Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension

The Turbulent Underwater Baths

5

Volume Five



Nagaharu Hibihana

Illust. = Masakage Hagiya


"OOH...!"
I looked up beyond the dome from the deck of the ship, where rays of light trickled down from between the waves above. The light clustered and made the scales glisten off the surrounding fish. It was almost as if we had been transported to a fairy tale world.


THE BIGGEST MIXED BATH YET IN THE
UNLIMITED BATH!!
LONG-AWAITED


"WE COULD USE SOME HELP HERE!"



A HERO SUMMONED FROM ANOTHER WORLD LIKE TOUYA. CURRENTLY TRAVELING SEPARATELY.



A HERO WITH A GIFT CALLED THE UNLIMITED BATH. GETS FIRED UP AT THE THOUGHT OF MIXED BATHING.



TOUYA'S YOUNGER SISTER, WHO WAS REINCARNATED BY THE HERO OF DARKNESS SUMMONING RITUAL.



A GIRL TOUYA MET DURING HIS JOURNEY. ON A QUEST TO FIND THE DESERT KINGDOM.



CLENA'S ATTENDANT. A LYCAON, A WOLF DEMI-HUMAN.



THE GODDESS OF DARKNESS. YOUNGEST OF THE SIX GODDESS SISTERS.

WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR

TOUYA HOUJOU IS SUMMONED TO A PARALLEL WORLD TO DEFEAT THE DEMON LORD. HE'S GRANTED A SPECIAL POWER, BUT IT'S... *THE POWER TO OPEN A DOOR TO A BATH ANYTIME AND ANYWHERE, THE UNLIMITED BATH!*

AFTER TRAVELING TO A CITY BY THE SEA, NEPTUNOPOLIS, TOUYA'S PARTY RUNS INTO HIS YOUNGER SISTER, YUKINA, WHO HAS TRANSFORMED INTO A DEMON.

THEY SAVE YUKINA FROM HER MAGIC BINDS BY DEFEATING THE FORMER DEMON GENERAL, PHOENIX, AND SHE JOINS THE PARTY. HOWEVER, THEIR HAPPY REUNION IS CUT SHORT WHEN THE GODDESS OF WATER APPEARS IN TOUYA'S DREAM AND TELLS HIM THAT HARUNO IS IN TROUBLE.

Table of Contents

1. Cover
2. Color Illustrations
3. Character Information
4. Pre-Bath – Prologue
5. First Bath – A Moment in the Family Bath
6. Second Bath – Fruity Bath on a Secluded Island
7. Third Bath – Mixed Bathing Under the Sea
8. Bath Break – The Goddess Bathing Experience
9. Fourth Bath – The Secret Lies Beyond the Steam
10. Post-Bath – The Author’s Booth
11. About J-Novel Club
12. Copyright

Pre-Bath – Prologue

“HARUNO IS WITH ME IF YOU WISH TO SAVE HER COME TO THE WATER CAPITAL”

The scraggly message a goddess had written for me in my dream.

When I woke up the next morning, I ran for the Grande Nautilus so that I could rescue Haruno as soon as possible.

“Calm down, Sir Touya!” But before I could, Rulitora grabbed my arms and restrained me. Rakti explained the situation in my place, since I couldn’t get a word out of my infuriated head. She was also present in my dream, as the Goddess of Darkness.

“...Basically, it seems that Haruno’s party is in sister Water’s house right now.”

“She sent us a letter saying they were heading toward the Goddess of Wind, right? How did they end up with the Goddess of Water...?”

None of us could make heads or tails of the situation.

“Hey, are the water capital and the wind temple close to each other?”

“I’m sorry, Lady Yukina. I’m not sure where the wind temple is located... But I do know that the water capital is in the bay surrounded by Dragon’s Tail Peninsula and Talon Peninsula, so the two shouldn’t be very close.”

Thanks to the white dolphin, a cleric that served the Goddess of Water, I had an idea of where the water capital was. And thanks to Haruno’s letter, we also already knew where the wind temple was. Their source was a cyclops girl by the name of Prae who had been ordered by the Goddess of Wind to take Haruno to her. They couldn’t deduce the exact whereabouts of the wind temple from Prae’s story, but they at least knew it was on the western edge of the continent. Right now, we were on the southern edge. Even travelers who were prone to getting lost wouldn’t call these two places “close.”

“So did Haruno’s party fly from the west to the south?”

“...That’s almost impossible, even with crystal magic.”

Roni and Rium both wore quizzical expressions. This world had no cars or

airplanes, so it'd be difficult... no, impossible, to cross that distance in such a short time frame. The white dolphin also mentioned that no such spells existed among water cleric magic.

"Which means that something abnormal happened to Haruno's party." As everyone else analyzed the situation, I had finished readying myself up. A metallic sound rang in the air as I stepped up before everyone.

"Tou... ya...?" Yukina questioned me with a dumbfounded expression. Her stare was directed at a thing in my hand—a pitch black great sword, my Gravesword. I had been lost in thought about Haruno this whole time. All that filled my mind were ways that I might be able to save her from the temple of the Goddess of Water.

"In any case, we just need to save Haruno! I don't care if it's a demon lord or a goddess that's standing in my way...!"

"Calm down, it's not like we have anything to fight right now." Clena responded with a curt whack to my head.

"Again, I don't think sister Water kidnapped them or anything! She might have, well... she must have found it hard to communicate in the dream!"

Rakti in the spotlight. I had been made to sit on my knees as Rakti imposed herself in front of me, lecturing me on how her sister wasn't a bad goddess. Rulitora had taken away my Gravesword, so all I could do was listen. In the meantime, Yukina was weighing down my legs by using me as a lap pillow. Rium was also leaning against my back, so if this was meant to be punishment, then I was all for it.

That aside, Rakti explained that the Goddess of Water's message only sounded harsh because she was trying to communicate to me in Japanese, which she wasn't used to. In reality, she had wanted to convey much more thorough information.

"So what did she want to tell Touya?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know... We're only inside your dream, so it's harder for us to relay our thoughts to each other. Not only that, sister Water is normally very quiet..." Rakti replied dejectedly to Rulitora's question.

Most of the beings that lived in the ocean didn't need to speak, so she must have gotten used to being quiet. On the other hand, the dreams didn't stop the Goddess of Light from being a chatterbox one bit. Whenever she wanted to lecture Rakti, she would go all out. Anyway, from the little information Rakti was able to gather from the quiet Goddess of Water, it appeared that Haruno's entire party was safe at the water capital for now.

"For now?"

"Um, I don't know the details, but they're being targeted by the demon lord's army, or are being chased by them..."

"Alright, give me back my Gravesword."

"No, we're keeping that away from you until we actually have to battle." Clena whacked my head again as I tried to reach for the sword.

"Okay then, can I ask where this water capital exactly is?"

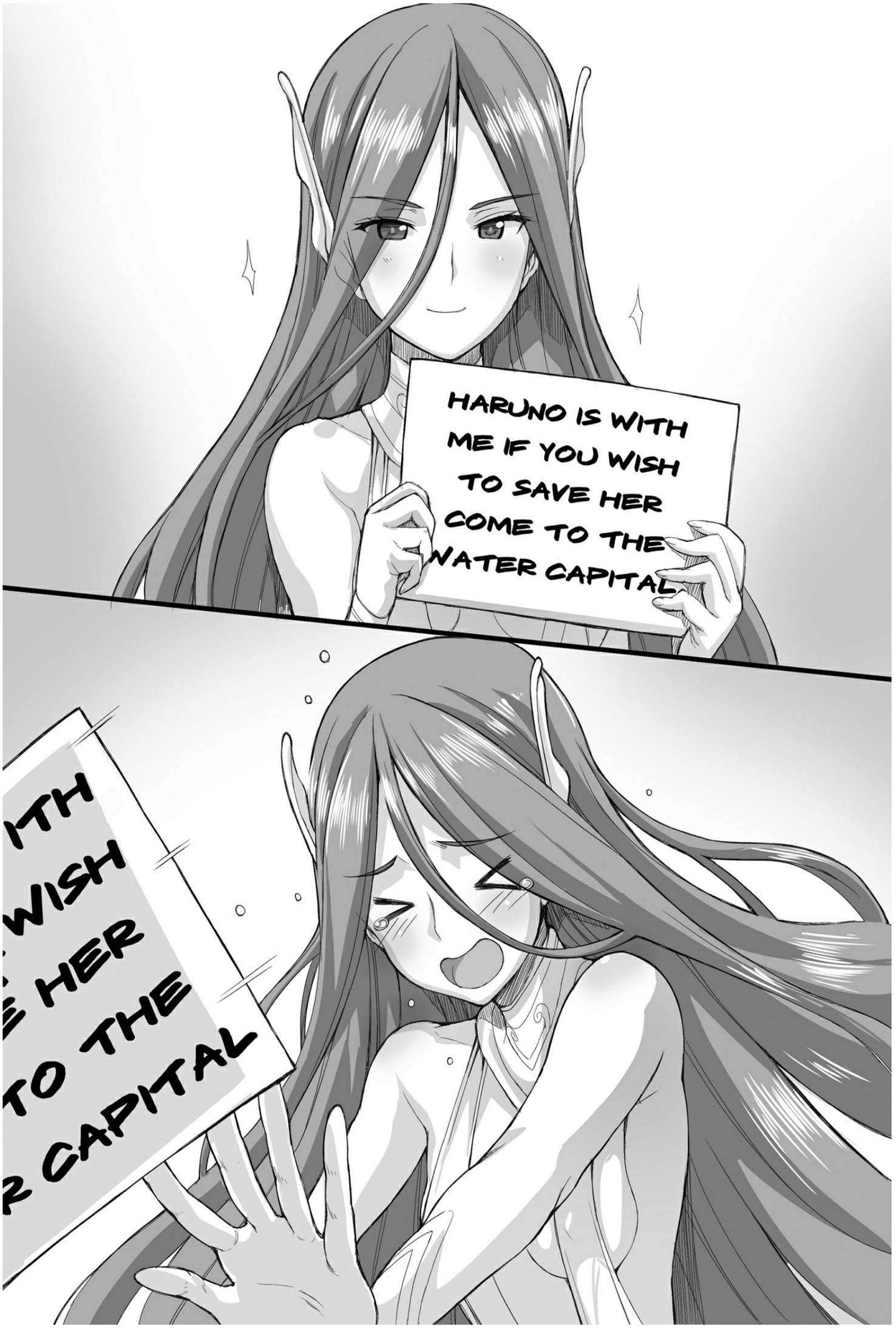
"...Well, as long as we don't have to fight the Goddess of Water."

"I know what she meant by that message now, so don't worry." I wasn't about to make Rakti cry, and I didn't want to make any more enemies, either. "Then again, why did the Goddess of Water go out of her way to write in Japanese when the Goddess of Light's blessing lets me understand any language from this world?"

"...She might not have gotten that message. Sister Water tends to make those sorts of mistakes."

Oh, so she was just dense?

We asked the white dolphin for the exact location of the water capital, then set sail back to Neptune to prepare for another long journey. The Goddess of Water appeared again in my dream that night, wearing the same expression as last time, but then her cheeks blushed red and she threw her flipbook at me. Yeah, I could see that she wasn't a bad goddess now.


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First Bath – A Moment in the Family Bath

We said our goodbyes to the gillmen and returned to Neptunopolis. We arrived at Rondalan's dock, which now looked all too familiar after the time we spent aiding its construction.

"Come on, I'm begging you! Make me a ship like that too..."

"Oh, be quiet! I need to talk to them now!" Rondalan looked like he was quarreling with a fisherman as he ran toward us. Apparently the fisherman wanted a ship like our Grande Nautilus. The townsfolk treated Rondalan like nothing more than a wart before, but his reputation had improved ever since building something this impressive. The temple might still turn him away, but at least he could get along better with his neighbors now.

Rondalan asked us several questions in rapid succession about how the Grande Nautilus fared. He seemed satisfied with the overall results, but it'd take time for me to explain all the details he requested.

"Step aside, let me handle this." Right on time, Shakova interrupted our conversation. He'd be much more suited for handling Rondalan's inquiries.

"I want to perform some checkups on the ship, so we'll stay behind."

"Thanks, Pardoe. We're going deep underwater next, so make sure everything's in shape. I'm going to close the door to the Unlimited Bath, so make sure you have everything you need."

The water capital was right in the center of the bay, and so deep down that it couldn't compare to the shallow waters nearby. Not to mention it was far out from shore. The Grande Nautilus just finished its first voyage, so we needed them to perform some thorough maintenance and make sure it was in tip-top condition for the next one. Mark was also staying behind to help, and Crissa would look after them.

Next, we needed to resupply on food. It'd be a long voyage, so we needed to restock from scratch this time.

"You need fish? Leave that to me!"

"Thank you, please deliver it to us on the day we depart."

Fishermen amicably approached us with various offers. All of them had become familiar faces ever since we started coming here regularly. We could use the fishing pond, one of the latest features of the Unlimited Bath, to catch fresh fish, but we didn't want to put everyone's goodwill to waste.

Thinking about it, that fishing pond must actually be an altar. The Goddess of Fire's altar was a pillar made from a giant fire stone, so in the same vein, this altar symbolized the importance of water to followers of the Goddess of Water.

Anyway, we left Grande Nautilus in Pardoe's group's hands and left to go shopping. I was worried we'd attract stares for making Yukina walk around in her swimsuit-like outfit, but there were actually plenty of women in the city clad in similarly revealing clothing. I guess it wasn't too surprising, for a beach city. This city was divided between the elevated and coastal areas, but it looked like she'd be perfectly fine in the coastal area dressed like that.

All we needed to do was make advance orders for food today, then head to Ficus Brand. Yukina needed some new clothes. I wanted to buy her a tailor-made middle school uniform.

"Oh, Rulitora. Bring one of the treasure boxes."

"One with gold coins in it?" Rulitora asked, cocking his head. I nodded in response. Yukina's clothes were important, but we couldn't waste any time to find Haruno. I was prepared to pay a rush fee if we needed to.

Rulitora carried the treasure box using a wooden rack tied to his back, and Rium sat on his shoulder. Of course, I held Yukina's hand. Rakti looked at us with a hint of jealousy in her eyes, but Clena took her hand first so that Yukina would have some space. Roni smiled at the two of them warm-heartedly. Between Rakti in her maid outfit and Roni in her leather armor, the latter looked much more the part as our attendant.

First, we revisited the shop where we had all our nautilus meat smoked, and asked them to refer us to another shop to order a large quantity of preserved foods. The referral cost extra, but time was money when it came to finding a shop good enough for a professional seal of approval. The shop owner recommended lime and sauerkraut when we said we were going on a long voyage, but I said we already had a source for citrus fruit, so we only ended up

ordering a bit of sauerkraut from his suggestions.

That source was one of my latest gifts, the “Goddess of Water’s Faucet.” The shop owner suggested foods rich in vitamin C to prevent scurvy, but the orange juice from the faucet already covered that. The juice might have been made from my MP, but its nutritional value was just the same as the real thing. Maybe the Goddess of Water granted me that gift because she knew she’d be calling us to the water capital. *That awkward thoughtfulness really suits her,* I thought as I recalled how she threw her flipbook at me with her cheeks flushed red. It was a convenient gift in any case, so I’d be sure to make use of it.

Something surprising came up as we conversed with the shopkeeper. He looked like he was approaching his golden years, but he actually knew of the gillmen’s island. About thirty years ago, the coastal area was home to many fisherman who worshiped the Goddess of Water. The shopkeeper often sailed to that island on his friend’s fishing boat to pray. The route to the island was well traveled since the fisherman wanted blessings from the ocean and prayed for large hauls. However, starting about thirty years ago, more and more monsters riddled the route to the temple and it became unsafe to sail there. Phoenix must have taken over the island to use as his hideout around that time. Faith in the Goddess of Water was already waning since the elevated area worshiped the Goddess of Light back then, but that event put a complete stop to it.

Damn, Phoenix. I know you’re the infamous general who lost 100 battles, but you don’t have to go make other parties win on top of that. Not to mention it’s the light temple, your supposed enemy, who you helped lead to victory... Could you take a hint? I had so many complaints for Phoenix, but I didn’t want to see him again either.

The shopkeeper was still faithful to this day, so I told him that the hero Cosmos and I collaborated to defeat the demon lord’s army and freed the island and the gillmen living there. I defeated Phoenix, and Cosmos reclaimed the hideout, so it wasn’t wrong to say that we collaborated. We just split up the work, is all.

Cosmos wasn’t the type to bother with the details here, but I needed to keep the princess in mind. This would serve as a form of publicity for Cosmos’ party.

The only concern left was how this follower would behave, but he was kind toward Rulitora and apparently toward the gillmen as well, so I wasn't too worried.

Now that we finished putting in our food orders, it was finally time to shop at Ficus Brand. Clena and the other girls had come here before to buy swimsuits, but this was my first time here. A statue of a woman clad in a bikini stood at the entrance. The sculpture looked like an ancient piece of art, yet the bikini was modern and chic—kind of a surreal combination. The store's interior was spacious, with products lining every wall. The middle of the floor was filled with more statues of women in swimsuits. Men's swimsuits took up a small corner of the floor, not too different from the gender ratio at the brand's location in Jupiteropolis. Well, this ratio wasn't too different in swimsuit shops back in Japan, either.

"Touya, should I buy a swimsuit too?"

"I think you should, but... should we also get some wetsuits while we're here?"

"What's that?" Rakti answered my question with a question.

I guess I wasn't surprised that "wetsuit" wasn't a term here. I explained that it was a protective suit worn when you needed to spend time underwater.

"I've never heard of something like that..." Roni couldn't think of anything it might resemble. Apparently wetsuits hadn't been invented in this world.

"Wouldn't the water veil work?" Clena suggested.

"Does that work deep underwater?"

"I'm not sure, but I at least haven't heard any warnings against using the veil underwater, so it should be fine."

"Was spirit magic always that haphazard?" I suppose magic in this world was all pretty haphazard.

I remained silent for a moment, but then Rium spoke up from atop Rulitora's shoulder. "A long time ago... a demon general used that spell to cross an ocean."

“...Seriously?”

As the story went, a demon general led a few of his troops from one shore to another on foot as part of a surprise attack on a fortress. Unlike us, there was no way for them to rest along the way, which just went to show that general’s fortitude. That battle was apparently well documented, so it served as proof that the water veil would work. In that case, I didn’t need to worry about finding us wetsuits.

“Okay then, let’s stop the chitchat and buy Yukina some clothes!”

“Alright!”

“Did the rest of you need anything, Clena?”

“Not really—we bought everything we needed during the last trip.”

“Okay then, can you help Yukina pick out some underwear? I’ll go ask if we can get a school uniform tailored for her.” I couldn’t exactly hang around the girls as she tried on underwear, so I opted to ask the tailor about the school uniform in the meantime.

“Sure. But make sure to be back by the time we start looking at clothes, okay?”

“I know.”

Clena gave me a stern reminder, but I was already way ahead of her. No chance in hell I’d miss that. In fact, I bet I wanted to pick out some cute clothing for Yukina the most out of all of us.

“Yukina, I’m going to discuss an order with the shopkeeper, so go ahead and start shopping with the other girls.”

“O-okay...” Yukina looked a little hesitant, but nodded.

Her dejected face tempted me to take back what I just said, but I suppressed the urge. She wouldn’t be traveling with just me, but with the whole group. The other girls needed some time to become friends with her as well. Most importantly, I was about to request the middle school uniform that she had dreamed of wearing in her past life. As her older brother, I absolutely had to make her dream come true.

I remembered the details of the uniform, so I brought with me a paper that I'd drawn the uniform on. The employee in the raver market had been wearing a similar sailor uniform, though the designs differed. The tailors in this world should be able to make them. I called for the tailors, getting a little excited thinking how closely we could recreate the uniform. Surprisingly, they got right on board as soon as they saw my drawing.

"Um, is there something wrong?"

"Not at all, it's just... this design from your world looks so similar to the uniforms at our raver market."

They were unexpectedly enthusiastic. I listened in on their conversation, where they suggested that this design could be used for a new product. Apparently their reaction was connected to the medals I had received in Hephaestusopolis. From the bits and pieces I could hear, they were considering using my appearance as publicity for their shop. Uh-huh, so my fame as a hero could be used like this, too. I didn't have any problems with it, so I might as well let them. But just in case Haruno might misunderstand, I explained to them that I wanted to make a school uniform for my little sister. I hoped the message went through.

"Also, I was hoping that this order could be done as soon as possible..."

"We can finish this right up by tomorrow."

"I'd be grateful for that, but are you sure that's okay?"

"We already know how to make these uniforms. And since it's an order from you, Sir Hero, we will make it our highest priority."

I see, they could just use the raver market uniform as their base. I looked over at Yukina. She seemed like she was having fun with the other girls. If she had managed to enter middle school, she would have gone out shopping with her friends after school like this. Oh yeah, I had talked with the others about this before... I might as well take the opportunity to order school uniforms for everyone else as well.

"...Can I request the same for all five girls over there?"

"With a rush fee, we can get it done in two days."

I exchanged a firm handshake with the tailor, then of course handed them a larger tip than Clena had suggested. When I walked back to the girls, they were just about to start picking out clothes for Yukina. They knew I'd be gone for a short time, so they went ahead and picked out underwear first.

"Okay, what do you want to look at first?"

"Pajamas!"

A cute pair of pajamas, huh? I wondered how clothes would work with her wings and tail, but her wings grew from her lower back, so they wouldn't get in the way too badly. The tailors would help fit any clothing for her tail. Yukina picked out a cute pair of plaid pajamas, and then a female staff member helped measure the width of her tail. She then cut a hole in the pajama pants. Tail sizes differed greatly depending on the demi-human race, so they had this system in place. I expected no less from Ficus Brand—the legendary pervert wasn't just a name. Rulitora's tail looked about as wide as Yukina's waist. I couldn't imagine him wearing a cute pair of pajamas, though.

Yukina couldn't fly if her wings were covered, so she looked through camisoles and tank tops that reached above her belly button. Also, she wouldn't be able to fly in a skirt, so we stuck with pants. All the choices so far allowed her to enjoy an active lifestyle. *She really has gotten healthier,* I thought with a smile.

Yukina approached me with a camisole over each arm. "Hey hey, Touya, should I pick the pink one or the blue one?"

"I like the pattern better on the pink one," I answered, which made Yukina grin. The pink camisole was decorated with cute fish drawings, befitting a southern country. She always did like clothing with cute illustrations.

"But... this one looks more refreshing, don't you think?"

However, she then pouted while thrusting out her arm with the blue camisole draped over it. I see, the light blue color would feel cooler under the Neptune heat. But we didn't come here to buy just one shirt.

"You can buy both, you know?"

"Really?!"

We came here to buy her a whole wardrobe. Two camisoles wouldn't be enough, either. I pointed this out to her, which made her eyes sparkle as she darted around the store, picking out outfits. Clena and the other girls helped give her advice. We had only come here to buy some clothes, but this also served as a way for the girls to get to know each other better.

After completing a round of shopping, we went to meet with Cosmos. They were part of the reason why we were able to save Yukina, so I had to give them my thanks. They were currently staying at the Maiden of the Roaring Waves inn, but when we arrived, neither Ricott nor most of the royal guards were present. Sharp as ever, the princess noticed my confusion and told us that the guards were currently preparing their ship to set sail again. Ricott was in charge of all such practical matters.

I thanked them one more time for helping us save Yukina, to which Cosmos replied, "I'm glad!" with a pearly white smile. Impressive how he could act like that, even though he'd failed to retrieve his own target.

I mentioned that we custom ordered a sailor uniform for Yukina, which he unexpectedly became fascinated by. "Huh, so that shop can make sailor uniforms? Maybe I should have them make a set for everyone in my party as well."

Wait, did he mean not only Princess Franchellis, but every last one of the royal guards as well? The princess covered her mouth with her fan as she stared exasperated at Cosmos, who had stars in his eyes. Cosmos then stood up and walked toward Foley and the other bodyguards. The princess took the opportunity to lean toward us.

"...Anyway, I'm glad you are here. We had been searching for you as well."

"You were? What for?"

"We are looking for Balsamina, you see, but we don't have any leads... You had fought with that demon general directly—might you have an idea of where he could flee to?"

"Unfortunately, we don't know anything specific... Oh, and he's only a former demon general, by the way." Phoenix had plenty of witty comebacks, but he hadn't blurted out any information about other possible hideouts. "...Well,

Balsamina aside, Phoenix might be attempting to meet up with other survivors of the demon lord's army."

"...For what reason?"

"He was known as the undead king, but called himself Phoenix because he feared naming himself 'king' would make the demon lord angry. I think he's actually very afraid of the demon lord."

"I-I'm not sure what to say about that..."

Yeah, I was speechless too. But I was mentioning it now because it might be useful to know that even the demon lord's subordinates feared him.

"To be honest, I wouldn't be surprised if they were hiding among normal people in the city."

"That's impossible... oh, but it is true that Balsamina was hiding in Jupiteropolis."

Just in case, I should mention that I wasn't joking around right now. If Cosmos wanted to chase after Balsamina, he'll have an inevitable run-in with Phoenix. I was giving them information on his personality to prepare for a possible fight—most importantly, letting them know that he was easily provoked.

"Yukina, we have some time right now, so could you tell them everything you know again?"

"Sure, I can."

And so we relayed everything we knew about Phoenix to the princess. Yukina's speech was more akin to a long rant filled with every complaint she had about Phoenix, but the princess listened with attentive ears. She knew how important this was. In the end, we didn't finish talking until Ricott's group came back. It had gotten later than I expected, so I opened the door to head back, and was already in the hallway when Cosmos called out to me.

"Touya..."

"What?"

"Seeing you has given me conviction. Just because the other party is a demon, that is not reason enough to fight. I'm sure Balsamina and I will come to a

mutual understanding!”

“...That’s good to hear. Good luck.” His serious tone caught me off guard, so I was rendered speechless for a moment before I turned around and replied in kind.

“Of course, we both understand that cuteness is justice! —Guh?!”

Never mind, I was wrong. I slammed the door behind me, but it sounded like it hit him square in the nose. Yukina and the others looked stunned as well.

“I can agree that she’s cute, but that’s not the point...”

“Touya, that guy...”

“What about him?” *If you say that he’s attractive, I’ll burst into tears on the spot.*

But Yukina was thinking something completely different. “His personality, or I guess his vibe? It’s really similar to Phoenix’s. I bet Balsamina isn’t very good at dealing with those types.”

“I-I see...” She was persuasive, coming from someone who knew them both. But Cosmos supported our quest to rescue Yukina and wished for our success with all his heart. In that case, I’ll give him my support as well. *I sincerely hope you’ll eventually find mutual understanding with Balsamina.* I clenched my fist with determination as I turned away from the door, wails of pain still resounding from the other side.

The next day, I brought Rulitora and Shakova with me to meet with Kopan at the auction house. We were only going to reclaim our luggage, so I left Yukina with the others to watch over our room. The area was teeming with nobles, merchants, and people with influence, so I didn’t want to risk bringing her and attracting attention.

I witnessed the effects of my reputation as a hero yesterday, so today I wore a full suit of armor as a way of showing myself off. I wanted to give off the vibe of a warrior with battle experience. I put on the Magic Eater and equipped a tuna knife from the Goddess of Fire’s kitchen around my hips. The knife was about as large as a long sword and plenty gaudy since it was from the Goddess of Fire, so it was perfect as an actual sword.

Unsurprisingly, we attracted plenty of attention walking down the street, so Kopan was already waiting for us when we entered the auction house's lobby.

"My my my, I heard all about your success! You eliminated the remaining demon army forces that were threatening our city! Oh, how wonderful to hear! Now Neptunopolis can feel at peace!" He shook my hand as he chattered in a loud voice. From the sound of it, he wanted to show off my accomplishments but also exhibit how friendly he was with me at the same time.

I let him put on a show for a little longer, then the auction house manager arrived and guided us to another room. The inside of the room was hidden by a curtain, so I couldn't tell what was inside. The manager only opened the curtains after shutting the door behind us. He revealed a mountain of gold and silver coins and various goods that reached about as high as my chest. Rulitora let out a whistle in astonishment.

"Oh, so the curtain was so that no one outside could see this..."

"It's just etiquette," the manager smiled.

Not only that, I bet it was also to avoid potential trouble. We had plenty of eyes on us before we entered this room.

"So what's the other stuff here besides the gold and silver coins?" They didn't look like anything I had requested, nor old items that didn't sell.

"We had asked for cursed items, so is that everything here?"

"That's part of it, but nyot everything here is cursed."

"Oh yes, we would have had to gather far too many coins for you, so we converted some of the profits into easily sellable items instead. Oh no no no, I don't need anything extra for this. This is just part of my services. Ah, and I'll take the cut I was promised from this pile here."

Shakova explained that 90 percent of the items in the pile were gems or metal ingots that were worth a lot of money. Apparently it was common for travelers to turn their money into gems since they were much lighter to carry around. In our case, Shakova and the other ketolts could turn them into items worth even more money, so it worked out well for us.

“And this is... a painting?” Rulitora peered at the remaining 10 percent of the items, which appeared to be works of art and various expensive-looking pieces of furniture and ornaments.

“Yes, this is my portion. Oh no no, I won’t ask for a bonus. This is more than enough for me.”

“I can provide proof that these items are worth ten percent when converted to gold,” the manager said, then handed me three pieces of paper. Each of them showed the results of the auction, the coins and treasures that Kopan gathered, and the price of the other items that Kopan bid on. It was essentially a receipt.

According to Shakova, Kopan could use his skills to negotiate his items for more profit. So he was using this to expand his trade, huh? What a capable... or rather, crafty guy. Well, the end results confirmed that leaving the auction to Kopan was the right decision.

We said our goodbyes to Kopan, and declined the manager’s offer to prepare us a carriage to transport the goods back. I instead put everything inside the Unlimited Bath and headed out. A normal person would need a carriage for all of that. My gift really was convenient in times like these.

“Let’s stop by the light temple on the way back.”

“The temple?”

“Yeah, to ask them about our carriage.”

We had originally bought the carriage to travel through the void and carry a large amount of luggage, but now that my Unlimited Bath had grown, we no longer had the need. The carriage made for quicker travel and we could store it inside the Unlimited Bath, but our next destination was under the ocean. Considering how much it would cost us to feed a horse, it just wasn’t worth it. Not to mention we’d have to discuss what else we needed to do before returning to land after reuniting with Haruno’s party. Letting the carriage go and buying a new one the next time we needed it was the more sensible decision.

We had sent the horse through the void and the demon lord’s former castle,

but it was still just a normal horse. The light temple should take plenty good care of it if we told them that the horse came back alive from the demon lord's castle.

And thus I met with the temple elder and asked if they could take on the horse and carriage. It'd feel wrong to ask them for money, so I made the offer as a donation rather than a sale. The elder happily accepted my offer. They had a pasture for raising horses for the temple of light's pilgrims, so the horse could go there. The carriage could just be broken down, but they might also keep it as a memento.

"I hear that you are traveling by sea—are you planning to go to Ares?"

"Oh? Yes, that's the plan." Ares was the nation that encompassed Dragon's Tail peninsula, which drew an arc from the west to the south side of the bay. Going there would be faster than returning to Neptune after we rescued Haruno's party, so that was our goal.

"In that case, please be careful. The Goddess of Light's protection does not reach that country."

"...You mean it's a country like Hephaestus?" I asked, puzzled. I recalled that their light temple was small and humble.

The temple elder shook his head grimly. "It is even worse. There is no temple of light in that country."

I see, so faith in the Goddess of Light had been completely eradicated there. I bet the Goddess won't be too pleased in my dreams.

"They are protected by the Goddess of Earth now, but they were once the first nation to fall to the demon lord, and served as part of his army until his collapse."

"But that was only long ago, right?"

"That may be true, but it is rumored that many demons live in hiding in that nation."

"...I see. I'll be careful." It was only a rumor that I should take with a grain of salt, but I should take it anyway. I needed to focus on saving Haruno right now,

so I filed the information in the back of my mind. In any case, I couldn't help but think that any country under the Goddess of Earth must be a good country due to the lady that appeared in my dreams. The head temple of the Goddess of Earth might be there too, so I couldn't avoid going there if I wanted the blessing.

After we got back, I asked Rakti about what we'd heard, but unfortunately she couldn't remember anything. That couldn't be helped, though—of course her memories would be foggy after 500 years of being sealed. I put the topic aside until we needed to set sail for Ares.

We had rented out the cabin by the riverbank again for tonight. Rakti hopped back to Yukina, who was enraptured by the fishing net. Roni and Rium also joined the fun. Rulitora was the one pulling the net. He was serving as the de facto father of the group for tonight. The ketolts were enthralled by the ingots, so I spoke with Clena regarding our next steps.

"Alright, so tomorrow we take a day off, then the next day we'll pick up our orders and set sail?"

"It's not a day off—we need to clean up the Unlimited Bath tomorrow. It got bigger again, so we need to reorganize everything and make space for the food."

Our items and furniture never moved when the Bath grew larger, so we needed to move them by hand every time. It had grown even more than usual this time around, so I was getting exhausted just thinking about it. We also needed to sort the items we brought back from the auction house, so chores would take up a large portion of today and tomorrow. Clena sighed, as if she just arrived at the same conclusion.

"...Well, let's start with organizing the treasures."

"Can't we just stuff them in the treasure boxes?"

"That would damage them."

I imagined opening a treasure chest packed with shining treasures, but Clena brought me back to reality.

"That sounds difficult... Can I not be in charge of that? I can handle other stuff

in the meantime.” I wasn’t making excuses, just trying to find the right person for the job... is the excuse I made.

“Yeah, yeah. We can have Shakova take care of the gems and accessories. I’ll organize the books,” Clena replied and smiled, looking as if she could read my mind. I felt like I lost this round, so I’ll plan a counterattack. In the bath.

And then, the day of departure arrived. We finished cleaning up the Unlimited Bath, picked up our orders, and placed them in the newly acquired space.

The sailor uniform was styled for summer wear, and we also bought the sewing patterns so that we could order it again at another shop. They apparently had a large order come in yesterday, so the tailors had a pile of sewing patterns on them. That was most definitely Cosmos. According to a tailor in Ficus Brand, they still had room for improvement. I had told them all the details I could remember about the uniform, but in addition, they tailored it so that it could be worn over a long period of time like travel clothing. The sailor uniform was actually made using the same techniques that were used on the traveling maid uniforms. The top was on the short side, but that couldn’t be avoided since Yukina needed her wings to fly.

“Ta-da!” Yukina changed into her uniform as soon as she could, then struck a pose in front of me. Her dream of wearing that uniform was my dream as well. She was adorable. I felt myself choking up, but I tried my best to hold back the tears. Yukina apparently felt the same, but she couldn’t hold it in and leaped into my chest. I embraced her back, and she looked up at me with a radiant smile.

“I’m so happy for you, Yukina.”

“Thank you...!”

It was worth being summoned to this world just to see her smile. Right now, I felt so from the bottom of my heart. *I want to protect her smile from now on.* With my newfound resolve, I squeezed her petite shoulders into a tighter hug.

“I’m so glad, Touya... Yukina...”

“Yeah... thank you, Clena.”

Clena and the others were in tears. Rulitora was trying his best to hide it, but

failing. Rakti was practically sobbing.

I have a good family. That thought came to mind.



The Grande Nautilus' maintenance ended without a hitch, and we had nothing left to do in Neptunopolis. Our next goal was to save Haruno and her party. We never heard back from them even after sending letters, likely because they were stuck in the water capital. There was a high possibility that they didn't know we had saved Yukina yet, so I wanted to introduce them to each other quickly. I had multiple reasons to find Haruno as soon as we could.

We headed to Rondalan's dock and boarded the ship, Yukina clinging to my arm all the while. Word had gone around that we were leaving today, so Rondalan, his neighbors near the port, clerics from the temple, and even Kopan and Cosmos' party had come to send us off.

"Touya! Let us meet again somewhere in this wide world!!"

"Here's to hoping you have Balsamina with you next time!"

"Thank you, my friend!!"

We shouted our goodbyes at each other, and he ended up recognizing me as a friend. Well, that wasn't a bad thing. I waved my arm back at the crowd as the transparent hatch closed in front of us.

"Alright everyone, let's go!"

At my signal, the Grande Nautilus started up and slowly submerged itself under the water. Our target was the water capital, where Haruno's party awaited us. This was the beginning of our underwater adventure.

Second Bath – Fruity Bath on a Secluded Island

Following our departure from Neptunopolis, we cruised close to the surface of the water, letting Yukina soak in the emerald-blue sights. We couldn't change our speed, in any case. Pardoe was at the helm. Shakova and Mark also knew how to steer a ship, so the three of them were on rotation.

I looked up beyond the dome from the deck of the ship, where rays of light trickled down from between the waves above. The light clustered and made the scales of the surrounding fish glisten. It was almost as if we had been transported to a fairy tale world. Yukina's mouth was agape as she stared at water above, reminding me of the times I spent reading fairy tales to her. My face broke into a smile as I remembered how her eyes were brimming with the same curiosity as back then.

"Where are you looking? That's not the ocean." I continued staring as Rium joined in, pressing her face against the dome next to Yukina, until Clena interjected.

"...You're not looking at the ocean either, Clena."

"I can use the water veil, remember? I'm pretty used to being surrounded by water." She was referring to the spell she used to protect us against poison gas when we crossed Mt. Lemnos in Hephaestusopolis. The spell was originally supposed to be used underwater. Apparently she had used it for such cases in the past. "But this *is* prettier. I used it in a river before, but the water was murky."

"Wouldn't you have gotten swept away in a river that deep?"

"You just need to walk diagonally."

We conversed as the Grande Nautilus continued her journey. Large marine monsters wouldn't attack us close to shore, so for about half a day we cruised close to the surface, and no one left the ship's deck all the meanwhile. Yukina, Rakti, and Rium had their hands and faces peeled to the dome. They looked like little kids exploring an aquarium.

"Okay, it's about time to lower our depth."

“Roger!”

From what I’d heard, the marine monsters that lived in the ocean’s depths hunted prey near the surface by following their shadows. Apparently fishing boats sometimes fell victim due to the shadows they cast. The gillman cleric told us that sailing close to the ocean floor would be safer since we’d be harder to see. And if monsters tried to attack prey below them, they’d risk crashing into the ocean floor, which only spelled out a lot of pain for their large bodies.

“I’m lowering the cover, meow.” Pardoe pushed a button on the rudder, which enveloped the dome in a white casing. This was to help the ship withstand the change in water pressure. Light wouldn’t reach us this far down anyway, so the cover made no difference in our visibility. From this point on, we’d rely on a radar made from crystal magic for navigation. The radar gave off magic waves, not electromagnetic waves, so it’d be completely invisible to any monsters that couldn’t use magic.

In any case, the show was over. Time to break up the party. All of us returned to the Unlimited Bath, save for Pardoe at the helm and Mark overseeing the radar. Oh yeah, I should ask Crissa to bring them some refreshments later. Though I wouldn’t mention who it’d refresh more.

“Touya, what are we gonna do now?”

“Sort our luggage.”

“...Huh?”

“Sort our luggage.”

It was important, so I said it twice. We’d put off any cleaning so that we could set sail as early as possible. Right now, the Bath was quite a mess. Most of the time until we reached the water capital would be spent on cleaning everything up. I also didn’t have a full grasp on everything Kopan had bought for us yet.

“Roni and Crissa will be in charge of sorting the food.”

“Understood!”

“Leave it to us.”

It’d be best to leave the food organization to the people who’d be cooking it

later.

“Rulitora, help them out.”

“Very well.”

However, the sheer amount of food was daunting, so I had Rulitora take some hard labor off their hands.

“Shakova will be in charge of the accessories and antiques. Gather all of the cursed items together. I’ll dispel the curses later.”

“I’ll myake an inventory list, too.”

That was a great idea. His professionalism continued to impress.

“Rium, you take care of the gems.”

“...Got it.” Rium’s lips shifted ever so slightly, forming a faint smile. Crystal mages used gems often, so she was more than qualified to appraise what we had. I had told her that she could use whatever unprocessed gems she found a need for, which must have gotten her even more motivated for the job.

“Clena will be in charge of the books.”

“We have a lot more now, huh?”

“Still plenty of space left on the bookshelf, though.”

The bookshelf we took from Hadesopolis still had room. My collector’s spirit burned at the thought of eventually filling the bookshelf with all kinds of valuable books. All our new books were ones that Kopan bid on from the auction. Ancient manuscripts and scrolls made up a portion of the items Kopan bought that we could easily liquidate. They were apparently worth a hefty price because they contained hints on possibly buried treasure, and some specialist treasure hunters valued them highly. So the books themselves were valuable, but would be worth even more if you managed to find the treasure. Maybe this was another one of Kopan’s bonus services? Knowing him, he’d want to help us auction off those treasures if we ran into each other again in the future. In any case, the Goddess of Light’s blessing allowed me to read even these ancient scriptures, so I gladly welcomed them to our collection. I was tempted to organize the books as well, but we had too many other chores on the list. Clena

was pretty much a historian, so she'd have no trouble sorting them on her own.

Right then, Yukina and Rakti jumped onto me, upset at the fact that I had yet to assign them anything.

"Touya, what about me? What about me?"

"I want to help too!!"

Yukina wrapped herself around my head, and Rakti around my waist. *Come on, don't cry, I didn't forget about you two.*

"You two will be with me."

"With Touya? Yay!"

"What should we do?"

"Everything else."

"...Huh?"

"Like I said, everything else." Once again, this was important, so I said it twice.

We let everyone else take care of whatever they specialized in, but there were plenty of other miscellaneous chores. For example, sorting all the items we bought for our daily necessities. The Unlimited Bath had plenty of its own furnishings, but that hardly covered all the bases. Shakova had too much on his hands, so we could at least handle sorting the metal ingots. We had a giant pile of weapons and armor, too. The ketolts were fixing up anything from Hadesopolis that looked like they still had a little life in them. Everything else was scrapped and had been turned into iron and steel ingots, which were gradually forming a jumbled pile. We'd be giving it all to Pardoe to work with later, but we needed to organize the ingots or else there wouldn't be room for anything else.

"On that note, let's start with the money." First on the list was something that was easy to overlook, but very important. Unlike paper money, the coins used in this world got inconceivably heavy once you had too much.

"I have a rich big brother, huh..."

"We pretty much turned the demon lord's castle upside down." Thanks to

that adventure, we'd been able to travel a little luxuriously.

"Where should we put everything?"

"In the drawers... I guess?"

"That'll make it look like you're keeping a secret stash."

Yukina looked stunned, but we shouldn't keep money anywhere that stood out, and I couldn't think of anything better. Well, we didn't have to finish everything up today. The rest of the group would help us out once their tasks were done, so let's just take it slow for now.

I laid out a bed sheet on the tatami-floored room to spread the coins on top of. Our first task was splitting the coins into gold, silver, and copper. The only reason we were doing it in this room was because it'd be a pain to carry them elsewhere after we were done. It was also a pain getting the coins here in the first place, but that was my job. Yukina and Rakti plopped themselves down on the sheet and began sorting the coins. In the meantime, I transported more chests and bags over to them. The chests were far too heavy to carry, so I split it between several tips.

"Hey, Touya..." Yukina called for me after I stepped back into the room with the last bag of coins. She was holding a dull copper coin.

"What's up?"

"You can use orange juice to clean up coins, right?"

"Oh yeah, I've heard of that. Never tried it myself, though." We almost tried once in the past, but ended up eating the oranges instead.

"Do you think we can use the orange juice from that faucet, too?"

"...I wonder?"

The science behind it was that acid could dissolve the copper oxide from the surface of the coins, leaving just the copper coating behind. The orange juice from the faucet contained the same nutrients as the real thing, so it must have been just as acidic as well. Yukina and I looked over at Rakti, but she just shook her head. She wasn't denying the idea, but saying that she didn't know either way.

“Why don’t we try it out?”

“Sure, we can just clean them off again if it doesn’t work... let’s get all the dirty copper coins together.”

“Only the copper coins? Understood!”

I brought two wooden buckets over to carry the coins in. In the meantime, the girls filled up the buckets while chattering things like, “Do you think these’ll get shiny again~?” Yukina’s tail waved back and forth in anticipation. I transported the remaining gold and silver coins into the chests in each drawer.

“Touya~!”

“We finished~!”

After some time, the girls brought over the buckets while grinning ear to ear, each filled about halfway with copper coins. Well then, we might as well fill them up. I grabbed a bucket with both hands and took the girls over to the Goddess of Water’s faucet room.

“Oh, what’s this?” Clena called out to us along the way, where she had been organizing the bookshelf in the central room we were using as a living room.

“We’re testing to see if orange juice can clean the rust off these copper coins.”

“...What do you mean?”

Clena started following us, as we had caught her interest, so I explained the science to her as we entered the faucet room. In this world, rust was normally cleaned off using a polishing powder. However, the powder would scrub the engravings off coins, which made them lose their value.

I filled the buckets with orange juice as Yukina and Rakti watched, eyes sparkling. The changes wouldn’t happen so quickly though; we’d need to leave this be for a while.

“Hey, while you have some time, would you mind taking a look at this?”

“Oh?”

Clena handed me a book, which I flipped through and determined was a very

ancient diary.

“This was from the auction, too? I wonder how...”

“It must have been someone famous. This diary is from a wealthy merchant who made his fortune from trading.”

“Interesting...” It was like an autobiography, but not quite. The important part was that the diary must have contained valuable tips for merchants.

Clena drew herself closer to me and started flipping through the pages. “There’s something I want you to see, though. Right here, and right here...” She stopped at a particular page and pointed to the third paragraph.

“Hades... Ares... Neptune?” Three city names appeared on the page: Hades, the former capital of the demon lord’s army. Ares, who was once Hades’ ally. And Neptune, where we had just come from. I read the surrounding text to find out what was going on, and learned that this merchant had attained his wealth by trading between Hades and Ares. “...Wait a minute, doesn’t this say that he used Neptune as a waypoint?”

“The closest port between Hades and Ares is Neptune, after all.”

“How far back was this? When was he able to go in and out of Hades with all those goods?”

“Hades was just a normal nation 500 years ago, so this must be from when the demon lord reigned, or some time before that.”

In other words, this was a diary from before the battle between the first sacred king and the demon lord. If we researched this book in more detail, we could learn some facts about the world back then.

“Let’s read it over after we finish cleaning everything.”

“Yeah, so let’s get back to working.”

One more item on the to-do list.

We still had more buckets, so we gradually filled them up while getting other work done along the way.

“Yukina, Rakti, let’s start heading back.” I called out to the two girls to return

to the tatami room and continue our tasks.

After soaking in the orange juice for half a day, the copper coins were cleared of all their rust and brought back to a shine that even Clena hadn't seen before. Yukina and Rakti were especially excited, but Rium glared at me as if asking why she wasn't invited. Cleaning the coins up didn't raise their value one bit, but I felt immensely satisfied looking at the pile of copper coins that were now just as shiny as their gold counterparts.

We concentrated on organizing our luggage until we finally finished during the morning of the fourth day. The Grande Nautilus was currently running along the continent heading west, close to the ocean floor so that we'd avoid marine monsters. After about another day, we'd change course going south. We'd finalized this route after discussing it with the gillmen and fishermen in Neptune. Apparently there was a large uninhabited island to the south. The island was slightly west of the center of the bay and was a prime spot for replenishing food and water, but sailors also used it as a vital landmark along their voyages. The water capital was even farther west of that island, so we made it our first destination.

In the meantime, I focused on practicing magic and reading over the old books. Especially the old books, since we rarely had the free time to do so. First of all though, I needed to write down all the information about spells the goddesses told me in my dream the previous night. This had become my morning routine.

"Touyaaa? What are you doing so early?"

Yukina started poking at me, but I needed to write everything down before I forgot it, so I ignored her. Everything the goddesses taught me wasn't recorded in our current magic textbooks. If I didn't do this, I wouldn't have anything to practice later.

"Is this... Japanese?"

"Yeah, these spells aren't exactly something I should make public."

I also used Japanese in my exchanges with Haruno. The people of this world couldn't read it, so it was perfect for confidential documents. Come to think of it, I had sent another letter to Haruno yesterday and had yet to receive a reply.

Apparently they were safe in the water capital, but they must be stuck in a situation where they couldn't reply, or couldn't read the letters in the first place. I was worried about them, but the Grande Nautilus was moving as fast as she could. Right now, I could only make good use of my time. I calmed myself down and returned my focus to recording my dream.

The goddesses only taught me the general gist of these spells, huh? If I hadn't learned my foundations through those textbooks, I wouldn't have been able to make heads or tails of what they were saying. It felt wrong to say this myself, but these were legendary-class spells I was writing down. This was just a bundle of parchment paper right now, but I'd like to compile these into a book in the future. I set that little ambition aside for now, waited for the ink on the parchment to dry, then filed the papers back on the magic bookshelf.

I went out the front door with Yukina glued to my back and saw that breakfast had already been served. The others had laid out a blanket on the garden outside, creating something like a picnic. The table was just high enough for the ketolts to reach, so everyone else sat themselves on the blanket.

"Looks like another tasty breakfast today..."

The fragrance of freshly baked bread wafted from the basket on the table to my nose, and Yukina's eyes sparkled as she gazed at it over my shoulder. Everyone already knew about my morning routine, so they had started eating before me. I approached the table, but Rakti and Rium stood up and dashed over to me before I got very far. They squeezed themselves around me on either side. Roni was reaching her arm out, looking like she wanted to say something. I took a hint and looked down to see that both of their mouths were covered in jam, and now so was my shirt. Apparently they couldn't stay put after seeing Yukina clinging onto me. Rium was normally a well-behaved girl thanks to how her master Nartha had raised her... which went to show how jealous she was of Yukina. Well, I'd happily accept her affection if that was all there was to it. Same with Rakti, too. Their innocent smiles were so cute it was unbearable, but I needed to set some ground rules here. I was the party leader here—the guardian of these girls. I took a deep breath, pushed the two off me, and made sure I sounded stern but not too loud.

"Watch your manners, you two."

They were taken aback for a moment, but eventually noticed the jam stains on my shirt and regretfully hung their heads. I bent down to match their eye level and waited until they said “sorry” in soft voices.

“Now, what have you learned from this?”

“I won’t run around when I’m eating.”

“I’ll wipe my mouth... if it’s dirty...”

“Good girls.” They knew what they did wrong and were reflecting on it.

Roni handed me a towel while grinning, so I wiped their mouths and turned their frowns back into smiles. Yeah, I liked them a lot better when they were smiling.

“Sir Touya, your shirt has gotten dirty, so please change out of it.”

“Well, it would have gotten dirty eventually anyway. I’ll put it over there.”

“I-I can do the laundry!”

“I’ll help, too...”

“Oh my... in that case, why don’t the two of you help me after breakfast?”

Rakti volunteered herself and Rium quickly followed, even though she normally didn’t handle the chores. Roni smiled broadly in response to the girls’ offers.

Oh no, I’m about to break into just as wide of a grin. I should hurry up and change so that they don’t notice.

I finally changed and sat down at an empty space. Clena sat to my right, and Rulitora to my left. I wondered where Yukina went, but saw her sitting next to Rakti and the other girls. I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing she was getting along with them just fine.

Rulitora addressed me while I grinned at the girls. “Good job.”

“Wouldn’t that have been your job, since you’re the oldest one here?”

“Maybe, but I wouldn’t have known my limits...”

“...I see.”

The Torano'o tribe wore nothing but loincloths, be it men or women. They also had different etiquette when it came to eating, so he must not have been totally clear on our customs. He may have acted as the father of our party, but not when it came to disciplining the younger ones.

"...Oh?" I suddenly noticed something and turned to Clena. Her elegant profile was tinted in pink. Her pale, almost translucent beauty was a sight for sore eyes, but that wasn't the point right now. "Clena... you're normally the type to speak up abut manners in those situations, aren't you?"

"Y-you think? Well, you got to it faster than I did, Touya."

That might have been true, but something still bugged me. I stared and observed her growing even more red.

"...I bet you've experienced something similar, haven't you?"

Her shoulders twitched. I didn't look away, and she continued to avoid my gaze. I tried poking her bright red cheek.

"...I did the same to my mom's dress when I was little." Clena finally sighed and told me the truth after some poking. I knew it. "The way you scolded the girls earlier kind of reminded me of my mom..."

I wasn't sure how to react to that. If I complimented her mom right now, that'd be like complimenting myself as well.

"I'm sure you'd make a good father."

"Th-thanks."

Clena gave me a gentle smile as I tried to stammer out a response. I couldn't help but get embarrassed if she admitted that to me so bluntly. Now I was the one averting my gaze.

My eyes darted around me, only to find that not only Rulitora, but everyone at the table was staring at me with a grin. Yukina was looking kind of proud of herself. Well, I was fine with this as long as it made Yukina happy. I got the idea to stuff my face with bread to change the mood, but Clena grabbed a piece before I could, spread jam onto it, and handed it to me.

"Aren't you going to eat?"

“...Thanks.”

Clena really let herself be bold in these situations. I felt like I had lost as I sat there eating silently, though.

“I’m sure you’d make a good mother too, Clena.” Thus, I offered a counterattack.

“Oh, in that case, I’m sure we’d make a good married couple.” But Clena parried it with a teasing grin, unfazed. She didn’t look my way; her cheeks flushed red instead. But either way, this had gotten serious now.

This called for skin-on-skin contact. That was the best move for whenever she got a little haughty like this. I couldn’t make my move now, but I saved my plans for after breakfast. *You’re not getting the last laugh, Clena.* I looked back and saw that she was now red to her ears and kept glancing my way, waiting for a reaction.

After breakfast, I made Clena lie down on my lap as a pillow.

“If you’re tired, just tell me.”

“I do love how you can tell without me saying so, though.♥”

In short, she was holding back some exhaustion after all the luggage sorting. She normally wouldn’t do this where other people could see, but she had an excuse this time. Though I’d happily lend my lap anytime if she just gave the word. Maybe she even planned this so that I’d initiate physical contact afterward. If so, she had me in the palm of her hand, but I didn’t feel an ounce of frustration since she’d opened herself up to me so much. I stroked her hair as she squirmed, feeling slightly ticklish.

In another room, Roni and Crissa were teaching Rakti, Rium, and Yukina how to wash stains off a shirt by hand. Yukina had sensed some sort of impending danger after realizing she was the only one among all the girls who couldn’t do any chores. Even Rium knew how to clean up after herself after she finished her work. In any case, I was glad Yukina pushed herself into the group of her own accord.

We were just a few days away from reaching the island. Until then, I’d make sure everyone had their time to relax. I kept an eye on my little sister trying her

best, while fiddling with Clena's hair and enjoying this moment of peace. However, that peace abruptly ended not long after the girls finished the laundry and jumped onto me.

The following five days were spent reading old books, practicing spells, and taking a quality breather. I sent a letter to Haruno every evening, but never received a reply. If she really was safe at the water capital, she should be able to afford some time to send a response. There must have been something preventing her from doing so. I saw the goddesses in my dreams every night, but the Goddess of Water never showed herself again, and I was unable to confirm anything more. The other goddesses didn't know any details either, and they could only shake their heads at me. I was curious about what was going on, but we couldn't force the Grande Nautilus to go any faster. The most I could do right now was ensure that we wouldn't arrive any later. I quelled my impatience by swinging my gravesword and fishing in the pond with Yukina and the others.

Another four days passed and we finally were nearing the island. We raised the ship closer to the water's surface, then I peered through a telescope above. I saw an island slightly bigger than I'd imagined, almost completely covered by trees.

"So that's the island we heard about... the Resupply Island?"

"Everyone drops by here to resupply, so that's what it ended up being called."

If the island was that important, then why didn't they build a port city here and give it a proper name? Or maybe I just thought that because I didn't know any better. In any case, the island was less than half a day away now.

"Pardoe, there should be a cove where we can dock the ship, so head toward that."

"Roger that!"

Our first goal was to find the cove that other ships used. Next, we had two main things in mind. One was to give the ketolts who had been steering the ship a break. We'd be heading straight for the water capital after this, so this was their only chance to rest. I wanted to make sure they were as refreshed as possible.

The second was to replenish our food supply. Most of the preserved foods you could bring on a voyage were dried foods, so this was a great chance for sailors to obtain fresh fruit. This was important for staving off illnesses during the journey. The Unlimited Bath had plenty of convenient features right now, but it still didn't have a refrigerator. We still mainly relied on dried foods, but had the orange juice faucet as well. Getting fruit wasn't as vital for us, but we might as well indulge in some while giving Pardoe and the others a break.

"Looks like there are no other ships right now."

"Perfect for a little break."

We entered the cove surrounded by a small hill and spotted no other ships. There was a spacious beach with white sand, so we docked the Grande Nautilus there without trouble. I set foot on the sandy beach, had Rulitora set up a tarp to shield us against the sun, and began preparations for some foraging.

"I'll be so bored without the fire altar here, meow!"

"No, just rest."

"Purr, I can do plenty of handiwork without an altar."

"Don't try, Shakova."

"Like I said, just rest!"

In the end, Pardoe took out some armor to polish. Well, these *were* the ketolts who forced their own throne onto a human because they wanted to focus on blacksmithing... I shouldn't bother them if this was what they wanted. A change of pace counted as a break, too.

Mark put on a full suit of armor to keep watch just in case, but he'd give up on that soon enough because Crissa wanted to play. On that note, Crissa was in charge of watching the Grande Nautilus and the other ketolts while the rest of us headed to the forest to forage for fruit. As for Mark? He couldn't be trusted to keep watch because he'd keep staring at Crissa in a swimsuit. Just in case, I walked up to him and patted him on the shoulder.

"Mark, my boy. You might think you're catching some sneaky glances, but it's actually really obvious."

“Wh-wh-wh-what are you talking about, meow?!”

I might as well give him some advice as his elder. “I’ve already given up on trying to be sneaky. I let them know I’m watching, plain as day.”

“And how does that work out...?”

I didn’t tell him that Clena and Roni also tried to sneak glances in the bath. I could tell just as easily, you know? Though maybe the two of them were just *too* obvious. Anyway, we started our trek into the forest. Roni led the group, followed by Clena, Rakti, and I. Yukina and Rium followed me on either side. Rulitora protected our rear. I carried two baskets, and Clena one.

“The trees here are different from the ones in Neptune.”

The forest was humid, swarming with mossy trees covered in thick vines. The grass was a different variety from the grass in Neptune, too. This felt more like a jungle than a forest. I started getting excited at the prospect of southern fruit.

“Aren’t there monsters here, Touya?”

“Yeah, so we can expect to take back some meat, too.” I wasn’t one to speak, but the sailors in this world sure were hardy.

“But apparently there are some dangerous ones farther in.”

“...Dangerous ones?”

“The sailors don’t go near the area, so no one knows the details.”

I listened to Clena and Rium’s conversation until we encountered soft, sweet scents and a colorful array of fruits around us. We hadn’t walked far at all, yet there was already so much. The sailors had plenty of reasons to stay safe on the outskirts of the island rather than venturing farther in.

“I’ve never seen some of these fruits before. Are you sure they’re safe?”

“Apparently they’ve all been wiped out already. On the outer parts of the island, at least.”

“Everything dangerous is deeper inside, huh?”

“I’m sure they altered the island like that on purpose.”

“Why not build a whole city if they went that far?” Yukina laughed, which

prompted Rium to return to our right.

“...It’s inconvenient to live here,” she murmured. So that was all it amounted to.

This island was abundant with food sources, but on the flip side, it had nothing else. If you were to ask me if I’d want to live here, I’d definitely say no.

“Well, we’ll be fine as long as we don’t stray too far. Roni, are there any monsters around?”

“I can’t smell any monsters... but I do smell a bunch of sweet fragrances that way.”

“Alright, let’s head there.”

Roni led the way, and then I heard the sound of wings flapping above me. I looked up, but didn’t see anything. I’d felt the presence of some sort of monster since we got here, but hadn’t been able to spot anything yet. The monsters might be wary of humans, since other sailors invaded their territory every once in a while.

We continued on our way, the sound of flapping wings or a rustle in the bush appearing every once in a while, but we encountered no actual monsters. We arrived at a small clearing with several varieties of fruit surrounding us.

“Alright, let’s harvest a bunch here.”

“Then I shall be in charge of keeping watch. Sir Touya, please gather the fruit with everyone else.”

“Good plan. I’ll leave it to you, Rulitora. We can finish it faster this way.”

“Understood!”

Just in case a monster attacked, we split up into two groups between Clena, Roni, and Rakti, and Yukina, Rium, and I. I looked over at Clena’s group, who were picking fruit from shorter trees. Yukina and Rium in my group could fly, so they picked fruit from the taller trees and I stood prepared to catch them from below. After we filled one basket, Yukina flew down and hugged me from behind, tired.

“Touya, let me ride on your shoulders~♥”

“You can fly... I have to use MP.”

“No, I use MP to fly too.”

I figured her wings looked a little too small to carry an entire human. So she really did use magic.

“Alright, alright. Let’s aim for that tree next.”

We might as well aim for shorter trees if she was getting tired. The one I pointed to was easy enough to reach if she sat on my shoulders. I couldn’t carry both of them at once, so I let Yukina up first while Rium took a breather.

“...I know I was the one who asked, but are you okay? I’m not a kid anymore...”

“You’re even lighter than I thought.” I had grown even stronger, too.

Happy with the answer, Yukina started shouting out commands like “Right! Right! Oh, left!” I had to twist my body every time, forcing me to make a silly face as her thighs pushed against me, and we continued picking fruit. After the basket was about half filled, it became Rium’s turn. She was much more quiet, but tried to reach for fruit even if it was a little too far, so I had to be careful to keep our balance.

“Ah, oomph...”

“.....”

“Say something when you lean forward, I’m losing balance...!”

But Rium was lost in her own world as she silently picked more and more fruit. I glanced at her from underneath and noticed her serious expression. I couldn’t distract her now, so I made sure to keep note of her center of gravity so that we wouldn’t fall over.

In the meantime, something had caught Yukina’s eye and she’d floated off somewhere to follow it, and just now returned with her catch.

“Touya, look at this! We match!” With a gleaming smile, Yukina held up a giant bat with a wingspan I’d estimate to be around one stuto. It was struggling as she held it up by its wings.

By “match,” I assumed she was talking about its wings. Their shapes really were similar. I was startled for a moment, my eyes wide, but then Rium mumbled from above me.

“...A tropical bat.”

“Oh, that’s what this is...?”

The name reminded me of a conversation I’d had with the fishermen in Neptune. This was a bat monster with black wings and golden fur covering its body. It had the face of a dog with large round eyes. They mainly subsisted on fruit and were docile creatures who didn’t attack humans of their own accord. They must have been what I’d been hearing since stepping foot on this island.

“They’re the source of meat... that the sailors resupply on...”

“Meat?!” Yukina exclaimed in surprise.

That was fact. These bats had delicious meat since all they ate was fruit. They weren’t easily spotted though, so if a sailor managed to catch one, it was considered an omen of good luck.

“Touya...” Yukina looked at me with tears in her eyes. I wouldn’t have been mad at her if she let the bat go, but it looks like she hadn’t thought that far yet. The tropical bat was still struggling between her hands.

“...Well, we’re not starving for meat, and we have a source of fish too. We can’t get much meat off just one, anyway.”

“Really?!” Yukina’s eyes sparkled again as she released the bat, which immediately flew away. She was startled for a moment, but then waved her hands as it flew off.

“Rium, I’ll help too~”

“Okay...”

Her spirits lifted, Yukina flew up and gathered more fruit. The basket was almost full now, so we’d be able to finish in a flash. I checked Clena’s group, but they already had their basket on the ground, and she was snickering in my direction. Once we finished up here, we’d be able to head back to the beach.

However, Rulitora put a stop to our merrymaking.

“Sir Touya, be careful. Something is approaching us.”

“What?” We paused our fruit picking and I let Rium back down to the ground. Clena’s group ran toward us, basket in hand. A nearby bush rustled as I picked up the Crescent Moon and pointed it toward the sound.

“Oh, just humans...” A wound-covered gillman shouldering a bundle of spears emerged from the greenery. “Hold on, I’m not your enemy.” He raised both his fins upward after noticing that we were armed. The gillman’s body was a light shade of pink, and judging from the voice, I presumed he was male. His body was on the larger end, and he was carrying a basket full of short spears. He had been holding some, but stuck them into the ground. “I’m looking for a certain fruit. Let me look at what you have picked.”

I didn’t see a problem with his request. I looked over at Clena, who apparently came to the same conclusion and nodded back. My group only picked a few varieties of fruit from nearby, so the search didn’t take too long. However, Clena’s group had looked for multiple varieties, so they took a while to finish.

“Have you seen a fruit about this big?” The gillman had picked out a few to inspect, but they weren’t what he was looking for. He used his fins to indicate about how big the fruit was, which seemed about watermelon size.

“We haven’t come across anything that big,” Clena said.

“In fact, I don’t think this area would have any fruit that comes close,” I followed.

The gillman took a glance at his surroundings and sighed, “I see... Then have you seen anything similar in size elsewhere?”

“No... we wouldn’t have let something that big slip by. Can you tell us something else about how it looks, like color or a pattern?”

The gillman didn’t respond, only crossed his fins and groaned. *Huh, I didn’t know that those fins could cross like human arms.*

“I don’t know the details either... I’ve only heard that eating it will cure any illness.”

“...It cures any illness? Is someone you know sick?” Yukina reacted quickly to

his comment. She must have taken the comment personally, since she had died of an illness and was transported to this world.

“My younger sister... she doesn’t have much longer. My only hope is that fruit.”

And with that, I couldn’t let this go either. We’d planned to take the day off on this island to let the ketolts rest, anyway. There’d be no issue with helping him in the meantime. We could get our rest after the ship set sail again.

“Is that so? I’ll lend you my help.”

“...Are you sure?”

“My little sister has also been very sick in the past. I have free time today, so don’t worry about it.”

“I see, thank you for the offer.”

I left out the part where she actually died and was transported to this world, but the gillman found common ground between us and agreed. “My name is Veil, and yours?”

“I’m Touya, and this is my little sister, Yukina...” I introduced everyone in my party. The pink gillman cocked his head after I introduced the girl with wings and a tail as my little sister, but he made no comment.

Now then—I’d offered my help, but this island was too big to search in a day. We needed to narrow down the possibilities and focus. “Do you have any other information on this fruit?”

“I’ve heard that obtaining it involves putting yourself in danger. Your group looks strong, so I appreciate your help.”

“In danger?” *Does it grow off the side of a cliff?*

I’d heard that plants growing in those areas can store their nutrients and are therefore more flavorful, but this island didn’t have any cliffs.

“Apparently the fruit only grows on some sort of monster.”

“*That* kind of danger?!” The first thing that came to mind was the dragon we had fought in Hephaestus. In this world, “dragon” was a term for powerful

monsters that could alter their surroundings at will to make their habitat easier to live in. The one we had fought was a plant-type dragon that scattered poisonous spores around it.

“Plant-type monsters tend to be bigger and more numerous in the south,” Rium explained.

I see. So it wouldn’t be that strange for a plant-type monster to live here.

“Fruit from a monster would be... a delicacy,” she continued, with a faint smile and eyes sparkling. Ooh, this was the face she made whenever she got curious and worked up about something.

I got a little queasy thinking about how the other animals it preyed on became the nutrients for its fruit, but that would indeed make it tastier. Just how much nutrition did it contain, if it could cure any disease? That wasn’t my main concern right now, though. I had an idea of where we might be able to find that fruit.

“Hey, Rulitora. Back in Neptune, we were told to not go too deep into the island, right?”

“Yes, they told us that a dangerous monster lived there.”

“...You think that’s it?”

“There is a good chance.”

When we chatted with the sailors back during our stay in Neptune, they warned us not to stray deep into the island. I hadn’t paid the warning much mind since the Unlimited Bath allowed us to stock up on enough food anyway, but they must have been referring to the plant monster on this island. Plant monsters were more active during their breeding season, so we must be in that season right now.

“So if we kill the monster deep inside this island, then we can obtain the fruit that will save my sister?”

“We don’t have any proof, but... the likelihood is high. This island isn’t very big, so it wouldn’t have many options for storing nutrients in large quantities.”

“I see, that makes sense...”

“As long as the stories about the fruit being on this island and being able to cure any illness are true, that is.” It’d be a different story if the fruit could only cure certain diseases—in that case, we’d search for medicinal plants. But if it could really cure any disease, then I couldn’t imagine anything other than a fruit that was produced from vitality itself. And if it was on this island, then the monster must be using its environment to gather and store those nutrients.

“I’m certain that it’s on this island. A warrior once told me that he obtained the fruit on this island long ago... in exchange for one of his eyes.”

“...Was that warrior a gillman?”

“Yes, why do you ask?”

“No, it’s nothing.” I shook my head as I recalled the one-eyed gillman I met on the other island. In any case, the first thing we should do was head deeper inside the island. The sailors hadn’t warned us of any other dangerous location. If this plant monster really existed, it’d be there. We placed the fruit baskets inside the Unlimited Bath, then Rulitora and I fully equipped ourselves.

“Should I put on some armor, too?”

“If you want to, I think the armor you wore at the beach will work since it’s so hot here.” I was referring to her top half armor, bottom half swimsuit outfit.

“You look much hotter than I do in that thing.”

“I have to be ready, in case it’s really a dragon...”

“Do you really think something that strong lives here?”

“I’m sure you’re much more knowledgeable about this than I am, Clena, but would a fruit that cures any illness be that easy to get?”

“...Yeah, that’s not something you see every day.”

In other words, a dragon was most likely the monster producing such a fruit. But even if that was the case, the silver lining was that it won’t be scattering poisonous spores like the dragon back in Hephaestus. We continued chatting about what kind of monster it could possibly be, and then Yukina suddenly hugged me from behind.

“Touya... thank you.”

“Hm? What for?”

“For helping that gillman. His little sister must be so worried about him right now...”

I could hear her choking up behind her words. She must have seen herself in his little sister the way I saw myself in Veil.

“It gets really lonely when you’re waiting, you know? So let’s find that fruit as soon as we can. That way, Veil can go back to his little sister more quickly, too.”

“...You’re right.” If it really was a dragon, then Veil wouldn’t be able to fight it himself. I started shivering when I thought about what might happen to his sister if Veil couldn’t make it back. Fortunately, this island wasn’t too big, so we should be able to depart again right on schedule. Let’s find that fruit within the day so that Veil could return to his little sister’s side.

“Let’s do it, Yukina.”

“Sure thing!” she replied happily, flapping her wings.

Clena then turned to Yukina and held out her hand. “I’m just as worried about those siblings as you are. Let’s do our best, Yukina.”

“.....” Yukina stared at Clena’s hand with hesitation for a short while. She looked like she wanted to say something, but eventually pulled out her own for a handshake. “Got it, let’s save Veil’s little sister!”

“Yes!”

They were really starting to get along. I was absolutely elated as I nodded at their exchange.

“Well, this will be a piece of cake if my big brother and I work together~♥”

“Oh? Touya and I have actually defeated a dragon before. You should leave this one to the people with more experience.♪”

Unfortunately, my elation got slammed to the ground in the next moment.

“But we’re rescuing siblings here! You shouldn’t butt in.”

“I’m not butting in. You’re like my little sister now, and that makes me happy!”

“...Pfft! You just mean ‘in-law’! I bet you only think of me as a sister-in-law!”

“Huh? Er, I wasn’t implying that much...” Clena was taken aback by the unexpected retort. Her face was bright red.

Yukina continued her chiding, knowing she had the upper hand now, while Clena just waved her hands in denial. Yukina started grinning like she was starting to have fun, and Clena looked embarrassed, but not upset at her situation. They really were getting along.

“...I can’t have either of them getting hurt, though.” I wanted to help Veil, but I wasn’t going to sacrifice anyone in the process. I’ll crush any monster, no matter what was waiting for us. As I continued to watch the two girls, my gauntlet-covered hand formed a tight fist.

“Touya! Stop staring and help me out!”

“Touyaaa, do you prefer big boobs?! Do you really?!”

The girls glared at me. They really did look like a pair of quarreling siblings. But in that case, it was the job of the older brother to put an end to their argument. I called out to the two of them.

It wasn’t too tough of an argument to settle. They stopped as soon as I mentioned Veil’s little sister, who was still waiting for him.

“I got off track there... we need to hurry and find that cure-all fruit.”

“Yeah, let’s send him and the fruit back as soon as we can!”

And thus, they made up. Well, they weren’t actually arguing in the first place, so I wasn’t sure if they “made up” in that regard.

Anyway, our party made its way toward the island depths. The area wasn’t home to any strong monsters, so we progressed without trouble.

This was such a pleasant island, come to think of it. Sunlight filtered down through the treetops and a refreshing breeze kept us cool. The weather might be getting less harsh the farther we progressed inward. We would have stayed here for a few days if we weren’t in a rush to find Haruno. But right now, our goal was to find the panacea for Veil’s sick sister. We walked for a while until Roni, who led the group, turned back and spoke to us.

“Um, aren’t there a lot of fallen trees around here?”

“...There sure are.” An eerie amount. I inspected one that was close to us, and it didn’t look like it had fallen because it withered, but rather because something knocked it down.

“So something around here can knock down these trees...” Veil also peered at the broken part of the tree with a complex expression. The trunk was pretty thick. Anything that could fell it must have enormous strength.

“...It really is a dragon,” Rakti said as she pressed her hand against the ground.

“You can tell?”

“If they’re as strong as a dragon, yes.”

I see. The goddess sisters each governed a part of nature. They must be able to detect a dragon’s presence, since it could affect its own natural habitat.

“So it’s really a dragon? Though it seems easier to deal with than the one back in Hephaestus.”

“...No poison gas.”

Rulitora, then Rium, who was perched on his shoulder commented as they gazed at our surroundings. They had a point—it’d be much easier for us to fight since we didn’t need the water veil this time.

“So is this island the result of the dragon altering its environment?”

“What a nice dragon,” Roni giggled at Clena’s question. But if that was the case, then how should we proceed? The optimal scenario would be retrieving that fruit without killing the monster.

I glanced at Veil, who had a resolute look in his eyes. I couldn’t discern the expressions of a gillman that well, but maybe I could tell because his circumstances resembled mine in the past. *What would I have done if I had learned there was a panacea that could save Yukina?* I thought as we made our way deeper inside the island. Before long, we heard heavy crackling sounds in the distance. We approached the direction the sound came from, only to be met with a bizarre sight.

“What in the world...?” The first thing I saw was a giant bulb about the size of

an elephant. It was a deep green color and smelled grassy, like the rabbit pen we'd kept back in my elementary school. I couldn't tell if they were roots or vines, but several of them were writhing about from underneath the bulb. No, it wasn't just the vines. The bulb itself moved, too. It looked like several smaller protrusions grew from the ends of the vines, which allowed the monster to move. It progressed slowly until it reached a tree, coiled two of its vines around the trunk, and then... crushed the trunk to pieces a second later.

"What...?" I was so shocked that I didn't register what just happened for a few seconds.

"Wh-wh-wh-what was that?!"

"I-I don't know! It broke the tree down because it was in its way...?"

"Those vines aren't that thick! Rakti could crush them in a bear hug!"

"No I couldn't!" Rakti yelled back at my weird example, but honestly, those vines were no thicker than Rakti's arm. Even so, they snapped the tree in two. That was a display of just how powerful this thing was.

This was a dragon we were dealing with. It didn't have scales or a single other characteristic a dragon would have besides its sheer strength.

"Touya, hey Touya. Look, its stomach is bulging!" Yukina pointed to the bulb, which had expanded a considerable amount. Maybe it was setting up an attack. I immediately stepped in front of everyone and situated my shield.

"Fall back, everyone!" I shouted, but surprisingly, the bulb dragon's next move was not an attack.

Its green exterior quickly opened up, revealing a blooming red flower. In the same moment, it shot something all around us.

"Oh, they've reached the ground." However, whatever it shot wasn't enough to do us any harm. One of them fell on my helmet, so Clena grabbed it off me.

"What's that?"

"It's... a seed. Did the dragon make these?"

"It didn't look like a balsam flower..."

So that giant green bulb was actually the bud of a flower. I should change the name from bulb dragon to flower dragon from now on.

“Touya... look at this.” Rium picked up two seeds and showed them to me. They were clearly different varieties. The one that had fallen on my helmet didn’t match either. The flower dragon was now slowly closing its petals. Its vines picked the fruit off the fallen tree, then dropped them inside from the tip of the bud.

“...I see, so it eats fruit that way, then stores the seeds inside itself.”

“What is that dragon trying to accomplish?” Veil cocked his head, puzzled.

I, on the other hand, was starting to understand this flower dragon’s purpose. “...It’s maintaining the forest, isn’t it?”

“Maintaining? What do you mean, Sir Touya?”

“I think it’s called thinning? If a forest is too crowded with trees, it has a harder time growing because they’re blocking out too much sun.”

“Oh, I think I’ve heard of that before...?”

You have, we watched a program about it on TV before. The program phrased it something like “the dying forest,” which made Yukina cry since she was watching so intently.

“...So it fell a tree just now to make room for the other trees around it?”

“That’s the idea. It was also scattering the seeds of the fruit it ate. That’s how it’s regulating the environment on this island.”

Indeed, this Resupply Island was maintained by the flower dragon so that it would always have a fresh harvest of fruit. Or rather, the dragon was only building its own feeding grounds, and the sailors just helped themselves to the leftovers once in a while.

“...Yeah, that does line up with what dragons do.”

“It’s a very peaceful one compared to the one in Hephaestus, though.”

Everyone else agreed with my explanation. This also explained why the sailors didn’t want us approaching the center of the island. They didn’t want me killing

the dragon, even if we got ourselves in danger. They hadn't told us the full story, most likely because I had a Dragon Slayer medal. The medal made me pretty famous for having slayed a dragon in Hephaestus, so they probably thought I'd set out to defeat another dragon once I learned of its existence. But well, I didn't think I had to say this, but I wasn't the type to pick fights with dragons for fun.

"...Anyway, we can't kill that dragon. Who knows what would happen to this island then?"

"So are you telling us to let it go? To give up on saving my sister?" Veil tightened his grip on his spear when he heard my conclusion. His anger was clearly oozing from the tone of his voice, but he was jumping to conclusions.

"That's not it. We just need to find a way to retrieve the fruit without killing it. Would you cut down an entire tree just to pick one fruit?"

"Well... no, I wouldn't."

"You see? Now the main question is where that fruit is hiding on its body. Or maybe it's not carrying any fruit at all."

Veil quieted down, though still disgruntled, and I looked back at the flower dragon. It was about the size of an elephant, but its body only consisted of a bud and vines. It was definitely a plant, but I couldn't imagine where its fruit might grow. Just as I was considering the possibility that we were barking up the wrong tree, Rulitora spoke up from beside me.

"Sir Touya, when the flower bloomed earlier, I saw some things that looked like orbs inside..."

"Orbs?"

A flower was still a flower no matter the size, so it should also have a stamen or pistil. And of course, that would grow into a fruit.

"I wonder if it'll open up again?"

"We don't know when it'll bloom. Maybe when it's done digesting the fruit it just ate..."

"If it digests fast... then this island would have become barren a long time

ago,” Rium bluntly interjected in Rulitora and my conversation. Her statement made everyone fall silent.

“A-anyway, let’s continue following and observing it. If we know when it blooms, we can just pick the fruit then.”

“...What if it never opens no matter how long we wait?”

“Then I’ll force myself in there.” I was the one who offered to help, so I should at least do that much. It would likely try to fight back, but I’d be fine as long as I had the Magic Eater equipped. That method would also incur less damage on the flower dragon than if we blindly attack it.

“...This feels weird.”

“What’s wrong, Touya?”

“No, it’s nothing.” It felt a little bizarre trying to prioritize a monster’s safety, but I didn’t want the demon Yukina, who was currently looking at me worriedly, to hear that. This monster was indirectly helping humans, so we should be fine if we just avoided fighting it.

“Oh, it’s moving!” The flower dragon started moving again while we were deliberating.

“Go ahead and follow it. I’m going to make some preparations.” I wasted no time and opened the door to the Unlimited Bath, rushing inside. We’d be able to deal with the dragon more easily if we used *that*. I picked up my secret weapon, which I decided on from analyzing all the information we knew so far.

“Kyaaah!!”

And then I heard a scream. I noticed it was Clena’s voice, so I darted out from the Bath with an axe in my right hand and my secret weapon in the left. But by the time I exited the bath, everyone else was already out of my sight. They had already chased the dragon a distance away. I noticed a trail that implied something heavy being dragged along the ground. I closed the door and ran, following the trail. Fortunately, they hadn’t gone too far and I caught up to them in a flash.

“...Um, what are you doing?” I asked after seeing what was going on.

The flower dragon was using its vines in an attempt to part everyone from their armor. Rulitora and Veil were using all their strength to keep their weapons from being snatched away. Clena and Roni were trying to not have their upper armor stripped off of them.

“Can’t you tell?! We could use some help here!” Clena was in tears, her bra about to be torn off along with the rest of her armor, and vital parts of her body about to be exposed. She was using both hands to try and get the vines off her.

Rium was nimbly dodging the attacks on her flying disc, but Yukina and Rakti were hanging off the vines from their swimsuit bottoms. They looked like they might get swallowed any moment now. I should prioritize those two.

“Wait a bit, Clena!” I pierced the Crescent Moon into the ground and summoned earth spirits to hold it in place. I rushed toward Yukina and Rakti, then grabbed my secret weapon—a jar containing white granules—and threw a fistful of the granules onto the vines. Not a moment later, the vines that made contact with the granules flinched back and weakened their grip on the girls.

Just as I thought. I quickly turned around and did the same for Clena and the others. Lastly, I threw another fistful at the bud itself, which made the dragon start to scurry away and released Rium from her predicament as well.

“Are you all okay?”

“Somehow...”

“It took two spears and broke one... damn it!”

Rulitora was fine, but one of Veil’s spears had snapped and two others were missing from his basket. The stolen spears had been swallowed up inside the bud. So the top of the bud was its mouth? There were no other casualties, so I checked on the girls next.

“Thanks for saving us... but what did you throw at it?”

“Salt.”

Clena and Roni were readjusting their armor, but they stopped in their tracks after my answer. *Clena, I have a full view of your cleavage if you stop there.*

“Vegetables soften if you soak them in salt... is that the idea?” Rakti asked as

she squirmed around. She was holding down her panties so that they wouldn't fall. Apparently they had gotten stretched by the vines. Yukina was in the same predicament, but she was using her tail as a clever bolster.

Rium had managed to dodge all the vines, so her swimsuit was unharmed. However, since she had been flying back and forth the whole time, her ever-emotionless face was flushed red and covered in sweat. Thank goodness—if she had been caught, she would have had no chance of fighting back with her small body.

She flew down beside me, then looked up and asked, "...How did you know?"

I used a towel to wipe the sweat off her face, then spoke up so that everyone could hear my reasoning. "The sailors warned us to not venture too deep inside the island, right?"

"That was because of the dragon..."

"But they didn't tell us to avoid setting foot on the island in the first place, right?"

"That's true..." Roni murmured. She had made friends with the fishermen's wives and learned a few seafood recipes from them. She must have been scanning through whatever gossip she remembered hearing from them.

"That dragon probably can't go to the outer edges of the island. So this is a safe place for the sailors to dock as long as they don't stray too deep."

"And the dragon can't wander out because of the salt?"

"More specifically, because of the ocean. Just like Rakti said, the salt dries out the plants."

"I see... Even if it's a dragon, it's still a plant."

"Yep. Though my idea was *way* more effective than I thought it'd be."

The dragon couldn't approach the water, so I figured the salt would have some effect, but I wasn't expecting it to outright run away. Either way, it left a trail behind when it ran, so tracking it down again wouldn't be hard.

"Rulitora, Rium, and Veil—you three follow the dragon. I'll wait for the others to change."

“Understood.”

“Hold on to this, Rium.” I handed her the jar of salt, which made her look as happy as a puppy that had just been given a treat. If the dragon tried to attack them again, she could shower salt onto it from above. “Alright then, the rest of you should hurry and change.”

“I just need to retie my swimsuit. Roni, take the others inside and assist them.”

“Understood, we’ll be right back! Oh, and I’ll bring a spare jar of salt!” Roni said, then led Yukina and Rakti into the Unlimited Bath.

It was my job to retie Clena’s swimsuit.

“I guess you have no other choice since we’re in a hurry.”

“You don’t have to make excuses for me!” Clena reprimanded me, her cheeks bright red. She must have been embarrassed, but held it in because she had no one else to ask. It showed how reliable she was, in a way. I felt like she might punch me if I pointed that out to her though, so I kept it to myself.

“...Are you thinking anything weird?”

“No, nothing weird. Okay, it’s done.”

“Oh... thank you.”

We waited for the rest of the girls to come out, a bit of an awkward air between us.

“Hmm, you two seem suspicious!”

“Nothing happened! Come on, let’s get going!”

Yukina prodded us, sharp as ever, but I quickly closed the door so that we could set off. Yukina had changed into her sailor uniform, and Rakti into her maid uniform. Roni was wearing her usual armor, but was fully equipped now. She had a jar of salt under her arm.

“I helped!”

“Good job, Rakti!” I briefly patted Rakti on her head as she puffed out her chest, and then we started chasing the trail again.

After some time, I spotted Rulitora's large figure up ahead. Judging from the time we spent changing and how far they'd gone, the flower dragon had really picked up its speed.

"Rulitora, how are things?"

"It has been advancing without even giving us a glance, Sir Touya."

"That salt really did a number on it!" Veil followed in an irritated tone. This wasn't good—he looked like he was itching to throw the spear he was holding.

Killing the dragon would affect the ecosystem of the island itself, so I wanted to avoid it if at all possible. Now that we knew its weak point, we should be able to get its fruit without harming it. Still, its body was only a bud and some vines. How would it grow its own fruit? Apparently something was inside the bud, so I wanted to confirm that one more time somehow. As I racked my brain, the flower dragon suddenly slowed down.

"What's happening?"

"There is a pond nearby." Rulitora pointed toward a small pond, which the dragon was now heading toward.

"It looks pretty dirty..." I could tell just by looking. The water was brownish and very murky.

"That's a collection of rainwater. I've heard that it rains heavily once every few days on this island. It rained yesterday, too. The pond must have formed from that rainwater."

"Yesterday?" We were sailing toward this island yesterday, but I didn't remember it raining on us at all.

"Can the dragon make it rain, too? I mean, Goldfish had the ability to do the opposite. He prevented rain from falling near the oasis."

"Oh yeah..." Clena reminded me of Goldfish's abilities. So the dragon could do the same thing... or rather, the opposite of it. I had an idea of what the dragon's immediate goal was.

"Is it rehydrating itself?" Yukina noticed, too. She had come to the same conclusion I did.

I had no idea how it was able to make it rain, but it must have been making use of that spot as a temporary water reserve. Or maybe that hole in the ground had actually been dug up by the dragon itself.

“Now we have even more reasons why we can’t kill it...”

“Huh? And why’s that?” Veil whined in response to Roni’s comment.

Hey, don’t you go threatening Roni. I immediately stepped between them and shielded her.

I was of the same mindset as Roni. The dragon didn’t just thin the trees, spread seeds, and maintain the forest—it even created rain to help the habitat flourish. The small pond might even be a vital source of water for other monsters living here. No, not just monsters... The sailors who visited this island also used the rain as a precious source of fresh water during their voyages. For a giant green bulb, this dragon sure was a saint. An absolute angel. We absolutely had to avoid killing it now. In fact, killing it would only spell trouble. I couldn’t imagine the scale of devastation to established sea routes if this dragon were no longer here. The dragon guarded the very ecosystem of this island. Not only that, it was a key player in supporting the sailors in the surrounding waters. How should we settle this as peacefully as possible? I never expected to find myself worrying about something like this when our opponent was a monster.

“Oh, it stopped, Touya.” The flower dragon stopped while thoughts were still racing through my head. “But wait, isn’t it still pretty far from the pond?” However, she noted that it didn’t quite make sense for the dragon to stop there. We knew it was a bud, but I figured from the shape that it would go into the pond and suck up the water there. I tilted my head in confusion, but the dragon’s next move was completely out of left field.

“Seriously?!” The bud sharply leaned over until its head collided with the water... Well, I had no idea if that was its head or not. The ground nearby rumbled loudly. Was it sucking up the water now?

“Let’s get closer!” I darted ahead without waiting for anyone to respond. “Let’s use this chance to find the fruit! Yukina and Rium, you two search from above! Clena, keep an eye on the water and let us know when it’s about to run

out!”

I quickly shouted my orders as I ran toward the flower dragon. A glance behind me showed that the others were following just a step behind. I finally drew close to it, but it was so focused on drinking up the water that it didn’t bat an eye in my direction. Well, it didn’t have eyes in the first place.

It was using the bud like a pump to suck in all the water. At this rate, it’d be done in no time. We needed to find what we could quickly. I tried looking under it for the first time, but all I saw were smaller vines squirming around. I wanted to check inside the bud too, but we were in no position to do so.

“Touya, the pond is almost empty!”

“That was fast! Stand back, everyone!”

“B-but...!”

“We still have plenty of salt to use! Now hurry!” Veil hesitated, but my one command sent him running as well.

As soon as we got out of the way, the dragon stood its bud upright and began walking again. We approached the pond at a safe distance and saw that there was no water left—it was just a crater now.

“It wasn’t that huge of a pond, but that thing sure dried it up at an unbelievable speed...”

“It didn’t slow down afterward, though.”

“Yeah, it’s probably still thirsty. Let’s keep following it.”

There were likely several ponds scattered around the island. In fact, maybe it had prepared all these reserves in case something like this ever happened.

“Did any of you find anything?” I asked the group, but no one responded. No surprise, since we barely had time to search. We had no choice but to keep following its tracks. If it came down to it, I could always throw another bunch of salt to force it to drink more water. Next time, we’d be more prepared.

“Oh, hold on a second!” Right as we were about to get going again, Roni jumped into the empty crater. She returned with a familiar-looking object.

“My spears!” Yes, they were Veil’s two spears that the dragon had swallowed. They must have fallen out when the bud tilted itself.

“...Wait!” And then it hit me. Since those things it used to walk were vines and not roots, it had to stick its bud into the pond to consume water. In that case, what if the water was coming from another direction? “Hey, how do you think that dragon would absorb water if it was raining...?”

“How? I mean... still from the top of its bud, right?”

Right, it would point itself to the sky. That wouldn’t be very efficient, though. The opening at the tip of the bud was relatively tiny.

“It’d make more sense if it could spread itself out, right?”

“Spread itself out? How?” Clena asked. I pointed to the dragon’s bud.

“That big thing. The giant bud.” It acted like a pump just now. Judging from how it had eaten fruit and spit out the seeds, the inside of the bud could store water and other items. That was also why Veil’s spears fell back out while it was slanted over. We already knew the bud could move pretty freely, so how would it efficiently gather water when it rained?

The answer was simple—it just needed a larger surface area. The giant bud just needed to bloom into a flower, a receptacle for the water.

“I didn’t think of that...” Yukina mumbled as she flapped her wings. Rium vigorously nodded next to her, noting that she agreed. Well, they wouldn’t have noticed it because the bud was underwater the whole time. Though I had taken that as a hint.

“This means that whatever is inside is really important.”

“You mean...?!” Veil gasped, then turned toward the dragon. Everyone else’s gazes followed. If the fruit wasn’t outside, then it had to be inside. The logic was self-evident. Not to mention the inside of it must have been hollow—a perfect storage spot. A spot that the bud and vines were protecting with all its might. Come to think of it, the ovary inside a flower ripened into a fruit. It was only natural that we’d find fruit inside.

“So the orbs Rulitora saw earlier...”

“Those must have been it.”

“Damn it! So we have to wait until the next time it rains?! It just rained yesterday! I’m nearly running out of time!” Veil yelled in anger as he struck his fins against the ground. However, he had no idea. He had yet to learn just what kind of a hero he was working with.

The events that followed went without a hitch. I pulled out the hose for the first time in a while. My Unlimited Bath had grown much larger since the first time I used it, so it was just barely long enough to reach the door. As long as it *did* reach the door though, we were all set.

I sprayed water from the air like a shower, which made the dragon stop in its tracks, and its bud slowly opened. Underneath its hard outer shell were large, pink, and wavy flower petals that almost looked like silk. The petals gradually revealed themselves, layer by layer, until a giant flower blossomed like a dazzling dress. So this was the true form of the flower dragon. I was captivated by the sight for a moment. A sweet smell wafted through the air, a sharp contrast to the grassy smell the green bud gave off.

“Wow...”

“It’s beautiful...” Clena and Roni were just as entranced. I had almost dropped the hose because it looked so mystical. Stems that looked like a bunch of pillars grew from the center of the flower, and many golden orbs were attached to their ends.

“That’s it! That’s the fruit that can cure any illness...!” Veil pointed to the orbs and yelled.

Jackpot. So the fruit really was inside the bud.

“Clena, Roni, hold the hose.”

“...Er, oh, got it.”

“Rulitora, Veil—the three of us will fight off the vines. We should be strong enough to match it.”

“Understood!”

“Y-yes! I’ll use all my spears on it!”

Please don't, you'll need those to make it back home. "Yukina, you pick the fruit. Rium, if any of the vines go for Yukina, throw salt at them."

"Leave it to me, Touya!"

"I don't think they will... but okay."

Just as Rium surmised, the vines had been dangling listlessly since the flower bloomed. They would probably remain that way even after we invaded its space, but we still needed some safeguards.

Yukina approached the flower from the sky. The vines remained still. It gave its full attention to resupplying itself with water, just like back at the pond. Yukina slowly reached out her arms. I held my breath, watching her cautiously and silently pick a single fruit, then drift her way back toward us.

"I did it!"

"Alright, we're escaping! All of you go ahead of me! It won't move as long as it's still drinking water!"

"I shall stay behind!"

"...Thank you."

The others escaped first, leaving only Rulitora and I behind. I finally shut off the water flow when everyone had retreated a safe distance away, threw the hose back inside the Unlimited Bath, jumped onto Rulitora's back, and ran away as fast as we could. I glanced behind me and saw that the dragon was slowly closing its petals again. It most likely wouldn't start moving again until after the bud had completely returned to form. We retrieved the fruit without killing the dragon, and thus our goal was safely met.



After that ordeal, we retreated safely back to the beach, then reconvened with Pardoe and the other ketolts. It had gotten later than I had realized. The sun was just about to set beyond the horizon. Crissa had already started preparing dinner. We invited Veil over for a meal before he left, but he turned us down, saying he needed to bring the fruit to his sister as soon as possible. He said he would catch fish to eat along his way back.

“Thank you, I couldn’t have gotten this fruit without all your help.” Veil hung his head down, acting much more modest than he’d ever been.

“Don’t worry about it, I just couldn’t treat your situation as someone else’s business,” I replied, hugging Yukina’s shoulder close to me.

“Could you hold onto this for a moment?”

“Huh? But you need this...”

Veil handed the fruit over to me. I took it before understanding what he was trying to do and immediately tried giving it back, but before I could, he dived into the ocean. I stared blankly for a while, fruit in hand, and then he returned with a barrel tied to a string.

“Take this as my thanks.” He opened the barrel and revealed a bunch of sparkling coral, among other items. It was a valuable haul, just judging from the sheer quantity. Veil lifted the barrel, then took out the items and lined them up on the sand. “I’ve heard that these items are valuable among humans. I brought them with me just in case.”

“Oh, so you were prepared to barter the fruit from humans, too... In that case, we’ll gladly take this.”

“Please do. I need to exchange the things in here with the fruit.”

Had he managed to get the fruit on his own, he would have thrown the items out anyway. He really was determined.

Veil took the fruit back from me, put it inside the barrel, then waved his fin and dived back into the sea. We waved back as his figure slowly grew distant, swimming toward the setting sun.

“I kind of regret not getting one of those fruits for ourselves, though. I’d like

to try a taste, if it really is that amazing," I mumbled idly, which made the rest of the group turn to me. "Wh-what's up?"

"...You didn't notice?"

"Notice what?" I asked, and then everyone's eyes landed on Yukina. I looked at her in turn, and then caught sight of a certain something. "...Yukina, what's that you've got your tail wrapped around?"

"Teehee♪" Her tail was holding something I'd seen very recently. Something that was in my very own hands just a moment ago—that golden fruit. Apparently Yukina had used both her hands and her tail to pick two fruits before she ran off.

"Honestly, I can't believe you..."

"I've gotten so much more dependable, right?" Yukina hugged me, as if prodding me to praise her. Well, I guess it didn't matter if we managed to run off with an extra one. I patted her head while grumbling, "Say something next time, or else you'll have me worried."

"Alright, let's have that for dessert tonight."

"...Agreed."

Rakti picked up the fruit and Rium's eyes followed, sparkling with intrigue. Crissa's dinner, however, was a full-out seafood barbecue. I was looking forward to dessert, but this wasn't something I could skip either.

"Okay then, let's get going."

"Yeah!"

The sun set and the beach gradually grew darker. I took Yukina's hand and led her to the campfires.

"Touya, I finished grilling one!" Rakti waved and called for me, now wearing an apron over her swimsuit. She handed me a skewer stuffed with slices of fish. "It's good!" she grinned.

Crissa's barbecue was focused mainly on ingredients sourced from the sea. My skewer consisted of slices of white fish, shellfish, and something that looked like an octopus tentacle. The fishing pond in the Unlimited Bath allowed you to

actually catch sea creatures aside from just fish. Even now, Crissa and Mark were fishing up new catches to add to the ingredient supply. I wanted Mark to get some rest, but maybe that'd be mean to ask of him. I might as well let him help Crissa to his heart's content right now. That would make him happiest.

"Can't let him have all the fun, though..." In that case, I should liven things up here as well. I looked at Rium, who was sitting on the beach and staring tirelessly at the bunch of coral Veil had left for us. I bet she wouldn't remember to eat if I let her be, so I called out to her.

"And why aren't you calling for me, huuuh?"

"Because you're sneaking up on me anyway?"

Yukina latched onto me from behind, though she didn't manage to catch me off guard. She must have flown over in lieu of me picking up on her footsteps, but in this noisy atmosphere, the breeze her wings created stood out more. I supported Yukina's weight with my back, and then Rium finally stood up.

"How is it? Found anything interesting?"

"...It's all interesting. There's nothing like it in Athena." She shook her head.

If I remembered correctly, Athena was entirely landlocked. Unfortunately, Rium wouldn't have much knowledge on the items here. We checked with Shakova, who said that while none of the items were especially rare, they could be used to create accessories or decorations. I asked if they could be turned into weapons, but he said that hitting something with a stick would be more effective than using coral. If that was the case, then I might as well leave everything in Shakova's hands.

Now that we had the gift matters settled, it was time to eat. Rulitora and Pardoe were already drinking from wooden beer mugs. Shakova went back to his group and started drinking as well. Rulitora had three skewers in one hand, then scarfed them all up in one bite. He may have had a bigger mouth than all of us combined, but even for him that was pretty extravagant. So that's why Crissa was so busy. Their drinking party wouldn't be ending anytime soon. I'll offer to switch jobs with Crissa when I'm done eating.

"Hey everyone, dessert's ready~!"

I had cleaned off a few skewers and was chomping down on a grilled fish when Roni and Clena brought out a plate of sliced dragon's fruit. It looked pretty close to sliced cantaloupe, only the skin was a bright and lustrous blue, while the inside looked moist and honey-colored. We only got one slice each, but that couldn't be helped since we were splitting between ten people.

"Alright, our leader Touya should take the first bite."

"Me? Okay then..." At Clena's suggestion, I transported a slice from the plate to my mouth. I chewed on it for a few seconds, then slowly said, "...It's sweet. It really does feel like it'd cure any illness."

"Ooh, me next... Wow, it's so sweet! This is crazy!" Yukina yelped in surprise as she took the second bite.

That prompted everyone else to take their own slice, put their hand over their mouth, and faint shortly after. Yeah, this was sweet. *Too* sweet. If a fruit contained enough nutrients to cure any disease, then its flavor would be just as dense.

The taste wasn't bad, though. I mean, it was kind of disgusting at this point, but it was also *delicious*. I wanted to throw it up, but that'd be a giant waste. So instead, I bore with the torrent of flavor that enveloped my insides like a maelstrom. This was the first time I experienced a food that was so flavorful it tired me out.

"...It's good if you think of it like a medicine," Yukina mumbled from beside me. Her voice sounded much more earnest than it usually did.

Well, out of all the impressions rushing through me, "delicious" still stood out the most, so Veil's sister should be fine. I hoped.

"Do you really think it tastes that weird? I think it's fine..." And then there was Rakti, the only one out of all of us munching on the fruit unaffectedly. I kept forgetting recently, but you'd expect as much from a goddess... I suppose?

In any case, Rakti confirmed that this was indeed healthy for us, so we had Rulitora and the rest try it out too. They also fainted, but the fruit was sure to snatch their weariness away. The remaining two slices were for Mark and Crissa. Pardoe and Shakova should be able to convince them to eat it. And thus,

Yukina, Rakti, Rium, and I went over to trade places with Crissa. Clena and Roni had gone back to finishing up their barbecue dinner. I guess it acted as a palate cleanser. Even I was chewing on some salty meat jerky right now.

I believed everyone should try that fruit at least once, so while we were trading places, I told Crissa to make sure she got a bite of it herself. Shortly after, I heard a "Gyaaah!!" in Mark's voice, but I pretended I didn't hear it. This was payback for helping Crissa even though I told him to rest. With that he should get his energy back.

"Geez, what an ordeal... well, I suppose it wasn't that bad," Clena grumbled from her post-dinner bath, face half submerged.

"All the soreness from my legs just vanished. How does it feel for you?"

"...Same for me, actually," Clena sighed, exasperated since the fruit really did have an effect despite all the trouble.

I knew how she felt—it was hard to accept, like the results were disappointing yet exactly what they promised. I had wanted to make Mark eat the fruit since he'd been helping Crissa without so much as stopping to breathe. That was just out of the kindness of my heart. Yeah.

"On that note, are you okay where the vines grabbed you? I can help heal any injuries."

"Oh, I was a little red, but I'm fine now. See?" Clena showed me her wrist. Indeed, her skin was spotless.

"How about you, Roni?"

"I'm fine as well."

"Didn't your armor suffer the most damage since it was pulled around so much?"

"Yes, all the clasps are broken now..."

"That's not something I can fix with magic..." I'll ask the ketolts to help later. They'd have time to mend it in between steering breaks. We couldn't afford to enter the water capital in broken armor, so if it came down to it, we could take over the steering as well.

I asked Yukina and Rakti the same question next. “How about you two?”

“Look, look~!”

“D-do you see any marks...?”

The girls turned their behinds toward me, then flipped up the hems of their yuamigi. I hurried to cover my eyes. Oh yeah, the vines had grabbed them from the bottom...

“U-um, you two look fine.”

“Have some shame, you girls!”

Roni checked the girls instead and confirmed that they had nothing to worry about. Immediately after, Clena leaped out of the bath and slapped both of their butts.

“Show some modesty! This isn’t even about being around other boys or girls!” She then made the two girls kneel inside the tub as she towered over them, hands on her hips. Both Yukina and Rakti had tears in their eyes, maybe because they had gotten slapped especially hard. Well, I couldn’t say I condemned their actions just now, but they were indeed immodest. I decided to not butt into Clena’s tirade—the girls needed it.



“It’s big... but not as big as Sera’s.”

“Shh!” I put my hand over Rium’s mouth as she scooted over next to me. And it’s not like I wasn’t stopping Clena because her wet yuamigi perfectly outlined her shapely round butt or anything. Really, I wasn’t.

She was raised in a noble family, so she was much better suited for these lectures on etiquette than I. That being said, we couldn’t have the girls get overheated in the bath, so I should stop them soon.

“Uh-huh... so showing them off in plain view isn’t necessarily sexy...”

“...Well, you’re not wrong.”

“Oh yeah, sister Earth is like that. Touya can never keep his eyes off her.”

“Rakti, tell me more.”

...At least, I *think* it was okay to leave this in Clena’s hands.

Third Bath – Mixed Bathing Under the Sea

Our voyage was smooth sailing thereafter. Pardoe finished mending the broken armor literally first thing in the morning, so all we had left to do was maintain our spirits until we arrived at the water capital. We didn't encounter any marine monsters since we were sailing so close to the ocean floor, so it was a peaceful journey for the next few days. Eventually, the Grande Nautilus' radar picked up a signal on a bunch of giant buildings.

Pardoe, who was manning the radar, said in a perplexed tone, "These structures... are definitely myan-made." He couldn't be sure until we saw it in person, but there was hardly any questioning it. We finally arrived at the water capital.

"Alright, let's continue cruising until we get closer. They were the ones who invited us here, but there's still a chance that they'll notice us and start something."

"You think it's gonna get violent, meow?"

"No... but I can't say for sure."

I'd continued sending Haruno a letter every day, but she never replied. We couldn't let our guard down until we knew what was going on. We readied ourselves for a possible attack and continued sailing the ship toward the radar's readings. As we slowly approached, we picked up three small readings coming from the water capital.

I'd held off on this until now since we never had a use for it, but let me explain how the Grande Nautilus was armed. This ship was equipped with two types of weapons. The first was silver spears, but not the small ones that Rium used. These were more aptly called silver ballistae, big enough to pierce through giant marine monsters when shot. Their dormant size was already big, so they packed a punch, but at a significant monetary cost.

The second was magic cannons, which could fire spells from the inside to the outside of the ship. This was actually something I had come up with and requested to be constructed. The construction itself was simple—according to Rium, the cannons were just using the ship itself as a conductor for magic.

Though apparently the insides were pretty messy to allow for ease of use.

The placement of the cannons was normal enough: one at the bow, two at the hull, two on either side, and two at the stern, for a total of nine. The cannons in the front and back where aimed downward, while the ones at the sides were aimed upward.

“Clena, go for it.”

“Got it. ...Water veil!”

Clena rested her hand against the magic crystal on the ship deck, chanted her spell, and then a large bubble formed out of the cannon at the ship’s bow and enveloped the entire ship. Now we could lower the ship’s dome without having to worry about succumbing to the water pressure. We only opened it slightly, though. The dome was our armor. We needed to tread with caution until we knew who we were up against.

“Now it’s my turn... summon spirit!” I summoned light spirits, which formed from one cannon at the ship’s hull and brightened our surroundings. We couldn’t use these cannons if magic was already occupying them, so we reserved the other cannon at the hull in case we would need it.

In the meantime, the three readings continued to approach us. They apparently noticed the opened dome and poked their heads inside the bubble. However, they immediately withdrew. Apparently they couldn’t breathe air.

One of the three was a white gillman. He must have been a water cleric. I’d never seen the species the other two were from before, though. They looked like turtle men... or maybe pillbug men? Oh yeah, they looked like the giant isopods that lived in the ocean depths. I remembered learning about them on TV before. They certainly looked similar as they had their back to us, talking about something with the water cleric. From the looks of it, the water cleric was their leader. He led the two giant isopods, almost as big as Rulitora, closer to us.

“They’re not monsters... right? Do you recognize them, Clena?”

“Sorry, I don’t. I’ve studied quite a bit on monsters and demi-humans, but...” Clena knitted her eyebrows, perplexed.

I asked Rium the same, but she didn’t respond. She was just staring at the

giant isopods in earnest. This was how she acted when something new tickled her curiosity. I racked my brain over how to interact with these completely unknown beings, but someone unexpected covered for me.

“They’re probably bathynomus, a race that serves sister Water. I’ve never seen them before either, but I’ve heard about them.” Yes, the Goddess of Darkness, Rakti. I kept forgetting she was a goddess.

So they weren’t monsters, but a race that served the Goddess of Water, like gillmen. Just like how the Goddess of Light had elves, the Goddess of Darkness had demons, the Goddess of Fire had ketolts, and the Goddess of Wind had cyclopes and glaupis. According to Rakti, the bathynomus could only operate deep underwater and were completely unknown to races living on land.

“So is this first contact between land dwellers and bathynomus?”

“...Most likely,” Rium responded, her cheeks glowing red at the thought of standing within a moment of history.

The creatures outside the ship pointed toward the water capital three times, then quickly swam away.

“Are they telling us to follow them...?” Mark was at the rudder, but couldn’t decide if we should chase after them or not.

“We have no choice but to follow them. But we still don’t know what’s going on, so don’t let your guard down.”

“I’ll keep watch outside.” Roni placed herself on lookout duty, and we kept the dome and water veil as-is as we followed the bathynomus to the water capital.

We stayed vigilant, but nothing happened in the time it took us to reach the capital. The place was covered in tall but skinny mountains, almost like a forest. There was a larger mountain in the distance, but that one was wider and more imposing.

Looking closely, I noticed that each mountain had what looked like a door and windows, and bathynomus were coming and going from each. They were staring back at us, too. The Grande Nautilus must have been a pretty rare sight.

These mountains must have housed residents of the capital. Each of them was really tall, so maybe they were apartments.

“Open up the dome all the way.” I finally opened up our entire field of vision and observed all I could of the water capital.

The mountains, both skinny and wide, continued as far as the eye could see. Everything was enveloped by a deep blue hue, which emitted a dim light. It was a little eerie, but also strangely calming. The skinny mountains were like waves, while the wider mountains were like islands among them. One mountain stood especially prominent above all of them. That must be where the Goddess of Water was. I’d been calling this a water capital, but it was even bigger than I was expecting.

“...A fossilized city?” Yukina whispered.

“This? A city? This is way too big to be just a city!” Clena responded. I could relate to both of them.

If each and every one of these mountains was a dwelling, then this was essentially a metropolis filled with high-rise apartments. Yukina called it a fossilized city, but Clena couldn’t even begin to fathom how this could be considered one. That couldn’t be helped, since she hadn’t seen the cities of our world. In this world, even the castle in Jupiter couldn’t compare in size. From her perspective, the mountains themselves had become houses. Only castles could even approach that size in this world. This was essentially a city filled with castles.

The water cleric beckoned to us with his fin and started swimming alongside the ship. The two bathynomus split up and entered the forest of high-rise apartments.

“Looks like we can’t enter the city like this, so let’s follow the gillman.”

We carefully navigated around the mountains. The cleric eventually led us to a large ledge on the outskirts of the city.

“What a giant cave... even a whale could fit in here.”

The underside of the ledge contained a large opening to a cavern, which the cleric swam into and we followed. It was surprisingly spacious inside, and I

could see light above us. The cleric kept swimming up toward the light. The Grande Nautilus ascended in kind until we arrived in an area above water.

The room was pretty big. Just like the outside, the walls here were a deep blue and radiated a faint light. I could see around us without having to use the light spirits. One wall was covered in a giant mural, from the water's surface to the ceiling. I guessed that it depicted the Goddess of Water. This painting most resembled the real goddess compared to the depictions we'd seen so far. Maybe this was the case because the goddess herself lived here.

"This is probably a shrine for creatures to worship at when they can't enter the capital."

"...What kind of creatures would those be?"

"I'm sure there are several kinds, but marine monsters, most likely."

Rakti and Rium conversed as they stared at the mural. I see. This room was so big because of the kinds of creatures that visited. The Grande Nautilus could fit in here with plenty of room to spare, so it wasn't hard to imagine how big some of the monsters who visited were. I'd start getting scared if I kept thinking about it though, so I looked around the room to focus my mind on other things.

The room wasn't just a mural. There was also a floor to walk on underneath. The floor was wide and flat, and a tunnel in the wall led deeper inside. I bet this place was used by the gillmen as well. They were dolphin demi-humans, so they could only stay underwater for so long.

Now I understood why the water capital was located in the bay. This area was surrounded by the mainland and two peninsulas, so most of the sea floor was still on the continental shelf. The capital itself might be deeper, but still within reach of the gillmen.

"Sir Touya, I see people over there!"

I looked where Roni was pointing and saw some people that were neither gillmen nor bathynomus. The water cleric had gone ashore and started talking to them.

That person was... Haruno! I could recognize her glossy, silky, lustrous black hair from this distance. There was no mistake!! The blond woman to her right

must be Sera. The three to her left were Sandra, Rin, and Lumis. The large blue-skinned girl behind her must be the cyclops, Prae, that she mentioned in her letters. I couldn't see the small imp, Daisy, from here though.

"Let's get out. Pardoe, you guys stay here and keep watch for now."

"No problem, meow!"

I led Rulitora, Rium, Clena, Roni, and Rakti to solid ground. I wore minimal armor with only a tuna knife attached near my hip. As soon as I opened the hatch and stepped out of the Grande Nautilus, Haruno noticed us and came running.

"Touyaaa!!"

I couldn't hold back after hearing her voice, either. I dashed forward and embraced her as she leaped into my arms.

"Haruno... are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?" She felt lighter than the last time we'd seen each other. Thinking about it, I had just grown stronger, but we'd been without contact for so long that I blurted the first thing that came to mind.

"I-I'm okay. Um, you must have sent a lot of letters, right? I'm sorry, our holy tool broke..."

"It broke? What happened to it?"

"Actually..."

Haruno was about to speak, but I suddenly noticed that something was off. Something was different about her from the Haruno I knew before. I gazed at her from the top of her head to the tip of her toes. She wasn't injured, as far as I could tell. She didn't seem funny when she ran to me earlier, either. Her hair was a little longer and she was slightly more tanned now, but that wasn't what felt off.



Her breasts felt a little bigger when we hugged each other, but that wasn't it either. Though it was also very important to note. Lastly, I looked her right in the face, and I finally realized what it was.

"Huh? Your eyes..." Her eyes were a different color. Was she an imposter? No, I didn't think so. An imposter wouldn't reveal themselves with such an obvious giveaway. "Haruno, what happened to your eyes...?" I asked.

She covered one eye with her hand and sighed, "I was just about to say... the wind temple was attacked and destroyed."

"...What?" The wind temple was Haruno's party's destination. I figured something had happened to it, but I wasn't expecting this.

"The Goddess of Wind was defeated, too."

"What did you say?!" I looked back at Rakti. She was far enough away that I didn't think she heard, since she was just blankly staring at us from beside Clena.

"I took on what remained of the Goddess' powers and managed to flee to here, but... my eyes are a side effect of that." Haruno finished her story and removed her hand from her eye. Her irises were now a dark green instead of the black they once were. She looked straight at me with those eyes like shining emeralds.

Shining emeralds. As I was captivated by her gaze, Clena, Sera, and all the others started to gather.

"It has been a long time, Touya."

"You too, Sera. I'm glad to see that you're well." I felt a sense of security with her gentle smile. If Sera was calm, then that must have meant Haruno was in no danger right now.

The three temple knights soon followed, and we exchanged our greetings. Or maybe I should call them former temple knights? They had abandoned the Goddess of Light's band of pilgrims in favor of supporting Haruno. They looked fine and healthy, too. Looks like I didn't have to worry about injuries on their end, either.

Next, I saw Prae and Daisy. I could easily discern who was who based on their sizes. Prae was two or three heads taller than Rulitora.

“Goddess of Darkness, so cuuute!” Shockingly, she figured out that Rakti was the Goddess of Darkness from just a glance. She embraced Rakti like she wanted to chomp down on her, but Rakti didn’t seem like she was hurting, so Prae must have had a good handle on her limits. She really was jumbo-sized, though. Rakti looked like a doll in her arms. I wanted to experience being hugged by her too, but I kept that thought to myself.

“Huh, so you’re Haruno’s boy...” Then there was Daisy, who flew around my head while sneering. Haruno must have told her a lot about me, as she was peering at me with intrigue. I wondered how exactly she had portrayed me to the other girls, but I wasn’t too keen on finding that out.

Yukina then jumped in and started flying around as well. I almost thought they were making friends, but then I felt sparks over my head. Rivals, huh? Were they fighting for the “mischievous devil girl” role?

Then, Daisy made use of her size by sprawling herself on top of my head. Yukina couldn’t find a counter against that move.

“Um, I’d like to talk more in our room, but is she heavy...?”

“Nah, she’s light as a feather. Don’t worry about it, Haruno.”

“Now now, don’t act so spoiled. Come over here, Yukina.”

“...Okaaay.”

With Clena’s help, the only girl who remained stuck to me was Daisy, and then we started walking to the room Haruno’s party was staying in. Though Yukina still flew around me and glared enviously at Daisy.

“Why are you so glued to Touya?”

“This guy’s emitting some pretty comfy powers,” Daisy laughed above me. I couldn’t tell if she meant my partial demon transformation or my Unlimited Bath.

On another note, the water cleric had remained silent as he guided us. It looked like having us meet went perfectly according to plan.

I walked down a very peculiar hallway with Haruno. The floor was made of soft sand, and the abnormally high ceiling was covered in faintly glowing moss. The smooth rock walls were a shade of pale blue different from the walls outside. This cave was clearly man-made.

Haruno said that the moss on the ceilings provided both light and oxygen. This sure was a cleverly constructed place. Apparently several of these caves dotted the outskirts of the water capital and were used as rental housing for followers who couldn't breathe underwater. Haruno's party had rented out this entire cave.

"Isn't this way too big for just your group? Although I don't know if they have anything smaller..."

"About that... you'll see if you come over here," Haruno said, then led us in front of a large room. The room had no door, so I peeked inside from the hallway and saw a few dozen figures suddenly turn our way.

The figures looked completely out of place in this water capital. They came up to about my shoulder. Their bodies were pretty wide as well, but since they were covered in feathers, I couldn't tell where their bodies ended and feathers began. Their faces were flat with two large, piercing eyes. Instead of lips, they sported pointy beaks. They were clearly a race of birds, not fish.

"Owls? Wait, don't tell me..."

"Yes, they are the glaupis who were once driven out of Athena."

I knew they were winged demi-humans, but I wasn't expecting them to be owls. I looked around the room and estimated that there were a couple dozen of them in total. Judging by their varying sizes, both children and adults were present. Ten of them were standing in front of us armed with spears and wearing breastplates. At first I thought they were holding the spears with their wings, but they actually had hands covered in feathers.

Farther back, I noticed several larger figures that I assumed were cyclopes. They all had blue skin like Prae. Some smaller cyclopes were among the group, but I didn't notice them at first because of the glaupis. Were they kids? Their heads were moving around skittishly.

...Wait, most of the cyclopes were women—especially the adults. Maybe they were all mothers? If the wind temple had really fallen, then the women and children would have escaped first—or rather, they were made to escape first.

“Come over here, Touya. Let’s talk in the room farther inside.”

One of the glaupis holding a spear joined our group, and the water cleric followed. However, the room we entered was absolutely dreary. There wasn’t a single piece of furniture inside, and the floor was all sand.

“What is this place?”

“All the rooms are like this,” Haruno said, and then I suddenly recalled the feast we’d had with the gillmen. All the gillmen had either eaten standing up or sitting directly on the beach—none of them used chairs. Come to think of it, I could barely imagine a gillman sitting on a chair.

“The gillmen all live in houses like this. They might have a place to store their spears, at most?” Yukina, who had allied with the gillmen for a while, confirmed my suspicions. I see, so furniture like desks and chairs weren’t part of their culture. The room was spacious, but that made me feel all the more restless.

“Haruno, let’s use the Unlimited Bath instead.”

“Oh? Are you sure? You mentioned it’s bigger now, but...”

“There won’t be a problem.”

Haruno and I had promised each other that when we became stronger, we’d reunite and bathe together. But I never would have imagined that we’d meet again in a place like this. Thoughts raced through my head as I stepped out of the room, summoned the door to the Bath, and flipped it open. I made sure to summon it outside the room since Prae and the other cyclopes were too big to go inside.

“Come on in! This is my new and improved Unlimited Bath!” It felt like I was inviting a girl into my own room. I tried to sound confident, but this was still pretty embarrassing. Apparently Haruno felt the same way and slightly blushed and mumbled, “Excuse me,” as she crossed the door.

“Wow...” she exclaimed, her eyes wide in astonishment. The growth of this

Bath also signified my own growth, so I was happy to hear her reaction.

“Unbelievable!” Daisy, who had been resting atop my head, fluttered her wings and started flying around. She might hit her head on the ceiling if I let her be, so I told her to stay close to Yukina.

“Come in, everyone.” I invited Sera and the pilgrims in next. They had seen the Bath back when it was just a tiny room and a tub, so they gasped at how much it had changed. “...Oh yeah, what have you all been doing for water here?”

“We’ve been managing, though we can’t gather too much at once.”

“I see... The water here is all fresh, so feel free to give some out to everyone else if they need it.”

“In that case, let me take care of it.”

“I’ll help too!”

Sera and Lumis volunteered themselves, so I left it to them. Sera should be familiar with how to use the faucets in here, but they had since moved locations, so I asked Rium to assist them.

“How about food?”

“We have been providing food for everyone!” the water cleric interjected after being silent for so long. That wasn’t the only part of my question, though.

“Don’t worry, I trust you on that. But can you obtain food from land all the way down here? I don’t think you can do much in terms of making fire for cooking, either.”

“W-well...”

“It’s the best they can do, Touya. Cooking food isn’t even customary for the ones living down here,” Haruno defended the cleric with an awkward smile. So they had been eating nothing but sashimi and seaweed salad? I worried about their nutritional balance.

“Roni, go cook something up. Use the fishing pond if you need to.”

“Understood!”

I had assumed that we were just going to pick up Haruno's party and leave, so we didn't have an unlimited supply of food, but Roni should be able to make something nice. Even simple fried fish would be a refreshing meal for them.

"Sandra, Rin, can you help her?" Haruno asked.

"Yes, we will. We'll assist with whatever she asks."

"Gotcha! Wow, I haven't had a hot meal in *ages*."

Sandra and Rin followed Roni into the kitchen, so now all that was left were me, Clena, Rakti, Haruno, the water cleric, and the glaupis. The central room would have a lot of people coming and going, so I took the six of us to the tatami-floored room we normally used as the bedroom. It'd be a little cramped with all of us in there, but we couldn't exactly use the bathroom, so this would have to do. I slid open the window and saw Rulitora and Prae, whom he had guided outside. Good, now she could be part of our conversation too.

"Now then... could you tell us everything that happened?" I sat cross-legged at the head of the table and asked Haruno.

"Yes. First, let me tell you what happened to the wind temple," Haruno kneeled down, straightened her back, and replied.

I promptly corrected my posture and assumed the same proper sitting stance as her. The atmosphere had suddenly become a lot more rigid as soon as we stepped inside this room. The traditional, serious Japanese air made it Haruno's home court. Clena and Rakti looked confused at the way we were sitting at first, but then imitated our postures.

"The gillman and glaupis over there—don't worry about sitting like us. Just make yourselves comfortable," I addressed the two who were anxiously trying to sit like us, then told Clena and Rakti that they could relax as well. After that, I urged Haruno to continue.

Her emerald eyes stared directly at me, then she began. "I'm sure you're wondering, so let me say this first... The one who attacked the wind temple wasn't the demon lord army—it was Jupiter."

"The sacred family?"

“Most likely... I don’t know if it was an order from the sacred king or from the prince, though.”

“...We came across the hero Cosmos’ party in Neptune, and Princess Franchellis told us that the prince is anti-demi-human.”

“Do you believe that?”

“It’s much more likely than the sacred king, at least.”

My impression of the sacred king wasn’t necessarily a bad one, but it wasn’t particularly good either. On the other hand, my impression of Princess Franchellis had done a one-eighty since meeting her in Neptune. I figured she was as oblivious as Cosmos at first, but that was just an act. In reality, she was pretty sharp. Cosmos was definitely important to her though, so as long as he and I were on the same side, we could trust her information. Maybe she had put on that act because Cosmos had been the most enthusiastic about subjugating the demon lord. If that was the case, then she had a pretty pragmatic way of thinking.

“I’m thinking we can trust her word as long as we don’t share a conflict of interest.”

“Clena, was it? In that case, it’s much more likely that the prince ordered it... but we still can’t say for sure.”

“Yeah, and that’s fine for now.” The bigger issue was that the demon lord’s army *wasn’t* part of this. I’d heard that prejudice against demi-humans had died down, but maybe it was resurging. The sacred family had summoned us as heroes after learning of the demon lord’s possible revival. Fearing the demon lord, they probably started to view not only demons, but all demi-humans as their enemies.

“One other thing I’ve been wondering about... Is it that easy to defeat a goddess? Rakti aside, since she had been sealed and lost her powers.”

Hearing that, the water cleric interrupted with a quivering voice. “Um...”

“What is it?”

“Is this girl named Rakti, um...?”

“Yeah, she’s the Goddess of Darkness.”

The water cleric’s jaw dropped to the floor and the glaupis rustled his feathers. I bet they never expected the Goddess of Darkness herself to be right in front of them.

“I-I shall notify the Goddess right away.”

“You don’t have to. I bet she already knows.” I let Rakti’s secret slip so easily because it would come out soon enough anyway, with the Goddess of Water here. When we headed back to the Grande Nautilus, I planned to introduce Haruno’s party to the ketolts and tell them about Rakti at the same time.

“Um, Touya? We goddesses have two bodies. One of them is our original divine form, while the other is our corporeal body we use to interact with this world.”

“W-was that how it is...?”

“The ones you see in your dreams are our original forms.”

Seriously? So the other goddesses were in their original forms in my dreams, too?

“Wait, does that mean the Goddess of Light was physically present in the temple in Jupiter, too?”

“No, sister Light’s corporeal form has already been lost. She cast a spell that assimilated her body with something else in order to store her powers. Right now, the only ones left with physical bodies are sister Water, sister Wind, and I...” Rakti started choking up toward the end of her sentence and hung her head. Since the Goddess of Wind’s corporeal form had now been defeated, the only ones left were Rakti and the Goddess of Water.

“So then, Haruno...”

“We didn’t completely merge, but she granted me her powers.”

“Her physical form had been weak ever since she left Athena. After she learned of Jupiter’s attack, she trusted part of her remaining power to Lady Haruno and told us to run away...”

I see, so that was how Haruno had gotten her powers. “Did she use what was

left of her power to fight Jupiter?”

“No, actually...” Haruno’s voice faded, but suddenly the glaupis slammed his fist against the tatami floor and wailed.

“Our Goddess! She used her remaining power to transport us all the way here! Her physical form is likely nothing more than an empty husk now...!”

“So that’s why she was defeated...!” Instead of fighting Jupiter’s army, the Goddess of Wind had put priority on ensuring everyone’s escape. Even if it meant sacrificing her corporeal form to the opponent. “So the Goddess of Wind had warping abilities?”

“It’s called a ‘sanctuary.’ The Goddess of Wind can use her sanctuary as a medium to go anywhere in the world.”

“Normally, only goddesses can enter their own sanctuaries. But since sister Wind assimilated part of her power with Haruno’s body, she was allowed to enter. Then, she used her remaining power to transport everyone else to sister Water.”

“She must have thought that this was the safest place, since the Goddess of Water still has a physical form...” I surmised, and Rakti nodded. Rakti was also an option, but I wouldn’t have been able to handle having such a huge number of people dumped on me. The water capital was her only choice.

“...I think all the demi-humans here was the limit of who sister Wind could transport. I’ve heard that her sanctuary takes a tremendous amount of power to use...”

“Ahh, my Goddess...!” Hearing Rakti’s words, the glaupis broke down in tears.

After seeing only women and children among the cyclopes, I guessed that only a small fraction of the people in the temple had been able to escape. The few armed glaupis had been transported to protect everyone else, but this was still a huge shock for him, even knowing that.

“Now I’m worried about everyone who was left behind, though.”

“Then you can just ask~”

“Huh?”

Prae answered Clena's question, grinning as she peeked inside from the window. According to Haruno, this girl was actually a cleric who served the Goddess of Wind. In the wind temple, the cyclopes were normally clerics, while the glaupis were temple knights. Despite appearances, Prae should have all the knowledge a cleric would. What she said just now wasn't just nonsense.

"Prae, was it? What do you mean?" Though in spite of that, I unwittingly spoke to her like she was a kid, thanks to her innocent air.

She responded to me with a big, happy smile. "Um, Haruno is part-goddess now, so she can grant blessings!"

"...Oh, so I can just receive the blessing from her." After that, I'd be able to see the Goddess of Wind in my dreams, just like all the others. Her corporeal form might have been defeated, but according to Rakti, she should still have her original divine form.

"That's right. If Touya gets the wind blessing, then he can communicate with sister Wind in my sanctuary. She must be keeping an eye on everyone who was left behind!"

"I see, so that's the plan... Wait." Hold on, Rakti just said something that caught my ear. "...Sanctuary? Yours?"

"Yes? That's what we've always been using."

"Huh?"

"What?"

"You mean... that dream with the goddesses I always see is because of your sanctuary?"

"Yes! I don't know why Touya and all my sisters can enter it, but that's definitely my sanctuary!"

"So you haven't figured that part out...?"

"I'm sure it's fine! For I am the one who rules over serenity and the night, the Goddess of Darkness!"

I had no idea what was fine about it, but her confident smile made me forget anything I was going to say. I couldn't just sit here shocked, though. I set aside

the topic of my dreams for now.

The others explained everything that had happened until I had a firm grasp on what exactly went on with the wind temple and with Haruno's body. The Goddess of Wind wanted to use her sanctuary to let everyone escape, but she needed to grant Haruno her powers first to let her enter, and then used her remaining power to transport everyone she could. In that case, it was no wonder why they had lost to Jupiter's army. Haruno said that it was barely a fight, and the goddess' corporeal form had likely already disappeared.

The Goddess of Water had most likely called us here because she had no other way of transporting Haruno and the others back above ground. I asked the water cleric if that was the only reason why we were called here. "There's nothing going on in the water capital, is there?"

"Well, humans coming down here is a big incident in itself."

"Besides that."

"...No, nothing in particular."

He paused before saying that. Was there really nothing going on, or was it hard to talk about? What should I do here?

"Okay then, please tell the Goddess of Water that the Goddess of Darkness has arrived."

"Understood."

"Please arrange a time for us to meet with the Goddess, too. I want to properly thank her for taking care of Haruno's party."

"...I shall let her know. May I ask you to wait a while?"

"I don't mind. But our food is limited right now, so we can't just wait forever, you know?"

"I understand."

"Alright then, we'll leave it in your hands."

The water cleric hurried away as soon as we finished talking. Maybe he wanted to avoid me interrogating him any further... no, I only thought that

because I suspected him. In any case, this was the most we could do for now. If the goddess was in some sort of trouble, she could always request our help. If our meeting ended up delayed, then that implied the cleric was keeping something from us. We should start preparing ourselves for any sudden movements right now, while keeping an eye on the other side.

“Okay, should we get Touya his blessing from the Goddess of Wind first? The Unlimited Bath will grow even more if we do.”

“You’re right, we should get everything taken care of in case we need to depart.” Clena and Haruno made their suggestion, probably because they also thought the cleric’s actions were suspicious.

Yes, there was one major preparation we should make. We needed to ready ourselves in case we needed to depart at any moment.

After Roni’s group finished prepping in the kitchen, we stepped out of the Unlimited Bath, then moved to the inner room to conduct the blessing ceremony. However, Haruno said something strange.

“Okay, so I’m supposed to grant the blessing now... Um, should we kiss or something?”

“Uh, I received my earth blessing from a plump middle-aged man, the water blessing from a gillman, and the fire blessing from a group of muscular old men...” And the darkness blessing from a goldfish. Needless to say, I didn’t kiss any of them. In any case, it looked like Haruno didn’t know how a blessing ceremony worked. “Rakti, do you know?”

“I don’t know how sister Wind normally does it, but it’s just granting a blessing.” Rakti explained that all you needed to do to grant a blessing was gather power in your hand and touch the receiver. It was a sensible explanation, but apparently a goddess’ power was the only requirement.

Haruno’s hand was already giving off a faint light. I kneeled down on one knee before her, just to make it seem formal. She placed her hand on my head, and then the light seemed to pass into me, then eventually dissipated.

“...Is this really okay?” Apparently this was all a ceremony needed, but Haruno wasn’t fully satisfied.

I wasn't satisfied either, in another sense. "Now I'm wondering what the ceremony for the fire blessing was all about..."

"I think that was just to sister Fire's liking." According to Rakti, clerics needed to perform different rituals depending on each goddess in order to borrow their powers.

"All Goldfish needed to do was yell 'Curse yer hides!' at me, though."

"That man was actually an arch-cleric under my temple." Huh, so Goldfish was actually someone pretty important.

Back on topic, Haruno was finally satisfied after hearing our explanations. "I guess it's better this way, then. I don't know how to recite any ritual prayers, anyway."

"And I trust the Goddess of Water a lot more now."

"Why is that?"

"Because her ceremony was normal." The fire ceremony was just awful in comparison. It'd probably show up in my nightmares if I didn't see the goddesses every night. If that was really the Goddess of Darkness' sanctuary, then I had Rakti to thank for my peace of mind.

Now that our simple ceremony was over, it was time to check out how the Unlimited Bath had changed. But before that, there was one thing we had to do.

"Haruno, ask everyone to gather their luggage together."

"Everyone? You mean Prae, and all the others?"

"And the glaupis, too." If we wanted to prepare to leave at any time, then we needed to get everyone in the Grande Nautilus first. The cyclopes would be safe as long as we had them board the ship.

Now then, let's see how the Unlimited Bath had changed. We could get back the Grande Nautilus first, but if they had a lot of luggage, then it'd be easier to move everything inside the Bath first.

"It's grown even bigger..." I opened the door to find that the inner building was even farther away than before. The hose had just barely been able to reach

outside back on the dragon's island, but now it definitely wouldn't reach... Or so I thought, but now there was a drinking fountain right beside the door. It was a common drinking fountain you'd find in parks—the type where the water streamed out in an arc. There was a faucet on the side, so we could attach the hose there.

Rium twisted the faucet on, which spurted a stream of water right at Daisy's face as she was peering into it. The water actually had enough force to cause Daisy some pain, so I soothed her with healing magic.

Rakti stepped closer and leaned down to inspect the drinking fountain. "This one... is from sister Water."

This wasn't water for cleaning, but water to drink. In other words, it wasn't for purification. So this wasn't from my new wind blessing, but growth from a previous blessing, like how the washing machine had popped up.

Haruno's party looked around, speechless. Not surprising, since they had been taken aback by how large my Unlimited Bath had grown just earlier, and now it had grown even more.

The left side of the building had expanded. A new room had probably formed next to the fire kitchen. If it followed the order of the goddess sisters, then that should house the new gift I received from the wind blessing.

"Hasn't it grown even more than it usually does?"

"You think?" Following Rulitora's remark, I tried to count the number of stones in the stone path, but stopped when I realized that I didn't know how many there were in the first place. I took a small breath and looked up, and then I realized the true meaning behind Rulitora's words. "...What's all *that*?"

The building had actually grown taller. Of course Rulitora would be the first one to notice. Either the ceiling had gotten higher, or there was a second floor now. We wouldn't know until we saw for ourselves.

The sliding door itself had grown even larger. Even Prae could enter if she stooped down a little. I wondered if a sliding door this big would be heavy, but I guess since this was a gift, even Rakti could slide it open with ease.

"We're going to check inside, so Yukina, take Daisy and see what's changed

outside.”

“Okay!”

“Sure, whatever.”

I saw the two off and crossed the door. The ceiling was indeed higher than it was before, but not enough to cover how tall the building had become. There had to be a second floor.

“This is my second time at a place like this~” Prae said with a smile, which made Haruno look a little sad.

I asked her what was wrong, and she whispered in my ear that her “first time” was likely the time she was captured and trapped in a jailhouse in Athena. I see. In that case, we needed to show Prae some hospitality here.

“Comparing the bath with a jailhouse? I would never forgive that, even if a goddess would! I’m gonna show her such a good time here to the point that she’ll never be able to go back to how she used to live!”

“Well, I don’t think a goddess would forgive that, either...”

“Probably not,” I bluntly agreed with Sera’s retort. The goddesses I met in my dreams would no doubt be irritated at this conversation.

But my feelings were just as pertinent. Even accounting for our differences in culture, I couldn’t just leave a girl be when she couldn’t tell the difference between a house and a jail cell.

We entered the building, and I saw a set of stairs to the right of the newly expanded entrance hall. The stairs were right behind the sink. The sink itself hadn’t moved even though the room had grown larger, so a new set of stairs took up the empty space.

“Is this where we take off our shoes?”

Oh yeah, this was the first time Sera and the others experienced taking off their shoes at the front door. Well, that was just the way it worked here, so they had to get used to it.

“I’ve been thinking... this isn’t even a bath anymore, is it?”

“It’s not just my Unlimited Bath that’s been leveling up—I’ve received a new gift with every blessing. So this isn’t just a bathroom, but a space that unifies all my gifts.”

I was curious about my new gift, but let’s check out the second floor first. Prae was too big to climb the stairs, so instead I asked her, Rulitora, and Roni to clean up the central room for now. Our furniture didn’t move when the room expanded, so we needed to reorganize accordingly. Rulitora and Prae should be able to finish the job fast.

“We can assist as well.” Sera, Sandra, Rin, and Lumis volunteered themselves. The job was in capable hands.

I led Haruno, Clena, Rakti, and Rium to the second floor, which turned out to be an empty, spacious room. No furniture was in sight, but the carpet looked especially fluffy and inviting. Rium dived right onto the floor and tumbled about.

“.....”

“You can try it too, Rakti.”

“R-really? Okay then!”

She had been fidgeting hesitantly, but a bit of encouragement prompted her to happily dive onto the carpet as well. She rolled around with Rium. They were rolling so much that their skirts were endearingly riding up their legs, but neither of them seemed to notice.

“Um... may I, as well?”

Et tu, Haruno? You’re one of them?

I had no reason to say no, so I gave her my permission, and she let out a gleeful cheer and jumped right in. And now there were three girls rolling about on the ground.

I wasn’t expecting this side from our diligent honors student, but she was plenty adorable like this—in fact, I welcomed it. Impressively, her skirt wasn’t riding up her legs at all. Was that wind magic at work?

Anyway, this carpet was so fluffy that diving into it didn’t look like it would

hurt at all. Could this room be considered its own gift?



“You’re such a kid, Haruno~” Clena said slyly.

“Okay, we’re going in too!”

“Wha—?!”

Clena’s apprehensive posture made it plain as day that she wanted to try it out as well, so I grabbed her shoulders and plunged ourselves in. Yeah, I was getting jealous of the girls too.

It actually didn’t hurt one bit. Clena had fallen head-first, but the soft carpet absorbed the impact, and she was wide-eyed at her lack of injury.

The carpet itself wasn’t difficult to walk on, but it was still soft and fluffy bliss once you lay down. It struck the perfect balance. Placing any furniture on here would be a waste.

“How is this so soft?! It’s just carpet, and yet...!”

“This is better than my bed at home...”

Judging by Clena’s and Haruno’s reactions, this was grade-A material. Rium and Rakti were still tossing themselves about, trying to absorb every bit of the sensation they could.

The room also had a terrace on either side, which opened up to the outside. The openings weren’t covered in glass.

I looked out onto the left balcony, where Yukina and Daisy just happened to drop by. Anyone who could fly would be able to enter the second floor directly from here, huh. I asked the two of them what they had found.

“It’s gotten sooo big!”

“It’s big enough to fit everyone inside.”

I had a feeling before, but the outer garden really had expanded much more than usual. Maybe the Goddess of Wind’s desire to protect everyone who had escaped manifested itself in this gift. Haruno breathed a sigh of relief from nearby, and I became less anxious as well.

“Oh, and there’s a big windmill.”

“A windmill?” I looked out the terrace to see a pure white windmill opposite

the fire altar. Like always, the “gift handbook” popped up in my head and informed me that the windmill was the wind altar.

The windmill didn’t move with the wind, but rather created wind by forcing it to spin. It was more like an electric fan, in that sense. We could use it to make dried fruits and other preserves.

“Huh, isn’t the fire altar really far away now?”

“The altars are tied to the four corners of this space.”

The fishing pond was likely farther away now, too. This was one inconvenience from the Unlimited Bath growing larger, but it couldn’t be helped.

Now then, it pained me to leave this fluffy carpet, but I needed to go downstairs and check out what the new room held.

“*Ahem.* We can come back to rest later.”

Haruno cleared her throat, a little embarrassed, and prompted everyone else to stand up.

“Cold!!” I exclaimed as soon as I opened the door to my new gift. The others who had been cleaning up the first floor looked over out of curiosity.

“Cold? Does that mean...” Haruno peered inside the room, then shivered at the chilly air.

“Is this... a refrigerator?”

“Looks like it. I had given up on having one since the water blessing didn’t make one appear, but the wind blessing actually did it.”

The entire room was a refrigerator. Thanks to the wind blessing, it was fitted with some sort of air cooling system, so the room was cold and breezy inside. The door was heavy in order to keep the cold air from escaping, though that caught me off guard when I first opened it.

Yukina hopped inside and twirled, giggling, “It’s cold!” She sure was unaffected by the temperature despite wearing what was essentially a swimsuit.

“Are demons strong against cold temperatures?”

“It depends, I guess?” Clena was also strong against the cold, but she figured that was because of the environment she grew up in.

“So what’s a... *refrigerator*?” No one else knew what we were talking about, and Rium was the first to ask.

“...It’s kind of hard to explain when you think about it. I guess it mainly... chills your food so that it lasts longer?”

“Ooh, so it’s like an icehouse.” Having grown up in the north, Clena immediately understood what I was talking about. Roni helped explain to everyone else how this room worked.

“In our world, there’s a refrigerator in every house.”

“They’re not as big as this one, though. This is commercial-size, isn’t it?”

Haruno and I tried walking inside, but it really was chilly. She shivered and snuggled her body closer to mine, which made Yukina jealous and hug me as well. Her skin was ice cold.

“Yukina, your body is freezing.”

“Oh no, let’s get out of here!”

“Okay then, can we get right in the bath?”

“...I’m plenty tempted to as well, but let’s save that for after we return to the Grande Nautilus.” Everyone else was keeping themselves busy, so we shouldn’t be skipping off into the bath quite yet. “But you can take a bath by yourself if you want, Yukina...”

“No, I don’t wanna!”

I figured she’d say that. Oh well, we just had to hold off for now.

“Alright, wear my cloak instead.”

“Okaaay!” Yukina skipped out of the refrigerator room and the two of us followed.

“Haruno, about how much luggage do you think everyone has?”

“They didn’t have time to bring much...”

“It shouldn’t take long to carry everything in here, then. Let’s pick up the pace.”

“Okay!”

If I were to give this new gift a name, I’d call it the Unlimited Refrigerator. It was absolutely useless in battle as always, but it sure was convenient. Our next big step was to bring everyone back to land. The refrigerator would help us store plenty of food, so I planned to put it to good use.

First on the list was transporting everyone’s luggage into the Bath.

“Is this a village?” the group of demi-humans asked as soon as they stepped inside the Unlimited Bath.

I didn’t think this counted as a village. In fact, if they wanted to turn it into one, I’d no longer be able to move away from here.

The upgraded Unlimited Bath was big enough to act as a shelter, so we shouldn’t be too cramped during our journey back to the surface. After moving everyone’s belongings inside, we made our way back to the ship. I placed a magic crystal against the door to open it, then invited everyone in. Next, I told the ketolts about Rakti’s true identity.

“—So I never mentioned this before, but Rakti is actually the Goddess of Darkness that the first sacred king accidentally placed a seal on.”

“W-well, I suppose it was purrfectly reasonable to keep that from us, but...”

“But?”

“I can’t quite believe that this girl is really a goddess, meow.”

“Same here.”

“Sniff...”

Unsurprisingly, they didn’t totally believe that Rakti was a goddess. Her eyes were watering. Well, it was the truth whether they liked it or not. Rakti was also one of the primary reasons why we hadn’t been driven out of the water capital even though we weren’t followers of the Goddess of Water.

“So now what do we do? The water cleric was acting suspicious earlier.”

“He was clearly hiding something. I haven’t sensed any ill will from him before, though.”

“You can tell...?” Clena was astounded by Haruno’s judgments. You’d expect no less from the girl who exposed the injustices lurking in Athenopolis all in one night.

“I wonder what sort of response we’re going to get...”

“How was it when your party arrived, Lady Haruno?”

“We were told she was busy, so we didn’t request an audience. We couldn’t leave this cave, in any case,” Haruno answered Rulitora’s question with a wry smile.

Here at the ocean floor, their food supply and livelihoods were in the water capital’s hands. Haruno’s party had no choice but to stay silent. Now that we were here, though, they could finally make their move.

“Touya, what should we do next?” Sera asked me. We just had to wait for a response to our meeting request for now, but we couldn’t wait forever.

“Let’s give it three days.”

“What if we haven’t heard anything by then?”

“I’d feel bad for Rakti, but we’ll return to the surface.” I didn’t know what was going on, but if the goddess needed help, she should be able to reach us. If we heard no response, then that meant she either didn’t need help or didn’t want to ask us for it.

We only had a limited supply of food, too. Haruno said that the gillmen were bringing them food, but that would only be the case as long as we stayed in the water capital. We needed to keep our supplies high enough to sustain everyone until we returned to land. Considering that, I picked three days as our limit. If we made good use of the fishing pond, then we’d have barely enough food for the trip. Well, we could sustain ourselves for longer, but then we’d be eating fish three meals a day. We packed as much food as we could, but I would never have expected so many people here. So what should we do for now, in concrete

terms?

“Let’s keep the dome open so that we always have someone on the lookout.”

“The gillmen will come back to deliver food, so we need someone to greet them. We can ask the glaupis to help keep watch.”

There were six wind temple knights present. If they joined, then we could always have someone on lookout duty. I left Haruno in charge of talking to them.

“I’m going to keep the fishing pond active at all times. We need to have people constantly catching fish, too.”

“We can eat whatever they bring us for now, and then smoke everything we catch... no, then we’d run out of wood. Let’s dry them.”

As usual, Clena was a great planner. She knew how to make use of all the resources we had at our disposal. Ocean water surrounded us, so we had an unlimited source for salt. The wind altar was also perfect for dehydrating things. *This gift of mine sure is convenient, I have to say.*

And so we each took up our posts. The glaupis agreed to cooperate as soon as Haruno asked. The temple knights were absolutely eager to help, so much that all of them volunteered themselves for night duty. They had been forced to escape to protect their peers, so they were especially keen on fulfilling any duties that befitted a temple knight.

I appreciate the thought, but get some sleep. Including Rulitora, Sandra, and the other girls, we had more than enough people to take turns keeping watch.

Everyone else worked on drying food. Clena, Yukina, Rium, and I were in charge of catching fish. Haruno, Sera, Roni, Rakti, and Crissa processed everything we caught. The girls were split up into groups that couldn’t or could cook. I was a decent cook, but my stamina would be put to better use at the fishing pond.

All the ketolts besides Crissa were at the fire altar making salt. To make dried fish, we needed to pickle the processed fish in a salt water brine, but the ocean water wasn’t salty enough for that. I felt bad for making the ketolts do all the work, but I’ll make sure to apologize to them later. A certain goddess might

complain that her altar was being used for something boring, but I was sure she'd laugh it off later. I knew enough about her from meeting her in my dreams.

The rest of the glaupis split up and assisted everyone here and there. I was worried that the cyclopes wouldn't be able to contribute since they were so big, but they could at least carry things back and forth. Ocean water was especially heavy, so I was grateful to have them around. I realized that we were really dealing with deep ocean water, which was less salty than warmer waters.

Anyway, this was much easier than figuring out how to deal with a dragon. We gradually worked on our respective duties while spending our leisure time with each other, waiting for the goddess to respond.

...But that only lasted for so long.

"Ugh, this is exhausting..."

Let me go over the process for making dried fish one more time. We used the Goddess of Water's fishing pond to catch fish, then used the Goddess of Fire's fire altar to make a salt water brine, then used the Goddess of Wind's windmill to dry it out. All my gifts were operating at maximum capacity. My MP was draining faster than it had been in a long time.

I couldn't keep fishing in this state, so I left it to Clena and was lying down in the tatami-floored room right now. The carpet on the second floor was a tempting choice as well, but this room helped me relax the most.

"Whoa there, are you gonna hold up like that?" Daisy asked. She had her back to me, wings fluttering and face turned my way. Her wings produced a soothing breeze against my face. Apparently Haruno had asked her to check up on me.

"I'm just being wrung dry right now. I'll be better after we finish making all the dried fish."

"Why's that?"

"Well, putting all my gifts into action is going to suck away my MP. Summoning the fish from shallow waters is taking a lot more effort than I was expecting." We were at the ocean floor right now, but the distance directly above us to reach fish in shallow waters was only about 200 stuto.

“Why are you going out of your way to summon them? Is it because all the fish around us are civilians?”

I hadn’t even thought about that. Though in this case, they’d be *sea*vilians. The only sea creatures living in the capital should be the bathynomus, though.

“N-no, it’s not that. I just don’t know if the fish down here are edible.”

“Is that so?”

“I don’t know the details, but I heard about a species of fish that gives you terrible stomachaches even though it doesn’t contain any poison.”

“Ew... don’t make me eat something like that!”

“I just said I’m not catching them!”

Apparently the fat in that species of fish couldn’t be digested by humans. Maybe it was different for imps, but we didn’t have to test it out. I didn’t even know if there were any of those fish around here.

Anyway, quantity was the biggest factor right now. I summoned fish nonstop into the pond so that they could be caught and processed, but this was honestly taking a toll on my MP. I wasn’t exactly skipping out on work though, so I may as well get what rest I could right now.

“Daisy, can you check up on everyone else? Let me know if anything’s wrong.”

“Sure thing.”

I saw her petite flying figure off, and now that I was finally alone, closed my eyes.

“Touyaaa, it’s time to eat~”

I slept until Rakti came to wake me up. Everyone’s work was progressing without a hitch, so Daisy never came back to wake me. I thought I’d see the goddesses in my dreams, but I actually didn’t this time.

“Hey, Rakti. I wanted to see the goddesses in my sleep, but couldn’t... Does it not work on an afternoon nap?”

“Huh? Ooh, I think that’s because I was awake. It’s my sanctuary, after all.”

I see, that made sense. I was hoping for the Goddess of Water to show up, but

I guess that would have to wait until tonight.

The gillman had brought over our dinner, which Rulitora and the others took. The heap of seafood didn't consist of any weird deep water fish, but just normal fish, shrimp, shellfish, seaweed, and other ingredients. Everything was raw, but that was to be expected. We were so deep underwater, and I didn't want them to try and fail at cooking, either. Apparently Haruno's party had been making their own fires to cook the food until now. They barely had any seasoning to use, and all they could do was heat up the fish until it was done.

"This is soooo good!!"

"I've never tasted anything like this before... It's great!!"

And now, everyone was awestruck by the Goddess of Water's special udon broth. The broth was fish-based, but I bet none of them could tell.

Today's dinner was fish stew made by Haruno and the other girls.

"Wow! This tastes nothing like what you make, Touya!"

"Well sorry about that." I had made something similar to this before, but like Yukina said, this was on another level. I picked up a piece of tender meat that was giving off faint steam with my fork. The seasoning permeated throughout the meat, and each bite filled my mouth with a distinctly Japanese flavor.

Clena took a bite and widened her eyes. Then she glanced at me. She was thinking the same thing as Yukina, huh?

"I thought everyone was tired of tasting just salt all the time, so I tried simmering the broth down and concentrating the flavor," Haruno smiled. She had plenty of help in the kitchen, but she was the only one who knew this particular technique. I thought she'd look cute in a household apron before, but now I thought she'd look best in a professional chef's apron.

The side dishes that the others cooked were absolutely delicious as well, and now I was getting worried that we wouldn't be able to keep this up until we reached the surface. However, apparently they hadn't used up too much of our spices. The udon broth covered almost the entire flavor profile.

"We don't have many vegetables, but I guess we can't do much about that.

Let’s make sure everyone gets a share of the orange juice.”

The cyclops children were especially fond of it.

“This is tasty~♪ Thank you, Touyaaa~♥”

Correction—Prae was the most fond of it. Her giant body suddenly hugged me from behind. She just about knocked me over, but I somehow managed to keep my feet on the ground.

“Don’t just drink the juice. Make sure to eat, okay? You don’t have to hold back.”

“Okaaay~♪” Prae cheerfully bounced back to get another serving of orange juice.

I have to make sure she eats some fish, too. Though I’m not sure if we have a big enough serving... I thought, but then Lumis approached her with a big portion of fish stew. According to Sera, those two were actually close friends. I could leave Prae in her hands.

“How did the drying go? Did any of the altars stop working during the day?”

“No, it was fine. I bet your MP is leveling up like crazy again.”

“Even if it is, the card doesn’t show it, so I can’t tell anything that’s going on with it.” The lines had already shot off my card a long time ago.

“Oh yeah, I wonder if I’ve become stronger after gaining the goddess’ powers...” Haruno joined the conversation. I was curious about that, too. We couldn’t find out until we reached land though, so no use in wondering about it now.

Dinner continued as Clena and Roni held a little Q&A session with Haruno about her cooking techniques. Clena didn’t cook often, but she still knew a thing or two about it. And then, after a pause in their conversation, Haruno mumbled something.

“Um...”

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh, well, I just remembered something.”

“What did you remember?”

“Well...” Haruno looked down, her face flushed red. Was she talking about...

“...After dinner?” I asked, my heart racing. Haruno looked back at me with upturned eyes, then shyly nodded. We wouldn’t be heading straight to bed after dinner... there was something to do in between.

“Um, we did promise. The next time we meet we’d bathe together, with everyone,” Haruno said timidly, but her face also formed a bashful smile. I had to respect the courage Haruno was showing right now, so I nodded in response.

“Touya, your face is red as a tomato.” But then I panicked as soon as Yukina pointed that out.

Calm down, calm down. It’s just the usual bath, but with Haruno now. Wait, that’s a really important part!

Compared to me, Haruno’s eyes were now sparkling and she had somehow started looking confident. But the more bold she acted toward me, the more embarrassed I got. *Oh no, I can feel my ears getting red, too.* I felt like steam could pop out of my head at any moment.

“L-looking forward to it, Haruno!” However, Clena wasn’t about to back down to her audacity like me. She raised her voice to match Haruno’s.

“Thank you, Clena. I’ll be joining you all from today onward.” She met Clena’s words with a refined smile. Was it just my imagination, or was there tension in the air between them?

After dinner and clean-up, we all decided to bathe together. Now all of us were in the changing room, but well...

Yukina, Clena, Roni, Rium, and Rakti were the usual bathing group. But now, Haruno, Sera, Sandra, Rin, Lumis, Daisy, and Prae were joining them. The door to the bathing room had grown large enough that even Prae could enter if she stooped down a little. Size-wise, the bath itself was as wide as before, but now extended farther lengthwise.

That wasn’t the problem here, though... Twelve beautiful girls were standing inside this room. And then there was me, the only guy. Now that I finally had

time to think about it, this was pretty amazing. Happy? Sure, it made me happy, but this was a little *too* much. I had to make sure I didn't stare, and I always put my clothes on one side of the basket away from theirs, too.

However, the girls had been acting differently recently. They had gotten remarkably nonchalant. Maybe they'd gotten used to it, or maybe they felt their advantage in numbers, but they'd become so bold that even I was shocked. Thanks to that, I'd been having a hard time talking to them until they finished changing into their yuamigi. I couldn't exactly look up from the ground, after all. Especially with Clena.

I changed with my head facing the wall, hearing merry voices behind me. Apparently the other girls in Haruno's party didn't mind mixed bathing either, so that was one less thing to worry about. They must have been so casual about the idea since they outnumbered me twelve to one. In any case, I definitely felt more eyes on me than usual. It must have been Haruno's party, since this was their first time.

"...Haruno, it's rude to stare, you know?"

"How bold, Haruno! We've been trying not to..."

"I-I'm sorry, I just..."

Correction: apparently it was just Haruno. Clena couldn't let the offense slip by and called out to her.

"You're only allowed to stare if you're okay with being stared at yourself."

"Really?!"

That's the first I've heard of this.

"Hold on a sec, Clena. Since when has that been a rule?" I asked her with my head still to the wall.

"It's just my piece of advice," she replied coolly. "I stopped being worried about having your eyes on me when I realized that I could do the same. Isn't that right, Roni?"



“Lady Clena?!” Roni exclaimed in embarrassment, which made me realize what Clena was referring to. *That* incident.

“You mean... back in Ceres?”

“Bingo. You’re as sharp as ever.”

I knew it. Back when we stayed at the temple in Ceres, I witnessed Clena in her birthday suit when I rescued her out of the bath, and Roni ending up seeing all of me as well. I had asked Clena to take care of Roni’s embarrassment, so she must have spoken to her about this mindset back then. I see, so they were employing the “eye for an eye” principle.

“You’ve started to look more tough lately, so you’ve been a pleasure to look at.♥”

“R-really?”

“Yeah! Your back’s gotten bigger!” Roni complimented me excitedly.

I honestly couldn’t tell. Well, I’d been wearing the Magic Eater a lot recently, so maybe they were speaking the truth. I noticed that they sometimes looked at me in the bath, but I had no idea they were thinking about me like that. Well, as long as it made them happy... I guess? Clena and the other girls had gotten more tough as well, in a different way.

“...Touya!”

“Y-yes?!” I had been lost in thought about the girls’ progress, but then Haruno’s shrill voice brought me back to reality. I just about turned around, but barely managed to endure. “Um... what is it?”

“I’ll look at you plenty, so please look at me as well!”

“Hold on, how’d you arrive at that?” I couldn’t have predicted Haruno’s words.

“Lady Haruno, don’t take off your yuamigi!”

And what was she wearing, or *not* wearing, while saying that? How much of herself was she willing to show me? Can I look? Can I really? Can I stare at those things that I think would even beat Clena’s in size? The temptation to turn

around filled my head, but I fought against it with all my might.

“...Uh, I’ll go in first.” I knew I couldn’t fight it for long, though. Ignoring the commotion happening behind me, I entered the bath first. I wasn’t running away. This was just a tactical withdrawal. It wasn’t like I could calm down the situation in the changing room, anyway.

I entered the bathing room and took a seat at a faucet far from the door. Clena had fainted in Ceres because I hadn’t realized I was sitting too close. I poured some water over myself, and then Yukina and Daisy entered the room shortly after. They noticed me, and Daisy flew right up close. We didn’t have any yuamigi in her size, so she was wrapped in a hand towel. She was apparently an adult in imp years, so her body was already well developed—though miniature-sized.

“Heya, it’s gotten even more interesting back there.”

Her mischievous grin was that of a kid’s, though. Maybe she wasn’t quite an adult yet, mentally. She sat down on the stool next to me, so I grabbed a pail and filled it with water. “What’s happening?”

“The lot of them took off their... *yuamigi*? And are talking things over with extremely serious expressions.”

All of them? I wanted to see this, but I couldn’t give in to temptation. I couldn’t have them catching colds, though.

“Yukina, turn on that switch by the door for the heater in the changing room,” I asked Yukina, who was still by the entrance.

“Huh? Oh, this one. Got it.” She then picked up a stool and sat down behind me.

“What are you doing?”

“I’ll wash your back. The early bird gets the worm!”

“Huh? You don’t have to...”

“But washing each other is fun.”

“That sounds terrifying,” said Daisy. To be fair, it’d be tough to handle someone of her size. I didn’t trust myself to scrub her small head and body.

“Yukina, let’s trade spots. And Daisy, pay attention. I’ll teach you how to use this bath’s features.” I couldn’t just leave Daisy be, though, so I should at least teach her how to use this bath. I washed Yukina’s hair as usual, but this time Daisy flew in circles above us and watched with curiosity.

“...Hey, is it that fun to wash each other?”

“It feels really nice... it makes me happy...”

Daisy stared at Yukina’s face, which now formed a relaxed grin. Come to think of it, I had no idea how imps normally cleaned themselves.

“How do imps take baths?”

“Huh? Well, we don’t use all this foam.”

“...What about when you get dirty?”

“We jump into the water!”

That was pretty barbarian. Apparently imps enjoyed playing in the water, unlike ketolts.

“But you *do* clean yourself first, right?”

“...Do I have to?”

“You have to.”

Haruno had tried getting Daisy to use soap during their travels, but Daisy had always managed to escape. She was even trembling at the sight of the shampoo bottle right now.

“Isn’t that kind of scary, though?”

“Scary? In what way?”

“It’s like a mass of light magic, right?”

“...I don’t think it’ll hurt you, though.” I *had* used the Bath to defeat monsters before, but that didn’t work just because it was a manifested form of light magic. Daisy looked a little more interested after I explained that to her, and then she timidly approached the shampoo bottle. She couldn’t pour it out herself though, so I assisted.

“Make sure the suds don’t get in your eyes.”

“Ooh~” She started washing her hair with clumsy hand movements. It reminded me of how Yukina used to wash herself.

She was already falling ill by the time she started elementary school, so our parents were often busy and left me to help her take baths. One time, however, she insisted on washing herself. I taught her how to wash her body, clumsy as we both were, and eventually all I had left to do was keep an eye on her in the bath. She had gotten plenty adept, so I figured she would be fine by herself. This continued for about a month, but one day, she suddenly started crying. I calmed her down and asked her what was wrong, and then she replied that she felt so lonely as she shut her eyes and washed her hair all by herself. After that, we started our tradition of washing each other.

I finished washing Yukina’s hair as I reminisced on the past, then rinsed the shampoo off. I looked over at Daisy before our next step, but her entire face was covered in suds as she yelled, “It hurts! Ow ow!”

“Daisy, I’m going to wash the foam off your face.” I used my finger to lift her bangs, then poured water over her face. She then fell silent as if the pain had subsided, then resumed scrubbing her hair. Yukina had done the same thing at first. Following what I did back then, I continued to lift her bangs off her face until she finished. Daisy peered at me and we ended up staring at each other. Yukina had also done this in the past, which made me laugh as I remembered.

“D-don’t laugh at me! I’m not scared!” Her face was red, most likely not just because of the hot water. Yukina sat next to her, nodding along.

She’d been in the same position before. She was so scared of shutting her eyes and just stared at me while I helped lift her bangs off her face. I remembered it just like yesterday.

I was feeling awfully relaxed despite not soaking in the bath yet, until Daisy asked, “Am I done yet?” Yukina promptly helped her rinse off the shampoo, and then she shook her head to splash off the excess water. I told her she did well and patted her head, but she brushed my hand off in embarrassment.

Next, we taught her how to wash her body. Daisy’s washcloth had been cut from a bigger one by Roni. Yukina first scrubbed herself to demonstrate how it

was done. Daisy imitated her, but soon enough ended up entirely covered in soapy suds. They didn't get in her eyes this time though, so she was fine. However, a problem emerged when she tried to wash a certain part of her body.

"Huh? Hmm?"

It was her back. Her wings got in the way of her washing her own back.

"Let me help you, Daisy."

"...Sure."

I should be able to manage if it's just her back and wings. I moved her stool so that she sat in front of me.

Her body sure was tiny, though. I took the washcloth and gently washed her back, making sure I didn't hurt her. I washed my hands first so that I didn't damage the membrane on her wings. This was my first time washing wings...

In the meantime, Daisy had grown meek as a lamb. Yukina watched over the two of us, full of smiles. Daisy noticed and tried to punch her in the nose, but Yukina simply blocked it with the palm of her hand. *Hey now, settle down.* After I rinsed all the suds off, Daisy stood up and flapped her wings to get rid of the water.

"Come with me, Daisy!"

"Whoa, hey! Let me go!" She tried to fly away soon after, but before she could, Yukina grabbed her into a hug. Yukina ignored her rapidly flailing legs and carried her right over to the bathtub. I wanted to join them, but I hadn't washed my hair or body yet. I'd told Daisy that she needed to clean herself first, so I had to follow my own example.

I guess I'm washing myself today, I thought, but then the door to the changing room suddenly flew open. I looked over to find Rakti and Rium, and then Prae, who ducked and walked in. Sandra, Rin, and Lumis followed. I didn't see any sign of Clena, Roni, Haruno, or Sera. Rakti and Rium quickly noticed me and skipped over. Prae followed them close behind.

"Where are the rest?"

“...They were taking too long to talk, so we left them.”

“Oh, but don’t worry. They’re not fighting or anything.”

“Everyone is getting along~”

I wondered what those four were talking about? It made me curious, but it must have been some sort of girls’ talk that I shouldn’t poke my nose into. While I was lost in thought, Rium sat down in Daisy’s seat in front of me and Rakti sat down in Yukina’s seat behind me. Prae stared at us from the side. She was still wearing her eyepatch.

Well, we couldn’t do anything but wait for the remaining four to be done. We might as well carry on for now.

“Alright then, let’s start with the hair. I’ll teach you how to use this bath, Prae, so make sure to pay attention.”

“Okaaay~”

I started with Rium’s hair, instructing Prae all the while. Rium had tensed herself up out of nervousness, then flinched when I applied shampoo to her hair. She had never been able to get used to the shampoo.

Rakti was having fun lathering up a washcloth behind me. The thought of having a goddess wash my back was crazy, but Rakti had always been fond of taking care of others. In that sense, she was pretty goddess-like... if that sounded right? Anyway, I washed Rium’s hair as Rakti washed my back. This really was calming. It was like our little hour of peace.

“H-hey, you’re making it harder to wash.” Rium was gradually drawing her head closer to me. This was a normal occurrence. She would sometimes fall asleep like this, so I spoke up to keep her awake. “Don’t you imitate her, too.”

“Eheheh...” Rakti mirrored Rium and stuck her entire body to me. This was a normal occurrence, too. I was never able to tell her off too sternly after that shy giggle. She had been acting especially doting ever since Yukina joined our party. She must have gotten jealous after seeing Yukina act so spoiled around me.

Prae kept watching us from nearby. Her single unconcealed eye was glistening like a ruby. Her eye looked about twice as large as mine. The reflection of my

face seemed especially conspicuous in her pupil, and I ended up staring back at her as I worried whether or not I looked too goofy.

That made Prae look away while squealing “kyaah~” Oh, we had been staring right at each other. Crap... I acted rude.

“Sorry for staring so much.”

“I-it’s okaaay~ I just got a little embarrassed~” She waved her hands to hide her embarrassment. Judging by her behavior, she was like any other girl, just with blue skin. Though her hands were big enough to stir up a light breeze that chilled my cheeks.

Now that I had gotten a good look at her though, her juvenile personality contrasted her feminine figure. It was hard to tell due to her size, but I estimated her proportions to be about that of a 20-year-old’s.

Wait, crap, I started staring at her again. I had just finished apologizing, too. Her breasts, which were each bigger than my head, were staring me in the face, but I couldn’t look. I had to resist.

“Whoa, I can’t wash you like this...!”

“It’s my turn... right now...” Perhaps because she could tell what I was thinking, Rium pressed herself into me harder. It didn’t hurt of course, but I couldn’t move like this. The girl behind me had also kept rubbing herself against me until bubbles formed all around us. Prae looked on all the while, her smile unchanged.

I finally finished washing Rium’s hair as I struggled against the forces sandwiching me. It had taken some time, since I needed to be gentle with Rium.

After that, Rakti took Rium’s seat. She had finished scrubbing my back, so she eagerly sat down in front of me. Rium hopped into Prae’s bosom and rested there, looking back at us. I was about to tell her to hop into the bath for warmth, but... that didn’t seem necessary. She seemed plenty warm with Prae wrapped around her.

A spectacular pair of boobs were plopped above Rium’s head. Man, I wished I could trade places with her right now.

“Touya...?”

Geez, I started looking again. I brought myself back to reality and started washing Rakti’s hair.

As I massaged her head as usual, she also started to draw herself toward me. Her expression was composed, but her cheeks flushed a deeper red than usual for being in the bath. She was clearly doing it intentionally. I already knew that Rium would come crawling over and lean against my back soon after this.

“Guh.” ...or so I thought, but this time, Prae came along too.

Surprisingly, she wasn’t heavy. I had prepared myself so that I wouldn’t fall onto Rakti, but apparently Prae made sure that she wasn’t leaning her weight against me. I was being made into a sandwich again, though. A sandwich with two big and plump berries encasing my head. I wanted to stay like this, but I couldn’t move at all. Not to mention that Rakti was just nuzzling herself against me now.

“Could... could you get off me for a bit? I can’t wash Rakti, and Rium probably can’t breathe.”

“I’m okay... like this.”

“Even if you’re fine, Rium, Prae needs to wash herself.”

“...You’re not going to wash me?”

Oh, so that’s what she was waiting for. Well, if she insisted... wait, no. She really would insist, but there was no way I could wash her front.

“I can only wash your back, okay? Though if you wait a bit, I can also wash your hair.”

“Okay, I can wait!” Prae said happily, then got off me. I kind of regretted it, but I had no choice.

“Rium, help Prae if she doesn’t understand something.”

“...Okay.” Rium unstuck herself from me as well, and now I could finally concentrate on Rakti.

However, Rakti started snuggling against me even more after that. She would

often start doing these things without a word. I rinsed the shampoo off her and patted her head, and the smile she showed me in response was positively contagious. Her snuggling made it harder to wash her, but I could never say anything against it when she showed me that smile.

I looked over and saw Prae trying to scrub herself with awkward gestures. She had been given a full-sized bath towel to use as her washcloth. Rium was washing her back, and Rakti also volunteered to help as soon as she noticed. She really was clumsy, though. I wondered if she had never used soap before.

“She’s never washed herself with anything other than water before.” Suddenly, Rin spoke out to us. Her tone was somewhat playful.

It looked like she had just finished washing her hair, as her wavy flaxen locks glistened with water droplets. She wasn’t as shapely as Clena or Haruno, but I could tell she had slim proportions under her wet yuamigi. I had been trying to not look in their direction, but Sandra and Lumis were sitting close to the door, which was far from us. On the other hand, Rin had chosen to sit only two faucets away from us. She didn’t seem to pay me any mind though as she continued to talk.

“Prae did try it once before, but then she got shampoo in her eye...”

“And then she refused to use soap again?”

Rin nodded. Even monsters would faint if they got this shampoo in their eyes. Though wasn’t her eyepatch to blame here? Maybe Prae had gotten convinced to give it one more shot after seeing everyone else have fun here.

“Well, we haven’t been able to use this stuff in a long time either. It really is nice.”

“Oh? Was the amount I gave you in Jupiter not enough?”

“It’s not that. We just don’t have much water to waste here.”

“Oh, I guess you wouldn’t have anything other than drinking water.” Everything around us was salt water. “In that case, use as much as you want here. We won’t run out as long as I don’t run out of MP.”

“That’s the plan! And I’ll give you a little fanservice as thanks♪” she said

flirtatiously.

“...Did you quit being a pilgrim to get more shampoo?”

“I can’t deny that, but I *did* think seriously about it. Even though I quit being a pilgrim, I’m still a temple knight.”

“Did that go against your faith?”

“I didn’t think about it *that* seriously...”

Which is it? I was about to ask, but then Rin suddenly stared right at me.

“Anyway, I just didn’t believe that either Lady Haruno or you were wrong.”

“I-I see...” So she trusted us. And what was up with her suddenly getting so serious? That made my heart skip a beat.

“Oh, but don’t go staring at the other two. Sandra might be an apathetic brute, but Lumis is honestly pretty shy.”

“I can hear you, Rin!” And then she did another one-eighty back to acting playful.

Sandra protested her comments. She had finished washing her hair as well, and was in the middle of scrubbing her body. Of course, she wasn’t wearing her yuamigi at the moment.

“Alright now, don’t stare!” Rin immediately blocked my view. The sight was already burned into my pupils, though.

Rin said she looked brutish, but she was nothing of the sort. Her indigo-blue hair was long and lustrous, and her tall figure had well-balanced proportions. Her legs were especially long and slender. They were perfect for ogling. On top of that, she had been unabashedly washing her naked self despite the fact that I was looking at her. Even Clena and the usual group cared about my gazes a bit more.

“Sorry, Sandra hasn’t changed since her pilgrim days.”

“...Do all pilgrims act like that?” I had imagined them as a far more earnest group of people, like a bunch of genius women.

“They’re a bunch of women who spend their days without a man in sight, you

know? Live long enough in that environment, and you'll forget what embarrassment feels like."

"...Is that so?"

"It is."

Come to think of it, Rin had always been different from the other pilgrims ever since I met her. I never would have thought that her job would affect that aspect of her personality.

"Sandra, have a little more shame! That's why I was calling you a brute earlier! Be more self-aware! You really are apathetic!"

"You have no right to say all that to me. Didn't you just say you were giving him some fanservice? If that's how we should thank him for using the bath..."

"That's naive, silly-tits."

"Silly-tits?!"

"You think you can thank him by simply hanging your tits out in the open, and that's just silly."

"Hanging...?!"

Sandra was the one with the bigger bust between the two of them. Rin's complaints might have had something to do with that. She had gotten something wrong though, so I needed to correct her.

"Hold on, Rin. With a lady as beautiful as Sandra, it really is enough to do that."

"S-Sir Touya, please stop with the jokes!"

"No, I'm being serious here. Your legs are great."

"Legs?!" That finally made Sandra embarrassed enough to curl up and cover her legs with her soapy washcloth. She then realized her chest was completely bare and covered that as well.

"Yes, that's what I'm talking about!"

"What?!"

“That shame! Sir Touya would be much more pleased with that!”

“Ehhh...” Sandra flapped her mouth open and closed a few times, then finally hung her head down.

Basically, since the pilgrims traveled entirely as a group of women, they had become more ignorant of a man’s gaze. They were treated as personifications of the goddess and were revered from a distance, which may have encouraged their behavior even more. They were always on the go, so worrying about nudity would just mean that they weren’t fulfilling their duties well enough. Rin viewed that as abandoning their womanhood, but to me, that shamelessness didn’t change how beautiful of a woman Sandra was. Though I couldn’t deny how appealing it was to see an unexpectedly shy side to her dignified self. It was rude to keep staring at someone who was embarrassed though, so I stopped. I recalled how Clena had just said, “You’re only allowed to stare if you’re okay with being stared at yourself.” I felt like that didn’t quite apply here.

Rin had her arms folded, nodding “Yeah, that’s how you charm them,” so I tried prodding a reaction out of her.

“Have you thought about how to charm someone, Rin?”

“Wasn’t I just talking about fanservice?♪” She didn’t back down, instead striking a pose and huffing proudly.

That’s a little off from the “thanking” you were talking about, I thought, but it was easier to let her act however she pleased.

“Thank goodness you got away from that before you got brainwashed too, Lumis.”

“Don’t bring me into the conversation, Rin!” Lumis exclaimed from afar. She had been listening in this whole time. This wasn’t something I wanted to learn, though.

“Oh, Lady Haruno hasn’t been brainwashed either, so don’t worry about that.”

“I-I see...”

“In fact, I’d say that Lady Haruno’s behavior has influenced the rest of us a bit...”

“That’s impressive.” I could see that happening, considering Haruno’s personality.

“She was telling us to be more mindful of a man’s gaze, and all... Anyway, I’m gonna be scrubbing my body now, so... you can peek *just* a little, okay?”

“You’re making this pretty difficult for me.” I returned Rin’s flirtatious wink with as casual of a tone as I could muster, though my heart was beating out of my chest. I wondered what she meant by “just a little,” but unfortunately I didn’t have time to wonder for long.

“I’m done~♪” Prae suddenly hugged me against her freshly-washed body.

Rium and Rakti looked proud of themselves for a job well done. It must have taken some effort for them to wash Prae’s large back. Now then, it was time for me to wash Prae’s hair as we had promised, but where should I start?

“Prae, do you mind removing your eyepatch?”

“Umm... That’s a little...”

Negative, huh. I had to take another route.

“U-um... may I help?” I racked my brain over how I should approach the task until Lumis spoke up to us in a timid voice. She had already put her yuamigi back on after her shower.

“Oh? Are you sure?” I couldn’t tell if she was okay being so close to me.

“W-well, I helped take care of Prae during our travels! And I’ve always had a lot of demi-human friends...!” She further explained with a flushed face that her hometown had plenty of demi-humans that she got along with, and she had volunteered to look after Prae when she joined the party. So that’s why she had come up to us even though this was embarrassing for her. I hoped she didn’t think I was about to try anything funny on Prae.

“In that case, please do.”

“Th-thank you! What should I do first? Cover her eyes?”

“No, I don’t think that would prevent the shampoo from stinging.” I had thought up a certain plan, so let’s try that first.

“...What are you doing, Touya?”

“Exactly what it looks like, Yukina.”

We had Prae lie on her back so that I could wash her hair. Daisy, who had followed behind Yukina, mumbled, “Is this a beauty salon now?”

Oh yeah, I had tried this with Yukina before, too. She was never able to go to a salon due to her health, so we played make-believe. Not surprisingly, she was looking at us enviously right now. I’d have to remember to do this with her tomorrow. But right now, it was Prae’s turn. Her head really was big, so I had Lumis use the shower head to rinse the suds off her face. I arrived at this plan after thinking about how to avoid getting foam in her eyes. Right now, she was probably feeling embarrassed as it was her first time, and was squeezing her eyes shut with her cheeks flushed red.

“It feels nice... having my hair shampooed...”

I was happy to get both Prae and Daisy to convert. It might have been tiring to wash this big head, but I enjoyed it as long as it made Prae happy. In fact, it made me feel kind of proud since they were essentially approving of my Unlimited Bath.

“Lumis, could you turn on the shower head... Uh, Lumis?”

“H-hyah?!” Lumis let out a shrill cry after I called her name. She had been spacing out for some reason.

“What’s wrong?” Had she been staring at something? I looked in the direction she had just been staring, where I found Prae’s two big, blue, and propped-up knees... No, only slightly lower than those were two big blue bazongas.

...Let’s pretend I didn’t see that.

Lumis looked away in embarrassment after she noticed where my eyes had been. She was the same age as Haruno, but let’s just say that she was sometimes mistaken for a boy.

Now then, I asked Lumis one more time to rinse the shampoo off Prae’s hair.

The next step was drying her hair off enough that the water wouldn't seep into her eyepatch later. Yup, this looked about right. Lastly, I patted her short and ruffly hair.

"Alright, done."

"Thank youuuuu!!"

"Gyah?!"

She suddenly sat up and latched onto me energetically. Three stutos' worth of a cyclops leaned into me. It was so soft... my face was getting buried. But it was heavy. But so soft, too.

"Wait, Prae! You're crushing Sir Touya!"

"I-I'm okay..."

Lumis was getting anxious, but I was fine. I could handle this. This was another way to measure just how far I'd grown. I continued to support her giant knockers—er, body, with all my strength. However, I got the feeling that she'd lift me up and spin me around soon, so I quickly got my fill and pointed out the bathtub to her.

"Look, Prae! Look at the bathtub over there!"

"Huh? Oh... but I'm too big..."

"You're fine. Do you see that handrail over there? If you follow it, you'll get to the deeper end of the tub. I think even you will be able to sit and soak there."

"Really?!"

"Really. And be careful if you're going there too, Lumis."

"Thank you. Come on, Prae, let's go."

"See you later, Touya~♪"

The two girls walked to the bath hand in hand. They couldn't differ more in height and skin color, but they looked like sisters. The smaller Lumis would be the older sister here, though.

I watched as Prae plopped down in the deeper end of the tub. The water would only come up to her waist if she sat upright, so she lay on her back and

cheerfully splashed her feet in the water. They didn't look like they were having any issues.

"Yahoo!"

"H-hey, Rin! Oh, Sir Touya, we'll also be getting in now!"

Having just finished washing herself, Rin hopped, skipped, and jumped into the bath. Sandra gave me a short bow, her cheeks still a little pink. I kept an eye on everyone enjoying their soak, when suddenly a voice came from behind me.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Touya."

It was Haruno. The chilly outside air seeped into the bath from the door. I quickly turned around and became speechless at the sight of her.

Her smooth black hair glistened under the light. It may as well have been threads of silk. Her once fair skin had gotten a little tanned, but I thought she looked much more healthy and captivating this way. She'd told me that she had gotten better at using swords, but her arms were still slender and supple. Maybe that was an effect of the Goddess' blessing, like my strength. Her elegant yet sweet face was flushed a shade of pink. Below that was her yuamigi, which was just barely containing a massive pair of melons. I knew she was big before, but I never imagined they'd be right in front of me like this.

After letting myself be entranced for a moment, I asked the necessary: "...Isn't your yuamigi a little small?"

She looked borderline in many ways right now. To put it briefly, her chest was lifting up the rest of her yuamigi so much that the bottom hem was right around the danger zone. Haruno tried to pull it down, but that only made her chest spill out more, so she could do nothing but fidget awkwardly.

"I'll pick one a size bigger next time..."

"But uh, you could always go back and change right now."

"...Y-you're right. Hold on a moment."

Realizing that she couldn't exactly go on like this, she scurried back into the changing room. I guess I should pat myself on the back for not missing the chance to sneak a peek at her butt?

“You’re as quick as ever,” Clena said to me, exasperated. She wasn’t losing to Haruno in certain departments I won’t mention.

“Why didn’t you point it out to her before she came in?”

“Uh... sorry. I was too focused on our chat.”

“What were you all talking about? You took so long.”

“Huh? Uh, just everything that we’ve done until now? And what we plan to do next! We were just exchanging information!”

“Uh-huh...?” I didn’t quite believe her, but I decided not to pry further.

“Wow, it really has gotten bigger in here,” Sera said as she looked around. She hadn’t been in the Unlimited Bath since Jupiter, so “surprised” wouldn’t begin to cover what she was feeling right now.

“Hm? What is it?”

“N-no, it’s nothing...”

She tilted her head and I quickly looked away. Well... Sera was quite the adult, if you know what I meant. Though she shouldn’t have been much older than the other girls. I accidentally became bewitched by her graceful presence.

Clena and Roni sat themselves to my right, while Sera sat one stool down to my left. She left a spot in between us for Haruno.

“Th-thanks for waiting...”

“No worries, I just got here... well, no, that’s not true.” Crap, I was getting too nervous. Clena was smirking at me.

She must have been just as nervous though, since she wasn’t asking me to wash her hair like she normally did. Roni kept giving me stray glances, but wasn’t speaking up either. The atmosphere was feeling a little tense. I didn’t think they had been fighting in the changing room, though.

I hadn’t cleaned myself anywhere besides my back yet, so I started washing my hair, and then heard the three around me begin as well. They were apparently showering their bodies first. Maybe it was because I had to keep my eyes closed for now? I might as well take a little longer to wash my hair today.

“You’re going to make us feel anxious if you keep doing that.” Or so I thought, but eventually Clena tossed some water over my head. I looked up to find Haruno giggling at me.

“Thank you for worrying about us, Touya. But we can’t finish washing ourselves that fast, anyway.”

I-I see, I was only encouraging them to wash faster. In any case, it was me and eight girls just earlier, and now four. They weren’t being shy, maybe because they had the advantage in numbers. It was painful resisting the buoyant temptations all around me, but I couldn’t act rude.

I thought it might be awkward for all of us to be silent, but then Haruno spoke up. Might as well let her break the tension in the air.

“Um, thank you for looking after Prae. She’s been sad ever since we came here.”

“She was? She didn’t seem like it...”

“She changed after you all arrived, Touya. The Goddess of Wind was like a mother to her...”

“I see, so...” Rakti might have done the trick, since she was the Goddess of Wind’s younger sister.

“I wasn’t able to fill that role for her...”

“You may have inherited her powers, but you haven’t transformed into a goddess yourself, right?” Clena interjected.

The mood was much less awkward when we chatted like this. Though all the girls were showering right now, so none were wearing their yuamigi.

“Well... I wonder about that?”

“Oh, I think we’ll have an answer for that tonight.”

“Huh? Oh, was it that thing Prae mentioned earlier?”

“Yeah, the dream I have with the goddesses every night. If you don’t show up in my dream, then that means you haven’t become a goddess.”

“And it was the Goddess of Water who told you that Haruno was here, right?”

“We were told that Touya would be coming here... was that how it happened?”

Oh yeah, the Goddess of Water never showed up in my dream after that. Did that water cleric’s attitude have something to do with it? If she appeared tonight, then I wanted to ask.

“What are the other goddesses like, by the way? The Goddess of Wind was very different from Rakti.”

“Their ages are pretty far apart, judging by their appearances. I think the reliefs in the temples give the order they were born in?”

“Oh yeah. From the top, it’s Light, Fire, Wind, Water, Earth, and Darkness.”

“...That doesn’t quite match with how all of them look.” Especially the Goddess of Earth—I couldn’t believe she was the second youngest. Both her looks and her personality made her much more of a mother figure than the Goddess of Light.

“Really?”

“Just to give an example that Haruno would understand... the Goddess of Light is a strict bespectacled teacher, the Goddess of Fire is a gym teacher, and the Goddess of Earth is a school nurse.”

“...What?”

“Well, I’ve been learning magic in my dreams. They show up wearing a suit, a tracksuit, and a white lab coat.”

“Th-they change outfits in your dreams?” Haruno stopped scrubbing herself. Needless to say, she looked shocked.

Sera was sitting stone-faced, looking straight ahead. I looked toward the tub, and Sandra and the others had also frozen up. They had been eavesdropping on our conversation.

“They *are* goddesses, right?”

“When they first appeared, they really did look like the goddesses of legend.”

“M-my goddess...” Sera had her hands on her head. She was a light cleric,

after all. I could tell how she was feeling right now.

I should clear something up for her. “U-um, Sera? Their outfits aside, they’ve been amazing at teaching me spells. Everything they’ve taught me has been ancient spells lost throughout the ages.”

“I-is that so?!” Sera jumped out of her seat and approached me. She left her washcloth behind, so nothing was covering her other than bits of foam. She grabbed my shoulders and shook me back and forth, so I couldn’t avert my eyes.

“Wait, calm down, Sera! I can see! I can see everything!”

“Wha... oh, oh no, how could I...”

Sera returned to herself and covered her body. Round of applause for me, who burned her figure into my mind despite being disoriented.

“A-and I wrote down everything they’ve taught me, so I can show you later.”

“Really?! Thank you so much!!” And now she hugged me. I was still sitting, so she buried my face in her chest.

“Ow! My eyes! My eyesssss!!” Her body was still covered in soap though, so I didn’t get the opportunity to appreciate it.



“Now then... Touya, can you help me with the usual now that I’m done here?” We calmed Sera down, and after the girls finished washing their bodies, Clena asked me to wash her hair.

I glanced at Haruno and Sera, who both wore keen expressions. That was all they were wearing, though... *I’m glad, but please put on your yuamigi if you’re done showering.*

“Oh, don’t worry about Haruno. She said she wanted to watch how we normally do it first.”

“We were talking about it earlier,” Roni added.

I see, so this topic fell under their “information exchange”? They did need to let their guards down to let me wash their hair.

“It’s really amazing, though. I could do it all day.”

“Th-that sounds exciting, but also scary...”

Oh no, it wasn’t scary. I’ve been making them melt with my techniques recently, but I wasn’t doing anything funny with them.

I needed to wash their hair in earnest today so that Haruno and Sera would trust me. First up was Clena, then Roni.

“I see, you really are just washing their hair... right?”

“Why did you turn that into a question?” I was going about it like normal, so it didn’t compute. Maybe because Clena started making a pleasurable face as soon as I touched her head? Roni was wearing a similar expression right now, but I didn’t point it out. This was one of the few times she could kick back from all her duties. I made sure to give her tail a thorough cleaning, too.

“That went fine, right?”

“It was scary in a different way... Clena, your face is completely red.”

“I-it’s just hot in here!” Clena gave an unconvincing excuse.

Just in case, let me clarify that I didn’t change my scrubbing techniques between Clena, Yukina, or any of the other girls. I didn’t have some special powers emanating from my fingers, either. Roni’s reaction was just naturally

similar to Yukina's.

I ended up starting with Sera, but she simply said, "My, this does feel nice," with a calm smile. No problems came up, other than the fact that I stole a few glances at her big butt.

Haruno became less anxious after seeing that, so now it was her turn. Like Sera, she also had long and beautiful hair. I should take good care of her.

"Ah... ngh..." And thus I meticulously, carefully, and diligently washed her hair, but an embarrassed voice escaped her throat.

"Um... does it hurt, Haruno?"

"N-no! It doesn't! It just feels really good..."

"I-I see..." Maybe I really did have powers emanating from my fingers. In either case, she didn't seem to mind it. I needed to focus just on her head, or else I'd be in trouble.

On another note, both Sera's and Haruno's hair seemed a little damaged. The feel of my fingers brushing through their hair felt different from Clena's. I didn't voice that thought, though. But from now on, we'd be together. As long as she continued to use my MP-based shampoo, her hair would return to its lustrous shine from back in Jupiter. Or maybe even better than that.

Later in the bathtub, Haruno and Clena latched firmly onto me. Sera and Roni sat opposite to us and grinned.

"Clena, your face is red. Shouldn't you be getting out soon?"

"Aren't you even redder than me, Haruno?"

The softness around my arms was great, but sparks were flying on either side of me. Oh, maybe they were fighting to see who would stay in here with me longer.

Their quarrel continued on after that. I would stop them if they were actually fighting, but they weren't causing trouble, so I let them be. All I could do was enjoy the supple softness pressing into me on either side.

Eventually, Yukina's group left the bath, then Rakti's group, then Sandra's group. Finally, Sera led Roni out of the water and it was just us three remaining.

“Heh... heheh... you don’t have to push yourself, you know?”

“S-same to you...”

They taunted, but in the end, they knocked themselves out at the same time. I was still fine, so I picked them both up and carried them out of the room.

“Hmm... why don’t you get dizzy in the bath, Touya?” After a while of rest, Haruno sat up and asked me that.

Yukina answered in my stead. “Touya’s always taken long baths. He would stay in there for sooo long after I got out, but I’ve never seen him get dizzy before!”

Yeah, I’d always been fond of long baths. Maybe that was one of the reasons why I’d been handed the Unlimited Bath as my gift. Haruno looked puzzled at that answer, as if it made sense but there was still something missing for her.

Bath Break – The Goddess Bathing Experience

Today was an eventful day. We reunited with Haruno's party, learned about what happened to the wind temple, and then I received the wind blessing. Shockingly, it was actually Jupiter's army who had attacked the wind temple. If Princess Franchellis was to be believed, then the prince, who was supposedly anti-demi-human, likely had a hand in it. Only a few dozen glaupis and cyclopes were able to escape the temple. We had no idea what had happened to the rest. We requested an audience with the Goddess of Water, but she had yet to reply. It might be faster for me to ask her directly in my dream, assuming she showed up. The cyclopes were using the bath right now, but once they're done, I should catch an early night. Meeting the goddesses was key to finding more information right now.

On that note, my bath was popular. The cyclopes were returning with bright smiles. Their entire group was just women and children. They had been looking weary all day, so I hoped the bath revitalized them a bit.

"Touya, hey Touya. Should we use the second floor to sleep tonight?"

"That alluring carpet, huh..."

"It's more like the entire floor is a bed..." Clena opined. According to her, it shouldn't even be called a carpet anymore.

"Then what is it?" I asked her, but she could only reply, "Something unknown."

"If that's a bed, then it's beyond king-sized." So what should we call a bed even bigger than that? Great-King-sized? Or going even further, maybe Kingdom-sized? No, that might be going too far. In any case, I might as well name that room the "Bedroom," in a literal sense.

"Also, the tatami room hasn't been getting much bigger, huh?"

"Of course it hasn't. My sisters' blessings have been working to suppress my own."

"Oh, is that how it is?" Since they were restraining my transformation into a demon, the gift of darkness that was the tatami-floored room wasn't growing

larger. We had been using it as a reading room, so I wouldn't feel at ease if the room was too spacious, anyway. In that case, I was thankful for the side effect.

"Excuse us!" Rin's group joined us for bed like it was a matter of course. Though since the room was so expansive, they stayed a good distance away from us.

Haruno and Clena had since regained consciousness and were now latching onto my arms. They were grabbing onto me like it was some sort of contest. I had no reason to stop them, so I savored the sensations around my arms until I fell asleep and was transported to the world of my dreams—Rakti's sanctuary, where the goddesses awaited.

The goddesses were acting a little different from usual tonight, though. As usual, I couldn't move, but two different girls were now latched on my arms. On one side was Rakti, who was probably trying to compete with Haruno and Clena as well. She looked like a little koala; it was adorable.

On the other side was a girl I had never met before. Her chartreuse-green hair was tied up into twintails, and she stared back at me with familiar emerald eyes. Seeing as there were no other possibilities, she must have been the Goddess of Wind. She was about the same height as Haruno, but gave off the polar opposite aura. I could imagine her running around in an open field. Maybe you could call her a sporty beauty?

"...That's enough."

"Okaaay, sister."

A majestic voice resounded, and then the Goddess of Wind let go of my arm and turned around. Her twintails spread like wings, and she took one smooth glide to stand next to the owner of the voice, the Goddess of Light.

...Wait, what?

"Wind can carry many things, you know? Wind through the plains carries the scent of grass, wind from the south carries warmth, and wind from this sanctuary carries the sound of my sweet, sweet voice," the Goddess of Wind explained to me as if she had read my mind.

"So this is thanks to the wind blessing..." I mumbled, then realized that I could

hear my own voice, too.

“The vast seas are within you as well,” said the Goddess of Water as she appeared next. “You didn’t notice last time, but I wonder if you will today?”

“Notice what...?!” I asked, but then suddenly felt pressure at the back of my head. Wait, pressure? In this dream world?

“Fire brings about heat, but you have yet to perceive that,” said a loud and resonant voice. I guessed that this was the Goddess of Fire. She was hugging me from behind. The pressure against my head was from her chest pushing into me.

And then I noticed how warm Rakti felt. Oh yeah, she was holding onto me like this when the Goddess of Water first appeared. I hadn’t noticed back then since close physical contact was normal for us. The next time the Goddess of Water appeared, she had thrown her flipbook at me and then never showed up again. If the flipbook had actually hit me, would I have felt it? Now that the Goddess of Water was finally back, I could feel physical sensations again.

“The sea is within me”—she must have meant that blood flowed through me in my dreams now. I didn’t understand the logic behind it, but I had gained the sense of touch in my dreams. Since I could hear the goddesses now, the wind blessing had also given me the sense of sound. Assuming the light blessing gave me the sense of sight, it made sense why I couldn’t do anything but see in my dreams until now.

“It appears you’ve figured it out. Hahah, what an excellent student.” The Goddess of Light smiled. However, her voice was seeping with majesty. I could see why Rakti always cowered when she was being scolded now.

“But there’s one thing I don’t understand...”

“Why you cannot move your body, is it?”

I didn’t even need this ability to speak, apparently. Right on cue, the Goddess of Earth appeared standing next to the Goddess of Light.

Light, Fire, Wind, Water, Earth, and Darkness. The six goddess sisters were all present. They were all wearing elegant dresses today, so they looked especially divine. Well, except for maybe one of them. In Rakti’s case, it felt like I was

watching over my little sister trying her best at her school festival. It reminded me of Yukina back in kindergarten. She was a bundle of energy back then.

“You are unable to move your body because the ground you stand on is still ambiguous. Please come to where I am next time.”

Basically, I needed to redo the blessing ceremony at the head earth temple. Since I couldn’t move, the Goddess of Fire could play with me however she wanted and I just had to put up with it. Well, I was more than happy... But I couldn’t have them reading my mind. The Goddess of Light was looking more and more displeased, while the Goddess of Water gave me a cold stare. Meanwhile, the Goddess of Earth gazed at us with an amused grin.

You’re putting your dignity as goddesses to waste, I thought, and then the Goddesses of Light and Water promptly coughed and straightened their backs. The Goddess of Earth remained unchanged, though.

Honestly, the biggest blow was how she relentlessly looked at me with those kind eyes. I could bear with the others getting angry at me much more easily than this.

The Goddess of Fire probably just wanted to tease me. She was treating me like her younger brother just as how I treated Rakti like my younger sister. That made me glad, but she wasn’t letting go of me, so I had no choice but to continue the conversation like this.

I asked about what happened to the wind temple, but unfortunately, the Goddess of Wind didn’t know anything from after she was defeated. The fact that she had helped so many of her followers escape was the only silver lining. That was no surprise, though. I’ll inform Haruno about this tomorrow morning, but for now I needed to speak with the Goddess of Water.

“May I ask if you received our request for an audience with you?”

“I did... but you don’t need to speak so formally, little brother.”

“Little... brother?” They really were thinking of me as a brother? Maybe they thought so because I could enter the sanctuary like them.

“That’s right! Call me your big sis!” the Goddess of Wind chimed in, but I wasn’t really feeling it. Maybe with the Goddesses of Light, Fire, Water, and

Earth, sure. She was apparently the third oldest, but her appearance certainly didn't suggest it. Of course, Rakti would be the other little sister here.

"I'm your big sister too, you know?!"

"Uh, that's not gonna work..." Even the Goddess of Wind agreed on that one.

The Goddess of Water got us back on track with an "*Ahem.*"

"Well then, I recommend that you all return to the surface for now."

"...Can I ask the reason?"

The Goddess of Water remained silent for a while, but eventually started speaking again. "If I do not tell you, you would try to find out by yourself... In that case, I shall explain."

Was she hesitant to talk about this? I could barely tell, since her expression was always unchanged. Thinking back, I only remembered seeing a different expression on her face when she threw the flipbook at me.

"The demon lord's army is currently visiting me," she said as if it was an everyday occurrence.

"What?!"

"It is nothing to be surprised about. They have come to negotiate—to establish trade with us."

"T-trade...?" That came from left field. Well, this is a country of demi-humans, so maybe it wasn't so shocking. I had no choice but to hear her out right now.

"...Are you asking us to not interfere because you're negotiating with the demon lord's army?"

The Goddess of Water replied in a quiet voice, "Are you implying that I would establish harmonious relations with the ones who abandoned my youngest sister...?"

Her eyes were lit like a fireplace burning with rage. And here I thought she represented water.

The Goddess of Fire was essentially acting as my bodyguard with her hug, but that only made the Goddess of Water feel even more intimidating. Rakti had

already hidden herself behind us. The Goddess of Wind also went from standing by her to standing next to us. Only the Goddess of Light and Earth remained composed.

“Now now, my sister. Please calm yourself.”

Just when I was thinking about changing the topic, the Goddess of Earth alleviated the situation with her soothing voice. The Goddess of Water returned to her senses and gave a little cough.

“Dear little brother, don’t mistake her for being cool and collected, now. My little sister embodies the wrath of the raging rapids despite how she looks,” the Goddess of Wind whispered in my ear. That was naive thinking, though.

“I’d be just as enraged if the same thing happened to Yukina, you know?”

“Oh no! You’re one of them!”

Yep. I’m the big *brother here.*

The Goddess of Wind drew back from me, but the Goddess of Fire looked at her quizzically.



“I’m mad about this, too. Wouldn’t you also shoo the demons away if they came knocking?”

“Well, I guess... Oh, but I can’t forgive the sacred family, either.”

“Of course, that is fine,” the Goddess of Light said, nodding.

Hey, watch out, sacred family. You made her angry. The goddess sisters sure were close, though certain followers kept making trouble under the guide of their faith in the Goddess of Light.

Besides that, there was one thing on my mind. The demon lord’s army had apparently come here to negotiate, but this was the bottom of the ocean. How in the world did they manage to get here?

“Can demons move freely underwater, too? I really doubt that’s the case.” The only possibility was that there was some species of demon equipped to live underwater like the gillmen or bathynomus.

“It’s the water veil that Clena uses, Touya. Demons can use spirit magic, too.”

“Oh yeah... But wait, wouldn’t it still take a long time for them to get here?”

“Well... what if they had a loooot of MP?” Rakti sounded unsure, but now I knew that it wasn’t impossible. If it was a particularly strong demon, then they might be able to use an acceleration spell as well.

“If that’s the case, then they must be someone important... Who is it? Could it be the Flame Devil?” I think he had a terrible personality. Though I’d never met him before.

“...What do you plan to do with that information?” the Goddess of Water asked with her usual stoic expression. Her gentle tone bore few inflections.

“I’ll go save you if I think you’re in danger. I couldn’t have done anything about the Goddess of Water, but we’re physically within reach of each other right now. I’d do it.”

“I see... Sister, don’t make that smug face behind him. It’s irritating.”

Not much of a reaction, I thought before the Goddess of Fire got told off. I wonder what sort of face she had made? At least I could tell by the atmosphere

that she approved of my suggestions.

“Oh, and don’t worry about me. I’ve barely had any power since I departed from Athena, anyway. I left the rest in Haruno’s hands!”

The Goddess of Wind sure was carefree. I should let Haruno and the others know her thoughts tomorrow morning.

As the Goddess of Water gazed at us brightening up the atmosphere, she sighed and said, “The one visiting me right now is... the Demon Dog.”

The Demon Dog, one of the Five Great Demon Generals alongside the Flame Devil. If someone that important was on the job, then the demon lord’s army must be preparing to make their move right now. What were they trying to get out of establishing trade here? We might as well go and see for ourselves.

Fourth Bath – The Secret Lies Beyond the Steam

The next morning, I awoke to a suffocating pressure. I opened my eyes to find Haruno's and Clena's faces to my right and left. There was zero space between us. Apparently they had turned around in their sleep and eventually ended up leaning into me. Oh, Haruno was drooling. She was normally so virtuous, so a face like this was a rare sight. I was happy knowing that she could relax herself so much here.

Meanwhile, I was trying my best to not look down. I did take a quick glance, but no more. Both of their pajamas were loose fits, exposing their chests. They were bulging into something impressive right now as they squeezed against me.

I would be getting up by now, but they were coiled around my arms so much that I could barely move. I'd wake them up if I tried. I could tell that my face was doing its own comedy routine right now.

Perking my ears to my surroundings, all I could hear were the faint sighs of sleep. No one else had woken up yet. Alright then, I might as well pretend to have fallen asleep again and enjoy my fill of these exquisite sensations. ...The problem was that these two girls were feigning sleep, too.

In the end, we pretended to be asleep until everyone else got up and made breakfast, and Daisy kicked me in the head. I could sometimes tell that the girls were feigning sleep, but couldn't bring myself to ask if they were awake.

"...Are you okay? I can heal you, come over here."

"Uugh... your head is too hard!" Daisy had taken the brunt of her own kick. After I healed her, she plopped herself on my head and we went downstairs.

We ate a light breakfast, and then I told everyone about my dream from last night. Haruno's party breathed a sigh of relief when I relayed the Goddess of Wind's message. Needless to say, the most shocking bit of information was that the Demon Dog, one of the Five Great Demon Generals, had come to the water capital.

"A demon general is here?!"

Hey now, don't slap your hands on the table and lean over it. I can't tell where to look since your shirt is so loose... Haruno was staring me in the eye, while I couldn't focus on anything on her body for half a second. We continued our little skit until Rulitora presented a question as he munched on a piece of jerky.

"And did the Goddess of Water ask you to do anything?"

"Yeah, she suggested that we return to the surface. Though I told her that we'd come rescue her if the situation looks dangerous."

"Mhmm. Dangerous, huh..." Rulitora thought about something as he dangled the jerky in his mouth. He was probably wondering what "dangerous" meant here.

"Apparently they came here to establish a trade agreement."

"Do you believe that?"

"I'm not sure." Judging from everything we'd seen thus far, they were most definitely up to something. However, this was a move they'd never made before, so I was honestly at a loss.

"If they really are negotiating a trade agreement, then we shouldn't barge in..."

"Yeah, but only if it's true..."

"And that's the problem right now." The only thing I could say for sure was that they wanted to meet with the Goddess of Water for whatever reason. We needed to plan our next moves while considering what the Demon Dog's goal might be.

Alright, let's put this in order. First, was it possible that the demon lord's army really did want to establish trade here? After I brought this up, Clena grabbed a certain book from the bookshelf.

"Hey, this diary..."

The book was a diary from a merchant who had amassed his fortune through trade. Reading further, we learned that he traveled between Hades and Ares in a caravan, using Neptune as his base of operations. He still led the caravan even after establishing his wealth, and apparently that was so that he could enjoy

delicacies from various lands. He had put a lot of focus into writing about those delicacies. He mentioned that the demon lord had been summoned, and that a festival in Hades was held to celebrate it. We could tell through the merchant's writing that he was excited at the opportunity to make some sales.

He continued writing about his caravan's travels after that, which meant that Hades still traded normally with its neighboring countries even after the demon lord, Amann Naga, was summoned. He even wrote that he had a contest with a merchant from Hephaestus and lost, implying that Hades' trading partners weren't just Ares and Neptune. Rakti didn't descend to her corporeal form very often back then, so she had no idea of these events.

"Their economy was pretty normal, huh..." Haruno mumbled as she flipped through the pages. Thanks to the Goddess of Light's blessing, she could also read ancient texts from this world.

"Considering that, maybe it isn't too weird for them to have come here asking to trade...?"

"Putting aside the fact that this is the bottom of the ocean, at least."

"Hmm, the water capital's location wasn't exactly a secret back then either..."

"But they didn't trade, right?"

"If they did, then the bathynomus would have been mentioned in here."

"Oh, you're right."

I see, it made sense for the demon general to be negotiating a trade agreement in itself. Even the demon lord's army needed a way to fund themselves. However, it didn't make sense for them to choose the water capital. We couldn't deny the possibility that this was a trap, either.

In that case, let's discuss the chance that this is a trap next. For example, they might be asking to trade as a way to arm themselves before an attack. That was definitely possible. There were many ways to do it, such as hiding some soldiers among their merchants. Though I didn't know how effective that strategy might be, considering this was the ocean.

"Besides arming themselves... there's also the chance that they want to have

spies infiltrate the city.”

“Right. They might not want to attack, but use this place as a strategic ground.”

“Don’t spies gather information and then fight with a spy from somewhere else?”

“...What movie did you learn that from?”

“It’s from a game.”

Yukina was mistaken about a spy’s job, but everyone else was even more clueless about what we were talking about. They were all wearing quizzical expressions. Movies and games were a topic for just the three of us.

Then, Rakti timidly raised her hand. “Umm... I think there’s one more possibility. The gillman back at the island mentioned that the Dark Prince has been searching for a way to revive the demon lord.”

“...Oh.” Crap, I forgot about that one. I figured they would need the power of light or darkness or something to do it like how Rakti was unsealed, but that was just me being blinded by preconceptions. Everyone else was looking perplexed, too. Come to think of it, we didn’t even know what state the demon lord was in right now. I wouldn’t be surprised if the key to his revival was something the Goddess of Water could provide.

“So maybe the Demon Dog is working under the Dark Prince’s orders, too.”

“He’s apparently the son of the demon lord himself, so it’s very possible.”

“Now what? There’s much more of a chance that this is a trap.”

“More specifically, even if it’s not a trap, we have to make our move.” It was only conjecture to say that this was related to the demon lord’s revival, but we couldn’t overlook it, either. On the flip side, it was very unlikely that they just wanted to trade for the sake of it.

“It’s decided. Everyone, we’re going to see the Goddess of Water.”

“But this capital is really big, isn’t it? Do you know where to go?”

“Let’s ask the gillman who brings us our food.” We could have asked the one

who brought us breakfast, but oh well. We started making preparations while waiting for the next one.

“Okay, let’s get ready. In the worst case scenario, we might have to fight a demon general. Rulitora, help ready our weapons.”

“Understood.”

“Rium, check the supplies on the Grande Nautilus.”

“Okay... I’ll ask the ketolts to help.”

As long as we were suspecting the demon lord’s army of planning something, we couldn’t deny the possibility of a battle. I finally stood up, having finished my preparations, but then Daisy plopped herself down on my shoulder.

“Hey, what if it’s not a trap and they really did come here to talk about trading? What’ll you do after you barge in?” she inquired.

That was indeed a problem. I had a plan, though.

“If that’s the case, then that means they’re open to discussion. All we have to do is talk to them normally. We have an excuse, too.”

“An excuse? Oh, like Rakti wanting to meet the Goddess of Water?”

That could work too. If the situation called for it, I could change our excuse to that. However, depending on their attitude, we could push ourselves a little more. I looked at Clena, which made everyone else do the same. They all wondered what she had to do with it, but I bet Clena knew the answer already. She sighed, giving me an exasperated look.

“Do you really think we can do that...?”

“As long as they’re open to discussion. This might be a once in a lifetime chance, you know?”

“...I guess so. The Demon Dog and Dark Prince are both part of the Five Great Demon Generals, so there’s no better information source than him.”

Yes, that was our excuse to visit the Goddess of Water. Of course, we’d protect the goddess if she was in danger, but this was one more thing we had to try. If we wanted to learn more about the Dark Prince, Clena’s possible father,

then we had no better chance.

“If the Dark Prince really had a kid and then ran off somewhere, you can give him a good talking to.”

“Yeah. First we’ll ask him to admit it, and then ask him to take responsibility as a father.”

“Do you demand child support at times like these?”

“Child support? What’s that?”

A term that didn’t register in this world. This was yet another conversation for just the three of us.

We received our lunch delivery a little before noon. The Goddess of Water already knew we’d be coming, so she sent a cleric who would help guide us there. Our preparations were so that everyone could leave the ship for a brief time. Once we arrived, I’d have to close the door to the Unlimited Bath, or else I couldn’t move from my position.

According to the water cleric, there were two types of routes to get to the Temple of the Goddess of Water: one was a dry route, like the cave we were currently in, and the other was simply traveling through the sea. There were four entrances that eventually spread out across the mountain like a fish net. I asked why there were so many paths, and the cleric answered that it was simply because the Goddess of Water lived in the temple. In that sense, it was more like a castle.

The temple also had a room as spacious as our current cave, so everyone who wasn’t directly meeting with the Goddess of Water could wait there. The ones meeting with her would be the people who had a direct connection to the goddesses—Rakti, Haruno, Prae, and I. Next was Clena, who had a connection to the demon lord’s army. Yukina, Rulitora, Roni, Rium, Sera, and Daisy made up the rest, for a total of eleven. I was worried about leaving all the non-combatants behind, but with the three temple knights, the ketolts, and the glaupis warriors, they should have enough bodyguards.

We set off with the water cleric as our guide. Since the water capital was so vast and would take some time to traverse, we asked the cleric to board the

Grande Nautilus as well. I stood on the deck and asked the cleric more about what the current situation was like.

“So the demons visited to talk about trade? How has that been faring?”

“...They’ve made absolutely no progress. You see, the goddess...”

“She’s not willing to accept or back down, huh?”

“H-heavens no! I would never be so insolent as to guess what the goddess is thinking...!” the cleric said in a fluster. If he were human, he’d be wiping the sweat off his forehead with a handkerchief right now. He was a gillman though, and I didn’t think they sweated.

“Have the demons been silent this whole time, meow?” Pardoe asked from the rudder, which made the cleric droop his shoulders even more. As an aside, Mark was currently in charge of the radar.

“I do not know... But at this rate, it may be a repeat of what happened to the Goddess of Wind...” I see, it would do them no good if she was surrounded. Maybe that was part of the reason why he was being so cooperative with us.

I had thought as much when I heard the Goddess of Wind talk in my dream, but the goddesses didn’t have much attachment to their corporeal forms. The Goddess of Water surely knew that she was in a risky situation right now. Despite that, she wasn’t taking any action because she wouldn’t mind losing her current body.

But even if she was okay with it, it would come as a huge shock to her followers. The same thing had happened to Prae and her friends. Even Haruno’s party had been affected by it. The people of this capital would absolutely be dismayed. *Geez, could you think about the people who worry for you a little more?*

The goddesses thought of me as a little brother and part of their family, so I wondered if I could say something to her once we were done with this. Maybe I could ask the Goddess of Light to lecture her in my dream? Oh, or maybe it’d be most effective to have Rakti say, “I hate you, sis!” to her. Well, that might have been going too far.

“By the way, how long have these negotiations been going on for?”

“Tomorrow... no, by the day after tomorrow, it’ll have been 20 days.”

“...The Demon Dog sure is patient.” He was pushing the negotiations in earnest. Was he stubborn, or just nice? You could convince me that he really did just want to trade at this rate.

“The Demon Dog might be patient, but what about his companions? Have they gotten mad at him?”

“Well... they’ve been shut away in their room, so I can’t say...”

According to the cleric, the Demon Dog had brought along three subordinates who could all use spirit magic. I recalled the story about a demon general who crossed the sea on foot, then launched a surprise attack against a fortress by the coast. They must have used the same method to get here. The simplest possibility was that they took turns using the water veil to progress. *Seriously, there’s a limit to how much you can brute force your way through something.*

Anyway, if they had such a small party, then I didn’t have to worry for the non-combatants’ safety. I should let everyone else know that the Demon Dog’s subordinates could all use magic, too.

On another note, the water capital sure was huge. Apparently the largest mountain standing in the center of the city was the main temple, but according to the radar, the center was still far ahead. I’d never looked at Jupiter from a bird’s eye perspective before, but the water capital was clearly bigger.

“.....” As I gazed at the radar next to Mark, I realized one thing. “...That story about the demon general who walked across the sea to launch a surprise attack—was that the Demon Dog?”

“I’ve heard the story before, but I do not know their name...”

Unfortunately, the water cleric couldn’t offer any details. Navigating the ocean floor to launch a surprise attack... maybe only one of them could have done it. No, that was a dangerous way of thinking. If multiple people knew how to cast the water veil, then surely others could launch the surprise attack, too.

“Mark, pay attention to our surroundings more closely.”

“Why?”

“There’s a chance that other demon generals have come here. It’d work for them as long as they can use the water veil.”

“I-I see, meow...” The Demon Dog might have been taking his sweet time right now, but maybe he was also waiting for reinforcements. Considering that, figuring out his true intentions was even more vital now. We needed to hurry. I asked Pardoe to pick up the Grande Nautilus’ speed.

We eventually reached the head temple a while after lunch with no signs of an attack against us.

We surrounded the bow of the ship with a water veil and opened the dome to let the guards know that a cleric was already here to guide us. The temple was heavily guarded by gillmen and bathynomus warriors wielding spears. I couldn’t tell if their defenses were up because of the demon army or if they were normally like this.

The water cleric began to lead us to an entrance that would let us avoid crossing paths with the demon army. However, a moment later, Mark shouted at us from his post at the radar.

“Something’s heading toward us from above! There are a lot of them, meow!”

“What?!” I looked at the radar from above Mark’s head and saw that it was indeed detecting several objects above. They were currently about sea level, but were quickly sinking down toward us. At this rate, they’d arrive in only a few minutes.

“Touya! The guards haven’t noticed them yet!”

“...Oh yeah! Summon spirit!” I pressed my hand against a magic crystal, then aimed a starboard cannon upward and fired light spirits through it. The flash of light quickly flew far above us and revealed the shadows of the beings sinking down.

There were several bubbles, each with something like an anchor inside. Figures were riding on each anchor, floating down to our location. The guards had apparently noticed the presence now and had started frantically moving about.

But what were they? They were diving—no, *sinking*—directly toward us,

which meant that they knew where the water capital was located. If that weren't the case, then they would just be on a suicide mission. Judging by the guards' reactions, these people weren't their allies. The most likely possibility was the demon army. The Demon Dog must have used some method to tell the army how to get here.

"Ah..." Haruno gasped as she looked above her, stunned, as if she had just realized something. "Oh yeah, this might be the bottom of the ocean, but it's only a few hundred stuto from the surface... it'd be much faster that way rather than walking here from the shore."

Oh, that's what she was thinking. Considering how the demon army could transport themselves, it'd be much faster for them to head straight down here from sea level rather than walk along the ocean floor from shore. The Demon Dog certainly might have suggested such a route. They could carry anchors and spirit magic users out to sea by ship, then use the water veil and anchor to sink down. That was the army's descent strategy... or sinking strategy?

"...How are they planning to get back?" Daisy asked from atop my head, bewildered. That was my line.

The demon army was rapidly approaching, and now I could see who exactly was sitting on those anchors. Men and women with silver hair, wings, and feathers—the same types of demons as Yukina and Balsamina.

Yukina had told me that she focused MP into her wings to fly, unlike actual birds. Perhaps these demons would do the same to get back home. It made sense as long as they were willing to abandon the anchors.

They sure had this planned out. We weren't going to let them follow through with those plans, though.

"Close the dome! We're going to fight back using the radar!" I ordered everyone to up our defenses and get ready for battle. Now that Clena didn't need to maintain the water veil, the two of us could manage the magic cannons.

We were about to float the ship upward so that the guards wouldn't get caught by stray bullets, when the radar suddenly detected several spirit readings. Not a moment later, the ship shook from a heavy impact.

“Did they hit us?! Clena, prepare for a counterattack!”

“Help me with the light spirits!”

“Oh, right!” I quickly realized her plan and ran toward her. We overlapped our hands together on the same magic crystal.

“Summon spirit!”

“O sparks, pierce them!!”

We combined our spells and fired a beam of light from the cannon on port. Unfortunately it wasn’t a critical hit, but the signals on the radar were in disarray. They might not have known how to react to the sudden light attack.

That was enough for now. The gillmen used the opportunity to rush at the demon army, and the bathynomus followed quickly right behind.

Now we couldn’t keep firing recklessly without getting the guards caught in the blast. I mulled over how we should support the guards when one of the anchors suddenly escaped the fracas and bolted to the ocean floor. The radar picked up a mass of power coming from the anchor. Crap, they were aiming a spell into the skirmish.

“Clena, one more time!”

“Got it!”

We fired another beam of light from the cannon at the bow. However, a blast also came from the anchor at the ocean floor, which collided with our attack and created a giant explosion.

“Kyaah?!” The water trembled and the whole ship wobbled. I planted my feet firmly on the ground and absorbed the vibrations with the Magic Eater, then grabbed Clena’s shoulders as she was about to fall over.

“Where’s the enemy now?!”

“He’s headed to the temple! How fast!!” the cleric wailed in response as he gazed at the radar from beside Mark. The mystery enemy had left the rest of the army behind and was making a beeline to the temple. Judging by his movements, he was the strongest out of their entire group. He was likely their leader.

“...Do you think the guards can handle the rest of them?”

“I-I believe so!”

We risked getting the guards caught in the crossfire if we tried to interfere, not to mention it’d be a bad idea to ignore the temple at this rate. If this mystery enemy managed to find the Demon Dog, they might be unbeatable. Thus, we had only one choice. Everyone around me had seemingly come to the same decision as they resolutely nodded their heads.

“Okay, we’re chasing the enemy into the temple!!” At my command, the Grande Nautilus picked up its speed and approached the temple. We followed the signal of the enemy’s leader past the front gate. The passages inside were barely wide enough to fit the Grande Nautilus. We had to proceed with caution.

According to the cleric, the Demon Dog has used this exact same path. I didn’t think that was a coincidence. They had definitely exchanged some sort of intel.

Meanwhile, the enemy was moving a little too quickly, as his readings were getting farther and farther away from us. Maybe he was flying like Yukina, or using some other movement technique. We frantically chased after the signal, but then the enemy suddenly stopped and produced a giant amount of MP.

“He’s attacking!”

“Prepare a counter...!” Right as I tried to launch a counterattack, a larger tremor than ever before rocked the ship. Everyone besides me couldn’t keep their balance and fell to the floor.

“What happened?!”

“I-I don’t know, meow!”

I tried to open the dome for a peek, but it wouldn’t budge.

“Is something riding on it?” Rulitora asked as he gazed at the dome above. Indeed, the radar was showing that the ship’s hull was pointed slightly downward.

“Don’t tell me he used that attack to make the passage collapse?!”

That was the only possibility. The rubble must have been weighing down on the ship right now.

“He could have crushed the passage around us instead... how reckless,” said Haruno, looking shocked.

I agreed, but we weren’t just going to sit here twiddling our thumbs. “I have a way to get the rubble off the hull of the ship.”

As long as some part of the rubble touched one of the cannons, then I could summon earth spirits to move them. Rock was still rock, even if it was at the bottom of the sea. I made quick work of moving the rubble aside. I utilized the spirits to repair the path enough for the Grande Nautilus to pass through. The enemy had made forward progress in the meantime though, so now he was quite a ways ahead of us.

“The target’s not mewving anymore. But I’m picking up other signals around him!”

“They look like the temple guards... Touya, a battle has already begun!”

“We were too late! Let’s hurry it up!”

We picked up speed with the cleric as our guide. Eventually, we arrived at the end of a canal that led us to a spacious room with breathable air. The light blue walls formed the shape of a half-dome and radiated a faint light. At the opposite end of the room was a large hallway.

I opened the dome of the ship, only to witness the fight that had already broken out. The first sight that leaped into my eyes was the large pools of red blood. There were already many casualties.

“E-everyone! We have to help them!” The water cleric jumped out of the ship in a panic after he saw the tragedy. Sera jumped out after him, quickly followed by Prae. They were fellow clerics, so they couldn’t leave the wounded be. I was still worried about their safety, so I had Sandra, Lumis, and Rin run after them.

Many of the gillmen warriors were surrounding three people in the center of the room. I also noticed that one demon had already been defeated. The demons may have been strong, but the gillmen were no pushovers either.

There were two demons with silver hair and wings, and one large man with bluish-black skin. He was brandishing a cross-shaped lance that looked as imposing as his own physique. I could tell from this distance that they were all

dressed rather shoddily. The tall man seemed to be their leader.

Meanwhile, plenty of gillmen were still left standing. They should be able to overpower the demons at this rate, but...

“The tall guy is our biggest worry, huh.”

“I think... he might be a dark elf.”

“You don’t sound too confident.”

“I’ll spare you the details, but dark elves followed the Goddess of Darkness. His skin color looks the same as what I’ve found in my readings. I’ve never heard of an elf being that big, though.”

Indeed, the elf named Foley in Cosmos’ party was pretty petite. A giant dark elf, huh...

“Wait, is he the Dark Giant?!” If that was the case, then this battle wasn’t just a question of numbers anymore. I wanted to help, but... I couldn’t. As long as people were inside the Unlimited Bath, I couldn’t close the door. I could only move around within the ship—maybe the outer edge of the deck, at best. Our original plan was to make everyone disembark the ship, but those plans were no longer. I couldn’t force everyone who couldn’t fight into the situation outside. However, I could still command the party from here and provide backup with the magic cannons. We had to do *something*. But how do we take on one of the Five Great Demon Generals?

“Sir Touya, I shall volunteer myself...” As I fumbled through my thoughts for a plan, Rulitora offered to take on the dark elf himself.

“...Can you do it?”

“I will. There is no one else as capable.”

“...Please.” There was no time to hesitate. I just had to believe in him for now.

“Rium, be on standby! Get some silver ballistae ready!”

“Understood.”

“I’ll also be on standby at the cannon in front! Rulitora, we’ll fire a blast if it comes down to it!”

“If so, I shall take him down with me...!”

“Don’t you dare! Make sure you dodge it!”

Rulitora nodded, let out a ferocious howl from the bow of the ship, then sprang forth in the direction of the dark elf. I hoped he really acknowledged what I said.

Damn that dark elf, though. If only he had planned his attack a little deeper into the room, then I could have at least let everyone off the ship and acted as Rulitora’s shield. Attack, though? That would be tough. I could already tell from what I’d seen so far that he was an extraordinary warrior.

“Touya, I’ll be going, too. I should be able to take on those other two demons.”

“We’re leaving too.”

Haruno, Clena, Roni, and Yukina said. I was worried about them, but I couldn’t hold them back. The other two demons might not have been as formidable as the dark elf, but they were capable enough to participate in this invasion with him. They had been protecting the dark elf’s back even while they were outnumbered. As long as we could keep the two demons busy, Rulitora had less to worry about. I had to let the girls go to ensure our victory.

“We shall also go forth!” The glaupis knights emerged, now fully armed. Their group could provide cover for the four girls.

I asked the ketolts to leave the helm and guard the door to the Unlimited Bath. My role was to guard Rium, who was on standby at the deck.

“Daisy, stay with Rakti.” She’d risk getting herself in danger if she stuck to me. She must have realized the same thing, as she obediently flew over to Rakti’s shoulder. The two of them could stay on lookout. I couldn’t oversee the entire battlefield alone.

I might as well summon some spirits, too. I’d be using wind spirits today. It was a spell I had learned just this morning. I could summon a giant whirlwind that sliced through the enemies—or so I wished, but the most I could do was redirect some enemy flames, listen from afar, or carry my voice a distance away. I readied the spirits so that they could be fired from the cannons at any

moment, then kept a watchful eye on the battlefield.

“Prepare yourself!!” The flow of the battle had massively changed ever since Rulitora got involved.

“Tch!!”

The dark elf, who had effortlessly swept away countless gillmen with a single swing of his lance, was finally on the defensive now that Rulitora was attacking him. The gillmen watched for an opening and charged at the dark elf all together, but he kicked Rulitora aside and then mowed the gillmen down using the same momentum.

“A lizard... were you on board that odd ship? I even blocked the road for you, yet you still came here to die.” His voice was that of an angry dog who was threatening to bite at any moment. The tone alone conveyed his ruthlessness.

He was about the same height as Rulitora, which was about two heads taller than me. Observing him a little more closely, I noticed that he was barely wearing anything you could call armor. I guess he didn’t have the opportunity to change, but it really emphasized his savage aura. He was slender but had a muscular physique, and his bluish-black skin almost made him look like a bronze statue. His hair was paler than silver, almost white. I suppose it was platinum blonde.

“Do you even know who I am?”

“My master said that you might be the Dark Giant.”

“Huh... Well, you’re absolutely right! Let me give you a little reward!”

So that dark elf really was the Dark Giant. I wasn’t exactly happy about guessing correctly.

The gillmen from earlier couldn’t move after being mowed to the ground. Sera and the other clerics wanted to treat them, but they couldn’t approach since the Dark Giant was still nearby. Haruno’s group was waiting for an opportunity to single out the two demons, but they weren’t having any luck either.

“...But if you knew that and still attacked me, then you must be quite the fool,

eh?”

“Now... I wonder about that!”

In the end, only Rulitora and the Dark Giant made their moves. Their glaive and cross-shaped lance repeatedly clanged against each other. Rulitora seemed to be the only one on the offensive, but the Dark Giant wasn’t breaking a sweat. In fact, he seemed to be merely measuring Rulitora’s strength right now.

But Rulitora wasn’t just attacking mindlessly, either. He relentlessly swung at the Dark Giant and gradually moved their fight deeper and deeper into the room. The clerics used this chance to approach the injured and started treating them.

The two other demons tried to aim for Rulitora’s back, but Clena and Roni, and then Haruno and Yukina, blocked each of them with their own attacks. The glaupis were covering them, so I didn’t need to worry too much about their group.

Our biggest problem was still the Dark Giant. After being pushed back for a while, he finally started to switch up his movements. He effortlessly blocked Rulitora’s attacks, then started parrying them.

Wait, had he purposely let the other demons deal with the rest of us to create a one-on-one fight with Rulitora? Several gillmen were still surrounding them, but he probably didn’t see them as any more than pebbles by the road. He figured he would win as long as he beat Rulitora. Haruno’s group could join the fight if they beat the other two demons, but he must have been confident that he could deal Rulitora a finishing blow before that happened. I didn’t know about that, but if it did happen, it’d be our loss.

In any case, if the Demon Dog showed up around now, then we’d be caught between a rock and a hard place. I’d say we were the ones who needed to hurry up and deal that finishing blow.

“Hey, let me ask you one thing! That armor... is it made of bone?”

“...? Yes, it’s dragon bone...”

“I see, I see... that’s damn nice! Hahahah...!” the Dark Giant suddenly started laughing.

He'd asked a strange question. Why did he care about the armor's materials?

"I've cut apart human bones time and time again, but I've never cut dragon bone before! This sounds like fun... let me test out my 'Human Husk' on it!!"

Not a second after that shout, the Dark Giant shifted his balance and began his attack. Rulitora was almost caught off guard by the sudden shift and switched to defense, but he hadn't lost yet. He used his glaive and the giant jawbone on his armor to parry the ferocious onslaught of attacks that I doubted my Magic Eater would have even been able to withstand.

"Tch, let me cut you down already!"

"I refuse!!"

The next moment, the Dark Giant lost his balance. It was Rulitora's tail. He had used his tail to set up a sneak attack from the ground.

Rulitora used the opening to strike. However, he didn't choose a wide brandish that would have left himself open, but a series of short and quick strikes.

"That's nothing!" The enemy wouldn't be going down so easily, though—he quickly got back up, where their glaive and lance clashed against each other once again. I didn't have to use the wind spirits to hear the sounds of their heavy weapons in battle.

They were on equal footing right now. Rulitora was blocking each and every attack with great agility. However, he couldn't go on forever. His opponent was one of the Five Great Demon Generals—not someone you could simply beat through endurance.

The gillmen were still surrounding them all the meanwhile, but they couldn't find an opening to intervene in this heated battle. The two other demons were plenty capable as well, seeing as they worked directly under the demon general. Haruno's group was gradually wearing them down, but they hadn't decisively won yet. I couldn't jump in, either.

Was there any way to change the flow of this battle and seize victory...? There was. Just one way.

It involved the magic cannons. I could fire a shot directly at the battlefield. That was all I could do. If I missed, I might injure multiple people on our side and catalyze our own defeat. I had to do this, though. We had no idea when the Demon Dog would arrive.

My palms were sweaty as I wrapped my hand around the magic crystal. I couldn't fire right now. The fallen gillmen were still in the way.

I used wind spirits to tell Sera's group to move the injured away from the line of fire. They promptly started carrying the gillmen away, but the Dark Giant would notice their movements soon enough. The water cleric must have told our plan to the gillmen who were closer to the fight, as they surrounded the group at more of a distance to hide the clerics' movements. However, our opponent wasn't naive. I shouldn't assume that this was buying us any more time.

I waited for a good time to tell Haruno's group my plan. They immediately led their battles away from the line of fire.

Alright, even Yukina was properly fighting. Haruno was leading their battle, but she was doing an excellent job supporting her from behind.

Haruno really was impressive, though. The demon was firing spell upon spell at her, but everything bounced off of her and vanished. That must have been her Unlimited Reflection. It was proving extremely useful in a real battle.

The demon they were fighting could wield both magic and swords—a magic knight. Their opponent's sword skills weren't half bad, but Haruno had a slight upper hand when it came to pure swordsmanship.

Meanwhile, Clena and Roni's fight had the opposite development. They were also fighting a magic knight, but Clena had quickly broken their opponent's sword in half. Roni kept darting to the demon's flank for an attack, but since neither of them could nullify spells, they had yet to find the opportunity to deal a decisive blow.

Rulitora had gradually been getting pushed back. I wouldn't be able to help him even if my voice could reach. He didn't have the spare attention to listen right now.

Of the two demons, the one Haruno's pair was fighting excelled at swordsmanship, while the one Clena's pair was fighting excelled at magic. Had they switched, their battles might have ended already, but things weren't going according to plan. We couldn't exactly have them trade places, either. They had put a good distance between the two battles by now, most likely so that the demons couldn't communicate with each other.

However... I could still intervene. No matter how fast and strong they were, they still didn't hold a candle to the Dark Giant.

"Summon spirit...!" I raised my hands in the air and generated two balls of light. This was the time for light spirits. I could control them as long as they remained within my sights. I guided the spheres of light closer to each demon from above. They would actually be difficult to notice from there, especially since they were so focused on battle at the moment.

"Now!" Once the spheres were above each demon's head, I quickly dropped them. Each ball of light drew an arc and slammed themselves right in the back of each demon's head. Of course, they had no way to guard themselves from an attack they didn't notice. That one hit didn't do much damage, but...

"We're not letting..."

"...that chance go!"

...it was more than enough to create a distraction for the girls to use. In the one moment the demons stopped in their tracks, the four girls dashed directly toward them.

Clena pierced her opponent from the side, then Roni used a knife for the finishing blow. Haruno knocked the sword out of her opponent's hands, then Yukina fired an explosion of dark spirits at point-blank range in their face. Dark spirits could rob someone of their consciousness. There was no way the demon could resist at that range.

Alright, the four girls were finally free. Now we just had to deal with the Dark Giant, but that wouldn't be easy. Rulitora was trying his best to gain the upper hand, but he wasn't quite accomplishing it. The only sounds around us were their weapons ringing in the air. No one else could even say a word. Needless to say, none of them could interrupt the fight, either. If they tried, they'd just

throw off the balance of the battle.

It'd be great if Rulitora could win for us, but judging by the battle right now, it wasn't going that way. That was simply their difference in strength. In fact, it was impressive that he'd managed to hold out until now.

Thanks to Sera and the other clerics, all of the injured had been transported to safety. The line of fire was all clear. I could shoot any time. However, there was nothing I could do. If only we could create some distance between them...! And then, the wind spirits carried a voice to my ear.

"...?!" Its message was shocking, but I had no time to spare.

I aimed the magic cannon. My target was the Dark Giant, but Rulitora was entwined in battle right next to him. He would no doubt get caught in the blast.

"...I'll trust you! Blazing Dance!!"

Even so, I fired. A heat ray soared from the cannon to the two still caught in their fight. The fire was as hot and powerful as I could muster. The scorching light was about to envelope them both. However, at the last moment, a figure suddenly appeared before Rulitora as his shield.

It was Haruno. She had used the wind to dash to that spot.

"Unlimited Reflection!!" Half of the heat ray was deflected—yes, just the part that would have hit Haruno and Rulitora.

Even one of the Five Great Demon Generals couldn't intercept a surprise attack during a sword fight, so he was swallowed up by the light before he could even scream. He was no longer bluish-black, but a "dark giant," just like his namesake. Well, that attack had come at the speed of light. If he had managed to avoid it, then we had no chance of winning. Haruno was the impressive one for making it in time. Was that the power of the Goddess of Wind?

Yes, the voice from earlier had been Haruno's. "I can do something about it, so fire at Rulitora too," she said. I had honestly been terrified, but I was glad it worked out.

Oh, but we shouldn't let our guards down just yet, I told everyone using the wind spirits. The dark elf wasn't moving one bit, but I bet Phoenix could revive

from that state. *Though he was special...* I thought, and suddenly—

“Gaaaah!!”

I knew it wouldn’t be so easy.

The Dark Giant roared and swung his cross-shaped lance, the one with the unsettling name “Human Husk,” but no one was around him anymore. Everyone was keeping their distance.

I had seen this coming. I might as well fire another shot.

“Alright then, one more time!”

In any case, he had sustained a lot of damage. Every last inch of the Dark Giant’s body was engulfed by the heat ray. I shot through the wall behind him as well, but I can fix it later, so please don’t yell at me.

“That one had to have done it, right...?”

The temperature of the room had risen after two Blazing Dances. But I still couldn’t take my eyes off the Dark Giant, and didn’t even let myself wipe the sweat off my forehead.

Everyone stared at him silently. The waves crashing against the ship sounded painfully loud. The magic crystal was cold. My sweaty hands must have been cooling it.

The one who eventually broke the eternity of silence was the Dark Giant. His charred body was finally... *not* breaking apart?! He was trying to stand using the lance as a cane! Rulitora and the others braced themselves for battle again. I also readied myself for a third blast, but stopped. The Dark Giant hadn’t moved another inch from his stance. Was he... trying to die while standing? I hadn’t imagined that I would witness something like this ever since coming to this world.

Rium came to my side, then used something that looked like opera glasses to peer at the scene, but she confirmed that he wasn’t moving a muscle. Rakti also borrowed the glasses for a look.

We should be fine now, I was about to tell everyone, but then Rakti jumped onto me.

“H-his finger moved!”

“He’s still alive?!”

We both shouted unwittingly. How robust was he?

I bet the rest of them heard us even without the wind spirits. After a stir, they all put their guards up again.

I couldn’t tell if he was feigning his own death or if he had lost consciousness for a bit, but the Dark Giant roared again and lifted his lance. He was covered from head to toe in wounds. His breathing was ragged. However, his eyes still possessed a fierce glare. I didn’t think he’d simply collapse again at this rate.

This was now a test of endurance. The Blazing Dance used up a lot of my energy, but I’ll keep firing them until he never got up again.

“Stop there, brother.”

However, right when I pressed my hand against the magic crystal, a familiar voice rang in my ears. Before I could put a name to the voice, water started gushing in from the hole I had created in the wall.

“What...?!” The water flowed toward the Dark Giant and the two demons as if it had a mind of its own, then swallowed them all and brought them toward me. “This is bad...!”

It was too late to move the Grande Nautilus out of the way. I quickly hugged Rakti, Rium, and Daisy tight to shield them with my own body.

A second later, the raging stream rocked the ship. I firmly kept my balance and protected the girls from the swaying as best I could. When the rocking subsided, the Dark Giant’s body was nowhere to be found. I asked the gillmen, who didn’t see where he had gone off to either, but our entire party was unhurt.

“Do not worry. I let them rise back to the surface.”

The same voice entered my ears again. I looked toward the opposite side of the room, where a large ball of water had emerged from the hallway.

“I knew it...”

“Sister...!”

Yes, the figure inside the ball of water was none other than the Goddess of Water who I had met in my dreams. The raging stream from just now must have been her doing.

I noticed that something was protruding from the ball of water. Or rather, the ball itself extended to form something like a thread. I looked to see what was on the other end of the thread, then inadvertently mumbled, “That’s surreal...” Everyone else in the room kept glancing at each other, unsure of how to react either.

“Woof...”

Yes, the Goddess of Water had brought a large dog along with her. The water leash wrapped itself around its huge body.

“...Uh, Rium. Take Rakti with you to the Goddess of Water.” I stared blankly for a while, then came to my senses and gave out an order. Rakti could tell the Goddess of Water about everything that had just transpired.

In the meantime, I let everyone out of the Unlimited Bath so that I could finally move around. The ketolts and glaupis helped everyone off the ship. Since I couldn’t disembark just yet, I stayed on the deck and watched the radar to make sure no more enemies were coming. Fortunately I picked up nothing from the canal, and all the movement I could see in the room was Sera and the other clerics treating the injured.

The four girls, including Yukina, had gone to speak with the Goddess of Water. From what I could pick up using the wind spirits, Haruno was giving her thanks for letting them take shelter here. I’d need to say my own words of appreciation later, too. After they were done, Yukina flew back to my side.

“Touya, it looks like the battle outside is already over, too. The Goddess took all the demons and sent them on a current back to the surface.”

“...Does that mean she’s invincible as long as she’s underwater?”

Come to think of it, Rakti had lost her powers because the country that believed in her, Hades, had fallen to ruin. The land was now a barren desert that people called the “void.” On the other hand, the Goddess of Water was in

her prime since her followers lived in all the seas throughout the world. I didn't know the ratio between water and land on this planet, but the land had to be split between the five other goddess sisters, while the Goddess of Water had sole control over all of the water. She must have been the goddess with the most followers out of all of them. No wonder she was so strong.

The dog seemed to be grumbling about something to the Goddess of Water. I used the wind spirits to listen in again—the dog was saying that one of his demon cohorts had leaked information to the Dark Giant without his knowing. Judging by their conversation, he must have been the Demon Dog. So he could talk like a normal person, huh.

"What's wrong, meow?"

"...No, it's nothing."

The ketolts looked exactly like cats on the outside, so he must have been from some similar race. The Goddess of Water had gone out of her way to catch him, so we might as well ask him some questions later. No more enemies had shown up on the radar by the time all the glaupis exited the ship safely, so I finally walked toward the Goddess of Water for a belated greeting.

"Thank you very much. You helped all of us."

"Do not worry. You seem to have saved some of my followers as well."

I came here thinking that the Goddess of Water was in trouble after hearing about the Demon Dog in my dream last night, but maybe we hadn't needed to. She must have said that she recommended we go back to the surface because she knew she could handle this herself.

"...The five of you, come with me," she pointed to Rakti, Haruno, Prae, Clena, and me. Maybe she already knew that Clena had something to do with the demon lord. The rest of us had close connections to the goddesses.

The goddess guided us deeper inside the temple. The rest of our group would be taken care of like guests, so I let the clerics handle it.

The Demon Dog was obediently following the goddess, still trapped within his water leash. He looked like a big dog standing up, but he was walking on two legs like it was the most natural thing in the world. He was much taller than the

ketolts, reaching up to about my chin. As far as breeds went, I'd say he looked close to a Shiba Inu.

I asked Clena if Shibas existed in this world, and she responded that a similar variety of sweep dogs lived in the mountains in the south. Huh, so I guess they did exist.

"I think the Demon Dog is a lycaon."

"The same race as Roni...? Does that mean he's a 'dark lycaon' or something?"

"Actually, Roni would be a 'light lycaon.' It's the opposite relationship that the elves and dark elves have."

Apparently lycaons who had the full visage of a dog or wolf were the original ones. Roni's race had transformed into a form closer to that of a human's after they started following the Goddess of Light. I think I'd heard the story somewhere before.

We kept our pace behind the Goddess of Water as she led us through many branching passageways, until we finally arrived at a dead end. There was a wall of water, and even though nothing was keeping the water in place, it wasn't streaming out into the hallway.

The ball of water surrounding the Goddess merged with the rest of the wall as they intersected, and then she walked farther inside. She then created a tunnel out behind her so that the rest of us could walk through, though Prae had to crawl on all fours.

Inside, my vision was immediately swamped with deep blue. I squinted and looked around to see that the room was a half-dome shape. The Goddess of Water walked to the center of the dome and turned around so that her thin water veil and the Demon Dog faced us.

"Now then... you all have questions you would like to ask the Demon Dog, don't you? Go ahead, I have him captured here for you." The Goddess of Water cut right to the chase. She could read my mind, which made things easier.

Well, I may as well take her up on her hospitality. I had a mountain of questions for this dog.

The Demon Dog was also getting into the mindset as he drooped his ears and said, “Umm, as long as it’s something I can answer?” He really did seem a lot more harmless than the Dark Giant. He wasn’t just frightened of us either. In fact, he seemed rather composed.

“You can go first, Touya.”

“Yeah, I can wait.”

Haruno and Clena urged me to be first batter.

“You had said that one of your companions leaked information without your knowledge... but in that case, why would a demon send a spy to a fellow member of the demon army?” I phrased it to frame the Demon Dog as the victim in this incident, but there was still a chance that he was lying.

“Well, there are actually two factions within the demon lord’s army right now. I’ll leave it up to you to believe my words or not.”

“So the Dark Giant was part of another faction?”

“That’s the case... Oh, but I act as a mediator so that fights don’t break out between the two factions, so you could say I’m a neutral party, or something to that effect.”

All of us looked toward Rakti. As soon as she noticed, she shook her head and exclaimed, “I don’t know! I really don’t!”

I’d heard that the Olympus Alliance wasn’t free of internal conflict either, so I guess it was no surprise that the demon lord’s army was the same...

I was stuck trying to figure out how to continue the conversation when Haruno chimed in. “Um, what are the principles behind each faction?”

“Hmm... using names you all might recognize, the White-Faced Ogre is trying to revive the demon lord.”

The White-Faced Ogre was one of the Five Great Demon Generals that we had barely any information on.

“On the opposite side, some people have been wanting to name the Dark Prince the new demon lord, then have him overthrow the sacred family...”

“A successor, huh? So the Dark Prince really is the demon lord’s son?”

“That was the case in their previous lives, at least...”

“Family bonds don’t change even after you revive,” I said sternly. This was Yukina’s older brother talking.

“...Yes, I agree,” the Demon Dog muttered. His gaze looked a little milder. I glanced at Clena, who was listening to our conversation with an earnest expression.

“Though I’m neutral, I lean toward the White-Faced Ogre’s faction, while the Dark Giant is part of the Dark Prince’s faction...”

So that was why a spy had been sent his way? Assuming his was telling the truth, that is.

Alright, let me ask about the other generals now. “How about the last of the Five Great Demon Generals?”

“Oh, the Flame Devil? I haven’t seen him in about a hundred years... Oh, but he should be part of the White-Faced Ogre’s faction. Though I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s betrayed us since then.”

You’re not very well trusted, Flame Devil.

“He built a tea house near Hephaestus. Though it looked like it had been abandoned for more than a hundred years.”

“What’s that? Never heard of it...”

I figured I should give the Demon Dog some information as well, but he only responded wide-eyed in surprise. So he built that entire tea house without letting any of his comrades know?

Well, that aside... There was one more problem demon.

“What about Phoenix?”

“...Huh? He’s still alive?”

How would he even die? I wanted to ask. He might still be playing dumb though, so I didn’t back down from the interrogation.

“A demon working under him by the name of Balsamina let it slip while she

was running away from us that the Dark Prince was currently trying to revive the demon lord...” I said, which made the Demon Dog’s eyes dart around the room. Did he realize that his statements contradicted what we had heard from Balsamina?

The Goddess of Water tightened the leash, which made him cry, “Eek!” and then he started explaining it to us while fidgeting. “I-I wasn’t lying, you see. The Dark Prince has always done things without rhyme or reason. We weren’t even sure if he had sworn his allegiance to the demon lord back in the day...”

“Yet he’s trying to revive that same demon lord right now?”

“I don’t know. I have no idea why he would be trying to do that...”

We were getting nowhere. What should I do... Oh yeah—

“Your mind is the only one I can read.”

She beat me to the punch. So we couldn’t ask the Goddess of Water to tell us if he was telling the truth or not. And she could only read my mind, huh? I guess that was another side effect of my dreams. I was curious about this new revelation, but first was getting more information from the Demon Dog.

“I don’t think Phoenix has contact with either faction right now... He might have been referring to a time long ago when the Dark Prince had tried to revive the demon lord.”

“You mean Phoenix had outdated knowledge?”

“The Dark Prince only declared that he would become the new demon lord about ten years ago.”

Huh, that was pretty recent. Though I guess that made sense, because any earlier and he might have accomplished his goal already. Even Haruno was having trouble telling from the dog’s face if he was lying right now or not.

“I don’t think we’ll gain any more information by chasing this topic further.”

“Well, we’re not going to get any irrefutable proof, at least.”

Clena was having trouble discerning the truth, too. She said it was fifty-fifty right now. On that note, both Rakti and Prae were thinking that he might not be lying.

“...Can I go next?” Haruno slightly raised her hand. I’ll leave the next part of the conversation to her. “Let’s say you’re telling the truth about there being two factions in the demon lord’s army, and that one of your comrades sent a spy after you. Oh, do you know what ‘spy’ means?”

The Demon Dog nodded, and Haruno gave a slow nod in response.

“So that means that you came here for some purpose separate from the Dark Giant. What might that be?”

I see. Assuming he really wasn’t in cahoots with the Dark Giant, he must have had some other goal in mind.

“Um... that’s what we’ve been saying from the beginning, to make an offer to trade...” the Demon Dog replied timidly, looking a little stunned.

“But why is the demon lord’s army trying to establish trade...?”

“What do you mean? It’s always been like this.”

“Huh?”

“That has always been the demon lord army’s objective. We wanted to use our central location in the continent to advance trading and commerce,” he explained bluntly, without any particular enthusiasm. Even I was almost convinced that he was telling the truth right now. The demon lord army’s objective was to advance commerce? What in the world?

“Wait a second. Didn’t Hades initiate war with its surrounding countries back then?” Though that was only the story passed down by the sacred family... maybe the sacred family had actually instigated the attack.

“Oh... we didn’t mean that, but that might have been how the other countries interpreted our actions...” the Demon Dog drooped his shoulders dejectedly.

“...What does that mean?”

“It was all our trading. The demon lord’s commerce went far too well...”

Commerce going well led them to war?

“For example, even if we were happy with our profits, our neighboring countries wouldn’t have been as pleased on their end. Though I can only reflect

on it like this since it's been so long."

Hold on a second, did he really mean...? Clena was still trying to mull over what he just said, Rakti had her head tilted in confusion, and for Prae, it sounded like nonsensical babble. Only Haruno had arrived at the same conclusion as I did. Her lips trembled as she spoke in a feeble voice.

"Do you mean... the war that the demon lord's army started was... an economic war?"

"Economic... war?"

"It's when you steal or hoard resources to weaken another country's economy... Basically, did the other countries fall to poverty by trading with Hades?" Haruno asked, which made the Demon Dog turn his face away.

I grabbed both his cheeks and forced him to look back our way. How fluffy.

"What did you do?"

"W-we didn't do anything evil! But... in the end, Jupiter allied with other countries to fight against us, so I suppose we went a *liiittle* too far with the trading..." Apparently the Demon Dog was fuzzy on the details of how exactly it had gone down. Haruno and I glanced at each other, as we still had no concrete answers.

We tried asking the two goddesses, too. The Goddess of Water said that she hadn't paid attention to the events above water, but that ships frequently passed by at the time. The country of Ares sat on the opposite end of the bay, on Dragon's Talon Peninsula. It was the first to fall to the demon lord's rule and remained their ally for the duration of the war, so those were most likely trade ships and not warships. Rakti didn't know the details either, but apparently Hades had developed magnificently in the years following the demon lord's summoning, and they lived in an era of peace.

I asked the Demon Dog what kind of business the demon lord conducted, and apparently he had taken ideas from merchants he used to know to develop his own style of a market economy. The Demon Dog said he loved calculating money more than he loved to eat, so he gladly helped develop the demon lord's plan.

Apparently they abolished the countless barricades that kept travelers from freely moving around in the country and established the famous *rakuichi rakuza*, a free market system that encouraged merchants to set up shop. Come to think of it, we had never come across gated communities within a country itself. Maybe the other countries imitated the demon lord's policies after he was sealed.

In addition, he introduced a paper money system and created a bank himself.

I remembered learning about *rakuichi rakuza* in school. It didn't sound like a particularly unfair market system at the time, but I wonder? Haruno also had her head tilted beside me. On the other end, Clena's face had stiffened up.

"What's wrong?"

"I've never heard of paper money or banks... is that different from a moneylender? Um... did the people from 500 years ago even stand a chance against the demon lord's economic policies?"

"Oh..." Even now, 500 years later, this world's culture was still far behind that of the world I had come from.

"Maybe it's like a fantasy medieval Europe?"

"I actually think they've developed exactly into ancient Rome..." According to Haruno, the aqueducts, public bathhouses, and the raver market all were in line with the customs of ancient Rome.

I see, we only thought those business schemes were fair because we were thinking from the perspective of modern Japan. People from 500 years ago would have a wildly different mindset.

When the Demon Dog said that things had gone too well, he must have meant that Hades had gained an enormous profit at the expense of its neighboring countries. That "Demon King of the Sixth Heaven" had plenty of legends about him, so claiming that he wouldn't leave anything half-done, including commerce, was probably more fact than opinion.

"I have one more question. How was the relationship between the demon lord and the temple of darkness? We've heard that he didn't like religion interfering with politics back in our world."

“Hmm, he was hardly the only one to hold that viewpoint.”

“So was he antagonistic toward them?”

“I don’t know about that. He completely separated politics and religion, but I don’t think he was antagonistic...”

Rakti said that she didn’t remember him being particularly unfriendly, either. He did pay them respect, but didn’t tolerate them trying to get involved in politics.

“Hey, Touya...” Clena had something on her mind after that. I was just about to speak to her as well.

“We’re probably thinking the same thing. The Masked Cleric, right?”

Clena nodded in response. We had fought Goldfish, AKA the Masked Cleric, one of the 16 demon generals, back in Hadesopolis. He had claimed that the demon lord started disrespecting the temple of darkness. The demon lord apparently wasn’t antagonistic toward them, but did those in the temple think the same?

The Masked Cleric had led the first sacred king to Hades back then. As a result, the demon lord was sealed and Hades fell to ruin. In other words, the demon lord’s policies had angered the temple. The real story was slowly becoming clearer.

“The world at the time had no way to counter the demon lord’s aggressive business practices, and all the wealth from their surrounding countries fell into Hades’ hands.”

“From the other countries’ perspectives, they were losing money to circulate. Their economy stagnated.” I didn’t understand everything, but that was pretty serious.

“And banks, too... there’s a saying about a merchant of Lombardy who claimed he could create money using magic...”

“People in the past must have thought it was essentially magic...”

The barricades within countries might have been abolished to this day, but banks didn’t remain. The most similar system was converting between money

and gems. Even if they had tried to imitate Hades' policies, no one could have understood how it all worked after the country was destroyed.

A country going through severe recession, but they couldn't understand how. Meanwhile, Hades was flourishing like never before. Perhaps the other nations thought of the demon lord's market as more of a "demon lord's curse."

"Also, his policy of not letting the temple get involved in political matters angered the clerics there."

"I doubt the temple of darkness was the only one who got angry. If the rich were gathering in Hades, that meant the nation itself started gaining more influence."

"So the wealthy wanted to gain more power..."

I didn't feel like we were thinking too hard about this. The leaders of each nation sensed the impending danger, and their temples would have fanned the flames as well. What resulted was an alliance formed with Jupiter as its center, an attack, and the so-called war from the legends. The sacred family's story stated that the demon lord's army initiated the attack, which wasn't exactly false. The demon lord's economy was viewed as just that much of a threat.

All of us looked despondent when we reached that conclusion.

"I feel like we just learned something inconceivable..."

"Me too..."

I was jealous of Prae right now, who kept on smiling as if she hadn't understood a word of this. Rakti was also looking a little perplexed, so she might not have absorbed the whole story either. In fact, Clena might have been an exception to the rule for being able to follow along with us all the way. Oh yeah, maybe that was because she might have been blood-related to the demon lord himself.

"That's all for my questions, but Clena..."

"Ah, yeah. I suppose I'll try asking."

It was now Clena's turn. Needless to say, she'd be asking about the Dark Prince.

She took out her sword together with its sheath, then showed the Demon Dog the crest on its clasp. He stared intently at it, then after a moment, became so shocked that his tail stood on end.

“W-wait a moment. Why do you have this? Did you already fight him? Was he defeated?”

“No, we’re having so much trouble exactly because we can’t find him...” Clena sighed deeply, then explained that this sword was gifted to her mother from her father, that she didn’t know who her father was, and that no one knew his whereabouts right now.

“So you mean...”

“For now, can you tell us if you know anything about the Dark Prince having a child, or if he might have given the sword to another demon?” I added, and then the Demon Dog promptly shook his head in a furious fashion.

“No no no no! Absolutely positively not! There is utterly no way he could have given a sword with the Crest of Five Quinces to someone else!!”

Clena had it in her hands right now, though. Well, Clena’s mother might not have been just “someone else” to the Dark Prince.

However, the Demon Dog had never heard of the Dark Prince having a child before, so we weren’t able to get any more clues regarding Clena’s lineage. Though the Demon Dog seemed convinced that it was true already.

“Do you know anyone else we might be able to ask?”

“I doubt the Dark Giant would know, either... You’ll know as soon as you meet him, though. The demon lord had been in the same situation.”

“Hm? What are you talking about?”

“You see, when we were first summoned to this world, we were transformed into demons.”

The hero of darkness summoning ritual, huh?

“The demon lord and the prince were transformed into different races, but they still knew they were father and son at a glance. I’m not sure how to put it, but you get that instinct.”

Come to think of it, I had recognized Yukina at one glance too. Her hair had turned silver and she gave off a completely different aura, but I was sure of it. So the demon lord and the Dark Prince had gone through the same?

“Do you think it would work with a grandfather and granddaughter, too? Oh, but he’s sealed right now...”

“It should work even if he is sealed. As his granddaughter, you’ll be able to tell. I would absolutely recommend that you go see for yourself, as our possible princess.”

“Does that mean you’ll guide me to where the demon lord is sealed?”

“No, I’m being held captive here... I can tell you the location, so please do travel there yourselves.”

Oh yeah, even though we were talking to him so much right now, he was still the Goddess of Water’s prisoner.

“Do you want to go, Clena?”

“Hmm... It might be dangerous, but I don’t want to let this chance slip by.”

Alright, we’ll go there as long as Clena wished for it. The White-Faced Ogre was likely guarding the demon lord’s body. It’d be easier if the Demon Dog could come with us. I wondered what the Goddess of Water planned to do with him? If she wanted to keep him as a pet, then I’d like to borrow him for the trip.

“I can give him to you if you wish, brother.”

“...Are you sure?”

“I only kept him because you all wanted to speak with him. I would have sent him drifting back to the surface afterward.”

The Demon Dog curled his tail in fear. Well in that case, we’d gladly take him.

The goddess freed him from his water leash. He first walked up to Clena and gave her a bow. It seemed like we wouldn’t have to worry about his behavior.

“So where’s the demon lord sealed?”

“Not far from here. The demon lord is currently in Ares.”

Ares, the nation that allied with the demon lord’s army until the very end. We

had planned to go there next anyway, but now we had one more important goal to accomplish. This visit wouldn’t affect just Clena, but potentially the future of this entire world. My mind was filled with resolve, and I firmly nodded.



Post-Bath – The Author's Booth

Nice to meet you, everyone picking up this series for the first time, and to my long-time readers, apologies for making you wait for so long. I was able to get volume 5 in your hands thanks to all of your support. I hope you enjoyed it.

In this volume, Touya and co. learned the secrets of the demon lord's army, but what do you all imagine when you think of a "demon lord"? A great and dignified king? A wise and kind old man? Maybe someone the hero isn't supposed to fight, but who becomes the heroine of the story? It might be nice for the hero to be a girl, too. In that case, the demon lord might be of the "wise and kind" variety.

Anyway, in *Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension*, I aimed for a demon lord that's "a little weirder than usual, but still fearsome." Perhaps he never intended to be fearsome but was still viewed that way by others, and if the others ended up mistaken in their viewpoints... well, it gets complicated.

This volume cleared up one mystery surrounding the battle between the first sacred king and the demon lord, and personally I wrote it out imagining that it was something the "Demon King of the Sixth Heaven" would actually do. Most people would think of *rakuichi rakuza* if you mentioned the Demon King of the Sixth Heaven and economics. He was often considered a strongly business-minded person due to all that.

On another note, Haruno appeared on the cover for the first time in four volumes after our hero finally reunites with her, but did you notice one little thing different about her from the cover of volume one? If you haven't figured it out yet, try comparing her with volume one's cover. It was mentioned in the volume itself, too.

Thank you so much to Masakage Hagiya, who not only drew the beautiful cover but the stunning two-page color spread of the bath scene, to my new editor Y, and to everyone who was involved in the publishing and selling of this book.

It'll be getting hot by the time this volume goes on sale. Make sure you don't get heatstroke, stay healthy, and enjoy the rest of summer full of energy.

Nagaharu Hibihana, May 2017.



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Mixed Bathing in Another Dimension: The Turbulent Underwater Baths by Nagaharu Hibihana

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