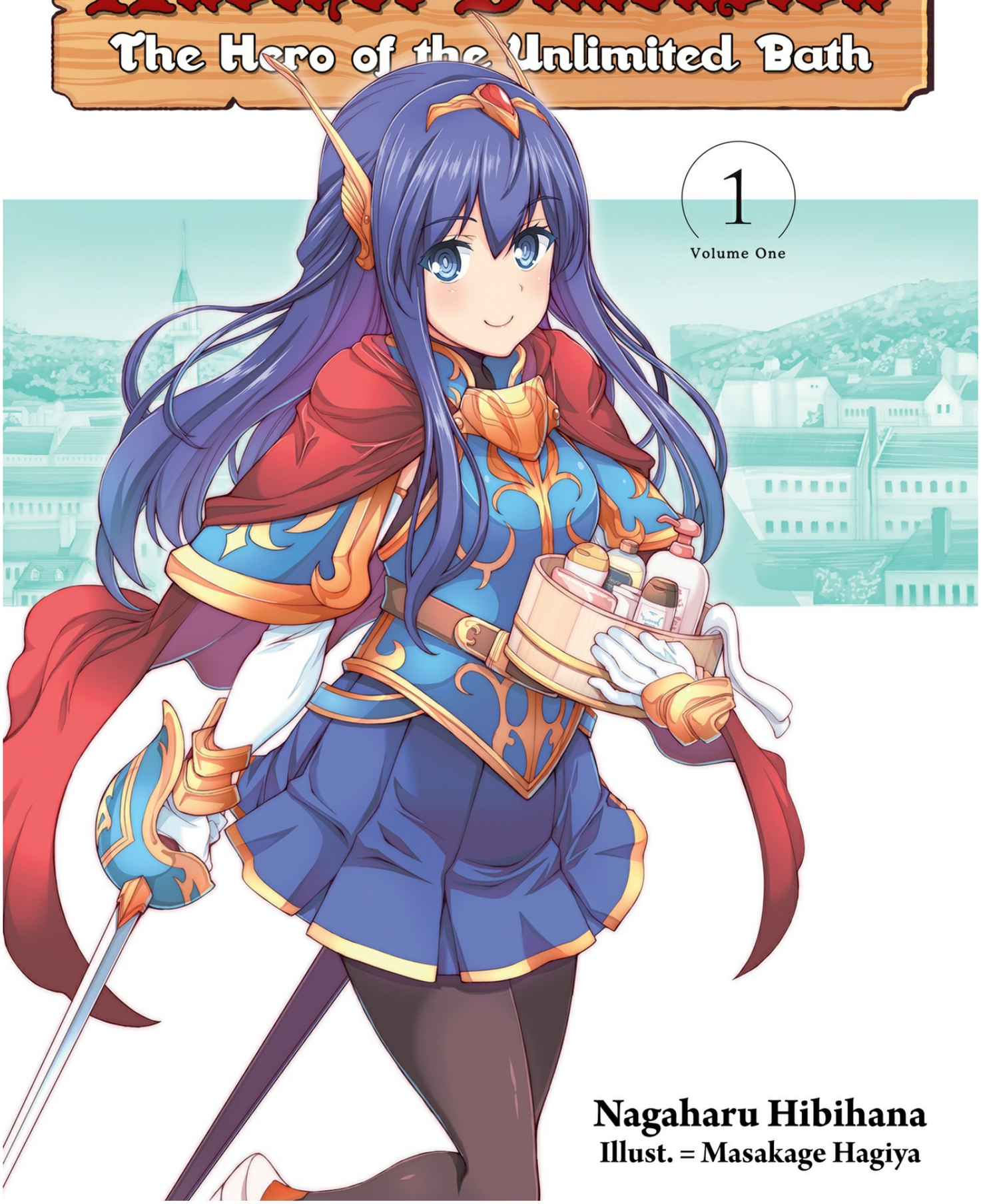
Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension

The Hero of the Unlimited Bath

1

Volume One



Nagaharu Hibihana

Illust. = Masakage Hagiya


ONE OF THE SUMMONED HEROES
HARUNO SHINONOME
SOUNDS LIKE HARUNO'S ENTERED THE BATH AREA. IN OTHER WORDS, SHE'S COMPLETELY NAKED RIGHT NOW, AND HER PAJAMAS AND UNDERWEAR ARE WITHIN AN ARM'S REACH.
"WOW..!" I HEARD HARUNO MURMUR, AND COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL A BIT PROUD. I HEARD THE SOUND OF HOT WATER, PROBABLY HARUNO WASHING HERSELF, FOLLOWED BY THE SHOWER SPLASHING.


"GET IN!"
CUSTARD CREAM GRABBED SILVER'S ARM AND MOVED IT TOWARD ME UNTIL I COULD REACH OUT FROM THE RICKSHAW AND GRAB ON.
THE HERO OF THE UNLIMITED BATH
TOUYA HOUJOU
GIRL HE MET IN THE DESERT
CLENA
CLENA'S SERVANT
RONI


"YOU'RE CERTAINLY TAKING YOUR TIME," SHE FINALLY SAID.
"NOT ON PURPOSE. LIKE I SAID, IT'S ONLY BEEN A LITTLE OVER A MONTH SINCE I STARTED STUDYING THIS MAGIC."

Table of Contents

Cover

Color Illustrations

Pre-Bath – Prologue

First Bath – Take a Dip in Another Dimension

Second Bath – With a Bare Heart

Bath Break

Third Bath – Skinship

Fourth Bath – Death Bath, Scalding Hot Bath, Super Intense Bath

Spring Bath – Haruno’s Feelings

Post-Bath – The Author’s Booth

About J-Novel Club

Copyright

Pre-Bath – Prologue

You know the ‘kapon’ sound effect you see in manga, when people plunk down the stool? Who came up with that? That’s the kind of minutiae I was thinking about as I sat in the bath.

I tried looking around, but thick steam prevented me from seeing anything around or above me. *Just how big is this place?*

I had bigger problems at hand, though. You see, there were these figures around me – oh, I’ll just come out and say it. Women. As I sat in the spacious bath, I was surrounded by countless women. Naked women.

When I looked to the right, I saw a girl with preposterously perfect proportions, and when I looked to the left, I saw a slightly plump girl-next-door type. Around them stood five other women with a mystical air to them. No, wait, there were six. The sixth one, a petite girl with long black hair, was hiding in the shadow of another woman as she stared at me. Standing nearby her was a woman who looked like someone’s older sister, and another who looked like someone’s little sister. One girl had beast ears and a tail, while another was a little devil girl who looked small enough to sit on someone’s shoulder.

There were many other women in the bath, and I could even see a giant in the distance who was easily twice as big as me, and ‘mega-sized’ in more ways than one. No matter what they looked like, for some reason, every last woman was creeping toward me with a happy grin on her face.

Wait... Is this a trap?

Any normal, healthy man would probably feel overjoyed in a situation like this, but it all seemed too good to be true, and my suspicion steadily increased. The problem was, I found myself completely surrounded on all sides, so I had no way to escape.

As I heard laughter echo out, the skin-colored siege net instantly closed in on me. A blonde-haired girl was the first to touch me, but her hand was quickly

followed by many others.

In a matter of seconds, I was swallowed up into a wall of flesh. If they had been trying to rip me apart, I probably would have felt scared, but all they did was gently caress me. It felt good, if a bit ticklish, so I was at a loss for words. As I started to marvel at the variety and profundity of human skin color, I spotted a lone girl beyond all the fleshly crevices.

She calmly stood up in the water, then began wading toward me. Instantly, the curtain of skin parted, creating a path for her. She stared at me, extended her arms, and then, with a benevolent smile–



“Waaaahh!” I shouted as I awoke with a start. “A dream? What a... dream...” I muttered, trying to catch my breath. My pajamas were caked in sweat.

Incidentally, in between ‘what a’ and ‘dream,’ I had probably meant to stick in an adjective like ‘awesome,’ ‘fun,’ ‘amazing,’ or even ‘totally excellent.’ The too-good-to-be-true developments within the dream had surprised me so much that I’d ended up awaking and ruining it all, so I found myself wishing I had stayed asleep just a bit longer.

But even if I go back to sleep now, I probably won’t be able to see the exact same dream, I thought, as I looked around my room. It didn’t exactly feel like home, but it was the desolate room I’d been assigned to.

My name was Touya Houjou. I used to be your average everyday junior in high school – until a week ago, when I was summoned to another world filled with swords and sorcery, where I was blessed with a miraculous ‘gift’ by a being called the Goddess of Light. Apparently, gifts can only be given to people who are summoned from another world, which is why they called us here.

“But why did they have to give me *this* gift...”

You see, the gift I had acquired was the ‘Unlimited Bath,’ which allowed me to take a bath anytime, anywhere. It didn’t just create a bath, though – since it was my gift, I knew what it was capable of. It also created a fragrant, gentle soap that could cleanse and soften anyone’s skin to a beautiful degree. It even came with shampoo, conditioner, and treatment products that could help restore damaged hair and improve scalp health.

Basically, I also had the power to beautify anyone’s hair. Oh, and how could I forget to mention the foaming face wash? Skin care is super important.

The bath was also equipped with towels soft enough for a baby’s skin. It was capable of materializing everything one would need for the perfect bath experience. The Unlimited Bath is incredible, and will also give your hair and skin that clean sheen you’ve always dreamed of!

“How am I gonna beat the demon lord with this?!” My shout echoed inside the Unlimited Bath.

It’s not like I had just given up from the get-go, you know. I mean, this power

came from the Goddess of Light, so I figured it had some secret to it. I believed in it, and researched it to the best of my abilities. That's why I was still hanging out in the temple, despite the fact that I'd awakened my gift.

I know, some of you probably think you've already figured it all out. 'I got it! The bathwater has some sacred quality that deals damage to monsters! Or maybe it heals humans, or maybe it can enhance magic. Wait no, maybe every monster in this world, including the demon lord himself, is weak to water!'

Sorry, but no. All wrong. It was just clean, warm water. I thought the wash bowls that came with the bath might have anti-evil powers hidden within them, but no, they were just normal bowls as well. All my research taught me was that the Unlimited Bath only allowed someone to take a bath whenever and wherever they wanted, which was absolutely useless in a fight.

How do they expect me to fight the demon lord with this? There's just no way...

Letting out a defeated sigh, I stared blankly up at the moist ceiling of the Unlimited Bath.

First Bath – Take a Dip in Another Dimension

Do you know about the ‘summoned to another world’ genre? It’s the genre where a character gets summoned from modern-day Earth into another world. I’d always liked these kinds of stories, but they had only been fiction in my mind. I never thought anything like that would actually happen – until one week ago.

I was riding the train home from school as usual, when suddenly I found myself in the center of a magical circle on the floor of a chalk white temple. My seat disappeared, and I fell smack on my butt. It was a temple where they worshiped the Goddess of Light. There, I was greeted by the elder of the temple and a girl who called herself a princess. Behind them stood a line of people with swords, who looked to be either knights or soldiers. It seemed like a smart choice to do as they said.

The two in front of me explained that they had summoned me because their oracle claimed the demon lord was coming back to life. Apparently, the hero who previously sealed away the demon lord also came from my world – Japan, in fact – which is why they summoned me, too. Then, they explained that I would be given a gift. In other words, they were hoping that I’d be able to use my gift in order to prevent the demon lord’s resurrection.

I figured that due to the situation, I’d be better off not asking why the goddess didn’t have the courtesy to just invite me over, or why they had to forcibly summon me here out of the blue. At first, I thought they were just going to toss me out into the wild with minimal support, like a video game, but since the prestige of the kingdom was riding on this summoning, they’d actually put a lot of thought into the preparation. After I underwent the training to awaken my gift in the temple, both the royal family and the temple were going to help me prepare before I left on my journey. Of the three people who were summoned to the castle before me, one said he only needed three days of preparation, but the sacred king told him that was crazy and ordered him to take his time. It’s not like I intended to skimp on my preparations, but first I

wanted to know what I'd be dealing with. I had just been summoned to this strange new world, and had no idea what to expect.

"How am I supposed to fight with this?" I complained to the temple elder.

He had a long white beard, and had basically been put in charge of me. He even helped me research the Unlimited Bath a little. I wanted to see if other people could also use the bath, so I invited him inside. For some reason, when he saw hot water burst out from the shower head, he cried out: "This must be divine providence from the Goddess of Light!"

"Ah... I suppose it's about time I gave you this," he said.

"A status card, huh?" I replied, as the elder handed me what looked like a green credit card.

In this world, there existed 'levels' and 'stats' that measured how strong each person was, and this card contained all of that information. First, there was HP (Health Power), which measured exhaustion. Next came MP (Magic Power), which measured magical capacity, and VIT (Vitality), which measured physical resilience. STR (Strength) measured muscular strength, MEN (Mentality) measured mental fortitude and acuity, and TEC (Technique) measured dexterity and agility.

There was no stat that indicated intelligence. Apparently, since it was a combination of various elements such as wisdom and cogitative capacity, it couldn't be measured in a single stat.

Levels acted as markers for a person's overall strength. Apparently, total stats were boosted by any sort of blessings that the person had earned. So just because someone had a high level, it didn't necessarily mean they had high stats, and the opposite was also true.

"Over half the strength of every person in this world comes from the strength of their blessings. And since you've been blessed by the Goddess of Light, you have the potential to become far stronger than any of us," the elder said.

"Whoa, hold on a minute," I interjected. "I don't even have a special attack or anything."

The elder claimed that my blessing was enough to allow me to fight, but I had

trouble sharing his optimism. I was only Level 1, and judging from the radar chart that appeared next to them, my stats were all below average. My MP and MEN were slightly on the higher end, but the elder told me that they had only risen since I used them a lot while researching the Unlimited Bath. He went on to say that with a lot more training, I could grow strong enough to defeat the demon lord. If he thought that'd make me feel better, he was really missing the point.

Then, I saw the elder's card. He was Level 28. His stats were all fairly high, and they were all *way* higher than mine. It made me want to ask why he didn't just go fight the demon lord himself.

"The presence of the demon lord is a great threat to our world, and the monsters grow more and more violent with each day. We need to be strong just to survive," he said. I guess he'd noticed my lack of motivation and decided to change his approach.

Unfortunately, there was no way for summoned heroes to return home. Their very first king had been a hero summoned from my world, and no one could fathom why I would want to go back.

"This card belongs to you now. Take it with you, for it's the most reliable identification card that our world possesses."

The elder's words echoed in my mind. *"We need to be strong just to survive."* He probably figured out exactly how I was feeling, and was trying to hint to me that I'd still need to get strong even if I couldn't fight the demon lord. It left me with some complicated feelings, but I decided that the elder probably had good intentions.

After we spoke, I headed into the temple hallway. As I neared my room, I heard people talking in the courtyard.

"Yah! Hiya! Hooah!"

"That's it, Lady Haruno! Oh, you're sweating..."

"Thank you, Sera."

I followed the voices to see a girl with long black hair swinging a wooden sword around. Next to her stood a cleric who was wiping the sweat off her

cheek. The black-haired girl was Haruno Shinonome, another person who'd been summoned along with me, and Sera was one of the clerics who had been charged with teaching us how to fight.

Now that the four other heroes had all awakened their gifts, Sera was glued to Shinonome's side. I didn't remember doing any sword practice during my gift training, but it had already been a week since then, and Shinonome remained the only one who had yet to awaken. I guess they were simply trying everything they could. I mean, it was bad enough that I had awakened a powerless gift like the Unlimited Bath, but since Shinonome had yet to awaken anything at all, she was in a very tough position. I hoped she'd manage to awaken it as quickly as possible, but it was a personal problem that I couldn't really help with, so I just kept walking to my room as I watched them.

There was something cute about the way Shinonome's lustrous black hair enveloped her beautiful face. She looked like a truly traditional Japanese girl, which was a rarity in those days. From the moment I saw her when she was first summoned, I felt she had a rare beauty that just demanded your full attention.

Sera had long, slightly wavy, blonde hair, and looked to be around the same age as me, but she had more of a mature aura to her. She also seemed to be a very serious person. Both of them were wearing sporty clothes for their sword practice, but Shinonome was wearing gym clothes straight out of a Japanese school. Either she had been summoned while she was coming home from school, or she had been carrying them around in a backpack. At first glance, Shinonome seemed to be a quiet, dainty girl, perhaps from a well-to-do family, but she actually looked pretty imposing while holding a sword. *Maybe she practiced kendo back home?*

"So cute..." I unconsciously murmured.

Yeah, cute. That was the simplest way to put it. They were both cute. If I had to use two words, I'd say they were 'super cute.' Just how cute were they? Well, if I saw them out in the town, even *I* would be drawn to muster up whatever little courage to call out to them.

I raised my hand to say hello, but then decided that I had no business talking to such radiant flowers and gave up. It seemed that they had noticed me,

though, because they both nodded in my direction. Sera smiled, while Shinonome looked a bit embarrassed.

I glanced around. There was no one else in sight. *They really are looking at me.* In a panic, I hastily nodded back. I just hoped they hadn't heard what had slipped out of my mouth.

I could no longer handle them watching me, so I nodded once more, then clumsily spun around and escaped. Although I didn't notice it at the time, they kept staring at me until I was out of sight.

After my escape, I had two temple guards escort me into town. I had remained cooped up in the castle until I awakened my gift, and was eager to get a look at this new world. The scenery outside the temple brought to mind historical images of European cities that I had seen on TV. Since there was magic, though, everything looked a lot tidier than the actual middle ages.

According to what I heard in the temple, this was a city-state composed of one city and the surrounding region. The state was called Jupiter, and this was its capital, Jupiteropolis. Its current king had inherited the blood of the hero who defeated the demon lord, and was known as the sacred king. Due to that, the city was often called the sacred king's Capital of Jupiter, or just the Sacred Capital.

The guards told me the city was in the middle of a festival that commemorated the beginning of spring, and guided me through the brick buildings toward the town square. The pathways were very tight, and even when we got to the 'main street,' the widest street in town, it was still only about three meters wide. Meanwhile, those cramped streets were only about half that size. The town was surrounded by a wall in order to keep monsters out, but that also limited the amount of habitable space, so they couldn't widen the roads willy-nilly. The main street was only bigger than the others was so that carriages could pass through, and the tallest structures were only about three stories high.

It all looked like a scene right out of a movie. There were no modern-looking buildings, and it appeared that I was looking at the biggest piece of architecture in the whole kingdom. The guards claimed that the countryside had wider

roads, although the houses there were much smaller. Obviously, what I thought of as normal didn't really apply to this world.

The guards led me into San Pilaca Square, a wide open, circular space surrounded by two rows of marble pillars. Beyond the square, I could see San Pilaca Cathedral. "What does San Pilaca mean?"

"That's the name of the arch-cleric who fought alongside the first sacred king."

The first sacred king had taken three allies with him on his quest. It sounded just like an RPG. Incidentally, 'San' was a title given to saintly people who achieved particularly commendable deeds during their lifetime. It sounded like 'San' was their equivalent of the 'Sei' (Sacred) character in Japanese.

San Pilaca created San Pilaca Square right before he passed away. The inner pillars were lined with statues of other historical saints, while there was a large knight statue in the center. According to the guards, the knight in the center was the first sacred king. He was clad in armor and a helmet that looked like a fusion between knight and samurai garb. The first sacred king had fought the demon lord over 500 years ago, which would have been right during Japan's Warring States Period. With that in mind, it made sense that he sort of looked like a samurai.

Near the first sacred king's statue were about 30 people wearing armor, lined up in rows of two as they slowly crossed their blades.

"What are those people doing? Don't tell me they're fighting..."

"Oh, that's just the main event of the festival," one guard said.

"They're singing about the history of the battle between the first sacred king and the demon lord, and expressing it through a dance," the other added.

"Oh, so it's just a performance... Er, a musical?"

As I listened, I noticed that each person either wore a set of white or black armor, in order to represent the sacred king and demon lord's forces. Aside from matching their swords together, they also worked in their shields, and there was a lot of variation to their movements. I watched as one white soldier spun around a black one and slid his sword across the man's neck. There was a

beat, and then the black soldier fell. If it had been real, blood probably would have spurted out from his neck. It looked like an assassination more than any kind of fight, though. Maybe the actual battle between the sacred king and the demon lord was much more brutal and violent than what the words 'hero and demon lord' brought to the mind of a modern day guy like myself.

And now I have to jump right in the middle of this mess... With the Unlimited Bath, a gift that'll be absolutely useless in every battle. A shiver ran down my neck, and I decided not to over-analyze it for the time being.

In between the two pillar circles was a corridor filled with spectators. Every time there was a development in the performance, they'd cheer loudly.

Am I the only scared one here? Or maybe everyone who's afraid simply didn't come to watch this. I guess the people who are enjoying this just think this danger doesn't apply to them.

Either way, I didn't like it. I decided to leave as quickly as possible, to my guards' chagrin. It really did seem like enjoying that violent festival was the normal thing to do here.

Afterwards, I stopped by an open café near the square. The two guards recommended a drink known as *con panna.* After waiting a bit, I received an espresso in a small white cup that came with an even smaller cream-filled cup. Apparently, the cream was meant for the coffee, but people also ate the leftover cream afterwards. And it was all made using magic.

I guess magic can be pretty convenient...

I poured half of the cream into the coffee and gave it a sip. It tasted good, and the cream was just sweet enough. After I poured the cream in, I realized it was the exact same thing as Vienna coffee.

There weren't many customers around, so we could really kick back and relax. It seemed like most people had gone off to watch the performance. The only unfortunate thing was that I had to sit and drink my coffee with two other guys. Could you really blame me for wishing they had been Shinonome and Sera instead? Now that I think about it, I probably should have invited them along with us. It seemed like Shinonome was frustrated over how she couldn't awaken her gift, so it might have been the perfect way for her to take a break.

Maybe it would have been strange for *me* to invite her, but Sera probably would've been considerate enough to push things in the right direction.

After we ate some more and did some shopping, I returned to the temple. Back in my room, I started thinking about what I would do from here on out. After narrowing it down, I realized I basically needed two things: money and power. Since there was no way for me to go back home, I was forced to build a life in this world. The money I used for shopping near the square was all given to the guards by the temple elder. They'd probably keep helping me prepare for my journey, but that would be it. I might gain more support later by doing heroic deeds, but there was no way I could beat the demon lord with the Unlimited Bath. I had to accept that all my support would be cut off the moment I departed. I needed to find a way to keep making money on the road, not to mention protect myself.

In this world, monsters didn't drop money and stuff when you killed them. There did exist hunters who took meat and skins from the monsters they killed, and sold them in order to make a living, but I doubted I'd be able to compete with them.

"Hold on a minute..."

Suddenly, I realized something. The Unlimited Bath didn't just allow people to bathe, it also created bath products such as soap. Everything inside was created from my MP, which meant that even if some items were taken out, I could just close the door and reopen it again later, then use my MP to make more. The key here was whether the soap would remain intact even after removing it from the bath.

I might be able to sell this stuff.

Even if it used up my MP, I'd only need to rest in order to replenish it. I had the mathematical knowledge of an average high schooler, which meant that I at least had a fighting chance of becoming a merchant. And so, I decided to become a soap merchant in this strange new world, and live out a modest life far away from any heroes or demon lords. I also planned to find a cute wife and start a happy family.

If Shinonome never awakens her gift, I'll look after her. No, wait, I should just

marry her.

I walked over to the temple elder's room with footsteps so light I almost felt like skipping. The idea was just so perfect, I could hardly contain myself.

"–thus, I'm going to live out a modest life as a soap merchant!"

"It's true that soap that effective doesn't exist in our world. We probably wouldn't be able to recreate it."

"Right? Right? I'm sure I'll be able to sell a ton!"

"But, how much would you charge for it? If you sell it too cheap, you may run into problems with the people you hire to prepare and peddle it."

"Urk..." The elder's words had left me speechless. "Well then, maybe I could sell it as a high end product..."

"So you'd be targeting nobles and wealthy people. Considering its high quality, it could get rave reviews and become a hit."

"Then my plan would be a success!"

"Perhaps... But it may be hard for you to live a *modest* life, in that case. If people found out that a hero was engaging in such a venture..."

Oh no. This is bad. I can see it now... 'If you've got time to do that, then why don't you go and defeat the demon lord?!' People will gossip and call me a coward behind my back.

I thought it would've worked as long as no one found out I was a hero, but it seemed as if things wouldn't be that easy. And so, within a matter of minutes, the temple elder had shattered all my hopes.

"Incidentally, do you have any interest in learning cleric spells?" After we finished our discussion, the elder spoke up again.

"You want me to become a cleric?"

"Cleric spells are techniques. Becoming a cleric is a way of life. They're two different things."

According to the cleric, some of the people who hunted monsters had access to basic cleric spells, such as Healing Light. As you might have guessed, that

spell produced a light capable of healing wounds. Usually, people needed to make contributions to temples in order to learn such spells, but the elder was willing to teach me some as a means of support. I had comparatively high MP and MEN stats, which both affected magic. Since the Unlimited Bath required MP, it was a given that those stats would keep rising over time, which meant that learning more magic would be a pretty good idea. *I am in a fantasy realm, after all... I guess it won't hurt to learn a few spells.*

"Okay. Please teach me all you can."

"Ho ho ho! Just leave it to me." Once I agreed, the elder stroked his long beard and let out a gentle laugh.

Of course I wouldn't be allowed to go on living in the temple long enough to learn every single spell they had to offer. I couldn't force the elder to stick with me for that long, either. So on the next day, aside from my magic lessons with the elder, I acquired a cleric spellbook and started studying on my own. At first, I wasn't sure if I'd be able to read it. But for some reason, even though I didn't recognize the script at all, I was able to understand the book without any problems. It was really strange.

I later discovered that the Goddess of Light's blessing also allowed summoned heroes to read and understand the common language. It felt very odd to understand letters that I had never seen before, but I definitely wasn't complaining. I also had the goddess to thank for giving a modern Japanese guy like me the ability to use cleric spells. Even the people in this world needed to be blessed in order to use them.

The elder later taught me that magic in this world could be split into two big categories: cleric spells, and everything else. Cleric spells existed as a systematized set of techniques, while all other magic was sort of lumped together.

As I started learning, I came up with another idea. Instead of wash bowls, I could take some barrels into the Unlimited Bath, fill them with water, then sell them to water merchants. That's right – even though the elder had just told me that my soap plan was a bad idea, I was already cooking up something else. The water that came out of the Unlimited Bath didn't have any special powers. It

was just pure water. But unlike modern day Japan, there weren't any water purifiers in this world, so pure water still had a lot of value.

I guess if someone went into the remote wilderness, they might be able to find some, so it isn't completely unattainable, but... If I can match up the price and quantity to the demand, I should have no problems selling it. I hope.

Of course, I only planned to do this in order to save up some money for my travels. The elder told me that the other heroes weren't planning things that thoroughly, but without money, I wasn't going to get anywhere, so I just let his words roll off me. Long story short, I had the elder introduce me to a merchant who had dealt with the temple before, and who'd also be interested in buying my water.

I'm educated, so I should have an advantage over these people in terms of mathematics... then again, I'm going up against a pro. Are my math skills even going to matter to a professional merchant?

I sat nervously in the temple's reception room, until a portly man walked in.

"Hello there. I heard all about the details. Are you the hero?" He gave me an affable smile.

The merchant looked to be on the late end of middle age, with balding white hair and a white beard. His shirt was also white, and he wore a very sharp, straightened vest over it. He was short and stout, but he looked like an experienced traveler, so I imagined there was some muscle mixed in with that fat.

He sat down across the table from me, and we began our negotiations. "Nice to meet you. My name's Touya."

"Sir Touya, yes? My name is Kopan."

Kopan had come to this state in order to sell goods he gathered in another state. Jupiter was a big city, but it didn't have many specialties. The state provided food and other living supplies, but didn't seem very interested in adding new products to their lineup.

"But Goddess Spring Water is a different story altogether!" Kopan said.

That was the name I had given my new product. I couldn't just call it 'pure water,' now could I? I thought about calling it 'Touya Water,' but that was too embarrassing, so I went with my next best idea. Besides, it came from a gift that was given to me by the Goddess of Light herself, so it wasn't like I was lying or anything.

"You did well calling on a merchant such as myself! Speaking of which, Sir Hero, it's been a while since I began my journey, and I've noticed that the monsters have been getting more and more ferocious as of late. In fact, just the other day..."

"Y-yes?"

A torrent of words began spilling out from Kopan's mouth. I expected it to be business talk, but all of a sudden he switched over to talking about the current state of the world. I couldn't help but feel that he was trying to put the squeeze on me a little, especially considering the topic he'd chosen.

This is bad. He's overwhelming me... And he's quite the chatterbox.

"H-hold on a minute!" I forced Kopan to stop talking. I wasn't sure if this was the right way to do things, but I had a feeling that it'd be dangerous to let him keep a firm grip on the reins of this conversation.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Uh, err... First, I'd like you to take a look at the product."

"Oh, may I see it already?!"

Good, he seems interested. Wasting no time, I had a temple servant bring in a jar of the water.

"Oh my goodness!" Even this chatterbox was silenced once he took a look inside the jar.

Purified water was a rare sight in this world. Even the elder had agreed that it was pure enough to earn the 'Goddess' title.

"Well?"

"There's no need to discuss this any further! Please let me purchase it!"

I had planned to settle the terms little by little while he was still awestruck, but Kopan regained his composure much quicker than I'd expected. *Oh well. At least he'll definitely buy. Now we just need to negotiate a price.*

"I know you mentioned how rare and valuable it is, but if the price is too high, it'll become difficult to do business. We aren't dealing with a jewel, after all. So, here's what I was thinking..." Kopan began.

"That should work. I have five whole barrels, after all. How much will it be?"

"Don't be silly! We'll be able to sell all that Goddess Spring Water in a single day!"

"That's okay! I can prepare more every day."

"Oh my!"

"Anyway, if you buy it for this much, I could sell it exclusively to you until my departure..."

"Hmm. That's a very attractive proposal... Okay, you win! You've got yourself a deal!" Kopan slapped his knee and announced defeat.

Possibly due to the fact that I had an overwhelming advantage, I managed to sell the water for a higher price than the elder had suggested. For the time being, it looked like this business venture would be a success.

Afterwards, we decided on the details, such as the time of collection, and made the terms official. When we shook hands at the end, Kopan was smiling. He seemed to think this was a pretty good deal as well. I also decided I'd save the money I made for travel expenses.

Finishing my discussion with Kopan, I left the reception room and headed back to my quarters. After mulling it over, I decided I'd have them make me a hose while I was still building up support funds for my preparations. A hose would make it much easier to transport water from the bath, and would surely come in handy for future business. Even if they couldn't make me something like the rubber hoses back in my world, I was hopeful they'd at least be able to create something similar.

As thoughts kept crowding my mind, I suddenly heard a voice behind me.

“Um, may I have a moment of your time?”

“Yes?” As I turned around, I was startled to see who was standing there, and hurriedly sat up straight. Sera was standing right behind me, clad in a loose, white robe. “Wh-what’s the matter?”

She was 18, one year older than me, a beautiful, ‘big sister’ type with a gentle air to her. Her voice sounded a bit shrill, possibly out of nervousness.

“I, um, I have a request for you, Sir Touya...”

“What is it?”

Sera fidgeted nervously as she spoke. This side of her was pretty cute as well.

Maybe her request has something to do with Shinonome?

“Um... Could you allow the children to use your bath?”

“...What?” Now *I* sounded a bit shrill, for an entirely different reason.

Sera went on to explain that the orphans who lived at the temple had become very curious about the Unlimited Bath. Barrels full of clean water kept coming out from the door in the courtyard, so naturally they were interested. It wasn’t just children, though – there were a lot of curious adults gathered around watching.

“By the way, where’s Shinonome?” I asked.

“I don’t want her pushing herself too hard and getting hurt, so I gave her the day off.”

“Oh...” I was glad to hear that Shinonome was resting, but I hoped it wasn’t because she felt she couldn’t go on anymore.

It seemed that word of the Unlimited Bath had already spread around the temple, so I didn’t mind letting children use it. “It’s a bit cramped, though.”

“That’s fine. It’s only a few kids. They’re very curious about that ‘shower’ thing, so I hoped you could let them use it.”

In this world, there existed large bathhouses, like the kind you’d see in Ancient Rome. Aside from those, the only people who owned their own private bathtubs were a handful of wealthy people. Compared to those, the Unlimited

Bath was much smaller, probably even more than Sera imagined.

"It'd be dangerous to let small children use it on their own, so we'll need someone to watch them," I said.

"I understand. I plan to take care of them myself."

"...You're going to go in with them?"

"But of course."

"Just so you know, I have to be inside in order to activate the bath, so that means we'll be in there together."

"I don't mind."

My heart began to pound as I watched Sera calmly give me a small nod of confirmation. Just for the record, I wasn't hiding any nefarious motive – I really had to be inside in order to create any water, be it hot or cold.

"I-it really is cramped, though, so we'll have to split them up into smaller groups."

After I showed her the inside of the Unlimited Bath, she looked around and suggested splitting the kids into groups of three. The bath was only large enough to barely fit two adults, or about four small children. Sera was right in guessing that three would be the limit for a comfortable dip.

It must seem cramped to her. She's from a world where there are only big public bathhouses and luxurious private bathtubs, after all.

In the end, I agreed to let the children into the Unlimited Bath, and I couldn't deny that knowing Sera would be joining them gave me a little motivation. Sera was going to take care of them, not bathe herself, so she wore a shirt and shorts like yesterday, rather than stripping naked – but I had no regrets. This would be fantastic in its own right. It allowed me to see her pale thighs extending out from her shorts, as well as her well-shaped, perky breasts pushing up from beneath her thin shirt. Despite how her usual robe attire made her seem, Sera was someone who looked slimmer when she wore clothes. She had her hair tied behind her head in a chignon, which allowed me to see a rare sight – the back of her neck.

Still, I knew enough to realize that if I gave her any weird, long stares, she'd only return them with cold, disapproving eyes. The Unlimited Bath was cramped to begin with, but now we were just one degree removed from being smushed up against one another. I even felt like I could get a whiff of Sera's wonderful scent mixed in with that of the soap. I almost lost it for a moment, but struggled to keep my legs firm and retain my composure. I needed to keep my mind calm, act normal, and explain how to use the bath. They certainly wouldn't know how to use the shampoo, and it could hurt them if it got in their eyes, so I needed to explain every last detail.

Once I started working together with Sera, I realized just how difficult it was to give a group of children a bath. It was their first time seeing all the things that the Unlimited Bath held, so they all got really excited. They especially loved the shower, and the first three girls inside took turns using it to wash themselves.

Sera got wet as she washed the children, and, well, the water made her shirt turn a bit see-through. *No, no...* I kept telling myself, and quickly averted my eyes. I won't say what I saw, but it was a pale yellow color. I felt like I was going to end up staring at it the entire time, so I moved to the changing area and helped dry off the kids who were done.

Suddenly, I realized my eyes were locked onto her butt, which happened to be pointing straight at me. Her wet shorts clung to her swelling, protruding bottom, and its curves plus the outline of her underwear were visible.

That must be what they call 'child-rearing hips.' In Japanese, being 'stuck under a woman's bottom' means you're at her beck and call, but in Sera's case, I certainly wouldn't mind it – in fact, I really wish I could be!

With a start, I pushed my mind back into reality. I hurriedly looked up to see Sera giving the children a loving smile.

Ugh... I'm terrible. I'm so ashamed that I took this job just because it'd come with some nice perks.

Sera had surely asked me for help because she trusted me. I needed to make sure I didn't betray her trust, so I worked hard to act like a gentleman and focused on taking care of the children.

Next after the trio were two girls, followed by six boys in two groups of three. Sera said she was going to take the girls, so I did my best to look away from her as I handed her a big bath towel. The moment I did that, she realized I had seen her, and nervously covered up her body.

After she left, the boys came in with a friendly older priest. They were full of energy, and two of the wilder boys got shampoo in their eyes, but we had no problems apart from that, and everyone ended up enjoying their bath.

After the boys all finished, I was left to clean up the Unlimited Bath alone in the courtyard. I didn't need to clean the bath itself, though. All I had to do was close the bath's door then reopen it. I felt fatigued when MP slipped out from my body, but that was all it took to restore the bath to its original condition. This was another one of the Unlimited Bath's abilities. Being able to take the bath anywhere meant I could also use MP to keep the bath in perfect condition.

"Umm..."

"Whoa!"

I had just finished up and turned to head back to my room when I saw Sera standing behind me. She called out to me so suddenly that I let out a startled shout.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said.

"N-no, you just surprised me... What's wrong?"

I was so surprised that I almost told her why I was *really* surprised, but I managed to regain my composure in the middle. You see, Sera had already changed back into that loose robe of hers. The way it perfectly hid her curvaceous body is what had truly surprised me.



No, no... No weird grins! Stay cool. I focused and gave her my best poker face.

“Huh? Shinonome?” I glanced next to Sera and saw Shinonome standing there. Once our eyes met, she hurriedly looked down to her feet.

For some reason, she seemed wary of me. *I can’t remember doing anything that would make her hate me... Maybe she’s just a little shy.*

“Um, it’s our first time speaking to each other, isn’t it? My name is Haruno Shinonome. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m Touya Houjou. The pleasure’s all mine.”

“It seems that only highly respected people go by their family names here, so please call me Haruno.”

“Oh, really? You can call me Touya, too, then.”

“Okay, Touya.”

“Again, it’s nice to meet you, Haruno.”

Things still felt a little awkward, but it was our first time speaking to each other, so that was to be expected. After we finished our introductions, however, that was it for the conversation. Funnily enough, the silence pushed us both to glance at Sera and seek help at exactly the same moment.

“Um, er, I have something to ask you, Sir Touya,” she said.

“What? About Haruno’s gift?” I asked.

Hearing this, Sera gave me small, gentle nod, while Haruno bit her lip and nodded as well.

Thought so. In terms of her asking me for help, that was the only thing I could come up with.

“I can’t give you any advice on awakening, though,” I said. “After all, I became able to use mine right after finishing the training they gave me.”

“...I see.” Sera and Haruno both looked clearly disappointed. They must have been desperate.

Then, for some reason, Sera blurted out something insane. “Um, Sir Touya,

would you be so kind as to give Lady Haruno a bath?!”

“What?!” I squeaked in an abnormal voice and shot my eyes toward Haruno. Her silence told me that she had apparently agreed to this plan. “Sera, you know that I have to be inside the bath in order to use it, right?”

“Of course!” Sera leaned forward.

Whoa, she sure is getting close... She smells nice, though...

I started to feel embarrassed and glanced at Haruno, who also turned red and looked away. *Perhaps she isn’t in full agreement with this after all. If I ogle her here, I’ll end up creating something much worse than a bad first impression. No smiling just yet...* I told myself, and turned to ask Sera a question.

“May I ask why? I think I’ve come up with a pretty good guess, but...”

“Yes... I thought that maybe if she comes in contact with one of the Goddess of Light’s other gifts, it might help her to awaken her own... We’ve become desperate, so I even took her to the San Pilaca Cathedral on the day of the festival.”

“The festival was a nice diversion, at least...” Haruno said as she smiled shyly.

So they were at the festival, too. I was curious to ask her if she’d also watched that musical, but decided that now wasn’t the time.

“I understand where you’re coming from, but you do know that we’ve confirmed the Unlimited Bath’s water is just normal water and not holy water, right?” I didn’t even know if holy water existed in this world.

“Yes, but it’s true that it comes from the blessing of the Goddess of Light, correct?” Sera asked.

“Well, yeah...” It was created from the gift she had given me, so that was true.

“Lady Haruno just needs to find the right trigger. Coming in contact with a blessing from the goddess might be just what she needs...”

Suddenly, I understood. Her request had seemed insane at first, but after listening to the explanation, I could see the logic behind it. She hoped that by putting Haruno in contact with the Unlimited Bath – a power bestowed by the Goddess of Light – it would stimulate the gift that was sleeping inside Haruno.

Perhaps the whole reason she'd asked me to bathe the children was to confirm whether or not it'd be okay to request something like this.

Haruno looked torn, as if she wasn't sure what to say. I decided that in this situation, the best thing to do would be to take the request seriously, so I turned back to her.

"Like I said just now, I need to be inside the Unlimited Bath in order to use it. If that's okay with you, then I'll be happy to help." Since Haruno was from the same world as me, I felt like I could speak to her in a more relaxed tone. "It's all up to how you feel about the idea. If it makes you feel uneasy or embarrassed, then we can forget we ever talked about this."

"In that case..." Haruno made a desperate face and started to say something, but I put up a hand to stop her. First, I wanted her to listen to everything I had to say.

"I'm sure you're feeling panicked because the other four heroes have awakened, but we don't exactly have a time limit, so there's no need to hurry. Besides, as long as you keep training, there's always a chance that you'll awaken one day. After hearing all that, do you still want to take a bath with me – someone who was a complete stranger until about a week ago?"

"D-do we... have to go into the bath together?" Haruno was red up to her ears.

Good. If she had made a face and said something like 'What are you saying? Gross,' then I might have burst into tears right in front of her.

"A-Anyway, I don't think you need to panic yet, Haruno. If you feel too embarrassed, you should just wait. I don't think it'd be any fun to force someone into the bath against their will, nor would I want to."

Honestly, though, I felt like I was missing out on the chance of a lifetime. *How could I let go of a chance to take a bath with such a cute girl? I should just take a bath with Sera instead,* part of my heart shouted out. *If possible, though, I'd rather take a bath with someone who actually wants to, instead of someone who's having second thoughts.* That was how I truly felt – although I can't deny that this also came from self-interest, and the hope that it might give me a chance of being liked by either girl.

After staring at me in silence for a while, Haruno bowed her head and apologized. “I’m sorry.”

“Well, I’m not angry or anything...”

“No, I want to thank you.” When Haruno raised her head, she was slightly smiling. She looked so cute that I started to feel remorseful about turning her down, but I withstood it.

“Thank you, Touya,” she said. “I’m glad you answered me the way you did.”

“...I did something to earn your thanks?”

“To me, you did.” Haruno grinned. She looked more beautiful than cute at that point.

When it came to bathing together, I simply thought if a girl was sincerely interested there’d be a better chance of getting her to like me. But if my decision had proven helpful, then that was even better.

“I’m going to think about it a bit more,” she said. “Before that, though, I’m going to try working a little harder.”

“Yeah. You can think about it after you’ve given it your all.”

“Exactly! Sorry for making you worry, Sera. I’m okay now.”

“I’m just glad you’ve cheered up...” Sera said with a relieved smile.

Haruno must have gotten depressed over not being able to awaken her gift, and fell into a panic. I wasn’t able to help her awaken, but I did manage to cheer her up, so I was certainly satisfied. I wasn’t even sure whether bathing together would allow her to awaken, so this seemed to be the best course of action. Of course, if she ever decided she wanted to bathe in the Unlimited Bath, I’d be all for it.

Haruno and Sera really seemed to be good friends. I later heard that Sera planned to join Haruno’s party once she departed. When I saw how close they were, I realized something: *I don’t have a single person to add to my party.*

That evening, I left Haruno and Sera and returned to my room. I rolled onto my bed, noting how hard the bed mat felt. After some additional thinking, I realized just what a difficult problem I faced when it came to party members – a

problem that revolved around my gift, the Unlimited Bath. It allowed me to bathe myself on the road, but I felt guilty about how I wouldn't be able to let any of my party members bathe on their own as well. I had to be in the Unlimited Bath, or it wouldn't be able to produce any water. It was also pretty cramped. Adding someone to my party, whether they were male or female, meant that I'd also need to ask them if they'd be okay bathing with me. The events at noon had taught me that unless they were a small child, no one would be happy about having to bathe with an adult male. I had experienced this firsthand when I let the temple elder inside in order to investigate the Unlimited Bath's powers. Bathing with another guy was no fun. I felt this was important, so I repeated it to myself.

I concluded that I would only be able to team up with women who would agree to bathe with me. Instead of bathing alone and not letting any of my party members in, or forcing myself to bathe with other men, finding women who would be okay with bathing with me from the beginning seemed to be the most constructive solution. I had received a gift that allowed me to bathe with anyone I liked. The Goddess of Light was basically ordering me to find some willing women. I couldn't deny that I had my own personal desires – in fact, allow me to admit that I did. I wanted to bathe with a girl.

This plan of mine was certainly easier said than done, and when I told the temple elder about it the next day, he agreed only after some exasperation. Then, just as he promised to help me find some party members, a young male temple knight in a white overcoat hurried in.

"W-we've got trouble! Cosmos the Hero was attacked by demonic assassins!"

"What?!" The temple elder was so startled that he knocked down his chair and stood up.

As I listened to the report, the first thing I thought was: *Who's that?* I soon learned that the first out of the five heroes to awaken his gift, Akio Nishizawa, had renamed himself 'Cosmos the Hero.' *Akio* was the word for the cosmos flower in Japanese, so it made sense.

"Is Cosmos the Hero safe now?" the temple elder asked.

"Y-yes, soldiers from the castle helped him defeat the monsters."

As I listened to the temple elder and the temple knight speak, relief washed over me. All I'd ever heard about Akio were the details surrounding his gift. He was another one of the few people who hailed from the same world as me, so I was glad to hear he was safe. After he quickly awakened his gift, Cosmos was summoned to the royal castle. There, he met this kingdom's princess, one of the people who had summoned us, and managed to add her to his party. Normally, one might have second thoughts about taking a princess out on a dangerous journey, but all members of the royal family underwent training from a young age, so it was actually safer than enlisting a complete amateur. She was also the descendant of a family of heroes who could use holy magic, so with that in mind, she was the perfect choice to team up with a hero. After adding the princess to his party, Cosmos continued preparing for his journey and kept searching daily for more party members in town. The day he was attacked, a lone girl had asked him to let her join. I'm not sure if it was because she was cute or not, but Cosmos apparently said yes immediately. Then, when they were on their way back to the castle, the barrier that protected the castle forced the girl to reveal her true form.

"The hero's party defeated the demons, but it seems that Cosmos was confused by the sudden development. He kept saying 'She must have had some reason,' and 'She really wasn't a bad person...'" the temple knight said.

Hearing this, the temple elder let out a sigh and shook his head. Whether this was a response to Cosmos' confusion, or due to how naive his remarks seemed, I didn't know. I kind of understood how Cosmos felt, though. After all, he had agreed to add her to his party, so it must have been hard to suddenly accept that she was actually his enemy. I got the feeling that Cosmos was a bit of a narcissist, but also had a gentle side. Something else was bugging me, though.

"Were the monsters really after Cosmos?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" the temple guard replied, so I explained.

"If they were after Cosmos, they could have simply taken him out in a more convenient spot before he returned to the castle. That way, he wouldn't have been able to get help from the castle soldiers."

"Guards were also sent out with the princess, you know."

“But there had to be less than what they had at the castle.”

“I suppose...”

Putting it bluntly, I had a hard time believing the monsters would risk so much just to attack a hero who still had yet to accomplish anything – especially one like me.

“Hm... You make a good point. Let’s relay this to the royal family.”

After a while, the temple elder came to a conclusion and sent the temple knight back to the castle. Once I saw how quickly he called other people in and started giving out orders, I realized now wasn’t the time to ask him for personal advice, so I took my leave and got out of his way.

That evening, after I finished my water production and magic training, I laid back down on my bed in my room and started studying the cleric magic textbook. Despite what I had said in the afternoon, I felt like there was a possibility I could get attacked one day, too. After all, I was a hero, and that might be the reason why the attack happened in the first place. But I had no fighting skills, nor was my gift meant for battle, and I didn’t have any guards of my own. If I had been attacked that day, I probably wouldn’t have survived. Once I came to that conclusion, fear sent shivers into my shoulders and caused me to shrink up a bit.

Magic, party members, or weapons. I needed something in order to protect myself, but all I currently possessed was a magic textbook. For the time being, my only choice was to go on studying cleric magic.

As I pored over the text, I suddenly heard a knock on my door. I hurriedly got up from the bed and looked toward it.

“Um... It’s me, Haruno. Are you awake, Touya?” I heard Haruno’s voice coming from beyond the door. It was cute, gentle, and sweet. “...Touya?”

“...Ohhh, Haruno! I’ll be right there!”

I had been so entranced by her voice that I was frozen in place. Rolling off my bed, I moved to open the door, then stopped and made sure my hair, my collar, and nothing else was disheveled before I opened it.

“Wh-what’s the matter, Haruno?”

“There’s something I’d like to ask you about... Do you have time now?”

“Come on in! I was just reading!”

“Thank you...” Haruno said in a small voice as she came in. She was wearing a thick gown over her sheer white pajamas, and was holding it closed with crossed arms.

“Here, sit down. Oh, over here, I mean.” The only furniture in the room was a dresser and a small table to which a single chair was attached. I let Haruno sit in the chair and sat on my bed so that we could face each other. I was in another world, in a room that someone had lent to me, but it still felt like a girl had come to visit me in my own room, so I was ecstatic. My voice might have even sounded high-pitched.

Whether or not she realized how excited I really was, Haruno sat down across from me, and, with a solemn face, told me why she had come to visit. “Touya, did you hear about Cosmos? About how he was attacked?” It was cute how she tipped her head to the side when she said ‘Cosmos.’

“Yeah, I did. What about it?”

“...Touya, why do you think Cosmos was attacked?”

“Well... Because he’s a hero. But maybe they were after the princess, or merely using it as a way to get into the castle.”

Haruno nodded as she listened. It seemed she had been thinking the same thing. “But if he was attacked because he was a hero, then I really need to hurry now. It could be me who gets attacked next, after all.”

“...It’s definitely a possibility.” I should have just said something cool there like “I’ll protect you,” but unfortunately I wasn’t even sure whether I’d be able to protect myself, so I didn’t have any room to talk big. But as I listened to her, I started to understand what Haruno really wanted to say.

“Anyway, I know that I declined yesterday, so I really shouldn’t be saying this now, but... Would it be possible for you to let me bathe in the Unlimited Bath?”

I knew it. She said exactly what I had expected her to.

After talking to her for the first time yesterday, I learned that Haruno wasn't excited about being summoned into another world. On the contrary, she felt endangered, especially since she was the only one who still had yet to awaken. After hearing about the attack on Cosmos, she must have felt the same fear that I did – that if she was attacked, she surely wouldn't survive.

"I wasn't able to awaken my gift today. All I can do now is ask for your help, Touya..." Haruno said with teary eyes.

The way she implored me almost made me feel like I had done something wrong. *Or wait, am I about to? I'm going to bathe with a beautiful girl, all for the lofty purpose of helping her awaken her gift. Honestly, I'm the one who's benefiting from this. I couldn't possibly ask for better luck.* I tried to act calm, but I kept feeling like all my inner excitement was going to bubble up to the surface.

"...Oh." Suddenly, I realized something. Haruno's shoulders were softly trembling.

Seeing how helpless she looked extinguished all my excitement in no time. *There's no way Haruno could be unfazed by asking me for such a favor. She came to me out of pure desperation, and look at how I'm reacting!*

"Haruno, I'm sorry!"

"N-no... You're a man, so I suppose it's to be expected."

Haruno did her best to cover for me, but the way she was holding her gown shut made it almost look like she was afraid of me. *Maybe she's been afraid of me since the very beginning?* The moment that thought came to me, I realized I couldn't possibly do anything that might hurt her.

"Okay, I know!" I leapt up and opened the door to the Unlimited Bath within my room. I'd been using it in the courtyard for the past several days, but I could open it anywhere.

I took out one of the bath's white towels and wrapped it around my head. I couldn't see Haruno's face, but I'm sure she was perplexed by my sudden actions.

"Haruno!"

“Y-yes?”

“I won’t look! No matter what! I even have my eyes closed under the towel! You don’t need to worry now! Go on and bathe in the Unlimited Bath!”

“...You really don’t mind?”

“Of course not. This is all I can do for you right now.”

“Th-thank you very much!” I hope that Haruno was actually as happy as she sounded when she thanked me.

Once I entered the Unlimited Bath and sat against the wall of the changing area, Haruno followed me in. In this world, people wore shoes even when they were inside buildings, so we were both wearing sandals. We took them off before we entered the Unlimited Bath, though.

“Excuse me...” Haruno said.

Once we both got inside, I realized just how small it really was. She was standing right next to me, and I felt like the tips of our noses would touch if I wasn’t careful. Suddenly, something else touched me. It felt like the hem of her gown.

“Uhh, do you see where the bath towels are?”

“Um... Oh, yes. I see them.”

“Okay. Now, in order to use the bath... Oh, sorry, I’ll shut up. Just pretend like I’m not here.”

“Oh no, please, you can relax...”

It felt like we were both acting strange. *Guess I’m not the only one who’s nervous here.* I kept my mouth shut like I promised, but due to that, it only seemed to make the smaller noises stand out more – namely, the sound of clothing sliding off her body.

That just sounded like the fwump of clothing hitting the ground. Was it a skirt? No, her pajama bottoms. Does that mean she’s wearing nothing but her panties right now? I sharpened my ears and put my imagination on full throttle. After a moment, I heard the curtain that separated the changing area from the bath open and shut.

Sounds like Haruno's entered the bath area. In other words, she's completely naked right now, and her pajamas and underwear are within an arm's reach.

"Wow..." I heard Haruno murmur, and couldn't help but feel a bit proud.

I heard the sound of hot water, probably Haruno washing herself, followed by the shower splashing. Suddenly, an idea came to me. With the curtain separating us, Haruno would never notice if I took my blindfold off. She'd probably only be able to see my silhouette.

The devilish suggestion made my fingertips twitch, but I clenched my fist and withstood the temptation. *No. I can't betray Haruno's trust here.* As a desperate struggle unfolded in my heart, I heard louder splashes coming out from the bath, signaling that Haruno had entered it. *This is bad. Just hearing those sounds is making me imagine her bathing. I'm getting too excited... At this rate, I won't be able to last.* Quickly, I remembered some of the basic bits of knowledge from the textbook I had just been reading and repeated them inside my head. I didn't want to scare Haruno, so I kept perfectly quiet. I couldn't keep myself from reacting to every little sound that came out from the bath, but I stood strong and kept repeating the knowledge inside my head as if it was a Buddhist chant.

"Touya. Touya!"

"...Huh? Haruno, are you done already?"

I had repeated the textbook chant about a hundred times before Haruno's voice shook me back into reality. It felt really strange. My mind was focused on the chanting, but my ears could still clearly hear what was going on in the bath. I couldn't see, so I wasn't sure about what was happening, but I clearly heard her let out a small squeal. I took off the blindfold and opened my eyes. – there she was, standing in front of me with warm, reddened cheeks. Her wet black hair made her look even more enchanting than usual.

"Thank you very much. And... I'm sorry." As she said that, Haruno bowed her head deeply. I had no idea why she was apologizing.

"Um, why are you apologizing?"

"Well... The truth is, I was worried you might try to do something weird to

me.”

“Oh, right.” Even though I hadn’t done anything, I’d certainly been thinking about it, so I couldn’t really argue.

“But you didn’t do anything, Touya, so I want to apologize for doubting you.”

“Nah, it’s okay. I can’t really blame you, considering the situation. Instead, I want to thank you for trusting me.” As I thanked her, Haruno agreed with an embarrassed smile. I felt like I could stare at that shy smile of hers forever.

“So, how was it?” I asked. “Do you feel like you might awaken your gift?”

I wasn’t just blushing, my heart was pounding in my chest as well, so I tried changing the subject in order to cover it up. I felt like there was no way I’d be able to hide how red my cheeks had gotten, though. Still, Haruno looked pretty red herself, so it looked like we’d be able to move ahead without touching on it.

“I’m not really sure, but... I felt like it helped me somehow.”

“I don’t really know how to explain it, but when I awakened my gift, it felt like an instruction manual got pounded into my head. All of a sudden, I knew how to use it.”

“That sounds very strange...”

Some might even say that was stranger than the experience of being summoned into another world. “I don’t know what happened with the other three, but I awakened my gift the next morning after I finished my training. Maybe you should wait and see if something happens tomorrow morning?”

“Okay, I think I’ll do that.”

I didn’t understand the logic behind it, but it seemed like proper rest was important to growth. Haruno seemed satisfied, and bowed once more before she returned to her own room. The bath towels were high quality, so I gave one to her as a gift. Once I was alone, I closed the door and started taking deep breaths inside, in the hopes that I could catch a whiff of any lingering scents before I reset the Unlimited Bath. *There’s probably nothing wrong with doing this, right?*

The next morning, Haruno managed to awaken her gift without any other

problems. When I went out to the courtyard in order to train, I ran into Haruno and Sera, who both thanked me at the same time. Sera grabbed my hands and gave them a tight squeeze. It looked like she was about to cry as she thanked me. She'd been so worried about Haruno that she must have been truly overjoyed. They had wanted to come and tell me even before they went to the temple elder. I'm not sure if the Unlimited Bath really had any effect or not, but it certainly felt nice to receive their thanks. *Looks like all my desperate patience paid off.*

Afterwards, they left to go and report to the temple elder. Once I started practicing a little magic in the courtyard, I realized that I had somehow become able to use some basic light-based cleric magic. The hundred chants I did in my mind yesterday must have been more useful than I realized. Was I really that desperate for some light to cast the darkness of my blindfold away? Despite the success this day had brought, I was still a bit depressed by how badly I had wanted to peek at her in the bath.

Second Bath – With a Bare Heart

"Ha ha ha! That kneel of yours looks perfect, right down to the positioning! Who taught you how to do that?"

Thankfully, our guide had taught us proper manners ahead of time, so we didn't end up doing anything rude when we had our audience with the king. He looked very dignified with his long black kaiser mustache, and basically said he would support us if we either went to defeat the demon lord, or prevent his revival. It didn't look like we had any other choice, so we nodded solemnly in response.

After we left the audience chamber and heard the door close behind us, we let out huge sighs of relief. I glanced at Haruno, who was standing next to me. Sweat was running down her forehead. It seemed as if I wasn't the only one who had been nervous.

The audience had ended quicker than I thought it would, but there was a reason for that. The sacred king's royal family and the Temple of the Goddess of Light had worked together in order to perform the hero summoning, but they didn't have complete solidarity. In fact, normally, the temple acted independently of the kingdom. The reason they had summoned five heroes was so they could split them up between the royal family and the temple. It all came down to who would have the right to claim the prestige when a hero managed to achieve something great. Maybe the reason they were both eager to support us was because they were competing with each other.

The sacred king's side had already claimed the self-titled Cosmos, Natsuki Kannami, and Ritsu Nakahana. That's probably why he had been so quick to dismiss Haruno and I. After all, I had awakened my powerless Unlimited Bath ability, while Haruno had just barely awakened hers. I could understand why the sacred king decided he didn't need us. Still, he'd required us to come for an audience, *and* had stationed the other heroes he'd chosen within the castle for the sake of 'preparations.' It was definitely a little less than subtle. That also

might have been part of the reason why he had the princess join Cosmos' party. Meanwhile, the bearded temple elder had taught me cleric magic in order to try and make me as strong as possible, despite the fact that I couldn't use my gift to fight. Either way, I was just grateful that I didn't have to part with Haruno.

Outside the audience chamber, two people awaited us.

"Lady Haruno!"

"Sera!"

One of them was Haruno's party member, Sera, who was clad in her loose, white robe. The other was a sharp-looking old gentleman with a trimmed mustache. He was wearing a white temple knight uniform, and had a sword sheathed at his side. An unusually calm aura made me relax when I saw him, despite the fact that he was armed.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Just a humble temple knight. Today, I have the honor of acting as a guide for you heroes." As he spoke, the gentleman gave us a gracious bow. He almost looked like he could be someone's butler, so I decided to call him 'Mr. Butler' in my mind.

"...You seem like you're someone really important," I said.

"I've just been at this a long time," Mr. Butler said with a smile. Honestly, I found it hard to believe, but I doubted he'd tell me the truth no matter how I retorted.

"Would you two like to depart? We could talk as we travel, if you like."

It appeared that he was to be our guide for the day. First, he took us to buy armor. Making sure we could defend ourselves was important, but since size adjustments were necessary for certain items, we had to decide on our orders first. Mr. Butler drove us out from the castle in a carriage, then pointed the horses toward the best armor smith in the Sacred Capital, often visited by nobles and the royal family.

In the carriage, Haruno and Sera discussed what they planned to do from here on out – namely, whether or not they would try to find a way for Haruno to

return home. It wasn't like I didn't have any lingering attachments to my home, but I wasn't sure if I'd actually want to throw this all away if I found a way back during my journey. *My home world and this world... I'm not really sure how to compare them, so I guess I should hold off on a decision for the time being, at least until I learn more about this world.*

As I continued to ponder, the carriage entered a block filled with craftsmen and smiths. This block was the craftsmen's town, a place where not only smiths, but leather dressers, tailors, and other craftsmen with their own workshops all gathered and worked. It had been built under the seventh sacred king's orders, and allowed people to take care of all their traveling preparations, aside from food, right in one block.

"We've arrived," Mr. Butler said, as we got out of the carriage.

In front of us stood a workshop with a very elegant atmosphere. *I guess the royal family doesn't shop here for nothing.*

Upon entering we found ourselves in a reception area, with several armor samples displayed on racks. The sound of hammering could be heard from beyond the counter. Seeing how this was a smith, I thought we'd be greeted by a curt craftsman-type man, so I was surprised to see a man behind the counter with a friendly, professional smile. There were also female staff members who handled the measuring. When I took a closer look at the samples, I realized there was female armor on display as well, meaning this world also had its share of females warriors.

Instead of using a tape measure lined with millimeter increments, they measured us by making marks on an object called a 'stute string,' which was about one meter long. The stute was this kingdom's unit of measurement, and was equal to the distance of three of the king's steps. This made it seem like the length of a stute would change each time a new sacred king claimed the throne, or even just grew older, but according to the clerk, the length of a stute didn't really change that much from king to king.

After I got measured, I ordered a piece of armor known as a brigandine. With multiple steel plates weaved in between two pieces of leather, it was a great piece of armor with a good balance of flexibility and defensive power. I also

ordered an open-faced helmet with good visibility, vambraces and gauntlets to protect my arms, greaves to protect my legs, and a large round shield. Since equipping them boosted my blessing power, it was surprisingly easy to move around in full armor. At first I never thought I'd be able to go on a journey with a bunch of heavy equipment on, but it appeared that this world operated on a different set of rules.

Haruno, however, couldn't equip as much weight as I could. She chose a piece of torso armor made out of hard boiled leather, a small round buckler shield, and a circlet for her forehead that Sera recommended.

Fearing that her arms and legs would be left defenseless, I suggested she pick up some more armor. "You can't go wearing just that. You need to protect your arms and legs, too."

"I guess I'll just order some gauntlets and greaves, then..."

Sera ordered the same thing. Apparently, the smith had agreed to give our orders top priority.

There was something else I noticed during my time at the smith. I had already figured out that Sera was the type of woman who looked slimmer when she was in clothes, but now it hit me that Haruno, wearing her thick cardigan, was also a force to be reckoned with. Two beautifully curved mounds rose up from beneath her blouse, and her bra was faintly visible. Below, I could see a thin waist, a round bottom, and two long legs. I had never seen someone with such a well-proportioned body in my home world, let alone this one. The mere fact that she was standing in front of me almost felt like a miracle. Considering I only met her because I got summoned here made me feel just a tiny bit glad about it all – never pass up a good deal, I always say.

Afterwards, we went next door to place orders at the weapon shop. After speaking with Mr. Butler and the clerk, I chose a one-handed broad ax, which could do damage even if wielded by an amateur. Although it was made for battle, the clerk recommended it because it could also come in handy while camping.

Haruno chose a thin, one stute long sword, while Sera chose an even shorter thin short sword. I also chose a dagger as a sub-weapon. This was a weapon

that had many other uses aside from battle, so I recommended it to Haruno and Sera, and all three of us ended up ordering the same one. It made me a little happy to know the three of us had matching daggers.

After that, we went to the tailor's workshop. So far, I'd borrowed all my clothes from the temple, so I needed to buy my own before I departed.

"Is that sign... a leaf?" I asked. Above the door to the workshop was a sign with a big leaf on it.

"That's a fig leaf, the Ficus brand symbol," Mr. Butler answered.

"Is the Ficus brand really good or something?"

"Ficus was the name of an old craftsman whose skill earned him great fame. The fact that his brand has a shop in every big city around the world should tell you just how skilled he was."

"Awesome!" I blurted out.

Clearly, Ficus was a world-famous brand. When I nervously entered the shop, I was completely unprepared for what I saw.

"Are they... *trying* to insult their clientele?" I asked.

"Absolutely not," Mr. Butler replied.

"Then what? Are they just trying to keep male customers away?"

"Well, maybe."

"What do you mean maybe?!"

Inside the workshop were samples just like we'd seen at the weapons and armor shops. However, within this shop, there was nothing but female underwear on display. The moment I entered, I felt a silent oppression that was basically telling me I needed to leave.

"If this is enough to startle you, then you have a lot more training to do," said Mr. Butler, who didn't look the least bit fazed. Maybe he was actually a perverted gentleman.

Haruno and Sera also had reddened cheeks, and looked just as embarrassed as I did.

“Huh? Did European underwear really look like this in the middle ages?” Haruno asked.

She had a point. All the underwear on display had modern Japanese designs. The rest of the clothing all fit with the fantasy atmosphere, but this underwear was clearly from a different era.

As we stared at each other, a female clerk came out and answered Haruno’s question. “The Great Ficus was an underwear craftsman who specialized in female underwear.”

“Well, I guess every craftsman has his or her specialty, so there’s bound to be specialists in underwear out there somewhere...” I said.

“The Great Ficus sought to answer this question: What sort of underwear makes the female body look the most beautiful? Some say his research alone advanced female underwear history by a thousand years!”

“What a pervert!” As the clerk proudly continued her explanation, I just couldn’t help but shout that out.

After we regained our composure, we continued purchasing our own outfits. Of course, we couldn’t do it together, so I split up from Haruno and Sera.

“Still, don’t you think they’re putting a little too much emphasis on that one category?” I asked. There was an area for men’s clothes inside the workshop as well, but it was incredibly small, and only covered about 20% of the entire shop.

I picked up a piece of underwear. It wasn’t a loincloth or anything, but it didn’t look like any sort of design I had ever seen before, either. In fact, it looked like a pair of boxer shorts from the distant past.

“So, that Ficus guy never made any male underwear?” I asked.

“The Great Ficus’ motto for male underwear was: ‘One leaf is enough,’ and never crafted a single piece of male underwear,” the clerk answered.

“This is starting to make my head hurt... You mean all the underwear here is stuff that his apprentices or whatever made after his death?”

“Yes. Incidentally, Ficus died over 200 years ago.”

“So despite having over 200 years to work, none of his apprentices were ever

able to surpass a single man?”

“The Ficus brand is still unrivaled in terms of men’s clothing as well.”

“...Man, Ficus is incredible.” The next thing I knew, I was praising him.

This Ficus guy was a pervert – a *huge* pervert, that much was true. At the same time, I couldn’t deny the fact that he was also a huge genius.

“Just as he preached, the Great Ficus never wore anything but a single leaf throughout his entire life, until he died of an illness one winter day,” the clerk went on.

“What was this guy trying to prove?! Wait, is that what the leaf on the sign is supposed to be?!”

Apparently, the fig leaf was now considered a ceremonial uniform in honor of Ficus’ great achievements. How did it even stay in place? With magic, of course.

How’s that for some fantasy?

This was the last thing I wanted in my fantasy story.

Apparently, it was even acceptable for him to appear like that in front of the king, but in the 200 years after his death, no one else had followed his lead. For better or worse, the Great Ficus truly was unsurpassable. I sure as heck didn’t want to try and surpass him.

Leaves aside, even though the designs looked a bit old, the clothing seemed to be completely functional, so I decided to buy all my underwear at that shop. I also ordered some travel clothes and had the clerk measure me. After placing all my orders, I paid for the ready-made clothes that I was going to take home that day and had them bundled up. Still, the girls had yet to finish their shopping. It seemed like it took girls a longer amount of time to shop, especially when it came to underwear, so I decided to patiently wait for them to finish.

After a while, Haruno and Sera returned from placing their orders. When they saw Mr. Butler and I, they both bowed their heads apologetically. We merely laughed it off, understanding that it was a man’s eternal duty to wait for women to finish shopping. Apparently, both of the girls had to get all of their bras made-to-order – perhaps because they were both much curvier than their

clothes gave away.

On our way home in the carriage, Haruno started talking to me, with a mixture of shock and wonder on her face. “You may not be able to understand this, Touya, but... I think the underwear in this world is a lot more advanced than ours.”

“...Seriously?” I turned to the side and stared at her with wide eyes.

“I’ll spare you the details, but apparently they custom made underwear with battles in mind.”

“Guess it’s a cultural difference?”

Haruno nodded in response to my question. “They also cast magic with the wearer in mind.”

“They really go that far?”

“Yes. It makes the underwear more expensive, though...”

Even though she spared me the details, I figured it meant this underwear was for people who moved around a lot. I couldn’t help but glance at the firm blazer that covered Haruno’s boobs, and at the loose white robe that shrouded Sera’s boobs, then quickly looked away. Yes, they both appeared *much* slimmer when they wore clothes. In fact, I think they were wearing the sort of clothes that masked their curves on purpose.

“But the designs are really cute.” Haruno must have had a hard time shopping. Even I knew that the bigger the cup size, the less choice there was.



“Ficus really is amazing,” I said.

“Yeah... I guess you can’t underestimate this world just because it appears to be medieval.”

“They’ve got magic on their side, after all.” It was certainly a strange way of realizing this world wasn’t completely on a medieval level in terms of technology and culture. The existence of magic alone was a huge difference – perhaps that’s why this world was able to evolve in its own unique way, such as with the Ficus brand.

I can’t underestimate this world just because I have modern knowledge on my side. Learning about that perverted genius had given me a chance to reconsider my view on this world. It seemed as if Haruno had experienced something similar, as she also had a pensive look on her face.

“But for some reason,” I said, as I stared up at the ceiling of the carriage. “I just can’t bring myself to respect that Ficus guy.”

“I feel the same way...” Haruno said, with a troubled smile.

Next, we went out to buy the remainder of what we’d need for our journey, aside from food: shoes, cloaks to protect us from the cold, water skins, light sources, tinderboxes, and other small things.

After that, Haruno and I headed back to the temple. The next day, we planned to begin our real preparations and start looking for party members. I thought that Haruno and Sera would both make nice party members, but I didn’t have the courage to ask them if they’d be okay with bathing together so soon after what had happened. Bathing with two girls who were actually very curvy would most likely be heaven on earth, but unfortunately I had to give up on that dream for the time being – so we parted ways.

“I can’t go with you, Sir Touya, but I can introduce you to some people.” Mr. Butler had responsibilities to the temple, so he couldn’t come with me either. “If you could first tell me what sort of party members you’re looking for, I’ll do my best to search for them.”

“Well... I’m not interested in bathing with other men.”

“...Yes, I would suppose not.” The temple elder, who was also with us, understood exactly what I was looking for from that simple declaration.

Due to the way my Unlimited Bath worked, adding someone to my party meant we’d have to bathe together.

“A difficult condition indeed...” Mr. Butler’s face hardened, as if he had figured out what I was thinking.

“I agree. But I can’t just bathe alone and exclude my party members...”

“Yes, I can understand that.”

Allow me to repeat myself: I didn’t want to just hog the bath to myself. As I continued to think, Mr. Butler raised two fingers and started to speak.

“I’ve come up with two possible solutions. The first would be to search for party members who don’t bathe... Oh, please don’t misunderstand here. I’m talking about non-humans who don’t bathe to begin with.”

He was talking about demi-humans. Creatures that resembled humans, but weren’t. In my world, dwarves and elves were pretty famous. Of course, they were legendary creatures, but it seemed like they might actually exist in this world.

“Hmm. Where can I find them?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. I’ve never met one myself, you see.”

“Aw, come on.”

“Apparently you rarely catch sight of them in the human realm,” Mr. Butler answered nonchalantly, completely ignoring my outcry. “Remember, it was just an idea. I’ll try to search for them, but please don’t get your hopes up too high.” So basically, chances were pretty slim.

“What was your other idea?” I asked.

“Choose a woman who wouldn’t mind bathing with a male, I suppose. You’re a hero, Sir Touya, so I think you’d be surprised at how easy it could be... To find a woman who wants sperm, that is.”

“Don’t say *sperm*!” I couldn’t believe he had said that word so bluntly. Maybe

he really was a perverted gentleman after all. “You haven’t forgotten that I’m gathering these people for my *journey*, have you?”

“If it weren’t for that condition, I’m sure that noble women would have flocked to you, rather seriously. They were quick to instate me as your guide, so I’ve already received several requests.”

“...Really?”

“If possible, I could arrange for you to meet with them right now. Their ages range from 21 to 12, so you’re free to choose as you please.”

“12?! You want me to put a child in danger?!”

“How rude. A 12-year old is a full-fledged adult.”

“...Excuse me?” I glanced at the temple elder for confirmation. He nodded in reply.

According to the temple elder, most people in this world were labeled adults between the ages of 12 to 15. It seemed like 12 was on the early end, though. Anyone labeled as an adult was allowed to marry, which made me feel a mixture of envy and shock.

“Is being a hero from another world really that great of a thing, that it would make people flock from all over?”

“What if I told you that the very first sacred king had also been one?” Mr. Butler retorted.

“So they see me as someone close to the sacred king’s line...” As I muttered this, the temple elder stroked his long beard and gave me a slow nod.

“At least when it comes to this kingdom. If you wanted a harem, you could easily create one. But there are two other male heroes out there, so you’d better act fast! The early bird catches the worm!” Mr. Butler said, then pointed a sharp finger at me. He was getting so into this.

I couldn’t deny that it sounded tempting, but I told myself I wasn’t a total wimp for getting nervous at the thought of some very aggressive women coming straight for me. I had a feeling that if I didn’t stick with Mr. Butler, things could take a very sharp turn for the worse, so I tried changing the

subject.

“What about other kingdoms? Are there any you aren’t on good terms with?” When I asked this question, Mr. Butler and the temple elder looked at each other in a way that instantly revealed the answer.

“It’d take a long time to explain the details, so I’ll save them for another time,” Mr. Butler said. “Basically, we belong to the Olympus Alliance, which is formed from twelve countries that exist in this continent.”

“Jupiter is a central member of the alliance, so sometimes other entities try to rob us of our status,” the temple elder said.

“So just because you’re in an alliance, it doesn’t mean you’re on ‘good’ terms with everyone?” I asked.

“That’s basically how it goes with foreign relations.” Mr. Butler twirled his mustache and gave me a cynical look.

Temples existed in every country, and had their own private network, so it seemed like they knew a good deal about foreign relations.

“We’re not engaging in direct war with anyone, though, so please don’t worry,” Mr. Butler said. “We fought with a neighboring country three years ago, though.”

“Don’t worry? But what about the demon lord?”

“The demon lord’s underlings were behind the scuffle that began that war.”

“...I thought he hadn’t come back to life yet?”

“We’re not sure on the details, but some say that despite being sealed, he can still command other monsters.” Apparently, the demon lord was much more dangerous than I thought. “We won’t be able to launch a wide-scale search, but I’ll figure something out.”

“You can find people for me?”

“There are some aggressive candidates out there, but it might be difficult if we’re too blunt with our terms...” The temple elder said in a worried tone.

“I know what you’re about to say.” Mr. Butler furrowed his brow a bit. “It’s

going to be difficult to tell them that ‘bathing with the hero’ is one of the conditions, correct?”

“No. If you start out with too strong of a request, Sir Touya, then you’ll lose the initiative,” the temple elder answered.

“Just how aggressive are these women?!” I shouted. The thought of a high-handed, aggressive 12-year old piqued my curiosity, but there was no way I was going down that road.

“Are you sure you won’t consider being flexible for a male party member, perhaps if the conditions are very good?” Mr. Butler asked.

“Please. The bath isn’t that spacious...”

I was so exhausted from heckling Mr. Butler that I let an honest reaction slip right out. There was just no way I’d be able to enjoy bathing with another man. That was the one rule I had no intentions of budging on.

Several days later, I had yet to find a single candidate, so I just kept studying magic and training for battle. Apparently, Haruno had already found several party members. Similar to how the aggressive noble ladies had flocked to the male heroes, certain lascivious noblemen had flocked to the female heroes, but she had turned them all down.

“Some of them seemed like they were pretty strong, but not very serious about going on a journey with me...” Yes, they were probably much more focused on having their way with her.

As they say, one man’s fault is another man’s lesson. I may have been in no place to judge others, but I knew I had to be careful.

“I bet it was hard to get them to back down,” I said.

“The temple knights protected me.” I had thought about enlisting some myself, but they were all loyal to their current employers, and none were as passionate as Sera. I was really impressed by how dedicated she was to assisting Haruno.

“That reminds me,” I said. “Did you get any news on how the other three are doing? I’ve been so busy with studying and training that I haven’t heard

anything.”

“Oh. About that...”

Haruno seemed to be curious about them as well, and had gathered a good bit of information. First, I learned that Akio Nishizawa, aka Cosmos, wasn’t trying to hide his gift’s ability at all. He was a slender man with a handsome face, and my first impression was that of a narcissist who tended to push his luck. Perhaps he was someone who just preferred to show off his abilities rather than hide them.

His gift was the Unlimited Bullet, which allowed him to create two guns that he could fire as many times as he wanted – a very aggressive gift, and a far cry from my Unlimited Bath. He had already added the holy princess of this kingdom to his party and enlisted the help of the princess’ elite guards. Since it was their duty to stay near the princess at all times, it meant they all had to be young women. According to Haruno, they looked like a group of high school girls on a field trip. In other words, to my envy, Cosmos currently had 12 party members, all of which were girls – and not only that, he was still regularly venturing out to town in order to look for more. Of all of us, he was the one who was the most positive and excited about being a hero, so I hoped he’d work hard in terms of defeating the demon lord. Incidentally, it seemed that not many of the aggressive noble ladies had gone for him. Perhaps they decided they couldn’t beat the sacred princess.

Next we had Ritsu Nakahana, who still had yet to reveal the details of her gift. She was a petite girl with short, bright brown hair. Apparently, she’d been an office lady before her summoning, and no one really knew how old she was, but her face looked rather young. She seemed very interested in the two cool-looking guys, and didn’t so much as glance in my direction, so that was all I knew about her. Apparently, she was searching for impressive men to add to her party, and had already chosen two young men who had been introduced to her within the castle. One was the third son of a notable family, who were overjoyed to hear of the honor he’d been bestowed with. The other man, however, had suddenly started proclaiming how his duty was to “protect Ritsu the Heroine,” despite being the firstborn son, so his family had to hurriedly name his younger brother their proper heir. It had caused quite an uproar.

Therefore, I came to the conclusion that Ritsu had a penchant for causing chaos, but that wasn't even the half of it. It turned out that for her third party member, she'd set her sights on the prince. Since Cosmos had enlisted the princess, she probably thought that she had a chance, too. However, the prince shot her down instantly, and she'd even managed to enrage him.

After that, Ritsu Nakahana slipped out of the castle and took refuge at one of her party members' homes. Several days later, she took her two party members and fled, which acted as a covert beginning for her journey. Someone who saw them leave had remarked that their party had looked like "a princess in disguise with two gorgeous aides." It seemed as if they had at least made the proper preparations, so they were probably all right for the time being.

The third hero was Natsuki Kannami, a 20-year old university student. If Cosmos was the cool, slender type, then he was the buff, physical type. He was handsome as well, but his personality was the exact opposite of Cosmos'. Just from his aura, you could tell that he was a reticent, serious man – especially when you looked at his thick eyebrows.

I remember his troubled look when Ritsu Nakahana had gone up and talked to him out of the blue. Additionally, due to how silent he was, he hadn't revealed the nature of his gift. They had introduced some party member candidates to him at the castle, but he declared that he'd only take people who could best him in battle. He had yet to be defeated.

Last but not least came Haruno and myself. We were both searching for party members, but hadn't come across anyone. We had both taken a bit of time to awaken our gifts, so we felt like we had fallen behind. It's not like there was a deadline for our journeys, though, so I was prepared to take my time.

On that day, I'd spent every waking moment training in the temple. The temple elder was nice enough to teach me how to fight, and helped me out whenever he returned from his duties. I couldn't help but feel a bit suspicious, though, so after training I went to his office and asked him why he was doing all this for me. He laughed and replied that it was because he wanted me to become the temple's hero.

"I want you and Haruno to journey out as Heroes of the Temple of the

Goddess of Light.”

“That’s a really long title.”

“Then as Heroes of the Goddess.” He was surprisingly flexible when it came to the name.

As we started talking, Haruno entered the room. He must have already spoken to her about this.

I had an idea about why this had happened, so I asked the temple elder a question. “Is this because Haruno and I got sent away from the castle?”

“That’s part of it.” The temple elder gave me a long nod.

“Well, I can think of another reason – at least, about me. I’m not sure about Haruno...”

“Oh, no, I think I’m in the exact same situation,” she said.

“What? You too?”

“Temple elder...” Haruno said. “Have we been labeled as unfit for the title of ‘Hero of Jupiter’ since we haven’t added any Jupiterians to our parties?”

“You hit the nail on the head, aside from the title. You were labeled as unfit to bear the title of ‘Hero of the Sacred King.’” The temple elder let out a deep sigh and affirmed Haruno’s words.

Sera, who had joined Haruno’s party, was born in this kingdom, but since the temple didn’t officially belong to the kingdom, she didn’t count as a member of the royal family’s side. Meanwhile, I had yet to find a single party member.

“Which means that even if we manage to do something great as heroes, our deeds won’t serve to bolster Jupiter’s reputation,” Haruno said, and the temple elder nodded slowly.

So that’s why they only introduced the children of noble families to us.

“I thought everyone was all worried about the demon lord coming back to life?” I asked.

“I guess they’re not just doing it out of the goodness of their hearts,” Haruno replied.

“If they just want to bolster their prestige, then why didn’t they split us up one by one from the start, or actually try to win us over?”

“That’s probably what their candidates were for...”

“Aggressive nobles? That was their best idea?” If that had really been their plan, then it had completely backfired.

Suddenly, a thought came to me. *If they had gathered up enough noble men and women and told each of us to pick one as a party member, Haruno surely would have chosen a female. Even if they were only meant to be guides, it still could have been possible... Yet the sacred king hadn’t done that. Why not?*

“...Did the temple prevent them from doing that?” If the temple and the royal family had been trying to undermine each other without our knowledge, it would explain a lot.

“I see,” Haruno chimed in. “You wanted to make it so that Jupiter couldn’t claim all the benefits for themselves. Since the temple took part in the summoning, I suppose it’s in your right.” It seemed like Haruno understood what I was trying to say.

“You’re really sharp... That’s the one good thing you’ve got going for you.” As he listened to us, the temple elder let out a very deep sigh. *Bullseye.* “We allow the heroes to freely choose their party members, then look at the results and decide which side they’ll be on. That’s the rule that the sacred king and I set.” In other words, we had a chance to fall on either side depending on who we chose as party members.

“Don’t tell me you also pushed Sera to become friends with Haruno?” I asked.

“When you think about how deeply dedicated Sera is to her work, you’ll find that there was a possibility she’d have asked to join Haruno’s party on her own. I won’t deny that I didn’t plan things a little for my own benefit, though.”

“And that’s also why you offered to teach me magic?”

“Yes. I wanted to try and get you on our side.” The temple elder was being quite honest. I suppose it was only natural that he’d try to work for the sake of his own organization, though.

After listening to the temple elder, Haruno and I looked at each other. *Should we really answer his request and become Heroes of the Goddess?*

“In the end, it’s just a question of who we want backing us...” I said.

“Yes, but we aren’t strong enough to refuse them both and survive on our own. I feel like refusing to be connected to someone is like refusing this world itself,” Haruno said.

“...Yeah, I sort of get what you mean.”

In order to survive in this world, we had to build relationships here. In that regard, finding party members and choosing to become heroes for either the sacred king or the goddess was the first big decision we faced.

“I think the Temple of the Goddess of Light won’t be too restrictive on us, but what about you, Touya?”

“I’m not devout or anything, but yeah, I guess it’s better than being tied to a kingdom.”

“Comparatively.” Haruno laughed, and I couldn’t help but laugh along with her.

Neglecting to deepen our relationship with the kingdom of Jupiter had put us in this situation. With that in mind, becoming Heroes of the Goddess was a choice we’d freely made.

I had another question. “That reminds me, I don’t really know about the doctrine here, but you aren’t going to ask us to kill demi-humans or anything, right?”

“What do you think the Goddess of Light is?” the temple elder retorted. “Unthinkable.”

“Sorry, I just wanted to be sure.” Apparently, there were a small number of demi-humans who worshiped the Goddess of Light.

There was a temple in every kingdom, and what they lacked in authority, they made up for with their extensive network, so I figured it’d be okay to back them. Haruno and I looked at each other once more, nodded, then turned back to the temple elder.

“Okay. Count me in.”

“We’ll become your Heroes of the Goddess.”

We didn’t really have any right to refuse, but we wanted to do this the right way. We wanted to choose for ourselves and build up a relationship with this world. Therefore, we didn’t want our first big decision to be forced upon us – we wanted to decide it for ourselves. It was self-serving, but it was important to us.

“Thank you. I’m deeply grateful to you both.” The temple elder seemed to understand how we felt, and thanked us with a deep bow of his head.

At that point, we had both officially become Heroes of the Goddess. I had no intention of competing with Cosmos and the others, but I did feel relieved that Haruno and I were on the same side. Still, Ritsu Nakahana and the scene she had caused was partly connected to this. Since the prince had gotten angry and refused to accept her as a Hero of the Sacred King, she’d gone off to journey completely on her own, without becoming a hero for either side. Talk about a troublemaker.

The reason the temple elder was trying to train me was because the two strongest heroes had already been taken by the sacred king’s side, which had made him desperate to do something for his side in response. Luckily, the temple elder was skilled enough to not only teach magic, but fighting as well, so I decided to learn as much as possible from him before I set off.

Three days later, another incident occurred: Cosmos’ party ended up resolving a dispute at the raver market in the town.

“Raver market?” I asked the temple elder, soon after I heard the news. I didn’t even know what ‘raver’ meant, so I was curious about the details.

When I found out that ‘raver’ was another word for ‘slave,’ I almost punched the temple elder in the face. It felt like a natural reaction for someone who’d grown up in modern day Japan. In reality, the ‘slaves’ of this world were a bit different from what I knew.

Ravers were purchased to own, had no freedom, and could be handed off to other owners depending on the circumstances. That much was the same as the

slaves I was familiar with. However, they only had no freedom in regards to their work. They got time off, and unless they had a particularly awful master, they never got treated as badly as the slaves I had learned about. Ravers also didn't need to work for their entire lives – their period of employment was set in stone.

This kingdom – or, the Olympus Alliance, I should say, had established this system, and the people of this kingdom were split into two categories: citizens, and everyone else. Most of the ravers belong to the 'everyone else' category, and unless they were criminal ravers who had been demoted to that status as punishment, they could gain citizenship once they completed their work period. After listening to the explanation, it sounded like each raver was bound to a sort of service contract. They seemed similar to the apprentices and indentured servants that I had often seen in historical movies and TV shows.

The truth was that aside from the clerics, the rest of the temple's servants were ravers. The raver system also had apprenticeship aspects to it, so some of the ravers who served the temple could study to become clerics as they worked. On top of that, once they became licensed clerics, they could shorten their work periods and gain citizenship sooner than normal.

According to Mr. Butler, an evil moneylender had tried to purchase a girl in order to pay off her parents' debt, but Cosmos' party had gallantly stepped in and saved her. It was legal to become a raver in order to pay off a debt, but only if you were the person who had originally incurred the debt. Having another family member become a raver instead was illegal, so if the girl had actually been the one in debt, then Cosmos' party would have been in the wrong for stepping in.

It all sounded so cliché, like an episode from some TV show. Regardless, Cosmos' party had infiltrated the raver market and managed to capture the evil moneylender. Honestly, it sounded a bit different from a typical heroic deed, but it was still a noble feat. On top of that, after investigating the moneylender, they found out that he had also been capturing travelers and forcing them to become ravers.

"I didn't see anything myself, but I heard that there was an elf found among the kidnapped travelers," Mr. Butler said. Apparently, the elves of this world

were beautiful, slender, and had long ears – just how I imagined them to be.

"I can't believe he found an elf outside of the woods..." The temple elder seemed surprised that an elf had shown up in town.

"Is it really that rare?" I asked.

"It's more than rare. They say that elves never take a single step out from their woodland territories unless they have a reason to."

According to Mr. Butler, elves only left the forest right before big disasters would occur, so in some areas, they were seen as harbingers of misfortune. This elf was no exception, and had come in to report to the sacred king regarding the resurrection of the demon lord. After completing her mission and delivering the report to the sacred king's heroes and the sacred princess, the female elf decided to assist in the battle with the demon lord, and joined Cosmos' party.

I was a bit curious about this beautiful female elf, but it seemed like she was dead-set on fighting the demon lord, so I wasn't that envious. At the very least, I was a good loser.

"...Oh, maybe *this* will help you find some party members," Mr. Butler said.

"What will?"

"Just hire what's called a battle raver. They usually only take temporary jobs whenever there are big wars, but some hire themselves out on specific contracts. I'm sure they'd make fine party members for a hero."

"R-really?"

I wasn't sure what it would look like if a hero such as myself started dragging ravers around with him, but the temple elder explained to me why hiring a raver was a good thing. It was seen as something that only middle class or higher people could do. They would entrust chores and farmwork to the ravers, while going out to their civil jobs. This kingdom – no, the entire Olympus Alliance – thought of it as a virtue. Perhaps some considered it an opportunity to give others a chance at citizenship. The fact that I had to 'purchase' people really stuck in my mind, but I could also see how I was merely paying for a contracted term of work up front. Of course, there had to be people who didn't care about virtue, and abused ravers by working them too hard so they could

live easier lives, but I couldn't just reject this system based on a few rotten apples. *I guess I'll just have to accept it as part of this world's culture.*

The next day, I took the temple elder and Mr. Butler's suggestion and went out to search for a raver. As I sat down in the carriage, I let out a deep sigh. *Is this what they call a 'culture gap'?* I continued to ponder the recent turn of events, until Mr. Butler spoke up from the driver's seat.

"I forgot to mention yesterday – the craftsmen and clerks we saw at those shops were all ravers too, you know."

"Really?! Oww!" I accidentally stood up and smashed my head into the ceiling of the carriage.

Cradling my head, I sat back down and listened to Mr. Butler. He explained how the buildings in the craftsmen's town all belonged to either the sacred king's family, or another noble, so all the craftsmen there were ravers. "Things differ a bit in the other kingdoms, but that's how craftsmen are treated here in Jupiter."

"...In order to protect their know-how?"

"Exactly, Sir Touya."

The king and the nobles were able to hire craftsmen ravers and hide their skills by keeping them together, while also cleverly using the master-apprentice system to make sure craftsmen continued to pass on all their talents. In this regard, one could say the royal family and the nobles were protecting, or perhaps monopolizing the craftsmen and their abilities, and it became clear how much they valued it. Perhaps the craftsmen's town was created mainly in order to gather all of them in one place so that it'd be easier to protect them.

On another note, when you think of a fantasy world, the first thing that comes to your mind is an adventurer, right? Those kinds of people existed in this world too, but there weren't many who went on adventures back to back. Most of them had a base somewhere, from which they hunted monsters and fulfilled citizens' requests in order to make a living. If there happened to be a big war taking place somewhere, they'd participate for pay, as battle ravers.

That's right – the adventurers of this world were all battle ravers. When there

weren't any big battles, they worked as normal adventurers. But if they happened to achieve great feats in battle, a noble could spot them and hire one as a permanent raver. Then, after gaining citizenship, they might even be able to rise up to knighthood. It was a high risk, high reward scenario, and there were many battle ravers who sought it. With that in mind, it'd be dangerous for one to join a hero's party, even though it also worked as a long-term contract, and there was a chance they could achieve something truly great, so it wasn't that bad a deal.

Female battle ravers also seemed to be pretty common. Since the power of blessings boosted innate physical ability, it allowed women and men to fight on equal footing. It sounded crazy to me, but it was also commonplace for people to use ravers for sexual services, and some were even hired for that purpose from the very beginning. In this world, women had as much power and rights as men, so that aspect went both ways.

No wonder this world has so many aggressive noblewomen. You know, I never really thought of anything beyond bathing with a girl, but on second thought, this scenario of mine is starting to look a little half-baked. If I can't find anyone willing to meet my modest condition, then perhaps I need to take things a little further. With ravers, I could put my conditions on the table from the very beginning. Besides, when it actually came time to bathing with a woman, who said I'd be able to hold back? Despite my excuses, as I sat in the rattling carriage and mulled it over in my mind, I realized that I'd been feeling extremely excited ever since the previous day.

There was also talk about how demi-humans who were captured in battle sometimes became ravers as well. Due to that, there was always a chance one would appear at the raver market, but at the time, I didn't have the composure to think that far ahead.

"Sir Touya, we've arrived." Before I knew it, the carriage had arrived at the raver market.

I glanced out the window to see a towering building that looked like a giant coliseum. There was a stage within where the raver auctions supposedly took place, and inside the circular building that surrounded the stage were several business rooms that housed ravers split up by category.

After knocking on the door to the room I wanted to enter, the merchant in charge came out holding a small box filled with bundled-up papers and told me to sit down. The quality of the paper looked similar to *washi*, or Japanese paper. Apparently, it was used quite often in this world – introduced by the first sacred king, perhaps.

Doing as I was told, I sat down, and Mr. Butler walked up and stood next to me. He didn't say a thing to the merchant. *Is he just acting how a subordinate is supposed to?*

"Now, what sort of battle raver would you be looking for?" the merchant asked.

"Do you have any demi-human battle ravers?" Mr. Butler was the first to answer. When I looked at him, he turned to me and said: "They probably don't have many, so we should get this out of the way first."

I was really after a female battle raver, but I'd still happily check out a beast-eared female, so I decided to stay quiet and leave it to him.

"Demi-human battle ravers? I'm sorry, but..." the merchant began evasively.

Not only were they rarer, but demi-humans who became ravers were mostly captured for doing something bad, which meant that the bulk of them were criminals. Battle ravers were basically free, so becoming one was hardly a punishment.

"Most of the demi-humans become labor ravers. They get comparatively harder physical labor."

When I glared at Mr. Butler, he kept his cool and replied: "That's why I wanted to get this out of the way first." He probably already knew all this, and just thought it would be a nice bonus to actually find one. "In that case, could we see your human battle ravers next? The females, if you don't mind." Having given up on demi-human ravers, Mr. Butler quickly moved on to the next category.

The merchant did as he was told and started picking the female ravers out from his list, then suddenly stopped and gazed up at the ceiling, as if he'd remembered something. "That reminds me, we do have an unusual lizardman

among our labor ravers.”

“Unusual?”

“He sold himself to us. He said he’d do any manner of hard labor just as long as we bought him for a high price.”

“...Why would he say that?” Curious, I asked another question. “Do lizardmen bathe?”

“Um, if you’re asking whether he’s a swamp type or a desert type, he’s a desert type. A male sand lizardman.”

I thought it was a strange question upon posing it, but apparently the merchant didn’t think so, and gave me a thorough reply laden with terms unfamiliar to me. I later learned that lizardmen lived together in different settlements created by them. Swamp types constructed homes in wetlands and near riverbeds, while desert types lived in dry terrain. Both types were optimized for their terrains. Swamp types were great swimmers, while desert types had toughened bodies that allowed survival in harsh climates.

“Desert lizardmen don’t like moisture, so they don’t bathe. They do rinse regularly, though, so you don’t need to worry about them getting dirty!” the merchant explained.

“I-I see...” As the merchant leaned forward and tried to sell me the lizardman, I couldn’t help but recoil a bit. He must have thought I asked about bathing because I was worried about how filthy the lizardman might be. Things had certainly taken a strange turn, considering how I’d only come here in search of a female raver.

“And he isn’t a criminal raver?” Mr. Butler asked.

“Huh? Oh, no! No, of course not! He’s a very hard worker, and only came here because he wanted to make some money!” The merchant started rubbing his hands together as he answered the question. It was the first time I’d seen someone actually doing that.

With exaggerated gestures, the merchant continued to explain how there was nothing wrong with the lizardman. Did he have some vested interest in this? For whatever reason, he was desperate to contract this raver to someone, which

only ended up making the raver seem more suspicious in the end.

As if he'd been thinking the same thing, Mr. Butler interjected. "Are there any other problems with him?"

"Well, he *is* a demi-human raver, so he has no oath magic cast on him. That makes a lot of people nervous, you see..."

Oath magic. It was the first I'd heard of the term. I looked to Mr. Butler, who quickly noticed and started to explain.

"It's a type of cleric magic. When you cast it on someone, oath terms appear on their forehead. If they break the oath, they'll suffer extreme pain."

"That sounds horrible..."

"Really?" After he heard my honest feelings, Mr. Butler just stared back at me with a serious face. At first it sounded like this magic infringed on human rights, but when I heard his next line, I realized my error. "Oath magic is only allowed when criminal ravers are hired to do work. Without that, they'd be put to death, you know?"

"...I see." Hearing that, I had no choice but to agree.

It made sense, though. I'd certainly be too afraid to keep a criminal raver by my side without some sort of leash like that. Oath magic allowed people to turn criminals into ravers and punish them with work instead of death. It seemed cruel at first glance, but this oath magic was saving criminals' lives. And since most demi-human ravers were criminals, it made sense why so many people would feel nervous that the lizardman didn't have oath magic cast on him, even if he wasn't a criminal.

"Incidentally, can he fight?" Mr. Butler asked.

"He told us he was a warrior in his tribe, so I believe he can. But he said he needed a lot of money fast, so instead of becoming a battle raver, where he would only be hired temporarily, he became a labor raver, since it'd allow him a long period of employment."

"Hmm. What do you think, Sir Touya?"

Honestly, I wanted a female battle raver, but it was true that this lizardman

was a male that I wouldn't have to bathe with. It'd require a bit of courage for me to say 'No, please show me the women instead.'

"...Okay. Should I go to the labor raver room, then?" I asked.

"Oh no, I'll bring him right here at once!"

In the end, my curiosity won out, and I decided to meet this unique lizardman. Oh no, it wasn't because Mr. Butler and the merchant were glaring at me with disapproving eyes. Not at all. I'll admit that I was afraid about what Haruno and Sera would think if they found out, though.

According to the merchant, as long as the lizardman agreed, we could hire him as a battle raver even though he was registered as a labor raver. Apparently, it was normal for people to gather up strong labor ravers and use them as soldiers when they needed more help.

"As long as you aren't hiring me temporarily, I don't mind being hired as a battle raver."

That was the first thing the lizardman said once he entered the room. Perhaps it was because I was listening through a translation provided by the goddess' blessing, but he sounded surprisingly well-spoken.

He was kneeling on one leg, but looked close to two meters tall, or two stutes in this world's terms. He was muscular, with a large frame, and was apparently on the large end compared to other sand lizardmen. The area underneath his chin, his chest, and his stomach were all ribbed like a snake, while the rest of his body was covered in amber scales. Was it protective coloring? It seemed like that color would blend right in with the desert. He seemed a little forward-bent, and basically had the upper body of a human. His skeleton looked much different, especially on his lower half, and his legs reminded me of bipedal dinosaurs or perhaps even kangaroos. He had the face of a lizard, a large mouth filled with small fangs, and his horizontally long, scarlet eyes were staring right at me. Black lines enclosed his eyes, reminding me of the eyes of an Egyptian king. This was what a sand lizardman looked like. I had no idea how to judge them by looks, but he looked strong and brave. The only thing he wore was a loincloth to cover his lower hips. Apparently, it was common dress for lizardmen.

“May I first ask why you need money? I want to make sure it’s for nothing bad,” I asked.

Now that I had seen what a demi-human looked like, that was the next thing on my mind. According to the merchant, it was quite unusual for demi-humans to sell themselves.

“...Water. Right now, no rain is falling in the land where my people live.” The moment I heard the lizardman say that, I imagined a savanna where there were dry and rainy seasons. “We rely on a reservoir to survive the dry seasons, but this year, we were attacked by a large monster, and the reservoir got destroyed. We managed to kill the monster, but failed to recover the water we lost.”

“So that’s why you want water...”

“I asked the merchant to deliver to my people water equal to the price I sold myself for.”

I looked to the merchant, who promptly confirmed this with a file. “It appears that he made that agreement with the merchant in charge of the labor ravers.”

When ravers sold themselves, they could take the profits with them to their places of employment, or pay a service charge to have it delivered somewhere else. It certainly sounded like an emergency, so the lizardman had changed all the money into water and sent it off right at the start. It seemed like a bit of a special case, but the raver market had been happy to accommodate him.

“But will selling yourself suffice to buy enough water for your people to survive on?” Mr. Butler asked.

The lizardman shook his head sadly. “Absolutely not, but it’s better than nothing. At the very least, it’ll help some to survive.”

“I see you’ve put a lot of thought into this... Well, Sir Touya?” Mr. Butler turned to me. It seemed like it was time for me to decide on my purchase.

“Please buy me!” The lizardman looked straight at me and bowed his head deeply.

I’ll be honest here. Personality and ability-wise, I thought I’d struck gold. His

strong, muscular body was big, even for a sand lizardman, he was a warrior, and he also seemed to be a genuine, hardworking person. The public opinion of demi-humans must have been really bad if no one had bought him just because he didn't have oath magic cast on him.

But... I wanted a female raver to bathe with. And if it had to be a demi-human, then I at least wanted a girl with beast ears. Maybe I'd even settle for a lamia-type or a mermaid with fish scales, as long as she was beautiful.

I had never once wished for a bulky lizard guy.

Despite all that, I still managed to realize that my Unlimited Bath might have what it takes to save this lizardman's people. After all, it allowed people to bathe anytime, anywhere. As long as I had the MP to cover it, I could create as much hot water as I wanted, and even take it out from the bath. I couldn't become a permanent water tank for them, but perhaps I'd be able to help them until they got out of the crisis they were currently in.

Allow me to repeat: I wanted a female raver who I could bathe with. A beautiful, young girl. Pleasantly plump. Nothing like this buff lizardman.

But I didn't have enough courage to ignore someone in need of the help I could provide and say: "Give me a woman!"

"...Fine. I'll buy you."

"Thank you!" The moment he heard my voice, the lizardman's head shot up. Then, he bowed it back down so far it looked like he was going to kiss the ground.

"Ohhh! Then let us make a contract right away! However, I already sent the water out, so I won't be able to lower his price any further," the merchant added in a calculating tone. Not like it mattered – because I wasn't the one who was going to pay.

After giving the merchant a side glance as he prepared the contract, I called out to the lizardman, who was still bowing his head.

"I don't think I got your name. I'm Touya. What's yours?"

The lizardman raised his head and looked straight at me as he answered. "I'm

Rulitora, a warrior of the Torano'o tribe... Or I was, at least. It's very nice to meet you." As he introduced himself, I saw that his scaled tail was covered in black stripes.

"Now, I'll bring out the female ravers," the merchant said.

"No, that's enough."

"...Are you sure?"

After buying Rulitora, I took him and Mr. Butler to the craftsmen's town. I could have purchased a female raver as well if I'd wanted to, but I couldn't bring myself to say it. How could I just help someone and then say "Now, I'd like a woman to bathe with me?"

Soon, we arrived at the weapon smith. Rulitora had always used a spear back home, and said that the ones at this smith felt too light. Once he heard that, a competitive fire started to burn in the blacksmith's eye, and he pulled out a large glaive, a long weapon with a single-edged blade on the end, which was extremely difficult for a single human to carry.

Rulitora picked up the super heavy masterpiece as if it was nothing, and gave it a few sharp swings. Even to my amateur eyes, these swings looked much different from those made by someone swinging a light weapon.

"I guess you like it?" I asked.

"Yes. This feels much better." I could sense how happy Rulitora was.

Yep, this is definitely a buy. I had the blacksmith put a scarlet cloth on the joint of the blade to match Rulitora's eyes, then bought a hand ax and a knife for him.

After leaving the weapon smith in high spirits, it was time for us to pick out armor. Since Rulitora's body was covered in scales, he wouldn't be able to wear any clothes under his armor, so that meant metal armor was out. Meanwhile, leather gear would only be a downgrade from his naturally protective scales.

In the end, I bought him a set of half plate armor made from a giant scorpion's carapace. It was a monster native to Rulitora's land that also possessed a carapace that was as strong as steel. As long as the armor was

created from natural sources, we could use the perverted master Ficus' magic to prevent any chafing, which would allow Rulitora to wear it without any clothes underneath.

The armor would all have to be made-to-order, so it seemed like it'd end up being a little expensive, but again, I wasn't the one who had to pay. It might have been a problem if it became really expensive, but Mr. Butler didn't say anything, so it must have been okay.

Lastly, I bought him a change of clothes from perverted genius Ficus' famous brand – a few simple robes and some spare copies of the loincloth he had been wearing.

After we left the smith and Rulitora changed into a robe, we headed to the temple. The people there seemed surprised to see Rulitora, but after I explained that he wasn't a criminal raver, they calmed down.

When I introduced him to Haruno, she ended up running and hiding behind Sera's back. After we spoke a bit, she calmed down and laughed at herself a little. "I'm about to depart, so I need to prepare myself for even bigger surprises, don't I?"

Rulitora was assigned to the room next to mine. Before he went in to rest, I took him to the temple elder's office and explained how I was a hero who had been summoned from another world. "The problem is my gift... Oh, I guess it'd be easier if I just showed you," I said, then created a door to the Unlimited Bath on the wall.

The moment he saw the door, Rulitora instantly poised himself. He was definitely fast.

"You don't need to worry. This is my gift, the Unlimited Bath. Look inside."

After I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath and went inside, Rulitora cautiously moved up to the door and carefully peered inside – then scowled and pulled back. It appeared that the steam of the Unlimited Bath didn't mix with sand lizardmen.

"Is this a human bath? I've never seen one before."

"Yeah, this is what they look like in my world. With this, I can take a bath

anywhere, anytime I want. That's the only thing I can do. Can you believe they expect me to fight the demon lord with this? Hilarious, right?"

"I-I suppose..." Rulitora hesitated to join in as I made fun of myself. I imagined the gift seemed even more worthless to him, since he never bathed.

"But it also allows me to do this," I said, as I turned the faucet and filled a wash bowl up with water. "Look. The temple elder used his magic to confirm that it's safe. Tasteless, odorless, completely pure water!"

"Pure water?" Rulitora took the wash bowl from me and pensively stuck a finger into the water. "Y-You're right... It was so humid in there, yet this water is cold! And so is this vessel!"

Even the wash bowl had surprised him. After all, it was plastic, so it must have looked like something bizarre. I'd long since gotten used to it, but even the temple elder and his aides had acted the same way when they first saw it, too.

"The Unlimited Bath can create as much water as my MP will allow. Do you know what that means?"

When he heard this, Rulitora looked up at me. It seemed that he had figured it out. "With this, my people could make a new reservoir!"

"Just so you know, I can't keep supplying water to you forever."

"That's fine, as long as we have enough to get through the crisis!"

"Yeah, that should be manageable. That's why I chose you." When I said that, Rulitora placed the bowl down, then knelt before me and bowed his head respectfully. "Thank you so much, Sir Touya. I, Rulitora, pledge my loyalty to you!"

"Thanks, Rulitora. I'm a total amateur when it comes to adventuring and fighting, so I'll be counting on you."

"Yes sir!"

It had been even more effective than I was hoping – now he sounded more like my subordinate, rather than my ally. But he'd always acted like a proper raver from the start, so I wasn't really worried. We hadn't known each other for very long, but I could already tell he was a very sincere person. I was happy to

accept Rulitora's demeanor, since it meant that I had found myself a trustworthy ally.

"But finding a third party member is going to be even harder now," the temple elder said. "An average warrior will only serve as a nuisance to a powerhouse like that. You're going to have to think of a new approach."

"...Are you serious?"

Those with skills aside from fighting probably went down completely different career paths, unless they were extremely curious about the adventuring lifestyle. It made perfect sense.

"Um... I'm sorry?" Rulitora stammered.

"No, Rulitora, you don't need to apologize for anything."

I had the temple elder make a status card for Rulitora. His was light purple, and he was already at Level 29, a whole level higher than the temple elder.

My card was green, but the temple elder's was also purple. According to him, colors went in this order: green, blue, purple, red, orange, then, when someone surpassed human boundaries and got to Level 50 or above, their cards turned gold permanently. Not even the temple elder had ever seen a gold card, but legend claimed that the first sacred king had possessed one.

Instead of automatic updates, status cards had to be updated manually at a temple. It cost quite a bit to get a new card issued, but simply updating was cheap. Some nobles created status cards for newborn babies and updated them every year in order to celebrate their growth.

On Rulitora's status card, I could see that he had hardly any MP, but his other stats were pretty high. His HP, STR, and VIT were all even higher than the temple elder's, but his TEC was the highest. He had average MEN for a Level 29 person, but it certainly wasn't low. According to the temple elder, Rulitora had a standard warrior build, and his scores were all impressive.



With that in mind, I understood how instead of lining another average warrior up beside him, simply letting Rulitora swing his glaive around like a madman would allow him to unleash his full power as my front line. I could let Rulitora take the front and line another person up next to me, but in that scenario I'd need to get stronger myself, or I'd end up dragging my partner down.

Also, I still hadn't mustered up enough courage to ask for a female raver to bathe with me. I could have just looked for a non-warrior party member, but I'd still need to ask them if they'd be okay with bathing together. And if I could do that, then I wouldn't have needed to purchase a raver to begin with.

In other words, I had taken a huge leap back from my bathtime dreams.

The next several days went peacefully, without any big incidents. The one piece of noteworthy news was that Natsuki Kannami, who had gone undefeated in his search for party members, had finally been bested by the kingdom's greatest military leader, an elderly old general. Natsuki Kannami had asked the old general to train him then and there. The old man agreed, passed on his inheritance to his son, and joined Natsuki's party as a means of 'retiring.' It sounded so dramatic – painfully melodramatic, that is. I wondered if Natsuki's status card had turned blue already. Apparently, they'd both decided there weren't any more strong people in this kingdom, and had already departed. I felt like Rulitora would be powerful enough to take them on, but I guess they hadn't taken a look at the raver market – in a way, Rulitora and I had both been very lucky.

I was doing pretty well, too, aside from finding party members, that is. Rulitora had taken part in my training with the temple elder, and I'd learned how to use a basic light-elemental cleric spell called Summon Light Spirit. It summoned a spherical light spirit which could be used to attack enemies. It wasn't what I had imagined – but that was *my* problem. I needed to be able to heal with my cleric magic, or there would be no point in having it, so I learned another spell: Healing Light. This was a basic healing spell, and could heal any wound that the caster could touch. As long as I managed to successfully summon the spirit at the start, I'm sure I'd be able to get used to the rest with time.

After increasing my water stock daily, I got a sense for how much MP it sapped from me. Using magic or my gift required MP, and I started to feel mental fatigue after I dropped below 50%. When I dropped down to a third remaining, physical inertia set in. In the beginning, I didn't know how to pace myself, and often used up so much MP that it left me immobilized. According to the temple elder, in those moments, I had been down to 10% MP remaining.

If someone ever used up all of their MP, it would knock them unconscious, which made it virtually impossible. A good night's rest was enough to recover MP. Depending on how much was lost, one night might not be enough to recover everything, but it was currently working for me.

In other news, my hose was almost complete. Rubber existed in this world, but if they tried to make it as hard as a Japanese hose, it'd end up too stiff to bend. That might have been perfect for the part that attached to the faucet, but in the end, a craftsman suggested using sea monster intestine covered in skin to create the hose.

'Sea monster' was the term they used to refer to all giant monsters that lived in the sea. Their smell wouldn't pass into the water, and it was durable enough to keep the water from spilling out, so it seemed like I had acquired a first-rate hose. The water skins I had bought the other day were also made out of sea monster skin. Apparently, it was common sense for all travelers to carry two skins: one filled with water, and one filled with alcohol.

Meanwhile, Haruno was in a tough spot. A ton of people had gathered up around her, claiming that they wanted to 'join the heroine's party.' Sons of nobles were spilling into the temple non-stop.

Cosmos was protected by the princess, while the other two heroes had already departed. And since my condition was so 'special,' perhaps everyone just thought that Haruno was their last chance. Haruno understood that, so she went out to meet every single person – and refused them all. After seeing how exhausted she was, I suggested having Rulitora give them a skill test to turn them all away, but she refused that as well.

I asked her why, but she just said she had her reasons. Perhaps she merely wanted to get out of this mess on her own. She had enough energy to come to

my room and complain every night, so I assumed she was still okay. Actually, I was happy that she had chosen me as her complaint box. Still, there were some pretty tenacious people out there, and things had gotten so bad that Haruno couldn't even walk outside of the temple in peace.

Thankfully, the temple elder came to her rescue and ordered a group of people known as the Goddess of Light Pilgrims to guard her. It was a group solely composed of women who visited temples in various lands in order to 'allow the Goddess of Light to borrow female clerics in order to descend to the people,' and there were even some female temple knights among them. Since their main purpose was to journey around and help people in a world where monsters ran rampant, they had filled the group with the most skilled members of the temple. They had been contacted immediately after Cosmos was attacked, and the nearest faction had just arrived in the nick of time.

The pilgrims who had come to guard Haruno and I and were also some of the party member candidates that the temple had recommended. But since I already had Rulitora and was busy cooping up inside the temple with my training, I just wanted them to focus all their efforts on protecting Haruno. Of course, the Unlimited Bath was still in the back of my mind. It'd be more than a little difficult to go up to the female temple knights in their prim and proper white uniforms and say: "Please bathe with me." In the end, Haruno started going out of the city daily with the pilgrims in order to train – partly so that she wouldn't cause any more trouble for the temple. People treated the Goddess of Light Pilgrims as vessels of the goddess, which meant that they possessed great authority. Angering them meant angering basically everyone else in the vicinity. This rendered the noble families' sons powerless, which certainly put me at ease.

Several more days passed, until yet another incident occurred. This time, though, it wasn't a bad incident. While training outside of the city, Haruno had managed to save a girl who had gotten attacked by a group of monsters.

"All I really did was embrace the girl and shiver, though..." Haruno said bashfully, but I still thought she deserved praise simply for not running away.

Sera and the pilgrims were the ones who actually fought the monsters. On top of that, when one of the monsters lunged for Haruno, the one who destroyed it

was none other than the girl she had saved.

“Umm... Allow me to introduce my new party member,” Haruno said, then guided in a girl who had been hiding in her shadow.

She was petite, with cocoa-colored hair that came down to her shoulders, and only stood as tall as my chest. She also wore a rough-looking cloak that looked a bit too big for her tiny body.

“Her name is Rium. She can use magic!”

“...I’m Rium. Nice to meet you.”

“Uh, nice to meet you, too, Rium.”

Rium’s self-introduction had been brief, and she hadn’t moved a muscle in her face as she spoke. I guessed that she was just the calm, silent type. I wasn’t sure of Rium’s status, but she looked like a little girl, so I spoke on a first name basis right from the start, and she didn’t seem to mind. I later learned that she had journeyed here from Athena, another kingdom in the Olympus Alliance, after garnering an interest in the rumors about the newly-summoned heroes.

Sera put a hand on Rium’s shoulder. She looked really happy. “She’s only 14, yet she’s already become a skilled crystal mage.”

“Crystal mage?”

I soon learned that Rium could use what was called ‘crystal magic,’ which had the power to create magic items. The name came from how the mages used special crystals charged with magic, otherwise known as magic crystals, to create all sorts of different things. When Rium defeated the monster that attacked Haruno, she’d pulled what had looked like a silver skewer from her pocket. In the next moment, she’d transformed it into a silver spear and skewered the monster. On a side note, the tools used to make status cards were all created by crystal mages.

Still, if Rium was 14, that’d make her a second-year in middle school in my world. Visually, the small girl looked like an elementary schooler. She seemed rather cold, especially in contrast to how giddy Haruno and Sera were. They both must have thought Rium was the most adorable girl they’d ever seen, and perhaps they were even starting to look upon her as a little sister.

From the next day on, Haruno's party started training in the temple courtyard. The temple elder had convinced her to train within the temple grounds since it was so dangerous outside. While I was busy tending to my daily duty of carrying water out from the bath, Haruno and Sera took on Rulitora in sword training. I readjusted the location of my door so that I could watch them as I worked.

Haruno looked very dignified when she held a sword – and very cool. I had heard that she used to do archery, but it was hard to believe that she'd been a complete swordfighting amateur until a dozen or so days ago. Haruno's movements already looked clearly sharper than Sera's.

"B-but you're making good progress too, Sir Touya!" One of the temple servants encouraged me as they waited for the current barrel to fill up with water.

It was true that compared to when I had first started, I could keep up with Rulitora and the temple elder much better now. But I had no intention of getting conceited and believing that I actually had some sort of hidden potential. Haruno probably wasn't a hidden sword master either. Like the temple elder said, it was all thanks to the blessings we'd received from the Goddess of Light, the most sacred being in this world. At first glance, Haruno looked like a quiet young lady, so watching her gallantly swing a sword toward a huge lizardman made for a pretty impressive scene.

Meanwhile, Rium became interested in the Unlimited Bath for some reason, and had gone inside. Within the bath, there was only a single curtain that separated the bath from the changing area. At that moment, the curtain was open. I had placed the barrel in the changing area, and was using the shower to fill it up with water as I sat next to it on a plastic chair I had brought in from the bath area. Where was Rium? Well, she was crawling in the bath area, seemingly unconcerned by how wet she was getting, and staring intently at a certain object.

"What is this?" she asked, snapping my eyes away from Haruno's training. In her hand, she held a shampoo bottle.

"That's shampoo," I answered. "It's basically soap that's meant for washing

hair.”

“...But it feels like there’s liquid inside,” she said, as she shook the bottle next to her ear and tried to listen to what was happening. Her eyes made it seem like she was confronting me about something. Since liquid soap didn’t exist in this world, it must have seemed like I was lying.

“No, I’m not lying. Here, give it to me, and stick your hand out.”

Rium suspiciously handed the shampoo bottle to me. When I pressed down on the nozzle and a little shampoo squirted out onto her tiny hands, her eyes grew wide. She probably didn’t even understand how the nozzle worked.

Next, I scooped some hot water out from the bath and trickled it over her hands. “Here, try lathering it up.”

“...Like this?” As Rium moved her hands around, they slowly became covered in white bubbles.

The soap in this world was more primitive than what I knew, and didn’t lather up this beautifully. The male servants who were still waiting for the water to fill up also curiously gazed at the bubbles. As Rium stared at it, her eyes lit up. Despite the fact that she had been so curt up until now, I felt like I was finally starting to see traces of an expression that befit a girl her age – it even looked a bit childish. *No wonder Haruno and Sera find her so adorable.*

“Hey, don’t eat that! It isn’t cream!”

The moment I saw Rium pop open her mouth and move some bubbles toward it, I frantically stopped her. As I quickly washed off the bubbles, Rium glared at me again, but for some reason, this time she looked strangely childlike and cute.

“What’s going on in there?” Finished with their training, Haruno and Sera peeked inside the Unlimited Bath. Rulitora hated the steam, so he was standing a bit behind them.

“Oh, well Rium just tried to put shampoo bubbles in her mouth.”

“Oh... Sorry. Rium, that isn’t food.” Once Haruno corrected her, Rium drooped and stared down at the ground.

She looked like a pouting puppy, so I tried to cheer her up. “I’m sure any other person from this world would’ve thought it was cream, too.”

“Perhaps. They don’t have much soap to begin with, and it doesn’t make many bubbles,” Haruno added. She bathed in the temple everyday, so I figured she knew what she was talking about.

“Touya...”

“Hm? What is it, Rium?” Rium yanked on my sleeve, so I crouched down and listened to her.

“It’s interesting. I want to try this bath from another world.”

“...What?”

“Rium?!” Haruno screeched.

Without warning, Rium had dropped a huge bomb on us, and it had left Haruno reeling.

Still, I could tell Rium was dead serious by the way she was staring so intently at me. It seemed like she really didn’t mind bathing with me. Haruno tried to talk Rium out of it, while Sera also fell into a panic.



“Um, Rium... I think you should wait to become better friends with him before you do something like that...”

“We aren’t friends?”

“No, you are! Touya’s your friend!”

“Then we can go in together!”

“But, um, that’s different!!” Haruno shouted, as she swung her arms up and made a big X. It was fun to see her acting so surprisingly unladylike and cute.

Unable to go on watching, Sera tried a simpler approach. “Rium, think about it for a moment. Bathing together means that you and Touya both need to get naked and sit next to each other in that tiny bath. Doesn’t that sound embarrassing?”

“No.”

“Well, it *is*! It’s extremely embarrassing! I’m getting embarrassed just thinking about it!”

Unfortunately, nothing seemed to work on Rium. Sera only seemed to be making herself more and more embarrassed with her own imagination. Even she had her dense moments. In contrast, the two of them made the ever-nonplussed Rium seem colossally brave. And I must say, I was starting to feel a bit sad at how desperately they were trying to change Rium’s mind. *Guess I shouldn’t have stared at their chests so much...*

“You need to be *better* friends than you are now!”

“I don’t understand.”

“Understand! Please!”

“Why do you keep shouting at me?” At last, Rium cocked her head and started questioning Haruno’s frantic protests.

In response, Haruno looked at me, and blushed again. Where had all her thunder gone?

“Umm...” I began. “If there’s something you don’t want me to hear, I guess I’ll just leave...”

“No, it’s not that! It’s nothing like that!” Haruno began swinging her arms madly.

Eventually, she seemed to calm down a bit. Clearing her throat, she looked back to Rium and started to speak in a quiet voice. “Rium, you aren’t a child anymore, so you need to take better care of yourself. Bathing together is something you can only do with someone you really trust.”

“You don’t trust Touya?”

“I’m embarrassed! I feel like I might be able to trust him, but that’s a completely different topic altogether!” So she *did* trust me. That made me a little happy. “And besides, you’ve just barely met him. You don’t know him enough to decide whether or not you can trust him, right?”

“...” Rium looked between Haruno and I, then slowly nodded, as if she understood.

Sera patted a hand on her chest in relief, then looked at me and bowed her head. “I’m so sorry for all the commotion, Sir Touya...”

“Oh no, it’s fine. More importantly, here. This is a present for you.” I handed a bath set that contained soap and shampoo to Sera.

“What? But this is...”

“If I run out, I can always just create more with my MP. And I’ve already proven that the items won’t disappear even if they get taken out from the bath. I also know that this soap is on a whole different level from the soap in your world.”

After watching Haruno for the past several days, I realized that her hair had lost the luster that I’d remembered seeing when I first met her. It was probably due to the lower quality of soap she was using. If she used the shampoo that came from my Unlimited Bath, I was sure her black hair would be shining again in no time.

“You know how to use this kind of shampoo, right? Don’t try to eat it like Rium did, okay?” I tried throwing in a little joke, but Sera listened to every word with a very serious face.

“It this really okay? It seems like such a valuable item...” She had a point. In this world, it was impossible to find such a thing. But I still wanted her and Haruno to use my soap.

“Well, as long as you only use it between yourselves, and don’t make a big deal out of it...”

“I understand. I would never do something to betray your trust, Sir Touya.”

“Okay, thanks. I trust you, too, Sera.” She was taking this all so seriously, I felt like I should be thanking her instead.

On second thought, this might lower my chances of getting to bathe with them... But it doesn’t seem like I’ll be able to for a while, so I’m sure this was the right decision.

“Thank you very much, Touya,” Haruno said.

“...Thanks.” Rium followed Haruno’s lead and came up and thanked me on her own.

“It hurts if you get it in your eyes, so ask Haruno how to use it, okay?” I told her.

As I watched them rejoice over the soap, a thought occurred to me. *If I had bought a female raver just so that I could have someone to bathe with me, I would have never been able to look them in the eyes ever again...* And so, I decided to make as much soap as I could and create a stock so that I could keep giving them lots and lots of presents.

In the days that remained before my departure, I went out to do some shopping and continued to train. I wanted to acclimate myself to this world as quickly as possible. I went with Haruno’s group, of course, who had three pilgrim knights guarding them. One of these three was a friend of Sera’s, and she was close to Haruno in age, so they were already on friendly terms. I feared that going out in full armor would make the townspeople afraid of us, but there were a lot of people walking around with battle ravers to guard them, so we didn’t even stand out. Rulitora, the giant sand lizardman who was walking beside us, definitely got the most attention.

One day, we went to the open café that served *con panna,* which I had visited

on the day of the festival. Haruno seemed to like it too, and her face kept breaking into a smile. *So far, so good.*

Rulitora struggled with the tiny cup, but he wasn't adverse to drinking coffee. Of course, I paid for everything. I wanted to get a grasp on the average cost of things in this world, so I used the money I'd made from selling water. Haruno tried to pay for her portion at first, but I was stubborn and told her that my honor as a man was riding on this. I paid for Rulitora as well, but only because I was his employer.

Next, in order to help Haruno get a sense for the price of things as well, we went shopping together. Since I was the more experienced one, I had no choice but to guide her. It really felt like we were on a date, so I was a little nervous.

While we were shopping, I got caught up in staring at her as she scanned the products lined up in the storefronts. *Should I try to hold her hand? No, if I tried something like that all of a sudden, it might make her hate me...* Then, as I continued to hesitate, I felt someone grab my hand.

"...Together." It wasn't Haruno, but Rium.

Before I knew it, she had Haruno holding her other hand, and seemed quite satisfied. As we walked on together, I couldn't help but notice how the three pilgrims watching us sighed in disappointment.

Several more days passed, until the hose I had ordered was finally completed. Covered in grey sea monster skin, it looked more similar to a fire truck hose.

I also had the craftsmen prepare me a rickshaw. I thought about what we'd need to do in order to get to Rulitora's homeland as quickly as possible. In the end, I decided that just having Rulitora run would be faster than using horses.

Once I packed the food and other items we'd bought into the rickshaw, we were finally ready to depart. We'd be leaving a bit earlier than Haruno, but this was in order to save Rulitora's homeland, so we had no choice. Besides, she had Sera, Rium, and the pilgrims with her. The same went for Cosmos – the more party members a hero had, the more time it took them to get ready to leave. But it was all worth it in my eyes, as long as it meant that Haruno would have a safe journey.

The temple elder offered to lend me a few of the pilgrims as well, but I turned him down. If the temple ordered them to bathe with me, they'd probably do it, but that's exactly why I couldn't accept it. Bathing with someone who was ordered to do so would be no different than bathing with a raver. Besides, if I got any more party members, we wouldn't be able to ride in the rickshaw. I wanted to save Rulitora's people as quickly as possible, then keep Haruno as safe as I could, and in order to complete both goals to the best of my ability, Rulitora and I had no choice but to go out on our own.

I'd already talked to Haruno about it, so it was a done deal. She said she felt guilty about how she was the only one who had so many people protecting her, but when I explained how the Unlimited Bath worked, she understood. When I closed the door to the Unlimited Bath, it became impossible to access from the outside. I even had the temple elder do a little experiment – not even magic could trace it. This also made it impossible for me to make contact with the outside, but if it was Rulitora fighting, he'd probably be better off without me there to drag him down. The Unlimited Bath was cramped, so not many people would be able to hide inside at the same time. With that in mind, journeying as a party of two was definitely the best option.

The night before we departed, I rolled around in bed, unable to get Haruno out of my mind. Ever since she entered the Unlimited Bath that day, we'd discussed a lot. Haruno had been a first-year in high school back in our world. She went to a very prestigious girls' academy known even to me. She mentioned that she'd been in all-girl schools since she became a middle schooler, so she hadn't talked to a boy this much in a long time. It also turned out that she was the daughter of a politician. She'd always had that sort of high society air about her, but now I knew for sure that she was from a well-to-do family.

I didn't want to make her do all the talking, so I also told her about my family. I was just a normal second-year in a public high school, with a salaryman father and a mother who worked part-time. Honestly, we had nothing in common aside from the fact that we were both born in Japan – yet we had encountered each other in a completely different world.

It must be destiny. Am I being too romantic for my own good here?

I... think I like her...

Her glossy black hair and soft-spoken, docile demeanor... the fact that she had a good head on her shoulders, and a good upbringing... how strong she was deep inside, and how surprisingly funny she could be. When I thought about how the shampoo I created had helped her black hair regain the shine it'd temporarily lost, I felt proud. I couldn't deny the fact that I felt close to her since she was from my homeland, but she had also been a source of comfort to me over the past week.

Most importantly, I wanted to bathe with her from the bottom of my heart. I wanted to take out what she had imprisoned under her chest armor, her surcoat, and her cloak, and let them float in my bath. I wasn't joking around here – I was deadly serious. Haruno had been the reason I had decided not to buy a female raver to have someone to bathe with. I just wanted to bathe with Haruno, and no one else.

"Ahhhh! Owww!" Once I got to that point, I accidentally rolled off the bed and fell on the floor.

Spreading my arms and legs on the ground, I continued to ponder my problem. I was troubled – troubled about Haruno. I liked her, but if that was all there was to it, I wouldn't have needed to worry about a thing. We had shared a very fantastic meeting – it was a classic 'boy meets girl' scenario.

"But Sera's really nice, too..."

My problem was that Haruno wasn't the only one I liked. I knew how much effort Sera had put into helping Haruno. She had a very strong sense of responsibility, but that wasn't all. After all the teamwork they'd done, they'd most likely become best friends.

Sera wanted to help her friend. It was probably the most powerful emotion that Sera was feeling. She was so kind – and she was also 18, one year older than me, with blonde hair that reminded me of warm sunlight. Her wavy hair had become even more brilliant after she started using my shampoo. Her skin also looked tender and lustrous, and since she had a reputation as a young, beautiful cleric, it only made her look all the more radiant. But what stuck out most in my mind was the bountiful, round derriere that she hid beneath her

cleric's robes.

I wanted to bathe with her – not just with Haruno, but Sera as well.

"But how could I forget Rium?!"

I couldn't allow myself to neglect Rium, Haruno's other party member. She was only 14 years old, with straight, cocoa-colored hair that came down to her shoulders. In modern Japan terms, she'd be a second-year in middle school. Her petite frame made her look more like an elementary schooler, though.

Rium was just so lovable, and I wanted to adore her. She seemed stoic at first glance, but I knew that there was more to her. Her eyes lit up when she saw bubbly shampoo, and she showed me an expression that looked much younger than her age. I bet if I taught her about more things, that curiosity would glimmer in her eyes again. I would've never been able to do it in front of Haruno, yet I still sort of regretted not bathing with Rium when she had requested it. But it was too late now, and there was no sense in crying over it.

So, I don't just like Haruno... I like her entire party. How can I be so unprincipled? But no matter what I told myself, I couldn't forget the paradise I had seen in that dream. If I had to go on living with the Unlimited Bath, then I least wanted to try and make that into a reality.

As I firmed my impure resolve, someone knocked on my door.

"Um, it's me, Haruno. Are you awake, Touya?"

Haruno... She always comes to visit around this time. I hurriedly jumped up and let her in.

"Thanks..." She was in her pajamas, as usual, and held her gown closed with both hands. Perhaps it had just become an unconscious habit for her to always hide her chest. "Touya, your eyes..."

"Err, sorry!" Panicked, I looked her straight in the eyes and apologized.

"You're... a pervert, aren't you, Touya?"

"I can't deny that." After all, I'd just been dreaming about how I wanted to bathe with her.

"I guess that's a better answer than denial," she said with a sigh.

According to Haruno, she had the ability to sense ulterior motives within people. It was just something that came naturally to her. Due to that, she preferred it when people were open versus trying to hide something as petty as a glance toward the chest area. Of course, it would have been better to simply not look at all, but it was important to apologize honestly when one accidentally did.

“I have a request for you, Touya. You can summon light spirits, right?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah.”

“Could you try attacking me with one?”

“...What?” I stared at Haruno blankly.

This made her a bit flustered. “It’s fine, really, just try it.”

“Whoa whoa whoa, hold on a second here. I accidentally got hit by one in my training, and those things really hurt.”

“Please, just... trust me.”

“I do. Probably more than anyone else in this world. But this is different. There’s no way I’d ever be able to attack you, Haruno.”

As she listened, Haruno started to look a little embarrassed. In retrospect, I suppose I’d said something pretty big there. I was just being honest, though.

“Grr... You’re so mean, Touya.”

“I’d be mean if I actually attacked you.”

“Well... Yes, I guess you’re right.” After thinking for a moment, Haruno finally seemed to agree with me. “I’m sorry. Can you open up the Unlimited Bath instead, then?”

“Huh? Sure.” I didn’t know what she wanted, so I simply did as I was told and opened the door.

“Now then, if you’ll excuse me. Oh, Touya, please come inside as well. I want to use the water.”

“Okay.”

Haruno walked into the bath, scooped some hot water into a wash bowl, then

splashed it all over her face.

“Whoa!”

I had no chance of stopping her. I hastily handed her a towel, but she refused it with a hand gesture. When I looked at her hand, I realized something – she wasn’t the least bit wet.

“Look closely, Touya. I’m not wet at all,” Haruno said, then spread open her hands to show me. With that, her gown opened up a little, and I could clearly see just how big her hidden breasts were. “Not there!”

“S-sorry!”

“Come on...”

She was right. And it wasn’t just her hands – her beautiful black hair, porcelain skin, her gown, and her pajamas were all dry.

“What in the...?”

“Unlimited Reflection... I have the power to avoid influence from anything that’s created by MP. This means that no magic, magic items, or even gifts can touch me.” I’d heard all those terms before, and it made sense. I looked at her, and she nodded. “This is my gift.”

Haruno stared at me with serious eyes. It was such an amazing ability, I didn’t know what to say. Then, I realized something.

“Wait, hold on a minute! Haruno, if magic doesn’t work on you, then does that mean you can’t heal yourself with magic? That’s no good!”

“Oh, you don’t need to worry about that. If I choose to let it touch me, it will. Watch.” Haruno rolled up a sleeve and put her hand into the water. When she took it out, it was clearly dry. “It’s just like how you can open and close the door of your Unlimited Bath. In my case, this gift automatically reflects everything unless I focus on it.”

I passed a hand over my chest in relief – apparently, she *could* turn it on and off. “Phew... If your gift prevented magic from healing you, I would have stopped you at all costs from departing.”

“Sorry for making you worry.” Despite her apologetic tone, Haruno was

beaming.

Incidentally, after some time, it became impossible for Haruno to deflect soap and other things that had been taken out of the Unlimited Bath. Haruno suspected that it was because something created from MP had gone to being ‘an ordinary object.’ Over the past few days, Haruno had asked numerous times to give her soap – turns out that it was all part of an experiment to test out her gift.

“Well that’s news to me. But how come you decided to ask me for help? And tell me about your gift?”

“Um... You trusted me and told me about *your* gift, so I didn’t want to just keep mine a secret.” Haruno fidgeted as she answered my question.

It appeared that she had told me about her gift because she trusted me. The elder and the others knew about my ability, mainly because I didn’t see the point in hiding a gift like that, but apparently Haruno hadn’t taken it that way. Regardless, I was grateful that it had given me brownie points with her.

“Oh. Thanks, Haruno.”

“No, thank *you,* Touya.” After thanking each other, Haruno and I looked each other in the eyes and laughed.

Once we left the Unlimited Bath, I closed the door and made it disappear. Instead of returning to her own room, Haruno sat down on the chair in mine. Since I only had one chair, I sat on the bed.

“Touya, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“Is the reason you’ve been having trouble finding party members... because of your gift?” She hit the nail right on the head.

“Well, you know how small it is. I just can’t imagine myself bathing with another guy in there. I had the temple elder and his helpers enter in order to confirm how my gift worked, but I can’t really say it was any fun.”

“So that’s why you picked Rulitora?”

“Yeah, otherwise I’d feel guilty about not letting someone into the bath.

Rulitora hates damp places, so he can't enter baths like these, which means I can keep my conscience clear."

"I see..." Haruno nodded, then looked downwards as if she was thinking about something.

She was a smart person, so I worried about her figuring out my ulterior motive, but I also felt a little happy that she'd put so much thought into something related to me. Eventually, she brought her head up a bit and looked at me.

"...You'd really rather bathe with a girl, huh?"

Another bullseye. But I knew that hiding something would be the wrong decision here – so I decided to come clean about everything.

"Well, I'm a guy. If I had to bathe with someone, I'd rather it be a girl."

"So that's also why you went to buy a raver, huh?"

"...At first, I thought about buying a female raver. But not anymore. I'm done entertaining the idea of buying a raver just to bathe with me."

"Why is that?"

"If I did that, then I wouldn't be able to look you straight in the face." It made me really embarrassed to say this out loud, and I knew that my face had turned as red as a cherry.

Haruno was also blushing to an extreme degree. "...It's not fair for you to say something like that at a time like this," Haruno said in a pouty tone, as she pursed her lips.

"Really, I'm just telling you the truth!" I argued, desperate to get her to believe me.

It was the bare, naked truth. Haruno's face turned even redder as she looked downwards. It appeared that she believed me.

With her head down, she started to speak. "The truth is, at first, you scared me. You know, when I asked you to let me into the Unlimited Bath."

"Oh... Yeah, I guess that makes sense, considering what happened."

“But then you told me that there was no need to hurry, remember? That’s when I realized you weren’t so scary after all.”

Good. Seems like I made the right decision back there.

“You did some really considerate things for Sera and I after that, as well.”

“I just couldn’t ignore you,” I said, as I unconsciously averted my gaze. Now it was my turn to be embarrassed.

As I flitted my eyes around, I caught Haruno smiling and looking back at me. “It’s been fun so far. Thank you very much. I was happy to get all the soap, too.”

“No, the pleasure was all mine... I’m glad that that you got your beautiful hair back.”

“It’s all thanks to your shampoo, Touya.” Haruno looked downward again. Seeing her thank me so politely left me at a loss. Then, she smiled, and her expression turned serious. “Touya, I have something important to ask you.”

Bewildered at her sudden change in tone, I fixed my posture and got ready to listen to her. My Japanese instincts had me sitting cross-legged on my bed.

Haruno looked deep into my eyes. I felt so nervous as I waited for her to open her mouth again.

“Would you... like to bathe with me?”

I fell off the bed. “You got all serious for *that*?!”

“This is important! Extremely important! To me, at least!”

“Well, that may be so, but come on, look at how tense the situation got!”

“I just thought it’d be the proper atmosphere for what I was asking!”

“Urk...” Haruno’s momentum had left me reeling.

She had probably already figured out that I liked her. I hadn’t told her straight out, but I wasn’t hiding it, either. I didn’t know what was going on in Haruno’s mind, but if she considered the details surrounding my Unlimited Bath, there was no way she could feel indifferently to it. In other words, she was exactly right in approaching me this way.

I sat up straight and answered her honestly. “I want to bathe with you.”

As she listened to my words, Haruno turned her head down in embarrassment, and her face took on a fiery red color.

If I go any further, she might end up hating me. But I chose to be completely honest with her... Deciding that it'd be impossible for me to keep hiding things from her, I strengthened my resolve and kept speaking.

"I also want to bathe with Sera and Rium." Haruno's eyes went wide, probably either from shock or surprise.

I knew I shouldn't have said that! I thought, when suddenly, she burst out laughing.

"...I'm supposed to get angry here, aren't I?"

"Yeah, I mean I know I'm the one who said it, but it's okay to be angry, you know! The only reason I said it was because I felt like I wouldn't be able to hide it."

Right after she heard that, Haruno's face went blank. As I wondered what I'd said wrong, she asked me in an accusing tone: "Are you afraid of me?"

Apparently she thought I felt like I couldn't hide anything from her because I was afraid of her. Haruno was so sharp that I couldn't help but wonder how hard it must have been for her to deal with people up until now.

Again, I decided to take the honest route. "I'm afraid of you hating me because I hide stuff."

I was sure that Haruno wouldn't have liked it if I hid something from her, so I decided to be honest about everything. I didn't want her to hate me. I knew that what I was saying sounded crazy, but that was the biggest reason why I was saying it. I should have just done away with my impure desires, but if humans could purify themselves that easily, we all probably would have attained enlightenment by now.

Haruno let out a sigh, then started speaking in an awkward tone. "...Sorry. I was testing you, Touya."

"You already knew, huh?"

Haruno gave me a small nod. "If you had hidden the bathing stuff from me, I

probably would have had second thoughts about staying friends with you.”

Haruno seemed to feel bad about this, but considering it from her side, it was only natural that she’d want to ascertain that, and I wasn’t intolerant enough to judge her for it.

“But since you told me the truth, I feel like things look positive for your request, even if I may not be able to grant it right away,” Haruno said, then let out another sigh. “But I didn’t expect you to be so honest about Sera and Rium as well.”

“But you knew, right?”

“Well, yeah. Sometimes your eyes look really perverted...”

I was aware – that’s exactly why I decided to be completely honest with her, since I’d just end up giving myself away.

“What do you think I should do in this situation?” she asked.

“Uh, I don’t think I’m the right person to answer that.”

“Do you think I should bathe with you?”

After her possibly reconsidering our friendship, then thinking positively about it, this is where we had arrived at. Honestly, I was torn. I felt that if I let this chance go, like I did with Rium, I’d only regret it in the end. But at that moment, I only had one answer.

“I don’t want to bathe with you while you still have reservations.”

It may sound like I was being a wuss, but I wanted to treat her feelings with respect, even if it meant wimping out. Luckily, it seemed like she understood this.

As her cheeks turned a bashful shade of red, she gave me such a teasingly sweet look. “...You’re so unfair, Touya.” Although she averted her gaze again, she didn’t seem pouty like before. After a moment, she turned her face back to me. She looked a bit calmer. “I think I’ve been relying a little too much on you, since we’re from the same world and all.”

Of course, I also had special feelings for her because we were from the same world, but my feelings went much farther than that. “I’m in the same boat – but

that’s not the only reason I started to like you.”

“The same goes for me. You’re perverted, Touya, but I also know that you’re kind and trustworthy.”

We stared at each other in silence for a moment. I could feel my face getting hot. *Wait a minute... did we just confess our feelings for each other? And is it actually turning out to be a success?*

I had no words. I felt like if I got any closer to her, it might ruin everything, so I remained perfectly frozen on my bed. Haruno was still red, with a very meek expression on her face.

Eventually she looked up, and stared at me with serious, determined eyes. “What I’m afraid of... is getting to the point where I rely on you for everything.”

“But I never really...”

“No. We’re surviving now because the temple is supporting us, but it’s almost time for us both to depart,” Haruno said in a placating manner.

She was right. The only reason we were surviving now was because the temple was covering all of our living expenses. We wouldn’t be here right now if it weren’t for them. Perhaps I could have survived by selling water, but maybe that’s why Haruno felt like she would end up relying on me for everything.

“Honestly, I wanted to depart with you. But if I rely on you here, I’ll only end up making trouble for you.” Clearly, Sera wasn’t the only one in their group who had a strong sense of responsibility. “I want to get strong. Strong enough so that I don’t need to rely on you or my allies for everything.”

“I understand. I’ve only made it this far thanks to Rulitora as well.”

Despite the fact that Haruno and I were summoned as heroes, we still had a long way to go. My daily training with Rulitora had taught me that through and through.

“Once my party is ready, we’re going to travel to Athenapolis,” Haruno said.

“Rium’s homeland?”

“Yes. Apparently that’s where her teacher is. You’re going to Rulitora’s homeland, right, Touya?”

“Yeah, they’re in dire need of water. A perfect match for me and my gift, wouldn’t you say?”

Haruno agreed with a chuckle. “Touya, let’s meet again once we both get stronger.”

“Once we get stronger, huh? Sounds good to me.”

There’s no way I can fight the demon lord. Once I learned just how weak I really was, that thought never left my mind. *When I depart, I’m just going to be running for my life. But if I think about it as a way to gain confidence for the next time I meet Haruno, maybe it’ll give me a more positive outlook on my journey. I need to get stronger in this world. Rising in social standing is a good option as well. With power and capital, I’ll be able to take care of Haruno and her party members.* Just thinking about it made me smile.

“Are you thinking about perverted stuff again?” Haruno was so sharp. Or maybe my face was just that easy to read.

“I just thought that if I got stronger, I might be able to bathe with you, Sera, and Rium.”

“Oh, come on... Well, I’ll think about it. I can’t vouch for Sera and Rium, though.”

“Huh?”

Haruno looked straight at me, then nodded her blushing face slowly, as if she’d decided on something. After taking a few steps toward me, she pushed her body up against mine and moved her face in close. “We won’t see each other for a while, so I’ll just do this...” she said, then closed her eyes. It was plain to see that she was waiting for a kiss.

“Whoa, Haruno?!”

But she wouldn’t say anything, which left me at a loss for words as well.

If I don’t kiss her here, what’ll that make me? I shook off my embarrassment and pulled her body in so close that I could feel her soft, voluptuous chest pushing up against me.

My face is still a bit too far away, I thought, then put some muscle into the

arm I had around her waist and pushed us even closer together. Despite how formidable she'd looked when she was fighting, she had an unbelievably thin waist.

"...Haruno." With my heart beating in my chest, I moved my face in, closed my eyes, and pressed my lips to hers.

I had no recollection of how much time passed after that. Whether we stayed like that for a moment or an eternity, eventually, I slowly pulled my lips back, opened my eyes, and looked her in the face. She slowly opened her eyes as well and stared back. We were so close that we could feel the tickle of each other's breath.

As I stared at Haruno's pink cheeks and moist eyes, a thought rose into my mind. *I need to get strong enough to earn her respect.*

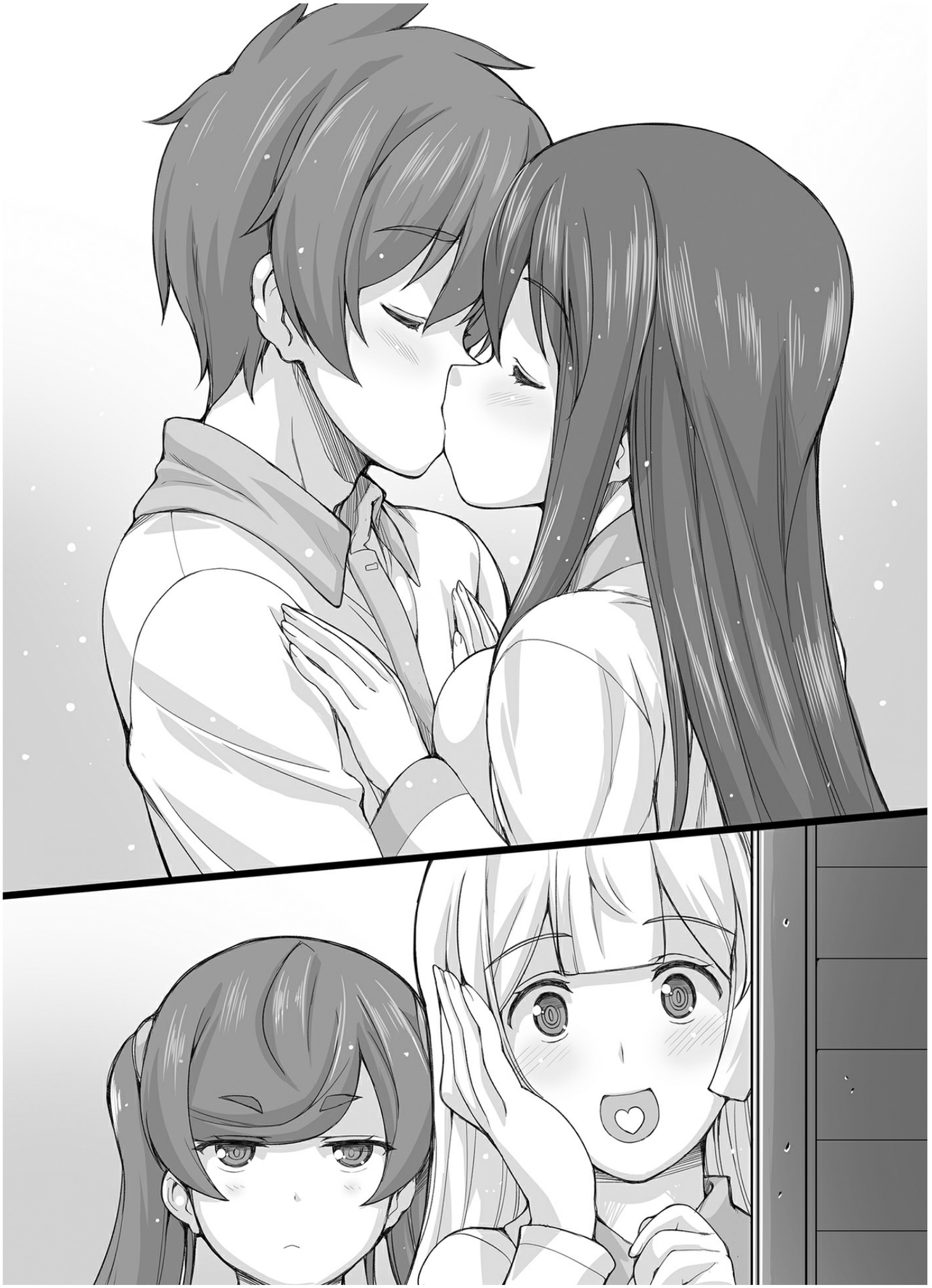
"Touya..." This time, it was Haruno who pressed her lips to mine.

We had said all we needed to. Just looking into each other's eyes and calling out each other's names was enough to make us happy. My heart was beating so fast. Back in my home world, I'd been pretty jaded when it came to love, but I think I simply never had a chance to really experience it.

I must be a really possessive person. Right now, I feel like I don't want to hand Haruno over to anyone. I even wish we could depart on our journeys together. But if I did that, I'd be preventing her from reaching her goal of getting strong enough to not have to rely on anyone, and that's the one thing I don't want to do. I'm afraid of the demon lord, but I don't just want my journey to be a means of escape. I want it to be a way for me to achieve one of my goals. And someday, I'm going to bathe with Haruno's entire party.

"...Your eyes look perverted again." Suddenly, Haruno was looking at me with accusing eyes.

"Yeah, I was thinking about bathing with you," I answered proudly, filled with indomitable confidence.



“I guess this is what they mean when they say love creates weakness.”

“You can say that again. Honestly, I don’t want to leave your side. I wish we could depart together.”

In response, Haruno gave me a dazzling smile. It was so adorable that it made me hug her with all my might. Haruno seemed surprised and shivered for a moment, but then quickly moved her arm around my body and hugged me back. I didn’t want to leave her, but I felt that if I didn’t let go soon, I would never be able to. We kissed one last time, reconfirming how we both felt, then pulled our lips apart.

Suddenly, I heard a rattle. Haruno looked toward the door, and my eyes quickly followed. We were inside the temple, so I doubted it was some kind of intruder, but I gave Haruno a dagger just in case, moved in front of her, and opened the door.

“Ha... Ha ha ha...” On the other side of the door we saw Sera, Rium, and the three temple knights.

Apparently, they’d been waiting there the whole time, hoping something would happen on our last night before we departed. *Hoping ‘something’ would happen?* It was obvious what they were after, although I couldn’t help but wonder how they were able to hear us.

Haruno quickly shot away from me and bowed her head down. I tried to play it off as best I could.

“Errr... Uhh, I’m sorry you all had to see that,” Haruno said.

“Oh no, it was quite the... Um, I mean...!” Sera stammered.

“Yeah, you don’t need to apologize for anything, Haruno! If anyone should be sorry, it’s me!” I shouted.

“But, Sir Touya, you seemed so serious and manly, even I... Err, wait, no!” Sera seemed really confused.

“Sera, just calm down. Deep breaths,” I said.

“Hooo, haaa...”

Following my advice, Sera raised both arms, stuck out her chest, and started breathing deeply. When she did this, her chest pushed up through the loose robe, allowing me to see its curves quite clearly. Next to me, Haruno hid her own chest with her hands and glared at me. It appeared that both Haruno and Sera had a habit of hiding their breasts.

Recently, however, I'd noticed something. Compared to Haruno, who purposefully made her big boobs hard to see, Sera had big boobs that naturally hid themselves from those around them. Due to that, Sera's sometimes unwillingly revealed themselves, such as with her deep breathing.

"Did that calm you down?" I asked.

"Yes. Please excuse me..." Finally calm, Sera took a long look at my face. "Hmm..."

"Is something wrong?" I cocked my head. It seemed like she was pondering something.

She lightly clapped her hands, then walked forward and embraced me. "I can't do it as well as Lady Haruno, but..." With that, Sera gave me a kiss on my right cheek. Unlike Haruno's straight, black hair, Sera had wavy blonde hair that lightly tickled my cheeks, making me feel like it was enveloping me.

Sera moved her head back, smiled at me, then showed me her right cheek. It appeared that she wanted me to return the favor. Nervously, I planted a kiss smack on her right cheek.

"Is it normal to say goodbye this way in your world?" I asked.

"What? No, not at all. I just got a little jealous of Lady Haruno, that's all."

"Uh... Okay."

"I'll bathe with you eventually as well, because I trust you, Sir Touya."

Sera's smile possessed not an ounce of malicious intent. Since she usually acted pretty casual around me, I took it in a positive light, hoping it meant that she trusted and admired me.

Next, Rium yanked on the sleeve of my tunic. When I looked at her, she whispered: "Come down."

I did as she told and crouched down beside her, then showed her my left cheek. Rium hesitated for a bit, then squinted as if she'd made up her mind and kissed my cheek. Unlike Sera's, it was a long kiss.

After she pulled her face away, Rium looked embarrassed and restless. She also couldn't seem to bring herself to show me her cheek. In retaliation, I kissed Rium on both cheeks and her forehead, then squeezed her tiny body in close and patted her on the head. She looked so cute as her eyes bugged out in surprise.

"You be careful, too, Rium. Make sure you get along with Haruno and Sera, you hear?" After I let her go, looked her in the eyes and said that, Rium simply nodded her red face over and over.

Next, I took out something I'd prepared in advance: shampoo and soap that I'd stored up from the Unlimited Bath. With this, Haruno and her party members' hair would remain protected. When the three temple knights saw that, they cheered. They must have been fans of my soap as well. I had given Haruno's party so much that they could easily let the pilgrims use some as well. When I told this to the three knights, they were overjoyed, and thanked me with beaming faces.

After they finished thanking me, Haruno shot me an exasperated look. "...You were pretty popular even back in your own world, weren't you, Touya?"

"Not one bit. You're the first person I've ever kissed, you know."

I was certainly getting carried away – but they seemed to be fine with it, which just gave me more courage. I knew that I'd never be able to do any of this back in my home world.

"I-It was my first time, too! So, um, once more!" Did seeing me kiss the other two spur this on – was she merely jealous? Either way, Haruno and I moved toward each other again for one last, intense kiss.

The three knights cheered once more. But once Haruno and I continued to peck at each other, once, twice, thrice, their cheers grew softer, until nothing but silence enveloped us. That was how I ended the final night before my departure.

The next morning, Rulitora and I updated our status cards. I had gotten to Level 7. My stats had all gone up, while my MP had skyrocketed. Level represented strength, which meant this was all thanks to my training. The reason my MP had gone up so high was probably because I had been creating water and soap every day. Meanwhile, Rulitora's level and stats had hardly changed at all. It seemed that it became harder and harder to rise to each new level, so the training that took me to Level 7 had meant hardly anything to him.

On that day, we were going to depart from Jupiteropolis and head to Rulitora's homeland in the southern wasteland. I felt sad about leaving, but I knew that I couldn't stay here forever if I wanted to achieve my goal.

I held my head up high and walked to the entrance of the temple.

"Touya, you're smiling." Haruno poked my cheek.

"Whoops." I tried to make my face look more serious. "But you are, too, Haruno..."

"What, r-really?! Sera, I don't have any hickeys, do I?" Haruno said with a grin.

"You're fine. Wait, does that mean you two were kissing again this morning?"

"Sir Touya, please get in," Rulitora called to me.

"Okay," I said as I got into the rickshaw.

These were more common in town than carriages. It looked like a slanted bowl, where the passenger sat on a blanket thrown over all the luggage. Due to this, one had to carefully pack things so that whatever was on top could act as a cushion. It could probably fit two or three people without any luggage, but currently it could barely hold one.

I was wearing a brigandine on my torso, vambraces to protect my arms, gauntlets to protect my wrists, greaves to protect my legs, and an open-faced helmet. I placed my broad ax and large round shield next to me on the blanket, so that they were within an arm's reach. I also had my dagger strapped to my side as a secondary weapon. On top of all my armor, I was wearing a surcoat, mainly to keep sunlight from heating up my metal armor. I had picked a magical one that was especially resistant to heat.

At long last, all my preparations were finally complete. As the children I had bathed threw confetti into the air, we left the temple, accompanied by the cheers of all the people who had come to see us off. They had all gathered to watch the Hero of the Goddess depart. Upon closer look, I spotted Kopan, the water merchant who'd helped me save up some money, and the owners of the shops that I'd visited along with Haruno and the others.

Rulitora gazed into the crowd. It seemed as if he had noticed something as well.

"Hmm..."

"What's wrong, Rulitora?"

"No... It was probably just my imagination."

"Oh. Huh? Isn't that the guy from the raver market?"

"Yes, it is. And the person next to him is the labor raver manager who took care of me."

Slightly left from where Rulitora was gazing, I found the raver market people. I also spotted the weapon and armor smiths as well. It looked like everyone who'd taken care of us in the Sacred Capital had come to see us off, and I felt very grateful.

I looked back once more, then looked to Haruno, who was standing next to the temple elder and Mr. Butler. Haruno, Sera, and Rium were all waving their hands side by side. Around them, the three female knights had raised their swords in the temple's customary salute. Looking at them from a distance, I could tell what fine knights they all were.

I need to get stronger, so that I can hurry back and pick up Haruno's group. With determination pounding in my heart, I set off on my journey across this fantastic world.

Bath Break

“Tch... He’s a sharp one...” I muttered as I watched the Hero of the Goddess from the shadow of a building.

The lizardman suddenly glanced in my direction. Had he noticed me? Or was it just a coincidence? I quickly hid myself, so I doubted they’d find me, but I was still on edge.

My name was Maius, a demon who had infiltrated this kingdom. I hadn’t transformed into a puny human, though. All I needed to do to stay incognito was wear a cloak and keep my hood low. Humans were just so stupid. I had originally come here with a superior, but she’d messed up while attacking another hero and had since vacated the premises, which meant I was in charge now.

I was stronger anyway, so I didn’t mind. After sending some subordinates out to track the hero and the lizardman, I discovered they were heading south. That was bad. I hoped they weren’t heading for the southern wasteland. That would be bad.

The humans called it the ‘the void’ and mostly ignored it, so why was he heading there? Did he know about the secret? If the Goddess of Light had given him some kind of sign, it could be possible. Ever since 500 years ago, that Goddess of Light had been up to no good. That must have been why he was heading there.

I didn’t have many monsters inside the city, but I had stationed a hundred outside it. Two versus a hundred. All I needed to do was attack him before he reached the wasteland. I’d be able to catch up to that plodding rickshaw in no time, and since my boss wasn’t around, if I defeated the hero, the glory would all go to me. *Heh heh heh. My day’s finally come! Time to show the world the power of the great Maius, strong enough to be the demon lord’s right hand – no, to rival even the demon lord himself!*

Third Bath – Skinship

Beyond the gate of Sacred City Jupiteropolis lay a massive meadow. Far in the distance, I could see mountains, while the deep green that filled the gap between the plains and the mountains looked like a forest.

Finally, my adventure had begun.

A gravel road that continued as far as the eye could see instantly filled me with butterflies. Beyond this road lay the mixed bathing paradise I'd been dreaming of.

Yes, I could open up the Unlimited Bath anytime I wanted, but it was more of an emotional thing. Noticing my change in expression, Rulitora turned back and called to me as he continued to pull the rickshaw.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, it's just that I lived in a much bigger, crowded place than Jupiter. Seeing all this nature is a rare sight for me."

"I see. It's too bad I can't take it slow and let you enjoy the scenery, then..." Rulitora cocked his head, as if he wanted to say more.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Truth be told, I felt like something was watching us when we left the temple." Rulitora slit his eyes as he answered.

"You think it's the nobles I turned down?"

"No... It ran away before long, but I feel like it wasn't human."

"...What?" The moment I heard Rulitora's reply, I remembered the story about Cosmos the Hero getting attacked. *They'd said the demons had attacked Cosmos and then retreated. If that was so, then was there really only one demon lurking in the city?*

"Who do you think the monster would go for first, between Haruno and I?"

“You first, for sure. Lady Haruno is currently the most well-protected out of all the heroes, since she has the Goddess of Light Pilgrims on her side.”

Which meant that I was the target. I didn’t just want to enjoy the scenery, I wanted to take a walk and feel the fresh dirt beneath my feet, but there was no way I was going to even attempt that now. I didn’t have time to be discouraged, though. I needed to figure out a way to deal with our mysterious pursuer.

“Rulitora, run as fast as you can. I don’t mind if it’s a bumpy ride. We need to cover some ground while there’s no one around.”

“Are you sure? It might get really shaky.”

“I don’t get carsick easily, and if that’s all it takes to keep us safe, who am I to complain?” I said, then added one more thing. “Oh, and you don’t need to worry about leaving tracks. I don’t want the monster to lose us and go after Haruno’s party instead.”

The ideal situation would be to let the demon track us while also preventing it from catching up to us.

“Yes sir!” I saw an energetic gleam in Rulitora’s eye, and we soon became one with the wind.

I don’t remember much of what happened that day. I do remember regurgitating my lunch in a very over-the-top fashion, though.

When we crossed the mountains on the next day, it was a much smoother ride in the rickshaw, since the mountain trail prevented Rulitora from running at top speed. That kept me from getting carsick, and I was even able to enjoy the scenery a little. Since the path was lined with trees, that was pretty much all I could see, but the sound of the wind passing through them and the birds chirping intermittently was enough to entertain me.

Thanks to that, I really enjoyed dinner. We had the same menu as yesterday – vegetables and beans served with a soup cooked with bread, sausage, and smoked meat similar to bacon, but it tasted way better than yesterday. Apparently, the smoked meat had been prepared using the meat of a lesser boar. It looked exactly like bacon, so that’s how I decided to refer to it.

My lack of an appetite had prevented me from eating much, so I had Rulitora

eat over half my plate on the first day, but in the mountains I was finally able to eat my fill. Once I had the chance to actually enjoy my food, I realized I'd want a bit of variety in the future, which meant that I either had to improve my cooking skills or find a party member who was a good cook.

"Sir Touya, it appears that someone's following us after all."

"Really?" I hadn't noticed at all. *Can Rulitora sense auras or something?*

"Our pursuer closed in on us several times before we entered the mountains."

"How many more days will it take us to reach your homeland, Rulitora?"

"About two days, once we get past the mountains. If I speed up, I may be able to get us there in only one."

"...Let's speed up, then."

"The ride will get rough again..."

"It's either endure two days, or one really hard day, so I guess I'd prefer one."

I could see Rulitora was worried about me, so I forced out a smile. It may sound stupid now, but at the time, I was wondering if maybe withstanding all the shaking would somehow boost my VIT and MEN a little.

When I got out of the Unlimited Bath the next morning, I could see the other side of the mountains, illuminated by the morning sun. There were no trees or grass – it was a wasteland, as far as the eye could see. This was the 'void' located to the south of the Sacred City.

Ever since the day I bought Rulitora, I'd been researching it. Okay, okay, it was the temple clerics who did the actual research. I just listened to their reports. The void had gained its name from the fact that it was a completely barren wasteland with a desert in the center. After looking at the map, I discovered that it lay on the south end of the Olympus Alliance, and was shaped like a malformed diamond that continued all the way to the sea. One of the clerics who'd done the research claimed that the only reason it hadn't spread to the north was because the mountains stood in the way.

Additionally, legend had it that there used to be a desert kingdom in the center of the desert in the middle of the void, but it eventually fell to ruin due

to an event that had also turned the void barren in the process. After that, the sand lizardmen and the monsters were the only ones who had remained in the desert. Some theories even went that the sand lizardmen had descended from the original rulers of the kingdom.

Hearing talk of a fallen kingdom really excited the adventurer inside me, but unfortunately no information on the kingdom was found at the temple. According to the clerics, the rumors were all unfounded wives' tales, and no one was even sure if such a kingdom had existed in the first place. Apparently, superstitions existed in fantasy worlds as well. It was a bit disappointing, but on second thought, there'd be no way a complete amateur would ever be able to make it to a place like that, so I figured it was all for the best in the end. *Right now, I need to focus on saving Rulitora's homeland.*

As I prepared for breakfast, I called out to Rulitora. "Is your homeland beyond this point?"

"Yes, I'm sure everyone's gathered up near the rebuilt reservoir."

It turned out that Rulitora's people didn't have a set village – they were nomads. The environment was already harsh in the first place, so it was no surprise that losing their water source had put them into a crisis. The reason they couldn't leave the empty reservoir was because there was no water to be found anywhere else at the time being.

We reached the desert by morning, yet it was already hot. I took Rulitora's advice and removed my armor before I got in the rickshaw, in order to prepare for the heat. Soon, Rulitora was running at full speed again for the first time in a day. The shaking was as bad as ever, but I withstood it, laying on my side in order to avoid his tail.

Honestly, when I had first heard Rulitora talk about it, I'd simply imagined that their water supply had been cut off. I didn't realize just how serious the situation was – until that morning. When the sun appeared, and I felt how hot the void was, the reality of it all hit me, and I realized I needed to get to the Torano'o tribe and give them water as quickly as humanly possible.

As the sun rose, I began to sweat more and more. Rulitora was used to this, so he still looked fine, but I was starting to feel like I wouldn't make it.

We started taking breaks every now and then, during which I'd take water out from the Unlimited Bath and use it to hydrate myself. I also made sure to give my body some salt, too.

"All we did was cross one mountain, and the weather's already so different... What's going on in this world?"

Despite the fact that I had only been muttering to myself during the break, Rulitora answered me dutifully. "People say the weather turned this way because of the desert kingdom, but I don't know the details."

"The one that was in the center of the desert, huh?"

Rulitora nodded. Even his people rarely ever went into the desert, so no one knew if such a kingdom actually existed. Going off the knowledge I'd amassed from reading fiction novels in my world, I hypothesized that this kingdom had progressed their technology at a rapid rate, but made a mistake during some experiment and destroyed themselves. If this weather was a by-product of something like that, they had really caused some serious problems.

We had lunch early – gotta eat when you can – although all we had were simple ham sandwiches.

After eating and finishing my break, I remembered something. "Hey, is that demon still following us?"

"Well, it's hard to tell exactly what it's doing. Want me to go look for it?"

"...No, if monsters come here we'll have to abandon all our luggage and run." I couldn't fight the monsters on my own, nor could I pull a rickshaw filled with stuff. "Can we go together?"

"It may be a little dangerous, but if you're prepared to run in case of emergency..."

"Let's do that, then. We can just run once we spot who's following us."

"Okay. Let's go, then."

As he stuck his chest out, Rulitora's bulky, amber body looked like it could take on anything. Even if it was a little dangerous, it'd be better if we stayed together. And so, we went back a little and looked for our pursuer.

“What’s that?” After walking for a bit, I spotted a cloud of dust rising up from the other side of the wasteland.

Rulitora stared at the dust cloud as well. “There’s a lot of them... But a group that big could only be... Huh?!” Rulitora leaned forward for a closer look, as if he’d realized something. Curious, I rose to my feet. “There are humans at the front! Two! They’re being chased!!”

“What?!” The shock nearly sent me tumbling out from the rickshaw. “Why are humans there?! I thought no humans lived in the void!”

“Sometimes, humans come to this land to collect special fruit that only grows here...”

“*That’s* what they were doing?!” I could recall hearing about battle ravers doing those sorts of jobs somewhere. “...Let’s help them.”

“Are you sure? I’m not sure how we’ll fare against that many...”

“I’ll support you with magic as you run full speed ahead. Then, we’ll put the two of them in the rickshaw and escape. How does that sound?”

“...Understood. Let’s try it.”

It seemed like I’d convinced Rulitora – or maybe he’d just given up arguing. The group of monsters was currently on our left side, and stretched out a long way back, as if the monsters all had different running speeds. If we had been in a war movie, our general would have told us to charge at them from the side – but our goal was to save the two people they were chasing.

“Let’s charge at the frontmost group from the side. Then, once we save those two, we’ll make a run for it.”

“Makes sense. We won’t be able to change direction with monsters in front of us.” If we tried that, it might ruin the rickshaw’s wheels.

It seemed like I wouldn’t be able to use my broad ax here, so I held up my round shield. “Go, Rulitora!”

“Hang on tight, Sir Touya!” The moment he shouted that, Rulitora leaned forward and started sprinting at full speed.

The monsters were moving forward, so we had to approach them diagonally.

For a bit, we ran parallel with their left side, then I leaned forward and fired a Summon Light Spirit spell over Rulitora's head. It wasn't enough to defeat any monsters, but I managed to knock some off balance, which meant they'd probably get trampled by the ones behind them. Seeing this, I realized it'd be better to use my magic to hinder their progress instead of trying to defeat them, so I switched targets. Summon Light Spirit could be adjusted based on the caster's MP pool and how it was charged.

Meanwhile, Rulitora casually swung his glaive with one hand and charged straight into the mob. The monsters hadn't expected trouble to come from the side, so this caused mass hysteria. As Rulitora kept swinging his glaive around, parts of several monsters went flying into the air. I averted my eyes from the splattering blood and shot a light ball about twice the size of a baseball straight toward the monsters.

The two people who were running away seemed to notice us, and glanced over in our direction as they continued to run. I hadn't noticed it before when we were at a distance, but I could see now that they were both girls. Since Rulitora was in front, I was afraid they'd think we were just more monsters.

Worried, I called out: "We're on your side! Get in!" to let them know it was okay.

Yes, that seemed suspicious in its own way, but luckily they were desperate enough to believe me. As our rickshaw moved past the front of the monsters and reached the two, I saw one girl with long, custard cream-colored hair pulling the hand of another with silver hair. They ran toward us – the silver-haired girl was panting hard. It didn't seem like she'd be able to run for much longer. Custard cream grabbed silver's arm and moved it toward me until I could reach out from the rickshaw and grab on.

"Oww!" Silver let out a pained shout, but we didn't have time to worry about that.

The girl was heavy, especially with her armor on, but the other one pushed her up from behind, so I managed to forcibly pull her into the rickshaw. Next, I stuck my hand out to help custard cream up, only to watch as she leapt into the rickshaw on her own. She definitely had some athletic skills.

Now that we had safely rescued the two girls, all we had left to do was escape. “Rulitora! I got them both in!”

“I’ll speed up, then! Please hold on tight!” Instantly, Rulitora sped up, and the rickshaw started shaking even more violently.

Silver didn’t have enough strength left to hold onto the rickshaw, so custard cream supported her with her body. I stabilized my body on the edges of the rickshaw, and looked back to the monsters who were now chasing after all of us.

“Halt!!” A small, hooded man riding a boar-like monster could be heard shouting from the very front of the monsters.

Is that their leader? He sure is acting like he’s in charge... That thing he’s riding on is probably a lesser boar. If we can take out their leader, we might be able to stop the entire mob.

With that in mind, I channeled my MP and created a light spirit that was as big as a soccer ball, then tossed it toward the lesser boar. The boar recoiled and came to a sudden stop, which sent the short man flying onto the ground.

“Hffff?! Oww! Waugh! Mmpgh!” In an instant, his body was swallowed up by the horde of monsters behind him.

Even though I was the one who did it, I couldn’t help but cringe. “Eesh...”

That hooded man looked like a mage. He might have had resistance to magic, so I’d aimed at the boar instead. Despite my attack, though, the mob showed no signs of stopping. Now, the lesser boar led them, as they bared their fangs and rushed toward us.

Guess that guy wasn’t their leader after all. Or maybe they’re just beyond his control now? Either way, the two we’d saved had taken a lot of damage, and they also looked exhausted, so I was afraid that going any faster might cause them to pass out.

“I have no choice...” The moment I decided my only hope was to stop the monsters using magic, I heard a rumble coming from the direction we were running in. When I turned around and looked ahead, I saw a new mob creating a dust cloud as it came toward us. “Don’t tell me... We’re sandwiched?!”

“No... They’re on our side! They’re my allies!” Rulitora called out.

“What?” Soon, the group passed by us, and my question was answered.

As I followed the storming crowd with my eyes, I quickly figured out who they were: Lizardmen, with bodies covered in amber scales and black stripes on their long tails. They were the Torano’o tribe, sand lizardmen just like Rulitora.

The Torano’o warriors let out a battle cry and flew at the monsters like arrows. In moments, they tore right through the mob. The warriors on the front lines, who stood about as tall as Rulitora, looked especially powerful. Once their mob got broken up, the monsters wasted no time in screaming for their lives and running away. The smaller lizardmen – well, they were still bigger than me, but you get the idea – tried to go after them, but the ones as big as Rulitora stopped them.

“Rulitora, can we approach them?”

“Y-yes, I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“Be sure to let them know we’re approaching, then.”

“Yes, sir!” Rulitora swung his glaive around and pulled our rickshaw toward the dust cloud. This time, he wasn’t moving at full speed, and took his time.

Soon, we were surrounded by ten lizardmen wearing loincloths and carrying spears. The two girls we saved were clearly afraid, so I put them at ease.

“Rulitora! I thought that was you! Have you returned to us?!” asked the largest lizardman, who wore a feather ornament on his head.

“Yes. I found a very good buyer.”

“I can tell, judging from that armor. Is that giant scorpion?” The big lizardman curiously inspected Rulitora’s armor.

Apparently, giant scorpions were one of the strongest creatures in the desert part of the void. Simply seeing Rulitora in giant scorpion armor instantly told the lizardmen what sort of treatment he had received.

“Rulitora, I’m guessing you know these people. Introduce them to me.”

“Oh, please excuse me. That’s Dokutora, the warrior chief of the Torano’o

tribe.”

“I’m just an amateur who took over for Rulitora,” the big lizardman named Dokutora said with a hearty laugh.

Dokutora was large, and certainly didn’t look any smaller than Rulitora. In exchange for Rulitora’s lean, muscular body and masculine features, Dokutora was stockier, and possessed a round face and a potbelly. Rather than a lizard, he looked more like a round tyrannosaurus. He was stout all across the board, and seemed to possess great strength. The other nine lizardmen more or less went up to Rulitora’s shoulders. They were probably average height for lizardmen.

“Dokutora, this is Sir Touya. He owns me right now.”

“I see... Hm? Then why did you come back, Rulitora?” Dokutora cocked his head. It seemed he thought Rulitora had returned because he completed his work period.

Unsure of how much he was allowed to say, Rulitora glanced at me. “They’re going to see it eventually, so you might as well tell them,” I said.

I wasn’t really sure if it was okay to let the two girls we saved hear, but I felt like it was too late now. I didn’t want to force them to follow any orders just because I saved them, but I hoped they’d keep it a secret.

“Okay then, I’ll explain the situation to them.” Rulitora gave me a deep nod, then turned back to Dokutora’s group and began to speak.

“Dokutora, this is a Hero of the Goddess. He received a gift that allows him to create water.”

“A hero?! Water?!”

“You don’t need to concern yourself with the hero part,” I called out from the rickshaw, as Dokutora let out cries of surprise. “Right now, I don’t really feel like a hero, nor do I have any real strength.”

“Did you receive the water I sent out with the money I got from selling myself?” Rulitora asked.

“We’ve managed to preserve as much as possible by limiting our usage, but

we're almost out. The elder was worrying about what we'll do for the next two months, before it starts raining again."

"Oh... Well, you don't need to worry. With Sir Touya's gift, we'll be able to save everyone. That's why he came all the way here."

"His gift? Oh, so he was summoned from another world!"

Only those who were summoned from other worlds received blessings from the Goddess of Light. Therefore, hearing the word 'gift' was enough to make Dokutora aware of who I really was. After he shouted, the other lizardmen started to make some commotion as well. Soon, all their eyes were on me, which felt a bit uncomfortable.

"Rulitora, how about we hurry to your people? It seems like we still haven't arrived yet, and they're in dire need of water, right?" I asked.

"Y-you're right."

"I want to let these two rest as well." I shifted my eyes to the two girls we saved.

Silver still couldn't move, so custard cream held her as she stayed on guard. She looked just like a puppy who was doing its best to appear menacing. I had no intention to harm her, of course, so I kind of wanted her to stop, but I decided there was nothing I could do at the time being. I was on friendly terms with the lizardmen thanks to Rulitora, but it didn't change the fact that these girls were surrounded by warriors from a species that was alien to them. On the contrary, I thought it was very noble how custard cream was protecting her companion despite her own exhaustion.

We need to get to the lizardmen's settlement. Once we have a safe place to rest, I'm sure I'll be able to convince them that I don't mean any harm.

"Don't worry about rattling the rickshaw anymore. Just run as fast as you can," I said. Even if I fell unconscious, I could still create water as long as I had MP.

"Huh? What was that about rattling?" Dokutora asked.

"Oh, don't worry about it. When Rulitora runs at full speed, this rickshaw

shakes pretty badly, that's all."

When he heard that, Dokutora took a look at the rickshaw's wheels and commented on how fragile they looked. I'm sure most things looked fragile compared to his bulky arms.

"If that's the case, then ride on my back," Dokutora said. "We can leave the vehicle and the other two to Rulitora."

"What?"

"That should give you a more stable ride than the rickshaw, Sir Touya," Rulitora said. "I should be able to cut down on the rattling if I lower my speed a little, which will make it easier on those two. And with the other warriors around us, we'll be safe."

This meant that Dokutora and I would get to the village quicker, which would allow me to prepare the water while also allowing Rulitora to carry the girls at a calmer speed. It made sense, but...

I glanced at the two girls. Even though I was a stranger to them, I wonder how they'd feel if I left them completely alone with all these lizardmen.

"...Go!" The silver-haired girl forced out a pained voice.

"What?"

"Lady Clena?!"

"It's okay, Roni... More importantly, you! People are waiting for your help, aren't they? We'll be fine, just go!"

It wasn't very convincing considering how debilitated she sounded, but it appeared that the girl named Clena had figured out the gist of what the lizardmen and I had discussed. When I looked at the girl with the custard cream-colored hair named Roni, she nodded with strong eyes. "...Okay. Thanks for the help, Dokutora. Rulitora, take good care of those two!"

"Leave it to me!" Dokutora shouted.

"Understood!" Rulitora nodded.

I gave all my water skins to Clena and Roni, then put on my desert/wasteland-

customized overcoat and climbed onto Dokutora's back. I wondered how he would fare with a high schooler on his back, but once I got up there, I realized I had no reason to fear. Dokutora was over two stutes tall, and had broader shoulders than Rulitora. It almost made me feel like I'd become a kid again.

"Ready? Then let's go!" Once Dokutora made sure I was on his back, he started sprinting.

"Wow! There's no shaking at aaaall!" It was surprising how comfortable the ride actually was. I felt like I might fall off if I got too comfortable, but I didn't bounce a bit.

"Gah hah hah! Not even Rulitora can beat me in terms of stability!" Dokutora called out, pleased by how surprised I was.

Now I wouldn't need to worry about getting carsick. I couldn't actually see his entire body from where I was, but I bet he *really* looked like a tyrannosaurus when he was leaned forward and sprinting.

As I traversed the wasteland on the back of this dinosaur-ish lizardman, I felt the wind on my skin. I'd never be able to experience anything like this at home, no matter where I decided to take a vacation, so I felt like I'd discovered another perk to being summoned here. As thoughts ran through my head, I made sure to hang on tight to Dokutora so that I didn't fall off.

We reached the Torano'o tribe's settlement before the sun went down. "Dokutora, I held on pretty tight, so I hope I didn't hurt your neck or anything."

"Huh? You'll need a lot more strength than that if you want to strangle me!" I had been hanging on for dear life, but it hadn't even fazed him.

Unlike Rulitora, Dokutora wasn't my raver, so I started out referring to him as 'Sir Dokutora' just in case – but he told me there was no need. The ride had taken a while, so my arms were sore from holding on for so long. I wanted to rest as soon as possible, but first there was something more important I had to do.

"Hey, Dokutora. Where are you storing the water?"

"Rulitora sold himself to buy us that water, so I split it up into jugs and put them in everyone's houses." While I was still on his back, Dokutora pointed into

the distance, where I saw big tents made out of sheer white cloth.

In this lizardman settlement, everyone lived in tents. They migrated every now and then, so tents were probably all they needed.

“Okay then, I guess I’ll start by filling up the jugs. Can you gather them up for me, Dokutora?”

“Right now? But you look exhausted.”

“You’re almost out of water, right?” The lizardmen were my top priority at the moment, due to their water crisis.

“...Thank you.”

“Oh, but let me down first. I can’t move my arms.”

“One minute.” Dokutora let me down and leaned me up against a rock, then ran off to the tents.

Once I was alone, I took off the unrefined overcoat and struggled to withstand the pain I felt in my arms. Honestly, it hurt badly. My entire body hurt. Still, I refused to let it get the best of me, and attached the hose to the faucet inside the Unlimited Bath. The sand lizardmen wouldn’t want to go in there, so I was the only one who could do it.

Once I finished my preparations, I sat down against the tub. After waiting for a bit, Dokutora returned with the jugs and two other lizardmen. I had no way of telling whether they were male, female, young, or old from their appearances. One of them was small, though, so I guessed it was a child. He was holding a cup in his hands.

“Dokutora, I need to ask you a question before I get myself into any trouble... Is there any way for someone like me to tell how old or what gender a lizardman is?”

“...Oh, I see. Unlike humans, we don’t have hair, breasts, or wrinkles.”

It turned out that Dokutora had brought over a young woman and child, but they only wore loincloths like him and Rulitora. The woman had no boobs, since apparently lizardmen didn’t have breasts to begin with.

“When lizardmen get older, their scales harden... Oh, I guess I’ll just have to

narrate for you.”

“Umm, Chief Dokutora told us we could receive water from you...” The lizardwoman asked meekly. The floating door and the Infinite Bath beyond it must have startled her.

“Dokutora, put the end of this hose into the jug... No, put it into that child’s cup first.” I handed the hose to Dokutora, then went back inside the Infinite Bath and turned on the faucet.

Dokutora let out a shout. When I looked back, I saw that his face had gotten completely drenched. Apparently, he’d never seen a hose before, so he’d been peering into it right when I turned the water on.

A few moments later, he took the cup from the child and filled it up to the brim with water. Then, he put the hose into the water jug that was on the ground. When the child lizardman took the cup back, he didn’t seem sure about what to do, and looked between his mother and I.

“You can drink it. There’s still a lot more where that came from,” I said.

The mother bowed her head to me, then patted her child on the head. The child opened his eyes and mouth wide, then gulped down the water.

It was still hard for me to figure out lizardmen’s facial expressions, but I’m pretty sure the child looked super happy. “This tastes so good!”

“I bet that quenched your thirst,” his mother said. “Thank you so much, Sir Touya.”

“Oh, don’t mention it. Just using my gift, that’s all!” If people kept bowing their heads to me, it’d only make me even more uncomfortable. I tried to change the subject and called out to Dokutora. “Dokutora, how many water jugs are there?”

“The water merchant brought 14. Hmm, I think this one’s almost full.”

“Whoa, this should do it then,” I said, as I turned off the faucet.

Rulitora sold himself, and they only gave him this much water? Although, the void is pretty far from the city... I guess a lot of his money must have gotten eaten up by transportation costs. I knew that they were almost out of water, but

the more I hear about their situation, the more dangerous it seems. That child must have been really thirsty...

"I'm glad we hurried here... Keep bringing on the jugs, Dokutora!"

"You bet!" I could hear heavy thumping as Dokutora jogged off happily.

When I watched him leave, I spotted the child looking quite refreshed after drinking my water. If I had gotten here a few days later, the lizardmen may have seen their first losses with the frail little ones like him. I was glad to know that withstanding Rulitora's full speed for all that time had actually been worth it.

"First, I need to fill these 14 jugs up. I can worry about the reservoir tomorrow."

Honestly, I was mentally exhausted. Using Summon Light Spirit multiple times on those monsters had really taken a toll on me. I still had enough MP left, though, and I wanted to get the jugs filled so I could truly relax.

As I was massaging my arms and trying to grin and bear it through the pain, more lizardmen brought over the other jugs. I was used to seeing them thanks to Rulitora, so they didn't scare me one bit. As I filled the jugs up, I decided to talk with Dokutora. He hated steam too, so he kept his distance, but I could still hear his voice.

According to Dokutora, about one hundred Torano'o tribe lizardmen lived in this settlement. There used to be a bit more, but they'd lost some in a battle with the sandworm, the monster that destroyed the reservoir As the name implied, the sandworm was a huge worm-like creature that lived in the desert, but rarely appeared in the wasteland. Since they'd dug a hole in the ground to create the reservoir, I wondered how it could have been destroyed, but now everything made sense – the worm had destroyed it from below the ground. A crack had appeared in the wall of the reservoir, which caused all the water to leak out, leaving the lizardmen with no way to survive until the next rainy season.

"Many of our warriors died in our battle against the sandworm. We need to train more young people and turn them into warriors so they can protect the village, but now that we don't even have Rulitora with us anymore, I just don't know what to do," Dokutora said, as he smacked the bare part of his head that

wasn’t covered by the feather ornament.

After Rulitora left, Dokutora had been made the next warrior chief since he was the second strongest, but he really seemed to be at the end of his rope due to how bad the Torano’o tribe’s situation had become.

“Who were the nine lizardmen with you?” I asked.

“Oh, those are the warriors who survived.”

Only ten had survived the sandworm battle, including Dokutora. They always had to travel far not just for hunting, but to gather water as well, which is how they’d found us.

“Does it take time to train young lizardmen?”

“No. We can hunt on our own, after all. But...”

“But?”

“They’re still young. They shouldn’t have to hunt yet. But if we don’t make them into warriors, we won’t be able to move to a new settlement.”

Dokutora crouched down and scratched his head. It made his feather ornament – the symbol of the warrior chief – quiver on his head. Since the lizardmen traveled across the monster-filled wasteland, hunting, living, and then moving their entire village time and time again, they needed to have a hefty supply of warriors. But their trainees were all still very young, and weren’t at the proper age to start hunting.

“If they experience true battle, they’ll probably become fine warriors. But it’s dangerous to make such young lizardmen hunt. Especially now that we’ve already lost so many...” Dokutora looked up at the sky. He certainly seemed desperate.

I couldn’t bear to just sit and watch him, so I decided to give him my amateur opinion. “Why don’t you train them before they start hunting?”

“We always train them. But having real experience in battle makes a great difference.”

As someone who had basically zero battle experience, it was a bit troubling to hear. “Is it a bad idea to hunt in a group?”

“If they do, it’ll prevent each warrior from maturing on their own.”

I had figured it’d be the only safe way to give the young novice lizardmen some real battle experience, but Dokutora didn’t seem to like that idea. “Don’t the monsters around here run in packs?”

“If we attacked a pack, it’d start a war. When we hunt, we only target up to three at a time.”

It made sense. To Dokutora, Torano’o hunting meant one warrior taking on a monster and winning on his or her own. If they went hunting in groups, some warriors would end up not needing to do anything, which meant that certain warriors would get more experience than others. Dokutora wanted to turn each member of his tribe into a proper warrior, so that was a path he couldn’t take.

“How about this, then. Why don’t you create a squad?”

“A squad?”

“I’ve heard that this is how human armies work. Also, the heroes fought the demon lord four on one, remember?” I recalled how during my search for party members, I’d heard about how armies were composed of squads that each contained four people. “You have ten veteran warriors left, right? Why don’t you have each of them take three young lizardmen out and teach them how to hunt?”

If the veterans were watching small squads from the background, they’d be able to assist them and make sure everyone got an equal amount of experience. It was also safer than sending the young people out on their own, and would give them more experience than going out in a group. Dokutora seemed to like the one-on-one system, but this was no time to be stubborn.

“Hmmm. We’ve never done it that way up until now...” Dokutora growled. Considering how strong their bodies were, they might have never even considered the concept.

“But you’ve never been in this big of a crisis up until now, right? And besides, once they get enough experience, you can send them all out on their own again.”

“True. If we consider it a part of their training before they go out to hunt for

real... Okay, I'm going to go talk to the elder."

It was a balanced plan that didn't lean too far toward either extreme, and it appeared to have convinced Dokutora. I didn't know all the details about the Torano'o tribe's living conditions, but I thought it was at least a better plan than what they had.

Dokutora quickly stood up and headed off to a group of lizardmen who had been watching us from afar. By the time I finished filling up all 14 jugs, it was already past 7 PM. The sun was long past set, but Rulitora's group still had yet to arrive. *I hope nothing happened to them...*

After the lizardmen took the jugs and went back to their tents, Dokutora returned with another lizardman whose feather accessory was even more ornate than his. This lizardman had a scraggier face than the others, and as I stared at it, I started to understand what Dokutora had meant about older lizardmen's scales getting harder. Judging from his fancy feather ornament, I guessed that this was the elder Dokutora had mentioned earlier. I thought about kneeling, but the two of them beat me to it.

"Sir Touya, Hero of the Goddess," the elder said. Thank you so much for coming to save our tribe. I can't possibly express my gratitude."

"He gave me permission to create squads and start the new hunting training," Dokutora said. "We'll get them started first thing tomorrow!"

"I also hear that you bestowed us with a bit of your wisdom, so I would like to thank you for that as well," the elder added.

Dokutora and the elder bowed their heads deeply. I'd experienced this sort of treatment several times before at the temple, so I had sort of gotten used to it, but it was more like I'd just given up on worrying about it. At least it no longer made me uncomfortable.

"After I heard about your tribe from Rulitora, I thought my gift might be able to help. The thing is, because of my MP, I can't keep water flowing all day, but I hope to keep things going at a steady pace while you begin your battle training. While I'm working, I hope you'll let me stay in your village with you."

"Of course. We'll be sure to protect you while you're resting."

“Thanks, I appreciate it.”

In the end, asking for something fair in return made things move a lot more smoothly. My experience making a deal with that water merchant in the temple had come in handy. In exchange for saving the tribe from their water crisis, they’d let me stay here and offer me protection. It may not have been the fairest deal ever, but either way, they owed me now, and since we were both getting something out of this, it made everything else proceed with ease.

“Dokutora, prepare a new tent. We’ll let Sir Touya rest there.”

“I’ll have it set up at once!” Upon hearing the elder’s order, Dokutora instantly stood up and ran off. On his way, he called out to some other lizardmen. That tent was going to be ready in no time.

It turned out to be a white tent with a pillar in the center, just like the other ones that the Torano’o tribe used. It was made for lizardmen, so it looked pretty big to me.

By the time Rulitora’s group arrived, Dokutora and the other lizardmen had already finished setting up the tent. Only two young Torano’o tribe warriors had returned with Rulitora and the two girls in the rickshaw. Monsters were precious food to them, so the remaining seven had gone out to see what they could scavenge from the mess.

“It sure took you a while,” I said.

“Those two had taken more damage than we realized. I went slow so that I wouldn’t put any more strain on them...”

“Are you sure they’re okay?”

“I thought you’d want to hear about what happened to them, so I carried them to that tent over there.”

Rulitora and I headed to the tent to check on the two girls. When we got inside, the silver-haired girl named Clena spun violently around in bed and gave me a pained expression. Next to her stood the girl with the custard cream-colored hair, Roni. Roni was lying deeper in the room, beyond Clena. It looked like she had taken much more damage.

“Relax,” I said. “If I wanted to hurt you, I wouldn’t have saved you back there.”

“...”

I tried to calm them down, but it didn’t really work. Clena was staring at me as if she had chosen that spot specifically in order to protect Roni. They were definitely still afraid of me.

At this rate, they’ll never warm up to me. I guess I’ll have to try and force out a conversation here. I moved up to Clena and sat down in front of her. Rulitora sat down diagonally behind me.

“I guess it’s about time I introduced myself. I’m Touya. This sand lizardman is my raver, Rulitora. Just so you know, he isn’t a criminal raver.” As I introduced him, Rulitora bowed his head.

“...I’m Clena. And that’s Roni. She isn’t a criminal raver either, of course.” I couldn’t tell if she was still afraid of me or not, but she at least told me her name.

It seemed strange that she went out of her way to tell me that Roni wasn’t a criminal raver, but it made sense when I looked at her again. Roni had a full head of shaggy hair that went down to her waist. When I first rescued her, I hadn’t noticed, but on closer inspection, I realized that she had triangular beast ears right where her human ears would have been.

“Is she a demi-human?”

“Yes, a lycaon,” Clena said, then pushed Roni’s bangs apart and showed us her forehead. There was no oath seal on her forehead, which proved that she wasn’t a criminal raver. Clena must have wanted to convince us that her raver was a guiltless one.

According to Rulitora, lycaon were wolven demi-humans. They had wolf ears in place of human ears, and grew wolven tails from their rear ends. However, their faces looked almost exactly the same as humans. Their canines were a bit sharper, but Roni had her mouth closed, so I couldn’t check. Just like how Rulitora’s face resembled a lizard’s, lycaons’ faces had looked like wolves’ long ago. But ever since they started living alongside humans and believing in the

Goddess of Light, their faces grew closer to humans'. People said there were generally two types of lycaons: those who still lived apart from humans and possessed wolven faces, and those who had mixed blood with humans and received blessings from the Goddess of Light. "Why's her hair so shaggy?" I asked.

"...I don't think that has anything to do with the fact that she's a lycaon," Clena answered.

Roni was wearing a leather breastplate, leather gauntlets, shinguards, a thin vest and long pants. She had a curved blade known as a scimitar strapped to her waist, and carried a small shield on her shoulder. All her equipment looked very practical and simple.

Clena's silver hair was cut into a natural, soft bob. The silver color looked pretty, but unfortunately, it had lost its sheen. It looked like she was wearing a dress with a long skirt, but I could see that she was wearing metal armor beneath it. The hilt of the thin sword at her waist looked very well made, and it was plain to see by her fancy clothes that she had been born in the upper class. She also had a small shield on her left arm with its own ornate design.

"H-hold on a minute." After staring at them, something came to mind and I gazed around the tent. *Nope.* Just like I thought, they were both missing a certain something. "What happened to your desert overcoats?"

"Desert...?" Clena gave me a dubious look.

But this is the wasteland, they were probably thinking – which meant they'd traveled to the wasteland part of the void without desert overcoats. Talk about reckless. There was a pretty good reason why they made overcoats specifically designed for the desert in this world. And even if they hadn't brought them, they should have at least thought of some sort of countermeasure, such as using umbrellas or taking their armor off like I had.

"Don't tell me..."

"Hey, what are you doing?!" Clena shouted as I moved close to her and touched her armor.

I ignored her panic. "I knew it. It feels hot..."

Because the sun had already set, it was only warm, but it probably felt like it was burning during the daytime. A white surcoat wasn't enough to deflect the powerful sun in the wasteland. Roni was wearing leather armor, so hers wasn't as bad as Clena's, but it still felt warm. They probably had been unable to take off their equipment with the lizardmen around, and had kept it on the entire time.

"I'm just going to ask you this while you're still awake – is it okay for me to take your equipment off? Your armor feels really hot." Just so you know, I wasn't bringing this up for impure reasons. It had to be done.

"...Fine. I wish I could just ask Roni to do it, though." Clena seemed to understand this as well, so she hesitantly accepted my suggestion.

When she heard this, Roni winced and tried to pick herself up, but she didn't have enough strength left. I held her back and helped her lay down again, but she resisted with what little power she still possessed.

"It's okay, Roni! Don't push yourself!" The moment Clena said that, Roni stopped resisting and slumped down to the bed. She was unconscious. She must have only made it this far due to her willpower.

I started undressing Clena first. Her dress-shaped surcoat was tied with a cord around her back, so she couldn't undo it herself. Roni must have always helped her do it.

Underneath the surcoat, she was wearing half plate armor, gauntlets, and greaves. I silently removed her equipment. I figured that if I tried to fill the silence with some stupid quips, I'd only seem more worked up over this. Clena was clearly not used to having a man remove her armor, and blushed as she silently gave me free reign over her body.

Underneath her armor, she wore simple clothes that looked easy to move in, and seemed much higher quality than what I was wearing. *She must be the daughter of some rich family...*

"Oww!"

"I was afraid of this... I bet your skin got burned," I said.

Clena flitted her eyes away from me. It seemed that I was right. Keeping that

hot armor on for the entire day had ended up burning her skin. I mean, it's not like they could hop into the Infinite Bath and cool themselves like I could, so I wasn't surprised.

"I understand why you might not want to bring it up, but you have to be honest about these sorts of things."

"Talking about it won't change anything..."

"I can use healing magic. Only Healing Light, but still..."

The moment I said that, Clena's face turned so red it looked like it was burning. I understood why – Healing Light required the caster to channel healing magic into their hands, which meant they needed to get close enough to touch their targets. Touching a wound would hurt the person, but since it sped up the healing process, many people did it that way. Due to that, Healing Light could only be used on superficial wounds. In order to heal bones or organs, one would have to use a more advanced spell that could heal from a distance.

"Just so you know, I've only been studying cleric magic for a little over a month." In other words, I needed to have my target undress and show me the wound in order to heal it – which definitely required permission beforehand.

After I finished removing her armor, I called out to Clena, who was still struggling against the pain. "I'm going to take off Roni's armor now, so you can use that time to decide whether or not you want magic healing. Even if you decide not to do it, I'll prepare some clean water for you."

"...Okay."

It'd be easy to cool their bodies with water prepared using the Unlimited Bath. Whichever option Clena chose, she'd end up okay. As I thought about this, I started taking off Roni's armor, and couldn't help but glance at Clena as she pondered her decision with a bright red face. My hand happened to pass over Roni's breasts a bit, but it wasn't on purpose, so I hoped she'd forgive me. They were small, but when I touched them, I could feel how firm and perky they were. I also noticed how warm her body was.

While I worked, Clena mumbled out questions to me. It started out with what

a human like me was doing at a Torano'o tribe settlement, then how I got here and how I made Rulitora my raver. Of course, I told her the entire truth without hiding anything. I wasn't sure if it was okay to tell her about my gift and how I was summoned, but it was too late now, since I had already told her about how I saved the Torano'o tribe from their water crisis. Incidentally, when she asked how I was going to prepare cold water, I made sure to explain that someone would have to bathe with me in order to use the Unlimited Bath. Of course, both of us didn't need to bathe at the same time – I could always prepare the water separately.

"You're... One of the heroes from another world who was summoned to Jupiter?" Clena asked.

The two girls came from Juno, a kingdom in the Olympus Alliance that lied farther to the northwest than Jupiter. They had passed through the Sacred City on their way to the void. They'd also heard rumors about the hero summoning.

Apparently, it snowed a lot in Juno. As I listened, I wondered if coming from a cold place had made them underestimate the heat of the void. People had most likely warned them about the heat, but it was something that people had to experience firsthand to really understand. When I touched upon this, Clena blushed and silently nodded. *Another bullseye for me.*

As I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath and continued to explain its ability, Clena's eyes widened. I poured some water into a wash bowl and brought it out. Then, I loosened Roni's collar and belt as she lay on a blanket.

Immediately, Clena started to panic. "What are you doing?! I didn't say you could go that far!"

"Don't get so freaked out. I only did it because it's necessary."

I had no plans to turn back. Now that I had her belt loosened, I could glance at a bit of the white panties she wore underneath, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Roni's body felt so hot that I worried she might be experiencing heatstroke. Luckily, she drank some water, so she was probably a little better off, but she still had yet to sit up. It was time for some modern wisdom to come to the rescue.

I wet a towel with some cold water and placed it on the back of Roni's neck, under her armpits, and on her thighs, in order to cool the areas that were close to her thicker blood vessels. Slipping a towel in her pants made them wet, but there was no helping that. I doubted it'd be okay if I just pulled her pants down without permission, after all. Finally, I put the wet towel on her forehead, and had Rulitora fan her with a board because we lacked an actual fan.

"You want me to fan her, in order to cool her down with the wind?" he asked.

"It's more for the heat of vaporization, but yeah, you've got the basic idea."



Rulitora seemed to understand that he didn't need to be so cautious around the girls either, so he traded out his glaive for a board and started fanning Roni. She was starting to look somewhat relaxed, so it seemed like she would be okay for the time being.

Once I took a break, Clena gave me a suspicious look. "Wh-what are you doing?"

"Treating her heatstroke."

The temperature control panel inside the Unlimited Bath allowed me to create not only hot water, but cold water as well.

But Clena cocked her head. It appeared that she hadn't heard the word 'heatstroke' before. "She'll be... okay, won't she?"

"I'm pretty sure I'm doing the right thing here. After she wakes up, I'll have her drink some water with salt in it."

"Salt?"

"Sweat is salty, right? We need to replace the salt she lost from sweating so much."

"...Okay."

She didn't seem convinced, but it at least made her stop complaining. Even though the heatstroke countermeasure was my idea, the Torano'o tribe also knew about the importance of salt, and most of them had some rock salt in their tents.

"So, what'll it be? Magic or cold water?" I asked.

It was time to decide how I was going to heal Clena's burns. The best way to heal her would be if she just stopped acting stubborn, stripped, and let me touch her. But I knew I wasn't enlightened enough to perform such a feat without feeling a little excited, so I couldn't demand anything like that.

"...I have one condition," Clena said.

"So it depends on the details, huh? Well then, let me hear it."

Clena pointed her index finger at me. "I want you to let me into the Unlimited

Bath, too."

"Did you hear a word I said? I need to be in there for you to use it..."

"Exactly! It's not fair if I'm the only one who has to get naked!"

"Uh, that's some crazy logic you've got there." Perhaps the heat had gotten to her head a little.

"Well, if you're okay with stripping, then we can save the bathing for later. First, come over here," I said. I didn't want to waste time discussing things any further. At this point, it didn't matter if I was prepared to get naked or not – she clearly was, so I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath.

"Rulitora, I'm going to close the door for a bit, so I need you to watch over Roni. Don't forget to give her some of the saltwater, okay?"

"Leave it to me."

I left Roni with Rulitora, then took two cups with pinches of salt in them inside the Unlimited Bath with me. First, I filled the cups with water, kept one inside, and passed the other to Rulitora – that was what I wanted Roni to drink when she woke up.

Clena still couldn't stand up on her own, so I had to carry her inside. She was only a bit shorter than me, but without her armor, she was pretty light. After that, I gave her the other cup of saltwater. Her hands were shaking, so I put mine on hers and helped her.

"Can you take off your clothes by yourself?" I asked her after she closed the door. She shook her head.

She wasn't as bad as Roni, but it seemed that she was suffering from something close to heatstroke as well. Her balance looked off, so I imagined she was at least feeling some sort of dizziness and fatigue. She'd merely been *acting* tough up until now.

"Okay then, I'll take them off for you," I said.

Clena gave me a small nod. She looked delirious, and showed no signs of resistance. I sat her down on one of the stools in the bath, then started taking her clothes off one by one. *I'm healing her, I'm healing her,* I kept repeating to

myself.

Once I took off the clothes she had on under her armor, her slip became visible. Pastel pink. And it felt really soft. The hem was tucked into her pants, so I pulled them off next. I offered her my shoulder for support so that she could stick her hips out, then slid her pants down to her thighs.

After I sat her back down, I moved to the lower part of her legs and pulled her pants off. *I feel like a pervert,* I realized, perhaps a bit too late. *And I certainly must look like one.* Despite that, whether she just didn't care or had simply given up, Clena let me do as I pleased without saying anything. Her slip was short enough so that it wasn't tangled up into her pants, so I was able to lift her up and easily remove them as well.

At last, I could see her bra and panties. They were red – a dazzling crimson that bled into my eyes. Clena had silver hair and pale skin, which really made the red stand out. *Now, if only she was in a healthy condition...* Unfortunately, the skin on her chest was also bright red, and the same went for her swollen shoulders and back.

"Looks like you were right on the verge of getting burned."

"It stings." I could hear her muttering from above my head as I stared at her chest.

She looked like someone who'd gotten a little too much sun after a day at the beach or the pool. I'd been surprised by how loud she'd been earlier, but perhaps the pain was holding her back now.

Clena's chest wasn't as large as Haruno's or Sera's, but she had enough to create some cleavage – and they were certainly big enough to be called 'big boobs.' She had a nice curve that went from her waist to her hips, but they looked plumper than Haruno's and Sera's. Pale, soft, and squishy – those are the words I'd use to describe her body.

As I continued to stare intently at her breasts, I struggled to pull my mind back into reality and hurriedly called out to her. "Okay now, let me try casting some magic on this. I'm going to take your bra off, okay?"

"...Okay." She was red up to her ears, and had completely averted her eyes

from me.

As I undid the front hook to her bra with shaky fingers, her full breasts spilled out. I didn't know if it was okay to just stand there and stare in admiration, so I held myself back. The parts that had been covered by the bra were in the worst condition. They had clearly been burned, and looked painful.

I felt the fabric of the bra with my finger. *Is this what caused her to get so hot?* I let out a sigh. *I'm going to have to do everything in my power to heal this.*

I closed my eyes and focused my mind on channeling healing power into my hands. I decided I'd start with the worst areas first, so I picked both breasts up carefully, as if they were precious gems, and allowed the light to slip through my fingers. I could feel their weight in my palms.

Clena flinched the moment I touched them, as if she'd felt some kind of pain, but she didn't let out a peep.

"You're certainly taking your time," she finally said.

"Not on purpose. Like I said, it's only been a little over a month since I started studying this magic."

Clena was right – it was going slowly, since I was still so inexperienced. As a result, I had to touch her breasts for a relatively long time, so I understood her need to say something. Her cheeks were flush with an embarrassed shade of red, and she looked very uncomfortable as she kept her eyes averted. Precisely because of the situation we were in, I wanted to do my very best and not leave a single wound behind. I wasn't merely trying to act serious in order to touch her breasts for as long as possible. You have to believe me. Once I finished healing the lower parts, I caressed my way to the upper parts of her breasts. As I did so, my fingertips and palms accidentally slid over her nipples.

"Mm..." Clena let out a sweet sigh.

I did my best to withstand her voice and focused on the healing. I kept moving my hands upward as I healed her burns, treating her collarbone, neck, shoulder, and back in that order.

"I'm going to look at your arms and legs as well," I said.

“O-okay.”

Once she gave me permission, I looked at her hands and legs only to see redness around the parts that had been covered. I placed both of my hands on each spot and used Healing Light to fix everything.

“...That should do it.” After healing all the burns and checking to make sure her skin was back in pristine condition, I nodded in satisfaction. “I think I got it all.”

“...” Clena was still silent. She was hiding her breasts with both hands, but since she was pushing them together, it only made her cleavage bigger. She kept fidgeting around, and it seemed like something was up.

“What’s wrong? Tell me if you’re hurting somewhere. I still have some MP left.”

“...” It sounded like she was muttering something, but I was unable to hear it. I moved my ear close to her lips, until I finally heard: “My butt, too...”

“...Remember, I’m merely healing you here.”

“J-just hurry it up. It’s embarrassing...”

Clena held on to the edge of the tub and got on her knees, as I nervously pulled down her panties. She was right. Her big, round butt was red as well, but it looked to be the lightest of all the burns. Still, there was no way I could just stop without healing it as well, so I channeled healing magic into my hands and rubbed them on her protruding buttocks.

Incidentally, after I checked with the Ficus brand store on a later date, I discovered that they did sell female underwear that had high permeability and allowed heat to escape. They even had underwear that was strong against the cold. That perverted genius really had thought of everything.

“Don’t forget, you promised me we’d take a bath together!” Clena said with a crimson face after she wrapped herself in a towel.

Apparently, she thought it was unfair that she was the only one who had to get naked. I could sort of understand, but how she got from that to ‘bathing together’ was beyond me. She was probably saying it as a means of retaliation,

but to me, a man who dreamed of bathing together with a girl, it was anything but that.

So I told her the truth. “You do realize that bathing together with you would be a reward for me, right?”

“Urk...”

I had to stay inside the Unlimited Bath in order to use it, but I couldn’t stay in such a cramped place with a half-naked girl forever, so I moved in front of Clena and opened the door – only to see an awakened Roni standing right in front of me.

“Lady Clena!”

“Roni!”

Once she saw us, Roni instantly ran inside, so I stepped back and got out of their way. As long as they weren’t going to use the bath, I didn’t need to be in there, so as they joined hands and rejoiced at how they were both okay, I stepped out of the changing area and went to go find Rulitora.

“It looks like Roni’s feeling better now,” I said.

“She awoke after a while, so I gave her the cup of water, then returned the towel to its original place and had her rest there,” Rulitora replied.

“Good. Judging from what I just saw, she’s going to be okay.” When I looked back into the bath, I saw that Roni had started crying out of happiness, while Clena was still clad in a bath towel, trying to put her at ease.

“Where’s everyone else?” I asked.

“They were just gathered up around the tent, but once that girl awoke, they all breathed a sigh of relief and left.”

“Gotcha.”

When I took Clena into the Unlimited Bath, were they not worried because she was awake? Did they trust me? Or... were they being considerate and simply hoping we’d have a nice time? Lizardmen didn’t really seem to understand how human baths worked, so it must have been the first or second options.

“Did the elder say anything?”

“He left us in charge, but told us to contact him if anything changes.”

“I see...” I looked back to the girls again, and realized that I still had yet to find out exactly who they were. “You two can stay here tonight, but do you mind if we gather up everything besides your clothes? I don’t want the villagers to get nervous.”

“...So be it. But take care of our swords, okay? They’re valuable,” Clena said.

“You saved us, after all, so I don’t mind,” Roni added.

Clena had a lycaon demi-human with her, so perhaps that’s why she so easily agreed to let me gather up her things. I took the two swords and wrapped each one in some cloth for protection. Now there was no need to worry about Clena’s decorative sword getting damaged.

“Rulitora, take their weapons for me. And be careful with them.”

“Understood.”

“Wait, hold on,” Clena said. “Roni, you had some daggers in your bag, didn’t you?”

“Yes, Lady Clena.” When Clena called her name, Roni pulled five daggers out from their bags and handed them to Rulitora.

“Also, I’d like to know what you were doing in the void,” I said.

“...Are you a Hero of the Sacred King?” Clena asked.

“No, I’m a Hero of the Goddess. From the Goddess of Light temple.”

“Oh, a hero from the temple... I suppose that’s the lesser of two evils. Fine, I’ll tell you.”

Does Clena have a problem with my ties to Jupiter or the Goddess of Light temple? She seems like she’s the daughter of a noble family, so maybe they’re wrapped up in some political dispute?

As thoughts ran through my head, Roni spoke up. “Lady Clena, since Sir Touya saved us, we need to thank him somehow.”

“Oh, yeah, you’re right. Does money have value here?”

“It does not,” Rulitora answered. Human currency was rarely used among the lizardmen – they all just shared what they hunted.

“Perhaps we’d better think of a gift, then,” Clena said.

On the following day, Clena and Roni ended up giving daggers to the two lizardmen who’d returned to the village with them. The Torano’o tribe mostly used simple weapons, so I imagined they’d been pleased to receive them. The girls tried to give Rulitora one as well, but since he was my raver, I refused for him.

“And now for you...” Clena said, as she stared me right in the face. She was smirking, as if she’d just thought of something. “Touya... Earlier, you said that bathing with me would be a reward for you, right?”

Yes. I certainly did say that.

“How about bathing with me, then?” Clena said, with a triumphant look on her face. Earlier, she had been as pale as a sheet, but with her energy restored, Clena’s face looked cute and charming.

“Lady Clena?!” Roni’s eyes widened. Her tail also puffed up due to her shock.

Roni, who was also in much better spirits, stood a bit shorter than Clena. Compared to Clena’s plump body, Roni was slim with small breasts. I’d heard that lycaons had sharp, wolven eyes that helped them hunt their prey, but her face looked adorable enough to belong to a playful little puppy – perhaps because she was still young.

“Touya saw me naked,” Clena declared. “It’s not fair unless I get to see him naked, too!”

“Are you sure you don’t just feel like you’ve gone too far to back out now?” I immediately countered. It’s true that I wanted to bathe with a girl – that’s precisely why I refused to budge on my principles. And so, as I restrained my excitement after hearing Clena talk about bathing with me, I looked her straight in the eyes and said: “Listen carefully. I told you once already that I’d bathe with you, and mark my words, I mean to do just that. You could almost say that’s the entire reason I began this journey in the first place.”

“Urk...” Faced with my dead serious eyes, Clena recoiled.

“Did you hear what Sir Touya just said?” Roni looked like she was about to cry.

I wasn’t trying to scare them, but I wanted them to understand how serious I was. After all, I knew I wouldn’t enjoy it if I had to bathe with someone who was only doing it reluctantly.

“Th-then that’s all the more reason to do it! You saved both our lives, and even got rid of all my burns before they created any scars! What kind of a person would I be if I didn’t go this far to repay you?”

“I just coincidentally happened to know some cleric magic, that’s all. You don’t need to get so serious about it,” I said, which only made Clena gape at me in shock.

“Don’t you know how hard it is to heal burns? And if it’s done too late, the burns could create scars. Are you sure you’ve only been studying magic for a month?” Clena asked, as she pressed on her chest and held the bath towel on her body.

It was true that recovery magic could stop bleeding and close up wounds – save lives, basically – but it couldn’t restore everything. I had figured that burns weren’t that big of a deal, but when I really stopped and thought about it, I remembered seeing multiple people with terrible burns on their hands and legs when I was a kid.

“You know how a woman with burns on her breasts would be treated, right?” Clena asked.

“...Well, I don’t exactly know, but I can guess.” Next, I decided to confirm something. “Clena, are you a noble from Junopolis?”

“Y-yes! Lady Clena is...”

“No, Roni!” As Roni started to happily explain, Clena stopped her. “It’s true that I was born into that sort of family, but they’ve pretty much disowned me. And besides, I’m only involved with this problem due to a matter of pride.”

“...” It turned out that she really was a noble, just as I had guessed. She seemed to be stuck in a complicated situation, but I had no idea as to what it could be. “Before you decide how to thank me, I want to hear about your

situation first. We can talk after that.”

“Fine. Can I change in here?”

“The door won’t close if I’m outside it.”

I could create a door to the Unlimited Bath anywhere nearby me, but once it appeared, I was unable to go very far from it. If the door was left open and I tried to walk away, I’d eventually run into some sort of invisible wall.

“Okay,” Clena said. “Just as long as I don’t have to walk on the dirt.”

“Oh, right. Sure, make yourself at home.” Since she was barefoot, Clena didn’t seem to want to change on the ground.

Then, Roni crept near and looked up to me. “Um, Sir Touya. I’d like to change her into these clothes, if possible...”

“Okay, just hurry it up. You know, you should change too, Roni.”

“Er, are you sure you don’t want to check them?”

She must have thought I’d want to check to see if there was anything hidden in the clothes. I figured that if she was bringing it up herself, things would be fine.

“Honestly, at this point I pretty much trust you two. And besides, if you are planning something, remember that I have a very reliable bodyguard with me,” I said, pointing to Rulitora. The only reason I’d gathered up their weapons and luggage wasn’t really because I was trying to be cautious against them, but more because I wanted to be considerate of the lizardmen. “Th-thank you very much!” Roni bowed her head, then took the clothes to Clena.

As I watched her gallantly run off, I sat next to Rulitora with our backs facing the Unlimited Bath, so that we wouldn’t see anything. Yes, it seemed a little late for this, but oh well.

“We’re done now.” After a bit, I heard a voice and turned around to see Clena and Roni standing in fresh new clothes. They were both wearing deep navy long sleeve shirts and pants, similar to the clothes they’d been wearing under their armor earlier. Since the color of the clothes was so plain, it only made Roni’s bright custard cream-colored hair stand out even more.

“Now then, sit down over there and tell me what’s going on with you,” I said, motioning to a cloth I’d laid on the ground that was big enough for both of them.

The blanket that Roni had been using got wet during the heatstroke treatment, so I’d moved it into the corner. Once the two girls sat down on the new cloth, I sat cross-legged in front of them on my own, while Rulitora sat behind me to my right. Since they lived in tents with open floors, they were used to sitting directly on the ground.

“Allow me to thank you once more. If it hadn’t been for you two, Roni and I wouldn’t have made it. Thank you so much.” Clena sat up straight and bowed her head deeply. She seemed to know exactly how to be perfectly polite.

Roni also thanked me and bowed her head. She was just full of energy, and her smile looked cute.

“Seems like you’re both okay now. I’m glad you recovered so quickly.” When I said that, the girls raised their heads. Their faces were both full of color now.

Since Clena had been wearing metal armor, she’d been worse off than Roni, but the pain from the burns hadn’t caused her to fall unconscious. Not only that, but she was currently surrounded by a man and a bunch of lizardmen. She acted tough, but I imagined that she was experiencing stormy weather on the inside. That’s why I was so happy to see that the two were in high spirits again.

Now that I looked at her, I could tell Clena wasn’t pushing herself to appear a certain way. She trusted us, and was opening her heart to us, and that made me happier than anything else. As I continued to look at her from the front, my eyes couldn’t help but slide down to her plump thighs. Then, remembering how Haruno had caught me looking at her breasts, I quickly averted my gaze – and ended up looking Clena straight in the eyes. She was blushing, and looked like she wanted to say something. *Did I just get caught again?*

I decided to cover for myself by beginning the conversation. “So, what were you doing in the void? I traveled there for a reason, but what about you?”

“...Don’t laugh, okay?” Clena said.

“I’ll do my best.”

Roni looked worried as she watched Clena. *Is their reason really that weird?*

“I was heading for the desert kingdom,” Clena answered.

“That thing in the center of the southern desert?” I asked.

“...You’re not going to laugh?” Clena asked with a worried face.

I cocked my head, trying to figure out why she was so worried, and then I remembered. Even the people at the temple had said the stories about the desert kingdom were hard to believe, and treated them like superstition. To people in this world, ‘looking for the desert kingdom’ probably equated to something like ‘looking for cryptids’ in my world.

“Umm, Lady Clena,” Roni said, looking a bit flustered. “Since Sir Touya was summoned, perhaps he doesn’t know about the desert kingdom?”

“No, I know about it.”

“You do?!” When I quickly answered, Roni turned to me in surprise. Her tail was puffed up again – it seemed like that happened whenever she got surprised.

“Remember, I told you that I came here to save the Torano’o tribe. I knew where they were located, so I did a little research on the void.”

“Ohhh...” Roni’s beast ears twitched as an impressed look passed over her face. She had a childish charm to her, but it was different from Rium’s.

“If I were to laugh, it’d be at the fact that you crossed the wasteland in metal armor without even preparing a desert/wasteland-customized overcoat.”

“Urk... G-give us a break! We didn’t know it was going to be this hot!” Clena argued with a heated face.

I felt like there was a difference in the amount of knowledge the average person possessed in this world, versus my world. For example, I’d never actually been to the desert, but I’d seen it multiple times on TV. In this world, people could only learn things from word of mouth or books, and the rest was left up to their imagination.

“...I’m grateful to you,” Clena said, as she averted her eyes in embarrassment. “To the lizardmen who saved our lives and carried us all the way here... And to

you, who saved my womanhood."

She must have been talking about the burns on her boobs. They looked so amazingly big and plump, I couldn't help but feel proud that I'd managed to fully restore their curvaceous splendor. As these thoughts ran through my head, Clena started blushing and staring at me again, so I decided to get back to the topic at hand.

"A-anyway, I'm not going to laugh at the fact that you were looking for the desert kingdom. I actually think it sounds pretty adventurous."

"...Oh. Thanks." Clena and Roni looked so sweet as they displayed their relief.

I went on. "But now that I've heard what you're after, I'm afraid I can't let you go any further." I stared at Clena as I said this, and she stared back with a grave look on her face. Meanwhile, Roni glanced nervously between Clena and I.

"...Because we aren't prepared well enough?" Clena asked.

"That's one reason why, but it's because I know exactly what sort of situation this desert is in right now." This time, I glanced at Rulitora.

"Rulitora, tell them about the sandworm that attacked the reservoir."

"I see. Of course."

Rulitora figured out exactly where I was heading with this, so he turned to Clena and Roni and told them about the sandworm that had attacked the Torano'o tribe's lifeline. He also left out no details about the many warriors who had died fighting the monster.

As they listened, Clena and Roni's faces stiffened. Roni squeezed her hands into fists on top of her knees and grit her teeth in a frightened expression, while her tail flopped weakly onto the floor.

"Apparently, there are other monsters as well, like the giant scorpions," I said, as Rulitora smacked his armor. When they looked at the carapace that covered his body, I wanted them to imagine how big the original monster had been. "Heat worse than the wasteland, and powerful monsters. Do you really think you could make it through there alone, regardless of how well you're prepared?"

“W-well...”

“Lady Clena...” Roni worriedly glanced at Clena, who was at a loss for words and staring downwards.

“There’s also the basic question of whether or not the desert kingdom actually exists. Wandering around a desert looking for legendary ruins is a recipe for suicide.”

“I-it does exist! I’m sure of it!” Clena shot her head up and retorted loudly.

“If you’re that sure, then do you have any proof? The people at the temple in Jupiter said they hadn’t found any.”

“Well... That’s because it was erased. The desert kingdom was completely erased from existence.”

“...What do you mean?” I asked, and Clena looked away awkwardly. She seemed to be hesitating about whether or not it was okay to tell me.

“Lady Clena...” Roni murmured worriedly.

Clena gave her a small smile, then turned back to me with determined eyes. “Well, I do owe my life to you... And besides, Touya, it’s connected to you as well.”

“Connected to me?” I retorted in confusion. Clena gave me a mysterious nod. “The desert kingdom truly did exist, but it was erased from history.”

So it wasn’t that records hadn’t been left – they had just been completely erased. No wonder the people at the temple hadn’t been able to come up with anything. The question now was why it was erased from history, and what it had to do with me. Luckily, what Clena said next completely answered all of that.

“The demon lord and the demon race were born in the desert kingdom.”

That’s right. According to Clena, the desert kingdom used to belong to the demon lord. It was also the site of the final battle between the demon lord and the first sacred king.

Fourth Bath – Death Bath, Scalding Hot Bath, Super Intense Bath

And so I stood in the wasteland, face to face with a monster. It was a gembolic, a monster with grayish brown fur, a black tail, and a large horn jutting out of its white forehead. Gembolics were herbivores, but easily scared, so they often attacked people who got too close. When it thrust its horn forward, I deflected it to the left with the side of my round shield.

"Gotcha!"

Then, I spun my body with my left leg and swung my broad ax as hard as I could into the gembolic's defenseless neck. It was heavy hit. I hadn't managed to slice off its neck, but I could feel its spine snap. The gembolic fell to the ground, motionless, and I let out a sigh. "Excellent job, Sir Touya!"

After I pulled out my ax and set it on the ground, I put my hands together and prayed so the gembolic's soul would rest in peace. In this world, offering up a prayer after defeating a monster allowed one to absorb part of the monster's blessing power as an enhancement. There was no set way to do the prayer, so everyone just did their own thing. Some even danced, so I figured there'd be no problem with me putting my palms together.

In terms of boosting stats and leveling up, actual battles did the job much quicker than practice. I had no plans to take on the demon lord or the demon army officers who did his bidding, but I knew that I'd have to fight monsters eventually – meaning that Rulitora's suggestion to go hunting was actually a pretty good idea. It'd give me real battle experience, and allow me to level up at the same time.

It had already been a week since I first arrived at the Torano'o tribe settlement. I went hunting early in the morning, practiced with my magic textbook and created water in the afternoon, then went to bed early in the evening, day after day.

“Hmm. The sweepdogs are looking over here.”

Rulitora’s eyes were focused on three dog-like monsters hidden in the shadow of a rock. Each was a size bigger than a wolf, and had a unique dotted pattern on its fur. They often went after leftover food and cleaned out fishermen’s hauls, so people called them sweepdogs. These monsters were a common sight all over the wasteland, and now, they’d set their sights on the gembolic I just defeated. If I ignored them, they might follow me back to the settlement, which could put the children in danger. I had no choice but to fight.

I left my broad ax on the ground, then unsheathed my dagger and approached the sweepdog. This was the monster type I’d first defeated, one week ago. There had only been one at the time, but it was fast, and hard to keep up with using my heavy broad ax. In the end, I just kept swinging my ax around wildly until it occasionally hit something.

This time, I didn’t want to struggle. A dagger would be enough to take down a sweepdog that leapt at me, and I knew from experience that a light dagger with its quick, small movements would make it easier to fight one. When the first sweepdog lunged at me, I knocked it on the side with my shield, like I’d done with the gembolic, then thrust out my dagger to the throat of the second sweepdog that leapt at me from behind. After feeling my dagger go in deeper than I thought it would, I quickly let go of it and went back to my broad ax.

I needed to keep my guard up. When I turned my shield toward the first sweepdog, it was ready to leap at me again. Instead of taking the brunt of it with my shield, I stepped in as the sweepdog jumped and prepared to counter it with my shield. Slamming an enemy with one’s shield was known as a shield bash, but there also existed a technique known as the counter bash. After I bashed the sweepdog back, I followed through and finished it off with my broad ax before it could get back up.

“Sir Touya, behind you!”

As Rulitora’s sudden shout echoed, I held up my shield and turned around to see the third sweepdog drooling and baring its sharp fangs. It leapt at me, and I panicked – I wouldn’t be able to counter in time with my broad ax. I frantically blocked with my shield, but my timing was off, so I failed to counter it as well.

“Stone Throw!”

Rulitora ran toward me with his glaive, but before he could reach me, round stones went flying straight into the third sweepdog’s side.



Surprised by the sudden turn of events, Rulitora stopped in his tracks. I, on the other hand, already knew where the bullets had come from.

“That was a close call.”

I looked in the direction of the voice and spotted Clena and Roni. They were both wearing a simple surcoat just like me, and Clena was holding her thin sword with her arms crossed. I didn’t know the details surrounding the bullets I’d just seen, but it was apparently one of her spells.

They had been watching me fight from afar. It’d been a full week since I healed them, and as a result they seemed to feel indebted to me. Clena was still acting cautious of me – probably because I’d touched so many different parts of her. After the healing, they decided to stay at the settlement as well, since there was no way they’d be able to get home safely on their own. They ended up sleeping in my tent. The lizardmen didn’t have guest tents, and they’d only put one up for me since I was a special exception. Clena and Roni didn’t insist on getting a tent of their own, and decided that if they had to sleep in someone else’s, they’d rather it be with a fellow human.

After all that had happened, Roni tried to mediate things between us by saying “it was necessary for the treatment.” Yes, I’m sorry, but of course I had been excited the entire time. When I saw how pure Roni was in the way she worried about us, it kind of made me hate myself.

Despite the fact that she had her guard up, I assumed Clena came out to hunt with me because she still preferred that to being surrounded by lizardmen she didn’t know. She normally kept her distance, but would swoop in to help me when things got rough.

“You can use your light cleric magic, right? Why aren’t you casting any spells? If you had summoned a light spirit and put it on standby, you could have saved yourself back there,” Clena said.

“Oh, you can use it that way, too?” It seemed like some really good advice. Honestly, I’d never even considered that strategy.

“I suppose you really are a beginner, Sir Touya...” Roni added.

“Yeah. That’s why I was trying to fight without using magic – to train myself.”

At first, I'd struggled against a single sweepdog, but now I could take on a gembolic, which was an even stronger monster. Even though they were monsters, I had hesitated when it came to taking their lives, and made Rulitora come to my rescue when one almost got me. But one day, when I saw a young lizardman come home wounded from a hunt, I realized something: without the help of Rulitora and the other lizardmen, I would have ended up the same way. That allowed me to cut off my emotions and fight the monsters, which in turn made me grow. Normally one might be tempted to become a little over confident or get carried away, but luckily, I didn't need to worry about any of that.

"Sir Touya, shall we call it a day?" Roni asked.

"Yeah, good idea."

"Roni, time for us to head back too," Clena said.

"Yes, Lady Clena!"

Over the past week, I'd more or less gotten used to this life. But the stronger I got, the farther Rulitora seemed to be from me. I imagined I was now able to truly understand just how strong he really was, which had completely been over my head thus far. Clena also surpassed me in terms of magic ability, which was evident in how accurate her aim had been with the sweepdog. I wasn't stupid enough to gain false confidence in a situation like this.

"Thanks for helping me back there, Clena."

Once I thanked her, Clena looked in the other direction. "Oh, it was nothing." Her cheeks were red. She had her guard up against me, but she didn't hate me.

Rulitora lifted up the gembolic I'd defeated with ease. "Let's be off, then." It was my third gembolic for the day, and he was carrying them all without any problems.

We left the sweepdogs where they were. Gembolic meat could be eaten, but sweepdog meat had a stench that rendered it inedible. It was probably due to what they ate. Since we left the corpses there, they would eventually be eaten by other carnivorous monsters.

Once we returned, I spotted people gathered up in front of the settlement

entrance.

“Ohh! Sir Touya has returned!”

“Sir Touya! Over here!” Some lizardmen who saw me began shouting.

“Let’s go, Rulitora!”

“Yes, sir!” Rulitora and I nodded to each other, then dashed toward the group.

They were surrounding two other lizardmen. One was bleeding from the shoulder, and the other from the thigh. I placed my hand on the wounds and used Healing Light to heal them. In the blink of an eye, the wounds disappeared. My week of training had certainly paid off. After using up all my MP and then restoring it day after day, my magic ability had risen a great deal.

“You didn’t heal me slowly on purpose, did you?” Clena asked.

“Believe me, I didn’t.” That was just a testament to how much I’d grown.

After I finished healing them, I washed the blood off my hands and called out to them. “What happened back there? Did you let your guard down?”

Offended, the two warriors quickly retorted. “Not a bit!”

“We made sure to defeat the monsters!”

After living there for a week, I learned how to tell lizardmen’s facial expressions apart. The young warriors were pointing to the corpse of a gold ox, which I assumed they’d defeated. As the name suggests, gold oxen were wild ox monsters that possessed golden fur.

I heard Roni speaking to Rulitora behind me. “I’ve never seen that type of monster before.”

“Because we’ve been avoiding them,” he answered. The gold ox was one of the strongest monsters in the void, so Rulitora had been making sure that an inexperienced trainee like me didn’t end up facing it too soon.

“Praise them, Sir Touya! Those three took down a gold ox all on their own!” Dokutora patted a warrior near him on the back and let out a hearty laugh.

“Wow! That’s incredible!”

The lizardman who Dokutora was patting had been in a squad with the other two. Basically, the idea to put each of the ten warriors who'd survived the battle with the sandworm in charge of three young lizardmen had turned out to be a success. Just like I'd grown over the past week, the young lizardman had gained a lot of battle experience under the tutelage of the tribe's veterans.

After being so worried about the future of his tribe, the warrior chief Dokutora looked simply ecstatic. Through hunting in groups of four, they'd learned how to work as a team, and even recently started mixing in other members to try out different combinations.

"Oh, and Sir Touya, I'll be sure to have them deliver the monster's fur later."

After he watched the young warriors heal up, Dokutora picked up the golden ox and left with it. The monster's golden fur was actually closer to the color of the desert or the wasteland earth – in other words, it was a camouflaging color, and prized as a rare fur in human towns. Since the Torano'o tribe lived in such a hot place, they needed meat, but didn't have much use for fur, so I decided to accept all the golden ox fur as thanks for the water.

After we ate lunch, we moved to the reservoir and dumped all the water I'd collected from the Unlimited Bath into it. Then, I went inside the Unlimited Bath to escape the sun and did a little studying.

The reservoir wasn't just a hole they'd dug in the ground – it was shaped like a grinding mortar, and was lined with glass on the inside. Thanks to that, the water didn't slip into the earth, allowing the hole to be used as a proper reservoir. There were numerous spots like this in the void, and the Torano'o tribe used them regularly. I could see a few trees growing on the edge of the hole, and there was enough space to lie down near one and still be in the shade.

The hole was surprisingly large, so much that when I first saw it, I'd let out a gasp. I was also surprised by how little water was left in it. The elder suggested that the holes had been created by large fireballs, which made me wonder: how big did a fireball have to be in order to melt the ground? Regardless of what may have happened here in the past, it was the kind of idea that sent shivers up my spine. According to Clena and Roni, there was a possibility that the hole had

been created by a stray blast during the battle that had happened in the desert kingdom. *Just what sort of battle happened between the sacred king and the demon lord?*

Of course, the Torano'o tribe didn't have the power to create a new reservoir. After their reservoir was destroyed by the sandworm, they were, in a way, lucky that it'd only created a hole that caused the water to leak out. Normally, sandworms avoided water, so the mere fact that it had run into their reservoir was bad enough, and it had all truly been a stroke of awful luck for the Torano'o tribe.

While we dumped the water into the reservoir, Rulitora stood guard over me. Since it'd be too hot for him to stand there in his gear, he left his giant scorpion armor inside the tent. I was hot too, so I'd taken off all my armor and was only wearing light clothes. Today, Clena and Roni were standing closer to me than when we went hunting, possibly because it was so hot out.

"You're still not out of the sun completely, right?" I asked. "I won't order you to come near me, but it wouldn't hurt for you to get a little closer to the water."

"...You won't do anything weird?" Clena asked.

"No, I won't. Have I done anything over the past week?"

"...I guess not."

I hadn't done a single thing. The only time I'd ever touched Clena was when I healed her burns. I wanted to bathe with her, but I didn't want to force her to do it and make her hate me. After all, ever since then, neither of them had stepped a foot in the Unlimited Bath, and instead washed themselves with water inside the tent. They borrowed soap and towels from me, though.

Because of that, I just didn't feel like using the Unlimited Bath alone. I had to leave the tent while they were washing themselves, so I washed myself with the lizardmen in the reservoir. Letting my body float in the water while I stared up at a clear, starry sky was actually pretty fun, and something I'd have a hard time recreating in my home world. The Unlimited Bath was comfortable with all its furnishings, but this was a different pleasure that you couldn't experience with an indoor bath.

I also felt less resistance toward bathing with the lizardmen than I had felt toward bathing with the temple elder. The first time after I brought some water out, I'd bathed with a young female lizardman and her child. That might sound exciting, but remember, she looked the same as the male lizardmen. But perhaps it was for the better that they all looked much different from normal humans.

The problem was the children in the settlement. I really wish they'd stop submerging their faces in the water and paddling toward me. They looked just like crocodiles when they did that, and it was pretty scary. They also seemed to enjoy being able to surprise me. Thankfully, I was able to become good friends with not just the children, but everyone else in the settlement over that week. Bathing in the same water as them may have helped that somewhat.

Also, let me just state for the record that there were no problems with using soap in the reservoir. I had first noticed it when Clena and Roni used my soap, but for some reason, the water it'd been used in would eventually purify itself. Whatever soap got left over became unable to retain its form, and simply dissolved. My soap wasn't just superior, it was also eco-friendly.

"Lady Clena, you heard Sir Touya..." Roni spoke up.

"...Fine." Once Roni prodded her, Clena moved a bit closer to me. We went through this sort of thing just about every day. As they hesitated to get close to me, I invited them both inside the Unlimited Bath. "It's nice and cool here. Come on in."

"O-Okay..."

When she took off her shoes and stepped inside the changing area, Clena's face changed from tense to relaxed. With all three of us inside, the bath felt pretty cramped, but I could lower the temperature of the water in order to make it a refreshing cold bath.

It had been so hot outside that they were both sweating. "Here, take some towels."

"...Thanks." Clena took the towel without resisting.

Despite the heat outside, it was nice and breezy inside the bath, thanks to the

cool water. I had some cups ready, and I poured cold water in them so we could refresh ourselves. *Heh heh heh... This feels so good, once they experience it, they'll never be able to escape!*

Seriously, though, it's not like I intended to do anything *bad* to them. It's just that we'd been living in the same tent for a week, so I wanted to try and get them to stop keeping me at a distance, and I hoped the cool bath would be the thing to do it. Thanks to my MP growing, I could create water for a longer period, which allowed the reservoir to fill up much quicker than I'd planned. Now, it was one third full, and lizardmen children were already able to play near the edge of the water.

When I saw that, I asked Rulitora a question. "You lizardmen go into the water often, right?"

"Yes, since it helps us get through the heat." Technically, they never took baths, but they did submerge themselves in water every day.

"Why are baths off limits?"

"Because of the... 'steam,' was it? We just can't stand that. It prevents us from opening our eyes, and feels like our bodies are being enveloped by something. Very uncomfortable."

"Th-that does sound pretty bad..." It seemed like sand lizardmen were more averse to baths than I thought.

We spent the next few hours in peace. Then, Roni's wolven ears suddenly started to twitch.

"Huh?" she murmured.

"Roni, what's wrong?"

Instead of answering Clena, Roni left the Unlimited Bath, closed her eyes, and placed her hands around the backs of her ears. Once I realized that she was straining her ears, I stuck out a finger toward the children playing near the water and shushed them. They obediently placed their hands over their mouths and kept quiet.

"I knew it... People are approaching. Saying there's trouble."

“Trouble? Maybe the ones who went out hunting today discovered something.”

But what could they have found in this barren wasteland? Although, if the lizardmen are saying there’s trouble, it’s probably something bad...

“Hey, maybe we should head back.” Clena nudged my shoulder. Judging from her subdued look, she had probably been thinking similar thoughts.

“Okay. Roni, where are the voices coming from?”

“Uhh... Over there.”

“Toward Jupiter,” Clena added.

“Rulitora, go and stand watch over there just in case,” I said. “I’ll get the children out of the reservoir.”

“Understood.” Rulitora immediately picked up his glaive and ran off in the direction Roni was pointing toward.

While he surveyed the area, I got the children out of the water and gave them some towels I’d prepared. It’d be okay if they were still a little wet. Once I checked to make sure no one was missing, we took the children back to the settlement.

After we hurried back, we found that the warriors who’d been shouting had already returned to the settlement, and a crowd had gathered near the entrance. Dokutora was so big that his head popped out from the crowd a little. Once we got near, Rulitora called out to him. “Dokutora!”

“Oh, Rulitora! Are the children with you? I was just about to go and get them.”

“Yes, we noticed the voices and brought them all back. What happened?”

“Well... There’s a horde of monsters approaching.”

As we listened to them talk, Clena and I exchanged a look. Instantly, I recalled the mob of monsters that I’d saved them from. I heard that the lizardmen hadn’t been able to completely eradicate them, so these were most likely the survivors.

Oblivious to our surprise, Rulitora and Dokutora went on talking. According to the warriors, who were now sitting on the ground, a small hooded man had been leading the horde.

“The guy I knocked over?!” I blurted out.

There had been a small hooded man leading the monsters who attacked Clena and Roni... Could it be the same guy?

“Was he riding a lesser boar?” I asked.

“Yes. Do you know him?”

“By the time you guys arrived on the scene, he had already been flattened by the monsters behind him.”

“...He must be a tough one, then.”

I imagined the man must have taken quite a bit of damage from being trampled like that, but perhaps he was really tough – or maybe he’d been able to quickly dodge out of the way. Either way, if this small man was the same one, we needed to be careful.

“But what have they been doing for the past week?” Clena interjected.

“Maybe they don’t have anyone who can use cleric magic, so they had to wait for their wounds to heal?” Roni guessed.

“That’s a good question,” a young warrior answered.

Perhaps they’d been preparing for something. Or could this be some kind of trap?

Dokutora also looked a bit tense. But the words that came out of the young warrior’s mouth dissipated – no, eradicated all my questions.

“The thing is... the monster horde looked bigger than it did last time. About five times bigger.”

“Five times?!”

With my questions eradicated, I had no choice but to accept the biggest crisis I’d faced yet. *No wonder Dokutora looks so tense. Don’t tell me that small man spent this entire week gathering up as many monsters as he could...*

“That reminds me,” Clena said. “I’ve heard about a certain type of magic that allows demons to control monsters. Sometimes they’ll even summon monsters and then put them under their control, so maybe that’s what allowed him to gather so many.”

“Summoning, huh?” It felt strange to think that this magic was a similar type to the one that’d brought me here.

“Umm...” Roni cocked her head in worry, perhaps because she’d noticed how grave my face had become.

“Oh no, I’m fine, I’m fine.” In response, I shook my hand and tried to pass it off as nothing.

The question now was whether or not we could win against a horde of monsters that was five times the size of the previous one. This settlement had already lost many of its veterans in the sandworm attack. Even if hunting in groups of four had taught the young warriors how to fight, I doubted they’d be able to go up against such a mob and make it out unscathed.

When I looked around, I saw how solemn everyone had become – it felt like we were attending a funeral. They probably all realized how difficult it would be to protect the settlement. Slowly, everyone started whispering things to the person nearest to them, and when I looked at their faces, I could tell that it was nothing constructive. Meanwhile, Clena and Roni had moved in and were currently hiding behind my back. The worsening mood must have scared them.

In order to break through this deadlock, I decided to propose a plan. As I guarded Clena and Roni with my back, I called out to Rulitora. “Rulitora, how many reservoirs do the Torano’o tribe use?”

“What? Well, it rains in different places depending on the season, and it’s hard to hunt during those periods, so we always move to wherever the rainy season just ended.”

In other words, they moved to a full reservoir that wasn’t going to get any more rain. “Could you move to another reservoir, then? It may not have water in it now, but I can easily do something about that.”

“Well...”

“No.” As Rulitora hesitated, the elder stepped in for him. “If we turn our backs and run here, the monsters could completely demolish the reservoir beyond all repair.”

“Hmm...” I couldn’t think of a rebuttal.

The lizardmen relied on the limited water that filled the reservoirs during the rainy seasons in order to survive, so losing an entire reservoir was a matter of life and death. No matter how threatening their enemy was, they couldn’t afford to run away. I also couldn’t stay here forever, especially since it got even hotter during summer. I could only barely withstand the heat now thanks to the Unlimited Bath, and I didn’t have any confidence that I could take it if things became even more intense. The only way to solve this problem seemed to be the Torano’o tribe moving to another area, but I didn’t have the power to guarantee their safety after I left the void. In the end, I realized the idea to throw everything away and run was an irresponsible one.

“Sir Touya. Moving west is the quickest way to leave the void. You should have the power to make it, even with your human legs. If you keep going west, you’ll find a town road, which will lead you to a human village.”

“...Hey.” My voice suddenly got low. I knew what the elder was trying to say.

“This area is on the verge of becoming a battlefield. Sir Touya, you must escape and survive, no matter what it takes.” Yes, he was telling me to run away – to abandon the Torano’o tribe and run away.

Once they told me to go and immediately bundle up my things, I returned to my tent and sat on the ground without spreading some cloth down.

“...Hey, what are you going to do?” Clena asked timidly.

I had no answer for her. Roni also looked worried, and her shoulders were shaking softly, as if she was afraid. Outside the tent, I could hear more noise than usual, and saw silhouettes of the lizardmen running to and fro on the white wall of the tent. They were getting ready to fight.

I want to help them somehow... But what can I do? I had needed Clena’s help when I was up against only three sweepdogs... At this rate, I’ll just hold everyone back. The elder said they’d be able to preserve the water until the

rainy season, but honestly, I'm not sure I believe him. He'd also told me that I'd helped them enough. That they couldn't cause me any more trouble...

Rulitora also intended to stay at the village. He apologized for making that decision despite becoming my raver, and said that he'd buy us enough time to escape. They knew their chances at victory were low at best – but it was a matter of survival.

Honestly, I was scared. I thought that I might be able to come in handy even though I couldn't fight, thanks to Healing Light, but I was still scared. I was afraid of standing on the battlefield. I'd become able to hunt over the past week, but my fear taught me that it'd only been due to the safety I felt from being watched over by Rulitora and the others. But I was also afraid of what would happen if I did as they said and ran. The Torano'o tribe had a very low chance of victory. There were simply too many monsters. What would happen if they got annihilated after I ran? I'd probably become tortured by guilt from abandoning them. I was afraid of fighting, but I was also afraid of that.

"Clena, Roni, are you–"

"We'll leave that up to you." Clena interjected.

"We can't escape the void without your water, Sir Touya..." Roni added.

"Sorry if this seems harsh, but it's not exactly the kind of situation where we can just choose the better option."

Clena and Roni were going to leave their fates up to me. Now I had even more responsibility to bear. I had little hope of winning if I fought, but I'd become a prisoner to guilt if I ran. In this situation, a hero would probably fight. I honestly didn't care about whether or not I acted like a hero, but it wasn't as if that made running away seem like the better decision.

When I sent Clena and Roni a glance for help, I saw Haruno's face in their own for a moment. *If I ran here and survived, would I be able to proudly look Haruno in the face when we reunited? No way. I wouldn't even be able to stand in her presence any longer. I'd feel too ashamed. And it'd fill me with regret.*

As I looked down to the ground, the faces of the lizardmen came to me. Dokutora and his hearty laugh. The solemn elder and his hard-to-read facial

expressions. The young warriors who always did their best no matter how injured they got. The mischievous children, and the rest of the villagers.

That's right. If I abandon the Torano'o tribe here, I'll regret it forever.

That settles it. I'm not going to run. I'm going to stay with them and fight. I may hold them back if I fight normally, but I should be able to support them with my cleric magic.

When I looked up, Clena and Roni were staring at me with worried eyes.

"You're going to fight, aren't you?" Clena asked me, after she saw my face.

"Yeah." I nodded, and she let out a small sigh. Judging from her lack of surprise, I guessed she'd expected this from the beginning.

"See?" she said. "I told you he'd end up staying, didn't I?"

"Well, Sir Touya was nice enough to save us when we were in trouble, too..." Roni seemed unsure of how to respond to Clena's triumphant declaration, so she gave me an awkward smile.

Wait... Do they think I'm some kind of brave person who can't ignore people who are in trouble? No... Maybe they even think I'm heroic! They know I'm a Hero of the Goddess, after all...

I wanted to make sure I straightened out this misunderstanding, so I called out to them. "Just so you know, I'm only doing this because I don't want to regret having run away."

"Who cares? I wouldn't blame you for running in a situation like this."

"Besides, you wouldn't be able to make this decision without at least a little bravery," Roni added.

It was like they could both read my mind. Of course, it made sense that people in this world knew exactly how fearsome monsters really were.

"Relax, it's still better than bluffing your way through!" Clena said with a smile, and her words felt surprisingly reassuring. She had seemed frail when I was healing her burns, but in this moment, she looked like a truly reliable woman. "...You're not thinking about anything weird, are you?"

Sorry. I was remembering when I healed the burns on your boobs.

Once we decided we were going to stay, we made preparations to fight, rather than run, then left the tent. I had Roni help me put my brigandine on. It was a different type than mine, but the metal armor that Clena wore was hard to put on alone, so Roni was used to helping. Thanks to that, she was an extremely skilled assistant. I could feel the villagers' eyes on us as we walked up to the warriors. Rulitora was the first to notice us.

"Sir Touya, why are you dressed like that?!"

"You need a healing squad, right?" I smiled, and Rulitora turned to Dokutora in shock. I was trying to act cool, and hoped that it hadn't backfired.

"I'll plan our strategy!" Clena proudly declared in front of the Torano'o warriors.

Rulitora and the others gave her an incredulous look, but Roni jumped in and nervously explained. "Lady Clena comes from a family of strategists, you see..."

Despite Roni's vague wording, I concluded that Clena came from a family that studied military tactics. Compulsory education didn't exist in this world, which meant that Clena probably came from a family of military nobles or knights. Judging from the way she carried herself and her ornate sword, it made sense. The Torano'o tribe seemed clueless when it came to strategy, especially since they hadn't thought of fighting in groups of four until I brought it up, so I decided to mediate and listen to what she had to say.

"Still, there's only so much we can do in a situation like this," Clena began.

She ended up suggesting a plan where we'd leave the settlement and attack the monsters head on. There, the warriors would split into two groups: one to stop the mob, and another to attack it from the side. The Torano'o tribe's settlement was located in the center of a flat wasteland, and only had a simple fence around it, which made it rather unfit for defending. Rulitora and the others agreed that it would be hard to fight and protect the settlement at the same time, so they accepted the plan. According to Clena, this plan wouldn't work against a human army, but it would be effective against a mob of monsters, since they'd lose their order with a single solid hit. In exchange, taking out whoever was controlling the monsters was an absolute necessity.

The small hooded man. Even without the plan, there was no way we could ignore someone who had the ability to quintuple his forces in a single week.

The warriors would split into a front and rear group and march out. The group in front would defend from mob attacks, while the rear group would circle around and attack from the side. Clena, Roni and I planned to stand in the back of the front group. The only question left was who would command each group. Rulitora and Dokutora were good candidates, but Rulitora wanted to use his giant scorpion armor to assist in the defending, and Dokutora declined outright.

"I'm the current warrior chief," he said. "It's my job to protect the settlement."

"Hmm..." Once he heard that, Rulitora became unable to stand his ground – especially considering how he had stepped down from his post as warrior chief and left the settlement – and decided to join the attackers.

Rulitora had probably wanted to use his armor to become everyone's shield. But in the same vein, his glaive was much stronger than the spears Dokutora and the other lizardmen were using. Having him work hard as an attacker seemed to be the best choice.

Once we got a bit out from the village, the massive monster horde came into view ahead of us. They were closer than we expected. If we had departed even a little later, we might have been forced to fight them in an area that could have ended up damaging the settlement. Dokutora stopped the warriors, and we prepared to engage the enemy.

"Touya, can you summon three light spirits?" Clena asked.

"You want to send them out as a pre-emptive attack?"

"Yeah, but I don't want you to hit the monsters. I'm going to utilize your power for something else."

"Oh, I see."

I did as Clena told me and summoned three light spirits, which cost me hardly any MP. Clena possessed a spell that allowed her to borrow power from various spirits in order to attack. The Stone Throw she'd used to help me when we were out hunting had been magic powered by earth spirits. In this world there

existed people who could borrow some power from certain spirits and use their magic. In the case of earth spirits, they were known as geomancers. Clena, however, could borrow power from almost any spirit. It was a very unique type of magic, something she'd learned from trial and error, rather than a textbook or a teacher. And since she'd never found anyone else who could do such a thing, she didn't have a title like geomancer. Apparently, she'd never even thought to give herself one in the first place.

"If you can borrow power from spirits... Maybe you could call it spirit magic?" I asked.

"I don't really have a name for it, but I guess that isn't bad," Clena answered. "I'll just call it spirit magic."

"Y-you sure you don't need to think harder about it?"

In the end, our conversation led Clena to adopt the 'spirit magic' name I'd proposed. Since magic in this world was split up as 'cleric magic and everything else,' all that fell into the latter half was categorized in a surprisingly haphazard manner.

"Lady Clena, the fire is ready."

"Thanks, Roni."

Below us on the ground, Roni had started a fire in order to borrow power from fire spirits. Clena's spirit magic had one drawback – she could only borrow power from spirits that existed around her. In other words, if she was inside where there was no wind blowing, she wouldn't be able to gain power from wind spirits. If she was outside and the sun was shining, she could borrow power from light spirits that way, but summoning them allowed her to absorb more power with less MP. That's why Roni was making a fire – in order to call fire spirits to Clena's side.

Roni was skilled at these sorts of things. She had high STR and TEC stats, and was kind of like a jack of all trades. She was even almighty when it came to housework. This was all based on her lycaon race, though. She had a low STR stat compared to other lycaon, but was still as strong as an average human adult. The same went for the sand lizardmen – demi-humans' physical abilities were truly astounding.

“Um, Sir Touya. The fire’s hot, so please be careful!” she called out.

“O-okay,” I answered.

Aside from the fact that she had wolf ears where her human ears should have been, and a wolf tail coming out from her behind, she looked exactly the same as a human, and was actually pretty cute. As I continued to stare at Roni, the mob of monsters got close enough that I could now see each individual monster, and I spotted sweepdogs, gembolics, and gold oxen midst the crowd.

“I can’t find the hooded guy,” I muttered. “Maybe he’s hiding in the back, or hidden in another squad...”

“There is no other squad.” Clena quickly shot down one of my ideas.

“Where’s your proof?”

“I’ve heard about demons having ways to control monsters, but they can’t gather up monsters that don’t exist. I doubt he was able to herd that many in only a week.”

“Then how...”

“With summoning magic, it would be difficult, but not impossible. Especially if he summoned in monsters from nearby.”

“In other words, the hooded man used summoning magic to amass so many? And that’s why there can’t be another squad? Because if he gets too far away from them, he won’t be able to control them?”

“...Surprising. I didn’t expect you to figure all that out on your own.”

“Wow! How did you put it all together?!” Roni shouted.

“...Guess I just got lucky.” I’d just taken a wild guess based on all the games I’d played, but it looked like I’d been exactly right. Clena and Roni stared at me in surprise, and it didn’t look like I’d be able to give them an explanation they’d understand, so I just decided to stay quiet and casually play it off.

“Time for our pre-emptive strike!” Clena unsheathed her sword and raised it up to the sky. Soon, the three light spirits gathered at the top and formed a large light orb. “Blow them away! Flash!”

In the next instant, it looked like the orb was going to expand even further – then, it transformed into a ray of light that slashed horizontally across the mob. Once it passed, a delayed explosion rocked the ground, and some of the monsters in the very front went flying.

“Now!”

Following Clena, Rulitora and the other lizardmen started throwing rocks at the monsters. Stones that ranged from the size of baseballs to soccer balls could deal serious damage when thrown from lizardman arms. Faced with a rain of stone projectiles, the monsters cowered and stopped in their tracks.

“Gooo!”

Instantly, Dokutora’s group thrust their spears out and charged. Their goal was to take the full brunt of the monsters’ attacks and stop them in their tracks, but there was no need for them to stand and wait until the monsters reached them. After Clena’s magic and Rulitora’s group threw stones, a powerful head-on attack could allow us to gain the advantage. This was the key to Clena’s strategy.

Once Dokutora’s attack was successful, Rulitora began to move. “Okay! Follow me!”

With that, he led the warriors around so they could strike the side of the mob. Meanwhile, the humans remained in the center and supported the defending warriors from behind.

“Lady Clena!” Roni shouted. “That one’s in trouble!”

“He’s only focused on what’s in front of him... Flame Arrow!!”

Roni continued to scan the front line and let Clena know when anyone was in trouble. Whenever Clena got the signal, she’d cast a Flame Arrow, and a fiery dart would arc up from the fire and go sailing toward a monster. Now that the warriors and monsters were fighting side by side, she couldn’t cast any more spells like Flash, but she could target individual monsters with spells like Flame Arrow. Since Clena wouldn’t be able to keep up with casting and finding people on her own, Roni used her eyes to help.

Meanwhile, it was my job to using Healing Light to heal whoever got hurt.

Everyone was still doing pretty well, though, so I didn't have anything to do. I didn't have good enough eyesight to help Roni out, and since I couldn't waste my MP, I had no choice but to stand and watch the battle develop.

It looked like the lizardmen had gained the upper hand for the time being, but since the monsters had us beat in numbers, no one could let up. It was about ten stutes from where I stood to the front lines, and I could hear angry roars and shouts echoing. *This* was a battlefield. I thought I'd gotten a little used to fighting, but it was far more intense and frightening than hunting had ever been.

I didn't have time to be scared, though. Next to me, Clena and Roni were performing their duties without even flinching. I didn't care about looking cool, but I didn't want to look pathetic, either. I tried to strengthen my quivering legs, and continued to stare straight at the battlefield as thoughts ran through my mind. *Am I going to be fighting like that someday?*

"There he is! I can see Rulitora!" Someone called out.

Sure enough, just when the monsters regained their composure and started pushing Dokutora back, Rulitora's group charged in from the side. The monsters were taken by surprise, and completely lost their momentum. Meanwhile, Rulitora and his warriors never stopped rushing forward. As I watched, I was reminded how large Dokutora and Rulitora were. Their heads always remained above the crowd, so I could see exactly what they were doing.

Rulitora's moves were especially impressive. With one swing of his glaive, he sent several monsters flying into the air. Even when he wasn't using his usual forward-bent charge, he could still swing his glaive around and slash his way through the enemy, as if he was cutting a path through the wilderness. This was the strength of a Level 29 ex-Torano'o warrior chief. Dokutora, the current warrior chief, didn't look as flashy as Rulitora because he was busy shutting down the monsters' attacks. He was probably around Rulitora's level in terms of strength.

It looked as if Clena's plan had been a success. The scales were tipping in our favor. Still, it's not as if we hadn't suffered any damage. Once a few warriors got seriously injured, others stepped up to take their places, while I healed them

with Healing Light. Soon, I was faced with a young warrior who had taken a golden ox's charge head-on. He had a large wound in his right side, and blood was gushing out. I needed to touch the wound in order to use Healing Light, so I put my hand over the gored hole.

"Gggh...!"

"Just hang in there!" I said.

I felt my hands touch something wet and squishy. But this warrior had gotten injured after risking his life to fight – I couldn't allow myself to feel afraid. For the time being, I'd only be able to stop the blood, but it was better than letting him go on fighting without it.

"...Thanks," he said. "You can do the rest once the fight's over."

"Don't do anything too rash," I said.

The young warrior placed a hand on his throbbing side and went back out to the battlefield. I was worried, but I couldn't stop him. If he wasn't there, the other warriors would only have a greater burden to bear. Once I saw him off, I prepared some more water for the next warrior. I didn't want to touch someone with bloodied hands.

Afterwards, I healed five more warriors. During that time, three monsters slipped through the front lines, but the defending warriors took them out for us. Thanks to Rulitora's group, the monsters' numbers kept decreasing. Then, once I healed my sixth, I heard a voice coming from ahead. It sounded strangely shrill and irritating.

"Dammit! You can't let them get any further!"

Once I stopped the warrior's bleeding, I looked in the direction of the voice. I couldn't tell what he said after that, but I knew I'd heard it somewhere before.

"That voice just now..."

"I think that's the hooded man who was chasing us," Roni said, as her ears twitched.

"If we can defeat him, the one who summoned these monsters, will we win?"

"Just so you know," Clena quickly answered, "defeating him won't make the

monsters he summoned disappear. Remember how he got trampled last time, yet the monsters were still around?”

“Now that you mention it...”

With summoning magic, there were three parts to the process: the summoning itself, assuming control, then returning whatever was summoned back to its original location. Depending on what was summoned, some things could be instantly returned by defeating the summoner, but that didn’t seem to apply to beast-type monsters.

“Maybe I’m actually being controlled, too...” I began.

“No, no,” Clena said. “We’d be able to tell with a glance if you were.”

Apparently, one could tell by looking at the creature’s eyes – there was usually some sort of difference to them, such as being glazed over or looking dim.

“Why do these lizards keep standing in my way?! Curse that stupid hero!”

“...Huh?”

I couldn’t help but react when I heard the shrill voice a second time, and I was pretty sure I’d heard it say ‘hero.’ In other words, the reason that small, hooded man had gathered up so many monsters and attacked was because he knew that one of the summoned heroes was here. It was also strange how the charging monsters were worried about letting *us* advance. Honestly, it made no sense. I thought about going up to the front lines to find out more, but it didn’t seem possible judging by how many warriors kept switching out, and how many wounded ones I had to deal with. Meanwhile, Rulitora’s group continued to defeat monsters until all of a sudden, they had less on their side than we did.

If we’re going to capture that guy, I need to let Rulitora know at once. Then, I heard that annoying voice a third time.

“You ingrates... Fine, have it your way!”

Instantly, a pillar of light rose up from the ground. Rulitora tried swinging his glaive at it, but it was deflected with a loud clang, as if its blade had struck something hard.

“Don’t tell me that’s a ritual barrier...” Clena muttered as she watched beside me.

“A ritual barrier?”

“A barrier used to protect a caster when they’re trying to activate a big spell. He must be trying to summon something huge!”

When I looked back to the light pillar, I saw Rulitora and Dokutora double teaming it. Despite their efforts, they couldn’t seem to break through.

“Get back! A shockwave will burst out when the summoning succeeds!” Clena shouted out.

They did as she said, and dashed away from the light pillar. Immediately afterwards, blue flames poured out over the ground, and warriors screamed. Some of them failed to run away fast enough, and were swallowed up in the fire.

Behind the flames, I saw a large shadow wavering. Something was floating far above even Rulitora’s head.

Once the flames dispersed, I saw a gigantic, bloodshot eyeball floating in the sky. I didn’t bother mentioning this to anyone, but it felt just like a battle scene from a video game. Visually, it looked like a giant bulb with stringy things dangling out from it, like the kind you saw submerged in water cultures. In the center of the orb was a huge eye, while poisonous-looking tendrils, veins, or whatever they were, extended out from the bottom. From below, it looked really creepy, and the eye itself was massive. Rulitora probably couldn’t grab it even if he extended his arms to their limit.

The giant bloodshot eyeball peered down at us. *How is a monster like that going to attack us?*

“Mwa ha ha ha! You had your fun, lizards, but now it’s time to teach you just how foolish you were to ever defy the great Maius!!” the man named Maius declared, in an arrogant voice. He must have had a lot of confidence in that giant eyeball monster of his.

Perhaps due to the eye, the remaining monsters had all started running off in random directions. Thanks to that, we now had a clear view of Maius, who was

standing directly below the eyeball.

Maius took off his hood. His skin wasn't just pale, it was stark white, and his head was utterly hairless. He had the body of a child's, and while I couldn't see his face that clearly, it looked like an old man's. Maius didn't look very strong, but considering how he had just summoned that huge eyeball, I assumed his magic power was nothing to scoff at.

The giant eyeball was the real threat here. After a shout from Clena, the warriors all tossed their spears at the eyeball, but all it had to do was shake its tendrils to deflect them. Rulitora's glaive was the only weapon that seemed to actually slice into the creature, but the damage was insignificant. I had hoped that some of the other spears might end up hitting Maius instead, but unfortunately the tendrils knocked them all away. *So that's why he's standing below it.*

"Clena!" I called out.

Little did I know she was already prepared. "I'm on it! Flame Arrow!"

She fired a dart straight at the eyeball, but once again, the tendrils blocked it. They only looked like tendrils, and weren't actually plant-based, so they didn't even burn up. The warriors picked up their spears and got back into position, but were hesitating, since they already knew the weapons wouldn't work.

"Heh heh heh... Now do you realize just how powerful I am?!" I wanted to correct him and say it was the power of his eyeball, not *his* power, but I figured now wasn't the time. In any case, Maius seemed very proud that he'd managed to deflect all our attacks. "Now to give you a taste of my *true* power!"

With that, Maius raised a finger toward the sky – and the eyeball above him. Soon, I saw a powerful light burning within the pupil. I heard a growl, and assumed it was coming from the eyeball. But Clena and the defenders were looking around, wondering where the sound was coming from.



Since it sounded like a growl, they probably never imagined that it'd be coming from the mouthless eyeball. Rulitora's group also looked unsettled, especially since they had no way of attacking.

"Sir Touya, I'm scared..."

It seemed like Roni was the only one who'd caught on to the impending doom we were facing, and her ears were both drooping. It also seemed like more light had gathered into the center of the massive eye that gazed down on us. Just what was that light going to do? Maius was the only one who knew. I had a pretty good guess, though, based on all the games and stuff I'd been exposed to.

"Everyone, run to the sides! Now!" Once they heard my voice, the warriors all began to move. Clena and Roni fell behind by a second, so I grabbed their hands and yanked them away.

"Fiiiire!"

In the next moment, the eyeball fired a beam that opened up a massive hole where we had just been standing.

Now that I understood the attack, I let out a shout. "Are you kidding me?! Doesn't that guy have any respect for the fantasy genre?!"

That's right, it was a beam. The eyeball had just fired a massive laser beam at us.

The beam sent fear into even the Torano'o tribe warriors, who all panicked and moved back. In response, the eyeball mercilessly fired another beam and cut open another gaping hole in the ground. The edges of the hole were burned, and the smell pricked my nose. If any of us got hit by that, we probably won't live to regret it.

"Mwa ha ha ha! You can't keep running forever!"

The eyeball fired a third beam, which landed smack dab at the spot where I'd just been standing. It appeared the eyeball was aiming for me, which confirmed that Maius knew I was a Hero of the Goddess.

Suddenly, I remembered how Cosmos the Hero had been attacked by

demons. *Maius must have been the owner of the eyes Rulitora felt on us when we departed. They must have followed us here from Jupiter, then ran into Clena and Roni by coincidence and started chasing them instead.*

"What's wrong? Can't even fight back, can you? C'mon, I wanna see you get even more scared! Grovel to me! Bow down before me and admit your defeat!"

Since we had yet to counterattack, Maius was acting like he'd already won, but I ignored him for the time being. I had more important matters to focus on. Luckily, the eyeball couldn't keep firing beams in succession. Once it fired one, it needed some time to recharge. Additionally, once it finished charging, it couldn't change direction, which meant that we'd always have a chance to evade. That meant we wouldn't have to keep running around forever, and I could also keep other people out of the line of fire.

"Everyone, get away from wherever the eyeball's looking! It fires the beam whenever it stops moving!" I shouted in a loud voice, so everyone could hear me.

"O-okay!" Once they heard me, Rulitora's group removed themselves from the eyeball's line of sight. This left them with no time to attack, but since that beam was an instant kill, we really had no other choice. Clena left with the defenders, while Roni continued to run around with me out of worry.

"Tch! Very clever!" Maius had been cackling only moments ago, but now he seemed much less confident, and surprised that we'd easily figured out how the beam worked.

Still, it didn't mean this battle had become any easier for our side. Running around was sapping our stamina, and we were still in the process of being cornered.

We need to think of something, otherwise he'll just keep whittling our stamina down until he can nab us – and that's only moments away, unfortunately. I'd almost been zapped numerous times, and had only narrowly escaped thanks to Roni pulling my hand.

"...I know!" Suddenly, an idea hit me. I didn't know if it would really do anything, but it was worth a try. "Roni, give me a hand!"

“Um, okay!”

“And everyone else, just keep running around to buy time!”

“Hey, you could at least explain yourself!” Clena called out from behind, but I didn’t have time to engage her.

After dodging the umpteenth beam, I quickly opened the door to the Unlimited Bath and jumped inside.

“Hurry up and close the door!”

“O-okay!” After jumping in with me, Roni frantically closed the door, upon which we could no longer hear the growling charge noise.

It was impossible for anything to reach the Unlimited Bath from the outside, which meant that we could make preparations here in peace. If we took too long, though, it could put Clena and the others in danger, so we needed to hurry.

“Roni, here’s what comes next...”

“Okay! Let’s hurry!” And so, Roni helped me prepare a certain something.

After a few minutes, our plans were complete. I picked up our special weapon, while Roni cracked open the door and took a peek at what was going on outside.

“The eye isn’t moving,” she said. “And the demon is still below it.”

“Okay, we’ll jump out after it fires its next beam.”

“...Beam? You mean that light?”

“...Yeah, that thing.” It appeared that the word ‘beam’ didn’t mean anything to people in this world. *Focus! You can’t miss this chance.* I pushed all unnecessary thoughts out of my mind and concentrated.

“It fired the beam!” Roni shouted. “Now!”

“Let’s go!” Roni opened the door, and I leapt out.

The giant eyeball was floating in the same spot, with sparks flying around its pupil. It looked as if it had just finished firing a beam. Underneath it stood Maius, protected by the tendrils. He wasn’t moving either.

After glancing around, I saw that there were new holes, but no fallen lizardmen on the ground. Clena was also in fine condition, which meant that everyone had been able to keep dodging without any problems. *I can't waste this chance.* I quickly pulled out my secret weapon – the hose – and aimed it a little upwards toward the eyeball.

"Now, Roni!" I shouted, and I felt vibrations rock through the arm that was holding the hose. Right after Roni opened the door, she'd dashed back into the Unlimited Bath. "Take this, eyeball!"

Water erupted out from the hose, creating a wide arc, and assaulted the floating eyeball. When Roni heard the signal, she'd opened the faucet that the hose was attached to. The eyeball tried to protect itself with its tendrils, but unlike spears, which only had to be deflected once, the tendrils were powerless against liquid. And since I'd aimed the hose up a little, the water spilled mercilessly all over the eyeball.

"Mwa ha ha ha! You fools! Of all the things to try... You really think that's going to stop my–?!" Maius' voice was cut off by an ear-shattering screech that exploded out from the eyeball. By this point, I was really curious as to where that voice was coming from. "Impossible! How could it get damaged by mere water?!"

"Who said that was mere water?!" The water I'd fired was much more than that – because I'd poured an entire bottle of shampoo down the hose.

Water mixed with shampoo was now splashing all over the eye. I hadn't been sure whether it would work or not, but if that eye was anything like a human eye, then it was worth a try.

"Don't tell me this is the hero's power... Blergh?!"

Maius was cut off once more – this time, by the eyeball itself. Unable to bear all the pain, the eyeball had fallen straight down, crushing Maius beneath. There was no way he'd make it out unscathed.

Realizing this was our chance, I quickly called out to Rulitora. "Rulitora! Finish him off!"

"Yes, sir!"

Rulitora was standing closer to the eyeball than the other warriors, probably so he could act as a decoy, which allowed him to immediately begin a forward-bent charge with his glaive. He reached the eyeball in the blink of an eye, then raised his glaive high and brought it down with a thundering swoosh. That attack sliced the eyeball right in two.

At long last, the wriggling tendrils came to a dead stop. It looked as if we'd won. Once they saw the tendrils stop, the other warriors sat down in exhaustion. I imagined they were tired from running around so much. Still steady on his feet, Dokutora moved up to the eyeball, then plucked up Maius, who at this point looked like a dirty, beat-up rag. I'd wanted to hear what he had to say, but it looked like that wasn't possible anymore. *Oh well. I should just feel happy that we managed to win this one.*

"Well, gather up, everyone who's wounded... I'll just have to heal you one by one!" *After I get a little rest, that is.*

If I were to put it in RPG terms, I was the cleric, or the healer of the party. Now, I had to go back and use Healing Light to properly heal everyone whose bleeding I'd temporarily stopped. I started healing the most heavily wounded first, but I only got to half before I collapsed. It felt like using any more MP would render me completely immobilized. Only the lightly wounded were left, so we decided to heal them all tomorrow and headed back to the settlement. The rest of the lizardmen had been busy collecting meat and fur from the monsters while I worked on the healing, and according to Dokutora, it'd been their greatest haul yet. Now that our battle with the massive monster horde was over, it felt like it had all just been one big hunt.

Incidentally, they weren't able to salvage anything from the big eyeball. I remembered how tuna eyes were often eaten, so I thought it might be edible, but unfortunately, no one rose to the challenge – including myself. Left with no other choice, I asked Clena to dispose of it along with Maius' corpse.

As I watched the flames rise high, I put my hands together. I needed to do this first and foremost to level up, but I also couldn't ignore the feeling that this was a good time for some prayer. The lizardmen caught on that I was praying, even if they didn't understand exactly what it was for, so they followed suit and offered up prayers in their own way.

That evening, we had a grand banquet. The lizardmen planned to tan the hides and smoke the meat they'd gathered from the battle, but they also cooked part of the meat for dinner. Due to how much there was, only cooking a bit of it created enough for a full-scale banquet. Roni was also kind enough to add some flavoring to our meat.

Next to us, Rulitora and Dokutora were engaged in a heated discussion, and since the children who had become fond of me were instead absorbed in the meat, I was alone with Clena and Roni. They seemed tired from all the running they'd done, especially Clena, who spoke to me in a languid tone.

"Hey Touya, what are you going to do from here on out?"

"Well, first I need to fill up the reservoir..."

"And after that?"

"After that... I still haven't thought about it." When I said that, she stared deeply into my face.

I had a feeling I knew what she wanted to say. Their goal was to find the desert kingdom, which existed somewhere in the desert at the center of the void. The desert kingdom used to belong to the demon lord, and since I was summoned as a hero to fight the demon lord, I couldn't act like this had nothing to do with me.

Clena stared beyond the settlement to the wasteland as she spoke. "Apparently 500 years ago, before the desert kingdom was destroyed, this area was still full of greenery."

"Did something happen in the battle between the first sacred king and the demon lord?" I asked, and Clena shook her head.

"Well, something happened that was big enough to create those reservoirs, but I don't know the details. That's why I wanted to go to the desert kingdom – so we could find out."

"I see..."

I pondered this for a moment. Clena and Roni were staring at me with eyes full of anticipation, but I was more interested in this story than they knew. After

all, the entire reason I was summoned was so I could do something about the demon lord, who was supposedly about to break out of his seal – yet I had no details on the demon lord himself. Since people kept talking about stopping the demon lord, it seemed strange that no one knew where he had come from or what exactly he was... But if all that history had simply been erased, then it made sense. Perhaps the key to unlock the mysteries behind that lost history lay within the desert kingdom.

Honestly, I didn't really want to fight the demon lord, and wanted to avoid it if at all possible. At the same time, I knew I couldn't just stand by and run away if something happened. With that in mind, perhaps it would be helpful to investigate the land where the demon lord and the demons were born.

"I thought the sand lizardmen might know something about it..." Clena said, as she looked away from me.

I followed her eyes to the elder. From the word 'elder,' many people might imagine a small old person with a bent back, but that didn't apply to the Torano'o tribe. Here, elders ascended from warrior chiefs, and the elder who stood in front of us now was no smaller than Rulitora or Dokutora. It was difficult to tell if a lizardman was old, young, or male or female at first glance, but their scales got harder when they got older, and this elder's scraggy scales with their faded shade of amber told me just how ancient he was.

"I came to thank you for saving my people and the settlement..." The elder narrowed his eyes. "There are some oral traditions that we elders inherit, but they're all related to tribe leadership, so I'm not sure I can be of any help..." He slowly shook his head.

Unfortunately, the Torano'o tribes possessed no oral traditions related to the desert kingdom – but Clena stubbornly stood her ground. "Hold on a minute! I heard that you people descended from the inhabitants of the desert kingdom!"

"Oh yeah, I heard that too. But is there any truth to it?" I asked.

The elder casually denied the claims. "I'm afraid that's incorrect."

According to the elder, the Torano'o tribe moved to the wasteland after it had already become a void. Their ancestors had journeyed across the coastline and entered the void from the south, and had even circumvented the desert when

they journeyed to the northern end. One oral tradition of the tribe warned about going near the desert due to the dangers that lay within, but this was simply a warning about the dangerous monsters that existed there.

“But...” Realizing that we’d come up with nothing, Clena let her head droop down, while Roni frantically supported her.

“Oh, but there’s one... I’m not sure if it’s connected to the desert kingdom, but there’s one oral tradition that talks about the demons,” the elder said.

“Not related to the desert?”

“Not directly.” Clena and Roni looked to the elder as he spoke. “Like I told you, our ancestors entered from the south.”

“After it had already become the void.”

“Yes. They reached this land after going west around the desert... But along the way, they were attacked by demons.”

“Attacked by demons? Not in the desert, but in the wasteland?” I asked, and the elder gave me a big nod.

“I’m not sure of the details, but on the west side of the wasteland there was a large gate that was overflowing with demons. And beyond the gate was a massive underground tunnel.”

“An underground tunnel... That led to the desert?” The elder nodded again, affirming my guess.

Clena seemed to also understand what this meant. She was leaning forward and resting her chin on my shoulder as she listened. I could feel something soft really pushing into my back. In fact, it felt like two large mounds were smushing up hard against it, but she didn’t really seem to mind.

“Then, the elder at the time worked together with the warrior chief to destroy the gate so that no one could ever pass through it again.”

“So it wasn’t sealed off completely, then?” Clena asked, just to be sure.

The elder laughed and shook his head. “We don’t have spells or techniques that could achieve such things.”

When Clena and I heard that, we looked at each other and nodded. “It’s worth checking out... Can you tell us where the gate lies?” I asked.

“It’s a part of our oral traditions, but I suppose we could make an exception for you, Sir Touya...” After saying that, the elder looked at Clena and Roni. He felt indebted to me, but didn’t seem to want to tell Clena and Roni as well.

Once she realized she was being watched, Clena stood up. I felt the softness leave my back and turned to look at her.

Then, she said something entirely unexpected. “That’s fine! I don’t care! After all... I need to risk my life on Touya to pay him back for what he did for me!”

“Risk your *life*?!” Roni shrieked.

In response, I weakly muttered: “...What?”

Along with the elder, Rulitora and Dokutora, who had been sitting next to him the entire time, were all blinking their eyes in confusion. I’d recently realized that lizardmen blinked more than usual whenever they were surprised.

I realized I had to do something, so I stood up and turned to Clena. “Hold on a minute. Just what are you talking about?”

“You did enough for me to earn this. That’s all I mean.”

“And what exactly did I do?”

“Like I said earlier, you saved ‘both’ of my lives, remember?”

In other words, all I’d really done was saved Clena and Roni and healed their burns, but to Clena, I’d also saved her from the fate of being a noblewoman covered in ugly scars.

“Right now, I can’t pay you with money or anything like that. Technically, in a situation like this the best thing I’d be able to do is become your wife, but I’m still...”

“Um, no, I think risking your life is still way more than necessary.” When I thought about it as saving a damsel in distress, or how in stories parents offered their daughters up to the people who saved them, I could sort of understand it. In Clena’s case, even though she was disowned, she still had pride in her noble birth. “There’s no reason for you to go that far...”

“You’re the one who went too far.” Clena gently placed a hand on her chest.

I was speechless. When I looked at her face, I understood everything. Clena wasn’t saying this because she felt she had no choice. She really was offering herself to me in exchange for saving her life. I looked down a bit, and couldn’t help but notice how plump and curvaceous her body was. And she was only 15 years old.

Clena really was a cute girl, with her soft, bouncy silver bob that curled inwards, her big bright eyes, and her adorable face. Let me be honest here – she wanted to risk her life for me, and that feeling alone was enough to make me super happy.

“Let’s table the whole ‘life’ thing for a moment,” I said. “Does this mean you’re willing to help me look for the desert kingdom?”

“Yes, of course,” she answered. “I want to find it too, you know.”

In the end, I decided to close things by accepting her as a party member for the time being. Don’t call me a wuss, okay? She just started talking about risking her life for me all of a sudden, so I was really at a loss. Clena and Roni had both been looking for the desert kingdom from the beginning, so they’d already been risking their lives even before I’d gotten involved – which meant that Rulitora and I going along would give them a better chance at survival. And besides, why would I turn down a chance to travel with two girls who were that cute? Gaining more party members and getting strong enough to bathe with them all was right in line with the original promise I’d made with Haruno, Sera, and Rium.

Once we came to a decision, I turned back to the elder. “Elder, these two are my party members now. If you still insist on not telling me with them present, I’ll send them back to the tent.”

“Hmm... So be it. Even though it’s part of our oral traditions, this isn’t exactly one of the most important lines.”

Since the Torano’o tribe mainly lived on the northern side of the void, information that pertained to the west side wasn’t that important to them. Still, it wasn’t just something he could tell anyone, but I was prepared to take responsibility for Clena and Roni now that they were my party members.

“It’s located in the west...”

We all had trouble following as the elder explained the exact location of the gate. Lizardmen seemed to have very unique ways of giving directions.

Luckily, Rulitora had been listening, so we didn’t need to worry. “It’s okay. I know where that is.”

Roni brought out a map from the tent so we could confirm the location.

“Rulitora,” I said. “Where exactly is the gate on this map?”

“I can’t be sure of the exact spot with this map... But I believe it’s around here.” Rulitora and Dokutora peered down at the map, then traced a circle around the west side of the void. It ended up being a pretty big circle.

“No, I think it’s a little more down to the south.” The elder extended his hand and tapped a claw on the southern end of the circle. We didn’t have an exact location, but it certainly narrowed things down. At this point, the next course of action was to actually go there and find it for ourselves.

“So once we go west out of the void, we just need to go down south a bit?” Clena asked, as she traced a route along the map.

“We can head toward Ceresopolis, then move east from there,” Roni said, pointing to one of the large town markers. It looked the same as Jupiteropolis’ mark, and had ‘Ceresopolis’ written beside it.

“What kind of a kingdom is Ceres?” I asked.

“They’re known for their agriculture,” Roni answered.

“So, a nice rustic kingdom, eh? Guess that’ll be our next stop!”

We couldn’t leave until I finished filling the reservoir, but we could certainly begin preparing. The elder was kind enough to have the entire tribe help us prepare. We had no choice but to gather food for our journey from the settlement, so I was truly grateful. Of course, due to the locale, we had a rather limited selection, but I wasn’t worried.

“I’m going to head back to the tent and rest a bit. What about you, Rulitora?”

“Could I stay and drink with Dokutora and the others?”

“Sure, why not? I won’t need you to guard me as long as we’re in the settlement.”

“Thank you very much!”

Even though he was my raver, I had no intention of robbing Rulitora of his freedom, and now was the perfect time to let Rulitora do as he pleased.

“Clena, Roni, what are you two going to do?”

“If you’re going back to the tent, Touya, then we’ll go with you.” Clena was so tired that she didn’t have the energy to enjoy the banquet.

“Please support yourself on my shoulder, Lady Clena.” Roni seemed to still be in good shape, but she’d decided to head back to the tent with Clena and rest with us.

Once I got back to the tent, something occurred to me. *What are we going to do about baths tonight? I don’t have the energy to go all the way back out to the reservoir... I’ll be okay without bathing for a day, but what about Clena and Roni?*

“Clena, Roni, do you want to wash yourselves off? If so, I’ll go outside.”

“Oh? Good point...” Clena looked up at the ceiling for a moment, then crossed her eyes and looked down, deep in thought. Finally, she raised her head. “...Do you want to use the Unlimited Bath? ...Together?”

She was acting casual, but I could hear how shrill her voice had gotten. Her face was bright red, and her eyes looked very worried.

“Huh? What?” Roni anxiously looked between Clena and I.

“Calm down, Clena. What is this, all of a sudden? I mean, I’m happy... Really happy, but...” Faced with her sudden request, I wasn’t exactly unfazed, but I knew it wouldn’t do any good for us to both lose control of our emotions. I did my best to talk in a soothing voice, in order to try and calm Clena down. “First you talk about risking your life for me, and now this... You’re getting way too ahead of yourself.”

“But, I...”

“I know you have your pride as a noble. And I’m not trying to make light of

the fact that I healed your burns... In fact, I'm proud that I was able to remove every last wound and make your boobs pristine again."

"In that case–!"

"But hearing you say you're going to risk your life for me is just too heavy to deal with. Do nobles cause people trouble in order to pay them back? They don't, do they?"

"Urk..."

"Neither of us are calm right now. We need to cool off."

"...Fine." It looked as if I'd managed to calm her down for the time being. Next to her, Roni patted her chest in relief.

I spread out a large cloth on the ground inside the tent and sat Clena and Roni down on it. I decided to prepare some cold water in order to help them relax, but when I opened the door to the Unlimited Bath, Roni's shoulders twitched. "That's rude, Roni," Clena scolded her.

Roni let her shoulders droop back down. "S-sorry." It was so cute how her ears and tail always moved in accordance with her emotions.

I took three cups, entered the Unlimited Bath, filled them to the brim with cold water, then passed two to Clena and Roni. I spread a cloth across from them, took the remaining cup, and sat down on it.

After Clena drank some water, she called out to me in a calm voice. "Okay. Now I want to re-discuss the bathing together business."

"I can't really use the Unlimited Bath unless I'm there inside it. Still, I would hate to have to keep my party members outside while I use it alone."

"I guess I can understand that," Clena said, glancing at Roni. "Roni, or I suppose lycaons as a whole have a similar custom." She was referring to wolf demi-humans – Roni's race. "They always think about rank first when several people are present. They're extremely loyal, so they're often hired as servants in Junopolis."

"Interesting..." I guessed it was similar to how pet dogs ordered people in terms of ranks even within families, and in some cases, the dogs considered

themselves to be at a higher rank than their masters. Of course, saying “That sounds like a pet dog” to her would be like saying “You’re acting like a wolf” to a human, so I restrained myself.

“I want to treat Roni more like a friend, rather than a servant, but she just can’t seem to stop acting reserved, so it makes me feel bad that she’s the only one acting her part all the time.”

“I see you have your share of problems, too, Clena.”

“I guess.” Clena and I looked at each other and laughed. *You know, we may be able to get along pretty well...*

“But we *are* master and servant!” Roni protested.

“It’s true that you’re my personal raver, Roni. She was the only one who came with me when my family disowned me.”

“Is that so?” I didn’t know why Clena had been disowned, but it seemed better for me not to touch upon it. In any case, Clena and Roni’s master-servant relationship was exactly how I imagined it to be.

“I wish we could just be closer, without worrying about our status,” Clena said.

“But I...”

“See how she acts?”

Clena was Roni’s master, so it was only natural of her to act like a servant. But since Clena wanted them to act like equal friends, she was dissatisfied with that.

“Can’t you use your authority as her master to free her from raver servitude?” I asked.

“You need money to do that. And since it’s tied to citizenship, it costs a pretty penny,” Clena answered. I supposed that meant it was out of the question, since Clena had been disowned. “I just wish we could be a little more friendly with each other, that’s all.”

“It’s impossible. I’m a lycaon...” Roni drooped once more.

She wanted to be good friends with Clena too, but apparently her lycaon heritage prevented that. When I took this into account, I could see that from Roni's point of view, she and Clena belonged to a group in which Clena possessed the higher rank. Due to that, Roni's lycaon customs left her with no choice but to act like a loyal servant to Clena. This was probably one of the reasons why lycaons were such popular servants in Junopolis.

Is there anything I can do for them? Soon enough, I came up with an idea.

"Clena, Clena, hold on a minute."

"What is it?"

"Lend me your ear for a moment. I just thought of something."

"What?" Clena crept toward me, and I whispered my idea into her ear. "I see. That might work?"

"Really? You like my idea?"

"I have no problems with it! How about you?"

"Why would I complain at this stage?"

"Guess you have a point. In that case, we might as well try it."

And so, my sinister plot succeeded. Well, it wasn't *that* sinister, I guess.

Clena turned to Roni with a big grin on her face. "Roni, listen to what Touya has to say."

"O-okay!" Roni did as she was told and hurriedly adjusted her posture.

I stared across from me to Roni's face, then looked at Clena's poker face, and began to speak. "Roni, Clena, I want you to become my new party members. But forget all that talk about risking your lives for the time being. We okay so far?"

"That's fine with me. I won't forget the two lives you saved, though."

"Me either!" Roni added.

I knew I couldn't do away with all the 'debt' talk, since it would infringe on Clena and Roni's pride, so first I wanted Roni to agree to become my party member, just as planned. "And Clena is your master, right, Roni?"

“Yes!” Roni said with a happy smile. They were master and servant, but I could tell that Roni really admired Clena.

“But I think Clena wants to be a little friendlier with you, Roni.”

“Y-yes...” The smile on Roni’s face quickly changed into a depressed frown. She was so easy to read.

It seemed as if Roni wouldn’t be able to relax unless she knew that someone was a higher rank than her. This came from her lycaon blood, which made it a difficult problem to fix – but it also gave me the chance to try one specific strategy.

“Roni, you and Clena owe your lives to me,” I said.

“Huh? Oh, yes. Of course.”

As I watched how nervous Roni looked, I continued. I felt a little guilty, as if I was bullying her a little, but Clena had already given me permission, so that was my excuse. “Our other party member, Rulitora, is my raver. With that in mind, who do you think has the highest rank within our group? Who’s the party leader?”

“That’s... you, Sir Touya.”

“Well then, as your leader, I have an order for you. From now on, I want you to act like Clena’s friend.”

“Got it, Roni?” Clena grinned. She looked really satisfied.

Roni looked as if she’d been taken by surprise, but once she understood what was going on, a smile rose to her face, and she answered with enthusiasm. “Okay!”

When Clena heard that reply, her face began to sparkle. Roni’s lycaon instincts had been the only reason why she acted like a servant. In the end, she personally thought of Clena as a friend, too. “Roni, from here on out, we’re going to be friends, not master and servant,” said Clena. “I’m looking forward to it!”

“Yes, Lady Clena!” Roni was still referring to Clena in the same way, but her attitude seemed to have become a lot softer.

Just looking at the ecstatic grin on Clena's face made me pretty happy, too. She must have been overjoyed. Lycaons sensed out ranks within groups and obeyed the leader. Therefore, Roni had instinctively treated Clena as her leader. That's why I figured all we needed was someone to stand at a higher rank than Clena. In other words, me – the one who'd saved both of their lives. I'd simply become the leader of the party, while Roni could go on being Clena's raver. I had hoped that deceiving Roni's instinctive loyalty might be all we needed in order to get her to act friendlier. It may have seemed like I was trying to gain control of Roni for myself, but Clena had given me permission without a second thought. Perhaps because she'd been disowned, Clena had no real hang-ups about this sort of thing, but whether or not she could become equal friends with Roni was very important to her.

"If you're planning to use our debt as an excuse to steal Roni from me, then I'd say no, but you won't do that, right, Touya? We're going to stay together, aren't we?"

"Of course. I have a conscience, you know."

"Then I have no problems with this. Not when it comes to you, Touya!" Clena said with a smile.

"Thank you so much, Sir Touya." Roni nodded her head deeply.

The problem now was whether or not *I'd* be able to accept this situation – but I'd already given up on worrying. Rulitora and I were basically like boss and employee by that point anyway. Rulitora didn't keep track of his exact age, but he was apparently over 30, and when we stood together we looked just like an adult and a child, so it was hard for me to look at him as a friend. After all, Rulitora had already gotten married and had children. Unfortunately, they'd died in the battle with the sandworm, which had been one of the reasons why he decided to sell himself as a raver. This was part of why we eventually fell into a boss and co-worker relationship. If anything, it was closest to how a loyal retainer would act toward the young lord he served. I just had to be careful that I didn't become a *stupid* young lord.

"Remember, I had no problems accepting Rulitora's demeanor," I added.

"Is this pretty much how you were treated in your other world, too?" Clena

asked.

“No way!” I laughed. I’d been born into a run-of-the-mill family, so I answered her honestly. “I’m going to become the kind of man that Rulitora will be proud to serve. I’m ready to grow.”

I’d vowed to get stronger in order to bathe with Haruno and the others, but this basically meant the same thing. I had to rise up to that sort of status somehow, or else I’d never be able to bathe with everyone.

“With that goal in mind, this is nothing. And if it solves your problem too, Clena, then that’s the icing on top of the cake.”

“Icing... cake?”

“It means I couldn’t be happier.”

Sometimes, there were phrases that didn’t get translated through the Goddess of Light’s blessing, which caused some problems. The nuances of certain sayings and idioms could be translated, but it didn’t ensure that everything always made sense, so one needed to be careful. If there was an idiom that matched up in this world, it’d just get translated into that, but if there was no applicable idiom, it’d just get translated as-is using this world’s language. For example, proper nouns such as monster names and people’s names like Clena and Roni were simply transmitted to me as sounds, without being translated. Another drawback was how it allowed me to read and write, but since I wasn’t used to writing in this language, it took me a lot of time to get anything done. There were a lot of people in this world who couldn’t read or write, so just being able to understand it gave me more than enough ability, but still.

Anyway, the next thing I knew, Clena was staring straight at me with an ear-to-ear grin. She looked really happy. When I thought back and recalled how she’d been so worried about Roni despite being on the verge of collapsing due to her burns, I realized just what a good person she was. I couldn’t understand what kind of noble family would want to disown a girl like this. She didn’t seem too worried about it, though, so I figured it’d be a bad idea for me to touch upon it. Besides, thanks to her family, I’d gotten both Clena and Roni as new party members, so I decided to be thankful instead.

Here, I'd like to give a little analysis of how I thought I appeared to Clena and Roni. I was a suspicious man who traveled with a sand lizardman. They'd had no other choice but to go inside a tent with me, with no idea of what I was planning to do to them, but to their surprise, I'd helped them. I even healed all their burns, which might have scarred them for the rest of their lives. I may have appeared a bit conceited, but I hope they found some charm, or even some "gap *moe*" in my personality. Either way, I was grateful that Clena and Roni had come to trust me.

"Speaking of which, have you and Roni always traveled together, Clena?" I asked.

"We found several people who said they'd join us on the road from Junopolis to here, but Lady Clena said we couldn't trust any of them," Roni answered.

"They were all more or less brigands. Don't tell me you actually thought they could be trusted, Roni?"

"They were suspicious," Roni said bluntly. Her lycaon blood also gave an extremely good sense of smell, just like a wolf's. "But you smell really good, Sir Touya!"

"Oh, thanks. I bet it's all thanks to the Unlimited Bath."

Apparently, I smelled good. It probably had something to do with the fact that I used soap from the Unlimited Bath to keep myself clean. As usual, my gift came in handy in the weirdest places.

"There was also the problem of whether or not we could mention anything about the desert kingdom," Clena added.

Since all history of the desert kingdom had been erased from the entire Olympus Alliance, searching for it had become something akin to sticking one's nose into a taboo subject. Since I was interested in the desert kingdom as the birthplace of the demon lord, and I seemed trustworthy, they'd gotten a good enough impression to ignore the fact that they barely knew me. Basically, it was like they'd found someone with the same interests. I could understand that – especially when I thought about how we were all heretical believers of the same myth. In the end, I also felt like I'd be able to get along well with Clena.

“Now, about the bath...” she spoke up.

“You still want to go on about that? I’m happy to, but are you two sure you’re okay with this?” Clena seemed fine, so *I* ended up hesitating. “Um, of course, if you just want to use the water, I can dump hot water into the laundry tub as usual.”

But Clena swiftly kicked my proposal right out the window. “Why don’t you just bathe with us?” Of course, as she said this, her cheeks were also turning a violent shade of red.

“Like I said, I didn’t save you so that I could force you to do things like this.” I tried to remind her of that fact.

“I’m not ashamed of a single thing on my body. And you’d prefer to do things this way, right?!” As she spoke, Clena walked toward me and made her declaration right before my eyes. It seemed like she was forcing it out a little.

When I looked straight up at her from my sitting position on the ground, her plump breasts prevented me from seeing her face, but I was sure she looked absolutely triumphant. “...What happened to all that embarrassment you displayed when I was healing you?” I took a jab at her.

In response, Clena rolled her eyes and shoved her face toward me. “A strange man who I’m not sure I can trust, and a man I do trust. Why would I act the same way towards both?”

“Touche.” She was right. Clena had decided to trust me, which is why she was acting this way now.

“I think you have room to grow, but that lack of confidence is really dragging you down. Seems like you’re still at a low level, though, so I guess it can’t be helped.”

“Leave me alone.”

“An otherworlder like you made it this far with only a sand lizardman for company, so I bet you’re not used to traveling with a party. Don’t worry, though, I’ll help you out,” Clena said, with an amused laugh. Honestly, I couldn’t be more grateful. “Besides, this is also a way for me to pay you up front.”

Pay me... for what? I had no idea what she was talking bout.

Then, Clena shot me another grin and went on. “For your growth, and your future.”

“Because I’m a Hero of the Goddess?”

“That’s one reason, but the main one is your magic.”

“Magic? But I can only use basic stuff.”

“You used that basic magic to heal my burns without leaving a single scar, didn’t you? That’s way more amazing than you may think it is.” Clena placed a hand on her chest. She looked sort of happy. “You’ve only just begun studying cleric magic, but how long do you think it usually takes to cast a spell?”

“For Healing Light, it depends on the size of the wound, but it takes less than a minute to summon a light spirit.”

“That’s about average for normal magic. But this past week, you’ve been using your MP for over six hours a day in order to power your gift. And you’re only going to keep on using it that way. Don’t you think that’s incredible?”

“But as long as I don’t overuse it, I feel hardly any physical stress.”

“Yet the fact that you continually use it is enough to enhance your MP. And probably your MEN stat, too. The next time you update your status card, I bet it’s going to look crazy. You got a blessing from the Goddess of Light as well, remember.”

Status cards weren’t convenient enough to display stats in real time, which meant mine currently displayed the stats I’d had before I departed. *I thought that the battles I’d taken part in during hunting would enhance my physical stats, but if Clena’s right, then my MP and MEN are going to grow by a lot as well. If the formula was one minute for one spell, then I’d cast 360 spells per day. When I look at it that way, I guess I really have been training myself thoroughly.*

“So you’re saying that I’m someone worth betting on?” I asked.

“Adding in the fact that you saved us, and what you discussed with the Torano’o tribe, I believe in you now.”

“That sounds a bit calculating...”

“I don’t know who you’re comparing me to, but I’m just being honest. Besides, I’m sure whoever you’re thinking of must want something from you as well.”

“Want something from me...?”

I was thinking of Haruno, of course. When I looked back on it, it seemed like Rium’s attraction to me came from simple curiosity, while I couldn’t deny that Haruno and I had sought comfort and sanctuary in each other. Sera was so oblivious that I had no idea what she wanted.

Huh. So that’s what she means. All of a sudden, I understood. I’d promised Haruno that we’d bathe once we got stronger, but that strength meant the power to stand up to a threat that ran rampant in this world. Haruno had most likely seen some kind of potential in me, and I’d decided that I wanted to get strong enough to live up to it. Up to this point, I’d only thought vaguely about growing strong enough to fulfill my promise, but thanks to Clena’s words, I was starting to see the concrete details. I wanted to gain the power to survive in this world, and grow strong enough to protect girls. I also wanted to gain success and social status in this world – which meant that I needed to answer to Clena’s expectations and protect her and Roni.

“Okay. Er, I mean, thank you. Thanks to your words, Clena, I’ve gotten a more concrete picture of my goal.”

“I’m glad I could be of help. I’m expecting great things from you.” When she spoke, she sounded slightly relieved.

I stared into her eyes, and she stared right back at me. Despite being disowned, she hadn’t abandoned her pride as a noble. She was a confident woman. In her mind, I guess she trusted in me like one would trust in a good investment. Some people might feel angry at that and call her conniving or calculating, but I didn’t feel that way.

Clena believed that I was going to rise to do great things. If I got angry there, then I was set to fail. Accepting her trust and answering up to it was the right path to take. I needed to feel confident and proud that she trusted me, and do my best not to let her down.

“Okay, I got it. Now, please take this opportunity to tell me exactly what you want from me.” When I said this, Clena beamed. “Okay. It seems like there are some things you don’t understand about this world, so I’ll explain from square one.”

“Please do.”

“I told you about how I was disowned, right? We went on a journey after that, and haven’t belonged to any organization since then. Got it?”

I nodded. *If I called her unemployed and homeless here, she’d probably get angry.*

“What I want is for you to become a home for us to return to, Touya.”

“In other words, your guardian?”

Clena nodded with solemn eyes. Ever since Clena and Roni were disowned, they’d had to support each other all on their own. They also probably hadn’t been able to find any party members due to the desert kingdom and how it was erased from history. Maybe that had something to do with the reason why they were disowned.

Then I appeared – a Hero of the Goddess who saved their lives and seemed to have some potential for the future. I was also one of the few humans who was willing to help them search for the desert kingdom, which translated to heresy in the Olympus Alliance. *No wonder they can’t ignore me. If I was in Clena’s shoes, I’d do anything to try and join my party.* There was a very low possibility that they’d make it to the desert kingdom on their own, after all. It was calculating, but it made more sense than assuming she’d fallen in love with me at first sight.

“Still...” I muttered. “Would it be too greedy to ask for a little love as well?”

“Huh? That stuff comes later, right? Besides, at this point, I think I’m already rather fond of you...” Clena replied with a straight face.

It appeared that the philosophy behind love and marriage in this world differed a bit from mine – although I’d heard that things used to be similar to this long ago. Being surrounded by cute girls sounded like the ultimate male fantasy, but I knew that things were never that sweet in reality.

“When you first touched me, I was shocked, but you did save me and all...” Clena said. “And refusing to run and fighting in the last battle gave you a lot of bonus points. It made me feel like I could count on you in a crisis.”

“I was just scared of the guilt I’d feel if I ran, really!”

“Yeah, I’ve grown to look at that as one of your cute points.” Clena smiled mischievously.

“...Well, thanks.” I was so embarrassed that I had to look away from her.

In order to change the subject, I spoke to Roni next. “And what do you want, Roni?”

“Huh? I can say something, too?”

“Of course.”

“Roni, just take him up on his offer,” Clena added.

“Uhhh, umm...” Roni crossed her arms and thought.

Since she’s Clena’s servant, does she always only think of herself as one half of a whole?

Then, Roni’s ears twitched, and she spoke to me in a sweet, childlike voice. “Ummm, please become good friends with me and Lady Clena!”

Oh no. I feel like something hot is going to come gushing out of my nose. She’s just too cute! “...Can I hug you?” I asked.

“Huh? What?”

“Touya will come from the right, and I’ll come from the left.” It turned out that Clena had been thinking the exact same thing.

“Whaaat?!”

We sandwiched Roni, then hugged her as tight as we could and rubbed our cheeks up against hers. At first, Roni looked bewildered, but then her face relaxed, and she started to look happy. *She’s so cute.*

“Hey, don’t you think it’s about time we took a bath?” After we gave Roni some love, Clena invited me to bathe with her once again. Her cheeks were crimson as usual, and her voice sounded shrill.

Honestly, I was overjoyed at the idea of bathing with her, but I still wasn't sure whether it was a good idea or not. *If I take into account the discussion we just shared, I can see it being a perk they could offer in exchange for my protection. On the other hand, they don't really have anything else to offer me in the first place... In that case, should I just honestly accept their feelings and be careful not to ask too much of them?*

"...Okay," I said. "Let's do it. Clena, Roni... I want you to bathe with me!"

I've made up my mind. I'm going to bathe with them, and protect them.

"Now those are the eyes I like to see," Clena said. "Roni, what do you say?"

"Oh, I'll join in too, of course. Please let me wash your back for you!" With a full-faced grin, Roni wagged her tail and agreed to bathe with us.

She was acting just like a servant, most likely on purpose. Currently, she was clad in a long-sleeved shirt and pants under her armor, but I bet she'd look great in maid clothes. I also thought it'd be nice to put her in a kimono and make her look like a Japanese style inn attendant. She was just so obedient, it almost made me worried – but also made me want to do my best to protect her.

When I looked at Clena, I saw that she was also giving Roni a warm, protective grin. She probably felt the same way I did. When our eyes met, we both showed each other smiles filled with love. In that moment, we completely understood each other. We both needed to do our best to protect Roni.

"But are you sure you're okay with this, Lady Clena? Lately, your tummy's gotten a little..."

"No one asked you to mention that!" Clena quickly shouted, red in the face.

"Y-yes ma'am!"

Even though she sounded mad, Clena's face still looked slightly happy. Roni had probably never taken a jab at her like that before. Either way, I lacked the courage to comment on the situation, so I resigned myself to silently watching them play around.

A few moments later, we entered the Unlimited Bath. Clena and I carried in

changes of clothes, while Roni brought in a washboard and a stick of wood. During our travels, bathtime would be the perfect chance to wash clothes. After all, where else would we be able to get so much water at once?

“Huh? What’s this?”

I saw that there was something red in the corner of the changing area, so I went and picked it up. It turned out to be the bright red panties that Clena had been wearing when I’d healed her burns. Apparently, she’d forgotten to put them back on, and since I’d only been using the Unlimited Bath to take out water and soap, I hadn’t noticed them either.

“Hey! Give those back!”

Clena was fine with bathing together, but this seemed to be too embarrassing. Red in the face once more, she pulled them out of my hands. She tried to hide the panties behind her back, but I wasn’t going to have any of this.

“Hold on now, Clena. Show me those panties once more!”

“What?! But...”

“Why did you leave those in here?!”

“...Huh?” Clena looked absolutely dumbfounded.

“Up until now, I’ve always made sure there was nothing left in here before I closed the door.”

“Uhh... Why?”

“All the hot water I drain out goes back to my MP pool. If you left your panties here, it might have gotten converted to my MP as well.”

“Um... That’s, uh...” I could understand how awkward it made her feel. I’m not even sure how I felt about someone’s panties becoming my MP. I didn’t understand how it really worked, but I’d always made sure never to leave anything inside other than what was originally there, so I’d actually just performed an impromptu experiment with her panties.

“Hmm, judging by how stretched they are, I’m positive they’re Lady Clena’s panties.” Roni’s appraisal confirmed that the panties were indeed Clena’s.

“Don’t call them stretched!” It appeared that both her butt and her boobs were both right in the middle of a growth spurt.

“...I’m sure we’ve all got a lot on our mind now, but how about we just get in the bath already?” I suggested.

“Yeah. By all means, let’s go.” Clena was probably just happy to see us stop talking about her panties, so she agreed with an exasperated face.

First, Roni took off her clothes without any hesitation. I stared at her body from head to toe. Even though she was a lycaon, her nails didn’t look very sharp. Lycaons had tails, but they didn’t put holes in their pants, and instead had a string attached to a notch in their tail that they used to tie it around their waists. When she undid her belt, I noticed that she was wearing low-rise panties. Apparently in this world, low-rise panties were popular since they didn’t put pressure on the abdomen. They also didn’t get in the way of tails, which was a merit that only existed in a fantasy world like this.

“Sir Touya, Lady Clena, I’m naked now!” Roni stood proudly in her birthday suit, without hiding a bit. At this point, it was just refreshing to see someone as open as her.

Despite the fact that Rium had looked small for her age, she’d been rather mature psychologically. In contrast, Roni was the same age as Clena, yet stood a bit shorter. Her boobs weren’t large, but they were certainly protruding to a healthy degree. Her waist was thin, her butt small, and her form looked perfectly curvy for a woman her age. She also had long, slender legs. In other words, she looked physically normal for her age, but seemed a little bit childish on the inside.

Either way, she was a sight for sore eyes. When I tousled her thick, shaggy hair, she squinted as if it felt good and accepted my hand. I could directly feel how she admired me, and her smile looked so radiant. She was just so cute, I couldn’t resist gently patting her on the head once more.

“Huh? Lady Clena, is something wrong?” Roni asked.

Clena was still fidgeting around, and hadn’t taken off her clothes yet. She had seemed fine until we got inside, but perhaps us talking about her body had made her more self-conscious than usual.

When Clena noticed my eyes on her, she blushed and timidly asked me something. “Hey, Touya. Can I ask you a question?”

“What?”

“Do you think I’m... fat?” Her solemn eyes told me just how worried she was.

I decided to answer honestly. “I think your plump body is really sexy.”

“Umm...”

“No, I’m being serious.”

Clena looked a little miffed, but I really was serious. It was true that compared to Roni’s compact body and girlish features, Clena seemed plumper overall – I wasn’t about to deny that – but the curve of her waist and her thick body made her overflow with voluptuous charm. I simply thought it’d be rude to call someone like her ‘fat.’ After all, if she was truly fat, she wouldn’t have been able to travel all the way from Junopolis in the north down to the wasteland. Her body had to be well-trained, especially when you considered how it was able to support her bursting breasts so well. She didn’t look muscular, though – rather, soft and feminine. That was yet another one of her miracles.

“...I guess that’s the gist of how I feel. What do you think?”

As I finished my passionate monologue, Clena stood frozen, her face a fiery red. It seemed like she didn’t know what to say, but I had just done my best to answer her question honestly, so I hoped she’d cut me some slack.

Finally, as if she couldn’t take it anymore, she let out a bellow. “F-fine! I’ll get naked! Go on, look all you want!!”

As she energetically pulled off her top, her breasts revealed themselves with a large jiggle, enshrouded by a slip and an orange bra. Next, she took off her pants, allowing view of her voluminous butt and panties of the same color. Her skin was so white that her veins stood out, so it seemed that she preferred colored underwear, and had several differently-colored sets.

“Well?!” In her undies, Clena crossed her arms and proudly revealed herself to me. She was clearly doing it in order to hide how embarrassed she was, and it felt a bit forced. “More importantly, why are you still in your clothes? Hurry

up and strip!!”

When Clena yelled at me with her bright red face, I realized at last that I was still clothed as well.

“Allow me to help you, Sir Touya,” said Roni.

“Oh, no, I’ll be fine. I can take off my clothes on my own.”

Since I’d never had anyone help me undress before, the idea made me feel childish and embarrassed more than anything else. Rulitora and I helped each other put on armor since it was impossible to do on our own, but those were two different things. Roni looked at me in disappointment, but I withstood her eyes and took off my clothes. *But maybe someday, when I become a successful hero, stuff like that will become commonplace in my life...*

Clena and I finished undressing at about the same time. Whether my words had helped her regain her confidence, or whether she’d simply given up caring, she was standing proudly with her hands on her hips, as if she had nothing to be ashamed of. Her face was red, though – which meant that she *was* embarrassed after all. Still, I couldn’t get over how huge she was. Before I knew it, I was entranced in her–

“Sorry, but I think you should wear a towel after all. Both of you.”

Realizing the impending crisis within me, I asked them to both wear towels – as I made sure to imprint their gorgeous bodies in my mind. I could easily imagine how things would go if we all decided to bathe naked together: I’d be too busy trying to stay calm to enjoy anything.

“F-fine. Here, Roni, put this on.” Clena was acting disappointed, but she looked relieved.

“Okay.”

I knew Clena had been forcing down her embarrassment. As I saw how obviously more cheerful Clena had become, I realized I had made the right decision, and tied my own towel around my waist. Now, we were finally ready to enter the bath.

Once I entered the bath with my towel on, I explained how to use the faucet,

shower, soap, and shampoo. Clena and Roni had nothing but bath towels on as well, so it was pretty exciting, but I did my best to stay calm and explain things properly. People in this world knew how to use soap and towels, but everything else was completely new to them.

"I know how to use the soap, but not the shampoo..." That's what Clena had told me when I lent them shampoo and soap a week ago. My soap was similar to the kind they had here, but they'd never seen a liquid like my shampoo, so I understood why they reacted that way.

"How about I wash both of your hair, and you learn how to use it that way?" I asked.

"...Okay," Clena said.

"I'll go first then, Lady Clena," Roni said with a solemn face, then sat down on the stool.

She probably felt like she was about to become my guinea pig. It wasn't anything that scary, but since it was a first time experience for her, I could understand how she felt.

"Do lycaons have higher body temperatures than humans?" I asked.

"I don't think theirs is that different. Why?" Clena asked.

"Just wanted to be sure about the shower temperature."

Usually, it was best to set the shower temperature just a bit higher than body temperature when washing one's head, so I used the panel to raise it a bit. Then, I sat behind Roni, while Clena sat next to me on the edge of the tub. The bath was cramped, so there was no room to put any space between us. I told Clena to watch so she could learn, but she seemed really embarrassed, and would only give me a glance every now and then. That only made *me* more embarrassed.

I tried to regain my senses and looked at Roni's custard cream-colored hair, only to realize how much of it there was. It went down to her waist, but the sheer volume of it was incredible, and the fact that she was so skinny only made it seem like there was even more. On top of that, it was so frizzy that I'd be lying if I called it anything but unkempt. Her hair was wild and unruly.

“First, you need to wet the hair,” I said.

“Okay!”

I let out some more warm water and wet her hair. Roni smiled, enjoying the feeling as warm water spilled all over her. When I was a kid, I’d helped my friend give his big long-haired dog a bath over at his house, and this sort of reminded me of that. Roni’s beast ears sat right where a human’s ears would have been, and a fluffy wolf tail extended out from her butt and slipped right through the gap in her towel. Clena had probably adjusted it for her. Even though I was focused on Roni’s hair, I hadn’t forgotten about her ears or her tail. When I let the shower wet her tail, Roni flinched, as if it felt ticklish.

“Does it always pour out warm water at the same temperature? Wow...” Clena marveled as she looked between the shower and the control panel.

I had never really thought about it, but this was much more than a rare curiosity to people from this world. Since there was so much, it took me a while, but I finally managed to wet all of Roni’s hair, then turned off the shower.

“Hmm. Your hair feels damaged. We’ll have to start with the treatment product.”

Since Roni’s hair was damaged, I first put some treatment on the hair that went down her back, then lightly, gently massaged it in.

“What are you doing?” Clena asked.

“This treatment product helps to beautify damaged hair. Normally, people use it after shampoo, but when you wash long hair, it’s better to massage this into the damaged hair first.”

“Hmm... So it isn’t soap, huh?” Clena studied the treatment bottle. I guess it was more like a nutrient supplement than soap.

“Now for the shampoo. Roni, close your eyes tight. If the bubbles get in your eyes, it’ll hurt.”

When I spoke to her, Roni snapped back to reality and smiled. “Oh, so it’s just like soap! Okay!”

As she spoke, Roni’s tail moved and tickled my stomach. Clena and I looked at

each other and snickered, then I put some shampoo on my hand and lathered it on Roni's head. Instead of using my nails, I made sure to use the balls of my fingers to massage it in and wash the scalp rather than the hair. The same went for her ears and tail. When I touched her ears, Roni let out a cute squeal.

"Okay, now wait a minute with the lather on your head."

"This sure takes a lot of time..." Clena said.

Afterwards, I added some water and used my hands to gently wash the suds off, then finished it off with some treatment based on how damaged her hair felt. Roni's hair seemed to really be suffering, so I went with a full course.

Once I finished washing her hair, I had to gently take care of her wet hair. In other words, there could be no rubbing or massaging – I needed to not 'wipe' her hair off, but rather 'absorb the moisture' from it. We were going to soak in the tub after this, so I lightly absorbed as much moisture as I could, then wrapped a towel around her hair so no more water could get into it. Since she had so much hair, it looked funnier than it should have.

"H-how does it feel?" Clena asked curiously.

"Phew..." Roni had gotten so relaxed that she couldn't answer.

It seemed like she'd really enjoyed it, so I made a little fist pump behind her. That was all it took for Clena to figure out how this would proceed. She stiffened her red face and gave me a look as if she had something to say to me.

"It's your turn next, Clena," I said. "But at this rate, it looks like Roni won't be able to learn anything..."

"Can we just worry about teaching her next time? I want to wash my hair too, you know," she replied.

"Sure. Okay then, Roni, come over here and take Clena's spot."

When I sat Roni down on the edge of the tub, it looked like she was just going to fall backwards, so I moved her behind me. Once she sat down, Roni drooped over and nuzzled up against my back. She had turned to mush. It was cute, and I was glad to feel her up against my back, so I silently let her do as she pleased.

"Seems like it'll be easy to wash your hair, Clena."

“Roni just has too much.”

“True.”

As we talked, I started to wash Clena’s hair. It only went down to her shoulders, so it didn’t take much time. When I touched it, I realized it wasn’t as damaged as Roni’s had been, so I decided conditioner would be the best thing to use. *Boy am I glad I decided to make her wear a towel. If she was naked right now, I’d probably be too embarrassed to act so calm.*

I followed the proper steps and gently washed Clena’s silver hair. *All I need to do is make sure I don’t look down, and I’ll be fine. Towels become surprisingly transparent when they get wet...*

“Hey,” Clena said, as I finished applying the conditioner and started to wash her hair.

“Wh-what?”

She didn’t seem as entranced as Roni had been, but her cheeks were flushed. “Can I wash your hair too, Touya?”

“To practice?”

She glanced at me and gave me a small nod.

I couldn’t deny that my hair would make the perfect practice dummy. “Okay then, please do.”

With that, I switched places with Clena. Roni was still out of it, so I made her sit cross-legged in front of me when I sat down on the stool. It was so adorable how she nuzzled her body up against me.

I doubt you all want to read about a guy getting his hair washed, so I’ll skip that part. Clena was so focused on washing my hair properly that she’d push her body against me until her boobs touched my back, then pull away, over and over. Even though I couldn’t see her face, I could tell how panicked it was making her, which was really cute.

Unfortunately, I had nothing to teach them in regards to washing the body. Clena and Roni were surprised to see how well my soap lathered up, but aside from that, everything went the same as it did in their world.

First, Roni washed Clena’s back. They both looked like they were playing, and seemed to be having a lot of fun.



Of course, they had to remove their towels in order to wash their bodies, and in that respect, I was thankful that the soap lathered so well.

Clena finished washing her body first, so she put her towel back on and entered the tub. When she submerged herself, excess water gushed over the top. It was a small tub, so it was to be expected.

Suddenly, Clena blushed, as if she'd finally noticed that I'd been staring at her with a toothy grin the entire time. Then, she used both hands to splash some hot water in my direction. I acted irritated, but I was secretly enjoying it deep down, of course.

"You're next, Sir Touya!" Roni waved with a smile.

Apparently, she was going to wash my back for me. Obviously I had no reason to decline, so I switched places with Clena and sat down in front of Roni.

After she washed my back, Roni got into the bath, which was too small for all three of us to enter at once. In other words, I had to wash the rest of my body on my own as the two of them soaked in the tub. I noticed that Clena kept shyly glancing at me, despite the fact that I'd removed my towel in order to wash my body. Of course, I'd stared intently at both of them the entire time they washed each other, so I couldn't exactly blame her.

After I took my time washing myself, I switched places with Roni. Just so you know, I wasn't really happy to expose myself to them. I'd only taken my time in order to give Roni time to warm up.

Clena seemed to want to soak for a bit longer, so I sat down next to her. Meanwhile, Roni picked up the washboard and stick and started washing the laundry. We'd taken turns soaking during my experiments at the temple, so it was my first time sitting in the tub with someone else. It really did feel cramped. Roni was slim, so she and Clena probably had been a good fit, but my male physique and Clena's thick body left us with no choice but to nudge up against each other.

In the end, Clena and I pushed our backs up to opposing sides of the tub and sat across from each other. There wasn't enough space for us to stretch out our legs, so I opened mine while Clena sat between them.

Clena... I understand that you might be too embarrassed to look me in the face, or maybe you don't want me to look you *in the face, but either way... Just don't look down! I'm doing the best I can to withstand this, okay?*

On top of that, Clena's arms were pushing her boobs up and creating some incredible cleavage.

"C-can't you do anything about how cramped this is?" she asked.

"It's always been this size... This is how big private baths are back where I live."

"Private baths? Just how rich are you people?"

"Well, I don't know about other countries, but it's pretty normal to own one in mine. I've also been using shampoo since I was a kid, you know?"

"No wonder you're so used to this... Your world sounds amazing."

As we spoke, it reminded me how I was still living in another world, despite the fact that I was bathing in a very familiar place. Clena's silver hair and Roni's custard cream-colored hair were both sights I rarely saw back home.

"I wonder if gifts grow?" I asked. "You know, like levels and stats."

"They probably do, based on personal growth."

"Oh. Well, it doesn't seem like this will ever be useful in battle regardless of how much I grow, so I wish I could at least figure out a way to make it a little more comfy."

"Yeah, I wish that the three of us could at least fit..." Clena looked to Roni. I followed her eyes and saw Roni happily beating clothes with her wooden stick. She seemed to be a fan of the beating wash style. It was heartwarming to watch, but perhaps because I was born in modern Japan, it seemed really inconvenient how we didn't have a washing machine.

"Either way, watching her sure soothes the heart..."

As soon as I made a dopey face, Clena glared at me. "She's mine. You're the party leader, Touya, but I'm Roni's master, and don't you forget it."

Clena had given me the seat of party leader and allowed me to become the

new target of Roni's instinctual loyalty, but she wasn't prepared to let me have Roni herself. I understood exactly how she felt. But I wasn't the type to just shut up and back down, so I replied to Clena with an honest declaration. "Don't worry. Eventually, it won't matter, since you'll be all mine, too."

"...I'm expecting great things of you," Clena said, as she bashfully averted her gaze.

Now that I had bathed with them, Clena was expecting great things from me in return. I needed to take proper responsibility, as a man.

After we got out of the bath, we spread a big cloth on the floor and got ready to go to sleep. The cloth wasn't very thick, but since the ground was close to sand, it didn't hurt our backs. Lizardmen's tails got in the way if they tried to sleep facing up, so they all slept face down and curled up. But we didn't need to go that far – the three of us were going to line up in a row and sleep side by side.

Up until yesterday, Clena and Roni had belonged to a different group than me, but since we were an official party now, I'd wanted us to try sleeping together. We fought a bit over who got to sleep in the middle, but in the end, Roni won out. The fight for the middle had started between Clena and I, but in the end, Roni seemed really excited for the chance, so we decided to relinquish it to her. We also used some thin string that Clena had in her things to hang up the laundry inside the tent.

As I watched Roni hum and happily hang up the red, orange, and two white pieces of underwear, I asked Clena a question. "Do you always hang up laundry at night?"

"What, you want to hang it up during the daytime and just sit there and wait for it?"

I looked down at her. "...Oh, I see."

I thought that hanging up laundry under the sun was the best way to dry it, but travelers were busy traveling during the daytime. And it's not like they could use their underwear as a flag or something.

"People only do proper laundry like that in towns. If you happened to find an

abandoned hut, I guess you could rest there for a few days and do it there."

"Yeah, that makes sense."

"What did you do on your way here from Jupiter?"

"It took us a day to reach the mountains from Jupiter, then a day to get over the mountains, then another day to reach the wasteland and the monster horde."

Clena couldn't believe her ears. "Wh-what a crazy schedule..."

Even though it had been necessary in order to save the Torano'o tribe, I thought it had been crazy as well. Incidentally, the Torano'o tribe left their laundry to the wives of the settlement. Normally, they only washed those skimpy loincloths they wore, so they weren't really used to heavy laundry, but since the loincloth was a durable piece of clothing made for travel, they didn't have to worry about them getting torn or anything.

"Don't you know about the spot where the Torano'o tribe hangs all their loincloths?" I asked.

"No, I always just followed you whenever you walked around."

Now that she mentioned it, I realized that I'd left my laundry to the female lizardmen as well, and I'd never actually gone there myself. Since Clena had always stayed with me, there was no way she'd know about it. "I'd hesitate about hanging up laundry right outside of the tent," Clena said, "but maybe a place like that would work."

"Okay then, I'll guide you there first thing in the morning. That way, it should all dry before lunch."

"Figures, with this climate..." The sun was really strong in these parts.

"I'm all done!" Roni called out.

"Thanks for the hard work, Roni," I said.

Once she finished hanging up the laundry, Roni came over to us and sat down on the cloth. Her tail was swishing amicably.

With our preparations finished, we decided to go to sleep. When I looked up

at the ceiling, I could see Clena's bra hanging in the tent and the stars in the night sky behind it. It made me feel a little embarrassed, so I rolled over on my side. Roni was already sleeping soundly in the middle, and when I looked beyond her, my eyes met with Clena, who had also rolled over onto her side. *Oh no, this is way more embarrassing.*

"Why did you roll over, too?!" she whispered.

"I just felt like I might remember what the thing hanging from the ceiling usually hides..."

"Urk... Never mind. Just turn the other way." I couldn't see her face anymore, but I guessed it was red.

With my back to the two of them, I tried to stay still. I was still a bit nervous, and I wasn't as tired as either of them, so I had trouble getting to sleep.

Then, I heard Clena whisper from behind me. "Hey, Touya..." As I was deciding whether or not I should turn around before I answered, she kept going. "Uhh... Take good care of us from tomorrow on, okay?"

I sensed a bit of a bashful tone in her relaxed voice. *I wonder what sort of face she's making?* The moment that thought came to me, I rolled around and looked at her.

"J-just keep looking the other way..."

"No, I wanted to see your face..." I found myself unable to continue my sentence. I hadn't thought about what I'd do after I looked at her.

As I tried to figure out why we were staring at each other, Roni grabbed both of our hands and pulled them toward her chest, so that all three of us were holding hands in a semi-hug.

"We need to all get along..." Roni said with a dopey grin. It seemed like she was talking in her sleep.

I slid my hand ahead a little and interlocked my fingers with Clena's. Once I did that, she moved her hand toward me and gripped mine in return. This time when we stared at each other, we both had soft smiles on our faces. It felt pretty good.

With our hands connected, we went to sleep, watching each other under the slivers of moonlight that slipped in through the tent.

Maius' assault had been an unexpected twist, and they'd told me it'd be okay for me to run away. I was glad that I'd stayed and fought, though.

Outside the tent, I could hear the Torano'o tribe enjoying their banquet. Clena looked at peace, while Roni was happily asleep. I would have lost all of this if I'd chosen to run away. *I'm so glad I managed to scrounge up what little courage I had back there.*

Then, something caught my eye – beyond Roni's modest mounds, upon which my hand currently sat, I could see Clena's bountiful cleavage, nestled right underneath her head. I'd frantically put on a bath towel so I didn't have to experience the torture of holding back in her presence, but maybe I had been a little too hasty. *No, this is bad. I still have so many more people to bathe with: Haruno, Sera, Rium, and all the other beautiful women I have yet to meet. In order to do that, there are things I need to acquire. To protect the women of this world, I need power, status, and fame. And more than anything, I need the mental fortitude to withstand bathing towel-less with a girl! I know what I'm aiming for... Yes... That massive bath I once dreamed about...* As I stared at Clena's white breasts and reaffirmed my resolve, I closed my eyes and descended into slumber.

Spring Bath – Haruno's Feelings

My name is Haruno Shinonome. I'm a 16-year old high school student at an all girls' school. Right now, I'm in another world, where I'm doing my best as a Heroine of the Goddess.

On our way to Athena, we stopped at a small village. There was no large inn or temple there, so we borrowed a chapel and set up a tent around it. Since I was a heroine, Sera, Rium, and the three temple knights who'd befriended us were allowed to use the chapel as shelter.

"Rin!" Sandra scolded Rin, who'd wasted no time in lying down on a long bench within the chapel.

Rin was a year older than me, and had her wavy hair styled in two miniature ponytails. She was slim and stylish, so I often asked her for fashion tips. She really knew a lot.

Sandra, on the other hand, was tall, and kept her blue hair in a ponytail. She was 18 years old. Rin wasn't exactly a goof-off, but she was clever and always tried to take the easy route, which often irked the more stern and serious Sandra.

"I'm going to go help outside. Sandra, can I leave this area to you?"

"Of course, Sera."

Sera and Sandra were on a first name basis with each other. They were the same age, and had grown up in Jupiteropolis together. Once Sera finished praying, she brought Rium in and prepared to make dinner.

"Haruno, let me help you take your armor off."

"Thank you, Lumis."

Lumis, the girl who was helping me take my armor off, was so skinny and petite that people often thought she was younger than me, but we were

actually the same age – 16. She was the one I got along with best, and the only one of the pilgrims who didn't refer to me as 'Lady Haruno.'

Once I finished taking my armor off, it was my turn to help Lumis. She currently had her brown hair in a side ponytail, but used to have a short haircut that often made people mistake her for a boy. I couldn't understand why – she was way too cute for that!

We ate dinner, but it was still too early to sleep, so I sat inside the chapel and did some thinking. "Hey, Lady Haruno." Rin called out to me, probably because she'd figured out that I was bored. "Can I ask you a question? What do you like about Sir Touya?"

"...Um?"

Well, that's pretty abrupt. I guess she wants to talk about love with me, all of a sudden? What are we, elementary school girls on a field trip? I do like him, but... How does she know? Oh, she must have seen us kissing... That was so embarrassing.

"Hey, Rin..." Sandra tried to stop Rin with an exasperated look on her face.

But Rin's eyes were glimmering, and she wouldn't be stopped. "What's the big deal? I need to know how Lady Haruno feels, otherwise I won't know if it's okay to cheer him on or not."

Lumis, you look way too interested for your own good. And Sera, you're turning red and all, but it's so obvious how you want to hear the answer... I'm not going to say anything, though. I mean, it's just too embarrassing. And my face is already burning up. My cheeks must be as red as cherries.

I picked up Rium and sent my thoughts out to Touya, wherever he was under the starry sky. At first, he'd seemed a bit scary, but I soon realized that he wasn't at all. He was a pervert, but he was also a kind person who cared about us. I know, I know, that still makes him a pervert.

They had introduced several male party member candidates to me, but they all seemed like they just wanted to use me, mostly for impure purposes. It felt more like I was being set up for marriage rather than looking for allies to journey with, and I doubted it was only in my mind. Political marriage, you

know, that sort of thing. Perhaps that's why I started to like him. Compared to them, Touya acted much more considerate to me, so I liked him better. He never did anything I didn't like, either.

I understood that the reason I liked him was probably also due to the fact that he was one of the few people I could really trust and feel close to in this alien world. But Touya saved me from having to look at lusterless hair and remember that I was in a completely different world. When he took me shopping to help me get used to going out into this world, it had sort of felt like a date, so I'd been a little excited. Honestly, I decided to kiss him that night because I wanted to burn his memory into my heart before we went our separate ways. It was the first time either of us had ever kissed someone, so I figured it'd become an important memory. At least, that's what I hoped.

There's no use crying over the fact that he's going to bathe with other girls for the first time instead of me. This is a choice I made. And I haven't given up on Touya. I like him, remember? Besides, he said he wanted to bathe with Sera, Rium, and I. I've been coming up with my own plan, and I think it includes getting to know his new friends. I'm sure Touya will only party up with good people, after all. That's why I need to hurry up and get strong enough to survive in this world, so that I can–"

"...Haruno."

"Hm? What's wrong, Rium?"

"You're talking."

"...What?" As I looked around, I saw everyone staring at me with gentle eyes.

I was so embarrassed that I hid my face. I was sure I must have been red up to my ears.

My name is Haruno Shinonome. I'm a 16-year old high school student at an all girls' school. Right now, I'm a girl who's in love with Touya Houjou.

Post-Bath – The Author's Booth

Nice to meet you. I'm Nagaharu Hibihana. How did you enjoy *Mixed Bathing in Another World Volume 1: The Hero of the Unlimited Bath?*

Since you're here, allow me to tell you a behind-the-scenes story. It takes place back when the only thing I knew was that this would be a story about a modern guy getting summoned into a fantasy world. I hadn't even decided on the title. When I read about how medieval Europe, the main model for Western-style fantasy worlds, was less sanitary than our modern age, a question popped into my mind. Would a modern person be able to withstand living in a world that has much lower sanitation standards than ours?

Since this is fantasy, I could have just explained it with magic. But when I looked at this aspect, which people might usually ignore, I thought: "Well then, why don't I give my character an ability that will help him live his life?" That's where the idea for the Unlimited Bath came from.

An idea alone isn't enough, though. The important thing was what my main character Touya was going to do with his power.

"Okay then! Mixed bathing!" That was the first thing I thought of – the first newborn cries of *Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension.*

No, really. That's exactly how it went. And Masakage Hagiya-sensei is the one who drew this fantasy world of swords, sorcery, bubbles, skin, and mixed bathing. When I saw the illustrations that kept coming, I swallowed down my joy, wondering if it was really okay to include all these great illustrations with *my* work.

I'd also like to thank my editor, K-sama, who gave me a lot of advice, the editing department at Overlap, and everyone who was involved with the publishing and sales. I really owe you all a lot. Also, I'd like to send out a big thank you to everyone who's been reading my work and supporting me since my web serialization days. I was only able to deliver *Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension* to everyone thanks to you. And finally, to everyone who was kind

enough to pick up and read this book: Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you so much.

Late February, 2015 – Nagaharu Hibihana



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

Newsletter

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 2 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

J-Novel Club Membership

Copyright

Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension: The Hero of the Unlimited Bath by Nagaharu Hibihana

Translated by Dan Luffey Edited by C. Vanstiphout

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2015 Nagaharu Hibihana Illustrations Copyright © 2015 Masakage Hagiya Cover illustration by Masakage Hagiya All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2015 by OVERLAP

This English edition is published by arrangement with OVERLAP Inc., Tokyo English translation © 2017 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: February 2017