

WRITTEN BY
Kumanano
ILLUSTRATED BY
029

18
novel



KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR



KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR

– Bear Bear Bear Kuma –

- VOLUME 18 -

-AUTHOR-

Kumanano

-ILLUSTRATOR-

029

[SEVEN SEAS]



CONTENTS

464	The Bear Discovers New Land
465	The Bear Goes to the Hot Spring
466	The Bear Buys Tatami
467	The Bear Accepts a Quest in the Land of Wa
468	The Bear Heads to the Village
469	The Bear Fights the Kamaitachi – Part 1
470	The Bear Fights the Kamaitachi – Part 2
471	The Bear Eats Wagyu
472	The Bear Talks with Shinobu
473	The Bear Butters up Kumakyu
474	The Bear Looks for the Man, Eats Eel over Rice, and Buys Artisanal Candy
475	The Bear Finds the Man with the Eye Patch
476	The Bear Watches Shinobu’s Fight
477	The Bear Fights the Man with the Cross-Shaped Scar
478	The Bear Hears Out Shinobu – Part 1
479	The Bear Hears Out Shinobu – Part 2
480	The Bear Goes to See Lady Sakura
481	The Bear Talks with Sakura
482	The Light of Hope – Sakura’s Viewpoint
483	The Bear Speaks with Sakura
484	The Bear Talks to the King
485	The Bear Talks about What Comes Next
486	The Bear Heads to Linesu
487	The Bear Talks with Lady Kagari
488	The Bear Has Promises Made
489	The Bear Explains to Mumulute
490	The Bear Discusses the Past
EXTRA STORIES	
 Afterword	

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Seven Seas Entertainment

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Illustrated by 029

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Name: Yuna
Age: 15
Gender: Female

► Yuna's Status_

► BEAR HOOD (NONTRANSFERABLE)

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

► BLACK BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

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

► WHITE BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

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

► BLACK AND WHITE BEAR CLOTHES (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Appears to be a onesie. Reversible.

Front: Black Bear Clothes

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

Reverse: White Bear Clothes

Automatically restores health and mana while worn.
Restoration amount and speed is based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.

► BLACK BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

► WHITE BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Increases speed based on the user's level.

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

Gives heat and cold resistance.

◀ KUMAYURU (CUB FORM)

▼ KUMAKYU



► BEAR UNDERWEAR (NONTRANSFERABLE)

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

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

Will grow with the user.

► BEAR SUMMONS

Can be summoned from the bear gloves.

Can be changed into cub forms.

Skills

► FANTASY WORLD LANGUAGE

The fantasy world's language will sound like Japanese. Spoken words are conveyed to the other party in the fantasy world language.

► FANTASY WORLD LITERACY

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

► BEAR EXTRADIMENSIONAL STORAGE

The white bear's mouth opens into infinite space. It can hold (eat) anything. However, it cannot hold (eat) living things. Time will stop for objects that are inside of it. Anything that is put into the extradimensional storage can be pulled out at any time.

► BEAR IDENTIFICATION

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

► BEAR DETECTION

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

► BEAR MAP 2.0

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

► BEAR SUMMONING

Bears can be summoned from the bear gloves. A black bear can be summoned from the black glove. A white bear can be summoned from the white glove. Summons, Beast Cubification: The bear summons can be transformed into bear cubs.

► BEAR TRANSPORTER GATE

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

► BEAR PHONE

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

► BEAR WATER WALKING

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

► BEAR TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION

You can call your summoned beasts from a distance.

Magic

► BEAR LIGHT

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

► BEAR PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENT

Routing mana through the bear gear allows for physical enhancement.

► BEAR FIRE MAGIC

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

► BEAR WATER MAGIC

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

► BEAR WIND MAGIC

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

► BEAR EARTH MAGIC

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

► BEAR ELECTRICITY MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use electricity elemental magic. Power is proportional to mana and the mental image. When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR HEALING MAGIC

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

► CHARACTERS

vol.18

CRIMONIA



FINA

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

ELF VILLAGE



LUIMIN

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



MUMULUTE

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



CHAPTER 464

THE BEAR DISCOVERS NEW LAND

WHILE I WAS on Talgwei gathering fruit, I spotted boats and land off in the distance, so I decided to go check it out.

I rode on Kumayuru, my bear leaping through the crashing waves as Kumakyu followed behind. My bears avoided the whirlpool around the island and ran over the ocean toward land. I looked over my shoulder and saw Talgwei getting farther and farther away. If I hadn't had my bear gate to teleport home, I would've been too scared to head off the island at all. Thank goodness for the bear transport gate!

I kept an eye out for boats so I wouldn't get caught as I headed to land. They probably wouldn't see me from so far away, but it'd be a ton of trouble if they did. I gradually, cautiously approached the land. In the distance, I spotted a port where several boats were anchored and buildings up ahead of that.

Wow. So this land really was populated.

I wondered what kind of country it'd be. I was kind of looking forward to it, but then I remembered that I'd probably attract a lot of attention and trouble if I walked around in my bear clothes. That always happened whenever I went to a new town, so I'd given up on fighting it.

If I stayed on Kumayuru and headed to the port, they'd see me, so I used my detection skill to find a deserted place, then crept onto shore unnoticed. I was a little ways from the port but still in town.

"Thank you both," I said to my bears, and then I recalled them.

I would already gather attention in my bear clothes. Literal bears would attract even more, so I headed to the buildings by myself. The townscape steadily came into view.

Wait... was this...?

I started walking a little faster. I garnered stares, as usual, walking around town, but

what I was seeing was way more important than that. I looked around at the buildings, the streets, and the people walking by.

The roofs were made of tile. Around me, people were dressed in what looked a whole lot like traditional Japanese clothes. Sure, some people were wearing clothes like Fina's land did, but there were more people dressed in clothes that looked like kimono.

Was this the Land of Wa?

Huh. Maybe this was a cultural melting pot? This was probably the place that Mileela traded with to get rice, miso, and soy sauce.

So, what to do now?

I wondered if they had Merchants' Guilds around here. Maybe Adventurers' Guilds, too. Would the monsters be the same or different? My curiosity was percolating.

I really wanted to explore the town, but I needed to find an inn to stay at for the night first. I'd take my time finding a place to set up a bear gate.

While I thought that over and watched my surroundings, I heard the usual commentary: "A bear?" "A bear?" "Bear?" "That a bear?" Lots of people were whispering around me and staring in curiosity. I ignored them as I walked.

While I was heading through, I came across a grandiose wooden building with a tile roof. The whole thing was enclosed by a fence. The sign said it was called the Camellia Inn. Lodgings found!

Even the style of the sign looked Japanese. The whole place was practically screaming at me to stay there. Maybe I'd stay a few days and take the opportunity to explore the town. It didn't sound like a bad idea. I could take my time finding a place for my bear gate. I headed off to the inn's entrance to see if they had room for me.

The sliding door rattled as I opened it, and I headed in.

"Welcome."

Once I was indoors, I saw a girl around my age (and dressed like a traditional inn's

hostess) approach me. She had something that looked like a Japanese kanzashi ornament in her hair. Adorable!

When she saw my outfit, she looked surprised. "A bear?!"

She started ogling me like she didn't know what to do with me.

"Um, so I'm on my own. Do you have a room to spare for tonight?"

"Oh, yes. We should." She answered when I talked to her, at least.

Anyway, it looked like they had somewhere I could stay. If it was a nice room, then I'd stick around for a few days.

"Before I arrange a room for you, may I check in on a few things?"

"What things? If you're curious about my outfit, I can't answer questions about it," I told her.

"Oh, not that. Though I am curious..." Of course she was. "Are you from another land?"

"You don't take foreigners as guests?"

"Oh, no, that's not what I mean. I'd merely like to check in with you before you stay here about something. This inn has no beds. Some of our overseas guests don't like sleeping directly on the floor, so we usually recommend another inn in those cases."

They had no beds here. There was only one reason I could think of for why that might be the case.

"Do you have tatami floors and futon bedding?"

If this was like a traditional Japanese inn, then it might also have traditional Japanese rooms.

"Yes. Are you already familiar with those? We use futon bedding laid out directly on tatami floors. Some guests are very upset when they learn of this, so we check in with foreign guests."

"Yeah, I'm fine."

I'd had a tatami room in my condo too. Back then I hadn't been excited about it, but now the word "tatami" made me nostalgic.

The girl seemed relieved when I said all that. She probably wanted customers, but not the trouble that came with certain ones.

"Then what type of room would you like?"

"What kinds do you have?"

"We have ones with an attached bath."

"Is the bath a hot spring?!"

"Yes, we also have a large communal bath. Some guests prefer to bathe on their own, so we also have private baths too."

"I'd like one with a bath, then."

As excited as I was for a hot spring bath, I wasn't so keen on a communal one. Getting a room with a bath was a no-brainer.

"The rooms are on the larger side and more expensive..." she said.

She was looking at me awkwardly like she was waiting to see how I'd respond. She seemed worried if I was good for the money. Well, I guess no one would expect a girl in a bear outfit to be rich.

"That's fine," I said. "Oh, right. Can I use this money here?"

This was another country. There was a chance that my foreign currency wouldn't work here, so I showed her what I had.

"Yes, that should be fine," she said.

What a relief.

I paid for a three-day stay to start with. That'd include breakfast and dinner too. It'd be cheaper without the meals, but I asked for them anyway.

"I'm Konoha, the innkeeper's daughter. If you need anything, please ask me at any time."

"I'm Yuna. I can't tell you anything about my wardrobe choice." I made sure to drive the point home about my bear onesie. "Anyway, it's nice to meet you."

"I-I understand."

She'd seemed like she wanted to say something, but now she didn't. I guess I'd cut off the question she wanted to ask.

Konoha led me to my room.

"Um, so I have a question... what's the name of this country?"

Konoha looked surprised when I asked that. Right. You'd at least think a foreign traveler would know where they were headed. Konoha told me anyway, though.

"This is the Land of Wa."

I knew it.

"Where did you come from, Miss Yuna?"

"Umm, do you know Mileela?" I said that name since I knew they already had ties to the Land of Wa.

"Yes, I do. I heard that they were plagued by a large monster that prevented safe passage for some time."

Right, the kraken. I'd almost forgotten about that whole thing.

"I heard that an adventurer took care of it. I can hardly imagine someone being able to fight a giant monster in the sea, so the adventurers in Mileela must be very impressive."

"Oh, yeah, whoever did that must be really impressive." I'd been the one to do it, actually, but I pretended we were talking about someone else.

"Do you know what the adventurer was like, Miss Yuna?"

I couldn't exactly say, *You're talking to her*, and she wouldn't believe me even if I did anyway. So, instead, I used my customary answer: "I don't really know much."

"I see. If only the adventurer would stay at our inn! I'd ask them to regale us with the tale. It's too bad they aren't."

Well, I could, but... I felt kinda guilty about my fib.

CHAPTER 465

THE BEAR GOES TO THE HOT SPRING

KONOHA LED ME to my room at the Camellia Inn. It was a traditional, spacious inn, and my room seemed to be in an annex.

“Other guests won’t come near this room, so you’ll have a quiet stay.”

It seemed ideal.

When I opened the door, I found a huge room, just like Konoha described. It wasn’t really intended for one person. Well, I wasn’t alone anyway. Kumayuru and Kumakyu were with me, after all.

The floor was made from tatami mats, which reminded me of home. They say that distance makes the heart grow fonder, and I guess even I got nostalgic sometimes.

I tried to step straight onto the tatami floor.

“If you’ll excuse me, we request that you take your shoes off before entering the room.”

I’d been trying to go in with my bear feet still on. My shoes couldn’t get dirty, so I could technically put my shoed feet on the bed and it’d be fine. I didn’t want to explain that, though, so I pulled off my shoes before heading in.

Wow. It felt amazing walking around on the tatami mats in my bare feet. I felt nostalgic from the familiar sensation. In my original world, I wouldn’t have blinked twice at having a Japanese-style room in my condo. Same with rice, miso, and soy sauce. I only realized how precious those items were after I lost them, which made me all the more excited to see them in another country.

“Miss Yuna, you seem happy.”

“This is all a little nostalgic for me,” I explained.

“It is?”

"Yeah, I've felt floors like this before."

"Oh, that explains why you said you could sleep on tatami."

While I was still luxuriating in the springiness of tatami under my toes, Konoha walked over to the next room. I followed her.

"This is the hot spring. You'll be able to bathe whenever you'd like, so please use it whenever you please."

I opened the door to find a changing room, and when I opened the door farther in, I found a Japanese cypress bath already steaming. It was big enough for a whole family. I could probably fit Kumayuru and Kumakyu in their cub forms in there too.

Next, she told me to let them know when I would take my meals or go out, and she explained how to use the room to me.

"We will bring your food to you when it's mealtime. Will you be going out today?"

Hmm, I wasn't sure yet. The sun was getting close to setting for the day, but I also kind of wanted to go out. Hrm, what to do...

After thinking about it for a while, I decided to explore the town tomorrow morning and that the Japanese-style room and bath were enough for me for now. Plus I needed to tell Fina where I was.

"I'm going to take a bath today and just rest," I said.

"Understood. Would you like bread or rice for your meal then?"

"I get to choose?"

"Yes, as we do have guests from other countries here."

"Then I'll have the rice, please."

I was in the Land of Wa, after all, so I figured I should eat the local food. At the same time, I really hoped they wouldn't serve anything weird like locusts or caterpillars or anything.

"Um, we won't be able to accommodate any substitutions, though."

"You're not serving bugs, right?"

I hadn't eaten bugs before, but I didn't think I could stomach them, literally or figuratively. I wouldn't be brave enough to sample them even if they were local delicacies. I wasn't going to be too demanding, but I really just didn't want to eat bugs.

"Not at all. We have rice and soup made using miso. Dinner will come with simmered vegetables and seafood."

I was glad. Seafood! Now *that* I was looking forward to.

"Will you be all right with that?"

"Yeah, that'll be great."

"Then please call for me when you'd like to eat." She bowed then left the room.

I had seafood in Mileela, but I was excited to try it in a new place. I felt guilty thinking this, considering I was lucky enough to have Anz cooking for me, but this was going to be real Japanese-style food. Not like I meant that Anz's cooking was bad at all, just... wow.

After the hostess left, I summoned my bears in their cub forms.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, look! It's tatami."

They both crooned at me. Once my bears felt the springy tatami, they took off running. I guess they really liked how it felt under their paws.

"Don't damage the tatami, okay? Mind your claws. Also, if anyone comes by, let me know. You need to hide so they don't see you."

They both crooned.

I gave them a rundown of what had happened so far. If someone found my bears in the room, it'd give them a scare. I was basically sneaking pets into the inn. I knew I was doing something I wasn't supposed to, so I had to be careful.

While they listened to me, my bears rolled around on the tatami. As I watched them play, I pulled out my bear phone and contacted Fina.

“Yuna?”

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“What’s going on?”

“Uh, so I’m going to be away from Crimonia for a while. I wanted to let you know.”

“Are you going somewhere?”

“It’s not so much that I’m going so much as that I’m already here.”

I told her all about how I’d gone to another country that I’d spotted off of Talgwei’s coast.

“Are you okay? It isn’t dangerous, is it?”

“I’m just fine. Seems like I’ve made it to the Land of Wa.”

“The Land of Wa? The place that makes rice, miso, and soy sauce?”

“Yeah. Good memory!”

“We use it in the shops and at home. But you really traveled that far?”

I had no idea how far away this place was, but what I did know was that it probably wasn’t easy to get to.

“I’m going to be here for a while, so let me know if anything happens.”

“All right...”

“Do you want me to bring you over too?” I asked since it seemed like she felt left out. If I just set up a bear gate really quick, I could get her here fast.

“I want to, but if I leave home for too long, it makes Dad feel sad.”

...Oh. Gentz. Well, he did spend a while without Fina when she went to the dwarves' town. It hadn't been all that long since then.

"If you are allowed to come, just let me know whenever."

"Okay. You be careful, Yuna."

After I hung up, I decided to soak in the bath until dinner.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, come over here. Let's get in the hot spring together."

When I called them, they got off the floor and came over. They seemed to like the tatami. Maybe I could turn one room of a bear house into a Japanese-style space? I wondered if they sold tatami somewhere in this town. I'd figure that out tomorrow.

Anyway, I took my bears over to the changing room. I pulled off my bear gear and rushed into the spring. The bath was filled with tons of steam, and hot water was flowing from a bamboo tube.

I stuck a hand into the cypress tub to check the temperature.

"That's hot!"

It seemed hotter than a normal spring. My bears dove right in without any drama. They both were super resilient to hot and cold.

After I poured a little water over myself, I started dipping my toes in cautiously. It was pretty hot, but I could stand it as long as I went slow. Soon, I sunk in all the way to my shoulders.

"Ahh..."

It felt so nice. I wished I had an outside view too, but since this wasn't an open-air bath, I didn't have any natural scenery around me. Maybe I could find one of those somewhere in this town.

I wished Crimonia could have a hot spring bath like this, but they didn't have a spring around in the first place. Then again, even Tokyo has springs. Maybe all I had to do was

dig. I didn't know enough about springs to know for sure, though. I knew that I wouldn't find a spring through luck alone, digging randomly. For now, this hot spring was enough for me.

"Haah, this feels so nice."

My bears crooned at me. They set their heads on the rim of the bath, all blissed out.

Hot springs were the peak of luxury. I really hoped I could bring Fina with me at some point.

Once I was done with the hot spring, I headed back to my room and dried my bears off with a towel and dryer. Then, once I changed into my white bear onesie, I entered relaxation mode.

While I lounged around brushing my bears, they turned to the door and crooned, alerting me to someone outside the door the moment before I heard a knock.

I told my bears to hide and then opened the door. Konoha, the girl who'd led me to my room, was there.

"I've brought your meal..."

The moment she saw my outfit, she froze. I guess she was surprised that I'd gone from my black clothes to white.

"Thank you."

After she stared at me for a while, she came back to her senses.

"You're white now."

"I'm not giving you any explanation about my clothes, just FYI."

I got ahead of the situation. She didn't ask me anything.

Konoha set the table. She set down rice, miso soup, veggies, boiled crab, and a whole bunch of other stuff. It was a luxurious meal. Oh, it looked good!

“How was the hot spring?” Konoha asked as she continued setting down the dishes.

“It felt great.”

“I’m very glad.” She really did seem happy. I guess she was enjoying the praise.

“Did you come to the Land of Wa on your own, Miss Yuna?”

“Yeah, I did.”

She seemed surprised by that.

“Well, I am an adventurer, after all. I can handle a little danger.”

“You’re an adventurer...?”



She paused and looked at me skeptically. Well, I'd be a little taken aback if she'd accepted it straight away.

"Can you use magic, by any chance?"

"Yeah, some."

"That's amazing. So that's how you made it here to another country all on your own."

Guess that's all it took to convince her.

"Come to think of it, is there an Adventurers' Guild around here?"

"Yes, indeed there is."

I thought so—looked like I was right. Guess I'd be paying a visit tomorrow. I wondered if everyone would be carrying katanas. What would the mages be like? Exploring was going to be fascinating.

After I confirmed that Konoha left, I called for my bears to come back out of hiding.

"Let's eat together."

They both crooned.

"Time to dig in!"

I picked up a bowl and chopsticks and started chowing down, along with my bears.

CHAPTER 466

THE BEAR BUYS TATAMI

THE NEXT MORNING, I woke up after sleeping on the tatami in a Japanese-style futon.

Morning already?

Yesterday, after I finished eating, I headed back to the hot spring. I went to bed while I was still warm from the water. Since I'd also worn my white bear suit to sleep, I had a great morning when I woke up. Kumayuru and Kumakyu, who were curled up under the blankets on either side of me, got up when I did.

“Good morning, you two,” I said. They both crooned.

I put away the bedding and changed into my black bear suit, then started thinking about what I'd do for the day. I was planning to buy tatami if they were selling any, and I wanted to check out the Adventurers' Guild too. I wanted to buy souvenirs for Fina and the others if I could find something. Last, I needed to also find a spot to set up a bear gate.

While I was mulling over my plans for the day, Kumayuru and Kumakyu looked at the door and crooned. It seemed someone had come. I told my bears to hide, so they plodded on over to the adjacent room.

There was a knock at the door. I opened it to find Konoha.

“Good morning. I've brought your breakfast.”

“Thank you.”

“Did you get a good night's rest?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“I'm very glad.”

Konoha happily set up the table. Today's breakfast was simple: rice, grilled fish, miso soup, seaweed, and pickles.

That was when I remembered I was going to eat out for lunch. I was looking forward to finding something delicious.

Once I finished up, I recalled my bears and headed out. As I got to the entrance of the inn, I spied Konoha.

"Are you going out?"

"Yeah. I had something I wanted to ask too. Do you know if any shops around here sell tatami?"

"Tatami?"

"Yeah, I really liked the mats here, so I want to buy some for home."

"I'm glad that you've enjoyed them." Konoha smiled as though she was basking in praise. "When you leave the inn and walk down the road to the right, you'll find a place that sells tatami. The sign will have a drawing of it, so it should be easy to spot. But will you be able to bring it home with you?"

"I have an item bag, so it'll be fine." I had my bear storage from the god, which could fit a few tatami mats easily.

After that, I asked Konoha about the Merchants' Guild, the Adventurers' Guild, and other places of interest I could go. I took notes.

"Thank you," I said, then left.

I headed to the tatami shop first. As I was walking around the town and looking around, I heard people whispering just like yesterday.

"A bear?" "What? Is that a bear?" "Which country wears clothes like that?" No matter where I went, my bear onesie always stood out.

I pulled my bear hood low over my head to hide. Some kids surrounded me and started

making comments too. “It’s a bear!” “Those clothes are weird!”

“Rah!” I shouted loudly, and that made them scatter from surprise.

It seemed like no one had taught them manners. Wish they could’ve taken a page out of Fina and the rest of the kids back home’s books.

Anyway, the houses all looked Japanese too. A tiled roof could transform a home’s feel entirely. Without the tiles, they probably would have looked like regular old wooden houses.

I wondered if this country had castles too, just like Japan. I sure hoped I could get a look at them then. I decided to ask Konoha once I was back at the inn.

I kept seeing people point at me and saying, “bear this,” “bear that,” over and over again as I headed to my destination.

“I think it’s around here...”

I checked the notes I’d taken from talking with Konoha as I looked around for the sign with the tatami mats drawn on it. There it was.

“Excuuuuse me!” I called out once I got into the shop.

“Coooooming!”

A woman in an apron rushed over.

“Thank you for—huh? A bear?”

The woman froze when she saw me. Well, typical. I ignored what she said.

“I’d like to buy some tatami mats.”

“Uh, tatami?”

Yeah, what else? This was a tatami shop!

"I heard I can buy some here," I said.

"Oh, yes. Yes, tatami. Our shop. Of course."

She still seemed curious about my clothes, but once she realized I was there to buy something, she went into customer service mode.

"So, miss, how many mats do you need? And where do you live? Do you need us to pull up the old ones and install them? Are you in a hurry?" She started asking me all sorts of questions.

I guess most people were replacing old mats when they bought tatami. Not many people probably brought them back home to a different country.

"It's okay, I don't need that since my house isn't in this town."

"Really? Did you come all the way here alone, miss?"

"I did," I said, but I really wished she wasn't talking to me like a little kid. This was probably the first time she'd ever seen anyone in clothes like mine before, and the thought that always came to mind occurred to me: Do people think this outfit looks childish?

"Um, miss, I'm sure you'll understand once you see them, but tatami mats are large and heavy. I'm not sure you'll be able to bring them home alone..." The woman glanced at the tatami mats stocked in her shop.

One mat was very large and looked pretty hefty. If I hadn't had my bear gear, I probably wouldn't have been able to lift even one of them.

"Or did you come here on a wagon, by any chance?" The woman glanced outside.

"I have an item bag, so I should be able to carry them."

"An item bag? Well, I suppose that'll do. How many would you like then?"

The conversation started moving once we established I could carry them. I really had no idea how many I needed now that she was asking. Four and a half? Six? Eight?

Maybe six was enough?

Maybe I wouldn't stop at outfitting my Crimonia house—I could do the one in the capital, and Mileela, and even my traveling bear house too. I could also see the orphans hanging out in a tatami-covered room. Tatami seemed like it might be better than carpet.

I did some napkin math, then answered, "I think sixty mats should do it."

The inside of the shop looked well stocked. I assumed they'd have enough.

"Um, miss... Tatami is a bit pricey, and that seems like quite a lot of mats. You might want to check in with your parents," the woman very gently said to me.

I guess this was how anybody would react to a girl who looked like me coming in and asking for sixty whole tatami mats.

"Don't worry. I have the money to pay for it," I said.

"But surely they wouldn't all fit in an item bag?"

I couldn't tell if she was worried about herself or me, but she kept stonewalling. Maybe she was worried for both of us. Explaining sounded like too much trouble, so I asked the price instead and paid it out. The moment she saw all that money, she did a one-eighty and went back to her customer service face. For better or worse, I guess money changed how people behaved.

"So, what kind of tatami are you looking for?"

Unfortunately, I had no idea what made for good or bad tatami or even what kinds of tatami I could buy. So, I bought some that seemed high quality to use for my personal space and bought normal tatami for the rest. Since I was buying so much, she gave me a discount. I stowed it all away in my bear storage.

"Th-thank you."

The woman looked a little shell-shocked by the whole exchange, but she still bowed her head as I left the shop.

Now I'd be able to make myself my own Japanese-style room once I was home. I was

looking forward to it.

Since I was done buying my tatami, I decided to look for a chest of drawers and other Japanese-style furniture. Whether I'd use any of it was another matter. I guess the fact that I bought anything I wanted without having plans for it was kind of a bad habit. If Fina knew, she'd probably tell me off for being so wasteful.

I bought her a hair accessory and a hand mirror to make sure I'd have something to put her in a good mood. I kind of wondered whether it'd all have the opposite effect, but I couldn't think of anything better to do. An idea came to me while I was eating dango for lunch instead of a proper sit-down meal. *Maybe I should bring her food instead?*

While I was wandering around and shopping, I finally made my way to the Adventurers' Guild.

Even the guild was headquartered in an elegant, tile-roofed building. When I headed inside, it was filled with regular-looking adventurers and some who looked a little like samurai.

Well, this was chaotic, I thought to myself as I looked around. As usual, people stared right back.

“A bear?” “A bear?” “A bear?” “That’s the bloody bear!”

Wait, what was that last comment? Did I hear that right? I could've sworn I heard someone shout, “The bloody bear!”

When I took a look around, I did, in fact, find an adventurer staring right at me and quaking in his boots. My outfit wasn't all that frightening though. I'd be shy to admit it to anybody, but I'd even describe it as cute. Did this adventurer know me? Why was he so scared? I couldn't remember ever doing anything that'd make anyone frightened. He wasn't trying to talk to me, so I decided to just ignore it. The other adventurers also stared, but none of them tried to approach me.

I looked around the room and found the reception desk. A woman dressed in a kimono

who was in her mid-twenties was sitting there. She was wearing an ornate hairpin in her hair. She was also giving me a look.

I headed over and asked her, “Um, I had a question.”

“Y-yes, what is it?”

She looked me over. I knew she was curious, but I just went ahead with my question about the guild.

“Can I use a guild card from another country here?”

“Um, you can. Are you an adventurer?” She gave me a surprised look.

“I am,” I told her, and the entire room stirred. I glanced around at the hubbub.

Then the receptionist stood up and started saying to the adventurers, “Everyone, if you’re not here for work, please head home. This isn’t a place to loiter just because you have nothing to do.”

“We’re trading info. Right, guys?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“Trading’s important.”

“That’s what you say every day. Please take on a job or two once in a while.” She seemed pretty fed up with them. Guess adventurers like that existed in any guild.

Anyway, it looked like I really could use my card anywhere. Weird!

I started to head off to the quest board, but a guy dressed in Japanese-style clothes walked over to the receptionist.

“I put in a quest yesterday. Has anyone accepted it?”

“Mr. Itsuki, was it? Not quite yet.”

“Well, that’s a problem. They’ve been taking down the livestock—our cattle. I’m not sure if we’ll be able to make a living at this rate unless they’re all slaughtered.”

“Whether or not they take quests is up to the adventurers, I’m afraid. I can ask some directly, but considering they’re kamaitachi, well...”

The receptionist glanced at the loitering adventurers. They all averted their eyes.

“You’ll need a skilled adventurer to fight those. I’m not sure we’ll be able to find one anytime soon...”

She emphasized “skilled” as she looked over at the man. Maybe they were hard up for high-ranking adventurers here.

“Please, I’m begging you. The village is in danger.” The man bowed his head until his forehead touched the desk.

“Mr. Itsuki, please don’t.”

“Please,” he said again without raising his face.

A kamaitachi was a type of Japanese mythical creature that could create blades from the wind. Well, apparently, it wasn’t *mythical* over here, but a regular old monster.

“How about I take the quest, then?” I said to the man since curiosity had taken hold of me.

CHAPTER 467

THE BEAR ACCEPTS A QUEST IN THE LAND OF WA

THE MAN RAISED his head when I said that. He looked me over.

“A bear?” Apparently, he’d been too occupied to notice me coming in.

“How about I take this quest?”

“Are you pulling my leg, miss?” The man clenched his hand into a fist.

He looked upset that I wasn’t taking him seriously. Guess that was the normal response to a girl in a bear suit volunteering for a monster-slaying quest. Well, I’d been through this before, so I decided to let it go.

“But you don’t have other adventurers willing to go, do you?”

I looked around at the ones in the guild. They were all pointedly ignoring the conversation.

“Um, miss, kamaitachi are lightning-fast. They’re dangerous monsters that can attack you from afar using gusts of wind as blades. Slaying one is no joke. According to Mr. Itsuki, there are multiple too, so I don’t think this is a quest for a beginner...”

The receptionist explained like I was some kid who didn’t know a single thing about kamaitachi. She assumed I was brand new to this.

“Also, when they figure out that their opponent is stronger, they immediately run off to the woods nearby to hide, so they’re not easy to fight,” the man added. He seemed worked up.

I knew I could beat it in speed, though. If it tried to hide, I could use my bear detection skill to find it as long as it was considered a monster.

"I only said I could take the quest because you seemed in trouble. I wouldn't push to take a quest though." I was curious about the quest, but I wasn't going to get into a fight just to take one.

The man looked at me and thought for a little.

"So, you really are an adventurer, miss? Just to be sure."

"I am."

This was getting to be a chore, so I took out my guild card.

"Rank C..."

The man seemed flabbergasted when he saw my card and even the receptionist was shocked when she heard him.

"Can you beat a kamaitachi?"

"I haven't fought one before, so I can't say for certain, but..."

Nothing was for certain. For example, if there were a whole bunch of kamaitachi, like ten thousand or hundreds of thousands, of course not.

The man glanced over me and went into thought. Even after seeing my guild card, he didn't seem convinced of my rank. Well, I was dressed as a bear after all. Of course he wouldn't.

"Then shall I come too?"

Someone started talking to us out of nowhere.

"Miss Shinobu?!"

The receptionist even seemed shocked. A girl about my age had appeared out of nowhere. Her outfit was eye-catching. She was wearing a dark green-and-purple number that made her look a lot like a shinobi—a ninja. I imagined her sneaking around in the dead of night in those clothes.

"If you're not sure that that bear's as strong as she claims, I'll tag along."

"Things should be fine if you're with them, yes," the receptionist said, sounding relieved.

"Mr. Itsuki, she will be able to defeat the kamaitachi without an issue. The guild can attest to her abilities."

"Really?"

The man gave the girl who'd appeared out of nowhere a look just like he'd given me.

"She is an excellent adventurer. Mr. Itsuki, I'm sure you were in a hurry, weren't you? I'm not sure when anyone will take the quest if you don't accept her help," the receptionist said to him.

He seemed conflicted as he looked over this Shinobu girl.

"You really think this girl can defeat them?"

"Yes. She's defeated kamaitachi before as well."

The receptionist nodded decisively when the man gave the girl a more respectful gaze.

"Well, I'm counting on you."

I'd been cut out of the job. I was disappointed I wouldn't be seeing a kamaitachi, but as long as I stuck around, I'd have a chance of seeing one.

"Looks like you don't need me, then."

If the girl was taking the quest, I was redundant.

"No, I'm just tagging along to help. If you don't take the quest, I won't either," Shinobu said and turned on her heel to leave the guild. I stopped her.

"If you're taking the quest, you don't need me, do you?"

"But then there's no point to it."

I didn't follow. She was an adventurer with the skill to fight a kamaitachi—she didn't need me around. If we both took the quest, her reward would be cut in half.

“Why?”

“Uh, well, it’d be like I stole your quest if I did,” she said.

“I wouldn’t really mind.” She could take the quest—I wasn’t going to resent her for it, and I wouldn’t be upset.

“Even if you *are* fine with it, it won’t look ‘fine’ to everyone else. It’ll look like I stole it out from under you... so you need to come with me.”

I could understand that. I guess others could talk behind her back if she did something that seemed shady.

“I’m fine with both of you coming. If the bear girl takes the quest, you will too, then?” the man asked Shinobu.

“As long as it’s with Miss Bear here.”

“All right. Then please, both of you come. Please slay the kamaitachi.”

The man seemed really eager to get rid of these monsters. He bowed deeply at both of us. This kind of seemed like one of those things I couldn’t refuse.

“Well, then I’ll process this as the both of them accepting the quest.”

That was it. We were doing this. I wondered what her deal was?

“May I have your guild cards?”

Both of us offered up our cards to the receptionist. The receptionist was shocked when she looked at my card.

“You really are in rank C, just like Miss Shinobu.”

I glanced, and yep, rank C. She was about my age and also at rank C. No wonder she could handle a kamaitachi.

Just who was she, then?

“So your name’s Miss Yuna, huh? I’m Shinobu. Nice to meet you. I’ll just call you by

your name without an honorific, so you can just call me Shinobu too," Shinobu introduced herself again.

She was already trying to get on super friendly terms with me, which I didn't really know how to deal with. I wasn't good with these kinds of people—I preferred to keep my distance.

"Still, you're in rank C, huh? You're pretty powerful then."

"But you're in the same rank," I said.

"I've still got a long way to go." She smiled.

Hm, sus... I wasn't one to talk, but she seemed a little sus.

"I swear I'm not anyone suspicious. So, Mr. Itsuki, was it? I need to prep some things, so how does heading out first thing in the morning sound?"



It was past noon and getting pretty close to snack time.

"I would rather go back to the village right away, but all right. I'll head back first and let the chief know."

It seemed like a better idea to go over tomorrow morning to me too since then we wouldn't need to stay over at the village overnight. I'd already paid my inn fees too, so I kind of wanted to make it a day trip. I wanted to be back in time to use the hot spring.

"Do you know where the village is?"

"Um, it's right here," the receptionist said, pointing out the spot on the quest sheet to Shinobu.

"Looks like it's close."

According to Shinobu, we could get there in half a day by carriage or wagon. On my bears, it'd probably take barely an hour.

Since I'd already taken a quest, I headed out of the guild instead of looking over the quest board like I'd initially planned.

"Why are you following me?"

That fishy ninja Shinobu was on my tail.

"I was thinking maybe we should stay at the same inn."

"You want to stay at the same one as me?"

Why was she acting so suspicious?

"I'd like to learn more about you," she said.

"There's nothing to know."

"You're acting very cold."

Ugh. I guess I'd gotten tangled up in a really annoying person. I should've just accepted the quest on my own or turned it right down.

I headed back to Camellia Inn with Shinobu. She *followed* me back, I should say.

"This inn's pretty cushy."

Shinobu eyed the large Japanese-style inn in front of us. Guess I'd chosen a winner, then.

When we got inside, I found Konoha.

"Welcome back."

It was nice being greeted by a cute girl in Japanese-style clothes. If I'd turned up in this town when I first got to this world, I might've taken up camp in this inn so I could lounge in the hot spring.

"Um, and who might you be?" Konoha looked at Shinobu, who was behind me.

"She's a stranger," I said. "I'm going back to my room, so if you could bring my meal when it's time, please."

"A stranger? Aw. But we're doing a job together."

"Just so you know, if you follow me to my room, I'll kick you out."

"You're very mean, Yuna. Well, let's meet tomorrow morning at the entrance of the inn."

When Shinobu started talking to Konoha, I headed over to my room.

What was her deal? She kept smiling. I couldn't figure her out. And what was the deal with her adventurer rank? I couldn't believe she was also in rank C at my age... not that I was one to talk. And it seemed like she routinely fought solo. I had the bear gear, but if she was in rank C just through her own abilities, she had to be really powerful.

There was something suspicious about all this. If she could do the job on her own, why did she need me? When I tried to reject the quest, she'd insisted she couldn't do it alone, and her excuse seemed made up. It was like she was desperate to keep me involved. Anyway, best to be on my guard around her.

I summoned my bears in cub form and told them to watch out for people coming into

the room.

Shinobu didn't attempt to invade my room that night. Konoha brought in my meal.

"Um, what happened to the girl who was with me?"

"Oh, yes, she's staying here as well."

"If she asks anything about me, you don't have to tell her anything."

"Yes, you have nothing to worry about. That would be a breach of trust, so we don't answer questions about other guests."

I was glad to hear the employees here were well-trained. Good thing I'd chosen this inn.

"Thank you."

"Please don't mention it. I'll come back to take your dishes, so please enjoy your meal."

I did exactly that.

After I finished eating and was relaxing, my bears looked over at the door and crooned.

When I used my detection skill, I saw a person approaching my room. The person stopped at the door but froze there. Konoha wouldn't have done that. Besides, she'd already come by to take my dishes earlier.

I told my bears to hide and quietly opened the door.

"Whoa!"

Shinobu was right there.

"What is it?"

"Um, I wanted to talk with you about tomorrow." Shinobu smiled.

Oh, she was absolutely fibbing. She'd come up with that on the spot.

"Do we need to? I'm pretty sure you could defeat the kamaitachi on your own. I'll help you out if you need it, though."

"You're leaving it t' me?"

"Well, you *are* powerful, aren't you?"

"Oh, no, no. I'm not. Ms. Sumire was just exaggerating. I'm very weak."

Sumire? Was that the receptionist? Maybe I should've asked her more about Shinobu.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Uh, your footsteps were too loud?" I offered on a whim.

"I was loud?"

I wasn't going to tell her the truth.

"I highly doubt that..." Shinobu murmured to herself quietly.

"What was that?"

"Oh, nothing. Just talkin' to myself. Don't worry about it."

Suspicious...

"So, are you all alone, Yuna?"

"Yeah, why?"

She tried to peek into the room, but my bears were already in hiding.

"Well, please make sure you come out tomorrow morning. Don't be late." Shinobu waved her hand behind her and left.

What did she come for, then?

I was kind of worried she'd come back, so I reminded my bears to alert me if anyone approached again while I was in the hot springs or asleep.

CHAPTER 468

THE BEAR HEADS TO THE VILLAGE

WHEN MORNING CAME, my designated alarm clocks, Kumayuru and Kumakyu, woke me up. Since they hadn't done that during the night, I guess we hadn't had any visitors. Maybe I was just being paranoid?

Once I was up, I thanked my bears and soaked in the hot spring until breakfast. Then I ate and headed to the entrance, where I found Konoha and Shinobu.

"Are you going out?"

"I'm planning on coming back, but not until late, so I won't need any meals."

I'd already paid for three nights here. That included breakfast and dinner too. I didn't see any point in making her prep meals for me to wait when she had no idea when I'd be back. It was just polite to give her a heads-up.

"Yes, as you wish."

"So, what were you two talking about?"

"Just this and that. Like how girls wearing bear outfits are cute. Stuff like that," Shinobu replied.

About me, then.

"Well, since you're here, we can head out," she said. Moving together, we left the inn.

"How do you plan on getting to the village, Shinobu? Did you prep a carriage?"

"That's a secret—at least until we're out of town," Shinobu said like a kid up to no good.

What was she hiding?

“You look cute in that bear outfit, but I bet it’s downright hard to move in. You sure you wanna wear that to go fight kamaitachi?”

“If you don’t need me, you can go right on alone. I’ll wait in the town. You can have the entire reward too, of course.”

That would make things so much easier, really.

“Don’t say that. We’re in this together! Come on.”

Shinobu sure was acting like we were besties—she even latched onto my arm, making me have to peel her off. I really had no idea how to handle people who believed everyone was their buddy. Noa could be like that too, but there was something different about this. Maybe it was their ages?

“If you try asking about my outfit or try hugging me again, I’m heading right home.”

“A-all right, understood. No more questions or hugging.”

After I secured that promise, we headed for the outskirts of town.

When we left the town area, the gate guard gave us a suspicious look and stopped us. Shinobu said some stuff and they let us go.

“Thank you.”

“Oh, not at all. I’m glad I could help.”

“So, we’re out of town now. What do we do?”

I thought we’d rent a horse somewhere on the way, but Shinobu had just led us right out of town. We weren’t walking, were we? Well, she was a ninja, so I guess she normally would’ve run or something?

“Well...”

Shinobu put her hands together, interweaving her fingers to make symbols with her hands. Mana gathered in them, and a horse appeared out of nowhere.

“Is that a summon?”

“This is Hayatemaru, my partner,” Shinobu said as she stroked the horse’s neck.

I hadn’t seen any summons other than Kumayuru, Kumakyu, and Sanya’s bird. I had one note for Shinobu though.

“Not a frog or a snake or a slug, then?”

“What? Why would anyone summon anything like that? You can’t travel on those.”

Well, true, but that was what ninjas were normally known for summoning. If they wanted to travel on them, I guess they’d need giant versions. Just imagining it grossed me out. I was grateful that Kumayuru and Kumakyu were mine.

“Well, shall we?” Shinobu looked me over and then looked at the horse. “I think you might have trouble mounting in your clothes.”

“It’ll be all right.”

Since it’d be a chore otherwise, I raised my right hand and just summoned Kumayuru.

“A bear? A bear came outta nowhere! Is that a summon?”

“Yes, just like yours.”

Shinobu seemed surprised but not alarmed.

“It looks more cute than strong,” she said.

“Cwoon.”

Kumayuru scowled at Shinobu. I think it was trying to look tough around company but it had failed. Or was I imagining things?

“What’s its name?”

“Kumayuru.”

“Kumayuru, huh. That’s a cute name. Can I pet it?”

I said yes, so Shinobu gave Kumayuru a pat.

"Wow! How is it this fluffy? It's so soft. May I ride it? I'd really like to."

"Hayatemaru looks kind of sad. Are you sure?"

Hayatemaru actually was sadly bowing its head down.

"Ahh! Hayatemaru, I'm sorry. You're the best, Hayatemaru." Shinobu went to check on Hayatemaru and left Kumayuru be.

Looked like summons were the same everywhere. Mounts didn't like their owners riding on other summons.

"Too bad I can't ride Kumayuru. Shall we go?"

Shinobu got onto Hayatemaru, and I got onto Kumayuru. Then we headed off to the village where the kamaitachi had appeared.

Shinobu and Hayatemaru kept pace with Kumayuru and me.

"So, basically a kamaitachi is a monster that uses wind magic. Is that right?"

"Yes. The really strong ones could lop off your arm, so be careful. On the other hand, if you overburden yourself with steel armor, you won't be able to keep up with it."

The kamaitachi couldn't cut through steel, but wearing steel slowed you down. She explained to me that you needed to be able to maneuver fast in light protective gear to make slaying them feasible.

"So does that mean fighting them with magic is the best?"

"That depends on the mage's abilities. Mages generally wear light clothing, so they'll need to attack from far away and that means having good aim. And if they get too close, most mages aren't good with close-range combat and would end up getting hurt."

Right. If a mage had to fight a swordsman or something up close, they'd get wiped out immediately if they didn't have a way of protecting themselves. I wasn't too bad in a close-range fight, but maybe not the best.

"And the worst thing about it is that they live in the woods. Once they hide in the grass, it's difficult to find them and they can attack you by surprise."

It did sound dangerous having random super-sharp gusts of wind suddenly assaulting you. Based on Shinobu's explanation, it made sense that kamaitachi weren't enemies for beginners. That was why all the adventurers at the guild were trying to pretend they hadn't heard us.

"So, how are you going to fight the kamaitachi, Yuna?"

"I'm just going to fight them like anything else."

I had my detection skill, so I could tell where the kamaitachi would be. All I had to do was attack them with some magic after that. If I had to fight them head-on, I had tons of ways to deal with them, all thanks to my bear gear.

"How would you do it, Shinobu?"

"The same as you. I'd just fight them like anything else," she smiled and said. I really had no idea what she was thinking.

We didn't take breaks and got to the village.

"Kumayuru is so fast."

"Hayatemaru's pretty fast too."

We'd made it within an hour of leaving town. The man who'd come to the guild yesterday was at the entrance to the village.

"Mr. Itsuki, it seems we kept you waiting."

We headed over to him.

"What? Why is there a bear here?!"

Mr. Itsuki was surprised to see Kumayuru, who I was still riding.

"This bear is hers. It's harmless," Shinobu said before I had a chance to explain.

“Is it?”

“My bear won’t attack you as long as you don’t attack it.”

“You’re sure about that?”

Mr. Itsuki boggled at Kumayuru. My bear crooned to show there was nothing to be afraid of. Mr. Itsuki looked from me to Kumayuru and came to some sort of conclusion.

“All right. Anyway, I’m glad you’ve come.”

Mr. Itsuki ushered us into the village. Shinobu and I got off of Kumayuru and Hayatemaru, then headed in with him. A lot of the houses in the village were made from wood, and some had tiled roofs. They wore clothing like something straight from a Japanese period drama. When they saw Kumayuru, the villagers panicked, but Mr. Itsuki calmed them down with an explanation. The other villagers just watched from afar and didn’t approach us. Were they scared of Kumayuru?

“So, what’s the situation?”

“When I got back yesterday, two more of our cattle’d been done in. At least none of the villagers are hurt. Do you two really believe you can defeat the kamaitachi? I just don’t want any more damage at this point,” Mr. Itsuki checked in with us again.

If he asked other adventurers to take on the quest, the delay would cost them more damage. If we couldn’t slay the monsters now, the village would be in trouble.

“I should be able to defeat them, but the issue is there’s more than one. Do you know how many there are?”

“Sorry. When they come, we all run and hide. We don’t have an accurate count.”

It would be reckless for anyone who couldn’t fight to try to beat them off. They’d end up hacked up like the cattle. I wasn’t going to blame Mr. Itsuki for hiding.

Mr. Itsuki led us to what seemed to be their pasture. Cows grazed in the giant stretch of grass. This was where the kamaitachi would come.

"Well, Yuna, what should we do? We could keep watch for now?"

"What ideas do you have, Shinobu?"

"Me? Just fight them if they appear, I suppose."

Wait. Did she just have meat for brains?

"Where do they usually come from?" Since Shinobu wasn't being helpful, I asked Mr. Itsuki.

"From those woods." He pointed at some trees up ahead.

"Then that cow over there might be in danger?"

A lone cow wandered close to the woods.

Mr. Itsuki said awkwardly, "Um, that cow's there as a sacrifice so the other cows and the rest of us can get away."

If they kept all the cattle together, the entire herd would be killed. So, they left one cow in the most dangerous spot to serve as a sacrifice for the others—one death to save nine others. It was kind of an unpleasant solution, but their hands were tied.

"In that case, we should be able to find the kamaitachi in the woods?" I figured I could just slay them before they attacked.

"You don't mean you're going to fight them in the woods, do you?"

"That's the same as walking straight into the jaws of death."

Shinobu and Mr. Itsuki both seemed flabbergasted by the thought.

Because the kamaitachi could attack from any one of the many blind spots created by the trees, most people wouldn't fight them there. I just wasn't the type to wait for monsters to come to me. Also, I had my detection skill.

"It'll be fine. If any monsters are nearby, my bear will let me know so we'll get rid of them quick and come straight back." I gave Kumayuru next to me a pat on the head. "I'd like to get back to the inn quickly so I can soak in the hot spring. You can stay here,

Shinobu. I'll head into the woods with Kumayuru and slay the kamaitachi."

I wanted to get this over with quickly.

"I'll come too," Shinobu said.

"You don't need to force yourself to."

"I'm here to help. I'd like to at least lend a hand."

I didn't want her to see me fight, but I was curious about her fighting style.

Right then, Kumayuru crooned and looked at the woods. I immediately understood what that meant. When I used my detection skill, I saw kamaitachi—and not just one either. They were heading toward us fast.

"They're coming!"

"You're serious?!"

"What should we do?" Shinobu asked.

"Kumayuru, you protect Mr. Itsuki and stay here," I said as I ran off toward the monsters.

CHAPTER 469

THE BEAR FIGHTS THE KAMAITACHI

PART 1

I WAS STILL pretty far away from the cow, but as I ran, it started to go berserk. I realized it was running away. It fell, lifeless. I was too late—but I couldn't let the cow's sacrifice go to waste.

I could see something traveling at high speed along the ground near the cow. Was that the kamaitachi? They were fast and I couldn't see them clearly, but they were small. They looked just like weasels, like how kamaitachi were normally depicted. I counted three, four... no, more than five.

As I ran, I shot ice arrows at them. Even though I had target correction, they dodged. These things were fast. They swung their sickle-like arms and created gusts of wind that sliced through the grass toward me. I created several earth walls in a row using magic to see how powerful their blows were. Their wind blades couldn't even crumble even one of my walls. I could rely on just one.

I passed by the walls and tried to attack again, but the group divided to the right and left.

“I'll take the right ones!”

I wavered for a moment, but Shinobu called out to me from behind, and I sensed her passing me on the right.

I ran to the left. The kamaitachi loosed air blades on us. I could protect myself using earth walls, but they would also block my view, making me lose sight of the kamaitachi for a moment. When I tried to get closer, the kamaitachi launched more gusts at me.

Ugh, what a chore!

I imagined having bear claws to strengthen my magic and swiped at them. Three claw-shaped blades swept through the kamaitachi's gusts of wind and hit the monsters

themselves. One down!

When I tried to attack the next one, the monster dashed across the ground at high speed toward the woods. Looked like Shinobu was right—as soon as they sensed danger, they scrambled. I thought about running after them, but I didn't want to start a chase.

These monsters might be more of a chore than I'd expected. If they attacked me, I could just turn the tables on them, but they were so fast that when they wanted to run, I could only let them. They were harder to battle than I expected, too.

"Looks like they ran away," Shinobu said.

When I looked over her way, I saw something that looked a lot like three kunai—like the small ninja throwing weapons—embedded in a kamaitachi on the ground. Looked like she'd taken one down on her own too.

She pulled the kunai out of the monster, wiped them off on a cloth, and put them away in the front of her robes. Just like a ninja. She didn't have much of a bust to speak of, so I guess we had that in common.

"You're very agile. Your magic is really powerful too," Shinobu commented.

Since I'd used bear magic, marks had been left on the ground. I'd been more focused on attacking than defending. Basically, my bear magic could both protect me from attacks and hurt my opponents at the same time. Two birds with one stone. I'd have preferred to attack the entire group of kamaitachi and take them down there, though.

When Mr. Itsuki saw that we were done with the battle, he came over.

"Did you fight them all off?"

Shinobu looked at the kamaitachi on the ground as she explained. "Yuna and I got one each. The rest ran off into the woods."

"I see. Still, you've helped us. If you two hadn't been here, we would have lost more."

Mr. Itsuki looked at the cow that had been taken down.

"I'm surprised you knew when the kamaitachi were approaching, though."

"That's because my bear told me."

I started to pat Kumayuru, who had come back with Mr. Itsuki, on the head.

"Kumayuru can tell?" Shinobu asked.

"If any monsters are nearby, yes."

"Can it also sense people?"

"Well, yes."

Shinobu seemed to have realized something when I said that. I might've said too much.

"Did you have it summoned at the inn too?"

"Maybe." I didn't want her to tell Konoha, so I tried to keep it ambiguous.

"I see." Shinobu nodded to herself.

Anyway, I put the kamaitachi I'd fought off into my bear storage.

"What are you doing next?"

"I'm going into the woods to fight the rest of them."

"We're really going in?" Shinobu asked.

"If we wait here, we'll just waste time."

If I knew when they'd come back, I could just wait, but if I had to do a stakeout to figure out their schedule, I'd just end up wasting time. I preferred going on the offense.

It wasn't even a rash decision. I had my detection skill, so they couldn't attack me by surprise. Also, they'd just gone back into the forest. They probably hadn't gone that deep in.

"Shinobu, you stay in the village. If any kamaitachi head there while I'm gone, please handle them."

“No, I’m going with you. We took the quest together, so I’m sticking by your side.”

“Kumayuru will do that, so I’ll be fine.” I looked over at my bear.

When I thought about wandering the Land of Wa with a bear, I was reminded of Kintaro from that one folktale. He was wielding a Japanese axe and accompanied by his bear. That’d make me Kintaro in this scenario. Not sure I wanted to be Kintaro.

While my imagination was running wild, Kumayuru gave me a questioning look. I gave my bear a pat on the head and just said, “It’s nothing.”

* * *

In the end, Shinobu came with us into the woods. Hayatemaru wasn’t any good in the woods, so he was recalled.

Mr. Itsuki seemed worried about the plan, but when he saw I was determined, he said, “Thank you.”

“Kumayuru, let me know if any monsters show up.”

“Cwoon.”

I’d be able to tell with my detection skill, but since Shinobu was with us, I asked Kumayuru to do that anyway.

“I’d like to check in about something.”

“What is it?”

“Can you understand what Kumayuru is saying?”

“I get the gist.”

“That’s amazing.”

“It’s because we’ve been together for so long.”

It’d only been a few months since I’d met Kumayuru and Kumakyu, but I felt like we’d been together forever. I couldn’t imagine living without my bears now.

They were my precious family.

I headed deeper into the woods. I led the group, followed by Kumayuru, and then Shinobu behind.

“I’ll protect your back, Yuna.”

“Kumayuru will protect me, so it’s fine.”

“Cwoon.” Kumayuru was basically saying, “Leave it to me.”

“Aw, you’re so cold. You should’ve said, ‘I’m counting on you.’”

I couldn’t let someone I’d just met watch my back. Especially not a fishy ninja wannabe. Sure, a ninja might throw themselves into doing anything for their master, but she wasn’t going to risk her life for a stranger she’d just met the other day like me. Also, I didn’t really know how powerful Shinobu was, so I couldn’t leave it to her. My bears were the only ones I trusted to watch my back.

When I checked my detection skill, I saw the kamaitachi show up. It looked like they’d run deep into the forest. Based on how fast they’d run, they could have easily escaped from my detection skill’s range. Maybe they thought they were safe now that they were in the woods?

Kumayuru crooned quietly, “Cwoon.”

“Are they close by?” Shinobu asked in a quiet voice when Kumayuru let out a cry.

“They are.”

I checked on my detection skill as I slowly closed in the distance on the kamaitachi. I saw two nearby. They were near some vegetation slightly up ahead. I used my detection skill to check on the distance and direction, then threw two ice arrows at them. The signals both disappeared. Looked like it was a direct hit. When they couldn’t dodge, I could hit them then.

“Did you just slay them?”

“Just two. There are still more, so we should make sure they don’t approach us first. Try to keep quiet.”

It’d be such a chore to deal with them dashing around the woods if they were as quick as the others we’d encountered. It’d be best to defeat them before they could start moving around.

“Stealth is my forte, so it’ll be fine.”

I shuddered at the thought that she might be a stalker because she was good at sneaking around. Ninjas *were* kind of stalkers, though, since the job was to collect information. They had to spy on people from ceilings, sneak peeks from behind walls, keep a watch from the tops of trees—maybe even hide under beds. In my previous world, all of that was kinda criminal behavior.

“Yuna, you’re not thinking any strange thoughts, are you?”

She was sharp. Had she read my mind? Was this just another one of her ninja skills in action?

“I’m not thinking anything,” I said, brushing her off.

* * *

I collected the kamaitachi I’d defeated with my ice arrows and headed off to the next ones. Kumayuru pretended to guide me and gave little croons all the way. This is what people mean when they talk about being on the same wavelength.

“Three...”

“Four...”

I defeated the kamaitachi in the brush one at a time. As I did that, we headed deeper and deeper into the woods. I’d already taken out ten of them.

“You’re not givin’ me a chance to help.”

I wanted to see Shinobu in action, but I couldn’t let any of the kamaitachi notice us and

make a break for it.

Things were going well, but when I headed to the next one and shot an ice arrow at it, the bush moved and the kamaitachi did too. This was the first time one had managed to dodge me. The kamaitachi that came out of the bushes was a different color from the rest.

“It’s silver?”

Two silver kamaitachi had leapt out of the grass, but they leapt right back into the brush just as quickly. When I used my detection skill, I saw they were so fast that they’d put some distance between themselves and us. Worse, they’d scattered in different directions.

“Were those silver? And there were two of them. Those are gonna be trouble.” Shinobu looked a little peeved.

“What do you mean?”

“Just assume they’re incredibly powerful. They’re fast, sensitive, and right hard to hit with any attack. Also, well, their attacks can cut right through low-quality steel armor.”

Well, that sounded dangerous. At the same time, they only showed up as being normal kamaitachi on my detection skill. Shouldn’t they be listed as a subspecies of kamaitachi, or get a silver label or something at least?

“Can you handle one of them?”

I was going to put Shinobu to work a little. I didn’t mind if she said no or even if she decided to run off. It’d just say something about her character.

“I’d like to turn ya down, but I guess I can’t?”

“Well, you did say you wanted to help me.”

“All right...” Shinobu reluctantly agreed.

“Kumayuru says that one of them is near that tree.” I checked where it’d gone on my detection skill and let her know. “Want to return, Kumayuru?”

I showed my bear my bear puppet, but Kumayuru shook their head and crooned at me.

“Can I leave the other kamaitachi to you?”

I could see others nearby. It’d be a problem if those showed up while we fought the silver ones.

My bear happily agreed with another croon. Kumayuru was happy to be of service. I was kind of worried about leaving Kumayuru alone though, so I decided to bring in Kumakyu too. I hadn’t wanted to resort to this since Shinobu was around, but I didn’t want to put Kumayuru at risk. I summoned Kumakyu from my white bear puppet.

“A white bear?”

“Kumakyu, could you help Kumayuru with the kamaitachi around here? If you see a silver one, I’ll handle it, so you just run if you see any.” I didn’t want to see either of my bears injured.

“Cwoon.”

Kumakyu seemed to be saying, “Leave it to me,” just like Kumayuru had.

“Okay, let’s head out.”

“Are you going to ignore my question...?”

Shinobu had been looking at Kumakyu since earlier like she was full of curiosity—I’d noticed but hadn’t acknowledged it. I didn’t have time to explain right now.

When I headed off, all the others did too.

CHAPTER 470

THE BEAR FIGHTS THE KAMAITACHI

PART 2

I SHOT ICE ARROWS at the grass where the silver -kamaitachi was hiding, but it flipped around and dodged. The kamaitachi quickly hid in the brush. I looked at my detection skill to check where it was but saw the grass to my right quiver, then a wind blade came flying at me.

I immediately made an earth wall to protect myself... but it broke that! I immediately thrust out my white bear puppet and blocked the attack. It was a powerful one. If I hadn't had a bear puppet from the god, I would've been in trouble. I bet they really could cut through metal.

I let loose a wind blade myself in the direction of the rustling grass. It sliced through the vegetation and assaulted the kamaitachi, which dodged. I could understand what Shinobu had said about how they were sensitive and how it was hard to hit them. They were small and fast, and that made them a real pain.

Worse, we weren't in ideal terrain for fighting. The grass was in the way, but the trees were the worst. They were in the way when I needed to move, and they gave the kamaitachi places to hide. We'd already taken down some trees, and the kamaitachi were using those to hide and move around. The terrain we were in was all to the monsters' advantage.

If I had more visibility, I'd be able to fight better, but I was the one who'd said we would come into the woods. No one had told me there were more powerful species of kamaitachi, though.

Just like Shinobu had said, this one was much faster and stronger than any of the others. And its senses were super sharp. This was definitely a higher-class monster.

The kamaitachi moved through the brush and launched wind blades at me. I used my own bear wind blades to protect myself. When the wind blades clashed, the grass and leaves would block my vision.

It was all in the way!

I glanced over to check my detection skill to see where the monster was and shot a wind blade at it. I ended up taking down a tree. At this rate, I'd just keep damaging the surrounding forest. I couldn't exactly start a fire either.

I took a deep breath and went into thought. Maybe I'd use that thing... If I was up against a small opponent, maybe it was time to fight size with size—or lack thereof.

I created a bear earth golem about the size of a dog. By the time I'd finished, I had more than ten bears lined up along the ground. I infused these with mana and locked onto the silver kamaitachi.

“Minibears, head out!”

I swung my arm like a general, and the minibears went into motion. This was a new type of magic I'd cooked up: a minibear army. Since they were so small, they couldn't really do much damage, but I could make tons of them.

The minibears ran along the ground toward the kamaitachi. It tried to escape but was hunted down like hounds were after it.

The monster hit my bears with wind blades, which sliced through them, but since there were so many minibears, the next one would already be on its way to attacking the kamaitachi. The monster ran through the grass as the bears surrounded it. They drove the kamaitachi up the tree. Finally, one of the minibears launched itself onto the monster and latched on.

We'd caught it!

The minibear was heavy enough to slow the kamaitachi down. Then another minibear latched onto it, and it fell from the tree and even more dogpiled on it until it couldn't move anymore. It was fully weighed down by the bears now. I came up to it and gave it the finishing blow.

“Whew.”

This was a lot more work than I’d expected.

How were my bears doing? And Shinobu? I looked around until I noticed some sound from far away, then I used my detection skill to check the area. I saw Kumayuru and Kumakyu’s signals pretty far away from me. I was worried about Shinobu too, but I ran over to my bears instead.

I kept running, and when I got there, I was shocked by the state of my surroundings. The brush was cut down and the trees were broken and toppled over.

What had happened here? Was it a silver kamaitachi?

I ran over to my bears and found them fighting a silver kamaitachi. But why?

* * *

The monster was attacking Kumayuru with wind blades, and they quickly lunged out of the way. The kamaitachi kept flinging blades after them in quick succession. Kumayuru brought up a paw and sliced through the blades. My bears were using the power of the bearyllium to fight back with magic.

Kumayuru swiped with their claws at the kamaitachi, shooting wind magic after it. The silver kamaitachi ran, but Kumakyu was waiting for it—Kumakyu attacked the monster with another claw attack. Now that it had no way of escape, the kamaitachi had no option but to take the hit. It wasn’t quite enough to take it down, and it tried to escape, but it tumbled right into Kumayuru who dealt the finishing blow.

Now that the fights were over, I rejoined my bears.

“Kumakyu, Kumayuru, why did you fight the silver kamaitachi?”

They both crooned. When I scolded them a little, they lowered their heads. This was so dangerous! If anything happened to them, I couldn’t forgive myself.

“Why would you do something so reckless? I know I told you not to. I said to let me handle the silver kamaitachi and to just handle the normal kamaitachi.”

They both crooned at me remorsefully.

"Oh, about that," I heard Shinobu say, and startled. She'd sneaked up on me!

"It was 'cause the other kamaitachi was comin' at you. They started fighting it to get it away from you."

"Really?" I asked Kumayuru and Kumakyu. They both crooned in reply and nodded slightly.

Instead of listening to me, they'd tried to protect me. It made me kind of happy. Now that I knew that was why they'd done it, I just couldn't be angry at them.

"Haah..." I let out a sigh and gave my bears some gentle head pats. "Thank you. But don't take risks like that."

They both crooned again, but a happy one this time.

I'd noticed the two of them seemed faster than usual. It must have been because of the bearyllium. I looked at their ribbons. I had no idea how much it'd powered them up, but I was just glad that it was protecting them.

"So, how'd things go for you, Shinobu?"

"I defeated mine," Shinobu replied with a smile. When I looked more closely at Shinobu, I noticed tears in her clothes.

"Your clothes are torn. Did you get hurt?"

"Oh, I'm fine. I just barely dodged it."

Shinobu showed me one of the tears. The skin underneath was whole. It really seemed like she'd escaped by a hair.

"But my clothes aren't salvageable. I think I might request more of a reward. I did defeat a silver one, so I suppose it's worth it."

Apparently silver kamaitachi parts were worth a lot, but if Shinobu knew what had happened with Kumayuru and Kumakyu, that meant she must have been watching all of us fight.

I asked her how she knew what my bears had done, and she blew me off by saying, “I just happened to notice.”

She wouldn’t have been able to pay that much attention to them until she was skilled enough in battle to be able to afford to hold back. Just who was Shinobu?

“Do you think that’s all of the kamaitachi?” Shinobu asked me while I was pondering her identity.

“Kumakyu, Kumayuru?” I asked them and then checked my detection skill.

I didn’t see any. So it looked like my bears really had gotten rid of the regular kamaitachi, then. They both crooned as though they were telling me that.

“Looks like there aren’t any nearby.”

“I see. Good. The silver kamaitachi were already a lot to deal with, after all. I’m glad you and Kumayuru and that white bear were all here.”

“Cwoon,” Kumakyu protested at Shinobu and nudged her.

“What’s wrong?”

“Kumakyu is mad you didn’t say their name.”

“Sorry about that. It’s Kumakyu, right?”

“Cwoon.” Kumakyu seemed mollified.

“That’s a pretty cute name you’ve got.”

Kumakyu seemed even happier to get that compliment. I hadn’t really been thinking that hard when I chose the name, but I was happy it made my bear happy.

After that, we collected the kamaitachi and left the woods.

We kind of made a mess in there. I hoped that was all right.

CHAPTER 471

THE BEAR EATS WAGYU

IF I SUDDENLY APPEARED with Kumakyu, we'd probably make a commotion, so I recalled my bear before we went through the village.

"Sorry, Kumakyu. I'll summon you again when we're home."

"Cwoon." Kumakyu gave me a sad little cry. I gave my bear a pat and recalled them.

"Poor thing. Kumakyu looked pitiful," Shinobu said.

"Yeah, but if I brought another bear back with me, I'd shock all the villagers."

"You have a point."

I didn't want to explain anything either and we were only going to be around here for a little bit longer anyway.

"So let's hurry up and report back so we can get home."

The faster I got back to the inn, the faster I could get into the hot spring with Kumakyu and sleep.

Once we were back at the village, we found several men waiting for us.

"I'm so relieved. You came back safe."

"She really is dressed as a bear."

"And she has an actual bear with her too."

"You mean this girl in the bear getup went to battle kamaitachi?"

The men were staring at me and Kumayuru. Everyone reacted the same no matter the country. Next to me, I heard Shinobu mutter quietly, "I was there too."

"So, you two, what happened to the kamaitachi?"

"We defeated them," Shinobu replied for me. We each pulled out the monsters we'd slain from our item bags.

When the men saw those, they gave us surprised looks. They probably hadn't thought a girl like me—or Shinobu, for that matter—could have defeated the monsters.

"You really did slay them."

"Now we can live in peace."

"You girls are amazing."

"See? I told you they'd be fine. I knew they could do it," Mr. Itsuki said a little proudly to the men.

"Huh? Just yesterday you were lamenting about how you gave the quest to a strange girl in a bear getup."

"I was! But I also said that the guild introduced me to another adventurer too, so it was all fine."

"Even then, you seemed nervous because she was just a young girl, too."

I guess that they really didn't have all that much faith in female adventurers then? Our ages also played a role in this since both Shinobu and I were pretty young compared to other adventurers. Things might have been different if we were both a little older.

One of the men looked at the kamaitachi and his expression changed as he did.

"You've got a silver one?"

"It's true. And three of them even."

The men looked at the silver kamaitachi in surprise.

"It was a lot of work fighting them. They're fast and that one even tore through my clothes," Shinobu said, showing off the tear. She had one tear near her arm and another one near her stomach. She was hiding the one close to her torso though. When I'd seen

it earlier, I noticed she had abs. That was something we didn't have in common.

Maybe I should exercise? Nah. I wasn't the type.

"You're not hurt, are you?!" Mr. Itsuki asked, seeming alarmed.

"I'm fine. It's just clothes. I'm not goin' to ask for compensation or anything."

Uh, she absolutely was when she put it like that.

She looked at her clothes, then at the men.

"Please allow us to compensate you..."

Shinobu grinned when Mr. Itsuki offered. Well, I guess this kind of thing was normal for adventurers. If you fought a monster that was stronger than anticipated, it wasn't that odd to ask for a little extra.

"Our cattle and other animals will be safe now, right?"

The villagers seemed happy, but I still needed to remind them of something.

"Sorry for raining on your parade, but we only defeated the kamaitachi around the village. There might be more deeper in the woods."

You couldn't assume you were done once you killed the monsters directly in front of you. This wasn't a video game. There might be more in the woods, and they might attack the village in times to come.

Shinobu corrected me, "From my experience, that shouldn't happen. Kamaitachi move in groups. Since we got the entire group, we can assume we slayed them all. And you had Kumayuru check our surroundings, didn't you?"

Shinobu looked at me to reconfirm.

"Yeah, there weren't any nearby," I answered in Kumayuru's place.

"If Kumayuru has said so, then we should be fine," Shinobu said. Good to know there was nothing to worry about after we left.

"Also, we had to cut down some trees because we battled the kamaitachi in the forest." I didn't want them complaining later about it.

"Oh? The village will find a use for them. That's all right." Since they could use wood in a lot of different ways, the trees wouldn't be going to waste.

"I'm sure you must be tired after battling those monsters. We've prepared some rooms, so please rest."

"You have? Well, I'll be glad to, then." Shinobu accepted Mr. Itsuki's consideration.

"I'll head out, then," I said.

"What? You're not going to rest?" Shinobu seemed shocked.

"I'm not tired at all," I said. Besides, if I was going to relax anywhere, it was going to be at the hot spring back at the inn. I wanted to hang out on the tatami mats with my bears.

"Please stay! We'll prepare some lunch for you."

"The beef here is delicious."

Wait... if this was the Land of Wa, did that mean the beef would be wagyu?! That got my attention! I could eat beef in Crimonia, but if the food was good here, then I couldn't pass on it.

I wanted some, but I didn't know whether I could eat it after seeing the cute cows... but I got over it quickly. I'd eaten wolf meat in the past and I could eat the poultry the orphans were raising. I'd even seen Fina butchering meat before. I might have refused in the past, but now that I was in another world, I was more stout of heart. Easy to be brave when I wasn't the one doing the butchering anyway.

I'd decided. I'd take them up on their offer.

We were led to one of the houses. Shinobu walked ahead of us, and I followed, then Kumayuru. Once we got to the front door, the man who had led us there awkwardly said, "Um, about the bear..."

“Cwoon?”

I didn’t know which bear he meant at first, and then I realized he was looking at Kumayuru.

My bear was quizzically cocking their head to the side slightly.

“If you could leave it outside...”

Well, Kumayuru was an animal, and a bear, so it made sense, but why did Kumayuru have to look at me like that?

“No exceptions?” I asked the man.

“Well, it’s a bit large...”

So, time to choose: either have Kumayuru stay outside or recall them back into my bear gloves. Or maybe I’d just say, “No, thank you,” to the meal and head home?

While I was thinking it over, Shinobu said, “The bear helped slay the kamaitachi too. We only took ‘em all down, including the silver ones, without letting any escape, because the bear helped. You wanna leave poor Kumayuru outside?”

The man looked at Kumayuru, seeming to think. Then he groaned. “Okay, you can come in with the bear.”

“Kumayuru, aren’t you glad? You can eat with us.” Shinobu gave Kumayuru a pat on the head.

“Cwoon.” Kumayuru gave us a happy cry.

I guess Kumayuru was starting to come around on Shinobu. Wait, was this, like, another ninja move? I’ve heard that female ninjas could seduce their targets into giving them information. What secrets could Kumayuru reveal to her? As that silly thought crossed my mind, I realized it wasn’t like she could understand Kumayuru’s speech anyway. Maybe she just liked my bear like anyone else. She patted Kumayuru with the same blissful look everyone else got.

I headed inside the house with my bear.

"Well, please wait here for a bit."

The man left the room.

"I'm so excited."

"Cwoon." Kumayuru seemed to be too.

Since I was alone with Shinobu now, I asked her the question that had been on my mind.

"So, why did you come with me on this quest, Shinobu?"

"Because I thought that they'd say no if you took it alone."

"Even if that happened, it wouldn't have concerned you, though."

All of her excuses made no sense—having to turn some things down was part of the job. Also, someone else would have still taken the quest even if I hadn't done it. Even I knew that. Even without job experience in my old world, I did have some in this world now.

"Well..."

"Well?"

"I-it was because I saw a cute bear in trouble. I don't think any girl wouldn't say something when a cute girl is in trouble," Shinobu said, smiling and clearly hiding something.

"That line would work better coming from a man."

Then again, I'd never had a guy try to come to my rescue like that.

"Oh, no, girls *definitely* help cute girls too."

I gave Shinobu a dubious look.

"Oh, don't give me that," she said. "Oh, the food is here. Let's eat."

Shinobu looked at the door to change the subject just as the man came in carrying charcoal and some beef, interrupting us. I'd wanted to ask more questions, but I guess I had to hold off.

"Thank you for waiting."

He started to work the coal. They were looking nice and hot as the man set a grill on top of them along with some of the beef. The cut audibly sizzled as it cooked. Oh, that sounded *good*.

He also had some sort of condiment that looked like soy sauce. When I tried it with that, it really brought out the flavor of the rest of the food. Maybe I'd buy some for home as gifts. I could buy tons and keep it in the bear storage too. Then I could eat wagyu anytime I wanted.

"Cwoon."

Kumayuru seemed to want some, so I fed a cooked piece of meat to my bear. Since my bear wasn't in cub form, it was a tiny speck in their enormous mouth, but Kumayuru seemed to savor the morsel anyway.

"Kumayuru, wanna try a piece of mine too?"

Shinobu shared a piece from her meal with Kumayuru the same way I had.

"It'd be nice to have some larger cuts," Shinobu said, and the man brought just that over for Kumayuru.

Since that seemed like it would normally be really expensive, I decided to turn down any extra reward. Shinobu did the same.

"I'll sell the kamaitachi, so it's okay," she said.

I bought some more beef for Kumakyu, who we'd left out. I could just imagine Kumakyu sulking when I summoned them next, so I made sure to buy a little more than normal to make up for leaving them out. The villagers tried to gift the beef to me, but I politely turned them down.

CHAPTER 472

THE BEAR TALKS WITH SHINOBU

AFTER WE ATE the meal they treated us to, we said thank you and left for home. A lot of people came to see us off.

I turned us toward the town and set Kumayuru running. Shinobu dashed beside me on Hayatemaru.

“Yuna, once we get to town, I wanna talk to you about somethin’.”

“About what?”

“I got something to share with you.”

“Does it have anything to do with why you came with me on this quest?”

“Well, yeah.”

She’d just pretended there wasn’t anything else to it earlier. Why tell me now? Was it because she couldn’t talk over there?

“If it’s going to cause any trouble for me, no thanks.”

I was here as a tourist right now. So I didn’t want anything cramping my style.

“Um, please don’t say that...”

“So it is going to be trouble, then?”

“I’m afraid it is...” Shinobu answered honestly.

“Then I really don’t want to know.”

“Please just hear me out. I’m begging you.”

“Well, if you’ll tell me everything you’ve been hiding, then I’ll at least listen.”

I wanted to know why Shinobu was following me around. I didn’t understand why she’d taken the quest. She’d practically said that she needed to do it with me. I just didn’t understand what she was talking about or how she was acting. And I sure didn’t like how this whole experience was making me feel.

If what she told me was too much trouble, I’d just go about my business and forget all about it.

“Got it. I’ll tell you after we get back t’ town.”

Once we actually were back, I headed to the Adventurers’ Guild to finish up our quest with a report.

“We’re back,” Shinobu said almost as though she’d just come home from work. The way she said it made all the eyes in the guild snap to us. She didn’t seem bothered by it and headed straight to the reception desk.

“We finished our quest,” she said.

Shinobu produced the quest document and her guild card, so I pulled out my card too. The receptionist checked the document, which had Mr. Itsuki’s signature as proof we’d completed the quest.

“Thank you for your work. So, what would you like to do with the kamaitachi? Would you like to sell them to us?”

“Yes, please. My clothes are in tatters because of them.”

Shinobu showed off the cuts to the receptionist.

“Oh my! That’s highly unusual for you, Miss Shinobu.”

“That’s because there were silver kamaitachi. Three of them too.”

“Were there really? And did you...?”

“I took out one. Yuna took out two of them.”

“By Miss Yuna, you mean...” The receptionist turned over to me. “Did you really?” She looked at me with disbelief.

“It’s true. And Yuna defeated most of the normal ones on her own.”

Well, really Kumayuru and Kumakyu took down a lot of them too.

“What’ll you do with yours, Yuna?”

What to do? Maybe it’d be best to have them buy them here? Or maybe I’d ask Fina to harvest from them? She didn’t need to do any harvesting work, but I’d bought her a mithril knife, so...

I decided I’d ask Fina to handle them for me. If she didn’t know how to deal with them, then I’d ask Gentz for help.

“I’m fine. I’ll take them with me.”

“They’ll spoil,” Shinobu warned me.

“I have a special item bag, so it’s fine.”

I opened and closed the mouths of my bear puppets to demonstrate where I stored things.

“Well, I’ll give you the reward now, so please split it between yourselves.”

The receptionist placed some money on the table. Shinobu grabbed only a tenth of it.

“I think this is about my cut,” she said.

“You can have half.”

“I couldn’t possibly do that. I only slayed a few of them. The rest is yours.”

“Are you sure?”

She was technically right about how many she slayed, but she’d also given me

information about the kamaitachi. That had plenty of value.

"This is a fair split. Don't worry about it. In exchange, I'd like you to hear me out."

"Are you trying to give me the money so I can't say no to you?" As the saying went, nothing is more expensive than something that's free.

"I wouldn't do anything that underhanded."

I was on the fence for a while, but I decided to take the money. Worst case, I could just push it back on her.

"All right, then I'll take it. Thank you."

I put the money away into my bear storage. I also took back my guild card and had finished making my report, so all I had to do was go back to the inn. I wanted to relax once I got there, but now I needed to hear Shinobu out.

"So, where should we talk?"

"It'd be best in a place without anyone else around, so could we head on back to your room?"

"Sure," I said.

And that was how we decided that we'd talk in my room at the inn.

We were back at the inn.

"Miss Yuna, Miss Shinobu, welcome back," Konoha greeted us.

"Thank you. I'd like dinner when the time comes."

"And I'll stay another night, so I'd like a room," Shinobu said.

"Of course. Thank you both."

Shinobu finished getting her room and we both headed over to mine.

"This sure is nice," Shinobu said as she looked all around.

I sat down on one of the floor cushions.

"So, what do you want to talk about?"

Shinobu sat on a floor cushion on the other side of the table.

"I'm looking for this man."

Shinobu took something out of the inside of her robes. It was a piece of paper. She unfolded it and showed me an ugly portrait of a man drawn on it—a real shady character, with a patch over his left eye and everything. It looked kind of like a wanted poster.

"Who's this guy? He looks like a nasty customer." I wasn't sure I wanted anything to do with someone who was drawn in that style.

"He's my parents' nemesis," Shinobu answered.

"..."

Dead silence flowed between us. This had gotten heavy real quick. This was the first time I'd ever regretted hearing someone out. In manga and novels, revenge stories usually didn't have happy endings. The people getting the revenge didn't even end up happy.

"You're not going to ask me to have Kumayuru find him for you, are you? I can't do that."

What Kumayuru could do was basically the same as what my detection skill could do. The most information I got from that was whether it was someone I knew, like Fina. I couldn't use it to find someone I'd never met before.

"No, that's not what I'm looking for. Though it would help if you could help me find him, of course. He seems to be in this town."

Still, this was a huge town. It wasn't going to be easy finding someone here.

"So, what did you want to ask me then?"

“You’re stronger than me, aren’t you, Yuna?”

“I think you might be stronger.”

“I doubt it. I think you’re probably stronger.”

Wait, had she followed me on the quest to check that? No way she would have assumed I was powerful just by looking at me. Anyone would assume I was just some girl in a weird getup. There was something off about the order of operations—how she was behaving made no sense.

“So, you want me to fight that guy then?”

“If we really gotta,” she said.

“Wait, so there might not be any fighting?”

I initially assumed she was asking me to help her get revenge, but apparently that wasn’t the goal.

“I’m gonna capture him. I’d like you to help if I fall though. All you gotta do is keep an eye on me—unless something happens to me, that is. And I won’t ask you t’do it for free either. I’ll pay, of course.”

After saying that, Shinobu pulled a drawstring pouch from her item bag. She opened it to show me the money inside. It was quite a hefty sum—enough to buy a small house.

“It’s all I’ve got. If I die, I want you to capture him for me.” Her face was serious as she looked at me. “If I die, there’s no point in having any money. So I’ll give it to you. Oh, but if I catch him, I’d like it back.” Shinobu smiled as she said that.

“What if I take the money and run?”

“I’ve been watching you over these two days. I talked to you about this because I don’t believe you would. You even offered to help Mr. Itsuki.”

I’d only done that because I wanted to see kamaitachi.

“You were faster than anyone to act when the cow was attacked.”

Of course I was going to do something; I mean, I was there for the quest.

"And you even went right in that dangerous forest because the villagers would've been in big trouble if the kamaitachi weren't all killed."

I just hadn't wanted to waste any time.

"Then you slayed the silver kamaitachi and didn't boast about it or try'n negotiate for more of the reward."

Well, Shinobu had done enough of that for both of us.

"You even refused any additional compensation because they treated you to a meal."

That was because Kumayuru had eaten too much.

"Was that why you didn't take the reward?"

"That was a fair split," she insisted.

"Why me? Aren't there other powerful adventurers around? Why would you ask me when we just met?"

Who would ask a girl in a bear suit like me to do this?

"It's intuition. You struck my interest when we first met, and I just haven't been able to take my eyes off you."

That sounded a whole lot like she'd just been horrified by my fashion faux pas and hadn't been able to look away.

"Now I know how powerful you are from the quest, so I wanted to ask you to do it."

Hmm. It didn't sound like she was lying, but I also felt like she was hiding something. Super sketchy.

"Is the man that powerful?"

Shinobu was a C-rank adventurer. Even the guild trusted her. I'd seen her fight before, so I knew it wasn't just for show either. She'd even slayed a silver kamaitachi, which

I'd struggled with.

"He's strong. I think I'll barely be a match for him. I don't intend to fail, but I don't think I'm certain to win either. So if the worst happens, I'd like your help."

Shinobu bowed. I wasn't regretting hearing her out, but this was some weird story.

"So to make absolutely sure, you're not going to kill him? You're just capturing him?"

"Honestly, I wanna kill him. But he's committed other crimes too. Since there might be others like me, I wanna capture him so I can make him fess up about his crimes."

The stronger someone was, the harder they would be to capture. The more even the match, the longer the fight might draw out, which also increased the difficulty. One misstep and you might die—that was why Shinobu wanted me to step in if the worst happened.

"In that case, why don't you just report where he is and have someone else catch him?" Didn't they have police or a government or something?

"I got no evidence, so there's no point in reporting him."

I'd injured people before but never killed anyone, so if she'd asked me to kill him, I would have said no without hesitating.

"Haah..." All I could manage was a sigh.

At this point, I'd taken a quest with Shinobu, battled monsters with her, and even eaten alongside her. If I said no and she ended up dying while I was unaware, I'd feel awful. I'd regret it and wonder if she would have died if I'd been there. Maybe I was being conceited thinking my help would make the difference, but I had bear gear from a literal god, so.

I sighed again.

"Okay, okay. I'll do it, then, but I have a condition."

"What's that? Do you want my body? Well, if it's you, I guess it's okay..." Shinobu started to tug off her robe from her shoulder.

“Nope! No, thank you.”

“You’re so terrible. You don’t gotta phrase it that way.” Shinobu pretended to cry.

She sure seemed flippant, considering she was walking into the jaws of death. Maybe she just wanted to lighten the mood.

“If it seems like you’re in danger, I’ll help out.”

“In other words, you’ll get between us?” She seemed a little upset.

“No. If it seems like you’re about to die, then that’s the same as you losing. I’ll help you if it comes to that. I won’t promise to wait until you’re dead.”

I wasn’t backing down on this point. If she died or got hurt in front of me, that’d be too traumatic.

“Well, if you’re going to stare daggers at me, I really can’t say no. I’ll leave it t’your judgment, Yuna.”

I accepted Shinobu’s quest.

CHAPTER 473

THE BEAR BUTTERS UP KUMAKYU

“SO, WHAT’S the man’s name?”

“You see that cross-shaped scar on his cheek, right?” Shinobu said.

When I looked at the drawing, I saw it on his right cheek.

“He makes a sign with his hands in the shape of a cross too. It looks a lot like ‘juu,’ the written character for the number ten, so he’s called Jyubei.” Shinobu made a cross sign with her hands.

Those sorts of hand signs were ways of communicating with people at a distance. That sure sounded like ninjas.

So his name was Jyubei because of his scar. I was glad he wasn’t named Jubei instead after the little girls’ anime from my world. If he stuck on an eye patch and named himself after a shoujo anime, that’d be a different kind of alarming.

“So, do you have a way of finding him? I can’t stick around for long.”

I’d told Shinobu I would come with her, but I couldn’t stay here for an extended time. I had stuff to do too. I also wanted to walk around the Land of Wa and see the sights. Plus I needed to get back to Crimonia at some point.

“I’ve heard of someone who looks like him hanging out in a certain place, so I was going to go search there. So I just need you to stick with me for three days. If we still can’t find him, I’ll give up for now.”

I hoped we could figure this out before the three days were up then. I really didn’t want to come back to the Land of Wa and find out that Shinobu was dead or something.

“Oh, and if that happens, please return my money.”

I already intended to but being told what to do made me feel like doing the opposite.

Well, I didn't want her following me around, so I was going to return it anyway.

"But I'll keep enough to cover sticking around you for three days."

I was pretty sure that was fair.

While I was negotiating with Shinobu, there was a knock on the door and Konoha came in with my dinner. I'd lost track of time completely. We must have been talking for a while.

Shinobu folded up the portrait on the table and put it back into her robes. Then Konoha quickly set the cleaned-off table.

While I was watching her, I realized something was off.

"Why do you have two meals here?"

She'd definitely set the table for two.

"I'm eating with you, Yuna," Shinobu told me.

"News to me."

"Well, we didn't know how long we'd be talking, so I asked Konoha to do it."

Well, she had a point. I think she could have at least mentioned it, though.

"You're not going to tell me you asked to share the room with me too, are you?"

"Oh, you want me to spend the night? Unfortunately, I've got my own room. I really would have preferred sharing a futon."

I told her that I'd take her job, but I wasn't sharing a futon with her.

"If you said we were sharing a room, I'd have pushed you out the door by now."

"Well, that's a bit depressing to hear."

While we were talking, Konoha finished setting the table. The food she'd set up looked a little odd though. Shinobu seemed to have noticed too.

“The meals look a little different?”

She was completely right. The meals looked entirely different for each of us. Mine looked a lot fancier. Mine had crab and shrimp, and seemed kind of fancy. Shinobu had grilled fish and broiled veggies—way more of a normal dinner.

“The room you’re staying in is slightly more expensive than our usual accommodations, Miss Yuna. Because of this, the meals are special as well,” Konoha answered.

Uh-huh, so that was why my food was so fancy. I was kind of glad I’d chosen a better room, even though it was a little on the pricey side. There was a hot spring in the room too. Plus it was in its own annex, away from the main building, so it was quiet. And this dinner was delicious!

I realized something while we were talking about the room.

“Oh, right. I’d like to stay for a little longer. Would that be all right?”

Since I was going to be hanging out with Shinobu, I’d need to stick around town for a while. I’d only paid up for three nights, so if anyone else had reserved this room, I’d need to leave. Konoha seemed happy when I asked, though.

“Yes, that’s fine. How long would you like to extend your stay?”

I was glad I could stick around.

“How about three more days?”

“You must be rich, Yuna. You’re in such a big room for such a long stay.”

“Well, I did just come across a big windfall.” I showed off the drawstring pouch of money.

“But that’s my money!”

I planned on returning it, but it was still in my hands for now.

“Oh, by the way, are you going to be able to pay for your room, Shinobu?”

“I’m fine. I already paid for it.”

I had all of Shinobu’s money. I doubted that she’d given me every single cent, but I was glad I wasn’t going to have to pay her way.

After I paid to extend my stay, we ate our respective (very dissimilar) meals. Shinobu looked like she wanted a bite of mine, but I never offered.

“So, how strong is this Jyubei guy?”

I ignored the look Shinobu was giving my food and nibbled on some crab. It was so good! The seasoned rice was great too. I really liked the tempura.

“Uh, right... He’s first-rate at sword fighting,” Shinobu said as she picked at her grilled fish.

Well, that’s what it seemed like based on the drawing of him. He looked a lot like a warrior.

“And he can use magic too.”

“Magic?”

“He can unleash wind blades from the tip of his sword. He’s a lot worse than any kamaitachi.”

Now that she’d mentioned magic, this historical drama had shifted into a historical fantasy. Magic was a thing in this world, so what else had I expected? It kind of felt wrong for a warrior to use magic, though. I was a girl in a bear suit interloping in this drama, so I was one to talk.

“It seems like you know an awful lot about this guy. Have you fought him before?”

“I saw him fight my dad.”

“I see...”

Did that mean she’d watched him kill her dad? Well, now I didn’t know how to continue the conversation.

“Well, now that magic’s in the mix, that makes this harder,” I said.

“If you fight him in close combat, you can stop him from using it.”

Shinobu told me all she knew about the guy until we finished our meals.

“You ate everything. You didn’t offer me a single bite.”

“Well, it’s my meal,” I said.

And it was delicious. I hoped I’d be able to bring Fina with me next time. The food and hot spring made staying here worthwhile.

“Well, I’m gonna head on back to my room.”

I was convinced she was going to blurt out something else, like “I’m going to try out the hot spring,” or something.

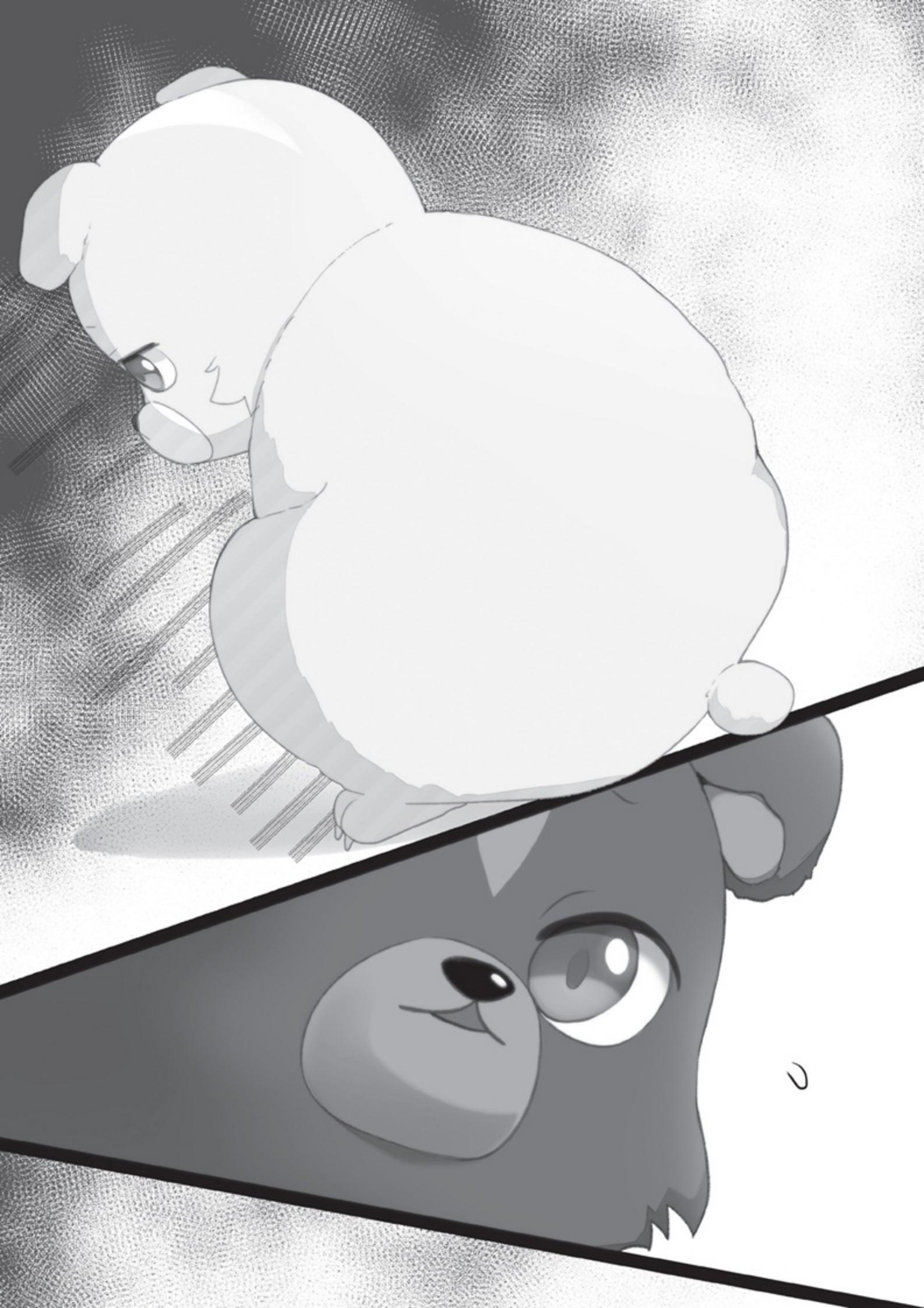
“I really wanted to sit in the hot spring with you,” she added, “but I think it’ll be better to rest up for tonight.”

With that straightforward comment, Shinobu left the room. Then, as though trading places with my departed guest, Konoha came in to clean up the dishes and set up the futon for me.

Once everyone was gone, I summoned Kumayuru and Kumakyu in cub form. I needed to put Kumakyu in a good mood fast before my bear started to sulk. But... I was too late.

Kumakyu turned away from me, and I felt the sadness radiating off my bear’s sullen back. This was really bad. Kumakyu was fully in sulk mode.

“Kumakyu? Oh, my little Kumakyuu?”



“Cwoon.”

Kumakyu wouldn't even look at me. Uhhh, this was serious.

“Sorry, Kumakyu. I wasn't trying to leave you out on purpose.” I hugged Kumakyu from behind.

I'd spent all day with Kumayuru summoned. On top of that, Kumakyu was the only one left out of our meal at the village after we defeated the kamaitachi. I'd bought some beef for them though.

“I have some food for you, but I wonder if I can cook it in the room. Probably not...”

That made Kumakyu give me an even more forlorn cry. We were at an inn, after all. I couldn't just start a fire here. Uhhh, what could I do then? I needed to think!

“We can take a bath together and then sleep together tonight?”

Kumakyu still wouldn't look at me.

“Did you really want to try the beef that badly?”

Kumakyu shook their head slightly. Then what was wrong?

While I was trying to figure it out, Kumayuru headed over to Kumakyu and they started to croon at each other like they were having a conversation. Once they were done, Kumayuru walked over to a corner of the room and curled up into a little ball.

What just happened?

While I was still confused, Kumakyu looked over at me. Then my bear started to nuzzle me. Was Kumayuru having Kumakyu take their turn spending time with me?

“Kumayuru?”

When I said my bear's name, I didn't get a reaction. I guess I was right then—I was supposed to hang out with Kumakyu instead, then. Well, I guess I'd just go with it since Kumayuru was being so nice.

“Okay, Kumakyu, how about we take a bath together?”

“Cwoon,” Kumakyu gave me a happy cry.

I really needed to make sure Kumayuru knew how much I appreciated this later.

I took Kumakyu over to the bath and then set up a bear gate, so I could cook the meat to eat with Kumakyu. We couldn’t eat it in the room, so we just needed to go somewhere else to cook it.

“Kumakyu, want to eat together, then?” I’d just eaten dinner, but I needed to eat more for Kumakyu’s sake.

We headed to Talgwei’s island, but right when I opened the door, Kumakyu called out to Kumayuru. That was when Kumayuru, who had been curled up and motionless the entire time, started to stir.

“Cwoon.”

“Cwoon.”

They started up another conversation I couldn’t understand, then Kumayuru walked over to the gate with Kumakyu. It looked like Kumakyu had invited Kumayuru along. They really got along well.

Then we headed to the bear house on Talgwei, and even though I’d already eaten dinner, I had another meal with my bears. I mean, Kumakyu seemed to want to eat with us.

Even though Kumakyu was in a better mood after the meal, my stomach sure wasn’t. I rubbed my round belly. I couldn’t eat another bite.

Once we got back to the inn, I was so full that I just collapsed onto the futon.

“I can’t move another inch.”

I hugged Kumayuru and fell asleep.

CHAPTER 474

THE BEAR LOOKS FOR THE MAN, EATS EEL OVER RICE, AND BUYS ARTISANAL CANDY

THE NEXT DAY, Kumakyu gave me a gentle awakening. It looked like my bear was back in a good mood.

All good, then.

Kumayuru, who still seemed to be treating Kumakyu extra nice, slept curled up at my feet. I gave it some pets as a thank-you. Kumayuru did their part in the bear-cheering-up squad.

“Thanks, Kumayuru.”

“Cwoon.”

Also, my giant belly had shrunk back to its normal size.

After I ate breakfast, I headed off to walk around town with Shinobu to look for the man with an eye patch and a scar on his cheek.

“People seem to be looking this way,” Shinobu commented.

“Yup, they are.”

“And they’re pointing.”

“Sure are.”

“I think they’re whispering to each other too.”

“Seems like it.”

“I think I just heard the word *bear*.”

“You probably did.”

Since we woke up early the day before and went out before a lot of people were outside, I hadn’t gotten this many looks. Today, on the other hand, we needed to search for Jyubei, so we were walking around while a lot of people were out and about. I ignored everyone, but Shinobu seemed bothered by it.

Well, I guess a ninja wasn’t used to sticking out, so it made sense that it bugged her.

“I feel embarrassed having so many people watch me. Won’t you change clothes, Yuna?”

“No. Do you have something to say about the only decent outfit I own?”

I took on a slightly strong tone with her. My bear onesie was both my only piece of clothing and my best piece of clothing.

“Uh, I don’t, but I wondered if you were embarrassed by all this.”

Of course I was, but I couldn’t take it off, so I had to deal with it. Especially since we were going to catch a criminal today. I couldn’t take off my bear gear.

“If you don’t want to be around me, then we can go back on the agreement.”

“Fine. I can deal with this...”

Shinobu seemed to have given up. She strode forward. Sometimes it’s important to know when to give in.

As the stares closed in on us, we used Shinobu’s intel to find the man.

“Hmm, it’s hard to find him.”

“If we could find him that easily, I never would have had trouble in the first place,” Shinobu replied.

Fair point. If we could find him just like that, none of this embarrassing walking around would be needed.

“I’m gettin’ a bit peckish. Is there anything you wanna eat? You can buy something

from the money I gave you. It's on me," Shinobu said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Least I can do."

"Then I guess I'll take you up on it."

I headed to a shop that had caught my eye.

"How about this place?"

I smelled something delicious wafting from inside.

"Looks like eel?" Shinobu said.

While we were looking for the man, I'd found something else instead. Unagi! I'd found eel over rice. Since we potentially needed to fight later, it was important we got adequate nourishment.

"This place is pricey," Shinobu said. She didn't seem to want to go inside.

It did look kind of fancy on the outside, but I was itching for some eel. We simply had to go.

"Don't worry about the cost."

I showed off the drawstring pouch. It was Shinobu's money.

"You're such a brute, Yuna."

Since money was no object, I headed right inside.

"Welcome—a bear?!"

A female employee froze when she saw me. Just another normal day. I started talking to her through her shock.

"Party of two."

"Oh, yes. A party of two. Please take these seats here."

The woman kept glancing at me like she'd seen something completely outside the ordinary. I ignored her, of course.

It smelled wonderful, and I really wanted to eat soon. Once she led us to our seats, she let us see the menu.

"Which are you ordering, Yuna?"

One specific thing had caught my eye. It was the golden extra-special unagi on rice. Of course it was the most expensive, which appealed to me.

"I want the golden extra-special unagi on rice."

If someone else was footing the bill, you obviously picked the most expensive option.

"The golden extra-special unagi on rice? Could you order something a little less expensive?" Shinobu pointed at the normal unagi on rice.

"I want the golden extra-special unagi on rice," I repeated.

"Urgh... then one golden extra-special special unagi on rice and one regular one, please," Shinobu ordered from the waitress, who seemed dubious about this whole thing even as she said, "You got it."

"But what is the golden first-class special unagi on rice supposed to be, anyway?"

"You ordered it without even knowing? Unlike normal unagi, it looks gold because of the way light reflects on it. That's why it's called that. It's fattier than other unagi, so it tastes better."

Well, if it was that good, then I really wanted to try it.

"But there aren't a lot of them around, so it's expensive."

"Well, good thing I don't need to worry about the price." I pulled out the pouch of money again.

"That's *my* money."

“And we can use it to pay for lunch, right?”

“I said that, but I would really appreciate it if you used some common sense.”

I didn’t have any. My motto was “Eat what you want.”

After we waited a while, the golden extra-special -unagi on rice came out. Oh, that looked good. The unagi on rice in front of Shinobu was way less nice-looking than mine.

I picked up my chopsticks and started to dig in. It was soft. I cut into the unagi and ate a mouthful with the rice.

“It’s delicious.”

The sauce on it was great too.

“Of course it is. It’s the golden extra-special unagi on rice.” Shinobu started eating her meal too. “Yuna, are you from some rich family? You’re staying in an expensive room and ordering expensive stuff without batting an eye.”

“I’m just your everyday adventurer.”

“No normal adventurer would stay in that room by themself or order the golden extra-special unagi on rice.”

“Really? But you’ve saved up quite a bit. You need to use the money you earn.”

“That’s because I like to save up.”

It was important to have some savings, but if you made money, you had to use it too. If everyone hoarded their income, then there wouldn’t be an economy.

Anyway, the unagi on rice was more important than Shinobu. It was so good. Maybe I could take some home with me? I wanted to have Fina try it too. And maybe I could bring some to Zelef.

“Is something wrong?”

“I was wondering if I could bring some home with me.”

“You mean the eel?”

“Yeah, since it’s so good. I want to let someone I know try it.”

Even if I brought eel back home with me, I didn’t know how to cut it and I didn’t have the right sauce. Maybe I could just buy some that was already prepared?

“It’s best when it’s fresh and hot. It won’t be as good if you bring it back with you.”

“Sure.”

That wasn’t an issue—my bear storage would take care of it. Once things calmed down, I’d try asking if I could order to go.

* * *

We finished eating. Yup, amazing. I was so full and satisfied.

Then we paid. Of course I used my money instead of Shinobu’s.

“You’re not going to use my money?”

“Not unless you end up dying.”

“Yuna...”

“Oh, but I’m going to pay for your meal with your money.”

“All right...”

Shinobu made a face, but she wasn’t Fina, Noa, or one of the others, so she could pay her own way.

Once I had a full belly, we walked over to one of the places where the man we were looking for would probably be. We’d been walking since morning, but we hadn’t been able to find anyone of his description.

“Are you sure he’s around here?”

“I got intel that someone saw him around.”

“And you’re sure it’s reliable?”

“I don’t have anything else to rely on.”

I guess there wasn’t anything to do about it. If there had been too many sightings of him, that would’ve been an issue, too. We’d have to rely on the limited information we had to steadily walk the streets in search of him.

I looked all over my surroundings, and people looked at me like they’d seen something bizarre. I ignored the looks and kept looking around. As I did that, one stall on the streetside caught my eye.

“Oh, what’s that?”

I ran over.

“Yuna, where are you going?! Did you find him?” Shinobu yelled at me from behind, but I was making a beeline for the stall.

“Wh-what the?! A bear?” The man at the stall was surprised by my sudden appearance.

I ignored him and looked at what he was selling. He had a ton of artisanal candies in different shapes.

“What? Candy? Yuna, are you a little kid?” Shinobu made her way over, but she didn’t seem interested in the candy at all.

I’d seen this before on TV but never in real life, so I was into it. He had tons of animals: rabbits, birds, horses, dogs, cats, cows, pigs, foxes, and even raccoon dogs. He also had different fruits like apples, oranges, strawberries, and stuff. I also saw some goldfish and other types of sea creatures, like squid and octopi. Then there were all the colorful flowers, pretty butterflies, small chicks, and large birds. They all looked like art.

The only thing was that they had tons of animals but no bears. Maybe bears just weren’t popular? Well, if I ate a bear, that’d basically be cannibalism. It was still disappointing not to see any.

"What? You wanna buy one, bear girl?" The man had gotten over his surprise and started talking to me as I stared at the candy.

"I'd like all of it."

I was sure that the orphans would love this. Even though I was still disappointed by the lack of bears, I did see an upside to not having any. If there had been one, they might've fought over it, though. Most of the kids really loved bears now—probably because of my influence.

"Miss... I know these don't cost much individually, but are you sure you have the money? If you're joking around, you can take a hike." The man raised an eyebrow.

"I can pay for them. I've never seen such pretty candy before, so I want to take them home for people. I think they'll enjoy them."

"I see. Sorry about that. I'm happy for the compliment. Are you sure you can afford it?" The man seemed a little worried.

"Yeah."

"You're not gonna use my money for this, are you?!" Shinobu said.

"I'm not."

She didn't have to worry so much. I even paid for the unagi myself earlier. Did she really intend to give me her money, then? I felt like if I actually spent it, she might actually die. I didn't want *that* shadow hanging over me, so I wasn't going to do that.

I bought all my stuff on my own dime. I calculated out the cost and brought out enough money to pay for the candy.

"I think this should cover it."

"Yup, looks like it's all here. I'm sorry for ever doubting you." The man gave a straightforward apology.

"How will you take it all with you though?"

"I have a box, so I'll put them in there and then put that in my item bag."

I brought out a traditional Japanese layered box that I'd bought as a souvenir and started to put the candy into it.

"Well, looks like I need to make more."

"Mister, would you make some bears then? You have lots of animals, but none of those."

"What? You want a bear too? Well, considering your outfit, I can see you're a fan of them."

"Too? There were others?"

"Well, for some reason, bears have been popular today and they kept selling as I made them. I sold one just earlier too."

Wait, did that mean...?

"But bears haven't sold this much in the past." The man looked puzzled. "And some kids even said it wasn't the kind of bear they were looking for. I couldn't get an idea of what they wanted."

"Wait, do you think they meant you, Yuna?"

The thought had occurred to me. The man stared at me when Shinobu said that.

I'd been walking around all day under everyone's stares. I'd also walked around before meeting Shinobu too. Maybe the kids wanted bears that looked like me, then.

"I see. They did say they wanted cute bears."

I didn't like him looking at me as he said the word "cute."

Well, in the end, it was really the bear onesie that was cute and not me—I knew that. I wasn't that conceited.

The man started to heat up his candy and cut the formless sugar using some tool that looked a lot like a pair of scissors. He also tugged at it and built up the shape. Like art—or rather like magic—the candy took on form.

Eventually, he finished making a girl dressed in a bear onesie out of the candy.

“You’re amazing, mister.”

He really was... though I didn’t recall agreeing to be the model.



"Here, miss." For some reason, he offered it to me. "That's a thank-you. Now I've got a new product idea."

Wait, was he going to sell them? I couldn't imagine this going well.

After that, he told me he could take custom orders, so I had him make some regular bear candies, too.

CHAPTER 475

THE BEAR FINDS THE MAN WITH THE EYE PATCH

I WALKED ALL AROUND town all day, but we didn't find the man in the eye patch with the scar on his cheek. All I found were a lot of rubbernecks gawking at me.

"Yuna, you're not looking at any of the people at all. You're just keeping an eye on the shops."

I'd shifted into tourist mode at some point. Well, it was a lot more fun sightseeing than people-watching.

"So, I was thinking, I stand out so much that maybe he's noticed me?"

"I don't think anyone would just assume a girl in a bear costume is looking for them."

She did have a point.

"But if I stand out, then don't you stand out too since you're with me?"

"Well, I suppose so."

"Also, are you sure it's even possible to find someone in this huge town? Can't we get help or something?"

Two was better than one, and three was better than two. The more people we had to help, the better our chances would be of finding him.

"We won't know whether any information might leak, so I can't involve too many people in the search. If he realizes someone is looking for him and goes into hiding or leaves town, then I'd have to gather info on him all over again."

She had a point. We were in a tricky spot, then. If more people helped look for him, that would increase our chances of finding him, but it'd also increase the possibility

he'd hear we were coming. I didn't know which would be worse, but I really hoped we could find him in the three days we had.

Once the sun set, we headed back to the inn. I ate a delicious meal, soaked in the hot spring, and fell asleep with my bears in my arms to get rid of the day's fatigue.

We started the second day of our search. We wandered the town, same as yesterday.

"You don't want to kill him, Shinobu?"

My parents were who they were, so I wouldn't have tried to find whoever did it and avenge myself if they were murdered, personally. If someone did kill them, it was pretty safe to assume that my parents were in the wrong.

"Right. If I kill him, that'll be that. If I can catch him, though, then I can make him confess."

"So, just to be sure, it'd be okay if he ended up half-dead, right?"

"Half-dead? What horrors are you planning on subjecting him to?"

I gave it some thought.

"Maybe we can strike him with fear in a way that really shakes him up?"

We could scare him so much he'd never do anything bad ever again. But still, if he'd done some terrible crimes, would he get the death penalty?

Something else to consider—why'd Shinobu's dad get killed in the first place? If this guy killed people at random, that was pretty horrifying, right? There was a chance Shinobu's dad had done something bad and been killed for it. I mean, murder's bad and all, but if Shinobu's dad was a villain, then you reaped what you sowed.

"Why'd he kill your dad?"

"I'm not sure... That's why I need to catch him to find out."

Was there a chance Shinobu's dad was a monster? She told me that the killer had killed

others. What if they were bad people too? The guy in the portrait sure looked a whole lot like a baddie, but maybe that was a reflection of the artist's feelings. Also, you couldn't judge a book by its cover. I'd been on the receiving end of that plenty of times, and I'd been put on the spot as a result.

The more I thought about it, the less I understood. I'd need to calmly suss out this situation once we found the guy. I couldn't just accept what Shinobu was saying at face value.

The sun started to set, and we still hadn't found him.

"Should we head back to the inn soon?" I asked Shinobu next to me. She didn't reply. I looked over and realized she had stopped walking.

"Shinobu?"

"I found him."

Shinobu was staring at a specific spot. I followed her eyes and found a tall man who was dressed like a samurai. Him?

He'd just come out of a dango shop. He started walking right after he got outside. Since he'd changed directions immediately, I couldn't check whether he had the scar on his cheek. I did catch the eye patch over his left eye.

"Let's go after him," Shinobu said.

"You're not going to catch him right now?"

"There are people around here. If we cause a commotion and someone gets hurt, it'll be real bad. I wanna stop him after he gets somewhere quiet or goes back to the inn where he's stayin'"

We followed the man just like Shinobu suggested. Personally, I wanted to just hit him with a spell from behind and get this over with. But if the man was innocent and if Shinobu wasn't justified, then we'd just be criminals.

Ugh, this was such a chore. I didn't want to deal with this.

“Yuna, let’s go.”

We kept a slight distance as we followed after the man to avoid detection.

“Are you sure it’s him?”

“I know it’s him. I’d never forget that guy,” she answered firmly.

The man had no idea he was being tailed. He just kept walking.

I wondered where he was going. I really hoped he’d go somewhere deserted.

He didn’t notice us, but the people who passed by did stare as we went. My clothes weren’t exactly made for stealth. It was one thing to just look for someone, but I think trying to follow a guy without getting noticed was kind of impossible in a bear onesie.

“Shinobu, maybe we should separate?”

“We won’t get too close, so it should be fine.”

Shinobu and I kept our distance as we continued to follow him. He headed from one of the main roads to a side street. Steadily, the crowd of pedestrians around us thinned.

“You’re sure you don’t want me to help you?”

“I’ll do this myself, so it’ll be fine.”

After that, we quietly followed, careful not to let him out of our sight. He didn’t turn around and kept walking, farther and farther out of town. We reached an area that was filled with a lot of old houses that were enclosed in wooden fencing. No one else was around.

This was the perfect time to attack or talk to him.

“Shinobu,” I said, but right then the man stopped.

“This spot seems like it’ll do,” the man said and turned around.

Under the setting sun, the man exposed his face to us. He wore an eye patch over his left eye, and he had a scar on his cheek. This was the man from Shinobu’s drawing.

"You noticed us?" Shinobu wasn't trying to hide from him anymore. I followed her lead.

"People were incessantly chattering about bears behind me the whole time. Of course I noticed."

Oops. I told her I couldn't follow people. Well, then again, he hadn't ever actually seen me. He'd never turned around once. How had he guessed I was following him, then?

He looked at me and smiled.

"So you came to this deserted area once you realized you were being tailed?" Shinobu asked.

"I'm sure neither of us wants a commotion." The man also seemed to not want to draw attention. "So, why were you following me?"

"Did you forget about me?"

The moment Shinobu said that she swung out her hand and, simultaneously, the man unsheathed his sword. The clang of metal hitting metal rang out and something fell to the ground.

It was a kunai.

Shinobu must have thrown it and the man had stopped it with his sword. Shinobu had been efficient and fast, but the man still parried it. It'd all happened in a flash. Wow, they were evenly matched.

"Oh, I guess you're the girl whose father I killed. So you're here to avenge him then?"

"I'm glad you're quick on the uptake."

Shinobu produced a knife from her robes next.

"I won't kill you, but if I win, I want you to tell me everything."

"If that's what you wanted, you should have attacked me from behind the moment you found me."

The man readied his sword.

“I’d never do anything so cowardly. I’ll defeat you with my own strength.”

“Ha ha. Sounds interesting. Then I’ll allow you to fight me. So, is that girl in the adorable bear clothes over there going to be our audience? Or am I taking you both on?”

The man pointed his sword at me. The way he held his sword told me he’d attack me if I went to call for help.

“Yuna, don’t meddle, just like we agreed. I just want you to watch, but if something happens to me, please take over.”

She wanted me to watch without calling for help.

“I promise that if it seems like you’re close to dying, I’ll help.”

“But only if the worst actually happens.”

There was a chance Shinobu would end up losing even before I could lend a hand. If it seemed like there was a huge discrepancy between their skills, I planned to help earlier. I’d also decide whether the man really was a bad guy or not based on how he and Shinobu acted.

Shinobu started to run. The man waited for her to strike.

CHAPTER 476

THE BEAR WATCHES SHINOBU'S FIGHT

THE MAN WITH the eye patch and Shinobu started to fight in the deserted street.

As Shinobu started running she threw a kunai. The man dodged it. In that short time, Shinobu approached the man and swung the knife in her left hand at the man. He easily dodged it and swung his own blade at her. Shinobu shifted her weight and dodged, then she moved to the man's left side in a flash and tried to attack him.

It seemed like his left side was his weak side because of his eye patch. Shinobu kept to his left as she attacked.

"Are you attempting to attack me from a blind spot?"

"Weak spots are there for attacking, after all," Shinobu said.

"I thought you said you didn't fight like a coward."

"This is a tactic, not cowardice."

The two of them continued to swing while they talked. Their blades whiffed through the air. Shinobu was at a disadvantage since she didn't have as much reach, but she used the man's blind spot and moved quickly, which evened the playing field. Even though Shinobu was attacking the man from the side he couldn't see, he still was able to dodge her. Shinobu was also doing the same with him though.

They kept exchanging blows for a while. It was impressive. They both seemed to know what was coming and dodged by a hair's width.

When the man avoided Shinobu's knife, he would widely swing his sword from the side. Shinobu jumped back to dodge it.

"Whew." The man let out a breath and smiled. "I can see you really are his daughter. You're powerful."

Though he said that, the man seemed far from tired. Shinobu, on the other hand, seemed frazzled. Even though he had a blind spot, it seemed like the man was pretty good at close combat.

“Are you refusing to use your magic to taunt me?”

“No need to trouble anyone else with our fight. And you haven’t used any yourself.”

There were wooden houses to the left and right of them. Shinobu had said the man could use wind magic, but I didn’t know what kind of magic *she* had. This wasn’t a fight between samurai—in this world, magic could surpass some weapons. Even swordplay skills weren’t as powerful as magic.

The only thing was that because magic required imagination, you could be defenseless for a moment while thinking. It was easier to cast a spell you already knew well. Magic could get tricky in close combat, which was why mages usually fought at a distance.

If he used magic without regard for their surroundings, that would put Shinobu at a disadvantage because she couldn’t use it herself. Even if she was technically able, she probably still wouldn’t.

“That’s not true,” she said. Wind began to whirl around the knife Shinobu held in her right hand. “I just need to make sure I don’t hurt anything around me when I use it.”

Shinobu moved fast and closed the distance between her and the man. She moved to his left side again and swung her knife.

The knife couldn’t reach him from that distance, but a blade of wind released from the knife’s tip. The man parried even that attack with his sword. Shinobu got even closer to him and pulled back the arm she’d swung with, then swung at him again. This time the man met the knife with his sword. Shinobu was thrown back from the blow and lost her balance. He kicked her. She was sent flying.

“Shinobu!”

“I’m fine.”

She’d jumped back to avoid the blow.

Considering he’d seen through her attack, the man must have a better sense of their

surroundings than Shinobu. He was just that calm and collected during the fight.

I still didn't know the reason why he had killed Shinobu's dad, but at this rate, Shinobu was going to lose. Maybe it was time for me to go in.

"You're strong," Shinobu said, letting out a little exhale as she tried to steady her breath.

"Want me to step in?"

I knew that she wasn't going to say yes, but I wanted to check in anyway.

"I'm fine. You just watch our fight and learn his moves."

So she wanted me to study him? Oh my gosh. Shinobu wasn't fighting for herself. She was doing this so I could observe when I fought him next.

But why?

"When it actually gets dangerous, I'm not going to ask for permission," I told her.

Shinobu didn't reply to that and just smiled. Then she gripped her knife in her hand and ran at him.

* * *

She used a spell as she tried to attack, but the man easily dodged it. Shinobu threw herself at him even harder. I was hopeful that this would be it, but the man still hadn't used magic yet. And sometimes his cheek would twitch up, as though he was smiling.

Shinobu started to move even faster, and she cornered the man. She steadily overpowered his movements as she attacked him with gusts of wind and her knife.

She was wearing him down.

Or so I thought—the man suddenly started to swing his sword faster and parried Shinobu's attacks. Shinobu stopped and the man withdrew far away.

"You're stronger than I thought. Looks like I'll need to take this a bit more seriously."

“Are you going to use magic then?”

“No, just this,” the man replied, and he pulled the eye patch off. The eye he’d been hiding under it was now visible. I’d thought that it would be injured, but he didn’t have a single scar. Then he opened it.

“You can see?”

“Yes, I can see you very clearly.”

“Are you mocking me?”

“No. I was just limiting my own abilities. But I recognize your skill, so I took the patch off.”

He’d been limiting himself by not using magic and covering his eye.

The man readied his sword. Shinobu shot off several small wind blades as she ran at the man. He was faster now. Shinobu lightly dodged the attacks and she threw her kunai. The man parried it with his sword, which flashed as he waved it.

Now that he had both eyes open, he didn’t have a blind spot. Shinobu’s advantage was gone.

She couldn’t dodge him and had to parry his attacks more often with her knife. The sheer force of his heavy blows along with their speed all tipped the fight in the man’s favor.

Shinobu still tried to keep her distance and returned blows using her wind magic, but she seemed concerned for her surroundings and didn’t put much force behind them, so they didn’t reach her opponent. It seemed as if she’d slowed. Shinobu was scrambling, but the man was only parrying her attacks, so his movements were more economical.

“Guh.” Shinobu was getting tired. She withdrew, unable to attack.

“Looks like you’re at your limit. Let’s end this here.”

The man crouched and thrust his sword in front of him. Wait, wasn't that...?!

"Shinobu! Get out of there!"

The moment I shouted, the man stepped forward. In an instant, he was next to her.

He was fast.

Shinobu threw her kunai as she withdrew. As the man lunged, he batted the kunai away. I thought he'd stop his charge, but he didn't. The man drew back his arm and thrust his sword forward again. Shinobu used the kunai in her hand to stop it, but it didn't stop his advance. He pulled back his arm and thrust another time.

Was it a three-stage thrust—like one of those special moves?

This time his sword connected. He stabbed Shinobu, and she fell to the ground.

"Shinobu!"

I tried to run over to her, but she was still moving. She held herself up off the ground using her shaking arm and tried to get herself back up.

"I-I'm okay." Shinobu shakily clutched her stomach as she stood.

"Are you sure?"

Shinobu turned over the fabric at her torso. Chainmail?

"It's mithril. I jumped back, so I avoided a direct hit."

I felt so relieved. I was convinced she'd been stabbed.

"So you even dodged that. Do you want to continue the fight?"

"Of course."

"Then I'll pierce through next time."

The man launched a surprise attack and got ready to lunge again. Shinobu held her knife with her weak hand. At that moment, I intervened.

I leapt in as he was getting ready to stab her, moving to Shinobu's side instantly. Once I was between them, I used my mithril knife to parry his blade, interrupting his three-stage thrusting attack. When I stood in front of Shinobu to protect her, the man took his distance.

"Yuna?"

"I'm tapping in."

I had no idea why this man had killed Shinobu's father. I didn't even know what kind of man he was. He might just be some bloodthirsty warmonger. Maybe Shinobu's dad had been too. Maybe they just fought because they'd agreed to it, and one of them had died as a result. No matter the reason, there was one thing I was sure of.

"I won't let you die, so I'm tapping in. He's my opponent now," I told Shinobu. She seemed disappointed.

If I could defeat this man, then I'd get some answers. All the emotions bottled up in me would clear up.

"Yuna, he's strong..."

"I saw. I know."

He had terrifying sword skills and magic to boot. Shinobu had limitations on what she could do with magic, but she wouldn't have been able to defeat him even if she was able to cut loose. He'd been limiting his magic usage, too, and had been able to keep up.

"Shinobu, just rest now."

I'd take him on. Even while we were talking, the man didn't try to attack.

"Sorry, but you'll have to deal with me now. If you let your guard down because of how I look, you'll regret it."

"I would never. You were fast enough to come between us. And you had the skill to precisely parry my lunge. Most of all, you weren't scared. You can't be a normal girl."

It didn't look like he'd go easy on me because of my bear clothes. I wasn't sure whether

I was happy or disappointed.

"Then I recommend you don't hold back." I pointed the Kumayuru knife at him.

"Very well. I'll give you all I've got. Don't blame me when you're dead." The man readied his sword.

"I don't intend to, so if I win, then you tell me everything," I said.

"All right. I'll tell you whatever you'd like to know if you win."

"That's a deal."

I readied my Kumayuru knife.

CHAPTER 477

THE BEAR FIGHTS THE MAN WITH THE CROSS-SHAPED SCAR

I FACED THE MAN. The road we were fighting on only had enough space for two carriages to pass through, so there wasn't much room to maneuver. I was in the same boat as Shinobu—I couldn't use any large-scale spells. If I used wind magic, I could blow away the buildings. If I used flames, that could burn the buildings down. Even water and earth magic could have easily damaged the houses. If I used bear magic especially, that'd be a disaster. I needed to rely on weak magic and my weapons to attack, but I really wished I could fight in a more open area so I could move freely.

The man went on the move, and when he reached me, he swung his sword. I parried it with my knife.

I could see it all—I could clearly see his planned attacks. He swung from the right and left and stabbed at me, then he pulled his sword back and tried to stab again. My bear gear made it easy to follow his movements. But no matter how well you see an opponent's attacks, it didn't matter if you couldn't keep up with them yourself—you'd end up losing quickly.

I blocked everything and swiveled as I dodged his last thrust, then tried to move right into a roundhouse kick. If I could make contact, I'd be able to blow him away, but he drew back slightly and dodged me. My foot went through the air instead.

He could've just taken a girl's kick at least. Then I could've sent his defenses flying too.

“You’re fast considering your clothes should hamper your movements.”

“Don’t blame your own lack of speed on your opponent.”

“Well now you’ve said it. Then can you dodge this?”

The man crouched and readied himself to lunge. It was another three-stage thrust. I got ready to take him on.

He stepped forward. The moment he went on the move, I created an earth wall right between us, but his sword broke through the wall, and he charged at me.

I'd expected it. I guess a wall I'd made on the fly wouldn't cut it. I dramatically parried his sword with my Kumayuru knife just like before, and he lost his balance. I was desperately bracing for his next attack, afraid it'd connect. The man pulled back his sword by force and lunged in, trying to stab again.

I punched the sword from the side using my white bear puppet. He didn't seem to expect that, and that sent his sword flying away. I saw my chance right then. I gave him a black bear puppet punch while he was defenseless.

There! That got him. Or so I thought—he blocked it. The man held his arms up in front of him to block my bear punch.

He was sent flying back, but he still was on his two feet. If he could block it that quickly, he had fast reactions.

“I didn’t think a girl dressed up as a bear would hold back on me.”

“Hold back?”

I hadn’t though.

“You have a knife, but you still used your black glove to punch me instead. I’d say that’s holding back.”

He was right. I was holding my knife in my black bear puppet’s mouth, but I’d still tried to just punch him instead of stabbing. I could have stabbed him, but I’d end up fatally wounding him if I had.

“I promised Shinobu we’d catch you instead of killing you.” We were just here to beat him, not to murder him. “I’m not holding back.”

“Ha ha.” The man let out a laugh. “That’s the definition of holding back! But if you’d attacked me with that knife, it would have been stopped by my mithril bracer, just like my sword was by her chainmail.”

Mithril bracer? Both of them must have been loaded. I kind of wanted to tell Toya about this.

“So don’t you dare hold back.”

Still though, a mithril knife against a mithril bracer. I’d heard of pitting the strongest spear against the strongest shield, and this wasn’t that, but I wondered which would win.

Since his bracer was probably made by a different blacksmith, it wasn’t an exact comparison though. I guess this was kind of like pitting Ghazal’s work against whoever made his bracer. The people using the weapon and armor were a deciding factor too, though.

“In that case, I’ll make sure you can’t hold back.”

The man grabbed his sword, which was far away and on the ground, then put his hand on the hilt of his wakizashi—that short style of sword samurai normally carry.

Was he a dual wielder?

The three-stage thrust was one thing, but who was this guy? What kind of samurai was he?

“If you hold back, you’ll die.”

“You should wait to say that until you’ve gotten a hit on me,” I replied.

I pulled out my Kumakyu knife and readied both in my hands. If he had two swords, I might as well have two knives. I’d make him yield by beating him at his own game.

When I readied my knives, he smiled.

“So you’ll dual wield to face me? Fine by me. I’ll take you on.”

The man ran toward me.

All four of the blades crossed. He sped up as he attacked with both blades.

With two blades to deal with, I had more to keep track of, and he was *fast*. He stabbed

from both sides again and again, switching from the right to left and then suddenly switching which side he alternated from. I blocked with my knives. He was relentless. Since there was a difference in our reach, my swings didn't reach him, but I wasn't being worn down much.



Thanks to my bear puppets, my hands didn't go numb even when I met his blade. I was stronger, too, and I wasn't slowing. He, on the other hand, was already tired from fighting Shinobu. If this was a war of attrition, I was at an advantage.

The man moved even faster, and I met all his attacks. He was looking at me in disbelief.

"That's all? You can use magic. Would you like to move somewhere where you can use it more easily?"

If we did that, I'd be at an advantage. I was hoping he'd give in to my taunting.

"Right, then let's change locations."

Wait, seriously? As he said that, he brought his arm down. Smoke poured out of a point on the ground.

Was that a smoke bomb? Was he supposed to be a ninja now?!

I thought he'd try to attack me, but instead, he ran the other way. Was he trying to escape?

"Yuna!" Shinobu yelled at me from behind.

I tried to follow him, but I couldn't leave Shinobu alone here while she was injured. I summoned Kumayuru.

"Kumayuru, watch over Shinobu."

I used my detection skill and took off. I didn't take my eyes off of the signal. He was fast.

He was racing away, but I wasn't going to let him. I made a beeline for him and chased him down from the rooftops.

I saw him. Then the man stopped and turned around.

"You followed me?"

"Don't assume you can get away so easy."

“I was running at my full speed.”

“Then get in shape.”

I really shouldn’t be saying that considering how soft I was, but I taunted him anyway. If I hadn’t had my bear gear, I wouldn’t have been able to run even a hundred meters. Even Fina could beat me at a race.

“How about we restart our match?”

The man readied his sword. We were far away from the town now and there weren’t any houses around. We could use magic without worrying about anything else around us. This put me at an advantage.

The man already had wind magic cast on his sword.

“Did you think you’d be at an advantage if we went to a more wide-open space where we could use magic?”

“I dunno. Maybe.”

The man swung his sword to the side from far away and sent an air blade flying at me. I used wind magic to cancel it out.

He swung his sword again and sent another wind blade flying. I countered all the wind blades he sent at me. A gigantic gust stirred between us, and sand and dust flew around us. The man and I exchanged blows using magic. We exchanged blows with our weapons too, then retreated from one another.

“Whew.” The man slowly let out a breath, then readied his sword and swung it down. At the same time, he shot a wind blade at me.

He was faster than before. He went on the move.

I dodged the wind blade and struck back. His swords and my knives clashed. At that moment, he released another wind blade from his sword. This was magic at close quarters.

I swiveled around and dodged the gust. Then he attacked me with his sword again. I unleashed an air shot at him aimed at his stomach. He flew backward, but it wasn’t a

fatal wound.

I pursued, trying to drive him into a corner just like how I'd caught the silver kamaitachi. I created minibears out of earth magic and sent them at him. They ran for him, but he cut through them before they could catch him.

Even though they were made from earth, I got ticked when my little bears were sliced in half. I returned the bears to dirt and created a whirlwind at the man's feet using wind magic. I'd send him flying into the air and that'd be the end of it.

The wind gathered below him and made his clothes flutter. When I tried to send him airborne, he aimed his sword down and swung it like he was drawing a circle. Another whirlwind formed at his feet and canceled mine.

This was getting tough.

“Don’t tell me that’s all you have?”

“I would have been disappointed if that had done you in.”

“Are you going to show me some more fun?”

“I might show it to you, but you won’t be the one having fun.”

I was a little annoyed that he’d cut through my minibears and blocked the wind magic I’d tried to use as a surprise tactic.

“You won’t be able to beat me without trying to kill me,” he told me.

“Big words for a guy who hasn’t even touched me.”

“Yuna!” While I was talking to the man, Shinobu appeared on Kumayuru.

“How about this, then?!”

The man glanced at Shinobu and Kumayuru. At that moment, he unleashed a wind blade on them.

“Kumayuru!”

The moment I turned away from him, he attacked me.

Was it a distraction? His blade had closed the distance between us.

I put the Kumakyu knife in my hand into my bear storage and blocked his sword using the mouth of my white bear puppet. He was surprised, but I kicked him. Before I could make contact, he let go of his sword and retreated.

I glanced over at my bear. It seemed they'd dodged the attack, so they were fine. I was glad.

I glared at the man.

"Do you understand what you just did?" I said.

He was silent.

"You'll regret it."

No answer from him again.

"You got ahead of yourself just because I was going easy on you."

"..."

"Shinobu, I'm not holding back anymore."

"Yuna..."

"You attacked Kumayuru. So now you're going to pay."

"Yuna, you can't."

I started to feel upset when Shinobu said that.

"I'm allowed to beat him half-dead, aren't I?"

I was going to end this. I wouldn't let him attack Kumayuru ever again. I tossed aside the sword. I wouldn't forgive him, even if he apologized.

To pen him in, I made some bear statues. It was the same bear blockade I'd created to slay the kraken. They weren't nearly as large as back then, but they were big enough to stop him from running away.

The many bear statues walled him in, and the only exit was right behind me. The man tried to cut through them with a wind blade, but no dice.

"I'm pretty sure I said I wasn't letting you get away."

"Yuna, please wait!" Shinobu said, but I was too worked up to listen.

I ran. He readied his remaining sword. He swung and shot off another wind blade. I destroyed the gust of wind using my white bear puppet. Then I headed straight for the man.

I was right in front of his face. He judged the timing and brought his sword down. I parried his sword with my Kumayuru knife. With his arm up, he was defenseless.

I punched him right in the stomach with my white bear puppet.

CHAPTER 478

THE BEAR HEARS OUT SHINOBU

PART 1

WHEN MY BEAR PUNCH hit him, the man's face twisted in pain for the very first time. I put some force behind the punch, and the man was sent flying into the bear statues behind him. He crashed into them and crumpled.

He tried to stand up. He could still move? Whatever. Time to finish him.

I sent some minibears at the man as he was slowing down. It seemed like he was doing his utmost just to stay standing, so once the bears grabbed him, he could only kneel to the ground under their weight. He fell face-flat to the ground.

I slowly approached the man as the little bears crushed him. Then I pulled up his head by force.

“Looks like I won. Tell me everything.”

He didn't say a word.

“If you're not going to tell me, then I'll ask Shinobu.” I turned to look at Shinobu behind me.

Shinobu looked worried about the man. She wasn't happy that I'd caught him at all. When I'd looked at Kumayuru, Shinobu had seemed worried about him then too.

“Shinobu, how do you know this man? He's a friend, isn't he?” I glared at her as I asked.

“I'm sorry. We staged this whole thing to test you.”

Shinobu made her way in front of me, then sat with her legs folded under her. She placed her hands on the ground and bowed her head down. It didn't seem like she was going to keep lying to me.

“You were trying to *test* me?”

Shinobu raised her head and looked at me.

“Yuna, you’re scaring me.”

“Yeah. I’m angry.”

“I’m sorry.” Shinobu shrunk away from my glare.

“This is my teacher.”

“Your teacher? Why are a teacher and his apprentice testing me?”

“We were tryin’ to see if you have the power to save our country.”

I was shocked.

I didn’t know what to say. This was out of nowhere. Save the... country? I could barely think.

“I don’t have that kind of power,” I told her.

“No, you do. Lady Sakura said you’re the light who will save us.”

“Lady Sakura?”

That was a new name.

“Who is she? Is she the one who planned all this?”

I glared at Shinobu.

“Well...”

“Shinobu, you should tell her everything. Don’t hide any of it,” the man said as the minibears still held him down.

“Sir... all right then. Yuna, I’ll start from the beginning, so please hear me out.”

We'd gotten this far, and I wanted to know the truth. I decided I'd let her talk.

"All right. I'll at least hear what you have to say."

"Thank you."

Shinobu grabbed a twig in front of her and started drawing on the ground. She drew a sort of configuration of circles in a diamond shape.

"This is the Land of Wa, where we live."

Wait, was it made up of four large islands, then? Or maybe continents? In any case, it was made of four land masses.

Then Shinobu drew one smaller circle in the middle of the four others.

"At the center of the Land of Wa, there's an island where a monster is sealed away."

"You're not going to tell me that you want me to fight the monster since the seal broke, are you?"

This was straight out of a video game.

"It's not unsealed yet."

"Then it's close to breaking?"

Shinobu nodded.

"It will soon, and Lady Sakura saw a future where the monster will revive."

"She saw the future? That's possible?"

"Only a few people know this, so please keep it secret. Lady Sakura can see the future in her dreams."

Oh, so like, clairvoyance?

"In a dream from about a month ago, Lady Sakura saw the monster rampaging after the seal broke. Many people would die in its path of destruction. At first, everyone was

unsure about the dream, but she had the same dream again later. Then, after investigating the island, we found that part of the seal was weakening.”

“In other words, you want me to help slay the monster?”

“Yes.”

“Why me? Don’t you have strong people in the Land of Wa to do that? Your teacher seems strong.”

I looked over at the man pinned down by my minibears.

“We do have powerful people here, but it’s impossible for them. They say the monster feeds off negative feelings. None can get through the barrier. Only certain people are allowed through.”

“Certain people?”

“Just women. My teacher and any powerful men can’t get on the island. And we haven’t been able to easily find a woman who is strong enough to fight the monster.”

Ah. That’s where I came in, then.

Hm? But now I had more questions. How had she known about me? How had she known I was here? How did she know about how powerful I really was?

Every solved mystery led to another one. According to Shinobu, she already knew about me from the start and approached me because of that.

“How did you know about me, then?”

I thought maybe it was because of the whole kraken incident, but that wasn’t what Shinobu told me.

“From Lady Sakura’s dream. She said that in her dream, she saw a tiny but very bright, beautiful, and warm light. Lady Sakura called it our light of hope.”

“In other words, you think that light is me?”

She couldn’t have known that was me based on that alone. Who would assume a girl

in a bear suit was their country's ray of hope?

"She said the light was riding on a beast and came from the eastern sea."

Someone who came from the sea on a beast... Did she mean me riding Kumayuru and Kumakyu then?

Shinobu pointed at one of the islands with the twig.

"When the king heard about it, he collected a whole bunch of soldiers to meet you at the harbor."

"Soldiers...?"

"It was his way of dealing with someone strong enough to defeat the sealed monster appearing riding on a beast. He didn't know whether a threat would enter the country."

Was I a boogeyman or something?

"But when the soldiers were stationed, the next day, Lady Sakura had a dream of the light fading away."

If the light was me, then I probably would have turned back home after seeing a ton of soldiers at the harbor because I didn't want to bother with them.

"And then a whole bunch of other conditions started to appear too. We tried having other people wait to meet you, including my teacher. But every time, the light wouldn't come to us."

Well, of course. They would have been suspicious.

"Then I was selected. And though I didn't believe it, that was when the light riding on the beast didn't disappear."

So that was why Shinobu had approached me.

"So I kept a watch over the ocean from a high vantage point where I could see the harbor and saw you riding across the ocean on your bear. I was shocked by it. Someone riding a beast had actually come from the sea. On top of that, I saw that the person

riding the bear was a girl in a cute bear outfit. I was completely confused. I was imagining someone incredibly strong.”

“Well, sorry for dressing so cutesy.”

Shinobu looked at my clothes and smiled slightly.

“That’s why I couldn’t tell whether you were really the light of hope that Lady Sakura talked about. I knew I had to make sure, so I kept an eye on you. Then you went around eating food and buying a lot of tatami mats. You really didn’t seem like our country’s savior.”

I hadn’t even noticed. So she must have been watching me since I arrived.

“Then that’s what you were doing at the Adventurers’ Guild too?”

“Yes. You accepted a quest, so I thought it was a chance to see how powerful you were, but the client seemed like he was going to reject you, so I decided to intervene. Since I have a name around here as an adventurer, I thought that he wouldn’t say no to me doing the quest.”

“So that’s why you said there was no point unless I went with you.”

I remembered our conversation back then.

“Yes. I wanted to know how powerful you are, so if you let go of the quest, that would mean everything I did would be useless, so I panicked.”

“Okay, I see what happened now, but why did you put on this whole act? You could have just asked me.”

“I was going to at first, of course. But there were some people against that. They didn’t think a stranger could really be that powerful. We didn’t know whether to put our faith in an outsider, and we didn’t know if we could let you step on land where the monster was sealed. There were a lot of different opinions. We didn’t have the time to debate, but we also couldn’t make progress without knowing what kind of person you were. So, in order to check, we were going to have an official match, but Lady Sakura said that made the light in her dream disappear.”

Right. I could imagine turning down a match if someone was trying to test me.

"So we thought about the possibilities and settled on having my teacher, one of the country's most powerful people, battle you to test you. In order to know how powerful you were, we needed to see you use all your skills. So when we discussed that, we settled on making it an act."

"So then that story about your dad dying?"

"I'm sorry. That was a lie, but my dad really did lose against my teacher in the past, so it wasn't a total lie."

"Then why did you tell me you didn't want revenge and just wanted to catch him?"

"Because if I said that we would kill him, the light would have disappeared. So we settled on catching him instead in the story."

She was right that I wouldn't have helped a stranger do some revenge murder. Or any other kind of murder.

"But weren't you actually fighting your teacher back then?"

It hadn't looked like an act. She'd actually gotten hurt and almost died.

"We were serious. I put my life on the line in that battle. That was the only way to keep the light from disappearing. One of us might have died in the fight, but we didn't have time to explore that avenue more."

For divination dreams, she would have needed to sleep. It wasn't like they could have gotten several divinations at once.

"How could a teacher actually kill his apprentice?"

I looked over at the man.

"Please don't be upset with him. I was going after his life too. He also was prepared to die at your hands to see how powerful you are. We were both ready to die. It's a small price to pay in order to save the country."

"Haah..." All I could manage was a sigh. "Did you really think I'd help out if you all came clean only after you died, Shinobu?"

I probably would have been so upset that I would have gone back to Crimonia.

"I wasn't sure. But I'm still alive and so is my master. And you're hearing us out now. I'd like it if you'd meet Lady Sakura and the king and hear what they have to say."

Shinobu placed her hands on the ground again and touched her head to it. Even the man, who still could barely move under the minibears, bowed his head.

"I just can't forgive you for attacking Kumayuru in order to get me to show my true abilities."

"I was gonna block it, but Kumayuru dodged really easily."

"Cwoon."

Kumayuru, who was next to me, proudly seemed to be saying, "It was easy."

Excuse me, did Kumayuru even understand why I was upset? And why did my bear seem to be smiling?

CHAPTER 479

THE BEAR HEARS OUT SHINOBU

PART 2

I MORE OR LESS got the gist of it.

Lady Sakura had seen their light of hope riding in on a beast. They thought that was me. That was why they'd made contact with me, hoping that I could fight the monster for them, but depending on how they contacted me, I'd disappear. On top of that, they hadn't had time to think of ways to contact me. That's how we'd gotten all the way to the present.

"You mean the whole thing was fake from the time we met?"

"We were gonna do this before you arrived. Since you were such a cute girl, I wasn't sure what to do at first."

Well, shoving the "cute" comment aside, anyone would be confused by my bear onesie look.

"I'm really sorry, Yuna," Shinobu said as she bowed her head.

I didn't think they needed to do something this complex. They could have just talked to me, but I wasn't sure whether I would have helped or listened if they'd done that.

I mean if the first person I met coming to a new country told me that I was going to be their savior and that they wanted me to meet the king and some person named Lady Sakura, I think I probably would have said no. If anything, I probably would have run off. It would have seemed fishy to me.

I tried to think of which route would have successfully gotten me to agree, but because I was such a tricky person, I couldn't think of any easy method. I guess I was kind of the impossible-to-win-over girl from a dating sim.

It was such a convoluted scheme, and it had made this such a big deal. I got why this

had happened, but it didn't make me feel that great to have been tested like this. At the same time, seeing Shinobu in front of me, beaten up as she was, I couldn't not hear her out.

Thinking about it that way, maybe this really was the only way they could have successfully roped me in.

"So, about this Lady Sakura—what's she like?" I asked.

"She's a priestess."

"A priestess? As in a shrine maiden? Do all of them have special powers?"

In manga and novels, they usually had mysterious powers.

"Only Lady Sakura has special powers."

So those were her divination powers. I guess people in this world had supernatural powers like that, but I also kind of felt bad for her.

Even if it was a dream, it couldn't have felt nice to see people dying over and over again. She might have seen people important to her die over and over. And if she knew that it *was* truly the future, then her divinations were nightmares. I wouldn't be surprised if she broke under the mental strain.

If I saw my bears or Fina dying over and over again, I probably wouldn't have been able to stay sane. And she'd seen it happen over and over again for nearly a month. I kind of sympathized with her a little.

I could understand why she would rely on a single ray of hope in those dreams. Still, I wondered if there wasn't a better way to go about this.

"So will you meet Lady Sakura and His Majesty?"

"Do you really think I can fight that sealed monster?"

"Lady Sakura said you're our light of hope. I believe her."

"But you said there were some people who don't believe I can?"

"You won against my teacher. No one will say a word. I won't let them!" Shinobu gave me a serious look.

"No matter what you say, no one's going to put their faith in a girl dressed as a bear."

"You don't have to worry about that. There were others watching the fight. Once they report that, no one will say a word against you. I can guarantee that."

"People were watching?"

"There were three people."

We were being spied on during the battle? That made me want to refuse, but now that she was saying the fate of the nation was in my hands, I couldn't exactly do that.

I looked at Shinobu again. She was beat up all over. Her face was dirty, her clothes were in tatters, and she was all scraped up. I was pretty sure she was probably hurt in other places too that I couldn't even see. They'd risked their lives here. I couldn't just say no.

"Haah..."

All I could manage was yet another sigh.

"Okay, okay. I'll meet Lady Sakura, but I can't promise anything."

I wanted to hear everything first. If I didn't ask for more details, we couldn't move forward, and I wouldn't ever feel better about all the things that had happened. I'd figure everything out after meeting this Lady Sakura person.

"Thank you." Shinobu stood up and hugged me.

"I get it, so you can let me go. We need to treat your wounds."

"I'm sorry" Shinobu let go like I asked.

I got a wet towel out and wiped Shinobu's face.

"Do your wounds hurt?"

"I'm fine. I said this earlier, but I have mithril chainmail on, so it wasn't a fatal wound."

She still was injured in the spots where she hadn't been wearing armor.

"But you weren't wearing it when we faced the kamaitachi?"

"I didn't have it prepared then. I knew I needed it if I was going to fight my teacher to the death."

Shinobu looked at the man, who said apologetically, "Sorry, but could you have these bears let me go soon?"

Oh! I'd completely forgotten he was even there. I had the minibears let go of Jyubei. He stood up once all that weight was off of him.

"I'd like to thank you again. Thank you for saving Shinobu. That way I didn't have to live with killing her with my own hands."

"I think that you could have come up with a better idea for the act," I said.

"Sorry. Just like Shinobu said, we couldn't let things go wrong. There might have been other routes, but we needed to take one we were certain was right. We just couldn't find other options. I'm deeply sorry for the unpleasantness." The man bowed his head low.

He'd probably felt the weight of their country's future and his and Shinobu's lives on his shoulders. Of course he wouldn't want to kill his own apprentice.

"And I'm sorry for attacking your precious bear. If you haven't hit me enough already, you can hit me some more. You can even cut off my arm. I'll offer my life if you'd like, so..."

This wasn't a joke. He was *really* serious.

"You don't need to do any of that. Like I said before, I'll meet Lady Sakura, but that doesn't mean I'll say yes to anything."

I could sympathize with Lady Sakura, but if she didn't treat people as human, I wouldn't say yes even if Shinobu begged me to. If I needed to get away, I could just set up a bear gate. Wouldn't be too hard to run across the ocean if I had to.

"Sir, I'll treat your wounds," Shinobu said.

“Thank you.”

It seemed that he'd been able to withstand the bear punch because he was wearing chainmail.

“Wait, was that why you told me your bracer was made of mithril too?”

“Yes, I said that so you would really attack me.”

Shinobu started to treat Mr. Jyubei, even though she was also injured. I thought for a bit and made a decision.

“Yuna?”

“I'll heal you.”

I placed my bear puppet on Mr. Jyubei's injury. His stomach was swollen where I'd hit him.

“The swelling is starting to go down,” Shinobu said.

“It might still hurt a little when you move, but it's better than leaving it as is.” I'd done this before to treat Fina, but apparently it still had hurt a little after.

I'd never been hurt enough to use it on myself before and one of the only other times I'd used it was on the bears at the honey tree. I didn't really know much about how it felt after treatment because of that.

“If you have any wounds, let me see them, Shinobu.”

“Are you sure?”

“It's not great for a girl to get scars. If you want to thank me, just don't tell anyone about this.”

After I healed Mr. Jyubei, I also healed Shinobu's wounds. Their wounds weren't that large, so all their little cuts healed just fine.

“Thank you.”

“Much obliged.”

They both bowed their heads.

“Okay, I’ll fix up everything around us then.”

I used magic to destroy the bear statues and that was that. It wasn’t like I could leave those lying around, of course.

After that, we headed to the Adventurers’ Guild. They seemed to be worried that I wouldn’t just go with them to see Lady Sakura and the king, so they wanted to show me proof of their identities there. They were probably trying to be considerate.

“Oh, Mr. Jyubei, Miss Shinobu.”

The person at the front desk knew who Mr. Jyubei was. Guess he wasn’t using a pseudonym.

“Oh, and the girl in the cute bear outfit from the other day is with you too.”

The woman talked to the man and Shinobu like normal. She was the same one we’d talked to when getting the kamaitachi quest.

“Mr. Jyubei, Miss Shinobu, why are your clothes in tatters? And why are you covered in dirt?”

My bear gear never got dirty, so I was clean as a whistle.

“We just got done with a job.” Shinobu gave her a smile to move on from the topic.

Well, she wasn’t lying. Fighting Jyubei was a job.

“Whatever you were up against must have been ferocious for you to end up in such a state!”

Ferocious? Shinobu had fought with Mr. Jyubei, but Mr. Jyubei had fought with me.

"Oh, that info's a secret."

"Well, I realize there are some things you can't talk about due to your positions, but please don't push yourselves too hard."

Based on what the receptionist was saying, it seemed like she knew a bit about them.

"So, what were you doing with Mr. Jyubei at a time like this? Oh, Miss Shinobu, don't tell me you were causing trouble for the bear girl?"

"That's a mean assumption. I haven't done anything like that."

Well, she had, actually. She was even involving me in some real annoying stuff.

"Oh, you haven't? You really should be careful not to cause any trouble for Mr. Jyubei or anyone else, all right?"

The receptionist was having a friendly chat with us. Now that I thought back on it, maybe Shinobu hadn't shown anyone else the drawing because she didn't want them to recognize it as Mr. Jyubei. Shinobu hadn't wanted to show anyone else the portrait or ask anyone else for help.

"Then what happened today?"

"Oh, I just wanted you to tell this bear girl here about the two of us," Mr. Jyubei said.

"Tell her about what? Oh, so Miss Shinobu did do something, then? And now she's in trouble with you because you're her guardian?"

"I-I said I didn't do anything." Shinobu waved her hands around and denied it.

"You're really sure?" The receptionist gave Shinobu a dubious look.

"It's true."

But the receptionist wasn't completely wrong either.

"You'd just like me to tell her about you two?"

"Yes, please." Mr. Jyubei bowed to the receptionist.

"I don't fully understand the situation, but Mr. Jyubei is the national general commander."

The general! A real big shot.

"Miss Shinobu is an adventurer, but she's also something like an apprentice—or I suppose a subordinate?"

The receptionist seemed a little unsure.

"Both are true," Shinobu said.

"So you really are his apprentice, then?" I commented. "Subordinate" seemed to fit better, based on what I'd seen.

"You didn't believe us?"

"Well, you two fight completely differently, after all."

Shinobu used short blades like a ninja while Mr. Jyubei was a general and used a different set of weapons.

"My dad taught me how to use weapons, and my teacher showed me how to fight."

"She was already fully trained in a style, so I didn't make her change it," Mr. Jyubei said.

I guess that was because her dad was a ninja?

After that, I took a look at their guild cards and verified who they were. Then we were done talking for the night and would see Lady Sakura the next day in the -metropolis. Or maybe it was a royal capital? Or just a city? In any case, we were headed her way.

CHAPTER 480

THE BEAR GOES TO SEE LADY SAKURA

THE NEXT DAY, I left the inn to go meet the priestess Lady Sakura, and the king.

“The hot spring was nice, and the food was so good.”

I was thanking Konoha for taking such great care of me for the last few days.

“I’m happy to hear you say that.”

Konoha told me, “Please come again.” Next time, I’d be sure to bring Fina.

Then we headed out. Shinobu and Mr. Jyubei rode on their own horses, and I rode on Kumakyu.

“So you’re on Kumakyu this time?”

“Yeah.”

Last night, I’d only summoned Kumayuru and showed so much concern during the fight that Kumakyu had ended up upset again. I couldn’t have left Shinobu though, and I summoned Kumayuru because they were most familiar with each other. And the reason I’d been so worried was because Kumayuru had been attacked.

To Kumakyu, though, it seemed like I must have been leaving them out on purpose. So, today I summoned Kumakyu.

“Well, it seems like you’re pretty famous, Yuna,” Shinobu commented.

“What do you mean?”

“I found out some things from an adventurer who knew about you.”

I thought no one in this town should have known who I was, but then I remembered the first time I’d been at the guild. Someone had said, “Bloody bear.”

"He said he was from another continent. And that you fought a very powerful monster there."

Wait, did they know a lot about me then? I guess it depended on what the adventurer knew. If he came from Crimonia, then it was just the tigerwolves and the black viper that he'd know about. He didn't know about the kraken, did he? And there was no way he could know about the giant scorpion.

"Well, now that I think about it, I should have asked to see your guild card," Shinobu said.

I wouldn't have wanted them to see that, so I would have politely said no anyway. Even if they asked, it was private. Especially now that Shinobu was way more suspicious than before. Not that I'd have let anyone else look.

Jeez, I guess I am, like, the most difficult route to capture in a dating sim, huh?

"Come to think of it, Mr. Jyubei, do you normally have an eye patch on?"

He had one on now. I knew from yesterday that it wasn't actually covering a scar.

"This is part of my training, and it's a good way of estimating my opponent's abilities, so I keep it on."

"It's good for when he checks on his subordinates' and apprentices' abilities. Most people start out by trying to get him to take it off. Then as you get stronger, you can dodge his three-stage thrust, his dual wielding, and his magic."

He powered up like he was straight from some battle manga.

"I really wanted to get him to start dual wielding myself to show you."

"But if you wanted to see how strong I was, what was the point of showing me how he fought?"

"That wasn't the point of it. I would have given up on recruiting you if you saw him fight and ran away. Someone who can't save one person couldn't save the whole nation. But you did save me."

Shinobu seemed happy about that.

"I also wanted to show you my fighting style to see how you'd handle things. You were amazing out there," Mr. Jyubei said.

Wow. A pretty thorough test of me, then.

He'd sounded like he was taunting us, but now he spoke very differently. He had some talent as an actor. I'd taken him for a real nasty customer.

As we rode on our mounts, we caught sight of the royal capital—or city or wherever—that Lady Sakura would be at before the afternoon.

"Lady Sakura and the king are over there."

I wondered what they'd be like. If she was haughty or made me annoyed, I was going to go right home. I wasn't planning on hearing out anyone who was rude to me. Even if I was supposed to be their hero, I wasn't a saint. I wasn't going to save people who made me uncomfortable.

"Come to think of it, I should also tell you ahead of time that if either the priestess or the king laughs at me, I'll just go straight home."

I made sure to drive that point home. If you were going to ask a person a favor, the least you could do was treat them with proper manners.

Shinobu glanced at Mr. Jyubei.

"I'll inform His Majesty later, so it should be fine," he said.

Wait, should he have been saying that? And why did he say it in front of me?

"I think Lady Sakura should be fine."

Oh, so the king would laugh at me, but this Lady Sakura had manners?

We caught sight of the gate to the city.

"Can we go straight in?" I looked at Kumakyu. The two of them did too.

“I’m not sure.”

“I think it should be fine,” Mr. Jyubei said. “There might be a commotion though.”

“In any case, your clothes will stand out,” Shinobu said. “We’ll get stares if Yuna so much as walks around town.”

Shinobu seemed to be remembering what had happened when we walked around looking for Mr. Jyubei. Well, the townspeople really had been staring at us back then.

“In that case, would you like to ride Hayatemaru with me, Yuna?” She patted Hayatemaru’s neck. A horse wouldn’t stand out too much, I supposed.

While I was thinking it over, Kumakyu gave me a forlorn cry. I wished my bear wouldn’t sound so sad. That decided things though. After weighing whether I wanted to reveal Kumakyu’s cub form against Kumakyu’s mood, I chose to shrink down my bear.

“Your bears can shrink, Yuna?!”

The two gave Kumakyu a surprised look.

“Kumakyu is a special bear,” I explained.

“Is it a sacred beast?”

Well, since I’d gotten my bears from a god, divine beast was probably more accurate. Either way, I wasn’t going to tell Shinobu that.

I picked up Kumakyu and got on Hayatemaru. Shinobu got on behind me. I’d ridden in a horse-drawn carriage before, but not directly on a horse’s back before. Hayatemaru started trotting off toward the gate.

“Yuna.”

“What is it?”

“You’re so soft. You feel nice.”

Shinobu leaned into me. I turned around and glared.

“Pull any funny business and I’ll punch you.”

“...”

“What? Why’d you go quiet?”

“Ugh, fine. Don’t glare like that. I won’t do anything.” Shinobu looked disappointed.

After the guild card check, we headed in through the gate. The gate guard looked surprised, of course, but we were with Mr. Jyubei. They didn’t say anything or stop us.

“Yuna, welcome to Tessera.”

I still wasn’t sure if it was just a city or the royal capital, but in any case, I’d gotten to Tessera in the Land of Wa. No, it wasn’t named Edo or Kyoto or anything like that, but it did look a lot like a Japanese capital. The castle here wasn’t a Western-style place like Lady Flora lived in. No, this was more like a Japanese-style castle.

I’d never entered one of the castles back home in Japan. I hadn’t gone on any trips in elementary school, and I’d been a shut-in by middle school. I wasn’t going to go sightseeing on my own just to see a castle. I’d only seen them on TV and on the internet.

“Is Lady Sakura in that castle?”

“Not there. She’s in another spot.”

I was a little disappointed. I kind of wanted to see the inside.

“But His Majesty lives there,” Shinobu told me.

Right—he would, being the king. I guess I’d see inside when I met him then.

“Wow, people really are staring,” Shinobu commented.

“Yes, they are.”

My travel companions both looked around them. The people around were staring at me. Not even Kumakyu in cub form interested them as much as my outfit.

"Shinobu, I'll go inform the castle. You introduce her to Lady Sakura." Mr. Jyubei then gave the side of his horse a light kick and raced off.

"Hey, sir, that's unfair!"

Mr. Jyubei just ignored her and disappeared from view though. We were left alone.

"I know he needed to make his report, but he ran away just now, didn't he?"

He was just too embarrassed to hang around while people stared at me. Figures.

"Well, let's hurry over to Lady Sakura too."

In order to escape from the eyes as soon as possible, Shinobu gave Hayatemaru a gentle kick in the side and we took off too.

The horse ran through the streets. It was a lot more populated than the seaside town, and there were a lot more buildings too.

"Is it really that interesting?" Shinobu asked as she watched me staring all around.

"Oh, right, well, it's completely different from where I live."

Even in my original world, my home was surrounded by a ton of condos, so I didn't see houses with Japanese architecture like this often.

"Right," Shinobu said. "I'd like to go to the country you live in sometime too."

Well, I didn't know how far away it was, but I doubted it would be easy to just visit.

Hayatemaru kept on going as we rode on.

"So, are we near Lady Sakura yet?"

There were fewer and fewer people on the road. We'd been following the side of a long wall for a while.

"We're here, but the entrance is farther off."

"Is it on the other side of this wall then?"

“That’s right.”

Apparently, she lived on a spacious plot of land.

After we kept going for a while, we came across the entrance. Two guards with spears stood there. They glanced at me, then immediately turned to Shinobu.

“Master Shinobu, we have been waiting for you. Lady Sakura awaits your presence.”

“Yes. Yuna, we’ll walk from here.”

We both dismounted from Hayatemaru.

“Was this in the dream too?” I asked Shinobu in a whisper. It seemed they knew we were coming.

“No, we informed them yesterday.”

Shinobu recalled Hayatemaru and we headed through the gate. The gate guard gave me a curious look but didn’t say anything as I headed through.

As I headed in, a large garden spread out before me, and a giant building loomed up ahead. I’d seen something like this on TV before. It was like a samurai residence.

We headed right into the building, down the halls, and Shinobu stopped in front of a set of sliding doors.

“It is Shinobu. I have brought Yuna.”

“Please come in.”

I heard a voice from inside and Shinobu opened the doors. The room inside was spacious and covered in tatami. Inside was a person, seated on the ground and dressed in white priestess garments.

Was that Lady Sakura? She was actually very small, now that I took a good look at her.

Wait.

Was she a *kid*?

CHAPTER 481

THE BEAR TALKS WITH SAKURA

INSIDE THE SPACIOUS tatami room was a girl in white priestess garb, sitting alone.

“Lady Sakura, I’m back.”

“Shinobu, were you hurt?” The girl stood up. She seemed worried about Shinobu.

“I’m fine. Perfectly well, in fact.”

Shinobu did some somersaults on the spot. She was super flexible, like an actual ninja. She hadn’t gotten too injured and even if it hurt after I healed her with magic, it probably wasn’t that bad.

“I’m so glad.” The young girl sat back down. She seemed relieved.

Shinobu and I made our way to her. There were sitting cushions in front of the girl, and she beckoned us to use them.

“Yuna, I’d like to introduce you to Lady Sakura.”

“I am she,” the girl said.

She didn’t look her age at all anymore—the expression she’d had when she was worried about Shinobu was gone. Now she looked serious as she greeted me.

She seemed to be around Fina’s age, with a pretty face and a dignified air. Even her posture was perfect as she looked at me. Her long black hair draped over her white priestess robes, and she had a real mystique to her. I hadn’t expected the priestess with the premonitions to be such a young girl.

“I think you already know, but I’m Yuna, and this is Kumakyu,” I introduced the two of us as I held Kumakyu in my arms.

“I sincerely apologize for any discomfort we may have caused, Lady Yuna. We are

incredibly sorry we had to call upon you in this manner.”

She really didn’t speak like a little kid. When she apologized, she even maturely bowed her head until it almost touched the tatami mat.

“That’s enough,” I replied. “Please raise your head up.”

I felt bad for making a little kid basically prostrate herself in front of me. Sakura slowly raised her head.

“Thank you.”



"But I haven't decided to take your quest yet. Shinobu risked her life, so I've at least come to listen to what you have to say." I was also curious about her dreams.

"Yes, Shinobu had to take on a burdensome role. I'm very grateful for it."

"It was nothing, especially compared to what you have to do, Lady Sakura," Shinobu said.

"Thank you, Shinobu." Sakura smiled at her.

Then she looked at me nervously. Was I really that scary? I mean, I wasn't exactly a mascot, but I also wasn't exactly dressed to intimidate. Sakura exhaled slightly and seemed to have resolved herself to say something.

"Lady Yuna, may I hold your hands?"

"My hands?"

I flapped the mouths of my bear puppets open and shut. Sakura's face remained utterly serious. It didn't seem like her motive was to see how soft they were.

"Yes, if it's not too much trouble."

Sakura bowed her head.

"You're not going to do anything odd?"

"No, nothing odd. I will promise you that."

"All right, then."

"Th-thank you."

With that, Sakura stood up and came over to me. Then she sat back down in front of me, took my bear puppets in her hands nervously, and slowly closed her eyes. She didn't move in the slightest as she held my bear puppets in her hands. She remained silent. A minute passed and Sakura still hadn't moved, but the moment I thought about saying something, she started to cry.

"Wh-what's wrong?!" I panicked. I hadn't thought she'd cry from just holding my

hands.

"You have warm, beautiful mana. I'm certain that this is the light I felt in my dream. We've finally reached you."

Sakura gripped my bear puppet even more tightly. Her hands were small and felt so weak, but I could tell she didn't want to let go.

"Finally... Finally."

She didn't wipe away her tears and wouldn't let go of my hands. I had no idea what to do and just watched Sakura as she slowly opened her eyes. As she cried, she smiled.

"I'm very sorry. I was seeking you for so long, but no matter how I tried to reach for you, I could never catch you."

Sakura let go and wiped her tears away.

"I was so anxious to make sure it was you, but I know now that you are our light. Our hope."

"Uh, you think so?"

"You showed up in my dreams several times and I tried to catch you so many times. I feel the same light from you, Lady Yuna. I know it is you," Sakura answered firmly.

Then she smiled happily. Sakura thanked me and moved away, then sat back down.

"Can you really see the future in your dreams? And can you see everything in your dreams?"

"No, I can only see things related to me. And I can't see everything. My visions are capricious and even if I want to see something, I do not have control over them. And sometimes I see things I do not want to see as well."

"You can only see your own future?"

"Yes, only the future as it relates to me, I believe."

So she couldn't see the future of others then.

“Can I ask a question?”

“Yes. If I’m able to answer it, I will.”

“What happens in the future if I don’t help you?”

“The seal will break, and the monster will revive. Many people die in front of me.”

“What happens to the monster after it revives?”

“I’m not sure. I’m not sure whether it is slayed after or if it wreaks more destruction. I die in the future. I do not know what will happen after.”

Oh. She’d seen herself die multiple times. She hadn’t tried to flee? Or maybe she hadn’t been able to?

This little girl had seen herself die over and over again. She found a ray of hope, but she hadn’t been able to catch hold of it. I think I understood why she cried earlier.

“But then in that hopeless dream, I found a light. Even though it was far away, it felt warm. It wavered and when I looked closely, I saw the shape of a beast upon which a person was riding,” she said and looked at Kumakyu.

Well, I rode in on Kumayuru, though.

“I named that our light of hope, but I wasn’t sure how to bring the light here. The light wavered and moved freely as it willed. I worked as hard as I could to catch it, but I never could. But then I saw that it came from the sea.”

I’d heard this part from Shinobu.

“His Majesty stationed soldiers in order to greet the one riding the beast, but then the light disappeared. So he immediately recalled the soldiers.”

Sakura started to tell me about what I’d already heard from Shinobu. Then finally Shinobu made contact with me after I rode in on my beast.

“Can the future be changed?”

“Not with a small effort, but someone with great power can if they set their mind to

it."

"With great power?"

"A king, for example. If His Majesty acts, the entire nation will mobilize. First, we found that someone riding a beast would come from the sea. His Majesty was not sure how dangerous the beast would be and prepared soldiers. On that night, the light left and disappeared in my dream. I could not change the future on my own, but the actions of someone with power were able to make it change."

If she knew that a horde of monsters was about to attack, Sakura couldn't face them on her own since she didn't have the power to take them on. A king with an army could change a future like that.

"I heard that you decided to have Mr. Jyubei test how strong I am from Shinobu. Did the king not believe you about your light?"

Sakura shook her head.

"It was not His Majesty. They were leaders and people who believed in protecting old traditions. They do not wish to allow an outsider into that land, and they do not wish to ask for help from that which they do not understand. Some did not have a favorable opinion of you. It isn't as though His Majesty can rely solely on my opinions..." Sakura lowered her head as though she were embarrassed by the situation.

So that was why it'd turned into a whole ordeal. Sakura was the only one who really knew about the light. To others, it just sounded like some suspicious person on a beast was coming into town from the ocean. No one knew how powerful the person would be. There was a possibility that the person would have been an enemy and not here for anything good.

Instead, they'd gotten a girl in a bear suit riding a bear. Maybe that had been even harder to swallow.

"In addition, my dreams are secret and only a limited number know of them. I am sorry we have troubled you." Sakura seemed apologetic.

"So, to be sure, you really want to ask someone dressed like me to do this? Are you sure the others won't complain?"

I was dressed in a bear onesie, after all. To any normal person, I wouldn't seem like I could beat a monster.

"You won against Jyubei. No one will be able to complain. If they continue to doubt your abilities despite that, Lady Yuna, then that person is simply a fool who doesn't understand the serious situation our nation is in."

Sakura's little hands on her lap balled into tight little fists. I didn't think she wanted to make me fight anyone. I could tell from the face she made when Shinobu came into the room.

I really wanted to save this girl.

They should have just had Sakura come to me to ask in the first place. They started off on the wrong track though. The whole thing had ballooned because she told the king about it, but if Sakura had been the one who approached me, I think I would have listened to her. If she talked to me this seriously, I would have done what she asked if I was capable of it.

When I thought of it that way, I guess kids really tug at my heartstrings? There was the time with Fina, the black viper, the orphanage, Noa asking me to slay the ten thousand monsters, Misa's birthday party, Karina back at the desert... it was always kids asking me for help.

Apparently, they were my weakness.

CHAPTER 482

THE LIGHT OF HOPE

SAKURA'S VIEWPOINT

ONE DAY, I dreamed about the future.

Even as I grappled with this immense power, I was afraid. The ability to see the future is not always a blessing. Some of it makes me glad. Others, miserable.

My power isn't infallible. It does not always show me what I want to see. It shows me both the good and the bad of the future.

I have seen even my own friends die.

About a month ago, I had another dream. On an island in the middle of our nation called Linesu, a black mist crept over the island and attacked the towns, killing the people in my dream. Soldiers died to save me. Finally, I was powerless, and I died as well.

When I woke in the mornings, it all felt like nothing more than a nightmare, but the dream continued for three nights in a row. I only saw dreams a few times each year. More often than not I mistake them for normal dreams. But this was a dream of the future.

Linesu is where a monster was once sealed. The black mist likely represented the monster.

It is not as though my dreams show all of the future. I am only shown fragments. Those few who knew about my dreams told His Majesty of what I had seen and so they advised sending people to look into the monster's seal on Linesu. His Majesty agreed without delay. There, they found that a portion of the seal had weakened.

His Majesty immediately began to act. However, men are not allowed on the island, so

His Majesty had difficulty determining what to do. We could not allow the dream to come to be.

We were unable to find a method of preventing the catastrophe, and another day had gone by. Every night in my dreams, I had the dream of myself dying. I grew to be afraid of sleep, but I needed to find any clue to prevent what was to come. I was sure there would be a clue in my dreams, but on that day, everyone died yet again.

I was unable to do anything as the darkness attacked them all and everyone perished. I died several times more until I lost hope. The darkness closed in. I was without light. I was afraid. I was suffering and in pain. I felt as though something were tearing my body apart.

I wanted someone, anyone to help. I wanted to wake from the dream as soon as I could. I could not escape the nightmare.

As I was in the midst of that despair, a light shone upon me. This light was warm and gentle. It soothed my pain and my suffering, so I reached for it in the hopes it would save me. The light grew distant. My small hands could not reach it.

I tried with all my might to chase after it, and I reached my arms as much as I could toward it. I did not watch my feet and tripped, and the light grew more and more distant.

I begged for it not to go, but my prayers never reached it and as the light disappeared, I was enclosed by the darkness. I felt as though my body were on fire as I woke.

I was still alive.

As relief washed over me, I remembered the light. It was so very warm. It illuminated the world of death. That light of hope would save our nation.

Then, the next day, the light appeared in my hopeless dream once more. As I watched it, my heart grew warm, but the light grew distant. I failed to reach it again.

I begged it to please save us. I would do anything in my power for it. I would give my

very life for it. Please, save everyone.

As though my wishes had reached it, the light slowly approached.

It seemed to be an animal? The light was in the shape of some animal. Not a horse, but something larger. It was a beast of a ferocious shape. Upon that beast rode a person. I felt something warm from the light, which was now in the shape of a person. This person would protect the nation.

I reached my hands toward it and the person atop the beast wavered and left.

Wait! Please! Don't go!

My words did not reach it. It left across the eastern sea.

Then I woke from my dream of the future.

I informed His Majesty of my dreams.

“A person riding a beast will come from the eastern sea?”

“I’m unsure what the light is trying to tell me, but that is how it seems.”

His Majesty concealed my dream as a message from a priestess and spoke to his vassals. Some vassals rejoiced and others warned of danger.

“Is it truly a light of hope?” “Are you certain the beast will not attack the people?” “If this person will come riding a beast, won’t it be dangerous?” “Can we truly trust this person on this beast?” “Can we allow an outsider onto Linesu?” “Do you really believe that they can defeat the monster on Linesu?” “No, we must trust them.” “We have no other way to deal with the monster.”

Some feared the beast and did not want a stranger to enter the island. Others sought salvation from the light.

His Majesty listened to their views and considered the danger of the beast of light from my dreams. He decided to station soldiers at the harbor. I informed him it was unnecessary, but he told me that this person with power the equivalent of the sealed

monster may also be dangerous, and I could not refute him.

The dream I saw that night was of the light not even approaching once it saw the soldiers in a line by the sea. It disappeared far away back across the sea. Then the nation fell into despair, many people died, and I did as well.

After His Majesty heard about what was in my dream, he immediately gave the order to withdraw the troops.

Though His Majesty chose many different people to meet the light, including vassals and generals, the light would approach but always vanish in the end. *Someone* needed to meet the light.

And so after deliberation, we selected Shinobu, a girl with the ability to fight. Oddly, the light approached much closer than it ever had in the past. It seemed that Shinobu's ability to talk to anyone casually worked well for this.

At the same time, Shinobu was asked to check whether the light of hope was safe and to check how powerful they were. Shinobu took this job of utmost importance with a smile.

"I would do anything to save you, Lady Sakura."

I wanted Shinobu to live too. I didn't want anyone to die.

Shinobu left to watch the eastern sea, and several days later, a report arrived. According to it, a girl dressed as a bear had come to us across the ocean riding atop a black bear.

I didn't understand. A girl dressed as a bear riding a bear? In what way was she dressed as a bear? Was she wearing bear fur? I imagined it and was somewhat frightened.

According to the report, she was thirteen or fourteen years old.

Was she really such a young child? It also said that the bear was running across the

ocean. The bear was running over the waters? I couldn't even imagine that.

And it was not a single bear with her. She also wrote of a white bear.

If the light in the shape of a beast was a bear, and the girl was the person riding on it, then this was what I had seen in my dream.

I read through the rest of the report.

The girl who had ridden in from the ocean came onto land and both of the bears had somehow disappeared.

In Shinobu's report, she wrote, "I believe the bears are summons and she recalled them."

She also wrote that she did not approach her immediately and was watching the girl. The girl seemed to enjoy looking around as she walked around town, and she was staying at an inn. She also wrote that she hadn't noticed her doing anything out of the ordinary and did not know whether this was the light of hope.

However, that night, I did not have any dreams.

I did not know what would happen. I could only hope that things would go in a good direction.

The next night, the new report I'd been waiting for arrived.

The girl had bought tatami and many other things according to it. She had even bought sixty tatami mats.

So many?

On top of that, the bear glove she had was an item bag.

Bear glove?

I simply couldn't do it—I couldn't imagine what it looked like based on just that. I needed to go see her with my own eyes.

If I met her, I was sure I would understand, but I could not. I couldn't get in the way of Shinobu's work.

I read the rest of the report.

It seemed she had met the girl. When the girl went to the Adventurers' Guild, there was a person there whose village was being attacked by kamaitachi, so she took their quest. Shinobu wrote she was going on the quest too.

I was relieved they had met.

The girl dressed as a bear was named Lady Yuna. Shinobu said she would watch the girl fight and see if she really was powerful enough to be the light of hope. If she could be, then she would fight Jyubei. I felt anxious.

I woke up the next morning. Again, I didn't have any dreams.

Had I simply not seen anything? Had something changed? Seeing dreams made me anxious, but now their absence made me just as anxious.

On that night, a new report arrived. In the report, it said that the girl summoned her black and also her white bears. The black bear was named Kumayuru and the white one was Kumakyu. What cute names!

She also wrote that the girl easily slayed the kamaitachi. I didn't know how powerful kamaitachi were, but based on Shinobu's report, they were powerful indeed.

Jyubei also agreed to pretend to fight her as though she was trying to avenge her parents. I was worried about Jyubei and Shinobu fighting, and about whether the girl could win against Jyubei. If she couldn't win against him, then she couldn't be the light of hope.

I understood that. Anyone who couldn't defeat Jyubei wouldn't be able to defeat the

sealed monster.

Even though I wanted her to be the light, I felt guilty having a thirteen-or fourteen-year-old girl fight Jyubei and a monster. But we needed to know if we could rely on her.

She was going to fight against Jyubei that day. I waited for Shinobu to report back. I was full of anxiety. Jyubei and Shinobu would fight for real. Then the girl we thought was the light would fight him.

I hoped they would all come back safe. I hoped that she was the light.

* * *

While I was nervous, I received a report late at night. It said that the girl had won against Jyubei.

I couldn't believe it. She won against that Jyubei? Then she really was the light?! I began to cry.

I wanted to meet the girl—Lady Yuna—as soon as possible.

I needed to also apologize to her for what had happened.

CHAPTER 483

THE BEAR SPEAKS WITH SAKURA

“LADY YUNA, I would like to ask you something.

May I?”

“What is it?”

“The reports said that you have a black bear and a white bear that people can ride. Is this a different bear? It seemed to have the same name.”

Sakura looked at the bear in my arms. She'd gotten reports about my bears but of course she couldn't have gotten a report that they could shrink since I hadn't shown that until we got into town.

Before I could answer, Shinobu explained, “Yuna's bears can shrink and become larger.”

I'd forgotten to tell her not to tell anyone.

“Really?”

Sakura stared at Kumakyu. Suddenly, she looked like a girl of her actual age instead of much older.

“I can make my bear bigger if you'd like.”

“Could you?!” Sakura's eyes glittered.

I placed Kumakyu to the side and returned them to their original size.

“I-it really is bigger. This is the esteemed Kumakyu, yes?”

Esteemed Kumakyu? Well, she was calling me Lady Yuna too. I felt kind of embarrassed. That was kind of overkill for a bum like me. I was just a former shut-in

gamer.

“Lady Yuna, um, if it isn’t too much trouble, may I also see the esteemed Kumayuru as well...?”

Sakura seemed hesitant to ask for that. Since she already had gotten reports and knew about my bears, I didn’t have anything to hide. I summoned Kumayuru.

“This is Kumayuru.”

“Cwoon,” Kumayuru greeted Sakura.

“The esteemed Kumayuru and esteemed Kumakyu. They’re so divine.”

Sakura put her hands together like she was praying. My bears crooned, then cocked their heads to the side quizzically. Did their soft faces really look *divine*?

“Shinobu, maybe you should have Sakura checked by a doctor.”

“I understand what you mean, but she’s not sick. That’s simply what Lady Sakura sees.”

In other words, my bears didn’t look divine to Shinobu.

“You can’t see how divine their faces are, Shinobu?”

Kumayuru and Kumakyu looked over at Shinobu. Shinobu looked back at them.

“Um, well, I guess I can kind of see it. Yeah, they look radiant.”

Shinobu put her hand up and pretended to be blinded by them. Yeah, she couldn’t see it either. They just had pudgy faces. They were cute, but not what I’d call “divine.”

Maybe they looked like that because I’d gotten them from a god and Sakura was a priestess?

“These are the beasts of light then. Lady Yuna, may I touch them?”

“Sure, you can touch them.” I doubted Sakura would do anything weird, so I gave my permission.

Sakura held Kumakyu's paw.

"I feel the same power as I did from you, Lady Yuna. And it feels so soft and nice."

After that, she took Kumayuru's paw and said the same things.

"Thank you," Sakura said, seeming satisfied as she returned to her spot.

Next, I asked Sakura a question. Even if I was taking the quest, I still needed to ask. There were things I could and couldn't do too. If this monster was like Talgwei, I'd be way out of my league, for example.

"Could I ask questions about the monster that's sealed away? Or should I ask the king or someone else?"

"I can discuss what I know."

Sakura started to explain.

Over a century ago, all the people in the country worked together to weaken the monster and seal it away on Linesu Island.

Because the monster would feed off human malice, they forbade entry onto the island. But there were men who continued to try entering the island anyway, so they put up a barrier to keep out men specifically.

"Why do only men try to get onto the island?"

"The woman taking care of the barrier then was a beautiful woman. Then a rumor spread that a beautiful woman lived alone on the island and men tried to visit her."

Well, I guess men trying to get onto an island where there was only one woman would be a source of nasty feelings.

"In that case, why didn't they give her a guard?"

"If there were more people, that could increase the negative emotions manyfold. We could only ever have one person maintaining the barrier."

"So the woman set up a barrier to prevent men from entering as well."

I could understand that. If I could set up a barrier like that, I would do the same. A barrier that convenient was fantasy stuff, though.

Well, I guess this was a fantasy world, after all.

"Is it possible to take down the barrier then?" I asked.

"According to the person who put up the barrier, she used the barrier that holds the monster in, so taking it down would mean we might not be able to reseal the monster."

I hadn't gotten the full story from her, but Shinobu had covered most of it. The trouble was that men weren't allowed in through the barrier. That would already lower the amount of firepower they could draw from.

"So, what kind of monster is it?"

No one had told me yet. That was the information I really needed.

"It's a snake with four heads. We call it the Orochi."

"The Orochi..."

"It can breathe fire and roast people alive, and create whirlwinds to cut people up, and drown people in the water it spews. When it uses earth magic, it can crush people."

The Yamata no Orochi One was a famous Orochi in Japan, a mythical creature that looked like a giant snake with eight heads. I guess this one wasn't mythical, but a real monster.

Was it different from a black viper then? Maybe it was a little more like a hydra? I couldn't really imagine how big it was either. If it was just the size of a black viper with four heads, I could probably beat it.

"Lady Yuna, we would like your help weakening the Orochi before the seal fully breaks, and then we would like your help resealing it."

"Will I be the only one fighting it?"

"No, we'll gather others as well. As I said earlier, only women can enter the island, so I think there won't be enough power. No other person could defeat Jyubei."

Mr. Jyubei was strong after all. I guess there just weren't any women around as strong as him.

"And I'll be participating too," Shinobu added.

"You are, Shinobu? Even though you can't win against Mr. Jyubei?"

"I'm one of the more powerful people around. You're the exception for being able to fight him, Yuna. I couldn't believe how you handled those knives. I've never seen someone block my teacher's sword that easily. And then there was that giant bear wall."

My bear magic was my secret technique—my special move—my ultimate magic.

It also used up a lot of mana. If I needed to be on the offense like I'd been with the kraken, it was better for me to wear my white bear suit, but that wouldn't have flown in that situation.

"Lady Yuna, please, won't you help us?" Sakura bowed her head deeply.

So it was a four-headed orochi. I had no idea whether I could beat it. At the same time though, I couldn't forget how Sakura had held my hands and cried. A little girl had experienced her friends and herself dying in a dream so many times. It must have been a terrible ordeal, and if I didn't help, it might become reality.

"I might not be able to beat it, you know."

"I believe in my dreams. So I believe in you, Lady Yuna." She looked straight at me.

"If I can't do it, I'm running away though."

"That's all right if you do," Sakura didn't hesitate to reply.

Was Sakura actually the age she looked? She seemed like a kid, but her mind seemed more like an adult's.

"Sakura, how old are you?"

“Um, I’m ten. Why?”

She looked exactly that small.

“Okay, okay. I have no idea how much I can do, but I’ll help.”

“Th-thank you.”

Her serious face broke out into a grin that suited her age and cuteness better.

“But don’t expect much from me.”

“I believe in you.”

That was too much pressure. Having her faith was too much of a burden. I didn’t want to betray her, especially since she was such an innocent girl, but I really didn’t know how this would turn out.

“Guess that’s all we gotta talk about. I’m gonna call in the people who have been waiting outside the room,” Shinobu said and stood up. Then she opened the sliding door.

Mr. Jyubei was there along with a man in a hakama, traditional Japanese pants.

“So you’re finally done talking,” the man said and came straight in.

He was in his forties. He had a beard and was on the larger side.

“Why, she truly is dressed as a bear! And I see the white and black bears, just as the reports indicated.”

The man looked at me, then at my bears. He didn’t seem scared of them at all.

“Sakura, you’re sure it’s this girl?”

“Yes. There’s no mistake. She’s our light of hope.”

“I see. So, how has this all gone?”

“She will help us.”

“All right. All of you, turn away and plug your ears!”

When the man said that, Shinobu, Mr. Jyubei, and Sakura did as they were told.

What was going on? The man came right up to me and dramatically sat down.

“I am this country’s king, Suo. I apologize for the rudeness we have treated you with. And I am grateful for your help.”

The man deeply bowed his head.

“You’re the king...?”

He raised his head.

“As a king, I cannot apologize in front of my vassals, so I wanted to do this here.”

Uh, his vassals Mr. Jyubei, Shinobu, and Sakura were right here in front of him, except they were turned around and weren’t listening. Was the king really allowed to bow to a girl in a bear onesie?

“You may all turn back around,” the king said, and everyone did that like nothing had happened.

No one was going to say anything? They had their ears covered though, so I guess they weren’t supposed to have heard? How did they know to turn back around if they couldn’t hear?

I wasn’t gonna say anything, but...

CHAPTER 484

THE BEAR TALKS TO THE KING

“YOUR MAJESTY, how goes the situation at the -castle?” Sakura asked, as though nothing at all had

happened.

How could she just pretend that nothing had happened so easily? No one else showed any indication they’d heard anything either.

I decided to follow her lead, saying nothing.

“They have been silenced. No matter what her outfit looks like or how old she might be, she was strong enough to defeat Jyubei. I believe each of them has already received the report, so they won’t say another word.”

The king then turned to me.

Wait, did he just comment on my outfit? Well, it wasn’t like I could deny how I was dressed.

“Though I read the reports, I did not expect such a little girl. I would have serious reservations had it not been for you, Sakura.”

L-little? Me? Maybe the king was just big! Still, he seemed to have faith in Sakura.

Then the king looked over at Mr. Jyubei behind him.

“Jyubei, did you really lose to her?”

“Yes. Despite her appearance, she wasn’t frightened by witnessing my fight with Shinobu. And when Shinobu was in danger, she risked her own life to save her and won against me. I was using all my strength. I swear upon my life that she is stronger than any general or person around.”

“I see. So in other countries, people can be small but mighty.”

Uh, not really. I hadn’t met anyone as strong as me so far. That was thanks to the bear gear I’d gotten from that god. If I didn’t have my gear, I would’ve been a powerless girl.

The king then looked at Kumayuru and Kumakyu, who were at my sides.

“And here are the beasts of hope you made mention of, Sakura. I believe they were described to me as ferocious, but I do not believe there’s anything to fear from these bears.”

Both bears crooned in disagreement. *I* thought they were pretty cool, at least when they were fighting, but their faces were so pudgy that I couldn’t deny the king’s words. It was for the best. If they were too scary, they’d frighten little kids.

“Can they be touched?”

“As long as you don’t hurt them.”

“I would not. Then I shall touch them.”

The king started with Kumakyu.

“Oh-ho, this feels very nice. I enjoy this greatly. And it is a beautiful white! I would like a fur like this for myself.”

The moment the king said that, Kumakyu quickly retreated and hid behind me.

“Cwoon.”

I couldn’t exactly hide my bears, considering how big they were. He’d better not try anything, though.

The king watched Kumakyu. The moment I tried to ask the king not to joke around, Sakura intervened.

“Uncle! Please be more careful with what you say. Do you realize how much Shinobu and Jyubei had to do to bring Lady Yuna and her esteemed bears here? If she had been angered by your words and left the country, what would we do?!”

Sakura was fuming at the king.

"I'm sorry. I would never turn them into furs. I simply wanted to convey how lovely they were to touch." The king gave a straightforward apology.

Wait a sec... Her uncle?

"I understand your intention, but there are some things you shouldn't say. Please take responsibility for your own words. The very fate of the nation may hinge on them."

"All right, all right. Don't be so upset. Also, Sakura, call me Your Majesty here."

"I'm sorry," Sakura was apologizing this time.

"You called him uncle? How are you related?"

"Sakura is my sister's daughter."

"Then she's also royalty?"

"No. My mother stopped being royalty when she married my father."

I'd heard of cases where royalty lost their status when they married commoners in my old world too.

"So I am just an ordinary priestess."

I highly doubted normal priestesses had dreams about the future, but I understood a little more why the king believed in Sakura. It seemed like more people among the king's advisors hadn't believed her than had.

"So that's why you believed in what Sakura had to say."

"Yes. My sister had mystical powers as well."

The king seemed wistful. Everyone else went silent.

Sakura finally spoke up, "I lost my mother and father when I was small."

She said something so heavy with such ease.

"I've raised her like my own," said the king. "But because of our statuses, she must call me Your Majesty in public."

So that was why he'd told her off earlier.

I felt so bad she'd lost her parents by ten years old, but I also knew tons of other kids who had lost their parents or been abandoned. I remembered the orphans' faces. Some were even younger than Sakura. They were still living full and happy lives. Kids keep growing even after their parents are gone, although they still need the love of adults. That was why the headmistress and Liz were with them.

Sakura had the king and Shinobu, so it seemed like she'd been raised well. I didn't think I needed to worry about her.

I hoped she wouldn't grow into a weirdo like me.

"Then you're like me. I can't see my parents anymore either," I said.

"You too, Lady Yuna?"

I wasn't lying. I had no way of getting back to my old world, so chances of seeing them again were slim. Also, I wasn't sure if I wanted to go back. Maybe if I could travel back and forth... but if it would be a one way trip, I think I'd choose to stay in this world. I had lots of people I cared about here, after all.

"Yeah, but I have Kumayuru and Kumakyu, so I'm fine."

I looked at my bears, who were my family. They both happily crooned at me.

"I have my uncle, so I'm fine too," Sakura said with a smile. I didn't see any hint of gloom in her expression.

"So, Yuna, was it? How far did you get in your conversation?"

I told him how Sakura had told me about the seal breaking on the Orochi, how we needed to weaken the monster to reseal it, and how I knew I'd be fighting it.

"And you're fine with this, even if you might risk your life?"

"Right, Shinobu and Mr. Jyubei fought and risked their lives for their country, and

Sakura is suffering even though she's so young. I just couldn't say no after hearing all about that."

I actually wanted to say "no" to anything too hard. I hadn't had my fill of the Land of Wa. If the country was destroyed, then I might lose miso and soy sauce and a ton of ingredients. I wanted it to stay.

"I see. Thank you."

And I couldn't abandon such a young girl.

"Just to be clear, I don't know if I can defeat it."

I couldn't overpromise. I'd never fought an orochi before, much less seen one. I wouldn't know whether bear magic would work on it until I tried fighting it.

"We are simply grateful for you to lend us your strength, as the light of hope that Sakura spoke of," the king said.

"As long as you're with us, I believe we can change the future, Lady Yuna."

Sakura looked at me with full faith.

"I'll do the best I'm able to."

I had no idea whether I could fulfill Sakura's expectations, but I'd already said yes, so I'd do what I could.

"Well, once this is all over, I'd like to thank you. If you have any wish I can grant, I'd like you to tell me. What do you desire? Riches? Status?"

I didn't need either. If I really needed to pick something, I'd say a place to set up a bear gate. Without setting one up, I couldn't go home to Crimonia or come back here. I wanted a spot I could come in and out of without drawing attention. I could buy a house, so I didn't need that. It'd be better to ask for something I couldn't easily get.

So, I decided to reply like this:

"I don't need riches or status. If you'd like to thank me, then after the orochi is sealed, you can make a judgment based on how much I contribute. I'll formally ask you for

something then."

First things first. Defeat the monster, then ask for a favor.

"All right. And I will do my best to grant your wish when the time comes," the king promised me.

If we successfully sealed the monster away, maybe I'd ask for a house with a hot spring. Two birds with one stone; a hot bath and a bear gate. That seemed like a reasonable request.

"Then I shall take my leave. Sakura, I leave Yuna to you," said the king. "I have much to do regarding this matter."

He left the room, leaving me with Sakura. Mr. Jyubei also bobbed his head and left with the king.

Sakura, Shinobu, my bears, and I were the only ones left in the room. Then I asked Sakura what to do next, since she was the one who knew what I had to do.

"So, do I just wait until the seal breaks?"

I couldn't exactly do that when we didn't know when it'd break. I could set up a bear gate and then come back when the seal actually broke.

"We would actually like you to meet Lady Kagari, if you would."

"Lady Kagari?"

That was a new name.

"She is the person who has maintained the barrier the longest on Linesu. She knows the most about the monster that is sealed there."

If she'd been dealing with the barrier the longest, I imagined she was old. Maybe she'd even dedicated most of her life to the orochi's seal? I'd read manga and novels like that. To protect the seal generation after generation, many people might have given up their lives. That was kind of sad to think about.

I didn't know if I could do it, but maybe I could save her from having to do that

anymore.

“All right then. I’ll meet Lady Kagari.”

Most importantly, I wanted a little more information about how to defeat the Orochi.

“Thank you. Then we’ll lead you to Lady Kagari tomorrow.”

“I’ll arrange for a ship,” Shinobu said.

“Shinobu, please wait a moment.”

As Shinobu tried to leave, Sakura stopped her. She looked at me, then my bears.

“Um, Lady Yuna, may I ask something?”

“What is it?”

“I heard that you rode on top of your esteemed bears to come here via the ocean. Is that true?”

Shinobu had seen me, so if it was in the reports, there was no use denying it. I nodded.

“It’s true,” I said.

“Um, in that case...” Her voice almost seemed to disappear.

“Do you want to ride them?”

That’s what Sakura’s face said. She wanted to ride them, but she didn’t think she could ask.

“Um, uh, well, yes.” Sakura looked down as she hesitantly nodded. “When I heard about them running on the water, it sounded like something from a dream. As long as it’s not too much trouble.”

She glanced at my bears. She was desperate to ride my bears to Linesu.

Well, she already knew about them anyway. And if we got on a boat, the people operating it would see my clothes. That’d be its own kind of annoying. My bears were

a much nicer ide.

"I don't really mind. But I can't let you ride them in front of others. People would be shocked if they suddenly saw bears and it'd cause trouble if anyone made a big commotion about my bears running on water."

Normal bears couldn't do that.

"Shinobu..." Sakura looked over for support.

"Right. In that case, there's a good spot for gettin' in the water without anyone seeing," Shinobu answered after thinking a bit.

"Is there really?"

"There is. So we won't get a boat, but we'll ride on Kumayuru and Kumakyu to Lady Kagari instead."

It seemed Shinobu intended to ride on Kumayuru and Kumakyu too.

We'd ride on my bears to the island.

CHAPTER 485

THE BEAR TALKS ABOUT WHAT COMES NEXT

“YOU'RE COMING TOO, Sakura? Couldn't Shinobu show me where to go? Isn't it dangerous for you to go to the island where the Orochi is sealed?”

“The seal isn't broken yet. And I'm not sure if Lady Kagari would speak to you without me,” Sakura said a little hesitantly as she looked at me. “Since um... you're dressed as a bear...”

She was right. If I walked up and said, “I'm that light of hope Sakura told you about,” there was no way she would believe me. Even if Shinobu introduced me, she might think that it was a joke. If the niece of the king came herself, though, then it was highly likely she'd believe it. Also, I would have been too embarrassed to call myself the light of hope in the first place. When I thought about that aspect of it, it'd just be better to have Sakura come too.

“Lady Kagari is very particular, too,” Shinobu added.

So was I. Maybe we were a little alike?

We settled on our plans for the next day, so I was going to stay at this house too.

“Oh, right. Shinobu, you can have this back.”

I pulled out Shinobu's pouch of money. I'd just remembered it when the king talked about giving me a reward. If Shinobu had died trying to fight Mr. Jyubei, I was supposed to take her place avenging her parents. But she hadn't died. So I needed to give her back her money.

“Well...”

When Shinobu saw the money, she'd started to reach for it at first, but then she immediately pulled her hand away.

“I can’t take that. You fought my teacher just like you promised. You also beat him fair and square, so that’s your money now.”

“So just to make sure, is this the country’s money?”

“No, it’s my personal savings. I needed you to fight my teacher no matter what, so I decided to give you the money because it was necessary.”

Since Shinobu took initiative on her own, it was her own money. If this had been the country’s money, I would have taken it, but taking Shinobu’s personal funds was another matter. I knew how hard it was to save up.

And even though it’d all been a ruse, she’d actually fought against Mr. Jyubei and risked her life. She might have even actually died doing that. I couldn’t take this from her when she’d done all that.

“You can have it back,” I said again and thrust the money at her.

“Yuna?”

“Well, our promise was that I’d take it if you die, but you’re alive right now.”

“That’s true, but you still beat my teacher. I promised I’d give you the money if you got revenge on him for me. Even if that was an act, you still fulfilled your part of the deal. If I take that back, I feel like it’d all be a lie. I was prepared to die fighting my teacher back then. He was gonna kill me. Those feelings weren’t fake.”

I knew that. I’d taken on her quest because I’d seen how serious Shinobu was. That was another reason why I couldn’t take the money. This money had all of Shinobu’s emotions in it, but even when I offered it to her, Shinobu wouldn’t take it. I felt the same way she did though.

So, I tried to copy a scene I’d seen before in anime.

“Then I’ll just take this.”

I took one gold coin from the pouch.

“Yuna?”

"Now I've gotten some money and I can fulfill my promise that I'd return it to you if you lived. This means we've both fulfilled our ends of the bargain, right?"

Shinobu seemed exasperated.

"Yuna... I got this sense from you when you fought my teacher too, but you're kind of chivalrous, like a guy. You were so cool when you saved me. If you do something like this, I'm gonna end up falling for you."

I backed away from her.

"Why are you trying to get away?!"

Sorry. I wasn't interested in men, but I wasn't interested in her either.

Sakura started laughing at me.

"Lady Sakura?"

"I'm sorry. It was just so funny to hear you think Lady Yuna is like a man."

I mean, if a handsome man wore a onesie and tried to say something suave, anyone would laugh. What you say is important, but appearances are just as vital.

Things settled down because of what Sakura had said, and Shinobu accepted her money back.

After that, we had a luxurious dinner and I gladly ate it up.

"Do you always eat food this good?"

"No, this is special because you're here, Lady Yuna. It seems that Uncle has asked that you be treated with hospitality."

"That seems like His Majesty. He's making it harder for her to say no," Shinobu commented.

Well, I guess it was harder to turn them down when they were treating me to

something this extravagant versus, say, serving me rice with a single umeboshi on top.

"That isn't the case at all. It's normal for us to treat our guests well. Please don't say anything odd, Shinobu."

"Sorry."

Well, I guess beautiful food was one way to express their hospitality.

After I had dinner, I had a bath. They really had thought of everything.

Shinobu was right. When they went this far, it was difficult to say no.

"The baths here are hot springs, so they're the best."

I was looking forward to it.

I held my bears in cub form as Sakura led me to the baths. I was a little anxious about taking my bear gear off in an unknown land, but since my bears were with me, I'd be fine if things got dicey.

"I'll be right outside, so if anything happens, just call me," Shinobu said, then stood at the entrance of the changing room like she was on guard. Sakura and I headed in.

"Um, why are you here too, Sakura?"

"I'd like to wash your back for you, Lady Yuna."

"I can do that on my own."

"Then please allow me to wash the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru."

Ah. So that was her angle.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, what would you like?" I asked them. They both crooned like they were fine with it.

"They say it's okay."

"Really?! Thank you so much, both of you!" Sakura broke out into a full smile.

Sakura started to happily undress, but once we were in the bath itself she looked worried. She looked at one bear, then another.

"What's wrong?"

"Who should I wash first? I can't decide."

"Want me to wash the other one?"

"No, that won't do. It won't be heartfelt, then! I shall wash them both at once. Pardon me, esteemed Kumakyu and esteemed Kumayuru, but could you come to me?"

My bears headed over to Sakura. She sat them down in front of her and started to wash them both.

"Esteemed Kumayuru, how does it feel?"

"Cwoon."

"And how are you faring, esteemed Kumakyu?"

"Cwoon."

She washed them both thoroughly. They seemed to be enjoying it.

I left my bears to Sakura and washed myself, then sunk into the bathtub.

"Ahh, this feels great."

If I was going to ask for anything, it would be a bath with a hot spring. Well, I could only ask for that if I somehow could help with sealing the monster away again.

"Sakura, I have a question if that's all right?"

"Yes, what is it?"

Sakura looked at me as she was washing my bears.

"Did you have a dream yesterday—or this morning, rather?"

Sakura had seen herself dying over and over again, but now that I was here maybe her dreams were different.

"I'm very sorry. I have not had a single dream since you met Shinobu."

"So you're not sure whether the future has changed then?"

"I'm not. But even just the possibility that there might be a bright future awaiting us, rather than despair, makes me happy."

We were writing our own future as we went. This felt like some coming-of-age manga.

We headed over to Sakura's room after the hot springs, intending to share a room. Sakura had hesitantly asked me if we could sleep in the same room while we were in the bath, and I'd said yes.

"I'll be in the room over, so if anything happens, just call me," Shinobu said.

It seemed they really were going to take care of me, like His Majesty had said.

"So, should we go to sleep?"

"Yes, I look forward to sleeping, esteemed Kumakyu."

"Cwoon."

Sakura held my bear like a stuffed animal as she got under the covers.

"Kumayuru, you're with me then."

"Cwoon."

I got under the covers with Kumayuru.

I heard Sakura start to snore almost immediately. She must have been tired, and maybe this has brought her some relief. Though I couldn't be sure, I prayed she

wouldn't have another bad dream tonight. I didn't want her to keep experiencing her death.

The hot spring put me right to sleep, too.

CHAPTER 486

THE BEAR HEADS TO LINESU

THE NEXT MORNING, when I woke up, Sakura was sitting properly on her futon mattress and had Kumakyu on her lap.

“Good morning.”

“You’re already awake?”

“Yes, I had a wonderful dream, so I was dwelling on it,” Sakura answered back with an invigorated look on her face.

“A dream?”

“Yes, a dream where the esteemed Kumakyu protected me. In the darkness, I was crying alone when the esteemed Kumakyu arrived out of nowhere and gently embraced me. It was warm and all of my worries disappeared as I was swathed in safety. And then the esteemed Kumakyu also cried out and a bright light made the darkness go away and protected me. It all looked so very gallant and impressive. I haven’t slept so soundly in a while. Oh, esteemed Kumakyu, thank you very much.”

“Cwoon.”

Kumakyu gave out a cry as though to tell her it was nothing. Maybe this was a divination dream too?

“So do you think we will successfully seal the Orochi away again?”

Sakura shook her head.

“I’m not sure. I don’t think that was a dream of the future. I think that the esteemed Kumakyu was rescuing me from my nightmares.”

I felt secure when my bears were around while I slept too. They were very comforting. Maybe that was the power Kumayuru and Kumakyu had. A god had given them to me

after all. They didn't look it when I stared at their faces though.

Once Shinobu came over, we all had breakfast and headed out to Linesu. According to her, we would go to the shore by carriage and then ride to Linesu on my bears. They'd ridden Hayatemaru to the carriage we'd be taking.

"Please hurry and board," Shinobu said as she clambered into the driver's seat.

I guess it made sense she was driving. If anyone else had come along, I wouldn't let them see my bears run across the water.

"Well, we're off," Shinobu said.

Once she was sure we were in the carriage, Shinobu got it moving.

"Lady Sakura, it seems you like Kumakyu," Shinobu said from the driver's seat.

Sakura carefully put my bear in her lap, holding it slightly differently from Fina and Noa. Kumayuru was also on my lap, by the way.

"I feel relieved when I'm with the esteemed Kumakyu."

"I know what you mean. Because they're so soft and feels so nice."

I agreed. My bears were great to snuggle.

"Yes, they are soft, but holding the esteemed Kumakyu comforts me and settles my heart."

Aw. I was glad Kumakyu made her feel safer in her dreams.

"Also the Land of Wa believes white to be a lucky color that is a symbol of purity. So that might also be why I feel this way."

"Cwoon." Kumayuru, who was black, gave a sorrowful croon.

"I do not believe you are impure, esteemed Kumayuru. Black isn't bad luck, so please don't look at me that way." To comfort Kumayuru, Sakura reached out and patted my

bear's face.

I vaguely remembered hearing white birds, snakes, and cats were good luck. The rabbit of matchmaking was also white. Thinking about it now, I guessed white was a lucky color. Putting it another way, dark colors were usually wicked, unlucky, and dirty. They were associated with more bad things than good.

None of that mattered, though.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, you both bring me good luck."

Both my bears happily crooned at that. Every day was fun because I had my bears with me. I couldn't imagine living without them.

After a little while, the carriage left the town and we were at the shoreline.

"No one should be able to see from here. But we gotta be careful of the ships out on the sea."

Well, if we kept our distance, they wouldn't come near us either.

Shinobu recalled Hayatemaru. I put the entire carriage in my bear storage. They'd already seen me put several tatami mats in there, so there was no point in hiding it. Then I returned my bears to their original size so we could cross the water.

"Okay, I'm going to have Sakura and Shinobu ride on you, Kumakyu, is that okay?"

"Cwoon."

Kumakyu crouched in front of Sakura.

"Oh, esteemed Kumakyu, I look forward to our journey."

Sakura gingerly got onto Kumakyu's back. She seemed about to fall over, but Kumakyu shifted around to keep her upright.

"Thank you," she said.

“Cwoon.”

“That is the first time I’ve ridden on a bear.”

I didn’t think there were a lot of opportunities to ride a bear, so that didn’t surprise me. They weren’t the type of animal to just let anyone ride them.

“All right, and I’m counting on you too,” Shinobu got on after Sakura from behind, then I got on Kumayuru.

“They really can run across the top of the water? They’re not going to swim, right?”

“Didn’t you see it earlier, Shinobu?”

“I did, but I still can’t believe it.”

“Then do you want to go by boat by yourself?”

“Yuna! Why are you bullying me?”

“I’m not. If you feel anxious, I was just thinking you could get on a boat instead.” She didn’t need to force herself to ride on my bears.

“I’m sorry. I guess you’re right.”

Shinobu hugged Kumakyu, trying to show she wasn’t getting off.

“Okay, we’re getting on the water, so no being surprised and no struggling.”

It wouldn’t be my fault if they didn’t listen and fell.

“Y-yes, Lady Yuna.”

“Understood.”

“Kumayuru, Kumakyu,” I said. “Let’s go.”

They both crooned at us. My bears leapt onto the water and started to run.

“Goodness! Look at us!” Sakura cried.

"This is amazing," Shinobu said.

"This is like a dream."

Sakura was smiling as she rode Kumakyu. She looked like a kid on an amusement park ride, though unlike most kids, Sakura was kind of mature for her age. She took what she was doing seriously; very formal. I almost wished Shinobu would take a leaf from her book too.

"What is it?" She seemed to have noticed I was looking at her.

"It's nothing," I told her. "Okay, I'm going to have them go faster now, so hold on tight."

Well, they wouldn't fall off because of Kumayuru and Kumakyu's abilities, but it couldn't hurt. If you wanted to get off, you could fall off.

My bears ran toward Linesu. I could see it in the distance even from our current position. Well, if it was big enough, its visibility didn't mean it was close.

As we got closer, I started to be able to make out how large it really was. Maybe about the same size as Talgwei? I couldn't tell for sure, but that's what it seemed like.

When I looked up at the island, I saw a black bird thing taking flight. That seemed a little ominous.

It didn't take long before we were at the wharf.

"Look how far we came!"

"I'm amazed Kumakyu and Kumayuru can actually run on water," Shinobu said.

"Thank you so much, esteemed Kumakyu."

"This was a valuable experience. Thank you," Shinobu also said.

Kumakyu was ecstatic to get their praise.

"Thank you too, Kumayuru," I said.

"Cwoon."

Once we were on Linesu, we headed straight into the woods while still on my bears. The island was covered in forest, so there was only one road leading into it. Kagari was supposed to be deeper in.

“So Lady Kagari lives here alone?”

“Yes. Sometimes people come to look after the island, but usually the caretaker lives alone.”

“Do you feel bad leaving her alone in a place like this though?”

Even a former shut-in like me wouldn’t want to live on a deserted island. What would I do for internet or T.V.? Yeah, don’t think I could do it.

“She enjoys being on her own. Sometimes she comes to the town around the castle too for a change of pace. She doesn’t leave for long, but it’s not nearly as bad as you might be imagining, Lady Yuna.”

Well, if Sakura said so. I would’ve felt sorry for her if she were like, locked away here as a sacrifice or something.

Kumayuru and Kumakyu continued down a paved road, which headed straight toward the island’s center.

“I think we should be able to see it soon.”

Just like that, I caught sight of a building that looked a lot like a shrine. We got off of my bears and headed into the shrine.

“Lady Kagari, are you in?” Sakura called into the shrine.

“Who calls upon me?”

“It’s Sakura.”

“You’ve come again? I’m quite sure I told you to escape abroad.”

A beautiful woman in her twenties appeared from inside the shrine. Her hair, which was long and golden, fluttered as she made her way toward us. She wore a colorful kimono, which set off her golden hair. Her breasts were close to spilling over the wide

gap in her nearly-open kimono.

"Oh! Why are you dressing like that again? Please maintain some modesty."

Even though we were all girls, I had no idea where to direct my eyes. She was really pretty. Her boobs were pretty hard to miss. They were so big. Almost as big as mine would be when I grew into mine, I bet.

"Enough of that. 'Tis no concern, as no one would ever cast an eye upon me here," the lady said.

"We're seeing you right now."

"Yet we are all maidens. I see no issue," the woman protested.

"You can't. You really need to dress properly. I've even brought visitors this time. Shinobu, please help me," Sakura said.

"All right."



The two of them approached Kagari and fixed up her clothes like they'd done it a hundred times before.

Was this pretty blonde woman really the person taking care of the barrier?

CHAPTER 487

THE BEAR TALKS WITH LADY KAGARI

THANKS TO SAKURA and Shinobu, Lady Kagari was now dressed properly. She sat down roughly, cross-legged, which detracted from her beauty. Sakura sighed. Apparently, this was a regular thing.

“Sakura, I am sure I told you to leave this country,” the woman repeated what she’d said to Sakura earlier.

“I couldn’t leave you behind, Lady Kagari.”

“You needn’t worry about me,” the woman said.

She seemed sort of resigned.

“Lady Kagari...”

“I promised your mother I would protect you as well.”

“My mother...?”

“Indeed. She asked me to do so before she passed, so I must protect you, even if it means risking my own life.”

“Lady Kagari, even so, you...”

“If the Orochi revives, even I do not know what will come to be. I am only certain a great many people will die. I do not want you to be one of them,” the woman said to Sakura gently. She seemed genuinely concerned based on the look on her face.

“Now, who is this girl in the peculiar outfit? And why have you brought bears along with you?”

The woman looked at me where I was behind Sakura.

“This is Lady Yuna, the light of hope from the dream I told you about the other day. Her white bear is the esteemed Kumakyu, and the black bear is the esteemed Kumayuru.”

Sakura introduced all of us. It felt kind of awkward for her to describe me as the light of hope again, but if she was claiming I glowed in her dreams, then I guessed the name fit.

“Lady Yuna, this is Lady Kagari, who is the caretaker of the island’s barrier.”

Now we were both introduced and ready to talk.

“Sakura, I know you can see the future in these dreams of yours, but do you truly see this girl in a strange bear outfit as the light of hope?”

Ms. Kagari seemed suspicious. Naturally. Sakura looked over at me and said without any hesitation at all, “Yes, I see her as the light.”

“Are you sure you still have your power to see the future?”

“I think that Lady Yuna will be able to help you,” Sakura said, so Ms. Kagari looked at me appraisingly.

“Yuna, was it? How much do you already know?”

“That the seal on the Orochi, which is on this island, is about to break and you need help?”

I summarized the rest of what I’d heard from Sakura.

“Why would you fight the Orochi after knowing all this about it? Are you sure you haven’t deluded yourself into believing you can fight it because Sakura called you the light of hope? You would have to be either a simpleton or an ignoramus to have no fear of death.”

Wow. Guess I was silly if I said “yes,” no matter what.

“I have no idea if I can fight this Orochi since I haven’t seen it before. If I can’t do it, I’ll run away. I want to at least try for Sakura’s sake.”

“Lady Yuna...” Sakura seemed happy when I said that.

I just wouldn't know until I fought it, but if they asked whether I was willing to risk my life for this, my answer would be a resounding "no." Still, I had the bear gear I'd gotten from the god and I didn't want to abandon Sakura while she was in a battle with fate.

It didn't seem like Ms. Kagari believed either of us, though.

"You attempted to bring others who claimed they could fight the Orochi, but I turned them back because they were not powerful enough. They would simply lose their lives for nothing if they fought. I do not wish for you to lose your life at such a young age. No one will speak ill of you if you quickly leave this country."

She flicked her hand as though to signal for me to go home.

"Lady Kagari! Lady Yuna truly is the light of hope. She is powerful too."

"Even if you are right, I've grown tired of this. There is no hope. I am the only one who understands how powerful the Orochi truly is. Only those who have fought it understand that."

"You may be right, but..."

Did she just imply she fought the Orochi?

"But it was sealed away over a century ago, right? Ms. Kagari, was it? You don't seem that old," I said.

She looked like she was in her twenties. Maybe she could have looked young like Elleaura, but that would mean she could only be in her thirties at most. And she was claiming that she'd fought the Orochi hundreds of years ago? At first I assumed she was an elf, but she didn't have long ears.

"Sakura, you did not inform her about me?"

"No, I thought that she might think it was a lie and wouldn't accept the quest." Sakura apologetically looked at me. "And only a small number of people know of you. It isn't something I can tell everyone."

"I know you would not reveal the information to anyone. Sakura, look at her again. Are you sure you want to place your faith in this young maiden?"

Sakura stared at me.

"She has my faith."

"I see. Then that'll do," Ms. Kagari said, then her hair ruffled and long, dark brown ears appeared from under her hair. Then her kimono shifted and something fuzzy appeared from under it.

She had animal ears and a tail?

"I am a centuries-old fox. Several hundred years ago, I fought the Orochi and learned how dreadful it truly was."

"A fox..."

Did that mean she was a fox spirit?

"Yes, I am a beast. Are you frightened?"

The tail quivered from under her kimono.

"Not in particular," I said.

I mean, this world had monsters. I wasn't all that scared of a fox that could take on the form of a human.

"Oh. What a boring reaction," she said. "I hoped you would call me a liar! But now you understand. I was alive hundreds of years ago and even before that."

Well, elves exist in this world, so it didn't seem all that weird for a fox spirit to live for centuries.

"Then you must understand the weight of my words when I tell you of the monster I battled. I will not say it cannot be vanquished. It has been weakened in the past and we were able to seal it away, however, there were many who lost their lives. Most importantly, those who helped me in the past are no longer here."

Ms. Kagari's eyes took on a faraway look.

"But you are not alone, so that isn't true. If you join forces with Lady Yuna, you can do

it."

"Do not overestimate my abilities. I must use all my power to simply hold the barrier. I no longer have the power to fight."

"How long will the barrier last?"

"Now 'tis only a matter of time before it falls."

"Lady Kagari, please accept Lady Yuna's help in that case."

Ms. Kagari stared straight at Sakura.

"You truly believe in this strangely dressed girl then. All right..."

"Lady Kagari!"

Sakura seemed happy when she realized she'd been able to convince Ms. Kagari.

"Then if you truly are the light of hope, then show me hope, won't you," Ms. Kagari said.

"Show you? How? Do I just fight you to show you then?"

"No, I would like you to bring the person I most hope to have at my side to me. If you are able to do this, then I shall accept you are the light of hope."

So now she was suddenly making unreasonable demands. I didn't know anyone in the Land of Wa.

"Who is it?" I asked anyway just to find out.

"At the time the orochi went on a rampage, I had another with me."

"Oh, Lady Kagari..."

"Oh-ho, I know," she said. "I know it is impossible, so it could only happen if there were a miracle. But to me, this is what hope would be."

"Just so you know, I can't bring you someone who's dead."

I wasn't going to be able to bring a centuries-old blast from the past here or anything.

"As long as he has not been killed, he should be alive and well somewhere."

"So this person's alive? Is it another fox like you?"

Ms. Kagari shook her head.

"He is an elf."

An elf...?

"Where he is now, I do not know. However, he is also the one who created this barrier, so if he is here, then we shall manage in some way. If you truly are Sakura's light of hope, then show me some heartlight. Allow me to see Mumulute once more! If you cannot, then simply go home."

"...?!" Me and my bears all reacted to that name.

"Lady Kagari, that's simply impossible," Sakura was saying.

"I am well aware. I know 'tis nothing but a dream. It may be impossible or he may be somewhere. Perhaps he has already perished in some accident. However, I have thought time and time again that I wished Mumulute could be by my side. That if only he were here, we could turn back this peril. However, he is not. And 'tis impossible for him to be here." Ms. Kagari's voice died into a whisper and she seemed close to tears.

By Mumulute, did she mean *that* Mumulute?

"So this Mr. Mumulute elf person—has he been to this nation before?" I asked.

"Yes, when I was but a young kit."

She looked like a young kit to me right now, to be honest.

"Then the orochi appeared, and when we needed him most, the adventurer appeared. Mumulute created a sealing circle for us on this island—one that he claimed to be a secret of the elves—and he successfully sealed the weakened orochi. And I have remained here in this land since to protect the barrier."

Was this Mumulute the one I knew?

"So, if you claim to be the light of hope, then bring Mumulute to me. Show me hope."

She sounded heartbroken as she said that.

"Lady Kagari..."

"..."

Sakura and Shinobu had no idea what to say. They were probably convinced doing this would be impossible. I knew a Mumulute who was a man—an elf who fit the description. Yeah. I could bring him here.

"So if I bring Mr. Mumulute, then I'll be able to defeat the Orochi?"

"That I do not know. But the possibility would be much higher. And if you could bring Mumulute, then I will put my full faith into you being the light of hope. Ha ha. But such a miracle would never happen even if the whole world were flipped atop its head."

Well, what to do...

First, I just needed to bring Mumulute over. But if I did that, then I'd need to explain the bear transport gate. And what would happen if he wasn't the right Mumulute? Then again, he knew a lot about barriers and magic circles. He probably was the right person.

"You would do well to give up and return home," she said conclusively.

"What will you do then, Ms. Kagari?"

"'Tis the fate of the barrier's caretaker. I must remain until the end to face the Orochi."

Then she meant she'd die?

"Lady Kagari, please believe in Lady Yuna."

Sakura bowed her head.

"Nay. You would do well to leave soon, girl dressed as a bear. If you truly are Sakura's

light of hope, then please, take Sakura and escape. I am begging you.”

Ms. Kagari bowed her head low to me. It didn’t seem that she didn’t trust me or anything like that. I think she just really was worried about Sakura.

“Lady Kagari...” Sakura didn’t seem to know what to say.

“Okay... So I just need to bring you this Mr. Mumulute then,” I said.

I couldn’t just abandon her now. I couldn’t forgive myself if I did. And I didn’t want the Land of Wa to be destroyed.

“What are you saying? We do not even know where he may be. Yet you claim you will simply bring him here?” Ms. Kagari stood up as though she realized something. “You—you do not mean to say you know him?!”

She slowly approached me and grabbed my shoulders.

“I know an elf named Mumulute.”

“Lady Yuna, you really know him?”

“He fits the description, so I think it must be him, but I won’t know for sure until I check.”

“Where is this Mumulute you know?! Is he near here? You really believe you can bring him here?”

She started to shake my shoulders really hard.

“You’ll need to all agree to keep one of my secrets though.”

“A secret of yours, Lady Yuna?”

“Yeah, You’ll need to keep it from the king, and also your teacher.”

I looked at all three of them. I didn’t want the bear gate to become widespread information.

“I would not speak a word to anyone. I will do as you say,” Sakura said.

"And I as well," Ms. Kagari said. "I will make any promise required to see Mumulute."

We all looked at Shinobu.

"I wouldn't tell anybody either, of course," she said.

"And you can't write it in a letter either."

"Of course I wouldn't."

She was definitely avoiding my eyes. Maybe I'd need to have her agree using contract magic? She was a ninja, after all.

CHAPTER 488

THE BEAR HAS PROMISES MADE

“I’LL CHECK, so just wait a bit.”

I left the room to use my bear phone.

“Are you going somewhere?” Ms. Kagari asked.

“I need to check in with Mr. Mumulute.”

“How will you manage that? Are you going to him now?”

Hmm. I was going to use the bear phone, but I wondered how I’d handle this smoothly without giving away too much.

“Not exactly. The way I’m contacting him is a secret too.”

“What? Do you not trust us? We will protect your secrets,” Ms. Kagari said.

“Yes, I promise as well,” Sakura said.

“Yeah,” Shinobu added.

I kind of got the sense that Shinobu was not taking this fully seriously. It would be a pain if she started

investigating me after and asking questions, though. Also, I could still potentially use contract magic.

“I’ll repeat this again: You can’t tell anybody.”

I pulled out my bear phone and dialed up Luimin. After a while, I heard her voice through the phone.

“Yuna?”

“Do you have a sec?”

“Yes, I do. Has something happened?” Luimin asked me through the bear phone. She seemed relaxed and at ease.

“I’d like to see Mr. Mumulute. Could I go over there right now?”

“My grandfather? Just a second. I’ll go check. Grandfather, Yuna wants to see you.”

I heard Mumulute answer, “All right,” on the other end of the phone.

“It looks like you can.”

“Is Mr. Mumulute with you?”

“We’re in the middle of fishing right now. Would you like some fish too? I caught a really big one.”

Even though everyone on my side of the line was frazzled about the orochi, I could hear in Luimin’s tone of voice that she was enjoying herself. She was always bright and cheerful.

“Sure, but I’m going over to you right now, so can you tell Mumulute that?”

“Uh-huh, I will. Then we’ll head home right now.”

“Thank you. Could you come to the sacred tree then?”

“The sacred tree?”

“And sorry, but remember how you and Mumulute agreed to contract magic? Could you ask Mumulute to get it ready again?”

“Contract magic?”

“Yeah, the one where you ‘die’ if you leak my secret.”

I glanced at Shinobu as I emphasized the word “die.”

“Oh, yes, the one where they feel like they’re going to die if they spill any of your secrets.”

Are you making a contract with someone?"

"Yeah. I need to reveal a few of my secrets to some people, but there's one person who might talk to others." I glanced at Shinobu again. "So can you prep a contract that'll make the person 'die' if they talk?"

"Okay. I'll tell Grandfather and get it ready right away."

Even when I was talking about death over and over, Luimin still seemed cheerful over the phone.

"Sorry, for disturbing you while you're fishing."

"We can do that whenever. I'm just happy I get to see you."

"Thank you. Okay, I'm counting on you."

I hung up the bear phone. Now we just needed to get Mumulute here.

"Uh, you were looking right at me while saying somethin' pretty disturbing. Who was that person we heard from that strange device?"

"It sounded like a cute girl's voice."

"And she spoke about her grandfather... you don't mean to say..."

"That was Mumulute's granddaughter."

"So he's married and had grandchildren?"

"He has at least three. I'm not sure how many kids he has though."

If he had more kids, maybe he'd have even more grandchildren too. I only knew about Luimin and Sanya's family.

"Isn't there something more important we should be asking about? What was that bear-shaped device?"

Everyone looked at the bear phone in my hand.

“What a cute bear.”

“It would be better as a fox.”

I heard croons from my bears. Kumayuru and Kumakyu were protesting Ms. Kagari’s comment.

“I like bears,” I said, which put Kumayuru and Kumakyu back in a good mood.

“So, what is that?” Shinobu brought the conversation back to my bear phone again as she stared at it.

“It’s a magical device that lets you talk with people who are far away.”

“You have a magical device like that? So you could make reports wherever you are, then? I’d like one for myself.” Shinobu was starting to reach for the bear phone, so I stowed it away in my bear storage.

“Hey!”

“Sorry, but I’m the only one who can use it.”

“Really? Aw, but if I just had something as handy as that, my job would be so much easier.”

Shinobu seemed sad, but if I gave her a phone, she’d only be able to talk to me. She mentioned a job, though. Was she really a ninja?

“But Lady Yuna, you said earlier that you would go see Lord Mumulute. How will you do that? Is he close by?”

“What? Was he living right under my nose this entire time?!” Ms. Kagari shifted when Sakura made her comment.

“No. He’s probably pretty far away.”

I didn’t know where Talgwei had gone, but I doubted we were anywhere near the elves’ village.

“Then how shall we see him?” Ms. Kagari asked.

Through the bear gate. I just needed to make sure of something first.

"So, to be sure, will I be able to bring Mumulute to the island? I heard men couldn't enter."

The island was surrounded by a barrier that didn't allow men in. There'd be no point in bringing Mumulute here if he couldn't come in.

"If he is the same Mumulute that I speak of, that is no matter. As I said before, Mumulute created the barrier to seal the Orochi. The barrier is filled with his magic. I simply added my own magic circle to exclude men over top of it. If he is the very same Mumulute, then there should be no issue. I have been on this island over a century awaiting his return."

Over a century? Was she in love with him? Well, Ms. Kagari had a nice figure, after all—just like how my figure would be in the future. I wouldn't be surprised if something started up between her and Mumulute.

Then again, he kind of had a wife and kids, and even grandkids. Maybe they could have been together before he got married though?

"So I can bring him here then?"

"Yes, 'tis fine if you do. Those who created the barrier, including Mumulute, may enter. Though Mumulute is likely the only one who still lives."

Humans didn't live forever, like elves did. Mumulute was the only guy who could enter the barrier.

"So, Lady Yuna, how will you bring Lord Mumulute here?"

"It's a secret, really, but a ton of people's lives are in the balance, and we might be able to save them if Mumulute were here, right? So I'll tell you my secret, but you can't tell anyone, just like I said earlier. Normally, I'd have you all enter a magical contract."

Sakura seemed fine, but Shinobu was a talker. I bet she'd talk if the king ordered her to.

"Do you mean the contract that would result in our deaths if we were to tell your secrets, Lady Yuna?"

“Yeah, basically.”

“As I said earlier, I wouldn’t speak a word of it. So if it would help you feel at ease, I will accept that magical contract.”

“And I as well,” Ms. Kagari said. “If you can bring Mumulute here, I will enter any contract you ask me to.”

Sakura and Kagari seemed undeterred by the prospect of a death contract.

“Are you really sure? Like I said before, you could die.”

“I do not mind. I never intend to speak your secrets, so I wouldn’t be in danger.”

“And I am not a woman who would speak so easily of such things.”

They never intended on breaking the contract, so they weren’t afraid of it.

That left Shinobu. We all looked at her.

“There’s nothing to think about. Yuna saved my life and she’s going to save our nation. If you ask me to stay silent, I won’t tell a soul.”

“Are you really sure?”

“My life is in your hands, Yuna.” Shinobu placed her right hand on her heart.

“I don’t need your life. All I need is your silence.”

Now that everyone had made their promises, I brought out a bear gate.

“A door!”

“A bear door,” Kagari said.

“It’s a bear,” Shinobu also said.

“When I opened this door, it’ll connect to the village Mumulute lives in.”

“Then Mumulute is just behind this door...”

Kagari tried to open it.

"It'll only open for me. It's the same as the device I was using to talk with earlier. They only work when I use them."

As we were talking, I heard the bear phone go off in my storage. I pulled it out.

"*Yuna, we're near the sacred tree now.*"

"Then I'll come over right now."

"Okay, I'll be waiting."

We hung up again.

"Well, I'm going over, so Kumayuru and Kumakyu, you watch over Shinobu and make sure she doesn't do anything suspicious."

They both crooned.

"Wait, why'd you only name me right then?"

"It was a joke..."

"You're so mean. I risk my life and tell you I believe in you, but you still joke like that?"

Shinobu seemed pretty sad. I guess I'd taken the teasing a little too far.

Anyway, I left the three of them with my bears and used the gate to open a passage between here and the bear house within the sacred tree's barrier.

When the three saw a room on the other side of the door, they were shocked. I stepped through.

"So Mumulute is ahead of here."

Ms. Kagari started to walk, so I stopped her.

"This is inside of the elves' barrier, so it might be dangerous. You shouldn't come through it."

Ms. Kagari stopped herself from going through the gate.

"I'll bring Mumulute over" I said, then I closed the gate and went past the rocky terrain that encapsulated the sacred tree. When I got outside of the area, I saw Luimin and Mumulute.

CHAPTER 489

THE BEAR EXPLAINS TO MUMULUTE

“YUNA!”

Luimin happily ran over when she saw me. If she had a tail like Ms. Kagari, it'd probably be wagging right that minute.

“Do you have time to eat today?” Luimin asked. “I caught a really big fish.”

She seemed really happy about that since she gave me a huge smile.

“Umm, maybe not today. I’m sorry.”

Since Sakura and the others knew about the gate now, I could come back another time for a meal. But the situation the Land of Wa was in was a huge weight on me.

“I see then. That’s too bad.”

Luimin looked a little glum. If she had fox ears, then they would have been drooping right now. I couldn’t

help but imagine those things after seeing Ms. Kagari’s ears and tail.

“If you ask me next time in advance, I’ll take you up on it though. Let me know the next time you catch something.”

“Really? I’ll hold you to it then.”

Her ears and tail pricked up again (in my mind).

After that, I started talking to Mumulute.

“Mr. Mumulute, thank you for coming here.”

“No need to thank me. You’ve helped me so much, don’t worry about a little thing like

this. So, you need contract magic? Are there people you need to tell your secret to?"

"There are, and there's someone who wants to meet you."

"Me?"

"Have you been to a place called the Land of Wa where you helped seal away a monster called an orochi? And met a fox woman named Kagari?"

"The Land of Wa... the orochi... seal... Kagari... fox..."

Mr. Mumulute seemed to be mulling over my words. It'd happened over a hundred years ago. He couldn't easily remember it, apparently. His face moved as if the images were slowly returning to him, and he snapped to the present suddenly.

"The orochi, huh? Now that was a time. I did do that."

He sounded nostalgic. So it looked like he was the same Mumulute.

"But how did you know about all of that?"

"Uh, so I just went to the Land of Wa and the orochi seems like it's about to come back. I'm supposed to help defeat it, or reseal it, I guess. Ms. Kagari said that an adventurer from way back named Mumulute who was an elf helped them seal the orochi. I thought that it might be you, so I called Luimin."

I gave him the rough rundown.

"I see," he said.

"Grandfather, did you really do all of that?"

"When I was young. Still, the orochi's seal is breaking? Kagari must have kept watch over it until now, then."

"So she wants you to come to the Land of Wa."

"Is that far away?" Luimin asked.

I had no idea. I didn't even know what distance it was away from here. While I was

trying to come up with a way to answer that, Mumulute answered for me. “It is. I just so happened to come across it on my journey at the time. How did you get involved in all of this though, miss?”

“I just happened to stop by there too, but then a whole bunch of things happened and I ended up finding out about the orochi, then I met Kagari. She told me about what you did.”

Maybe I’d been the light of hope in Sakura’s dreams specifically because I could bring Mr. Mumulute over. No one else had the means of doing that.

“You happened to come across it? That shouldn’t be an easy thing to do.”

It was all a combination of being on Talgwei and having my bear gate. I explained that I’d happened to come across the Land of Wa while visiting a moving island that I had a bear gate on (without telling him about Talgwei, at least for now).

“The ocean is like a really big lake, right?” Luimin asked.

“It’s even bigger than that.”

“I’d like to see the ocean someday.”

Luimin already knew about the bear gates, so I could take her. Maybe I could bring her and Fina together next time?

“So, Mr. Mumulute, would you come to the Land of Wa?”

“Sure, I can. If Ms. Kagari is asking for help, then I couldn’t say no.”

“Thank you.”

“No need to thank me. It was something I still needed to do. I’ll feel better resolving this while I’m alive so I don’t worry about it for my remaining years.”

He would have worried about it? I was pretty sure he’d forgotten all about it until just a moment ago. How many years did he have left anyway? Mr. Mumulute would probably outlive me.

I had a lot of things I wanted to poke fun at, but I decided to let it all go.

“Let’s go see Kagari then.”

So, Mumulute was coming to the Land of Wa. Then Luimin said, “Yuna, could I come too?”

“We might need to fight, so it’s better if you stick around here, Luimin.”

She couldn’t exactly help out.

“I might not be able to contribute, but I’d still like to help you and Grandfather.”

“Luimin...”

“Also, I’m curious about Kagari. Is she one of your old flames?” Luimin asked. Oh! Was that it?

“What are you talking about, Luimin?”

“Mom was talking about it. That men risk their lives for the women they like.”

“Sh-she’s not an old flame or anything like that. She was just in trouble, so I lent her a hand.”

“You seem nervous, Grandfather.”

“Who wouldn’t be with their grandchild talking like that? You agree with me, don’t you, miss?”

I didn’t know what to say. I didn’t have grandchildren or even children. I could get what he was trying to say though.

“So I can meet Kagari then, can’t I?”

“Well... I suppose.”

In the end, Mr. Mumulute caved and Luimin was coming with us.

“If it becomes dangerous, you’ll have to go home right away.”

“Okay.”

If we needed to fight, then we could just send her home. That way I could also leave Sakura in her care temporarily at the elves' village too. We'd have enough time for that, at least.

Since the bear gate I'd used was inside the sacred tree's barrier, I brought out a new gate and connected it to the gate where Ms. Kagari and the others were. When I opened the door, I found Shinobu being restrained by Kumayuru.

"What are you doing?"

"Yuna, please help me," Shinobu said.

I looked at Sakura and gave her a look that asked, *What happened here?*

"Um, after you left through the door, Shinobu became curious and started to look at it. I tried to stop her, but she said, 'I just wanna see a bit.'" Sakura gave her best impression of Shinobu when she said that. It was kind of cute. "Then the esteemed Kumakyu and Kumayuru stopped her and this is what happened."

My bears were begging for attention, so I said, "Kumayuru, Kumakyu, thank you both." I gave Kumayuru, who still had Shinobu pinned, a pat, then Kumakyu one too for fairness's sake.

"Urgh, it's heavy. Please save me sooner rather than later."

"Cwoon."

"They're not heavy."

"No, they really are. It's a bear, y'know. A whole bear is right on top of me. Or are you telling me Kumayuru cares about its weight? Like it's a teenage girl or somethin'?"

"Maybe."

I mean, even if Kumayuru wasn't a teenage girl, nobody would want someone fat-shaming them. That wasn't something that anyone wanted to hear.

"Kumayuru, please let her go," I said.

"Cwoon."

Kumayuru got off of Shinobu.

"That was so much weight."

"It's your own fault that this happened, Shinobu," Sakura softly chided her.

"But I got curious. You can get to a whole new world just by opening up a door. It's supernatural."

I got how she felt. Even I felt awed by magic when I first saw and used it.

"May we come through, miss?"

"Oh, yeah, sorry. You can step through."

Mr. Mumulute and Luimin, who were outside the bear gate, went through it cautiously.

"Is that you, Mumulute?"

"Kagari?"

Ms. Kagari slowly approached Mr. Mumulute.

"Is that really you, Mumulute?" She had to check again. Her voice was full of emotion.

"It's been quite a long time."

"How long do you think I've been waiting, you fool!"

Kagari started to pummel Mumulute in the chest. It was their first meeting in over a hundred years, and unlike any reunion I'd had in my life. I couldn't even imagine what it'd be like seeing someone for the first time in a century.

"Mumulute, Mumulute."

"I'm sorry," Mumulute said as Kagari wept into his chest.

We quietly waited so we wouldn't disrupt their reunion.

"All better now?"

After a while, Ms. Kagari let go of Mr. Mumulute and moved away from him.

“I’m sorry. Sakura, Shinobu, you forget what you just saw.”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t see anything, so it’s all fine,” Shinobu said.

They were both pretending they had no idea what she was talking about, which just went to show how nice they were.

“So, tell me, is this fetching girl the grandchild that the girl spoke to me about?”

Ms. Kagari looked at Luimin.

“Um, yes. I’m Luimin.” After introducing herself, Luimin bobbed her head slightly.

“You’re not like Mumulute in the slightest. You’re cute. I am Kagari, and Mumulute once granted me aid.”

“My name is Sakura. It is nice to meet you, Lady Luimin.” Sakura also joined in on the greetings.

“Lady? Just Luimin is fine.” Luimin waved her hands wildly as she asked for Sakura to get rid of the honorific.

“But you are the grandchild of the person who helped us seal the Orochi in the past. I could never be so rude as to simply use your name.”

“I’m really not special enough for that, so please don’t.”

“I see. Then may I call you Miss Luimin?”

“Sure, that would be fine. Then, can I call you Saku?”

“Yes.”

Sakura seemed very happy. Maybe Sakura liked cute nicknames like that?

“I’m Shinobu. Heya, Luimin.”

Okay, now *that* was a casual greeting, but Luimin didn't seem to mind.

"Yes, it's nice to meet you, Miss Shinobu."

Introductions made, it was time to get to work.

CHAPTER 490

THE BEAR DISCUSSES THE PAST

“MY, MUMULUTE, you’ve aged,” Kagari said.

“Well, it has been some time. Generations have passed for humans, and even an elf would age in that time. I’m very well preserved if you think of it like that.”

“I, on the other hand, am still young.” Her boobs jiggled as she said it.

“Um, are you not an elf, Ms. Kagari?” Luimin asked.

“I am a fox.”

Kagari twitched her ears and tail as she said that. Luimin was looking at them with curiosity.

“May I touch them?”

“Under normal circumstances, I would categorically refuse, but you are Mumulute’s granddaughter, so I shall make an exception for you.”

“Thank you.”

Luimin seemed happy, but Sakura and Shinobu were both shocked. Luimin didn’t notice at all as she touched Ms. Kagari’s ears and tail.

“They’re so soft and fluffy.”

“Thank you. I do take care of myself, after all.”

I wanted to feel them too. Kumayuru and Kumakyu nuzzled me on either side like they’d read my mind. Apparently they wanted me to pet them instead if I was going to pet anyone. I pulled off my bear puppets and patted my bears. They were soft and fluffy, which was great.

"Thank you," Luimin said, seeming satisfied. She moved away from Ms. Kagari.

"You're amazing Luimin. I can't believe you asked Lady Kagari to do that."

"Was I not supposed to?"

"It isn't not allowed, but we would never dare to ask Lady Kagari if we could do that."

"Sakura did badger me in the past," Ms. Kagari said.

"That was only when I was young and still didn't know you very well," Sakura pouted.

She was *still* young, honestly.

"I had no idea. I'm sorry for asking without knowing anything."

"Ha ha. That is quite all right." Ms. Kagari smiled gently.

"Also, Mumulute, show me your face."

"What is it?"

Mr. Mumulute did as Ms. Kagari asked, then she gently stroked his face. It was kind of a flirty move, but the moment I thought that, I heard a slap. She'd actually done it!

For a moment, Mr. Mumulute seemed like he had no idea what had happened.

"How could you leave me here and disappear from the country? Do you have any idea how much I have been through? They believed I was the hero who sealed the orochi. It was an entire ordeal."

"I did say goodbye to you."

"You did, however, you escaped the night before the king was to thank you. I had to attend on my own."

"We were roaming adventurers. We all conferred with each other and decided to run, so it wasn't all my doing."

"Then why would you not take me with you?"

“Because you were already a resident here in this land. And you had something to protect here. So, I talked to everyone and we decided only we would go. Even if we invited you, I don’t think you would have said yes.”

“That may be the case, but I wish you would have asked.”

“Sorry...” Mr. Mumulute looked down and murmured as he placed a hand on Kagari’s head.

“But you came back, so I forgive you.”

“I missed you too.”

They gazed at one another fondly while I pretended I never knew that Mr. Mumulute had forgotten Ms. Kagari completely. If I told her that, Ms. Kagari probably would have killed him. I’m the type of gal who can read the room. But there was someone present who didn’t have my good sensibilities.

“Oh, but Grandfather! You didn’t remember her at all, I thought?”

Luimin might not have meant badly, but oh, wow, was that not helping! I couldn’t save the situation, and Mr. Mumulute ended up on the receiving end of Ms. Kagari’s punch.

“So, Kagari, I heard from the girl that the Orochi is about to revive. Is that true?” Mr. Mumulute rubbed his red cheek as he asked.

“Yes, ‘tis true. Your magic circle has weakened. It will break soon and the Orochi will revive. We should handle this on our own as a country, but it seems we will need to seek your help once more, even though it is no longer your concern as someone who lives so far from us. I am sorry for the trouble we are causing you.”

Ms. Kagari bowed her head.

“Oh, don’t say all that. We fought alongside each other. If I were in a spot where I couldn’t help, that would be one thing, but thanks to the girl, I can offer a helping hand.”

Mr. Mumulute actually did take Ms. Kagari’s hand.

"You're right," she said. "Please help us."

"And with her here, we should be able to make do just fine," Mr. Mumulute said as he looked at me.

"What exactly is this girl in the bear getup? She created this door and Sakura calls her the light of hope. She brought you here when I thought I would never see you again."

"She saved the elven village that is my hometown. The door I know nothing about and will ask no questions about—that is the promise I made to her."

"I see. Then I shall refrain from asking as well. I am simply content with this miracle that I am able to see you."

"Miracle... yes, I suppose it is one. I never thought I would be able to see you again either. I can't thank her enough."

The two of them looked at me. I was embarrassed. I wished they wouldn't stare like that.

"Let's put aside the orochi for now and make the agreement with the girl. So, Mumulute, will you cast your contract magic for us?"

"If you promise not to talk about anything, then you don't need to make a contract," I said to Ms. Kagari.

"No, I keep my promises. And I think that one of us might tell a secret," Sakura said looking at Shinobu.

"I wouldn't," she insisted.

"I don't doubt that you wouldn't keep a secret, but if His Majesty ordered you to, I'm sure you would."

"Well..."

"You're not in trouble. But you can't help the position you're in, so Lady Yuna, please allow us to make a contract."

Even if Shinobu didn't intend on telling anyone anything, she might need to follow the

king's orders.

"Then what about if we just have Shinobu make a contract?"

"We couldn't possibly force only Shinobu to do it."

"Yes, 'tis right. You followed through on your promise and brought Mumulute to us. 'Tis our turn to fulfill our promises. Unlike Shinobu, I have no intention of speaking to anyone about this matter, so there will be no issue if I make a contract. There is no need to be concerned."

"Yes, I wouldn't have any issue either."

"Y-yeah, no problems here," Shinobu said.

Sakura and Shinobu followed Ms. Kagari's lead.

"Mumulute, please start the process."

"All right."

Mr. Mumulute pulled a carpet out from his item bag and unfurled it. It had a magic circle already drawn on it. These things sure were handy.

Without a moment's hesitation, all three of them signed their contracts.

EXTRA STORY

ENCOUNTERING THE BEAR:

SHINOBU CHRONICLES

PART 1

I BELIEVED WITH everything in me that Lady Sakura's dream was true, so I waited for when the savior of our nation would arrive. I had no idea who this person would be. All we knew was that they would come from the ocean to the east and ride upon a beast and would be like a warm light.

If they were coming from the ocean, that probably meant they'd be on a boat. We had some ships come in to trade with us and lots of people who traveled here, so that seemed the most likely possibility. But no ships were coming right now.

"I hope that they come soon."

I absentmindedly watched the ocean from a high spot where I could easily see if anything dark was headed for the shore.

"What's that?"

I pulled out a scope and peered at it. It was somewhere around here...

"...?!"

I pulled my eye away from the eyepiece and squinted. Unbelievable! A black bear was running on top of the water. There was a person riding atop it!

I couldn't believe it. I was seeing a bear running on top of the water already as it was, but when I looked more closely, the person riding on top of it looked oddly like a bear too.

I looked in my scope one more time. That was definitely a black bear running across the water—no question. When I looked even more closely, a second, white bear was

with them.

A person coming from the eastern sea riding on a beast...

"This can't be possible..."

This wasn't what I'd imagined at all.

This person was supposed to fight a giant snake. I thought it would be a man on some ferocious beast. Instead, she was a girl dressed weirdly like a bear riding on *another* bear over the eastern sea.

A hero accompanied by a beast from the eastern sea... This was the light of hope that Lady Sakura had mentioned? I couldn't imagine this was it. But how could it be anyone else?

The girl looked around cautiously, then, finally, came ashore.

"That's hinky."

She raised her arm and then the bears both disappeared.

"Is that bear a summon?"

I had a horse summon named Hayatemaru too. She must have recalled them then. She probably assumed that bringing bears into town would cause a commotion. She started hurrying into the heart of town.

I left my post and followed her in. She stuck out like a sore thumb because of her clothes, so it wasn't too hard to tail her.

"She really doesn't blend in," I commented to myself.

Most of the people she passed stared at her. She seemed to be having a high time checking out the town as she walked through.

"Is she a tourist?"

She walked around town and stopped right in front of a traditional inn. She thought for a second as she read the sign and headed inside.

“I guess she needs digs?”

I wanted to go in to check it for myself, but it was too soon to approach her. I needed to be deliberate about this.

I watched the inn for a while, but she didn’t come out. Guess this was gonna be where she set up for the night.

I wrote up two letters and handed them over to a messenger.

“I’m counting on you,” I told the messenger and he left with the letters.

“All right... what now?”

I couldn’t go get a room at the same inn, and I couldn’t stop watching for her.

“Guess I’m stuck staking the place out from outside.”

Since she could leave the inn, I had to stay out here.

The sun set. I was getting mighty sleepy. She showed no sign of leaving the building.

After sunrise, she finally came back out, still dressed in the same bear costume.

“I guess she knows what she’s about, huh?”

She started walking around town, so I followed her from afar. As before, she really stuck out and everyone she passed by stared at her. Even if I stared right at her, she might not have noticed.

She pulled her bear hood over her face and started to run.

“Is she embarrassed?”

Well, why wear that bear getup, then? While I was thinking that over and watching her, she stopped in front of a shop.

“Tatami?”

It was a tatami shop. She went inside. I watched her from afar. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but the woman in the shop looked surprised when she saw the girl's outfit.

"Well, she is dressed like a bear, after all..."

After a while, she left the shop looking satisfied. I caught her buying about sixty tatami mats. I was surprised her item bag could fit that many. Had to be loaded, too.

After she bought tatami, she also got furniture and some food at a stall. She seemed to be having fun. Other than her outfit, she really seemed like a normal girl.

She really didn't seem like she could fight a gigantic snake, but she most closely matched Lady Sakura's description. She'd come from the eastern sea, and on a beast too. If she had been a huge man or a superior mage, I never would have doubted her, but she was a bear... and a cute bear, at that.

Was she really our light of hope, though? I had my doubts.

"Hm?"

While I was debating with myself, she headed into the Adventurers' Guild.

The guild? This didn't seem like the sort of place she'd visit. Was she here for a job? Or to take out a quest? I needed to gather intel, so I snuck in behind her without her noticing.

When she walked in, the whole guild started chattering and no one noticed me coming in. I sat down in a seat toward the back to hide and watched her.

The others were making fun of her and laughing. I wish they'd cut it out. I didn't know whether to join the fray and stop them. The girl herself didn't seem to mind them though.

Right then, a man came into the guild. He was just a regular man, not an adventurer.

He headed to the reception desk and talked to the receptionist. Apparently, he was there to check on a quest. Kamaitachi had appeared at his village, and he needed them

slayed, but no one would take the quest. Kamaitachi are wicked quick, and their attacks are dangerous, so you needed someone who was pretty powerful to slay 'em. Ms. Sumire at the reception desk looked around and asked whether someone could help.

That'd been a close call. Since I was hiding behind a pillar, she hadn't seen me. I could fight the kamaitachi, but I wasn't in the position to take a job right now. I needed to collect information on the bear girl. The fate of the nation depended on it. I couldn't just drop that and take a side job.

Right when I was feeling guilty about it, the bear girl talked to the man.

"How about I take this quest?"

Could she fight? Well, if she was really the hope from Lady Sakura's dream, then she had to be able to. This was the perfect chance to see what kind of stuff she was made of.

Or, that was what I'd thought, but the man got mad and started saying there was no way she could slay the kamaitachi. I understood why he felt that way, but this was no good. At this rate, the girl wouldn't take the quest.

I thought about it. Actually, this was the perfect chance to approach her. I stood up and headed over to the desk.

"Then shall I come with you?"

If I did that, I could figure out what kind of person she was and see how she handled the kamaitachi up close. I'd found a pretty good method of checking what kind of person she was, if I do say so myself. The only issue was that she knew who I was now, but I would have needed to contact her eventually anyway. This was the perfect timing for it.

Ms. Sumire convinced the man everything would be fine when I showed up. I was a pretty good adventurer myself. As long as she vouched for me, I was sure we could head out to the kamaitachi quest.

I thought that we'd both end up taking the quest, but instead, they were assuming I'd go on my own. The girl in the bear clothes tried to back out and was about to leave. But then there would be no point in taking the quest. This coulda been bad news. I

tried to think of an excuse to get her to come with me.

"Uh, well, it'd be like I stole your quest if I did," I told her. I pretended that I didn't want to seem like I was swooping in from the side to take the quest, but she didn't seem to mind.

No good. I made up more excuses and somehow finagled her to come with me on the slaying quest. That'd sure been close. But with this, I'd be able to collect a lot more intel on her.

Her name was Yuna, she was a C-rank adventurer, which was amazing for her age, but it still wasn't high enough to fight the gigantic snake.

I'd still made progress by getting her name and her rank though. Now all I needed to do was figure out how powerful she actually was.

* * *

We decided to head out to the quest early in the morning the next day, then I left the guild with Yuna. I followed behind her. It seemed like she was staying at the same inn.

Since we were going out on the same quest, I could stay at the same inn with her. I wouldn't have to be on stakeout outside this time.

Even though Yuna was here all alone, she had a giant room with a hot spring. She had to be rich. I decided to get a small room. It was a whole lot better than sleeping outside. Plus, I'd be able to get a meal and sleep in a warm bed, unlike yesterday. I couldn't just hang around in my room. I needed as much information about Yuna as I could. I decided to head to her room.

I made sure not to make any noise as I approached. I was really good at sneaking into places unnoticed.

I came close to the door, hoping I'd be able to hear something when it opened on me. Yuna was standing right in front of me.

"What is it?"

Had she noticed me? But how? I'd come here without making a sound. I knew I was undetectable. I hadn't made any mistake that would have alerted her to my presence,

especially not through a solid door.

I broke out into a sweat. It would be bad if she found me suspicious.

“Um, I wanted to talk with you about tomorrow.”

Yuna looked at me dubiously and I tried to smile it off. She thought I was sketchy.

Yuna told me she'd rely on me if anything bad happened. Because of Ms. Sumire, she knew I was strong, and that made it hard for me to really talk to her. At the same time, I needed to know something.

“How did you know I was here?”

I needed to know since it affected my work.

“Uh, your footsteps were too loud?” Yuna answered.

Uh, impossible. Not with the amount of training I'd done. I'd been very careful when I approached her room, so she couldn't have noticed.

She had to be hiding something, but she wouldn't tell me anything. I was curious, but I knew she'd clam up even more if I pressed her, so I returned to my own room.

I wrote a report to Lady Sakura and the king about my activities that day, handed it off to the messenger and finished my work.

For the first time in a while, I had a restful sleep.

EXTRA STORY

ENCOUNTERING THE BEAR:

SHINOBU CHRONICLES

PART 2

THE NEXT DAY, after I ate breakfast, I headed to the entrance of the inn where I'd promised to meet with Yuna. Konoha was there, cleaning.

"Are you going out?" she asked when she noticed me.

"I'm waiting for Yuna. Has she come here yet?"

"No, I haven't seen her."

I decided to collect some more intel on Yuna.

"Miss Konoha, from what you've seen of Yuna, what do you think of her?"

Konoha thought about it.

"Do you two not know each other already?"

"I only met Yuna yesterday, but we're going out together today, so I'd like to know more about her."

"I see. Well, she doesn't seem to like anyone asking her about her clothes, so I suggest avoiding that."

I thought so. I was really curious about why Yuna dressed as a bear. In Lady Sakura's dream, if the light of hope meets anyone other than me, they end up disappearing beyond the eastern sea. Maybe the others would have asked Yuna about her bear clothes, and that's why keeping her here was so hard.

"But I do wonder why she dresses as a bear."

You and everyone else, lady.

"But when she first came to the inn, she told me that she wouldn't answer any questions."

Hm, so she'd tried it? So it seemed like I should avoid it if it was touchy. It'd be pretty bad if she got annoyed and went home.

So I talked with Konoha about general things as I got info on Yuna until I saw the person in question coming toward us. She was in her bear clothes again, which were adorable. I really couldn't see this cute girl being the savior of the country.

Yuna and I headed to the outskirts of town so we could go to the village and slay the kamaitachi.

She asked me how we were getting to the village. I -already knew Yuna could summon bears, but I only knew that because I'd seen her running on the water.

I couldn't tell her that, though, so I decided that if I summoned my horse, she would probably summon her bears. If she wanted to hide them, then I could just have her ride with me. But when I summoned Hayatemaru, Yuna also summoned her black bear.

Its name was Kumayuru. That was an adorable--sounding name, and it didn't seem like it fit for a bear. I wanted to know what happened to the white bear too, but she didn't summon it, so I didn't ask.

Then, we headed off to the kamaitachi on our mounts.

While we headed out, we talked about kamaitachi. It seemed like she really didn't know anything about them. Why was she so calm about them, then though?

I guess that was how confident she was about her skills. Or maybe overconfident. I'd be able to figure that out after seeing her battle the kamaitachi.

When we got to the village, the man who made the quest met us.

He seemed uneasy to have us there. Well, we were adventurers, but we were both girls and in our mid-teens and one of us was in bear PJs. Fair enough.

The man led us to where the kamaitachi would appear. The area we came to was a pasture with a lot of cattle. And there was one cow away from the others near the woods.

Yuna seemed to be wondering why that was, too. She asked about it and we got back the answer that it was a sacrifice for the kamaitachi. They were sacrificing the one so the many could survive. I'd heard of this happening before. If you tried to make sure everyone survived individually, you might end up losing more. It might have been heartless, but it was necessary.

Right then, Yuna's bear let out a cry. At the same time, Yuna ran toward the cow. She had quick reflexes. I immediately dashed after her.

Man, she was fast. I was doing all I could to keep up. Even though she was wearing clothes that seemed like they would get in the way, how could she run so fast?

The cow went down. We hadn't made it in time. Several kamaitachi were around the downed cow. As we got closer, they split into two groups. They seemed like they were trying to attack Yuna from either side. I wanted to see how powerful Yuna was, but I needed her trust too.

I said to her from behind, "I'll take the right ones!"

She understood that immediately and ran to the left. So she was quick on the uptake, too.

I watched Yuna's fight from the side of my eye as I fought the kamaitachi. The two kamaitachi started to surround me. I watched the timing of their irregular movements and threw three kunai at them. Unlike knives, kunai didn't break as easily and they were easier to use. All three stabbed into one of the kamaitachi.

Well, one down. Yuna also used wind magic to take down a kamaitachi. A magic user! Interesting.

It would be hard to hit them with magic when they were running around so fast. That meant she had to be powerful on her own. But I still didn't know whether she was powerful enough to take on a gigantic snake.

Yuna and I took down a kamaitachi each, and as they realized they had no chance of winning, the rest fled to the woods.

Yuna and I discussed what to do next. Thinking about it rationally, waiting in the pasture for the kamaitachi to attack the cattle would be the best strategy. The plus for that was that we would have wide visibility when fighting. The negative was that we wouldn't know when they'd come.

Yuna seemed to think the same, but then she suddenly told me she was going into the woods to fight the -kamaitachi because she didn't want to bother waiting. Any normal person would never do that.

The woods were the kamaitachi's territory. They'd try to attack from the crush and hid behind the trees. We would be at an overwhelming disadvantage. But supposedly Yuna's summoned bear knew where the kamaitachi were. Did that mean she understood what her bear was saying?

Yuna suddenly blurted out that she'd go alone. I couldn't let her do that, so I went in with her.

Thanks to Kumayuru, we were able to find the hiding kamaitachi and Yuna took them down. Right as I thought that we'd be able to defeat all the kamaitachi by charging in after them, one with silver fur appeared, then another. Unlike normal ones, silver kamaitachi are faster and have stronger attacks. This looked pretty bad...

This seemed like the perfect opportunity to see how strong Yuna was, but leaving her to fight two would be dangerous. I thought about it and decided to lure one away.

Yuna asked Kumayuru to handle the rest of the normal kamaitachi. I was grateful for the help. It'd be difficult to fight a silver kamaitachi while regular ones were also attacking. She seemed worried about leaving Kumayuru alone, and summoned the white bear too. Its name was Kumakyu. Another cute name.

I wanted to ask about the white bear, but we didn't have time. Instead, I faced off

against the silver kamaitachi as I watched Yuna and her bears fight. If any of them were in danger, I could protect them.

* * *

I didn't have to worry about it. Yuna beat her kamaitachi about the same time as me, and the bears defeated another silver one that appeared in front of them. Yuna was upset that her bears had fought the silver kamaitachi, but I knew that they'd done it to protect Yuna. They were good bears and clearly cared about their owner.

I learned through this fight that Yuna was powerful and so were her two bears. She could use magic, could fight in combat, was brave, good at decision-making, quick to think of plans, and most of all, she was experienced in battle. When most people were placed in danger, their faces would freeze; they'd become nervous, they'd lose their breath, and get too stressed to handle it. From Yuna's expression though, I saw none of that. The only ones who could be this calm were overwhelmingly more powerful than their opponents.

Now that I knew Yuna was strong, I needed to move on to the next stage. That made me nervous. For the last test to see if Yuna was really our light of hope, I needed her to fight one of the most powerful people in the country---my teacher, Jyubei.

If she couldn't whip him, there was no way she could defeat the gigantic snake. If she lost to him, then we couldn't accept Yuna as our light of hope. If that ended up happening, then I'd leave her be and let her go home to her country.

I would have her leave for her own sake. I didn't want to involve a girl in a cute bear outfit in the problems of another country. If she was powerful enough to defeat my teacher, even if I had to give up my life, I'd need to ask her to help us.

My life was nothing in comparison to protecting the country and helping Lady Sakura.

EXTRA STORY

ENCOUNTERING THE BEAR:

SHINOBU CHRONICLES

PART 3

YUNA BELIEVED ME after I told her Jyubei was my parents' sworn enemy, and she agreed to look for him with me.

I was tricking Yuna. I felt a pang in my heart. If Yuna found out the truth, then I couldn't do anything if she held a grudge against me, but I needed to fulfill this role for the sake of Lady Sakura and my country.

I wrote my reports and arranged to fight my teacher. We would fight on the second day.

On the first day, we would look around town as part of our "search." We ended up eating really good food and looking at some artisanal candy. Other than her clothes, Yuna seemed like a normal girl.

I wanted her to see the town and fall in love with our nation. I didn't care what she thought about me, but if she really was our light of hope, I wanted her to actually protect our country.

We started the search up again on the second day. According to our plans, we were supposed to meet around here.

I found him. Just as planned, I saw him walking around. Since he had a scar on his face, he looked like a perfect villain. Didn't reflect his kind heart at all.

I told Yuna I'd spotted him. She said we needed to catch him right away, but we couldn't

do it here. If we did it anywhere where there were people around, we'd cause mayhem.

Once we reached a deserted side street, my teacher turned around. We'd start a battle then, and we'd have to stake our lives.

If Yuna ran away after seeing me and my teacher fight with all we were worth, I didn't plan to go after her. If she ran away just after seeing our fight, then she'd never be able to fight against the Orochi when she'd need to put her life at stake. Internally, I both wanted her to run and not. I was confused about my own feelings.

* * *

We fought a real battle.

My teacher drew his sword, and I readied my knife. He had an eye patch over his left eye. That was part of his training, but it was also a way of leveling the playing field.

I attacked from his left side, where he had the eye patch. Though his vision was restricted, it wasn't weak enough for that to be his downfall in a fight. I'd seen him fight several times before, but he was faster than usual. If I wasn't paying close attention, I would have been stabbed right through.

I cast magic as I fought against him. Yuna didn't show any signs of running away even as she watched us. Any normal girl would have run from fear if they saw this, but Yuna was watching us closely.

This was no normal girl.

In the fight, I steadily pushed my teacher into a corner. At this rate, right as I thought I might strike him with my blade just once, he took off his eye patch. Too bad for me. I wanted to get one blow in before he did that, but he leveled up his game.

I hoped Yuna was watching closely. Now that there was one less thing holding him back, his attacks were even faster, and I couldn't reach him with my own at all. Even when it came to speed, the one point where I had the upper hand, whenever I dodged his strikes, I would lose some of my stamina and slow down.

Then he crouched. This was bad. One of his lunges was coming.

At the same time I realized danger was incoming, Yuna shouted, "Shinobu! Get out of there!"

How did she know?

The blade lunged at me with lightning speed. Since I knew what it was, I pulled myself together just enough to react. I threw a kunai almost as a reflex. He blocked it and sent the kunai flying using his sword. I knew that this wasn't the end of it. He'd strike three times. I retreated. I took as much distance as I could from him. Even a hair's breadth could be the difference between life and death, here.

I blocked the second blow with my kunai in my hand, but then his third was already on its way. I wouldn't be able to dodge it now. The blade hit me, and I felt pain run through me.

Still, it wasn't a fatal blow. I was wearing mithril chainmail under my clothes, but if I hadn't, I would be in a world of trouble now.

Yuna ran over to me looking worried, but it wasn't time for her to come in yet. I hadn't shown her my teacher's full abilities.

As I readied my knife, my teacher readied himself to lunge again, as though he understood. It seemed like I was going to be in trouble.

He lunged at me, and even though I willed myself to move, my body wouldn't listen. I was angry with myself. Was this it?

Right as I was about to give up, Yuna intervened and knocked back my teacher's sword. She was holding a knife in her right hand. She's deflected my teacher's strike?

"Yuna?"

"I'm tapping in."

How could she say that after seeing us battle? I thought that Yuna would run away, or she would tell me to give up because it was impossible, but she did neither. Instead, she was taking over for me.

I was close to tears. I felt another pang in my chest about tricking her. But I couldn't give up now. The fate of the nation depended on it.

"Yuna, he's strong..."

My teacher really was.

"I saw, so I know."

How could she say that if she really knew?

"Shinobu, you take your time resting."

Yuna smiled at me and turned to face my teacher. Her smile was like a ray of hope to me.

Then my teacher and Yuna faced each other. She readied her knife. It was impossible to defeat my teacher with just weapons though. Hadn't she seen our fight?! I thought Yuna used magic to fight as an adventurer. But even though I was worried, they started to exchange blows.

An unbelievable scene unfolded before me. Even though she was in such baggy clothes, she was still keeping up and parrying my teacher's attacks and sending his sword back.

She could see his strikes? Most people who fought my teacher would be down on the first strike. But she had blocked and dodged my teacher several times already. I'd only been able to parry him because I'd fought him so many times that I knew his habits. If I let my concentration dissipate even the tiniest bit, his sword would be at my throat.

That was how I knew how amazing Yuna was—because I'd fought my teacher so many times before.

Wasn't she afraid? Most people would be afraid if the point of a blade were turned at them. Yuna didn't run from his blade and continued to take on his strikes head-on. Then my teacher smiled—he was enjoying himself.

Suddenly, he crouched. He was getting ready for another three-stage thrust. He'd be

going all out to see if Yuna could handle his full abilities. At the same time he stepped forward, he thrust his blade.

He was so fast! In an instant, he was coming right up to Yuna. As the thrust approached her head-on, she repelled it directly with her knife.

My teacher's sword dramatically snapped back, and he lost his balance. Normally, he would immediately draw back his sword and thrust again for his three-stage thrust. This time though, he'd been parried so dramatically that he was thrown backwards and couldn't complete the next lunge.

Even though Yuna had only seen it once before, she already had found a way to counter the attack and had stopped the second blow. It was easy to explain, but normal people would never be capable of doing that. And if she hadn't been precise as she blocked, my teacher wouldn't have lost his balance.

It wasn't normal to even be able to repel a lunge like that in the first place. But she parried his strikes with perfect timing and even made him lose his balance from blocking him so firmly.

She made him stagger backward so he was unguarded. Then she brought back the hand she held her knife in and stepped forward. Her hand connected right with my teacher's unprotected torso.

It was a perfect, efficient blow. She moved so fluidly. I expected to see her knife in my teacher's stomach, but no—she'd just punched him. She hadn't used her knife. She'd just punched him with the hand that still held her knife.

My teacher was sent flying back, but he didn't go down. He'd blocked Yuna's blow with his arm.

I thought my teacher was amazing, but Yuna was even more impressive. She was a match for him—even surpassing him. I couldn't believe it. But then my teacher laughed and accused her of holding back.

Yuna had only punched him. If she'd stabbed him with that knife instead...

My teacher might never have picked up a sword again if that had happened. He might have died in the worst-case scenario. Yuna had done that in order to keep her promise to me. I remembered that I'd told her I wanted to catch him rather than kill him, and

that pang went through my heart again.

* * *

Then my teacher unsheathed his wakizashi. That meant he was serious. He was actually using all his abilities—including his dual wielding, which made him incredibly powerful. You couldn't tell where he would attack from. If you focused on one side, it was difficult to see both swords and their trajectories at once. But that also meant it was a difficult technique too.

But Yuna just pulled out a second knife herself, so she had one in either hand too. I really couldn't believe anything she was doing. Some had tried to mimic my teacher's dual wielding in the past, but it wasn't easy. For a split second, I caught a smile on his face before he started running.

Yuna followed his lead. She could follow all his strikes from both sides. She dodged, parried, and dealt with each of his attacks. Usually, anyone who overwhelmed and took the defense was at a disadvantage, but Yuna was able to handle blows from either of my teacher's swords and was keeping up with him. I wondered how many people could truly fight on an equal level with my teacher. He seemed to be having fun.

Next, Yuna steadily forced him into a corner. I couldn't believe it. She wasn't using any magic, but she was still keeping up with my teacher using just her weapons. Even when she wasn't using her full abilities, she was still this powerful.

Right as Yuna was gaining the upper hand, my teacher threw a smoke bomb down and fled. But Yuna wasn't caught by surprise at all. Without a moment's hesitation, she left Kumayuru to take care of me and headed off to pursue my teacher.

Normal people would have been surprised by the smoke bomb and flinched. Yuna, on the other hand, acted decisively. She even had the sense to think of me. She wasn't just looking at what was in front of her—she had her eye on her surroundings too. Most people would lose sight of what else was going on around them while in a fight. Yuna was just full of surprises.

I tried to follow the two of them, but Kumayuru stopped me.

"Please," I said. "I need to go."

“Cwoon.”

The bear shook its head. It was as though it could understand me.

“Dontcha worry about Yuna? I won’t get close, so please.”

I put my hands together to beg.

“Cwoon.”

It seemed as though Kumayuru understood me since it crouched down.

“I’m supposed to ride you?”

“Cwoon.”

“Thank you.”

Once I got on, Kumayuru headed straight off to Yuna and my teacher even though we’d lost sight of them. This must have been the ability they’d used to sense the kamaitachi too. This was also why I’d been caught when I snuck over to Yuna’s room.

Maybe it could tell by scent?

We came to a clearing where Yuna and my teacher were already exchanging blows.

My teacher was using his wind magic through his sword. Kamaitachi couldn’t produce anything even close to his wind blades. He could even cut through steel armor, but Yuna cast her own spells and canceled the gusts out.

She had to really be strong.

As they were fighting, my teacher glanced at me. It was coming.

He sent a wind blade flying at us—that was to make Yuna angry, but I was going to block it. Instead though, Kumayuru crooned and easily dodged my teacher’s attack.

That was still enough to make Yuna upset though. I realized my teacher was really in danger of dying now—that was how upset Yuna was.

Yuna held her hand in front of her and gigantic bears appeared all around to surround my teacher. He'd lost all means of escape because of the wall of bears.

Then Yuna suddenly rushed toward him. My teacher brought down his sword as fast as he was able in order to meet her, but Yuna parried it. It was impressive.

Now that my teacher was unguarded, Yuna punched him and sent him flying. She had won against my teacher. I couldn't believe it. She'd won despite how powerful he was. She'd been better at handling her weapons and her magic was also overwhelmingly more powerful. On top of that, she was stout of heart. Despite all that, she was kind.

I was sure everyone could recognize Yuna as the light of hope.

Now the real problem: After all this, if we apologized, would she forgive us?

Just thinking of how the country's fate rested on my shoulders made me feel heavy. Even if I were asked to give my life, I couldn't have said no. If we could save the country in exchange for just my life, that was a low cost to pay.

Even though it had only been a few days since I'd first met her, I knew Yuna would never do anything like that to me. I'd never met a girl as kind, strong, and mysterious as her.

"Looks like I won. Tell me everything."

Yuna was staring right at me with a frightening look on her face. Even though she was dressed so cutely, I was afraid.

I take it all back—she might actually kill me for real.

AFTERWORD

I'M KUMANANO. Thank you for picking up *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear's* eighteenth volume.

It's already been a full year since the anime aired. It felt like that all happened just yesterday.

With all the merch that has also been made, I have no words to express how grateful I am.

I think some of you may be interested in knowing more about Season Two. Production is well underway! I'm doing my best as the author to give all the help I can. I hope that you're looking forward to it.

In this volume, we went to the Land of Wa. The country trades with Mileela and stocks them with things like miso and soy sauce. By coincidence, Talgwei, the moving island, happens to approach the continent, so Yuna heads over.

Yuna checks out the buildings there and goes shopping, and she has fun acting like a tourist. While she's doing that though, a fishy girl dressed like a ninja approaches her. The two of them start working together, and then the ninja girl asks Yuna to save the nation. I hope that you enjoyed Yuna's new adventure in the Land of Wa. Thank you.

I'd also like to thank everyone who strived to get this book out. Thank you for drawing such wonderful illustrations, 029. Thank you so much for drawing another pair of cute girls.

I'm always relying on my editor as well. To the many people who were involved in the publishing of *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear*, Volume 18, thank you.

I'm grateful for the readers who have read along thus far.

Let's meet again for the nineteenth volume!

KUMANANO — ON A DAY IN FEBRUARY, 2021



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