

WRITTEN BY  
**Kumanano**

ILLUSTRATED BY  
**029**

**16**  
novel



# **KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR**

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**– Bear Bear Bear Kuma –**

**- VOLUME 16 -**

**-AUTHOR-**

**Kumanano**

**-ILLUSTRATOR-**

**029**

**[ SEVEN SEAS ]**



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NOVEL  
**16**

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*Seven Seas Entertainment*

KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR Vol. 16

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Illustrated by 029

Originally published in Japan in 2020 by  
SHUFU TO SEIKATSU SHA CO., LTD., Tokyo.  
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through TOHAN CORPORATION, Tokyo.

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Seven Seas press and purchase enquiries can be sent to  
Marketing Manager Lianne Sentar at [press@gomanga.com](mailto:press@gomanga.com).  
Information regarding the distribution and purchase of  
digital editions is available from Digital Manager CK Russell  
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ISBN: 979-8-88843-070-5

Printed in Canada

First Printing: December 2023

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Name: Yuna  
Age: 15  
Gender: Female

► Yuna's Status\_

► BEAR HOOD (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Can see the effects of weapons and tools through the beary good eyes of the hood.

► BLACK BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Attack glove, increases power based on the user's level. Can summon the black bear Kumayuru.

► WHITE BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Defense glove, increases defense based on the user's level. Can summon the white bear Kumakyu.

► 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.  
Restoration amount and speed is based on the user's level.  
Gives heat and cold resistance.

► BLACK BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

► WHITE BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Increases speed based on the user's level.

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

Gives heat and cold resistance.

◀ KUMAYURU (CUB FORM)

▼ KUMAKYU



► 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.

► BEAR SUMMONS

Can be summoned from the bear gloves.

Can be changed into cub forms.

## Skills

### ► 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 2.0

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. Summons, Beast Cubification: The bear summons can be transformed into bear cubs.

### ► 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.

### ► BEAR PHONE

Can have long-distance conversations with others. Phone persists until caster dispels it. Physically indestructible. Can call people a bear phone is given to by picturing the person. Incoming call is announced by the sound of a bear's cry. By using mana to turn the phone on or off, user can make calls.

### ► BEAR WATER WALKING

Gain the ability to traverse water. Summons gain the ability to travel on water.

### ► BEAR TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION

You can call your summoned beasts from a distance.

## 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

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one 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

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one 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

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one 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

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use earth elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image. When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

### ► BEAR ELECTRICITY MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use electricity elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image. When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

### ► BEAR HEALING MAGIC

Can give treatment by means of the bear's kind heart.



**CRIMONIA****FINA**

A ten-year-old girl. The first person Yuna met when she came to the other world. Yuna saved her mother. She harvests the monsters Yuna defeats. Yuna likes bringing her along.

**SHURI**

Seven years old. Little sister of Fina. An admirable young girl who sticks by her mother, Tiermina, and helps her with the Bear's Lounge. Loves bears.

**TIERMINA**

Fina's and Shuri's mother. Yuna cured her illness. After that she married Gentz. Yuna entrusts the accounting work, among other things, of the Bear's Dining Room and Bear's Lounge to her.

**GENTZ**

In charge of harvesting monsters at the Crimonia Adventurers' Guild. Cares for Fina and later marries Tiermina.

**NOIRE FOCHROSÉ**

Nicknamed Noa. Ten years old. Second daughter of the Fochrosé family. A cheerful girl who loves bears.

**CLIFF FOCHROSÉ**

Noa's father and the Lord of Crimonia. A man well-acquainted with Yuna's hijinks. Friendly and liked by his subjects.

**SHERRY**

An orphan girl. Apprenticing at a tailor because she's good with her hands. Accepts a commission from Yuna to create stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

**TEMOKA**

Tailor in Crimonia who takes the orphan Sherry as an apprentice.

**KARIN**

Yuna saves her mother Morin's bakery from loan sharks in the capital. After that, Karin and her mother bake bread at the "Bear's Lounge."

**NERIN**

Morin's relative. She runs into Yuna when she comes to the capital to see Morin. Later on, she takes over cake production in Morin's shop.

**ANZ**

Daughter of an innkeeper in Mileela. Yuna brought her to Crimonia because of her cooking skills. Is in charge of the "Bear's Dining Room."

**MORIN**

A capital baker. Yuna helps when her bakery is in trouble. After that, she's put in charge of the "Bear's Lounge."

**NEAF**

Travels from Mileela to Crimonia to work at Anz's shop but ends up working at the orphanage.

**SENO**

The youngest of the group who came to work at Anz's shop.

**FORNE**

Comes to work at Anz's shop. Is like an older sister to Anz and Seno.

**BETTE**

Comes to work in Anz's shop. A hard-working girl.

**GOLD**

Blacksmith in Crimonia. Made Fina's mithril knife.

## SHEELIN



### MISANA FAHRENGRAM

Nicknamed Misa. Ten years old. Saved from monsters on the way to the king's birthday festival by Yuna. She invites Yuna to her birthday party.

## CAPITAL



### ELLEAURA FOCHROSÉ

Noa and Shia's mother. Thirty-five years old. Ordinarily lives in the capital and works for the king. Is very well connected and helps Yuna with a lot of things but can be a bit pushy.



### SHIA FOCHROSÉ

Noa's older sister, fifteen years old. Wears pigtails. Attends the capital academy. Yuna met her while escorting Noa to the capital. After that, Yuna guards Shia during her practical training for the academy.



### PRINCESS FLORA

Princess of the Elfanica Kingdom. Calls Yuna "bear." Yuna likes her, frequently showering her with gifts like picture books and stuffed animals.



### TEILIA

Princess of the Elfanica Kingdom. Flora's older sister. Shia's classmate at the academy. Was looking forward to meeting Yuna after Princess Flora told her all about the "bear."

### GHAZAL

A blacksmith in the capital. At Gold's instruction, Yuna comes to see him. Later on, he makes mithril fighting knives for Yuna.

## ELF VILLAGE



### SANYA

Guild master of the capital's Adventurers' Guild. A female elf, she keeps Yuna out of trouble with the other adventurers. Has a hawk-like summon named Folg that acts as a messenger.

### MUMULUTE

Sanya and Luimin's grandfather. He is the head of the elves' village. Was once an active adventurer.

### ARUTUL

Sanya and Luimin's father. A slender male elf who looks like he's in his mid-twenties.

### TALIA

Sanya and Luimin's mother. No one would bat an eye if she claimed to be their older sister based on how she looks.



### LUIMIN

Sanya's little sister. Yuna helped her when she collapsed in front of the bear house in the capital. Very polite but can be clumsy.

### LUCCA

Sanya and Luimin's little brother. Eight years old. Loves Luimin.

### VENA

Sanya and Luimin's grandmother. Wife of Mumulute. A charming elf.

### LABILATA

Young, taciturn elf who serves as watchman for the elven woods. Sanya's fiancé.

## JADE'S PARTY

### JADE

The reliable leader of the four-person party that keeps bumping into Yuna, who teamed up with her during the golem extermination and in Dezelt. Recognizes Yuna's strength and is nothing to scoff at himself.

### TOYA

A tongue-in-cheek, mischievous swordsman. Often the butt of jokes, he sets the mood for the party.



### MEL

A cheerful mage who is always smiling. Adores Kumayuru and Kumakyu, but Yuna refuses to let her ride them.



### SENIA

A cool knife-wielding woman. Always teases Toya.

## LALUZ

### RETBELLE

Major merchant who holds an immense amount of influence in Laluz. A shrewd man but spoils his granddaughter. Gives Yuna a house in exchange for one of her picture books.

### ALKA

Retbelle's granddaughter. Has pretty silver hair and an adorable smile. Around five years old. Is obsessed with Yuna's picture books and bear stuffed animals.





# CHAPTER 406

## THE BEAR MAKES PRESSED FLOWERS

“AH, I SLEPT so well.” I stretched my whole body to its full height.

After I’d come back from the employee trip yesterday, I’d had some of Tiermina’s home cooking, then collapsed at home right into bed without even taking a bath. I’d gone to bed early and woke up feeling refreshed.

“Good morning, you two,” I said to my two miniaturized bears, who were curled up right next to me. They both crooned in reply and got up. We took a morning bath together, then started our day.

Once we were done with breakfast and I was relaxing with my bears, Fina and Shuri stopped by.

“What’s up?”

“Did you forget, Yuna? Aren’t we going to Lady Noa’s house today to press flowers?”

Oh, right. I’d *completely* forgotten I’d promised to do that. I’d been planning on taking it easy the day after I got home, but Misa was heading back to Sheerin. We needed to get to the pressed flowers pretty soon after we got back.

I sat up and recalled my bears so I could start heading over to Noa’s house.

When I got there, with Fina and Shuri in tow, Lala greeted us and took us to Noa’s room. Noa, Misa, and Shia were waiting for us.

“Yuna, we were waiting for you to arrive. Please come in too, Fina and Shuri.”

“Thank you for inviting us over today!” Fina said.

“Thank you.” Shuri mimicked Fina when her older sister greeted Noa.

“Well, shall we get started right away then?”

“Yes!”

“Okay!”

Noa led Fina and Shuri by the hand to a table. She was super energetic considering only one day had gone by since our return. I wished she could share some of that energy with me.

I followed the three upbeat kids over to the table. All the supplies we needed for pressing flowers, as well as the blossoms themselves, were already laid out.

“What are these?” I asked.

“Shia and the rest of you have flowers, but Misa and I don’t, so I asked Lala to bring some from the garden.”

“I’m pretty sure I said that I had some flowers ready and that you didn’t need to prep any...”

“But it’s so exciting! I think we ought to press all kinds of flowers! And Fina, Shuri, you may use any flowers you’d like too. In exchange, let us use some of the flowers you picked as well.”

“Okay!”

“Yeah, it’s fine by me.”

Fina and Shuri both agreed to Noa’s proposal.

I produced the flowers that Fina and the others had picked on Talgwei and set them on the table. We had flowers from many places in any color you could imagine.

“I haven’t seen any of these before,” Noa said.

“Do you know a lot about flowers, Noa?”

“No, not a great amount, but Lala does display flowers inside the estate, so I know that I haven’t seen these before.”

“I haven’t seen any of these at home either, but they’re all so beautiful,” Misa said,

picking up some.

So, even two noblewomen couldn't recognize these flowers. Well, the type of flora differed based on the region you were in, and these flowers had been blooming on a literal moving island. Since Talgwei traveled the world, it made sense that we'd found flowers that they hadn't seen before.

I thought of selling flowers as a business idea, but the whole thing sounded like a big old chore, so I ruled it out immediately. Becoming a florist was a common dream job for little girls, but a cute job like that just wouldn't be right for someone like me. Who ever had heard of a girl in a bear onesie selling flowers? Just imagining it made me laugh.

"Yuna, what's wrong?"

"Hm? Oh, nothing," I said. I couldn't explain I'd been laughing at the image of me working hard in a store packed with flowers. Come to think of it, Fina probably would have been great at working a flower shop though, especially surrounded by flowers. I bet she'd wear a cute apron while tending her wares. Fina fit that image so much better than me in my bear onesie.

Since I'd been staring at her the whole time, Fina tilted her head quizzically in response.

"Well, should we press some flowers then?"

"How do we do this, Yuna?"

"It's easy," I replied. "I'll show you how right now, so just watch."

I picked a small white flower and placed it on top of some cloth. Then, using a pair of tweezers, I fixed the petals, arranging them just so. Once they looked just how I wanted them, I placed another piece of cloth over top of it.

"Shia, could you grab me an iron?"

"Yes."

I took the iron from Shia and placed it on top of the cloth, then counted out ten seconds. After I pulled the iron away, I let the flowers cool and then placed the iron

back on top of the cloth again. Doing that a few more times would guarantee that the flower would keep its colors.

After watching my demonstration, Shuri held the flower on top of her little hand.

“The flower’s all flat...!” she said.

“Now if we frame them, you can see the pretty flowers whenever you want.”

There were probably a few finicky little steps to the process, but this was more or less the gist of it, based on my memories.

“Shia, do we only have one iron?”

“There are three. We can split into groups of two to use them.”

So, Noa and Misa formed one group, Fina and Shuri another, and I teamed up with Shia to make the pressed flowers. We each chose flowers we liked as we went, then before we knew it, we were putting them in frames.

“Yuna, what do you think of doing it like this?”

“I think that works nicely.”

Shia had assembled a yellow and red bouquet in her frame. I hadn’t made these since elementary school, but my memory seemed to be guiding me correctly. Even if we weren’t doing it quite right, it was still okay as long as none of us got too far off track. We kept going, arranging the flowers according to what looked best to us.

I didn’t know whether we really needed it, but since Shia had prepped a desiccant, I placed that in the frame too. With that, our displays were done.

“Aww, I think yours is the best, Yuna.”

“I don’t think it is,” I said. “Yours looks nice too, Noa.”

Noa had used bright flowers in hers, which made the arrangement look a little garish. At the same time, they looked cheerful to me—a lot like her. She was apparently going to display her creation in her own room. In contrast, Misa had chosen more subdued colors. She was going to give that to her parents as a present since they’d stayed at

home.

I looked over at Fina and Shuri to find that Shuri had chosen giant flowers.

“Do you think Mom will like it?”

“You worked so hard to make it that I’m sure she will. You made a really nice one too, Fina.”

“I want to give it to Mom!”

*Looks like Gentz isn’t getting anything,* I thought, though I didn’t say anything.

“Are you giving yours to Ellelaura, Shia?”

“I think Mother will be much happier with Noa’s, so I will give this to Cattleya as a present.”

“Am I giving mine to Mother?”

“I think she’d like it, yeah! We have extra flowers, so if you make another one, I’ll give it to her.”

“Okay! I’ll make another, but you should make it with me so it can be a joint present.”

“Oh, good idea!”

The two of them got to work on Ellelaura’s present.

“Yuna, can we put this up in one of the shops?” Fina asked me.

That seemed like a good idea, so I said yes. That broke the dam though, and suddenly all of them were asking me to put up their displays too. I said yes to everyone, of course.

They all went back to their arts and crafts, very cheerful. I watched them with a smile. I was glad I’d suggested making the pressed flowers in the first place.

“You’re not making any, Yuna?”

I didn't have anyone to give them to anyway. I could have displayed another one in my house though. Nah, though—I kind of felt like it was too girly for someone like me. Then again, I was also the person who had teddy bears displayed in my room. Not that teddy bears are abnormal or anything.

I couldn't just stand there and watch everyone else press flowers. While I was trying to figure out what to do, I remembered a certain little girl who lived in the castle.

"I'll make some for Princess Flora."

I picked up some new flowers and started to think of what kind of display I'd make from them. The first thought that occurred to me was to make it bear themed, but it'd be pretty hard to make a bear out of flowers.

It was no good. After wracking my brain to come up with something bear-like, I just made some regular pressed flowers. One by one, the flowers disappeared off the table as we all went ahead with our arts and crafts until we were completely done with our creations.

# CHAPTER 407

## THE BEAR HELPS AT THE SHOP

WE DISPLAYED the flowers we'd made in our rooms and gave them as presents. The leftover flowers went on display at Morin and Anz's shops. The girls all seemed thrilled to show off their creations. They were also an unexpected hit with the customers.

A few days had passed since we'd come back from Mileela and Misa was going back to Sheerin tomorrow. I was going to treat everyone to bread, cake, and pudding at the Bear's Lounge.

I headed to the bakery to find several customers already lined up before it'd opened. It made me happy to know they were looking forward to buying what was inside.

I brought the others with me to the back entrance and popped into the kitchen. The delicious smell of fresh bread wafted toward me. After greeting Morin and Karin, we took our freshly baked bread, some pudding, and some cake, and headed to a corner of the bakery to eat.

"It's as good as I thought it would be! I'm so jealous that Noa can eat this anytime she wants."

"Absolutely, Misa," Shia replied. She got to eat this regularly since she lived in the capital.

"But you could go to the capital restaurant for pudding and cakes."

Now that she mentioned it, I remembered the restaurant started by Ellelaura and Zelef had opened. But I wasn't going anywhere near there—not since they'd set up bear statues near it.

"It's much more expensive at that restaurant, so we can't go often. Mother won't give me much of an allowance either."

Huh. I didn't realize that girls in the nobility had an allowance.

"I understand that. Father won't increase my allowance as well, so I can't come here every day."

Seems like Noa was in the same boat, too. Well, better this than thinking they could get anything their hearts desired. Kids who grew up with silver spoons in their mouths were more likely to be nuisances to everyone around them when they grew into adults. Having an allowance meant they'd have to learn the prices of things around town. Plus, they'd learn how to manage their money. Cliff and Ellelaura were doing a great job educating their daughters.

"That's why I ask Lala to let me have pudding or cake from here once a week as my treat."

"Noa, that's so unfair!"

"That's right. I'm not even able to eat any of this *either*."

Shia and Misa clamored in protest.

For a moment, I thought Lala was going soft on Noa, but once a week wasn't too bad. Obviously, having cake every day wasn't okay but... demanding it once a week was kind of cute.

While we were taking our time chatting and snacking, the bakery got busy. As soon as the doors opened, it was pure chaos. Only a few customers wandered in at first, but they quickly built up into an endless throng of people. Before I knew it, all the seats were taken up and the kids working the floor were running, trying to keep up.

There were two main culprits behind this crush: One, they'd been closed for a while. Two, they'd also introduced ice cream. The shop had started selling it about two days ago. We hadn't advertised it or anything, but the news spread around town by word of mouth. It was sure keeping the kids busy.

"Yuna, I think I'll help," Fina said.

"Me too!"

Shuri volunteered as well, then the two headed into the back of the bakery. I couldn't stand by and do nothing then.

"Sorry, but I'm going to help out too. You three can take your time eating," I told the others.

When I stood though, Noa piped up, "Yuna, I'd like to help as well!"

"Noa?"

"I'd like to too."

"If both of you are helping, then I couldn't possibly sit idle."

Misa and Shia both volunteered themselves.

Wait, *three* noble ladies were getting their hands dirty at a bakery? My rational side wanted to shut that down quick, fast, and in a hurry. I was happy they were willing to pitch in, but we really didn't have the time to teach them the ropes when it was so busy. And it'd sound bad to put it this way, but it'd honestly be more effort if they did join in. I'd need to watch over them. Worst still, all three of them had differing—and kinda complicated—social statuses. I couldn't decide whether it was okay to even let them work.

"We've spent time with Mil and the others here. We can't help every day, but we can this time at the very least."

"I wholly agree with Noa."

"I can wash dishes or help with anything you need!"

"Really? We actually could use help with the dishes."

In the end, I couldn't bring myself to turn them down, so all three of the girls helped out.

Misa and Shia both washed plates and cups in the kitchen. Normally, having nobility do anything like that would be out of the question, but that was really the only thing I could ask them to do. Actually, it was the *only* job there was to do. It wasn't like they could help with baking, and they'd have a hard time interacting with customers since

they didn't know the menu very well. That meant that the only work left for them was dishwashing. And hey—they'd literally volunteered for it.

It was a really crucial job in a bakery too. Putting them on dishwashing duty also freed up the kids who had been doing dishes to do other stuff, which meant that Morin and Nerin had more hands to help them with baking and that we had people to make the ice cream for the next day.

Meanwhile, Noa, the last of the trio, was helping Mil bake the bear bread. Fina had already taught her how to do it, and she'd continued practicing with Lala at home. Since the bear faces took attention to form correctly, they ended up taking a lot of time to make. No fear—Noa was speeding through the bread with a practiced hand.

I could see why she'd told us to "leave the bear bread to me."

"Lady Noir, you're so good at this. Your bears are adorable! I'm sure they'll sell right away."

"It'd be wonderful if that were to happen," Noa replied.

Noa and Mil were chatting up a storm. Misa and Shia were watching them and looking a tad bit jealous, but they just didn't have the experience needed for the job.

After Morin inspected and gave the okay on the bear bread, she started loading all the bread—including the loaves she'd made—straight into the stone ovens. Since we had three of them, we could bake all the loaves at once. Morin kept an eye on everything as it baked. The kids could help out with the baking too, but they didn't compare to Morin's skills, especially when it came to the more minute stuff.

"Yuna, the bread is done! If you could bring it out to the floor," she called to me.

My job was delivering the bread. I'd actually been planning to help out with making the bear bread, but with Noa taking up the baton, she'd taken my job too. I took the fresh loaves and headed out to the main floor. Once I arrived, I found Karin issuing instructions to the kids, who were still sprinting around like mad.

"The battling bear table has opened up, so clean it up! And the running bear table too, please." Karin scanned the bakery as she issued more directions to the kids.

"I'll take the battling bear!"

“I can clean up the running bear!”

The two kids who'd answered Karin's call each headed off to their respective tables. Whenever they'd need to give directions in the bakery about the tables, they'd use the bear ornaments decorating the tables to identify them. Karin and the kids had memorized all the bear dolls, so they could immediately identify where to go with just that simple description. When I'd first seen that, I'd offered to number the tables, but they'd told me they didn't need that since they'd already memorized the bears. Fina and Shuri had them memorized, too.

“Now, the bear with the fish in its mouth.”

The kids were speeding around trying to follow Karin's orders. I glanced at the register to see Fina helping customers while dressed in her bear outfit.

“So, one bear bread, a salad bread, and also one pudding. Would you like to dine in?”

“Thank you very much!”

“The pizza will take a few minutes!”

“I'm very sorry. We're only able to serve one ice cream per person.”

Fina was killing it.

“Fina, I've brought the fresh bread.”

“Thank you, Yuna!”

Fina started to stack the bread I'd brought on the shelves. Whenever another customer was ready to make an order, she handled that as well.

Meanwhile, Shuri wiped down empty tables and guided customers to their seats. It looked like Fina and Shuri were helping keep the crush of customers at bay. The kitchen was continuing to function thanks to Noa and her team.

Once I felt reassured the bakery rush had passed, I decided to hop over to Anz's restaurant. I was starting to worry they might've been in a similar situation, and when I got there, I found out I'd been completely right. Anz was close to screaming when I got inside.

"Ahhh, we don't have enough food to serve! Forne, how is the rice coming along?!"

"It's almost done!"

"Anzy, we need more grilled fish!"

"Got it! I'm putting it up now."

"Also, the three-piece rice ball set and stir-fried vegetables please."

"Forne, could you do the rice balls?"

"Yes! I'm on it!"

In the restaurant, Anz and Forne managed the kitchen while Seno and Bettie held down the fort on the restaurant floor. Neaf would help with anything the others didn't get to.

They were keeping their heads above water, but barely.

"Anz, you look busy. Are things okay?"

"Ms. Yuna? We're perfectly fine. I'm happy to know that they were waiting to eat my cooking," Anz replied, seeming as happy as she claimed.

Anz didn't have kids helping out at her restaurant. Normally they could manage with just four people, but today was super busy. Once it was past lunchtime, the crowd would thin out. Since they looked like they were managing, I left the restaurant and headed back to the Bear's Lounge.

Now that we'd weathered lunch, we didn't need to keep making more bread and cakes.

Things settled down.

"Noa, Shia, Misa, thank you. You were lifesavers."

"I had so much fun making the bread!"

"All I did was wash dishes though..."

"That helped more than enough," I replied.

"I wanted to make bread like Noa," Misa complained.

"Well, Noa had to learn from Fina, and she was also practicing it at home."

"I'll practice at home too."

Uh, even if she did practice, it wasn't as though we'd need her to work here though.

After that, we had a little meal as a thank you to everyone for helping out. The bear bread Noa made was delish. Once we'd had our fill of fun and food, Misa and Gran headed back to Sheerin.

# CHAPTER 408

## THE BEAR ESCORTS SHIA

MISA WAS on her way to Sheerin. Shia would be

heading home to the capital a few days after that, so I ended up being the one to escort her back. Since Shia had known that I wanted to gift Lady Flora the pressed flowers I'd made, she'd invited me to go with her. I could have said no if I'd wanted. It was tricky because if I headed off to the capital right after Shia got back, it'd seem like I'd said no because I didn't want to go with her.

So, even though it was kind of a pain, I escorted her back anyway.

Shia seemed jazzed about riding to the capital on my bears. Noa looked on jealously.

"I want to go to the capital too!" she said, but she'd just gone on a trip to Mileela. She'd gotten to hang out with Misa until her friend had gone home. There was no way Cliff would allow her to have even more trips with the number of lessons she'd skipped already.

I headed off outside the town with Shia, then summoned my bears.

"Hee hee hee! I'll have so much to boast about to Cattleya after riding back home on Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

Sounded like Shia's friend also liked my bears. I hadn't seen her since the academy festival.

"So, which one shall I ride?" Shia asked while stroking Kumayuru. I had her hop onto Kumayuru while I mounted Kumakyu.

"Thank you for the ride, Kumayuru," Shia said.

"Cwoon."

"Oh, so cute! You're just as comfortable to ride as when we crossed the ocean. Oh, how I wish you were mine. If only I had my own Kumayuru and Kumakyu, I could come to Crimonia as quickly as possible whenever I wanted."

The horse Shia had ridden from the capital was staying put at Cliff's estate. The horses in the capital and Crimonia all belonged to Cliff anyway, so it didn't matter where they were boarded. He just planned to take them back next time he headed to the capital. I guess having an extra horse or two around wasn't a big deal to aristocrats.

"We're going to go fast, so don't fall off. Kumayuru, Kumakyu, we're counting on you."

They both crooned in response.

Once we were mounted, my bears sped up into a run. I didn't see any point in hiding my bears' abilities from Shia at this point, so I had them really haul it. We were going even faster than when I'd escorted Noa to the capital.

"Y-Yuna, are you sure we're not going too fast?"

"They're not even going at their full speed," I said.

"R-really?! Kumayuru, are you doing okay?"

"We'll take breaks, so they'll be fine. Kumayuru, Kumakyu, make sure to tell us if you get tired."

They crooned at us. Then for some reason, they started to run even faster. The two of them cut their own path to the capital instead of using the roads, so we'd get there even sooner.

"Yuna, we're not on the road anymore."

"It's okay. This is just a shortcut."

I'd used my bear mapping skill to keep track of the direction of the capital so we could take a shortcut. They ran through fields and forests, and even ignored bridges to run directly over rivers. Since Shia already knew my bears could run over water, that was all fine to show her.

Once night fell, I brought out the bear house and we made camp. Shia scanned the

inside of the bear house once we stepped inside—this was only the second time she'd been in it. The first time had been at Talgwei. We were kind of riled up back then though, so she hadn't gotten a good look around. This time, she took it all in.

"Noa told me already, but I'm surprised there really is a full bath here, and that it's so bear themed." Shia shared her thoughts once she'd taken the tour.

"I'll get the bath and our dinner ready, so just wait a sec."

"I'll help."

"I just need to fill the bath with hot water and our dinner is going to come from my item bag, so no need."

I turned on the hot water, which streamed from the bear statue's mouth. After that, I brought out some bread from my bear storage.

"I'll show you your room later, so once you take a bath, make sure to get to bed early."

"This doesn't seem normal for camping. Your bears are so fast, and you have an item bag that can fit a whole house. Yuna, this is so much luxury. Normally we'd have to camp outside under the stars with just a blanket. And we wouldn't be able to bathe, of course. Now that I've asked you to escort me once, I think I'll never be able to ask anyone else again!"

Shia stroked Kumayuru, who was currently in cub form.

I knew the bear house itself was impressive, but the fact it fit into an item bag was easily the most shocking part. I could even fit giant monsters in it, which made my bear puppet super handy to have.

After Shia finished eating, she asked me, "Yuna, would you take a bath with me? It's large so we both could fit, right?"

"I need to tidy up, so I'll take one later," I said, politely turning her down. Taking a bath with Shia, who was the same age as me, would probably be psychologically damaging...

I glanced at Shia's chest. *They* were bigger than mine, that was for sure. Since I'd been taking baths with Fina and Noa in Mileela, I didn't think about it so much. It'd definitely

bother me if I was alone with just Shia.

If she so much as mentioned any size difference between us?

I'd end up crying myself to sleep.

But just wait. I'd catch up with her—no! Outdo her!—in six months, maybe year, tops! She could just wait until then.

"I think Kumayuru's tired too, so why don't you two go take one together?" I offered up my bear to Shia to escape my fate.

"Okay. Then I'll head off to take a bath with Kumayuru."

Shia left without catching onto what was really going on in my head. Once I'd finished cleaning and Shia was done with her bath, I showed her to a bedroom.

"We'll leave early tomorrow, okay? Kumayuru, if Shia oversleeps, make sure to wake her up."

"If you could, I'd really appreciate it, Kumayuru," Shia said.

"Cwoon."

I took a bath with Kumakyu, and then we headed off to bed together.

*Slap slap.*

The next morning, Kumakyu woke me up. I thanked my bear, then moved to get breakfast ready.

"Yuna, Kumayuru woke me up in the most terrible manner," Shia said as she came in rubbing her stomach just as I was getting breakfast ready to go.

"That's because you didn't wake up fast enough."

She told me she'd actually stayed up late into the night talking to Kumayuru. Wait, but... Kumayuru couldn't talk? Eh, I guess it was like talking to a pet, then? Well, I also

talked to my bears, so I couldn't really judge anyone for doing the same.

That must have been why she has so much trouble waking up. Since Kumayuru's soft bear punches hadn't worked, he had resorted to slamming right into her stomach—the most extreme wake-up technique Kumayuru had. I made sure to praise Kumayuru for a job well done.

"Aren't we up a little early, though...?"

"I don't want people seeing the bear house, so I like heading out early."

We were pretty far from the road, but I wanted to be careful just in case.

After we finished breakfast, we resumed our journey to the capital. We were still using shortcuts, so I estimated we'd get to our destination sometime in the afternoon.

"I can hardly believe it. How did we get here so soon?"

"C'mon, let's get going," I said.

After recalling my bears, I approached the capital's gate. The guard gave me a funny look, but I ignored it and headed inside, all the way to Shia's house.

"Well, see ya," I said.

"Yuna, aren't you going to say hello to Mother?"

"Umm... actually, I was going to head over to the castle to see Lady Flora, so I think I'll run into her there."

If I entered the castle at all, chances were high Ellelaura would harass me.

"Well, in that case, if you do see Mother, would you please let her know I'm home?"



“Got it.”

After I left Shia, I headed to my next destination. I passed through the castle gate, business as usual, but I told the guards this time, “I’ll be going home right away, so you don’t have to tell His Majesty I’m here.”

They told me they absolutely couldn’t keep my visit secret. One of them took off running to let him know.

I knocked as soon as I got to Lady Flora’s room. I had to take off my bear glove to do that, of course. The door opened and Ange, Lady Flora’s caretaker, came to greet me.

“Oh! Why, it’s you, Miss Yuna. Welcome in!”

Ange ushered me in with a smile on her face. I found Lady Flora inside with a pen in her hand, writing something on a sheet of paper.

“Lady Flora, Miss Yuna has arrived.”

“Bear!”

The moment she saw me, her face lit up. That smile was the whole reason I liked visiting her.

“What were you doing there, Lady Flora?” I asked.

“I’m dwawing a bear!” she said.

She picked up the paper and showed it off to me. She’d drawn some sort of black creature thing—apparently that was the bear? Regardless, it was very childlike and cute. She wouldn’t be an artist in her future, but it was good for kids to express themselves while they were young. It’d make her into a more sensitive person.

“Oh, you’ve done such a good job of drawing Miss Yuna,” Ange said.

“I did!”

“What?”

Wait a sec—now that was something I couldn’t skip over. Was this creature supposed

to be me? I mean, she did say it was a “bear” but it looked like a creature no matter what angle I tried viewing it from. For argument’s sake, let’s say it was a bear, okay—but was this thing really supposed to be me?

“Is this black bear *me*?”

“Yeah!” Lady Flora’s sincere eyes met mine.

It was a perfectly normal drawing for a kid her age, but I wished it at least looked a *little* human.

After that, I gave Lady Flora the pressed flowers.

“Thank you, bear!”

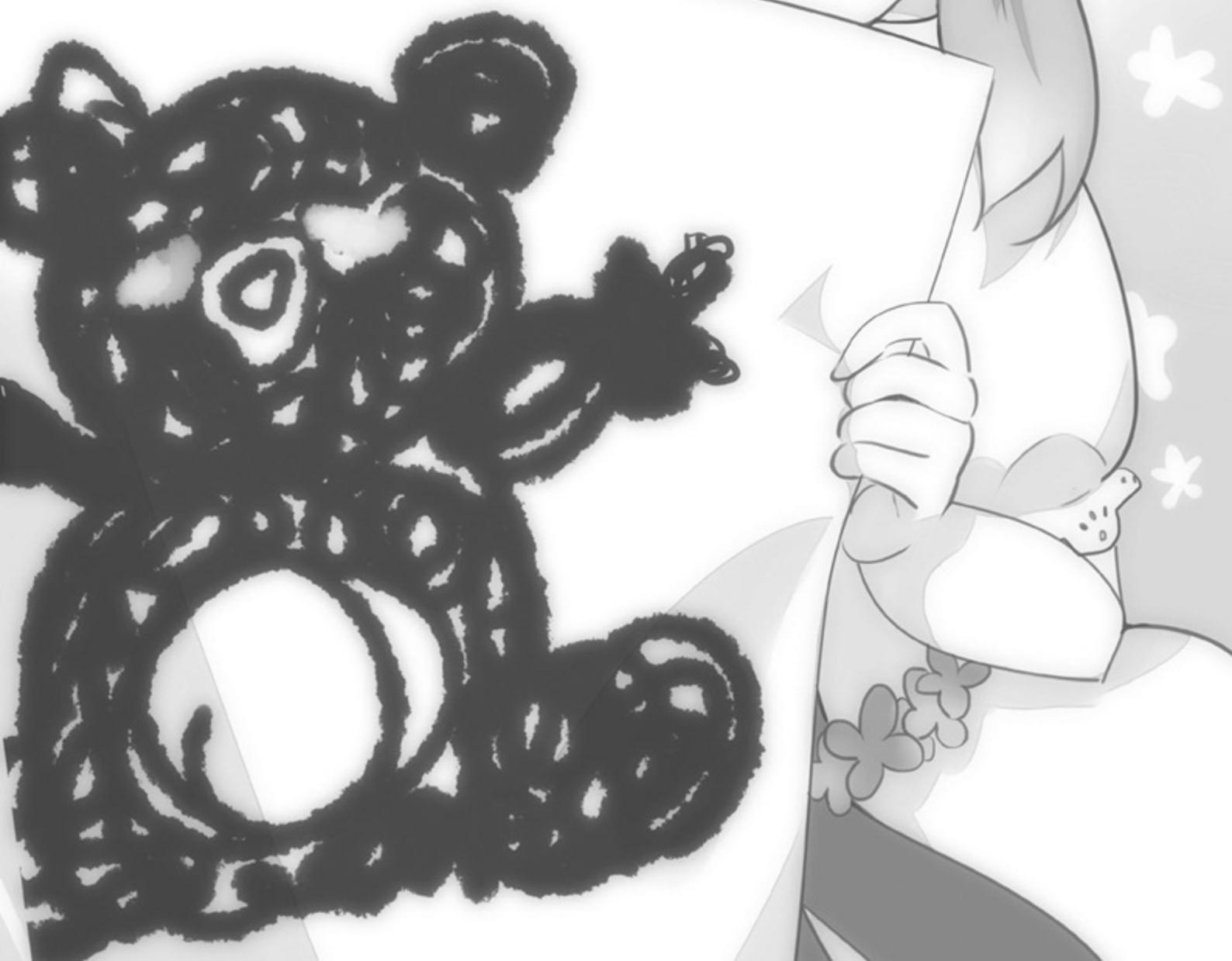
“Then we shall hang this up in your room?” Ange asked, taking the framed flowers from me doing just that.

“You can have this, bear.”

Lady Flora offered up the creature she’d drawn with a smile. There was only one way I could respond, of course.

“Thank you. I’ll treasure it.”

She sure looked happy when I took it, and it was a drawing she’d made for me. I guess I could take it and embarrass Lady Flora with it in a few years or something.



After that, we started drawing together and Ellelaura came into the room. I'd expected her sooner. She came alone this time though—I didn't see any sign of the king or queen.

Since Shia had asked me to, I told Ellelaura that she was home.

"Oh, so you escorted her here, then? Thank you. I wonder if she enjoyed it."

"She did," I said. "I never thought that she would come with us." I'd been pretty surprised when Shia had come to visit us with Rulina.

"After hearing that Noa was going to the ocean, she simply couldn't resist the idea of going as well. So, what are you up to here?" Ellelaura looked at the table, where we had pens and paper, as well as our bear drawings.

"Your drawings are just as impressive as ever, Yuna," she said after seeing my bears. I'd been showing Lady Flora how to draw to help her advance her skills a little.

"What about me?"

"You are so talented as well, Lady Flora! This must be Yuna."

She was looking at a drawing next to me. It was the same drawing Lady Flora had given me earlier. How did she know the creature was me? Wait, was that how I looked to other people? Now I just felt un-bear-ably bad.

# CHAPTER 409

## THE BEAR EATS ICE CREAM WITH THE TWO PRINCESSES

“ARE HIS AND Her Majesty not coming?”

Normally they'd come by even if I didn't invite them. The guard at the gate had taken off when I'd come into the castle, so they should have known I was here. I'd expected some kind of visit.

“I'm not sure about Her Majesty, but His Majesty can't come due to work. Also, according to His Majesty, if I see anything that looks tasty, I'm to save some for him.”

Was he just assuming that I brought food everywhere I went? Even if I did, I was bringing everything for Lady Flora, not her old man.

“Something tasty?”

And now she'd picked up on those words. It was all the king's fault.

Lady Flora was looking at me, her eyes wide with anticipation.

Urgh. Did I have anything?

I thought about it for a bit, then realized I still had ice cream.

“It's cold though. Would that be okay?”

Since I was wearing my bear onesie, I didn't really feel changes in temperature. If it were warm out, I probably would've thought of ice cream right away, but I just never felt hot because of the bear suit. I looked over at Lady Flora and noted that she was wearing something absolutely adorable, and that the cloth it was made of was thin.

“It's cold? Is it yummy?”

“Yes, it’s delicious.”

“I wanna have some!”

I produced a cup of ice cream and a spoon from my bear storage.

“Oh my, Yuna. You’ve made a new dish?”

“I figured it’d be warm during our beach trip, so I made some cold treats.”

“And you do have some for me, *right?*”

I knew it. I pulled out some more ice cream for Ellelaura and five more cups on top of that.

“Ange, these three are for Zelef, His Majesty, and Her Majesty, and these two are for you and your daughter.”

“Oh, even for my daughter?”

“She’s been taking care of her bear stuffed animal, hasn’t she?”

“Yes, she always sleeps with it.”

“Then you can let her know it’s a present from the bear,” I said.

“Thank you.” Ange looked pleased.

“It’ll melt and won’t be as good if you keep it in a warm place. Would you be able to put it into a freezer?”

“Why, of course. I’ll go right away to find a freezer for these right away.”

Ange took the ice cream and left the room. I felt like I’d forgotten something. Maybe it was just in my head?

“Well, how about we get started then.”

Lady Flora and Ellelaura both started digging in.

“Oh, it really is cold and delicious.”

“Uh-huh, it’s yummy.”

“And it melts in the mouth in such a lovely way.”

Both of them continued eating with full smiles on their faces. As I watched them, I started feeling in the mood for ice cream too, so I took out a cup for myself and started eating.

Yup. Delicious.

\* \* \*

As we were eating together, the door opened without so much as a knock. I thought it might’ve been the king or queen for a sec, but I was wrong on both counts.

“So the rumors were right! Here you are, Yuna.”

Lady Flora’s older sister and the first princess of the kingdom herself—Teilia—made an entrance. We’d spent so much time at the academy festival together, and I’d completely forgotten about her. Uh, I might have also promised I’d let her know the next time I visited the castle and that I’d share the food I brought with her too... So that’s who I’d forgotten!

“While I was walking around the castle, I kept hearing things about a bear coming or walking around, so I thought maybe it was you. And here I see you really *did* come to Flora’s room.” Teilia grumbled as she made her way over to us. “You left me out again, Yuna. You’re even eating something! Why would you call Ellelaura but not me?!”

I didn’t know what to say in response. I’d never actually called Ellelaura over—or the king or queen, for that matter. They all just came on their own. I’d never called a single one of them.

“Are you mad...?” Lady Flora asked.

“I’m not. Is that good, Flora?”

“Uh-huh. It’s cold and yummy!” she answered, grinning. I braced myself for the words Teilia would say after she saw that face.

“Then I’d like some too.”

And there they were, just as I’d imagined them.

If Teilia found out I hadn’t even left her ice cream in the freezer, she probably would’ve made a scene the next time I came back here. So, in order to cover that up, I handed her some ice cream and pretended like I’d been planning to give it right to her from the start.

Teilia sat down on a chair and started eating—it looked like she bought it.

“Wow, it’s so cold and delicious. Shaved ice is also cold, but there’s something different about this.”

In the end, shaved ice was still just ice that’d been flavored with syrup. It wasn’t anything like ice cream at all.

“I think it’d be easy to eat lots of this—unlike shaved ice.”

“No. You’d get a stomachache.”

I couldn’t recommend overeating ice cream. Or shaved ice, for that matter.

“So, everyone was eating food as delicious as this, all while I was away at the academy?”

“That’s not exactly right. I’d bring food for Lady Flora, and everyone would just barge in. I didn’t invite them over or anything.”

“But you still seem to prepare enough for everyone each time you come.”

“I just make everything in bulk. I really don’t think of Ellelaura specifically.”

“Well, you didn’t have to go as far as to say that! We always look forward to the food you bring, you know,” Ellelaura said.

I wished she’d see it from my perspective. I couldn’t bring something new every time I dropped by.

After that, Lady Flora finished her ice cream, but she still seemed hungry. I couldn't let her eat multiple cups in a single day, though. So, once Ange came back, I handed off a ton of ice cream to her and told her to give a portion to Lady Flora starting tomorrow, though that meant Ange ended up having to make a second trip to the freezer.

Then, when Teilia and Ellelaura saw that, of course they had to coerce me into prepping multiple days' worth of ice cream for them too. Nerin made ice cream at the shop, but after seeing how slammed she'd been making them, I obviously couldn't ask her for some.

That meant I'd need to make some myself.

\* \* \*

Once we were done eating, we went back to drawing. Teilia watched and commented, "So this is Yuna. You really do love Yuna, don't you, Flora?"

*How did everyone connect that creature to me?!* I yelled, but only in my mind. Didn't she have anyone around to teach her how to draw? Wasn't the royalty supposed to study the arts?

"I wish you would draw something of me, your own big sister."

"Of you? Okay. I can!" Then Lady Flora set to work on Teilia's portrait.

Since the king and queen hadn't made an appearance for once, my time spent with Lady Flora was very peaceful.

"Lady Flora, I'll come back again sometime soon."

"Okay."

"Please do try to come by when I'm in," Teilia said.

That'd be kind of a pain. Once she was back at the academy, she wouldn't have a lot of time off. It'd be a lot harder to see her then.

So, I decided to reply, "I'll do my best."

I'd been planning on heading straight back to Crimonia, but Ellelaura stopped me. She

invited me to have dinner as thanks for bringing Shia home, so I ended up staying over at her house. She asked us a lot about what we'd done at the beach, then Shia gave Ellelaura the pressed flowers from Noa, which she seemed to really like.

The next morning, Shia and Ellelaura were seeing me off in front of the house.

"Yuna, if you come back to the capital, please make sure to drop by."

"Give my regards to Noa and Cliff!"

Once I was off, instead of heading to my bear house, I headed in an entirely different direction.

When I'd gone to Talgwei and fought the wyverns, I'd used my mithril knives. Before that, I'd used them to fight scorpions in the pyramid. Since I was already in the capital, I was heading to the blacksmith to have Ghazal do some maintenance on my knives.

People were staring at me, as usual, and I even heard some "bear" comments on the way. Once I got into the shop, I was immediately greeted by an iron golem—still standing, not yet melted down. Ghazal had a shopfront golem instead of a shopfront dog.

I patted the iron golem lightly and headed further into the shop. I didn't see any customers around—maybe because it was early in the day. The repeated clang of metal being hammered rang out from the back.

"Ghazal, are you in?" I called as I headed deeper inside. The hammering stopped.

"Just gimme a sec," he answered back, then I heard the hammering start up again. I loitered around in the shop for a while until the hammering finally ceased and Ghazal appeared.

"Ah, so it's you, bear girl. Sorry. Couldn't leave my work right then. So, what brings you here today?"

"I had to stop by the capital for something, so I wanted to ask if you could take a look at my knives. You did say you'd take a look *on the house*, after all."

I really emphasized “on the house.” After all, Ghazal had offered to do maintenance for me for free after I’d brought him the iron golem.

“You haven’t got to say it like that, miss—I’ll take a look at some knives for ya.”

“So, actually, do you run this shop alone?”

It was probably a lot of work doing the blacksmithing and also minding the storefront on his own. Gold in Crimonia had Nelt working with him—did Ghazal not have anyone then? Dwarf women looked young, but all the male dwarves just looked like little old men. I seriously couldn’t tell how old anyone was.

“Yup, I’m all alone right now.”

He kind of mumbled that for some reason. I decided not to push it. I’d just been curious about it because it’d suddenly come to mind, so no need to dig.

“C’mon, I’ll take a look, so show them here.”

I brought out my two knives from my bear storage and handed them off to Ghazal. Ghazal unsheathed them and inspected the blades for a while.

“Doesn’t look like there’re any problems. Looks like you’ve been treating them right too. I’ll go ahead and fix them up for you anyway, though. Also, what’d you cut with these?”

“...” I didn’t say anything.

“Goblins? Wolves?”

“Do I really have to say...?” I’d definitely give him a shock if I’d said “wyverns.”

“If you don’t wanna tell me, you don’t gotta. Just was curious, since I’m the maker and all. Helps to know whether the monsters you fought were weak or strong, and it gives me something to discuss with other weapon makers. We look at how things went with a weapon and adjust what we do next time. Gives us ideas for the future. Just a professional curiosity.”

Well, now that he’d put it like that, I couldn’t lie to him or keep silent.

"Well, as long as you promise not to tell anyone else."

"I wouldn't. Like I told ya, I just want an idea of how the weapon I made is being used, what it's cutting, and how that affects its condition."

I decided to be honest with him.

"Um, they were wyverns."

"..."

"And then I guess there was also that giant scorpion right before that?"

"..."

Ghazal looked at the knives, then at me.

"You're not pulling my leg, are you?"

"They were really sharp and cut right through everything. They sliced right through the wyverns' wings and through one's neck..."

Why was I mumbling all this like I'd done something bad?

"You used these against wyverns? You really never fail to impress me, miss. Now, you mentioned a large scorpion—that doesn't have anything to do with the adventurers who brought in part of a scorpion shell and caused a commotion earlier, does it?" he said, eyes unfocusing as if to recall.

Maybe he meant Jade's party?

"Now, does any of that have to do with you?"

"It probably was me, but was it really that big of a deal?"

There was no point in lying now, so I just asked him about it directly.

"We mostly focus on metals, so I just heard about the whole thing from an acquaintance who makes armor outta monster hides and parts. It was just one part of the shell, but the thing was so big that word got around the neighborhood."

“Urgh... did it really...?”

“It was only a piece, so lots of speculation was going around about where the rest of it was and whether those adventurers had it. Looked like everybody got stirred up trying to figure out who could’ve had the rest of it. The adventurers who brought it in weren’t giving any details.”

Looks like Jade and the others had kept their promise and weren’t revealing my secret then.

“Never would’ve figured it was you.”

“I just ended up in a situation where I had to. I wasn’t looking for a fight. And then I needed to pay off the adventurers I was with so they wouldn’t tell anyone else...”

“Explains how they got it and why they wouldn’t tell anyone where the rest was then.” Ghazal nodded. He’d accepted my explanation.

“Now, that giant scorpion’s already surprising enough, but you’re telling me you fought *wyverns* too?”

“I just found myself in a situation where I had to.”

I’d only done it to protect Fina and the others, and to keep the wyverns from going to Mileela. I hadn’t sought them out or anything.

“Anyway, I’ve got the gist. I’ll head to the back, get these into shape and all that, so you just hold tight here for a bit.” Ghazal took the knives and left.

I hadn’t thought the whole deal with the scorpion would cause such a commotion. At this rate, I wouldn’t be able to sell the rest of the parts quietly. Well, when I needed to, I could just ask Cliff or the king to take the parts off of me.

# CHAPTER 410

## THE BEAR MAKES PUDDING WITH GIANT EGGS

“ALL FINISHED.”

Ghazal handed the knives back to me once he was done repairing them.

“Didn’t look like there were any problems, even after the wyverns and giant scorpion. Looks like you’ve been doing a decent job handling your blades.”

I was kind of happy to hear him say that—it almost sounded like praise. Well, if I weren’t handling them right, I’d feel bad. I’d be irresponsible if the knives ended up nicked or broken after he’d gone to the trouble of making them for me.

At the same time, weapons weren’t forever. These would break eventually and then I wouldn’t be able to use them anymore. On the other hand, if I handled them right, then he’d forgive me when that time came.

“Say, you were saying that you wanted to find out more about an ore you found at the mine—didja ever make it out to the dwarves’ village?”

For a moment, I had no idea what he was talking about, but then it came back to me. When I’d gotten the mithril, I’d also had to fight off some golems. That was also when I’d found some ore called Bearyllium—which was just a silly name, in my opinion. Ghazal had taken a look at it, but he hadn’t known much about it either, unfortunately. Instead, he’d told me to head out to the dwarves’ village to see if anyone there recognized it.

At the same time though, something called Bearyllium had to be an item made for me to use for sure, so I’d just assumed that even dwarves wouldn’t recognize it, no matter how much they knew about ores. That was why I hadn’t tried going.

I’d been busy, too. Since obtaining the Bearyllium, I’d had to go to Misa’s birthday party, the elven woods, the academy festival, the desert, and the beach, so I was just too busy to make it out to the dwarves’ village anyway. I’d ended up leaving the Bearyllium in my bear storage to collect dust, so to speak.

"I've been pretty busy, so I haven't made it out yet," I told him. In truth, I'd just forgotten.

Now that I was looking back on all the stuff I'd done, I was really getting around. Not bad for a shut-in. But now I was free, and besides, maybe it was worthwhile to check out the village even if they couldn't help me with the Bearyllium.

I casually pulled it out of my bear storage. Wait a sec... Had it always been this color? From what I remembered, it was a round ore and looked kind of unique. But now it was bright white. I pulled out more of it and found that the other pieces of Bearyllium were also the same color. I was pretty sure it didn't look like this before. I used my skill to check on it.

*Bearyllium.*

A mysterious ore.

The name and description were exactly the same. Yep—Bearyllium.

"Looks different from before," Ghazal commented.

"Yeah, I haven't taken it out of my item bag since last time. This is the same ore I got back then, though."

Ghazal took the Bearyllium.

"What a fascinating rock."

I wasn't nearly surprised as he was, it seemed. I mean, this was Bearyllium we were talking about. Unexpected turns of events were, well... to be expected.

"Kinda makes me want to break it open to see what's inside."

"I'd like to leave that as a last resort. I'm a little worried about what this rock is, so I don't think I can break it into pieces or anything."

It was likely a rare ore, so I probably couldn't get any more of it. If I destroyed it and couldn't use it anymore, that'd put me in a pickle.

"I suppose you have a point. In that case, I think you really would need to talk to my teacher to find out what it is."

Come to think of it, I did remember Ghazal mentioning that his and Gold's teacher lived in the dwarves' town.

"My teacher used to travel the world to study all sorts of ores, so there's a chance you might be able to find out what it is."

I guess it'd be worthwhile to at least meet his teacher, then. Even if they didn't know what the Bearyllium was, he might know something worth knowing.

At the same time, I'd gotten my hands on this Bearyllium, so I kind of wanted to know more about it—that was just the gamer in me talking. Also, it wasn't like I had anything better do to do with my time.

"If you do head out to the dwarves' town, give my master my regards, will ya?"

He told me his teacher's name, then I headed off to my bear house.

If I headed straight back to Crimonia, people would get suspicious, so I decided to burn some time. I cleaned my capital bear house. It was kind of lonely doing that all on my own though, so I summoned my bears in their cub forms to help.

"What do you say—how about some cleaning?"

They both crooned in response.

I handed off a rag to each of them and asked them to do the floors. They tumbled around the floor as they wiped it down, so I left them to it and started gathering all the bedding. I took those and hung them up to air out at my home in the elves' village, where the sacred tree was. That way, no one would see them. Luimin and only a few other elves could get into the barrier, after all.

Then I collected the bedding from the house in Mileela and all the bedding I used for

travel and did the same for them. My bear storage made it easy to carry them around—otherwise I would've had to carry them one by one. It sure was useful.

The weather was nice out in the elves' village, which made it perfect laundry weather. Once I'd gathered up everything that I needed and washed them, I also hung up those things to dry.

All finished, I took my bears and headed to the sacred tree. I changed them back to their original sizes and took a nap with them as cushions.

Evening rolled around. I finally woke up and scrambled to get the bedding and laundry.

After getting back to Crimonia, I called Karin, Nerin, Fina, Shuri, and all the kids who worked at the Bear's Lounge to the bakery. I'd been planning to do that earlier, even before deciding to go to the dwarves' town.

"Yuna, what did you call everyone here for?"

"I got a kind of rare egg, so I wanted to make pudding together with it," I said.

"A rare egg?"

"Ta-da!"

With great fanfare, I produced the egg. It was the giant duck egg I'd gotten in Dezelt.

Silence.

*Huh?* The kids didn't seem all too impressed seeing it.

"Wait, are giant eggs not all that rare then?"

No. Normal eggs were rare, so there was no way...

"Is that really an egg?"

"What? You're kidding! There's no way that giant thing is an egg!"

“So, there are giant kokekko too then.”

“Don’t you know? It’s obviously a dragon’s egg. Dragons are big, so it’s gotta be one!”

“I’ve never seen a dragon before...”

They all had a lot to say about the duck egg.

By “dragon,” did they mean *wyverns*? Or maybe this world had fire-breathing dragons and ferocious ones like in the game?

“Yuna, is this really an egg?”

“It’s so big!”

Fina’s eyes shone with wonder while Shuri bluntly poked the egg.

“It’s not a dragon egg or a giant kokekko egg,” I explained. “It came from a giant bird that swims in a lake.”

“A giant birdy?”

“Hmm. I think it was about this big.”

I spread out my hands to show them just how large the bird had been.

“Are there really birds that big around?”

“Then if we warm this egg up, will it hatch into a giant birdy?”

“Umm... well, it wouldn’t have a mommy or daddy bird, so probably not? And we don’t have a giant lake to raise them on, so I don’t think we can keep any.”

“Yuna, can I touch it?”

“Me too! Me too!”

“Sure,” I said. “But it’s heavy, so be careful.”

The kids started carefully feeling the egg and picking it up.

“It’s heavy and giant!”

“It really is so heavy.”

“Me next.”

“I want to hold it too.”

They took their turns lifting the giant egg. I was kind of worried seeing them heft it in their little hands... they wouldn’t drop it, would they?

“Take turns. And don’t go running off somewhere with it. If it breaks, we’d have a mess on our hands, so be careful.”

Well, there were only eight of them, counting Fina and Shuri, in total. I had two eggs, so they weren’t trying to fight over them too much.

“Yuna, are these really eggs?” Karin asked, watching the kids as they carried the eggs around.

“They are.”

“So, you’re saying there’s really a bird this large?”

“I think the kids could even ride around on its back,” I told her.

“Then could they *fly* on the birds too?” Nerin asked, her eyes sparkling from beside Karin.

“Umm. If they did, the birds wouldn’t be able to spread their wings, so I don’t think it’d work.”

At least, that was true if they sat on the middle of the bird, but maybe it’d work if they sat on its neck instead?

“That’s such a shame,” Nerin replied.

Now they looked disappointed. I guess they’d really been hoping to fly around.

“So, I wanted to make pudding using these eggs, so would you all be willing to help?”

“Uh-huh!”

“Yeah.”

The eggs made their way back to the tabletop.

“But how will we break them?”

“They’re way too big.”

“I can’t get a grip on it!”

Unlike a regular kokekko egg, we couldn’t knock these into something to crack them.

“And they’re hard too.”

Compared to a kokekko egg, sure. I’d seen people use a hammer or something hard to break a hole in ostrich eggs on TV and the internet. They’d make a hole large enough to get the insides out. I pulled out a hammer from my bear storage that I’d prepped just for that purpose.

“We’ll use this,” I explained.

“A hammer?”

“I guess more accurately, we’ll break a hole in the egg. It’ll be my first time too, so I’m not sure if I’m doing it right.”

Maybe this world had another way of doing it, but I sure had no idea what that could be, so we’d go with the hammer.

I held the tool in my bear puppet’s mouth and knocked it lightly against the egg. This did absolutely nothing. I tried again with a little more effort and managed a crack on the egg.

“It split?”

“Almost there.”

I gave it one more gentle whack and we had a hole.

"Could someone bring a bowl for the insides?"

"Yes."

I took the bowl and started to drain the contents into it. It didn't go well. I broke the yolk in the process.

"Aw, it broke." The kids looked disappointed when they saw the yellow leaking out.

Hmm. Maybe the hole had been too small? I'd been hoping to show the egg off to the other kids and keep it intact, but maybe that was the wrong way to go.

On the next egg I made a larger hole and got a beautiful intact yolk out of it. The kids *oohed* and *ahhed*.

"It's huge!"

"So, this would've turned into a giant birdy."

"Sure wish I coulda seen it."

I wished I could've shared the birds with them, but I couldn't take them all the way to the lake. I could have brought the birds to them through my bear gate, but we couldn't keep any here as livestock. We could've just eaten the birds too, but I wasn't too sure about that idea.

"Okay, I'm going to mix now."

As soon as I punctured the yolk, the kids started making disappointed sounds: "Aww..." "The yolk broke..."

We needed to mix the yolk to make pudding, so there kind of hadn't been a point to getting it out cleanly anyway. Can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, and you can't make pudding without breaking the yolk.

"C'mon, you're going to all help, right? Try mixing up the egg. And don't forget to prep all the stuff we'll need, including cups."

We divided up the tasks and got to work making the egg pudding.

I'd heard once that the typical ostrich egg is twenty times as large as a chicken egg. I could make two puddings per egg, so that calculated out to eighty servings—if the duck eggs were the same size as ostrich eggs, that is. It was a pretty simple calculation, but I figured I could more or less make enough pudding for the orphans and all the other people I knew. Easy.

With everyone's help, we finished making a whole boatload of pudding. When I taste tested it, it had a richer flavor than kokekko pudding, too.

I headed off to the orphanage, Anz's place, and Noa's estate to hand them out. The flavor of the pudding was already a big treat, but they seemed even more shocked by the leftover eggshell I showed off to them. I decided that I'd bring some kokekko pudding to Karina sometime too.

# CHAPTER 411

## THE BEAR TELLS TIERNINA A SECRET

I'D MADE PUDDING from a giant egg, so I decided it was about time to head to the dwarves' town when something else popped onto my radar—Talgwei.

I decided to invite Fina over and pay the moving island a visit. I headed off early in the morning to Fina's house to ask her to come with me.

"Only Fina *again*?"

When I invited just Fina with me, Shuri looked disappointed. Right, I'd left Shuri at home a lot of times in the past. To Shuri, it probably seemed like the two of us were off having fun without her.

"I wanna go too."

I wish she wouldn't make those puppy-dog eyes at me. I would have brought her if we were just riding out on my bears, but this time I had to use my bear gate, which meant I'd need to tell Shuri about the gate if she came with us.

Hrm... what to do?

"I really can't go?"

Now she was looking down at the ground pitifully. Fina gave her sister a gentle hug.

"I'll stay with Shuri today," Fina said.

"Fina..." Shuri said.

Well, I couldn't separate the siblings *now*. Shuri hadn't told anyone about Talgwei last time, either. She wasn't the type of kid to go around spreading my business, so I made my decision.

"All right. You can come too, but you have to make a promise."

“A promise?”

“Yeah. There’s a secret involved to getting to the place we’re going, so you have to keep that a secret from Tiermina and Gentz.”

In order to tell her about the gate, I had to make sure she’d keep quiet.

“Even Mom?”

“Yeah, both your mom and dad. You can’t tell anyone.”

I brought the bear puppet up to my lips, miming how she’d have to keep mum. But then someone else spoke up right then.

“Oh, this is an exciting discussion.”

I went silent.

It was the last person I wanted to hear in this situation... When I turned around, Tiermina was right there behind me.

“Yuna, what secret are you keeping from me, exactly?” Tiermina looked at me with a smile.

I’d heard that people could be scared speechless, but this was my first time experiencing it.

“Mom, um... this is just...” Fina tried and failed to smooth over the situation.

“Why are you here, Tiermina? Didn’t you have work?”

“Liz is taking care of things today, so I was fixing up the garden at home. I thought you’d just stopped by our house, but then I overheard your conversation and that you’re going off somewhere in secret. This sounds like it might concern me. I’m *their mother* after all, so I decided to make an entrance.”

I’d been positive that she was busy taking care of the kokekko at the orphanage. I guess any mother would be concerned after overhearing her young daughters were heading out on a secret trip.

"I'm fine with them going out with you, but not when it involves a secret. Wait, Yuna, you're not making them do anything *bad*, are you?" she asked me, looking completely serious.

"No, nothing bad."

"Then why in the world would you need to keep it secret from me and Gentz?"

"It's not just a secret from you two—I meant that it needed to be kept secret from everyone."

I couldn't let just anyone know about the bear gate. It'd mean trouble later for me otherwise.

"I trust you, but you still can't tell me?"

I would've thought over sharing the gate with her, but she didn't even give me a moment to breathe.

"And it really isn't anything bad, Fina?"

"It's not. We haven't done anything."

"So you should be able to tell me." Tiermina stared straight into Fina's eyes.

"Well..."

Fina was stuck between a rock and a hard place—keeping a secret for me, or being grilled by her mom. She looked at both of us, then turned her face down.

"Fina..."

At this rate, it'd be an argument.

"Tiermina, please don't be so hard on Fina. It's one of my secrets, so I asked her to keep it from other people. She's just keeping her promise to me."

"One of *your* secrets?"

"It's something that'll put me in a tight spot if other people find out."

Tiermina stared me and Fina down.

"Haaah... all right. Fina, stop making that face. I was wrong to ask. So, you were just keeping Yuna's secret for her?" Tiermina gave Fina a gentle smile and a pat on the head.

"Mom..."

"You're really not having her doing anything bad or dangerous then, Yuna?"

"I swear on (the bear) god's name," I said. But now I felt ashamed making Fina keep secrets from Tiermina. I firmed up my resolve. "I'll explain it to you, Tiermina, so would you like to come to my house right now?"

"Yuna?!"

Fina looked surprised. I just couldn't keep it secret any longer. I just couldn't let Fina keep the truth from her own mom. Plus, it'd get harder to ask Fina to come with me to places if we had to sneak around.

"Are you sure? I'd like to know your secret, but what could you possibly need to hide from others?"

"You know, thinking ahead, I think it'll be good if you know too, Tiermina. Also, I'm sure Fina felt uncomfortable with it, and I wanted to tell Shuri about it anyway. So as long as no one else finds out, it should be okay."

I didn't know what I'd do if this incident had ruined their relationship.

"I'll keep it a secret, considering I already owe you so much for saving my life. Are you really sure about telling me, though?"

"I don't see any problem with it as long as you don't tell others."

"All right. I vow on (the bear) god's name, I won't tell another soul," Tiermina said wryly. We all smiled.

I brought them all to my bear house after that.

"Did we really need to go all the way to your house just to talk?"

"I think it'll be faster for you to see it. You probably wouldn't believe it if I told you."

"I feel a little nervous. You have so many secrets that I wonder which one you could possibly be sharing with me."

Tiermina looked happy as a little kid.

Did I really have that many secrets? I only kept secret my family, where I came from, my bear clothes, how powerful I was, my money, my recipes, my healing magic, my bear summons, my bear phones... okay, maybe that was a lot. Tiermina hadn't asked much about it until now, but apparently that'd only been out of consideration for me.

Once we got to my house, I took them to the room with the bear gate.

"What a large door. My, even your doors have bears on them! So, what about this room?"

"Um, so Tiermina, where do you think this door goes if you open it?"

"Where? To the next room of course."

Since I'd set up the gate along the wall, Tiermina had given the most logical response. She could never have guessed this led to Mileela and the capital.

"This door is a magical device that's connected to identical doors set up in other locations so that I can travel to faraway places."

Tiermina looked at Fina when I explained that and then gave me a serious look.

"And you're really not joking about this, are you...?"

I nodded.

"I knew you were mysterious, but this... There's even more to you than I realized, Yuna. So, where does this door lead?"

"I've set up doors in other locations I've been to, like the capital and Mileela. Would you like to go to one of those places?"

"Then let's try Mileela, please."

I pictured Mileela in my mind and opened the door. My room in the bear house in Mileela materialized through the entryway. I headed into the room and opened a window to show her the blue ocean spread out before us. It was the same place we'd gone for our employee trip.

"It's the ocean!" Shuri yelled as she looked out.

"I didn't entirely believe it, but after actually experiencing it, I have no idea what to say. You knew about this, Fina?"

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"I asked her not to tell you, so please don't be upset at her."

"I'm not upset. I'm glad she kept your secret. I'd have to have a talk with her if she were the type to spill other peoples' secrets." Tiermina patted Fina's head.

"Mom..."

Fina gave Tiermina a smile. Even family could keep secrets from each other, but I didn't want Fina and Tiermina's relationship to deteriorate because of me.

"But I do feel a little sad. It feels a little like you've chosen Yuna over me. I wonder if this is the beginning of you becoming independent."

"Aw, Mom..." Fina looked embarrassed.

"But this explains a lot. Whenever I'd ask Fina where she went, she'd never give me a straight answer."

"That's because I couldn't say I went to the capital."

I guess I'd made things hard for Fina in a lot of ways. This meant that there weren't any secrets between them now, at least. Now Fina could talk with Tiermina about things without having to lie.

We all went to the capital. The first thing Tiermina said when we went outside was, "So your capital house is also in the shape of a bear"

She stared right at it. I had bear houses everywhere—Crimonia, Mileela, the capital, the elves' village, Talgwei's island... I was just well-traveled is all.

"Mom, you can see the castle." Fina pointed, and we really could.

"This is feeling a little unreal. You're right. This isn't a secret you can tell just anyone. Fina, Shuri, you both need to make sure not to tell anyone."

"Not even Dad?" Shuri asked. Right. There was Gentz too. It wasn't like I'd forgotten about him entirely as, like, a person. But I'd forget him every once in a while.

"If you could, I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell him," I said.

"All right. Then we'll just keep it among us girls."

"Yes."

"Okay! Us girls!"

That was a relief. But, you know, maybe we should all feel a little bad for Gentz.

We went sightseeing around the capital before heading back to Crimonia. On the way home, Tiermina commented, "You really do stand out in that bear outfit."

*Ouch!* Right where it hurt.

# CHAPTER 412

## THE BEAR DOES A LOOP AROUND TALGWEI

THE DAY AFTER I'd revealed my secret about the gate to Tiermina and Shuri, Fina and Shuri both came with me to Talgwei's island. I used my detection skill to check the area and made sure I didn't see any monster signals. Then, I summoned my bears.

When we exited the house, the first thing Shuri did was look around.

"Yuna, is this the moving island?"

"That's right," I said.

"But what about the monsters?" She looked a little worried and clung to Kumakyu.

"There aren't any more monsters, so don't worry. And if anything dangerous comes, Kumayuru and Kumakyu will tell us."

They both crooned at us.

It was like they were telling us we could count on them. That seemed to be enough for Shuri—she instantly looked at ease.

"Can I go pick fruit then?"

I vaguely remembered that she'd mentioned wanting to bring back fruit as a souvenir last time, but her plans had been ruined by the monsters.

"We can pick some later to bring back to Tiermina," I said.

"Okay!"

I wanted to bring home some bananas since I had ice cream now. A banana parfait sounded like the most perfect thing.

"Yuna, why'd we come to this island?"

"I wanted to explore it a little more, especially since we couldn't look around much because of all the stuff that happened last time. I think we should be safe, but make sure you both stick by Kumayuru and Kumakyu, okay?"

They both nodded obediently.

We headed to the stone where Kryuna Halk's book would be. I poured mana into it. It lit up and Kryuna Halk's book appeared just as it had last time.

"Are you going to read the book?"

"Not right now, but we might need it."

If we came across anything we didn't understand, I planned on looking it up in the book. I felt like my habit of never reading gaming guides was showing through right now. I wouldn't have minded leafing through it, but I was used to referencing guidebooks only after I came across something I didn't get while playing. Modern games usually had tutorials anyway, so it wasn't like you needed an official guide to get you started.

So, after obtaining Kryuna Halk's book, we explored the opposite direction from the one we'd gone in last time we were here. Near Talgwei's head, there was a tall cliff around where we'd found Kryuna Halk's book. In this direction, the cliffs dipped close to sea level. When we'd first come here, we leapt onto Talgwei from somewhere around there, where the cliffs were low.

"I wonder how far from Mileela we are?" Fina said as she looked out at the ocean.

I looked out at the ocean too. The horizon spread out before us without an island in sight. All I could hear were the crashing waves. I wanted to give Fina an answer, but I had no more idea than she did. Even using my bear mapping skill, all I could see was the one spot where we were in a sea of unknown darkness. It wasn't possible to zoom out on the map either, so I couldn't see the entire world. I didn't know where Talgwei had gone because of that. If I'd been a sailor, I might've been able to figure it out using the angle of the sun, but unfortunately, that wasn't a skill I had.

Only Talgwei knew where we were.

Besides, if I could see the whole world, that'd take away one thing to look forward to. In terms of games, it'd be like if a new land you were given access to had its map and mysteries opened up to you all at once. Just imagining the possibilities was something that I looked forward to. Once Talgwei got closer to land that I didn't recognize, I'd try exploring it.

"The wind feels nice."

The wind played with Fina and Shuri's hair and skirts. They fluttered in the breeze. I looked at myself. My onesie didn't have a skirt, and my hair wasn't out either. I wondered how feminine I looked. I mean, it wasn't like wearing a skirt made someone a girl, but Fina definitely seemed more girly than me.

Anyway, I pulled off my bear hood so I could feel the wind too. It did feel nice, actually, but the sun was a little too strong now that my face was exposed.

"Aren't you two hot?"

"I'm okay."

"Me too."

Unlike me, the one who'd spent so much time indoors, the two of them were used to this kind of exposure. The sun was way too strong for a former shut-in—a lesson I'd learned back when we'd gone to the beach. I couldn't beat the heat without my bear equipment.

At the same time, maybe it would have been good for Fina and Shuri to wear hats. They'd probably look nice in straw hats.

Maybe I could find a couple for sale.

Once we'd enjoyed the sea breeze for a while, we headed off in the direction of Talgwei's tail. It looked pretty much the same as when we'd approached it from the other direction. On one side of us was the ocean and on the other was the forest. There was a small hill at the center where Talgwei's second mouth was.

"Yuna, there's a path here."

Just like Shuri said, a trail led into the woods, but I planned on going all the way around Talgwei today. I didn't want to make any detours.

"Yuna, what's that?"

As we went down the slope, Fina pointed ahead at a stone monument just like the one where we'd found Kryuna Halk's book.

Wait. Wasn't this the place?

I flipped through Kryuna Halk's book. Yeah, looked like it was. It was the spot that Kryuna had recommended escaping from in an emergency. The stone had been left untouched here for a while, so it was filthy. I used water magic to clean it off.

Huh... looked like it had some writing on it too:

"Emergency Escape Point"

This was the spot Kryuna Halk had written about.

"How to escape this island: The whirlpool periodically weakens. At that time, touch this stone and shout the word 'Release.' A boat will then appear."

A boat would appear...? Like *how*?

"Yuna, can I touch it?" Shuri asked. She didn't try to immediately though. It seemed like she was obeying what I'd told her earlier.

"Um. We don't know what'll happen, so why don't you let me do it? You two stick with Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

"Aw. I wanted to try..."

"Careful, Yuna."

Fina held Shuri's hand and took her over to my bears. Once I made sure they were away, I touched the stone and recited the word. In that moment, to my surprise, a boat really did appear on the coast.

"A boat!" Shuri shouted.

It was a midsize craft that could probably hold about twenty people. Some rope had appeared with the boat and was keeping it tethered in place. If we untied the rope, there'd be nothing to stop us from sailing off.

So, this was the emergency ship Kryuna Halk had set up.

“Yuna, the boat’s really rocking a lot.”

Shuri was right. The whirlpool wasn’t being kind to the ship. Even though it was held in place by the rope, the ship seemed like it’d break down at this rate. If I could produce the boat, I had to be able to also put it away. I touched the stone and imagined putting the boat back, which thankfully, made it disappear.

“It’s gone!”

“It looked like it went into the stone.”

“Maybe it’s like an item bag?”

I checked Kryuna Halk’s book. Confirmed—the stone was a kind of item bag. When the bag was released, anyone could summon the boat. This was the escape method Kryuna Halk had devised for visitors—he sure seemed like a good Samaritan, thinking about people when he wouldn’t even be around. He’d even left this book and written up notes about Talgwei. I wished he’d put a stone under that cherry-blossom tree that lures monsters too. That would’ve warned us about the danger a lot faster than the book.

There was one other stone, but nothing came out of it—maybe because it’d already been used up.

After that, we did a half loop around the island. Combined with our earlier half loop on our previous trip, that meant we’d done one full turn of Talgwei. It was a lot nicer talking with Fina and Shuri while exploring than just striking out on my own.

“Yuna, can we pick some fruit?”

“Sure,” I said.

Once I'd given her my permission, Shuri ran off. Fina and Kumayuru ran off after her.

There were a lot of different fruits—apples, orans, bananas, peaches, cherries, and even some I'd never seen before. The island really was filled with all sorts of treasures.

Shuri stretched a hand up toward an apple higher up but couldn't quite reach.

"Kumayuru, help."

"Cwoon."

Kumayuru headed under the apples and let Shuri clamber on. She stood up on her tippy toes on top of him and picked the apple, then handed that off to Fina down below. What a good team.

"Yuna, how many are we allowed to pick?" Shuri asked from on top of Kumayuru.

Right. If I didn't tell her a limit, there was a chance she'd pick too many.

"Hm... How about only the amount that'll fit in this basket?"

I pulled out a slightly large handbasket from my bear storage.

"You can bring home anything that fits in here."

Fina started piling the apples in.

"One basket per fruit?"

"No, just one basket *total*."

"Aww. Okay, then, Kumayuru, let's pick that one next."

"Cwoon."

Shuri rode on Kumayuru to the oran tree. Fina ran after them. They seemed to be having fun. It was kind of weird for me just to watch, so I picked some fruit for myself with Kumakyu.

Once their basket was filled, we started to eat some of the fruit.

“Yum!”

Shuri was helping herself to some delicious-looking grapes.

“Say ahh, Fina.” Shuri fed a grape to Fina, who opened her mouth for Shuri. “Is it good?”

“Uh-huh. It’s so good!”

Shuri looked happy for her. They were such good siblings. It really was better to have Shuri with us.

“Yuna, say ahhh.”

Next Shuri gave me one—I opened my mouth, and she fed me just the way she had Fina. Yup, delicious.

Maybe I’d use grapes as toppings on a cake sometime. I had bananas now, so I’d be able to make cakes with lots of different fruits. The discovery of all this new fruit marked another productive day.

# CHAPTER 413

## THE BEAR DECIDES TO GO TO THE DWARVES' TOWN

“YUNA, ARE YOU heading off to Rudnik?” asked Nelt. She was the wife of Gold, the blacksmith.

After getting back from the employee trip, I’d finally had some time to just relax for the first time in forever. I’d finished making the pressed flowers, making pudding from the giant duck eggs, and walking around the parts of Talgwei I was curious about.

Since I was running out of things I needed to do, I decided to go to the dwarves’ town, Rudnik. But before heading out, I’d gone to see Gold and Nelt.

“Yeah. So if you want me to pass on a message or a letter to anyone there, I can.”

“Gold! Yuna says she’s going to Rudnik!” Nelt called to the back, then Gold made his way over.

“Please give my regards to my teacher, Lojina,” Gold said before turning right back around. Before he could get away, Nelt bonked him over the head.

“Yuna came all the way out here to us. How could you act like that around her? I’m sorry about him. Gold hasn’t gone back to Rudnik once since leaving, so he just feels overwhelmed is all.”

“He hasn’t sent any letters?”

“He does once a year.”

Well, better than Sanya, at least. Granted, dwarves and elves had their differences.

“So, why Rudnik then?”

“Ghazal told me about it, so I wanted to see what kind of place it was.”

And it was also a way of passing the time. I didn't think I'd have much luck identifying the ore I'd gotten from golem slaying—I mean, this was Bearyllium we were talking about.

"You're going all the way to Rudnik for sightseeing?"

"Yeah, taking a look around towns is a sort of hobby for me."

Sightseeing in another world was something I hadn't done in a while. Dwarves didn't exist in my original world, so I was looking forward to seeing how they lived.

"All right, then just wait a moment. I'll have Gold write a letter right now."

Then Nelt commanded her husband to get writing.

"Do you have anything to write too, Nelt?"

"Oh, I don't know anyone there," she told me.

"Ah. Sorry."

"Please don't worry about it. The kids at your place haven't got any parents either. The same goes for me, so when Gold said he was leaving, I decided to head out with him."

"You must have been really close."

"Well, having Gold around was what got me through it."

Gold turned his back on us when Nelt said that. Maybe he was embarrassed? It was a really charming dynamic though.

"Here are the letters," Gold said. "For my teacher and my parents. Told them about you too, so they should help you out if anything happens."

He didn't turn around as he passed the letters back to me. I took them and saw they were labeled "Teacher" and "Parents." The back side of them had notes about where they lived.

"I'll make sure to deliver these," I told him.

“I’m sure you’ll be fine, considering who you are, but have a safe trip nonetheless.”

“Of course, I’ll be fine. Kumayuru and Kumakyu will be with me.”

After taking the letters, I headed out.

Next, I headed to see Tiermina and Fina at their house. Tiermina was around when I got there, but Fina and Shuri weren’t.

“Are you leaving on a job?”

“No, I’m just thinking of going on a quick visit to the dwarves’ town where Gold came from.”

“The dwarves’ town? I heard about that place when I was still an adventurer. It’s pretty far away, right?”

The closest spot I could get to it from was through the bear gate to the elves’ village.

“I have a gate near there, so it shouldn’t take too long.”

It’d probably have taken a while if I’d gone by carriage from Crimonia though. On the other hand, with my bear gate and my two bear summons, I’d be able to shorten my travel time by a lot.

“Those gates sure are handy.”

“The only downside is I can only set them up in places I’ve already traveled to.”

“That’s more than useful enough.”

I’d really been taking advantage of the bear gates since coming here. I could go on a walk to the capital as though it were just next door.

“If anything happens, I’ll come back right away. Just let me know.”

Fina had a bear phone, so she could call me anytime.

"You know, most people wouldn't be able to get back so easily like that. But you can actually do it, and I just have no idea how to reply. So, was it that device Fina has—the bear phone—that we're supposed to use in order to talk long distance? Normally doing that would be an ordeal, but you've made it so easy."

Well, both my bear gate and my bear phone were gifts from the god. I was really grateful for that.

"So, are you leaving Fina behind this time? I was convinced you'd want to take her with you. You can if you'd like to, you know."

Honestly, I did want to take her with me. I'd had a lot of fun last time when we explored Talgwei. It was a lot more fun than traveling alone. Plus, I could be myself around Fina.

"Are you sure you should give permission to loan out your own daughter that easily?"

"I trust you a lot more because of what you shared earlier. And I know that you can make it back here through that gate if anything dangerous were to happen. I have it on very good authority from Fina that you take good care of my daughters. You have your bears guard them if any monsters appear. You'd never intentionally take her anywhere dangerous, and she told me that you'd send her away through the gate if anything bad happens."

Maybe she was referring to when Fina came with me to guard Noa, the stuff with the mine, and the incident at Talgwei?

"If you keep such a good eye on them, I know that I don't need to worry about my daughter while she's with you. And it's not as though she'll have the same opportunity to travel so far if I hold her back. As long as you don't have any issues taking her, you can have her tag along as long as she wants to go too."

"Tiermina..."

"She had to go through so many hardships because I was sick. I want to give her the freedom to do what she wants."

When I'd first met Fina, she'd seemed really tired. She'd done all she could as a ten-year-old looking after both her bedridden mother and her little sister. Tiermina must have felt guilty that Fina had needed to do that.

“What about Shuri?”

“Hmm. I think she might be too young. And if Shuri went with Fina, why, Gentz would start to feel down.”

After they’d become family, Gentz had really bonded with Fina and Shuri. He was so touched when they’d started calling him dad. I guess he was the doting father type.

“But I think most kids eventually start thinking their dads are stinky, dirty old fogeys who get in the way of things—even I did once upon a time.”

Tiermina looked misty-eyed as she recalled the past. I felt bad for Gentz, but I guess that was just the way things went as kids grew up.

I mean, I felt that way—or rather *feel* that way.

Come to think of it, they hadn’t come up until now, but I wondered whether Fina and Shuri had grandparents—that is, Tiermina’s parents. Thinking back to how Tiermina hadn’t had anyone else around when she was sick, it was possible they weren’t around anymore. I didn’t want anyone digging into my family’s past, so I decided it’d be better not to ask.

Then, as I was talking to Tiermina, the front door opened.

“I’m home!” Shuri said.

“I’m home!” Fina called out as well from the door. They made their way over to the room we were in.

“Mom, we bought everything you asked.”

“We did!”

“Thank you both!”

The two of them were carrying baskets and bags full of all kinds of groceries.

“You two are so great at running errands.”

“Yuna?”

They both noticed I was around too.

"Why are you visiting? Did you need something from Mom?"

"I'm going to be out of town for a while, so I wanted to ask her to watch the shops and keep an eye on the kokekko."

"You're going somewhere?"

I told the two everything I'd already explained to Tiermina.

"Fina, do you remember how I told you I'd gotten some ore from a mine and how Ghazal told me he didn't know what it was but that I could go to the dwarves' hometown?"

It'd only been a short conversation, but Fina still remembered it. "Oh, yes. That was when you ordered the knives from him."

"I was thinking of heading over to their village."

"Fina, if you'd like to go with Yuna, you can."

"Mom?"

"If you'd like to go, Yuna said she'd take you with her."

It looked like Tiermina was leaving it up to Fina.

"Can I really, Yuna?" Fina looked at me for confirmation.

"I'm not sure how fun it'll be, though. If you're okay with it, want to come? I'd like someone to talk to while I'm there."

Fina looked at Tiermina and then at me again.

"As long as I'm not getting in your way, I'd like to go." Fina seemed a little shy as she said that.

"It's not a bother," I told her. "Just like I said earlier, I have a lot more fun when you come with me."

"Then I'll go too." Fina gave me a genuine smile.

So, with that, Fina was coming with me on my trip. Shuri seemed like she wanted to go too, but this was a bona fide trip, so we were having her stay put at home.

"When you get a little bigger, okay, Shuri?" I told her.

"Aww..."

"Then how about we put you in charge of communication, then, Shuri?"

"Communication?"

I made a new bear phone and showed it to Shuri.

"Oh! It's the thing you can talk through."

"Yeah. I want you to tell me if anything happens with this. I'll call you too. Since you're staying in Crimonia, you're the only one we can count on. What do you say?"

"Uh-huh. I'll do it."

I handed the bear phone off to Shuri and she happily took it. I could've had Tiermina handle it, but I let Shuri have this.

"Oh, but it's a secret from Gentz, so be careful not to show him."

"Okay, I won't."

Shuri clutched the phone happily. Meanwhile, as Tiermina listened in on us, I heard her murmur, "Hm. Looks like I have even more secrets to keep from Gentz."

# CHAPTER 414

## THE BEAR GOES TO THE ELVES' VILLAGE

I USED THE bear gate to arrive at the elves' village with Fina. Since only a few people could get through the barrier around the sacred tree where the gate was, I headed out first, then set up a new gate outside that area to bring Fina over. I did it that way because I had no idea what would happen to Fina if I did bring her through the barrier. I couldn't exactly experiment, so I decided to do the travel in two phases, even though it'd take more time. Then again, the only extra work it amounted to was leaving the barrier, making a new gate, and opening that for Fina.

"Where is this place?"

Fina looked around as soon as she walked through the gate. But we were surrounded by rock walls and forest, so there weren't any markers to help her find out where we were.

"Um, it's past the capital and a town called Laluz... then over a giant river... and, uh, in a forest past that, I guess?" I tried to think of the path as I answered.

"I'm not sure where that is."

Right.

"Short answer: it's nearby the elves' village, which is super far away."

"The elves' village?"

"A little while ago, I came by here with Sanya. I set up a bear gate here then."

"Oh, right. You did say that you were going somewhere with Sanya a little while ago."

I always made sure to tell Fina whenever I went anywhere on a long trip. I guess she remembered when I did.

While I was talking with Fina, I heard someone coming closer to us over the grass.

"Oh, so it was you, Yuna. Sorry. I didn't mean to be late."

An elf girl with long, light-green hair had arrived—it was Luimin.

When I told Luimin that I was coming to the elves' village over my bear phone the day before, she'd told me she would come to get me. I told her she really didn't need to, but it looks like she'd decided to anyway.

"Yuna, is this girl the person you talked about yesterday? Fina?" Luimin looked at Fina and smiled.

"This is Fina, the person who saved my life," I confirmed.

"Yuna! I asked you not to introduce me that way!" Fina pouted and bopped me with her little fists. It didn't hurt, of course.

"So this girl is Luimin. This is Sanya's little sister. You know, the Adventurers' Guild master at the capital?"

"Her sister?" Fina seemed really surprised by that.

"I see you know her. Like Yuna said, I'm Luimin. Yuna helped me when I fainted, so I guess she saved my life too?"

I didn't know how safe the capital was, but a cute girl sure wasn't safe no matter what if she fainted outside. I'd probably saved her from more than one danger.

"Um, I'm Fina. Yuna saved me while I was being attacked by monsters, so *she* saved *my* life." Fina corrected my introduction with her own.

"Then we've both been rescued by Yuna."

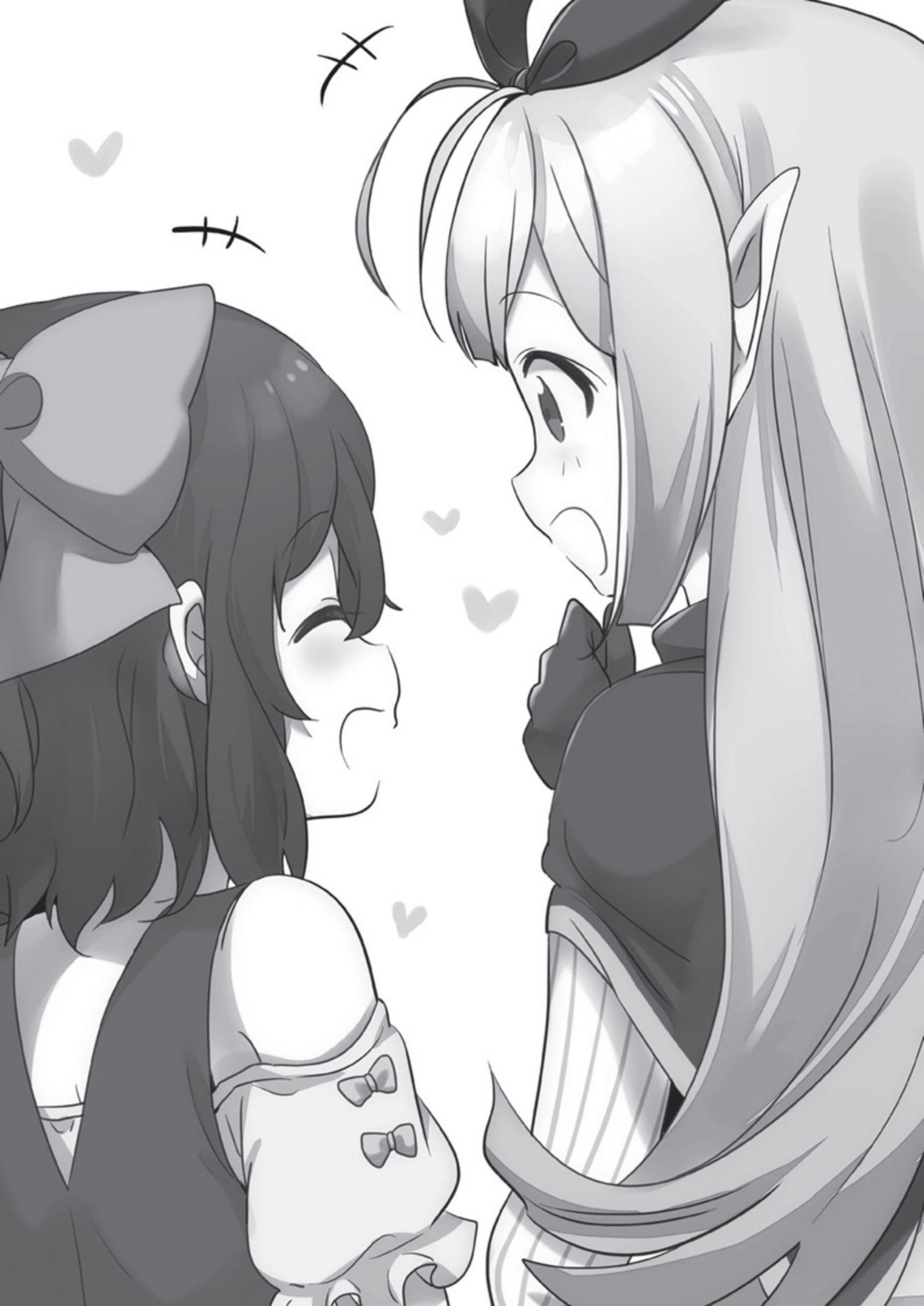
"Yes!"

They already seemed to be hitting it off even though they'd only just met each other. Well, I was glad they got along.

Fina and I headed off to the elves' village with Luimin. The two of them chatted as they walked next to me.

“So even you know about the bear gates then, Fina?”

“I was also surprised you knew about the gates too.”



"Only you two and your families know about it," I told them.

It wasn't their whole families though—just the ones they were related to directly. Thinking about it, they had a lot in common.

"I didn't think you'd make me agree to a magical contract that would make laughing into torture."

"A magical contract?"

"Yes. If I try to tell anyone Yuna's secret, I'll end up laughing until it hurts. It's so terrible that I can't even think of talking about it." Luimin smiled, but it was a little pained.

Come to think of it, I'd only seen what had happened to Sanya and Mumulute, but they'd both looked like they'd suffered a lot while laughing. I wondered what could've been fueling those laughs. Like, you could laugh because you heard a funny story, or because you were feeling ticklish, or even from eating hallucinogenic mushrooms or something. I wondered which kind of laugh it was...

"I don't have a contract like that," Fina said.

"That's because I trust you, so you don't need one." Fina actually had kept quiet even while Tiermina questioned her. "And also, it was your own dad who mentioned making a contract, Luimin. I didn't even propose it. Plus, I changed the contract terms from death to laughing instead."

Also, Mumulute was the only one who could cast the magic for a contract, so it wasn't like I was personally responsible.

"But if I do try talking about it, I'd still be tortured. With laughter, but still."

"So don't talk about it."

She'd be fine as long as she didn't try to talk about my bear underwear like a certain other elf. I was going to make sure that secret went with her to her grave.

"Yuna," Luimin said. "How much does Fina know? I'm allowed to talk to someone who already knows, right?"

"I think that Fina knows everything you know. Actually, Fina probably knows more."

“If I tell Luimin those things, will I be tortured with laughter too?”

“You don’t have a contract, so you should be fine, Fina.”

“Oh, good.”

She looked relieved.

“So that means you know about the bear phones too, Fina?”

Luimin pulled one out of her pocket. Fina did the same.

“Yuna, would I be able to talk with Luimin and Shuri on this phone?”

Fina looked between her phone and Luimin’s.

Actually, I didn’t know: I’d never tried that out before. Until now, only Fina and Luimin had had bear phones. But neither of them had known each other, so there hadn’t been any opportunities to try it out. Now Shuri had one, and these two knew each other too. If they wanted to, Fina and Shuri, and Fina and Luimin probably *could* talk together.

Then I thought about the bear gate and how only I could use it and I felt a little less certain.

“I haven’t tried. I’m not sure.”

“Really? Then can we try later? If it works, then I can talk with Shuri too.”

Fina looked happy as she held the phone.

“Sure, but we’re close to the village, so let’s do it later.”

“Well then, Fina, let’s both try it later,” Luimin said.

“Yeah.”

“But only somewhere no one else is around,” I warned.

“Oh course!”

“Yes.”

It was a chorus of agreement.

Once we got to the village, the people we passed by greeted me. I guess they remembered me. Last time I’d come, tensions had been a little high, but now, they didn’t seem worried. The place looked normal and peaceful.

“Yuna, are all the people here elves?” Fina was curiously looking around.

A lot of the people had long ears—a trait specific to elves—and green hair. Some of the elves had hair in other colors, of course, but a green head of hair was the most common.

“Yeah, only elves live here.”

“I see. Then Sanya must have lived here too, once.”

“You know my sister well then?”

“Yes, we’ve met a lot of times. She’s a very pretty person.”

Luimin seemed happy about the praise for her sister. She’d probably be just as pretty when she grew up.

Once we got to the center of the village, we caught sight of the kids playing. They ran over as soon as they saw me.

“It’s the bear!”

“The bear’s here!”

“It’s Luimin!”

They started making a big fuss as they surrounded us. Around me specifically, really.

"Make sure none of you cause trouble for Yuna, okay. You're blocking her path."

"Awww..."

They were tugging on my arms and clothes.

"You promised Grandfa—I mean, the chief—you'd behave."

Luimin was older than the other kids and gave them a warning. After they answered Luimin back with a "You're right," they all left.

Well, that was good. It wasn't like I could've shaken them off. Looked like Mumulute's orders held some weight.

"Thank you, Luimin. It's interesting to see the more grownup side of you."

"Well, I am older, after all," she said, thrusting out her chest.

I could hear the kids talking to each other off somewhere else.

"I thought there was a commotion. So, you've come back, Yuna. And in the same clothes, it seems."

A handsome young elf came by: Labilata, who was apparently Sanya's fiancé.

"And looks like you've got that same sour look."

The expression on his face canceled out any good looks he had.

"You can stick around the village as much as you'd like, but please refrain from creating a scene." He smiled for a split second before leaving.

"What was that?"

"Hee hee hee. That's his version of being polite to you, especially since you saved the village." Luimin interpreted for me, since I wouldn't understand the guy otherwise.

"Really?"

"I think he would have stopped the kids if I hadn't. So please don't hate him."

He wasn't antagonizing me or anything, so it wasn't like I hated him. He'd even thanked me before I went home before. He probably wasn't singling me out—I bet he was just like that with everybody. After all, some people aren't good at interacting with others.

"Also, are you going to visit Grandfather, Yuna?"

"Yeah, there's something I want to ask him really quick."

Since we'd come to the elves' village, I wanted to ask Mumulute about Dezelt and whether he was the same Mumulute who'd conquered the pyramid. There was a chance it was someone else with the same exact name, after all.

"So, do you think I'd be able to see him?"

"It should be fine. I think he would see you anytime you wanted. You did save the village, after all."

"You're exaggerating."

"You said that earlier too. Yuna, did you really save the village?" Fina asked very politely after listening to me and Luimin talk this whole time.

"I just fought off some monsters that attacked the village is all. It's no big deal."

"I wouldn't say you 'just' fought them off," Luimin said as we arrived at Mumulute's house. He was laid out on a long chair in front of the house. Maybe he was catching some rays?

"Grandfather, Yuna is here."

"Oh, the bear girl?"

Mumulute stood up.

"It's been a long time, Mumulute," I said.

"I'm glad to see you here. Did you come for more sacred tree tea and mushrooms?"

"I would appreciate some, but today I'm here on other business. Luimin, sorry but would you mind showing Fina around the village? I'd like a word with Mumulute."

Sorry, Fina. If you could just go around with Luimin for a while.”

“Oh, uh, okay.”

“All right. I’ll show her around. Fina, let’s go.”

“Oh, sure.”

Luimin took Fina’s hand, and they ran off so fast that Fina almost seemed close to tripping.

# CHAPTER 415

## THE BEAR IS CAUGHT BY TALIA

AFTER I MADE sure that Fina and Luimin had left,

I talked with Mumulute.

“So, what did you want to discuss?”

“Have you heard the town of Dezelt, Mumulute?”

“Dezelt?” Mumulute tilted his head to the side, thinking.

Then he started touching his temple, wracking his brain. It seemed like he did remember something about it, but that he couldn’t remember just from the name. I decided to feed him more info to help out.

“It’s a town in the desert with a lake, and there’s a pyramid nearby.”

Mumulute was silent for a while.

*Pat!* He plopped his right fist into his left palm as though he’d thought of something.

“Yes! The one in the desert. What a nostalgic name.”

Ah! So he remembered.

“So, were you the Mumulute in the party that solved the maze in the pyramid? And two people stayed behind to found the town, right?”

“My, you know quite a bit about it.”

“A little while ago, I went to Dezelt, and the lord of the town told me about its founding. I found out there was an elf named Mumulute as part of the history, so I wondered if it was you.”

"Indeed it was," Mumulute said. He seemed to be reminiscing about the past.

The water had already been bubbling out to make the lake by the time Mumulute's party got out of the maze. They'd built a rest stop there for anyone passing through in the desert. Merchants had started to gather around it, then crafters, livestock farmers, construction workers, and others who'd helped build the town. Karina's ancestor, who'd also been one of Mumulute's party members, had overseen all of it.

"Once we realized that the middle of the lake had a barrier that kept the high temperatures at bay, we built a wall."

"When I talked to the lord about you, he seemed to want to meet you."

"I see. So you visited the town built by Quat and Shian then."

I gathered they were the party members and Karina's ancestors.

"Yeah."

"So their descendants continue to protect the town. I see." Mumulute was reliving the old days.

"In that case, would you like to visit Dezelt sometime?"

"I would like to see their children, but I'm afraid I cannot leave the village while I am the head of it."

It would take him time to travel normally, but if we used the bear gate, that'd make the trip really quick.

"That won't be an issue," I said. "I have a bear gate in Dezelt. You could make it into a day trip."

"You'd let me use your gate?"

"Yeah. But I don't think I can do it now. Would another time be fine?"

"Oh yes, especially since I imagine it won't be long. Mere years or decades at most."

Right, this was what elves were like.

*Cwoon, cwoon.*

After Mumulute gave me some sacred tree tea and we talked a while, my white bear puppet started crooning at me. It was my bear phone, though it really sounded like my puppet itself was crooning though when it rang out of the blue. Who could it be though? Only Fina, Shuri, and Luimin had phones.

“Well, Mumulute, I’ll invite you along next time,” I said.

Mumulute looked curious about the sound, but I left him and found a secluded spot. Then I pulled out the phone, which had been continuing to croon the whole time.

“Hello?”

“*Oh, it went through.*”

I heard Fina’s voice on the other side.

“What is it? Did something happen?”

“*I’m sorry. I tried using the phone to call Luimin or Shuri. But it wouldn’t work, so I called you to make sure it wasn’t broken.*”

“So you couldn’t talk to Luimin or Shuri?”

“*No, we couldn’t.*”

Apparently, the phones only worked to talk to me then. Well, I’d guessed that might be how it worked. I couldn’t transfer any of the bear equipment either and the bear gate would only open for me, so maybe the bear phones could only call me because I’d used my mana to create them. I guess they’d be too overpowered if anyone could use the phones to talk to anyone.

“So, where are you two now?”

“*Um, Luimin, where are we?*”

“*Just outside the village.*”

I heard Luimin's voice over the phone. I asked them to meet me in front of Luimin's house. Once I got there, I saw the two of them heading my way.

"So, it wasn't broken then, Yuna?" Fina asked me, still clutching the bear phone and looking anxious.

"It's not. I think it can only call me. I had no idea since I hadn't tried using it that way before now."

"That's too bad," she replied.

"I thought we might be able to still talk even if Fina went home," Luimin said.

"Well, if you want to tell her something, I could let her know."

"Okay."

They both looked kind of disappointed though.

Well, I'd said my hellos to Mumulute, so it seemed about time to head out...

"Oh, I thought you'd stopped by, Yuna," I heard a voice from behind me. When I turned around, I found Luimin's mom, Talia. Same as ever, she looked very young. I wouldn't have been able to tell she was a mother of three. But she was an elf. No point in thinking too hard about it.

"While I was walking through the village, I heard that a bear had stopped by. I knew right away that it had to be you, Yuna."

Talia seemed happy she'd guessed right, but was that really a good way of knowing I'd come? What if someone saw an actual bear? If they said, "a bear came by" or "a bear showed up," wouldn't that put anyone who thought it was me in mortal peril? Well, I guess most people would scream if they saw a bear, so maybe it was clear enough. I kind of worried about Talia making a mistake like that though, considering she was kind of a chill soul.

"So, is that your sister, Yuna?" she asked, trying out her powers of deduction again. Nice try. Fina and I didn't even look alike.

"Oh, but she's not wearing bear clothes. I suppose not." Talia tilted her head.

Wait, did she think bear clothes were genetic?

"She's not," I said. "This is Fina. I owe her my li... ah, my gratitude for helping me out so often."

Since Fina didn't want me introducing her as the person I owed my life to now (and glared at me when I almost did), I corrected myself partway through.

"So, you're Fina. I'm Talia, Luimin's big sister. You can call me big sis too, if you'd like," Talia said, with no hesitation showing on her face.

"Then that must mean you're Sanya's sister," Fina commented without even doubting Talia's story.

"Oh, you know Sanya?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, even better. I'm Sanya's older sister, so you can call me big sis."

"Okay, big sis," Fina said. I think she was trying to move past this part of the conversation. However, Luimin was quick to stop them.

"Mom! Please stop! Fina will actually believe you. Fina, she's our *mother*, not our sister."

"Your... mom?" Fina seemed flabbergasted.

Well, considering how Talia looked, anyone would have believed it. That was why her little prank had worked so well.

"You didn't have to ruin my fun so soon."

"Mother, it's embarrassing. Stooop!" Luimin burned bright red.

"Well, I guess the jig is up. It's nice to meet you. I'm Luimin's mother. As an apology for tricking you, I've got some delicious fruit to share, if you like."

Talia grabbed Fina's hand and pulled her into the house.

“Uh, but what about Yuna?”

Fina turned for help as she was yanked along. I shook my head and followed the two into the house. Luimin did the same, sighing deeply.

As we ate the fruit Talia had prepped for us, we got right started talking. So much for heading to the dwarves’ town immediately...

“Lucca isn’t here?”

“He’s out playing in the woods.”

Their father, Arutul, was off at work.

“Who’s Lucca?”

“Ah, Luimin’s little brother.”

“Hee hee. Too bad for Lucca. He’s going to be disappointed he missed you.”

Well, Luimin couldn’t talk about the bear phone, so there hadn’t been any way to tell him I was coming anyway. She’d end up being tortured with laughter if she did.

“Fina, make sure to eat up.” Talia lined up more fruit in front of us.

“Th-Thank you.”

We kept chowing down on the sweet-and-sour fruit. I kind of felt like I’d been eating a lot of fruit lately...

“Actually, Yuna, you mentioned going to the dwarves’ town, didn’t you?” Luimin asked as she ate.

“Oh, you are, Yuna?” Talia perked up at that.

“Just for a little fun,” I said. “I finished talking with Mumulute, so I was planning to leave.”

“That’s a shame, especially since I just made friends with Fina.”

Luimin looked a little disappointed.

“I’ll bring Fina here again sometime.”

They’d gotten really close in such a short time. Both of them knew my secrets, so Luimin could be open without fear of tickle torture.

“Then I’m going to hold you to it. Wow—the dwarves’ town though. That brings back some memories.”

“Have you been before?”

“Yes, several times.”

Elves went to the dwarves’ town, huh? I thought they didn’t get along.

“And everything went fine?”

“My father was with me, so we didn’t get lost. I might have if I’d been alone though...”

That hadn’t been what I was asking, but the conversation brought Luimin back to when she’d gotten lost at the capital.

“I thought elves and dwarves didn’t get along, so I was wondering if it was safe for you to visit the dwarves’ town.”

“Do we not get along?” Luimin asked back.

Wait. I’d been the one asking her the question!

“Do you?”

“I’ve never heard of any issues. And when I went to visit, they were really nice to us.”

My stereotypes were useless in this world, then. In the manga and novels I used to read, elves and dwarves tended to be at each other’s throats. Arguments seemed to naturally bubble up between a bearded dwarf and a beautiful elf.

"I'd like to pay the dwarves' town another visit sometime."

"Oh, what a good idea. Why don't you go with them, Luimin? I was just hoping to get a new frying pan and pot. Oh, and a new knife. Oh! I should ask all the neighbors what they want, too."

"Mom?"

As Talia rambled on to herself, she stood up and left the house. We watched her leave in silence.

"Um, so I guess this means..."

What the heck was she up to?

"It looks like I have to go with you. Um, I'm sorry about my mother," Luimin apologized to us, looking very embarrassed while she did it.

"I'm fine with you tagging along, but don't you need to ask your dad too?"

"That shouldn't be an issue. I don't think anyone can stop my mom once she starts."

This clearly wasn't the first time Luimin had suffered at the hands of her mom.

"A frying pan and pots though?" I ventured.

I always thought of weapons and armor when it came to dwarves, but apparently that wasn't the case here. Gold and Ghazal mainly worked with weapons and armor. I hadn't really thought about what else dwarves did, but it seemed they also manufactured cookware and other metal housewares.

"Fina, should we buy something for Tiermina too?"

Crimonia sold those things as well, but the dwarves' town would probably have great stuff since it was the source. The quality of cookware could really vary. There were a lot of factors to consider, like the materials used, the weight, the non-stick attributes of the pan, and heat conductivity. Maybe it'd be good to buy one from the dwarves' town. Yeah, it was a good idea.

When I looked at Fina, she awkwardly said, "Mom actually already asked for one."

“Really?”

“Yes, she asked me to buy a lot of things.”

Well, that’s a capable housewife for you. She’d already thought of it.

“Then maybe I’ll buy some for the orphanage and Anz’s group.”

“They also asked me to get them things. The orphanage and the shops want large pans.”

I kind of felt like everyone was a step ahead of me. Then again, I guess it made sense an orphanage would need large pans. If you had to make a ton of food, the right tool for the job made things a whole lot easier.

Maybe I’d try buying one for myself. It’d be good to have something custom for my bear houses. If I wanted backup pans, I’d need even more. I could carry one in my bear storage to use when I needed it, but it was too much of a bother for me to remember to wash it, *then* put it away. I preferred having one dedicated to each location.

We kept eating Talia’s fruit and chatting until she came back.

“Luimin, here’s your list.” She handed Luimin several slips of paper. As Luimin looked them over, a series of increasingly alarmed expressions flitted across her face.

“M-Mom, this is a lot...!”

She laid the lists out on the table. They each had the requester’s name at the top and a list of frying pans, pots, and knives, complete with detailed information about the brands and sizes they wanted. And there were *several* sheets of paper.

“Well, y’know, everyone said they wanted something if you were going to be in the area anyway.”

Did she just say “y’know”? I guess it fit, since she looked young. Kind of weird if you remembered she was probably over a century old, though.

“I also borrowed an item bag from your grandfather, so you should be able to manage.

And here's the money." She handed both over to Luimin. "And your grandfather wants a giant pan all of us can gather around to eat together."

"Urgh... even he's joining in?"

Luimin fell over onto the table, utterly defeated. Looked like she was going with us for sure then.

# CHAPTER 416

## THE BEAR HEADS OUT TO THE DWARVES' TOWN

I TOOK FINA and Luimin outside the village, then summoned my bears. This was their time to shine.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu! It’s been a while,” Luimin said, giving them both pats on their heads as a greeting. They happily crooned at her. Then, we headed out. Luimin and Fina shared Kumayuru, and I rode Kumakyu.

The dwarves’ town was farther off than the elves’ village. They’d formed their settlement by the mines, dependent neither on Elfanica nor Solzonark.

“Are you sure we won’t get lost?”

“We should be okay. I’ve been there multiple times,” Luimin said, full of self-confidence.

The shortcut to getting there was through the elven woods, and we had Luimin as our guide. I was kind of worried considering I knew her history of getting lost and fainting on the streets of the capital, but her self-confidence seemed solid and reassuring. I hadn’t been able to refuse bringing her, so I guess we formed a little traveling party.

Originally, I was planning to go back toward Laluz, where the giant river was, to get back on the main road toward the dwarves’ town. To do that, we would have needed to go all the way around the elven woods where the village was, then around the mountain.

Backtracking would mean adding time to our route though, and what was the saying? “Slow and steady wins the race.” When I’d gone to the desert, I’d tried to take a shortcut and ended up lost.

*But.* If this shortcut actually worked, it’d be less strain on my bears, and we definitely

wouldn't bump into other people in the woods. That'd be a load off my mind. Those were definitely net positives. Taking the easy way around wasn't *always* a bad thing. As long as Luimin didn't get lost, the merits outweighed any cons. And we weren't in a hurry either, so even if we did get lost, it'd just be a fun memory for later.

Anyway, Luimin claimed the woods were the elves' backyard, so I decided to believe her as my bears ran through them.

\* \* \*

"That sure was a lot," Fina said. She must have been talking about earlier. As soon as we'd tried to leave Luimin's house, all the elvish wives from the village had gathered in front of the house. I'd been surprised for a second, but quickly I realized that Talia must have gone around telling everyone about us while she talked to them about the pots and pans. Once they'd heard that, all the wives had brought over baskets filled to the brim with mountain veggies and mushrooms.

I could never have enough food on me, so I thanked them and gratefully took everything they gave me. Also, I could store everything in my bear storage, so nothing would rot, no matter how much they gave me.

"Since you seemed so happy the last time we sent you home with food, they all brought some over for you."

"Yuna brought a bunch of mushrooms and vegetables to us once before. Were those from here?"

I'd split the other harvest with Fina's house and Anz, then used the rest at the beach when we were cooking. Having to feed forty people meant everything disappeared quick. I was really happy about this opportunity to restock. Maybe we had enough for tempura?

"Want to eat some of it tonight?"

"I'll help!"

Fina seemed as excited about the prospect of food as I was.

After that, Luimin gave directions to my bears, which went well despite my earlier reservations. We went through the trees, followed a river downstream, and then

trekked up a mountain.

I checked my bear map. We were going around in twists and turns but heading generally in the right direction despite that. We weren't going around in circles like some manga gag.

I left the directions to Luimin and dangerous monster lookout duty to my bears while I relaxed on Kumakyu's back.

I heard Fina and Luimin excitedly chattering away beside me on Kumayuru. They were talking about the two people they both had in common: me and Sanya.

We took breaks as we progressed steadily. But then, suddenly, Luimin stopped Kumayuru and looked around.

"Huh? That's odd... I'm sure it was around here."

There were cliffs around us but no roads to speak of.

"Are we lost?"

"We're not. But there was supposed to be a bridge around here."

"A bridge? You don't mean that, do you?"

I pointed with my black bear puppet.

"Oh, there it is."

We headed over to where there ought to be a bridge. Only, there was no bridge. There was now only a snapped rope.

"We can't cross over this anymore." Luimin's spirits were just as tattered as the remains of the bridge. "If we don't cross here, we'll need to go back where we came... and it'd be a long route from there."

Luimin started to panic.

I sighed, then got off Kumakyu and headed near the cliffs. It was only about ten meters across, cliff to cliff, and a ten meter drop down. My bears could jump it, but that

wouldn't help the elves in the future who needed the bridge.

"Step aside a little," I said, crouching down and placing my black bear puppet on the ground. I imagined pouring my mana into the ground. Soil started to grow from the cliff and reached over to the other side until a land bridge was formed. Thankfully, I'd made a bridge like this in the underground section of the pyramid, so I already knew how to do this.

"You're amazing, Yuna!" Luimin said.

"But why are there bears on it?"

The pillars holding up the edges of the bridge were bears. When I'd imagined reinforcing the bridge, I'd just ended up making bears. Anyway, the bridge wouldn't fall down.

"Well, we should be able to cross like this."

We crossed the bridge and continued our journey.

We kept going. There were no attacks by any monsters or ferocious beasts, and we didn't get lost. Soon, it was nightfall.

"It's getting dark, so let's camp here for tonight."

"Yuna, are you bringing out the bear house?" Luimin asked excitedly.

"The bear house is so amazing. We don't need to camp, and we can take baths. We can recover from all our fatigue from the day. It's the very best!"

I guess Luimin either had a terrible time getting to the capital or she just really liked my bear house. I pulled out the house and miniaturized my bears into their cub forms. Then while we waited for the bath to fill up, I got dinner started. Since we'd gotten mountain veggies just earlier, I decided to make tempura even though I knew it'd take a little bit of effort.

"Yuna, I'll help too," Fina offered.

“I’ll fry them, so could you plate them?”

“Yes.”

How could I refuse? Luimin also piped up.

“Yuna, what can I help with?”

“Your job is to sit...” I said after giving it some thought.

“Urgh. You’re so mean.”

“I’m kidding. Actually, I don’t have a job for you.”

Since we were just making tempura, I didn’t have three peoples’ worth of work.

“You can help out next time, Luimin, so just rest up with Kumayuru and Kumakyu.”

Luimin glanced at my bears, who were curled up and comfy.

“Ahh. It’s such an enticing suggestion, but I can’t relax all by myself while you two are making dinner...” She stared longingly at my bears as she said that.

“Then why don’t you help clean after dinner?”

“All right,” Luimin said. “But if there is anything I can help set up, please let me know.”

With that compromise struck, Luimin went off to play with my bears.

I cut the veggies, dipped them into the egg wash, then flour, and dropped them in the oil to fry. I could have just tried them without the batter, but I was in a tempura kinda mood. I had carrots, potatoes, peppers, and a whole bunch of other veggies in my bear storage. I’d bought tons of them while in Crimonia, the villages, and the capital. I mean, it’d be a chore to go back to buy stuff, and sometimes places wouldn’t sell the things I needed. As a rule, I’d just buy stuff when it was around.

Since Luimin was with us this time, I used squid and octopus too. I figured she probably hadn’t tried it before. We ended up with tempura that celebrated both the

forest and the ocean.

Also, since I was in my bear gear, it was no big deal when the oil splashed at me. I didn't get any on my hands either, thanks to my bear puppets. I was totally geared right for the job.

Then, once we were done prepping dinner, we talked while munching on tempura. Luimin was surprised by the food. She'd never had anything like it before, but she seemed to enjoy it.

"Oh, I know. Yuna, what did you do at Luimin's village? She wouldn't tell me no matter how much I asked her. Everyone made it seem like you did something, so I'm really curious now."

"Well, if I tell you, I'd end up being tortured by laughter," Luimin spoke up as she nibbled on a carrot.

Was she serious? I wondered if what happened at the village would count. The contract had only been to keep quiet about my secrets. Mumulute had said the contract would work according to my wishes. So that meant things would only activate the laughter if I wanted to keep them secret. If I'd wanted the stuff at the village to be a secret at the time of the contract, Luimin would have laughed then.

I tried to remember how I'd felt about it at the time, but I just couldn't remember.

"I'm not sure if it'd count, so want to try testing it out?"

"No!" Luimin shouted. What about the spirit of scientific inquiry? I guess she didn't share it. Instead, I told Fina what happened at the village myself.

"You seem to really trust Fina, Yuna."

"Yeah, basically. Fina's not the type to break promises, so I trust her a lot."

"Yuna..." Fina seemed really happy I'd said that.

"But you helped the village by defeating the monsters," Luimin added.

"What kinds of monsters?" Fina asked.

Aw, she caught that? I'd tried to gloss over it while explaining...

"If you ask that, you might be in for a lot of trouble," I said.

If I told her, she'd learn about the cockatrice. I'd been keeping that a secret since I assumed it'd be a huge shock for Fina. If she knew about it, I'd end up asking her to harvest parts from it.

"Trouble? It'll cause trouble to know?!"

"Yeah, are you curious why? Want me to tell you what it was?"

She started to brood over my cryptic words.

"Uh... I do want to know."

Even after all that conflict, she'd decided to ask anyway. I told her about fighting the cockatrice and volkrows. The moment she heard the cockatrice come up, Fina stopped eating.

"Yuna... you're not going to ask me to harvest from a cockatrice, are you?" Fina asked hesitantly.

"Well... I can't do it. Y'know?"

I tried my best impression of Talia.

"I can't!" Fina's yell echoed throughout the entire bear house. Well, I'd *told* her she might not wanna know.

# CHAPTER 417

## THE BEAR STAYS THE NIGHT IN THE BEAR HOUSE

AFTER WE FINISHED our meal, Fina and I left Luimin to clean up. The two of us patted my bears' bellies while we rested. They were so nice and fluffy. My bears also seemed to enjoy the belly rubs, so it was a win-win situation.

The only issue was that Fina, who was on Kumayuru duty, kept telling me over and over again, "I really can't harvest from a cockatrice." Dang. Would I need to go to the Adventurers' Guild? Or maybe Mumulute would know how to do it? He used to be an adventurer and he'd lived a long time, so there was a possibility he'd even done it before. But as I thought about how I would have to find someone to buy the parts off me, maybe it was better if I went to the guild. Then again—*again*—it'd probably turn into a huge deal, and I didn't want to deal with that kind of attention, so I settled on selling it off to the king. He already knew a ton of stuff about me, so it wouldn't be a whole *thing* if I added that I was a cockatrice slayer to the mix. The king was probably my best bet for a drama free place to sell my stuff in general.

As I was thinking that and patting Kumakyu's fluffy belly, the white bear puppet I'd put on the table started crooning.

"Yuna, your glove is yelling."

"That's the bear phone," I said. "Maybe it's Shuri?"

Only three people had bear phones and two of them were right here, so it actually had to be Shuri by process of elimination.

I put my glove back on and got out my phone.

"Hello, Shuri?"

"Yuna?"

“What is it? Did something happen?”

*“Dad was worried about Fina, so I wanted to hear her voice.”*

“Dad was worried?” Fina asked the bear phone.

*“Yeah, he’s scared that maybe you got hurt or attacked by a monster. He was worried all through dinner. Mom and I said that you’re with Yuna, so you should be okay, but then he said what if you got lost and separated from her.”*

“Dad...”

Wow—Gentz was an overanxious parent. I guess that was inevitable with daughters as cute as Fina and Shuri. Then again—still too much, Dad.

“Um. Dad doesn’t know about the bear phones, so you can’t tell him not to worry because we talked. Shuri, you take care of Mom and Dad, okay? Also, it looks like you can’t call my phone directly, so if anything happens, you tell Yuna.”

*“Okay, I got it. Be careful, Fina.”*

Once we finished the call, Luimin joined us.

“Yuna, I finished washing the dishes. Were you just talking to Fina’s sister?”

“Yeah, her name is Shuri. She’s adorable and looks just like Fina.”

They didn’t act similar, but they were definitely both cute.

“Her name’s Shuri? I’d like to meet her sometime.”

Luimin and Shuri both knew about the bear gate, so I could take Luimin with me to Crimonia or Shuri to the elves’ village.

“Sure. I can take one of you to the other sometime.”

“I’d like to visit the town you and Fina live in.”

“I’d like to walk through the elves’ village with Shuri.”

They really wanted to visit each other, it looked like.

"We have the bear gate, so you can both go to each other. You can't do it all the time, but every once in a while would be fine."

"Thank you so much, Yuna. Then I'll remind you sometime."

They both looked thrilled.

"Okay. Well, how about we take baths and go to bed soon?"

"Normally we wouldn't be able to take baths while out camping. This is so luxurious."

"Can Kumayuru and Kumakyu join us? I'd like to give them a scrub to thank them for carrying us all day," Fina said.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu," I looked at my bears. "What would you like to do?"

I gave them the choice. They both crooned and headed over to Fina.

"They say they want to go in with you."

"Then why don't you join us too, Yuna?" Luimin said. "It'll take more time if we all go in separately."

"I'll take one later," I said.

I really preferred taking my time alone, but Luimin and Fina grabbed my wrists anyway and pulled me right out of my chair.

"I'll wash your back."

"I'll do your hair!"

Even Kumayuru and Kumakyu were nuzzling me. I sighed.

"Okay, okay. I'll go in with you, so don't grab me like that."

I shook all four of them off and we headed off to the bath.

Fina and Luimin not only cleaned Kumayuru and Kumakyu but also me. They carefully washed my back and hair, just like they'd threatened. I returned the favor, of course. Maybe it wasn't so bad taking baths together every once in a while.

The next morning, the two of them were already awake when I came in. They must have slept really well.

"You two are up early," I commented.

"Yes, the beds were so fluffy. I fell asleep right away."

"I was going to try talking with Fina, but then the bed was so comfortable that I fell asleep immediately and woke up early."

The sheets had been extra soft, yeah. Maybe because I'd just aired them out? I'd put them straight into my bear storage, so they were probably just as fluffy as they'd been when I took them down. That explained why they'd fallen asleep so quick and gotten an early start.



Every night I'd sleep in my comfy bear clothes while surrounded by Kumayuru and Kumakyu, who had the absolute best fur ever. A good night's sleep was the key to a good wake-up. A perfectly logical chain of events. Then again, if the bed was too comfortable, you could just as easily give up on waking up and fall back asleep. I wondered how often I'd done that.

"Glad I gave the bedding a good airing out," I said.

Once we finished breakfast, we headed right back out toward Rudnik. This time, Luimin kept saying things like "I'm pretty sure it was this way," "I can see that mountain, so that should mean..." and "C'mon! Remember! You can do it!" She seemed a lot less certain than last time.

When I checked my bear map, we were still headed roughly the right way. I left things up to Luimin. I'd let her keep going until she told me that she was lost.

I ate some chips and ice cream while on top of Kumakyu as I surveyed my surroundings. I wasn't selfish. I shared my snacks.

"Then if we go forward..."

Kumayuru, who carried Luimin and Fina, started running. The woods parted and gave way to a sprawling meadow. Literally out of the woods, you might say.

"If we keep going forward, there should be a path."

I had both my bears break out into a full run across the lovely field.

"Yuna, I see a path," Fina said.

Just like Luimin had told us, we came upon a large road where carriages could come and go.

"If we keep heading down this, the dwarves' town, Rudnik, should be ahead."

Even though she'd been anxious until now, Luimin said that confidently. She could get the job done when she set her mind to it.

"Luimin, what kind of place is the dwarves' town?"

"Um, there are a lot of dwarves there."

"Yeah, I kind of gathered that." That seemed like a very Luimin thing to say.

"And they're not the only ones, of course. There are adventurers who go there to buy weapons and armor. Oh, and merchants who come to buy things made by the dwarves too."

"What did you go there for last time?"

"We went to buy a weapon for an elf who'd just come of age. Elven men are supposed to protect the village, so when they become adults, Grandfa... ah, I mean, the chief gives them a weapon. I came here with Dad to buy it."

Come to think of it, Labilata and the others had been patrolling the woods last time I came to the village. I imagined elves as being able to make bows, but they couldn't make their own swords. If you can't make it, you gotta get it from somewhere.

And like, can you imagine an elf forging a sword?

We headed down the road and avoided anyone we came across to keep my bears from scaring anyone. Eventually, we were close to Rudnik.

"Looks like it's about time to get off Kumayuru and Kumakyu to walk," I said. If I rode my bears into a town I hadn't visited before, I'd scare the townspeople. No one in Crimonia was shocked anymore, but I had to be careful with places I'd never been to.

"But won't they think it's odd if we walk over?"

"Are there any towns or villages near here, Luimin?"

If there were, then we wouldn't seem suspicious if we came in on foot.

"Um. I've only been to Rudnik using the shortcut, so I'm not sure what's around it."

Luimin seemed apologetic. Well, she couldn't help that. Also, of course she wouldn't know much about the area around the place—she'd only been here a few times for specific things.

I clapped my hands together—or rather, patted my bear puppets against each other. It was kind of inconvenient to have those on when I needed a dramatic moment.

“Okay, I’ve got a question for you all! Is it more suspicious for a human child, elf girl, and girl in a bear outfit like me to walk into town, or for us to all head over riding Kumayuru and Kumakyu?”

I pointed at Fina, Luimin, then me using my bear puppet. Finally, I looked over at my bears. The two looked at each other after I asked my question. We’d look suspicious no matter what. We were all just way too different from each other. If all three of us were elves, they probably wouldn’t have thought there was anything off about us at all. We weren’t dressing alike, we weren’t similar ages, and we were entirely different species.

Luimin raised a hand.

“I think we’d be okay as long as you took off your bear clothes, Yuna!”

“Not gonna happen!” I didn’t hesitate to shoot that down.

This was my first time in this town, and I had no idea what would be in there. There was a chance I’d end up in a fight with someone. Plus, I was in charge of protecting Fina and Luimin. Okay, maybe I’d attract less negative attention in another set of clothes, but we were not going to consider that.

“I think they would be most shocked to see us ride in on Kumayuru and Kumakyu.”

We couldn’t come up with a good solution. We were still talking when Kumayuru crooned and gestured behind us. I saw a wagon coming at us at high speed. I tried to corral my bears to head to the edge of the road when I realized the person on the carriage was waving at us.

Wait... was that...?

It slowed until it came to a stop right in front of us. I was absolutely taken by surprise at who was sitting in the driver’s seat. What were they doing here?

“I knew it—it’s Yuna.”

“Mel?”

Mel looked at me happily from the driver's seat.

"Ha, I knew my eyes didn't deceive me."

"Hey, Mel! Don't speed up like you're gonna run us over like that!"

Jade's head poked out from behind the driver's seat next.

"What are you two doing here?"

"I'm here too." Senia's face also appeared. That made three.

"Ouch. That knocked around my rump, c'mon." I heard Toya's voice from within the carriage.

What were the four of them doing here?

# CHAPTER 418

## THE BEAR REUNITES WITH JADE AND THE OTHERS

MEL, SENIA, JADE, and Toya got out of the -carriage in that order. Mel and Senia made a beeline for Kumayuru and Kumakyu to give them a good cuddle.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu, you’re always so adorable.”

“So cute!”

My bears crooned. The two girls started to pet them.

“So, what are you doing here, Yuna?” Mel asked me as she patted Kumayuru.

“I was steering the carriage when I saw black and white bears walking around, and a black bear riding on top of one. You’re pretty distinct! And you’ve got two adorable girls with you this time.”

Mel looked over at Fina and Luimin.

“Your name was Fina, wasn’t it? The last time we met was at the academy festival, I think. Do you remember me?”

“Yes, I do. You and Jade helped with the harvesting.”

“I’m so glad you remember us!” Jade seemed genuinely happy.

Fina had met them after getting a request to harvest tigerwolves, and then she’d met them again at the academy festival during a monster harvesting and animal butchering exhibit.

“I don’t think I’ve met you before though.”

“Hello, I’m Luimin. Yuna has helped me out a lot.”

Luimin bobbed her head as she introduced herself.

"Yuna, did you get yourself another girl?"

"Why would you put it that way? What do you take me for? A new girl?"

"Well, when you were at the festival, you had a giant entourage of them with you."

Mel was full of nostalgia. That's right—Fina, Shuri, Noa, and Teilia had been with me. I didn't think they'd seen me with Shia and Misa though.

"And it seemed like Karina liked you too."

Well. I didn't know what to say to that.

Fina said in a small voice, "Karina?"

"So, why are you all the way out here with these girls?" Jade asked after we'd gone way off topic.

"Well..."

I didn't know quite what to say. I could probably just tell them about the Bearyllium. It'd be a pain if they asked for details, so I didn't have a lot of options for how to answer them.

"We're here to look around at the dwarves' town and to buy pots and pans."

"To look around town?"

"To buy pots and pans?"

"And you've come all the way from Crimonia with Fina to do that?"

They all looked at me in exasperation, Jade included.

Yeah, yeah. Normal people wouldn't just up and travel to Rudnik from Crimonia just to go sightseeing and buy cookware. I wished they wouldn't look at me like that.

"Why are *you* all here?" I countered. "I thought you were mostly taking jobs around

the capital."

"We came to Rudnik in order to buy Toya a mithril sword."

Right, they had mentioned that in the desert, but they could've bought one in the capital. Why had they come all the way here to get one? I asked about that, and Toya seemed kind of shaken up.

"Oh, that."

"Wait, don't tell her." Toya tried to stop Mel, but she seemed intent on having her fun.

"Um, so you know about Ghazal, the blacksmith who made your mithril knives? Toya came out and said that he was going to have Ghazal make his blade too. Well, we were going to get a mithril sword for him anyway, so that was all fine up until that point, but Ghazal said no!"

"Agh! I said you didn't have to tell them." Toya looked so flustered.

"Ghazal really said no? He made my knives. I can't imagine him rejecting people."

I'd brought him mithril to use, and he'd just made it when I asked. He didn't seem like the type of guy to turn down business.

"To be more accurate, he was *thrown out* by Ghazal."

"Thrown out?"

I didn't follow. Well, I guess it was the same as refusing him service, in a way.

"Toya was so afraid of that golem near the front of the shop."

"I *so* wasn't afraid! Just surprised..."

"Same thing. So anyway, after the golem scare, Toya backed up and knocked down all the weapons and armor behind him."

I thought that kind of stuff only happened in manga.

"Then Ghazal was like getting mad and like, 'What kind of adventurer's scared by a

golem!' He was so angry."

"What gives him the right to say that when he's got an iron golem standing in that spot? Any normal person would get a shock seeing that."

That was definitely the iron golem I'd given him as a present. I was pretty sure he'd said last time that the adventurers had all liked seeing it. Guess some adventurers were scared of it, though, if Toya was anything to go by.

"Ghazal said you're the only one who reacted that way to it, Toya."

"Ugh. That was because I was so focused on the swords around the shop... and then it suddenly came into the corner of my vision..."

"Then you should pay attention to your surroundings more—that's a required part of being an adventurer."

"Ugh."

"Also, Ghazal's famous. He's an excellent craftsman, so he probably chooses who he works with."

"I'm sure he decided Toya was a *no* the moment he saw him."

Mel and Senia piled on the teasing as Toya made excuses for himself. He wilted.

"Why would he not work with me even though he made weapons for a girl dressed as a bear!" Toya pointed at me.

"Toya, you need a reality check. Yuna is super powerful. Your abilities, on the other hand, are just sad." Senia mock-pouted. She used her face to illustrate his pathetic nature.

"What do you mean, I'm sad? My abilities aren't *sad*."

I was feeling bad for Toya now, so I tried to help him save face. Just a little.

"I think Ghazal agreed to make me a weapon because I had a letter of introduction from a blacksmith in Crimonia."

“See! That’s why he wouldn’t do it for me!”

“Don’t buy it.”

“I doubt it.”

“No way!”

Even after all my trouble to help him, every one of his party members rejected that theory. I guess I couldn’t be too disappointed since I hadn’t believed it in the first place.

“But aren’t there blacksmiths other than Ghazal in the capital? Why did you need to come all the way here?”

I only knew Ghazal’s place in the capital, though, too. But I was sure there had to be other places, considering how large the place was.

“Well, there are, but working mithril ore is difficult, so few can make weapons from it. We could have found another blacksmith, but a merchant we know asked us to buy stock from Rudnik anyway, so we decided to get the sword made here.”

Sounded reasonable enough. In other words, Toya’s sword was just an extra errand on top of a work trip.

“Also, my sword and Senia’s knives were made in Rudnik too, so I thought it was fitting.” Jade gestured at the sword on his hip with his eyes.

As we were talking, my bears crooned softly to alert us. Another carriage was approaching. Jade and the rest of the party soon noticed.

“Guess we should get going soon. We need to get a room still, and we can talk in town.”

“I’ll ride Kumayuru.”

“I’ll ride Kumakyu.”

“You can get in the carriage, Yuna.”

Mel and Senia were already trying to clamber onto my bears. Wait, no way.

“Don’t make trouble for Yuna.”

“So, about that,” I said.

I told him about how I wasn’t sure whether to ride on my bears or to walk into town.

“Well, you’re right that you’ll stand out if you do.”

Jade looked at Kumayuru and Kumakyu, then at me. He was really saying *I’d* stand out—not just my bears. I told him about how we were going to pretend we’d walked from a nearby village or town if there were any around.

“There are villages within walking distance for sure. But...” Jade looked at Fina, Luimin, then me. We really did make a motley bunch. It definitely wouldn’t seem like a ten-year-old girl, elf girl, and (grownup) bear girl could have all come from the same village.

“Then how about you ride with us?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, you’ve helped us plenty of times.”

I accepted Jade’s favor. I thanked my bears for carrying us all this way, then recalled them. Mel and Senia seemed disappointed. When I turned, I found Fina and Luimin felt the same way.

Was it me, or were bear enthusiasts proliferating? Well, my bears were cute, so it was only natural.

We got into the carriage and headed out to Rudnik.

# CHAPTER 419

## THE BEAR ENTERS RUDNIK

JADE AND TOYA sat in the driver's seat of the carriage. The other members of the party were riding in the back.

"Did you really come here just to buy pots?" Mel asked not me, but Fina and Luimin instead. Why so skeptical?

"Yes, my mom asked us to buy some."

"My mom and my entire village asked me to buy them things too."

Fina and Luimin were backing up what I'd said. Mel let out a sigh.

"I guess it's true. I was convinced it was a job, considering it's you, Yuna. Like maybe a ferocious monster or something."

"I wouldn't have brought Fina or Luimin then. Also, why a ferocious monster?"

"Well, you run into ridiculous monsters wherever you go, Yuna. You'll go goblin hunting and end up finding a goblin king. Then there was the black viper incident." Mel started to count on her fingers.

"It wasn't like that!"

"But you still headed straight toward it, didn't you?"

"Well..."

"Also, the golem Barbould's group failed to slay."

She counted off another finger. For a sec, I was like "who's Barbould again"? Then I remembered that was one of the guys I called the bozo rangers.

"Also, there was the whole thing with Karina."

Mel probably meant the giant scorpion.

I'd also slayed ten thousand monsters, a kraken, and some wyverns, but Mel didn't know about that. Powerful monsters did tend to show up wherever I went. It wasn't like I was looking for them or whatever. Most of the time I was coming to someone's rescue.

"Have you really fought that many monsters, Yuna? If you include what happened at my village..." Luimin murmured so Mel and Senia couldn't hear.

That was weird. Maybe I brought misfortune wherever I went? No, no way. I'd just happened to wander into places where there were monsters already present. It wasn't like they were following me around.

"Yuna, I'm joking. Please stop taking it seriously."

Mel poked me in the cheek when she saw me brooding.

"You can't forget all the people you've saved, Yuna."

"You should be prouder, Yuna."

But I'd only been able to do that thanks to the bear gear I'd gotten from the god. I didn't have anything to be proud of.

"I think I'd prefer to go unnoticed," I replied.

"You want to go unnoticed while wearing such a cute outfit?"

"You really do dress cutely."

"I think you look cute too."

"Yes, me too."

Once Mel had started them up, everyone else just had to join in. But even the cute bear getup was from the god too.

"Also, Yuna, thank you again for the scorpion parts. We were able to make some great armor with that."

Mel seemed to have remembered because we talked about Karina. She bent her arm and turned up her sleeve to show me her wrist. She wore a silver gauntlet on it.

“You made that with the scorpion?”

I was pretty sure it hadn’t been silver though, so it must have been painted.

“Yes, we had it treated. It’s sturdy but light, so it doesn’t get in the way when I use magic. Well, I never get close to the fighting, so I don’t really need it. But it’s good to have just in case.”

“I made some for my wrists and ankles too.” Senia showed those off. Hers were black.

“They’re perfect for kicking Toya.”

“T-they’re not for kicking me!” Toya yelled from the driver’s seat.

“But it’s lighter than the armor I was wearing before, so it’s easier to move around in.”

Jade swiveled his arm around from the driver’s seat to show off. He had some on too.

“A blacksmith we know wanted some, so we sold some of the leftovers. Is that okay with you?”

“I gave it to you, so you can do what you want with it.”

I’d left the rest of the scorpion untouched. I glanced at Fina. She’d harvested the smaller scorpions, so maybe she could do the big one too?

I tried imagining it: Fina, working with a scorpion even taller than her. Nope. Couldn’t picture it. If she made one slipup, the shell would roll over and crush her.

“Well, thanks to that, we raised some money for Toya’s mithril sword.”

That was the important thing.

“You better thank Yuna, Toya.”

“Ugh.”

"C'mon, say thank you to her."

"Ughhh."

He wasn't facing us, but I could tell he wasn't sure what to do.

"I don't mind. That was a bribe to keep you from talking, so it's fine as long as you keep your side of the bargain."

That hadn't swayed Toya's decision, since he said anyway, "M-miss, th-thank you."

If he was that embarrassed about it, he could have just kept quiet. Also, we'd traded mana gems for it too. He really hadn't needed to thank me. Or maybe they'd sold it for more than I thought?

As we talked, we made our way to the entrance of Rudnik. I held my guild card up to the crystal panel and then headed into town. When I'd gone through, the dwarf at the gate had stroked his long beard while eyeing me suspiciously. But he waved us in. I'd made it in just fine. Maybe it helped being with Jade's party.

The carriage continued onward.

Rudnik was built around a mine. It sprawled in the valley between two mountains. Since dwarves lived in the town, I'd been expecting stone houses, but most of them actually looked pretty normal.

"A lot of the blacksmiths are housed in stone buildings for safety."

Probably in case of fire. Fire was pretty key to smithing, so if their business burned down, the flames could leap from building to building. The fact that wooden houses burn easily is probably something they'd discovered a long time ago.

"I really can't tell whether someone's an adult or child from afar because of how short the dwarves are," Toya murmured.

When I peeked outside the carriage, I saw a ton of dwarves. I also had trouble telling

the kids and adults apart, though I didn't say that out loud like Toya.

Since the men all wore beards, they were easy to tell apart from the kids. The women were a little more difficult to differentiate.

"You can't say something like that in front of them."

"I wouldn't."

Focusing on their height was pretty rude.

Jade headed off to the center of town to find a place to park the carriage.

There were stables in the town. They cost money, but they'd take care of the horses at least. Some inns would do the same, but most couldn't because of space constraints. That's why dedicated stables were so necessary. Plus, if you didn't pick up your horse in time, they might just sell it.

The carriage stopped at a giant shed-like building.

"Okay, I'm going to get the carriage stored, so off you get."

We all obeyed Jade's instructions. He headed inside to go take care of that.

"Well, shall we head to an inn?"

As soon as Jade came back, he led us toward the lodging.

"Are they far away?"

I didn't want to walk much. I should have known, but whenever I passed by the dwarves, I'd hear them whispering those familiar phrases: "A bear...?" "Bear...?"

I guess bear onesies weren't all that normal for dwarves. Well, who were they normal for? Just me.

"The inns are nearby, but if they're not open, we'll need to walk more."

No good. I guess the places closer to the stables *would* fill up faster. The closest inn only had one room. We needed three rooms, so we had to keep it moving. Jade and Toya were staying in one, Mel and Senia in another, and then I'd be rooming with Fina and Luimin. Mel tried to offer to share a room, but I politely declined.

At the next inn, we were luckier and found the three rooms we needed.

"Aw, I wish we could have stayed with you, Yuna."

"Yeah, especially since Kumayuru and Kumakyu would be there too."

They both looked disappointed. I was glad there were enough rooms available. We didn't need to share a room or walk any farther.

I checked out our three-person room.

"Yuna, are you sure about paying the fee?"

"I have money from my mom to pay with."

I'd paid for both of them, which seemed to bother them.

"Don't worry about it. I brought you here, Fina, and you were our guide, Luimin."

"Thank you, Yuna."

"Yuna, thank you so much."

I hadn't been planning to let them pay for their lodging or food anyway. The adult was supposed to take care of that kind of thing.

After we checked in on the room, we went to eat an early dinner.

Dwarves were running the hotel, of course. Not all people living here were just craftsmen, which was kind of obvious. Some people farmed and others were innkeepers. I mean, if all of them were blacksmiths, that'd cause a lot of issues.

"Ah, I'm so hungry. Let's order as soon as we can."

We were all in agreement with Toya, so we ordered our food.

“Yuna, are you going out pot shopping tomorrow?”

“I am, but I’m also planning to go to a blacksmith.”

“You are?”

“Ghazal gave me a letter to give to his teacher.”

I was already planning to courier the letters over.

As soon as I said Ghazal’s name, Toya made a face like he’d remembered something awful.

“Ghazal’s teacher? Who’s that?”

“Uh, I think it was Lojina?” I had to think to remember.

“Lojina? You mean *that* Lojina?”

“You know Lojina, Jade?”

I didn’t know what he meant by “*that* Lojina.”

“He’s famous. He’s one of the top three blacksmiths here. Ghazal was Lojina’s apprentice, right? I can see why he’s so skilled.”

Guess Ghazal’s teacher was some kind of minor celebrity.

“In that case, should we have Toya’s sword made at Lojina’s forge?”

“No, we’re planning on going to the place where the rest of us got our mithril weapons made. If we just turned up, Lojina wouldn’t simply make a weapon for us. Also, according to what I’ve heard, he only makes a weapon a month.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, though those are just rumors. And if he’s not fully satisfied with it, he’ll break it.”

What did he think weapons were? Pottery? In my mind, I imagined him as a potter really unhappy with an imperfect plate and smashing it to pieces. He was a blacksmith, though. Maybe he melted them instead?

“So, he’s a super famous blacksmith,” I said.

“But he might make you something since you know Ghazal.”

Hmm, I already had knives from Ghazal, so I wasn’t sure I needed anything. I’d started thinking about investing in a normal sword, but if I had one made, I’d ask Ghazal to do it. I wasn’t certain a famous blacksmith like him would make something for a girl dressed as a bear anyway.

# CHAPTER 420

## THE BEAR HEADS TO THE BLACKSMITH DISTRICT

I TALKED OVER my plans for the visit. I was going to visit Lojina, Ghazal and Gold's teacher. Then I'd go and buy pots and frypans and check out the town. I was planning on sticking around for a few days, so I didn't need to have a rigid schedule. Jade and the others were going to get Toya's sword made, and it'd take a while to gather up the supplies they'd be transporting for the merchant, so they were going to be around for a few days too.

Lojina was near the blacksmith their party was heading to, so I was going to travel with them tomorrow.

Once we finished eating, we headed back to the rooms. Mel and Senia still seemed to want to share ours, but I politely turned them down.

"All right, then. We've got an early morning, so don't stay up all night, you two."

"We won't!"

"I won't."

I summoned my bears in their cub form as a safety measure and also as my alarm clock. Fina and Luimin eyed them longingly.

"Yuna, can I sleep with Kumayuru?"

"Me too," Fina said after Luimin.

Well, I slept with them every day, so I could give them up every once in a while. They happily brought my bears to their beds. She was normally mature enough to go with the flow but seeing her ask to cuddle a bear like this reminded me Fina was still a kid.

My bears were super snuggly—the two girls fell fast asleep as soon as they got in bed.

The next morning, Fina and Luimin woke me up. My bears had bopped away at them with their paws bright and early. My alarm clocks were functioning perfectly—though this time, they'd been alarm clocks for other people. Thankfully, they told me it'd been a nice way of waking up. No leaping onto their tummies or smothering their faces this time. Those were rougher awakenings.

I recalled my bears, and once we'd gotten changed, we headed down to the first-floor dining room. Mel and Senia were already there. We took seats at the same table and ordered our breakfasts.

“Ugh, I’m so jealous.”

“It’s so unfair, you two.”

Mel and Senia were grumbling after hearing about how Fina and Luimin had snuggled with my bears all night.

Once we got our food, Jade and a very sleepy looking Toya made their way down. They'd been drinking long into the night. Come to think of it, dwarves were famous drinkers in games and novels—maybe the same applied in this world? Maybe I'd bring some local brew back for Ghazal and Gold, then.

After that, we finished our food and headed to the blacksmiths. I pulled my bear hood low over my head as I stared all around Rudnik's streets while we walked. That way I wouldn't have to deal with the stares.

Mel looked around, then glanced at me. On the other side of me, Senia stared at me, silent.

“Looks like everyone’s staring,” murmured Jade.

“Why don’t you change out of those clothes? We all know you love bears, but you don’t have to dress like one all the time.” Toya said, bothered by the attention—he had no clue I needed it for my OP bear powers. I couldn’t take my bear clothes off—what if

something bad happened?

More importantly, if I didn't have my gear on, I was limp and weak.

"Toya, what are you saying? If she takes off her bear clothes, she won't be Yuna anymore," Mel huffed at Toya's comment and Senia silently kicked him in the rump.

I was happy they were looking out for me, but that comment was kind of uncalled for on Mel's part. Then again, if I took off my bear gear, I'd actually just be a normal person—weaker than Fina, actually.

"What's with you? I just said it because of the stares. Look at them all."

He was right—it was pretty uncomfortable. I wasn't ogled in Crimonia anymore, but every new town I went to meant I'd get looks of wonder, surprise, and curiosity. Some of the dwarf children were pointing at me and shouting, "It's a bear!" The onesie did tend to get that reaction. Toya, though, seemed especially bothered by the stares.

"Well, I'm gonna stand a little farther away from you, if it's all the same."

If he really didn't want me around, then I just wouldn't be. It'd be lonely, but I could walk on my own a little ways away. Super loner powers, activate!

"What are you saying? We'd never make you do that. If you hate being stared at so much, why don't you walk alone, Toya? I'll stick by Yuna."

"Same here."

"I want to walk with you, Yuna," Fina said.

"Me too," Luimin agreed.

"All of you are so..."

Mel had wrapped an arm over my shoulders and Senia had clamped onto me from behind. Fina grabbed my hand while Luimin held my gaze and talked to me. I was so happy to hear them say they wanted me around.

Toya winced as the others rallied around me. He looked to the party leader for help.

“I’m going to walk with Yuna. It’s not that bad.”

*“Jaaaade!”*

Once he was betrayed by a fellow man like Jade, Toya peeled off from the group slightly to walk on his own.

“Anyway. Seems like there are a lot of people around.”

“You’re right. There are more than last time we were here, at least.”

“A lot of them are adventurers and merchants.”

The three remaining party members chatted with each other as they surveyed their surroundings. They were right—there were a lot of humans mixed in with the dwarves. I’d assumed that this was just how it always was.

“Are you sure they didn’t just come here for shopping?”

“Hmm. I think there are still a lot of people if it were just that.” Jade seemed wary as he looked around.

No new clues or answers revealed themselves, though, so the conversation petered out as the shops around us slowly shifted to mainly smithies. The blacksmiths were all gathered in this area, and hammering rang out up and down the street and all around us.

If this racket existed all over the town, what would happen to naptime? I guess that was why they’d all gathered in one spot then. If they’d been in the residential areas, people would have moved to get away from it anyway.

“Is the place where you got your mithril sword really famous, Jade?”

Making mithril weapons was supposed to be difficult, so I assumed they had to be made by a smith of a certain level. Jade didn’t reply the way I thought he would, though.

“Hm, I’m not so sure. The smiths on this road are all great.”

Before I could reply, a stranger’s voice interjected. “You’re supposed to say, ‘He’s the best,’ you know.”

Jade looked around, seeming surprised. When he found the person who had spoken, his surprise only seemed to only multiply.

“Kusehlo?”

“Jade, it’s been too long. Don’t tell me you broke the sword I made you?” A dwarf with a majestic beard grinned at us.

“I haven’t broken it.”

“That so? Anyway. Looks like you’ve got a girl with an interesting fashion sense with you.” Kusehlo, the dwarf, was looking at me now. “Was wondering what you could be when I saw you from behind. A girl dressed as a bear?”

Kusehlo stared straight at me. I supposed that was my cue to introduce myself.

“Um, my name is Yuna. Jade has done a lot for me in the past.”

“Name’s Kusehlo. I’m a blacksmith, but *apparently* not the best.”

“Kusehlo... I think you’re the best, personally.”

“Hmph! Don’t give me empty flattery. I’m satisfied so long as you take care of that sword I made you.”

“I really am.” Jade lightly brushed the sword at this hip with his hand.

“I’m also using my weapons,” Senia interjected.

Kusehlo seemed genuinely pleased at that. “So, what brings you to the town this time? And are those kids Mel’s daughters?”

He looked at us as he said that. Wait, he wasn’t including me in that, was he?

“I’m not nearly old enough to be a mom,” Mel said, tugging Kusehlo’s beard.

“Ha ha. Apologies for that. Suppose I do recall you’re younger, now that you’ve reminded me.”

“I’m Luimin. I came here to buy a sword with my father in the past.”

“Ahh, so you’re Arutul’s girl then.”

They must’ve been Kusehlo’s clients in the past. Small world. If Kusehlo had been Ghazal’s teacher, the world would’ve been cramped from being so small.

“Did you come to buy a sword then?”

“My mom asked me to buy pots this time.”

“Pots... I wish I could offer you some, but I’m a weapon maker by trade.”

Kusehlo seemed apologetic, but it’s not like he’d done something wrong. Even if he worked with metal, it was an entirely different trade. They just required different skills to make.

“So, this girl in the bear suit and that one there aren’t elves?”

“The girl dressed as a bear is Yuna, and this is Fina. They’re friends. They live in another town, but we came here together.”

Looked like we’d been upgraded to friends in Luimin’s mind. It kind of embarrassed me, but I wasn’t going to deny it. Fina and I just gave customary greetings, rather than dispute anything she’d said.

“All right, so I know who you two are now, but that doesn’t explain why you’d travel with an elf girl. You couldn’t have come all the way here to buy pots from a weaponsmith, could you?”

“No, we’re here to get Toya his sword.” Jade glanced over at Toya, who was standing some distance away from us.

“Toya’s? Well, why’s the lad all off on his own if he wants a weapon?” Kusehlo glanced at us, then at Toya.

If this had been a certain game I used to play, this was around the time when you’d get a pop up that said, “Toya seems to want to join your party!” and then you’d be able to choose *yes* or *no*. Jade sighed slightly when he saw Toya ready to rejoin once he was getting something out of it.

“Toya, get over here already!”

Looks like Jade had picked “yes,” then. Toya happily came over. It had to be lonely on his own.

“All right, let’s talk details in my shop, then.” Kusehlo started to walk off and we followed.

His forge turned out to be a reasonably large stone building. The sound of metal being hammered clanged from inside. The walls were adorned with swords and knives, just the way a smithy’s shop should be decorated.

Gold and Ghazal had the same kind of aesthetic, but it felt like there were way more weapons here as compared to theirs. Maybe Kusehlo had some mithril swords too?

“So, you just want a sword for Toya then?”

“Would you make one for him?”

“Suppose one of those swords won’t do you then?”

He glanced at the swords along the walls.

“I was hoping for a mithril sword.”

“Mithril, huh?” Kusehlo eyed Toya. “If it’s you asking, then I’m not too sure. But if it’s Jade, I wouldn’t necessarily refuse. Can you really handle a mithril blade, Toya? If you can’t master it, I’m not going to make you one.”

“I think he’s barely ready, but that’s still ready enough. It’s all up to Toya whether he can do it.”

“Barely, huh? Well, if you say so, Jade, then I’ll size him up. Then I’ll decide whether to make one or not.”

Size him up? How? Maybe he was going to inspect Toya’s hands like Ghazal had checked on mine? In manga, they’d check for whether the person had held a sword enough to get blisters and form hard calluses. Maybe it was like that? But my hands were soft as butter, so if that were the case nobody would have ever made me a weapon. I was glad that I’d asked Ghazal to do it.

# CHAPTER 421

## THE BEAR OBSERVES TOYA'S TEST

“SO, BEFORE I check on Toya, Jade, I have a question for you. Have you already made a contract with

anyone? If you haven’t, want to make one with me?”

“A contract?” Jade repeated what Kusehlo had said. The other members of the party seemed at a loss about what that was too.

“What? You don’t know?”

“We came straight here after staying at the hotel overnight.”

“So, you don’t know about the gate of trials then?”

The gate of trials? What was that? Sounded kind of fun.

“The gate of trials? Oh. That thing...” Jade picked up on what he meant pretty quickly. He nodded slightly. “Right, that was a thing in this town.”

“Oh yeah.”

“I’d forgotten all about it.”

Mel and Senia seemed to know what it was now, and they all nodded. But me, Fina, and Luimin were still in the dark.

“What’s the gate of trials?” I asked outright.

They all started to explain. There was some kind of gate in this town, as the name implied. Once a year, the gate would open so blacksmiths could test their skill for a few days. It was a place to check how much the blacksmiths had improved over the year, and also, a way for apprentices to test their mettle as craftsmen.

"So that's why there are so many adventurers around."

"Wait, what do the adventurers have to do with it?"

"Well, that's obvious. The blacksmiths make swords, but they need adventurers to use them."

According to Kusehlo, you needed both a blacksmith to make a sword and someone who could use it. I guess that made sense, considering blacksmiths didn't really go around fighting anything or anybody. That was for fighters.

"So, Jade, how about you join in using one of my own swords? Just think of it as taking a sword out for a test drive."

"Sure. But you could have chosen one of your favorite adventurer customers over me."

"Yes, I do have an adventurer I normally contract with each year, and that was the plan this year. But I've just heard he was injured a few days ago. The rest of the adventurers I know already have contracts with others or aren't contactable right now."

So Jade was a last resort.

"Thought about just not participating at first, but I'd prefer to know my skills haven't dulled. And then you showed up. Perfect timing. I couldn't let you go without asking."

Blacksmiths liked to use the same adventurer year after year whenever possible, since the way someone handled a weapon could differ wildly from person to person. They wanted to make sure it was a direct comparison to the previous year. The blacksmiths were using the gate of trials to check on their own skills, and whether they'd improved or declined. Some would even decide whether or not to retire based on the results. Adventurers could show the same fluctuations in their abilities too, of course, but it was no good to try to control for every variable. He also explained that some blacksmiths would seek out elite adventurers to really show off.

"You're not trying to go for the top, then, Kusehlo?"

"I'm perfectly fine working with clients like you. Can't be bothered to fuss with swords to present to the royalty or flashy knights who want the best sword possible. I'll hand off that kind of work to folks who like it. I'm going to make swords the way I want, and if I happen to make a real good one, then I've just got something to celebrate."

He grinned.

Right. Even if someone made a really good sword, that didn't mean the next one would be just as good. If you could just pop out amazing swords every time, it wouldn't be such a difficult skill. Masterpieces can't be mass produced.

"Some people spend their whole lives dedicated to making the ultimate sword. Others, like me, make tons of them for adventurers. To each their own."

As he stroked his beard, I could feel the self--confidence that came from age.

"All right, if you want me to do it, I'll make a contract with you."

"You're a lifesaver"

We were done talking, so it was time to test Toya's mettle.

As Kusehlo left us to prepare that, Jade asked me, "What about you, Yuna? If you want to go to Lojina's, Mel can take you."

Hmm, what to do? Personally, I was curious what kind of trial Kusehlo had in store for Toya. If he was just going to check out Toya's hands, that'd be pretty boring, but they'd started walking off, so it seemed like it'd be more involved. If they had some sort of standard evaluation, I kind of wanted to know what it was for future reference.

"I'm wondering if Toya will pass, so I'll stick around." And I wasn't in a hurry to get to Lojina anyway.

"Are you two okay with that?" I asked Fina and Luimin.

"Yes, I don't mind."

"I'd like to see how Toya does too."

All of us were interested. Well, we came all this way, so it would've been weirder if they hadn't been interested at all. But Toya personally had different feelings about it.

"You don't have to come. I'm sure you've got places you need to be."

He seemed unhappy when I started to follow. That just made me want to go watch him

more.

"He'd be embarrassed if Kusehlo said no," Mel explained.

"He's already embarrassed," Senia contributed to the interpretation.

"He wouldn't say no!"

That was a pretty specific denial. Maybe protesting a little too hard, Toya?

"Then it should be fine if Yuna and the others watch."

"Ugh."

Toya couldn't think of a way to get us to leave, so he just gave in.

"Also, Kusehlo, have you gotten an apprentice?"

We'd been hearing someone hammering away in the back for a while now. Jade was peering over to where the sound was coming from.

"That's my son. Blurted out that he wants to become a blacksmith, so I've been teaching him. Hammers away every day like that, but the kid's got a long way to go."

The clangs continued in the background. Just from the sound, I could tell he was giving his all.

"Jade, you know where the backyard is. You wait there while I get things prepared."

We headed over as the clangs continued in the back of the smithy.

"What's he going to have Toya do?"

"You'll see once he's back."

After some time, Kusehlo brought several swords into the backyard.

"Toya, we're testing you starting now."

"R-right." Toya sounded a little nervous.

Kusehlo offered one of the swords in his hand.

"It's not as good as the one I made for Jade, but this is a mithril sword I made."

Toya took the sword, then Kusehlo drove the second blade he was holding into the ground.

"This one's a blunt sword my son made. You try cutting through this sword with that mithril blade. If you can do it, I'll make you one of your own."

Toya compared the two swords and nodded.

"All right."

He drew the mithril sword from its scabbard and stood in front of the second sword in the ground. After taking a short breath, he steeled himself. He brought down the sword in a swift arc. Instead of a clean, easy cut, it bounced right off and tumbled along the ground.

We all looked from where the swords lay, and then back to Toya.

"Wait! Let me try one more time."

Toya grabbed the other sword and stuck it firmly back into the earth. He took another deep breath to ready himself, then brought the sword down again. Unfortunately, he got more or less the same result.

He stared at the sword in his hand. Everyone was quiet.

"Mr. Kusehlo, are you sure this sword isn't dull?"

Kusehlo silently picked up the fallen sword and stuck it back into the ground. Next, he took the mithril sword from Toya and handed it off to Jade.

"Jade, you show him how it's done. And don't hold back—that won't help Toya."

Jade took the sword and turned to the sword in the ground. With a flash, the second sword fell apart—sliced through the middle.

"That's the difference between you and Jade. A mithril sword's too advanced for you. Making you one would just be a waste of ore."

Geez, he really didn't have to say it that bluntly...

"Toya..."

Jade, Mel, and Senia looked worried for him. Toya clenched his hand into a fist.

"If you pay the money, other blacksmiths will make one for you. Try somebody else."

"Kusehlo..." Jade was about to say something, but Toya stopped him.

"Mr. Kusehlo, so all I've gotta do is cut it?" Toya lifted his head up. His chagrin seemed to have been replaced with determination as he stared right at Kusehlo.

"Yup, you cut that, and I'll make a sword for you."

Toya headed to Jade and took the sword again.

"Let me borrow this sword, sir! I'm sure I'll be able to do it in a few days."

Kusehlo stared at Toya.

"Please..."



Toya bowed deeply, but the dwarf simply contemplated the crown of the adventurer's head for a while.

"All right, you can borrow it. Take those other swords with you too, if you want." He gestured lazily at a few other dull blades.

"I promise I'll do it."

Toya took the swords Kusehlo's son had made and headed off on his own.

"Toya!" Jade yelled.

"I'm going with him. Jade, you and Mel stay here." Senia followed after Toya.

Fina and Luimin had no idea what to do, so they just watched as the two adventurers left us, then looked at Jade and Mel. Finally, they turned to me.

"Will he be okay?" I really had no idea, so I asked Jade.

"Yeah, we can leave it in Senia's hands."

"Toya'll be all right."

Jade and Mel watched the two members of their party go off. I was still kind of worried, but I guess it'd be okay with Senia going after him.

"Kusehlo, weren't you a little hard on him? You've never been this harsh before."

He had been pretty hard on Toya. At the same time though, sometimes games would have equipment you couldn't use if your skills weren't at the level they needed to be. You have to take responsibility for your growth if you want to be good enough for the best equipment.

Kusehlo turned his back to us before talking.

"No reason for it. Just me being capricious."

"Capricious?"

"One of the young adventurers who got a hold of one of my swords died recently."

Thought he was hot stuff because he had a nice sword. He went to fight a powerful monster and got himself killed quick.”

After that he didn’t say anything.

“That’s not your fault.”

That had just been a new adventurer being reckless because he didn’t understand his own abilities. It’d be like a normal person thinking they were invincible just because they’d gotten their hands on a hero’s sword or something. Jade was right, it wasn’t Kusehlo’s fault.

“You may be right, but as a matter of principle, I only make swords for people who can handle them. If Toya can’t handle this, then I’m not making him one. If he wants a mithril sword, then someone else can make it.”

Kusehlo picked up the sword Jade had cut and checked on the slice.

“Looks like you’ve improved,” he commented.

“Kusehlo...”

“Well, that’s enough. Tell Toya he’s got until the gate of trials closes.”

“All right.”

All we could do now was pray Toya would be able to manage it.

# CHAPTER 422

## THE BEAR ATTEMPTS THE TEST

I LOOKED at the bit of the sword that was still in the ground after Jade had cut through it. The break was clean though I couldn't rightly call it a break. That was a clean slice. Now that I knew it could be done, I wanted to try it out.

I'd cut through metal when I'd used my mithril knives out on the iron golem's arm, but I hadn't cut through a sword before. If I couldn't manage it, the sword would probably go flying like it had for Toya. Worse, my own blade might break. If either of those things happened, then I'd have failed.

Urgh. I really wanted to try it, but Toya already left with the mithril sword. Maybe I could try with my own knives?

While I was trying to figure out what to do, Mel started talking to me, "Yuna, what's gotten into you? Do you want to try it out yourself?"

She'd read my mind—Or maybe it was that obvious. I rubbed my bear puppets into my face so she couldn't tell what I was thinking from my expression.

"I do, but I didn't know whether I should since it's Toya's test."

If I did it just for fun and pulled it off, it'd be super awkward since it was Toya's test.

"You're worried about that? Yuna... I know you can use magic and knives. Are you a sword fighter, too?"

"Well, maybe."

When I first came to this world, I used a cheap sword. I'd done the same with a knife. I knew what to do from playing games, and it seemed to work out okay. Also, I'd had matches against knights in Shia's place at the academy festival. It wasn't as though I was a complete novice with a sword, but that didn't mean I was on Jade's level.

"Really? Then want to try? I'd like to see you use a sword too," Mel said. He addressed

Kusehlo next. "Kusehlo, Yuna says she'd like a try. Is that okay with you?"

"Try? Try at what?"

"What Jade and Toya were doing."

Mel looked over at the sword that Jade had cut.

"A bear girl, one who doesn't even have a sword on her hip, could do what Toya couldn't? Don't make me laugh! This isn't a game even if you think it looks fun." Kusehlo looked me up and down and loudly snorted.

Any normal person would assume that based on my appearance, especially since the more serious-looking Toya hadn't been able to manage it. It was pretty rude to laugh, though. Hadn't anyone taught him not to judge a book by its cover?

"Kusehlo, she's a great adventurer in her own right. Would you let her give it a try?"

"You too, Jade...?" Now Kusehlo was stroking his beard and thinking about it.

"She's no amateur. She's a great adventurer—and even more powerful than I am."

"That girl? In that getup? An adventurer stronger than you? I'm mishearing."

He narrowed his eyes and stared at me like I was some exotic animal at the zoo.

"You really don't look all that powerful. Let's say I humor you and you are a powerful adventurer—I'd understand if you were a mage, since some people are born with a large amount of mana. That wouldn't apply for sword fighting. You can't learn to wield a sword like it's magic. You need to practice over time. You need to test yourself against opponents."

I *had* wielded a sword multiple times, though it'd been in games, and I'd fought monsters and humans too. As far as combat experience went, I probably outstripped most living adventurers here in this world. Who else had faced hundreds or thousands of opponents? Who had done that in *one day*?

"You should know that as well, Jade. You know how much work you put into getting where you are now. She hardly looks like she's worked a day in her life."

Well, since coming here, I'd relied on my OP bear abilities and hadn't really done any training. I hadn't suffered through much to get here. Kusehlo wasn't wrong about that. The two skills I'd gained since coming to this world were to bear embarrassment and ignore stares.

But I *had* learned how to sword fight. Even if it was through a game, I had the skills.

"And even if she wanted to try, she probably wouldn't be able to wave a sword, considering how small she is. Swords are much too heavy for children."

Look who's talking—he wasn't all that tall himself! He was about the same height as me, actually.

"I think Yuna's powerful enough to hold one."

"Yeah, she'd be able to."

Jade and Mel had both seen me take out a golem with a one-hit KO before. They didn't hesitate to disagree with Kusehlo—they believed their eyes. And yeah, swords were heavy. If I didn't have my bear gear, I couldn't even lift one up or use one the way I wanted. In a way, Kusehlo wasn't wrong. If I didn't have my bear gear, I really would've been weak.

"In any case, Toya took that mithril sword. I couldn't let you try even if I wanted to."

"That's a shame. I really wanted to see how Yuna would wield a sword."

I was just as disappointed as Mel. Fina and Luimin looked like they felt the same.

Then Jade asked, "Then want to use mine?" He looked at the sword at his hip. "It might be large for you though."

He was right—his sword was on the bigger side. I still had no doubt I'd be able to handle it. I'd used both short and long swords in the game.

"Well, if you'd lend it to me," I said. He offered it up without any hesitation. I accepted it.

It was large and I bet it was heavy, but I couldn't tell since I was wearing my bear puppets. I slowly unsheathed it. *Wow*, it was pretty. He'd been treating it really well. I

couldn't find a single nick or bit of tarnish. Now that I had it in my hands, I needed one.

I had to have it.

I smiled as I readied the sword in my bear puppet's mouth.

"Is this one of the mana-type swords?"

"No, it's one of the refined ones."

Mithril weapons came in two varieties: one that made use of the mana you imbued into the blade and one that refined mithril's natural qualities to the greatest extent possible. My mithril knives were both mana types.

I tried waving around the sword a couple of times. It made a nice whooshing sound as it cut through the air. I liked my knives, but this sword was so nice. Maybe a little long for me personally. I could carry a large sword in my bear storage without much hassle, but for my height, it was a little unwieldy to use.

"Yuna, you look so cool."

"You're faster than my dad!"

Fina and Luimin were praising me as they watched me test out the sword.

"I think she is amazing, but... cool? Really?"

"I agree with Jade. A girl in a cute bear outfit swinging a sword isn't cool so much as amazing. Maybe adorable? I'm not even sure how to express what it looks like."

I tried imagining what they saw: A girl in a bear onesie swinging a sword. It just sounded like something from a skit. Or like a circus. I shooed the image from my mind immediately.

"C'mon, are you doing this?"

Kusehlo stuck a sword into the ground. I knew it was a dull sword, but his son probably would've felt miserable seeing it used this way.

I stood in front of it. I gripped my sword, trying to remember how I'd felt during my

gamer days, and breathed deeply to calm myself. Then I brought down my sword diagonally down from the right.

Nothing happened to the dull sword.

“Did you miss, Yuna?”

“Maybe you weren’t close enough to it?”

“No, it reached the other sword.”

“But it’s still intact.”

Everyone looked unsure.

I used Jade’s sword to give the dull blade a little prod. It finally dropped to the ground. A clean cut, lengthwise down the center.

“Oh. It was cut all the way through.”

Jade’s expression was wry, like he’d expected this all along.

“Thank you, Jade. This is a nice sword.”

“Yeah, it’s the one Kusehlo made me, after all.”

I sheathed the sword and handed it back to Jade.

“You’re amazing, Yuna!” Fina said.

“I was convinced you hadn’t touched it.”

Both Fina and Luimin excitedly ran over to me.

“It’s just a great sword. You heard what Kusehlo said. The sword Toya just used earlier wasn’t as good. It’s a different test, so it’s not really fair to compare us.”

I didn’t think I’d have managed this using the sword Toya had been given. I’d only been able to do a trick like this thanks to Jade’s sword being so well made.

"Jade... just who is that bear girl? This is..."

Kusehlo picked up the dull sword and looked it over.

"Her name is Yuna, and she's an adventurer. I knew she could use magic and knives, but I didn't know for sure she could use a blade like this," Jade explained. Kusehlo was dumbstruck.

Well, I was dressed like a bear. Who could blame him?

# CHAPTER 423

## THE BEAR MEETS LOJINA

NOW THAT was satisfying.

Jade's sword had a nice edge to it. Good swords were just that—good. The only issue was that because it was much longer than a knife, my movements were a lot more restricted. The short sword I'd used at the academy festival actually might've been the perfect length for me.

It wasn't really clear whether Toya would get his mithril sword, but since I didn't have anything else to do there, I decided to leave Kusehlo's shop.

*Glance, glance...*

"Kusehlo, if Toya can do it, I hope you'll still make his sword."

"Yup, I keep promises. I'll make one for him if he succeeds."

*Glance, glance...*

"You make sure to tell him he's got to do it before the gate of trials closes though."

*Glance, glance...*

Kusehlo hadn't stopped stealing peeks at me since starting his conversation with Jade. Did he have something to say to me? Maybe he was going to say it'd all been a fluke? Or was it a coincidence, or that I'd cheated? Well, I actually was using my OP bear abilities. That was basically cheating, so if he said that, I wasn't sure I could dispute it honestly.

Even if I had sword-fighting skills, I couldn't swing a sword without my bear puppets. It'd be way too heavy for me. I never would have been able to swing the sword with the control I'd had. It was all thanks to my bear gear.

Kusehlo's looks were starting to bug me, though, so I decided to head out with Fina

and Luimin.

“Jade, Mel, we’ll wait outside.”

“All right. We’ll be there soon too.”

“Ahh...”

I felt like I’d heard a funny sound come from behind us just now... I was probably just imagining things. We waited outside for Jade and Mel.

“Yuna,” Luimin said. “You can use a sword, and not just magic? If Labilata finds out, he might make you fight him.”

“Luimin, you can’t tell him.” I gave Luimin a firm squeeze on her shoulder.

She nodded very readily.

“Did you know, Fina?”

“Yes, I saw Yuna fight in a match with a sword once.”

She probably meant the academy festival matches.

“You did? I wish I could have seen her in a match too.”

“But you don’t want to see me fight Labilata,” I reminded her.

While we were talking outside, Jade and Mel came by. Mel was supposed to take us to Lojina’s place... but she couldn’t do it, it turned out.

“Sorry. I’ll make it up to you.” Mel held her pressed her hands together as a sign of apology. “Toya and Senia were supposed to help Jade with the purchasing, but since they’re both off somewhere, I need to go with Jade now instead.”

“I could manage on my own, you know.”

“Obviously I’m not leaving you to do it all by yourself.”

They were going to buy the stuff the merchant from the capital had asked them for. Mel gave us a map to help us find our way to Lojina instead.

“Luimin, do you know where this is?”

“Yes, I should be able to get us there. I know where it is.”

It fell to Luimin to show us the way since she’d been around town before.

“Kusehlo really was staring at you, wasn’t he, Yuna? I’m surprised you could ignore that.”

Ah. It wasn’t just in my head.

“Maybe it’s my bear clothes?”

“I don’t know... I think he didn’t start until after you cut through the sword.”

Yeah. It looked like he thought I was cheating. Good! Whew. I didn’t know what I would have done if he’d asked where I learned how to use a sword instead.

I left Jade and Mel and headed off to Lojina’s place. Luimin walked at the front with the map, and Fina and I followed to the sides behind her.

“Um, so it’s over here this way...” “Turn the corner here...” “Straight...” “Turn at the bend two streets ahead...” Luimin looked at the map as she plowed forward. No hesitation, no sign of getting lost. Then she came to a stop.

“This one.” Luimin stretched out her arm and pointed at a shop.

“This one?”

“Yes, this one.”

This one? She said it so confidently, but...

“This doesn’t look like a blacksmith, though?”

The sign featured drawings of pots and frypans. It didn't look like a place for forging weapons.

"Luimin, are you sure we're not lost?"

"We aren't. The map says this is it. I'm sure I'm not wrong."

Luimin pouted as she showed me the map. She was right—if Kusehlo's forge was in this spot, then going down here, turning at this spot, going straight, then turning at the bend two streets ahead...

"You're right," I said.

"See. I didn't get the directions wrong." She was very defensive about it.

Jade and the others had come here a long time ago, so there was a possibility that Lojina had moved in the meantime. The map might be a little suspect, too.

"Anyway, how about we go into the shop and ask them?"

Since we couldn't go back where we came, I preferred asking this place for directions instead. It was also possible that he'd just closed down the shop and this one was someone else's in the same spot. If so, they might know about the old owner.

"Excuse me."

Once we got into the shop, I saw it was filled with piles upon piles of pots and pans of assorted sizes. Maybe we could buy ours here.

"This pot looks like the perfect size. And this one looks so easy to use!"

Fina was holding up pots at arm's length and evaluating them.

"Should we buy what we need here?" Luimin also looked over the notes she'd gotten from Talia as she scanned the store.

We were getting off track from our original goal. As we were looking around, someone came in from the back of the shop.

"Welcome. Are you looking to buy for yourself or at wholesale?"

A dwarfish woman of indeterminate age approached us. Because she was short, I couldn't tell how old she was. She could have been my age, for all I knew. Or maybe she was older? No clue.

"A bear?!"

What I *did* know was that she was very surprised to see me. A smile spread across her face, and she approached and took my hand.

"How cute..."

She did a full loop around me.

"Um."

"I'm sorry. Um, you're just so... adorable."



Actually, I thought she was the adorable one—and small and pretty too. Then again, dwarves wouldn't grow any bigger, so she probably wouldn't end up pretty in that tall, lanky way.

"So, what are you looking for today? Just let me know and I'll bring things out. If you'd like something custom made, we can do that, though it would take time. And the commissions do cost a bit more." The dwarf girl shifted to talking business.

Fina held a pot in her hands as she considered what to do. I personally wanted to wait to shop after my other business was out of the way.

"I have some things I want to buy, but there's something I'd like to ask about if that's okay?"

"Oh, sure. What would that be?"

"Do you know if someone named Lojina has a shop around here? If you happen to know him, we came here to meet him."

"Oh, you mean my dad?"

"Your dad?"

"That's right. Lojina is my dad."

"Uh, but you don't seem to have any swords here?"

I didn't see a single one. All they had were kitchen supplies and tools like saws and hammers. The closest thing to a blade they had was a kitchen knife.

"Oh, did you come here after hearing about my dad? Sorry. He doesn't make swords anymore." She bowed her head to apologize.

This really was Lojina's shop, so what was going on? This was the guy who taught both Gold and Ghazal how to make weapons. Right?

"Um. I know Gold and Ghazal. Would I be able to see Lojina?"

I didn't understand what the deal was, so I decided to name drop those two in case it'd at least get me in the room with him. If the Lojina this girl knew was the same one that

I was looking for, she'd know who they were.

"Oh, Gold and Ghazal! You know them?!"

She looked surprised. Based on how she reacted, it seemed we were talking about the same Lojina.

"Yeah, I live in the same town as Gold, and I've met Ghazal before too. The two of them had letters for Lojina."

I pulled out the two letters from my bear storage.

"One moment, please. Um, Mom is out, so Dad! *Dad!*"

The girl called for her father after seeing the letters and headed deeper into the shop.

"Well, we're in the right place..."

"I wasn't wrong, but you were so convinced I was, Yuna. That was terrible of you."

"Sorry. I just didn't think that the teacher of weapons blacksmiths would be selling pots and pans."

"Are you sure he's Gold and Ghazal's teacher though?"

Fina seemed to think the same thing as me. I guess it was only natural. I looked around the place but didn't see a single sword. What had happened?

The girl had told me he wasn't making them anymore. If you thought about it, that meant he used to make them. He must have had a reason for quitting weapons specifically—that seemed the most likely possibility. If he'd been injured, he probably couldn't keep making pots and pans. Neither Gold nor Ghazal had mentioned any of this.

While I was thinking about it, I heard the girl's voice as well as a man's voice from the back.

"A bear girl? What's that? I don't understand what you're saying."

"I told you. A bear girl knows Gold and Ghazal, and she brought you letters!"

“But who’s this bear girl? Is there an actual bear in the shop?”

“She’s a girl—like I said.”

“Right, so a female bear, you mean.”

“No.”

Their voices steadily grew louder. The girl returned, leading a dwarfish man by the arm. I guess this was her dad. Lojina?

He looked very surprised to see me. He only gave Fina and Luimin a quick glance over, but he looked me up and down multiple times. Again, bear outfit. I get it.

“A bear?”

“See? She’s a bear.”

“That she is.”

“And she’s a girl.”

“Yes, indeed.”

They’d kind of been going at it just a second ago, but the moment he saw me, their argument was buried.

“Are you Lojina?”

“I am, but are you really acquainted with Gold and Ghazal?”

“Yes, they’ve both helped me out tons. When I told them I was coming over here, they had me take this letter for them.”

After explaining, I handed off the letters I had to him.

“Are Gold and Ghazal doing well?”

“Gold and Nelt are doing well together, and Ghazal is a famous blacksmith in the capital now.”

I was just repeating what Jade had said about Ghazal though.

"I see. So they've done well for themselves."

"Um, if you'd be okay with it... I'd like to hear how Nelt or rather how all three of them are doing."

The girl grasped my bear puppet.

"Sure," I said. "There were things I wanted to ask Lojina about too."

I'd come here about the Bearyllium too, of course. Not that I thought that would amount to anything.

They gave me some tea and we got talking.

# CHAPTER 424

## THE BEAR TALKS ABOUT GOLD AND GHAZAL

THEY LED US to a spacious room. It didn't seem like a parlor in a house so much as a breakroom or conference room at an office. In the middle of the room they had a table and chairs, and the walls were lined with bookshelves filled with pots and pans. It seemed like the room was being used for extra storage too.

Still—not one single sword.

“Sorry it's so small. Sit where you like.”

“Oh, Mom's not here. Um, would you like some drinks and snacks?”

The girl ducked into another room and returned with some cups and tea.

“I'm sorry we don't have anything fancy.”

“No, it's all right. This is great.”

We started sipping the tea she brought out. All of us sat down in our chairs and introduced ourselves. Lojina's daughter told us her name was Lilyka. I assumed she was a younger girl based on how she tied her medium-long hair in a ponytail with a ribbon, but I really couldn't tell what age she was. The same had happened with Nelt too. I remembered back to the time I'd thought Gold might've been cradle robbing.

“So, you three kids came all the way from the town where Gold lives on your own? I thought he lived pretty far away.”

He'd just called us kids—did that include me though? I was supposed to be their guardian.

“Well, I'm an *adventurer* and I came here while *protecting* the two of them.” I emphasized my words a bit.

“You're an adventurer...?”

Lojina and Lilyka both seemed surprised by that. No matter where I went, everyone always seemed to react the same way when I said I was an adventurer. I guess there was nothing I could do about it, considering this was just what I looked like, but it'd be nice if people believed me once in a while for variety's sake.

"Yuna, are you really an adventurer? I think it'd be dangerous for a new adventurer to come all the way here on their own," Lilyka said. "Especially since you're a girl protecting two younger girls."

I felt like I'd never know what the definition of a new adventurer was. I mean, take a new student for example. You'd call them new during the beginning of their first year, but definitely not right before their summer vacation.

I wondered how it worked for junior employees. I had no idea since I'd never worked in a company before, but I wondered whether an employee would be considered a novice throughout their entire first year. If we were using the school definition of a newbie, I definitely wasn't a new adventurer anymore. I definitely wasn't a veteran yet, but I also felt like if you called me intermediate, you'd be misled. I wondered how much skill you'd need to count as either of those anyway. I wouldn't want to call someone perpetually stuck at Rank E a veteran no matter how long they'd been around, that's for sure.

"I'm surprised your parents allowed you to come here. My mom and dad would never allow something like that," Lilyka murmured as she looked pointedly at Lojina.

"Yuna is really strong, so they were okay with me going."

"Yes, my mom let me go because she didn't need to worry. Yuna would be with me."

When Lilyka voiced concerns, both Fina and Luimin backed me up about how strong I was. Despite that, Lilyka kept on looking at me like she didn't believe I could handle myself.

"You're really that strong?"

Yep—Can't judge a book by its cover, after all.

"You said that Gold and Ghazal helped you. I thought maybe you'd convinced them to make you some kitchenware. Are you telling me they made you weapons?"

"They made me some fighting knives," I said.

Gold had made Fina a knife for monster harvesting, and Ghazal had made me some for fighting.

"A bear with weapons..."

I decided to ignore the part where he'd said "bear." Plus, any adventurer needed to have a weapon or two.

"Gold and Ghazal both wrote in their letters that you're an excellent adventurer. And Gold also mentioned that you tend to cause a commotion with that bear outfit of yours. Said to be on the lookout for that." Lojina placed the letter he'd finished reading on the table.

I wondered what else was in there. I always wanted to know what was in letters. What was that about me causing a commotion? I wish people would stop describing me like I was a troublemaker.

And why had they written about me anyway? They were writing to people in their hometown, so they should've been writing about their own lives. Maybe they didn't want to write about themselves, so they wrote about me instead? That sounded kinda like Gold.

"Can I see too?" Lilyka picked up the letter on the table and started reading.

Well, I'd finished up the favor Gold and Ghazal had asked me to do. Now I just needed to ask about my own business.

"Wow! They really say she's an amazing adventurer. Despite how she looks, she's quite powerful." Lilyka looked from me to the letter. She still didn't look convinced.

Why did I feel like I was having déjà vu right now? I felt like Gold had written the same thing in his letter to Ghazal a while back. Couldn't they have written that I was strong, just like a bear?

"How are Gold and Nelt doing? They don't fight, do they? Are they getting along?"

"Nelt has Gold under her thumb, but they're doing fine together," I said.

"Oh, really? It says they're doing fine in the letter, but I thought they might have been lying to keep us from worrying. I feel better hearing about them from someone who knows them."

"Fina might actually know more about them. She's known them longer than me."

"Really?"

Fina'd been the one who introduced me to Gold's place. I'd only gotten to Crimonia a few months ago, so Fina knew them way better. They'd been watching over her for a while.

Lilyka asked Fina a whole bunch of questions. Fina told her about getting the harvesting knife and also how Gold had maintained it for her for free. Then they got to things I hadn't known about, so I listened intently.

"Gold and Nelt treat me very well," Fina said.

"Do they? That seems like the two of them, all right."

Lilyka latched onto every single word Fina said and nodded along happily.

"But why did Gold move so far off into Crimonia?"

Gold and Nelt had left their hometown to come to Crimonia, but it didn't seem like they'd been forced to do it.

"He wanted to quickly become self-sufficient so he could live with Nelt. Nelt's parents died young, so Gold's parents looked after her since they were neighbors. Well, a lot of other things happened in between, but Gold and Nelt both left the town together and decided to start a smithy somewhere else. They wanted to have a shop here, but there wasn't work to go around to new smiths, so they ended up leaving. It must have been pretty hard to get a shop running in Crimonia too, though."

Gold had done it all to be with Nelt. What a sweet person. Well, he was also the kind of guy to give Fina a harvesting knife and do upkeep on it for free. He and Nelt were such a nice couple.

"So, how's Ghazal doing in the capital? You just said that he was famous. Is he really?"

"I don't know a lot about that, but other adventurers I know said he's an excellent blacksmith."

"Excellent, huh? Sounds like he's working hard then."

Lilyka seemed even more giddy than when I'd talked about Gold, but maybe that was my imagination?

"Um, was Ghazal on his own?" Lilyka asked, hesitating a little.

*On his own?*

"He didn't have any apprentices that I could tell. He did all the weapon making and customer handling on his own."

I think he could stand to hire someone to help him though, but he was doing everything on his own.

"Really... He's doing it all on his own." Lilyka turned her face down. She looked kind of happy about that.

I asked why Ghazal had ended up in the capital.

"He said he wanted to test his mettle out at the capital and left. I didn't think he'd go all the way to the capital in Elfanica though."

It did kind of seem like something Ghazal would do.

"They could've stuck around and started a business here instead of going off to the capital or some other town. I would've given them the money to do it, at least," Lojina crossed his arms and grumbled.

"Dad! He's been lonely since Ghazal left."

Maybe this guy didn't like showing people his real feelings. Why did he go from making swords to pots and pans, though? I couldn't find a good way to ask.

"So, Ghazal mentioned in his letter that he wants me to look at some ore you've got."

I was curious about Lojina, but he started talking about the Bearyllium. Looks like

Ghazal had made sure to mention it.

I brought out the two Bearyllium ores from my bear storage and set them on the table. Lojina picked one up and Lilyka took the other. Natural thing to do when presented with two of them, I suppose.

Lojina weighed it in his hand and squinted at it, squeezing his hand over it as he tapped at it with his fingers. Lilyka did the same, almost as though she were copying him. You could see the family resemblance.

“Do you know what it might be?”

My hopes were not high.

Lojina silently stood from his seat and looked for something inside a nearby box. Once he found whatever he'd been searching for, he came back. He held the thing in his hand as he peered at the Bearyllium. Was that a magnifier?

“I've seen this. This thing is a fey stone. But looks like there's something different about it.”

“A fey stone?” So it wasn't Bearyllium, then?

“But I'm afraid I can't tell what kind of fey stone it's turned into.”

“Um, so what is a fey stone?”

“It's a type of object that holds a specialized power that can amplify an attribute power of the possessor. For example, a fire fey stone can strengthen fire magic. Likewise, a water fey stone can power up water magic.”

Oh, so it was a power-up item, then. I got a bad, bad feeling about the name “Bearyllium” in the back of my mind. I didn't want to accept it, but this had to be a bear-attribute fey stone. I'd come across another present from the god, then.

# CHAPTER 425

## THE BEAR SHOWS OFF THE MITHRIL KNIVES

I'D MADE some progress on the Bearyllium, though I never would have guessed it was a fey stone on my own. If Bearyllium is a power-up item, then did that mean it made me more powerful just by having it? Did I need to process it in some way? I looked at the Bearyllium in their hands as I asked, "How do I use a fey stone? Do I just need to carry it around?"

"You'd actually be in more luck asking that little elf girl there about it. The elves know a lot more about these than I do." Lojina nodded and looked at Luimin next to me.

Huh, I'd had someone who knew what Bearyllium was right next to me this whole time. I looked at her next, but Luimin shook her head *no*. Her hands too, for emphasis.

"Grandfather would probably know more about it, but I really don't."

So she didn't know even though she was an elf. Still, having a lead like this that I could ask Mumulute about made this trip to Rudnik worthwhile.

I wasn't in a hurry to do anything with the Bearyllium. I was going to have to bring Luimin home anyway, so I'd be able to ask Mumulute when we got back to the elves' village. Maybe I could have saved a trip if I'd asked Mumulute about it from the beginning, but I hadn't known he'd be the guy to ask.

"Still, sounds like Ghazal hasn't studied up enough if he can't even recognize a fey stone. Maybe I should bring him back and train him again."

"He didn't know because you didn't teach him about them. You shouldn't blame poor Ghazal because you didn't teach him well enough."

Lilyka had Ghazal's back. Lojina really was Ghazal and Gold's teacher from how these two talked about them. But then there was something I was curious about, given that.

"So, Lojina, you're Gold and Ghazal's blacksmith teacher then?"

"That about sums it up. I taught them all sorts of things."

"Then why aren't there any swords in your shop? You have pots and pans all over, but neither Ghazal or Gold mentioned anything about it. I'm sorry if it's private, I'm just curious."

"Well..." Lojina turned away. He seemed to have a hard time getting the words out. Was it a difficult subject?

"Dad, why don't you tell her? You can't hide it anymore. Once Yuna goes home, all three of them will find out anyway."

"You didn't get hurt, did you?"

"No, Dad just—"

"Lilyka!" Lojina tried to stop her, but she kept going anyway.

"Dad was so depressed when Ghazal and Gold left town. They were his precious apprentices, after all. He took them under his wing and watched them grow, but then they left."

"I-It's not like that. I wasn't depressed."

"What's not like that? When Gold and Nelt left, you were drinking for *days*. And then when Ghazal left, you only forged a single sword per month. You were like an empty shell."

"That was because I couldn't make the swords the way I wanted to."

"It was definitely because they left."

"It's not..."

Jade had mentioned him only making one sword a month. I wondered how Jade would feel knowing this was the real story.

"Mom got so mad that she told you to make pots if you couldn't make swords."

"Well, if you wanna talk about that, then how about you, Lilyka? You were inconsolable

when Ghazal left too.”

“I-I was not! And we’re talking about *you* right now.” Both of them pouted as they looked at each other.

It seemed Lojina had lost his motivation from Gold and Ghazal’s departure. I think I could understand that. Motivation is really important. But if he was so depressed he couldn’t even make weapons, he must have really cared for his two apprentices.

“That’s why I told you that you should get a new apprentice. You’ll get your will to make weapons back if you do that.”

“It’s not that easy to replace someone.”

“That’s only because you’re so strict. Not everyone can do everything that Gold and Ghazal could do from the start.”

“What’s the point if I’m not strict with them?”

They were back at it again. I guess they had a good father-daughter relationship, considering they were so assertive about what they thought. I smiled to myself. Fina and Luimin, on the other hand, seemed at a loss as to what to do. It wasn’t an actual fight, so I wasn’t uncomfortable.

While those two were fighting, someone else came into the room.

“I could hear your voices all the way from inside the shop. There aren’t any clients around, but it’s embarrassing. Lower your voices!”

“Mom?!”

A short dwarfish woman with short hair looked sternly at Lojina and Lilyka. This was Lilyka’s mother. She surveyed the room before her gaze rested on us.

“Why are you two making such a fuss in front of company?”

“It’s all Dad’s fault.”

“No, it’s *yours*, Lilyka.”

They glared at each other. Lilyka's mother looked like she'd given up, so she turned to my group.

"What are you cutely dressed girls doing here?"

"Yuna and Fina came from the same town Gold and Nelt live in, and Luimin is from the elves' village. She came with Yuna to buy pots." Lilyka summed it up for us.

"You're from the same city as Gold and Nelt?"

"They've helped us a lot."

"And she says she knows Ghazal too."

"Do Gold and Ghazal make clothes now?" Lilyka's mother looked at my bear clothes with surprise.

"They made me knives," I explained. "Gold and Ghazal weren't involved with my outfit at all."

"You took me by surprise. I was shocked they'd started making cute clothes."

I wondered where she had gotten that idea from. The ridiculous image of two bearded dwarves attempting to make a bear onesie floated in front of my eyes, and I tried to bat it away. They would be good at detail work and might actually make something really cute, which was all the more frightening.

We introduced ourselves. Lilyka's mom was named Wiola.

"You have knives made by Gold and Ghazal, don't you? Will you let me see those? I think if Dad sees that they're doing their work well, maybe he'll be able to move on."

"I'd like to take a look at them too."

Lojina seemed like he had a word or two to say about what Lilyka had just told me, but when Wiola agreed with Lilyka, he went silent.

"Gold just made a knife for harvesting though. Just so you know."

"Regardless of what type of weapon it is, the craftsmanship will speak for itself."

I'd asked Lilyka, but Lojina answered. So, he *did* want to see.

I pulled out my Kumayuru mithril knife from my bear storage, and Fina produced the mithril knife Gold had made from her item bag. We set them on the table.

Lojina picked up Fina's knife.

"This is for harvesting? Gold made this?"

He unsheathed the knife and took a look at the blade.

"Ah. Mithril?"

Lojina got it right just by looking at the blade.

"Lass, would you mind if I tested it?"

"Um."

Lojina asked Fina, who looked over at me. I nodded slightly.

Lojina stood up once he had permission and pulled out something that looked a lot like an animal hide from a drawer. He easily sliced through the hide. He checked the knife's edge as he did so.

"Looks like Gold's improved. If his skills had deteriorated in the slightest, I would've called him back and made him do his training over again."

Even though he said that, a smile crept over his face. Lojina was happy his apprentice had improved. He wiped the knife with a cloth, then returned it to its sheath.

"Would you let me see it too?" Lilyka asked Fina and took the knife.

"It really is pretty. Are you sure he hasn't overtaken you, Dad?"

"Hmph. Not hardly," Lojina dismissed Lilyka.

"But why has a little girl like you got a mithril knife? That's not something you can just go out and buy. You're not from a well-to-do family, are you?"

Fina was quick to deny that.

"Um... we're not very well off at home. Actually, Yuna bought this knife for me."

She wasn't poor, though. Gentz was there and Tiermina worked. Maybe she still hadn't shaken her old mindset. She'd been pretty upset when I'd bought her the mithril knife, too.

"You bought her a mithril knife?"

"Fina does harvesting work on monsters, so she helps me with any monsters and animals I take down."

"A mithril knife is an extravagant tool for that kind of task."

"Well, if she didn't have one, there was something she wouldn't have been able to harvest from."

"What?"

"...A black tiger."

There was a brief but deep silence.

"Did I hear you right?"

I didn't know whether he was choosing to believe what Gold and Ghazal had said in their letters, but he seemed more awed than incredulous. Maybe only half disbelieving.

Lojina moved on to inspecting the black Kumayuru knife that Ghazal had made.

"Is that a bear?" Lojina glanced at the bear etched into the grip, then up at my getup.

What? Yeah, it's a bear. It was Ghazal's idea. He slowly drew the knife from its sheath.

"So, this is mithril too. This time for combat."

He asked me whether he could test it out in the same way he'd asked Fina. I agreed.

“You use this knife, lass?”

“I do. Ghazal recognizes my skill.”

When I’d cut through the iron golem, he’d praised me. I wasn’t overselling it, right?

“May I test you a little?”

“Test me?”

Lojina stood up and brought back a thin iron rod.

Uh, did blacksmiths like tests or what? Is that what he kept iron rods like this for? It looked about one centimeter in diameter from what I could tell. It was an uninspiring test considering I’d cut through an iron golem’s arm with the mithril knives.

“I want to check whether Ghazal and Gold are still good judges. It’s all right if you can’t do it. But if the two of them say you’re such a great adventurer, then you should be able to do this. It would help me understand how you defeated a black tiger.”

Lojina held the iron rod at arm’s length.

“You want me to cut it while you’re holding it? That’s dangerous.”

“This is the best way to see your true abilities. Don’t worry, I won’t hold it too firmly.”

He did as he said and held it loosely. The slightest tap could have knocked it from his grip.

“Now, we don’t want the rod to fly out of my hand. The less of an impact I feel in my hands when you cut it, the better. You want to try it out?”

Ghazal and Gold’s honor were on the line. They’d called me an amazing adventurer, so I couldn’t tell him I wouldn’t do it. I accepted the test.

I picked up the knife and stood in front of Lojina.

“Is it okay if I use mana?”

“Use any of your abilities.”

Wasn't Lojina scared? I would never do this with a person if I didn't know how strong they were. He looked at me very seriously.

I poured mana into my knife, and then I swung.

# CHAPTER 426

## THE BEAR BUYS KITCHEN UTENSILS

WHEN I BROUGHT down the Kumayuru knife, a third of the rod that Lojina held fell to the ground. Well. Looked like I'd passed with flying colors.

The remaining section of rod was still in Lojina's hand. I hadn't sent it flying. I'd only cut through the rod. His hand was still intact, of course, and he wasn't bleeding or anything.

But Lojina didn't react.

"I cut it," I said.

Lojina stared at the cut rod, bewildered. He firmed up his grip on it and smiled.

"I barely felt anything. Look at this smooth cut! Ghazal wrote in his letter you could cut through metal, but I didn't think you'd be this skilled."

I guess Ghazal had told him about the iron golem I'd sliced as a test. Must have been where Lojina got the idea. He asked to see my knife, so I handed it to him.

"Not even a nick. I can't see any signs you used it. That proves how well your mana stuck to the blade."

"Ghazal just made a really good knife. I'm sure he had a great teacher too."

Lojina looked embarrassed when I said that.

"Of course he did. It was me. Obviously, he could manage this at the very least. Looks like they're still good judges of talent. Sorry for testing you like this."

Lojina giddily returned the Kumayuru knife to me. I sheathed it again and put it away into my bear storage.

"But still, lass, I'm surprised you have such amazing skills and wear that outfit. If

you're an adventurer, you should really consider dressing the part. Some people might make light of you otherwise. Weapons are important, but wearing the appropriate gear to match your ability is important too. You'll be judged by how you look."

This was the first time someone explained their reasoning for wanting me to change clothes. People decide whether they'll hang around a person based on how they look first. Normally, someone who went around wearing a onesie wouldn't have many friends. I only got away with it because I'd come to this world.

...I *was* getting away with it. Right?

"Looks like Gold and Ghazal didn't judge you based on how you look, though."

Well, they'd already heard rumors about me at that point. Gold seemed to have connections to the Adventurers' Guild. Ghazal knew about the mithril golem and had read the introduction letter from Gold.

"So, it looks like you weren't just a cutesy girl dressed as a bear," Lilyka said.

"You're amazing, even though you dress so cutely," Wiola added.

They were both stroking my outfit while they looked on, full of wonder.

It was time to talk about why we'd come to town.

We'd come here to sightsee and shop, and also so I could find something out about the Bearyllium. Since I'd found out the Bearyllium ores were fey stones, it seemed like coming to the dwarves' town had been worth my time. Soon we were going to have a look around town, and once we finished buying pots and pans, we'd head back.

"So, you all came to buy pots and pans and other kitchen utensils, then?"

"Well, I was actually here to identify the mystery ore I brought. But then while coming here, a lot of people I knew asked for things from Rudnik."

Come to think of it, Fina and Luimin had been the ones everyone had asked things from, not me. I had my own plans to buy cookware for my bear houses, though.

“Why don’t you buy everything here? They’re pots and pans made by a former great weapons blacksmith.”

“What do you mean by ‘former?’”

“Well, it’s true, Dad. After seeing Ghazal and Gold’s knives, don’t you feel like making weapons again? Weren’t Yuna’s skills inspiring?”

“Hmph...”

Lojina didn’t confirm or deny it. Since he wasn’t saying no, maybe it was rolling around in his head a little. If he was motivated after seeing his former students’ knives, then maybe coming here had been fair. He had all that skill as a weapons crafter, after all, so not putting it to use was a real waste.

We ended up buying our things at Lojina’s shop. Once we were back in the main shop area, we started searching for each thing we needed.

“Wiola, do you have all of these?”

Luimin quickly gave up searching on her own and showed Wiola several lists.

“Oh, so many.”

“My mom asked all the neighbors what they wanted when this town was mentioned. Then she came back with all these lists.”

“As a business owner, I can’t say I’m unhappy.”

“But it’s way too much.” Luimin drooped her head as she gripped the lists.

I looked over at Fina to see that Lilyka was helping her search for what she needed.

“Lilyka, do you have a pot a little bigger than this?”

Fina had two frypans and some odds and ends that Tiermina had asked for. She was asking Lilyka to help her find everything else.

"Yeah." Lilyka found the pot that Fina was asking about with a shopkeeper's finesse.

"And then I need things for the shops and the orphanage..."

"Here's the large one for you. We don't normally get a lot of people buying the large pots, so we don't make them without a special order," Lilyka said as she looked over Fina's notes.

"Then it looks like we'll need to go to another shop."

"How long are all of you going to be here?" Lilyka asked Fina, who looked at me.

"We haven't decided a specific amount of time, but we'll be here for a few days at least," I answered for Fina.

We were planning to look around town. Since we were already here, I wanted to see the gate of trials open. I was interested in participating, but I doubted any blacksmiths would ask me to.

"If you put in an order, Dad should be able to make it in that time."

"But it'll cost more, won't it?" Fina asked, seeming a little wary.

I did kind of remember her saying it cost an extra fee when we came in. Unlike me, Fina had a good sense of financial responsibility. She didn't want any markups. I personally didn't like bothering with that stuff, so I would've just ordered it without caring. Fina had a few things to teach me. Money was finite and I really should have been treating it more carefully.

Lilyka glanced over at Wiola when Fina said that.

"Since they're friends of Gold and Ghazal, we won't charge you an additional fee."

"We'll sell it to you at normal price."

"Thank you. Then I'd like to order these."

"It looks like Luimin's got some that need to be special ordered too. Since you're ordering so much, we'll give you a slight discount."

I looked over at Luimin. She was busy buying a small mountain of kitchen supplies. It didn't look like several people's worth of supplies so much as several households.

"Oh? You're getting hammers too?"

A few pots Lumin had picked out held tools inside. I saw a wide variety of hammers and nails.

"It was part of the list of stuff. Mom asked a lot of people what they wanted, I guess."

Well, the elves' village had no blacksmith of their own, so I guess this was their only opportunity to buy this sort of stuff. I could have bought stuff in Crimonia or the capital, but I figured I might as well outfit my bear houses while we were here. I was buying a lot, so I got a discount too, of course.

"Well, we'll go around looking at the town now."

We were planning to just wander after this.

Lilyka offered to go with us to show us around.

"But what about your work?"

"Mom..." Lilyka gave her mom a pleading look.

"Sure. You can go ahead."

"Thanks, Mom!"

Now Lilyka was joining us as our guide with permission.

We were going to pick up all the stuff we we'd bought, once everything was done. When Lojina saw the list of things to make, he'd let out a sigh.

"Dad, put all you've got into making those pots and pans."

"Weren't you trying to get me to make swords earlier?"

"Right now you need to make these, though, so put everything you've got into them for the family."

With that, Lilyka left minding the shop to her mom and headed off outside with us.

After we'd been walking for a while, I started to hear the usual "It's a bear...!", "What the heck is that outfit?", "A bear?" Every little comment came flooding into my ears. I kept walking and pretended not to hear it.

Fina and Luimin ignored it too, but there was one person who had trouble letting it go.

"Um, so I'm just going to ask—why do you dress as a bear, Yuna?"

Lilyka looked at the people around us as she asked. Fina and Luimin gestured at her as though to say she wasn't supposed to ask about that. I really didn't want anyone to ask, but maybe they'd been concerned about me. Maybe they thought something was wrong.

"Oh, is it something that I shouldn't have mentioned?"

"Well, it's more that I'd rather people not ask."

"But I just can't help but notice everyone staring at you."

As Lilyka looked around at our surroundings, her embarrassment redoubled. People close and far watched us with the same open interest.

"I'm sure they're just staring because we're an odd gang—we've got a dwarf, elf, human, and a bear all in one group."

I pointed at each of them, ending on myself, with a bear puppet. We were all different species. That was why we stood out so much. It wasn't just because of me—really!

"Yuna..."

"Yuna... you called yourself a bear?"

Fina and Luimin seemed flabbergasted.

No fair. If I'd said I was human, someone else would've made the joke.

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, that's fine. We still do stand out though. It doesn't bother the rest of you?"

"I'm okay. I'm used to it."

Fina smiled. She's used to what? To being stared at? Or to the embarrassment?

"I'm not. It almost feels like they're staring at me." Luimin fidgeted and looked at her surroundings.

"Well, Yuna's outfit isn't something you see every day. Are there a lot of people dressed like Yuna in the capital?"

Fina and Luimin exchanged a look when Lilyka asked that.

"I've only been to the capital once."

"I've only been a few times too."

They *knew* not a single person in the capital wore bear onesies, but they were trying to save me a little face. I was fine though. They could've said that no one anywhere dressed like I did. Meanwhile, I was practically crying on the inside.

"Really? I think it'd be pretty cute if there were a lot of people wearing them though."

Imagining the adventurers and townspeople of the capital wearing onesies like me—and onesies flooding the capital in general—was giving me psychic damage. A sea of onesie-wearers joining me would be mortifying. If that ever happened, it'd spell the end of human fashion for all of history.

# CHAPTER 427

## THE BEAR GOES SHOPPING

SINCE I DIDN'T have the option of taking off my onesie, I convinced Lilyka to give up. She resigned herself to being showered in stares as we walked around.

"So, super random, but there sure are a lot of dwarves here," I said.

I'd sometimes see some around Crimonia and the capital, but not this many. No matter where I looked to either side and in front of me, dwarves were *everywhere*—and they were so short. Even the fully grown men weren't all that tall. At most, they were my height. The same went for the women. Lilyka was just a tad shorter than me.

"Since we have a lot of mines and woods around here, there are plenty of natural resources. It's the perfect place for dwarves to settle."

Looked like access to resources was important no matter where you were from. The dwarves in this world specialized in crafts, just like they did in games and books.

"So, Fina, Luimin, is there anything you'd like to see or go to?"

"I'll go wherever Yuna wants to," Fina answered.

"I just needed to go shopping."

"Yuna," Fina asked me, "is there anywhere you want to go?"

"Hmm. How about we just wander and go into any shop that catches our interest? Oh, and I'd like to look for some souvenirs."

"Okay."

"Sure!"

If I found something unusual, I might buy something for Noa. I'd left without saying anything to her, so she was definitely going to be upset I hadn't brought her anything.

I didn't know what I'd do if she told me she was unhappy with me directly. I'd decided to buy a present to have at the ready.

"If you could take us somewhere where we could buy something like that, that would be really great," I said to Lilyka.

She happily agreed, so we started looking for things that we could give as souvenirs as Lilyka guided us through the town.

"How about this place? It has metal crafts, like cute trinkets and accessories."

It was a small general store. Lilyka didn't wait for us to respond and headed straight in, so we followed her. Just like Lilyka had told us, the shop was filled with shelves and tables lined with rings, necklaces, hair trinkets, brooches, and other accessories for girls, all finely crafted from metal.

"These are pretty."

"They really are."

Fina and Luimin were browsing the accessories lining the shelves.

"Fina, what about this one?" Lilyka picked up a blue flower accessory that had been colored with something and showed it off to Fina.

"It's a cute flower. The color's pretty too."

"I think red would go with your hair, Luimin, since it's light green. It'll look just like the flower is blooming. Won't that look great?"

Lilyka held the hair accessories up to Fina and Luimin's heads to check.

"Do you really think so?"

"Look in the mirror and see for yourselves."

Fina looked at the mirror bashfully to see how she looked with the flower in her hair. They chattered away together, all gathered around the mirror. Everyone looked like

they were enjoying themselves, but the moment Fina took a look at the price tag, her spirits sank.

“It might be a little too expensive for me...”

“We don’t carry much cash around the village, so I don’t have much to spend either,” Luimin said.

They looked between the price tag and the items in question, then slowly returned the hair accessories to their shelves.

I picked up the blue hair accessory Fina had put down and held it up to her hair.

“Y-Yuna?!” She looked at me with surprise.

“Don’t move, Fina. I can’t see how it looks if you move.”

“Why my hair though?”

“I was thinking it’d make a good present for you, so I wanted to check how it looked.”

“A present? I’m really fine. Plus, it’s expensive.”

“We came all the way here. I was thinking I’d buy you something to commemorate the trip. Luimin, I’ll buy you one too, so pick out your favorite one.”

“But...”

“Please don’t worry about it. Fina, you’re always doing things for me. And Luimin, you gave us directions here, so think of it as a thank-you gift from me.”

Fina and Luimin thanked me, then giddily started trying on all kinds of necklaces, brooches, hair accessories, and other little delightful things in the mirror. Girly fun. I didn’t feel like I could really join in, but I was fine picking out stuff for them to try on. If I’d had to pick something for myself, my mind would have gone completely blank.

“Yuna, you’re not a boy, right?” Lilyka, who had been watching our exchange, asked me. She looked serious about the question.

“What do you mean?”

Was it because I had no boobs? I did—the onesie hid them, is all.

“Well, you kind of act a bit like one. Especially when you were cutting the rod with the knife. Even my dad’s impressed.”

Oh, so that was why.

“Yuna really is very dashing. She saved me and my village, and she looked cooler than any of the elvish men while she did!”

“Yes, Yuna is so cool!” Even Fina joined in with Luimin but as a girl, I wasn’t so sure I wanted people to compliment me by saying I was *dashing*.

“You’re not going to get anything out of complimenting me. C’mon, pick out what you want, you two.”

“Then I’d like you to choose something for me, Yuna.”

“Me too.”

“Okay, okay. But don’t complain if you don’t end up liking it.”

“That won’t happen.”

“I’d be happy with anything you choose for me,” Luimin said.

As Lilyka watched us talk, I heard her murmur, “Maybe she really is a man...”

“Aren’t you buying one for yourself, Yuna?” Fina asked me as I was picking something out for the two of them.

“Unlike you two, I know nothing’s going to look good on me.”

I could dress up my bear clothes by attaching a hair ornament to my bear hood, or wear a necklace, brooch, or bracelets. None of that would really go with the bear onesie.

If the bozo rangers from the last mine I’d been to were here, they would’ve said

something like, "A pet needs a collar." Alas, I didn't see any collars here. And I would have stopped shopping if someone told me off to bear punch them into the sky.

"You have really pretty hair, so I think it'd look nice on you, Yuna."

"Yes, your hair is so long and pretty. If I were a boy, I wouldn't pass you by."

"Thanks."

I decided to just accept the flattery. I mean, they both cared about me, so they probably couldn't be brutally honest. I took what they said with a grain of salt.

I picked out hair accessories for Fina and Luimin, then chose some souvenirs for Noa, Misa, and Shuri with Fina. Luimin was off having fun looking at the accessories with Lilyka in the meantime.

"Maybe this one for Lady Noa?" Fina picked up a hair accessory with silver detailing.

"Then let's get this one for Misa. What do you think?" I picked up a gold accessory. Noa and Misa were kind of like siblings. I thought they'd look nice in matching accessories.

"I think that would be nice."

Since Fina had given her approval, I decided on those as gifts.

"Okay, then how about one that matches yours for Shuri, Fina?"

I bought an accessory that matched the one I'd picked out for Fina. I also paid for the ones for Noa and Misa, but Fina wanted to buy Shuri's too. We went halfsies on that one.

Fina and Luimin put the ornaments in their hair as soon as we were done paying. Fina's had a blue flower while Luimin's was red.

"Yuna, does it look good on me?" Fina turned to ask me.

"It's very cute."

She seemed happy but also embarrassed when I said that.

“Yuna, Yuna, what about me?”

“You look great too, Luimin.”

She turned to show me the hair ornament. I swear, cute girls could look good in anything. As Lilyka watched us, I heard her murmur, “That’s exactly how men compliment women too.”

Jeez, all I’d done was tell them how they looked...

“What should I get Lucca? I don’t think he’d like anything for his hair, of course. Gosh, I’m so jealous you have a sister, Fina.”

Girls could have different tastes, but when you had to get something for a person of a different gender, forget it. They could have entirely different interests. Like, I really doubted that Luimin’s brother would want a hair accessory.

“How about a knife for him then?” Lilyka proposed when Luimin started to think it over.

I guess that just went to show she was a blacksmith’s daughter, recommending a knife right away.

“Hmm, boys do like weapons.”

I could kind of get that. When I’d been in my original world, I remembered boys talking about how they were going to buy wooden swords on a school trip.

“Hmm, I think my dad wouldn’t like me buying him a knife without asking.”

I didn’t really know the etiquette in this world, but I didn’t know whether gifting a knife to a young kid was rude here. Then again, I was the one who’d given Fina, a ten-year-old child, a mithril knife. I had no idea what an elf boy from another world would want as a gift. Since none of us had ideas, we kept exploring the town trying to find something for him.

“Oh, maybe this place.” Luimin peered into a shop through its small window. “This is a variety store.”

We headed inside and found that they were selling small things like wall decorations and little decorative table tchotchkies.

Luimin took a look at one of their shelves. She was looking at armored knights and adventurers made from metal—they were figures that ranged from ten to thirty centimeters tall. They were all posed differently too. Some of them were just standing while others carried swords.

If you put two of them together, they'd look like they were battling each other too. I thought it'd be nice to have some monster ones to go with them. It was impressive they were all made from metal.

"They're so cool. I think Lucca would like one of these."

"Those are pretty popular and merchants from all over come to buy them."

I could believe that.

"This shelf has animals."

Fina was looking over horses, cows, pigs, birds, and animals I'd never seen before. I felt like if you collected them all, you could make a zoo. Another shelf carried reptiles. What kind of person would want a snake or a frog, though?

Fina and Luimin were scouring the animal shelf for something specific though.

"I don't see any bears."

"You're right. I don't either."

Oh. That's what they were looking for? There really weren't any. Maybe the shop didn't make animals unless they were popular? Huh, that was a little sad, though.

A woman came by when Fina and Luimin looked disappointed.

"Sorry, a merchant from Elfanica bought all of the bear figurines. We're all out," she said. "There's been more demand for bears lately. I know you must love bears, so I'm sorry for the inconvenience." She was eyeing my bear clothes as she said this.

That wasn't why I dressed like this. Still, the worker was giving me a knowing smile. I

wished she wouldn't look at me like that.

"I do wonder why bears are selling so well."

"Aw, I really wanted a bear."

They were out of bears, so we gave up our search and left the shop. I thought we could've just gone for a knight, personally. The knights and other figures were cool.

Next we went to a woodworker's shop to look at their carvings, but they didn't have any bears either. It seemed like the merchant from Elfanica had hit up this place too.

"I don't think you need to get a bear specifically though."

"No, no, Lucca loves bears, so he'd be thrilled to get one."

She didn't need to put it like that. I did wonder where all this demand for bears was coming from. I couldn't help but feel curious.

We scoured the other shops until Luimin got her hands on a bear decoration. For some reason, Fina bought one too. I could've made one from dirt or stone if she'd wanted one. If I had, though, it wouldn't have been a souvenir, would it?

After that, I found something I liked too, which I bought secretly so I could give them out as presents to the three of them.

"Yuna, what is this?"

"They were selling really pretty small handicraft boxes, so I bought some. You can put your hair ornaments from this trip and the academy festival in it."

"Thank you, Yuna!"

"You got one for me too?" Luimin looked at the box, then me.

"I couldn't only buy one for Fina. You can put your hair accessory in your box too."

"I'll treasure it for the rest of my life."

Whoa, when Lumin said it, it was a little intense. She'd probably have the accessory box for centuries.

"Why did you buy one for me too?" Lilyka looked at the box she held in wonder.

"Because I wanted to thank you for showing us around town."

Since she'd turned down me buying her a hair accessory earlier, I'd bought a box without telling her this time.

"But I feel awkward getting a gift from someone younger than me."

"I'm fifteen," I said.

"Well, I'm eighteen."

We both gave each other puzzled looks at the same time.

"What?!! You're fifteen, Yuna? I thought you'd be younger!"

I guess that explained the tone she'd taken talking to me. I really couldn't tell anyone's ages though—whether they were elves or dwarves. Who knows? Maybe they were lying about their ages. Maybe they'd get in trouble for it someday.

# CHAPTER 428

## THE BEAR GOES TO SEE THE GATE OF TRIALS

AFTER FINDING out Lilyka's age, I didn't really know whether to address her differently. I didn't want to be too casual with her since she was older than me, though I did act that way with Cliff and Toya. She'd told me not to worry about it, but I was at least glad I hadn't treated her like she was younger.

After that, we had a slightly late lunch. I got stares the moment we entered the dining hall. Of course I did.

"Lilyka, thank you very much. I found something great to buy my brother thanks to you."

Luimin sure looked happy, but I wondered if Lucca would actually like a bear figurine as a present. I guess a knight wouldn't have been a good gift for an elf boy either. I wondered what elvish children liked in the first place.

"I'm just glad you're enjoying yourself. Once we finish eating, where would you like to go next? I can take you anywhere."

We hadn't walked the entire town yet, but there was a place I wanted to go in particular.

"I heard that there's something called a gate of trials here. Where is that? I'd like to take a look at it."

"The gate of trials? Wait, Yuna—are you participating?"

"I'm not."

Nobody would ask a bear to be their champion anyway.

"One of my adventurer friends is though, so I was a little curious about it."

Well, not a little curious—I really wanted to know more about it. It sounded like a fun

event. I wanted to participate, but since I couldn't, I was going to cheer on Jade. I wanted to see the gate of trials at least once beforehand.

"Really? That's such a waste after Gold, Ghazal, and Dad all acknowledged your skills. If Dad could just make a sword, I'm sure he would have asked you to do it."

"Is Lojina not making one?"

"Hmm. I'm not sure. It seems like he can't motivate himself to do it right now. When he saw Gold and Ghazal's knives, though, it looked like he felt purpose again for the first time in a long time. He might make one."

It'd be nice if he did. That meant it was worthwhile for me to have come by with Fina. If she hadn't been here, he wouldn't have been able to see Gold's knife. And if I hadn't come, he wouldn't have seen Ghazal's knife either. I was glad we'd been able to show them to him.

The big awkward thing looming on the horizon was that I didn't know what I'd tell Gold and Ghazal when I saw them. If they found out their teacher wasn't making any swords anymore, I think it'd depress them a lot. I didn't know whether or not to tell them the truth. I'd need to mull over what to do when I saw them again. For now, I decided to put it out of my mind and enjoy the dwarves' town.

After we finished lunch, we headed to the gate of trials.

"So just to let you know right now, you can't go inside."

"It's closed, right?"

"Yeah, and no one can open it, and even if someone managed to, you still wouldn't be able to enter it."

Well, I just wanted to know where the trial would be when Jade did it. That was all right.

"Also, we'll need to climb a long flight of stairs. Are you all okay with that?"

According to Lilyka, it was remote, and we'd have to take some stairs to get there.

Didn't matter. I was wearing my bear onesie, so I'd be fine no matter how far I had to climb.

"I'll be okay. What about you two?"

"I'd like to see, so I'll go too."

"I'll also go."

Fina and Luimin were full of energy.

We got to the town's outskirts. I hadn't expected the scene that would greet us—a stairway winding all the way up the mountain.

"You mean it's up this flight of stairs?"

"That it is."

I looked up. And up. And *up*. Just looking made my thighs hurt.

"How many are there?"

"I'm not sure. I've never counted."

I couldn't even estimate. All I knew was that the stairway was ridiculously long.

Fina and I slowly started climbing. Luimin deftly skipped several stairs at a time. Lilyka headed up with us, but I heard her mutter under her breath, "Wonder if we'll make it to the top..." This probably wasn't fun for Lilyka or Fina, considering their short legs.

As we slowly made our way up, Fina turned her face up.

"Uhh, Luimin is already pretty high."

She was waving down at us from way farther up the stairs. She'd been raised in the woods and was an elf, -after all. I guess a stairway like this wasn't difficult terrain for Luimin.

Fina tried to follow after Luimin too, but she lost her breath partway and had to go back to climbing at her own pace. I matched her.

"Just let me know if you get tired," I told her.

"I will."

We kept heading up with Luimin leading us. After her, Lilyka, Fina, and I followed in that order. Once we were halfway up, Fina stopped.

"Fina, want to rest a while?"

I pulled some cold water from my bear storage to hand to Fina. She took the cup and chugged it all down in one go.

"Thank you, Yuna."

"Yuna, could I have some too?"

I handed water to Lilyka.

"It's so cold. Oh, it tastes good!"

"Yuna, could I also have some?" Luimin asked. She'd been way higher up, but had doubled back. She must have been full of energy if she'd come all the way back down just for some water. She hardly seemed like the same elf who'd collapsed in front of my house. That had been because she hadn't eaten for days, so this was different.

I handed Luimin a cup, then drank some myself.

After our short break, we went back to climbing the stairs.

They just kept going. If I hadn't had my bear gear, I never would've been able to climb these stairs, considering how weak I was. I was really thankful for my bear gear.

On the other hand, Fina was working her hardest to climb. The sweat beaded on her forehead.

Urgh. I started to feel the guilt.

"Fina, if you're tired, want me to carry you on my back? Or in my arms?" That'd make me feel a little better, if I could help.

Fina smiled slightly and replied, "I'm okay."

She really did work hard.

"If you get tired, just let me know," I told her again. "My back and arms are always free."

Once we finally reached the top of the long stairway, we looked down. I could see the path all the way to the ground. I couldn't believe we'd climbed all those stairs. No way I could have done this on my own. The other three had done it on their own power, no OP gear.

"I'm so tired! But this feels so nice."

Fina was out of breath, but she looked down at the streets spread below her. We had a full view of the entire town. The climb felt totally worth it.

"Does everyone who does the trial have to climb up here?"

"Just once a year. The blacksmiths just come up with them, but it's only the adventurer who needs to worry about the trial."

Well, the adventurers were the ones wielding the weapons, after all. Adventurers hiked mountains and through places with uneven footing, so they'd be able to climb the stairs fine. They had skills not everyone else had. If I hadn't had my bear OP powers, I certainly never would have become one.

After looking at the scene down below, I started to also take a look around the mountain side. A plaza spread out in front of where the stairs led.

"Yuna, this way." Lilyka started walking again, so we followed behind her.

I saw a building farther off, closer to the mountain, and something that looked a lot like a gate. Lilyka stopped in front of that.

“Is this the gate of trials?”

The gate seemed to be blocking off the opening to a cave. It looked similar to my bear gates.

“Yeah, this is it.”

We headed closer to the doors.

“So, when does it open? I’ve heard people say it should be opening soon.”

Toya only had until the gate closed. I was a little worried about that.

“No one knows the exact day it’ll open, just that the gate will once it’s flowing with mana. It typically happens around this time every year.”

“It sounds like the gate just opens on its own.”

“Yeah, the gate of trials opens on its own and closes on its own.”

“Mysterious.”

“Yeah. But it’s a very important place for anyone who makes weapons.”

I felt the urge to pry open the gate using my bear gear, but I definitely was not giving in to that. It’d open in a few days anyway. If it opened sooner than expected, Toya wouldn’t have as much time for his own trial. I’d feel bad if he failed because of that. But still, I hoped it’d open soon.

\* \* \*

“Have you seen inside the gate, Lilyka?”

I only saw rock beyond where the gate stood, so I imagined there was a cave. That meant I couldn’t see where it led, unfortunately.

“I’ve never gone inside, so I don’t know much about it.”

"You've never been in? Does that mean you can't see inside even when it opens?"

"Only blacksmiths who have made weapons and their champions are allowed inside, so the rest of us can't go."

That meant I wouldn't be able to cheer Jade on. More precisely, I wouldn't be able to see the trial at all. I guess the only way to go in was to participate. Even if I tagged along, I wouldn't be able to see any part of it. As a former gamer, that kind of killed me inside. I seriously couldn't even spectate?

"According to Dad, there's a wide space inside, and you can test out the weapons you made in there."

"Test them? Like how?"

"He didn't tell me much, but it seems like it depends on the weapon and the craftsman."

If all the trials were different, I felt like it'd be difficult to tell whose was the best.

"But then you wouldn't be able to tell who won?"

"It's a competition with yourself as a maker of weapons. Your current self against yourself from yesterday. Your current self against yourself from a month ago. Your current self against yourself from a year ago. The goal is to see if you've grown. It's about looking inward, not really about competing with others."

"Wow. You really are a blacksmith's daughter, Lilyka."

"I've asked about it in the past just like you are now. I'm just quoting my dad."

Lilyka seemed embarrassed, but I could understand what Lojina had meant. He probably meant that they were testing how much they'd grown since last year. That was why they asked the same adventurer as the previous year to help them.

Wrestling against yourself was nice and all but competing against another person was important, too. You could have a friendly rival to push you to get better, for example. That was another way to grow.

"Also, there are a lot of different types of weapons, like knives, swords, spears, hammers, and others. We wouldn't be able to choose the best weapon among them

like that."

She had a point. I thought they could've split it off into divisions. Maybe I'd been corrupted by too many video games.

I wondered—maybe they *couldn't* do that. Maybe the gate itself was the judge of the trials rather than people. The more I learned about it, the more burning my curiosity became. What was the trial? I guess I'd have to ask Jade once he'd done it himself.

# CHAPTER 429

## THE BEAR CARRIES LUIMIN IN HER ARMS

“LILYKA, WHAT’S that building?” I noticed a building near the gate.

“That’s the building the Blacksmiths’ Guild manages. Well, it’s used as a break room during the trials and as a reception area. It’s pretty much only used when the gate of trials is open.”

*In a place like that?* was my first thought, but then I realized they could have used item bags to bring up the supplies to make it.

“Ghazal and Gold were there too.”

“Have they participated?”

“They have, but they were apprentices, so they couldn’t find adventurers willing to fight with their swords. They ended up asking new adventurers, but they weren’t very good. Apparently, it was a pretty miserable experience.”

They talked about it a lot. Then Dad got mad at them and told them *they* were the ones who weren’t skilled enough. Hee hee. Those were good memories.”

“Even Mr. Gold was like that at one point?” asked Fina, who had been listening. She seemed mystified. It wasn’t that confusing, though. Even the two of them would have been apprentices once. It wasn’t like anyone was born making perfect weapons.

I understood how Fina felt, though. Seeing the two now, I couldn’t imagine them as apprentices.

After seeing the gate of trials and talking about the two dwarves’ days as apprentices, we started to head back. Going back meant returning down that long flight of stairs.

“The trip up was terrible, but I’m glad we got to see this view.”

“Really? You seemed to have an easy time going up, Luimin.”

“It was difficult.”

“Don’t lie.” I tugged on Luimin’s cheeks.

“Th-That hurts.”

“Then don’t lie,” I said. I let go.

“Ugh! Even if it looked easy for me, it wasn’t.”

“I’m pretty sure you can’t claim it was hard compared to Fina and Lilyka.”

“It was! I was so tired.”

“I didn’t want to go up the stairs very much either.”

It seemed like it’d actually been pretty difficult for them then.

“Fina, want me to carry you down?”

“Uh, I’m okay. Why do you keep trying to carry me, Yuna?”

“Well, you’re the youngest and you’re not an elf or a dwarf.” In my head, I also murmured, “Or a bear.”

Elves seemed light on their feet, and I imagined dwarves to be really sturdy. Bears, on the other hand, were invincible. That left Fina as the weakest. I was always going to offer her help.

“Then if you don’t want Yuna to carry you, could I ride on her back in your place?” Luimin, who’d been listening in, latched onto my back.

“My back isn’t Fina’s to lend out,” I tried to say, but I thought of something fun to do, so I accepted Luimin’s proposal instead.

Instead of having her get on my back, she’d be riding in front.

“Uh. Why am I not on your back?”

I swept Luimin off her feet to carry her in my arms.

“Y-Yuna?”

“Make sure you hold on tight. If you fall, you’ll die.” I grinned.

“Why are you smiling like that? Aren’t we just going down the stairs?”

I refused to meet her gaze.

“Wh-why won’t you look at me, Yuna?!”

Instead of answering her, I stood next to the stairs with Luimin in my arms. The side of the stairs was just a cliff, so it was the perfect spot to leap right down.

“Y-Yuna, there aren’t any stairs there...!” Luimin seemed worried.

“Okay. Fina, Lilyka, we’ll see you down there.”

“Yuna?” Fina said.

“Yuna?” Lilyka also called to me.

I took a running start off the cliff. Luimin screamed in my arms and held me tighter. I leapt off random footholds on the way to cushion our fall twice, then took the rest of the plunge. Finally, a perfect landing.

Luimin held onto me like a vise even after we’d landed. If I hadn’t had my bear gear, I wouldn’t have been able to withstand it.

“Yuna, that was terrible of you! Why did you jump?! I was so terrified...!”



Luimin got out of my arms and sat down on the ground. I could see tears welling up in her eyes. I guess I'd really scared her.

"Well, I thought it'd be more fun going down this way," I said.

It was kind of a safe version of a bungee jump. I thought she'd have fun. Apparently not.

"Wait, can you not stand up?"

"Yeah, and whose fault do you think that is!"

As Luimin complained at me, her legs quivered like jelly. She couldn't get up.

"Urgh, that was so scary."

"Wait, did you pee yourself a little?"

"I did *not*!"

Pretty quick denial, there.

Then Fina and Lilyka ran down the stairs and right to us as soon as they could.

"Luimin, are you okay?"

"Ugh. Fina, it was so scary. I thought I was a gonner."

Luimin hugged Fina. She'd finally regained her composure enough to stand.

"Yuna, you actually jumped off from that high with Luimin? Without getting hurt or anything?" Lilyka asked. She was very concerned.

"I used mana to reinforce myself, so I'm okay."

"You don't look it, but you really are amazing, Yuna."

She'd gone from looking concerned to shocked. The bear suit really made people

underestimate me.

“Want me to take you and Fina down next time?”

“No, thank you.”

“I think I’m okay too.”

Both of them very decisively shook their heads. I thought it’d be fun.

Too bad.

After that, Luimin seemed in a better mood. We went to Lilyka’s house—or rather Lojina’s—for dinner. We talked all about what had happened today and about the capital.

Lilyka had wanted to know more about the elves’ village, so Luimin told her about it.

“I’d like to go to the elves’ village and Fina’s hometown too.”

“Not the capital?”

“I’d like to go there too, of course. I think it might be nice to see Ghazal with his own work set up. It’s far away though, so I can’t get there easily.”

I could go there and come back easily thanks to my bear gates, but to a normal person, the capital was pretty far away.

“I’m surprised you all came here from so far away,” Lilyka said.

“I used my summons,” I explained.

“Your summons?”

I couldn’t tell her about the bear gate, so that was the explanation I’d settled on. We really had ridden here from the elves’ village on Kumayuru and Kumakyu, so I wasn’t precisely lying.

“Yuna’s summons are bears and they’re very cute,” Luimin said. “And they’re so fast that it didn’t even take two full days to get here from my village.”

“Really? But aren’t bears scary?”

“Kumayuru and Kumakyu are cute.”

“Yes, they’re adorable!”

Luimin and Fina both tried to use my bears’ cuteness to persuade her to come around. They wanted her to like my bears.

“Bear summons...” Lilyka looked over at me.

She seemed curious about what they looked like.

“Um, would you like to see them?”

“They’re not dangerous? They won’t attack me, will they? Or try to eat me?” Lilyka asked, making absolutely sure.

“You’re not in danger as long as you don’t suddenly attack them.”

“I’d never do anything like that.” Lilyka shook her head.

I got Lojina and Wiola’s permission before moving to a room large enough to summon my bears.

I held up my arms and summoned them.

“Bears!”

Both Lilyka and Lojina hid behind me.

“The black one is Kumayuru, and the white one is Kumakyu.”

As I introduced them, Fina and Luimin ran over to hug them.

“Are you sure they’re safe?”

“Absolutely!”

“They won’t do anything bad to you.”

When Fina and Luimin told them that, Lilyka and Lojina slowly crept out. Lojina and Wiola were surprised, but they didn’t seem afraid now. Lilyka cautiously reached a hand out to Kumayuru.

“It’s soft. This feels so nice too.”

Kumayuru crooned quietly, enjoying being petted. Lilyka seemed reassured that Kumayuru wouldn’t attack her and started rubbing my bear’s head next.

“So, this one is a white bear. What a pretty color”

Lilyka started to pet them both now that her fears had eased. After that, she rode on their backs like a little kid until she tuckered herself out. It seemed that she liked them.

\* \* \*

We thanked Lojina and also Wiola for making us dinner and then headed back to the inn.

“I’m so very tired!”

Luimin collapsed right onto her bed.

“My legs feel so heavy...”

Fina also sat down on her bed and massaged her legs. She’d worked really hard to go up and down the stairs.

“Okay, how about we go take baths and then sleep?”

“But the bath is so...”

“Don’t worry,” I said.

Our room in the inn didn’t have a bath, so we would have needed to go to the public bath to take one. It’d be a bother going now, and I didn’t want to take off all my gear in

front of strangers. I made sure to lock the room's door so that Mel and Senia wouldn't barge in, then I brought out a bear gate. Everyone in the room knew about my gates anyway, so I didn't have to avoid using them.

I opened up the gate to the bear gate in the elven woods. I could have taken us to my Crimonia bear house, but I didn't want anyone to notice my lights were on and figure out I was home. That would lead to trouble. In the elven woods, though, we were pretty far away from the village. Even if the light could be seen from outside, no one would be there to notice it. Also, Mumulute was the head of the village and knew about my bear gate, so I was sure he'd do something to explain it all away if something happened. It'd be a bother if I went to the Crimonia house and Luimin asked to see the town. The elven woods it was.

We headed into the bath and massaged our tired legs after a day of walking. Baths really were the epitome of civilization.

# CHAPTER 430

## THE BEAR GOES ON A FIELD TRIP

THE NEXT MORNING, Fina and Luimin woke me up after Kumayuru and Kumakyu woke them up. They'd swiped my bears like usual for their sleep, which left me feeling a little lonely. Maybe I'd pull out some teddy bears to sleep with next time.

We changed clothes and were in the dining hall having breakfast when Mel and Senia turned up.

"Good morning, you three," Mel greeted us. Senia raised her hand in salutation. We returned their greetings.

"Sorry about yesterday, Yuna. Did you get to see Lojina?"

"Yes, I did." He didn't have a weapons store anymore, which had been a surprise to me.

"So, are you all done with shopping, Mel?" I asked.

"Yeah, generally, but there are a few more things we'll need to pick up, and some others we had made to order."

Then I asked how Toya was doing.

"Hmm, even though he's usually so carefree, he really was down about things. I think he could just go with another blacksmith, but he's insisting on going with Kusehlo."

"But I did get him to promise," Senia said. She'd let Toya spend his time training until the next test, but if he failed again, Toya promised they would go to another blacksmith. I wasn't sure he could hone his skills like that in just a few days. Would he be able to do it?

"Toya has real talent. He just isn't good under pressure. That's why he always acts so happy-go-lucky in order to hide it. He thinks no one knows, but we've caught on."

I had no idea. I'd just thought he was a chipper guy.

"So, for now, we'll let Toya do what he wants. We don't need him for shopping anyway. So, what are you guys doing today?"

"We're going to see Lojina again."

"Didn't you do that yesterday? Wait, are you having weapons made?"

I guess Mel didn't realize that Lojina didn't make weapons anymore. I told her how he'd made a career switch to making cookware.

"This isn't a joke, right?"

"He really does make pots and pans now."

"They sound like some tough pots and pans," Senia chimed in, which I wholeheartedly agreed with.

"He's going to let us watch him make the ones we ordered yesterday."

The day before during dinner, Fina and Luimin had said they wanted to see how the pots were made. Lojina had agreed. Today we were going to head over for that—kind of like a field trip. Personally, I think watching swords being made would've been cooler.

Mel and Senia went off to go shopping, and we headed to Lojina's shop. When we got inside Lilyka came over to greet us. Still couldn't believe how short she was and that she was older than me.

"We were waiting for you. My dad's already working, so you can go on in."

Lilyka gave us her permission, so we went into the working area. Inside we were greeted by the sound of a hammer banging against metal.

"Oh, it's so hot."

"I guess he works inside this heat."

Fina and Luimin looked like they felt toasty. I wasn't hot at all in my climate-controlled bear onesie—a chilly onesie felt like oxymoron, though. I was starting to feel like it was nonsense even though I was the one who thought it up.

"You really came? I thought you were joking yesterday. Is it really that interesting to see me hammering away at a lump of metal?" Lojina said as he worked on a pot.

"Yes, I'm looking forward to seeing how it's made."

"There aren't any blacksmiths in the elf village, so I'm curious, too."

"Well, do what you want if all you're doing is looking. There's some dangerous stuff around here, so don't you go touching things all on your own. And don't get too close. Don't want you young girls getting your skin burned." Lojina gave us a safety spiel, then went back to hammering the iron.

Fina and Luimin watched him closely. Each strike seemed like magic forging the iron into something else entirely. The shape of the sheet changed. Maybe it wasn't less cool to make a pot than a sword. I hadn't been interested at first since he wasn't making a weapon, but I was fascinated now as I watched him work the metal.

Sweat dripped down Fina and Luimin's foreheads as they watched intently. I told them to let me know if they were thirsty since I didn't want them to get dehydrated.

With his godlike skill, Lojina finished the pot. I felt like we'd witnessed a true craftsman.

Lojina made pots and pans one after another. Fina and Luimin couldn't stick around in the hot room for long, so midway through we left the workshop.

"Are you all okay? The forge must have been sweltering." Lilyka served us some tea.

"Yes, it was hot."

"It was so loud too."

They both chugged their cups of cooled tea in one go.

"The heat is pretty bad, but the sound can be a lot too. There were three people working before, so imagine it being three times as loud." Lilyka seemed to be reminiscing.

I wondered when Gold and Ghazal would come back to their hometown. I didn't have a hometown to return to. Well, maybe that wasn't totally true. Crimonia was starting to become my hometown, now.

Lojina came over as we sipped our cool drinks, and Lilyka handed him something to drink too.

"Did you have fun watching?" Lojina asked Fina and Luimin as he drank his water.

"Yes. Watching the hard iron change shape every time you hit it was so interesting."

"Hot iron is easy to mold, and it hardens when cooled. All I do is watch out for that as I hammer at it."

"Your hands were like magic, Lojina."

Lojina seemed delighted when Fina and Luimin showered him with praise.

"Are swords or pots easier to make?"

"Swords are more difficult. You can't just consider the toughness of a sword but also need to think how it'll strike, cut, and defend too. When you're making them you have to take into account the temperature, how hard you're hitting, and a lot of other factors. Try as you might to forge them the exact same way, no two swords will be alike, so even if you make your best sword, you can't make another that's identical," Lojina quietly answered Fina's question. "But that doesn't make pots, pans, and kitchen utensils easy to make. Even pots have their difficulties. But with weapons, the sky's the limit for how good you can make them and what you need from them. With pots, if they're past their prime, you can trade them in for a new one as soon as they can't be used. Can't have a sword give out on you."

"If your sword breaks, can't you just replace it too?" Luimin asked as though it were the obvious thing to do.

"Lassie, you make it sound easy, but what happens when a sword breaks during a

battle?"

"Well, um..." Luimin seemed to understand now.

"You could keep a spare in your item bag, sure, but what kind of opponent's going to give you time to pull it out? Besides, not everyone can afford to buy a spare."

"Right..."

"And if the sword had been sharper, it might've turned the direction of a fight—if it were a bit sturdier, it wouldn't break—if it were just a bit lighter, it would be easier to wield. All those little bits and ifs are what people look for in a sword, and they never stop asking for more. That little 'bit' more can save a person. When a craftsman makes a weapon, they take the wielder's life into their own hands. That's why it's so hard to make a weapon."

Kusehlo had said something similar—he only wanted his best weapons to be used by people with the skill to wield them. That was why he wouldn't make a mithril sword for Toya; It wasn't just about the money to a top-tier weapon maker.

Nobody died if a pot broke while it was being used. You could just replace it, easy as that.

"Well, it all depends on the blacksmith. At the end of the day, that's just my opinion."

He made sure to add that caveat to be courteous to other blacksmiths. Some people did place more importance on money, but their livelihoods depended on it, so I couldn't say one way of thinking was more correct than the other. Even I knew that living in poverty was difficult.

"Will you ever make weapons again, Lojina?"

"Dunno."

After saying that single word, Lojina finished his break and returned to work.

# CHAPTER 431

## THE BEAR SLICES THROUGH A SWORD AGAIN

I HEADED with Fina and Luimin to the edge of town to bring food and stuff to Toya.

“Is Toya’s special training going well?” I asked Senia, who had joined us.

“He’s doing his best. Through some coincidence or miracle, he’s been able to slice through the sword one out of every ten swings.”

*Come on, Senia—at least pretend to say it wasn’t a fluke,* I thought to myself.

“Really? Then in that case couldn’t he pass?”

“Toya doesn’t think it’s good enough. Besides, Kusehlo said that he’ll only get three chances, so he wouldn’t pass with how things are going now.”

He definitely wouldn’t pass with a success rate of 10 percent.

“That’s tough.”

“Not really. The test is really easy. The target isn’t moving, he has time to concentrate, and he can strike from any distance he wants. Normally his opponent would be moving since that’s how it is when you’re dealing with enemies. This test is *easy*.”

When she put it like that, I guess she was right. He just had to cut through a stationary object. He was free to get as close as he wanted and to swing when he felt ready, plus he could take deep breaths to focus himself. In the real world, opponents would move around and wouldn’t give you the time to ready yourself. They wouldn’t let you get close enough to slice through them easily, and if you were too far away, you’d miss them—if they got in too close, an overhead strike wouldn’t be possible. The real test would be cutting through a moving target.

The test really was super easy just like Senia said—he even had three whole chances.

“If he can cut through a stationary target, then he’s halfway there. He’ll need to be able

to slice through a moving target to be fully there,” Senia said without a single bit of emotion showing on her face at all. “Toya’s not even halfway where he should be.”

The world was pretty harsh, sometimes.

\* \* \*

We got to the forest and found Toya swinging his sword.

“Toya, we brought you something to eat.”

“Thanks.” Toya stopped swinging and looked over at us. “Oh, even you girls are here?”

“Are you working hard?”

“Yup, I’m going to get Mr. Kusehlo to recognize my skill and make me a weapon.” Toya sheathed his sword and sat down on a comfortable-looking rock nearby, then he tucked into the bread we brought for him.

“How are you feeling about it? Senia said that every once in a while—through some coincidence or miracle—you’ve managed to slice a few swords.”

“It’s not a coincidence or a miracle. It’s my own abilities... it’s just I can only manage it once in every ten swings.”

Sure sounded like a coincidence.

“But I’m so close to feeling it. When I get it right, I can still tell how it felt in my hands. If I can get it to feel like that anytime, then I’ll be able to do it.” Toya stared at his hands. “I tried asking Jade and Senia, but they can do it naturally, so they weren’t any help.”

“That’s the difference between an ordinary person and a genius,” Senia quipped.

“Hmph! Well, I’m going to prove that this ‘ordinary person’ can do it if he tries.”

Some people were prodigies who could learn anything or who could pick things up just by watching.

“It’s rough for regular people with geniuses around. I get how you feel,” I said.

Pure, unadulterated silence followed as Fina, Luimin, Senia, and Toya all looked at me in shock, like I couldn't possibly know what I was talking about. Their expressions were all identical.

"What?" I said.

"That's a thoughtless comment coming from you," Toya said. "You take down powerful monsters, have got a natural gift for mana, and know how to handle a weapon."

"You're a genius, Yuna."

"You're amazing," Fina said.

"No arguments here."

Okay, so *apparently* I was a genius. I may have *appeared* to be one from other people's perspectives, but I wasn't special—I just had cheat abilities.

"How did you get so strong at your age? I get that people are born with the aptitude for magic, but at your age, you should be scared when you see a monster. Not only that, you fight like you know what you're doing—especially up against those wyrms and scorpions. You seemed like an experienced adventurer. Wait... are you actually much older than you look?!"

Toya started shouting like he'd cracked the code. I went over to him and gave him a light kick to send him flying.

"I'm not lying about my age, and I've just got more experience than normal people—that's why I'm so used to fighting."

I'd fought hundreds or thousands of battles in a single day for multiple days in a row in the game to gain experience. That's why I wasn't afraid of monsters and why I had so much practice. It wasn't just monsters I'd fought either—I'd fought hundreds and thousands of matches with other players. Definitely way more than Toya.

"If you have so much experience, when did you start fighting?"

"That's a secret."

I hid my mouth, trying my best impression of a delicate maiden. That got a laugh from

Fina and Luimin. I guess I must've looked weird doing it.

"Now I just wanna know even more," Toya said.

"It's not good to ask a girl her secrets." Senia hugged me from behind to protect me from Toya. "But if it's a fellow woman asking, it isn't an issue."

"I'm not saying."

"Drat."

I couldn't talk about the game. I didn't have another explanation for all my experience, so there wasn't anything I could say.

"Would you mind if we sparred?" Toya asked.

"Don't, Toya. You'll just embarrass yourself."

"I don't think I'll win, but I don't plan on going down too easily."

"Sure, just for a little," I agreed. Fighting other people could be fun.

I had my speed and strength thanks to my bear gear, but the way I used it came from all the skills I'd picked up in the game. That's what you really needed to win.

Toya and I prepped for a simple match. Since real weapons would be too dangerous, we used wooden ones instead. I squared off against Toya. Then the match kicked off at Senia's signal.

...

A few minutes later, Toya was slumped over and looking pretty mopey.

"Um, sorry. I'm no good at holding back, so I thought if I tried to pretend to be around your level it'd..."

Toya had his back toward me and was crouching down.

*I did* go easy on him, of course. Toya wasn't weak, but he wasn't strong either, so I didn't attack much and played defense. The issue was that I kept dodging and the more Toya missed, the more he attacked when he didn't need to, which meant he left himself open... and that was when I'd attacked when I shouldn't have.

I mean, he'd left himself wide open.

"How are you so fast when those clothes look so hard to move in? And where is all that power coming from?"

My outfit didn't look all that flexible, but I wouldn't be fast without it. When Toya had realized that his attacks weren't landing, he'd resorted to brute force. However, it was no match for the strength of my bear onesie.

"It's experience. I've almost died so many times"—in the game—"and that's how I got my experience."

"You've almost died?"

"That's why I don't let myself lose often. It's not like I gained the abilities I have now that easily either."

My bear equipment boosted my physical strength. If I didn't have that, then I couldn't have swung a sword, pushed forward, or met Toya's sword, but my actions and decisions were all me.

"Kusehlo's test would be easy pickings for you then," Toya muttered.

"Yuna already borrowed Jade's sword and passed it," Senia commented.

"How do you know about that Senia?" I asked—she hadn't been there.

"Mel told me."

*I see.*

"So, Jade lent you his sword? He barely ever lets me borrow it." Toya sank into an even deeper depression.

"But hey, look, Jade's sword and the one you used are different. Jade's sword is much

better."

"I-I suppose it is..."

Why was I the one comforting Toya? This should have been Senia's job. They were in the same party.

"In that case, you just need to try it with Toya's sword," she said.

Senia! Why would she say something like that? If I did that, Toya would be even more depressed, and I didn't feel comfortable missing on purpose.

"Toya. You should carefully study Yuna's movements, especially the tip of her sword. Her physique and strength are different from yours, of course, but it'll still be good reference. I use knives, so I can't teach you, and I know you don't want you to rely on Jade too much."

Even though he refused, Senia kept explaining why it would help in a serious tone of voice. He lifted his head. He was serious, now.

"Watch and learn... that's right. As things are now, I'm not sure if I'll be able to do it. Please help me, miss." Toya stood up and held out his mithril blade to me.

I felt like this wasn't a situation where I could refuse, so I ended up doing it. I stabbed a dull sword into the ground and borrowed the mithril one from Toya. He stood behind me and concentrated on watching the sword.

I tightly grasped the hilt. I couldn't feel how heavy it was because of my bear gear, but it was a little large. I took some practice swings and checked how far I was from the other sword.

"Well, here I go."

I stood in front of the other sword and brought down my arms, slicing the blunt sword right in the middle.

Toya stood frozen and silent as he stared at the remains of the blade. He didn't seem that shocked—actually, it seemed like he was thinking.

"Speed, angle, power," he muttered to himself as though he were just saying everything

that came to his mind. “Can you do that again?”

Toya pulled out a new dull sword without even waiting for a reply. He tied something to it and stabbed it into the ground. The blade had two red strings tied to it.

“This time can you cut the sword between these two strings? Your swing was so fast, I couldn’t see the moment it cut, but if I know where you’re going to make the cut, I can focus there.”

So, the red strings were a guide. I guess if he concentrated on that area, he couldn’t miss the moment of the slice. It was only one or two centimeters wide, but I guess if it’d help Toya, then I’d do it for him.

“Just once though,” I said.

“Yeah. Once is plenty enough.”

“All right, I’m going to cut it diagonally from the top string to the bottom, so watch closely.”

Fina and the others were watching our exchange silently. I took a deep breath and grasped the mithril sword tightly in my bear puppets, then I brought the sword down to cut diagonally between the upper and lower strings. The upper portion of the sword split away from the lower.

I could hear someone quietly let out a breath from nearby. Toya was unblinking, staring at the sword stuck in the ground. I held out the mithril one to him and he took it without a word.

“I hope that was helpful.”

“Yeah, very. Thank you.”

Toya held the hilt tightly and started to swing it. If he was able to get even something out of that, no matter how small, I’d be happy.

We left so as not to distract Toya from his training. During dinner that evening, I was surprised when Toya thanked me again—apparently, he’d managed to figure something out.

# CHAPTER 432

## THE BEAR BUYS A HOUSE

TODAY, I WAS headed to the Merchants' Guild to buy a house where I could set up a bear gate. I didn't know when I would come back to the dwarves' town after this visit, but as a former gamer, I wanted a travel point nonetheless. Besides, there didn't seem to be a limit of the number of gates I could make, so I figured there was no harm making one here.

Most importantly, setting up a gate would make going home easier.

"Fina, Luimin, you could have just waited for me."

When I'd told them what I was planning, they'd insisted on coming with me.

"I want to see what kind of house you buy," Fina told me.

"But Yuna, can you afford this? Aren't houses really expensive?" Luimin asked.

"Um, well, yeah."

Then again, the prices in a town versus the capital would be different. Even neighborhoods within a town could have different prices based on how nice the area was to live in. The plot of land I'd bought in the capital was close to the upper-class district, so it'd been pretty expensive. I wouldn't know how much houses cost in this town until I asked, but I doubted they were cheap.

I wasn't worried about money though. I had the funds I'd earned in my previous world plus what I'd earned here. Also, even Fina didn't know this, but I was making money on the tunnel tolls.

"I definitely couldn't buy anything with the money I have."

All she had was enough to buy pots and pans, so yeah, that made sense.

We came to the main street and looked for the Merchants' Guild. From what the inn had told us, it was around here.

"Yuna, is that it over there?" Fina pointed ahead at a sign. We'd been in the right area after all.

"Looks like it."

I went inside the building with Fina and Luimin in tow. There weren't as many people inside as I was expecting, which was a good thing for me. No one else was waiting for the reception desk, so it looked like we didn't need to wait. I went right up to find a cute dwarf girl sitting down at the reception area.

"A bear?!"

That caught me by surprise, and she also seemed shocked as soon as she saw my outfit. Well, this was par for the course, so I ignored it and carried on.

"Um, I'd like to buy a house."

"You *girls* are buying a house?"

The receptionist looked at me, then the two behind me. No normal person would take the three of us for real estate moguls.

"Don't worry, I have the funds," I told her, which only made her eye me with suspicion.

"Well, I need to ask, but are your parents here?"

"They're not. Will that be an issue? I definitely have money to pay."

"No, it's nothing like that. It's just..."

She looked at me, Fina, and Luimin, then cycled back to me. She thought a bit before asking for our residence cards.

"A guild card should be fine, right?"

"That's right. Anything I can use to check your identity would work."

I handed her my guild card. Her expression changed after she took it.

“Name: Yuna. Adventurer Rank: C. Merchants’ Guild Rank: E...”

I didn’t know which part she was surprised by. Maybe the adventurer rank?

“It says your class is bear?”

Oh, I guess that’s what got her.

“It’s just like how it looks,” I answered, since I couldn’t be bothered.

“I see...”

I didn’t know what she’d assumed, but I didn’t question it.

“Well, then, do you have an area in mind or a spending limit?” she asked.

“I don’t really have an upper price limit. If possible, I’d like somewhere away from the town center that doesn’t stand out, and where no one would notice people coming in and out would be nice. A small house is fine but nothing dirty.”

After I told her my requirements for a house where I could set up my bear gate, the receptionist looked at us again with even more suspicion. Then she said something completely absurd.

“Somewhere away from the town center that doesn’t stand out... Are you runaways?”

“N-No. You should understand just by looking at me. I just don’t want to be a spectacle.”

“Really?”

When I was in Crimonia, Milaine had already known me, so it had been easy for me to rent a place. In the capital, Gran and Elleaura had vouched for me. Atola had given me permission to build my own house in Mileela after I defeated the kraken. In Laluz, Retbelle had given me a house. As thanks for slaying monsters in the elf village, Mumulute had helped me get a spot for my house. In Dezelt I’d had a letter of introduction from the feudal lord Barlimer.

Every time I’d gone to build or buy a house previously, there’d been people around to

help me. This time I had no letter of recommendation or connections, and nobody I knew around. I hadn't fully appreciated how people had rallied around me until now.

"Yuna..." Fina said, looking worried.

"Yuna," Luimin also said my name and looked equally concerned.

Maybe it'd be best to give up for now. I could always resort to making a house outside of town, but the problem was someone might notice. It could turn into a whole thing.

As I was mulling over my options, I heard someone say, "Bear girl?" from behind me. I looked over my shoulder to find someone I'd just been thinking about.

"Retbelle?"

He was the man from Laluz we'd caused trouble for because of Luimin's bracelet. Later, when I was going to set up a bear gate in Laluz, he'd given me a house.

"And you must be the elf girl from before?"

"Uh, yes. I'm sorry for all the trouble I caused you." Luimin bowed to Retbelle.

"Not at all. I created some issues for you on my granddaughter's account as well."

"So why are you here, Retbelle?"

"I'm a merchant, aren't I? I'm procuring my wares."

He sure was active for his age.

"So that must mean you're in the guild to buy things?" I asked.

"That's right. Now, what brings you girls here?" he asked.

I told him the gist of it—about buying pots and pans and kitchen stuff. I also told him we'd come to the guild to buy a house since we were already here, but that the lady thought we were runaways and was stonewalling us.

Retbelle looked kind of shocked.

“You’re going to buy a *house*?”

Normal reaction. Most people didn’t buy houses in places they didn’t intend to live.

“Well...”

As I was thinking about what to say, Luimin jumped in. “We’ll be coming from the elves’ village in the future to go shopping, so we were going to buy a house. Yuna is entering into the contract for us.” I couldn’t think of anything better, so I just joined in on that.

“That’s right, and they’re letting me use the house too.”

Retbelle looked at Luimin and me and thought for a moment before replying, “In that case, I could speak to them for you.”

“Are you sure?”

“As repayment for causing you both trouble before,” he added.

It felt bad to lie, but it was true that I was going to use the house. I thanked Retbelle, and he took my place to speak to the receptionist.

...

The receptionist looked surprised.

...

Someone important-looking came over.

...

The three of them kept going with their discussion.

“I understand. If you will be their guarantor, Retbelle, then we have no issues.”

Retbelle got things approved in a flash after taking over negotiations. Thanks to him, I’d be able to buy a home without anyone suspecting me of weird stuff (like being a runaway).

"Well then, I'll go look for homes that meet your requirements, so please wait a moment." The receptionist headed into the back of the building to look through documents.

"Thank you, Retbelle."

"It wasn't anything at all, but will you be able to afford it?"

"I'm fine."

He was hung up on the money, too.

"My apologies, but I have some work to do. I'll take my leave."

"How can I thank you?" I stopped him.

"You can bring my granddaughter, Alka, a picture book if you make another one." Retbelle smiled broadly, then left.

I couldn't argue with him if he had work. I decided that if I made another picture book, I'd make sure to give a copy to Alka.

# CHAPTER 433

## THE BEAR CLEANS HER HOUSE

AFTER RETBELLE went back to work, the receptionist looked for houses for me.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. There are several houses that meet your requirements. If you'll please take a look."

The receptionist returned holding some documents. She spread out a map of what looked like the town in front of me.

"All right, I will go over the candidate properties and their neighborhoods, so please let me know if there are any that interest you."

While looking between the map and documents, she went over each house one at a time. She told me each one's size, price, and surroundings in detail. Maybe it was because of Retbelle, but she'd shown me a lot of potential spots—it reminded me to be thankful he'd been there.

"There aren't many people in this area, but it's somewhat far from the town center, so it's a bit inconvenient."

"This one is in a residential area, so it's relatively populated, but it's convenient to live in."

"This one was originally owned by a blacksmith. They were in this location to get away from crowds, but it is currently unoccupied."

"This building is in a newly developed residential area. There aren't many people there now, but more homes will be built there in the future."

"This one is away from the town center and is quiet. However, since it is so remote, shopping may be difficult."

I narrowed my choices down to two candidates, though I'd decide after actually seeing the houses and their neighborhoods. The receptionist—her name was Fam—was going to guide us to them. Fam prepared a carriage that we all climbed aboard. I guess she was being extra considerate since Fina and Luimin were with me.

We headed to the first house.

"Oh, right, Yuna. Your class is bear?" Luimin asked from beside me. It seemed like she was talking about the conversation I'd had in the guild earlier.

"Classes are something they register at the Adventurers' Guild. Like, swordsmen use swords and mages use magic, but when I was registering at the guild, I didn't have a sword and I didn't think I could call myself a mage, so I just jotted down 'bear' as a joke."

After I wrote down "bear," Helen had gone ahead and put that on my guild card. So here I was now—class: bear.

"Is that right? I wouldn't think anyone would write 'bear' as their class, even as a joke."

I wish someone could've told me when I'd just gotten to this world. Oh, well. I didn't have a clue what was going on at the time, so what could I have done? Now I might describe myself as a swordsman-mage.

As we were talking, our carriage came to a stop.

"We have arrived."

We hopped down from the carriage. Just as I'd hoped, we were located away from the town center in a relatively unpopulated spot. If I remembered right, this used to be a blacksmith's house.

We headed inside.

"It's so dusty." Luimin pinched her nose.

"Cleaning it would be tough." Fina covered her mouth and nose too.

"I apologize. No one has lived here for several years. If you are in a hurry, we can call for cleaners immediately."

I took a quick look around, but it wasn't move-in ready.

"I'll decide after we look at the next house."

We headed to the next candidate. The second house was constructed near the town wall, just like the orphanage in Crimonia. There were a few houses in the area, but there didn't seem to be much foot traffic. Moreover, I could tell from just a glance that it was newer and cleaner than the blacksmith's old house. It also had a garden and looked in pretty good shape from out front.

"Shall we go inside?"

The receptionist opened the door and we ventured in.

"The inside is clean."

"Yes, shortly after the building was constructed, the family ended up having to move. As a result, it was not used long," Fam explained.

It looked like it hadn't been occupied for a few months, so only a little dust had collected in that time. This seemed like something we would be able to clean ourselves.

"But the shops and street stalls at the town center are quite far..."

It was definitely farther away than the first house, but that wasn't a problem since I wouldn't be living here. This was a no-brainer.

"Yeah, I'll go with this one."

This one was also cheaper and there wasn't much foot traffic or many houses in the neighborhood. Basically perfect.

"Thank you very much. Shall we go through the formalities?"

The receptionist pulled out some paperwork and looked for a spot to write, but after she failed to find any tables or desks around, she started to say, "Shall we return to the

guild?" Instead, I pulled out a table and two chairs from my bear storage.

The receptionist was shocked at the furniture appearing from my bear puppets, but I ignored her and got to signing the paperwork.

"And how would you like to pay? We do have payment plans available."

"I'll pay a lump sum."

"What?"

"I'll pay all of it," I said again.

Since this was more trouble than I wanted to deal with, I dumped out the amount of money specified in the contract onto the table.

"Is this enough?"

"Um, I'll need to count it. One moment please." She started counting the money on the table. "Yes, it is all accounted for."

The receptionist stared at me and the money on the table, stunned.

"This house is yours now. Thank you very much." She put the money into her item bag, a strained smile on her face all the while. "Also, shall I get a cleaning service for you? Though it does cost an additional fee."

"That's all right. It's cleaner than I thought it would be, so I can do it myself."

"All right, then. Well, I am here for assistance. If anything comes up, please don't hesitate to come to the merchants' guild." Fam bowed and left.

"Well, I'm going to do some cleaning, so you two can go for a walk if you'd like."

"I'll help out."

"Me too!" Luimin raised her hand when Fina spoke up, offering to lend her support.

"Are you sure?"

“Yes. You’re always helping me, Yuna,” Fina told me.

“Besides, we can’t go enjoy ourselves while you’re cleaning here,” Luimin said.

“Thank you. Then I guess I’ll accept your help.”

I was grateful.

“Okay!”

“I’ll work really hard.”

I pulled a full set of cleaning supplies out of my bear storage, then I took out some aprons that could get dirty and had them put those on.

“Where should we start?”

“First I’ll blow out all the dust, so let’s open the windows.”

Fina and Luimin opened all the windows and doors as I instructed. After I double checked everything was open, I used wind magic to blow all of the dust collected on the floors and in any small crevices out of the house.

“That’s amazing, Yuna!”

“I’m going to do that in the other rooms too, so please handle the rest of the cleaning here.”

“Okay.”

“Leave it to us.”

Fina and Luimin took their dust cloths and started wiping things down. It would take quite a while with just the two of them cleaning, so I recruited some help. I held my bear puppets out in front of myself and summoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu in their cub forms.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu, please lend them a hand.”

“Can Kumayuru and Kumakyu really clean?” Fina asked.

My bears both crooned positively, but even though they acted confident, all they could really do was clean the floors. I took out some more cloths, and after my bears took those in their front paws, they pushed along with their hind legs and built up speed as they wiped the floor.

“Amazing. I can’t let myself lose to them.”

“Me neither.”

Luimin and Fina grabbed their cloths and started to tackle the windows, shelves, and all the places where my bears couldn’t reach. Leaving this room to the four of them, I went around to the other rooms and blew them out with wind magic. With them all scrubbing, the house was rapidly coming together.

Then as evening fell, we wrapped up.

“I’m pooped...”

“My arms are so tired.”

Kumayuru and Kumakyu crooned in agreement. Fina and Luimin were holding my bears while collapsed on the ground.

“I know we just cleaned it, but don’t lie on the ground,” I told them.

“Okay!” they chorused and popped right back up.

Finally, I went to the storage area on the first floor to do what I’d purchased the house for in the first place: I set up a bear gate on the deepest wall inside.

Mission complete.

“Are we going to use this gate to go home, Yuna?”

“Well, that will depend on Jade and the others. If we go back separately, then we can use it. But if we end up going together, we won’t be able to.”

“It’ll be nice if we can get home easily, but it’d be a shame if we can’t ride Kumayuru

and Kumakyu."

Well, at worst I could just tell the party we had to take Luimin back to her village and wouldn't be able to travel with them. I guess everything depended on how Jade's group reacted.

"Well, how about we wash off from cleaning and then go back?"

These two had worked up a sweat in the heat. Even though they'd worn aprons, that hadn't stopped the dust getting in their hair.

I immediately used the bear gate in front of us and we headed to my bear house in the elves' village.

We stripped, washed away the grime from scrubbing, and cleaned ourselves.

"I'll wash you too, Kumayuru."

My bear crooned in response.

"I'll give Kumakyu a wash."

The other one crooned too.

Luimin washed Kumayuru while Fina worked on Kumakyu.

After we all washed off, we sank into the bathwater.

"Ahh, this feels so nice."

"Yeah, I can feel all the fatigue from the day melting away."

They looked like they could melt right into the bath.

"Thanks for today, you two," I said, but then my bears started crooning in protest when they saw I was only thanking Fina and Luimin. "My bad. Thank you both too, Kumayuru, Kumakyu."

My bears both crooned in reply again, this time happily.

"I'm glad we cleaned it up."

"But it's not like I'm going to be living there, so you didn't need to be that thorough."

They'd given it a very deep clean.

"If I see dirt, I can't help but want to clean it."

"Me too. Shuri makes a lot of messes and those always bother me."

They both really had it together. They'd make good wives for someone someday. I almost wanted them as wives for myself.

After that we headed back to the inn. It was there that Jade's party told us the news: the gate of trials had opened.

# EXTRA STORY

## THE BEAR MAKES SUMMER BEAR CLOTHES

“WELCOME!”

“Thank you.”

When I came in, the kids looked nice and cool as they greeted the customers. Just days ago, I'd come by the Bear's Lounge and the kids had been working in their usual bear uniforms, but I'd noticed they were red in the face and their foreheads were covered in sweat.

We were still in the warm season. And even if we hadn't been, they were working in the hot kitchen where they were baking bread and pizzas in the stone ovens. When I saw that they seemed really hot, I told them they could take off the bear uniforms to work in lighter clothes.

The kids answered back that they didn't want to.

“If we don't wear the bear clothes, then it's not the bear shop.”

“I want to work in my bear clothes.”

No one would even consider taking off the bear clothes.

“But if all of you faint, Morin will worry about you. And I would too, of course.”

That got the kids to stop saying no. I almost felt like I was bullying them.

“I'm also worried about them fainting, so I've been asking them to wear lighter clothes. No luck.” Morin, who had been listening in, seemed to have been concerned about the kids too. “I've been having them drink water and take breaks, at least.”

Morin seemed to be having trouble too. The kids refused to take off the bear uniforms. I wondered if there was a good way of addressing this. Maybe they needed a summer version of the clothes? They could have short sleeves and we could remove the hoods

but add a headband with ears in its place. But just imagining that, I felt like the shop would end up seeming even weirder than it already was.

“Yuna?”

While I was thinking, one of the kids said my name out of concern. No, no, don’t worry about me while I worry about you! I placed one of my bear puppets on the girl’s head.

I looked at the bear hoods they were wearing, then remembered that Jade’s party had been wearing cloaks with hoods out in the desert. They’d sewn water mana gems into their cloaks, which helped give them relief in the heat.

When Jade had told me about it, I’d been thinking of making the kids some cooler clothes, but had gotten busy and forgotten. Sure, I’d gone through a pyramid and then immediately started prep work to go to Mileela when I got home, but those were all excuses.

I had time now.

“All right then. I’m going to make new bear clothes, so once those are done, change into them.”

“New bear clothes?”

I left the shop as the kids tilted their heads at me in confusion and headed off to the tailor where Sherry worked. I needed to talk to Temoka.

“We can make that.”

Surprisingly, Temoka already knew how to make the cloaks with the water gems. Apparently, senior knights used them too. Since knights had to always wear their armor, even in the hot weather, it was one of the methods they used to keep cool.

In my head, I couldn’t imagine the sheer torture of wearing armor even when it was hot. On the other hand, armor seemed nice and warm during the cold winters. Maybe they used fire mana gems to keep warm too.

“But we’ll need to use mana thread in order for the water gems to be cooling. Mana threads are special and more expensive than normal thread.”

Temoka seemed a little reluctant to tell me this. I didn't see any issue with that, though.

"Don't worry about the cost," I told him.

It'd be worse if the kids fainted. The Bear's Lounge was making plenty of money. The kids had made that through their work, so obviously I'd spend it on them.

"So, how long would it take you to make clothes using those mana threads?"

If it took too long, the weather would be cool again, and there'd be no point. I needed six uniforms at minimum. Also, I needed some for Nerin, too, and for Fina and Shuri, since they sometimes helped out.

"Well, I won't need to make them from scratch. I could sew it into the current clothes they have now, so it won't take too long."

Rich knights would have them made from scratch, but normal people would just get the mana threads sewn in parts of their clothes.

"I think that should be enough to make them feel cooler."

That was what I cared about, so it worked for me.

"Can I order the clothes from you, in that case?"

Temoka didn't seem unhappy with that at all and agreed to do it. We needed the bear uniforms to do this though, so I headed back to the bakery and gathered all the spare uniforms I could.

When I came back to the tailor with all the clothes, Temoka and Sherry had already prepped everything so they could get started right away.

"Okay, Sherry, we're going to finish this today, so get ready to work hard on this."

"Okay."

The two of them started sewing in the mana threads.

"Sherry, make sure you sew right here where the stitches are supposed to go, okay?"

“Okay.”

Every once in a while, Temoka would give her a gentle—or strict—instruction to teach her the correct technique. They weren’t family yet, but I hoped they’d someday turn into one like how Gentz and Fina were.

They finished their sewing by evening and added the water gems.

\* \* \*

The next day, I went to the shop before it opened. The kids were already hard at work, prepping the shop for opening.

“You should all wear these to work today,” I told them.

I started handing the modified uniforms to everyone.

“What’s this?”

“These look the same, but if you put them on, you’ll see it’ll be a lot cooler than before. Make sure to wear these if you work while it’s warm.”

“It’ll be cooler?”

“Yeah, so you can keep working in the bear uniforms.”

“n?!”

Once they took the clothes, the kids headed to the changing room.

“Here’s one for you too, Nerin.”

“Thank you.”

Nerin also wore a bear uniform. She headed off to the changing room too once I handed one to her.

After a while, all the kids and Nerin came out in the uniforms again.

“Yuna, I changed.”

“Okay, try touching the mana gem on the uniform,” I told them.

They did just as I said. I couldn’t tell if it was working from the looks on their faces though. I guess maybe the clothes wouldn’t work right away.

“Anyway, try working like that for now. I think it’ll be less hot than yesterday.”

Everyone got back to work when I said that.

I couldn’t just watch them all day, of course, so I headed home, kept an eye on the time, and swung back by the shop later. I headed in from the kitchen-side back entrance.

The kids were busily zooming around.

“Yuna!”

They came over when they noticed me.

“What do you think? Is it cooler?”

“Yeah, it’s not hot anymore.”

“It’s really cooler!”

They all smiled as they replied.

I looked at a girl who was wearing a bear uniform. Unlike yesterday, she wasn’t sweating, and her face wasn’t red. Yeah, looked like this was working.

“Let me know if you do feel hot, though.”

“Okay.”

“All right.”

The kids headed back to work.

“Thank you so much, Yuna.” Morin talked to me as she baked bread.

“Unlike yesterday, the kids don’t look tired.”

Then it was good I’d had the uniforms made.

“Are you all right too, Morin?” The kids had special clothes, but Morin was left in her normal outfit.

“Thank you for thinking of me. I’m fine, though. I’ve been doing this work for years, so I’m used to the heat.”

Still, being used to the heat didn’t mean it was easy. And it’d be hot for a long time. Plus, she had to use fire to bake bread and sponge cakes. We needed a counterplan for the heat.

When I’d talked with Morin about setting up a device similar to an air conditioner in the kitchen, Morin replied she wasn’t that delicate. At the same time, it’d be a real problem if she ever fainted, so I decided to set one up anyway. I’d leave it to her, whether she wanted to use it.

When Karin found out, she asked for one in the shop too, but it’d be a problem if customers loitered longer, so I nixed that idea.

“If it’s too hot, want to wear a bear uniform too, Karin?”

Unlike me, she was cute, so I thought it’d look good on her.

Karin turned me down, telling me, “That’s too embarrassing! I could never!”

“Karin, I felt embarrassed too at first. If you wear it long enough, you get used to it.”

Nerin gestured at her bear uniform as she jumped into our conversation.

Made sense. At first, I’d been embarrassed too, but I’d gotten used to my bear clothes over time. I didn’t even feel much hesitation about walking around in my bear clothes in Crimonia anymore.

“Ha ha. But it’s so nice and cool, Karin. You’re wasting a great opportunity.”

Karin looked at Nerin jealously.

"Urgh. If I were in my own room... and if they were pajamas. Maybe."

Now she was agonizing about it.

Come to think of it, they didn't have air conditioners in their living spaces. Maybe the nights were hot for them.

A few days later, Karin asked for a bear uniform to use as pajamas, so I asked Temoka to make them in secret. She hadn't needed to get a bear uniform specifically, but Karin didn't seem to realize it.

# EXTRA STORY

## THE BLACKSMITH KUSEHLO'S CHRONICLES

AS I WAS coming back to my workshop after an outing, I found some familiar faces at my door. I recognized them to be Jade's adventurer party—a group I'd made weapons for in the past.

They had kids with them this time, and my eyes settled on one in particular, a girl dressed in black. She looked like a blob of black fabric, in fact, and she had animal-like ears on her head, complete with something round on her rump that looked a lot like a tail.

As I approached them out of curiosity, I caught some of their conversation.

"Is the place where you got your mithril sword really famous, Jade?"

So they were jabbering about me, then. I'd made Jade's mithril sword. And it was a fine piece of work, at that.

"Hm, I'm not so sure. The smiths on this road are all great."

Jade answered her, but he couldn't have spoken right. I made sure to correct the record.

"You're supposed to say, 'He's the best,' you know."

"Kusehlo?"

When I said that, every single one of them reared around, all spooked. I didn't think I actually was the best, and I wasn't planning on claiming to be. Still, wouldn't have killed him to say I was a great blacksmith, even if he was lying through his teeth.

Jade gave me a discombobulated look. Didn't seem to get that I'd just been pulling his leg.

"Jade, it's been too long. Don't tell me you broke the sword I made you?"

"No, I haven't broken it."

"Anyway, looks like you've got a girl with an interesting fashion sense with you." I laughed and took another look at the eccentric character we had with us.

Couldn't tell from behind, but it seemed that black fabric was some sort of bear getup. I'd never seen anything like it. Her clothes were baggy, and I couldn't imagine it was easy moving in that thing. Her hands were covered in gloves in the shape of bear faces, and she wore giant bear-foot shoes too.

I doubted she'd be able to handle taking a walk, much less swing a weapon. Well, not as though a girl dressed like a bear was going to go around waving a sword. Didn't do anyone any good with me worrying about it. Just how I thought, as a weapon maker. Had to always guess what kind of weapon somebody would want. Why'd I ever think she'd use a weapon in the first place? Maybe a psychic inkling. Or maybe I was losing my touch.

Her name was Yuna, and it seemed Jade had been helping her out.

"Name's Kusehlo. I'm a blacksmith, but *apparently* not the best."

"Kusehlo... I think you're the best, personally."

Jade seemed to be making an attempt at improving my mood.

"Hmph! Don't give me empty flattery. I'm satisfied so long as you take care of that sword I made you." That was the greatest thing I could ask for as a blacksmith.

Jade and Senia brushed their hands against their own weapons as though they were cherishing their blades. Knowing that the weapons I'd made them had protected their lives and likely saved many more made me happy.

I was thankful to see their faces, and to know they were alive and well.

\* \* \*

After that, I asked them what had brought them here. A sword for Toya. I led them into the forge to get the details. Couldn't let them stay standing outside, after all. We'd draw

stares.

Came to find they wanted me to forge a mithril sword for Toya. I made sure they knew I didn't approve.

I'd had a regular—a novice adventurer—just about a year ago who'd used one of my cheaper swords, since he hadn't had much money. As he completed quests, he started to grow, so I made him a better weapon. But that lad assumed having a better weapon also meant he was more capable than he was, and he took on a quest he couldn't handle. Ended in his death. Getting his hands on a weapon he wasn't ready for had probably given him the wrong idea. If only he hadn't had that sword, maybe he wouldn't have taken on something he couldn't handle.

After that, I'd always test out a client's skill before making them a good weapon. Toya was the type who'd get ahead of himself. If he weren't with Jade and the rest, he'd probably be more reckless than he already was. I didn't intend to make him a weapon if he couldn't show he was at a level where he could wield it. I decided to test whether he could handle a mithril sword.

\* \* \*

I brought one of my old mithril swords and my son's dull blades to the rear yard. Then I stuck one of my son's swords into the ground and handed the mithril sword to Toya.

"This one's a blunt sword my son made. You try cutting through this sword with that mithril blade. If you can do it, I'll make you one of your own."

This would be no easy feat. Dull or not, the blade was still made of metal.

But once this lad had his hands on a mithril sword, he'd surely take on higher-ranked quests. He would have to go up against monsters with tougher hides and foes with sturdier armor. And the thing about a real opponent? They move. A sword stuck in the ground, on the other hand, was an easy target. If he couldn't cut through an immobile foe, well, then he didn't have what it took to wield a mithril blade.

The lad just told me, "All right."

He gripped the mithril sword and stared down the sword in the ground. Then, he readied the blade and brought it down.

His speed looked good—so did the force he put in it. Only issue was the angle was bad. The dull sword went off flying and tumbling along the ground. Looked like he couldn't do it.

Toya asked for another chance. I knew the same thing would happen again, and it did.

Toya tried to blame it on the sword. I had Jade give it a try next, and he did a splendid job of slicing right through it. Looked like he hadn't lost any of his skill.

I told Toya he oughta give up, but instead the lad asked for more time. Well, if he couldn't cut through the blade after days of practice, he'd finally take it as the sign it was.

I accepted his proposal, and he headed off with my mithril sword.

When Jade attempted to pick up the broken sword, the girl in the bear outfit contemplated the blade still in the ground. Then she asked if she could give it a try like Toya.

Now, I tell you, this wasn't an easy test. You needed technique to slice through a sword with another sword or you'd end up sending stuff flying like Toya had. If you tried to rely on brute force, the dull sword would just crack. It truly wasn't easy. You had to factor in lots of things to do it—the angle, the speed, the force... And she wanted to "give it a try."

Jade and Mel were talking like the bear girl could do it. Did they know something I didn't? When I said I had no other mithril blades to spare, in a shocking turn of events, Jade volunteered his own. I could see him loaning it out to one of his party members, but never to a child. Jade musta truly believed in her capabilities.

She borrowed Jade's sword and swung it. It was like she couldn't feel its weight. Where had that strength come from? I knew Jade's blade was heavy as it was large, yet she wielded it as though it were nothing. Maybe under all those bear clothes, she was hiding muscle?

She stood in front of the blade in the ground.

*What?*

Seriousness came over her face as the air around us grew tense.

I couldn't take my eyes off of her. The moment everything around us hushed quiet, she brought her sword down.

She was fast. I could hardly make out when she'd swung it. That one swing—it was enough for me to see how powerful the bear girl was. When bringing a sword down, stopping the blade can be difficult unless the wielder has the strength to halt it. A novice will often give in to the weight of the sword. It was typical to watch some strong novice swing the blade with all they had, only to end up slamming the sword straight into the ground. To my shock, the bear girl had brought down the heavy sword extremely quickly and successfully stopped the blade.

She hadn't let the blade control her—it was proof she had mastery over it. She hadn't sent the blade in the ground flying, nor had she broken it instead of slicing through it.

Had she only swung her sword at the air? No, that was impossible. She was too close to the sword. I'd seen where the swords had met.

She prodded the sword with the tip of the one in her hand, and the blade plopped to the ground. I doubted my eyes. She'd sliced through it. I hadn't even heard a sound. This trick couldn't be accomplished through any fluke.

I felt goosebumps up and down my arms.

What was she? Who was this bear girl?

She didn't even boast—all she did was claim Jade had a good sword. I was happy to hear her say that as the one who'd made Jade's blade, and if the girl asked me to forge a mithril blade for her, why, I wouldn't have denied her. When I looked beyond her appearance, I saw true skill.

# AFTERWORD

I'M KUMANANO. Thank you for picking up *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear's* sixteenth volume.

I think this book will be on sale right before the anime starts airing. It feels like the anime talks happened forever ago, but it snuck up on me. Time sure flies.

At the time, I planned on leaving everything about the anime up to the director, but they asked me to be involved as the creator of the work. I helped where I could. From my involvement, I learned that there were so many people working hard to make *Kuma Bear* happen. It was a wonderful experience.

There were the writers, especially the director, who wrote the scenarios. Then there was EMT Squared Co., who produced the animations, the operations team who made advertisements, the voice actors who gave the characters life, the director of audiography, the people who composed the music, and also K, the producer from Kadokawa who put it all together. I'm sure there were also many people working behind the scenes I don't even know about.

Thanks to all of their efforts, *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear* is now an anime. I learned so many things I never would have if I hadn't participated. I cannot thank every-one enough for allowing me to have such a valuable experience.

I'm unsure whether you'll pick up this book before or after the anime begins airing but thank you for reading *Kuma Bear*. *Kuma Bear* will continue as a novel, so I hope you'll follow along with the continuation.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who strived to get this book out.

Thank you to 029 for drawing such beautiful illustrations, as always, and for taking my many requests.

I'm always relying on my editor as well. And also, to the many people who were involved in the publishing of *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear* Volume 16. Thank you. I'm grateful for the readers who have read along thus far. Let's meet again in the seventeenth volume.



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