

WRITTEN BY
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029

2
novel



KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR

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– Bear Bear Bear Kuma –

- VOLUME 2 -

-AUTHOR-

Kumanano

-ILLUSTRATOR-

029

[Seven Seas]



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Seven Seas Entertainment

KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR Vol. 2

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Illustrated by 029

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Skills

► Yuna's Status_

► FANTASY WORLD LANGUAGE

The fantasy world's language will sound like Japanese.

Spoken words are conveyed to the other party in the fantasy world language.

► FANTASY WORLD LITERACY

The ability to read the fantasy world writing.

Written words become the fantasy world's words.

► BEAR EXTRADIMENSIONAL STORAGE

The white bear's mouth opens into infinite space. It can hold (eat) anything.

However, it cannot hold (eat) living things.

Time will stop for objects that are inside of it.

Anything that is put into the extradimensional storage can be pulled out at any time.

► BEAR IDENTIFICATION

By looking through the bear eyes on the Bear Clothes' hood, one can see the effects of a weapon or tool.

Doesn't work without wearing the hood.

► BEAR DETECTION

Using the wild abilities of bears, can detect monsters or people.

► BEAR MAP

Any area looked at by the bear eyes can be made into a map.

► BEAR SUMMONING

Bears can be summoned from the bear gloves.

A black bear can be summoned from the black glove.

A white bear can be summoned from the white glove.

► BEAR TRANSPORTER GATE

By setting up a gate, can move between gates.

When more than three gates are in place, can travel to a location by picturing it.

This gate can only be opened with the bear hand.

Magic

► BEAR LIGHT

Mana collected in the bear glove creates a light in the shape of a bear.

► BEAR PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENT

Routing mana through the bear gear allows for physical enhancement.

► BEAR FIRE MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use fire elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WATER MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use water elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WIND MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use wind elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR EARTH MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use earth elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

 Equipment▶ **BLACK BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

Attack glove, increases power based on the user's level.

▶ **WHITE BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

Defense glove, increases defense based on the user's level.

▶ **BLACK BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**▶ **WHITE BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

Increases speed based on the user's level.

Prevents fatigue when walking long distances based on the user's level.

▶ **BLACK AND WHITE BEAR CLOTHES (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

Appears to be a onesie. Reversible.

FRONT: BLACK BEAR CLOTHES

Increases physical and magic resistance based on the user's level.

Gives heat and cold resistance.

REVERSE: WHITE BEAR CLOTHES

Automatically restores health and mana while worn. Amount and speed based on the user's level.

Gives heat and cold resistance.

▶ **BEAR UNDERWEAR (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

Won't get dirty no matter how much they're used.

An excellent item that won't retain sweat or smells.

Will grow with the user.

CHAPTER 27

THE RUMORED BEAR

THE STREET where I set up shop became infamous in a matter of days. It made sense; a bear-shaped house with a mysterious, bear-suited inhabitant springing up in the empty lot from out of nowhere would give anyone pause. Tons of people started coming by to ogle the bear house from afar. As a result, I wasn't going outside much. I *did* go out for food the day after I settled in, but since then, I'd gotten in the habit of cooking at home.

"Yuna, I finished the butchering for today."

Since Fina came by every day after I asked her to do my butchering, I decided that, as a rule, she had to rest for a day after three days of work. I also decided that I'd limit the butchering to five monsters a day. Otherwise, Fina would just keep her head down and work herself to the bone. If she kept it to five, she'd finish her work in half a day.

"Thanks. Be careful on your way home."

"I will. Aren't you going to work, Yuna?"

"I'll go sometime..."

If I was in my previous world, turning into a recluse wouldn't be an issue, but I couldn't stay like that forever here. I decided to go to the guild first thing tomorrow. I needed to slay some monsters for Fina to butcher, anyway.

The next morning, I followed through on my decision.

"Oh, Ms. Yuna! You've finally come back," Helen yelled at me as I entered the hall.

Why did the guild have to be this annoying?

"Good morning, Helen," I greeted her, heading over to her desk.

“Really now, where have you been lately? We’ve been waiting for you.”

“Waiting for me?”

“Yes. We have a quest you’ve been nominated for.”

“Me? Nominated for a quest?”

“It came from a Lord Cliff Fochrosé.”

“Who’s that?”

No one I knew went by that name. It was my first time even hearing it.

“You don’t know who he is? Count Fochrosé presides over this town.”

“He’s the lord?”

If he was a count and a lord, that made him part of the aristocracy. Someone like that had sent me a quest? In manga and novels, aristocracy were always just as much trouble as royalty. I’d rather keep my nose clean. That was why...

“Pass.”

“Huh?”

“I refuse.”

“Huh?”

“I’m heading home.” I turned around.

“W-wait just a moment, please,” Helen leaned out from the desk and grabbed my bear suit.

“What?”

“What are you going home for?”

“I’m going home to sleep.”

“It’s still morning.”

“When I go to sleep has nothing to do with you, does it, Helen?”

“In that case, please listen to me before you go to bed. You haven’t been by much lately, and Lord Fochrosé’s envoy has stopped by several times.”

“Not my problem.”

“Please just listen to what I have to say.”

“No way!”

“Pleeease.” Helen tightened her grip.

“Once I hear you out, can I turn it down?”

“Why are you so against doing this?”

“My grandmother’s dying wish was for me not to get involved with the aristocracy or royalty.”

“What kind of last request is that?”

“Well, aristocrats and royalty will kill people right away when they don’t like someone, or they’ll imprison them. Or if they find a pretty girl, they’ll lust after her body and threaten her if she refuses them. They’ll charge people with crimes they didn’t commit, take the populace’s money, and use that money to have their way with things. That’s the kind of people they are. Plus, they’ve got arrogant, stubborn kids who expect everything to go exactly the way they want and throw their weight around to get it.”

“What kind of thinking is that?”

“Am I wrong?”

“There certainly are some aristocrats like that. But Lord Fochrosé is different. He is a kind and decent person.”

“You’ve met him before?”

“I’ve seen him. And I haven’t heard any terrible rumors about him, so he’s fine.”

“But on the other hand, if he just killed them, no one would know. Dead men tell no tales, so the saying goes.”

“Why is that what your mind goes to?”

I couldn’t tell her that I’d been influenced by manga and novels.

“Hey, what’s with all this early-morning commotion?”

As Helen and I argued, the clump of muscles (the Guildmaster) came over from the back.

“Guildmaster!”

“Helen, you know that it gets busy in the mornings. What are you doing?”

“This isn’t my fault. I want to tell Yuna about the designated quest Lord Fochrosé has nominated her for, but she has strange prejudices against the aristocracy and won’t even hear what the job is about.”

They weren’t prejudices. In manga and novels, they were facts.

“Prejudices?”

“She’s saying all these things about how the aristocracy kills people they don’t like and demands the bodies of beautiful women, and how their children are arrogant and stubborn.”

“Well, that’s for sure,” the Guildmaster said.

“Guildmaster!”

“Right, sorry. There definitely are aristocrats like that, but Cliff is different, so you can rest easy.”

Cliff? I thought. Is he really allowed to be on a first-name basis with the aristocracy like that?

“You’re completely sure?”

"Yeah. Plus, I know the guy."

I supposed it made sense for the Guildmaster to know the lord.

"Please do it," said Helen. "If you turn it down, you'll put his trust in the guild in jeopardy." She switched into a fierce two-handed grip. I got the impression she wouldn't let go until I accepted.

"Ummm. Okay, I got it. I'll just hear you out."

"Thank you so very much. But actually, there's nothing to tell you. He has just ordered you to come to his house."

"What now?"

That was a hundred times more sketchy. If he tried to pull something while no one was around to see...

"You haven't got anything to worry about. I think he just wants to meet the bear that everyone's been talking about."

"That who's been talking about?"

"You've become a bit of a celebrity in this town, Ms. Yuna."

Well, I thought, I guess a person would get famous walking around town in a bear onesie, but I don't think that's enough reason to summon me.

"Just give in this time around," said the Guildmaster. "You've slain hordes of wolves and goblins—a goblin king, even—alone, in a bear suit. That's ignoring the fact that you built that bear house and conjure bears to get around and crush your enemies. That's going to get you in the gossip mill. Even a lord couldn't help wanting to meet you after hearing about that, right?"

"What was that about a bear house?" It seemed that Helen wasn't up to date on my business.

"You don't know? She rented some land and built a house on it. It looks like a bear from the outside. On top of that, she supposedly built it without anybody noticing, so she's been the hot topic of the town."

“I had no idea. I will go take a look sometime.”

No, you don't have to, I thought.

All I was doing was completing quests like a regular adventurer, making a (bear) house like normal with magic, going slaying on my (bear) rides, and wearing my normal (bear) clothes while walking around town.

“Can’t I just say no?” I didn’t want to meet him. I just wanted to go home.

“Who knows?” said the Guildmaster. “Adventurers don’t normally reject quests from the aristocracy. If you’re going to turn him down, your only option might be to skip town.”

“What a pain.” That was all I could say.

“Don’t say that. You’ve just tickled his fancy. If it’s just a meeting, you might as well go see him.”

“Well if I *were* to meet him, when should I do it? A lord isn’t exactly going to have spare time.”

“Yes, he has informed us of a few days that would work. Either tomorrow or the afternoon three days from now would be ideal.”

If he was that busy, he didn’t have to go out of his way to meet me.

“I won’t let you go until I hear you say that you’ll accept the quest.” Helen still had my outfit in her immovable clutches.

“I got it. I’ll go meet him. That’s all I’ve got to do, right?”

“Will you really? Thank you so much.”

She finally let go. Without any other options, I ended up deciding to go meet him the following afternoon.

What a pain, I thought again.

CHAPTER 28

THE BEAR GOES TO THE LORD'S RESIDENCE

THE NEXT DAY, I followed Helen's directions to the lord's mansion. A guard with a scary-looking face was posted at its outer gates. She *had* told them that I'd be heading over today, right? This whole thing was a pain in the butt, but I resigned myself to it and approached the gate.

The guard turned and locked his eyes on me. He definitely thought I was suspicious, and it wasn't like he had any choice. Somebody wearing a bear onesie was approaching him, in a world where onesies didn't exist.

"What business do you have here?" He scanned me from head to toe.

"I'm the adventurer, Yuna. I was called here by the lord."

"You're the one... I heard about that. I'll need you to show me your guild card to confirm your identity."

Oh, good. I suppose you'd have to be *real* stupid to summon someone and not warn the staff they were coming. After he finished checking my guild card, the guard led me all the way to the entrance, where a maid in her early twenties took over.

So such maids really do exist, I thought. She was even wearing the picture-perfect black and white outfit. People with a real specific fetish would be ecstatic right around now.

The maid was clearly surprised by the sight of me, but immediately recomposed herself. She told me her name was Lala and, after lightly bowing her head, asked me to follow her. Lala walked silently through the mansion, stopped in front of a door, and knocked on it.

"Master Cliff, I have brought the adventurer Yuna."

"Come in," a voice answered from within.

"Excuse me." Lala opened the door and urged me inside. I obeyed, and she shut the

door behind me.

The room was expansive, containing a large desk and a table flanked by a pair of sofas. It felt like an office. A blond man in his thirties sat behind the desk.

“Please, take a seat on the sofa over there,” he directed.

I did as he asked.

“Looks like you really are dressed like a bear.”

The man came over and sat on the sofa across from me. A wry smile took over his mouth as he looked at me. Looked like he really was some slimy aristocrat.

“If you just called me over to laugh at me, then I’m going home.”

“Oh, no. I apologize.”

“What did you want with me, then?”

“I just wanted to meet the bear everyone was talking about.” Hadn’t the Guildmaster said basically the same thing? “My daughter wanted to meet you, too.”

“Your daughter?”

“I hear she spied you once in town. Since then, nothing delights her more than to have me relate all the reports about you that make their way to me.”

Wait a sec! Aren’t there privacy laws against that?!

“So does that mean you called me here for your daughter?”

“Partly, yes, but I also simply wanted to see the bear that everyone’s talking about.”

Like I’m a zoo exhibit, I thought. “My name isn’t ‘the bear’—it’s Yuna.”

“Right. I’m Cliff. You must already be aware of this, but I’m the lord of the town.”

“Well, are you satisfied now that you’ve seen me?”

“Don’t be mad. You’re ruining your adorable face.”

It was kind of embarrassing to be called adorable in a face-to-face conversation. I pulled my bear hood low over my head, so he couldn’t see me.

“Still, I find it hard to believe like a little girl like you could have possibly slayed a goblin king and tigerwolves.”

“Maybe it’s all a lie.”

“I did some looking into you before summoning you here—since I was going to have you meet my daughter.”

He’d been investigating me? That didn’t make me feel great, though there wasn’t anything I could have done about it.

There was a knock at the door. “I have brought Madame Noir,” Lala called.

“Come in.”

A cute girl about Fina’s age, with long, blonde hair, entered the room. “Father, is it true that the bear is here?!”

“This is my daughter Noir. She’s been wanting to meet you.”

When she caught sight of me, the little girl’s eyes glittered. She dashed over to me. “Are you the bear? My name is Noir. Please call me Noa.”

“Umm, I’m Yuna. Could you please call me by my name instead of referring to me as the bear?”

“Got it. Your name is Yuna.”

Noa sat down next to me and looked me up and down.

“Um, may I give you a hug?” she asked, seeming sheepish.

“Sure.”

I would’ve said no to a boy, even if they were a kid, but I couldn’t turn her down such

a cute little girl.

"Thank you so very much."

Noa hugged me. I gave her a pat on her head, which just reached my chest. Between Fina and this, maybe little-sister types were just my thing.

"You're so soft. And you also smell nice." She rubbed her head into my belly. "I saw you in town once, Yuna."

Cliff just said something about that, didn't he?

"I only saw you from afar, but you looked so cute that I couldn't stop looking at you. Since then I have been asking father to tell me about you. I've wanted to meet you for so long!"

"So, what do you want me to do?" I asked Cliff.

"I haven't decided on anything in particular. Why don't you just talk to my daughter?"

"I want to hear about how you defeated the monsters!"

It wasn't that exciting a tale—all I did was sling some magic around. Still, the little girl was clearly desperate for a story, and I didn't want to disappoint her, so I told her about my fights with the goblin king and the tigerwolves, leaving out the grim and unflattering parts. Noa's eyes glittered as she listened to me. Cliff remained silent and sipped his drink.

"That's amazing!"

"You believe me? I might be lying."

"I believe you. My father has told me the same stories, anyway."

"As I said earlier, I looked into you. The least I could do was fact-check what I heard about your accomplishments," Cliff said.

I guessed that since you could determine time of death from a mana gem, the only thing they couldn't verify was whether I'd racked up those kills entirely on my own. Since my well of monster-slaying yarns had run dry, I figured I was done, but Noa was

still watching me.

"May I ask you something, Yuna?" she ventured, as though it were difficult to say.

"What do you need?"

"Um... would you show me your bear summons?"

"My summons?"

"Yes. I've been wanting to see your beast summons ever since I heard about them from my father."

"I'd like to see them as well."

"You sure? Might be dangerous."

"Is that so?" said Cliff.

"Well, I suppose it should be fine as long as you don't try to attack them or hurt me."

"I have no intentions of doing that. I have nothing to gain from attacking you—not to mention that my daughter would hate me if I did."

With Lord Cliff's assent, I decided I'd summon Kumayuru and Kumakyu in the mansion's gardens. Noa led us there happily while Lala trailed behind us.

CHAPTER 29

THE BEAR FINISHES HER QUEST

WE ALL MOVED over to a place I figured was the back of the gardens. The gardens were spacious, as you'd expect of a lord's residence. Apparently, the guards also used it as a training ground, though it was empty at the moment.

"Yuna, is this enough room?"

"This'll do. I'm going to summon them, now. Come, Kumayuru, Kumakyu."

It wasn't like there was a set phrase to summon them, but I tried to come up with something that seemed appropriate. Two giant furballs, one black and one white, exploded out of the bear puppets. They started to move, slowly, turning to show us their faces.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, come over here."

When I called them, they happily trotted over to me. They looked pretty cute when they did, but everyone behind me started making a commotion.

"They're bears. There are bears! Yuna, may I touch them?!" Noa was jumping up and down.

"Madame Noir, that's dangerous! Please keep back!" Lala grabbed Noa's arm, shielding her with her body.

"Lala, please let me go! I can't see the bears! I want to touch them!"

But the maid held her firmly. "Please say something, Master Cliff!"

"I think it should be fine."

"Master Cliff?!"

Since her employer had given the go-ahead, Lala backed off. Freed from the maid's

grip, Noa slowly approached the bears.

“May I really touch them?”

“It’s fine. Give them a gentle pat.”

Noa gently touched Kumayuru. She patted Kumakyu with her other hand. The two bears squinted their eyes at her, seeming pleased.

“They are so warm. And soft!” Noa hugged Kumakyu’s neck.

“Want to ride them?”

“May I really?!”

“Kumakyu, you good?”

Kumakyu lowered itself to the ground by way of reply, making it easier for Noa to get on. Noa cautiously started to climb onto Kumakyu’s back.

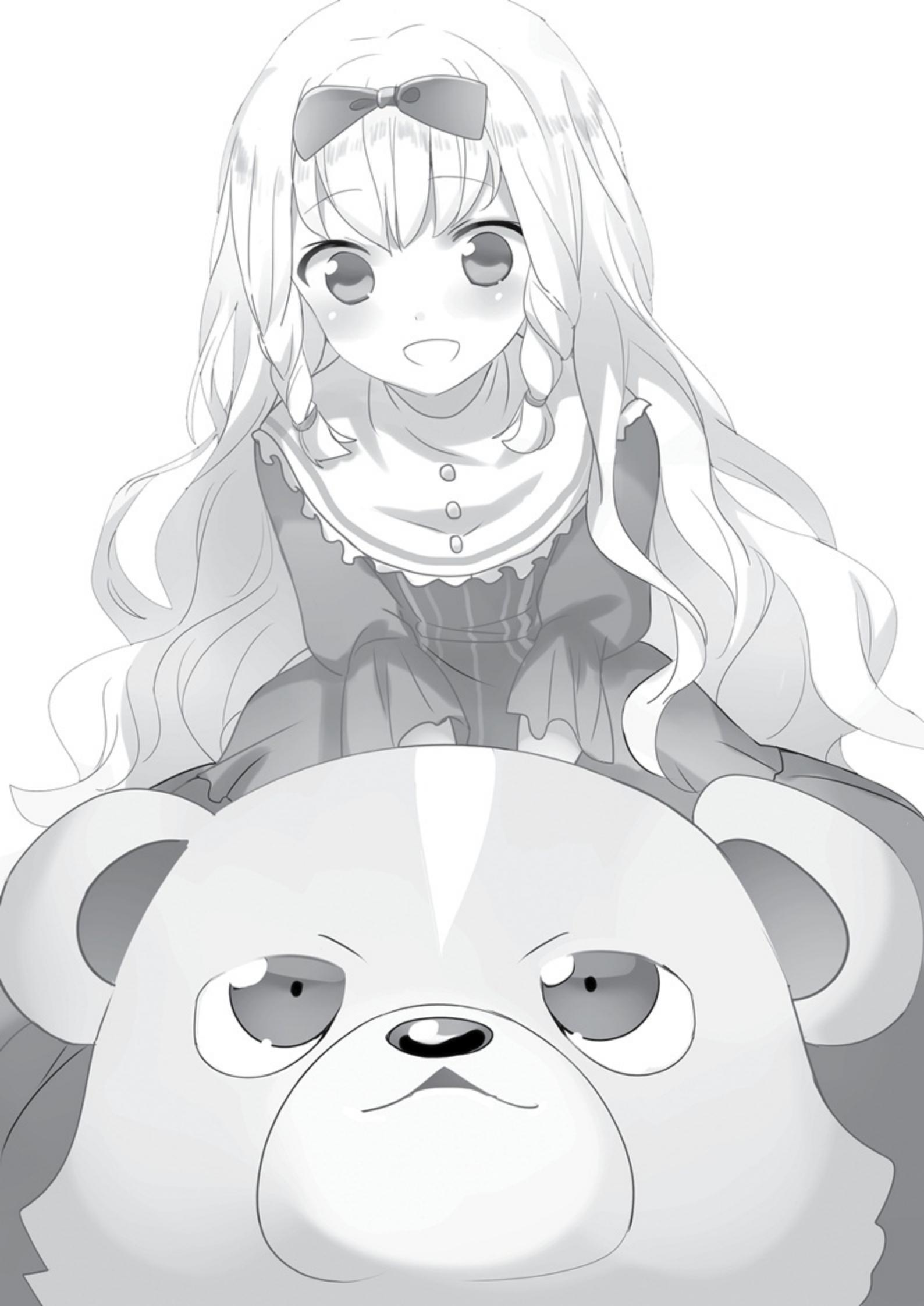
“It’s okay, you won’t fall.”

I lent her a hand and got her mounted. Once Kumakyu made sure Noa was safely settled, the bear slowly stood up.

“Whoa! It’s so high.” She seemed to be enjoying herself. “Yuna, may we take a walk? Just even once around the house?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. Kumakyu, please take good care of Noa.” I didn’t know how big the house was, but I guessed going around it once couldn’t hurt.

Kumakyu cooed quietly in response. With Noa astride its back, the bear started to slowly shamble off.



"M-Madame Noir!" Lala scurried after them in a fluster.

Cliff watched Noa, the maid, and the bear depart. Once they were out of sight, he came over to me.

"Forgive me, but may I touch one too?" he asked.

"I guess," I said. It's not like I could refuse.

Cliff slowly patted Kumayuru. "Oh, the fur feels nice. A great texture, too."

"You want to ride it?"

"May I?"

"Just once around the house, like Noa."

"Right, I understand."

As soon as Cliff was mounted on Kumayuru, he urged the bear on, trying to catch up with Noa. A little while passed before the two of them returned, side by side on their respective bears.

"Yuna, thank you so much. That was so fun!"

"Yes, that was quite a valuable experience for me as well."

Lala followed in the bears' wake, looking haggard. It wasn't my fault though, so I decided not to pay any mind to it.

"Well then," said Cliff as he dismounted, "I have work, so I'm going back to the house. I'll leave Noa with you. Please come back see me before you leave."

Noa had to have taken a liking to Kumakyu, since she was showing no signs of getting off. "This feels so nice..."

The little girl was splayed out on top of Kumakyu. She stroked the bear for a while before her hand stopped moving; I thought it was weird how quiet she was being, so went over to take a look. Noa was fast asleep, snoring quietly. I told Kumakyu to ease its way into the shade of a tree. It wasn't like I could let her sleep out in the sun. Lala

watched Noa with concern.

"There's no need to worry," I said. "Still, we don't want her to catch cold. Have you got something to put on her?"

Lala rushed back to the house and brought back a blanket, but since Kumakyu was so tall, she couldn't get it over Noa.

"Kumayuru, could you help her out?"

Kumayuru put its forepaws under Lala's arms and hoisted her up so she could tuck Noa in.

"Thank you so very much, Master Kumayuru."

It looked like she'd finally stopped wigging out. Lala and I sat down with Noa in the shade as she slept. I pulled out a small cask of oran berry juice—I'd gotten attached to the stuff, since it tasted so much like orange juice—and two wooden cups from my bear storage. I magicked up some ice and served it on the rocks; Lala took a long draft of hers.

"This is delicious."

"Glad to hear it."

"I needed the pick-me-up. Thank you."

"I have more, so drink as much as you'd like."

"They're much more docile than I expected." Lala looked at Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

"Well, they are summons, after all. They're not like wild bears." Then again, it wasn't like I'd ever seen a wild bear before.

"Yes, of course. Madame Noir seems to enjoy their company. We are grateful for your service."

"You don't need to thank me. This *is* supposed to be a job."

Lala explained that she had been Noa's caretaker since the girl was five, and her charge

was very precious to her. After we talked for a while, Noa started to stir.

"Morning. Are you awake?"

"Huh, where am I...?" Noa rubbed her eyes as she looked around.

"You dozed right off, Noa."

"I did. Kumakyu just felt so nice I fell right asleep."

"Madame Noir, may we head inside soon? We don't want you to catch a cold."

"I want to stay with Kumakyu."

Noa was clearly set on sticking with the bear. That wouldn't do, so I gave Kumakyu a subtle signal as I said, "Kumakyu is tired. Will you let it rest?"

At that, the bear cooed quietly, pretending to be sleepy.

"Yes, that's right," Lala chimed in. "Madame Noir, Master Kumakyu was making sure that you did not fall down as you slept. Please allow Master Kumakyu to rest."

Kumakyu turned its head slightly to Noa's place and looked at her with teary eyes. Noa looked back. I could see the gears in her head turning.

"...okay, I understand. Sorry, Kumakyu." She climbed off the bear and gently patted it.
"Rest well."

"Kumakyu, Kumayuru, that's all for now." I unsummoned the bears, sending them back into the gloves.

"Well then, Madame Noir, shall we head back to your room?"

"I'm going to pay Cliff a visit."

"Oh, Yuna? Are you going home already?"

"Well, my job here is done." I was pretty sure I'd fulfilled the quest.

"Yuna," said Noa, "please eat dinner with us!"

She grabbed my bear glove. I tried to turn her down, but she just dragged me by the hand back into the mansion, where we ran back into Cliff and got to talking about dinner. Eventually, Cliff also invited me to stay and eat with them, so I did.

I excused myself after dinner. They asked me to stay the night, but I politely turned them down.

“Yuna, you have to come visit again, okay?”

Noa and Lala saw me to the gate. After promising Noa I’d return, we parted.

CHAPTER 30

FINA WORKS

A FEW DAYS AGO, I went with Yuna to go tigerwolf slaying.

While Yuna went to work, I stayed in her bear house and worked on breaking down her old kills. At one point, I went out to look for herbs for Mom, but almost got lost. I only made it back thanks to Kumakyu.

I asked Kumakyu to wait outside, went to the storehouse, and pulled a wolf from the cold storage. It was small for a monster, but big for me, and I struggled to lay it out on the table. Yuna had set up a stool for me, so I didn't have to stand on tiptoe.

I used my skinning knife to clean the pelt and separate the meat into cuts. I also took out the mana gem and set it aside. The parts we don't need go into the trash bin. Apparently, the trash bin is a very deep hole; Yuna told me to make sure I don't fall in.

It's scary, so I made sure to be careful around it.

After I butchered a few wolves, the storehouse door opened. Yuna was back. I wondered if she already beat the tigerwolf? I wasn't even done with the first batch yet. Yuna told me she wanted me to pull out the tigerwolf's mana gem. It was part of my job, so I said I would, of course.

I was surprised by how massive the tigerwolf was. Yuna was so cool!

A tigerwolf is the same type of monster as a wolf, so its mana gem is in the same spot, kind of between the heart and liver. It was about twice the size of a wolf's and had a different sort of luster to it. I washed it with water until it was clean and gave it to Yuna.

We ate lunch, and I got back to butchering wolves. Yuna said she was going to sleep a while. Maybe she was tired from fighting the tigerwolf?

I decided to try my hardest, too. I'd work hard to get all the butchering done.

Once I wrapped up, I went to the second floor to go wake Yuna. I didn't know which room she was sleeping in, so I knocked on the door of the closest room and ducked inside when I didn't hear anything. There she was. She looked really comfortable.

I shook her awake. "Yuna, Yuna."

She woke up.

When she got out of bed, her clothes were pure white, exactly like Kumakyu. She looked cute in her black bear outfit, but she looked cute as a white bear, too. I guess she can reverse her clothes to switch between being a black bear or a white bear?

After I told her I was done with my work, we ended up going home. Yuna made the bear house disappear. Magic sure is amazing. We went back on Kumayuru. Apparently if she uses just one of the bears, the other one gets grumpy. I think I understand how they feel.

The gate guard was so surprised. Anyone would be, seeing the three of us, but the bear was cute, so I didn't think he should be too worried.

Since I was going to work the next day too, I went to Yuna's place at the inn, but she apparently didn't have anywhere to process the bodies. Since it would be a pain to have to leave town every time we needed any butchering done, she visited the adventurers' guild to ask them about getting a space of our own. They told us to see the trade guild, so we ended up heading there.

It was becoming a really big deal. I started to feel nervous.

When we got to the trade guild, everyone looked at Yuna. That bear outfit sure does stand out. Yuna talked to the reception lady at the desk for a couple of minutes and walked away with a plot of land. The lady took us to the empty plot, and Yuna plopped down the bear house there.

No matter how many times I saw it, it was amazing.

I got to work right away. That day, I butchered tigerwolves. It was supposed to be

pretty similar to working with wolves, but even a kid like me knows tigerwolf pelts are expensive. I had to be really careful removing them, or they'd turn out worthless. Still, I tried my hardest, and when I wrapped up for the day, I felt I'd done an okay job.

For a few days straight, I went to Yuna's house and wore away at the pile of bodies.

Then, one day while I was in the middle of cleaning and separating meat, I felt dizzy for a second. Just when I thought I might be in trouble, I collapsed.

Unluckily, Yuna saw and ran over to me. She looked at my hand and got this really concerned look. I was bleeding. I must have cut my hand a little when I fell. It hurt some. Not that much.

Yuna touched the place where I was bleeding. I think she did something magic. It felt warm, and then it stopped hurting, and my cut even disappeared. It was amazing.

She took off the bear glove and put her hand on my forehead. Apparently, I had a fever. She told me to go upstairs and sleep in a bed in one of the rooms for now. When I was lying in bed, she touched my forehead again. That time, she kept her bear gloves on. It felt so nice and soft, and that feeling just got stronger and stronger, until I ended up falling asleep.

It was dark out when I woke up. She told me that she'd made me dinner, and that I should take it home and eat it. Then she told me that I should take the day off tomorrow. Yuna said I could come to her house two days later. She told me that, from now on, I would take a day off from harvesting every three days.

If I did other work on a day off, she told me she wouldn't let me do her butchering anymore. She was worried about my health, so I decided to do as she said.

CHAPTER 31

THE BEAR GOES TO EXAMINE FINA'S MOTHER'S ILLNESS

TODAY WAS A REST DAY. Like Fina, I was taking a break.

I'd been learning all kinds of things this past month, such as that when one of my skills leveled up, the new abilities kicked in right away. Right now, I had seven skills.

Fantasy World Language: Can understand the fantasy world's language. (Life in this world would have been a whole lot more complicated if I hadn't had this.)

Fantasy World Literacy: Able to read and write the fantasy world's script. (This was how I could work at the guild.)

Bear Extradimensional Storage: Storage for anything other than living things. (Despite all my tests, I still hadn't figured out a weight or size cap.)

Bear Identification: Able to see effectiveness of tools and weapons (Well, I guess this would be normal to have in any game).

Bear Detection: The ability to know the position of dangerous monsters and people. (Makes slaying monsters a breeze.).

Bear Map: Automatically generate maps of places I have visited. (An automatic mapping system, just like the kind you find in RPGs. Kept me from getting lost.).

Bear Summoning: Can summon bears from my bear gloves. (All-purpose bears for travel, fighting, or protection. The downside was that I couldn't walk through town with them.)

In addition to skills, I had magic. According to the rules of this world as I understood them, you could learn magic through hard work, but in my case, I could easily use magic by channeling mana through my bears. On the other hand, I couldn't use magic without the bear gear.

Shaping a spell around a mental image had a direct impact on its power and appearance. For example, when I cast a fire spell with a gas-powered torch in mind, I could make a flame that could melt through iron. Even if I showed the people in this world that magic, they probably wouldn't be able to invoke it exactly the same way, since they'd never seen that kind of fire.

Ice was the same. I didn't think they'd be able to imagine the molecules in water freezing. You can only get so specific with a mental image when your understanding of the world is still essentially medieval.

I noticed it again when Fina collapsed. Just like with any other spell, if you imagined the muscle and skin closing up, you could seal a wound with healing magic. I hadn't tested it out yet, but I bet that if you went deeper and pictured the blood vessels and such mending, it would work that much better.

On top of that, there were spells that healed fevers and sickness—the kind of spells that you'd use to remove debuffs like poison and paralysis in games. How much more powerful would that sort of spell be, then, if you were aware and could visualize what germs were?

As I pondered the skills and magic I'd picked up, I heard a noise from the entrance. There was a barrier around the bear house that only let in people I approved of. Right now, Fina was the only one who could enter.

The moment I emerged into the hallway leading to the first floor, Fina leapt out at me.

“Yuna!”

Something felt off. Fina shivered as she latched onto me.

“What’s wrong?” I pulled Fina off and looked down at her face. It was wet with tears; her eyes were bloodshot.

“Y-yuna, m-my mom...”

“Calm down.”

“My mom is really sick... and even giving her medicine... doesn’t help... I tried going to Mr. Gentz, but... he said he’d go out to find medicine and hasn’t come back... Wh-what should I do?”

“Okay, I got it. Could you take me to your house?” There was a chance I could cure her, though I didn’t like the idea of testing my theory in such a precarious situation.

Fina and I headed to her house.

The house was small. Did Fina really live here with her mother and little sister? In the bedroom, Fina’s mother lay very still, breathing shallowly. A small girl was crying by the bed, and Gentz stood with her.

“Mr. Gentz?!”

“I’m sorry I was so late.”

“Did you find medicine for my mom?”

“Sorry,” Gentz said. He lowered his head.

Fina’s mother reached out with a trembling hand and weakly patted her daughter’s head. “Gentz, if anything... happens to me... please... take care of my daughters.”

“Wh-what are you saying? What’s supposed to happen to you?!” Mr. Gentz yelled.

“Gentz... I’ve troubled you... so much. Thank you so much for the medicine and for what you did for Fina.” Sweat beaded on the woman’s forehead as she spoke.

“It’s okay. If you rest, you’ll get better. Stop trying to talk. I’ll look after these two, so you just focus on healing.”

“Shuri... Fina... let me see your faces.”

“Mom!” The two girls said at once, running to the bedside.

“I’m so sorry I couldn’t do anything for you. And thank you, Fina, Shuri.”

Pain mingled with her smile. She seemed at her limit. She screwed her eyes shut.

I tried to clap my hands to calm everyone down, but hitting the bear gloves together didn’t make any sound. They noticed what I was doing, anyway.

“Yuna?”

“I don’t know if I can help, but I’m going to take a look at her, so move aside.”

Fina drew her sister away by the hand, holding her while she cried. I stood beside the bed and looked at Fina’s mother. She was barely in her thirties and wasting away. She probably hadn’t been eating much.

“Please hold on just a little longer.”

I put both my hands over the suffering mother’s body and poured mana into both my bear gloves. I imagined the virus, or germ, or pathogen, or whatever it was, being purged from all her cells.

“Cure.”

I didn’t need to say the word, but it made it easier to channel my will. The spell wreathed her body in light. The lines of pain steadily disappeared from her face, and she started to breathe more easily.

Had it worked? She still looked weak.

“Heal,” I chanted, this time visualizing a spell to restore her stamina.

Fina’s mother’s eyes opened slowly. She sat up in bed like nothing at all had happened.

“...it doesn’t hurt anymore?”

“Mom!” Her two daughters ran over to her.

“Looks like it worked.”

"Miss, what'd you do? You looked like some kind of powerful priest or cleric—no, that doesn't matter right now. Whatever you did, thank you," Gentz said, his eyes welling up as he grabbed my hand.

"Yuna, thank you!" Fina was crying, too.

"Excuse me, thank you very much. Are you the one who healed me?"

"Please take it easy for a while," I said. "We don't know if you're completely healed yet." After all, all I'd done was restore some of her stamina with magic. I hadn't brought her wasted-away body back to peak condition.

"Then how much do I owe you? As you can see, I don't have any way to pay you right now..."

"Wait! I'll pay her. Miss, I can't do it right now, but I'm sure I'll be able to. Please don't do anything to this family!"

What kind of villain did they think I was? *I healed you, so pay me! If you don't, I'll take your daughters!* Well, if I were a villain *and* a lolicon, I guess it might go something like this...

"Heh heh heh, if you want to pay me back, well you've got two charming daughters, haven't you?"

Obviously, I needed to clear up the misunderstanding.

"I don't need money. I just wanted to protect Fina's smile," I said, and gave Fina a pat on the head. Apparently, I'd said something really moving, because Fina immediately hugged me. I felt kind of guilty...

"But..."

"Right, if there's anything I can do for you, just tell me," Gentz said.

"I'll do anything once I've gotten my energy back."

Anything! Their words, not mine.

"In that case, I'd like the two of you do something that only you can do."

“ ”

“ ”

I looked at Fina and her sister.

“Fina, go buy something yummy with your sister. Make sure you have your mom eat something that’ll nourish her.”

I pulled money out of my bear storage and handed it over to Fina.

“But...”

“It’s fine. Your mom’s fine, so go along.”

“Okay, I got it. Shuri, let’s go.”

I watched them leave the house holding each other’s hands and once again looked to Gentz and their mother.

“What are you going to make us do?”

“I want you two to live together for Fina and her sister’s sakes.”

“...huh?”

“...what?”

Their mouths hung open and stuck there.

“I know that you like Fina’s mom, Gentz.” I’d heard it direct from Fina.

“Y-you...”

“Nuh-uh. Even Fina already knows. And you trust Gentz enough to leave your children with him, so it’s not like you *don’t* like him.”

“Well, that’s...” Her face reddened slightly.

“And it’s not like you’d be upsetting those kids. Besides, Gentz works at the guild, so

he's got a steady income. I'm kind of worried about you three women living on your own. I'd feel more at peace if Gentz was with you, you know?"

"But..."

"You like Fina's mom, don't you, Gentz?"

"That's..." Gentz gulped. Then, he looked at Fina's mother. "Tiermina, w-would you do the honor of marrying me? I've loved you for a long time. It's an insult to Roy, but I love you!"

"Gentz... thank you."

The two of them deserved some privacy. I left the room quietly—or at least, tried to, before Gentz called out to me.

"Where are you going?"

"Home. The rest of this is a family issue."

"I see. So, um thanks," he thanked me sheepishly.

"Make sure you do a proper job of looking after Fina and everyone."

"Yeah, just leave it up to me."

"If she's not feeling well again, just call me."

I left Fina's house behind and went home.

CHAPTER 32

FINA ASKS THE BEAR FOR SOMETHING

WHEN I WOKE UP in the morning, Mom was in pain. She's usually in pain, but this was different. She wasn't conscious. No matter how many times I called her name, she didn't answer. I tried over and over to get her to take her medicine, but even after she finally got it down, nothing changed. There was a ton of sweat running down her forehead.

My little sister Shuri was so worried. She stuck by the bed, calling *Mom, Mom*. I couldn't let things stay like this.

"Shuri, take care of Mom."

"Sis?" She gave me a worried look.

"I'm going to Mr. Gentz. It'll be okay. Mr. Gentz will be able to do something."

I gently patted her head and ran to Mr. Gentz's house. He wouldn't be at work yet. It was a good thing there weren't many people out on the street yet. When I made it there, I banged on the door really hard.

"Mr. Gentz! Mr. Gentz!"

Mr. Gentz came out when I knocked. "What's wrong? Why are you here so early in the morning?"

"It's Mom."

"What happened to Tiermina?!"

"She's hurting. Worse than before." I couldn't stop crying anymore. "She isn't getting better."

"I'll be right there."

Mr. Gentz started running. I ran as fast as I could, too. By the time I got to my house, I couldn't see Mr. Gentz anymore, since he was running ahead of me. Inside, I saw Mr. Gentz calling out to Mom. She didn't respond.

Mr. Gentz turned to me and Shuri. "I'm going to find medicine. You watch over your mom."

Shuri and I held mom's hands. I thought, *Please, save my mom. I'd do anything I can. Please don't take her away from us. Please...*

"Mom..."

"Fina, Shuri..."

"Mom!"

Mom was awake again. My prayers had reached someone.

"Fina, Shuri, I'm sorry."

Why was she apologizing? She hadn't done anything wrong. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Mom..."

"This might be it for me. If I die, look to Gentz. I'm sure he'll help you."

It seemed like it hurt her to talk. She was going to die? I didn't want to think about it.

"I'm sorry, you two. I'm so sorry that you had a mom like this."

She held our hands with her weak grip. I wondered how long it had been since Mr. Gentz left.

He wasn't back. It might have just been a few minutes, but it felt like hours had gone by already. *Please hurry home*, I wished again.

"Ugh."

The pain must have been getting stronger. *Someone, help*. Shuri's little hand squeezed

mine hard. I couldn't give up.

"Shuri." I looked into Shuri's eyes. She looked uneasy. "Keep holding Mom's hand."

I took the hand she was holding mine with and moved it to Mom's.

"Sis?"

"Maybe Yuna can do something."

I left Shuri to take care of her and ran over to Yuna's house. I wasn't allowed to be tired yet. I could see the bear house. I opened the door without knocking.

"Yuna!"

Yuna was there. "What's wrong?"

"Y-Yuna, m-my mom..."

I couldn't do it. My voice wouldn't come out.

"Calm down."

"My mom is really sick... and even giving her medicine... doesn't help... I tried going to Mr. Gentz, but... he said he'd go out to find medicine and hasn't come back... wh-what should I do?"

When I saw Yuna's face, I couldn't stop crying. I came all the way here, but Yuna wasn't any kind of doctor. Still, I thought, because this was Yuna, she might be able to do something.

Yuna gently put her hand on my head. "Okay, I got it. Could you take me to your house?" she said with a kind smile.

And I did.

When we got there, Mr. Gentz had returned. Maybe he had gotten the medicine? "Mr. Gentz?!"

“I’m sorry I was so late.”

“Did you find medicine for my mom?”

“Sorry.” Mr. Gentz lowered his head. If it was a medicine that was easy to get, then Mr. Gentz probably would have had it already. He’d already done so much. I couldn’t be mad at him.

I let myself get closer to the bed. Mom looked like she was in so much pain that I almost couldn’t look at her.

“Gentz, if anything... happens to me... please... take care of my daughters.”

“Wh-what are you saying? What’s supposed to happen to you?!” Mr. Gentz yelled.

“Gentz... I’ve troubled you... so much. Thank you so much for the medicine and for what you did for Fina.” “It’s okay. If you rest, you’ll get better. Stop trying to talk. I’ll look after these two, so you just focus on healing.”

“Shuri... Fina... let me see your faces.”

“Mom!” we both cried.

I couldn’t see my mom’s face through my tears. She hugged us close with her weak arms.

“I’m so sorry I couldn’t do anything for you. And thank you, Fina, Shuri.”

She closed her eyes.

“Thank you, Gentz.”

It looked like she couldn’t open her eyes anymore. I held her hand, but she couldn’t grip it back anymore. She couldn’t open her eyes, anymore. Maybe she wouldn’t ever say my name again.

Mom, Mom, Mom.

I couldn’t stop crying.

I heard a weird sound behind me. When I turned around, Yuna was hitting her hands together.

“Yuna?”

“I don’t know if I can help, but I’m going to take a look at her, so move aside.” Yuna pulled us away from the bed. “Please just hold on for a little while,” she said to my mom.

Yuna laid her bear hands on my mom.

“Cure.”

Her body lit up. The glow of the magic was pretty, and I felt warm, as if, just for the moment, I felt the presence of a god there. My mom’s breathing calmed down. I couldn’t believe it. Until that moment, she sounded like she was suffocating, but now her breathing was growing even.

“Heal.”

This time Yuna chanted a different spell. Mom’s eyes slowly opened, and—like nothing had happened at all—she got out of bed.

“...it doesn’t hurt anymore?”

“Mom!”

“Looks like it worked.”

“Miss, what’d you do? You looked like some kind of powerful priest or cleric—no, that doesn’t matter right now. Whatever you did, thank you.” Mr. Gentz thanked Yuna. That was right—I hadn’t thanked her yet!

“Yuna, thank you!”

Mr. Gentz and my mom started asking Yuna how to pay her back. I remembered hearing from Mr. Gentz that the only way to heal my mom’s sickness was to pay a lot of money to a priest. We didn’t have that kind of money.

Yuna saved my mom. I’d risk my life to pay her back, if I had to—but Yuna said

something I didn't expect.

"I don't need money. I just wanted to protect Fina's smile."

I almost started crying again. Would I ever be able to pay back my debt to Yuna while I was still alive?

"But..."

"Right, if there's anything I can do for you, just tell me."

"I'll do anything once I've gotten my energy back."

Right. We couldn't just let things be, even if Yuna said she didn't want anything in return. If I had something I could do, I would do it.

I noticed that the moment that Mom and Mr. Gentz said "anything," the corner of Yuna's mouth twitched up.

"In that case, I'd like the two of you to do something that only you can do." she blurted out.

The air in the room got heavy. What was Yuna going to tell them to do? She looked around the room before settling on me and Shuri.

"Fina, go buy something yummy with your sister. Make sure you have your mom eat something that'll nourish her."

She handed me money. Was Yuna planning on telling my mom and Mr. Gentz to do something she didn't want us to hear? I wanted to know what was happening, but... I also urgently wanted to get my mom something nutritious to eat, like Yuna had said, so I left with Shuri.

CHAPTER 33

THE BEAR EATS ON THE GO

TIERMINA WAS HEALTHY. It might even be safe to say she'd made a complete recovery. She and Gentz ended up following through on their engagement. They were looking for a house where the four of them could live together. Tiermina's was too small, and apparently Gentz had been living in a squalid little bachelor pad.

For whatever reason, Fina and Shuri had decided to crash at the bear house.

"Uhh, so, why're the two of you here?"

"Mr. Gentz—I mean our dad and mom need some time alone—that's what we think."

Were those really the thoughts of a ten-year-old girl?

"Are we being a bother?"

"It's fine, but it's important for all four of you to be together."

"We'll live together once we find a house, so it'll work out."

"But why are you studying?" I asked. Shuri was practicing her alphabet in my living room.

"My mom taught me how to read, but she couldn't teach Shuri while she was sick, and I needed to do the housework and make money."

They called it studying, but it boiled down to looking at characters written on dirty paper. They didn't have anything to write with, much less paper to practice on. All they were doing was memorizing the letters by sight.

"In that case, how about we go get you some proper study materials?"

"Huh?"

“If you study like that, it’ll take you a while to learn anything.”

“But...”

I knew exactly what Fina was thinking. “Don’t worry about the money. It’ll be a present to celebrate the wedding.”

“But it’s Mom who’s getting married.”

“Don’t sweat the details.”

I left with the two of them in tow. They held hands, sticking close to each other. They were good siblings.

We hit up the bookstore first. “Excuse me!” I called out to the old lady who ran the place.

“What is it? I can hear you just fine without all that shouting.”

“Excuse me, but do you have picture books for kids? We’d like to study the alphabet.”

“Let’s see now, I’ve got this, this, and that.”

She brought out three picture books and something that looked like a chart. I decided to buy it all.

Next, we popped down to the general store to pick up some basic writing implements. This left us peckish, so I decided to get something at the stands in the plaza. When we got there, delicious smells wafted to us from the various stalls. The stall nearest the entrance was selling kebabs, or something approximate. They smelled great.

“Three for me, mister.”

“Oh, if it isn’t the bear girl! Three, was it? Here you go! Thanks for everything.”

He handed me three skewers. I stuck one in my mouth and gave the other two to Fina and Shuri.

“Thank you very much.”

“Thank you.”

I scanned the stands for more succulent prey.

“Bear girl! How’d you like some vegetable soup?” I heard someone cry from a nearby stall. Steam rose from a giant pot; again, the smell woke something animal in me.

“Sure. I guess I’ll take three.”

“Come again!”

He served up warm veggie soup in wooden containers we’d have to return. I took the soup and handed it to the girls.

“Bear girl, how does bread with your soup sound?”

“That’s no fair. Bear girl, how about our barbecue?”

All around us, the stand owners leapt into their hard-sell routine.

“How about our fresh-squeezed juice?” A woman selling a baffling selection of fruit juice joined the fray.

“I feel kind of like bread today, so I’ll take three small ones.”

“Right, thank you.”

The man from the first stall handed me my order, thanking me profusely for my patronage, and I apologized to the others.

“I’ll come buy stuff from you next time.”

“It’s fine.”

“You’d better!”

I accepted the bread and went around greeting the stands around me, then sat at an empty bench nearby.

It might just have been because I’d been eating on the go there a lot lately, but I’d gotten to know the people at the stands. I’m sure the bear outfit had something to do with it, but the number of people who would call out to me while I walked around the

plaza increased by the day.

As much as I appreciated all the attention, my plaza visits were becoming enough of a habit to make me worry about my weight. I tried pinching my belly through the bear suit. Sure would be nice if I'd had a skill that kept me from getting fat.

"Let's chow down."

"Thank you, Yuna."

"Thank you."

Shuri mimicked her sister and thanked me. They were both so cute! We took our time eating our soup and bread together.

It was hearty soup, more veggie than broth. The ingredients in this world were pretty similar to the ones in Japan. There were carrots, daikon, cabbage, cucumbers, and other veggies that I only caught glimpses of but tasted familiar enough, but the things that were important to me as a Japanese person—rice, soy sauce, and miso—were nowhere to be seen. I longed for ramen and noodles. It looked like they had flour. *Maybe, I thought, they at least have udon somewhere?*

At any rate, it was delicious enough. After we ate, we decided to go back to the bear house to study. Later, Tiermina and Gentz would find out that I'd taken them out to eat and I'd get in trouble for making the kids miss out on the dinner they'd prepared.

Beware overeating when dining on the go.

They still thanked me for the study supplies, though.

CHAPTER 34

THE BEAR HELPS MOVE

FINA'S FAMILY DECIDED on their new home—a place near the adventurers' guild, on Gentz's request—and paid for it with Gentz's savings from his lonely bachelor life. I was at Fina's house today to help with moving.

"Bring the stuff you want to take over here. Make sure to put the small stuff in a box together." I started putting the things they'd packed away in boxes into the bear storage. "Are you taking this table, too?"

"We don't have money to buy a new one, so yes please."

"In that case, you're going to take the chairs too, right?"

"If you can fit those, please."

The family brought out other stuff while I was occupied with Tiermina's instructions, and I kept putting more and more of it away. Fina and Shuri had worked hard to pack all of their meager belongings.

"Yuna," said Fina, "could you take the bed, too?"

"Sure." I went over to Fina's room. All that remained were a few boxes left in one corner and the bed in question.

"Just one?"

"Yes, Shuri and I sleep together."

"Well, in that case, you need to have your new dad buy another one for you."

I put Fina's bed away in the bear storage, then dipped into Tiermina's room and did the same with her bed.

"Say, your bottomless bag is pretty amazing, miss. We'd normally need a cart to haul

all this stuff.”

Well, that was because it was an item I’d gotten from the admin and/or god—not that I could tell them that. I went to each room and put all the large furniture in my storage.

“Is that all you need to move?” The house was bare.

“Yes, thank you, Yuna,” Tiermina said.

With the first phase dealt with, we headed to Gentz’s house.

I’d often heard that men living alone lived like slobs and wondered why. Apparently, Gentz hadn’t escaped that stereotype. He’d known for a few days that they’d be moving today, so why hadn’t he cleaned up?

“This is pretty terrible,” Tiermina muttered quietly as she looked around.

“Sorry,” Gentz said with a hangdog expression.

“Yuna, sorry, but could you take the girls to the new house?”

“Sure, I can.”

“Fina, you get the boxes for your room in order ahead of us. I told you how we’d split the rooms yesterday, so you already know what to do. Also, I’ve cleaned the rooms to a certain extent, but I didn’t get all of it, so could you finish up? Prioritize the sleeping areas first. Once you finish that, I’ll leave arranging the things to you. Please clean the other rooms, too. I’ll come by after I finish cleaning here.”

She handed over the keys to the new place to Fina.

Next, she looked at me, “Yuna, I’m sorry, but once you get the stuff moved, could you come back here?”

“Yeah.”

“Then, if you three could do that, please.”

What else did I expect but military efficiency from the single mom of two kids? We headed to the new house, which sat midway between the inn I'd been staying at before and the guild. It was bigger than their previous house but didn't seem dusty at all; credit to Tiermina for the advance cleaning.

"Yuna, could you take out the cleaning supplies?"

I pulled them out. Fina took a bucket and headed to the kitchen to draw water from the mana gem.

"Yuna, could you come to the second floor?"

The three of us went up to the second floor. Fina checked out the room on the right. It was over six-tatami-mats wide, which, to my Japanese sensibilities, was pretty roomy. Fina opened a window to air out the room.

"Shuri, open the windows in the other rooms. After you do that, could you start cleaning?"

Shuri nodded and left.

"Yuna, could you place the furniture?"

Just as Fina told me, I started setting the furniture and beds down. Even if I put them down in slightly the wrong place, I could use my bear strength to finetune their placement. At the end, I put down the boxes with Fina and Shuri's things on the floor.

I set Tiermina's bed, furniture, and boxes on the floor of her room, figuring she'd have her own ideas about what to do with them. I held off on taking out the smaller things and went back to the first floor, where little Shuri was working her darndest to get it clean. I deposited the table, chairs, tableware, and such in the kitchen. Finally, I put the leftover items I wasn't sure about in an unused room on the first floor.

"Fina, this is everything. I'm going back to Gentz's."

"Thank you so much," said Fina.

"Thank you," said Shuri.

"Make sure you put some elbow grease into it, you two."

When I got to Gentz's house, there was a mountain of boxes waiting outside. It smelled of a quick and dirty fix. Gentz seemed exhausted but followed Tiermina's instructions obediently. Apparently, he was already whipped.

I followed Tiermina's instructions myself, and soon the last of Gentz' stuff was in bear storage. His house now empty, we headed to their new home.

Inside, the mountain of stuff was half-cleaned up. Fina and Shuri came over as they realized we were back.

"Fina, Shuri, good job."

"But it's not done yet."

"It's not getting done in a day. For now, let's just make sure we have a place to sleep. Yuna, could you put anything that we can move by hand, other than the furniture, in the back room on the first floor? I'll tell you where to put the rest."

We set up the larger items we'd brought from Gentz's house, placing them in the corners of the rooms where they belonged. Apparently, Tiermina and Gentz would figure out exact placement later. When we weren't sure where something should go, we put them in the first-floor room from earlier.

"Well, we've made sure we have a place to sleep, so let's call it a day." Tiermina came down from the second floor to the first. "Fina, is the kitchen all set up?"

"I'm sorry. I haven't cleaned that up yet."

"It's okay. You've been working very hard, Fina, Shuri. It's not your fault that a certain idiot didn't clean things up in advance."

"Sorry." Gentz hung his head low.

"Dinner's gonna take a while if we start now."

"Why don't we go eat out somewhere?" Gentz said, hoping to recover his honor.

“We can’t. Now that the four of us are living together, we’ll have new expenses. I don’t have any money saved up, and we can’t use your savings for something like that.”

“But it’s too late to start cooking now. What are you planning to do?”

The two of them glared at each other. I wish they’d stop acting like they were about to divorce right on the first day they’d moved into a new place.

“Oh, okay,” I said. “I’ll pay, so let’s go eat somewhere. That works, right?”

“We can’t impose on you any more than we already have, Yuna. We’re already grateful that you moved our things. It would have cost us to hire movers, and doing it ourselves would have taken us several days. We can’t eat out on your dime after you’ve done so much for us.”

I didn’t mind, but I could see why she’d think that way. “In that case, how about you make a meal at my place?”

“At your house?”

“You can use any ingredients you want, so whip up something good.”

“Umm. I guess that should be fine? Okay! I’ll make something delicious for you.”

Relieved to finally reach a compromise, the five of us set off for the bear house.

CHAPTER 35

THE BEAR TAKES A BEAR BATH

“NO MATTER HOW MANY times you see it, it’s an impressive house.”

Tiermina and Gentz had been to the bear house more than once now. After I saved Tiermina’s life, she had wanted to thank me again and to see Fina at work, so Fina had brought her over.

“Well, I’m going to borrow your kitchen. Fina, could you help me?”

“I’ll help too,” Shuri declared.

“Go to town,” I said, “I’m flush.”

“Okay, thank you. We really should be the ones bringing the ingredients, though.”

“Really, don’t worry about it.”

“We’re always receiving wolf meat from you. The debt we owe you just keeps building up.”

Tiermina took her two daughters and headed to the kitchen. Left behind, Gentz and I decided to wait in a couple of chairs in the living room.

“Pretty amazing house,” he muttered, looking around. “Is that tigerwolf fur?”

I had the tigerwolf pelt that I’d gotten from the first time I went slaying with Fina over the mantel. I was using the other one in my room in place of a blanket.

“When I first saw you, bear girl, I didn’t think you’d be this amazing,” he said, like he was reminiscing.

More than a whole month had passed since I’d changed worlds. My bear costume had become famous around town. It was kind of scary how quickly I’d gotten used to it. I no longer felt embarrassed.

“Bear girl.”

“Ms. Bear.”

“Little cub.”

“The Bloody Bear.”

Though there were many names people used, they all referred to me. I still couldn't butcher a kill, but I'd gotten used to defeating monsters. The gamer life had prepared me well. I'd met Fina, and there were tons of interesting things about this world, too. Though I hadn't gotten a letter or message from the god/admin/whatever it was since that first day, I was grateful they'd brought me here.

“But, miss, are you sure about this?”

“Excuse me?”

“About the house.”

“Oh, about that.”

As a wedding present, I had bought them the plot for the new house. Gentz's savings had only gone towards the physical building.

“It's fine,” I said. “It's just that, after I'm gone and you're dead, I don't want to see those three out on the streets. And as long as they have a house, that's not going to happen, right?”

“Hey, don't write me off me like that! I've got a bright future ahead of me.”

“Then make sure you look after them. If you don't, you know what happens, don't you?”

“Of course. I swear on Roy's grave that I'll protect them.”

Roy, Gentz explained, was Tiermina's late husband. When they were young, the three of them had been in the same party. Apparently, they disbanded when Roy and Tiermina got married, and Gentz started working at the guild. Several years later, when Tiermina was pregnant with Shuri, Roy went out on some solo quest and bit it.

Since then, Gentz had looked out for Tiermina's family on the sly, and somewhere along the line, he fell for her.

As I listened to Gentz talk about the past, Fina and Shuri brought in dish after steaming dish. At the end, Tiermina brought out a single massive entree. My stomach spoke up for me.

"Thank you for waiting," she said. "We've made plenty, so please eat tons."

Tiermina and her daughters took their seats.

"Yuna, I'm sorry, but we ended up using a lot of the ingredients."

"It's fine. Again, I'm not hurting for goods."

"That bear fridge is great. The veggies and meat don't go bad."

"I'll add it to the wedding registry." Since this world's fridges definitely didn't work like Japan's did, I'd just made one myself after buying an ice mana gem.

"Much as I'd love that, we already owe you so much, and we can't give you anything in return."

"If you can't give me anything in return, then I'll take your daughter." I gave Fina a look as she ate some meat.

"Oh, are you sure you want a daughter like that?" Tiermina also looked at Fina.

"She's obedient and adorable, works hard, care about her family, and can cook. And, y'know, she can skin a tigerwolf like it's no biggie, which is pretty amazing."

Fina's chopsticks stopped moving. "Ugh, could you stop, mom? And you too, Yuna."

"How do you even raise a ten-year-old like that?" I mused.

"I think it's my fault," said Tiermina. "Because I got sick and burdened her, she had to work harder than normal kids. She looked after her sister and I while I was sick, did the housework, and worked at Gentz's. It's because I never allowed her to do anything a child should."

"I didn't think it was a burden or anything," said Fina.

"A ten-year-old isn't supposed to be able to think like that."

"I wasn't the only one who worked hard. Shuri helped too." She gave her sister, who was hard at work eating next to her, a pat on the head.

"You're right. Shuri did her best too, didn't she?" Tiermina looked happily at her daughters.

After we finished our meal, Tiermina helped clean up. I was lounged around and drank an after-meal oran juice.

"I suppose we should be getting home soon." Tiermina stood up from her chair.

"It's already late, so why don't you stay over? I have the rooms. And..." I looked at Shuri, who was nodding off. "Shuri worked so hard to help with the moving."

"Umm..." Tiermina seemed conflicted. "Won't we be a bother?"

"And you're all dusty and sweaty from the work of moving, right? Wouldn't it be too much to go home now and have to prep the bath?"

"You're right. In that case, would you mind?"

It seemed that baths were common even in this world, to a certain extent. Most people had them, unless they were very poor. You could easily draw and heat water with a set of fire and water gems. Since I'd prepped the bath while Tiermina made dinner, it was ready for use.

"The three of you should go ahead. I'll show you to your rooms later."

"We can go in together?"

When I'd constructed the bath, I'd made it big, thinking I could use it as a place to wash Kumayuru and Kumakyu when they got dirty. As it turned out, they were always clean when I sent them back and summoned them again, so that didn't end up happening.

“It’ll fit three. Fina, show everyone there.”

“Yuna, you should come too! You’re okay with that, right, Mom?”

“That’s fine, but are you sure we’ll all fit?”

“It’ll be fine. Yuna’s bear bath is huge.” Fina opened up her arms wide to show how big the bath was. She’d used my bath several times after she got dirty from butchering and such.

“It’s a bear bath?”

“You’ll understand it when you see it.”

Fina grabbed my hand and pulled me from my seat. She woke up Shuri, who yawned slightly and stood up, too. Lastly, she grabbed her mom’s hand.

Before we headed to the bath, I looked at Gentz. “Please don’t come in.”

“Like I would!”

The four of us headed to the bath.

“Undress here,” I instructed. In Japan, we would have called this the changing room. I got boxes ready for each of them to stow their clothes.

“Yuna...” Tiermina was looking at me.

“What is it?”

“Well, it’s the first time I’ve seen you without your hood on.”

“Can’t you still see my face regardless of whether I’m wearing a hood?” When I was walking around town, I’d pull it low to hide my face, but I pushed it back when I was talking to people I knew.

“I can, but you seem completely different without it than when you have it on. I didn’t think your hair would be so long. Hair changes a girl’s appearance so much.”

I touched my hair. She was right—you couldn’t see my hip-length hair when I was

wearing the hood.

"Your hair is pretty, Yuna," Fina said.

"Okay, okay. You don't need to flatter me, so just get into the bath."

"It wasn't flattery!"

I ignored Fina, took off the bear clothes, and went into the bath, which was big enough to hold about ten people. I'd plunked down a white bear and a black to the right and left of the tub: hot water streamed out of their mouths. I'd based them on the designs of hot springs I'd seen on TV—a hermit like me had never gone to a hot spring in person, of course.

"It really is a bear bath," Tiermina said.

"Make sure to wash yourself before you get in the tub."

"You have soap, too... it's almost like an aristocrat's bath."

"Shuri, I'll wash you, so come over here."

Fina sat Shuri in a chair and soaped her down, starting with her head. Tiermina, seemingly disappointed she hadn't been able to help her daughters wash up, looked at me. "Yuna, shall I wash you?"

"I can do it myself."

"But isn't it hard to wash that beautiful black hair of yours? Since it's so long?"

"It's a pain, but I can do it myself."



I'd gotten used to it over the years. I sat down next to Fina and soaped myself clean. Shuri, who was clean before anyone else, had already gone to sink into the hot water. The moment Fina tried to wash herself, Tiermina caught her and started washing her. Eventually, we were all in the tub.

"Yuna, you have a lovely figure."

"Do I?" My waist was slim, but as for my chest...

"It is a pity about your chest."

It was like she'd read my mind. My chest was barely bigger than Fina's, though I wasn't sure how I felt about comparing myself to a ten-year-old.

"I plan on growing curves. Like bam, shwoo, bam," I declared. I still had a few more years to grow.

"I wonder if that's possible."

"Do you think mine will get bigger?" Fina said.

I compared Fina and Tiermina. "You're free to dream."

"That feels rather unkind..." Tiermina looked at her own rather demure chest. She'd put on some weight compared to when she'd been bedridden, but she was still emaciated. "You don't need to worry, Fina. Yours will get bigger, unlike mine."

"I'd like mine to be the same size as Yuna's."

I hugged Fina, feeling a deep kinship with her in that moment.

Eventually, we wrapped towels around our heads and got out of our extended bath. When we made it back to the main area of the house, we spied Gentz sitting there all by himself, looking lonely. When he saw us...

"You! You took a ton of time!" His shout rang through the room.

CHAPTER 36

THE BEAR USES A BLOW DRYER

“ALL RIGHT, it’s my turn now!” Gentz headed to the bath.

The remaining four of us towed off. It would take a while to get our hair dry like that, so I headed over to my room and brought back a pseudo-blow dryer. I’d used earth magic to make something dryer-shaped and set a couple of fire and wind gems in it. There was a chance someone out there sold this sort of thing, but it would have been a pain to look for one in the stores, so I just made one myself.

“Fina, come over here for a sec.”

“What do you need?”

“Turn around and sit here.”

She obediently flipped around to so her back was to me and sat down. Her hair, which was a little longer than

shoulder length, hung down in front of me. I grabbed the dryer and ran mana through it. Warm wind started coming from the dryer.

“Eep! What is that?” Fina squealed, whipping around.

“It’s a tool to dry your hair by blowing out hot air.” I showed her it was fine by blowing it at her hand.

“It’s warm.”

“Now that you know, turn around.”

Fina obediently turned away from me. Once Fina’s hair was dry, I moved on to Shuri, whose hair was a little longer than Fina’s.

“Yuna,” said Tiermina, “that’s a useful tool you’ve got there.”

"I made it since it's so hard to dry long hair."

"When you're finished, may I borrow it, too?" Tiermina's hair was back-length.

"Sure." I handed the dryer over to Tiermina once I finished with Shuri.

"Are you sure I can go before you?" she asked. I had my hair wrapped in a towel and hadn't dried it yet.

"It'll take me a while, so I can do it after."

"I'll use this with gratitude, then."

Tiermina turned it on her hair as her daughters watched. It was such a wholesome scene. When she finished and handed it back to me, Gentz came back from his bath.

"That was some great hot water. Those bears sure gave me a fright though. Thanks, Miss." Then Gentz took a good look at me and froze up.

"What's wrong?"

"Bear girl, you sure look different without your hood on."

"You think so?"

"I had no idea that your hair was that long under the hood. Hair makes such a difference to people's impression of you."

Who are Tiermina and Gentz getting their lines from? I thought.

"I think you look pretty cute in your hood," he said, "but you look beautiful with your long hair."

"Yes, I think that too!"

"Praising me isn't going to get you anything."

"It's such a shame that you're hiding your hair when it's this pretty."

Since I couldn't tell them I was powerless without my bear onesie, of course, I decided

to keep quiet. Fina started helping me when I was partway through drying my hair, and I thanked her. Once we were all done, I led them to the guest rooms.

“Gentz, you use the room in the back. I only have two beds for Tiermina and the girls, but could you take that room next to it?”

“Yes, Shuri and I can share a bed.”

I looked over at Gentz. “Gentz.”

“What?”

“Make sure you don’t pay any night-time visits to Tiermina. Fina and Shuri need to sleep,” I told Gentz, with a look that meant business.

“I wouldn’t do something like that!”

“Don’t have her visit you in your room, either. I don’t want to wash dirty sheets.”

“I wouldn’t want you to do that, either!”

“We wouldn’t do anything like that in someone else’s house,” Tiermina said, “especially with the girls around. In any case, we’re all exhausted, so I’m going to sleep. Thank you so much for everything today.”

“Goodnight, Yuna.”

“Night.”

“I’m heading to bed. You were a big help today. Thanks,” Gentz told me sheepishly and headed to his room.

I retired to my room.

The next morning, when I woke up and went downstairs, Fina was prepping breakfast.

“Morning.” I greeted.

“Good morning.”

“You’re up early.”

“I always wake first and make breakfast for my family, so I just went ahead...”

“Don’t worry about the ingredients you used or anything. Is everyone else still asleep?”

“Mr. Gentz, I mean my dad, went to work. He said to tell you thank you.”

He had been taking days off work to rush over when Tiermina was sick, then while looking for a house, and moving. He couldn’t keep that up, obviously.

“Shuri and mom are still in bed.”

“Let them sleep. They must be tired.”

Even though I cured Tiermina, she was still slowly rebuilding her strength. Being bedridden so long had cost her, and the move must have left her exhausted.

“It’s fine. Shuri is always asleep until around now, and my mom has been sick for a long time, so she’s not good with mornings, but she’ll wake when I get her up.”

In other words, they needed someone else to rouse them.

“I’m finished making breakfast, so I’ll pay them a visit.”

Fina headed upstairs. After a few minutes, Tiermina and Shuri came down, rubbing their eyes.

“Yuna, good morning. Thanks so much for yesterday.”

She still looked pretty tired. Shuri looked drowsy, too. In spite of that, they dug into the breakfast Fina had made, which consisted of simple veggie sandwiches and some milk. Come to think of it, I hadn’t had fried eggs since I left Earth. I would have killed for a fried egg sandwich right about then.

“Fina, I have something I want to ask you real quick.”

“What’s that?”

“Do you know where they sell eggs?”

“Excuse me?”

“Like I said—eggs. Frying up some eggs to stick between bread is the best, so I’d like to get some. I was just thinking I hadn’t really seen any place selling them.”

“Yuna, normal stores don’t carry luxury products like that.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Only the nobles and a small number of rich people can eat something high-grade like an egg,” Tiermina explained. “You have to go to the woods or something to collect eggs, and if you take too long, they end up going bad, so you can’t bring them back from far away, either. Even if you transport them with a fast horse, it’ll cost more than we can afford.”

“Uhh, can’t you catch some flightless birds and raise them to lay...”

“Flightless birds? Aren’t they birds *because* they can fly?”

Maybe this world didn’t have chickens? Or maybe this was a region where they didn’t have chickens? If I looked around, would I find some somewhere? I added chicken and eggs to my list of wanted ingredients.

After breakfast, the three of them went home in order to finish cleaning up their things from moving. I offered to help, but they turned me down.

“You need to work too, don’t you, Yuna?”

Actually, I had enough money to live without working for a while. A wise person once said working was losing. Still, I decided to head over to the adventurers’ guild to check the quest boards.

CHAPTER 37

FINA GETS A NEW DAD

WHEN I CAME BACK from going to buy my mom something good to eat, Yuna wasn't there anymore. Apparently, she went home. I hadn't thanked her enough, and even though we bought the food using Yuna's money, I hadn't thanked her for that yet, either.

When I looked at my mom and Mr. Gentz, they were blushing for some reason. I wonder what happened?

"Um, Fina, Shuri. Well—how do I put this—would you like a new dad?"

"A dad?"

It was a weird question. My dad was dead.

"I'm not sure. I don't really remember my dad, so I don't know what to think about a new one..."

"I dunno," Shuri said.

Mr. Gentz scratched his head and looked at us. "Your mom and I are going to get married. Fina, Shuri, would you give us your blessing?"

"Married?"

"I want to become your dad. I want to protect the three of you. I don't think I'll be as good as that bear girl, but would you let me protect you guys?"

"Mr. Gentz?"

"Fina, Shuri, would you be okay with Gentz being your dad?" my mom asked us.

I didn't really get it. But...

"If that would make you happy, Mom."

Shuri nodded too.

"Yes, that would. And I'll make sure you two are happy too. Um... thanks, Fina and Shuri."

Mr. Gentz hugged us. He and Mom did seem happy.

Everything that followed was a mess. My mom tried to get out of bed now that she was better, and I had to get her to lie down, and then keep doing that every time she tried to make food, clean, or go out. Yuna told me to make sure she rested for a while. I had Shuri stand watch over Mom. She seemed happy to spend time with her.

Daddy Gentz was looking for a house where the four of us could live together. I had to get ready to move, little by little.

A few days after Mom was cured, we found a new house and decided to move. I got approval from Yuna for my mom to leave bed. The day we moved, Yuna was going to help, too.

Normally, moving takes a lot of time and money. We would have had to rent a wagon and trailer and make a whole bunch of roundtrips, but Yuna could fit anything in her bottomless bag, no matter how big or heavy it was. When we went tigerwolf slaying, I'd been shocked to see her pull her house out of it and put it back.

Since we got the things in the house ready ahead of time, we were done with everything before the afternoon. We went to Mister Gentz's house next. It was ridiculous. I don't know if he ever cleaned it. Mom was super upset. She asked Shuri, Yuna, and me to go to the new house ahead of her and clean up.

When we got to the house, I asked Shuri to clean. I had Yuna bring out the furniture and beds. Usually we would need a lot of people to bring the beds from the first floor to the second floor, but Yuna just pulled them out of her bear glove and then we were done. After Yuna finished pulling out the things, she went to Dad's house.

Shuri and I gave cleaning the new house our all. When the sun started to set, my mom

came back with the other two, and we started talking about food. The house still wasn't clean, and we couldn't make food there. When Dad said that we could go out to eat, my mom got mad at him since it was a waste of money.

In the end, Yuna took care of us and we went to her house. I wonder why Yuna is so kind?

We ate and ended up staying over at Yuna's house. Since we were staying over and were dirty from moving, Yuna let us take baths. Yuna's bath was so big that even the four of us could go in together. We made Dad wait outside.

Yuna was slim and dainty, and really pretty, especially her hair, which was black and went all the way to her back. I wondered if mine would be that pretty if I let it grow too.

When we got into the bath, we started talking about breasts. Yuna said she'd end up *bam, shwoo, bam*. I wonder what she meant by that? I wanted my chest to be about as big as Yuna's. I saw a lot of adults with big breasts, but they seemed like they would get in the way.

I looked at my own chest and asked my mom, "Do you think mine will get bigger?"

For some reason, Yuna looked at my mom's breasts, then mine. "You're free to dream," she said.

My mom got a little mad when Yuna said that. "You don't need to worry. Yours will get bigger, unlike mine."

"I'd like mine to be the same size as Yuna's."

The second I said that, Yuna hugged me. For some reason, it had made her happy.

Dad got in the bath after us. While he was doing that, we dried our hair. Yuna's hair was long and it looked like it would be hard to dry. When I was drying my hair with a towel, Yuna brought out a round, long tool that was in a weird shape. Yuna told me to turn around, so I was good and did that. I felt hot wind blowing on me from behind. I was surprised and made a weird sound.

Yuna told me it was a tool to dry hair by blowing warm wind. The wind was nice, and my hair was dry before I knew it. My sister got her hair dry, and then my mom, and Yuna dried hers at the end. Yuna is so amazing for having such a useful tool like that.

Right when we finished drying our hair, dad came out of the bath, so we decided to sleep, since we were tired from moving. My dad slept alone, and I slept with Shuri and my mom.

Yuna talked about stuff I didn't understand. Since mom and dad would get the sheets dirty if they slept together, she said they couldn't be together. I guess they wouldn't get the sheets dirty if they were apart?

I'll ask Mom about it next time.

The next morning, I got up alone. Mom and Shuri were sleeping. I went down to the first floor as quietly as I could. When I was making breakfast, Dad came down to the first floor. He ate ahead of everyone and went to the guild; work there starts early in the morning.

Yuna came down to replace him. Since I was done making breakfast, I went to wake up the others. While the four of us ate breakfast together, Yuna asked me something weird.

"Do you know where they sell eggs?"

Did she mean bird eggs? When I told her she couldn't get them from a normal store, she looked disappointed. Did she really want eggs that much?

After we finished breakfast, we went back to our new house to finish cleaning up. Shuri picked up the small things, and mom and I picked up the big things. It would have been nice to have Dad around to help, but we couldn't do anything about that. We finished putting away everything that we'd brought from our old house, but we struggled with Dad's stuff because it was all just crammed into whatever boxes they fit in.

All of these changes—Mom being healthy, getting to eat good food, having a new dad—were because of Yuna.

CHAPTER 38

THE BEAR IS THANKED BY THE GUILDMaster

I WENT TO THE GUILD to find something to keep myself busy. I made eye contact with Helen at the front desk, but I passed right through to the board where the quests were put up.

“Yuna!” Helen called out to me. I wished she wouldn’t yell the moment she saw me. The adventurers in the room were staring, but then again, I guess they’d be doing that even if she hadn’t shouted; they still weren’t used to the onesie.

“What?” She’d probably call my name again if I ignored her, so I decided to hear her out.

“What have you gone and done this time? The Guildmaster told me to call you when you came.”

What was with this lady? “I haven’t gone and done anything. This time. I think.”

“Are you sure?”

I sure didn’t remember doing anything, even when she shot me a dubious look. I hadn’t been taking quests the last few days. anyway, and I didn’t remember causing anyone any trouble.

Regardless of how I felt, Helen marched me over to the Guildmaster’s room. The Guildmaster was working at a desk in the back, which didn’t suit his musclebound image at all.

“Please sit.” He gestured towards a huge table ringed with chairs. I took the seat closest to the door. “It’s about Gentz. I wanted to thank you.”

“Thank me?”

“You healed Tiermina’s sickness and encouraged her to marry Gentz, didn’t you?”

“I did, but why are you thanking me?”

“First, it seems that you used a valuable medicine from your hometown to heal Tiermina’s illness.”

Since it might be bad if word got out that I’d healed her with magic, I asked Gentz and the others to say I’d healed her with expensive drugs.

“Tiermina was a former adventurer, so I was worried about her illness,” the Guildmaster continued.

“Are you saying you were involved with having Fina work at the guild, too?”

“I thought it was the least I could do. I still couldn’t publicly hire her, so we only brought her in when we had a lot of work. That’s why I was grateful to see you bring in so many wolves. You’re still giving her work, aren’t you?”

“Only because I wanted to.”

“That’s not the only thing. I was worried Gentz would pine for that woman all the way to the grave. Between Roy, her illness, and the kids, he needed the push from you to feel like he had a place with her. I wanted to tell you that. Thank you.”

“Don’t worry about it. I sort of coerced them to get married for Fina’s sake.”

“It was kindhearted coercion. In any case, we don’t have to worry about him anymore, and he can devote himself to his work now.”

It was possible that Gentz and the Guildmaster didn’t just have a boss-subordinate relationship. They didn’t seem like they used to be in the same party together, though.

“If that’s all you need me for, I’ll be heading back.”

The moment I tried to stand up from my seat, there was a knock at the door.

“What is it?”

“Excuse me.”

A guild worker bobbed her head.

"Guildmaster, Lord Cliff Fochrosé has arrived. May I bring him to you?"

The worker glanced at me. I guessed she couldn't make an aristocrat wait, even if the Guildmaster was busy with me. *What kind of business does Cliff have with the Guildmaster?* I thought.

"We just finished," I said, "so it's fine."

The worker looked at the Guildmaster. He gave a small nod.

"Then I will call him in."

The worker left the room.

"I'll head out, too."

"Yeah, sorry for calling you in."

I stood up from my seat and, the moment I tried to leave the room, the door opened.

"Sorry for coming in so early."

Cliff came in through the door. Our eyes just barely met.

"A bear? Oh, Yuna."

I gave him that little half-nod head-bob you use when you want to do the bare minimum to greet them politely. The moment I tried to pass him by, he called out to stop me.

"This is perfect timing. Could you hear me out too, Yuna?"

He grabbed my shoulder, pulled me back into the room, and had me sit down.

"So then, what is it that brought you here so early in the morning, Lord Cliff?"

"You can be informal like usual."

The Guildmaster looked at me.

“You don’t have to worry about Yuna.”

“Well, if you’re the one saying it, then I get it. What’s brought you to the adventurers’ guild?”

The Guildmaster’s tone warmed.

“I had something I needed to ask you. You know that the king is celebrating his fortieth birthday next month, right?”

“I don’t think there’s a body in the whole country who doesn’t.”

I didn’t. Regardless, it looked like that was happening.

“I don’t have anything good to offer him for the occasion.”

“In that case, ask the merchants’ guild.”

“I already went to the merchants’ guild, but they didn’t have something that would please the king. There’s no appeal in offering something that he could buy with money. I was wondering whether you had any rare swords, armor, or tools.”

“We pass all our goods along to the merchants’ guild. You’ve already seen it all.”

“Of course. I just came to make sure. So, as my second idea, Yuna, I wanted to ask you...”

“Ask me what?”

I got a bad feeling from this.

“Have you got anything rare? Something like that bottomless bag of yours? Or an item that can summon mounts?”

“Sorry, but I don’t. I don’t intend on turning over mine, obviously.”

If he forced me to, all I could do was run away.

“In that case, could you make something? Like the bear house. I gave it a look some time ago—it’s quite impressive. Of course, we can’t move something that big, but it’d be wonderful if you could whip up a small one.”

Ummm, I thought, it's not like I can't make one.

I could go back to the well of Earth conveniences and make something like the blow dryer. Then again, maybe they'd already figured out all the appliances I knew I could make—or maybe not. I was coming up empty, and I didn't want to stick out by making something bad, either.

For the time being, I looked into the bear storage to see if I could find anything good.

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Yeah? I thought. I'd hit on something promising.

“You came to the adventurers’ guild for something rare, right?”

“Yeah.”

“In that case, how’s this?”

I pulled the sword I’d taken from the goblin king from my bear storage.

“And this is?”

Cliff and the Guildmaster looked it over.

“It’s the goblin king’s sword.”

“Really!”

There was no mistaking it so long as I had bear identification on my side.

“I heard about the affair with the goblin king, but to take its sword? Unheard of.”

Their reaction was much better than I’d expected.

“Anyway, we need to check whether it’s real.”

The Guildmaster brought over a worker who could appraise it. An elderly man immediately came over and turned it over in his hands, feeling out the blade and hilt.

“There is no doubt about it.”

“I see, thanks. You can go now.”

The appraiser lowered his head and left the room.

“Can you present this to the king?”

“Yes, it’s more than rare enough.”

“How rare can it be? Goblin kings aren’t that hard to come by.”

“They don’t all have swords like this. I don’t know the details, but apparently they begin as normal swords; the mana from the goblin king carrying it runs through the sword and alters it over the course of years. If the king is young, or its mana is weak, its sword is nothing special.”

I guessed it made sense; in the game, goblin king swords were a fairly rare drop. At the same time, the concept of goblin kings growing didn’t exist in the game.

“So, will you let me have that sword?”

“I don’t mind.”

I didn’t need it, and more importantly, it had a lame name. If I was going to have a sword, I wanted a cool one.

“So, how much will you let me have it for?”

“How much do people usually charge?”

“To be honest, I don’t know. It’s not something you can get ahold of, even if you go looking. Name your price. If I can pay it, then I will.”

“That’s still pretty disadvantageous for me. I might under-charge without even knowing.”

Well, it wasn't like I had money problems, so I didn't care how much it was worth. But that wasn't any fun.

"I'll give it to you free of charge if you agree to owe me a favor."

"A favor?"

"You must be doing all kinds of terrible things since you're a lord, right? So, I want you to help me when I'm in trouble someday."

"You sure have a bad opinion of me. I'm a decent person."

"Well, putting aside the jokes, if I have something I need from you in the future, I'd like you to hear my request."

"Can you give me an example of what you'd want?"

"Like forcing a Guildmaster out of a job?"

"H-hey." The Guildmaster stood up.

"That was a joke. I don't have anything right now. If something happens in the future, I'll ask you for it. And if it's impossible, you can turn me down."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yeah. That seems like it'd be more interesting."

"Then I'll graciously accept this. I'll prepare a written agreement later."

"I don't need one. If you break your promise, then it's fine if that's that."

I smiled at him. Practically, I didn't need the sword. I didn't have a problem parting with it. Him owing me a favor was pure profit.

"I vow that I'll help you if it's something I can help with."

Vowing was kind of a dramatic thing to do.

"In that case, please do when the time comes."

CHAPTER 39

THE BEAR GOES SNAKE SLAYING

MY CONVERSATION with Cliff and the Guildmaster held me up, but I finally made it to the quest board.

D-Rank Board

- Sword teacher (women-only).
 - Orc slaying.
 - Tigerwolf full materials.
 - Two hundred goblin mana gems, no time restriction.
 - Obtain Melmel grass.
 - Stone monkey slaying at Hoelle mountain, unknown number.
-
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- ...

There wasn't anything that called to me.

Sword teacher (women-only). Did bears count? All I knew about sword fighting was from the game. Teaching another person seemed like a pain anyway. Orc slaying didn't seem like fun. I'd defeated tigerwolves earlier, and I couldn't remove gems from goblins, so that was impossible. Not knowing how many stone monkeys there were was a problem. I didn't want to take any quests when I didn't know how long it would take.

If I hadn't been taken captive for so long, there might have been others, but I couldn't do anything about that.

I decided to check the C-rank board.

C-Rank Board

- Wyvern materials.
 - Convoy for a certain person, strict secrecy.
 - Mermaid scale.
 - Annihilation of the Zamon thief group.
 - Histori flower collection.
 - Watersnake slaying, includes materials.
 - Firetiger slaying, includes materials.
-
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- ...

The C-rank slaying quests looked like fun, but they were things that didn't have a specified location or were far away. I was surprised that mermaids existed, though. It might be nice to go see them some time. Just when I was thinking of going home since there weren't any interesting quests I could do in a day trip, I noticed there was a commotion at the front desk.

"Why not?"

"It isn't that you can't do it. I'm just saying it would take time."

"Then it won't be done in time. My mom and dad and everyone in the village will die."

There was a short boy crying and pleading with Helen.

"Like I said, we don't have any adventurers that can defeat a black viper. Even if we called one out, it would take until tomorrow."

"My mom and dad, though..."

The boy broke down into sobs.

"What's wrong?"

"Yuna."

I headed over to the two.

"Apparently a black viper appeared in this boy's village."

"Is that a snake?"

"Yes. It's larger than a normal viper. If it's an outsize specimen, maybe a hundred-odd meters. It seems several of the villagers have been eaten. This boy rode a horse all the way to town, but even if he were to get an adventurer who could defeat it, they're still out and won't be back for several days."

A black viper, huh? I looked at the sobbing boy.

"Then how about I go?"

Not like I had anything to do anyway.

"You want to *just go*? It's not like you're taking a stroll through the neighborhood. The large specimens are B-rank monsters."

"But if we don't hurry, then the village will be in danger, right?"

"Yes, but..."

"If it's dangerous, I'll bail out; it'll be fine. Helen, could you at least prepare the formalities for calling adventurers? I can at least buy some time."

“You think I’m an idiot?!” the boy yelled. “There’s no way somebody dressed as weirdly as you could defeat the black viper.” That was valid. Normally, people wouldn’t think that a girl in a bear onesie could defeat a monster like that.

“Uhh, in that case, I’ll go ahead of everyone and collect information.”

“Collect information?”

“I’ll collect information and hand it over to the adventurers you call, Helen. If we can figure out how big it is and where it is, then it’ll make things go faster, right?”

The boy nodded slightly at my off-the-cuff lie.

“So, Helen, where is that village?”

“It’s a day and a half’s journey to the southeast, assuming you’ve a fast horse.”

I wondered if a day and a half was far. I didn’t know how many hours a horse could run in a day. Obviously not all twenty-four.

“Are you really going?”

“I’ve got nothing better to do.”

“Please wait a moment. I will confirm things with the Guildmaster.”

Helen left her seat and headed to the Guildmaster’s room. However, the Guildmaster immediately came back with her.

“You’re going to slay a black viper?”

“I’m just going to check it out. If it seems like I can defeat it, I will, and if I can’t, I’ll run and gather information that I’ll hand over to the adventurers that Helen calls.”

“Helen, who are those adventurers?”

“That’d be One-Eyed Rush’s C-rank party.”

What kind of middle-school edgelord nickname was “One-Eyed Rush?” I didn’t want to be called anything like that, but I sure wanted to see them. I wondered if they had

eyepatches or something.

"The one-eyed C-rank, huh. I don't feel all that confident just sending one party. If you can make arrangements for others, please do."

"Understood."

"In that case, let's go, Yuna."

It sounded like the Guildmaster said something weird.

"Let's go?"

"I'm going, too. I used to be an adventurer myself. I won't hold you down."

That wasn't very reassuring.

"How do you plan on getting there?"

"I'll use my horse. We should be able to get there tomorrow."

"In that case, I'll go ahead. My summons shouldn't even take a day to get there."

"Is that true?"

"I have two, so if I switch them out, then probably."

I didn't know for sure, though.

"You go ahead, then. Don't do anything ridiculous until I get there."

"Got it."

The moment I tried to leave the guild, the boy stopped me.

"Wait. Could you take me with you?"

"You'd get in the way."

"I'll guide you there. That should cut some time down."

I gave him a once-over. He looked light. I guess it'd be fine if I was just carrying a kid's worth of extra weight.

"Okay. We won't take any breaks."

"I don't mind. It's for the village. I can't wait around here by myself."

"In that case, we can't lose any time, kid."

"I'm Kai."

"I'm Yuna. Let's head out, Kai."

We left town, and I summoned Kumayuru. Kai was surprised.

"Get on. We're in a hurry, aren't we?"

"Miss, what is that? And what's with your outfit?"

"That doesn't matter right now, does it? Your family's waiting, aren't they?"

Kai nodded and mounted Kumayuru. I got on behind him.

"Make sure you look ahead and guide the way."

Kai nodded.

Kumayuru ran, following Kai's directions. Kumayuru was faster than a horse and had stamina to boot. After running for three hours, we dismounted and made some time for a small meal.

"Let's finish in five."

I pulled bread and juice from my bear storage and handed them to Kai. He thanked me and practically wolfed down the bread.

"How far out are we?"

"We're about halfway there, maybe a little less."

In that case, we'd arrive in about three hours. After we finished our meal, we switched over to Kumakyu. Even though Kai should have been tired from riding his horse into town at the crack of dawn, he guided us patiently.

"If we've got a straight shot for a while, you should sleep for a bit."

Kai shook his head.

"I'm fine. I wouldn't be able to. We'll lose time if the heading's even slightly off anyway. At first, I thought having a weirdly dressed girl come wouldn't help, but you've got to be something special if you can summon bears like these. Maybe you'll be able to help everyone escape, even if you can't defeat the black viper. That's why I want to get there fast. Even if I get to the village, I won't be useful. I think my role is to make sure you don't get lost and get you close to the village, if nothing else."

Kai was way too mature. Between Fina and this kid, what was going on with the kids in this world?

"In that case, make sure you do a good job showing me the way."

"Please save everyone in the village, miss."

"I'll do what I can."

Kumakyu bore down on the village.

CHAPTER 40

THE BEAR EXTERMINATES THE SNAKE

A FEW HOURS AFTER we'd switched to Kumakyu, we switched over to Kumayuru again and picked up where we left off. We caught sight of the village as the sun started to set. Kumayuru slowed down as we crossed its outer limits. It was quiet inside. There wasn't a single sound—it was like a ghost town.

The phrase *total annihilation* came to mind. I felt a little ill.

Kai got off of Kumayuru and ran into the village.

"Everyone, are you here?! It's me. It's Kai. I came back!" Kai shouted. No-one answered for a long while. The door of a nearby house crept open.

"Is it you, Kai?"

A man came out of the house.

"Dad! Where's Mom? Where's the rest of the village?"

"Your mom is fine, but she can't do much. We haven't had a decent meal for several days."

"What about everyone else in the village?"

"They won't come out."

"Why not?"

"It reacts to sound. The Ermina family tried to run and all got eaten. Londo got eaten when he went to get water from the well. No one goes outside anymore, since we might end up eaten."

"In that case, wouldn't talking here be dangerous, too?"

“Yeah, it is.”

“Then, Dad...”

“But someone has to do it. For Domgol’s sake.”

“Domgol?”

“When we got you on the horse in order to get help, Domgol acted as a decoy and died.”

“Domgol was...”

“So, we need to hear from you and figure out what to do now. That’s what we can do for Domgol’s sake.”

“Dad...”

“What’s with the bear?”

Kai’s dad looked at me.

“This girl is an adventurer who came ahead to gather information.”

His expression turned downcast and bitter.

“A girl in a bear outfit, like that’s gonna...”

“Dad, the Guildmaster is coming after us. They said they’re sending C-rank adventurers after that.”

Kai’s dad looked relieved. Well, I guess anyone would be when they found out that their fate was entrusted to more than a girl in a bear suit—professionals, even!

“When is the Guildmaster getting here?”

“We were able to get to the village from the town in half a day because we used her summons, but the Guildmaster said it would take him until tomorrow.”

“I see, so what are you going to do, miss?”

"First I'll gather information, then if I can, I'll slay it."

"Jokes are only funny if you can laugh at them. *If you can slay it? There's no way,*" he spat, clearly needing to vent.

"You're not the one who decides that. That's me. Tell me everything about this black viper."

"We don't know much. Just that it comes into the village to eat first thing in the morning. It destroys a house, and after it eats everyone inside, it leaves. Then, if anyone tries to run, it eats them. If you make any noise, you end up the first thing it wants to eat."

"In that case, I'll head out to see the black viper."

"This late at night?"

In about an hour, give or take, the sun would drop completely behind the horizon.

"I'm going because it's late. If I find it and it turns into a battle, you can use me as a decoy and run away. You can run away as long as you have a horse, right?"

"No, I don't think anyone would run anymore. Everyone believes they'll be eaten if they run. And we don't have enough horses for everyone in the village to get away."

"Anyway, I'm going."

"Miss, please be careful."

I patted Kai's head, jumped onto Kumayuru, and took off.

My bear detection picked up something a slight ways off. It would probably only take me a few minutes to get there at Kumayuru's pace.

We ran through empty plains. The black viper we were looking for was sure to turn up soon. In the dim evening light, I made out a dark shape ahead; I thought it was a boulder until I noticed the heaped, winding coils, big around as a bus.

It was huge and apparently asleep. *Well, I thought, victory comes to those who strike first.*

I dismounted and recalled Kumayuru. When I looked back at the black viper, its head had perked up. Its eyes were fixed on me; its tongue flicked out, tasting the air. Seeing it awake, with the whole terrible mass of it in motion, I didn't feel quite so tough anymore.

The viper whipped out, narrowing the distance between us in an instant. Before I could blink, its mouth took up my whole field of vision.

I leapt to the right. Its gigantic body grazed me as it went by. For a second I thought I was safe, but its body swept around for another pass. I immediately guarded with my white bear hand, but it sent me tumbling back along the ground.

For as far as it threw me, I expected to feel more of an impact. Maybe the suit soaked it up? The viper didn't give me any time to speculate; it reared up to strike again.

I couldn't jump out of its reach. I juked left and right, but even when I dodged it, its coils and tail would lash out at me two, three times in a row. When it moved, its body threw up a cloud of dust that stung my eyes and turned everything murky. It was coming up on full dark, too; it was hard to make out its black body against the night.

It reacted to sounds. Maybe coming in the evening was a mistake.

I blew away the cloud of dust with a wind spell.

I ran through my usual set of combat spells over the handful of times it stopped moving, but they just rolled off its scales. It was too big for a pit. Bear magic would be overdoing it; I thought I could defeat it if I used the fire bear, but since the hide seemed like it'd be useful for a lot of things, I wanted to avoid burning it if possible.

In the game, it didn't matter how I defeated things; they'd still turn into items. In real life, if you burned something, you couldn't put it back to the way it was. If you cut it with a sword, it'd be scratched. If you attacked with magic, you'd damage the materials.

Fire was off the table, and wind didn't look any more promising. When I thought my air cutters drew blood, the wound would heal over in seconds.

If I can't attack the outside, I thought, how about the insides?

I jumped back to buy myself some distance. The viper slithered after me. I wove from

side to side, waiting for it to open its mouth. All it did was charge at me, and it hadn't gone in for a bite since its first attack. It wouldn't open its mouth if I stuck with this approach. Maybe it would if I jumped?

I kicked the ground and leapt up high. When I escaped up into the sky, the black viper opened its mouth wide and struck. In that moment, I conjured ten fire bears about the same size as one of my bear puppets.

The mini fire bears assembled into a clean rank and file in front of me. The black viper's mouth approached in a straight line. It was like it was practically asking for me to loose the bears into its mouth. They burned its long tongue on the way down.



The viper writhed in pain, its body collapsing with a mighty *thud*.

Its body thrashed, shaking the ground, but after a while its movements weakened, and in the end, it stopped moving.

Just between you and me: there was a smell like prime barbecue that wafted out of its mouth.

“Is it over?”

Bear detection couldn’t pick up its signal. It was dead, all right.

You definitely couldn’t defeat a monster with normal magic once it got to this class. Did that mean I had to think up more convenient bear magic? If I kept things up like this, I’d end up burning up all the materials I wanted.

I stowed the viper’s body in bear storage. Mission complete. I took out Kumakyu and decided to head back to the village. Kai was standing around at the outskirts.

“What’re you doing in a place like this?”

“I was waiting for you.”

“For me?”

“Yeah, I was thinking if you ran back here, then I’d let myself get eaten first and give you time to escape,” he told me with firm, straightforward eyes. He probably wasn’t joking.

“Why?”

“You brought information on how to defeat the viper, right? If you died, it wouldn’t help Domgol, who sacrificed himself so that I could go get help.”

What was with all these tenacious kids in this world? I gently patted Kai on the head.

“Miss?”

“It’s fine. I beat the viper,” I said, in order to make him feel better.

“Huh?”

“Could you call everyone in the village here? I’ll show them the proof.”

I smiled.

“Move back a little.”

Once he was standing at a safe distance, I pulled the proof out of bear storage.

“Is it dead?” he asked.

I beat on the corpse a little to buy him a little peace of mind. The body remained motionless.

“It really is...”

He slowly, slowly touched the viper’s cooling bulk.

“I’ll call everyone.”

He ran into the village.

After a while, the villagers came out of their houses and headed over to the corpse.

“Did you really defeat it?”

“It’s the black viper.”

“Is it really dead?”

There were people who burst out crying at the sight of it.

“Did the bear girl defeat it?”

“Th-thank you.”

“Thank you so very much.”

“Thanks, miss.”

No one minded how I looked. Kai's dad came up to me from among them.

"Miss, sorry about earlier. Thank you. You saved the village." He bowed his head.

"You don't have to worry about that. No one would believe a girl like me could defeat it."

"If you ever need anything, tell me. If it's something I can do anything about, I will. You saved my life."

"I don't have anything I want. Just live for your clever boy here."

While Kai's father was apologizing, an elder appeared next to him. They just kept coming one after another. Who was it this time?

"I am the chief, Zun. Thank you so much for saving the village." He lowered his head.

"But if I had been a little earlier..."

"No, we heard from Kai. You came here immediately after hearing him out once he reached the town. That you came within the day was more than fast enough. My expectation was that it would take several days. Do not trouble yourself with those who have already perished, miss."

Really, what was I going to say to that?

The elder turned around and looked at all the villagers.

"You all likely haven't had a decent meal. We are late in doing so, but let us have a feast."

At his voice, the villagers responded with joy.

"We cannot offer you much hospitality, but please join us."

The elder bowed again and went to start preparing the feast. The villagers each brought ingredients from their houses, made a fire in the middle of the village, and prepared a whole bunch of dishes. They danced, made a ruckus, ate, and made a big deal of that day for the sake of those who died and those still living.

While I was languidly watching the villagers, they came up to me one after another

with food and more gratitude. I might have looked like a spectacle to the kids, since they couldn't keep their hands off me. I kept seeing the parents stop them.

The feast continued late into the night, and I ended up staying at the elder's house.

CHAPTER 41

THE BEAR FINISHES THE SNAKE EXTERMINATION AND GOES BACK TO TOWN

THE NEXT DAY, I woke up early in the morning.

The ceiling was different. I remembered that I'd stayed the night at the village chief's house. When I got up and stood, I heard activity in the room next to me. The elder seemed to already be awake. I headed over to greet him.

"Good morning."

"I didn't wake you, did I?"

"You didn't."

"I will make us something simple for breakfast, so please wait."

I waited absentmindedly, and eventually he brought over our meal. It was bread, veggies... and eggs?

"Help yourself. I hope it is to your taste."

"Um, what's this?"

I pointed at the fried egg.

"This is a kokkeko egg. Kai's father went first thing in the morning to collect some. He said he wanted you to eat it."

"Uh, thank you," I said, then notched the bread with the knife, put veggies and the egg between it, and ate.

"It's good."

"I am glad. I am sure that Kai's father will also be glad after he went to collect it."

Once I finished breakfast I decided to follow up on this new development.

"So you can gather kokkeko eggs in this village?"

"Yes, we can. If we go first thing, we can find them fresh-laid."

"What's a kokkeko bird like?"

"It can't fly very high, so it makes its nests in the bushes on the ground. They are also very quick at running."

Was it a chicken?

"I believe we still have kokkeko eggs and kokkekos from this morning's collection, so would you like to bring them home?"

"Could I really?" I was overjoyed.

"Of course. This village owes you its life. We have nothing to pay you with, so this is a drop in the bucket."

Obtained eggs and chickens!

With breakfast over with, I started getting ready to leave.

"Are you really going home?"

"I need to report to the guild, after all."

When I left the village chief's house, Kai came over.

"Miss, you're going home?"

"The Guildmaster and adventurers are heading over here, so if I don't report to them, it'll cause them trouble."

On the way out, I picked up three kokkekos and about ten eggs from Kai's father. Whatever folks called them, they were pretty obviously chickens. That might have

been the happiest part of the job this time around.

It was a little ways out, but I decided I'd come back again.

I called Kumayuru, and we made for Crimonia, listening to the sound of my hosts shouting their thanks slowly fade into the distance.

Several hours later, we spotted someone bearing down in our direction. Suspecting it was the Guildmaster, I had Kumayuru slow down.

"Is that you, Yuna?!"

The Guildmaster brought his horse to a halt.

"What're you doing here? The village wasn't annihilated, was it?"

"I've defeated the black viper."

"...huh, sorry, could you say that again?"

"I defeated the black viper," I said again.

"You're joking."

This whole interaction was a pain, so I pulled the body out of my bear storage and laid it out in front of him.

"So you really defeated it on your own. It's not damaged anywhere."

"It's got a hide like a tank, but its insides handle fireballs about as well as you'd expect."

"You say that like it was easy..." the Guildmaster said, peering into the viper's mouth. "It's true. I'm amazed the spell reached so *deep*—the throat's what, two meters wide? I'd expect a fire spell to detonate in its mouth."

I couldn't tell him my fireballs had walked their way down its digestive tract on stubby little bear legs.

"Anyway, I got it. If there's no point to going to the village, then let's head back to town."

We set off again, the both of us headed for Crimonia this time.

"Begging your pardon, but my horse can't keep pace with your bear. Could you slow down? I have questions."

I broke down what happened at the village for him.

"That was pretty reckless of you."

With the bear gear, I could afford to be.

We took a brief rest stop, and when we got on the road home again, I let Kumayuru take it slow. Both our mounts deserved a break, and I wasn't in any kind of hurry.

We got back to town the following day and went straight to the guild. Helen saw us and broke into tears.

"Yuna, Guildmaster... why are you here? Did the village...?"

"Helen, it's fine. The black viper was defeated," the Guildmaster explained.

"Was it really!?" Helen wiped away her tears.

"Yeah, it's true, so calm down. Why were you so worried?"

"Rush from C-Rank came back injured, and I was having such a difficult time reaching any adventurers above C-Rank. I should have expected you would be able to handle it, Guildmaster."

Helen looked at the Guildmaster reverently.

"I didn't. Yuna did, alone."

"What...?" Helen slowly looked my way. *Don't look at me with eyes that wide, I thought. It's embarrassing.*

“I felt the same, but it’s true.”

She didn’t look reassured.

“So, Yuna, it’s getting late. I hate to ask you to do this, but could you come by again tomorrow? We need to write the report for this and inventory the materials from the viper.”

“When?”

“Earlier would be better, but I’m sure you’re tired too. I’ll let you decide when.”

“Got it.”

I left the adventurers’ guild.

CHAPTER 42

THE BEAR GOES TO THE ORPHANAGE

THANKS TO THE BEAR SUIT'S white side, I woke up feeling refreshed. I pulled some eggs from bear storage and made a fried egg sandwich. I felt another pang of longing for rice, soy sauce, and miso—so close to a Japanese breakfast, and yet so far.

The Guildmaster had called me in, but since he hadn't specified a time, I took my time with breakfast before I left. As soon as I got to the guild, an employee showed me over to the Guildmaster's office.

"You're earlier than I expected."

"I went straight to sleep yesterday. Aren't you early, too?"

He was already working.

"I've been here all night working through the backlog and the black viper stuff."

"The black viper stuff?"

"We've had a lot of offers for the materials now that word's gotten out."

"I haven't decided whether I was going to sell it, though."

"I know, but I couldn't tell them that. The merchants and armorers would hound you to the ends of the earth."

"Is it really that popular?"

"Well, the skin makes excellent armor—it's sturdy, it's light, and it soaks up mana like a sponge. There are tons of adventurers who would want it. The meat's a delicacy, too. You can sell any cut for a killing. You can use the fangs for all kinds of purposes too, and depending on the size of the specimen, there's a chance it's got a B-rank mana gem. In other words, anyone would want those materials."

“You’re saying I’ve got to sell it?”

“Whether you sell it or not is your prerogative. But, if you don’t...”

“People are going to bug me about it anyway?”

“That’s right. Speaking for the guild, I’d rather you sell it to us directly rather than give it to someone else.”

“I don’t mind selling it, though I’d like the mana gem and some of the materials.”

I didn’t know when the mana gem might come in handy.

“Yeah, I don’t mind. It’d be reassuring to me if you let us have the skin and the meat.”

“So where should I have it butchered? It’d be impossible in the warehouse, right?”

The Guildmaster looked pensive, and then troubled.

“We’ll have to do it outside.”

“Outside?”

“Nobody would complain if we did it outside the gates, right? Sorry for asking you so soon, but could you handle moving the body?”

“I can.”

The Guildmaster and I left the room.

“Helen, gather the employees who can butcher and figure out the bare minimum staff we need to keep the warehouse running.”

Helen ran off and gathered about ten people in total, Gentz and Fina among them.

“I thought we might need more hands,” Gentz explained, detecting my surprise at seeing Fina.

The butchers and I walked in a procession from the guild to the gate, and from there to a spot that wouldn’t block traffic.

“This should do.”

With the Guildmaster’s OK, I pulled the black viper out of bear storage. The butchers let out a collective gasp.

“It’s huge.”

“Did the bear girl really beat this thing?”

“I can’t believe that thing fit in her bottomless bag.”

“Do you think we can finish this today?”

“You lot, the work won’t get done with you just staring at it. Once you’re finished, take the parts to cold storage. Prioritize the meat first—we lose out if any of it rots. The skin can go last.”

The butchers voiced their agreement.

“So, Yuna, what’re you going to do?”

“Me?”

“You going to watch or go home?”

“*Can I go home?*”

If I could, I would. I wasn’t interested in watching anyone gut a snake.

“Yeah, we won’t mind. We’ll take the harvested materials to the guild. You can decide which portions you want there.”

“Guess I’ll go home. When do you think it’ll be over?”

“No idea. I’ll send somebody to your house when it is.”

“In that case, please have Fina do it—there won’t be any extra hassle letting her in.”

“Got it.”

Since going straight home wouldn't have been any fun, I decided to hit up the plaza for lunch. I figured I could stand to cool my heels for a while before I went home; whatever I got wouldn't go cold in my bear storage, anyway. As I scanned the square for grub, I saw some grubby-looking kids in an out of the way corner.

I headed to a nearby stall that was selling wolf kebabs.

"Oh, bear girl, you're back. But you're early today."

I was a regular here. I ordered a kebab and asked about the kids.

"Ah, they're from the orphanage. They come by occasionally."

"For what?"

"They're waiting for the customers' leftovers."

"For leftovers..."

"They scrounge for 'em. We don't mind since it's already paid for, but it doesn't exactly leave one feeling warm and fuzzy."

I looked them over again. The youngest looked to be five-year-olds, and I don't think any of them was older than about twelve.

"Mister, twenty kebabs please."

"Don't bother. You can feed them today, but what about tomorrow? If you can't help them, better to leave them alone," the man said. I understood what he meant. If they were adults, I'd ignore them, but I couldn't just overlook kids.

"Does the orphanage not get money from the town?"

It would be weird if they didn't get public support.

"No idea. Could be they pull in buckets of cash, could be they get a pittance. I've never asked. From the looks of it, I don't think it'd be much."

Cliff seemed like a decent lord in person, but my opinion of him dipped in that moment. I asked for my twenty kebabs again.

“Don’t make me say I told you so.”

I took my order and crossed to the corner where the kids were gathered; they watched me closely.

“Take one each.”

They shot each other confused looks.

“We can eat these?” a girl asked me in a tiny voice.

“They’re hot, so don’t wolf them down.”

I handed her a kebab, which she tore into immediately. The other kids took that as their cue to dig in.

“Miss, thank you,” she told me. Of course, I couldn’t just leave it at that.

“Could you lead me to the orphanage?” I asked the girl.

The girl tilted her head like she didn’t get what I was saying.

“You must be hungry. You probably want more food, right? Could you maybe bring me to the orphanage? I have some meat, so let’s all eat together.”

She nodded slightly.

“Over here.”

The other kids hesitated for a while after she set off, then they ended up coming with us.

The walk took us all the way to the edge of town, which seemed like a bit much for a kid. The orphanage was a single building set off from everything else. The walls were cracked, and here and there I could make out a hole that ran all the way through the

facade. The ceiling couldn't have been much better.

So it's this bad, huh? I thought. I should never have given Cliff that sword. He had some work to do before flattering the king. It might have been better for me to fund the orphanage with the profits from selling the sword myself.

As we drew near, an elderly woman came out of the house. "Who might you be? I am Bo, the headmistress."

"I'm Yuna, the adventurer. I saw these kids in the central square."

"In the central square... you went there again?"

The headmistress gave the kids a meaningful look, and they apologized, one after another.

"It's fine," she said. "It's my own fault for not being able to provide meals for you, after all. Did these children do you wrong?"

"No, it just seemed like they were hungry."

"I'm sorry. Um, though it is an embarrassment, we don't have much to eat," the headmistress said. She shuffled her feet, unable to look me in the eye.

"You don't get funding from the town?"

"Since last year, we received less and less every month. We were cut off about three months ago."

"You were cut off..."

That lord...

"Yes, they said they didn't have any money to spare for us."

"Then how have you been eating?"

"We pick up the damaged goods that the inns, eateries, and fruit and vegetable sellers cannot sell to customers."

That Cliff...

I felt my bile rising.

“But we still don’t have enough, so these children go to the central square...”

“Headmistress, I’ll give you the ingredients, so make sure these kids eat their fill.”

I had them take me to the kitchen. I pulled out a lump of wolf meat Fina’d processed for me out of my bear storage. Since it wouldn’t be all that healthy just to eat meat, I also pulled out the bread I’d stocked up and a barrel of oran juice.

“Um, Yuna...”

“Gimme a hand, headmistress. Actually, before that, are you the only instructor here?”

“No, there is also a girl named Liz, but she’s gone to restock the pantry.”

We cooked the wolf meat, sliced the bread, and made it a set with the oran juice, lining the table with them.

“There’s enough for all of you, so don’t rush.”

“Everyone, please thank Yuna.”

The kids started eating at the headmistress’s signal. They ate like they were all fighting and grinned like maniacs the whole time.

“Yuna, thank you so much. It’s been so long since the kids have smiled.”

“I still have wolf meat, so if there’s not enough, cook some more.”

“Thank you very much.”

I watched the kids eat for a while, then excused myself. Several of the kids noticed and followed me out.

“Bear girl, where are you going?”

“I was thinking of giving your house a fixing. It must be drafty.”

I checked the cracks and holes, patching them with earth spells as I went.

"That's amazing, bear girl."

"Could you show me anything I missed?"

They'd know what needed fixing better than I would. I followed their lead, then checked out the roof. I didn't know where the leaks would be, so I covered the whole thing with a thin layer of earth. With that dealt with, I moved on to mending the interior walls. Eventually the headmistress asked me what I was doing, and I gave her the same explanation the kids got.

When I moved on to the bedroom, I noticed that an effort had been made to separate it into a boys' side and a girls' side, but it was still packed nearly wall-to-wall with bedframes.

Each bed was draped with a small, thin towel. *Is that supposed to be their blanket?* I thought. It had to have been cold.

I ran a quick headcount; the orphanage was supposed to support twenty-three people. I pulled out thirty wolf pelts and handed them to the headmistress.

"Yuna?"

"Please give these to the kids. There's enough for you and then some."

I went to each room and finished mending the walls.

When I came back to the dining room, they had all finished eating. Oddly, nobody'd touched the leftover wolf meat.

"You didn't eat this?"

"Yes. If you'd let us, I'd like to hand this out tomorrow. The children said they would rather eat it tomorrow than today."

"Oh, sorry. I forgot to tell you—I'll prep several days' worth, so you can eat it."

I pulled out more wolf meat and bread from bear storage.

If they had this much, it'd probably last a few days.

"Um, why are you doing all this for us?"

"If an adult can't eat, it's their own fault for not working, but a kid not being able to eat isn't their own fault. It's the adult's fault. If they don't have parents, the adults around them can help them. That makes us allies."

"Th-thank you so much."

"I'm sort of familiar with the lord here, so I'll tell him to give you funding."

Plus, if I didn't have a word with him, I just wouldn't feel right with myself.

"Please don't do that."

"Why not?"

"The lord lets us live here rent-free. If we make him angry and he kicks us off, we won't have anywhere else to go."

"Is the lord that terrible?"

"I wouldn't put it that way..."

"But you don't get funding, though."

"We're thankful to even have a place to live."

Cliff was the pits. I figured I'd rather punch him than have a word with him.

"Anyway, I'm going to head home."

"Yes, um, thank you so much."

"You're going home, bear girl?"

The kids gathered.

“I'll be back.”

I gave the kids a pat on the head.

“You're putting Yuna in a difficult spot. Everyone, say thank you.”

“Thank you, bear girl.”

“Thank you.”

The kids smiled; I was glad they were in good spirits.

CHAPTER 43

THE BEAR MOBILIZES FOR THE ORPHANAGE

I WENT BACK to the bear house and thought over the orphanage's three bare necessities. Clothes could wait; food would become a problem again in a few days; they were fine for shelter for a while.

The biggest problem was definitely food. Just like the stall guy was saying, I couldn't restock them every day, but I couldn't take back what I offered either. While I was mulling it over, I heard a knock at the door and Fina calling me.

"Fina, are you all done butchering?"

"Yes, and the Guildmaster is calling you."

Since I wasn't making any headway with the orphanage, I headed over to the guild with Fina in tow.

"Oh, you're here," the Guildmaster himself welcomed me.

"So, how's the black viper?"

"Yeah, we've got it put away in cold storage."

We popped in to give it a look; the mass of skin, meat, and fangs was piled like a mountain.

"How much would the guild want?"

"There's no such thing as too much."

"How about half?"

"A little more."

"Then how about I take a third?"

"Hmm, I suppose that'd be fine."

The Guildmaster signed off on the paperwork, and I got my guaranteed portion into bear storage.

"Here's the mana gem. I actually would have preferred it if you'd sold this, too."

Since you needed mana gems to make a ton of things, I'd been holding them for myself lately. I had no idea what I'd make from this one, but I didn't intend on selling it.

"It'll take a while to pay you back with this volume."

"I'm fine with getting it whenever."

When I left, the sun was starting to set. I headed straight to the bear house, finished dinner and my bath, and laid down on my bed.

I couldn't come up with a way to help the orphanage with the materials I had from the black viper. I could sell it all and funnel the money to them, but then that'd be it.

I pulled up my status screen. Lately I'd only been fighting low-ranking monsters, so I hadn't been increasing levels. The black viper must have put me over the top; I'd gone up a level and picked up a new skill.

Bear Transporter Gate

By setting up a gate, can move between gates.

When more than three gates are in place, can travel to a specific location by picturing it.

This gate can only be opened with the bear hand.

Oooh, I thought, now that's useful.

Still, I'd have to set them up. It would've been super convenient if I could just picture

a place in my head and warp there. This was more than useful enough, though, so I was grateful. I wanted to try it out right away, so I got up from my bed and set up a gate in my room. A double door with bear reliefs installed itself in the bare wall. It was a lot bigger than I'd expected—wide enough for Kumayuru and Kumakyu to go through and have room to spare. I headed to a room on the first floor, set up a second gate, and opened it onto my room upstairs.

If I was going to set up gates outside, I needed to figure out places to put them that I wouldn't regret. It wasn't like they'd disappear after I used the skill. I had to consider times when I'd track in dirt, or if I'd be traveling with my bears, and there were a lot more inconveniences to consider than I'd expected. I wouldn't have had to think so much about logistics if it was just teleportation, and it would've been nice to be able to warp out of fights, but oh well.

Anyway, I took down the bear transport gate, thinking about when Fina would come by.

Hmm, I thought. Bear transport gate sure is a mouthful. Maybe bear gate for short, then?

For a moment, I felt a chill. Maybe I'd caught a cold. I decided to leave the name for later and went to bed early for the day.

That morning, I made another fried egg and veggie sandwich for breakfast. As I nibbled on the bread, the god of good ideas blessed me.

Right, I thought, I've got this on lockdown. I took a decisive bite.

Eggs. If I could just produce eggs and sell them...

After breakfast, I headed to the merchants' guild. I felt like there were a lot more people there than when I'd been before. No, there were *definitely* a lot more people than before. They were flooding the entrance. I wondered if I could even get inside, with all the commotion.

While I waited for the congestion to clear up, I overheard some familiar chatter.

“It’s the bear.”

“You don’t mean *that* bear?”

“The black viper bear.”

When I took a step forward, a path parted for me. It was almost like Moses parting the red sea. I went in without hesitation and looked around for Milaine, who had helped me last time. I spotted her, but it looked like she was busy with someone else. Just as I started to gripe about it under my breath, she finished up and noticed me.

“Yuna!” she called out. “What’s going on?”

“There was something I wanted to ask you about, Milaine.”

I looked at the line of people waiting at her station and wondered if she was even allowed to talk to me.

“I’ll hear you out.”

“Are you sure?”

“It’s fine. I’ll switch out with someone. Let’s talk over here.”

The people in line were kind of giving me scary looks. I couldn’t help it since I’d cut, but it wasn’t my fault, all right? Milaine flagged down a clerk to take her spot and took me to another room.

“It’s kind of crowded here. Did something happen?”

“You’re asking, of all people?”

She looked at me in exasperation.

“...?”

How was I supposed to know what was going on at the merchants’ guild?

“Ahh...”

Why was she sighing?

"Looks like you're serious. Everyone is here to buy the materials from the black viper you killed. It's been a madhouse since yesterday. We only have so much, but everyone wants tons."

"Really?"

"The skin and fangs are pretty popular. The meat is high-grade too, so there are merchants who take it to the royal capital to sell it."

"Is it really that popular?"

"Yes, and it's all because of you. We're making a killing because of you."

She bowed her head slightly.

"So, what did you need to ask about? I'll go quite the lengths if you need something."

I was thankful for that. I didn't hesitate to ask her.

"So there's an orphanage, right?"

"You mean the one at the edge of town?"

"Yeah. Could you sell me the land near there?"

"The land near the orphanage? I'll go look a few things up, so please give me a moment."

Milaine left the room and came back with documents in a flash, as usual.

"Yes, it should be fine. No one uses that land."

"Can people not use it because of the orphanage?"

"To put it perhaps too bluntly, they are uneducated children. Even if someone did want to build there, they'd be worried about them causing trouble. And since it's at the edge of town, there aren't many people around that land as it is."

I supposed that some people would consider having dirty kids around a mood-killer.

“So, that means I can buy it, right?”

“Yes, there’s no issue with that.”

“In that case, sell me some of that land.”

“Beg pardon, but what do you plan on using it for?”

“Hmmm, it’s a secret.”

“A secret?”

“Since I’m not sure if I’ll be successful yet.”



I paid the amount she indicated and received the deed to the land around the orphanage. I went back to the bear house and set up a transport gate in the storage house. Once I set that up, I left town and called out Kumayuru. If I went now, I could get there by the end of the day.

I rode back to the town where I'd beaten the black viper. It was a faster trip with just the one passenger. I kicked myself for not checking my status before I left the first time around; I could've spared myself the trouble today and set up the gate on this end. Not that there was any point complaining now.

This time, I didn't go into the village; I headed up into the mountains a little ways away. I was running out of daylight.

"I wonder if there's a good spot."

After a few minutes of searching, I found the perfect place under a cliff.

Maybe this would work? I thought. *No one would probably wander by here, either.*

I went down the cliff and dug out a tunnel. I made it wide enough for Kumayuru and Kumakyu to fit and dug out a cave in the back. I made a couple of bear lights so I could keep working in the dark.

I decided to leave the details for a later day, blocked off the entrance with an earth spell, and set up a transport gate.

"I'm home."

I was back at the bear house storage instantaneously. This was definitely a handy skill to have.

CHAPTER 44

THE BEAR RAISES BIRDS

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, I took the bear transport gate to the village. When I got there, a villager saw me coming and came over.

“What’s wrong?”

“I want to meet with the village chief, if you wouldn’t mind.”

“Yes, I believe that should be fine.”

The villager politely guided me to the village chief’s home.

“Oh, if it isn’t Yuna. What brings you here?” the village chief said, greeting me with a smile.

“Good morning. I just need a small favor...”

“I’ll hear out any favor you have to ask.”

“So about the kokekko you were kind enough to give me the other day... is it possible to catch living ones?”

“You want them alive? If we set a trap, I believe it should be relatively easy to catch one.”

“In that case, could you please catch some for me? I want the eggs, so I’d really like hens, if you can get them.”

“What is a favor to the one who saved our village? How many would you like?”

“The more the better, but I don’t want to cut down on the village’s food supply, so if you could just get as many as wouldn’t affect the village.”

“Understood. Well then, we’ll get anyone free in the village to go out to capture them immediately.”

“Thanks.”

If I could get ahold of a live kokekko, then I’d have fresh-laid eggs.

“So then, what would you like to do in the meantime?”

“How long do you think it’ll take?”

“Let’s see, I think we should be able to capture a few by the afternoon.”

“In that case, I’ll be back this afternoon. I have some other errands to run in the mountains.”

With another step crossed from my to-do list, I headed back to the cave where the transport gate was.

When I got back to the cave, I erased the gate on that end temporarily. With some liberally applied earth magic, I made the cave even wider and set up a single-story house in the shape of a cub with a kitchen, a restroom, a bathing room, and a personal room, and lit the whole thing with mana gems. To finish things off, I stood up a bear transport gate right next to the entrance of the cub house. Base numero uno complete.

When I came back to the village, they had about twenty kokekkos tied up for me. It was more than I’d hoped for.

“Are you sure I can have this many?”

“The next round of chicks’ll grow up quick, and we don’t really get monsters out here, so it’s an ideal environment for them. Please take them and don’t worry about it.”

I guess the black viper came all the way to a human settlement because it couldn’t find monsters to eat? I thought.

I had the villagers tie the kokekkos to Kumayuru and Kumakyu so the birds wouldn’t fall off. It would’ve been nice if I could carry live cargo in bear storage, but I just had to bear with it.

“Are you really heading back right now?”

“I’d rather get home earlier than later.”

“I see. We were hoping to entertain you some...”

“You’ve done more than enough.”

I tried to pay for the kokekkos when I left, but the village chief wouldn’t take it.

“No, no, we couldn’t accept anything from the savior of our village.”

I couldn’t let that happen, so I forced the money on him, then I made Kumayuru and Kumakyu run for it. I went straight back to the cave and took the gate to my house in Crimonia. I would have headed straight to the orphanage, but I couldn’t have the bears running around town. I’d cause an uproar. I decided to wait until evening. I left the kokekkos tied to the bears, figuring it probably wouldn’t kill them.

When night fell, the bears stirred. They ran through the streets in the cover of dark. Wouldn’t it be better to use a transport gate, you say? Cards on the table, I just really wanted to run through town on a bear.

We cut past the orphanage and arrived on the land I’d bought. I got down from Kumayuru and checked out the plot. I guessed the spot would work just fine. I called up a henhouse out of the earth and surrounded it with a three-meter wall. *They probably won’t be able to run away if it’s this tall, right?* I thought.

I led the bears into the henhouse and untied the ropes binding the kokekko. Once they were free, the birds wandered around the house. I felt a whole lot better seeing that they really were still alive.

The next morning, I visited the orphanage after finishing breakfast. I found the kids gathered outside the wall of the henhouse.

“Bear girl?! ”

They swarmed me on sight.

“Bear girl, a wall appeared overnight.”

One of them gestured around, trying to give me an emphatic explanation about the wall in question. I put a hand on the kid's head.

"That's because I made it."

"*You* did that?"

The orphans looked at me with slackjawed amazement.

"Anyway, I've got something I need to tell all of you and your headmistress about, so let's go inside."

When we got there, the headmistress was with a woman who looked like she was about twenty. I had a pretty good idea who she was.

"Liz," said the headmistress, "this is Yuna from the other day—thank you again, by the way."

"Thank you so much for the food," Liz said, bowing her head.

"What brings you here today?"

"I was wondering if it would be okay to give the kids some work. I'd pay them a fair wage, of course."

"You're giving jobs to the children?"

"Don't worry, it's not anything dangerous."

"What kind of work is it?"

"Have you seen the wall outside?"

"I have. The children have been making a fuss about the wall since it appeared when we woke up this morning."

"I made it last night. I'd like the children to look after the birds inside the wall."

"Umm, you made it in a single night?"

“You want them to look after birds?”

I told them how I’d made the walls and explained what kind of work I needed done: I needed the kids to gather the eggs in the mornings, clean the hut, and take care of the kokekkos. I made sure to emphasize that the kokekko weren’t to be eaten.

“In other words, you’re starting a business selling eggs?”

“Well, considering how much eggs seem to go for in this town, yeah.”

“Are you sure you want to pay us for just doing that?”

The headmistress looked at me in disbelief.

“I have other stuff in mind for you later, but that’s it for now. What do you think?”

The headmistress looked over at the children.

“Well, everyone? It looks like Yuna has a job for you. If you work, you’ll be able to eat. If you don’t, we’ll end up back to the situation we were in just a few days ago. Yuna can’t keep bringing food,” the headmistress told the kids.

The kids listened to the both of us, then looked at each other and shared a collective nod.

“I’ll do it.”

“Please let me do it.”

“I’ll do it too.”

“Me three.”

“Me four.”

I appreciated the energy behind their reply.

“In that case, can I assume everyone is in?”

The reply was unanimous.

“Yuna, I’ll leave the kids in your care,” the headmistress said, bowing deeply.

“Sure. Also, could I borrow Liz?”

“Me?”

“Yeah, I want you to manage the kids.”

“That’s no trouble, if that’s what you need from her. Liz, make sure you listen to everything Yuna says.”

“Yes, headmistress.”

I made a beeline for the henhouse, trailing kids. Inside, we found the kokekkos napping.

“Here are your jobs: First, when it’s nice out, let the birds out first thing in the morning. Second, collect any eggs in the henhouse. Third, clean the henhouse. Fourth, give the birds food and water. Fifth, get the birds back into the henhouse once everything’s done.

“Can you do that?” I asked.

They agreed without hesitation.

“Alright, let the birds out. The eggs that they lay are going to become your food money, so make sure you’re gentle.”

The kids confirmed they’d understood me.

“Put the eggs in these containers.”

I conjured up ten egg cartons with an earth spell, each with ten holes. That first day, the kids gathered enough to fill one pack. I guess that was pretty good for twenty kokekkos.

“Liz, have you got any vegetable scraps?”

“Yes, we do...”

“Is it okay if I feed them to the birds?”

“Well...”

Even though they were just scraps, Liz had still gone out and begged for them. It was no wonder she'd feel weird feeding them to the birds.

“I'm not going to ask you to put your faith in me yet, but the vegetables you got are going to nourish the birds so they'll produce eggs.”

“I see...”

I wasn't sure if she believed me, but she gave me her permission.

“Alright, Liz, can I leave the rest up to you?”

“Are you going somewhere?”

“Well, we've finally gotten eggs, so we've got to go sell them.”

I took the full carton and set off for the next stop on my list.

CHAPTER 45

THE BEAR BECOMES AN F-RANK MERCHANT

THE MERCHANT GUILD was just as jam-packed as it was yesterday. I didn't want to think that all this was because of me.

Wading into the crowd, I noticed Tiermina was there too. Our eyes met.

"Yuna?"

"Hello, Tiermina. What's going on? What're you doing here?"

"I came by to see whether they had jobs at the merchant guild."

"You're looking for a job?"

"Yeah, I was actually hoping to be reinstated as an adventurer, but the family vetoed that. Since I can read and write and do math, I thought maybe I could find a job that skews more towards that, so I came to check out the merchant guild."

More mumbles in the crowd: "She could read and write..."

"And do math..."

"Tiermina, would you actually be interested in working for me?"

"For you, Yuna?"

"I kinda started a new business. You'd be a lifesaver if you could help me out."

I needed someone to manage the eggs and be an intermediary with the merchant guild.

"So, what kind of work is it?"

"I'm not sure about explaining it here..."

There were a lot of merchants around. It was a pain going out of our way to do it, but I had us go back to the bear house so no one would overhear about my egg scheme.

“So what’s your business?”

I got Tiermina something to drink, and then got to explaining what the work would be. I told her how the orphanage was keeping the kokekkos and how they’d lay the eggs. I told her I wanted to sell the eggs to the merchant guild.

“When you say you want me managing things, do you mean you want me to manage the kokekkos? I haven’t really raised birds before.”

“The orphans will manage the birds. I was thinking you’d manage the sales at the merchant guild.”

“And by sales you mean?”

“I was just about to go to the merchant guild to line up a sales contract for the eggs with them. I was thinking you could do the management, finances, inventory, and cost checks. I’d want you to make sure our books are straight and stuff.”

Even talking about it was such a pain. If Tiermina didn’t accept my offer, I’d have to do everything myself.

“I understand what you’re saying, but this seems like a big deal. Are you sure you want to leave all that up to me?”

“I don’t know that many people in this town anyway, and I at least know what kind of person you are.” When I explained my reasoning, Tiermina smiled.

“Okay, I get it. I’ll accept the job. You’ve been looking out for my daughters and I as it is, and I was already thinking of working, so I’m grateful for the opportunity.”

Business manager acquired! My job was getting smaller and smaller.

Since I was done talking with Tiermina, I headed back to the merchant guild to get the egg business going. It was still overflowing with people. Waiting at the entrance of the merchant guild like I had the other day, it was the same old story. I caught them muttering about “the bear,” and they made a hole at the sight of me.

“Yuna, you’re amazing.”

Tiermina seemed stunned at the sight of it. Maybe she didn’t know what happened with the black viper?

I went into the guild and took a look over at the reception desk. There were several people there. I tried looking for Milaine, but it looked like she wasn’t around. Maybe it was her day off? I was actually hoping to get somebody I knew. When I reluctantly lined up at the desks, someone called out to me from behind.

“Oh, Yuna. What brings you here today? And who is this?”

I wheeled around; Milaine was behind me.

“Why did you sneak up on me?”

“I was outside on my break. What did you come by to the merchant guild for?”

“I had something I wanted to sell, so I wanted to talk to you about it.”

“And that something is?”

Milaine’s eyes glinted. *Excuse you, I thought, that’s terrifying.*

“In that case, let’s talk in another room.”

Milaine latched onto me and dragged me away. Tiermina followed behind us.

“So what was it you wanted to talk about?”

We were in a small, private room. There was a big desk surrounded with chairs. We sat down across from Milaine, and I pulled the eggs from my bear storage.

“Are these kokekko eggs?”

“I’d like to start selling these eggs. Can you help me with that?”

“How many would you be looking to move, on average?”

“For now, between ten and twenty a day, but later on I’m hoping to aim for a thousand in a day if I can get a lot.”

“A thousand? How can you collect that many?”

“By raising kokekkos.”

“You’re raising birds... is this connected to the land around the orphanage?”

I explained my business plan.

“So then, do you think it’d be possible to sell the eggs regularly?”

“Let’s see. It would depend on the price, but it is possible.”

“I’ll leave the pricing up to you.”

Letting the specialist do what they do best was the right thing to do. I didn’t know how much eggs were worth anyway.

“Are you sure that’s what you would like?”

“What’s there to be worried about?”

“You’ll force the price down if you flood the market with eggs. There isn’t any need to go out of your way to increase the number in circulation...”

“I have a couple of reasons for doing this, but I want regular people to be able to eat eggs. Plus, I think that people will eventually figure out the orphanage is providing the eggs. People would be less likely to try stealing lots of cheap eggs than a few expensive ones. That’d be safer for the orphans, too.

“Plus, if they’re cheaper, then we’ll get to have a lot more egg-based meals.”

Milaine and Tiermina seemed surprised by my explanation. Apparently, no matter which world you’re in, operating a business without thinking much about your profit margin puts you in the minority.

The three of us talked over things and drew up a contract. Every day, someone would come by the henhouse near the orphanage to get the eggs. We'd leave pricing to the guild. It'd be a problem if they were too expensive and didn't sell, after all. The guild would provide vegetable scraps for feed. That'd take the burden off of Liz. Tiermina would basically be in charge of delivery. We'd keep how the eggs were obtained and who was producing them a secret. In addition, we wrote a certain "something" in for the last clause.

"Is this contract agreeable?"

"Yeah, it's fine."

"Well then, I'll register you at the merchant guild, so if you would be so kind as to allow me to see your guild card."

"You want me to register?"

"Generally you need to be registered with the guild if you want to do legitimate business."

I wish she wouldn't look at me like she was saying "even little kids knew that."

"So do you only need me to register?"

"I'm afraid I'll need Tiermina to register as well. When doing any transactions with the eggs, they'll need to check your guild cards."

"In that case, can I use the card the adventurers' guild made me?"

"Yes, all guild cards are fundamentally the same. All we're doing is adding information to the card, so you can use the same one you created at the adventurers' guild."

Tiermina and I handed over our guild cards to Milaine. After taking them, Milaine headed over to a crystal panel in the corner of the room, placed the cards there, and processed them. It took a couple of minutes.

"I should explain how the merchant guild and these cards work."

I checked the card.

Name: Yuna

Age: 15 Years Old

Class: Bear

Adventurer Rank: D

Merchant Rank: F

As usual, my class was still bear.

“Just like the adventurer rank, the merchant rank indicates your merchant level. The higher you increase in rank, the more your credibility increases. As a result, when doing business in a new town, a higher rank gets you more preferential treatment.”

“Preferential how?”

“For example, those towns might allow you to rent better plots of land, give you introductions to people you need, or let you have better materials, since you look like a good investment.”

I see, I thought. So my reputation goes up along with my rank. That's basically the same for adventurers.

“By the way, how do I increase my rank?”

“That would be through contributing to the guild. To put it simply, it's based on how much you collect in taxes.”

That was pretty simple.

“Also, this applies to any town you go to, but you'll be required to receive permission to trade at the merchant guild wherever you go. If you do business without permission, you'll end up getting penalized, so please be careful.”

Basically, they didn't want me to do business arbitrarily. I wasn't planning on setting up shop or anything right now anyway.

"Also, just as with the adventurers' guild, you can deposit money here. You should be aware that any money you deposit at the adventurers' guild is combined with the amount you deposit here. You may also withdraw money at either guild."

I'd gotten the same explanation at the adventurers' guild, but I hadn't used that feature. I had the bear storage and the fortune the god had converted for me. Another hundred million yen wouldn't make a difference if you already had ten billion.

"How would you like us to handle the proceeds from the eggs then? Would you like that in cash? Would you rather deposit the money in either your card or Tiermina's?"

"Please deposit it in Tiermina's," I said, without hesitation.

"Hold on a sec," said Tiermina. "Do you mean you're depositing all the money with me?"

"Well yeah. I need to pay your wages and the kids', plus there are probably going to be expenses. It'd be a pain for me to prep all the money each time."

"While I'm glad you trust me, I'd rather not be responsible for what might potentially end up being a large sum of money."

"In that case, what if we decide on a set amount of money? How about we deposit only the amount Tiermina would need in her card and put the rest on yours, Yuna?"

"We can do that?"

"Yes, we often do that for merchants who have separate people responsible for the stock and managing the wages."

After deciding on the amount of money we needed for Tiermina's and the kids' wages—and for any necessary expenses—we decided the rest would be deposited into my card.

Since we'd figured out how we'd do things moving forward, I left the guild. If I needed to do anything else, I could come back again later. I gave Milaine the eggs I'd brought in today for free so the guild's valued clients could try them. I needed to sink some

cost in first before I could start seeing returns.

With the guild behind us, we headed to the orphanage in order to introduce Tiermina and talk about our next move. Basically, I asked the headmistress to manage the orphanage like usual. I'd hand over the wages the kids earned to the headmistress and would have her make the arrangements for their necessities. I asked Liz to take care of the kids and, of course, figured out what I'd be paying her. I asked Tiermina to manage the eggs and money. I wanted her to be the face of operations when dealing with the merchant guild.

As for me?

I wouldn't even lift a finger.

I made the henhouse and the walls, caught the birds, and made the contract with the guild. I didn't have a role anymore, except to catch more birds. Since it'd be an issue if I caught them all near the village, I'd go further afield to procure the others.

Because of that, we increased the number of kokekkos we had to three hundred and even had some chicks born from the eggs to raise.

Then one day, the lord Cliff paid me a visit.

"Welcome, Lord Cliff. What brings you by?"

I at least welcomed him politely.

"Yuna, I have something I want to ask you."

"What could that be?"

"Why will you not sell eggs to the Fochrosé family?"

CHAPTER 46

CLIFF FOLLOWS THE MYSTERY OF THE EGGS

MY BUTLER RONDO came into my office in the middle of the reprieve I'd rightfully taken from the morning's mountain of paperwork.

"I apologize for intruding, sir."

"What is it? Something urgent?"

"No, it's nothing dire, but I think it's something you should hear."

If Rondo said so, then it probably really wasn't that important. Regardless, it seemed to trouble him.

"Recently, a large number of kokekko eggs have started to flood into the town, under odd circumstances."

"Odd in what way?"

"First of all, we do not know where they are coming from. In addition, they refuse to sell them if I use the Fochrosé house's name."

"Wait, what?"

"Every time I inquire with our suppliers about the eggs, they always speak in riddles. When I tell them they may take their time explaining the situation, they never give me a response. However, when I go to shops as a normal person would, I am able to obtain eggs, but when I ask that they be delivered to the Fochrosé house, they tell me that they are out of stock, and that making an advance order won't be possible for the foreseeable future."

"What is the meaning of this?"

Now it was starting to trouble me.

“The only thing I am certain of is that they refuse to sell eggs to the Fochrosé household. Even when I inquired at the merchant guild, they claimed to have no knowledge of this.”

I didn’t particularly mind not being able to eat eggs, but it didn’t put me in a good mood.

“I don’t have any urgent work for the afternoon. I suppose I’ll head over to the merchant guild.”

I cut my break short and headed to the guild.

I’d made no appointment, but I was still able to secure an immediate meeting with the Guildmaster.

“Why, Lord Cliff! What brings you all the way to the merchant guild?”

Milaine gave me a suspicious grin.

“I’m not here to talk business today. I came to ask about something personal.”

“What could that be?”

“It’s about the kokekko eggs.”

“Kokekko eggs?” Milaine’s expression didn’t budge.

“That’s right. Apparently no one intends to sell them to me.”

“We’re doing no such thing.”

Milaine had always been upstanding with me; what moved her to lie to my face now?

“The information that’s worked its way up to me says otherwise.”

“Are you sure that it wasn’t just that the eggs sold out or advance orders filled up because they’re so popular?”

“The people selling the eggs said the exact same thing.”

“Then that’s how it must be.”

“Do you really think I’d accept that explanation?”

“It wouldn’t kill you to go without eggs to eat.”

“I’m offended that I have no idea who is doing this to me. Also, I’d like to have eggs for my daughter.”

“Well then, would you like to take some home for her?”

“What about some for me?”

“I’m afraid we don’t have any for you.”

Milaine grinned at me. What an irritating woman. There weren’t many people around who could stand up to me.

“So you just won’t tell me at all?”

“That’s the arrangement—don’t sell eggs to Lord Cliff.”

“Do you intend to keep that promise even if it means damaging your relationship with your own lord?”

“That’s right. If you weren’t the bad guy in this situation, I likely would have been on your side. This time around, I’m with her, though. I rather like her.”

I was the bad guy? And who was this *her*? Who could Milaine be talking about?

“You’ve made many children suffer. *She* rescued them.”

Suffering children? Who in the world was she talking about? I didn’t remember torturing anyone.

“I recognize that you’re a splendid lord, but I mean to support her so long as she’s plainly in the right.”

“It’s rare for you to back someone to that extent.”

“She intrigues me. I’ve met my fair share of people up until now, but I’ve never met any other person whose strength, behavior, and philosophies I haven’t been able to figure out.”

“Hearing that from you, I’d like to meet her, regardless of the egg situation.”

“I’m not planning on connecting you two.”

“Could you at least tell me what it is I did?”

“No. If I told you, you’d put two and two together, and figure out how she’s connected.”

“Then maybe I’ll have you repay that loan from earlier?”

“The loan?”

“You’re weren’t able to prepare the king’s gift, right?”

The merchant guild couldn’t make its usual arrangements this year.

“And you’re bringing that up now because?”

“That’s one of the guild’s duties, isn’t it?”

“Come to think of it, did you decide on an offering for the king?”

“Yeah, the adventurers’ guild gave me a goblin king’s sword.”

“A goblin king’s sword?”

“Yeah, that bear adventurer got it when she defeated the goblin king.”

“By bear, do you mean Yuna?”

When I mentioned Yuna, Milaine’s reaction changed for the first time.

“You know Yuna?” I asked.

“She’s the rookie who defeated a hundred goblins, overhunted the wolves, slayed tigerwolves, recently defeated the black viper, and dresses like an adorable bear.”

“You seem awfully knowledgeable about her.”

“That’s because she’s a promising rookie. Even the merchant guild has its eyes set on her. I had no idea she’d gotten a goblin king’s sword when she slayed the goblin horde. I wish she had sold it to the merchant guild.”

“And that’s how I got an offering for the king. So maybe I’ll have you return that loan for not making good on your duty to prepare an offering for the king?”

“That’s underhanded. So it seems you already know Yuna, then.”

“More or less. She’s also caught my eye. I’ve never met an adventurer as interesting as her.”

“Well, it looks like that very same adventurer hates you.”

“...what was that?”

“Yuna is the one who is supplying eggs to the guild. She also made her deal with the merchant guild on the condition that we refuse to sell them to the Fochrosé family.”

“It was Yuna?”

That bear girl hated me? I felt unsettled.

When I first met her, I thought she was an interesting girl. I ruminated on what I knew of her—her peculiar house, her generous gifts to my family, her accomplishments in battle. She seemed personable. *That* Yuna hated me? It didn’t seem that way the last time we spoke.

“May I ask why she feels that way about me?”

“You’ll need to ask her yourself.”

I doubted I’d get an answer even if I kept pressing her. Milaine was that kind of woman.

“I understand. I’ll go see Yuna.”

I left the merchant guild and made my way to the notorious bear house.

I called Yuna out, waiting at her door.

"Welcome, Lord Cliff. What brings you by?"

"Yuna, I have something I want to ask you."

"What could that be?"

"Why will you not sell eggs to the Fochrosé family?"

"What're you talking about?"

"I pressured it out of Milaine, so don't get mad at her."

"I'm not really that mad. I told her that she could tell you about me if it caused trouble for the guild anyway."

"Well, why did you tell them not to sell them to me?"

"It's because the orphanage is producing the eggs."

"...um?"

"So, I just had them not sell them to you to rile you up."

"Why would you not sell eggs to me because the orphanage is producing them?"

"Are you for real? You've been steadily chipping away at their funding until you just cut them off in the end. Sure, the orphanage isn't contributing to the town, but I don't think that justifies driving kids to their death when they've got a future ahead of them. It's not like the kids don't have parents because they want to. I don't like how you sacrificed them just because they weren't essential."

Yuna didn't give me any time to process.

"The children were so hungry," she went on, "they were scavenging for people's leftovers. The orphanage's instructors were begging for the shops and inns' scraps. They wore the same clothes every single day. The house they sleep in is drafty. They

don't have warm blankets for their beds. Why should those kids feed you with the eggs from chickens they worked so hard to raise?"

"..."

"Besides, I'm sure you could survive without eggs—you're a lord, after all."

I didn't understand what Yuna was saying. Every new detail of her account baffled me afresh.

"I figured they earned a little retribution on their behalf, even if the headmistress already seemed grateful enough just getting a place to live."

As I started assembling the pieces of Yuna's account, I understood why Milaine had sided with her—but I hadn't cut off the orphanage's funding. Why did she think I had?

"Yuna, you probably won't believe me, but I didn't cut off the orphanage. I'm going to go home and confirm that. Once I understand what's going on, I'll come back."

I quickly returned to my residence. I didn't walk—I ran. I needed answers.

Once I returned to my office, I called for Rondo.

"Are you back, Master Cliff?"

"Rondo! This is urgent—I need you to find out what happened to the orphanage's funding."

"The orphanage's funding, you say?"

"That's right, find the person who made me look like a heartless lord!"

"I understand."

Rondo bowed his head and left. I was so worked up, I didn't get any of the afternoon's work done.

Rondo came back to my office that evening.

"May I, Master Cliff?"

"Did you find something?"

"Yes, the person managing the orphanage's funding is Master Enz Roland."

"It was Enz?"

I see. So he was responsible. I wanted to punch myself for not knowing what was going on in my own domain.

"It seems Master Enz is embezzling the orphanage's funds."

"He did what?!"

At its core my job was to delegate work to others, yes, but also to check up on them. Every month, when the orphanage's request for funds crossed my desk, I would sign it and release the funds without giving it another thought. Of course Yuna would be angry.

"I have yet to examine the details; however, it seems that Master Enz has falsified the records of every fiscal exchange he has been involved with to conceal his embezzlement. It appears he is also in debt."

"Why would he need to take out loans if he's embezzling our funds?"

"It seems he's quite the womanizer. Furthermore, his wife seems to have a bottomless appetite for jewelry and such, and his son seems to have taken to his father's extravagant philandering habits."

"You've got to be kidding me!"

That was the town's money.

"Does he take us for fools?! Rondo! Gather the soldiers immediately and surround Enz's estate. Absolutely do not let him escape; I want the entire Roland family brought to me alive!"

"Yes, understood."

Rondo headed out of the office.

An hour later, my men presented me with Enz in all his swinish glory, along with his wife and son. All three of them were absolute scum. I felt sick to my stomach.

"Lord Cliff, what possible reason could you have to send soldiers for us at this late hour?"

"I feel like executing you and your family immediately, so please choose your answers wisely"

"..."

"Did you embezzle the funds meant for the orphanage?!"

"I have done no such thing."

"The orphanage is claiming they haven't received anything!"

"Well, it's the people at the *orphanage* saying that. They're probably just hoping to get more out of you by pretending they didn't receive the money. Trash is as trash does."

You're the trash!

I controlled the urge to strike him and continued with my line of questioning.

"It seems that the jobs I've entrusted to you have largely remained undone."

"It will all be done at a future date. We've just had some slight setbacks," he responded, keeping calm.

"There's also the matter of your debts."

"Those are minor. I'll be able to repay those soon, so it's nothing you need to be concerned about."

It didn't look like he intended to tell the truth.

"Then you won't have any problems with me inspecting your house."

"Well..."

Finally, his expression changed.

"We have already begun searching your residence."

"You really think you'll be able to get away with that? I'll tell my brother in the royal capital."

"This is my town. As soon as I gather evidence, I will have you executed. Throw those three into the jail!" I ordered the soldiers.

"Wait, you have to let me contact my brother in the royal capital!"

"Someone shut this guy up. He's sickening."

The soldiers gagged the Rolands' mouths with cloth and took them from the room.

Some time later, Rondo came back from examining Roland's house.

"Did you find anything?"

"Yes, we found all the proof we needed."

Rondo was pale.

"What's wrong?"

"Master Enz's actions were despicable."

"Was it that terrible?"

"Embezzlement, fraud, rape, murders, illegal dealings—just too many things to count."

“Murder?!”

“We are still tallying the corpses in the dungeon. The cruelty was such that I could hardly believe it had all been done by a human.”

Rondo’s account was just unbearable.

Apparently Enz would hire young girls from the country as his servants, have his way with them until they died, and abandon them in the basement. Since they had recently come from the countryside, no one would notice when they went missing. If a family member or their sweetheart came in search of them, he would invite them to his residence, ensnare them, and kill them. This had gone on for a while.

His wife would spend money freely on jewelry. Enz would then embezzle or misappropriate the funds he needed to pay off the debt she racked up.

His son would do as he liked abusing women in the town and would squash any lawsuits using Enz’s money and influence. He was in the habit of extorting shopkeepers around town, forcing them out of business if they defied him.

The reason none of this had reached me was obvious now—Enz had put a stop to it before it could. His older brother was most likely pulling strings for him, but this was my town. I wouldn’t let them get away with whatever they wanted.

“Execute them.”

I was out of patience.

“Are you certain? We risk making enemies at the capital.”

“It doesn’t matter. We’ll say they were killed by a home invader.”

The Roland house was executed. We secured evidence of their crimes. We seized their assets. We rescued the survivors in the dungeon. Once we treated those who had a place to go, we prepared them for the journey home. After everything was done, I headed back to Yuna’s house.

“I’m sorry.”

I lowered my head and explained why the orphanage's funding had been cut off. Normally, I wouldn't tell an ordinary person about any of this, but I felt I had to tell this girl.

"My subordinate embezzled the money. I didn't realize it. I will be reinstating the orphanage's funding immediately."

"You don't need to."

"..."

"They're all already working their butts off. They don't need a subsidy anymore."

"But that's..."

I still didn't feel better about it.

"If you have that kind of money, why not put it to good use?"

"And by that you mean?"

"Like you could use it to make an oversight department to make sure something stupid like that doesn't ever happen again."

"To oversee things?"

"They'd make sure that the money is being used the way you instructed it to be. For example, if they were in charge of the orphanage funds, they would go to the orphanage every few months and check in to make sure they were using the money for expenses they actually needed. They'd check whether the stuff they were buying counted as a reasonable purchase. If there was a person doing that, it wouldn't be that easy to misappropriate or embezzle the money. Then again, if the person overseeing stuff ended up becoming a criminal, there wouldn't be a point."

"Then what would I do?"

"That's obvious. You can't just choose someone you trust—you need to pick someone who'd trust you so much they'd put their life on the line. You have to have at least one person like that, right?"

“Actually, I do.”

I had Rondo.

“Really? Good for you.”

Yuna didn’t say anything after that.

“So the orphanage really is fine?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“You really saved me there. We got by without any of the children dying. Thank you for that.”

I left Yuna’s house and returned to mine. I had a mountain of work. Rondo would have to take a break from being my butler so he could work as my right-hand man.

CHAPTER 47

THE BEAR MAKES PUDDING

I WONDER IF IT WORKED.

I'd gotten my hands on a ton of eggs, so I'd decided to try making pudding.

When I opened the refrigerator, the cold air brushed my face. A row of puddings greeted me. I grabbed one of them, took it to the table, and gave it a taste.

“Delicious.”

I gobbled it down. I just couldn't stop my spoon from moving. I headed back to the fridge for seconds. Right after I'd finished two whole, long-yearned-for puddings, Fina and Shuri came to visit.

“We're here, Yuna.”

“Sit down and wait right here.”

“So what was the yummy food you told us about?”

I had them stop by so they could be my official taste testers.

“They're treats I made using eggs.”

I set out a cold pudding for each of them. They took their spoons and ate a bite.

“It's so good...”

While Fina was murmuring her impression, Shuri had already shoveled several more bites into her mouth.

“Shuri, don't eat too fast.”

“But it's so good.”

Smiles formed on their faces.

“I’m glad you two seem to like it.”

“It’s so yummy, Yuna. I had no idea you could make something this delicious out of eggs.”

“Well, this is just a prototype. Let me know if you had any impressions while you were eating it—like if it was too sweet or not sweet enough.”

“There isn’t a single thing wrong with it. It’s sweet and delicious.”

“Yeah, delicious.”

Shuri seemed regretful as she licked her spoon.



I ended up pulling two more puddings from the refrigerator and brought them out in front of the girls.

“These are your last ones.”

When I set the puddings on the table, their spoons got to work. I went back to the refrigerator and stuck the rest of the puddings into my bear storage. After they finished eating and we parted ways, I headed out to the orphanage for my next official taste test.

When I got to the henhouse near the orphanage, the kids were hard at work taking care of the birds. I called out to them and headed inside.

“Welcome, Yuna.”

The headmistress and some girls were prepping lunch.

“Did I come at a bad time?”

“Not at all, this is fine. While it’s not much, would you be kind enough to have lunch with us?”

Since she’d gone out of her way to invite me, I humbly accepted. The kids sat down in their seats in the expansive room and patiently waited for everyone’s meals to be set out. After all the meals were set up, they said, “We give you thanks, bear girl, for this meal.”

Once that was over, the kids started to eat.

“You’re still doing that?”

“We are able to eat like this because of you. We can’t forget to be grateful for that.”

Their grace before meals used to be, “We give you thanks, Yuna, for this meal.” Of course, it was way too embarrassing for them to say my name, so I’d asked them to stop, but the kids just wouldn’t.

“It’s because we’re thankful to you, Yuna.”

“It’s because we get to eat tons because of you, Yuna.”

“It’s because we get to eat all this yummy food because of you, Yuna.”

“We get to wear nice clothes because of you, Yuna.”

“We have a warm house to live in because of you, Yuna.”

“We get to sleep in warm beds because of you, Yuna.”

“...because of you, Yuna.”

Since it was so embarrassing that my name came up at every meal, we settled on a compromise, and they started thanking the bear girl instead. It was still plenty embarrassing, though.

The orphanage’s lunch was just bread and veggie soup, but the kids seemed to be pretty stoked to eat it. Just seeing them like that made me feel happy, which was kind of weird. I never would have thought of myself as the caring type like this—especially since I hadn’t done anything like this in Japan. Even though I had the money, I never tried donating.

While I was watching the kids, a few of them finished eating. I pulled the puddings out of my bear storage.

“What’s that?” a girl asked.

“These are snacks I made using the eggs from the birds you all worked hard to look after. They’re yummy.”

I started putting the puddings in front of the kids. I set aside a portion for the headmistress and Liz, of course.

“What the heck? This is delicious.”

“It’s so good.”

“I only have one for each of you, so make sure to savor it.”

It seemed popular with the kids.

“Yuna, this is so tasty,” Liz said.

“Thank you. These were all a result of you and the kids working hard to raise those birds. I made this pudding out of their eggs, after all.”

“Really?”

“Just selling them would be a waste, after all.”

“Eggs are amazing, aren’t they? They can become money or turn into these delicious sweets.”

“It’d be nice if we could get just a few more birds and eggs though.”

If we could do that, I could make tons of things without worrying about cutting into our supply.

“Yes, we’ll make sure to put our elbow grease into it.”

“If you end up with too many to handle, just let me know, okay. I’ll figure something out.”

“We will, but we’re still okay, since the children are working so hard.”

While I was talking with Liz, the kids emptied their pudding containers. I asked the kids what they thought of the pudding and then left the orphanage.

CHAPTER 48

THE BEAR DELIVERS PUDDING

MY NEXT STOP was the Fochrosé residence. I didn't care about Cliff, but I did want to treat Noa to pudding. I told the guard standing in front of the gate the general reason why I wanted to meet Noa. The guard already knew me and told me to wait. A little bit later, Noa herself came running over from the front door.

"Yuna."

Bomph. Noa dove right into my chest. The bear outfit absorbed the impact, though.

"Long time no see, Noir."

"You can call me Noa instead. Well, did you have a reason you wanted to see me? Even if you don't, I'm still happy to give you a warm welcome."

"I made a treat, so I wanted to see if you would try it out for me."

"A treat? That sounds delightful."

Pulling my arm, Noa took me into a room.

"Well then, what kind of food is it?"

"It's a dessert made from kokekko eggs."

I pulled the pudding out of the bear storage. Of course I couldn't forget the spoon.

Noa picked up that spoon and ate a mouthful of the pudding.

"It's delicious."

"I'm glad you like it."

"This is my first time eating something this good."

“You’re exaggerating.”

“No, not at all. This is the first time I’ve tasted something so melty, cold, sweet, and delicate.”

“Well, women and children tend to like those flavors, I guess.”

Noa wasn’t just flattering me—she really seemed to be savoring it as she ate.

“Oh, looks like I already ate it all.”

The cup was already empty. She looked at me silently and full of greed.

“Just one more, okay.”

“Thank you.”

When I handed off another pudding to her, there was a knock at the door.

“I’m coming in, Noa. I heard that Yuna came by.”

Cliff came into the room.

“Sorry for just dropping in,” I said.

“I don’t mind. What are the two of you doing?”

“Yuna is sharing a sweet she made with me that’s called pu-ding.”

“Pudding?”

Noa took a bite of her newly acquired pudding. She was smiling like a little kid. That alone justified coming here.

“Is it really that good?” Cliff asked, looking at his daughter’s smile.

“Yes, it’s delicious.”

“Noa, would you be kind enough to let me have a bite?”

“No way,” Noa refused him outright.

“Noa.”

“No. It was a present from Yuna.”

“Yuna?”

Cliff looked at me hungrily. It just wasn’t right for an adult to look at me like that.

“Agh, all right already. Please let me know what you think when you’re done. It’s still a prototype, so I haven’t fine-tuned the flavor yet.”

“This is just a prototype?” said Noa. “But it’s already better than any other sweet I know of.”

“Well, I’m calling it a prototype, but I just need to adjust the sweetness.”

I passed a pudding to Cliff, who took a bite of it.

“What... is this?”

His face changed.

“I haven’t had a confectionary this delicious before, not even in the royal capital.”

Maybe this world didn’t have a lot of great confectionaries, then? Well, I guess they wouldn’t be able to help it if it was that hard to get ahold of eggs. Cliff and Noa’s spoons never stopped moving.

“Thank you for the treat, Yuna. It was very good.”

“Was it? That’s good. Was there any part of it you would have wanted improved?”

“No, I don’t think it has a single fault.”

“It’d be fine even if you just told me you wanted it a little more or less sweet.”

“For me, I think I’d like it a little less sweet. The first bite is delicious, but it starts to become overpowering after a while.”

"Do you think so? I thought it was delicious, though," Noa said.

"Well, palates vary among adults and kids and between genders after all. I'm going to use you both as reference."

"Are you opening a store or something?"

"I'm not planning to right now. It's just that I was thinking I could help orphans in their future careers if, say, they wanted to cook or make desserts instead of raising birds."

"You're thinking that far ahead?"

"I was just thinking about how, if there was a business around, I could have a pudding without going out of my way to make it myself."

"So you're guiding the children, then? You're a much finer adult than I am."

I took their empty cups back from them and put them in bear storage.

"Well then, is there anything else you needed?"

He had specifically come to his daughter's room to meet me, and I doubted he'd come just to see me.

"Yes, I have a favor to ask. Could you escort Noa to the royal capital for me?"

"To the capital?"

"Yes, we need to attend the king's fortieth birthday celebration, but a certain someone gave me a mountain of work to do, and I suspect I won't be able to head out until the last minute. If that happens, we'll be on a very strict itinerary, and I'd rather not put my daughter through that."

"When you say *someone* caused you a lot of work... you're not talking about me, are you?"

"I'm thankful, I really am, but it's true."

That was a false accusation at best. The stuff with the orphanage was all Cliff's oversight as the lord. It wasn't my fault at all. Since I was the one who uncovered the

crime, he really should have been thanking me.

But the royal capital, huh.

"Will there be other escorts? How would we go there?"

If there were other escorts, I'd consider turning it down, since it would be a pain. Traveling by carriage would be even more of a pain.

"Just the one who took down the black viper—I think you'll be more than enough. And you have your beast summons for transportation, don't you?"

"Does that mean I get to ride the bears?!" Noa let out a burst of joy.

"I heard your summons are faster than horses. If that's the case, you could run if you encountered any danger."

I wanted to go to the capital anyway, so I didn't have a reason to refuse.

"Well then, when do we leave?"

"If you want to go early, tomorrow should work fine. I'm sure Noa wants to see her mother sooner rather than later"

Now that he mentioned it, I hadn't seen her mother in the house before. No one mentioned her, so I'd assumed she had passed away, but I guess I was wrong.

"Does your mom live in the capital?" I asked Noa, who seemed excited.

"Uh-huh, she works there."

"In that case, want to head out tomorrow?"

"Really?"

"You want to see your mom as soon as you can, right?"

I ended up accepting the role as Noa's escort to the capital.

"In that case, could you wait a moment, Yuna? I have something I'd like you to take to

“my wife,” Cliff left and then came right back with two letters and a large box. “Could you deliver this to Ellelaura?”

“What’s that?” I pointed at the box.

“It has the goblin king sword you gave me inside. If the unexpected happens, please give it to Ellelaura. I wrote down the details in this letter, so she’ll know what to do when you give it to her. Also, please give this letter to the adventurers’ guild. I’ve asked that they treat this as a quest.”

I put the letter and the box with the goblin’s king sword into bear storage.

“I’m looking forward to seeing you tomorrow, Yuna.”

“Yeah, you too.”

I left the lord’s residence to prepare for tomorrow.

CHAPTER 49

THE BEAR REPORTS ABOUT GOING TO THE CAPITAL

FIRST, I headed to the merchant guild to tell Milaine I was heading out of town. There weren't many people at the merchant guild—possibly because it was past noon. When I went to the reception desk, Milaine seemed bored.

"Yuna? What do you need?"

"I'm heading to the royal capital for a while, so I wanted to ask if you could leave the egg stuff to Tiermina."

Actually, she was pretty much already handling it all anyway. The most I did was weigh in on prices every once in a while.

"You're going to the royal capital?"

"I just have a quick escort job."

"I see. Well then, since you're going to the capital, I'll look forward to the souvenirs."

"Sure, is there something you want?"

"I'll leave that up to you."

When it came to souvenirs, meals, or anything, that was the most difficult response to ever get. I guess it was better than if she'd asked me for something unreasonable.

"This isn't really a souvenir, but you can have this, Milaine."

I took a pudding out of the bear storage.

"What's this?"

"It's a cuisine called pudding. I made it from kokekko eggs. Put it in the refrigerator and eat it on your break. Let me know what you think about it when I get back from the capital."

"Thank you very much. I'll eat it later. Please take this in return."

Milaine wrote something down and handed me a sealed letter.

"What's this?"

"It's my letter of introduction. If you give this to the royal capital's merchant guild, I think they might give you favorable accommodations. Use it if you run into trouble with them."

Since I was planning to visit the merchant guild, I gratefully accepted the letter.

"Don't forget about the pudding. Make sure you chill it before eating it," I said on my way out.

After that, I just needed to visit three more places: Fina's house, the adventurers' guild, and the orphanage. The adventurers' guild was the closest on my route. When I got there, it wasn't all that busy. I hit up Helen at the reception desk.

"Oh, Ms. Yuna."

"Could you help me with this?"

I handed Cliff's letter to Helen. Her eyes scanned its contents.

"I'll process this at the reception desk, so if you could let me have your guild card, please."

I passed it to her.

"Well, I suppose this means you won't be in town for a while."

"I'm not sure for how long, though."

The Guildmaster appeared from who knows where and called out to me.

“Yuna, you going somewhere?”

“It seems she’s going to the royal capital at Lord Cliff’s request.”

“Oh, for the king’s birthday celebration?”

The Guildmaster looked carefully at me.

“Yuna, hold on a sec.”

He ducked away into an inner room. I got to wondering what it might be just when he returned.

“Take this with you.”

Another stop, another letter.

“What is this?”

“It’s so you won’t cause a ruckus at the capital’s adventurers’ guild.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You’re going to the capital looking like that, aren’t you? Did you forget your first day here?”

No one tried to pick fights with me when I came into the guild anymore. I didn’t even get as many strange looks walking around town anymore. Actually, kids had started following me around more lately. It was like I was becoming some kind of hometown mascot. I couldn’t expect the same treatment abroad.

“I think if you give this letter to the adventurers’ guild, they’ll look after you a little.”



I'd be thankful for that. I mean, knocking people down one by one gets tedious after a while. After I thanked him for the letter, I took off.

My next stop was Fina's house. Gentz wasn't there, but all three of the women were.

"Oh, come right in, Yuna. What brings you by?"

"Yuna is here?!"

Fina came down from upstairs. Shuri followed after her.

"I came to let you know that starting tomorrow, I'll be going to the royal capital for a while."

"You're going to the capital?" asked Shuri.

"I'm there for an escort job. Tiermina, I think you'll do fine, but if you could look after the orphanage stuff?"

"Got it. I'm sure we won't run into any trouble, so please take your time sightseeing at the capital. It's your first time, isn't it?"

"I wish I could go," Fina mumbled softly as she listened in on us.

"You haven't gone before?"

"I haven't."

I guess with no father and Tiermina sick, she wouldn't have been able to.

"You want to come, too?"

"Oh, are you sure?"

"Well, it's a two-person trip with just me and the person I'm escorting, so adding another person won't cause any problems."

"Are you sure, Yuna? Isn't it a job?" Tiermina asked.

"I'll ask the person I'm escorting tomorrow, then. If I get permission, we'll go together. Otherwise, guess you'll need to keep shop."

"I'm so jealous, sissy," Shuri said, giving her sister an envious look.

"You can't go, Shuri. You've got to look after the house with Mommy."

"Waaaah."

"You really don't want to be alone with your mom then, huh?"

Shuri shook her head from side to side, "Nuh-uh."

Tiermina gave Shuri a hug.

"Well then, I'll come for you tomorrow morning. You don't need to prepare anything, but if there's something you're taking, get it ready so I can put it in my bottomless bag."

Finally, I went to the orphanage to let the headmistress and the kids know I wouldn't come by for a while and left them some wolf meat.

CHAPTER 50

FINA THANKS THE BEAR

JUST RECENTLY, Dad came home looking really glum. I wonder why?

I heard that apparently a black viper came out and was attacking a village nearby. It was a huge deal at the guild. Apparently Dad got to come back from his job butchering and trading, but the other employees couldn't change shifts.

The black viper is supposed to be a ginormous snake. I haven't ever seen one before. They say you needed a party of C-rank adventurers to beat it, at the very least. Yuna and the Guildmaster both went to beat it alone. My dad seemed worried. He was mumbling, *There's no way they'll be able to defeat it.*

A few days later, Yuna and the Guildmaster came home safe and sound. When my dad got home, he was so happy telling me about it. Since they're harvesting the black viper tomorrow, they called me in to help.

I went to the guild with Dad early in the morning, but it looked like Yuna wasn't there yet. Since she was so tired from going out slaying, she wasn't going to come in at a specific time. I decided to help out the guild like old times until she came, but then Yuna came to the guild looking really energetic. I couldn't really tell how strong a black viper was supposed to be anymore.

I waited in cold storage for them to tell me what to do to harvest the black viper, but then they called everyone to come outside. They said it was so big that we couldn't even harvest it inside cold storage. We ended up harvesting it outside town. When Yuna pulled the viper's body out of her bear puppet's mouth, I wondered how she could beat something so huge on her own.

Once I got my directions, I got to butchering. I paired up with Dad. First he would skin it; then I would cut up lumps of meat from where he skinned and put them in a bottomless bag. I wasn't sure if we could finish it all in one day. Anyway, I decided to work hard.

A lot of hours later, there was no viper left to process. I was so relieved. I let other people carry the materials and brought Yuna back to the guild from her place like the Guildmaster asked. Then I was done with a whole day's work. I decided I would head home and go to bed early today. I was tired, but I was glad I could help Dad.

Lately, we've been on cloud nine.

Mom got better, and Dad tries to make us laugh when we eat. Mom always says, "That's not funny," but she's laughing when she says it. I'm not sure how long it's been since we've cracked up at the dinner table. Maybe it was the first time it was like that for Shuri.

Then, one of those days, my mother said something I didn't expect.

"Maybe I'll work as an adventurer."

We all stopped her. Dad especially wouldn't allow it.

"Are you planning on dying and leaving your kids behind?! Is that how little you trust me to be the breadwinner?!"

I was scared just imagining Mom going to fight a black viper, but I could imagine Yuna beating it without breaking into a sweat. I wonder why that was? The only time I'd seen her fight was when we first met.

Shuri hugged mom too, and shook her head so hard her whole body trembled. In the end, we reached a compromise so she would get work through the merchant guild.

...I wonder why she ended up working for Yuna instead? Apparently her job was trading bird eggs. What was Yuna doing? Maybe she was going to quit being an adventurer so she could be a merchant?

One day Yuna told me, "Come over to my house with Shuri tomorrow."

She said she wanted us to sample some food. I was a little worried, but I was excited about it. After I ate breakfast the next morning, I went with Shuri to the bear house and Yuna brought out a sweet called "pudding." It was yellow. It was supposed to be made out of eggs. Was it really okay for me to eat something that fancy?

But then again, Yuna made it for me. I gratefully scooped up a spoonful. It was soft and sweet. I'd never heard about it before, let alone tasted anything like it. I finished eating the whole thing before I knew it.

Shuri's cup was empty, too. When we both looked disappointed, Yuna smiled and brought out one more for each of us. This time, I ate it slowly.

Mmhmm, it was so good.

Yuna is already amazing since she's such a strong adventurer, but being able to make food like this is pretty incredible, too. I was so happy it was scary.

While I was teaching Shuri the alphabet at home during the afternoon that day, Yuna came over. I wondered if she wanted something. When we asked her about it, she said she was escorting someone to the capital. She came to ask my mom to watch the orphanage.

"I wish I could go."

When I said that, she ended up deciding to bring me too. Is it really okay for me to go? We'll find out if I can go tomorrow after she checks with her client. I don't know whether I can go, but I'm looking forward to tomorrow.

EXTRA STORY

THE ROOKIE ADVENTURERS

PART ONE

I HEADED OVER to the adventurers' guild to kill time today. I came to the guild in my bear onesie like usual, but I didn't hear anybody making fun of me. Inside, I checked the quest boards, hoping for something interesting.

I thought about how I wouldn't have minded another black viper now that I knew how to defeat them as I perused the D-rank and C-rank boards. What rank would a black viper end up being, anyway? If it was higher than B-rank, I obviously wouldn't find one on the boards I was looking at. I gave the B-rank boards a quick peek just in case, but I didn't find any quests with new monsters or that seemed interesting.

Just when I was thinking about taking my business elsewhere, I took a step without looking where I was going.

"Ah!"

I'd knocked the girl in front of me over onto her butt. We seemed to be around the same age. She was taller, though. Why was she the one who ended up falling, then? I guessed I could thank my bear gear for that.

"Sorry. Are you okay?"

I offered a bear puppet to the grounded girl. After she got a look at me, she looked around the room.

"A bear?"

A bit hesitantly, she grasped my puppet. Once she was standing upright, she thanked me.

"M-much obliged."

“You’re not hurt, are you?”

“No, I’m fine.”

Right when I was about to take my leave, this boy rushed over to her.

“Horn, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just bumped into that bear.”

The kid looked at me once again.

“A bear?!”

He only just noticed?!

“Sorry about that. I was kind of lost in thought.”

“No, it’s fine. I wasn’t looking where I was going, since I was looking for everyone,” Horn said, bowing her head.

“Guess we get to share the blame.”

“Yes, it seems so,” Horn replied with a smile.

The kid was looking over at me.

“What?”

I knew what he wanted to say, but I called him out on it since he was staring. He probably didn’t have a clue that his life hinged on what he said next. Jokes aside, the kid started talking.

“Are you that bear from the rumors?”

Well, if anyone talked about bears in this town, they were definitely talking about me.

“I might be.”

If there were any other bears around, I’d like to see them. Well, that’s what I thought,

but all I could picture were older guys with very few mutual interests. After looking me over, the kid opened his trap again.

"Oh c'mon, they must've been teasing us!" the kid said. He *tsked*.

"Oh, sorry," said Horn. "It's just that someone was telling us there's this scary adventurer who dresses like a bear in this town and that we shouldn't go near them."

"On top of that, they were trying to get us all riled up and saying that this bear took down a tigerwolf, goblin king, and black viper alone."

Yup, that was true.

"So you're supposed to be that bear all the rumors are about?"

The punk bopped my head, and I started counting backwards from ten. When I looked around, the other adventurers were watching us, wide-eyed and gaping like fish. *Uh*, I thought, *are they thinking I was going to do something?*

Well, I was. A pair of boys rushed over like they could see the bloody thought forming in my head.

"Horn, Shin, what do you think you're doing?"

"I mean *really*. We were looking for you two."

If I had to describe them in a word, one was hyperactive and the other one seemed belligerent.

"This bear ran into Horn."

Put that finger down, I thought. It's rude to point at people. Where'd you learn your manners?

"A bear? You don't mean that one from the rumors?"

"Oh, you mean the one the front desk told us about..."

"I heard about it from the senior adventurers..."

“But they were telling me that the bear was terrifying.”

“What a joke. When they said it was a woman dressed as a bear, I was imagining a giant lady.”

The punk bopped my head all over again. *I'm allowed to be angry soon, right?* I thought. The nearby adventurers were making themselves scarce. The guild workers weren't allowed to run away, and I could see on their faces that they knew they were in for it. I was just about to grab the little punk's hand...

“Yuna! Please wait!” Helen was yelling at me.

“Wasn’t the guild supposed to be neutral to disputes between adventurers?”

“It’s also the guild’s job to make sure you don’t get pulled into any trouble.”

Right, I guess they *had* promised me that. I wished she would’ve come to my rescue a little earlier.

“Umm, what’s the matter?” the girl said, not seeming to understand what Helen was saying. I would’ve loved to dangle them by the legs over a long drop, but cooler heads prevailed.

“Did none of you listen to what I told you the other day?” Helen cautioned the boys.

“You mean about the bear?”

“That’s right. I told you that there’s a girl who dresses as a bear and that under no circumstances should you mock her or approach her for fun.”

“You mean *this* bear?”

He bopped my head.

“Stop that. If you don’t want to die, you should apologize immediately and get to your work,” Helen grabbed the kid’s hand and pointed at the door.

“All right, we’ll go. Let’s get going, everyone.”

“Okay. I’m so sorry, bear miss.”

Horn and the boys left the guild.

"Miss Yuna, I apologize. I thought I explained things well enough, but it seems they didn't understand."

I was kind of dubious about whatever she'd told them. I guess they thought she'd pulled one over on them when they saw me in this onesie.

"Wait, so what's the explanation you've been giving?"

"That there is an adventurer who dresses like a bear and that they should never approach her for their own amusement."

"That's it?"

"No, I also tell them about the monsters you've slain so they know how strong you are, so they shouldn't make fun of you or tease you. I also tell them about the D-rank and E-rank adventurers who tried laying a hand on you and ended up shells of their former selves."

What was that about shells now? Was this supposed to be like some travel advisory warning about a dangerous bear on the loose or something?

"When it seems like they don't actually believe me despite all of that, I ask the seasoned adventurers to talk to them."

When I looked around the guild, everybody averted their eyes simultaneously. What the heck did they tell those kids? I had no idea any of this stuff was going on in the guild.

"Those were the instructions we received from the Guildmaster himself. We took these measures so you wouldn't be involved in unnecessary incidents."

I wish they'd stop describing me like some indiscriminately attacking bear. If anybody picked a fight with me, on the other hand...

"I made sure to give those kids the whole explanation too," Helen said. She let out a sigh.

Well, after everybody had told them I was a holy terror, lo-and-behold, they just see

this girl in pajamas. No wonder they thought it was a joke. Not that that was any reason to forgive anyone for bopping someone else on the head.

“I wonder if those kids will be okay.”

“Is there something to worry about?”

“A bit. Those kids are just rookies, but they took a quest for wolf slaying. That’s why I’m a bit concerned.”

“What’s their rank?”

“They just joined the other day, so they’re still rank F. Apparently they can handle wolves, though.”

“Then shouldn’t they be fine?”

“Yes, but this time they’re going a bit out of the way, so I’m a little worried.”

“But it’s just wolves.”

“It seems that a large pack’s been seen too near one of the neighboring villages, so they put in a quest. It’s not much, but there’s a reward, so the kids chose to go.”

I understood her concern, but if they’d defeated wolves before, they should be fine. That’s how it was in the game, too. Fighting multiple opponents at once was the secret to efficiency.

“Well then, Miss Yuna, did you come in to look at the quests?”

“There weren’t any interesting ones, so I’m heading home.”

“Interesting ones... that’s not normally way people prioritize quests.”

Helen seemed appalled.

I was still bored the following day. Quests didn’t vary much within the span of one or two days. The weather was nice, so I thought about taking a stroll with Kumayuru and

Kumakyu.

“Fina, let’s go for a walk!”

That was the first thing I said to her when she came in for work.

“But why do you want to do that all of a sudden?”

“I’ve got some time on my hands, so I thought I’d go for a walk with the bears. I was hoping you’d come with, Fina.”

“But what about my work?”

“You get the day off!”

“Boo...”

“You can take some wolf meat back with you.”

That sealed the deal.

“So then where are we going, Yuna?”

“I was thinking we could go to a village I’ve been to before, but let’s grab some souvenirs to bring with us first.”

I took Fina shopping before we left town. We were going to the village whose boar problem I’d solved. Marie’s baby should have been due soon. I wanted to get her a baby shower gift.

“Hey mister, I’ll take all of that fruit, please.”

I bought out all of the vendor’s oran.

“Um, are you sure about buying all of them, bear girl?”

“If me taking all of them would cause trouble, just give me however many I can buy.”

“I don’t really mind, but what are you going to do with them all?”

"They're just going to be a little gift."

Since we'd come to an agreement, I put the box of orans into bear storage. After that, I went around to a couple shops, bought some things that seemed like they would be hard to get ahold of in the village, and headed out of town.

EXTRA STORY

THE ROOKIE ADVENTURERS

PART TWO

WITH ME RIDING KUMAYURU and Fina riding Kumakyu, we left Crimonia and ran across the plains. The weather was good—perfect for a walk. Then again, if anyone saw us, they'd probably tell me to double-check what "walk" means in a dictionary. After a while, I spotted a familiar forest. As long as I used my map skill, we wouldn't get lost. The village came into view after a few minutes on bearback.

The barrier I'd created was looking good. As we got closer, I found Bogue guarding the same village entrance he had last time.

"Lady Yuna?!"

For a second I thought there was something weird about his tone, but I was *sure* I was just mishearing things.

"Long time no see! Has Marie had her baby yet?"

"Yes, ma'am, a healthy baby boy."

I was glad she hadn't had any complications.

"Lady Yuna, hast ye come to bless us with an inquiry?"

Alright, maybe I wasn't mishearing... maybe he was just a goon.

"And who might that white bear and girl o'er yonder be?"

Right, I thought, he didn't know about Kumakyu.

"This is one of my bears too, so relax. The girl's Fina. She was free, so I had her come with me on a walk."

Fina bobbed her head and introduced herself.

"I want to visit Brandaugh and Marie, so can I go into the village?"

"Yes, of course. However, aforeward, may I bid ye visit the village chief?"

"Sure."

"Thank you very much."

Since explaining how summons worked to the villagers would have been a pain, I decided not to send the bears home. Since they stood out as much as anybody would expect them to, the kids obviously started gathering as soon as we came through the gates—and the adults, too.

I kind of felt like they were making a big deal out of this.

"Yuna..."

It looked like Fina wasn't really sure what to do about the kids that were coming up to us. Bogue told the kids not to get too close; they seemed disappointed as they filed away. *Uhh, I thought, I guess I'd have to play with them later or something.*

The chief must have noticed the commotion, because by the time we turned up at his house he was outside waiting for us.

"What in the world is going on?" he said, before noticing me. "Lady Yuna!"

Okay, so the goon-speak was contagious.

"What has brought you to our neck of the woods?"

"I had some time to kill, so I just went on a walk. Also, I was wondering whether Marie might've had her baby by now"

"Yes, a healthy baby boy."

"Yeah, I heard from Bogue. That's great. I brought gifts, so make sure everyone in the village shares them."

"You have brought us tidings? We are glad, but we have naught to give in thanks, Lady Yuna."

I hoped there was something wrong with my ears.

"Umm, so what's up with you calling me *Lady* Yuna?"

"Why, it's because you're the savior of the village, of course. We cannot thank you enough for the wall that you put up; it's protecting our crops from the other animals."

"I get why you're doing it, but please don't call me a Lady. I'm not that big of a deal."

"But..."

"If you don't, I'll smash the walls," I made myself sound really serious.

"Well... fine. Then may we call you Miss Yuna?"

"Sure, that works."

One way or another, I got them to stop calling me a lady.

"Yuna!"

A voice called my name. When I pried my eyes away from the chief and searched for the source, I saw Marie coming over, baby in hand.

"Marie, congratulations."

"Why, thank you."

"Happy to hear the baby was born healthy"

"All thanks to you, Yuna, just like the other stuff. Since you defeated the forest guardian, I could focus on pulling through for the delivery."

"What's his name?"

"If it had been a girl, I was thinking about naming her Yuna."

Please stop, I thought. Just don't name a baby after me, please. Thank you, God, for making the kid a boy.

"His name is Yuuk. We borrowed a syllable from your name."

Well, I guess tons of people could have names that start with "Yu," so I guess that worked fine. Yuuk didn't cry when I took a peek at him. Maybe he didn't have a sense of stranger danger? Actually, he was laughing. He wasn't laughing because of how I looked, was he?

"So where's Brandaugh?"

"He's out hunting."

No changes there.

"I think he'll be back soon, so you can see him. I'm sure he'll be glad to see you too."

That's what I'd planned to do from the beginning anyway, so I just nodded.

"Oh right, I brought some stuff that'll be good for your health, so just eat it whenever, Marie."

"I'm glad, but are you sure? I haven't done anything for you. Meanwhile, you've done nothing but help us."

"Please don't worry about it. You need to fortify yourself with some good food so you can put your best foot forward raising this kid."

I'm sure she was probably dealing with the baby crying at night and all kinds of stuff. She had to keep herself well-fed, too.

Noon rolled around, so the chief treated us to lunch at his house. Fina was rocking Yuuk in her arms next to me.

"Fina," said Marie, "you're pretty good at that."

"Yes, I took care of my younger sister when she was this age."

Shuri? I thought. But they're only three years apart.

I heard that Tiermina's husband had passed away while she was pregnant with Shuri. That meant that if Tiermina had to work, Fina probably would have had to look after Shuri. Even with Gentz's help it must have been a terrible time, having to deal with a tiny girl.

I reached out my arm and patted Fina's head.

"Y-yuna?"

She was bewildered.

"I was just thinking that you're pretty remarkable."

I think she must not have understood what I meant, since she tilted her head to the side quizzically.

After I finished the meal, I gave the chief and Marie the gifts I'd brought from Crimonia.

"This is so much."

"I was thinking you need to get some proper nutrition. You can share them with any other pregnant women around or distribute them among the village."

"Thank you."

I was just happy she didn't try politely declining it.

"So Fina, did you really just come to the village to have a walk?" Marie asked Fina.

"Yes. When I went to Yuna's house, she suddenly asked me to go for a walk and then brought me all the way here," Fina replied, putting on a strained smile.

"Ha ha, that seems just like Yuna, I guess. I suppose you could call her laid-back. She seems pretty loose."

"Yes."

Why the heck was she agreeing? Was I actually acting that loose? When I was in Japan, I didn't go to school. I didn't listen to my parents. All I did was game. I was pretty much doing whatever I wanted in the fantasy world. I couldn't figure out anything to say to prove them wrong.

"Anyway, how much longer until you think Brandaugh will get back?"

"I think it'd be anytime now if he caught something..."

"Is there something wrong?" I asked, since I felt like she was implying something with the way she said that.

Marie looked over towards the chief. He nodded, and then began to speak.

"You defeated the forest guardian."

"Yeah, I did."

"We are not sure if that is the reason why, but there have been more wolves around lately," the chief seemed pained as he said it. "But, of course, we are grateful that you defeated the guardian for us."

"We think the wolves probably didn't come around because the guardian was already here."

"The wolves seem cute compared to the guardian. There are several in our village that can fight them off. It's just that there are so many of them."

"Brandaugh has been going out to hunt them, but we haven't been able to bring down the population."

"So the other day, when a merchant came by, we asked them to post a wolf slaying quest at the adventurers' guild."

"Then some young adventurers showed up last night."

"They went out slaying this morning, so please don't worry. We think the wolf numbers will go down."

Relax, huh, I thought. I was just hoping this wasn't like some sort of turning point or

something. I was sure the wolf population would go down with the adventurers coming in, even if they were young, and in any case, the village had people who could hold their own.

After that, I listened to them talk about the village while waiting for Brandaugh to return. Apparently they'd decorated the back of the chief's home with the forest guardian's skin. Fina went to check it out and was surprised by how big it was.

"You couldn't sell it?"

"No, we sold the meat and traded it with neighboring villages for food, but we wanted to leave proof that you saved the village. After all the villagers discussed it, we decided to keep this."

"Once my little guy gets bigger, I'm planning on telling him the story of your exploits while we look over this skin," Marie said, looking at her son's face.

It was kind of embarrassing; I just wanted them to stop.

When we left the chief's house, there were some kids watching my bears from across the way. I beckoned them closer, and a few rushed over.

"Hey, do you want to pet the bears?"

The kids nodded.

"You can pet them, but you better not give them any trouble."

They latched onto Kumayuru and Kumakyu the second they had permission. They made sure to follow my orders and didn't do anything to upset them. After the kids spent a while playing with the bears, I heard a commotion near the village entrance. Someone was running over to us.

"Chief! This is terrible!" they shouted. Several people followed after him.

"What's gotten you so riled up?" the village chief said. The others in the house had

followed him out.

"There's a tigerwolf!"

"A tigerwolf?!"

"I-is Brandaugh okay?!" Marie questioned the man who had come to the chief's house.

"I'm sorry. He was with me part of the way, but he stayed behind to distract it." He hung his head slightly as he apologized.

The man had a quiver full of arrows on his shoulder. He was probably another hunter.

"No..." Marie said, crumpling to her knees.

The situation was kind of dire, I guess.

"Chief!" said the hunter. "Quickly—call the men together and fortify the entrance. It might be able to clear the wall, so you must tell the women and children to get inside their homes."

The chief nodded and gave the order. The kids who had been playing with the bears clung to Kumakyu and Kumayuru nervously.

"Bear girl..."

"It'll be okay, but since it might be dangerous, you should all go home and listen to what your moms and dads tell you."

The children nodded and returned to their respective homes.

"Have you seen any of the adventurers?"

"When I was hunting, I caught a glimpse of them, but we didn't know about the tigerwolf back then, so we went separate ways. I'm not sure what happened to them after that."

"Chief! Do you think those adventurers can handle a tigerwolf?"

"They showed me their guild cards, but they were just F-rank rookies. I think it's

impossible. Actually, I'm worried about them."

The chief dipped his head low and furrowed his brow. Then he raised his head and looked at me without saying anything. He turned his gaze on the men gathered in the village.

"Hurry and close the entrance. Some of you take guard along the wall!"

"What are we going to do about Brandaugh and the adventurers?"

"We wait for them to escape here. If we search for them imprudently, we might have to sacrifice more of our own."

"But..."

Marie was so overcome with worry she couldn't continue. All she could do was hug her son tightly.

"Yuna..." Fina gave me a brittle look.

"It'll be fine."

I gave Fina a gentle pat on the head.

EXTRA STORY

THE ROOKIE ADVENTURERS

PART THREE

“I'M HEADED OUT.”

“Miss Yuna!”

“I'm going to take the bears and go in there to get Brandaugh and the others real quick.”

“It's too dangerous! Tigerwolves are different from the forest guardian. They are ferocious!”

The chief was genuinely worried for me.

“That's right. The guardian just ate all our crops when we did nothing, but tigerwolves will actually attack people.”

“Yuna, it's dangerous.”

The villagers were genuinely concerned for me.

“Though it'll cost some money, we'll put up a quest at the adventurers' guild, so please don't be worried.”

Couldn't they see they had an adventurer right in front of their eyes?

“But chief, what should we do? Who should we have go to the town? We can't just wait for a merchant like last time.”

“And we need to do this quickly.”

“We should figure out what to do about Brandaugh before any of that, shouldn't we?”

"I will say this as many times as I need to, but we will not go save Brandaugh. We just have to hope that he will make it back to the village."

The village felt gloomy at the chief's words. No one wanted to fight the tigerwolves. They knew they would die if they did. Was my only option to stay silent? I mounted Kumayuru.

"Miss Yuna?" said the chief.

"Just going out for a little stroll," I replied, since persuading him of anything would be a pain. My eyes met with Marie's.

"I've got Kumayuru and Kumakyu around, so I shouldn't have any problems going out on a walk."

I hoped my bears gave Marie some peace of mind.

"But..."

"I'm just going for a walk, so you don't need to worry about me like that."

"Yuna..." Marie said, looking at her feet.

"Miss Yuna," the chief said in her place, "please do what you can."

He bowed his head very low.

"I don't know what you're asking for. Just going for a walk."

"Miss Yuna..."

"Okay, going to go for a bit of a stroll. Sorry Fina, but you wait here."

"Yuna," Fina said as she rushed over, seeming concerned.

"It'll be fine. I've taken them down before."

"Yeah, but be careful."

I rode Kumayuru hell-for-leather. Kumakyu kept pace.

Bear detection revealed a lot of wolves, but no sign of Brandaugh. The tigerwolves were getting close. I needed to hurry, or things would hit the fan.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu, mush.”

We thundered through the forest. I detected five people nearby. I wondered if it was the rookies and Brandaugh. If I sensed them, they had to still be alive. It looked like I was going to make it in time.

“Run, Horn!”

“Shin! A wolf went that way.”

“Where is the tigerwolf?!”

“Brandaugh! That’s dangerous.

“You guys go on ahead!”

“But—”

“This forest is my expertise! I’ll figure something out. Actually, you’d all just get in the way!”

I could hear their voices. It seemed like they were in a tight spot. Kumayuru ran faster. I caught sight of them; if I could see them, that meant they could see me.

“A bear!”

One of the boys pointed his sword at Kumayuru.

“You idiot, look closer!”

“It’s Miss Bear!”

I fired an ice arrow, drilling into the forehead of the wolf that had been chasing them.

My second volley cleared out the others looming in the brush.

“Whoa.”

I realized they were that party with the guy who’d bopped my head yesterday. Fortunately for them, now wasn’t the time to get all bent out of shape about that.

“Kumakyu! You take over.”

I left Kumakyu to guard them and ran over to Brandaugh. He was standing on top of a pretty high rocky outcrop, his bow at the ready. I followed his sight line and spotted a tigerwolf weaving through the forest. He’d been laying down a curtain of suppressing fire on it.

Honestly, what was that man thinking? That whole thing about nice guys finishing last was true, apparently. Pulling that kind of move was a sure way to get mauled.

The tigerwolf slipped between arrow after arrow, veering to the left and right as it bore down on Brandaugh.

“Kumayuru!”

Kumayuru sped up, closing with the tigerwolf in an instant. Its body slammed the tigerwolf as it readied to pounce. Kumayuru took the impact well; I didn’t so much as move in my seat.

“Miss!”

“Long time no see, Brandaugh,” I said, raising my bear puppet to greet him.

“Why are you here?”

“I’m going for a walk,” I answered, my attention locked to the tigerwolf. It slowly stood up and looked in my direction.

“Miss, make a run for it!”

There was no way I could run with my target right there, regardless of what he said—that was my precious, precious pelt, after all. I got down from Kumayuru and confronted the tigerwolf.

"Miss," said Brandaugh, "it's dangerous."

"Dangerous for who? You just had a baby, so you shouldn't be putting yourself into danger anyway," I said, not shifting my attention as I scolded him.

We didn't have time to hold a long conversation. The tiger wolf glared, grit its teeth, and growled. If I didn't have my bear gear, I'd be cowering around now. I closed in and loosed an air cutter. The tigerwolf detected the change in pressure and flipped clear of it in a very un-wolflike show of acrobatics.

At the same time, though, dodging wasn't the same as acting of your own volition. It was something that your opponent forced you to do. I ate up the distance its dodge had built, fortified my body, and smashed it square in the side with a bear punch. Its body scraped against the ground.

Oh, I thought, maybe I hit it too hard, until the tigerwolf tried to stand back up. An arrow flew past my head and struck it straight in its right eye.

"Brandaugh?"

"I didn't think you needed my help, but I saw an opening."

The tigerwolf stood with the arrow still stuck in its eye.

"That might have made things worse."

Brandaugh's hand shook as he readied his bow. I could feel the aura of pure murder rolling off the tigerwolf's body, too. I didn't know whether it was a buff from the bear gear, my experience gaming, or just a security blanket thing, but I didn't feel the kind of dread Brandaugh was feeling.

"It'll be fine."

The tigerwolf and I kicked off the ground simultaneously.

Even with one crushed eye, it avoided all of the bear cutters I fired. Still, Brandaugh had given me a blind spot to exploit. I juked right and caught it in a hail of compressed water bullets. The tiger wolf let out a scream as it collapsed, but rallied seconds later. It opened its gigantic mouth, like it wanted me intimately familiar with all its teeth. When it presented me with that opportunity, I shot an ice arrow straight down its

throat.

Just when I thought its one-eyed glare meant it still meant business, it collapsed on its side.

“Did you kill it?”

It didn’t get back up.

“Seems like it.”

Brandaugh relaxed his bow.

“Miss, you saved me. Thanks.”

“I said it before, but I was just taking a walk, so don’t worry about it.”

“You’re so modest, even after saving my life.”

Brandaugh patted my head through the top of the bear hood, and I heard the bushes rustling behind us.

“Brandaugh, are you okay?”

The rookies had turned up.

“I’m pretty sure I told you all to run away.”

“Sorry. We were worried about you. Thank you for what you did earlier. If you hadn’t caused that diversion, we would have been...”

“Don’t worry about it. I just happened to be around at the right moment. I just happen to know more about this forest than you all do.”

“So were you the one who handled that tigerwolf, Brandaugh?” the rookie asked, looking at the arrow sticking out of the tigerwolf’s eye.

“Nah, this young lady took down the tigerwolf. I just took advantage of an opening she made.”

The rookies looked at me.

"This bear did that?"

Just as one of the boys mumbled that, I saw the girl next to him elbow him.

"He means thank you for everything you just did."

"Thank you very much. You saved us."

The four rookies politely bowed their heads.

"So what should we do with this guy? I'd like to take it back, but..." Brandaugh asked, looking at the dead tigerwolf.

"I'll carry it."

I went up to the tigerwolf and put it in my bear storage.

"Amazing as always. This has been bugging me for a while now—what's with that white bear?"

Come to think of it, this was the first time Brandaugh saw Kumakyu.

When we got back to the village, the men were armed and the entrance was closed off.

"Brandaugh! You're safe! And so are the adventurers!"

"Yeah, she gave us a hand."

"Is that right? What a relief. You only just had a baby, so don't make Marie worry."

"Sorry about that."

"So what happened to the tigerwolf? Is it nearby? If it isn't, we were talking about going to the adventurers' guild in town."

"Oh, the tigerwolf's dead. She killed it."

“...Wha?”

All of the men had the same reaction.

“We’ll be fine now.”

“Is that really true?”

No one seemed to believe Brandaugh.

“But the tigerwolf is on another level compared to the guardian.”

“What good would lying about something like this do? I’ll explain the details later. Anyway, let me go to the chief so I can give my report.”

The men parted to the right and left to make a path. Brandaugh and I headed to the chief’s house together. Kumayuru and Kumakyu followed behind us, and the rookies trailed at the very end of the procession.

“Brandaugh, you’re back?! ”

The chief and Marie came out from the chief’s house. Fina followed behind them.

“You’re not hurt?”

“I’m fine.”

Relief spread across Marie’s face.

“Well then, Brandaugh, what happened to the tigerwolf?” the chief asked.

“She killed it.”

“Is this true?! ”

I thought it would be faster to show them the actual thing than explaining it, so I took the tigerwolf out of bear storage. They looked at the body in disbelief. When the chief saw it was dead, he bowed his head.

"Miss Yuna, thank you very much. You have my sincere gratitude for rescuing Brandaugh and going so far as to defeat the tigerwolf. Though it doesn't amount to much, please allow us to pay you as thanks."

"I just happened to be on a walk, and I just so happened to discover Brandaugh and coincidentally beat a tigerwolf. I don't have a reason to take money from the village."

"But..." the chief seemed like he wanted to say something, but he couldn't get the words out.

"Plus, with the baby just being born, I couldn't let Marie become a widow."

"Yuna..." Marie smiled at me, wiping her tears away. Right then, Yuuk reached out his arms as far as he could get them from within Marie's arms.

"Yuuk?"

Yuuk was reaching out towards the tigerwolf's corpse. Marie sunk down to her knees while still holding Yuuk, and he grabbed the tigerwolf's fur.

"Yuuk?"

When Marie tried to pull Yuuk's hand from the fur, he started to cry. When she got flustered and let his hand go, he latched onto the tigerwolf's pelt again.

"Yuna, I'm so sorry. I'll make him let go right now."

When Marie pried Yuuk's hand away, he really started crying. She rocked him to the best of her ability, but he just wouldn't stop. It seemed like he just *really* liked the pelt.

"Marie, please accept this tigerwolf as your son's late birthday gift."

"But... I can't accept that. I'll get him to calm down."

Nevertheless, Yuuk wouldn't stop crying from within Marie's arms.

"Why won't he stop crying for me?"

I ended up laughing watching Marie working her hardest to soothe her baby.

"Ha ha. Marie, please take it. Chief, the pelt is for Yuuk, but the village can use the meat any way it sees fit."

"Are you sure?"

I nodded.

After that, we had Fina butcher the tigerwolf. The villagers were pretty shocked at how quickly she worked. We divvied up the pelt and meat as we'd agreed.

While I was watching Fina's butchering operation, the rookies came over.

"Um, do you have a sec?"

"What is it?"

"Thank you very much."

They lowered their heads.

"If you hadn't come when you did..."

"We might have been goners."

"Also, I'm sorry we were rude to you at the adventurers' guild."

"Um, please forgive Shin. He didn't mean it badly. Everyone told us that you were terrifying and violent, so when we saw you were so cute, he thought it was a practical joke."

"We had no idea you were that strong. We're just rookies; we figured it was a hazing thing. If you're at all like the rumors say, please just take me. The others didn't do anything wrong."

"Could I ask you something? What did they tell you at the adventurers' guild?"

“Well...”

They told me the same thing Helen did. But as for what the other adventurers had told them... It looked like I had some punishment to dole out when I got back to Crimonia.

“Are you really going home? It’s already late, so please stay the night.”

“It would be fine if I was alone, but I’ve got this one here,” I said, and put my hand on Fina’s head. “We came here without telling her parents. I don’t want to make them worry.”

“Yes, you’re right. We certainly can’t keep you. Yuna, thanks again for everything you did this visit.”

“I’ll come again on another walk.”

“Yeah. I’ll be waiting. Please come again at your own leisure too, Fina.”

“Yes, I’ll look forward to it,” Fina said, and smiled at them.

The rookies were staying for a while to keep wolf hunting. I mounted Kumakyu, Fina mounted Kumayuru and we hurried back to Crimonia, but by the time we got there, the sun had set and we ended up getting in trouble with Tiermina.

Fina, sorry for getting you involved in this.

EXTRA STORY

ENCOUNTER WITH A BEAR

THE HEADMISTRESS CHRONICLES

WE HAD NOTHING to eat today, either. It's taken everything we could to make a soup from vegetable scraps once a day. It has been about three months since our funding was cut, and we haven't been able to provide the children proper things to eat.

As the adult, I had to do something. Liz and I would go to get food, but there were limits. If we begged every day, they would give us dirty looks. Even if we were to go somewhere else, they would not look upon us kindly. Regardless, because the children were waiting, we had to beg even as we endured their disgust.

Liz had been gone since morning, but I could not know how much she would bring back. I soothed the small child in front of me and couldn't help but worry as I thought about the future. The other children had gone out. They likely headed for the central plaza. The children searched for leftovers from the food carts there.

I could hardly admonish them for doing that.

If only I could prepare them some food, they wouldn't need to do that. However, I didn't have the means to do that, so all I could do was tell them not to be an annoyance. If things continued like this, someone might die, or the children would likely start stealing. If the children resorted to crime, those who currently gave us food would stop. If that happened, that would spell the end of the orphanage. I had thought about asking the lord for help, but if he were to think we'd turned defiant, he might evict us, and the children would have no place to go.

There was nothing I could do. I held my head and went deep into thought when I noticed a commotion outside. It seemed the children had returned earlier than usual.

Had something happened?

I anxiously went outside to find the children gathered around a girl with a strange appearance. A bear?

I called out a greeting to this girl with the appearance of a bear.

“Who might you be? I am the headmistress, Bo. I manage this orphanage.”

“I’m Yuna, the adventurer. I saw these kids in the central square.”

“In the central square... you went there again?”

I knew they had, but I had to admonish them for appearances’ sake. The children apologized, but I was the one truly at fault.

“It’s fine. It is my own fault for not being able to provide meals for you, after all. Did these children do you wrong?”

Even if they had done something to her, all I could do was apologize. I hoped she would accept.

“No, it just seemed like they were hungry.”

“I’m sorry. Um, though it is an embarrassment, we don’t have much to eat.”

It wasn’t anything to hide, so I told her the truth. Normally I wouldn’t talk about such things in front of the children, but since she was asking me so many questions, I ended up telling her. Then Yuna, the girl dressed as a bear, brought out wolf meat for us. Moreover, there was quite a large amount of it. She even produced bread and something for us to drink.

She told us to eat as much as we wanted. In truth, I didn’t want to take anything without a reason, but the children could not pry their eyes off the food. I decided to thank her and accepted it.

After we prepared the food, the children ate it in delight. How long had it been since I saw them smiling like that?

Yuna stood up and began inspecting the inside of the orphanage. I was grilling the meat she prepared for us, so I could not leave it be.

“Are you children already done?”

There was still meat. The children looked at it hungrily.

“Miss, I don’t need anymore.”

“Me neither.”

They all laid their forks and chopsticks down on the table.

“Why is that?”

“I want to eat it tomorrow...”

Of course. Even if they had food today, that didn’t mean they would have any the next day.

“All right. Let’s ask Yuna if we may have permission to eat it tomorrow.”

I went searching for Yuna. When I found her, she was repairing our crumbling, hole-filled walls with magic.

“What are you doing?” It was plain as day, but I still had to ask.

“I’m mending the walls. It must be cold with the wind coming through the gaps.”

That certainly was true. Yuna inspected the room, repairing the walls as she went. Then she went to the children’s bedroom and saw the small towels on their beds. We had no warm blankets. She pulled out warm-looking wolf pelts from the bear on her hand and handed them to me.

“Yuna?”

“Please give these to the kids. It’d be cold with just a single towel. There’s enough for you and extras.”

Why was she doing all this for us? I was so perplexed by Yuna’s actions that I forgot to ask about the wolf meat, and we ended up returning to the dining area. When Yuna noticed that the food she gave us hadn’t been eaten, I asked her about it.

“Yes, if you’d let us, I’d like to hand this out tomorrow. The children said they would rather eat it tomorrow rather than today.”

"Oh, sorry. I forgot to tell you. I'll prep several days' worth, so you can eat it."

Yuna brought out more meat and bread.

"Um, why are you doing all this for us?" I asked. I couldn't keep silent

"If an adult can't eat, it's their own fault for not working, but a kid not being able to eat isn't their own fault. It's the adult's fault. If they don't have parents, the adults around them can help them. That makes us allies."

I was almost about to cry. Even though she was an adventurer, those were warmer words than I would expect from such a young girl. The children ate until they were full. As Yuna watched them, she gave us more food. All I could do was thank her. After she watched over the orphanage for some time, she excused herself. The children were sad as they came up to her.

"You're putting Yuna in a difficult spot. Everyone, say thank you."

"Thank you, bear girl."

"Thank you."

It was the morning three days after Yuna came to us.

We were eating breakfast using the food Yuna had given us. Since she had given us so many provisions, we were able to eat morning meals. The children were delighted to eat. We really would need to thank Yuna again the next time she came. At first, I thought she was just a strange-looking girl. I suppose you can't judge a book by its cover. I had to make sure I taught the children that as well.

After the children ate breakfast, they went outside, but they came back immediately.

"Headmistress!"

They rushed over to me.

"Why are you so shaken?"

“There’s a weird wall outside.”

I didn’t understand what they were saying. What was outside? The children grabbed my hands and pulled me outside, into the shadow of a gigantic wall. It could not have been there yesterday. If it had, the children would have made the same fuss they were now. I tried asking Liz about it, but she simply shook her head. Regardless, even if it was potentially dangerous, we could do nothing about it. I warned the children not to get close and returned to the house.

What in the world was that wall? I couldn’t fathom that it had sprung up overnight. It was fine as long as it wasn’t a danger to the children. As I thought over the wall, the door opened and the children entered... with a bear? No, it was just Yuna. I put aside the matter of the wall so I could greet her and introduce Liz.

“So what brings you here today?”

Out of all things, she replied that she wanted to give the children work. I worried that she was planning to have the children do something dangerous.

“Don’t worry, it’s not anything dangerous.”

“What kind of work is it?”

Though Yuna had helped us so much, I had to make sure I knew exactly what she wanted the children to do. They were my wards to protect, after all. Apparently Yuna made the wall neighboring us, and she was keeping birds inside of it. She explained that the work involved would be things children could do, such as collecting eggs, cleaning, and raising the birds. Based on what she said, none of it seemed dangerous. It seemed she planned to sell the eggs she gathered for money, and just by doing that, the children would receive wages.

As the children listened to us, I asked them, “What do you all think? It looks like Yuna has a job for you. If you work, you’ll be able to eat. If you don’t, we’ll end up back to the situation we were in just a few days ago. Yuna isn’t bringing food anymore.”

It was wrong to force the children to do it. They had to decide for themselves, so I waited for their response. They looked at one another and all nodded at once.

“I’ll do it.”

“Please let me do it.”

“I’ll do it too.”

“Me three.”

“Me four.”

Their replies were energetic. Their words made me happy.

“Yuna, I’ll leave the kids in your care.”

I bowed my head.

Yuna took Liz and the children to the wall. I was sure the kids would be fine with Liz there.

Later, Yuna introduced me to a woman named Tiermina, who she said would be our intermediary with the merchant guild. The children told me she was a kind person. The number of birds increased before we even realized it, much to the children’s surprise.

As I was watching the smaller children at the orphanage, Tiermina came by.

“Headmistress.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“I heard from Yuna there was a cold storehouse. Do you know where it is?”

“What about it?”

A few days ago, Yuna made a cold storehouse for us. She said we would need one since we had so many children, but at the moment, all that was in it was the wolf meat we received from Yuna.

“I think someone will bring by food before long, so when they come, could you show them where it is?”

“They’re bringing food?”

“You have so many children, and with us borrowing Liz, it must be difficult going out to buy food. Because of that, I’ve arranged for the minimum you’d need to make meals to be delivered.”

“Thank you very much.”

I finally understood what she meant—we were being provided food in place of wages.

“If there is anything else you need, please let me know. Anything is fine as long as it’s not too expensive. Of course, we can also provide things that are expensive if they’re necessary, but I would need to talk to Yuna before doing it.”

“Excuse me, but may I ask why Yuna is doing all of this for us?” I asked. It bothered me. There was a possibility Tiermina would know.

“I guess it’s just because she’s Yuna, right?”

“Because she’s her?”

“I don’t know what she’s thinking, but she’s kind. My daughter Fina is also very fond of her. I don’t think she will do anything bad to the orphanage, so there’s no need to worry.”

“I see.”

“Oh, but she occasionally just blurts out the most ridiculous things, so be careful when she does.”

Tiermina laughed.

That girl dressed as an adorable bear... that girl dressed as an adorable bear had come abruptly into our lives, given us food, given the children work, and even given us proper wages. She completely changed our situation. The children were laughing, and smiles seemed to spread within the orphanage. We could eat our fill. I no longer saw sad children going hungry. We had warm places to sleep. We no longer had to sleep in the cold. It was an unshakable fact that the one who had given us all of that was the bear girl.

I decided I would trust in Yuna from now on.

EXTRA STORY

CHRONICLES OF TIERMINA'S ENCOUNTERS WITH THE BEAR

THANKS TO A MYSTERIOUS GIRL who dressed as a bear, I recovered from my illness. I never thought that I would be released from my suffering. I'd always thought that would happen when I passed on. I never thought I'd return to the days when I lived happily with my daughters. I'd never be able to thank the girl dressed as a bear—Yuna—enough.

When I told her I wanted to compensate her, she smiled and said something entirely ridiculous.

“I want you two to live together for Fina and her sister’s sakes.”

Gentz really had been helping us since my husband had passed away. He prepared medicine for me when I got sick and recommended my daughter for work. I worked with him during my adventurer days, so it wasn’t like I didn’t know him. We had come to rely on him these last few years. He was good to my daughter and took care of her. If anyone asked whether I loved him, I wouldn’t know what to say. If anyone asked whether I disliked him, I could say I didn’t. Regardless of that, I was happy when Gentz genuinely told me he loved me. In that moment I felt like I loved him back.

My daughters blessed our marriage. I was taken aback by how happy Gentz seemed when that happened. We looked for a place all four of us could live and moved to a new house.

The move went by quickly thanks to Yuna. She really was doing nothing but taking care of us. Even if I wanted to pay her back, I didn’t know how I could. Of course, I didn’t consider getting married to Gentz a form of paying her back. She wanted us to get married because she was thinking of us. She saved my daughter from monsters and shared her food with us. My daughters and I were indebted to her to an extent we would never be able to pay back except bit by bit.

Anyway, since I was better, I needed to start working. We only had so much money.

Gentz was working at the adventurers' guild, but buying the house had eaten into his savings. We also couldn't bet on none of us getting sick in the future. We needed something in reserve if that happened.

"Maybe I'll work as an adventurer," I said to everyone while we were eating. "I can slay wolves, so I was thinking of accepting lower-ranked quests."

I was a former adventurer. I could take on a wolf on my own. That would ease our finances and let us build up some savings. I thought it was a great idea when I told everyone, but they were all against it.

"No way. I won't let you do something that dangerous."

"It'll be fine. Gentz, you know as well as I do that I can at least slay wolves."

"How many years do you think it's been since you retired as an adventurer? You've got an employment gap. It's too dangerous!"

Gentz was extremely against it.

"That's right, Mom. It's dangerous."

"Mom, you can't do anything scary."

My daughters clung to me from the left and right.

"It'll be all right. I won't do anything reckless. Besides, we need the money."

"Are you planning on dying and leaving your kids behind?! Is that how little you trust me to be the breadwinner?!"

"That's not what I'm saying. We used a lot of money for the move, and we'll probably need more from here."

"I'll work," said Fina. "I'll talk to Yuna and get a lot of butchering work." Now even my daughter has started to say that sort of thing.

I tried everything I could to persuade them, but Gentz got mad, my daughters burst into tears, and we ended up having an arduous meal. Considering all of my family members' opposition, I gave up on being an adventurer, and we came to an agreement

that I find a job through the merchant guild.

They were all incurable worrywarts.

The next day, I headed towards the merchant guild in search of a job. I ran into Yuna outside. She asked me why I was at the guild, so I explained our family meeting to her. She said something unbelievable.

"Tiermina, would you actually be interested in working for me?"

She told me she was starting a business and invited me onboard. We went to Yuna's house so we could talk about the details. I was always taken aback by the bear house, no matter how many times I saw it.

She meant to sell eggs. On top of that, she already bought a plot of land near the orphanage and had made a building. Apparently she was going to prep the birds and start bringing in tons of them. I listened to her in shock. Wasn't she supposed to be an *adventurer*?

Even though she kept telling me, "I'm doing this for myself, since I just want to eat eggs," I knew she was really doing it for the orphans. She's just a really good kid. This kindhearted, bear-suited girl saved Fina, helped me, and gave Gentz and I the push we needed. That was why I accepted the job right away. I wanted to pay back even the smallest amount of my debt and to help Yuna as she tried her best to do this for the orphans.

When I went to the merchant guild and we talked out the details, I realized this would involve a great deal of money. Regardless of that, Yuna tried to entrust me with all of the sales. I was happy she had confidence in me, but that was just too much money. In the end, we distributed the sales by depositing them between my guild card and Yuna's. I would manage the money for wages and necessary expenses. The rest of the sales would be put on Yuna's guild card.

I wondered if Yuna just didn't know how to handle money, but as I watched her do everything, I realized she wasn't doing this to turn a profit. If I asked her about it, I'm sure she would have told me she was doing it for the eggs. That was just the kindhearted girl she was.

With that, I started my job. At first there weren't many birds, but Yuna brought them in from out of nowhere, and the population steadily began to increase. Eggs could be sold for a high price while there weren't many around, but when supply increased, their price would go down too. Considering that and the labor, I thought it would have been easier to keep supply low and sell them at a markup. However, Yuna smiled and told me that if there were more eggs around and they were cheaper, everyone would be able to eat them.

According to Yuna's logic, if the eggs were valuable, there was a chance they'd attract thieves, and that would potentially put the orphans in danger. On the other hand, if eggs were cheap, there would be no incentive to steal them, and we wouldn't be putting the orphans at risk.

All she was thinking about were the orphans and how to make it so that anyone could have access to eggs. Was this girl really fifteen? If she told me she was a merchant's daughter, I probably would have believed her. She was a kindhearted girl and an important friend to my daughter. I would work as hard as I could to repay even a sliver of my debt to her.

But since she was paying my wages, was I really repaying her?

Well, I have work today, too. Time to put my all into it.

AFTERWORD

IT'S BEEN A WHILE. I'm sure it must feel like just the other day for readers on the *Let's Be Novelists* website. Thank you so much for going from picking up the first volume to the second. Thanks to all of you, we were able to publish the second volume with no problems.

Since the protagonist Yuna becomes nothing more than an ordinary girl when she takes off her bear onesie, she lives dressed like that, as usual. The people who were looking down on Yuna for the way she looked at first change the way they treat her after they realize how strong she is. The rumors about Yuna started at the adventurers' guild, spread to the merchant guild, and reached the ear of the lord before long. This volume is about how word of the bear onesie steadily began to spread throughout the town of Crimonia.

One would wonder what people who have never seen a bear onesie before would think when they saw one.

I wrote the story in this book about a year ago. Back then, I was just writing from the momentum without really thinking much about it. When I thought over the things I'd set up back then, I made several modifications. In the plot in my head, I was planning to have Yuna go to the royal capital as quickly as she could without even building the bear house. Because of that, I never would have thought Fina would become such a pivotal character back when I was first writing. At first, Fina's role was to just explain the fantasy world. She was someone who was made for the purpose of explaining the town, the adventurers' guild, and the things Yuna needed to live in that world. At this point, she's become an indispensable character in this work.

Since Yuna stayed in Crimonia, we were able to meet Noa, Cliff, and the children of the orphanage. From now on, I think the story will expand with this town at its center.

I think you may have realized this while reading, but I've removed the status screen and other things from the second volume. The reason for that was because it isn't as though there are game gauges, so displaying the same skills and magic every time didn't seem necessary. Because of that, I've listed the skills and magic Yuna has obtained on the first page. I'd be delighted if you referenced those while you were

reading.

I want to thank 029 for drawing Yuna and Fina so cutely in the first volume. When I asked 029 to draw Yuna in her white bear outfit, I was met with ready agreement. It sure is a cute look.

Finally, thank you to those who helped me put out this work. I'd like to thank the proofreader who helped with any errors and such, my managing editor, and everyone at the publisher.

Kumanano – A certain day in November, 2015



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PtF by: traitorATZEN