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KARINA
HALF-DWARF SLAVE
AISHIA
DWARF MERCHANT
SATIE
PROPRIETOR OF SHUNRAI
HARUMIKAZUCHI
RANK C ADVENTURER
BLADE
???
GODDESS


JUST FOR GOOD MEASURE, I GRABBED MY OWN CHEST AND GAVE IT A SQUEEZE.
DAMN, THAT'S SOFT...
"WAIT, BUT I'M A GUY! WHAT GIVES?!"

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Tutorial

“Ah ha ha! Some ‘God of Destruction’ *you* are! Compared to the real deal, you’re just a two-bit weaaakling!”

“Eeeep!”

As I mocked the terrified old man in front of me—well, I say “I,” but it was actually the goddess currently possessing my new female body—he began to gradually disassemble as though he were made of Lego bricks. That’s not a figure of speech, by the way—he really was disintegrating into tiny blocks without a drop of blood being spilled, starting from his fingers and toes. In fact, his right arm had already completely dispersed up to the shoulder.

I guessed this was the power of spatial magic, the divine blessing I’d been granted.

Let’s pause for a moment to describe the scene: There’s a magnificent, ornate temple. A frail-looking geezer dressed in gaudy and glittering apparel, calling himself the god of destruction, stands in the center. And a plain-looking girl with straight black hair—no more striking than a village NPC at a glance—stands in front of him, harassing him.

A plain-looking girl—in other words, me.

The old man’s eyes, at first lecherously glued to my chest, were now wide with bewilderment and fear. With his remaining arm, he desperately attempted to gather up the flesh-and-blood-colored blocks scattering the floor. Before he could, however, I mercilessly delivered a powerful kick to his chest, sending him through the air as easily as a soccer ball. He slammed into one of the temple’s pillars with a “Gyack!”

“J-Just what kind of monster *are* you?!” he whimpered. “P-Please, have mercy!”

“Seriously? A little spell like that should be child’s play for the self-proclaimed God of Destruction, right? Oh, what’s that? You can’t recover? Ah ha ha! How pathetic! What a weaaakling! You honestly thought a small fry like you could pass yourself off as my beloved, the *real* God of Destruction?! Well, you thought

wrong, and now it’s time for your divine punishment! BAAAM!”

As an utterly gleeful voice sprang from my mouth, I picked up a piece of debris that had been falling indefinitely through a pair of portals I’d created and smashed it down a hair’s breadth away from the old man, scaring him out of his wits.

“Eeeep! Oh, please, spare me!”

“Ah ha ha! What’s wrong? Not gonna fight back? I don’t mind, you know—do your worst!”



“F... Fireball!” the man cried out, sending an orb of fire my way. But before it could reach me, it was abruptly extinguished upon hitting a solidified mass of space similar to an invisible wall.

“Well, not that I’ll let you hit me,” I said with a smirk.

“M-My Psychokinesis...was ineffective?!”

“Oh, that was your attempt at an attack? Sorry, my bad. Ah ha ha.”

Apparently I could solidify my body as a separate entity from the rest of space-time, rendering all outside forces ineffective. That also included an object’s weight—under this spell, I could lift a piece of debris as though it were utterly weightless, and if one hit me as a projectile it would smash into pieces upon making contact with my body.

Such was the might of the completely broken offensive and defensive buff known as “I Am the Star.”

My right hand suddenly swiped sideways, and despite being a distance away, the old man’s body split cleanly at the torso. Once again, there was no blood.

The geezer let out a shriek. “Eeek! M-My body’s...!”

“Ah ha ha, relax. Your upper and lower halves are still connected by space, so you’re not dead just yet. Although I can sever the connection at any time. Tee hee.”

“H-Help! Someone help...”

“No one’s coming to help you. This pocket of space is currently cut off from the rest of the world! Oh, here, let me restore your arm—copy, flip, aaand attach!”

With just a clap of my hands, a copy of the old man’s left arm appeared out of thin air, flipped itself around, and attached itself to his right shoulder—blood vessels, nerves, and all. Once the process was complete, it looked indistinguishable from his right arm before it had been dismantled.

Whoa, my head feels all woozy. I guess all that must’ve taken a pretty big toll on my mind.

“Hey, you okay?” I said to myself. “This is basically the tutorial, so this is all basic stuff so far.”

Did you just say “basically,” O Goddess?

“Oh, come on, I just misspoke. It’s a real tutorial! You’re learning stuff, aren’t you?”

Even after calling myself out in my mind, I—or rather, the

goddess controlling me—replied with a giggle.

I couldn't really argue with her—I was indeed learning stuff.

"So you see, you can copy someone's body, infinitely reproducing them! This way, you can inflict as much harm on them as you please! That said, copying normally uses up a bunch of MP, but for instructional purposes I've granted you *infinite* MP! See? Doesn't this feel like a tutorial?"

Right...this was nothing more than a helpful tutorial from the Goddess to show me how to use my new powers. It definitely *wasn't* a thinly veiled attempt to exact revenge upon a foolish old man misappropriating her lover's name... But wait a minute, wasn't defeating the "false God of Destruction" supposed to be my ultimate goal?

Uh, Goddess... What happened to all those warnings you gave me earlier about not using my powers to directly influence the real world?

"Well, I gotta show you the ropes somehow, right? This is the tutorial, so it doesn't count! Or are you implying you think you'll be fine on your own?"

No, no, no complaints here! Your gracious instructions, ma'am!

"Ooh, obedient, aren't we? I like that. Oh, by the way, you can do *this* too!"

My hand turned like I was twisting the valve of a faucet. In response, the self-proclaimed God of Destruction's arm twisted and snapped like a twig. *Damn, this ability's seriously OP!* Looking at the old man's face contorted in pain, I belatedly realized he wasn't making any sound. Apparently, my barrier of spatial magic was also shutting out his screams of agony.

"Now then, I think it's about time we kick things up a notch and remove the gore filter, wouldn't you say? This might get a little graphic—viewer discretion advised."

Eugh.

For some time afterward, the Goddess took her sweet time gleefully eviscerating the so-called God of Destruction over and over again.

Okay... Maybe I should explain how it all came to this from the beginning.

Originally I was just a typical, nondescript Japanese adult male—or at least, I should've been. But without even having

received a visit from the usual isekai truck, I suddenly found myself in an otherworldly place. It was a world of pure white, and before I knew it, a young girl with golden hair and eyes was grinning before me.

"Welcome! Sorry for the short notice, but you've been relocated to the world I manage...or should I say reincarnated, considering I've given you a brand-new body? Ah, well, who cares about the details?! Point is, you'll be starting a new life in a brand-new world from here on!"

Huh...?

"Yes, that's the correct response! You really dodged a bullet just now, you know. If you'd replied with something like 'What the hell do you think you're doing?! This is a textbook case of kidnapping! Apologize right this instant!' and tried to refuse, you would've been erased immediately! Congratulations—you exercised more discretion than the schmuck before you!" The girl's dry applause reverberated through the white space.

The person who came before me was..."erased"?

"So anyway, I'm gonna bless you with power. In return, there's something I want you to do for me."

A-All right.

"Deference—I like that! Oh, I'm the Goddess of Time and Space, by the way. A *bona fide* goddess, mind you. That part's important." The goddess girl then continued her explanation. "In the world I'm about to send you to, there's some blasphemous moron claiming he's a god. I want you to take him down."

A...god?

"*Self-proclaimed* god! He's actually just a pitiful human. He popped up while I was away for a little while, so I need to show him the power of a *real* god and whack him back down. Problem is, there's a rule that forbids us gods from interfering directly, so I have to get someone from another world to mete out judgment in my place." She grinned.

So since gods can't interfere with the world directly, they lend their powers to someone else and get them to do it instead. I guess that makes sense. And if the so-called god in this world isn't bound by any such rule, then it'd indeed mean they aren't a real god. Seems logical enough.

"As your reward for completing this task," the Goddess went on, "I'll give you free rein to do whatever you want in this world from now on. Whether you want to use your new powers to

become a hero of the people or just gorge yourself on various pleasures, the world's your oyster! You're supposed to be dead, but I'm graciously giving you a new lease on life! What better reward is there than that? Oh, right—you might experience a *tiiiny* bit of memory loss, but it's nothing you need to worry about. I mean, *I'm* not worried about it, so that means you shouldn't be either."

R-Right. Um, can I really do anything *I want in this new world?*

"Yep! You can even call yourself a god if you want! As my disciple, you'll be equivalent in rank to a lesser god anyway."

Even though I'd been ordered to kill someone else claiming to be a god? I tilted my head in puzzlement.

"Oh, I see why you're confused. Calling yourself a god by itself is a-okay. I actually don't have a problem with that. The problem is that this idiot's calling himself by a *certain* god's name."

And what name would that be, Miss Goddess?

"The God of Destruction!"

That name seemed to be a sort of taboo for her.

So you want me to find the impostor calling himself this "God of Destruction," and take him down?

"Quick on the uptake, aren't you? I like that! You got it—and I've specially made you a new body to help you get the job done."

The Goddess snapped her fingers, and the weightlessness I'd been feeling ever since I'd entered the white world disappeared. I could sense my feet touch down on the ground—my soul must've entered this new body she'd mentioned. At the same time, the Goddess brought a giant mirror down in front of me. Reflected there, before my eyes, was a girl who looked to be around eighteen, with straight, black hair and round, brown eyes. While her appearance was kind of plain, she was actually pretty cute. Plus, she had a nice rack.

"Damn, who's this beauty? She's kinda… Wait, why is my voice so high?! Huh?! That's *me*?!"

The girl in the mirror was making the same movements I was making. I stepped back in shock and felt my long black hair flutter. Finally, just for good measure, I grabbed my own chest and gave it a squeeze. *Damn, that's soft…*

"Wait, I'm not supposed to be a girl! I'm a guy! What gives?!" I shouted.

"Oh, it's just what I'm into—*ahem*, I mean, because you're

borrowing a goddess's powers and all, making you in my image allows you to receive my blessing more easily."

"I heard that, you know! You said it was what you were into!"

"You wanna complain, I'll erase you. It's true that it makes it easier to receive my blessing if you're a girl like me, so it's a win-win for both of us. Plus, now that it's your own body, you can cop a feel, or do something even *more* pleasurable, whenever you want! Right?"

I didn't raise any more objections—I had the feeling that if I argued with her any further, it'd be my *soul* she erased rather than this new body. It definitely wasn't because I wanted to cop a feel or do something even more pleasurable. Honest.

"Now, take this book. It contains everything you need to know about spatial magic and the world you're about to enter. Also, I've granted you the ability to learn all types of skills."

"Th-Thank you very much."

"And as a special service from me, I'll take control of your body and show you just what it's capable of. But only this once—wouldn't want you to get too overstimulated since it's your first time."

"I-I-I'm not a virgin! *Ahem*, uh, I mean, I'd appreciate that. Thank you for your guidance."

Thus, a former Japanese man became a girl and began a new life in another world.

"By the way, for this tutorial, your opponent will be none other than the false God of Destruction! Let's get right to it, shall we?"

"Wait, what?"

And so, that's how it all happened. As a result, the "God of Destruction," the final boss I was supposed to take on, had been trounced just like that during the so-called "tutorial."

Well, I say "just like that," but actually, it was more like merciless, drawn-out torture. "Huh? You still don't get it? Oh well, since it's the tutorial, I guess I'll have to show you over and over again until you understand!" the Goddess would say at the end of each session—despite the fact that I never said a word—before restoring the pitiful old man's mind and body for yet another torture session. This cycle continued for seven days and seven nights in total.

Oh, she did allow me to deal the final blow, though. "Now, for

the coup de grâce, try using your own power!" she'd said. "You only need to sever the connection between his mind and body, and you win! Easy, right?"

Once the deed was done, she spoke up once more, now taking a back seat as a voice in my mind. *"O disciple of mine, thou hast brought the hammer of judgment down on that wayward charlatan! I thank thee for thy hard labor!"*

"Hard labor?" I was pretty sure the Goddess had done all that "labor" herself. The poor final boss had already been at 1 HP and moaning, "Please…kill me already…" Finishing him had been so easy, it'd only taken sixty seconds. Surely my transfer here wasn't just so the Goddess could cheat the system and beat this guy senseless…right?

"Uh, Goddess… Did you even need me for this?"

"Oh, yes. According to the rules, anyway."

The rules, huh? I see. Well, if the rules said so, guess there's no helping it. Come to think of it, if even gods have formalities they need to abide by, does that mean they answer to an even higher power? Now there's *a scary thought.*

"Anyway, that felt fantastic, so I'm satisfied now. As promised, you're free to do whatever from now on. Knock yourself out!"

"A-All right."

"If you ever need to talk to me again, just pray at one of the churches. Well then, have fun! Noshi!"

"Noshi?" *Like, the Japanese slang term for the "hand-waving" emoticon?*

This one? (・ω・)ノシ

Do people speak Japanese in this world?

…

Wait, that's it?

Seriously?

She just up and left me here?

I looked around and realized I was in the middle of an abandoned ruin. Apparently, it was once called the Kingdom of Alchemy under the false God of Destruction's rule, but thanks to the Goddess's handiwork, it was now nothing more than a pile of rubble. More specifically, it was probably the work of "Meteor Shotgun," a technique where she'd created upper and lower pockets of space to infinitely accelerate and then fling pieces of debris with the force of a blade capable of slicing through dimensions. She'd also created air terrariums, pockets of space

that had instantaneously reduced entire sections of the kingdom to scorched earth, and other times she'd used a spell called "Reversi" to switch the upper and lower portions of a fixed space, flipping everything upside down and causing even more absurd carnage. But likely the most formidable and destructive spells had been "Black Hole," which created a space of infinite holding, and "White Hole," which instantaneously released everything stored in that space. Those two spells alone *really* did a number on the place.

They were all super powerful spells, each capable of laying an entire kingdom to waste on its own. *Spatial magic is seriously terrifying. Hmm… Yeah, I can see how someone with this power could easily rise to god status.*

"At any rate, it's one thing for a kingdom to get destroyed overnight after invoking the wrath of the gods, but…"

An entire kingdom had fallen only because its ruler had posed as a goddess's boyfriend (godfriend?). *That's a tough break.* Right then and there, I swore in my heart that even if I *did* call myself a god someday, I would never use the name "God of Destruction," no matter what.

"Now then, what should I do from here?"

With the false god already dead, my objective was complete, meaning I no longer had any goal to work toward. The Goddess had also said I was free to do whatever I wanted.

"Maybe I should look around for any survivors? Nah, maybe not… They might think *I* caused all this. Considering we were at it for seven whole days, there's no way they wouldn't have seen my face. Actually, I should get out of here before it becomes a problem."

It's not my fault! It was the Goddess who did all this, not me!

First, I teleported up into the sky. Then, after spotting a remote mountain in the distance, I teleported myself there. This should be far enough. I let out a sigh of relief.

Then I heard my stomach growl. Come to think of it, our fight had lasted seven days, yet I hadn't had anything to eat ever since I'd arrived in this world. I'd kind of assumed this body would be fine without sustenance from that, but maybe that was only because it was the tutorial. Now that I was on my own, it seemed I was getting hungry.

A fruit that looked like a yellow apple caught my eye. I used spatial magic to bring it to me, then I took it in my hand.

“I wonder if this is edible?”

Suddenly, the Tome of General Knowledge that the Goddess had given me appeared out of thin air. *Huh? I didn’t even summon it, and it just popped into existence on its own? That’s kind of freaky.*

“Is it telling me to look it up? Does it recognize my voice? All right, guess I’ll try asking— Is this apple here edible?”

As if reacting to my voice, the book’s pages flipped madly until they reached an entry depicting the fruit. One word on the open page was flashing: “edible.” But there was no name listed. The fruit didn’t have a specific name, then?

“Ah, got it…I think. Well, at least now I know I can eat it.”

Apparently determining its service was no longer needed, the book vanished into space once more. I bit into the apple’s shiny skin and chewed. It was sweet, with a mouthfeel similar to sushi rice. Hmm— Well, it *smelled* good, but I couldn’t say I was a fan. *So much for apples from the wilderness…I’ll take the selectively bred kind instead, thanks. Oh, it feels like my magic’s recovering with each bite, though. I certainly don’t mind that.*

So this Tome of General Knowledge… It looks like I can make it appear at will to look up a bunch of stuff. Oh, right—I wonder if I can understand the language of this world? I’m guessing so, since I understood the Goddess and the old man’s pleas to spare his life.

“In that case, living a normal life here is going to be easy—especially with spatial magic at my disposal.” In fact, if I wanted, I could duplicate this apple over and over and never have to worry about finding food again. And while my MP might be limited now that the tutorial was over, it would recover on its own after resting. Looked like survival wouldn’t be an issue.

Still, as someone used to the facilities of modern Japan, I’d rather not live off the land if I can help it. I’d like to live somewhere more civilized.

Like somewhere with a toilet, for instance.

What does the general public’s idea of a toilet look like in this world, I wonder? Oh, the tome appeared again. Let’s see…a slime latrine? “Note: Slimes growing larger than a certain size are known to occasionally become hostile, so beware.” *Yikes. Is there, like, a model more similar to a flush toilet that’d prevent the slime from splashing up on me? Hmm… “N/A,” it says. Guess that’s a no. If I want something like that, I’ll have to make it myself.*

“Or maybe I could get someone like an artisan to make it for me,” I said aloud. “O all-knowing tome, any suggestions on what

I should do from here on out?"

The book appeared, its pages flipping. "N/A," huh? For a moment I'd gotten my hopes up, but it looked like I couldn't count on it to be a conversation or discussion partner after all.

Oh. Actually, there might be no point in asking now, but what is my social standing like here, anyway? Will I be treated like an outsider?

"Hey, Mr. Tome of General Knowledge, what's society here like?"

Apparently, population was determined based on poll tax, so while not as accurate as Japan's, there was a census of sorts. I thanked the book, and it retreated into the void once more. Hmm... Well, with the former God of Destruction's kingdom now in ruins, maybe I could just blend in among the chaos?

Come to think of it, citizenship aside, I didn't even remember my name.

"Honestly... I even have to choose my name on my own? I guess I should've decided on that while the Goddess was giving me the tutorial."

What was I called in my former life again? Well, considering I'm a different gender now, I guess I should change it anyway. As long as I have a male name I'll consider myself a man, and that'd be problematic here. So for now, I'll give myself a temporary female name. I can always change it later if I think of a better one. Let's see... Karino, Kamei... Hmm, Karina? Yeah, that one's not bad.

"Karina. All right, let's go with that for the time being. You know, it fits my appearance better than I thought." Upon saying the name a few more times, it felt like it suited me even more. Surely that wasn't because the Goddess had just carelessly slapped together some template body plain enough to go with *any* name, was it? Well, I guessed that didn't really matter.

"First off, I guess I'll look for a town."

Scratching my head in thought, I took my first steps toward a brand-new life.

Chapter 1

Searching from overhead, I was immediately able to locate a town.

Rather, it was just down the road leading from the ruined Kingdom of Alchemy. It was a castle town built atop a plain and surrounded by fortress walls. According to the Tome of General Knowledge, apparently the town's name was Solasidore, and it was part of the neighboring kingdom, Pavelkant.

"All right, this'll be my first stop!"

First, let's nail down my background in case anyone asks: As the Kingdom of Alchemy was getting razed by God's wrath, I ran here for refuge. I'd just become a merchant in the Kingdom of Alchemy the other day, and I was now out of work. I needed a place where I could set up a new storefront. *Something like that, maybe?*

After mulling it over for a while, I decided that becoming a merchant would be my best option. Using the spatial magic the Goddess gave me, I could store a hundred copies of this planet or more, which for *my* purposes might as well have been infinite. Also, with the ability to teleport, I could zip between towns and cities regardless of road conditions! I could carry as much as I wanted without having to worry about transport fees! *Yessiree, it's a merchant's life for me!*

"Plus, I can read and write, and use magic besides. Finding work should be simple enough anyway." Even if I couldn't hack it as a merchant, I could definitely become an adventurer for hire. As long as I had spatial magic, no monster could scare me! If possible, I'd like to make a killing right off the bat, then spend the rest of my days living a comfortable life. Then I could work only when I felt like it and laze around the rest of the time!

I teleported myself to Solasidore's gates. Fortunately, there was no queue to get in. The wall was so enormous that you had to look up to see the top, and the gates were just as imposing. A guard stationed at the gates spotted me and called out.

"Proof of identification?"

Proof of identification? *Dammit, I don't have anything like that.*

"I-I'm sorry, sir. I lost it."

“Then I’ll have to ask you to leave.”

“Um… W-Wait! I need help! I’ve been attacked!” Realizing he was about to shoo me away, I thought fast.

“What?! Explain! Where did it happen?! Who attacked you?!” The look on the guard’s face changed immediately, and he began pressing me for details.

Huh? Now *you’re interested?*

“Um, well, you know the Kingdom of Alchemy, right? A god attacked there! I had no choice but to leave all my belongings behind and flee!”

“Huh? Oh…the Kingdom of Alchemy, you say?” The guard mulled over my story (that *did* contain a grain of truth) for a while. Just as I was worrying that I’d said the wrong thing and accidentally made more trouble for myself, he nodded.

“So you’re a resident of the Kingdom of Alchemy, then?”

“Um, yes, that’s right. My name’s Karina.”

“All right. Come with me. I need to ask you some questions.”

The guard led me into the guardroom.

K-chak, came the sound of a door locking behind me. Wait, huh?

“Now then…Karina, you said? Just who are you, really?”

Was I being interrogated, by any chance?

I immediately came up with a story off the top of my head. It was a little long-winded, but to sum up:

I’m Karina, eighteen years old! I moved from the Kingdom of Alchemy to Pavelkant’s fort town Solasidore to try to strike it rich as a merchant! But since my home was destroyed, I have nowhere to go back to if you don’t let me in! I’m in a tight spot here! My possessions also all got stolen by a hometown acquaintance who I thought was my friend, so I have nothing to my name!

“Oh, is that so? Sounds like you’ve had it rough—if you’re telling the truth, that is.”

Despite my efforts to explain myself, the guard couldn’t have looked more doubtful. *Come to think of it, I’m really kind of too pretty to be walking around on my own, huh? I mean, would anyone in this world with looks like mine normally be traveling on foot from one kingdom to another by themselves?* And even though I’d said I was attacked, my clothes weren’t dirty, and I didn’t have a scratch on me. Yeah, no wonder he was skeptical.

“A-Actually, the truth is…I flew here using magic,” I said. I

didn't tell him it was spatial magic, but it probably wasn't impossible to use magic to fly in this world, considering I'd seen the old man try to use it to escape at one point. Still, when I finally admitted a little of the truth to the guard…

"Oh? Then you're a mage, I take it? And your stolen possessions? How did that happen?"

"I, um, woke up and everything was gone?"

"And you plan on becoming a merchant?" he scoffed.

Wah, this guy doesn't miss a thing! I mean, I know it's his job and all, but still! Crap, I should've just teleported to the city proper instead of the gate!

After that, I showed them that I could read and write—to which they then suspected I might be a spy. "I don't think someone as dumb as her could be a spy, though," another guard helpfully pointed out. So then they thought I might just be a decoy for an *actual* spy, at which point they added *more* guards to keep a close eye on me— Aaah! *O Goddess, please save me! Your disciple's in serious trouble here!*

"Hm? Did you call for me? I thought I heard a sincere prayer from you just now."

"Goddess?!"

Suddenly, I heard her voice. When I turned to look at the first guard again, he'd stopped moving, almost as though time itself had frozen.

"Did you…stop time?!"

"Well, yeah. I am *the Goddess of Time and Space, after all. I've only stopped the flow of time within this room, though. That said, you're lucky there wasn't a dog in here—the rules say I'm forbidden to stop dogs with this spell, so I can't do this if there's one nearby."*

Huh? Why? And why only dogs?

"By the way, I'm also forbidden to grant you temporal magic. But if you want to learn it on your own, I'm not gonna stop you."

The Goddess casually admitted she didn't care whether I learned a spell I wasn't supposed to learn. *Isn't that, like, a big deal?*

"Anyway, so you need my help, huh? Very well, but do just this one thing for me in exchange: leave me an offering at the next church you come across."

"I-I'll do it! Oh, but it'd be great if you could help me resolve this situation as peacefully as possible, though. I'd rather not kill

anyone…and I hope by ‘offering,’ you don’t mean a sacrifice or anything…”

“Hey now, just who do you think I am? I don’t just go around killing people indiscriminately.”

Sorry. To be honest, I didn’t think you were too different from an actual *god of destruction.*

“I’ve made a fake ID for you and put it in your space of holding. Just show ’em that, and you’ll be off the hook.”

“Th-Thank you so much, Goddess! I’ll give you a great offering as a token of my gratitude!”

“By the way—and this is very important—rather than a regular offering, I’d like the stockings of a beautiful girl. Other than yourself, that is.”

“Why would you want a beautiful girl’s stockings? Aren’t you basically a girl too?”

“It’s just what I’m into.”

Who knew the gods had such…*eccentric* hobbies?

“Now then, on my count, I’m going to restore time to its normal flow! Ready? Three, two, one…”

At the end of the Goddess’s countdown, time moved again.

“Oh! I-I have proof of identification after all!”

“You do? But I thought you said you lost it earlier.”

“W-Well, I forgot I hid it underneath my clothes! Here you go.” As I reached into my shirt, I stealthily opened up my space of holding and pulled out the proof of identification the Goddess had given me. It was a medallion only slightly larger than a five-hundred-yen coin but with a hole in the center like a five-yen one. I handed the medal to the guard, who scrutinized it.

“This is… Yes, I see now.” The guard had clearly changed his tune—his stern expression had relaxed. “All right, you’re clear. You can pass. Really, why didn’t you just say who you were from the start?”

“S-Sorry. Thank you very much.” Wow, that proof of ID must’ve really been something special. I wasn’t sure what it signified, but at least it had let me through. The guard handed the medal back to me, and I took another look at it.

It looked no different from a jumbo-size five-yen coin.

Seriously? Five-yen coins count for identification in this world? No sooner than I thought that, the Goddess’s voice resounded in my head once more.

“Actually, no. That’s a hypnosis item, and it fooled the guard into thinking *you’d given him proper identification. But the effect wears off the more you use the coin, so be careful!”*

Is it just me, or is this “goddess” more like a demon? But, well, she did save me, so I kept my mouth shut. *Let’s just count it as a blessing for now.*

“Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you something when we first met, so do you mind if I tell you now? Doesn’t matter, I’ll say it anyway—truth is, this world’s actually on the verge of collapsing.”

Excuse me? What did she just say?

“You see, there are these superspecial, ultra-awesome things called ‘sacred treasures,’ but there are so many of them that they sorta ended up consuming the world’s energy, and we’re kind of in an energy deficit right now. So if you feel up to it, I wouldn’t mind if you retrieved them for me.”

Huh? That sounds awfully urgent, don’t you think?! Should you really be saying something like that so nonchalantly?!

“Well, it’s not like the world will fall apart immediately if you don’t. I just thought that if you had nothing else better to do, it might be good if you did that. I’ll tell you more once you bring that offering I asked for to the church. Laters!”

The Goddess’s voice in my head fell silent.

Wh-What the hell?! The world’s on the verge of collapse?! Then I can’t waste any time—I need to get a beautiful girl’s stockings as soon as I can and learn what I need to do to keep this from coming to pass!

* * *

I’d finally gotten permission to enter the town thanks to the Goddess’s all-purpose fake ID. But since its hypnosis function apparently had a limited number of uses, I’d still have to obtain a real ID at some point.

Meaning I’d need to launder one from somewhere.

With that in mind, I headed to the Trader’s Guild, thinking I could get an ID and register as a merchant at the same time. The guild was a large, square building made of stone. The atmosphere inside was bustling—vendors were shouting all over the place, peddling their wares. It certainly did feel like a hub for trade. There was an information desk as well, so I walked up to the receptionist behind the counter.

“Excuse me, how do I register with this guild?” I asked.

“I trust you’re a newcomer, ma’am? It’s twenty-five silvers for new members to register, and I’ll need proof of identification.”

“Oh—sorry, I’ll come back later, then.”

Come to think of it, while the Goddess had blessed me with identification (sort of), she’d neglected to give me any money. *Crap… Why does it cost so much to join a guild, anyway?!* So I moved on to plan B: the Adventurer’s Guild.

“If you’re penniless, the Adventurer’s Guild is your best option”—so it was written in the Tome of General Knowledge. It also said that one could climb the ranks and earn even more, depending on their skill. With spatial magic at my disposal, I was practically invincible—I’d be able to reach Rank SSS in no time at all! (Though it’d probably be better to go a bit more slowly than that.) Most importantly, you could register for the guild in advance, and pay the fee later! Thus, I made for the Adventurer’s Guild next.

The building was made of wood, almost like a tavern. In fact, there was actually a tavern inside. The moment I entered, all eyes gathered on me—more specifically, my chest. *Come on, can’t you guys be a little more subtle?* And furtive glances like those only make it even *more* obvious. Heh heh, what a bunch of perverts.

Thankfully, I didn’t have to get involved with any of them as I walked up to the counter. “Excuse me, I’d like to become an adventurer.”

“Yes, ma’am. It’s five large coppers for new members to register, and I’ll need proof of identification. You may register in advance and pay the fee later, but then the fee becomes five large coppers and one medium copper.”

“I’d like to pay later, please. Here’s my ID. Oh, by the way, my name’s Karina.”

I chose to delay payment and showed the multipurpose fake ID to the receptionist. Everything was going as planned. Normally in order to register, your ID would need the signature of a town mayor or mentor adventurer—in other words, someone who’d be responsible for you if you happened to cause trouble. If you couldn’t at least get someone of that level to vouch for you, the guild wouldn’t consider you trustworthy enough to register. *In my case, though, I have a god vouching for me! How’s* that *for a guarantee? Heh heh heh.*

As for the currency system here... *One copper coin is basically enough to buy a loaf of rye bread. One medium copper is worth five coppers, and one large copper is equal to ten coppers. A silver coin is one hundred coppers, and a gold coin is a hundred silvers. Silvers and golds also have medium and large variants, which are treated the same as their copper counterparts. (However, since merchants are already required to be well-versed in math, the terms "medium" and "large" are rarely exchanged among businessmen, apparently.)*

In other words, in terms of Japanese currency, the guild fee would have originally been five thousand yen, and now that I'd chosen to pay later, it was around five thousand, five hundred.

"Your ID checks out. Welcome to our guild, Miss Karina! Here's a temporary guild license. Do note that you can only use this here and nowhere else. Once your payment is processed, we'll give you a proper license. Your rank is currently G."

"Thank you."

I was given a card made of wood with some numbers on it. *Ah, so it's this sort of system.*

Incidentally, G rank meant you're a temporary member. F rank meant you're a novice; D meant you're qualified; C, veteran; B, elite; and A, super elite. There was also a special rank, S. In other words, nothing too surprising. *Hmm...so S is above A here too, just like Japan? Or maybe the receptionist's words were just automatically translated that way to make it easier for me to understand. The words I read and wrote were translated to Japanese on their own, after all.*

"I know it's sudden, but could you assign me a monster to defeat right away? I don't have the money to stay anywhere right now."

"Well, I wouldn't recommend that, since you don't even have a weapon yet..."

As I was talking to the receptionist, a red-haired man who'd been drinking at the bar staggered up to me, wooden tankard in hand. "Hard up for money, miss? I'll give you six large coppers for one night with me!"

"Mr. Blade?! What are you thinking?!" the receptionist cried.

I see. Right, I'm a girl now. Even if I had nothing else of value to sell, my body itself was a selling point. More specifically, my chest. *Well, I'm still a guy inside, though, so I'd rather not sell my body to another man.*

"You'd need to bring me a hundred gold before I'd even

consider letting a drunkard like you buy me," I said with a snort. I also assumed a defensive stance, as if to say, *Just try and touch me, and I'll knock you to kingdom come.*

But the man just burst out laughing. "Ha ha ha! I mean, I'd gladly pay up if I could, but if I had that kind of money I wouldn't be working as an adventurer in the first place! Sorry for approaching you like that. Here's some money as an apology—take it."

The red-haired adventurer flicked a copper coin with a hole in the middle—a medium copper, in other words—in my direction. It caught me off guard, but I managed to snatch it out of the air.



“Nice catch! With reflexes like that, I’m sure you’ll turn out to be a fine adventurer!”

“Um…thanks?”

The man erupted into laughter once more. “Well, I’ve had enough embarrassment for today, so see ya later! Ha ha ha!” He walked back over to the bar, where his two companions immediately began razzing him:

“Damn, dude, she turned you down hard!”

“For someone who didn’t have a hope in hell, you sure tried to show off—and how lame! What was that ‘here’s some money as an apology’?”

“Oh, shut up. She’s a newbie, so I wanted to help her out.”

“Huh…I thought he was trying to cause trouble, but maybe he’s a kinder person than I thought,” I murmured.

“Erm…yes. Mr. Blade is a kind person at heart. He often looks after the less experienced adventurers.”

“His name’s Blade? Okay, I’ll remember that.”

And that was how I earned my first bit of money in this new world—tossed to me by a drunk busybody of a senior adventurer.

Pinching my newly acquired coin between my finger and thumb, I examined it closely. If I could buy five loaves of rye bread with this, it’d roughly come out to five hundred yen in Japanese currency. Not bad. Plus, I could copy the coin as many times as I wanted using spatial magic. In other words, now that I had one coin, I could instantly become rich.

“…”

Except it didn’t seem right to do that. It somehow felt wrong. After all, it’d be like printing counterfeit money. Well, apparently spatial magic made perfect copies down to the molecule, so it technically would still be legal tender, but money was money. Maybe it was nothing more than pocket change at the moment, but if I was aiming to be a merchant in the future, I would need to be more careful. As I earned more money dealing with other merchants, I’d juice the market with money that wasn’t supposed to exist and cause prices to skyrocket. Inflation would cause the entire market to crumble, and it’d all be because I duplicated a single copper coin.

Also, the more I duplicated coins, the less resistance I’d have to the idea. *If I’m going to copy anything, it should be the goods*

themselves… No, that wouldn't be smart. Merchants sell things other people make and collect. If I sold them and I was the only one to profit, I'd be bypassing the normal monetary exchange, and that wouldn't be healthy for the economy either.

"Then I won't use magic to copy money or goods, unless there's absolutely no other option."

With the power of spatial magic, there should be plenty of other ways to make money. I'll be giving myself a handicap, but maybe the challenge will make it more fun, right? Yeah! With that decided, I stored the coin in my space of holding for now.

Incidentally, following that logic, copying goods I made from scratch would be A-okay. In fact, it'd be a plus—not having to make each one would save me a ton of time! On top of that, the Goddess has granted me the foundation to learn other skills as well. I could even go down the path of smithing, alchemy, or magecraft if I feel like it! Items for my personal use would also be fine to copy, as long as I don't sell them. For instance, if I wanted to make myself a sword out of a rare metal, I could just copy one piece of metal and save myself the trouble of having to find the rest. I could also copy as much material as I needed for practicing crafting. But I can't sell any of these—they're for me only! I have to keep that in mind!

"Of course, if I make too many rules, that'd be boring in itself… Oh, whoa."

Suddenly, I was overcome with an intense urge to pee. My first urge to pee in this new world. Luckily, I was already inside the Adventurer's Guild, which was a relief. *I'd rather not have my first bathroom experience as a girl be out in the wilderness.*

"Excuse me, where's the bathroom?" I asked the receptionist.

"Oh yes, it's right over there."

"Thanks."

Oh, shit, I'm leaking…I guess becoming conscious of needing to pee made it worse. Come to think of it, how do girls even hold it in without a…you know? Not good… I need to get to the toilet right now!

I threw the door open in a panic. Several guys were already peeing in toilets resembling urinals. Ugh…the room reeked of piss. The stench of ammonia was even more intense than in Shinjuku Station. *Maybe inventing flush toilets should actually be my priority in this world.*

"Whoa, miss! This is the guys' bathroom, you know!"

Shit, that's right—I'm a girl now. Karina, you ditz!

“Too late now! I’m gonna leak! Lemme use a stall!”

“Wha? Well, I guess if peeing yourself’s the alternative, fine. Just watch out for the slime.”

I flew into the largest stall, and commenced my inaugural tinkle in a new world. *Whew… Wait, there’s no TP?!*

Man, that feels better, though. Good thing I managed to get one of the sit-down stalls. *Let’s see…according to the Tome of General Knowledge, toilet paper isn’t a thing here. People use “cleansing” spells instead, apparently. Well, I guess that means you don’t have to worry about running out of TP, just MP!* Also, there really was a slime creature at the bottom! And it was really angry to see me too—apparently Mr. Slime here was called a “scavenger slime,” and men and women had separate versions they were supposed to use. As for why, the tome didn’t say…maybe it was just a matter of preference. *Looks like bathroom etiquette here runs deeper than I thought…or perhaps I should say, the work of a slime runs deep. Literally.*

* * *

After finishing up my first trip to the bathroom as a different sex, I spent the next hour at the bar area gathering advice and info from more experienced adventurers.

“It’s common for adventurers and merchants to tame scavenger slimes for themselves. When you’re out in the wilderness, trust me, there’s a big difference between having one and going without.”

“Yeah, I bet.”

“By taming a scavenger slime, you won’t have to buy bait every time you need one, and if you’re ever in a tight spot, you can even use them as decoys. Slimes are easy to split apart too—in fact, maybe you’d like to share mine? Ha ha, sorry, that’s just an old adventurer’s joke—no need to make that face.”

The adventurer I’d met earlier, Blade, was letting me in on tips and tricks for camping out that weren’t detailed in the Tome of General Knowledge. *Yeah, this all sounds like useful information. Not that I see myself ever needing to camp out in the wilderness, since I’ve got spatial magic…*

Why did I start by gathering information, you may ask? Well, while I was on the john, I’d had a thought. I’d perused the Tome of General Knowledge for info on the lifestyle of an adventurer,

but I couldn't find the specific information I'd wanted. So I was asking around to learn what I wanted to know. While there was a how-to for camping written in the book, it didn't include any of the specifics. Not too surprising, since it was a Tome of *General* Knowledge, but it meant I was clueless about what to do if I ever needed to go to the bathroom outdoors. So I'd chosen Blade, the man who'd tossed me the medium copper earlier, as my first target to question.

"But man, I never would've thought you'd actually come and talk to me again. You sure are weird. No, sorry, I mean that as a compliment. Most newbies wouldn't think to pick the brains of older adventurers, but it's actually a smart move. You'll be a fantastic adventurer, I know it!"

"Nah, I don't think I'll be *that* great or anything. Oh, your tankard's empty. Go on, order another. My treat."

"Really? Hell yeah, thanks!"

Yes, that's right—in truth, I'd bribed Mr. Senior Adventurer for info by offering to buy him a round. Blade had looked shocked by my proposal at first, but he'd immediately agreed.

Just as the receptionist had said, Blade seemed to be a good guy at heart. He was happy to give me advice that might help me out, and as thanks for treating him, he'd even treated *me* to a meal. I was currently scarfing down a ham-and-lettuce sandwich priced at five coppers. Considering my meager funds at present, he might as well have treated me to a feast.

"No, thank *you*, Mr. Blade."

"Ha ha, don't thank me just yet. That money was a gift 'cause I gave you trouble, but I'll have you pay me back for that sandwich once you've earned some of your own money. Or, if that doesn't suit you, I'll call it even if you spend the night with me."

"I'll pay with money," I replied immediately.

"Ha ha, Blade got turned down again!" another man at the table said.

A third snorted. "You oughta just give up while you're ahead, buddy!"

"Looks like you guys are running low too," I said. "Go on, top yourselves off with another round on me."

"Seriously? I'm startin' to like you, lass!"

"Me too! I feel like the booze is tastin' especially good today!"

Blade's comrades—Shildon, a man with a barrel-like physique, and Sekko, another guy who was small and built like a monkey—

were also present at the table. The three of them, including Blade, were all Rank C—in other words, veteran adventurers—and in a party together. Blade and Shildon were apparently frontline fighters, while Sekko provided guerrilla support from the rear.

"By the way, Karina," Blade continued, "you going solo? It didn't seem like you came with anyone else. Don't have any friends to invite along?"

"Yes, I more or less work solo. I may look weak, but I'm confident I can hold my own in a fight. I'm also hoping to become a merchant in the future...I think."

"Yet you didn't even have enough to pay the guild registration fee up front, huh? Well, I doubt you'll be able to secure a storefront right off the bat, so I'd recommend starting as a peddler first. And if you feel you need a bodyguard while you're out hawking your wares, just give our team, Sun Bacchus, a call! We'll probably be doing this adventuring thing for at least another ten years, after all!"

"Well, we'll see if I have my own store by then," I replied evasively. *With spatial magic at my disposal, I doubt I'll need to rely on anyone. Still, "Sun Bacchus"? Like, the ball of fire glowing in the sky and the Roman god of wine? Interesting choice for a team name.*

The three members of Sun Bacchus proceeded to blast me with advice.

"But first, you'll need to earn some money and take on a quest. It's two large silvers and one medium silver just to register with the Trader's Guild, right? You'll want money on hand for various other things too, so you'll need to save up."

"Keeping your money at the guild is the safest way to do that. If you leave your money at an inn, it can get stolen."

"As for what type of quest you should take first... Hmm. Though they're considered beginner-level, I wouldn't take on a gathering quest just yet. They sound simple, but they're tougher than they look. If you don't take the proper steps to extract the medicinal herbs, you'll ruin them—and that's the best-case scenario. Some of the more careless morons will uproot the entire thing, which kills the entire plant."

Wow, this seems like pretty critical information. Now I'm glad I asked these older adventurers first. Just treating a few guys to drinks yielded such a bounty of information? This is so easy that it somehow feels like I'm cheating!

“So I should start with a simple monster-hunting quest instead?” I asked.

“First, you’ll need some equipment. Right now, you look about as prepared as a regular citizen.”

“I concur. A beauty like you walking around without a weapon, you’re just asking to get attacked. You should at least arm yourself so people don’t think you’re an easy mark.”

“Yeah, someone like Blade approached you, after all. Seriously, though, in your case, you could also get with a higher-ranked adventurer and join their party as their lover. That’d give you access to special treatment and perks G rank adventurers wouldn’t normally get.”

“Wow, I never would’ve thought of that.” None of this info was in my general knowledge book, so it was all great to know! *Even if I’d never go that route.*

“Also, don’t venture too far from the city, or the magic beasts will make quick work of you. If you absolutely have to leave, wait till you have some stealth skills under your belt. That probably won’t be enough to defeat them, though.”

“Your safest bet would probably be a delivery quest, but they pay like crap.”

“At the very least, you need some arms, so head behind the guild and grab some wood from the woodshed. If you’re lucky, you might find some good wood there to tie together into a shield.”

Oh, you don’t say? Come to think of it, it might be handy to learn some woodworking skills. Wait, so wood’s just lying around for anyone to use? Is it, like, an adventurer’s version of a soup kitchen? Not that I’m in any position to comment.

“Actually, I’m a mage, so I think I can manage that much on my own.”

“A mage? What kind of magic can you use?”

“Um, well, for instance, I have a spell that’ll let me cut a tree in half, just like that.” I made a slicing motion with my hand. “I shouldn’t have a problem getting wood, at least.”

“So a wind-based spell? In that case, hunting slimes might be your best bet after all. Rabbits too, probably.”

“Oh—by the way, if you spread some blood around on the ground, you can also lure goblins and wolves out. Then grab whatever materials you need for your quest and run. Just make sure not to leave any blood behind while you’re fleeing, or they’ll

think you're wounded and easy prey. They can track you by the smell of it, you see."

"But be careful. Wolves can repel blades with their fur. And they're fast, so you can't run from them. Their bellies are soft, though, so duck underneath them when they leap toward you and an upward stab with a knife should do the trick."

"C'mon, Shildon, that won't work if a pack surrounds her. Listen here, Karina. Most of the wolves you'll encounter near town will be alone, but once you get farther out, they'll attack in groups. You want to steer clear of them at all costs. The knife trick won't work if it gets stuck in one of their stomachs. They'll chase you relentlessly, and you'll have no weapon to defend yourself with."

Oh. Right. Seriously, though, I wasn't expecting Blade and his teammates to be so generous! A single comment from me, and they just start spilling valuable intel! I almost want to let them give my chest a little squeeze as a token of my appreciation. Almost.

"First off, let's figure out what gear you need! We're risking our lives together as adventurers, after all! We gotta help each other out!"

"Yes, Sir Blade! Thank you!"

"Ha ha ha! Good-looking *and* respectful!"

"Ha ha, 'preciate it!"

I appreciate all the juicy info too! Someday, when I'm a merchant, I promise I'll return the favor and hire you three to protect me.

I buttered up Blade some more afterward until he eventually treated *me* to a drink too. The four of us enjoyed drinks and lively conversation well into the night.

"Ugh, my head…"

When I awoke, I found myself in a wooden room. The light coming from the window made me squint, and a chill from the morning breeze lightly grazed my shoulders.

Man… What happened last night? I remember the guild tossed us out because they were about to close, but what happened after that?

~ • ~ • ~

"What's wrong, Karina?! You haven't drunk nearly enough yet! Let me introduce you to one of my favorite spots, and we'll fix that! Come on!"

“Yessir, Mr. Blade! I’m right behind you!”

“Huh? Wait, Blade! Don’t tell me you’re taking her to Shunrai?! Shildon, get the hell up! We gotta stop ’im before it’s too… Dammit, you’re asleep?!”

“Hunh? Oh—yeah, I’ll stop ’em, don’t you… Urgh…”

“Stop clingin’ to me, you damn drunk! Get off already! Blade, get back here! You can’t be bringin’ a young girl to a place like that!”

~ • ~ • ~

Oh, right… We left those other two behind, and then Blade took me to a place called Shunrai. We ended up drinking with a beautiful older woman, and then…

Wait—I’m naked! Well, not completely, but I’ve only got a shirt and panties on! No wonder I’m so cold! And Blade’s here next to me in only his underwear!

Wait, don’t tell me… Don’t tell me this young girl’s…already had her first time?! We didn’t actually *do it…did we? You’ve gotta be kidding! Ugh…I* do *feel a little sore down there…and dammit, what’s with this splitting headache?! Oh, I’m gonna throw up…*

“Finally awake, I see.”

Just as I was about to hurl, I heard a voice, and I turned to see an absolute beauty of a woman. Her golden hair was done up, she was smoking a tobacco pipe, and she wore a tight, chic dress that emphasized the curves of her body. She looked like a cool, independent, self-sufficient woman, perfect in every way. To think such beauty was even possible in this world! But what really caught my attention were her ears and tail. A fox girl! That’s right, folks—we had a fox girl in the building! I never thought I’d see one in person. Now *this* was my kind of isekai!

Sorry, I got a little too excited there. Trying not to let my elation show on the surface, I addressed her. “A-And you are, miss…?”

“Name’s Harumikazuchi, owner of Shunrai. Judging from your expression, guess you don’t remember all that went down last night.” She blew out a cute little puff of smoke as if exasperated.

Oh dear, she was dangerously hot. *At this rate, I seriously might fall for her. She’d look damn good in a cheongsam.*

“Um, did I trouble you somehow, by any chance?”

“You could say that. In fact, you could say you and that Blade

fellow there owe me so much that I had to strip you of your possessions as collateral."

Oh…that explained why we were both nearly naked. She'd taken everything we had. Then…I *hadn't* done it with Blade after all? My virginity was intact?! I looked at Blade in suspicion, but Harumikazuchi shook her head.

"Good grief. Don't worry, Blade here didn't lay a hand on you. Though I wasn't watching you the whole time you were asleep, so I can't guarantee he didn't try anything then."

"Really? That's a relief!" Considering I still had underwear on, I doubted he'd done anything then either. *I'm safe!* "Oh, right. Yesterday was supposed to be Blade's treat, so I don't think I had a tab of my own. Can you at least give me *my* clothes back?"

"Sorry, I took your clothes as payment for something else—my stockings you've got clutched in your hand there."

"Huh? Oh…" I hadn't noticed until now, but I was gripping a pair of stockings in my right hand. According to Miss Fox Lady, in my drunkenness I'd begged her to give me her stockings so I could give them as an offering to the Goddess. I'd said I didn't have any money to pay her, but in return, she could have the clothes off my back instead. (By the way, my multipurpose ID had been within my space of holding, so thankfully I still had that.)

"Those clothes of yours were of nicer make than I'd expected, though. So as a token of my thanks, I've given you an outfit of mine to wear out of here." Harumikazuchi gestured with her pipe at a bundle of clothes in the room's corner. "I'll also return your temporary guild license, since I can't sell that for anything."

"'Preciate it," I said, quickly beginning to dress myself in the hand-me-downs. W*ow, these are as stiff as a board. Or rather, they're seriously chafing me, especially down* there*. Wait a minute… Something's wrong. My virginity is still intact…right?*

"Hey, you all right?" Harumikazuchi asked. "Yeah, I didn't know it was your first time, so I probably went a bit too rough at the start. Sorry about that." She giggled.

Uh, wait. So then…that means…

"My first time was with you?!"

"That's right. I know you're probably shocked to hear that, but __"

"HELL YEAH! SCORE!"

Chastity, I bid you adieu! My virgin era is over at long last! And to

think I was able to graduate with a bombshell like Harumikazuchi… This world rules! You're the best, Goddess!

"Except…I was so drunk, I don't remember any of it! Goddammit!"

"Oh, so you actually *do* swing that way," Harumikazuchi commented. "Guess last night wasn't just due to loosened inhibitions from alcohol, then."

Oh dear, it sounds like I let my impulses get the better of me last night. "B-By the way, what exactly did we do, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Hm? Oh, well, things got started in the first-floor bar area with drinks and merriment and such, but then later on we moved upstairs and then…" She whispered the rest in my ear. "And *then*…" She whispered some more.



“I licked you all over like a dog?! And I role-played as an infant?!”

Shame on you, Karina from last night! How impure! Now I can never get married… Well, not like I planned on it anyway!

“Well, I was hardly innocent either. Recalling it now, even *I’m* a little embarrassed by all we did,” Harumikazuchi said bashfully.

But thanks to those loosened inhibitions, I could get with a beautiful fox girl! If only I could remember it… Curses! Return, my memory! Return! Ngh… No use, I can’t remember a damn thing!

Sigh… What a waste. All right, that settles it—from now on, I’m only drinking in moderation.

As uncomfortable as they were, I threw on the fox lady’s hand-me-downs. *I’m now realizing how much better my original clothes felt. Guess you don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone.*

“Oh—actually, someone really important gave those clothes to me. I won’t ask you to give them back, but can I at least give them a proper goodbye?”

“Hm? Well, if that’s all, I don’t mind.” With a nod, Harumikazuchi brought my old clothes over.

Considering the Goddess had made these clothes along with my body, they were practically also a part of me. I hugged the outfit tightly. “Thank you for your service until now… I’ll never forget you!”

Then I copied them while they were concealed against my body.

All right, mission accomplished. I quickly swapped the copy with the original and slipped the original outfit into my space of holding. *Look, if they’re really as valuable as Harumikazuchi says, I can’t just let them go so easily. Plus, these hand-me-downs really aren’t comfortable at all. I’ll just change into my old outfit later. Gotcha, fox lady! Wait—didn’t I promise to myself that I would only copy sellable items as a last resort? Oh, but this is for my own personal use, so it doesn’t count!*

Plus, I’m the type to strive for one hundred percent completion in all my games. Since I have unlimited storage space, I might as well go for a complete inventory! It’d be a shame to lose out on an item this early on, especially an otherwise unobtainable starting item from the Goddess. And I wouldn’t want her to get upset at me for trying to sell it either. Though it was technically stripped from me, so I’m safe there. And I don’t remember what I said when I was drunk,

so that doesn't count either. Right?

Ooh, I'm feeling a little woozy again. Just like the Goddess said, it looks like copying items takes a fair bit of MP.

"Thanks for letting me pay my last respects." I handed the copied outfit back to Harumikazuchi.

"No prob." After taking the clothes, she pulled the pipe out of her mouth, turned her head sideways, and blew out a puff of smoke. "Actually…"

"Hm? What is it?"

"If they're really that important to you, I might not sell them after all. I could keep them with me, where I know they'll be safe."

What a kind lady! Did I really have my first time with another human or an angel?! After this, I really need to show the Goddess my appreciation for sending me here.

"Oh, don't worry about that. I have several similar outfits at home, actually." *With this, it won't look so unusual for me to have the same outfit on when I see her again.*

"Seriously? Then never mind, I'll go ahead and sell 'em. Or I could have them fitted to my size and wear them myself."

The fox lady, wearing the same clothes as me?! Isn't that practically indirect intercourse?!

"Um, Harumikazuchi, do you mind if I come see you again?"

"As a customer, sure, but as a newbie adventurer, it might be too high of a hurdle to clear for you money-wise."

Gack! That's right, I could only enter because Blade was a Rank C adventurer. And since it's an establishment where adventurers can enjoy various pleasures, of course it'd be expensive. Could I maybe earn a bunch of money as a merchant and then *come back? In that case, that slow, comfortable merchant life is looking more and more appealing by the second. I wanna become a regular at her place!*

"If it's just *me* you want, however… Look, you enticed me into doing all those things with you yesterday, and I didn't dislike it. But I'll have to charge you next time, regardless of your gender."

"No, that's not necessarily what I— Um, how much, exactly?"

"I suppose that depends on how up for it I'm feeling at the time, but I'd say around a hundred gold. I don't normally make myself for sale, you see." Giggling, she tickled my chin with her left hand. My body instantly and automatically reacted—my heart beat furiously, and I felt a deep longing like my chest was being squeezed in a vise. *Honestly, what magic words could I have*

possibly said last night to seduce a woman like her?! I sure wish I could remember!

"Urk...! Ow, ow, ow. My head!" Blade was also starting to regain consciousness. He got to his feet.

"Oh, you're up, Blade?" I asked. "You all right?"

"Y-Yeah, never better. Except for my head... Damn, it hurts. Guess I went a little too hard on the booze last night."

He was only wearing underwear. *Now that I get a good look at him, he's pretty ripped—though I guess that's to be expected of a frontline fighter.*

"Wait, where are my clothes?" he asked. Then he noticed Harumikazuchi. "Oh, hey, Haru."

"Honestly, Blade, what are you thinking, showing such a pathetic side of yourself to a brand-new adventurer? You ought to be ashamed."

He hung his head. "I know. I'm sorry."

The fox lady and Blade were treating each other casually, as though they'd known each other since forever. *Damn, I'm kinda jealous!*

"Well, uh, can you just put last night on my tab for now? If you could at least give me my gear back, I'll pay you as soon as I can."

"Hmph. Well, considering all I made off you last night, I guess I can look the other way. I'm sure you'll be back for more too."

"Thanks, Haru, you're the best! I owe ya!"

She tossed his gear and a wallet, now empty, onto the floor beside him. *Maybe it's just me, but I feel this is far from the first time this has happened.*

"And that's how you make sure you at least keep your gear after going on a bender, even if you have to beg for it," Blade announced sagely. "That's a very important trick of the trade from a pro. Got it, Karina?"

You're really going to try to save face after such a pathetic showing?

"Yessir!" I responded.

"Uh, Haru, my sword's not here." After redressing and checking to make sure his gear was all accounted for, Blade frowned in puzzlement.

"Naturally," Harumikazuchi answered with a puff of smoke. "Adding in the mess this girl here made as well, there was more damage than usual. Bring me five large coppers, and you'll get

your weapon back. Just hunt a few slimes or something—that shouldn't be too much trouble for a pro like you, right? And watch over this girl for me too, while you're at it," she said with another puff of smoke and a giggle. God, I wanted to stroke her tail so bad.

"Right, then...follow me to the woodshed, Karina. I'll teach you some carpentry skills."

"'Preciate it! Looking forward to it."

With Blade now...mentoring me, I guess, the two of us left Shunrai. Oh, by the way, according to my Tome of General Knowledge, diseases and unwanted pregnancies were easily preventable with magic and potions in this world, and there were shops out there that specifically sold such goods. So I was free to do whatever—in more ways than one! *Isekai really are the best!*

* * *

Blade showed me a carpentry skill that allowed the user's hand to function as various woodworking tools. For instance, making a sawing motion with the hand would let it cut like a saw, and using a fist like a hammer gave it the power of an actual hammer. He could use his fingers like the claw of a hammer to yank out any nails stuck in the scrap lumber, then straighten those out with his hand to repurpose them, though nails that were too bent required a smithing skill in order to straighten out.

"I bet you could make a good living as a carpenter with skills like this," I commented.

"Funny you say that, because I actually hail from a long line of carpenters. My older brother's currently running the business." He bent a ruined nail in the opposite direction to straighten it, this time using his own strength. It was still a little crooked, but it was usable now. I continued to watch as he fashioned the scrap wood into a simple shield.

"As you can see, as long as they have a few good, flat planks, anyone can make a shield. Even a complete beginner can tie wood together with a string. Here, take it."

"'Preciate it." *Now that I've seen the entire process, it looks like I can just use spatial magic in lieu of carpentry skills. Obviously I can use magic to sever the wood, but I don't think I'd need nails either—I should be able to glue the wood together by combining pockets of*

space instead. I'm still working with wood, so I can get away with calling it a woodworking skill, right?

"Still, is it really okay to just take the wood in this shed?"

"Oh yeah, no problem there. Just don't use too much of it. It's the guild's emergency stock, and it's meant for adventurers with no money to their name—like us right now, for instance. But we've got to save some for others who might be in need."

"Huh, okay."

"Wood this clean can easily be recycled and repurposed. In fact, this wood's so good that it'd fetch serious coin at a scrap shop. Otherwise the guild wouldn't have gone out of the way to build a shed with a roof to preserve it."

Wow, the Adventurer's Guild sounds a lot more generous to newcomers than I would've expected.

"Wait, if you're giving this shield to a newbie like me, what are *you* going to use?"

"That's only a beginner's shield, so it's no big deal. Besides, I don't need a shield. As long as I've got this, I'm good." He selected a piece of easily holdable wood shaped like a pole. "You've got a shield, and I've got a pole. We should be equipped enough to hunt some slimes now. Follow me, Karina—we're headed to the Slime Forest."

"Yessir!"

Now humbly equipped, Blade and I headed out of the town.

The Slime Forest was only a short walk from the town, and slimes were the only monsters there, making it the perfect place for novices to hunt.

"Don't let your guard down, Karina. Slimes might be the only monsters in the area, but they're all over the place. If you get surrounded by a group of over three, get out of there immediately or you won't make it."

"Yessir! I'll be careful!"

"Good response, full of spirit! You'll be a fine adventurer yet, I know it!"

Is that his catchphrase or something?

"Now then, it's easy to hunt slimes even with wooden weapons and armor. That makes them perfect targets for beginners. But they can still be dangerous if you're not careful."

According to Blade, it was important to keep your gear maintained after every hunt, even if it was just hunting slimes. If

the gear was trashed beyond repair, it was best to toss it rather than attempt to use it on the next hunt.

"In your case, the best way to hunt slimes is to wait for them to attack and block with your shield. Then, once they're stuck to your shield, punch 'em with your fist, and you're done. Easy, right? Just be careful—you won't finish them if you don't hit their cores, so aim carefully."

"And in your case?"

"Just dodge their attack, then punch them. Or you can punch them without waiting for them to attack. Either way, I won't deny using a shield is the safer option."

Apparently, Blade was the type to prefer the "unsafe" option.

"Also, I know it's tempting, but don't try to mimic what I'm about to do here. Of course, it'd be great if you *could* pull it off, but as a newbie, it's best to play it safe and take as few risks as possible."

"Huh? What are you gonna do?"

"Well, that's— Oh, look, here's our first target now."

A wild slime had appeared, about the size of a stump and resembling a water manju. Its round core was floating in its center, clearly visible.

Blade aimed his wooden pole at the slime's core and thrust it forward. Just before the pole entered the slime's insides, he reduced the force of his thrust for a clean entrance. Then, once inside, he reapplied force, piercing through the other side and pushing the slime's core out of its body. The intact core rolled onto the ground, and after a single shudder, the slime melted into a puddle.

"And that's how it's done."

"Wow! Nice work, Blade!"

"Heh heh, it was nothing. But just keep in mind that the core will return to the slime if you leave it on the ground too long, so you'll want to deliver these within the day."

Apparently slime cores were quite valuable, even damaged ones. They could serve as nutrition for scavenger slimes or be recycled to create a new slime. However, the intact ones sold for a lot more.

"I gotta pay Haru back, after all, so I need the core intact. But be careful—if your thrust isn't executed well, the slime can absorb your weapon. So I'd recommend sticking to the shield method for now, just to be safe."

“Yessir. Oh, actually…” Couldn’t I just pop the core right out with spatial magic? Or if I was supposed to be a wind magic user, maybe it’d be best to blow the slime away as if it was being carried by the wind?

“Hey, can I try using my magic on one?”

“Sure, go ahead. Today’s a good day to experiment, since you’ve got me here to help you out.”

“Thanks.”

I tried using magic on the next slime that appeared. First, I used spatial magic to capture the entire slime except for its core. Then I slid the rest of the slime to the side while modifying its shape, making it look as though a gust of wind had blown it apart!

“Burst!” I shouted as the aqueous part of the slime splattered into pieces. The core dropped to the ground, perfectly intact. Success!

“Wow, it actually worked!”

“Whoa, way to go. You didn’t even need a weapon. If you can manage that, you’ll make enough to register for the guild in no time.”

“I wouldn’t have been able to charge the spell if you weren’t watching the area for me, though.”

“Oh, you realized that, did you? You’re awfully sharp. Yep, you’ll make a fine adventurer yet.”

We continued hunting slimes, and by the end we had five (completely intact) slime cores.

Once the hunt was over, we returned to the Adventurer’s Guild. Blade laid five slime cores on the counter.

“Yo, Sophie! Special delivery. Karina got all these herself.”

“Are you sure you didn’t get them for her?”

“Nope, she was seriously amazing. Her magic’s something else. Those slimes just went *woosh*!”

“I see. Then she didn’t have any problems. I’m glad to hear that.”

Blade backed me up, saying that I’d recovered those slime cores intact all on my own. *Thanks, bud! Although your description could’ve used some work.* Miss Receptionist must have trusted Blade a lot to have accepted a statement like *that* without question.

Since the slime cores were all unharmed, my share of the

reward came out to eight large coppers, which I immediately spent to register with the guild.

"Congratulations, Miss Karina," the receptionist said. "Here's your official adventurer's license. You're now Rank F."

At last, my coveted adventurer's license! Look out, world—Karina's an official adventurer now! Sure, F rank is still considered novice-level, but I have an official ID now! I don't have to deceive people anymore by hypnotizing them with the Goddess's item!

"Welp, I'm gonna go pay Haru what I owe her," Blade said. "See ya later, Karina!"

"Yessir! Thanks for all your help! Hope we can work together again soon!"

"Sure!" he said with a chuckle. "Maybe you can treat me to a round with your *own* money next time!"

He walked away with a wave, clearly trying to act cool. Still, I bowed my head in gratitude. He'd really been a huge help—he'd even shown me how carpentry skills worked. But most importantly, he'd introduced me to a beautiful fox lady! *I've got to save up as quickly as I can so I can see her again. Maybe even as early as tonight, if I'm lucky!*

"You know, if Blade wasn't such an irresponsible drunkard, he might be decent," Sophie the receptionist commented.

"I mean, I think he's a pretty good person regardless," I said.

"He dragged you to Shunrai last night, didn't he? Were you really all right in a place like that?"

It depends on what you mean by "all right," miss. I ended up losing my virginity, so the answer's probably no. But by the same token, I couldn't have been happier!

"Well, long story short, it all worked out in the end. Because I met the owner there—the love of my life."

"Karina, I've been wondering... Do you prefer women, by any chance?"

"Actually, I'm *only* into women," I said. I was still a guy at heart, after all.

"O-Oh. Is that so?" The receptionist looked ever so slightly taken aback. *Don't worry, miss! I wouldn't do anything to you without your consent!*

"Oh—can you assign me another quest right away, please?" I asked.

"Certainly. Another slime core quest, then?"

"Actually, there's one for gathering lumber, right? A logging

quest? Could I have that one instead?"

"Logging is tougher than it seems. You can get attacked by monsters while you're cutting down trees, and we don't have anyone from the guild available to accompany you at present. So I wouldn't recommend it."

Yesterday I'd seen this quest on the bulletin board, and it had caught my eye:

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[Quest] Logging. Reward: One silver per log delivered.
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Normally this one was meant to be taken on as a team. A guild employee was supposed to accompany the team, gathering the wood they chopped into a magic bag, while the team was to watch the area for monsters and keep the employee safe. Plus, if any blood was spilled, other monsters would be drawn to its smell, significantly increasing the job's difficulty. Since the reward had to be split between teammates, each individual's share wasn't really worth the time or trouble—in fact, this job was usually only done by a special team of adventurers called the "Lumberjacks." Blade had explained all this to me previously.

To be honest, at my current level it'd probably be impossible for me too—if I didn't have spatial magic, that is.

"Thus, I'd strongly advise against this quest," the receptionist said.

"I'm a mage, so I think I'll be fine. And if I get attacked, I'll just defeat the monsters and grab the monster parts to take back as proof."

"Hmm…magic, you say? Well, don't say I didn't warn you. From here on out, it's your responsibility to come back safe."

The receptionist stressed once again the danger associated with the job. Apparently, it'd normally be much too difficult for a newbie adventurer to handle solo. But that meant if I *did* manage to complete it on my own, my reward would be that much better. She was right in that harvesting slime cores would definitely be easier, though. Easier to carry back too. Still, there'd be a limit to how many intact slime cores I could earn money for in a day, since they weren't constantly in demand. And there was always a market for lumber.

"All right, I'll assign you to the quest if you're sure. But if it looks like it's beyond what you can handle, promise you'll come

back right away."

"I will. Thank you."

And so, I successfully signed up for my first logging quest.

After accepting the quest, I headed to the area the guild had specified. *Whoa, there's a lot of wood here. All right, time to cut down all the trees!*

"Though apparently I can't take any wood from reforested areas... Well, makes sense."

Some wooded areas had apparently been reforested in an effort to make wood gathering safer and easier. Cutting down trees in these areas would be considered theft. Just like back on Earth, huh?

"Let's see... Considering spatial magic has the power to raze an entire mountain, maybe I could clear this whole area in one go? Nah, better not. I should probably turn in a reasonable amount for one person to handle."

I supposed I could also cut down one tree, then copy the lumber repeatedly. But I'd be delivering a bunch of the same logs, down to the molecule, so the guild would probably get suspicious. Then what if I copied each of them one at a time and delivered them to guild branches in other towns? No, they'd still be the same type of tree, so I might still get found out. *Best to not go that route at all, then.*

"Okay, then. If I *do* use magic, I'll have to disguise it somehow. So what if I make the logs float with spatial magic but make it look as though I'm carrying them myself?"

If I carried one log in each arm, I could only carry a maximum of two. That meant I'd have to do the same thing every day for two weeks to reach my desired financial goal— *Oh wait, considering the price of staying at an inn, I'd need even more, wouldn't I?*

"Anyway, now that I have a plan, let's try it out!"

I immediately cut down two trees and lopped off their branches, reducing them to logs. Then I lifted the logs into the air with spatial magic and placed them under my arms so it looked like I was carrying them. Now I just needed to haul these back over to Solasidore to complete the quest. It was even easier than an herb-gathering quest, considering I hadn't even needed to search for the required items! (Actually, since the floating logs were lifting me up slightly, it was more like they were carrying

me, but don't tell anyone.)

On the way back, two goblins attacked. However, I used both logs to knock their lights out—permanently—and made it back to the town safe and sound. After depositing the logs in the designated drop-off area and receiving the proof of their delivery, I headed back to the guild to complete the quest.

"Here you go! Two logs, safely delivered, as you can see!"

The receptionist looked shocked. "Really?! I suppose magic's more powerful than I thought... Oh, and you brought proof of defeating two goblins, I see. With that, your reward comes to two silvers and one large copper."

"All right! I got a bonus for monster killing!" I'd been worried about the extra cost of an inn, but my reward had increased for eliminating the goblins that had attacked me. *Logging quests rule! I'm gonna sign up for another one tomorrow!*

"By the way," I asked the receptionist, "are there any inns around you'd recommend? I still haven't found a place to stay the night."

"Huh?" The receptionist looked confused at first. "Oh, that's right—you drank the night away with Blade last night, didn't you? Let's see...the safest one for women would be the Woodwitch Inn, I'd say, and it's five large coppers for one night. Meals do cost extra there, but their rooms are secure and offer complete privacy."

Five large coppers, and food isn't even included? Hm. "That sounds awfully pricey for one night."

"I was just thinking based on what you earned today, it might be an option. And your safety is the most important thing to consider."

"Is there any spot in or outside the city where I could camp out instead?"

"Well, you could head to the slums, I suppose. You wouldn't have to pay anything to stay...but a girl as pretty as you will surely be a prime target for the more unsavory folk, so I'd advise against it."

Slums, huh? So this world also has areas more impoverished than others. Sounds like it might be dangerous to stay there, though...maybe I should steer clear.

"There are also communal inns specifically for adventurers...but again, with your looks, it's highly likely you'll be a mark. So I'd recommend you get your own room somewhere."

“Hm. So I’m just too gorgeous for my own good? I’m so charming that my beauty tempts everyone around me? Wait… Come to think of it, I didn’t take a bath yesterday. Maybe I’d be safe after all, since no one would want to approach me,” I joked.

“Well, I’d avoid the public bath, but you can always use a cleansing spell instead. You should have enough MP for it, since you’re a mage.”

So you can use magic to keep your hygiene up too? I don’t have to bathe anymore? Now that’s what I call convenient!

“Wait… If I just need a safe space to stay, then couldn’t I…”

“You can’t stay in the guild overnight. I’m sorry.”

“No, that didn’t even cross my mind. I actually think I can manage this with magic.”

That’s right—a safe “space.” In other words, this is a job for spatial magic! Why couldn’t I just create a pocket of space to stay in? I could even seal it up and open it as needed. The Goddess’s magic is so versatile that honestly, the hardest part of using it is imagining all the possibilities!

Now to procure some bedding and decorations for the interior!

“All right, let’s use today’s earnings to do some shopping! Excuse me, ma’am, is there anywhere I could buy general goods, like blankets or pillows?”

“What in the world are you planning?”

“That’s a secret. But don’t worry, it’s not illegal. I promise I won’t make trouble for anyone.”

The receptionist informed me of a shop whose goods might be in my price range. *Excellent! Time to deck out my own secret base!*

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My name’s Karina! Today, I’m going shopping! With a budget of two silver coins, what amazing things will I be able to buy?

First off, let’s buy a used leather backpack! Let’s see, that comes out to…one silver coin?! Wait, what?! I used up half my budget right off the bat?!

I only needed the bag to disguise the act of depositing and withdrawing from my space of holding, but wow, this world’s bags were seriously expensive! Well, they weren’t mass-produced in a factory or anything, so I got why they couldn’t be cheap, but still, it was a used product! *Cut me some slack!*

The middle-aged man running the store had told me that I'd be lucky to get a brand-new bag for two *large* silvers these days. He'd also said that the more used and worn bags got, the more flexible and easier to use they became. *Guess I ended up buying into his sales pitch. Oh well.* This backpack was large enough to fit a whole person inside, so it would also prove useful once I was officially a merchant. It was probably worth the investment.

"Hold up, now that I look closer...this has a hole in it!"

The bottom of the leather backpack was all worn out, and there was a hole large enough to stick my index finger through. *Hmm...well, as long as I only put big things in here, it shouldn't be a problem—unless the weight makes the bottom rip out. Don't tell me the reason the backpack only cost one silver was because it was junk from the start!*

Still, since the things I put in here were actually going into the space of holding and not the backpack itself, I figured it didn't really matter. Wait, no, I still needed to put something in there to make it *look* like it had my things in it. *So let's seal that sucker up with some magic!* I copied a five-centimeter square of intact leather from the upper part of the backpack and pasted it over the hole. Certainly not a professional repair job, but it would have to do. It was the same color leather since it came from the same backpack, so unless you were really inspecting it closely, it looked good as new! Copying small things like this didn't take a toll on my mind either, so I figured I should probably fix up the rest of this backpack too, if I had some free time later on.

"Come to think of it, maybe I ought to start seriously considering DIY more."

It was usually cheaper to make things yourself, after all. Well, technically, in Japan even the cost of ingredients and materials could seriously add up, but at least in this world, making things on my own would no doubt be cheaper than buying them. Especially with my spatial magic.

Yeah—that's right! With spatial magic, why *buy* home decor? I could make tables and chairs with ease simply by cutting and pasting wood together! Cups too—I could just gouge out small stumps or something! I could make a bed frame out of wood as well, so now I just needed bedclothes. Of course, I only needed to buy one piece of fabric—I could copy the rest! It was for my own use, so it was fair game! Though I decided I should probably only copy things I'd already purchased once. I wasn't just going

to steal from shops by duplicating their wares, especially since I was going to be a merchant myself someday.

Plus, I could get lumber for my own private use by cutting my own trees. Oh, but unseasoned wood was more brittle and prone to breaking, wasn't it? Maybe there was a spatial magic spell I could use to get around that. For now, I decided to try it. Since it was for my own private use, there weren't any limits! To be honest, I doubted anyone would complain if I cut down some of the trees in the Kingdom of Alchemy either. I mean, it wasn't really much of a kingdom anymore these days.

"All right, first off, let's check to see if I have enough left in the budget to afford cotton or cloth!"

Oh, and some food too. After going without a proper meal for all this time, I was seriously starving.

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As it turned out, cotton was even more expensive than I'd expected. *Hmm, I'd like to buy at least a small portion so I can copy the rest of what I need...but on the other hand, there's another kind of padding here made from tanned wolf hides that's priced more reasonably. This portion's five large coppers...but there are holes all over. Are you really allowed to sell something this poorly made? And why does it have holes in it, anyway? Was the wolf hide used to begin with or something?*

I decided to ask the merchant about it. "Hey, mister, why does this have so many holes in it?"

"Oh, that was a project an apprentice of mine did for practice. Couldn't let my good hides be used for training, so I gave 'em one where the hunter used arrows or something to pierce the wolf full of holes and kill it. Better than some of the ones where the hide got torn in two, at least."

Apparently the tanning process involved pulling the hide tight, and that had widened the original holes the arrows had made. "Oh, I see now. But...is it really okay to sell something like this?"

"It's still enough to make up a portion, so why not? I mean, if you're using it as padding for bedclothes it's better to have holes in it anyway, since your sweat can ruin it pretty quickly."

"Oh, okay." I asked him whether he had any tanned hides that were in better condition. He said he didn't at the moment, but if

he did, they'd at least cost several silvers.

Still, I could always use spatial magic to fix those holes, so for me, it was a bargain. "Then I'll take this portion here. And some of this dried meat too. Enough to make the total one silver."

"Sure thing. Thanks very much! You know what, since you're so pretty, I'll give you a little extra jerky."

"Wow, thanks! You're a nice guy, aren't you? I like that."

"Heh heh, just for that, I'll throw in a few more. Come back soon!"

Ah, the perks of being a beautiful girl!

Still, tools you'd typically need to fix holes like these—needles, thread, scissors, and the like—sure were expensive in this world. *In Japan you could go to a hundred-yen store and get any of them, but I guess they're in higher demand here since everything is handmade.* Purchasing all of the aforementioned items in *this* world would normally run me several silvers.

But again, I could manipulate space, so I didn't need any of that! The convenience of this magic truly was divine!

"Divine... Oh, come to think of it, where *is* the church here, anyway?"

The merchant heard me and answered. "Over there," he said, pointing. "Big white building. You can't miss it."

"'Preciate it." *If it's that close, guess I'll go say hi to the Goddess. I need to give her my offering (Harumikazuchi's stockings) as well.*

I walked down the road and immediately spotted the big white building in question. Just as the merchant had said, there was no way I could have missed it. What a wonderful edifice!

"Welcome, miss. Do you have business at the church today?"

After all, look at this pink-haired, well-endowed nun! What is she, a succubus?! My libido's going nuts just looking at her! Not good... Her supple, perfectly proportioned body's making me drool. Better gulp it down. "Ah, well, I just thought I'd come to pray."

"To pray! My, how devout! Please, right this way!"

Miss Nun led me to the chapel. At the front was an altar of wood and stained glass, with a round symbol in the center that very much resembled the five-yen coin the Goddess had given me as an ID. Pews were lined up facing the front of the chapel, and a few people were sitting here and there. I guessed you were allowed to come and pray whenever you wanted. Oh, it looked like some folks were also just stretched out on the pews, asleep.

“Are they, um, allowed to do that?”

“Of course. Entering a state of nothingness is also a form of worship. Though we do step in once the snoring reaches an intolerable threshold.”

“R-Right.” If something like *that* counted as worship, I thought I could become quite the pious follower myself! With such thoughts, I made my way to a pew in the very front and sat down.

Um… How am I supposed to give the Goddess this offering, anyway? For now, I took Harumikazuchi’s stockings out of my space of holding. The moment I did, I felt the space around me transform.

Before I knew it, I found myself in *another* space, which resembled a twinkling night sky. I was still in a sitting position, but there was no chair underneath me. It was different from the white space I’d first met the Goddess in, but once more, before my eyes, was the golden-haired girl from before.

“Hey, hey, welcome back, Karina! I’ve been waiting for you to show up! Now gimme those socks!”

“Here ya go.”

Acquiescing to her immediate demand, I handed over the coveted stockings. The Goddess let out a whoop of joy as she raised the garments high, then proceeded to sniff them.



“This scent…the sweet incense of a lady of the night! Oh yeah, that’s the stuff right there. As for the taste, I’ll check that later. Delicacies should be savored, after all.” The Goddess gingerly placed the socks in her own bag of holding like they were some precious heirloom.

*That’s quite the…*abnormal *assessment for a pair of everyday socks. And I’m just going to pretend I didn’t hear that last part.*

“By the way… Why socks?”

“You see, socks are the closest thing to the feet, and a human’s feet support them throughout their entire lives. So their socks contain their data—in other words, part of their lives. As gods and goddesses, we feed on that data, so they’re the perfect offering!”

Wow, that was a more sensible reason than I expected… Nope, a sensible individual would never utter any of that. She definitely came up with all that on the spot just now.

“Anyway, well done, Karina! Keep ’em coming! If you can manage it, get me a smelly, sweaty, freshly removed pair worn for an embarrassingly long time!”

Yep, that settled it—she was just a pervert.

“What’s that look for? Something wrong?” she asked.

“Oh, n-no, of course not.”

The Goddess beamed at me. If you weren’t aware of her—ahem—*eccentric* qualities, she’d probably look like a cute, ordinary girl. Or perhaps that eccentricity in itself was her divine quality?

“Oh, right—when I gave you the power to create your own pockets of space, I didn’t add in the ability to manipulate time, did I? Wouldn’t want those freshly removed stockings to lose their natural warmth, so I’ll make it so that only within your space of holding, you can control the flow of time between 0x and 1x speed. Consider it a special treat!”

“Wow, thanks a lot,” I said in monotone.

You’re seriously powering up my spatial magic for such a dumb reason?

And zero times… Wouldn’t that be, like, stopping time entirely? Didn’t she say earlier that time magic was forbidden or something? I should keep this power hidden from others, then.

“After all, if I’m gonna eat something, I’d rather it be fresh. You can even put seafood in there to keep it from going bad if you want. And if you copy the food while its time is stopped, you can

treat yourself to as much fresh fish as you want!"

"Well, that does sound pretty appealing."

"I know, right? And there are other uses too, like storing away someone else's magic to use for later! I call it 'Neo Magic Cylinder'!"

Uh... By any chance, did you just give me a ridiculously OP ability, Goddess?

"I really can use my magic to do anything, huh?"

"Nah, compared to my full power, that puny bit of magic I've given you won't hurt anything. Even if you end up wiping out a whole culture or civilization, I'll just rebuild 'em from scratch."

So the power to bring the self-proclaimed God of Destruction's entire kingdom to ruin is just a "puny bit of magic" in the Goddess's eyes, eh? Ha ha... Yeah, that's not terrifying at all.

"By the way, I really do appreciate how you don't plan to abuse that copy ability. That's another reason I've powered you up—to reward that good nature and spirit of yours. So keep those socks comin'!"

"If it wasn't for that last part, I would've thought you were actually being sincere. Wait, you'd get in trouble with your superiors if I went around copying everything, wouldn't you?"

"What? Of course not. I meant it from the bottom of my heart."

Really? Well, if so, that does make me pretty happy... "Hold up, how do you know I imposed a limit on myself?"

"There are altars dedicated to me all over the town—at the guild, shops, and even the town gate—and they all have these things that stick to their ceilings called 'home shrines.' I can hear your innermost thoughts through those."

I suppose that's so you can keep an eye on your disciple more easily? Wait, so that quaint little altar I saw at Shunrai means... Eeeeeek! The Goddess saw my deflowering?!

"Look, back there at Shunrai... I'm sorry about that. You graciously gave me this body, and I..."

"No need to apologize. That body I gave you amplifies your desires, so it stands to reason you'd go wild after getting drunk. In fact, I kind of wish you'd do it more!"

"Um, Goddess?"

"I mean, it'd be boring otherwise, right? Though really it's that it makes it more likely for you to get me all sorts of women's stockings. Oh, who am I kidding—I just like watching! So go out

there and give me some more peep shows! Oh, and it looks like your body's developed an innate desire for socks as well—as expected of one made in my image!"

"Um, Goddess?"

"O disciple of mine, God is always watching over you!"

Apparently she'd finally gotten tired of trying to hide it. This pervert Goddess was way too carefree! *And an innate desire for socks?! There's no way I actually have an instinct like that deep within me, right?! Gimme a break!*

"But you probably also have times where you want to move around all stealthy-like, outside of my supervision, right? Like for planning your eventual revenge against me."

"No, no revenge here…but it would definitely be nice to have some privacy."

"Then rejoice, because your prayers have been answered! Introducing Mr. Sneaky!" The Goddess showed me a palm-size statue resembling an egg on a pedestal. "By placing this consumable item in any room, you can make that room safe from the prying eyes of any god or goddess! And when using it in an open space, it's effective up to a range of ten meters!"

"Wow!"

"Well, naturally a goddess of my level *could* look anyway if I really wanted to. But I promise here and now on my name as the Goddess of Space and Time that unless it's an absolute emergency I won't peek, even if you die inside that room."

"Me dying doesn't count as an absolute emergency, huh? Then just out of curiosity, what would?"

"Probably if I don't hear from you in ten years or if my sweetheart decides to step out on me with you. Not that either of those things would ever happen."

I was starting to get the feeling that anything having to do with her sweetheart was dangerous territory to tread.

"And so, for the ultimate privacy, here's Mr. Sneaky! Buy now, and I'll let you have one for 100 SP!"

"SP? Is that an abbreviation for 'skill points'?"

"Huh? Of course not. It stands for 'socks points'!"

The Goddess gave me an incredulous look, as though the answer should've been obvious, but personally, I'd never heard of any such point system.

"As you deliver me more socks, I'll award you SP based on their quality. Then you can use that SP to buy special rewards

from me! Applause, applause!”

“Yay, sounds...great.”

“By the way, those rewards include actual skill points, as well as consumable scrolls that let you learn new skills.”

“Really? Tell me more!” This sounded too important to let her overlook explaining.

“Heh heh heh, hook, line, and sinker! Very well, here’s a catalog of possible rewards you can earn. I made that myself, so treat it with care.”

“Thank you very much!”

She casually handed me a pamphlet that looked suspiciously like a full-color doujinshi. But when I opened it, it was indeed a list of various scrolls that would teach me offensive magic skills, martial arts skills, and the like, along with a hodgepodge of other goods and the amount of SP required to earn each of them. *I’ll take my time going over all this later, so let’s close the book for now. Oh, what’s this? On the back of the pamphlet, it says “only good for one year.”*

“Um, Goddess? What does ‘only good for one year’ mean?”

“Yeah, well, that’s your first catalog, so I’m giving it to you as a gift. After that, you’ll need SP to purchase them, so better start saving up for the next one!”

The Goddess urged me to flip to the last page of the pamphlet, where “Catalog: 200 SP” was listed, along with a crude illustration of the catalog in question.

Two hundred SP, huh... Is that cheap, or expensive? I can’t tell.

“By the way... How much SP did I earn from Harumikazuchi’s stockings?”

“For Miss Harumikazuchi’s, I’ll award you 60 SP. If the passage of time and you holding them all that time hadn’t caused the scent to fade, I would’ve given you 80. By the way, a perfect score gets you 100 SP.”

“I see.” In other words, if I didn’t deliver at least two more pairs of stockings within the year, I’d lose access to the catalog. Also, if I wanted more items, I would have to give her more socks. Mr. Sneaky was a consumable item, and I probably wanted more of those.

Yeah...I’m starting to understand how the Goddess thinks. She doesn’t care how much I struggle, as long as I deliver her socks. Hmm... Does this isekai have slaves, I wonder? If I bought a slave girl to make her wear a bunch of stockings, could I farm SP infinitely?

“By the way, my SP evaluation criteria might change at any time depending on how I’m feeling. Giving me socks from the same person or a bunch of rapid-fire deliveries will only result in fewer points, so keep that in mind. Even a perfect delivery would get boring if I got it every day. Variety is the spice of life!”

“I should’ve figured.”

“Even if you forget and just give me offerings when I’m least expecting it, that’s totally fine! I like surprises!”

Only occasionally is totally fine, huh? Then maybe the slave girl route wouldn’t be such a bad option after all. I should look into that later… Dammit, I’ve already bought into this whole sock-delivering mess! Curse you, Goddess! You’re a shrewd saleswoman!

“Just to check, my stockings don’t count? I’m a beautiful girl too, right?”

“Nope, they don’t count. There are artists out there who don’t count their own works among actual art, right? It’s more or less the same as that.”

So I guess copying my own socks with spatial magic is also out. The magic power contained within would transfer to myself, and her power as a goddess would wane.

“I kind of feel like I was lucky to get those first stockings, though,” I said. “Socks from a beautiful girl aren’t exactly so easy to obtain. A guy’s socks don’t count?”

“That’s why I’m offering extra SP for more difficult acquisitions. Technically I’d be fine with socks from men, kids, or the elderly too, but they just don’t have that same shame factor.”

“Shame factor?”

“Absolutely. Shame is the ultimate spice, after all. Socks that don’t reflect the embarrassment of the wearer will always get an exceedingly low score. And the more beautiful and put-together a woman is, the more shame she feels toward relinquishing her used socks! I could feel the shame in Miss Harumikazuchi’s pair earlier! It was wonderful!”

So explained the Goddess. “Oh, and freshly laundered socks will get an automatic zero. That’s very important, so keep that in mind,” she added.

Sounds like I might incur her wrath by offering up low-scoring socks. That’s a scary thought. “Hmm… Well, for the time being, I guess I’ll shoot for the socks of that succubus nun outside.”

“That succubus is one of my own creations, actually. Not in a ‘reincarnated from another world’ sense like you, but she’s a

messenger of mine. An angel, if you will. Her race is 'succubus,' though."

"So she really *is* a succubus! No wonder she was so hot!"

"I know, right? One of my finest works, if I do say so myself."

And since angels are like the hands and feet of the gods they serve, she, like me, wouldn't count. Actually, what sort of goddess has a succubus as her "angel"?

"There's an angel stationed at each of my churches within the larger towns so that the buildings don't go unsupervised. They're also your fellow coworkers, in that they harvest socks from my followers and give them to me. So be sure to get along with them!"

"Coworkers, huh?"

I thought I was supposed to be aiming to be a merchant. I don't recall ever signing up to harvest used socks. Well, I'll try and get along with them anyway.

"Um, if I try and bum socks off one of your angels without realizing their true identity, please don't get too upset."

"Then I'll make it so that all my underlings can recognize each other at a glance. How's that?"

"W-Works for me." *Sounds convenient...I think?*

"Now then, the taste of Harumikazuchi's stockings is calling me, so I'll see you another—"

"Wait, Goddess. Last time you mentioned something about sacred treasures and the world being in danger?"

"Oh, whoops, I almost forgot. Tee hee!"

Let's not forget something as important as the destruction of the world, shall we?

"To be honest, it's really only at the level of 'if it's convenient for you, it'd be a stroke of good luck for me,' but there are indeed items in this world known as 'sacred treasures.'"

Sacred treasures—items that allowed humans to take a step closer to the divine, or items that simply manifested the powers or miracles of the gods. They apparently came in many forms—some were standard, like chalices, holy swords, or holy armor, while others assumed the forms of daily household items like pillows or blankets. Some were even inconspicuously mixed in with nature and looked no different from a regular boulder or tree.

As for their effects, they were so great that they could transform entire environments. Apparently they could enrich the

land's soil, turn a desert into an oasis, transform those who gathered a series of seven into a god, make a fortress impregnable, or eradicate tens of thousands of enemy soldiers in one fell swoop.

"You see, I was originally a little too generous with these and scattered them everywhere. Thanks to that, this world's currently in an energy deficit. Ten more years, it'll all go kaput."

"And the world will crumble?"

"Well, I've been siphoning the energy from the other worlds I manage to keep this one alive, so it shouldn't all fall to ruin as long as I don't abandon it."

"Oh, that's good news…maybe."

"Still, it won't do to operate at a deficit." She likened the current state of the world to a successful company using their surplus funds to offset the failure of one of their subsidiaries. *Yeah, that doesn't sound like a healthy business model to me.*

"Plus, the further we sink in debt, the more I'll probably feel like cutting my losses and leaving this world. But if you keep providing me with stockings, I might have a reason to stay. Get my drift?"

Hmm, yeah, I get it. This Goddess is only looking out for number one—herself. Well, she is a god, after all.

"Couldn't you just take control of my body like you did during the tutorial and gather them all up at once?"

"Huh? Of course not. That'd be way too much work on my end."

Oh, I see. Guess nothing can be done about that, then…

"For every sacred treasure you recover, I'll award you a bonus 500 SP. So do your best!"

So…roughly eight times the SP I got from Harumikazuchi's stockings? The fate of the world hinges on the recovery of these divine items, right? Doesn't that value seem a little…low?

"More like Harumikazuchi's stockings were worth that much!" the Goddess exclaimed.

"So it was the value of the *socks* you rigged. Should've known."

Well, it's her point system, so no use complaining about it.

Looks like socks are the most efficient path to obtaining SP. But I couldn't just ignore the sacred treasures either. After all, if the Goddess ever decided to abandon the world on a whim, the world would fall to ruin in only ten years.

"All right, I understand," I said. "Unless they're being used to

make the world a better place or something, I'll recover as many as I can." If recovering one being used to turn a desert into an oasis killed a bunch of people, for instance, it'd leave a bad taste in my mouth.

"You don't need to prioritize the sacred treasures or anything. Just live your life as you see fit and make sure you deepen your connections with many beautiful women along the way, so you can get those glorious socks!"

"R-Right."

She wasn't even trying to hide that the stockings were more important to her.

"Now then, until we meet again, my dear Karina! Adieu! (･ω･)ﾉ ﾞ"

"R-Right, another time. 'Adieu'?"

And there's that emoticon again. The people in this world don't seem to know Japanese, but you *seem to be awfully knowledgeable about my world, Goddess...*

* * *

I'd now received my missive from the Goddess (Quest: Obtain the Shame-Filled Stockings of the World's Beautiful Women!) Wow, God sure was more of a pervert than I'd expected. Not that I'd ever say that out loud, lest she strike me down.

Considering she also placed a terrifying bomb in my body (in the form of the innate desire for socks), I ought to get 100 SP worth of stockings as quickly as I can so I can have a private space away from her! Why do I have to struggle with such a perverted internal impulse, anyway? Oh, wait—maybe it's the price I have to pay for my power? Guess it's true, then—you really can't get anything without giving something else in return.

"Um, are you all right?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah, I'm okay, Miss Nun."

Before I knew it, I was back in the chapel and once again sitting in the frontmost pew. I was no longer holding Harumikazuchi's stockings, and I sensed that I could now make time flow slower inside my space of holding—both proof that my meeting with the Goddess had actually happened.

"If you're feeling under the weather, we have a lounge in the back that you may lie down and rest in— Hmph, you're one of us, I see. Never mind, what a shame. May you bring peace to the

world.” Upon peering into my eyes, the succubus nun’s demeanor changed instantly. She turned on her heel and left.

She must’ve been trying to get closer to me because she wanted my stockings. Well, I am a beautiful girl, so I can’t blame her.

I’d also been able to immediately recognize that she was one of the Goddess’s subordinates after looking into her pink eyes. *What a strange feeling.*

Anyway, now that today’s business with the Goddess was concluded, I left the church—wow, the sky was so pretty tonight—then turned around and headed right back into the building. I had something I needed to ask the succubus nun.

“Excuse me, Miss Nun, but to be honest, I’m currently penniless. Do you have a blanket or something I can borrow?”

“Hm. Well, we usually require donating a certain amount first, but just for tonight, I suppose I can let you sleep in the lounge. No complimentary breakfast, though.”

“That’s fine! Thank you so much!” Wow, so I supposed I really could rely on my coworkers for help! That’s right, we were on the same team, so we needed to help each other out when we needed it. Then while I was out making a ton of money, I’d come back and donate to the church when I could!

* * *

A night passed, and I woke up to the morning twittering of birds. Since my private room within my space of holding wasn’t ready yet, and Miss Nun had graciously offered, I’d spent the night in the church’s lounge room with a warm blanket over my body.

“Ah… Morning already,” I mumbled, throwing off the blanket.

Oh, perhaps I should copy that blanket, in case I need it later for myself. I didn’t plan to sell it, so it was fine, right? Oh, but since I didn’t actually own it, maybe not? Hmm…

Sure, why not? It’s fine! This blanket’s too warm to relinquish!

And so, I placed a copy of the blanket in my space of holding. *Oh no, I’m getting woozy again.* That blanket was pretty large, after all. Probably the biggest thing I’d copied so far. With the original blanket still in my hands, I sat down for a moment and waited for the dizziness to pass. Then my stomach rumbled. I’d munched on a few pieces of dried jerky for last night’s dinner, but it was way too hard and salty to eat much of. It really

hammered home just how much effort my original world put into researching and developing the perfect jerky recipe. It was only after I'd read the entry in the Tome of General Knowledge that I'd learned jerky like this was supposed to complement dishes, such as by being cut into pieces with a knife and added into a soup. If only I'd known that sooner!

Suddenly, I heard a knock on the door. "Are you awake, miss?"

"Yeah, I'm up," I answered. It was Miss Nun's voice. I folded the blanket up and opened the door to see her carrying a tray of what looked like a small piece of bread and vegetable soup. I swallowed hard.

"Good morning. Here's your breakfast."

"I thought you said breakfast wouldn't be on the house?"

"Well, since I'd already had supper prepared last night, I thought I could at least provide leftovers to a colleague."

So this is the grace of an angel! This is God's messenger at work! Except she was a succubus. *Come to think of it, religions are all about this mutual aid between followers thing, aren't they?* Japan didn't really have a specified religion (Buddhism was probably the closest we had to that), so it was wild to think that religious organizations treated you like family just because you believed in the same higher power. *I should reciprocate and show my faith as well.*

"After I make a bunch of money, I'll come back here and make a donation," I said.

"I appreciate that, fellow disciple. I'll be waiting, though I won't hold my breath."

"Hm? Oh, no, I'll definitely come back, I promise. The Goddess has already blessed me with so much, I have to repay her."

"Oh? Very well, then I anticipate your return. Please donate enough to repay all you say the Goddess has done for you."

"I told you I would, didn't I? It'll be sometime in the future, though."

"Well, you're penniless right now, after all. In the meantime, please accept this charity from the church." She winked at me.

Oh, shit, I think I'm in love. Wait a minute, what if the reason I'm so quick to fall for these women is that bomb the Goddess planted inside me? Oh, but it's no good... When a girl this cute's in front of me, I can't contain my euphoria! Marry me, Sister! Suffocate me with that plump body of yours! Throw off that habit—I need to check if you've got one of those cute succubus demon tails!

“Excuse me, would you mind not undressing me with your eyes? I can tell that sort of thing, you know.”

“Guh!”

Succubi were even more frightening than I’d thought!

The nun’s breakfast wasn’t exactly what I’d call delicious, but I was grateful for her generosity all the same. *Thanks a lot, Sister!*

“By the way, Miss Nun, what’s your name?”

“Hm? It’s Siesta. A common name, wouldn’t you say?”

I see, so the sister’s name is Siesta! That’ll be easy to remember since they sound so similar. I’ve really gotta do my best logging so I can repay Miss Siesta for her kindness!

My enthusiasm renewed, I left the church and headed for the Adventurer’s Guild. When I reached the reception desk, I heard someone call out to me.

“Yo, Karina! You really took on a logging quest all by yourself?”

“Oh, Mr. Blade. I did indeed, why?”

“Well, our team was also thinking about doing one. How about we help you out? It’s probably tough for just one person, right?” He flashed a grin that showed his teeth. Shildon and Sekko were also there beside him.

If I didn’t know any better, it would’ve sounded like he and his team were trying to leech off my talent. But that couldn’t be the case, because he couldn’t have known about how easily I’d completed the quest…right? Right, of course not. He was just in his “looking after novice adventurers” mode, since he wasn’t drunk off his ass today. That had to be it.

But sorry, Blade. This quest had to be done with only one person: Me.

“Actually, Blade, I was going to do this one myself…” I was about to refuse him, but then I realized something—with three extra people helping out, couldn’t I carry more logs at once than I could on my own? Maybe it’d be better to let them help me after all. In the end, I decided to give them the green light.

“If you’re okay with me taking seventy percent of the reward and you guys taking thirty, then you can help!”

“Hey now, don’t you think you have that backward? As your mentors, we’ll teach you all sorts of tricks and shortcuts senior adventurers use. You can even turn logging into a profession, if you get good enough at it.”

“I can imagine. I got two silvers yesterday for one quest, after

all.”

Blade fell silent for a moment. “Wait a minute. You actually *completed* that quest? On your own? And two silvers means…you carried two logs by yourself?!”

“Sure did. I picked up two logs, one under each arm, and carried them back to town. You can vouch for me, right, Miss Receptionist?”

The receptionist behind the desk nodded. All three senior adventurers looked shocked.

“Why didn’t you say so?!” Blade shouted. “Now we look like total idiots!”

“While we can publicly disclose what quests an adventurer takes on, we cannot reveal whether they succeeded or failed, as that is personal information,” the receptionist replied.

“Ah, she’s right, Blade. That does count as personal information,” Shildon said. “She couldn’t help it.”

“And after you spent all that time rehearsing the smug grin you were going to give her.”

“Shildon, Sekko, come on, cut me some slack, okay?”

Apparently the members of Sun Bacchus had heard that a brand-new adventurer had signed up for a logging quest, but nothing beyond that. And since I’d delivered the logs to the designated drop-off point and not the guild itself, no one had been around to witness my success.

“Still, if that’s true, it changes everything,” Blade said. “I guess you don’t need our help after all, then… How did you *do* that, anyway? Can you tell us?”

“Simply put, I used magic.”

“Ah, right, magic. Should’ve known. Man, magic sure is impressive, eh?”

He accepted my explanation just like that. *Blade… You’re kind of a simpleton, aren’t you?*

“And so, since I can do the whole quest on my own anyway, that’s why I offered to give you guys thirty percent.”

“But do you really need us to help?”

“In the sense that I’ll be able to say ‘Everyone got their logs?!’ like the scene in a certain famous manga.”

“The hell are you talking about? Well, I already cleared my schedule for the day intending to help you out, so I might as well.”

For real? You really are a nice guy, Blade.

“Liar. You just need more money ’cause the missus at Shunrai’s demanding you pay up already.”

“She’s scary when she’s angry, after all. Her tail gets all bristly too.”

“Sh-Shut up, you two! Some things you should just keep to yourself!”

I see, so it’s for Miss Harumikazuchi’s sake? Then that’s even better! If putzing around with these three will benefit that beauty in the end, you won’t hear any complaints from me!

* * *

In the end, my buddies ended up helping me out on my logging quest. Just as I’d suggested, we decided to split the proceeds seventy-thirty.

Just as we were about to head to the forest, however, Blade spoke up. “Huh? We’re not using a wagon?”

“I don’t have anything like that,” I replied.

“You’ve gotta be kidding! Are you nuts?! Why didn’t you just borrow one from— Oh, right. F rank adventurers wouldn’t have the connections *to* borrow one yet. No problem, we’ll rent one for you.”

Wow, now that would be a big help. After all, each of us could only carry two logs at a time, one under each arm. Without a wagon, we’d be limited to only eight logs per trip.

“I mean, with a wagon, you could carry up to six logs!” Blade said.

“In that case, maybe we don’t need one after all.” I replied.

“H-Huh? Really?”

“No, wait. If we could carry six logs *each*, wagons might be better after all.”

“Whoa, hold on! Just how many trees are you planning to cut down?!”

Hm? As many as I can, of course.

“It costs one large copper per day to rent one wagon,” Blade informed me. “Can we really make enough on this job to comfortably afford renting four?”

“For sure! Piece of cake!” I said.

“Seriously?! That magic of yours is something else.”

“C’mon, Blade. Surely you know better than to swallow her words at face value,” Shildon said.

“In fact, aren’t you a little *too* trusting of her as of late? Something happen between you two?” Sekko chimed in.

“Sure did. A few things happened while me and her were at Shunrai. I’ll never forget all I witnessed that night…”

Wait, you *saw everything too?! Just what all did you see?! The tidbits Harumikazuchi told me were embarrassing enough on their own!*

“Don’t worry, guys! She’s a girl we can trust! I guarantee it!”

“Uh, Karina, what did you do to him? Did you become…his mistress?”

“Absolutely not. But keep the Shunrai thing a secret anyway.”

That night was just as embarrassing for me, after all… Sure wish I *could remember it, though!*

Anyway, thanks to Blade’s referral, I was able to rent four wagons. After that, we made for the forest.

“All right, time to cut down some trees!” I said.

“Go right ahead!” Blade said. “We’ll watch the area for monsters in the meantime!”

“Heeere we go!”

“Whoa, already?!”

In one fell swoop, I used my spatial magic to instantly down one tree. Right before it hit the ground, I solidified the space—freezing the tree in place—then I lowered it gently.

“I-I didn’t even see the spell activate!” Sekko said in shock.

“That’s because I just used some slight wind magic,” I replied.

“Wind magic can do *that*?!”

“What’d I tell ya? Karina’s pretty awesome, huh?”

“Why do *you* look so proud, Blade? Well, at least it looks like we’ll get our money’s worth with these wagons.”

He was right about that. If each wagon could carry six logs, I could cut down twenty-three more trees in no time.

“Then, at least leave the branches to us,” Shildon said. “Now that the tree’s cut down, we can use Blade’s woodworking skill to—”

“Oh, right, I forgot about the branches. Hyah!”

“You sliced them all off in one go?! What are you, superhuman?! Then at least let us load them into the—”

“Oh, that won’t be necessary. I can use magic to make them as light as a feather.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me…”

Wow! Not only can I cut the tree down in an instant, I can lop off its branches just as fast! Then by hollowing out the logs' contents by creating a space of holding inside the log, I can make them incredibly light! (Of course, I'd have to replace the log's contents afterward so it wouldn't look suspicious.) Mwa ha ha… Witness the divine might of spatial magic in action!

"I guess you really can do this all by yourself after all, huh, Karina?" Blade said. "Did we really even need to be here?"

"As a formality, yes."

"A formality? What formality?"

"Men, shoulder your cargo! Everyone got their logs?!" I recited.

"Whoa! She prepared another wagon's worth just like that?!"

Because it took practically no time to prepare a load, we were able to make two round trips in one day, turning in a grand total of forty-eight logs.

When we dropped a stack of forty-eight receipts for complete delivery onto the guild's counter, the receptionist's smile stiffened.

"Th-This is an amount I'd normally expect from a designated logging team."

"I know, right?" Blade said with a wry grin. "We were just as surprised."

"Seriously. I think this might be the first time something Blade was excited about actually lived up to the hype," Shildon said.

"Oh, you think so too?" Sekko said.

The senior adventurers still hadn't gotten over their astonishment.

"Er… You were going to split it seventy-thirty, correct?" the receptionist said, and she handed me seventy percent of the reward.

"Karina, just go ahead and take four large silvers' worth," Blade said.

"Huh? But wait, my share should be thirty-three silvers and six large coppers. The monsters I killed on the way should've covered the cost of the wagons too, so isn't that a little much?"

"Considering how little we did, I'd feel bad even taking thirty percent. Consider it the stubbornness of a senior adventurer… Ah, dammit! With power like that, you really are gonna be a big deal someday! I guarantee it!"

“’Preciate it!”

Apparently it wasn’t that he’d miscalculated the ratio. Shildon and Sekko were nodding in agreement as well. *In that case, I’ll take you up on your offer without refusing! A novice should show deference to their mentors, after all.*

“In addition to your reward, you’ve gone up an adventurer rank!” the receptionist announced. “Congratulations, you are now Rank E!”

“Huh? I ranked up already? I’m not a novice anymore? That was fast! Wait, this is only my third day since registering, though. Is that really okay? What standard is rank even determined by?”

“Anyone earning a total of one large silver’s worth over the course of a single month is automatically promoted to Rank E. In other words, the criteria for Rank E is based on your earnings.”

I see. I’d just earned four large silvers in the course of a single day, so that would definitely qualify. She went on to explain that to reach Rank D, I’d need to earn a total of two large silvers’ worth in a month *and* be actively registered in the guild for a certain amount of time. For Rank C, I’d also have to have completed a certain number of quests and gained the trust of the guild to a certain degree. So both of those ranks would actually take time to attain.

“Guess that means you guys in Sun Bacchus must be pretty seasoned adventurers after all,” I commented.

“Hey now, that’s rude. Do we not look like seasoned adventurers to you?” Blade replied.

“Well, at the start, you just looked like a drunk trying to hit on me.”

“Ugh.” Blade had no rebuttal.

“So, Karina, what do you plan to do from here on? Before, I was thinking I’d invite you to join our party, but seeing what you can accomplish on your own, I think we’d just get in your way.”

Wow, what an honest guy! I would’ve thought he’d try and exploit a newbie like me more since I didn’t know anything. That would’ve been a more interesting development, anyway.

“You said you wanted to become a merchant, right?” he continued.

“Oh—yeah, but I have another quest I have to complete first, so I was thinking I might try and find somewhere to buy a slave.”

That’s right, a quest—in other words, sock gathering. I was

planning to buy a cute slave girl and dress her in stockings to naturally farm SP! *Even if my own socks aren't any good, the Goddess shouldn't have any complaints about that! Not to mention, slave girls are an isekai staple. Tussling and arguing with a cute slave girl—now that sounds like fun!*

So I decided to ask Blade and the others where I could buy a slave and how much they would run.

"Karina…I don't think you should do that."

Immediate disapproval!

"You dashed my hopes right from the start!"

"Well, I mean, think about it from their perspective! They didn't become slaves because they *wanted* to."

"Yeah, I suppose not." Nobody would—unless they were a crazy, masochistic pervert.

"They all want to get *out* of slavery. You understand that, right?"

"Return to a free lifestyle. Yeah, I see." Anyone would want to live a free life rather than be a slave. Right. That went without saying.

"That's why they generally shouldn't be trusted. A few will genuinely work hard to earn the trust of their master, sure. But unless you want to get swindled, you should always assume they're trying to deceive you. Whatever you do, don't trust them with anything until they've squared their debts away and returned to a normal life."

"Huh? How come?"

"Because their attitudes often suddenly change once they're no longer a slave. Take this scenario, for example."

~ • ~ • ~

"Miss Slave, I love you. Will you marry me?"

"Oh, master! I'm so happy you feel that way about me! But regrettably, slaves aren't allowed to marry…"

"Then as of right now, you're free! Now that you're no longer a slave, we can get hitched! Now, my dear, let's—"

"Hell yeah! Free at last! Ha ha, gotcha, you *beep* piece of *beep*! You can't even make proper conversation with anyone unless you think they're beneath you! Who the hell would ever want to sleep with a gloomy, miserable *beeeep* like you?! You know how hard it was to pretend like I was interested in you day

in and day out? Well, no longer! See ya, sucker! By the way, I'll be taking all the gifts you bought me with me as compensation for all you put me through. I hated them all, but they should at least fetch me some good coin! Gah ha ha!"

~ • ~ • ~

"...is more or less how Shildon got deceived and taken for everything he had."

"That happened to *Shildon*?! Seriously?!"

"Urgh... Thanks for opening up those old wounds, Blade! You know how ashamed I am of that!"

"Considering all the trouble that incident caused us, I'm never gonna let you live it down."

So Blade was speaking from experience. Yikes.

By the way, despite Blade's exaggerated account, this was apparently what really happened: In the few days after Shildon freed her, the slave continued to act interested in him while secretly transferring the rights to his assets to herself in a way that wouldn't violate the law. She legally stripped him of everything he owned. Double yikes.

"She asked Shildon to tutor her and teach her about the world, and through that she learned of a way she could swindle him without resorting to crime," Blade explained.

"Even though he'd bought an expensive potion to treat her injuries," Sekko added, "and lived with her for a whole three years afterward. Sad, huh?"

"Sekko, aren't you just rubbing salt in his wounds?" I asked. "Shildon... Um, don't let it bother you too much?"

"And here I genuinely believed she was an innocent, helpless girl who needed me to dote on her...*sniff*..." He was in the fetal position, hugging his knees.

"It was a good thing he still had money stashed away in savings," Blade said grimly. "Too bad it was the money they'd both saved up for their married life together. She made off with that too."

"Gaaaahh!" Shildon screamed.

To think Shildon, who was in charge of the party's defense, would suffer that much damage! Well, it was mental damage and not physical, but still.

"Learn from my experience, Karina," he said weakly. "No

matter how perfect they seem, assume that all slave girls you see are out to get you."

"Er, yessir. I'll keep that in mind."

Thank you for your service, Shildon! Your trauma will save others from that fate in the future! I salute you!

"As you can see from Shildon's sorry state, the experience of thinking a girl liked you and reciprocating only to find out they hated your guts is really rough. So if you decide to buy a slave anyway, at least go in with the knowledge that you'll probably end up betrayed."

"Enough already..." Shildon moaned. Blade's words continued to cut his friend like a knife. *Isn't that a little too harsh, Blade? Can't you see the poor guy's already a corpse?*

"I assume you don't have any dreams or ambitions of owning a slave either, huh, Sekko?"

"That's right, Karina. Slaves are expensive to take care of, and they're a lot of extra responsibility. They're not something you can just buy on a whim."

They weren't just expensive to purchase, apparently—they were also expensive to feed, house, and buy clothes and other necessities for. Plus, if one ran away and committed a crime somewhere, you'd be the one held responsible. Some slaves would even use this to their advantage in order to get away from masters they didn't like, manipulating their masters into returning them and buying a new slave instead. *Whoa... So they can just keep rolling for masters like a gacha until they get one they're satisfied with? That's...actually scary to think about.*

"Although, since you're not in a party and working solo, buying a slave might actually be a good option," Blade mused.

Huh? Doesn't that, like, contradict everything that's been said so far?

"That's odd. Based on how the conversation's been going, I'd have thought you'd be against it," I said.

"Only if you're buying a slave as a pet or for adult purposes. If you hire a slave just to help out with work, it's a different story."

"Wh-What makes you think that I'd want a slave for adult purposes?!" I cried out. *Nonsense! I'm a girl, remember?! A purehearted, innocent girl! I'd never—*

"Enough with the act, Karina. It's too late to hide it now. Just a bit ago you had the same look in your eyes that Shildon did back then."

“Yeah, Karina,” Sekko said. “It was obvious what you were thinking just by looking: ‘Then I’ll just need to teach her a lesson before she deceives me.’”

“Was I really that transparent back then?” Shildon groaned.

Damn. Looks like the cat’s out of the bag for me too.

“And when you think about it, any slave who shows promise in that sort of work, regardless of gender, would normally just get shipped to a brothel. That means any of the pretty ones who are still left are guaranteed to be outliers in some way.”

“O-Oh, that makes sense.” Slaves didn’t have the right to deny a proposition. And the slaves who were pros at that kind of work were probably already snapped up by brothels, so none of the more skilled ones would be left. If they were, they’d either be a rare anomaly or one with extenuating circumstances like a criminal history.

At the same time, the slaves meant to be purchased for labor weren’t likely as problematic. Of course, the fact that they had yet to be sold could be indicative of their quality or other problems, but it was still preferable, since there was at least a chance there’d be a suitable one in the bunch.

“And so, if you just want a friendly companion or servant to help you with labor, a slave would be the way to go,” Blade continued. “Especially for you, since you seem to have quite a few secrets yourself.”

“O-Oh, you realized?” *Not like I was especially trying to hide it, though.*

“Well, not like we’re gonna pry or anything. Adventurers aren’t supposed to butt into each other’s personal lives.”

“Actually, I’m on a mission from heaven, and—”

“I said we wouldn’t ask! Actually, why’d you tell us?! We don’t wanna get involved in something like that!”

Tch. And here I was hoping they’d help me gather the sacred treasures.

“Anyway, I’m not finished,” Blade went on. “Slaves also have a number of curses placed on them. One of these is basically an agreement of confidentiality. If a slave’s ever about to blab their master’s secrets, their body will freeze in place and they won’t be able to speak.”

“Oh, so it’s basically the same as their master ordering, ‘That’s classified information, so shut up.’ That way, the master doesn’t ever need to worry about a slave leaking his secrets, even when

he's away," I said.

"You got it. Merchants have lots of info they need to keep confidential, for instance, and it's handy for merchants buying slaves to help out at their shops."

Yeah, I can see how it'd be convenient for a company to force their employees to keep their mouths shut.

"But just keep in mind, most slaves became slaves to begin with because they either committed some wrongdoing or went deep in debt. The minute you start thinking, '*My* slave wouldn't do that!' and let your guard down is when they'll walk off with your wallet."

"So even though they can be handy, don't trust them or put your faith in them. Right?"

"In general, there's three things you need to remember. One, assume they're always up to no good, and only order them to do things they can't possibly use to exploit you. Two, make sure they're not doing anything except what they're ordered to, and don't give them any leeway. And three, don't free them before they're supposed to be freed."

So basically, I just need to make sure I keep them in line.

"Hm? But if I tell a slave not to do anything bad, wouldn't doing so anyway count as insubordination and grounds for punishment? Why would they do it, anyway?"

"Because slaves don't see their crimes as bad things."

So it's a matter of perspective, then. Yeah, I guess a command like that wouldn't stop anyone who steals and swindles as naturally as they breathe. Sounds like a pain.

"As I said, most slaves fall into slavery because of some misdeed or unpaid debt, but some have other reasons. Scarier ones. But if you're gonna buy one, I'd actually go for the more dangerous ones if I were you."

"Huh? How come?"

"Well, you seem to have quite the history yourself, so maybe you'll have an easier time getting along with them. Depending on what that history is, of course."

"Wow, Blade, you're a genius!" I wouldn't have thought of that, and it actually made a lot of sense. As expected of a senior adventurer!

"All right, then I'm gonna go buy the most dangerous, shifty, suspicious-looking slave girl I can!"

"Wait. Going right now would be meaningless."

“Why? If I don’t hurry, someone might buy up the one I want first!”

Blade just shook his head and shrugged his shoulders in exasperation. “Slaves cost around one gold. You don’t have enough.”

Wh-What?! Tell me that before *I get all excited next time!*

Chapter 2

The next day, at noon, I secretly made my way over to the slave trader's. While I couldn't afford a slave with the money I had on hand, I'd thought maybe they'd let me put down a deposit to hold one. I'd made four large silvers in one day, after all—only two more days and I could pay the full amount!

In cases like this, the early bird got the worm. There was no use crying over spilled milk. It was better to act and repent than not to act and regret. Idioms aside, I didn't know how much I'd need for a deposit, so to be safe, I'd withdrawn all four large silvers from the guild. (They'd be more secure in my space of holding anyway.)

Huh? Why'd I sleep in until noon, you ask? Well, all that fantasizing about cohabiting with a cute slave girl got me a little excited, and I kinda ended up researching my own body...a lot...in various ways...and I was so exhausted afterward that I didn't wake up until noon. *Man, women's bodies are seriously amazing.* That said, I did hold myself back a little—it was highly likely the Goddess was watching, after all. I just touched a few things here and there, that's all. I mean, I earned my pay for the day, so what was wrong with just taking it easy for the night? *That's what a life of leisure is all about!*

By the way, some trivia about slave traders, courtesy of the Tome of General Knowledge: they're basically the last safety net a criminal has in this world. Because these vendors sheltered those who would otherwise have nowhere else to go and have nothing to eat, it was more preferable for them than being out on the streets, so they generally didn't object and went obediently. This also contributed to the overall safety of the town. Apparently these traders had strong ties with the authorities.

I see, so slave traders are basically government workers in this world? Well, there'll always be criminals, so I guess they don't have to worry about job security, at least.

The slave trader's facility was a large building surrounded by tall fences on all sides. I walked up to a shifty-looking man standing at the entrance. "Excuse me. This is where you can buy

slaves, correct?"

He took a quick glance at me. "Hm? A girl? You don't seem like you're hurtin' for money. You a customer?"

Well, I *was* a pretty girl, after all, so no wonder he thought I was well-off. I'd probably have looked a lot more destitute if I was less pretty, though.

"Yes. Well, actually, I'm just here to browse today. I can't pay the full amount just yet."

"I see. I'll let master know. Come this way."

"Master?" Did he work here as an employee, or was he a slave himself? At any rate, I followed him into what looked like a negotiation room, with a long couch and low table presumably for filling out documents. There was a home shrine inside, as well as pots with pretty pink flowers. *Nice decoration sense.*

Upon taking a seat on the hard couch, the facility's master showed up—a red-bearded, neatly dressed, middle-aged man. He certainly looked like he had money. *What's with that garish, ridiculously expensive-looking ring on his finger? Is he going to a party after this or something?*

"Oh, now you're a fine specimen, aren't you?" he said.

Hey, now, I'm supposed to be a customer*. Is that any way to treat your patrons right off the bat?*

"Anyway, you came to buy a slave, right? I trust you have the coin for it?"

"Ah— No, I'm just window-shopping today. But I plan to come back once I have the money, so if I find one I want, I'd like to know your price."

"Huh? You pullin' my leg, girl?"

Hey, what's with the glare? Is it because I said I was only here to window-shop?

"Well, whatever. And?" The slave trader sat in the chair opposite me and jerked his chin as though urging me to continue.

"That's all. Like I said, I'm only here to look—"

"And I'm asking you what kind of slave you're looking for! Honestly, this is why doing business with women is such a pain!"

First time I've heard that. And your attitude's terrible, dude.

"A girl of age, not too expensive," I answered. "Problematic. Oh, and preferably one with pretty legs and feet."

"A girl of age, huh? I see one right in front of me, actually." He gave me a boorish grin. *Whoa now, I told you I was a customer!*

What's with this guy? Does he want to buy me? Then try it—if you can afford me, that is.

"Do you have any slaves like that or not? I thought my conditions were already pretty lenient, but if you don't—"

"Oh. Well, it's not like I don't, but..." He put his pinky finger in his ear, dug out a ball of wax, and blew it away into the air. *You do know you're dealing with a customer right now, right? And if you have what I want, show me the goods already. Aggressive selling's normally frowned upon in business, but I'd prefer even that over whatever this is.*

"Come on. Follow me." He stood up and walked toward the exit. Honestly, I didn't even really feel like buying from him anymore, but I figured I might as well check his inventory just in case. I half-heartedly followed behind.

He led me into a room that looked like a prison. The cells had iron bars over the doors, and a few male slaves in ragged clothing could be seen inside here and there as we passed into a stairwell that led underground.

"You said you wanted a problematic slave, right? I have one down here."

In the small cell, through the iron bars, I saw a slave girl collapsed on the ground.

Both her arms were missing at the shoulders, and her face was covered in filthy bandages. Some of these had come loose, revealing gruesome burn scars underneath. The rags she was wearing were so tattered they barely resembled clothing at all—only her important bits were concealed. But the exposed parts of her body were covered in bruises, wounds, and what looked like tattoos.

Yeesh. Oh, but her legs and feet were comparatively intact, barring a few bruises and scrapes here and there.

"She's a half dwarf by birth, so she's pretty sturdy. Perfect for a punching bag."

"A half dwarf? You don't say. So those exist too, huh?"

"What, she doesn't freak you out? You got some balls, girl." He looked slightly impressed. Well, compared to all the carnage and gore the Goddess had shown me back during the tutorial, this was nothing. By now I'd built up a resistance to things like this.

"By the way, why is she in this state?"

"Oh, apparently she was in the Kingdom of Alchemy, singing some song outside that one of the businesses there wasn't too

keen on, so they taught her a lesson. She was apparently a minstrel, but they ruined her voice too."

I see. Arms to hold her instrument, beauty to draw the people's attention, a voice to sing with—they completely destroyed everything she'd need to continue her minstrel work.

"If they did all that to teach her a lesson, then why'd they sell her here?"

"Who knows? If someone comes to me with a good offer, I buy, no questions asked. That's the slave trade. Maybe they just got bored of her."

Hmm... Well, I guess it doesn't really matter. If it was one of the businesses in the Kingdom of Alchemy, it's probably defunct now anyway—along with the rest of the kingdom.

"Also, I doubt this will matter to you since you're also a girl, but she's a virgin."

"Huh? You mean they went that far to teach her a lesson, but they kept that part of her intact?"

"The blood of a virgin can be used as alchemy material. Her blood offsets the cost of keeping her alive, so I ain't complaining."

"So virgins make more convenient slaves because their blood pays for their own maintenance costs. I see. From a business perspective, that makes sense." Come to think of it, Blade did mention that potions were a thing here. Scavenger slimes also sounded like they were probably a product of alchemy.

"So, how much is she?"

"One gold... No, two. Two gold for the girl. Can you afford that? Or would you like to look at some others first?"

"Hey, you clearly just jacked up the price."

"That's because you don't seem as repulsed as I thought you would. It costs money just to keep these slaves alive. Traders have to take what they can get, whenever they can. Plus, she's the cheapest out of all my females."

Well, I understand that maintaining each of these slaves is pricey, but didn't you just say selling her virgin blood offsets her own costs? He thinks I'm an idiot, doesn't he?

"But who in the world would buy someone like her for two gold?"

"Figured you'd say that. No one would be able to heal injuries like those, after all, and she isn't worth healing in the first place. All right, let's move on, then."

“I didn’t say I wasn’t interested. I’ll buy her if you drop it back down to one gold.”

“No kidding? Then it’s a deal. One gold it is.”

No way! That was the price he’d wanted all along?!

“In that case, I might as well buy. But I can’t pay in full right now.”

“Hmph. Is that so? All right, fine.”

I decided I was going to purchase this girl. I knew I could heal wounds of that degree in no time with spatial magic, considering how many times the Goddess had revived that old geezer over and over again from such a miserable state.

Oh, you’re wondering if I should check and see if her personality’s manageable first? It doesn’t really matter—people can become anything if they’re desperate enough! Like how that slave girl of Shildon’s pulled the wool over his eyes and made off with his assets even after he bought expensive potions to treat her severe wounds! I must not forget the lessons of my predecessors—I won’t let a slave girl deceive me! So the correct answer is to turn a blind eye to her personality entirely!

Well, even if she does turn out to be trouble, I can just shut her up in the space of holding until I need her. The ability to manipulate space sure is handy.

“If I pay you ten silvers, will you put her on hold for me?”

“I suppose. I’ll draw up a contract. Come on.”

Good grief. It took a while, but it looks like we’re finally making some headway.

We headed back upstairs to the negotiation room from before.

“Now, then, we’ve got some formalities to take care of first.”

“Hm, really?” Well, if this business was affiliated with the government, there were probably various procedures I had to go through.

“First, answer my questions. Careful, now—you can even look at the flowers if you need to calm down first. Here, this one’s my favorite.” He brought a potted plant over to the table. To think an old man like this guy would have a cute hobby like flowers!

“First, your background. Something tells me you’re not a noble.”

“No, I’m not. I’m a commoner, and I work as an adventurer.”

“What about your family?”

“Don’t have one.”

“Oh, so you live alone, eh?” The slave trader’s lips curled up into a grin. *What, is there some problem with a bachelorette buying a slave girl?*

“Any lovers?”

“Not at the moment. Why, trying to hit on me?”

“Not at all. I just have to ask. I ought to know what kind of place I’m selling one of my slaves out to, see? Relax.” He pushed the potted flowers a little closer to me. *Come on, you seriously think just looking at flowers will make someone calm down? What fairy tale world do you live in?*

“They sure smell nice, don’t they?”

“Mm… Well, I suppose.” They seemed to give off a sweet, peachy smell.

“Now, let’s move on. We’ve got a bunch of questions left.”

“Get on with it, then.”

“Where do you live?”

“Hm? Not anywhere in particular at the moment…”

“No address? Then you’re a tourist?”

“Tourist… Yeah, that’s right. I travel…”

“Any diseases?”

“Diseases…? No, no, I’m the very picture of health.”

Huh? How many questions have we gone through now? I’m starting to get sleepy. How many more are left? Damn, what a pain…!

#Side: The Slave Trader

The name’s Bareas, and I’m the slave trader of this town. Well, some call me a slave trader. Others call me “master.”

I was granted the privilege to deal in slaves by none other than the town’s lord himself, and as such, everyone around here adheres to my command. Still, it costs money to run a business like this, and since the lord forbade me from ever refusing an offer for a slave, no matter how little profit it’d make me, I’m not as well-off as most people would think.

So sometimes, I have to rely on my own power to make ends meet. Perhaps it’s a little crooked, but there shouldn’t be a problem as long as no one finds out.

Indeed—I don’t like to brag, but I have an incredible ability. No, not my talent and influence as a slave trader—that goes without

saying—but this ring I wear on my finger. More specifically, the jewel inside the ring, "Dominion." This jewel, imparted onto me by the divine, emits a sweet smell when magic is channeled into it. And all those who smell it are forced to obey my every command.

That's not all. The more a person smells it, the more subservient to me they become. However, a good deal of time needs to pass in between doses. If I get too impatient and have them smell a great deal all at once, their brain ceases to function. Then they're useless to me.

Long story short, I can only use it once per day. But that's where my profession as a slave trader comes in handy—using Dominion, I can control someone and legally bind them into slavery while their consciousness is hazy. That way, even when they come to their senses, they still belong to me! And as long as I put a clause in the contract telling them not to blab, no one will find out about Dominion. By nabbing slaves for free, I can make the huge profit I deserve!

However, it only works on those with no relation to me. If they hear the conditions and refuse, I have to dispel it, but because their consciousnesses are hazy during the period they're under Dominion's control, there's no danger of them going out and telling anyone there either. Plus, it's not like anyone from the slums will be missed if they go missing. In fact, it's more like I'm doing the town a favor by cleaning up the streets! I'm contributing to the safety of the public, just like the lord here wants me to!

Which leads me to my current situation. An incredible specimen visited me just a bit ago. She came to buy a slave, apparently, but to me, she looked completely clueless about the world. However, she didn't look like she was starving or too poor to afford her own meals. She didn't show me any respect either, so I guessed she wasn't from this town. In the first place, there's no way I wouldn't have known about such a beauty living here.

When I first saw the quality of her clothing, I thought she was a noble from somewhere, but that apparently wasn't the case. She asked me to show her my cheap slaves, and when I showed her the cheapest slave I had, intending to give her a scare, she didn't even bat an eye. In fact, she even asked to buy her! A useless piece of trash like that slave would just be in the way while she's traveling, so why would she even want it? This girl's not part of some sting operation…right?

Then again, she had a decidedly unladylike, impure aura about her—one that I doubt even a cleansing spell would be enough to get rid of. From that, I initially suspected that she wanted the slave for sexual purposes…but that slave has curse sigils all over her that negate the effects of healing magic, so even if she bought her, the girl'd never be anything more than a burden. In the worst case, she'd just sell the slave back to me.

At any rate, I collected her personal information, telling her it was a survey that was necessary to complete before buying a slave. To my surprise, it turned out she had no one supporting her, no ties to anyone in town, and was a traveler of common status!

"I'll ask one more time to confirm: You're really a commoner with no connections whatsoever?"

A pause. "That's right."

"And no one would look for you if you were to suddenly disappear. You don't have anyone backing your actions."

Another pause. "Correct."

Just to double-check, I asked her the same questions after she'd fallen under Dominion's trance. Her answers didn't change. So there was no doubt, then—she'd been telling the truth. Then what the hell was she planning to do with such a useless slave? When I asked her, she gave me a bizarre, incomprehensible answer:

"I'm gonna put socks on her."

I was starting to think maybe her family had chased her out because she wasn't right in the head.

To sum up, an excellent specimen, the likes of which I'd never seen, had come to me with the most unusual caveats I'd ever heard of.



Clueless about the world, yet at least well-off enough to not worry about her next meal. *How cruel—she's just out of my reach! If I don't make her my slave, it'll be just too unfair! The world is so harsh. So I'll just correct it myself.*

"Oh, right, you said you had money on hand. Show me what you got."

"Here you go." She produced four large silvers from her bag. *Not enough, but we're not done here just yet.*

"Do you have any way to earn the remaining amount?"

"I'll earn it right away. It's me you're talking to, after all."

Where the hell's that confidence coming from? Or so I thought, but with a body like hers, she could probably pay the rest within the month. In other words, it'd be the same as if I had her earn money as one of my slaves.

"Just to confirm, are you a virgin?"

She smirked. "Nope."

Why do you look so smug about that? If she were a virgin, she would've fetched an even higher price…but if she'd already had her first time, I might as well help myself to a sample! I stretched my hand out and grasped her soft, supple, easily malleable breast from over her clothes. *Whoa, now that feels good. So she's not padding them—they're natural.* Wanting to feel her bare skin next, I slipped my hand underneath her clothes—

"Excuse me, what do you think you're doing?"

Hm. Back talk, huh? I must've taken a little too long—the effects of Dominion were beginning to wear off. It also wore off faster the more my commands were at odds with the slave's original will. Still, she hadn't pushed me away, so the effects were likely still there.

"Just a little appraisal. This is an important step too."

"Oh, okay."

Good—she was still completely under Dominion's influence. I needed to hurry up and bind her with that contract while I still could—I could always appraise her in full later. Like always, I wrote in the contract that she made a bet with me and promised to hand over everything she owned and become my slave if she lost. Now I just needed her letter consenting to the terms of our bet.

"Hey, can I go home already?"

"All right, now I'll need your proof of identification."

Before binding her to the contract, I checked her ID just in

case. If the name on the contract was fake or incorrect, it might not pass legally. At the same time, putting her real name on the contract would make the document that much more valid. So it was important to make sure.

"Here." She tossed it to me. Her name was Karina, registered with the Adventurer's Guild as a Rank E adventurer. *Perfect. Now I just need to have her sign it, and we're all done.*

"I wanna go home," she grumbled. "Oh, here's more ID if you need it. C'mon, this is getting to be a real pain, so can we wrap this up already?"

"How many times are you gonna say you wanna go home, you... Hm?" I took a look at the additional item she'd passed to me: a disk with a hole in the middle. *Ah, I see.* This would indeed count as proper identification. Yes, no problems here.

"Come on, I can go home, right? Here, take a good look at what I gave you."

"Fool. Of course I can't let you go before the contract is... Huh?"

Wait. If this ID is the real thing, I can't stop her from going. Now that I get a closer look, it says here she legally has the right to go home. Hmm, well, even I can't argue with that. Now that she's shown me this, I can't come up with any reason to keep her from leaving.

After all, this is unequivocal proof that she has the legal right to leave. It's so obviously genuine that there's no point in questioning it.

"All right, fine. Go on home."

"Thanks a bunch. See ya." Karina grabbed her silver coins and IDs, stood up, and made for the exit.

"Huh? A-Are you sure that was okay just now, master?" a slave at the entrance asked. I'd ordered him to wait outside the door just in case she tried to resist. No, I didn't like the outcome, but I couldn't help it—my hands were tied. If I'd refused to let her go after showing me an ID like that, there would've been a serious problem... Wait, huh?

"You fool!" I bellowed at the slave. "Why didn't you grab her before she could leave?!"

"Huh? But you just said to let her go!"

I raised one eyebrow and cocked my head in puzzlement. Why would I say something like that? *Wait—did that girl do something to me?*

"Well, whatever. If she wants that slave, she'll have to come back here sooner or later." *Then I'll make her mine, along with her*

gold coins, as payment!

Still, I couldn't help but recall how her breast had felt when I'd squeezed it. In a word, it was euphoric. Plus, her ignorance of the world made her the best kind of prey—better than a kid who knew the slums like the back of her hand or a harlot drenched in perfume. She lost points for not being a virgin, but I decided I could give her a pass on that.

"Tell the hoodlums about Karina and ask them to keep an eye out. Tell them to catch her and bring her here if she looks like she's about to leave the city."

"Understood, master."

You slipped through my fingers this time, but next time I see you, you're mine. I won't let you escape—Karina!

#Side: END

Huh…? What was I doing again?

Next thing I knew, I was strolling through the town. *What the heck? Wasn't I at the slave trader's place? Um, what happened there again? Er… Right, I was asking about the price of a slave. It was…one gold, right? Then maybe I should go on more logging quests with Blade. If we really put in the effort, we can make that much in no time.*

"Did I give that slave trader a down payment? I can't remember. No—the four large silvers are still here. Wait, or did I let him squeeze my boobs as payment instead?" *Ugh… My memory's all a haze. But at least that slave girl probably won't get sold before I come back. I doubt anyone besides me would want to buy her in her current state.*

Just then, a chill ran up my spine. *Oh no, am I getting a cold? Not good… I think I'll go home, get warm, and take it easy today.*

And so, I decided to take a break from work the rest of the day and focus on furnishing my living space instead so that I'd have a warm bed to sleep in. Right now, I had the blanket I'd copied at the church and the tattered fur pelt I'd purchased. The pelt would trap my body heat, and I'd sweat more the hotter I got, making me even more likely to get sick. So it was actually better to have holes in the pelt, for more breathability. *Actually, maybe the right move is to make even more holes, then put it on top of the blanket? Hmm… Nah, I'm thinking about this backward. If I'm taking the time and effort to furnish my base, then I might as well*

splurge on better materials now! More cost-effective in the long run!

"I'll have to wait on the slave girl, but I think I'll spend these four large silvers on furnishings instead."

It wouldn't be a loss anyway, considering I could make that much from a single day of logging. Provided I could get Blade and his party to help out again, that is.

I made my way to the market for another shopping trip. First, I needed to get my sleeping situation in order—in other words, set up my bed. I didn't have to worry about security measures, since I'd be safe as long as I was in my space of holding.

"Now then, I doubt I'll find optimal bedclothes, but I should at least look for something competent."

Although, if I was basing "competent" on my standards from when I'd lived in Japan, it might have meant I would already be looking for the best bedclothes possible in this world. Considering how expensive cotton was, anyway. For now, I set my maximum budget at three large silvers.

First off, I went back to the store I'd bought the pelt and dried jerky from the other day. The guy there seemed to know his stuff, so I'd figured it'd be quicker if I just asked him. *Actually, since he sold cotton as well, I might just find everything I need at his store.*

"Oh, you came back after all, eh?" he said with a grin. "Welcome back!"

"Hi. Um, it's been a few days since I was last here. You still remember me?"

"Of course! How could I possibly forget a beauty like you? Even if you asked me to, it'd be impossible! Now then, anything you're looking for in particular?"

Oho, this guy's really good at buttering people up. "Actually, I was thinking I needed a bed, and I seem to recall you sold cotton here. How much cotton would you give me for two large silvers?" I showed the merchant the money.

"Oh, cash in hand, eh? Looks like you're serious about buying, then. Hmm... Not enough to make a bed out of, at least."

"Oh. Well...could you do something about the price, then?" I gave him a glance with upturned eyes. Even if he *couldn't* lower the price, maybe he'd give me more for my coin as a bonus.

"Well now, let's see. That rack of yours looks even softer than cotton, so for two large silvers and a little squeeze, you can have

enough to fill that whole backpack you're wearing." He laughed. "Just kidding."

Yep, there it is. You know, you say you're just kidding, but the look in your eyes, plus the fact that you're goggling at my chest, tells me otherwise. Hmm... Well, if I had enough cotton to fill this backpack, I could make both a futon and bedclothes. So it's negotiation time!

"Seriously, though," he went on as though he'd never made the offer, "couldn't you just use straw as a substitute for the cotton you can't afford? I mean—"

"Sure, why not?" I said, cutting him off. "For two large silvers and boobs you can fondle to your heart's content, I'll take a backpack full of the best cotton you got."

"Huh?!" The man looked shocked and even a little timid. *Hey now,* you *brought it up first.* "A-Are you serious?!"

"So do we have a deal?"

I heard him gulp. Heh heh, I got him.

"S-Sure. Then if you don't mind, c-can you lift up your—"

"Whoa, whoa, hold up. Did I ever say they were *my* boobs?"

"Huh?" He froze mid-motion, with a pathetic expression on his face.

"Now stay right there and do as I say. The world's changing, you know—these days, it's not just men who are in charge. First, some preparations. Open your hand slightly like this, and raise it upward."

"L-Like this?"

"No, turn your palm— Right, like you're grabbing an imaginary breast in the sky. Yes, just like that."

The man raised his hand to the sky, just as I instructed. With this, preparations were complete.

"All right, now turn your hand like a drill. Wait, you don't know what a drill is, do you? Here, fix your wrist in this position and twist your arm from the elbow up. Twist so hard that your elbow moves too!"

"O-Okay!" Again, just as I'd ordered, the man quickly twisted his arm from the elbow up, his arm pointed toward the sky. He looked like a complete idiot.

"Good. So how does it feel? Feeling anything soft and pillowy?"

"Whoa! Now that you mention it..."

Yes indeed, there was a way to fondle breasts whenever and wherever you liked. A divine miracle that, with some spatial magic and a little centrifugal force, could turn the atmosphere

itself into your own funbag fantasy.

"I call it… 'Sylph's Knockers'!"

"This is…!" The man's eyes opened wide, deeply moved. Wait—never mind, he just looked confused. "Er, are these really breasts I'm feeling, though? I can't tell."

"What, you've never felt the real thing? Then just this once, you can touch mine to confirm that it's the same sensation." Indeed, using the feel of my own breasts as a reference, I'd tested and perfected this trick beforehand to make sure it felt as close to the real thing as possible.

"Huh?!" He was able to confirm that the sensation of Sylph's Knockers was indeed remarkably similar to my own. "So this is how a real breast feels…"

"Same as Sylph's, right?"

"Yeah."

Excellent. Now that he agrees, he should be satisfied. Wait—shit, I ended up letting him feel mine anyway! Well, just one time shouldn't hurt. After all, it was only after feeling them countless times myself that I became desensitized to where I started wanting more. Yeah, just once won't be a problem. It's not even like I let him touch my nipples or anything.

"All right, here's your two large silvers as promised, so I'm going to need that cotton now," I told the man, who was opening and closing his hands as though trying to relive the sensation of feeling those breasts.

"O-Oh, right. Actually, my grandmother next door sells the cotton. Do you have sewing tools? If not, she can do the sewing for you. She'll probably charge you extra, but I can, er, cover that as well, as thanks."

"Oh, I'm good on needlework. I can do all the stitching myself. I just need the materials right now."

Of course, I didn't plan on doing any stitching at all. I was going to use spatial magic to piece everything together.

"Do you have a pillow, then? It's better for pillows to be firm, so you might want to use straw for that instead. I have a few straw pillows already made, so I'll throw in one of those too if you'd like."

"Ooh, sounds good. Thanks!"

Right, I will *need a pillow, won't I? Negotiations sure are easier when the other party does all the work for you!* Now that the merchant was in high spirits and eagerly willing to help me out, I

was able to gather the materials for my futon just like that—and for only two large silvers! And I got a pillow and even more jerky as a bonus! *You're the best, dude! He's trying so hard for me that I should at least thank him to show my gratitude.* I grabbed the merchant's hand with both of my own.

"Thanks, mister! You were a huge help!" I said, beaming at him.

That's right, I'm giving you a girl's beautiful smile—a priceless gift—for absolutely free! Aren't I generous?

The merchant managed a dopey grin back, obviously smitten. *Heh…too easy.*

I stuffed the newly bought materials for my bed in my backpack. Without my space of holding they probably wouldn't have all fit inside, but seeing me successfully shut my backpack, the merchant crossed his arms with an impressed look.

"Whoa, I can't believe that all fit," he said. "So where are you taking all that to? The whole load has to be pretty heavy, so I can help carry some of it if you want."

"No, that's okay. I can carry this home by myself, so don't worry." I effortlessly lifted the backpack onto my shoulders. It was light—obviously, since there was almost nothing actually inside.

"Mgh… Well, okay. Be sure to come and visit again. I'll give you more jerky!"

"Sure, I'll be back—if there's something I want to buy." *Oh, maybe I should blow him a kiss for good measure. Pfft, his face got all red again. He must be a total virgin! Ah ha ha!*

Now then, where would be a good place to put my personal pocket of space? As I was looking around the area, a familiar voice called out to me.

"Yo, if it isn't Karina! Out shopping today?"

"Oh, hey, Blade. What's up? Yeah, I was buying some material for my bed."

"Your bed? So you decided to rent a place, eh? Well, considering the long term, that's the more preferable option. With large silvers, it was probably easy to afford."

Hm? I reflected on Blade's words. *I see—most people wouldn't have an infinite pocket of storage space to live in, so saying "buying material for a bed" probably made him think I'd found a place here*

in the town to live. Huh, it never even occurred to me that renting a room was an option. Since I have to look around for an inconspicuous place to enter my closed space every time I want to go back home, renting a room might be more preferable.

"But you live by yourself, right? Be careful, then. Women living alone are easy targets for thieves. And be sure to greet your neighbors. If you can, you might want to bring them gifts too. The more you get to know them, the more likely they'll be to help you out in case of an emergency."

"Oh, that's not a bad idea." Indeed, greeting and maintaining a friendly rapport with one's neighbors was critical. So critical, it was written in Japan's oldest encyclopedia. Probably.

Really, though, Blade sure does like to help me out. What is he, my mom?

"Oh, and you'll need to buy things for the rest of the room besides your bed, I'm sure. For instance, a scavenger slime that both sexes could use. I can help you shop for what you need if you'd like."

"Hmm, I'm kind of just focusing on one thing at a time right now. Though I never would've considered a scavenger slime, so thanks for that."

At present, if I needed to use the bathroom in my pocket of space, I created a black hole to do my business in and then erased it to dispose of the waste. *Yeah, maybe I should at least set a toilet bowl in there.*

"I really don't have enough money to shop for anything other than my bed today. So if you're free, could you go logging with me again tomorrow? At least until I earn one gold?"

"Sure thing! Then we'll meet bright and early tomorrow at the guild. In the meantime, I'll ask Shildon and Sekko if they want to join. We'll split the earnings the same as yesterday."

With that, Blade waved in farewell and walked away.

All right, now that I'm set to earn more money tomorrow, let's do a little more shopping. I sauntered around the market with my backpack, browsing the wares. *Wow, there sure are a lot of vendors lined up. Reminds me of a flea market.*

"They're selling all sorts of things too," I mused. Vegetables, fruits, knives, scissors, cudgels, plates, and utensils… Whoa, they even had books here. *Oh, what's this? "*Getting into Alchemy"? *Huh, now that might be useful.*

“Hey mister, can I take a look at this book?”

“Hm? Sure, but don’t ruin it. Tear even so much as a page, and you’re buying it.” The middle-aged merchant crouched down to pick up the book and stared at me intently. *Hm? He’s not looking at my chest, but farther down. That’s odd. Oh—I guess he can see my panties.* I subtly put my legs together and adjusted my skirt to conceal them. I may have been a guy at heart, but having your underwear seen was a little embarrassing, even for me.

The book was tightly bound with leather. Upon opening it, I saw letters written on parchment. Looked like I could read it just fine—excellent. It seemed to detail the proper way to make potions. Huh, potion making wasn’t a skill but a technique? Wait, no, apparently if you mastered the technique, it then became a learnable skill. Interesting.

Rather than healing the slave with a hodgepodge of spatial magic, it would look less conspicuous if I used a potion instead, so that might have been better anyway. And look, the method for such a potion was written right here!

“How much is this book, sir?”

“Three silvers.”

“You wouldn’t take *one* silver?”

“It’s a memento of my grandmother, so I can’t just give it away for nothing. But tell you what, I’ll throw in some magic stones for free. They can apparently be used as potion ingredients.”

Magic stones—a material harvested from monsters. They could apparently be used for a variety of things—or so Blade had told me. You could also get junk magic stones from goblins. In fact, the reason Blade had told me this was that we’d killed some goblins on our way back from logging, and Blade and his party had grabbed some for themselves.

“I may not look it, but I’m an adventurer. I can get magic stones on my own. Anything else you can offer?”

“Hmm… How about three potion bottles and a cauldron?”

A cauldron was apparently an indispensable magic tool for crafting potions. It was smaller than the cauldrons I was familiar with—about the size of a softball—and had a magic circle inscribed on it. This, along with some herbs and a few magic stones, was considered the starter set for potion making. *I guess that works. All right, deal.* I handed him one large silver and took the change and goods. It did feel a little bad to essentially be used as a change dispenser, but to be honest, I *did* feel my mood

lift a little when I took the silver coins he handed me.

* * *

I wanted to read the book I'd bought right away, so I made a show of heading into a back alley and entered my closed space. That way no one would notice me.

Currently, I had my blanket, pelt, dried jerky, material to build my futon, and the catalog from the Goddess all strewn on the floor. There were no walls. Yesterday I'd wrapped myself up in a blanket and slept here, thinking about how badly I wanted that slave girl.

Hmm, it's not a dark space, yet it's an expanse of black. Might be a bit late to ask, but really, what is *this space, anyway? Not that there's any use thinking about it.* There was an actual floor, and the gravity was also normal—or was that just because it was how I thought it was supposed to be? Considering the closed space reflected my own perception of what a storage space ought to be, I could probably make this space rainbow-colored if I wanted to. *On second thought, that'd look pretty hideous, so let's not.*

It wasn't exaggerating to say a closed space created with the Goddess's spatial magic was like a separate world all on its own. An empty world, but a world nonetheless. The vastness of the space was starting to make me a little antsy, so for the time being I shrunk it down to the size of a normal room and left it at that.

"Now then, time to read—or wait, I should make my futon first so I have something to read on."

I was the type that liked to read lying down in bed. *So first, let's build the futon.* Because I'd let him fondle some boobs, the merchant had sold me more than enough cotton. First, I arranged the cotton into a futon shape and sandwiched it between two layers of cloth—the blanket on the bottom and the pelt on the top. *Now connect them all with spatial magic, and done. Easy!*

Hmm... It's a little too soft. Let's put more cotton in. I used spatial magic to transfer the ratio of cotton to cloth to make it firmer. *Now it's perfect. Mm... I ended up using a lot of cotton, though. Maybe I should've used some straw to balance it out after all.*

Next, I made my bedclothes. These were supposed to be soft, so there was no need to add more cotton. Wow, I didn't have any

cotton left over. I'd used it all!

Now just put the pillow here, and—done! My bed's all set up! To be frank, it was more or less already set up once I had all the materials I needed—thanks to the versatility of spatial magic!

I immediately lay down on the bed and assumed the reading position.

"Alchemy also has a certain romance to it, huh... Oh, come to think of it, I wonder if alchemy skills are also included in the Goddess's catalog of SP rewards?"

I used spatial magic to bring the catalog over to me and flipped through the pages. *Let's see... Yep, there they are. And two types: "Alchemy (Medicine) - 50 SP" and "Alchemy (Magecraft) - 50 SP." Magecraft... So that's a thing in this world too, huh? I wonder if I should put some effort into getting SP so I can get these. Or should I go down the straight and narrow and spend them on these alchemy skills? For now, let's shoot for the latter.*

"Let's see, it says here that to make a potion you need... Hm, looks like I don't have enough ingredients."

So to concoct a potion, you need a cauldron, herbs, and some kind of catalyst material like magic stones. The cauldron had been given to me as a freebie, but I still needed herbs and a catalyst.

"Hmm. Looks like the herb pictured here is medicinal." I memorized what the herb looked like and decided I'd keep an eye out for it tomorrow during my logging quest. I'd enjoy my new, wonderfully comfortable futon by sleeping the rest of the day.

* * *

"Here's your share for today, Karina," said Blade.

"All right!"

And so the next day, I earned more money logging with my buddies. After three round trips, we delivered seventy-two logs in total, and my share came out to six large silvers.

"At this rate, I'll have enough for that slave by tomorrow!" I cheered.

"Ah, about that, Karina—the guild says we gotta wait. We won't be able to do any more logging for a while."

"Huh?" I tilted my head in confusion. *You mean logging jobs aren't something you can do every day? Wait—now that I look at it,*

they took the request off the bulletin board!

"Why?! What gives?!"

"Probably because we did way too much."

"What?! You mean my greed eventually became my undoing?! No way! Is this some kind of intervention from the logging companies so they can stay in business?"

"No, it's simply that the clients have all the wood they need. Logs can't be used as building material if they're not dried out first, after all."

"Oh, I see." Come to think of it, the client we'd delivered the third batch to did have a bit of a strained smile... *Yeah, I guess I overdid it. Sorry.*

"Though the logging companies have also apparently been raising a stink over our efforts. They're worried they'll be out of a job if we do any more. At any rate, if you want to continue adventuring in this town without everyone hating you, you might want to find another way to earn money."

"Mrgh." *Right, I should've known. Even lumber can potentially induce an economic collapse.* I really had gone overboard. After discussing it with Blade, we agreed to leave the logging to the professionals for a while.

"I think it'd probably be best to abstain from logging for at least a month. Preferably, half a year."

"Uoohh..." I let out a cry of despair. It took around a whole year for logs to dry out on Earth, but apparently in this world it took half that time thanks to the application of magic. However, even magic couldn't dry logs out overnight. In other words, we weren't to do any more logging until then. *Makes sense to me.*

I decided there was no helping it, then. I had to find another avenue of work.

Right now I had a total of seventy-five silvers on me. After subtracting my living expenses, I would need another thirty silvers to purchase the girl—three large silvers, in other words. *Hm. What should I do, then? I could always duplicate one of my large silvers until I had enough... No! Bad Karina! You told yourself you'd only use duplication as a last resort!*

"Do you know of any work I could do to get rich quick, Blade?"

"I don't think any job will get you rich 'quick,' Karina. Plus," he muttered, "I think you'll be hard-pressed to find a job matching the level of income we made today. Times like these, it's best to ask the guild's reception desk for advice. Hey, Sophie, know of

any high-paying jobs we could take on?"

"Let's see," the receptionist said, leafing through some documents before shaking her head. "It doesn't look like we have any where you'll make the same amount you did today—at least not any suitable for Karina's current rank. Having said that, it's not like I could let an F rank adventurer take on an A rank quest anyway."

"Yeah, I figured as much."

"Oh—but if you're looking to make money, why not check with the Trader's Guild? If you register as a merchant, you'll save a bit on groceries and the like. That's only after you buy a lot, though."

Oh, so the more you buy, the bigger discount you get? Well, I have a space of holding that allows me to freeze time, so none of the groceries I buy will ever go bad. That's an advantage in itself.

"That'd be just perfect for you, Karina!" Blade said. "You said you wanted to become a merchant, after all!"

"Well, that's true." And the reason I'd refrained from duplicating my money in the first place was so I could live an honest life as a merchant. At least, I thought that was the reason. *My memory's a little hazy on that, though.*

"Then I guess I'll try my hand as a merchant for a little while. Oh, right—how much was the guild entrance fee again? It'll cost money to register."

"Actually, the Trader's Guild and Adventurer's Guild are partners, so just showing your adventurer's license will suffice."

Apparently many adventurers were also merchants, so the two guilds allowed them to access their bank accounts from either one. That was pretty convenient.

If memory served, it was twenty-five silvers to register at the Trader's Guild. That would delay my purchase of the slave girl a little more, but at this point there was no helping it. If I went two steps back but three steps forward, it was still progress!

Oh, right. If I'm going to be making all this money back anyway, I might as well take an additional step back and go see Harumikazuchi again!

"Hey, Blade. How many silvers does it cost for a drink at Shunrai?"

"Shunrai? What, gonna go see Haru again? Take care not to get stripped of everything you own again, then."

"I will. Want me to treat you, as thanks for helping me?"

"Idiot, don't waste that money on me. You'll need to save for

some starting capital if you plan to be a merchant. And did we really do anything worthy of thanks? Based on how much we earned from your efforts, *we* ought to thank *you*."

"Agreed," Shildon said. "If anything, just ask for us by name when you need a bodyguard. That'd be thanks enough."

"Not that we think someone as skilled as you will need it," Sekko added.

Wow! Blade and the others were so gallant!

"Well, according to what I've heard, the merchant world isn't so kind as we are. Try your best not to get involved with any shady characters. Though I think you of all people will be fine, Karina."

"Gotcha. By the way, Blade, did you know that what you just said is called a 'flag'?"

"A flag? No, I've never heard of that."

That was most definitely a flag telling me I was guaranteed to run into some swindler once I became a merchant! *I mean, that slave trader I met was already plenty suspicious! I've got to watch out!*

That said, even if some swindler *did* fool me and take my money, I was sure I could manage with spatial magic somehow. So no worries!

"Oh, right," Blade said. "If you do run into trouble, you can always ask Haru for advice. As Shunrai's proprietor, she probably knows a thing or two about business herself. I bet she's also registered with the Trader's Guild."

"What an excellent suggestion!" *Now I have even more of a reason to visit my favorite fox lady!* I waved goodbye to Blade and the others and, in high spirits, headed over to Shunrai.

* * *

The scene: Shunrai's ground floor. Two women are sitting at the bar counter—Miss Fox Lady and me.

In all honesty, I would've loved to take her upstairs, but she'd turned me down, saying she wasn't feeling up to it today. *Aw, bummer!* Still, she'd agreed to chat and drink with me for a while, so we were knocking a few back at the bar counter. She gave her female staff a drink order, then handed me a glass of amber liquid a little later. She clinked her own glass together with mine, and we both took a sip.

“I was sure you’d come back to beg me to work here, but it looks like you managed to save up enough money on your own to drink here, eh? I’m impressed. Unless it was dirty money, that is?”

“No way! I earned this money fair and square! I just used Blade, his party, and a little magic to cut down some trees.”

“Oh, using magic to complete logging quests? You don’t say.” Her ears twitched, seemingly in admiration. *Heh heh, go on! Keep praising me!*

“And so, I was thinking about joining the Trader’s Guild and wanted some advice.”

“Hm? Planning to become a merchant, are we? You’re not going to keep logging with Blade and his party?”

“Y’see, we got a little carried away, and the guild kinda barred us from doing any more. Though I was already thinking about becoming a merchant from the get-go, since it’d give me a profession to utilize my special ability.”

“True, if you can use such amazing magic, becoming a traveling peddler would be easy for you.”

Indeed—after all, the special ability in question even allowed me to teleport. I didn’t tell her that, though.

“But you know, this is a bar, not an information center. I’m not sure I’ll be too much help.”

“That’s okay, just whatever advice you can give is fine! You’re the only one I can talk to about this!”

She looked slightly mollified. “All right, guess there’s no helping it. To reward you for your courage for coming here alone as a woman, I suppose I can give you a few pointers.”

All right! You’re a saint, fox lady!

“Now, what was it you wanted to ask about in particular?”

“Maybe something like what type of items would be good to sell?”

“Oh, the employees at the guild will help you out a lot more on that than I could. They’ll tell you what’s in demand and what vendors they need more of. I doubt they’ll outright tell you which items you’ll profit most from—but they’ll also probably tell you which items don’t sell at all or are illegal to sell.”

So there are illegal items even in this world, eh?

“In fact,” she continued, “when I was first getting this bar off the ground, I just sold whatever items the guild told me to buy, since it was the safest route. You might not make any money at

first, but think of it as an offering of goodwill to your fellow senior merchants. Eventually you'll win their trust, which will be more valuable to you in the end. If they trust you, they won't be so quick to cut you off if you run into a serious loss."

"I see." In other words, without their trust, I'd be lucky to find someone to help me among the fellow smaller merchants. Though considering I'd made everything I currently had on hand in a single day of logging, it shouldn't be too hard to recover on my own.

"Oh, and here's something else you need to be careful about selling—fragile items like these." She pointed to the alcohol in her hand—or rather, the glass.

"Oh, right," I said with a nod. "If items like that break, you'll lose out on that sale." But I had spatial magic on my side. As long as I stored my merchandise in my space of holding, it would never break. *In fact, fragile items might be the easiest way to profit, so maybe I should make those my focus?*

"Hm?" Come to think of it, this confirmed that glassware like cups and such did exist in this world. *But wait—didn't I drink from a wooden cup last time I was here? Well, potions and the like are in glass bottles, so I guess I should've realized that by now.*

"Finally noticed, eh? That's right—I wanted to give you a warm welcome to my establishment, so I pulled out the good stuff."

"Oh..." I was taken aback by her generosity.

"Although, I also wanted to keep an eye on how much you drank, since you staggered around here dead drunk last time."

"Er... Yeah, that did indeed happen last time. Right." Now I remembered—Blade had treated me, and I'd drunk a little too much. How could I have forgotten?

"By the way, what's the quickest way to make money in this town?" I asked.

"Selling your body, most definitely. That's how I was able to expand this bar to its current size."

I see, so fox lady's speaking from experience. I don't want to sleep with guys, though.

"Barring that, the only other way is to work your butt off. A merchant that can't secure any inventory will just be a laughingstock."

"Hm. Yeah, guess you need a product to sell before you can do any business... Oh, wait!" If I didn't have anything to sell, I could just make some stuff myself, just like I'd made my own

futon the other day! With spatial magic, I could create goods for free and profit!

Yeah, that's right! I had some excess logs from the logging quest today, and I'd gathered some medicinal herbs and magic stones along the way. Couldn't I use those ingredients to make my own potions?

"What if I made my own goods to sell? Oh, but if I did that, wouldn't I classify as a craftsman? Would it be best to join *their* guild instead, if there even is one?"

"If you're making your own goods and plan to make a decent amount of them, you'll be classified as the owner of a workshop—in which case, you'll need to register with the Trader's Guild."

"Oh, so I should just stick with the Trader's Guild as planned, then. Good to know."

Looks like I'll be Foreman Karina, owner and proprietor of Karina Works!

"Great. Now that I have a plan, let's drink the day away!" I downed the contents of my glass in one go. This world's alcohol was kind of lukewarm and not too strong, but it did have a tinge of sweetness that I was quite fond of.

"Oh, sorry, but I'm cutting you off at one glass today. You might lose your memory again and forget all this advice I went through the trouble of giving you."

"Huh? Oh, right. Fair point..."

"And you'll need money to join the Trader's Guild, so you should save what you have. Watch yourself around people like me—I won't hesitate to take what you've got."

And yet you stopped me at one glass, huh? She couldn't have been any more of a softie. I couldn't help but smile wryly in response.

In the end, after buying one glass of alcohol and a light snack, I left Shunrai and headed home. I didn't want anyone to see me entering my space of holding, so I walked into an abandoned alley first. *Whoa, just one glass and I'm feeling buzzed? Looks like this body has a low tolerance for alcohol... Hic!*

"Sorry, miss. End of the line."

Huh? "Miss"? Oh, right, that's me. I turned to the man who'd called out to me. "Sorry, my bad," I said with a small bow, and I turned around again.

But another man stepped in front of me to block my path.

“Apologies, but this path only goes one way. If you want to pass, you’ll have to pay up.”

“Huh? Really?” I made a one-eighty back around to the other man, who was blocking the other side of the alley. *Uh-oh.*

“If it’s a one-way path and the way forward’s blocked, where am I supposed to go?”

“Where indeed? Let’s see… How about heaven?”

“Oh, heaven! I see—if I can’t go forward or back, I’ll just go up! Thanks, mister! Sorry for troubling you.” I used my spatial magic to lift myself up into the sky and get the hell out of there.

Oh, right! If I’m in the sky, no one will be able to see me anyway! What a profound discovery!

And so, within the skies of Solasidore, I opened my space of holding and spent the rest of the night in my room. *Hic!*

* * *

Upon waking up the next morning and leaving my space of holding, I realized there was no ground underneath my feet.

As soon as I woke up, I’d commented to myself what a good sleep I’d had, seen the pretty sky outside, and almost unconsciously walked out. Damn, that was close. If I’d carelessly taken a step forward, I would’ve fallen to my death! Scary!

Also, I know it’s after-the-fact, but now that I think about it, I wonder what that encounter in the alley yesterday was all about? Were they hitting on me? Were they trying to extort me, or perhaps even kidnap me? I guess I really was careless to walk into a back alley alone, huh? I didn’t lose my memory or anything, but I must’ve been pretty sloshed to think that was a good idea. I really do need to watch my alcohol intake from now on. Or maybe it was just because my former residence, Japan, was safe enough that women could walk to the convenience store alone at night without worry. (Although I was a guy back then.)

“Man, noon already? I overslept big time…” Making my way through the sky, I gave a big stretch. I could control the temperature and humidity of my closed space just the way I liked it, so maybe there was a way to tell what time it was outside. *I’ll have to ask the Goddess next time I see her.*

Why is it so bad that I slept in, you ask? Actually, I guess it’s not. I’ve got enough saved up that I don’t have to worry about starving,

and I don't have a boss, so it's not like anyone's gonna complain about me oversleeping. Whoa... Is this what freedom from the daily grind is like? I could get used to this! So this is what it's like to have an OP ability in an isekai!

"All right, I think I'll head to the Trader's Guild and see what's up!"

I could set my own schedule. I could do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted! *This rules!* After teleporting myself from the sky to a ground path with no pedestrian traffic, I made my way over to the Trader's Guild.

This was my second visit to the Trader's Guild since arriving at Solasidore. This time, however, I had identification, and I wasn't broke.

"Here's my adventurer's license."

"Thank you." The receptionist examined it for a moment. "Confirmed. It's twenty-five silvers to register with the guild. Would you like the amount withdrawn from your account?"

"Yes, please!"

Thus, I became an official member of the Trader's Guild. From this day on, I was a merchant! I decided to call my store "Shounin," which means "merchant" in Japanese. Commoners didn't have surnames in this world, but merchants apparently introduced themselves as though their store name was their surname, so now I could call myself "Karina Shounin." Heh heh.

"What goods will you be dealing in?" the receptionist asked me.

"Huh? Uh, nothing in particular, I guess. Just whatever's in vogue. Other than that, I've got plans to make and sell my own goods. And I plan to travel, I guess?"

"In that case, I'll register your business as a general store. It's common for adventurers to run businesses like these on the side. However, there is a regulation on some types of goods."

"A regulation?"

The receptionist explained that when registered as a general store, there were several items you couldn't sell: armor, weapons, or anything else related to combat; slaves; and monsters considered rare or dangerous. That said, a simple request wasn't enough to sell these goods—you needed to contribute a certain amount to the corresponding guilds, as well as undergo a course that certified you to sell such goods. On top of that, there were

apparently a limited number of merchants who could be certified at once, so parents would typically end up passing the shops down to their sons.

"For things like weapons, salt, and liquor, you'd probably be forgiven if you sold a little. But once the amount surpasses private transactions, you'll be slapped with various fines and penalties, so do be careful."

For instance, if an adventuring party you knew asked them to sell you a set of armor, that much could be overlooked. But selling them en masse to the general public would get you arrested. *I see; that makes sense.* You were also allowed to sell common, highly popularized potions with no repercussions—but especially potent poisons could be applied to weaponry, so you needed certification to sell those. If I hadn't known they were illegal and tried to sell them, I might've gone to jail!

"I guess pleading ignorance wouldn't work either, huh?"

"It would not. Therefore, if you come across an item you're not sure you can legally sell, you should always check with the guild first."

They'd probably confiscate whatever illegal goods you found, but I suppose it's better than putting them on the market unknowingly and getting thrown in the slammer.

"We recommend that beginners start out selling common goods everyone's already familiar with."

"I see. Thank you for the advice! By the way, are there any places you'd recommend to procure goods to sell?"

"Well, how about going to the lounge and mingling with some of the other merchants? They might be willing to help newer merchants find inventory." The guild receptionist pointed to a room nearby that did indeed look like a lounge area, complete with a bar. The one at the Adventurer's Guild was busier and more like a café, but this one looked much more upscale, most likely to better accommodate business discussions. According to the receptionist, merchants with their own stores would occasionally show up here, but most were peddlers.

Well, if there's a place in the Trader's Guild just for talking to more experienced merchants, that suits my needs to a T. I did as the receptionist suggested and headed to the lounge. As I entered, all eyes in the room immediately gravitated to me—or more accurately, my chest. *Seriously, you guys are way too obvious.*

“Hey, little missy, I overheard that you’re a peddler? I have a few suggestions for you; wanna hear ’em?”

Uh-oh, a shifty guy right off the bat! Compared to the adventurers I’d met—especially Blade—this man was acting awfully timid. He kept stealing glances at my chest as he held his glass in one hand. Just by looking at the glass, I could tell the drink was expensive, though I wouldn’t expect any less from a guild based in mercantilism. *All right—time to lead him on while fishing as much information as I can out of him!*

“Hm? Suggestions? What do you mean? Won’t you tell me, big boooy?” *The lean forward! The upturned eyes! The drawing out of syllables! The bewitching gaze! Tee hee, flawless, if I do say so myself! Doing this to a guy is giving me goose bumps, though!*

He looked positively infatuated. “U-Uh, right. Suggestions. That would be magic stones, of course! They pay top coin for those over in the Kingdom of Alchemy. If you go over there, you can also procure magic tools and potions for cheap, then sell them at a markup here. Rinse and repeat, and you’ll never go in the red.”

“Oh, you don’t say.” *Sorry, buddy. That kingdom no longer exists. Your information’s dated! Or maybe that’s common in this world, what with the old technology? Let’s check.* “But I heard the Kingdom of Alchemy fell into ruin.”

“Ha ha ha, there’s no way that’s true. An entire kingdom can’t be destroyed so easily—especially not one of the most powerful kingdoms to ever exist, ruled by the God of Destruction himself.”

“Ha ha… Yeah. Right, of course not.”

*Okay, looks like I’m not gonna learn anything from this guy, so time to switch targets! Let’s look for a woman this time… Whoa, hold the phone! Cute girl detected at the bar counter! Just at a glance, she looks younger than me—but that drink in her hand is most definitely alcohol! In other words, she’s a legal loli—*ahem*, I mean, a dwarf! I’ve already seen a half dwarf, so it stands to reason regular dwarves would be a thing as well! Besides, she’s drinking alcohol and she’s short—she’s gotta be a dwarf!* (Author’s Note: this is a stereotype.)

I walked away from the man without another word and headed for the legal loli instead. She had cute, naturally curly red hair and large, green eyes. She was sipping her glass with both hands, which was cute in itself. Was she drinking wine?

“Excuse me, do you have a moment?” I asked.

“Hm? Who the hell’re you? I’m enjoyin’ my drinking time right

now, so buzz off.”



She glared at me coldly, but now was the time to stand my ground. I ignored her rejection and kept going. “Actually, I’ve just registered with the guild, and I’m looking to become a merchant. I noticed you were a woman like me, and as a newbie merchant, I thought I should introduce myself to someone clearly more experienced in the trade. Here, let me buy you a drink.”

“For real?! Sure is nice to finally meet someone with a keen eye! Everyone’s always tellin’ me I can’t drink here ’cause they think I’m a kid! I’m a dwarf, ya idjits! Ain’t it obvious?!”

No sooner than I’d offered to treat her to alcohol, her mood instantly improved. As I thought, all dwarves loved alcohol.

“So since you’re a woman like me, and a seasoned merchant no doubt many years my senior, care to share a few pointers?”

“Sure, why not? When I saw you try to honey trap that poor schmuck over there I wasn’t sure what your deal was, but y’know, you’re not so bad after all! I’ll give you one piece of advice for each round you buy me!”

Hell yeah! I took out a large silver and slid it across the counter. *Barman, one glass for the nice lady, please.*

“First off, what’s your name? Mine’s Karina.”

“Nice to meet ya, Karina! I’m Satie. My full name’s pretty long, so just call me Satie.” She stuck out her hand for a handshake. *Whoa, her hand’s tiny. Tiny, yet warm and soft. Is she really an adult? Just based on her appearance, she looks like a middle schooler. Still, she’s seriously cute. I kinda want to call her “Li’l Satie!”*

“Liquor’s my trade, actually,” she said. “I purchase alcohol from all over the world and sell it. So if you’re ever in the market for booze, just gimme a holler.”

“Oh, wow. I heard that you need a certification to sell liquor, though.”

“Sure do. I really worked my ass off for it too.”

The dwarf merchant sells alcohol, huh? Yep, that checks out!

“Aren’t you gonna drink too, Karina? Here, I’ll buy ya a round.”

“O-Oh, okay. Actually, maybe I shouldn’t—when I get drunk, I get a bit…you know.”

“What?! Ya mean to say you’re turning down free alcohol?!”

“Like hell I am! Fill ’er up!”

Shit, I got caught up in the moment. If I didn’t refuse, I was gonna get drunk and black out again…or so I’d thought, but Li’l Satie was already pouring alcohol into my glass. *Manipulated into drinking by a girl who looks like a middle schooler? I don’t know if I*

should be happy about this or not!

* * *

Welp, it looks like I lost my memory again, so as always, let's confirm the situation first. Let's see... I was in a room, perhaps an inn. There were scattered clothes on the floor, and the dwarf girl—Satie—was in the bed, snoring cutely. Both of us were only wearing camisoles—maybe for sleepwear?

I see. In other words...we did the deed?!

"Yaaawn... Huh?"

Li'l Satie's awake!

"Oh, uh, good...morning, Satie," I mumbled.

"'Satie'? C'mon, Karikari, don't you mean 'Li'l Satie'? Now that we're *this* intimate, who cares about formalities? Call me whatever you like. Whew, *damn*, last night was fun! Even *I* prob'ly drank a little too much!"

"Karikari"?! What happened?! How'd we get this close in such a short span of time?!

"Sorry, I, er, kind of lost my memory of last night. What exactly did we do again?"

"Huh?! Oh, so you're one of those amnesiac types, huh? Damn... That's a real shame you can't remember, considering you loved it so much you were begging me for more." She grinned impishly. *She's not just a loli, but a* cheeky *loli?! We've got a cheeky loli here, folks!*

"Word of warning, though, Karikari. You seriously need to be more careful about your alcohol intake. If you're too careless, someone might take advantage of ya and rope ya into a slave contract."

"What?! I drank that much?! Tell me what happened!"

"Well, I invited you over to my room to drink, but when you started takin' off your clothes, that was a real shock. Then ya kissed me for a looong time, like..."

Waaah! I knew it! Satie took me to her place, and I'm in her house right now! But I apparently made the first move, I guess?!

"After that, let's see... Ya bragged about how you could undress a girl using only your mouth, then you got up close to me and..." She whispered in my ear. "And before I knew it, you'd stripped me down to my underwear."

"My mouth?! Oh, jeez... I'm really sorry about that."

“The same mouth you kissed me with too… Mmm, well, don’t worry about it. I was also at fault for drinkin’ too much.”

I don’t really want to believe it, but could it be that when I’m under the influence of alcohol, I’m just as much of a pervert as the Goddess herself? Liquor really is terrifying—just about as terrifying as having a huge gap in my memory!

“Don’t beat yourself up over it, Karikari,” Satie said. “It’s not the first time someone’s pushed me onto the bed, and you only kissed me, which might as well have been a greeting in my book. Though I do typically charge people before I let ’em pin me down,” she said with a grin.

“Huh? Li’l Satie, there’s a bulge in my backpack here. Do you know what’s inside?”

“Yeah, that’d be the booze you bought from me last night! Really appreciate your patronage, babe.” She sauntered up next to me and gave me a peck on the cheek. *Waaah! She kissed me! Her lips are so soft! I can feel my face going beet red!*

“Huh, you’re a lot more demure when you’re sober. You’re even cuter than I thought, Karikari.”

She even gently stroked my head! *I’m getting my head patted—by a loli! Oh no… She’s already got me wrapped around her finger, hasn’t she?!*

“Li’l Satie… I’m really sorry about last night. I probably went a little overboard.”

“I’ll say. I know *I* experienced my fair share of firsts…not that I really minded. By the way, can I have my stockings back now? Where’d you hide them, anyway?”

Suddenly, I noticed that there were two pieces of tattered cloth—apparently a pair of stockings—stored in my space of holding. What’s more, I’d closed it off in its own separate preservation space and stopped the flow of time inside! Way to go, me! *Wait, I can actually partition off my space of holding and manipulate time there differently from the rest of the space?! I had no idea I could do that, but it sure is convenient!*

I copied Satie’s stockings in their preserved state, then reached into the camisole I was wearing and pulled them out to make it look like I’d been hiding them in my cleavage. “Sorry. Looks like I had them in there for some reason— Ew, they stink.”

“H-Hey! D-Don’t say that when you’re the one who took ’em off me! You were so thrilled to have ’em last night!” she said with a teary-eyed pout. Her face was as red as a tomato.

I guess I took her socks so I could offer them up to the Goddess? That had to have been the reason, right? Actually… I feel like I was almost too *good at this. The Goddess didn't possess me again to take the socks herself, did she?*

"Guh… You had 'em in your cleavage, huh?" Satie said. "Cleavage… Grrr… It's okay, it's normal for dwarves to have tiny tits, so I'm not jealous at all… You sure did have to fish around in there for a while, though… Must be nice… A-Anyway, you gave them back, that's all that matters. Purify! Purify! Purify!"

"Sorry, Li'l Satie…" Because I'd accidentally said her socks reeked out loud, she was feverishly applying cleansing magic to them. *Wait, Satie! They didn't stink that bad! The unexpected sharpness of the odor just hit my nostrils all of a sudden and… Ugh, why did I just get this strong desire to taste them?! It must be because of this body! Curse you, Goddess! And Satie, I can't deliver copies to the Goddess, so I only gave you a copy of your socks! I still have the original pair! Forgive me!*

"Hold up—doesn't that mean you've got the smell of my feet between your tits? Then you should cleanse yourself before it gets all itchy there."

"Itchy? Don't tell me you have athlete's foot or something?"

"Ath-leets? The hell's that, some type of leech? Nah, it'll just be sweaty and uncomfortable, is all I meant."

Huh? You mean to say…foot fungus is nonexistent in this world?! Did the Goddess just purge it entirely or something?! Well, I guess that's one less thing to worry about, so I'm certainly not gonna complain—honestly, if I'm going to become a peddler, that'll be a big help! (Although I could've always just given my feet more room to breathe using spatial magic!)

Anyway, Satie got ready to leave the inn so she could head to the next town. After she packed up, I followed her out the door. Apparently she'd already hailed a horsebird-drawn carriage (horsebirds were oversized birds that couldn't fly, but they were strong and perfect for pulling carriages, apparently). Once outside, we said our farewells.

"Let's drink again sometime," she said. "Next time I won't let you strip my socks off so easily."

"Ha ha, sure. See you later, Li'l Satie."

"And I'll make you buy more booze from me too!"

"I-I think I'll pass, honestly. I've had enough alcohol for a

while." *Man, for being so pint-size, she sure is pushy!*

By the way, members of the Trader's Guild could use their licenses to make transactions with each other using the money in their bank accounts. *An isekai with electronic payment… Now that's a new one.*

Thanks to that convenience, I now had a lot less in my account than I'd started with—only twenty silvers. I'd apparently bought (and drunk) nearly thirty silvers' worth of alcohol last night. Er… Well, at least she'd given me a good deal on some inventory! According to her, she'd given me enough that I could easily profit if I was able to sell it all privately. (I couldn't sell alcohol in my shop without a certification, or I'd incur a penalty.)

Well, I'll just consider it a tuition fee, considering she graciously taught me all sorts of things about the traveling merchant life—even if I can't remember most of it thanks to all the booze I drank!

All these bottles of liquor made my backpack heavy, so I temporarily took the liquid out and stored it in my space of holding. I'd have to remember to put it back in the bottles later… *Wait, come to think of it, isn't this exactly the kind of fragile item Harumikazuchi told me to refrain from selling? Ah, well. I've got spatial magic to keep them safe. Plus, how could I resist someone as cute as Li'l Satie?*

Er, actually, I'd like to, ahem, bask *in what memories I have of Satie for a while longer, so the Goddess can surely wait two or three days for her offering, right? I can preserve the socks by freezing time within my space of holding, after all, so it'll be fine!*

By the way, when I'd asked the veteran peddler Li'l Satie about the quickest way to profit, she'd answered that there wasn't really any such shortcut. The quickest way she knew was to grab common goods from one town and sell them in another town where those goods weren't so common, which wasn't exactly "quick" at all. However, there were more *efficient* ways to profit than others, like paying a high price for a bunch of compact goods in bulk and selling them at a markup, or buying materials cheap, giving them to a craftsman to make goods with, then selling the finished product. In other words, the peddlers in this town mainly made a living selling potion ingredients to the Kingdom of Alchemy, then bought the potions they made in return, but… *Right, the kingdom's a pile of rubble right now.*

So with potions out of the question, the fastest option for me was to craft my *own* goods and sell them for high prices. *Actually, isn't that one big reason I chose the merchant life in the first place? I have the knowledge from my previous life in Japan—it should be easy to develop new products! With this, I win! My success is guaranteed!*

All right, let's get to craftin' some sellable items! The time has come to utilize my peerless knowledge of Japan!

* * *

When attempting to solve a problem, you first need to analyze it.

For example, say you weren't feeling good, and without even analyzing the problem first, you assumed you were sick and took cold medicine. But if in reality you just ate too much and got a stomachache, you would've taken the wrong action.

After all, a stomachache from overeating requires an antacid, not cold medicine. If you don't correctly identify the cause of a problem before taking action, you'll be wasting your time. Therefore, in order to solve a problem quickly, you first need to answer what the *origin* of the problem is.

You also need to make sure your answer is the correct one. This holds especially true for situations like my current predicament. For instance, my issue was that I had to make money as quickly as possible, so let's say the solution I came up with was "I'll make and sell rice balls." I would spend a copper per rice ball, then turn around and sell each for two coppers. That would mean if I wanted one gold, I would need to sell ten thousand rice balls. That wouldn't be quick at all, and even if I did sell that many, say they became a smash hit. Then I'd need to make even more, working past my original goal. No thanks. I didn't want to work, I wanted to make money fast. And the real shortcut to doing so—copying my coins until I had enough—was off-limits. Therefore, the next best way was to sell my wares to rich people at a ridiculously high markup. Besides, even if I did make an item valuable enough to worth one gold coin, no one but the wealthy could afford it anyway!

Now, do I know anyone personally who's rich? Oh, right—that slave trader. I'm sure he'd have at least a gold coin or two, so I'll just sell him something. That's the fastest method I've thought of yet!

“But what could I make that he’d want?” *Come to think of it, he said he liked flowers, so what if I offered him some rare flower? Except I don’t know what passes for a “rare” flower in this world… Hmm.*

No, wait. It doesn’t need to be a flower. As long as that guy would happily pay a gold coin for it, anything would do. Actually, it seemed like he cared more about the smell of the flower than the flower itself, so what about a fragrance of some kind? It’d no doubt count as a luxury item, so he wouldn’t mind forking over the gold, right?

“Er, but how do you make a perfume, anyway?”

If I recall, isn’t perfume made with oil or something? Some kind of oil that requires a bunch of petals to harvest enough of? Then how—and where—am I supposed to get those? I wouldn’t have the first clue. It’s not like I ever tried making perfume in my past life either.

Hmm. My knowledge of Japan might be peerless, but I guess my overall knowledge is lacking. Well, I can learn how to make potions using the book I bought, so that’s probably the best place to start.

“For now, I guess I’ll try making a potion that smells nice. Maybe I can pass it off as perfume.”

I’d picked up the essential ingredients for potion making during my logging quest the other day, so I decided I might as well try it. If I ran out or didn’t have enough, I could always just run out and get more, and if other merchants had gone to the Kingdom of Alchemy to buy potions, then they were at least reasonably in demand.

And so, I headed to my secret base and attempted to brew some potions. The method listed in the book was as follows:

Step 1: Crush the medicinal herbs and extract the product within.

Step 2: Boil the product while casting the appropriate spell. (Note: You must use a cauldron specifically for potions.)

Step 3: Add the catalyst to the potion base you made in Step 2. Boil until its essence is fully extracted, and you’re done!

Apparently you could create a variety of potions depending on what catalyst you added in Step 3. The catalyst materials were useless on their own, but once added to the potion base, they revealed their true effect, resulting in the completed potion. There were also a variety of medicinal herbs, and while some were more effective than others, they could all be used as potion bases. Not that it was really relevant to me, since all the herbs I’d gathered in the forest were the same type.

“For now I guess anything goes, so let’s make our soup stock

first. Crushing these herbs by hand sounds like a pain, so how about we utilize spatial magic instead?"

Apparently you were supposed to use a mortar and pestle to crush and grind the herb, then strain out the liquid with a cloth or something similar. But all that was way too much work, so using my magic, I diced the herbs finely enough that they looked crushed, then pressurized them with space and gathered the liquid into the cauldron.

"That's all?! You gotta be kidding!" *One herb yielded only one drop of potion base? Seriously?! Then how many herbs will I need to fill the cauldron?!*

"I harvested those herbs without Blade and the others, so I can teleport to the mountains and gather some more whenever I want. Then, since I'm not selling them, I can just copy the ones I get!"

In that case, I might as well take the opportunity to experiment! First, I copied enough herbs to fill the small cauldron with liquid. It smelled like...raw vegetation. *What is this, vegetable juice?*

"Now, let's see... While it's boiling, I need to cast a spell on the cauldron to imbue this juice with magic." That meant I needed a flame, so I supercompressed the air to ignite a branch I'd picked up in the forest. In other words, I created a fire piston. By adding kinetic energy to the supercompressed air, I could heat something up enough for it to catch fire—and all I did was apply modern physics! *You'd normally first use something easily flammable, like cotton, as an igniter, but I'm better than that, 'cause I can control space! What better way to heat up a branch than ignite it directly?*

"Now bring it to a boil." I put the dried branch underneath the cauldron as a heat source. *All right, now we apply mana to the cauldron. Er, how much should I apply? Let's start off with a light amount for now.*

Whoa, it's glowing brightly already! Did I accidentally channel in too much? Or is that what it's supposed to do? The book doesn't say!

"Wow! The liquid turned blue! It's a deep blue, but the book only says it should be 'blue,' so did I do it right?"

Well, I guess it doesn't matter. Even if I messed up, I had infinite herbs to test with until I got it right. I decided to keep going and see what happened. Now that I had my potion base, it was time to move on to Step 3.

According to the book, if you crumbled up a magic stone to

use as your catalyst, you got a mana potion. *Let's try it out!* I took out the magic stones I'd gathered from the goblins I'd defeated on the logging quest, then I crushed the stones with spatial magic.

"Hmm... It's supposed to get even bluer now, but the color's not changing at all." *I guess that means I didn't put enough magic stones in. I still have some left, but I don't know how many I need to add—so let's copy them like the herbs!*

"One, two, three... There, I've put three more in. Huh, it's still not enough? Or rather, the potion was already a really deep blue when I started, so maybe it can't get any bluer than that?"

I had no way of knowing the answers, so for now, I kept the cauldron at a boil and continued to add magic stones as the amount of liquid decreased. By the time I'd added the twentieth stone, it looked to me like nearly half of the cauldron's contents were magic stone powder. *Er... This can't be right, can it?* The color was also changing from blue to purple, making me further suspect that I'd messed up.

"Er... Well, let's just call this one complete, shall we?" I used spatial magic to lift the potion out of the cauldron. *Hmm, it's a little transparent, but it looks like a purple liquid to me. Definitely not blue.* Throwing caution to the wind, I decided to take a small taste.

"Hm... Oh, I think I can feel my MP recovering!" It wasn't even enough to restore the mana I'd used to copy a single magic stone, but I did feel like I had a tiny bit more. So could I call this potion a success? Nah, I guess not, considering I could never sell such an ineffective potion.

"I wonder where I went wrong?" I put my homemade potion in a bottle for now. Even inside the bottle it looked purple, almost like amethyst. Yet the book said mana potions should be clear blue.

"Did I mess up when extracting the mana? Oh, wait!" I took out another book—this one being the Tome of General Knowledge the Goddess had given me. "I forgot to check and see if it said anything about making potions in here!"

The book's pages flipped automatically to a certain entry. *Oh, it is in here! Let's see what it says...*

"Wow! It even has the different colors of potions and what they mean. Awesome!"

The tome the Goddess had given me was printed in full color,

so I was able to see exactly what a mana potion was supposed to look like. Oh, that's a pretty blue—in other words, clearly different from the mana potion I'd attempted to brew. Then did the purple color mean it went bad somehow?

Incidentally, a healing potion was supposed to be green. There were other, more advanced potions as well, but the book didn't cover them in detail—which I assumed was because, once again, it was only a Tome of "General" Knowledge. What a shame!

"Anyway, the color's not what it should be, so I guess this one's a failure after all." I put my first attempt at brewing potions into my space of holding. I created a storage space specifically for potion making, then placed the rest of the cauldron's contents in there as well. Thanks to spatial magic, I didn't even have to wash the cauldron before starting a new attempt. On to the next one! After all, I never expected I'd get it right on the first try to begin with!

"Well, I think I got pretty close, so I have the basics down, at least." Technically my goal was to make a perfume I could sell to the slave trader—the potion was just a means to an end. *So this time, we're going all in! Let's make a potion that smells so good, he'll have to buy it!*

Now, instead of magic stones, what could I use as a catalyst to make it smell nice? Apples, maybe? Like the kind I found in the mountains after fleeing the Kingdom of Alchemy? It's worth a try.

And so, after making a hundred copies of said apple, extracting the juice, filling the cauldron with a mixture of apple juice and herb extract, and brewing the contents, I ended up with a potion that was clear yellow. *Er... What the heck kind of potion is this?* It smelled extremely sweet, and after giving it a quick sample, it tasted sweet too. I even felt my mood lift a little after trying it. At any rate, the smell was exactly what I was going for, so this would probably work.

"Even when I spread it on something, it dries immediately and doesn't feel sticky. Considering how sugary sweet the substance is, that's unexpected." *Maybe this potion base(?) can be used for other things as well. It's basically a fragrance, so I wonder if I could sell it as an air freshener to freshen up rooms with. Or maybe it'd be better to just market it as a type of water that smells good, then let the customer decide how to use it.*

For now, I bottled it up. *The color's so pretty!*

At last, I had something I could sell. I put the contents of the cauldron away in storage, then I saw I had one more empty bottle for potions. *Might as well fill it up, so let's try and make a real mana potion this time!*

It took me half a day, but I finally managed to make a potion with the correct color. "Yep, this looks exactly like the color in the book!"

It turned out that adding water during the boiling process gave the potion the clear blue it needed. It did make the liquid a little thinner, though. *I didn't dilute its effectiveness, right?*

I bottled the potion and observed the color. It retained its blueness. *Looks good to me, so let's try it!*

"Ugh, it's bitter! Hm... Oh." Just as I'd suspected, I didn't feel my mana recover at all. *I guess I really did add too much water. Well, I only used three herbs and one magic stone and filled the rest of the cauldron with water, so I'm not too surprised.*

"But I do like the color, so it might be a good room decoration." I put the bottle in my space of holding, as well as the bevy of other attempts at potions I'd made today. It was getting late, so that was enough for now. Tomorrow, I'd head back to the slave trader's for some business.

#Side: Slave Trader Bareas

"What do you mean, you lost her?!"

"S-Sorry, master!"

The name's Bareas, and I'm the slave trader of this town. My prey, Karina, has apparently flown the coop all of a sudden. According to the hoodlum I had keeping an eye on her, after taking the money she'd earned on adventuring quests and spending it on booze in a bar owned by a fox woman, she flew up into the air and disappeared.

That's bullshit! You expect me to believe that?! I bet you just weren't paying attention and came up with some poor excuse so you wouldn't get in trouble! And you kept this to yourself for a whole day before telling me?! Useless!

"Sorry won't cut it—this is grounds for punishment. I'm tearing all the nails off your hands and feet, one by one, so grit those teeth!"

Goddammit! I could've made a ton of money! The more I thought about it, the more frustrated and angry I became.

"N-No, anything but that! Have mercy, master!"

"Enough! If you don't want that, then pay me enough to make up for this loss. Five gold, and I'll let you off the hook."

"I don't have that kind of money! I'll look for her, how about that?! I'll find her, I promise!"

"You won't find her if she's already escaped, idiot!" I grabbed the sniveling hoodlum by the neck and was about to drag him to the underground basement when one of the slaves in my employ addressed me.

"Master, she's here!"

"Huh?! By 'she,' you don't mean...Karina?!" I threw the hoodlum to the floor and demanded the slave elaborate. "Are you sure? You're not lying to cover for this guy, are you?"

"No, she's really here."

"You're serious?! Looks like you were lucky today, fool," I said to the pathetic hoodlum. "Now get the hell out of my sight. Naturally, you won't be getting a cent from me, since you failed your task."

"I-I understand, master! Thank you for your generosity!" He was on the verge of tears as he ran away like a coward. But as I watched him go, I felt my spirits lift. After all, the prey that I thought had run away had shown up on my doorstep! Recalling the softness of Karina's breasts all over again, I had to get a hold of myself and calm down before entering the meeting room.

Karina was already seated when I entered. "Did you get the money I asked for?" I asked.

"No. I came today to negotiate. I told you I had ways of making money, right? Well, I've got something you might be interested in. One gold coin if you wanna buy."

She was exuding a sweet smell—apparently she'd gone out of her way to put on perfume. *Meaning she intends to sell herself to me for one gold? Heh heh heh... What a dirty girl.*

"All right, I'll buy." *Except once we're done with our fun, I'll cast Dominion on you and make you mine for good!*

"Ooh, agreeing to buy before you've even seen the product? That's awfully bold of you. Anyway, this fragrance is what I'm selling."

"Huh?"

Karina set a glass bottle on the table, filled with yellow liquid. It looked like a potion bottle. Hm... If the potion was yellow, the legendary ambrosia came to mind, but surely she wouldn't have brought something like that here to sell, right? No, of course not. After all, ambrosia was a miracle potion that temporarily granted immortality. No way she'd part with an item like that for a measly one gold. To begin with, the legends said it could only be made using an extremely rare fruit that grew on a mountain impossible for humans to climb. So this potion she was selling me was probably made to *look* like ambrosia. She called it a "fragrance," after all.

"Hmph. You think I was born yesterday? Where'd you get this?"

"I made it myself. I thought you might be interested—what do you think?"

So that sweet smell didn't come from her but this concoction. And she could brew potions, eh? Heh heh... Then maybe I could capitalize on that talent of hers once I turned her into a slave and forced her to make potions to sell.

"You already said you'd buy it for one gold, right? Then give me that slave girl downstairs and we'll call it even."

"Fine. You've got a deal."

"All right!"

Now that this fragrance was making the room smell all sweet, I could camouflage Dominion's smell within it and not get found out! So without further ado, I channeled mana into the gem on my finger.

"What's wrong? Hurry up, I wanna see the girl," Karina said.

"Huh? R-Right. Hey, you there! Go get her." Karina didn't seem like she was under Dominion's influence yet, so I did as she asked and ordered one of my slaves to bring the girl here. She still had legs, at least, so she shouldn't have trouble walking. I also asked the slave to take his time fetching her, so Dominion should take effect by the time she got there.

"Oh, right. I have some other potions I made too. Wanna look?"

"Sure, might as well." I accepted her offer—mostly to stall for time—and she brought out two more potions: a mana potion and a high mana potion.

"You made these as well, I take it?"

"That's right. Name your price," she said, looking smug as she

displayed her wares. I might have been a slave trader, but I was a businessman first and foremost. I knew what potions like these typically went for. Let's see...the richer the potion's color, the higher the grade. With that in mind...the mana potion was worth about two silvers and the high mana potion about thirty silvers.

"I'll take 'em for free," I said.

"Huh? You're joking, right? There's no way I can just give these to you."

"Of course I'm joking. Just some trader's humor, is all. I'll pay thirty-two silvers for both." *Damn! Dominion should've started to take effect by now. What's going on? She looks totally unfazed. I was so surprised, I accidentally gave the market price as my offer!*

She mentioned she had a Trader's Guild license, so I'll pay her by card. Shit, thirty-two silvers... Well, I can just get that money right back if I can get Dominion to work!

"He's taking his sweet time, huh? What's the holdup?" Karina asked.

"O-Oh, well, I'm sure he'll be back any minute with the girl. In the meantime, let's get this paperwork out of the way, so that you can take her with you as soon as she arrives." I prepared the legal documentation for owning a slave. *Something's wrong—it still isn't working. It's showing even less effect than if I'd already cast it today! In other words, no effect at all!*

Shit, I've finished drawing up all the documentation, and Karina's still lucid! What else can I do to stall for time...? Right, the yellow potion on the table, the fragrance! I'll use that!

"This fragrance of yours really does have a nice smell," I said.

"I know, right? I went through a lot of trouble to make it." She grinned smugly again. *Good, looks like I've bought a little more time. Dominion should finally start to work on her any second now.* "To be honest, I tried using it as a fragrance myself, but the sweetness was overpoweringly dense. I couldn't smell anything else."

"Huh?" Couldn't smell anything else? Then that meant—she couldn't smell Dominion right now either?!

"What's wrong? You looked shocked all of a sudden."

"O-Oh, nothing. Nothing at all." *Goddammit, this has never happened before! Right, if her sense of smell's being overpowered, she can't smell anything else! To think the all-powerful Dominion had such an obvious loophole!*

"Master, I've returned with the slave you asked for."

“Huh?! O-Oh, back already, are you?” I nearly shouted at him for not taking longer to return, but with Karina currently immune to Dominion’s effects, it was actually better this way. Now she wouldn’t get suspicious of me for having taken *too* long to bring the girl here.

“Excellent!” Karina said. “With the papers already drawn up, all that’s left now is to seal the contract with magic, right? Oh, also, don’t forget her socks.”

“Y-Yes, I suppose you’re right.” Indeed, the legal documents were already finished and in front of me. I was out of options—I couldn’t stall for time any longer. Ultimately, I ended up parting with one of the slaves for a measly bottle of yellow fragrance.

Karina dragged the girl out of the room in high spirits. Meanwhile, I had to pretend to be satisfied with the transaction, watching her go with a grin plastered on my face. Inwardly, however, I felt utterly humiliated.

“Karina, you bitch… How dare you make a mockery of me, the esteemed Bareas?!”

Whether it was due to a coincidence or an inevitability, I didn’t know. But one thing was certain: I’d been knocked off course somehow. She’d fallen under Dominion’s spell so easily during our first meeting…and yet, this time…!

She tricked me, didn’t she?! That’s not fair! You’re supposed to fall under my rule, dammit!

“You’ll pay for this, Karina… Mark my words! Hey, you—send word to all the hoodlums, ruffians, and criminals in this town. Tell them to hunt her down.”

“Y-Yes, master.”

This town was the hunting ground, and Karina was the prey. I didn’t need Dominion to capture her when I could do it with brute force!

Right here, right now, your fate’s decided, Karina. There’s no other path for you now but to become my slave.

#Side: END

My name’s Karina! Today, I went to a slave trader and successfully bought a slave! *Heh heh, now I’m one step closer to my isekai dream of creating a harem of lovely girls who bend to my every perverted whim, just like the protagonists of my favorite light novels… Whoopsie, looks like I let my true feelings slip.* **I just want**

to make a friend, that's all! Nothing but pure intentions here!

"Still…I never dreamed that guy would actually value that fragrance at one gold. But if he'd refused, I would've had to go back to the drawing board, so I'm glad he agreed." He'd even paid me thirty-two silver for my failed concoctions! You know, maybe that slave trader wasn't such a bad guy after all.

Meanwhile, the slave girl wore a vacant expression, and she didn't resist as I dragged her along. Since she didn't have arms, I led her by the waist.

"You're staring at me even more intently than that slave trader was as we left," I told her. *He must've really been reluctant to part with this girl—sorry, that's a lie. I know exactly why he was staring at me, considering his eyes were glued to my chest the whole time I was there. Even funnier, he didn't realize he was doing it most of the time, so every now and then he'd take a furtive glance, thinking he was being subtle. A few times he even unconsciously raised his hands in a grabbing motion.*

Well, it's not like I don't get it—after all, I am *extraordinarily beautiful. I completely understand why someone would want to look at me with lewd intent. And with that understanding, I was able to swindle that slave trader out of some clothes and other necessities for Miss Slave Girl here, as a bonus. Heh heh heh… Serves you right, lmao.*

"Still, as is, you stick out like a sore thumb. Let's get you back to base as quick as possible." In truth, ever since we'd left the slave trader's, I'd felt gazes all around me—not toward me, but the girl. Not too surprising, considering she was armless, her face was all bandaged up, and she was a young half dwarf limping along like she was wounded. Anyone with a conscience would be startled to lay eyes on her.

I escorted the girl around a corner and into a back alley, where I promptly deployed spatial magic to enter my space of holding along with the young half dwarf.

"…?" The girl finally showed a reaction, looking confused all of a sudden.

"Oh? Yeah, makes sense you'd be a little surprised after that."

After blinking in bewilderment, her head was on a swivel as she gawked at her surroundings. Naturally, since I'd taken her somewhere clearly removed from the town she'd been in just now.

“Now then, things would be pretty dull if you weren’t as equally impressed by me, so let’s heal those wounds of yours, shall we?”

As soon as I’d said that, the girl looked at me. It seemed like she wanted to say something, but her voice was gone and she had no arms to gesture with. Still, I more or less understood what she was thinking: *Can you really heal me?*

“First, your voice.” I placed my hand on her throat and used spatial magic to perform a scan. *Oh—looks like her throat’s been burned by some substance?* The wound had become a keloid and hardened to where she couldn’t use her voice anymore. Using my own vocal cords as a reference, I removed, copied, and combined at a cellular level to restore her throat, then smoothed everything out to where it looked good as new. Surgery complete!

“There, that should do it. Voice working now?”

The girl coughed. “Eh… Ah… Ah?! I can talk!”

“Great, looks like the operation was a success. I’ll do some fine-tuning later, but that should do for now.”

I’d known that much was possible, at least, because I’d seen the medical applications of spatial magic for myself back when the Goddess had revived that self-proclaimed God of Destruction to full health from a disembodied state. That tutorial of hers really was…something.

“Next, we’ll fix your face. I don’t know what it looked like originally, but if you’ve got any requests for alterations, just let me know.” I removed the bandages from her face and focused on eliminating the scars first. *Let’s see, burn marks are covering her face all over…but how do I restore her face if I don’t know what it used to look like? Wait—she’s a half dwarf, right? So let’s use Satie’s face as a reference! This girl’s got a way lighter complexion, but they’re both dwarves, so it should be fine!*

There are some burn marks on her eyes, so I’ll fix those up. There, all better. Now let’s give her more hair by copying and pasting… Yep, that oughta do it! Her hair’s even red like Satie’s. In fact, maybe she looks a little too *much like her? Ah, well, not my problem.*

“Ah… Eh?” the girl mumbled.

“Now for the arms. While we’re at it, let’s spruce up the rest of your body too.” I copied her leg, and through some additional copying and deleting, I fashioned the copied leg into an arm. Maybe they wouldn’t be as dexterous as the originals, but with a

little rehab she would probably manage. *Just gotta put her to work, is all!* Now that the right arm was done, I copied it and flipped it around to make a left arm.

While I was at it, I also got rid of those unsightly tattoos, looking like scribbles all over her body, as well as any other old wounds that had left scars. *Technology sure has come a long way to be able to replicate individual cells exactly— Oh, right, that's my magic. Let's give her skin a nice sheen too.*

"Whew... Operation complete. Making two arms took more out of me than I thought."

"Eh... Eh...?" The girl looked utterly taken aback at the absence of her wounds and scars. *Impressive, huh? That's Dr. Karina's special high-speed surgery for you! I get the job done before the patient even has time to lie on the operating table!*

In fact, the entire thing had taken less than thirty seconds. *Not a bad time, if I do say so myself.*

"I can speak...and I have arms! And a face... Waaahhh!" She started sobbing.

"Well, you can't do any work without a voice, face, or arms, so I had no choice."

But the girl nodded enthusiastically and bowed deeply. "Thank you so much, master! I'm so grateful! Words can't express —" She cut off as she was suddenly overcome with a coughing fit.

"Whoa, whoa, you just got healed, so don't push yourself. Just spend the rest of the day getting used to that new body of yours," I said with a wry smile.

Guh! I might be acting all cool and subdued, but I'm so tired I'm about to fall over! I used too much MP! I know they were failed attempts, but I wish I hadn't sold those potions—any amount of pick-me-up would be welcome right about now! I need to make more effective potions, so I'll have them on hand in times like these. I need to get better at potion brewing!

And yet, this girl is thanking me like I'm her savior, like I'm the coolest person in the world. Seriously, what a cutie. I wonder if she'd even forgive me if I took her to bed right now...

Whoa now, hold up, Karina! Let's not get carried away! Remember what Shildon told you—when dealing with slaves, always assume that they're out to get you! I'm undoubtedly being tested right now! By the world! By the Goddess!

At the very least, first impressions are key! For now, let's play the

part of a firm, reliable master! Oh—nope, no good. I'm about to pass out.

"Guh… Yeah, you go on and spend the rest of the—whoa…day getting used to your body. I'm gonna…lie down for a bit."

The girl coughed again. "Yes, master! Good night, master!"

I flopped down on my homemade futon. As tired as I was, sleep assaulted me the second I hit the pillow. *Zzzz.*

* * *

After sleeping for half the day, I woke up to find the slave girl sitting on the ground, staring at me silently. By my guess, it was probably evening by now.



“G-Good morning, master.”

“Morning… Er, what are you doing?”

“Oh! Well, I was just watching you.”

Right. Come to think of it, I didn’t make her a room, and she doesn’t have a bed. There’s not really anything here for her to do either. Sorry about that. Wait…what if she needs to go to the bathroom? Oh, looks like she knew to use the pot. Good.

“How’s your throat? And are you getting used to your new arms?”

“Yes, master. I’ve been exercising them, just as you told me. And I can speak just fine!”

“If you ever have a problem with them, just let me know. I can adjust them for you, er…” I was about to say her name, then realized I didn’t know what to call her. The master was supposed to name the slave, but I wasn’t so good at naming things—I could only come up with “Karina” as my own temporary name, after all! So I decided to let her pick her own name.

“Right, you don’t have a name yet, do you, Miss Slave? Then go on and pick one yourself.”

“Huh? Are you sure? Is that really okay? Th-Then, please call me Aishia, master!”

“Aishia, huh? Nice name. All right, Aishia, you’re going to be in my service for the rest of your life, so from here on, you’re forbidden to lie to me. That’s an order.”

“I understand. Don’t worry, master, I’ll be with you until the day I die.”

So said the slave girl—Aishia—with a polite bow.

She seemed loyal for now, but maybe that was just because she was currently on a high from being healed and back to normal after so long in that miserable state. *I’m going to have her around for quite a while, so that’s plenty of time for her to turn on me without warning. You can’t trust her, Karina! Remember Shildon’s teachings… Remember Shildon’s teachings!*

“Anyway, does anything feel off? Need me to tweak anything?”

“Yes, master! There are no problems with my body at present, but my voice feels funny.”

And so, I got to work fine-tuning her voice.

“Ahh. Ahh. Um, could you make the pitch a little higher, please?”

“Sure. Let’s see, I’ll just fiddle with the vocal cords a little and…done. How’s that?”

“Ahh. Ahh. Yes, that’s perfect! Thank you so much, master!”

With that, I’d finished tuning Aishia’s voice. Considering she used to be a minstrel, I got why she’d be particular about it.

Naturally, I didn’t do it out of the goodness of my heart. *This is all part of my strategy!*

“Just to let you know, if I don’t check your throat periodically and perform regular maintenance on it, I can’t guarantee you’ll keep your voice.”

“I understand. Don’t worry, master, I’ll be with you until the day I die.”

“You’ll serve me until then, huh? I’m happy to hear that. You’re a good girl, Aishia.”

“Tee hee, you’re embarrassing me, master!”

Good. Now she knows that she might lose that voice of hers if she tries to betray me. That’s right, I’m holding her precious minstrel voice over her head so she’ll stay bound to me forever! Mwa ha ha!

By the way, I also used spatial magic to let her check her own face, but apparently she was pretty happy with it as is. *I wonder if I made her prettier than she was originally? Well, that would stand to reason—I modeled her off Li’l Satie, after all! Anyone would find Satie cute, and my revised version of her based on my memories no doubt makes her even cuter!*

At that moment, an adorable puppylike growl came from Aishia’s stomach. *Come to think of it, I haven’t fed her anything yet.* I *haven’t eaten yet either.*

It wasn’t like I had no food at home. There was dried jerky in my space of holding, as well as apples. I also had a cauldron and logs, so cooking was an option. But, well, it would take time to whip something up, and I didn’t have a traditional cookstove like the ones in Japan.

“Guess we’re eating out today, then. Here, make do with this for now.” I handed her an apple.

“I will! Have a nice meal!”

“Er, you’re not going to come with me?”

“Huh?” She tilted her head in confusion. “But I’m a slave.”

I tilted *my* head in confusion. It seemed like there was a mutual misunderstanding between us. “Oh, wait. Surely you didn’t expect me to be the kind of master who passes you one apple and considers that your meal for the day? I wouldn’t do

that. That's just a snack to tide you over."

"E-Er, um, is that so? I apologize for my stomach's rudeness just now, master. Just imagining tasting something so sweet made it jump for joy, I think."

R-Right. Well, considering the state she'd *been* in, an apple was probably like a luxurious feast for her. "There are plenty more of those where that came from, so go ahead and eat it all, if you want."

"Ohhh! Then I'll help myself!" She took a big bite. "Mmm!" Tears began to stream from her eyes.

"Are you okay?! Did you get a sour bite or something?! Are you okay?!"

"N-No, I'm fine… I was just so surprised at how sweet it was! I've never tasted anything so delicious in all my life!"

Really? It's just a normal apple, though… Wait, no; considering how long it'd been since Aishia had had anything sweet to eat, a normal apple for her was probably like the highest-class, most expensive apple in the world. Like the old saying went, an empty stomach was the greatest seasoning of all.

"Savor as many as you want. I have an unlimited supply, after all."

"Th-Thank you so much, master! I will serve you as long as I live!"

After Aishia had polished off three apples, she seemed to be full. But I still had yet to eat dinner, so while I was at it, I decided I'd take her out on the town and show off her cuteness to the public.

"All right, time to head out. I've got the money from the failed potions I sold, so I would've liked to buy you some bedding, but it's too late for that now, huh?"

"Yes, master. Also, I'll be fine sleeping on the floor. There's no wind in this place, so I won't get cold."

"Really? Well, I could also just copy my own bedding. It's for personal use, so it won't violate the rules I imposed on myself."

At any rate, I walked out of the closed space with Aishia in tow. As I suspected, it was evening—just in time for dinner.

When I entered the Adventurer's Guild, Blade called out to me, looking relieved. "Hey, Karina! You're still alive and kickin'! We hadn't seen you in a while, so we were worried about you! We even went lookin'!"

"Hey, Blade. You went lookin' for me? Why?" *Did he think I'd kicked the bucket or something? Look, dude, I'm healthy! Not a scratch on me!*

"There's someone running all over the place looking for you for some reason. On top of that, we hadn't seen you at all. Where've you been, anyway?"

"Huh? Why would they be looking for me?" I couldn't imagine why. *I'm just your friendly neighborhood adventurer-slash-merchant, is all.*

"Maybe it's someone who didn't take too kindly to your overeager logging the other day? You're a new solo adventurer with a ton of money, and easy on the eyes to boot. You've even had people try to attack you before. I mean, personality aside, you're quite the catch."

"Oh, now that you mention it... Wait, what do you mean, 'personality aside'?!" *Now you've done it! I'll tell on you to Miss Harumikazuchi— Oh, wait. Blade was with me during my first visit to Shunrai, wasn't he? I don't remember what happened there myself, and all I have to go on is what Harumikazuchi told me, but just based on what I heard, it's no wonder he'd say that, huh?*

"Come to think of it, you're right. I have money, I'm a newcomer to this town with barely any connections, and I'm extraordinarily pretty. Plus, I'm not staying at an inn. In other words, I'm like a walking target just waiting to get mugged. I'm so beautiful, I'm a danger to myself."

"Huh? S-Sure, we'll go with that. Anyway, when we asked some of our friends if they'd seen you, they said they saw a black-haired girl getting dragged out of the Trader's Guild by another merchant. After hearing that, of course we were gonna worry."

"I see. Sorry for worrying you." *I think mostly the vagueness of the information was to blame there, but whatever.* "It's true, that was me. But the merchant was also a girl, so I was fine."

"Huh?! The merchant was a girl?! Was *she* okay?!"

"You hear she's a girl and now you're suddenly worried about *her* more than me? Just who do you think I am, Blade? Not that your concern is unwarranted, considering I ended up blackout drunk again."

Satie had cleverly coerced me into buying her excess wares, after all. Even if I *had* ended up doing something not so good, I'd had her consent, at least. *Probably. I think. Maybe. Anyway, she may* look *like a loli, but that's only 'cause she's a dwarf! She's a legal*

adult, so that means I'm in the clear!

"By the way, Karina, I've been wondering... Who's this girl here?"

"Oh, right, introductions. This is Aishia. Go on, Aishia, introduce yourself."

"Yes, master! My name is Aishia, and I am her slave! I'm a half dwarf!" She gave a polite bow to Blade. *Yep, she's a cutie all right.*

"Hey, Karina, come over here a minute," he said, beckoning me over.

"Huh? What's wrong?"

He brought his face close to mine and whispered, "You didn't steal her, did you? I know we're friends and all, but if you did, I'll have no choice but to report you."

"What? Of course not, who do you think I am? I bought her legally, from the slave trader here!"

"No way! I mean, a cute, obedient half dwarf like that would normally run you ten gold or so! Guess the merchant life's more lucrative than I thought."

Oh, right. From his perspective, Aishia would just look like a normal girl with no blemishes or defects, and that, coupled with her demure personality, would normally put her squarely in the "expensive" slave bracket. And considering I'd made enough from logging the other day that they'd barred me from doing it anymore, it was no wonder he'd think I had that kind of money.

"Actually, you're not gonna believe this, but I bought her for only one gold."

"Huh?! How the hell'd you pull that off?! Even if you used some backdoor method, that's way too cheap!"

"Oh, you want to hear how I did it?"

"Nah, on second thought, forget it. I feel like I'd be better off not knowing!" Blade covered his ears with his hands and shook his head. *You sure you don't want to hear? I don't mind recounting my heroic saga, you know!*

"You don't find it strange that I managed to make one gold's worth in that short span of time?" I asked.

"Nah, since it's you we're talking about, that part doesn't surprise me at all. You probably used that magic of yours to earn a bunch, like you did when we were logging. I mean, you even told me you bought a house already, right?"

Wow, Blade's trust in me runs deep—one gold's worth of trust, at

least!

"Just be careful, though," he said. "That slave of yours looks valuable even at a glance, so watch where you're going when you're out with her. Don't use back alleys under any circumstances, only main roads. And even when you're on the roads, stay right in the middle. Walking on either side will make it easier for ne'er-do-wells to ambush you and carry you into the shadows."

"What are you, my mom?"

"Oh, shut up! But also, be absolutely sure to keep your door locked at night! And—"

"Wait, you're *still* not done? Man, you're a worrywart."

"I mean, you actually do have people targeting you as we speak, right? Then you can't be too careful— Wait, don't tell me the reason you're being hunted down has to do with how you bought that slave for so cheap?"

Huh? Well, I bought Aishia legally and went through all the procedures, so I doubt it? "Oh yeah, I *am* being targeted, huh? What a pain... Er, would it be a problem if I just took down anyone trying to attack me?"

"Huh? No, considering *your* strength, I'd say that'd probably be your best option. Right, you'd easily defeat anyone who attacked you from the front, so all *you'd* have to worry about is getting ambushed..."

Oh? Wow, I can really feel Blade's faith in me. Thanks, bud! "Actually, would killing them outright be a crime if they tried to kill me first?"

"C'mon, now, it doesn't sound like a joke when it's *you* saying it."

"Or what if I said it was an accident or that I misjudged my own strength?"

"You're not joking after all, huh?" Blade scratched his head in worry, most likely recalling how I'd cut down multiple trees in one fell swoop during our quest together. I understood his concern—after all, what I could do to a tree would be even easier for me to do to a human body. "Well, actually, you could claim you acted in self-defense, as long as the other party attacked you first. Apparently the church has some kind of magic device that can tell that sort of thing."

No kidding? Then, as long as it's in self-defense, you can be as violent as you want?!

“Well, if you just straight up assault them here in town with an intent to kill, it’d be considered attempted theft. Ironically, something more minor like stealing their wallet would be allowed. Just be aware that if your act of self-defense is found to be unjustifiable, you’ll be fined. If that happens, well, just call me if you need help on quests to earn money!”

“You’re kidding! You mean with enough money I can just erase my criminal charges if I go too far?! That’s awesome!”

To think such a world even exists! I guess the life of a citizen in this world is worth way less than a citizen of Japan’s! Wait—aren’t I a citizen of this world now too?!

* * *

My name’s Karina, and apparently, some bad people are after me! Scary! I can’t live comfortably with these hoodlums and ruffians running around, so I’ve got no choice but to send ’em flying myself! I’ll contribute to maintaining the public order, and while I’m at it, I’ll take whatever money they’ve got and donate it to the church! Aren’t I a good girl?

And so, I wandered the streets alone at night, holding a liquor bottle filled with water. Where was Aishia, you ask? Back at my base, of course—it’d be too dangerous to bring her along for this. *She’s probably snoozing on my futon right about now.*

Pretending to stagger around like a drunk, I entered a back alley—the same one where the guys had tried to hit on me—or rather, shake me down—the other day. *Now then, will they take the bait?*

“End of the line,” a voice said.

“And nowhere to run,” added another.

Two wallets ripe for the taking appeared, just as I’d hoped! The corner of my mouth turned up in a smirk. *Heh heh, I’m sober today, so rest assured, I won’t be running away this time.*

“Huh? What’s that smirk on your face for? Hey, bro, block her exit from behind. Now that I get a good look at her, she’s pretty cute. We won’t let her get away.”

“On it, bro! Leave it to me!” I heard footsteps behind me. *Oh no, whatever will I do? I’m sandwiched between two wallets—now I have to choose which one to take money from! Woe is me! Wait, these aren’t the same guys as the other day, I guess. Hmm… Oh well.*

As long as they've got money, it's all the same, really.

"What's going on here?" I asked. "Are you guys muggers or something? Am I about to be assaulted?"

"Heh heh, quick on the uptake, aren't we? Then let's cut right to the chase—hand over everything you've got. Clothes included."

"Naturally, we'll be taking the body *in* those clothes too—once we've had a little bit of fun with you, we'll sell you into slavery."

"Wh-What? Slavery? But I'm an upstanding citizen with no criminal record or debt to speak of! No slave trader would buy someone like that!"

"Doesn't matter! The moment you were unlucky enough to have Master Bareas lay his eyes on you, your fate was sealed!"

Bareas, eh? I feel like I've heard that name before... Wait, that's the slave trader I bought Aishia from! I only knew a few people here so far, so remembering his name was easy.

"Huh? In other words, that pervert attacked regular citizens and forced them into slavery? Wasn't that, like, a massive scandal that could get him in serious trouble if someone found out?"

"B-Bro, this is bad! Why'd you tell her that?! We were supposed to keep it a secret!"

"She's getting sold into slavery either way, so who cares? No one'll find out!"

"Oh, that's true! You're a genius, bro!"

Uh, no, if I manage to escape here, you'll all be finished. You should have waited until you'd captured me first before talking. Or, wait, I guess with two able-bodied men against a weak young girl, anyone would think I was as good as captured already. Normally, anyway.

At any rate, now that they'd announced their intent to make me a slave, they'd displayed clear intent to harm me. That meant I was probably clear to act in self-defense already, but just to make sure my counterattack would be justified, I needed a little more. Like a punch in my direction, for instance.

"Hm, well, how should I say this? You two just aren't my type, so don't think I won't resist." I adopted a weak-looking fighting stance. *All right, now hurry up and come at me. Do your thing.*

My intent must've gotten through to them, because the one in front of me, Wallet A, unsheathed his sword. "Hey, little girl. You don't want that pretty face of yours to get all messed up, do you? Then you better do as I say."

With a snicker, I deliberately lowered my guard, pointed at him, and laughed. “Ah ha ha! You idiot, I’m not gonna be worth anything if you touch my face or my body! Yet you’re threatening me with a *blade*? Is there really a brain in that head of yours?!”

“Huh? Er... Now that you mention it, I guess you’re right.”

Wait, what? No! Don’t agree with me, you fool! I’m trying to rile you up! C’mon, attack me already! Right now I’ve made myself invincible with I Am The Star! So hit me with your best shot!

“Hey, bro! She just called you an idiot!”

“What?! Who’re you callin’ an idiot?! I’ll kill you!”

“You just realized?!” I couldn’t help but retort.

Anyway, here it comes!

Thunk! He tried to bludgeon me with the flat part of his blade. Even without the sharp end, a sword was a mass of metal and thus plenty effective as a blunt weapon. Easy to bash in a young girl’s head with too. But not me—I took no damage, and my posture didn’t even budge! What’s more, I was now completely in the clear to retaliate in self-defense!

“Wh-What the hell? It’s like I hit a rock or somethin’...”

“In you go!” With a *shoop*, I opened a pocket of space and sent Wallet A inside. Naturally, it was a separate pocket from the one Aishia was in. I also froze time in there, so I didn’t need to worry about him causing a ruckus.

Having witnessed Wallet A disappear all of a sudden, Wallet B looked fearful. “Wh-What...? Hey, what did you do to my bro just now?! Where’d he go?!”

“Where indeed? Guess he just ceased to exist all of a sudden! What’s the matter—are you scared? Chicken? Bawk bawk bawk!”

“W... Waaahhh!”

Oh, looks like Wallet B’s not running away either. He’s charging toward me! Good, good! Go on, punch me as hard as you can! Although, even if I know it’s not gonna hurt, I can’t deny having a fist fly right in front of your face is a little unnerving. It feels like being attacked by an enemy in VR, except in this case it’s not V, just R.

“Huh?! Why does it feel like I’m hittin’ a steel block?! What the hell *are* you?!”

“Huh? Why, a regular citizen, of course. For you to punch a defenseless, innocent girl like that for no reason—you really are terrible.” I snapped my fingers, freezing the lower half of Wallet B’s body in place. *Sorry, you’re not gonna escape from me.*

“My legs! I-I can’t move! No... Have mercy!”

“Hey now, you two tried to kill me first. Heh heh heh… Oh, whoops, we can’t have you squealing pathetically, now can we? Someone might overhear.” I cut his voice off. Wallet B’s mouth opened and closed like a fish gasping for air, but no more sound came out.

If the so-called God of Destruction couldn’t escape from these bindings, no way some two-bit criminal could. “Now then, tell me everything you know—like the whereabouts of the rest of your little gang. Oh, don’t worry. I can still understand what you’re saying, so go on. Spill it.”

“!!!”

Hey now, no screaming. You’d better start talking, ’cause this isn’t gonna end till I get some information. The night is still young, after all!

After extracting the information I wanted from Wallet B—and his wallet, of course—I popped him into my space of holding with the other one.

“Still, how broke can you get? They both had hardly any money at all. Oh, right—that’s probably why they turned to crime in the first place,” I muttered. *Wait—it’s becoming increasingly difficult to tell who the villain is in this situation, isn’t it? Not good, not good! Karina’s supposed to be a paragon of justice! That’s right—justice should be my goal here. After all, as long as it’s in the name of justice, people can be as cruel and brutal as they want!*

“But really, to think that slave trader’s involved with human trafficking… Wait, or is he allowed to get away with that *because* he’s a slave trader? No, no, of course not. Any way you look at it, he’d never be permitted to abduct people in his own town.”

I didn’t know much about the laws of this kingdom, but I couldn’t imagine how that’d pass muster. Rather, if it did, the problem would lie with the kingdom’s laws themselves.

In other words, time to apprehend the villain and turn him into my personal treasure vault! I’ve decided—I’ll make that lecherous slave trader my main dish! While making the town safer, I’ll extort him for all he’s worth! Keh heh… After all, according to Wallet B, that slave trader’s got quite a bit of hush money in his pocket too. Just how much of that dirty money does he have saved up? I can’t wait to find out!

And so, using the information I got from Wallet B, I strolled

around to the other back alleys.

"Just a minute, missy. You got money? Why don't you share some of that with us?"

"If you don't, you might not live to see tomorrow, get my drift?"

"Let's jump her! I wanna feel them titties!"

Wallets C, D, and E appeared!

"If it's an allowance you want, go home crying to your mom, small dick."

Karina used "Taunt"! The wallets are enraged!

The wallets attacked! They missed! Karina received 0 damage! Karina can now use "Self-Defense"!

"All right, you're next. Say hello to infinite space!"

"N-No, I don't wanna disappear! Help m—"

The wallets safe in my space of holding, I moved on to the next group.

"Whoa, she's even more stacked than I heard! Come over here, li'l girl. Let's have some fun."

"It'll be fun for *us*, anyway!"

Wallets F and G appeared!

"With that hair and those outfits? Don't make me laugh. You actually think that looks cool? Lame-asses."

Karina used "Taunt"! The wallets are enraged!

The wallets attacked! They missed! Karina received 0 damage! Karina can now use "Self-Defense"!

"Huh?! Where'd my friend go?!"

"Oh, don't worry, you're next!"

The wallets safe in my space of holding, I moved on to the next group.

"You again?! Bitch, you won't get away from us like you did the other day! This time, you're finished!"

"Today, we brought a net! Take this!"

Wallets H and I appeared! Preemptive strike—Wallets H and I used "Net"! But who cares?! Karina can now use "Self-Defense"! In the space they go!

Er, how many have I put in there now? It's getting to where it'd be a pain to count them.

"There's more? Seriously?" I groaned. While there were some

variations here and there, for the most part the wallets had behaved the same way. It felt like taking down palette swaps of enemies in an RPG—in other words, it was getting a little dull.

When I got to the next location, however, things were shaken up a bit.

"Hey, you're the girl who did the logging quests, right? You must've gotten quite a pretty penny from that job."

"We senior adventurers have been doin' this longer than you. Hand over half of your earnings and we'll give you a good lesson."

Oh, these are delinquent adventurers*! That spices things up a little!*

"You're friends with that Blade character, right? Ditch him, and we'll mentor you instead."

"Come to our place. We'll make you feel good in ways that meddling do-gooder never could."

Hey now, don't speak ill of my buddy Blade in front of me. "Hold up. I don't like it when people talk about others behind their backs. If you're gonna say it, say it to his face! Go up to him and *then* call him a pathetic, careless drunk who's terrible with money!"

"Er, aren't *you* talking about him behind his back right now?"

"Don't try and take the high ground now, you miserable delinquents! As the lone moral and upstanding citizen here, obviously *I'm* the only one qualified to criticize him! You failures can shut your traps! Go and get your asses stabbed by a goblin or something!"

"Uh, I think she's drunk."

"Must be."

Huh? But I'm completely sober! Uh-oh, the speech patterns of all these ruffians I've dealt with today must've rubbed off on me. Not good, I gotta be more careful. Karina's no primate—she's a civilized lady!

"By the way, what rank are you two, anyway? No, don't tell me—Rank G, right? It's obvious from how weak you look!"

"We're Rank D, you cheeky bitch!"

"D, huh? If you got that far, throwing in the towel must've been all the more humiliating for you. Perhaps I should put you out of your misery and strangle you right here?"

I could see the veins bulge out of the failed adventurers' heads. Good, my taunting was working. *Really, though, you didn't*

even make it to Rank C and you're putting Blade down? Sounds like your personalities are the problem, then.

"Hey, let's show her that a Rank E weakling like her ought to respect her superiors."

"Sounds good. After all, in terms of ability, we're closer to Rank B!"

"Pfft, don't make me laugh! If you two-bit delinquents wanna call yourselves Rank B, then I'm Rank S! Ya puny little runts!"

"That's it! You're dead meat, girl!" they said in unison.

Finally! They threw punches at me, so the moment the punches connected, I trapped them in my space of holding! Aaand done! *Fools, you only brought that on yourself.* My self-defense couldn't have been more justified.

Hmm... In the end, they weren't much different from the others, were they? The flavor was different, but that was all, really. *Even if you order a different flavor, ramen is still ramen.* And handling the delinquents of this town felt much the same way. *Sigh.*

"I should probably call it a day, I guess." By this point, I'd visited all the gang territories Wallet B had informed me of. And in the end, the total amount of money from the other wallets only added up to five silvers. Pathetic... I'd made more money in a single day of logging! If I'd known that was all they had, maybe I should've just let them be. Just kidding.

More importantly, what am I gonna do with all these guys in my space of holding? There were over fifteen of them, so even if I went to the guards and turned them in, I couldn't just pretend to take them out of my backpack like other things I'd stored in infinite space. Man, if there were at least a female delinquent in the mix, I might have been a little more satisfied. *Why do they all have to be men, dammit?! Now I can't even use them to farm socks for the Goddess!*

Plus, they were just a bunch of street muggers, so they probably didn't have any bounties attached to them or anything. And even if I sold them to the slave trader, it wouldn't matter; his money was going to be my money anyway when I was through with him.

"So that just leaves killing them...but that'd leave a bad taste in my mouth." I didn't know about their other victims, but they hadn't really done anything to *me* to deserve death, at least. At

the same time, interrogating each of them about what they'd done and doling out suitable punishments for those crimes sounded like way too much work. Besides, it wasn't my job to scrutinize people for their faults.

"Oh, wait!" Suddenly, I hit upon an ingenious idea, and I headed to the guardroom after all. I was going to hand them over to the guards anyway—but of course, that alone wouldn't be any fun. I decided I'd get them to confess their misdeeds on their own by threatening them *just* a tad: "If you do any more crime, the scary Goddess will come, and you'll meet with a terrible fate. So turn yourself in if you know what's good for you." Then I'd leave the rest to the officials at the scene. I called this operation "Code name: Namahage!"

With this, I'd reduce the amount of work *I* had to do, I wouldn't have to kill anyone who didn't deserve it, and I'd contribute to upholding justice in this town! Three birds with one stone!

"Heh heh heh… I'm a genius! Now where would be good to threaten them? Yeah, over there should do." *I'll use my teleportation to head to the ravaged wasteland where the Goddess once wreaked havoc—the ruins of the Kingdom of Alchemy. That way, even if I go a little too far in threatening them, at least I won't hurt any innocent bystanders!*

In the end, threatening them all took more time than I expected, and I didn't even make it to the slave trader's that day to *withdraw* my money. *But that's just between us.*

#Side: Delinquent

When that girl showed up on my turf that day, she'd looked like prey ripe for the taking. She should've been an easy mark. I was supposed to threaten her into giving up her money—no, I probably would've had a little fun with her first. (And with me as her partner, she probably would've enjoyed herself too!) Yet when I'd called out to her…

"Seriously?! You delinquents are all the same. Do you guys all follow a manual or something? Whatever, just come at me already, you two-bit mob enemy."

For a moment, I couldn't believe my ears. Then, a beat later, I came to my senses and realized that the girl was picking a fight with me. "Oh yeah? Perfect—then I'll kill you and have some fun

with your corpse afterward!”

“Oh no, how scary! I’m gonna wet myself!” the girl said, but from the smirk on her face, she was obviously making fun of me. *That’s it, you little bitch—you might be easy on the eyes, but a brat like you belongs six feet under!*

I took the log I was holding as a weapon and swung it at the girl. She didn’t even try to defend as the log hit her square in the chest—and smashed to pieces upon impact. My hand went numb from the recoil, as though I’d struck a massive boulder.

“Huh…? What just—”

“And there we go, self-defense justified.”

“You brat, what are you—” But I didn’t even get to finish my sentence, because in the next instant, the world around me was pitch-black. Then, as though someone had suddenly turned out the lights, a vast, starry sky suddenly surrounded me.

“Huh?!” *What’s going on?! What happened to me? What did she do to me?!*

“Where the hell are we?!”

“What did you do to me, you bitch?! Gaaah!”

“Huh? Wait, is that you, Barad?” Apparently, one of my acquaintances was also around here. When my eyes finally adjusted to the darkness, I could see some other men I vaguely recognized, and I realized that we were all standing in the middle of a ruin. *What the hell’s going on here?*

At that moment, a bright light shone down, only illuminating our area. It was so bright I had to squint. *What is this, some kind of light magic? It’s like it’s daytime around us, but nighttime everywhere else in the ruin.*

“All right everyone, settle down. Attention!”

“Huh?! Who’s… Wait, what?” Underneath the light that was as bright as the sun itself, I turned in the direction of the voice. It was definitely the voice of the girl I’d just tried to attack. Just as I’d suspected, there she was—but she was floating in the air, with nothing to hold her up.

“The hell?! What’d you do, brat?! Wait, I can’t move?! Guh!” I tried to approach her so I could give her a piece of my mind, but my legs were frozen in place, as though rooted to the spot. As it turned out, my upper body was also frozen, right down to my fingertips. I could only move from the neck up.

“What’s going on?! What is this?! Someone help me!”

“Huh?! This is bullshit! What is this?!”

“Nooo, I don’t wanna die! Save me, bro!”

The cries of the other men echoed throughout the ruin—apparently they couldn’t move either.

“All right, listen up,” the girl said. “From this moment on, you’ll be participating in a game where you’ll need to kill each other to survive—*ahem*, sorry, I couldn’t help myself. Actually, I just have one question for you all: Do you believe in a higher power?”

Huh? What’s this bitch going on about all of a sudden? No doubt the others were thinking the same thing too.

“The Goddess is angry with all of you, you see. *Very* angry. And it’s because you’re all bad people. Didn’t your parents ever teach you all not to cause trouble for others? Hmm?”

“Shut the hell up, you—”

“You’re causing *us* trouble right now, brat—”

“So this is all your fault?! I’m gonna murder you—”

One by one, the men who raised their voices in anger fell silent.

“O wayward children, the Goddess has watched over you all this time—mostly for her own entertainment. Now the time of judgment is at hand…and she has dispatched me, her disciple, to mete out your punishment.” The girl pointed to herself smugly with her thumb. *I see—she’s insane.*

Given the situation, however, I couldn’t entirely dismiss her words as nonsense. At first I’d been in a back alley of the town, and now I was here, in the middle of a ruin. No, not just me—we’d all been transported to this place in the blink of an eye. If that wasn’t the work of a higher power, then what was? Could she…actually be telling the truth?

“Now then, it’s punishment time! If anybody wants to be first to repent, raise your hand! The punishment will go on until all of you apologize and swear to turn yourselves over to the authorities! Until it’s unanimous, you’ll all continue to suffer!”

“Wait, huh?” No sooner than the girl had finished speaking, our feet started to rise up above the ground. *I’m floating… No,* flying*?!* At incredible speed, we all rose up into the sky, then were flipped upside down to where our faces were directed toward the ground. *Oh, shit… We’re way high up.* Because the light from above was illuminating the area we’d just been standing in, I could easily tell just how far away the ground was. *It’s like I’m a bird,* was my last idle thought before I realized I was approaching the ground at breakneck speed.

I'm falling! "Aaaagh!" I screamed.

"Gyaaahh!"

"I'm dead! I'm gonna dieee!"

The wind pulverized my body as I descended rapidly toward a pitch-black section of ground. Just as I braced for impact, however, my body stopped an inch away from certain death.

"Guh... What happened?" I panted, my entire body drenched in sweat. I thought I was dead... *No, maybe I did die. I honestly don't know anymore.*

"All right, children, has everyone reflected on their misdeeds? Hmm... I can't hear you. One more time, then!"

"Huh...? Gaaah!" Once again, we were all launched high into the sky. Then, once we'd risen to around the same height as before...we dropped like rocks!

"Gyaaahhh!"

"Oh, shiiiiit!"

"I've reflected! I'm ready to repent! Just stop this already—Ahhhhh!"



Once again, I stopped an inch from the ground, just before certain death…! Even knowing I probably wasn't actually going to die this time, it was no less terrifying! *I don't wanna do that again!*

"Gaaah! My arm…my arm!" one man cried.

"Oh, whoops, my bad. Looks like I misjudged my timing a little. Let me fix that right up for you."

"Gyaaah, aaahhh, the pain! Aaah… Huh?"

"There you go, good as new. Oh, but I won't be able to fix you guys forever, and I can't guarantee I won't mess up again, so you'd better hope all of you repent before my magic runs out!"

Oh. Apparently I wasn't guaranteed to be safe during this forced freefall "punishment" after all.

"I-I repent! I'll turn myself in, I promise!" I said.

"M-Me too! Just make it stop!"

"Oh, looks like we have some obedient children after all! But since some of you have yet to speak up, we're going another round! Let's take it from the top!" the insane girl shouted, and we all launched back up into the air once again.

"Nooo! Not agaaain!"

"Mooommmmmyyy, save meeeeee!"

"…"

"H-Hey, did that guy over there pass out?!"

"Looks like it! Wait, didn't she say this was gonna last until we *all* repented? Then that means—"

"If someone faints before they can repent, this'll go on *forever*?! Nooo!"

For the rest of the night, until sunrise came and we were finally all able to promise in unison to repent and turn ourselves in (if any of our timing was even a little off, she'd send us back up for yet another drop), our hellish repeated skydive without parachutes continued. We'd all pissed and shit ourselves multiple times and were in miserable states, but in the end, there were no deaths or casualties among us.

"Good, good, looks like you all repented! Perfect timing too—it's morning now and I'm getting tired. Truth be told, I was getting so sleepy I almost accidentally let you all hit the ground, so I'm glad you saved me the trouble!"

She's seriously terrifying. No sooner than I'd thought that, I found myself collapsed on the ground along with the other men

just outside Solasidore's gates.

"By the way, don't breathe a word about me or what happened here," the girl said. "I've memorized all your faces, just in case! All right, dismissed!"

Feeling like we'd been released from years of torture, we all cried tears of relief.

"Or maybe we should do one more, just for good measure?"

"We all repent! We promise to turn ourselves in!"

We all raised our hands and shouted in perfect unison.

"Tch. Well, I guess you've gotten the point now. You're dismissed for real this time. But just take heed: If you don't actually turn yourselves in, or if you leave out a single one of your crimes in your confession, I'll hunt you down. Then I'll expose not just *your* crimes, but all the crimes that I'm aware of that were committed by your gang and its affiliates. Got it?"

After that click of her tongue and one last reminder, she disappeared.

It went without saying, but afterward we all went straight to turn ourselves in to the guards, practically beating down the door of the guardroom to get in and even forgetting to clean ourselves up first. If one of us had tried to escape, we were all prepared to grab him and drag him here, but fortunately, we didn't have to. We all happened to be of the same mind.

#Side: END

I was exhausted after staying up all night, so I passed out as soon as I got back to my base and slept until noon. Aishia was still in my bed, so I ended up sleeping next to her. However...

"Good morning, master!"

"Morning, Aishia."

When I woke up, she was there observing my sleeping face once again. *Well, it's true I haven't assigned her any tasks yet, so she probably just has nothing better to do. All I've ordered her to do so far is put socks on, after all.*

"Here, master. Your breakfast."

"Mm, thanks."

She'd handed me an apple. It was one of the apples I'd copied to make the fragrance with. I'd set a bunch aside in case I ever needed a snack in the future.

“You know, I’m getting a little tired of eating apples—aren’t you?” I said. “We should go to the market and buy some actual groceries.”

“Actually, if I had the ingredients and cooking utensils, I could cook some proper meals for you.”

“Oh? You can cook, Aishia?”

“If it’s just simple homemade meals, I can manage. My family taught me the basics, and as a traveling minstrel I would often have to cook for myself. I can at least guarantee it’d be edible.”

You don’t say… I kinda want to try her cooking. In that case, let’s make today a shopping day—while I’m at it, I’d also like to make her her own room. I could make the entrance like Doraemon’s “everywhere door,” where she can enter her own personal space just by passing through it. Oh, but I should put a lock on it somehow so not just anyone can go in. Privacy and security and the like are important, after all. I should make a bathroom too, while I’m at it.

Come to think of it, I wonder what those delinquents I spent all last night threatening are up to? I checked their current locations. Last night I’d marked them using spatial magic so I could track their whereabouts. I’d planned to make good on my threat and send them up for one more skydiving session if one of them had decided to make a run for it, but it looked like they were all gathered at the guardhouse. *Guess they really did turn themselves in, like good children. Excellent.* I rewarded their honesty with my own generosity by dispelling their trackers, removing the spatial magic I’d planted on them.

“Now then, that only leaves the main dish—the slave trader. I gotta go there today too and collect my money… Actually, I should go see Blade first, so he won’t think I kicked the bucket or something.” I felt a little bad about worrying him the other day, so I headed to the guild to tell him I’d taken care of the delinquents.

“And so, I took care of the wallets.”

“Wallets? You seriously only saw those guys as money in your pocket? Well, never mind that for now. What happened after that?”

“I went through all their territories, taking the money inside those wallets, and it only came out to five measly silvers in the end! Can you believe that?! I mean, I could’ve made way more money sticking to logging!” I grumbled to my senior adventurer

buddy. “Aren’t villains supposed to have oodles of cash stashed away or something?”

“You really did take their money too, then.” He sighed. “Well, they usually use whatever they manage to extort that day on various pleasures, so they probably run off to spend it as soon as they get it. That’s why they weren’t carrying large amounts of cash.”

“Come to think of it, that makes sense. What are you, a fount of wisdom or something?” *Yeah, even if they did have money saved up, it’d be at their houses or at a bank. A bank… Right, a bank!*

“Anyway, so after this I was going to head to the bank—er, I mean, the slave trader’s—to get myself an actually decent sum of money,” I said with a grin. “Wanna come with?”

Blade just gave me a look of pity, like he was dealing with a hopeless child. “Karina…”

“Oh, c’mon, what’s that look for? You use magic for all sorts of things too, right?”

“No, that’s not the issue here. You see, I’d kind of already guessed you were the one behind it, but… How can I say this…?”

“If you’ve got something you wanna say, don’t beat around the bush! Just tell me!”

He shrugged. “All right, if you say so. Actually, the authorities already came around and destroyed that slave trader’s facility.”

Ex…cuse me?

“Wait! What about my money?! They can’t just do that out of the blue before I get my money!”

“Yeah, once you started talking about money, I realized you were probably the reason the slave trader got shut down, and it looks like I was right… Hey, Karina, you had those delinquents turn themselves in too, didn’t you?”

“Sure did. I’m surprised you learned about that so quickly.”

“Well, the guardhouse is close to where I live, and those delinquents were shouting out their confessions so loudly, I couldn’t help but overhear. So that really was your doing, then.”

I see. Sounds like they went to turn themselves in first thing in the morning and kept the whole neighborhood up in the process.

“Anyway, thanks to their testimonies, the authorities went straight to the slave trader’s. So their prey wouldn’t have time to flee, that is.”

“Oh. In other words…” *While I was snoozing away, the guards were busy seizing my bank and everything in it? C’mon! Why do the*

police have to be so competent now*, of all times? I guess I picked a bad time to sleep in! Sob…* "My money…"

"Well, look on the bright side. At least their quick response saved a lot of people who needed saving, right?"

"Dammit, Blade, you're too good of a person!"

What's more, apparently the authorities had given the money they'd confiscated back to the injured victims, so now I couldn't even take it back from the guards! *And this'll make it harder for me to steal money from bad people from now on! Curses!*

"Come to think of it, how'd you pull all that off, anyway?" Blade asked. "The delinquents in this town aren't exactly wimps, so normally they'd never be threatened into turning themselves in."

"Oh, nothing really. I just did some things here and there. With magic."

"I see. Well, I wasn't worried that they'd kill you or anything, but… Yeah, I guess magic really is more powerful than I thought."

I thought I heard him mutter "You think you could teach me some of that?" But I pretended not to hear him. *He's not favored by the Goddess like I am, so he'd never be able to reach my level anyway.*

"Well, looks like my plan blew up in my face, so back to the drawing board," I said with a sigh.

"Gonna take on some more quests? I'll join you if you want."

"I could, but since I'm banned from logging for now, I've got some other things I want to take care of first. Later."

"O-Oh, okay. Well, regardless, the town's a little safer now thanks to your efforts. So thanks for that."

Yeah, yeah. You're welcome. I guess*.*

Anyway, because I'd talked to Blade and learned what happened, my schedule had suddenly opened up. *In that case, maybe I'll go report to the Goddess, since I've got some socks for her.*

Chapter 3

#Side: Slave Trader Bareas

“Hahh…hurk…”

The name’s Bareas, and I’m the slave trader of this town. Right now, however, I’d had to leave Solasidore because the guards came and raided my business all of a sudden! And if that wasn’t bad enough, apparently the hooligans I’d looked after as though they were my own suddenly decided to betray me and rat me out all at once! If it’d only been a few misdeeds exposed, I could’ve swept it under the rug, but they’d blabbed about *all* my crimes—even the minor ones *I* couldn’t recall! *I mean, how do you expect me to remember all the slum girls I’ve played around with or female customers I’ve sampled, dammit?!*

With Dominion’s power, I’d managed to give the guards the slip, and I fled to a forest outside of Solasidore. It was known as a dangerous forest with monsters, but this place might as well have been my second home. After all, monsters were also helpless against Dominion’s power, and in fact, I’d occasionally used the monsters here to dispose of any subordinates I found particularly displeasing. For the time being, however, I’d use the monsters to defend myself—unlike those delinquents who ratted me out, they wouldn’t be able to betray me!

“Phew… All right, I should be safe here. Rrgh… Dammit, what happened, anyway? Naturally *I* didn’t make any mistakes, so someone must’ve been out to get me. Right, that’s the only possible explanation!” And until I got revenge on the one who’d put me in this situation, my anger wouldn’t abate. There were many possibilities as to who, of course—I had a lot of enemies who were jealous of my power and prestige as a slave trader, and who would have a lot to gain from putting me out of business. But somehow, I was convinced it was *her* doing.

“You’re the culprit, aren’t you, Karina?”

I mean, out of all those I’d tried controlling, she was the only one who’d successfully avoided Dominion’s clutches, so this had to be all her fault! Everything started going to shit after she showed up, so there was no other explanation!

“Shit! Damn you, Karina! I’ll grab that bitch by the hair, drag her here, and have the slimes gradually devour her, starting from her hands and feet! Then once her limbs are dissolved, I’ll have a goblin impregnate her! Or maybe it should be an orc? Oh, what the hell—why not both?!” *You deserve that much for doing this to the likes of me, after all!*

But if that was the plan, I’d need to put the monsters here under Dominion’s influence. So after imbuing the jewel with magic, I headed deeper into the forest.

I made my way into the forest’s depths until I reached a settlement of goblins. As a human, normally I’d be unwelcome and quite possibly attacked, but thanks to the power of Dominion, they all fell under my command. In fact, I’d used this settlement a number of times before, so even without Dominion they’d come to regard me as something like their master.

Despite their hideous green color, they were humanoid monsters. Each was only about as big as a human child, but in groups they could easily attack a party of adventurers or kidnap a small girl. That was why they’d made their home in this forest, which was often frequented by adventurers.

At the same time, goblins were idiots and didn’t understand a lot of human language, so I was restricted to giving them simple orders. But if I ordered them to “attack her!” in a loud voice, they might sense hostility and turn on me instead. On the other hand, if I said to “bring her here,” they might kill her first. It had happened before, after all. If I told them simply to “capture” the girl, though, there was a good chance they’d sense I wanted her for sexual purposes and bring her to me alive. So that should be fine.

“First, I’ll tell them to capture Karina.” Even if Dominion didn’t work on Karina herself, I could still use it to sic the goblins on her. Imagining her begging for my forgiveness, I couldn’t help but smirk. *Oh, the anticipation is killing me!*

The goblins should already have two or three girls captive here, so maybe I’ll fool around with them for a bit to tide me over. The goblins tended to use them for their own breeding purposes, but hopefully they were still in a state to be played with.

I entered a miserable hut made up of tree branches and dirt and sat down on the crude grass sofa. Apparently for goblins this was the height of luxury, reserved only for the likes of

royalty. Honestly, these creatures really were brainless—but I at least recognized their attempt at etiquette. A group of goblins that were new to the settlement and hadn't been here when I'd last shown up came over to greet me. Hm? These ones were awfully large. Was one of their parents a human? These must have been hobgoblins, then. If they were a superior breed, that meant they'd be stronger and serve my army well.

Huh? The hell happened to this one? It's a runt compared to the others, but it has a huge head. It's sniveling and snotting all over the place too. Heh... What a moronic-looking goblin! Its face reminds me of a pig!

"Now then, what's the first order of business? Guess I'll start by finding an orc to serve me. I'll need one when I'm having my fun with Karina. Oh, and I'll need a slime too. Just you wait, Karina. You'll regret ever crossing me!"

In the past, whenever one of my deeds was exposed, I could only use goblins in my efforts to cover it up right away. But now that the cat was out of the bag, I didn't have any restrictions. I could use Dominion to put any monster I wanted under my control! With this power, I could even rule the world! *Yes—from here on, my saga of world domination begins!*

"What a genius idea, if I do say so myself! First I'll attack Solasidore to destroy any traces of evidence. With the town gone, my criminal record will be wiped clean. Rather, they were false accusations to begin with—I never did anything wrong! The people who didn't acknowledge me are to blame!"

The goblins watched me raise my voice and titled their heads in puzzlement, grunting unintelligibly.

"Oh. Well, you simpletons probably won't understand any of this, but there's a town over there. A bad town. There are women and food there. And a girl named Karina." With nothing better to do, I explained it to the goblins in the simplest terms I could. "To attack that place, we'll need to bolster forces—no, you probably don't understand that, so how can I put it more simply? Er, we'll need a bigger group to attack the bad town!" I raised my fist up in the air. The goblins cried out, as if all fired up.

"That's right. Not just you goblins. We'll need orcs and slimes too. The bad town is strong, so we need a big group! Understand, goblins?!" I tapped one of the goblins' empty heads—the piglike runt from earlier. Actually, because his head was bigger than all the others, it made him look kinda cute. For a

goblin, that is.

*Now then, time to start my saga of revenge! Just watch me, Karina! Your luck ran out when you tried to oppose the future ruler of the world! I'll *beep* you, and *beeeep* you, and *beeep* your *beeeeeeeep* for good measure!*

Now where are those other girls you goblins captured? Huh? Another bunch already took them?! Goddammit! I'll crush those fools! Those girls are probably already dead by now—what a waste!

#Side: END

My name's Karina! Today, I went to the church to report to the Goddess! While I was at it, I gave my friend Siesta one large silver as an offering, and she was thrilled! Money sure is a powerful thing! Feelings can't substitute for money, but money can substitute for feelings!

Anyway, the moment I sat down in the frontmost pew, I was whisked away to the Goddess's space. Once again, I was surrounded by a starry sky. The white world I'd entered when I first met her must've been a one time only thing.

"O Goddess, I come bearing gifts!"

"And I've been expecting your arrival! Now hurry up and gimme the goods!" The golden-haired Goddess pounced on me out of nowhere. After peeling her off me, I took out Satie's socks, which had been preserved in my storage space all this time. Ugh—perhaps because I'd preserved them shortly after I'd taken them off her, they still reeked. It also looked like there'd been a hole near the toe at one point, because it'd been sloppily sewed up.

And yet, the Goddess snatched the ragged, pitiful socks from me with joy. "Now that's what I'm talking about! Full marks, Karina! Ohhh, the way the scent just makes your eyes water! The way you stole them from her, the smell, the preservation method, the shame! All of it was absolutely perfect! Excellent work! Ohhh... The way this hole here is even hand-stitched—this right here is what you call a veritable work of art! Ten out of ten, no notes! For this offering, I award you a full 100 SP!"

R-Really?! All right! Leave it to Li'l Satie to earn a perfect score! "And 100 SP means I can buy..."

"That's right, Mr. Sneaky's all yours! Go do crimes or whatever!"

"I'm not gonna use it to commit crimes or anything, but

thanks anyway.” The Goddess tossed me an egg-shaped device—Mr. Sneaky, apparently. Now I could have my own private time away from the prying eyes of the Goddess! Good, good! There were certain things I wouldn’t want this little girl Goddess to see! *(That’s why up until now I’ve just been settling for playing with my boobs a lot.)*

“To be honest, I’m shocked!” the Goddess continued. “I was sure your offering wouldn’t merit enough points, and I was prepared to recommend you a loan plan or have you pay in installments—dragging you into crippling debt in the process—but to think you achieved a perfect score right off the bat! You’re a terrifying force to be reckoned with.”

“I’d say what you just uttered was much more terrifying.” I was already the kind of person who didn’t like to leave any debts behind when I borrowed something, so just the notion of being indebted to the Goddess made me panic. “By the way, I’ve been wondering… I wasn’t of sound mind when I took those socks, and yet I preserved them in my space perfectly, even freezing time right when I needed to. You didn’t possess me again, did you?”

“Nope. Like I said before, that body of yours comes equipped with an innate, insatiable desire for socks. That’s why you instinctively preserved them. The gods can’t lie!”

Really…? Well, I guess I have no choice but to believe her anyway. Even if she was *lying, I couldn’t do anything about it.*

“Still, though, you’ve really been putting in the work. To think I gave you some vague mission on a whim, and you’ve now come back with two pairs of high-quality socks in such a short time!”

“O-Oh, er, thanks…I guess?”

“I knew putting a man’s soul in a cute girl’s body was the right move! A girl’s mind just lacks that key level of assertiveness, and if I kept you in a man’s body, everyone would just think you were a creep! You should be praising my keen insight!”

“Well, no complaints on that front, so sure.”

“Well, you in particular surely would’ve been drawn to the sock life even if I hadn’t mentioned it! You were born under that star, after all.”

“Yeah, because you made my body that way!” If there really were such a smelly star, no doubt it would also be under this Goddess’s jurisdiction.

“Now I’m looking even more forward to your offerings in the

future, Karina! I'm especially anticipating the socks from your slave, Aishia!"

"Well, that's pretty much her only job right now, but okay."

I strongly suspected I was being manipulated in multiple ways, but as it hadn't inconvenienced me so far, I decided I'd continue to curry favor with the Goddess. Through socks, of course.

"By the way, Goddess, I punished a bunch of delinquents. Wanna hear what happened?"

"Sure, go ahead and tell me. I already watched it all go down, though."

So you were *watching.*

"After all, you punished them in my name, correct?" she said.

"Er... Well, technically."

"Then wouldn't it be only natural that I'd hear my name, get curious, and come to watch?"

"Er... I suppose." Yeah, I did question their faith and tell them the Goddess was furious with them to threaten them, but only to give them a scare.

"Besides, when your amusement level is off the charts like that, I've gotta at least check and see what's up."

"Amusement level?"

"Yeah, it rises whenever you feel like you're enjoying yourself. I may be a divine being, but even I wanna see some entertainment every now and then, you know? And what better metric to determine what *I'd* find entertaining than a beauty like you made in my image? That was another critical reason for your body's appearance—I needed you to have a form I could empathize with more easily!"

So this "amusement level" was another key factor, was it?

"To put it in simpler terms," she continued, "it's like getting a push notification that one of my favorite streamers has gone live. By the way, I also watch your mini-streams every morning."

So whenever I was enjoying myself, the Goddess got notified about it?! *Yikes... Then I guess purchasing Mr. Sneaky was the right move after all.*

"Anyway, the way you handled those delinquents... I had a blast watching it!"

"As long as you enjoyed yourself, that's all that matters."

"It looked to me like those men were enjoying their forced

skydiving session too."

"They were indeed. Oh, just to clarify, I made sure not to hit their vitals, so their lives weren't in danger or anything."

"I couldn't have cared less if you'd killed them, actually, but I guess that just shows how generous you are. You're a good girl, Karina!" She patted my head with a grin.

Hearing her speak about the deaths of her own subjects as casually as discussing the weather reminded me that despite her little girl appearance, she was still a superior entity. "Do the lives of humans not mean anything to you gods at all?"

"Unless they catch my interest in some way, not really. And I don't really force the humans of this world to worship me. It's not the only world I own, after all."

"Wait, so this world to you is just like a PC collector buying one more rig for his collection?!"

"More or less. I mean, wouldn't that only be natural for a superior being like me?"

So to her, this world was nothing more than a hobby. *Yeah, I suppose that tracks, considering she didn't hesitate to wreak havoc on it in order to eliminate a guy stupid enough to claim her lover's name.*

"At any rate, using me to threaten a bunch of ne'er-do-wells was honestly more entertaining than I thought," the Goddess said. "Feel free to use my name however you want in the future too! Get 'em to bow before you, like the great Lord Mito!"

"Are you sure that's okay? Wait, you actually know about that old Japanese TV drama?"

"Of course. I'm a goddess, after all!"

That's the reason, huh? *Well, apparently she also knows about revolving payments and live streaming, so I guess I shouldn't be surprised.*

"In fact, if you're ever about to do something interesting like that, go ahead and use my name anyway so I'll know to tune in!" she continued. "As your goddess, I'll watch over you! Rather, if you don't call me, I'll be all pouty, and you don't want that."

Apparently, when I performed duties in her name, it established a simple ritual that made it easier for her to watch what I was doing. It apparently made her see me at a higher resolution or something.

"You should also call me if there's some big event or drama going on. Even if it turns out to be boring, I won't be upset or

anything. Even ‘just chatting’ streams can be fun in their own way!”

“Sounds like you have a lot of free time on your hands, Goddess.”

“Well, of course. As the Goddess of Time and Space, I have all the time in the world! Oh, but just be careful—I won’t be able to see you if Mr. Sneaky’s active, and a stream with no picture or sound? No thanks!”

“Gotcha. Er, I’ll call you if something like that comes up.”

“Really? Yay! Actually, you know what? I’ll award you bonus SP if it’s especially entertaining!”

Ooh, bonus SP? That did sound nice. The fewer socks I could get by with offering, the less effort I had to make on my end!

“Anyway, that concludes today’s appraisal, but before you go, allow me to offer you some extra information you might be interested in. Actually, one of those sacred treasures I mentioned is in your vicinity and should therefore be incredibly easy to recover—somewhere around Solasidore, as a matter of fact.”

Come to think of it, gathering the sacred treasures was another way I could earn SP, wasn’t it? “Er, this would be even easier if you, well, told me where these sacred treasures are.”

“Huh? But that wouldn’t be any fun.”

If my memory’s correct, didn’t you say the world’s in an energy deficit and in danger of collapsing if I didn’t fetch those treasures? Wait, no, then you clarified that as long as you kept supplying the world with energy, it wouldn’t collapse—so I guess to you, it wasn’t that big a deal. I’m sure you see sock gathering as the more pressing matter here.

“In any case, do your best to entertain me more with your antics in the future! Fair wheel! (・ω・)ﾉｼ”

“R-Right, see ya.” *Fair wheel? That’s not even a real salutation, Goddess. And I’m not even going to comment on the emoticon anymore. I mean, it’s one thing to put it in text, but how are you even saying it out loud—dammit, I ended up commenting on it after all.*

* * *

After finishing my talk with the Goddess, I headed home. She was just as unapologetically perverted as ever, it seemed. *That golden-haired loli just lives completely carefree, huh? Well, that’s convenient for me, at least.*

“I guess I’ve already unconsciously accepted that I’m her disciple, huh?”

“Of course you are, my comrade,” Siesta said with a smile. “We were all the Goddess’s children from the moment we were born.”

What a cutie! Come to think of it, I *had* been in the church before my offering to the Goddess, hadn’t I? “Have I been here all this time?”

“You were speaking with the Goddess, correct? To me it only looked like several seconds had passed… Oh? What’s this egg-like trinket?”

“Hm? Oh, this is a magic item I got from the Goddess that keeps prying eyes away. Mr. Sneaky, it’s apparently called.” I’d received it in the Goddess’s world, but it was in my hands in reality as though it was completely natural.

“By the way, Siesta, have you ever received anything like this? A reward from the Goddess, I mean.”

“A reward, you say? Why, yes, of course I have. Mostly in the form of sweets.”

“Sweets, huh? I guess anything goes with the Goddess, then.” Was that sort of thing listed in my catalog as well, I wonder? I opened it up to check.

“Oh? What’s that book?”

“This is a reward catalog the Goddess gave me last time I talked to her. Oh, wow, there *are* sweets in here—and all kinds too, looks like.” Not just the kinds found in convenience stores in Japan, but sweets made with exotic fruits from other worlds as well! The menu was so extensive, I couldn’t help but be interested.

“They all look delicious, but even the cheapest one is 50 SP. And the more expensive ones go up to 500 SP! Would the effort even be worth it?” Wait, wasn’t 500 SP supposed to be the value of one recovered sacred treasure? Just how delectable was this treat supposed to be, anyway?!

“It’s only natural the Goddess would require that level of devotion, considering the value of those sweets,” Siesta answered. “After all, fruits from other worlds are normally unobtainable by anyone other than the Goddess herself.”

“I suppose so. That makes them even more tempting, though…” I flipped through the catalog a little more, until my eyes landed on a certain entry:

[Skip Your Period (one use only): 35 SP]

According to the description, it was apparently a reward that allowed the user to skip their time of the month once, and you had to buy each use separately. “Note: Using this item in the middle of your period will immediately end it, so I recommend using it before it starts!” was the helpful disclaimer included.

I see…I am *a girl now after all. And if it’s written in my catalog, I guess that means I have to go through periods just like any other girl, huh?* “Hey Siesta, have you used this one before?”

“Oh—well, I’m a succubus, you see, so my body allows me to control menstruation and the like at will.”

Whoa! Talk about a useful trait! Anyway, all the other girls of the world get through this every month, so I think I can probably manage on my own as well—

“Tee hee, it seems that the Goddess truly favors you, my comrade. I must admit I am envious.”

“Er, in what way? It seems to me like she’s always trying to exploit me any way she can.”

“Hm? Oh, I see—perhaps you’ve yet to have your first period?”

First period… Right, come to think of it, I suppose that would be the case. And?

“Dear comrade, your periods are going to be excruciating and miserable. I’m a succubus, so I can sense these things.”

“Huh?” *Um, excuse me? That actually sounds horrifying. Both my period* and *your ability.*

“Oh? Look here, there’s something about a…sub-scrip-shun?” she said, peering at my catalog and pointing. “What might this refer to?”

“Hm? A subscription?” *Let’s see what it says, then.* “For a monthly payment of only 30 SP, you’ll get one pill every month! And as an added bonus, your first month is free!” *Right… This is to ensure you’ll continue to get frequent deliveries, isn’t it, Goddess? I see your game.*

“See? The Goddess has blessed you. She’s given you the opportunity to avoid your miserable, hellish menstruation experience for the price of one average pair of socks! At least in your case, I can say there will be a critical difference between having that pill in your life and not having it, so I’d highly recommend taking advantage of that offer.”

“Ha ha, you don’t say?” I managed a dry laugh. *Well, if Siesta*

the succubus recommends it, I guess I ought to seriously consider it. Damn you, Goddess, you planted this bomb inside me on purpose, didn't you? If this trap is what you consider a "blessing," then I'd rather be unblessed!

Well, whatever. If that was how it was, I should look for that sacred treasure so I could buy that subscription—and maybe buy some sweets with whatever was left over! According to the Goddess, that treasure should be nearby and relatively easy to recover, so I decided to make that my priority!

#Side: Aishia

My name was Aishia. I was a half dwarf and a slave who used to be a minstrel.

However, until just the other day, my arms, my face, and my voice—the three things most indispensable to work as a minstrel—had all been destroyed.

It had happened in the Kingdom of Alchemy. I'd been hired to sing for a business to gain them customers, as per usual, when a rival business had suddenly invented a reason to make an example of me.

It was a situation so adverse that I could only lament my rotten luck. But having lost everything I needed to continue as a minstrel, I also fell into a deep despair. The physical pain from losing my arms was so unbearable that I lost my sense of time, and even though the store I'd advertised for had long since ceased operations, I'd apparently been languishing in that prison, unable to live or die and my fate on display for everyone to see, for three whole years.

Although I'm a half dwarf, I still have dwarven blood in me, and thanks to that resilience I couldn't even die to put myself out of my misery. And because of my slave contract, I couldn't even bite off my tongue to end my own life. So I was forced to wallow in endless despair. Also, the reason I was sold to Solasidore in the first place was that the rival company just got sick of having me around. I was basically given to the slave trader as a bonus to another deal, treated like I was an afterthought. But my legs were still intact, so all I remember about that time was that I got dragged and led around a whole lot. In the end, even after reaching Solasidore I was once again made an example of—though I was in a miserable state from the beginning, so it was

more like I was there to make the other slaves believe they didn't have it so bad compared to me.

Naturally, in the state I'd been in, no one had wanted to buy me. I'd just stayed down in that prison, wondering when I'd finally die, cursing my resilient dwarven body.

But then, opportunity finally came knocking, and I met master.

When master saw me for the first time, she looked totally calm. She even negotiated with the slave trader on the spot to buy me for one gold coin. And she really did come back and buy me! At that moment I remember thinking, "maybe this is the person who'll finally kill me and put me out of my misery."

But then a miracle happened. Yes, it had to have been a miracle. Master used her magic to restore my arms, face, and voice! I had my arms back, and what's more, they didn't hurt! My vision was clear! I could speak, and my breath was no longer ragged! Relieved from my suffering after so long, I couldn't stop my tears from flowing.

No amount of healing magic had ever given me relief. Even the more advanced types of holy magic were less effective the longer the injuries persisted, and although I'd repeatedly been told only a year had passed, I learned after master bought me that it had actually been three. With that much time passing, any amount of holy magic would be ineffective—and yet master had healed me in the blink of an eye! Even with the cursed tattoos on my body, which rendered all healing magic ineffective!

She was a goddess. She must have been. No priest or servant of God could perform such a miracle, so there was no other explanation except that she was a goddess herself. With all she'd done for me, how could I not pledge to serve her the rest of my life?

She even let me choose my own name, so my name became "Aishia," a nickname my loved ones had given me. That was because I wanted master to call me by that name as well.

"You're going to be in my service for the rest of your life, so from here on, you're forbidden to lie to me," master said. "That's an order."

"I understand, master. I will serve you until the day I die."

I wouldn't mind if you wanted to give me a pet name of your own, you know... As I had that embarrassing thought, however, my stomach suddenly growled.

“Here, make do with this for now,” master said, and she handed me a golden apple. *N-No way… Just look at the rich, sweet mana coming off of it! I-Is this really an apple? It looks like one, sure, but the apples I know of are all red… A-Am I really to have this for a meal? It looks so delicious…!*

Huh? This is just a snack? A-And I can eat as many of these as I want, whenever I want?! For the past several years, my diet’s only consisted of leftover scraps and goblin entrails, and now you’re saying I’m allowed this luxury all of a sudden?! Oh, master… I’m so grateful!

“Then I’ll help myself!” I said, and I bit into the golden apple. The sweetness of the juice spread throughout my mouth, and at the same time, I felt my body fill up with mana. This was…the legendary ambrosia fruit, wasn’t it?! Then that settled it—my master was a goddess!

“Are you okay?! Did you get a sour bite or something?!” master asked. I must’ve worried her, since tears started spilling from my face all of a sudden from the fruit’s deliciousness. And just between us, even after having enough human food to make up for three years’ worth of malnourishment, I still had yet to taste anything as good as that fruit. (I only called it “human food” because the tastiness of that fruit clearly surpassed the realm of humans and extended into the divine.)

By the way, where is master’s home located, anyway? It seems like whenever we go out, we’re suddenly outside, and when we go home we’re back home before I know it, so it’s honestly baffling.

Anyway, after going outside for a bit, I got sleepy all of a sudden, and master sent me home. Shamefully, I ended up going to bed before she did, but when I woke up, she was sleeping right next to me. The truth is, when I saw her like that, I felt my heart skip a beat.

She had long eyelashes, her lips trembled cutely as she slept, and her skin was silky smooth—so beautiful that even though I too was a woman, my heart was beating out of my chest. I felt a sudden impulse to run my fingers through her stunning black hair—

No, I can’t, I’m a slave. I have to get a hold of myself and work hard in master’s service. Except, what can I do to help her? Right, I’ll prepare her breakfast for now. (That “preparation” only consisted of choosing from the massive pile of ambrosia fruits and

handing her one, though.)

When she woke up and I offered her the fruit, she seemed more interested in human food instead. *I suppose a divine being like her has the luxury of enjoying food for reasons other than pure nourishment. Wait, she wants to try* my *food?! Absolutely—just leave it to me! I'll do my best to satisfy you! Er, are you sure that's all you want from me, though? Isn't there something more I could do to repay you for the kindness you've shown me? I'll do anything you want me to. Seriously, anything.*

If my master were a man, it would make things a lot easier. Then I could just offer up my body as thanks... *Hmm, do gods even feel lust, though? They do make babies in some of the myths I've heard, so they must, right? Oh—right, there's even a myth where two goddesses make a baby, isn't there? That means there might be hope for me too!*

Two days afterward, master remodeled her home to make room for me. *Er, I* think *it's a home, anyway?* At first I thought it was located somewhere underground, but despite it being totally dark everywhere else, the living space was bright, and there were no walls to speak of. You couldn't even call it a room, really. Master called this her "base," but before her remodel, it had really only contained her bed and a place to go to the bathroom. Perhaps for a goddess like her, that was all she'd needed to be satisfied.

Anyway, she mumbled something like "this place needs some rooms," and a log appeared out of thin air. Then it floated up in front of her and began cutting itself up. The pieces floated in the air and combined themselves to create a door. There was even a doorknob, made from stone. *Huh? How is this possible? Magic? This is different from any magic* I *know of!*

"That should do it for a room," she said, and she stood the door upright on the ground. As I looked on, unsure what power this door held or what she even meant, she opened it and urged me inside. Beyond the door was an actual room, with white walls.

"Huh?!" Once inside, I turned around to look at the door, but it had disappeared. There wasn't even a doorknob on the wall behind me.

"Wh-What is this?!"

"A new room," master answered. "More or less an extension, I

guess?"

This wasn't like any building extension I'd ever heard of. And before I knew it, master had another door, identical to the one she'd just set up, in her hands. "Where do you want *your* room, Aishia?"

"H-Huh? Y-You're giving me my own room, master?"

"Yeah. If you'd rather have one bigger than this, just let me know. I can make it as big as you want."

"Th-Then, I'd like my room to be right across from yours! And I'd like it to be the same size as well!"

"Okay. Since the doors are identical, I'll put nameplates on them too, so we don't get them confused."

Just like that, I had my own room. Seriously, this wasn't like any building add-on I knew of... Oh, right, this was how *goddesses* added on to their buildings, huh? That must have been it. Oh well, it didn't matter—because now I could head straight to master's room every morning as soon as I woke up!

"Oh, right, I should probably make locks for these rooms too. It's important that we both have our privacy, after all."

"O-Oh, right. Yes, indeed."

And so, master added bars onto the inside of our doors, for privacy. *Curses! Well, I guess there's no helping it. Even if I'd like to be by her side twenty-four seven, master will surely have times where she'll want to be alone.*

After that, she also built a bathroom and kitchen, then she turned the original space into what she called a "living room." At first I built a makeshift stove, using the stones master brought with her to cook some simple meals for us, but it didn't seem to satisfy her enough, and the next day she built a kitchen proper. Then, after saying "while I'm at it, might as well try making these," she made a box that froze anything you put into it, a boulder stove that could maintain constant heat, and containers that perfectly preserved fresh ingredients, foodstuffs, or whatever else you put inside...and all sorts of other devices that were far beyond my own understanding. *This is all "while you were at it" to you, master?!*

"I just used a little spatial magic is all. No big deal. Use all these however you see fit."

"Well, I at least understand that these are all incredible devices. Thank you so much, master!"

She was a mystery. A complete enigma. But there was no

disputing that these would all be incredibly convenient.

"Oh, right, actually, there *is* something I'd like you to do for me, Aishia."

"Yes, master, with pleasure! Just name it!" *I'll do anything for you! Anything!*

"There's something I want you to search for."

Information gathering, is it? Absolutely—you can count on me! I'll show you the skills I picked up when I was a minstrel! What will I be doing? Going undercover to infiltrate a corrupt business, perhaps? Or—

"You don't have to go out of your way, though. Just keep an eye out for it if you feel like it. I'll be doing the same."

O-Oh. So it wasn't that important after all, huh?

Um, Master, isn't there anything else I could do to help you? Some important task that would allow me to show my gratitude and devotion to you? I don't... I don't want to have any more scary dreams where I'm more useful to others dead than I am alive! You can even extract my blood every day and sell it—it's quite valuable! As long as I can be of use to you, I don't mind!

Sob... Master... You're just so kind to me that I don't know what to do with myself!

#Side: END

"Master, welcome back."

"O-Oh, yeah. I'm home."

Several days had passed, and it felt like they'd gone by in the blink of an eye. I'd spent the majority of that time wandering around Solasidore trying to gather information on the sacred treasure's whereabouts while taking on delivery quests inside the town to make some money on the side. I'd also sent Aishia out on various errands and asked her to keep an ear out for information in the meantime as well. I set the entrance to the space of holding in one of the back alleys that had become much safer.

"Did you learn anything on your end, Aishia?"

"Yes! I heard the slave trader—or rather, the former slave trader, Bareas, has a bounty on his head."

"You don't say?" Sounded like the slave trader gave law enforcement the slip. *C'mon, guys, do your jobs right!* She then proceeded to mention that his seized assets had amounted to considerable worth, including several incredibly rare potions.

The total value of these was reportedly enough to compensate the slave trader's victims, and enough to set both the Adventurer's and Trader's Guilds abuzz. (Aishia wasn't considered a victim, though—so she wouldn't be eligible for compensation, which was a little disappointing.)

"According to what I heard, the reward for the bounty will also come out of the money from his seized assets."

"Dammit! If I'd only gotten there first, those potions and all that money could've been mine!" And if I'd known the authorities were gonna put a bounty on him, I would've slapped some magic on him so I could track his whereabouts! Right now I didn't even remember his face well enough to go look for him!

Oh well, I guess I should prioritize looking for the sacred treasure anyway. I'll just look for the slave trader later, if I still feel like it.

"What about you, master? Did you find anything out?"

"Sadly, no. But I did get you a souvenir." I passed her a knife I'd bought at the general store while I'd been out.

"Ooh! A kitchen knife! Now I won't have to trouble you to chop the ingredients anymore! I'll store this in the kitchen right away!" She scurried away to the kitchen. Up until now, I'd been chopping the ingredients at the same time as I'd stored them, though, so I didn't recall it being much trouble. To be honest, I'd thought she'd find it more convenient to have her vegetables precut, but she'd been adamant on doing it herself since cooking was *her* job.

Oh, right—I forgot to mention it, but I made a kitchen. I'd made the space I'd been using up until now the living room, then built a kitchen, bathroom, and bedrooms for me and Aishia around it. I also built doors with simple bar locks and placed them on the border of each of our bedrooms. They looked no different from regular rooms with regular doors at first, but much like a matryoshka doll, the doors each opened into a larger, surrounding layer of space, which then connected to each room in the house. It did look a little surreal to see two doors across from each other placed in the middle of absolute nothingness, though.

I'd made good use of the woodworking method Blade had shown me. Essentially, I'd used spatial magic to mimic the process by cutting up some raw lumber I'd gathered in the mountains and sticking the pieces together. They would probably come apart in due time, but I could always just fix them with

magic if they did, so it didn't really matter.

I'd also gradually begun to fill my spatial base with other conveniences as well. Probably the toughest of these to replicate was the oven, which I'd made by slicing a giant boulder I'd found in the mountains and creating a space inside it that was fixed at two hundred degrees Celsius. Some of the heat leaked outside the oven, so it wasn't perfect, but Aishia seemed happy to be able to cook at a constant temperature, at least. (And in fact, the pot-au-feu she'd made to test the oven out had been incredibly delicious.)

I'd also made a refrigerator and freezer, but unless I actually needed something to be cold, it was far more convenient to preserve food in a pocket of stopped time. That way hot food would never get cold and was always ready to eat, and I could even copy a dish as many times as I wanted until I had my fill.

Huh? Was it okay to copy foodstuffs, you ask? I wouldn't be selling the food for personal gain or anything, so I'd say it's fine. I'll properly dispose of the portions Aishia makes, but I wouldn't want her to starve either, so I gotta have some stock food on hand!

Also, just in case you were wondering, I hadn't done anything with Aishia yet. I mean, considering I'd be the one bringing it up, I wasn't really sure how to go about it. I'd attempted to frame it as a command, but I got nervous and froze up before I could give the order. She'd looked up at me with those sparkling, expectant eyes and underage-looking half dwarf body, saying, "What is it, master?" Guilt overwhelmed me, and I couldn't bring myself to continue.

Curses... If I'd just been up-front about it with her from the start, we could've already been doing it! Instead I just had to put on airs and act all cool! I missed my chance!

Aishia returned from the kitchen carrying a tray with cream stew and bread on top—today's breakfast. She set the tray on the living room table, and we enjoyed our meal together.

"Thanks for the food," I said.

"No, I should thank you, master, for all the blessings you've given me today."

"Er...you don't need to thank me every time you sit down to eat a meal, you know."

"If you order me to stop I will stop, but I will still continue to give thanks in my heart each time. With that said, do you still want me to stop?"

“Mmrgh… For a slave, you’re pretty obstinate, huh?” Oh well, I supposed that was better than when she’d hesitated to sit at the same table as me because “it was far more than a slave like her deserved.” Still, it seemed that she viewed me as some sort of deity. *I’m not, honest! I’m just a deity’s disciple, is all!*

“I just want you to enjoy this meal. Nothing else.”

“I understand, master. I will enjoy this meal (and give thanks to master in my heart for this blessing).”

It sounded like she added something unnecessary under her breath, but whatever. *I suppose it’s fine.*

Huh?! Wait, I almost forgot! Remember Shildon’s teachings, Karina! She’s obviously trying to butter you up! No doubt about it—if I’m not careful, I’ll fall into her trap! I mean, I haven’t even done that much to earn her gratitude yet, so isn’t it strange for her to harbor this much loyalty toward me already?!

At any rate, I scooped the stew into my mouth with a wooden spoon. Mmm… It was well seasoned. The carrots were sweet and melted in your mouth too…delicious. I liked the broccoli in there too. The white sauce accentuated the flavor of the vegetables, making the dish even tastier. Ooh, there were big pieces of chicken in there too. Juicy and delectable… What was that, Aishia? This wasn’t chicken? It was frog meat? Well, it was still good. *More normal than socks, at least.*

“Oh, also, I don’t know if this is related, but apparently there have been some strange goings-on in the monster forest.”

“The monster forest? Would that be the one me and Blade’s group went logging in?” That forest was teeming with monsters, which was why adventurers were permitted to fell trees there. There were even megafrogs, frog monsters as tall as medium-size dogs.

“I heard some people saying they’d seen some megafrogs on the outskirts in the forest, and it had looked like they were fleeing from deeper in,” Aishia reported.

“Oh? In other words, something in the forest’s depths might’ve spooked them and chased them away.” And if so, there was a chance that “something” might’ve been the sacred treasure we were looking for. *Is that what you’re suggesting, Aishia?*

“That’s right, master. This is just one possible theory, and it might be a foolish notion to begin with, but what if it means that slave trader, Bareas, has the sacred treasure with him and is

currently hiding out somewhere deep in the forest?"

Wow, Aishia…you're a girl of many talents, huh? Impressive deduction work.

"It's worth checking out, I'd say. I guess I could head to the monster forest today and see."

"Er, master, this may be rather presumptuous of me to say, but wouldn't that be dangerous?"

Come to think of it, Aishia hadn't yet seen how powerful my magic was. Well, she was probably already well aware, since I'd used it to restore her arms, but she had yet to witness its potential in combat.

"Don't worry, Aishia. I'm super strong."

"Oh, in that case, I won't worry!"

Wait, huh? She bought it just like that? Slaves don't have some curse on them that makes them take their master's words at face value, right? Well, as long as she understands, I guess.

Anyway, first I went to the Adventurer's Guild. If I was already going to the forest, I figured I might as well pick up a survey quest to do in the meantime. As I was perusing the bulletin board, Blade called out to me. *Come to think of it, you seem to be here a lot, dude. You have a lot of free time on your hands or something?*

"Hey, Karina! Perfect timing—I was hoping I'd run into you!"

"Huh? Something up?"

"Let's go logging, Karina! Logging!"

I tilted my head in puzzlement. Sure, we'd make a killing, but didn't the guild expressly forbid me from any more logging since I overdid it the first couple of times?

"Oh, c'mon, you must've heard by now, right?" Blade said. "About the strange behavior in the forest?"

"Well, yeah, I did hear something about that, but what does that have to do with logging?"

"The lumberjacks—that's what we call adventurers who specialize in logging—apparently got real banged up because of that weirdness in the forest, and they couldn't complete the quest they were on. It'll take some time for them to recover, so just for today, they've allowed us to do some logging in their stead."

Oh, I see. So just for today, our logging privileges have been reinstated.

“If you wanna go, we don’t mind splitting the reward the same way as before. How about it?”

“Sure, why not? I already had some business in that forest anyway, and I was just looking to see if there was some kind of scouting quest I could do while I was at it.”

“Perfect, then, because we just took a scouting quest there. You can just join in! That’ll make us a party of four. They tend to give scouting quests to those with more experience doing it, so now’s as good a time as any to rack some up!”

So Blade’s really planning to profit by taking on a logging quest and a scouting quest at the same time, is he? Clever! Makes me want to learn from him!

“Aren’t you lucky, Blade? She agreed to go with you. Now you can pay Miss Harumikazuchi what you owe her! She’s been nagging you a lot lately, after all,” Shildon said.

“Thanks, Karina. With our cut from the logging, Haru won’t yell at Blade anymore,” Sekko chimed in.

“Hey, I wasn’t even trying to act all cool this time! So what gives, you two?! Well, I won’t deny it. I gotta pay Haru what I owe her, and I’m kinda broke right now.”

“What would happen if you couldn’t pay up? I don’t mind pitching in if it pleases Miss Harumikazuchi in the end, but I’m just curious.” What would they have done if I’d refused? Knowing them, they probably would’ve just endured the fox lady’s wrath and paid as they earned more. I’d personally consider her anger to be a reward, myself. *Kind of makes me jealous. Maybe I should drink a bunch there and put it on my tab as well?*

At any rate, traveling with this reliable bunch while I went to the forest was convenient for both of us. A win-win, if you will.

“All right! Now that that’s decided, let’s zip right over there and zip right back! C’mon, Karina!”

“Yessir! First we need to rent a wagon, though, right?!”

“Whoa, whoa! Before we do anything, we gotta fill out the paperwork for the quest!”

“Then that’ll be your job, Sekko! We’ll meet you at the town gate! Shildon, get a wagon meant for two people.”

That left me alone with Blade. *That was a pretty smooth move, buddy.* And if it meant less work for me, I certainly wasn’t gonna complain.

Here we are, in the forest!

“Hmm, yeah, looks like the forest is goin’ nuts,” Blade said immediately.

“How do you know?” I asked. “Could you explain it to me in terms I can understand?”

“Uh, well, it seems like a lot of things have been coming in and going out.”

That vague explanation didn’t really help. Though we’d come across and eliminated a number of goblins on the way here, so there were definitely more monsters in the area.

“Look here, Karina,” Sekko offered, pointing. “There are footprints here, and you can see the branches are all broken around here. These are the things you need to look for. If you look closer, you can see the footprints are fresh, and some of these branches are freshly broken.”

“Oh, I see! That’s our reliable scout Sekko!” I said. Now that he’d brought it to my attention, I also noticed that the footprints were smaller, like a child’s. The branches that had been snapped off were also at a lower height, and there were quite a lot of them. Some looked like they’d been that way for some time, while others looked recent.

“Based on what I’ve heard from other adventurers, three orcs have been sighted here. These are probably their tracks.” Sekko pointed to a particularly large set of footprints. Huh, so these were what orc footprints looked like. *I’d better remember that.*

Blade chuckled. “Scouting skills like these are Sekko’s forte. I can tell these things too, but just on instinct, really. I can’t explain it too well.”

“You do realize that scouting is basically just analyzing those instincts and making their reasoning explicit, right?”

“Well, I tend to leave all that difficult stuff to Sekko. I just bring the muscle! That’s how Sun Bacchus has operated up until now—right, Shildon?”

“Man, you sure are breezy about it. You sure that’s okay? A rookie adventurer is watching, you know.”

“Karina can just follow my example if she ever finds some teammates she can split the work with. Not that it’s exactly easy to find party members you strike a perfect balance with. Even *we’re* not perfect all the time.”

These three really do get along well with each other, don’t they?

“Anyway, should I start chopping some trees down?” I asked.

“Hold your horses. Hm… Yep, looks like this was where those lumberjacks were attacked. Some of these trees have only been cut into once or twice.”

“Well, should we make a big noise on purpose and draw the monsters here, then?”

“Are you an idiot, Karina? Then we’d be surrounded by orcs! Wait—no, I guess *you’d* manage, huh?”

“Most likely! I’ve never gone hunting before, but orcs die if you lop off their heads, right? Wait, or is an orc’s neck several times as thick and sturdy as a log?”

“No, a log would be sturdier. In the first place, I’ve never heard of a monster that didn’t die after losing its head, so just imagining a monster like that freaks me out. Er… Just be sure to protect us too, okay?”

C’mon, Blade, don’t be such a coward.

I quickly finished felling the trees in the area, and I deliberately did so as loudly as possible, neither reducing the noise nor breaking the fall of the trees with spatial magic. The birds in the area got spooked by the ruckus and flew away.

“What do people normally do to mask all this commotion when they log?” I asked.

“Nothing. They just watch the area and stay on guard in case a monster attacks.”

“So basically what we’re doing right now, then. Oh, look, goblins.”

Three goblins appeared, coming from deeper into the forest. They looked wary of us. *Should I take them out?*

“That’s strange. They’ve noticed us, yet they’re not attacking.”

“Meaning normally goblins are the type to attack on sight?” I asked.

“They’re more likely to attack when they’re in groups. In other words, this could be bad.” Blade replied, looking anxious.

Oh, the goblins seem to be keeping their distance too. “Are goblins even intelligent enough to realize the benefit of attacking in groups?” I asked. “They’re monsters, right?”

“Well, about that. When goblins settle and build their own villages and such, there’s a chance that superior goblin races will be born. And when they come into the picture, all the goblins in the village become smarter.”

Apparently, they could learn to overwhelm tougher enemies with numbers, learn what it means when humans say “wait,” or

learn to run from foes they had no chance of winning against. That made them all the more dangerous. And this forest was the goblins' turf. If they escaped into territory they were familiar with, they wouldn't be as easy to defeat.

"In other words, there's a chance they've built a village somewhere here, and one of these superior goblins is around."

"Then the reason they haven't attacked is because they're waiting for something that *can* win against us," I finished.

"You got it. Which means... You gotta be kidding me. The goblins brought an orc here to do the job?" Blade groaned.

As he spoke, two orcs joined up with the group of goblins. They were both huge, green, bipedal, and piglike creatures.

"Huh, would you look at that. Goblins and orcs, forming an alliance. Well, they do look similar, I guess."

"No, no, they're completely different! Normally they'd never join forces! This is even worse than I imagined. Time to retreat. We'll back away veeery slowly..."

"Huh? Can we not just kill 'em?" I asked.

"Right...*you're* here. I almost forgot. If you think you can take them, then sure, go nuts."

"Roger that. Air Cutter!"

Swoosh! I decapitated all of the goblins and orcs in one fell swoop. Easy peasy.

"I-I just kind of said it not really expecting anything, but you really *did* take them out! Now let's get out of here, before their blood attracts more of them. As for the quest, I think we've gathered plenty of information for one day."

"Huh? We're not gonna collect their remains? I've been dabbling in alchemy lately, so I'd like some more magic stones. And are we just gonna leave the logs behind?"

"All right, fine. You've got ten minutes, then we're leaving. Staying any longer than that would be far too risky."

"Then I'll finish this up in ten minutes, no problem. The logging too."

"Oh, right! With *your* logging ability, we'll probably make it with time to spare. Man, you're so skilled that it messes my judgment up big-time..."

Er, you should already know what I'm capable of, right? Otherwise you wouldn't have asked me to go logging with you in the first place. Did you forget? Well, I guess the fact that he hadn't planned to rely on me proves his own reliability, in a way.

“Oh, since we already have these wagons, how about we take both orc corpses back with us?” he said. “Orc meat is pretty tasty.”

“Would they sell for more than lumber, you think?”

“Well, a decent bit more, yeah.”

And so, we tied the orc corpses onto the wagon—on top of the logs—and made our way back to the town.

Upon returning, we delivered the lumber we’d gathered and reported the results, then went back to the same spot in the forest to gather more logs.

“We retreated temporarily because it was too risky to continue, right? So was it really okay to come back here so soon?” I asked.

“Well, we’re also here to investigate, right?” Blade said. “Now that some time has passed, we might see some more interesting things. Normally at this point we wouldn’t even be risking logging, you know? We’d check things out as safely as we possibly could, then head back to town.”

“But I’m here now, so today’s an exception. Right?”

“You got it. Therefore, I’m counting on you, my reliable protégé!”

Considering his debt to Harumikazuchi, I’d say he also wanted to do an extra round trip’s worth of logging, which was only possible with me helping out.

“Then while I’m chopping down these trees, you senior adventurers handle the investigating. We’ll play to each of our strengths!”

“Roger that! Leave the scouting to us!”

I cut down more trees and loaded them on the cart. As long as I got them all cut down first, we could just flee if something happened.

“That’s strange, the corpses we left behind are gone. Did the goblins take them?”

“Why would they do that? Some other monster probably ate ’em. Except… It doesn’t feel like a monster’s been here.”

“The goblin settlement’s that way. There’s no sign that they dragged the bodies off, but there are some footprints. A bunch of ’em.”

Ooh, looks as though they really are investigating this seriously. They actually sound like experienced adventurers!

“Hey guys, the logging’s done.” I announced.

“Fast as usual, Karina!” Blade said. “All right, now let’s make ourselves scarce. No reason to stick around here any longer.”

“By the way, I spotted some goblins watching us, so I took ’em out.”

“Tell us that next time! Oh, wait, you just did. Then tell us that first! Honestly, what am I gonna do with you… Wait, those aren’t goblins, they’re orc assassins! Superior orcs!”

Seriously? Come to think of it, they did look a little taller than the average goblin. “Huh? But compared to those orcs we saw before, they’re so skinny. They’ve got no *substance*. Are they really a superior breed? They don’t even look that tasty.”

“Karina, monsters don’t breed superior versions of themselves just so they can taste better.”

“Oh, right. Guess not!”

Anyway, we decided to gather up the orc assassin corpses and fasten them on top of the logs in the wagon. There was something going on deep in the forest, and at least now we knew there had to be settlements of goblins and orcs farther in. What’s more, there were superior orcs at the orc settlement. While I didn’t have any concrete proof, something told me that the sacred treasure was in that village.

Back at the guild, we received our reward for the lumber and the monsters we’d exterminated. Including the reward for the scouting quest, it was an awfully large sum for an extermination, so we were all smiles.

“Now then, about the goblin and orc settlements…” I muttered to myself. “How should I handle this? Wait, shit—Blade and the others already reported it to the guild, didn’t they?!”

Indeed, the members of Sun Bacchus had already shared the results of their investigation—meaning it had already become public knowledge. Now I couldn’t just carelessly get involved. *Curses… If only I’d asked Blade and the others to keep quiet, I could’ve gone in there and taken care of things on the sly, and we could’ve had a swift, happy ending where everyone profited! (Everyone except the goblins, that is.)*

“At this point, maybe I should just get them to attack the town,” I mused. “Then the adventurers here would band together to eliminate the threat. Then I could say I got all fired

up from the attack and went on to destroy the settlement in revenge." *And among all those adventurers, I doubt anyone would notice me sneak away either. Not a bad plan, Karina!*

"On second thought, there's no telling how much time all that would take. Hmm... I'd better rethink it." *Guess that plan won't work after all*—or so I thought, but unbelievably, the orcs ended up attacking the town on their own the very next day! *Seriously?! Talk about a lucky coincidence!*

#Side: Slave Trader Bareas

After using Dominion's power to bring the goblins under my control, I did the same with the orcs.

This must have been what they called "honest labor!" First, I had the goblins capture one orc (a bunch of goblins died for it, but getting the orc on my side was worth it), then I used Dominion on it. Then, with the orc added to my forces, I moved on to capture the next orc. It was just one orc against an orc and a group of goblins, so I was the clear winner. Now with two orcs under my command, I was able to capture two orcs at a time. From there, it was rinse and repeat until I had the entire village under my rule. There *were* some superior breeds among the orcs, which took a little more time to capture, but they eventually fell in line too. My forces were now even more formidable!

"Gya ha ha! I knew it—with this power, I'm gonna rule over all the creatures in the world!"

I got the orcsmiths—a superior breed of orc that were especially good with their hands—to make me a lavishly decorated throne that I could recline on. Orcsmiths were craftsmen, so they could also make weapons and armor. Having this many orcs and superior orcs already gathered in one place was truly a stroke of good fortune for me. *With this, I can build an army of orcs and take Solasidore by storm! Heh heh heh!*

As I was fantasizing—er, I mean, planning the future—an armored orc came up to me. "King Bareas, I have a report," it rasped.

"Oh, it's the orc general. What news?"

Some superior breeds of orcs understood human language and could even converse with humans, especially the ones who had human mothers. This orc general's mother had also been a

human, apparently. *Once the town's destroyed, I should grab the otherwise useless girls and use them to strengthen my orc army even more! Heh heh heh.*

"The reaper of the forest, the Death Serpent, has been spotted."

The Death Serpent?! Even I knew about that—a huge, venomous snake said to be the strongest creature in this whole forest! It was so large that it could swallow orcs whole, and if you ever laid eyes on it, you'd best prepare for death. The moment it bit into you, you were a goner. *So they say, anyway.*

"Is that so? Perfect—I'll capture that thing alive!"

"Our army will suffer massive casualties against that creature as it stands. We will need to borrow your power, O King."

"Seriously? You guys are useless without me, huh?" Honestly, how did they even manage before I showed up? *At the same time, we'll need all the forces we can get when we attack the town, so I can't carelessly lose them here.*

"All right, I guess there's no helping it. I'll put you all under my command and lead you to victory."

"Ooh! Thank you, King Bareas! We are forever in your service!"

Heh heh. Naturally—I'm your king, after all!

And so, by using three of my orcs as meat shields, I successfully placed the Death Serpent under Dominion's spell as well. It was a tough bridge to cross, for sure, but sacrificing three orcs to get the Death Serpent was unmistakably a good deal. While I was at it, I got a *second* one too, so now I had twin serpents!

"Phew! Men, today was a huge success! Tonight, we feast!"

"Er, King Bareas, we also need to have a burial for the orcs we lost in battle..."

"Huh? Oh, right, that. Yeah, do whatever you need to there."

"Understood. Then, we plan to serve three attack boars as a feast to honor their noble sacrifice."

"What? Don't waste those boars on something like that. Serve the megafrogs instead." Hmph, for orcs, they sure were spoiled. Those attack boars were *my* dinner!

"B-But King Bareas, we need to appropriately honor the resolute warriors who gave their lives in battle to—"

"Yeah, yeah, that's enough outta you. Dominion!" I channeled mana into my ring. The troublesome orc general smelled the jewel's fragrance and fell silent. Just for good measure, I gave

him a command of my own. “Listen up. You’ll eat the megafrogs. Anyone who complains about it gets fed to the Death Serpents. Got it?”

“I…understand…”

Good.

Now then. As it currently stood, I not only had orcs, but Death Serpents under my command. But Death Serpents preyed on orcs, so the longer they were in my army, the more my forces would dwindle!

Oh, maybe they’ll eat goblins instead. If I get them to breed with the female attack boars, I’ll get more goblins, and in three days’ time the newborns will be able to fight. By the time we attack the city, I’ll have a surplus, and I can sacrifice a few of them to the serpents. Those snakes eat a lot, you know.

Was it finally time to stage our attack, then? The orcsmiths had made all the armor we needed—

“King Bareas, we have news.”

“Whoa! Orc assassins, I told you not to just appear in front of me all of a sudden like that!”

“Apologies, but we have information regarding your ‘Karina.’”

What?! Do tell! The orc assassins told me that an adventurer had been cutting down trees in the forest. She was with three other adventurers, had black hair, and one of them had called her “Karina,” so there could be no doubt.

“This info came from the goblins we dispatched to the forest’s outskirts as scouts,” the orc assassin said. He went on to say that the orc assassin who’d stayed to keep an eye on Karina had yet to return. Hm… Were her comrades super strong or something? Well, if they were going logging, they were probably lumberjacks, and therefore physically stronger than most.

“And if you guys came back, that means Karina headed back to town, right? Then that’s perfect timing! Men, it’s time to attack the city!”

“Hooray! At last!” the orc assassin said.

“That’s right. It’s getting harder and harder for me to resist feasting on the town’s delicacies. We’re taking Solasidore by storm!”

I had an army of goblins and orcs, as well as Death Serpents—reapers of the forest—on my side. That was more than enough force to urge the other monsters in the forest over to the town

and attack!

It was a calamity so rare, it only naturally happened once every hundred years or so—a stampede. In other words, monsters going berserk and attacking human settlements. But with my power, I could make it happen whenever I wanted!

First, I'd wear down the city's defenses with the grunt monsters, then move in and attack with the main force! It was a foolproof plan, one I'd been cooking up in my head ever since I'd first thought of attacking the city. A plan fit for one such as I, who had obtained the power of the divine! I'd mulled it over while patting the head of the cute, snot-nosed goblin. Conversing with him gave me some good ideas! Maybe it was because his face looked like a stupid pig's?

Oh, wait. Before that, though, I needed to take measures to make sure they didn't accidentally kill Karina in the process. "Send a separate unit to capture Karina alive, so I can make her mine!"

"Yes, King Bareas! Understood!"

Dominion was the power of the divine. All I had to do was shove the ring in her face to make sure the fragrance got in her nose, break her mind to where she'd never regain her sense of self, and turn her into my pet. While I was at it, I'd turn the rest of the town's women into my pets as well! Unless they were ugly, of course, in which case I'd hand 'em over to the orcs. *Oh, and while I'm at it, I ought to get that stuck-up proprietor at Shunrai to bow down to me and lick my feet! I'll make that vixen rue the day she banned me from the premises!*

"We attack immediately! It's time to make Solasidore ours!" I declared. The monsters under my command all let out enthusiastic battle cries.

#Side: END

#Side: Adventurers

"Shit, shit, shit!"

The party of adventurers who'd come to the forest to gather lumber looked at each other as though they'd all seen something they never should have seen.

They'd heard that the stand-in loggers commissioned by the guild had fulfilled their mission with ease, and they had assumed it meant *they'd* be safe logging here as well. However, that had

been a grave mistake.

"The hell?! I've never seen that many orcs in one place!"

Indeed—on their way to the forest, they'd noticed many humanoid shapes in the distance and stopped in caution. That turned out to be the right move, as the human shapes had all turned out to be monsters. And not just the orcs looking like bipedal boars; there were also intelligent, superior breeds of orc in the mix as well. Too many monsters to count, in fact. They could even see some goblins here and there.

"And it looks like they all came out from the forest. This is bad."

"Y-Yeah, and heading in the direction of the town! Are they gonna attack Solasidore?!"

"What the hell's going on?! Nothing like this has ever happened before!"

"I guess you young'uns don't know," an old veteran by the name of Raiden said before sighing. He was the most experienced adventurer in the group.

"You know what's happening here, Mr. Raiden?!"

"Sure do. This is undoubtedly a stampede. When superior breeds of monsters grow to adulthood and multiply, the food supply in the forest grows scarce, and the monsters need to seek prey elsewhere. I think the last one happened...forty years ago, was it?" he said with a nod. "And that 'food' they settled on was none other than humans, of course. It was a horrible scene." Raiden's hands trembled as he recalled the carnage back then. The other adventurers all gulped.

"We need to let the town know, before it's too late!" Raiden shouted. "Forget about an old codger like me—you young'uns run as fast as you can!"

The urgency in his voice spurred the younger adventurers on, and they all dashed away at once, so determined to warn the town that they didn't worry about leaving the slower ones in the group behind.

As it turned out, Raiden made it back to the town before any of the others. Upon reaching the gates, he cried out. "There's a stampede heading this way! The monsters are on a rampage!"

"Wh-Whoa, you ran up here fast, old man!" the guard said.

"Guess that's why he's a veteran," said another. "He'd have to be skilled, or he wouldn't have survived this long."

“Haah…haah!” panted the younger adventurers, who had just reached the gates and were all out of breath.

Raiden glanced at them out of the corner of his eye. “I never imagined you all would be so out of shape. Hey, guardsman! They’re coming from over there. Go to the watchtower and check! Hurry!”

“R-Right away! Hey, you! The lookout on duty! See anything from up there?!”

The guard on duty at the watchtower squinted. He could just barely make out what looked like a sea of green in the distance.

“No way… What the hell’s that?! Are those all goblins and orcs?!”

The green-skinned goblins and orcs were approaching the town, moving across the land like moss eating into a boulder.

“All hands on deck! We’ve got an emergency!” The guard rang the bell in the watchtower with all his might. The bell’s clangs signaled the gravity of the situation to the other guards, and bells resounded from the other watchtowers on the town’s perimeter. The domino effect continued until warning bells were ringing all over the city.

#Side: END

As I was spending another day strolling around town and asking for any information on the sacred treasure, pandemonium suddenly broke out all over.

I stopped a passerby on the street and asked him what was going on. Apparently, several adventurers had spotted a parade of goblins and orcs heading toward the town from the direction of the forest. This group was abnormally large—not just ten or twenty monsters, but totaling in the hundreds or maybe even thousands. The guard at the watchtower had apparently also spotted the monster horde from his position, and guards all over had immediately gone to sound the town’s emergency bells. *I see, that explains why I’m hearing bells ring out all around me.*

“And that’s what happened,” he finished. “Now that you understand, you should follow me to the church to take refuge. We should be safe there.”

“But I’m an adventurer, and there’s probably an opportunity for adventurer work here.”

“Huh? But it’d be such a waste for a cute girl like you to be orc food! Come with me instead!”

Ah, I see. So there was an ulterior motive behind generously informing me of the situation. I get it now.

I politely turned down the man who'd felt comfortable hitting on a girl even in the middle of an emergency, and with no better plan for now, I headed for the Adventurer's Guild.

As I passed through the guild's entrance, a conversation reached my ears.

"I understand. I'll be praying for your success."

"Thanks, Sophie. Don't worry, I'll defend this town with my life. And when I come back, I'll take you out on a date."

"A d-date?! I-In that case, you'd better not get yourself killed!"

"Relax, it's just a stampede. I'll be fine. I'll save this town and everyone in it."

With that exchange, the receptionist lady at the counter and Blade embraced each other.

Er, did I miss something?

"Hey, Shildon. Can you explain what's going on here?"

"Oh, hey, Karina. Did you just get here? You missed the best part, then. Sophia just confessed her feelings to Blade!"

Oh, I see. Blade declared his intent to join the team of courageous adventurers about to charge headlong into the monster horde, and Miss Receptionist here, who'd secretly had a crush on him all this time, hurled her whole heart at him in response. And now, this is the result. At least, that was what I assumed.

Oh, she gave him a kiss! Way to go, Blade.

"Wait, isn't this basically a suicide mission?" I asked. "He could actually die if he's not careful."

"Well, yeah. But it's really more that moments like this are all he's good for."

"And it's not like he'll be alone," Sekko piped up. "Shildon and I are going too."

Huh? Shildon and Sekko too? It sounded like they'd all made peace with the possibility of dying, then.

"By the way, do either of *you* have a missus waiting at home?" I asked.

"Well, er, that is to say..." Shildon stammered.

"How about *you*, Karina? Feel like confessing to me?" Sekko said.

"Nah, I'm sure you can find a better woman than me," I replied.

“Thanks for the template rejection phrase.” He sighed, then muttered under his breath, “Go die in a fire, Blade.”

Apparently, there were some pent-up feelings there.

“Oh, Karina! You came too, huh?”

“Hey, Blade. Yeah, I just got here. But seriously, look at you, acting all smooth back there!”

“Well, what can I say? It’s like a job, being this popular! Just kidding, ha ha.” He laughed dryly, scratching his head in apparent embarrassment.

“Actually, why are you all so determined to put your lives on the line for this town?” I asked.

“We just want to keep the town we were born and raised in safe. Do we need any other reason?” was Blade’s immediate response. *Oh no, that was kind of cool. No wonder he’s got that receptionist head over heels for him… Huh? Wait, don’t Shildon and Sekko feel the same as Blade, though? Why am I treating him so differently from them?*

“Er, actually, Karina, can I talk to you about something in private?”

“Huh? What is it?” I followed Blade over the other side of the room to talk.

“By now I’ve more or less realized you’re hiding some insane power. Well, maybe you’re not actually *hiding* it, per se…”

Right, I haven’t really tried that hard to keep it under wraps, huh?

“Is there something you want me to do, Blade?”

“If you can’t, don’t worry about it. But yeah, if you really are that powerful, then even if the three of us don’t make it through this, I’d like you to protect this town in our place.”

“Oh?” *It sounds to me like you want to do it yourself if possible, though, and you’re asking me just in case things get rough. Heh heh, all right, Blade, I like your moxie. If it’s for you, I’ll gladly—*

“If you end up coming back alive, treat me to a night out at Shunrai and we have a deal.”

“All right, deal! I’ll hold you to that!”

—milk you for the best reward I can think of! Yippee! Thanks a bunch, Blade—now I’ll help you with everything I’ve got!

And so, I decided I’d work from the shadows. After all, I’d only been asked to help out, not solve the problem! *Leave the espionage to me!* Publicly I was supposed to be a mage, though,

so first I joined the other mages in providing offensive support from atop the fortress wall bordering the town.

Outside the town gates, which had been sealed shut, two groups of resolved adventurers were lying in wait to either side. Once the enemy forces were whittled down with magic, they were to ambush the remaining monsters from both sides. My three senior adventurer buddies were included in that team.

Now then, what should I do from here on? While I was thinking, the horde of monsters arrived at the ambush point, with the comparatively weaker monsters like goblins, megafrogs, and kobolds all in front.

“Everyone, use the spells in your repertoire with the biggest areas of effect! Fire!” The commander—apparently a royal knight sent to protect the town—gave the order, and everyone unleashed their offensive magic at once. Balls of fire, spears of water, and javelins of lightning all went flying. I took a few out as well, shouting out “Air Cutter!” all the while.

“Mages, cease fire! Archers, take aim and shoot!” The archer unit was up next. Arrows sailed through the air and descended upon the remaining monsters. The plan was to alternate between arrows and magic to thin out the horde.

“Hm?” Suddenly I noticed something, and I quickly created a defensive barrier of spatial magic around Blade and the others, who were still lying in wait. A high-pitched sound rang out—an orc assassin had been about to take them by surprise, and I’d deflected the attack before it could hit. Anyone else wouldn’t have noticed in time.

“Wh-Whoa!” The soldier who’d nearly died froze in shock, likely realizing what a close call it had been. The orc assassin was unharmed, but it looked bewildered. In the next instant, however, Blade’s blade sliced through its torso. He bisected the orc assassin with a single slash!

Pretty impressive, Blade! I applauded, though I doubted he could hear it from his position.

“What the hell was— Gyah?!” Then Blade made a sudden unnatural sliding motion—as though something had picked him up and dragged him to the side—narrowly avoiding the hatchet that cleaved through the space he’d just occupied. At the same time, he raised his blade, then cut the goblin that had tried to surprise him in half.

Good, good. Looks like my spatial manipulation spell to create a

dummy hero, which I've dubbed "You Are the Star," is working just as intended!

Yep, that's right. I'm just working behind the scenes this time, so I can't be the hero. I can, however, manipulate the hero's every move like a puppeteer! Naturally, the "heroes" in this case will be all *of Sun Bacchus, not just Blade. I'll make Shildon and Sekko heroes too!*

"We'll head them off here. You guys go on!"

"S-Sorry, Sun Bacchus! And thank you! We won't forget what you've done for us!"

Sounds like Sun Bacchus is really making a name for themselves today.

"Hey, Shildon, you think they'll raise our ranks once this battle's over?"

"I wouldn't doubt it. By the way, it's looked like your body's been moving on its own for some time now. That's got to be *her* doing, right?"

"Ha ha ha. You think so too, huh? Really, just who *is* that girl?"

Me? No one special—just a disciple of the Goddess, is all! Now then, let's make a little more of a scene, shall we?

"Come at me, you bastards! Here we go... Hi-yahhh!" Blade's sword glinted with light, and he cut down around twenty monsters with a single slash.

"I-I'll protect this town too! Eek!" A monster sent an attack in Shildon's direction, but his defense was impregnable. For some bizarre reason I wouldn't know anything about whatsoever, it looked almost like the attack's trajectory had been guided to Shildon's shield, where it was promptly repelled.

"Aagh?! What the— Shit, that was close!" Meanwhile, Sekko was charging at a group of enemies, weaving in and out of their attacks without even receiving so much as a scratch. Then, with pinpoint accuracy, he decapitated the goblin that looked like the leader of the group.



The trio of Sun Bacchus looked just as invincible as I'd planned. Whew, but manipulating them sure was hard work! In fact, there were several times where I was so focused, it looked to others like I was slacking off. *I promise I'm doing my part too, Commander! Air Cutter, Air Cutter! See? I lopped that goblin's head off just now, so leave me alone! Phew, this is tough.*

"Medium-size enemy spotted! It's an orc warrior! Wait, no—there are large-size enemies behind it too! A Death Serpent?! You gotta be kidding me! What's the 'Reaper of the Forest' doing *here*?!"

"Mages, switch to your most powerful spells! Fire!" On the commander's signal, the mages released a volley of spells. *Yeah, yeah, I'm doing it too. Air Cutter, Air Cutter. Sorry, jeez. Man, what a chore. Huh? No, I'm not just pretending to fight, commander, I promise. Look, I'll take out that big one over there to prove it to you. There, it's dead. See? I'm doing my part, so you don't need to pay any mind to what I'm doing over here!*

#Side: Slave Trader Bareas

The orcs and I got close enough to see the town. A nauseating number of monsters had already gathered around Solasidore, both those who'd been driven out of the forest and the goblins who'd led them here.

More importantly, Karina was right there, before my eyes! She was on top of the town's wall, eliminating monster after monster with her magic. Even from a distance, I'd never mistake her sleek black hair for anyone else's. So she was a mage, was she? That would be handy in battle once she was mine.

"Listen up, you orcs! That's her. That's Karina! Capture her right now!"

"I apologize, but we won't be able to get close without reducing their numbers first."

Rrgh... How frustrating! You useless bunch!

Still...the townsfolk *were* putting up more of a fight than I would have guessed. I expected the goblins to get mowed down, but even the orc assassins were failing to take the enemy unit by surprise, and the adventurers were even retaliating with attacks of their own!

"Dammit! You Solasidore bastards are better than I thought!"

But three adventurers out of the bunch were especially dangerous. After killing the orc assassin trying to take him by surprise, one of the trio zigzagged across the battlefield, eliminating grunt monster after grunt monster. There was an adventurer that skilled in Solasidore?! Shit, I had no idea!

"Your orders, King Bareas?" the orc general asked.

"Rrgh... That tears it! Release the Death Serpents! They'll crush any adventurer underfoot, no matter how skilled!"

I ordered the orcs to bring out the twin Death Serpents—but not even a moment later, one serpent's head fell to the ground. *Huh?! Why?! What just happened?!* That serpent wasn't anywhere near that adventurer trio—so it was someone else's handiwork?!

Now headless and spraying blood everywhere, the Death Serpent fell to the ground. *What should I do now?! Do I have any other options?! Am I gonna die next?!*

"Your orders, King Bareas?" the orc general repeated. *Is that all you can say, fool?!*

"How should I know?! Aren't you supposed to be a general?! Then *you* think of a plan! Ahhh, dammit, I guess we have no choice but to fall back. I don't think they noticed me, so as long as I survive, we can just keep trying as many times as—"

"I can't allow that," said a voice. It didn't belong to the orc general, or even the orc assassins. It was the snot-nosed goblin I'd been using as my personal armrest.

"Huh? You can't allow that? You think you're the boss of *me*, now?"

Wait, this thing could actually talk?

"We have no provisions left. If we don't capture the town, we goblins will have no future."

"Ha ha! Think you're a smarty-pants, do you? Since when did *you* learn such advanced vocabulary?!"

"Bareas. You were useful in growing my forces, so I let you do as you pleased. But if you're just going to run away, then I'll take over from here. From now on, *I'm* king."

"Huh? King? You're just a cheeky little goblin. I've had enough out of you." I was about to punt him away—but he grabbed my leg! *Huh? Were goblins always this strong?* Oh well, it didn't matter.

"How dare you resist me, brat! Dominion!" I thrust the jewel at the snot-nosed goblin, intending to silence him for good—

"Kee!"

"Gyaah!" *The goblin bit my hand?! O-Ouch! It hurrrts!* "Aaah! Shit!

You bit my hand, you— Huh? My finger!”

I felt the pain in my finger disappear instantly, and a chill ran up my spine. My finger was gone—the finger with the Dominion ring!

The snot-nosed goblin moved his mouth like he was chewing. *N-No way, you gotta be kidding me!* Blood kept gushing from the stump where my finger used to be. Meanwhile, I heard a gulp come from the goblin’s throat.

“G-Give it back! Give my finger back, you brat! What have you done?!” I was so angry I temporarily forgot my pain and grabbed the goblin by the throat. First I’d rip his neck apart, and then…and then… *Rrgh, goddammit!* “Hey, one of you orcs!” I shouted to the orc general and orc assassins. “You do it instead! Come kill this bastard! Tear him apart and get that ring back!”

But neither of them said a word, instead kneeling to the snot-nosed goblin and bowing their heads. “Shall we, O King?”

“Go ahead,” the goblin said. “As I said before, this man has outlived his usefulness.” He then blew a wad of snot from his nose.

“Wh-What…?”

“You control the goblins by smell, correct? Then I just had to stuff up my nose with slime goo to defend against it.”

“Huh? You intentionally stuffed up your nose to avoid Dominion?!”

You’re kidding me! It was that simple?!

Come to think of it, this guy *was* always dripping snot. Wait—how long had he been doing this, though?! And how long had this bratty goblin been by my side now?! How long had he been investigating me?!

“When we heard about a goblin village where a human was coming and going as he pleased, how could we not get suspicious and investigate? I infiltrated the village myself to check.”

“Huh? Then from the very start… No, even before then?!”

“That’s right. You’ve been my target for quite a while now—because I wanted that power of yours. Thanks to you, our forces have grown larger and more powerful than ever.” He gave me a repulsive grin.

“N-Nonsense! You’re telling me a goblin could come up with all that?!”

“You really are thick, aren’t you? After all this time, you still

can’t tell the difference between an orc and a goblin.”

“Wh-What do you—” Wait, this guy *was* a goblin, right? L-Looking closer, his face actually looked more similar to the orcs… Agh, the pain from losing my finger was so intense that I couldn’t think straight!

“I am the Orc King. The strongest and wisest being in the forest!”

“The Orc King?! The one who stands above all breeds of orc?! It was *you* all along?!” The Orc King was the most formidable monster of all, a disaster-level being said to cause stampedes! In other words…they’d been playing me like a fiddle this whole time?!

“We have the strength we need at last. Bareas, the strange human able to bend all to his will using a magic stone in his ring—you are no longer necessary. But as a reward for your usefulness, your death will be swift and painless. Orc assassin, will you do the honors?”

Before I knew it, the orc assassin had gotten behind me. *Huh? W-Wait!* I felt the sensation of cold metal on my neck—and at nearly the same time, a searing heat. My vision flipped, and I was looking up at my own body. My headless body. So that meant…I was decapitated? *Huh? Why? What happened?*

“Do not worry, we will destroy the town you so desired in your place.”

You’re just going to leave me here?! I tried to shout, but nothing came out.

“Rest in peace.”

With those final words, my head was crushed underfoot.

#Side: END

#Side: Orc King

The Orc King had eaten the slave trader Bareas’s ring—and the Dominion jewel within it—and gained its power. He’d sought that divine power for so long. With its power, he could augment his innate ability to lead and bend even more breeds of orc to his will.

“Charm.”

The result was this brand-new ability, Charm. He decided to test it out, to see what kind of power it held.

As it turned out, it was the ability to get all females of any race

to submit—or rather, to bewitch them and make them submit of their own will. He was a little dissatisfied. If it had worked on males as well, he could've turned the tide of this battle in an instant. However, *because* it only worked on females, its effects were significantly more potent, so he really should've been grateful.

Controlling females would be enough. There were many within the enemy's forces, including the one Bareas had called "Karina." She would be the key to the Orc King's victory.

He had realized that the Death Serpent's demise hadn't been the work of the human trio running amok on the battlefield. He didn't know the source, but he could tell it had been done with magic—and from the wounds on the snake, an incredibly powerful spell at that. And when he'd traced the spell's trajectory back to its caster, he'd spotted a female human standing on top of the town wall. Bareas hadn't noticed at all, but that female had been none other than Karina.

However powerful a mage she might be, as long as she was a female, the Orc King could use Charm to place her under his command. With this newfound power from the gods, the Orc King would never lose to a woman. In fact, he would just use the woman to gain even more power!

"Your orders, O King?" the orc general asked. He was likely asking whether to continue fighting or to retreat for now.

"We continue. And we will win!" the Orc King said with a smirk. There was food in the town, and there were females. Once they were victorious, they would all belong to the orcs. He could already clearly envision that future.

With the power of Charm, he was sure he'd win. He could see the shining path to victory laid out before him, so there was no reason to retreat. "Women, kill the human males. If you do, you will earn your king's favor!"

The Orc King didn't hesitate to use his new power to charm the females and order them to slaughter the men of the town.

#Side: END

"Oraoraora! Die, you monsters!"

"Guh! Kuh... Aaaaa!"

"Oh...the sky's so pretty today."

The Sun Bacchus trio continued to kick monster butt. Apparently, Sekko even had the leeway to admire the blue sky

while dodging attacks to and fro. It looked like Shildon was moving so vigorously he ended up biting his tongue when he spoke, though… *Hm?* There was a round-headed goblin over there shouting, but I couldn't hear what he was saying.

Then, at that moment, a fireball came flying from the town wall toward Sun Bacchus. *Whoa, be more careful, fellow mages!* I quickly slid them to the side so they'd avoid it. The fireball hit the ground and exploded with surprising force.

"Well, it was just one fireball, so it was probably a mistake. Wait— Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

However, the first fireball was only the beginning. Several more projectiles hurtled from the town wall, clearly aiming to kill the trio. Sure, they were smack in the middle of the front lines, so they'd be easy to hit, but you couldn't pass *this* off as an accident!

"Hail to the king!" a female warrior cried.

"Guh?! Gurk…" an adventurer burbled.

"Eep! What's— Gyack!" another said as he was stabbed.

Whoa! And now even the warriors on the front lines were fighting among themselves! *What's going on here?!* Actually, correction—it looked like it was female warriors stabbing the men! Did those guys cheat on them or something? *You're the worst, you scum! It's because of two-timing trash like you that the women are all taken, leaving none for me! I spit on you! Ptooey! I won't let you die since we need all the forces we can get right now, but after this battle, you're done for! Your abilities to reproduce, specifically! I'll tear 'em all off!*

Jokes aside, isn't this situation kind of bizarre? The allies on the front lines were fighting each other like they'd had a confusion spell cast on them. *Wait— Whoa, whoa!* Why were the *archers* firing upon the front lines now?! *If I don't move them out of the way, they're all gonna die!*

There, I diverted the arrows' trajectories to hit the enemy forces instead. Phew.

"But really, why is this all happening?" I said, puzzled. But it wasn't like I had any other choice, so I tried to quell all the infighting first. Humans all have the same pressure points, right? So I just decided to press down on their carotid arteries with spatial magic and…there they fell.

"H-Hey! The attackers collapsed all of a sudden! It's probably poison—stay on your guard!"

“Poison?! That’s not good… What’s going on?! Is it the orcs’ handiwork?!”

“There *was* that strange-looking goblin from earlier—it looked like it was chanting something out loud! A curse?!”

Uh-oh. Because I was working from the shadows, it looked like they’d mistaken my interference for an enemy attack. Not like I was going to speak up and admit it was me, though.

“A poison that only works on women?” one man cried out. “But how did it spread even over to the town wall? Wait… You’re the only one who looks unharmed. Hello? Are you all right, girl?”

“Huh? Who, me?!” *Uh-oh, he called out to me all of a sudden! Don’t scare me like that!* “Oh—yeah, I’m fine! I’m tougher than I look, you know?”

“Glad to hear, but retreat if you start feeling like something’s wrong. If you can’t walk on your own, I’ll even lend you my shoulder.”

“Ah ha ha. ’Preciate it, but I’ll be fine,” I answered. When I did, the man slumped away, disappointed.

Phew, looks like he bought it. Still, he did say a poison that “only works on women,” didn’t he? Thinking back on it now, the adventurers who I’d made faint had indeed all been women. In that case, why hadn’t *I* gone rogue as well? Did I not count as a woman or something? Even though I was this beautiful? That kind of ticked me off. *I know I have the brain of a guy, but still.*

Then I felt an intense gaze on me. “Huh? Where’s it coming from? That yellow-eyed goblin there?”

There was a young-looking goblin standing there, with yellow eyes, green skin and a big, round head. He also had a nose like a pig’s snout, which made him look kinda cute. *Maybe I should capture him and turn him into my pet. With all this commotion going on, I doubt anyone would notice me abduct a single goblin… Wait, cute? What are you thinking, Karina? That’s a goblin you’re talking about! A monster!*

“Oh no… Don’t tell me I have a monster fetish? You’ve got to be joking… Give me a break!” Still, I couldn’t tear my eyes away from that glowing, yellow gaze of his. The longer we stared at each other, the more I realized I liked him… I *liked* him?! No, absolutely not! Harumikazuchi was the only one for me! If I was gonna let anyone penetrate me at all, it’d have to be a futanari, or a really, really cute femboy!

“I’ll kill you before you tempt me any more! Go, Sun Bacchus,

my minions!” I gathered the trio of Blade and the others around the yellow-eyed goblin. *I’m serious, you know? You’re dead meat!*

“Kyaaah! Wait, wait! I don’t wanna die!”

“Eeep! N-No, this is much for me to handle! I can’t win… It’s hopeless!”

“Ah ha ha ha! Look at all the blood! It’s so red!”

A bunch of orcs and a huge snake blocked their path forward, but I had them cut all the monsters down. *Blade, you and Shildon should stop acting so cowardly and learn from your buddy Sekko. Just look how happy he is!*

Anyway, once Blade finally made it to the yellow-eyed goblin, I had him raise his sword and bring it down on the monster’s neck —

Ching!

His sword bounced off?!

Huh? I couldn’t finish him?! No way! What happened?!

In truth, Blade’s “blade” was actually just spatial magic I’d disguised to look like his sword. There shouldn’t have been anything it couldn’t cut! And it wasn’t like goblins had parts of their body that were especially hard to sever, like konnyaku or nata de coco did! Wait—don’t tell me that somewhere deep down I didn’t want to kill him, and I’d unconsciously held back?!

“Kya ha ha! It’s no use! You can’t resist my Charm, this power granted to me by the gods!”

“The gods, you say?” Hearing that, I immediately came to my senses. *I see, it was just the power of the divine. Thank goodness—I knew there was no way I could actually fall in love with a goblin! Phew… I thought I felt my heart skip a beat back there for a minute, but it must’ve just been because I was angry. Nothing to worry about. Charm, huh? The power of the gods…*

Huh? Wait, did that mean this goblin had a sacred treasure? Then that made him my prey! In that case, it was time to hunt!

That said, if he did have a sacred treasure, he was probably the boss monster here. If so, and Blade and his party defeated him, his remains and possessions would no doubt all be gathered and collected as spoils of the battle. In that case, should I just take him out myself? No, he’d repelled my magic attack just a little while ago, so I needed to figure out another easy way to beat him.

“Hmm… Perhaps I’ll retreat for now and take my time coming up with a strategy.” Right—I had an infinite pocket of storage

space, so I could just toss the goblin in there while everyone else was preoccupied with battle. Then I could take all the time I needed to figure out how to deal with him afterward. I could freeze time in there, after all.

That said, that yellow-eyed goblin stood out big time. If I tried to erase him with spatial magic, others would most likely notice and I'd cause a big scene. I needed an opportunity first.

"Hmm, what would be a good distraction? Maybe this?" I took out one of my failed experimental potions, used spatial magic to solidify it into crystal, then sent it flying into Blade's hands. Then I connected the space in front of my mouth to the space next to Blade's ear so that he could hear my voice.

"Hi, Blade. Right now I'm talking directly into your ear because I need to tell you something. I've sent you a bomb of concentrated magic, so throw it at the enemy like it's your ultimate magical item. Thanks!"

There was no response.

"Huh? Earth to Blade? Come in, Blade! What are you, asleep or something?"

"K-Karina... Don't think I won't remember this!"

"And don't *you* forget my promise to treat you at Shunrai." With that, I ended the transmission.

Immediately afterward, Blade and the others moved into action. Well, they were *forced* into action, really, since I was partly controlling them.

#Side: Blade

For most of the battle, my buddies and I had been inexplicably moving against our will, taking out monster after monster. Now I found myself equally matched against a petite, yellow-eyed orc who—judging from its appearance—was probably an Orc King. To be honest, I'd already thought I was a goner once one of those lady adventurers watching our backs tried stabbing me all of a sudden, but somehow, I was totally unharmed. *Really, just who are you, Karina?! Without you here, I probably would've already been dead six times over by now!*

"Damn, this orc's tough! My sword broke when I hit him!"

"My shield too! Though honestly this thing's weak enough that it falls apart when you crack it anyway."

"Oh yeah, good point. Look, mine's still holding up. Ah ha ha!"

Yeah, this is also Karina's doing, I'm sure of it. I know I asked for her help before the battle began, but I didn't think she'd go this far... No, I'm glad she did; she's been a huge help. She's doing what she promised, and at this rate we'll probably win as long as the three of us make it through this. But I didn't want to think about what would happen afterward. After all, everyone was gonna expect this level of heroism from our party in every battle from now on! *Normally we're not this skilled, so we're gonna get crushed under the weight of their unrealistic expectations! I mean, it's better than dying, obviously, but still!*

Guess it might be time to retire as an adventurer. I planned to keep going for another ten years, at least, but now...

Then Karina's voice reached my ear. "Hi, Blade. Right now I'm talking directly into your ear because I need to tell you something. I've sent you a bomb of concentrated magic, so throw it at the enemy like it's your ultimate magical item. Thanks!"

Karina had passed me what was apparently a magic bomb. *You've gotta be kidding me—isn't she supposed to be up on the town wall? How did she give me this?* She could use her wind magic to project her voice, so that much made sense, but... *Yeah, maybe I shouldn't even be surprised at this point.*

"K-Karina... Don't think I won't remember this!"

"And don't *you* forget your promise to treat me at Shunrai."

A night at Shunrai feels like a small price to pay in comparison...but whatever. I guess we'll just fight beyond our limits until we can't physically fight anymore, and then we'll have to retire.

Then, it finally hit me. I'd been concentrating on the battle and hadn't had time to think about anything else, but exchanging quips with Karina had made me realize. This magic bomb—a purple crystal brimming with mana—was the answer to all our problems. I signaled to Shildon and Sekko with my eyes, then took a quick glance at the adventurers fighting around me.

"Hey, you two, time to use our *ultimate weapon*—this magic item!"

"Magic item?" Shildon said. "What do you—oh, now I get it! Yeah, guess we have no choice!"

Sekko seemed to get it too. "Do what you must, Blade! Let's use the most powerful item we have!"

It looked like they grasped my intent immediately, as they both replied loud enough for everyone in the area to hear. *Ha ha,*

I'm grateful to have comrades so quick on the uptake.

Immediately afterward, our moment came, and I threw the crystal I'd received from Karina into the air. Well, I say *I* because it was my body, but my speech was all I had full control over right now, so it was more like an assisted throw.

A beat later, I shouted out, "Take this! Taste the power of our ultimate weapon!"

Once high in the air, the crystal's trajectory suddenly changed to head straight for the Orc King.

"That won't work!" the Orc King shouted. The crystal bounced off his body and broke in half. A moment later, however, an ominous dark hole opened at his feet.

"Huh?! Aah!"

The surrounding ground had vanished. There was nothing to support him underneath, so he couldn't even leap away. He fell right into the black void. At first he'd grabbed hold of the edge with lightning-quick reflexes, but the hole immediately opened up wider as if rejecting his efforts, and it swallowed the Orc King up. Once the top of his head had disappeared into the void, the opening snapped shut as quickly as it had opened up, and the ground was visible again as though nothing had happened.

"Huh? What...was all that?"

"He disappeared?"

Just like that, the formidable Orc King had fallen into a void, never to be seen again. There were light abrasions on the ground where the hole had been, but those were the only traces. An astonished-looking orc assassin jumped up and down on that spot, but the ground was now back to normal, so nothing happened. "O King, what happened to you?" he cried.

The other orcs screeched among themselves, clearly bewildered by their king's disappearance. Meanwhile, as though it had just woken up from a trance, the enormous serpent in their ranks began attacking the nearby orcs. *Oh, and it looks like its tail sent Sekko flying. Wait, huh?! Karina, aren't you supposed to be protecting us?!*

"Whoops, my bad. Sorry about that—I let my guard down a little, but I promise he didn't take any damage, so I hope you can forgive me!"

He's not hurt... That's a relief. Then I guess I can let you off the hook?

While the three of us were all inwardly panicking, though, the

adventurers on the front lines let out spirited cries. “Blade’s party, Sun Bacchus, has defeated the boss monster! We can take care of the grunts!”

“Yeeeaaah!”

With the Orc King gone, the adventurers moved to dispatch the remaining monsters. At this point, our victory was assured.

“Hey, Karina, we’re all good here, so we three are clear to retreat now, right? Hello? Karina?” I shouted toward the town wall in her direction, but there was no response.

“Hey, answer me! Shit, can she not hear me or something?!”

“Mm…nn… What is it, Blade? I didn’t hear you, so one more time, please.”

Seriously? We were busting our butts over here, and she sounded totally distracted by something else. “A-All right. Me and the others are pretty much spent, and we need to take a rest. Can we go ahead and retreat?”

“Huh? C’mon, just rack up some more achievements and be big damn heroes already. That receptionist lady will be thrilled too, I’m sure— Ahhn!”

“No, I don’t think that’ll work. We just barely managed to fool them with the power of that magic bomb!” I then suggested the thing I’d thought of while fighting the Orc King—pushing all of the responsibility for his defeat onto the crystal itself. “What if we say that the magical item powered us up, and the orc must’ve been using a similar enhancement because the two powers resonated and wiped the Orc King from existence?”

“Oh, not bad,” she replied. “Not bad at all…but are you sure you don’t want the glory for yourselves?”

She clearly hadn’t thought this through enough to consider what would happen afterward. I sighed and shook my head. “And what if they gave us a quest way beyond what we could actually handle? We’d die.”

“Yeah, good point. As expected of a senior adventurer—always careful about managing risks. Mnn… Then I guess I’ll release you guys from my control and protection. Do your best to make it out of there alive without getting hurt!”

I guess Sekko hadn’t gotten hurt by the serpent’s tail earlier, because even without controlling him, Karina’s protection was still active.

Still, she seemed awfully tired herself. Her breath sounded seriously ragged. Her appearance was her only good point, so if

she started looking like a mess, she'd lose her one redeeming feature!

Anyway, after finishing our conversation, I was able to move my body again. Whew, what a day—or so I would've liked to say, but no sooner than I'd sighed in relief, the orc assassin who'd been inspecting the ground where the Orc King had disappeared glared at me with bloodlust.

"Huh? You're still here?" I said.

"You… You… How dare you do that to our king?!"

"Whoa!"

Uh, Karina? It looks like there was still an orc assassin left… A little help here? Karina? Karina?!

After that, the three of us barely took down the assassin with our shabby weapons and armor. The struggle ended up making our story that our power earlier had come from the magic item seem more convincing, but I wasn't happy about it! *I'll remember this, Karina! I'll make you pay somehow! Oh, I know—I think I'll go tell Miss Haru what you've been up to!*

#Side: END

#Side: Orc King

Earlier in the fight, when the Orc King had first shown up on the battlefield, he'd charmed several female adventurers to betray their comrades. However, the rogue adventurers were instantly repressed—so easily that the Orc King was shocked.

"Why did my plan not work?!"

It was because Karina had interfered. A sudden magic attack had struck the rogue adventurers around her like lightning, knocking the females to the ground like bowling pins. Perhaps the Orc King was the only one present who'd realized it was Karina's handiwork.

The most shocking thing of all, however, was that Karina—a female—hadn't bent to the Orc King's will.

"Rgggh… Why?! She's definitely a female, so why isn't my Charm working?!"

And as a result, the three males who were having their mana boosted by Karina attacked the Orc King without interruption. They were the ones rampaging around the battlefield the most and the greatest threat to the Orc King's plan. There was no

doubt in his mind—their power was actually Karina's power. On the other hand, it meant that everything would turn in his favor if he could just capture her.

"And yet... Dammit! Why?!" The human trio's attacks were so relentless that the Orc King had to use his divine power to go on the defensive—otherwise he would've been cut down. No, it wasn't *their* offensive, it was Karina's. This battle was ultimately between Karina and him. She was just using the trio as pawns to take him out.

"Gaaahhh!" the Orc King screeched. As he warded off Sun Bacchus's attacks, he sent more Charm magic Karina's way. She was tough, that was certain. If he didn't capture her here, he would be done for—that was how dire his situation had become. Perhaps sensing his desperation, the attacks from the pawn trio grew even fiercer.

"Hey, you two, time to use our *ultimate weapon*—this magic item!"

"Magic item? What do you—oh, now I get it! Yeah, guess we have no choice!"

"Do what you must, Blade! Let's use the most powerful item we have!"

Finally, the pawns tossed something into the air. "Take this! Taste the power of our ultimate weapon!"

It was a crystal. Its trajectory bent unnaturally in midair and headed for the Orc King, who knocked it away with his hand. "That won't work!"

A moment later, however, the crystal broke, and the ground below the Orc King's feet vanished. He felt a sense of weightlessness, as though he'd stepped onto a pit trap.

"Oh no—!"

He'd been had. He'd been so focused on the crystal coming from above that he hadn't noticed the attack from below. Now in midair, he scrambled to escape, but the ground distanced itself as soon as he reached out to grab the ledge, and his hand swiped only air.

His efforts rejected, the Orc King landed in a space of nothingness. "Huh? Where am I? What is this place?"

It was a vast expanse, so dimly lit that he couldn't see anything in front of him. The ground below him had disappeared, and yet he hadn't even felt like he'd fallen. In other

words, it wasn't your typical pit trap.

"Who did this?! Show yourself! Hello? Is anyone there?!" The Orc King heard his own voice die out as though absorbed by the space itself. It didn't reverberate, and it didn't come back to him in an echo.

He was convinced. This space was filled with Karina's magic. This was definitely her doing.

"Charm!" the Orc King cried in desperation. With no ground to stomp on and no wall to punch angrily, his only option was to fight back. But even his Charm elicited no response.

Still, that was fine. Karina would surely appear before him eventually, and the moment she did, he would release Charm. She would become his obedient pet.

"Come on, hurry up… Do your worst!"

Finally, Karina showed up. And with no other means of retaliation, the Orc King continuously fired Charm at her with all his might.

#Side: END

"Hm… I released Blade and the others from their powered-up states, then retreated myself because I was in a pretty rough state too. But I didn't expect this."

I'd trapped the Orc King in my space of holding, which was fine, but it seemed he wasn't going down without a fight. More accurately, I was so horny that my legs were trembling as I resisted his charm. If I hadn't been a guy inside, I probably would've caved.

According to Blade and the others, this guy wasn't actually a goblin like I'd thought—he was an Orc King or something. Really, I never would've guessed. And since he wasn't listed in my Tome of General Knowledge, he was probably a rare monster.

"More importantly, this is getting pretty dicey… Nnn…even my guy brain's struggling to resist! Ahhn! Freeze! Freeze!"

Is it because he's using divine power? My time stop ability isn't working on him either! I decided to make a tactical retreat before it was too late.

"Master, welcome back!"

When I returned to my base, the cute redhead Aishia came to greet me. *Oh no, those sparkling eyes of hers are absolutely adorable. I wanna pin her down! I love you, Aishia!*

“Are you okay, master? You look unsteady. Please lean on me, then!” She wrapped her soft arm around me and clung to my body to support me. The faint scent of her sweat tickled my nostrils.

“Aishia, I don’t think now is a good time for this.”

“If there’s something you need me to do, master, anything at all, just name it!”

Anything, huh? *Well, you said it, not me.*

“Well, you see, my body right now is kinda, how should I say, *pent-up*, and—”

“Oh, I see! Yes, I understand. Don’t worry, it’s only natural to get excited like that after a fierce battle. Go right ahead—use my body however you see fit! That’s what slaves are for, after all!”

“Huh?! A-Are you sure? I’m talking about *that*, you know?”

In response, Aishia just gave me a big smile, like she couldn’t be happier. “Absolutely! Be my guest!”

“You’re *sure* you’re okay with it?”

“I belong to you, master, so please, go ahead!”

“Then sorry—but I’m digging in!”

And so, I finally had sex with Aishia. *My thanks to you, Orc King, for giving me this opportunity…!*

After spending the entire night in bed with Aishia, my mind and body had calmed down. As I embraced her naked body against mine under the covers, I was finally able to think clearly.

First off, this heightened sex drive was most definitely the Orc King’s doing.

“Phew, what should I do? This isn’t good.” *If I keep him in my space of holding and stay like this any longer, I might break Aishia!*

“I don’t mind being broken if you’re the one doing it, master. After all, can’t you just fix me right up?”

“Hm? Can something like that be fixed, though? Well, I probably could.” Even if her mind broke, I thought I could probably manage.

“Then I don’t mind. Please hurl your desires onto me without reserve. The more it hurts, the happier I’ll be—break me, and remake me into your ideal.” She sounded almost coquettish as she kissed me lightly on the cheek. *Kuh…! She’s gonna make me fall for her!*

“Mm… Well, I still can’t stay in this state for the rest of my life, or it’s gonna cause problems. I need to solve this somehow.”

“Why? I think just spending day after day indulging our carnal desires sounds wonderful enough.”

“Er, w-well, we’ll need money to live on, so I’ll have to work. And besides that, I want to enjoy everything this world has to offer.”

And so, I had to do something about the Orc King soon. That said, I didn’t want him to seduce me either, and since my peerless spatial magic hadn’t worked on him, I didn’t want to risk an approach. *So much for “peerless,” huh?*

I decided to ask Aishia for advice, repressing my desire to go another round with her just enough to hold a conversation.

“I see, so you’d belong to the Orc King the instant you saw him. That *does* sound like a serious problem. I don’t want him to take you away from me, master.”

“Right? And then I wouldn’t be able to make my delivery to the Goddess.”

“Hm? Delivery to the Goddess? What do you mean?” Aishia tilted her head in puzzlement. *Huh? Did I not already tell her about that?*

“There are sacred treasures out there that I have to recover for the Goddess, you see. And I’m pretty sure that Orc King has one. I think that’s why my attacks aren’t working.”

“So there exists a divine being even higher than you, master? I see.”

Once again, she offhandedly referred to me as some sort of deity. *Like I keep saying, I’m not God, I’m just her gofer!*

“Is there no way you can take the Orc King’s sacred treasure?” Aishia continued.

“I considered that, and I tried searching the space for it, but I couldn’t find it anywhere. I’m starting to wonder if the treasure became a part of him somehow.”

“Then that would mean the Orc King *is* the sacred treasure, correct? In that case, couldn’t you just deliver him to the Goddess as is?”

“Hm?” I ruminated on Aishia’s words for a moment. The Orc King was the sacred treasure. *I see, that possibility hadn’t even crossed my mind, let alone delivering him to the Goddess as is!*

“Hm… You think that’ll actually work, though?”

“Well, adventurers are sometimes asked to deliver captured monsters alive, right? And in this case, the item to be delivered is

a monster.”

“Right. And?”

“However, once you’ve captured a monster, you can’t risk letting it out of its cage to deliver it, can you? You have to hand it over while it’s caged.”

“Er…right, that makes sense?” *In other words, you mean to say that delivering the sacred treasure in its current state is my safest option? Considering what happened during my last confrontation with him, I’m inclined to believe it.*

“Wouldn’t it be *more* of a problem if you killed him and wiped the sacred treasure out as a result? There are instances of that happening in some of the myths of old, in fact. Like the one where a man killed a bird that laid golden eggs, and as a result, golden eggs were never obtainable again.”

“Oh! Come to think of it, you’re right!” Indeed, in that case, handing him over as he was would be a hundred times better than carelessly killing him! “Now that that’s decided, I’ll bring him to the Goddess right away! Thanks a bunch for the help, Aishia!”

“Oh, r-right, you’re welcome. Do be careful, master.”

With that, I hurried to the church.

#Side: Orc King

By his own senses, approximately an evening had passed since he’d been shut up in that space. He continued to wait there—until all of a sudden, he felt ground beneath his feet.

“Whoa! Wh-What’s happening?!” The sudden pull of gravity made him topple over. Before his eyes was a young child—a girl with golden hair. It wasn’t Karina, but he could feel immense power radiating from her.

“Charm!”

“Yeah, that’s not gonna work,” the girl said with a grin.

The Orc King was baffled. She was young and female, so his charm should’ve taken effect! Yet the girl didn’t look the least bit infatuated with him—or even interested in him, for that matter. He didn’t even sense an effort to resist, as he had with Karina.

“Charm! Charm! Charm!” he cried, flinging his ability desperately. He didn’t know why, but this girl terrified him.

She laughed. “Fool, there’s no way the power of the gods would work on an *actual* god. Now then, it’s extraction time!”

No sooner than the girl had said that, the Orc King felt a great

power leave his body. The extracted energy gathered before his eyes to form a shining golden orb—the power of the gods. The Orc King reached out toward the orb, but it zipped into the girl's outstretched hand before he could touch it.

"G-Give that back!"

"No way. This was mine to begin with." The girl shrank the orb down to the size of a small candy and casually popped it into her mouth, just like that.

"Nooo!"

"Well, that's that, I guess. Socks are still more delectable, but I suppose this'll do." She licked her lips. "Hmm, I don't really need this thing left over, though. Oh? Is there something on your mind, perhaps?" she asked the orc with coquettish, upturned eyes. From the girl's perspective, this was just because she wanted to look cute, but the Orc King interpreted it quite differently. He thought she was fawning over him—even though she'd just stolen his power and even called him *this thing*.

"Y-You, female! I will make you mine, as you wish, so send my power back to its rightful home—me!"

"Excuse me? The God of Destruction is my only lover," she said with a smile—though it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Looks like you've just earned yourself the death penalty."

At that moment, the Goddess's wrath was unleashed—a wrath so powerful that it could destroy the world twice over. The Orc King, with his small, frail body, was hit with the full brunt of that wrath—in fact, he literally went flying. As the Goddess's rage enveloped him, every cell in his body cried out for mercy before simultaneously exploding. Just like that, the Orc King was no more.

"Whoops, guess I went a little too far there. At the same time, I've got better things to do than deal with him, so it's whatever. Still, it's a shame. If only he'd asked me to send *him* back home instead of that power, I would've done it, you know?" Naturally, someone as powerful as her could've returned him home in a near-death state and then toyed with him even more afterward, but she hadn't been angry enough to warrant *that*.

"Now then, back to watching Karina's antics!" With her task complete, she plunked down on an invisible chair in the middle of the empty space, swinging her legs back and forth in anticipation. She'd already forgotten about the Orc King

completely.

#Side: END

After accessing the Goddess's space from the church, I handed the Orc King over to the Goddess.

"All right, delivery confirmed. As promised, I'll award you 500 SP," she said.

"Yes, it worked! Thank you, Goddess!" So I'd never needed to defeat the Orc King in the first place! I could've just delivered him here the entire time!

Phew, that's better. The moment I handed him over, my mind and body returned to normal. That confirmed it, then—it was all the Orc King's fault.

"Well, I admit it would've been pretty cute if you'd come after *me* with your heightened libido, but I also kinda wanted to see what you'd be like if he actually got you to submit."

"Seriously? But if that happened, Goddess, my adventures would've been over."

"Hm… You're right, that *would* be a waste, wouldn't it? Well, I got to see you do it with Aishia last night, so that's good enough for now, I suppose."

Shit. Come to think of it, I was so worried about the Orc King that I forgot to use Mr. Sneaky! Oh no, the Goddess saw my antics again…

"Anyway, now that you have more points, want that subscription to the period-skipping medicine? I heard you talking about it with Siesta, you know."

Right, we were discussing it in the church, so of course she would've heard that too. "Yes, please!"

"Then I'll put you in for a year's worth… There, you've used 350 SP. You have 150 SP remaining. Thanks so much!" A small vial suddenly appeared in my hand, containing a single dose. "Since your first month is on the house, I'll send you one dose for the next twelve months before your period begins. Cherish that medicine—it's extremely valuable."

Ooh! So I can skip my period with this! Hmm… I bet I can't copy this anyway, so I won't even try. No doubt the Goddess has some copy protection measure put on it or something.

"Oh, I almost forgot to mention—the pills sold in general stores will work on you too."

"Huh? Pills?"

“Yeah, pills to stop a woman’s period. Made by my very own lover, the God of Destruction—and no side effects either! That way, all the working women of the world can use it too!” She thrust out her chest, looking smug.

Medicine to halt a woman’s period? Come to think of it, that sort of thing existed in Japan too, didn’t it? And that really wouldn’t be any different from skipping my period, would it…? *Wait, hold on. Pills like that existed in this world all along? And they’re even sold in the stores here?*

“Seriously? But I’d thought you couldn’t get pills like those unless you were in Japan.”

“Don’t tell me you thought items from Japan couldn’t exist here because it’s a different world? This is a world where you can heal any injury by drinking a potion, and you thought *Japanese* goods were out of the question?”

“Well, when you put it like that…” Come to think of it, she was right. There was no rule stating that an isekai couldn’t include things from Japan as well. “But wait, then why didn’t Siesta, or Blade’s party, or anyone else for that matter, say a word about it?”

“Siesta doesn’t need that sort of medicine anyway, so she probably just doesn’t know. Your adventuring buddies are guys, so they wouldn’t have had any reason to look into it. I’ll bet Harumikazuchi, Li’l Satie and Aishia know, but they likely assumed you already knew too, so they didn’t say anything.”

Oh, right. They probably never even imagined Karina was zero years old, practically a newborn.

“In other words…” I began.

The Goddess, with a big smirk, whispered the rest into my ear. “In other words, Karina, you just wasted all that SP. Tee hee!”



She sounded really happy about it too.

“G-G-Goddess?! You tricked me, didn’t you?!”

“Who, me? I didn’t do anything. It’s your fault for not doing your research. Those pills are in your general knowledge book too, and if I hadn’t said anything you probably would’ve wasted another 350 SP next year too, so you ought to be thanking me for my generosity, no?”

Nggghhh…! She’s absolutely right, so I can’t argue!

“In that case, let me cancel! I demand to cancel my subscription!”

“Sorry, too bad! No refunds in *my* catalog! Well, since you made me take care of that Orc King guy for you, just consider this a handling fee and accept your loss this time.”

“Nrrrggghhh…!” H-How frustrating—her argument was airtight!

And so, she transported me back to the church, accompanied by a sense of defeat. In my hand was the vial of period-skip medicine I’d spent 350 SP on. The subscription would carry over automatically onto next year if I didn’t cancel it a month before it ran out, so I’d have to remember to cancel when that time came… *Rgggh, curse you, Goddess! I’ll remember this, and one day—I don’t know exactly how right now, but one day—it’ll be payback time!*

Epilogue

#Side: Aishia

After departing the house to make her delivery, master came back rather quickly.

“Gaaah! That Goddess had me dancing in the palm of her hand all along! Comfort me, dear Aishia!”

“W-Welcome back, master. Er... There, there?” Startled by master suddenly gracing me with a hug and asking to be comforted, I cautiously patted her on the head. Huh, she didn’t seem as fluffy as she had been before she left. *I wonder what that’s all about?*

My head pat technique must have worked, because master calmed down enough to explain what had happened. Apparently, an even higher divine power had tricked her.

“So yeah, after I delivered the Orc King, she suggested I purchase a subscription to this medicine that skips periods. Then...well, she told me there are already pills you can get at a general store that stop your period before it happens.”

“Er, you didn’t already know, master?”

“No, I didn’t!” she wailed. “I wish someone would’ve told me! I’m completely new to this world—I don’t know anything about it! I was basically born less than a month ago!” She pressed her face against my stomach, wiping her tears on my shirt. *Oh yes, I like that. Please do that more often— Er, I mean, it’s an honor to be relied on, master!*

“Phew... All right, I feel better now that I’ve vented. S-Sorry, Aishia, for crying on you like that.”

“Huh? N-No, think nothing of it. Please rely on me like that more often, in fact. It made me feel like you were my child.”

“Huh?” Master tilted her head cutely. *Oh, you’re so adorable, master! I want to dote on you like I’m your mother! That’s probably unbecoming of me as a slave, but I can’t help it!*

“Well, anyway, how about we eat out today?” she said. “Let’s go outside for some fresh air!”

“Er, but I already had today’s meal prepared, just in case.”

“Oh, I see. Then we’ll eat that tomorrow! Since I can freeze

time, it'll be no less fresh!"

"Oh, that's a good point. Okay." I was a little disappointed she wasn't going to eat the delicious meal I'd prepared today, but she reminded me of the pantry she'd made that kept food as fresh as when it was first prepared. It wasn't anything like I'd ever seen in this world before, so I supposed I still wasn't used to its convenience.

"Apparently they're having a big festival in town to celebrate our victory against the monster stampede, so I wanna enjoy it with you. Is that okay?"

"I see. I'd be happy to!" *What happened yesterday, huh?* No doubt master had been integral in keeping the town safe. *I'm looking forward to seeing how much praise the townsfolk will heap upon her!*

Upon stepping through the door to the outside world, we were in the church's rear garden. I'd thought the door led to the town's back alleys, since that was where we had come out from last time, but this must have been another one of master's miracles.

"Oh, whoops, I haven't claimed my reward for yesterday yet, have I? Sorry, Aishia—is it okay if I stop at the guild first?"

"Certainly, master!"

And so, we made our way to the Adventurer's Guild. Hm? How odd. I didn't hear any voices lauding master as she walked by. *Hello? She's right here in front of you all, ripe for praising!*

"Raaagh! Take that! Blade Slice!"

"I don't think so! Shildon Guard!"

"Sekko Dodge! Ah ha ha!"

A group of children were swinging their toys around while playing. Blade, Shildon, Sekko...those were the names of the adventurers master met at the guild, as I recalled.

"Those three guys really are the pride of this town. True heroes."

"You said it. Next time I put in a request, I think I'll ask for them by name."

"Apparently they had some temporary special power during that fight, though, so they said they can't take anything too risky."

Thanks to my eavesdropping skills I'd picked up on from my time as a minstrel, I overheard several men talking among

themselves outside the guild. *What do you mean, "those three guys?" Master's a woman, and she works solo.* Things weren't adding up, but I'd likely learn more once we entered the guild.

"Three cheers for the town's new heroes, the adventuring trio Sun Bacchus!"

"Hip, hip, hooray!"

Huh?! What in the world is going on here?! Shouldn't you all be raising your glasses to master?! I looked at her to see her reaction, but she seemed completely nonchalant as she observed the merrymaking.

"Peaceful times like these really are the best, aren't they?" she said.

"Master..." *I see—she finds the peace of the townsfolk more important than having her own work recognized. Tch... How unfair. Those guys didn't seem that crooked the other day, but it looks like I misjudged them. Stealing all the credit from one as purehearted as master... You three ought to go to hell for this! Guess there's no other choice—as a former minstrel, I've got to do my part to spread master's gospel far and wide—*

"Yo, Blade, just who I wanted to see! Sup? All rested and ready for action, I take it?"

"Heyyy, if it isn't Karina! Ready for action, my ass—my body still aches like hell. It was only after a good long rest last night that I could finally move again."

Gasp! It was none other than the leader of the party who'd taken credit for master's achievements, the insolent cur Blade! The bastard had been drinking at the bar without a care in the world when master called out to him.

"Well, just take it easy today. You earned it. Seriously, you did a great job out there," she said.

"Only thanks to you. Well, it looks like with how things shook out, I can keep adventuring for a little while longer, at least. By the way, I told Haru exactly what you wanted me to, as promised."

"Oh, you did?! Really?!"

"Of course. Just who do you think you're talking to, anyway? Blade the adventurer never goes back on his word!" He thumped his chest with pride.

"You know, Blade, you really are a hero. You're cool, reliable, and strong. I bet the receptionist lady was thrilled to see you come back, huh?"

“Well, she was…until she dumped me after she found out I spent all my reward money at Shunrai! I couldn’t tell her it was to treat you, of course, so I couldn’t say anything to defend myself either.” He slumped down on the counter, looking dejected.

“Oh… You don’t say? Er, I guess that’s my fault. Sorry.”

“Nah, don’t worry about it. If you hadn’t helped out, I would’ve died anyway, so just pretend like the confession never happened and we’ll call it even.”

“All right. But I still feel bad, so let me at least buy you a round. Keep at it, hero. One day you’ll find your princess.”

Master patted him on the shoulder consolingly. *Master…don’t you think you’re being a little* too *nice to him?*

“Come to think of it, where are Shildon and Sekko?”

“They’re still at the inn and totally immobile. I’m the party leader, so I can’t just lie around—I’ve got to look alive. If I wasn’t the leader, I’d probably still be in bed too, ’cause, man, everything hurts.” As he twisted his neck and rolled his shoulders, his body made cracking noises.

“Oh, right, I probably should’ve given you one of my potions, huh? Well, better late than never. Here.”

“Oh, nice! This’ll really help… Huh, that’s the first time I’ve seen a yellow potion. Is it really okay to drink this?”

Master had handed Blade a yellow potion. *Huh? Wait, don’t tell me that’s the legendary ambrosia? I get the feeling it’s the concentrate from the mountain of fruits stored back at the base…*

“I made this potion myself. I didn’t put anything inedible in there, so you should be fine. I think.”

“Whoa now, hold up! You *think*?! What’s that mean?!”

“At any rate, it expires after today, so just drink it. And no reselling it either, okay?”

“Do I look like I’d sell things on the black market? I’m not one to refuse a drink, so thanks.”

“Glad to hear it! Then see you later, Blade! I’m going to Shunrai right this instant!”

“No, you’re not; it’s still daytime. You’ll have to wait until tonight.”

“Oh, right. Then I’ll go as soon as it gets dark! See ya!”

Master grabbed my shoulders and led me toward the exit. Then, once we were out of the guild, she whispered in my ear. “Heh heh, that ‘potion’ I gave him was actually one of the fragrances I made. He’ll be a walking air freshener before long!

But I made it just like I make my potions, so it shouldn't hurt him."

Oh, impressive, master! So this is your way of handing out divine punishment! Then I won't say anything else about the matter. I could hear Blade behind us shouting, "Hey Karina, what gives?!" so he must've drunk the fragrance, but if he was feeling good enough to yell like that, he was probably fine. *Serves you right, you shameless cur.*

After that, master and I bought some skewered meat, soup, and honey juice from a food stand on the main road to enjoy while we walked around town. Outside of those purchases, she bought out nearly every food stand with the rest of her reward money, saying she planned to donate it all to Shunrai. It was enough food that I seriously worried she wouldn't be able to carry it all, let alone eat it, but apparently her backpack was somehow linked to her storage room, so my worries were unfounded.

"Still, I didn't expect to get such a hefty reward," she said. "It was enough that I could even go on this shopping spree."

"Meaning you really were indispensable in the battle yesterday, as I thought."

"Mmm, well, not officially, since all I did was fire attack magic from the top of the wall...but unofficially, I suppose so."

"In other words, the ones who need to know know. I understand, master." *That's my master—her accomplishments were so outstanding that not even that trio could steal all her glory!*

Looking down at the orc meat skewer in her hand, master suddenly spoke up. "Hey, Aishia, those orc assassins are a superior breed of orc, but apparently food stands like these don't sell their meat because it tastes worse than regular orc. Did you know that?"

"No, master, I didn't! How interesting! You sure are well-informed!"

"No, I didn't know either. Blade told me. If you didn't know, I guess it wasn't common knowledge." She paused. "Aishia, I still have a whole lot to learn about this world, so please teach me all sorts of things in the future, okay?"

Oh, is that so? I'd already guessed that might be the case, since strong people like her tended to be muscleheads, but it seemed master really did lack worldliness—or rather, she was unfamiliar with the world around her.

“Oh, but you know, there’s a superstition out there that says eating the meat of stronger beings will make you stronger in turn,” I said.

“Oh, is there? Interesting. Then maybe there’s a region somewhere where they serve dragon meat too?” she muttered to herself.

It’s said that dragons are so strong that should you ever meet one, you might as well consider your life over, yet the first thing that comes to her mind is eating them, huh? As I thought, master must be ridiculously strong.

Master and I continued to enjoy the festivities until it got dark, after which we headed to Shunrai.

“Hi, Harumikazuchi!” master said. “I’ve come tonight to drink on my buddy Blade’s tab! Hope that’s okay!”

“Been expecting you, Karina. Yeah, Blade already told me everything.”

A beautiful fox woman greeted master with a wave as we entered. She kept her fingers together as she waved, giving it an elegant, adult nuance—more like a beckon, really. *Er, master? This is an adult establishment, isn’t it? One of those ones where the girls use the bar on the first floor to invite their clients upstairs? Oh, look, there’s a stage here too. As a former minstrel, I can’t deny that makes me a little curious.*

“Blade said he got more than enough reward money, so he wants you to go ahead and drink your fill,” the woman continued. “If your bill ends up exceeding his budget, I’ll have him pay off the rest later.” She paused. “Hm? Is that girl with you a slave? Sorry, but if you brought her here to work, we don’t accept children.”

“I-I’m Aishia,” I said, introducing myself. “I’m a half dwarf, and despite how I look, I’m an adult… Er, master, if it’s what you want, I’d be happy to work here.”

“No, no, no, not at all!” She shook her head vigorously. “I just thought I’d bring you along to drink too, since Blade was already picking up the tab! And with that said, let’s drink the night away! Oh—right, Harumikazuchi, there was a festival going on today, so I came bearing gifts!”

“Oh really? I appreciate that. My girls will be thrilled as well. Wait, you had these in your backpack as is, without any wrapping? Aren’t you worried about the inside getting all

messy?”

“Heh heh heh. That’s where my secret technique comes in, you see. I can even carry around a bowl of soup in there without spilling a drop!”

“You don’t say? That *is* quite impressive.” Harumikazuchi took the food items master offered her. *A secret technique… Master must be referring to her magic. I suppose magic* is *a technique, in a way, so that makes sense.*

“Now, with the gifts out of the way—let’s party, Harumikazuchi! You join in too, Aishia! We’ll drink until the sun comes up—Blade’s paying for it, after all!”

“I suppose I have no choice,” the fox woman said with a smile. “Aishia, you said you were a half dwarf, right? I suppose that means you can hold your liquor?”

“I prefer hard liquor, actually.”

“Well, Karina’s a lightweight compared to the two of us, so the faster we knock her out, the less trouble she’ll be. You help out too.” She poured herself a glass of amber mead and downed it in one go with a gulp. *Liquor, huh… Come to think of it, I haven’t enjoyed a proper drink since I became a slave, so it’s been…three years now. Drinking too much isn’t good for your throat, but I’m not a minstrel anymore, so it should be fine, right? Besides, master can always fix my throat right up. Not just heal*—fix*. That’s how incredible she is.*

“H-Hey, you two?” master said. “If you’re planning something behind my back, at least make sure I can’t hear you first.”

In the end, master was totally smashed after only a few drinks, and Harumikazuchi and I helped her up to the second floor so she could rest. *As for what the three of us did afterward: That’s a secret, but we were at it until the sun came up. Oh, master, I adore you so much!*

#Side: END

Uuugh. When I woke up, I had a splitting headache. Next to me was the half dwarf Aishia in sheer sleepwear. *Oh—come to think of it, it looks like I’m also in sheer sleepwear. Wow, how lewd!* The fabric was so thin, it’d probably tear if you pulled on it, which was scary in itself. From a cost perspective, that is.

More importantly, what happened last night…? I couldn’t remember. But when I checked my preservation storage space, there were two new pairs of socks from Aishia and

Harumikazuchi inside. *Hm… You know, I don't think I'll offer these to the Goddess.* Aishia aside, I'd just delivered a pair from Harumikazuchi not too long ago. *I'll keep these for myself. Huh? No, of course not for embezzlement purposes. Just as a keepsake, that's all.*

"Hello? Is this thing on? Hey, hey, it's your Goddess speaking! I'm glad to see you've also awakened to the glory of socks, so since we're kindred spirits, I'll overlook your negligence this time. End divine message."

I guess she noticed. Don't try to pass that off as a "divine message," Goddess. And the only reason we're "kindred spirits" is because you planted this disposition inside me, remember?

Still, there was a slight problem. Harumikazuchi worked in the sex trade, so she was fine, but Aishia was my slave, meaning she couldn't go against my orders. What if she didn't actually want to do any of this with me? When I thought about that, it did make me hesitate to make a move on her. Although, she *was* my slave, so maybe it was silly to worry about that? *Hmm… Oh man, her sleeping face is so cute! Nah, I can't help myself!*

"Oh, you're awake, huh? Morning, sleepyhead."

"H-Harumikazuchi?" I turned toward the room's entrance to see Harumikazuchi standing there, in the same black dress emphasizing her curves that she'd worn when we'd first met.

"Breakfast is ready. You hungry? Don't worry about paying, I'll just have Blade cover it." She brought three servings of onigiri over. *O-Onigiri?! Then there must be rice in this world as well!* Although, this was the world of a goddess well-versed in Earth and Japanese culture, so that shouldn't have surprised me.

"All right, I love onigiri!" I cried. "What'd you use for the filling?"

"Oh? You know this dish? I didn't think anyone around these parts was familiar with it."

"Well, yeah. We ate it a lot back where I'm from. You know, sushi and the like."

"You know sushi too? You don't say. Perhaps your hometown isn't too far from mine, then."

Well, I guess that confirms sushi's here too, even though that wasn't my aim. By the way, the ingredient turned out to be dried whitefish, broken into small pieces. Its moderate saltiness paired excellently with the rice. Very skillful!

"So rice isn't common here after all, then?"

“It’s sold a few places nearby, but mostly for livestock feed, meaning it’s cheap and it tastes awful. I had the good stuff ordered from a business acquaintance of mine in Verald.”

Verald—a port city with a body of water vast enough for large ships to dock comfortably and a so-called mecca of trade. I’d heard of it here and there. In other words, considering how much it probably cost to ship that rice, this was probably an expensive menu item normally. Good thing Blade was paying and not me.

“Yawn… Good morning, master… Oh! I’m so sorry! I can’t believe I let you get up before me!”

“Don’t worry about it, seriously. By the way, I probably had too much to drink, so I don’t remember what happened last night.”

“Er… Well… Let’s just say you were awfully persistent!”

Whaaat?! What’s that *assessment for?! What does it even mean in this context?!*

“Yeah, that’s a good word for it,” Harumikazuchi chimed in. “You were so assertive, you honestly wore me out.”

“Wh-What did I even *do* last night?!” *Curses, if only my memory would…! No good, I can’t remember! Nrrrggghhh!*

“Go on, Aishia, you eat up too. Blade’s treat.”

“Thank you, Miss Harumikazuchi.”

Aishia had looked somewhat wary around Harumikazuchi yesterday, but she seemed to be completely comfortable around her now. Was it because they’d both looked after me while I’d been passed out drunk? In other words, they were now friends thanks to me! *Go me!*

“Oh! This is onigiri, isn’t it?! This pairs well with beishu, you know!”

“Just what I expected to hear from an alcohol-loving dwarf,” Harumikazuchi said. “Though it stands to reason it’d go together with beishu, since it’s sake.”

Beishu? Was that like seishu? So sake existed in this world too. Hmm. “Do you get sake from Verald as well, then?” I asked. “Maybe I should take a trip there.”

“Oh, if you’re going, that’d be perfect timing. I have something I need to pick up there, so could you get it for me?” The fox lady’s keen ears did not miss my offhand comment as she grinned slyly.

If it was for you, Harumikazuchi, I’d do anything you ask. Oh, but

if alcohol were concerned, I was limited to trading privately. I didn't have a license, after all.

And so, with a new task from my beloved Harumikazuchi, I decided to set out from Solasidore and take a trip to Verald, the port city. "In that case, let's head there as soon as we can!"

"Yes, master. Then we'll need to prepare for our trip… Hm? But in your case, what would you need to prepare? If we have our base, we won't even need a tent, will we?"

"Hmm, that's true…but you know, it might be good to have some normal traveling clothes." In order to hide the fact that I could cheat using spatial magic, I should actually look the part and dress like an average peddler. "And if there's something we don't have enough of, we can always come back here and buy it. For now, I need to look like a normal merchant—so let's go clothes shopping! Aishia, I leave it to you to decide what looks good on me!"

"Yes, master! Your wish is my command!" She looked overjoyed that I'd given her a task. *Well, if she's that gung ho about working, I'd better do my best too, so I don't look bad in comparison.*

"By the way, master, I never asked. Is there some sort of goal you're aiming for?"

"Goal? Hmm, let's see…" To be frank, I had nothing of the sort. After all, the Goddess herself had said "knock yourself out" and left me here in this world to do whatever I wanted. But if I had to say…

I wanna live a slow, peaceful, leisurely life with a ton of money and never having to work! I wanna gorge myself on all the delicious food this world has to offer! And most of all, I wanna create a yuri harem of beautiful women! Without the jealousy and infighting part, preferably!

In fact, with the spatial magic the Goddess had given me, they weren't impossible dreams. I could fulfill the big three avarices at once, no problem!

"For now, I'd like to amass as much money as I can," I answered. "I think we'll need it."

"I understand, master! Then I, Aishia, shall devote my heart and soul to making your dream a reality!"

"No, you don't need to work that hard. Just in moderation is fine."

For now, I'd just do whatever I wanted, deliver a few pairs of socks to the Goddess here and there, and live my life the way I

saw fit. As long as I didn’t cause trouble for others!

Later, however, I realized that if I was trying to look the part of a merchant, I should carry some goods with me too. I went to buy some and realized my wallet was empty, so I actually had to stay a few more days in Solasidore before setting off. But just keep that between us.

Extra Story: The Goddess’s Zippers, Explained

“Hm, hm, hmm…♪”

In a room within the divine realm, with a starry sky above and clouds on the ground, a young girl—the Goddess—opened a wooden closet that looked completely out of place in the otherwise barren expanse and chose her outfit for the day.

She was in a great mood. Or rather, she *seemed* like she was in a great mood. In reality, she was pissed. That was because some schmuck in the world she managed as a hobby had shown up, claiming the name of her lover, the God of Destruction. What’s more, the old fart looked absolutely nothing like her beloved—he was just some fool claiming he’d perfected alchemy, all so he could indulge in his selfish desires. How could she *not* be upset?

However, she was the type to smile through her anger. “Since it’s a *special* occasion and all, I think I ought to dress up a little bit,” she said cheerfully. “Some stylish-looking *battle garb,* perhaps?”

Of course, she couldn’t go down to the world herself. She’d have to use the hero system installed within the world to send a soul from *another* world there instead. But if she exploited a *tiny* loophole—more specifically, if she created a vessel in her likeness for the hero to use—she could interfere just a little. And for that purpose, it was in her best interest for her own clothes to be similar to the vessel’s.

“And yet, none of these look like they’ll fit the bill. I’d like to have some kind of accessory that visually represents my ability, you know? Oh, come to think of it, in that movie the God of Destruction showed me the other day, there was that guy who used zippers to zip open pockets of space!”

In the film, the man could stick a zipper onto a wall and unzip it to enter a completely different space, or stick it on one of his enemies and zip them apart. In fact, rather than just opening a hole in empty space without warning, perhaps having a zipper as a visual aid would make the concept easier to grasp for beginners. Her main technique of spatial magic worked a little

differently from normal magic, after all.

Although, once she exploited her loophole, her vessel would probably pick it up pretty quickly without even needing a visual aid. Still, considering the time her magic would take to master, any aid that reduced that time even by one second would be worth using—because it would lessen the time she'd have to wait to hand down her punishment.

"All right, it's decided! I'll wear this outfit here that has a ridiculous amount of pointless zippers on it!" While she was at it, she'd wear this huge zipper necklace around her neck so her vessel would realize how powerful her might as a goddess was! With that thought, she grinned.

"Hmm, but you know, that's still not enough. I need even more zippers." She thought for a moment. This outfit had been a gift from her lover, the God of Destruction, and it had many zippers in all sorts of places that you could unzip and stick your hand in—well, that aside, the point was there were no more places she could add zippers to. Plus, she didn't want to try to alter an outfit her lover had gifted her.

"Then I guess there's no other choice. I'll put them directly on my body!"

That said, if she put too many on, it'd look unsightly. She needed to find a specific place. Her mouth? It would make it hard to speak, so that was out. Her eyelids? Nope, she needed to see. Under her clothes somewhere...? No, because then it couldn't be seen. And if she put one on her stomach, her guts might accidentally spill out when she opened it.

Legs, feet... No, now that she thought about it, putting zippers on her bare skin would probably be pretty painful to begin with. Unless her lover did the job, of course—then it'd probably feel pretty good.

"So the only other option is my hair," she said, and she poked her big ahoge. *Yeah, my hair won't hurt! Perfect!* With that decided, she picked up the zipper she wanted to use.

"Oh, right! Maybe I should split this in two, and give the other half to the God of Destruction! That way we'll be, like, a matching couple! Like 'with our powers combined, we are one,' or something!" She squealed and blushed. "Oh no, what am I saying?!" Hugging herself, she indulged in her own fantasies.

"All right, now that that's decided, I'll put this on with spatial magic all careful-like and...done!" She examined herself in the

mirror and struck a pose. “Yep, I’m a cutie all right!”

The Goddess was fully satisfied. And as though to symbolize her mood, the zipper around her neck, overflowing with divine power, glowed gold.

Afterword

When you think about it, it's actually kind of a waste of time for a god to order the hero to defeat the demon king, isn't it? If they're a god, why couldn't they just use a finger or two to wipe the demon king out themselves? I mean, if I had some extraordinarily OP ability, I'd just go down and annihilate the demon king. Total evaporation.

Such was the thought process that led to the idea for this work, and it is thanks to your support, dear readers, that I was finally able to deliver it in book form. And with illustrations by Ixy, no less! With that alone, this book is already a gem in my eyes. A diamond, even! Thank you so much for your adorable art, Ixy!

And now for the afterword. I wrote a little more in the main text than expected, so I've only been allowed a page to comment. With that said, let's do this as succinctly as possible!

As you know, this was originally a web novel, but many changes have been made for the book version. The editor actually wanted to keep the entire first volume in Solasidore, so I had to do some serious revisions and additions to pad things out. (I'd wanted to introduce the next town!) And here I thought the book version would be easy since the story was already written! In the end, I had to work even harder than before! Curses!

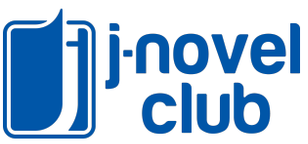
Anyway, I made a number of changes, so you might find it interesting to compare them and see what changed— Huh? I'm already out of space? One page is shorter than I thought...!

Onikage Supana









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Knock Yourself Out! The Goddess Beat the Final Boss in the Tutorial, So Now I'm Free to Do Whatever: Volume 1
by Onikage Supana

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