
story
Itsuki Mizuho
art
Nekobyou Neko
To Another World... with LAND MINES!
7

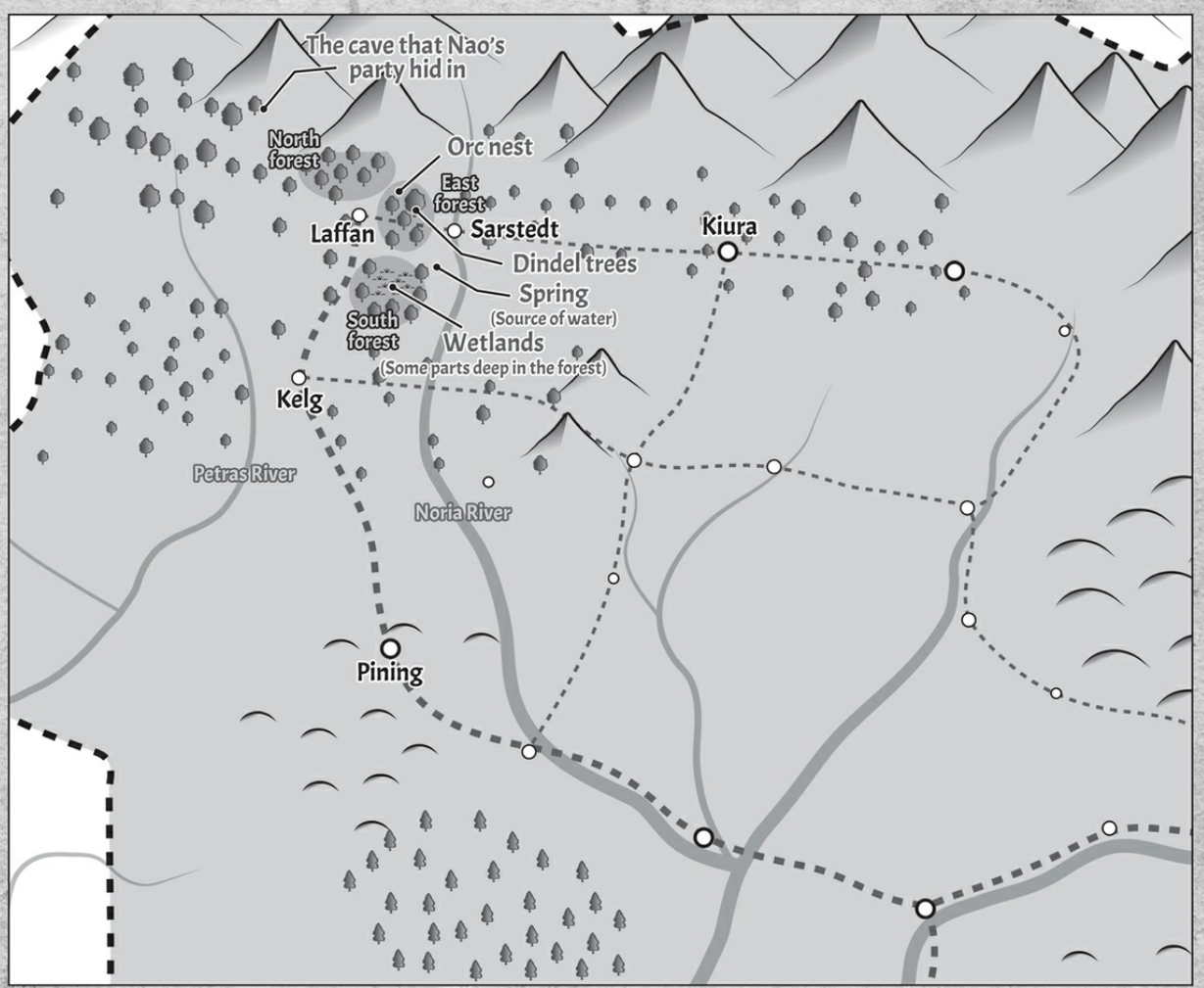

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Nao
Ishuca
Remi
“Well, she was curious about what we were doing,” I said.
“Sorry to keep you wai— oh, Remi? Why is she here?”
The calm before the storm—


The root of all evil—
"The annual exclusive sale of holy water will now begin!"
"I apologize for the wait!"
"What's going on over there?" Touya asked.
We were all pretty confused, but it seemed like the stallholder had the answers to our questions.
Mary
Metea
"Those people are believers of the Holy Satomi Sect. They're a huge nuisance, but..."
"The Holy Satomi Sect? Really?" I asked.
"When that many people gather in one place, won't it block the thoroughfares?" Haruka asked. "Won't the authorities try to crack down on them?"
"Meat?! Yeah, I love meat!" Metea exclaimed. "I can eat a ton!"
Metea's eyes were shining with excitement as she reached out and received a plate from Haruka. Smiling, she grabbed a spoon and began to dig into the stew.
Haruka
Two sisters who lost their dad—


Touya gets laid—
The brothels had wide entrances so you could see all the beautiful women sitting in a row inside.
Hmm. Well, actually, a more accurate way to put it would be that there are some beautiful women sitting in a row. It all comes down to personal taste, but let's just say there's a lot of...variation in their looks.
Touya
To Another World... with LAND MINES!
7

To Another World... with Land Mines! Local Map



CONTENTS

TO ANOTHER WORLD...
WITH LAND MINES!

Prologue

Chapter 1 At the Orphanage

Chapter 2 Retrieval of a Prized Family Heirloom for a Quest

Side Story—Touya Gets Laid

Chapter 3 Holy Satomi Sect

Chapter 4 Mayhem in Kelg

Side Story—Part Three of Sai's Adventures:
I'll Have Some Faith in You

Table of Contents

1. Cover
2. Color Illustrations
3. Local Map
4. Prologue
5. Chapter 1—At the Orphanage
6. Chapter 2—Retrieval of a Prized Family Heirloom for a Quest
7. Side Story—Touya Gets Laid
8. Chapter 3—Holy Satomi Sect
9. Chapter 4—Mayhem in Kelg
10. Side Story—Part Three of Sai’s Adventures: I’ll Have Some Faith in You
11. Afterword
12. Bonus High Resolution Illustrations
13. About J-Novel Club
14. Copyright

Prologue

"...I must say, Nao-san, you and your party are some of this guild's top troublema— I mean, moneymakers," said Diola.

We had survived our battle against a lava boar thanks to Touya's "valiant sacrifice." Diola-san greeted us with her usual smile when we returned to town and dropped by the Adventurers' Guild afterward. She seemed happy to see that we were safe, but she fell silent for a long time after we showed her the carcass of the lava boar. When she finally broke her silence, she sounded like she was being careful with her choice of words, but her true feelings sort of slipped out. However, it was definitely true that we had accomplished and earned a lot as adventurers, and we also had something else to show her this time.

I respectfully bowed before offering the object that we had brought back with us. "I apologize for the hassle. With that in mind, please accept this humble gift."

"Why are you acting like that, Nao-san?" Diola asked. "I don't want to recei— Huh?!"

Diola-san frowned as she took the sword that I was presenting to her. As she inspected it, she seemed confused at first, but she gasped as soon as she saw the family crest on the hilt. She shot me a sharp look. "O-Oh. Where did you obtain this, Nao-san?"

"We found a cave deep within the forest. A skeleton knight that we encountered inside the cave was wielding that sword," I said.

We summarized our experiences in the forest, and after she heard our account, Diola-san laid one of her hands to her forehead and looked heavenward for a while. Eventually, she sighed deeply, as if she had finally accepted reality.

"We were fairly certain that this would cause you a lot of trouble, Diola-san,

but we feel it would be better to leave it to you instead of meddling ourselves," said Natsuki.

"Mm. It's not as though we can try to sell the sword," said Haruka.

"Of course not! You might get jailed if you did!" Diola-san sounded very surprised and anxious when she heard Natsuki and Haruka's words, but also exhausted; she sighed again. "Very well. I'll give this case my personal attention. It is a delicate issue, after all."

"Thank you very much, Diola-san," said Natsuki.

"It's part of the function of this guild to deal with such issues, so don't worry about it," said Diola. "However, the guild in this town is understaffed, so I'd appreciate it if your party would hold back a bit. And just what is *that*?"

"Oh, this is a lava boar," said Yuki.

"I'm not asking about the name of the animal!" Diola-san snapped back. She looked up at the huge body of the lava boar. "I'm just confused about how your party encountered something this dangerous—and amazed that you managed to defeat it."

"Yeah, we only barely managed to defeat it," I said. "And one of us had to give his life."

"Huh?! Who..."

Diola-san hastily looked around at us, but she blinked and cocked her head slightly after she noticed that all five of us were here and none of us were injured. Her actions were very cute despite her age, and I almost smiled when I saw that, so I covered my face with my hands as I forced out a response. "Well, you see, Touya's dying words were 'I'll be back,' and then..."

"Bweeeh! We won't forget about you, Touya!" Yuki exclaimed, looking upward. "I'm sure he's watching over us as a star high in the distant skies..."

"Enough with that joke!" Touya exclaimed. "All that happened is that the lava boar sent me flying."

I wasn't willing to agree with Touya's assessment. "That doesn't change the fact that it was quite dangerous, Touya. You would probably be dead if we

didn’t have Haruka around.”

“Ugh. W-Well, yeah, I guess you’re right about that...” Touya grimaced and seemed flustered.

Diola-san gasped once again when she saw Touya’s reaction. “In that case, it must have been a serious injury. If I recall correctly, you’re capable of using very powerful healing magic, aren’t you, Haruka-san?”

“Yeah. The new breastplate that we bought for Touya was destroyed in one hit, so it really was a serious injury,” Haruka replied. “To be honest, I probably wouldn’t have been able to heal him in time if we hadn’t purchased that breastplate.”

“Don’t forget about the newly improved actons that we worked hard to make better at absorbing impacts,” said Yuki.

“If that’s how your party fared against the lava boar, then I’m sure that the average adventurer in Laffan would die if they encountered one,” said Diola; she was aware of the fact that we’d used elemental metal in our new armor. She muttered something about how she needed to publicize the danger of lava boars, then glanced at us with a slightly admonitory expression. “Your party has handed me a sword that’ll be a lot of work to deal with and also encountered monsters that have never before been sighted near Laffan, so I’ll probably have to put in a great deal of overtime. Do you have some sort of grudge against me, Nao-san?”

“Of course not!” I exclaimed. “I feel absolutely indebted to you and grateful for all that you’ve done for us, Diola-san!”

“Really, now? I’ve become awfully busy ever since your party showed up in town,” said Diola. “Do you really feel grateful? Are you capable of declaring that with absolute confidence?”

Diola-san was staring at me intently, so I nodded deeply. “Yes, of course! So grateful, in fact, that I’m more than willing to go harvest dindels once again when autumn rolls around!”

Diola easily granted me forgiveness along with a beaming smile. “Okay, I forgive you!”

Man, dindels really work great as a bribe—I'm joking, of course!

"However, there are many issues at hand that need to be dealt with cautiously, so it'll take me some time," said Diola. "Is that fine with all of you?"

"Of course," said Haruka. "Also, I assume we shouldn't go anywhere near the cave where we found the sword, right?"

"Yes, please. I would really appreciate it if your party would stay away for a while," said Diola. "Please wait until the matter of the sword has been resolved."

Diola-san seemed a bit apologetic, as if she felt bad about placing restrictions upon adventurers, but we all nodded to indicate that we were fine with this.

"We definitely can't go near that cave again anytime soon regardless," said Haruka. "For one thing, we'll need to get Touya's armor fixed first."

"Yeah. I don't think we'll encounter foes as strong as lava boars that often, but we can't let our guard down," I said.

"I guess we'll take a short break for a while," said Yuki. "With that in mind, you don't have to rush, Diola-san."

"Thank you very much." Diola-san bowed slightly. "I will contact your party once I have finished investigating the sword."

Chapter 1—At the Orphanage

The morning after we returned to Laffan, I woke up and saw that the sun was already high in the sky. *Okay, perhaps "morning" isn't the most accurate term to describe this time of day.* I had gone to sleep right after we had returned home from the guild yesterday, and I must have been more exhausted than I'd realized from the battle against a powerful new foe.

"Well, I guess all of us were exhausted from the battle," I said.

Despite the time, nobody had come to wake me up, so everybody else was probably still sleeping, or else they'd allowed me to sleep in to recover from fatigue. I crawled out of my bed and put on some indoor slippers, then opened the window, stretched, and took a deep breath of the fresh summer air. I roughly combed through my bedhead with my hands and then descended to the living room on the first floor without changing out of my pajamas. Not too long ago, the room had been a bit barren, but now it was filled with new furniture we had bought the other day and had become a place where all of us could relax; we just had to be sure to wear slippers.

I yawned as I entered the living room. "Hellooo. Am I the last one— Or not, I guess."

All three of the girls were in the living room, lounging apart from each other on three different sofas. They had cups of tea in their hands.

"Good morning, Nao-kun," said Natsuki.

"Hello," said Yuki. "Actually, though, it's almost noon."

"It's true that we're not working today, but you seem way too relaxed, Nao," said Haruka. "Your hair is a mess too. Come over here for a bit."

Haruka beckoned me over, and I obediently walked over and sat down next to her. She took out a comb and started to put my hair in order. Yuki grinned when she saw that and walked over behind us. "Do you plan on heading out somewhere today, Nao?"

“Nah, I plan on taking it easy and resting. Yesterday was exhausting,” I replied. “You girls are planning on doing the same, right?”

The girls had changed out of their pajamas, but they were wearing light indoor clothes that looked quite cute but weren’t suitable for walking around outdoors.

“In that case, you’re fine with whatever for your hairstyle, right?” Yuki asked. “Any ideas, Haruka?”

“Braids, maybe? A chignon could work as well,” said Haruka. “What do you want, Nao?”

“Whatever you feel like doing is fine,” I replied. “I’m okay with anything as long as it doesn’t get in the way.”

What’s so fun about playing with my hair? It’s way shorter than Haruka’s or Natsuki’s, so I don’t get it at all. I relaxed into the sofa and looked at Natsuki in front of me, and she chuckled as she looked between my face and my hair. “Are you sure about letting the two of them do whatever they want with your hair, Nao-kun?”

“Like I said, I don’t really care if I don’t have to go outside,” I replied. “More importantly, is Touya still asleep?”

“Yeah,” said Natsuki. “He suffered a serious injury yesterday, after all. We healed it with magic, but healing can’t restore stamina.”

“He should wake up any time now due to hunger, however,” said Haruka. “Sit up straight for a bit, Nao.”

“Yeah, I feel kind of hungry myself,” I said. “Oh, yeah, he’s awake now. I’m surprised that you guessed correctly, Haruka.”

From far away, I heard some footsteps on the stairs—obviously Touya’s, since all of the other residents of this house were here in the living room.

“It’s hard to continue sleeping at this time of the day during the summer,” said Haruka. “Did you not get hot when you were sleeping, Nao?”

“Oh, right, it’s uncomfortable to continue sleeping with closed windows,” I said.

Our rooms were all laid out the same way and all faced the sun, so they were warm and cozy during the winter. However, the peak of summer was now approaching, and the temperature in our rooms rose abruptly by late morning. If we opened all the windows in our rooms and the corridors, it would draw a breeze through the house, but we couldn't do that while we were asleep.

"We probably should start practicing the Air Conditioning spell real soon," I said. "I guess we'll have to make do with something else for now, however. *Wind*."

"Hello. Man, it's really hot," said Touya. "Oh, whew, this feels great! Thanks for the wind, Nao!"

I had used Wind Magic, which I had recently learned, to send some air in Touya's direction the moment he entered the room. He seemed very relaxed; he closed his eyes and wagged his ears and tail, which had been drooping before he was fully awake.

"Being fluffy must be nice and all, but it looks like summer feels hotter for you," I said.

"Yeah, it kinda does," said Touya. "That's one downside of being fluffy. Oh, Nao, I see that your hair's being played with."

Touya chuckled when he looked at my head, and I chuckled back. "I'm the one who's letting them play with my hair, ha ha."

"Yeah, it's true that I'm playing with your hair. I'll give you a pigtail look if that's what you want, Nao," said Haruka.

"Anything but that, please," I said. "Also, I kind of want to eat lunch right now..."

"Yeah, good point. All right, this should do," said Haruka. "You want something for lunch as well, right, Touya?"

"Yeah, please," said Touya. "By the way, are you going to leave your hair as is, Nao?"

"I mean, I don't really mind," I said. "It's not like I'm going outside today."

I couldn't see what Haruka had done to my hair, but when I shook my head

gently, it felt fine, so I didn't really care. Anyway, Haruka and Yuki would probably fix my hair once they got bored of whatever this new style was.

"Don't worry, Nao! You look good," Yuki exclaimed.

"Mm, that's true, tee hee. You look very cute, Nao-kun," said Natsuki.

Although Yuki and Natsuki were both praising my new hairstyle, Touya had an awkward expression on his face as he examined me. I was a bit curious as to why Natsuki had used the word "cute," but the only people who would see it were my four friends here, so it wasn't important.

"Well, if you're okay with it, then sure," said Touya. His gaze followed Haruka as she headed into the kitchen. "More importantly, we're taking today off, but what are we doing tomorrow?"

Yuki pointed at Touya. "We need to get your armor repaired, of course! It only lasted one day in spite of how expensive it was."

"Yeah, it really was expensive," I said. "It was a brand-new breastplate that cost over fifty thousand Rea."

We had provided the elemental metal ourselves, so most of the cost had been the skilled labor. It would have cost many times more if we'd wanted to purchase elemental metal armor.

"The breastplate is so damaged that we'll probably have to get it completely reforged," said Natsuki. "The elemental metal can probably be reused, but as for the cost of the labor..."

"Depending on how much we end up earning from that lava boar, our battle might have been a net loss," I said.

"Ugh. I'm really sorry about this," said Touya. "I'll pay for the repairs out of my own pock—"

Haruka interrupted Touya's words as she returned with her hands full of plates. "No, Touya. We all agreed that weapons and armor fall under shared expenses, remember? They protect all of us as a party, after all."

It was true that we had all agreed on that policy before. It would have been a different story if Touya had broken his breastplate outside of combat, but he

had stood on the front line protecting the rest of us, so it wouldn't have been fair to make him pay for the repairs by himself.

The rest of us nodded in agreement with Haruka's words, but I had something to add. "That said, we're leaving it to you to come up with an excuse for Gantz-san, Touya. I'm not brave enough to tell him that we broke one of his newly made pieces on the first day of use."

I had heard before that elemental metal was way more difficult to process than normal iron and even more difficult than harder metals like white iron, so Gantz-san would probably be upset if he found out that the armor had been destroyed instantly. Touya seemed to realize what would happen, and he sighed at the thought. "All right, I'll be the one who takes a scolding from Gantz-san. What about everyone else, though? Any plans for the near future?"

"Well, I'd like to practice my healing magic a bit more," said Haruka. "To be honest, I was barely able to save you this time, Touya."

"Yeah, the breastplate was completely caved in," I said. "I'm pretty sure you had some broken ribs."

"Definitely!" Yuki exclaimed. "I'm surprised you still had the energy to joke around and say 'I'll be back!'"

At the time, I had assumed Touya was fine because he was joking around, but the blood had drained out of my face after the battle when I'd checked the damage to the breastplate. On top of that, Touya had been spitting a lot of blood, so I was really impressed that Haruka had somehow kept her composure while she healed him.

"Oh, yeah, I didn't really feel any pain at the time," said Touya. "It was probably because of adrenaline." He laughed awkwardly and scratched his head.

We all sighed in response.

"I still don't think it was the right time to joke around," I said. "But regardless, I think the lesson I'm going to take away from this experience is that I should learn some basic healing magic myself. Haruka can heal serious injuries, but I'd like to help her conserve mana if I can."

We could only allocate so much time to training every day. It would have been ideal if I could have devoted my time to practicing offensive magic, since that was my role in our party's current division of labor, but I still needed to learn some healing magic for survival's sake even if it wasn't the optimum use of my time.

"That sounds like a good idea," said Haruka. "In that case, let's practice Light Magic together. I want to improve my healing abilities as well."

"Do you have anything specific in mind, Haruka?" Yuki asked. "You've already spent a lot of time practicing healing, haven't you? How do you plan to become even better?"

"There's a simple answer to that," said Haruka. "I plan on asking an expert at healing magic."

"An expert? People who can use healing magic are very rare, aren't they?" Yuki asked. She cocked her head in confusion.

But Haruka smiled back confidently. "Don't worry—I have someone in mind."

★★★★★★★★★

The next day, Touya seemed a bit depressed as he headed out, carrying the broken breastplate with him. A while after he departed, the rest of us visited Advastlis-sama's temple. Apparently Ishuca-san was the person Haruka had in mind; according to her, Ishuca-san was actually a very talented Light mage, which made perfect sense to me after I made the connection between Light Magic and temples in my head. I wasn't sure if Ishuca-san would actually be willing to teach us Light Magic, but Haruka explained that there was a good chance Ishuca-san would be more than happy—if we paid for instruction. Haruka's choice of words wasn't polite by any means, but she made a good point. Ishuca-san was a priestess, but she was also a pragmatic one who would probably be willing to compromise on some things to a certain extent for the sake of the temple and the orphanage. I had no idea whether temples considered Light Magic an important religious secret, but I felt like it would probably be possible to negotiate depending on the amount of money that we donated.

The girls had assigned the responsibility of negotiating with Ishuca-san to me.

Their stated reasoning was that I had the best chance because I was the one who visited the temple the most often, but I suspected the real reason was that they wanted to avoid having to talk money with someone as scary as Ishuca-san.

As I entered the temple, the girls pushed on my back, and I was once again greeted by Ishuca-san's gentle smile. I lightly greeted her in turn before taking out more money than usual for the donation. I made my donation and spent a moment in prayer, all for the sake of leaving a good impression on Ishuca-san. *Please let me succeed in today's negotiations!*

"Your current level is Level 18. You need to gain 6,490 EXP in order to level up."

According to the voice that I heard in my head, I had leveled up twice since the last time I visited, probably because of the battle against the lava boar, but checking my experience wasn't the main reason I was here today. After I'd finished praying, I turned around to look at Ishuca-san. I wasn't sure if it was because there were four of us here today, but she seemed happier than usual; she was smiling and clasping her hands together and struck up a conversation with me before I could take the initiative.

"Thank you for visiting to offer prayers once again," said Ishuca. "May our god be with you."

"Thank you for your time, Ishuca-san," I said. "Um..."

I hesitated, uncertain of how to ask Ishuca-san for a favor, and Yuki poked me in the back as if to urge me to hurry up. *Yeah, I get it, relax!* Behind my back, I slapped Yuki's finger away with one hand, but it was obvious enough that Ishuca-san noticed.

She continued to smile gently but nodded and said, "Please feel free to speak your mind, Nao-san."

"Well, you see, Ishuca-san, I wanted to ask you a favor, so..."

"I would be more than willing to help a devout fellow believer such as yourself, Nao-san, but I can't guarantee anything until you tell me what kind of favor you want to request."

“Oh, yeah, good point. Um, Ishuca-san, I heard that you can use Light Magic. Is that true?”

“Yes, it is. My abilities at Light Magic are nothing to boast about, but I am competent. Are you in need of some healing?” Ishuca-san had answered my question casually, but then she seemed to become a bit confused; she tilted her head quizzically. “Oh, wait. If I recall correctly, some of the other members of your party can use Light Magic, can’t they? That being the case...”

“Yeah, that’s right, but one of us suffered a serious injury the other day, so we want to improve our healing magic,” I replied.

“Hmm. I see.” Ishuca-san nodded and paused in thought, then smiled and brought up an idea. “It sounds like this will be a long story, so please follow me to the back where we can relax and talk things out.”

★★★★★★★★★

Ishuca-san guided us to the orphanage behind the temple. We were aware of its existence, but we couldn’t have entered without permission, so today was the first time we had set foot inside. The orphanage was a bit smaller than our house, but it had a wide and spacious yard that looked like a good playground for kids. The orphanage building itself looked quite old, so I worried about drafts passing through cracks in the beams, but it didn’t look dirty at all, so someone must have been taking good care of it.

“So this is the orphanage, huh? How many children are there here?” I asked.

“As of now, twenty-three in total,” Ishuca replied.

I wasn’t sure what to make of that number in relation to the size of Laffan as a whole. The situation of orphanages seemed like a good proxy for the safety and governance of a town, but it was hard to make a judgment because I had no point of reference.

The girls must have felt the same way, because Yuki hesitantly asked a follow-up question. “Um, is that a lot or just a few?”

“Well, if I had to choose, then I would say it isn’t very many,” Ishuca replied. “However, that doesn’t mean it’s easy managing an orphanage this size.”

“Where do your operating funds come from?” I asked.

“The orphanage is funded by money from the local lord and donations from believers who visit the temple,” Ishuca replied. “I have to stretch that money as far as I can, but...”

There were traces of repair work all over the interior of the orphanage building, and it looked much older inside than it had outside. It seemed like the building was holding up for now, but large-scale repair work would probably be necessary sometime soon.

“You probably don’t have much to spare, do you?” I asked.

“Mm, I don’t,” Ishuca replied. “There’s enough money to feed the children, but it would take a lot more to provide them with educa—”

“Head Priest!”

Ishuca-san’s words were cut short by the voice of a small girl who came running up to her. The small girl abruptly slowed down when she noticed us, then hid behind Ishuca-san, hugging one of her legs.

“Hello?” The girl looked up at us with her head cocked. She appeared to be about three to four years old and was a bit underweight. Her clothes were ragged, but her face was quite charming.

“These people are the ones who have made a number of generous donations recently,” said Ishuca.

The girl bowed and thanked us very politely. “Oh! Thanksh you very much!” she lisped.

I inadvertently looked at Ishuca-san after hearing that oddly polite response from the girl, but Ishuca-san averted her gaze. *I mean, yeah, I get that it’s a very powerful weapon, but did you really train kids to turn the cuteness up around potential donors, Ishuca-san?*

Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki had somewhat cold looks in their eyes as well, but Ishuca-san maintained her smile as she avoided meeting our eyes and instead bent down to talk to the small girl. “What’s the matter, Remi?”

“Oh, right!” Remi exclaimed. “Big bro Coro and Jay are fighting with each

other!”

“Oh, my, that isn’t good at all!” Ishuca exclaimed.

Despite her words, Ishuca-san showed no signs of panic as she gently took hold of Remi’s hand and walked deeper into the orphanage. We followed the two of them. Remi, for her part, periodically glanced back at us in curiosity, and I felt a bit warm inside when I noticed that.

We heard some loud noises along with the raised voices of children and soon arrived at what seemed to be a dining hall. There were a couple of chairs and a large table inside, but they were lined up against the wall, and two boys who looked to be around the age of seven or eight were wrestling on the ground in the open space that the furniture probably occupied normally. There were some other kids cheering at the fight or watching from afar as well as kids playing in the corners of the dining hall, indifferent to the fight. In fact, a lot of boys and girls were gathered in the dining hall. The kids who were cheering hastily closed their mouths the moment they noticed Ishuca-san approaching, but the two boys didn’t notice at all, since they were busy fighting. It looked more like play wrestling rather than a serious fight—they weren’t hitting each other with clenched fists—but they were definitely causing a commotion, so a scolding from Ishuca-san awaited them.

“Jay, Coron, stop that right now!” she exclaimed.

“Yikes, run!”

The two boys yelled the same words in unison despite the fact that they had been fighting a second earlier, and both of them tore off toward a different area of the orphanage.

“Gosh, again? I’m sorry about the commotion,” said Ishuca.

“Well, I think that kind of playful ‘fighting’ is perfectly normal for kids of that age,” said Yuki.

“Mm. It’s good to see kids being energetic,” said Natsuki.

It was definitely a good thing that the boys were energetic enough to play-fight with each other. However, all of the kids looked a bit thin, so there must not have been enough food—at least, not enough to fill them up—and it also

seemed like Ishuca-san must have been struggling to find clothes for them. Clothes were quite expensive in this world, so it would have been very painful financially for Ishuca-san if the kids accidentally ripped and ruined their clothes in situations like fights. Back in Japan, used clothes were sold by weight, which was way different from this world.

That said, the orphans didn't look gloomy at all. If the donations I had provided on a daily basis helped improve their lives, then I could tell myself that the money was being put to good use. *Actually, what if Ishuca-san is just tricking me into thinking this way? Well, it's not a bad thing, so I guess it doesn't really matter.*

"Thank you for being understanding. I'm afraid I don't have anything like tea to serve you, but please take a seat." After inviting us to sit down, Ishuca-san gently pushed on Remi's back. "Remi, I will be talking with these people here for a while, so please go play with the others."

"Okay! Bye-bye, miss!"

Remi obediently nodded in response to Ishuca-san's words, then smiled and waved at us before running off to join the other kids.

Haruka seemed a bit sad as she watched Remi run off. "She's a good girl, and really cute too."

"Remi's been at this orphanage for about half a year, but she's somewhat shy," said Ishuca. "She's especially shy around adult men, but..."

Ishuca-san stared at me as she let her sentence trail off. The girls stared at me too.

"Miss, huh? Hmm," said Haruka.

"Huh?"

I touched my hair without thinking too much, but my hairstyle was the same as usual, so it wasn't weird like what it had been yesterday.

"Oh, I guess I'm just imagining things," I said.

"No, it's not your imagination, Nao-kun," said Natsuki. "Your hair is a bit long, after all."

“You’re quite slim as well, and you’re wearing casual clothes today,” said Yuki. “That being the case, it wouldn’t be weird if you looked like a girl to her.”

“Nah, there’s no way, right? Please tell me so, Ishuca-san,” I said.

Sure, I don’t have my usual adventurer clothes and equipment on me today, but that shouldn’t be enough to make me look like a girl!

However, the response that I received from Ishuca-san was an indirect affirmation that I had been mistaken for a girl. “Um, elves are quite rare here in Laffan, and you’re wearing loose clothing, so...”

“Loose clothing, huh? Oh, I guess it’s probably because Haruka was next to me,” I said.

“Huh?! Why the sudden stray arrow?! There’s a very distinct and clear difference between you and me!” Haruka hugged her chest and seemed offended by my words, but she quickly recovered and muttered something scary about how it didn’t really matter if I looked like a girl, then continued, “More importantly, let’s get back to the topic of healing magic.”

“Mm. It’s true that I learned magic when I became a priest, but I’m not sure if the information I learned will be useful to your party,” said Ishuca. “I can only teach the basics...”

Ishuca-san looked at Haruka and me as if to imply that it would be pointless due to the fact that our party already had a couple of elves who were good at magic, but Haruka shook her head immediately. “I still think there’s a point in learning about how others learned magic.”

None of us had actually learned the basics of magic in the proper way. In fact, we had only gained the power to use magic because Advastlis-sama had bestowed it upon us, and we had relied exclusively on those skills whenever we practiced magic on our own, so we had no idea if we were approaching magic in the right way. With that in mind, there was a chance that lessons from someone like Ishuca-san would be much more valuable and worthwhile to us than we had initially assumed.

“I see. However, there are some priests who believe that Light Magic is a miraculous gift from the gods, and those priests disapprove of teaching Light

Magic to people who are not members of a temple," said Ishuca.

"Mm, that's a perfectly reasonable opinion," I said. "With that in mind, I would like to humbly offer you this."

I handed over a small leather bag, and Ishuca-san smiled after she accepted it from me and felt its weight. "However, I'm sure that nobody will object to the idea of teaching Light Magic to devout and pious people like you and your friends, Nao-san."

The leather bag contained forty gold coins, which I felt was a bit much, but on the other hand, it was fairly normal to pay attendance fees of a hundred thousand yen per person to learn specialized skills at a seminar back in Japan. On top of that, the money would go toward improving the lives of the orphans, so I had no regrets about this, and it was less troublesome than having to become a member of the temple or an official believer in order to receive lessons from Ishuca-san.

"By the way, you don't think that way, do you, Ishuca-san?" I asked.

"Of course not," Ishuca replied. "That line of thinking is merely the way temples justify maintaining a monopoly on Light Magic."

We all looked at each other out of surprise at that frank answer.

"I didn't expect to hear such an honest answer," I said. "Are you sure you shouldn't have been a little less direct?"

"Well, it's the truth. Besides, it's impossible to maintain a monopoly over Light Magic in this kingdom," said Ishuca. "After all, elves can use Light Magic, and there are also a few humans out there who are lucky enough to learn Light Magic from those elves."

According to Ishuca-san, other kingdoms that discriminated against nonhuman races had succeeded at maintaining stricter control over Light Magic, so people in those kingdoms had no choice but to rely on temples for healing. However, gods existed in this world and even dished out divine punishments from time to time, so apparently temples in those kingdoms couldn't just take advantage of their monopoly on Light Magic to bring in obscene profits.

“The rare humans who can use Light Magic tend to appear among the orphans that temples take care of, however, so it’s hard to deny the reasoning that it’s a blessing for piety,” said Ishuca, although she frowned to herself when she brought up that caveat.

To Haruka, I whispered, “What do you think?”

“We already know the actual answer, Nao,” Haruka whispered back. “It’s just a matter of probability.”

Humans could only use magic if they had the aptitude for it, and even with the relevant skill, it would be difficult to learn magic if you weren’t able to become the apprentice of a mage with the same aptitude. It would be a different story if there were some technique for ordinary people to learn their own aptitudes, but techniques like that weren’t common knowledge, so human Light mages were very rare.

“If it’s just a matter of having the right skills and finding someone who can teach you how to use them, another factor is probably the high likelihood that temples have priests who can teach Light Magic,” I whispered.

“Mm. And only the orphans with an aptitude for Light Magic end up becoming mages. That’s all there is to it,” Haruka whispered.

There were probably some orphans out there who had the aptitude for different types of elemental magic, but Light Magic was the only one that the average priest could teach, and the orphans who learned Light Magic probably tended to become priests themselves, so the cycle continued repeating itself.

Ishuca-san noticed that Haruka and I were having a whispered conversation and said, “Oh, I’m sorry—this is probably a topic that doesn’t feel very relevant to elves.”

I shook my head. “Please don’t worry about it. Also, I have no doubt that blessings from the gods do exist, Ishuca-san.”

I myself had received a blessing, after all, albeit not a very useful one. However, it hadn’t taken the form of an aptitude for a certain element of magic.

“As a priest, I’m glad to hear that,” said Ishuca. “Now, then, I’d like to get started with lessons right away, but we should probably move somewhere else

—it would be hard to concentrate here.”

The kids who had been making a commotion had already left, but there were plenty of other kids playing with each other here in the dining hall. Ishuca-san glanced over them with a smile, then stood up and led us outside.

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We walked to a row of trees that seemed to have been planted around the orphanage. The lush greenery blocked off the hot sunlight, and the refreshing wind that blew through the trees from time to time felt very comfortable on my skin. We all sat down in the shade and prepared to listen to Ishuca-san’s words.

“Now, then. As for how to improve your abilities at Light Magic, the damn old men at the great temple told me that—”

“Huh?”

All of us inadvertently gasped in shock when we heard the first few words that flew out of Ishuca-san’s mouth, and she stopped herself for a moment when she noticed our reactions, then smiled and continued as if nothing had happened. “It is said that the path will naturally open ahead of pious and virtuous priests who perform ablutions and prove their devotion, but...”

Man, Ishuca-san’s true “personality” really does slip out from time to time despite the fact that she looks like a pure and feminine priest. Well, there’s no reason for me to call attention to it, and it’s easier to get along with someone like her, so it works out fine for us.

“Is that not true?” I asked.

“Mm. Light Magic isn’t something that you can become better at simply by being pious,” Ishuca replied. “It is true that training as a priest can help you become better at Light Magic, but that is merely the result of hard work, not strong faith. Faith can be what helps people endure harsh training, however.”

Oh, yeah, now that I think about it, Advastlis-sama told us before that our efforts would never betray us. We believed in the existence of gods, at least in this world, but we weren’t exactly devout. We would have been at a loss if the path to becoming better at Light Magic had been something spiritual, so I was glad that Ishuca-san’s approach was a pragmatic one.

“Therefore, the first thing I will teach your party is meditation,” said Ishuca. “The first step is to calm your emotions and feel the flow of mana inside your body. The majority of people drop out at this step, but it shouldn’t be a problem for your party.”

“Yeah, we can already use magic,” I said.

“Mm. However, the basics are very important,” said Ishuca. “I still perform meditation on a daily basis.”

“Yeah, we also train on a daily basis,” I said. “Is there a specific position we have to get in for meditation, Ishuca-san?”

“Whatever works best for you,” Ishuca replied. “Try to find the position that makes you feel the most relaxed.”

Hmm. The only thing that comes to mind is the position for Zen meditation. I don’t know any other ways to meditate.

“By the way, Ishuca-san, what was your training like?” Yuki asked.

Ishuca-san’s reply was rather ambiguous. “The first time I felt mana was when I felt the earth out in a grassy plain.”

“You felt the earth, huh?” I said.

Hold on, doesn’t that just mean she fell asleep out in the plains?

“It was back when I took a short break from my harsh training and meditated by myself. My consciousness faded away a bit, and I felt like I was floating somewhere. That’s when I recognized what mana was,” said Ishuca. “I had been told that it was best to meditate in the presence of the gods, but that has nothing to do with it. It would be a nuisance to meditate inside a temple, if anything.”

We all fell silent after we heard Ishuca-san’s words. *Yeah, she definitely fell asleep outside. The way she worded things doesn’t sound too weird, but she basically told us that she ran away from her harsh training and was dozing off when she suddenly felt what mana was.*

However, we remained silent and Ishuca-san maintained her perfect smile as she continued with her discourse. “After you recognize what mana is, the next

step is to practice channeling it throughout your body and then concentrating all of it in one spot. Once you're done with that, the next step is to practice gathering more mana and releasing it all at once. Those are the basics of Light Magic as taught at temples."

"Um, won't you collapse if you release all of your mana at once?" I asked.

I wanted to know if that was actually something that Ishuca-san had done. I was very aware of how painful it felt to be completely drained of mana.

But Ishuca-san nodded casually. "Yes, but that's the only way to increase your mana capacity. However, it's something that you should probably only do before you go to bed or when you have plenty of free time. For now, please meditate here while testing out the other forms of training. I'll be back in a bit with some tools that are used for training."

We saw Ishuca-san off as she headed back toward the orphanage. When she had departed, we all looked at each other.

"I guess training at temples is actually harsher than we thought it was," said Yuki.

"It's possible that it's harsh because that's the only way humans can gain the ability to use magic," I said.

"We've always been able to use magic with ease, though," said Haruka. "Well, I guess you and I are elves and Yuki can use four different types of elemental magic, so we might all be exceptions. Natsuki is the closest thing we have to a 'normal' mage. What do you think, Natsuki?"

"I don't really have any fully considered opinion," said Natsuki. "However, we've fought monsters on a routine basis, so perhaps our situation is a bit different from that of the average priest."

"Oh, yeah, that's a good point," I said. "Monsters are a good source of experience points, after all."

The difference between the number of experience points that we earned from training and the number that we earned from combat against monsters was probably the reason that Natsuki had a decent amount of mana even though she had never pushed herself to the point of being completely drained

of mana during training. However, training was necessary in order to defeat monsters, so the fact that it didn't earn us as many experience points was no reason for us to slack off in that regard.

"We should still test out the training methods that Ishuca-san taught us, though," I said. "We paid a total of forty gold coins, after all."

"Mm. We have no idea which method will actually be the most effective, however," said Haruka.

Mana control was something that all of us had been practicing for a while now, and we had done some training that was similar in principle to what Ishuca-san had described—apart from releasing all of our mana at once. Besides, it would be a waste not to test things out after we had handed over a large donation as a tuition fee.

I sat in a Zen meditation position, and the girls copied me—except for Yuki, who looked like she was about to stretch out on the ground and go to sleep.

"Are you going to 'feel' the earth, Yuki?" I asked.

"Yep," Yuki replied. "Someone has to test it out, right?"

"Well, Yuki can't use Light Magic anyway, so it should be fine," said Natsuki.

"Honestly, I bet this training can be applied to magic in general," I said. "Oh well."

Given that Ishuca-san had accidentally found success that way, there was a chance that sleeping on the ground was a real, viable form of magic training, so I was counting on Yuki to test it out for us. I closed my eyes and felt the mana in my own body without a problem. Channeling mana through my body was something that I had done quite often for the Enhanced Muscles and Magic Barrier skills. Hopefully I could level up those two skills if I practiced some more. As for gathering my mana in one spot, that was somewhat similar to the process of casting a spell, so improving the speed at which I could gather mana would probably enable me to cast multiple spells in a row more smoothly. What Ishuca-san had called "gathering more mana" sounded like it meant taking in mana from the air. It would be amazing if that was actually possible, but I had no idea if there was mana in the air. *Hmm?* I couldn't feel mana in the air, but I

felt the presence of something, so I opened my eyes and saw Remi in front of me, watching me curiously.

“What are you doing, miss?”

“Oh, um, I’m actually a mister and not a miss...”

“Mister? Is your name mister, miss?”

“No, my name is Nao, but—”

“Nao-chan! What are you doing, Nao-chan?”

Yeah, I figured it wouldn’t be possible to have a logical conversation with a kid! Also, why did she choose “Nao-chan” of all things? That makes me sound even more like a girl! The girls, who were meditating next to me, looked like they were trying their best to restrain themselves from grinning; their cheeks were twitching a bit. *I hope you all know that you’re supposed to calm yourselves and cast away random thoughts during meditation.* On the other hand, I felt like I had actually reached a state of perfect selflessness through accepting my fate.

“Sure, call me whatever you want,” I said. “We’re training to get better at magic, Remi.”

“Training! Remi wants to do training as well!”

I used simple terms to explain what we were doing because Remi probably wouldn’t have been able to understand if I’d explained in detail. Remi smiled happily after she heard my words and then hopped in my lap while I was still seated in meditation. I heard a giggle from the person who was “feeling the earth” and felt an urge for a moment to throw Remi at her defenseless belly, but I returned to my senses after I noticed Remi’s eyes, innocent and full of curiosity, looking up at me. I didn’t care about the earth-feeler at all, but it wouldn’t have been nice to Remi if I’d suddenly thrown her at someone.

“Teach me!” Remi exclaimed.

“Mm. First, close your eyes and relax,” I said. “After that, slowly breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe oouut...”

“Okay,” said Remi. “In, out, iiin, oooout...”

“Once you’ve calmed down, continue breathing like that as you search for something warm inside of yourself,” I said.

Remi leaned on me as she took deep breaths and growled to herself in a cute way. Mana was something that everyone in this world had. Not everyone could use magic, but people like Touya were able to enhance their physical abilities through the use of mana, so it was possible that this training could be useful for other purposes as well.

However, it wasn’t that easy to recognize your own mana, and Remi grumbled for a while before looking up at me, pouting and puffing her cheeks up. “This is hard. Also, you feel warm, Nao-chan!”

“Hee hee. Yes, it is very hard,” said Haruka. “However, try to look for something inside of yourself that is as warm as Nao-chan.”

“Okay!” Remi exclaimed. Remi nodded obediently and closed her eyes, then continued growling to herself. When I noticed what she was doing, I looked at Haruka, and we both chuckled quietly before resuming our meditation. A while after that, I stopped hearing the growling sounds from Remi, so I opened my eyes and saw that she was asleep, although still steadily breathing in the way that I had taught her to.

“It looks like meditation was a bit too difficult for a child as young as Remi,” said Natsuki.

“Tee hee, she hasn’t trained enough to be on my level,” said Yuki. “Someone as talented as me can train even while sleeping on the ground like this!”

“What kind of perspective is that, Yuki?” I asked. “Do you relate to Remi as a small kid?”

“No, that’s not it!” Yuki exclaimed. “Everything I said is from the perspective of someone who started training before she did!”

“Really, now? By the way, how did your meditation go?” I asked. “Did you manage to ‘feel the earth’?”

“Well, yeah, the ground feels quite warm at this time of the year,” Yuki replied. “So this can probably be a different form of training.”

Yuki got up and stretched a bit, and not too long after, Ishuca-san returned with a small box in her hands. She looked a bit surprised when she saw Remi in my lap. “Sorry to keep you wai— Oh, Remi? Why is she here?”

“Well, she was curious about what we were doing,” I said.

“I see. Sorry for the trouble,” said Ishuca-san. “I’ll take care of her from here.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” I said. “I don’t really mind. She feels a bit warm, but she’s not heavy at all.”

Ishuca-san set down the box she was carrying, then bent down in front of me and extended her hands, but I shook my head in response. A kid’s high body temperature felt a bit uncomfortable with the hot weather, but I would have felt worse if I’d accidentally woken her up. I gently created some wind with magic to cool myself, and Remi mumbled some words and smiled in her sleep. She looked like she felt quite comfortable, and Ishuca-san smiled gently as well when she saw that.

“It seems like Remi really likes you, Nao-san,” said Ishuca. “On top of that, you’re a male adult that she met for the first time today, so...”

“Mm. Remi directly went to Nao-kun instead of Yuki, Haruka, or me,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, Nao-kun technically counts as a guy, but still!” Yuki exclaimed.

“The ‘technically counts’ was unnecessary, Yuki,” I said. “Well, I guess you just can’t feel the overwhelming lady’s-man aura that’s pulsating out of me.”

“Lady’s man? That doesn’t sound like a very accurate word to describe someone like you who wakes up and doesn’t care about fixing his bedhead, Nao,” said Yuki.

“Ugh! You’re absolutely right about that!” I exclaimed.

I would tie up my hair without much thought to how it looked and wear clothes that the girls had prepared for me, so it was true that I wasn’t a very stylish man. However, it wasn’t completely my fault. Back in Japan, I had cared about my appearance as much as the average guy, and I had worn clothes that I bought for myself, but it was very difficult to replicate all of that here in this

different world. Cheap used clothes weren't stylish at all, and what mattered the most to me now was whether they were wearable. In addition, products like face wash, hair gel, and shampoo weren't normally available. However, the Purification spell, which both Haruka and Natsuki could cast, was capable of cleaning anyone in one use, and they had sewn decent-looking clothes for me as well, so I had no reason not to take the path of least resistance.

"Well, Nao-san, I like the fact that you give off a warm and friendly aura," said Ishuca. "I think that's why Remi looks at ease while sleeping on your lap. She's normally a very wary child, after all."



“Oh, thank you very much for saying that, Ishuca-san,” I said.

“Hmm. When you put it that way, it almost sounds as though the rest of us *don’t* have a warm and friendly aura like Nao-kun does,” said Natsuki.

Haruka and Yuki fell silent after they heard Natsuki’s awkward analysis, and Ishuca hastily picked up the small box on the ground and presented it to us as if to change the subject. “W-Well, some people are simply better at getting along with others! More importantly, please take a look at this.”

The box appeared to be made of some sturdy metal and had no fancy decorations at all. However, after Ishuca-san held a hand above it and muttered something, lines of light ran over it and formed a geometric pattern.

“Whoa, it’s very pretty,” said Yuki. “Is it a magical device?”

“Yes, it is,” said Ishuca. “However, the box itself is just a container for storing valuables. It’s the contents that are important.”

The lines of light disappeared and the lid of the box opened. Ishuca-san reached into the box with her right arm and took out a translucent sphere that was covered in cloth. It was about the size of a table tennis ball and looked like a crystal ball at first glance.

“This magical device is called a Light Orb, and it’s used for practicing Light Magic,” said Ishuca. “As for how to use it, that should be obvious after a demonstration. *Light Cure*.”

A bright green light flowed out of the orb in Ishuca-san’s right hand right after she cast the spell.

“As you all saw just now, that’s what happens when you use magic on the orb,” said Ishuca. “Now, then, the problem that a mage has to solve in the process of practicing Light Magic is how to test the effects of spells.”

“Yeah, that’s definitely true,” said Haruka. “The Light spell is very obvious, but when it comes to other spells, it’s hard to tell from practice whether they have any effect at all.”

All of us nodded deeply; it was something that had been on our minds for quite a while. It was hard to tell if healing spells had worked properly without

someone to heal, but injuring ourselves for the purpose of practice wasn't a very comfortable idea. Spells such as Resist Poison and Resist Disease would be even harder to practice because we would have no idea how to differentiate between our natural resistance and the effects of the spells, and we had no idea how we'd even test spells like Cure Insanity.

"That's what this orb is for. It only lights up beautifully if the Light Magic spell that you've used on it has worked properly," said Ishuca. "The color of the light differs depending on the spell, but the orb recognizes all of the spells under the aegis of Light Magic."

"Really? In that case, is this orb a rare and valuable artifact?" Natsuki asked, sounding a bit nervous.

Ishuca-san nodded. "I'm not sure about the exact number, but you can probably count the number of Light Orbs in this entire kingdom on one hand."

We all fell silent after we heard Ishuca-san's words. *Is she actually way more important than I initially assumed?* The Light Orb was obviously very useful for people who wanted to practice Light Magic. I had no idea exactly how much someone would pay for such a rare magical device if it went up for auction, but it would probably fetch a price so high that even we wouldn't be capable of reimbursing Ishuca-san if we accidentally broke it in the worst-case scenario.

"Now, then, please feel free to use this Light Orb," said Ishuca.

She proffered it for us to take, but none of us were brave enough to casually touch something so rare and valuable.

Ishuca-san smiled at us. "Don't worry. It's actually quite sturdy, so it won't break even if you accidentally drop it to the ground. I can't let your party borrow this Light Orb and take it home with you, but it's perfectly fine if you use it here."

"...In that case, we'll use it for a while," said Haruka.

The first person who reached out for the Light Orb was Haruka. She grabbed it with her right hand and used the Light Cure spell on it just as Ishuca-san had done earlier, but this time, the light that flowed out of the orb was a brilliant white.

“Hmm? Why did it shine like this?” Haruka asked.

“It’s because you used more mana than the spell required,” Ishuca replied. “The spell itself worked fine, but the brilliant light means that you wasted mana. A faint light would mean that you used too little.”

“Does that mean that when you use the perfect amount of mana, the orb only shines with a moderately bright light?” Haruka asked.

“Yes, that’s right,” Ishuca replied. “You are supposed to practice spells on the Light Orb after you’re done with meditation, and that’s what I did for quite a while.”

Ishuca-san had a distant look in her eyes, as if she had recalled some painful memories. However, all of us were more concerned about the information that we had just learned. We had assumed that everything would be fine as long as long as we succeeded at casting a spell; we hadn’t even considered the possibility that we had been wasting mana.

“I am afraid that I am not capable of teaching advanced Light Magic, but I believe that this Light Orb should help you to improve your mana efficiency,” said Ishuca. “What do you think?”

“Yeah, this magical device will be of great help to us! Thank you very much!” I exclaimed. “But are you sure that it’s okay for us to use this, Ishuca-san?”

“I have received ample returns from your party, so don’t worry about it,” said Ishuca. “By the way, the small box can’t be moved once you close the lid. There shouldn’t be any issues, but please use it to protect the orb if necessary.”

Ishuca-san smiled, then told us that she had work to deal with and headed back toward the temple. We all looked at the orb cupped in Haruka’s right hand and sighed in unison.

“This might come off as somewhat rude, but...we ended up with a real windfall,” said Haruka.

“Yes, we really did,” said Natsuki. “This Light Orb is worth more than the forty gold coins we paid as tuition.”

The meditation methods that Ishuca-san had taught us were valuable as well,

but they weren't as useful as the Light Orb. It was nice that it could detect whether we had successfully cast a Light Magic spell, and the fact that we could also use it to monitor our efficiency with mana would help us practice other elemental magic as well.

"Can I give it a try?" Natsuki asked. Haruka handed her the Light Orb, and she said, "*Anti-Magic*."

A bright blue light flowed out of the orb.

"It seems that non-Light Magic spells work just as well," said Natsuki. "I believe I used the perfect amount of mana."

"Let me give it a try next," I said. "Here goes. *Light Cure*."

There was no reaction from the orb.

"Ugh. I guess it really isn't possible to succeed right away," I said.

I was a bit disappointed even though I had somewhat expected the results. The girls all laughed.

"So this is what happens when someone fails at casting a spell on the Light Orb, huh? This really is a useful magical device," said Haruka. "I would love it if we could obtain one for ourselves, but..."

"There's no way," I said. "I don't think we would be able to afford the price even if there were one on sale or up for auction."

"Yeah, it sounds like there are a total of five Light Orbs or fewer in this kingdom," said Yuki. "I would love to obtain something like a Fire Orb or a Water Orb, since I can't use Light Magic, but those probably aren't easy to obtain either. Also, I'm kind of curious about the box that the Light Orb was inside."

Yuki grabbed the small metal box, which Ishuca-san had casually left behind. It was probably valuable in its own right based on Ishuca-san's description.

"This is basically like a safe for valuables, right? I wonder if it's an alchemical product," said Yuki.

"Be careful with that, Yuki," said Haruka. "If you break it, we probably won't be able to afford to replace it."

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” said Yuki. “The lines of light that ran over the box earlier looked quite cool, however. Hmm. Alchemy is a really profound profession! There’s so much to learn about it.”

“Yeah, I agree, but keep your voice down, Yuki,” I said. “Remi’s sleeping.”

“Oh, my bad,” said Yuki. “Hmm. How was this box made?”

Yuki lowered her voice as she resumed her examination of the box, and the rest of us took turns practicing magic on the orb. By the end of the day, I had succeeded at learning Level 1 Light Magic, and the girls had improved the efficiency of their mana usage. Due to our successes, we all agreed to come back to the orphanage and continue practicing Light Magic.

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We had gotten lucky and obtained access to a very useful magical device, but Haruka and Natsuki were the main ones using it. For the most part, Yuki and I tagged along with them and visited the orphanage on a daily basis while we worked on leveling up our Time Magic. I had invested a lot of points into Time Magic because I had felt certain it would be powerful, but so far, its utility had been limited. It had proven its worth in certain situations, such as when I threw a rock at a scalp ape and later when I gouged out the lava boar’s eye with my spear, but most of the time, the spells weren’t that useful in their own right, and they weren’t easy to cast even when I combined them with more familiar forms of magic. For example, shortly after arriving in this world, I had tested the Slow Time spell to see if I could cast it in combat, but I’d quickly determined that it would only have worked on weak foes. I wanted to use it on strong foes, but it seemed likely that they would be capable of resisting its effects, so it wasn’t very useful at all.

Fire magic was a much easier and more effective way to deal damage. There was a Time Magic spell called Pressure Field, which sounded like a powerful spell, but if I applied enough potency to crush a foe, one use would be enough to drain all of my mana. On top of that, the result of the spell would be grotesque: it would crush the target from above. With that in mind, the girls would probably disapprove of the results, and besides, it would also be impossible to retrieve materials from a crushed foe, so it simply wasn’t

acceptable for the purpose of earning money from monsters.

The only Time Magic spell that could be somewhat useful under ordinary circumstances was one I had learned recently called Planeshift, but it was also tricky to cast. The spell would divide a space of the user's choosing and bisect whatever was inside, but it would take quite a long time for me to set the area of effect for the spell before I could cast it, so there was no way I could land it on a mobile foe. I'd discovered that it could cleanly slice through very hard rocks if it landed, but it would be a disaster if I accidentally missed and landed the spell on one of my other party members. All Time Magic spells consumed a lot of mana, so Planeshift offered no advantages over Fire Magic. So far, the only Time Magic spell that had been useful in its own right was probably the Sanctuary spell, which was very good for keeping bugs away, but we could afford a magical device for the same purpose if we really wanted one.

However, despite all the disadvantages that I just described, the points that I had invested in Time Magic hadn't gone to waste. Actually, just the fact that Time Magic was essential to creating magic bags made the investment completely worthwhile. The main reason that my party was able to earn more money than other adventurers was that we could transport many more materials in our bags; the bags, along with alchemy, were the foundation of our decently affluent lives. That being the case, my Time Magic would have been quite useless without Haruka around.

"Man, I really want to upgrade my Time Magic," I said with a sigh. "As of right now, it's nowhere near as impressive as it sounds."

Yuki was taking part in my brainstorm, and she sighed as well after she heard my complaints. "Yeah, definitely. The biggest problem is that Time Magic spells aren't really effective relative to the amount of mana they require. Should we try to increase our mana capacity?"

"Nah, if we're going to brute force things with mana, then it would be better just to use Fire Magic," I said.

"Oh, right, we're both mages who can use different types of elemental magic," said Yuki.

Brute force via increased mana would have been an option for us if Time

Magic were the only type of magic that we could use, but that wasn't the case. Since I was an elf, I was capable of learning all types of magic, and Yuki was able to use Fire, Water, and Earth Magic in addition to Time Magic. Even if we did increase our mana, it would make more sense to use it for those other types of magic; there was no point in reserving it all for Time Magic spells. What we needed to figure out was a way to use Time Magic without expending so much mana per spell. Yuki and I were looking through the grimoire on Time Magic together for any hints that could help us, but...

"Let's talk this out, including the spells that we can't use yet," said Yuki. "What do you think about the Stagnant Field spell, Nao?"

"If I recall correctly, that's a barrier-type spell that affects everyone inside, including allies," I said. "It also slows down long-range attacks from allies, so I think it's pointless."

Arrows fired from outside of the spell's area of effect would be slowed more or less to a halt the moment they entered it. We might be able to take advantage of the Stagnant Field spell by firing a lot of arrows at it and then canceling the effect so that the arrows would be released in a huge barrage, but that wasn't exactly a strategy we could use in normal combat given how much mana the spell would consume.

"Do you think it's possible to somehow exclude allies from the Stagnant Field, Nao?" Yuki asked.

"Nah, I don't think Advastlis-sama would let us off that easy," I replied. "Hmm. Actually, he might—but only if there's some kind of demerit as well."

"Demerit? Such as?" Yuki asked.

"Well, maybe something like...people can move inside the spell, but whatever they're wearing won't?" I replied.

"Whoa, I bet you'd be really happy to see people rip their clothes off!" Yuki exclaimed. "However, you should never use it inside of town!"

"Huh?! There would be nothing for me to be happy about!" I exclaimed. "What I mean is that you might be bound by your clothes and unable to move, that's all."

Normal people wouldn't be willing to rip off their clothes in order to move around, and there was also the danger of suffocating if the air around people stagnated as well. With that in mind, the Stagnant Field spell wasn't exactly something that we could easily test out even if we could exclude allies from its effects.

"I guess that's a good point. Hmm. How about the Bend Sphere spell, then?" Yuki asked. "That lets us warp and crush the bodies of monsters, right?"

"That's a Level 8 Time Magic spell, Yuki," I replied. "We'll be capable of using the Planeshift spell for actual combat by that point."

Yuki was pouting. "Oh, come on, why are you refuting all of my ideas? Bring up some ideas of your own!"

"I mean, to be honest, that's kind of hard for me, because all I can think of are reasons that each spell might not be useful," I said. I had already thought things through to a certain extent, so it wasn't that easy to come up with useful ideas. Both of us continued to rack our brains for a while, but our brainstorming session was suddenly interrupted by someone else.

"Bam!"

It was Remi, who grabbed my back in a big hug as she shouted. She had taken to me quite fast for some reason. In fact, she would wander around near me whenever we visited the orphanage. She was a typical kid who would nap on my shoulders, lap, or even on my head when she got tired, although that last case was the most unusual. Kids were sometimes capable of balancing in weird spots and falling asleep.

"What's wrong, Nao-chan? Are you studying?" Remi climbed atop my shoulders and peeked at the book in my lap. "Um, I don't understand anything in that book!"

"Well, it's a book on Time Magic," I said. "Yuki and I are studying right now."

"Time Magic? Oh, magic!" Remi exclaimed. "Show me!"

"Uh, it's hard to show what we're doing right now," I said, but I had to cave after I saw that Remi's eyes were gleaming with excitement, so I chose a spell that would have an obvious effect. "Hmm. Okay, okay. *Light Weight*."

I lifted her up from my shoulders and held her in front of me, then let her go. Remi stared at me in confusion, but it seemed like she had noticed that the sensation of landing on the ground was different from usual, and she jumped up and down a few times and seemed amazed.

She stared at me again. “Whoa, magic! Remi can jump very high!”

Remi seemed very happy. She jumped at me, and I caught her in my arms and set her down on my lap.

“More, more!” Remi exclaimed.

“I’m sorry, Remi, but no,” I said. “The magic is about to wear off, so it’s dangerous.”

“Hmm, okay!” Remi exclaimed. She obediently nodded and sat in my lap without further complaint.

Yuki laughed when she saw that. “Ha ha, yeah! So that’s one way to make use of Time Magic spells!”

“I’m not so sure about that,” I said. “I think we would have to practice a lot to make it usable during actual combat.”

Using the Light Weight spell while we were moving around and exploring outside of combat would be fine, but it could be dangerous during combat if we couldn’t stabilize the potency and duration of the spell’s effects. It would be lethal if the spell ran out during combat and we suddenly slowed down.

“Well, fine, I suppose this is one way to go about it,” I said. “I wanted to use cool and stylish magic during combat, but I guess it’s better to go with stable spells that we can count on to be useful.” I sighed as I resigned myself to the idea of practicing the Light Weight spell.

Yuki’s mouth went wide in surprise as she stared at me. “Cool and stylish? Wait, was that your goal this whole time?!”

“Well, no, it wasn’t my only goal, but it was definitely a significant consideration,” I said. “Doesn’t the idea of something like a dimension slash sound cool to you as well, Yuki?”

“You’re talking about the Planeshift spell, right?! Well, yeah, it’s true that it

does sound cool to me too, but still!”

I covered my right eye with one of my hands and waved the other hand at Yuki to tempt her. “Hee hee, I know that you like the idea of things like invisible attacks as well. It’s time to unleash your inner edgelord, Yuki.”

I’m confident that you’re the only one among the girls who hasn’t forgotten those days, Yuki. You chose to get the aptitude for Time Magic during the character creation process, after all!

“N-No, stop, don’t awaken those memories!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Are you okay, Yuki-chan?” Remi asked.

Yuki and I both fell silent after we heard Remi’s voice. She was staring at Yuki.

I coughed and changed the subject. “We can talk about this on another day. For now, let’s practice using the Heavy Weight spell on objects and weapons that we can throw or use as projectiles.”

“Hmm?”

Remi seemed a bit confused, but I held her and patted her on her head to smooth things over. “Well, it’s not that hard to use the Heavy Weight spell on things that you throw yourself, but it’s hard to get the timing right with objects thrown by other people, especially if it’s something like an arrow that’s moving very quickly.”

The caveat I had mentioned also applied to advanced Time Magic spells such as Planeshift. It was impossible to use Time Magic spells on mobile foes without extensive practice.

“Yeah, that makes sense. The basics are important, after all,” said Yuki. “This will also be useful for getting to the point of performing dimension slashes in the future, tee hee!”

“Ugh, don’t laugh if you’re going to bring it up again,” I said. “All right, let’s start practicing.”

“Oh, Remi wants to help out!” Remi exclaimed. She hopped up and raised both of her hands in the air to indicate her eagerness.

“Oh, really? Thanks, Remi,” I said. “In that case, can you gather some small

rocks for us?”

“Okay!” Remi exclaimed. “Lots of rocks, lots of rocks!”

The method of practice that Yuki and I ended up agreeing upon was to cast magic on rocks thrown by Remi. After we had gotten a decent grasp of the Heavy Weight spell, we asked Haruka to join us so we could use the spell on her arrows for advanced practice. Casting the spell on rocks thrown by a little girl hadn’t been too difficult, but it wasn’t easy to cast it on arrows speeding through the air, so it took a few days before we had become competent enough to use the spell successfully in actual combat.

Ten days had passed when Diola-san finally contacted us with updates about all the issues we had asked her to deal with. In the meantime, Gantz-san had completed the repairs to Touya’s breastplate, and the rest of us had gotten somewhat tired of practicing magic at the orphanage, so the moment we got the word, we hastily made our way to the Adventurers’ Guild.

Although we were all gung ho, Diola-san looked quite tired when she greeted us. She guided us to a private room for what promised to be a long discussion.

“Um, are you exhausted, Diola-san?” I asked.

“Mm, I am,” Diola replied. “Not too long ago, I had ample free time, but recently, my days have been quite busy and *fulfilling* thanks to the efforts of some hardworking adventurers.”

There were some small dark circles under Diola-san’s eyes, and her hair, which was usually neat and tidy, looked a bit messy. On top of that, her eyes also seemed a bit scary as she stared at us.

“Well, I am glad to have work to do, since it benefits the guild—and benefits me as well; it directly affects my salary,” said Diola. “However, I would appreciate it if your party could go a bit easier on me in the future.”

“Um, I feel like you should direct those words to the monsters that have appeared around Laffan,” said Yuki. “We can’t really do anything about it...”

Diola-san looked down and sighed deeply. “Yes, I suppose that’s true. If unusual incidents become routine, they can no longer be called unusual, after all.” She slapped her cheeks, then looked up again and smiled at us. “Now,

then, first things first. Let's get the assessment for the lava boar out of the way. Your party wants to keep the magicite and the fur, correct?"

"Yeah," I replied. "This encounter was another reminder of the importance of armor, so we want to use those for ourselves."

Lava boar magicite was an alchemical material, and although we had no plans to use it right away, large magicites weren't easy to obtain, so we had decided to keep this one just in case. Money wasn't an issue for us at the moment, so it would be cool if we could craft an amazing magical device like the box that Ishuca-san had shown us.

"Money is pointless if you're dead, so I think that's a splendid idea," said Diola. "The fur has been handed over to the tanners. When their work is done, it will be returned to you. As for the tusks and the remaining meat—after subtracting the labor fees associated with the tanning and gutting, the total comes to 206,000 Rea."

"Oh, that actually sounds like a decent amount of money," said Touya.

"Well, you would get more money for the meat and tusks in a larger town," said Diola. "However, lava boar meat is tough and comes in huge volumes, so you can't get as much money for it here in Laffan; there isn't enough demand."

"Mm, that makes sense. Lava boar meat is harder to use than orc meat," said Haruka. "The liver didn't taste very good either."

We had actually received some parts of the lava boar the last time we were at the guild, and the girls had made a couple meals out of it, but it was hard to call it completely edible. It would eventually get soft if you simmered it for a long time, and it tasted pretty good because of how skilled the girls were at cooking, but ordinary citizens couldn't afford the time or the fuel required. It hadn't been too difficult for us because we had access to the Accelerate Time spell, which had proven very useful for simmering the meat, but it had still been a lot of work—so much so that the girls started talking about how they wanted a pressure cooker. As for the liver, which Touya's appraisal skill had described as a delicacy, it wasn't anything special. I didn't especially enjoy liver in the first place, and I couldn't tell the difference between lava boar liver and other kinds, so the "delicacy" description felt a bit inaccurate to me.

“It’s hard to sell lava boar liver unless you can find a buyer with unusual tastes,” said Diola. “Most people don’t enjoy eating raw food, after all.”

“Huh? Wait, is lava boar meat considered a delicacy because people eat it raw?!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Yes. You weren’t aware of that? It seems that people who eat lava boar liver usually hire the services of a mage who can use the Disinfect spell first,” said Diola. “As a result, it’s a delicacy that only rich people eat.”

Initially, Yuki sounded terrified at the idea of raw liver. “R-Raw liver? That sounds risky—or maybe not?” After a moment of reflection, she paused and tilted her head. “Um, Diola-san, is it safe to eat stuff like raw meat if we use the Disinfect spell on it?”

Since arriving in this world, none of us had suffered from an upset stomach, which was all thanks to the Robust skill. However, if the Disinfect spell could completely eliminate the risk of food poisoning, then it would be great to have. For one thing, it would make it safe for us to eat sashimi, a soul food that I really longed for as a Japanese person. Another problem we’d have to contend with in order to obtain sashimi was figuring out a way to reach the sea, but that was something to think about another day.

“From what I’ve heard, yes, it’s safe,” said Diola. “It seems that even without the Disinfect spell, it’s safe to eat raw lava boar liver as long as it’s fresh. However, be careful if you order for some at a dining establishment—there are some low-quality places out there.”

“I don’t think we’ll go out of our way to order lava boar liver, but do you have any examples in mind?” I asked.

“Well, apparently some places serve lava boar liver that isn’t very fresh and hasn’t been cleansed with the Disinfect spell,” Diola replied. “And there are even worse places that will serve you liver from other monsters like orcs and pass it off as lava boar... The list goes on.”

“Yikes, orc liver? Is that even something you can safely eat raw?” I asked.

Offal didn’t necessarily gross me out in its own right—places like Aera-san’s café served it—but raw offal was a different story, especially in a world where

hygiene and cleanliness weren't exactly widespread concepts.

Diola-san slowly shook her head. "If you're lucky, then you'll end up with nothing worse than an upset stomach. If you're unlucky, then..."

"Then...?" all of us asked in unison.

Diola-san paused for a moment before continuing. "A parasite will chew its way through your insides and burst out of your skin once it's done."

"Yikes, I had no idea parasites were that scary!" Touya exclaimed. "I'm not gonna say anything about rare meat being delicious anymore!"

"Yeah, I'm only going to eat well-done meat from now on," I said.

"Another option would be to use the Disinfect spell on our food every time we eat," said Haruka.

"Mm. We should learn how to use that spell as soon as possible," said Natsuki.

"I'm counting on the two of you!" Yuki exclaimed. "I absolutely don't want to get killed by a parasite!"

We all had grave looks on our faces, and Diola-san gave us a playful smile. "By the way, just so you know, there are a decent number of strong monsters that can be eaten raw. I don't recommend trying it out, however."

"We wouldn't try even if you recommended some to us, Diola-san," said Haruka. "It's not worth the risk."

"Mm, a wise decision," said Diola. "The worst results are quite horrifying, and __"

Diola-san chuckled as she was about to tell us something, but Haruka hastily cut her off. "Please, no, you don't have to go into detail! I don't want to know!"

"Really? I was simply going to talk about the wonders and dangers of nature," said Diola.

"That doesn't make it sound any more appealing," said Yuki. She shook her head, looking exhausted.

Diola-san had a happy expression on her face as she regarded Yuki.

“Um, Diola-san, is this your way of getting revenge on us for bringing you a lot of work to deal with?” I asked.

“Of course not, Nao-san,” said Diola. “I am merely providing your party with useful information so that you’ll know what to avoid and won’t end up with regrets.”

Uh, I don’t know if I can trust those words based on the way you’re smiling at us, Diola-san. It was true that the information Diola-san had provided us could prove quite useful, however.

“In any case, we’ll stop eating raw monster meat from now on,” said Haruka.

“Mm, I figured you would,” said Diola. “However, there are rumors that one can absorb the strength of powerful monsters by eating their meat, so...”

“That sounds like a typical rumor,” said Haruka. “I don’t suppose there’s any truth to it?”

“Nobody knows for sure—there’s no way to prove or disprove the rumors,” said Diola. “Besides, there’s no universally agreed upon definition of a powerful monster. Dragons would definitely count, but...”

“Dragons are legendary creatures, aren’t they? I guess I’ll keep this information tucked away in the back of my head.” Haruka seemed a bit exasperated; she sighed before continuing. “Well, those are still decent earnings from the lava boar even if we can’t sell the liver.”

Half of our earnings from the lava boar would go into the pool for shared expenses, and there was already more than enough to cover the repair fees for Touya’s broken breastplate. On top of that, we had also obtained a sturdy pelt that would be suitable for leather armor, which would be a great upgrade for the members of our party who didn’t wear heavy metal armor—namely, the girls and me.

“We also got some good combat experience fighting the lava boar,” I said.

“Mm. It wasn’t an easy battle at all, but we gained a lot from it,” said Natsuki.

We had to avoid mentioning levels and experience points around Diola-san, but everyone else in my party had leveled up twice from that one fight, just as I

had. Training was important too, but actual combat remained the best source of experience points.

“I don’t think I could handle fighting multiple lava boars back-to-back, however,” said Touya. “Are we likely to run into more, Diola-san?”

“I did some investigating, but there have been no reported sightings of lava boars around Laffan,” said Diola. “The lava boar that you fought could have crossed over from a different region or spawned spontaneously, but I can’t say for sure when there is no reliable information about the exact reason that monsters appear.”

It sounded like Diola-san was implying that there was a possibility we could run into more lava boars in the future.

“Is it possible for monsters to suddenly spawn out of nowhere?” I asked.

“Yes, that seems to be the case. Dungeons are very different from natural ecosystems, and the monsters also behave differently from normal animals,” said Diola. “Almost everything about monsters is shrouded in mystery.”

Orcs were the monsters that my party was most familiar with. Normal animals would often have offspring alongside them, but so far, we had only encountered adult orcs. Orcs also had large bodies, so a large feeding ground would be necessary for them to obtain adequate nutrition through hunting and gathering. The north forest probably wasn’t big enough to support packs of orcs numbering in the hundreds, and yet there were hundreds of orcs in the north forest somehow, and they hadn’t stripped the forest bare. According to Diola-san, the most widely accepted theory was that monsters fed off mana, and there was plenty of evidence supporting that theory, including the fact that there were more monsters in areas that were rich in mana, the existence of monsters like skeletons and ghosts that had no need of food for sustenance, and the existence of monsters in dungeons where there was no food available.

“However, another common theory is that monsters within a single area are all more or less equally powerful,” said Diola. “So if the other monsters in the north forest haven’t become stronger as well, that lava boar may be an anomaly.”

“I see. I’m glad to hear that,” said Haruka. “We’ll stay alert, however.”

“Mm, that’s a good idea.” Diola-san nodded and paused, then sighed as if to relieve some stress. “Now, then, the next thing we ought to talk about is the sword that your party handed over to me. The evidence I’ve gathered suggests that the sword belonged to the House of Nernas, and that means the abandoned mine where your party found the sword is the same one I told your party about before.”

Oh, yeah, she told us before about a lord who illegally carried out mithril mining operations without the permission of the monarchy, and she said that that lord is still missing. If I recall correctly, the younger brother of that lord returned from the capital and assumed the title of viscount, and the current Viscount Nernas is the son of that younger brother.

“Um, will there be any penalties imposed on us because we found the sword?” I asked.

“Oh, not at all,” Diola replied. “However, it would be best if you avoided talking about this due to the fact that it amounts to a scandal for our lord.”

“Yeah, we definitely won’t spread the story around,” I said. “We don’t want to make enemies for no reason.”

“Your discovery of the swords is a significant accomplishment in itself, however, so as long as your party agrees to sell them, you will receive a reward of one hundred gold coins on top of the base reward per sword,” said Diola. “Is that all right with all of you?”

“It’s not like we can actually use the swords ourselves, so that seems fine,” I said. “That amount of money sounds like a bit more than the market price, however.”

The market price of white iron swords was about fifty gold coins. We had retrieved four swords, each with a family crest engraved on it, so we would be getting an extra two hundred gold coins for selling all of them to the guild. Even taking into account that some fraction of the reward was probably hush money, it was still quite a lot.

When I looked at each of my friends in turn for confirmation, they all nodded. Diola-san sighed in relief after she saw that. “Thank you for being understanding. Also, I’d like to ask a favor from your party. Can you take a look

at this?”

Diola-san presented us with a quest poster that looked brownish and quite old. Haruka accepted the poster and the rest of us looked at it together.

“Hmm, let’s see,” said Haruka. “Retrieval of a family heirloom sword? The client that issued this quest is the House of Nernas, huh?”

“Yes. The missing lord probably took the family heirloom with him when he disappeared, but a lot of factors have prevented the retrieval of the sword so far,” said Diola. “I believe I talked about it a bit before, but let me explain in further detail.”

According to Diola-san, the missing lord had caused a lot of problems for the viscounty, and fixing things wasn’t easy for the younger brother who had inherited his title. His predecessor had instigated a situation so serious that every sensible noble avoided even associating with the House of Nernas, so the new Viscount Nernas had no one he could count on for support. On top of that, the local army of the viscounty had been severely depleted due to the fact that most of the soldiers had been loyal to the previous lord and obeyed his illegal orders, so maintaining law and order was another challenge facing the new viscount. As a result, he had neither the time nor the resources to devote to the search for his family’s missing heirloom.

“The younger brother didn’t try to force things, so in that sense, he was a good lord,” said Diola. “However, unhappily for him, another issue came up just after he had managed to stabilize affairs internal to the viscounty.”

Apparently the other issue was that acquisition of precious wood had become difficult due to the fact that monsters had grown quite strong around the areas where precious wood could be harvested. Precious wood was the key material for Laffan’s furniture industry, and the supply directly affected the financial situation of the viscounty. That being the case, the lord obviously had to prioritize obtaining a steady supply of precious wood over the search for a family heirloom. Fortunately for the viscounty, the previous lord’s younger brother was a sensible lord. He had given up on any hope of retrieving the family heirloom with his own hands and had instead issued a quest to the Adventurers’ Guild; meanwhile, he had committed the local army to obtaining

precious wood. However, that had only worked for a brief period of time, as the monsters had eventually become too strong for the local army to deal with, and the supply of precious wood in Laffan had dried up completely until recently when we brought some back to town ourselves.

“Was this quest actually on the bulletin board?” Yuki asked. “I don’t remember ever seeing it before.”

“No, you’re right. This hasn’t been posted on the bulletin board because it would be too hard for most adventurers in Laffan,” Diola replied. “They would be baited by the reward and die in vain, after all. As a result, this quest has continued to collect dust even though a new lord has inherited the title of viscount.”

“The reward is three hundred gold coins, huh? That’s three hundred thousand Rea,” said Touya. “That sum is quite high for a quest reward in Laffan, but...”

Touya’s voice trailed off, but Diola-san nodded. “It would have been a worthwhile reward back when it was issued, but it’s not as much now. However, it is a fact that your party is the only one that is probably capable of completing this quest. Your party will be rewarded with preferential treatment to a certain extent, so I would really appreciate it if you would all agree to accept this quest.”

“Preferential treatment, huh? Since you’re the one asking, Diola-san, I wouldn’t mind accepting this quest, but what do you exactly mean by preferential treatment?” Haruka asked.

“In addition to the reward for the quest itself, your party will be paid one hundred gold coins for the family heirloom,” said Diola. “A reward of fifty gold coins will also be provided for every sword you recover that has the crest of the House of Nernas engraved on it. You can probably find more of those in the same area where you found the first few swords.”

The skeleton knights we had slain were probably former soldiers in the local army under the command of the viscount, and if each one was wielding an engraved sword, we would earn fifty gold coins per slain skeleton knight. Given that we could inflict a lot of damage on undead monsters with our Light Magic, it would be like an easy gold rush for us.

“Are you saying that we’ll earn at least four hundred gold coins for the completion of the quest itself and even more depending on how hard we work, Diola-san?” Haruka asked.

“Yes, that’s right,” Diola replied. “You should be able to retrieve at least ten of the swords with the family crest.”

Oh, hmm. I guess that means we can shoot for a goal of around a thousand gold coins, huh? We all exchanged glances with each other, and Diola-san seemed to take that as a sign of interest. “Your party will also earn a lot of rank up points if you complete this quest.”

“Huh? Rank up points? Have those always been a thing?” I asked.

“Internally, yes. Your party’s actual prowess at combat and earnings are more than sufficient to justify a rank up, but the number of quests you’ve completed is a bit lacking,” Diola replied. “One reason for that is the paucity of quests that suit your current ranks, so that will be factored in when we consider promoting you, but I cannot make that decision on my own, since everything has to be recorded. But at any rate, you won’t get that kind of bargain very often in your entire careers as adventurers, so this is a good opportunity to earn rank up points while you can.” To emphasize how precious this opportunity was, Diola-san held up one index finger and smiled at us.

Is this some kind of loyalty program...?



However, it was true that we seldom got the opportunity to fulfill quests that suited our current ranks, which must have meant it would normally be hard for us to earn rank up points.

“In that case, I’m down to accept the quest,” I said. “Any other opinions?”

“Nah, I’m down as well,” said Touya. “For one thing, we were already planning to go back and explore the area where we found the swords.”

“Mm, there are no downsides to accepting the quest,” said Haruka. “Right, Diola-san?”

“Correct,” Diola replied. “The quest doesn’t have a deadline either, so feel free to work on it at your own pace.”

It sounded like there was no reason for us to decline, so we all nodded, and relief spread across Diola-san’s face. “Thank you all very much for accepting the quest. I feel very glad that I put in the effort to negotiate the fine details.”

“Huh? Wait, did you personally visit the current lord to negotiate with him?” I asked.

Diola-san chuckled awkwardly. “Candidly, yes, I did. There wasn’t anyone else I could count on to handle the matter, so I had to take care of it myself. It was quite exhausting, however.”

“O-Oh, um, Diola-san, thank you for your hard work,” I said.

It had probably been quite a lot of work for Diola-san; traveling consumed a lot of time in this world. It took three days by carriage to reach Kelg, a town south of Laffan. Pining, the capital city of the viscounty, was even farther south and would take an additional three to four days of travel. However, those numbers only applied if the speed of your carriage was limited by baggage. You could probably arrive at Pining in half of that time on horseback, but that still wasn’t nothing. The negotiation process itself would have required a fair amount of time as well, so relative to the obstacles she faced, Diola-san had definitely taken swift action.

“Mm, thank you very much for working so hard to deal with all of these problems, Diola-san,” said Natsuki. “I suppose that means we will have to work

hard as well.”

“Yeah, it would be wrong not to work hard after Diola-san managed to negotiate favorable conditions for us,” said Yuki. “The negotiation process itself must’ve been quite hard, right, Diola-san?”

“Somewhat, yes. However, providing support and assistance to adventurers is part of my job here at the Adventurers’ Guild,” said Diola. “All that matters to me is that the members of this party continue to work hard, *especially* during the autumn.” She emphasized those last few words and smiled pointedly.

What that means is that you want us to work hard at harvesting dindels when they’re in season, right, Diola-san?

I could respect the consistent value she placed on dindels, but there was also a chance that it was all just an act to put us at ease. One piece of evidence for that theory was the way the expression on her face quickly turned serious again before she resumed speaking. “However, please don’t force yourselves to take unnecessary risks. All of you are excellent adventurers and proficient at combat, but adventurers can easily die if they let their guard down or make even small mistakes, so please try to stay alert. I will be praying for your safe return.”

Diola-san’s words were harsh but caring at the same time, and we all responded with an “Okay!”

Chapter 2—Retrieval of a Prized Family Heirloom for a Quest

We had started making preparations the very day after we accepted the quest to retrieve the sword that was a prized family heirloom of the House of Nernas. It would be impossible to explore the abandoned mines thoroughly in a single day due to the distance between that area and Laffan, and they had been abandoned for a very long time, so thorough preparations were necessary for prolonged exploration. The first thing we worked on was upgrading our magic bags. Our current magic bags had already proven quite useful to us, but we had also significantly improved our abilities at magic in the time since we crafted them.

We had renewed the enchantments on the magic bags from time to time, but after some discussion, we all agreed that this would be a good opportunity to dispel all of the enchantments on the bags and start again from scratch. We could reuse the physical bags, so the only expenditure would be our mana. It would be an exhausting process, but it would improve the quality of our magic bags and would be a good opportunity to obtain more experience at that kind of enchantment, so there was no reason for us not to make the attempt. On top of helping to ensure our safety, the ability to carry more supplies with us would put us at ease psychologically.

Another part of our preparations was making medicine. Natsuki, with her Pharmacy skill, was the one responsible for that. All of the medicines she could make with the Pharmacy skill were less potent than magic, but they could serve as a backup option if we ever found ourselves in a situation in which we couldn’t use magic. We also had to stock up on food; we tried to fit as much as we could into the magic bags. It would have been too much under normal circumstances, but stories about miners being trapped in underground tunnels due to cave-ins were common back on Earth, and if that happened to us, there was no way we could expect help or supplies from the outside. A surplus of food might well end up being our lifeline.

Lastly, we stocked up on tools we could use inside of the abandoned mines. Natsuki and I worked together to purchase all sorts of general goods, while Haruka and Yuki collaborated in creating magical devices through alchemy. The goods that we purchased included rope, blankets, charcoal, long poles, large swaths of cloth, leather bags, and so on. We had no idea if we would actually use all of them, but they wouldn't drag us down if we simply tossed them into our magic bags, and our financial situation wasn't so dire that we couldn't afford these kinds of expenses. It would feel better to end up saying something like "We just so happen to have the right tool for the job!" than to be at a loss because we hadn't prepared adequately, and it was better to be safe than sorry.

As for Touya, he was stuck at Gantz-san's place by himself. He had been assigned a very important mission, namely improving our sleeping environment. We were going to be exploring an abandoned mine, and although we would be sheltered from the rain inside, we wouldn't be protected from the cold; the rocky floor of the mines was chilly and uneven. Blankets could help us endure the cold to a certain extent, but over time, it would definitely have a negative effect on us. With that in mind, we had searched around to see if there were any cots for sale, but there seemed not to be. When we had asked Gantz-san why that was, he told us that nobody would buy such a thing even if he had made some. Even cots that were simple enough to be used for camping would still be quite bulky, and the average adventurer didn't own any magic bags, so most of them would effectively be excluded from the customer base. As for the class of adventurers who could afford carriages, they had no need of cots; they could simply sleep inside of their carriages. Gantz-san's reasoning was that the product would be too niche to generate much demand, so he wasn't willing to help us with this project.

As a result, the girls issued Touya an absolute order: to obtain, at any cost, foldable cots similar to poolside deck chairs back on Earth. However, it wasn't exactly easy to create such things based on the image in our heads, and Touya had to ask for Tomi's help. They toiled away at the task for almost two weeks before completing some products that looked serviceable. We'd had plenty of idle time, so we had been able to handle all the other preparations, but Diola-san had warned us to be careful and to stay alert. Touya had suffered some

serious injuries back during our battle with a lava boar, so as we stocked up on food and tools, we adopted the mentality that more was better than less. Finally, we began our journey back to the abandoned mines.

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Enough time had passed since our last expedition that the middle of summer was now approaching. We hadn't visited the forests in quite a while, and it was hotter than we had expected. The trees blocked the sunlight to a certain extent, but it still felt quite hot in our armor.

"Man, summer has arrived in full force," I said. "I'd like to avoid intense combat in this weather if we reasonably can, but..." I wiped some sweat from my brow.

Touya gave me an exasperated look. "Bro, I'm the one who would have the hardest time fighting in this heat, and Natsuki would have it the worst after me. You can just cast magic at range if you want to, Nao, so don't complain."

"Hmm. Yeah, I guess you're right about that," I said.

During combat, Touya would swing around his sword on the front line, and Natsuki would mainly use her naginata to attack foes directly as well. The only time Natsuki would attack with magic was against undead foes, and she usually reserved her mana in case we needed healing magic after combat.

"I'm sorry if my words came across as a bit inconsiderate, Natsuki," I said.

"Don't worry about it, Nao-kun," said Natsuki. "I feel the same way as you do about the heat being uncomfortable."

She had a nonchalant expression despite her words, however. It wasn't like she wasn't sweating, but there were no signs of discomfort on her face, possibly because she was the best of all of us at disciplining her own emotions.

"Huh? What about me? Shouldn't you apologize to me first, Nao?" Touya asked.

He seemed genuinely puzzled, so I nodded. "Oh, right. Sorry, Touya, but I didn't really care about your feelings."

"I don't think that's what you're supposed to be apologizing about!" Touya

exclaimed.

“I’m just joking,” I said. “I really appreciate your hard work as a tank, Touya. Thanks, dude.”

Touya looked pretty surprised for a moment, but he quickly smiled as if my sincere praise had embarrassed him. “O-Oh, I see. Yeah, that’s more like it! We’re buddies forever, yep!”

“Hmm. It’s quite rare to hear you praise Touya like that, Nao,” said Haruka. “I know that you’re not lying, but even so...”

“Well, it doesn’t hurt to be sincere once in a while,” I said. “We need Touya to continue acting as our party’s meat shield, after all.”

I had been completely blunt once again, but Touya grinned and wrapped his arm around my shoulders. “Oh, do you feel embarrassed or something, Nao? Ha ha ha!”

“Ugh, get away from me, Touya!” I exclaimed. “Don’t cling to me in this hot weather!”

I pushed Touya’s fluffy body away and flapped my clothes to circulate air through them. It was enough for me to feel a fair bit cooler, probably because the actons we were wearing had a cooling function that Haruka, Yuki, and Riva had worked together to apply. The function itself was amazing to have during summer, but it was a shame that its effects were a bit limited.

“By the way, would it be possible to improve the cooling function of the actons slightly?” I asked.

Haruka and Yuki both shook their heads.

“Actually, that would be hard to do,” Yuki replied. “Or rather, in this case, better not to try.”

“There are multiple ways in which the function itself isn’t really adjustable,” said Haruka.

According to the two of them, it would theoretically be possible to improve the cooling function, but there were some issues, the first being temperature. Cooling the acton itself was one thing, but an auto-adjustment function was

another entirely. If the cooling function activated when we were sweating or when the temperature outside dropped, it might chill us too much or even cause us to catch cold.

Another issue was the amount of mana that the cooling function would consume. We'd turned our actons into magical devices that drew mana from the wearer. Obviously they would draw more if we strengthened the cooling effect. The extra mana consumption wouldn't be an issue for Haruka or me, but it would be dangerous for someone like Touya with less mana, especially because he needed mana for the Enhanced Muscles and Indomitable skills. And it would still be bad even for the members of our party with more mana, since an increase in the amount of mana we were expending unconsciously would pose the risk of accidentally messing up the management of our mana for the number of times we could use magic, which could lead to a fatal lapse during combat.

"That's why we've restrained the potency of the cooling function," said Haruka. "This was the best we could do while reducing the risk that the passive mana consumption would negatively affect all sorts of other things."

"We might be able to improve things through research and testing in the future, but for this summer, you'll have to make do," said Yuki, clasping her hands in an apologetic gesture. "Sorry, Nao."

I shook my head in response. "Oh, it's fine. The current cooling function is quite decent, so thank you very much for your efforts."

Most adventurers couldn't obtain anything like the actons we were currently wearing, so it was probably best not to ask for too much.

"We should do our best to avoid dehydration, however," said Natsuki. "Heat stroke can be fatal, after all."

"Mm. This is our first summer in this world, and taking a break from adventuring until autumn could be an option, depending on the circumstances," said Haruka. "We *do* have enough savings."

"A relaxing vacation, huh? We've sort of been neglecting our house, so that sounds like a decent idea," I said. "However..."

We owned a newly built house that we had paid a lot of money for plus the mansion that we had received from Edith. We had done the absolute minimum in terms of maintenance in order to prevent our houses from getting completely overgrown with greenery, but we hadn't exactly made good use of either of them. Yuki had mentioned that she wanted to try out gardening as well, which was an activity we could focus on for a few months after completing this quest. Summer was arguably not the best season for gardening, however.

"A vacation, huh? To be honest, I'd like to keep earning money whenever possible," said Touya. "I want to get a cute wife with animal ears as soon as I can, after all, so I need a lot more money."

"Huh? Are you planning on looking for a partner right away, Touya?" I asked. "You're not even twenty yet. Isn't it a bit early to be thinking about that?"

"Yeah, I guess you're right about that," said Touya. "But actually, maybe it's not too early in this world."

By our standards, the average age of marriage might be somewhat low in this world. Ordinary people probably had to start looking for partners around our age. That said, I had no idea what was typical for adventurers.

"Well, it's more like I figured you were the type of person who'd want to play around a bit more before considering marriage, so—"

Touya suddenly interrupted my words by wrapping his arm around my shoulders a lot more tightly than before. "Hey, Nao, don't you feel the urge to take a piss? Let's go together!" He gave me a hard shove on the back.

"What kind of childish excuse is that?!" I exclaimed. "Fine, I'll tag along with you. Sorry, we'll be back in a bit."

I wasn't feeling the urge to relieve myself quite yet, but it was a guy thing to piss together, so I played along with Touya. The girls seemed a bit suspicious of us even as I casually waved at them, but we walked far enough away that they wouldn't be able to hear us. However, instead of pulling down his zipper, Touya walked around in front of me, grabbed me by the shoulders, and stared directly into my eyes.

"Uh, sorry, Touya, but I don't swing that way," I said. "Good luck with finding

a husband, though.”

“That’s not it, Nao!” Touya exclaimed. “Tell me, what do you know?”

“Huh? Oh, is this about that time I saw you wandering around suspiciously in an area where there are brothels?” I asked.

When I admitted what I’d seen the other day, Touya grimaced as if something really bitter had been thrust into his mouth, then pulled himself closer to me with a scary look on his face. “How much money do you want, Nao?”

“Relax, I’m not trying to extort money from you or anything like that, Touya,” I said.

I wouldn’t have forgiven him if he had used some of the money that we’d set aside for shared expenses, but Touya was free to have some “fun” as long as he paid for it out of his own pockets. He was the only one who would be responsible for the results of his actions, after all. *Please get your face away from me, Touya! You’re way too close!*

Luckily for me, it seemed like my unspoken thoughts had gotten across to Touya; he let go of my shoulders, then clasped his hands together and bowed to me. “Please keep this a secret, Nao! Also, please learn how to use the Treatment spell!”

“Okay, Touya, that last part is asking for a bit too much. There’s nothing casual about that ‘also,’ dude!”

You’re free to do whatever you want in your own time, Touya, but don’t make me clean up your messes! That said, it would be detrimental to me if Touya had to drop out of our shared life as a result of not receiving the Treatment spell, so...

“Just to make sure...you didn’t go to a really sketchy brothel or anything like that, did you, Touya?”

“Nah, I was careful to avoid places like that. Haruka warned us about this before, remember?”

“I mean, for exactly that reason, I would normally tell you to stop going to brothels in the first place, but as a fellow young guy, I can’t really blame you,

so...”

It was sort of normal for teenagers to be painfully horny, and it seemed natural to me that beastmen might be hornier than other races.

“Oh, yeah, I figured you would understand as a fellow guy, Nao!” Touya exclaimed. “If you want, I can hook you up, so—”

“Nah, I’ll pass,” I said. “I don’t want to think about what might happen to me if Haruka found out...”

“Oh, right, I forgot that’s a thing in your case,” said Touya.

Touya looked at me as if he really pitied me, which vaguely offended me. “It’s not like I’m pussy whipped or anything like that. Besides, we’re not even dating, so...”

“I’ve always been confused about that,” said Touya. “Why haven’t you two gotten together? It’s been so many years, and yet...”

Touya’s look of pity quickly changed to one of exasperation after he heard my words. *I mean, that’s just how it is with childhood friends, Touya. It’s hard for things to change without some kind of opportunity or outside factor, you know?*

“It’s been like this for over ten years, yeah,” I said. “But enough about me for now. Let’s get back to what we were talking about before. Are you sure you haven’t caught any diseases?”

“I don’t think so,” Touya replied. “It seemed like the brothel I went to was a proper one that would check for that kind of thing. But there’s no guarantee, right?”

“Yeah, true. However, I’m not confident I can learn how to use the Treatment spell myself,” I said. “I can’t really commit too much time to leveling up my Light Magic, so...”

The Treatment spell could heal diseases, but it was a Level 6 Light Magic spell. It would be a different story if I had been the only person in our party who could use Light Magic, but we had Haruka and Natsuki around, so it was better for me to devote my time to improving my abilities at Fire Magic and Time Magic.

“I’ve been practicing Light Magic a bit here and there, but as far as I’m concerned, it’s mainly a support type of magic,” I said. “I can’t commit to something that isn’t efficient for our party as a whole.”

“Ugh, yeah, that reasoning makes perfect sense,” said Touya. “I would do the same thing if I were you.”

“Right? When the time comes, all I’ll be able to do to help you out is lower my head and beg Haruka for mercy alongside you,” I said.

“Oh, I knew I could count on you in times of need, buddy!” Touya exclaimed.

“I don’t really think this is a nice thing to bond over, but sure,” I said.

I would be begging the girls for help in order to save a friend who’d screwed up playing around with prostitutes. “Horrific” was the only word that came to mind to describe that situation.

Touya’s eyes shone with happiness as he shook my hands, but I shook him off and pointed a finger in his face. “However, don’t get too addicted to brothels, Touya. You’ll regret it if you burn through your savings. Remember that you have a dream to work toward.”

Touya groaned. “Ugh. Yeah, I’ll be careful for real.” He had a serious look on his face, so it seemed like he got what I was talking about.

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“We’re back!” Touya exclaimed. “Sorry for keeping you all waiting!”

Touya had a beaming smile on his face, but the girls looked at him like they were still suspicious. Haruka was the one that spoke for the rest of them. “You guys sure took your time. Are you done?”

“Yeah, we feel completely refreshed!” Touya exclaimed. He smiled in a way that did seem like he’d just emptied his bladder.

Haruka nodded. “I see. That’s good to hear.”

However, she had an awkward expression on her face as she cast the Purification spell on Touya and me.

“Oh, thanks!” Touya exclaimed.

“You’re welcome,” said Haruka. “More importantly, are you serious about trying to get married as soon as possible, Touya?”

“Yeah, Touya, we need to talk about this. We discussed it a bit among ourselves while you and Nao were gone, but if you’re going to retire from adventurer work, then we’ll have to discuss what to do as a party from now on,” said Yuki. “Also, are you really planning on living out the rest of your life with just your current savings?”

Touya had interrupted the discussion of marriage with his excuse about needing to go to the bathroom. (Actually, though, both of us really had relieved ourselves while we were at it.) Now that the girls had brought us full circle, he folded his arms in thought. “Yeah, it’s an issue that I need to take into consideration. I’d like to get married to someone who can do adventurer work with me, but...”

Unfortunately for Touya, I hadn’t seen any cute adventurers with animal ears in Laffan—at least not any that Touya would have found attractive. Or rather, I hadn’t seen any beastwomen adventurers at all, and the population of female adventurers of any race was close to zero, so a change of plans would be in order if he was serious about looking for a partner in marriage.

“Hmm. How about something like adopting some orphans?” Touya asked.

“Are you planning to raise an orphan as your future wife like Hikaru Genji did with Murasaki in *The Tale of Genji*, Touya?!” I shot back without really thinking. “That’s really creepy!”

It seemed like the heat had gotten to Touya and caused him to blurt out something ridiculous. As for the girls, they didn’t voice whatever they were thinking, but they were looking at Touya like he was absolute scum.

However, Touya seemed to be completely unbothered by their glares. He puffed his chest out and said, “Please, it would simply be an act of altruism! If I raise a lot of orphans, then maybe one of them will want to get married to me once she’s grown up, right?”

“Oh, that’s actually more reasonable than what I thought you were about to say,” said Natsuki. “I assumed that you were planning on doing something like adopting a child of your liking and brainwashing her into loving you or

something along those lines...”

Natsuki sounded quite relieved, but Touya stared at her. “Natsuki, I think we should sit down together to talk about your impression of me.”

“There’s no need for that,” said Natsuki. “I just told you what I think, Touya-kun, so...”

“Oh, come on, please don’t think of me that way!” Touya exclaimed.

He was fiercely objecting to Natsuki’s nonchalant response, but my opinion was actually the same as hers. *Sorry, Touya, but I think you would do almost anything to obtain a cute wife with animal ears. For one thing, you’ve already gone so far as to abandon your human self to become a beastman.* Haruka and Yuki were lightly nodding as well, so both of them probably had similar thoughts.

“Setting aside the question of whether or not there are a bunch of beastgirl orphans up for adoption,” Haruka put in, “Touya’s idea actually sounds somewhat realistic...which makes it a serious matter.”

“Yeah, it’s a pretty vile idea,” said Yuki. “Sure, some kids might say they want to get married to you once they grow up for you depending on how you interact with them, but the fact that you’re consciously aiming for that result makes it unacceptable.”

“Really? Orphans getting married to the people who adopt them doesn’t seem to be considered weird at all in this different world...”

For his part, it seemed like Touya had done some research into this topic beforehand. According to him, wealth and high income were generally considered the two most desirable traits in a marriage partner due to the fact that social welfare didn’t exist in this world. Ideals such as “love is all you need” would never work; you would simply starve. Ugly rich men were more sought after than handsome poor men, and apparently polygamy was accepted if you were rich enough to afford multiple wives. It was also especially hard for orphans to get decent jobs in this world, so orphans who got adopted as heirs or as marriage partners were considered winners in life.

“Is all of that true, Haruka?” I asked.

“Yeah, more or less. Men in this world are expected to provide financial stability above all. The next most desirable trait is personality,” said Haruka. “Looks are considered tertiary in terms. It seems like it’s the opposite for women, but a similar phenomenon occurs in regard to affluent women, so there’s no significant difference between genders.”

Based on Haruka’s summary, it sounded like men whose looks were their only positive trait would still have to woo women with money. *Hmm. Well, I guess that’s just how life is. I’m still young enough to have some romantic ideas about love, but...*

“Just so you know, Touya, you won’t be able to accomplish your scheme here in Laffan,” said Yuki.

“Oh, come on, don’t use a word like scheme,” said Touya. “Well, I guess it’s probably impossible to find orphan beastgirls around here...”

“Yeah, but that’s not what Yuki is talking about, Touya. If I recall correctly, you haven’t visited the orphanage behind the temple of Advastlis-sama in Laffan,” said Haruka. “That orphanage is properly managed, so someone like you with ulterior motives would definitely get rejected as a candidate.”

“I have altruistic motives, I swear...”

Touya sounded a bit unwilling to give up on his idea, and the girls all chuckled.

“I can’t really agree with you about that, Touya-kun,” said Natsuki. “Besides, the person who’s donated the most to the temple is Nao-kun.”

“Yeah, Nao would be a better fit for the definition of altruistic,” said Yuki. She grinned as she provided Touya with some additional info. “And there’s even a girl at the orphanage who likes him...”

Touya immediately turned around and gave me a look that was full of respect. “What?! Oh, my best friend never disappoints! I had no idea you were pioneering my strategy, Nao!”

“Don’t slander me with that label! That’s not it at all!” I exclaimed. “I’m different from you, Touya! I don’t have those kinds of ulterior motives! I really don’t!”

Remi seemed to like me for some reason, and whenever I visited the orphanage, she would stick to me the entire time. I was happy that she liked me and I thought she was a cute kid, but I couldn't consider her as a potential romantic interest. She was simply way too young. On top of that, she would call me Nao-chan, so I had no idea if she was even aware that I was a guy.

"Okay, chill, I get it," said Touya. "You know, you actually sound a bit suspicious just because of how defensive you're acting, Nao."

"Nah, Nao is free of guilt—as of right now," said Haruka. "That could change ten years down the line, however."

"The girl at the orphanage has refined facial features, so she has a bright future," said Natsuki. "It's definitely possible that Nao-kun will change his mind."

"Oh, come on, don't all of you pile on me like this," I said. "More importantly, we're almost at the area where we encountered the lava boar, so it's about time to focus."

"Tee hee, you're right about that," said Haruka. "The forests feel a bit different than before—it feels like the temperature has dropped a bit."

We were bantering, but we were still inside the forest, so after my Scout skill detected an increase in the number of monsters in the general vicinity, I warned the others to get ready. They listened immediately and began scanning our surroundings with serious expressions on their faces.

"It's a bit darker here than on the outskirts of the forests, and I feel like there are more shade plants too," said Yuki.

"Mm. I'm glad that it feels cooler here, however," said Natsuki.

"I can feel the presence of many more monsters than were here before," said Touya. "We barely encountered any back then, so..."

"Yeah, my Scout skill has also detected a bunch of unknown signals," I said. "It's possible that the other monsters weren't around last time because a powerful monster like a lava boar was here."

We hadn't encountered any monsters around here when we had been

running from the lava boar or when we had headed back to town after slaying it. In part, that was because I had made use of my Scout skill to steer us clear of other monsters, but it was also true that there hadn't been that many monsters to avoid. One way or another, we'd been so exhausted as a result of our battle with the lava boar that we were grateful when we successfully avoided combat with any more monsters. On the other hand, we wouldn't have been so exhausted if we hadn't been forced to fight the lava boar in the first place, so the positives and negatives had offset each other.

"I think we should try fighting a new foe first," I said. "Last time, we managed to 'enter' the abandoned mines without too much trouble, in a manner of speaking, but we'll have to change our plans if the foes here are stronger than expected, right?"

"I mean, the lava boar basically chased us into the abandoned mine, but that does sound like a good idea to me, yeah," said Yuki.

We definitely had to be wary of lava boars, but we also had to be wary of other monsters such as ogres that we wouldn't be able to escape from once they detected us. Our policy for new areas was to attack from the outskirts every time, so we carefully approached the signals that were closest to our location and found four monsters that looked similar to alligators. They were about three meters long from their heads to the tips of their tails, and wide enough that a grown adult wouldn't be able to wrap their arms all the way around them. In fact, they looked fat and sluggish, but based on some crucial extra information from the Third Eye Skill, we couldn't drop our guard.

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  Race: Killergator
Condition: Healthy
Skills: Bite, Poisonous Teeth, Water Magic
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The Poisonous Teeth skill obviously sounded dangerous, but we also had to be wary of their Water Magic. Up to this point, we hadn't fought any monsters with magic skills. It was possible that my Third Eye skill had merely been too low level to detect the magic skills of other monsters, but the likelihood of that being true seemed very low, since we had fought a lot of different kinds and

none of them had used magic against us.

"What's wrong, Nao?" Touya asked. "You sort of have a grave look on your face..."

"Well, they have the Water Magic skill," I replied. "Water Magic isn't exactly very powerful in terms of dealing damage, but magic used by monsters might be different from the magic that we know from grimoires, so keep that in mind."

"Oh, I didn't know you could see that much with your Third Eye skill now," said Touya.

"Yeah, I've grown a bit, but it might also just be the result of me having acquired more knowledge," I said.

My Third Eye skill was currently Level 3, and it was possible that I could see more thanks to multiple factors, including the higher level, my combat experience, and the knowledge that I had obtained from sources like monster encyclopedias.

"Monsters that can use magic, huh? This will be our first time fighting something like that," said Natsuki. "Are they terribly strong, Nao-kun?"

"Nah, they don't feel like they're that strong," I said. "However, I think it would be best if we slay them before they get an opportunity to use magic. Also, they're venomous," I added as casually as I could.

"Huh?! That's a really important piece of information, Nao!" Yuki exclaimed. She glanced over at me, looking anxious.

I grinned and gave her a thumbs up. "Don't worry, Yuki. They have a skill called Poisonous Teeth, but you'll be fine as long as you don't get bitten!"

"I mean, yeah, that's true, but still," said Yuki. "Oh well. Let's just do our best to *avoid* getting bitten."

I'm pretty sure that it won't be an issue if you just stay alert, Yuki. The plan for our initial salvo was for Haruka to fire an arrow enhanced by the Heavy Weight spell. It was a good opportunity to test the results of our practice, and it wouldn't be too hard for me to match Haruka's timing, since we could do it

before combat actually started. The two of us glanced at each other to confirm that we were both ready, and the moment she loosed her arrow, I cast the Heavy Weight spell on it. The arrow itself looked like any old arrow, but when it struck home, the results were completely different.

"Whoa, that's a really nasty combo," said Yuki.

Yuki sounded a bit spooked, which was a perfectly normal reaction. Haruka had used her masterful sharpshooter abilities and pierced through a killergator's eyes. One eyeball exploded the moment the arrowhead pierced it, and the shaft sank two thirds of its length into the killergator's skull before it stopped.

Natsuki and Touya had leaped forward the moment Haruka released her arrow, and now Natsuki sliced into the flank of another killergator with her naginata. But that wasn't enough to kill it in one blow, and it began to swing its massive tail, so Natsuki had to retreat.

Touya's target was the third killergator. He swung his sword down on its head, but the only result was a dull sound, and the monster didn't seem to have suffered any real damage. It opened its jaws in an intimidating display, which turned out to be a fatal mistake. It was the perfect target for Yuki: she shot a Fireball into its open maw. The killergator tried to close its jaws in time, but it was too late. Its belly swelled up with an explosive sound, and its body twitched for a moment before it at last stopped moving. Blood spilled out of its jaws.

"Two foes left— Whoa!"

One of the uninjured killergators released a jet of water, which Touya dodged just in the nick of time. The current grazed him and gouged a channel in the ground behind him.

"Their movements are pretty sluggish!" I exclaimed. "Probably best to attack them from the side. *Fire Arrow*!"

The killergators were actually nimble enough considering their size, but they moved around on stubby legs as they swung their tails, and they were much slower than monsters like orcs, so it was very easy to land attacks on them. Their backs appeared to be armored, so I aimed a Fire Arrow at a gator's fleshy flank, and the spell easily pierced all the way through it.

“Bro, aim for the one over there!” Touya exclaimed. “Either that or kill them in one attack!”

Touya pointed at the killergator that was rampaging around after Natsuki had wounded it. Natsuki seemed to be struggling to find an opening, but now I had wounded the last killergator that hadn’t taken any damage up to this point, so both of them were on a rampage now, and Touya retreated a bit as well to wait and see what would happen next.

“Yeah, my bad,” I said. “However, the way it’s thrashing around, I think the other killergator will die on its own eventually.”

Natsuki’s naginata attack had opened a wound between the killergator’s front leg and hind leg, and a lot of blood and organs were spilling out of the hole as it flailed around. *Yikes, it looks really gross.* The gator I had airholed was also spraying blood everywhere, but there weren’t any organs coming out. I wasn’t sure if that was because the wound itself was too small or if I hadn’t attacked a good spot.

“It’s hard to find an opening right now!” Touya exclaimed.

“Yeah, true, but it’s not like I can really do anything about it,” I said.

Touya couldn’t attack at range, so his complaints made perfect sense to me. I maneuvered over next to Touya and held up my spear, then lunged at a killergator. It wasn’t hard to deal them damage as long as I avoided their plated backs, and as I worked away at it, the killergator gradually slowed down and stopped moving.

“Whew. What about the other—whoa!”

The other killergator was already dead by the time I looked, its tail sliced in half. Natsuki must have been responsible for that. In fact, she was standing next to the sliced tail and smiling as she wiped blood from the blade of her naginata.

“I’m amazed that you managed to slice through its tail,” I said. “These killergators have some really tough skin on top.”

“Mm, it was a bit hard to slice through, but it wasn’t an issue after I circulated mana through my naginata,” said Natsuki. “And you handled the other killergator, Nao-kun, so that made it easier for me.”

It sounded like the reason that Natsuki had initially struggled to find an opening was because two killergators had been rampaging around her.

“Yeah, given how slim you are, I guess one whack from a killergator’s thick tail would be enough to break some bones,” I said.

Natsuki seemed pleased. “Tee hee. Thank you for being concerned about my well-being, Nao-kun,” she said with a smile.

Touya grinned when he saw Natsuki’s reaction, and he nodded before chiming in. “Yeah, Natsuki’s slim legs definitely wouldn’t survive an attack from a killergator’s tail!”

Natsuki responded to Touya’s words with a cold smile. “Just so you know, Touya-kun, blatant flattery can actually make people feel uncomfortable.”

“Ugh, I can’t believe there’s such a huge difference in the way that you responded!” Touya exclaimed. “What’s so different between me and Nao?!”

Touya’s complaints were perfectly fair, but his words met with exasperated looks from the girls.

“It’s because you were careless with your words the other day, Touya,” said Yuki. “Just now, you had a look on your face that basically said you wanted to make up for it, so your words didn’t sound sincere at all.”

“Mm. I could tell that you were blatantly trying to get on my good side again, Touya-kun,” said Natsuki.

“Ugh,” said Touya. “I wasn’t trying to offend anyone, so...”

Touya let his shoulders slump, and his ears and tail drooped as well. Touya must have been self conscious about the fact that he’d implied Natsuki’s legs were thick the other day after we defeated the bind viper. That was probably why he had tried to make up for it this time, but it was pointless given how obvious his intentions were.

However, I still felt a bit bad for him. I understood why Natsuki was bothered, but I tried to change the subject. “M-More importantly, Touya, how much are the killergators worth? It’s time for you to use your Appraisal skill.”

“O-Oh, yeah, I’ll get right on it!” Touya exclaimed. “Apparently the most

valuable part of killergators is their skin. Their meat is bland and mild—it's an easy-to-eat kind of meat. As for the standard value of each part, their magicites are worth eleven thousand Rea apiece, the skin is worth forty-eight thousand, and the meat is worth fifteen thousand."

"Huh? It sounds like these killergators are actually worth more than ogres," I said.

Magicites from ogres were worth about ten thousand Rea, and their pelts were worth about forty thousand. On the other hand, ogre meat wasn't worth any money at all. The price of magicites was stable, but the value of other monster parts varied depending on how useful they were. As a result, the value of a monster's parts wasn't always proportionate to its strength, although I felt a bit conflicted about the fact that killergators were worth about fifty percent more money than ogres even though the killergators had been easier to slay. A battle against four ogres at once would have been much harder.

"Ignoring the other parts of a killergator, I wonder if the value of their magicites means that they're stronger overall than ogres," said Yuki.

"I'm not completely sure about that," said Haruka. "Killergators are capable of using magic, so perhaps that's one reason that their magicites are worth more."

"Oh, yeah, magic," I said. "The spell that it used actually looked quite powerful."

I checked the ground where the killergator's spell had landed, and the water had gouged a hole that looked like it was about five centimeters deep and three meters wide.

"That was the Water Blast spell, right?" Yuki asked.

"Yeah, it's the only one that comes to mind, but the Water Blast spell isn't normally that powerful," I said.

"Mm. It's normally only powerful enough to stagger a target if used up close," said Haruka. "I guess it's possible that magic used by monsters is a bit different from our magic after all..."

"With that in mind, we should stay alert and avoid blindly believing the information provided by the Third Eye skill," said Natsuki. "In addition, it's

possible that there are differences between individual monsters of the same species. When you think about it, the Fire Arrow spell that our party uses a lot is now completely different from what it was in the beginning."

"Yeah, we're not in a game where monsters are all the same," said Yuki. "Anyway, I'm kind of glad that we found a new monster that we can earn a lot of money from."

"Good point," said Touya. "We slew four alligators, so that adds up to about...three hundred gold coins?!"

Three hundred gold coins was about the same amount of money that we would earn from slaying six ogres. Ogres were far from easy to defeat; comparatively, killergators were no challenge. In fact, in terms of what we could realistically accomplish in a single day, killergators would probably be the best source of income for us; we couldn't earn any more from precious wood for a while, but if we continued to hunt killergators at this pace, each of us would be able to earn the equivalent of one hundred million yen per year.

"Hell yeah, I'm really motivated now!" Touya exclaimed. "Let's keep this up!"

Touya seemed quite pumped about this new potential source of income, but that wouldn't change our strategy as a party. The killergators might not be very strong, but they were still new foes that we weren't yet accustomed to fighting, and there was also a chance that we would accidentally mess up during combat due to the hot weather. With that in mind, the best approach for us was to avoid taking risks and spend a few days exploring.

As we ventured deeper into the forest, we encountered two additional types of monsters for the first time. One was called a camouflage spider. It was a fat green spider with a body over three meters in length. When we encountered one for the first time, the screams from the girls were quite loud—in part, no doubt, because the spider eluded my Scout skill and suddenly appeared in front of us, descending from the treetops. But the main reason for their reaction, of course, was the simple fact that it was a spider. I myself got goose bumps when I saw it.

The other monsters that we encountered were stab rabbits. They were only about fifty centimeters long, and they would jump out of holes in the ground

and try to stab our legs with their long, sharp teeth, but they weren't a threat to us. For one thing, we could easily detect them with the Scout skill. For another, stab rabbits looked pretty scary and weren't cute at all, so the girls were perfectly calm whenever they beheaded the ones that attacked us. However, stab rabbit meat was delicious, and their pelts were worth a lot due to their beauty and quality. Other monsters like ogres and orcs would show up from time to time, and we would slay them as we carefully explored the forests. In the end, it took us almost a week of exploration before we finally arrived at the abandoned mines once again.

There were still traces of our battle outside the abandoned mine. I had no idea if it was because the mining had been carried out in secret, but the open space didn't appear to have been cleared very thoroughly, and there were fragments of wood everywhere from the trees that the lava boar had knocked down, along with huge craters in the ground. The smell of blood, which had been thick in the air, was gone by now, but all of the other detritus remained to remind us that we had been fighting for our very lives, and as a result, we shifted from a somewhat relaxed mood to a more somber one.

"We've finally arrived," I said. I turned toward Yuki. "Oh, by the way, you girls crafted some magical devices that will help us inside of the abandoned mine, right?"

Yuki grinned at me and wrapped her arms around my shoulders. "Oh, do you want to know, Nao? I'll be more than happy to tell you what we accomplished!"

"...Keep it short."

She was being kind of annoying, but she had used the word "accomplished," so she and Haruka must have worked quite hard. It probably wouldn't hurt to indulge her and listen for a bit.

"Tee hee! The first thing we crafted was this special compass here!" Yuki exclaimed. "What's special about it is the fact that there are no magnets inside!"

The object that Yuki showed me didn't look like a compass at all. In fact, it looked like an A4-sized drawing board. There was a piece of graph paper slotted into the front.

“It’s meant to be used together with another unit,” said Yuki. “Normal compasses sometimes don’t function underground, especially in areas like mines where there’s magnetic material all around, so that’s why we went with this instead.”

“The main unit is this device here,” said Haruka. “We can just set it up at the entrance of the abandoned mine.”

The object that Haruka took out and placed on the ground was a box that looked like a small microwave. She pressed one of the buttons on top, and direction arrows, along with two numbers, appeared on the drawing board that Yuki was holding in her hands.

“Mm, it looks like it works!” Yuki exclaimed. “So, the numbers here are the distance and the altitude difference between the main unit and the extension unit in my hands.”

The numbers changed each time Yuki moved the drawing board around. The resolution looked like it was about ten centimeters.

“Whoa, I didn’t expect this to be such a high performance device,” I said. “This will probably make mapping out new areas a lot easier, huh?”

“It definitely will!” Yuki exclaimed. “But also, you’re not the one on mapping duty, so you shouldn’t say that—I’m the one in charge, Nao, and I did it last time too!”

“I mean, the map that you made last time was quite good, Yuki, so I know that I can trust you to make a good map again,” I said. “I’m pretty sure that I would never have been able to draw such an accurate map myself. With that in mind—I feel bad asking you to do this again, but can you handle mapping duty?”

“Please—flattery will get you nowhere,” said Yuki. “I understand that I’m suited for this duty, so I’ll do it, but still!”

“Does he even have to flatter you, Yuki?” Touya asked. “You’re always nice to him.”

“Shut up, Touya,” Yuki replied. “Anyway, some other magical devices we crafted: gas detectors. We didn’t really have a good safety measure last time, but now we’re prepared. These detectors will sound an alarm and vibrate if

there's any toxic gas nearby, so equip them, like, on your shoulders or somewhere like that."

Yuki took two small box-shaped magical devices out of her magic bag and foisted one of them on Touya along with a belt. Touya accepted them without asking any questions, but then he cocked his head. "Hey, why did you give *me* the first one?"

"Gas tends to rise to the top or a room or fall to the bottom depending on whether it's lighter or heavier than air," said Yuki. "You're the tallest person in our party, Touya, so that's why."

"I'll attach the other detector to my ankles," said Haruka. "That way, we're covered from above and below."

According to Haruka and Yuki, the best way to use the gas detectors would have been to wrap one around your head like a headlight, but it wouldn't have looked nice and, more importantly, would probably have gotten in the way during combat, so they had factored in those considerations when crafting these gas detectors.

"Uh-huh," said Touya. "But by the time toxic gas reaches shoulder height, won't I have already inhaled some?"

"Don't worry, Touya," said Haruka. "The detectors are sensitive—they'll detect toxic gas before it's concentrated enough to do you any harm."

"Weight isn't the only thing that distinguishes different gasses from each other," said Yuki. "The airflow is another factor."

Touya nodded. "Oh, yeah, I guess that makes sense."

Gasses were more fluid than solids or liquids, so nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide wouldn't separate out in an enclosed space. The same presumably applied to toxic gasses, so we probably wouldn't have to worry too much considering that the environment we would be moving around in was a cave.

"Well, in the worst-case scenario, if there's a toxic gas that's lethal to inhale even in small amounts, then..."

"Then what, Haruka?" Touya asked.

She shrugged. “Then you should just give up.”

“Huh?!”

“I mean, there’s nothing we can do in that kind of situation,” said Haruka. “Don’t worry, Touya. We have the Cure Poison spell, and if you’re still alive, we’ll drag you with us when we retreat—as long as we can afford to do so.”

“Are you saying that you’ll leave me behind if the situation is really dire?!” Touya exclaimed. “It would be understandable, but still...” Even as he added those calmer, more rational words, he had a sad look on his face.

Yuki tapped Touya on the shoulder. “It is what it is, Touya. The rational decision would be to prioritize Haruka’s and Natsuki’s safety.”

“Yeah, we won’t have any healers if we lose the two of them,” I said. “If it comes down to it, either Touya or I should be the first to fall.”

“There’s no need to worry so much about this,” said Haruka. “The gas detectors can detect the most common toxic gasses with no difficulty. We crafted these together, Yuki, so you should know.”

“Ha ha, yeah, I was just joking,” said Yuki. “We’ll probably all die together if the gas detectors don’t work, so no one will be left behind!” She made a sideways peace sign and winked at us.

I had no idea how to reply to those words. Even if we were all dying, our party would be cheerful as long as Yuki was around, but it still wasn’t a pleasant outcome to contemplate.

“Man, I don’t like the idea of that at all,” said Touya. “I’m fine embracing death when the time comes, but I really don’t want to become an undead monster.”

“Yeah, same,” I said. “If I die, I’d prefer for somebody to retrieve my body or just burn it.”

There was one part of a zombie’s body that was always completely exposed, and unlike in a video game with an ethics rating, there was no mosaic to cover it. I have no intention of mentioning exactly what part I’m talking about, and nobody else in my party had brought it up either, although Touya and I would

definitely have chatted about it if it had been just the two of us here. Turning into a skeleton wouldn't be nearly as bad, because nobody would be able to tell that it was me, but I didn't relish the thought that I might have to become a zombie first.

"...We should probably stop talking about this," said Natsuki. "We do have a professional jinxer among us."

"Oh, come on, not you too, Natsuki!" Touya exclaimed. "Sure, I jinxed us last time, but..."

"Don't worry, Touya," said Haruka. "This place used to be a mine, so the chances of encountering unforeseen problems are probably quite low."

I felt like Haruka might have just jinxed us, but the jinx would probably only strike if I commented on it, so I chose to remain silent.

"Everyone ready?" Haruka asked. "Okay, let's enter the abandoned mine."

Natsuki led the way.

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Our objective was to retrieve a sword that was a prized heirloom of a noble family, so it wasn't necessary that we map out the abandoned mine in its entirety. However, we had no idea where the sword was actually located, so our only option was to search the mine thoroughly. We descended to the place where we had turned around on our first foray, and Yuki resumed the mapping work.

We explored slowly to make sure nothing would escape our notice. All of the foes we encountered were undead monsters; there didn't seem to be any monsters that had wandered in from the forest outside. However, the undead monsters reliably appeared in groups of fewer than ten, so Haruka and Natsuki easily banished them with the Purification spell. All Touya and I had to do was retrieve the magicites lying on the ground afterward.

Just as a precaution, I remained on alert, but my Scout skill had leveled up, so there was no way I would fail to notice shadow ghosts, and scouting out foes inside of the abandoned mine was much easier than in the forests, where the greenery obstructed my line of sight. The muggy summer weather didn't

trouble us inside of the abandoned mine either, but exploration was very boring. Yuki didn't need to contribute to combat any more than Touya and I did, but boredom was less of an issue for her; her mapping duties at least kept her using her brain. In a way, she was the one member of our party who had to devote the most energy to her assigned duty. As we explored, she would periodically stop in her tracks and mumble to herself, drumming her fingers on her forehead, while she counted squares on the graph paper. It looked like a lot of work, so I wasn't dumb enough to voice my own feelings of boredom.

Touya, however, wasn't as careful as I was.

"Man, there's nothing for me to do. I'm so bored."

Veins stood out in Yuki's forehead. "...Haruka, Natsuki, it seems like Touya wants to do some melee combat against zombies. He was talking about how it would be cool to try out some joint lock techniques..."

"Huh? I never said anything like that!" Touya exclaimed.

"Getting drenched in the juices from rotten meat should be a good cure for your boredom, Touya," said Yuki, sounding absolutely serious.

Touya lowered his head. "Okay, I'm sorry!"

Yeah, Touya, it's not right to complain about being bored when Yuki's working so hard.

"Do you want me to take over, Yuki?" I asked. "You must be burnt out, right?"

"To be honest, yeah, I am," Yuki replied. "But don't worry about it. The final map might become inaccurate if I swap with you at this point."

"The map doesn't have to be extremely detailed," said Haruka. "All we need is something that's detailed enough that we don't get lost."

"Yeah, I know, but if I didn't draw out all the little passageways, I feel like we would get confused and waste more time," said Yuki. She had a self-deprecating smile on her face. "For now, I'll continue giving it my best."

Haruka nodded. "If you say so, Yuki. However, we should probably call it for today. We need some time to prepare our campsite."

"It's hard to be certain of the time in here, but it must already be that time of

day,” said Natsuki.

While exploring the forests, we had generally returned to Laffan in the evenings, but that wouldn’t have been an effective way to explore the mine, so our plan was to make camp inside until we found the heirloom sword.

It was probably evening by now. It would normally be a bit too early to go to bed, but this was our first time camping out in a place like a mine, and Yuki looked like she was very tired, so it seemed like a good idea to stop and make camp with plenty of time to spare just in case. We all agreed with Haruka’s idea and chose a dead-end passageway as the site for our camp. The end of the tunnel was actually fairly spacious. We lowered our luggage to the ground there.

“All right, we should probably start by preparing the things we’ll be sleeping on,” I said.

“Oh, I guess it’s finally my turn to contribute!” Touya exclaimed. “This is an opportunity for me to make up for my mistakes. It’s time to debut my own amazing, blazing-hot invention!”

“We can’t exactly sleep on something that breathes fire, but we’re counting on you,” I said. “None of us have seen the finished product.”

“Heh heh, behold the result of my hard work—and Tomi’s!” Touya exclaimed.

Touya presented what appeared to be some deckchairs that could be folded in half. They were pipe frames, about two meters in length when fully extended, with cloth stretched over them. They weren’t that wide, but they were long enough that even Touya could sleep with his legs stretched out.

Touya unfolded one of the deckchairs and adjusted the length of its eight legs in order to set it up horizontally as a bed. He puffed out his chest before continuing with his spiel. “Check it out! The parts we struggled with the most were making the length of the legs adjustable—and the reclining function.”

“Hmm, these look quite decent considering they’re just bent pipes with some cloth stretched over them,” I said. “However, a reclining function doesn’t seem necessary!”

“Nah, it’s actually quite important,” said Touya. “Good sleep quality comes

from sleeping on a good bed, so being able to relax is important."

"Reclining is for taking it easy while on vacation," I said. "It's not at all necessary for adventurer work."

Are you telling me that we should relax with tropical drinks in our hands here in a dingy abandoned mine, Touya? I stared at him for an answer, but he just chuckled and shrugged. "Well, yeah, it's actually just an extra function. You can extend the legs of a deckchair near where your head will lie. The main goal was just to make it so you can sleep horizontally even in places where the ground isn't flat. And it wasn't easy to implement the adjustment function, actually."

"Yeah, that's definitely important," I said. "You'd probably wake up way more tired after sleeping on a deckchair that was wobbling or tilting the whole time."

Yuki immediately lay down on a deckchair and rolled around, but the eight legs remained perfectly stable, so it didn't wobble at all, and the cloth stretched around the pipes didn't come loose either.

"Oh, this is actually quite nice!" Yuki exclaimed.

"These deckchairs look quite well made," said Natsuki. "So much so, in fact, that I'm sure I'll feel safe sleeping on them."

"Right? Tomi and I worked hard to make them sturdy!" Touya exclaimed. "They'll have to handle a lot of weight if we sleep in our equipment, after all!"

The girls all muttered "Weight?" in unison.

Touya hastily added, "I-I mean, I definitely weigh over a hundred kilos, so that would be pretty hard on a deck chair, ha ha ha!"

"In any case...we couldn't find any insulation mats for sale," said Haruka, "but these deckchairs look like they'll be sufficient to protect us from the cold ground."

"Mm. Most adventurers would simply spread their cloaks on the ground, or some slightly waterproof cloth," said Natsuki. "We can't sleep in sleeping bags either due to the need to stay alert against monster attacks." She smiled. "Thank you for preparing these deckchairs for us, Touya-kun."

"It's all good! I didn't want to sleep on the hard ground any more than anyone

else, so yeah!” Touya exclaimed. He laughed dryly to himself and then muttered under his breath, “Whew, I’m safe. I was almost screwed.”

I still think you should be more careful with your words, Touya.

“It’s nice that we don’t have to set up any tents,” said Yuki, “since we don’t have to worry about dew in here.”

“Mm, that’s true,” said Haruka. “If it gets too cold, we can set up tents and cast the Warmth spell inside, but...”

“It feels cool here, but it’s not that cold,” said Natsuki. “One reason for that is probably that we’ve been moving around.”

The temperature of the tunnel felt like it was around fifteen degrees Celsius. I wasn’t completely sure about that, because the same temperature could feel very different depending on the season. It did feel a bit too cold to sleep, but not so cold that we wouldn’t be comfortable simply covering ourselves with blankets.

“That said, we should probably switch out our actons for normal clothes,” said Haruka. “There’s no need for the cooling function in here.”

“Oh, yeah, you mentioned before that you couldn’t make the cooling function adjustable,” I said. “It hasn’t bothered me so far, though.”

I would have suspected that the cooling function of the acton would have caused me to feel quite chilly due to how low the ambient temperature was, but that didn’t seem to be the case. *Hmm. Actually, if the temperature feels this low while I’m wearing my acton, then I guess the actual ambient temperature is a bit higher than I initially assumed.*

“I’m pretty sure we’ll feel colder when we’re not moving around... Okay, so we need to prepare a change of clothes, and what else?” Yuki paused to look around our environment, and then she tilted her head. “Huh? Wait, are we done already? Were makeshift beds the only things that we needed to prepare?”

“Mm. We have complete meals stored in our magic bags,” said Natsuki. “We can start a fire and drink some tea if we want.”

“That sounds like a nice idea,” said Haruka. “After that, let’s go to sleep early. I don’t think any of us are sleepy yet, but it’s necessary in order to get enough hours of sleep.”

We were in a group of five, so the ideal shift system would be to have two people on lookout while the other three slept. It would take a total of twelve hours for everyone to get at least six hours of sleep. It seemed extremely inefficient to spend an entire half a day camping out, but it would be pointless if we reduced our sleep and got so fatigued that we suffered injuries due to inattention. With all of that in mind, we had no choice but to camp out for half of a day each time for the sake of safety and consistency.

“Just as a precaution, I’ll cast the Sanctuary spell to repel bugs,” I said. “We have no idea what might be inside these tunnels.”

“Yeah, that’s really important!” Yuki exclaimed. “The idea of bugs dropping from the ceiling while we’re asleep sounds really nasty!”

Haruka had a serious expression on her face and paused in thought as if she had realized something after hearing Yuki’s words. “When you put it like that, it might actually be useful to set up tents here.”

At our level, even attacks from other humans didn’t do us a lot of damage anymore, so there was no need to worry about being stung by bugs. However, it would be pretty distressing if bugs dropped on our faces, especially if they somehow managed to get inside our mouths.

“Relax, Haruka,” I said. “The Sanctuary spell is perfectly capable of repelling bugs.”

“I’m counting on you, then, Nao,” said Haruka. “I’m pretty sure I won’t be able to hold myself back if a bug falls on me.”

She stared at me, sounding deadly serious. *What do you mean by that, Haruka? Well, I probably don’t want to know, so I guess I’ll stop thinking about this.*

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Luckily for me, I woke the next morning without ever having learned what Haruka couldn’t hold back from doing. Monsters hadn’t attacked us during the

middle of the night, and the deckchairs that Touya had prepared for us as makeshift beds were very good, so our fatigue from yesterday was completely gone. We swiftly finished breakfast, then resumed our exploration of the abandoned mine, but we were interrupted before too long.

Yuki dashed in front of the rest of us and blocked our way.

“Listen up, everyone! I have a very important announcement to make!” she declared. “I’m a different person today, tee hee! A brand new Yuki-chan is here!”

She was wearing a weird smile, and the rest of us exchanged glances. We seemed to have reached the same conclusion, so I placed one hand on my forehead and shook my head. “I guess we made you work too hard yesterday, Yuki. The overuse of your brain caused your intelligence to drop, huh?”

“That’s not it at all!” Yuki exclaimed. “How did you come to that conclusion?!”

“Do you really want to know?” I asked. “Are you sure you won’t regret asking?”

“Um, wait, let me think about this,” Yuki replied. She glanced up at me, looking a little anxious. “Am I going to hear something that I’ll wish I could forget?”

Haruka chuckled. “Where has your confidence gone, Yuki?”

“I mean, as a girl, I’m scared about what Nao might say! Wait, no, that’s not important right now!” Yuki threw out her chest as if she had remembered what she was going to announce, then extended her right hand. “This might come as a surprise, but based on what I saw when I checked my status screen last night, it seems I have obtained a skill called Mapping, and it’s Level 1!”

“Seriously?! Whoa!” Touya exclaimed. “Does it automatically map out the areas that you walk through?!”

Yuki grimaced and shook her head. “Nah, it’s not quite that convenient.”

“In that case, does it display a translucent map like our status screens?” Touya asked.

“No, it doesn’t,” Yuki replied.

“Oh, does it display a map of the surrounding terrain in your head or somethi—”

“Your mind has been ruined by video games, Touya! There’s no way a skill would ever be that convenient!” Yuki yelled as if she had lost her patience. “Just think about all the skills we’ve discovered up until now! Think about what kind of god Advastlis-sama is! It’s just a skill that assists me with creating a map by hand!”

After Yuki finished yelling, I asked her for more details. Apparently the Mapping skill would make it easier for her to keep track of the cardinal directions and the surrounding terrain, and it would improve the accuracy of her drawing.

“That’s it? That doesn’t sound that impressive,” said Touya. “I got excited for nothing, huh?”

“Oh, come on, is that how you’re going to respond after how excited you sounded? Gosh, I can’t believe you!” Yuki exclaimed. She sounded a bit angry.

Touya shook his head; he seemed exasperated. “I mean, you’re the one who tried to hype it up, Yuki. You kind of set yourself up for this, you know?”

Sorry, Yuki, but I have to give this one to Touya.

“Well, it’s a skill with levels, right? So there’s a chance it will evolve into something better after you level it up a few times,” I said.

My Third Eye skill had become better and easier to use, and there was a chance that at a higher level, Yuki would unlock an automatic mapping function like Touya had speculated abo— *Actually, maybe not? Advastlis-sama designed these skills, so...*

“To be honest, I think the Mapping skill will be quite useful as is,” said Haruka. “It might not make a drastic difference, but even so...”

“Mm. Mapping duty looks like a lot of work, after all,” said Natsuki. “The Mapping skill should help you out, right, Yuki?”

“Tee hee, please look forward to seeing good results from the brand-new Yuki-chan!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki smiled and seemed to cheer up after Haruka and Natsuki backed her up, and as it turned out, the “new Yuki-chan” was actually something of an improvement. She didn’t really seem to be drawing much faster than before, but the number of times she stopped to confirm the direction did significantly decrease, which did allow us to explore more quickly on our second day in the mine. However, the biggest difference was that Yuki herself seemed less fatigued. We were exploring an abandoned mine—an environment that was completely unfamiliar to us—so mental fatigue was by no means an insignificant consideration. I had assumed that if we ever cut short a day of exploring, it would be because of mental rather than physical fatigue, so it seemed like Yuki’s new skill was really helping us keep advancing smoothly. The five days after we entered the abandoned mine passed without any real issues.

However, despite the amount of time that we had spent exploring the abandoned mine, we still weren’t even close to exploring the entire place. We had encountered a total of over two hundred monsters and had retrieved a few dozen engraved swords, but we had yet to stumble upon the family heirloom we needed to complete the quest. On top of that, the deeper we explored, the more often we encountered groups of undead monsters, which slowed the pace of our exploration somewhat. Their magicites would be a decent source of money, but I felt kind of awkward about the fact that Touya and I couldn’t do much of anything to help, whereas the girls were working really hard.

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Maybe I jinxed myself by thinking that, because from the sixth day onward, things got different. The undead monsters we had encountered so far were mainly zombies and skeletons along with the occasional ghost, but the number of undead monsters decreased as different monsters started to appear. One of the new kinds of monsters we encountered were giant bats, which attacked us from above in almost total silence. They were somewhat dangerous due to the fact that I had a hard time detecting them with my Scout skill, albeit not as dangerous as shadow ghosts. Fortunately, Touya’s ears could detect the ultrasonic chirps that the bats emitted, so we had yet to be caught completely off guard.

Night snakes were another variety of monster that we encountered for the

first time. They were about one meter long, but in spite of their size, the color of their skin allowed them to blend in with their surroundings, and they would wait in dark places to ambush us. In fact, although I could identify their location with my Scout skill, it was quite difficult to pick them out with the naked eye. On top of that, my Third Eye skill had revealed to me that night snakes had a skill called Poisonous Bite, so we had to be very careful whenever we fought them. Ultimately, however, they were foes that we could deal with the moment they made a move as long as we knew in advance where they were located. We later learned that their venom was very potent and would take immediate effect, and that their fangs were sharp enough to pierce through normal boots. They weren't a threat to my party thanks to the Scout skill and the Cure Poison skill, but they were probably more than dangerous enough for the average adventurer.

Kevan kobolds were the last type of monster that we encountered. They were about the same size as goblins. Folklore back on Earth described various kinds of cute kobolds, but unfortunately for us, the kobolds in this world were hideous. *Hmm. I guess we're actually lucky that they're ugly. We would probably hesitate to slay them if they looked cute.* The kobolds looked like a weird mix between a goblin and a weasel. They were actually quite dexterous and carried spears made of stone, but their spears weren't that sturdy, and the kobolds didn't wield them with particular skill. The stone spears were basically junk against our weapons, and in fact, they were so easy to break that they were probably a net negative for the kobolds. Overall, none of the new monsters were too difficult to slay, but one big difference was the fact that we couldn't slay them with the Purification skill, so...

"I'm glad that we can contribute in combat against these new monsters, but they're not worth much money at all," said Touya.

"Yeah, they really aren't. Even the monsters outside of the mine are stronger," I said.

According to the information from Touya's Appraisal skill, the magicites from the new varieties of monster were worth eleven hundred Rea, four hundred Rea, and eight hundred Rea respectively, meaning all of them were worth less than magicites from skeletons. From our perspective, night snakes were the

worst: they were weak enough that even an ordinary person could slay one if they knew where it was, but their magicites were the least valuable of all, and we couldn't get any other useful materials from them.

Apparently night snake meat was technically edible, and you could use their venom to make antidotes, but there was no reason for us to eat the meager amount of meat we could get from a snake, and as for the venom glands, it would be a lot of work to retrieve them given how small the snakes were, so none of us were motivated to try. The only thing that we could retrieve from kevan kobolds were their magicites, so the best among the three new types of monster were the giant bats. Their meat was edible, and the membranes of their wings were actually considered a delicacy. However, they were still weak foes, so the materials we could retrieve from them weren't worth much at all. In fact, killergators were worth much more money than giant bats.

"It's quite cool, so I was considering whether it would be feasible for us to hunt monsters in here during the summer, but now I'm thinking probably not," said Haruka.

"It's a hard choice to make—accepting less income during summer versus bearing with the heat to hunt more valuable monsters," said Natsuki.

"By the way, how are you two coming along with the development of an Air Conditioning spell?" Touya asked.

Yuki and I glanced at each other and nodded in unison before responding to Touya's question. "We're sort of done, at least to a certain extent. Right, Yuki?"

"Yeah. It has the same considerations and the same potential downsides as the Warmth spell, though," said Yuki, "meaning they aren't spells that we can use during adventurer work, Touya."

My party consisted of soft people who had grown up in a civilized society with access to all sorts of convenient technology. Yuki and I had agreed that it would be really painful to live through summer without air conditioning, so we had put in some hard work and succeeded at developing the Air Conditioning spell, but the result was a spell that could only cool the air in our immediate surroundings. Currently, our house wasn't really insulated at all, so if we ever stopped using the Air Conditioning spell, the temperature inside would rise

right away. At the moment, Yuki and I were the only ones that could use the spell, and Haruka was the only other person in our party who could learn to use it. In addition, for the sake of efficiency, all of us would have to gather in the same room. All of those facts together meant that the Air Conditioning spell was a bit inconvenient to use in its current state.

"If we're going to use magic to cool ourselves though, then the Wind spell is a more realistic option," I said. "We'll only feel cooler temporarily, however."

"With that in mind, the idea of a long summer vacation doesn't sound too bad," said Natsuki.

I had no reason to object to the idea of a long vacation. However, Touya had mentioned that he wanted to earn money, and he was crossing his arms in thought when I glanced at him.

"Hmm. Well, there might be stronger monsters deeper within the mine, right?" Touya asked.

"Yeah, maybe," I replied. "I have no idea how large this place is, however."

"It's definitely quite large even though the mining operations here were carried out in secret," said Haruka. "The numbers of undead monsters have decreased, so I feel like we must be near the end. But in any case, we can think about this later—after we find what we need for the quest that we accepted."

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Haruka's prediction turned out to be wrong; we hadn't concluded our exploration of the abandoned mine even after three more days. The number of undead monsters continued to decrease as we ventured deeper into the abandoned mine, so we only managed to retrieve an additional three swords. We still hadn't found the family heirloom sword, and the monsters we ran into were still weak, so our earnings from this quest were quite scanty so far. In fact, it would be a total waste of time if we couldn't find the family heirloom sword. On the fourth day after Haruka predicted we would be wrapping up soon, all of us felt a bit worn down, but then something unexpected happened.

"Uh, this is what I think it is, right?" Yuki asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "Why is something like this here, of all places? There's no

way that it was hidden here before this place was abandoned, right?”

“It looks much too clean for that possibility,” said Natsuki. “Metal fittings would normally rust over time, after all.”

“What if this place was a bandit’s hideo— Actually, never mind,” said Yuki. “I’m probably overthinking this.”

The thing that had appeared in front of us was a treasure chest of the kind commonly found in video games. It wasn’t something that I would ever have expected to find in an actual cave, however, so I felt pretty suspicious, as did almost everyone else.

Touya was the one exception. He shook my shoulders and, sounding not even a little bit tense, said, “Hey, let’s open this! We might find something good inside!”

Haruka hastily raised her voice when she saw Touya carelessly reach for the chest. “Touya, stop!”

“Huh?”

“The fact that there’s a treasure chest here of all places is obviously suspicious!” Haruka exclaimed.

“Yeah, Haruka’s completely right!” Yuki exclaimed. “Touching that without thinking is basically attempted suicide!”

Haruka’s words were completely logical, as were Yuki’s, but Touya just shrugged in an exaggerated way. “The two of you should look at it like this. Treasure chests make you think of dungeons, and dungeons make you think of treasure chests, so the place we’re in is obviously a dungeon!”

“Your assumption is way too simplistic!” I exclaimed. “There’s a possibility that someone purposefully placed this treasure chest here!”

Sure, similar thoughts popped into my head, but I don’t think you can just assume “treasure chest equals dungeon,” Touya.

“Well, I think we can ignore that possibility considering the path that we had to travel through to get here,” said Touya.

“I mean, yeah, but that’s if there’s only one entrance to this mine!” I

exclaimed.

It was true that it would probably have been very difficult for anyone to place a treasure chest this deep within the abandoned mine given the large number of undead and regular monsters that we'd encountered on our way here, but it would be a different story if there was another entrance nearby.

"Hmm, that's a good point," said Yuki. "However, why would anyone place a treasure chest here? I don't think it's a safe place to hide something valuable."

"Well, there are no banks in this world," said Haruka, "and large amounts of money are heavy."

"We're carrying around almost all of our money and assets on us, but ordinary people can't do the same," said Natsuki.

The main monetary assets in this world were currency, precious metals, and jewelry. However, coins were the only form of currency, and as a result, a large amount of money was always extremely heavy. My party was only somewhat affluent, but even we would have had a hard time carrying around all of our money without a magic bag. However, it didn't make sense to leave all of our money behind in our house. Laffan wasn't quite safe enough that anyone could just lock their doors and assume no one would or could break in. It was considered common sense for people never to leave their valuables at home. As for the people who were somewhat affluent but didn't have magic bags, they would make use of jewelry and accessories. Such things were more valuable than coins per unit of weight, and they were easier to carry on your person as well, but they came with significant downsides, such as the fact that their value could differ drastically depending on the region you were in or the danger of being scammed into purchasing low-quality jewelry. It was a different story if people like that had access to merchants who they could trust, but it was best for most people to avoid jewelry because there was no way for amateurs to distinguish fakes, so we hadn't dabbled in that area. Apparently Natsuki had something of an eye for jewelry, but we had no idea if the standards of quality were the same in this world as they had been in ours, so there was no reason for us to take unnecessary risks.

As for other ways of protecting your assets, one classic method would be to

hide them somewhere, like under the floor of your house or in a location that only you were aware of. Everyone in my party agreed that that didn't sound secure enough, but at the same time, stashing money in something like a home safe would only be an acceptable option in areas where public safety was guaranteed. With that in mind, I had recently felt an appreciation for the banks back on Earth, which you could trust with your money even at almost zero interest. As a sidenote, my party had hidden a certain amount of money for emergencies—for example, in case we ever had to flee for our lives and abandon all of our belongings. Given how strong we had become, it probably wouldn't be too hard to start over from the beginning, but there was no point in subjecting ourselves to a tough lifestyle when we could take preventive measures. I explained all of the above to Touya once again, but...

"Basically, what you're saying is that this might be a dungeon-type treasure chest or a treasure chest that contains someone's hidden assets, right, Nao? So let's open it!"

I stopped Touya right as he was reaching for the treasure chest again. "Dude, wait," I said. "I know how you feel, Touya, but don't be hasty."

Outside of towns, it was legal to keep any money that you found, so even if this chest did contain someone's personal assets, that wasn't the issue. However...

"Treasure chests tend to be booby-trapped, right? You should think twice about touching one carelessly," I said.

"Oh, come on, it's common sense that the treasure chests you find in the beginning area are safe," said Touya.

"What kind of commo— Oh, you're talking about what it's like in games again," said Haruka. "We're not sure yet whether or not this abandoned mine is a dungeon, Touya."

"Mm. If someone hid this treasure chest here, then it may well be booby-trapped," said Natsuki.

"However, you can go ahead and open it if you're willing to tank the trap head-on, Touya," said Yuki.

Haruka's and Natsuki's words were full of actual common sense, whereas Yuki had basically dared Touya to see if he was brave enough to open the treasure chest without caring about the potential consequences. However, it seemed like even Touya wasn't willing to take the brunt of a trap, since he stepped away from the treasure chest.

"Hmm. Something like an explosion would be bad, so I'll pass on that," said Touya.

"Well, I don't think a treasure chest would be booby trapped to explode if someone set it up here, but it's best to err on the side of safety," said Natsuki.

It would have been pointless to set up an explosive booby trap to protect the contents of a treasure chest if the explosion itself would destroy whatever was inside. Only someone with a mentality like "If I can't have it, no one can!" would consider such a thing.

"Before anything else, let me have a look at this chest," said Natsuki.

Natsuki was the only person in our party who had the Traps and Snares 101 skill along with the Lock Picking skill. I myself had Level 1 Traps and Snares 101, but that alone wouldn't be sufficient for opening a treasure chest.

While the rest of us were on standby some distance away, Natsuki examined the chest. It was a bit cold and heartless of us, but the precaution was necessary in case Natsuki failed at her task and activated a booby trap. We wouldn't be able to save her if we all suffered the consequences.

A few minutes passed as the rest of us watched Natsuki at work, and then she stood, her head cocked.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"The chest isn't even locked, which probably means it isn't booby-trapped," said Natsuki.

"Probably, huh? That sounds awfully ambiguous," said Haruka.

"What I mean is that I can't detect any traps that I recognize," said Natsuki. "That said, my Traps and Snares 101 skill is still only Level 1."

"I guess you can't really determine for certain whether or not it's booby-

trapped," I said. "All right, Touya, feel free to open the treasure chest."

I smiled as I urged him on, but Touya seemed a bit more hesitant this time. Natsuki's ambiguous words must have affected his initial carefree attitude and made him feel uneasy. "Huh? Are you serious about that after what we just heard? I'm actually more scared now than I was before Natsuki had a look at it, dude."

"It should be safe to open. I did make use of a skill to examine it," said Natsuki. "This was my first time examining a treasure chest for booby traps, however."

"That makes me even more nervous," said Touya.

"Don't worry, Touya," I said. "I have the perfect thing for you. Use this ten-foot pole."

From my magic bag, I extracted a pole that was about three meters long, which I then placed in Touya's hands. Ten-foot poles were a tool that had saved the lives of countless adventurers in games.

After Touya accepted the pole, the rest of us stepped away in perfect synchronization.

"Well, here goes," said Touya. "Everyone ready? Absolutely sure?"

"Come, Touya," I said, gesturing for him to hurry up.

He looked back and forth between me and the treasure chest a few more times before he finally gave up and poked it with the tip of the pole. Nothing happened immediately, which seemed to relieve Touya; he started to rattle the chest harder. After some more experimentation, he slowly opened the lid, which slid off onto the ground behind the chest. Touya waited for a few more seconds, but once again, nothing happened, so he breathed a sigh of relief and carefully approached the open chest. He looked inside, then reached in and pulled something out, tilting his head as Natsuki had.

"A sword, huh?" said Haruka.

"Yeah," said Touya. "I used my Appraisal skill on it, but apparently this is just an ordinary iron sword."



“The loot turned out to be rubbish, huh?” I said.

Ordinary iron swords weren’t exactly garbage, but they weren’t worth much either. We could probably sell this for a few gold coins, but there was no way it would be worth even ten gold coins. With that in mind, it was equivalent in value to a few magicites from weak monsters, so it felt kind of disappointing as loot from a “treasure” chest. *I think this should be just called a box.*

“However, this also means there’s a greater likelihood that the abandoned mine is a dungeon,” said Natsuki.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes,” Natsuki replied. “Do you think an ordinary person would hide a cheap sword in a place like this, Nao-kun?”

“Nah, there’s no way,” I said.

Only a very mischievous trickster would go out of their way to pull such a prank. There were probably some people back on Earth who would hide treasure chests or create treasure maps for fun, but it was highly unlikely in this world given how harsh life was here.

“A dungeon, huh? In that case, we’ll have to watch out for traps as well,” said Haruka. “Can we count on you in that regard, Natsuki?”

“Of course,” said Natsuki. “I’ll do my best.”

If the abandoned mine was a dungeon, then it would be possible to find treasure here, but it would also be more dangerous. Natsuki solemnly nodded in response to Haruka’s words.

Four days had passed since we had first discovered a treasure chest, but we had yet to find another entrance even though we had explored deeper into the abandoned mine. On the other hand, we had found another treasure chest, which meant there was a high likelihood that the abandoned mine was, in fact, a dungeon. All that this treasure chest contained was a potion capable of healing light wounds, so it wasn’t particularly useful to us. According to the Appraisal skill, it was no more effective than the potions that the girls had crafted. That meant we would feel safer using potions we’d made ourselves, so

the potion from the treasure chest was basically just trash. We had no idea if we could even sell it, and we wouldn't even have bothered retrieving it from the treasure chest if we hadn't had magic bags.

We continued to be wary of traps, but we hadn't encountered any so far. According to Touya, traps didn't generally appear in the shallowest parts of a dungeon, but we couldn't afford to take his words as absolute; we had no choice but to remain alert while we explored, which meant extra work for Natsuki. However, one day, we finally found what we'd been looking for when we encountered a group of fifty skeletons deep within the abandoned mine. Recently, we'd been encountering undead monsters less often, so we hadn't expected to encounter a group this size. The Appraisal skill identified one of the skeletons in the group as a skeleton king. It was wielding a fancy-looking sword that looked quite valuable. In fact, that sword was probably the family heirloom that the House of Nernas wanted us to retrieve.

"Bingo, huh?" I said.

"Mm. However, I'm not sure if we can say we got lucky, considering we're probably at the very end of the abandoned mine," said Haruka.

We had thoroughly explored all the branching paths through the mine, and there was no empty space left on the map that Yuki had drawn. This group of skeletons was located at a dead end. To me as a gamer, it seemed completely normal to fully map out every area of a dungeon, but it sort of felt like we had wasted some time, since our objective was just to retrieve the family heirloom.

"It doesn't matter, right? We would have had to completely map out this place anyway in search of treasure chests," said Touya.

"Are you really that eager to search for treasure chests even after all the junk that we've gotten from the ones we've found so far, Touya?" Yuki asked playfully.

"That's just hindsight!" Touya exclaimed. "I just don't want to miss out on any treasure chests even if the odds of getting decent loot are almost zero!"

"Low odds are low odds, Touya," said Haruka. "Gambling on those kinds of odds won't get you anywhere."

“Ugh, you’re such a realist, Haruka!” Touya exclaimed. “I bet you’re the type of person who doesn’t understand the joy of buying lottery tickets!”

“Well, I can’t recall ever having bought any myself,” said Haruka.

While Touya gnashed his teeth, Yuki and Natsuki both chuckled at Haruka’s casual response, so in all likelihood, neither of them bought lottery tickets either.

“I’m not the kind of guy who buys lottery tickets, but I can understand how Touya feels,” I said. “It would feel better knowing you’d fully explored a place rather than thinking later about the possibility that there was a treasure chest with good loot down a path that you didn’t explore.”

“Yeah, I understand that line of thinking, and I’m not against it, but right now, let’s focus on the task ahead of us,” said Haruka. “Luckily for us, I don’t see any signs of the skeletons moving out of that open space, but...”

“Mm. I have no clue why that is, but it could be a tactical decision,” said Natsuki.

We were currently in a narrow passageway, peeking out into an open space full of skeletons. Although we were hidden, there was a high likelihood that the skeletons had already noticed us given that we could see them from our location. Or rather, there was no way that the skeletons hadn’t noticed us given that we were using the Light spell. However, they hadn’t attacked us yet, probably because they understood that they would be at a disadvantage if they fought us in a narrow passageway. There were fifty skeletons in total, meaning our party was only one tenth the size of theirs. Under those circumstances, it would normally have been more advantageous for the skeletons to wait for us in the open space and try to surround us, but that wasn’t the case here.

“*Purification*!”

Our initial move was a volley of Purification spells from Haruka and Natsuki. There was no reason not to use the spell against undead monsters. It was true that the best way to make use of a numerical advantage was to wait for your foes in an open space, but although the skeletons vastly outnumbered us, that tactic wouldn’t work in a scenario in which their opponents had Light Magic. As long as they weren’t going to approach us, we could safely whittle down the

number of undead from afar, so there was no reason for us to approach them. In addition, they were all bunched together, so the first volley of Purification spells vanquished about one-third of them. At that point, the skeletons finally started to move and charged right at us in a single file line—which proved to be another tactical mistake, because that was right when the second volley of spells went off. Their formation made them sitting ducks, and Haruka and Natsuki destroyed them with ease. Our frontline fighters hadn't even joined combat yet, but there were only four skeleton knights remaining—plus one skeleton king.

"Are skeleton kings actually stupid or something?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. Maybe it has to do with the person it was in life," said Haruka.

"Oh, yeah, that would make sense," I said. "Maybe a smart skeleton king can't spawn if it used to be some stupid noble."

I hadn't heard any voices from the skeletons, and I wasn't sure if the skeleton king was capable of issuing commands for battle, but so far, the group of skeletons here had been much easier to deal with than the group of skeleton knights that we'd fought before. I had no idea if Haruka's theory was actually correct, but it made intuitive sense.

The first person who leaped into battle was Touya. "All right, let's do this!" he exclaimed.

We could have simply let Haruka and Natsuki finish off the remaining five skeletons, and that would have been perfectly fine, but it was also okay for the rest of us to contribute to combat. Touya destroyed one of the skeleton knights instantly, then zeroed in on the skeleton king. Yuki and I chased after him and took on the other skeleton knights; I faced off against two while Yuki faced off against one. Skeleton knights were a bit stronger than normal skeletons, but they were still weak enough that we could defeat them with plain brute force. I crushed the head of one and decapitated another, then crushed its head under my foot. Yuki followed suit and defeated the skeleton knight she was fighting. Touya slew the skeleton king at about the same time, and all it left behind was its magicite—and the family heirloom sword. This was technically our last battle in the abandoned mine, but it had ended quite swiftly without any trouble.

Unfortunately for the skeletons, they'd had basically no chance against us; Light Magic was too powerful against them.

"Man, I gotta say, the skeleton king was really weak despite its name," said Touya, sounding a bit unhappy.

He muttered that he hadn't been able to contribute anything significant to this battle, but I felt like that was better than having to fight against a foe that was too powerful for us, although I could relate to his disappointment.

"Well, it's possible that not all skeleton kings are the same, so—"

My words were suddenly interrupted by the sound of something collapsing. I hastily looked around the room for the source of the sound and saw that a section of the back wall had crumbled, leaving behind a dark hole.

"Uh, the walls didn't just happen to collapse at this exact moment, right...?" I asked.

"Probably not. The timing was too convenient for it to be a coincidence," said Haruka.

Natsuki moved her floating Light spell toward the hole and reported, "It looks like there's a path that leads downward."

It was possible that the wall had collapsed as a result of our victory against the skeletons, but we hadn't used any flashy magic, and Touya hadn't smashed the walls either, so that seemed highly unlikely. *A path that happens to lead deeper down, huh? Hmm...*

"If you compare this to how things work in games, I think this might be like a path opening up after you defeat a boss," said Touya.

"Yeah, I was thinking the same thing," I said. "But is that actually normal for dungeons in this world?"

The girls all shook their heads.

"As far as common sense in this world goes, dungeons seem to be a mystery," said Haruka.

"Yeah, there isn't much known about dungeons," said Yuki. "And anyway, my General Knowledge skill only covers simple stuff, so it's not useful here."

“I’ve asked around and done some research myself, but I’m afraid that I don’t have much information either,” said Natsuki.

There were no libraries in Laffan, and it would have been pointless to ask other adventurers in Laffan, so the only way we could have obtained information about dungeons was from Diola-san or books that were sold in stores, but in any case, we hadn’t planned to explore a dungeon at all, so the girls hadn’t done any intensive research. Apparently they only knew a few bits of information, such as the fact that dungeons were different from natural environments and that they contained treasure chests.

Diola-san had told us before that some monsters lived in dungeons in spite of a lack of prey animals for them to feed on, but the same was true of some monsters that lived outside of dungeons, so it seemed like it would be hard to determine whether this place was a dungeon or simply a cave that monsters had come to inhabit. The fact that we had found treasure chests was strong evidence that the abandoned mine was a dungeon, but that wasn’t enough information for us to be certain. There was a possibility that Marcus-san, as the branch master of the Adventurers’ Guild in Laffan, had detailed knowledge regarding dungeons, but we didn’t know him well enough that we could casually ask him about a topic like that.

“I’m a bit curious about what’s on the other side of this hole, but we should probably head back to Laffan first,” said Touya, peeking down the steeply sloping path. “Right, Haruka?”

Haruka nodded. “Mm. At this point, we haven’t had any sunlight for almost two weeks. You’re probably quite tired as well, right, Touya?”

“Well, not physically, but it’s true that I’m a bit mentally tired,” said Touya.

“I’m curious about this new path too, but we can leave it for next time,” I said.

“Yep. I’m also a bit curious, but we have something else to do first.” Yuki was standing next to Touya and peeking down the hole, but she stood up and hopped over to the spot where the family heirloom sword was lying on the floor. She picked it up and raised it high in the air. “Dun dun duuun! Yuki has obtained the family heirloom sword!”

She had a big smile on her face. The rest of us spaced out for a moment, then

started chuckling.

“Mission complete!” Yuki exclaimed. “Yay!”

“Tee hee, you’re right about that,” said Haruka. “The first thing we should do is to celebrate the fact that we found the sword.”

“Mm. We have completed the quest that we accepted, after all,” said Natsuki. “I’m sure that Diola-san will be happy to hear about this.”

In a way, the “boss” of this dungeon had been a letdown, but that didn’t change the fact that we had accomplished our objective.

“All right, let’s head back to Laffan,” I said. “We have a complete map thanks to Yuki, so finding the path back will be no problem.”

“Yeah, I’m also free from mapping work!” Yuki exclaimed, pointing at me. She threw her arms up in the air “Whoo-hoo!”

She seemed much happier than she had been a moment ago, and as we watched her antics, the rest of us chuckled once again.

Side Story—Touya Gets Laid

My party and I were taking a day off work, so I headed to town by myself to kill some time. I'd asked Nao earlier if he wanted to come along, but he'd declined my invitation and told me he was exhausted and wanted to sleep in instead. Combat was the only thing I was good at, but the other members of my party all had a lot of things they could do during our days off, so Nao's excuse was perfectly reasonable. During character creation, I'd chosen Blacksmithing as a crafting skill, but it had turned out to be mostly useless after we had gotten acquainted with Tomi. The skill had basically become a hobby for me, and I would only do it from time to time in a corner of our yard or at Gantz-san's place with his permission. And anyway, half of the things that I would craft were just simple projects for fun.

My most recent project was forging shuriken. I wanted nail-shaped bo shuriken, not the spiky star kind. The reason for that was that I thought it would be cool if I could quickly draw some and throw them in battle. It was something probably one guy out of every ten would dream about, after all. The weapons shops in Laffan did sell throwing stars, but I preferred the blunter feel of bo shuriken. However, I had only recently started forging and practicing with shuriken, and I was doing it all in secret, so it would be a while before I could show off some actual results. Shuriken weren't easy to forge. With bo shuriken, if you didn't factor in the center of gravity while making them, you could end up hitting your target with the butt end instead of the point. Tomi would probably have been able to craft one with ease if I'd asked him, but I didn't mind spending some time on this project. It was mainly something to do for fun. Actually, I enjoyed the trial and error process.

But I was taking a break from my shuriken hobby for today. Moderation was the key to not becoming bored of something.

"All right, where should I go?"

There weren't really any places I could go to in Laffan to have fun. Larger

towns would have places like theaters, but there were none in Laffan, and anyway, I wasn't interested in plays. I wouldn't have minded attending something like a vaudeville show, but there weren't any of those in Laffan either, and I hadn't even seen any street performances in all the time we'd been living here. With that in mind, the main sources of entertainment for ordinary citizens in Laffan were drinking, gambling, and whoring. Drinking wasn't an option for me. Cold ale was drinkable, but that didn't mean I actually enjoyed drinking it, and I had no way to chill it without the girls around. The same applied to wine and stuff like that. I felt like fruit juice was better in every way unless you were the kind of person who just wanted to drink to look cool. But as far as I was concerned, it would be lame to look like an ass before the booze even made you act like one.

As far as gambling, there did seem to be a gambling house in the area of town where my party's house was located, but I had never gone. Things like poker and mahjong were fun as games, but places with other types of games didn't sound that appealing to me, and I was pretty sure that an amateur like myself would never be able to earn money gambling. Even in this world, there was no way places like that wouldn't be set up to favor the house.

On the other hand, I *was* curious about prostitution. It was known as the world's oldest profession for a reason, and there was a red-light district even in a podunk town like Laffan. I hadn't visited that area up until now because my party had been busy and I hadn't had the spare change, but...

"Hmm. This might be a good opportunity to check it out..."

Haruka had specifically told Nao and me not to visit any brothels, but as a guy, it was just too tempting. Nao would probably have tried to stop me—he was kind of a serious dude—but he wasn't around right now. Anyway, I wasn't sure if it was because he'd turned into an elf, but I felt like his libido was weaker now than it had been back on Earth.

I paused in thought and came up with an excuse. "It's always worth trying something new, yep. But how should I approach this?"

Back in Japan, I had been a normal high school student, so it went without saying that I'd never visited a brothel. Diola-san was the first person that I

would have asked for information about most stuff, but this topic would have been way too awkward. There was a chance that if I did ask, Diola-san would have casually provided me with the info I wanted, but the girls would definitely end up hearing about it from her.

Hmm. Should I ask Tomi? Actually, nah, he's a dwarf. Gantz-san is married, and Simon-san is probably too old to have much of a libido. There are a handful of other guys I know whose names come to mind, but they're not really people I know well enough to ask.

"Man, I don't really want to go in blind..."

I wasn't so horny that I would be okay with literally any woman. I also had some strong personal preferences. Maybe this wasn't the right way to think about it, but I wasn't willing to pay for a terrible experience.

"Well, for now, I guess I'll just go and have a look at the red-light district for myself."

I wouldn't get anywhere by standing around here thinking, so I walked toward the general area of the red-light district in the hopes that something would come to mind once I arrived at an actual brothel.

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"Whoa, hell yeah!"

I had left home after finishing lunch, so it was late afternoon now. It was still some time before the prime hours, but the district had started operations for the day. I was walking around and observing all of the brothels along the way. I had passed by the red-light district before, but this was the first time I'd actually been able to explore the area. It wasn't like I could have dropped by when Haruka and the other girls were around.

I had done some research beforehand about the different types of brothels. Apparently brothels in this world could be split into three major categories.

First, there were brothels that looked like dining establishments at first glance. There were some differences between actual dining establishments and those types of brothels. For one thing, they tended to have way more waitresses than the number of tables would warrant. For another, there were

private rooms available, although that was also true of places like The Slumbering Bear that acted as inns and taverns at the same time. However, the biggest difference between a place like The Slumbering Bear and that kind of brothel was that none of the customers would hang around the tavern area very long. They would either leave quickly or disappear into one of the private rooms with a waitress. Basically, the tavern area was like a waiting room for johns to choose which waitress they wanted to spend some alone time with.

The second category of brothels were the ones that were obviously brothels even from the outside. They had wide entrances so you could see all the beautiful women sitting in a row inside. *Hmm. Well, actually, a more accurate way to put it is that there would be* some *beautiful women sitting in a row. It all comes down to personal taste, but let's just say there's a lot of...variation in their looks.* These types of brothels had touts standing outside to attract customers as well, so they were the fanciest and the most pleasant to pass by.

As for the third and final category of brothels, they were kind of special in a way. They looked high class, but you couldn't see the interiors from the outside and they wouldn't accept any first-time customers. The entrances were technically open, but there would be some kind of thin and silky fabric hanging over them, so you could only get a peek inside when the wind blew that aside. *Man, those brothels really understand how sexy a brief glimpse can be! You never know when you might be able to see the faces of the girls inside, but that's what's so fun. Plus, the ones I saw looked really pretty on average!*

However, only an amateur would get taken for a fool by the design of those types of brothels. I was an amateur, but I liked to consider myself a halfway smart one.

I walked back to the entrance of the red-light district and entered a normal tavern to order a random drink. It was on the expensive side, but that was a necessary expense, since what I was really after was information, so I paid without any hesitation.

I took a sip from my drink before I struck up a conversation with the tavern keeper behind the counter. "Hey, I've got something I want to ask about. Is that okay?"

“Sure. Or I should say, everybody who’s ever visited this place was here for one reason in particular.”

“Really? Well, yeah, I guess you’re probably right about that.”

If all you wanted to do was drink, there was no reason to go out of your way to visit a tavern near the red-light district. It must have been obvious what someone like myself who didn’t seem very familiar with this area was really here for.

The tavern keeper grinned as he started to provide me with information. “Let’s start with the types of brothels known as restaurants. They’re the most casual ones available. The prices start at a few large silver coins, but don’t expect too much if that’s all you’re willing to pay. The classier places won’t even let you in the door for that little.”

He was describing the same kinds of “restaurants” I had been thinking about earlier. According to the tavern keeper, some places only offered service by hand or mouth, but it all depended on the price—and the looks of the individual prostitute. Apparently the prostitutes who were kind of old and ugly were the most passionate about their craft, whereas the ones who were young and pretty were more businesslike about it. It was basically the free market at work.

“From time to time, there are guys who start a commotion. I’d recommend against ever being that guy. Cause a problem in a brothel and scary men will appear out of nowhere. If you don’t want to get in trouble, then I suggest you decide on the services you want to pay for beforehand, then try to negotiate the price.”

According to the tavern keeper, regular customers would decide the kind and number of sexual services and the length of time they wanted to spend before paying for a prostitute. He also tried to teach me the basics of how to negotiate with a prostitute, but all that was a bit much for an amateur like myself. Lastly, he told me about how you could tell other guys to go “eat” at “restaurants” as a dirty joke. *I get it, but I’ll never get an opportunity to use that one! If I crack it around Nao and word gets back to Haruka, my life will be in danger! Those kinds of dad jokes should only be used around middle-aged men.*

“The second type of brothels are ordinary brothels. You’ve come across

places where you can look in and see all the women sitting there, haven't you? The way those brothels work is that you can pick a girl you like from the ones sitting in a row. The prices start at a few gold coins, so it's a bit expensive, but most of the time, you'll get your money's worth. More importantly, you won't have to worry about catching something. That said, I recommend someplace like that for a virgin like you. I'm sure you'll have a good time!"

"I-I'm not a virgin!"

He gave me an exasperated look. "...Buddy, everything you've done so far screams 'virgin' to me. How many years do you think I've been operating this tavern? I can always tell, no problem."

He sounded pretty sure of himself, so I gave up on trying to come up with a rebuttal and asked him about something else that had been on my mind. "Ugh, fine, you got me. But anyway, does that mean the 'restaurants' you told me about earlier would be dangerous for me?"

"Well, cheap places attract cheap customers."

High-class brothels would attract rich customers who were clean and took care of themselves with respect to diseases. On the other hand, when poor people went to brothels, they weren't concerned about anything but sex, and even if they got a sexually transmitted disease, they wouldn't be able to afford treatment. *Yeah, okay, I'm definitely avoiding the cheap places.* There was a chance that my Level 5 Robust skill would work on sexually transmitted diseases, but if it didn't I would be screwed. Having to ask Haruka or Natsuki for a cure would be an absolute nightmare. The other options—like visiting some shady doctor or buying medicine—were just as scary to me. Nao was my last hope, but it seemed like he wasn't planning to focus on upping his Light Magic anytime soon. It made perfect sense to me, though, since we had the girls around. It would be a better use of Nao's time to train other types of magic.

"Last are the luxury brothels. You've come across brothels you can't see inside, haven't you? As you'd expect, they're the most expensive of all. It's not for the likes of you—the lowest price you'll find is ten gold coins." He stared at me for a moment longer, then shrugged.

Nah, actually, I can afford that just fine. Ten gold coins is the lowest price,

huh? I brought about fifty gold coins with me, but it probably isn't a good idea to spend all of them at once.

"You'll get the best women and the best service at luxury brothels. The trouble is the price. But word has it that the price is always worth it, so keep that in mind if you ever stumble upon that kind of money."

"By the way, are there any beastwomen prostitutes?"

"At luxury brothels?"

"Nah, I mean in general—at all types of brothels."

"Nope. There are barely any beastmen and beastwomen in this town in the first place, so it's not easy for a beastwoman to become a prostitute."

According to the tavern keeper, discrimination wasn't a huge problem here in Laffan, but there were still some people who were disgusted by the idea of beastwomen being objects of sexual desire. *What a shame! I would definitely have frequented brothels back on Earth if there had been some beastwomen prostitutes working there!*

"What, are you the kind of guy who can only get hard around women of the same race as yourself?"

"No, that's not it! But..."

"I see. Take it easy, buddy. A normal brothel won't turn you away just because you're a beastman. Neither will a luxury brothel, for that matter."

Oh, right, I forgot about that possibility. I guess a beastman like me wouldn't be able to go to a brothel in a country where beastmen and beastwomen were discriminated against.

"You might also encounter streetwalkers in the red-light district, but don't go near any of them. You'll be lucky to get off with nothing worse than a disease. If you're unlucky, you'll get robbed of everything on you. It's rare to get murdered by a streetwalker, but the chances aren't zero, so you should avoid them."

According to the tavern keeper, streetwalkers were a type of prostitute who solicited clients on the streets. They were cheaper than the prostitutes at "restaurants," but mainly because they would get things done in random dark

alleys. You could take one to an inn that offered rooms for sex if you were willing to pay for it, but the tavern keeper told me that he wouldn't recommend that because of the likelihood that it would be a turn off to have sex in a bright place. However...

"Really? I didn't see any streetwalkers when I walked through the red-light district."

"Well, it's still bright outside. They only start to show up after sunset. The dark is more convenient for them, especially if their clients are drunk."

According to the tavern keeper, most women who worked as streetwalkers had shady or complicated pasts. On a related note, not all prostitutes in this world were actually low in social status. The prostitutes who worked at luxury brothels weren't regarded as highly as the most celebrated courtesans in Japanese history, but they were still considered to have higher standing than ordinary citizens. Even the prostitutes who worked at normal brothels and "restaurants" weren't generally looked down on, and anyway, prostitutes had to take some risks as part of their trade, so it wasn't that likely that a woman would end up as a streetwalker just because she wanted to stay relatively anonymous. The real reasons were usually a lot worse; she might be ugly or diseased, or she might have a criminal past.

"...Also, there technically are male prostitutes, but you can only find them in one specific place."

"I don't swing that way at all!"

"Well, if you were willing to give it a try, you might actually become pretty popular, so..."

"What kind of compliment is that?!"

I can't believe this guy just said that I would do well as a male prostitute! According to the tavern owner, male prostitutes mainly catered to other men. There were a few places with male prostitutes who catered to women, though. That didn't shock me to hear, since women have sex drives too.

"By the way, how do I handle contraception?"

He gave me a look. "Huh? That's something for the brothels to worry about.

The client has nothing to do with that.”

The tavern owner seemed confused by my question, but it was an important question to me as someone who’d gotten sex education, and there wasn’t anything as convenient as a contraceptive spell listed in the grimoires I’d glanced through. All we were missing were grimoires on Darkness Magic, so maybe those would have a contraceptive spell, but Darkness mages were even rarer than Light mages, so I doubted that anybody was using Darkness Magic at the average brothel.

“I mean, wouldn’t you be bothered by the possibility of having a child as a result of going to a brothel?”

“Nah, it’s not something you even need to take into account. The people who run brothels wouldn’t be able to stay in business if the prostitutes working there got pregnant all the time. I’m not exactly sure about the details, but they use all kinds of different methods to deal with *that* potential issue.”

Hmm. I wonder if those methods include medicine or if they just prevent johns from sleeping with girls when they’re at their most fertile. Also, do they sell anything like condoms in this world?

“Oh, yeah, what about the male prostitutes who cater to women?”

“Those guys are all infertile. They do it to themselves with medicine.”

“Seriously? Yikes...”

The slight envy that I had felt toward those male prostitutes evaporated the minute I heard those words. Prostitutes couldn’t exactly be choosy about their clients, so it wasn’t an easy job for men or women. Still, thinking about it made me feel a little down.

When I’d asked as much as I wanted to know, I headed back into the red-light district. Factoring in all the information I’d gotten, my decision was to visit one of the two luxury brothels in Laffan. When I’d passed by earlier, I’d caught a glimpse of a girl I liked. At first, I was hesitant about the choice between a normal brothel and a luxury brothel, but I had enough money to afford a luxury brothel, and it wasn’t like I could actually visit the red-light district all the time. Besides, anyone’s first time was important. I would probably regret it for the

rest of my life if my first time was unpleasant. But even after I'd decided on a luxury brothel for all of those reasons, I still felt a bit hesitant, so I spent some time walking around in circles outside like a suspicious character.

But time was of the essence. I couldn't walk around in circles forever. My parents weren't here in this world. As for the girls, they probably wouldn't scold me even if I didn't return home until early tomorrow morning, but they would probably ask me why I'd been out so late, and I was dead certain I wouldn't be able to come up with a good reason, so I had to get home today at a decent time.

"All right, here goes!"

I quietly reaffirmed my resolve and then took a step toward a completely new experience.

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A few hours later, I stood outside the brothel feeling completely drained.

"That was amazing..."

I'd had a pleasant experience—the stuff of dreams, really. Since it was my first time, the girl I had picked took the lead in a good way. *Man, they really are professionals!* The trade-off was that my wallet was now almost empty. It really had been a luxurious experience in both quality and price.

"Man, I'll definitely go broke if I get addicted to this..."

I was pretty confident that my earnings were among the highest in Laffan, but even that wouldn't be enough to sustain an addiction to luxury brothels. Places like this probably targeted rich nobles, ordinary citizens who could somehow afford a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and stupid men who had resigned themselves to going broke. And I wasn't stupid, so...

"Once a year—actually, no, twice a year should be doable... Ugh. Twice a year, huh? That's not often enough. Once every three months? Nah, no, that's a direct path to doom..."

Visiting again would mean emptying my wallet again. I felt very conflicted about it the whole way home. *Who knows whether or not I'll come back?*

Maybe I will. Then again, maybe I won't. I can't say for sure.

Chapter 3—Holy Satomi Sect

When we finally returned to Laffan, more than ten days after we set out, Diola-san led us to a meeting room. We placed the family heirloom sword on the table in front of us, and the moment she saw the sword, Diola-san congratulated us on our safe return and the successful completion of the quest. However, her smile stiffened after I started to line up twenty other engraved swords on the table, and when that number surpassed thirty, the smile looked like it was on the verge of crumbling entirely. However, Diola-san was a professional, so she quickly recovered after blinking a few times and then nodded.

“I see that your party has brought back thirty-three engraved swords in addition to the family heirloom sword. The reward for the quest itself is three hundred gold coins, and the reward for the heirloom sword alone is one hundred gold coins,” said Diola. “Your party will also receive fifty coins per engraved sword, so the total comes to 2,050 gold coins.”

“Thank you very much, Diola-san,” I said. “Also—”

“Don’t tell me there are more!” Diola exclaimed.

“Oh, um, we just wanted to turn in some magicites while we’re at it,” I said.

Diola-san breathed a sigh of relief after I had explained things. “Oh, magicites? Mm, I suppose your party must have some from the undead monsters you slew.”

“Yeah,” I said. “We have quite a lot of magicites on us, in fact.”

I took the magicites out of one of our magic bags and piled them up into a mountain on the table in front of me. A somber expression appeared on Diola-san’s face, and she sighed and slowly shook her head. “I didn’t expect to see so many. A lot of people must have died in the abandoned mine...”

“Mm. This doesn’t necessarily mean all of the people who died in the mine rose as undead monsters, but there were definitely a lot of them,” said Haruka.

“A lot of the undead monsters were wielding weapons as well,” I said.

We had retrieved a total of thirty-three engraved swords, but there had been more than double that number of the rusty cheap swords. Unless someone had brought weapons into the abandoned mine at a later date for whatever reason, the number of engraved swords seemed to roughly match the number of troops that had been stationed there. However, the people who had been forced to toil in the mine were felons. The number of felons at the mine must have been many times the number of troops, so...

“It’s possible that there were a lot of troops stationed at the mine to prevent revolts, but in any case, that’s all in the past. The people who became undead monsters have finally been released into the afterlife thanks to your party’s efforts.” Diola-san paused for a moment and then smiled as if to signal that we should all move on to a different topic, then began to assess the magicites. “Hmm, plenty of these magicites have unusually high concentrations of mana, so your party will be richly rewarded for turning them in.”

It wasn’t possible to retrieve any sort of usable materials from undead monsters, but their magicites were worth quite a lot relative to how weak they were. However, the only reason that undead monsters were so easy for our party to defeat was that we had people who could cast the Purification spell. Under normal conditions, it would have been somewhat annoying to slay them by conventional means without destroying their magicites. Furthermore, zombies were a different story entirely, since their bodies were rotten. Taking all of those considerations into account, undead monsters weren’t exactly a lucrative source of money for most adventurers. However, apparently the magicites we had obtained on our expedition were worth a total of 820 gold coins. Our earnings from the magicites plus our earnings from the quest itself actually came quite close to the equivalent of fifty million yen.

“Your party’s earnings add up to a very hefty sum,” said Diola. “By the way, your party can choose to be paid with large gold coins if you so desire. Would you prefer that?”

“Huh? Large gold coins? The guild can actually pay out rewards that way?” I asked.

We glanced at each other after we heard this completely new offer. We already knew about the existence of large gold coins, but we hadn't actually seen any before. Each was worth ten gold coins.

"Yes. The Adventurers' Guild is a large organization, after all," said Diola. "It isn't possible for me to obtain pure gold coins, but platinum gold coins are available if you wish to be paid in that form."

Platinum gold coins were worth one hundred gold coins each, and pure gold coins were worth one thousand gold coins each. High-value coins like those were easier to carry around, but the trouble was that very few places would accept payment in those denominations, so both forms of specie were wildly impractical for an ordinary person's expenses, but...

"Platinum coins will be easier to count, so I'm down," said Yuki. "I also kind of want to see what they look like."

The second reason that Yuki brought up was probably closer to her true feelings on the matter, but honestly, I felt the same way.

"Yeah, we're probably going to put most of them into our savings, so practicality doesn't matter one way or another," I said. "By the way, Diola-san, can we exchange platinum coins for smaller specie at a later time?"

"Of course," Diola replied. "You can do so right here at the Adventurers' Guild, in fact."

When I'd asked Diola, I was assuming it would be impossible, so her response came as a surprise. The girls also seemed surprised, and Haruka chimed in, "Really? In that case, I would think more people would use platinum coins for their savings, but I've never heard of that."

"Well, you have to pay a handling fee for those services," said Diola. "Between platinum coins and jewelry, it's hard to say which is the better way of storing one's savings."

According to Diola-san, there were other issues with platinum coins. One was that the guild branches in smaller towns were often unable to deal with them; another was the steep fee involved in changing them to smaller specie. Apparently the guild would charge at least one percent even in large towns—a

handling fee of over ten thousand yen. ATM fees were nothing in comparison. That being the case, it made sense that most people didn't use platinum gold coins for ordinary transactions.

"In fact, there are a lot of high-ranked adventurers who request payment in ordinary gold coins because they don't want to pay the handling fee," said Diola. "Gold coins can get to be quite cumbersome if you're carrying large numbers with you at all times, but you're the rare adventurers who have magic bags, so..."

On a related note, if we asked to be paid in gold coins, then the reward for this quest would weigh slightly over ten kilograms. All of those coins could fit into a purse that was slightly bigger than my palm, so it would technically be possible to carry all of them around even without a magic bag, but it wouldn't be a very practical option. In fact, it would mean that carrying your money around was like carrying weights for endurance training.

But all of that was irrelevant to my party.

After our party discussed our options, I was the one to put our request to Diola-san. "Um, would it be possible for us to split our reward into five large gold coins and five platinum coins with the rest in regular gold coins?"

Diola-san smiled and nodded. "Very well. I will prepare the money as such. Once again, I would like to thank your party for accepting this quest. It was collecting dust for so long, and I feel relieved now that it's been completed. I admit I didn't expect your party to bring back so many engraved swords, however."

"We just happened to discover them in the course of exploring the abandoned mine," said Haruka. "And it's not as though we could have hidden them."

"Mm, I understand. It's just that, well...I may hear some bitter and irritable remarks about how I could have lowered the reward per sword, that's all," said Diola.

Diola-san was the one who had negotiated the exact value of the reward per sword. She'd had no idea just how many we would find, so she had probably decided on the figure based on a limited amount of information—that there

were at least ten engraved swords at the abandoned mine. A slightly lower value would really have helped with the guild's expenses.

"Well, it would be unacceptable to try to haggle for a lower price after your party has already completed the quest, so it is what it is," said Diola. "The House of Nernas isn't especially affluent by the standards of the nobility, however. The viscount is by no means stingy when it comes to necessary expenses, but it's a fact that he doesn't have endless amounts of money to spare."

According to Diola-san, the retrieval of the family heirloom sword and the other engraved swords was necessary to his dignity and reputation as a noble, but it wasn't something that absolutely had to be done right away. As a result, other adventurers had left the quest alone even though it had been issued under the name of the House of Nernas, but after our party had stumbled upon the abandoned mine and an engraved sword, the viscount had had no choice but to pay for the retrieval of the family heirloom and the other swords. However, the rewards—about two thousand gold coins—were unplanned expenses, and apparently paying them out would put quite a strain on the viscount's coffers.

"...Um, is Viscount Nernas going to end up having a bad impression of us after all this?" I asked.

It would be hard to live in a feudal society if the lord of the domain you lived in took a personal dislike to you, so I felt a bit uneasy, but Diola-san gently shook her head as if to indicate that we had nothing to worry about. "Not at all. The swords had to be retrieved at some point in time, after all. In fact, the viscount actually mentioned how he was glad that it was a group of honest adventurers who discovered the location of these objects."

According to Diola-san, if a group of felons or other wicked adventurers had been the ones to discover the family heirloom sword, they would likely have sold everything on the black market. In such a scenario, the cost of retrieving the swords would have become even greater, so apparently we hadn't done the viscount a disservice even considering the sheer size of the payout we were due.

“I’m glad to hear that,” said Haruka. With no preamble at all, she added, “And speaking of discoveries, there’s something else we have to tell you, Diola-san.”

Diola-san frowned. “Huh? What is it, Haruka-san? I have a bad feeling about this...”

“Don’t worry—it’s nothing too significant,” said Haruka.

“Are you sure about that? I have a hard time believing your words considering everything your party has accomplished,” said Diola.

But Diola-san continued to frown even after she heard what Haruka had to say next.

Accomplishments? Have we gotten Diola-san tangled up in a lot of different problems? Hmm. There were the dindels, the extermination of the orc nest, the quest to harvest precious wood, the purchase of a plot of land for our house, Edith’s haunted mansion, and the cleanup work after the incident with the bandits... I guess it’s also possible that we caused Diola-san some extra work with our magic bags and the conflict with Tokuoka’s party. Then there’s the lava boar that we dealt with the other day and this current incident concerning the family heirloom sword. Oh, hmm. Listing all of them out, those actually are a lot of incidents. The work Diola-san has had to do on our behalf is probably part of her job as an employee of the Adventurers’ Guild, but still, I feel like she’s helped us out in all sorts of ways.

“Relax, Diola-san,” said Haruka. “It’s nothing big this time. Right, Nao?”

“Yeah,” I said. “We just wanted to mention that the abandoned mine happens to be a dungeon.”

I tried my best to convey the information in a casual manner, but Diola-san laid a hand on her forehead and looked upward. “I knew it would be trouble! I knew it would be the most extreme kind of trouble!”

“...Is the discovery of a new dungeon that serious, Diola-san?” I asked.

“Yes, it is. All kinds of investigations and reports are required, and there aren’t many people at this branch of the guild who are capable of that kind of thing,” said Diola. “Depending on the result of the investigations, there might be even more work waiting in the wings...”

Diola-san looked dejected, but then she suddenly smiled at me in a playful way, as if an idea had popped into her head. “Nao-san, will you take responsibility if I miss my chance at marriage due to being too busy with work?”

She was probably saying it in jest, but Touya tilted his head in confusion. “Huh? Diola-san, isn’t it too late for someone your age to—”

“Touya-san, if you say another word, it’ll be war,” said Diola. “And if it comes down to that, I will use the full extent of my powers as an employee of the Adventurers’ Guild to carry out asymmetrical warfare, is that understood?”

Adventurers would be doomed in all sorts of ways if the people who worked for the guild decided to make their lives miserable. Based on the look in her eyes, Diola-san seemed completely serious, and Touya immediately bowed his head when he saw that. “Never mind! I said nothing! You’re still a young maiden, Diola-san!”

“Tee hee. Well, to be honest, regardless of how busy I am with work, I’ve more or less given up on *that* due to family problems,” said Diola. “It’s not as though I enjoy being very busy, however. Work in moderation is best, after all.”

“It’s better to report the discovery of a dungeon, right, Diola-san?” Yuki asked. “Isn’t that the recommended course of action?”

Diola-san nodded. “Yes, you’re right about that. As adventurers, you aren’t duty bound to do so, but it’s recommended that you report back to the guild if you discover a dungeon. But again, you are *not* duty bound to do so!”

“Um, what do you mean by that?” I asked.

“The Adventurers’ Guild will be glad to receive your report, but as far as how I feel personally...I suppose my feelings can be summed up with the words ‘Please go a bit easier on me!’” Diola replied. “You could have brought this matter up to me casually once the dust had settled with respect to other issues and I’d had a chance to take a bit of a break, you know?”

“I’m the type of person who prefers to deal with problems ahead of time whenever possible,” said Haruka.

“That’s a very good mentality!” Having offered that sarcastic praise, Diola fell silent, but after a moment, she smiled in a scary way. “Well, at least this makes

it easier for me to relay some news of my own. You see, the Adventurers' Guild at Kelg has issued a summons for your party."

We all glanced at each other in confusion.

"A summons? Did we do anything that warrants that?" Haruka asked.

Diola-san nodded. "In a way, yes, you did. Remember how your party slew some bandits the other day? It seems that the Adventurers' Guild at Kelg wants you to visit so that they can thank you for the work that your party has done."

"What does that mean?" Haruka asked. "We've already received a reward for our work..."

The reason we had hunted down the bandits was because of Edith's request, besides which we had received a bounty from the authorities. Most of that bounty had been covered by the lord, so it hadn't affected the Adventurers' Guild one way or another. However, according to Diola-san, some of the bandits had been former adventurers, as had some of their victims, so the Adventurers' Guild at Kelg had apparently arrived at the conclusion that it wouldn't hurt to bestow official recognition upon the adventurers who had resolved this problem.

"Really? They want us to go all the way to a different guild just for some praise?" Yuki asked. "Is this really meant to be a form of reward?"

"The intention behind the invitation sounds nice at first, but they're basically saying that the local guild branch will go out of their way to butter us up if we show up in Kelg, right?" Touya asked. "This doesn't sit right with me at all..."

Yuki and Touya both sounded a bit displeased, and Diola-san seemed somewhat troubled herself. She nodded and said, "Mm, both of you are completely right, but there are additional reasons behind the request. And if your party decides to answer this summons, all of you will be promoted to Rank 5 adventurers."

"Decide? Does that mean we really have a choice about whether or not we go?" I asked.

"Yes, the decision is up to your party," Diola replied. "You will rank up soon even if you decide not to go this time, so..."

“We’ve earned enough rank up points just thanks to the fact that we completed this quest, right?” Yuki asked.

Diola-san chuckled and nodded. “Yes, that is correct.”

“In that case, there’s no real reason for us to head over to Kelg,” I said. “Besides, why does it have to be at Kelg?”

It made no sense to me that we couldn’t simply receive a prize from the Adventurers’ Guild right here in Laffan. I voiced my thoughts to Diola-san, and she answered my question without any hesitation. “It’s just an excuse on the part of the Adventurers’ Guild at Kelg. What they really mean is that they want high-rank adventurers like your party to relocate to Kelg.”

“Huh? Is it okay for you to be so frank about this to us, Diola-san?” Yuki asked.

In contrast with Yuki’s hesitancy, Diola-san smiled confidently. “When it comes to this matter, Yuki-san, I am on your party’s side. My job was simply to pass along the message. It is up to your party to decide what to do, and I will assist you in any way I can.”

“That’s reassuring to hear,” said Haruka. “Does the local guild want us to move our base of operations to Kelg?”

“They would be very happy if your party decided to do so, but I think they will be glad even if your party only visits Kelg,” said Diola. “Are you aware of the recent civil strike in Kelg?”

“I remember you telling us before about how a bunch of adventurers in Kelg went bankrupt and became bandits,” said Haruka. “Is that related to this?”

“Yes. Your party has slain the bandits, but it wasn’t enough to cut short the trajectory of recent events in Kelg,” said Diola. “The number of people who have lost their livelihood has increased, and it seems that public order has deteriorated. The cause of all of this chaos seems to be the Holy Satomi Sect.”

Diola-san sounded exhausted as she explained the situation to us, and we all fell silent when we heard her words even though none of us were at fault.

“Um, so the situation is really dire?” I asked.

“It’s not quite that serious yet, but if it crosses a line, the lord will make an

effort to deal with it," Diola replied. "The guild at Kelg probably wants to prepare for the worst by securing the help of some adventurers who aren't under the influence of the Holy Satomi Sect—it seems that there are some adventurers among the host of believers."

"Okay, that makes sense," I said. "But if we go to Kelg, will we have to take orders from their guild?"

All of us had wanted to avoid the town of Kelg if possible, so there would be no point in visiting if the guild would force us to accept a quest to resolve their troubles, but Diola-san immediately shook her head in response to my question. "No, you won't. Your party may be offered quests for adventurer work, but as always, the decision to accept or turn down such quests is up to you and you alone."

The summons sounded like it wouldn't be that restrictive even if we answered it, so we couldn't simply make a hasty decision to turn it down. All of us exchanged another series of glances.

"...What would you suggest that we do, Diola-san?" I asked.

Diola-san had helped us out in many ways up to this point. It wasn't exactly a way to return the favor, but her opinion on this issue was one factor I wanted to take into account when all of us discussed what to do. However...

"As an employee of the Adventurers' Guild, I have no reason to advise you against answering the summons or visiting Kelg in order to ascend through the ranks as adventurers. It is a fact that the guild here at Laffan cannot issue quests that are suitable for adventurers of your capabilities." Diola-san paused for a moment and smiled gently before continuing. "However, speaking as a private individual, I would certainly appreciate it if your party decided to remain here in Laffan."

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"Oh, so these are what large gold coins and platinum coins look like, huh? They're prettier than normal gold coins," said Touya.

We were finally back home after our long absence, and Haruka and Natsuki were busy preparing tea. Meanwhile, Touya had picked up some of the coins

we'd received and was admiring them.

"These forms of specie are mostly used for savings, so they probably tend not to get damaged," I said.

"There are some fine details sculpted into the faces. Foundry technology in this world might actually be pretty developed," said Touya. "It could just be stamping, though."

The pristine condition and surface details of the coins were hints about minting technology in this world. As Touya had said, it must have been far more advanced than I had assumed, but on the other hand, things like magic and alchemy also existed in this world, so I had no idea if currency was actually produced by industrial technology. The methods used in minting currency were apparently a state secret due to their very nature, however, as you'd expect.

"The fact that platinum coins can't be easily used for ordinary transactions is an issue, however," said Natsuki. "Here's your tea, Nao-kun."

"Thanks." I received the tea from her and made sure that everyone had sat down before I continued. "All right, it's about time for us to discuss the issues we're now facing as a party."

There were two questions at hand. The first one was whether or not to answer the summons from Kelg. The second was what our party name should be. Right before we headed out of the guild building, Diola-san had asked us to decide on a party name; she had explained that it was kind of a hassle for her to write up reports about a nameless party with a lot of incredible achievements. It seemed that in most documents, she had simply written out all of our names or referred to us as "Nao's party," but it still sounded like a hassle. With that in mind, we needed to decide on a party name in order to help streamline the clerical work that Diola-san had to do.

"Let's start by deciding on a party name for ourselves," said Haruka. "What kinds of names are typical for parties of adventurers?"

"Uh, the ones I know are things like Fire Dragon Horn, Wiseman's Knot, and The Destroyers," said Yuki.

"...Are those actually real names?" Haruka asked. She had an awkward

expression on her face. “Those are the names of adventurer parties here in Laffan, right? How strong are the members of those parties?”

Yuki lifted a finger to her chin and tilted her head. “I don’t know if those party names are normal, but yeah, they’re all located here in Laffan. As for how strong they are, let’s just say that they’re suited to Laffan.”

“So basically, they’re weak,” I said. “Those party names might be indicators of the goals they’re working toward, but...” I chuckled.

The others seemed to have the same reaction, and they all nodded. If I had been a few years younger, it was possible that I would have thought of some pretty special names for our party, but by now I was aware of the line between edgy and ridiculous. *Yeah, the past needs to remain in the past. I won’t make the same cringey mistakes again.* It was fine to have a goal or objective to work toward, but it was also important to come up with a party name that you could tell others without feeling embarrassed at a later age.

“It would be nice if our party name could intimidate our foes to a certain extent, but it’s more important to come up with something that’s simple and describes our party accurately,” said Haruka.

“Hmm. How about something like Mages + 1? That’s one way to describe our party,” said Yuki.

“I would be the odd one out under that name!” Touya exclaimed. “Sure, it’s simple and descriptive, but still!”

It seemed like Touya wasn’t really happy with Yuki’s idea, but mages were rare, so it actually wouldn’t be the worst way to advertise our abilities.

“I think it would be fine to use some kind of shared goal as our party name,” said Natsuki. “A name that’s too grandiose would be embarrassing, however.”

“Our goal, huh?” I said. “Would something like Prioritize Self-Care work?”

“That kind of party name would definitely stand out a lot,” said Haruka. “We can come up with something a little bit more stylish than that, however.”

“In that case, how about something like Cherish Life?” I asked.

“I wasn’t suggesting that we simply adjust your suggestion,” said Haruka.

“Besides, that meaning is a bit different in its implications.”

“Well, my next idea is Be Safe,” I said.

“Like we’re a walking safety sign for a construction site?!” Touya exclaimed. “That sounds lame!”

Damn, even Touya shot down my idea. I didn’t actually think everyone would agree to it, but still.

“Do you have any ideas, then, Touya?” I asked. “It has to be a name that sounds cool and is appropriate for us.”

“Huh? I can’t just think of something when you ask me all of a sudden,” Touya replied. “Hmm. How about something like Take It Easy?”

Touya’s idea was probably just the first thing that had popped into his head, and Haruka was about to shoot it down reflexively, but then she blinked a few times and tilted her head as if she had changed her mind. “Oh, that actually doesn’t sound too bad. It does describe our goals.”

“Yeah, you can use idioms as a motto, and it doesn’t sound like it would be too embarrassing to introduce our party by that name,” said Yuki. “I’m not sure about it, however. Clients might yell at us to take our assignments more seriously.”

“Tee hee. You make some good points, Yuki,” said Haruka, chuckling. “We need a name that won’t raise any eyebrows and that suits our shared goals. Any ideas, Natsuki?”

Natsuki paused in thought for about ten seconds and then said, “How about something like Meikyo Shisui, the four-character Chinese idiom for ‘clear as a polished mirror and serene as still water’? My martial arts instructor would say that often.”

“Yeah, sure, that sounds good,” I said. “We’ve earned a lot of money recently, so it’s better to maintain a clear and serene mentality instead of taking risks.”

“Mm, it would be a good way to remind ourselves that we always have the option of retreating if we need to,” said Haruka.

“It definitely sounds more serious than Touya’s suggestion,” said Yuki. “Do

you mind if we go with Natsuki's idea, Touya?"

"Nah, I just blurted out the first thing that came to mind, so I don't really care," said Touya. "But should we rephrase—"

"Actually, I was thinking of what the words Meikyo Shisui sound like before they get auto-translated as a party name," said Natsuki.

The automatic translation ability that Advastlis-sama had bestowed upon us was very good; it was even able to catch the specific implications of words in the languages of this world. However, that also meant that we had unconsciously accepted the automatic translation as a normal feature of our lives, so we usually didn't think about word choice when speaking, although we could use words from languages back on Earth if we consciously tried to do so.

"Hmm. I'm not particularly against the idea, but why?" I asked.

"There's no particular reason. It's just that we've managed to stabilize our daily lives by this point, right? That being the case, I'm not saying that we should help out everyone who crosses our path, but I feel like it wouldn't hurt to help out some of our former classmates if they need it," said Natsuki. "And it's possible that they might try to contact us after they recognize the name of our party."

Oh, that's actually some very detailed reasoning. The five of us had been a close-knit group of friends even back on Earth, but it wasn't like we had been on bad terms with our other classmates. I felt no urge to go far out of my way to help them, but I wouldn't mind offering help if I happened to encounter former classmates who desperately needed it; after all, I could afford to do so now. However, I would only be willing to help people who had tried to live honest lives and hadn't turned to crime after they ended up in this world.

"In that case, there's no reason to object to that idea," I said. "Right, Haruka?"

"Mm. Okay, our party name will be Meikyo Shisui," said Haruka.

Everyone clapped in approval after Haruka declared her final decision.

"Well, that leaves the summons as the next item of discussion," I said. "What should we do?"

Silence descended upon us when I brought up that topic. We had previously decided to avoid going anywhere near Kelg, since the entire town was a metaphorical land mine. Maintaining that policy would of course mean refusing to answer the summons, but...

“Will Diola-san be okay if we don’t answer the summons? We don’t know for sure, right?” said Yuki.

“Yeah, that’s the main issue here,” said Touya. “Diola-san has really helped us out a lot in all kinds of ways, so...”

It seemed that the guild had unofficially put Diola-san in charge of our party, so I was worried that we might cause trouble for her if we refused to answer the summons from the guild at Kelg, which would have been pretty ungrateful behavior on our part.

We all fell silent as we considered our options. The first person to speak up was Haruka. “From Diola-san’s perspective, the best-case scenario is probably for us to stay in Kelg temporarily and then return to Laffan. That said, I think it all depends on how dangerous we think the Holy Satomi Sect is likely to be.”

“Hmm. Well, what about a scenario in which the Holy Satomi Sect didn’t exist?” I asked.

“If that were the case, then I would like to head over to Kelg,” Natsuki replied.

Natsuki had answered immediately, but Touya seemed a bit confused; he looked at Natsuki and asked, “It wouldn’t be too weird if I answered like that, but since when do you care about raising your adventurer rank, Natsuki? I assumed you didn’t care about that kind of thing...”

“It interests me insofar as people consider high-rank adventurers more trustworthy,” said Natsuki. “We don’t have a very stable position in this world, so I’d feel more at ease if we could take advantage of opportunities like this and reach a high adventurer rank.”

“Yeah, I completely agree with Natsuki,” said Haruka. “It’s not as though I want some badge to show off or be proud of, but I would like to get enough standing that we can resist unreasonable demands.”

“Even without factoring in our adventurer ranks, I’m still kind of curious about

what Kelg is like," said Yuki. "Apparently Kelg is a larger town than Laffan, so we might be able to obtain things there that we can't in Laffan, like new books or ingredients."

"It sounds like all three of you are more or less in favor of heading to Kelg," I said. "What about you, Touya?"

"I mean, I'm down to go if everyone else wants to. And anyway, we've gotten a lot stronger than we were when we first arrived in this world," said Touya. "I don't just mean in terms of our money and combat abilities. We've also acquired a lot of knowledge, so we should be able to deal with anything that comes our way, including any form of land mines. What about you, Nao?"

"Hmm. I guess it's fine with me," I said. "We've been transported to another world, and it'd feel like a waste to stay in one town and never explore."

We would have to stay alert against potential dangers, but stressing ourselves out was no good. The Holy Satomi Sect was probably too recent to be colluding with the people in power, so it probably wasn't that influential. It would be a different story if it had infiltrated existing local religions and cults, but in this world, the gods actually made their presence known through divine revelations and punishments, so there was probably a limit to how much you could get away with even using skills that a god had bestowed upon you.

"However, we should immediately retreat and flee from Kelg if it seems very dangerous," I said.

Everyone else nodded—although, on reflection, I had no idea if we would be able to extricate ourselves from that kind of situation easily.

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Kelg was located south of Laffan. It would ordinarily take about three days by horse-drawn carriage to travel between the two towns, which made it sound like they were quite far apart, but it was important to take into account that the travel speed of a horse-drawn carriage was only a bit faster than the walking speed of an adult. My party was capable of carrying our luggage inside of our magic bags, so we would actually be able to reach Kelg in a fraction of that time traveling on foot. Travel via horse-drawn carriages had its own merits, such as the fact that you could relax during a journey, besides which it was useful for

camping outside, but on top of the cost of renting the carriage itself, you had to provide water and food for the horses. As a result, we had decided to travel on foot this time. We ran down the highway that led to Kelg at a speed comparable to that of an Olympic runner, and it only took two days for us to reach our destination.

“Whoa, Kelg definitely looks bigger than Laffan,” I said as we passed through the city gates.

“Yeah, even the gates are a bit bigger,” said Touya. He had an awkward expression on his face as he examined our surroundings. “However, I don’t really like what I’m seeing here...”

The girls nodded. Their reactions were perfectly natural. We had adjusted the timing of our arrival so that we would enter Kelg in the morning, and there was a huge contrast between the fresh morning air and all of the beggars on the streets. We had seen beggars back in Laffan on rare occasions, but they had been located in the back alleys and bad parts of town, so we hadn’t seen them frequently while walking along the main road.

“Is the state of affairs here in Kelg actually more unstable than we assumed?” Natsuki asked.

“I have no idea,” I replied. “For one thing, we don’t know what Kelg was like before. It’s possible that this is how Kelg has always been, so...”

It was possible that Kelg was simply a town with a wide disparity between the rich and poor, but...

“No, that’s not it at all. This is a very recent phenomenon.”

The man who had suddenly chimed in to our conversation was an old soldier standing on guard near us, and he sounded a bit irritated.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yeah. It’s all because there’s been an increase in gullible people. The beggars you see here all got wrapped up in a suspicious cult known as the Holy Satomi Sect. I don’t think things will remain like this for long, but you kids should be careful here.”

The guard was staring at me and Touya as he voiced that warning, presumably because most of the people who had fallen for the cult were men. That was just an assumption on my part, but the person who had founded the cult was a girl, and all of the beggars here seemed to be men, so I had a feeling I wasn't wrong.

"Thank you for the warning. We'll bear it in mind," I said. "By the way, can you direct us to the Adventurers' Guild?"

"Sure, no problem."

The guard must have been a kind person; he'd provided us with a warning even though it was the first time he'd ever laid eyes on us. He kindly gave us directions to the guild and even told us that he would have guided us there if he could have, and we thanked him profusely before setting off again.

"The first thing we should do is deal with the reason we're here," I said. "We need to be free to get out of here if the situation calls for it."

"Mm. The main objective of our visit is a promotion, after all," said Natsuki.

We had agreed to leave Kelg immediately if it turned out to be dangerous here, but it would have been pointless if we'd fled before accomplishing the objective of our visit, so we were heading for the Adventurers' Guild, but...

"Let's get something to eat first!" Touya exclaimed. "I'm hungry!"

Touya's stomach ruined our initial plan, but he was right that we needed to eat.

"Yeah, I guess it would be better to eat breakfast first," I said. "We don't know how much time we'll have to spend at the guild."

"I agree, but I have bad memories of food from market stalls," said Haruka. "Can we rely on your nose, Touya?"

"Sure, leave it to me!" Touya exclaimed. He sniffed loudly. "Okay, this way!"

It had sounded like Haruka was at least partly joking when she requested Touya's help, but Touya took her words seriously and led us to a place that sold skewers. It didn't look like anything special, but it was hard to go wrong with skewers. Or rather, most market stalls in this world could be divided into two

categories: those that served skewered food and those that served soup. They could be further divided based on whether or not they provided you with bread. So far, I hadn't seen any stalls in this world that sold pastries or noodles, but I had no idea if it was because such stalls had a higher overhead or because such foods took longer to make and were unsuitable for sale in an outdoor market.

"Um, what kind of skewers are served here?" Natsuki asked.

"These skewers? They're large rabbit skewers! Would any of you like one?"

The stallholder proffered a freshly cooked skewer. I felt a bit hesitant about eating a type of meat that I hadn't eaten before, but Touya's nose was fairly reliable when it came to food.

"Sure, I'll try one out," I said. "Whoa, delicious! It's stall food that actually tastes good— Oh, um, I'm sorry about what I just said..."

Some rude words had slipped out of my mouth, but the stallholder didn't seem to mind; he just chuckled. "All good, my man. You praised my food, after all. You're adventurers from Laffan, aren't you? Adventurers from Laffan are always surprised when they try food from the stalls in this town, ha ha!"

"Oh, I see. Why does Laffan have so many stalls that serve bad-tasting food?" I asked.

"I dunno. There's been all kinds of talk—how it might be because the stalls at Laffan were started by retired adventurers who can't cook for shit, or maybe it's that the food is low quality because it has to be affordable for greenhorn adventurers. I personally think the price is the biggest factor," replied the stallholder. "Stalls at Laffan should at least provide bread if you pay for food that's around the same price as one of my skewers."

"Oh, yeah, we've had bread and soup from the stalls at Laffan," I said.

The food that we had eaten from stalls when we first arrived in this world had tasted awful, but it was just bread and soup, a meal that only cost three hundred Rea per person. As for the skewers we had just paid for, they were six hundred Rea apiece, and each one was pretty big. Six hundred Rea was a price that was perfectly affordable for us nowadays, although it wouldn't have been

originally.

“You struck gold, Touya!” Yuki exclaimed. “Good job!”

A smug grin appeared on Touya’s face after Yuki praised him. “Yeah, you can always count on me for this kind of thing! I’ll have another skewer!”

I was still a little hungry myself, but...

“Each skewer is pretty big, so another one might be too much for me,” I said. “Do you want to split one, Haruka?”

Haruka nodded. “I feel like I should be the one asking you that, but I can do one third. I’m still a little hungry too.”

Natsuki seemed slightly unhappy. She’d just finished eating, and she gestured with the bare wooden skewer. “You know, that makes it harder for me to order another. Yuki, let’s share half—”

“Huh? Half?”

Natsuki turned around to look at Yuki, but Yuki had just finished her second skewer.

“Ugh. Well, I guess it’s true that there’s no need to hold back, since we know each other quite well, but still...”

“Ha ha! If you want, I can cook a half-portion skewer. I’ll lower the price by half too!”

“...I appreciate the sentiment, but I’ll have another full-size skewer,” said Natsuki.

Apparently the problem wasn’t that Natsuki felt a bit too full. She finished another whole skewer with no trouble and drank some water, but right as we were about to get up and head toward the guild, a loud voice echoed throughout the surrounding area.

“I apologize for the wait! The annual exclusive sale of holy water will now begin!”

“Hm? Annual exclusive sale of holy water?” I looked in the direction of the voice I had heard and saw a few young girls. Behind them were a few guys

carrying large baskets, and people had started to gather around them.

“What’s going on over there?” Touya asked.

We were all pretty confused, but the stallholder seemed to know. “Those people are believers of the Holy Satomi Sect. They’re a huge nuisance, but...”

“The Holy Satomi Sect? Really?” I asked.

“When that many people gather in one place, won’t it block the thoroughfares?” Haruka asked. “Won’t the authorities try to crack down on them?”

“Nope, not at all. It seems that some of those in power are believers too. It’s not like they’re breaking any laws selling things there, so the guards don’t get involved either.”

Yeah, I guess that makes sense. They’re basically operating similar to a stall. There are just a lot of people around there.

“They do change the location for each annual sale, so it’s not as bad as it could be, but...”

While we were chatting with the stallholder, the size of the crowd had swelled, so we could no longer see the girls who had announced the sale. However, we could still hear their voices, and it was obvious that the sale was already a success.

“You will receive one ballot per purchase of a bottle of holy water, plus one handshake coupon if you buy a set of ten bottles!”

“...The way that they’re selling their products reminds me of how the idol business works back in Japan,” said Touya.

“Well, holy water is a consumable good, so it’s not as bad as the kind of crap that fans back on Earth would purchase to obtain ballots and coupons,” I said. “However, there’s no way a single person would ever need ten bottles, so...”

Ordinary people had basically no use for holy water, and the water that the Holy Satomi Sect was selling probably had no effect at all.

“Does that mean that people will just pour out the water they’re buying?” Haruka asked.

“Oh, that’s a keen observation,” said the stallholder. “Yeah, you’re spot on. A lot of people just pour it out in the streets after they buy it. It’s a big issue.”

The stallholder pointed with his chin, and when I looked in that direction, I saw a guy who had escaped the press of the crowd. He was carrying a bottle of holy water, and he walked toward the entrance of an alleyway to dispose of it before rejoining the crowd.

“The Holy Satomi Sect has been a huge nuisance for business. It’s true that wherever they show up, a lot of people gather, but those people don’t actually buy things from the other places nearby, so the only ones who profit are the Holy Satomi Sect—and the workshops that craft the bottles. Ugh...”

I mean, yeah, if those people are emptying their wallets on the merchandise the Holy Satomi Sect is selling, there’s no way they would have enough money left over to buy anything else. On top of that, it’s the ordinary citizens living nearby who have to clean up the discarded bottles, right? Man, this really is a nuisance...

“By the way, what are the handshake coupons and ballots?” I asked.

“Well, those are—”

Based on the stallholder’s explanation, the Holy Satomi Sect was a cult with a “saint” called Satomi as its figurehead. The rest of the top brass were also “saints”—all pretty-looking girls. As for the handshake coupons and ballots, apparently the former entitled the bearer to participate in handshake events of their choice that were hosted by the saints, while the latter entitled them to vote for their favorite saint in one of a regular series of popularity polls. *Yeah, this definitely sounds familiar.*

“Uh, does that mean the position of that Satomi girl can go up and down depending on how many votes she gets?” Yuki asked.

“Nah, seems that she’s in her own special category, above the other saints. After all, it wouldn’t be called the Holy Satomi Sect if someone could replace her that easily, right?”

Yeah, that makes sense. The “saint” moniker still seems weird to me, though.

“In any case, Saint Satomi’s devotees seem to consider her too popular for

the voting system.”

“Is she really that popular?” Haruka asked. “She’s just a normal girl, isn’t she?”

“Yeah—to an unnatural extent. Everybody who’s ever talked with her face-to-face has become a believer.”

Okay, yeah, this Takamatsu person definitely has some kind of dodgy skill. We all grimaced at the stallholder’s words; they were concrete evidence of Satomi Takamatsu’s involvement, and there was a possibility that some of our other classmates were involved too.

“Is it possible to shake hands with Saint Satomi if you have a handshake coupon?” I asked.

“Nah, that’s also in a separate category. One handshake coupon will only grant you the opportunity to shake hands with the top brass below Saint Satomi. If I recall correctly, you need to gather a hundred to get an opportunity to shake hands with *her*.”

If Satomi was really that popular, then the system made sense—she couldn’t possibly shake hands with all of her devotees—but...

“Yikes, that’s a really exploitative system,” said Yuki. “By the way, you sure seem knowledgeable about this topic.”

“I mean, yeah, the Holy Satomi sect has held their ‘annual’ sales near my stall several times already this year. All of that information is out in the open. I wish I didn’t have to know any of it, but...”

The stallholder sighed deeply, but the next words we heard came from inside the crowd and effectively made a mockery of everything he’d said. “Please line up over here if you want to draw lots! Ten handshake coupons will get you one draw!”

Touya raised his voice, seemingly without realizing it. “Gacha?!”

I felt the same way. *I can’t believe the Holy Satomi Sect has brought* this *part of Japanese culture to a different world. Will they eventually announce deals like ten free lots if you join the cult?*

“...What is that lottery supposed to be for?” Haruka asked.

“I dunno. This is the first time I’ve heard about it...”

“I’ll go take a look,” said Touya.

The stallholder seemed like he had no idea what was happening, and Touya headed over to scout things out after he noticed the look of confusion on the stallholder’s face. However, Touya had a bitter expression on his face when he returned from his reconnaissance mission.

“Welcome back,” I said.

“Thanks,” said Touya. “I swear, it was a real scam.”

According to Touya, there were five potential results that you could draw from the lottery:

- A coupon that allowed you to shake hands with Saint Satomi
- A coupon that allowed you to pick a saint to call out your name at an event
- A coupon that you could use to spend an hour with a saint of your choosing
- A ballot
- A coupon you could exchange for holy water

Apparently a believer could choose Saint Satomi for the second and third coupons if they gathered a total of ten, but Touya had only seen one instance of a ballot; the rest of the merchandise on sale consisted mainly of holy water coupons.

“Yeah, the odds of getting the first through third results must be quite low considering there have to be over a hundred people buying lots,” said Yuki.

“‘Quite low’ isn’t sufficient to describe it! Holy water is basically garbage, and a handshake coupon will simply turn into a ballot even if you’re lucky enough not to get the worst result!” I exclaimed. “Ballots aren’t even worth one tenth of the value of regular handshake coupons. Even mobile gacha games are bette — Actually, maybe not?”

Hmm. I’ve never actually dabbled in any gacha games myself, but the odds for

rare stuff are really low percentages, right? Like, a zero and a decimal point and then...

"Regardless, this is not a good trend," said Haruka. "Some people might end up in debt slavery as a result of going broke. The very thought of that scares me."

Gambling addiction was considered a disease back on modern-day Earth, and the addictiveness of gacha was also well-documented—so much so that gacha games were actually illegal in some countries. Combine that with the influence of one of the skills Advastlis-sama had bestowed upon us and the results could get pretty bad.

"There's a bad atmosphere in this town these days as a result of the increase in the number of beggars, and yet the Holy Satomi Sect wants to introduce gacha culture as well," I said. "Whatever they're doing here, it's way too aggressive."

I was curious about whether that was because the Holy Satomi Sect had no idea of the results of their activities on the ground level—or if everything was going exactly according to plan.

"I picked up some bottles of holy water," said Touya. "Do these actually work against undead monsters?"

He'd picked up five bottles of holy water, and he emptied one of them into his palm and took a sniff. However, it looked like he couldn't smell anything, and he commented that it just smelled like water.

"Hm? Oh, do you guys need holy water? I wouldn't recommend using those bottles. Even if all the temples in Kelg worked together, they wouldn't be able to create the volume of water that the Holy Satomi Sect is distributing everywhere."

"Mm, it seems that a great deal of work goes into creating authentic holy water," said Natsuki.

"Besides, the Holy Satomi Sect has never said anything about their holy water having any effect against undead monsters."

A dry laugh escaped the stallholder's mouth, but we all froze up for a

moment; our brains couldn't register the words that we'd just heard.

"Huh? What? Oh, I guess that makes sense," I said. "Wait, in that case, what is this holy water...?"

"According to the words of the Holy Satomi Sect, it's water that Saint Satomi has personally blessed. But they never say a word about its actual benefits."

The holy water I had received from Ishuca-san actually worked against undead monsters, so I'd initially had some hopes for these bottles just because they were called holy water. However, apparently the Holy Satomi Sect was cagey about the specifics.

"Yikes, that's really sketchy," Touya said with a grimace.

Yuki chuckled dryly. "Well, things like supplements are sketchy as well. You know, some companies advertise their products as being suited for people with high blood pressure or being helpful with something in general, but they never specify what the benefits are supposed to be."

"Yeah, definitely! There are also the tiny lines of disclaimer text under some ads about how it's just the personal opinion of the person speaking," said Touya. "Do they really think they can advertise whatever they want as long as they put up that disclaimer? I mean, sure, the products might work for some people, but..."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that all advertisements for healthy food and supplements are deceptive, but I wish businesses wouldn't try to sell things without providing concrete scientific evidence for their claims," said Haruka.

"Yeah, that happens all the time!" I exclaimed. "Especially the brands of water that get advertised as having certain effects! The holy water here in Kelg hasn't been advertised in that way, but— Oh, wait, is the holy water here actually not as bad as it could be?"

"What about advertisements claiming you can just ingest substances that are only supposed to have a benefit when injected? That makes no sense," said Yuki.

"Thesis papers from sketchy university professors were also quite common," said Natsuki. "It seems as though there were plenty of people back on Earth

who put too much faith in that kind of endorsement."

"However, technically, anyone can write a thesis paper if they want to, and there are 'journals' that will publish your work for a fee, so the honesty and accuracy of a paper is a whole different issue," said Haruka.

As a result of Touya's initial words, we'd fallen to conversing among ourselves about dishonest advertising tactics. Of course, the stallholder had no frame of reference for any of this. "Uh, I dunno what you guys are talking about, but it sounds like scams exist everywhere. But that being the case, do you guys know how to deal with scams?"

He had a troubled look on his face and was clearly asking us for help, but we all glanced at each other and frowned.

"Well, I don't think it'll be easy to solve the problem here in Kelg," said Touya. "It's not like the Holy Satomi Sect is dealing in drugs as far as anyone knows."

"There are a few ways the authorities could clear up this problem—gambling restrictions, restrictions on the freedom of assembly, and religious persecution," said Yuki. "All of those are pretty dangerous except the first one, though."

I nodded in response to Touya and Yuki's words. It would be possible for the kingdom to impose such measures—it was an autocracy—but I wasn't thrilled about the idea. Common sense from my life back on Earth still lingered on inside of me.

However, the stallholder had a bitter expression on his face and shook his head. "Yeah, that's a bit extreme. It's true that I've suffered a loss of revenue due to the Holy Satomi Sect, but I guess it's not that easy to sort out this problem. I'm still hanging on for now, but there are other stores and stalls that might be in danger soon."

The deterioration of public order and safety due to the increase in the number of beggars was also an issue, and it would only get worse if more people started spending their money on holy water rather than other things.

"Funnily enough, the total revenue from commercial transactions in Kelg probably won't change at all," I said. "It'll just be going entirely to the cult."

“The places that will be hit the hardest are taverns. I sell food, so it’ll never be as bad for me.”

People could live without alcohol, but they couldn’t live without food. However, in the long term, the actions of the Holy Satomi Sect were bound to have a negative impact upon the economy of Kelg as a whole. The outcome would depend in part on how the Holy Satomi Sect decided to spend the money that they had accumulated, but that wasn’t at all reassuring to contemplate. We were outsiders when it came to this problem, but it was still a very serious one.

“Well, I gotta say, the situation here is way worse than we assumed it would be,” I said.

We thanked the owner of the stall for all the information, then resumed our journey to the Adventurers’ Guild. Behind us, some voices announced that the next annual exclusive sale was scheduled to take place in the afternoon, but we ignored them and sighed in unison.

“They’re technically just selling products to people,” said Touya. “If the people of Kelg don’t know about the existence of skills, then...”

“Well, we don’t know if our classmates are using a specific skill to compel people to buy holy water,” said Haruka.

“Huh? The excitement we just witnessed seemed pretty unnatural, didn’t it?” Yuki asked.

“Yes, I agree that it seemed *very* unnatural, but there were plenty of people back on Earth who would splurge millions of yen on idols and gacha, so it could be something similar,” Haruka replied. “It’s not a mentality that I can understand, however. Nao, Touya, does it make sense to either of you?”

“I mean, the so-called saints were pretty cute, but that’s about it,” said Touya. “I might have gotten baited if any of them had animal ears!”

“Dude, I’m spooked—you seem like you really would fork over a bunch of money pretty casually!” I exclaimed. “For example, Touya, how would you respond if Riva told you she was broke and asked you for some help?”

“Riva, huh? Mm, her fluffy ears are quite cute,” said Touya. “However, bunny

ears aren't really my thing. I prefer wolf ears and cat ears and stuff like that. But I'd be willing to spend up to one hundred thousand Rea helping Riva!"

"I'm even more spooked by the fact that you came up with a realistic-sounding amount of money!" I exclaimed. "Well, anyway, as Haruka said, it's a business model that has succeeded even in a world without skills. There's no way I would ever pay money for a handshake, however. Haruka, come over here for a second."

"Uh, okay, I guess," said Haruka.

I extended one of my hands to Haruka, and she shook it, although she seemed a bit confused.

"Wouldn't you feel a bit empty if you'd had to pay money just for that?" I asked. "Handshakes only make you feel happy if they're done naturally, right?"

"Dude, Nao, that only applies to girls who you're close to," said Touya. "When it comes to shaking hands with a beautiful girl, there's definitely a demand."

"Huh? I don't think the saints were *that* cute," I said. "The idol system that the Holy Satomi Sect had set up may have created a feeling of scarcity, but going by appearance alone, it's objectively true that Haruka, Natsuki, and Yuki look much better, right?"

"Nao, you're praising us too much," said Haruka. "I appreciate the sentiment, however."

I had merely stated the objective truth, but Haruka thanked me for some reason, while Natsuki and Yuki looked away from me, as if they felt embarrassed.

"Damn it, so this is how lucky guys talk!" Touya seemed a bit frustrated after he heard my words. "There are some guys out there who can't find a single girl who's willing to shake hands with them, you know?!"

"I mean, that doesn't mean much coming from you," I said. "You're in the category of guys who *can* find girls who'd be willing to shake hands with you, so..."

"Yeah, I wouldn't mind shaking hands with you, Touya," said Yuki. "Ten Rea

and we can call it a deal.”

“You’re going to make me pay for it?!” Touya exclaimed. “On top of that, it’ll be reasonably affordable?!”

“All you have to do is to pay cash,” said Yuki. “No coupons necessary.”

“Mm. I would be willing to shake hands with you for twenty Rea, Touya-kun,” said Natsuki.

“The price went up?!” Touya exclaimed. “Wait, hold on, does the price scale based on how close we are as friends?!”

“If it does, then you would have to pay the market price to shake hands with me, Touya,” said Haruka.

“How am I supposed to react to that?!” Touya exclaimed. “By the way, how much would you girls charge Nao for a handshake?”

“Free, of course,” they all replied in unison.

“Oh, come on! Nao deserves to get stabbed in the back more than I do,” said Touya.

“Are you saying that I should work on leveling up until knives can’t pierce my skin anymore, Touya?” I asked.

I couldn’t think of any reasons that someone would try to stab me, but there were people like Iwanaka and his companions who would hold grudges against me, so...

“Heh heh, you better watch your back, Nao,” said Touya.

“You’re the one who’s going to stab me?!” I exclaimed. “Fine, fine. Yuki, can you cheer up Touya by shaking hands with him? He’s a pretty lonely guy...”

“If you say so, Nao,” said Yuki. “Just kidding! I’ll shake your tail for free, though, Touya.”

“Oh, nic— Wait, what? That’s different from shaking hands,” said Touya. “In fact, you should be the one paying me for something like that.”

“Yeah, honestly, your fur looks nice enough that you could probably earn money with it if you wanted to, Touya,” said Yuki. “You could start your own tail

cafés with a business model similar to that of cat cafés."

"What are tail cafés supposed to be like? It'd be pretty weird if the customers could only play with his tail," I said. "Wait, let's get back to what we were talking about before. You could say that the Holy Satomi Sect has merely imported a business model from Earth, but I feel like it's something that should never have been introduced to this world."

"Mm. It's also a bit strange that their business model is actually working quite well in a world where most people have less disposable income," said Natsuki.

"That being the case, there are decent odds that some sort of skill is at play," I said.

Back on Earth, I would have considered it karmic justice if someone who blew a lot of money on gacha and idol merchandise had ended up saddled with debt or abandoned by his family. However, it was a different story if skills were involved, especially considering we'd witnessed what had happened to Aera-san as a result of one of our classmates using a skill on her.

"Well, I don't think this is really something for us to worry about," said Touya. "Nothing good will come of getting involved, so let's just leave it to the nobles to deal with this issue."

"Aera-san was victimized by one of our classmates, so I feel a bit frustrated having to ignore this, but it'd be very bad if we tried to help and then got charmed or something like that," I said. "I guess we have no choice but to give up on the idea of getting revenge for Aera-san."

"Well, we don't know for sure if Takamatsu-san was actually the person who deceived Aera-san," said Haruka.

"In any case, there are no benefits to getting involved," said Natsuki. "Let's keep our distance from the Holy Satomi Sect."

"Yeah, I guess it's true that there's no need for us to take responsibility for the actions of our classmates," I said.

If we absolutely had to pin responsibility on someone, then it technically wasn't a human being at all: it was Advastlis-sama. But that would be like arguing that weapons were culpable for murder, so it would be better to just

abide by the conclusion that Takamatsu was responsible for her own actions.

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We arrived at the Kelg branch of the Adventurers' Guild. The guild building looked significantly larger than the one back in Laffan, and in keeping with its size, it also seemed much busier. The guild building back in Laffan would normally have been fairly empty at this time of the day, but in addition to all of the adventurers inside, it looked like there were a few quest posters remaining on the bulletin board inside. There were also a number of receptionists stationed at desks, and about half were women, some of them quite beautiful. Not that I had any complaints about Diola-san, but as a guy, it was hard for me not to stare at women like these.

I was fairly sure that I was staring too hard, but then the girls called my name. "...Nao?" Their tone sounded pretty scary.

"O-Oh, hmm, where should we turn in the summons?" I hurriedly took out the letter that Diola-san had given us and headed toward one of the desks—which happened to have a woman behind it, coincidentally.

"May I ask if it's okay to turn in this document here?" I asked.

"Hm? Oh, let me have a look." The receptionist lady seemed a bit confused, but after she read the letter, she hastily stood. "Th-This way, please!"

She guided us to a room with some sofas—apparently a parlor of some kind.

"Feel free to enter this room! I'll go and inform my superiors right away!" She gestured to us to indicate that we were free to sit down wherever we wanted and then left, walking at a rapid clip.

We all sat down on one of the sofas.

"Well, it seems like we're decently welcome here," said Touya.

"Mm, it definitely seems like we're going to be treated well," said Haruka. "However, we haven't been provided with any tea or snacks, and the sofa we're sitting on feels kind of cheap..."

"Yes, it doesn't compare to the high-quality sofa we purchased for our own house," said Natsuki. "But in any case, I still think this is better than being

forced to wait while standing."

"All that's left is to see how long we'll be kept waiting," said Haruka.

Haruka sounded a bit dubious, but fortunately for us, the door of the room opened after just a few minutes and two men entered. One of them was a bald guy whose face was covered in wrinkles; he looked like he might be in his seventies. The other man was much younger but still older than us—maybe in his late forties. Usually, a man's physique would only get worse from that age onward, but his body showed no signs of decline, so he must have been an active adventurer. All of us stood up as soon as the two of them entered, but the older guy raised his hand to indicate that we could remain seated, then sat on the sofa opposite us. The other guy remained standing behind him.

"I would like to thank you all very much for coming to Kelg. My name is William, and I am the master of this guild branch. As for the man behind me..."

"My name is Syrus, and I'm the branch master's bodyguard. I'm sorry to say this, but it's currently a bit unsafe here in Kelg..."

Syrus bowed toward us, as if he was apologetic about the fact that a mere bodyguard like himself had to remain present for this meeting, but we all shook our heads to indicate that there was no problem.

"I guess that means our initial impression of Kelg was correct," I said. "This town felt quite different from Laffan."

"Well, ordinarily, Kelg isn't too different from Laffan. In fact, the people of Laffan and Kelg are quite similar to each other; we're all located within the same viscounty, after all. However, let's set that aside for now and move on to the main topic." The branch master paused to adjust his seated posture a bit before lowering his head toward us. "Once again, thank you very much for answering the summons, and thank you for slaying those bandits. Not only many merchants but a number of adventurers fell prey to the bandits, as none of the adventurers here in Kelg are capable of defeating a large bandit gang. On behalf of the Kelg Adventurers' Guild, please allow me to express my gratitude to your party."

"Oh, um, it's true that we slew the bandits, but we had to leave it to the guild to deal with the aftermath, so we'd like to apologize about that," I said.

We had retrieved the identity cards that we'd found on the bandits who were former adventurers, but we hadn't been able to do anything for their victims. In fact, we had left all of that to Diola-san, but it was probably the guild in Kelg that had actually handled the cleanup, so I felt a bit bad about leaving behind all of those unidentifiable corpses.

"Think nothing of it. Everything turned out fine in the end. After all, the guild here in Kelg would have been in an awkward spot if adventurers from Laffan had handled everything, ha ha!" I had no idea if the branch master meant that sincerely or if he was just being considerate of us, but he chuckled lightly before continuing, "However, this does mean that your party will all be promoted to Rank 5. Syrus, please handle the necessary procedures for promotion."

"Understood," said Syrus. "Please present your adventurer cards."

We handed our cards over, and Syrus took them with him as he left the room. I wasn't sure if it was okay to leave such things to a bodyguard, but if the branch master had brought him in here, he was probably trustworthy enough.

"Now, then, that's all for the main matter at hand. Turning to other matters...does your party know about the Holy Satomi— Oh, it seems you're all aware and very perceptive. Can you at the very least please hear me out?"

A troubled look appeared on the branch master's face, probably because some hints of displeasure had appeared on our own faces. I told the branch master that we would listen for the time being and urged him to continue.

"Thank you. I believe your party is aware of this already, but the present situation in this town is a trifle complicated."

"Yeah, it definitely seems like it," I said. "Earlier today, we ran into an annual exclusive sale being put on by the Holy Satomi Sect."

"I see. Frankly, the actual situation is worse than you imagine. Among the citizenry, countless people have fallen into debt, while among those of higher standing, some have misappropriated money on behalf of the sect. As for adventurers, even those of comparatively good character have died as a result of recklessness in the field, taking on quests for which they were hardly qualified, and those of less than sterling character have turned to crime in order to earn money."

“Oh. Um, couldn’t the authorities solve all of those problems by cracking down on the Holy Satomi Sect?” If the situation was that serious, I felt like it was something that the lord of the viscounty had to deal with.

The branch master merely sighed. “Well, you see, the trouble is that the Holy Satomi Sect hasn’t actually violated any laws. They’re technically no more than a business selling goods. The commotion that they have caused would normally be sufficient reason to arrest them, but people of my generation still remember the days of the lord before the previous lord, so urging forceful measures is, shall we say, difficult.”

“Oh, right, the mithril mine.” *If I recall correctly, the lord at that time falsely accused people of crimes to “create” convict laborers, right?*

“I’m surprised that you know, but yes, that’s right. The current viscount has governed the viscounty well thus far, but...”

“Okay, I understand the reasoning as to why the authorities can’t make a move, but I still don’t think there’s anything we can do,” I said. “Just to be clear, we can’t resolve this situation even if we’re asked to do so.”

“Even I wouldn’t ask that of you—it would be asking for the impossible. The lord is hesitating to act due to the history of this viscounty, but it seems likely that he’ll make a decision soon, so the guild wants to have people ready for action when the time comes.”

“That sounds pretty ambiguous,” I said. “Aren’t there plenty of adventurers here in Kelg?”

“Ordinarily, yes. However, these are hardly ordinary times. There’s no way to tell which adventurers are believers of the Holy Satomi Sect. Moreover, there are very few Rank 5 adventurers here in Kelg, so the guild would deeply appreciate having your party around. The destruction of the bandit gang proves you are capable.”

Ugh, I guess Diola-san’s assumptions were completely correct. I wouldn’t hesitate to help if this were in Laffan—basically everyone I know in this world lives there—but Kelg is completely unfamiliar, so...

“We beg you for any help you feel able to offer. The guild cannot turn down a

request from the lord for our cooperation, so this matter is one the guild will have to deal with sooner or later. If you participate, you will be rewarded accordingly...”

The branch master seemed quite desperate, and we glanced at each other thoughtfully. None of us wanted to get involved with any of our classmates who had land mine skills, but the Adventurers’ Guild was the only real professional connection that we had in this world. With all of that in mind, this would be a good opportunity for us to make the guild personnel feel indebted to us, so...

“Well, we don’t plan to stay here in Kelg for very long,” I said. “If that’s okay, then...”

“Of course. Your party will not be forced to do anything. It’s merely that if something should happen, it would be wonderful to have your assistance.”

I had given a very noncommittal answer, but the branch master bowed deeply as he thanked me.

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Yuki folded her arms behind her head and sighed as soon as we exited the guild building.

“Just like we thought,” said Yuki. “I knew we would get dragged into trouble.”

“Mm. Based on the situation the branch master described, something is bound to happen eventually,” said Natsuki. “We need to discuss whether or not to get involved, but...”

“It’s hard to say. There are a lot of different pros and cons,” I said. “But in any case, there’s no real point in overthinking this, so I think we can just respond flexibly and deal with things as they come. It’s not like we have to make a decision immediately, right?”

“Yeah, that’s right. It’s possible that nothing will happen while we’re here in Kelg,” said Haruka. “If it doesn’t, then it’s true that there’s no point in worrying. With all of that in mind, let’s—”

“Let’s eat lunch!” Touya exclaimed.

“...Didn’t you just eat earlier, Touya?” I asked.

“Yeah, I did,” Touya replied. “However, it’s noon now, and two skewers were nowhere near enough to fill my stomach.”

Our conversation with the branch master hadn’t taken too long, but we had spent some time earlier observing the Holy Satomi Sect’s exclusive sale, so Touya was right that noon had rolled around. I wasn’t very hungry, but it was technically time for lunch.

“Well, I guess we can eat lunch while looking for an inn to stay at,” I said. “Food from an actual dining hall instead of a stall would be nice.”

By now, we had some idea of what to look for in dining halls. The most important thing was to look for a place that wasn’t too cheap. The food at cheap places could be decent, but that was “decent” for the citizens of this world; it would taste way worse to our palates. Unfortunately for us, there didn’t seem to be any diners where the food was cheap, fast, and good. That being the case, the beef bowl chains back in Japan were very good— *Actually, now that I think about it, I don’t think they were that great. They definitely tasted way better than most meals in this world, but maybe I’m letting nostalgia color my memories too much.*

Another important thing to look for was the food that was served as the main dish. From best to worst, the most common foods were white bread, potatoes, brown bread that had been baked on the same day, and brown bread that had been baked a few days earlier. White bread was quite good, and brown bread was acceptable if it was fresh. Any dining hall where you could smell freshly baked bread would be an excellent choice. However, at this time of day, freshly baked bread would probably be hard to find. The alternative—brown bread that was a few days old—was absolutely disgusting, and we would have been very unlucky to end up in a dining hall that served that kind of food.

“Touya, use your nose to guide us to a place with delicious food once again!” Yuki exclaimed. “Go, boy, go!”

“I’m not a dog, but okay,” said Touya. “*Sniff, sniff.* Hmm. I smelled baked bread over there.”

Touya had complained at first, but he obeyed Yuki’s request and wandered around a bit, then pointed at a dining hall. All of the dining halls in the vicinity

looked quite busy—it was, after all, lunchtime—but the dining hall that Touya had indicated appeared to be much busier than the rest. There was a long line of people outside, and when I glanced inside to see what food was on offer...

“Whoa!” I grabbed Haruka’s hand and pointed inside of the dining hall. “Take a look, Haruka!”

“What are you—oh, an actual menu?” said Haruka. “Wait, does that mean there are multiple options that we can choose to order?”

There were a few different menus on the wall at the back of the dining hall; they displayed words like *brown bread, sliced potatoes, mashed potatoes,* and *white bread*. To the side, there was some more text—something about an extra fee for mashed potatoes and white bread but not for brown bread. That had to mean we could actually choose what main dish we wanted. *I’m sure of it!*

“There’s no reason for us not to go here!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, definitely!” Yuki exclaimed. “The side dishes look pretty tasty too, so I’m actually looking forward to it.”

“There doesn’t seem to be enough meat, but I guess I can just order extra for myself,” said Touya.

The line outside was quite long, but no one voiced any objections, so we waited for a while before we were finally able to enter the dining hall. All of us ordered a set meal with white bread. Touya was the only one who ordered extra meat, as he often did; beastmen required more “fuel” than other races in order to sustain their incredible strength. It was similar to the fact that SUVs and sedans had different purposes such that there was no point in comparing their fuel efficiency. Luckily for us, we had earned enough money that there was no need for us to worry about being unable to afford the food that Touya required.

Dining halls like this one were the type of place where you had to wait a while before being seated, but the food would be ready quite quickly, and as expected, our set meals had arrived at our table soon after we’d placed our orders—a bit later than the orders that other customers had placed around the same time as us, but that was probably because we had all ordered white bread.

“Whoa, this bread is actually a bit warm,” I said.

The white bread looked kind of similar to a French roll. It was a bit harder than the types of bread we had eaten back in Japan, but it wasn’t as hard as brown bread, which felt like it would make your gums bleed. It smelled good and felt a bit warm to the touch, and it made some crispy sounds when I lightly pressed on it with my fingers.

“Mm. It’s not freshly baked, but it was probably warmed up a bit before being served,” said Haruka.

“Brown bread probably gets served as is,” said Natsuki. “It becomes even harder when you reheat it.”

The side dishes were all quite decent as well, especially considering the price for a set meal. As I enjoyed my food, I looked around the dining hall and saw a wooden board with the menu pasted onto it. In addition to the prices, which we had seen earlier, there were some wooden menu boards hanging up; they looked like the kind of thing you would see in Japanese dining establishments, especially the ones that the actors would visit in TV dramas. All that was missing was a blackboard menu. Most of the ordinary citizens in this world were illiterate, so a lot of dining halls didn’t post menus at all. However, everyone in my party preferred places with menus because they made it easier for us to order upon our first visit to a new place. I wasn’t sure if it was because it was harder to preserve food in this world, but there weren’t that many different items on the menu.

“Hmm? Wait a second...”

As I was looking around the dining hall, something unexpected suddenly popped into my line of sight. Haruka was sitting next to me, so I poked her and pointed at what I had just seen.

“What is it, Nao?” Haruka asked. “Oh, isn’t that Umezono-san?”

Yeah, I guess my eyes weren’t deceiving me. The moment they heard Haruka’s words, everyone else reacted—as did Umezono herself, who had just had finished setting some food down on a table near us.

We all stared at each other for a bit.

“Huh?!” Umezono exclaimed. She seemed very surprised. “What are you all _”

She almost raised her voice, but she immediately pressed her hands to her chest and took some deep breaths to calm herself. After she had calmed down, she looked away from us and said under her breath, “Whew. U-Um, err, I’m sorry about how I acted before.”

At that abrupt and blunt apology, all of us glanced at each other. Yuki and Natsuki hadn’t been with us at the time, but the rest of us had told them about our encounter with Umezono, so both of them were as surprised as we were, and it was actually Yuki who voiced the question that we all had on our minds. “What’s the matter? I never expected to hear an apology from you. Haruka and the others told us that you said some pretty nasty things to them...”

“That’s exactly why I’m apologizing,” said Umezono. “I was really stressed out at the time, and things didn’t work out well for me, so I didn’t have much money either.”

Umezono had had feelings of rivalry and jealousy toward Haruka, so she seemed fine with talking to Yuki as an intermediary. She looked a bit sheepish as she muttered some more excuses.

“Hmm. Well, I can sort of understand how you felt,” said Yuki. “Natsuki and I thought of some crazy plans when we were stressed out. I only managed to get by because I had her with me.”



“Right?! I didn’t think I would feel so insecure and helpless being alone,” said Umezono. “Having no money was bad enough, but when I actually had money, I also got paranoid about other people trying to steal it. Coming to this world really gave me a newfound appreciation for my parents.” Umezono covered her face with one hand and sighed.

I could relate to her. I would have felt terrified if I’d been told to walk alone by myself in a dangerous foreign country, after all. The information you would see on television back in Japan was probably biased, but I still felt spooked when I remembered news about countries with homicide rates that were one hundred times that of Japan, or news about people being assaulted at police stations. Maybe that kind of thing wasn’t a big deal for the locals of those places, but that didn’t change the fact that the prospect of navigating a foreign country seemed intimidating to me, and a whole new world was even worse. Laffan wasn’t that dangerous, however. The unsafe areas of Laffan that we knew about weren’t that ba— *Actually, I guess it would still be dangerous for a girl to walk around alone in those areas.*

“If that’s the case, you shouldn’t have acted so hostile toward us,” said Haruka, sounding a bit exasperated. “We didn’t have much spare money at the time either, and I can’t say for sure that we would have helped you out even if you had acted friendly toward us, but we could have worked together, you know?”

Umezono snapped back right away. “Look, I was way too stressed out at the time! Well, I mean, my situation wasn’t that bad back when we first met, but it became way worse afterward...” The look in her eyes was quite gloomy; she must have been recalling her struggles at the time.

“Well, it seems like you’ve gone through a lot of hardships,” said Yuki.

Umezono shook her head as if to shake the memories out, then yelled, “‘Hardships’ doesn’t begin to describe what I went through!”

“I see. By the way, is it okay for you to continue talking with us here?” Yuki asked. “You abandoned your job as a waitress at the time, right?”

“Oh, don’t worry, it’s fine here,” Umezono replied.

Glancing behind her, Umezono smiled and waved at a guy who had emerged from the kitchen. The guy smiled in response and greeted us with a nod before returning to the kitchen. *Oh, hmm, is this what I think it is...?*

"It's true that I shouldn't stand around talking for too long, though," said Umezono. "Do you have some time to spare today? If you do, then stay here. In exchange, you don't have to pay for the food you've ordered."

Umezono shrugged as she pointed at the food on our table, and Yuki nodded before glancing at the rest of us. "Oh, sure. I'm also curious about something. Any objections?"

"Nah, I don't mind," said Haruka. "We still have to look for an inn to stay at, however."

"Oh, I know a good inn," said Umezono. "And thanks. Wait here for a bit until I'm free."

Umezono left to resume her work as a waitress, and all of us watched her as she walked away.

"Hmm. She seems quite different," I said. I was a bit confused by the way Umezono had treated us this time around.

Yuki tilted her head in thought for a moment before she responded to me. "Well, the way she just acted was actually how she always acted back in Japan. She's the type of person who doesn't always listen to others, but I guess you can technically describe that as the trait of a leader? She could also come off as kind of self-centered as a result. She's definitely not the type of person that everyone can get along with."

"Really? I have a hard time imagining that *anyone* would get along with her," said Touya with a grimace. "She's way too intense."

I actually agreed with him. In fact, Umezono's words had irritated me at the time.

"Well, her feelings of jealousy toward Haruka were obvious for a long time," said Yuki.

"I have no idea why she felt that way about me," said Haruka. "I never really

interacted with her or cared about her one way or another...”

Haruka seemed a bit confused, but Yuki and Natsuki just chuckled.

“That’s probably exactly what she didn’t like about you, Haruka,” said Yuki. “She was probably irritated by her one-sided resentment.”

“It’s possible to be kind to everyone and still be disliked, however,” said Natsuki. “People will criticize you because you act nice, so...”

Natsuki laughed dryly, so it sounded like she had experienced such things firsthand. I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that girls also formed cliques at schools. As for guys, even the guys who were cool, friendly, and good at both sports and academics weren’t liked by every other guy. Some guys would probably feel inferior and hate guys like that. *Hmm. Actually, maybe not? Touya technically fit the bill as far as a friendly guy who was good at everything, and the other guys would tease him from time to time because he was good friends with Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki, but there weren’t any guys who genuinely hated him, were there? I don’t know what any of my classmates actually felt deep down in their hearts, but there were no obvious signs of tension, so I bet I’m right. Well, actually, any guys who liked Haruka, Yuki, or Natsuki might have disliked Touya.*

“Social relationships are really complicated,” I said. “I guess it would be best to not think about it too much.”

“It’s possible that Umezono-san simply overreacted a bit due to stress,” said Yuki.

“Stress can cause depression. People in that state of mind might do things like burst out crying all of a sudden or get angry for no apparent reason,” said Natsuki. “In a manner of speaking, it was fortunate for her that she had only resorted to harsh words.”

“Hmm. I guess you can’t really blame her for how she acted if it was due to an illness, especially considering the situation she was in,” said Yuki.

“Yeah, I don’t want to think about how I would act if I were alone and stressed out,” I said.

Man, I’m really glad that Haruka and Touya were able to recognize me back

when we were in our "soul" states. My party had managed to survive because there were three of us, but things could easily have turned out quite differently if we'd been separated from each other.

"Haruka, the reason Umezono-san acted hostile toward you and the others at the time was probably because she thought you were worse off than her and thus someone she could vent her stress at," said Natsuki. "However, the issue was that her assumption was completely wrong."

"Well, I mean, as I said earlier, it wasn't like we had money to spare at the time," said Haruka. "We had just barely managed to stabilize our lives enough that we could afford to head out of Laffan to search for you and Yuki..."

"Yeah, we definitely couldn't have afforded to go out of our way to help someone who was actively hostile to us," I said.

"At the time, it seemed like some of our classmates might be a threat to us too," said Touya. "None of us were granted overpowered abilities, but we had to be aware of the risk that other people had been."

Even if some of our classmates had started with fewer points available to them in the beginning, they could still have become dangerous if they'd spent all of their points on Fire Magic or similar skills. It was also possible that we wouldn't have been able to fight back if we were ambushed from the shadows. With all of that in mind, people like Umezono who only attacked us verbally were much easier to deal with. We could choose between simply refusing to associate with them or eliminating them with our own hands while we could. The real threats were the type of people who would act friendly until they betrayed you. It would have been dangerous to blindly trust our classmates if we couldn't tell for sure whether their friendliness was genuine, and for our part, we had no reason to go out of our way to be friendly when we couldn't afford to do so.

"Well, I guess it's good to know that Umezono-san is safe," said Yuki. "She's not exactly the type of person who I would be willing to stick my neck out to help, but it's not like I wanted her to die..."

"Yeah, you're right about that," I said. "If she's trying to live a proper life and hasn't turned to crime, that's good to know. She is a fellow Japanese person,

after all.”

“Mm, Umezono-san seems as though she’s okay now,” said Natsuki.

Umezono was walking around the dining hall with a smile on her face, and that alone, plus the lively look in her eyes, made her seem much different from before.

“Hey, hey, was that guy Umezono’s boyfriend?” Yuki asked. She had a grin on her face.

“That is certainly a possibility,” said Haruka. “I’m sure she’ll explain that to us along with other things.”

The rest of us chuckled and continued to savor our food while waiting for Umezono to get free so we could have the long chat she’d asked for.

★★★★★★★★★

It was well into the afternoon when Umezono finally had the time to talk. By now, there were plenty of empty seats in the dining hall. It had actually remained fully occupied even after we had finished our lunch, so we had asked Umezono if she wanted us to drop by some other time, but she’d told us that the busiest time of the day would be over soon, so we had stayed in our seats. In fact, a few seats had opened up right after we talked with her, so we hadn’t felt too bad about taking up space.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” said Umezono. “Feel free to drink this.”

Umezono brought over some cups and set them on our table, and Haruka cocked her head after taking a sniff. “Wait, is this wine?”

“Yeah, it is. But it’s a fairly young wine with almost no alcohol content, so it’s more like grape juice,” said Umezono. “I figured all of you would prefer something like this, right? If you want to drink ale, then—”

“Nah, none of us drink, so this is fine,” said Haruka. “But are you sure about this? Isn’t wine a bit more expensive than other beverages?”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Umezono. “Take it as another token of my apology.”

Wine was more expensive than ale in this viscounty, but naturally, the price

varied a great deal depending on the quality. It was a matter of personal taste, but all of us certainly found that wine went down more easily. At the same time, it wasn't as though we enjoyed wine enough to go out of our way to buy it, and well water was perfectly drinkable, so we would usually just drink that instead. However, there was no reason to turn down a free drink, so I took a sip from the cup in front of me.

"Whoa, this actually tastes pretty decent," I said.

"Right? The wine that's served here is usually a bit more diluted, so consider it a bonus," said Umezono.

She was right that it tasted like grape juice that had been diluted a bit. According to Umezono, some cheap wines were composed of about fifty percent water, but she had served us some less diluted wine. It wasn't amazing by any means, but it was pretty decent considering fruit was more expensive in this world.

"Oh, by the way, just call me Yasue. I've been using that name, so yeah."

Yuki seemed a bit confused and asked her for confirmation. "Yasue? Didn't you say something a long time ago about how you didn't like that name because it sounds like an old lady's name?"

Oh, yeah, Yuki had a lot of friends back in Japan, so I guess she's very well-informed about such matters.

Yasue awkwardly scratched her head and turned away from Yuki. "Oh, you actually remember that? Yeah, back in Japan, I didn't like my name. You know, it kind of sounds like an old lady's name, right?"

"Well, I sort of understand how you feel about your name, but it's not like it's a bad one, right?" I asked.

It was true that the name Yasue was pretty old fashioned. The pool of popular names inevitably changed over time. However, it was still better than some names with kanji that you couldn't even read at first glance or the types of names that were just embarrassingly weird.

"Yeah, it's the name that my parents gave me," said Yasue. "After being transported to this world, I finally realized that I should have appreciated my

parents more, so I'd like to at least bear my true name in their memory. I died before my parents did, after all."

When she finished speaking, Yasue looked a bit embarrassed—and lonely.

"Well, yeah, everyone in our class died before our parents," said Yuki. "It's not like we caused our own deaths, though, so I've gotten over the guilt."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I have no choice but to move on eventually," said Yasue.

It wasn't like the five of us had purposefully convened something like a group therapy session, but we had already discussed this topic among ourselves multiple times before. All of us had moms and dads who were still alive, but all of us were also only children. Our parents must have been depressed when they learned of our deaths, but it wasn't like we could do anything about it, so the conclusion we had arrived at was that our parents had no choice but to move on as well.

My parents had had me late in life. I sort of wished I could send them a letter informing them that I was okay, but even if that were possible, they would probably have thought it was from an imposter trying to scam them.

Yasue sighed and took a deep breath, then hesitantly mumbled, "Ugh. Oh, by the way, um, I wanted to ask about something..."

I had an idea about what she wanted to ask, and if I was right, it was hard for her to talk about by its very nature. Yasue glanced at Haruka from time to time but never seemed to muster the rest of her question.

Yuki noticed Yasue's hesitation, so she grinned and asked Yasue a question instead. "Before that, can I ask you something? Who was that guy from the kitchen earlier?"

Yuki was probably acting that way in order to lighten the mood; I didn't think it was out of pure curiosity. *Right, Yuki? I hope not...*

"Oh, um, his name is Chester, and, um, he's my husband," Yasue replied.

"Husband, huh? Wait, husband?!" Yuki exclaimed. "You got married?! He's not just your boyfriend?!"

“U-Um, well, yeah, I got married,” said Umezono. “He helped me out in my darkest hour, and I said a lot of mean things to him, but he still treated me very kindly. He, um, confessed to me a while after that, so...”

It seemed like a simple way to put it was that Umezono had been deeply moved by Chester’s kindness.

Haruka sighed. “Is that why you’ve calmed down as a person?” She seemed very surprised by the news.

“I guess that’s one way to put it,” Yasue replied with a smile. “I’m confident that he’ll protect me no matter what, hee hee.”

I had no idea what had actually happened, but it sounded like Yasue had experienced an amazing love story.

“Yeah, yeah, it’s good that you’re happy,” said Yuki. “So, what did *you* want to ask about?”

Yasue seemed more comfortable talking now that the atmosphere in the room had changed. “Oh, right. I’m very sorry about lying to you all back then!” She clasped her hands together and lowered her head toward us as if to beg for forgiveness.

“Oh, are you talking about your skills?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, I lied about my skills at the time,” said Yasue. “I actually have the Copy skill. As for my other skills, I obtained the Robust and Pharmacy skills because I was scared of diseases. I, um, also obtained the Slightly Attractive Appearance and Beautiful Skin skills,” she added in a lower voice, probably because she felt awkward about admitting it.

It seemed perfectly natural for a girl to want to look better, though. At the time, Haruka had apparently only seen the Copy skill with her Third Eye, so I was a bit surprised to learn that Yasue had so many skills. However, at a low level, the Third Eye skill wasn’t exactly capable of seeing everything right away, so that was probably why Haruka hadn’t been able to identify all of Yasue’s skills.

“Yeah, I figured as much based on your actions at the time,” said Haruka.

“Oh, yeah, I had a feeling that you would realize the truth,” said Yasue. “I guess I kind of gave it away with my final words to you...”

“That’s part of it, but I also saw that you had the Copy skill beforehand thanks to my Third Eye skill,” said Haruka.

“Huh?! Oh, so you were aware the entire time? Ugh, that means I was an absolute fool...”

Yasue sighed deeply and seemed a bit dejected, but Haruka had an awkward expression on her face when she saw that reaction. “We sort of tested you at the time to see what kind of person you were. I feel a bit bad about that, but we couldn’t really afford to blindly trust anyone back then. Our stance as a party was to eliminate any potential threats to us...”

Instead of jabbing back at Haruka, Yasue nodded deeply in response to her words. “Oh, um, yeah, that’s a completely understandable stance to take,” said Yasue. “I felt like everyone was my enemy back then, after all. It’s really hard to maintain your mental stability when you’re in a bad situation. The existence of skills also made it hard for me to tell whether or not I could actually trust my classmates, so...” She seemed like she was thinking back on her own actions, but it was also possible that she had met a troublesome classmate.

“Did you bring this up after all this time because you wanted to ask us about the Copy skill?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah. I’m really sorry about what I did, but I’d appreciate it if you could tell me whatever you know about the Copy skill,” said Yasue. “I can’t seem to get better at cooking no matter what I do. My husband’s cooking is delicious, but I want to cook something tasty for him myself as well. Is this because of the Copy skill?”

“Yeah, it’s the negative effect of copying someone else’s skills without their permission,” said Haruka. She seemed to have arrived at the conclusion that it was fine to tell Yasue about the disadvantages of the Copy skill due to the fact that Yasue had changed so dramatically.

Yasue collapsed on the table in front of us. “Ugh, I had no idea there was a catch like that. Now it makes sense that I can’t get better at cooking.”

“You’re not going to get angry at us?” Haruka asked.

“I mean, I’m the one who was in the wrong,” Yasue replied. “Only a very kind and patient person would have treated me nicely despite my attitude, and that’s my husband. Hee hee!”

A relaxed smile had reappeared on Yasue’s face, so a happy episode from her memories must have popped up in her mind. It was good to see that she was happy, especially since it was better than her holding an unreasonable grudge against us.

“Also, it’s not like the Copy skill is actually hindering my daily life,” said Yasue. “But I would really appreciate it if you could teach me the Cooking skill. I want to serve my husband some homemade meals of my own, like I said.”

Man, she’s really good at bringing up her love for her husband in an organic way from time to time.

Haruka chuckled in a slightly exasperated manner. “I see. Well, I don’t mind teaching you in our free time. I also wouldn’t mind teaching you some other skills, but you’d have to copy them from us first.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I copied most of your skills the last time we met, Azuma-san,” said Yasue.

“Okay, then. By the way, you can just call me Haruka,” said Haruka. “As for the others, please refer to them as Natsuki, Yuki, Nao, and Touya.”

“Hm? Wait, Nagai?” Yasue looked at us in the order that Haruka had just named, but she paused for a moment when she looked at Touya. “Are you the only one who changed your name, Touya?”

“Oh, I’m surprised that you remember,” said Touya. “Yeah, my actual name is Tomoya, but I decided to go by Touya instead to avoid trouble with our classmates. I can probably go back to Tomoya if I want, but I’ve become used to the name of Touya by now.”

Yasue nodded deeply in response to Touya’s explanation and brought up a name that had been on our minds lately. “Yeah, there definitely are some troublesome classmates of ours out there. If I don’t count myself, the biggest example would be Satomi Takamatsu.”

“You’ve realized as well?” I asked.

“Of course I have. She didn’t change the pronunciation of her name at all, right?” said Yasue. “Her pyramid scheme is also way too obvious. On top of that, I’ve actually seen her myself due to the fact that I live here in Kelg, and she has ‘adjusted’ her appearance way more than I did.” Yasue grinned and pointed at her own face and chest.

“So it was her?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, I’m fairly sure. She stood out so much that even I couldn’t look away from her,” Yasue replied. “I also beat up my husband as a result—he was standing next to me at the time.”

It seemed like Yasue’s aggressive attitude, which Yuki had described earlier, hadn’t changed at all. However, it was technically true that she had just punished her husband for inadvertently staring at another woman. On top of that, it seemed like a lot of people had gone bankrupt as a result of falling prey to the Holy Satomi Sect, so Yasue’s decision had actually been a wise one even though it had been a bit of a violent solution.

“The Holy Satomi Sect has ruined the atmosphere of Kelg, so I really wish someone would do something about them soon. I heard that they’ve used the money that they gathered to—” Yasue glanced at Touya and me, blushed, then coughed for a moment. “Well, um, let’s just say that there are rumors about them doing things that go against public morals, so...”

“Oh, would you please describe these things in detail?” Yuki asked with a grin.

Yasue glared at Yuki. “I know that you’re just teasing me! They’ve brought guys back with them for sex!”

“I can’t believe you’re blushing about things like that when you’re married,” said Yuki. “By the way, haven’t you ever considered cooperating with Satomi? You could enjoy the benefits of her cult.”

“I could ask the same of you,” said Yasue. “It’s not like I was especially good friends with her back in Japan, and I think that obeying the laws of this world is the right thing to do. Protecting my new life with my husband is more important to me.”

“Mm. I don’t plan on trusting or helping out any of our former classmates just because they’re our classmates,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, exactly. The only person who has helped me in this world is my husband, after all,” said Yasue. “Good people are good and bad people are bad. That’s a universal truth that hasn’t changed even though we’re in a different world. That’s all there is to it...”

But it seemed like Yasue had conflicted feelings about her own words; she sounded like she was trying to convince herself.

“It’s best not to get involved with the Holy Satomi Sect,” said Haruka. “By the way, Yasue, in return for me teaching you our skills—”

“Just so you know, I don’t have that much money to spare,” said Yasue, sounding a bit wary of what Haruka might ask in return. “A lot of customers come here every day, but I’m barely turning a profit...”

Haruka just chuckled. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to ask for money. For now, at least, we’re not hurting for money.”

“...Are you sure?” Yasue asked. “I can pay up to one gold coin per day of lessons, so...”

One gold coin wasn’t much money for us now, although the amount of money that Natsuki and Yuki had earned in one day of work at the inn had been about one tenth of a gold coin, so Yasue was actually being quite generous with her offer. However, Haruka shook her head, then wrapped her arms around Yuki and Natsuki’s shoulders and pulled them with her toward Yasue.

“Again, we don’t need money,” Haruka replied. “However, how about something like this in exchange?” She continued in a whisper, “*If you end up giving birth to a child, please tell us about your experiences.*”

“Huh?! Wha— *What did you just say?!*”

“*You do the things that married couples do in bed, right?*” Haruka asked.

“*I-I mean, yeah, I do,*” Yasue replied.

“*In that case, we’re counting on you,*” said Haruka.

“*Seriously? F-Fine, I guess,*” said Yasue. “*However, why are you asking me*

about this?”

“*Now that we’re in a different world, we’d like to hear from someone who knows what* both *things are like,*” said Haruka.

“*Mm. We don’t have anyone we can count on for that kind of information, after all,*” said Natsuki.

“*Oh, yeah, it’ll be relevant to you girls if any of you get together with the guys in your party,*” said Yasue. “*I technically do have people like my mother-in-law who I can ask about these things, so...*”

“*That’s good to know,*” said Yuki. “*By the way, did you feel at all uneasy about the idea of marriage, Yasue?*”

“*I mean, yeah, a bit, but I’m completely in love with my husband, so...*”

“*Oh, gosh, you’re so cute!*”

It seemed like the girls had begun a secret conversation, and I was well aware of the fact that trying to join in would have been a very bad idea. In fact, it was possible that the girls would have yelled at me if I’d happened to hear a single word of what they were discussing, even if it wasn’t my fault. It was also possible that the girls would have been cool with allowing Touya and me to join their conversation, but that would have been troublesome in a different way. With all of that in mind, Touya and I walked away from the girls and chatted to kill time.

★★★★★★★★★

We visited the reference room of the Adventurers’ Guild in Kelg on the day after we had reunited with Yasue, motivated by the knowledge that we could improve the Appraisal skill by obtaining more information in general. Books were something that we could easily afford, but there was no reason for us to skip out on information that we could obtain for free from places like reference rooms.

“It looks like there aren’t many booklets here,” I said. “There are more here than back in Laffan, but still.”

The booklets in the guild back in Laffan had appeared handmade. In contrast

to the shabby appearance of that room, the reference room here actually had proper bookshelves. However, there were only ten booklets in total lined up on the shelves, so it barely qualified as a proper reference room.

“There are a few duplicates as well,” said Haruka. “It looks like there are only eight different booklets.”

Natsuki was skimming the booklets. “There also aren’t that many words in these booklets, so we can probably finish all of them in two days.”

Touya frowned; he didn’t seem confident of that. “Huh? Can you actually read *that* fast, Natsuki? There are eight booklets here, you know?”

“Don’t worry, there aren’t that many pages in the booklets relative to how thick they are,” said Natsuki. “It’s just that the pages are thick.”

“You don’t have to force yourself to finish everything in a rush, Touya,” said Haruka. “Everyone’s free to do whatever they want once they finish reading the booklets here.”

“Are you going to remain here by yourself to read, Touya? If I finish before you, I’m going to ditch you!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Ugh, fine, I’ll do my best,” said Touya.

He didn’t sound happy about the idea of being ditched, and he grimaced as he picked up a booklet to read. However...

Four days had passed since we had first arrived in Kelg. I was strolling through the town with Yuki and Natsuki. We’d left Touya behind in the reference room, but it wasn’t because he was reading too slowly; it was just that he’d taken way more breaks than the rest of us. Every two hours or so, he’d stand up and tell the rest of us he was “heading out to gather information.” I had checked to see what he was actually up to, and he seemed to be enjoying himself chatting with the guild receptionists. It wasn’t the most inexcusable thing in the world, but it meant he ended up having to remain behind to make up for the lost time. As for Haruka, she’d finished reading the booklets quite fast, so she headed out to Yasue’s place to teach her some skills. Yasue had copied skills from Touya and me as well, but Haruka’s skills, like Cooking and Sewing, were more useful for

everyday life. Our other skills were ones that only adventurers would use on a daily basis, so Haruka had decided in advance that she would only teach them to Yasue if we had some spare time. As for why I was strolling through Kelg with Yuki and Natsuki, it was because one of the reasons we had decided to visit Kelg was to look around for bookstores.

"This is the area where Yasue told us to look around, isn't it?" Natsuki asked.

"Yeah, it should be. Oh, I think we found the place! Wait, hold on." Yuki, who was walking ahead of Natsuki and me, pointed at a store, then ran over to read the poster on the door. "What's this? Hmm..."

The poster in front of Yuki read *Books on sale! Fifty percent off on all goods!*

Yuki raised her voice in shock when she registered what the poster said. "Huh?! Fifty percent off on all books?! In this world?!"

Her reaction was a perfectly normal one. Up to this point, I'd never seen a sale at a bookstore in this world, nor had I seen any posters like this one, since most ordinary people were illiterate. On top of that, most books were one-of-a-kind products and, as such, extremely valuable. It wouldn't be too unusual to find deals on sheaves of documents that hadn't been bound into a book, or on books like Time Magic grimoires that were unlikely to sell, but a sale on the entire inventory of a store was pretty unusual.

"Well, I guess it isn't too crazy for a *bookstore* to have a poster outside," said Yuki. "The customers would have to be literate, after all."

"Mm. However, we certainly are lucky to have come across a store with books on sale so early in our search," said Natsuki. "I feel like this bodes well for us!"

Back on Earth, Natsuki's family had been fairly well-off, but apparently even she was susceptible to the word "sale"; she seemed quite happy as she led the way inside. The rest of us followed behind, and the first thing we saw when we entered was an enormous pile of books on the front counter. Deeper into the bookstore, there were even more towers of books; in fact, there were so many that we couldn't see much of the interior of the store. There was a clerk standing in a gaps between two towers and looking quite uncomfortable. The number of books seemed totally out of proportion to the size of the bookstore —although that actually sort of reminded me of some used bookstores I'd

visited back in Japan.

“Welcome!”

The clerk was a middle-aged man. The moment he noticed us, he turned on a beaming smile, probably because he assumed we might help clean out his excess inventory.

“Um, there sure are a lot of books here,” I said.

“Yes! You see, it’s all because of the Holy Satomi Sect...”

The clerk chuckled as he told us about the details. Apparently, it was all because people under the sway of the Holy Satomi Sect would frantically try to raise money in order to obtain coupons and ballots. Even after people had burned through their living expenses, they still clung to hope as long as they had so much as a cent to their name, but then there were those who went into debt or pawned their possessions—household goods, works of art, books, and even their own houses—in order to be able to continue purchasing the “holy” water.

“Yikes, it sounds like the situation here in Kelg is way worse than we had thought,” said Yuki. “There are a lot of books here, so...”

“So even wealthy people and nobles have fallen under the spell of the Holy Satomi Sect,” I said.

“Correct. As a result, books are available quite cheaply, but...”

“Mm, but we can see that excess inventory has become an issue.” Natsuki had a serious expression on her face. She nodded and then she turned around to whisper to me. “*However, in a way, this works out in our favor.*”

It would probably have been amoral to feel actively glad about this development—it meant the city of Kelg was in deep trouble—but there was nothing wrong with us taking advantage of this opportunity. *We’re just going to lend this guy a helping hand, yep.*

“Oh, so that’s why there was a poster advertising a sale,” said Yuki. “There are definitely a lot of books here.”

“Mm. This store is running out of cash on hand—and storage space. If you’re

willing to buy in bulk, then I can offer an additional discount."

"Hmm. In that case, can you start by showing us any books you have on magic, alchemy, and pharmacology?" Natsuki asked.

"Of course!"

The clerk showed no signs of hesitation; he swiftly piled some books on the counter. Despite the sheer number of books cluttering up the store, he must have properly sorted them. When he was done lining them up on the counter, we checked through the pile. Some of the books seemed to overlap in content with the ones we already owned, but we quickly decided we could afford to grab any books that caught our interest.

"*The Beginner's Guide to Special Magic*? Might be interesting," I said.

"In that case, I believe I have another book that would be of interest to you as well. It doesn't deal directly with the same subject, but it can serve as a useful point of reference."

"If you have any books that might be useful for adventurers, like books with information about monsters and dungeons, we'd like to examine those as well, please," said Natsuki.

We continued checking through the books that caught our interest and periodically asked the clerk for recommendations. Most of the books failed to meet the criteria we had in mind, but before too long, we had already piled up over fifty books that seemed at least potentially interesting to us.

"Um, may I ask, what other types of books do you have in stock?" Natsuki asked.

"There are books under the categories of entertainment and history as well as a special category for autobiographical works written by nobles to embellish their achievements."



“Embellish? Does anyone actually purchase those types of books?” Natsuki asked.

“No. It’s hardly possible to tell a noble that their refuse is unwanted, so I have no choice but to purchase whatever they offer, but most of them end up in the disposal wagon. I also have a certain number of diaries in stock, but those, too, generally end up in the wagon.”

The clerk chuckled as he pointed at an area where two stacks of books towered as high as my waist. According to the clerk, these books would, for the most part, remain unsold even if they were moved into the “disposal wagon,” which contained his very cheapest books.

“Autobiographies and diaries, you said?” asked Natsuki.

It was possible that books like that would become valuable as historical documents in the future, but in the present, they were just trash. *As a noble, why would you even sell your own diaries? Wouldn’t you just expose yourself to ridicule? I guess it’s also possible that the point is to inflict mental torture on the reader. There are diaries that are written for other people’s enjoyment, like the poetic diaries of classical Japanese literature, but I think the odds are quite low that any of these works have that level of literary merit.*

“I’d like to check the books under the category of entertainment and history, and I might also be willing to purchase some of the autobiographies and diaries,” said Natsuki.

I was very surprised by Natsuki’s sudden offer to the clerk, but he seemed pretty pleased. “Might be willing?! Diaries take up a great deal of space and never sell, so that’d be much appreciated!”

The autobiographies and diaries of nobles were worthless to everyone but their authors, who probably considered them to be important records of their pedigrees. The bookstore couldn’t risk offending the nobles by destroying their works outright, so the only alternative was to sell them for cheap. However, I didn’t see the point in purchasing these kinds of works.

“Natsuki, why would you want to purchase stuff like diaries?” I whispered.

“I’m somewhat interested,” Natsuki whispered. “I’d like to learn how nobles

think and what's considered common sense in this world. Besides, we don't own a lot of books that we can read for pleasure, so they'll be a good way to kill time."

Natsuki was an avid reader, but books were the furthest thing from cheap in this world. Although you could easily find a decent number of books in any bookstore, one book would cost you a whole fistful of gold coins. That was a cost we could afford at this point, but we weren't yet rich enough that we could afford to blow money on books unless they contained useful information to justify their price. In this store, however, we could obtain a bunch of books cheaply, so it was probably a good opportunity for us.

"Um, do you think this is an unwise idea, Nao-kun?" Natsuki asked, looking at me with puppy dog eyes. "Do you think Haruka would scold me for what I'm doing?"

Of course, I had no choice but to cave. "...Um, nah, I think it's fine," I said. "I'm sure she'll forgive you for splurging a bit on books."

I helped Natsuki gather some books that we thought Haruka would enjoy as well, and we added a few extra books in the categories of history and entertainment, plus a fair amount of trash from the wagon, which brought the total we were planning to purchase close to one hundred volumes even if we excluded the trash, which the clerk might as well have been paying us to take off his hands. As he'd promised, he added a bulk discount to the sale prices, and in the end, we only had to pay five hundred gold coins for all those books. Five hundred gold coins was a lot of money, but it was fairly cheap considering the true value of the books. The clerk seemed pleased too; he clearly hadn't lost out in this transaction. It was a win-win situation, and we left the bookstore feeling proud of our haul.

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"Man, we really got a good deal," I said. "At least, I think we did, right?"

The original cost of the books had probably been close to nothing, so we'd had no choice but to trust that the clerk wasn't lying to us about the fifty percent discount and the additional bulk discount. Regardless, it had definitely been a bargain given the sheer number of books that we had purchased.

However, the books had still cost us five hundred gold coins. We had agreed as a party that book purchases would be funded from our pool for shared expenses, but the three of us had all used some of our own money to help cover the cost.

"I've got to say, though, five million yen for a bulk purchase of books would be ridiculously expensive back in Japan," said Yuki.

"We obtained some interesting books, so I think we got our money's worth," said Natsuki. "In any case, it's not as though we've been wasting a lot of money up to this point, so it doesn't hurt to splurge a bit on books."

"Yeah, point taken," I said. "Hey, when we get back to Laffan, let's place an order for some bookshelves."

Books wouldn't take up much space if we simply stuffed them into our magic bags, but that would make it hard for us to search for specific titles. Touya and Haruka hadn't been with us when we turned the store upside down, so it would probably be easier for the two of them to search through the books if they were lined up on shelves.

"We all chose books according to our own preferences, so that's a good idea," said Yuki. "Natsuki, you gathered some cooking books, right?"

"Mm. There are all kinds of ingredients I don't know about, after all," said Natsuki. "I might be able to expand the repertoire of dishes that I can cook after I learn in more detail about ingredients that are unique to this world."

"Ingredients that are unique to this world, huh? That sounds like it could result in some interesting dishes," I said.

All of the girls were good cooks, and I had no complaints about the meals they made. Still, they were pretty ordinary meals. That was more than enough for me on a daily basis, but now that I thought about it, I felt like it would be nice to enjoy some completely unfamiliar dishes from time to time. *Hmm. At some point in the future, it might be nice to head out on a journey in search of exotic ingredients and delicacies.*

"I also bought a bunch of books that interested me," I said. "I'm really glad we came across the sale."

“Yep! Wait, hold on,” said Yuki. “Now that I think about it, there might be other things on sale in Kelg, right?”

“Oh, yeah, the clerk told us people were pawning stuff like household goods and works of art,” I said.

“Mm. With all of that in mind, it’s possible that some of the other things we’ve been looking for are on sale as well,” said Natsuki.

Apart from answering the summons we’d received from the guild, our party had three other main objectives for visiting Kelg. The first was to buy books, the second was to gather ingredients that weren’t available in Laffan, and the third was to secure some magic conduits. We had asked Gantz-san about the conduits before, but he’d told us that he didn’t have anything good in stock. In fact, he’d told us that in spite of their price, magic conduits weren’t that effective despite their astronomical price, so we had dropped that idea; we hadn’t had much money at the time. However, at this point, we could easily afford such implements. There was no need for us to obtain magic conduits right away, but we had discussed the possibility of checking out what was available here in Kelg, just to be aware of our options for the future.

“I think it should be fine to purchase a magic conduit if we find one on sale,” said Yuki. “Injuries are scary.”

“Yeah, definitely,” I said. “The worst injuries we’ve suffered so far are fractured bones, but Touya could have been in serious trouble the other day.”

“Mm. I’m really glad that Touya-kun didn’t lose any limbs,” said Natsuki.

Offensive magic was something that we could cover via continuously attacking during combat, but healing magic was a different story. Haruka and Natsuki had leveled up their Light Magic, but they still weren’t capable of regenerating severed limbs. I had no idea if a magic conduit would allow a mage to use higher tiers of magic or if it would merely increase the potency of the magic, but obtaining one would make me feel a lot safer if the former was the case. However, only a Level 10 Light Magic spell called Regenerate could restore lost limbs, and that was quite far away.

“Well, for the time being, let’s just take a look around town,” I said. “We might get lucky and stumble across some sales for the other things that we’ve

looking for.”

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When we set out to explore Kelg, we had slightly high hopes, but...

“No luck, huh?” said Yuki. “Ugh.”

“Mm. We couldn’t even find any proper magic conduits,” said Natsuki. “Ugh.”

We had checked out weapon stores, general goods stores, and alchemical stores, but none of them had magic conduits. I had no idea if it was because there were no nobles in Kelg that owned valuable magic conduits or if it was because such nobles hadn’t fallen under the influence of the Holy Satomi Sect, but we couldn’t find what we had been looking for.

“There were some cheap magic conduits available, but there’s no point in buying those, right?” Yuki asked.

“Mm. When we touched them, they didn’t seem as though they would be useful,” said Natsuki. “Do you feel the same, Nao-kun?”

“Yeah. The best way I could describe the ones we found is to say that they might help us maintain high performance from morning up till noon,” I said.

“That’s sort of a confusing metaphor, but I guess I kind of understand what you’re getting at, Nao,” said Yuki. “It’d be such a tiny difference relative to how expensive those magic conduits were.”

The magic conduits that we had found would have been somewhat valuable to mages who only used magic during combat, but weapons would be a much sounder investment for our party.

“We may have to look around a larger town than Kelg,” said Natsuki. “Kelg isn’t urban as such.”

“Yeah, it’s just a large town by provincial standards,” said Yuki. “We may have to go all the way to the capital of this kingdom to find good magic conduits.”

“That’s a fair point, but we still have one last alchemical store to check out,” I said. “I’m pinning my last hopes on it!”

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“Magic conduits? I’m afraid I don’t have any in stock.”

At those curt words from the old lady who owned the alchemical store, my hopes were dashed. Based on the information we had gathered beforehand, this was the last place that had seemed like it might have what we were looking for. I sighed, reflecting that this meant we probably wouldn’t find magic conduits anywhere in Kelg.

However, the owner seemed a bit perplexed. “Just to be clear, it is alchemists who craft magic conduits, but they’re sold at weapon stores. It’s a different story if you want to place an order for one, of course.”

“We checked the local weapon stores before we came here,” said Natsuki. “There wasn’t anything serviceable on sale, so...”

“Oh, are you looking for a conduit of high quality? That sort of thing will be hard to find. There are hardly any expensive magic conduits in circulation on the market, and it takes valuable magicites to craft them, so very few alchemists are capable of crafting one.”

“I see. What about you, then?” I asked.

“Me?” She shook her head and sighed. “Can’t. Don’t have the aptitude for it.”

She looked like a veteran alchemist, so I’d had high hopes, but if she said she lacked the aptitude... *Hmm. Wait, aptitude? Haruka has the Craft Aptitude: Alchemy skill, so could she make a magic conduit? Even if she can, that’s only an option if we can somehow obtain a magicite of sufficient value.*

“By the way, what are the effects of a magic conduit?” Yuki asked.

“Hm? You’re looking for one and you don’t know?”

The owner had a slightly exasperated look on her face, so Yuki hastily waved her hands in denial. “No, I mean, we know that magic conduits make it easier for mages to use magic, but we don’t know the specifics, so...”

“Well, it’s true that’s all that the most widely available conduits can do—make your spells go off slightly faster or make you feel like you’re using less mana.”

“Wait, so you’ll only ‘feel’ like you’re using less mana? Really?” I asked.

The owner chuckled, probably because we had disappointed looks on our faces. “Yes, it’s an ambiguous sensation. The effects will be more powerful if you use a magic conduit that was crafted from a high-tier magicite, however.”

“Um, what counts as high tier?” Yuki asked.

“Magicites from mystical monsters such as griffons or anything stronger than that counts. There are outlandish rumors, though—that magicites from dragons can halve your mana consumption or even allow you to use spells one or two levels above what you can currently use.”

Whoa, that sounds amazing. A magic conduit like that would put us much closer to being able to use the Regenerate spell, and it could also serve as a weapon of last resort if we needed powerful offensive magic. The “outlandish” part doesn’t sound promising, however.

“By outlandish, do you mean that such magicites don’t really exist?” I asked.

“I told you the rumored effects. Magic conduits crafted using high-tier magicites do exist, but that sort of thing is only available in auctions at the capital, where bids in pure gold coins fly around, so they’re the furthest thing from affordable for most people.”

One pure gold coin was worth one hundred platinum coins—the equivalent of ten million yen. As their name implied, they were made of pure gold, and apparently they were as large as a normal person’s palm. I sort of wanted to see one for myself, but it wasn’t something that an ordinary person could easily obtain. If it was true that people casually bid many pure gold coins at auctions in the capital, there was no way we could ever hope to win.

“So I assume magicites from mystical monsters are expensive too?” Yuki asked.

“Depends. Not all of them require pure gold coins, but there are very few in circulation.”

I guess that means it won’t be easy for us to craft our own magic conduits using high-tier magicites. We could try to hunt mystical monsters ourselves, but by the time we’re capable of doing that, I feel like we’ll no longer stand to benefit much from magic conduits. The bottom line is that magic conduits

probably aren't the right option for us.

"Thank you very much for all of that information," I said.

We thanked the owner for her time and then left the alchemy store and headed back toward our inn.

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"So, does that mean the only things that you purchased were books?" Haruka asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "Sorry, Haruka."

"It's fine. The books themselves are enough," said Haruka. "I admit I was slightly surprised when I first heard the cost, however."

She laughed, but "slightly surprised" was an understatement. When we gathered in the inn, we had given Haruka the purse that contained the money for our shared expenses, and Yuki had simply told her that we'd spent five hundred gold coins without explaining the particulars. Luckily for us, Haruka's anger had abated after we showed her all of the books we'd purchased, although she still scolded Yuki about the importance of communication and letting people know in advance when you were planning to spend that kind of money.

"Let's forget about magic conduits for now. If we won't get much out of them despite their high price, then our money would be better spent on other things," said Haruka. "We can return to this issue if we happen to obtain a high-tier magicite at some point."

"Yeah, that sounds reasonable to me," I said. "By the way, how did things go today for you and Touya?"

"I made some progress, but I'll probably have to keep reading in the reference room for a bit longer," said Touya. "I should be done by tomorrow or the day after."

"I finished what I headed out to do," said Haruka. "Yasue can now use the Cooking and Sewing skills, so I'll be free to tag along with the three of you tomorrow."

“Oh, already? See, Copy *is* a very good and useful skill!” Yuki exclaimed.

“What’s with this bragging all of a sudden, Yuki? You know, you don’t have to overdo it,” said Touya. “I no longer think you’re useless, so relax.”

“That’s not what I’m trying to do!” Yuki exclaimed. Then she glared. “Also, what do you mean ‘no longer’?!”

Touya laughed. “I’m just joking. I know that the Copy skill is useful if people are willing to teach you their skills!”

“Mm. A person with the Copy skill can learn many new skills in a short amount of time,” said Haruka. “I bet Yasue’s making a meal for Chester-san right about now.” She smiled as if she was imagining a heartwarming family scene, but...

“...Nah, I doubt it,” I said. “This is one of the busiest times of day for a dining hall, so...”

It was currently dinnertime. The dining hall had been quite busy when we’d visited during lunchtime, and dinnertime was probably even busier given the availability of alcohol. Haruka seemed to realize the truth after she heard my words, and the smile on her face swiftly changed to a cold expression. “Oh, I guess you’re right about that, Nao. Operating a dining hall sure is a lot of work.”

“It really is. A laid-back life operating a café as a couple sounds kind of nice, but it’s a different story if you actually have to run it as a business all on your own,” said Yuki. “You can’t just take days off whenever you want. It doesn’t sound like an easy life.”

“If you want a laid-back life, a high-end café would probably be a better bet,” said Natsuki. “I don’t know if you would attract any customers, however.”

Back on Earth, there were some highly exclusive cafés that only accepted a limited number of customers per day. I had no idea if that kind of business was actually sustainable in the long term, but apparently it had plenty of merits. One was the fact that the café’s food stocks would be depleted only gradually; another was the fact that it wasn’t necessary to have large numbers of employees. It would only work if the café had a cook whose food could attract customers, however.

“The dishes that you girls cook all taste delicious, so I’m sure that attracting customers shouldn’t be an issue,” I said. “Also, if you do open a café like that, please hire me as a waiter.”

“I appreciate the praise, but I wish you were confident and assertive enough to say that you would hire *us*, Nao,” said Haruka.

“I mean, that’s easy to say, but are you telling me that I should try to open my own dining establishment when I don’t even know how to cook myself?” I asked.

The idea of being an owner of a bar or a café sounded cool to me, but they weren’t roles that I would be capable of handling myself.

“Well, in any case, if we do try to start our own dining establishment, then it’ll probably be one where Touya and I go out to hunt for ingredients for everyone else to cook and serve to customers,” I said.

“Game meat cuisine, huh? That sounds like it would be interesting as well,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, it definitely sounds like it would be fun!” Yuki exclaimed. “However, that’s something to think about for when we’re older in the future. Let’s focus on the stuff that we have to deal with in the present.”

“Right. What does the atmosphere of the guild feel like to you, Touya?” I asked. “You’ve gathered information there, right?”

“Hmm. Well, I can’t say for sure, but it feels like something big is about to happen soon,” said Touya. “It doesn’t feel like it could be tomorrow, but it could be anytime within a week.”

According to Touya, he hadn’t heard any concrete words, but he had detected some hints from conversations and the actions of other adventurers. I had assumed that he had only been chatting with the receptionist ladies, but it seemed like he had actually been gathering some information as well. *Damn, Touya. I’m actually kind of impressed.*

“Hmm. In that case, I guess the best course of action for us would be to return to Laffan as we initially planned,” I said. “Touya’s going to continue reading at the reference room tomorrow, but what about the rest of us?”

“We should go check what ingredients there are at the marketplace,” said Haruka. “That should be it for our objectives here in Kelg, so...”

“I kind of want to obtain some flower seeds as well if possible. I don’t know about how much time we’ll actually have for this, but we do have a yard at our home, so it’d be nice to make it a bit more colorful,” said Yuki. “Touya mentioned things like corn before, and that would be nice to grow.”

“Oh, I’m so glad that you actually remembered that, Yuki!” Touya exclaimed. “I’m counting on you for this, please! Sweet corn would go great with grilled meat!”

“I don’t know if there’s any type of corn in this world that is sweet and can be consumed after you grill it, but we can try to look around,” said Haruka.

“It would definitely be nice to start working on a kitchen garden. It’s hard to obtain fresh vegetables, after all,” said Natsuki. “We happened to obtain a second house with a lot of space, so there’s plenty of land we can use to grow crops.”

It was possible to find freshly harvested vegetables at the marketplace, but the vegetables would wither very quickly because they weren’t preserved in something like a freezer. On the other hand, we would be able to harvest fresh vegetables from our yard if we could successfully grow some ourselves.

“It has to be crops that don’t require constant watering and can grow by themselves even if we leave them alone,” I said. “We might have to leave our home for multiple days due to adventurer work, so...”

“Yeah, good point,” said Yuki. “I guess we can just sort of treat it like a pastime. We’re not actual farmers, after all.”

“All right, let’s look for those things tomorrow,” I said. “Would you like some free time for yourself as well, Touya?”

“Yeah. I don’t think anything’s going to change right away, but I’d also like to spend a day looking around Kelg,” said Touya.

“In that case, we should all finish up our remaining tasks and objectives so that we can leave Kelg three days from now,” I said.

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On the next day, we saw Touya off as he headed to the reference room at the guild before we split into two groups to explore the marketplace in Kelg. I had no real objective in mind, so I paired up with Haruka to help her look for ingredients. Food products were the main things that were sold at the marketplace, but Kelg was a larger town than Laffan, so there were also some other unexpected products being sold, and it was all very interesting to see.

“Whoa, this looks quite well-made,” I said.

“You can buy it if you want,” said Haruka. “You have your own money, after all.”

“Uh, nah, I think I’ll pass,” I said.

The state of our personal finances was stable enough that I could casually purchase products from a marketplace if I wanted to, but the fact that we had struggled a lot in the beginning for money made me feel hesitant about spending money on useless things. The product that had caught my interest was just a wood carving, after all. It looked quite well-made, but I had no idea if something like this would sell well at a morning market, and it felt sort of similar to trying to sell a wood-carved bear at a supermarket back on Earth.

“I don’t really think you can call this a household good, so there’s no reason for me to buy this,” I said. “By the way, speaking of selling things for money, weren’t you very excited a while ago about passive income via royalties from selling backpacks? What happened to that?”

Haruka blushed and looked away from me as if she felt embarrassed after she heard my words. “D-Did I really act that excited? It’s true that I was happy about it, but not that much.”

I distinctly recall you smiling while you crafted backpacks, Haruka. However, we didn’t have as much spare money at the time, so I can’t really blame you for acting that way. The “passive” part of passive income sounds really nice to me.

“Well, I do receive royalties from time to time,” said Haruka. “All of that money goes to funding shared expenses like food, however.”

“Really? I feel like it would be fine if you simply pocketed the money for

yourself, Haruka," I said.

"Everyone contributed to the crafting of the backpacks, so it's only fair this way," said Haruka. "Besides, the royalties aren't that much compared to how much we earn nowadays. Actually, hmm, it's still quite decent for a single source of income. As for how much we've received from royalties so far..."

The amount of money that Haruka mentioned was more than sufficient for an ordinary citizen's yearly salary, but it was an amount that would disappear instantly if we purchased new weapons or armor. With that in mind, the passive income from royalties wasn't exactly something to be very excited or happy about nowadays.

"We could earn more money quicker by just slaying monsters, huh? Oh well," I said. "Hm? What's this? I haven't seen this kind of grain crop before."

The new grain that I found was located at an empty corner of the marketplace. It had a triangular shape and looked brownish. There was a possibility that it was actually some type of seed, nut, or fruit, but there was a square box nearby that looked like it was used for measurement to sell by weight, so it was probably a grain.

"Oh, this looks kind of similar to buckwheat," said Haruka. "In fact, it might be this world's version of buckwheat."

"Oh, I see—wait, can't we just directly call it buckwheat?!" I exclaimed.

The best season for the consumption of soba noodles made from buckwheat was about to roll around, but distinguishing between this world's buckwheat and the buckwheat back on Earth would sort of make me lose my appetite.

"Yeah, we can. Our auto-translate gift probably translates the word directly. However, it might actually be something completely different despite the similarity," said Haruka. "Sir, may we have a look at these with our hands?"

"Of course. I would really appreciate it if you bought any amount of what I have here."

The stall owner was a dude that looked kind of timid, but he smiled after he heard Haruka's words and placed a pinch of the buckwheat onto her hands. Haruka observed the buckwheat for a bit before she nodded to herself. "Yeah,

this is definitely buckwheat. We can purchase some if you want to eat soba noodles, Nao, but it'll take a lot of work to turn these into buckwheat flour. You'll have to remove the hulls, grind it with a mortar, and put them through a sieve. Are you willing to do all of that?"

"O-Oh, I see," I said. "I'd love to eat soba noodles during the summer, but..."

We had managed to develop a sauce that was similar to soy sauce, and Yuki was able to make udon noodles, so I was fairly confident that she would be able to make soba noodles as well, but it seemed like it would require a lot of work to complete. *Hmm. Regular flour can be purchased directly, so should I just make do with regular noodles?*

However, the stall owner talked to me while I was hesitating about a decision. "Um, I can sell these for cheap, so would you be willing to buy in bulk? Would a price like this work?"

Haruka seemed very surprised after she heard the actual price that the stall owner offered to us. I had no idea what was so surprising about the price due to the fact that I usually wasn't responsible for heading out to purchase ingredients, but it seemed like the offered price was less than half of how much the same amount of wheat would cost.

"Why did you offer such a cheap price?" Haruka asked.

"It's because these don't sell well in this town. Buckwheat isn't commonly consumed here, after all."

According to the stall owner, his hometown was a poor village that was located a bit far from Kelg, and the soil there wasn't very fertile, so the villagers would plant a lot of buckwheat because buckwheat could grow well even under those conditions. However, buckwheat wasn't very popular because it had a reputation as a type of famine food, so it wouldn't sell well here in Kelg. As a result, the villagers would usually just consume the buckwheat themselves and sell other crops instead, but it seemed like a low yield had occurred this year, so the villagers had no choice but to try and sell buckwheat in order to survive.

"Buckwheat is cheaper, but wheat is more popular, so..."

"Mm. Buckwheat is harder to use, and people that usually don't consume

food made from buckwheat won't go out of their way to purchase any," said Haruka. "Do you eat buckwheat as it is in your village?"

"Yeah. We just peel the buckwheat and boil them for consumption."

Does that actually taste any good? If it's something similar to porridge, then it doesn't sound very appetizing to me. Sure, buckwheat is very nutritious, but still.

"What's the plan, Haruka?" I asked.

"...If we're going to purchase the buckwheat, then we'll need specialized tools for them," Haruka replied. "I can't exactly ask you or Touya to work manually, after all."

"Huh?!" I exclaimed. "Well, I mean, I guess that kind of duty would be on Touya and me if it comes down to it, but..."

Us guys were reliant on the girls for cooking, so it would only be fair for us to contribute if we were asked to help out with the required preparations. *Do we have to grind it with a stone mortar, or do we have to use a wooden mortar instead? I know that wooden mortars can be used for hulling rice, but would they work for buckwheat as well? We won't have to do this work by hand, right?*

"Like I said, I'm not going to ask you or Touya to do such work by hand," said Haruka. "Hmm. Okay, sir, we'll purchase all of the buckwheat."

"Huh?! Really?! I have a lot here, so..."

The stall owner raised his voice out of surprise when he heard Haruka's words, but his reaction was perfectly natural. There were three large bags at the stall that were all full of buckwheat, and the bags looked like they weighed about sixty kilograms each. Physical labor was something that all of us had had to perform ever since we had been transported to this different world, so everyone would eat more food for meals compared to before during our time back in Japan, but I had no idea how long it would take for us to go through all of the buckwheat. Soba noodles were a type of food that I decently enjoyed, but it wasn't something that I would want to eat on a daily basis, so I only wanted to eat enough for one summer's worth. *Oh, wait, I almost forgot about the tradition of eating soba noodles on New Year's Eve. I didn't eat any last year, so I'll have to make up for that. Well, one bag should still be more than*

enough for everything, so...

"However, we'll only be purchasing buckwheat this time," said Haruka. "We're not residents of this town, so we won't be back in the future."

"That's perfectly fine! Thank you very much! Where would you like me to carry the bags?"

The owner had a beaming smile on his face as he thanked us, but Haruka picked up a bag herself after she paid him money. "Oh, don't worry, we can carry these by ourselves."

"Huh? There's no way the two of you can— Huh?!"

Haruka casually lifted one of the big bags onto her shoulders with ease, and the stall owner's jaws dropped when he saw the sight. *I guess this means that I'm in charge of the other two bags.* I used the Enhanced Muscles skill as I carried the other two bags on my shoulders, but they were quite heavy. The stall owner was still looking at us in shock, but we left him alone and walked away to an alley before we stuffed the buckwheat bags into our magic bags. I stretched my arms after we were done and sighed out of relief. *Man, I really don't think elves are suited for physical labor.*

"Whew, that was a bit tiring," I said. "On a side note, life in a poor village sure seems to be quite harsh, huh?"

"Mm. The price was much cheaper than I thought it would be," said Haruka. "I wonder if that means it's difficult for such villagers to obtain hard cash."

"Well, they can probably just feed themselves with their own crops," I said.

The amount of money that Haruka had paid the stall owner was something that was less than what a day laborer would earn for a week's worth of work. With that in mind, it was probably impossible to live in a town and survive off selling crops. I had heard stories about how a lot of adventurers were former villagers from rural villages, and I finally understood why that was the case.

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Haruka and I didn't buy anything else after our purchase of the buckwheat, and we enjoyed the scenery instead as we strolled through the marketplace for

a while before we grouped up with Yuki and Natsuki and continued to stroll around as a group of four.

“Yuki, Natsuki, did you find anything good?” I asked.

“Nah, we didn’t find any ornamental plants,” Yuki replied. “We did find some seeds that can grow into flowers that look pretty, however. What about you?”

“We found some buckwheat on our end,” I said. “I was thinking about asking you to use the buckwheat to make soba noodles, Yuki.”

“Huh?! You’re asking for too much from me, Nao. I haven’t made soba noodles before,” said Yuki. “I’m not saying that it’ll be impossible, but...”

Yuki seemed a bit troubled after I casually tried to ask her for a favor, but Natsuki helped her out. “It seems like Touya-kun knows how to make soba noodles. He mentioned before that his dad became addicted to making soba noodles at one point.”

“Oh, yeah, making soba noodles sounds like something a middle-aged man would enjoy doing,” I said. “This might be a biased opinion, however.”

“Well, it works out for us because we’ll be able to make soba noodles thanks to it,” said Yuki. “Okay, I’ll ask Touya to teach me what he knows and try to make some soba noodles myself!”

“I would feel a bit uneasy if Touya were the one that was making the soba noodles, but I feel at ease knowing that you’ll be the one to do so instead, Yuki,” I said. “We purchased a lot of buckwheat, however. Is there any other use for buckwheat aside from turning it into noodles?”

“Hmm. Well, you can also use buckwheat flour to make things like buckwheat dumplings and galettes,” said Natsuki.

“Those don’t sound like types of food that are meant for consumption on a regular basis,” I said. “Are you sure we didn’t purchase too much buckwheat, Haruka?”

The condition of the buckwheat would mostly remain the same due to the fact that all of it had been placed inside our magic bags. As a result, preservation wasn’t really an issue, but I had no idea if it had been absolutely

necessary to purchase so much buckwheat except to help out someone in need.

“Trust me, Nao, I did think this out. Specialized tools would be kind of a waste if we didn’t have large amounts of buckwheat to make them worth it, and we can donate food to the orphanage back in Laffan if we can somehow make dried noodles as well,” said Haruka. “Buckwheat in its base form wouldn’t be very useful, after all.”

“Donations, huh? That sounds like a good idea,” said Natsuki. “It would be a good way to return the favor for the help that Ishuca-san provided us.”

“Whoa, I had no idea that you were such an altruistic person, Haruka,” I said.

I teased Haruka with a playful tone to my voice, but Haruka shook her head in response to my words. “That’s not it at all. I’m just pursuing what will be beneficial to us. There are gods in this world, so it wouldn’t hurt to do good things even with ulterior motives, right?”

“Hmm. I guess that’s one way to think about it,” I said.

Haruka’s words sounded partly like an excuse to hide her embarrassment about performing a good deed, but it was also possible that such acts would be effective due to the existence of gods. In addition, good deeds were still good deeds even if you had ulterior motives for performing them, and there was nothing bad about providing Remi and the other orphans with a good source of nutrition.

“The last thing that we’re looking for is corn, right?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Yuki replied. “When I asked around, I heard that corn is available, so it should be around here—oh, there they are!”

I looked in the direction of Yuki’s gaze and saw a basket that was full of corn. However, they weren’t covered by husks like the ones you would see at supermarkets back in Japan. The corns were cleanly peeled and stacked on top of each other in the basket, and they looked a bit smallish as well. On top of that, they also looked like they were being sold in a dried state.

“The corn there doesn’t look like the sweet type of corn that you can use for grilling,” said Natsuki. “They look like a brittle type of corn, but I’ve never used any before myself. They probably require further processing, but I think they’re

used to make flour.”

“Corn flour? Oh, you mean for things like tortillas? That’s all I know about,” said Haruka.

“Aren’t those kind of similar to the galettes that I mentioned earlier?” I asked.

Tortillas and galettes both felt like different forms of crêpes to me. The flour that was used for them was different, so they probably had a different taste and texture, but...

“Yeah, you’re sort of right about that,” Yuki replied. “With that in mind, it probably won’t be very good for the sake of adding some variety to the food we can eat.”

“Well, Touya did mention that he wanted to eat corn, so we can buy some for him,” said Haruka. “It’ll also let us show him the corn that we found here. In addition, we can ask the stall owner to find out if there are other ways of eating the corn.”

“Oh, right, there might be some ways of cooking and eating food that are unique to this different world,” said Yuki. “Okay, I’ll go buy some!”

I was a bit curious about the corn myself, so I followed Yuki to the stall.

“Oh, there are actually a lot of different colors of corn here,” I said.

“Yeah. White corn and yellow corn were the most common ones back in Japan, but it seems like there were all sorts of other colors out there back on Earth,” said Yuki.

“Warm colors like red are fine, but colors like blue aren’t very appetizing to me,” I said.

“Yeah, blue corn feels very unfamiliar,” said Yuki. “Let’s just buy some yellow ones to bring back with us.”

“Oh, are you going to purchase some corn?”

The stall owner talked to us after Yuki and I had been chatting with each other for a while, and he was a man that looked like he was in his late twenties. As for his physique, he looked a bit weak for a farmer, so he was probably a merchant.

“We’re thinking about it,” said Yuki. “By the way, how are you supposed to eat the corn?”

“Oh, yeah, they’re not commonly consumed in this region. There are plenty of different methods, such as using the kernels for soup or turning the corn into flour for bread. Bread made from corn flour tastes delicious in a different way compared to bread made from wheat, after all.”

“They’re not commonly consumed in this region? Oh, does that mean it’s a crop that can’t be grown here?” Yuki asked.

“Nah, there are some nearby regions where corn is grown, so you could grow some corn here if you wanted.”

“Hmm, I see,” said Yuki. “Would you happen to be a merchant that travels around to sell goods?”

“Yeah, I travel around the towns in this region. The goods at this stall are ones that I stocked up on from another town.”

“Oh, that makes sense,” said Yuki. “In that case, I’d like to purchase ten each of the three types of yellow corn here.”

The merchant smiled and started to pack some corn into bags after he heard Yuki’s order. “Cheers! Do you happen to prefer yellow corn over the others?”

“Well, the yellow ones just kind of feel like they’ll taste better, I guess?” said Yuki.

“Is that so? Doesn’t red corn look tasty as well? They taste differently compared to yellow corn, so...”

It was technically true that the assumption of other colors indicating a bad taste was merely a fixed idea in our heads. Things like adzuki beans were red, and purple was a normal color for fruits. On the other hand, colors like yellow and white could make something look like it wasn’t ripe. It was just that yellow corn was the most familiar type of corn to us, and Yuki was probably also self-aware about that, as she chuckled in response to the merchant’s words. “Yeah, it’s just my personal opinion. In addition, deep colors look like they would change the color of things like soups if you tried to use them, so...”

“I mean, the color that’s visible is just the color of the husk, so the corn inside is actually white. Well, I guess the color of the husk does affect the inside a little bit.” The merchant seemed a bit confused at first, but he nodded in response as if he understood Yuki’s words and threw in some different colored corn before he handed the bag to Yuki. “I added some extra types of colored corn for free, so give them a try when you feel like it.”

“Really? Thanks a lot! We’ll come back for more if we happen to visit Kelg again!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Sure. I usually set up a stall around here from time to time, so feel free to drop by again if you see me around!”

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Yuki and I brought back some corn with us as we returned to where Haruka and Natsuki were waiting, and it seemed like they had purchased some goods themselves. Natsuki was holding a small bag in one of her hands, and it sort of looked like something that could fit about one to two kilos of rice inside of it.

“Did the two of you purchase something else as well?” I asked.

“Yes, we did,” Natsuki replied. “There was a stall that was selling rapeseed, so we went and bought some.”

“Rapeseed? Oh, I see. Is it for making vegetable oil?” I asked.

“Yes, that’s one purpose for them,” Haruka replied. “We have plenty of animal fats and oils in stock, but tempura is something that requires vegetable oil.”

“In addition, rapeseed flowers can probably grow by themselves even if we leave them alone,” said Natsuki. “We felt like it would be a nice addition of colors to our yard.”

“We can enjoy both the flowers and the oil from them, huh? That sounds quite good to me,” I said.

However, Yuki grimaced after she heard Haruka and Natsuki’s words, so it seemed like she had a different opinion. “Hmm. A yard full of rapeseed flowers doesn’t sound like a wonderful garden. The flowers will look pretty, but...”

“You’re free to enjoy gardening however you want, Yuki,” said Natsuki. “We technically do have two yards, after all. I don’t think we can maintain that much space by ourselves, however.”

“Yeah, it took a lot of work to fix up the yard at Edith’s mansion to look presentable,” I said.

We had worked very hard at mowing the grass and cutting through the greenery at the yard of Edith’s mansion, but our efforts had only turned a dense thicket into a grassy plain. The result wasn’t exactly something that we could call a proper yard, but it would probably take ages to clean up the entire place. On top of that, it was currently summer, so we would have to mow through any grass that had grown back again once we returned to Laffan. *Ugh, I’m not looking forward to it at all...*

“I won’t stop you if you want to work hard by yourself at this, Yuki,” said Haruka. “Are you planning to become a full-time gardener?”

Yuki was probably self-aware of the fact that becoming a full-time gardener was the only way for her to create a wonderful garden, and she shook her head in response to Haruka’s words. “Nah, that’s going a bit too far. I’ll compromise and make do with a small flower bed.”

“Wise decision,” I said. “Now, then, we’re more or less done with what we’re here for, so that just leaves one last thing for us to do.”

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“So, why did you all drop by to pay me another visit?” Yasue asked.

The place that we dropped by in order to eat lunch was Yasue’s dining hall. Or rather, the owner of the dining hall was probably Yasue’s husband, Chester.

“I figured that the right thing to do would be to let you know right before we leave Kelg,” I said. “We’re also here for lunch. The food that’s served here tastes quite good, after all.”

“Thanks for the praise. I helped with the menu, so I’m glad that you like it,” said Yasue. “You sure are polite in weird ways, though.”

“I mean, you’re one of the few other fellow people from Japan that we can

get along with, so there's no reason for us to be hostile to each other," I said.

It would be best to completely avoid our classmates that were troublesome, but there was no reason for us to refuse to associate with someone that wasn't hostile to us. On top of that, it was possible that we could potentially help each other out in one way or another in the future.

"Yeah, good point. We don't have any relatives that we can rely on in this world, after all," said Yasue. "Well, it's kind of a shame that you're all returning to Laffan on the day after tomorrow."

"That's where we usually work, and our house is located in Laffan as well," said Yuki.

"I can't believe you already own a house," said Yasue. "A year hasn't even passed since we were first transported to this different world."

"We all contributed to the purchase of the house as a party of five people," said Natsuki. "There's no way any of us would have been able to afford a house individually."

"The fact that you managed to find a husband within a year is way more amazing from our point of view, Yasue," said Yuki.

"Mm. There is a *certain* person who has made no progress over a decade and a half or so back in Japan and over half a year in this different world despite being together almost all the time," said Natsuki. "I won't say exactly who we're talking about, however."

"Yeah, progress is happening at a snail's pace," said Yuki. "I won't say exactly who we're talking about, however."

Huh? Did Yuki and Natsuki look at me just now? Nah, I'm probably imagining things.

"Oh, is there actually someone like that? I wonder who it is," said Haruka.

"Yeah, there is. It's really weird," said Yuki. "I wonder who it is."

"Look, if you're all here just to perform some kind of skit, then please go away," said Yasue. "The person is obviously—"

Yasue sounded like she felt no hesitation at all, so I hastily interrupted her

words and brought up the other reason we were here. “M-More importantly, Yasue, we’re free tomorrow, so we wanted to ask you if you know about any places in Kelg that would be good to visit.”

“*Sigh.* I guess it’s more ‘complicated’ than it might seem. Well, Kelg isn’t really an interesting town. It’s not a tourist spot, after all.” I wasn’t sure who the sigh was directed at, but Yasue sighed deeply and paused in thought for a while before she clapped her hands together. “Oh, actually, I dropped by all of the dining establishments here in Kelg to see if I could gather any information that would be useful for me and my husband’s dining hall, and there was one place that was pretty good, so how about that? I hate to admit it, but it was a very nice café. However, I gave up on trying to use it as a reference due to the fact that the café has a completely different target customer base and the fact that it would be very costly.”

“A dining establishment, huh? I guess that’s all there is to Kelg,” said Haruka.

“I mean, yeah, there aren’t really that many people with free time to play around,” said Yasue. “There are also places like casinos, but your party won’t go there, right? Oh, right, I forgot about brothels. I can tell you the location of the brothels if you want me to.”

“No, thank you!”

Yasue grinned playfully as she brought up one last thing that had popped up in her mind, but all of the girls firmly turned down her offer at the same time.

“There technically are some brothels with a business model similar to host clubs, you know?” said Yasue.

“Listen, we’ll never visit one,” said Haruka. “Just please only tell us the location of the café that you mentioned.”

Haruka sighed deeply before she told Yasue the only thing she wanted to know about, and Yasue chuckled in response. “Sure. The café is a bit expensive, but your party can probably afford the prices just fine.”

The café that Yasue had told us about was located in a slightly affluent area of Kelg. It didn’t look very large, but it looked quite fancy from the outside and gave off the impression of being an expensive place. With that in mind, it was

obviously not a place that catered to ordinary citizens, so I felt quite surprised about the fact that Yasue had been brave enough to enter the café.

“Yikes, this café looks like it’ll be expensive for sure from its appearance alone,” said Yuki.

“Yeah, I feel the same way, but Aera-san’s café had a similar atmosphere,” I said.

“That’s a bit of a special case,” said Haruka. “Well, dining at a café like this is something that we can afford just fine by now, so let’s enter the café.”

It had probably been a painful expense for Yasue, but if she had been able to afford a visit to the café, then it was probably affordable for us as well. We opened the doors and entered the café, and we were greeted by some calming music.

“Welcome.”

I looked in the direction of the quiet voice that I heard, and I saw a cool and handsome man that was standing up perfectly straight. He had some white hair, and he was wearing blackish clothes. I had never visited a bar before, but he looked like someone that would be a perfect fit for a bartender.

“Please feel free to take a seat here.”

We followed the man to a table, and he handed us a menu right after we all sat down. Being handed a menu would have been perfectly normal back on Earth, but I felt a bit confused because it was unusual in this different world, and the prices for the items on the menu were quite unusual as well. Aera-san’s café was kind of designed to cater to affluent people, but the café we were in seemed like it was even more of a high-end place. A drink from this place would be worth about as much as two or three meals at Yasue’s dining hall, and the total price would skyrocket to an amount that would be enough to cover a few days’ worth of food expenses if you added on some snacks or light meals. However, the café had a fitting atmosphere for its high prices, so it wouldn’t be right to describe it as a rip-off. We had just finished a meal not too long ago at Yasue’s dining hall, so we ordered some tea and looked around the interior of the café.

“The interior of this café looks quite good, and the chairs we’re sitting in feel comfortable as well,” I said.

“They might be chairs that were made in Laffan,” said Natsuki. “They don’t look like they’re as expensive as the ones that we ordered, however.”

“Nah, there’s no way someone would leave out furniture made from precious wood at a place like this,” said Haruka. “More importantly, there’s something else that stands out the most to me.”

Haruka used her eyes to indicate a specific place, and she was looking at a person that was sitting at a corner of the café. The person looked like a woman from her physique, and she was completely covered by a robe just like Riva. Her face was hidden by a hood, and she was actually performing music live in that state. It was normal to hear some nice background music at a café, but that only applied to the ones back on Earth. You couldn’t exactly play some music with ease by just flipping on a switch in this different world, so music was actually quite rare here. I had assumed that there would be bards at taverns, but we hadn’t seen any so far. However, I wasn’t sure if that was because Laffan was located in the countryside or if it was because we usually wouldn’t visit taverns.

“The music sounds like a track that requires a lot of skill to play properly,” said Natsuki. “The person playing the music is definitely quite talented.”

“She’s playing the rhythm instruments by herself as well, so that’s quite impressive indeed,” said Yuki.

“String instruments that are similar to lutes were what I had in mind for common instruments in a fantasy world like the one we’re in, but it looks like I guessed completely wrong,” I said.

The musician was actually playing a flute, and the instrument itself looked sort of similar to the bamboo flutes that were known as shakuhachi. At the same time, she was also using her right leg and left leg to beat some percussion instruments that gave off a high pitch and low pitch sound respectively to keep the beat for the track that she was playing. It was a display of great talent and prowess, but the actual melody sounded very soothing, and I enjoyed the background music as I took a sip from my cup of tea that had arrived at our table.

“Hmm. To be honest, just between us, I feel like the tea brewed by you girls tastes a lot better,” I said.

“Thank you for the praise, Nao,” said Haruka. “However, just so you know, that’s only because the levels of our Cooking skills are all high.”

“Oh, that makes sense. I guess it’s kind of like having professional cooks at home,” I said. “I really appreciate it.”

Haruka’s Level 4 Cooking skill was definitely on par with professional cooks, so it probably wasn’t fair to compare the tea served at this café with the tea that was served at home.

“If the tea tastes like this, then there’s a good chance that the food served at Aera-san’s café tastes better as well,” said Yuki.

“There were some high-end restaurants back in Japan that spent the most money on location and creating a high-end atmosphere, so the quality of food served at such places wasn’t that impressive,” said Natsuki. “With that in mind, we should probably praise Aera-san’s cooking abilities the most.”

“Even if you factor in the atmosphere, I still prefer Aera-san’s café much more than this place,” I said.

A cool-looking owner of a café was nice and all, but a cute-looking elf was much more preferable to me. Aera-san’s café had an advantage in terms of the taste of the food and drinks, so the only thing that this place had over Aera-san’s café was the live performance for background music. On top of that, Aera-san’s café was also much cheaper, so there was no reason for us to go out of our way to return to this café in the future.

“Yeah, that’s definitely the case for us,” said Haruka. “Well, let’s just enjoy the music while we’re here.”

I nodded in response to Haruka’s words and silently listened to the background music. The music stopped after a while, and a few people from the other tables stood up and dropped some money into a box that was located in front of the musician.

“Oh, is the musician not actually someone that’s hired by the café? If so, then I’ll have to lower my personal rating for this café,” I said.

“It might also just be a tip system that’s separate from wages,” said Natsuki.

Natsuki’s words made perfect sense to me, so I nodded and dropped one large silver coin into the box for our group of five people.

“Um—”

“Hm?”

I looked at the musician after I heard her voice, and she hastily looked down before she muttered the rest of her words. “Thank you very much.”

“Your performance was excellent,” I said. “Thank you for letting us hear some good music.”

The musician bowed to me after she heard my words, and then she started to play some music again. The new track she played sounded like a cheerful and high-tempo one, and it felt quite powerful for some background music, but I was fine with it. We hadn’t heard music in quite a long time up until now, so we remained at the café for a while to enjoy the music before we eventually headed back to our inn.

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“That’s not fair!” Touya exclaimed. “I wanted to go as well!”

We grouped back up with Touya, and he pouted right after we told him about our experience earlier today at the café.

“Relax, we still have free time tomorrow,” I said. “We’ll tell you the location of the café, so feel free to go there by yourself if you want to.”

“Oh, um, I don’t know about that,” said Touya. “Well, if there are some cute waitresses, then...”

“There was only a café owner that looked cool and handsome at that place,” said Haruka. “Do you still want to go, Touya?”

“Nah, I’ll pass! Cool and handsome are traits that I’d love to obtain myself, but the food doesn’t taste very good, right?” Touya asked.

“Mm. We ordered some snacks after a while, but the snacks tasted about the same as the ones at the first café that we visited in Laffan,” Haruka replied.

“They definitely tasted better than what you can get at other places, but they’re not worth the price.”

“In that case, there’s no reason for me to go to that café,” said Touya. “I kind of wanted to listen to music because it’s been a while since I last heard some. Do any of you girls have any plans for playing music in the future?”

“Music, huh? I wouldn’t mind if we had some instruments, but the ones familiar to us aren’t sold at stores, right?” Natsuki asked.

“We haven’t searched before, but yeah, there probably aren’t any,” I replied.

I had no memories of instruments being sold at stores in this different world, but it was kind of because our party had no spare money in the beginning, and none of us had been particularly interested in instruments either. On top of that, the instruments in this different world were probably completely different from the ones back on Earth, so even someone like Natsuki would have to practice for a bit before she could play proper music with one.

“I don’t think we’ll be able to find any for sale, but you know how to play the piano, right, Haruka?” I asked.

“Yes, but a piano would be very expensive even if it were possible to find one for sale,” Haruka replied. “Mechanical instruments like grand pianos back on Earth were worth at least one million yen, after all. Other instruments would be better if we have to play by hand. Natsuki, you can play the koto, right?”

“Yes, to a casual extent,” said Natsuki. “By the way, Yuki was good at playing the violin.”

“Yuki?! No way!”

Touya and I voiced our shock at the same time, and Yuki pouted after she heard our words. “What’s with those reactions?! Just to be clear, I really am decently good at playing the violin!”

“Well, I mean, Yuki, an instrument like a koto is perfectly fitting for Natsuki, but you and a violin don’t feel like a match at all in my head,” I said.

“Yeah, violins feel like expensive instruments to me,” said Touya. “You were an ordinary citizen back in Japan, right, Yuki? So...”

“I get what you guys are trying to say, but pianos are actually more expensive than violins,” said Yuki. “Upright pianos are relatively cheap compared to other ones, but even those pianos are as expensive as the violins that are suited for experts.”

“Oh, really?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Yuki replied. “The grand piano at Natsuki’s house back in Japan was worth as much as ten copies of the violin that I owned!”

“...The two of you owned those instruments, so I can’t really tell whether it’s just that pianos are expensive, or if it’s just that violins are cheap, but the only thing I do understand is that Natsuki’s piano was worth a lot,” said Touya.

Touya had an awkward expression on his face after he heard Yuki’s words, and I nodded in agreement with him.

“Um, it wasn’t really *that* expensive,” said Natsuki. “I don’t think so, at least.”

“No way.”

Touya, Haruka, and I all voiced the same words at the same time. *There’s absolutely no way that anything at Natsuki’s house was cheap.*

“Well, it was the highest quality that an ordinary household could afford, so it’s not too unreasonable,” said Yuki. “That piano definitely wasn’t cheap, but households with children that attend music schools can probably afford one if they save up for it.”

“Wouldn’t that be something in the milli—”

Haruka seemed quite surprised and sounded like she was about to voice some comments, but Natsuki interrupted her as if to prevent Haruka from finishing her words. “E-Enough about the price of instruments. More importantly, Touya-kun, what do you plan on doing tomorrow? Are you going to head out by yourself, or do you want to head out somewhere all together as a full group?”

“I don’t really have anything in mind, but we could look for instruments while we’re on this topic,” said Touya. “We’ve never actively looked for instruments while exploring a town, so there might actually be a store that sells instruments out there.”

“Well, we probably shouldn’t get our hopes up, but it’s not like there’s any specific place that we have to visit, so I guess that’s fine,” I said.

We hadn’t found any interesting places today, so the idea of tagging along with Touya sounded acceptable to me, and nobody else voiced any objections. We went to bed earlier in order to prepare for the next day, but...

Chapter 4—Mayhem in Kelg

“Hey, Nao, wake up.”

I felt the sensation of someone shaking my body, and the first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was some fluffy ears that were twitching, but I noticed Touya’s face not too long after. *Your ears stand out a lot when they twitch, Touya. I’m not trying to imply anything, but yeah.*

“Hm? What’s up? It’s way too early to get up, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’s the middle of the night at the moment,” Touya replied. “However, just listen carefully to the sounds outside.”

Touya’s ears were a bit distracting because they were still twitching, but I tried my best to ignore them as I strained my own ears and heard some noise outside. Noise in itself wouldn’t be anything weird due to the fact that there were some taverns nearby, but it was way too late in the night for people to still be awake in a world without electricity. I opened the windows slightly to see what was outside, and I saw some faint reddish light and smoke in the distance.

“Did a fire break out? It looks like it’s spreading throughout town as well,” I said. “The right thing to do would be to help out with extinguishing the fire if this happened in Laffan, but...”

We had a lot of acquaintances in Laffan, and there were also people that could vouch for us, but we were complete outsiders here in Kelg, and people would definitely feel suspicious about strangers like us if we showed up at the scene of the fire.

“On top of that, it’s not an accidental fire, right? The places that are burning look too far away from each other to be separate incidents,” I said.

I could see three different places that were burning, so it would be too optimistic to assume that all three fires had coincidentally broken out at the same time.

“Yeah, probably,” said Touya. “The voices that I can hear sound a bit

disturbing, after all. We should probably change clothes and get ready to head out."

As an elf, I had good ears, but my ears weren't as good as those of a beastman like Touya, and I nodded in response to Touya's words as I changed my clothes. I heard a knock on the door of our room when I had finished, and the girls entered our room right after that knock. They all looked like they were ready to head out.

"You girls woke up as well?" I asked.

"None of us are bold enough to casually continue sleeping in a situation like this," Haruka replied. "We hadn't let our guard down, after all."

"Mm. Considering the state of affairs here in Kelg, there was a risk of something happening at any time," said Natsuki.

"Do you girls think this commotion was caused by the Holy Satomi Sect?" I asked.

"That's the most logical answer," said Yuki. "It's hard to imagine that this is an unrelated incident."

"Ugh, I can't believe they interrupted my vacation!" Touya exclaimed. "The actions of the Holy Satomi Sect are absolutely unforgivable!"

"Now's not the time for that, Touya!" I exclaimed. "What should we do?"

Touya clenched his fists and teeth out of frustration, and I shot back at him as I looked at the girls for instructions. Our basic policy was to flee if the situation was dangerous for us, but fleeing would make us look like we were allies of the perpetrators, so that wasn't an option. However, it would also be difficult for us to act alone, so...

"...Let's wait and see for now," said Haruka. "We might get in trouble if outsiders like us head out and try to help."

"The same conclusion as Nao, huh? Yuki, Natsuki, what do you two think?" Touya asked.

"Both of us feel the same way," Yuki replied. "It would be a mere act of violence if civilians like us try to crack down on the Holy Satomi Sect, after all."

“Mm. We haven’t been attacked ourselves, so we can’t exactly claim self-defense,” said Natsuki. “Autonomy would be a valid excuse if this was Laffan, but not for here in Kelg.”

It would be a different story if we had officially accepted a quest from the guild in Kelg for maintaining law and order, but our party was currently just made up of some regular adventurers.

“Yeah, we might end up getting jailed depending on our actions,” I said.

“Hmm, yeah, all of that makes sense. I feel a bit frustrated about this, but I guess we have no choice but to wait,” said Touya. “However, why did the Holy Satomi Sect choose to start a commotion right now of all times? It’s not like they’re a terrorist organization, and their goal is to make money, right?”

“Didn’t you mention before that you felt that something big was going to happen soon, Touya? Some information about the authorities’ plans probably got leaked somehow,” I said. “However, that still doesn’t explain why the Holy Satomi Sect decided to cause a commotion. This will probably cut off their income for a while, and it’ll also put them in an even worse situation, so it’s really confusing to me.”

I had no idea about what kind of crimes the Holy Satomi Sect would be charged with when the authorities finally cracked down on them, but if the Holy Satomi Sect added arson to their list of crimes, then the death sentence was probably awaiting them. It would be a different story if they were planning to take advantage of this commotion to attempt a coup d’état, but they probably weren’t that powerful.

“Surrender should be the best choice for the Holy Satomi Sect, but that probably doesn’t apply for Satomi herself if she can take advantage of the commotion to escape,” said Yuki. “I’m not sure if this is enough to make escape easy, however.”

“Mm. There’s no way that the guards of the town haven’t locked up the gates in this situation,” said Natsuki. “It would be a different story if there were an easy way to get over the walls, however.”

The walls surrounding Kelg weren’t that high, so they probably hadn’t been built with warfare in mind. Everyone in our party could probably hop over the

walls even without using any specific tools, and ordinary citizens could probably climb over the walls just fine through the use of a ladder as long as there weren't any guards around.

"I wasn't exactly close with Satomi, but she is one of our former classmates, so it's not like I want her to die," I said. "With that in mind, I'm not sure how to feel about this."

I looked outside at the town from the windows, and I saw some houses that were still burning. Such houses definitely had people that lived in them, so I felt even more conflicted. It seemed like everyone else had similar feelings, and we sat down silently before we all sighed in unison. We continued to quietly watch over the situation in Kelg, but there was no sign of the commotion being quelled any time soon even after two hours had passed. In fact, the noise and panic outside grew louder and louder, so...

"Perhaps there are more people in the Holy Satomi Sect than we thought there were," said Haruka.

"There could also be some outlaws that are taking advantage of the commotion to wreak havoc," said Natsuki. "I've seen people on television before that claimed their actions were merely part of a peaceful protest, even though the situation obviously looked like a riot with the goal of looting goods and money."

"Oh, that would make sense. Are there just a lot of those people in Kelg, or are the guards too weak to maintain law and order?" said Touya. "Damn it!"

Touya clicked his tongue out of frustration, and Haruka sighed after she heard Touya's words. "It's probably just a lack of manpower. The guild mentioned that it wanted to have people ready for action, remember?"

"That's probably why the Holy Satomi Sect decided to act before the guild was ready," said Natsuki. "This is an issue, however. We should be fine, but will Yasue's dining hall be okay?"

The rest of us fell silent after we heard Natsuki's words. Due to the nature of its business model, a dining hall wasn't exactly a very attractive target for looting, but I had no idea if a rioting mob would keep that kind of common sense in mind. Rioters were people that would enjoy performing pointless

actions like randomly flipping over cars, so it would probably be best to expect the worst.

"...Should we head out? Our first encounter with Yasue in this different world was kind of awkward, but it would still bother me if something bad happened to her," I said.

The word "encounter" felt a bit weird due to the fact that we had already been acquainted with each other back in Japan, but it was a fact that Yasue had initially tried to pick a fight with us in this different world. However, she seemed like she wasn't really a bad person after we sat down and talked with her, and she seemed like she was happily married to Chester as well, so I wanted to help her out if possible.

"Mm. Even if nothing happens to Yasue's dining hall, it won't matter because it's not like we have anything else to do," said Haruka.

I had no idea if Haruka was serious or if she was just trying to hide her embarrassment, but we headed out after the rest of us heard Haruka's words. We brought out weapons and armor with us just in case as we walked in the direction of Yasue's dining hall, and we saw some appalling sights on our way that were beyond our imagination. There were a few buildings that weren't burning anymore, but there were many places that were still burning, and we also saw some dead bodies from time to time that looked like they had been discarded on the streets. We had no idea if the dead bodies were the victims of the Holy Satomi Sect, the fires, or rioters, but the Holy Satomi Sect was obviously the cause of the deaths in one way or another. We saw some ordinary citizens that were running away from time to time, and we also saw some suspicious groups of people that had their faces completely hidden, but none of them tried to attack us, and it was probably because we were armed.

"It's not like I felt any real pity for Satomi in the first place, but I definitely don't feel any pity for her after seeing what happened tonight," I said.

"Yeah, I completely agree," said Yuki. "I feel like her actions are unforgivable at this point."

However, there was nothing we could do for the dead bodies, so we ignored them and continued to walk through town. Yasue's dining hall wouldn't have

been very far from our inn if we could have walked directly over there, but our path had been blocked by burning obstacles from time to time, so we had to take the long way through the alleys. However, the situation of the town in those places was even worse than what it was on the main road. There were a lot more buildings that had burned down from the fires, and it was probably because the buildings in the alleys were packed tighter than the ones along the main road. There were also a lot more dead bodies in the alleys as a result. I had become somewhat used to seeing dead bodies by now, but I was still really glad that it was dark outside during the middle of the night.

"Damn it, I can't believe that the fires affected some kids as well," said Touya.

Touya clicked his tongue after he saw something, and it looked like there were two small bodies piled upon each other ahead of us, and both bodies were completely covered in soot. We all looked away from the harrowing sight and tried to hurry ahead, but Touya suddenly stopped in his tracks and turned around. "Hold on, are those some beastgirls...?"

"Touya, it's true that beastwomen are rare, but now's not the time for it," I said.

"Yeah, I know that, but— Wait, they're still alive!" Touya exclaimed.

Touya frowned as he strained his ears, and then he hastily ran over to the children. The rest of us followed him shortly, and I heard some faint wheezing when I bent down next to the children. The children were definitely still alive, but their bodies were in a really bad condition. One of the children was a girl that looked like she was less than ten years old, and she was hugging a girl that looked even younger than her in a protective way, so the two of them were probably sisters. However, the arms of the older sister all the way up to her neck looked like all of it had been carbonized from burns. I couldn't confirm for sure due to the fact that her body had collapsed on the ground, but it looked like the burns had spread to her back as well. On top of that, her left arm looked like it had been twisted in a weird direction, and there were numerous wounds on her face and legs. As for the younger sister, she looked like she was a bit better off than her older sister, but there were large burns and deep wounds on her back. I had no idea if she had been hit by something or if someone had attacked her, but she had a slanted wound that was covered by

some rags. However, the rags were completely stained with blood.

“Mm, they definitely seem like they’re barely still alive,” said Haruka. “I’m not sure how much I can heal, but I’ll give it a try. *Purification*. *Cure*.”

Haruka used her Purification spell to clean the children before she tried to heal the broken arm. However, the older sister didn’t react at all even though the healing process was supposed to be very painful, but her wheezing calmed down a bit.

“The external wounds and burns of the other child look really bad as well,” said Natsuki. “*Cure*.”

Natsuki gently unfolded the arms of the older sister and picked up the younger sister in her own arms before she used the Cure spell on her. The wounds that the younger sister had suffered looked like they had been healed as a result, but the Cure spell wasn’t that powerful against severe burns, so the burn scars were still visible on the reddish skin of the younger sister.

“We can’t just leave these children here, right?” Yuki asked. “It doesn’t look like their parents or relatives are around here, so...”

It would have been fine to leave the children with the guards under normal circumstances, but we had no idea if the guards would properly take care of the children amid the mayhem that was happening in Kelg. On top of that, the children were severely injured. There was a clear solution if the children were simply separated from their parents or relatives, but if that wasn’t the case, then...

“If we’re going to take these children into our custody, then we’ll have to bring them with us back to our inn,” I said. “However, what should we do about Yasue’s dining hall in that case?”

Touya replied to my question right away as he confidently pounded his own chest. “Leave that to me! I’m counting on the rest of you to take care of the children!”

“Are you sure you’ll be fine by yourself, Touya?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. There aren’t many people out there that are brave enough to attack me,” Touya replied. “In fact, it’s you guys that should be wary of being

attacked. At first glance, you all look like girls that are easy to defeat, after all."

"...I agree with you about the fact that you're unlikely to get attacked, but I'm a guy as well, you know?" I said.

Sure, I'm a slender guy, and my hair is long, but I'm definitely taller than the girls, Touya.

"It's hard to tell in this darkness," said Touya. "The girls look small and weak, but only on the outside, so..."

"Touya...?"

"Oh, I guess it's time for me to get going!" Touya exclaimed. "See ya! I'm leaving the rest to you all!"

Touya grinned and gave us a thumbs up as if to lighten the atmosphere before he ran away, and the rest of us glanced at each other afterward before we all sighed in unison.

"Well, let's just thank Touya for now and hurry back to our inn," said Haruka. "I'd like to provide these children with a bed to rest on, after all."

"Yeah," I said. "I'll carry one of them."

I picked up one of the children from Haruka before we hurried back to our inn. There was a chance that other people would accuse us of child abduction under normal circumstances, so I had no idea if it was a good thing that this wasn't something that we had to worry about. We managed to return to our room at the inn without anyone stopping us, and we laid down the two sisters on a bed. I looked at them once again now that we were in a bright place, and the color of their hair was a beautiful light brown, while their ears and tails were dark brown with stripes. I had no idea if it was because of what had happened tonight, or if it was because good sources of nutrition hadn't been available to them, but the state of their fur didn't look as glossy as Touya's fur, and the burn scars on their bodies looked even more painful due to the fact that the soot had been cleaned away.

"The shape of their ears looks a bit different from Touya's ears," said Haruka. "I wonder if they're of the cat subspecies for beastwomen. It looks like their breathing has calmed down a lot by now."

“The injuries are still very serious, however,” said Natsuki. “There are burn scars everywhere, and there are missing toes as well, so...”

Natsuki seemed very sad as she looked at the right foot of the older sister. The older sister had been wearing some shoes that looked like cheap ones, and it seemed like flames had burned away the sole of her right shoe and some of her toes as well. The younger sister had been wearing some cheap shoes as well, but she wasn’t as badly burnt, and it was probably because her older sister had been carrying her as a form of protection. The physiques of their bodies looked very similar to each other, so the older sister had probably exerted hysterical strength in a desperate attempt to save her younger sister.

“She’s a girl, so it’d be nice if we could heal her toes, but it’s not possible at the moment, right?” Yuki asked.

“Mm. We’ve talked about this before, but Natsuki and I aren’t capable of healing lost limbs and body parts in general,” Haruka replied. “We used the Cure spell instead of the Light Cure spell as well, so this is as much as we can do for the burns. Hmm. Well, we might be able to completely heal the burns if we gouge all the way to the dermis before using the Cure spell, so...”

“Yikes, that sounds really painful!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki’s face turned a bit pale after she heard Haruka’s words, and I nodded deeply in agreement. I would be able to withstand pain caused by the healing of a serious injury if it was during battle, but I wasn’t keen about the idea during normal times regardless of whether I was on the receiving end or not.

“I’d prefer not to try it out myself if possible,” said Natsuki. “We’ll probably have to try the Regenerate spell, but—hm?”

I had no idea if it was because Yuki had raised her voice just now, but the older sister quietly groaned and opened her eyes. “Ugh. Wh-Where am I? *Cough, cough*!”

“Calm down. You’ll be okay,” said Haruka. “Please drink some water first.”

Haruka talked to the girl with a gentle voice and wrapped one of her hands around the back of the coughing girl as she brought some water to the girl’s mouth. The girl drank the water as if she was panting for some, and then she

frantically moved her eyes around as if she had just realized something. “Th-Thank you— Wait, where’s Met?!”

“The other girl that was with you is right next to you,” said Haruka. “We healed her and let her sleep.”

Met was probably the name of the younger sister. The older sister jumped out of bed as she looked for her younger sister, but she relaxed and laid back down on the bed after Haruka gently held her back and pointed at the other bed next to her.

“Healing? Oh, it doesn’t hurt anymore...? I felt nothing but pain for a long time, so...”

The girl gasped out of surprise before tears started to flow out of her eyes, and Haruka gently patted her on her head as she gently wiped away the girl’s tears. Even burns at the fingertips would sting a lot, so I had no idea how much it would hurt if you suffered burns all over your body. On top of that, the girl had also protected her younger sister as she ran away from danger. I had no idea where the flames had started to burn away at her body, but I didn’t want to think about how it would feel to walk around with burnt feet and missing toes. The girl was probably crying out of relief due to the fact that she wasn’t feeling pain anymore, and some time passed before she finally stopped crying after she calmed down, but she had a slightly wary look in her eyes as she stared at us.

“Once again, thank you all very much for the help. My name is Mary, and the girl next to me is Metea, my younger sister. Um, who are you all?”

“We’re just some ordinary adventurers,” I said. “We picked you and your sister up on the road and healed both of you.”

Mary had woken up and found herself surrounded by strangers, so she was probably feeling very uneasy. I tried to casually respond to her question, but it seemed like Mary felt more suspicious of us after she heard my words.

“Um, do you mean healing by magic? If I recall correctly, that’s very expensive, and we don’t have any money on us,” said Mary. “O-Oh, please spare my sister! I’ll do anything in her place, so—”

I had no idea what kind of worst-case scenario had appeared in her mind, but Mary reached out with her hands as if she was begging for mercy, and Natsuki chuckled in an awkward way when she saw Mary's reaction.

"Don't worry, we have no intention of asking you to pay for healing fees," said Natsuki. "We also aren't going to ask you to do anything ridiculous. Please drink this and get some rest for now."

The cup that Natsuki offered to Mary was a fruit juice drink that had been mixed with some herbs, and it was a special type of medicine that was easy for children to drink that Natsuki had made with her Pharmacy skill. Natsuki's words weren't enough to make Mary let her guard down, but Mary seemed like she was aware of the fact that there wasn't anything else she could do, and she hesitantly took a sip from the cup.

"Huh? Whoa, this is really sweet," said Mary.

The drink itself looked greenish due to the fact that it had been mixed with herbs. Mary's eyes widened with surprise due to the fact that she probably hadn't expected it to taste good, and she held the cup with her own hands before she swiftly drank all of the juice.

"O-Oh, u-um, the drink tasted very delicious," said Mary.

Mary looked at the empty cup in a way as if she wanted to drink some more, but she looked down out of embarrassment when she noticed that the girls were smiling at her in a warm way.

"That's good to know," said Haruka. "Now, then, please sleep and get some rest. We can talk again tomorrow."

"Okay," said Mary.

Haruka wiped Mary's mouth before she tucked her into bed, and it seemed like Mary had used up all of her energy due to the fact that we started to hear some sleeping sounds from her not too long after that. Mary's face in her sleep looked much calmer compared to before, and we all sighed in unison out of relief when we saw that.

"She seems fine now," said Haruka. "I figured she would panic a lot more, but..."

“Yeah, same here. She looks like she’s not even ten years old, right? Life isn’t easy in this different world, but I’m still surprised that she’s so mature for her age for the sake of protecting her younger sister,” said Yuki. “There’s no way I could have done the same things as her if I was in her place.”

“Oh, yeah, you didn’t talk at all, Yuki,” I said. “Why’s that? It’s not like you’re not good with children or anything, right?”

Yuki was a very friendly person that was good at getting along with others, after all. In fact, she was the type of person that would be liked by most children, but I had no idea if that was partly because Yuki was good at meeting eyes with children due to being short.

“I remained quiet on purpose!” Yuki exclaimed. “Anyone would feel very confused if they woke up and suddenly heard the voices of many people, right? Haruka and Natsuki give off a more reliable impression, so I decided that it would be better to leave things to them.”

“Oh, right, I forgot that you look like someone around Mary’s age, Yuki,” I said.

“Yeah, she probably wouldn’t be put at ease if a fellow child talked to— I mean, no, that’s not the case at all!” Yuki exclaimed. “I’m taller than her!”

“...I don’t think there’s a significant difference,” I said. “Even if there is, it’s probably a number that’s ten centimeters or fewer.”

However, I hadn’t seen Mary’s actual height while standing up and walking around, so I couldn’t tell for sure.

Yuki cringed out of pain when she heard my words, and she then muttered something pathetic after she observed Mary for a few seconds. “W-Well, I mean, my breasts are bigger than hers!”

“Yuki, are you sure that’s something you can be proud about?” Haruka asked. “Mary might actually be half your age, or even younger, so...”

“I don’t want to hear it from you, Haruka!” Yuki exclaimed. “Mine are still bigger than yours!”

“I-I never said anything about being proud of my size!” Haruka exclaimed. “B-

Besides, it's not something that bothers me at all!"

"Both of you, please quiet down," said Natsuki. "If you both continue to talk loudly, then these girls might wake up."

Natsuki's warning was a bit too late, however. Mary didn't wake up, and it was probably because she had just fallen asleep, but Metea woke up and looked like she was about to cry after she noticed that she was surrounded by strangers.

"Don't worry, your sister is sleeping on the bed next to you," said Haruka.

Metea raised her voice after she heard Haruka's words, and then she slapped Mary's cheeks with her palms. Mary groaned in her sleep afterward, and Metea smiled out of relief after she saw Mary's reaction.

"I'm so glad that big sis is alive," said Metea. "Um, who are you all?"

"We're just some ordinary adventurers," said Haruka. "We'll tell you more tomorrow once you have more energy."

"Mm. Please drink this and get some rest for tonight," said Natsuki.

Metea seemed like she was more energetic than her older sister, but she had suffered some serious injuries as well. Natsuki offered a cup with the same type of juice in it as the one that she had offered to Mary earlier, and Metea happily drank all of the juice in one go without any hesitation.

"Thank you," said Metea. "Whoa, this tastes delicious! Oh, um..."

Metea reacted the same way as her older sister had earlier after she had emptied the cup, but she licked the edges of the cup and muttered the words "sweet" and "delicious" as she glanced between us and the cup.

"Hee hee. Would you like to drink another cup of the juice?" Natsuki asked.

"Yeah!" Metea exclaimed. "Thank you very much!"

Natsuki refilled the cup in Metea's hands, and Metea drank slower than before as if to enjoy the taste of the juice. However, it didn't take too long for her to finish the second serving, and she fell back on her bed right after Natsuki took the empty cup away from her. In fact, it was as if she had suddenly run out of energy, and she fell asleep right away. All of us glanced at each other and

chuckled quietly when we saw that. Part of the reason as to why Metea had fallen asleep so quickly was probably because her injuries hadn't been as bad as Mary's injuries, but it was also possible that Metea was much bolder than her older sister. Their situation wasn't exactly a very bright one, but Metea's actions had filled us with hope.

★★★★★★★★★

The sun had started to rise outside when Touya returned to our room at the inn.

"Welcome back, Touya," I said. "How were things outside in town and at Yasue's dining hall?"

"The fires seem to have been extinguished for the most part, so the town has calmed down to an extent," said Touya. "As for Yasue's dining hall, there were some suspicious people there, so I went ahead and knocked a guy out."

"Wait, really? What if that guy was innocent?" I asked.

"Well, Yasue and her husband thanked me for it," Touya replied. "Her husband's name was Chester, right? He's probably a nice guy because he helped Yasue, but it seems like he's not that strong when it comes to combat."

According to Touya, the people outside of Yasue's dining hall had been armed, and they had tried to break in as well, so we probably didn't need to worry about the possibility of Touya being jailed as a penalty for the crime of assault.

"I mean, yeah, it's fairly normal for a cook to be weak in combat," I said. "I gotta say, though, I'm kind of surprised that Chester was willing to help Yasue."

"It's probably because of Yasue's appearance," said Touya. "She does look beautiful, after all. This might not be a nice way to put it, but Chester probably had ulterior motives for helping her."

"I can sort of understand that motivation as a fellow guy, but I would personally avoid girls that act hostile to me," I said.

Yasue had mentioned this to us before herself, but it seemed like she had initially acted in a very nasty way toward Chester. It was true that Yasue's

actions had been a result of stress and anxiety, but I still wouldn't feel willing to help out someone that had a bad personality if that person was a girl that looked beautiful. On the other hand, I would feel motivated to help out someone with a good personality regardless of whether they were a guy or a girl. However, I was an ordinary person, so I would only help out other people if I could afford to do so.

"You're only able to say that because you're blessed when it comes to girls, Nao," said Touya. "Most guys would be willing to put up with almost anything for a chance at getting close to a beautiful girl, you know? On the other hand, you've already been close to beautiful girls with good personalities for a very long time, so someone like you deserves to be stabbed in the back."

"Don't try to casually curse me like that!" I exclaimed. "Besides, doesn't that apply to you as well, Touya?!"

The girls seemed a bit happy to hear some words of praise from Touya, but I felt like it wouldn't be right for other guys to feel envious and to hold a grudge against me as a result.

"Yeah, that's true. However, there's one trait that the girls in our party lack," said Touya.

"...I can tell what you're going to say, but I might as well ask to make sure," I said. "What is it?"

"Animal ears and tails!" Touya exclaimed.

There was nothing surprising at all about Touya's answer, and the girls joined me as I stared at Touya, but it seemed like that didn't deter him at all as he grinned before he continued with his words. "People would treat me like a crazy guy if I stated this back on Earth, but it's a perfectly normal opinion in this different world! Hell yeah!"

"Well, yeah, it's basically just you saying that you prefer girls that are of the same race," I said. "With that in mind, is that why you wanted to save these sisters, Touya? Are you trying to copy Chester's example? Is this the revival of your plan, Touya?"

"Please, the age gap between me and these sisters is way too large!" Touya

exclaimed. “I’m not a lolicon!”

The fact that Touya had referred to me as a “pioneer” of his plan had nothing to do with my perfectly reasonable assumptions, but Touya strongly refuted all of them. However, Yuki grinned in a playful manner when she saw Touya’s reaction.

“I think the age gap won’t be an issue if you wait for them to become adults,” said Yuki. “There was a similar age gap between Hikaru Genji and Murasaki, right?”

“Mm, there was an age gap of eight years between them,” said Natsuki. “Hikaru Genji first met Murasaki when Murasaki was ten years old as well, so that’s kind of similar to these sisters.”

“Wait, that’s it? I thought it was something that was much more problematic,” I said.

An age gap of eight years would be quite creepy for the current age of the sisters, but it wouldn’t be an issue after about ten years or so. I had assumed that Hikaru Genji had raised a much younger girl to become his wife in the future, so...

“I think the creepy part about Hikaru Genji is the fact that he more or less kidnapped Murasaki when Murasaki’s grandmother died,” said Yuki. “Adopting a child that lost their relatives doesn’t sound like something bad in itself, but the actual situation was something completely different.”

“Mm, it’s definitely creepy if you apply modern values to that example. However, men were treated as adults around the age of fourteen in the past, and it seemed like some would even get married around the age,” said Natsuki. “On top of that, Hikaru Genji married Murasaki when Murasaki was around the age of fourteen to fifteen.”

“Hikaru Genji was trash as both a parent and a husband, however,” said Yuki. “In fact, he was the very definition of a scumbag.”

The rest of us nodded deeply in agreement with Yuki’s words. Hikaru Genji had managed to get away with his actions because he was handsome and because he was the protagonist of a fictional story, but his actions were similar

to that of a bad son that took advantage of his parents' social status to do whatever he wanted to do. A similar example in fantasy novels would be the characters that are brought to justice by the protagonist.

"By the way, age gap couples are actually quite common in this different world," said Haruka. "With that in mind, all you have to do is wait a few years, Touya. Marriage right now is technically possible if you want to, but—"

"Trust me, I don't have any ulterior motives!" Touya exclaimed. "Well, I stopped in my tracks and turned around because I noticed their animal ears, but that's it!"

"Oh, yeah, it's definitely true that these sisters managed to survive thanks to the fact that you noticed their animal ears, Touya," I said.

I had averted my eyes away from the bodies of the sisters, so I hadn't noticed the fact that they weren't dead yet at the time, and it would have probably been almost impossible for other people to save those sisters even if they had wanted to do so.

"Well, I guess this just might be fate," said Touya. "More importantly, are they okay? Did they wake up?"

"Yeah, I think they should be okay," said Haruka. "Both of them fell asleep after they drank the medicine-infused juice that Natsuki made, however."

"That kind of sounds like a crime if taken out of context," said Touya. "Did you ask them about their situation?"

"Nah, they were exhausted, so we figured that it was best for them to get some rest first," I said. "All we know is their names and the fact that they're sisters."

"What about their parents or relatives?" Touya asked.

"We know nothing. None of us asked, and Mary also didn't say anything about them," said Haruka. "However, we don't know if it's because they're orphans, or if it's just because they got lost. The first thing that the sisters asked about when they woke up was each other, so it's best to expect the worst."

Mary had asked about Metea, and Metea had asked about Mary right away.

Neither of them had mentioned their mom or dad, and that was probably an important hint about their situation.

“Well, let’s put that aside for now and talk about what we should do next,” I said. “Should we head out of Kelg now that things have calmed down? If so, then that means we’ll have to cancel your sightseeing plans, Touya, but we might be able to avoid further trouble.”

“Nah, there’s no way I would want to go out for sightseeing in these circumstances!” Touya exclaimed. “However, that doesn’t mean I agree with the idea of heading out of Kelg. What about these sisters?”

“I don’t think we can avoid trouble at this point after the incident that happened here in Kelg,” said Haruka. “In any case, we definitely need to decide how to respond to the Adventurers’ Guild and what to do about these sisters. The normal thing to do would be to leave them at an orphanage, but...”

“Wait, what?! Are you serious, Haruka?!” Touya exclaimed. “Do you plan to abandon them?!”

“Calm down, Touya,” I said. “Haruka’s words are common sense in this different world.”

Touya glared at Haruka and almost stood up, but I dragged him back down and tried to calm him. It was common sense to return lost children to their parents or relatives, and if they had none, then it was common sense to leave them at an orphanage or the guards of a town. Helping injured people was a good deed, but we could become criminals if we continued to keep the sisters in our custody without permission.

“Even if the sisters themselves are willing to stay with us, it would still count as abduction if we didn’t have parental consent back on Earth,” said Yuki.

“There is nothing wrong with wanting to help them out if they’re orphans, but you cannot be half-hearted about it,” said Natsuki. “You need to decide how much you’re willing to be responsible for their lives. If you’re willing to look after them all the way until they become adults, Touya-kun, then I’ll respect your decision, but...”

Yuki and Natsuki both had serious looks on their faces as they looked at

Touya, and Touya faltered a bit in response. “Ugh. U-Um...”

Our current earnings would be more than enough to financially support two children, but that was only if we didn’t die. It was possible for us to die at any time as adventurers, but it wasn’t like we could actually obtain a stable job due to the fact that we had nobody that could vouch for us in regard to our background in this different world, and Touya was aware of this as well. He simply had to calm down and think about things rationally.

Touya paused in thought a bit after he heard Yuki and Natsuki’s words, and Haruka shrugged when she saw that. “All of us are more than willing to help you if that’s your intention, but you can always wait on a decision after we obtain detailed information about the specific circumstances of the sisters. The scenario of them safely meeting back up with their parents is possible, after all.”

The scenario that Haruka had brought up was the most ideal one, but she seemed hesitant as she looked down at the floor.

We discussed our plans for the day among ourselves, and our conclusion was to ask the sisters about their situation once they woke up and to head to the guild afterward at around noon, but the guild was one step ahead of us. The guild receptionist lady that Touya had actively chatted with for the sake of gathering “information” visited our room at the inn right after we had finished eating breakfast. Her name was Ketola, and she was a very attractive person, but she wasn’t a beastwoman.

“I believe you are all aware of this, but a riot instigated by the Holy Satomi Sect has broken out here in Kelg,” said Ketola. “The guild would like your party to cooperate with the guards in order to put down the riot.”

We had expected that the guild would request for our cooperation, but we hadn’t expected that they would be aware of our location.

“I’m surprised that the guild acted so quickly,” I said. “Did the guild go out of its way to investigate the inn that we’re staying at?”

“Your party didn’t seem to be too enthusiastic, so the guild decided that it was best to act fast,” said Ketola. “As for the inn, Touya mentioned the name of the inn before, so...”

I glanced at Touya after I heard Ketola-san's words, and he was tilting his head as if he couldn't recall the incident, but the information had definitely slipped out of his mouth due to the fact that Ketola-san was here. Touya had told the rest of us that he was gathering information from Ketola-san, but it seemed like Ketola-san had also gathered information from him at the same time.

"Each person in your party will be rewarded twenty thousand Rea per day," said Ketola. "You may also earn extra rewards depending on the results and how well you perform."

Whoa, that sounds pretty nice. Is that the standard for Rank 5 adventurers? However...

"Um, I'm sorry, but we can't really come to a decision right away," I said.

"The guild would really appreciate it if your party could get to work right away, but it is a fact that you're not obligated to do so," said Ketola. "Are you worried about these children here? You can leave them with the guild or at an orphanage if you want to, so..."

Ketola-san had a look of sorrow on her face as she glanced at the sisters that were still sleeping on the bed, and her sorrowful look was probably because it was easy to guess what had happened to the sisters based on their ragged clothes.

"That's definitely one reason as to why we can't decide right away," said Haruka. "We saved these children last night. Are there other children that were harmed by the riot?"

"Yes. In fact, a lot of children were harmed by the riot, and most of them are children that lost their parents," said Ketola. "The guild wants to put an end to this riot as soon as possible in order to prevent the number of victims from increasing further, so a bounty has been placed on the main perpetrators."

Ketola-san showed us a wanted poster for Saint Satomi, and it had a sketch of Satomi's face along with a bounty of one thousand gold coins written on the poster. The bounty on the leaders of the bandit gang would be around two hundred gold coins, so the bounty on Satomi was actually a significant amount of money.

“Wanted dead or alive, but dead preferred, huh?” said Yuki. “Yikes. The additional note here sounds spooky as well.”

Yuki pointed at a section of the wanted poster that read, “The criminal above possesses a mysterious kind of power, so it is advised to not listen to her words. Do not allow her to talk in any way if you capture her alive. Knock her unconscious or apply a gag and blindfold to her.” On a side note, the literal heads of criminals would do just fine for the sake of collecting the reward for a bounty, but it wasn’t easy to identify an individual through the use of a wanted poster alone, so capturing criminals alive was the recommended course of action in most cases. You would be guilty of murder if you killed and turned in the head of the wrong person, after all.

On the other hand, if you turned someone in alive, then extenuating circumstances would be considered even if you accidentally turned in the wrong person. You could be found innocent and acquitted if the person you turned in was reasonably suspicious in any way, but you would usually have to pay a fine for it. Due to these associated risks, it wasn’t easy for anyone to make a living as a bounty hunter, and the bounties on the heads of bandits were mostly a surplus reward for slaying the bandits, so bounties weren’t exactly something that most people would aim to hunt down for the sake of the reward itself. With all of that in mind, Saint Satomi’s wanted poster was quite unusual due to the fact that there was a “dead preferred” note on it.

“Let’s see what her criminal charges are,” said Natsuki. “Causing chaos and turmoil to society, huh? That sounds quite ambiguous.”

“She would have been arrested much earlier in the past if she had committed some obvious criminal acts,” said Ketola. “Viscount Nernas has issued plenty of warnings to her before, but it seems like she ignored and resisted all of them.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s not good at all,” said Haruka. “She basically humiliated the lord, and there’s no excusing that.”

The lord’s words were the law in the region of the kingdom that he presided over, and there were almost no exceptions to this, but it seemed like the Holy Satomi Sect had failed to understand that.

“Mm. In spite of that, the lord continued to act with much restraint toward

the Holy Satomi Sect, but something happened that turned the tide not too long ago."

According to Ketola-san, the lord hadn't been very eager at first about the idea of cracking down on the Holy Satomi Sect due to the events in the past around the abandoned mines and the fact that some nobles and affluent merchants had fallen under the influence of the Holy Satomi Sect. However, it seemed like the Holy Satomi Sect had finally made a fatal mistake, but I had no idea if it was because Satomi had misinterpreted the lord's actions or if it was because she wasn't a natural resident of this different world.

"It seems like Saint Satomi started to call herself a god, and that caused the lord to finally make a decision to crack down on the Holy Satomi Sect," said Ketola.

Actual gods existed in this different world, so the act of calling yourself a god was a very sensitive issue. You could possibly get away with calling yourself an apostle or an agent of a god, but calling yourself a god would be a grave mistake. There were many reasons for this, such as the sheer audacity of the act and the fact that a lot of religions would turn against you, but the biggest issue was divine punishments. Divine punishments existed in this world, and there were plenty of examples in the past that had affected a lot of other people in the surrounding area. With all of that in mind, it seemed like the use of force to crack down on a cult was perfectly acceptable even if it would lead to some casualties.

"However, the lord needed some time to prepare before acting," said Ketola. "Unfortunately, it seems like information about this was somehow leaked to the Holy Satomi Sect, and that led to the riot that happened last night."

"I see. However, anyone with a sensible mind would have an idea of how the lord would act if you called yourself a god, right?" Haruka asked.

"Normally, yes," Ketola replied. "They're a cult, however, so..."

Ketola chuckled awkwardly in response to Haruka's words, but the fact that Satomi was in charge of the Holy Satomi Sect provided us with a different viewpoint and insight into the actual truth. *It's probably similar to how Satomi got carried away and called herself a god, but she panicked after someone with*

common sense pointed out her mistake, and then she stirred up her believers to cause mayhem in an attempt to take advantage of it to escape from Kelg. Yeah, I think I'm right about this.

"In any case, that is all about the current situation," said Ketola. "The guild would really appreciate it if your party could help out the citizens of Kelg, and we will do whatever we can for these children as well."

Ketola-san told us that she would be waiting for us before she hastily hurried out and headed back to the guild, and Mary woke up not too long after Ketola-san had left our room.

"Where is this— Oh, right," said Mary.

Mary looked like she was a bit confused at first as she blinked a few times, but she seemed to recall the events of last night right away and lowered her eyes. However, she looked like she was feeling better now, and it was probably due to sleep and the medicine that Natsuki had provided her last night.

"Do you feel okay?" I asked. "If you do, we can prepare a meal for you, so..."

"O-Oh, um, we don't have any money," Mary replied. "We also don't have anything to pay in return for the healing, so—"

Mary's stomach made a cute growling sound when she tried to decline my offer, however, and she blushed out of embarrassment when it happened. On the other hand, Haruka smiled and took out some food from our magic bags after she heard that sound.

"Don't worry, we can afford food expenses for you and your sister just fine," said Haruka. "Do you want to wake up your sister as well?"

"...Thank you very much," said Mary. "Met, wake up."

"*Yawn.* Huh? Big sis? Oh, I smell something good!" Metea exclaimed.

Mary gently shook Metea's body, and it seemed like beastwomen were very good at adapting to any situation, as Metea opened her eyes right away and jumped out of bed as she stared at the plates that were in Haruka's hands.

"Do you want to eat this?" Haruka asked. "You're a beastwoman, so I figured that you would prefer more meat."

The food on the plates looked like some kind of beef stew with a lot of meat, but the meat itself was probably orc meat. The plates themselves were kind of small, but Haruka had probably used these plates so that it would be easier for the sisters to eat even while in bed.

“Meat?! Yeah, I love meat!” Metea exclaimed. “I can eat a ton!”

Metea’s eyes were shining with excitement as she reached out and received a plate from Haruka. Smiling, she grabbed a spoon and began to dig into the stew. In fact, Metea seemed like a child that had been presented with a cake on their birthday. *Oh, yeah, now that I think about it, meat’s actually somewhat expensive in this world, huh? It never really crossed my mind until now since everyone in my party can eat meat on a regular basis.*

“Feel free to eat as well if you want to, Mary-chan,” said Haruka.

“O-Oh, thank you very much,” said Mary.

Mary looked a bit embarrassed by her younger sister’s appetite, but it seemed like even she couldn’t resist the temptation of meat, as she started to devour food at a pace slightly slower than her sister after Haruka handed over a plate to her. Natsuki provided her with some bread after that, and she finished the bread with ease along with another serving of the stew. The sisters had been burned by fires last night, but both of them had eaten as much as the amount that Touya would normally eat, so there was a good chance that they were hungry on a regular basis due to the lack of enough food for fulfilling meals. Mary seemed quite relaxed as she drank some water after she had finished her meal, but she stood up straight before she looked at everyone in my party.

“Once again, thank you all very much for saving us,” said Mary. “I don’t know how to fully express how grateful I am for the healing that you provided for me and my sister, and...”

The older sister politely bowed to us to express her thanks, and the younger sister hastily followed her older sister’s example. Both of them were very cute, and the fact that their ears moved around a bit was also nice to look at. *Yeah, I wouldn’t mind having younger sisters if they were like these girls. If Touya’s serious about taking them into his custody and raising them, then I guess I can*

back him up.

“I mentioned this last night, but my name is Mary,” said Mary. “As for my sister, her name is—”

“I’m Met!” Metea exclaimed.

“Her name is Metea,” said Mary.

According to Mary, she was nine years old, and Metea was seven years old, but it seemed like people that were born in the kingdom that we were in would be treated as one year old upon birth, and their age would go up at the beginning of a new year. From our perspective, they would appear at least a year or even two years younger for the ones born near the end of a year than what their age would suggest, and that meant the actual age of the sisters was probably around the age of kids in elementary school.



Man, I gotta say, though, Mary really is mature for her age. Is it because she has a younger sister?

"Oh, right, we haven't actually introduced ourselves," said Haruka. "My name's Haruka. As for the guy that wasn't here last night, his name is Touya, and he's a beastman."

"Hey, I'm Touya," said Touya. "Just call me Touya."

"Hello. My name is Natsuki," said Natsuki.

"My name's Yuki," said Yuki. "You can call me big sis Yuki if you want to!"

"My name's Nao," I said. "You can call me big bro Nao if you want to."

"Big bro Nao! Big sis Yuki, Haruka, and Natsuki! Touya!" Metea exclaimed. "Okay, I won't forget now!"

I had played along with Yuki's half-joking words, but Metea was a very pure child that took our words at face value and smiled as she pointed at each of us to confirm our names, and that included Touya's words as well.

"M-Met, be polite!" Mary exclaimed. "I'm so sorry about this, Touya-san."

"Oh, don't worry. I don't mind being referred to casually," said Touya. "In fact, I'd also be okay with being called big bro Touya."

Touya acted a bit noncommittal after he glanced at the girls and noticed that they looked a bit happy after they heard the words big sis from Metea. None of us had any younger siblings, so we were all weak to the words big sis and big bro.

"Um, big bro Touya?" said Metea.

Metea tilted her head as she called Touya's name, and Touya smirked after he heard Metea's words. *Uh, what's with that look on your face, Touya? I mean, sure, I like the idea of these sisters becoming our younger sisters as well, but still.*

"*Cough.* Can you tell us about your situation?" Touya asked. "The options available to us might change depending on the information that you provide."

I stared at Touya for a bit, and Touya coughed purposefully as if he noticed

my gaze before he urged Mary to tell us about themselves. Mary grimaced after she heard Touya's words, and she sounded very resentful as she brought up a specific name. "The Holy Satomi Sect ruined everything about our lives. Everything..."

According to Mary, their parents were a beastman and beastwoman couple that had immigrated to Kelg, but their mother wasn't around anymore by the time Mary had become old enough to understand things around herself, so the sisters had been raised by their dad. Their dad had used his physical strength as a beastman to earn money via manual labor, and Mary had fulfilled the role of the mom in the family by taking care of household chores. Their dad's earnings hadn't been great by any means, but their family had managed to make do with what they could and lived poor but peaceful lives.

However, everything had changed after the Holy Satomi Sect had shown up in Kelg. Mary's family had been renting a house in Kelg, and the landlord of that house was a normal person that wouldn't bother Mary's family as long as they paid up for the rent. However, that landlord fell under the influence of the Holy Satomi Sect after a while. The landlord had started to run low on money after purchasing a large amount of "holy" water, and he rashly sold the property that he owned as a result. The house that Mary's family had been renting was included among that, and the person that had purchased the property was someone that was absolutely absurd from our perspective. It seemed like the new landlord had suddenly raised the rent and warned Mary's family that he would kick them out if they couldn't pay up. There weren't any laws in this different world that protected tenants, and Mary's dad burnt through their family savings to pay the new rent and planned to look for a new house to rent, but the riot caused by the Holy Satomi Sect had ruined those plans.

According to Mary, the sisters had been left at home by themselves last night, but they had remained quiet due to the fact that something in the air had felt wrong to them. They had heard violent sounds from outside of their house, and their dad hadn't been at home because he was out for work. It seemed like Mary had been too scared to take a look outside for a while, but it wouldn't have been fair to blame her for that due to the fact that she had felt very anxious and uneasy at the time. However, everything was too late by the time

she had finally realized what was going on outside. Mary saw flames nearby as soon as she opened the windows, and she hastily grabbed Metea's hands as she ran to the back entrance, but there had been nowhere to run because the flames had already consumed the other nearby houses. On top of that, the flames had spread to Mary's house and destroyed the walls. Mary had desperately covered Metea's body to protect her, but they had both frozen up when a wall had almost collapsed on top of them. However, their dad had showed up around that time, and his body had been covered with injuries everywhere. He stuck his hand into the burning rubble as soon as he had noticed that his children were inside, and he hurled them outside of the burning house.

"I don't really remember what happened after that aside from the fact that we had been completely surrounded by fire," said Mary. "I vividly remember that our house completely collapsed before our dad came out, however. I desperately tried to protect my sister as we ran away, but..."

Mary looked down as if a flashback of those memories was going through her head, and tears started to drop out of her eyes. As for Metea, she had muttered the words "dad" and cried while Mary was telling us their story, and soon she had cried herself to sleep in Natsuki's arms. Metea had seemed quite energetic while she was eating food before, but it was probably because she had been too hungry at the time or just hadn't wanted to think about what had happened to them at all.

"Okay, we understand your situation now," said Haruka. "You did your best, Mary."

"Thank you," said Mary. "Ugh..."

Haruka used a handkerchief to wipe Mary's eyes before she hugged her, and then Mary started to cry quietly in Haruka's arms. Mary's story was much darker than I'd thought it would be, and the rest of us were all at a loss for words as we glanced at each other. *Man, I don't have enough life experience to know what to say in times like this...*

"I-I'm gonna go make some tea!" Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki stood up as if she couldn't stand the atmosphere anymore and used tea

as an excuse to run away from the room despite the fact that we had warm drinks in our magic bags. *You know, Yuki, it's currently summer, so you should have probably brought up something that's only served as a cold drink instead.*

"Oh, hmm. I wonder if there are any good snacks to go with tea in here," said Touya.

Touya muttered some awkward words to himself as he turned his back to me and started to search our magic bags.

"Uh..."

I wasn't sure what to do as I looked at Natsuki and Haruka for an answer, but Natsuki simply chuckled in response to me. As for Haruka, she stared at me in a way as if she was telling me to sit still quietly. I felt a bit awkward as I waited for time to pass, and there was some tea and snacks lined up on the table inside of the room by the time Mary had calmed down. The warm tea had been made by Yuki and the snacks that Touya had found inside of our magic bags were some nut cookies with honey that had been homemade by Natsuki. We all enjoyed the tea and snacks as we resumed our conversation with Mary. As for Metea, she had woken up as soon as the cookies had been lined up on the table, and she was currently eating some cookies with a smile on her face. I was a bit surprised that she was able to switch moods so easily even though she had been crying earlier, but it was probably one way of adapting and surviving in this different world where death was a familiar neighbor. However, that didn't mean people weren't sad about the deaths of others that were close to them. Most ordinary citizens in this world would starve to death if they submitted themselves to grief and wasted time, so Mary and Metea had probably seen how people wouldn't do that as they grew up. Common sense would differ depending on the period of history that you lived in, and the same would apply to a different world.

"Do the cookies taste good, Metea?" Haruka asked.

"Yeah, they do!" Metea replied. "Thank you!"

Metea smiled as she thanked us for the cookies, and we all felt something warm in our hearts after we heard Metea's honest and straightforward words. However, we wouldn't get anywhere if we simply continued to bask in the

warm feelings, so Haruka turned around to Mary in order to get back on track.

“Do you feel okay about continuing with your story, Mary?” Haruka asked.

“Yes, I’m fine. Dad always told us about how we should be ready to live by ourselves if it came down to it due to the fact that his work was dangerous,” said Mary. “I didn’t expect to part with him like this, however.”

Construction work in this different world was quite dangerous, although it wasn’t as dangerous as adventurer work. Safety measures and equipment were kind of missing, so injuries as a result of construction work were normal, and construction deaths weren’t rare at all. The pay scaling with the risks wasn’t something that applied to all construction sites, but the dad of the sisters had probably taken on some dangerous work in order to earn enough money to support them.

“We’ll try to look for your dad, but don’t get your hopes up,” said Haruka.

“Thank you very much,” said Mary. “However...”

It seemed like Mary was almost sure that their dad was dead even though she wasn’t willing to say it out loud. The sisters would have died last night if we hadn’t found them, and the chances of their dad being alive were quite low even if he had escaped their house in time due to the fact that he had probably suffered even worse burns than the sisters. Healing magic was something that existed in this different world, but it was only available to very few people.

“It’s best if we can find him, but you don’t have anyone else you can rely on, right?” I asked.

“That’s right,” Mary replied. “Dad never mentioned anything about relatives, and we don’t know anyone that would be willing to take us in, so...”

Mary seemed like she felt really sad as she lowered her eyes, but everyone in my party arrived at the same conclusion and nodded in agreement after we glanced at each other.

“Um, we can help you out if you and your sister are okay with this idea,” said Haruka.

Metea raised her hands right away after she heard Haruka’s words as she

continued to chew on the cookie inside of her mouth. “Please help us! These cookies taste delicious!”

“M-Met?! U-Um, please wait for a bit!” Mary exclaimed.

Mary scolded Metea for her impulsive response, and they both turned their backs on us as they started to talk to each other in secret.

“*Met, remember what dad told us about things that are too good to be true?!*” Mary exclaimed.

“*Don’t worry, I’m sure they’re good people*,” said Metea.

The sisters were whispering to each other, but my high performance elf ears could hear what they were talking about just fine due to the fact that they were standing very close to me. Haruka had the same elf ears as me, and Touya had even better ears than us, so both of them could probably also hear the sisters. Yuki’s mouth was twitching in a weird way, and Natsuki’s hearing had become better thanks to leveling up, so it was probably the same for them as well.

“*Met, I trust your gut feelings, but you still have to be wary!*” Mary exclaimed.

“*What else can we do? We’ll die without any help*,” said Metea.

“*Ugh...*”

“*I don’t want to suffer from hunger or pain anymore*,” said Metea.

“*Ugh...!*”

“*Also, the cookies taste delicious!*”

“*L-Look, I’ll talk things out with them first, so can you please stay quiet until I’m done, Met?*” Mary asked.

Metea seemed a bit unhappy after she heard Mary’s words, but she still nodded in response. “*...Okay*.”

“*I’m begging you, okay?*”

Mary reminded Metea a second time to remain quiet before she turned around to us, and she seemed a bit embarrassed when she coughed awkwardly before she resumed our conversation. “Sorry for the wait. Um, you said you would be willing to take care of us, right? Why is that?”

“Why, huh?” I said.

We all glanced at each other and paused in thought after we heard Mary’s words. *Hmm. It’s easy to come up with reasons retrospectively, such as feeling sorry for them after hearing about their situation or the fact that it would feel weird to leave them on their own after saving and getting involved with them, but...*

“It’s just because we happened to notice you, I guess?” I said.

Mary had a look of doubt in her eyes as she glanced at me after she heard my words, but I wasn’t lying at all. We wouldn’t have crossed paths last night if the sisters had collapsed on a different road, and we wouldn’t have thought about the idea of helping other people. There were probably a lot of other people that had suffered from the riot, but we weren’t actual saints that would go out of our way to search for and aid other people.

“Another reason is your animal ears,” said Haruka. “Touya has similar ears, and they caught our eyes because they’re unusual.”

Haruka pointed at Mary’s animal ears as she chimed in, but the look of doubt in Mary’s eyes worsened after she heard Haruka’s words. *I mean, it’s actually the truth. Touya wouldn’t have stopped in his tracks if animal ears hadn’t caught his attention, after all.*

“That sounds very suspicious to me. Nobody would take in children for those kinds of reasons,” said Mary. “Even I know how difficult it is to raise children. Dad struggled a lot, after all.”

Mary clearly stated her suspicions straight to our faces, but Metea didn’t seem to be bothered at all by Mary’s reaction. In fact, Metea quietly reached out for the cookies that were in front of them. However, Mary had happily eaten some herself as well, so there was only one cookie left, and Metea looked at our cookies that we hadn’t finished after she finished that last one. Haruka noticed that and casually moved her plate of cookies in front of Metea before she responded to Mary’s words. “Your concerns are perfectly valid, Mary, but things are a bit different from our perspective. To be honest with you, the amount of money that’s required to feed you and your sister until you’re both adults isn’t that much money to us.”

It would have been difficult for us to take in children back in Japan even if we had wanted to do so, but educational and medical expenses were more or less unnecessary in this different world compared to how things were back on Earth. Luxuries like smartphones didn't exist here, so there was no need to factor in those expenses either. Food expenses would normally be a significant drain in regard to beastmen and beastwomen, but it wouldn't be that much of a burden on us due to the fact that we could hunt for meat ourselves. I was a bit concerned about what would happen to the sisters if something bad happened to us, but it probably wouldn't be an issue if we donated a large amount of money to Ishuca-san and asked her to take care of the sisters in the worst-case scenario. The sisters would probably end up at an orphanage one way or another if we didn't take them in, after all.

"Another reason is because you're good kids. We initially saved you out of coincidence, but one of the reasons why we're willing to help out is because of your actions, Mary," said Yuki. "You're polite and know how to say thanks to people. You're also very cute!"

"Mm. I'm sure that your dad raised you well," said Natsuki.

The ability to thank others when you received help was very important. If Mary and Metea were children that weren't willing to say thanks to other people, then we probably wouldn't have felt motivated at all to help them out. We weren't exactly mature or responsible enough to raise children to be polite and grateful, and it would probably have been much better to leave such children at places like orphanages.

"However, our house is located at Laffan, so you'll have to move to a different town if you come with us, and we don't plan to spoil you at all," said Haruka. "With all of that in mind, your monetary expenses can easily be covered by using Touya's allowance."

"Whoa, you're amazing, big bro Touya!" Metea exclaimed. "Are you rich?"

"Yeah, I am," said Touya. "Praise me more!"

Touya had a huge grin on his face after Metea looked at him with respect in her eyes, but that grin froze up after he heard Metea's next words. "Yeah, you're really amazing, so please become my sugar daddy!"

“Met?!”

Mary raised her voice out of surprise when she heard Metea’s words, and Yuki seemed a bit impressed as she looked at Touya. “Damn, I didn’t expect you to be so quick at making a move, Touya. You’ve already succeeded at your plan, huh?”

“Dad told me that resourcefulness is very important for a guy, and that I shouldn’t let a guy escape if he’s a rich sugar daddy who can support me!” Metea exclaimed. “He emphasized that it’s important to never miss out on a good opportunity!”

Mary had an awkward look on her face as she muttered the words “Dad...” after she heard Metea’s words. *Hmm. I don’t know if this is a case of her dad having taught her well or if he taught her these things too early.*

“Um, Metea-chan, do you really understand the meaning of your dad’s words?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah!” Metea replied. “He told me to find someone who can feed me!”

Natsuki bent down to meet Metea’s eyes as she calmly asked for confirmation, but Metea sounded very confident and energetic as she responded to Natsuki’s question. Metea’s answer was technically correct, and it was actually a very important factor to consider in regard to marriage. There was plenty of hope for people that weren’t handsome or beautiful in this different world. In fact, if you were rich, then you would be far more popular than poor people even if you looked ugly. In a way, there was a very harsh standard of equality in this world. However, rich people that were handsome or beautiful would obviously be more popular than ugly rich people, so...

“You sure are wise in regard to survival, Metea,” said Haruka. “What about you, Mary? What do you think? Feel free to head out if you think that you can’t trust us. You can probably ask an orphanage in this town for shelter if you want to.”

“Big sis, the people who succeed in life by seizing an opportunity are the people who can make a decision right away!” Metea exclaimed.

“Ugh...”

I had no idea if Metea was a decisive person or if she was just someone that would always go along with her gut feelings like what had been mentioned earlier when the sisters were talking with each other, but Mary seemed a bit overwhelmed by Metea's insistence on a swift decision. However, there was nothing wrong with feeling hesitant about making a decision right away. After all, suspicion was a natural response to someone that told you they would help you out as long as you tagged along with them, so Mary's reaction was perfectly normal.

"Well, there's no need to arrive at a decision right away," I said. "Mary, we'll take care of you while we're here in Kelg, so feel free to make use of this time to talk things out with your sister before making a decision."

"Okay, thank you very much," said Mary. "I'll think over this thoroughly."

Mary breathed a sigh of relief and bowed toward me after I threw her a lifeline. After that, we headed out and moved to a different room so that the sisters could discuss things among themselves without us around. We had actually booked two rooms for four at our inn, and Mary and Metea had been sleeping in my and Touya's room due to the fact that our room had enough extra beds, so we gathered at the girls' room.

"Now, then, we've offered to take care of the sisters, but we also need to discuss things among ourselves," I said.

"Yeah, you're right about that," said Yuki. "The first topic we need to discuss is the fact that Touya has become a lolicon, and..."

"Huh?! No, I haven't become a lolicon at all!" Touya exclaimed.

"Mm. You're free to carry out a plan for adopting orphans and raising them to become your wives in the future, but marrying Metea right now would be going too far," said Haruka. "I'm very disappointed in you, Touya."

"My plan is a long-term one!" Touya exclaimed. "I'll succeed eventually through sheer numbers!"

"Oh, so you haven't abandoned your actual plan, huh?" said Natsuki.

"Ugh, damn it, my tongue slipped!" Touya exclaimed.

“Tee hee. Okay, enough joking around,” said Haruka. “Nobody has any objections about the idea of taking care of the sisters, right?”

We all chuckled at Touya as he panicked after he realized the meaning of his words, but we all had serious expressions on our faces and nodded after we heard Haruka’s words. The initial topic of our discussion among ourselves had been about Touya’s responsibility in regard to the sisters, but we all wanted to take care of the sisters as much as we could after we learned the details of their situation. There were a few things that worried me about the idea of taking children into our custody, but it would still be better than leaving them to fend for themselves even if something happened in the future that would cause them to part ways with us.

“In any case, it all depends on the final decision of the sisters,” I said. “They might decide that they can trust orphanages more than us, after all.”

The orphanages that were run by temples that worshiped the Five Great Gods were actually safe, unlike potential ones that were run by suspicious new cults. Divine punishments were guaranteed in this world by the existence of gods, after all. The orphanage at Laffan seemed like a proper institution that wasn’t corrupt, so it was probably safe to assume the same for the other orphanages that were run by temples that worshiped the Five Great Gods.

“Mm, orphanages in this world aren’t bad places,” said Natsuki. “They’re cute girls, however, so I would like to take care of the sisters ourselves if possible.”

“The lack of corruption doesn’t necessarily mean every orphanage has enough money to sustain itself, however,” said Yuki.

Yuki sighed for a moment before she stuck her hands into her magic bag to take out some clothes, and then she started to cut them for some reason.

“Yeah, orphanages need donations to remain open,” I said. “By the way, what are you doing, Yuki?”

“Well, the sisters will need clothes even if they choose to go to an orphanage,” said Yuki. “The clothes that they were wearing have become rags, and their house was burned down as well, so...”

The clothes that the sisters had been wearing were no longer wearable at all

because they were completely charred, so the sisters were wearing the yukata robes that the girls had made before. The robes were a good fit for Mary, but the sleeves of the robes were a bit too long for Metea. The sisters definitely needed different clothes due to the fact that the yukata robes that the girls had made weren't clothes that were meant for use outdoors, and Yuki's physique was the most similar to those of the sisters, so she was probably trying to adjust her own clothes for them.

"Mm. We probably can't find any places that are selling clothes right now in Kelg, after all," said Haruka. "I'll help out as well."

Haruka and Natsuki joined Yuki for the adjusting process of the clothes, and we continued our conversation while the girls were working on that.

"I personally want to heal their burn scars and lost toes even if the sisters end up choosing to go to an orphanage," said Natsuki. "However, that can only be done through the use of the Regenerate spell, and I'm not sure if we'll be able to succeed, so..."

"We'll be able to put our practice to actual use," said Haruka. "We've practiced before just in case any of us lost body parts, but we've never gotten an opportunity to test out the spell."

Regenerate was a Level 10 Light Magic spell, but the good thing about magic in this different world was the fact that there was no need for you to learn all of the other lower spells before you could use a high-level spell. However, it was true that the difficulty of a spell scaled with its level, so high-level spells weren't easy to learn at all, and most Light Magic spells weren't easy to practice due to the fact that it was hard to tell if they had worked properly or not. This issue had been resolved to a certain extent through the use of a Light Orb, but using Light Magic on a Light Orb was different from actually using Light Magic on someone that required healing. With all of that in mind, the sisters were perfect targets for practice even though that wasn't exactly a very nice way to describe it. You would normally have to pay a lot of money for someone to cast the Regenerate spell on you, and there would be no negative effects even if Haruka and Natsuki failed at using the spell, so the sisters had nothing to lose from this.

"Another thing we need to decide on is whether or not to help out the guild

here in Kelg," I said. "If we do decide to participate, then we'll have to kill other people, and we'll probably also have to battle some of our other classmates, so..."

Everyone else looked down and paused in thought after they heard my reminder. We had slain some bandits before, but those battles had been more or less one-sided ones, so we couldn't really count that as proper experience for fighting other people. With that in mind, we still had no idea what the risks were in regard to full-fledged conflict against other people. On the other hand, there wouldn't be much in the way of returns for us compared to the risks. The monetary rewards would be quite decent, but we would be able to earn much more money from slaying monsters, and that would be much less stressful on us as well. In addition, our policy as a party was to prioritize safety above all, and we had avoided taking pointless risks up until now by weighing the merits against the demerits for decisions. If we applied that policy to our current situation, then the right decision would be to skip out on participation, but...

"I'm not exactly a very righteous person by any means, but I don't really want to flee from Kelg in this situation," I said. "I'm honestly kind of angry after what happened last night and after hearing Mary's story, but this isn't rational at all, so..."

"I think that's perfectly fine. Sure, the rewards might not be worth it, but it's not like the risks are something that we can't take on, right? We can also make the guild owe us a favor if we participate," said Touya. "More importantly, I cannot forgive the people that harmed some young girls with rare animal ears!"

"That last reason definitely sounds like your true and honest feelings, Touya!" Yuki initially jabbed back at Touya's angry words, but she then sighed and nodded in response. "I more or less agree with you, however. Gosh, what was the Holy Satomi Sect thinking by attempting arson and a riot?"

"They probably weren't thinking anything at all," said Natsuki. "If they had a brain, then they wouldn't have started a cult with a slash-and-burn style."

"In a way, it's sort of like a form of scorched-earth tactics due to the fact that they probably didn't consider the consequences of exploiting people as much as they could," said Haruka. "There were some countries back on Earth that

outlawed loot boxes, and that's perfectly understandable. It's better to squeeze money from people over the long-term for the purpose of sustainability, however."

"Oh, come on, surely there's a better way to put it, Haruka!" I said. "Hmm. Well, I've heard stories about people being unable to escape gambling addiction, so I guess that makes sense."

"Mm. I wonder if it's possible to heal gambling addiction with the Cure Addiction spell," said Natsuki.

"Cure Insanity might be a more suitable spell for that purpose. It'd be great if we could pacify the cult believers with this spell, but we haven't practiced it at all, so we probably can't," said Haruka. "They're not really spells that are useful to us, after all."

Cure Addiction was a spell that could cure poisoning and intoxication caused by drugs, while Cure Insanity could cure mental disorders, but the difficulty of the spells were Level 8 and Level 9, respectively. According to Haruka and Natsuki, these spells were easier than the Regenerate spell, but neither of them could use the spells because they wouldn't be useful to us even if the girls practiced them.

"Both of you are okay with the idea of helping out the guild, right? In that case, let's do our best!" I exclaimed.

I slapped my knees as I stood up, and everyone else had serious expressions on their faces as they nodded in response to my words.

The Adventurers' Guild in Kelg seemed like it was very busy when we entered the building. There were a lot of injured people sitting on the ground, people moving around in a rush, and people yelling at others. We all stopped in our tracks when we saw how active the guild was, and Ketola-san rushed over to us right away.

"Oh, thank you all for coming!" Ketola exclaimed. "The guild has been waiting for your party!"

"No problem. We decided that it would be wrong not to do anything after seeing the state of the town," I said.

The main reason we had decided to help out was because of Mary's story, but the awful things we had seen on our way to the guild had helped to reaffirm our resolve.

"I'm glad to hear that. The guild lacks more manpower than the initial estimated number, after all," said Ketola. "Oh, please follow me! I'll guide you to the branch master!"

Ketola looked down and breathed a sigh of relief when she heard my words, but she immediately looked back up and forcefully grabbed one of my arms as if to indicate that she wasn't going to let me escape. After that, she headed straight to the branch master's room and opened the door without knocking first.

"Branch master! Touya-san's party is here!" Ketola exclaimed.

"Oh, really?! I've been waiting for this day!"

The branch master greeted us with a look of joy on his face, and it seemed like he wasn't bothered at all by the fact that Ketola hadn't knocked on his door.

"I'm sorry that we're late," I said. "We'd like to take on some work."

"Don't worry, it's fine. The fact that your party is willing to take some work is more than enough to make up for it. There are a lot of victims, and the guild doesn't have enough people to deal with everything."

"Victims? Is a newly established cult actually capable of killing adventurers?" Haruka asked. "Did some strong adventurers side with the Holy Satomi Sect or something?"

The branch master grimaced as he responded to Haruka's question. "No, there haven't been any defections among the high-rank adventurers, but the issue is the Holy Satomi Sect has members that are zealous and are willing to give up their lives for their cult."

According to the branch master, the adventurers in Kelg weren't that strong on average, but they also weren't weak enough to lose against ordinary citizens that were the majority of the believers in the Holy Satomi Sect. However, the adventurers weren't competent enough to capture the believers without

harming them due to the fact that those believers would recklessly charge forward with a disregard for their own lives. In addition, it would become very dangerous if adventurers had to face off against defected adventurers, and some of them would even die in the worst-case scenario. The result of all of this was the scene that we had seen earlier upon entering the guild building, and Natsuki raised her hand as if that scene had popped back up in her mind. “Mm, I remember seeing a lot of injured people. Um, if you don’t mind, we can go and use magic to heal those people.”

“Really? If you do, then that will be factored into your party’s reward, so...”

“However, we will only provide as much healing as we can afford without inhibiting our activities as adventurers, so we won’t be able to heal that many people,” said Natsuki.

“That’s perfectly fine. Ketola, go and gather the adventurers that can probably return to work after some light healing.”

“Okay, I’ll get to it right away! Natsuki-san, please come with me!”

Ketola-san and Natsuki hastily headed out of the room, and then the branch master beckoned to the rest of us before he headed out of the room as well. “Follow me. I must say, however, your party really came at the perfect time. If your party had arrived any later, then the name of your party and rumors about the sight of my splendid prostration would have become famous in Kelg, ha ha!”

“Wait, what were you planning to do?!” Touya exclaimed.

The branch master laughed in a weird and spooky way, and Touya jabbed back at the branch master, but the branch master nonchalantly responded to his words. “Oh, nothing significant. I was just going to yell your names outside of your inn while kneeling on the ground, that’s all.”

“That’s straight up coercion, isn’t it?!” Touya exclaimed. “Do you have no pride as a branch master?!”

Touya seemed very shocked after he heard the branch master’s words. Adventurers had the freedom to choose what kind of quests they wanted to accept and take on, but if word got around about the fact that our party refused

to help out during Kelg's time of need, then it would have become difficult for us to remain here or return in the future.

"I'm more than willing to put my meager pride aside if that's what it takes to save the lives of adventurers!"

"That statement sounds kind of impressive in itself, but we're adventurers too," said Haruka.

"Don't worry, I wouldn't go that far for quests that were really dangerous. Besides, it's something acceptable for your party, right?"

It sounded like the branch master was implying that we were willing to take on risks due to the fact that we were here in the guild, and Haruka sighed in response to his words. "Hmm. Should we say thanks for giving us too much credit?"

"I think it's a perfectly accurate evaluation. In any case, please enter this room."

The room that the branch master had led us to was a meeting room on the second floor of the guild, and there were about ten guys inside of the room. The only person we recognized among those guys was Syrus, the adventurer that had served as the branch master's bodyguard before, and the rest were all strangers to us. *Hmm. Wait, that guy wearing armor looks kind of familiar to me. Have I seen him before?*

"Oh, the guard at the gates!" Yuki exclaimed.

It seemed like Yuki had recalled who that person was, and Touya clapped his hands together in agreement with Yuki. "Oh, I remember now as well! No wonder I felt like I'd seen him before!"

"Oh, you're the adventurers that I saw before. My name's Sadius, and I've been appointed to the rank of captain in the local army under Viscount Nernas."

It seemed like Sadius remembered who we were as well, and he nodded right away in response to Yuki and Touya's words.

"I'm surprised that you remember us," I said. "We had only chatted with each

other for a bit, so...”

“I was placed in charge of monitoring the people that enter and exit Kelg,” said Sadius. “There’s no way I would forget a party that has elves and a beastman.”

“Oh, that makes sense. We definitely do stand out a lot,” I said. “Sadius sounds kind of similar to Syrus, however. Is that just a coincidence?”

Sadius and Syrus looked like they were around the same age, and their faces sort of looked similar to each other as well.

“Oh, Sadius is my younger brother,” said Syrus. “I became an adventurer, but he joined the local army because he’s more of a serious person than I am.”

Whoa, they’re actually related to each other? I guess my hunch was right.

“The local army? Is that different from the guards in town?” I asked.

“Yes, it kind of is. There are some differences between each territory in the kingdom that are ruled over by different nobles, but as for how things are in this viscounty that’s ruled over by Viscount Nernas, the military is divided between the guards of each town that maintain public order and the local army that has a stronger emphasis on military actions,” said Sadius. “Both belong to the same chain of command, but the local army can be sent on expeditions to anywhere within or even outside of the viscounty in some cases.”

According to Sadius’s explanation, it sounded like the guards of each town were the local police, while the local army was the armed forces for the viscounty as a whole.

“Oh, does that mean that the preparations against the Holy Satomi Sect had already started by the time you were stationed at the gates?” I asked.

“Yes,” Sadius replied. “The plan was to prevent the escape of the Holy Satomi Sect while investigating the cult’s hideouts, but...”

“Information got leaked and led to the events of yesterday, huh?” I said.

There wasn’t any specific meaning behind my words, but Sadius grimaced after he heard me. “Yes. The troops under my command are doing their best, but believers of the Holy Satomi Sect are still continuing to escape. I hate to say

this, but it’s because we’re not competent enough.”

According to Sadius, the local army wasn’t really popular among the citizens of the viscounty as a result of the scandals that the lord two generations ago had caused at the time, and the only work the local army had to do were things like slaying vermin from time to time and protecting places such as the mansion of the lord. Troops of the local army had much more time for training than adventurers but it seemed like they severely lacked actual combat experience compared to adventurers.

“That’s why we’re counting on the adventurers for help,” said Sadius. “However, branch master, are these adventurers really the last personnel that are available? They seem very young, so...”

“Yes. In fact, I was willing to show off my excellent abilities at prostration in person in order to convince them to help out.”

The branch master sounded very confident as he backed us up, but Sadius frowned after he heard the branch master’s words and looked at us for confirmation. “Are you all sure about this? This work will be quite dangerous, so...”

“Yes, we’re sure.” I casually shrugged as I responded to Sadius’s words. “We’ll do our best within reasonable limits while avoiding death.”

“That’s perfectly fine. I don’t have any intention of asking you adventurers to put your lives on the line,” said Sadius. “That is our job as the troops of the local army, after all.”

Sadius stated some words that sounded kind of cool, but Syrus smirked as he chimed in. “Pfft, there’s no need to worry about these guys. They’re tough Rank 5 adventurers that massacred an entire bandit gang by themselves, after all!”

“Oh, please, massacre isn’t exactly a nice way to put it,” said Touya. “It’s not like we really wanted to kill them, so...”

“Nah, it was something that your party accomplished, right? As adventurers, you should be proud of such feats!” Syrus exclaimed.

“We don’t really think it’s something to be proud about,” I said. “Peace and safety is one of our party’s policies, so...”

“Are you telling me that a party with that kind of policy exterminated an orc nest, massacred a bandit gang, and even slew a lava boar? Oh, please, surely you’re joking!” Syrus exclaimed.

Hmm. I guess it’s true that our achievements make us sound like adventurers who enjoy facing off against danger. We’ve been careful about the kind of work that we’ve accepted, however.

“Or rather, I’m surprised that you know about all of this, Syrus,” I said.

“Well, I work here at the guild, so it’s easy for me to obtain such information,” said Syrus.

Oh, yeah, I guess that’s why he was assigned the task of being the branch master’s bodyguard. However, it seemed like Sadius and the other adventurers hadn’t been aware of this, and it seemed like the new information had changed their opinion of us. When we had initially entered the meeting room, they had looked at us in a way as if they doubted our abilities. It was probably because we were outsiders, but it seemed like half of that doubt had turned into respect now. I also heard some voices that were talking about us, and it was possible that Syrus had expected this kind of reaction to his words.

“I had no idea that you were such accomplished adventurers,” said Sadius. “In that case, I feel much more at ease about asking for your help.”

“Um, just to be clear, we’d prefer if word about this doesn’t get around,” said Haruka.

Haruka seemed a bit troubled by the events that had just happened, but Syrus had an exasperated look on his face as he shook his head in response. “Nah, there’s no way you can stop this information from spreading. Rumors about the accomplishments of adventurers are something that naturally spread over time. In fact, I’m kind of confused about the fact that your accomplishments aren’t well-known at all, especially since they’re more than enough to make you famous in both Kelg and Laffan, so...”

The fact that we weren’t well-known was probably thanks to the efforts of Diola-san and our party’s lack of friends. Sadly for us, we weren’t acquainted with any other adventurers so that we could boast to each other about our accomplishments.

“Well, it’s fine with us as long as you don’t actively spread this information,” I said. “More importantly, how much progress has been made on the plan against the Holy Satomi Sect?”

“Well, to be honest, we’ve just barely managed to return things to square one from the initial setback,” said Sadius.

According to Sadius, the arson incident that had happened last night had occupied all of the local army’s attention, and they had been busy with putting out fires and rescue work. The Holy Satomi Sect had probably intended for the arson incident to be a distraction, but it wasn’t something that the local army could ignore, so they had no choice but to take a reactive approach to the situation at hand. Things had finally settled down around this morning, and they had tried to capture or kill the believers of the Holy Satomi Sect during the process, but they had suffered some losses as well, so it seemed like the situation wasn’t looking good so far.

“I see,” I said. “We saw a lot of burnt buildings on our way here, but were there a lot of casualties as well in terms of wounded and dead people?”

“Yeah, there was a considerable number for both,” said Sadius. “It’s a painful issue that’ll have to be dealt with all the way into the future, but the first thing to do for now is to launch a counteroffensive!”

Sadius grimaced as he responded to my question, but he snapped out of it right away and slammed the map that was spread on top of the table in front of him before he looked around at the other adventurers in the meeting room.

“The town will be divided up into sections that will be assigned to different adventurer parties,” said Sadius. “Make sure to thoroughly clean up the sections that you’re assigned to. As for the details...”

The other adventurers that had been gathered in this meeting room were probably the leaders of their own adventurer parties. Sadius pointed at the map of the town on the table as he brought up the party names of each adventurer party, and we were assigned a section of the town near the gates that was somewhat wide compared to the others. However...

“Sorry, but we’re not from around here, so we’re not really familiar with the geography of this town,” I said. “With that in mind, we don’t know how to tell

allies apart from enemies, so...”

I raised my hand as I brought up an opinion that had been on my mind, and Syrus nodded in response to my words. “Don’t worry, another adventurer will be assigned to your party as your party’s guide. Freddy, get over here!”

“Yessir! Leave it to me, dude!”

The person that responded to Syrus’s words was a young guy with a small physique and facial features that looked a bit scary. However, he was only young compared to the other adventurers in the meeting room, so he was definitely someone who was in his late twenties. He had a sharp gaze as well, but his height was about the same as Yuki, so that gaze wasn’t very intimidating at all.

“Freddy is a veteran adventurer, and he’s a good scout,” said Syrus.

“Hey! Let’s get along!” Freddy exclaimed. “I’m kinda weak, but you can ask me anything about the work we’ve been assigned, dude!”

“O-Oh, yeah, it’s nice to meet you,” I said.

Freddy laughed in a friendly way as he waved at us, and we greeted him in return. He seemed like he was a bit of a casual and humble person who wasn’t really confident in himself, but he was actually quite strong when I checked him with my Third Eye skill. In a way, it made sense to me due to the fact that he was here in this meeting room, but his abilities as a scout seemed like they were much better than ours.

“As for how to recognize your allies and enemies, we’ll be using these things,” said Syrus. “Wrap these around each of your left arms.”

The things that Syrus had handed us were some pieces of yellow cloth. I looked around the room, and it seemed like everyone else had wrapped the same kind of yellow cloth around their upper arms.

“Oh, I see. I’ll wrap yours for you, Nao,” said Haruka. “Won’t the Holy Satomi Sect notice and copy this right away, however?”

Haruka wrapped a yellow piece of cloth around my left arm as she brought up a question, but Syrus grinned and nodded in response. “Don’t worry, we’ve also

decided on a password. Satomi is a cunt!”

Syrus suddenly raised his voice as he yelled some vulgar words, and the other adventurers reacted right away in unison. “Saints are shit!”

“Make sure to remember both of them,” said Syrus. “You might get attacked if you don’t reply correctly, after all.”

Touya and I chuckled awkwardly when we heard the vulgar exchange of phrases for the password. As for Haruka and Yuki, it seemed like both of them were completely flabbergasted by what they just heard.

“...I understand the intent behind those words, but couldn’t you have chosen something better for the password?” Haruka asked. “Our party has girls, so...”

“I’m sorry about this. My brother was the one that decided on this, but I couldn’t come up with a rebuttal when he told me that it would make the believers of the Holy Satomi Sect furious for sure,” said Sadius. “As a solution, I suggest just leaving the confirmation duty to the guys in your party.”

Sadius seemed a bit troubled as he looked at me and Touya, and Touya nodded in response as he pointed at one part of the map. “Okay, I’ll handle this together with Nao. By the way, why has nobody been assigned to this area? If I recall correctly, this is the high-class residential area of Kelg. Wait a second...”

“Nah, it’s not what you might think it is. This area is going to be left alone on purpose in order to lure the Holy Satomi Sect there,” said Sadius. “It’s true that it’s normally not an area that people can casually enter, but sentries have already been placed in order to watch over the area. It’ll be very obvious if the Holy Satomi Sect decides to flee there, after all.”

Sadius had immediately refuted Touya’s suspicions that the high-class residential area had been left alone due to the fact that the mansions of nobles and rich people were located there, but problems were guaranteed to arise if someone accidentally entered that area, so it seemed like the plan was to take all possible measures in order to corner the Holy Satomi Sect.

“Besides, it’ll also be ideal to avoid further casualties among the citizens of Kelg,” said Sadius. “The mansions in the high-class residential area are all very large, so it’s a good thing that you won’t have to worry about your surroundings

even if you go wild during combat there, right?”

Sadius grinned as he looked at me, and I nodded in response. “Hmm, yeah. What you mean is that it’s not a problem even if the mansions of rich people get destroyed as a result of combat, and you’ll take responsibility for dealing with any complaints afterward, right, Sadius?”

“Of course not! It’ll be a big problem if you destroy the mansions!” Sadius exclaimed. “Well, it’s true that I’ll take responsibility if something does happen, but please try not to destroy your surroundings. Nobles and rich people do count as citizens of Kelg as well, after all.”

“Well, if you’ll take responsibility, then that means we won’t have to hold back at all,” said Yuki. “That’s good to know.”

Yuki smiled in a scary way after she heard Sadius’s words, and Sadius sighed deeply after he saw that smile. “Please be careful, okay? Your party will get punished if you purposely destroy any mansions in the high-class residential area. I’m sure that I don’t have to worry about this in regard to the adventurers here, but punishments much severer than usual will be dealt out if you happen to take advantage of the chaos to loot and plunder.” Sadius paused for a moment and steeled the look on his face before he started talking again. “Okay, let’s go over the plan one last time. Everyone remembers the wanted posters, right? The highest priority target is Satomi, and the secondary priority targets are the other top brass of the Holy Satomi Sect. All of them are wanted dead or alive. Deal with them accordingly upon contact, and— Actually, I’ll be frank. There’s no point in capturing any of them. Kill them all.”

Sadius’s voice sounded very cold as he emphasized the last words of his sentence, and one of the other adventurers raised his voice to ask a question for confirmation. “Are you sure it’s fine for any of us adventurers to kill them? You won’t complain later about things like the local army losing face, right?”

“Of course not! Such things aren’t a factor when it comes to protecting people! The lord has already given his permission for this plan. There is no need to hold back even against nobles or rich people that are believers of the Holy Satomi Sect. In fact, capturing such people might actually cause unnecessary interference at a later point in time.” Sadius sounded absolutely disgusted at

the idea of those people rushing to the defense of the Holy Satomi Sect, and he paused for a moment as he looked around at all the adventurers here before he continued with his words. “However, don’t force yourselves to take risks. If you can’t kill the enemies, then wait for reinforcements. You can expect to get paid extra if you succeed at slaying a target, but you won’t get paid anything if you die. There’s no need for any of you to go out of your way to help out with budget cuts, okay?”

Sadius grinned as he cracked a joke at the end, and the other adventurers all laughed in response.

“Pfft, please, you don’t have to say such things to adventurers. There aren’t any generous people like that among us, after all! Right, everyone?”

“Yeah! We’ll squeeze out as much money as we can! You better be ready to put up with cheap alcohol for quite a long time, Sadius!”

“That’s reassuring to hear. Don’t worry, however. The lord isn’t a stingy person at all. Our salary won’t change even if there are budget cuts, although it won’t go up either.” Sadius shrugged his shoulders in a joking manner before he clapped his hands together to indicate that it was time to be serious again. “Return to this meeting room once you’ve finished cleansing the section of the town that was assigned to your parties. Is there anything else you have to add, branch master?”

Sadius turned around and asked the branch master for his input, and that was probably because it was the local army that had requested the cooperation of the Adventurers’ Guild. However, the branch master shook his head in response to Sadius’s words. “No, I don’t. My work here has been done after gathering all of the adventurer parties here.”

“I see. In that case, it’s time to commence the counteroffensive,” said Sadius. “I expect that all of us here will bravely fight hard with our very best! Let’s do this, everyone!”

“Aye!”

★★★★★★★★★

We headed out of the meeting room once the meeting was over, and the first

thing we saw was that Natsuki and Ketola-san were surrounded by a few dozen adventurers. Or rather, Natsuki was the one that was being surrounded, and Ketola-san was trying to protect Natsuki from being completely surrounded.

“Natsuki-san, I implore you to join our party!”

“No, please join our party instead! I promise that you will be treated very well!”

“Everyone, please abstain from forceful party invites! You will be penalized if you keep being so insistent!” Ketola exclaimed.

All of the people that were offering party invites were guys, and that made perfect sense to me. We made our way through the crowd toward Natsuki, and she seemed quite relieved to see us.

“You sure are popular, Natsuki,” said Haruka.

“I’m willing to change places with you at any time, Haruka,” said Natsuki. “Now’s not the time for this, however. Has the discussion on your end finished?”

“Yeah, we’re going to head out of the guild right away,” I said.

“Very well. Thank you for your help, Ketola-san,” said Natsuki.

“Don’t worry about it, Natsuki-san,” said Ketola. “Good luck, everyone!”

Natsuki turned around toward me after she thanked Ketola-san, and then she deliberately held my left arm against her chest for some reason.

“What?!”

“No way!”

“No, it can’t be! Damn it! Why is he a handsome guy?!”

All of the adventurers nearby stared at me and grumbled about what had just happened in front of them. *Guys, I know you’re all jealous, but Natsuki is wearing chain mail, so her chest doesn’t actually feel very soft.*

“You know, Natsuki, I don’t think it’s a good idea to arouse hostility among people that are our allies against the Holy Satomi Sect,” I said.

“Don’t worry, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki. “The people here are ones that I healed

as an extra service, so the adventurers that will be fighting against the Holy Satomi Sect are already outside."

"I see," I said. "Wait, hold on. It won't make a difference if we head out of the guild like this, right?"

"In that case, I'll help reduce things for you, Nao!" Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki grabbed my right arm and held it against her chest.

"Oh yeah, sure, this will work—or not! This just made things even worse!" I exclaimed.

"The only thing I'm reducing is the amount of attention on Natsuki," said Yuki. "I have no plans for reducing the amount of jealousy that's being directed at you, Nao."

"Oh, perhaps I can help out with that as well," said Haruka.

"Please don't do that, Haruka. It's only going to result in more jealousy and hatred directed toward me!" I exclaimed. "Let go of me, please! Natsuki needs to wrap the cloth around her left arm, after all!"

I freed my arms and started to wrap a yellow piece of cloth around Natsuki's left arm.

"Thank you, Nao-kun," said Natsuki. "What's this for, however? I see that you all have pieces of yellow cloth wrapped around your own arms, but..."

"It's one way for us to tell our allies apart from our enemies," I said. "All right, let's get going."

Our chatter between each other ended as soon as we headed outside of the guild, and as we jogged toward the section of the town that had been assigned to our party, we asked Freddy for information.

"Um, Freddy-san, can we ask you something?" Haruka asked.

"Just call me Freddy, dude," said Freddy. "I'm only a Rank 4 adventurer, after all. What's up?"

"I don't think there's any need to care about ranks when talking to each other, but I guess I'll take you up on that offer, Freddy," said Haruka. "You see,

we've only seen the wanted poster for Satomi, so can we leave the task of identifying any other top brass to you?"

Haruka seemed a bit hesitant at first about the idea of addressing a person that was older than her so casually, but she probably assumed that it was normal among adventurers before she went along with Freddy's words and asked him a question that had been on my mind as well.

"Yeah, all good, dude! I can take care of the task of telling allies apart from enemies, but I'm honestly not that confident about my abilities when it comes to combat, so I'm counting on the rest of you if we bump into a lot of enemies," said Freddy.

"Sure, that's fine with us," I said. "Where should we head first?"

"A hideout that was discovered via investigation efforts," said Freddy. "Our job is to capture any suspicious people within our assigned area of the town after storming the hideout, dude."

It sounded like the main objective was to storm the hideout while the side objective was to capture any suspicious people. According to Freddy, our job was to capture any believers of the Holy Satomi Sect and any looters in the area.

"The area we're heading to is one of the more unsafe areas of Kelg, so keep that in mind!" Freddy exclaimed. "There's the hideout, dude!"

The hideout looked like a normal private residence on the outside. It was a one-story building with walls that looked a bit old, and the size of the building itself also looked normal, so there was nothing about the house that stood out compared to the other nearby buildings. It seemed like there was an intricate network of streets here as well, so it probably would have been very hard for us to find the hideout by ourselves without Freddy's help.

"Nothing looks odd about this house, but I can't say the same about its surroundings," I said. "There aren't any burnt buildings nearby, after all."

"The Holy Satomi Sect had probably avoided starting fires near their own hideouts," said Touya. "Can we charge in, Freddy?"

Touya held up his sword as he asked Freddy for confirmation, but Freddy

shook his head and stepped forward in front of us. “Let me unlock the door first, dude!”

Freddy started to work on breaking the lock of the door, and I heard an opening sound after a few seconds.

“Whoa, that was amazing!” Touya exclaimed. “I can’t believe you managed to unlock the door so fast!”

“That’s all I’m good at,” said Freddy. “I’m counting on your party to take the lead, dude!”

Freddy swiftly moved behind us after he had finished unlocking the door of the house, and that was a bit lame compared to the feat he had just performed, but it was probably the right thing to do in regard to the division of roles in a group. Touya led the way as we invaded the hideout, and the rest of us followed him, but I couldn’t feel the presence of any other people in the house. I had expected this result due to the fact that my Scout skill hadn’t detected anyone when I had used it outside, and sure enough, there was nobody inside the house. However, there were skills that could hide the user, such as Sneak, so I focused on my Scout skill to detect even further.

“There doesn’t seem to be anyone here,” said Haruka. “Did they already escape?”

“Nah, there are some signals underground,” I said. “Freddy, please look around and try to see if there’s any entrances that lead underground.”

“Underground?! Roger, dude!” Freddy exclaimed.

I felt a faint presence of people from underground, and it seemed like they were panicking due to the fact that our party had invaded the building. I couldn’t tell exactly how many of them there were, but they were moving around a lot. *Hm? Hold on...*

“Freddy, is the building behind this house also a hideout of the Holy Satomi Sect?” I asked as I pointed at the back of the house.

Freddy briefly glanced at where I was pointing while he was looking for an entrance that led underground, but he shook his head as he responded to my question. “The house behind this one, dude? Nah, I don’t recall hearing any

reports about that, so...”

“I see,” I said. “The two buildings are probably connected to each other via an underground path, and it seems like they’re trying to escape from the other building.”

“Seriously?! Wait, dude, are you capable of detecting people with that much accuracy, Nao?!” Freddy exclaimed.

“Yeah. Continue to look for an entrance, Freddy,” I said. “Touya, Yuki, I’m counting on you two!”

“Okay!” they both replied.

“I found an entrance, dude!” Freddy exclaimed.

Freddy raised his voice right as Touya and Yuki dashed out of the house to secure the one behind us, and he stuck his fingers into a knothole in the floor before he pulled up about five to six floorboards at the same time and revealed a large hole along with a ladder that led underground.

“The floorboard itself was camouflage, huh? It’s a simple trick, but simple happens to be very effective in this case,” said Natsuki.

According to Natsuki, loose floorboards with gaps that allowed wind to pass through were perfectly normal in houses like the one we were in. There were no real traces of something hidden, so it was possible that it was a better way of concealing an entrance that led underground compared to crafting a hidden door.

“There are a couple of people underground,” I said. “It’s time to attack. Haruka, Natsuki, can I count on the two of you for stun grenade effects?”

The girls nodded right away after I asked them for confirmation.

“Okay, good. Freddy, you should probably close your eyes and cover your ears,” I said. “Three, two, one...”

“*Flash*!”

“*Bang*!”

“*Light*!”

Freddy hastily covered his ears right before multiple spells went off at about the same time underground, and a roaring sound vibrated through our surroundings along with a blinding flash of light.



The first spell that had gone off was the Flash spell that Natsuki used, and the name of the spell sounded like a new one, but it was actually just a renamed version of the Light spell at full potency and minimum duration. As for the Bang spell that Haruka used, it was a variation of a Level 1 Wind spell called Clap that had been modified to create a very large sound. Neither of the spells were difficult to use for the girls, and both spells were ones that we had started to practice after we had slain the bandit gang. These modified spells had been designed for the occasions when we needed to subdue other people, but such occasions were rare for us, and the spells themselves would only be effective in enclosed spaces. As a result, today was the first time that we had actually used the spells in actual combat, so I was kind of curious about how effective they were.

I pulled out my kodachi and leaped down the hole, and it seemed like there were four guys writhing around on the ground under the Light spell that I had thrown down earlier. *Hmm. If they're still blinded, then can I subdue them peacefully? I don't really want to kill them if I can avoid doing so.* I kicked the stomach of the first guy and used the hilt of my kodachi to smack the head of the second guy, and I looked at the third guy after I had taken out the first two, but he was on the verge of standing back up. There was no reason for me to take any risks, so I gave up on the idea of keeping them all alive and stabbed the third guy in the heart. I kicked the guy's body away after it lost strength upon death, and I saw that Natsuki had jumped down and knocked out the fourth guy when I turned around behind me.

"Hmm. There's only one exit from here," I said. "It seems like there aren't any other people here."

I gently opened the only door that was here in the underground room, and I found a simple passageway that seemed like it had been drug through the earth. There was a ladder that led up at the end of the passageway, and there was also a dead body next to the ladder. *Hmm. Any other people? Oh, it's just Touya and Yuki.*

"Touya! What's the situation on your end?" I asked.

"All good!" Touya exclaimed. "We'll come down soon!"

I headed over to the dead body near the ladder to move it away, and then Touya and Yuki both hopped down the ladder.

“Did you two manage to stop people in time on your end?” I asked.

“Yeah, I think so,” said Yuki. “We saw some people climbing out of a hole in the floor right as we entered the house.”

“The password actually ended up being useful,” said Touya. “It would have been awful if they were actually just people who enjoyed living under the floor of a house after all.”

“Nah, that’s highly unlikely,” I said. “Well, in any case, being cautious is a good thing.”

My Scout skill had informed me about the fact that some people had been trying to escape from the hideout of the Holy Satomi Sect, but it could only roughly detect the presence of others, so it probably wouldn’t be okay to kill someone right away without confirming if they were actually our enemies first.

“We bumped into six people on our end, and Touya finished off all of them,” said Yuki. “What about you, Nao?”

“Oh, yeah, I guess you would have no choice but to kill if you were outnumbered that badly,” I said. “There were four people on our end, so I held back a bit against them.”

I chatted with Touya and Yuki along the way as we headed back to the underground room in order to group up with the others, but...

“Huh, they’re all dead?” Yuki asked.

“I think three of them died right away,” I replied. “One of them should still be alive, but I’m not sure.”

The third and fourth guy that I had attacked were probably dead for sure, and the second guy that I had smacked in the head had died from a broken neck. As for the first guy that I had kicked away, it seemed like he had vomited blood due to the fact that his internal organs had been severely damaged by my kick.

“I finished off that guy, dude,” said Freddy. “There’s no way he could be saved, after all.”

It was possible that the first guy could have been saved via the use of healing magic, but most people in this different world wouldn't go out of their way to heal heinous criminals just so that the criminals could be brought to justice under the law via a trial. In fact, most people had the same mentality toward bandits, so killing them was considered better than trying to capture them.

"Hmm. Did you really hold back at all, Nao?" Yuki asked.

"I mean, I kicked the guy with an amount of force that would make Touya writhe in pain if he was caught off guard by it, so yeah," I replied.

Yuki had an exasperated look on her face after she heard my words. "Just so you know, Nao, that would be a fatal blow against ordinary people."

It sounded like practice for how to hold back when attacking a target was necessary for me.

"In any case, it's thanks to Nao that we managed to prevent any of them from escaping," said Freddy. "Let's move on to the next place, dude!"

"Can we really leave this place as is?" I asked.

"Everything will get cleaned up at once later, so it's fine to leave the dead bodies alone," Freddy replied. "It'd be bad if there was anything here that could be stolen, so I looked around for a bit, but the only thing I found was that thing over there, dude."

Freddy pointed at some kind of object that looked like it was a sturdy safe. I had no idea if Freddy was the one that had unlocked it, but the safe was wide open, and it looked like there were a lot of papers and blocks of wood inside of the safe.

"It seems like this hideout was a facility for crafting handshake coupons," said Natsuki. "It looks like there's some 'holy' water as well, but..."

Natsuki smiled wryly as she looked at a large wooden box that was located in a corner of the underground room. I looked inside the box and found a large number of "holy" water bottles scattered all over inside of it. Some of the bottles had dirt on them, so it was possible that the Holy Satomi Sect had recycled bottles that had been discarded on the ground in places like alleys.

“The ‘holy’ water was tossed aside like that without care while the handshake coupons were kept secure in a safe, huh?” said Touya. “I can’t believe there’s such a huge difference between how the believers handled them.”

“They probably considered the handshake coupons to be much more valuable than the ‘holy’ water,” said Haruka. “Both are trash to us, however.”

“There weren’t any valuables here, and the rest are all things that don’t matter even if someone steals them,” said Freddy. “Let’s hurry, dude!”

We headed out of the hideout after Freddy urged us to do so, and he led the way toward the next hideout of the Holy Satomi Sect.

“There are some girls at the next hideout who have been active as saints of the Holy Satomi Sect, so please be careful, dude!” Freddy exclaimed.

“...What do you mean by that, Freddy?” Haruka asked. “Are you telling us to not fall for their charms and to kill them?”

Freddy hastily turned around and shook his head after he heard Haruka’s question. “No, that’s not it! I just want you all to hold back a bit, and—” Freddy paused for a moment and glanced at me before he continued with his words. “Just to be clear, sending someone to the verge of death doesn’t count as holding back, dude.”

Oh, come on, Freddy. It’s not like I tried to do that on purpose.

“What’s the reason for that, Freddy? When everyone yelled that ‘saints are shit,’ you joined in as well, right? Is it because girls have ‘other’ uses?” Yuki asked. “I can’t say I approve of that at all as a girl myself. Wouldn’t it be more merciful to just kill them outright?”

“What kind of scumbag do you think I am, dude?!” Freddy exclaimed. “I mean, it’s true that could be a result depending on the circumstances, but still!”

According to Freddy, there weren’t any lax punishments like being locked up for the ordinary citizens that had committed crimes in this different world. Humane jail sentences were nonexistent, and the most common punishments were execution and forced labor. On top of that, the harshness of forced labor sentences could vary a lot all the way from the worse ones that included torture to the ones that included some painful forms of community service. It seemed

like being forced to work at a brothel was a form of forced labor sentence that could be issued, and that could be considered cruel and outrageous depending on the way you looked at it, but it was technically more beneficial to society compared to the choice of execution.

“It’s fine to fight back if you get attacked, but it seems like there are a lot of people that don’t really understand the meaning of their actions among the girls that acted as saints,” said Freddy. “The Holy Satomi Sect searched for girls with good looks and set them up as saints, dude.”

“The fact that they cooperated with the Holy Satomi Sect makes them just as guilty as any other believer,” said Natsuki. “People have died as a result of the Holy Satomi Sect’s actions, after all.”

People couldn’t simply be forgiven just because they were ignorant about the true nature of the Holy Satomi Sect. Natsuki was completely correct in this case, especially due to the fact that the Holy Satomi Sect had committed an inexcusable crime last night. The fact that Satomi had called herself a god was an issue as well, but the arson incident by the Holy Satomi Sect had caused extensive damage to Kelg and everyone that lived in the town.

“Most of the saints probably weren’t involved with the arson incident, so I’d like to save them if possible, dude,” said Freddy.

Hmm. I get what you’re saying, Freddy, but it’s possible that there might be other innocent people, right? Despite that, do you want us to give special treatment to the saints that served as the face of the Holy Satomi Sect? I don’t think that makes any sense at all.

“...If you say so, Freddy,” said Haruka. “We’ll do our best to be careful.”

Haruka hesitated for quite a bit before she replied to Freddy, so it seemed like Haruka had some similar thoughts to mine in her mind. However, Freddy was probably aware of that, so he didn’t say anything more and quickened his pace.

“We should arrive soon,” said Freddy. “Okay, there it is, dude. It’s the building on the right over there.”

The building that Freddy pointed at looked like an inn that was bigger than a normal house. The door of the building was open, and we heard a loud scream

from inside when we stopped right outside of the door.

“Eeeeek! P-Please, stop!”

“Shut up! Stop resisting! I know you used yourselves to earn a lot of money!”

Freddy was the first person that dashed into the building. His movements were very swift, and that was probably because he was a professional scout. We chased after him right away, but we saw a very shocking scene when we entered the building. The floor was completely covered in blood along with two dead guys with necks that had been cut in half, and Freddy was standing near them while he was wiping a knife. The interior of the building looked like it was a dining hall, and there were a few girls that were huddling and shivering in a corner of the hall. Some of the girls had disheveled clothes, but it seemed like Freddy had made it on time.

“Uh, Freddy, what’s the situation here?” I asked. “The two dead guys look like adventurers, so...”

There wasn’t any yellow cloth on the left arms of the dead guys, but they were probably adventurers due to the fact that it looked like they had been carrying around some poor-quality armor and weapons on them.

“They didn’t have any yellow cloth around their arms, so does that mean they were adventurers that defected to the Holy Satomi Sect?” Touya asked. “Were they fighting among themselves?”

“Nah, that’s probably not it,” Freddy replied. “I think what happened here is that these guys thought nobody would find out if they tried to assault girls, dude.”

I looked at the girls that were huddled up in the corner of the hall, and all of them nodded multiple times in response.

“Th-These guys suddenly barged in and attacked us, so...”

“I see. I guess that means these guys had nothing to do with the Holy Satomi Sect,” I said. “By the way, Freddy, was it actually okay for you to kill these guys?”

I was a bit worried due to the fact that it wasn’t like we had actually received

something such as a license to kill. It probably wouldn't be an issue to kill people that were involved with the Holy Satomi Sect, but I wasn't sure what would happen if we killed adventurers that had nothing to do with them. However, Freddy casually shrugged in response to my question. "Yeah, it's fine, dude. It's our job to deal with scoundrels who attempt to take advantage of the chaos, after all. These guys are adventurers that are well-known for misbehavior, so this was actually a good opportunity to get rid of them, dude."

"Oh, I see. Outsiders like us don't know about that kind of information," said Touya. "On a side note, did you lie to us about lacking confidence in your abilities when it comes to combat, Freddy? You killed these guys really fast, so..."

"Yeah, I completely agree with Touya," I said. "I knew that you were quite strong, but I didn't expect this at all."

There had only been a few seconds between the time of Freddy's entry and our entry. Freddy had probably caught the guys off guard, but a few seconds was still really fast for killing two adventurers.

"Well, it's just that these guys were weak, dude," said Freddy. "More importantly, do you girls know what's going on right now in Kelg?"

Freddy seemed like he felt very disgusted as he kicked the dead bodies before he talked to the girls in the corner of the hall, but the girls all shook their heads in response. "W-We don't know anything. All we knew was that it was very noisy and chaotic last night, and we were scared, so we all gathered here to hide, and..."

If they were telling the truth, then that would mean the girls had nothing to do with the arson incident and hadn't been informed about it either, but Haruka shook her head after she heard those words. "That's quite a carefree and brainless mentality. It would only take a little bit of thinking to realize what would eventually happen if you continued your activities as 'saints,' but I suppose all of you lack that basic level of intelligence. The lord decided to crack down on the Holy Satomi Sect, that's all."

The girls lowered their eyes out of fear after they heard Haruka's words. The youngest ones among them looked like they were about twelve to thirteen

years old while the oldest ones looked like they were about the same age as us. All of them looked quite cute, so the Holy Satomi Sect had definitely succeeded at finding girls with good looks to set up as saints, and the sight of them cowering in fear would probably make most people feel sympathetic for them.

“C-Come on, go easy on them, Haruka,” said Touya. “They’re still really young, and some of them look like they’re even younger than us, so...”

It seemed like feelings of sympathy had been evoked in Touya as he tried to act as a mediator, but Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki all shot him a cold look in response.

“Who do you think truly deserves sympathy between people that committed evil out of ignorance and innocent people that suffered despite leading righteous lives, Touya-kun?” Natsuki asked.

“Can you say the same words in front of Mary and Metea, Touya?” Yuki asked.

“...No, I can’t,” Touya replied.

Haruka and Natsuki had applied healing magic to the sisters before we had headed out of our inn, but the healing magic hadn’t been able to cure the burn scars or restore Mary’s lost toes. Mary had still thanked Haruka and Natsuki for the healing, but Metea had hugged Mary and started crying after she had finally realized that her older sister had lost some of her toes. On top of that, we had seen really awful sights multiple times on the way to the guild. Even if the “saints” here were ignorant of all of that, they were still part of the organization that had caused such tragedies, so their innocence was very doubtful.

“I think I’ll lose my cool if I continue to talk, so I’ll leave the rest to you, Freddy,” said Haruka.

It seemed like Freddy was able to take a hint as he silently bowed toward Haruka to thank her before he turned around and looked at the “saints” with a harsh expression on his face. “You’re all in deep trouble due to being part of the Holy Satomi Sect. In fact, nobody would get punished if they killed all of you, so — Calm down, dude! I wouldn’t have saved you all if that was my intention! You’ll only make things worse for yourselves if you cause a commotion!”

Freddy was probably trying to make the girls aware of the dangerous situation they were in by confronting them with the harsh reality ahead, but the girls started to scream out of fear. However, they all turned quiet after they heard the words that Freddy tacked on at the end.

“Just to be clear, your arrest is something that is set in stone, and every exit of the town has been blocked off, so there’s no way to escape, dude,” said Freddy. “With that in mind, I would suggest you comply with the law and to turn yourselves in if you want to lighten your criminal sentences, dude.”

It seemed like the girls had finally realized the precarious situation they were in after they heard Freddy’s words, and their faces looked very pale as they started to discuss things with each other. However, the only words that came out of their mouths were ones such as “What should we do...” and nothing else, so it seemed like they had no concrete ideas in mind. Natsuki started to tap the floor with her naginata as if she felt irritated by the actions of the girls, and the girls shivered out of fear as they glanced at the dead bodies before they all hastily started to beg for help and mercy. All of them were looking at Touya for some reason during that time, and it was probably because Touya had sort of tried to defend them earlier, but Freddy had a conflicted look on his face after he heard their words. *Freddy, have you forgotten about the fact that you instantly killed two guys in front of them? Sure, you might have saved them from getting raped, but I think it’s perfectly normal for them to be scared of you after seeing a shocking sight like that in front of their eyes.*

“U-Uh, Freddy, can we just take them to the Adventurers’ Guild?” Touya asked.

“There’s a limited number of jail cells that the guards of the town can watch over, so that’s what you’re supposed to do for the members of the Holy Satomi Sect that are obedient, dude,” said Freddy. “There are a decent number of adventurers left at the guild, after all.”

“Okay. In that case, let’s get going,” said Touya. “All of you, follow me.”

“O-Okay! E-Everyone, line up!”

The “saints” moved swiftly after they heard Touya’s words, and it was as if they were used to obeying other people’s orders. The girls seemed like they still

felt a bit scared, but they reacted right away when one of the older girls gave out an order to line up behind Touya. The rest of us surrounded them as we walked toward the guild, and we saw some people here and there on the way that glanced at us, but we arrived at the guild without anything notable happening. We handed over the girls to the guild staff and immediately headed back to the section of the town that had been assigned to us in order to patrol again from the beginning.

"No other hideouts have been found in this area of town, so we'll be done once we finish doing one last check of the area, dude," said Freddy.

"Hmm. It seems like further riots haven't occurred so far," I said.

There were some burnt-down buildings here and there, depressed people that were sitting on the ground, and people that were cleaning up rubble or dead bodies, so there weren't any peaceful scenes throughout the town, but it seemed like there were no signs of trouble breaking out anytime soon.

"It's probably because progress is being made for cracking down on the Holy Satomi Sect, dude," said Freddy.

"...Freddy, was dragging along the girls throughout town your actual objective?" Haruka asked.

Haruka stared at Freddy as she asked him about his true intentions, and Freddy chuckled awkwardly in response to Haruka's question. "I mean, I wasn't lying when I said that I wanted to save them, dude. It's true that the 'saints' are a symbol of the Holy Satomi Sect that stand out a lot, however."

"Is that why we were assigned to this specific section of the town?" Natsuki asked.

"Yeah. The idea was that outsiders would act more rationally in any situation," Freddy replied. "The way your party actually acted was a bit unexpected, however."

It sounded like Freddy hadn't expected the girls to act so harsh and strict toward the "saints" of the Holy Satomi Sect, but things had changed on our end. We would have probably acted in a different way if the chaos caused by the Holy Satomi Sect had been completely irrelevant to us, but we had already met

Mary and Metea, and everything that we had seen from last night up until now so far had been more than enough for us to empathize with the victims of the Holy Satomi Sect.

"I'm pretty sure things would have turned worse if some local adventurers had been assigned to this section of the town," I said. "More importantly, what should we do next after we're done with patrolling through this area?"

"We should return to the guild and answer any calls for reinforcements if there are any," said Freddy. "If there aren't, then we'll remain on standby until progress on all of the assigned sections is complete, dude. After that, all of us will spread out throughout the town and slowly corner the target of the counteroffensive."

"We're supposed to act like hunters that act as beaters to drive their prey to a specific spot, huh?" I said. "I feel like some members of the Holy Satomi Sect will manage to escape if they stay at hideouts that haven't been found yet, however."

"Speed is top priority for this operation, dude," said Freddy. "It's a compromise that has to be made due to the lack of manpower, dude."

According to Freddy, it seemed the expectation was that most of the Holy Satomi Sect would flee to their hideouts in the high-class residential area of the town, but if all the top of brass that had wanted posters on their heads hadn't been found, then the guards of Kelg would continue the search operation.

"The original plan was more detailed and meant to go more smoothly, dude," said Freddy. "However, the Holy Satomi Sect managed to take the initiative, so..."

Freddy probably felt much more agitated about the current situation of the town compared to us due to the fact that he was a local resident, and he had a melancholic look on his face as he gazed at the burnt buildings throughout the town.

All of the other adventurers had finished "cleansing" the sections of the town that had been assigned to them not too long after we had returned to the guild. Another meeting was held right away for the sake of giving out new orders before everyone scattered across Kelg once again, and we ventured through a

specifically designated path toward the high-class residential area of Kelg. We saw a few guards that looked like they were stationed there when we arrived at our destination, and the guards guided us to a mansion. The mansion was probably a noble's mansion based on the fact that it looked much larger and fancier than both our own house and Edith's mansion. There were plenty of guards stationed around the mansion as if to surround it, and all of the guards were wearing armor that looked exactly the same. We saw a bunch of other adventurers that were gathered around the gates of the mansion, so it seemed like my party was the last one to arrive.

"We're sorry for being late, Sadius," I said.

"The path that your party had to take was the longest, so it's fine." Sadius shook his head and paused for a moment to look around at all the other adventurers before he continued with his words. "Everything has gone according to plan so far for the counteroffensive thanks to all of your efforts. I believe all of you are already aware of this, but this mansion is the last hideout of the Holy Satomi Sect. Around twenty people have entered this mansion since the beginning of our counteroffensive, and the estimated total number of enemies inside is around forty people."

Touya raised eyebrows and whispered to me after he heard Sadius's words. "*Hey, Nao, what's the actual number of people inside the mansion? There should be way more than forty, right?*"

"*According to my Scout skill, there are sixty-three people inside, so that's quite a lot*," I whispered.

The number of people I could detect with my Scout skill was way more than the number from Sadius's estimate. All of them felt weaker than orcs, but our enemies were actual people with intelligence and wisdom, and they were also all ready to die for the sake of their cult, so it would be foolish to underestimate them. I wanted to avoid publicly revealing my abilities in any form if possible, but I wouldn't be able to sleep well if that caused more casualties among the other adventurers here. I glanced at everyone else in my party, and it seemed like they felt the same way, as all of them nodded back at me.

"Some of you will be assigned to positions around the mansion in order to

reinforce the encirclement," said Sadius. "As for the group that will storm the mansion, it'll be me, my brother, and some of the other adventurers here."

Sadius assigned twenty-two adventurers to the group for storming the mansion, and my party was included in that. He hadn't assigned any guards for our group, but based on what I could tell from my Third Eye skill, the guards of Kelg seemed like they weren't really that strong, so the way that Sadius had divided up personnel was probably appropriate. However...

"Um, may I interrupt for a moment?" I asked as I raised my hand for attention.

"It's true that we're outnumbered, but all of us here are more than strong enough to even that out—hm? What's wrong? Your party is key to the success of this operation, so..."

Sadius looked at me as if he was afraid that my party wanted to refuse to participate at the last moment, but I shook my head to quell his doubts. "Don't worry, we're not going to chicken out. I just wanted to mention that sixty-three is probably the actual number of people inside the mansion."

Sadius fell silent after he heard my words, and it was probably because he hadn't expected to hear such a number. On the other hand, Syrus sounded slightly doubtful as he talked to me in place of his younger brother. "Really? Well, I guess it wouldn't be odd for adventurers as strong as you to be capable of detecting the specific number of foes inside a building, so..."

"Yeah, this is just a rough estimate from what I can tell," I said. "I think we'll be fine in terms of the strength of the adventurers that were assigned to the task of storming the mansion, but it'll be dangerous to let our guard down against our foes."

Sadius looked at Syrus in a way as if to make sure after he had heard my words, and then he nodded after he saw Syrus's reaction. "I see. In that case, there's no need to hold back at all against the people inside the mansion! Make sure you kill all of them! Our foes are people that do not fear death! Assume that they will fight back fiercely as long as they can if you don't finish them off!"

Sadius spoke with a strong tone of voice as he gave out orders, and all of the adventurers yelled loudly with deep voices in response. The orders were quite

merciless, and it was probably due to the fact that we were in a difficult situation, but...

“Um, what about the idea of just burning the entire mansion?” I asked. “Wouldn’t that be the safest option?”

I tentatively brought up a suggestion, but Sadius grimaced in response to my words. “Sorry, but please avoid doing that. We can use this mansion to house the residents of Kelg that had their houses burned down if we successfully seize the mansion without damaging it too much, and it’s also ideal to confiscate things like proof of the Holy Satomi Sect’s crimes and assets that can be used for reconstruction here in Kelg.”

“In that case, I guess we shouldn’t use Fire Magic inside,” said Haruka. “Fire Magic is our forte, however.”

“Yeah, please don’t use Fire Magic if you can avoid doing so. However, there’s no need to hold back if it’s necessary for your own safety in emergency situations, and that applies to everyone here.” said Sadius.

Everyone nodded in response to Sadius’s words before we headed to the front gates of the mansion, which were fittingly large and sturdy for the size of the mansion but were locked tight and wouldn’t budge an inch.

“Can someone climb over— Actually, we should just destroy the gates,” said Sadius. “It’ll be dangerous if our foes shoot arrows at us during the climb, after all. Bring a battering ram!”

Sadius shouted at the troops of the local army under his command nearby, and they brought over a hammer that looked quite heavy.

“Are you sure a hammer like that will be enough for destroying the gates, Sadius?” I asked. “I can destroy the gates with my magic instead if you want me to.”

“Hmm. Can you actually do it?” Sadius asked. “The gates look very sturdy, so...”

“Yeah, I should be able to,” I replied. “Everyone, stand back a bit.”

The thick and sturdy gates of the mansion were made of wood, but they

looked like they had been designed to endure magic due to the fact that they had been reinforced with metal as well. It probably wouldn't be possible to destroy the gates through the casual use of a spell, so I took some time to infuse mana for the sake of enhancing the potency of my spell before I used it.

"*Fireball*!"

The ball of fire that flew forward from me was quite massive and much more potent than usual due to the amount of time and mana I had committed to it, and it created a large explosion upon landing on the gates. Debris from the destroyed gates flew up into the air after the explosion, and it created an unobstructed view of the path ahead of us as a result. Our allies and our foes beyond the gates made eye contact with each other, and we were all looking at the sky above us as the debris fell back down on the foes that had been awaiting us. Most of them reacted in time, but two of them weren't so fortunate, and the debris crushed them under them as dust flew up into the sky upon impact.

"This is fine, right?" I asked.

Silence had spread throughout my surroundings after I had used my magic, so I tried to break the silence by asking a question, and everyone on the battlefield started moving again after that, as if my voice had suddenly made all of them snap back to their senses.

"Your magic was way too powerful!" Sadius exclaimed. "I figured that you were strong because my brother vouched for you, but I didn't expect you to be *this* strong!"

"Yeah, I didn't expect this at all either," said Syrus. "In fact, this was way beyond my expectations."

As he approached me, Sadius seemed like he felt very shocked about what he had just seen, and Syrus had an exasperated look on his face as he chimed in as well. Our foes had swiftly fled into the mansion during this time, but it seemed like there were no plans to pursue them due to the risks of doing so.

"I mean, the gates looked like they were quite sturdy, so I figured it would be fine." I said. "I simply used a bit more mana than usual, that's all."

I shrugged in response as all of the other adventurers looked at me, and they started chattering with each other after they heard my words.

“Yikes, a bit more mana than usual is enough to create such a large explosion? I had no idea that elves could use such powerful magic...”

“Does that mean the other elf over there is capable of something similar? Hmm, yeah, they’re in the same party, and I guess the other members of that party are also very powerful...”

“Oh, yeah, Natsuki-san’s healing magic was amazing. It was so irresistible!”

“Ugh, I’m cumming from the very thought of being blasted away by magic from someone as beautiful as her!”

Keep the praise coming, yep! I think I heard some yikes comments as well, but surely it’s just my imagination!

“It’s reassuring to know for sure that you’re strong, but I’m kind of scared that you might be capable of actually burning the entire mansion,” said Sadius.

“Do you want me to do that?” I asked. “I can shoot a few more of what I did just now, so—”

“No, please don’t do it!” Sadius exclaimed. “Go retrieve the bodies under the debris. Feel free to kill them if they resist arrest. The rest of us will storm the mansion from the front entrance as planned.”

Sadius ordered the troops of the local army under his command to retrieve the bodies of the guys that had been crushed under the remains of the gates, and then he cautiously approached the entrance of the mansion. Syrus walked in a position where he could help him right away if needed, and the rest of us adventurers followed behind them. I had thought that we would receive backlash from the other adventurers if outsiders like us stood out, but all of them were silent. I had no idea if it was because we were Rank 5 adventurers or if it was because of the magic that I had performed earlier, however. All of us were wary of attacks from the second floor of the mansion, but we arrived at the entrance without anything happening, and Sadius placed his hands on the doors. However, it seemed like the doors were locked tight.

“Yeah, I figured our foes wouldn’t leave the entrance unlocked,” said Sadius.

“Freddy, unlock these doors.”

“Roger, dude!” Freddy exclaimed.

Freddy walked forward right after Sadius had called his name. He had displayed his excellent abilities at opening locked doors when he had tagged along with us earlier, and his abilities were put to good use once again as he succeeded at unlocking the doors within a few dozen seconds.

“All right, I’ll open the doors first,” said Sadius. “One of you, lend me a shield.”

Sadius borrowed a large shield from one of the adventurers behind him, and the rest of us took a step back from the doors. Haruka and a few other adventurers held up and drew their bows to prepare for shooting, and Sadius nodded after he saw that before he swiftly pushed open the doors. Arrows flew out from inside the mansion right after that, but most of the arrows landed on the doors, and only two arrows managed to land on the shield that Sadius had placed in front of himself. One arrow managed to fly past the shield, but he slashed it away with his sword. Natsuki’s Light spell went off at about the same time and lit up the entrance hall, and it seemed like there were about twenty foes here. There were eight people with bows above us at the atrium area of the second floor, and the rest were standing in front of us and were wielding swords in their hands.

“*Stone Missile*!”

Yuki and I used the same spell at about the same time, and arrows flew out from Haruka’s bow shortly after that. Our initial attack killed three of the archers, and arrows flew out from the other adventurers a bit after that, but most of them either missed or aimed at the same foe, so the volley of arrows from the other adventurers only managed to slay two additional archers. Touya, Sadius, and the adventurers that had melee weapons had jumped inside and started to fight the foes ahead of them by the time the additional volley of arrows had ended.

“Let’s clean up the foes above first,” I said. “Haruka, Yuki, come with me!”

Most people would avoid using bows once melee combat had started, but that wouldn’t apply to foes that weren’t afraid of friendly fire. Three of the archers on the second floor were unscathed, and the two that had been struck

in the head with Stone Missiles were obviously dead, but it wasn't clear for the three archers that had been shot down by arrows. If they were still alive, then we had to finish them off for sure along with the three other unscathed archers.

"Where's the staircase that leads to the second floor? Oh, damn it, is it all the way at the back?!" I asked.

"I'll jump up!" Yuki exclaimed. "Nao, let me use you as a jumping stool!"

Seriously?! I'm not as sturdy as Touya is, Yuki! However, it seemed like Yuki had no intention of stopping as she ran at me, so I hastily planted my feet firmly on the floor, and Yuki kicked my shoulders as she jumped up and grabbed onto the railing of the atrium above before she leaped up onto the second floor.

"Yuki sure is very nimble," said Haruka. "Should I try doing the same thing?"

Haruka continued to fire arrows at the archers on the second floor as she talked to me with a joking tone to her voice, but I shook my head in response. "Nah, there's no need. The archers on the second floor won't last long, and—Yeah, it looks like it's over."

Only three of the archers had been able to properly react to Yuki. They seemed very surprised as they tried to draw out their swords, but one of them was shot to death by Haruka's arrows, and the other two were swiftly slashed to death by Yuki. Yuki would probably also finish off the other archers that had been shot down earlier, so I turned around to the remaining foes on the first floor and pulled out my kodachi to face off against the foe that was running at me. He had a bit of a fanatical and crazy look in his eyes, but it wasn't like not fearing death would make you more proficient at combat. The man desperately slashed at me, but I swept his legs and stabbed at his heart through his defenseless back. I immediately stepped away after that, but the man didn't flail around at all, so he had probably died right away. Luckily for us, it seemed like our foes were merely people that didn't fear death, so they weren't people that could exceed human limits and turn into absolute monsters.

I looked at my surroundings, and it seemed like the skirmish was about to end. There were only a few foes remaining, and those foes were surrounded by multiple adventurers and got stabbed to death a few seconds after that. It was possible that things could have turned out differently if we had suffered some

casualties from the initial exchange of arrows, but the result of the skirmish was an overwhelming victory for our side.

“Touya, how strong were the foes that you fought?” I asked.

“Well, to be honest, they were really weak,” Touya replied. “This was a massive mistake by our foes in terms of tactics, right?”

“It was a success for us, however,” I said. “Our foes essentially threw bodies at us one by one, after all.”

We had been evenly matched with our foes in terms of numbers, but we were all people that were quite proficient at combat, while our foes were composed of people that were essentially amateurs at combat. There probably had been some former adventurers among our foes, but none of them were a match for the elite adventurers that Sadius had specifically picked for storming the mansion.

“Hmm. Does the enemy commander happen to be stupid or something?” Yuki asked.

“Well, anyone that’s a devout believer of the Holy Satomi Sect is dumb by definition for sure,” Natsuki replied.

Natsuki shrugged in response to Yuki after Yuki hopped back down from the second floor, but Sadius approached us to chime in to our conversation, and it seemed like he had finished assessing the damages that our side had suffered from the skirmish against the Holy Satomi Sect. “I agree about the fact that the enemy commander is foolish, but there is also the possibility that this was a deliberate plan to buy time, so don’t let your guard down.”

“Mm, we won’t,” said Haruka. “Are there any wounded people on our side as a result of the skirmish, Sadius?”

“Nope, and that’s because your party swiftly dealt with the archers,” said Sadius. “I really appreciate it.”

“We simply did what we were supposed to do,” said Haruka. “However, wouldn’t villains in situations like this usually send in an elite bodyguard to deal with us?”

“Oh, yeah, good point,” I said. “What’s the possibility of something like that happening, Syrus?”

I asked Syrus for confirmation in case we had to be careful of strong bodyguards, but Syrus had an exasperated look on his face as he responded to my words. “Huh? I don’t get what you guys are talking about at all. Well, in any case, I don’t think you have to worry about such things. If you ask me, there aren’t any other people in Kelg that are stronger than us, and there also aren’t any suspicious criminal organizations here.”

“Oh, does that mean our final battle against the Holy Satomi Sect won’t be something that’s fierce and exciting at all?” Touya asked.

“A turn of events like that would actually be bad for us. Besides, investigations have been carried out thoroughly and cautiously in order to avoid such unexpected situations,” said Sadius. “This isn’t anything to brag about, but the troops under my command in the local army would easily die if they had to face off against foes that are as strong as your party, you know?”

“Yeah, that’s definitely not something to brag about at all.” *I mean, sure, the troops of the local army that are surrounding the mansion all felt like they were really weak compared to us, but still...*

“Like I just said, that’s why investigations were carried out to avoid such situations. Being too cautious was what led to the arson incident last night, however.” Sadius grimaced for a brief moment before he sighed and shrugged his shoulders. “I hope you can understand the anguish I felt about the fact that I had to organize units that were mainly composed of adventurers to deal with the situation in Kelg.”

One of the other adventurers laughed and slapped Sadius’s shoulders after he heard Sadius’s words.

“Mainly, huh? That sure is an understatement! You’re the only soldier of the local army here, after all!”

“Oh, come on! Don’t spell it out like that!” Sadius exclaimed. “Do you want me to enlist you in the local army as part of the rank and file?”

“Please, there’s no way anyone here would join. Everyone here earns more

money than you do, ha ha!”

All the other adventurers started laughing as well, and everyone sounded quite relaxed. I had no idea if it was due to the fact that his older brother Syrus was here, but it seemed like the local army and the adventurers in Kelg actually had a fairly amiable relationship with each other.

“In any case, there’s no need for us to worry about encountering strong foes,” said Sadius. “Nao, are there any foes in the other areas of the mansion aside from beyond that room over there?”

The room that Sadius pointed at was located at the front in the entrance hall, and it was blocked off by some large double doors. The doors probably led to a lobby, and I attentively checked for the presence of foes with my Scout skill once again.

“Hmm. Nah, the rest of the foes should be all gathered beyond those doors unless there are some people that are well hidden,” I said.

“I see. In that case, it’s possible that they might be lying in ambush for us along with traps ahead,” said Sadius. “Everyone, make sure to stay alert!”

The other adventurers had been laughing just now, but all of them quickly got serious after they heard Sadius’s words. They were probably still on alert against our enemies even while they were chatting with each other, but the fact that they could switch their state of mind so quickly was probably due to the fact that they were proficient adventurers. In fact, all of them lined up right away after Sadius headed toward the double doors, and they had actually lined up in the same formation as earlier in order to be prepared.

“...We should probably prepare to deal with projectiles,” I muttered.

Haruka and Yuki both nodded in response to my words. The option of combining the Light spell with the Clap spell for the effect of a stun grenade would be very effective if it was just our party, but it would be a bad idea to use those spells now due to the fact that we had other adventurers around as our allies.

“Charge!” Sadius exclaimed.

Sadius opened the doors just like he had earlier, and the first thing we saw

were a bunch of foes that were holding up bows in their hands.

"*Wind Blast*!"

"*Sanctuary*!"

Haruka's Wind Blast spell served as cover for me and Yuki as we used the Sanctuary spell together at the same time. The volley of arrows from our foes slowed down due to the strong wind that had been created by Haruka's spell, and the arrows fell to the ground after they bounced off the barrier that had been formed for a brief moment by the double Sanctuary spell. Sanctuary was a spell that was normally capable of deflecting things like arrows with ease over a long period of time, but Yuki and I weren't proficient enough at the spell for that. However, we were capable of achieving similar results by significantly reducing the duration of the spell.

The other adventurers behind us all seemed confused for a brief moment when they saw what had happened in front of them, but they shot arrows back at our foes right away, and the adventurers with swords leaped forward into the room ahead of us. Our foes hastily threw away their bows and drew out their swords when they saw that, but it looked like they had been completely caught off guard. There were a total of about thirty foes in the lobby, and all of them were men.

"Damn it, you useless bastard! How did you manage to kill none of them?!"

A scumbag who had an unkempt beard was wailing at the end of the lobby while he kicked one of the guys that had been shot down by an arrow. *Seriously, dude? That's how you treat your allies? Well, I guess there's no point in thinking too much about this, since all of our foes here need to die.*

"There are a bunch of secondary priority targets here!" Freddy exclaimed. "No sign of the highest-priority target, however!"

Freddy was right about the fact that Satomi wasn't here in this lobby, but there were a bunch of guys at the back like the scumbag, and they all had physiques that weren't exactly very suitable for combat.

"Ugh, did she manage to escape? In any case, we'll have to slay all of the foes here first," said Sadius. "Front line, forward! Mages, provide backup with

magic!”

The lobby was quite spacious, but there wasn’t enough space for dozens of people swinging their swords. The other adventurers leaped forward to the front line after they heard Sadius’s orders, and Yuki and I kept providing backup through the use of the Stone Missile spell.

“I really didn’t expect for us to end up using spells that we usually don’t use,” I said.

“I mean, it’s not like we have any other realistic options,” said Yuki. “We’re not very good at combat against other people, after all.”

Stone Missile wasn’t a very potent spell, but it was decently effective against ordinary people. Yuki and I continued to slay the foes that had bows, and we heard some words from the other adventurers such as “You call this ‘not very good’?!” and “Please give us one of your party members, ideally Natsuki!” throughout the process. Some of the adventurers also yelled “What does that have to do with offensive magic?” after the comment about Natsuki, however.

“There’s no way we’ll part with Natsuki!” I exclaimed. “More importantly, do any of you recognize the face of that scumbag over there?”

I yelled back at the other adventurers as banter before I pointed at the scumbag that had caught my eye earlier, and the girls seemed a bit puzzled as they frowned in response to my words.

“Hmm. He kind of looks like an orc that we’ve slain before,” said Yuki. “Orcs are hairy, after all.”

“He has a similar physique to an orc, but he’s nowhere as hairy,” said Haruka. “His wide forehead completely lacks hair, after all.”

On a side note, the orcs in this different world looked very similar to boars. In fact, goblins were a better example of monsters that looked similar to people.

“Who are you calling an orc?! I am the Baronet of Reed! Stop wasting time and kill them!”

It seemed like the scumbag could hear our voices. His face was completely red from anger as he yelled and kicked at one of the guys near him, and that guy

ran toward us, but Touya slew him with ease and nodded to himself after that.

“Oh, it’s that guy, huh? I didn’t recognize him at all due to his beard,” said Touya.

The scumbag was a noble who had been the former owner of the plot of land that we owned, and he had fled from Laffan after he had lost all of his assets due to the mushroom disaster incident. We had seen him once when he had suddenly shown up at the guild in Laffan and lashed out at Diola-san as he demanded that she hand over some mushroom withering medicine, but his facial hair had been decently tidy at the time, so it was hard to tell that he was the same person at a glance due to how unkempt his facial hair was now.

“I guess he really hit rock bottom in life, huh?” said Haruka.

“Enough with the insults! I am a baronet!”

The scumbag continued to yell at us, but Freddy shook the dagger that he had in his hands as he casually responded to him. “Hey, baronet, there’s a duke lying around on the floor here, dude.”

Freddy had disposed of the foes that would cause some trouble if they remained alive after everything was over, and that was all according to plan. In fact, he had avoided combat at the front line and assassinated a lot of the secondary priority targets instead. All of those had acted in a similar way to the baronet, and that was because they had yelled at the other believers to protect them or to kill us adventurers. However, the lack of a clear leader that had authority over the other top brass had simply caused confusion among the rank-and-file of the Holy Satomi Sect, so all of the secondary priority targets had died without achieving anything at all.

“Damn it, you’re all useless! Hey, you over there! You’re a soldier of the local army, aren’t you? What is Viscount Nernas thinking by sending troops against me?!” The useless scumbag pointed and yelled at Sadius, who was giving out orders to our allies. “I will lodge a strong protest when this is over!”

“The situation at hand is way past that stage!” Sadius exclaimed. “However, I promise that you will be provided with honorable treatment if you stop resisting arrest and surrender!”

"*Honorable treatment, huh?*" I whispered. "*He's going to get executed, right?*"

"*I think what Sadius means is that he'll let the guy choose the way he wants to die*," Yuki whispered. "*There might be options like dying via drinking a cup of poison, after all.*"

"*I don't envy him at all, but I don't think he deserves that kind of luxury due to the fact that a lot of people have burned to death due to the actions of the Holy Satomi Sect*," Natsuki whispered.

Natsuki slew the foe in front of her as she whispered some words with a cold tone to her voice. It seemed like the 'saints' that we had found before had been unaware of the arson incident last night, but the guys here were definitely the actual perpetrators behind it. It hadn't felt real to me until I had actually walked around town to see what had happened, but there were a lot more burnt-down houses than I had expected there to be. I had also seen many instances of dead bodies that had been dragged out of those houses, and there were probably a lot of people that were still suffering from burns right now. However, a small upside to everything I had seen was the fact that I didn't feel any urge to show mercy in combat against other people.

"Defeat is imminent for you, Baronet of Reed!" Sadius exclaimed. "Many citizens have died as a result of the Holy Satomi Sect's actions. If you have any pride remaining as a noble, then you should stop resisting and surrender right now!"

"The lives of mere commoners do not matter at all! In fact, they should be happy to die for the sake of the great Satomi—"

The scumbag's words were interrupted by an arrow that suddenly pierced through his chest. Haruka was the one who had shot that arrow, and she looked at him in a way as if she was looking at absolute filth.

"I couldn't stand hearing his words anymore," said Haruka. "It's fine to kill him, right?"

"O-Oh, yeah, it's fine," said Sadius. "However—"

"He does not deserve an 'honorable' death. There are children that lost their parents to the arson incident, and they're suffering from burns that have left

behind scars," said Haruka. "If possible, I want to drag this guy in front of the victims, but I don't want to show those children something so miserable and disgusting, so I'll let him die here instead."

Sadius seemed a bit baffled by Haruka's actions, but Haruka firmly declared her stance to him. However, the scumbag was still alive due to the fact that Haruka's arrow had missed his vital spots, so it seemed like the idea of killing someone that had been talking right in front of you had been enough to make Haruka hesitate a bit.

"*Cough, cough!* You...shall...suffer...too!"

It seemed like the scumbag had prepared something beforehand, and he mustered the last of his strength as he smacked away a table that was near him. The table had a few bottles and candlesticks on it, and it seemed like the bottles were very fragile, as all of them broke and scattered liquid everywhere upon contact with the ground. The flames from the candlesticks then made contact with the liquid and flared up, but...

"*Extinguish Fire*!"

The flames were quenched after Yuki and I used the Extinguish Fire spell at the same time, and the look of satisfaction on the scumbag's face turned into shock after he saw what had happened.

"Wha—"

He died with his eyes wide open before he could finish his last words, however.

"Does this count as us having the last laugh?" I asked. "I'd feel awful if he felt satisfied as he died, after all."

"Yeah, I think so," said Touya. "The way he died is kind of laughable as well, after all."

Touya pointed at the two arrows that were protruding out of the scumbag's chest, and the second arrow had been from Haruka for the purpose of finishing him off. I looked at my surroundings, and it seemed like our allies were the only ones that were still standing. None of them were seriously injured, so we had achieved an overwhelming victory once again. *Hmm. There are still some other*

unresolved problems, so—

"Hey, Nao, I had no idea you could use a spell like that!" Sadius exclaimed. "If you only helped out with the firefighting efforts last night, then—"

"The Extinguish Fire spell isn't as useful as its name might sound, Sadius," I said. "We can only extinguish small fires with the spell, so we would have been useless against the fires that had spread everywhere across Kelg."

Sadius had approached me and interrupted my thoughts as he pressed me for an answer, but I gently pushed him back as I explained my reasoning as to why my party hadn't been around last night. We would have been able to put out the fires at a single building if we had used up all of our mana, but that would have been it. The building would have started burning again if the other nearby buildings had started to burn as well, after all. In fact, the Water Blast spell would probably be more useful for the purpose of putting out fires, but it would have been very risky for outsiders like us to wander around during the chaos last night.

"Oh, I guess that makes sense. I forgot about the fact that magic isn't actually omnipotent," said Sadius.

Sadius seemed a bit disappointed by what he heard from me, and it was most likely because he had struggled with the firefighting efforts last night, but there was something more important to think about at the moment.

"More importantly, Sadius, what are we supposed to do next?" I asked. "The highest-priority target isn't here, after all."

"Ugh, right. I figured that she would be here, but that's not the case. The mansion is completely surrounded, so it should be very difficult to escape," said Sadius. "Is she hiding in a different room? Syrus, do you feel the presence of any other people?"

"Nope, not at all," said Syrus. "What about you and your party, Nao?"

"Nah, the only people I can detect are the ones that are here in this lobby," I said. "I think Satomi has actually escaped by now unless she is actually capable of hiding her presence well."

I felt like the chances of Satomi hiding somewhere in this mansion were quite

low, but there was a possibility that she had skills such as the Sneak skill due to the fact that she was also someone that had been transported to this different world by Advastlis-sama. However, Satomi wasn't an active adventurer unlike everyone in my party. Based on her actions up until now, it was very unlikely for Satomi to have a level for the Sneak skill that was high enough to hide herself from me unless she had been granted a lot of points during the character creation process for everyone in my class.

"There wasn't any information about Satomi being someone who was talented at things like hiding," said Sadius. "People described her as pretty, charming, and an expert communicator, but that's it. Hmm. All right, I'll order the troops outside to enter, and then we'll search every corner of this mansion!"

The search mission that had been commenced was conducted very thoroughly, but it failed to succeed at finding Satomi or even any hidden paths and doors in the mansion, so the counteroffensive operation against the Holy Satomi Sect ended on a somewhat sour note.

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Two days had passed since we'd completed the counteroffensive operation against the Holy Satomi Sect, and all of us felt a bit conflicted on our way back to our inn after we had received our monetary reward from the guild. The reason for that was because Satomi hadn't been captured yet. We had received recognition for our contribution to the operation two days ago, and we had received a large bonus to our monetary reward as a result of that, but we couldn't really feel happy about this due to the fact that the root cause of the chaos in Kelg had been left alone so far.

"Damn it. Satomi must have taken advantage of the chaos caused by the arson incident to escape from Kelg, right? It's the only outcome that makes sense to me," said Touya.

Touya seemed like he felt very annoyed as he kicked the ground, and the girls all sighed at the same time after they heard his words.

"Sadius told us that Kelg was completely sealed off, but I'm not sure if we can trust him on that," said Yuki.

“It’s possible that she might have already fled days ago before the troops of the local army had set up a checkpoint at the gates,” said Natsuki.

“We have no idea if she’s actually still here in this town or not,” I said. “Hmm. Should we try to hunt down Satomi ourselves?”

The bounty on Satomi’s head was one thousand gold coins, and that would be a significant amount of money for most people, but it would merely be a form of extra income for us. With that in mind, the only real reason for us to go out of our way to hunt down Satomi would be to bring her to justice.

“Well, we’ll need to spend a few more days here in Kelg to investigate what happened to Mary and Metea’s dad, and they’ll probably need some time themselves to decide what they want to do, so I think it would be fine for us to try to hunt down Satomi during this period of time,” said Haruka.

“Hell yeah!” Touya exclaimed. “In that case, let’s—”

“Shidou-san!”

A tense atmosphere dawned upon us as soon as we heard a voice that interrupted Touya’s words. There were very few people out there that would refer to Yuki by her surname, after all. We looked in the direction of the voice that we heard and saw a suspicious person whose body was completely clad by some dirty-looking robes, and their face was hidden by a hood. The person was most likely one of our other classmates, but none of us were stupid enough to let our guard down due to the current situation in Kelg. We braced ourselves for anything that could happen, and the person started to shift their hood to the side, but Touya reacted right away once a glimpse of that person’s face became visible. He immediately stepped forward and lunged his fists at the person’s stomach, and the impact created a thud sound as the person’s body bent forward to form a chevron shape before it silently fell to ground.

“I-I didn’t expect you to be so quick and merciless, Touya,” I said.

Touya casually shrugged in response to my words. “I mean, the wanted poster said that we shouldn’t allow her to talk in any way, right? I simply obeyed the instructions that were written on the poster.”

The face that I had briefly seen beneath the hood was Satomi’s face, and I had

seen her face before on a wanted poster. *I gotta say, though, I'm a bit shocked that you didn't hesitate at all, Touya. I don't think I would hesitate against Satomi considering all the bad things that she did, but I probably wouldn't be able to punch a girl in the stomach under normal circumstances.*

"More importantly, is she still alive?" I asked. "Your punch didn't kill her, right?"

"Please, I know how to hold back properly," Touya replied. "Well, I'm pretty sure I did, right?"

Touya sounded a bit uneasy right as he talked to me while Haruka rolled up the hood. He turned around to Haruka to ask her for confirmation, and Haruka checked Satomi's stomach and pulse before she nodded back at Touya.

"She didn't spit out blood, and she's still breathing, so I think she's fine," said Haruka. "Touya's punch probably felt very painful, however."

"Mm, she looks the same as the drawing of her face on her wanted poster," said Yuki. "I'm surprised that Yasue was able to recognize Satomi right away, however. She looks way different now compared to what she looked like back on Earth, after all."

Yuki sounded a bit exasperated as she commented on Satomi's face, and I couldn't connect the dots between the face of the person in front of me and the face of the Satomi in my memories. The drawing of Satomi's face on the wanted poster had felt a bit weird to me when I saw it, but it seemed like the drawing was actually quite accurate.

"I wonder if she looks very different due to the Attractive Appearance skill," said Natsuki. "It could also be the Extremely Attractive Appearance skill instead, but I'm not sure."

"She's definitely a beautiful girl despite how dirty she looks right now," said Haruka. "I'm surprised that you were able to punch her without hesitating, Touya."

"I mean, I'm used to seeing beautiful girls, since I'm friends with all of you girls here, so Satomi's appearance didn't affect me at all," said Touya. "Besides, I'm well aware about how deceiving appearances can be."

“Oh, please, flattery won’t get you anywhere, Touya,” said Yuki. “Hm? Decei—”

Yuki seemed like she felt fairly pleased after she heard some praise from Touya, but she tilted her head after she realized what Touya had mentioned at the end, and Touya hastily cut her off before she could complete that thought. “A-Also, I felt free to punch her because I assumed that she could just get healed even if my punch sent her to the verge of death. A lot of awful and disastrous things have happened here in Kelg, including what happened to Mary and Metea, so it would be bad if Satomi managed to escape due to me holding back, right?”

“Mm, you make a good point,” said Haruka. “It would be awful for us if she fled to Laffan and tried to restart her cult there.”

“Yeah, I’d hate it if our house got set on fire due to Satomi’s actions,” said Yuki. “All right, let’s wrap up her body!”

Yuki took out some rags and seemed like she was quite experienced at the task as she rolled up Satomi’s body inside of the rags.

“You seem like you’re really good at this,” I said. “Are those rags the ones that we used as a mat to place the dead bodies of monsters and animals for gutting them?”

“Yeah, they are,” said Yuki. “I think we should buy new ones soon, so this is a good way to get rid of the old ones here.”

The rags weren’t that dirty due to the fact that Haruka and Natsuki would use the Purification spell on them after we had used them, but the Purification spell wasn’t able to turn the rags into a brand-new condition, and the rags would wear out over time through continuous use due to the fact that we had to lay them directly on the ground. The sight of Satomi being wrapped in those rags felt kind of weird and nasty, but it was an appropriate way to treat her.

“All right, let’s go to the guild so we can turn her in,” said Haruka. “The fact that we have to do this makes me feel a bit melancholic, however.”

“Yeah, I feel the same way, but we’ll become criminals ourselves if we try to hide her even if we have no intention of doing that,” I said.

It would actually be a merciful act from us to put an end to Satomi's life while she was still unconscious, but there was no reason for us to go out of our way to do that, so it would be better to simply turn her in and forget about her.

"There's no point in thinking too much about this," said Natsuki. "This is just a case of karma striking back. She's the cause of most of the awful things that have happened in Kelg lately, after all."

However, I couldn't sense any happy feelings from Natsuki, and the same applied to Yuki as well, so it seemed like both of them felt a bit conflicted about this.

"...Mm. Okay, can you handle the task of carrying Satomi, Touya?" Haruka asked.

"Me? I mean, sure, I don't mind, but she technically does count as a girl, so wouldn't it be better for you girls to carry her inste—"

"If I recall correctly, you said something earlier about deceiving appea—"

"All right, leave it to me!" Touya exclaimed.

Touya swiftly lifted the wrapped rags onto his shoulders and started to jog toward the guild.

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Things had calmed down at the guild by now, and it was because the guild had finished paying the adventurers that had participated in the operation to put an end to the Holy Satomi Sect. As a result, Ketola-san looked like she felt a bit confused and tilted her head when she saw us return to the guild, but her eyes opened wide out of shock when she saw the thing that Touya was carrying on his shoulders.

"U-Um, may I ask what Touya-san is carrying?" Ketola asked. "I-Is that a dead body?"

"Nah, it's still alive," I replied. "It's the thing that everyone is searching for right now."

I lowered my voice as I answered Ketola-san's question, and she froze for a moment before she made a loud sound when she hastily stood up from her

chair. “I-I’ll go inform the branch master right away! Please head to the meeting room first and wait there!”

We watched as Ketola-san ran up the stairs inside the guild building before we headed to the meeting room, and the branch master barged into the room along with Syrus right after Touya had placed the wrapped rags onto the ground.

“Ketola told me something almost unbelievable just now. Is it true?”

The branch master pointed at the thing on the ground right away without greeting us, and Syrus went over to unwrap the rags for confirmation after that. He paused for a moment when he saw what was inside of the rag before he turned around and nodded in response to the branch master.

“I see. Your party contributed a lot to the counteroffensive, and you’ve captured the mastermind behind the recent events in Kelg as well, huh? Hmm...”

The branch master sounded a bit impressed and suspicious of us, but I replied with an honest answer. “We just happened to come across her purely by chance. We weren’t actively looking for her, after all.”

We probably wouldn’t have noticed Satomi if she hadn’t talked to us, so she had nobody but herself to blame for this. There were multiple possible reasons for her doom, such as naively assuming that former classmates like us would help her out, Touya’s lack of hesitation, or overconfidence in her own ability to to make things work out for her in the end. *Hmm. Those are actually a lot of reasons, so I guess there wasn’t any way for her to avoid her doom.*

“Mm, luck is an important factor for the sake of success as an adventurer. Syrus, go contact and inform the local army about Satomi’s capture. Ketola, go prepare the money needed for the bounty reward.” The branch master casually nodded in response to my words before he gave out instructions to Syrus and Ketola-san, so it seemed like he wasn’t actually seriously suspicious of us, and he breathed a deep sigh of relief after they had hastily left the room. “Now, then. All that’s left is reconstruction, so I suppose I can finally rest at ease for now. I know that I asked a lot from the guild in Laffan, but your party has contributed way more than what I expected, so you can expect to receive a lot

of rank up points.”

“Oh, so rank up points actually get used, huh?”

I had assumed there was a chance that Diola-san had been joking when she had told us about the existence of rank up points.

“Yeah. However, there are many other names for rank up points, and they’re usually only useful at one specific branch of the Adventurers’ Guild.”

According to the branch master, internal information about adventurers wasn’t shared throughout the whole organization of the Adventurers’ Guild, so adventurer evaluations would vary between each branch. It would be a different story if you were an adventurer that had contributed enough to earn a letter of introduction or if you were famous enough that your name was well-known in other towns, but it seemed like most adventurers had to rebuild their reputations from scratch if they moved to a different town.

“I will inform the guild in Laffan about your achievements here in Kelg, of course, but what do you think about the idea of moving here to Kelg? I can guarantee to a certain extent that your party will receive favorable treatment here considering how proficient you are, so...”

“Thank you very much for the offer, but we have a house in Laffan, and the guild there has helped us out a lot so far, so we have no intention of moving to a different town,” I said.

“Mm, I figured as much. It’s a shame, but oh well. Loyalty and gratitude are important traits, after all.”

The branch master dropped the subject right after I explained the reasoning behind our party’s decision, so it seemed like he hadn’t actually expected to succeed at convincing us to move to Kelg.

“By the way, do you have a name for your party?”

“Yeah, Meikyo Shisui is the name that we settled on the other day,” said Haruka. “They are words from our hometown, and their meaning is a clear and serene state of mind. We figured that this would be a good policy for our party into the future, so that’s our reasoning behind that name.”

Haruka sounded like she wasn't used to the idea of introducing ourselves via our party name quite yet, and the branch master nodded a few times as if to slowly process the name in his head. "Meikyo Shisui, huh? I like the meaning of these words. I'll keep them in mind. Once again, thank you very much for your help this time. If there's anything the guild in Kelg can do to assist your party, then let me know. We will do our best to help out."

"Thank you," I said. "In that case, I know this is very sudden, but can we ask you for a favor?"

I told the branch master about the subject that I had in mind, and he seemed a bit surprised at first, but he nodded in response right away and had a genial smile on his face after he heard my words.

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The resilience of the sisters that we had saved on the night of the riot in Kelg was quite remarkable. The effects of healing magic had probably played a significant role as well, but the sisters had become able to move around just fine on the next day after we provided them with plenty of sleep and food even though they had suffered severe burns and had used up a lot of their energy before that. There were some unresolved issues, such as the burn scars on their skins and Mary's missing toes, but the Regenerate spell was actually able to slowly heal them, so it was only a matter of time before the sisters would become fully healed.

However, Regenerate was a Level 10 spell, so Haruka and Natsuki weren't capable of properly using it with ease, and both of them would collapse on their beds every day after they had used up all of their mana for the Regenerate spell. *Man, I don't want to think about the pain that they're probably feeling from completely exhausting their mana. I remember feeling an urge to vomit when I did it before.* The Regenerate spell was a spell that was normally capable of regenerating body parts like arms and legs in one use, but the fact that the girls had to take it slowly over time in order to achieve that result was a testament to the difficulty of the spell. Yuki and I were mages as well, so we looked after Haruka and Natsuki for a while due to the fact that we were aware of what they were going through, and a few days had passed after Satomi's arrest when we finally received the information that we had been awaiting.

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“Was this the location of the house that your family lived in, Mary?” Haruka asked.

“Yes, our house used to be here,” said Mary. “It’s gone now, however.”

We were at a completely empty lot. It seemed like the ruins had already been removed, and the only thing that remained was the ground that looked burnt. There hadn’t been a foundation made of concrete here, so there was no way for us to imagine what the house that had been here looked like.

“I see,” said Haruka. “I hate to break this to you and Metea, but your dad is dead.”

The favor that I had asked the branch master to do the other way was to investigate the whereabouts of the sisters’ dad. Adventurers were the ones that had been sent out to clean up the town after the riot and the arson incident, so I had hoped to obtain some clues when I asked the branch master. The branch master had been surprised at first, but he had willingly accepted the task and had obtained results in just a few days. According to the branch master, it had actually been very easy to gather information about the sisters’ dad. He was one of the few beastmen in Kelg, so that in itself had made him stand out a lot, and it seemed like a lot of other people knew him because he had accepted day labor jobs at the guild on a frequent basis. One of those guys had participated in the cleanup work for this area, and that guy had remembered seeing a dead body here.

“I...I had braced myself for this possibility when I ran away from here,” said Mary. “Dad was an ordinary person, after all.”

People with superhuman traits such as certain high-rank adventurers would probably be able to survive even if they were engulfed by flames. However, the chances of survival for an ordinary person that had been crushed under the ruins of a burning house were near zero, and Mary was probably aware of that. However, she was still just a young child. Tears weren’t flowing out of her eyes, but she tightly held Metea’s hands as if she was struggling to bear the harsh truth that had been presented to her. As for Metea, she was clamping her lips tightly together, so it seemed like she was following her older sister’s example.

“It seems like all of the dead bodies that have been found in this area of town will be buried at Veshmia-sama’s temple here in Kelg,” said Haruka.

Dead bodies weren’t really treated with that much care in this different world, and one reason for that was probably because people couldn’t afford to do so. Cremation was the standard way of dealing with dead bodies, and the main purpose of that was for the sake of preventing the spawn of undead monsters. The recommended form of cremation was to burn all of the bones to ashes, but that wasn’t easy to do for ordinary citizens, so most people would just break the remaining bones before they buried them. The cemeteries that were managed by temples were the burial sites of those bones, and very few people had personal graves in this different world. However, the circumstances were different for rich people and nobles due to the fact that they had family graveyards. Some of them even had personal graves, and they could also afford to pay priests for cremation via the use of the Holy Fire spell.

“Veshmia-sama’s temple is the one that’s the closest to our current location,” said Natsuki.

“Would the two of you like to go there?” Haruka asked.

“Yes, please,” Mary replied.

The sisters walked with heavy steps on our way to the temple, and all of us remained silent as a result until we arrived at our destination. The temple itself didn’t look that much different from Advastlis-sama’s temple in Laffan, and the lack of any priests inside of the temple was the only difference that stood out to me. *Oh, hold on, the statue that’s enshrined in the middle of the temple looks quite different as well.* Advastlis-sama looked like a young boy from his statue, but Veshmia-sama looked like a kind goddess from her statue. *No offense, but I’d prefer to get buried here once I die instead of at Advastlis-sama’s temple.* Mary and Metea knelt in front of the statue to offer up prayers, but it seemed like Veshmia-sama wasn’t the intended recipient.

“Dad, thank you very much for raising us up until now,” said Mary. “I’ll do my best to live and survive together with Metea.”

“Dad, I’ll keep your words in mind as I try to achieve happiness, so please rest at ease,” said Metea.

Gods probably wouldn't act in a nitpicky way, but it was important to show sincerity and gratitude, so I donated more money than usual on behalf of Mary and Metea before I prayed for their dad to rest in peace. *Hmm. No response from Veshmia-sama, huh? I guess this is normal, but it feels kind of weird to me due to the fact that I can always hear Advastlis-sama's voice at his temple in Laffan.* I glanced at everyone else on my left and right, and they all had awkward looks on their faces, so it seemed like we all felt the same way about this. Mary and Metea continued to pray for a while even though the rest of us had finished praying quite fast, but they eventually stood up and had satisfied looks on their faces after they were done.

"Are you two done praying?" I asked.

"Yes. Thank you very much," Mary replied. "I think I've managed to put this behind me."

"Thank you," said Metea. "I'm sure that our dad can rest at ease now."

The sisters smiled and thanked me in response. *Is this the equivalent of visiting the graves of a loved one in this world?* I had felt a bit hesitant about the idea of outright telling the sisters that their dad was dead, but it seemed like it had been necessary so that they could put it behind them.

"Okay, let's return to our inn," said Haruka.

All of us nodded in response to Haruka's words before we headed out of the temple. The sisters had been looking down the entire time when we had initially arrived, but they were looking up a bit now, so it seemed like they felt a bit better.

"Oh, right, there's an orphanage behind this temple as well," said Yuki.

Yuki turned around as she commented on something that had caught her attention.

"Yeah, the orphanage seems to be doing well, although I'm not sure if that's the best way to put it," I said.

I hadn't noticed this at all earlier, but I could hear the voices of children now that I had been provided with some peace of mind. The orphanage looked about the same as the one back in Laffan in terms of size, but it seemed like

there were way more people inside of the orphanage here. I could hear a lot of screaming and crying from children along with the sounds of running and yelling from adult voices, so the orphanage seemed very busy, and that was probably why there hadn't been any priests at the temple. Mary and Metea were looking at the orphanage, but I had no idea what they were thinking in their minds.

"Oh, now that I think about it, we never asked about your plans for the future," I said. "If you want to go to the orphanage, then—"

"No, please take us with you instead!" Mary exclaimed.

"Please!" Metea exclaimed.

I had asked the sisters just in case, but both of them had raised their voice to interrupt my words.

"Are you sure about that? I'm pretty sure that the Adventurers' Guild will provide you with support if we ask them to do so," I said.

"Just so you know, you can also wait until we've finished healing your burn scars and toes before entering the orphanage," said Haruka.

"No, please take us with you instead," said Mary. "We're beastwomen, after all, so..."

"Mm," said Metea. "We'll get treated a bit differently at an orphanage..."

The sisters smiled awkwardly in response to our words. It seemed like they wouldn't be bad enough for it to count as discrimination, but it was a fact that beastwomen were rare in Kelg. With that in mind, the sisters would probably feel awkward mingling among other children that were mentally immature, but I felt like there would be bigger issues aside from race at the orphanage based on what I could tell from outside.

"I see. If that's your decision, then we don't have any reason to say no on our end," I said. "Right, everyone?"

"Yeah!" Touya exclaimed. "Feel free to count on me! I'm of the same race, so it's only natural for me to provide help!"

"Mm, it's like we have new younger sisters now, so I actually feel happy about this," said Natsuki.

“Yeah, same here!” Yuki exclaimed. “I’ve always wanted to have younger sisters!”

Yuki patted Mary’s head to dote on her, but...

“I’m pretty sure that Mary will grow taller than you within a year or two, Yuki,” said Haruka.

“Th-That doesn’t matter at all!” Yuki exclaimed. “A younger sister is still a younger sister regardless of height!”

Yuki seemed like she felt uneasy after she heard Haruka’s words, but Metea tapped her own chest as she smiled at Yuki. “Don’t worry, big sis Yuki! It’ll take about four or five years before I grow taller than you!”

“Th-Thanks for trying to cheer me up, Metea,” said Yuki. “However, you’re still going to become taller than me in the end, right?”

“Yeah! I’m sure that I’ll eventually get an attractive body!” Metea exclaimed. “Please look forward to it, big bro Touya!”

“...Oh, um, yeah, sure, I guess?” said Touya.

The rest of us inadvertently chuckled after we saw Touya’s struggle to come up with a proper response to Metea’s words, and it helped lighten the heavy atmosphere among us.

“Tee hee. All right, let’s return to our inn,” said Haruka.

“Return!” Metea exclaimed.

Metea seemed very happy as she grabbed and pulled my hands and Haruka’s, and her tail was wagging happily as well. Mary had looked a bit nervous the entire time ever since we had first met her, but I noticed in the corner of my eye that she looked a bit more relaxed now as we turned our backs on the orphanage and started to walk back together.



Side Story—Part Three of Sai's Adventures: I'll Have Some Faith in You

Ivalia was the name of the dungeon city that I had journeyed to along with Adonix-san's party. The dungeon was the main industry of the city, and it was kind of weird to describe a dungeon as an industry, but it was actually an accurate label due to the fact that a lot of commodities and items could be found inside the dungeon. When I had started a new chapter of my life here in Ivalia, my goal had been to become part of that industry, but my fortunes had literally hit rock bottom all of a sudden when I fell down a pitfall trap by myself in the dungeon. I had thought that I was doomed when that had happened, but it seemed like everything wasn't over for me yet after a beautiful girl named Estelle had appeared in front of me. I had no idea if it was because I had prayed to Advastlis-sama, but I had somehow succeeded at forming a temporary party with her. *Ha ha! It wasn't wrong to try to pick up girls in a dungeon! Or, well, that's what I thought at first...*

"...Whoa, I had no idea that you were so ridiculously strong, Estelle," I said. "I'm just a burden that's holding you back, right? I'm useless, right?"

A few minutes had passed after I had started to walk together with Estelle when we encountered a monster that I hadn't seen before. However, Estelle swiftly stepped forward right away and slew the monster in one slash, and I felt absolutely shocked when I saw that. *Man, at this rate, I'm going to be the one that'll get picked up instead. Or rather, I don't think I'll have a chance with her at all if I remain very weak...*

"Really? I think you have the wrong idea," said Estelle. "What I did just now is something that any other Rank 5 adventurer is capable of doing with ease."

Yikes, is my adventurer rank way too low? Should I consider pursuing a different profession...?

"Besides, if you want to explore a dungeon solo, then this is the least you need to be able to do in order to not die right away," said Estelle.

“Seriously? Are dungeons really that difficult?” I asked.

“The dungeon in this city is actually fairly easy compared to other ones,” Estelle replied. “Monsters with edible parts spawn inside of here, after all. If you get lost and stranded in a dungeon where most of the monster spawns are mineral, metal, or undead monsters, then death is the only outcome that awaits you.”

“Hmm, I guess you wouldn’t be able to carry extra rations on you if you’re exploring a dungeon solo,” I said. “Oh, um, please let me handle the gutting work at the very least.”

I would become actually useless if Estelle handled that as well, so I volunteered myself and started on the gutting work. The monster that Estelle had slain was a huge rabbit that looked like it weighed over ten kilograms. I hadn’t seen this type of monster before, but Adonix-san’s party had taught me how to gut a rabbit during our journey to Ivalia, so I had some confidence in myself.

“If you insist, then sure,” said Estelle. “Considering the situation we’re in, we should only keep the magicite and meat, so discard everything else.”

“Gotcha. By the way, Estelle, do you know what this monster is?” I asked.

The monster seemed like it was a weak one due to the fact that Estelle had casually sliced off its head with ease, but we were currently in a part of a dungeon that was much deeper than the fifth floor that I had been at earlier, so there was no way that the monster was actually weak.

“This monster is a ripper hare. They’re annoying foes due to the fact that they can blast you with blades of wind, but they’re not very nimble, so it’s not that hard to deal with them one at a time,” Estelle replied. “However, the real issue here is the fact that ripper hares only start to show up from the fifteenth floor onward, so...”

“Ugh, really? I fell all the way down to here from the fifth floor,” I said. “What about you, Estelle?”

“Same here. I’ve explored all the way to the eighth floor solo, but I couldn’t really make any progress from there on,” said Estelle.

Estelle watched over my gutting work as she took out something from her bag that looked like a flask with water inside of it, and she drank from it to rehydrate herself. The flask seemed like it was more convenient to carry around than my water bag, but it also seemed like it couldn't hold that much water.

"I guess that means we're in a really bad situation," I said. "All of the monsters that show up from the fifteenth floor onward are strong, right?"

"I should be able to deal with any of them one-on-one," said Estelle. "However, I'm not sure if I'll be able to handle multiple of them at once, so..."

Huh? Wait a second, why do you have a look on your face that implies you're not sure if you'll be able to successfully protect me, Estelle?

"Um, just to be clear, I can fight as well, you know? I'm not as strong as you, but I'm decent at the use of a spear," I said.

"Nah, I'm not really willing to rely on a kid when it comes to combat, so— Oh, wait, I forgot about the fact that you're the same age as me," said Estelle. "You don't look like it, so it slipped my mind at first."

Oh no, is she treating me like a lost child or something?! Strength doesn't matter at all if she can't see me in a romantic light due to that kind of filter! Damn it, why did my Youth skill happen to be so effective?!

"Ugh. Look, I know that I have no right to complain even if I get treated as just a source of water due to the difference in our ranks, but I'm still a guy," I said. "I can't exactly say that I'll be reliable during combat, but I have no intention of being someone that you have to protect at all costs."

I had a serious tone to my voice as I stated my thoughts, and Estelle raised her hands to her chin as she paused in thought for a bit before she gently nodded in response. "Mm, okay. I suppose that I've become a bit too used to life as a solo adventurer. Let's discuss some things together first before we move on."

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The sizzling sound of meat being grilled echoed through the dungeon that we were in, and the source of that sound was the frying pan that Estelle was holding in her hands. The layers of fat from the rabbit that Estelle had slain earlier had been gathered and ignited inside of the frying pan, and that fire was

used to cook some thin slices of meat. She was basically burning meat to cook meat, and that description in itself sounded a bit weird, but it was an accurate way to describe what was happening in front of me.

“The key to survival is to figure out how to save resources in a reasonable manner,” said Estelle. “For example, using the fat from meat like this can help us save on both fuel and food, and we can reduce the amount of luggage on us if we eat when we have the time for it. Here, take a bite.”

“Thanks,” I said. “Whoa, this is delicious! This meat has only been seasoned with salt, but I think the meat itself has a rich flavor to it or something, so...”

The slices of meat that Estelle had handed over to me tasted way better than I had expected from something that had simply been seasoned with salt, and I was fairly sure that it wasn’t just because of the fact that a beautiful girl like Estelle had technically cooked this for me.

“Just so you know, our meals are probably going to be nothing but meat from now on,” said Estelle. “I hope we can escape from this dungeon before we start to get sick of it. In fact, I already feel a bit sick of meat myself.”

“Right, you looked like you didn’t really enjoy your meal at the inn,” I said.

“...Oh, did you see me at the time? The inns in this city serve way too many meat dishes, and it’s all because meat is easy to obtain from the dungeon,” said Estelle. “I want to eat more vegetables, but that’s sadly not an option.”

Estelle pouted and blushed after she heard my words, and those actions looked very cute to me.

“Do you want to eat more meat, Sai?” Estelle asked. “If you can, then I’ll cook some more.”

“Nah, I’m full now,” I replied. “Thanks. The meat tasted delicious.”

“I see. In that case, let’s drink some tea while we discuss things,” said Estelle. “Do you have your own cup?”

The amount of meat that we had obtained from the ripper hare weighed five kilograms, so there was still plenty of meat left. Estelle stored the remaining meat inside of her magic bag before she started to boil some water.

“Yeah, I do,” I said. “By the way, Estelle, are you also worried about me in terms of water?”

Water Magic was the only thing that I was good at, but I noticed that Estelle had poured out a lot of water from her flask. The flask itself looked like it could only hold about two cups of water, but she had drunk from it earlier, and the amount of water she had poured into a small pot looked like it was enough for two people. With all of that in mind, such a flask would normally become empty right away, but...

“Oh, are you wondering about this flask? It’s a magical device, but it’s not something that can produce an unlimited amount of water,” said Estelle. “Processed magicites are needed as fuel for this magical device. I’ve prepared a decent number of them ahead of time, but that’s limited, so I wasn’t lying when I told you that securing water is the only issue that I can’t deal with by myself.”

“I-In that case, please let me create water instead,” I said. “My mana is the only thing that’ll get consumed for it, after all.”

I hastily offered to create water for us, but Estelle chuckled lightly in response to my words. “Don’t worry, I won’t abandon you after having accepted your offer to party up. Besides, it’s nice to have someone around who can use Water Magic for things such as washing your own hands.”

Hmm. It sounds like you would’ve been fine in terms of drinking water for yourself, though. I took a sip from the tea that Estelle had brewed for us before I breathed a sigh of relief and moved on to the next topic. “First of all, I am someone who doesn’t have much experience as an adventurer. With that in mind, I’m pretty sure that I’ll have to rely on you quite often for adventurer knowledge, Estelle, so I’m sorry about that in advance. On the other hand, I’m more or less capable of slaying monsters like short horn deer by myself, and I can use up to Level 3 Water Magic spells, so feel free to use me after factoring all of that in.”

“I appreciate your honesty, Sai. I wouldn’t be able to trust someone who boasts about things they can’t actually do, after all. As for me, I can deal with monsters that are slightly stronger than the ripper hare earlier just fine by myself,” said Estelle. “I can use Fire Magic, but I mainly use my sword in

combat. I might not look like it, but I'm also a Rank 5 adventurer, so I've accumulated a decent amount of experience over time by now. Once again, let's help each other however we can and do our best to escape from this dungeon alive."

"I'll probably have to rely on help from you for a lot of things, but I'll do what I can," I said.

I deeply bowed toward Estelle to thank her, but Estelle gently shook her head in response. "I think you're more than competent considering the fact that you've climbed up to Rank 2 as an adventurer and can use Level 3 Water Magic spells at your age, Sai."

Estelle probably had no intention of this, but her words sounded a bit sarcastic. *Does she unconsciously think I'm someone who's younger than her deep down in her mind? Ugh.*

"My abilities pale in comparison to yours, Estelle," I said. "You're the same age as me, but you're a Rank 5 adventurer who is capable of exploring a dungeon solo, so..."

"I'm just someone that's incapable of trusting other people," said Estelle. "It's not something that I can be proud of at all."

Estelle had a look on her face that seemed a bit sad and lonely, but she lifted the cup of tea in her hands to her mouth as if to hide that.

"Really? You were willing to party up with me, so I didn't get that impression at all," I said.

"Well, to be honest, Sai, I still don't fully trust you," said Estelle. "Also, if you were stronger than me or looked older than me, then I probably would have turned down your offer to party up."

Yay, my Youth skill actually saved my life! Estelle's words made perfect sense to me, however. If I was a girl myself, then the idea of exploring a dungeon alone with a guy who looked similar to someone like Tezas-san would be very scary to me. The first impression on others from your appearance was very important, after all. Tezas-san was a very kind person, but I had no idea about that before I got to know him.

“Um, can I ask about why you don’t trust other people?” I asked.

“My story is something that’s very common, so I don’t think it’s worth talking about. Or rather, I’m quite interested in the reason that you joined that party with those guys, Sai. It seems like it’s not a matter that I need to report to the guards, and you’re much younger than your other party members as well, so I find it a bit strange.” Estelle raised one of her fingers to her chin as she paused in thought for a bit before she smiled at me in a playful way. “If you can tell me an interesting reason, then I’ll tell you about my circumstances as well.”

“Um...”

I felt a bit hesitant about what to do. I could probably come up with some random cover story through the use of my great imagination, but the idea of lying to someone who couldn’t trust other people felt bad to me. If I wanted Estelle to trust me, then I had to trust her first myself. A calculating part of me was also warning me that I would die if Estelle abandoned me, so I decided to tell her the truth.

“You see, I’m actually someone from a different world that got transported to this world by an evil god,” I said.

“...Huh? What? Are you actually more of an emotionally delicate person than I thought you were, Sai?” Estelle asked.

Estelle had a worried look on her face as she muttered something about the negative mental effects of confined spaces, but I hastily shook my head in response. “No, that’s not it! I’m not crazy! I’m perfectly sane!”

“Hmm. Oh, right, I’ve heard about how people around your age are prone to those kinds of delusions, Sai,” said Estelle. “You happen to be the same age as me, however, so...”

“No, that’s not it either!” I exclaimed. “I understand why you might think that way, but still!”

I strongly refuted Estelle’s assumptions once again after she looked at me with pity in her eyes, and then I told her the absolute truth about everything that had happened to me up until now. The content of my story was quite wild, and I also had no way to prove it, so I felt fairly sure that Estelle wouldn’t

believe me. However, contrary to my expectations, Estelle had a serious look on her face and paused in thought after she finished listening to my entire story.

“I can’t actually say that your story is unbelievable,” said Estelle. “It might be the work of Advastlis-sama, after all.”

“Oh, so I wasn’t transported by an evil god? If I recall correctly, Advastlis-sama is one of the Five Great Gods, right?” I asked.

The name of the god reminded me of the fact that Adonix-san was a devout believer of Advastlis-sama, and that was because he had grown up at an orphanage that had been founded by one of Advastlis-sama’s temples.

“Yes. He’s a god with a lot of stories about his playful and mischievous personality,” said Estelle. “In fact, there are so many to the point that I wouldn’t be surprised if he really did transport people from a different world into this world.”

Playful and mischievous, huh? I wasn’t really sure if it was okay to brush it off like that, but I had an idea of what she was talking about.

“Um, I actually heard a mysterious voice in my head when I prayed at Advastlis-sama’s temple in this city,” I said.

I told Estelle about how I had heard words such as experience points and levels, and Estelle nodded deeply in response. “Yeah, that’s solid proof for your story. I haven’t heard any stories about other people who have experienced something similar. Status screens, huh? It sounds like something that would be convenient to have, and— Huh?”

Estelle suddenly froze up as her eyes opened wide in surprise and looked around through the air.

“Hm? What’s wrong, Estelle?” I asked.

“Um, something suddenly appeared in front of me,” Estelle replied. “Is this the status screen that you were talking about? Why can I see it...?”

“Seriously?!” I exclaimed. “What’s written on the status screen?! Are there any skill names?!”

“Um, there’s Weapon Proficiency: Swords, Level 4 Swordsmanship, Level 4

Fire Magic, and— Hold on, you should never try to casually pry a girl's secrets, you know? Tsk, tsk."

Estelle leaked some information after I had eagerly asked her about her status screen, but she stopped herself midway through and raised her eyebrows as she scolded me as if I were a kid.

"U-Um, that's not why I asked, but I'm sorry," I said.

Yeah, I figured that she's really strong. It's obvious that I'd lose in a battle against her, and it's also obvious that she's really cute.

"However, why did you become able to see your own status screen all of a sudden?" I asked. "Is it because you partied up with me? Adonix-san and the other guys didn't mention anything about this, however, so..."

"You were a member of their party before you arrived in this city, right, Sai? Did you tell them about this as well?" Estelle asked.

"Nah, you're the only person that I've told about my entire story," I replied. "Most people wouldn't believe me even if I told them, after all. Oh, is that why you were suddenly able to see your status screen?"

Based on what had happened so far, it seemed like I had to party up with someone that I trusted and had to tell them about my story in order for their status screen to become visible to them.

"Mm, that might be the reason. In any case, your story turned out to be much more interesting than I thought it would be." Estelle nodded to herself as if she was satisfied with what she had heard from me, and she seemed quite happy as she laughed before she continued with her words. "I suppose that means I should tell you about my circumstances as well. You see, I'm actually the daughter of a baron."

"A baron? Does that mean you're a noblewoman?" I asked.

"I feel a bit embarrassed about being called a noblewoman, but yes, that's correct," Estelle replied. "You don't seem very surprised by this, however."

"I mean, I'm not really familiar with nobles, and that's because of my background that I told you about just now," I said. "Nobles didn't exist in the

country that I lived in, after all. In any case, your movements and actions seemed very beautiful and elegant to me, so what you just said makes perfect sense."

"I appreciate the praise, but I can't say I approve of staring at someone else without their permission, you know?" said Estelle.

"O-Oh, um, it wasn't on purpose! I just happened to see you by chance!" I exclaimed. "I guess you were aware the entire time, huh?"

Ugh. There's probably no point in trying to come up with an excuse. I felt a bit dejected after I heard Estelle's words, but Estelle actually chuckled at me when she saw my reaction. "Yes, I noticed your gaze on me back at the inn. However, I ignored it at the time because it seemed like you didn't have any malicious feelings toward me."

"O-Oh, I see," I said. "B-By the way, why is a noble like you working as an adventurer?"

I asked Estelle a question as a way to brush off my feelings of embarrassment, but Estelle chuckled at me once again before she continued with her words. "Nobles working as adventurers actually isn't too unusual or rare, but they do so as a profitable hobby instead of being dependent on adventurer work for livelihood. However, female noble adventurers are very rare, and my mother was actually one of them."

According to Estelle, one of her ancestors had been a very famous adventurer that had become a noble due to their accomplishments as an adventurer, and Estelle's mom had dreamed of becoming an adventurer from a young age since she had grown up hearing stories about that ancestor. In fact, her mom had actually worked as an active adventurer for a while despite being a noble. Her mom's adventurer activities had calmed down a bit after she had gotten married, but she had left most of her noble duties to her husband and spent time training Estelle or heading out together with her for adventurer work instead, so it sounded like Estelle's mom had freely lived her ideal life.

"I think I had a decently happy family, but everything changed after my mother died," said Estelle.

According to Estelle, her mom had died right before Estelle had reached

adulthood, and her dad had remarried not too long after that. In addition, her dad had declared that the son he had with Estelle's stepmother would become the heir to their family's baron title.

"Huh? Wait a second, your dad married into your family, right? Isn't that a form of forceful takeover?" I asked.

"Yes, but the bloodline of nobles isn't considered very important at all in this kingdom. Anyone can become a noble if they achieve a significant feat, and useless nobles will get stripped of their nobility title," Estelle replied. "In terms of bloodline, I should be the one to inherit the baron title, and I should find someone that will marry into my family, but my father was the one that took care of my family's official duties as nobility. He worked behind the scenes for support from the other noble families that have associated with my family, so it's not easy for me to overturn that through my lineage alone. My mother lived without a care for all of those things, after all."

A summary of Estelle's story was that she had been betrayed by her dad, but she chuckled awkwardly at the end, so she didn't seem like she felt sad about it.

"To be honest, I don't really care about my family's peerage, so I don't mind if my younger brother is the one who inherits the family title. However..." Estelle paused for a moment, and then she sharply raised her eyebrows as she pouted before she continued with her words. "What really, really, *really* annoys me is the fact that my dad tried to use me as a tool for obtaining power via marrying me off and seized the mansion and land where I have a lot of fond memories of my mother and my grandparents!"

"O-Oh, I see," I said.

It was the first time I had heard such strong words from Estelle ever since we had first met up until now.

"All of that is why I left home and started a full-fledged career as an adventurer," said Estelle. "It shouldn't be too difficult for me to chase my father out through the combination of my lineage and achievements as an adventurer, after all."

"Oh, that makes sense," I said. "However, is that really a common story in this world?"

I felt like Estelle had led a very eventful life up until now, but Estelle nodded right away in response to my question. “I’m just about to get to the common part of my story. I had become decently capable at the use of a sword and magic thanks to my mother, and I had joined a party with some people that were older than me. Everything had gone smoothly for us, and we had climbed to Rank 4 without any real troubles.”

Rank 4 was the minimum rank that was required to enter a dungeon, and Estelle’s party had moved to this city to challenge the dungeon. All of them had been strong adventurers, and they’d had a mage in their party as well, so they had explored deeper into the dungeon without much effort. However, that had eventually ended up backfiring on them.

“My party had explored halfway through the thirteenth floor at the time, but we noticed that we were surrounded by a lot of monsters when we entered a room on that floor one day,” said Estelle. “It was the first crisis that my party had ever experienced, but I thought that my party would be able to prevail if all of us worked together and did our best. That’s what I thought, at least. My party members arrived at a different conclusion, however.”

According to Estelle, all of her other party members had fled at the same time right after Estelle had used her magic and unsheathed her sword to face off against the monsters.

“I must say, I was actually kind of impressed by their lack of hesitation,” said Estelle. “In fact, I felt like the monsters were shocked as well for a moment when they saw what happened.”

A bitter and sad smile appeared on Estelle’s face as she commented about the actions of her former party members.

“...What happened after that?” I asked.

“Luckily for me, that room had another exit. I felt like it would be more dangerous to turn back, so I sliced my way through the pack of monsters and escaped from the room,” Estelle replied. “The monsters kept chasing me, but I somehow managed to slay the ones that got close and escaped from them as well. I struggled a lot too during my trip back to the surface, but as you can see, I survived just fine.”

“I guess the fact that you managed to make it out alive from a situation like that is why you seem so calm right now,” I said.

“Well, my survival was thanks to the teachings of my mother,” said Estelle. “She taught me about the importance of not being stingy when it comes to preparing for the worst.”

“I see. What happened to your other party members in the end?” I asked.

“It seemed like they suffered some injuries, but they survived as well. However, they apparently lied about me when they reported about what happened to the guild,” Estelle replied. “Their lies were exposed due to my return, and they were punished with a rank demotion that prevented them from entering the dungeon again. As a result, they ended up fleeing from Ivalia.”

“Huh? A demotion?! That’s it?!” I exclaimed. “Wouldn’t a harsher punishment have been more fitting considering what happened?”

I grumbled about the outcome, which felt unfair to me, but Estelle smiled awkwardly in response. “One way to see it is that I simply failed to escape due to being slow, after all. Even if I wanted the guild to deal a harsher punishment, the most they could do would be to revoke their adventurer cards. Everyone values their own life more than those of others, so it’s normal for people to decide to abandon others if their own lives depend on it. I’m sure the same will apply to you as well, Sai, so—”

“There’s no way I would ever abandon one of my party members!” I exclaimed. “The idea of prioritizing your own life in a tough situation sounds absolutely awful to me, so...”

“It’s better than the entire party dying, Sai,” said Estelle. “In a way, you can say that competent adventurers are ones who can make those kinds of decisions if they have to do so.”

Estelle had a sad look on her face as she looked down at the ground despite what she had just said. I tried to think of something to say to her, but I was at a loss for words. Estelle and I had only met each other recently, so I had no idea if my words would hold any weight when I hadn’t done anything to prove them. With that in mind, idealistic words that lacked substance probably wouldn’t

resonate with someone like her who had actually experienced what reality was like, so I kept my lips buttoned and drank some cold tea down my throat along with the words that I couldn't say to her.

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"Some are coming your way!" Estelle exclaimed.

"I got it covered!" I exclaimed.

Two grotto wolves had slipped past Estelle and were running toward me. Grotto wolves looked kind of small despite being wolves, but they were very agile, and their dark blue fur was hard to see due to the fact that there wasn't much light inside of the dungeon. However, that had only been an issue for me in the past. I initially had to rely on Estelle to take care of grotto wolves, but grotto wolves weren't actually that much of a threat to me anymore. I used the shaft of my spear to hit the nose of the first grotto wolf and smash it against the wall, and then I stabbed the other grotto wolf with my spear. After that, I swiftly pulled out my spear and finished off the first wolf that had bounced off the wall. I looked over to where Estelle was and saw that she had already slain four grotto wolves, so it seemed like she was on standby just in case I needed her help. However, I had managed to handle the grotto wolves just fine, and she smiled at me after she saw the results.

"Well done, Sai," said Estelle. "I see that you've become used to fighting grotto wolves by now."

"Yeah, thanks to your help," I said. "Man, I'm really glad that you were willing to party up with me, Estelle. I'm confident that I would have died if I had to explore by myself."

"I've had an easier time as well on my end thanks to having you around, Sai," said Estelle.

A lot of days had passed since I had formed a temporary party with Estelle. I wasn't sure about the exact number of days due to the fact that it wasn't possible to see the light of the sun inside of this dungeon, but I had slept a few dozen times by now, and the number of battles I had fought against monsters was probably multiple times more than that. As a result, I was fairly confident about my ability to fight as a party together with Estelle.

“You know, I’d say we make a good team, don’t we?” I asked.

“Do you think so, Sai? I kind of want you to become a bit stronger, however,” said Estelle.

“Ugh. Come on, you don’t have to be so harsh on me...”

I clutched my chest out of pain from Estelle’s words, and Estelle chuckled at me when she saw my reaction. “Tee hee, I’m just joking. Now, then, Sai. I’ve figured out a few things by now from our exploration of this dungeon, but I have bad news and good news for you. Which would you like to hear about first?”

“Yikes, I don’t like the sound of that,” I said. “Well, how about starting with the good news first?”

“The good news is that I’ve figured out the floor that we fell down to in this dungeon,” said Estelle. “I’m not completely sure about this just yet, but there’s a high chance that we’re on the eighteenth floor of this dungeon.”

“Whoa, that’s really good to know!” I exclaimed. “We’ve already climbed up two floors, after all!”

“Mm. It’s incomplete, but I do have a map of the dungeon that covers the floors all the way to the thirteenth floor, so we should be able to climb floors a lot faster from that point onward if we can get there,” said Estelle. “The ‘if’ is the caveat here, however.”

Estelle had a grave look on her face as she emphasized the “if” part, and I had an idea of what she was trying to get at after I heard her words. “I guess that means the bad news is a big issue for us. It’s not that we won’t have enough food, right?”

“Mm, that’s not it. I’m already sick of meat with just salt, but we won’t starve to death,” said Estelle. “I really wish vegetable monsters would spawn in this dungeon...”

Estelle sighed after she commented about the lack of vegetables for our meals, and it was true that I also felt a bit sick of nothing but meat by now. The fact that the meals were cooked by a beautiful girl like Estelle wasn’t able to prevent me from feeling sick of meat forever, so I would really appreciate some

vegetables as well, but...

“Are there actually monsters like that out there in this world?” I asked.

“Yes, there are, although I’m not sure if they can be found in this dungeon,” Estelle replied. “Edible ones are sort of rare, but there are a decent number of plant monsters, and treants are probably one of the most famous out of all of them.”

“Oh, I see,” I said. “I guess it wouldn’t be weird for moving vegetables to exist if there are moving trees.”

Hmm. I remember seeing plant monsters with tentacles in games back on Earth, and those kinds of monsters would usually capture girls and melt their clot—

“Were you thinking of something weird just now, Sai?” Estelle asked.

“Of course not! I was thinking of something serious!” I exclaimed. “Believe me!”

Estelle and I had become good at fighting in sync with each other during combat, but I also felt like she had become good at reading my mind outside of combat.

“Is that so? I’ll take your word for it, then. More importantly, let’s get back to what I was talking about,” said Estelle. “The bad news is that there’s a hurdle that we need to overcome between the fifteenth and sixteenth floors, and that hurdle is called a boss room. We have no choice but to go through there if we want to climb up floors.”

“That means we’ll have to fight a boss monster in that room, right?” I asked.

“Yes, that’s why it’s called a boss room. It seems like reptila is the name of the boss monster that shows up in that boss room of this dungeon, and it’s supposedly a humanoid reptilian monster,” Estelle replied. “It seems like they have a height of about two and a half meters, and they’re very muscular, so your bones will probably get smashed into bits if you receive a clean blow from one.”

“Yikes, that sounds like a hard foe to fight for our party, since we don’t have

someone who can fulfill the tank role," I said.

"Well, we'll be fine as long as we avoid the attacks of the reptila," said Estelle.

"I guess you're right about that," I said. "I don't think just hoping that attacks won't hit us will work, however."

"Yeah, everything depends on our individual efforts to dodge attacks, so we have no choice but to do our best," said Estelle. "We should arrive at the boss room soon."

Some stairs appeared in front of us not too long after Estelle had told me about the existence of boss rooms. Estelle and I nodded to each other without saying anything as we climbed up the stairs, and then we quietly opened the door at the top of the stairs a bit to peek inside.

"Uh, Estelle, is it just me, or is that monster actually wielding a weapon?" I asked.

"Oh, I happen to see the same thing as you do, Sai," Estelle replied. "According to the information that I gathered, reptilas are unarmed monsters, so..."

The reptila was standing with its back turned to us, but the spear in its hands didn't look like a cheap or weak one at all. In fact, it looked like something that would fetch a decent price if sold at a store. *Hold on, this isn't because of my blessing, right?! I don't want to battle a rare encounter in this kind of situation, Advastlis-sama! Ugh. I guess this means that increased financial luck can actually be detrimental in certain situations...*

"This is a bit different from what I expected it to be, Sai, but we have no choice but to slay the boss monster," said Estelle. "Let's go!"

"Ugh, yeah, you're right! Let's do this!" I exclaimed.

I opened the door and leaped forward into the room, and a Fire Arrow from Estelle flew forward from behind me at about the same time. I felt like it was going to land on the reptila, but the reptila suddenly turned around and used its spear to deflect the Fire Arrow. *Damn, that was impressive, but I wish it didn't happen!*

“I’ll provide you with backup via magic!” Estelle exclaimed. “Be careful, Sai!”

“Okay!” I exclaimed. “Hey, come at me!”

Our plan was to sandwich the reptila between us as we attacked it, so it was very simple. Estelle would give out signals whenever she was about to cast a spell, and I would move away from her spell’s trajectory at that time. It wasn’t a plan we could use against multiple foes, but it would probably be effective against a single foe. I was technically the main attacker, while Estelle would feint attacks to distract our foe while preparing her magic. All of that was according to plan, but Estelle would be at a disadvantage against a spear due to the fact that her weapon was a sword, so it would probably be best to assume that my role would be even more important.

“Damn it, why is this boss monster actually proficient at the use of a spear?!” I exclaimed.

The reptila wasn’t an unintelligent monster that was just holding a spear in its hands. In fact, it seemed like the reptila actually understood what a spear was capable of as we clashed against each other. The reptila’s abilities at using a spear weren’t as good as mine due to the fact that I had Level 3 Spearmanship, but the boss monster was able to make up for that difference via its large physique and muscles. My strength paled in comparison to the reptila’s strength, and I felt pain all over my body whenever I parried the reptila’s attacks. It was frustrating to admit, but I probably would have received a clean blow by now if Estelle hadn’t distracted the reptila from time to time.

“*Fire Arrow*!” Estelle exclaimed. “Ugh, it didn’t deal much damage!”

Estelle’s magic landed on the reptila’s back, but the reptila had some natural thick armor in the form of its scales on its back, so the Fire Arrow hadn’t been anywhere near to a fatal blow. The potency of Estelle’s magic would probably increase if she focused on magic only, but I would probably die in exchange. However, the reptila turned its attention away from me and toward Estelle, so it seemed like the Fire Arrow had caused it some pain. *An opening!* I aimed my spear at the reptila’s ribs right before it could aim its spear at Estelle. Its sides were probably weaker compared to its back, and I felt the sensation of my spear stabbing through meat. I tried to pull out my spear after that, but it felt

like the tip of my spear was lodged inside, and—

"Step back, Sai!" Estelle exclaimed.

I heard Estelle yell when I saw the reptila's tail swinging at me from the corner of my left eye.

"It can use its tail to attack as well?! That's not fair!" I exclaimed.

I used both of my hands in order to forcefully pull out my spear, but I wasn't able to do so in time to step back and dodge. I hastily covered my body using the shaft of my spear as a tail that was thicker than my leg smashed into me, and I felt an intense amount of pain along with a floating sensation as my brain failed to process what had just happened for a moment. My spear had been snapped in half, and I felt the sensation of the walls on my back. I looked around and saw Estelle a bit far away from me, and she was desperately trying to fend off the reptila's attacks, so it seemed like I had been sent flying toward the walls by the reptila's tail.

"Ugh, I should have bought a better spear!" I exclaimed.

I mean, this spear was the best I could afford at the time, but still! Pain ran throughout my body as I cursed under my breath. I was sure that I had stabbed my spear into the reptila just now, but it was still moving around energetically. My spear was now broken, and my eyes took notice of a door that was near me. It was a different door from the one that Estelle and I had passed through to enter this room. The doors of a boss room wouldn't lock themselves upon entering the room, so it wasn't impossible to flee from a boss room without finishing off the boss that was inside. The door was only a few meters away from me, so it was within reach of my hands, but I saw Estelle smiling from the corners of my eyes.

"Damn it! A real man is someone who can achieve ideal results!" I exclaimed.

A guy who can only fight under safe circumstances is worthless! I placed my hands on the walls in order to get back on my feet. My spear could work just fine as a short spear, but if willpower alone was enough to win a battle, then my spear wouldn't have been snapped in half, and there was no point in hoping that I would suddenly awaken some kind of new power due to a heroine being in a bind. Only a fool would delude himself with those kinds of ideas.

“There must be a way to victory,” I said. “What about magic...?”

Water Magic wasn’t suited for dealing damage, however. Water Jet was a spell I could use at my level for combat, and it would be enough to blow away a grotto wolf, but I had no idea if it would even be enough to distract a really muscular foe like a reptila.

“It won’t negatively affect allies too much, but it also won’t deal a lot of dama — Actually, wait, it might be very effective against a reptila!”

I had no time to hesitate, so I ran forward right away and splashed the reptila with the Water Blast spell in order to cover it in water. A large volume of water could probably trip an adult person, but it was a mere minor distraction for the reptila as it continued to attack Estelle, and Estelle couldn’t react to me at all due to the fact that she was too busy trying to fend off those attacks. However, that wasn’t a problem at all. In fact, it would be a problem for me if the reptila actually tried to deal with my magic.

“*Freeze*! *Water Blast*! *Freeze*! *Water Blast*! *Freeze*!”

All of the spells I used were simple ones that couldn’t ordinarily be used for dealing damage to foes. The name of the Freeze spell made it sound like you could damage foes by freezing them, but there was no way someone with only Level 3 Water Magic like me could use such powerful magic. Or rather, it wasn’t impossible to freeze someone with the Freeze spell, but every living being possessed mana and magic resistance. You had to be very proficient at Water Magic in order to be capable of piercing through that resistance to directly freeze an enemy, so it wasn’t something that I could pull off at the moment. However, it wouldn’t be an issue if the target of my Freeze spell was water itself, especially if the water had been created by myself.

“Sai, I feel really cold from your magic!” Estelle exclaimed.

“Sorry, but bear with it for a bit!” I exclaimed.

I had splashed the reptila in a way that it couldn’t dodge, and some of the water had splashed onto Estelle too due to the fact that she was fending off attacks from the reptila in front of it. I had made sure that Estelle was out of range of my Freeze spell, but she must have still felt cold, and her breath turned white. However, the reptila’s movements started to become numb after a

while.

“Hell yeah, all according to plan!” I exclaimed.

I had no idea what to do if the reptila was a warm-blooded animal that only looked like a reptile, but it seemed like I had been worried for nothing.

“Oh, I understand what you’re trying to do now,” said Estelle. “In that case, that means I can’t use Fire Magic to deal damage against the reptila.”

“Yeah, we can’t let it warm up,” I said. “I know this will be a big burden on you, but can you buy some more time for us?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. It’s a lot easier for me to fend off its attacks now,” said Estelle. “Besides, there’s also a certain Fire Magic spell I can use to help out. *Cool*!”

It seemed like Estelle had time to use magic now that the reptila’s movements had become numb, and a cold wind blew through us. Estelle’s magic wasn’t as potent as the Freeze spell, but it was still an effective form of backup.

“*Water Blast*! *Freeze*! *Freeze*!”

A film of ice formed on the reptila’s body, and its movements became even more numb. Estelle looked at me, and I nodded at her before I ran behind the reptila and aimed for the tip of its tail due to the fact that the tip was the weakest to coldness. Part of it was also because I wanted revenge against the tail that had sent me flying, but I had noticed from my observations during the battle that the reptila’s tail had actually played a crucial role in maintaining the balance of its body. I would have tried to slice off the tail if I had a weapon like a greatsword, but the only weapon I had on me at the moment was a makeshift short spear, so I stabbed my short spear through the middle of the reptila’s tail in an attempt to pin it to the ground. However, I heard a nasty tearing sound, and it seemed like my attack had actually torn off the reptila’s tail. The reptila lost its balance, and Estelle took advantage of that opening as she slashed at the reptila with her sword. A few fingers fell down to the ground along with the reptila’s spear after that, and Estelle kicked the spear toward me.

“Pick up the spear, Sai!” Estelle exclaimed.

“Okay!” I exclaimed. “Whoa, this is heavy!”

The reptila's spear felt much heavier than the spear I had been using, but it was a weight that I could handle.

"Watch out, Sai!" Estelle exclaimed. "It's coming for you!"

I held up my new spear and saw that the reptila was bleeding as it clenched its fists and ran toward me. The reptila still seemed very intimidating, but its movements were a lot more numb than before, and its body was wobbling around as well. Estelle was attacking it from behind, but it seemed like the reptila was focused on me due to the fact that I had its spear. I threw the shaft of my broken spear at the reptila's toes, and it succeeded at tilting the reptila's body upon impact.

"Take this!"

My new spear was much sharper than my old one, and the force of my thrust combined with its sharpness caused the tip of my new spear to pierce through the reptila's body all the way through its back. I immediately let go of the spear and stepped back in order to dodge the reptila's fists before it could swing them down at me, and the reptila collapsed face down right after its fists were crushed upon impact with the ground. Estelle and I fell silent once we saw that, and Estelle cautiously approached the reptila before she poked it with her sword, but the reptila didn't react at all.

"...It seems like it's actually dead," said Estelle.

"Yeah, I'm glad to hear that," I said. "Whew. This boss monster was much stronger than I thought it would be!"

I breathed a deep sigh of relief, and I felt my body relax as I sat down on the ground.

"Mm. I was also caught off guard by how strong the boss monster was," said Estelle. "My assumption was that it wouldn't be too strong based on the monsters that we fought on the eighteenth and seventeenth floors, so..."

"Yeah, I assumed the same thing," I said. "We wouldn't have been able to beat the boss monster if you hadn't been able to fend off its attacks, Estelle."

"Our victory was thanks to your resourcefulness, Sai," said Estelle. "I was at my limits as well."

“My idea somehow worked out in the end,” I said. “However, we should keep in mind that we happened to be lucky this time.”

Reptilian monsters that weren’t weak to coldness wouldn’t be unusual at all due to the fact that monsters were different from normal living beings, and it was possible that fire dragons were such monsters, though I had no idea if they actually existed or not. I stood back up and walked over to the reptila’s body before I flipped it over and pulled its spear out of its body.

“Yeah, this spear is a really good one. I guess I’ll use it in place of my broken spear. All that’s left is for us to retrieve the boss monster’s magicite,” I said. “What should we do about the other parts of the boss monster, Estelle? Some of them might be worth a decent amount of money, so—”

“Why didn’t you run away, Sai?” Estelle asked.

I stopped what I was doing and turned around after I heard Estelle’s voice behind me. Estelle looked at my face for a moment before she averted her gaze, as if she was a bit confused by my actions.

“To be honest, the battle against the boss monster could have easily gone the other way,” said Estelle. “You had plenty of opportunities to run away, Sai. Why didn’t you do so? I wouldn’t have blamed you if you’d fled from here.”



“I will never flee or abandon you.” There had been some words that I hadn’t been able to muster out of my mouth when we first met each other, and I voiced those words now with a firm conviction to my voice. “If I do flee, then it won’t be alone. I’ll flee with you, Este—I mean, we’ll flee together as a party, and I want you to believe me on this.”

Sure, I hesitated with my choice of words halfway through, but I’m not used to saying these kinds of things! I didn’t have a girlfriend back in Japan, and I didn’t have any friends that were girls either! Damn it. I bet someone like Kamiya would be able to come up with some smooth words with ease in situations like this... However, it seemed like my awkward words were actually somewhat effective.

“...I see. If you’re that confident, then I suppose I’ll have some faith in you, Sai,” said Estelle.

Estelle looked at me straight into my eyes and smiled in a way as if a budding flower had just blossomed.

★★★★★★★★★

Nothing of note had happened past the boss room. The only floors that Estelle and I had struggled on were the fifteenth and fourteenth floors. Estelle’s map had become useful as a reference once we had reached the thirteenth floor, and that had greatly increased our travel speed. We eventually got past the tenth floor and were about to reach the ninth floor when something of note actually happened.

“Sai?! Is that you, Sai?! Are you okay?! We’re here to rescue you!”

The party of four muscular guys that were very familiar to me appeared after I heard some nostalgic voices, and we were able to bask in the light of the sun not too long after that for the first time in a few dozen days.

Afterword

It's been a long time, and a heroine character with animal ears has finally appeared in Volume 7! Yay! It's also the first time that art of a heroine with animal ears has appeared on the cover of a volume! Huh? What about Riva? I mean, she's in a different category, so yeah. It's not like I wrote her because I had no idea if this series would last long enough for Mary and Metea to show up, nope! Huh? What about Kaho? I mean, she's also in a different category. Fox ears are cute, and she's one of my favorite characters, but she's a side story character, so yeah. Huh? What about Touya? He doesn't count at all. Sure, he might have acted like a heroine back in Volume 5, but it wasn't actually Touya himself controlling his own body during those scenes, so that doesn't count, right? On a side note, I tried to make Mary and Metea show up in Volume 6 so that I could see Nekobyou Neko-san's wonderful art for them, but I gave up on that idea after I realized that it was physically impossible to do so. With that in mind, I'm really glad that Volume 7 got published! I really appreciate your cute art for Mary and Metea, Nekobyou Neko-san!

While we're on the topic of art, let's talk about a certain character that was very unlucky in this volume in terms of art. The character that had character design art drawn for her, the character that showed up on the cover, and the character that only had one spoken line before she was knocked out in one hit! Umezono-san never showed up on the cover of a volume and never got any art drawn for her, but even she got more scenes than that character! Umezono-san did get an illustration in this volume, however. In fact, I received drawings for Umezono's character design way back in Volume 2, but she finally got to see the light of the day here in Volume 7. On the other hand, I have also received drawings for the Baronet of Reed's character design, but those ended up being scrapped. He won't show up again anyway, and it's not like anyone really wants to see him, right? Sorry about this, Nekobyou Neko-san. However, the unlucky character that I mentioned just now might show up again in a future volume, or maybe she won't!

Now, then, the side stories of this volume were about how Touya and Sai became real men in different ways. I don't think there's any need for me to talk about Touya's adventures in the side story, however. I tried my best to write the side story with a smutty theme, and I hope it worked out. As for Sai, he has some cool scenes, and he's on the path of a standard heroic protagonist. Don't worry, Sai, I think you're cooler than Nao is! However, whether or not you can get some romantic scenes with Estelle depends on how long the light novel version of this series can last for, so good luck! Last but not least, I would like to thank all of the readers for purchasing Volume 7 of *To Another World... with Land Mines!* It's thanks to all your support that another volume was able to be published, and I hope you will all continue to offer your support. I'd like to end on this note, and let's hopefully meet again some time in future.

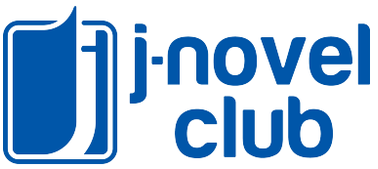
Itsuki Mizuho


story
Itsuki Mizuho
art
Nekobyou Neko
To Another World... with LAND MINES!
7


Nao
Ishuca
Remi
“Well, she was curious about what we were doing,” I said.
“Sorry to keep you wai— oh, Remi? Why is she here?”
The calm before the storm—


The root of all evil—
"The annual exclusive sale of holy water will now begin!"
"I apologize for the wait!"
"What's going on over there?" Touya asked.
We were all pretty confused, but it seemed like the stallholder had the answers to our questions.
"Those people are believers of the Holy Satomi Sect. They're a huge nuisance, but..."
"The Holy Satomi Sect? Really?" I asked.
"When that many people gather in one place, won't it block the thoroughfares?" Haruka asked. "Won't the authorities try to crack down on them?"
Haruka
Mary
Metea
"Meat?! Yeah, I love meat!" Metea exclaimed. "I can eat a ton!"
Metea's eyes were shining with excitement as she reached out and received a plate from Haruka. Smiling, she grabbed a spoon and began to dig into the stew.
Two sisters who lost their dad—


Touya gets laid—
The brothels had wide entrances so you could see all the beautiful women sitting in a row inside.
Hmm. Well, actually, a more accurate way to put it would be that there are some beautiful women sitting in a row. It all comes down to personal taste, but let's just say there's a lot of...variation in their looks.
Touya
To Another World... with LAND MINES!
7



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To Another World... with Land Mines! Volume 7

by Itsuki Mizuho

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