivers. Don’t surpass the limits of your entire species for a dumb sports competition, jerkwad.

“By the way, Ortega from the inn we just stayed at is one of the people who succeeded. In this city, anyone who successfully crosses the river is called a hero. Lowercase.”

“Fascinating. I don’t care. Also, are you proud of being a capital Hero? Do you feel superior to lowercase heroes? Is that why you said that?”

“Aaaanyway, I think you should give it a shot at least once, Keima. I think it’d be good for you.”

“In what world would it be good for me? I’m not gonna do it.”

“I say, Keima, I would like to see how far you can go! Don’t you, Rokuko?”

“You took the words right out of my mouth, Mephy. I was just thinking the same thing.”

Emmymephy and Rokuko supported Wataru from the side. *It’s not happening. I’m not gonna do it, ever. This isn’t a joke!*

“I mean, think about it. Falling into the river would be pretty dangerous. What if I drowned?”

“Oh, don’t worry. This is something of a tourist attraction. There’s a rescue

team swimming around at all times.” *A tourist attraction? Really? And who has the time to just swim around here twenty-four seven, waiting for someone to get in trouble? What about the monsters? What about them? Oh, they don’t come out at this time of day. Good to know...*

“...I don’t feel like changing out of wet clothes.”

“{Purification} and {Dry} can take care of that. It won’t be a problem.” *Ngh, Survival Magic sure is convenient! Man, Wataru sure wants me to give this a shot, huh?*

“Go for it.”

“My motto is to not push myself for no reason.”

“Can’t you make an exception, just this once?”

“There’s nothing in it for me.”

“Oh, but there is. Don’t you want to show off in front of me?” said Rokuko, butting in with a smug expression. But that wasn’t a motivating factor for me. In fact, her presence was actually motivating me *not* to try in case I failed hard.

“...Master.” Niku was wagging her tail. It was clear she was aching to run across the river. *Our little girl sure is an active one, eh?*

“Uhhh... Kuro. If you want to do it, feel free. Don’t worry about me.”

“Okay!”

“Alright, Kuro’s in the game! I’ll show you how it’s done first,” said Wataru before facing the river and crouching down. “Momentum is key! Keima, you watch too.”

“I’m not gonna do it.”

“Here I go! Hyah!” Wataru ran off without paying me any mind. Or rather, he jumped off like a shell out of a cannon. He kicked the water with his feet, making huge splashes as he bounded over the river.

...So the trick is to move your left foot before your right foot sinks, then move your right foot before your left foot sinks. Yeah, that’s not something a human should be capable of.

He reached the other side in no time, earning cheers we could hear all the way over here. And then he ran right back to our side.

“...And that’s how you do it. So? Did you learn anything?”

“I’ve learned you gave up on being a human. Very nice, Hero.”

“Ahaha, flattery won’t get you anywhere.” *Was that flattery?*

“Uhhh, anyway. Kuro, you don’t have to do that if you don’t want to.”

“I want to.”

“You could learn from her enthusiasm, Keima.” *Yeah, glance this way all you want. I’m not gonna budge.*

Niku mimicked Wataru and crouched at the edge. She focused her body... then blasted away. She jumped and skipped across the water, her feet kicking.

Wait, is she gonna make it? I thought... but in the end, she sunk after getting about halfway across the river. The rescue team got her and came back this way.

“Dang, that was close. You were just a little bit too short—if you get over halfway, the other side’s team will get you.”

“Ngh...”

“Good work, Kuro.” I cast {Purification} and {Dry} on Niku as her tail slumped sadly.

“Aalrighty then.” Suddenly, Gozou stepped forward. “Guess it’s my turn! Roppe, would ye go get my bones when I die?”

“Sure. Best of luck to you, Gozou. I’ll treat you to some of my best beer if you make it.”

“Gah, ye know that ain’t happening! Pour me a glass to help the wounds heal when I fail.”

Gozou crouched at the edge. That seemed to be the default pose everyone took.

...He leapt, and sank at the first step. The nearby rescue team got him and returned him in the blink of an eye.

“Ngh, can’t say I expected anything else...”

“That was two whole meters. Not bad, not bad.”

Gozou cast {Dry} on himself without looking particularly disappointed. He really had predicted that exact outcome.

“Alriiiight, now it’s yer turn, Keima!”

“Nah, like I said, it’s not happening. Why do you all want me to do this so bad?”

“Not gonna lie, I’m just thinking ye might actually be able to do it. Just give it a shot, alright? Even I gave it a go.”

“I believe in you too, Keima,” said Wataru.

“Me too,” added Roppe.

“I say, and so do I!” declared Emmymephy.

“Hear that, Keima? Just give up and do your best,” said Rokuko with a pat on my shoulders, as if that sealed the deal.

“Gotta say, the weight of your expectations is kinda overbearing. But alright. I’ll try getting to the other side if you can run across while carrying Princess Mephy.”

“Oh, really? Just give me a second.” *Wait, what? I thought that’d be too much even for Wataru.*

“Sir Wataru, where should I grab onto you?”

“Mmm, I’m gonna be going pretty fast, so... This should be best,” said Wataru before picking up Emmymephy in a literal princess carry. That meant he couldn’t crouch before starting, but he didn’t care. He got a running start then bounded across the river with Emmymephy in his arms.

A few seconds later, even louder cheers resounded from the other side of the river. Indeed. He had succeeded.

“I’m back.”

“I say, that was incredible! Simply incredible!”

Apparently it was the first time in history that anyone had managed to run across the river while carrying someone else. There were huge cheers on this end too, since he came back while still carrying her.

“...Seriously?”

“Well, Keima. It’s your turn now.” Rokuko plopped a hand on my shoulder as if that sealed the deal. For the second time. *Haaah. Alright. They’ve forced my hand here. I’ll show them my own way of crossing the river.*

“Alright, alright. I’ll get to the other side of the river then.”

“Oh! I can feel Keima getting serious!”

I went to the side of the river and... didn’t crouch like everyone else had. That wouldn’t help me, after all. I prepared to run normally instead.

“Whoa! You’re going with classic style?! That’s... fairly normal.” *Yeah, I didn’t even know there were styles to this.*

I took a casual step forward and let myself sink. I then started swimming to the other side of the river.

“He’s... What...?!”

Gaaah! It’s so cold. It was hard to swim while wearing normal clothes, but thanks to Golem assistance I managed to get to the other side while drifting down the river just a little bit. Neither rescue team bothered to get involved since I was just swimming normally.

And so, I arrived on the other side. *Man, that was cold. {Purification}, {Dry}, and good.*

“...Whew. That took a lot out of me. Heeey! Come on over, everyone!”

“Don’t just swiim! Come back heeere!” yelled Rokuko from the other side, annoyed, but I ignored her. After all, I never said a single time that I would run across the river. I warmed myself by a bonfire maintained by volunteers while waiting for everyone else to get here.

In the end, Rokuko and the others came over with the carriage on a ferry. Excluding Wataru and Emmymephy, that is. He ran across while princess carrying her again.

“You beat me again, Keima,” Wataru said with a grin. That threw me off.

“Huh? But I didn’t run across the river.”

“Oh, but you did! In spirit! I wasn’t seeing the true purpose of river running. When you get down to it, the ultimate goal of river running is getting to the other side. There was no rule that said you had to actually run across the river! In other words, the second you stood at the edge in classic style and brought river running back to its roots, you had me completely beat!”

...That’s the most forced retroactive justification I’ve ever heard in my life. I’m honestly kind of grossed out, not gonna lie. The more Wataru built me up, the more convinced I was that he wanted to lose to me. It made sense, too, given that he was a huge masochist who loved Neruneh toying with him.

“I say, all that matters is whether or not you win, not what you do to win!”

“Nah, nah, nah, Keima definitely cheated there. He didn’t even run a single step.”

“Right? I didn’t win there. No way. I don’t even know what he’s talking about with that history of river running stuff.” *Thank goodness Rokuko’s still sane.*

But in any case, Wataru was satisfied in his own weird way, and he didn’t push the subject any further.

* * *

After crossing the river that split Donsama in two, I was so tired that we headed straight to the Southern Hero’s Inn. I slept soundly all the way until dinner. Making sure to bring Niku with me to stay warm and not catch a cold, of course. She had fallen into the river too, so it was a win-win for the both of us.

Oh, and Gozou warmed up by drinking beer. I spared him a joke about how he should sleep in the same bed as Roppe. That’d just be crass.

“So, what’s on the menu today? Are we eating porridge two days in a row?”

“The Southern Hero’s Inn is in stiff competition with the Northern Hero’s inn, so they should have something different for us to eat.”

“Oh yeah? Like what?”

“Sweet porridge. That’s why Gozou and the others went to eat somewhere else.” *Uh-huh... Well, whatever.*

“Where’s Rokuko and Princess Mephy? Plus Ichika, I guess.” *It feels like those three are always together now.*

“They said they’d be using {Storage} to eat Kinue’s cooking in their rooms. What about you and Niku, Keima? I waited until now so I could eat with you.” Wataru pressed me for an answer.

“...Well, might as well enjoy the country’s food while we can. What do you want to do, Kuro?”

“I’ll eat with you.” *Yeah, I can see her tail drooping. Either she really didn’t like the porridge, or she really wanted to eat Kinue’s cooking. Guess I’ll order some rabbit skewers as a side or something.*

With that settled, we went to the inn’s dining hall. Though it was more like a bar than anything here. Probably thanks to the son trying to distinguish himself from his father.

“Oooh, Sir Wataru! I see your companion has recovered.”

“Yep. Though he wasn’t ever really in bad shape. Anyway, dinner for three, please.”

“Coming right up! Have a seat anywhere.”

We sat down at a table and had hot porridge delivered to us in no time. It had the faint scent of hot milk. This was the type of wheat porridge boiled in hot milk like Ichika had talked about yesterday. There was dry fruit inside too.

“Feels more like a hot dessert than anything, really.”

“Porridge is nice since it warms you up,” replied Wataru.

In any case, the side (?) of salted trout seemed best to eat separately. Or rather, it was best to eat the fish first then have the porridge as dessert.

“Y’know, why did people even start running across the river in the first place?”

“I heard it was because a long time ago, someone tried it on a whim and

actually did it.”

“...Man, we humans sure are impressive. We just love doing things that don’t matter.”

“Whoa, whoa, but you crossed the river yourself.”

“I just swam and you know it. That’s totally different.”

We went ahead and started to eat the porridge before it was cold, at which point the innkeep came over to chat. “Did you two try running the river?”

“Yeah, pretty much. She and I ended up dunked in the cold river while this Hero stayed high and dry.”

“I see. You have the courage I would expect from companions of Sir Wataru!”
Not really sure courage is the right word for being peer pressured into it. I think my motivations could be described as the exact opposite of courage, even.

“Thanks, but we didn’t manage to get across. He actually did it a second time, while carrying someone.”

“Indeed! I have heard the news. To think that such a spectacular feat would be performed in my lifetime! Sir Wataru, you are a true living legend. I can only imagine the fame your party staying at my inn will bring me.”

“Ahaha, you exaggerate,” said Wataru while scratching his head in embarrassment.

The innkeep then turned back to face me, and with a composed look, continued. “But it’s a good thing you’re staying in the south of the city after falling into the river. After all, the south is more warm and comfortable than the north.”

“Ahaha.” I laughed with a forced smile, since I didn’t really know whether he was joking or being serious. That seemed to satisfy him, as he gave us some roasted beans on the house. *Wataru, don’t even think about ordering some beer to go with them. I’m not gonna drink.*

“...So yeah, that’s how it is.”

“Huh? That’s how what is?”

“Er, the north and south of town, I mean.” He had been talking about the two inns being at odds with one another, but in fact the entire north and south of the city were at odds with each other. “Which is why I was thinking it’d be good if we could make these inns get along again. They stand out and everything, so, you know.” *So that’s your aim, Wataru.*

“Alright, well, that’s still got nothing to do with us.”

“...Honestly, I’m just kind of hoping that you can pull your usual magic and fix this in a snap.”

“That’s stuff for Heroes to do, isn’t it? You’re a river-running legend, Wataru. Surely they’ll listen if you say something. Why me? I’m just an everyday traveler. What do you want from me?” I blew off Wataru while feeding Niku the beans. *Nothing warms my heart quite like Niku nomming away at food.*

“I mean, this is you we’re talking about, Keima.”

“They may be at odds with each other, but this is just friendly banter. I mentioned this before, but all the supposed bad blood is probably just a publicity stunt. They don’t want us to get involved. And if I’m right, this won’t get any more serious than it already is.”

“I hope you’re right, but... I just can’t help but be uneasy,” said Wataru, having at some point adopted a pretty serious expression. Still, he was definitely just overthinking things.

“...Alright, if you’re that worried, how about we try asking around?”

“Huh?”

I looked around the dining hall for an approachable-looking customer to ask some questions. *Oh, there’s one. A guy drinking beer all alone. He should be good.*

I stood up and walked over to him. “Hey, you. You’re a villager here, right? I’m a traveler, and there are some things I want to ask. How ’bout I treat you to a beer for the trouble?”

“Huh? Sure, buy me a mug and I’ll answer ya.”

“Great. First question, then.” I casually sat down at his table with a boldness

that only travelers not sticking around for long could have. “The north and south of this city are on bad terms, huh?”

“Yeah. What of it?”

I raised a hand to order a beer. *I’ll try to ask what I can before the beer gets here.*

“Would you want to punch a northern guy in the mouth if you saw him?”

“Yeah, pretty much. If a northerner came in here I’d actually beat ’im to death.” *Damn, that’s intense.*

“Fascinating. In that case, would you want to go to war with the north if possible? Would you want to have an all-out war with spears and swords where you kill all the northern scum, even the women and children?”

“Huh? Er, well, I dunno if I’d go that far.”

“Oh, so you’d rather just commit genocide without a fight? You want to sneak into their houses and slit their throats one by one? Gonna be real with you, it would be easy as hell to poison their water supply.”

“Wh-What the hell?! I never said I’d want to go that far!” yelled the man with a sick expression.

“Interesting.” His response was to be expected. Most people who casually talked about killing people didn’t actually want to kill anyone, and no normal villager would want to commit genocide. “Alright, let’s talk hypothetical. Suppose a huge fire broke out in the north of the city and burned down all the homes, leaving every single one of them homeless and exposed to the elements. Would you southerners throw a big party and celebrate their loss?”

“O-Of course not. That’d be fucked up.”

“But you wouldn’t help them either, would you? Leaving them to die would kill two birds with one stone, except one bird is the entire population of the north and the other bird is getting your hands dirty. What luck! Congratulations!”

“Like hell I wouldn’t go help! I wouldn’t leave ’em to die!” The man slammed the table. *Oh, scary. Natural disasters do bring people together. Sure, I taunted*

him to bring that answer out of him, but still.

“...So if it came down to it, you’d help them.”

“Course I would! You wanna get knocked out, jerk?”

“I see. You’re a nice guy.”

“Wha...?!”

I gave a meaningful grin. The man froze, at a loss for words.

“Sorry for the weird questions. As promised, here’s your beer. See ya.” I left the stunned man with his fresh beer and went back to my original seat.

“See? Things won’t get serious.”

“Er, well. I guess?” Wataru blinked in confusion, still not entirely convinced.

“What’s with you, Wataru? A local said himself that he’d help them if it came down to it. I risked getting the shit beaten out of me to ask him that and you’re gonna ignore the results I got?”

“I mean, you were obviously goading him there.”

“People are most honest when they’re mad, aren’t they?” *But well, even if he did come at me, I would’ve been fine thanks to my Wearable Golem.* “This is just some casual infighting that’d go away the second something bad actually happened. Do you want to burn the city to the ground to make it happen sooner, Hero? I sure don’t. That’d be criminal.”

“...Why are your examples always so extreme, Keima? Are you drunk?” *Whoa, whoa, whoa, why would I be drunk? I haven’t had a single drop.*

“Oh, right. Mind paying for the drink I had to give him, Hero?”

“Awww, what...? I guess I don’t care.”

I ignored Wataru’s continued uncertainty and finished my dinner fast so I could go back to my room and sleep with Niku.

Southerner’s Perspective

The man drank his beer, feeling uneasy, when someone sat in front of him. He

looked up, thinking it was that traveler again, but it was actually the friend he had been waiting for.

“...Heya. You sure are late.”

“Yeah? More importantly, the hell happened to you? You’re looking all weird.”

“Just got wrapped up with a weird guy. Nothing too serious, though.” The man gulped down his beer, then sighed.

“You sure yelled pretty loud for something not serious. I heard you outside the inn, y’know. What, did he say the north of town was way better than the south?”

“...Nah, he asked if I wanted to commit genocide on the north side of town, including the women and children, and if I’d celebrate hard if a big fire or something destroyed their homes.”

“Wha?” His friend couldn’t believe his ears.

“...So then, alright. I yelled at him and said I’d help them if they needed it. Me, y’know? Me of all people, saying I’d go help the northerners.”

“Really now? Never thought I’d hear that from you. The whole city knows you’d sooner throw a punch than speak to a northerner.”

“Yeah. I don’t get it.”

“...Well, I guess we need rivals to get motivated, eh?”

It was true that although the northerners ticked him off, he didn’t actually want them to die. He definitely didn’t want to pick a fight with them big enough that women and children would get involved.

“It hit me that there’s a line we should never cross, y’know? I never thought about it before, but yeah. We don’t really want them to die or nothin’.”

“Yeah. Well... Yeah, you got a point.”

And so, thanks to this encounter and the revelations that followed, rules were set in place to define the lines that must never be crossed, while also establishing a pact for both sides of the river to unite in times of natural

disaster. These measures would ultimately prevent a disastrous confrontation between the two sides of the river, one which would have left the city in ashes, but nobody would ever know the name of the traveler that had saved them.

Keima's Perspective

Man, that was some good sleeping.

I slept right up until we were ready to go the next morning. Niku really did make the difference when it came to having a nice, warm night's sleep. Though it did help that I had exercised before bed. I always slept well after swimming.

"Still, the north and south of the city seem the exact same to me. What's so different about them?"

"Dunno. But ye know, I'm just glad the Adventurer's Guilds aren't fightin' or nothin'."

Though really, it wouldn't really matter to us travelers if the Guilds were fighting. In fact, we could even use it to our advantage in some ways, like Ichika did with her bartering.

"So, the plan is to leave Donsama today," announced Wataru to the party. "Is anybody forgetting anything?"

"Nope, dude. We had some fish from a stand and we had some fish for dinner. And to be real, if we forgot to eat something we can just turn right back around."

"Exactly the answer I expected from you, Ichika. What about you, Keima?"

"Pretty much the same. We just need to drop by the Guild to get some quests, yeah?"

"Maybe resolve some tragic familial disputes keeping two inns apart?"

"Not happening."

And so we went to the Adventurer's Guild in South Donsama. The luggage we had given to the northern Guild had already arrived, and since we didn't have anything to deliver we just went ahead and took delivery quests for the next

town and the imperial capital. But before we could leave, the receptionist called out to Wataru.

“Sir Wataru. We were just given a bodyguard quest with your name on it. The client is the merchant over there, and they would like to go to Corky.”

“Hm? What do you think, Keima?”

At first I wondered why he was asking me, but then I remembered I was technically in the middle of hiring Wataru as my bodyguard. In which case, it was up to me to decide whether he could take on a second client. And by the way, Corky was the name of the next big town we were visiting. It would take three days by carriage.

“Pass. There’s not enough space in the carriage for that merchant.”

“They have their own carriage,” replied Wataru while looking at the quest slip. “I normally take these quests while doing my own thing, since they have their own means of travel.”

Incidentally, if you were wondering how they knew we were going to Corky, Wataru had asked “I’m going to the imperial capital through Corky, does anyone have any delivery quests?” in a voice loud enough for everyone here to hear. There wasn’t anything suspicious about it, but...

“Why’d they specify you, Wataru? I’m guessing hiring a Hero is crazy expensive.”

“It happens, sometimes. Some people want connections, some people just want to be guarded by a Hero and all.” *So they just want to get closer to a Hero. Makes sense. Wataru may have a twisted masochistic heart, but he’s still a Hero. Though... I still think a gold a day for three days is a bit expensive to hire someone like him.*

“Well, even if I don’t take it, they’ll just have some other adventurer guard them. It’s not a big deal. You can do whatever you want here, Keima.”

“Honestly, I say we just let Princess Mephy decide. My carriage will have more space if you stay with the merchant, so yeah, sounds good to me.”

“Aww... Well, alright. Princess Mephy!”

Wataru went off to ask Emmymephy, and apparently she agreed because he told the receptionist he'd be taking the quest. The merchant, overjoyed, asked Wataru for a handshake, which Wataru gave.

...Sometimes quests just pop up out of nowhere, I guess, I thought just as Wataru finished talking to the merchant and came back this way. The merchant was hurrying outside.

"They want us to wait a bit so they can stock up on more merchandise."

"Makes sense. Having a Hero for a guard is some good insurance, and they must want to make back some of your fee."

"Yeah, though the road from here to Corky is generally pretty safe. There have been reports of a bandit camp nearby that may try coming for us. Maybe this merchant will be good bait for them. I went ahead and told them not to bring more than four carriages, though."

Oh, he wants to bait out the bandit camp. Guess he's less of a guard and more of a soldier this time, huh?

"Keima, have you killed anyone before? If you haven't, no need to force yourself here." *I technically have as a Dungeon Master, but that's all indirect killing. I might have to get my hands dirty if a bandit comes right for me here. Hmmm. That makes me kinda nervous.*

"By the way, an average C-Rank guard is expected to be able to fight against people. Bandits, basically. You're a D-Rank, but do you think you can manage it?"

"I can. Think of me as a normal rear guard. I can buy time even if I get surrounded, but come help if things get dangerous."

"You, a rear guard? I remember you beating me in a fist fight."

"That only happened because you were exhausted and beaten all to hell. One lucky punch doesn't make me a fighter."

"Well, alright then. You can trust your back to me."

But yeah, I've magic on top of my Wearable Golem. I should be fine no matter what happens... Huh? What about my Succubus ring? Yeah, I'm not using it. Like

hell I'll use it.

Gozou and Roppe were both C-Ranks, and Ichika was a former C-Rank, so they should all be fine. Niku was stronger than Ichika, and she could dominate bandits with or without killing them. Incidentally, the driver was apparently as strong as a C-Rank adventurer himself. Just what I would expect from a noble's carriage driver, I guess.

The problem was Rokuko and Emmymephy. Emmymephy was at least strong enough to beat a Great Boar, but according to Wataru I should consider her on the level of a D-Rank. Rokuko had her Wearable Golem too, but I honestly couldn't even imagine her in a fight. The rapier on her hip was the fakest blade you would ever see in your life. *Isn't it kinda messed up that Rokuko's the most normal out of all of us, despite not even being a human...? Well, whatever. I'll have Ichika or someone guard her.*

"Okay, let's go to the south gate and wait for them there," said Wataru.

"Sounds good."

* * *

So yeah, we ended up waiting at the south gate of Donsama on our way to the imperial capital. Ichika, Niku, and Emmymephy went to some nearby stands to get food. Given that they said they hadn't forgotten anything, I could imagine that Emmymephy just wanted to eat more. Sure.

"Still, Wataru gets quests just for him? He sure is famous," said Rokuko.

"Yeah, he's a Hero."

"Feels weird considering how he's treated at our inn."

"Yeah, he's Wataru," I replied, and Wataru took that opportunity to pop in.

"Did I hear my name just now?"

"You sure did. We're talking about how people outside treat you way differently than the people in our town do."

"Yep, Goren Town is special. It'd have to be to have you as a town chief," said Wataru, entirely as if it was all my fault. Rokuko nodded in agreement. *Why? Me being town chief should have nothing to do with it... I'm just a figurehead.*

Wozma, the guild receptionist, and Gozou are all more involved with running the town than I am.

“You know, that reminds me. How’re you and Neruneh doing?”

“Oh, super well! I was talking to her about how we could go on a date to Tsia the next time she’s free. Rokuko, could you do me a favor and give Neruneh some vacation days soon? Actually, I’ll straight up pay you to give her a raise.”

“Fine, fine... I’ll give Neruneh a vacation the next time you visit. You can borrow her for a bit.”

“Thank you!”

Wait... We’re already giving Neruneh days off whenever Wataru visits, so she can keep a handle on him. A date to Tsia shouldn’t change anything... Well, whatever.

It wasn’t long before the merchant we were supposed to be guarding came over. He had four canopied wagons, each packed with goods. Apparently the merchant driving the wagons was using {Storage}, too. *Uh... The wheels won’t fall off from the heavy load, will they? Never mind, I don’t want to think about this and jinx it.*

“I am ready to go, sir Hero. Thank you for your service.”

“No problem, you can count on me. Not even a Dragon is a threat with me around.”

“That is very encouraging indeed,” said the merchant with a bow. *Nice to meet you. Hope it’s a good three days together.*

We went through the gate with the merchant and departed for our next destination. Wataru predicted that we would be attacked, but he would probably do such a good job fighting the attackers off that he wouldn’t even need anybody’s help.

We were on our way to Corky with the four wagons of our merchant charge in tow. We continued down an oddly rocky section of the plains when suddenly we saw a wagon with a broken wheel stuck in the distance, blocking the road. It was about a full kilometer out, but positioned such that there was no easy way

to pass by it or take a detour around it. On top of that, there was a guy holding his arm with a worried expression.

The second he saw the guy, Gozou put a hand on the hilt of his weapon.
“Keima, that’s a bandit. Get ready for battle.”

“Oh, is it? I kinda figured, but wasn’t sure.”

“Course it is,” replied Gozou while cracking his neck. *Yeaah. It’s hard not to be suspicious of that guy.*

“Fer starters, a wagon stuck right in the middle o’ the road’s gonna be suspicious every time. The polite thing ta do is getting the wagon to the side of the road, even if ye’ve gotta take out all the stuff inside. The fact that guy didn’t even bother to do that despite all the help shows he’s one dumb bandit.”

I didn’t know about that custom, I thought while Ichika undid the fastening on her kitchen cleaver so she could pull it out whenever necessary.

“Check out the lack of a horse, too. He’s totes just using a random broken wagon that was sitting around. The law says we can just kill bandits pulling this junk, so heck yeah. Easy money.”

Niku stood up when Ichika said that. Looked like everyone was ready to go.

“The thing is, we’re borrowin’ this carriage. Can’t exactly go ’round scuffing up a noble’s family crest. I say we stop here n’ walk the rest of the way... Who wants to stay and guard the carriage?”

“Uhhh, I volunteer. Team Bacchus can go bandit hunting.”

“Alright then. Keima’s party’ll stay here, then. Works for me. Didja hear all that, Wataru?”

“Yuuup. I was listening,” replied Wataru from where he was sitting with the merchant one wagon behind.

“Let’s get this done, then.”

“Rokuko, everyone, stay safe!” said Roppe.

“I’ll go ahead and cast {Air Barricade} so arrows shouldn’t be any problem, but... Take care of Princess Mephy for me.”

We stopped our wagon about four hundred meters away from the bandits so Gozou, Roppe, and Wataru could get off. They then headed to the bandit while concealing their weapons, calling out loudly to ask if anything was wrong. *Not sure how well this surprise attack's gonna go with Gozou's battle hammer poking out from behind his back like that.*

Anyway, my job was to watch them casually from afar while doing nothing, which was exactly what I intended to do. But when I tried to lay down, Ichika unsheathed her cleaver.

"You hyped for this battle too, Master?"

"Huh? What're you talking about, Ichika? We're staying with the wagons, not fighting."

"Bruh, I think you've got the wrong idea. Our job's to protect the wagons, horses, and drivers from the jerks hiding out behind the rocks all around us. It's our time to shine. Right, Niku?"

"Yes. I'll shine, for Master."

"This might actually be kinda rough since there's four wagons and two babes here to protect. Gotta say, Master, I was hella surprised when you offered to do the hard job yourself." *Uh.*

I saw Niku unsheathing her dagger and crouching in a battle-ready stance, but before I could ask if that was really true, Wataru's squad began their attack. Arrows immediately launched toward our wagon from the side and got knocked aside thanks to Wataru's {Air Barricade}.

"...Right. So staying behind's the hard job."

"Woof, those arrows were heading right for the driver's neck. They've got a real deal archer on their side, my dudes. Let's see if we can't cut that bow in half."

"You can count on us for support!"

"I say, shoot them right through the eyes!"

Rokuko and Emmymephy were readying crossbows they were hiding, uh, somewhere? *Sit back down, you two.*

The bandits were coming out of hiding now that they knew arrows wouldn't work. One, two, three... *Okay, there's over ten of them.* Don't think the three of us can hold them all back at once. Not that that's a problem for me.

"Uh oh, we're a little short on hands here. What's the plan, Master?"

"Simple. If we don't have enough help, we just have to summon more."
Summoning help was my specialty. Hmm... {Create Golem} would tear up the ground and I'd have to hide the magic stones, so no thanks. I'll just use {Summon Gargoyle} here.

"...{Summon Gargoyle}, {Summon Gargoyle}, {Summon Gargoyle}... Okay, this is annoying. Come out ten at a time now, {Summon Gargoyle 10}." I shortened the spell after getting annoyed, and immediately our wagon was surrounded by magic circles from which Gargoyles started appearing. If Emmymephy asked, I would just say it was an advanced summoning spell I learned somewhere.

"Protect the wagons, Gargoyles!" The merchant and the drivers were surprised by the sudden appearance of monsters, but they understood from my shout and their positioning around the wagon that the Gargoyles were friends. But my shout also alerted the bandits to my presence.

"These are summons! Kill the summoners and the monsters'll all disappear! They're in the head wagon, get 'em!"

Looks like they know how to deal with summoned monsters. Not sure if that's common knowledge, or if these are just some smart bandits.

"Leave them to me, Master."

"I got this too, dudes."

I had some reliable allies. Niku and Ichika stood in front of the wagon to block the bandits from reaching it.

"Women! Looks like some pretty clean sex slaves. Let's take 'em!"

"Not happening, pals. My chastity belongs to Master."

"Hyah!"

The two of them started casually chopping down the bandits. *Holy shit, Niku's going right for their throats... Not a second of hesitation, even for humans.*

What a terrifying loli. She looks just like she does when hunting rabbits, my God.

“Th-These two’re strong!”

“Meatshields, get ’em! Crush ’em with numbers!” roared one of them, and the meatshields in question... slaves with collars swarmed around Niku and Ichika as they guarded the wagon.

“Hey, let me help too! Swoosh!” Rokuko launched an arrow... which smashed a Gargoyle’s head. *Wowee, friendly fire. Sit the fuck down.*

“What an awful shot. Watch and learn, Rokuko,” Emmymephy said before launching an arrow of her own and, surprising nobody, headshotting a Gargoyle. *How many times do I have to say it?*

“Noble women! These’ll sell for good money! Catch ’em alive, don’t hurt them!”

“Doesn’t matter if all the slaves die, we can just get more!”

Oh man, now the bandits are coming after us even harder. But I wasn’t going to let them get anywhere.

“Have some more {Summon Gargoyle}.” After all, I could summon an entire army’s worth of Gargoyles. As long as we could stall them for long enough...

“Tch! These slaves are pieces of crap! Listen u—”

“Okay, that’s enough. Don’t expect any backup, we already finished off the rest of your pals.”

Wataru returned and defeated the bandit’s leader. Checkmate. *That was pretty fast. Good ol’ Wataru, I never doubted you for a second.*

With the battle over, we started tying up the bandits. And by we I mean Ichika and Team Bacchus. Apparently we could sell them as convict slaves and make some cash. At proper establishments, you would earn five silvers for each fully-limbed man, and even at smaller inn cities you would be guaranteed three silvers... *Man, convict slaves sure are cheap.* But my motto is “waste not, want not.” No harm in getting some extra cash when possible.

“Good work, Master.”

“Same to you, Niku. In the end you only had to slit a few throats, huh? Good going.”

“That was thanks to you, Master. If there weren’t any Gargoyles I would have had to cut off all their heads.”

Yeah, that would have done it. And is it just me, or is Niku kinda, uh, violent? Not that I don’t appreciate how reliable a bloodthirsty loli is, of course.

“That was some choice strength through numbers, man. But are you sure you shoulda showed everyone your Gargoyles?” asked Ichika.

“It’s not a problem. Really, showing some of what I can do now will be convenient for backing me up in the future.”

“Can’t argue with that. Summoned monsters are pretty darn convenient for running errands and being decoys and stuff. The only thing is, you uh, kinda summoned a little more than most people can... Alright, I’m just gonna be real. You summoned waaaaaay more than most people can.”

Yeah, I kinda guessed that when the bandits said “summoners” a second ago.

“I say, my bad for getting in the way there. I never should have used a weapon I have no experience with.”

“It’s okay,” said Rokuko. “You can just practice for next time... Sigh. I wanted to kill at least one of them, too.”

“That’s pretty fucked up, Rokuko. I mean, you’ve always been a little on the psychopathic side when it comes to killing people, but, uh...”

“...No, like, I wanted to see if I would get DP for killing people outside my territory. I didn’t just want to kill for the fun of it, okay?” Rokuko whispered into my ear quietly, so Emmymephy wouldn’t hear.

Oh, that makes sense. I’m kinda curious about that too. No harm in learning about ways to get DP outside of the dungeon. Let’s see if Niku’s kills got us anything... Nope. Figures. Oh well, it’d stick out if we randomly killed the bandits at this point. We can experiment more later.

My thoughts were interrupted by Wataru walking over. “Good work,” he said. “Did any bandits get away?”

“We held them all down with Gargoyles. Should we have let some of them go?”

“No, it’s fine. Seems like they’re all honest fellows.”

I indirectly asked if we should have let some go so we could follow them back to their hideout, and Wataru indirectly answered that it didn’t matter since a few threats were enough to get them to spill the beans anyway. *Yep, not even Heroes have any mercy here.*

“But y’know, Keima, I’m impressed. Not many people can summon and control that many Gargoyles at once. You’re basically a one man army.”

“There’s a trick to it. You just have to give a simple order and let them figure out the rest.”

“Still, even with that in mind there sure were a lot of them. For Gargoyles... A normal summoner might be able to do three at best, while a court magician would struggle to get up to two digits.”

...Yeah, and I just summoned twenty on the spot. Maybe I went too far there... Uhhhh, well, let me just make the ones not doing anything disappear. Begone, begone, begone. Good work.

As an aside, I later went with Wataru to the bandits’ home base. I thought they might be camping out in a dungeon, but it was just an old abandoned village. Apparently it was pretty rare for bandits to conquer a dungeon and make it their home.

Oh, and Wataru cleaned up the stragglers without much effort. *Just what I’d expect from... yeah, you get the idea by now.*

* * *

Anyway, we sold the bandits at a town along the way. Our wallets were plump with the extra cash. However, they were plump in the first place, so we had basically gotten free money to do whatever we wanted with.

...I mean, it did feel like we got kinda ripped off there, but none of us wanted to keep traveling with them. Slowing down our wagons to keep up with their walking pace was pretty miserable.

But more importantly, we were back on our way to the next city.

“So, Gozou. What kind of place is this Corky?”

“It’s called the city o’ smithing. We’re gonna be stayin’ there for a bit longer, since me ’n Kantara were born there.”

“Interesting. Sure sounds like a lot of dwarves would live in a smithing city.”

“Yeah, lotsa people call it Dwarf City. Our actual hometown’s deeper in the mountains, though.”

Neat. So that is where Gozou and Kantara’s family are. I wouldn’t mind staying there and sleeping for a week then, honestly.

“Lotsa bars here too. Though they’ve only got beans and potatoes for snacks. Wish I had some fried food and potato chips here.”

“Are there any chefs that could get a handle on frying food?”

“Prolly one or two, if ye looked across the whole city for ’em... Or really, a chef like that would be the talk of the city. Didn’t know this ’til recently, but frying food is the kinda stuff only royal chefs can do.”

Riiight. Frying food was actually something one got a license for after studying Ishidaka the God of Food’s teachings. You wouldn’t be given a license if you couldn’t fry food over a free fire. They probably didn’t want to spread the practice too far since it was so easy to start fires with it. You had to use a ton of expensive oil just to practice, too, which was enough to gatekeep most people from learning. So did the lack of any self-teaching. The end result was it becoming something of a secret technique for the Food Church.

Just to be clear, Kinue already had her license thanks to Wozma. An inspector had come from Pavella to give her a test, which she’d passed.

“...Well, let’s take a look. Maybe a couple showed up while I was gone. I got nowhere to spend this money if there ain’t any fried food,” said Gozou. Seemed like he intended to use all the money he got from the bandits in bars.

“Got any souvenirs for your family?” I asked, and Roppe answered.

“I’ve got a couple good bottles of some wine from Goren’s dungeon, and that should be enough. Wataru’s holding them for me.”

“Oooh! Good thinkin’, Roppe.”

“Sheesh. Doing this kind of thing’s not my style, y’know,” Roppe said with a shrug.

“...You look kinda rough and rowdy, Roppe, but you’re surprisingly sensitive about these things. I think that’s a sign you’ll be a good wife, actually,” Rokuko said.

“Guh?! D-Don’t tease me, Rokuko!”

“I’m not teasing you. I want to learn from your example, really. Right, Mephy?”

“Indeed, I say. I shall confirm that you will be a splendid wife, Roppe.”

“Stop it! Your backup is so weighty it’ll crush me, Princess Mephy!”

Those three sure have become fast friends. Huh. Is Rokuko actually a total extrovert? She ended up being friends with Emmymephy before I even realized it, so... It really did happen in the blink of an eye. Or rather, the extended blink of an eye, as in, while I was asleep.

Anyway, we made it all the way to Corky’s gates. It seemed that most big cities in the Empire were all built pretty much the same. Corky too was surrounded by large stone walls. Who knew whether that was the imperial standard in Laverio, or if it was just convenient to do so with the technology of the time. Another possibility was there being some kind of magic that could create walls like these in a snap.

Thanks in part to our guard quest, we passed through the gates in no time. The quest was considered finished then and there since they had to investigate the merchant’s cargo. Wataru got their signature and their payment before catching up with us.

“Heya. Been a while, Wataru.”

“Seriously, Keima?! I can’t believe you actually made me stay in the merchant’s wagon the whole way here! That was just mean!”

“I was just making sure you didn’t slack and fail the quest you went out of your way to take. You should thank me, really.”

“Hmph. Well, it’s fine. I spent most of the time bragging about how much stronger you are than me. Rumors of the Ultimate Adventurer Keima who not even Heroes can beat should be spreading as we speak.”

“You just made an enemy for life.”

“Haha, I’m just kidding. I know you don’t like that kind of thing. I went ahead and kept the details of our quest a secret.”

“I sure hope you did. Anyway, let’s go to the guild.”

We drove our wagon in the direction of the Adventurer’s Guild. We could hear the clanging sounds of smithing at all times while riding down the main street. It sounded exactly like you’d expect a Dwarf City to sound.

By the way, from a human’s perspective, all dwarf women were lolis. Dwarves could tell how old they were from a glance, but to us they were all legal lolis. And while some might disagree, I was glad they were the kind of dwarf women that didn’t have beards or mustaches.

Also, despite being noon, the city was swarming with dwarves drinking at stands and adventurer parties clinking mugs together. There certainly were a lot of dwarves, but there were plenty of humans, elves, beastkin, and other races drinking and having a good time. This was basically heaven to any drinker.

Oh, that extra big person is a giant? Neat, I thought he was just a tall person. That winged person must be an avian. They’re not quite a bird-type beastkin. I know about them thanks to Maiodore.

“The further south you go, the more giants and avians there are.”

Cool. I wonder what the deal with the human races is, though. Giants are humans but Succubi and Apprentice Witches are monsters? Does having a magic stone really make that much of a difference?

“Hey, Ichika. What food is good here?” Rokuko asked.

“Mmm, I guess the beer’s the main thing. They’ve got their meat and potatoes and all that stuff, but it’s all sides to the beer, know what I’m saying? Do you drink, Rokuko?”

“I’m not a fan of beer since it’s so bitter, but I like how floaty it makes me

feel.”

“Oh? I say, I would like to see you drunk, Rokuko.”

“I don’t mind if Keima doesn’t mind.”

Ichika’s really rubbing off on Rokuko, huh? She seems pretty interested in food now. Also, don’t drink, Rokuko. My mind won’t be able to take it.

“I say, if you don’t like the bitterness, there’s beers with fruit juice in them. I’m sure you would like them.”

“You know, Mephy, at that point I’d rather just drink the juice as juice.”

“...Well, no need to force yourself to drink, I suppose.”

We reached the Adventurer’s Guild while Rokuko badmouthed fruit juice to Mephy.

“Alright, let’s get ta unloadin’ our quest stuff. Wataru, ye can turn our wagon in.”

“Oh, you’ll be turning the stuff in? I’m guessing you have some friends in there?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

We got our delivery quest items and entered the guild. I expected to see a bunch of adventurers getting extremely drunk, but surprisingly enough there wasn’t even a bar in the guild.

“Dwarf City’s Adventurer Guild doesn’t even have a bar?”

“What’s the point when there’s tons a bars all around? Sometimes people’ll bring their own beer here and go nuts, though.”

Yeah, makes sense. No point in setting up a pointless bar and increasing your workload for nothing.

We brought the items to the counter. The receptionist was a chubby loli... a female dwarf, probably. *Yeah. She’s got makeup on, and has that mature woman aura that receptionists tend to have.*

“Heya, Anita! We’ve got some quest junk here, have a look.”

“Gozou! It’s been awhile! A whole year, ain’t it been?”

“Been doing a lot of stuff in another town. I’m on my way to get a B-Rank.”

“B?! Hey, Gilmas! C’mere, Gozou’s saying he’s getting a B-Rank!”

“Whaaat?! Is that right, Gozou? Congrats! We gotta get our drinking game on!”

A different, bearded dwarf appeared from further within the guild after the receptionist dwarf called for him. “Gilmas” was probably short for “guildmaster,” rather than being his actual name. *Are they really gonna start drinking at noon? Maybe it’s good here for the gilmas... uh, guildmaster to have a habit of skipping work.*

“Hey, Keima. Just gonna warn ye now, Anita’s married to Gilmas, alright? Don’t go tryin’ ta seduce her now.”

“I mean, I wasn’t planning on it. Who do you think I am?”

“A loli hunter. Wait... Ah, I get it. Most humans think all dwarf women look like lolis, but you can tell the difference. Good on ye. Just what I’d expect from a loli hunter.”

Loli hunter, seriously? I seriously don’t get where this is coming from.

“...I can kinda tell the difference, but I sound like a perv when you put it like that. Also, how old is she actually?”

“Huh? She should be around—” Gozou started to reply, but before he finished, Anita the receptionist slapped me on the back.

“Hey hey hey! Are you Gozou’s party member? You’re a skinny one!”

“Er, uh, actually, uh.”

“Anita. This’s Keima. He’s the town chief of Goren, and he’s less a party member and more like our captain. He looks like a twig, but it’s thanks ta him that I got up to B-Rank.”

“Well how about that! Keima, huh? Guess Gozou owes you a lot, then! Thanks for looking after him. You wanna drink too?”

Oh man, she’s a grandma. She looks like a loli, but she’s a total grandma on

the inside.

“Nah, I don’t drink much. I’ll just take the sides.”

“You don’t drink?! Are you sick with somethin’ fierce? Shame, and you’re not even old enough to have a beard yet...”

“Er, sure, let’s go with that...” The hyperactive loli grandma crushed me with her sheer energy. *I wonder how old she actually is... But I guess it’s taboo to ask a woman her age. I’ll give up on finding it out for now.*

So, with that done, they grabbed food and beer from a nearby bar and started going to town. This place wasn’t called Dwarf City for nothing. Dwarves holding mugs the size of small barrels dropped by and clinked glasses with Gozou. There was a full blown party going on in the blink of an eye. A party that not just me, but Rokuko, Emmymephy, Ichika, and Niku got wrapped up in too.

“Masteeer, dude, why aren’t’cha drinking? Here, have a li’l sip, ‘kay?”

“Quit it, Ichika. I’m not going to drink just because you’re pouring me a glass. And what, are you already drunk?”

“My man, this is Dwarf City. What am I gonna drink if not beer?”

Juice or something. You sure are enjoying a lot of freedom for a slave, Ichika. Not that I mind.

“But really, I can tell this is Gozou’s hometown. There’s beer everywhere.”

“Gahaha! Yup! Ye can drink some yerself, y’know!”

“I’ll pass, it turns out I’m sick with some beer allergy or something. Right, Rokuko?” I said, turning to look at Rokuko, only to find her chugging a rapidly emptying beer mug.

“Fwaah! So bitteeeeer... Plain juice is definitely waaay better than this... Am I riiight?”

“Wha, hey! Who gave Rokuko beer?!”

“I say, it was I!”

“Princess Mephy?! Don’t let kids drink!” I glared at Emmymephy as she casually waved at us from the other side of the table.

“Oh? Rokuko said she’s of age. And in any case, it’s fine since she’s with you.”

“It’s anything but fine... Wait, are you drinking too, Princess Mephy?”

“Indeed! The royal will decrees that I shall drink! Truly, having a taste for alcohol is important for any empress!” Emmymephy declared. Since Haku was the founder of the Empire and she drank at a yearly festival, it was apparently normal for all members of the imperial family to drink.

“Fair, but don’t wrap Rokuko up with that. She’s an awful drunk.”

“But that is exactly what I wished to see!” cackled Emmymephy. *Uh, princess?*

“Try not to go too wild, alri— guh?!” I tried to give the drunk Emmymephy a lecture, but I suddenly felt something touching me beneath the table. Trembling, I scooted back my chair and found Niku looking up at me with a flushed expression.

“Er, what’re you doing down there? You surprised me.”

“.....” Niku nuzzled her cheek against my crotch again. Guuuh.



“Ni— Uh, Kuro? What’re you doing?”

“...Master’s smell...”

“You’re drunk too, aren’t you?! Hey, who gave Kuro beer?!”

“Bwuuh? That wasn’t juice? Ahahahaaaah!”

“Rokukooooooo!”

I even almost called her Niku in public. *God, this is awful. Am I the only sane person here?! There’s gotta be somewhere to hide...*

“Keima, over here!”

Anita the receptionist! The legal loli grandma! This is my way to victory! I retreated to Anita’s location with Rokuko in my arms and Niku clinging to my leg.

“Are you okay? Keima, and the girls.”

“Yeah, thanks to you... Got any water?”

“Sure, sure... Oh wait, this is beer. Whoopsie. Here’s your water.”

I took the beer, or rather the water, and had Rokuko and Niku drink some. When I held the cups up to their mouths, they bit into the rim of the cup and sipped water while chewing. *Now that’s cute.* I kinda want to pat their heads now. Too bad both my hands are occupied.

“Nguuh, Keimaaa, Keima... Nmmm...”

“Masteeer... Meat... Nzzz...”

And so, they slept. They were really synchronized there.

I decided to head to the inn to get them in bed... at which point I realized we hadn’t decided on an inn yet. I waved over Wataru, who was having at it in the middle of the party.

“Heeey, Wataru. Where’s our inn gonna be? I want to get Rokuko and Kuro in bed.”

“Oh, I think we’re staying in the inn beside Gozou’s parent’s house. Hey, Princess Mephy, that’s mine.”

“Ahahaha, not anymore!”

...Yeaah, I'll leave the drunk princess to Wataru. Time to find Gozou. Oh, there he is.

“Heeey. Gozou, where’s your parents’ place? By which I mean, where’s our inn?”

“Oh? Ahhh, your girlyies got too drunk, huh? It’s right nearby. Everybody, I’m duckin’ out for a second! Gotta guide Keima somewhere real fast.”

Gozou left the party and guided me to the inn as I followed behind with Rokuko and Niku on my shoulders. *I kinda picked them up without thinking about it, but my hips would be shattering right now without my Wearable Golem helping to carry them both. They’re actually pretty heavy. Oh... I could have just asked Ichika for help.*

“By the way, what’s your family even do for a living? Kantara’s from a smithing family, right?”

“My folks are adventurers. They specialize in mining.”

“Does that mean there’s metal-type Golems around the city?”

“Nah, there’s some ore veins in a dungeon nearby. Ye can get a steady supply of ore there, and monsters pop up there too. They’re kinda like miners that happen to be adventurers.”

“Neat, I didn’t know there were jobs like that,” I replied while stealthily checking the DP catalog. It looked like I could buy ore veins for cheaper metals. The veins Gozou was talking about were probably just dungeon structures. Like treasure chests, but larger.

I wonder if you can buy veins for them because they’re cheap, or if they’re cheap because you can buy veins for them. Probably a bit of both. It was also possible that they just weren’t in my DP catalog, and I’d have to find veins of precious metal—gold, silver, mythril, etc.—in real life before being able to buy them. Or well, that was more a fact than a possibility, since apparently this dungeon had a mythril vein deep inside of it.

“Here we are.”

The Forest Honey Inn. It was a sturdy, three story inn made of stone and located close to the guild. The two story stone building next to it was apparently where Gozou's parents lived.

"Me n' Roppe are gonna stay with my parents, so only gotta get rooms for your party, Wataru, and Princess Mephy. Guess that makes four rooms," Gozou said before going to talk to the inn's owner. The owner was a bear-eared beastkin rather than a dwarf.

They naturally knew each other as neighbors, and perhaps due to being apart for so long, their conversation was really dragging on. *I wanna get these two in bed already, y'know.*

After too long a wait, Gozou came back while scratching his head.

"Er, sorry, Keima. Looks like they're outta rooms. I only managed to get two fer ye."

"Really...? Well, nothing we can do about that. How about you let Wataru and Princess Mephy stay at your place? My party will use the inn rooms."

"...Eh, guess that's alright. They're probably gonna drink all night anyway."

I'm sure Princess Mephy will be safe with Wataru... Though they're both going to end up wasted out of their minds. Honestly, it wouldn't even be a problem if they crossed the line and did you-know-what. Wataru's apparently in the running to marry her anyway.

With our inn rooms secured, I finally got Rokuko and Niku in bed.

Hm... Guess I'll go to bed too. I spread out my futon in the room next to Rokuko and Niku's, then lay down to sleep.

* * *

I woke up to something soft being pressed against me.

"....."

It was warm and pleasantly soft, so I just went back to sleep... or I tried to, but something stuck in my mind. What might this soft, squishy thing be? It wasn't the futon. Judging by how it felt pressing against my face... It was something wrapped in cloth, but it wasn't stuffed with cotton or anything.

And actually, there was a faint scent of alcohol to it. Or I should say, a very strong stench of alcohol. And also, it was clinging to me. What? I looked up.

“Fwaah... Dude, that tickles... Nzzz...”

It was Ichika. *Why is Ichika using me as a dakimakura?* I tried to calm my confusion to dissect the situation.

...It probably went like this.

1: Gozou told her that he left us at the inn.

2: She came to the inn when she got tired.

3: The inn owner guided her to our rooms... Correction. He guided her to my room.

4: Ichika, being drunk, went straight into my futon.

5: Night ended, the sun rose, and morning began. (We're here now.)

Why? Did he think Ichika and I were a married couple with kids or something...? Well, whatever. This is a lot better than me sleeping in bed alone with Rokuko. At least with Ichika I can make excuses about her being my slave. Now, what to do about this. I don't want to wake her up, but she's squeezing me so hard I can't move at all.

Actually, this is a non-issue. I can just forget I saw anything and go right back to sleep.

Confident in my genius idea, I shifted back into my previous position and... *Wait.* If I go back to sleep, I'll end up burying my face in Ichika's massive tits again. Isn't that a problem? Not to mention that if I look up, Ichika's face is right in front of mine. That's kinda a bit much.

“Oh nooo, I can't eat anymoreee, but this is miiine!”

“Guuuh?!” She suddenly squeezed me hard, forcing my face right into her cleavage. *Yeah... She smells like beer. At least I can breathe in here.*

Aaanyway, Ichika did this herself. I'm the victim. And in the first place, Ichika's my slave. There's no problem at all with me burying my face in her tits. Alright. Perfect. Time to go back to sleep.

...But when I closed my eyes, Ichika started to stir. “Nnn... Ah, what...? What a weird dream... That was one massive curry roll... Ngh! And now it’s gone forever! I should’ve just bitten right into it...!”

Seriously? She picks now to wake up? Oh man. Should I wake up too? With my face buried in her tits...? I-I’ll just pretend to be asleep! The best thing for me to do is to pretend to sleep until this is all over!

“Wait... Am I grabbing onto sommmmeethIING?!”

I could feel Ichika stiffen. *And yeah, we’re stuck so close together I can feel her heartbeat too.*

“N-Niku...? D-Definitely, not... This is... M-Master?”

We may have the same black hair, but that was the only thing Niku and I had visually in common. I didn’t have her ears, after all. Ichika noticed that immediately.

Okaaay, pretending to sleep, pretending to sleep. Zzz. Zzz. I’m asleep. So don’t worry, just pretend this never happened... Please. Please pretend this didn’t happen.

“Where even am I...? Ouch, I think I drank so much I friggin’ forgot everything... Is this an inn? But wait, why am I in bed with Master... Nnn?”

I could hear Ichika’s heart rate speeding up. *Can’t really blame her for getting confused here.*

“...Ah! Right, this is dakimakura work! He got me drunk and dragged me into this?!”

How could you not be more wrong?! I shouted internally, but for the sake of pretending to sleep I kept my silence. My only option at this point was to go all the way with this fake sleeping.

“Awww, geez. I woulda done this no prob if he just asked, no need for all this getting me drunk business. Oh, but I guess he likes girls without boobs more...?” Ichika said shyly while stroking my head. *Seriously, you’ve got the wrong idea. I wouldn’t do that. Also, I have a foot fetish, but I don’t dislike boobs. They’re alright.*

“...Oopsie, gotta be careful. Don’t wanna make a wrong move and wake Master up. Sure am I glad I asked Niku about all this stuff,” Ichika said before wrapping her arms around my head to gently embrace it. *I don’t even know what’s going on anymore.*

“And y’know... I’d do more than this too. I wouldn’t even bite him...”

She’s saying something, but it’s hard to hear. Oh no. I can’t hear a word of it. Darn, guess I’ll just have to ignore it and go back to sleep.

In the end, Niku came by later and taught Ichika how to get out of bed without waking me, which meant my fake sleeping plan went perfectly. I slept through it all without anyone realizing I knew what happened. The end.

* * *

Having spent the night in the inn, I dropped by Gozou’s place to say my hellos before heading to Kantara’s place. After all, Gozou’s parents were just some normal adventurers. Wataru was still drinking, and Emmymephy was passed out drunk inside the guild. I’ll just pretend I never saw the imperial princess throwing up on a dirty floor while Anita comforted her.

Anyway, what was my goal in visiting Kantara’s place? Tourism, I guess. A little observation. I was a bit curious to see what a real deal smithy was like. My companions on this noble quest were Ichika and Rokuko. I left Niku behind. Her hangover was a bit too much for this walk.

“But y’know... Heheh, y’knooow, Masteeer.”

“You’re too close. Is it just me, or have you been like that all day? Did something happen?”

“Awww, you’re playing dumb? Mmm, well, if you don’t wanna say it, I’m game with that.”

“Um, Ichika? You are too close. It’s hard for him to walk when you’re sticking to him like that,” Rokuko said, forcing her way between me and Ichika. She then grabbed my arm, making it harder for me to walk, but hey. I appreciated the backup. After all, I didn’t know anything. I had absolutely, legitimately no idea why Ichika was in such a good mood today, or why she was being all buddy-buddy with me. The inn owner asked if I had a good time last night, but I didn’t

know what to tell him. All I did was sleep.

“No worries, Rokuko, I totally get that you’re the top dog wife! Yup, yup, I’m just a slave and dakimakura. I’m an item for Master to use as he dang well pleases. But like, even pets get close to their owner, y’know? What’s wrong with a little arm hugging?”

“Oh, right, a pet! That’s fine, then. I let Phenny ride on my shoulder and hand, after all.”

Rokuko’s pets were Phenny the Phoenix and Jewelry the Jewel Turtle. Guess she considered Ichika on the same level as them.

...Honestly, it fits. Treating her like that honestly fits perfectly. Why does Ichika feel so much more like a pet even though Niku’s the dog girl? Maybe because Niku is a dakimakura.

“Alright, so this is Kantara’s place...”

I went to the back entrance as directed, but there were still a ton of dwarves going in and out while the sounds of clanging metal filled the air. The smoke trailing from the furnace was visible from far away, and honestly just being near the smithy was uncomfortably hot.

Though actually, now that I think about it, will they actually let me see them work? I mean, Kantara did, but his parents are probably his teachers, so I can bet they’ll be doing higher level work... I can’t really blame them if they don’t want an outsider watching them. I’ll just give up if they tell me no. It’s not like I’m that desperate to watch. At most I’m just thinking I can record their work using the menu and recreate it with Golems, or help out Neruneh with her research.

...To be real though, even orichalcum forging can be done easily with {Create Golem}, so the absolute best case scenario here is learning to make items without relying on {Create Golem}, but... I think Kantara is doing a good job of that already. I guess I don’t need to watch? No, no, I need to see this kind of thing and learn more about what’s normal in this world.

“Keima, aren’t we going inside?”

“Oh, uh, I was just wondering if they’d even let us watch. Alright! Go forth,

Ichika?”

“Um, why me? Guess I don’t mind doing a little meet and greet. One sec... Excuse meee! Is this Kantara’s plaaace?” Ichika yelled at the door, and out came a white bearded dwarf with a walking staff.

“Huh? Kantara’s our boy, but who’re ye?”

“Aaah, I’m just from a place called Goren. Kantara’s been a real bro to me so I was thinking I’d drop by and see what’s up. Like, he’s totally kept my weapon sharp and stuff.”

“Yeah? Lemme take a look.”

Ichika handed the cleaver on her hip... the Golem Cleaver to the dwarf. He took it and flicked it with his finger, making a clink.

“A Magic Blade, huh? Sure looked like Kantara’s fixing it up.”

“Whoa, you can tell? That’s amazeballs. Dwarf smiths really are something else.”

“Hmph, course I can tell that much. He’s my son. Ye’d be able to tell the same ‘bout your kid.”

“Ohhoho. So you’re Untara, then?”

“The one and only,” said the dwarf—Kantara’s dad, Untara—with a bellowing belly laugh. “Seems like Kantara’s doing alright for himself. How bout ye come in for a beer?”

“Dude, that sounds fantastic. But mind if I introduce you to my master first? He’s the town chief of Goren.”

Alright, looks like it’s our turn. And wow, Ichika, you sure managed to hit it off with him in no time. I can tell you’re used to meeting new people and making friends.

“Errr, hello. Kantara’s been a good fri—”

“So yer the town chief, huh? Kinda skinny, ain’t ye? How’s a twig like ye leading a town o’ adventurers?” he said mirthfully, slapping me on the back.

“Watch out, dude. Master’s hella strong no matter how he looks. He basically

trashed a whole camp of bandits himself on the way here.”

“Really now! Alright, show me that blade on yer hip. I’m lookin’ forward to this.”

Sadly, Ichika made things a lot harder for me with one sentence. *That reminds me, I haven’t used Siesta as a weapon at all lately... Actually, I don’t use it as a weapon at all. Maybe I should start walking around with a staff so I look more like a mage.*

“Sure. But be careful, this is a Magic Blade.”

“Alrighty. Let’s see... here... whoa, lord above!” Untara immediately put Siesta in its sheath after pulling it out a bit. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, having apparently broken out into a sweat. “The hell is this thing? I nearly passed out just from takin’ it out... Ye must be the real deal if yer usin’ this thing, skinny or not. But how do ye even maintain that blade?”

“Uhhh...” *Actually, I’ve never done repairs on it at all. Not that it matters, since I don’t cut anything with it and it’s a Magic Blade anyway...*

I tried telepathically communicating with it just for the hell of it, like I did with Kosaki. I asked if it wanted maintenance, and it replied “Nn.” *Uhhhh, alright, that probably means “Yes.” Hm... Oh, I see. Looks like Siesta ended up on the Named list. No surprise then that I can communicate with it.*

“(...Alright, I’ll ask him to give you a checkup. Could you not blast your sleep rays while he’s doing it?)”

“(Nn.)”

Would it kill you to say yes or no...? But yeah, I can tell what it means since this is telepathy. That was a yes. I guess it’s just more of a silent type. Reminds me of how little Niku used to talk. Or well, I guess it’s even worse since it doesn’t have ears or a tail.

“(By the way, could you focus your sleep rays and only target enemies with them?)”

“(...Nnn.)”

Oh, that was a no. I could hear the regret. I guess it just can’t help but hit

everyone when it uses the sleep rays. It can't even avoid just its user. Those sure were a lot of details I understood thanks to telepathy. Anyway, it can turn the power on and off, so I'll ask Untara to do some maintenance.

"...I cut off its power for a bit. Could I ask you to do some maintenance on it?"

"What?! Ye gods... It really ain't doing it anymore. You really are a master o' this blade. I've heard legends that the true wielder of a Magic Blade can communicate spiritually an' bring out the best in it. The reverse is true too," Untara said with a grin while pulling out the blade again. I said nothing about having mentally negotiated with the sword through telepathy. I guess telepathy was basically communicating spiritually, though.

"Hey, Keima! I think I want him to fix up my sword too!" Rokuko patted the sword on her hip.

"Huh? Have you ever even used that rapier before...?"

"Gahaha! That's fer self defense, ain't it? Nothin' better than not having to use it!"

I mean, it's basically just decoration. So much so Rokuko used a crossbow the last time she actually tried fighting. But it is true that it's best to avoid any situations where Rokuko has to fight with a sword.

By the way, he easily agreed to let us watch him work after we gave him some Japanese wine and some of Phenny's eggshells. They were a rare item with some great fire resistance for forges, after all. Glad to see he liked them.

"I'll make anything ye need for free! Go ahead 'n take anything you want from the store!" he said with bloodshot eyes, but, uh, there wasn't really anything I wanted. But I went ahead and grabbed a mythril knife for Niku, plus asked him to make a mythril holy symbol. I also grabbed the mythril cleaver he had on the wall for free. It was all free, too. *He must have really liked that Japanese beer.*

Also, there was a crossbow there too, but the Golem Crossbow that Rokuko was using beat it out. Hers was a magic crossbow that reloaded itself, after all. I had made the bow part of it with composite materials through trial and error. That said, the individual parts in the store were all much more precisely crafted. Just what I would expect from a pro.

As for the staff I wanted just to look cool, he told me I'd be better off getting one from a magic tool store. I didn't mind waiting. It wasn't something I really needed, anyway. Not to mention that he gave me a mythril ingot to make one myself. It gleamed with a silver color and was thick enough to hold in his hand. *I could make it myself... but I think I'll ask a pro to take care of it.*

"I'm like, totally happy you would get such a rad cleaver for me, Master. I don't even know if I should use it. Eheheh."

"You should. It was free." Mythril was actually some pretty high class stuff. But the Phoenix eggshells I brought him were even more rare, so honestly it evened out pretty well. Though I didn't know exactly how valuable either were. I still had an entire room stocked full of the eggshells, so the word "rare" didn't exactly click for me.

Anyway, I'll have to turn the mythril knife and mythril cleaver into Magic Blade Golems later. I'll just need to fiddle with their insides a little... Though I have to wonder if there's any space for me to do fiddling. If there isn't, I'll just have to go with my original version of Golem Blades, even though they're weak to getting hit and die kinda fast.

Also, when I talked about Beddhism after asking him to make the holy symbol, he asked to join Beddhism himself and to make his own holy symbol. He even went so far as to ask me to let him help proselytize people into the church. I said sure. Oyasuminasai.

"...You know," said Rokuko, "Isn't this the first time we've talked about Beddhism on this whole trip?"

"Yup. I don't really care about spreading it too much. Not much I can do for people while away from town."

"That's true."

In this world, religions were built on practicality, not being able to immediately reward converts was a big problem. As it stood, Beddhism would never spread anywhere too far from Goren. *Maybe I should start selling futons on the road?*

Having finished watching Untara work in the smithy, our plans for the day

were over. We decided to wander around and do whatever. It was a bit hard to find anything interesting since the area around Kantara's place was filled with smithies.

"Are there even enough customers to support this many smithies?"

"Yeah dude, they've got people coming from all around to hire smiths from here. Not to mention all weapons and armor get worn down. They've always got business thanks to soldiers and adventurers."

"Makes sense."

Naturally, there were some other stores around too. The bars stuck out the most, but there were some stores selling accessories, and I saw some alchemist workshops too.

"Hey, Keima, isn't this an alchemist workshop? Let's try visiting it."

"Oh, cool. They might have some neat magic tools... Though wow, this place looks like a witch might own it," I said as I entered the kinda suspicious workshop with Rokuko. There were black curtains covering the walls just like a fortune teller's place... and I could feel the *Darkness* of a dark magician. The products themselves were placed on a table, or really, they were strewn about on the table.

...This is a store, right? Not an abode for the living incarnation of a darkness spell? The door was open, so... They should at least organize this stuff, or throw away the broken bottles. Tags for the products with their names and prices would be even better.

"Welcome. Take a look at whatever you like," said the tiny, black-robed owner of the store. *Rokuko... Are you sure this is an alchemist's place and not a dark magician's place?*

"Hey, what's this?" Rokuko pointed out a cute little bottle with pink liquid inside.

"Oh, that's a love potion. It's decently strong, but nothing amazing. Ten silvers."

"Hmm. Well, I don't need it. Right, Keima?"

Uh, right. Riiight.

“What about this?”

“That’s... a magic tool. What did it do again...? I think I just kinda made it without really thinking... Ah, fifty silvers will do.”

Why would we buy it when we don’t even know what it does? That’d be 500,000 yen in Japan, y’know. I guess alchemist wares just are that expensive... Oh? What’s this pillow?

“What’s this?”

“Oh, well. A pillow. Two silvers.”

“...What does it do?”

“Ever heard of the Church of Beddhism? It’s a religion all about peace and comfort, and this pillow was blessed by their pope in their home temple. It’ll really help you sleep.”

Waaait. “Sorry, could you say that again?”

“It’s a pillow blessed by the Beddhist pope. It’ll help you sleep.”

That has to be referring to me. There’s no other Beddhist popes. But I don’t remember blessing any pillows... Did some merchant bring one in during mass or something?

“This pillow is really something else. I tried it once myself, and it just cured my insomnia.”

“Wow, it can do that?”

“Yep, yep. I hear tons of nobles love these pillows. And right now, this one costs only two silvers.”

Looks just like a normal cotton pillow to me. Guess it should be fine to let this one slide.

“If you’re not convinced, I can throw in some Beddhist holy water.”

“What? Beddhist... holy water?”

“If you put two or three drops on the blessed pillow before sleeping, you’re

guaranteed to sleep soundly until morning. If you want to drink it, just mix a single drop into a cup of water,” explained the store owner while taking out a potion bottle filled with a clear, purplish liquid. *So that’s Beddhist holy water, huh?*

“So, Rokuko. Are we selling any holy water like that? That looks kind of like a sleeping potion.”

“We are, but it’s not this color. Ours is just herb water to help with relaxation.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. This is just a suspicious potion. Ichika, what do you think the Beddhist Church should do about this thing?”

“The Beddhist Church? Well, I mean, whatever you want, man. It’s your religion.”

The conclusion of our whispered discussion was that I should do what I wanted to. *Well, the first thing I’ll do is ask for details. Action can wait until that’s over.*

“Er, excuse me. Mind if I ask where you got this pillow and holy water?”

“Hm? I don’t know exactly where they’re from since I bought them both from some merchants... But, what, do you have a problem with my products?”

“Yeah. There’s a problem with them.”

“Like heck they have a problem. This store may look suspicious, but I’m an honest merchant doing honest work!”

“Oh, but they do. ’Cause I’m the pope of Beddhism, and we’re not selling either of these.”

“Whaaat?! A young man like you, a pope? Hahaha, good one... Wait, you’re serious?”

I held up the mythrill holy symbol I just got. The store owner went pale.

“H-Hold on a second.” They dug under their counter for something, then pulled out a magic tool that looked like a crystal ball. “C-Could you say that again with your hands on this? That you’re the Beddhist pope.”

“...I’m the Beddhist pope,” I said, and the crystal ball didn’t change color. But apparently it not doing anything was important.

“I-It didn’t shine... You’re the real thing?”

“What, this is a lie detecting magic tool? Let me double down, then: The Beddhist Church isn’t selling these products. Well that’s that. Now you get my issue, right?”

The store owner bobbed their head in rapid nods.

“We Beddhists may be forgiving folk, but I’m not about to let people pass off strange potions as Beddhist products.”

“B-But, that’s just what the person who sold me them said. I didn’t know anything! I promise!”

I pointed at the crystal ball. They understood what I meant and repeated themselves with their hands on the ball. It didn’t shine.

“Interesting. By the way, what’ll happen if you lie while touching it?”

“Er, it shines red. But you have to replace the magic stone every time it shines, so it’s not something you can really use at the drop of a hat. Though richer people have ones that don’t need to be touched or have their magic stones replaced,” explained the store owner. They did so while touching it, and it didn’t shine.

“Mind if I try it out? I’ll pay for the magic stone.”

“S-Sure.”

“Rokuko is my partner.”

...It didn’t shine. That meant the store owner wasn’t fiddling with it from behind the scenes.

“This mythrill holy symbol is proof of me being the Beddhist pope.” *Oh, there it goes. Bright red. Guess this is the real thing.*

“...Whaaat? That’s not proof of being the pope?”

“It’s just a random Beddhist holy symbol. I had a smith make it a second ago.”

The shopkeep switched out the magic stones. I bought one of the same size

from the DP catalog and handed it over, then had them put their hands on it again.

“Alright then. I don’t really mind embracing this holy water and pillow into Beddhism. If they really work and there are no side effects, that is.”

“R-Really?”

“I don’t even mind giving the pillow my blessing right here and now.”

“O-Ohhh...!”

Though I don’t know how to bless things, so I’ll just be saying some random prayer over it.

“In return, tell me who brought these things to you. Who was it? Where’d they get them?”

“R-Right! Um, it was a passing by alchemist, and I bought them three days ago,” said the storekeep without any hesitation. The ball didn’t shine.

“What did this alchemist look like?”

“Right! Um, it was a woman with black hair just like yours! And really bright red eyes!”

A black-haired, red-eyed woman. I knew someone that fit that description exactly, and my mouth twitched at the thought of her. I had gotten some extraordinary information from a random alchemist workshop I just wandered into.

“Umm, she said she worships both Chaos and Beddhism. There was something about Beddhism being some kind of sub-religion you can worship on the side.”

A black-haired, red-eyed woman. Worshiping Beddhism and Chaos. Yeah, there was no doubt that they were talking about Leona.

“Oh, I also bought some God of Chaos potions from her. I can’t put most of them on the shelves, but take a look. Futanaruu and Tee S! Tree Grower and Weed Cutter! Some of these last a night and others are so pure they last forever! I really have no idea how she managed to get her hands on these. I know she said she made them herself, but I don’t know. I would have believed

her a lot more if she said she stole them from a noble, but I haven't heard any rumors like that," said the shopkeeper while busting out a big box of potions. They were lined up in a beautiful gradient, going from translucent to thick and opaque. The fact that this slovenly shopkeeper bothered to organize them so much was a sign of how rare and valuable they were.

Anybody would take care with things that sell for as much as these do. But anyway, yeah, this is Leona's work. It couldn't be anyone but her.

I asked what the potions did just to double check, but I only knew one person who would bother to make potions with weirdo names like that. *And yeah, there's that TS potion again. I don't know why she bothered to hide the word "transsexual" like that. Nobody in this world's gonna understand wordplay like that. Well... Maybe that's the idea, honestly.*

"These will rake in a ton of cash at auctions, and she told me to carefully put them on sale one by one, but... I don't mind changing plans for a pope! I can sell them to you for how much I bought them for!" The shopkeep was pushing the suspicious drugs on me kinda enthusiastically.

"...How much did you buy them for, anyway?"

"Mmm, I think it was ten golds for this Tee S potion that lasts six months."

Ten golds...? That's pretty expensive. That'd be about ten million yen. Definitely the kind of thing that only rich and famous people would buy. Oh, but I guess I dumped a hundred golds into the town's budget without thinking too hard about it. Wataru's really messing with my sense of scale for money. Curse you, Wataru... But wait. My inn's grand suite costs twenty five golds, right. My bad.

"How much would they sell at an auction?"

"...About five to ten times as much as I bought them for. After all, the supply is way lower than the demand for them. Though I've heard there's been a lot of them circulating in the underground through back channels lately."

There's that much demand for them?

"...So. If this six-month one costs ten golds, how much does the permanent one cost? I'm impressed you had enough money to buy them."

“I sold the first ones I bought in the auction, used the profit to buy more, and kept that up until I could finally buy one of each of the permanent ones. They each cost me a thousand golds. Boy, am I glad I managed to buy them while she was still here.”

A thousand golds each...? There's four of them here, which means collectively they cost more than all the debt I loaded onto Wataru. And that's just how much they bought them for. It boggled the mind to think about how much they would make in an auction. If that five-to ten-times figure was trustworthy for them, then a single one of them would sell for more than all of Wataru's debt. That would be more than enough for a normal person to live extravagantly for the rest of their life.

“...You said you bought this pillow three days ago, right?”

“She would come visit regularly to sell what she had. It was about once a week, usually. But she left on a journey after the last one. I don't think she's in the city anymore.”

“Really?” I sighed in relief. If Leona had still been here, it would have been too dangerous to stay, but since she was gone the reverse was true. The longer we stayed here, the better. She would be getting further away from us every day we waited.

“Alright. You can keep using the Beddhist name for that pillow, but not the holy water. Just sell it as a sleeping potion or something. Agree to that and I won't come after you.”

“O-Okay. My apologies for the trouble.”

“...Also, I have an extremely bad history with that alchemist, so don't tell her about me if she comes back. Pass off the name change as some random Beddhist dropping by and getting pissed.”

“Right, got it! Oh, and can you bless my pillows now?”

The storekeep started pulling out a ton of pillows from a storage room. *How many pillows are there? Is this a pillow store?*

...I put my holy symbol on the pillows, clasped my hands, and chanted “Oyasuminasai.” Did that have an effect? Not at all. It was the thought that

counted in these kinds of things.

Side Chapter — Meanwhile at the Dungeon

Days had passed since Keima and the others left the dungeon. Goren's dungeon, the [Cave of Greed], was busier than ever.

"Keima and Gozou's parties aren't here! Now's our time to make some dough!"

"The town chief always just wanders in once a week and takes all the treasure somehow... But now that he's gone, the loot's ripe for the picking!"

Thus thought a surprising number of adventurers, who all formed a party together and ventured into the dungeon. To be honest, they had already been forming parties and exploring the dungeon for quite some time, but this time they were particularly motivated.

After some exploring, they found a treasure chest set on the floor of the labyrinth area. Most treasure chests in this dungeon just appeared there. They contained their enthusiasm and opened the box while keeping an eye on their surroundings.

"Whoa, some high class wine! We've got a whole bottle for ourselves!"

"Holy crap... Usually only Keima or Gozou can get this stuff."

"Yeah, the town chief grabs tons of the stuff and gives it all to the bar."

They did feel annoyed at them keeping all the good loot for themselves. But they were grateful that Keima wasn't too into alcohol and just sold it all to the bar, where they could drink it if they had the money for it. But prices were high, as you would expect for such a rare drink, and well, they couldn't help but feel envious about how much money Keima was making by selling huge stores of the stuff.

But then, some Goblins appeared. It was a party of five of them. Something cut audibly through the air before anyone could blink. Thunk! An arrow stabbed into the ground by the adventurers' feet.

“Hey! They’ve got a Goblin Archer! Protect the wine with your lives!”

“More of them?! How many fights has this been?! At least it’s just Goblins this time...!”

“I see three Clay Golems behind ’em. Should we fight? Maybe we should run.”

“Seriously! Crap, these are some lucky Goblins. We’d have a hard time if the Golems jumped in mid fight. Let’s get out of here.”

They decided to run and fled the dungeon together at the drop of a hat.

Incidentally, the Goblins in the dungeon could be split into two types. First were the small-fry Goblins. Second were the armed Goblins. It was simple to tell them apart, for obvious reasons. Armed Goblins had some kind of weapon in hand and often formed parties. The quality of the weapons were bad, and their corpses were the same as small-fry Goblins, so it was safe to say there was nothing good about them. That said, inexperienced adventurers could lose to them in a snap. Even C-Rank adventurers might find themselves in a bad situation where the best option is just to run away.

Of course, it was pretty easy to run away from Goblins, so few people actually died to armed ones. Rumor had it that the Goblins didn’t give chase since they were cautious about traps. Either way, they weren’t an opponent to treat lightly. Which is why the adventurers managed to run away safely.

“Haah, haaah... There, we got away. Anyway, why the hell are there so many monsters? I like all the treasure chests, but this just isn’t right.”

“Might be a paradigm shift...? Though it might just be a coincidence that we’re... Oh!”

“Huh? Didja think of something?”

“...Maybe it’s ’cause Keima and Gozou are gone?”

Indeed. Keima and Gozou hadn’t just been clearing out the items. They had been clearing out the monsters too. The adventurers, realizing once again how incredible the two of them were, nodded to themselves.

“Wait a second,” murmured one. “I’m pretty sure Gozou didn’t hunt too many monsters.”

“Huh? Really?”

“Yeah. I’ve seen Gozou delivering body parts and extermination counts before, but he didn’t have much more than either of us.”

Gozou delivered monster body parts and extermination counts to the Adventurer’s Guild just like a proper adventurer should. Extermination quests were often a stable source of income, so many adventurers did both of them.

“...What about the town chief?”

“...I’ve never seen him do either.”

That said, Keima was pretty lazy about that kind of thing. It was hard to say just how many monsters he was actually hunting.

“Does that mean he’s not hunting at all?”

“Nah, the opposite. The town chief’s running the town, right? That means he’s on the side of people paying for extermination quests. He doesn’t need to bother with reports. That’d just be adding on more work when he could just be paying himself instead.”

In other words, it was safe to say Keima was hunting all the monsters that Gozou wasn’t. Considering how much money Gozou usually spent... Keima would be single-handedly exterminating most of the monsters they were encountering. It didn’t take long for them to reach the shocking truth.

“What the hell...? So we’ve always been going into the dungeon after Keima’s picked it clean of monsters?”

“Damn. The town chief’s somethin’ else for sure.”

Just how many monsters did he hunt during his once a week dungeon dive? Not to mention that he always went in solo, like he was going for a casual walk. Whiiich meant he was fighting all those monsters alone. Where a full party of adventurers would run, Keima would casually stay and fight like he was walking through his home’s garden. It was hard to imagine that considering how apathetic he usually looked, but now that they thought about it, Wataru the Hero had talked about how he had never managed to beat Keima. That surely meant he was strong enough to beat a group of Goblins and Golems without

even thinking about it.

“...Guess that explains how he gets all the wine to himself.”

“Really, it’s thanks to him that we can safely buy it at the bar when we want to drink some...”

“Yeah, we’re way out of our league here. We can’t hold a candle to him.”

And so, Keima’s reputation grew stronger while he wasn’t even aware of it.

* * *

Within the Master Room, Rei was receiving a report from Neruneh and Elulu.

“And sooo, my research is doing just greaaat.”

“I’ve been spawning more monsters to compensate for the supposed amount that Keima and Niku would be hunting if they were here. Have I been going too far?”

“No, you’ve been doing perfect. Keep it up, both of you.”

As she sat in the seat usually reserved for Keima and flicked through the menu while watching the monitor, Rei couldn’t help but grin. Being entrusted with managing the dungeon while her master was gone filled her heart with joy.

“Bwahaha! I am the one who protects the dungeon while Master is gone! I, Rei the Vampire! Bwahahaha! I shall make the dungeon a perfect recreation of how it is while he is here!” she declared, unleashing her storm of emotions before catching her breath. Perfect. She calmed down.

Kinue, who had been standing next to Rei waiting for that, patted her shoulder. “Rei. Do you have a moment?”

“Hm? What is it, Kinue?”

“Do you really think this is a perfect recreation?” asked Kinue, a little unsatisfied. But Rei was unfazed by the nitpicking. She knew that, unlike Keima, she wasn’t capable of doing perfect work. Rei was anything but narcissistic. She had simply been having a little fun a second ago, so she embraced Kinue’s protests.

“Do you have any criticism? I am all ears.”

“Very well, then. Do you truly think so poorly of Master?”

A jolt ran through Rei. Kinue was, in short, trying to say that if Keima were dungeon diving as an adventurer, he would be slaughtering far more monsters than they were adding. She wasn't going far enough, and Rei understood that instantly. She's smart!

“You're right, Kinue! Elulu, add even more monsters! About twice as many!”

“Er, um, okay. Understood!”

“This is perfeect. Let's kill all the adventureeers...! But actually that would be a problem, so beat the adventureeers half-dead!”

“Oh? Did he say we could kill half of them?”

“Rei, beating someone half-dead is to hurt them badly, but not enough to kill them.”

And so, the difficulty level of the dungeon rose with each passing day. The result was Keima's reputation improving, so one could say Rei was indeed accomplishing her goals. Though whether Keima wanted that was an entirely different story.

Chapter 3—???'s Perspective

This country is rotten.

We can say such for a fact because this entire empire operates on a rotten foundation—dungeons, dens of objective evil. Dungeons are foul things born from a demon that calls itself Darkness and opposes the one true god, the Light God. In this empire, they were allowed to exist close to cities, and in some cases within the cities themselves.

Despite the fact that new research funded by the Holy Kingdom has proven that dungeons stymie the circulation of mana and rot the world from the inside out, the people of the Empire avert their eyes from the truth and make no attempt to change. As a result, our only option is to make them understand through force.

Our plans began with bribing a noble from the Empire. In exchange for just a slight amount of money, we succeeded in obtaining enormously valuable information. Unbelievably, the imperial princess had left the capital on a journey with only a single guard.

Some said that it was a trap, that it was a body double being used as bait to draw us out. But we had already learned and went to great lengths to confirm that the imperial princess hated traveling with guards, and at times pretended to be her own body double to avoid them. That information also cost a slight amount of money, but it was of course a natural expense.

Unfortunately, despite moving immediately to secure the princess after learning of this, she had seven bodyguards by the time we found her. Still, that would be much easier than dealing with the small army of bodyguards she would normally have. After all, her seven companions included slaves, women, and children.

We took action to secure the princess.

Our first trap was laid in a small town with an inn one day away from Tsia on

carriage. An informant of ours informed us of the day a carriage emblazoned with a noble crest left Tsia. We gathered the necessary strength to overpower the princess and waited.

...However, two days passed and there was no sign of her. We noticed something was off and checked with magic tools to see what had happened, whereupon we learned that she had taken a different route to Mikan. We hurried there as fast as we could.

As an aside, we would be charging both our country and this rotten empire for the magic stone used in the process.

It was a dangerous route with constant monster attacks that offered no respite, but we powered through with only a few injuries. We arrived at Mikan in pursuit of the princess.

A cooperator located in Mikan informed us that the imperial princess was staying within the city. That confirmed she truly had taken the dangerous route. We interpreted that as reasonable behavior for the rotten princess of a rotten empire—she had worked her guards to the bone to save only a mere few days.

We handed a small sum of money to the Mikan cooperator and learned that the imperial princess had taken an extermination quest for an Elk Bear. On top of that, she would be completing it with even fewer guards than she already had.

It was the perfect opportunity. We went to the forest first and awaited the imperial princess's arrival. Of course, we hid within the trees so that forest beasts and monsters wouldn't attack us.

They came just as our information had suggested. The beautiful girl wearing clothes far too fancy for a forest could safely be identified as the imperial princess.

...That is the princess, right? Her chest is flat as a board, but surely that isn't a prince.

She had only two guards with her, again as our information suggested—though it was more like one guard. The other was clearly a child. And a beastkin, at that. Judging by the quality of her clothes, she was probably a sex

slave. At which point we realized something truly awful.

The position of sex slave was the best possible outcome for a lowly beastkin slave. One endowed with such an honor would surely be smiling happily at all times. And yet, her expression was as flat as could be, entirely as if all her face muscles had died. Ah, but of course. She was being used as bait to draw out the Elk Bear.

We watched from a distance and saw, as expected, the beastkin be sent ahead first to begin their search.

...Before long, an Orc appeared. They defeated it without any issue. Her male guard was quite skilled.

Next came a Great Boar. We witnessed the cocky princess step forth to fight it herself, presumably with her own magic.

That was our chance! The foolish princess had willingly stepped away from her guards. No better opportunity would come to kidnap her.

We sent two of our men to get her. They approached the princess using the Great Boar as cover. We had sent two men after one woman to secure our success. Our patience would be rewarded soon.

Unfortunately, tragedy struck from nowhere. The princess's {Stone Pyre} couldn't support the Great Boar's weight! Such was the result of the inexperienced imperial princess attempting to punch above her weight. It was a fairly common mistake for higher ups unfamiliar with real battlefields to make.

If nothing was done, the Great Boar would crush the princess. What could we do? Before we found an answer, the Great Boar suddenly changed direction in midair and launched towards our companions.

Impossible.

And so, our men were flung back by the force of the Great Boar's body blow. The male guard who had knocked aside the boar said "Nice work" to the princess. *H-Had this been their goal all along?!*

There, we realized. We realized who the guard really was.

Wataru Nishimi, the Fallen Hero. A wretched Hero who had turned his back

on the duty given to him by the Light God, choosing not to destroy dungeons but to actually work to the benefit of the Dungeon Empire. Despite being a Hero, a direct servant of the Light God, he had fallen to our enemies.

...We would need to rethink our plans since we were dealing with Wataru the Fallen Hero. We gathered our wounded allies and fled undetected.

As an aside, we would be charging both our country and this rotten empire for the medical bill.

We rethought our plans and decided to kidnap the princess in Donsama. A cooperator informed us that the imperial princess had developed an interest in food stands. It was probably another case of rich people getting kicks from spending extravagant amounts of money on commoner goods. That was one way to gain popularity, but we would be exploiting it for our own ends.

We sent a man under our influence to buy a stand near the Adventurer's Guild. Our goal was to poison her. There was a part inside fish where it was hard to notice poison. Indeed, the guts. We would fill the guts with poison and feed it to the imperial princess. Her guards would send her to a hospital where a doctor on our side would wait for her to be alone, then kidnap her.

Furthermore, this poison could not be cured by an average poison-curing magic tool! The poison was held back by being expensive and weak in effect, but while within her body she would find herself increasingly weakened over time. It would take a man of enormous strength to endure the poison unfazed. Naturally, a sheltered imperial princess was no such man.

The plan was perfect! One worthy of a cash reward, surely.

"Here's a special one for a cute girl like you," our agent said while successfully delivering the poisoned fish to the princess. Now we just had to wait for her in the hospital... or so we thought, but unbelievably, Wataru the Fallen Hero removed the poisoned parts from the princess's fish. On top of that, he even went above and beyond by eating the poison to destroy it.

That was simply cruel. Simply going too far. We wept at the sight of the expensive poison we'd bought being used as snacks to accompany beer.

When we emotionally recovered, it was time for our next plan. Our target was

in North Donsama. They would have to use a ferry to reach the south of the city. With one exception, that is. That being going by foot.

As ludicrous as it sounds, Donsama made a sport of attempting to run across the river, and Wataru owned an extraordinary pair of legs that had successfully done just that. However, this was yet another opportunity for us to strike.

Wataru the Fallen Hero would run to the other side of the river, then the princess and her other guards would follow in a ferry. They would be separated, then, and her other guards were no doubt small fry compared to him. We would steal the entire ferry with the princess on it and Wataru far away! It was a strategy perfect in its simplicity!

Thus, we paid a small sum to purchase a ferry. We were ready for them to come at any moment.

However! Unbelievably! He crossed the river carrying the princess! He even ran back then back again as if to mock us!

One could say that this unprecedented feat was a reminder of the strength that Light God disciples wielded. We would surely be rejoicing if said strength was not being used against us!

And so, our attempt to kidnap the princess in Donsama failed as well.

However... That was not our only ploy involving Donsama. In truth, we had been spending years provoking the north and south sides of town into a ferocious rivalry. One day tensions would boil over and a fatal, merciless civil war would break out! Indeed, though we did fail to kidnap the princess here, victory would ultimately be ours!

With that inalienable truth putting strength in our hearts, we headed to the next city.

As an aside, we would be charging both our country and this rotten empire for the poison and boat.

This time, we struck out first and got ahead of them on the road. There was a group of bandits camping out by the road leading to Corky. We had cooperators in their midst, whom we contacted and directed them to ambush the princess on her way—paying only a small fee to ensure their loyalty.

The bandit group's strategy was to non-suspiciously block the road using a fallen carriage, then exploit the kindness of any who approached to help by launching a surprise attack. Truth be told, their strategy was so well known that the carriage would serve as a stalling measure at best, but they were a group of fools unwilling to learn and grow.

That said, their foolishness would serve us well here. Their strategy would draw Wataru the Fallen Hero from the wagon, naturally leaving the princess defenseless within. The small fry guards he left behind would be fully incapable of beating back the wave of foes that would soon crash upon them.

We would kidnap the princess within the wagon while Wataru the Fallen Hero was distracted by battle elsewhere. We didn't even have to involve ourselves in the battle directly. We could just sit and take the princess when they brought her back. It was, indeed, a perfect plan.

And in reality, the plan did draw Wataru and two others from the wagon. We had not predicted that they would have a merchant accompanying them, but the wagon in front emblazoned with a noble's crest left no room for doubt. Just as we thought our mission had finally succeeded, it happened.

Multiple Gargoyles were summoned around the wagon! Unbelievably, some of the remaining guards knew summoning magic. Not to mention that there were a huge amount of the Gargoyles. There were so many that they could only be explained by everyone still in the carriage knowing the spell {Summon Gargoyle}... Even the beastkin slave? Impossible. It couldn't be true. In which case, there was another guard on the level of a Hero, or perhaps several that were approaching Hero level? That was more possible. Learning this information was surely worth the failure of the plan. Our cooperators within the bandit group were taken down along with it, but we ourselves were safe. It wasn't a problem.

As an aside, we would be charging both our country and this rotten empire for the money we paid the bandits.

Curses. Our last chance is in Corky. She will make it back to the capital if we don't get her here.

However, everything prior to this was just a preamble. Now is where our true

power will shine. We will make use of all the experience and information we have accumulated up until this point. We shall obtain the imperial princess and strike down the merciless iron hammer of justice on this rotten empire! And also earn back the money and materials we have lost!

Keima's Perspective

"The truth is, Princess Mephy is being targeted."

"Uh."

Wataru broke the shocking news to me that evening. We had just been eating a normal old dinner, yet he casually dropped a bomb while grabbing some soy sauce. Our meal continued calmly.

Wataru poked a fork into a sausage, ate it, then continued. "Princess Mephy is being targeted."

"Eheheh, I say!" Emmymephy said with a fairly self-satisfied grin, like one a girl might have after being flirted with by her crush.

"...Oh, what, you mean she's being targeted in a romantic sense?"

"I believe they want to kidnap her so that they can ransom her for an enormous sum of money or possibly some other demand."

"Dang, that's pretty serious."

"Eheheh, I say!" Emmymephy laughed shyly, as if embarrassed. *What's there to be embarrassed and shy about here?*

"Well, I only learned this myself today, or rather I talked to Princess Mephy about it today. I wish she had mentioned it sooner."

"Forgive me. I didn't expect it to be this bad, I say."

"Errr, y'know. Wataru? Did ye have to tell all of us about this too?"

"Well, kinda. There's something I want to ask too."

All eight of us were gathered at the dinner table today. Wataru had invited us all to eat at a bar out of nowhere earlier.

“This ain’t somethin’ to talk about while drinkin’, and I’ve already got some beer in me.”

“A single mug of ale won’t get you drunk, Gozou. And don’t worry, it’s not that serious of a discussion.”

“Well, alright then.” Gozou stabbed a potato with his fork and chewed it down before mercilessly washing it down with ale.

“So... why’s Princess Mephy getting targeted?”

“I mean, because she’s the imperial princess. There could be a million reasons why if you look at all the possibilities, so don’t even bother.”

Honestly, fair. “Eheheh, I say.”

Again. Why are you getting embarrassed yet proud, Emmymephy? You look happy about this. Why?

“All that said. It was pretty obvious that Princess Mephy would be targeted and planning for this is basically standard procedure. She’s the best bait you could ask for. We knew we could use her to cut down the Empire’s enemies a little while coming to get you.”

“So the enemies are weak enough to just be cut down the day you learn they exist, huh...?” I couldn’t help but feel a little sympathy for them. Haku was an expert at mercilessly crushing her enemies like this.

“I say, there is no greater joy than to serve the First Empress.”

“You really think so?”

“Most all Empire citizens do. Isn’t that right, Sir Wataru?”

“Well, I’m not from the Empire in the first place, so... What about you, Gozou?” asked Wataru, casually shooting Mephy down.

“Huh? Eh, I’m part o’ the Ivory Church, so yea. If this is servin’ Lady Haku then I’m all for it.”

“Oh, this First Empress that Princess Mephy’s been talking about is Lady Haku. It didn’t click for me until now, but alright. I’m in it too.”

As thoroughbred adventurers, both Gozou and Roppe agreed with

Emmymephy. Incidentally, they both had Beddhism as a sub-religion.

“Feels kinda awk that my main dig is the Food God. Guess I’m all about helping Master instead, then?”

“My primary religion is Beddhism, so I... nom nom... prefer to serve Master.”

Ichika and Kuro prioritized me. *Thanks ol’ friends.*

“I don’t mind helping out if she asks. Same for you, right Keima?”

“Uhhh, well, I feel like Haku hasn’t actually asked us anything...”

Meanwhile, Rokuko and I were pretty nonchalant about it. *Yeah, I guess Haku’s influence in the Empire really is massive. That makes sense, given she founded it and all.*

“Right, anyway. I wanted to ask all of you for your help... I’ll just go ahead and say that Princess Mephy’s going to be kidnapped tomorrow,” Wataru said, forcing us back on topic.

“Uhhhh. You know that for a fact?”

“Yes. The fortune telling office in the capital contacted us and told us that she would be.”

“Fortune telling office?”

“Yes. We have one of those in the Empire. They’re not quite divine predictions coming from the gods, but they can predict the future for sure. Oh, and this is a secret, okay?”

“Maybe you shouldn’t be blabbing it out in a bar filled with people, then.”

“Well, all they can normally do is predict the weather.”

“Glorified weathermen, then. Great... Anyway, if you know she’s going to be kidnapped, can’t you just take steps to stop it from happening?”

“It’s dangerous to work against predictions, and unless it’s really serious we usually just let them happen.”

Apparently, stopping a prediction from occurring once would mess up all predictions for quite some time. They were predicting the weather in part to make sure predictions were still accurate. On top of that, the degree to which

the prediction was foiled would impact how long the fortune telling would be damaged, so when changing it they would try to minimize what they changed.

For example, in this case, stopping the princess from being kidnapped entirely would damage fortune telling for ten years, while foiling the kidnapping in the process would damage fortune telling for two years. Faking a kidnapping with Empire soldiers didn't count, since the action had to be done out of malice like the prediction said. What a pain.

"They predicted for us whether or not Princess Mephy would be safe during this trip despite us baiting out the opposing forces, and apparently they foretold that Princess Mephy would be kidnapped along the way. Though, my {Ultra Good Fortune} just absolutely destroyed every single one of their plots."

"Whoa, really? Didn't you not know about the prediction?" *That fortune telling office would suck if Wataru could ruin their predictions without even realizing it.*

"Hero skills are firmly planted in the realm of the divine. It's cake for them to overturn a single prediction. Especially always-active passives like mine."

"Interesting. I guess that means even predictions of the future are just a small factor to consider when planning."

"It's nice to know what the weather will be, though."

"They really are just a bunch of weathermen, huh?"

"Point being, they said not to come back until she gets kidnapped."

"Seriously?" *I get their logic, but I can't understand why they actually would say that.*

"Well, in conclusion, let Princess Mephy get kidnapped once. Thanks."

"I say, I'm counting on you." *I don't see what you expect me to do.*

"Won't it be way too dangerous to let Princess Mephy get kidnapped? What if they're trying to kill her? What if a fate worse than death awaits her?"

"Apparently the prediction said we'd rescue her safely. Once she gets kidnapped, we can immediately move to rescue her before anything happens."

Niku's hand popped into the air.

"Yes, Kuro?"

"How far do they have to go before the kidnapping is successful?"

"...They probably just have to get her back to their hideout, I think."

Guess we've just gotta be careful and let her get kidnapped. "Sheesh, thanks for wrapping us up in this junk. Could you take a second and think about how it feels for us?"

"Hahaha, well, I'm getting wrapped up in this myself too... It's my job, I guess." Wataru looked uncharacteristically down.

"Eheheh, I say." Emmymephy once again laughed shyly. *Seriously, what's with you? What is there to be shy about this?*

In order to invite the kidnapping, we had Emmymephy walk a not unnaturally far distance away from us while we kept an eye on her. Rokuko, Niku, and Ichika walked around Corky with her while Wataru and I stealthily watched from behind. Gozou and Roppe kept to their beer drinking. We were passing it off as Rokuko being a noble and a friend of Emmymephy's. Niku was Rokuko's servant, and Ichika was Emmymephy's maid.

...Huh? What's Gozou and Roppe doing? Oh, just drinking like normal, sending the signal that we guards are being lazy. Though in reality they're just pretending to drink, and they're ready to move the moment something happens.

"...Ye know, it ain't so easy to pretend to get drunk from water."

"You can drink a little. I'd be suspicious if your face didn't get red, after all."

"Good point! Alright then!"

He was chugging down beer while trying to say his bright-red cheeks weren't red at all, but I would pretend I didn't see anything. We would be fine with Wataru around anyway.

"I won't be getting too close, though."

Still, I'm counting on you, Wataru.

In any case, it was time for the princess to begin her tour of Corky. *Look at*

how many openings she has. Come and kidnap her so we can be done with this mess, thanks. I want to get to bed already.

First came a refined breakfast at an open cafe... styled bar. They ordered food based on Ichika's recommendation. Wataru and I sat at a different table and ate too, since ordering for groups was cheaper or something.

"What are you getting, Wataru? I'm gonna have the bread, cheese, and sausage."

"I think I'll just get the same thing."

It was the standard breakfast set here. We paid, and we must have come at a good time since the food was delivered in the blink of an eye.

Ohoho, this cheese and sausage tastes pretty good. They must have been smoked. They took some real chewing to get through and would probably fill my stomach just fine. Cheese and sausage really do go well together. I could get used to this kinda thing, really.

"This bread is nice, isn't it? Reminds me of barley bread."

"Yeah, I can understand why this set is the standard order. Goren's bread tastes better, though."

"Of course it does. You're using yeast to ferment the bread, right?"

Indeed, and we had learned that from resources found in the dungeon. Oh, though I could also say I learned it from my parents. I'm claiming that my parents were Japanese after all.

"Oh, mind if I order some beer?"

"Yes? What're you even talking 'bout, Wataru?"

"The standard set is supposed to include ale! We're missing so much by not getting some of the ale too! It's the finishing touch, the cherry on top that makes everything work!"

"Hahaha. Don't drink while on the freaking job."

We finished eating faster than Rokuko's group and started to wait for their next move. But it seemed like Emmymephy wanted to use this opportunity to

spread her wings and really enjoy her touring, so she finished fast too and urged Rokuko to finish faster. She glanced this way, and after I gave a nod she and the others stood up.

“...What was all that about? It sure seemed like some meaningful eye contact.”

“Yeah?”

“If I were to translate it, I’d say the conversation went like this: ‘So, Keima, are you two ready? Can we leave?’ ‘Sure, feel free to leave whenever.’ ‘Okie dokie.’ Am I right?”

“Yup. You’ve got a nice eye for these things, Wataru.”

“Figures.” Wataru shrugged his shoulders with a shake of his head, but regardless, we followed after Rokuko’s group.

They first went to a weapon shop. Though despite the name, they actually sold armor too. The majority of shops in Corky dealt with smithed metal, and I was pretty sure I heard they didn’t have any Magic Blades.

“We went over to see Kantara’s dad, uh, Untara I think? He gave us a bunch of stuff, like, mythrill weapons. He gave our weapons a checkup too.” *By the way, Siesta came back with a happy “Nnn!” after being repaired.*

“Oh, nice. Untara’s one of the more famous smiths in this town despite all the competition. But wait... He gave you mythrill weapons? You didn’t buy them?”

“He said we could take whatever we wanted after we brought him a gift.”

“...And what was that gift?”

“Just some Japanese wine from Goren and Phoenix eggshells.”

“Okay, makes sense.”

I guess it does. Either way, we peered into a nearby store ourselves while keeping an eye on Rokuko’s group.

“I’ve been wondering about this, but our black hair stands out a lot, doesn’t it?”

“Hm? Ahhh, well, I guess it does. Especially since I’m famous here.”

“Do you have any magic tools that can change what you look like? For camouflage purposes and all that.”

“No, but why not just disguise yourself normally?”

So he said, but I didn’t have any disguises on hand. I could transform into anyone I wanted using {Ultra Transformation}, but I had no intention of telling that to Wataru.

“Oh, what about cross dressing?”

“...I’ll pass on that. For now I’ll just buy a hat or helmet from this place.”

Wataru and I both grabbed some nearby hats.

“Oh, that hat looks good on you.”

“Yeah? So does yours. You look kinda like a barbarian in it.” Reason being, the store dealt with fur goods, and we had grabbed fur hats with the animal’s heads still on it. We could disguise our black hair within all the black fur.

“Foxes kinda suit you, Keima. In more ways than one.”

“Are those elk antlers on that bear head? Didn’t you hunt one of those earlier?”

We cut our conversation short. Wataru paid for the hats; they were a necessary expense for our trip. *Oh, looks like they finished their own shopping. I wonder what they got.*

“Hey, looks like they’re going into a clothing store.”

“I see... Oh! Changing rooms are the perfect place to kidnap someone! What do you think, Keima?”

“I think we should keep a close eye on them, then.”

Wataru and I watched over the clothing store. We bought some skewers from a nearby stand so as to not look suspicious just standing there. Skewered meat stands were pretty much everywhere. *I wonder what kind of meat this is, though. It’s kinda chewy.*

“It tastes better the more you chew. There’s a nice amount of salt on it too.”

“Oh yeah, there’s an ocean near the capital, isn’t there?”

We talked while gnawing our way through the chewy meat. It was actually convenient for our purposes that it took so long to eat the skewers, since it gave us an excuse to stand around for longer.

“Nom. By the way, Wataru. Your main weapon’s a sword, right? Are you using some kind of special Hero sword? You must be.”

“My sword, huh? Yeah, it is technically a Holy Blade.”

“Is that different from a Magic Blade?”

“Ah, well, they’re called Holy Blades but they’re actually the same thing as Magic Blades. I was given this one by Haku, and it’s called Air. I’m sure you can guess that it’s a Wind-type Magic Blade.”

A Wind-type, huh? I wonder if it can launch a whirlwind after you slice the air.

“What about your Magic Blade, Keima?”

“Oh, I use Siesta. I guess I never told you what it does? It puts people to sleep just like a Beddhist blade should. I use it during Beddhist mass,” I explained while patting Siesta’s sheath. *That reminds me. I wonder what Uzou and Muzou are up to. Not that I really care, honestly.*

“By put people to sleep, you mean it gives people the sleep status effect?”

“Yeah. By the way, the wielder gets sleepy first, since they’re the closest to it.”

“...Is it even usable, then? Feels like some kind of trap to me.”

“What’re you talking about? It’s the best Magic Blade I could ask for. I can sleep whenever I want.”

“Riiight...” Wataru said with a resigned nod for some reason. “That is the perfect sword for you.”

“Yep, it sure is. This baby’s gonna be on my hip for the rest of my life. Want me to unsheathe it a bit?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

No need to be shy, it’s fi— Oh, right, we’re in the middle of work.

“This reminds me, I was thinking of buying a staff to use as a weapon.”

“Oh, a staff? So you can look more like a mage?”

“Yeah. I got a mythrill ingot for it from Untara. Know a good magic shop for this kind of thing?”

“Well, for magic tools you’ll probably want the Hero Workshop... Though they mostly deal with daily life stuff. You’d probably be better off getting weaponized magic tools from elsewhere. I’ll show you a good place when we reach the capital.”

As our discussion continued, Rokuko and the others casually left the clothing store. They didn’t have anything in hand, which meant they had probably put what they’d bought into {Storage}. Or they just decided to buy all their clothes in the capital.

“...Looks like she didn’t get kidnapped.”

“Yep.”

Our work continued. Their next stop was some merchant’s store, tall and wide in structure with white walls.

“What do they sell there?”

“Slaves.”

“...Slaves, huh? You want to go buy some?”

“No no, I don’t want any. Don’t just go buy human beings like you would buy food from a stand.”

“Oh, I wasn’t planning on buying any either. I could just get some at Tsia if I wanted them. And I sure hope they’re not planning on buying any slaves.”

“Probably not. I would guess they’re baiting out the kidnappers. They’re going inside a building filled with slavers that know how to move people around. There would be no better place to kick off a kidnapping.”

By the way, apparently this store dealt mainly with debt slaves. Criminal slaves were mostly sent to do forced labor at mining dungeons and normal mines. *Neat, I didn’t realize there were normal mines too.*

“What are those non-dungeon mines like?”

“You don’t have to worry about monsters attacking you there, but the resources are all limited. They basically just exist since if the resources are there, we might as well grab them.”

Stone Golems apparently showed up a lot in mine dungeons. Most buildings in the Empire were actually made of stone thanks to the stone being mined along with the ores.

Anyway, Rokuko and the others left the building before Wataru and I even had the chance to look busy. They seemed pretty mad about something.

“I wonder if someone was rude to them inside or something.”

“Probably not. Who knows, though.”

“It doesn’t matter. Next, next... I feel like they’re gonna be ticked at us if they just come back with nothing having happened. Take care of calming down Princess Mephy for me, alright?”

“Whaaat...”

A Hero deals with the princess. It just makes sense, doesn’t it?

They went to an old fortune telling tent next. There was a pretty sizable line, which Rokuko and the others joined at the end.

“Finally, we’re here! This time it’ll happen for sure.”

“Honestly, I don’t even know what our goal here is anymore.”

“More kidnappings happen in fortune telling tents than anywhere else! It has to happen here!”

Wataru sure is getting into this, huh? He seems pretty confident, but I’m not sure where that confidence is coming from. Someone, please explain.

“Since time immemorial, fortune tellers have been spies or other covert operatives looking to gather information and cause subterfuge!”

“If that were always true, they would just arrest every fortune teller.” *And what kind of fortunes are they telling here? Romance fortunes? Neat.*

We waited for a bit, watching the line move until finally Rokuko and the others went inside.

“Okay, let’s split up. I’ll go around the back while you keep watch here. Remember to just follow the kidnappers without catching them!”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll go get you when they just walk out normally.”

And so, Wataru ran to the other side of the tent.

...And despite waiting for a bit, Rokuko and the others didn’t leave. *Wait, did it actually work?* I thought right before they did in fact leave. *That sure took a while. Like four times as long as any other group. Wait, I guess it’s because all of them got their fortune told. Makes sense.*

Niku was yawning, probably because she had been pretty bored inside. *Alright, time to get Wataru.*

“Wait, what?” When I returned with Wataru, Rokuko and the others were gone. Only Niku was left sitting at the side of the road.

“Ah, Master...” Niku stood up on shaky legs, then collapsed onto me. I quickly hugged her to hold her up.

“Uh, Kuro. Where’s Princess Mephy?”

“She was... kidnapped,” Kuro choked out before passing out in my arms.

“H-Hey...! Oh, she’s just sleeping. What in the world...?”

“This isn’t good,” Wataru said, at which point I realized we had completely lost track of Emmymephy and the others. *Oh crap, they actually kidnapped her. I mean, that’s what we wanted, but not like this!*

* * *

First, we split into two groups. Wataru would question the fortune teller while I went to tell Gozou and Roppe. We couldn’t leave Niku alone. She was our biggest lead, but she was sleeping soundly on my back with no sign of waking up anytime soon. I would ask her for details as soon as she woke up.

“Uhhhh... Hold on, Keima. How’d they get kidnapped while ye were watchin’em?”

“I’ve got no excuse, sorry. They were gone the second I took my eyes off

them.”

“That’s why guards ain’t supposed to take their eyes off anyone, sheesh.”

After meeting up with Gozou and the others, we went back to the tent where we found Wataru.

“The fortune teller’s responsible.” He immediately revealed he had basically the best source of information possible. It seemed that the fortune teller gave in the second Wataru the Hero put a little pressure on them.

“Oh, great. What the heck did they do?”

“They apparently filled the tent with a relaxation-inducing incense before hypnotizing them. They were hypnotized to get on a nearby carriage, and that was that.”

Hypnotism, huh? I should’ve guessed that existed here. If someone made me sleepy with incense then told me there was a comfy bed in a nearby carriage, I would be dancing on the palm of their hand in no time.

“Though I would guess Princess Mephy was conscious the whole time since she has suggestion resistance.”

“...That’s a thing?”

“She’s royalty. She has the full suite of resistance skills.” *Yeah, makes sense. It would be a big deal if someone started controlling the royal family.* “Does Rokuko or Ichika have anything like that?”

“Pretty sure Ichika has some poison resistance, but I dunno. I honestly have no idea what Rokuko has.”

In Ichika’s case, she had naturally developed a resistance to poison by eating all sorts of things her entire life. Average poison would make her stomach hurt a bit, but that was about it.

As for Rokuko... *Ehhh.* For some reason, maybe thanks to all that Absolute Authority stuff, it kinda feels like she’s the type to end up hypnotized and obedient at the drop of a hat. I gotta admit, I’m pretty nervous.

“I guess all we can do is look for them. Gozou, could you tell the cityfolk there’s been a kidnapping and get their help?” asked Wataru.

“You want to make a big deal outta this? Oh, y’know, guess this is a big deal.”

“Making it a big deal will actually help with the prediction, so yeah, go ahead.”

“Alright. See ye later then. Roppe, ye go on to the guild.”

“Roger dodger. See ya.”

Gozou and Roppe immediately went off on their duties.

“I’ll go give a formal announcement to the guards at the gate. I feel bad for everyone in Corky, but the gates are going to be shut down for a while.”

Huh, this sure is escalating quickly. But like Gozou said, the imperial princess getting kidnapped sure is a big deal. I’m worried about Rokuko and Ichika, too.

And so we searched for the imperial princess all night with the people of Corky, but found no trace of her whatsoever. Niku woke up, but all she remembered was that the others had gotten into a nondescript canopied wagon that you might find anywhere. Wataru acted fast, but it was very likely that the wagon had already left Corky. If that were true, we were out of options...

...Except the one I just remembered. *Oh crap, I can just look at the map. Rokuko disappearing must have thrown me a lot more off than I expected...*

I opened the map through the dungeon menu. *Oh, a tag on me. Let’s see here... “Stop forgetting this already.” Riiight... We chatted like this way back when I was kidnapped.*

“Guess I can afford to write whatever I want this time since we’ve got 500,000 DP on hand.” I changed the tag attached to me. *“Sorry, just remembered.”*

Within seconds, the tag changed to “Took you long enough!” The speed of the change really let me feel how mad Rokuko was.

“R-Right.” I changed the tag again, establishing the back and forth between us.

“Are you safe?”

“I’ve been kidnapped! But well, they weren’t rough or anything since we didn’t resist.”

"Good to know. I was worried."

"Ichika and Mephy are safe too."

"Where are you now?"

"The forest by Corky. At the bottom of a pond."

The bottom of a pond? I moved the map to check where Rokuko was, and found her dot along with the others in the forest to the east of Corky.

"Found you on the map. What do you mean you mean by bottom of the pond?"

"I meant what I said. It's surprisingly comfy here, but come get us as soon as you can."

"Alright," I replied, sighing in relief at Rokuko being safe. *"By the way, I heard you got hypnotized?"*

"I was obviously just acting. I don't need sleep like humans do."

That was true. Rokuko could easily ignore some sleepiness if she had her guard up. Lately, she's been pretty competent about these things.

"Mephy has her resistance, and Ichika just held her breath. You wouldn't believe how strong being raised by an ocean made her lungs."

"Wow. Nice going, Ichika."

"Niku had it rough, though, since she sucked in as much air as possible to lessen the effect on us. She fell over right before we got in the carriage."

"That explains that. It took until midnight for her to wake up, y'know." Seems like Niku was working hard in the shadows for us.

"Anyway, I'll be waiting. Come soon."

Alright. I had confirmed Rokuko and the others were safe. Now came the question of how to tell other people about this. I could hardly go around saying I had just used dungeon powers to find them.

"...Oh, I've got an idea." I went and found Wataru so I could act on that thought.

“What’s up, Keima? We still haven’t found Mephy or the others.”

“Oh, no, I just thought of a way to find them in a snap. It’s not a guarantee, but I think it’ll probably work.”

“What way?”

I handed Wataru a stick. “Wataru. Let’s gamble it all on your luck. Drop the stick and it’ll point right toward where Rokuko is, guaranteed.”

“Er... Wha?! K-Keima, hold on, that’s basically cheating!”

Indeed. My idea was to rely on Wataru’s {Ultra Good Fortune}.

“Even if the stick falls the wrong way somewhere along the line, with enough tries your luck is sure to guide us to where they are in the end.” Though truth be told, I already knew where Rokuko and the others were. If the stick fell in the wrong way, I could just subtly push things toward the right direction. “So? I say we trust your luck on this one.”

“...This might just work! I think you’ve done it again, Keima.”

Wataru stood the stick on one end, then let it drop. It did in fact end up pointing in the exact direction where Rokuko was on the map. {Ultra Good Fortune} truly was fearsome. Luck was the key to solving all sorts of problems. *Just wait, Rokuko. I’ll be right there.*

???’s Perspective

Having arrived at Corky first, we immediately began advancing our plans to kidnap the imperial princess. First was a carriage to move her, but the wagon we used to arrive would be ideal for leaving fewer tracks. It was a nondescript, canopied wagon that one might find anywhere. We had purchased it for stealth, and definitely not due to a lack of available funds.

Unfortunately, this time we had only two conspirators on our side. This was certainly not due to having run out of funds. Our organization is extremely wealthy with a fluid cash flow. The problem was just how little we had with us. One of our cooperators was a spy from our home country, which made them more than willing to help for a small fee. The problem was the demands of the

other cooperator.

Additionally, we would be charging both our country and this rotten empire for the money we used for negotiations.

Right after we had our cooperators secured, the imperial princess and her party arrived in Corky. Our thorough investigation led us to believe that the princess would be playing around in this city as well. Not to mention that the imperial capital was just days away from Corky—that's to say, she was days away from returning home. She would no doubt be letting extremely loose, and the relief of safely returning home would be the poison that let her guard down. In short: She was in the palm of our hands, and nothing could convince me otherwise.

We took action at once. First, we followed her from behind to observe and learn.

It seemed that she was staying in the family home of one of her guards. Luckily, an inn nearby was perfect for surveillance. Unfortunately for us, the princess—or rather, Wataru the Fallen Hero was extremely crafty. He stayed with her in the same home, perhaps knowing that we were targeting her. To make matters worse, neither he nor she were leaving. What was going on? They had been drinking so eagerly last night...

Ah. Yes, indeed. They were suffering from hangovers. Legend was that the demon known as the so-called Ivory Goddess could drink infinitely without getting drunk, but it seemed her divine protection did not extend to her descendants, the modern royal family. Though it was still up for debate whether the imperial princess truly was descended from that demon.

The next day, our prayers were answered! The princess left with her maids and the sex slave. We followed after them at once. First, they had breakfast at a bar. We needed to fill our own stomachs. Thus, we had breakfast as well. We purchased light meals at a nearby stand while watching from afar. *Hmm, what manner of meat might this be? I miss the food of my home country. Perhaps I should write for food supplies to be delivered to us as well.*

Surprisingly enough, the maids were sitting at the same table as the imperial

princess. Was she trying to gain favor with the people by interacting with those beneath her as equals...? If they were her friends, they would need to be nobles of notably high stature, but their crude manners while eating made even maids seem higher status than them. Who could they be?

We followed after the princess once she finished breakfast. Next up was shopping in a weapon store. What were they buying? Unsurprisingly, weapons. They were swinging some around.

Were they for the guards, or for her own purposes? It was hard to imagine the imperial princess wielding weapons in battle herself. Or so I thought, but in the end they bought weapons for the imperial princess. When lined up, one of the maids definitely looked more high and mighty than her, with quite the haughty expression. Entirely as if the imperial princess was merely her bodyguard.

Next, they entered a clothing store. If only we had a cooperator there, we could have seized the moment she changed clothes to kidnap her. How frustrating. Especially since now was a perfect opportunity with Wataru the Fallen Hero nowhere in sight.

That said, why was the imperial princess buying clothes in a bottom of the barrel commoner store like this? Surely no clothes fit for her could be found here. Her other maid, the one that didn't look so smug, was having fun dressing up the sex slave.

...That maid had a particularly sizable chest. A closer examination revealed she had a slave collar on, but she was dressed incredibly well. Perhaps she was once a rare noble from a collapsed family that ended up in slavery. The imperial princess had the kind of taste you would expect from royalty.

Moving on, they entered a slave trade building. Again, if we had a cooperator inside, we could wait for an opening and kidnap the princess after enslaving her. Our kidnapping would have gone perfectly if only we had the funds, but this failure was the result of our country failing to give us a more respectable budget.

However, the imperial princess and her party left after just a brief trip inside. They seemed to be fairly angry. The slaver must have made a fatal mistake and

offended her sensibilities. It is thanks to our keen wisdom that we need not recruit such a buffoon as a cooperator.

And so, the imperial princess finally arrived at the fortune telling tent. That was where our true plan began.

Inside was one of our cooperators. The fortune teller was in fact a spy from our country. They were capable of hypnosis. But it required a special incense, and to get them to cooperate we had to pay for the incense. That was annoying. We were prepared to report them to our country over this. Ripping off your comrades is despicable. I spit at such greedy behavior. Bleh.

That said, this conspirator was quite competent indeed. He successfully hypnotized the princess's party and guided them all into the wagon! *Hm? Wait, one is missing.* Oh, it's just the beastkin sex slave. Missing her isn't a problem at all.

Aside from the princess, we had the haughty slave and the thick slave reminiscent of a former noble. We had done more than our job, and that was surely worth triple the agreed upon payment.

We drove the wagon forward. Moving at a calm pace was important to not draw attention to ourselves. We just needed to leisurely make our way to where the second cooperator was.

Our second cooperator was called the Goddess of the Pond, and was a monster that could understand human speech. We welcomed her as a cooperator despite her monster nature. This was thanks to our immense technological ability. However, we didn't expect the monster to demand treasure from us.

The monster in question once had an axe dropped into its pond by a lumberjack, and it responded by taking out two axes—one silver, one gold—and asking which was dropped. The lumberjack answered honestly that he had dropped neither, and for his honesty she gave him both axes. This story resembled the legend of a goddess from the world of Heroes, and due to this she became known as the Goddess of the Pond.

Despite being a monster so friendly to humans, she demanded a large cash reward for assisting us. In the end, she was as reprehensible as the rest of the

monsters. But we needed her power. She was capable of storing things within the water of her pond.

Who would predict that kidnapped people would be hidden at the bottom of a pond? Nobody. One would need as much wisdom and inspiration as us to think of such a hiding place. It would never be found by anyone. The prisoners would never be able to escape. It was perfect for kidnapping.

And after much expensive negotiation, we had her agree to let us hide the kidnapped imperial princess there. It would be our victory if we could bring the princess there.

And thus, indeed we did succeed! We had the imperial princess in our hands! We brought her to the pond where our cooperator monster lived, and that was that.

“Have you awoken yet, princess?”

“Zzz... I say...”

“.....”

The princess remained asleep, with not a care in the world. She was so comically unaware. She didn't even seem to realize she had been kidnapped yet... Though that was thanks to the skills of our cooperator. Hard to blame her for this, then. Hahaha.



Her two maids were asleep as well. Good grief, sometimes being too skilled can be a problem as well.

“Hey. Monster. Come forth.” I threw a copper into the pond in place of a door bell. The monster popped their head out of the water.

“Oh my, oh my, what brings you here?”

“It is time for you to fulfill your end of the bargain. Store this wagon and all those within it beneath your water.”

“Who are you? I don’t believe I made any promises like that.”

“Quit messing around. We have your word.”

“...I was just kidding. Down they go, then.”

It was a strange sight. A hole opened within the pond, then tentacles like that of a Tentacle Slime stretched from within to envelop the wagon before dragging it into the water. It seemed that there would be air provided within the water itself.

Now then, we must return to the city for negotiations... Hm? “H-Hey. Why is the water enveloping us as well?”

“Oh? Did I not promise to hide you away?”

“That was for after the negotiations, not now!”

“You didn’t mention that before. And so, down you goooo.”

The tentacles dragged us into the pond as water. In the end, it had been unreasonable to expect a monster to understand the thoughts of humans—especially well-bred, highly intelligent humans such as ourselves. No matter. Our agreement included our safe release.

It was beneficial for us to be hidden while the city went into a craze to find the imperial princess. In which case, this was actually the better result for us. We could just wait here until all the dust had settled, then strut boldly out and without any mercy demand three times as much money as we used to accomplish this! That would be our right, since we have three hostages! In other words! We have won! AhahaHAHAHAHA!

Keima's Perspective

So yeah, I flawlessly led Wataru into taking us outside the city, then to the woods, then all the way to the pond.

"I wonder if Princess Mephy really is all the way out here."

"You dropped the stick five times and it pointed this way four times. That can only mean one thing."

"...Somehow, I get the feeling I won't ever get lost again, even if I'm tossed into a giant labyrinth."

Yeah, you'd find the exit just walking around randomly. Not to mention that you always just casually pass through the labyrinth area in my dungeon. Dang.

"Actually, couldn't you just flip a coin when you want to decide anything? I feel like you could just solve all your problems that way."

"That'd be going a bit too far. I need to think for myself sometimes. Not to mention, even if this case is special, I don't think it'd be smart to rely on my powers too much. It feels like I might just end up saying 'Well, that was bad luck' every time I failed."

What a serious guy. "Yeah, I think that's a good way of life for you."

"Whoa, I got Keima's approval. I'll have to brag about this to Rokuko later."

Is that really something worth bragging about? I thought to myself just as we arrived at the pond. "And here I thought we had found a clearing or something. Looks like it's just a pond."

"Yep, I don't see any huts nearby or anything."

At first glance, it was an innocuous pond. But Rokuko's dot did indeed put her inside it.

I peered inside. Nothing changed. It was a normal old pond with nothing special about it. The water was clear and I could see all the way to the bottom, but... there was nobody there.

"The water in this pond sure is clear."

"So clear there's not even any fish."

There weren't any, but there was something different here. I stealthily opened the map, then checked the tag on me.

"I saw you, Keima."

"I'm at the pond. You can see us from where you are?"

"Uh-huh. You were peering at us." Looks like Rokuko and the others can see us from inside the water. Guess they're being hidden by some kind of magic or something.

"So you can't see that I'm naked?" Uh... What?

"Just kidding. Ahahaha." Is now the time to be joking?

"I think the kidnappers are in another room." There are separate rooms down there...? Are they in an underwater mansion or something?

I looked over at Wataru, who was repeatedly dropping the stick to no avail, and began my strategy. "Y'know, the water's actually so clear it's kind of suspicious."

"I see. Normally I'd think that's crazy, but if you're saying it there must be something to it."

"Let's search around here. Where's the stick pointing?"

"I've tried dropping it from all sorts of places, but seventy percent of the time it falls toward the pond." It certainly had a surface wide enough to fit our Dancing Doll Inn inside of it.

"Actually, do the people in the city know about this pond in the middle of the forest? Wataru, got any info?"

"Gozou might know something."

I had told Gozou and Roppe that I would be searching outside the city with Wataru. They were meanwhile continuing the search inside the city. I knew that Rokuko and the others weren't in the city, but I wasn't supposed to. Not to mention that the criminals might have more accomplices in the city.

"I'll go back for a moment to get Gozou. Could you keep investigating here, Keima?"

“Yeah. Good luck.”

Wataru ran off in the direction of Corky. *Yeaaah, that's inhumanely fast. I'm sure he'll be back in the blink of an eye. Anyway, time to investigate in the way only I can.*

“Boy, it sure feels like someone's in the water watching me,” I said loudly before gathering up mana and holding just a little of it back. “{Fireball}.” I launched a fireball toward the water. It evaporated when it hit the water. You know what they say: When in doubt, shoot fireballs into a lake. *I think that's a saying here, anyway... And what's the difference between a pond and a lake? I think it was like, lakes are more than five meters in depth, or something.*

Anyway, the fireball didn't seem to accomplish much, so I moved onto my next course of action.

“...{Create Golem}.” I used some random earth to make a Clay Golem, which I ordered to jump into the clear pond water. *Oh wow, it got a little mudd—*

“GRAAAAH!”

“Whoa!”

A woman's voice suddenly roared from within the pond and the Golem was spat back out. “Don't pollute the water!”

“Huh? Er, okay. Sorry?”

“Good. As long as you understand.”

...I couldn't see anyone. Was the pond itself talking...?

“...{Summon Gargoyle}.” *Rock should be fine. In you go.*

“GRAAAAH!”

“What? Stone's not polluting anything,” I said while the Gargoyle flew by me, having been tossed out as well.

“Don't dump monsters in ponds!”

“I wasn't dumping them in the pond. I was just investigating it a little.”

“This is my territory! Don't come inside without permission!”

Territory of this mysterious voice, huh?

“Oh, I didn’t realize. I’m just a humble traveler, you see. Mind if I ask who you are?”

“I’m glad you asked! I am a goddess!”

Oh, a goddess. Neat.

“I can’t see you, though.”

“...Hmph, you humans are always so fussy over details. Here,” said the voice, and water from the pond rose up into a whirlwind that settled into a human form. It was half-transparent. Or she, rather.

“...You’re a slime girl?”

“Rude! I’m Undine!”

Undine... Wait, isn’t that the great spirit of water?

“Oh, you’re the great spirit of water?”

“That’s right! Feel free to worship me like the locals do.”

“By the way, I’m friends with Salamander.”

“...You are?”

“Yeah, so I know what’s up about spirits. Which leads me to my next question. How high-status of an Undine are you?”

“Ngh!”

Indeed. According to my ol’ pal Ittetsu, the Salamander-type Dungeon Core, there were multiple great spirit Salamanders out in the world. The fact that Ittetsu was a *Salamander-type* Core alone made it clear he was based on a species rather than a single person. And apparently, Ittetsu was the head Salamander. That seemed odd at first, but then I realized the top Dragon was Dungeon Core Number 5, and the top of the Laverio Empire was Haku, another Dungeon Core.

One could easily state that Dungeon Cores were overwhelmingly stronger than the species they were based on, even just considering how Dungeon Cores were immortal, didn’t need food, and didn’t get tired. It was no surprise that

they always ended up in the highest positions of power, even when species like Dragons were involved... How long would it be until the whole world was conquered by Dungeon Cores?

“Th-That’s not relevant at all! I’m Undine, and that’s that. I’m a big deal. I’m a goddess, so bow before me, human!” she declared, hiding what her true status was. *But yeah, it would be safe to guess that the average Undine is pretty strong. She did just tell me she’s so low status she’s embarrassed to say it, though.*

“Yeah, about that... I’m friends with some goddesses too.”

“Shut up, shut up! You sure are smug for a lowly human! Why do you have so many friends in high places?! Oh, I get it. You’re lying, aren’t you? Liar! Big fat liar!” Undine yelled while throwing a ball of water at me. Splash. *And now I’m wet.*

“...I’m not lying, but whatever. I’m looking for some people. Do you catch my drift here?”

“Oh, you’ve lost someone? If you want me to predict their location with water, bring some golds or something.”

“I know where they are.”

“Then go to them already.”

“They’re in there.” I pointed to the pond, and Undine melted back into the water, disappearing. *Dang, she actually ran away.*

At which point, Wataru returned. “I’m back. Gozou should be right behind me. Wait, why are you soaked? Did something happen?”

“A goddess popped out of the water and threw water balls at me. {Dry}.” I crossed my arms and thought about what to do while drying myself with Survival Magic.

“This is definitely the Goddess Pond.”

“The Goddess Pond? What’s with that name? Is it a dungeon or something?”

“Er, no, it’s just a pond with a name. The name comes from... Well, I’m sure you’ve heard the story of the golden axe and the silver axe, right?”

“Huh? What kinda story is that?” I did know the story, but since it came from Earth I played dumb instead. I had modified versions of stuff like the tortoise and the hare already in the Beddhist bible, though.

“You don’t know it? I feel like any adult must have heard it at least once.”

“Sorry, not ringing any bells. Could you explain it already?”

Wataru’s mouth bent into a frustrated frown. *Could you stop prodding to find out I’m Japanese already? We’re kinda in the middle of something urgent, y’know.*

“A lumberjack once dropped an axe into a pond, whereupon a goddess living in the pond appeared with two of them—one silver, one gold—and asked which was dropped. The lumberjack answered honestly that he had dropped neither, and for his honesty she gave him both axes.”

By the way, there was also a version where a greedy lumberjack dropped his axe into the pond on purpose and said the golden axe was his, which earned him nothing. He didn’t even get his original axe back.

“Anyway, there’s a myth just like that for this pond. Someone dropped an axe in the pond and got both a silver and golden axe in return. A Hero of old heard that and named this the Goddess Pond.”

“Neat.” *That explains that.*

“Though I heard the lumberjack in this world dropped a new mythrill axe, and was given much cheaper decorative axes of fake gold and silver in return.”

...Dang, that’s rough. In the original story he got his original axe back too.

“Yeah, the self-proclaimed goddess that popped up a second ago sure did seem greedy...”

“The lumberjack gave up on his axe, since it was his fault that he dropped it, and sold the axes she gave him to buy a second-hand axe. Well, in the end it was better than losing his axe for nothing at all.”

So she did help, but barely. Hmm...

.....

“Alright, we should be fine taking her out then. Wataru, would you mind blasting this pond away?”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Why so violent? All she did was hit you with water balls.”

Oh, right, I haven't told Wataru that Rokuko and the others are down there yet.

“Also, the goddess here has in fact been worshiped for a long time.”

“Yeah, she said she's Undine.”

“Whoa! Undine is one of the four great spirits... Keima, did you already make friends with her?”

If I had, would I be soaking wet? But anyway, yeah, knocking her out is kinda out of the question. Especially since Rokuko and the others might get wrapped up in the blast.

“There ye are, Keima! Did ye find a clue?”

“Yeah. It turns out Rokuko and the others are here.” Hiding that was getting kinda tedious, so I just said it.

“Say what?!” Gozou and Wataru yelled simultaneously.

“The goddess... Eh, it actually feels kinda wrong to call Undine a goddess. Let me call her the wannabe goddess. I tricked the wannabe goddess with a leading question. I said I was looking for people and I knew they were in the pond. Her response? Running away without saying a word. That seems guilty to me.”

Yeah, I'm gonna use the wannabe goddess's reaction as proof here. It's circumstantial evidence, but that's more than enough for me since I know she's actually guilty. I'm going all the way with this one.

“Rokuko and the others are probably inside the pond.”

“...Inside the pond, huh? It doesn't look like anybody's in there,” Wataru said while peering at the water.

“The wannabe goddess is probably using her powers to hide them.”

“Er, Keima. Ye know, ain't calling her a wannabe goddess sorta rude?”

“Goddess. Calling *that* a goddess would be rude to actual goddesses.”

“Keima, it’s not like ye know any godde— Right, Haku. Ne’er mind, then.”

Yup, Haku’s the Ivory Goddess. The actual legitimate real-deal goddess of the Ivory Church.

“But still, what’re we gonna do about this? We can’t exactly go ‘round beatin’ up a wannabe goddess.”

“You think so?”

“That wannabe goddess has been around Corky ever since me grandpa was a kid. Some o’ the older folk in Corky still worship her. They were saved from drowning by her, or somethin’.” Apparently, she had cleaned the rivers near where some of them lived as well. It was thanks to the wannabe goddess that they could make tasty beer out of clean water despite all the mines polluting the rivers.

“...By the way, wouldn’t they be drowning down there?”

I knew they could breathe just fine, but I had no way of explaining that to them.

“Keima, could you use {Summon Gargoyle} to investigate the pond right away?”

“Sure, let’s do it.”

Since Wataru was around, I said the full chant for summoning a Gargoyle. I chanted it five times for five Gargoyles. “Check to see if there’s any women at the bottom of the pond. Go!”

The Gargoyles jumped into the water... But. A whirlpool suddenly appeared into a pool, which sucked the Gargoyles inside. A tornado of water then rose up and spat them outside. The Gargoyles rained down on the ground one after another, unable to fly due to their sense of direction being flipped all over the place.

“Didn’t I tell you not to dump monsters in the pond?” said Undine, appearing gracefully above the pond surface.

“I didn’t dump them. I had them go investigate.”

“You shouldn’t intrude on others’ homes like that.” Now that she mentioned it, I pretty much was sending them into someone else’s home. However, it was the home of someone under suspicion for kidnapping the imperial princess. Suspects getting their homes searched just made sense.

“Errr, can I ask what your name is?” asked Wataru.

“I am the Goddess of the Pond. I have no name, so you may address me as Goddess,” replied the wannabe goddess with a forced air of dignity. *You may, huh? I’ll choose not to, then.*

“Since you’re Undine, how about I call you Unko?”

“Nghuh?! K-Keima, what?!”

“Unko... Well, you may call me that if you’d like.”

That literally means “shit” and “poop” in Japanese, but looks like it’s just fine in this fantasy language. Wataru knew what I was saying, though.

“K-Keima, Undine, that name isn’t very proper.”

“Why would you say that? I’m pretty sure I heard that in Japanese, you attach ‘ko’ to the end of names for girls.”

“Yeah, but Unko is a bit... In Japanese, it’s one word for describing excrement... You know that, right? You said that knowingly, didn’t you?”

Sure, but what better name for a piece of shit kidnapper than Unko? Not that I’m gonna say that and spill the beans.

“Denied! Rejected! What kind of disgusting name is that?!”

“Oh, that’s what it means? My apologies, O mighty Unko.”

“I demand you call me by another name! You heathen! You disgusting heathen!” She threw more water balls at me. *{Dry}, {Dry}. Okay.*

“Wataru, it sounds like the great Unko wants a new name. Go ahead and offer one up to her. Seems like she doesn’t like the perfectly good name I gave her.”

“Pfff... Uhh... Well, how about Dinne, then?”

“That doesn’t have any weird second meanings, right?”

“Right. None at all.”

“Then address me as Dinne! I will drown the next person who calls me Unko and thereby excrement! Understood?!” Declared Dinne, pointing a watery finger at us.

“Okay then. Dinne, can I ask you something?”

“Certainly. What is it?” answered Dinne with a calm, composed expression completely unlike the snarl she had on a second ago.

“Are there three women being held hostage in your pond?”

“.....” Dinne answered with only a smile.

“Um.”

“Oh, if you want me to answer, please pay a fair amount. Gold coins will do.”
So greedy!

“...Okay, here.” Wataru handed a gold coin to Dinne. *Yeah, that gold coin’s probably coming out of his pay.*

“I don’t recall kidnapping any three women.”

“.....”

“Well, since you so kindly paid, I will give an answer. There are certainly people at the pond.”

“Ah! They aren’t drowning?”

“Are you three drowning? No? Then they aren’t drowning.”

“When you say there are people at the pond, you aren’t talking about us, right?” I asked. Dinne ignored me. “Hello?”

“You didn’t pay.”

What a pain. Wataru went ahead and asked for me.

“Err, well. Is it fair to take that as there being people inside the pond outside of us three, and that they aren’t drowning?”

“Indeed. Now, any more information will cost you extra.” Thus ended the one gold’s worth of question time.

“...So, what’s the plan? We know they’re down there, and we know they’re not drowning.”

“We should have plenty of time if they’re not drowning.”

“Yep, we’re good.” We all sighed in relief.

“Dinne, could you free the girls inside of you?”

“Certainly, if you say the password.”

“The password?”

“I humbly accepted the duty of storing goods. If you say the password, I will return what I have taken. That is the promise I made.” *I see... So she’s like a safe with a code.* “Great spirits never break their promises. Understand? If you want them, say the password.”

“Sorry, I don’t know the password. Is there anything you can do?”

“No. This is a holy promise. Are you mocking my virtue?” *Yeah, it does seem like a great spirit would take promises pretty seriously.*

“Please, isn’t there anything...”

“No. There is nothing. I hold my promises. It is my duty to protect what I have been given.”

“...By the way, how much do you charge for that?”

“Five golds. I return the goods when the time is right.” It sounded expensive, but considering a great spirit was involved perhaps it was actually pretty cheap. And in this case, the time was right when somebody told her the password.

“I guess the plan was for allies of the kidnappers to come and say the password once all the dust settled.”

“Or they’d tell us the password in exchange for paying a ransom or following their demands. Either way, we can solve this by catching the culprits and getting the password out of them. This just got a lot simpler.” *The question is just whether the culprits will come or not.*

“Anyway, should we get some food over here? We don’t want them to go hungry while waiting.”

“Ichika should have a lot in her {Storage}. Rokuko too, actually.” *Sure is nice to not have to worry about food.*

“I think we should go inside and check. Just to make sure Rokuko’s really there,” Wataru said. That made sense, given that we couldn’t see them from out here.

“Dinne, could you store us in the pond for a second? You can let us out once we send a signal from within.”

“Certainly. Fifteen gold coins, if you would.”

...Charging for all three of us, huh? “Ye know, we don’t all gotta go inside. I’ll wait out here.”

“Errr, I think I’ll wait outside too, then. Keima, go have a look.”

“Sure. Pay up, Wataru.” *It was all coming out of the trip’s budget, anyway. I went ahead and had Wataru pay the five gold coins.*

“I shall store you, then. What will the signal be?”

“Let me out when Wataru or I... Wataru being this guy... says ‘That’s enough, Dinne.’ Wataru, you know what to do if thirty minutes pass and I’m not out yet.”

“Yeah, it is possible that she knocks you out as soon as you get inside. Okay. You can count on me.”

And so, as the representative for all of us I let Dinne store me. A hole in the pond’s surface opened up and Tentacle Slime-esque tentacles reached out to envelop me. It honestly felt pretty weird being pulled into the water like this.

“Well, here we are.” The tentacles left me inside a giant bubble. It was oval-shaped like a roll of bread, and sunlight streamed in from above the water’s surface. It was warm and comfy, like being enveloped by bright clear water. Even the air tasted clean as could be.

“...Wait.” But there was nothing in the bubble but me. To be specific, there was a floor, walls of water, and air. But that was it. There was pretty much just me and nothing else.

“Where’s Rokuko?” I opened my map... and found my answer immediately.

She was on the other side of the wall. In another bubble about five meters away, there was a canopied wagon. Rokuko and Ichika were there, plus Mephy. Rokuko was waving her hand.

“...I see. She’s keeping us in separate bubbles.” I waved back while checking the tag on the map.

“I guess you can’t hear us?”

“Nope.”

“So, when do you think you’ll be rescuing us?”

“She needs a password, apparently. Do you know what password the kidnappers set up?” I asked, and Rokuko pointed off in the distance. There was another bubble over there.

“The kidnappers are in that one.”

...I see. The kidnappers must be hiding and waiting in here.

“Man, this place is actually great for naps.”

“It does feel surprisingly calming to look at the water’s surface, doesn’t it?”
Honestly, it feels kind of like I’ve become a fish. Maybe I should just sleep until Wataru calls me... Nah, I shouldn’t.

...Oh, I can see Wataru peering into the water. If I’m on floor one of a building, he’d be at about floor three... And yeah, doesn’t look like he can see us. Seems like the pond is a lot deeper than it looks on the outside. Must be like a literal magic mirror thing going on.

“Alright, I’m gonna see if I can’t force my way out here.”

“GL.”

Rokuko ended the conversation with a brief acronym, and I got to work investigating the bubble right away.

First was the walls of water. I hit them, but they were hard like glass. They were cold, but touching them didn’t make my hands wet. I’d be completely out of food *and* water if not for {Storage}. I would be left starving while baking under the sun’s rays. *Ouch, I’m pretty sure I read a manga where someone was*

tortured like that. This isn't a place I want to stay in for too long.

Rokuko and the others were surely suffering... *Wait, not only can the canopy of the wagon block the sun, but they even have beach parasols with leg rests set up while they sip juice on beach chairs?* What is this, a vacation? Well, I guess that's no problem at all with the DP we have on us. That's good, at least.

The ground was... dirt. Yeah, nothing much to say about it. It seemed pretty damp, maybe because it was underwater before I came? *Let's try digging a little... No good.* It's too hard. There was like a thin layer of something stopping me from touching it.

Seems like the same layer is on the wall too. This whole place is covered by some kind of barrier. I can guess the ceiling has it too.

Next was checking to see if I could use magic inside. "Gate, open. I summon thee, magic-wielding monster of stone. Serve me. {Summon Gargoyle}."

I completed the chant without issue, and a Gargoyle did appear. Seemed like there was no problem with casting magic here. *I think I'll leave this guy behind and see if he's still here when I come back.*

What about physical force, though? I took out my Golem Blade from {Storage} and stabbed the wall without a shred of mercy.

Ngh, it doesn't feel like I've hit anything at all. It felt more like magnets were repelling the blade, and despite vibrating it probably hadn't hit the wall at all. I tried swinging it instead. *Gaaah, it bounced off! Yeah, I'm not skilled enough with the blade to break this wall.*

If a sword wouldn't work, how about magic?

"O Fire, become a sphere and smite my enemy—{Fireball}." First, a fireball. It shrunk and disappeared as soon as it hit the wall.

"Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt}." An ice bolt. It was knocked away and fell onto the ground.

"O Spear of light, pierce mine enemies—{Lightning}." Lightning. It spread across all the walls, then disappeared.

...Hmm. Let's aim a bit higher.

“O Fire, O Water, O Earth, O Wind, O Light, O Darkness! Defeat mine enemy! {Element Burst}!” Mana swirled and my strongest spell burst towards the ceiling... where it tore open a hole with a tiny sound. The beam of light continued upwards, making the water whirlpool before it shot into the sky.

Wowee. That spell sure is strong. Aaand water is dripping through the hole in the ceiling.

“Gyaaah?! Wh-What happened here?! H-Hey! Why is there a hole in the barrier!” cried Dinne, appearing out of nowhere. “How did you do that?! A water barrier summoned by the great spirit Undine should be nigh indestructible!”

“Uhhh, sorry. I was killing time and accidentally broke your ceiling. Could you close the hole?”

“Geez! No way! Get out of here! Go home!”

“...I haven’t said the password yet.”

“Then I won’t close the hole! And actually, I can’t maintain the barrier now, so you’re just going to have to accept getting wet!”

That’ll go a bit beyond getting wet. I’ll just drown. In which case, guess my hands are tied here.

“That’s enough, Dinne. Let me out of here.”

“Ptooey! Get out of here!”

Dang, she just spat on me. Guess I can’t really blame her, though.

I was sucked into another whirlpool and thrown out of the pond. The Gargoyle was too.

“Oh, Keima. Seems like you got out safely.”

Wataru and Gozou were waiting outside by the pond. I dismissed the Gargoyle and turned to Wataru.

“You were peering in, right? What’d you see?”

“I saw Princess Mephy and the others at the bottom of the ocean for a split second. It happened when you pierced the pond with your light magic.”

In other words, worse case scenario, I could use my magic to break through the magic mirror-esque thing and get through the barrier containing Rokuko and the others.

“By the way, what kind of magic was that? I’ve never seen it before.”

“It’s my secret technique. And that means I’m not telling.” I had used it without really thinking too much about it, but maybe that was a mistake. *Nah, all things considered it was important for saving Rokuko. Yeah.*

“Alright, what to do next...”

“More importantly, what was it like down there? I saw the others, but could you talk to them?”

“Oh, right. We were all kept in separate bubble rooms. There was water between us that kept us from talking. Also, the kidnappers were in there too. They had their own bubble room.”

“...So those were the kidnappers. I see.” Apparently he had seen them too in the second the barrier was broken.

“Okay, what should we do? Hide and wait until the culprits’ accomplices come?”

“Nah, we can’t afford to wait that long. I mean, I wouldn’t mind sleeping until then, but... Wataru, you remember where the bubbles are, right? How about you jump into the pond and go get them?”

“...I don’t think that’ll be possible. This isn’t the greatest matchup in the world for me. Dinne could probably beat me in a fight underwater.”

What? She’s stronger than Wataru...?

“Hold on. She’s stronger than you? Is she that big of a deal?”

“It’s just a question of elements. The sword I’m using, Air, can’t do anything in the water since it’s a Wind elemental weapon.”

I get the feeling Wataru could win easily even without a weapon.

“I could kill Dinne if it really came down to that, but then the water pollution would be an issue again, so...”

“Yeah, Keima. Ye’ve gotta think about the people. We’d lose our beer without that water.”

It was true that Dinne was one of the rare few who could keep the water clean for this mining city. *That complicates things...*

“Even if ye’ve gotta break that barrier thing, could ye try and do it as peacefully as possible?”

“I do think we should try to keep her alive. Keima, can you do anything about this?” *What, you’re just gonna bet on me having an idea? Well, good call. I do have an idea.*

“...We’ve just gotta do something that keeps her alive, right?”

“Well, yeah.” Wataru nodded.

“Would the residents of Corky help even if things got a little violent? Since this is for rescuing the imperial princess and all.”

“Yea, a little. They wouldn’t go off n’ help with killin’ her, though.” Gozou nodded as well.

I held up a finger and grinned. “I have an idea.”

...Yeah, I just wanted to say that line.

Dinne’s Perspective

I was letting myself drift within the pond. Something terrible had happened, and I wanted to forget it.

“Haaah. What an awful man. I simply cannot believe him.” Not only had he not shown me the respect I deserved as the great spirit Undine, he had even asked what rank I was. Well, it was true that my rank wasn’t particularly high, but still! *I’m a core Undine that has lived for two-hundred years...! Okay, sorry, I’m a shut-in that hasn’t left this forest in a hundred and fifty years since my arrival.*

I’m not particularly high-ranked, either... Ahhh, this is no good at all. This line of thinking simply isn’t good. Let me think about something else.

In times of sorrow, I found that nothing relieved my heart more than looking at the treasures I had collected from humans. I particularly liked this mythrill axe. I had even gone out of my way to give the owner golden and silver axes so he wouldn't try to get it back. It was still shining even after a whole hundred years! Oh, but one day I would like to have an orichalcum axe as well. *Hopefully a human offers one up to me someday.*

In the end, that strange man left without any issue after breaking my barrier. He left an ally behind, which potentially meant that he intended to come again, but I honestly didn't mind.

Oh, yes, I need to clean the air for the humans still here. I am a kind Undine that can show consideration for living beings that die in stagnant air.

...Oh? That human is putting something in their mouth. I wonder what they're doing... Oh, right! Humans will die without food and water! I forgot completely. Well, those in the wagon seem to be fine, but what about these other humans... What do humans eat, again? They don't eat jewels, right? No matter, I suppose. They can surely survive at least three days without eating. Yes. It looks like they're drinking water with Survival Magic. Perfect!

...By the way, I wonder what those at the wagon are eating? We spirits can survive on mana, so we only eat when food is offered up to us. Though I'm not a fan of meat like whole-roasted pigs. At the very least, I would like fruit or some crisp and fresh vegetables.

In any case, the humans seem to be enjoying their rest, which means I am an excellent host! Teehee!

Anyway, the next day. The human was murmuring something about having an empty stomach and starving, so I decided to ask those in the wagon whether they were willing to share some of their food.

"Excuse me, do you have a moment?"

"Oh, hello. Did something happen, um... Slime Girl?"

"No! Goodness, so rude... I am the goddess living in this pond, and in truth, Undine of the four great spirits! You may call me Dinne."

"Hmm. So?"

“Um.”

“What brings you here, Dinne? Are you letting us out?”

Not even this human was willing to pay me any respect whatsoever.

“Erm, I can’t let any of you out until the password is said. That was the promise I made.”

“Oh, okay. Could you tell us the password then?”

“Right, it waaas... Wait! Of course I can’t tell you! Geez, what were you thinking?!”

This blonde girl is no good at all. I’ll try the orange-haired one.

“Erm, excuse me, you over there. Please give me some of your food. The other human is hungry.”

“What, the kidnapper? I sure don’t give a heck. He’s the one who got us locked up here in the first place. You reap what you sow, bitch.”

How merciless! What a cruel bully you must be to abandon one of your own race as they suffer!

“You, the blue-haired girl.”

“I say, let us out of here already. Board games are only fun for so long. Is it not fair to say the kidnapping has already succeeded? There is no point to us staying here.”

“Errm. Some food, please.”

“Very well. You can have this. It’s a pretty stone I picked up at Donsama,” the human said while holding out a round, flat stone you might find at the bottom of a river.

Wow, what a pretty stone! The other human will surely rejoice over this...! If only. I know that humans can’t eat stones! Not even spirits or great spirits eat stones!

“Goodness gracious. I will have him give up on food. He knows the password, so if all else fails he can just leave.”

“Oh, that’s convenient. We can just wait him out.”

“I say, I know this strategy. It’s like siege warfare, Rokuko.”

“Dunno if you can really call this warfare, but whatevs.” The orange-haired girl took something out of {Storage}. It was a bottle with... some small things rolling around inside of it?

“What is that?”

“A nice and healthy little sweet. Tell ’im to eat one of these. It should help him out.”

“Oooh! I see you are kinder than the other two. You have my praise.” I took the candy as the blonde human pouted.

“Hey! What are you giving her, Ichika?!”

“Look out, girl! Run before she takes it back!”

“R-Right!” *I can’t let the blonde girl take the only food I managed to get!* In a hurry, I rushed out of the bubble.

“Seriously, Ichika. Didn’t that bottle have ‘Candy-Shaped Laxatives’ written on it?”

“I say, not bad.”

“I didn’t tell a single lie, dude!”

They were saying something, but my priority was giving him the food before they took it back! Now, with that, my schedule was free. I could go back to floating in the pond. *Ahaha. This water truly is wonderfully clear. A pond could not be clearer, if I do say so myself! Since this water is practically part of my body, one could say that the water being clear means I am beautiful. Ahhh, I am scared of how beautiful I am. I get the feeling that men have started wars to make water this beautiful their own, perhaps. Well, there was not much else more for me to do than to keep the water clear. It was that or stare at my treasure.*

And while doing both, an entire day had passed in the blink of an eye. *Oh my... The lone human looks pretty exhausted. Strange, and I gave him food just the other day.*

“Excuse me. Are you quite alright?”

“Ngh, nghoooh... I-I... shall not... die yet... I cannot...! S-Something, something, food, please...”

“If you are so hungry, why not just leave?”

“...Wataru the Fallen Hero... is outside...! I cannot... go now...! So...!”

“Ahhh, okay, okay. You need food, I understand.” It was annoying, but I could just get more food from the orange-haired girl.

...I wonder why the three girls are doing so well while he is suffering. Maybe humans are just that different. Or perhaps eating alone makes one so depressed and sad they end up like that?

“Um, excuse me. I’m here for more food.”

“Oh dear. That sounds rough. Here, you can have this,” said not the orange-haired girl, but in fact the blonde girl. *Oh, that reminds me! The blonde girl hadn’t refused to give me food, she had just been so rude I stopped talking to her!*

“They’re Goblin ears, but I’m pretty sure they’re edible.”

“Interesting, I didn’t know humans ate stuff like this. I know the mana of Goblins tastes extraordinarily bad, at least. But no matter. I shall praise you as well. You are a kind person!”

“Eheh. I know, right? I really am.” The blonde girl looked happy over being complimented. *Of course! Humans love to be complimented by goddesses!*

“Hold on. I say, am I being left out here?”

“I don’t intend to praise someone who didn’t offer any food.”

“Mnn, that is more frustrating than I thought it would be. But I shall expend this frustration on cards! Rokuko, Ichika, I say we play Sevens next!”

In any case, I successfully obtained food for today! He was so happy he cried! This is turning into something of an observation diary for humans, isn’t it? It’s fun in its own way, really.

And so, the next day.

“This is your opportunity to offer food as well, blue girl.”

“Oh, hello, Dinne. Coming to beg for food again?”

“You truly are rude, blonde girl! Geez! I am humbly electing to bow my head so as to obtain food for one of you humans! This is praiseworthy!” Indeed, I was going out of my way to visit the bottom of the pond!

“It sure doesn’t look like you’re lowering your head, but whatever. We’ll be saying goodbye today either way.”

“Saying goodbye?” I asked with a tilt of my head.

“Uh-huh. My partner, Keima, just finished getting everything ready.”

“Y-You mean that incredibly rude man?!” The man who broke my barrier! *This is a disaster! What exactly does he intend to do... Wait, no. I’m the goddess of this pond.* As long as I remain here, and particularly within the water, I can dissolve myself and avoid even that absurd spell he cast! “And by the way, if anything happens to me, all three of you will drown. He won’t be able to hit me with that magic while outside the pond, either.”

“That’s true. I’m looking forward to seeing how he manages to pull this one off.”

H-Hmph! Try and scare me all you like, it’s not happening! I thought, right before I felt it. Something had entered the water.

“Hm? This isn’t an offering... Surely it’s not trash.” I looked and saw that it was a large, snake-like tube. After a brief pause... it suddenly started to suck up the water at an enormously fast rate!

“...Erm? What?! H-Hold on a second, wh-what’s going ooon?!” I followed the tube up and saw that the rude man from before was holding it.

“Oh, has it started? What’s going on?” asked the blonde girl.

“Erm, th-the water is being sucked up! By that tube! I’m going to go complain to him!” I immediately began forming myself above the water... only to duck back inside the pond after feeling the stir of Wind mana. The rude man’s companion, the nicer one that had obediently paid me... the Hero had swung his sword at me.

Wh-What was he thinking?! What was he planning to do by hitting me with

Wind mana?!

The Hero was staring at the pond's surface while keeping his sword at the ready to protect the rude man. *I won't be able to leave the water at this rate! Ah, aaah! This is no good, no good at all! Even as I think, my water—my body!—is being sucked away! Wh-What in the world is going oooon?!*

Keima's Perspective

"Catching her didn't work... And really, I don't think it ever will. She could probably just pour herself out."

"Ahhh, well, no worries. I didn't expect it to work anyway." I had talked to Wataru about trying to capture Dinne in a prison of wind when she stuck her head out, but it didn't seem to work. All that meant was that I just had to move forward with my *good idea*.

My *good idea* was to drain the pond of all its water. Luckily, there were plenty of craftsmen in this smithy city that were more than willing to help me out. And, for example, they could even make a pump and hose if given detailed instructions. Which is what I did, and now I had hand-operated fire pumps made by all the craftsmen in the city working together. It only made sense that the smiths here would be able to make something similar.

Though, I did have to stealthily buy the schematics for the fire pump with DP. It took a day and a half to get it all ready, but now it was working flawlessly.

And by "it" I meant "them," because I'd had them make more than just one. I had them make fifty, in fact. Corky the smithing town really lived up to its reputation by having enough smiths to make fifty of them in a single day. Twenty of them were made by Untara's smithy. When pros go all out, their production speed gets pretty insane.

I had Wataru camp out by the pond in case any of the culprit's companions came while we were getting ready, but in the end that never happened. Which meant it was time for my plan. *This is being cruel to the goddess of the pond? I don't care. Please direct your complaints to the kidnapper. I'll drag him out while saving the others.*

The pumps were brought here in wagons, and we were borrowing some townsfolk from Corky to operate them. It wasn't hard at all to get volunteers when our mission was to rescue the imperial princess. I had been ready to summon Gargoyles or Golems if need be, but it wasn't necessary.

And to top it all off, my job here was to hold the hose connected to all fifty pumps and stick it into the pond as everyone's representative.

"Alriiight, the water level's going down. Let's keep on sucking 'til it's all gone. You can do it, men!"

"Y-Yeah..." stammered the fifty citizens.

"You're quiet! Don't you want to save the imperial princess?! If we get this done, the Empire's gonna treat the whole city to beer!"

"YEAAAAAH!" they roared.

At my encouragement, those pumping the fire pumps between the trees got pumped up. They were now brimming with enthusiasm. *Man, everyone sure does want to save the princess! Now this is what I call patriotism!*

"...Actually, I think they just want to drink beer," murmured Wataru as he continued to guard me, but I ignored him.

By the way, the tip of the hose stuck into the water was made of yellow steel, a metal known for its strong water resistance. The wannabe goddess Dinne would probably break her back if she tried to tear it apart inside the water. I also had spare tips at the ready.

...That's what happens when you have a ton of people helping out. Strength in numbers!

"Oh, nice, nice. The water's really draining fast now that they're motivated." It was honestly going so fast I had to question whether I had overprepared with the number of pumps, but they had properly been built to last and could be used to extinguish fires in the city, so that wasn't a problem at all. We also dumped the water we sucked out into a nearby river. This was an eco-friendly pond draining.

"Haah, haah. But is... the goddess... gonna be... safe...?"

“Turns out... she’ll be fine... if we just... pump water from the river... back into the pond!”

Uh oh. Looks like some worshipers of the wannabe goddess are mixed in here.
I signaled to Gozou with my eyes.

“Yoo, heya fellas! Yer doin’ some good work! But I hear yer worried ’bout the goddess, huh?”

“W-Well, ’course we are, yeah!”

“She’s been here... since we... were kids!”

The fact they kept pumping while talking to Gozou showed just how dedicated they really were.

“Think about it this way. The Goddess leaves her pond to clean the rivers ’n such, yeah? That means pumpin’ out the water from the pond ain’t much different from her visiting the river like usual.”

“O-Ohh! Now that you mention it, that’s totally true!”

“B-But, ain’t that gonna... offend the goddess? She’s like... the mother... of our whole city!”

One of the men agreed, but since the other didn’t Gozou continued his convincing.

“Can’t help offending her a little bit. She’s bein’ used by the villains who kidnapped the imperial princess. That be a fact. If we don’t go and save the princess here, the goddess is gonna get hunted down by the Guild. A true disciple would save ’er from that happening, even if it means makin’ her a little mad! Not to mention, we’ve got some great beer and food to offer up once we put the pond back in place!”

“Well, alright! That should... be fine... then!”

“Yeah! We’re doin’ this... to save... the goddess! It’s good workin’!”

“Not to mention, look over there. Even a little girl like that is workin’ hard to use the pumps and save her,” Gozou said while pointing toward Niku, who was slamming the pump harder and faster than anyone around her. A little girl rapidly moving the pump up and down with a serious, flat expression. The sight

of that ignited a fire in the heart of the two men.

“I’m not... gonna lose... to a little girl... like that!”

“We wanna... save the goddess... just as much!”

“Good man! Keep up the good work!”

“Yeah! Leave it to us!”

Gozou gave the pumping men a nod, then came back to me.

“Good work.”

“Yeah. All I did was say what ye told me to. Sheesh, can’t believe yer actually making this crazy plan happen.”

“Well, it’s not too hard once everything comes together. Just take a look. The water’s going down fast.”

The pond had already lost about ten centimeters of depth. It wasn’t a particularly wide pond to begin with, and at this rate it was easy to see that it’d be empty before night fell. Dinne hadn’t showed up to interfere since her initial escape. Things couldn’t be going better.

“Looks like I win,” I said without thinking.

“Er, Keima, are you familiar with the concept of jinxes?”

...Did you really have to say that, Wataru? If anything happens, it’s your fault.

Only once the pond had lost a meter of depth did Dinne poke her head out.

“H-Heeey! Stop it!” she cried, but I had no reason to stop.

“Give back the girls and I’ll stop.”

“I cannot do that.”

“Then perish.”

Negotiations broke down in an instant. I mercilessly continued draining water.

“I-If you don’t stop, I’ll do this! Hyah!”

“Whoa there.”

Dinne threw a water ball at me, but Wataru blocked it.

“S-Stop it! You’re getting in the way!”

“I am his bodyguard, technically. And please excuse my rudeness a second ago.”

“If you’re worried about being rude, stop that man!” Dinne yelled, puffing with anger, but Wataru just scratched his cheek.

“Uhhh... Well, I kind of have to rescue the princess you’ve kidnapped, so.”

“Grrr...!”

Our objectives being completely in opposition to each other prevented any compromise. After the water lowered another meter, Dinne’s head popped up again.

“S-Seriously, stop it already!”

“Like I said, I will if you give the girls back. You know kidnapping the imperial princess is a pretty huge crime, right?”

“I can’t unless someone says the password! If you want them back so badly, say the password! The password!”

“Okay, the password. I said it. The password. Give them back.”

“That’s not what I meant! I know you know that!” Dinne was getting teary-eyed. “Just stop this already! If you don’t, I have some tricks up my sleeve too!”

“Oh, hostages? Are you saying you’ll harm the people you’re storing? If that’s how you’re going to be, we’re going to have to go all-out on you.”

“I can’t do that because of the promise, but also, are you telling me this isn’t you going all out?!”

Of course not. I was taking the peaceful route despite the extra time and effort because Rokuko and the others were inside. If I had to save them immediately, I would slide into more drastic action. Worst case scenario, I would have to bust out the Charming Girl Succuma. *That’s a queen-class Charming Girl that even a guy like Ittetsu had to knock himself out to resist. Is that what you want? Huh?*

“P-Please don’t!”

“And that’s why I’m going easy on you first. Alright? Do you get the situation now? If so, how about you go ahead and free the hostages.”

“Grrr! Th-They’re not hostages! I’m just storing theem!” Dinne yelled before disappearing beneath the water again.

“...Keima, is there actually something worse you could be doing?”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to do it. It shaves years off my life.”

“I-It’s that serious?” *Well, it only metaphorically shaves years off my life in the sense that stress kills, but otherwise that’s pretty much true.*

The water sunk another meter, and just as the pond floor started coming into view, Dinne’s head popped up again.

“Th-This really is your final warning, okay?! Stop this!”

“Like I said before, give us the girls back and I’ll stop. I’ll even put the water back. Right, Wataru?”

“Right. We’re not doing this because we want to,” Wataru said while nodding beside me.

“Aaah, geez! I understand. I understand that I have no choice! At this point, I will have to show you what it truly means to technically be a great spirit of water. Don’t think you can beat me in battles of water!” declared Undine with a smug grin. *Oh man, she might actually have something.*

“E-Er. What’re you talking about?”

“The ultimate technique of an Undine! Behold! Gather, water, come to me! Water is my body and water is my blood! Take form with my being at the core—{Union: Undine}!”

It happened out of nowhere. Or well, Dinne had given us three warnings, so from her perspective it wasn’t out of nowhere at all. She chanted the spell, and upon finishing the water still in the pond swelled up together. It formed a massive ball of water, then rose above the pond—the hole that used to be a pond.

“Bwahahaha! Now, it is time for divine retribution. Know the wrath of a goddess! This is force permitted by the promise! I have the right to defend myself from brigands stealing my body away!”

Those who had been working the pumps reacted in various ways. Some screamed upon seeing the giant ball of water, some fell to their knees, some bowed while stammering out apologies, and some just bolted.

“...Well, that’s one trump card.” I could see Rokuko, the others, and the kidnapper in the core of the ball, along with bubbles containing what was presumably Dinne’s collected treasures.

Then, the ball shifted, and Dinne took human form with the wagons and such still inside her. They were contained in bubbles present at the core of the body—her chest. *I feel like she’s using the bubbles to make her boobs bigger... She sure cares about appearances, huh...?*

I opened the menu to see if Rokuko said anything, and saw... “*Wow, it just got a lot easier to see!*” ...*Yeah, okay, she’s doing fine.*

“Now, bow before me! Apologize! Return my water and offer up your belongings in penance!”

Right, now’s not the time for some chill tag conversations. I can survive dying once through {Ultra Transformation}, but that’s not true for anyone else.

“...I would normally be able to transform into a titan over twice this size, but you stole so much of my water... However! This is more than enough for humans like you! Size is strength!” the massive Dinne declared while raising an enormous arm over her head.

“Keima. What should we do?”

“...Cut the limbs off?”

“That should be fine, since Rokuko and the others are inside her chest. Though a fall from that high would be pretty deadly.”

Wataru swung his Holy Blade Air at the arm falling toward us. The slice shot through the air and cut Dinne’s arm clean off. It turned back into normal water and rained down into the pit where the pond used to be.

“Fooolools!”

But Dinne just sucked the water back up through her feet. She absorbed each droplet, and the water surged up her torso like a wave before reforming her arm in an instant.

“Bwahahaha! Attacks do not harm me!”

“Well, that’s Undine’s ultimate technique for you. Keima, could you call Salamander over? Maybe they could settle this as two great spirits.”

“Nah. He’s too far.”

“I kinda guessed that,” replied Wataru with a wry smile. “I can’t believe I’m fighting another great spirit so soon...”

“Oh yeah, you’ve fought a great spirit before. You’re pretty much an expert here.”

“Same to you, Keima. And you actually won.”

That doesn’t really matter here since I knocked him out with charms. “I only managed to win because it was Ittetsu. Anyway, what to do about this...” *And now that I think about it, what happens on the inside when she moves a lot? Oh crap, are Rokuko and the others okay?* I opened my map and saw—“Wow, we’re not shaking or bouncing around at all.” ...*Oh. Good.* Seems like the insides are safe after all. Maybe that has to do with how her promise doesn’t let her hurt the people she’s storing.

“Heeey, Keima! What’s the plan?!”

“Evacuate the Corky citizens back home.”

“What about the pumps?” asked Roppe.

“Human lives are the priority, but grab them if you can.”

After I gave my instructions to Gozou and Roppe, Dinne’s voice echoed above us. “Bwahahaha! Fear not, my divine retribution shall fall only on those two black-haired men! I am merely teaching them a lesson! Once I’m done, don’t even think about coming back and trying to exterminate me! Okay, everyone? Especially those of you in the guild? Okay!”

...Alright. Well, looks like we can focus on the pumps, then.

“You heard the lady, Gozou.”

“Y-Yeah. Good luck?”

“Master. I will stay behind as well.” Niku slid in front of me.

“Ah...! Now there’s three black-haired humans?!”

Huh, looks like Dinne can only tell us apart by our hair. Maybe it’s because she’s looking down at us from so far above?

“...Er, Niku. I appreciate the thought, but the situation’s kinda complicated right now. Could you retreat with Gozou for now, and come help only if we really need it? It would mean a lot.”

“...Okay.” Niku nodded, albeit reluctantly.

“So yeah, Dinne. We’ll evacuate everyone but ourselves. Could you wait a sec for that?”

“I shall wait five minutes. It’s easier for me to fight without innocent civilians around.”

I had my ultimate weapon Succuma ready if necessary, but if it came to that I would prefer just having Wataru around rather than a full crowd. The fewer people I had to erase the memory from, the better... Though I wasn’t sure if I could mess with a Hero’s memory at all. *Oh, right, there’s the kidnapper and Emmymephy too. Not sure if I should erase Rokuko and Ichika’s memories too or not.*

Five minutes passed. The citizens of Corky and everyone else evacuated, leaving only Wataru and me with the giant Dinne. *Alright, show time.*

“Well, let’s try a frontal assault. I believe in you, Wataru.”

“Could you provide some backup with that magic of yours, Keima?”

“Fine, fine.”

“Have you finished your little strategy meeting, mortals? Have you accepted your fate? Either way, here I come!” Dinne lifted a giant fist once again.

“Wataru.”

“Yep!”

Her swings wouldn't work with Wataru around. He swung Air again, cutting off her arm for the second time. Water rained down into the former-pond again, and then returned to her body again. *Yeah, at this rate we'll be stuck here forever.*

“Open up a path. I summon thee, magic-wielding monster of stone. Serve me —{Summon Gargoyle}!” I summoned several Gargoyles and sent them flying around Dinne to see what would happen.

“Grrr, these are annoying... However!” The giant Dinne swung her hand around, entirely like swatting away bugs. But unlike bugs, the Gargoyles hit by her massive palm ended up absorbed inside of her.

“Summoners can only summon so much. If I absorb them all and keep them within me, you are doomed! Unable to send them back and unable to summon more, you can do nothing but weep!” Dinne declared while moving the Gargoyles next to the bubbles in her chest.

“Clever girl...” I had never worried about any upper limits to summoning before, but with Wataru around I didn't want to summon a suspicious number of them. It would be better to just be safe and swap over to attack magic.

“...O Fire, O Water, O Earth, O Wind, O Light, O Darkness. Defeat mine enemy. {Element Burst}.” I gathered my energy and tried shooting her through the head. A big hole appeared in her face, but it went back to normal just like a Slime's face might.

“I know of that magic already! It can do nothing if I just dodge it!” It seemed she dodged it by opening a hole in her head herself.

“You really are like a Slime.”

“Don't lump me in with those lesser life forms! And you, Hero! I've figured out how to counter your attack, too!”

“Oh?”

Dinne lifted up a foot. “If I use my foot, you can't chop it down since it overlaps with my chest! I may not be able to harm those inside of me, but if you

two hurt them yourselves it's none of my business!"

Say... what? I was shocked. That actually was a dangerous move.

"...I can just circle around to your side."

"I-I'll turn myself if you try that! Like this!" Dinne deftly turned with her foot up in a feat that seemed impossible considering the laws of gravity.

"Oh, here's my chance—"

"No, Wataru, don't cut off her foot!"

"Huh?!"

I stopped Wataru before I could swing his sword. "If she loses her balance, who knows what'll happen to Rokuko and the others inside of her!"

"Ngh, r-right. She might say it's our fault that she lost balance. I guess we just have to dodge it normally then. Ready, Keima?"

I steeled my resolve and nodded.

"I-I'm going to step on you!" Dinne, continuing mostly out of stubbornness despite knowing she would probably fail, dropped her foot on the two of us. We watched it coming down. And in the end, I...



Rokuko's Perspective

Ah. She stepped on him. And by him, I meant Keima. Wataru dodged it easily and was still ready to fight.

"...I wonder if Keima's okay."

"I say, I'm worried as well. Hopefully that did not kill him."

"Oh, that's not what I meant. I was wondering if Keima's okay in the head."

"The head?" Mephy asked with a tilt of her head. Understandable. You would have to know Keima at least as well as I did to understand what I was talking about.

"To think he'd act like that when he has me... Sheesh."

"I don't think Master would be all about dying and leaving you behind Rokuko. I'm gonna guess my dude has a plan."

"No, and if he does it's just a retroactive excuse. Keima let her step on him on purpose."

"Wha? C'mon, he must have some sorta plan or something."

"I don't think so. Sheesh, Keima... You really are helpless." Ichika didn't seem to get it, but there was no doubt in my mind. I could understand Keima's thoughts like the back of my hand, after all.

He had been enraptured by Dinne's giant foot. To be more clear: There was no doubt that he had popped a boner and then jumped into the sole of her giant foot as it came crashing down. It turned out that he didn't care who a foot belonged to as long as it was a foot, even when that someone was a giant blob of morphed water.

"I honestly think that fetish of his might be a disease. Well, I don't mind it too much."

"I dunno what you're talking about, but, uh, is Master gonna be okay?"

"Oh, probably." He could die once thanks to his {Ultra Transformation}, after all, and it was hard to imagine him actually getting taken like that. Not to

mention...

“Oh, dude, there he is.”

“Hello there, Keima.”

Keima was brought up close to us in one of Dinne’s bubbles, just like the Gargoyles from a second ago. It wasn’t hard to imagine him relaxing and jumping into the foot after seeing the Gargoyles just get absorbed.

He waved at us with a relaxed grin. Voices didn’t carry past the bubble, so I just glared at him while opening up the menu to talk.

“So, how did getting stepped on feel?”

“It was just plain old water.” Keima gave a disappointed frown. *Sheesh, my partner really is something else.* I would have gotten mad if he’d called it incredible, but if it was just like normal water, he had basically just jumped into a bath.

“So, what’s the plan? I’m sure you have one.”

“I do. Uh, more or less.” Keima glanced around his bubble. I pointed in the direction of the kidnapper, assuming that’s what he wanted, and indeed it was. Luckily, all of our bubbles were clearly visible from each other without any overlapping. Keima gave me a thumbs up, and I puffed out my chest with a smirk. It would be embarrassing if I couldn’t even figure out that much.

“Now that I’m inside, I don’t have to worry about hitting you guys by accident.”

“What if it goes outside and hits Wataru?”

“He’ll probably survive a blast or two of this. Maybe more, who knows.” Keima replied while focusing his aim on the other bubble.

“...Rokuko, I say, you sure are fast to understand what Keima wants to say.”

“We’re partners, after all.” It would be hard not to when we’re chatting with tags.

“I wouldn’t have known Keima was looking for the kidnapper.”

“.....” Oh, right, I didn’t use the tag for that. H-Hmmm? Well, it’s only

natural. Partners share a deep emotional connection, after all. Eheh.

“Rokuko, my girl, your ears are crazy red right now. And that’s a super cute grin on your face, too.”

“Wh-What? You’re imagining things.” *W-Well, anyway, it looks like Keima’s about to let loose. We should get in the wagon before this place starts shaking all over.*

Keima’s Perspective

So yeah, I successfully infiltrated Dinne’s body. That was my plan all along. I saw the Gargoyles get absorbed into her body, and I knew Wataru’s {Ultra Good Fortune} bled into his surroundings as well. Not only was it likely for my Hail Mary to succeed, but even if it didn’t I would survive thanks to my {Ultra Transformation}. All the factors aligned and gave me only one option: to leap inside the foot.

It’s not what I personally wanted. I hadn’t hoped for anything in particular, but man, it was just normal friggin’ water. *God dammit. I mean, the shape itself was pretty good. And having a giant foot rushing toward me was actually kinda nice in its own way... Wait, that doesn’t matter right now.*

After Rokuko and the others got back into their wagon, I used some of my DP to buy leather bags. I filled them with air then stashed them in {Storage}. *That should be good enough, just in case. Maybe I should have used bicycle tubes instead...? Nah, it would be hard to explain to Wataru if he found them later.*

“{Element Burst}.” I shot a beam of mana to the bubble with the kidnapper.

“KYAAAAAAH?!”

A direct hit on the bubble. Dinne was screaming or something, but it didn’t matter. Air was leaving the bubble like a deflating air balloon. But that stopped once I put my hand over the hole. *Yeah, air won’t leak out as long as you plug the hole. Even if you’re plugging the hole from the inside.*

I already confirmed ahead of time that busting a hole through a barrier wouldn’t make the whole thing disappear. In which case, plugging the hole with your hand was all you needed to do. Sooo I changed the angle of my hand in the

hole, and...

“{Element Burst}, {Element Burst}, {Element Burst}.” I rapidfire shot {Element Bursts} at the culprit’s bubble. What would that do? Indeed, it would make too many holes for the culprit to cover himself. Though he was slumped on the ground and immobile anyway. Yeah.

“Wait, wait, wait, wait! Stop, stop, stop, stooop! My treasure! My mythrill aaaaxe!” Dinne was panicking. It seemed at least one of my stray shots had hit her treasure.

“Look ooout, if you don’t let him out he’s going to drown. Who knows what’ll happen to your treasure, too?”

“Gr, bubble barrier repair!”

“{Element Burst}.”

“GYAAAAAH!”

I could open more holes no matter how many times she tried repairing it. After all, my {Element Burst} only took as much mana as five Low-Rank spells—or in other words, not much at all. It was incredibly efficient. I could shoot off over a thousand of them with as much mana as I had. My throat would probably dry out from saying that spell name before I ran out.

“Ah! R-Right! How about this?! Bubble barrier join!” Dinne made a snap decision. She combined my bubble with the kidnapper’s. *Not a bad decision. Now I’ll drown too if I break the bubble.*

But at the same time, it was the perfect opportunity for me. The kidnapper was right in front of me, half-starving and exhausted.

“Ngggh... Guuuh...”

“I was planning for a war of attrition, but this is fine too. Hi there, kidnapper. Mind telling me the password?”

“D-Do you think... I would tell you...?”

“I’ll give you this if you do.” I took out a plate of Kinue’s cooking from {Storage}. Time had stopped since it was finished, so the smell of fresh cooking spread through the bubble. The kidnapper’s eyes widened. It only took a second

for him to crumble.

“...It’s *glory be to our god!* I said it, now give it to me!”

“Now, now, hold your horses. Let’s check to see if that’s true.”

I took out the crystal ball from before and made the kidnapper touch it. I had borrowed it from the storekeep thinking something like this might happen.

“Will that password let us free the imperial princess?”

“Yes. So would you—” The crystal ball shone red.

“It takes balls to lie in a situation like this. But well, sometimes being a sore loser doesn’t pay off.” I replaced the ball’s magic stone and stashed the food in {Storage}.

“A-Alright, I’ll say it! *May the light of our god shine on all!* The goddess will let the imperial princess go if you say that!” This time, the ball didn’t shine red.

“Alright, perfect. Eat up.”

“Oooh... My first meal in three days!” The kidnapper reached for the plate, but before he could start...

“Um, did I just hear the password?! Out you go, then! You and everything you brought with you!”

“Wha?!”

After Dinne’s merciless announcement, the kidnapper and all of us were thrown out of her body. Once outside, we saw Dinne crying and apologizing to Wataru.

“Oh great Hero! I have freed your princess and there is no more need for us to fight! Please forgive me already! I’m sorry! I never should have acted so smuuug!”

What the hell did Wataru do to her while I was inside? I mean, I did see snippets of the fight since her body’s transparent, but uh.

“Haha, well. She seemed so busy dealing with you on the inside, I used the opportunity to try and enclose her entire giant body in Air’s prison... and it actually worked.”

I dunno what that means exactly, but it seems like he dominated her. Oh man, this Hero's kinda scary.

And so, we successfully rescued the princess and secured the kidnapper. As an aside, the kidnapper had passed out from the shock of his food being thrown to the ground, but that wasn't our fault.

Epilogue

“Uh, by the way, couldn’t we have just asked her to store us in the same bubble as the kidnapper from the start?”

...So you noticed, huh? A little late for that, Wataru. “My actual plan was to break the barriers and save them after draining all the water. Through force, of course. If Dinne kept fighting even at that point, well, we could hardly be blamed for what would happen next.”

“Keima, you’re really pissed that Rokuko got kidnapped, aren’t you? Am I right?”

I wasn’t aware of it myself, but I was probably pretty mad. Yeah.

“Well, you got lucky, Dinne. This guy actually beat the crap of Salamander at Tsia Mountain.”

“Wait... Tsia Mountain’s Salamander...?! The head Salamander?!”

Hey, don’t go around giving me a bad name. You and Redra beat him up, not to mention all the damage he inflicted on himself. All I did was threaten to tell Redra about some things.

“Uwaaah! I should have given up way earlieeer! I’m so stupid!”

...Well, let’s just be glad neither of us inflicted permanent damage on the other. Yeah. It could always be worse!

In the end, we called everyone back to pump water from the river back into the pond... Or that’s what I expected to happen, anyway. After calling everyone back, we just connected the pond to the river with the hose directly and Dinne began refilling her pond at an incredibly fast rate. Almost like filling a pool with water. The villagers went nuts at the sight of that.

“Incredible! The divine and mighty Dinne is impressive beyond words!”

“She is the true goddess of the pond!”

“Indeed, sing more of my praises! Worship me, give me offerings! Hyahaha!

Bring me water!"

At this rate, everything would be back to normal tomorrow. And by the way... Resting upon Dinne's chest gleamed a mythrill holy symbol of Beddism, which I had given her as both an offering and as a small apology. She joined our religion the second she saw the symbol, crafted by Untara. The mythrill axe I had destroyed was actually just a normal steel axe with a layer of mythrill on top, so she was overjoyed to have something made of pure mythrill.

In any case, it was time to fulfill our promise to the townsfolk and... hold a feast around the pond.

"I wasn't helpful at all this time." Niku, standing next to me, slumped her head sadly. Her tail was hanging weakly.

"Don't worry. You were plenty helpful."

"But..."

"Dude, Niku, relax. You think Master would lie to you?" said a drunk Ichika.

"I was... useful?"

"Of course. If not for you, I might've lost my mind for a second there."

"....."

Oh, nice, she's cheered up. Her tail is wagging. I patted Niku's head.

"Hey, hey, Master. How about you use this babelicious Ichika as your daki tonight, huh? Babe-a-licious. Eheheh." Ichika clung to me, practically rubbing her body against me. *Nice beer smell.*

"Hey, could somebody get some water? This girl's drunk as hell."

"Awww, I'm totes not drunk at all yet. I've still got lots to drink! Don't be a buzzkiiiiill!"

Yeah, yeah, most drunks never say they're drunk. Niku came back with water pretty fast.

"Gahahaha! Keima, ye gotta drink too! Wataru the Hero's paying for it all tonight! Yer wasting yer money if ye don't drink!"

"Ahaha, drink and eat all you want! Wataru's covering everything! There's

only potatoes here, though!”

“There’s sausages, too! Keima, want a drink? I’m drinking too!”

Gozou, Roppe, and Wataru dropped by. The full and complete Team Bacchus.
Yeah, these are the drunks that actually do know when they’re drunk.

“Glad to see all of you in a good mood. A Hero’s party sure is a step above the rest.”

“What’re you talking about? Keima, this is pretty much a feast celebrating you, y’know? You did most of the saving yourself. Saving a princess is a big deal! Hah, I wouldn’t be surprised if you ended up with a full noble title and some land to rule.”

“Hey. All I saved was the princess’s body double. As far as the public’s concerned, anyway.”

“In a lot of ways, body doubles are just as important as the real imperial princess. And Mephy’s the real thing anyway, so.”

Ngh... Alright. All I can do is convince myself that since I’m already being called a legendary Dragon tamer, this won’t make a huge difference.

“Don’t ye sweat it. We’ll go an’ spread Beddhism where we can. Ye already converted Untara’s place, yeah? Turns out gettin’ more sleep helped raise their efficiency.”

“And now Dinne’s a part of Beddhism too! We should go ahead and build a church in Corky, really.”

...Yeah, I don’t know what to say about that. I’ve been doing a little proselytizing myself, but uh, I don’t want to be that aggressive about it. And why the heck is Undine joining Beddhism? Stop!

I decided to change the topic. “More importantly, who was behind the kidnapping after all?”

“That’s not anything for us to worry about. We’ve already handed him over, and specialists will take care of everything else. The Empire is pretty good about getting information it wants.”

I had to question how competent the Empire was if they entrusted saving the

princess to Wataru and me.

“Well, to be honest, it didn’t take long to figure out he’s from an extremist faction in the Holy Kingdom. Is there anything else you want to know?”

...Now that he mentions it, not really. Not like knowing will change anything.

“Cheers, then!” Wataru and I slapped mugs together in a cheers, mine filled with water. Oh, and it was pond water cleaned by the goddess of the pond, so it was pretty healthy stuff.

“There you are, Keima.”

“Oh, Rokuko. And Princess Mephy.”

Rokuko, who had been engaged in deep conversation with Emmymephy for a bit, came walking over. Emmymephy was with her.

“I say, Rokuko is indeed best for you, Keima. She is better fit for you than even I, the imperial princess.”

“Eheheh, well, I did manage to have a full conversation with him through just eye contact when we couldn’t hear each other! We are partners, after all!”

Hey, that was just because we were using the tag function to chat... But well, I guess that’s how it looks from the outside. Probably best to roll with that rather than to spill the beans about the dungeon.

“You really should have noticed us sooner, Keima.”

“Oh? But I say, he and Wataru discovered us as soon as one would think reasonably possible.”

“They wouldn’t have lost us in the first place if they were thinking that fast.”

“Ahhh, I suppose that’s true.” Emmymephy giggled. They really had become fast friends.

“...You better not drink this time, alright, Rokuko?”

“Hmph. I-I know, I won’t. You don’t want me to drink, right?”

“Indeed, he wants to keep your cute drunk self all to himself.”

“Princess Mephy, could you keep that kind of comment to yourself?”

“I merely stated the truth!”

...I fell silent, unable to argue, and Rokuko blushed crimson.

“Oh, Rokuko? I say, you’re getting bright red despite not drinking at all!”

“Sh-Shut it, this is all Keima’s fault! Keima, you need to apologize by... by... giving me an apology kiss!” *How does that logic even work?*

“Rokuko, that isn’t what we talked about. I say, what happened to giving him a princess kiss as thanks for saving you?”

“F-Forget about that! We might make babies if we kiss each other anyway!”

“Kisses don’t make babies... Rokuko, I say, just how innocent are you?”

...Looks like Emmymephy pushed Rokuko toward this.

“Now, now, go for it, I say!”

“.....”

Yeah, looks like it’s a little... a lot embarrassing for her to do it in front of other people. Especially when one such person is staring right at us.

“That’s more something to do in private, I think.”

“.....Mmm.”

“I say, what a coward’s way out. But the royal will decrees that you be forgiven, since Rokuko seems satisfied.” Emmymephy went off to greet other people. Though I would have expected that as imperial princess, she would instead be on constant guard against the flood of people coming to greet her.

“...You’re not going with her, Rokuko?”

“Not right now. More importantly, Keima.”

“Hm? Whoa, oof.”

Rokuko clung to my arm. “I’ll forgive you since you did actually come save me.”

“A-Alright.” *What is she forgiving me for, again?* I had no idea, but I went ahead and nodded anyway.

* * *

It turned out that the Japanese sake I bought with DP to offer up to Dinne was the best present she could have asked for. She was basically showering herself in it, and by that I mean she was literally dunking it on her head. Undine consumed drinks in quite the extravagant manner.

“This water! Is amazing! It’s so good! So go...ood... zzz...” And thanks to her extravagant drinking, she had alcohol coursing through her entire body in no time, knocking her out stone cold. We used that opportunity to leave for the imperial capital. *We’re leaving the rest to you, Corky citizens! Good luck!*

Anyway, three days passed after that, and only then did we finally arrive at the imperial capital.

“That was a long journey... Needlessly long, really...”

“Haha, I’m pretty thankful for it,” Wataru said. “This trip felt especially long to me too.”

We did what we had to do at the east gate and went inside in no time. The guards saluted us, Wataru gave a salute back, and we were in the imperial capital.

The gate led to a long, wide road made of paved stone. To the left and right were rows of buildings, some made out of stone and others made out of wood. The city was breathtaking, an unmistakable aesthetic step above all the cities we had visited on the way here. The group of alchemists in the Hero Workshop had been expending enormous effort to make a ton of buildings that resembled European architecture, which was one trademark of the imperial capital. Though they had been clearly going off memory.

The main street was worthy of its name, with a huge crowd of people and carriages moving up and down it. About one out of ten of the carriages looked fancier than the others and had crests emblazoned on them.

“And here’s the capital!” declared Wataru proudly with the main street behind his back. *You standing in the wagon makes it kind of hard to see, but putting that aside, everyone can see him from outside. He sure doesn’t care about embarrassing himself.*

Emmymephy, a native of the imperial capital herself, watched on with a slight

smirk. “I say, a number of people react like this after entering the capital. Not too many will even take notice of him.”

“Yeah, good point. This is the capital, after all.”

“Wow, Keima, you don’t seem very moved. It’s almost like you’ve seen a city this impressive before, or perhaps several cities much more impressive than this,” Wataru said.

“Mikan was nothing special, but I just saw Tsia, Donsama, and Corky. They were all pretty big.”

“...I feel like the capital is on another level from those.”

“Well, you know what they say, both a hundred and a million are ‘a lot.’ Once cities reach a certain size it’s hard to get more impressed when they get bigger. They’re all impressive compared to Goren.”

“Wow, how apathetic! Keima does it again.”

Well, I actually have come here before. Not that I’m going to say that. And where do you get off on calling me apathetic?

“Anyway, let’s go to the nearby Adventurer’s Guild for now. There’s more than one here, just like in Corky. One in each cardinal direction, then one in the center of the city.”

“So there’s one near each gate, huh? Guess this will be the eastern Guild then.”

By the way, Misha was in the central Guild. We probably wouldn’t be meeting this time. *P-Probably? I’m sure Misha realizes how problematic it would be for us to meet here.*

“More important, Keima, is the food. Ichika, I say, what food do you like here?”

“I’m gonna have to go with some dairy stuff thanks to all the farms. The stew here is pretty dope.”

“Rokuko, the cheese here is pretty good too. Not everyone likes the smell, but the people who do really love it.”

“Oh, a recommendation from you, Roppe? Guess I’ll try eating the cheese. If I don’t like it, well, I’ll think about that if it happens.”

...Rokuko sure has been influenced by Ichika, huh? Not that I don’t get how she feels. “By the way, Rokuko, do you remember why we’re here?”

“I kinda forgot. Was this a road trip for eating all over the country?”

“Nope. Nooot at all. We got summoned here since we beat a Dragon.”

“Oh, right.”

That said, Rokuko wasn’t actually a member of the two parties that took down the Dragon. *I’m sure Haku is planning something here.*

“Unlike the other cities, we have actual stuff to do here. Wataru, what are our plans looking like?”

“Well. I showed our letter at the gate, so those involved should already have been informed of our arrival. They’ll probably contact us once we show up at the guild, so once we get there we can just go with the flow.” They would be preparing places to stay for us themselves. All we had to do was deliver our quest items, then wait for them to show up.

* * *

We delivered our items, went to the Guild’s attached dining hall to wait, and then... she appeared.

“Yahoo! I’m here to get y’all, meow!”

“Oh, Misha. Thanks for coming.”

“Hey hey, Wataru. You sure are being worked to the bone again, huh? Come drop by whenever you want some more puurfect training from yours truly!”

Ah crap, it’s Misha. The dumb, pink, cat-eared A-Rank adventurer slash guildmaster Misha. And she seems pretty excited, too. Am I just screwed? Not knowing what else to do, I just played dumb.

“Hey, Wataru, who’s this Misha person? You should introduce us.”

“Huh? What’re you talking about, Keima? We’re tight now, we’re bros, we don’t need any introduc— Oh, wait, we do! Right, right! Oh right, how could I

forget that I hadn't met you before. It's very nice to meet you, stranger."

Misha kind of messed up beyond repair there, but yeah. She and I logically should never have ever met before. After all, I normally never left Goren, and Misha spent most of her time lazing around in the capital's head guild office. There were no opportunities for us to meet. We ended up knowing each other through dungeon business, excluding that it would be bizarre if we knew each other.

"...Wait, you and Misha know each other, Keima?"

"Nope, this is our first time meeting. I dunno who this Misha is, but she seems like a real joker. We'll definitely get along!"

"Agreed! This is our first time meeting, but it already feels like we've met several times before! Our friendship will last through the ages!"

"Indeed! I've never felt such friendship for someone at a first meeting before! Our friendship was ordained by fate! Yaaay!"

"Yaaay!"

We went ahead and high-fived. Hopefully that tricked him. I really hoped that tricked him. If it didn't, we would just have to keep up the act until he caved.

"Well, let me introduce myself. I'm Keima, town chief of Goren. This is Rokuko. And here are my slaves, Kuro and Ichika."

"I myself don't need an introduction, but, uhh, these are my party members, Gozou and Roppe."

"I say, I am Emmymephy Laverio! The royal will decrees that you call me Mephy, please." *Yeah, you didn't need to introduce yourself.*

"Uh-huh, uh-huh. I'm Misha. I run the imperial capital's Adventurer Guild as its guildmaster. Nice to meet all of you!"

Alright, now there won't be anything suspicious about us knowing each other's names and faces. But since Wataru still looked suspicious, I leaned over to whisper into his ear.

"Wataru. Between you and me, Misha's dropped by Goren once before. The thing is, she was undercover. I think you can imagine the rest. Don't go telling

anybody about this.”

“Ah, I get it. Makes sense.” Wataru nodded in understanding. Misha, having overheard me, gave a strong thumbs up.

Alright. Perfect. The best thing about this excuse is I can use it for all of Haku's other party members too. They were all undercover and we had to pretend not to know each other. If it seemed like we knew each other, it's because of that. There's no holes here.

“Okay, let's go! I'll take the lead with my beast, so just follow along with your whole wagon!” Misha went outside the guild and climbed onto a lion with a seat on its back. And also wings, not to mention a snake for a tail. We got back into our wagon.

“Alright, Lady Rokuko, up here please.” Misha reached a hand out to Rokuko as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

“Misha. I'm just Rokuko right now. You don't need to worry about that kind of thing.”

“...Ah. Sorry, I didn't think things through enough.”

I glanced around. Wataru was unfazed, but Gozou and Roppe were nodding to themselves, coming to conclusions they thought it would be best not to say. Emmymephy tilted her head in confusion, but that was reasonable. The guildmaster herself calling somebody else “lady” was kind of a big deal. Not to mention her prioritizing Rokuko above everybody else. Including the imperial princess Emmymephy.

“Oh, do you want to ride then, Princess Mephy?”

“...I say, why would I ride when Rokuko wouldn't?”

“Very true!”

Why are you agreeing with that? Read the mood a little, Misha.

“Okay, let's go to the castle. Try not to fall too far behiind.” Misha took the lead and started moving down the road. Her beast must have been pretty rare, given all the attention that was being drawn to it.

And she wanted Rokuko to ride that? Hmm. I've seriously got to question if

Misha isn't just dangerously incompetent. Almost everything she's done since coming here has been wrong. Or maybe Haku actually instructed her to treat Rokuko better than the imperial princess? Yeah, nah. This is Misha we're talking about.

As we followed along behind Misha, Team Bacchus started whispering to Rokuko, even though we were in a canopied wagon and there was no need to be secretive.

"Er, Rokuko. Should we start callin' ye Lady Rokuko now?"

"Wha? I don't think so, Gozou. It's not really something you should worry about."

"Yeah, I always just call her Rokuko!"

"Oh, Wataru, you can call me Lady Rokuko."

Her being mean to just Wataru was probably me rubbing off on her. *That's my partner for you. And it's fine, Wataru doesn't mind it.*

"Rokuko, I say, are you perhaps higher status than me?"

"What? You're high status, Mephy? Did you perform some incredible feat I don't know about?"

"I honestly did not expect you to start talking about incredible feats."

Rokuko, that's the imperial princess you're talking about here. She's high status even if she hasn't done anything to deserve it.

Finally, we arrived at the imperial castle. Unlike Haku's villa, it was surrounded by sturdy walls made of ashen gray stone, built for practicality more than appearances. Though if the day ever came that these walls were used, the war was probably already lost.

Thanks to Misha being at our helm, we were allowed into the castle without much issue. *Actually, aren't we still in a wagon with the Tsia family crest on it? Is that alright? It feels kind of like this will give the impression that they're colluding with the Tsia family, but I guess in reality the royal family is on good terms with Tsia anyway.*

Misha stopped after we entered the second gate of the city. We stopped our

wagon in turn.

“Okaaay, stop the wagon there and everyone climb down, please. Errrm, I’ll be handing off my beast here, so... Oh, Sally. Good timing. Could you take my little cutie to his room, please? Thaaanks.”

“Misha, don’t shove the reins into my hand. Ah, Keima. It’s been some time.”

Oh crap, it’s Sally, the Living Armor captain of the Imperial Knights and one of Haku’s party members. Actually, should she be walking around in her armor like that? I guess it’s fine if nobody’s saying anything.

“Oh? You know Sally too, Keima?”

“...She’s one of Haku’s party members, so yeah. She’s been to Goren before too.” I went ahead and dropped the excuse I had thought of ahead of time. It was pretty convenient.

“Wataru. I’ve heard the reports. It is good to see that you safely rescued Princess Mephy.”

“Ah, well, it was mostly thanks to Keima’s help that it went so well.” Wataru gave a small bow. I had guessed from him and Misha knowing each other, but I guess Wataru did in fact personally know all of Haku’s party members. That’s probably thanks to him receiving quests directly from her.

“We shall train later when time permits. Do not forget to drop by the training grounds.”

“...You always come at me ready to kill when we’re training. It’s kind of scary, to be honest.”

“Is that way not more effective? Wataru the Hero needs that level of training.” Sally puffed out her chest (i.e. her plate armor) in a challenging fashion. *She must be giving him some hellish training... Man, Wataru really is the protagonist of his own story, huh? He’s loaded with clichés.*

“Relax, Sally. Can I purretty please ask you to go do a favor for me?”

“What? It takes courage to order around the captain of the Imperial Knights like that, Misha.”

“Awww, what? Aren’t we friends, Sally?” Misha started to rub her cheek

against Sally, only to have her neck grabbed and pulled away.

“I have a message from Haku. Switch places with me, and cease making uncalled-for blunders. I imagine you went off the script and messed up in the process? Go back to the guild and do some of your guildmaster work or something. You have a lot of work built up, don’t you? I’m sure you do.”

“Ngh...! A-Alright, fiiine, I get it. Later, Keima! Let’s duel again sometime! I won’t lose this time!” Misha got back on her beast and energetically waved while leaving.

Is it even possible for her to say anything without fucking something up? Here comes Wataru with a smug comment.

“So you beat Misha too, huh, Keima? Even I can only beat her about half the time.”

“I beat her about the same way I usually beat you.”

“I would expect nothing less, Keima!”

“...Hm. How about you call me Lord Keima to patch with Rokuko’s Lady?”

“I would expect nothing less, Lord Keima!”

“Oh god, never mind, stop. That gave me actual goosebumps of disgust.”

“That’s pretty mean.” Wataru laughed, and Sally began guiding us into the castle.

...It’s finally time. It’s a bit late to be thinking this, but what’s actually going to be happening here? Should I be wearing my normal adventurer clothes? I thought, but instead of being taken to an audience chamber, we were brought to normal guest rooms.

“These are guest rooms for barons. There’s one for each of you, and you may stay here for the night. The audience and noble titles will be granted the day after tomorrow.”

“I say, very well then.”

“...Princess Mephy, please return to your room.” Sally stopped Emmymephy, who had been casually trying to go into Rokuko’s room.

“Errr. So the audience isn’t happening right away?”

“Keima... Do you think his highness the Emperor has that much free time? There have been so many sudden changes to his schedule and our plans that it is incredibly difficult for us to keep things on track. Even so, we are prioritizing your party’s audience. Do you understand, Keima?”

“Er. Yeah. Sorry, actually.” I reflexively apologized at the sight of Sally holding her aching head while grimacing.

“Wait, you said the Emperor?”

“Yes. His highness the Emperor. He is, as far as the public is concerned anyway, Haku’s descendant. Haku will of course be present at the audience, but it is best for us to confer peerage through the Emperor’s authority.”

Oh yeah, I get the feeling Haku is passing herself off as someone who spends most of her time in her villa. That would mean that even though she’s actually at the top of the food chain, the Emperor is an important figurehead. He’s kind of a for-show ruler, like how I’m just the town chief for show in Goren.

...Honestly, I just felt a lot of companionship for this guy. Though there’s a big difference between being a town chief and being an emperor.

“Not to mention, we will be spending tomorrow preparing clothes for you and teaching you all what to do during the audience. Prepare yourselves. Though you may feel free to rest easy for the rest of today.”

Oh, they’ll do the legwork to get us ready, too. I guess that’s actually why the audience is the day after tomorrow. Very considerate. I wish Misha could learn from this kind of consideration. And by that I mean have it ground into her skull.

“Would you like to eat in the dining hall? Or shall we have it delivered to your rooms?”

“Oh, I’ll take delivery, please.”

“Very well. I will pass the word. Maids will be sent soon, so please tell them anything you need. And do not wander around aimlessly. If caught wandering without permission, you will be arrested as spies. That will be all. Shall we go, Princess Mephy?”

“Oh fine, I say. Rokuko! I’ll sneak out and come to play later!”

Sally gave Rokuko a small bow, then dragged Emmymephy away, her armor clanking.

Gozou burst out a heavy sigh. “Guuuh. I thought me heart was gonna stop when the captain o’ the Imperial Knights started guidin’ us around...”

“You too, Gozou?” Roppe asked.

“The guildmaster was alright thanks to Keima, but this time was somethin’ else.”

Thanks to me? What’d I do...? Oh, right, the casual high five.

“Ye know, I’ve just gotta be glad they’re givin’ us time to prepare. Hey, Roppe, are ye gonna wear a dress?”

“Ahhh, I guess I might? And you’re going to be wearing a fancy outfit too, Gozou...”

The two of them imagined each other all dressed up, then grimaced a little.

“Don’t worry, it’s not that big of a deal! You won’t be executed for sneezing while the Emperor is talking or anything. Though you may be imprisoned,” Wataru said jokingly. Nobody laughed.

In any case, there were eight rooms, four on either side of a hallway. We just casually picked whichever we wanted. Not that there was any difference between them. Each had a futon, desk, and a pot. They were pretty basic rooms.

“Oh, this room’s mine. Keima, you go there, and Niku, you go to the very end one. Ichika can be on the other side across from us.”

“Okay.”

“You got it.”

For some reason, Rokuko decided on our rooms for us. *Well, I don’t mind. Time to go to sleep.*

I’m glad they have futons for beds here. Though honestly, there’s something impressive about that. Has Beddhism made its way all the way to the imperial

capital...?

“Still, I’m surprised you’re staying with us, Rokuko. I thought for sure Haku would call you over to her villa.”

“Maybe she’ll call me over during the night.”

“It’s possible.”

Either way, after some rest that could hardly be called rest at all, we would spend a day preparing, and then it would finally be time for the audience. *I’ll have to remember why I was called over before then! Haha, just kidding, I do remember. I-I do, I promise.*

* * *

We practiced what to do for a day, and then it was time for the audience.

The audience chamber was grand and magnificent. There were white pillars reminiscent of a temple lined up next to a lush red carpet. The carpet ended at three steps, upon which there was a golden throne with a handsome-looking middle-aged man sitting upon it. It was Lionel Laverio, Emperor of the Laverio Empire. Beside him stood the still young, still beautiful Ivory Goddess... Our own Haku.

We ourselves were wrapped in fancy garb, and we knelt on the carpet by the bottom step. I was at the front with Wataru and Rokuko on either side of me. Behind us were Gozou and Roppe, with Niku and Ichika at the very end.

Emmymephy was on top of the steps as well, with Sally the captain of the Imperial Knights standing slightly behind her as a guard. There were several government official-looking fellows, with at least one being a scribe writing everything down. That reinforced the fact this was an official audience, making things more tense than they might have been otherwise.

“You may raise your heads.”

“Sir.” I rose my head and looked at the Emperor as I had been thoroughly trained to do the day before.

“Keima Goren. You defeated a Flame Dragon. Is this correct?”

“It is correct, your highness. Please accept this gift,” I said while handing a

scale and some chips of Igni's claws to an official. (She had given us these to use as proof later. The scales had fallen off normally, and she had chipped her claws while grooming herself.) The official put them on a silver, probably mythril plate which he brought to Emperor Lionel.

The Emperor picked them up. For a bit he looked at them with great interest, letting out hrms and hohs, but quickly set them back down after Haku coughed.

"These are indeed the scales and claws of a Flame Dragon. Very well. To reward your efforts in relieving the Empire of such a menacing danger, and to reward your heroic rescue of Princess Emmymephy, I will be awarding you with the rank of baron. Your companions will be offered the rank of adventurer visad. Count Nishimi will be offered the gold reward he desires."

"We are honored."

Baron. That was the rank we expected ahead of time. *Yeah, well... Most B-Rank adventurers are given the adventurer noble rank of visad, but since I was the head of the Dragon defeating party, my accomplishments were too great to reward with just the rank of visad. Not to mention we added saving Emmymephy on top of that.*

This all regardless of the fact that Wataru was there too! Gozou and Roppe could have taken all the credit for rescuing Emmymephy, really. Why is all the credit being pushed onto me...? Gah!

The bottom tiers of noble ranks went like: adventurer visad, knight visad, plain visad, then baron, which made me three ranks above everyone else except Wataru. A commoner advancing up four noble ranks like that would apparently under normal circumstances come close to death two or three times.

...Also, as an aside, baron was a rank that could be inherited by your children. *Hurray! My kids will be nobles too!*

Since I was the only one who received a rank above plain visad, I alone went up to the Emperor and swore an oath of fealty before having him tap my shoulders with a jeweled sword. *Yeaaah, this is definitely something a Hero introduced. I've seen this in manga and light novels all the time, I thought while accepting the sword.*

Apparently, I just got to keep the sword. It was proof of being a baron, so I decided to hang it up in my office after getting back. *It's not like one of Haku's Magic Blades with cameras on it or something, right? That blue gemstone in the hilt is just a stone, right?*

Either way, the ceremony finished just as planned. All that was left was us leaving. There was no room for small talk in the Emperor's audience chamber. Honestly, it made me wonder why I had been summoned all the way just for this. Couldn't it have all been handled through a letter? I guess not.

"You may ask an official for more details, if you wish. Now, you may lea—"

"Okay, can I have a little time here? Yes, I can. Everything from here on out is off the record." Haku interrupted the Emperor with a bright smile. *Yep, here it is. Haku butting into things. I guessed this would happen the second I saw her in here.*

Haku flicked her hand, and all the government officials left the room in a timely manner. *Clearing the room, eh? I want to leave too, but I guess that's not happening.* Only us, Haku, the Emperor, Emmymephy, and Sally stayed in the audience chamber.

"Oh, relax. This is off the record and everything."

It's less that we're not relaxed, and more that we all feel like something bad's about to happen.

"Oh, my sweet little Rokuko," Haku called, and Rokuko blinked in surprise. The script we had been given yesterday definitely didn't mention this.

"Come on up, my dear."

"Oh, okay." Rokuko, having been casually called over by Haku the Ivory Goddess, climbed up the steps toward her. *Whoa now. We were just told yesterday the steps reflect the divide in our status, remember? Why are you climbing them like they're nothing? They're not like the steps in our dungeon's boss room that are just for show. They mean something.*

And look, the Emperor is furrowing his brows like he's thinking "Whaaaat...", not to mention Emmymephy opening her eyes wide in surprise. This is definitely just Haku letting loose without warning. Definitely.

“Ahaha.”

“...Um. This wasn’t, erm, part of the plan, was it?” Rokuko asked not to Haku, but the person beside her. *Uhhh, Rokuko, that’s the Emperor of this Empire you’re talking to. He’s a big deal, alright? He’s not some old man running a weapon shop. I mean, I guess it would be a big deal to ask Haku too, but still. Couldn’t you have at least asked Emmymephy or Sally?*

“...I know as much as you do. Could you please explain, First Empress?”

“I say, I would like to know as well, First Empress.”

“Of course, of course. Gladly.” Haku put her hands on Rokuko’s shoulders and smiled. “Allow me to introduce you all to my little sister. Rokuko, this is Lionel. He’s just the Emperor, so call him whatever you like. Emmymephy, you already know.”

“...Umm, nice to meet you, Emperor Lionel? Mephy?”

“...Lady Rokuko, I am honored to meet you.”

“.....”

U-Uh, weeeird. Why is the Emperor calling Rokuko “Lady Rokuko”...? Is she higher status than hiiim? And look, Emmymephy is flapping her mouth. She can’t even get a word out.

Gozou and Roppe were nodding to each other, their suspicions having been confirmed. Ichika, Niku, and Wataru didn’t have much of a reaction. They all knew already.

“Um, Haku. Weren’t we keeping it a secret that I’m your little sister?”

“It’s okay, we’re off the record right now. I’m getting involved a little since there was a reasonable excuse to bring you over here. Listen well, everyone. Speaking a word of this to anyone will be considered an act of treason, understood?”

Everyone bobbed their heads nodding. Nobody wanted to be executed. Given that the Emperor was nodding too, it was safe to conclude Haku had him by the balls.

“Now then, Lionel.”

“...Yes?”

“Rokuko is my precious little sister. Do you understand?”

“...If you are asking me to offer her the throne, I will do so gladly.”

“Wrong.”

Wait, he would just gladly give up his throne? I wouldn't want it even if he offered it to me. Seems like a busy job.

“I am telling you to make arrangements in her favor if anything is to happen. Understand?”

“...I would know to do that without the audience being interrupted in this manner, I think.”

“There are many officials who would not take kindly to me introducing her to you like this, Lionel.”

“Very true... I appreciate your consideration, First Empress.”

Oh, he's agreeing with that? I would have thought Haku could just use her dungeon functions to sneak us into his bedroom... Oh. Wait, is she keeping her dungeon a secret from the Emperor? Seriously? The Emperor? He's the top dog of the country as far as the people know. How could he not know about the dungeon... Isn't he Haku's descendant or something? I mean... Well, if he isn't her Dungeon Master, I guess maybe it makes sense? The fewer people who know the better, but... the Emperor? No way... Maybe she's only told him that the dungeon is under her complete control?

A single conversation was filling my head with dangerous questions. Thinking back, Sally had said that he was Haku's descendant “as far as the public was concerned,” so maybe they weren't blood-related at all? Maybe she just hasn't told him everything? Given that he offered to hand over the throne on the spot, it was possible he was just a puppet she made to navigate politics.

Is she talking to Rokuko like this with people ignorant of the dungeon stuff like Wataru and Gozou around so that I can't speak freely? So that there isn't even an off chance of me spilling the beans to the Emperor? If so, dang, what a pain. I don't want to deal with this. I hope I'm just misunderstanding something.

“Emmymephy, I certainly hope you haven’t been rude to my sweet little Rokuko.”

“O, O-O-O-O, Of course not, Empress! I say!” Emmymephy bowed with the blood draining from her face.

“I wonder about that.”

“Um, Haku? Mephy’s my friend, please don’t bully her too much.”

“If you insist, Rokuko.” Haku gave a refined laugh, and a little color returned to Emmymephy’s face. “In any case. That’ll be all for today. Those certain fellows will throw up quite a fuss if we stay here for too long. I hate to say goodbye, Rokuko, but I hope to see you soon.”

“Same to you, Haku. It’s always good to see my big sister,” Rokuko replied before casually jumping down the steps and walking back to us. “I’m back.”

Yeah, sure, I guess that’s just how you’re going to act now. Welcome back.

And so, despite some little mishaps, our audience with the Emperor ended safely. *I-I think we’re safe, anyway?*

* * *

Rokuko and I were called to Haku’s villa after the audience. Or well, we were all invited, but out of politeness only I—now a baron—and Rokuko ended up going. Sally explained that despite everyone being called, it was expected that I be sent as a representative, and everyone quickly agreed with that. Though Niku looked a little reluctant to stay behind.

...If only I could stay behind too. Sadly, I don’t think that’s an option for me.

With that out of the way, Rokuko and I went to Haku’s Ivory Villa for the first time in a while. Her crossdressing Succubus butler Chloe greeted us at the door and guided us to her. In the blink of an eye we were having a fancy tea party in a garden. *Well, I’m just glad I got a seat.*

Though, judging by how Rokuko’s friend Emmymephy wasn’t here, I could guess that this was a personal tea party she was holding to talk about dungeon business.

“Finally, I could officially summon you to my villa.”

“Haku, I said this before, but it’s good to see you again.”

“Oh yes, I’m happy to see you again Rokuko. You too, Keima.”

“Thanks. Mind if I go ahead and ask a question?”

“What would you like to know?” Haku replied with a smile.

“...How much does the Emperor know?”

“Oh, is that all? Let’s see... I’ve told that boy that I’m a Dungeon Core, at least. And that this capital is all under my control.”

Oh. Guess I read too deeply into things. I expected her to have only told him the barest essentials.

“Though, as you have likely guessed, I haven’t told him about Dungeon Masters.”

“...I see.”

“Would you expect anything else? He is not my Master, and there is no benefit of informing him about the system,” Haku said before taking a sip from her cup.

“Wait,” Rokuko said. “Does that mean you wanted to hide Keima’s identity from the Emperor?”

Haku widened her eyes in surprise. I was surprised too.

“I mean, what else could it be? You introduced me as your sister, but you didn’t say anything in particular about Keima. You did that to draw attention to me and away from him, right?”

“...Did Keima tell you that?”

I rapidly shook my head. “Not at all. H-Hey, Rokuko. Did you eat something weird recently?”

“What? Don’t be a jerk, Keima.” Rokuko pursed her lips and looked away.

I thought back to the audience with Rokuko’s perspective in mind. I had probably been right that Haku didn’t want me saying anything unnecessary. But it hadn’t occurred to me that her objective there was to hide me.

“...Haaah. You truly have grown, Rokuko.”

“Well, I do have a lot going on in my head.”

“To think that you would one day see right through me, Rokuko. You’re right. I imagine Keima figured out the same thing, but yes. I wanted to hide his significance as much as possible.” Haku went ahead and confirmed Rokuko’s theory. *Sorry, I didn’t actually figure that much out.*

“Dungeon Masters are the most critically important secret we dungeons have. We cannot let knowledge of it leak to humans that aren’t our Masters. And yet, Keima, do you even realize how much attention you are drawing to yourself? I seem to recall you saying you didn’t want to stand out much, but your actions say the opposite.”

My black hair and black eyes signaled my Hero blood to anyone paying attention. I was successfully developing a growing town, I was the pope of a new church supported by the Ivory Church, and on top of all that I was now a Dragon-defeating legend. Not to mention that I even rescued a princess recently... Apparently, some were discussing treating me like a Hero and elevating me to the S-Rank adventurer, granting me the rank of Count, and holding a parade in my honor.

But Haku had used her authority to crush all those plans without mercy.
Thank you! I owe you my life!

“Interesting. And you squashed the suspicion over that by telling the Emperor I’m your little sister. You’re using me as an excuse, right? That you don’t want to make Keima seem like a bigger deal than me?”

“Oh, don’t be mean, Rokuko. That’s just secondary. My main priority here was not exposing you to the public light, my dear.”

“Is that true, sister?”

“It’s true. Oh, would you like a berry tart? They’re quite delicious.” Haku held out a tart for Rokuko to eat, which she did while pouting a little.



...What in the world? Rokuko is dominating Haku in a conversation...? Seriously? I think at this point, Rokuko may actually have surpassed me.

Oh, but I did notice one thing myself.

"...You don't want me to stand out because I'm easier to eliminate that way, right?"

"Oh my, what an idea. Ahahaha."

She's not denying it. I'm spooked.

"...Haku, you won't actually kill Keima, right?"

"I won't, as long as he remembers his place."

"He's my partner. You can't touch him, okay?"

"He'll be safe as long as he's not my enemy."

Excuse me, I have some extremely important questions as to what makes you consider someone your enemy.

"By the way, Rokuko. I imagine you're calling him your partner rather than your Master to hide his identity as your Dungeon Master, correct?"

"What? No, not really."

"Oh. I see."

Oh shit, was that it? Am I her enemy now? I just felt a shudder run down my spine, and I'm pretty sure that's her raw killing intent hitting me.

Haku took a silent sip of her tea. "So, Keima. What are your thoughts on this?"

"...I don't intend to fight you. I would like our cooperation to continue."

"I see. May I take that to mean what I think it does?"

"Sorry, that could mean so many things I can't be sure we're on the same page. At the very least, I won't do anything Rokuko doesn't want me to." I took my own sip of tea. If touching Rokuko would make me Haku's enemy... I would probably have to start considering Haku an obstacle to take down. After all, Rokuko being kidnapped along with Emmymephy taught me that, apparently, I

couldn't relax without Rokuko around anymore. Even with Haku implicitly threatening my life here, I didn't feel like giving her up for even a second.

"...If Rokuko insists, I will, shall we say, 'bend over backwards' to accommodate her wishes. You may hold hands— Erm, very well, you may even hug. Anything more than that... Well, you didn't like the rich loli from the Tsia family, and Emmymephy's status didn't sway you, so we might be at an impasse."

"So you were trying to set me up with those two, huh?"

"Whatever do you mean? I merely received reports on the matter." Haku played dumb, but it was obvious both of them had been honey traps. *Too bad! I completely ignored both of them!*

"Oh, I have an idea. How about I take you to one of *those* stores and cover the cost? There are many of those in the imperial capital." Haku gave a smile. *Should you be talking about that kind of thing in front of Rokuko?*

"...Well, I care more about sleep than that kind of thing. And I think Rokuko wouldn't want me to go somewhere like that. Right, Rokuko?"

"Keima...! Well, Haku. What do you mean by *those* stores? Can I tag along with Keima?"

Both Haku and I choked at the same time. If she was saying that on purpose, I had to admire her guts. Though judging by the expression on her face, she really just didn't know.

"Keima..." Haku said, a scary look in her eyes.

"Hold on. This isn't my fault."

"...Th-That is true. I walked into this myself. And I have just remembered that there are quite a few things I will need to teach Rokuko. Which brings me to my next topic. Rokuko, shall we bathe together later? I have much to teach you while we're there."

"Hm? Okay."

Why teach her in the bathroom...? Well, there's probably no deep reason to this. Should be safe to say she's just trying to be efficient with her time by doing

both at once. Not wanting to come into conflict with Haku right away, I decided not to press further. Whew.

“In any case, it’s finally time. I can now openly treat you as my little sister, Rokuko. Although only when off the record.”

“Is it really openly if it has to be off the record?”

“I ensured that the nobles would overhear the announcement.”

Ah, she claimed it was off the record, but intentionally let the nobles know about it. What a fearsome mix of being public and private information. Things being unofficial open up a lot of opportunities, like hentai of copyrighted works.

“That said, I imagine that Lionel doesn’t truly believe that Rokuko is truly my little sister.”

“Oh? Really, sister?”

“I would expect that he concluded you were not my sister, but just someone special who had drawn my attention. That is technically true, since all Dungeon Cores are technically my brothers and sisters, but still.”

Oh yeah. All Dungeon Cores were born from Father, so Ittetsu (Core 112), Aidy (Core 666), and the idiot trio were all Haku’s little brothers and sisters. If she treated each one of them like humans treated their blood relatives, there’d be no end to her family.

“Of course, you are the only one I would ever treat as my little sister, Rokuko.” Haku said while stroking Rokuko’s head.

Rokuko’s mood improved on the spot and she beamed a proud smile. “Well, this is fine with me too. Now I can safely call myself your little sister, Haku.”

“That’s right. It’s off the record information, but the Emperor knows who you are now. Use my name when you need to, okay?”

“Okay!”

While the two of them giggled and laughed and hugged, I took a sip from my freshly poured cup of tea. *These tarts sure are good. Oh, do you mind if I bring some back with me? One of my party members sure loves to eat.*

Ahaha. I sure love these peaceful days.

...Yeah, yeah. Something's gonna happen in no time, I know. At least let me enjoy one day of peace. Please, God. I'll even be a hypocrite to ask for your help just this once. Hah.

Afterword

We've finally reached Volume 10. This is thanks to all of you, my well-cultured readers. It's been three years since my debut. It feels like it's been a long time, but also not. Don't tell me I'm just going to wake up and this is all a dream like a bad movie plot. That would have to be one long dream, so I guess not. It's said that light novel authors have an average life span of three years, so I'll keep working hard while taking care to stay healthy and not run out of ideas.

I managed to just casually overcome the Third Volume Wall and the Fifth Volume Wall, so I'll probably be fine, I think... I'll try to live up to everyone's expectations. Oh, and this year's fortune for me was "moderately good fortune." It feels kinda weird to get "moderately good fortune" instead of just plain "good fortune," but well... Better than nothing?

In this volume, I initially intended to end at a point further away in the story. I was thinking like, nice, I have a huge stock of web novel content to go through! I won't have to write much new content at all...! Well. There was just too much web novel content.

To be specific, the volume ended up so large it couldn't be contained in a single volume. I consulted the editor, I-san, and his response was to make the volume a two-parter. Yaaaah.

So, for all intents and purposes, this journey to the imperial capital was just part one, with Volume 11 being part two. With that in mind, I had some room for writing some new content, but...

"Oh, since they won't be a two-parter in practice, please make sure they stand independently as different volumes."—I-san

Say... what? And thus, I ended up adding a lot of content that wasn't in the web novel. I mean, I intended to write some new content no matter what, and there was a character in the web novel who wasn't introduced in the light novel yet. I put the Imperial Princess in to replace her, and the developments naturally changed from there... Before I knew it, this volume had ended up over

ninety-five percent original and edited content. My pen never had time to rest.

How? How did this happen? I thought for sure this volume would be easier for me, and yet...

Oh, and the names for cities in this volume were a variety of in-joke references. Some Nico livestream friends of mine suggested names, and the name of the driver came from the name of a wagon driver in a book one of my friends wrote.

Emmymephy's name is a bit hard to type, and I got it from taking suggestions during a livestream. When asking for princess names, one person suggested Emmy and another Mephy, so I combined them. Important noble people tend to have long names, don't they? I thought about changing it later, but I ended up rolling with it. That's just how I am. I decided on the main heroine's name, Rokuko, by rolling dice, after all.

Well, that's it for this time. May we meet again in Volume 11.

Supana Onikage

Bonus Short Stories

The Imperial Princess Goes Sightseeing—Open Cafe

For very complicated reasons, Emmymephy the imperial princess needed to get kidnapped. To accomplish that, she and Rokuko were casually sightseeing through a busy city. It looked like they were unguarded, but Wataru the Hero and Keima were actually watching over them from afar. They also had Ichika and Niku with them as supposed maids, and they were both strong fighters in their own right.

“So, what’re we eating?”

“Rokuko... I say, you seem quite happy-go-lucky about all this. Perhaps I should say courage is a virtue?”

“Nothing *that* bad will happen with Wataru around. I’m a lot more concerned about breakfast.”

And so, the princess squad went to an open cafe-styled bar. Really, the only thing that made it a bar instead of a full-on cafe was the fact that beer was the main beverage.

“Mmm, I say, I would like to be elegantly drinking some tea right now.”

“They should have tea if you ask. Isn’t this barley tea?”

“Girl, I’ll just warn you now, that’s only tea if you count beer with a leaf in it as tea,” Ichika joked from the side. A closer examination showed that although there was a picture of barley, the item itself was marked as ale. They wouldn’t be able to go sightseeing if they were drunk, and Keima prevented Rokuko from drinking in the first place. She wouldn’t want to drink somewhere without Keima anyway, so she decided to just pick something else.

“Any recommendations for food, Ichika?”

“Nmmm, I guess the ham, eggs, and pancakes would be pretty good? That’s the most rich girl food you’ll get here.”

“Okay, that’s fine with me. And you, Mephy?”

“The royal will decrees I have the same.”

“Roger dodger. Niku ’n me will be fine with just the standard breakfast set. Rich girls and we *maids* can’t be eating the same stuff, know what I mean?”

“Uh-huh. Whatever works.”

With their orders decided, they called over a waitress. Their food came almost instantly after it was ordered. Rokuko and Emmymephy got their ham, eggs, and pancakes while Ichika and Niku got bread, sausage, and cheese. They also had empty wooden cups. Ichika, as a maid, used the Survival Magic spell {Water Creation} to pour water into the cups before setting them back down.

“Whewee, menus sure do get a lot bigger the closer you are to the capital,” Ichika said.

“Our inn’s menu is way bigger... Oh, Ichika, that looks really tasty.”

“Sorry, girl, you’re not getting any. We maids gotta eat fast and get back to waiting.” Ichika broke open her bread to slide the cheese and sausage inside since she was eating while standing up. Niku copied her, then started scarfing it down.

“Well, Mephy and I will be eating nice and elegantly like noble ladies. We need to go slow so we don’t finish before Keima and Wataru, after all.”

“I say, Rokuko, that’s quite right. Elegantly... Sigh.” Emmymephy sighed after saying elegantly, as if it reminded her of something.

“Bad memories?”

“Indeed. I just remembered the princess life that awaits me once this journey ends and I return to the castle.”

“What’s so bad about that?” Rokuko asked while cutting her pancake and forking pieces into her mouth.

“Proper manners forbid talking while eating, for a start.”

“Oh, then just change what counts as good manners. You’re the imperial princess, Mephy. If you say it’s fine, it is fine.”

“Father would never allow anything like that.”

“I guess you’re screwed then,” Rokuko replied while taking a big bite of eggs... at which point it occurred to her she should try eating the pancakes and eggs together. She began cutting a bit of each.

They finished their meal and had some tea. That they’d brought themselves, of course (and by brought I mean bought with DP).

“I say, I wish this journey could continue forever... I honestly would not mind just marrying Sir Wataru here and living the rest of my life on the road.”

“Oh? You’re in love with Wataru, Mephy?” Rokuko asked. Emmymephy put a finger on her chin in thought.

“Mmm. I like him enough that I wouldn’t mind if I was told to marry him. I wouldn’t even mind if he had Neruneh with him as a concubine. What about you and Keima, Rokuko?”

“I got this from Keima already.” Rokuko proudly showed the ring on her left ring finger. “We’re planning on throwing a super fancy wedding soon. Beddhist style, naturally!”

“Hrrmmm, I say, I am quite envious. What a splendid ring... Hm? Wait, now that I look at it... What? Is this whole ring made of rubies?”

“Oh, that Keima. He said red looked good on me so he went out of his way to get this.”

“And there seems to be another ring inside of this... What? Could it be? No... My eyes must be deceiving me. It looks like a orichalcum ring inside.”

“Oh, no, that’s exactly right. But don’t expect me to give it to you, okay?” Rokuko pulled her hand back, having shown the ring off enough.

“...Is that a royal treasure of some sort? Just who in the world *is* Keima?”

“My partner.” Rokuko glanced over to a distant table, where Keima and Wataru were chatting. Keima noticed her look and nodded.

“Looks like they’ve finished eating. Everyone ready to go?”

“I see... A bond so tight that even eye contact is enough to communicate.”

Emmymephy let out a wistful, envious sigh before standing up.

The Imperial Princess Goes Sightseeing—Weapon Shop

For very complicated reasons, Emmymephy the imperial princess needed to get kidnapped. To accomplish that, she and Rokuko were casually sightseeing through a busy city. It looked like they were unguarded, but Wataru the Hero and Keima were actually watching over them from afar. They also had Ichika and Niku with them as supposed maids, and they were both strong fighters in their own rights.

After eating breakfast in a cafe-esque bar, the princess squad went to a weapon store.

“I say, there is nothing more famous in Corky than its smiths! Anyone here to patrol, or rather sightsee, would do well not to miss them!”

“You sure recovered from that slip of the tongue fast.”

“As the imperial princess, recovering smoothly from a blunder is second nature.”

In any case, although it was called a weapon shop, it sold armor and such as well. Everything was handmade by the smith, and it followed that there were no Magic Blades there.

“No Magic Blades, I see.”

“I say, if you want one you will have to go to a magic equipment shop.”

“Makes sense.”

By the way, the sword on Rokuko’s hip was just for decoration. She wasn’t particularly interested in weapons, but the same did not hold true for Emmymephy.

“I, and all of the royal family, are descended from the First Emperor, Lyon Laverio. He was once an adventurer, and his heroic blood runs through my veins.”

“Okay. So?”

“I love weapons, fighting, and all manner of adventurous things!” Emmymephy declared, full of hype.

“That doesn’t sound very princess-y to me.”

“Regardless, we shall take a look at the armor and equipment! I say, isn’t this sword splendid? It is made of mythrill!”

“Are there any made of orichalcum? That’s the kind of sword that would impress me.”

“Of course not, Rokuko. I say, be more realistic.” Emmymephy shrugged with a shake of her head. Orichalcum blades surpassed the level of national treasure and went right into the realm of divine myth. If one was just randomly lying around in a city’s weapon shop, it would be more terrifying than impressive.

“Well then, I suppose I should use this opportunity to buy something,” Emmymephy said before digging through a barrel stuffed with swords to look for something good.

“Aren’t those all pieces of junk? It says one silver each on the barrel right there.”

“I say, I know from experience you can dig out some hidden gems from barrels like this!”

“Well, I guess that makes sense. I think I’ll have a look too.” Rokuko followed Emmymephy’s example and started fishing through another barrel for something special.

“I say, let’s compete to see who can find the best blade!”

“Sure. I’m not on Wataru’s level, but I’m pretty confident in my own luck.”

...Seeing that, Ichika put a hand on her chin and thought things over. “Y’know, do you think we should be all about stopping Rokuko and Mephy right now? Like, ’cause we’re maids and all.”

It was true that Ichika and Niku were camouflaging themselves as maids accompanying their mistresses. It was reasonable to think that a maid would stop her mistress from rummaging through essentially a garbage bin.

“Maybe we should go all the way and join in?” Niku suggested.

“Naaah, we just got mythrill weapons from Untara yesterday. We’re good.”

“...Very true.”

In the end they settled on just quietly watching. They weren’t real maids, and since this was sightseeing, it made sense to let Rokuko and Mephy do what they wanted.

“I say, I’ve even heard of rusted weapons like these being true powerful blades of legend!”

“I guess I’ll go for this red dagger, then.”

The two mistresses each found a blade they liked.

“Rokuko, what about that dagger is red?”

“The gemstone.”

“Oh, I see. It was too tiny for me to see.”

As amateurs, they couldn’t tell which of them had the better blade. They decided to ask the owner of the shop which was superior.

“Thanks for the business. So, you wanna know which is better?”

“Indeed, I say. Which is the finer blade?” Emmymephy asked with eyes full of hope. The owner scratched his head.

“Well, the rusted blade you got here is actually scrap iron, you see.”

“Scrap iron...? Come again?”

“It’s not fit for fighting. You scrape off the rust and use the iron for smelting material. It’s scrap.”

“It’s unusable?”

“It’ll snap if you block a strike or stab something with it. Worth the silver for materials, but that’s about it.”

“Grrr, quite unusable indeed...” Emmymephy knew well as a (technically) trained fighter that no weapon so brittle could ever be used in battle.

“As for this dagger, well, you could do worse for self-defense. I bought it from a traveling alchemist the other day. Apparently the alchemist just made it for

fun, so I tossed it right in the barrel with the others. Since it's a dagger, not even derusting it will get you much iron."

"Well, that makes sense." Rokuko tossed the dagger into {Storage}.

"I'd say the dagger is better in the sense you can use it in a fight, while the rusted sword is better for materials. Hard to say which is better than the other."

"I guess it's a tie then, Mephy."

"Indeed it is, Rokuko."

And so they left the weapon shop, having accomplished some harmless and likely irrelevant shopping.

The Imperial Princess Goes Sightseeing—Clothing Store

When they left the weapon shop they saw Keima and Wataru wearing animal hats, so the princess squad went to a nearby clothing store to fight back. The clothing store dealt in both handmade clothes and secondhand clothes. Outfits of all sorts of colors were set on hangers.

"What do you think of clothing stores like this, Mephy? As the imperial princess, I mean."

"My clothes are generally tailor-made. However, the First Empress often stealthily leaves her villa to peruse clothing stores in the city, and I often sneak out of the castle to do the same."

In other words, they were just some girls chilling in a clothing store, which made everything look so nice. For commoner clothes, anyway.

"I say, clothing stores truly do get better the closer you are to the capital."

"They don't have any bunny girl outfits here, though."

"Rokuko, I say, I'm surprised you know about those strange bunny girl outfits. Those are quite rare, sold only in a small number of stores even in the imperial capital."

Strange outfits? That phrasing gave Rokuko pause. She hadn't thought the outfit was particularly strange, though, considering it was made for women to

wear with their shoulders exposed, it was a little lewd.

“I wanted Keima to wear one.”

“...Keima is a man, though.”

“Don’t you think it would look good on Wataru too?”

“...It certainly would!”

If the two men in question had been there, they would have had a thing or two to say about that, but luckily (or unluckily) they were both outside.

“But regardless, this store doesn’t have them. We will have to look for our own clothes.”

“Sadly... Oh, where should we try them on?”

“A dressing room... does not seem to be available.”

Perhaps to prevent theft, or perhaps because commoners didn’t need them, there wasn’t a dressing room. Customers damaging the clothes by putting them on was a real concern, especially when they were secondhand. Which was why Rokuko and Emmymephy decided to just sight read which clothes would look good on them.

“Oh, this is pretty cute. It reminds me of the Virgin Killing Sweater I saw in a book before.”

“Virgin Killing Sweater...? Was it worn by an assassin that only targets virgins?”

“What’s a virgin, anyway?”

“What? You do not know? Erm... It means someone who is still a child.”

“Clothes for an assassin that kills children... I wonder what the boob window has to do with that.”

“Truly, it is a mystery.”

Emmymephy and Rokuko picked clothes as they talked, eventually stumbling upon a mirror so pretty it seemed out of place.

“Ah, yes. This store is quite popular right now for the mirror it has.”

“Right, right. Mirrors are actually pretty expensive.” Not to mention that it was high quality and made of expensive glass.

“...I say, this mirror really does stand out here. This is suspicious!”

“Suspicious?”

“They had some way of earning *supplementary income*, and thanks to that they could afford this mirror... It’s the only explanation!”

If that supplementary income was from kidnapping, perhaps this was where Emmymephy would finally be kidnapped. It hadn’t occurred to them before then, but clothing stores really were perfect for kidnapping. You could get two products at once—clothes and slaves. If only the store had a dressing room.

“In other words, it’s possible this is a hangout for kidnappers.”

“Excuse me, miss! Please don’t say that. You’ll hurt my reputation,” the owner of the store said, having overheard their conversation. “That mirror was given to us by an alchemist the other day who was buying clothes for a slave.”

“Clothes for a slave? The prices don’t seem to add up.”

“She said she was fine with it, and there was no reason for me to refuse. I let her take a fair amount of clothes for it.”

Emmymephy nodded. She wouldn’t put it past an alchemist to do something like that. “My apologies for doubting you. In return, I’ll buy this outfit.”

“Thank you, thank you.”

She handed over a silver coin and put the clothes into {Storage}.

“I would also like you to pick out clothes for these two,” Emmymephy said while pointing at Niku and Ichika.

“Certainly. A spare set of clothes for your maids, then? I imagine they’ll wear them during chores?”

“I would like cute outfits that fit tightly for sneaking missions, but retain their cuteness nonetheless.”

“Oh, you two are in luck. Mephy’s buying clothes for you.”

Ichika and Niku, still standing back, bowed their heads.

“Thank you for your consideration, Princess Mephy.”

“Mmm. Thank you.”

Ichika and Niku were given clothes similar to the outfit that Mephy bought. And since Ichika’s boobs were a decent bit bigger than Emmymephy’s, the bust of her outfit was tight and really emphasized her *firepower*, which earned it a big thumbs up from all those involved.

“...I say, Rokuko. Isn’t Ichika’s bust a little unfair?”

“You’ll grow one too eventually, won’t you?”

“I hope so,” Mephy replied while placing a hand against her quite modest chest.

The Imperial Princess Goes Sightseeing—Slave Market

“I say, there is no place more rife with kidnapping than the slave market,” Emmymephy suggested, and so the princess squad went to a big slave market building. It looked like a normal old store, but inside there were indeed slaves being sold.

“But honestly, I have enough slaves already, so.”

“Agreed.”

“Totally.”

Niku and Ichika nodded in agreement with Rokuko. They were the only two slaves that Keima owned, but since he could just summon monsters at any point, they weren’t lacking in manpower. So much so that they always put off summoning more, since they could do so at any time.

“Now, now, no need to kill the mood. All we’re really here for is getting kidnapped.” And so, Emmymephy took the lead, going into the store herself. Inside was a red carpet leading up to a reception desk.

“I say, they must be quite profitable. This is a big store.”

“Uh-huh.”

They went ahead and spoke to the greasy man sitting behind reception.

“Welcome, fine ladies. Are you in search of slaves? Or perhaps here to sell some?”

“What kind of slaves do you have?”

“Ah, only the finest slaves in all the lands. Downstairs we have the young boys, upstairs we have the elderly and broad shouldered beasts of men. We also rent out slaves for nights, or hours if need be.”

“Just men? You don’t deal in any women slaves?”

“Oh, are you two of the more feminine persuasion? Forgive my rudeness. We certainly do have female slaves, yes.” The man spoke to Emmymephy and Rokuko while grinning and rubbing his hands together. He seemed to be the owner of the market.

“Incidentally, what is your budget?”

“I’m not planning on buying any.”

“I say, me neither.”

“Selling then, perhaps?” The man glanced at Niku and Ichika.

“Nope.”

“Not mine to sell.”

“Tch, just window shoppers, huh? Get the hell out of here.” The man clicked his tongue and spat, his attitude undergoing a complete reversal.

“Wow, you’re a real charmer, huh?”

“No point wasting my time acting all nice to fuckers that aren’t gonna spend any money. Or what, are you actually gonna sell those two hot bitches over there? I’ll pay a gold for both! Take a look!” The man took out a gold coin from his pocket and slammed it onto the desk.

“I say, on top of being incredibly rude, you are underselling them both by an absurd amount.”

“Fuck off. If you don’t wanna sell, then fucking don’t. But hey, if either of you want to sell yourselves, I’d say you’re each worth five whole golds. I’ll cough up fifty silvers for a night of good fucking, too.” The man looked over Rokuko and

Emmymephy with a nasty grin.

“Putting a price on me? I say, I’m beginning to think I should have him executed for treason.”

“If he’s the kidnapper, wouldn’t that be ideal anyway?”

“Mmm, well, I am technically undercover right now. I shall overlook his rudeness.”

“Yeah, yeah, get the fuck out. I don’t have the time to babysit kids and their window shopping. Go home and suck on your mommy’s tits.” The man shooed them away... and then his eyes fell on a certain part of Emmymephy’s body. He snorted. “Ah, my bad. I take back the five golds bit. With a chest like that, you’re worth three at best.”

.....

“LET GO OF ME, ICHIKA! I WILL HAVE THAT MAN EXECUTED! HE WILL DIIIIIE!”

“Yeah, yeah. Look, we did go in there to window shop, so let’s just play nice and leave, okay, girl?” Ichika pinned the outraged Emmymephy’s arms behind her back to drag her outside. And naturally, that meant Ichika’s huge boobs were pushing against Emmymephy’s back.

“ICHIKAAA! Are you pushing your boobs against me on purpose?! Huh?! ARE YOU A TREASONOUS DOG TOO?!”

“Girl, you know I can’t help this.”

“I will accept that they are soft and feel nice!”

On that day, they bore witness to the divide between the rich and the poor, the status-based society built upon breasts.

“I get how you feel, Mephy, but I mean... Five golds is pretty cheap for me too, don’t you think?”

“Dudes, he gave shitty prices on purpose to piss you off and make you leave.” After all, Niku had been appraised to be worth a single gold back in Tsia’s slave market, and that was when she had no skills and was still weak as all hell. It wasn’t hard for Ichika to conclude the man had been giving absurdly low prices on purpose to tick them off. He had no intention of buying any of them in the

first place.

“He made sure we weren’t planning to buy or sell first, so like, all of that was just some jokin’ around. That’s how we commoners talk to each other, y’know? Even at our inn, we kick out people who don’t plan on paying. The only difference is we’re a bit more polite about it,” Ichika explained.

“True. We did stop being customers the second we said we weren’t going to buy or sell anyone,” Rokuko said with a nod.

“He did tell us to leave, too,” Niku added.

And so, the princess squad left the slave market.

“GRAAAH! GRAAAAAH I SAY!”

Though Emmymephy’s rage was far from being quelled.

The Imperial Princess Goes Sightseeing—Prison Vacation

For very complicated reasons, Emmymephy the imperial princess needed to get kidnapped. To accomplish that, she and Rokuko were casually sightseeing through a busy city.

Or that was the idea anyway, but in reality they were kidnapped and imprisoned without much issue. That was fine since they predicted she would be imprisoned, but the fact they lost contact with each other was not very satisfactory to say the least.

“Good grief... I wonder if Niku managed to meet up with Keima? If she did, it sure is taking them a long time to come get us.”

“I say, Rokuko, you’ll have to be more patient. It hasn’t even been half a day since we were kidnapped.”

“They should have come rescue us the second we were imprisoned. Sheesh, they can hardly call themselves bodyguards at this rate.”

“But I say, it will be quite the task to rescue us from a place like this,” Emmymephy said while looking up. She could see the blue sky above the shimmering water surface.

Indeed, they were at the bottom of a pond. The princess squad was imprisoned within a giant underwater bubble.

“By the way, girls, the kidnapper is over there.” Ichika pointed outside the bubble where a suspicious-looking person in robes was pounding the walls. They couldn’t hear what he was saying, despite the clear walls, but it seemed like he was shouting “Don’t ignore me!” or something of the sort.

“Don’t tell me that the kidnapper can’t come here freely,” Rokuko said.

“I say, that wouldn’t be good for us. What should we do for food and the bathroom?” Emmymephy said, which prompted Ichika to fish through the wagon.

“Princess Mephy, check out this bucket. It’ll do juuust fine.”

“...Well, I suppose we have {Purification} either way.” She grimaced a little, but using the bucket was no rare occurrence on lengthy journeys. As the imperial princess of the Laverio Empire, Emmymephy had trained in camping outside and wasn’t particularly bothered by using them.

“We’ve got food in {Storage} too, so yeah, girl, we’ll be totes fine.”

“Right. I have a lot of food too,” Rokuko said, though she could just use the DP she had to buy more food at any point. She could do so as much as she wanted with {Storage} as an excuse.

“Grrr. I say, I wanted to try eating the food the kidnapper gave us.”

“I’m sure it would just taste bad. Let’s use this opportunity to have fun instead,” Rokuko suggested. They were technically imprisoned underwater, but on second thought, the bubble was a beautiful place that had warm sunlight streaming down across the sandy floor. It was like a beach paradise, really, and since they had plenty of food and shelter it was the ideal spot for a vacation. Rokuko went ahead and took out a wooden beach chair to rest on.

“Rokuko, I say, where did you get that chair?”

“From {Storage}, where else? I figured this might happen.”

“This? You predicted this, really?”

She hadn’t. She’d bought the chair with DP.

“Want some juice? Oh, I should ask which flavor you want. I have orange juice, apple juice, and some melon soda. I’ll charge Wataru for it later.”

“That’s my girl! Toss me an apple, dude!” Ichika jumped on the opportunity to get juice without any second thought. Her acceptance of the situation was impressively speedy. Emmymephy, seeing that, got some juice for herself too.

“I say, you were perfectly prepared... Well, I suppose we shall just wait until rescue comes. Goodness, this juice is ice cold.”

“Maybe because I put it in {Storage} during the winter?” Rokuko was playing dumb, but of course she had just bought it with DP.

“Rokuko, girl, chairs are nice, but how about we get some hammock action up in here?”

“That sounds like a solid idea to me. Those are much better for sleeping,” Rokuko said while busting out hammocks and the materials to set them up.

“...I say, Rokuko, your {Storage} is like a bag of holding.”

“Huh? Don’t all bags hold things?”

“Bags of holding have, like, infinite storage, and you can get anything you want from within then.”

Rokuko nodded, having learned a new phrase.

...Meanwhile, the kidnapper had grown tired of pounding on the bubble, and was now lying on the ground. He was using {Water Creation} to drink when he was thirsty, but since he didn’t have any cups, he had to just drink it off his palm. It was like heaven and hell when compared to the princess squad sipping straws stuck in juice glasses.

“...Rokuko, what do you think of him?”

“Oh Mephy, does he even matter? I don’t think so. Want me to get a curtain so we don’t have to see him?”

“I say, you even have curtains in there?”

“Though actually, I would rather show him what he’s missing. Want to eat some pasta, Mephy? Our maid chef back in the inn made some fresh.”

“Certainly.”

Once Rokuko took out a steaming hot plate of delicious-looking meat sauce pasta from {Storage}, Emmymephy decided not to think about the kidnapper anymore.









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Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 10

by Supana Onikage

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