

WRITTEN BY
Kumanano

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O29

3
novel



KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR

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– Bear Bear Bear Kuma –

- VOLUME 3 -

-AUTHOR-

Kumanano

-ILLUSTRATOR-

029

[SEVEN SEAS]

You
Want Some?



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Seven Seas Entertainment

KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR Vol. 3

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Illustrated by 029

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Skills

► Yuna's Status_

► FANTASY WORLD LANGUAGE

The fantasy world's language will sound like Japanese.

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

► FANTASY WORLD LITERACY

The ability to read the fantasy world writing.
Written words become the fantasy world's words.

► BEAR EXTRADIMENSIONAL STORAGE

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

However, it cannot hold (eat) living things.

Time will stop for objects that are inside of it.

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

► BEAR IDENTIFICATION

By looking through the bear eyes on the Bear Clothes' hood, one can see the effects of a weapon or tool.
Doesn't work without wearing the hood.

► BEAR DETECTION

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

► BEAR MAP

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

► BEAR SUMMONING

Bears can be summoned from the bear gloves.
A black bear can be summoned from the black glove.
A white bear can be summoned from the white glove.

► BEAR TRANSPORTER GATE

By setting up a gate, can move between gates.
When more than three gates are in place, can travel to a location by picturing it.
This gate can only be opened with the bear hand.

Magic

► BEAR LIGHT

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

► BEAR PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENT

Routing mana through the bear gear allows for physical enhancement.

► BEAR FIRE MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use fire elemental magic.
Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.
When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WATER MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use water elemental magic.
Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.
When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WIND MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use wind elemental magic.
Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.
When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR EARTH MAGIC

Based on the mana that is gathered in the bear glove, gives the ability to use earth elemental magic.
Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.
When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

Equipment

► **BLACK BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

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

► **WHITE BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

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

► **BLACK BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

► **WHITE BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

Increases speed based on the user's level.

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

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

Appears to be a onesie. Reversible.

FRONT: BLACK BEAR CLOTHES

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

Gives heat and cold resistance.

REVERSE: WHITE BEAR CLOTHES

Automatically restores health and mana while worn.

Amount and speed based on the user's level.

Gives heat and cold resistance.

► **BEAR UNDERWEAR (NONTRANSFERABLE)**

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

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

Will grow with the user.

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KUMA
BEAR

CHAPTER 51

THE BEAR HEADS TO THE ROYAL CAPITAL

ON THE DAY I headed out with the convoy, I first dropped by Tiermina's house to pick up Fina. From there, we headed to the feudal lord's house to meet up with Noa.

"So who are you guarding, Yuna?"

"Oh? Did I forget to mention it? It's the town lord's daughter."

Fina's face turned pale. "The lord... then does that mean we're headed to Lord Fochrosé's house?"

I nodded.

"I'm going back home," she blurted out. I grabbed her hand with my bear puppet to keep her from making a break for it.

"It's fine—it's not like they're going to eat you. Besides, I'm guarding his daughter—she's a kid named Noa."

Considering Fina's reaction, I guessed the divide between the nobility and commoners was pretty wide, even in this world. But Noa seemed like a sweet girl, even if she was a noble.

"Do you mean Lady Noir? But someone like me can't go with you..."

Weird, I thought. I called her by her nickname, but Fina called her Noir. I guess people didn't know her by that nickname, then?

"Anyway, let's get going," I said. "If they say you can't come, we'll go together on our own later."

Fina reluctantly came along, though I kept a grip on her hand. When we got to the mansion, Noa was already standing haughtily by the gate with her hands on her hips.

"You're late, Yuna!" she said, before even greeting us.

"We're not late. When did you start waiting?"

"Ever since I woke up and ate breakfast, so about an hour ago..."

"You're too early."

"I just couldn't wait, knowing I'd get to travel on the bears," she said, looking embarrassed. That was pretty cute.

"Well, I've got a favor to ask you."

"What is it?"

"I'm bringing her along, too—would you be okay with that?" I pointed to Fina, who flinched.

"Who is she?"

"This is my lifesaver, Fina."

"Th—that's not true. Yuna, *you* were the one who saved me!" Fina said. I wasn't convinced.

"She said she hasn't been to the royal capital before, so I thought I'd take her. I was hoping I could get permission from you and Cliff."

"I don't really mind, but I'm not giving up my spot on the bear."

"I'm going to have you ride together," I said.

"I suppose that's fine, but I'm riding in front!"

"I'd like to get Cliff's permission too, just in case. Could I see him?"

Noa went inside and came back with Cliff, who immediately gave his assent. "I don't mind," he said.

"Are you sure?"

"It's only one extra person. Besides, having a girl about the same age as my daughter along isn't a bad idea at all."

Fina greeted Cliff nervously, "I'm Fina."

"Please take care of my daughter."

"Y-yeshir," Fina stammered.

"Don't be mean to her." I pulled Fina's arm, putting myself between her and Cliff.

"You make me sound mean. I was just greeting her," he protested. I guess the fact that he was an aristocrat was just putting Fina on edge.

We headed for the city gates. Noa seemed to be enjoying herself, but Fina was a bundle of nerves.

"That reminds me, what's your name?" Noa asked.

"It's Fina."

"I'm Noir. Nice to meet you."

"Yes, ma'am!"

The formal introduction might have eased her worries, since a smile came back to Fina's face. Once we got out of town, I summoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu, and Noa happily hugged Kumayuru the moment the bear was done manifesting.

"Kumayuru, it's nice to see you!" She then hugged and greeted Kumakyu in the same way. "I said this already, but I get to ride in front, okay?"

"Yes, Lady Noir."

"Well then, it's a pleasure, Fina." Noa offered her hand to Fina, who took it nervously.

"Yes, it's a pleasure for me too."

Now mounted on Kumayuru in their respective positions, they both couldn't help but smile. *I guess they'll be fine*, I thought as I mounted Kumakyu.

"Well then, let's head out to the capital!"

Since we weren't in a hurry, we set out at a leisurely pace.

"Kumayuru, I'm counting on you to get us to the capital, okay?" Noa gave Kumayuru a gentle pet.

"Lady Noir, you already knew about Kumayuru and Kumakyu?"

"Yuna brought them to the mansion and let me ride them once. They took a nap with me, too. I've been so excited for this trip that I could hardly wait. How do you and Yuna know each other, Fina?"

"Fina bailed me out when I was lost in the forest, back when I first came here," I interrupted.

"That did happen," said Fina, "but Yuna was the one who saved me from a wolf attack. I just led her to town."

"And then, I became an adventurer, but because I couldn't butcher monsters, I ended up asking Fina to do it for me."

"Yes, and I'm really thankful for the money you pay me."

"Fina, you can butcher monsters?" Noa looked surprised.

"Yes, I've done it for a long time at the guild."

"For a long time? How old are you?"

"I'm ten."

"That makes you the same age as me. I can't believe you harvest monsters at your age..." Noa gave Fina a shocked look over her shoulder. So it *was* weird for ten-year-olds to be able to butcher monsters, even in this world. Fina really must've been special.

The two of them went on to have a friendly conversation. They were the same age, after all, regardless of class. While I listened to them talk, we followed the road to the capital at a leisurely pace. No monsters or robbers made an appearance, and the peaceful day soon turned to evening.

I looked around for the best place for us to set up camp. There was a stand of trees a little way off the main road that looked promising, so I headed there.

“Yuna,” said Noa, “you don’t mean to say that we’re camping outdoors here, right?!”

“Yeah, did you think we’d be staying at an inn?”

“Uh, well, yes. Whenever there were towns or villages nearby, we would stay at an inn. If that wasn’t the case, we slept in the carriage...”

Of course. She really was a nobleman’s daughter.

“Don’t worry. You’ll have something to sleep on.”

“...?”

I told the two of them to step back a bit and pulled a bear house out of bear storage. The bear house was in the shape of two seated bears: a mama and a cub. The mama bear was the actual house, and the cub was the attached storehouse where Fina could do her harvesting. The front door was set into the mama’s bears left paw pad.

I made it smaller so it wouldn’t be as noticeable, but it was still plenty eye-catching despite only being about half the size of the bear house back in town. I also redesigned the interiors a bit since the time Fina and I went tigerwolf slaying.

“Yuna?! Wh-wh...” Noa called out in astonishment.

“It’s a bear house. This one’s for travel, so it’s a little small.”



"I wasn't asking what it is—I wanted to know where it came from. Well, I suppose I know where it came from, but can that really fit in a bottomless bag?"

"I'm not sure what the upper limits of my bottomless bag are." The other, bigger house fit fine. So had the black viper.

"You're not surprised, Fina?" Noa asked. She *did* look pretty nonplussed.

"No. I've seen her pull out a bear house before."

"Also, this whole thing is a secret, so don't tell anyone," I warned Noa. "Anyway, why don't we head inside? You've got to be worn out after we traveled all day."

I unsummoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu, then led the girls inside.

"Oh Noa, sorry, but please take off your shoes here."

I had indoor shoes that were kind of like slippers ready for Noa and Fina in the entryway. Beyond the entryway was the combo living-dining room, which was brightly lit with mana stones and spacious enough to fit ten people.

"What *is* this house?!" Noa exclaimed in surprise.

"Pick a chair and sit down. I'll get dinner ready."

I headed for the kitchen, oiled up a frypan, and got some ground meat and eggs ready to make Salisbury steaks. I made a salad while the steaks were cooking. Kids gotta have their greens. Once the hamburger steaks were done, I served up still-warm soup from the inn into bowls and set some fresh bread on a plate. Then I poured fruit juice into cups. *Bon appétit.*

"Yuna, what's that?"

"It's dinner. If you want a meal like the ones you eat at your manor, I can't really do that."

"No, I wasn't thinking that at all. Actually, it smells even better than the meals I have at home."

"Does it? Great. Make sure to eat it while it's warm."

Noa and Fina started eating.

“What is this yummy thing?”

“It’s just hamburger steak.”

“Ham-bur-ger?”

“Yeah, you don’t eat it in this country?”

“It’s not really that we don’t eat it so much as this is my first time eating something like this.”

“Really? All I did to make it was mince up wolf meat, beef, and pork and stuff.”

“Yuna, do you think we could make this at my house too?” Fina asked.

“I think you could, but maybe making the sauce would be difficult. It’s really good with grated daikon, too.”

“Please teach me how to make it next time. I want to let everyone in my family taste it!”

“Sure.”

“Me too,” said Noa.

“Noa, you wouldn’t need to know, would you? You’ve got a maid making your meals.”

“That’s true, but I don’t like feeling left out.”

“Well, it can wait till we’re back in town.”

“This soup tastes great, too.”

“The inn made that for me.”

“And the bread?”

“I found a good bakery, so I stocked up on it.”

After chatting a bit, we finished our meal. By now, Fina and Noa had gotten comfortable enough around each other to be conversing normally.

“Now we take a short break, then take baths. We head out at sunrise, so we need to get to bed early.”

“Yes, I understand.”

“Are we really heading out that early?”

They had perfectly opposite reactions; Fina always rose early for work and house chores, while Noa was a noble who greeted the morning leisurely.

“It’s because I don’t want other people to spot the house. I want to break camp before anyone wakes up and starts looking around.”

“I understand. Also, I thought you mentioned something about a bath? Did I mishear?” Noa asked, rubbing her ears.

“You didn’t mishear. There is a bath, so get yourself warmed up before you head to bed. Fina, could you show her how the bath works?”

“I feel like everything I thought was common sense is crumbling away,” said Noa as Fina led her along to the bath.

While they were occupied, I cleaned up after the meal. Well, all I did was wash the dishes and cups. When the two of them came out, I gave them the dryer and told them to dry their hair while I got in the bath. When I got done and came back out, they were waiting.

“You’re not in bed yet?”

“In bed where?”

Right, I thought, I haven’t given them rooms yet.

The first floor had the living-dining room, kitchen, bathroom, and bath. The second story had three small rooms. One of those rooms was mine, and the other two were for guests. There were three beds in each of the rooms, for a total of six.

I showed the two of them the rooms. “What do you want to do? Wanna sleep in separate rooms?”

“I’m fine with either. You can choose, Lady Noir.”

“I want to talk before going to bed, so let’s stay in the same room.”

“Okay!”

“You can talk, but just make sure you turn in early,” I said, then went to my own room to sleep. It’d be embarrassing if I woke up late after warning them about that, after all.

CHAPTER 52

THE BEAR SPOTS A CARRIAGE UNDER ATTACK

I ENDED UP WAKING before sunrise the next morning. The sky was still mostly dark, and it was probably chilly, but the bear onesie kept me from feeling the cold at all. I changed from the white bear to the black bear side and went down to the first floor.

“Good morning, Yuna.” Fina was already awake, but I didn’t see Noa around.

“Morning. Where’s Noa?”

“I felt bad waking her up, so she’s still sleeping.”

“I’ll make breakfast, so go wake her.”

I got yesterday’s soup and bread ready for breakfast. Noa looked groggy when she came into the dining room.

“Good morning.”

“You look sleepy.”

“That’s because I’m always asleep around this time.”

“We’ll head out after breakfast.”

“Yeah-awn,” Noa replied, the words interrupted by a yawn. Fina smiled as she watched.

After we finished our meal, we resumed our journey toward the royal capital. The trip continued to be peaceful; we even stopped to buy some fresh veggies at a village we passed along the way.

I normally slept a lot when traveling. Since you couldn’t fall off the bears, you could nap on them without worry. Noa spent a lot of time asleep, too, probably because she

woke earlier than she was used to, and because the bears had such comfortable backs.

A few days had passed since we left town when something finally happened.

“Stop for a sec.”

Kumayuru and Kumakyu halted.

“Is there something wrong?”

“There are people and monsters up ahead.”

“Really?!”

I couldn’t see them from where we were. The only reason I could tell was thanks to my bear detection skill, which I was activating every once in a while. This time, it pinged a whole mess of mobs up ahead.

“Yuna, what should we do?”

“If people are being attacked, we have to go help them.”

My bear detection skill identified the monsters as orcs, which I could dispatch without breaking a sweat. But I didn’t want to drag Fina and Noa into danger.

“Yuna?” Fina looked worried; she hung behind Noa, clinging to her clothes. Leaving them behind would leave a bad taste in my mouth, and I let slip what was happening. They’d be so sad if the people under attack ended up dying.

“I’m going to pop over to help them. The monsters might try attacking you too, so you’ve got to make absolutely sure you stick by Kumayuru, got that?”

“Yuna, don’t do anything dangerous.”

“Yuna...”

“I’ll be fine.”

They still looked worried when I left them behind and galloped off with Kumakyu.

The orcs circled a carriage. People—adventurers, by the looks of them—were holding the perimeter, which was probably why I could still detect them. I was momentarily relieved to see them alive, but they looked outnumbered.

“One, two, three... eight.”

There were eight orcs in the fray, and four adventurers to hold them off. One, most likely a sorcerer, was being pinned down by an orc. A swordsman was occupied with two orcs beside the cart. The last two were separated some distance away, surrounded by five orcs.

I jumped off Kumakyu and ran for the sorcerer, who seemed to be in the most danger. They were collapsed on the ground, trying to crawl away, but the orc had hold of their leg. It was bringing down a club in its off-hand. This was bad.

I kicked off the ground, collected mana in my hand, and loosed a wind blade at the orc, severing its thick neck before it could see me coming. Maybe I’d gone up a level?

The sorcerer looked around, trying to figure out what happened, and noticed me. “A bear?!”

I ran past the surprised sorcerer and headed for the next target. A swordswoman was singlehandedly defending the cart from two orcs. Their backs were completely unguarded, but my new wind blades would go right through them, potentially damaging the cart and the swordswoman, too. I coiled earth around the orcs’ lower halves and immobilized them instead.

“What?!” the swordswoman cried out.

“I locked them down, so finish them off yourself!”

She picked up what I was putting down immediately, ducked to the orcs’ sides, and cut them down. Meanwhile, I headed to where the remaining two were fighting the five orcs away from the carriage.

Like before, I couldn’t use my wind blade, and the earth trick wouldn’t make it any

easier for the two humans to escape. I collected mana in my hands. Instead of picturing a wind blade, I pictured a clump of air. Then, I launched that clump at the orcs. I shot five of them off at once, each one hitting an orc and blowing it off its feet. The adventurers were knocked over by the blast, too, but at least they weren't dead.

The collapsed orcs got to their feet almost immediately. The adventurers seemed like they were trying to stand back up, too.

"It's dangerous, so just stay down!" I shouted.

I let a horizontal wind blade loose at the standing orcs, lopping them in half and splattering the adventurers with orc blood. *I saved you guys, I thought, so don't get mad at me, all right?* With the threat gone, I approached the bloodstained adventurers.

"You okay?"

"A bear?" A female adventurer with long hair stood up and sheathed her sword. The other female adventurer checked her surroundings.

"Um, did you save us?"

"Pretty much."

"Well, thank you. You really were a lifesaver."

"I just happened to be passing by, so don't worry about it."

They looked just awful with orc blood all over them, but they didn't seem angry. I felt kind of bad, but it was an emergency.

"Marina!" The adventurer that was fighting near the carriage ran over. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, we're fine. This girl dressed as a bear saved us. What about you?"

"Me and Elle are alright, thanks to her."

A relieved look came over the face of the adventurer with the long hair. "I see. I have to thank you again."

"Glad I made it in time."

“I’m Marina, the leader of this party. The one holding the large sword there is Masrika, and this is—”

“I’m Itia.”

Apparently, the sorcerer I saved first was named Elle. We headed back to the carriage, and I called for Kumayuru and Kumakyu on the way. Whether by telepathy or something else, I could give my bears instructions even when they were far away.

“Elle, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. A little longer and I would’ve been a goner, though.”

Perhaps it was because the orc had grabbed her, but her clothes were tattered, and I could see her pale skin. She was trying to cover it up, but since her chest was so big, her boobs were spilling out of her hands.

Was that what I was up against?!

“We’re alive because of you. Thank you.”

She thanked me with this indescribable look on her face, as she looked me up and down. She was probably holding back a ton of questions about my dress sense.

“What the heck are those?!” Marina cried out as she surveilled the perimeter.

“They’re bears!” The adventurers put their hands on their swords.

“Hold on, there are girls riding that bear.”

“These are my bears, so it’s okay.”

“Your bears?”

The adventurers looked at my getup, then at the bears, and relaxed their battle stances like they accepted that.

“Yuna, are you okay?!”

“Yuna, how are you?”

"I'm fine."

Noa and Fina dismounted from Kumayuru and ran over to where I was. I put my bear puppet hands on top of their heads to calm them down. They were shaking a little, which was understandable. They were ten-year-old girls.

CHAPTER 53

TOGETHER WITH THE BEAR

“YOU’RE THE ONE who saved us?”

A voice came from behind me while I was patting Noa and Fina’s heads. I turned around to see an older man and a girl there. The girl was maybe a little younger than Fina and Noa. They were dressed really nice, like Noa, so I guessed they were nobles, or maybe just a wealthy family. They had adventurers as guards, after all.

“If you’re talking about the orcs, then yeah.”

“I see. In that case, please allow me to give you my thanks. I am Gran Fahrengram. Thank you for saving both myself and my granddaughter.” The older man bowed his head.

“I’m Yuna, the adventurer. We just happened to be passing by, so don’t worry about it.”

“But my, what strange clothes you wear,” Gran said as he looked at my bear outfit. The other adventurers, who’d been wondering about my outfit until then, nodded too.

“Please don’t worry about that,” I replied. I still didn’t know how to explain the onesie.

“I’m impressed you defeated the orcs so easily. Also, is that Cliff’s daughter over there?” Gran looked over at Noa. *Looks like they know each other already*, I thought.

“Lord Gran, it’s such a pleasure to see you again. I’m Noir,” Noa greeted him like a real aristocrat.

“Ah yes, Noir. Has it been about a year? How big you’ve gotten. Is Cliff here?” Gran looked around.

“My father has work, so he stayed in the town. He told me to go to my mother in the royal capital by myself.”

“So you came all this way on your own?”

“Yes, but I’m fine, since I have my escort.”

Gran looked over at me. “Looks like that Cliff got you a very good adventurer, though a strangely dressed one.”

I wished he’d stop calling me “strange” over and over.

“Misa, nice to see you again.” Noa headed over to the girl next to Gran, who had long, beautiful silver hair.

“It’s a pleasure to see you again, my dearest Noa.”

“Misa, are you also going to the royal capital?”

“Yes, my mother and father went ahead of me, so I’m headed to the capital with my grandfather.”

My dearest? That had a nice ring to it. I tried to picture someone calling me “my dearest Yuna,” but it only came off kind of creepy. Yeah. Plus, it’d be embarrassing.

“Sorry to interrupt your conversation, but could I have a moment?” Marina was coming over, looking cleaner now that she washed off the orc blood. “If we leave the orcs as they are, it might attract their compatriots, or other monsters who seek to eat the bodies. I’d like to butcher them.”

“You want to butcher them?”

“You were the one who defeated them, but you did so by taking advantage of their being occupied with us. As such, we’d like a cut as well.”

Ah, so *that’s* what she meant. I didn’t know how valuable orc materials were, but it was natural these other adventurers would be thinking about such things.

“I don’t need a cut. You can do what you like with them.”

“Are you serious? You took down six of them. Itia defeated the two she did because of you, too.”

“We took out a couple on our own, so we don’t need to take everything.” Based on the bodies, there had been about ten orcs to start.

"We're going on ahead to the royal capital, so you can do what you want." I went over to Kumakyu and jumped up on its back. I had tons of orcs in my bear storage and didn't really need more. "Noa, Fina, we're going."

"Please wait a second," Gran called out. "If you're also going to the royal capital, why don't we go together?"

He wanted us to be travel buddies? My bears would have to slow down for their carriage to keep up, though. I thought about it for a moment, then replied, "I don't see any benefits to that, so no thank you."

"I'll pay you to escort us."

"You've already got those women to protect you, don't you? Besides, isn't that pretty rude to them?" I said, loud enough that the nearby adventurers could hear. If he was hiring me, that meant he didn't have much trust in them.

"I don't doubt Marina and the others' abilities. It's just that encountering a group of orcs on the way to the royal capital is normally unheard of."

It was? I supposed we really hadn't encountered any monsters up until that point.

"I'd like you to be here for my granddaughter. We've been cooped up inside the cart for the last few days, which has been tedious. Having someone she knows, like Noir, around could make the trip more enjoyable."

"Hmm."

It still felt like I was drawing the short end of the stick here. I didn't want to tell people about the bear house unless I trusted them, so if we traveled together, I couldn't use it. If we couldn't use the bear house, that meant no beds and no bath. Also, we'd be moving slower and covering way less ground.

So what was I going to do?

Cliff was paying me, so I would have looked to him for direction, but he wasn't here. I decided I'd ask Noa for her opinion, instead, seeing as how she was both the person I was escorting and the daughter of my client.

"Noa, what do you want to do?"

“Me?”

I called Noa over and whispered into her ear. “If we travel with them, we can’t use the bear house. So we wouldn’t be able to use the beds or bath, either.”

Noa started to mutter under her breath, *bath, bed, bath, bed*. It looked like there was a battle of the Bed and Bath versus Misa going on inside of Noa’s head right now. *Hmm, umm*, she murmured, and the battle finally came to a conclusion.

“Yuna, I’m worried about Misa. Do you think it would be okay if we went together?”

“If that’s what you want, it’s fine. But I have a few conditions.”

“What are those?”

“Naturally, we’ll keep the bear house a secret. Also, if there are monsters that I don’t think I can beat, the three of us will run and leave everyone else behind. Make sure you’re at least prepared for that.”

That was the one thing I wouldn’t budge on. Even I wasn’t invincible, and there had to be monsters—like dragons, for instance—that I couldn’t beat. If we encountered a foe like that, I might not be able to protect other people on top of Noa and Fina.

“I-I understand,” Noa said.

I turned to face Gran.

“Have you come to a decision?” he asked.

“We’ll travel with you.”

“You will? Ah, that’s wonderful.” Gran looked elated. Misa did too; she rushed over to Noa.

“Well then, could you help the women with harvesting, Fina? I’d like to head out as fast as possible.”

“Okay!” Fina hustled over to where the adventurers were harvesting the orcs.

“So, are these bears yours?” Gran asked, looking at Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

"They're my summons. They're safe, so don't hurt them."

"They're summons?"

Gran kept staring. Misa followed suit, looking awestruck, as Noa pulled her over to the bears.

"The black one is Kumayuru and the white one is Kumakyu."

Misa slowly got closer to Kumayuru.

"It's fine, they're nothing to be scared of." Noa started petting Kumayuru. Seeing that, Misa joined her and touched Kumayuru.

"It's soft."

"Right? They feel so nice. They make the very best sleeping spot."

Noa gave Kumayuru a giant hug, which seemed to settle things for the others. A short time later, Fina, Marina, and the others finished dealing with the orcs and rejoined us.

"This kid is great at butchering. She really helped us out. Also, are you actually sure about letting us have everything?"

"It's fine. It looks like we're heading to the capital together, so I'm looking forward to working with you."

"Yes, likewise."

Before we headed out, Marina checked the carriage. Luckily, it was fine, so we headed out right away. Once she finished the check, Marina sat down in the driver's seat and the swordswoman, Masrika, sat down next to her.

There was space for about six people inside the carriage. Gran, Misa, and Noa got in first, and Elle and Itia took the remaining spots, keeping an eye out through the side and rear windows.

Aren't escorts supposed to guard from the outside? Then again, it wasn't like they could

keep up with a carriage on foot for long hours, especially laden down with their gear and weapons. Plus, if monsters attacked after you'd been walking that long, you'd be too worn out to put up a fight. Just thinking about it made me feel renewed gratitude for my bear summons.

When she got into the carriage, Noa whipped her finger out and pointed at Fina, declaring, "I'll let you have the bears this time, but *that* seat is reserved for me."

Well, I thought, Kumayuru and Kumakyu are both my summons, though.

The carriage started moving. We followed after it, with Fina on Kumayuru and me on Kumakyu.

Clip clop, clip clop.

Hmm, I thought. We're going pretty slow. How long will it take to get to the royal capital from here at this pace? It wasn't like I could do anything about it at this point, though, so I decided to let the bears be on lookout while I took an afternoon nap. The weather was nice, and Kumakyu's warmth soon coaxed me into sleep.

The carriage rolled uneventfully forward until sunset. Marina told us to stop and pull off to the side of the main road in the middle of nowhere, where her party set up their cots and pulled travel rations from their bottomless bags. I really wanted to pull out my bear house, but restrained myself.

Since it looked like Misa was going to eat with her father and the other adventurers, I called Noa and Fina over to figure out dinner for ourselves. (Also, apparently, Misa was a nickname. Her full name was Misana.) As far as food prep went, all I was really doing was pulling simple meals out of the bear storage. The difference between mine and Marina's party's was that my bread was still soft and warm from the oven. I couldn't help but feel a tiny bit of a sense of superiority while we ate.

Soon, it was time to head to bed. We would be leaving at daybreak, which was fine by me. Marina came over just as I was about to tuck myself in.

"I'd like to figure out the order we'll keep watch."

Ah, the night watch: the great enemy of sleep and inevitable cost of roughing it.

"As far as keeping watch goes, we have these guys, so we should be fine." I pointed at Kumayuru and Kumakyu. "If any monsters or people come near us, they'll let us know."

"Really?"

"We don't need lookouts, but if you're really worried about it, can your group do it?"

"Can we really trust these bears?" Marina said, sizing up my furry companions.

"Whether you trust them or not is up to you." That was all I could say.

"I understand. We'll keep watch on our side."

Marina headed to the carriage.

"Where are you going to sleep?" I asked Noa, having defended my rightful eight hours of hay-hitting.

"What do you mean?"

"Are you going to sleep with Misa or with the bears?"

"Wh-what do you mean? You're going to sleep with the bears?" she asked, her voice quivering.

"Well, the night's cold and dangerous, right? Come here, Kumayuru, Kumakyu."

I called the bears over and had them sit down. Next, I called Fina over to demonstrate and bundled her up in a blanket. Once she was bundled up, Fina curled into the seated Kumakyu's furry belly. The bear's paws circled her, and there we had it—the art piece titled "Together With Bear" was complete.

"Wh-what is this? This is a sublime way to sleep!"

"See, it's not cold like this."

"I'll tell Misa I'm sleeping with you! Fina, make sure to keep a spot open for me!"

Noa dashed off, then quickly returned... with Misa in tow.

“Yuna, Misa said she wants to sleep with the bears too.”

“May I? Dearest Noa told me so many wonderful things about the bears today. I would like to partake. Please?” Misa fixed her big innocent eyes right on me. I couldn’t say no. She was even younger than Noa!

“Sure. The two of you can sleep with Kumayuru. Fina and I will sleep with Kumakyu.”

“Thank you, Yuna!”

“Thank you very much!”

Noa and Misa thanked me, and I got them wrapped up in a blanket and snuggling against Kumayuru’s stomach right away.

“Kumayuru, don’t wake the two of them up unless there’s something dangerous approaching. Kumakyu, please tell me if monsters or people come near us,” I asked. Then I leaned against Kumakyu’s stomach, making sure to leave Fina her half. It was warm. I tucked my hand into Kumakyu’s arm so I’d be holding it in my sleep.

“Good night, Fina.”

“Good night.”



CHAPTER 54

THE BEAR CATCHES THE ROBBERS

I WOKE UP IN THE MIDDLE of the night when Kumakyu moved.

“Kumakyu?”

I rubbed my eyes. Fina was sleeping quietly next to me. I used my detection skill, making sure not to wake her.

There were people some distance away who hadn’t been there when I checked before going to sleep. *If Kumakyu’s reacting to them, I thought, does that mean they just appeared?* I watched them for a while, but they didn’t seem to be moving. Maybe they were just camping for the night, like us?

“Kumakyu, tell me if they move.”

I went back to sleep. Kumakyu didn’t react again, and when I woke up the next morning, the group hadn’t moved from the place I’d sensed them last night.

Breakfast was light, and we left at sunrise. I kept my detection skill up as we went so we wouldn’t have to deal with a second monster attack. My radar picked up people tailing us. When we stopped for a break, they stopped. When the break was over, they moved with us. The signal I was picking up was always the same distance behind us.

It was definitely suspicious, but what did it mean? There weren’t many pleasant reasons for someone to shadow us. One possibility was that they were using us like guards. If a threat came from the front, we would handle it for them, and if something attacked them from behind, they would run over and force the monsters on us. The other possibility was that they were stalking us. This group was the recon team, and they were just waiting for the right time to attack—or for more of their friends to join them.

I didn’t know which it was yet.

The carriage stopped, and it looked we found where we'd be camping for the day. When I pinged my radar again, our mysterious followers had stopped too, of course. I had better report to the others.

"Marina, do you have a moment?"

"What is it?"

Marina looked over at me as she was setting up camp. I told her about the people following us and what I thought about it.

"While it's true that people sometimes stick to the carriage in front of them, they'll usually say something in advance and come to a mutual agreement on traveling together. Granted, sometimes the people at the front will charge for it, so there are cases where the others will follow some distance behind."

"Then do you think it's all right?"

"I can't quite say. They might be observing us. Actually, how can you tell?"

"My bears let me know about it." I didn't mention the detection skill. "So, what should we do?"

"I'd really like to get a look at who's following us, to be honest, but that would probably be useless."

"It is?"

"Their appearance is unlikely to tell us anything. Yuna, I know you're strong, but can we also count those bears as part of our firepower?"

"They're protecting Noa and Fina, so you won't really be able to count on them to fight."

Marina shook her head. "May we ask for your summons to protect Lady Misana and Lord Gran? That would make it easier for us to fight, as well."

True—it'd be tricky to protect the people you were guarding while also trying to fight. As far I was concerned, I'd be handling the attack alone; I just wanted to bring Marina and her crew up to speed. Getting ambushed, on the other hand, was an entirely

different kettle of fish from a fight we could all see coming.

"All right. I'll tell them to protect Misa and Gran too. It'd be easier if they're all inside the carriage."

Marina thanked me and went back to her party.

After dinner, we started getting ready for bed. Marina briefed everyone during our meal; she told Noa, Misa, and Fina to bunker down in the carriage once things got hot.

"Yuna, are we really going to be attacked?"

"Don't worry," I said. "If anything happens, these two will protect you."

Kumayuru and Kumakyu cooed in reply.

"Plus, you don't think I can be beat, do you?" Noa and Fina knew more about my abilities than Marina and the others did. "So you can sleep easy."

"Yuna, please don't push yourself too much," Fina said.

"It'll be fine. Like Marina said, they might just be normal travelers sneakily using us as guards." I gave Fina's head a gentle pat to steady her nerves. Noa and Misa were watching; they looked jealous, so I patted their heads the same way. It was a small price to pay for putting them at ease.

"We've got an early start tomorrow, so get to bed."

"Yes, Yuna, good night," Fina said.

"Yuna, good night," Noa said.

"Good night," Misa said.

They fell asleep in Kumayuru and Kumakyu's arms. Marina and the others looked kind of anxious, so I decided to trust the bears with lookout duty and get some sleep. We didn't know whether we'd actually be attacked, after all, and sleep was pretty important.

Something jostled me. When I opened my eyes, Kumakyu was there, nudging me upright.

“Kumakyu?”

The plan came back to me slowly as I started to come around. *Right, I thought, there was a chance we'd be attacked.* I pinged my radar. Yup, they were there all right. A crowd was starting to form. Ten, twenty—maybe about twenty-five people. Wasn't that a bit overkill to take on four adventurers?

I slipped away from Kumakyu, trying not to wake up Fina. I told Kumakyu to protect everyone if the enemies breached our camp. Not that I was planning to let them get here.

“They aren't here, are they?” Marina and the others had come over.

“You were still awake?” I expected them to take turns keeping watch.

“It's not like we could sleep after you told us we might be attacked.”

“There's a pretty big group of people congregating over there.”

“We should wake everyone get them in the carriage.”

“Let them sleep. I'll go.”

“Alone...?”

“I'll be okay. If any of them slip by me, please deal with them.”

“I'll go with you.”

“Marina?!” The other adventurers sounded shocked.

“You'd be holding me back,” I told her bluntly. She really would be a burden.

“Are you really going to be okay by yourself?”

"I'll be fine." I doubted they had anyone stronger than a goblin king or a black viper.

"All right. Then please do it."

"Sure. I'm headed off. Keep an eye on everyone."

I looked over to where Fina, Noa, and Misa were cuddled up with my bears. The three girls were sleeping like babies. Trusting their safety to my bears' capable paws, I ran off into the dark, following my bear detection skill's signal.

I could see pretty well all around me. Had the bear gear picked up some night vision skills when I wasn't looking? There were a few people ahead, clustered together in the dark and gripping their swords tight. Even though it was the dead of night, they didn't have a fire going. I could even hear their deranged conversation.

They were definitely bandits, which meant I was free and clear to attack them before they tried attacking us. I bore down on the unsuspecting gang. My bear shoes made no sound and my black bear outfit melted into the dark. I primed a spell.

"What's that?"

By the time they noticed me, it was too late. I assailed the bandits with air blasts, taking care to bank my shots so they'd hit the mounted ones but not their horses. The horses hadn't hurt anyone, after all. I forced the gang together with the opening volley, and followed up by conjuring bars of earth out of the ground around them. Finally, I sealed the top with an impromptu stone lid. The cage was complete.

"We can't break these! Casters to the front!"

Several of the bandits incanted spells, but they bounced off the bars and ended up causing mayhem inside the cage.

"Quit with the magic! We'll die!"

"That hurts! The heck is happening?"

"Somebody, whip up some light!"

"Good evening, bandits!"

They only really caught on that I was there once I started talking to them. “A bear?”

“What’s up with the getup?”

“Did you do this, you little twerp?”

“Let us out of here!”

“You’re that bear that was riding a bear...”

One of them seemed to already know about me. I guessed he was part of the group that was tailing us. I was surprised they decided to attack despite knowing about my bears. Maybe they figured they could handle it, since they had some sorcerers in their group.

“You really think you can this to us and live?!”

Are these guys stupid? Did they really think they could fight me when they were stuck in a cage? I hosed them down with a water spell to shut them up.

“Next time you open your mouths, I’ll switch to fire.”

“Shut your mouth! You think you can do this to the Zamon bandit clan...?!”

“Fire.”

I pitched a mass of fire into the cage.

“Hot! Hot! What do you think you’re doing!” The sorcerers inside the cage released water to snuff out the fire.

“I said that if you opened your mouth again, I’d launch fire at you next. Are you stupid?”

“Why, you little...”

They looked like they had plenty to say, but they kept their mouths shut this time. I used an earth spell to raise the cage off the ground by fifty centimeters. Some of the bandits inside lost their balance and fell over, raising a racket in the process, but I ignored them. Next, I attached wheels to the underside of the cage to make it mobile. I wasn’t concerned with their comfort, so I didn’t add springs to absorb the jolts and

bumps of the road.

Now, all I needed was something to move the cage. I thought I might use the horses, but they'd all run off. I thought it over and came up with something at once. It'd be pretty attention-grabbing, but it was my only option.

"Come forth, bear!"

I made a bear earth golem, following the same logic as when I made the fire and water bears to slay the tigerwolves and the black viper. It was about three meters tall.

"A bear!"

"What is that thing?!" The bandits were making a commotion in their cage.

"What're you planning on doing to us?"

"Let us outta here!"

They were so loud. Apparently petty thieves were idiots no matter what world you lived in. Sometimes they came with a smart leader, but this bunch just seemed like a pack of goons. I threw a ball of fire into the cage to silence them, and just like last time, one of the sorcerers set to putting it out like his life depended on it.

"Next time you open your mouths, I'll make you eat it."

I conjured a fireball for emphasis, and they scowled at me in silence. Did they really not understand the situation they were in? In any case, they'd gone quiet, so I had the earth bear golem pull the cage back to the carriage. If I took too long, Marina and the others might start to worry.

CHAPTER 55

THE BEAR ARRIVES AT THE ROYAL CAPITAL

EVERYONE WAS AWAKE when I arrived with the cage. Fina and Noa were on Kumayuru, waiting. I wondered if they were getting ready in case they had to run away on their own.

“You all got up?”

“It’s not like we could sleep knowing bandits were coming!”

“Yes, that is right. Of course we could not sleep when there was a chance bandits would be attacking us!” Gran was also awake. A geezer like him really ought to have stayed in bed.

“Yuna, I never thought you’d slip away without saying a word,” Noa said.

“Yuna, I think you went too far this time...” said Fina.

I caught the bandits, so why did I feel like I was the one in trouble here?

“Um, where do I even start?” Marina said, echoing what everyone was obviously thinking. “For now, could you tell us what you did with the bandits?”

Everyone’s eyes focused on me, and the cross-examination started. *Why is this happening?* I thought.

“As you can see, I caught the bandits, so I just put them in a cage.”

“How did you catch that many people alone?”

“I whipped it up with some earth magic.”

“And that cage?”

“I whipped it up with some earth magic.”

“And lastly, what about that bear?”

“I needed it to move the cage, so I whipped something up.”

From the looks on their faces and the way they’d sigh a little every time I answered, I got the impression I was exasperating them.

“The more I hear you talk, the stronger the urge to just laugh at what you’re saying,” Marina said. She looked fed up. “Well then, what are you going to do with those bandits?”

“I dunno, what do you think? Should we take them to the royal capital? Should we kill them here?”

“Those couldn’t be the Zamon bandits, could they?” Elle, the sorceress, spoke up from behind Marina, looking at the group.

“The Zamon bandits?” I remembered them saying something of the sort.

“They’re a group of bandits that have been running wild around here.”

“You’ve got to be joking. You caught the *Zamon* bandits singlehandedly?”

“Are they that big of a deal?”

“I’ve heard they’re a dreadful group that strips their victims of all money and valuables, and violates any women they cross paths with.”

There was a possibility their targets were Marina and the other women. On the other hand, just thinking that Fina and the other girls might have been who they were after...

“So we should kill them?” I suggested.

“I know it’ll be a lot of work, but we should deliver them to the capital’s guards and force them to give up the location of their hideout. They might be holding the women they’ve abducted there, and we don’t know where it is, or how many people they have guarding it. Getting that information out of them in a verifiable way is going to take time, and we’re in the middle of an escort mission. I think our best bet is to head for the royal capital and deliver them to the authorities there.”

Marina's plan was airtight. I had no objections. She and her party probably wanted to save the women captured by the bandits as soon as possible, but had come to this decision after weighing their skills and situation. I didn't plan on leaving Noa and Fina behind to go to the hideout, either. Much as it would be a giant pain in the behind, we'd take the bandits to the capital.

"Well, we've decided what to do from here. It's still dark, so should we go back to sleep?"

"You can sleep in a situation like this?"

"I don't feel like I can sleep after seeing all these bandits."

"Me neither."

"Yuna, I can't sleep either."

"Yuna..."

"Naturally, I do not feel as though I could sleep, either."

Not a single person was with me. They'd have to sleep near these bandits the next day, anyway, and dawn was still hours away. What were they going to do if they weren't going to sleep?

"Well then," said Gran, "what do we say to departing early? If the horses show signs of fatigue, we can allow them to rest at that point."

And so, we ended up resuming our journey to the royal capital even though it was still the middle of the night. Well, I was going to sleep on top of Kumakyu.

When the sun came up, we decided to have breakfast in order to give the horses a break. It sent the bandits into an uproar.

"Give us food!"

"Yeah, yeah, that's right."

"You won't die from not eating a few days."

"You gotta be kidding!"

I threw water on the rambunctious bandits to silence them. We confiscated all the bandits' bottomless bags with their weapons and such, so even if they had food, they couldn't eat it now. The only thing they were getting was the water their sorcerer made.

Around noon a few days after we captured the bandits, the wall surrounding the royal capital came into view. Multiple roads were converging at this point, all filled with carriages. At Gran's instruction, our carriage stopped.

"If we proceed any further than this, we'll draw attention to ourselves," he said.

"Yuna, sorry, but please wait here. We'll call the guards."

Gran, Marina, and the others advised me that unless I wanted to make an absurd name for myself or cause an uproar, I shouldn't take the bear golem into the city. We decided they'd go fetch the guards while I stayed behind.

I dismissed the golem and took apart the cage. Between being weakened by hunger and being tied up, the bandits had no strength to make a break for it. I recalled Kumayuru and Kumakyu, and then all that remained was to bide my time until Gran and the others returned.

"That sure is a big wall."

Even from a distance, I could tell it was huge. Fina looked awed by seeing something so big for the first time, too.

"I didn't think I would ever come this far away from home. My dad died when I was little, and my mother got sick, and even finding food every day was such a struggle that I didn't think I would ever go to the royal capital. This is all because of you, Yuna. Again."

"There'll be fun things ahead, too. Let's have a good time at the capital, shall we?"

"Yes!"

While I talked to Fina about our plans, Gran's carriage came back. I saw about a dozen guards on horseback behind him.

"Ms. Marina, are these the Zamon bandits?" The guards looked at the bound bandits. Marina got down from the carriage's driver seat.

"Yes, that's right," she said.

"I'm impressed you captured so many."

"Yes, well, that girl played a large part in making this happen."

"You mean the girl in the bear clothing you mentioned earlier, yes?"

They looked at me dubiously, but maybe because they accepted Marina and Gran's explanation, they didn't ask more about it. They loaded the bandits onto the guard's carriage. Since they were all exhausted, they didn't resist.

A little ways away, Gran was talking to someone who looked like the head of the guards.
"Ranzel, may we leave? We are fatigued from our long trip and wish to rest."

Right. I wanted to get inside the royal capital soon, too.

"Yes, of course. Thank you for your cooperation."

"If there is anything you need to know, please come see me." Gran was taking all the questions that would have been directed at me. He owed me his life, so he said this was the least he could do. He seemed like a pretty good guy. I wondered if a lot of the aristocrats in this world were actually decent people?

"Well then," said the guard, "I'll make arrangements for preferential entry into the capital."

"I'd be much obliged."

I was ready to walk the rest of the way when Gran told me to hop up into the carriage. I was grateful, but unsure if I'd fit on account of the onesie. Marina and two of her company were sitting in the driver's seat, so I took a spot between Fina and Noa. Across from us were Misa, Gran, and Elle. Even though they were squeezed in with me, Fina and Noa didn't complain at all; they seemed pretty happy being next to me. With nine people aboard, we started trotting along toward the entrance of the royal capital.

Mounted guards guided us as we jumped to the head of the line. I felt a little bit sorry

for all the people we passed still standing in queue. When we got to the entrance, the guards stopped their horses and told us to touch our guild and resident cards to the crystal panel for verification.

To do that, you had to get out of the carriage. When I disembarked, it caused an immediate commotion from the people around me.

“A bear?”

“Is that a bear?”

“What is with that getup?”

“You sure do stand out, Yuna.”

They really didn’t have to go out of their way to say anything. I touched my guild card to the crystal panel, and once it confirmed I had no criminal record, I went back into the carriage. Maybe I looked funny doing it, since Fina and the others were laughing at me.

“Yuna, it’s all right. Your clothes look cute.”

I didn’t know how to respond to a ten-year-old girl calling me cute.

Once we were all back on board, the carriage started moving again. Gran was being kind enough to take us all the way over to Noa’s mother’s house.

“Where’s your house, Noa?”

“In the upper-class district. It’s a slight distance from here.”

The carriage moved at a slow trot. The royal capital looked like it was bustling, based on what I could see of it from the small window. Fina was staring outside too, with her little mouth hanging open. Seeing that look on her face made me glad I brought her along.

“People have gathered from all over because of the king’s birthday celebration.”

“The capital has a lot of residents to begin with, but you’ll see more and more gathering as time goes on,” Marina told us from her seat at the reins.

Little by little, the carriage made its way to more deserted roads. The buildings around us changed, and mansions that looked like elegant estates became more frequent.

“Yuna, I can see it now. That’s where my mother’s house is.”

It was about the same size as the Lord of Crimonia’s house. I wondered who Noa’s mother was? She wasn’t with her family, and they said that she was working at the castle. I tried asking Noa, but apparently, she didn’t know anything other than where her mom worked.

The carriage stopped in front of the estate.

“Well then, Noir,” said Gran, “if you have time while you are in the royal capital, please come pay Misa a visit.”

“Will you not meet with my mother?”

“She likely isn’t home around this time. I will come greet her in the future, once I receive a full report from the guards.”

“Dear Noa, Fina, dear Yuna, please come by to see me.”

“Yeah, we will.”

“If possible,” said Misa, “I would like to play with Kumayuru and Kumakyu.”

“Sure. Include them in your playtime.”

“I will!”

We thanked Marina and the others, then got out of the carriage.

“You really helped us out. At first I thought you were just a weird looking girl.” Marina laughed, but it wasn’t mocking. “Let me know if you ever need a hand. If there’s anything we can do to help, we will.”

She grasped the reins and spurred the horses on. The carriage slowly came alive and pulled away.

CHAPTER 56

THE BEAR GETS IN A FIGHT WITH NOA'S OLDER SISTER

“WELL, YUNA, FINA, let’s head inside,” Noa said, leading us through the front doors.

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We heard the sound of running footsteps coming from somewhere.

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The footsteps were approaching us steadily from behind. Right as I turned around to face them, a blonde girl charged toward us.

“Nooo-aaaah!”

“Mother!”

“Noa, I’ve missed you!” The woman pressed her cheek against Noa’s. They had the same golden hair. She was around twenty-five years old, give or take, which seemed pretty young to be Noa’s mother. When I compared their faces while they were pressed up against each other, I realized they looked pretty similar, too. *Just how old was she when she had Noa?* I wondered.

“Cliff isn’t here?” Noa’s mother looked around.

“Father is still working in town. He told me to go ahead of him to the royal capital by myself.”

“Did he now? I can’t believe he let you come here alone.”

“He let me because Yuna escorted me.”

“Yuna? You don’t mean that girl in the amusing clothes?”

'Strange', I heard plenty, but no one called me 'amusing' before. Same difference, I guess.

"This person who's dressed as a bear is the adventurer Yuna. She escorted me all the way to the capital. And this is Fina. She's a bear friend."

Wait what? A *bear* friend? Since when had that happened?

Anyway. Putting that aside, I greeted Noa's mother. "Yuna. Pleased to meet you."

"I'm Fina. Yuna brought me along on this trip," Fina said, copying me.

"Oh my, what adorable children. I'm Noa's mother Ellelaura. Let's move inside so you can give me the details."

"But Mother, how did you know I was coming to the royal capital?"

"Oh, I told the gate guard to send me an urgent message when you and Cliff arrived. Then when word came, I dumped all my work on His Majesty and came running."

An urgent message? Did that mean they sent a messenger to the castle before we showed up? Wasn't that really quick? On top of that, she said she dumped all her work on the king—was that really okay? I guess she couldn't help it after she hadn't seen her daughter in such a long time.

Ellelaura guided us into the massive interior of the residence. Maids came to greet us. A few of them couldn't quite control their expressions when they saw me, but none of them laughed. We were guided to a spacious room.

"Please sit anywhere. I'm sure you're worn out."

There were two luxurious sofas that could seat about five people each on either side of a table. Fina hadn't left my side since earlier; it looked like she was mimicking whatever I did. When I sat down in the middle of a sofa, Fina plopped herself down to my right and Noa sat to my left. Once we were all seated, a maid brought us drinks. Because I had been thirsty, I drank it gratefully. It was cool and delicious. Fina grabbed her cup and drained it, too.

After I quenched my thirst, I looked over toward Ellelaura again. "Lord Cliff requested that I keep these safe, ma'am."

I pulled the letter and the box with the goblin king's sword from the bear storage.

"Oh, so that bear on your hand is a bottomless bag," Ellelaura remarked as she opened the letter and checked its contents. She nodded several times and looked over at me. Once she finished reading the letter, she closed it gently.

"So this is the goblin king's sword. He's found quite the rare item. And it seems you even let him have it."

"Oh, it was no issue at all, ma'am."

"Oh, stop being so formal."

"Are you sure?"

"It's fine. It was in the letter."

Now I wanted to know how Cliff described me in the letter...

"It's best if you don't worry about how she talks. It's best if you don't ask about her clothing. Also, she's stronger than she looks. She gets in trouble easily because of her clothes, so please back her up if necessary... there's a lot of other things written here too," Ellelaura read.

Yup, he made me sound like a ridiculous nuisance. Even worse, it was all true, so I couldn't even take issue with him for it.

"It also says that you're kind, and that you're an adventurer Noa's taken a liking to. It seems that Cliff has a lot of faith in you."

"Does he really?" He had entrusted me with Noa's safety, but it was embarrassing to hear someone say it out loud. I couldn't believe he placed that much faith in a girl who walked around wearing pajamas.

"That he tasked you with singlehandedly escorting our daughter speaks volumes. I was dubious that you could keep Noa safe alone, at first, but you've singlehandedly slain a hundred goblins, a goblin king, orcs, tigerwolves, and a black viper. I almost thought the contents of this letter were a joke."

"Yes, Yuna is amazing. When we were coming to the royal capital, she defeated orcs

and caught a bunch of bandits by herself!" Noa declared.

Elleaura looked shocked. "Is that really true?"

"Yes, Lord Gran was there as well. He can tell you what he saw."

Noa merrily talked about what happened on our way to the capital. She must have been eager to see her mother after so long.

"Well, look at the time. Shia should be home soon."

"Shia?" Yet another name to keep track of.

"Yes," said Noa, "she's my older sister. She goes to the royal academy right now."

"Noa, you have an older sister?"

"Yeah. She's five years older than me, though, so we're not super close."

She was fifteen? I looked at Elleaura again. Just how old was she when she had this kid? If I assumed she was twenty-eight, she'd have been thirteen... That wouldn't fly in Japan, but maybe it wasn't out of the question here?

"Yuna, are you letting strange thoughts run through your head?"

She read me like a book. I wondered if she was good at seeing through people, or if my face was just that transparent. I decided to come clean.

"You look so young, so I was wondering how old you were when you had your kids."

"Oh, how young do you think I look?" Elleaura blushed. Looks like women were always happy to be called young, no matter the world. Though I'd get angry whenever people guessed I was younger than I really am.

"At first I thought you were about twenty-five, but when I heard you have a fifteen-year-old daughter, I started wondering."

"Oh my, what a joy to hear you say that. Normally I wouldn't tell others how old I am, but I'll make a special exception for you. I'm thirty-five this year."

“My mother is famous for her beauty.”

“Oh, in that case, don’t you think my little girl will grow up to be a beauty too?”

“I hope so! That would make me so happy!” Noa seemed pleased.

There was a sudden commotion on the other side of the door, which opened to admit a girl in pigtails who was the spitting image of an older Noa.

“I’m back, Mother! Is Noa really here?”

I figured this was Shia. She was wearing school clothes. *I guess they have uniforms in this world, too.*



“Shia, you have guests before you.”

“Please excuse my rudeness. Wait, you mean that bear?!”

“Yes, that’s right. You’re being rude to the bear.”

Ellelaura, I thought, you’re also being rude.

“Mother, please don’t joke around.”

“Ha ha, this is no joke. This girl dressed as a bear is Yuna, the adventurer who escorted Noa to the royal capital. The girl next to her is her friend, Fina,” Ellelaura said.

“You’re saying these three girls came all the way to the capital on their own? You must be joking. These little girls came here all the way from Crimonia?”

I wondered if I was supposed to be one of “these little girls”? I supposed I *was* shorter than her.

“Hey you, could you stand up for me?”

I stood up like I was told.

“You must be joking. This cute little girl couldn’t be an adventurer.”

Cute little girl? I thought. *Excuse me, I’m fifteen, just like you are.* I was shorter than Shia, and my chest was flatter, but I was still growing, so that didn’t count.

“Sister, Yuna is strong. She’s amazing herself, but her bears are the most amazing of all.”

“Her bears?” Shia tilted her head dubiously.

“Ah yes,” said Ellelaura. “How about you have a match? If we do that, I’m sure Shia will understand.”

“Hold up—” Could they not make decisions on my behalf?

“Yuna, would you please take my daughter on as an opponent? Oh, and please don’t hold back. No major injuries, though, since she is a girl.”

“All right,” said Shia. “I accept the match.”

I don’t! This was a pain in the neck, and getting worse by the minute.

The situation just kept progressing from there, with or without my say-so. Before I knew it, the match was on and we were out in the courtyard.

“She’s gotten a big head thanks to being the strongest at her school,” said Elleaura, “so make sure you knock her down a few pegs.”

Uhh. I didn’t really know what to do. Even if I wasn’t supposed to hold back, this was still a member of the nobility we were talking. Plus, I was sure hurting her would make Noa sad.

“Mother! I don’t have a big head.”

“Oh, you don’t? Weren’t you saying there isn’t a single girl stronger than you at school?”

“I did, but that doesn’t mean I have a big head!”

“Ha ha, I’m joking.”

“Umm, your name was Yuna, right?” Shia scowled at me.

“Yeah.”

“Are you better with a sword or magic, Yuna? Please choose whichever you like.”

“A sword, then.”

A maid brought over wooden swords for us to choose from.

“Well then, whenever you’re ready,” Shia said, readying her sword. Sword-wielding girls sure did look pretty cool, especially when they held their weapons with such evident skill. Her long, golden hair just added to the effect.

“You’re sure it’s cool to go whenever?”

“It’s fine.”

"Well then, I'll take your word for it. Here I go."

I used my bear step to make my way right to Shia's chest in an instant, bringing my sword up to knock Shia's out of her grip. As her sword fluttered through the air, I stopped the tip of mine right in front of her face.

"Is that enough for you?" I lowered my sword and withdrew.

"H-hey, wait a minute."

"What?"

"Let's do this one more time, please," she asked, her eyes locked with mine in a serious expression. She wasn't just being a poor loser—it looked like she actually did want to try again. "Please."

"I'll fight with you until you're satisfied."

I prepped my sword and waited for Shia's move. When she made the first lunge, I nimbly dodged and knocked her sword down. She held her arm as though it'd gone numb. Despite that, she immediately retrieved her sword, readied, and attacked.

She swung her sword slowly and without much force. I didn't know any girls her age, so I couldn't tell if she was strong or weak for her level of training. I swept her blow away and brought my sword to a stop at the back of her neck. Shia had no strategy when she fought. It didn't look like she was thinking about how her opponent would defend against her, how they'd attack, or anything at all.

I flicked away Shia's wooden sword and pointed my sword at her defenseless body. "No matter how many times we do this, it's going to be the same."

"Pardon me, but may I use magic?"

"I'll allow it."

"Thank you very much." Shia switched her sword to her left hand and gathered mana that coalesced into a flame in her right hand. "Fireball!"

The fireball flew at me. I dipped out of its path. Shia was waiting there with her sword raised overhead. She was still as slow as ever, though. I parried the blow handily.

Shia jumped back, took some distance, and then threw another fireball. What were they teaching her at the academy? There was no point in knowing both magic and swordplay if you didn't use them together. Even beginner gamers a few months in knew how to fight better. Maybe it was a matter of experience? I'd done my share of PvP matches in the game world. Most were with chumps picking hopeless fights, but there'd been a few times I only won by the skin of my teeth. Even if I lost, I still would have learned something.

You couldn't get that type of experience in this world. If you lost, you'd die.

I sidestepped the fireball and closed the distance between me and Shia, then hit her in the stomach with a weak bear punch.

"Guh..." Shia bent over and sunk to her knees. Maybe that was a little too strong?

"That's enough," Elleaura said, ending the match.

"I-I can still..."

"You must know she was going easy on you."

"B-but..."

"It's over."

"...Okay," Shia answered meekly, looking at me as she stood up. "Your name was Yuna, wasn't it? You were really strong. Despite appearances, I'm actually one of the more powerful ones at the academy. I never thought I'd lose to someone younger than me."

"I'm fifteen."

"What?"

"Like I said, I'm fifteen. I'm the same age as you."

"No way, I thought you were younger than me."

Sure, I was smaller than average, but I wasn't that small... I think.

"Well then, how about we throw a party to celebrate Noa's arrival at the capital, and

to welcome Yuna and Fina?"

With the match concluded, we sat down together for a tasty meal, though I felt like something was missing. This world didn't have anywhere near as many seasonings as Japan. They had sugar, salt, and basic spices, but I yearned for soy sauce and miso.

Meanwhile, Fina was acting strange. She was eating with small bites, but she wasn't saying much. Even when someone did talk to her, she didn't seem to want to reply much. Maybe the food disagreed with her?

"Mother, do you think the teachers and everyone at the academy were going easy on me?"

"Hmm, I'm not sure about that. Yuna is an outlier. In terms of adventurers, I'm sure her level would be at least around Rank C."

"Rank C... Mother, that's impossible."

"She defeated a horde of a hundred goblins. She slayed a goblin king. She slayed orcs. She slayed a pair of tigerwolves. She slayed a black viper—and, of course, she did all of that by herself."

Where were the privacy protection laws in this place?! I wished people would stop gossiping about my exploits.

"So you shouldn't beat yourself up about it," Elleaura went on. "I just wanted you to know that there are kids the same age as you that are stronger."

"Yes. She was very strong. Yuna, I'm sorry about earlier," Shia said. Maybe she wasn't such a bad kid after all. "But you can use magic too, right, Yuna?"

"Pretty much."

"And is your magic as strong?"

"On top of that, Yuna has her bears. They're even more amazing," Noa said, proudly inserting herself into the conversation.

“Like I said before, what are these bears supposed to be?”

“They’re Yuna’s summons. They’re super cute.”

“Summons... um, would you let me see those bear summons later?”

“Sure,” I promised Shia.

Once we were done eating, we were led to the rooms we’d be sleeping in that night. Just as Fina asked, we shared the same room.

CHAPTER 57

THE BEAR GOES TO THE TRADE GUILD

ONCE WE WERE ALONE together, Fina let out a huge sigh and sat down on a bed.

“Yuna, today was exhausting.”

“Are you all right?”

“I’m okay, but is it really okay for me to stay the night in an aristocrat’s house?”

“I thought you were being quiet. Is that what was on your mind?”

“If I blurted out something weird or did something rude, it could be bad for my family.”

“Well, we’re done escorting Noa, so should we look for an inn or something? That would make you more comfortable, right?”

“But that would cost money...”

“I was the one that invited you to the capital. Don’t worry about the money.”

“But...”

“No ‘but’s. Anyway, we’ll look for an inn tomorrow, so don’t feel like you’ve got to be so tense.”

“Yes, Yuna. Thank you.”

We climbed into our respective beds and quickly fell asleep to rid ourselves of the day’s fatigue. The next morning, Fina was sitting on her bed with her legs splayed out on either side of her, looking bored.

“Morning.”

“Good morning.”

“You’re already up?”

“Yes, I woke up like usual, but I don’t have anything to do.”

Fina woke early in the morning to do chores since her mother Tiermina got sick. When the housework was finished, she would work at the adventurers’ guild. Being an early bird was probably a habit by now.

“In that case, should we change and go to the dining room?”

“Don’t you think it’s still too early?”

“If we’re early, we can just eat out. That way we can look for an inn right after.”

“Are we really going to look for an inn?”

“I’m not doing this for you. I don’t feel at home here, either.”

I changed from my white bear outfit to my black one and took Fina to the dining room. There was no one there. Maybe we really were too early for breakfast? For the time being, instead, I searched for someone to let know that we were leaving. When we left the dining room and went into the hall, we found the maid we saw yesterday.

“Oh, what a surprise to find you here, Ms. Yuna and Ms. Fina. You’re up early.”

“Morning. We wanted to get something to eat, if that would be okay. If not, I was thinking we could go out for something.”

“No, it’s fine. Please wait in the dining hall for now.”

While we waited in the dining room, Elleaura came in.

“Oh, you’re early.”

“Good morning.”

“Morning. Here for breakfast already?”

“Yes.”

“So, what do you have planned for today?”

Since she asked, I answered honestly, “We were thinking of going to go look for an inn.”

“An inn? Why’s that? You can stay here until after the king’s birthday celebration.”

“A commoner like myself just can’t feel at home at such a large estate,” I explained, acting as a proxy for Fina.

“Still, I’m not sure you’ll be able to find an inn with empty rooms. There are a lot more people in town than usual because of the celebration.”

Hmm. She might be right. In that case, though it was a little earlier than I planned, maybe it’d make sense to find a place to set up the bear house. If I had a bear house, I could set up a transport gate and not have to worry about inns anymore, either.

“We’ll still at least take a look.”

“Just know you can stay here as long as you like.”

We finished breakfast, and Fina and I headed out. Noa was still asleep, and Shia had gone off to the academy, in her uniform. Maybe Noa was sleeping in for the first time in a while after all those days breaking camp at sunrise.

We walked around the royal capital and went around to several inns. The people of Crimonia had gotten somewhat used to me, but now that we were in a new place, my bear outfit drew looks everywhere we went. When we passed by people, their eyes would turn in my direction. Then, without fail I’d hear them say something.

“A bear.”

“A bear?”

“How cute.”

“The heck is that?”

“It’s a bear.”

“Fina, sorry for drawing all this attention.”

“It’s fine. I’m used to it.”

Just like Elleaura said, all of the inns were full. At the last one, I switched to plan B and asked where I could find the trade guild.

Compared to the guild in Crimonia, the royal capital’s guild was on a whole different level. First off, there were a ton more people going in and out. Maybe they were visiting from different towns and villages? There might have even been people from other countries.

Ignoring the looks focusing on me, I went to find the reception desk. Apparently, you were supposed to take a numbered ticket, and then go to the reception desk when your number was called. I queued up in the ticket distribution line and got a numbered ticket.

The ticket I got was 195. Right now, they were calling 178. It looked like there was still some time until my number would be called, but there were ten reception desks. *Maybe it won’t take that long?*

After waiting for a short while, my number was called.

“Welcome. What business do you have with us today?” The receptionist’s smile started to slip for a moment when she saw my appearance, but it immediately snapped back. As would be expected of a receptionist in the royal capital.

“I’m looking for a plot of land inside the capital. Can I buy one?”

“Could you show me your resident card or a guild card, if you have one?”

I handed over my guild card.

“Please wait a moment.” She placed the guild card on the crystal panel. “You are Ms. Yuna?”

“Yes.”

“By the way, how are you planning on using the plot of land?”

“I’m planning to build a house.”

“In other words, you are going to live in the royal capital?”

“Still undecided. My main residence is in Crimonia, so I thought I would use the one here as a secondary location.”

“Understood. Well then, let me explain how the land works. First, the area near the castle is the upper-class sector that makes up the aristocrat quarter, so I can’t sell you anything there. Next, you’re not eligible to buy anything from the middle district yet. So that means at present, I can sell you something in the lower district.”

“What do I have to do to get something in the middle district?”

“You can buy land there if you have a letter of introduction from someone.”

So, proof of social status? I remembered the letter that Milaine, who helped me at the trade guild in Crimonia, had given me.

“Will this work as a letter of introduction?”

“Let me check.” The receptionist unfolded the letter from Milaine to verify it. “This is... ah.”

“And?”

“Please forgive me. I’m not sure I can decide this alone. Please wait a moment.”

The receptionist left her seat and disappeared into the back of the guild.

“Yuna, you’re going to build a house?” Fina asked.

“I was thinking it would come in handy in the future.”

If I built a house, I could set up a bear transport gate. Thinking about it from a transportation perspective, that would be super handy.

“Oh, why isn’t that Miss Yuna and Miss Fina?”

We spun around to find Gran and Elleaura.

"Gran? And Ellelaura? Why are the two of you doing here?"

"That's what we should be saying. And why are you at the trade guild of all places, Yuna? Didn't you say that you were going out looking for an inn?"

I told her that finding an inn had been impossible, just like she had said. "So I was thinking of buying a plot of land to build a house, but apparently I can't do that without a letter of introduction. Anyway, I gave them a letter of introduction I got from the trade guild in Crimonia, but I guess we're waiting for them to inspect it."

"You were going to build a house because you couldn't find an inn..."

"I don't even know what to say."

"But do you have enough money?"

"I think I'll probably be okay. If I can't afford it, I'll ditch the idea."

"In that case, shall I give you a letter of introduction?" Gran said.

"I can also write one for you," Ellelaura said.

"That would be a big help, but are you sure?"

"You saved my life, after all."

"Yes, since you've been helping out Cliff and my daughter."

I was thankful for that. If I had two endorsements from nobles, it was way more likely I'd be allowed to buy something.

"So, why are the two of you here?"

"I'm here for work."

"I am here for something similar as well."

While I was talking with Gran and Ellelaura, the receptionist returned.

"I apologize for the delay. As for the plot of land, you may purchase something from

the lower-class area of the middle-class district."

Looked like I could get something in the middle district without a problem. Maybe I didn't need the two's recommendations.

"Where is that?"

The receptionist spread out a map of the royal capital to show me. There was the entry gate to the capital; there was the castle. It was a little far away from Noa's residence, so it'd kind of be a pain to go back and forth.

"Oh, that's in the outskirts."

"Indeed it is."

The two members of my personal peanut gallery were peeking at the map from behind me.

"Miss, you over there, lend me some paper, will you? I will write her a letter of introduction."

"Please give me some paper, too." It seemed like the location didn't sit too well with my aristocratic friends.

"Umm, who might you be?"

"Gran Fahrengram."

"Elleaura Fochrosé."

"You are Count Fahrengram and the wife of Count Fochrosé?" The receptionist gasped in surprise and went visibly pale.

"That's right. If the lass needs a letter of introduction, I will write one, so please find her a better plot."

"Y-yes, sir. I'll get one ready right away."

The receptionist hurriedly stood up from her seat and ran off again. Moments later, an older woman emerged in her place.

"What is it now? When I heard Count Fahrengram himself was here, I thought it was the younger one—and here I find the geezer, instead."

"Watch your mouth, you crone."

"And here we have Fochrosé's little girl."

"I'm a bit too old to be called a little girl."

"Do the two of you intend to become this strangely dressed girl's guarantors?"

There it was again—another person calling me 'strange.'

"I owe this young lady my life."

"She also helped my husband and my daughter."

"Hm, did she now? Well, all right. If you are her guarantors, then we will prepare a plot of land befitting that. Well then, lass, I'm supposing you've got money at least?"

Well, it wasn't like there'd be any point to finding me a plot of land if I didn't have the money to buy it. "I'm not sure how much it'd cost, but I've got money from slaying a black viper."

"Pish, you must be something if you're willing to take a joke that far."

I wasn't joking... not that there was any point explaining.

"Anyway, do you have requests?"

"I'd prefer somewhere that's safe without too much traffic, if possible. If I have the luxury of choice, I'd like somewhere close to the adventurers' guild and close to Ellelaura's house."

"Well aren't you a greedy child. Well, fine. In that case, this would be the place." The granny pointed out a place on the map. "It's close to the upper district. Only the people who live here pass by, so there isn't much pedestrian traffic. The guards also do their patrols here, so it's very safe as well."

"It's close to my house, too," said Ellelaura.

"If you travel down this main road, it's close to the adventurers' guild too," said Gran.
"This looks good, don't you think, young lady?"

They gave me their explanations while pointing at the map.

"Taking your connections into account, this would be the cost."

I looked at the amount that was presented to me. It was cheaper than I expected. Was that because of Ellelaura and Gran?

"Don't you think that's expensive? There's no building there, right?"

"Don't be foolish. For a plot of land in a good location in the royal capital, this is cheap," said the old woman. "Can you pay this amount, young lady?"

"I can, but I'll happily bargain it down if I can."

"Can you really afford this, lass? This isn't a child's pocket money we're talking here. Even nobles might balk at producing this sum."

"It's not as though she has to pay it as a lump sum," Ellelaura said, trying to come to my aid.

"If this lass were the daughter of an aristocrat or a prominent merchant, it would be fine. If that's not the case, then I can't approve of anything other than a lump sum. On the other hand, if you can pay all at once, I'll consider a discount."

"In that case, I'll buy it, so please do."

The old woman laughed. "Are you serious? Well, if you have the money then that's no problem for me."

"Should I pull it out here?" It was a fair bit of money. This desk was probably too small.
"Sure, that's fine by me."

If that was her reply, then all I could do was pay up. I started pulling money out of my bear storage.

"W-wait a minute."

I ignored her and kept pulling out gold coins. The gold coins started forming a mountain on top of the counter.

“I said stop. Don’t put the money on this narrow counter.”

Take it out, don’t take it out—make up your mind, I thought.

“You’ll startle the people around us. You win. We can’t do large transactions here. Let’s go to another room.”

I put away the money, and the old crone guided us to another room.

“I’ll make good on my earlier promise. I said I could give you a bit of a discount. Of course, this is the most I can do.”

I pulled out the gold coins for the new amount she presented to me.

“But anyway, who are you? Are you the child of a notorious merchant, or something? No, if that were the case, I’d know about you through my information network. Are you some noble’s bastard?”

“I’m just an adventurer.”

“Heh, so you won’t tell me? Well, I’m sure I can find out on my own. If you have guarantors and money, this is a straightforward transaction. Here, that’s the contract. Now the plot is yours.”

“Thank you.”

“I don’t need your thanks. If you’re building a house, you can consult me for advice.”

“No need. This isn’t my first rodeo.”

“Is that so? Well then, we’re all done here.”

The granny shooed us from the room like we were nuisances. Now, I just needed to build a house. Once I did that and then set up a bear transport gate, I’d be able to come to the royal capital any time.

Plus, I’d be able to ease Fina’s tension—two birds with one stone.

CHAPTER 58

THE BEAR BUILDS A HOUSE IN THE ROYAL CAPITAL

GRAN ENDED UP DECIDING to take us in his carriage to the plot of land I purchased, and Ellelaura came along to see it. Since I didn't know the royal capital all that well, this was helpful.

"I'm glad you're here, but are you sure you two shouldn't be at work?"

"Oh, I already finished that, so don't you worry about it."

"Yes, my work is fine too. I met with Lord Gran right as I finished up, and we were just talking."

We found several guards posted next to his carriage.

"Hmm, is something the matter now?"

"Lord Gran, it's you. So you were with Ms. Yuna—and also Lady Ellelaura?!" One of the guards seemed surprised by Ellelaura's presence.

"Oh, Ranzel?" said Ellelaura. "What are you doing here?"

"I was going to report on the bandit incident from yesterday to Lord Gran, so I was on my way to pay a visit to his estate. I caught sight of Lord Gran's carriage and decided to wait here."

Oh! Now I remembered. The guy with the red hair was the head of the guards Gran was talking to when we handed over the bandits. He'd definitely been the highest-ranking person back then.

"The bandit incident, ah. Those were the bandits Yuna captured, correct?"

"So what's this about a report?"

"I would like both you and Ms. Yuna to come to the guard station with me, Lord Gran, if you would be so kind."

"I would not mind, but..." Gran looked at me. It wasn't like Fina would get ulcers if we delayed moving house by a day.

"I'm fine with that too. How about you, Fina?"

"Yes."

"Elleaura, I apologize, but it seems that we are going to the guard station," Gran said.

"It's fine. I'll go with you. Yuna is Cliff's guest, so I'll be her chaperone while she's here in the royal capital."

I wasn't sure when she appointed herself my chaperone, but having an influential person come with me could be useful. When we got to the guard station, we were led into a room.

"So, what did you need us for?"

"First, we have determined the secret base of the Zamon bandits, as well as their total number. It seems they are in a cave in the mountains to the west of here. There are about thirty more of them left. It seems they also still have several women held captive there as well."

"Well then, we must rescue them at once."

"Yes, but there is a slight problem."

"Problem?"

"Yes. A great many people are currently gathering in the royal capital for the king's birthday celebration, and as a result, the soldiers, knights, and guards of the capital are all tasked with security. We have no one to spare."

"Then why not send a request to the adventurers' guild?"

"I agree, Lord Gran, but we would need Yuna's permission."

Everyone looked over at me.

“Mine?”

“Ah, because she has a private claim to the bandits’ treasure?” Gran said, as though he just remembered something.

Explain it so I know what’s going on too, please, I thought.

“Yes, that’s right. Yuna has already captured twenty-five members of the bandit clan, but we have not gained control of their hideout. There’s nothing to harvest from bandits the way we can with monsters, so instead, adventurers who aid in their capture or defeat have the rights to take any weapons, armor, or tools the bandits have. That includes the treasures the bandits have gathered.”

“In other words, if we put out a request to adventurers, the ones who accept the quest would get the bandits’ treasures?”

“We were only able to obtain this information because Ms. Yuna captured the bandits on her own. However, we can’t arbitrarily submit a request to the adventurers’ guild. If we did, we would first need to obtain Ms. Yuna’s approval and decide what recompense we would give her.”

“Seems like a pain.”

“Well, there’s no helping that. However, young lady, if you were to eliminate the bandits, this wouldn’t be a problem.”

“Seems like a pain,” I repeated.

“Yuna...” Fina seemed aghast as she looked at me. *Don’t look at me like that.*

If it was a pain, then it was a pain. We’d come all the way here to see the royal capital, so why was I getting roped into eliminating bandits?

“In that case, shall I gather some soldiers?” Ellelaura, who was silently listening to the conversation, came to my rescue.

“Lady Ellelaura?”

“Are you sure?”

“It’s fine. It’ll give the soldiers some real experience, and I’m sure some of them are sick of just working security.”

“But aren’t they defending the capital?”

“It’s fine. Don’t worry about it. I just have to shuffle around some paperwork for that.”

She said it like it was easy, but could she really do that?

“I understand. Well then, Ellelaura, we will entrust matters with you.”

“Are you okay with this, Yuna?”

“I don’t really get everything that’s going on, but sure.”

“I’m worried about the people they’ve captured, so I’ll arrange for the soldiers immediately.” Ellelaura looked over at me. “I have to go back to work. Make sure you come back home, okay?”

“I will.”

“Also, please take these, Ms. Yuna.” Filthy swords, armor, and tons of other things were lined up before me. “These were the things that the bandits you captured were holding. Just as I said earlier, these now belong to you.”

Again, they were all filthy. I didn’t really want all that trash.

“Would it be possible for you to dispose of these?” I tried asking.

“Understood.”

As I checked over the bandits’ belongings one more time, something that caught my eye: the item bags the bandits used. From what I heard, the amount that could fit inside item bags varied from bag to bag...

“Would I be able to take even the item bags?”

"Yes, you may take anything they were carrying. We checked the contents, but all of them were empty. It seems they planned to put what they stole into those."

"Which one's the biggest?"

"That would be this one. Since the head of the Zamon bandits was carrying this one, it's on the large side."

So one of them was the leader, then. Maybe that had been the loudest guy?

I took the item bag. It was about the size of a handbag. It looked about the same as all the other ones. The smallest one was about large enough to fit inside a pant pocket.

"Could I take all the item bags the bandits had?"

They handed all of the bags to me, and I gratefully put them away into bear storage. Other than that, my business was done, so I thanked Gran for accompanying me.

"Oh, it was no trouble. If you hadn't captured them, we likely would have died, after all."

I was done with everything I needed to do, but apparently there were a couple of other things they needed to talk to Gran about. I wouldn't have minded waiting, but we ended up going home ahead of him.

We left behind the guard station and headed to the plot of land I bought at the trade guild. I at least had gotten a map, so I knew where it was, but the capital was so huge, they even had carriages running through it like buses. I had no idea which one was supposed to get me where I was headed. I wasn't in a rush so I decided we'd make our way slowly to the plot I bought by walking through the capital.

"Are you okay, Fina? You're not tired?"

"Yes, I'm okay, but there are so many people."

"You're right. There are a lot—I guess that's just what we should expect from a royal capital, though it might also be because of the birthday celebration."

“Yuna, is it okay if we hold hands so we don’t get separated?”

“You want to hold hands...” I looked at my bear puppet. “Is this okay?”

I held Fina’s hand in the puppet’s mouth.

“Yes, thank you very much.” Fina seemed happy.

We got to the plot of land I bought.

“This is the right place, right?” I checked the map and my surroundings.

“Yes, I think this is right.”

“Isn’t it kind of huge?”

“It *is* large.”

The place indicated on the map was sprawling. It was about four times larger than the plot where I’d built the bear house in Crimonia. In other words, I could put four bear houses end to end here, not that I had that many to spare. When I looked at the neighboring houses, they were spaced out pretty far away. To make sure I was right, I checked the names against the map.

“Yuna, did you really buy such a large plot of land?”

“Seems like it.”

I never would have thought it’d be this big. For the time being, I pulled out the bear house that I made for the royal capital. It was big, unlike the traveling bear house, but it felt small in comparison to how vast the land was when I set it up. It just looked wrong. Well, it already looked out of place, since it was shaped like a bear.

“It’s pretty dinky.”

“Yes.”

Maybe I should make a larger bear house next time? At any rate, we went inside.

“This is the same as your house in Crimonia, isn’t it?”

“Basically. I wouldn’t feel at home if it were different.”

I wasn’t tired thanks to the bear shoes, but Fina had to be exhausted from walking around, so we took a break and I pulled out some cold fruit juice.

“What will we do after this?”

“You’re not tired, Fina?”

“I am, a little.”

“Then I guess let’s go back to Noa’s house after we rest a little.”

“Yes, but I hope Lady Noir isn’t upset.”

“Yeah, we did leave without saying anything to her, but it was her own fault for not getting up.”

After we rested in the bear house for a while, we went back to Elleaura’s house.

“Yuna! Why did you leave me behind?”

When we got back to the residence, an angry Noa was there to greet us.

“We didn’t do it just because. We waited for a while after breakfast, but you didn’t get up.”

“Hmph...”

“So, anyway, when did you get up?”

“A little before noon...” she answered, hanging her head in shame.

“And you’re blaming me?”

“You could have woken me up?” she said, pouting this time.

"If we were still traveling, I would have, but since you slept that much, your body must've needed the rest."

"Ugh, fine. So where did you two go, then?"

"We went to the trade guild to buy a plot of land."

"You bought land? Yuna, are you coming to live in the royal capital?!" her voice went up in surprise.

"I'm not living here. I'm planning on coming here now and then, so I bought it to make a house for that."

"I don't think people normally build houses when they're just traveling now and then."

Well, I needed it to set up a bear transport gate.

"Does that mean you're not staying with us anymore, Yuna?"

"I just don't really feel settled in an aristocrat's room."

I couldn't say it was actually Fina who wasn't comfortable.

"But I'll be so lonely."

"We'll come to see you, and you can come over anytime you want to my place. It's close by, so we can see each other any time."

"Does that mean you've already built the house?" Normally that would be a weird question, but Noa knew who she was dealing with.

"I built a house about the same size as the one in Crimonia."

"I guess that means Fina isn't staying here, either..."

"Yes, since I came here with Yuna."

"But I'll be all alone if both of you and Kumayuru and Kumakyu are all gone."

I could see the disappointment on Noa's face, but it wasn't like this was goodbye

forever. Plus, we all lived in Crimonia, so we could see each other any time.

"We're not leaving quite yet, so don't look so disappointed. We need to see Elleaura still."

We ended up staying in their care for just one more day.

Elleaura came home around dinner time.

"Mother, welcome back," said Noa.

"I'm home."

"What were you doing with everyone?"

"I heard what happened when they left me behind and went out. I can't believe what happened at the trade guild—and that you got called out about the bandits. I wish I could've gone too."

"All I did was listen in."

"I hate being left out."

When I told her about today, it made her contrary.

"Elleaura, thank you so much for today."

She'd done so much for me already.

"Don't worry about it. All I did was write a letter of introduction. And the Zamon bandits were causing us trouble, too."

I was still thankful.

"So, how was the location?"

"It's quiet and there isn't much foot traffic, so it's great."

I still hadn't been expecting it to be that big, though.

"Well then, that's good."

"What happened with the bandits?"

"I dispatched troops right after that, so I think they'll defeat them in a few days."

Great, I thought. Looks like they made sure to send out their crackdown squad.

We ate dinner on the Fochrosés' dime, and that night Noa ended up sleeping in the same room with us.

CHAPTER 59

THE BEAR BUILDS A FLOWERBED WITH THE MAID

BEFORE WE LEFT the estate, I asked Noa if she wanted anything.

“In that case, I want to play with the bears.”

We headed over to the residence’s garden. It was the same place where I had the match with Shia the other day. It had a wall, so I didn’t even have to worry about people looking in. Since I promised to show her my summons after the match, Shia also came with us. Since it was her day off from the academy, she was wearing her own clothes. They were pretty cute.

“And you’re certain they aren’t dangerous?”

“They’re safe. Kumayuru and Kumakyu are so very cute,” the younger sister explained to her worried older sister.

When we got to the garden, I put out my right and left bear puppets in front of me and summoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu,” Noa said, hopping up and down. Shia was shocked. Fina approached them slowly.

“Shia, the bears are really smart, so that means they won’t hurt people. It’s okay. Try petting them.”

Shia slowly approached and touched Kumayuru. Once she realized Kumayuru was docile, she tried gently petting the bear.

“It’s soft.”

“Yes,” said Noa, “isn’t the texture wonderful?”

"Their fur is beautiful, too. I've never touched anything like it before."

"Yes, it feels really nice. When we were coming from Crimonia, I even took a nap while on top of Kumayuru."

Noa hopped up on Kumayuru's back.

"You should ride too, Shia. It's so comfortable on here."

Shia seemed uneasy, but she took Noa's hand and mounted behind her. Fina got onto Kumakyu.

"They really are so docile!"

It looked like things would be all right.

While Noa and the others were playing with the bears in the garden, a maid came along with a shovel. Her name was Surilina. She was the maid that was there when I had my match with Shia, and she was the one who served us our meals.

"Lady Noa! Lady Shia!" Surilina quickly readied the shovel like she was holding a sword. "What are bears doing here?!"

"Those bears are my summons, so they're not dangerous." I leapt in to stop Surilina; she still looked ready to throw down.

"They're your summons, Lady Yuna?"

"Yeah, so please lower your shovel."

"Surilina, it's okay," Noa said, clinging to Kumayuru in hopes of proving the bears were safe.

Surilina seemed to hesitate for a bit, but then lowered the shovel.

"They're really your summons, then, Lady Yuna? You are surprising in so many ways. So, what are you all doing here?"

“We’re playing with the bears,” said Noa.

“I promised them they could. Sorry for making you nervous.”

“Not at all. I was a bit surprised, but it was fine once I realized they weren’t dangerous.”

“Yuna, is it okay if I do a lap around the estate?” Noa asked.

“Sure, but don’t do anything too attention-grabbing.”

“I won’t. Alright Fina, we’re having a match!” She pointed at Fina, who was riding Kumakyu.

“Like I said, don’t do anything too attention-grabbing. Kumayuru, Kumakyu, no running.”

“But Yuna...” Noa looked sad when I issued my no-running order.

“No means no.”

“Okay.” Noa nodded reluctantly and goaded Kumayuru and Kumakyu into a light stroll.

“So, Surilina, why are you carrying a shovel?” She hadn’t come here just to fight the bears, had she?

“The lady of the house gave me permission to plant a flowerbed, so I’ve come to do that.”

“You’re not doing that all by yourself, right?”

“I am. I was the one who asked for the flowerbed. I plan on taking my time with it.”

Still, it wasn’t like that’d make the work any easier. I didn’t know how big she wanted to make the thing, but I knew it would be difficult to do alone.

“Can I lend a hand?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I don’t have any plans to go out today, and they’re doing that.”

I looked at Noa and the others as they rode the bears in slow laps around the estate. Even though I was looking at their backs, I could tell that they were having fun. Kumayuru and Kumakyu's little tails were wagging side to side.

"Those bears are lovely."

I started digging the flowerbed with Surilina. "About how big do you want it?"

"Let's see. I was planning on planting it from here to there."

That was bigger than I thought it'd be. Was she really planning on planting that whole thing herself? I doubted she intended to do it in a day, but it was still a considerable task.

"Well then, tell me what to do. I'll do it with magic."

"You know how to use earth magic then, Lady Yuna?"

"What about you?"

"Just a bit. Not enough that I can fight like adventurers." Surilina turned her hands towards the ground, and it swelled slightly.

We made a block frame for the flowerbed, set up the drainage, and got soil ready for the flowers. Magic's really convenient. I enjoyed doing things I couldn't have done in my original world. I lost plenty of things coming here, but I also gained plenty too. Noa and the others got in the way sometimes as we plugged away at our task, but partway through, they started helping out.

"Lady Yuna, can you take care of that over there?"

Maybe it was just her personality, or maybe it was because I was good at doing the things she asked, but Surilina gave me surprisingly detailed instructions. I was kind of getting in the swing of things, and we ended up with a near picture-perfect flowerbed.

"Lady Yuna, thank you very much. I didn't think this could be done in a single day."

"So, do you have any plants?"

"Yes, I have prepared the favorite flowers of the lady of the house."

“Hopefully they bloom nicely.”

“Yes, I’ll make sure to take care of them.”

When we surveyed the garden, two bears and three girls were fast asleep in it. It looked like they tuckered themselves out after playing and lending a hand with the flowerbed. There was still mud on their faces. I pulled out a handkerchief and wiped them clean.

“Ha ha. They’re going to need baths.” Surilina was eyeing the dirty children, but she was muddy from the work, too. I wasn’t dirty at all, thanks to my bear gear.

When I went to wake the three girls, Ellelaura came into the garden. “Oh? What are all of you doing in here?”

“My lady, welcome home.”

“Oh, they look so cozy.” She seemed delighted as she looked at the three of them asleep in Kumayuru and Kumakyu’s arms. “Are those bears your summons?”

“The black one is Kumayuru. The white one is Kumakyu.”

“What cute names. Can I touch them?”

“As long as you don’t hurt them.”

Ellelaura approached Kumayuru and touched the bear.

“It feels warm and nice to the touch. I understand why they fell asleep.” She smiled as she looked at the three girls. “So, what were the two of you doing?”

“We were making a flowerbed,” Surilina showed her our work.

“Oh, the one you were talking about before. You made this in one day? It’s beautiful.”

“Yes. Yuna’s earth magic is wonderful. She made it just how I imagined it.”

“Did she now? Yuna, thank you. We always seem to be bothering you for every little thing.” She looked at the beautifully made flowerbed and the sleeping girls surrounded by the bears. “I really must pay you back for all of this, somehow.”

“It’s really okay. I had fun making it.”

“In that case, we’ll have an extravagant dinner to thank you. Surilina, please let the head chef know.” She looked over at the sleeping kids. “Well, shall we get these three up soon?”

We shook them awake as they clung to the bears.

“Mother?” Noa looked at her mother with a sleepy face.

“Rise and shine. It looks like the three of you slept well.”

We got the three kids awake and I recalled the bears, which made all three of them look sad—even Fina, for some reason. We took baths, then once we were clean, feasted on the promised dinner.

CHAPTER 60

THE BEAR OBTAINS POTATOES

I WOKE IN THE BEAR HOUSE the next morning. We went back to it last night, after dinner at Ellelaura's house.

"Yuna, are you sure?"

"It's fine."

During dinner, Fina promised to go out with Noa. They also talked about inviting Misa, so it seemed the three of them were going to go sightseeing around the royal capital.

"Here," I said, "this is your allowance. The three of you are probably going to go to a ton of places. I'll give you more than usual, so use it on whatever you'd like. And, of course, you don't have to give it back to me."

I handed some money over to Fina.

"But..." She wasn't taking the money.

"I was the one who invited you to the royal capital, so don't worry about it. You don't want to cause trouble for the other two because you don't have money, do you?"

"Okay... I'll take it, but I'll work hard to pay you back."

"Don't worry about that. You're working hard at butchering, so consider this a bonus."

"A bonus?" Fina tilted her head to the side, as though she hadn't understood what I said.

"You're always working so hard, so it's like a special payment for that. So don't worry about it. Just spend it and have fun."

"Thank you, Yuna."

Fina put the money in her bottomless bag and left the house. Now that Fina left, I decided to do my own sightseeing around the capital.

As I walked around the capital, I received the usual attention.

“A bear?”

“Is that a bear?”

“Mom, what’s that?”

“How cute.”

“Is there some kind of event happening?”

It was embarrassing, but I had no choice but to just grin and bear it. I wished the god that brought me to this fantasy world had at least given me clothes I could walk around in without sticking out like a sore thumb. There were tons of other options, like the cool gear I used in the game. Why did it all have to be bears? If I was a guy, this would be completely out of the question.

I mentally invented new ways to cuss the god out as I wandered around the royal capital.

Eventually, I got to a place that looked like a plaza. There were cloths spread over the ground with all kinds of merchandise laid out on them. Maybe there’d be some unusual things around here? The shopkeepers looked surprised whenever I stopped to browse their wares, but no one looked at me maliciously.

“This is...”

I stopped.

“Hm? What a cutely dressed girl. Welcome in,” a man in his thirties said feebly.

There were vegetables lining the shop. One, in particular, caught my eye.

“Are those spuds?”

“That’s right. Would you like to buy some, dear?”

At last! I’d finally found the humble potato.

“I’ll take all of them.”

“Pardon? Miss bear, no matter how unpopular these tubers are, it’s not as though you could buy all of them with the money you’d be carrying.” The man seemed a little ticked off.

“How much are they?”

“Right. It’d be about this much. If you can pay that, I’ll sell them all to you.” He presented the amount to me brusquely.

But I replied, “Sold!”

“Like I said...”

I pulled out a little bit more than the specified amount and handed it over to the man.

“Really?” He looked at the money I pulled out and then at me in surprise. “Are you sure about this?”

“I’ll take them.”

I could steam them or make them into a potato salad. I could turn them into potato chips or fries for an afternoon snack—there were a million different things I could do with them. Anyway, I had a hankering for salted potato chips.

“If you’re going to eat them, please be careful. If you’re unlucky, they might make you vomit or give you a nasty stomachache.”

“Right, because of the poison.” The sprouts were poisonous.

“Spuds are tasty, but not many buy them because of that.”

“Yeah, the parts that sprout or turn green are poisonous. As long as you’re careful to

avoid those, they're fine."

"Is that true?"

"What?"

"What you just said."

"Yeah, it is?" That was common knowledge back home.

"I have certainly heard they cause more stomachaches once they've started to sprout. But how do you know about that, Miss Bear?"

"Where I grew up, everybody knows that."

"Is there such a place? No one knows about that around here, so I don't sell very many."

Maybe that's why they didn't sell them in Crimonia? "Could you tell me which village you're from, sir? Next time I'll go there to buy them from you."

"I would dearly appreciate that, but it's quite far away."

I pulled out a piece of paper and had him draw a map. This was the royal capital, and maybe this was Crimonia?

"Looks like it's close to Crimonia."

"Miss Bear, you know of Crimonia?"

"Yeah, I live there."

"You do? Well if you'll really buy them from me, I can bring them to Crimonia for you."

"Are you sure?" That would be a big help. I wanted to let the orphans try them.

"Yes! I wasn't selling many in the royal capital, but Crimonia is close to where my village is, and it would save me some trouble."

"Yeah, I'll buy them. In that case, next time you get to Crimonia, could you take them to the orphanage? I'll let them know in advance."

“To the orphanage?”

“There’s someone I know there. Also, here’s the advance payment.” I handed over the same amount as I had before.

“Are you sure? What if I don’t show up?”

“If that happens, I’ll head over to your village to collect them.”

“I was joking. I’ll make sure to bring them. My name’s Zamoru.”

“I’m Yuna.”

“Well then, what will you do with these? If you’re taking them somewhere, I can help.”

“That’s fine. I’ll put them away.”

I started loading the huge pile of potatoes into my bear storage. I was looking forward to the snacks they were sure to become.

“You’re something, Miss Bear.” The man watched in wonder as I put the potatoes away.
“Well then, when should I deliver more to Crimonia?”

“I’ll be here until the birthday celebration is over, and even if I head home right after that, that’d still be three weeks, so in about a month would be good.”

“Got it. I’ll definitely be there.”

I left the man and browsed the other stalls. I bought and ate some delicious looking meat skewers and anything that seemed unusual, and bought any ingredients that caught my fancy in bulk if it passed a taste test. It wasn’t like I scoped out every single item being sold in the place, but I definitely didn’t see any soy sauce, miso, or rice. I wanted sushi with soy sauce—even octopus or squid would do, ideally grilled—but I decided that acquiring potatoes was enough for today. Maybe I’d make potato chips and fries when I got home. Though it was a little early, I decided to head back.

When I made it back to the bear house, Fina still hadn’t returned. *Well then, I thought, guess I’ll whip up some chips for myself.*

I headed to the kitchen, took out some potatoes, thinly sliced them, and fried them in oil. They made great popping sounds as they fried up nice and crisp. I put them on a plate and sprinkled salt over them. With that, my dearly missed salted potato chips were done.

I was a little disappointed I couldn't make other flavors, but I popped a single chip in my mouth.

"Delicious."

Ah, I missed the flavor of chips. Since I was getting thirsty, I got myself something to drink. Fina came home while I was munching on the rest of the chips.

"Welcome home," I greeted. *Crunch crunch.* Fina looked a little haggard. "Did you have fun?"

"Yes, it was fun."

Then why'd she look so worn out? Did they go to so many places that it tired her out?

"Yuna, I'm giving this back." Fina pulled out the bag of money I'd given her. She told me that Noa apparently paid for everything, so she hadn't needed to use any. I should thank Noa next time I saw her.

"You might need it later, so just hold onto it," I said. *Crunch crunch.*

"What are you eating, Yuna?"

Crunch crunch.

"Potato chips."

"Poe-tay-toh chips?" Fina tilted her head to the side.

"Want to try some?"

"Yes, thank you."

I held the plate out to Fina.

Crunch crunch..."They're delicious."

"I'm glad you like them."

Fina ate another one.

"Eat as many as you like. There are a lot more."

"Thank you very much. Were they selling these?"

"They were selling spuds, so I bought some and turned them into chips." When she heard me say that, Fina pulled back her hand as though surprised. "Fina, do you know what spuds are?"

"I don't know much about them, but I heard a long time ago that you had to be careful when you ate them."

"You have to be careful about not eating the sprouts and the parts that are green, but otherwise, they're fine."

"Are they really?"

"If you eat the sprouted bits, you'll give yourself a stomachache. Worse, if you're unlucky. So you've got to be careful," I explained to her as she looked at me with reverence.

Munch munch. Crunch crunch. Ah, that hit the spot. I was really craving some consommé-flavored chips now, but of course, I couldn't magic those up out of nowhere. Fina watched me eat, then reached out her hand and took a few more chips.

"They're easy to make, so they're good as a snack."

With the two of us working at it, the plate rapidly emptied. I showed Fina how to make potato chips, then made fries for dinner. Unsurprisingly, those were a hit, too.

CHAPTER 61

THE BEAR GOES TO THE ROYAL CAPITAL'S ADVENTURERS' GUILD

SINCE I NEEDED TO REPORT the completion of my quest escorting Noa, I decided to go to the adventurers' guild the next day. I told Fina to go off with Noa again, just in case there was any of the usual trouble with the adventurers because of how I looked. If anything happened to Fina, I could never explain it to Tiermina.

I let the inquisitive gazes of the populace shower me as I headed over to the adventurers' guild alone. It was right where the trade guild said it'd be, straight down the large street that was close to the new bear house. The capital's guildhouse was bigger than the one in Crimonia. A bigger guild meant more adventurers, and more adventurers meant more punks. Even on the way in, I noticed some tough customers coming in right with me. I felt like a kitten heading into a pen of wild beasts. I was right to leave Fina behind.

Please, no "Well you're a wild bear, aren't you?" jokes. Thank you.

I pulled my bear hood down low and went inside, not locking eyes with anyone. The moment I went inside, the whispers started.

"Did a cute bear just walk in here?"

"You're right, there is a bear."

"That's a bear, alright."

"What a cute outfit."

"Bear attack. Somebody slay it. Bwa ha ha ha."

"Oh c'mon. You can't say stuff like that, even as a joke. You'll scare the lass."

"Then how about I slay her?"

"If you get close to her, that bear'll run away."

Clatter.

I heard the sound of a chair toppling over in the back.

"The bloody bear..." a man at the back murmured. "You shouldn't lay a hand on that bear."

"What's with you? What're you shaking for?"

"Don't get involved with that one."

"What's up with that guy?"

"Who cares, somebody go talk to her."

"In that case, I'll go warn her off."

A nearly two-meter-tall giant approached me. He grinned.

"Hey, bear girl. What did you come here for in that cute outfit? This isn't the type of place girls like you should be."

"I just came to report my quest completion."

"You're reporting on a quest? Are you an adventurer?"

"Well, yeah."

Laughs slipped out from all around me.

"Wait a minute. Since when could children become adventurers around here?"

I knew this routine. Guys like this were everywhere; I ignored him. When I went to pass him, the man stretched out a hand toward my bear hood. I caught hold of his hand with a bear puppet and flung him right out the front door. The adventurers stared in confusion and amazement.

"What just happened?"

“Didn’t she just throw him with one hand?”

“Must’ve been your imagination.”

They continued clamoring as the guy I threw out came back in.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he demanded, coming up to me while rubbing his head. Then, as he reached out a hand in order to grab me again, I grabbed his arm and tossed him back out the door a second time. That had to be self-defense, right? The guild went silent.

“What did you just do?”

“He came to attack me, so I just tossed him.”

Three men surrounded me.

“You guys are kinda in my way.”

“Did you think we’d just let you get away with doing that to our buddy, bear girl?”

“He was the one who attacked me out of nowhere.”

“Don’t you screw with us!”

The men were coming to attack me, so I grabbed their arms the same way I had with the other guy a moment ago, and took out the trash. At this point, the rest of the guild really went quiet. I stepped outside, where the men I’d thrown over the threshold were trying to stand up.

“You little...”

Was this farce going to play out every time I hit up a new guild? I really was glad I hadn’t brought Fina along. Once the men stood up, they scowled at me. They weren’t pulling out weapons, so I guessed that was a good thing, at least.

Since the men were closing in on me, I invoked a wind spell that blew up like a geyser out from under them. They soared into the sky in an instant. It took them higher than I was expecting; from the ground, they looked as big as grains of rice. Those little grains gradually grew louder as they grew bigger.

“Gyaaaaah!”

“Somebody heeeelp!”

“We’re gonna diiiiiiie!”

“...”

Right before they landed, I made a cushion of wind. The men were caught in the cushion, and in the next instant, I flung them into the air for a second time. I repeated this several times, and once they stopped screaming, I let them back down onto the ground.

“Don’t attack me again, okay?” I told the men, but they weren’t listening. It looked like they fainted. Well, at least that meant they wouldn’t be messing with me anymore.

I left them behind and went back inside. The other adventurers were watching me from the entrance. Among them was a woman who was walking over to me.

“Well well, just when I’d come out thinking I heard a commotion, I find an adorable bear.” The woman smiled at the sight of me and the collapsed adventurers. An elf? Her hair was long and light green, and I could see long ears peeking out through the strands. She was beautiful and fair-skinned. “That’s some impressive magic you’re using.”

“They were the ones that attacked. I was just defending myself. I’m sure those adventurers watching from over there can attest to that.”

“Can they?” The elf turned around and looked at the first row of adventurers. They nodded, though vaguely. “I do think you overdid it a bit.”

I thought so, too, but people like that just wouldn’t listen unless you drove the point home yourself.

“Well, I guess they learned a lesson. Make sure none of the rest of you cause trouble either, okay?” the elven woman warned the onlooking adventurers.

Who was she? The adventurers’ reactions gave me the feeling that she wasn’t just another one of them. She was sizing me up in a way I wasn’t used to.

“I see. You’re that bear there’s been rumors about.”

“Um, who are you?”

“I’m Sanya, the master of the adventurers’ guild here in the royal capital.” All of a sudden I understood why everybody here hung on her every word. “I heard about you from Gran—a girl in a bear outfit that defeated a troupe of bandits singlehandedly. I thought Gran was exaggerating, but it looks like it was true.”

Sanya looked at the dazed adventurers. One of them regained consciousness, but it didn’t look like he intended to fight me again—not that he could with the guild master around, anyway. If he did come back for more, I’d just send him on a stroll through the sky again.

“That’s why I told you not to mess with the bear,” an adventurer at the back murmured.

“You knew about that bear?”

“Yeah, I know how terrifying and powerful it is. That’s why I told you to stop.”

I must not have been the only adventurer visiting from Crimonia. With the way he was cowering, he might’ve been one I’d beaten.

“Well, what are you here for today?”

“I came to give a quest report,” I said.

Sanya took me to a reception desk and sat down with me.

“Well then, could I have your quest completion document and your guild card?” I handed over my guild card and the quest completion document with Elleaura’s signature. “An escort quest for the Fochrosé family, was it? Here, this is the quest fee, and this is the fee for escorting Gran.”

“For escorting Gran?”

“Gran came by the other day. He asked me to handle the quest fee and the quest completion procedures when you showed up.”

So that was why Gran’s name had come up before—he jumped through all the hoops to treat our chance meeting as an escort quest. I thanked him mentally as I accepted the money.

"I'll treat both the Fahrengram and the Fochrosé family escort quests as D-rank quests."

The D-rank quest count on my guild card increased by two as she said that. Apparently the higher the number I had, the better the impression strangers would have of me if I took on their escort quests. Since that part of the data was recorded on the card, you couldn't see it without a crystal panel.

"The guild master in Crimonia gave me a letter," I said. I'd gotten the letter to help ward off trouble, but trouble found me before I could hand it over.

"That must be from Ralock." So that was his name? Sanya skimmed the letter. "Looks like it's too late for a lot of these things."

I was thinking the same thing.

"Let the guild staff know who you are, but you should still be careful. That said, you have a staggering slaying record. I can hardly believe the part about the tigerwolves, much less that you killed a black viper solo."

She was reading the data on the guild card that was coming up on the crystal panel. I was wondering this for a while, but how did that crystal panel and the guild cards work? I guessed this was par for the course in a fantasy world.

"Considering that, I can't believe you're at Rank D."

Sanya returned my guild card. I finished the quest report and delivered the letter from the Crimonia guild master, so with that, my business here was done. After that, I'd take a quick peek at the quests they had, and then maybe continue my sightseeing around the capital.

"Are you not taking any quests?"

"I just got to the capital, so next time."

"Oh, that's a shame."

"I want to go sightseeing around the capital, and I was wondering if there are any stores around here that sell unusual things?"

“Unusual as in?”

“Like ingredients or tools, anything would be fine.”

“The trade guild would know more about that. But I guess right now that’d be the west district. They have all kinds of shops set up.”

“The west district, then. I’ll go over there next time.”

I thanked her and left the adventurers’ guild. This time the adventurers didn’t say anything as they saw me off.

CHAPTER 62

THE BEAR OBTAINS CHEESE

I LEFT THE GUILD and headed toward the plaza where the booths were set up. Getting something in my belly was at the top of my to-do list. Since there were a lot of booths, I felt like it'd take days to see all of them if I took my time. While I was perusing the items on display, I saw some backs I recognized. I slowly approached them from behind to surprise them. It seemed like they were caught up looking at something and didn't notice me coming up to them.

"Fina! Noa!" I called out to them.

"Y-Yuna?!" Noa exclaimed.

"Yuna! What are you doing here? What about the adventurers' guild?"

The two of them turned around in shock.

"I'm done with that, so I'm window-shopping. So, what were the two of you looking at?"

When I looked where the two of them had been looking, I could hear some sort of dispute.

"It looks like there's an older man selling strange food that's making a commotion."

"Strange how?"

"Supposedly, it's moldy."

Mold, huh? I went ahead of the girls to see for myself, and found an older man and a young guy getting in a fight in front of the stall.

"How can you sell something like that?! You're just causing trouble for everyone around you!"

"This isn't just any ordinary mold."

“Mold is mold!”

“You can eat the inner parts of this.”

“You can’t eat something that’s growing mold like that!”

The old man was trying his best to explain, but the other man wouldn’t listen and simply complained.

What interested me were the things lining the store. That stuff was undoubtedly mold. But that wasn’t a problem. It was *cheese*. It was unmistakably cheese. You could eat it alone, or between bread, and above all else, you could use it to make pizza.

I also really wanted to eat au gratin, though I was still a ways out from making that a reality.

“You two, that’s cheese.”

“Cheez?”

“You don’t know what that is?”

“No, I don’t.”

“I don’t either.”

If these two didn’t know what cheese was, it had to be rare. I had to get my hands on it by any means necessary.

“As I said, this is food.”

“Nobody is going to eat this stuff!”

“Yuna?” Fina called out to stop me, but I got in between the two.

“Sir, that’s cheese, isn’t it?”

“Yes indeed, you know what it is? What a lovely outfit you have there, lass.”

“What the heck? You popped out of nowhere. And what is with your clothes? I don’t

care if you're just a girl, don't you dare butt in!"

Standing this close, I realized he reeked of liquor. "This is food," I said, "If you don't even know that, you can keep quiet."

"You telling me stuff riddled with mold is supposed to be food? Don't make me laugh!"

Drunkards were nasty. They wouldn't listen to people and if you ignored them, they'd just start complaining for ungrounded reasons.

"Hey, you listening to me?!"

The guy tried to grab my shoulder. I caught hold of his arm and threw a soft bear punch at his stomach with my off hand. The man bent over and dropped to the ground, unconscious. And I thought I was going easy on him.

I left him where he fell, turned to the older man, and talked to him like nothing had happened, "Sir, are you all right?"

"Yes, you were a lifesaver. Thank you." The old man looked between me and the man on the ground. "Well then, miss, you know about cheese?"

"You ferment milk to make it, right? I don't really know all the details about how it's made, though."

"That's right. You sure know a lot for a youngster."

"Sir, is it okay if I have a sample?"

"Of course, please try some." The man cut a thin slice of cheese with a knife.

"Yuna, you're going to eat that?"

Fina and Noa seemed worried. Well, I was eating something that had mold growing on it, so I guess they couldn't help it.

"The mold is just on the surface, so it's fine." I popped the bite-sized piece of cheese into my mouth. It was a little strong, but definitely cheese. "Do you guys want to try it too?"

The two shook their heads. It was tasty, though.

“Sir, you’re selling this, right?”

“Yes, we needed money in the village, so I came to the royal capital to sell cheese, but no one would buy it.”

Yup, I thought, looks like cheese really hadn’t spread around in this world. Just like the guy from earlier, Fina and Noa didn’t know what it was.

“So that basically means I can buy everything you’ve got, right?”

“You’ll buy some, lass?”

“It depends on the price. How much is it?”

“I actually sell it by weight, but one block would be about this much.”

“I’ll buy it. I’ll take it all, please!”

“Are you serious about this?” The man looked at me like he didn’t believe me. Well, I guess I’d find it hard to believe someone saying they’d buy all your stock when no one would even look at the product before.

“Yeah, I’m serious.”

I took out the money. Surprise formed on the man’s face. “Thank you, bear girl.”

Right as we finished our deal, a commotion sprung up behind me. It looked like some patrolling soldiers arrived.

“We heard there was a fight happening here. A bear? Ms. Yuna?!” It was Ranzel, the guard who had helped out with the bandit group. “Ms. Yuna, what are you doing here? I heard a fight broke out here.”

“Nothing happened. A drunk guy was making a scene, fell down on his own, and fell asleep.”

I looked at the man I’d taken down earlier with a bear punch. He’d fallen for a different reason than I said, but he really had been drunk. Ranzel looked at the collapsed man,

and then at the crowd.

"Is this true?" he asked me, seeming dubious. The drunk started to foam at the mouth slightly.

There was no getting past this guy. I decided to be honest with him.

"The drunk guy was starting a fight with this man, so I came to his aid."

"What the bear girl is saying is the truth. She saved me."

"It wasn't Yuna's fault," said Noa.

"Yuna protected the man," said Fina.

On top of that, people around us also started advocating for me. I guess anyone would side with a girl in a bear onesie over a drunk. Ranzel scratched his head.

"I got it. I'll turn a blind eye this time."

Ranzel directed his subordinates to carry the man.

"This time I'll treat this as a drunk acting out of line, but please don't cause any more trouble, Ms. Yuna. It seems to follow you wherever you go."

I couldn't argue with that.

"Even if that weren't the case, people are gathering from all over, and we're already having a hard time keeping things civil. Please actually do keep out of hot water."

Here I was unable to make that promise.

"Well then, I'll be heading off," Ranzel said, bowing his head before leaving with his subordinates.

I resumed my cheese talk with the old man.

"Miss, it looks like I've caused you trouble. Thank you for what you've done."

"Don't worry about it. I wanted cheese either way. Supposing if you still have some, I'll

buy it."

"I'm sorry. I only brought what I could carry from the village. This is everything. There's still more at the village, however."

I didn't need an apology from this man—no, this saint of cheese. Still, I was overjoyed to hear there was more wherever he came from.

"Well then, could you tell me where your village is? I'll go there to buy some later."

"I would be happy if you did, but are you really that in need of cheese? I think this is a considerable amount already."

"I'm sort of looking after some kids at an orphanage. I was thinking I'd use this cheese to make them something to eat later."

"I see. All right, if you come to the village, I'll welcome you."

"Thank you."

"Not at all, I should be the one thanking you. If I couldn't sell this, I would have been in trouble."

"Really? In that case, I can pay a little more."

"Are you sure?"

"It's fine. In exchange, sell it to me a little more cheaply when I visit."

"Yes, of course. If I don't have to come to the capital, that saves me trouble."

I got the location of the village from the man and put all of the cheese I bought into my bear storage.

We left the man and I ended up going around with Fina and Noa to the stalls.

"Yuna, is the 'cheez' from earlier really that good?" Noa asked me. I must have been acting upbeat.

Bread was obviously on my mind, but I was also thinking of eating pizza when I got home. Between this and the potatoes the other day, it was like someone was just telling me to make pizza. A smile naturally formed over my face.

“Hmm, I guess it depends on the person. I like it, but there are also people who hate it.”

“Then... would you let me try some?”

“I-I’d also like to try some.”

“Well then, how about we head back home right now and make pizza or something? Most people like pizza, after all.”

Like I needed an excuse. A part of me hoped they’d turn out to be cheese philistines.

“Yes, I would like to try some.”

I tried remembering what ingredients I had in my bear storage as I bought the ingredients I was missing for pizza, and we ended up heading back to the bear house.

CHAPTER 63

THE BEAR GOES TO THE CASTLE

I STARTED BY making a stone oven in my pointlessly large yard. I recalled how they made one based on what I'd seen on TV as I built it. Magic sure is useful in times like this. Things were easy to fix, even if I made a mistake. After some trial and error, I completed my inaugural stone oven.

While I was making the stone oven, I had the other two knead wheat dough for me. With the dough done, I could prepare the toppings: potatoes, poultry, bell peppers, tomatoes, and the cheese I bought earlier. I laid out the toppings and placed it into the stone oven. Then I just had to wait for it to bake through. The cheese melted, and a mouthwatering smell drifted around.

"That seems about long enough."

I pulled it out right as it finished baking. The cheese was droopy and melty—it looked delicious.

"Is that 'pizza'?"

"It smells very good."

I sliced the pizza, placed some on plates, and handed them over to the two.

"It's hot, so please don't burn yourselves," I warned them, then prepared my own portion. It looked delicious. There wasn't any reason to hold back, so I dug right in. The cheese stretched. It was hot, but incredibly delicious. This was the taste of home that I missed. I missed being able to order it by phone and get it delivered within thirty minutes.

When Fina and Noa saw me enjoying it, they started eating too.

"It's hot! But it's tasty."

"It really is very good."

“Isn’t it? It makes you wonder why not everyone eats it when it’s this delicious.”

“Is this stretchy part cheese? So this is what happens when it melts.”

“The spuds are so soft and delicious too.”

“That’s because cheese and spuds go well together.”

I wanted to try making other kinds of pizza, but I didn’t have the ingredients. I wanted seafood pizza—one with squid and mini shrimp and clams on top. Sausage and bacon would be great too. For now, I decided I’d be patient with this one type of pizza. It wasn’t like I could eat it all if I made all of that. I had my doubts we’d be able to finish this huge single pie between two little kids and me.

“It’s not as good if you let it go cold, so eat it fast.”

As the three of us were eating pizza, I heard someone running over from far away. Shia appeared; she was wearing her uniform. Were the Fochrosés just the kind of family that ran everywhere?

“Shia, why are you here?”

“Academy let out early, and it looked like you hadn’t come home. I thought you’d be here and came over. Well then, what are you all eating?” she asked. She probably hadn’t seen it before.

“It’s called pizza.”

“‘Pizza,’ you say?”

“It’s like a food where you make really thin dough, put all kinds of ingredients on top, then put cheese on top, and bake it.” My explanation might have been a little inaccurate, but it was enough for a newbie.

“Would you like some, big sister Shia? It’s so very delicious,” said Noa.

I handed the remaining pizza over to Shia.

“Do you eat this with your hands?”

“In general, you hold it in your hands and eat it. If you don’t want to do that, I can get you a fork.”

Maybe nobles had an aversion to eating with their hands? Then again, Noa seemed to be eating with her hands just fine.

“It’s fine. I’ll eat it like this.”

“It’s hot, so be careful.”

Shia skillfully ferried the dripping cheese into her mouth and took a bite.

“It’s good...”

Shia also joined in, and the pizza dwindled. They had some healthy appetites.

“It’s such a shame we can’t eat this with Lady Misa.”

Now that she mentioned it, they hadn’t been with her today.

“There’s nothing that could be done about that. She was going out with her family today.”

So that’s why she hadn’t been around.

“If you all still want to eat more, I’ll bake it. What do you say?”

“I would like a little more.”

“Me too, please.”

“Me too.”

Looks like the three of them still had room in their stomachs. In answer to their requests, I decided to bake a pizza with the same ingredients as before. If this was how they were acting, maybe the kids at the orphanage would enjoy it too?

I sliced up the newly baked pizza and divided it among the three.

“Just be careful not to burn yourself.”

The three of them all replied with a cheerful “Yes” and began to eat. The two large pizzas disappeared cleanly into our four stomachs. Of course, we were uncomfortably stuffed by the end. I thought about making them a little smaller next time.

The next morning, Ellelaura came to the bear house.

“Good morning. What brings you here this early in the morning?”

“I heard from my daughters that it seems you’ve got some delicious food here.”

That had to be the pizza from yesterday, right?

“It’s not something that you eat for breakfast.”

Did Ellelaura come here this early in the morning just for something like that?

“You can’t eat it in the morning?”

“I guess there might be people who do, but it’s generally not eaten in the morning.”

It was heavy for a breakfast.

“Well that’s unfortunate. My daughters couldn’t eat dinner yesterday. Then when I questioned them about it, they said something about eating a delicious thing called pizza at your house, and they described it as though it tasted divine. It’s made me so bitter that I was the only one left out from having it.”

No matter how I considered the situation, I got the feeling I couldn’t refuse. It looked like I would be having pizza for the second day in a row.

“Ahh, all right. Then how about I make it for lunch?”

“Really? Well then, we have time until lunch, so how about I show you around the castle?”

“You mean *the castle*?”

“Yes, the other day Fina said that she wanted to see inside the castle. But, you can’t

really get in unless you're meant to be there. As long as I'm there, though, you can go in. So, let's take a field trip to the castle this morning and do pizza in the afternoon."

I guess there really wouldn't be many opportunities like this. I knew that Fina wanted to see it too, so we took her up on the offer, and that was how Fina and I ended up at the castle.

The giant structure towered before us. Two soldiers carrying long spears stood in front of the castle entrance. Fina was tense as she gripped my bear hand. Ellelaura hadn't said anything about it, but I wondered if it was okay for me to go inside looking like this. If we were stopped at the entrance, then I could just ask them to only show Fina around.

"Good morning, Lady Ellelaura. Who are these ladies?" Though he was polite while talking about us, he was giving me a look that said he didn't trust me. Well, that was his job, so I guess he had no choice.

"These are my guests. I thought I would show them around the inside of the castle. Will there be a problem with that?" Ellelaura said to the gate guard, like she was overpowering him.

In response, the guard took a step back from Ellelaura.

"No, not at all. It's just my job to check. Please, go ahead."

The gate guard saluted and let us in. Was that really it?

"Is there anything you two want to see?"

Ellelaura smiled again as she looked at us. Maybe she was scary if you got her angry?

"Nothing in particular for me."

I didn't know what was in the castle in the first place.

"I don't, either. I'm already happy with this."

It looked like Fina wanted to go home after she only passed through the gate. She

probably yearned to see it, but was at odds with how nervous she was from feeling out of place.

“Well then, let’s wander.”

“Are you sure we should have come without telling Noa?”

When we left the bear house, I asked about Noa. Just like last time, there was a chance that she would be sulky that I’d gone out with Fina without her.

“It’s okay. It’s her own fault for always sleeping in so late. I wonder if Cliff has actually been educating her. I need to make sure I ask next time I see him.”

And so the three of us ended up walking around the castle aimlessly. If I were to put it into words, the castle was large, pretty, and felt like a castle. Yeah, that really didn’t explain anything, did it?

Each time we passed someone, they bowed their head to Ellelaura. Then they look surprised once they saw me. I still had no idea what her *job* was here. I knew that she worked in the castle, at least. Her husband Cliff managed a fiefdom, so I thought the wife of a lord would normally help with that.

“What do you do in the castle, Ellelaura?”

“My job? Miscellaneous affairs.”

“Miscellaneous affairs?”

“I command the knights, process documents, do consultations with the king, and various things. The truth is I want to leave and go to where Cliff is, but the King, chancellor, knights, and others won’t let me go. So, I’m going to work at the castle just while Shia is attending academy. Then again, when Noa starts attending the academy, I’ll probably be stuck working at the castle again.”

I didn’t really get what her position was, but maybe Ellelaura was a super important person here? Was that why everyone bowed their heads for her? There was a chance things would become dreadful if I asked for more details, so I decided not to stick my nose into it.

"Well then, how about we see how the knight training is going next?"

We went through a courtyard in the center of the castle and came to a spacious training area full of armored soldiers practicing with swords and spears. When Ellelaura appeared in the training grounds, a knight came over.

"Lady Ellelaura, what brings you to a place like this? Are we due for an inspection?"

"I just came here to make sure you guys weren't skipping out. You can return to your practice."

The knight bowed his head and obediently returned to drills.

"Yuna, what do you think?"

"What do you mean?"

"Think you could beat these knights?"

I wondered how she could ask that with all of the knights in front of us.

"I couldn't win," I answered, at least.

All of the knights were giving Ellelaura fleeting glances.

"Looks like they've taken quite the interest in you, Yuna."

Apparently it wasn't Ellelaura they were looking at—it was me. Well, having someone as famous in the castle as Ellelaura bring some person in a onesie and a little girl along with her would attract curiosity.

As I watched the scene, I remembered my time as a gamer. There was an intensity to their training that was wholly unlike anything I saw in the game. While I was watching it eagerly, Ellelaura said something ridiculous.

"Yuna, want to practice with them?"

I did want to fight them to see how strong they were, but if I won here, they'd resent me for sure. It would've been one thing if this were the game, but I would still have to live in this world, so I didn't want to do that. That was why there was only one answer

to that question.

"I will have to respectfully decline."

"Too bad."

Maybe she brought me here because she wanted to see me fight? I don't think anyone would normally bring girls over to a place like this. Even Fina was keeping quiet. I proposed going to a different place. Ellelaura seemed disappointed, but she showed us to another location. When I turned around to head back to the castle, I saw a small girl running toward me.

"It's a bear!"

She latched onto my hip with a *poomf*. Uh, who is this? I thought. She was about four or five. She was wearing beautiful western-style clothes.

She was wearing beautiful clothes in a castle. Could this be...

"Why if it isn't Lady Flora. What are you doing here?"

Lady Flora? Could it be? Maybe it really was?



"I was walking around the castle. Everyone said they saw a bear, so I looked for it."

By "a bear" she probably meant me.

"Why is there a bear in the castle?"

"This bear is in the middle of a tour of the castle," Ellelaura answered. Why was she calling me a "bear" too?

"Really?" All I could do was nod under the force of those wibbly puppy-dog eyes.

"You are? Then I'll show you my room."

Her small hand grasped my bear puppet. I didn't know what to do; I gave Ellelaura a helpless look.

"Well, I suppose we're being shown around."

"Ellelaura?"

"You can't turn down an invitation from the princess, of course."

I knew it. This *was* the princess. But was this okay? This was the princess's room we were talking about. I wanted to refuse, but I also couldn't. Was I even allowed to go to a princess's room? I only knew about these things from manga and novels, but normal adventurers weren't supposed to enter these places, right?

"Ellelaura, don't you think this is a problem? She's *the* princess. We're commoners."

Next to me, Fina froze and her face became pale. Her mind probably ground to a halt more than mine after the entrance of someone who was practically above the clouds compared to her.

"I'll be with you, so it's fine. I'll take all responsibility for this."

"Bear, won't you come to my room?"

She gave me another pitiful look. There was no way out. I guess I couldn't do anything other than go. I couldn't shake off the small hand grasping my bear puppet.

“I’m going, don’t cry.”

I gently patted her head with my free hand. It was already in the past, but was it really okay to pat the head of royalty? Ellelaura hadn’t said anything, so it seemed fine. Princess Flora seemed happy as she pulled my hand. Fina’s face still looked pale as she followed us. Ellelaura followed with a smile.

The king wasn’t going to appear out of nowhere, right?

And so we ended up in the princess’s room. I don’t know how to describe it other than as magnificent.

Though I called it magnificent, it wasn’t like it was gilded splendor, or had expensive vases, or world-class paintings or anything. There was a lovely rug. A bed with a canopy. A soft-looking mattress. Tables and chairs that looked high class. That was the kind of room it was. It was fine and dandy that we’d come to her room, but what were we supposed to do now?

“Lady Flora, what shall we do? Would you like us to read you a picture book?”

“Picture books are boring.”

The book Ellelaura brought over was a story about a princess and a prince. When I looked it over, my first thought was that the illustrations sure didn’t look cute for a picture book. This one was drawn so realistically.

“Ellelaura, is there any paper and something to write with around?”

“There is, but why?”

“I’m going to draw a picture book.”

Who hasn’t yearned at least once to take up the road to becoming a manga artist? It wasn’t like that had been my goal, but there was a stretch of my hermitage when I had abundant time to draw.

“Yuna, would this work?”

Ellelaura brought over paper and writing utensils. I took them and started drawing a picture book.

CHAPTER 64

PICTURE BOOK:

THE BEAR AND THE GIRL

PART ONE

IN A CERTAIN TOWN, there was a young girl.

The girl had a mother she loved.

But, her mother was sick and bedridden.

The girl had no father.

The girl had to work for her mother's sake in order to get medicine.

There wasn't any work for little girls.

That was because no one would hire children.

The girl needed herbs and went into the woods to look for them.

There are many scary monsters in the woods.

But she needed to find herbs for her mother, whom she loved.

No matter how she looked, she couldn't find any herbs.

Though it was dangerous, the girl wandered into the depths of the woods.

The girl got lost and was surrounded by wolves.

She cried out, but no one came to help.

Mother, I'm sorry.

I'm sorry I couldn't find any herbs.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

She apologized even though no one could hear.

The moment the wolves seemed like they were about to attack, she was so scared she closed her eyes.

But, no matter how long she waited, they didn't attack.

When she opened her eyes slowly, the wolves were dead.

How?

The girl looked around.

There was a bear there.

"Are you okay?"

The bear spoke to her.

"Thank you so much."

The girl thanked the bear.

"Why are you in a place like this?"

Since the bear asked, the girl answered honestly.

The bear listened to her.

Then, the bear told her to get on its back.

The girl got on the bear's back.

The bear ran incredibly fast.

The bear stopped.

There were tons of herbs there.

The girl thanked the bear and gathered the herbs.

Now she could make medicine for her mother.

“Thank you, bear.”

The bear smiled kindly.

The bear defeated any monsters that came near them as it carried her to the town.

The girl thanked the bear over and over again.

The bear kindly patted the girl’s head.

The bear waved goodbye.

After the girl bowed her head to the bear for the last time, she ran to the house where her sick mother was.

The bear headed home to the woods.

The girl made her mother’s medicine with the herbs she brought home.

Her mother thanked her by smiling.

The girl also smiled.

Thank you, bear.



CHAPTER 65

THE BEAR DRAWS A PICTURE BOOK

I NEEDED TO THINK of what the story would be about. Of course, a bear theme would work well for this, given that the kid wouldn't let me (a bear) go. But did I even know any picture books that had bears in them? The only one I could think of was the bear that showed up in that one Kintaro fairytale. The only other thing I could think of was that "Bear in the Woods" song. I tried to think up things from my childhood, but realized that there's no way to remember things you didn't know existed. All I could do was make this story about something near and dear to me.

I started drawing a girl.

Lady Flora was staring by my side. She might've been marveling at the fact that I was drawing, since she was being quiet. I based the girl on Fina. It's easier to draw when you've got a muse.

"She looks exactly like Fina, doesn't she?"

"Well, that's because this actually happened to her."

"Oh, did it really?"

Fina, who was the subject of this, was far away, nervously drinking something the maid had given her. I suppose a commoner normally wouldn't experience getting their tea prepared by a maid. I burned through several sheets of paper. Finally, I got to the scene where the bear (me) would make an appearance.

"Why, what an adorable bear!"

I drew the cartoon bear (playing my role). Well, the one making an appearance wasn't me, but actually a cartoon of a real bear.

I really wished I actually had colors, but I thought I was doing a pretty good job with just black and white. Maybe next time I'd try to look around for colored pens.

“Whoa...”

Lady Flora’s eyes glittered as she looked at the drawing of the bear.

“Regardless, this is my first time seeing such cute drawings.”

“Is it really?”

“I know many artists, but I’ve never seen drawings like this before.”

I finished drawing the scene of the girl and the bear meeting.

“What happens to the girl?” Lady Flora asked me.

“Look forward to when I draw it.”

“Then hurry and draw it—hurry!”

I started to draw the next scenes. After that, I finished the drawings on several more sheets. I drew the scene of the girl going back to her town at the end and the bear going home to the woods, and the picture book was done.

“It’s done...”

It only took me a few hours to draw what was pretty much a tour de force. I guess that’s what’s to be expected, considering I’m not a pro picture book author. I organized the papers and handed them to Lady Flora.

“Are these for me, bear?”

“I guess I’d be pretty jazzed if you read it.”

“Thank you, bear.”

She took the book happily.

“Good for you, Lady Flora. I will have this bound later so that the pages do not come apart.”

Lady Flora was engrossed in my picture book. The most important thing was that she

was happy. I hadn't used my bear abilities, but my own powers to draw it in those hours. I felt like it was the first time my own abilities had actually been useful in this world. As I stretched my back muscles and eased my shoulders, there was a knock at the door, and a maid came in.

"Lady Flora, it is meal time."

"Then how about we head out, too?"

Elleaura stood up. I followed suit.

"You're going home already, bear?"

When Elleaura told Lady Flora we were leaving, Lady Flora latched onto my clothes.

"Uhh, Lady Flora, I will come back again."

"Will you really?"

"I will be at the capital for a while, so I will come again."

"Okay, I see."

Her little hand let go of my clothes.

"Fina, we're heading out. You can't be looking white as a sheet forever"

"Y-yuna?"

Fina came back to reality. It was like she was in a whole other world until now. I figured Fina would faint if she knew what was in the picture book, so I just kept mum.

We left Lady Flora and the castle grounds. In the end, the only places we were able to see were the knight's training grounds and the princess's room, but I had my fill of the castle. I had my doubts over whether Fina herself enjoyed it. When we returned to the bear house, Noa was sitting at the front entrance. When she noticed us, she stood up and struck a furious pose.

“Where were all of you?!”

“At the castle.”

I gave her a simple explanation of the morning.

“Mother! Why do you go places without telling me? Please bring me with you.”

“But you just wouldn’t wake up,” Elleaura calmly replied. “Besides, we decided that we would go to the castle after I got here, so there was no way to invite you.”

“You could have come back to the house or done something. Please don’t leave me out.”

“Then you should wake up bright and early.”

“Ugh... all right. But, please make sure you really wake me next time.”

“I will if you don’t tell me ‘just a little longer’ in your sleep.”

Noa turned bright red and went silent.

“But I can’t believe you’d know that we’d be here.”

“Surilina said that you were muttering about pizza when you left, Mother. I knew where you went immediately. But when I got here, no one was around. I’d like to have pizza again, too.”

“Well then, I’m about to make some, so could you give me a hand?”

I headed to the stone oven and started to prepare the pizza. Actually, the ingredients I’d gotten ready yesterday were still in bear storage, so all I had to do was measure them out, put the toppings on, and bake it. I finished prepping it, the oven started to fill with heat, and I put the pizza in to bake.

“Why, that smells scrumptious.”

“I’d like to eat something as delicious as this every day.”

“You’ll get fat.”

“This makes you fat?!”

“Yeah, since it’s got a lot of oil. At most, you should eat it only a couple times a month. And, if you eat too much, you’ll get tired of it, so it’s best to practice moderation.”

It wasn’t like you’d get bored of it if you had plenty of toppings though. I needed to search around the royal capital and look for more ingredients again. The quest for rice, soy, and miso continues... The pizza finished baking, so I pulled it out of the oven. I cut it into four portions and plated the works.

“Well then, I’m digging in.”

“It’s hot, so please be careful,” I warned Ellelaura, who was having it for the first time. It wouldn’t be good if she burned herself.

“Oh! It’s hot! But it’s very good.” She let the cheese stretch as she savored it.

“Yes, it’s delicious,” said Fina.

While everyone was eating, I got ready to bake another one. Yesterday, we stuffed ourselves to bursting point trying to eat two pies between four people. We had four people again today, but since Ellelaura was an adult, I thought two would be just right.

“Yuna, I can do it,” Fina offered to give me a hand between mouthfuls.

“You can keep eating, Fina. I’ll finish this right away.”

“But...”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“Okay.”

Fina seemed apologetic. She didn’t need to be, though. I finished getting the second pie ready and ate along with them until the pie finished baking. Two pies turned out to be the ideal amount with an adult present; Ellelaura also had a favorable opinion of the pizza in the end.

“It really did seem like it was a bit oily. I kind of want something refreshing now.”

"In that case, would you like to have pudding as a palette cleanser?"

"I'll eat one!" Noa yelled, raising her hand.

"Pudding? What could that be?"

"It's a sweet and yummy food," Noa started to explain in my place.

It was easier to just show Elleaura, so I pulled puddings from my bear storage.

"This is pudding?"

"One for each of you."

I only had a small stock of pudding left now. I'd eaten several on the way to the capital and since we'd gotten here. I was running low on eggs too, since I'd been using them in meal prep. Maybe I'd go back to Crimonia and get some?

"What is this? The pizza was wonderful, but this pudding is delicious as well! I think people would buy this if you went into business."

"If you had a store, I'd buy some every day."

Both parent and child praised me in tandem. Opening up shop might be doable if we got more birds to lay eggs, but how many birds did we have again? I left that stuff up to Liz and Tiermina, so I didn't really know. Once I got back to Crimonia again, I'd need to ask.

It seemed like Elleaura and Noa wanted to have more pudding, but I couldn't be that free with my stock, so they'd have to endure without it. It wouldn't be good for them to overdo it anyway.

"Yuna, thanks for today," Elleaura said.

"Taking a field trip to the castle was fun for me, too. Thank you very much."

That wasn't a lie. I had more than enough fun seeing the inside of the castle, even if it did nearly give Fina an aneurysm. I just didn't think I'd be called into the princess's room.

CHAPTER 66

THE BEAR TRIES HER BEST FOR NOA

A FEW DAYS HAD FLOWN BY since we came to the royal capital. I received word that the bandit group had been exterminated, and the surviving captives rescued. I was asked if they could give the bounty that I was supposed to receive to the victims and their families. Since the bandits' bottomless bags were the only things I might have use for, I asked for those, and gave them permission to distribute the rest of the spoils.

Today I was taking Fina, Noa, and Misa out to enjoy some sightseeing around the capital. I drew the usual stares, but the girls were there, and we weren't going anywhere dangerous. Still, when we passed the adventurers' guild, I tried to give it a wider berth.

"Yuna, it looks like there's something happening up ahead."

Noa was watching a commotion at the guild's doors. When I looked over, there were a ton of flustered-looking adventurers headed inside. Had something happened?

"I'm kind of curious, so I'm going to have a peek in the guild. What would you three like to do?"

"I'll go too," said Fina.

"Me too," Noa and Misa said, talking over each other.

It wasn't like I was going to accept a quest, so it was probably fine. If something happened, we could just count on Sanya. Inside, I was met with rambunctious, worried, and hesitant faces. There were all kinds of adventurers in there. In the middle of them, I could hear one yelling.

"What the heck is happening?"

"At present, the guild master is checking the results of the investigation. There will soon be an announcement from the guild, so please be patient."

A guild employee was trying their hardest to deal with the crowd pressing in.

"Yuna, do you think something happened?" Fina asked.

"It looks like it."

For the time being, I looked around, trying to find someone to explain what was happening. It wasn't like Sanya would be around, and there weren't any free staff members either.

"Yuna?"

I hunted for the familiar voice's source and found Marina and her party.

"Marina, everything's in a commotion. Did something happen?"

"You don't know? Everyone's saying a horde of monsters turned up near the capital and killed a few adventurers. The guild's opened up an investigation, but it seems the news isn't good."

"What do we know about it right now?"

"It's an army of goblins, wolves, and orcs, and there's word of wyverns in the sky."

"Are there usually any wyverns near here?"

"Of course not. It's unheard of."

As I caught up with Marina, Sanya came out from the back. The guild went into even more of a frenzy.

"I'm going to explain now, so quiet down," Sanya said, and there was total silence in the guild hall.

"According to our reconnaissance, there are more than ten thousand goblins, wolves, and orcs in total. In addition, though we don't have a definite count, we have confirmed the presence of wyverns."

Another commotion ensued.

"We are conveying this information to the castle as we speak. The soldiers of the royal capital will do battle alongside us."

"But why didn't we notice this until now?" someone cried out.

"A report surfaced of orcs on the main road. There have also been increased reports of goblins and wolves."

Maybe the orcs that attacked Gran and the others were part of this?

"Prepare for battle. Put your accepted quests on hold. I am making this a priority one quest."

I wondered if that meant I had to participate, too. I couldn't *not* participate.

"Marina," I asked, "where are these monsters located?"

"In a forest we passed on our way here. Those orcs back then might have been among their number."

It was pretty likely. I looked over at Noa, who had gone a bit pale. "Are you okay Noa?"

"My father..." she said.

"You don't mean that Cliff is on his way to the capital now?" said Misa.

"He probably has an escort," I said, "so unless they're attacked, they should be fine."

"Yeah..."

Noa still didn't look good. It would probably be better to get away from this place.

"We're heading out, you three."

I led the nervous-looking Noa out of the adventurers' guild. It had been a mistake to bring the girls along; I'd never imagined something like this would happen.

"Yuna, do you think my father will be okay?"

It was easy to say she didn't need to worry, but it was pretty likely the road that Cliff

was taking would have a group of ten thousand monsters on it. Repeating that he had an escort wouldn't offer her much comfort. When I saw Noa's anxious face, I made up my mind. I plopped my bear puppet down on her head with a *pomf*.

"I'm going to get Cliff."

"Yuna?"

"So don't worry, and wait at the house."

"Yuna!" Fina said.

"Fina, please wait at Noa's house until I get back. Misa, you take care of the two of them."

"I will," Misa declared.

"Yuna, you won't die, right?" Fina asked.

"No way."

I gave Fina's head a gentle pat as I left.

I ran in my bear onesie through the middle of the royal capital, bearing down on the gate. I still had to stop and show my guild card. There were a lot of people going into the capital, but not a lot going out. When the gate guard saw what I looked like, he was surprised, but didn't stop me. It looked like word of the advancing monsters hadn't come down yet.

Once I was past the city limits, I summoned and mounted Kumayuru, then headed toward Crimonia to intercept Cliff. I couldn't live with myself if I did nothing and he died, and I didn't want to see Noa cry.

Kumayuru's top speed easily outpaced the outbound horses on the road. Maybe when I got stronger, my bears did, too? They were definitely faster than they'd been when I first summoned them.

CHAPTER 67

THE BEAR MOB CLEARS

WE KEPT RUNNING in the direction of Crimonia, but I couldn't find Cliff. Since I was using the detection skill, I didn't think I would miss him—he wasn't *dead*, right? I wasn't picking up any corpses, though I did ping more monsters than I could count at the edge of my radar. I looked in the direction of the monster blips and saw a forest nearby.

I had a decision to make. Would I keep searching for Cliff, or would I slay the monsters?

I hadn't had any issues with wolves, goblins, and orcs in my battles in the past. My concern was my mana. Did I have enough mana to be able to defeat ten thousand monsters? I didn't know exactly how much mana I had. I never used magic to the point that I ran out since I came to this world. As a result, I didn't know exactly how much magic I could cast, or how much mana I could let loose.

Also, I didn't know how strong wyverns were. I fought them in the game, but not in this world.

I had no idea what I'd do with Cliff once I found him. If we were attacked by ten thousand monsters at that point, it would be difficult to fight and keep him safe.

I thought for a bit and made a decision. To protect Noa's smile, I changed course for the forest. If I could defeat the ten thousand monsters first, everything would work out.

"Kumayuru, thanks for everything till now."

I patted Kumayuru for the marathon I put them through, then swapped them out for Kumakyu.

"Kumakyu, we're going to be running through some monsters, so I'm counting on you."

When I gently brushed their neck, they snuggled up to me and let out a coo. I saddled up, and we rushed into the middle of the woods. As soon as we entered the forest, a

bunch of goblins came at us. I invoked a wind cutter and loosed it at the goblins' necks. They vanished from my radar.

The white bear charged through the middle of the forest. Goblin heads went flying on all sides as we passed. I lost track of the goblin corpses we left in the wake of Kumakyu's white shadow. As we ran, I caught sight of another horde ahead. Suddenly we slipped past the tree line and into a well of bright light. We were in a clearing flush with goblins.

I had Kumakyu run toward the middle of the group. I remembered my time in the game, and all those hours top-ranking in the time attack events. How many trash mobs can you clear in five minutes? Two minutes? Thirty seconds?

I purged the goblins in the clearing with a couple of spells, and still had mana to spare. I pinged my surroundings and found only wolves and orcs remaining. I didn't know how much longer my mana would hold out, so I decided to slay the orcs first, in the hopes that once I ran dry, I could fall back on weapons and the occasional thrown rock to handle the wolves.

I pulled chilled oren juice from bear storage and chugged it while I took a short rest, then had Kumakyu take me in the direction of the orcs.

"Sorry Kumakyu. Hang in there just a bit longer."

I still wasn't even halfway done.

A few minutes later, I encountered the orc horde. I put more mana into the wind blades fly than I had for the goblins, allowing for the additional resilience of orc necks. The blades sliced cleanly into the incoming orcs, so it looked like I'd judged the mana levels correctly.

I wanted to keep this fight long-distance; up close, they'd have more strength and staying power to work with than the goblins did. The orcs brandished their weapons and rushed at me with a speed that didn't match their cumbersome size.

Arrows flew at us as Kumakyu ran. Orc archers! I remembered those from the game, too; both here and there, getting pelted from a distance was annoying. I wrapped Kumakyu up in a protective wind spell. A bolt of flame flew past my face.

"They've got mages?"

They had covered all their fantasy combat bases. Annoying. *Oh well*, I thought. *Fight numbers with numbers*. I invoked an earth spell and made ten bear golems about the same size as my summons.

In that moment, for the first time ever, I felt my mana drain away. It was almost unnerving.

I had the bear golems rush the orcs. I ran behind them on Kumakyu. They used their sharp claws to stab at the orcs' throats. I loosed air cutters over the top, lopping heads where I could. The bear golems wouldn't stop even when arrows pierced them. Magic splashed against them harmlessly. Even when they sustained damage, I poured mana into them to repair them. The golems matched the orcs' movements, and I finished them off with my spells. Even if I was surrounded, the golems protected me.

Geeze, I thought, *why are there so many orcs around?* If this had been the game, you could just brush it off as an event, but this was just ridiculous. There had to be a reason they were so close to the capital and all in one place.

I cut the neck of the final orc. It was over. I looked behind me. We left a trail of orc corpses. Even though I'd fought that much, thanks to the bear clothes I wasn't feeling it much physically. I let out a small sigh and checked my remaining mana.

"There's still... some mana left... but I get the feeling there's a whole lot less."

If I could only convert it into a numerical value like in the game, I would know for sure.

The last monsters were the wolves and the wyverns. I pulled my hood down and checked my radar again. There were wyvern signals ahead; it looked like they came closer while I dealt with the orcs. Oddly, the wyverns weren't moving. Even when I looked into the sky, I didn't see them flying around. Were they taking a siesta or something? No way.

Since they weren't moving, I disassembled my golems and changed into the white bear clothes to recover my mana a bit. No one was around, right? A warm feeling that must have been mana recovery flooded me as I started stowing the orc bodies, taking their swords, bows, and staves as my spoils. The only thing I didn't take were the heads. I mean, they were *heads*. Even going near them squicked me out, and you couldn't sell them.

Once I felt I recovered enough mana, I changed back into the black bear outfit. No one was watching, right?

Well then, I thought, guess it's time to slay some wyverns.

I mounted Kumakyu and we made for the wyverns. They hadn't moved at all so far, and I soon learned why.

"They're sleeping?"

I didn't know why they were zonked out, but I'd defeat them before they woke. I got down from Kumakyu and slowly approached the sleeping wyverns. Then, one by one, I severed their heads. It all ended so simply, it was almost disappointing. Even though I was slicing their neighbors' heads off, the wyverns didn't wake up. Once I was done, I put their bodies into my bear storage.

Coming by wyvern materials this easily felt like cheating, but I guess I'd accept this as compensation for all my hard work. The moment I finished putting the last wyvern into bear storage, the ground started to tremble.

"What?"

The ground swelled, and I jumped back.

I saw a monster that I'd seen make appearances in the game rise from the ground. It looked like a blown up earthworm—it was a wyrm. It opened its mouth wide and crawled out. I hadn't noticed it while using my detection skill. It was possible that it didn't reach deep underground, or that I hadn't noticed it because it was underneath the wyverns. The wyrm turned toward me. Great goblets of drool streamed from its mouth. I guess I smelled tasty.

"Gross."

It lunged. I jumped back, clear of its mouth. Nothing that big should move so fast. I never fought wyrms in the game—they were just nasty. When you broke the skin it'd spray fluid all over and release a terrible smell, then heal over instantly. They were a huge pain to fight.

But now I had bear magic.

The moment I tried to invoke magic, the wyrm bent its body sharply. I dodged backward, but it sideswiped me with one of its massive coils. *You've got to be kidding me*, I thought. I was flicked away, but thanks to the bear equipment I wasn't hurt. I fixed my stance and released some wind magic, but I wasn't able to cut up the wyrm's body. I threw a fireball in the same way, but it was all repelled.

I knew it was a rehash, but I decided to defeat it in the same way I did the black viper. I faced the wyrm from a spot a little ways away. While the wyrm's mouth was open, it crawled and drew near. I made ten mini bears from conjured fire. Then I had them rush into the wyrm's wide-open mouth.

"Go!"

The wyrm might have mistook the bears as food, since it tried to eat them on its own. It was brainless. The mini fire bears moved around inside the wyrm's body. It writhed on the ground, spewing drool. In an attempt to escape from the pain, it tried to vomit out the foreign material, but the mini fire bears held fast within the wyrm. I got the feeling that this was the strongest magic I had for large creatures. No matter the monster, as long as they were a living creature, their insides were soft.

The wyrm banged itself against the ground many times, but gradually it stopped moving.

"Um, will I be able to sell this?"

With the black viper, I was able to sell the meat and skin and all kinds of stuff. I didn't want to eat this thing, and I wasn't sure about the skin. Even if it was edible, I didn't want to make Fina and the others eat it. For the time being, I left thinking about how to deal with the wyrm for later and put it in bear storage.

With that, the only thing left was the wolves. I hadn't used mana when I fought the wyverns and I just used the fire bears in the fight with the wyrm. I had plenty of mana left to defeat the wolves. It would be a quick errand, and then I could go home.

I called Kumakyu and headed toward the wolfpack. The fight was barely worth mentioning; the hard part was stowing the bodies. I could've left them as is, but when

I thought about the orphanage struggling to eat, I didn't want to waste them, so I made sure to collect them. They wouldn't go bad so long as they stayed in bear storage.

I had Kumayuru and Kumakyu help me out with rounding them up, then mounted Kumakyu and left the forest that now reeked of blood.

The air felt great to breathe. I looked at the sky; the sun was setting. It was dusk. In that case, I guess it'd make more sense to spend a night out than to force myself to get back?

I took the traveling bear house out of my bear storage and decided to stay the night.

For some reason, even though I wasn't physically fatigued, I was still awfully tired. I guess it was mental exhaustion? I had a simple dinner, and after I took a bath, I collapsed into bed and fell into the world of dreams.

CHAPTER 68

THE BEAR BARGAINS

I WOKE UP A FEW HOURS past sunrise. I slept in a bit, but I didn't need to rush back. I leisurely ate my breakfast and then went outside, where I saw a familiar face.

"Cliff?"

"I knew it. So this bear house is yours."

"Why are you here?"

"That's my line. I'm obviously headed to the royal capital."

There were five people guarding Cliff. I remembered seeing them before at Cliff's residence. They were all riding horses instead of using a carriage. Having Noa march over on a trip like that would have been difficult for her. Maybe that was why he left guarding her to me and sent her ahead.

"I came to get you," I said, "but now I don't need to, so I was about to head back to the capital."

"You were coming to get me?"

"A horde of monsters appeared in this area. Since Noa was worried about you, I came to get you."

"So when you say you no longer need to do that... what do you mean by that?"

"..."

If I answered that question, I felt like it'd end up becoming a pain, so I chose to remain silent.

"Yuna, answer my question," Cliff asked for a response.

If it spread that I defeated ten thousand monsters on my own, it would undoubtably become a huge deal. If that happened, it was likely that my calm and peaceful life would crumble away. What was I supposed to do?

“Well, you defeated the black viper, so you probably could defeat a horde of monsters.”

It looked like Cliff already decided I was the slayer of the monster horde in his mind. I wondered what his face would have looked like if he knew how many monsters it was. If I didn’t deny that now, I’d be in trouble once he got to the capital. He’d find out how many it was once we got there.

I should’ve headed home instead of staying the night. I wished I could’ve told that to myself yesterday. But it wasn’t like I could return to the past, so I had to do something.

“Cliff, you’re pretty high up as an aristocrat, right? Even if you did something terrible, you would be able to cover up a thing or two, right?”

“What do you even think of me? It’s not like I’d be capable of doing something like that.”

“So you can’t?! But you’re an aristocrat, aren’t you?”

“I have no idea what you think aristocrats are like in that head of yours, but I do not do things like that.”

“...”

Well that was no use, then. I thought that an aristocrat would be able to hush up a crime or two.

“In other words, there’s something you want me to cover up?” he asked as if he didn’t want to know.

I gave a little nod to his question.

Cliff let out a small sigh.

“Lay it on me.”

I glanced over at Cliff’s guards. Cliff noticed and once again let out a small sigh.

"You guys take a break here. Yuna, may we go inside?"

It looked like he'd hear me out. I approved and led Cliff inside.

"I was surprised by the exterior, but the interior is also outrageous," he let slip. "I want to ask more about this house, but let's hear what you have to say right now."

I took out some cold juice for Cliff and started talking about the monsters. I told him about how the horde appeared. I told him the adventurers and knights of the royal capital were on the move to defeat those monsters. I told him about how Noa looked like she was about to cry because she was worried about him heading to the capital, so I came to get him. I told him about how, on the way, I discovered the horde, so I defeated them by myself. I told him about the ten thousand monsters, the wyverns, and the wyrm. I told him I wanted all of it to go away.

All the while Cliff was listening to my story, he held his head and drummed his fingers on the table.

"Your story causes me great regret. However, I am also grateful. Thank you." Cliff lowered his head. Whoa. Nobles lowering their heads to commoners was supposed to be rare, according to the novels and manga I'd read.

"I did it for Noa, so don't worry about it."

"I see. In that case, I must thank Noa. On that note, I suppose you want me to be discreet about you slaying the monsters."

"I don't want to draw attention."

"Why is that? You'd be a hero. You'd have money and fame."

"I'm not interested in that. I want to live an enjoyable, peaceful life. That's why I want it to be like none of this ever happened."

"So you say, but to slay ten thousand monsters, wyverns, and a giant wyrm... It's unbelievable."

"Wanna see them?"

"Let my subordinates investigate the forest first. Right now, I only have your words to

go on."

Cliff headed outside and ordered his subordinates to investigate the forest, returning only when they'd confirmed the existence of goblin corpses everywhere. I told them which general direction to go, and the guards headed out.

"Well then, show me these monsters you slayed."

When Cliff's subordinates disappeared from view, I took out all of the wyverns. Cliff's face was transformed with shock. Then I took out the wyrm's corpse, and his shock turned to outright terror.

And I wasn't done yet. I moved on to producing orc corpses.

"That's enough. You don't need to take out any more."

"But there are still wolves."

"No, that's more than enough. Put them away, please."

Fair enough. I started stowing the monsters away once more. Now that I'd seen the wyrm again, it really was pretty gross. I didn't like bugs. I hadn't touched a bug since kindergarten, and I wasn't happy to be starting again now!

I finished putting all of the monsters into bear storage and looked over at Cliff, who was holding his forehead.

"I wish I could believe this was a joke," he said.

"So if we keep mum about this..." I prompted.

"Based on what you said, adventurers and knights of the royal capital are on their way here. There will absolutely be an uproar once they find all the monsters slain."

"Hey, look, no one saw anything. If we zip our lips, no one will know it was me."

"You know what, you..." Cliff looked exasperated.

Had I said something that weird? It wasn't like concealing what I'd done would hurt anyone. The monsters were gone, and the threat had vanished with them.

"This *at least* needs to be reported to the guild master." He sighed. "Let's figure out the rest once we hear from the people I sent to check the woods."

A short time later the guards returned from the forest. When Cliff listened to their report, he held his forehead for the umpteenth time that day. That wasn't my fault though, all right?

After giving it a lot of thought, he seemed to decide to talk one on one with the guild master, whom he thought would be heading this way. I wondered if Sanya would keep things quiet for me, and what would happen afterward if she didn't.

I ended up going to the royal capital with Cliff. Since I had to match the pace of the horses, it was slow going.

It took us half a day to intercept the guild master and her party, right when they were taking a break. I recalled Kumayuru to avoid surprising them, and rode behind Cliff when we approached. Of course, I still drew attention, thanks to my clothes.

"Oh, if it isn't Yuna the runaway," said Sanya.

Did they think I'd turned tail and run? Well, I was a memorable sight, so they had to have heard I'd left the city.

"Sanya. Has it truly been a year?"

"Cliff. Long time no see. Your wife has been very helpful."

"Has she been doing well, then?"

"Why are you and Yuna traveling together?"

"Yuna is here at my daughter's request. She asked Yuna to escort me." That was the cover story we'd decided on.

"Even if that's true, that doesn't change the fact that she ran from the guild's collective mission."

"Don't say that. Yuna came here for my sake. Surely protecting a noble takes the same importance as slaying monsters?"

"Very well, but she must participate in the monster slaying from here. We can't afford to let an adventurer who can defeat tigerwolves and black vipers go back to the capital."

"About that," Cliff said hesitantly. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

We took Sanya and moved off to a different location. Cliff confirmed there were no people around before resuming his tale.

"About that situation—something troubling has occurred. Because of that, I wanted to seek your assistance as guild master."

"What is it?" Sanya's tone matched Cliff's expression.

"Yuna slayed the ten thousand monsters, including the wyverns, by herself."

"...What?" Sanya's eyes were filled with surprise.

"Apparently, there was also a gigantic wyrm."

"A... gigantic... wyrm?" she repeated.

"If you want proof, she has the corpse. I've seen it. It would cause an uproar if she took it out here, though, so I don't suggest you ask her to."

"Why? Why not just produce it?"

"We wanted to keep the fact that Yuna defeated them a secret. Despite how she dresses, she says she wants to live a quiet life."

"Um, you're joking, right?"

"About what? About killing the monsters? Or about how she wants a quiet life dressed like this?"

“Both, of course.”

“At any rate, we came to consult with you before going any further.”

“Yuna, please tell me everything you know.” Sanya looked at me with serious eyes.

I did exactly that.

“In other words, the forest is filled with masses of goblin corpses and orc heads?”

“I’m not sure how many there are, but I didn’t need them, so I left them there.”

“I had my subordinate check on the goblin corpses, so they are undoubtedly there.”

Sanya held her head just like Cliff had earlier. “I’m not sure whether to be delighted or annoyed. This really is troubling.”

“Why not be delighted?”

“Yuna, you’re sure about this? You’d be a hero—you’d get fame, glory, money, everything.”

“Don’t need it.” It wasn’t worth losing my freedom for.

“But that’s what any adventurer would want...” Sanya breathed out a sigh. “All right. Let’s think of this as a good thing. We defeated the monsters without anyone dying. The problem is who defeated them.”

“What are you going to do?”

“We’ll say an A-rank adventurer came and killed them. We’ll also say that they took all the raw materials except the goblins.”

“Who were you thinking would be that A-rank adventurer?”

“It can be anyone. It’ll be an unknown A-rank.”

“What about the wyrm?”

“We can just keep quiet about that.”

It was settled.

Sanya gathered all of the adventurers and began her explanation, "Everyone listen. I've gotten a report that the ten thousand monsters and wyverns have been slayed by an A-rank adventurer."

"An A-rank adventurer?"

"Adventurers like that exist?"

"Guild master, who was that A-rank adventurer?"

"That is confidential. As you know, a large number of A-rank adventurers are free spirits."

The entire crowd accepted that readily. Were A-rank adventurers really like that?

"According to the report, all that was left behind were the goblin corpses with their mana stones and the orcs' heads. Because of that, we'll split into two groups from here: one that will head back to the capital and another that will deal with the aftermath of the goblins."

"Are the monsters really gone?"

"They are not. Why would I lie about that? Your reward will be the goblin mana stones. However, once the butchering is over, you'll need to deal with the corpses. Those who choose to return to the capital will receive no rewards. You're free to pick."

Once Sanya was done explaining, most of the high-ranking adventurers ended up heading back, which checked out, since it was primarily the lower-ranking adventurers who could use the mana stones. Since Sanya needed to inform the king of events, she headed back too, instructing some guild staff members to oversee the goblin butchery on her behalf.

The plan to shift the credit to some nameless A-rank Samaritan had gone off without a hitch.

"Cliff, thank you."

"Don't worry about it. I'm the one who should be thanking you."

“Well then, I’m going back ahead of you.”

“You’re not coming with us?”

“I can make it back in a few hours on my bears.”

“I see. That’s impressive.”

And so, I summoned Kumayuru and returned to the royal capital, leaving the carpet of monster corpses I’d made behind.

CHAPTER 69

TROUBLE OCCURS WHILE THE BEAR IS UNAWARE

THERE WAS ONCE a certain sorcerer. Ten years ago, this sorcerer was banned from the royal capital. All he did was use criminals as sacrifices to cast magic, but they cut off one of his arms and banished him from the capital.

The sorcerer swore revenge.

What are they claiming I did wrong?

I will not forgive that king.

His mere death won't settle this.

I will demolish the kingdom under his care.

I will bring it to ruin.

I will slaughter his citizens.

I will bring despair to him.

I will show him the ruin of his country as he lives on.

A decade has passed since I made that vow.

I gathered goblins, wolves, and orcs. Ten thousand in all.

Ten wyverns and a wyrm I was able to enslave.

At long last, the time for my revenge has come.

The man rejoiced. He had finally come this far. His body was haggard, the life drained

from his visage. He only lived for the sake of showing the king what it meant to despair out of his desire for revenge. The magic that controlled the monsters drained the man's life force. Nevertheless, if he could just enact his revenge, he would even offer his life.

To start, he wanted to see the face of the king in despair. The man traveled to the royal capital. He would sneak into the castle. Since he worked there in days past, he knew of a secret pathway or two. He would enter the king's office without being noticed.

“Who are you?”

“Have you forgotten? I am the one you exiled ten years ago, Ghoulzam.”

“Ghoulzam...”

The king had not recognized the wasted-away man. The thought that the man was inside the castle itself was preposterous.

“What are *you* doing here?”

“Why, I came to see you, of course. Oh, but please don't call for anyone. I just came to talk.”

“To talk?”

“At this very moment, a horde of monsters has been discovered and is giving you quite the headache.”

“How would you know that?”

“Because I was the one who gathered them to take revenge on you.”

“You say this is revenge?”

“Yes, revenge, a grudge, hatred, loathing—call it what you want. I just want to see your face in agony.”

“In that case, you've surely seen enough.”

“No, not yet. I want to see you stricken with despair as I let the wyverns destroy your

country, as the orcs violate and kill your citizens, and as the goblins and wolves run rampant and slaughter the children.”

Just saying it out loud delighted Ghoulzam.

“You...”

“Killing me would be pointless. It’s not as though I came here without preparing myself an escape route.”

The king’s hand halted over the hilt of his sword.

“As soon as I cast my spell, the monsters will approach the capital. It will likely be attacked in a few days’ time. The spell will be put in motion even if I were to die. Regardless of what happens, all you will be able to do is watch silently.”

“This country has adventurers, soldiers, and knights. Don’t think it will be so simple to make the capital fall.”

“I wasn’t thinking it would fall. Even ruining half of it would be enough. I would be fine with it if the wyverns only destroyed the gate and let the monsters invade. I wonder how many citizens would die if just that happened.”

A smile formed over Ghoulzam’s face.

“Adventurers have already departed to slay the monsters. We’ve also prepared soldiers. They may become martyrs, but they will protect the citizens.”

“They are no match for my army.”

“What?”

“I have also prepared a powerful wyrm. The adventurers will likely be a delicious appetizer before it moves on to the main course.”

“You bastard!”

“If you can’t defeat the wyrm, you won’t be able to defeat the goblins and wolves. The country will be destroyed. I will witness the pain on your face.”

“Nonsense!”

“Nonsense it is not. I spent my lifeblood on this spell... *guh*,” Ghoulzam coughed up blood. “Well, it isn’t all that accommodating. It saps my mana and life force. It’s unfortunate I won’t be able to see you suffering until the very end, but I’ll enjoy myself while I can.”

Ghoulzam invoked the spell. All of his mana started to drain from him. What little life he had left trickled away.

“Ghoulzam!”

“The wyrm awakens, and my army will advance. I will enjoy watching you—from a distance.”

Ghoulzam smiled as he vanished.

“Ghoulzam!!!” The king’s shout did not reach him.

“What is the matter, my king?!”

Royal guards came running at the king’s shouts.

“Call for Zhang immediately.”

“Yes, sir!”

The royal guards saluted and ran. Before long, an elderly man with a beard entered the office. This was Zhang, the country’s chancellor.

“You called, your majesty?”

“Gather the knights, soldiers, and sorcerers immediately and have them head out to slay monsters.”

“Elleaura is making the preparations now.”

“Tell her that there is also a wyrm among the monsters, and have her take countermeasures against it.”

“A wyrm, you say?”

“That’s right. At this rate, many of the capital’s adventurers would die in vain.”

“My king, where did you get that information?”

“We have no time to lose. I’ll explain later, so hurry.”

“Yes, sir.”

Zhang hustled out of the office.

“Please make it in time.”

Though he thought that, the king didn’t know how much damage there would be when they fought the wyrm. He could assume that Ghoulzam chose this day to strike knowing how many would be there for the festival. If they could not defeat it, there would be incalculable losses. First the adventurers left from the capital, and the next day the knights, sorcerers, and soldiers would depart.

A few days after Ghoulzam appeared, a ludicrous report arrived. An A-rank adventurer defeated the horde. The king was at a loss for words.

That report was a letter from the master of the adventurers’ guild. It was something he could put his faith in. Though he was relieved, he wondered who this A-rank adventurer was. Had they just happened to be there at the right time? Though he still had many questions, he at least knew the danger had passed. After that, the only thing that remained was finding Ghoulzam somewhere in the royal capital.

However, when the king was alone in his office, Ghoulzam appeared out of nowhere.

“What is happening? Why have the soldiers and the adventurers returned?” Ghoulzam asked the king in a low and cold voice.

“It seems an A-rank adventurer killed all of the monsters you prepared.”

“An A-rank adventurer? That’s impossible. I lured them away.”

"I don't understand it, either. That's just what was written in the guild master's report letter."

"Lies. *Guh-huh*," Goulzam vomited up blood. "Will my revenge be over without ever accomplishing anything? And all because of an unknown adventurer. My plan should have been perfect..."

With a face full of despair, Goulzam glared at the king.

"Why? Why are you smiling?"

"It's over now."

The king drew his sword and struck Goulzam down. As he was now, he had no strength, nor even the thought to dodge. The thought of his wasted effort alone filled his entire mind. The king called for the royal guard and had them dispose of Goulzam's corpse.

"I must express my gratitude to that adventurer."

The adventurer had protected the royal capital, as well as the lives of the citizens, adventurers, and soldiers, after all.

CHAPTER 70

THE BEAR MEETS THE KING

AS I RETURNED ahead of everyone else, I headed toward Noa's residence to get Fina. It was still bustling inside the royal capital, but in just a little while the messengers on the faster horses would arrive, and it would all immediately settle down.

When I got to the house, Surilina led me to the living room. After I waited for a bit, I heard the sound of running feet, and the door was thrown open.

"Yuna!" Fina said.

"Yuna!" Noa said.

"Are you two okay?"

"Yuna, are *you* okay?!" Fina asked.

"I'm fine. All of the monsters were slayed."

I didn't say that *I'd* slain them.

"Yuna, what happened to my father?"

"Cliff will be coming with the adventurers, so he's fine."

"Really?"

Noa's smile was back. Good. It was best when kids were smiling.

"Noa, thank you for looking after Fina."

"Not at all. We're friends, so of course I would."

"Lady Noa..."

Fina seemed happy.

A few days after I defeated the monsters, the adventurers and soldiers returned. Cliff also came back safely with them and reunited with his family. Someone who claimed to be a staff member of the adventurers' guild came to me and ordered me to appear at the guild hall.

"Welcome in, Yuna."

I was left alone in a room with Sanya.

"Well, did you need something from me?"

"Right, we have a slight problem," she continued to talk while averting her eyes. "It's His Majesty, the king. He wants to meet you—or rather, the fabricated A-rank adventurer."

"The king wants to... Can I refuse?"

"He said he absolutely must meet you. He even told me to tell him your name. Of course, I haven't told him anything about you, Yuna."

The equation "King = A Pain" completed itself in my mind.

"Sanya, thank you for your help. I'm heading out on a journey, so please don't look for me."

It was a cliché excuse, but it was all I had.

"Wait a second. If you run, you'll end up on the wanted list. I'll expose your name."

"Are you threatening me?"

"I'm just saying let's look for a compromise. You don't want anyone to know about how you slayed everything, right?"

"Yeah."

"In that case, how about only telling His Majesty? I will ask the king not to tell anyone

else.”

“Can you really do that?”

This was the country’s *king*. Would he really consent to that? I wasn’t certain if he would really meet with an adventurer he didn’t know without guards.

“He’s the kind of person who keeps his promises, so if we can make that agreement, then it is possible.”

“And if he doesn’t promise?”

“We’ll grandly extol you as a hero, or decorate you with an award. Maybe you’ll stand next to the king during the birthday celebration and shake his hand.”

“Um, how far would I have to travel to get to another country? It’d be great if I could get far enough that this country wouldn’t have any influence on the place.”

I had the transport gates, so I could still see Fina and the others and that wouldn’t be a problem. I’d just be living in a new place.

“Please Yuna, can you give me one day? If I can get the king to make that promise, would you meet His Majesty? If you’re going to be running from the capital, then waiting until then wouldn’t be too late, right?”

I definitely could just run away if it seemed like they were going to turn me into a hero. I reluctantly agreed to Sanya’s proposal and left the guild.

While I passed the time leisurely with Fina after coming back from the guild, Sanya came over to the bear house in the evening.

“Sorry for coming this late.”

“It’s no problem. Were you able to talk things through with the king?”

“Yes. It looks like His Majesty will meet with you alone.”

“Will the king really be by himself? He’s *the* king. He’s the most important person in

the country. If I were an assassin, what would you do?"

"I will be with you too, at least. Besides, His Majesty desperately wants to thank the person who defeated the monsters, no matter what that entails. That was why he accepted all of my requests."

If she had gone that far for me, I couldn't turn her down.

"Well then, when should I go and meet him?"

"Tomorrow morning. I'll come get you."

After that I asked a very important question.

"Is it okay if I go dressed like this? If I can't, I'll leave the capital tonight."

If I wasn't wearing this bear outfit and something happened, I wouldn't be able to get away.

"That will be fine. I also asked His Majesty if he wants to meet you despite the fact that you might be dressed strangely. When I asked that, he said that it didn't matter."

With Sanya doing all that for me, all I could do was nod.

When the next day came, I was still feeling reluctant. I prayed that Sanya wouldn't come, but my prayers didn't reach heaven and she ended up coming for me. I asked Fina to look after the house and headed to the castle with Sanya. I found someone I didn't want to meet at that moment there.

"Oh, Yuna. And if it isn't Sanya. What brings the two of you to a place like this?"

We ended up crossing paths with Ellelaura inside the castle. It wasn't unusual to see Ellelaura at her workplace, but it was just terrible timing meeting her in such a large castle.

"Yuna and I have a bit of business."

Like Cliff, Sanya was relaxed when she talked to Ellelaura.

“Oh, do you? Where are you going? I’ll go with you.”

“About that...”

“Oh, don’t worry about me. I’m free right now.”

“But what about your work?”

“I have excellent workers, so things should be fine.”

Sanya was in a bind. Of course, so was I.

When she saw our faces, Ellelaura let out a laugh.

“Ha ha, sorry about that. Please don’t look so anxious, you two. I heard about the monsters from Cliff. I haven’t told anyone, so it’s okay. You’re going to see His Majesty right now, aren’t you?”

Even though I told him not to talk about it, Cliff spilled the beans. He was so loose-lipped.

“That was mean-spirited, Ellelaura.”

“Yuna wouldn’t tell me, though.”

“I suppose it couldn’t be avoided. You are part of the castle, after all.”

“Why did you have to go so far as to forbid Cliff from talking about it? It was so much work getting him to crack.”

So Cliff really did do the best he could. I couldn’t get angry at that. But how’d she break him?

“Since you’ve already heard what happened, will you really come with us, Ellelaura?”
Sanya asked Ellelaura.

“Yes, I will. I heard things from Cliff, so I might be able to help.”

Now a group of three, we headed to the king’s office. Royal guards were standing at the entrance. Someone must have already informed the royal guards since, when they

saw Sanya, they let us enter. It seemed like they wanted to say something when they saw me, but they let me through without a word.

“I am glad you came...”

When I entered the room, there was a good-looking man in his forties inside. Was this the king? He wasn’t wearing a crown like they do in manga. When the king looked at me, he swallowed his words.

“So you’re here too, Ellelaura?”

“The adventurer that defeated the monsters is an acquaintance of mine.”

Ellelaura looked over at me. Then, as though to match her, the king looked in my direction again.

“Well, you told me you were bringing along an A-rank adventurer. What is this strangely dressed girl doing here?”

“Your Majesty, please accept my apologies. There was no A-rank adventurer. This girl single-handedly slayed the horde of monsters. I didn’t think anyone would believe this girl defeated the horde, so I lied about the A-rank adventurer,” Sanya reported what happened while also apologizing.

“I don’t have time for jokes. When is the adventurer coming?”

The king was angry. That was understandable. He had his expectations turned on their head.

“That is why I didn’t want you to meet her. Your Majesty, this is the truth; you have to believe it. I guarantee it as the guild master.”

“I also can give you my assurance this is true,” said Ellelaura.

“Even you?” After the king looked in Ellelaura’s direction, he turned his eyes to me. “Did you really defeat them? Remove that odd hood and speak.”

I was so nervous about being in front of the king that I hadn’t even taken off my hood. I doffed it and greeted him.

“I’m Yuna, the adventurer.”

“But you’re still just a child. Did you really defeat over ten thousand monsters all by yourself?”

I was on the small side, but I was still fifteen.

“Sanya, what did you do to confirm the monsters were defeated? You did verify that, right?”

“We checked on the goblins and orcs.”

I wonder if she told him about the orc heads?

“What about the wolves, wyverns, and wyrm?”

Sanya was surprised when he mentioned the wyrm. Only Sanya, Cliff, and I should have known about that.

“Your Majesty, where did you hear about the wyrm?”

“I heard it from the architect of the mayhem himself.”

“Who might that be?”

“That does not matter right now. What happened to them?”

“The slayed monsters are in her bottomless bag.”

“They’re in a *bottomless bag*?”

“Hers is of the highest grade.”

“This girl has something like that?”

“It’s true. Cliff has confirmed it.”

“I can’t believe this when it’s been sprung so abruptly on me, but it is true that the threat has vanished. You would have no reason to lie to me.”

The king thought a bit, then slowly approached me. *Excuse me, I thought, that's way too close. It's not like I can step back though, right?* I stood motionlessly as the king stared straight at me.

"You have my gratitude. I thank you for saving the citizens, adventurers, and soldiers of the royal capital."

He didn't bow his head, but *the king* thanked me.

"It was no big deal, I just happened to defeat the monsters."

"*You happened* to defeat them?"

Crap, I thought. I hadn't known how to reply and said what I was actually thinking.

"Ha ha ha, that's right. Yuna actually defeated the monsters for my daughter."

Elleaura hugged me with a smile on her face.

"She slayed the monsters because a little girl was about to cry," she said, like it was funny on its face.

The king looked bewildered.

"Oh, but isn't that more than enough of a reason? She's fighting for what she wants to protect."

"I understand that, but if the person who came up with the scheme heard that, I don't think he'd be able to rest even in death."

"What *scheme*?" Sanya's voice and my voice harmonized.

"Yes, right. I suppose I could tell all of you since you were involved."

The king explained that the attempted monster attack was a single man's attempt at enacting revenge. So there was magic that could manipulate monsters, huh? In the game, you could tame monsters and make them into your companions, but this seemed different. I never heard of magic that sapped your life. Well, the game hadn't gone that far in setting up something like that. Maybe it was a prohibited form of magic in this world.

As I dwelled on that, there was a commotion outside the door.

“You cannot, Lady Flora. There are guests inside.”

The door opened a little, and I could hear their voices.

“No! I’m going to see the bear.”

“Please, Lady Flora.”

“Noooo.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Well, Lady Flora has said she would like to meet the bear.”

The moment the royal guard opened the door to explain, she made full use of her tiny physique to quickly slip into the room.

“Bear!” Lady Flora hugged me. “I got to see you.”

She happily rubbed her face against my tummy.

“Oh? You know Flora?”

“When she came to the castle with me earlier, she met Lady Flora.” Elleaura explained.

“You don’t mean that bear picture book was her?”

“Did you see it? Yuna drew that. Pretty good, wasn’t it?”

“I’m not sure how to phrase this? Those drawings were endearing. When I asked who drew them, Flora would only say it was a bear. But now I understand.”

The king looked at me another time. So I’m a bear, so what?

“Bear, play with me.”

“Um, what do you think?”

I looked at everyone.

"Our conversation is finished, so I don't mind. I might contact you at a later date, so just give me your contact information."

"If that's the case, I can be the one to make contact," Ellelaura said.

"Well then, I will also talk to Cliff about this. Tell him I will call him on a later date."

I apologized to Cliff in my mind. It looked like this whole situation was ending uneventfully, though. I looked at Lady Flora, who was clinging to me. Then, I heard a cute little *gurgle* coming from her small stomach.

"Lady Flora, are you hungry?"

"Uh-huh."

There were still hours before lunch. I had pudding inside my bear storage. I guess giving her this little thing would be okay? But, was it okay to give a princess food?

"Um, may I present Lady Flora with something to eat?"

Well, I doubted I'd be allowed to, but I at least asked.

"That would be fine."

This is food we're talking about here, I thought. It might've been dangerous. Could he really give me permission to do that so willy-nilly? What would he have done if I fed her poison?

"Just to make sure, are you really okay with that? What if it was poisoned?"

"What, are you going to feed her poison?"

"I don't intend to. I thought royalty would be a little more cautious about that though."

"Ellelaura and Sanya trust you. I don't need to worry about something like that."

Well, if he was fine with that, I guess it was okay.

"Well then, Lady Flora. Shall we go to your room?"

"Yeah."

I grasped Flora's small hand with my bear puppet.

"You can have her eat it here. That way there will be no cause for suspicion."

When we tried to leave the room, the king stopped us. That was definitely true, but I didn't want to take the pudding out in front of the king. Then again, I couldn't just not pull out the pudding at this point, and it'd be a pain if he had weird doubts about me. I had Lady Flora sit on a sofa in the room and took out a pudding and spoon from bear storage.

"Lady Flora, please have this."

"What's this?"

"It's a cold, sweet, delicious confectionary."

Lady Flora held the spoon in her small hand and brought the pudding to her mouth. At that moment, her face seemed to bloom into a smile. One bite after another, Lady Flora shoveled the pudding into her mouth. It looked like she was having a grand time.

"Is it good?"

"Uh-huh," she gave a small nod.

Her smile was adorable. I felt the urge to pat her head and, in the end, I really did pat the head of the crown princess. No one scolded me, though.

"Is it really that good?"

It looked like I sparked his curiosity.

"Yuna, I'd like to eat some again as well." Elleaura greedily looked in my direction.

"You've had this before, Elleaura?" Sanya asked, but her eyes were on the pudding.

You too?

“Yes, she let me eat some before. It’s sweet, cold, and tasty.”

Everyone alternated between looking at me and the pudding.

“Err, do you want some?”

“Yes, I will partake in some.”

“Thank you, Yuna.”

“May I have some too?”

Anyway, I took out three puddings.

I had five puddings left. Maybe I’d need to head back to Crimonia to get eggs in order to make pudding now?

“What *is* this?”

“Mmhmm, it’s delicious.”

“Oh my, this really is good.”

The three of them happily savored it, just like Lady Flora. I was just happy they were happy. Right then, I could feel a gaze on me. Lady Flora was staring straight at me. She was looking at her empty cup and me.

“This is the last one. If you overeat you won’t be able to have lunch.”

“Uh-huh!”

After warning her, I took out another pudding.

“Do they really sell something as delicious as this in the castle town?”

“I had no idea it existed either.”

“Well yes, of course. Yuna thought up this confectionary,” Elleaura explained on my behalf, but it wasn’t like I invented it. At the same time, it wasn’t like I could say I made it using my knowledge from Earth.

“Is that right? It’s quite tasty.”

“It really is.”

“Do you think our chefs could make it if they knew the recipe?”

“They could.”

I didn’t want to tell it to them, though.

“You can’t. Yuna is trying to help the orphans open a store to sell this food.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Did Ellelaura hear that from Cliff? She started talking about what I had done in the town. She told them I was looking after the orphanage in the town, and that they were raising kokekko for the eggs used in the pudding. She told them I was planning on helping the children open a store if there were any who wanted to learn how to cook.

“How do you know so much about that?”

“I heard it from Cliff. The instant Cliff came here, he was so worked up talking about you that he told me all kinds of things.”

I guess I’d need to give Cliff a talking to about what personal information was.

“In that case, I won’t ask for the recipe. But my daughter would be so delighted if you’d bring some over once in a while, so please do.”

I guess *that* would be okay. I had the bear transport gate and could come any time anyway.

“Ellelaura, please arrange it so that Yuna can come to the castle any time.”

“Yes, understood.”

They ended up posting a castle entry permit on my guild card so I could come to deliver pudding. Was this really okay?

CHAPTER 71

THE BEAR RETURNS TO CRIMONIA FOR EGGS

I WAS OUT OF EGGS. I couldn't eat fried eggs or scrambled. I couldn't make egg sandwiches or pudding. This was a very pressing issue. I had to do an urgent restock.

So...

"Fina, I'm going to return to Crimonia. Do you want to go back too?"

"Whu-huh?" Fina gave me a strange response.

"I don't have any eggs, so I was thinking I would go to the orphanage."

"Are you going home, Yuna?"

I'd just go real quick through the transport gate.

"I am. You could go sightseeing around the capital, though, if you want to. What do you want to do?"

"I'll go home, then. May I say bye to Lady Noa?"

"Oh, you don't need to. We'll be back today."

"...?" Fina tilted her head a little. "In other words, we're heading to town today and then returning to the royal capital today?"

"That's right."

For some reason I got the sense she wasn't grasping what I was saying.

"If we're quick we can get back in the afternoon."

"Yuna, that would be so cruel to Kumayuru and Kumakyu. I don't mind not having eggs, so please don't do something so terrible to them."

“...?” This time I was the one who tilted my head. “We’ll go by the bear transport gate, so we won’t use the bears.”

“What’s a bear transport gate?” This time Fina tilted her head.

Right, I hadn’t told Fina.

“Sorry, you’ve always been with me, so I thought I told you already. I have a bear transport gate, so we can get back to the town instantly.”

“Yuna... I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

That was what I was thinking too. If I was in the real world and someone told me something like that, I would have thought they’d lost their minds. I didn’t know if teleportation magic existed in this world in the first place, so if it didn’t, obviously Fina would say that.

“Umm, I want to ask you something real quick, but in this country, is there a way to like transport yourself? Like a way to go from one place to another instantly?”

“...”

“For example, is there magic that could get you from the royal capital to the town in an instant?”

“I haven’t heard of anything like that.”

Yeah, of course there wouldn’t be. I wondered if it was okay to tell Fina about the bear transport gate. Fina wasn’t the kind of girl to spread that around. Well, even if other people knew, I was the only one who could use it, and I only set them up in the bear houses, so I ended up coming to the conclusion it was okay.

“Fina, I really trust you, okay.”

“Um, yes?” she gave me a nod with her head still tilted to the side.

I headed to the storehouse and set up a bear transport gate.

“I think you had one of these at the storehouse over there too.”

There was one in the storehouse, but I hadn't explained what it was to Fina. We'd been together so long, I thought I already told her.

"This gate is linked to the one in Crimonia."

"Yuna, even I'm not that gullible. If it were possible for me to go through this gate to get to the town where my mom is, no one would ever have any troubles."

That was sure true.

"Anyway, you'll understand once you go through it."

I took Fina's hand and opened the door of the bear transport gate. Beyond that was the inside of the storehouse of the bear house in Crimonia.

"Yuna?!"

Fina looked shocked. Well, anybody would be surprised.

"Don't tell anyone about this. Also, you can't use it to travel without me around."

When we left the storehouse, we were in our near and dear town of Crimonia.

"Tiermina should be at the orphanage right around now. Shall we go?"

The two of us headed to the orphanage.

"Bear girl!"

When we approached the orphanage, the children playing outside rushed over. They were the ones I started calling the child brigade without asking. They were still young, but they were good kids who took care of the younger ones. When one of them noticed me, a second one and then a third one ran up to me. The group of children surrounding me grew. I might have been imagining it, but I felt like there were more kids around.

"Everyone, did something happen?"

"Nope, we're fine."

"We're working hard."

I patted everyone's heads.

"Is Tiermina around?"

"Yeah, she's with the mistress."

I told everyone to have fun playing and headed to the orphanage. When I got inside, we found the director, Tiermina, and Liz having tea together.

"Mom."

"It's Fina and Yuna! You came back?"

"We're headed back to the royal capital right away. I wanted eggs, so we came back temporarily."

"You needed eggs?"

"Are there any?"

"All of the eggs belong to you, so as long as there are some, you've got them. You didn't come all the way back from the royal capital just for eggs, did you?"

Well, since she didn't know about the bear transport gate, that'd be her natural train of thought.

"Um, yeah. Kumayuru and Kumakyu really worked hard."

"Are your summons really that quick?"

Since I didn't have an answer I could give her, I just let my wheels spin.

"Well, they are summons."

I hoped she was satisfied with my vague non-answer.

"Well, when are you heading back to the royal capital?"

"If we're quick, we might even leave today."

“That’s so soon.”

“If the eggs won’t be ready until tomorrow, I don’t mind waiting.”

“Right. About how many did you want?”

“Around a hundred or two—the more the better.”

“In that case, would tomorrow work? I can get you a hundred today and I should be able to prepare even more tomorrow.”

I approved of that.

“Well then Fina, since you’re heading out tomorrow, it’s okay if you stick with Tiermina today. If you want to just stay here, then that’s fine too.”

“No, I would like to go back to the capital too. I still haven’t said goodbye to Lady Noa.”

“In that case, let’s meet at the orphanage tomorrow. Also, I have a request for you, Tiermina, and everyone else.”

“What is it?”

“I think in about a month from now a person selling spuds should come by, so can you accept those for me? I’ve already paid an advance, so pay for the rest with what you make from the eggs.”

“Spuds? I’ve seen those being sold sometimes, but I’ve occasionally heard they cause stomachaches.”

So I guess they did sell them in this town sometimes? Well, I wanted to buy them regularly, so that wasn’t a big deal.

“They’re fine as long as you don’t eat the parts that have sprouted or turned green.”

“Really?”

“So, please accept them for me.”

“All right.”

I took today's portion of the eggs and headed away from the orphanage. Compared to walking around in the royal capital, I didn't get as many stares. Every once in a while I'd hear a little kid say, "There's a bear," but that was pretty much it. When I'd give them a quick wave of my hand, they'd look delighted.

When I got home, there was someone standing out front.

"Yuna, you're finally back."

Milaine was standing before me, looking at me like she had found prey.

"Milaine? What happened?"

"Don't 'what happened' me. I have so many questions for you."

I wondered what was going on. I didn't remember doing anything that would have made Milaine upset.

"What was that food?!"

"What food?"

"The food you gave me before going to the royal capital."

"Oh, you mean the pudding."

Come to think if it, I did remember giving her some.

"Yes, that's right. That delicious food."

"I'm impressed you even knew I was in town."

"There's not a single person who wouldn't notice you in that outfit. I heard from a staff member at the trade guild that they saw you, so I waited in front of your home."

Milaine firmly grasped my shoulders to prevent my escape. I could have easily shaken her off, but that sure would have meant trouble for Milaine.

“I won’t run away, so could you let me go?”

“You mean it?”

“Milaine, you’re not acting like yourself.”

My dignified image of Milaine collapsed.

“That is your fault. It’s because you gave me that delicious thing and vanished.”

That wasn’t what I meant to do. It’d just been a thank you gift for her.

“Well then, Yuna, what is that food?”

“It’s made with eggs. I’m happy you’ve taken such a liking to it.”

“Well then, I have something to discuss with you. Would you open up a shop? Those would sell for certain.”

I knew they’d sell. I’d been planning around it for ages. I’m sure there would be kids interested in cooking, and if they just knew how, even kids could make pudding. That was why I hadn’t taught Cliff or even the king the recipe.

“Like I said before, I make pudding using eggs. What are the egg prices right now?”

“It’s dropped considerably. We’ve been getting two to three hundred every day.”

It looked like the price was falling just like I wanted it to. They’d also been selling a lot more to the guild wholesale. In that case, if we sold fewer to the guild, maybe we could open a shop?

According to Tiermina, we had about four hundred kokkeko right now. If I were to open a store, we needed at least five hundred, though in the future I wanted a thousand. If they were multiplying pretty well, maybe we’d get to five hundred before long?

If I limited sales, opening a shop would be feasible. The only problem was the store couldn’t be managed just by children. I needed an adult to watch them. I could trust Liz or Tiermina with the job, but Liz was looking after the children and the birds. Tiermina was managing the eggs. She said she finished her work in the morning,

which meant she had time in the afternoon.

Maybe I could discuss that with Tiermina.

“I can even prepare a chef.”

I’d rather she not. I’d have problems if the recipe leaked.

“For now, can I ask you to get the store first?”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t want to tell others the recipe, so I don’t need a chef.”

“I understand. Do you have any preferences regarding the store?”

“I’ll leave the size of the store to you, but please make it close to the orphanage. Also, if you could, please make sure it’s someplace where crowds wouldn’t be an issue.”

There was a chance we’d end up with lines. If hundreds of people lined up, it’d cause trouble for any neighbors.

“Why close to the orphanage?”

“When I open shop, I plan to have the children from the orphanage work there.”

“You’re going to have the orphans work?”

“I think it would help them gain independence.”

“Understood.”

“I’m not in a hurry, so take your time. I’m returning to the royal capital tomorrow.”

“Really?”

“I had some errands, so I popped back in for a bit.”

“I think it’s a bit far to be coming back here just for some errands.”

“My summons are just that amazing.”

I couldn’t tell her about the transport gate, so I fell back on my BS escape route. Milaine didn’t ask any more questions. Instead, she asked me something else.

“So, Yuna,” she said, like she was having trouble getting it out. “I wanted to ask if you could give me the pudding, but I’m not supposing you could do that.”

She seemed very covetous as she asked me that. She *had* helped me out a lot. I took four puddings out of my bear storage.

“This is the last of what I have right now.”

“Yuna, sweetie, thank you.”

She accepted them happily and carefully put them away in her bottomless bag, making sure she didn’t drop them, then left. Hmm? Now that I thought about it, had Milaine just called me “sweetie?” It must have been my imagination.

I decided to make pudding from the eggs I’d gotten from Tiermina, and with that, my day was over.

CHAPTER 72

THE BEAR SNAGS BAKERS

PART ONE

THE NEXT DAY, once I got my eggs, I headed back to the capital. I'd have some peace of mind for a while with them on hand. While I was lazing around in the bear house, I heard someone calling to me from outside. When I went out, Noa was pouting and standing imposingly. She looked like she was mad, but she just looked so cute with her cheeks puffed out like that.

“Yuna, where did you go when you left me behind today?”

I couldn't tell her about the bear transport gate, so I decided to redirect the conversation.

“Can I ask you a question too?”

“What would that be?”

“I don't really know what's up with you, but are you bored? Don't you need to go around greeting the other aristocrats or getting ready to attend the birthday celebration?”

I'd think that aristocrats would need to get the clothes they'd wear while participating in the birthday celebration ready or something.

“I don't have anything like that to do. My mother lives here, so there's no reason to go around greeting people. Even if I did have to do that, I'd just greet them at the party proper. Even then, my mother and father would be attending with me, and besides, my older sister is the one who's the star. I'm just an extra. More importantly, let's talk about yesterday. I came over with Misa. She said she wanted to meet with the bears.”

Then I did something terrible. I couldn't explain yesterday, so I just apologized obediently and invited Misa over to play with Kumayuru and Kumakyu. I spent the day watching the three of them, Fina included, play with the bears at home.

More and more days passed since I'd gotten to the capital, and the birthday celebration was approaching. Of course, the closer it came, the busier Cliff and the other nobles got. Noa and Misa, who were bored, couldn't go outside anymore. Lately I was going out just with Fina a lot more.

"I thought there were a ton of people when we came to the capital, but there are even more today."

"This is my first time ever seeing this many people."

"But the more people, the more I'm getting showered in stares."

"That's because your clothes stand out no matter where you go, Yuna."

Ever since I came to the capital, I started getting good at ignoring things. Though saying that it didn't bother me would have been a lie, you can adapt to anything. As long as they didn't try picking a fight with me, I decided to ignore them.

"There's no point in worrying about that. Let's just enjoy the birthday celebration."

"Okay."

We bought and ate stuff, browsed the stands, and wandered around looking at the capital. The capital was so vast that no matter how much time we had, there wasn't enough to leisurely go around to see it all. At the same time, I was able to get my hands on all kinds of rare things.

Though a lot of things had been a pain, there were a ton of benefits to escorting Noa.

"Oh, that's a nice smell."

The scent of freshly baked bread wafted to us from somewhere.

"Yes, that smells very good."

"Looks like it's coming from that bakery. That's perfect timing, so how about we get something to eat from there?"

I saw the signboard ahead in my vision. Though the store was sort of small, there was a crowd inside. Like me, it looked like everyone was lured in by the aroma. Fina and I

got in line to buy bread. Even if anyone were surprised by my appearance, no one said anything to us. Then, after waiting about ten minutes, our turn came.

“Looks like some tasty bread.”

A girl about my age was helping customers. Though she was surprised when she saw how I looked, she smiled at me right away.

“Th-thank you so much.”

“Could I have two of whatever you think is best?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The girl handed each of us freshly baked bread. They smelled great.

“If it’s good, I’ll come again.”

“We will look forward to seeing you!”

Fina and I walked as we ate the bread. Fina copied me, but maybe I was setting a bad example by walking and eating? I apologized to Tiermina in my mind and kept doing it.

“This might be the best bread I’ve had, of everything I’ve eaten.”

“Yes, it tastes really good.”

The bread was fluffy. I remembered the breads I had in Japan. I’m sure this bread would have been delicious if I used it for sandwiches, or since I had cheese, I could make pizza toast. There were lots of options. I needed to make sure I didn’t forget to buy more before heading back to Crimonia. Then I considered how many customers they had. It wasn’t like I could buy them up. Well, I had the bear transport gate, so I could go buy from them anytime, but I preferred to just buy a ton of it up all at once.

After that, Fina and I kept sightseeing around the capital while eating and walking. Since we were passing by that bakery again on the way back home, I decided to buy bread for the next morning. Fina approved. I mean, the bread was really good. I hoped that the bakery was still open. When we got closer, I didn’t see any customers around. Maybe they’d closed up?

In order to check, I went around to the front of the shop when I heard a girl yelling, “Stop!”

Someone’d left the door open. I could see a women in her thirties yelling. The girl from behind the counter was behind her. They were yelling at three men knocking things around inside. The mother put herself between her daughter and the men, and was doing everything she could to stand up to them. The crowd outside was steadily distancing itself.

“Hurry up and get out,” said one of the men. “This store isn’t yours.”

The three men were on a rampage. Bread flew into the air.

Snap.

“But according to the agreement, we have until the birthday celebration.”

“There’s somebody who wants to sell in this spot!”

The men stomped on the fallen bread.

Snap.

“But the agreement...”

“You keep going on and on about agreements. Shut up! You wanna work here, then you better cough up the rest of your husband’s debt. You could pay it with your little girl’s body if you’re hard up.”

The man grabbed the girl’s arm.

Snap. Snap.

“Let go of my daughter!”

The mother grabbed at the man to save her daughter, but the man punched her.

I burst into the store.

“Who the heck are you?!”

I punched the first man.

“What do you think you’re doing?!”

I kicked the second.

“Why you little—you think you can...”

I threw the third.

“Which one of you wants to die first?”

I stomped on their collapsed bodies.

“What are you?”

“Well, I’m a bear.” I didn’t have a name to offer to men like them.

“You think you can get away with doing this to us?” The man I’d thrown stood up and pulled out a knife.

“You pulled a blade on me, so you don’t get to complain if you end up dead.”

“Don’t screw with me!”

I gave him a bear punch straight in the solar plexus.

“Who’s next?” I looked at the remaining two.

“We remember what you look like now. Don’t think you’ll get out of the capital in one piece!” the surviving toughs said as they dragged their collapsed partner away.

“You okay?” I approached the mother and daughter.

“Yes, thank you.”

“But this is a terrible mess.”

All of their freshly made bread was on the ground. Since it all smelled so amazing, that just made it even worse. Just looking at it made me feel a surge of anger. I should’ve

really let them have it.

"They said something about a debt earlier?"

"We took out a loan when we bought this storefront, but just when my husband passed some days ago, they told us to pay back the debt or leave."

"But can't you pay back the debt really easily, considering you make such great bread?"

When I came to buy it in the afternoon, there was a line. Plus, it tasted great. They should have been able to pay the debt back considering that. But the mother shook her head.

"Apparently my late husband was tricked, and it wasn't a sum that we could pay back."

There was no getting away from loan sharks, even across worlds.

"So they want our shop as collateral for the debt."

What was one to do? Since I wanted the bread, I wanted the bakery to stay open.

"We were planning on saving up a bit of money before leaving here in order to have funds to build our next bakery."

"The agreement was that we had until the birthday celebration."

The daughter sorrowfully gathered the bread on the ground. The mother gently hugged her daughter over her shoulder. They were probably despondent. I wondered if there was anything I could do for them. A store, huh...

"Are you going to keep selling bread?"

"My husband entrusted me with the bread, so I plan on doing this until I die."

I couldn't stand by in silence.

"Okay, I got it. In that case, would you like to work at my store?"

"At your store, miss?"

"I have some small plans to make a store, but I've got a problem, since I don't have people to work there."

Tiermina and Liz were busy enough without extra duties at the new store in Crimonia, and it would sure be empty if we just sold pudding. It'd be great to sell the bread together with it. On top of that, the bread tasted divine. And they had management experience. They were exactly the kind of talent my store needed. Plus, if they could make bread, then we could sell pizza. Two birds, one stone.

"Who *are* you, miss?"

"I'm one of Crimonia's adventurers. I've got this idea for a shop, because... never mind why."

"You're an adventurer..."

The mother and child looked at me with wonder. While I waited for their reply, Fina pulled on my clothes.

"Yuna, there are people gathering."

People really started to form a crowd. There was a chance the men from earlier would be back.

"Let's talk details at my house, so how about we get a move on? If we stay here, your daughter might be in danger."

"But we would be causing you trouble, miss."

"Don't worry about it. Your daughter would be in trouble if I left her like this."

After the mother checked the state of the shop, she finally looked at her teary-eyed daughter.

"If you would be so kind," she said.

The mother's name was Morin, and her daughter was Karin. While I walked, I told them about the shop in Crimonia. I explained that we were going to sell a confection called pudding and a food called pizza and that the shop would employ orphans, and that I wanted them to be the managers.

"Fina and Yuna, just who are you?" Karin asked.

"Yuna is a very kind adventurer and good person," said Fina. "She's saved me a lot too."

"And what about those clothes?"

"Those are... well, it's because she's Yuna."

I didn't really get what she meant, but it was persuasive. I couldn't say otherwise.

We didn't see the men again on the way to the bear house.

"A bear?"

The two of them were slack-jawed at the sight of it.

"Yuna, what is that bear?"

"That's my house. We're going in."

I took the two of them into the house.

"Anyway, just rest here wherever."

"Um, Yuna, were you really serious about what you said earlier?" the mother asked, looking around the room.

"I was. I'd need you to leave the capital and come to Crimonia."

They would need to say goodbye to the people they knew in the capital. I brought out pudding and pizza for the two.

"What is this?"

"These are pizza and pudding—the things I said I wanted to sell in the shop when I spoke to you earlier. I was hoping you could be in charge of these as well as the bread."

The two of them were shocked when they saw the pizza and pudding for the first time.

When I suggested they have the pizza first, they picked it up.

“What is this?”

“Yuna, it’s so good,” Karin said.

“Are you going to teach us how to make this?”

“Yeah, since I’m going to have you bake it.”

After they finished eating the pizza, they ate the pudding.

“This is also delicious.”

“It really is.”

Once they finished eating, I asked them again.

“Would you work at my shop?”

Morin and Karin looked at each other.

“Will you really give us work?”

“Are you sure you want us to do it?”

“Yeah, since I want to eat your amazing bread.”

For a few seconds, Morin closed her eyes and went into thought. Then, she slowly opened them.

“I don’t know how much help we will be, but my daughter and I look forward to working with you.”

Morin bowed her head. When she saw that, Karin also bowed hers. I’d snagged me some bakers.

CHAPTER 73

THE BEAR SNAGS BAKERS

PART TWO

THE NEXT DAY, when I talked to Morin and Karin about our next steps, I noticed a commotion outside.

“Come out here!”

“We’ll break the door down!”

“Get out here, bear!”

Sure was noisy outside. Maybe I needed to put in some insulation.

“You don’t think they’re from yesterday...” Morin stood up.

“Yuna,” Fina said, giving me a worried look.

I turned a smile to her so she wouldn’t be anxious.

“I’m going to take a quick peek.”

“Yuna?!” Morin looked shocked when I said that. “It’s dangerous.”

“You don’t need to worry. Despite my outfit, I really am an adventurer.”

Morin looked me over. I in no way resembled an adventurer. I might have made her way more worried.

“You saw me when I was beating those guys when they came to the store.”

“I did... but if something does happen...”

“As your employer, it’s my job to protect my employees.”

After I told the three of them not to go outside, I went out on my own. There was a portly man on the lawn leading a group of about ten men.

"So you've finally come out, bear girl," the man said, grinning.

"Who the heck are you?"

"I'm the merchant, Lord Jowlz."

"Lardy Jowlz? That's a little on the nose, don't you think?"

"Why you little—!" one of the underlings yelled.

Looks like they didn't take a fancy to that. I thought it was a great name.

"Back down! So, bear girl, looks you like really did a number on some of my men yesterday."

"They were the ones who pulled a knife on me first. Should I have sliced them up?"

"You think you can get away with defying Lord Jowlz in this capital? How about I sell you along with that baker's daughter?" he said, still grinning.

I wanted to dribble him like a soccer ball up and down my property.

"But," he said, "if you give back the baker family, then I'll forgive you this time."

"You know what? You're seriously mistaken if you think that things are always going to go the way you want them."

"Looks like you don't know how the world works, either. There are some people you just can't pick fights with in this world. Just because you've got some talent, you can't just stick your head in things."

Jowlz's men drew their knives.

"That's enough. Could you close your mouth? It stinks."

I couldn't actually catch a whiff of him at this distance, but I *was* feeling nauseated.

I opened the ground beneath his men's feet. The merchant Jowlz was the only one left standing as they all fell into a hole. It was about a five-meter drop; they undoubtedly had broken bones. If they'd been unlucky, they might have even died.

"You little... so you're a sorceress?"

"I'm an adventurer."

"A girl dressed as weird as you is supposed to be an adventurer..."

No matter how I was dressed, I was an adventurer. I approached him.

"Keep back!"

"Then would you like to get in the hole yourself?"

I just wouldn't feel satisfied until I punched him at least once for Morin and Karin.

"Who do you think I am? I'm Jowlz the merchant. I even have clout with the master of the adventurers' guild. What's a little girl like you supposed to be able to do?!"

"Oh, I don't know who you are."

Jowlz was caught off guard by the unexpected address. He turned, and there was a person with long ears and long, light green hair standing in front of him.

"Sanya," I said, "what are you doing here?"

"I happened to be walking around, and I heard those men saying things to each other like 'The bear house is over here,' 'The bear is strong, so be careful,' 'Please let us get revenge on the bear,' so I thought it was about you, Yuna, and tailed them."

Well, if they were saying stuff like that, it'd definitely be about me.

"So, I heard that we're supposed to know each other. Did I just imagine that?"

Sanya looked upset.

"You're the master of the adventurers' guild?"

“Yes, I am. I don’t actually know you, but I do know that bear over there.”

“Don’t you screw with me! Who cares about guild masters! I’m close with the king himself. If I told the king about you guys, then you know what’d happen to you?”

Was this merchant an idiot? There was a saying that goes something like what happens once, happens twice or something, right?

“Who are you? I’ve never seen you before.”

Yeah, for some reason the king turned up. Could I joke about that?

“The king? There’s no way the king would be here.”

That’s what I’d think too. Why *was* he here?

“You’re free to believe it’s not true, but you used the king’s name in a criminal offense. Don’t think this will be treated lightly. Sanya, sorry for asking you to do this, but could you seize him? Please inform the castle as well.”

“Oh well. I suppose I’m the only one who can do it among us.”

Sanya put Jowlz in a headlock. I never got to punch him.

“Let me go. Do you even know who I am?”

“You’re pretty rambunctious.”

Sanya knocked him off his feet. Since Sanya punched him for me, I guess that was fine by me.

It looked like the two of them resolved things neatly. I guess that saved me trouble, so it was fine.

“So, what business would His Majesty the king have with me?”

“What? You’re not going to invite me in?” he said, looking at the bear house.

“You want to come inside?”

I didn't really want him to, though.

"Anyone would want to go inside after seeing that house."

"Before that, how did you know where my house was?"

"Elleaura told me, of course."

Well, I guess that was the only source of information he would've had about it.

"Ahh, all right."

For some reason, the most important person in the country ended up coming into the bear house.

"Yuna, was everything okay?" Fina asked.

Fina and Morin seemed worried.

"It was fine. The guild master came by."

"Oh good. So, who is this man?" Fina asked.

Well, I guess anyone would be curious about that.

"He's the king."

"Uhhh, the king?" Fina tilted her head to the side.

"Yes, the king."

"You mean the most important person in the country?"

"Yes."

"Wh-why would someone like that be here?!"

"I dunno. Why don't you ask him?"

Fina whipped her head to the right and left. Morin and Karin were both pale. They

might have known what the king looked like.

"So what was it you wanted to ask from me?" I asked the king as he looked around the room.

"Oh, yes of course. I wanted to ask if you could make the pudding from earlier for the birthday celebration. I'm sure it will give everyone a surprise if we served that at the banquet."

What was he thinking?! Could I say no?

"So, by any chance, could I refuse...?"

"What? Are you saying you're refusing me, the king?"

I guess when it came to the king, it was his way or the highway.

"It's not that. I need ingredients to make the pudding."

"If you require money, I will pay it."

It wasn't a matter of money. The issue was the eggs. I just replenished the eggs the other day, so I *could* make the pudding. The issue was how many I'd need to make. Of course, I couldn't go to Crimonia again to get more eggs.

"Also, how many would I need to make? I can't make a ton of them."

"If you can, three hundred."

Three hundred, huh... I thought. If I used the pudding I made the other day and the remaining eggs, maybe it was possible? I just replenished my eggs; maybe this was the perfect time to show Morin and Karin how to make pudding?

"So? Can you make it?"

When I thought about how it was for the king's birthday, I realized I didn't know when it actually was.

"I think it should be fine, but when was the festival again?"

“C’mon!” the king joked.

I just hadn’t been interested in knowing. It’s not like I could help that. The most I knew was that it was *probably* sometime soon.

“Yuna, it’s in five days,” Fina told me in a quiet voice from behind me.

“In that case, could I bring them to you on the morning of?”

“Yes, that’ll do.”

“Also, I’d prefer if no one found out I made them.”

“Right. We’ll have you sneak into the castle and put them in one of the empty rooms somewhere.”

“If they’re not chilled, they’re half as good though.”

“In that case, we will prepare a refrigerator in the room.”

If he was going to go that far, I didn’t have a good reason to say no. Pudding ended up being added to the menu of the king’s birthday celebration banquet.

The king went home, and Sanya had taken the trash that was making a commotion outside to the guard station, so my house was quiet again.

The atmosphere in the room changed somehow.

“Uhh, what’s gotten into everyone?”

I felt like everyone was looking at me differently.

“Uhh, Yuna, who *are* you? Are you really a noble?” Morin cautiously asked me.

“I’m not. I’m a normal adventurer.”

“But the king seemed to be so friendly with you.”

“We just happened to have an opportunity to meet each other.”

“But the king himself came over to your house.”

“That was just because he wanted to have some pudding.”

“But...”

The two of them really wouldn’t believe me. Even Fina was starting to look at me like I was an aristocrat. All that king had brought was unnecessary trouble for me. What else were they supposed to think? When somebody who was practically a god suddenly appeared in front of them, anyone who that person seemed to know would end up feeling like they were also at the same level. That was the same in any world. If you were a politician, you’d know lots of politicians. If you were a doctor, you’d know lots of doctors. If you were a teacher, you’d know lots of teachers. If you were a performer, you’d know lots of performers. If you were a shut-in, you’d know lots of shut-ins. (You’d see them a lot in the game.)

No matter what occupation you were in, you’d know a lot of people in the same circle. In that case, the royalty would know a lot of nobles.

“Ahh! Anyway, I’m not an aristocrat or involved with the royalty.”

I forcibly ended the conversation and talked about how to make pudding.

“So, it’ll be a little earlier than planned, but I’m going to have you both help me make pudding starting tomorrow.”

“Does that mean we’re making food for the king’s banquet?”

I nodded. If they were going to learn how to make it anyway, it’d be faster if we did it through practice.

“We can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Would it go into the mouth of the king himself?”

“Well, I think he would be eating it.”

“I can’t do something so frightful.”

“It’s not like we’re going to be poisoning them.”

It wasn’t anything to be so reluctant about, but the two of them wouldn’t agree to it.

“You won’t consider it at all?”

I felt like I was bullying them. Thinking about it from a general point of view, commoners making food for the king might’ve been unbelievable. Well, if somebody told me I’d be making food for the prime minister or some place’s president, I think I’d feel the same way. Since forcing the impossible wasn’t a good idea, I decided to make a hundred puddings with Fina in the end.

“In that case, Fina, the two of us will have to make them.”

But Fina shook her head.

“I can’t!”

Et tu, Fina? I thought.

The next day, I made the puddings by my lonely self after failing to persuade Fina to help. For the time being, I had the three of them watch from the side so they could learn how to make it. At the very least, I wish they’d crack the eggs, but they wouldn’t even do that. Putting it together with the pudding I made the day before, I decided to make three hundred puddings by myself. I silently cracked the eggs and whipped them. The three of them just watched. Were they that reluctant to make food for the king and his court?

They didn’t pick up on the bitter thoughts I radiated, and I ended up making the three hundred puddings.

I lined up the vast amounts of pudding in a gigantic refrigerator. Though most of the eggs I replenished were gone, Morin promised to make bread, so I was looking forward to the next day.

CHAPTER 74

THE BEAR GOES HOME TO CRIMONIA

I ATE BREAD MORIN MADE this morning too. It really was delicious.

“Your stone oven is pretty great, Yuna.”

I was happy she said that. As I took my time eating breakfast, Ranzel came to the bear house.

“Why are you here so early this morning?”

“I had a report on Jowlz, whom we caught the other day.”

“Right, that lard.”

According to Ranzel, Jowlz tried to wheedle and threaten people by using the names of other countries’ kings. He was also involved in violence, scams, and a whole bunch of other things. Morin’s bakery had also been part of that report. Morin listened in. This is how the talk basically went:

The debt would be wiped clean. The bakery would officially become Morin’s.

“Is that really true?”

“Yes, Jowlz’s property has been confiscated, and he will be receiving the death penalty based on the results of the investigation.”

“The death penalty...”

“To use the king’s name for crime is to tarnish it. In addition, His Majesty himself saw it happen. We cannot turn a blind eye.”

Well, I suppose not. His threat was that he was close with the king. It wouldn’t have been odd for the people to have thought that the king was involved with criminals from that. Ranzel brought the deed to the shop for Morin. She cried happy tears as she

accepted it. Ranzel bowed his head and left. A hush came over those of us who were left there.

“Isn’t that great? The shop your husband created is safe.”

“Yuna...”

“I really wanted you to come to Crimonia, though.”

Morin was beside herself and had no idea what to do.

“Don’t worry about it. Your husband probably would have wanted you to protect the shop.”

“I’m so sorry. You’ve done so much for us.”

“This is when you’re supposed to be happy.”

“Yuna, thank you.”

After that, Morin and Karin went back to their shop. It was too bad, but what was I supposed to do? Things had gone in a good direction, so I had to see Morin and Karin off toward that horizon. All I had to do was just go buy bread.

While I was making dinner with Fina, Morin and Karin came by.

“What’s up?”

“Could I talk to you for a bit?” said Morin.

I wondered what she wanted to talk about. I brought the two to a room.

Morin and Karin were just sitting in their seats looking at me. Morin took a deep breath, pulled a paper out of her pocket, and offered it to me.

“Yuna, we’d like you to have this.”

It was the shop’s deed.

“...?”

I had no idea why they'd give me that.

“Please let us work at your shop.”

“Why? You don't need to come to Crimonia. You can keep your shop open in the capital.”

“I talked it out with my daughter today while we were cleaning up the shop. You saved us, Yuna, and you trusted us and showed us how to make the pudding the king himself came to ask you for. We can't go back on our agreement just because we got our shop back.”

“You don't need to worry about that.”

Morin shook her head.

“Please take it.”

Morin once again forced the deed over to my side of the table.

“I'm happy, but I can't take this.”

“Yuna?”

“If you end up not liking my shop, you can always go back. But, if you like my shop, you can stay as long as you like.”

I gave the deed back to Morin.

“Please cherish the shop that's a memory of your husband.”

“Thank you.”

The two of them bowed their heads. They decided to head out to Crimonia the day after the birthday celebration. After the birthday celebration, the people who gathered would head back to their respective homes. Since the people going back to Crimonia would be going as a crowd, they wouldn't end up attacked by monsters or bandits as they traveled. The two decided to head to Crimonia as part of one of those groups.

Apparently the two of them would be cleaning the shop and going to see people who helped them in the capital until they headed out. For their sakes, I really needed to make sure this was a good shop.

On the day of the festival itself, I was waiting for Ellelaura so I could take the pudding to the castle. There were tons of people going in and out on that day, and even with a permit, I couldn't go into the castle by myself, so Ellelaura would be going with me.

"Fina, do you really not want to come?"

"Yes, I'll watch the house."

It seemed like meeting Lady Flora while we were looking around the castle the other day had sort of become a trauma for her, though nothing bad actually happened to her. As a commoner, even meeting royalty was enough to make her tense up. I didn't want to force it, so I ended up deciding to go alone. I told her I'd come home as soon as I could, though.

Eventually Ellelaura came by.

"Morning."

"Good morning."

"Ha ha, I'd like to see everyone's faces when they eat the pudding as soon as possible."

Ellelaura looked fiendish. She was the same as the king.

"Please make sure you really don't spread that I made them."

"I won't. You know, His Majesty comes up with some fun ideas."

"The people who end up being roped into those ideas sure end up with a lot of trouble, though."

"Ha ha, you're right. But it is fun to watch."

When we got to the castle, carriages that looked about right for bluebloods entered the castle one after another. There were a lot that were beautifully ornamented. I wasn't Fina, but seeing these sure made me want to run off. It was like going to a

friend's wedding and finding tons of people in high-class cars while I was the only one who came by bus.

Well, all I was doing was leaving the pudding, and I wasn't going to be part of the party, so it was fine. When I got into the castle, I was taken to a deserted room where someone'd set up a refrigerator.

"Please put the puddings in there."

I pulled them out of bear storage and started loading all three hundred into the fridge.

"Those look delicious."

"You can't eat them."

"Of course, even I wouldn't dare do that. But I won't be able to have them anymore once you go back to Crimonia."

"I'll treat you if you come by."

"I'll head home there once my daughter has a break from the academy, so I'll take you up on it then."

Well, by then I'd probably have the shop done; it might be nice to have her come by.

"In that case, I'm heading home."

"Are you really not going to come to the party? I can get a beautiful dress prepped for you."

"I've left Fina waiting all alone, so I'm going to head back."

Leaving Fina on her own would just be sad.

"Fina should have come by, too."

"Having her and I go to the king's birthday party is too tall of an order"

"Is it? I don't think there would be issues for the hero who slayed the horde and her friend to come."

“I don’t intend to become a hero, so I’ll have to respectfully decline.”

When I returned to the bear house, I found Fina looking lonely as she waited for me. Coming back was the right thing to do. Fina perked up when I got home.

“Yuna, welcome home.”

“Thanks. So, want to go see the parade or something?”

“But there won’t be a spot open if we go now.”

“I have some special seats, so it’ll be fine.”

I took Fina outside. When we headed to the main road, just as Fina said, a crowd formed, and we couldn’t see the parade through that.

“Yuna, I don’t think this will work.”

“How about over there? I’m going to leap, so hold on tight.”

I held Fina and jumped, first to the roof of a small house, and from there to a tall rooftop. Finally, I jumped onto the tallest structure around.

“We have a great view from here, right?”

Since people were going to see the parade, everything down below was overflowing. Everyone gathered to catch a glimpse of the king. Maybe it was like seeing a performer? Kind of like a parade after a pro baseball victory?

“Look, Fina. The people look like garbage from here.”

“Yuna...”

Fina was looking at me coldly. I did a magnificent job of ignoring that and brought out bread I bought ahead of time. While I ate and drank watching the capital from the top of the roof, the parade started. The cavalry led it. They were looking good as they held up their spears and swords. After the knights came the band. They accompanied the already lovely king’s parade with beautiful music. I saw a large carriage behind the

band that the king and a woman were riding on top of.

Was that the queen? She was beautiful. When a beautiful man and a beautiful woman had a kid, I guess you ended up with a cute girl like Lady Flora. Genes were nothing to trifle with. The king, who was waving at the people, noticed me on the roof. He said something to the queen and as she turned to look at me, she waved her hand.

What had he said to her? I couldn't ignore them, so I waved back at them feebly. The king's carriage passed by. The parade circulated through the capital and seemed to end with them entering the castle. The festivities continued late into the night on that day in the capital, and everyone celebrated the king's fortieth birthday. The next day, Morin and Karin headed to Crimonia. I also headed out to see the people who helped me before heading back to town. The adventurers' guild came first.

"Thank you again for slaying the monsters. You're welcome here anytime, so just let me know when you're working in the capital," said Sanya.

Next, I headed to Ellelaura's house.

"Yuna, thanks for everything you did for us. Thank you on behalf of my daughters, too," Cliff told me.

"Yuna, you're heading home before us," Noa said.

"Yuna, please have another match with me next time we see each other," Shia said.

"Yuna, if Cliff does anything odd, just let me know," said Ellelaura.

"I'll make sure that the flowerbed is blooming by the time you come back, so please come to see it soon," Surilina said.

Once Cliff's work was done, Noa would be going back to Crimonia with him. I was invited to stay until then, but since they didn't need me to escort them this time, I politely declined.

Next I went to Gran's house.

"Next time you come to my town, do come by my house. I will welcome you with open

arms," he said.

"I want to say goodbye to the bears," said Misa.

I called the bears out, just like Misa asked, and she said goodbye.

At the very end, I headed to the castle.

"I wish I could have shown you the faces of the aristocrats when they had that pudding. All of them came and asked me to introduce them to the person who made it," the king said. He laughed at the memory.

"Please make sure you don't tell anyone about me."

"So, what would you like to do about payment?"

Oh, I forgot. I wasn't hurting for cash.

"Hmm, keeping quiet is enough payment for that."

"What? You don't trust me?"

"I don't really have any money issues, so if Lady Flora seems like she's about to say something, please figure out some way to fix that."

"Understood. So aren't you going to see Flora?"

"I'll bring pudding again. She seems like she would cry if I see her."

I just couldn't do kids crying.

"I see. I'd like to eat pudding again too, so please come back sooner rather than later."

After finishing my goodbyes to the people who had been so kind to me, I decided to head back to Crimonia. Then again, I could come back whenever I wanted.

EXTRA STORY

THE THREE GIRLS SEE THE CAPITAL

PART ONE

BECAUSE LADY NOIR invited me out, I am going out with Lady Noir and Lady Misana. I tried to invite Yuna, but she said no. I wonder if I will be able to stomach it. Ughhh, it makes me nervous.

I was stewing on the sofa, waiting for the time to come, when Yuna put money on top of the table. She said that I would need money if I was sightseeing around the capital, so I should bring it with me.

She was right that it might cost money to go see the capital. We might eat somewhere. I got money from my mom already, but Yuna said that since she invited me to the capital, she would pay for everything.

It was just that Yuna gave me a lot of money. I think it's because she trusts me, but I think it was too much. She told me I could use it however I wanted, but I couldn't use that much money.

I wanted to say "Yuna, you can have it back. This is strange." In the end, I couldn't say no and I ended up taking it. I would like to make sure I spend as little of it as I can.

When I left Yuna, I went to Lady Noir's residence on my own. When I got to her house, the maid bowed to me and gave me a very polite greeting. I also automatically bowed my head and said hello back. I just couldn't get used to this, no matter how many times it happened.

"Fina, welcome."

"G-good morning, Lady Noir."

"Once Misa gets here, we'll head out."

Once I got there, we didn't have to wait very long for Lady Misana to come.

"My dearest Noa and Fina, good morning."

"Lady Misana, good morning."

"Misa, morning. So shall we head out?" Lady Noir said, but I wondered where we would go. Even though Yuna gave me money, I really didn't want to go anywhere that would cost a lot.

"Dear Noa, where will we go?" Lady Misana asked.

"I know one place we're going, but are there any places you two would like to go?"

I didn't know what to say when she asked where I wanted to go. I didn't know what there was in the capital, so I didn't know where I would want to go. I thought that walking around the capital would be enough sightseeing for me, but I wasn't sure if that would work. If there was one place I did want to go, it was the castle. I knew you couldn't go inside, but I wanted to see the castle from nearby. I couldn't say that out loud, so I held back my words.

"Is there not anywhere you two want to go?"

"Actually, where were you thinking of going?" Lady Misana asked.

"That's still a secret."

It seemed like Lady Noir wouldn't tell us where she wanted to go. When I saw Lady Noir smile, I felt nervous. I hoped that it would be a place where I wouldn't get a stomachache from going.

"I've come to the capital many times before. It's your first time at the capital, isn't it, Fina? Isn't there anywhere you'd like to go?" Lady Misana asked me. What was I to do?

They were both looking at me, so I decided to confess.

"I would like to see the castle from up close..."

"The castle?"

“Yes, I was hoping to see the castle when I came to the capital.”

When I answered honestly, Lady Noir thought for a bit and nodded.

“In that case, let’s see the castle first.”

“Are you sure?”

“I said it before, but we’re doing this to become closer friends, so we can do that.”

“Of course, I am okay with that too.”

“All right, let’s go.”

Lady Noir held my hand and Lady Misana’s and started running. You could see the castle from far away, but when you saw it up close, you could see how terrifically big it was. Was this where the king lived? I wonder if there were princes and princesses there? I wanted to see them, but since I was a commoner, I would never see them in my entire life. I heard I would be able to see the king and queen from very far away during the parade.

If I did see them, I would have a good story to tell my mom and Shuri. Of course, I would tell my dad, too.

There were a lot of people like me around, looking at the castle.

“There really are a lot of people,” said Lady Noir. She wasn’t looking at the castle. She was looking at the people around us.

“It’s the birthday celebration, so that’s just how it is. There are people coming from far away too.”

That meant that there were people like me there. I heard a family talking nearby.

“Mom, what is the inside of the castle like?”

“I wonder. I’m sure that it’s a beautiful place.”

“I’d like to see it.”

I was curious about what the inside of the castle looked like too, but I couldn't go inside. And, because it was the birthday celebration right now, you could see a lot of guards. Because of that, you couldn't even get close to the castle gate.

"Well, since we can't go in, how about we go around the castle?"

It was a very charming idea, but was that really okay? I did really want to see the castle from all kinds of spots.

"It's since we can't guide you inside. And since we want you to have fun, Fina."

I think Lady Noir was trying to be considerate of me. She really was very kind. Lady Misana said okay too, and they guided me around the whole outside of the castle. The two of them told me about what it looked like inside.

"The training grounds are ahead of that wall."

"There's even a pretty garden in there."

They were both very kind. I thought aristocrats were bossier, but they weren't like that. Or maybe they were just special? After that, Lady Noir and Lady Misana told me about what was over there and how pretty the scene looked from up high, and we finished our fun look around the castle.

"Lady Noir, Lady Misana, thank you so very much. It was very fun. I will tell my family all about it when I get home."

"I really wish we could have shown you around the castle, though."

"Not at all, this was fine. You both told me so much that I already had a lot of fun."

That was how I felt from my heart—like I had gone into the castle with their explanations.

"If that's true, it's fine. In that case, where should we go next?" Lady Noir asked, but I was already satisfied from seeing the castle, so I looked at Lady Misana.

"I'm a bit tired, Noa."

I move a lot more every day, so I wasn't that tired, but Lady Misana was.

“Right. In that case, how about we go to the eastern central square and rest?”

I couldn't tell if that was close, but I followed what Lady Noir said. When we went to the square, there were a lot more people around. I needed to be careful, so I wouldn't get separated. If I did, I would probably get lost. I mostly remembered how to get home, but just barely. I didn't want them worried about me, anyway.

I almost ran into someone, and it separated me a little from Lady Noir. When I tried to jog to follow after her, Lady Noir turned around and took Lady Misana's hand, and then she took mine.

“Lady Noir?”

“It would be bad if we lost you.”

Lady Noir pulled on my hand.

Her hand was very warm.

When Lady Noir did that, I broke into a smile.



“Also, don’t call me Noir—call me Noa. Anyone who is close to me calls me Noa.”

“In that case, you can call me Misa too.”

I could hardly believe what they were saying. You couldn’t call people by their nicknames unless you knew them well enough. If they were letting me call them by those, then did that mean they thought of a commoner like me as a friend?

“Lady Noir, Lady Misana...”

“No, it’s Noa.”

“Yes, it’s Misa.”

They both smiled and waited for me to say something.

Apparently I had to call them by their names.

“Lady Noa, Lady Misa...”

I was a little embarrassed, but when I said their names, they seemed happy.

“It’s a pleasure, Fina.”

“Fina, it’s so nice to know you.”

“Yes!”

EXTRA STORY

THE THREE GIRLS SEE THE CAPITAL

PART TWO

“WE’RE HERE.”

The place Lady Noa brought us to was lined with lots of tables and chairs. It was spacious. I saw lots of people were sitting and resting, or eating, or talking. Since there were open chairs, it looked like we could rest there, but I thought it might be agonizing to rest here without having anything to eat. The stands and tables around them had all kinds of delicious smells.

I felt like my stomach would start growling like this. I heard someone else’s stomach growling. It looked like the sound came from Lady Misa. She seemed embarrassed.

“You must be hungry.”

“Yes.”

I felt the same. Apparently we came here in order to eat.

“So, let’s buy something and then rest.”

I agreed with that suggestion.

The first stand we went to was a place that sold skewers. I smelled delicious, grilling meat. Lady Noa stood in front of the stand and ordered.

“Excuse me. Three skewers, please.”

“You got it! I’ll grill some tasty pieces for you cute girls.”

The man put the sauce on the skewers, then grilled them. They smelled very good. I

swallowed back my spit. I hoped the other two didn't hear that. They were watching the grill; I didn't think they noticed me. I was glad.

"Here you are. Thanks for waiting. Here are delicious skewers for you."

When I tried to pay with the money Yuna gave me, Lady Noa stopped me.

"I'll pay for it."

"But Yuna gave me money in order to..."

"I'll pay for today. I got money for everyone from my mother, so don't worry."

What did she say? Lady Noa had gotten money from her mother? I felt dizzy. People kept preparing money for me. For me, this was too much after I had trouble even getting food to eat just a little while ago. I could work to return Yuna's money, but if I got money from aristocrats, I didn't know how to pay them back. I didn't think Lady Noa and Lady Elleaura wanted it paid back, but I didn't know what to do. There definitely are walls between the aristocrats and commoners that you just can't get over.

I tried to think of some reason to say no to it, but I couldn't get the words out. I didn't know what to do anymore. While I was thinking, Lady Noa paid for the three of us and ended up taking the three skewers and offered one to me.

"I was the one who invited you out today," she said. "Here, take it. I'm going to buy a ton more stuff."

Was that really okay? Then after that, just like Lady Noa said, she started buying things one after another. My hands, Lady Misa's, and Lady Noa's hands were all full of so many different kinds of food we could barely hold everything.

After we bought our food, we put it down at an open table. Once we had it all laid out, it seemed like a lot. Could the three of us really eat it all? Lady Misa didn't seem to have a lot of experience buying food at the stands, so she seemed embarrassed when she ordered. On the other hand, Lady Noa seemed like she already knew what she was doing.

I tried asking about it indirectly.

“That’s because I’m always buying things at stands.”

So even aristocrats ate street food. Or maybe Lady Noa was special? We each lined up the food we brought on the table and sat down on the seats. Of course, I was feeling tired from walking.

“Well then, let’s all eat what we like. If there isn’t enough, I’ll buy more.”

No, Lady Noa. This is more than enough. Please don’t buy more. I couldn’t say it out loud, so I said it in my head.

But I really was hungry. The delicious smell from the food that wafted to me made me feel hungrier. I wanted to eat soon, but I waited for Lady Noa and Lady Misa to start. Lady Noa reached her hand out to the food first. When Lady Misa saw that, she also chose the food she wanted to eat the most from the stands. After I made sure they were eating, I also reached my hand to a skewer and brought it to my mouth.

It was flavored differently from the ones that were at the stands in Crimonia and felt new to me, but it was very yummy. I was sad I couldn’t buy some and bring them home as presents.

“So, Fina, why don’t you tell us about everything?” said Lady Noa while I was eating my skewer.

I was so surprised, I didn’t know what to say. I wondered what she was talking about.

“About you and Yuna,” she explained. “Could you tell us how you know each other?”

“Me and Yuna?”

“I want to know too!” said Lady Misa.

“I told you about it when we met, Lady Noa.”

I told her while we were riding on the bears on the way to the capital.

“Misa wants to know, and I’m sure there are things you haven’t told me yet too.”

Yuna told me certain parts of it were secret, and I wasn't about to share those. First, I told Lady Misa about how I met Yuna and the butcher work she gave me.

"Fina, going to pick herbs in the woods alone is dangerous."

"I'd think so."

They scolded me. I really was planning on searching nearby, but it was my own fault for going deeper in to look for them.

"But then Yuna was in those clothes even back then? I wonder why Yuna wears clothes like that, though," Lady Misa said.

I didn't know the answer to that.

"Kumayuru and Kumakyu come out of her bear gloves for sure, so I think she might need them. But, I think if that were it, she would only need those gloves."

"You don't know then, Fina?"

I didn't know that much about it, so I shook my head.

"Still, it's so amazing that she can beat wolves so easily. I want to see Yuna fight too," Lady Misa said.

When she fought with the orcs, Lady Misa was hiding in the carriage, so apparently she hadn't seen, and nobody saw her fight the bandits. Actually, I don't think I've really seen Yuna fight much.

"Fina, have you seen Yuna fight before?"

"Um, I saw her fighting the adventurers."

I told them about when I first took Yuna to the adventurers' guild. Yuna fought them with just one knife? She didn't use it as a weapon, so I guess she did it with her bare hands? I told them about how she fought many adventurers just with her bear gloves.

"I've seen Yuna fighting in town too," said Lady Noa.

Apparently Yuna fought adventurers that tried to argue with her using magic.

“I’m jealous of you both.”

Lady Misa’s small mouth pouted. I didn’t know what to do when she said that. When I saw it at first, I was worried that Yuna would get hurt.

I hadn’t thought that Yuna would be that strong.

“So, there was something I wanted to ask you, Fina.”

“Yes, what is that?”

Lady Noa asked me with serious eyes, “Did Yuna really defeat tigerwolves and a black viper? It’s not that I don’t believe it, but I was wondering whether a girl like Yuna could really beat those.”

“It’s true. When she accepted the tigerwolf quest, I was there with her.”

“W-were you really?!”

“Then did you see the tigerwolves?”

I shook my head.

“I was waiting for her far away with Kumakyu, but she showed me the tigerwolves she slayed.”

Since the bear house was a secret that Lady Misa didn’t know about, I couldn’t tell her about it.

“You weren’t with her when she defeated the black viper too, were you?”

“No, I think she only went with the master of the adventurers’ guild for that, but I heard she defeated it all on her own.”

“I heard that from my father. It looks like it was true.”

“Yes; I helped with the butchering. It was super big, so it was a lot of work.”

The black viper’s body was a lot of trouble. Mostly it was hard to get the blade of the knife to cut the skin. My dad said that if it were alive, the skin would become even

harder. Yuna had to be amazing to be able to defeat a monster like that.

"Now that you mention butchering, you can do that, right, Fina?"

"I can. I did it with those orcs. Marina said I did a good job."

But it wasn't like that was amazing. It was just that I've butchered stuff since I was young, so I knew how to do it. I didn't think it was that amazing, but Yuna was always praising me.

"It was because my dad wasn't there anymore, and my mom was sick, so I had to work."

When I talked about my family, the mood turned gloomy.

"It's fine now, so please don't worry about it. My mom is cured, and she works for Yuna."

"She works for Yuna? Isn't Yuna an adventurer? In other words, is your mom an adventurer?"

It looked like Lady Noa didn't know about the birds and the eggs. I told them about the orphanage.

"So Yuna was doing all of that?"

"Yuna is so amazing."

When they said nice things about Yuna, for some reason I also felt happy.

"Yuna made the pudding you both ate from those eggs."

"What is Yuna?"

I didn't know that either. She was a mysterious person in bear clothes who had Kumayuru and Kumakyu, was an adventurer, saved an orphanage, and cured my mom. I wondered if Yuna had family. She hadn't talked about her family even once. I'm sure there was a reason for that, but I couldn't ask her. No matter what she wore, Yuna saved my life, and she was my favorite person.

EXTRA STORY

THE THREE GIRLS SEE THE CAPITAL

PART THREE

“HOW DID YOU MEET YUNA, NOA?” Lady Misa asked.

I asked about that when we were coming to the capital. Apparently, she saw Yuna in the town while she was fighting adventurers at the start. After that, I heard she called Yuna to her mansion and rode on Kumayuru and Kumakyu. Ever since then, Lady Noa has loved those bears. I understand how she feels. With the way their fur feels, you feel happy just hugging them.

“I’m jealous of both of you.”

Lady Misa listened to what Lady Noa said and acted a little like she was sulking.

“But, Fina is with Yuna a lot more than me, so I’m jealous too.”

“But that’s for work...”

When I explained it to them, I heard them say, “That’s so nice,” and, “That’s so unfair.”

Since I would go to Yuna’s house to butcher things and Yuna would come by when I was helping my mom, I would see her a lot, and she was also taking me places a lot because she said she was bored. She would tell me things like, “Lets go eat,” and, “Let’s go on a walk.” Just the other day, we rode on Kumayuru and Kumakyu and went to a far-off village.

I really was with Yuna a lot. I guess it made sense that they were jealous.

We were talking a lot about Yuna for a while, and the food that was on the table disappeared. I was full now. I think Lady Noa and Lady Misa were, too.

We worked our hardest to make sure the three of us didn't leave anything behind. It would be a waste to throw it away. We prettied up the tabletop and rested.

"How about we go to the next place soon?" Lady Noa suddenly said.

I didn't really mind, but I wondered where we would go. Lady Misa tried asking where we were heading, but Lady Noa wouldn't tell us.

"It's a secret, but I'm sure that there's something great that's been finished up there."

Lady Noa smiled. I wondered what she meant when she said there was something great that was finished there? Lady Misa and I tilted our heads.

We were brought to the front of a store. There wasn't anything that looked like a sign around. I wondered what kind of store this was? Lady Noa was going inside, so we went in too.

"Excuse me. I'm Noir Fochrosé."

A man came over.

"Why, it's Lady Noir. You came all the way out here? We are planning to bring it to your residence tonight, as promised."

"I'm sorry. I wanted it a little earlier. Is it already done?"

"Yes, it is."

The man went into the back and came back immediately. He was carrying something in his hand. It wasn't that large. I wondered what it could be?

"This would be it. Please take a look at it."

Lady Noa checked the thing that she took; she looked happy. She was holding a residence card, or maybe it was a guild card? But it seemed like there were a lot of them. I wondered how many there were?

"Thank you very much. They look exactly like I wanted."

Lady Noa grabbed the cards and said thank you, then showed them to us. I looked at the cards and what they said.

Bear Fan Club Membership Card

Membership Number: 0000

Name:

Age:

I looked at the back.

Bear Fan Club Rules to Join

1. You must like bears.

2. Must have permission from the president and vice president.

3. Keep it strictly secret.

That was what was written on it.

“The Bear Fan Club?” Lady Misa asked.

“Yes, these are membership cards for the Bear Fan Club. I was thinking about it while I was coming to the capital, so I asked my mom to make these.”

Lady Noa looked happy when she told us.

“I was going to have them sent to my house, but I wanted them earlier.”

I wondered if Yuna would get mad. I could see Yuna with an angry face, even though she's never been angry. It was scary.

"So then, these are for you two. And make sure to write your names in yourself too."

Lady Noa handed us the membership cards.

When I looked at the card, it said my membership number was 0002.

Um, if there was a 0000 number, then that was Lady Noa, and so I supposed 0001 would be Lady Misa?

"I'm going to be member number one, Fina is number two, and Misa is number three."

"What about number zero?"

"That's Yuna, of course."

Did I have to be number two? I wondered whether Lady Misa really should have been three when I was two. I tried to speak up.

"Since I'm president, I'll be member one. And, Fina is two as vice president."

"I'm the vice president?!"

Was a vice president the second most important person?

I didn't know what to do. I needed to do something to say no.

"I think Lady Misa would be a better vice president..."

"Misa hasn't been around Yuna enough, so she can't."

Lady Misa nodded at that. That really was true, but I couldn't believe I would be vice president.

"And you're the one who's closest to Yuna, Fina. You need to report to us about all kinds of things as the vice president."

What was I supposed to report about?

“Oh, of course, keep this a secret from Yuna. You can’t talk about it.”

Even though Yuna was member number 0000, apparently we had to keep her in the dark. Something bothered me more than that, though. Weren’t the numbers on the cards very large?

I asked about that.

“We’re aiming for ten thousand members, of course!”

Yuna, please save me. This looks like it will become a very big deal. I ended up becoming the vice president of the Bear Fan Club and member number 0002. I carefully put my card deep into my bottomless bag. Please, may Yuna never find it.

Apparently Lady Noa only made a hundred cards so far. Lady Elleaura promised that once there were over a hundred members of the fan club, she would make another hundred.

Even a hundred people is too many.

AFTERWORD

IT'S NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN. I'm Kumanano, and thank you so very much for picking up *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear*, Volume 3 this time. It's thanks to you all that we've been able to successfully publish three volumes.

This volume more or less follows what was posted on *Let's Be Novelists*, but many details have been changed, so I think readers from the website will enjoy it, too. Yuna goes to the capital in this volume, which requires a multiday trip and camping on the road. The bear house, which is fully furnished with warm rooms, warm beds, and a bath, plays a key role.

Fina, Noa, and Misa start doing things together, too. They go to see the castle, go shopping, and then get Bear Fan Club membership cards. Though Yuna doesn't know about the fan club's existence, I do think I want to write about when she discovers it exists. Maybe it'll make an appearance in a future story.

My thanks to 029 for listening to me talk about indulgent details like the bear house and the picture book. In addition, including illustrations of Shia and Princess Flora really helped make writing them much easier. Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who helped me create this work. To the proofreader who helped find errors, to my managing editor, and to everyone at the publisher—thank you very much.

Kumanano – A certain day in March, 2016



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