

異世界料理道

Cooking with
wild game.

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Illust. こちも

VOLUME
5



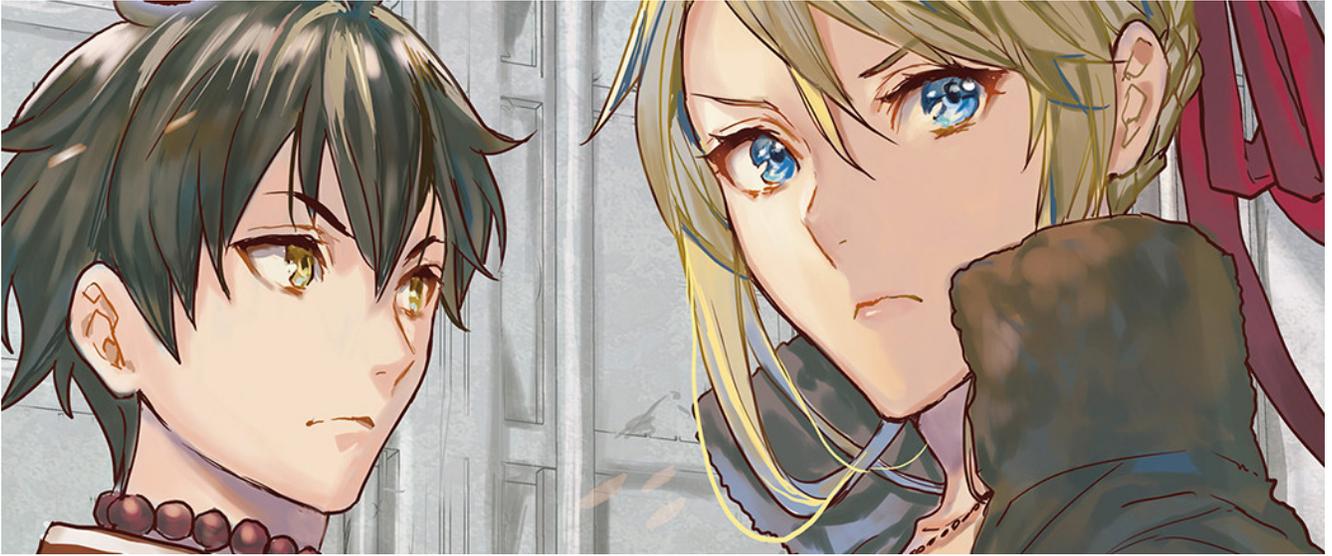
Cooking with Wild Game 異世界料理道

Volume 5

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Credits



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「シム人もジャガル人も、みんな帰つちまったぜえ？」

これ以上は宿場町に居残つたつて、

誰もギバの肉なんざ買わねえだらうよ？」

聞き覚えのない声だったし、

見覚えのない顔だった。

「……うらつしやいませ」

と、俺は笑顔で応対した。

どう見ても冷やかしの輩だが、

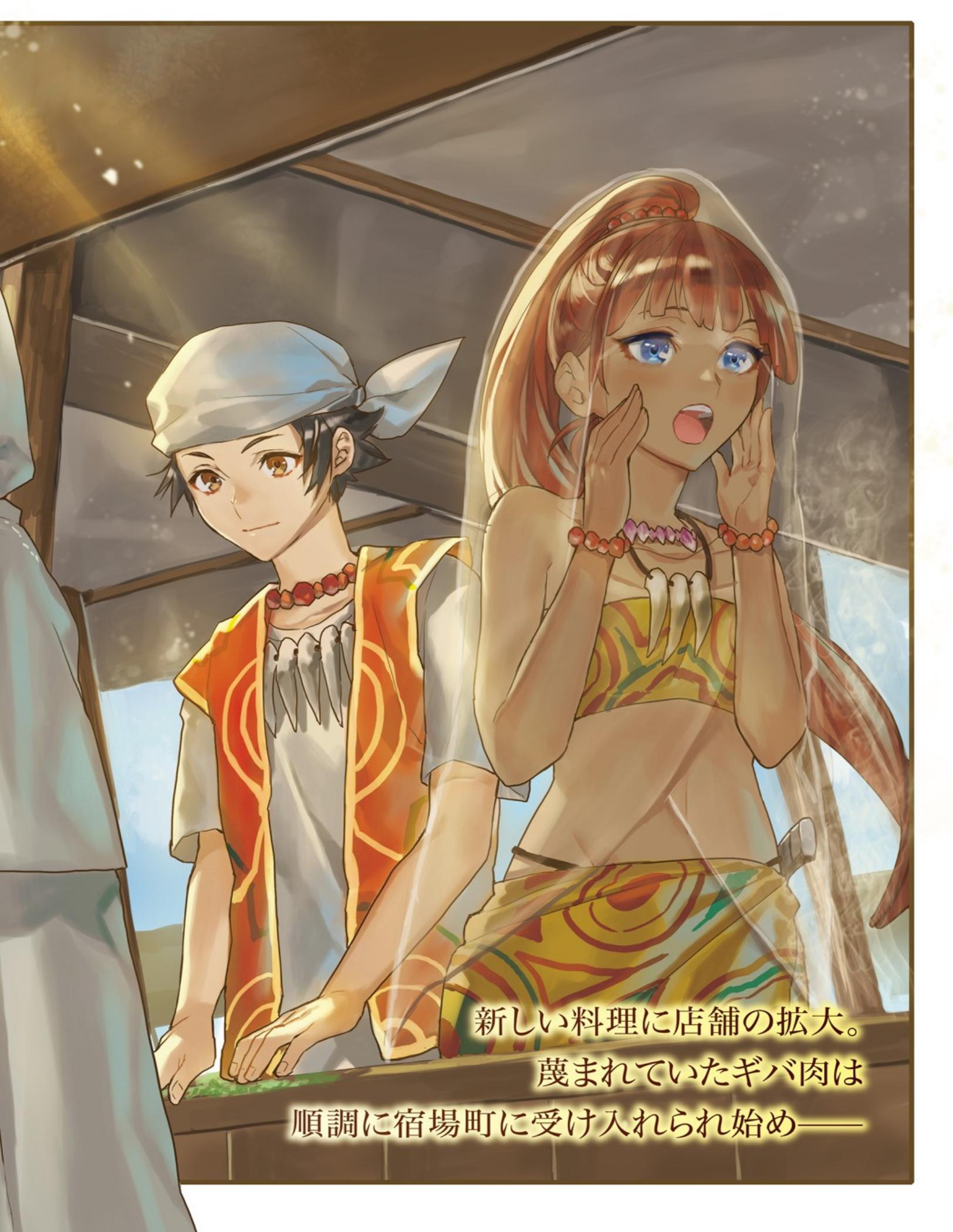
これこそ俺が初日から待ち望んでいた

西の民のお客様である。

異世界料理道

VOLUME 5

Cooking with wild game.

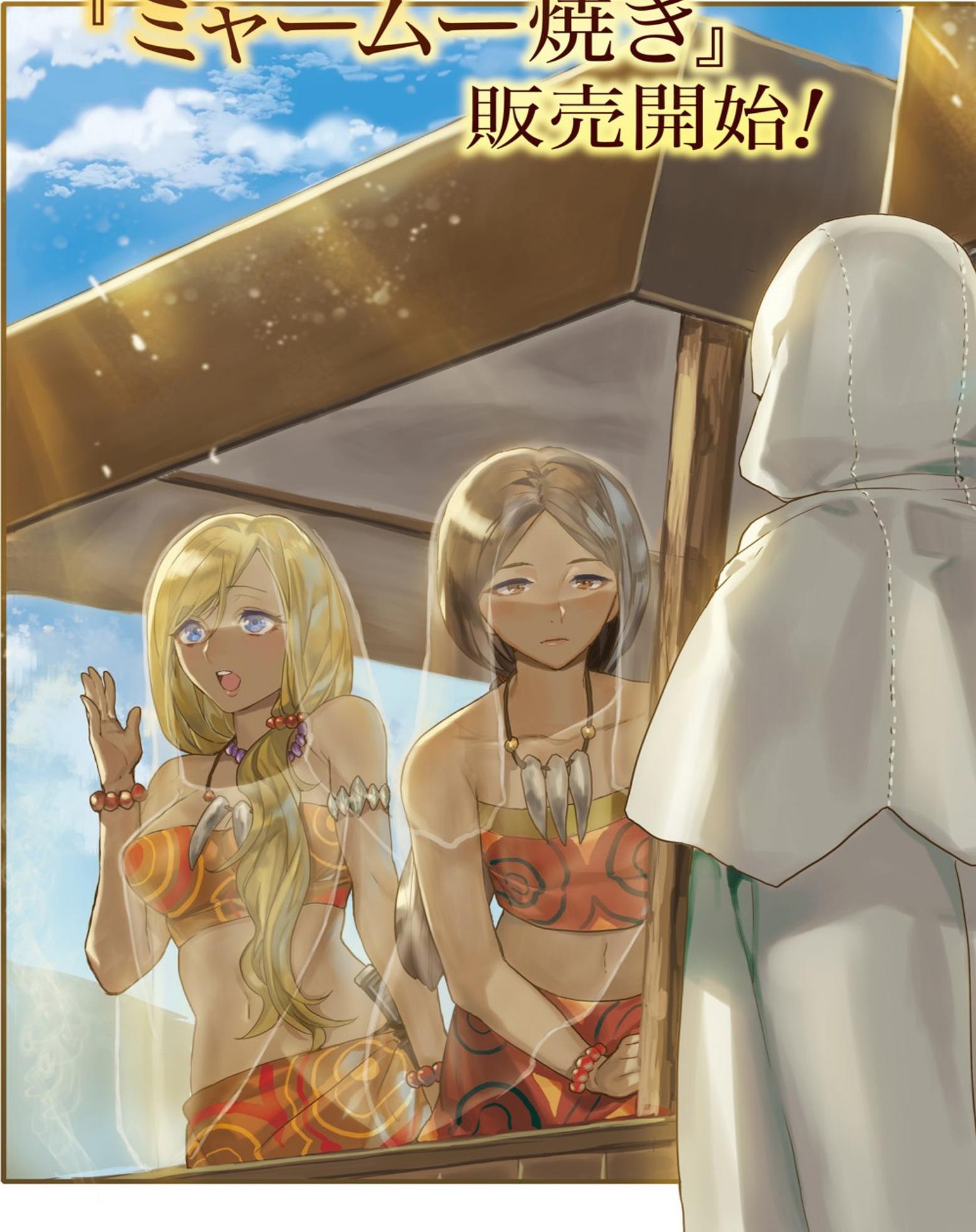


新しい料理に店舗の拡大。
蔑まれていたギバ肉は
順調に宿場町に受け入れられ始め——

新メニュー

『ミヤームー焼き』

販売開始!



「俺にはお前が必要なんだよ、アイルフア。

……お前がいてくれるから、俺は頑張ることができるとだ」

早くも全身に大汗をかきながら、俺は月明かりの下を進む。

「……つくづく、うつけ者なのだな、お前は……」

Chapter 1 - Fourth Day - The Glutton

Part 1

It was the fourth day since the stall opened.

Vena Wu and I reached the Post Station Town right on time, and headed straight to the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 to look for the owner Milano Mast— who had a grumpy face in the morning as usual. After taking our pushcart, we headed for the northern end of the marketplace under the curious eyes of the crowd.

About ten or so meters away from our assigned spot, we could already see a big crowd gathered there. As I advanced tensely, the westerners who were just here to gawk quickly moved away to either side of the street.

The southerners with fierce eyes and the expressionless easterners stared each other down as they waited for us before our stall. Their numbers far exceed yesterday's, totaling to about 30 persons.

A guard stood between as if he was mediating between the two camps. When we approached the rented spot, he glared at us:

「Hey, did you prepare enough food?」

「Yes. I have 40 portions for the first menu and 30 more for another dish, a total of 70 meals.」

I prepared 40 portions yesterday, and, contrary to my expectations, they were sold out before noon.

No one had the rights to complain about a product selling out, but there was a deep gulf between Semu and Jaguar, so they argued relentlessly because of my cooking, and it almost resulted in a riot.

If they continued to argue, my stall might be forced to stop operations. We hoped to avoid escalating things to that point, so I prepared 40 portions of 『Kiba burger』 and 30 『Myam-roasted meat』 .

「Alright, let's start off with the 『Kiba burger』 . Vena Wu, please start the fire.」

「Okay.」

Vena Wu seemed to be in a great mood.

She didn't seem bothered by the bloodthirsty customers and guards at all. I felt at ease when I looked at her.

「Ahh, the fruit wine smells nice... Is that the new dish...?」

「Yes. Aside from the fruit wine, I also used a herb called Myam in it. I dub this dish 『Myam-roasted meat』 .」

While I was answering, I picked up the sack with 6 kg of kiba meat and marinating sauce.

I loosened the opening and poured the sauce into another bag.

The meat was marinated for one hour, which just happened to be the time needed to walk from the Fa house to the Post Station Town.

「I will let you try the 『Myam-roasted meat』 when business quiets down.」

「Alright... Fufu, I'm looking forward to it...」

Vena Wu stirred the tarapa sauce in the pot and laughed sexily. Her eyes that always looked sleepy and dazed were studying the content in amazement.

「Oh...? The fragrance in this pot smells different from the past few days...」

「That's right, I added some Myam in. I wanted to experiment with different flavors, so I didn't add too much of it. Can you tell the difference?」

「Hmm, it smells nice... I'm starting to get hungry again...」

Myam was a herb. The fragrance and spiciness of it resembled garlic. It meshed really well with tarapa, which was similar to tomatoes.

It might just be my imagination, but the Jaguar people seemed to be getting rowdy. The fragrance of the Myam and tarapa had massive destructive power, stimulating their appetite even further.

I didn't mind their exaggerated reaction, but the crowd was getting bigger while we were preparing the ingredients.

「There are so many people... as if all the Jaguar and Semu people have been all gathered here...」

「I'm very grateful for their presence. From the looks of it, the first batch of 『Kiba burger』 will be sold out in no time.」

I have decided to rent another pushcart from tomorrow onwards and push out a new menu. I prayed quietly in my heart for us to make it through today peacefully.

「It's almost time, right...? Then, let's begin!」

Guided by the guards, the Jaguar people rushed to the stall. The southerners had brown unkempt hair and beard, stout body built, white skin, and a fierce face.

A middle-aged man stood at the fore of the group. He was the deputy leader of the architects, Arudas.

All the southerners had stout built and short stature, but this man was tall, so I couldn't have been mistaken.

「... Hey, sorry for the commotion yesterday.」

「No, we were at fault for not preparing an adequate amount of portions. Please don't take it to heart.」

「Yeah, it's a negligence to only prepare 40 meals for such a delicious dish.」

Even though Arudas had a stern face, there was a hint of guilt in his eyes.

「... It's great that they didn't chase you out of the Post Station Town. Why did the guards blame you even though we started the incident?」

「Probably... Because we are denizens of Forest's Edge.」

I answered as I made the 『Kiba burger』, and his face turned sour.

「The denizens of Forest's Edge abandoned the god of the south Jaguar, so I can understand why the older southerners admonish you as traitors. But the westerners took you in, so why are they viewing fellow citizens like you with disdain? I don't get it. If not for your efforts in hunting kiba, Genos won't be so prosperous.」

I felt the same way.

However, I couldn't discuss this with him properly while the customers were still crowding around. I could only serve him the completed 『Kiba burger』.

Arudas' stern face broke out into a smile.

「Hey, why don't you stay open until night time? I want to eat your cooking for dinner too.」

「Hmm~ That will be difficult... It will be great if the inns sell kiba meat too.」

I probed casually, but Arudas just shook his head regretfully.

「The kiba meat is delicious, but the important thing is your culinary skills. Pops has been gloomy ever since our visit that day. When he heard us discussing your cooking, he was full of complaints. If you are willing to cook a dish with karon or kimyusu for him, won't he leave his work behind and rush here?」

「I'm honored to hear that... But like I said yesterday, I will be selling a new dish starting at noon. Can you help me inform Pops, and ask him to try?」

「Hmm? Got it, I will tell him.」

「Hey, is it still not done yet?」

The customers behind rushed me while we were chatting a bit too long.

I then started making 『Kiba burger』 repeatedly.

No one requested for samples, so the 20 『Kiba burger』 kept decreasing. After selling them to all the Jaguar customers and a couple of Semu people, the burgers were out.

「Sorry! We will prepare the remaining batch of twenty, please wait for a while.」

Constrained by the size of the pot, we could only make twenty patties and sauce at one go.

I bought two tarapa on the way to work today. I chopped the tarapa apart and added it to the pot.

「Asuta, do you need strong fire...?」

「Yes, please.」

I picked up two bottles and shook the lighter one thoroughly, then poured both of them into the pot. The lighter bottle was filled till one quarter with fruit wine. I then added some diced aria and myam that I fried earlier. To avoid making the sauce too thick, the other bottle was filled with plain water.

As I heated up the sauce, the Jaguar people were more or less gone, so the guards left reluctantly.

The onlookers also dispersed, leaving just the black, tall, and skinny easterners behind.

「Fufu... This reminds me of house Lutim's wedding...」

「That's right, the atmosphere is bustling just like that time.」

「I'm not good with tending to the hearth... But I like doing it with you...」

I felt honored by her words.

Vena Wu looked really happy when she said that, and there wasn't any sign of her usual flirtiness in her eyes

I liked Vena Wu when she was working. I hoped we could continue to maintain this balance in our relationship— however, I couldn't let down my guard towards her yet.

「Okay, it's almost done.」

After adding a little bit of water, I seasoned it with pico leaves and rock salt.

I took out steaks that had been seared on the surface from a third leather pouch.

These leather pouches were expensive, each costing 15 red copper plates. But they had a large opening and were convenient to use. They were meant to carry fruit wine, and were specially

made so that the smell of food wouldn't linger on them. After discovering this convenient container, I made up my mind to sell 『Myam-roasted meat』 in my stall.

In order to not waste these expenses, I will definitely make this business a success.

「Sorry for the wait! We will now begin the sale of the remaining 20 burgers!」

The Semu people came over quietly when they heard my voice.

Most easterners preferred to wear hooded cloaks, but there were some who dressed casually, with beautiful swirly patterned clothes similar to the garments of Forest's Edge. They also had accessories made from stones and metal, and thin swords on their waist.

I felt that these Semu people bore some resemblance to the denizens of Forest's Edge. Not just their dressing, their quiet movement and lack of expression reminded me of the men of Forest's Edge.

But all the men of Forest's Edge were strong and powerful, and their skin had the color of chocolate milk.

Denizens of Forest's Edge like Shin Wu looked a little like these easterners. He was mature and quiet, and the corners of his eyes were high too.

While I was thinking about this, I sold twelve portions. We were suddenly left with eight 『Kiba burgers』 .

Furthermore, there were ten Semu people in cloaks standing at some distance apart from the rest. Could that group of people staring at us be the 《Silver Vase》 ? As I was wondering about that, one of them took off his hood and approached us.

As expected, long silver hair appeared before me.

He was the leader of the 《Silver Vase》 , Shumimaru— I forgot his last name.

「Kiba, not sell out, yet?」

「Not yet, there are eight left. I think I told you yesterday, I will be selling a new kiba dish later.」

「Eight...」

Shumimaru fell into deep thought as he looked at me.

He then returned to his comrades, and five of them walked over. After seeing them place their copper plates quietly onto the counter, I thanked them and started making five 『Kiba burgers』 .

「Left, three?」

Shumimaru came forth and asked again.

「Yes. What's the matter?」

「... I wait.」

「What?」

「I want try, new dish. Five men, have work, give up. Four others and me, wait.」

「I see. I will sell this new dish tomorrow morning too though.」

「Can't wait, tomorrow. Want to wait, today.」

As I chatted with Shumimaru, a man taller than Shumimaru walked over quietly.

「Then, can I buy the burgers first? Asuta, two, please.」

Kamyua Yost appeared before us.

He always showed himself suddenly, so I wasn't surprised anymore.

「Thank you for your support... Sorry that you made an empty trip yesterday.」

「Yeah! I had to buy snacks from another stall, it feels so empty eating that, it's like not eating at all. I'm curious about the new dish, but let's leave that for tomorrow.」

I explained what happened to Kamyua Yost when we returned the cart to the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 yesterday.

Even though Kamyua looked very surprised, he probably already knew that things would turn out this way.

「Here, 『Kiba burger』 for two. Sorry for the wait.」

「Thank you. Work hard from now on too!」

Kamyua Yost nodded at Shumimaru, turned and left with nimble strides.

He seldom talked to me when I was working, probably because he didn't want to disrupt my business.

「... That man, a friend?」

「Huh? Yes, I don't want to say it, but he is my friend.」

「I see... Hair and eyes, northerner. Skin color, westerner. Unfathomable.」

I see, so the people from this world could deduce Kamyua Yost's mixed heritage from his appearance.

「That's right.」

I didn't think that I should disclose Kamyua Yost's personal information to other patrons and answered vaguely.

「... His heart, easterner. I can't understand, his feelings, his thinking.」

Shumimaru looked as if he was deep in thought again.

「He smiles, but mood isn't clear... Fascinating.」

「That's right.」

I could only give the same reply.

Shumimaru was right. Both Kamyua Yost and him seemed elusive to me.

Leaving that aside, there was only one 『Kiba burger』 left, it would be bad if multiple customers were to come at the same time. It was about time to prepare the next dish— as I was thinking about that, a Jaguar customer visited our stall.

「Hey! It's not sold out yet!？」

「Yes, there's just one left.」

「Awesome! I overslept, and almost missed out on my meal!」

I only had a faint impression, but I think he visited yesterday too. I said to him warmly: 「Thank you for your continued support」, and used the last meat patty to make a 『Kiba burger』.

After sending off the gleeful customer, today's 『Kiba burgers』 were sold out.

Less than an hour after the stall opened, and the first dish was sold out. The 『Kiba burger』 went out of stock incredibly fast.

「Okay, let's pour the tarapa sauce into the leather pouch... Ah, we need to let it cool off first.」

「Hmm... There's plenty of sauce left over today too...」

「Yeah～」

Ignoring the elated Vena Wu, I fell into deep thought.

「The 『Kiba burger』 was sold out in no time, so the sauce isn't too thick yet. If I save this sauce for tomorrow, I can save a lot of ingredient cost.」

「Ehh...」

Vena Wu was on the verge of tears.

I laughed at the sight of her sorrowful face.

「I'm just kidding. Tarapa sauce by itself can be kept for two days, but this sauce already had meat mixed in, so it's better to eat them today. Please take them home with you.」

「Asuta... How mean of you...」

Vena Wu puffed her cheeks.

So she would puff her cheeks instead of pouting when she gets mad.

「... How adorable.」

Shumimaru muttered at this moment.

「Huh? Did you say something?」

「She is adorable. And beautiful.」

Easterners would keep a straight face when they compliment women.

「Thank you very much...」

Vena Wu thanked him insincerely with a cold smile. She was probably used to compliments from the opposite sex.

Anyway, after I let the pot cool off for three minutes, I poured the tarapa sauce into a leather pouch. I then started cooking 『Myam-roasted meat』.

『Myam-roasted meat』 was easy to make, I just had to roast the meat, unlike 『Kiba burger』 which had a fixed quantity per portion. I had to decide how much 『Myam-roasted meat』 I required to prepare ahead of time.

It doesn't look like there will be a crowd for the time being, so I should make just enough for the number of people who ordered, along with the samples.

I fried the sliced aria, then added in about one kg of marinated kiba meat. Just doing that was enough to make the fragrance of the myam, fruit wine, and roasted kiba meat explode and spread.

It was a pity that the street was deserted. 『Myam-roasted meat』 stimulated the noses of people better than 『Kiba burger』. Shumimaru also muttered expressionlessly:

「The myam smells nice.」

I scooped the fillings onto the plate, poured plenty of sauce that had thickened on top, then used a poitan to roll up the fillings and tino shreds.

「Ah, Vena Wu, can you take out the brazier for me?」

「Okay.」

We had to take out the brazier when there weren't any customers, or the inside of the pot would get burnt. Compared to making 『Kiba burger』, this was a bit more troublesome, but this would reduce the consumption of firewood, so there were pros and cons to this.

It would be great if we could use charcoal. I started making five portions of 『Myam-roasted meat』, and the rest would be the samples.

「Sorry for the wait, this dish is also two red copper plates.」

The Semu people nodded silently as usual, and they took out the copper plates with Shumimaru taking the lead. They had no intention of sampling.

They bit gently into the 『Myam-roasted meat』—— how did they find the taste? It was a bit inconvenient during times like this as they didn't have any expression.

「... Delicious. Tomorrow, take turns to eat.」

「What? Are you taking turns to eat?」

「Yes. Both delicious, hard to choose. So, take turns to eat.」

In conclusion, they liked this dish.

They were really introverted. I couldn't help smiling.

「Thank you. I'm happy to receive your praise.」

「I, very happy, to eat, delicious food.」

After Shumimaru said that, he suddenly looked at Vena Wu beside me.

「Asuta, can I, ask, one question?」

「Yes, what is it?」

「Asuta, she, wife?」

I couldn't answer right away, and Vena Wu used this chance to cling to my arm.

「That's a secret...」

「I see, excuse me.」

Shumimaru showed a hint of an emotion from the corner of his mouth.

The young silvered hair Semu man smiled a little— his face was quiet, steadfast and had a tint of sadness.

He put on his hood again and left with his four companions.

「Thank you for your patronage.」

I shouted at their back and shook off Vena Wu's arm.

「Wait a minute! Vena Wu, isn't that inappropriate?」

「Because... I will be troubled if an easterner falls for me... Do you think I should have shown off my sexy charm instead...?」

From the moment I got acquainted with Vena Wu, she had never stopped emitting her sexy charm.

However... it would be great if she continued to show her gentle and demure attitude when she attended to customers. I sighed.

「By the way, this is incredible... We just opened the stall, and had sold far more food than yesterday...」

「That's right. But the customers all came at the same time because they were afraid that we will be sold out.」

After that group of customers left, it was completely quiet. That was too extreme.

「There are still 25 『Myam-roasted meat』 left. If we sell them all, I will carry out the plan I told you about yesterday.」

「You want to rent another stall...? My clan plans to lend you a woman from the main house, and another from the branch house...」

「Ah, the branch house will also send a helper over?」

「That's right... Chores need to be done in the main house too, so we can't lend you three people at one go...」

Vena Wu sighed softly.

「Sigh... This will be our last day alone together... these four days were so blissful...」

「I-It will be fine, even if there are other colleagues, right?」

「Because... Leina will be picked from the main house, right...?」

I had already braced myself for that.

The young Rimee Wu and elderly grandma Ditto Min couldn't carry the heavy pot. Sati Lei Wu had to take care of Kota Wu. Mama Mia Lei was responsible for leading the Wu clan's women, so the only candidates were Leina Wu and Lala Wu.

I requested for a woman proficient in tending to the hearth, so that was like asking specifically for Leina Wu.

Vena Wu was doing her job far better than I imagined. I hoped I could build a stable relationship with Leina Wu too.

「... The people from the main house will visit the Post Station Town soon, they will tell you who will be the helpers...」

「Hmm? Isn't the Wu clan's grocery shopping trip tomorrow?」

「Yes... But I asked them to do something for me, so they will come a day early...」

Do what? I was about to ask when Vena Wu cut me off.

「Oh... They are here already... That sure is early...」

I followed Vena Wu's gaze and found two members of the Wu clan before us. This pairing surprised me

No, I wasn't surprised by the appearance of one of them—

The two approaching us straight from the south was the second sister and second brother of the Wu clan main house.

Part 2

「Long time no see, Asuta.」

Leina Wu greeted me first.

Her face was calm.

「Yes, it's been a while... Ten days have passed since our last meeting.」

Ten days ago, the atmosphere was awkward when we parted during the Lutim house banquet.

Please leave the Fa house and become a member of the Wu clan— I couldn't agree to Leina Wu's request.

Even so, Leina Wu refused to give up when she left, so I wasn't sure how I should interact with her. Seemed like I had to be firm and determined.

Leina Wu stood before us with a calm smile.

Her pure childlike smile was gone now.

「Vena-nee, here are the things you asked us to bring.」

「Ah, thank you... was it heavy...?」

「Not at all.」

Leina Wu placed the baggage on her shoulders beside the stall.

It was a large sack used to carry vegetables. It was filled with some hard objects, which made the sack look uneven.

「What's that? It looks like firewood.」

「It's firewood... I collected them in the past three days...」

I was confused.

「Work ended earlier than expected for the past three days... So Mama Mia Lei instructed me to work for you during my free time... So the only thing I could do was to pick firewood...」

「So that's what happened! I'm very grateful. From tomorrow onwards, we will be using even more firewood.」

「We had to carry a lot of things to town every day, so I asked Mama Mia Lei to bring this over during their grocery shopping trip... She said that it's just a trivial matter since we get to take the leftover tarapa every day...」

She threw a grudging sideways glance at me.

「Asuta, I wanted to give you a surprise, so I didn't tell you... but you were so mean and teased me...」

「S-Sorry. I was just joking. I'm really happy about this, thank you.」

While I was apologizing frantically, the sound of a sack being dropped clumsily to the ground covered my voice. Darum Wu had taken off the load from his shoulders.

He had three sacks on his back, which was three times that of Leina Wu. It was less than an hour journey from the Wu clan village to the Post Station Town, but neither the women of Forest's Edge nor I could carry so much in one go.

「Thank you, Darum... Don't you need to rest at home...?」

Darum Wu didn't answer.

I couldn't see his expression because a grey bandage-like cloth covered his face and head.

But the blue eyes he got from his father still burned brightly like a wolf. These eyes were the best way to identify him.



「Darum's face and head got hurt when he protected a man from the branch house... His injuries were serious, and he couldn't even walk three days ago...」

「Shut up.」

Darum Wu said in a low voice.

I didn't see Darum Wu on the night of the wedding. Compared to Leina Wu, it had been even longer since I last saw him.

Besides, this gentleman seldom spoke before me, and the last time I heard his voice— was probably that night more than a month ago, when we argued for the sake of Ai Fa.

I heard he got injured seven days ago, but I didn't know his injury was so serious...

About a month ago, I presented my view to Darum Wu on the spur of the moment. He had yet to pick any trouble with Ai Fa since then, so I was cool with him now.

So I lowered my head and thanked him without any reservation:

「Thank you very much for your kind assistance.」

And of course, he responded to me with a glare and unfriendly words:

「We are just giving you this firewood in return for your tarapa sauce, no need for thanks.」

「Really now, you are so stubborn... Are you going to mimic Papa Donda in such a way too...?」

Vena Wu laughed softly.

Darum Wu glared at Vena Wu, but that wasn't enough to shut his bold sister up.

「It's great that you can carry a heavy load now. You have almost recovered... and can go into the woods soon, right? Don't push yourself too hard...」

「... I'm not that so depraved that you of all people need to worry about me.」

「Oh, you actually said something so cold to your elder sister... See, isn't he adorable...?」

Vena Wu said to me quietly.

Only a relative would think Darum Wu's actions were cute. If the Tsun clan that was on bad terms with the Fa house had just one person as intimidating as Darum Wu, I would feel 50 percent more at danger.

「... Asuta, Papa Donda and Mama Mia Lei wants me to pass you a message, can you hear me out?」

Leina Wu interjected solemnly.

「If you need more helpers tomorrow, the main house will send Lala Wu, and the branch house will dispatch Shela Wu.」

「Ahh... Lala Wu and Shela Wu huh.」

「Yes. I tried my best to get the job, but they didn't accept my request.」

Leina Wu smiled gently.

Even when things didn't go her way, Leina Wu's expression was still so peaceful.

How strange, I couldn't understand what she was thinking at all.

「...Asuta, is that your new dish?」

Leina Wu looked at the plate used for sampling.

「T-That's right. Do you two want to try? It's probably cold now, I will heat it up for you.」

「No need, this is made for the people in Post Station Town, right? I can't eat their share. Asuta, I don't want to disrupt your work.」

Leina Wu lowered her eyelids and smiled gently.

Vena Wu sighed lazily when she saw Leina Wu's face.

「Asuta... Can I try it...? Can you make one for me now...?」

「Eh? Of course, no problem.」

I had an idea of Vena Wu's intentions. I stuck a firewood into the slow fire of the brazier and put it into the cart.

As I was heating up the pot, Darum Wu called out to Vena Wu:

「Hey, did anyone from the Tsun clan show up today?」

「Well... Not just the Tsun clan, I didn't see any other denizens of Forest's Edge here...」

「That's true. No one would go out of their way to the edge of the town when they shop for grocery. The existence of this stall is probably still not known to everyone yet.」

「I see.」

Darum Wu continued staring at Vena Wu and nodded.

「What about that Kamyua Yost guy?」

「He came to buy Asuta's food earlier... Maybe he is still hiding in the shade of some tree...」

「... Is that so.」

The flame in Darum Wu's eyes intensified, and he glared at the woods behind the stall.

That man might really be hiding somewhere right now and eavesdropping on us— just the thought of that made me unhappy. That man once told me about his attachment to the denizens of Forest's Edge, but his actions seemed to imply that he had no intention of getting to know the denizens of Forest's Edge. Just when would we be able to discern if he was friend or foe?

「Alright, I'm making it now.」

I tossed the aria and the meat into the pot, and made one 『Myam-roasted meat』 .

「It looks delicious...」

Vena Wu smiled happily after receiving it and took a bite.

「Yes, it's great... How sweet... Papa Donda might not like it though...」

「That's true, I used a surprising amount of fruit wine after all.」

「But it's really tasty... I like it a lot. It's on the level of a 『Kiba burger』 in my heart...」

After taking another bite, Vena Wu offered the 『Myam-roasted meat』 to Leina Wu.

「Leina... This is my share, so no need to hold back... Do you want a bite...?」

「Ehh, but...」

「If you don't, I will eat it all...」

Vena Wu took another bite after saying that.

A childish anxious expression appeared on Leina Wu's face.

That was the Leina Wu I knew.

「Then, just one bite...」

Leina Wu carefully reached out her hands.

She gently bit the 『Myam-roasted meat』 — and couldn't help smiling blissfully.

「It's... wonderful. The taste is really strong...」

「Yes, I think the people in town prefer heavier seasoning.」

「Asuta, you are incredible... I really want to help too...」

Leina Wu lowered her eyelids. She had reverted to her old honest self.

「... This stall won't close after just ten days. He can't rely on the same few women to help him forever... Maybe it will be your turn soon...」

「Yes, that's true.」

Leina Wu smiled shyly.

She then looked at me timidly.

「Asuta, when that time comes... I will be in your care.」

「Ah, yes. I will be in your care too.」

After hearing my answer, Leina Wu smiled brightly.

Her smile somehow made my heart ache.

At this moment Darum Wu said anxiously:

「If we are done here, then let's go.」

「Oh Darum, want to try a bite...?」

「Who wants to eat that thing?」

After Darum Wu said that, he glared at me with his wolf-like eyes again.

「Hey... Why are you giving that look of pity? Are you pitying me after seeing my miserable state of getting injured and not able to enter the forest?」

「What? I don't mean that! I was almost killed by kiba twice before, so I won't ever think that when I see someone who got hurt while hunting kiba.」

I really don't get along with Darum Wu. I thought to myself as I scratched my head.

Vena Wu then left the cart and clung onto Darum Wu's swole right arm.

「You can't do that. If you get agitated, your wounds will open again... If you want to recover sooner, you have to be more careful...」

「Shut up, don't cling to me.」

Darum Wu shook off his sister crudely.

He then turned and left just like that towards the south. Leina Wu quickly apologized:

「Sorry for disturbing your work... Please take care of Vena Wu and the others... Asuta, you be careful too.」

「Yes, thank you. Please send my regards to Donda Wu and Mia Lei Wu.」

Leina Wu showed a blissful smile, then chased after her brother.

Vena Wu held on the half-eaten 『Myam-roasted meat』, and sighed gently.

「Am I being too much of a busybody... But my heart aches for her when I see Leina suppress her own feelings...」

「Hmm? W-What happened?」

「After the Lutim house wedding, Leina seemed to be lost in thoughts all the time... What happened between you two on that night...?」

「Well... Something did happen...」

「You don't have to tell me what happened... Sigh, what kind of attitude should I be showing... I don't want to see Leina in pain, but I would hate to see you two become lovely dovelly even more...」

「.....」

「Asuta... It's about time you get married with Ai Fa, right...?」

What kind of face was I making now?

This was the first time I had seen Vena Wu making such a serious face.

「... Will things have a happy ending if I do that?」

「Yes... After your marriage with Ai Fa, I will be heartbroken, and can finally make up my mind to destroy everything...」

「What?」

「When that time comes, I will just need to seduce you, and we will leave Forest's Edge together. Ai Fa will never forgive us, so we can't stay in Forest's Edge anymore... And Leina will give up on you after seeing our immoral actions...」

「That's not a happy ending at all!」

「... I think this is the only way I can be with you...」

Vena Wu lowered her head sadly. Her words contradicted themselves, and I sighed exasperatedly.

「I already told you before that I have no plans to marry anyone. Your harrowing imagination will not turn true.」

「What will you do if Ai Fa proposes to you...? Asuta, can you reject her...?」

Of course— but I couldn't give that answer immediately.

Ai Fa proposing to me seemed so unrealistic.

But what if that day will come?

I don't know when I will disappear, so I don't intend to take a wife. Even with that thought in mind, I still want to be by Ai Fa's side until my life ends.

If Ai Fa proposed to me— what would I do?

Vena Wu watched the dumbfounded me as she fiddled with her chestnut-colored hair:

「Ai Fa might want to marry another man in the future... Let me tell you first, Darum is still hoping that Ai Fa will marry him... That child had turned down quite a few marriages in the past two years...」

「A-Ai Fa is just like me, she has no intention of marrying anyone or marrying into another family. That will never happen in the future.」

「A person's heart can change easily... Ai Fa had broken all ties with all the other denizens, but she took you in as a family member now... Who knows how Ai Fa will change in another year or two...?」

「You are... not wrong...」

「If Ai Fa wants to marry you, will you reject her...? After you turn her down and she marries Darum, will you be able to give her your blessing...?」

I kept mum.

With the way Ai Fa was now, I couldn't imagine her abandoning the lifestyle of a hunter.

However— the hearts of people can change drastically because of sudden events.

Besides, even if her feelings remain unchanged, she might suffer a career-ending injury like Shin Wu's father Ryada Wu and retire from kiba hunting.

If that time comes— what should I do?

「Hey, you still aren't closing your stall yet?」

An unfamiliar voice called out to me, making me snap out of my daze.

「The Semu and Jaguar people have all gone. Even if you continue to stay in the Post Station Town, no one else will buy kiba meat.」

An unfamiliar face said in an unfamiliar voice.

The other party was a man— a young man. He was about my age and looked like a delinquent.

He had ivory skin, a pair of beady brown eyes, and long light-brown hair. He was wearing a shirt that left his chest open, and a knife hung on his waist.

A group of people behind him matched his style of dressing, as well as age. The group had five members, and only one was a girl.

「... Welcome.」

I received him with a smile.

Even though their goal was to mock me, they were still westerners I had been hoping for since the first day.

Ai Fa's figure was still clear in my mind, but now wasn't the time to be worried about that.

「Kiba is really delicious, you know. How about giving it a try?」

I pointed to the plate with the samples, and the youth laughed out in disdain.

「How can westerners eat such things? Aren't you a westerner? Why are you frolicking with a 《kiba eater》 woman and selling kiba meat...? You already earned enough copper plates, right? Then scram back to Forest's Edge!」

That Uncle from Jaguar also complained like this two days ago. But the youth's words were full of malice and hostility, and couldn't be compared with him.

He probably came over to mock me because he felt fear and disdain for the denizens of Forest's Edge. Even though he said these words cockily, his gaze was wavering. He was smiling but didn't look happy. From the air he was giving us, I guessed that these delinquents were here to test their guts by taunting the denizens of Forest's Edge.

I was waiting for this kind of customers. The issue now was to make them taste the kiba meat.

「I'm not born in Forest's Edge, but I do think that kiba meat is tasty. I opened this stall because I wish to share with the people of the Post Station Town how delicious the kiba is.」

When he saw my humble smile, the youth's face cramped a little, and he snorted.

「Only the poor people from the south and east will think this thing tastes good! You are an eyesore, get lost!」

「Is that so? Only a few westerners had tried my food, but they think kiba tastes great. I guess people will have their own preference... Would you like to give it a try?」

I gave Vena Wu a look. Without needing me to tell her, Vena Wu had already put the brazier inside the cart's compartment.

「... That's interesting, go on and try it.」

The lone girl said excitedly and poked the back of the youth roughly.

It wasn't on the level of Vena Wu, but this girl also had a sexy charm around her. She was about my age and only wore a tube top with a skirt that went down to her ankles on her waist. She was like the Post Station Town version of Vena Wu. But the girl didn't have any veils or shawls, her bare skin was clearly visible. Her clothing had bright colors, and she wore many accessories on her neck and arms.

This sexy girl and the other youths all had ivory skin, while the skin of those who spend a lot of time under the sun had a skin tone closer to yellowish brown. Were all the westerners originally of the same race? I wondered to myself.

「Don't joke with me, why do I have to eat kiba meat?」

「Why not? If it's good, we will have some too.」

「Then you try it! If it's good, I will eat it too.」

「How useless. After so much talk, you are actually still scared of kiba, huh.」

The girl flicked her long brown hair and showed a taunting smile.

So they were really here as a courage test. That suited me just fine.

While the youth and the girl were arguing like newborn puppies, the pot had been heated up. I grabbed a small amount of kiba meat from my leather pouch.

After putting the meat into the pot, a delightful sizzling sound erupted along with a strong fragrance.

The two of them fell silent the next instant.

As if they were pulled by invisible strings, the youths that just a moment before were snickering behind, suddenly gathered before the stall.

When the surface of the meat was seared, I scooped a spoonful of sauce and tossed it into the pot. White smoke gushed out, leaving a nice aroma behind.

「... So there is myam. Of course, it will smell delicious if you add myam.」

The youth who approached us first said this sarcastically, but no one supported him.

When the meat was almost done, I put the samples on the plate back into the pot. After stirring it carefully, I scooped them up into the plate.

Vena Wu quickly took out the brazier, and I put the krilee toothpicks onto the plate.

「How about giving this a try? You just need to eat a sample. Even if it is not to your taste, it will be an interesting experience to talk about later, right?」

The five boys and one girl all showed troubled expressions.

They must have been filled with worries and were in a dilemma.

They hated kiba, so they were not willing to try this dish, but they were proud, and not willing to let others think they fear kiba; they had no affection for the denizens of Forest's Edge, but were curious about the fragrant food before them. All these reasons complicated their feelings.

「It looks... really tasty...」

「R-Retard, that's kiba meat.」

「That's right! Normal people won't eat the meat of a kiba.」

「My grandmother told me that we will grow horns and tusks of a kiba if we eat that.」

「He added myam, it smells so nice.」

「Right... But it really looks so delicious...」

「You are right! It looks really good!」

Hmm?

When I realized it, a caramel-haired head appeared among the youths.

It was the daughter of the vegetable stall peddler Uncle Dora, Tara.

「Asuta onii-chan, is this the new dish! The myam smells so good!」

「Oh right, Tara, do you want to try a sample?」

「Uwah~!」

After I put another toothpick onto the plate, Tara grabbed the toothpick happily.

As the group of teenagers stared at Tara, she cheered:

「It's delicious~! This isn't as soft as 『Kiba burger』, but it's also yummy! Asuta onii-chan, I want four!」

「Thank you! Doesn't your dad and the others need a sample?」

「They told me to hurry up and buy it if I think the sample tastes good!」

I was very moved.

Thanks to Uncle Dora's interference, the pot dealer and cloth seller became interested in kiba food.

And it was Vena Wu and Ludo Wu who helped in the opening of Uncle Dora's heart to me.

I smiled at Tara as I was thinking all that:

「Okay! Please wait a moment, I will prepare them for you right away.」

「Yes!」

We put the brazier we just took out back and started frying four portions of aria and meat.

I thought I heard one of the teenagers' gulps.

Now that I thought about it, my first Semu customer became only interested in our stall because he saw Tara buying 『Kiba burger』. Was this child destined to be our lucky star? I wondered to myself.

「Sorry for the wait! That will be eight red copper plates.」

「Yes! Thank you!」

Tara carefully held the four 『Myam-roasted meat』 to her chest and ran off.

I scraped off the remnants off the pot with my spatula and smiled at the group that was still hesitating.

「Would you like to try? The samples are free.」

「Okay... I will try it.」

The only girl in the group reached for the plate.

「R-Retard, you can't! What if you grow horns?」

「How is that possible. You really believe in such superstition?」

Even though the girl was saying this, her expression looked troubled.

「T-That little girl ate it nonchalantly just now, we look retarded being scared like this. If you don't want others to think you are a bum, then eat it.」

The girl grabbed the toothpick while ignoring the youth beside her who was yelling: 「I-I'm not afraid!」

After glaring at Vena Wu and me, she put the meat into her mouth with deadly resolve.

After chewing a couple of times, she opened her eyes wide.

「Uwah...」

「H-Hey, are you okay?」

A youth put his hand on the girl's shoulder, but she shook him off coldly.

She muttered:

「Absolutely... delicious...」

I sighed quietly in relief, and the youths started turning rowdy.

「What nonsense are you sprouting!? This is kiba meat! Are you right in the head?」

「Shut up! If you don't believe me then try it! If you think it tastes bad, I will strip right here!」

Don't do that, the guards would rush here. I hope she could spare me from that.

But our efforts were finally paying off.

A westerner I didn't know ate a kiba dish and gave a positive feedback. We finally reached this point on our fourth day.

「Damn it! Alright...! But, don't forget what you just said!」

One of the youths said menacingly and took a toothpick.

With a face on the verge of tears, he chose the smallest piece of meat and slowly put it in his mouth.

「Uwah...」

He opened his eyes wide, just like the girl did earlier.

「How is it? It tastes great, correct?」

The girl said arrogantly.

The other four took the samples too.

It tastes nasty. Fortunately, no one said that. All the youths looked stunned.

Compared to the southerners, maybe kiba suited the westerner's palette better? Or was the 『Myam-roasted meat』 more acceptable for everyone than 『Kiba burger』? It was impossible to tell now. But about half the people gave negative comments on the 『Kiba burger』 on the second day, so we have successfully taken another step forward.

「... Hey, one costs two red copper plates, right?」

「Yes.」

The girl asked me with a dangerous glare, and I answered warmly.

「H-Hey, Yumi, are you really going to buy?」

「Why not? This dish is delicious, there is no reason not to buy one, right? Or are you going to buy food from another stall?」

The girl named Yumi said with a stern look and put the copper plates down onto the counter forcefully.

「Ain'tcha buying? Let me say this first, I won't share a single bite with you.」

The youth looked at each other confusedly.

The girl shrugged arrogantly and stared at me again.

「Hurry up, you are making me hungry!」

「Yes! Please wait a moment.」

As we had to shift the brazier in and out again, we were really busy.

But I quite enjoyed being this busy.

There was still some time before noon, so even selling one more portion would be great for us.

「Vena Wu, I will leave the brazier to you.」

I turned to her with a smile.

But she didn't move at all.

Vena Wu narrowed her sexy and slightly droopy eyes, which made her look even more sleepy than usual.

「Vena Wu...?」

Was she actually dozing off at such a busy time?

No... When she narrowed her sleepy eyes, it had an unbelievably sharp gleam in them.

I never expected Vena Wu to show such dangerous eyes.

Why was she acting like that?

Moreover, she was looking at a direction I didn't expect.

She wasn't looking at me or the customer before us, or the bustling southern streets—Vena Wu was looking towards the ends of the north.

I slowly shifted my gaze.

So did the customers before me.

We both felt a sense of horror because a terrifying existence appeared in that direction.

He was about two meters tall and had a huge body like a human balloon. Was that a man or a ball of meat? He charged right at us with heavy strides on the stone-paved path.

He was the youngest son of the Tsun main house—— Mida Tsun.

Part 3

「Uwahh!」

One of the youths screamed meekly and fell on his butt.

The others backed away with their faces pale.

The youngest son of the Tsun clan grabbed my cart with enough momentum to send everyone flying.

He didn't pounce on me but at the cart.

「Huff~puff~」

Mida Tsun held the pillar supporting the roof and panted. He asked in a screeching voice:

「... What are you doing...? It smells nice... Just what are you doing...」

His voice was like a toddler, and his words were muddled.

「Hiee!」

The youth on the ground let out a frail scream. It was no wonder - Mida Tsun had a very disturbing appearance.

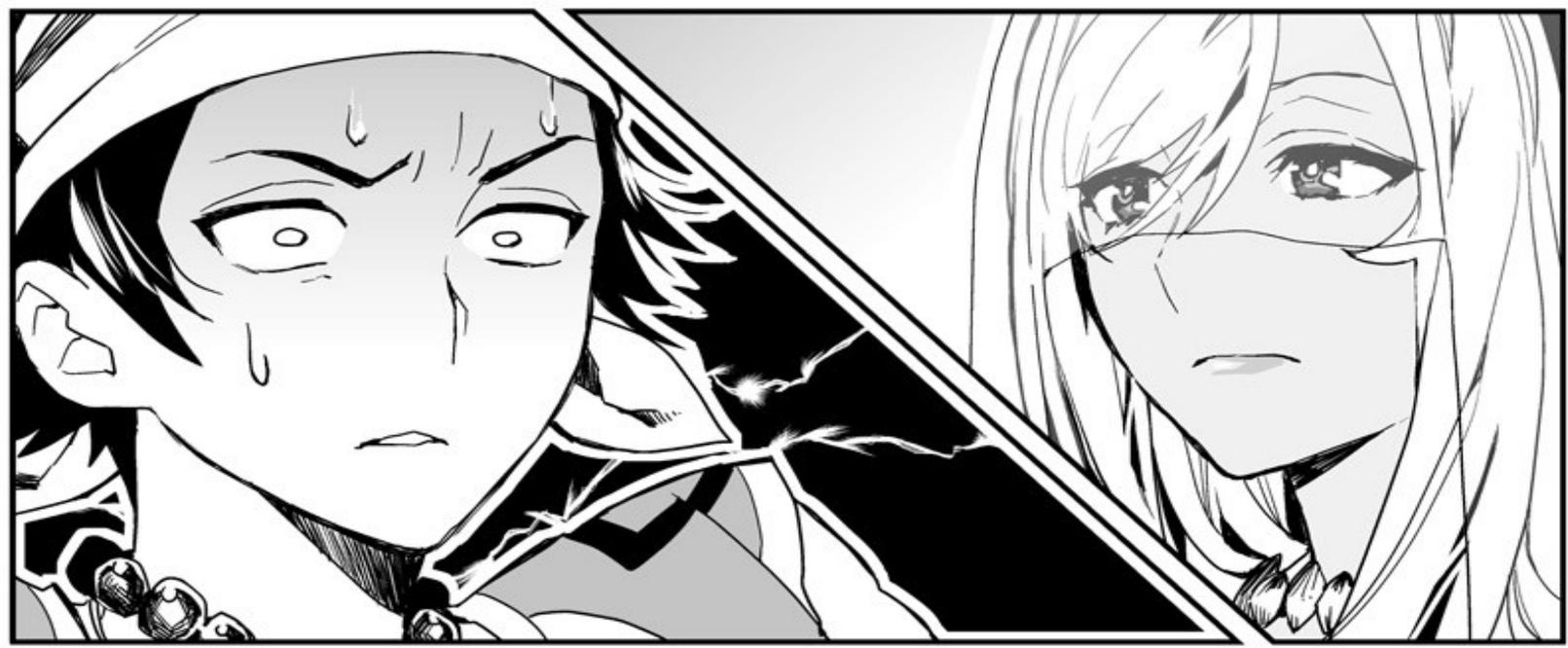
His face, torso, and limbs were all bloated, just like a human balloon. That might be just a tad abnormal, but when paired with his tall stature, it made him look like a monster.

His upper arms were thick, almost the size of Vena Wu's waist.

The legs supporting his gigantic body were short and stubby, like that of an elephant.

His entire body was like a ball, making it impossible to discern where his chest ended and stomach began.

The familiar Forest's Edge garments covered his body, but that shirt probably used three large pieces of cloth that married women would use. The cape made from kiba hide was too short and couldn't cover his body.



He didn't have tusks and horns that signified the pride of a hunter on his neck. Instead, he had a large club on his waist.

The more I looked at him, the weirder he seemed.

Furthermore — his ugly appearance made him look even less human.

His face was bloated unnaturally, with his nose and mouth squeezed together in the center of his face. The top of his head was bald, with untidy black hair stuck close to his ears.

But even so, his face still had a hint of innocence.

No, instead of innocence, it was closer to a baby— no, an animal.

His eyes were extremely small, and his thick eyelids almost covered his eyes. His nose almost had no bulge at all, only two black cavities were visible. His lips were thick, but his mouth was small. His face was twice the size of a normal man, but his facial features were tiny, making the proportion all wrong.

This panting piece of living meat grabbed tightly to my cart's pillar, and his beady eyes seemed full of life. Under the bright sunlight, the alien before us drew forth the fear lying in my heart.

「Ehh... Mida is hungry... it smells nice here...?」

The pillar kept creaking.

I snapped back to my senses when I heard that ominous sound.

「W-What are you doing!? Are you trying to destroy my cart!?!」

「Mida... is hungry you know...?」

Mida Tsun looked down at me unhappily.

I felt as if I was facing a large animal like an orangutan or a lowland gorilla.

After screaming in my heart, I placed my hand on my chest and slowed my breathing.

Calm down— I had to handle this calmly.

「Do you know what I'm doing? As you can see, I'm selling simple meals... Before I go on, can you let go? If you continue to pull on my cart, it will break.」

What should I do if a member of the Tsun clan visited my stall? Obviously, I had discussed this with Kaslan Lutim and Donda Wu countless times.

In short, I had to follow the law.

If they did anything unlawful, I should call for the guards.

If I violate the laws of the city or Forest's Edge carelessly, the violent act of the Tsun Clan would be legitimised. That was the gist of the plan.

「Do you understand what I'm saying? If you want to eat my cooking, you will have to pay copper plates... And I rented this cart from the city. If you break it, you will have to compensate me with copper plates. So, let go.」

I explained with simple words.

Mida Tsun looked down at me; his face was hard to understand like belonging to some sort of animal.

This guy... is probably different type from his elder brothers who only know violence...

Then what type was he? It's hard to explain, but I think he wasn't malicious, he just lacked the ability to tell right from wrong.

If I didn't say anything wrong, he wouldn't turn to violence... I hoped my guess was right.

「.....Tay Tsun has copper plates...」

Mida Tsun grumbled unhappily, but his fingers that were like giant caterpillars left the pillar.

「I see.」

I wiped away the cold sweat on my brows.

「Where is Tay Tsun? Did he come into the town with you?」

「... Yes...」

「Where is he now?」

「... Mida doesn't know... Mida was with him just now...」

Weird, this felt like talking to an ignorant child.

「...Because Mida smelled something nice, Mida ran over... It smells really nice...」

Speaking of which, during the banquet a few days ago, Mida Tsun didn't care about the situation back then and only reacted to the smell of the food.

As I was about to offer some samples to him, someone appeared.

「...Mida Tsun, what's wrong?」

A Forest's Edge man who looked about 50 years old asked. That elderly man wore the attire of a hunter and appeared silently from behind the meat pile.

The next instant, Mida Tsun exhaled loudly.

「Tay Tsun...! Mida is really hungry...」

「I see.」

The middle-aged man looked at me and Vena Wu.

At first glance, the man was just like any other denizens of Forest's Edge. He combed his hair back and had a grey beard. He might be old, but his facial features were well proportioned.

His figure was average and had the buffed body comm amongst Forest's Edge men. He had clothes with swirly patterns and a cape made of kiba hide. The pride of the hunters shined brightly on his chest, and he had a set of small and large blades around his waist. He was dressed just like any other hunter.

For some strange reason, despite his normal attire, something still seemed out of place.

His black eyes lacked strength, and he was expressionless like a mud doll.

Even though his body was buff, he didn't show any signs of life or power.

This was the first time I saw a Forest's Edge man that was so lifeless.

「... How much is this food?」

The man— Tay Tsun asked quietly.

「Two red copper plates... Are you buying?」

「Yes.」

「T-There are samples on this plate, you can try them first.」

「No need.」

There wasn't anything strange about our conversation.

But that still gave me goosebumps.

Shouldn't he be asking about some other things before enquiring about the price?

I was wearing Forest's Edge attire and opening a stall in the Post Station Town with Vena Wu, a Forest's Edge woman. Didn't he have any questions or comments about this?

... Apparently not.

Tay Tsun wasn't bothered at all, and turned to ask that meat pile:

「Mida Tsun, how much do you want to buy?」

「.....Mida wants to eat loads and loads...?」

「The clan head only gave us one white copper plate. If you use it all now, you can't buy anything else?」

「... But Mida wants to eat loads and loads...?」

「I see.」

Tay Tsun turned to me again and placed a white copper plate on the counter.

「Excuse me, I want five.」

「I understand... This customer here had already ordered, please wait a moment.」

That customer—the western girl Yumi was still trembling with a pale face. The other five youths were the same.

I held back my sigh, added firewood and put the brazier back into the cart.

Vena Wu was still staring at the two from the Tsun clan with the same eyes.

What is going on... This old man Tay Tsun is as suspicious as Mida Tsun.

Despite his age, he still acted subservient to Mida Tsun, so he must be from the Tsun branch house.

However, I had never seen any older men in the Wu clan village acting so subservient towards younger men. The men from the branch house would give adequate respect to Jiza Wu, Darum Wu, and Ludo Wu, but they were still treated as equals.

Between the Wu clan and the Tsun clan, which was the correct attitude that the denizens of Forest's Edge should have? I still couldn't judge, but that Tay Tsun character felt creepy to me.

「... Uwah... It looks yummy. Tay Tsun, it looks yummy...」

When he smelled the fragrance of the roasted meat, Mida Tsun placed his hands on Tay Tsun's shoulders and shook him hard.

「That's true.」

Even with his body being shaken hard, Tay Tsun still answered calmly and quietly.

He hid his emotions even better than the easterners.

No— Did this man really have emotions?

Kamyua is probably going to sit this one out.

I hoped he won't interfere.

If any other strange characters appear, my brain would definitely jam.

「Here, sorry for the wait.」

I handed the completed 『Myam-roasted meat』 to Yumi.

Yumi was still staring right at Mida Tsun, and received the merchandise unconsciously.

After I handed one of the merchandise to Tay Tsun, he immediately gave it to Mida Tsun.

「... Uwah...」

Mida Tsun's beady eyes shone, and he prepared to open his mouth.

As his throat was deep in his chest, he couldn't move his jaw. He had to lean his head back to open his mouth.

I was worried that his jaw dislocating or the corner of his mouth splitting— I shirked my shoulders a little as he tossed the 『Myam-roasted meat』 into his mouth.

He ate the 『Myam-roasted meat』 in one bite.

This was a scene right out of a nightmare.

Tay Tsun passed the remaining four 『Myam-roasted meat』 to him one after another, and the five 『Myam-roasted meat』 disappeared from this world.

「... Yummy... So yummy...」

「Thank you.」

I squeezed out a smile.

Once I accept payment, he was a customer. Even if he was from the hated Tsun clan, I will treat him the same.

「...Tay Tsun... Mida still wants to eat more...?」

「The copper plates are all gone.」

「...But... Mida wants to eat more...?」

「The clan head only gives you one white copper plate a month. Please wait until next month.」

His allowance was given monthly!

I was sorry to say this, but I was secretly sighing in relief.

Even if Mida Tsun had no nefarious intentions, he would still disrupt my business if he were to visit daily. That poor Yumi girl finally made up her mind to buy 『Myam-roasted meat』, but she was just standing there in a daze, unaware of what she was holding in her hands.

「...Mida wants to eat more.」

「Then come again next month.」

Tay Tsun voice was devoid of emotions. Finally, he acknowledged me with his gaze.

「Pardon our intrusion, we are leaving now.」

「A-Alright. Thank you for your patronage.」

Tay Tsun pushed Mida Tsun's back towards the north.

Speaking of which, I heard the Tsun clan village was to the north. There might be a road there leading straight to the Post Station Town.

Even so... Did they make this trip to the Post Station Town just to buy snacks for Mida Tsun?

I was relieved that they didn't cause too much of a commotion. I also felt depressed at the same time. No, it would be more than adequate to call it a sense of powerlessness.

Just what is with those guys...

Why is the kiba so delicious...! They didn't ask us that, they didn't even ask me what type of meat was used.

Did they know that I was staying in the Fa house?

Did they know that Vena Wu was from the Wu clan?

I didn't know anything.

I tried expelling the sigh I had been holding in all this while, but Vena Wu was one step ahead.

「Sigh...」

She collapsed onto the ground, her trembling fingers grasping my waistband.

「Enough already... Why is the youngest son of the Tsun clan in town...? Ugghh... I feel like vomiting...」

「A-Are you okay? Vena Wu, get a hold of yourself!」

「How do I do that... I can't stand that youngest son of the Tsun clan the most... Just looking at his fat body makes me disgusted...」

「Really? You looked so cool just now, like a man of the Forest's Edge.」

「I can't let the Tsun clan see my ugly side... Sigh, I feel really uncomfortable...」

「... You are incredible, as expected of a woman from the Wu clan.」

I said from the bottom of my heart and sighed in admiration.

「W... Who was that monster just now...?」

Yumi muttered to herself.

「That's a customer from Forest's Edge. Sorry to have disturbed everyone.」

After I answered, Yumi's shoulders quivered.

She returned to her senses and stared at me.

「You... You look so frail, but you really have guts huh? All these guys were helpless and can only tremble at the side.」

「W-Who's trembling!? You are the one who looks like you are about to cry!」

The youth sitting on the ground got up with a beet red face.

The other dazed youth also snapped back to reality.

「I saw him once before. I was very surprised when I saw him for the first time.」

I tried to mediate with a smile.

「Please dig in, it won't taste good if it gets cold.」

「Ah, yes...」

Yumi stared at me as she bit into the 『Myam-roasted meat』 .

She opened her eyes wide with surprise again.

「Uwah, it's delicious... Is this really kiba? It's tastier than karon.」

「Yes, this really is kiba. I'm glad that you like it.」

「Yeah... it's very tasty.」

Yumi looked up at me with demure eyes.

「Erm... Sorry about earlier, we were mocking that stall...」

「Ehh? Please don't mind, I understand that the people of Genos have a deep hatred towards kiba. I'm very happy to see you try kiba today.」

I used this chance to give her a friendly smile.

When she heard me said that Yumi who was munching on the 『Myam-roasted meat』 suddenly smiled at me sweetly.

She had a fierce demeanor, but her smile looked so innocent.

「What's with you! Don't flirt with men from Forest's Edge! They will abduct you into the woods!」

The youth who was on the ground earlier lashed out angrily, and Yumi glared unhappily at him.

「Are you retarded? Stop spouting nonsense. I'm just stating my honest opinions.」

She was right.

You heard that right, Vena Wu? Don't stare at me with those cold eyes.

「And so? You all are still not buying? After saying so much, you are still afraid of kiba and the denizens of Forest's Edge huh? If that is so, then don't approach this stall in the first place. Trying to act cool all the time, how retarded.」

「What did you say? Didn't you mock this stall earlier, and said 『The denizens of Forest's Edge actually dare to open a stall in town』?」

「I didn't know that kiba is so tasty... Besides, the ones I hate are those lawless denizens of Forest's Edge.」

The girl stole a glance my way.

「It might sound mean, but I don't think this skinny onii-san will act so lawlessly. Heck, he is not even a denizen of Forest's Edge.」

Was I that skinny? I was depressed but still squeezed out a smile.

「There are all sorts of people living in Forest's Edge. Some are fierce, some are gentle and kind. I believe that the denizens of Forest's Edge that bullies the people in town are a small minority.」

「I-In that case, who is that monster just now!? He is also a denizen of Forest's Edge!」

Even in Forest's Edge, he is a unique existence— I was about to answer when someone interjected:

「What are you arguing about? If you are not a customer, then scram. I won't allow you to disturb this bro's business!」

It was a Jaguar man who looked a little fierce.

「W-What's with you! It doesn't concern you, so get lost!」

「That's my line. If you aren't buying anything, then scram.」

The Jaguar man turned to me after saying those crude words.

The next instant, he was all smiles.

「So your stall is still open! I was working from morning until now and thought I will miss out on your food. I almost gave up.」

「Thank you. There's still ten or so meals left. If I can sell everything today, I will open another stall tomorrow.」

I remember this man, he was here early in the morning yesterday too. He had a fierce face but was smiling gleefully now.

「It will be noon soon, ten isn't enough! So you will be opening until noon from tomorrow onwards? Many people will be happy to hear that.」

「Ah, I'm selling this new dish today. Please try a sample.」

I stuck a toothpick onto the sample plate, but the Jaguar customer waved his hand firmly.

「No need no need, I know it's good just from the smell. Make one for me right now, how much is it?」

「Two red copper plates.」

「So cheap! That's a good thing for us. The other stalls will have no business now.」

He laughed, then glared at the western youth.

「You lots must be too scared to eat kiba, right? Don't block the way and scam. If you are so scared of kiba, then go and eat your kimyusu and karon quietly.」

「I-I just told you that we aren't scared of kiba! You are just a foreigner, how dare you look down on me!」

「What retarded nonsense is this, if not for us foreigners, the Post Station Town would have collapsed long ago! If there aren't any foreigners, who will you sell your goods too...? Besides, you lot moved to Genos from some other city in the first place, right?」

The Jaguar man said impatiently and waved his hands as if he was chasing flies away.

「Whatever. If the westerners don't dare to eat kiba, then we will eat them all. Bro, hurry and make one for me.」

「Yes, thank you.」

I was just waiting for the pot to heat up, I wasn't distracted by their conversation.

It was about time. When I toss the diced aria into the pot— One youth placed his copper plates loudly onto the counter.

「Hey! Give me one too! I'm not afraid of kiba at all!」

At this moment, another youth walked forth timidly. He quietly put out some copper plates and looked at me as if he was hesitant to speak.

「Hmmp, I paid before they did.」

The Jaguar man gave a dangerous look.

「It's fine! I will make three portions right now. Please wait a moment.」

「Ah... I want to buy one more.」

Yumi who finished her 『Myam-roasted meat』 gave me more copper plates.

「But why? You want that man from the Forest's Edge to fall for you that much!?!」

「No! I want to let my mother try this! I will tell her it's kiba after she finishes it and see what kind of face she will make.」

This girl seemed to be planning something malicious.

Even though she looked like a delinquent, but she was thoughtful enough to buy a light meal for her mother, which made me sigh.

「Thank you for your patronage!」

I tossed four portions of aria into the pot.

When I was putting the kiba meat in, the youth who was hesitant to speak told me quietly:

「I know that monster just now. He will visit the town once a month to buy light meals... If the food isn't to his taste, he will damage the stall.」

「I-if he breaks other people's stall so willfully, the guards won't just watch idly by, right?」

「That's right. But someone from the castle will always take care of things. They are afraid that the kiba will destroy the farms like last time if they angered the denizens of Forest's Edge.」

The youth said spitefully and looked at Vena Wu and me.

「I'm not scared of the kiba, but as long as Forest's Edge denizens who break the law are not punished, the Genos residents won't accept you.」

「... Thank you, I will keep that in mind.」

Despite all that, this youth was still willing to buy my food.

My capabilities were limited, so I couldn't take the Tsun clan to task— I could only fight in my own way.

I gave three portions of 『Myam-roasted meat』 to the western youth, and one portion to the southerner, and was left with 11 meals.

The streets became more crowded as the sun ascended. There weren't any other westerners who visited this stall, but we sold everything when the sun was at its peak.

In the Post Station Town, business was considered good if a stall sold between 20 to 50 portions. We sold 70 meals in just two and a half hours.

Only ten percent of the customers were westerners.

I didn't expect Mida Tsun's visit, but I still felt a great sense of pride and accomplishment.

「I can increase the number of stalls with east tomorrow.」

I said to Vena Wu as we cleaned up. She answered with a sullen face:

「Yes... but I'm worried about the youngest son of the Tsun clan... Asuta, be careful not to be abducted by him, okay...?」

「Abducted? Me?」

「Yes... That youngest son is capable of something that retarded...」

「... When the time comes, I will run away at full speed. Fortunately, I seem to be faster than him.」

「Yes. If he gives chase on the way home, just run off by yourself... I will try to bring the things back home somehow...」

We did need to be prepared for such a situation.

That Mida Tsun didn't seem to understand the power of the Wu clan, maybe he didn't even know that Vena Wu was from the Wu clan.

「Ehh, how disgusting... I can't stand his baby like face and voice... Asuta, you know how old he is...?」

「I don't want to know, don't tell me.」

「... He is younger than Ludo, you know...?」

「I said don't tell me!」

I felt a chill run down my back.

Furthermore— I felt that Tay Tsun was as terrifying as Mida Tsun. This had nothing to do with my own preference, they were just that creepy.

「We need to be more aware of the situation around us from tomorrow onwards...」

「That's true.」

Opening a stall was quite a prominent matter, I don't think the Tsun clan will continue to ignore us. We didn't just need to be on guard against Diga Tsun or Doddo Tsun, but the entire Tsun clan.

This was a battle akin to walking on thin ice, we had to give it our all.

After renewing our resolve, Vena Wu and I pushed the cart onto the stone paved road which was starting to get crowded.

Part 4

When Vena Wu and I returned to the Fa house, we ran into Ai Fa at the door.

There was still two hours before sunset. The stall was only opened until noon, but we only reached home at the time we scheduled as we had to prepare for tomorrow's work.

Ai Fa was home early today. Vena Wu and I carried iron pot, while Ai Fa had a 50 kg kiba on her shoulder. This scene must have looked amusing to a bystander.

「Great, you returned home safely.」

「Yes, you too... Eldest sister of the Wu clan, thank you for your hard work.」

「Ah, yeah... Ai Fa, did you hunt that kiba...?」

「... Why else would I be bringing it home?」

Ai Fa was a little taken aback when she answered, and swiftly walked to the door.

The huge thing on her shoulder seemed incredibly heavy.

「I'm going to skin it, so I will be at the back of the house.」

「Got it, thank you for your hard work. I will prepare the food for tomorrow together with dinner.」

「Okay.」

I bought quite a lot of things today, and Vena Wu helped me bring them to the entrance.

With the predicted sales increasing, the ingredients we had to bring back from the Post Station Town also increased. The fruit wines and gigo that looked like gigantic burdock was especially heavy, so the things we load on our return trip was about the same as our trip to town.

I took out the items inside the pot and placed them in front of the door, exhaled, then turned towards Vena Wu.

「Vena Wu, thank you for today. I will be counting on you tomorrow too.」

「Yes...」

Vena Wu's head was low and she seemed troubled.

「What's the matter? Are you worried about something?」

「No, it has nothing to do with work... I just think Ai Fa really has her own way of doing things...」

「Eh? I-In what way?」

「The fact that a woman can hunt such a huge kiba is just unbelievable to me...」

Vena Wu sighed.

「Asuta, you said that you can't imagine Ai Fa marrying anyone, and I understand why you think this way... Ai Fa looks outstanding, but she is more suited to getting a bride as a husband...」

Vena Wu was really good at imagining things.

Ai Fa was cooler than any other man. But despite her manly demeanor, she would show the face of a girl from time to time... I better not say more.

「Well, I'm going back then... See you tomorrow...?」

「Alright, thanks again.」

I went into the house, and checked the stores for people just in case, and carried the ingredients into the food store.

I didn't come back early today, but I already grilled the poitan for dinner in the morning. I decided to prepare the aria used for making meat patty first. When I took out the chopping board and the Santoku knife from the bag, Ai Fa returned to the house.

「Hmm? What's the matter?」

「I'm still in my hunting attire. I need to take it off to avoid the smell of blood and meat getting on it.」

The hunting attire refers to the cape made from kiba hide.

「I see. Ah, let me keep your hunting attire for you.」

「It's fine, I already hung the kiba up, so I want to rest for a bit. There's still some time before it gets dark anyway.」

「I see, do rest well.」

As Ai Fa loosened her shoes, I carried the aria out of the food store.

「You are back very late today... No, this is the time you are scheduled to return, right?」

「Hmm? Yes, this is the first time I returned on time.」

「It will take a lot of time to sell 70 portions after all.」

「Ah, that's not it. I told you yesterday that I will be setting up another stall tomorrow. So I went to the Wu clan village to discuss the plans.」

Ai Fa hung her cape on the wall, scooped water from the flask to drink, then sat down beside the stove. She gave me an incredulous look.

「So, how was your business?」

「We sold everything right after noon... Oh right, the youngest son of the Tsun Clan Mida Tsun and a man called Tay Tsun appeared at the stall.」

「What?」

Ai Fa turned tense.

「I will tell you the details later. Looking at this another way, on top of Doddo Tsun, we will have to be on guard against Mida Tsun. These people from the Tsun clan is really problematic.」

「If the clan head is depraved, the entire clan rots with him... It's great that you are safe.」

Ai Fa nodded sternly, then tilted her head quizzingly.

「By the way, you said that you closed the stall at noon?」

「Hmm? It should be right after noon passed.」

「...Did you sell 70 meals that quickly?」

「Yes. Most of the customers were southerners and easterners, but three westerners who passed by bought our kiba food!」

I turned towards Ai Fa with a smile, but found her close to me. Her waist was slightly bent, and her right hand was reaching for me. She remained still in this weird position.

「... What's the matter, Ai Fa?」

「Nothing, I almost grabbed your head unconsciously again.」

Ai Fa said seriously, then slowly lowered her right hand.

「That was close.」

I see.

She actually didn't have to restrain herself.

Hugs weren't good for my heart, but head pats would just make me a little embarrassed.

Besides, why did she described a head pat with the verb 「grab」 ?

「And so, I will be getting another helper tomorrow as planned. There will be four of us in total. Lala Wu and Shela Wu from the Wu clan will be assisting me.」

「Shela Wu?」

「She's Shin Wu's elder sister. Well, we met her in the stove room of Shin Wu's place during the Lutim house wedding. Don't you remember?」

「Ah... That coquettish woman with dark hair.」

「Coquettish」 didn't seem like a word Ai Fa would use.

「She's really charming, huh.」

「Ehh?」

「Her body is a little frail, but men want to marry such delicate girls, right?」

So even you were commenting from the perspective of a guy.

Never mind, I would be even more shocked if she started telling me about her ideal type of men.

「Hmm, her culinary skills are excellent, she is a perfect support. I'm looking forward to tomorrow.」

「.....」

「Hmm? What is it?」

「Your look is completely different from your depressed self yesterday. Your eyes and face are both filled with strength.」

「Don't bring up what happened yesterday please, I was just tired.」

I scratched my head and smiled wryly.

The next moment, Ai Fa suddenly knelt down before me.

Her face closed in on me quickly and stopped suddenly.

「A-Ai Fa, what's the matter?」

「Nothing, I almost hugged your head again.」

Ai Fa nodded firmly with a serious face.

「That was close.」

I see.

Was she serious?

But there was no way she could joke.

「Don't worry, I will restrain myself, and try my best not to make you uncomfortable.」

When Ai Fa touches me, I would resist a little not because I was unhappy.

I sighed, it seemed that there was a long road ahead before we could understand each other.

At that moment— when Ai Fa came near me, I felt an aroma enter my nose.

「Hmm... Is that the smell of the fruit that attracts kiba?」

The next instant, Ai Fa's cheeks turned red.

「Asuta, how many times do I have to tell you—」

「No! I'm not talking about your body scent! You are using the 『sacrificial hunting style』, correct?」

Ai Fa pouted with her face still red.

「I didn't use the 『sacrificial hunting style』, I just put it in the traps I set. That fruit has a strong smell, so it would get on me somehow.」

「I see... but since the numbers of kiba had decreased, you can stop using those fruits, right? We already made arrangements, if we run out of meat, the Wu clan will give theirs to us. You are already doing your part as a hunter.」

The kiba had already wiped out the food in this region and started moving south. Even so, Ai Fa still hunted one kiba every two days. She even got a kiba two days in a row today.

Hunting the kiba en masse could lower the damage to the farms in the west. But a hunter was said to have done their duty once they obtained enough tusks and horns for their family to survive. The Wu clan and Lutim house also followed this principle and estimate how many kiba they needed to hunt in a day.

There were only two people in the Fa house, so just hunting one kiba every five days would be enough. However, Ai Fa had hunted several times this amount in these twenty days. She didn't have to use the dangerous fruits that attracts kiba—

Ai Fa still pouted unhappily.

「I already told you, I'm not using the 『sacrificial hunting style』. I have been using that fruit in my traps before I even met you. Don't keep complaining.」

「I'm not complaining... When we visited the Wu clan, they told us that Darum Wu got injured, right? His wounds are serious, and he still can't enter the forest now.」

「... What of it?」

「No, I mean... I'm worried about you getting injured.」

「Hmmp!」

Ai Fa averted her head.

She glanced at me sideways.

「Let's discuss this when I really get injured.」

「But...」

「Before I met you, I often get injured. There are times when I can't enter the forest for days... The duties of a hunter are to survive and hunt kiba. You don't need to preach to me, I won't waste my life.」

「I see.」

I could only nod in agreement.

「I understand. Sorry, it's my bad... I didn't have enough resolve.」

「... You are my family, of course you will worry. I won't blame you over such trivial matters.」

Her tone turned gentle and her eyes were bright.

「However, stop mentioning about my scent. It makes me uncomfortable.」

「So that's what you are concerned about.」

I couldn't help smiling wryly.

「I was just surprised to smell the fruit that attracted kiba. You will be curious if I have a strange smell on me too.」

「... I won't pay attention to other people's scent.」

「I don't either... But that fruit has a strong aroma, so I can tell right away.」

「I just told you! Stop talking about that!」

Ai Fa reached out and grabbed me.

Her face was red with embarrassment.

「In order to not make you uncomfortable, I have been careful with my words and actions, so why are you not doing the same!? Do you enjoy seeing me unhappy!」

「N-No, that's not it. I'm not talking about your scent, but the fruits that attract kiba! You are overreacting!」

I raised my hands in surrender in a panic.

Ai Fa grabbed my chest and said in a low voice:

「... You are too sly.」

「Sly?」

「You are always doing what you want, so why should I hold myself back?」

「H-Hold yourself back? You mean not patting my head and things like that? You don't need to...」

「... Then, I can do as I wish?」

Ehh?

What did that mean? Was she going to give me a tight hug?

「S-Since that cause such a burden on your heart, then do as you wish...」

Our conversation was too weird.

If I was listening as a bystander, I would definitely be laughing now.

「... Hmmp.」

Ai Fa unhand me.

Was she going for a hug?

No— Ai Fa stood up majestically with a red face.

「I'm not like you. You are an unreasonable fool, but I will follow my own principle to the end.」

She was exaggerating too much.

I still apologized to her anyway:

「I'm really sorry. I will be more careful in the future and not make you uncomfortable... We should end this meaningless squabble and start on our work.」

「Hmmp.」

Ai Fa snorted, and walked to the entrance.

「What are we eating tonight?」

「Anything is fine. What do you want to eat?」

Ai Fa suddenly stopped.

After a while, she replied smugly: 「Hamburg steak.」

Ai Fa seemed very pleased with herself for not giving an answer on reflex. But her answer remained the same.

「That's right. We ate 『Myam-roasted meat』 yesterday, and shabu shabu the day before. Let's have normal hamburg steak today then.」

「Yes.」

Ai Fa started wearing her shoes.

I could finally turn towards the chopping board and start my work.

Hmm, what was I doing... Right, preparing the meat patty for 『Kiba burger』 .

I had to dice the aria.

Even if I started making the patty now, I could make it in time for dinner. I grabbed the Santoku knife that was kept in its white sheath.

The next moment— someone hugged me tightly from behind.

My arms and torso were held at the same time, and smooth soft hair brushed against my ear.

I almost screamed, but the other party quickly let go. The touch of her warm body didn't feel unpleasant, I felt the opposite of that instead.

「Retard, you are full of openings.」

Ai Fa laughed cheerfully.

「If you are not careful with your words next time, I will make you experience this discomfort.」

No.



Dear house head, that wasn't it.

I put my hands onto the floor weakly. The road towards us understanding each other wasn't just long, but precarious too.

Chapter 2 - Fifth day - Swarmed with Patrons

Part 1

It was the fifth day of operation. I opened another stall as planned.

However, when we got into place and were getting ready to open, Lala Wu and Shela Wu who had set off from the Wu clan village directly were still nowhere to be found.

「So slow... If they don't hurry, there will be another commotion.」

There was a bigger crowd than yesterday around the stall. The guards held spears and looked worried.

「It's fine, let's prepare as slowly as possible.」

I looked towards the empty stall beside us and started chopping the tino shreds for the 『Kiba burger』 .

In order to cook two different dishes at the same time, I borrowed a pot from the Wu clan to make 『Myam-roasted meat』 . I also asked Shela Wu to prepare the grilled poitan to be used with the 『Myam-roasted meat』 . We couldn't start the business in the other stall before their arrival.

Since the pot was with them, Lala Wu and Shela Wu could go to the Post Station Town directly from the Wu clan and didn't need to detour to the Fa house. They could save two hours of the to and fro trip involving the Fa house and use this time to forage for firewood and grill poitan.

Thanks to that, I prepared 60 『Kiba burger』 and 『Myam-roasted meat』 today, a total of 120 portions.

It was a huge number, so I didn't think we could sell them all. However, I could finally stay in the Post Station Town until our scheduled closing time.

How many meals could we sell in five hours? Just thinking about that made me tremble from excitement.

「... If we sell everything, that will be 240 red copper plates in revenue... How many kiba's worth of tusks and horns is that?」

「Exactly 20 tusks and horns from an adult kiba. After accounting for the cost, that would be 150 copper plates of profits, which is 13 kiba's worth of tusks and horns.」

I already calculated everything related to this.

On the other hand, if I couldn't sell a single portion, our losses would be equivalent to 7 kiba. I also needed to calculate that.

「Earning 13 kiba's worth in one day... I feel dizzy just hearing that...」

「No, we can't sell everything today. I don't think that is possible.」

「Really...? It's hard for me to imagine the scene of us not selling out...」

We chatted as we slowly did the preparations. At this moment, an energetic voice came from the other side of the crowd:

「Excuse me, let me through!」

Reinforcements have arrived.

「Sorry to keep you waiting! We should be on time, right? Are we late?」

The third daughter of the Wu clan Lala Wu appeared before us. She tied her bright red hair into a ponytail. I said to her with a smile:

「You are very punctual. We were probably too early. Let's meet up behind the inn tomorrow.」

「I see, got it... Really, this is heavy. Can I put the pot here?」

「Yes, thank you. Shela Wu, thanks for your help too.」

「Not at all, the pot is not too heavy so I can carry it.」

The branch family's Shela Wu smiled calmly. She had tied her dark brown hair behind her. She looked exceptionally delicate amongst the women of Forest's Edge.

They wrapped up the grilled poitan with a cloth, put it in the pot, then brought it together with the firewood that Lala Wu spent two hours to collect.

I heard that Shela Wu had a weak constitution. But she could still carry such a heavy load, which was a far cry from the idea of a 「frail woman」 in my heart. As all the women in Forest's Edge were incredibly strong, I thought Shela Wu just lacked their amazing might.

By the way, both of them wore veils and shawls, dressed for their trip to town. On Shela Wu's waist was a beautiful bright dress that covered up to her ankles. It matched her delicate face really well.

「Okay, I already explained the rough procedures yesterday. Vena Wu and Shela Wu will take care of the 『Kiba burger』 stall, Lala Wu and I will be responsible for the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall.」

「Okay~」 「Yes!」 「Alright.」

The three of them answered one after another.

A large crowd surrounded the stall, but Lala Wu and Shela Wu who were tending to the stall for the first time didn't look fazed at all. Looks like the denizens of Forest's Edge were used to being showered by the gaze of the townspeople.

As we waited for the pot to heat up, Shela Wu and I started chopping vegetables in our respective stalls. After closing the stall yesterday, I headed to the Wu clan to explain the job description. Hence, both new recruits moved smoothly.

「In short, I will cook the dish. Lala Wu, remember what to do with the food after I'm done with it.」

「Yes, if Vena-Nee can do it, then I can do it easily.」

I didn't know how to respond to her answer.

For the sake of Vena Wu's reputation, I had to explain that she wasn't clumsy at all. She did burn the meat sometimes when she tended to the hearth, but she had not made any mistake while tending to the stall in town.

「Speaking of which, there sure are a lot of people here. No wonder you can earn hundreds of copper plates.」

Lala Wu looked at the dozens of customers fearlessly.

Twenty people gathered on the third day; yesterday was the fourth day, and there were 30-odd people; And for today, the fifth day— I could see more than 40 people here. The Semu stood quietly on one side, and the Jaguar people were very noisy. If any unaware travelers were to pass by, they might think the two groups were about to start a riot.

「It's almost done.」

I tossed the diced aria into the heated pot.

I put in 7 aria which were enough for about 15 portions.

Just seeing my action made the Jaguar people more excited. When I tossed in about 3 kg of meat a short moment later, the sound they made was no different from cheering.

「Uwah, it smells great— So this is myam?」

「Yes. This ingredient isn't expensive, you can try buying some for the Wu clan next time.」

To stop the large amount of meat and aria from getting burnt, I kept moving my spatula and said to Lala Wu with a smile.

Lala Wu blinked her sea blue eyes.

「Asuta... you looked really happy.」

「Ehh? I-Is that so?」

「Yes. You always look happy when you are cooking. But this is the first time I see you showing such a gleeful face.」

Lala Wu showed her teeth in a cheerful smile after saying that.

Lala Wu was very sensitive and observant. I felt a little embarrassed when I heard her say that.

On the fifth day of opening, I could finally enjoy the situation I was in. I just wanted to avoid any trouble yesterday, so my nervousness far outweighed my happiness.

As I was thinking about that, I made my last attack and tossed the myam into the pot. The aroma from the myam and fruit wine erupted, and the Jaguar people cheered once more.

「H-Hey, are you done yet! Are you still cooking?」

One of the guards ran over in a panic.

「Yes, please wait a while more. It's about time to ask them to queue up.」

I smiled in response. The guard's action didn't make me feel uneasy.

The Jaguar people might be rowdy, but they didn't go overboard or taunt the Semu people. I could even feel some sense of order from their atmosphere.

The commotion two days ago happened because all our merchandise got sold out, and they were frustrated when they saw the group from Semu getting to buy more food than they did.

The Jaguar people had forthright characters, and their faces looked very cheerful right now. Most of them were getting on age, but they all had pure and innocent smiles.

I couldn't help feeling happy when I saw their gleeful faces.

I turned to the stall responsible for the 『Kiba burgers』 .

「Vena Wu, are both of you ready?」

「Yes, we are...」

「Okay, we will open now! Everyone, please place your orders five at a time.」

To avoid being scolded by the guards, I announced at an adequate volume. The Jaguar people formed up in neat rows.

「Lala Wu, we will take the money and hand over the goods.」

「Okay!」

I wrapped the tino shreds and meat with the grilled poitan and passed them to Lala Wu one by one.

They were followed by 5 more Semu and 5 more Jaguar people. In a blink of an eye, all 15 portions were gone.

「Sorry, please wait for a moment!」

The pot was still on the brazier, I tossed in aria and kiba meat again.

I fried the food and checked the situation in the neighboring stall. Vena Wu just happened to say cheerfully at this moment:

「Sorry, please wait for a while...」

They sold 20 portions too.

A total of 35 meals— But even so, the wall of people showed no signs of reducing.

「Shela Wu, are things going alright?」

「Things are fine right now...」

I asked Shela Wu who had the best cooking skills to prepare the additional tarapa sauce.

I observed for a moment and found her procedures to be correct.

At this moment, the food in the pot was done. After scooping them up into a plate, I called out to Vena Wu:

「Vena Wu, let's trade places.」

I asked her to make the 『Myam-roasted meat』, then walked to the 『Kiba burger』 stall.

「Good work. Yes, there don't seem to be any problems.」

The bright-red tarapa sauce was boiling and looked appetizing.

「Hey.」

When I was sprinkling crushed rock salt and pico leaves into the pot, a customer called out to me.

It was a young Jaguar man, one of the architects. He had been visiting daily since three days ago.

「You are still not done yet!? That's too much, we are waiting so anxiously.」

「Sorry! Please wait just a bit longer!」

I lowered my head in apology, then took out the meat patty in the leather pouch and put it into the tarapa sauce. The dish would be done once the meat patties were cooked.

「Incredible... I did hear about it, but I didn't expect business to be so good.」

Shela Wu said to me quietly:

「Asuta, thank you for giving me this chance to work. I can relieve some of Shin Wu's burden after earning these copper plates.」

「No, Mia Lei Wu and Donda Wu were the ones who sent you. I only asked for a woman proficient in tending to the hearth.」

In the Wu clan village, Shela Wu was one of the top few in culinary skills. That wasn't just pleasantries. I think only Leina Wu and Mama Mia Lei could compare with her.

After she joined the lineup, I harbored a secret hope that the Wu clan could manage one of the stalls in the future.

The Wu clan and the Fa house could then get the same profits. I only paid the Wu clan women 6 copper plates, and they had to prepare the grilled poitan, which made me felt a little bad.

And of course, I still need to observe this for a few months.

As I was thinking about that, the meat patties were cooked. I muttered 「Well done!」 and called for Vena Wu again.

「Vena Wu, please take care of this side...! Sorry for the wait! We will start selling again!」

I walked back to the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall, and the additional meals were almost all gone.

The wall of people was starting to thin.

「Lala Wu, can you help me make and sell the food?」

「Yes, I can do that now. Maybe I can do it better than Vena-nee.」

This Wu clan woman showed no mercy in her words.

But she was very reliable.

「Well then, I will leave this to you for now. I will prepare the additional food.」

At a glance, there were about ten customers waiting for their food.

The customers who completed their purchase stood right behind them to enjoy their meal. This place was still incredibly crowded.

I sold more than 30 『Myam-roasted meat』 in the morning... isn't that a little too popular?

Because the 『Kiba burger』 needed more preparation time, the customers who couldn't wait switched to 『Myam-roasted meat』, which resulted in its sales going up.

Of the 60 『Myam-roasted meat』 we prepared, half of them had been sold. I just prepared 20 more 『Kiba burger』, and the queuing customers will probably buy them all. It seemed that we could sell quite a number of meals in this morning.

But could we really last 5 hours like this?

I felt a chill down my back at the thought of that.

「Asuta onii-chan, I want two!」

A caramel-colored head poked out from the crowd. Our petite regular customer— Tara was here.

「Thank you for coming every day. Are you buying only two today?」

「Yes! This is for the cloth stall uncle and pot dealer uncle! Tara wants to eat 『Kiba burger』!」

「Is your father having 『Kiba burger』 too?」

I made the orders for the Semu and Jaguar people and asked Tara at the same time. Tara showed a gloomy face:

「Papa says he doesn't feel like eating. He had been depressed since morning.」

「Ehh? Is he not feeling well?」

「I don't know. He says he will be back to normal tomorrow...」

While Tara was looking down with a sullen face, I handed the 『Myam-roasted meat』 I just made to her nose.

「Here, two 『Myam-roasted meat』, that will be four red copper plates.」

「Thank you...! Ah, nice to meet you!」

「Hmm? Ah, oh? Hello...」

Tara smiled when she saw Lala Wu's shocked expression.

Tara's fear towards the denizens of the Forest's Edge seemed to be slowly fading. It was fortunate that Tara didn't meet Mida Tsun yesterday.

「Tara, I will buy vegetables after the stall closes. Please send my regards to your father.」

「Yes! See you next time!」

Tara ran off quickly.

The next customer was the architect Arudas.

「Hi, I overslept a little today... Oh, so this is the new product?」

「Oh, hello. Thank you for visiting every day. Want to try a sample?」

Speaking of which, all the customers passed on sampling and bought the 『Myam-roasted meat』 directly. I even forgot to take the sampling plate out.

「No need for me. But can you prepare some for them?」

Arudas turned to the side, and four Jaguar men with sullen faces walked over.

I couldn't remember all of them because of the large number of patrons, but the stout and old Jaguar man standing at the very front left a deep impression on me.

He was the boss of the architects, 「Pops」.

On the second day of opening, this man criticized the 『Kiba burger』 very thoroughly.

「... Thank you for making the trip here!」

「Hmmp, if Arudas didn't beg me, I wouldn't have come. No matter how you season it, kiba is still kiba. Why must I come all this way to suffer? How troubling.」

He was quick with his words like last time and spoke like a machine gun.

Pops surveyed the vicinity with a devious glint in his eyes.

「To think there are so many retards in this world who know nothing about taste. If they like kiba so much, why not go hunt them in the woods. Hey, I'm starving. Hurry up and end this mockery, so I can go eat karon.」

「Alright! Please wait for a moment!」

I took out the sampling plate from the bag and scooped some of the steaming meat onto it. After putting four toothpicks onto it, I handed it to them.

「Hmmp.」

Pops grunted and reached for the toothpick.

I stole a glance at the Pops reaction while I prepared 『Myam-roasted meat』 for Arudas. Lala Wu didn't know what transpired before this, so she could only watch the group eat the samples in surprise.

Pops put the meat into his mouth.

The other three did the same reluctantly.

「Uwah, this tastes great.」

Arudas cheered.

「Just the fragrance alone is so appetizing, and it tastes amazing! I thought nothing can surpass that tarapa kiba meat, but I was wrong. I'm going to buy this dish from tomorrow onwards.」

「Thank you!」

I couldn't stop working as there were Semu customers waiting behind them.

I observed Pops anxiously for his reaction. Pops continued concentrating on his chewing with a sullen face.

「... This is bad.」

The young Jaguar standing beside him muttered.

My heart started to race.

「That's right, really bad.」

Another elderly Jaguar man shook his head.

So— they couldn't accept it after all.

After receiving their complaints, I had not met any other Jaguar people who had problems with the kiba meat. It seemed that this group of people couldn't accept the taste of kiba meat no matter what.

I didn't make them fall in love with kiba meat, but thanks to their criticism, I got to improve the next dish by 「making the seasoning stronger」. I was confident that this 『Myam-roasted meat』 could attract the westerners who hated kiba to patronize our stall.

In the end, my kiba dish still couldn't satisfy Pops. It was regrettable, but nothing good will come from persisting on this. I was a little sad, but I didn't regret it. As I was about to apologize—

「What's so bad about it? It's super delicious.」

Arudas' laughter drowned out my voice, and he happily bit into his 『Myam-roasted meat』.

At this moment, the elderly man who was quiet all this time patted Pops' shoulder with an awkward smile.

「Give it up, Pops. It can't be helped.」

Pops remained silent.

By the way, how long was he going to chew?

Was he trying to show how tough the kiba meat was?

I hoped he could tell me specifically what he wasn't happy with. When I was leaning slightly out of the stall, the young Jaguar man who muttered 「This is bad!」 earlier walked to the stall.

He handed his copper plates to me.

「I don't like that soft and mushy meat last time, but this dish is delicious. Give me one.」

「Eh...? Ah, a-alright!」

I grabbed a grilled poitan frantically.

Another Jaguar man gave me his copper plates.

「I told you that the kiba meat wasn't good the previous time. Actually, I just hated the tarapa. I think the kiba meat tastes alright.」

「T-Thank you.」

As I made another 『Myam-roasted meat』, I stole another glance at Pops.

The Jaguar man, who patted Pops' shoulder, scratched his head with his thick fingers and smiled awkwardly.

「I don't like the taste of kiba meat. But the meat I ate doesn't have any stench at all. Hey, is that really kiba?」

「Yes. The parts of the kiba used and the seasoning might be different from the 『Kiba burger』, but this is definitely kiba meat.」

「I see. It doesn't taste like karon or kimyusu. This is bad. I give up... Hey, give me one too.」

As I was about to thank him—

「What kind of joke is this!」

Pops' furious voice drowned out my voice.

He then took large strides towards me and banged on the counter.

「Hey, what the hell is this!?!」

「W-What do you mean...?」

「The taste and texture of this meat are completely different from the one I tasted last time. Who will believe that this is kiba meat?」

Pops reverted to his normal volume. But his face was still stiff and looked absolutely displeased.

「Erm... The kiba burger from that time was made by molding the meat that had been minced into a patty. That's why their textures are different. As for the seasoning, I marinated the meat in fruit wine and myam sauce to mask the kiba's gamey taste before I roasted it.」

I answered Pops as I prepared food for three.

「So that was the sweetness of fruit wine. Now that you mentioned it, sugar is more valuable than salt in Genos.」

Another elderly Jaguar man interjected.

「The food in Genos tends to be salty. Your food is a mixture of sweet and saltiness, no wonder people love it so much... At least, I love it.」

「T-Thank you.」

The trio excluding Pops smiled awkwardly. Their face seemed to be saying 「To think I lost to this brat.」

As for Pops— he continued standing in front of the stall with a displeased face.

「……Pops, I don't know why are you so unhappy. But you will disrupt their business if you keep standing there.」

「Ah, it's fine for now. There aren't any customers.」

I couldn't increase the menu for the time being, but if there was any room for improvement for my dish, I could work on it. I would be happy to listen to Pops if he had any feedback.

At this moment, Lala Wu handed the 『Myam-roasted meat』 to the three customers.

「Ah, it's so tasty!」

「Yeah, this dish is delicious.」

「So kiba is actually so good. Even if I tell the folks back at home, they wouldn't believe me.」

The three Jaguar men had happy smiles just like their companions who came earlier.

When he heard what they said, Pops finally spoke:

「…… Can you prove that this is kiba?」

「Ehh?」

I was shocked.

「You didn't butcher the kiba before us, so you can't prove that this is kiba meat, right?」

「You are saying strange things again. At the very least, this isn't kimyusu or karon, right?」

Arudas tried soothing him with a smile, but Pops refused to budge.

「This might not be kiba meat. Gizu and Munto also live in the Morga mountains, right?」

The group eating the 『Myam-roasted meat』 behind Pops grumbled: 「Don't bring up those disgusting animals when we are eating.」

「That's right, Pops. Don't mention those things in front of the stall, how can their meat be this tasty?」

「Maybe it is Madarama snake or Barb wolf!」

「Hey... Don't those two animals eat people? If their meat is tastier than kiba, isn't that even more incredible? Pops, what you are saying doesn't make sense.」

Arudas said with surprise.

「... That's true.」

Pops muttered to himself, his voice had turned whimsical.

His green eyes were filled with disappointment as he looked my way.

「So, this really is kiba meat...?」

「Yes. What you ate last time and the meat you had today are all kiba meat.」

I confirmed what he said. I didn't know what Pops was thinking at all.

Pops sighed deeply.

「... I was wrong.」

「What?」

「I thought kiba wasn't tasty at all, but I was wrong. The dish last time was unpalatable, but this dish is splendid. The problem must lie with your culinary skill, it's not the kiba's fault.」

He might be right, but I didn't understand why he was so depressed.

「I only like thinly sliced karon thigh meat.」

「Eh? Ah, yes.」

「Boiled kimyusu meat isn't even worth mentioning. Roasted kimyusu is the best.」

「Yes...」

「Kiba doesn't taste bad, the important thing is how it is cooked.」

Pops sighed again as if it was the end of the world.

「But I said something retarded, and thought that kiba meat has no value... I'm ashamed of my own retardedness.」

「C-Customer, please don't mind such a trivial thing!」

Jaguar people were very emotional, so that was how they were like when they become depressed.

I consoled him in a panic:

「To be honest, I thought that 『Kiba burger』 which was a rare dish would draw the interest of the townspeople. However, I realized that this dish wasn't suitable for people trying kiba for the first time. I only realized my mistake after you told me about its flaws.」

「But...」

「It's the same with seasoning. Aside from you, no one else told me their complaints so readily. Your words were kind advices for me.」

I didn't know if what I was doing was right, but I couldn't help saying them out.

「When you complained that the 『Kiba burger』 tastes bad, I was really frustrated. And thanks to you, I did all I could to think up a solution. I'm very grateful.」

「... I see.」

Pops muttered softly:

「Thanks to you, it's my turn to feel frustrated.」

「Ah... Sorry...」

「No need to apologize. I admit that I was wrong, but I won't apologize to you.」

He then knocked the counter gently.

When he removed his hand, I found two red copper plates on the counter.

「I'm willing to pay for this delicious meal. Hurry up, we need to start working soon.」

Pops said to me with a smile and showed an arrogant face again.

Part 2

The first half of the battle was over.

That might be so, but we got over the morning peak period in just an hour. During this time, we sold 34 『Kiba burgers』 and 37 『Myam-roasted meat』. The speed was about one and a half times that of yesterday.

Normally, the crowd would be sparse at this time. However, things were unusual today, and the road was filled with people.

A group was gathered at the corner of the streets, whispering to themselves. A few girls were browsing the accessories in the neighboring stall and would steal glances our way at times. A

middle-aged man stood in the center of the road and stared at our stall. All of them were westerners with yellowish-brown or ivory skin.

Until yesterday, the crowd would disperse when the customers left. But it seemed that the westerners couldn't ignore me anymore. Why were the southerners and easterners so engrossed with kiba food? They probably felt it was unfathomable.

「Looks like things are slowing down~ Asuta, will there still be customers later?」

「Yes, the crowd will only be here when it is noon. That would be the time for us to make money.」

The easterners and southerners gathered early in the morning out of fear of the merchandise getting sold out. If we are open until the afternoon today, the customers will spread out their visiting time. So it depends on whether we can operate until noon.

「Hmm~ I should have prepared more 『Myam-roasted meat』. To think that we almost sold 40 of them in just the morning...」

「Didn't I tell you...? We will definitely sell out today.」

Vena Wu in the stall next door said with a gleeful smile.

「The customers consist of only southerners and easterners. Aside from that brat, I didn't see any other westerners.」

Lala Wu swept the stone paved road a little agitatedly.

「Why do they keep staring at us if they don't want to buy anything, how unpleasant.」

「That's fine. We need to get them curious, then they will try. I think this is a big improvement.」

「Hmmp~」

Lala Wu seemed reluctant to accept that.

「Since there aren't any customers, do you want to try the food? Are you hungry?」

「Ehh... I'm hungry from the smell of the food. But shouldn't you leave the extra portions to the townspeople?」

「These aren't excess portions, but the samples I prepared and accounted for. I also grilled some poitan for sampling use.」

I took out the poitan from a cloth pack.

「Uwah, what's that? It's so tiny!」

「This is the poitan for the staff to sample.」

The sample poitan was one size smaller than the 『Kiba burger』, about 10 cm in diameter and thinner. I only used a third of one poitan for this.

「I will be done right away, please tend to the stall.」

I took out the smallest patty from the leather pouch, which was about 8 cm big. As the mini meat patty was about 2 cm thick, it looked plump and cute.

After heating up the meat patty in the pot, I made two mini 『Kiba burger』.

「Sorry for the wait. Many customers are looking at us, can you eat outside of the stall?」

「Thank you... It looks delicious.」

Shela Wu was all smiles.

I walked back to the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall and handed the sample to Lala Wu. She laughed happily just like Ludo Wu did.

When the two of them headed to the empty space to the right to try the samples happily, Vena Wu looked at me sorrowfully.

「Vena Wu, I also prepared your share. Please bear with it for now, I can't let all three of you go at the same time.」

「Ehh... I can eat too...?」

「Yes. Since we have gotten additional helpers, I will prepare staff lunch every day.」

After I answered, Vena Wu who was standing two meters away reached for me with her right hand.

「... I can't reach...」

Of course, you can't.

By the way, did she have the habit of reaching for my clothes when she was happy?

I put the brazier back into the cart and heated up the meat and aria on the plate.

I then took out a wrapping made with half a poitan and made a mini 『Myam-roasted meat』.

「Lala Wu, this is your first day on the job, so I hope you can try both dishes. Can you still eat?」

When she heard me, Lala Wu ran over to hit my back and said: 「Of course I can!」

Lala Wu probably thought that physical contact was a sign of friendship, but all I felt was pain.

After that, Vena Wu and I ate one staff lunch each to stave off our hunger. During this time, only one Jaguar man came to buy the 『Myam-roasted meat』.

However, I realized that more and more westerners were on the road. The rules of the Post Station Town forbid me from touting for customers loudly or leaving the stall to advertise. As I was wondering how I could get these people to come over, a familiar group approached us from the north.

There were five of them, and all of them were cloaked. Four of them walked towards the 《Kiba burger》 stall, and only one stopped before me.

He took off his hood, and it was Shumimaru of the 《Silver Vase》 as expected.

「Asuta, I'm late.」

「Welcome, are you buying 『Myam-roasted meat』?」

「No, today, other dish, rotate to.」

In that case, why did he come here? As I was about to ask, he said: 「Asuta, stall owner, greeting.」

Shumimaru nodded at Lala Wu who he met for the first time, and his black pupils suddenly focused on my working platform.

「... That knife.」

「What?」

「Unfamiliar shape, from the west?」

「No, this is from my hometown.」

「Your hometown, where is it?」

「... A country named Japan. No one seemed to have heard of this country.」

「Japan, don't know.」

Shumimaru kept staring at the Santoku knife as we spoke.

「This knife, beautiful. Can I, observe closely?」

「Ehh...? No, this is a tool I'm using to cook, so I can't let any customer touch it.」

「I no, touch. I can, see?」

What was going on?

I didn't think there was anything suspicious about Shumimaru. But he was a Semu who concealed his expressions, so I still felt a little uneasy.

After hesitating for a few seconds, I grabbed the black handle, pointed the tip downwards, and lifted it before my chest.

The tall Shumimaru bent over slightly and stared at the body of the Santoku knife.

「... Beautiful. Incredible craftsmanship.」

「Thank you.」

「I know, you cherished it deeply. Excellent tools, if no cherish, will blunt.」

The one who cared for it wasn't me.

I also used all the knowledge and experience I had to maintain it with the unfamiliar whetstone of this world. However, the one who maintained this knife carefully for twenty years was my Dad.

I felt melancholic from Shumimaru's words. I quietly put the Santoku knife onto the work platform.

「Steel, Jaguar, renowned. Jaguar, produce, many steel. Semu, few steel.」

「Ah, I see.」

「Semu, steel, precious. So, steel, important.」

As he spoke, Shumimaru took out a knife from his cloak.

It was about 20 cm and kept inside a black leather sheath. The length of the blade was similar to the Santoku knife, but it was twice as wide as the Santoku knife. The handle was made from ebony wood, and swirly patterns were carved into it.

「Because steel precious, Semu, bladesmith, bring life to the blades.」

No matter how abundant steel was in a nation, the work done by the bladesmiths remained the same.

However— this knife was very attractive.

「We, sell knives, in Genos.」

「Ah, so this knife is your merchandise.」

「Steel, knife, Jaguar, renowned. But Semu, knife, excellence.」

Semu people didn't show their emotions, so this was probably a way for him to show his competitive side.

Shumimaru blinked troublingly.

「Genos, many chef, use, Semu knives.」

「Chefs...?」

At this moment, I realized it.

I heard that the Post Station Town didn't have any professional chefs. They could only be found inside the rock walls.

「Is this a kitchen knife?」

「Yes.」

「Are you doing business inside the Genos castle town?」

「Yes.」

Speaking of which, Shumimaru's group came from the north.

On the first day of business, when a member of the 《Silver Vase》 visited our stall, they came from the same direction.

They were returning to the Post Station Town from the castle town to the north.

「... Do the chefs in the castle town use Semu knives?」

「Not all. But many.」

「Can I look at the knife?」

Shumimaru rose the corner of his lips a little.

「I'm happy, you asked.」

He turned the handle towards me and pushed it my way.

No matter what kind of knife the chef in the Post Station Town used, it had nothing to do with me. Being just an apprentice chef, I couldn't differentiate how good a blade was.

However, Shumimaru took out this knife after complimenting Dad's Santoku knife, as if this was the pride of the Semu. He had my curiosity, and now he had my attention.

I drew out the blade from the black leather sheath with bated breath.

It was a single-edged knife, and the blade was almost rectangular.

With a breadth of 8 cm, it was thinner than normal vegetable knives. The tip of the knife was slightly curved, and the shape resembled the scythe style vegetable knives commonly found in the Kansai region.

On closer inspection, I saw an intrinsic whirlpool design on the side of the silver blade. The design was detailed, and I couldn't feel any groove at all. This decoration did not affect the cut surface of the food at all.

「... Is this a vegetable cutting knife?」

「Yes.」

A single blade knife with a thin body. My guess was right.

This knife was beautifully made.

The handle that was similar to ebony wood was smooth and easy to wield.

「Please, cut.」

「Ehh? Isn't this your merchandise? Can I try it?」

「No cut, no know, sharpness.」

Not just Semu, steel was expensive in this world. Compared to food, steel was very expensive. So I couldn't buy a cutting knife without any hesitation. However, I did want to test the sharpness of this beautiful knife.

「Well then, I will try it a little—」

I took out some tino that wasn't cut yet, folded the leaves in half, and started shredding them.

The sharpness was flawless.

I tried the Wu clan's knives when I tended to their hearth, and those couldn't compare to this knife at all. To be honest, this knife could even rival my father's Santoku knife.

This was a knife specialized for preparing vegetables, so the blade needed to be stiff and sharp. In contrast, the vegetable knife of the Wu clan was not as sharp as the Santoku knife.

「... This is indeed an excellent knife.」

Shumimaru nodded. He had a small cloth in one hand and extended his other hand to me.

I placed the knife on a clean plate and pointed the handle towards Shumimaru.

He cleaned the knife gracefully.

「I can only buy this kitchen knife when I earn more money... How much is that knife?」

「Twenty, white copper plates.」

This knife was just as expensive as the iron pot I bought a while back.

The vegetable knives sold in the Post Station Town were priced at 4 white and 5 red copper plates. The price of a high-quality product was incredible. But I thought it was a reasonable price.

「...Asuta, if you buy, white copper plates, 18.」

「Ehh?」

「We, blue month, stay in Genos. If you want, tell me.」

「... I understand, thank you.」

I nodded with a smile.

Shumimaru raised the corner of his mouth slightly again and then reverted to being expressionless swiftly.

「I'm, hungry. I want 『Kiba burger』, eat.」

「Alright, thank you for visiting us every day.」

Shumimaru nodded, then walked to the stall next door. Lala Wu watched him leaving guardedly, then spoke to me quietly:

「What? He wants 18 white copper plates for just a knife? Isn't that too expensive?」

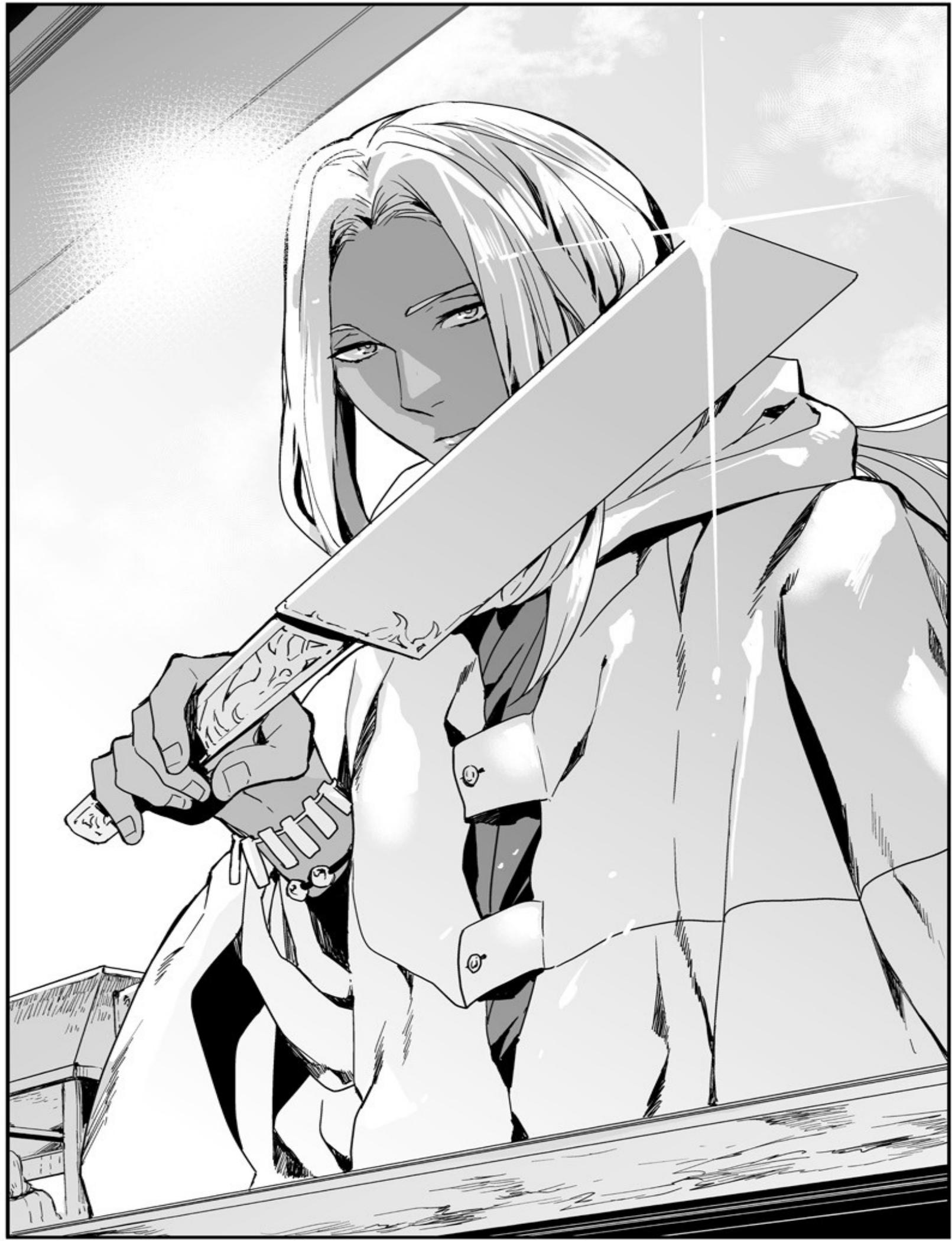
「Yes. But I want that knife very much.」

「... Buy it then? You already earned several hundred copper plates, right?」

「Even if I earn a hundred copper plates, I will only be left with half after accounting for the operational cost.」

「So what? You earn so much every day. If you don't spend it, the copper plates will crush the flooring in your house.」

She was exaggerating too much. However, if I continue to run this business successfully, I might really earn enough money to buy that knife.



No, now wasn't the time for material desires. We were still walking on a tightrope and needed to stabilize our lives first.

But I couldn't help wondering:

Is the only desire I have in this world are culinary tools!?

Was there anything that Ai Fa wanted?

Ai Fa only bought daily necessities. She was worse than me at figuring out how to spend those excess copper plates.

If I secretly buy a hair accessory for her, will she really beat me black and blue?

After the morning rush was over, the Tsun clan didn't assault us. So I fell into delusion and had a peaceful morning.

Part 3

After 《Silver Vase》 and Shumimaru left, Shela Wu called out to me.

「There's only one 『Kiba burger』. Can we take out the additional tarapa and heat them up?」

「Ah, please do. Do put the leftover hamburg steak and the samples onto the plate.」

「Alright.」

「Lala Wu, please watch the stall.」

「Yup.」

I went over to the 『Kiba burger』 stall to observe Shela Wu's and Vena Wu's work.

When the 《Silver Vase》 appeared, they had already chopped the tarapa. Vena Wu deftly added wood into the brazier, and Shela Wu placed the tarapa into the pot.

「…Asuta, there is a lot of tarapa left. Isn't adding two of them a little too much?」

「You are right. One should be enough I guess?」

「I think so too, so I only cut one.」

Shela Wu smiled.

「In that case, the amount of aria and fruit wine will need to be halved too, right?」

「Yes, please.」

We started cooking the tarapa sauce.

I added a little of myam into the sauce today, and the fragrance got even stronger.

Will this aroma draw in the westerners crowding the streets? As I was wondering about that, a group came over as if they were answering my thoughts.

「Hi, I came today too. I even brought my friends.」

The one who appeared was the only girl of the delinquent from yesterday—Yumi.

「Ah, thank you very much...」

My voice faded off mid-sentence because I saw the group of young girls her age standing behind Yumi.

There were four of them, and they all had ivory skin. They were dressed like Yumi, with a colorful tube top, and a dress that flowed down to their ankles. Was this the standard attire of the girls in western cities?

「Ehh? This is tarapa. It smells like you have added myam, it's not the dish I had yesterday, right?」

「No. The stall next door sells the 『Myam-roasted meat』 you had. This dish is called 『Kiba burger』, I'm making additional portions right now. Will you try it when I'm done?」

「Yes! I want to try.」

I thought she was a fierce girl yesterday, but she gave a completely different expression when she smiled. Even though her body was giving off a sexy air, her expression was pure and innocent.

「Asuta, the tarapa is done.」

Shela Wu called out to me softly.

「I know. Just the seasoning is left...」

As I was preparing to handle that, I stopped.

「... Can you do the seasoning for this?」

「Ehh?」

When I saw Shela Wu open her eyes wide, I went closer to her while maintaining a polite distance away.

「Shela Wu, please add in salt and pico leaves as you deem appropriate. If it is too bland, I will adjust it. If it tastes too thick, I will add a bit more tarapa.」

「... Yes, I understand.」

Shela Wu probably knew that this was part of her job, and she didn't show any hesitation in her eyes.

I nodded and turned to the customers.

「Well then, would you like to try the dish you had yesterday?」

「That's great. I already tried it, so let them try the sample.」

One of the girls looked at us timidly, and tried to stop us:

「W-Wait, Yumi...」

「Don't worry! I already explained to you, right? It's super tasty. Just think of it as me tricking you and try it.」

「But...」 「It's still...」

The girls squirmed their ivory skinned bodies reluctantly.

The same thing happened when Uncle Dora brought the clothing stall owner and the pot dealer to try the sample. But why was the atmosphere completely different from back then?

Speaking of which, only the adult men from the south and east were here to make a living in the Post Station Town. Hence, the only young female customers I had were Tara and Yumi.

That was why I appeared so lost in front of this group of young girls.

I had never considered this sort of problems. I might have been influenced by the simple lifestyle in Forest's Edge for the past month.

Ignoring my situation for now, from what I knew, every denizen from Forest's Edge had honest and simple personalities. It was the same with their women. I was surrounded by many women from Forest's Edge when I caretook the hearth. Hence, the girly actions and screams of the city girls were a heavy burden to me.

But they were my customers, so I said to them 「This way, please.」 with a smile, and guided them to the stall selling 『Myam-roasted meat』 .

I then said to Shela Wu quietly:

「Have you seasoned it?」

「Yes... Please try it.」

Shela Wu asked me to sample it with a tense face. I nodded and picked up the spoon to do a taste test.

No problem.

Shela Wu only tried the tarapa sauce a few times, and she could already reproduce the taste of the sauce. She seemed to have a natural affinity for cooking. In Forest's Edge that didn't place much importance on culinary skills, I think Shela Wu was a valuable existence.

「Well done. Now cook the meat patty, please.」

「... Okay.」

Shela Wu sighed in relief.

Compared to the other women in the Wu clan, I made Shela Wu work the hardest, so I should give her the remuneration she deserves one day.

「Well then...」

I turned to the customers. The girls were still squirming and saying: 「But...」 「I don't wanna...」

Stop squirming. I couldn't help venting in my heart. It seemed that I was still not mature enough.

Yumi flicked her long brown hair impatiently.

「Really now, you all are so timid. Hmm... W-What's your name?」

「Me? I'm Asuta.」

「Asuta huh. What an interesting name. Asuta, please let me try the sample again. If I do that, they will finally make up their minds.」

「Okay, thank you for your kind actions.」

After I answered with a smile, Yumi frowned a little.

「...Asuta, how old are you?」

「What? I'm 17.」

「You are just one year older than me. You don't need to be so polite.」

「How could I do that! You are an esteemed customer of mine, I can't be rude...! This way, please.」

「...Tch.」

Yumi clicked her tongue as if she was throwing a fit. She walked towards the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall.

The four girls gave chase in a group, as if they didn't dare to leave Yumi's side.

「Hmm? Lala Wu, did you already start the fire?」

「Huh? I thought you wanted to heat up the kiba meat, so I prepared ahead of time. Was I too nosey?」

「No, your judgment is correct. Please wait a moment.」

On the plates were enough kiba meat for the girls to sample.

I tossed the meat in the plate into the pot, poured in some sauce, and the aroma of the myam and fruit wine burst forth.

「See? It smells nice, right?」

Yumi looked at the girls smugly.

The girls all squeezed together and continued to squirm.

They might have looked terrified, but from my observations, they weren't that afraid of the kiba meat. The cloth stall owner and pot dealer who visited the other day were more scared than them.

How long they stayed in Genos, their gender, and their age— all these factors determined how much the residents of the Post Station Town were afraid of kiba.

「Sorry for the wait, please help yourselves.」

「Yes, thank you.」

Yumi put the 『Myam-roasted meat』 into her mouth fearlessly.

「Ah~ as I expected, it's delicious. Hey, compared to the kiba meat cooked with tarapa, which one tastes better?」

「Everyone has their own preference. Girls would probably prefer the tarapa one.」

「Then I will try both dishes...! Are you really not trying? Do you really believe the superstition that your skin will turn dark if you eat the kiba?」

The girls were still uneasy after hearing what Yumi said.

At this moment, someone walked to the stall from behind them.

「I want to ask... is trying the samples free?」

Two youths with ivory skin asked.

They were asking Yumi, not me.

「Hmm? That's right. Try a sample, then pay to buy one if you like the taste.」

「I see...」

The youths looked at me meekly.

I started smiling.

「Please try this. These two kiba stalls have completely different seasoning. Do compare them.」

「What do you think?」 「What should we do?」

The youths were hesitant.

「Asuta, the meat is done.」

「Yay!」

When Shela Wu told me the meat patty was cooked, Yumi rushed over happily.

「Kiba is delicious, and I'm confident about both... Uwah!」

「Hyaa!」

「Kyaa!」

The youths and I both screamed.

While they were lowering their heads troublingly, a totos moa stretched its long neck in between the youths.

「Excuse me.」

An emotionless voice came from above.

I couldn't see where the voice was coming from because of the roof. When I bent down, I found a Semu man in traveling attire riding on the back of the totos.



「Hey! Riding on totos is prohibited in town!」

After Yumi shouted energetically, the man said 「Pardon me!」, then jumped onto the stone-paved road.

He wore a cloak and had a dark face covered in sand. He was probably a traveler who came from the north. This Semu man looked at the signboard and then the sampling plate.

「... Kiba?」

「Yes, this is a kiba dish. Do you want to try a sample?」

I said bravely and pointed at the plate.

This Semu traveler seemed to understand western language. He nodded and took a toothpick.

「The other stall is also selling kiba dish. It's a seldom seen dish that uses tarapa.」

The traveler nodded again and left the stall while holding the reins of the totos.

At this moment, someone shouted crudely from the direction he was headed:

「Uwah! Don't browse the stalls with your totos, put it in a totos stable!」

Before I realized it, a Jaguar man appeared in the stall next door and bought a 『Kiba burger』.

The Semu man said 「Excuse me!」 again, and reached for the sample.

「Really now, the Semu are always a problem...」

The Jaguar man avoided the totos while muttering detestedly to himself, and walked over.

「Huh? Oh, you are selling a kiba dish here too?」

「Yes. From today onwards, we will be expanding to two stalls.」

「I thought I smelled myam, so it's from this stall! Are the dishes different?」

「Yes. Would you like to try a sample?」

The man walked over, pushed aside the hesitant youth, and took a toothpick.

His eyes opened wide in surprise after eating it.

「Uwah, this stall is delicious too... I didn't notice this place and bought the kiba dish from the stall next door.」

「Sorry about that. Would you like to change your dish?」

「But I want to eat the one I just bought...」

He lowered his head frustratedly and stared at me.

「Nevermind! I know! I will get this one too! You will close your stall at dusk, right? In that case, I will eat a good one now, and have a lighter dinner! How much is one?」

「T-Two red copper plates.」

「Such a budget price. Awesome, two of these just cost four red copper plates.」

He placed the copper plates on the counter with a satisfied smile.

「Thank you for your patronage, please wait a moment!」

At this moment, I heard a crude voice.

「What, you are actually selling kiba food?」

Three yellowish brown-skinned men were before the stall next door. They had sabres and axes on their waist and were dressed like gangsters.

「Who will buy such things in Genos? You can earn a tidy amount of copper plates by using your beautiful face and sexy body, right?」

Not only did they have sabres and axes, they also held fruit wine bottles in their hands.

I felt the urge to help them out, but Lala Wu grabbed my arm.

「Asuta, leave them be. You won't be of any help even if you go. Leave it to Vena-nee.」

「But...」

「When the women of Forest's Edge walk alone in town, they will often encounter such a situation. Those men are just small fries, Shela Wu and I can shoo them off too.」

「... A bunch of retards. They don't even have the resolve to make an enemy out of the denizens of the Forest's Edge.」

A Jaguar customers also ate his 『Kiba burger』 calmly.

「Don't be bothered about them, and make my food quick. I need to go back to work after I'm done.」

「A-Alright...」

I put the aria into the pot and felt my heart hanging in the air.

I couldn't hear what Vena Wu said, but those men were yelling barbarically: 「What did you say?」

「Are you kidding me!」

When I roasted the meat and finished the 『Myam-roasted meat』, those men had already left somberly with 『Kiba burgers』 in their hands.

「Didn't I tell you? Vena-nee gets harrassed very easily, so she's used to it.」

Vena Wu was impressive. I sighed, and the two hesitant youths suddenly called out to me with a weak voice.

「Excuse me... C-Can we try a sample...?」

「Of course!」

I checked again, and the girls were already eating the 『Kiba burger』 from the next stall. Yumi had bought her food ahead of the others and was chatting happily with Vena Wu as she enjoyed her 『Kiba burger』 .

「Uwah... It tastes great.」 「It's a bit tough, but it's not gamey at all.」

The two western men discussed their impressions.

What an introverted pair of youths.

「Please try a sample in the neighboring stall too.」

At this moment, a Semu man walked over and quietly took out his copper plates.

「W-Welcome! Please hold on for a moment!」

It suddenly got busier.

I looked up, and the sun was already at its peak.

Two and a half hours had passed before I knew it, and the second half of the battle had begun.

At the same time, I could see that the goal was in sight.

When the two youths and four girls decided to buy the 『Kiba burger』 and 『Myam-roasted meat』 , there were less than 20 of each product left.

「So this is the kiba dish that is the talk of the inn.」

Jaguar people crowded over. An equal number of Semu men approached quietly. It wasn't to the extent of the morning crowd, but the stall was flooded with customers.

When they saw the customers gathering, some ivory skinned people also came over.

And of course, not everyone who came bought the merchandise. Half of them went off without sampling, and a small number left as if they were fleeing after trying a bite.

However, there were still a few who bought the food worriedly.

「Hey, is this kiba?」

A group of children asked me.

They were younger than tara, about 5 or 6 years old.

「Yes. Would all of you want to try some?」

When I offered them the plate, the children laughed and scattered.

After a while, they gathered again and timidly approached the stall timidly.

「The samples are free. Do you want to try?」

「But... I will grow horns if I eat kiba, right?」

「Our skins will turn black too.」

「Hmm~? I have been eating kiba for a whole month, but I don't have any horns.」

I then pointed at Lala Wu besides me.

「Look, this onee-san doesn't have horns, right? It will be fine.」

After the kids tried the sample, they yelled: 「It's delicious!」 and then ran to the other end of the street.

「... They are so young, so they won't have copper plates on them, right?」

「It's fine. I will be happy if they think it tastes good.」

The amount of food gradually decreased.

The 『Myam-roasted meat』 sold out first. An hour after the second half began, we were left with two 『Myam-roasted meat』. Three Semu men came at this time.

「I'm very sorry! There's only two left. The stall beside us is selling a kiba dish cooked with tarapa, they should have some left...」

The Semu men talked quietly among themselves expressionlessly.

One of them then headed to our neighboring stall, and the remaining two took out their copper plates

「Thank you for your patronage. Please wait a moment.」

We finally reached the endpoint.

We could probably close shop successfully in a short while.

After handing the last two 『Myam-roasted meat』 to the customers, I asked the Lala Wu to take care of the fire and walked to the neighboring stall briskly.

「Shela Wu, how many are left on your side?」

Before Shela Wu could answer, a western youth who just tried the sample shouted:

「A-Alright, give me one!」

Shela Wu deftly made a 『Kiba burger』, Vena Wu handed it to him in exchange for the copper plates.

After the customer left, the two of them smiled at the same time.

「All sold out.」

「All sold out, huh...」

It had been just three hours since morning, and still two hours before my scheduled closing time. Despite that, the fifth day ended with all 120 portions sold out.

Part 4

After putting out the fire, we quickly closed the stall.

As I put the chopping board, plates, and the leftover vegetables into the bag, Vena Wu said to me with a smile:

「... As expected, we sold everything, right...?」

「That's right. To be honest, this doesn't feel like reality at all.」

It might not feel real, but the pile of copper plates was. Almost none of the customers paid with white copper plates, so the money pouch was filled with red copper plates.

We sold 120 portions and earned 240 red copper plates.

A staggering amount.

「Let's return the cart... Ah, this is too much money, I will go to the copper plate exchange place.」

Two hundred-odd copper plates weighed about 1.5 kg; I had to exchange them for white copper plates as soon as possible.

Even though no one would dare to rob denizens of the Forest's Edge, I couldn't let my guard down and walked carefully on the stone-paved path.

The Post Station Town was extremely crowded in the afternoon, and we were quite prominent pushing our cart. This was the fifth day of the stall opening, so I was used to it.

「Hi, you are closing already? You were open until so late today, huh.」

「Hey, I'm counting on you tomorrow too, alright?」

The Jaguar people greeted us warmly.

Men from Semu would nod at us.

「Ah, Uncle Dora, are you well? I will drop by your stall after I return the cart.」

「Hi, good work today... Don't worry, I'm healthy.」

Uncle Dora was in his usual spot, peddling vegetables laid out on a piece of cloth. His face was frail and his smile was weak.

I was worried about him, but I still needed to exchange the copper plates and return the cart.

The copper plate exchange was located in a sturdy building, right between the marketplace and the lodging facilities. A guard stood watch there most of the times. Even though I called it a copper plate exchange, it was actually a place that provides loans.

Exchanging copper plates was free of charge. Obviously, the money lenders didn't provide this service out of goodwill or hobby. They were requested by the Genos landlord to provide currency exchange services so copper plates could circulate in the Post Station Town smoothly.

Just what did the money lender think when they saw our business growing day by day? He tried his best to conceal his emotions and changed 200 red copper plates to 20 white copper plates.

We headed to 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 to return the carts and deposit our goods there for the time being. After getting glared at by Milano Mast, we returned to the marketplace.

「Speaking of which... Did Kamyua Yost came today...?」

「Ah, that's right. Today was too busy, so I even forgot about him.」

Kamyua Yost and the Tsun clan people didn't come today, so there wasn't any ridiculous commotion. The 120 meals were all sold out, what a peaceful day that matched my ideal day perfectly.

Vena Wu walked with large strides through the bustling city and shrugged sexily.

「Never mind, it's better that he didn't show... But even if he didn't show, he might still be planning something nefarious secretly. So it's fine either way...」

「Vena Wu, do you dislike Kamyua?」

「I hate elusive people... That's why I like you the most...」

Was I that easy to understand?

Anyways, I decided to head to Uncle Dora's stall.

「Hi, you brought so many people with you today.」

Uncle Dora welcomed me and the three girls. He looked a little frail, and Tara wasn't here.

「You don't look well... Are you ill?」

「I would never fall ill.」

He shook his head weakly.

「I will be frank... This morning, I found a kiba that had fallen into a trap I set.」

「Ehh?」

「To stop the kiba from eating my crops, I set several traps around my farm. Even so, I still found a lot of my vegetables damaged in the morning... And today, one retarded kiba fell into the trap.」

「... I see.」

「That's right. Since we caught it, we had to put it down. Everyone stood outside the trap and stabbed it to death with spears made from krilee... On a day like this, I couldn't eat meat. I could still hear it's miserable screams... Just thinking about it makes me shiver.」

His plump body really started to shake.

「The hunters of Forest's Edge are amazing. Encountering a kiba in the forest must be a nightmare. My knees go weak just at the sight of them... I can't fight with those monsters.」

「I can't either. Hunters really are amazing.」

Will Ai Fa be safe today?

I wanted to hurry on home and see Ai Fa's energetic face.

「By the way, the number of kiba had increased dramatically since last month. Our farms are still fine, but those near to the Forest's Edge suffered heavy losses. The farmers can't even make a living. When it really gets bad, the kiba will even eat ariana and its root before it is ready for harvesting.」

He shook his head depressedly.

「In recent years, the damage to the farms was turning worse. Will it become like my grandfather's generation, where the kiba will come out of the forest all day...?」

「I don't think you need to worry about that. However, the number of kiba is definitely increasing.」

Did the number of Forest's Edge denizens who gave up on hunting increase? We had no way of knowing the truth.

「Before the denizens of Forest's Edge shifted here, the farmers once banded together to hunt the kiba. Back then, many of them were gored to death... My grandfather's leg was injured, and he had to spend the rest of his life on a crutch. I don't want to do that... I absolutely don't want to hunt kiba.」

「Uncle...」

「Ah, sorry. The denizens of Forest's Edge risk their lives hunting kiba every day, so I shouldn't be saying this to you. I will be counting on your delicious meals from tomorrow onwards.」

「Yes, I will be in your care too.」

So that was what happened. No wonder he couldn't tell Tara how he felt.

Even though he had a cheerful expression, I couldn't ignore his words as a denizen of Forest's Edge.

How many kiba did the Tsun clan hunt? Maybe they didn't hunt at all... After all, a member of the Tsun clan got drunk in the afternoon, and even came into town to buy snacks!

The Tsun clan was as big as the Wu clan; if they didn't hunt properly, it would have dire effects on their surroundings.

「...Asuta, don't make such a heavy face. What are you buying today? How many?」

I decided to change my mood to not worry Uncle Dora.

All I could do was to do my best and make this business a success.

「Sorry, I want 200 tarapa, 30 aria... and 150 poitan.」

「You are finally buying 150 poitan! So, you will be preparing 150 portions tomorrow?」

「Yes. This is the limit of what the four of us can prepare.」

Aside from that, as the 『Kiba burger』 was more tedious to prepare, I decided to increase the 『Myam-roasted meat』 to 90 portions. I want to try in the remaining five days whether we can prepare these dishes properly.

「Oh right, the Fa house's meat store is about to become empty.」

I said to Vena Wu as I counted the poitan.

「The day after tomorrow, I hope the Wu clan can let me have some meat. Can you relay this to Donda Wu and Mia Lei Wu?」

「Yes, I understand...」

I already negotiated with the Wu clan about the kiba meat.

I had to rack my brains hard to set a price for kiba meat.

The Wu clan village hunted more than enough kiba meat, so Mia Lei Wu told me: 「Take as much as you need, no need for payment.」 But I had no idea how long my stall would run, and I couldn't keep accepting them free of charge. I insisted on paying an adequate price for the bloodletting work, and they agreed.

We were at an impasse on the price. The buyer kept raising the price, while the seller kept lowering the price. After such an interesting negotiation, we came to a compromise and used the 「price of kiba horns and tusks」 as the standard.

A large kiba would be 12 red copper plates, and the smaller ones, 8 plates. But the price was still too low, so I will have to adjust it to a more reasonable value in the near future.

「Alright then, I will be counting on you the day after tomorrow. Sorry, I would need you to carry a lot of things when the time comes.」

I asked Vena Wu to bring over the kiba meat I would need the next day when she will visit the Fa house in the morning. Vena Wu smiled as she put the poitan she counted into the sack.

「I will bring the meat from the Wu clan to the Fa house with a tow board, it's not much trouble... The work Lala and Shela Wu need to do when I'm on my way there is more tedious...」

「That's right. Make Vena-nee work hard sometimes too.」

Even though Vena Wu and Lala Wu didn't talk much at work, they were still very close. Shela Wu also smiled quietly beside them.

Everyone had faces of satisfaction.

After a tiring day, everyone felt a great sense of pride and accomplishment.

At least, I felt very satisfied.

Part 5

「Well then, I will be counting on you tomorrow.」

I put down the pot in front of the Fa house and bid Vena Wu farewell.

We spent a bit of time to close up and buy ingredients, but there was still four hours until sunset. Hence, I did have more than enough time to do my preparation.

I'm making 150 portions, so we should be staying until the scheduled closing time in the Post Station Town tomorrow. I will be returning later tomorrow, so I have to increase the efficiency of my preparation work.

I reached for the door.

But it was barred.

「Hmm? Ai Fa, are you home?」

I called out to Ai Fa and knocked on the door.

After a long silence, Ai Fa answered:

「Wait.」

But Ai Fa still didn't open the door. After about 30 seconds, I heard the sound of the bar being moved, and the door gradually opened.

I held my breath in surprise the next instance.

「Ai Fa, what happened to you!?!」

I didn't know what happened, but Ai Fa had never shown such a pained expression. Her face was filled with pain and cold sweat. Her blue eyes were burning like that of a wounded beast.

「Don't be so loud... hurry on in.」

Ai Fa's figure quickly disappeared behind the door.

I grabbed the bags and the pot and entered the house.

Ai Fa was wearing her cape and, while holding her left arm, she squatted behind the door.

「... Bar the door.」

I hurried and did that, then squatted down beside Ai Fa.

「What happened? Does your arm hurt? Did the Tsun clan attack you?」

At a glance, Ai Fa didn't have any obvious injuries.

But the last time Ai Fa made such a pained expression, was a long time ago when we were attacked by a Madarama snake.

「There's no one from the Tsun clan I would let to get me... The bone in my arm shifted out of place when I was hunting.」

Ai Fa finally squeezed out these words.

Bone— shifted?

Did she dislocate her arm?

「W-Which arm? The left arm? The shoulder? Or the elbow?」

「I told you not to be so loud... The left elbow. Don't worry, I already shifted the bone back into position.」

「O-Of course I will worry. Since it got dislocated, shouldn't we secure your arm? Is there anything that can act as a brace...」

Ai Fa head-butted my chest.

As she couldn't move her arms, she could only protest this way.

「It's useless for you to be so noisy... I know what to do, you just need to help me.」

「I-I got it. What should I do?」

「... Help me to take off my shoes.」

I did that quickly.

Just how intense was the pain of dislocating an elbow? And she moved the bone back herself! Even if I knew what to do, I probably wouldn't have the courage to follow through.

「I-I took them off.」

「Alright... Let's go over there...」

Ai Fa bit her lips and got up slowly.

The next instant, her body started wavering, and I held her shoulders as gently as I could.

How could this be... She really got injured...

I could feel her incredibly hot body even through the thick cape.

「... Take off the cape.」

「Okay.」

I loosened the hook holding the cape in place.

It slid onto the ground, and Ai Fa squatted by the wall.

「... Bring that unused rag here.」

I carried out her instruction obediently.

I then secured her forearm with a piece of plank, tied torn strips of cloth to her arm, and slung her left arm below her neck, securing it in place. The way she handled a dislocation was similar to my world.

「That will do... There are Lome leaves in my cape, bring it here.」

There were many hidden compartments sewn on the inside of the cape, and one of them was stuffed with a few black leaves shaped like maple leaves.

「This is medicine to bring down a fever... Add some water and crush it with a spoon... Just one leaf will do...」

Ai Fa leaned on the wall weakly and her voice was soft. She wasn't overwhelmed by the pain, her rising temperature made her lose her strength.

「I crushed it, do you want to drink it?」

I stood beside Ai Fa and fed her the Lome leaf with a spoon.

Ai Fa drank the mashed black leaf that looked nasty tasting.

「Okay... I will sleep for a while, wake me up for dinner.」

「What will be easier for you to eat? There's gigo at home, I can make poitan soup?」

「... Grilled poitan tastes better...」

Ai Fa pouted a little.

My chest tightened a little as I looked at her pained expression.

「Well then, I will help you prepare the dish that Grandma Jiba usually eat. If it doesn't taste good, you can soak the hamburg steak and poitan into the soup.」

「... We already ate hamburg steak yesterday, is that fine?」

「Don't mind that during times like this, idiot.」

I wet the other rag with water from the flask, squeezed them dry, and wiped away the sweat from Ai Fa's face.

「Feels good.」

Ai Fa closed her eyes quietly.

「Asuta, it's great that you are here... I suffered a similar injury one year ago. Back then, it took all my strength to tend to my wounds...」

「... Should I be optimistic, and be glad you didn't suffer a more serious wound?」

「Yes. This is but a scratch, I will be better in a few days... I will be in your care in the meantime.」

「Leave it to me.」

I scooped up some water to wash the cloth, then put it on Ai Fa's forehead.

It was just room temperature water, but it was better than nothing.

「I will sleep now... Go do your work.」

「Got it. Holler if you need me, okay?」

Even though that was what I said, I couldn't pull my eyes off Ai Fa.

Dislocation wasn't a light wound, but I was still relieved. I was glad that Ai Fa didn't suffer any mortal wound.

If I was to lose Ai Fa now, what should I do? Leaving the means to survive aside, I definitely wouldn't be able to accept the fact that I lost her.

Just how much resolve did the women of Forest's Edge had to make when they send their men off into the forest?

「Don't worry... I will be able to move freely tomorrow... don't worry about the Tsun clan...」

Ai Fa mumbled as if she was sleep talking.

I was going to the entrance to sort out the baggage, but I returned to her side and squatted down when I heard that.

「I understand. Rest well, I will prepare a delicious cuisine, so you can recover quickly.」

Ai Fa smiled with her eyes closed.

「...Asuta, I want to eat hamburg steak sooner...」

I nodded and held Ai Fa's hot cheeks with my hands. I then stood up and prepared dinner and the food for tomorrow's business.

Interlude - Their Morning Together

I opened my eyes, and Ai Fa's sleeping face appeared before me.

We were so close that my heart almost stopped.

Her pink lips were slightly open, making rhythmic breathing sounds. Her blonde eyelashes were long, and her similarly colored hair covered her forehead and cheeks like a decoration.

Ai Fa's slumbering face was peaceful, as if her pained expression last night was just a dream.

Her sleeping face made her look more childish than her actual age, as unguarded as a baby, pure and innocent. But her face was just a few centimeters from my nose, that was too close.

Ai Fa rested her head on my left shoulder and was sound asleep.

An indescribable feeling of happiness welled in my heart, yet, I felt confused at the same time.

Ai Fa's body leaned to the right as she slept on her side.

She was asleep while leaning on me.

When I realized that, my left half of the body sticking close to Ai Fa rapidly heated up.

My left arm was a bit numb, probably due to poor blood circulation.

... I had to calm down first.

My heart was thumping, but I still needed to deal with this situation calmly.

I searched my memory in a hurry to find out how I fell asleep last night.

Yesterday, Ai Fa suffered a serious injury during her hunt. Her left elbow dislocated.

She slept until dinner.

I fed her dinner myself.

The fever medicine had probably taken effect, so Ai Fa was drowsy the entire time. If I let her eat herself, she would probably drop the utensils onto the floor.

Besides, we don't have a dining table in our house, and she couldn't eat with one hand. I spent half an hour feeding her soup, hamburg steak, and grilled poitan slowly.

After dinner, Ai Fa leaned against the wall in a daze and didn't move. Her fever had subsided, and her dislocated elbow didn't seem to hurt too badly, but she still sat there without moving.

Lome leaves might have sedative effects. Ai Fa back then wasn't tense like she usually was, and looked pure, innocent and frail.

Seeing Ai Fa not acting like herself breaks my heart, but I still had to prepare the food for tomorrow. I started cooking the tarapa sauce and cut 90 portions of kiba meat needed for the 『Myam-roasted meat』 .

As I did my preparations, Ai Fa was silent and dozed in and out of sleep.

When I was finished, Ai Fa was in a daze again because of her fever.

I fed her some fever medicine, but Ai Fa seemed to still be in pain. I kept wiping Ai Fa's face with a wet piece of cloth, but that would only bring her a moment of relief.

「Enough... Sit by my side...」

「Your side?」

I answered confusedly, and Ai Fa leaned her entire body on my shoulder.

Her body was very feverish, and her forehead was blazingly hot.

「This is enough... When my fever subsides, I will recover my strength...」

Ai Fa's body shivered a little.

Her forehead and body were hot, but the fingers on her right hand grabbing my chest were as cold as ice.

I held her icy fingers tightly, and Ai Fa's eyes that were moist because of her fever stared at me.

「... I want to be like this, will it make you unhappy?」

「Not at all, don't worry about me for now.」

Until the candle burned out, I kept staring at Ai Fa's pained profile.

The candle burned out, yet, I could see her due to the light of the moon.

When her face turned peaceful again, I could hear her steady breathing.

That's great— I remembered being relieved, and didn't have any further memories after this.

Which meant, I fell asleep.

The sunlight shone through the window.

I observed the brightness in the room and noted that we didn't oversleep.

On a closer look, Ai Fa was right next to the wall in our house. We fell asleep leaning against the wall and probably slid down onto the floor. I hoped my body had cushioned her and protected her left arm from any harm.

I would gladly cushion her fall, but our positions were really awkward right now.

But I was afraid of aggravating her wounds if I moved, so I had to wake Ai Fa.

「Ai Fa, it's morning... Can you get up?」

「Hmm...」

Ai Fa grunted angrily.

Speaking of which, it was rare for me to get up earlier than Ai Fa.

Furthermore, Ai Fa opened her eyes immediately when I called out to her.

That was why I felt so flustered. Her childish and pouting face was so cute that it was a crime.

「Get up first, then sleep later. I can't move like this.」

「... You are noisy...」

Ai Fa complained softly, then rubbed her head against me.

Sigh, how did things turn out like this? After finally calming down, my brain was in a mess again.

「I'm the house head... you can't speak in such an arrogant tone...」

She was still half-asleep.

The sight of Ai Fa who was in a daze due to sleepiness was rare, like Darum Wu's smile.

But I couldn't keep admiring her cute face.

「Dear house head, it's time for morning chores. I need to clean up dinner from last night, so can you please get up for a while?」

「Hmmm...」

Ai Fa made a cute sound again and opened her eyes.

Her unfocused blue eyes looked at me from a close distance.

「...Asuta, it's you...」

「Yes, it's your family member Asuta.」

「...Hmm... It's Asuta...」

Ai Fa needlessly repeated herself, then smiled sweetly.

The prim and proper Ai Fa was actually smiling so sweetly.

Ai Fa showed a pure and innocent smile unlike her usual smile, then slowly closed her eyes.

「... So it's Asuta...」

「N-No, that's not it! It's morning! It's already morning, house head!」

She finally opened her eyes wide when she heard me saying that.

After sighing in relief, Ai Fa's looked at me quizzingly with her bright eyes.

「...Asuta, why are you sticking so close to me?」

「N-No matter how I look at it, aren't you the one sticking close to me...? Last night, we accidentally leaned on each other and fell asleep.」

「... I see, I don't remember.」

Ai Fa closed her eyes quickly.

「Thanks to you, my fever is down... Phew...」

She then let out a cute snore.

「Don't sleep anymore! Work! We still have work to do!」

Seeing that Ai Fa wasn't in pain anymore, I felt relieved and couldn't help yelling.

Ai Fa opened her eyes for the third time and looked at me unhappily.

「... It's morning.」

「Of course. The house is already so bright.」

「That's true. Lome leaves disrupted my sleep cycle. I want to rest a bit more.」

While she was saying that, Ai Fa rubbed her head on my chest again.

She then ignored the dumbfounded me and sat up suddenly.

「But I can't let myself sleep anymore. Asuta, sorry for troubling you.」

「Not at all... I'm glad that you feel better now.」

These few minutes were the most difficult of them all. I complained in my heart and got up slowly.

Ai Fa sat cross-legged on the bed and stretched her right arm.

「My fever is gone, and my wound doesn't hurt that much. I can start doing the morning chores now.」

「Ehh? Go and rest, I will wash the things.」

「What are you saying? What will you do if the Tsun clan people go there?」

「They are not that senseless, and won't attack us so early in the morning! In a way, this is the most prominent time... More importantly, you are hurt now and can't protect yourself, right?」

「Hmm? Only my left arm can't move, you think I will lose to them!」

Ai Fa pouted unhappily.

「As long as my right arm can move, I will be fine even if all three Tsun clan brothers were to attack me... In case of the eldest son of the Wu clan I would have to run.」

The denizens of the Forest's Edge could determine their opponent's strength accurately.

Speaking of which— if Ai Fa didn't dislocate her left arm, she had the confidence of defeating Jiza Wu?

What Ludo Wu said flashed across my mind. He said that only Donda Wu could defeat Kamyua Yost.

「... You can't wash anything with your hands anyway. If I run into danger, I will sprint home, so you just need to have a good rest.」

「Hmm... never mind, I don't want to walk around the village like this. I will leave the chores involving the water source to you.」

Ai Fa said with a hint of unhappiness on her face.

「Well then, I will take care of the chores at home then. Be careful, alright?」

「Okay. But shouldn't you rest? It will be bad if you get a fever again.」

「I already said that I'm fine. My bones don't hurt anymore, and my limbs are filled with strength. I need to move my body as usual to heal myself faster.」

She looked at me solemnly.

「Besides, I can feel that last night's dinner has become a part of my flesh and blood. Compared to my injury last year, my fever subsided faster this time. It's all thanks to you, Asuta.」

「... I'm glad to hear that.」

I finally started smiling.

Ai Fa's eyes were smiling too.

「Asuta, let's get to work.」

Naturally, I wasn't assaulted by the Tsun clan during my trip to the water source.

Unless under the influence of alcohol, the Tsun clan didn't dare to make any trouble in public. So there was no need to be so tense in the morning.

However, I did run into Mida Tsun and Tay Tsun in the Post Station Town last time.

They probably wouldn't create havoc by acting drunk.

But they had a creepy air about them, which made it hard to predict how they would act.

Even if the head of the Tsun clan ordered them to not stir up trouble, was Mida Tsun smart enough to understand his clan head's orders? Tay Tsun, on the other hand, was hard to understand. Hence, we could only be on guard for 24 hours a day.

「Hmm? Why are you dressed like that?」

When I returned home after cleaning the utensils, Ai Fa had already changed into her hunting attire.

She didn't just wear her cape, she was fully armed with the sabre on her waist.

「Do you even need to ask? I already finished the house chores and am going to forage for firewood and pico leaves.」

「No, your injury is recent, so you should rest for today. Going into the forest while you are injured will be too hard on you.」

I placed the pot I just washed onto the stove, scooped two ladles of water into the pot and started burning wood. Before heading into the edge of the woods, I had to cook the poitan.

I then hung the freshly washed clothes on the wall. My only t-shirt and the white towel were all worn out.

Ai Fa stood majestically in the center of the room, her eyes tracking me as I walked around the house. She said unhappily:

「Don't worry about my injury. Resting will just increase the load for tomorrow's work. Anyway, after we started running a business in the Post Station Town, the pico leaves are spoiling even faster, right?」

Of course, I noticed that.



Pico leaves were a type of spice and could absorb the moisture within the meat and had the effect of a preservative. I buried the meat patty and meat slices into pico leaves one day earlier, and the larger surface area of the processed meat resulted in the pico leaves absorbing even more moisture.

「We might need to change all the pico leaves in less than a month. In that case, we need to forage as much pico leaves as we can.」

「Hmm～ That's true...」

「And I sweated a lot yesterday. I want to bath, it feels really uncomfortable.」

Ai Fa said while scowling her nose.

「The cape will conceal my injured arm, so don't worry.」

Even if she said that, I still felt troubled. When she saw my face, Ai Fa's expression changed.

「Asuta, I know you are worried. But you don't really need to be concerned. I'm just following what my body is telling me... You have to trust my judgment.」

「... I know.」

Ai Fa's gaze was strong and unwavering, filled with strength and reliability.

Ai Fa was proud of herself as a hunter and wouldn't be stubborn and push herself, which would delay her recovery.

I had to believe in her.

After drying the poitan for the stall and for dinner, we picked up the sack to hold firewood and pico leaves and headed for the edge of the woods.

It was the usual morning scene.

However, Ai Fa adjusted the opening of the cape slightly to conceal the left half of her body. She tied her blonde hair loosely to the side. Ai Fa usually bundled her hair above her neck into a complicated pattern, but her hairstyle today was not much different from Vena Wu.

「Ai Fa, your hairstyle is really refreshing today. It's hard to tie your hair into your usual complicated pattern with just one hand, right?」

「Yes, that is tough.」

「It's nice to change your hairdo every now and then; it suits you.」

Anything looked good on a beautiful girl. I added in my heart.

Ai Fa snorted disinterestedly as we walked along the dirt path.

「Long hair is a hassle, I always wanted to cut it. I really hope that denizens of Forest's Edge will abolish the rule about hair.」

According to the rules of Forest's Edge, women can't cut their hair before marriage.

In the future, will Ai Fa's beautiful long hair be trimmed short?

We reached the Lante river as we chatted.

This was a slow-flowing river at the edge of the woods. The river bank was covered in rocks; the greenery was dense upstream, and loads of pico leaves could be found there.

Going by our usual habits, the members of the Fa house were supposed to bath in the stream before picking the pico leaves.

「Will you really be fine? Don't get washed away by the water, okay?」

「Shut up.」

With those words, Ai Fa handed me her necklace and cape for safekeeping.

As I held the cape, Ai Fa took out a cloth for wiping her body from inside the cape and a change of clothes that had swirly patterns.

「Oh right, you didn't go to the water source today.」

Ai Fa usually changed her clothes early in the morning and washed them at the water source.

「Can you do your laundry with one hand...? Never mind, you can't let me help either.」

「... If you already know, then don't say it out loud.」

After glaring at me with squinted eyes, Ai Fa went around to the cover of the boulder. This was the usual scene too.

I had lived in Ai Fa's abode for almost 40 days. During my first morning in the Fa house we were attacked by a madarama snake and a kiba consecutively.

After that, we didn't encounter such a crisis again. Even now, I still prayed that god wouldn't let us meet with such a disaster in the morning when Ai Fa was injured.

While I was leaning against the boulder and keeping an eye on the woods, Ai Fa called out to me from the stream.

「What is it?」

「... You have lived in the Fa house for over a month now.」

So Ai Fa was thinking about the same thing. This made me a little happy.

「That's right, 40 days passed in a blink of an eye— but I also think that a lot happened in these 40 days.」

「Yes... Today is the second day of the blue month.」

It was rare for Ai Fa to mention the date.

In order to grasp the migration cycle of the kiba, Ai Fa knew the dates very well. However, everyday life wouldn't be an inconvenience even if one didn't know the calendar, so I was clueless about it.

「Is that so. Then Kamyua will be heading to the eastern kingdom in another 13 days... And are there any events in the blue month?」

「No, nothing important.」

「Is your birthday coming soon?」

「My birthday is in the red month.」

When the hell is the red month?

At this moment, I realized I even lost my birthday.

If I was to count backward, I could calculate when my next birthday would be. But in this world, the solar calendar was not of much use. According to the calendar in this world, there was an additional 13th month every third year. So there wasn't much meaning in calculating my birthday.

No matter what, in my original world, I was just a second-year high schooler that was just 17. It had only been half a month since my birthday when I ran into that disaster.

In that case, could I treat the day I appeared in this world as my second birthday?

Will I still be here in a year or two?

Or will I be pulled back into the scene of the fire, and let fate run its original course?

Or maybe I will be transported to another world— no, please, just no.

If that happened, I would lose everything I had. I was weak mentally, and wouldn't be able to bear such an experience.

While I was lost in these thoughts, Ai Fa called me again:

「Asuta, come over here.」

「Ehh? Are you done bathing?」

「Yes.」

「Are you clothed?」

「... Just what are you thinking?」

There was anger simmering in Ai Fa's voice. I quickly moved behind the boulder.

Ai Fa sat there cross-legged and glared at me with a slightly ferocious face.

And of course, she was already wearing her clothes, and even her left arm had been bandaged. Her head was tilted slightly to the right, and her long wet hair flowed to the ground.

「It's hard for me to dry my hair with one hand.」

Ai Fa handed me a cloth angrily.

「I see.」

I knelt on one knee in the rocky ground and tried to carry out my mistress' request. If performing such a trivial task could help Ai Fa, I was glad to do so.

「... Long hair is such a bother.」

Ai Fa complained as she scowled her mouth.

「Don't say that, you have really nice long hair.」

「Hmmp, my hair reflects the light and gets in the way of my hunt. If I had black hair like my father Gill—」

Ai Fa stopped a little unnaturally.

「What's the matter?」

When I asked that, she lowered her eyelids and said: 「It's nothing.」

「I suddenly remembered that a long time ago, I also mentioned this to Grandma Jiba and Rimee Wu.」

「I see.」

Speaking of which, I felt that I had grown apart from Grandma Jiba and Rimee Wu. Our lives were getting on track now, but I still missed the time we spent in the Wu village.

「...Oh right. Ai Fa, you can't hunt like this, right?」

「Of course. I need to recuperate between ten days to half a month.」

「During this time, do you want to stay in the Wu clan village during the day?」 I suggested while drying her hair.

Ai Fa looked up at me in surprise.

「But why? I have no reason to do that.」

「You can only rest if you stay at home, right...? Besides, we need to be wary of the Tsun clan.」

「The Tsun clan don't know that I'm hurt.」

「Even if they don't know, they might still come and pick on us?」

「If that happens, they will suffer my fury. I can't hold back now, so those Tsun clan retards will be in danger instead.」

「But...」

「Asuta, we are not the kins of the Wu clan, we shouldn't rely on them.」

Ai Fa's stern eyes looked straight at me through her wet fringe.

「We are merely paying an adequate amount of copper plates in exchange for the help of the Wu clan's women. We don't have any special relationship with the Wu clan.」

「But Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba are both special to you. I think this is a good chance for you to chat with them.」

Ai Fa's eyes turned gentle.

She poked my chest gently.

「Thanks to you, I renewed my bonds with Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba. I have no other wish other than that... even without any dialogue, my heart is still bonded tightly with them.」

「Yes.」

「Leaving my relationship with them aside for now, I don't think I should rely on the Wu clan. I have turned down their marriage proposal before. Besides, when a member of the Wu clan suggested that you should join another house, I also rejected them.」

I see. I kept quiet.

But even so, I still thought the Fa house should work hard on building a normal relationship with the Wu clan. However, Leina Wu thought that it was dangerous for me to stay in the Fa house. If we were to go to the Wu clan because of Ai Fa's injury, it would be a slap in her face.

「I understand. Let's ignore what I just said, I didn't think it through properly.」

「Your thinking is always too shallow.」

「...Hey.」

「You never think things through, right?」

「Hey! The truth hurts, you know?」

「I'm just kidding, don't be mad.」

Ai Fa said nonchalantly.

She poked my chest gently again.

「You are always saying things I don't understand, but I don't always feel unhappy about it. If it makes me uncomfortable, I will just beat you up. So don't hold back and say whatever you want in the future.」

「... I don't want to get beaten up, so I will talk less.」

I answered without much thought, and Ai Fa answered sternly:

「You can't, you have to tell me how you feel and what you are thinking, don't hide anything.」

「... Will you also do the same?」

When she heard my answer, Ai Fa pouted a little and replied: 「... I'm doing my best.」

I felt a fluttering in my chest, and I patted Ai Fa's head.

「Alright, your hair is almost dry.」

「Yes.」

Ai Fa nimbly manipulated a string with her mouth and right hand and tied up her long hair again.

「... Right now, the most troubling person isn't the eldest, nor the second son of the Tsun clan, but the youngest. In that case, your situation is more precarious than mine.」

「That's right. I'm very cautious every day.」

「Eh?」

「Since I can only rest and recover, it makes no difference whether I'm home or in the city, right? If we can see each other, we will both be more at ease.」

Ai Fa stared at me closely.

「I won't get the way of your work, and I can help carry some luggage too. If I feel sleepy, I can rest adequately... It won't inconvenience you, right?」

「Not at all. I will feel more at ease if you are with me.」

I said sincerely.

The Post Station Town wasn't safe, but compared to leaving Ai Fa home alone, I would be able to rest easier if she was with me

We never imagined that this day would not end normally.

Our business in the Post Station Town was going smoothly, and we had no idea that starting from today we will have to stay in the Wu clan village.

Staying in the Wu clan had nothing to do with Ai Fa's injuries. While we were operating our stall in the Post Station Town, the appearance of a certain person threw our plans awry.

A member of the Tsun clan we had never seen before was finally targeting Ai Fa and me.

Chapter 3 - Sixth and Seventh Day - The Immoral Messenger

Part 1

Business was going smoothly.

This was the sixth day of business, and a large crowd of southerners and easterners were still gathered in front of my stall today and purchased a large number of my food. I prepared 150 portions today. *What will be the result at the end of the day?* I was filled with anticipation since morning.

「Hmm... I think the crowd yesterday was bigger.」

Lala Wu commented after the morning rush period was over.

「That's right. When they saw us still operating in the afternoon, some of the customers stopped going out of their way to queue in the morning.」

「Is that so? What should we do if we can't sell everything?」

「I will try to negotiate with the people in the Wu clan village for trade of this food for meat or poitan. We can't waste so much food after all.」

While we were talking, there was a small number of easterners and southerners patronizing our stalls.

There was also a group of westerners watching from the side, their numbers were the same as yesterday. Thinking back, on the first day of opening this road was pretty much deserted. In comparison, the street was incredibly crowded now.

「Okay, there won't be many customers for the time being, let's take breaks in turns and have a light meal. Lala Wu, please watch the 『Kiba burger』 stall.」

「Okay, I understand... What are we eating today?」

「I'm planning to pour tarapa sauce over the meat slices used in the 『Myam-roasted meat』. This is a special dish made especially for the staff.」

「Ehh!?」

Lala Wu opened her blue eyes wide in surprise.

I was a bit taken aback by how shocked she looked.

「What's the matter? The marinated meat suits tarapa sauce really well, right? The ingredients used in both dishes are similar after all.」

「No, that's not it. I was just thinking that eating it that way will be nice. I was just surprised that you thought the same way too.」

「I see. I knew you would like it.」

When I said that, Lala Wu asked in surprise again: 「But why?」

「Because... you didn't like the soft texture of the hamburg steak, and you mentioned you like tarapa sauce. So I thought this combination will fit your ideal.」

「...Why do you remember so clearly? I said that more than ten days ago, right?」

「Huh? Because the denizens of Forest's Edge don't often give specific feedback, so what you said left a deep impression on me.」

When she heard my reply, Lala Wu hesitated for a moment before thanking me.

I replied with a smile: 「You are welcome.」

「Well then, who will rest first? Lala Wu, can you eat now?」

「Yes, I can eat any time... Is Ai Fa eating too?」

Ai Fa did what she said she would. After accompanying me to the Post Station Town and helping carry some of the load, she was resting in the shade of the woods behind us.

She concealed her left arm with her cape and sat cross-legged with one knee up. She had the sabre in her right arm. There was some distance between us and her, so I couldn't tell if she was asleep.

「I prepared her share. We have to check if she is awake.」

「Ah, I will go check.」

Lala Wu walked briskly towards Ai Fa with these words.

Ai Fa appeared to be awake. They talked for a bit, and Lala Wu immediately came back.

「She can eat. So let's eat with Ai Fa.」

「Alright.」

By the way, judging from Lala Wu's actions, I thought she wanted to deepen her relationship with Ai Fa.

Ai Fa said we shouldn't rely on the Wu clan, but we don't need to misinterpret the goodwill of others.

And so, I asked Shela Wu to attend to the 『Kiba burger』 stall, Vena Wu to watch the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall, and we briskly walked to Ai Fa's side with our staff meal.

「Sorry for the wait. Here's the grilled poitan and kiba with tarapa sauce.」

「Yes.」

Ai Fa nodded magnanimously.

She had been busying herself since morning, but her wounds didn't seem to be hurting, and her temperature's normal, so she maintained her usual serious expression.

Lala Wu and I sat on either side of Ai Fa.

「Your condition seems good. We had to carry a lot of things today, you were a big help.」

「Before I recover from my injuries, I can help every morning. But after I become strong enough to enter the woods again, you will have to think of another way.」

「There's nothing to think about either, I can only settle it with brute force and endurance.」

As we chatted idly, everyone finished the mini meal in no time.

I intentionally stayed quiet, and Lala Wu used this chance to say:

「Ai Fa... I want to thank you.」

「... Thank me?」

「Yes, Shin Wu told me about the 『sacrificial hunting style』. If not for your talking him out of it, Shin Wu would have acted dangerously. Thank you.」

Lala Wu bowed towards Ai Fa with her veiled redhead.

Ai Fa tilted her head quizzingly.

「I merely stated what I thought. During a hunt, there will be a large number of kins staying by his side, right? In such a situation, using the fruits that attract kiba will be too retarded. And he was planning to use the 『sacrificial hunting style』, which would endanger those around him.」

「Yes, Shin Wu is very depressed. He felt selfish for only caring about his own glory.」

「... He just didn't want to rely on his kins. There is no shame in that.」

「That's right, I think so too.」

Ai Fa's voice and expression were cold, but Lala Wu nodded happily.

「Well then, let's go back. Vena Wu is probably starting to get anxious.」

「That's true.」

Lala Wu and I stood up.

「Asuta.」

Ai Fa called out to me.

「You just started working but I can already feel how responsible you are.」

She raised the corners of her lips a little.

「I just wanted to tell you that. Go back to work.」

「Yes, I know.」

I felt very encouraged and walked back to the stall.

On the short trip there, Lala Wu said to me immediately:

「I'm really surprised. Ai Fa is actually smiling.」

「Eh? Ah, yeah.」

Recently, Ai Fa was smiling more often, and I felt her smile was very reserved. But Lala Wu was still surprised. It seemed that Ai Fa would only show a poker face in front of outsiders.

After Vena Wu and Shela Wu also took their rest, I switched the jobs of the two new employees. I took care of the 『Myam-roasted meat』 with Shela Wu, while the Wu main house sisters handled the 『Kiba burger』.

I didn't want to rush their training, but their learning speed exceeded my expectations.

「Both of you are very capable. We had worked together to prepare the banquet for the house Lutim wedding, and it looks like that experience served you well.」

「Thank you for your compliment, I'm very honored.」

Shela Wu smiled calmly.

She sure liked to smile. When I realized that, Shela Wu was staring at the plate used for samples.

「Asuta, this dish has a very strong taste, can the seasoning be plainer?」

「Of course. The denizens of Forest's Edge will probably think the seasoning is too thick, right? You just need to shorten the marinating time, and it will be plainer. I will adjust the saltiness by using this method when making 『Myam-roasted meat』 at home.」

Shela Wu suddenly looked at me with pitiful eyes.

「Pardon me... I want to let my family taste this dish... Can you tell me how long to marinate and how to make the sauce...?」

「I can tell you right now. Shela Wu, you have six people in your house, right?」

I did a rough calculation in my head.

「Erm... for the fruit wine, you will need a quarter bottle. And a quarter diced aria. One finger length of myam will be enough. The time I marinate is roughly the same as drying the poitan, so use that as a guide and shorten the time... You can slice the meat a little thicker. For the denizens of Forest's Edge, you don't need to cut it so thin. The taste won't be so strong then.」

「Alright, thank you.」

I continued after seeing Shela Wu's relieved smile:

「However, you don't have to insist on this method of seasoning, this is just my personal preference after all. If you want it to be sweeter, you can decrease the amount of myam. If you want a gentler taste, you can add more aria... You can also try adding other diced ingredients. Please figure out the taste you like the best by testing it out.」

Shela Wu looked surprised, but she then showed a brilliant smile.

「Thank you. Ever since I met you, my heart has been filled with happiness. Seeing my family enjoy my cooking makes me really happy.」

「I'm glad to hear that.」

While we were talking, an odd couple appeared.

Kamyua Yost's disciple Leito was here together with Tara.

「Asuta onii-chan, two please!」

「I want two too.」

「Alright, thank you... Your mentor isn't coming today, is he?」

「Kamyua was busy with work until the morning again and is resting in the inn right now. He isn't willing to miss your food two days in a row, so he asked me to run this errand for him.」

Leito said with a gentle smile.

Tara was also all smiles.

When they stood side by side, the difference between them was more prominent. Tara's smile was filled with pure bliss, while Leito's smile was much more mature.

Leito was the disciple of that suspicious man, so maybe I had some preconception about him. But I still didn't think he was a normal innocent boy.

「Here, sorry for the wait.」

「Thank you... Sorry, is that the head of the Fa house? Did she come to town with you today? 」

As expected of Leito, his eyes were really sharp. I showed him a business smile.

「Yes. She helped me to carry the goods here today. Hunting kiba is very tough work these days, so she is taking a break for a while 」

「I see, so that's how it is. 」

Leito was still smiling calmly.

Kamyua Yost didn't show up two days in a row. Just what was he busying himself with? I didn't plan to probe this boy about that.

After the two young patrons left, the stalls gradually turned busy.

The sun reached its peak, and there was an obvious increase in human traffic.

Business in the beginning wasn't as good as yesterday, but we still sold 63 portions. Compared to other stalls, this was incredibly good sales. Two days ago, we sold 70 meals at noon, so the speed of sales didn't vary too much.

Business was going smoothly.

It looked like I didn't need to regret preparing 150 meals.

「Sorry, Lala Wu, can you run an errand for me? Help me buy two tarapa, two tino, and 20 aria. 」

「Okay~ 」

Lala Wu ran off with the copper plates in hand.

At this moment, I felt someone standing behind me.

「Hmm? What's the matter, Ai Fa? 」

Ai Fa suddenly appeared behind us.

Shela Wu also turned towards Ai Fa in surprise.

Ai Fa narrowed her eyes and looked to the north.

「... It's denizens from Forest's Edge. 」

Since they came from the north, they might be from the Tsun clan.

As expected— one of them was the grey-haired Tay Tsun,

And the one walking beside him wasn't the human balloon Mida Tsun, but a slender woman wearing a veil and shawl.

These two had an ominous air about them as they approached the stall. Thankfully, there were no customers at this moment.

「Hmmp... I still can't believe it, there really are denizens of Forest's Edge doing business in the Post Station Town.」

I could hear a high screeching voice of a woman entering my ears.

Just who was this woman? Just standing face to face with her sent a chill down my spine.

She was a beauty.

She had proportionate features, and her figure could rival Vena Wu.

The brown hair of the woman was carefully tied into many plaids, which flowed out from the veil.

Her slightly dark eyes had a strong gleam in them.

It was a cruel, cold, and merciless light as if belonging to a venomous snake.

The smile on her face had a hint of poison too.

「I did hear rumors that a strange foreigner was staying in the Fa house. But I never imagined that the head of the Fa house would go to town herself. You must be the only female hunter in Forest's Edge, head of the Fa house, Ai Fa. Right?」

I understood at that moment.

The chill I felt on my back wasn't because of her cruel appearance or her high pitched voice, but the smell.

In the stall that was surrounded by the aroma of fruit wine and myam, an ominous scent came from the other party.

It was the scent of rust— obviously, it was rotting blood.

「... Who are you?」

Ai Fa asked quietly.

The woman with the ominous scent raised the corner of her lips in a faint smile.

「I'm the eldest daughter of the Tsun clan, Yamiel Tsun. Female hunter of the Fa house, my younger brothers Dida and Doddo were in your care before.」

Part 2

So this was the eldest daughter of the Tsun clan, Yamiel Tsun.

The woman with an ominous scent of blood showed a venomous snake-like smile, then stared at Ai Fa, Shela Wu, and me.

Yamiel Tsun's gaze intimidated Shela Wu, and she took a step back. Vena Wu who was standing in the stall next door called out to her:

「Excuse me, Shela Wu, can we switch places...?」

Shela Wu slowly walked to the stall next door while keeping her eyes on Yamiel Tsun.

Vena Wu handed the spatula for stirring the tarapa sauce to Shela Wu, then walked briskly to us.

「It's been a while... Do you still remember me...?」

「... Of course, eldest daughter of the Wu clan, Vena Wu.」

Yamiel Tsun smiled coldly.

Vena Wu narrowed her eyes sleepily, she did the same when facing Mida Tsun last time.

「Hmmp, so the Wu clan is involved in this matter after all. I heard a foreigner tended to the hearth during house Lutim's wedding. The kins of the Wu clan sure are close to the Fa house.」

「That's right... we are really close... So, what brings you here...?」

「Fufu, I'm just here to relay a message from my house head.」

Yamiel Tsun looked at me, her eyes were icy like a snake

「The foreigner from the Fa house, can I have your name, please?」

「... I'm Asuta.」

I wasn't afraid.

Just disgusted.

This woman made me shudder more than Mida Tsun and Tay Tsun.

Why was there such a strong scent of blood on her? Even after butchering a kiba, my body wouldn't give off such an intense odor.

I wouldn't be so creeped out if this was a butchering room, but the scent of blood was so distinct just with her standing before us. I couldn't bring myself to trust her and my heart was filled with disgust.

「Asuta of the Fa house, huh... Asuta, the Tsun clan is rather troubled right now.」

「... Is that so?」

「Mida keeps throwing tantrums... Ever since he tasted your cooking in the Post Station Town, he keeps crying about eating it again.」

Mida Tsun, huh.

So, what did she want from me?

「Hence, the head of the Tsun clan Zuro Tsun wants me to relay this to you... Asuta, can you tend to the hearth of the Tsun clan for one night?」

At this moment, I could hear the sound of someone stepping on the ground.

Ai Fa had taken half a step forth.

And, as expected, blue flames were burning in her eyes.

「Are you the eldest daughter of the Tsun clan Yamiel Tsun?」

「Yes, head of the Fa house, Ai Fa.」

「Asuta might be a foreigner, but he is still a member of the Fa house. If you have business with a Fa house member, you need to notify me, the house head, first.」

「Oh, is that so? Well then, will you—」

「I refuse.」

Ai Fa shot down Yamiel Tsun mercilessly.

Yamiel Tsun let out a shrill laugh

「... You refuse?」

「I refuse.」

「This will be troubling then...I thought Mida will quiet down after one night. But he made an even bigger fuss two days later instead. Diga and Doddo beat and kicked him in anger, but to no avail. Not just that, his appetite even increased.」

「That's the Tsun clan's problem and has nothing to do with the Fa house.」

Ai Fa was furious and was already showing the eyes of a hunter.

Yamiel Tsun was still smiling coldly, while Tay Tsun stood on the side like a shade.

「Why then? When house Lutim held their wedding, he tended to their hearth. But now he can't tend to the Tsun clan's hearth. I don't understand.」

「You don't understand? Think about everything that the Tsun clan had done to the Fa house.」

「You mean the matter of Diga sneaking into the Fa house? Or Doddo drawing his blade in the Post Station Town and during the Lutim house wedding...? I can only apologize on behalf of my useless brothers. Will you tend to the Tsun clan's hearth now?」

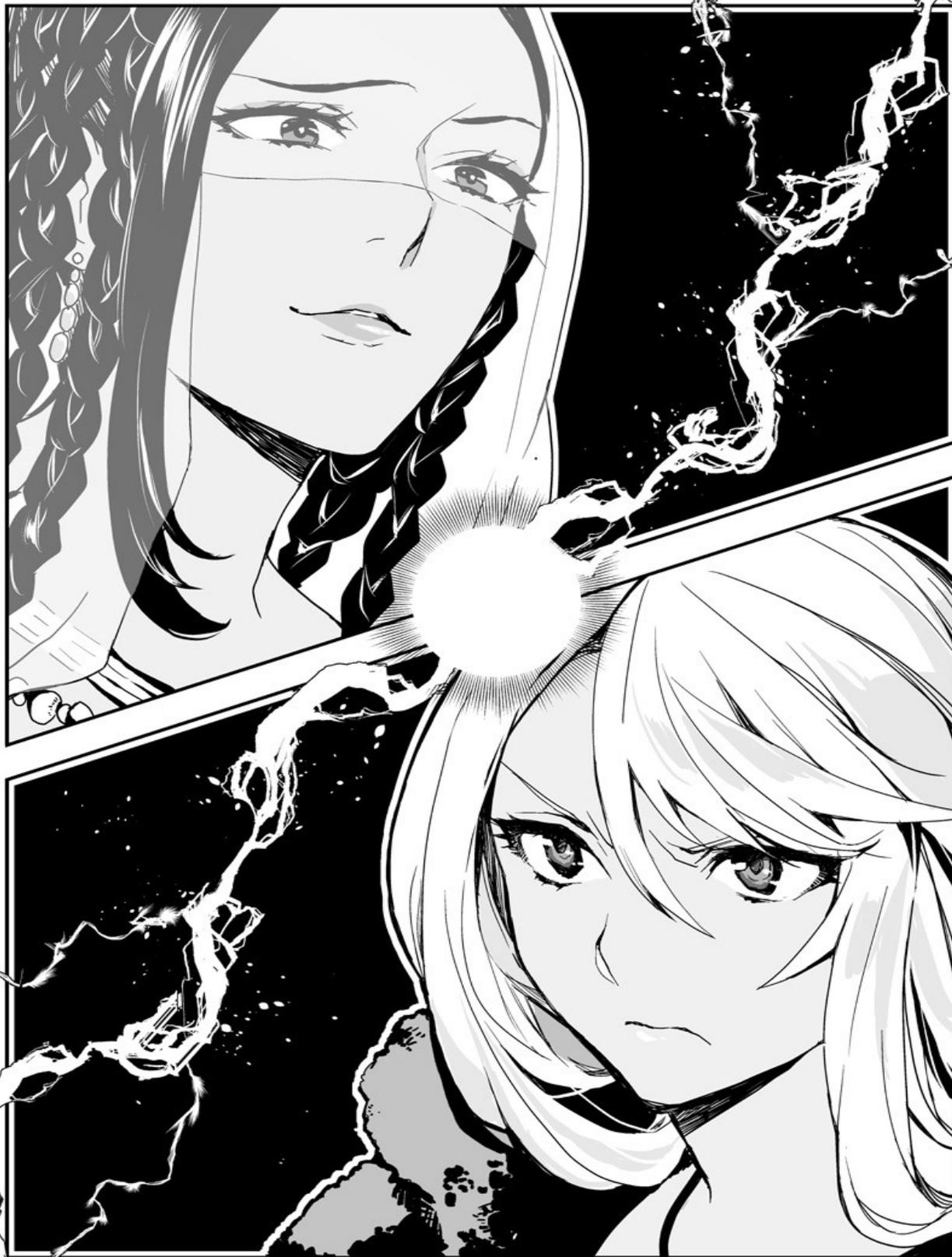
「I don't need superficial apologies. If you really want to apologize, then hand over an arm.」

Ai Fa wasn't loud, but there was a deep rage in her voice. Ai Fa was furious when she heard the ridiculous demand from the Tsun clan, asking me to tend to their hearth.

「If you want to eat Asuta's cooking, then abide by the Post Station Town's law and buy the food here with copper plates. That's the only way the Tsun clan will get to taste his cooking.」

「Copper plates, huh... Just how much copper plates will we have to spend to appease Mida Tsun's appetite?」

At this moment, a suspicious light shone in Yamiel Tsun's dark eyes.



She was like a venomous snake that had found her prey.

「Asuta, were you paid a proper amount of remuneration when you tended to house Lutim's hearth?」

「Ehh? ... What about it?」

「That's true. The We clan has more than a hundred kin. Besides, the wedding for the heir of the house Lutim is a serious matter. Since the Fa house isn't a kin of the Wu clan, they had to give you remuneration.」

There seemed to be something dangerous hiding behind her words.

Yamiel Tsun appeared to be different from her younger brothers and wouldn't resort to violence in the spur of the moment. She used devious means to trap her target instead.

「How much did they pay? Ten kiba's worth of tusks and horns? Twenty? Or was it thirty?」

「... I don't need to answer you.」

「I see. Never mind then... The Tsun clan is willing to pay you 40 kiba worth of tusks and horns as remuneration.」

I was stiff from surprise.

40 kiba worth of tusks and horns— that's equal to 480 red copper plates. Even if the Tsun clan kept all the money given by Genos to themselves, would they really waste so much money on such a farce?

Ai Fa and Vena Wu stood on either side of me, and I observed their faces.

A fire was still raging in Ai Fa's eyes, while Vena Wu's still narrowed her eyes sleepily, with a gleam of doubt shining in her light colored eyes.

「It's... It's just tending to the hearth for one night, and you are willing to pay so much? In that case, you can just buy the food here with that money.」

「We can't afford to spend that much on snacks. We want you to handle a big project that is on the scale of the Lutim house wedding.」

I heard someone's gasps. From the place it came from, that was probably Vena Wu.

I stared at the evil woman's creepy smile, and couldn't avert my gaze.

「On the tenth day of the blue month, we will be hosting the annual house-head conference. All the house-head will attend with one male follower. There will be 80 denizens from the Forest's

Edge on that night. I can pay you 40 kiba's worth of tusks and horns as remuneration. Asuta, will you tend to the hearth for that night?」

「I see, so that's how it is... I was wondering why you are so generous, so you intend to make all the house-heads pay one kiba's worth of payment.」

「Yes, Asuta's cooking is expensive, right? The people in the Post Station Town detest kiba, but he is able to sell kiba food. His culinary skill must be incredible... Asuta, what do you—」

「I refuse.」

Ai Fa cut her off again.

「This has nothing to do with the payment. We have no obligation to take on this job.」

「Oh... You intend to monopolize the wealth and secret?」

Yamiel Tsun lifted the corners of her lips again.

「There were more than a hundred residents of Post Station Town who bought Asuta's cooking, right? Everyone thinks kiba is tough, smelly and unpalatable. But Asuta can turn kiba into a delicacy, this is no different from a miracle... Are the Fa house and Wu clan planning to hog the secret and wealth?」

I gulped quietly.

This woman was hiding an ace in the hole as expected. How could she know my sales figures as an outsider?

「That's not a crime, right? My conscience is clear. If you want to know the truth, then lower your head and beg us. Don't go the roundabout way and ask Asuta to tend to the hearth.」

「Ai Fa of house Fa, we are doing this for the sake of Mida Tsun. We are not interested in neither your wealth nor secret.」

Yamiel Tsun licked her lips with her slim tongue.

「Tusks and horns from 40 kiba, is this remuneration satisfactory to you? Aside from tending to the hearth for the house-head conference, the Tsun clan head hopes you can prepare the food for Mida Tsun too... If you are not willing to, I can only forsake all hope.」

「... Forsake all hope?」

I asked.

Yamiel Tsun's voice and face gave me an ominous feeling.

「Yes... Mida Tsun is my adorable kid brother, but I'm not capable of watching over him. I can only leave his fate to the heavens.」

「... I don't understand what you mean.」

「I meant it literally. If this goes on, Diga and Doddo will beat him to death. I might as well undo his chains.」

「... Chains?」

「Yes, I will undo his chains and let him roam wherever he wishes... He might end up getting stabbed to death by the guards in the Post Station Town. But that's better than a slow death via beatings.」

Was she telling the truth?

I thought there's a 90% chance that she was probably bluffing. She was threatening us that she could incite Mida Tsun to attack if we don't do what she says.

Who would chain up their own family? She was probably lying. I won't, and don't to believe in those lies.

So she must be intimidating me.

I might not believe it—

But there was still a 10% chance that was the truth. The dangerous aura of this woman made me think that.

「... It doesn't concern us.」

Ai Fa's voice didn't waver at all.

「If the Tsun clan's youngest son attempts to harm my family, I will cut him down according to the rules of Forest's Edge, without needing the guards to interfere.」

「Hmmp, you sure are stubborn.」

Yamiel Tsun showed a seductive smile and wasn't fazed at all.

「Never mind, this is just a whimsical idea. I will discuss this with my clan head first. I will be back at this time tomorrow. Give me the answer at that time then.」

「Be it today or tomorrow, the answer won't ever change. We will do as we wish even if you don't like it.」

「Ai Fa, I already know what you think. Discuss it properly with Asuta, the Wu clan, and house Lutim then... See you tomorrow.」

Yamiel Tsun gestured with her chin to Tay Tsun standing beside her.

In the end, Tay Tsun held his peace. After acknowledging us with an emotionless gaze, he left alongside his mistress.

They only left behind a silence that was like the aftermath of a nightmare.

「... I have to discuss this with Papa Donda...」

Vena Wu finally broke the silence, and said reluctantly:

「Just what is that woman scheming... I think she just wants to make a mountain out of a mole hole, and create chaos...」

「Who knows. I think this is a scam.」

I didn't think Yamiel Tsun came up with that idea on the spot. She had a firm grip on our information. She even knew things that Mida Tsun and Tay Tsun couldn't have known.

After seeing how infatuated Mida Tsun was with my food, Yamiel Tsun decided to make use of it in her scheme.

「...Asuta, what are you thinking about?」

Ai Fa called out to me quietly.

I turned back and found Ai Fa looking at me expressionlessly with flames of agitation still lingering in her eyes.

「Don't worry, just focus on your own work. Just treat the Tsun clan's words as a joke.」

「Yes, but...」

「There is no room for discussion. I won't permit you to caretake the Tsun clan's hearth.」

With these angry words, Ai Fa walked back to the tree shade.

Looking closely, Shela Wu and Lala Wu were standing at the 『Kiba burger』 stall and looking at us worriedly. I nodded at them to express 「we are fine」, then looked at Vena Wu beside us:

「Vena Wu, what was that stench just now?」

「... Stench? Was there a stench...?」

「Huh? Didn't you smell a stench?」

Vena Wu shook her head.

「The myam was too strong, I couldn't smell anything...」

I see.

My sense of smell was more sensitive than others, so maybe I was the only one who noticed that faint stench of blood. Even so, I still didn't trust that woman.

I wanted to ask more about the Tsun clan and Yamiel Tsun, but a Jaguar customer suddenly appeared.

「Hey, are you okay? The atmosphere just now was really tense, you know?」

「Ah, sorry about that. It's nothing.」

「Is that so? That didn't look like a small matter... Hey, don't cause any trouble here, the guards will chase you out. You all are the only thing I look forward to every day. What will I do if I can't eat your cooking?」

「I'm honored to hear you say that... Are you buying one?」

At this moment, two middle-aged Jaguar men also came over.

They were probably waiting for Yamiel Tsun to leave. There were other Jaguar and Semu customers heading to the 『Kiba burger』 stall too.

They probably didn't dare to come near because of the dangerous air emitted by the denizens of Forest's Edge.

This was a critical time for us.

The Tsun clan had finally started to interfere with our business directly.

Even if the revolting things Yamiel Tsun said were all a bluff, there would be a huge uproar if Mida Tsun really came to the stall to dine without paying. If it escalated, I might be barred from the Post Station Town.

Just imagining myself tending to the Tsun clan's hearth made me goosebumps. But I couldn't keep turning them down. Our business was just getting on track, and it might get destroyed if I don't think of a good countermeasure.

I can't depend on Kamyua Yost in such a situation... I can only discuss this with Donda Wu and Kaslan Lutim.

And I had to get Ai Fa to agree with this.

Maybe this was the biggest obstacle. I sighed softly.

In the middle of my sigh I felt a strong emotion stirring in my abdomen.

My intense mood swing surprised myself.

They are unforgivable... Someone seemed to be muttering in my head.

There was no way another person was hiding in my body, so that must be my own voice.

Who are they? I asked myself.

I can't forgive those who get in my way. The other me answered.

Was I really that easily agitated?

This wasn't the first time the Tsun clan did something nefarious, so why was I so worked up?

This... is just like something those guys would do!

Those guys?

Are the guys that are referred...?

Could they be the people who disrupted Dad's business with malicious means?

Because Dad wouldn't go along with them, they knocked him down with a van and even committed arson to the shop. Did I unconsciously overlap those violent ruffians with the Tsun clan?

Calm down. Those despicable people did attempt to destroy other people's livelihood for the sake of their own profits... But this situation is different!

I took a deep breath and tried to suppress the agitation rising in my chest.

I can't let the Tsun clan do whatever they want... But if I'm blinded by rage, I will lose fights that I'm capable of winning. I need to calm down.

At that moment, I realized Vena Wu was staring dumbfounded at me.

「What's the matter?」

After I asked her, Vena Wu just shook her head.

「Asuta... So you are capable of showing such a vicious look... Your eyes earlier were just like Papa Donda and Ai Fa...」

「Ehh? That won't do! Doing business requires a pleasant expression!」

I slapped my own cheeks hard.

I could feel the sting on my face.

「... Let's focus on work. Please switch places with Shela Wu and teach Lala Wu how to make 『Kiba burger』 .」

「Yes...」

Vena Wu turned and left reluctantly.

I should concentrate on running the business and worry about those things later.

Before I realized, it was almost noon and we still had merchandise to sell.

I pushed the seeds of frustration into my heart and focused on work.

Part 3

After that, we didn't meet with any other crisis and ended work for the day.

There was also a small number of westerner patrons today. We were open until the very last moment and sold 141 portions.

This was the sixth day of business, and I have finally figured out the maximum number of customers. I didn't know if this number would change in the future, but we were heading towards our goal at a faster than expected speed.

I hoped that one day, the denizens of Forest's Edge could use kiba meat to exchange for copper plates. I hoped the denizens of Forest's Edge could rise out of poverty. We took on the reckless challenge of opening a stall in order to achieve this goal.

I did not wish to be hindered by anyone.

「To think that the Tsun clan raised such a retarded demand...」

Donda Wu held a fruit wine in one hand and squeezed out these words unhappily.

After the Wu clan finished their dinner, we stayed in the hall illuminated by kiba wax candles. The ones present were the 4 men from the Wu main house, Mama Mia Lei, Vena Wu, Ai Fa, and me. Kaslan Lutim also rushed over from his village to attend.

「They want Asuta to tend to the hearth during the house head conference. It's a pity that the Tsun clan is hosting it, or else there wouldn't be any problems. The real issue is that we still don't know their motive behind this demand.」

Kaslan Lutim who I had not seen in ten days muttered quietly.

Dan Lutim wasn't interested in us opening a stall in the Post Station Town, so he delegated his mature and steady heir to handle everything related to this.

「Excuse me, can you tell me what is this house head conference? I heard it's a grand meeting held once a year.」

「Yes. We hold a house head conference annually. During that time, all the house heads will gather at the Tsun clan village and share about their lives. The Forest's Edge settlement is very vast, so everyone uses this chance to learn how others are doing.」

The house head conference was held on the tenth day of the blue month— which was eight days from now. Ai Fa intentionally mentioned 「blue month」 this morning, she probably happened to remember this event.

「The house head conference is set to be held in the afternoon. After everyone spends a night in the Tsun clan settlement, they will return at dawn... The Tsun clan wants you to tend to the hearth during that night.」

「Hmm~ I don't understand. The thing about Mida Tsun is probably just an excuse, they must be after something else... Why would the Tsun clan want me to go there?」

「We have no way of knowing. Asuta, do you have any clues?」

Kaslan Lutim looked at me calmly, and I nodded.

「Yamiel Tsun knows about my stall's revenue. I think she got the information from the money-lenders.」

「Money-lenders?」

「Yes. The Wu clan and Lutim house don't interact with the Tsun clan, and this should be the same for the residents of Post Station Town too. However, the money-lenders are operating in the Post Station Town under the orders of the landlord. They might have informed the Tsun clan.」

I visited the money-lenders to exchange the copper plates every day, so the owner had a good grasp on the business of my stall. The Tsun clan was the chief clan of the tribe and had close relations with the lord of Genos. The Tsun clan might have grasped how well my business was doing through the money-lender.

「The Tsun clan already knows how much wealth my business can bring. I think that is the main reason why they are inviting me. What do you all think?」

「That is plausible... No, that's the most logical explanation. Zuro Tsun is the head of the Tsun clan and also the tribal leader of Forest's Edge . His goal must be the wealth Asuta can earn.」

After Kaslan Lutim said that, Ludo Wu yelled:

「What nonsense! Never mind, that's how the Tsun clan would think. They want to spend their days swimming in copper plates.」

「Yes. I was thinking that we need to prepare countermeasures against the Tsun clan monopolizing all the wealth when everyone will be able to trade kiba for copper plates. It seems that just the profits brought in by Asuta alone are enough to entice Zuro Tsun.」

「But, what is the reason for making me tend to the hearth? Does he want to steal my kiba cooking skills?」

I had no intention of hiding my cooking methods in the first place.

Kaslan Lutim slowly shook his head.

「With how depraved the head of the Tsun clan is, he won't think about such a roundabout method. Zuro Tsun's target is you... He probably wants you to marry into the Tsun clan and become a member of the Tsun clan.」

「Marry in... as Yamiel Tsun's husband?」

Just the thought sent a chill down my spine.

Never mind, even if it wasn't that creepy woman, I didn't plan to marry into any other houses.

「But will they let a foreigner like me marry in for such a reason? That's too rash.」

「Marrying in is just an example. Zuro Tsun definitely wants you, that's the kind of man he is.」

「How boring...」

Donda Wu started mumbling this time:

「What a bore, I can't even yawn about this. How could the chief clan allow this pale foreigner to marry into their house?」

His tone was calm, but an agitated flame burned in his eyes.

When the Tsun clan was involved, Donda Wu would be more agitated than usual.

「So... Brat, what are you going to do?」

「D-Don't joke with me, I won't marry into the Tsun clan. I'm already very reluctant to tend their hearth... However, I might get chased out of the Post Station Town if Mida Tsun makes a scene in town.」

「Why? The one at fault is Mida Tsun, not you.」

「Technically you are right. But when the Semu people and Jaguar people had a commotion because I didn't have enough food to sell, I was almost chased out of the Post Station Town. The guards and Milano Mast who supervise the marketplace rental probably think I'm an eyesore.」

「... Did they make this judgment according to the law of the city?」

「No, that probably depended on the mood of the guards and Milano Mast.」

「Ho~ I didn't know the people in the city take things so lightly. Instead of the law, they prioritize their mood?」

After Ludo Wu interjected happily, Donda Wu stared at him irately.

「That's the pot calling the kettle black, Ludo. Have you ever respected the rules of Forest's Edge before?」

「I abide by the more important ones!」

Ludo Wu rebutted childishly.

Ignoring the parent-child dialogue, I continued:

「Like I already mentioned before, when Ai Fa and I had an incident with Doddo Tsun in the Post Station Town, the guards ignored us and only listened to the Tsun clan. With that in mind, even if Mida Tsun was the one who started it, I will be the one that gets punished. Yamiel Tsun probably knew that and will incite Mida Tsun to act against me.」

Actually, instead of what I really think, this was closer to what I was hoping for.

I hoped that Mida Tsun wasn't really chained up at home, and that Yamiel didn't really want her brother to be killed by guards.

The Tsun clan had already abandoned the honor of the denizens of Forest's Edge. If they were also cruel to their own family, then they would really be beyond redemption.

「Hmm... Ai Fa, you don't want Asuta to have anything to do with the Tsun clan, right?」

Kaslan Lutim asked Ai Fa for her opinion again.

There was a dangerous gleam in Ai Fa's eyes, and she remained silent. She had been sulking ever since we met Yamiel Tsun.

「I understand how you feel. During the house head conference, Ai Fa won't be able to be by Asuta's side all the time. Besides, the kins of the Tsun clan will also attend this conference. In a way, the kins are more dangerous than the Tsun clan... Asuta, do you still plan to open the stall in the Post Station Town?」

「Yes. The business is doing better than I expected, I want to keep working on it and achieve my primary goal.」

「Hmm... I guess we have to find a way to solve the problem at its roots.」

Kaslan Lutim supported his chin with his muscular hand and fell into deep thought.

Ludo Wu looked at his profile and said aggressively:

「Let's turn down the Tsun clan's proposal. If they coerce that human meatball to stir up trouble, we can just fight back. I can't use a blade in the Post Station Town so it will be a tough fight, but I can break his legs if another man works together with me.」

「In that case, we will have to wait for Mida Tsun to commit violence. If the other party doesn't attack first, the people in the city will arrest us if we attack preemptively. Even if they acted first and we were able to stop Mida Tsun, Asuta might still be expelled from the Post Station Town.」

Kaslan Lutim was deep in thought as he continued logically:

「Besides, we don't know when Mida Tsun would appear and can't send two men to protect Asuta all the time. The men wouldn't be able to perform their duties as hunters this way.」

「This is such a pain. What should we do then?」

「Well... We can accept their request for now, and let Asuta tend to the hearth for the house head conference.」

Ai Fa's eyes were filled with rage again when she heard Kaslan Lutim's words.

「It's dangerous for Asuta to go alone. We don't know what they are scheming and need a plan to protect Asuta.」

「Hmm? Since it's the house head conference, Dad, Dan Lutim, and the male followers accompanying them will be there too. But men can't enter the stove room, how will we protect Asuta?」

「We will let the woman protect Asuta then.」

Kaslan Lutim alternated his gaze between Donda Wu and Mama Mia Lei.

「We can let the women from the Wu clan and house Lutim accompany Asuta to the Tsun clan... I think this can be our condition for accepting their request. What are your opinions on this?」

「Hmm? Are you are saying that we should tend to the hearth for the house head conference together with Asuta?」 : Mama Mia Lei didn't seem surprised in her response.

Donda Wu glared at Kaslan Lutim, as if he was probing with his gaze.

「There would be 80 participants for the house head conference. Asuta's cooking is unique in style, and he can't prepare such a large quantity alone. We can argue that the women from the Wu clan and house Lutim have already mastered these techniques and can assist him... On the other hand, we will force the Tsun clan women to help, no matter if they like it or not, and make them learn Asuta's cooking.」

「I see. This way, the Tsun clan will be able to satisfy Mida Tsun even if I'm gone.」

「Correct. Not just that, we want to let them know that the Wu clan and house Lutim also learned the skills to cook kiba in a delicious way. That will divert some attention away from you, and Zuro Tsun won't just target you alone.」

I thought this was a brilliant plan.

「Kaslan Lutim, your words are hard to understand... But I will be happy to assist Asuta.」

Mama Mia Lei showed her teeth in a big smile. Her smile was just like Ludo Wu and Lala Wu.

Their appearance might be dissimilar, but they truly were parent and child. Such an untimely thought arose in my heart.

「And we can use this chance to lecture the women of the Tsun clan. It is not just the fault of the men that the Tsun clan became so depraved. It is the female duty to keep men in line, and I'm eager to teach those Tsun clan women a lesson.」

「Hey, you are supposed to lead the Wu clan's women. Are you going to ditch your work and go to the Tsun clan?」

Donda Wu complained unhappily, and Mama Mia Lei said with a smile:

「What's the problem? There won't that many people at home for that period, so Ditto Min and Rimee can handle the chores... By the way, who do you intend to bring there, clan head?」

「Hmm... I should be taking Darum with me.」

Donda Wu looked at the second son of the Wu clan.

Darum Wu had already taken off the bandage on his head, and only one piece of bandage covered the middle of his face.

「There are still eight days until the house head conference... It will depend on how fast Darum recovers from his injuries.」

「If Darum-nii can't attend, then the one going will be me, right?」

Ludo Wu cheered.

Hmm? Why was Jiza Wu left out as a potential candidate? While I was showing a baffled face, Kaslan Lutim looked my way with a face full of regrets.

「According to tradition, the heir to the house has to keep watch over his home when the head is away for the house head conference. Smaller houses that have few men are not restricted by this rule, but the Wu clan and Lutim house need to abide by this custom. The second son of the house Lutim will accompany my house head.」

「I see... by the way, there are 80 people including the house heads and followers. So there are 40 house heads. Since Forest's Edge has 500 people, isn't that number too small?」

「Only the house head from the main house can attend the house head conference. The branch houses are not included.」

Speaking of which, the second son of house Lutim was already married with kids, and was himself the head of a Lutim branch house.

However, the Fa house didn't have any branch houses, so did Ai Fa attend the conference alone last year too? So she stayed by herself in the Tsun clan she was bad terms with and didn't seek help from anyone.

My house head sure was strong.

「Darum.」

Donda Wu looked at the second son of the Wu clan with stern eyes.

「That carefree brat is not reliable. Recover from your wounds, and make sure you can move freely in 8 days.」

「I got it.」

「Whatever.」

Darum Wu nodded in acknowledgment, while Ludo Wu grumbled with puffed cheeks.

「In that case, the four staying home will be Jiza, Ludo, Jiba and Sati Lei. Ditto Min and Rimee can tend to the hearth then. I will take Vena, Leina, and Lala to help Asuta. I can get 2 or 3 more helpers from the branch houses.」

「House Lutim can lend out a few women too. We should be able to gather ten helpers. With that many women by his side, the Tsun clan won't be able to do anything devious to Asuta in the stove room. Do the two of you agree to this?」

Kaslan Lutim asked Ai Fa and me.

In the end, we should be the ones deciding.

Should I accept the dubious request from the Tsun clan? If I agree to this, the Wu clan and house Lutim would provide the aforementioned assistance.

The significance of me working in the Post Station Town was big and will affect the future of the Forest's Edge. Hence, the Wu clan already agreed to help without needing me to ask for assistance.

But Ai Fa— bit her lips with a pained expression.

「Do we... have no other choice but to accept the Tsun clan's suggestion?」

「Yes. Compared to the Post Station Town, it will be safer to protect Asuta in the stove room. Even if we fended off Mida Tsun, you will still live every day in fear if Zuro doesn't stop his obsession over Asuta.」

Kaslan Lutim stared at Ai Fa's frustrated profile.

「Since it has come to this, let's announce why the Fa house is opening a stall in the Post Station Town during the house head conference. We can also tell everyone about the importance of bloodletting and how to butcher the kiba.」

「Ehh? Are we telling them at such a time?」

After hearing my question Kaslan Lutim nodded firmly.

「We have no other choice given the circumstances. We need to let all the houses know that hindering your business in the Post Station Town means obstructing the prosperity of Forest's Edge. If we can affix a value to kiba meat, we won't even need to set up a stall, and we will be able to earn more copper plates than you. We can then divert Zuro Tsun's attention.」

Kaslan Lutim smiled.

「After we announce this at the house head conference, everyone will taste your cooking personally. This will make our words more convincing. When they understand how delicious your cooking is, they will know why the people in the city are buying kiba meat.」

Kaslan Lutim planned to turn around the crisis and gain control of the initiative in Forest's Edge in one go.

「The best defense is a good offense」 — Kaslan Lutim's decision-making capabilities were terrifying good.

「However, this is just the best resolution method I could come up with. Donda Wu agreed to this plan after thinking it through. However, you two will be the ones making the final decision.」

「Hmmp... I'm not helping because of your pretty speech. I will only lend you helpers if you pay an adequate price.」

Donda Wu said coldly.

「If you want the women of the Wu clan to help manage the house head conference, you have to pay for their work. That's the only thing I have to say.」

「Our clan head sure is stubborn.」

Mama Mia Lei retorted, and Donda Wu averted his face after saying: 「Shut up.」 .

And then— Ai Fa glanced my way.

I nodded firmly.

「I get goosebumps just thinking about tending the Tsun clan's stove. But caretaking the stove for the house head conference is a different matter. I can also correct the Tsun clan's ways together with the members of the Wu clan and Lutim house— there is a big significance in that.」

「.....」

「I can't stand the Tsun clan interfering with my business. It's fine if my business fails due to my incompetence. But I won't allow the Tsun clan to disrupt my business for their personal gains.」

I felt another strong surge of emotion squirm in my abdomen.

I tried my best to suppress it and looked at Ai Fa.

「... I see.」

Ai Fa closed her eyelids.

「... The Fa house is neither the kin of the Wu clan nor house Lutim, so I feel bad that you are doing so much for us...」

「You are too reserved! You saved Jiba's soul and taught us how to make delicious food. You even prepared the house Lutim wedding banquet so splendidly! Ai Fa, Asuta, you are our important friends.」

Mama Mia Lei said loudly with a smile.

「Besides, if we leave the Tsun clan be, Asuta won't be able to do his business. Consequently, Vena and Lala will lose their jobs. The Wu clan helping you is protection of our own wealth too. Don't be so reserved, just keep that in mind and choose the right path.」

「Then... Can I borrow your strength?」

Ai Fa clenched her right hand into a fist, pushed it onto the floor, and stared at Mama Mia Lei.

「I can't go near the stove room during the house head conference... Can you protect my family member on my behalf?」

「We will definitely protect him, and not let the Tsun clan lay a finger on him.」

Vena Wu sat beside Mama Mia Lei and nodded seriously.

Ai Fa was quiet for a moment. She then lowered her head quickly.

「Alright then... I ... accept Kaslan Lutim's proposal.」

A pained expression appeared on Ai Fa's face. She must be unwilling to let someone else hold our fates in their hands.

But we could no longer open the stall in the Post Station Town by ourselves. If we were adamant about not receiving anyone's help, Ai Fa and I had just to stay in the Fa house and live a plain and simple life.

We only opened a stall in the Post Station Town to bring a better future to Forest's Edge. If we didn't want to slowly slide back to our original route, we had to work together with the Wu clan and house Lutim.

I wanted to convince Ai Fa with these reasons, but she arrived at the same conclusion after thinking about it for a long time.

I enjoyed this joyous feeling secretly in my heart.

「It's decided then... We will discuss the details in the morning. I'm turning in.」

Donda Wu's deep voice ended the secret meeting between the three houses.

After the Wu clan members returned to their rooms, the three guests headed to the entrance. Like what he did during the pre-wedding celebration, Kaslan Lutim headed to a Wu clan branch house, while Ai Fa and I stayed in an empty house.

When Kaslan Lutim left, I waited for Ai Fa to tie her shoes with one hand. At this moment, Mama Mia Lei came to us.

「Ai Fa, I just remembered something. Would you like to stay in the Wu clan village temporarily before the house head conference?」

「... But why?」

「Isn't it obvious? We still need to discuss the details over a few meetings. Besides, the women of the Wu clan can learn to make the food for the house head conference too. In that case, won't it be more convenient to stay in this village for now?」

「But...」

「You just need to bring over all the meat and vegetables from the Fa house. You won't need to keep running home then... Don't worry about how Darum or Leina feels. Even if you are not here, their pain won't be reduced.」

「M-Mia Lei Wu, what are you...」

I butted in frantically, and Mama Mia Lei smiled smugly.

Kamyua Yost often smiled like this too, but the warmth of her smile was very much different.

「I can tell what my children are thinking with one glance. They are just like me and Donda when we were young. I don't understand Jiza and Vena sometimes though... Anyway, the Tsun clan is a troublesome opponent, so we have to be prepared. Can we count on you for this?」

Mama Mia Lei then returned to her chambers without waiting for our reply.

Ai Fa and I looked at each other with complicated feelings.

「... Today, I learned how magnanimous Mia Lei Wu actually is.」

Ai Fa sighed softly and tied her shoes.

We went out of the door and found Kaslan Lutim who was waiting outside.

「Ai Fa, Asuta, thank you for your hard work. You still have to do your business tomorrow, so let's end our discussion for today.」

「It's fine, we will be sleeping very soon.」

I had already prepared the ingredients for tomorrow inside the Wu clan's stove room. With the Wu clan women helping with dinner, my food preparation work was smoother than usual. Staying in the Wu clan wouldn't affect my business at all.

「I never imagined that Zuro Tsun will become aware of your existence so soon... or that you will earn so much money in such a short time.」

As we walked towards our rooms under the clear moonlight, Kaslan Lutim smiled calmly at us.

「Asuta, I thought I knew how capable you are, but I underestimated you. I'm ashamed of my foolishness.」

「The business wasn't successful because of my capability, but because of the kiba. When I started this business, I also undervalued the power of the kiba.」

「... When your prowess combines with the kiba's strength, it will definitely guide the denizens of Forest's Edge to prosperity. For the future of Forest's Edge we have to stop the Tsun clan's tyranny.」

Kaslan Lutim looked at me and Ai Fa with his sturdy and strong gaze.

「I still need to discuss something amidst my father and Donda Wu. I want to tell the Min, Lei, Mamu and the other kin houses about selling kiba meat and ask them to cooperate with us. Ai Fa, Asuta, let us overcome this obstacle together.」

「Alright. I will be in your care then.」

The Tsun clan was a threat, but as long as the Wu clan, Lutim house and Ai Fa stayed in Forest's Edge, we wouldn't need to submit to the Tsun clan.

My prowess might be trivial, but there wouldn't be a problem as long as allies were with me.

I, too, had to do what I could and not allow anyone to destroy my stall through unethical means.

I swore again in my heart with determination. I looked up at the star-filled skies, which painted a scene that was different from my original world.

Part 4

「Well, it's decided then...」

The next day, which was the third day of the blue month, we opened our stall for the seventh time.

Yamiel Tsun came as she promised, and left with a satisfied smile on her face.

「Mida can be saved now. I will warn my brother not to do anything retarded, so please don't worry... I'm looking forward to the house head conference.」

She agreed to all the terms I raised.

Be it the Wu clan women accompanying me and assisting me with the hearth, or the demand for the Tsun clan women to participate too, Yamiel Tsun agreed to all that.

The entire thing was going too smoothly, which felt a bit chilling instead. However, we could now rest easy for the time being.

「Alright, I need to change my mood and focus on business... Since the troublesome person is gone, I can start peddling my secret merchandise.」

Ai Fa retreated to the woods behind us, and I smiled at Vena Wu. It was her turn to tend to the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall today.

The secret merchandise was kiba jerky, a staple food of the denizens of Forest's Edge.

The important thing about jerky was how long it could be preserved and not its taste. Unless it was absolutely necessary, people wouldn't buy jerky. To be honest, the taste of salt and pico leaves were really strong for the jerky, and it was extraordinary tough too. I had to hold it in my mouth and wait for it to soften before I could bite it into pieces.

However, there were many travelers in the Post Station Town, and many of the stalls sold jerky. Such jerky only focused on being practical instead of the taste. Kimyusu jerky was soft, but only had the taste of the spices. Karon tasted like high-class beef jerky, but it was tougher than kiba jerky.

Just selling light meals isn't enough for you, and now you want to earn money by selling jerky huh — others might feel unhappy about me venturing into this business. I also had to be ready to compete directly with others. In order to make the people in the Post Station Town recognize the value of kiba meat, I did everything that I could.

By the way, karon jerky was more expensive than kimyusu jerky, so I used the price of the karon jerky as the standard. Two hundred gram cost 3 red copper plates. In the Post Station Town, they were sold in chunks between 400 to 600 g.

According to my calculations, the meat and vegetables in Post Station Town are rather cheap. Assuming one red copper plate is 100 yen, then aria which is like onion cost 20 yen. The cabbage-like tino is 50 yen, karon jerky is priced at 150 yen per 100 g. In comparison, one kitchen knife cost 4,500 yen, and a pot is 24,000 yen.

Food wasn't ridiculously cheap, but it was much less expensive when compared to cloth or leather products.

Besides, jerky had to be specially processed, so it had a higher price point while the fresh meat was cheaper. Based on what I heard from Uncle Dora, he paid less than one copper plate for 100 g of meat when he bought them for his own consumption. Kamyua Yost did mention that 「meat is more expensive than vegetables」, but compared to my old world, the meat here wasn't so expensive that it was impossible to buy.

That's why no one even thought about eating kiba. I hope that in the future, kiba meat can be sold for about the same price as karon meat.

I sliced out some jerky for sampling use while I thought about this. Then, a Semu man in a hooded cloak came over right then, his long silver hair visible inside his hood.

「Hmm? What's the matter, Shumimaru?」

He was already here to buy 『Kiba burger』 early in the morning.

Shumimaru stared at the thing in my hand with his dark eyes.

「... Jerky, kiba?」

「Yes. I will be selling this starting from today. Please feel free to try a sample.」

I offered him the plate with the jerky, and Shumimaru took a bite after nodding.

「... Copper plates, how many?」

「I'm planning to set the price to be similar to karon jerky. This size is about 6 copper plates.」

「... Now, you have, how many?」

「Ehh? Well, I prepared ten chunks of jerky today.」

I had prepared ten chunks of jerky about 400 g in weight, so 4 kg in total.

Jerky was dried food that was easy to carry, and only travelers would buy them. I had no expectations of it selling well.

I will try making kiba bacon that has a shorter shelf life but tastes better.

As I fell into deep thought, Shumimaru asked expressionlessly:

「Jerky, last, how long?」

「If you store it properly, it can last for half a year.」

「I see.」

Shumimaru reached for the insides of his cloak.

「Please, all, give me.」

「Ehh?」

「Total is, 6 white copper plates?」

「P-Please wait! 《Silver Vase》 will stay in the Post Station Town until the end of the month, right? Why are you buying such a large quantity of jerky?」

「I want, other cities, sell it in.」

Shumimaru tilted his head and asked confusedly, not understanding why I looked so flustered.

「Genos, food, cheap. Food, we buy, in other cities, sell .」

So he was planning to resell it.

I understood. They not only sold merchandise from their home country, they also toured the other cities and reselled their specialties to other places. This had to be the way they conducted business all this while.

「Kiba meat, rare. Other cities, definitely sell. I, more jerky, want.」

「I see... How much do you want exactly?」

Shumimaru lowered his eyelids in deep thought.

「... If can, I want buy, 60 white copper plates.」

60 white copper plates— that's about 40 kg.

The Wu clan and house Lutim still had plenty of leftover kib, so this amount wasn't a problem.

「Alright then, why don't I hand the goods over to you on the day before the 《Silver Vase》 leaves Genos then? I will make it right before the deadline, so the merchandise can be preserved for six months from that time.」

Shumimaru squinted his eyes happily.

「Your way, big help. Thank you.」

「Not at all, I should be thanking you! Thank you for visiting every day and making such a great request.」

「《Silver Vase》, Asuta, good terms. Thank the Eastern God Semu.」

Shumimaru suddenly looked beside me.

Vena Wu was staring at the streets mindlessly.

「...Asuta, you, Vena Wu, calls. Your name, Vena Wu, is?」

「... So what if it is...?」

Vena Wu glanced at him impatiently.

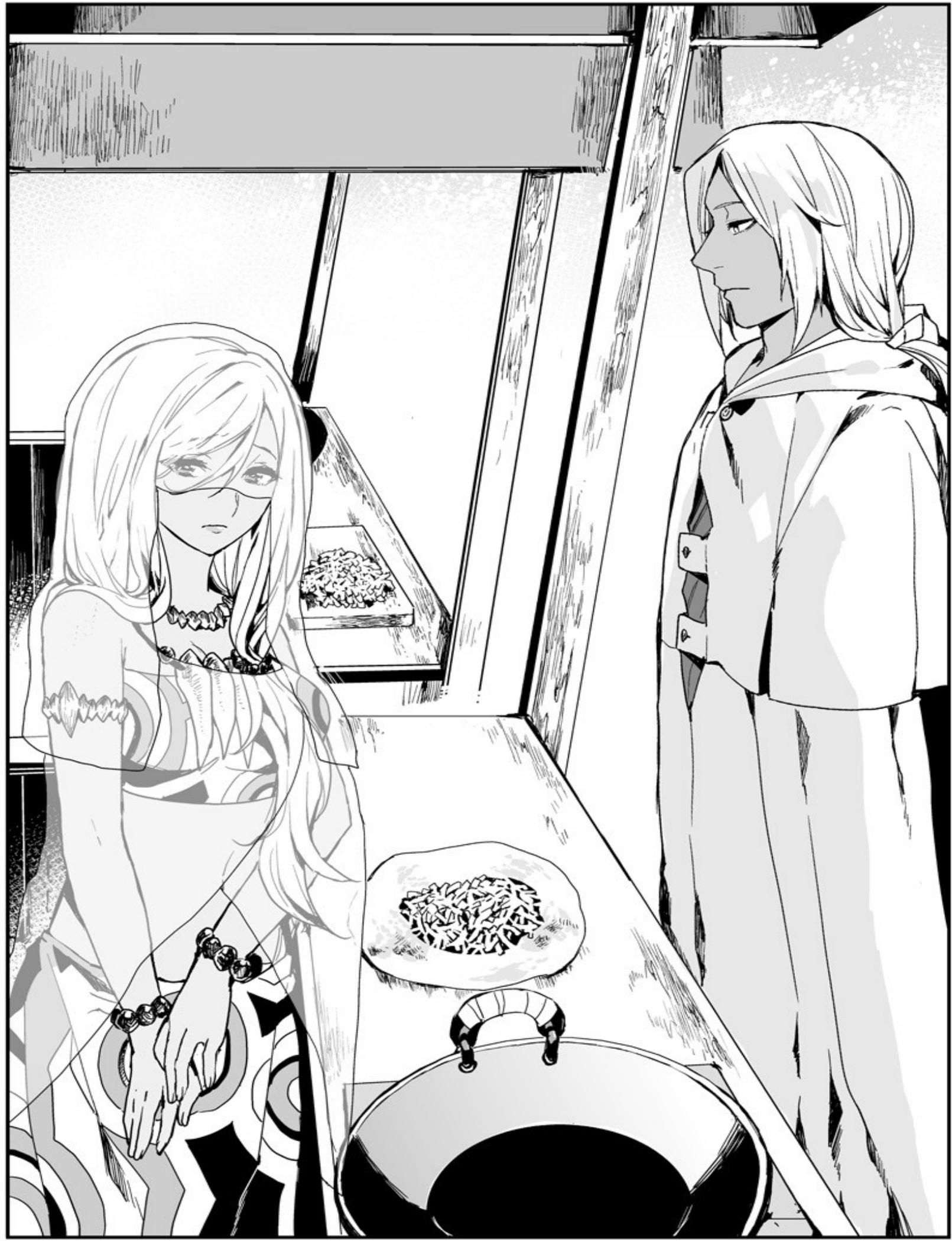
Shumimaru shook his head with a blank face.

「No, beautiful name, I just think... Well then, my leave, I take.」

Shumimaru put on his hood, turned, and left.

Vena Wu crossed her arms haughtily, and I sighed.

「Hmm~ I feel so crestfallen... Shumimaru is becoming more and more important to me.」



「That's what you think Asuta, but not me... I said this before right, I don't like elusive people...」

「Is that so? You are actually comparing Shumimaru with a dubious character like Kamyua, that's being mean to the former.」

「He's completely different from that man, but anyone who shows his emotions so directly is more charming...」

When Vena Wu said that, she peeked behind her worriedly.

Ai Fa was still resting under the tree shade 5 meters behind us.

She looked a little more listless today.

「...Ai Fa always hides her true feelings, and I'm not good with her type too...」

「Hmm, but don't you feel really happy when they occasionally open their heart to you?」

「...Asuta, since you said that, do you think a woman like Ai Fa is full of charm...?」

「I-I don't mean that.」

As we were chatting, the streets gradually turned crowded.

It was almost time for the second half. When I was thinking that, two familiar figures approached at the same time.

「Asuta onii-chan, I want two!」

「Asuta, I want two, alright?」

They even placed their orders simultaneously.

Tara and Yumi appeared before me at the same time.

The child with yellowish brown skin and the ivory skinned young girl who was two heads taller looked at each other in surprise.

「Ah! You are the kid who was here last time!」

Yumi yelled, and Tara looked confused.

「When was the last time?」

「You don't remember, huh... Never mind. So you know Asuta very well.」

「Yes! Asuta onii-chan is my savior!」

She was exaggerating. In retrospect, Doddo Tsun appeared before me when I met Tara. Mida Tsun came when I met Yumi. I sighed at the strange workings of fate and started frying the aria after putting pot on the brazier.

「Hmmp~ so even a child born in Genos patronizes your stall. You really are something special. That girl over there even sold 『Kiba burgers』 to some drunkards, right?」

She was referring to Vena Wu of course.

Vena Wu shrugged gracefully.

「You are really incredible. This stall is at the edge of town, but it earns more than the other food stalls. Many westerners visit your stall too, right?」

「Yes, it's all thanks to you. Two of your friends visited earlier too.」

「Fufu~n, I helped you advertise a lot. Many of the young people came here after hearing my recommendation.」

Yumi said arrogantly. When she heard that, Tara also said loudly:

「Tara also told many of her friends!」

But she looked dejected after saying that.

「... But everyone says that the kiba is scary, and don't want to eat kiba. They are afraid of their parents scolding them too...」

「It can't be helped. The longer they stayed in Genos, the more adamant they are against eating kiba. We can only wait for time to dilute this prejudice.」

I consoled Tara while I grilled the kiba.

The next instant, Yumi leaned forward.

「Hold it right there! This kid is also your customer, right? Why are you so formal only to me, that's not fair.」

「Eh? There is a big difference in age between you two... Oh right, I already knew Tara before opening the stall. Isn't that right?」

「Yes!」

A smile returned to Tara's face, and she nodded firmly.

「Uwah~ I can't accept this!」

Yumi grumbled unhappily.

「... Oh right, Asuta, for how long your stall was operating?」

「Ehh? The stall beside us has been opened for seven days, and three days for this stall.」

「I see. What about the future? You won't close shop after just ten days, right?」

This girl was familiar with the information about the marketplace. I nodded and said:

「Yes, if possible, I want to keep the business going.」

「Then, would you like to sign a contract with us?」

「What?」

「My family operates the 《West Wind Inn》 and also manages part of the marketplace. My father is stubborn, but my mom knows how delicious kiba is, so we will treat you just like a normal vendor.」

Her proposal was unexpected.

「The uncle running the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 bears a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge, so his attitude is terrible, right? Don't you want to run your business happily?」

「W-Wait, Milano Mast who operates the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 bears a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge?」

「Yes. But I don't know the details. I heard that a denizen of Forest's Edge killed relative or friend. In the end, the case made no headway because of the lack of evidence.」

There was a competitive gleam in Yumi's eyes.

「The denizens of Forest's Edge would stir up trouble from time to time, so not everyone can trust them. If I didn't see you talk to that monster, I wouldn't want to befriend you too... You are right, only time can heal all wounds.」

「... Yes, I think that too.」

I swallowed the sigh that almost escaped my mouth and started making four portions of 『Myam-roasted meat』 .

「As for the contract, I will discuss it with Milano Mast. But I don't intend to go out of my way and keep my distance from him. I will choose to respect his feelings, is that alright?」

「Of course, it's fine, just do what you think is right. If I can eat your delicious cooking, I won't have any complaints.」

Yumi showed an innocent smile again and received the 『Myam-roasted meat』 . Tara cheered too.

When she saw Tara running to the stall selling 『Kiba burger』 , Yumi opened her eyes wide.

「Ehh? You're still buying?」

「Yes! The 『Myam-roasted meat』 is for the cloth stall owner and pot dealer! Papa and I will have 『Kiba burger』 !」

「Hmm~ you are capable despite your young age.」

After Yumi said that, she accompanied Tara to buy the 『Kiba burger』, and the two of them went off together.

Their skin color differed, but they were like sisters with a big age gap. I watched them go and remembered that it would be the tenth day of opening in another three days.

Just selling 20 to 30 portions will be good enough. That was my thinking in the past. I never imagined that I could expand my stalls and that sales would reach almost 150 portions a day.

I got a temporary respite from the threat of the Tsun clan and could focus on running the stall for now.

There were still seven days before the house head conference. I had to get even better results before that day came, so that the denizens of Forest's Edge would know that a better future was possible for them.

I won't let the Tsun clan do whatever they wish!

With that thought in mind, I picked up the leather pouch filled with kiba meat.

Part 5

After selling 145 portions, the seventh day of operation ended.

We could definitely sell the remaining 5 meals if we waited ten or so minutes, but I had to honor the contract I made with the Wu clan. When the sun reached the middle between the peak and the horizon, we started packing up quickly.

By the way, we also sold 800 g of jerky which yielded 12 red copper plates. But making jerky only required rock salt, so the ingredient cost was cheap. With how low the cost was, even without the special case of the 《Silver Vase》, the jerky would be a strong addition to our menu.

And so, work for today ended smoothly too. I wanted to discuss the next contract with Milano Mast, but he stayed in the kitchen the entire time, and only his daughter who was afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge tended to the counter alone. The talk with him had to wait for the next time.

Kamyua Yost wasn't in the inn too, and Leito had been running errands for him for the past two days. Our problem with the Tsun clan had worsened, while Kamyua Yost grew more distant from us.

Was he taking Donda Wu's words to heart and intentionally avoiding us? Or did he have other motives? Or was this all just a coincidence? Only heaven knew.

Never mind, this is better than him interfering mindlessly.

After convincing myself, Ai Fa, Vena Wu, and I went home.

We had to take the necessities from the Fa house. Specifically speaking, they were the ingredients from the food store, a change of clothes, whetstone, ropes, all the copper plates, and other daily necessities.

We now owned more than 60 white copper plates. After reaching 100 white copper plates, we will be able to finally change it to a 「silver plate」. Before that happened, we had to keep the heavy plates at home or on us

「... We will have to leave the house for seven days.」

Ai Fa looked at the barren food store and muttered emotionlessly.

This was the second time I would be staying outside for a long stint, but it was the first for Ai Fa.

I packed as many things as I could into the pot, and the balance was put on a tow board for Ai Fa to pull. We started heading towards the Wu clan village, and it felt a bit like us shifting house.

「Ah, welcome back!」

When we headed to the stove room after depositing our blades with the Wu clan, Rimee Wu and Leina Wu were preparing dinner inside.

「Heehee, are you really moving into the Wu clan village?」

Rimee Wu said to Ai Fa and me with a smile. We didn't have a chance to speak with her yesterday.

「Yes, I will be in your care until the house head conference seven days later... Are you having hamburg steak for dinner?」

「Yes! Leina-nee and Rimee are already good at making hamburg steak! It's yummy, so look forward to dinner tonight!」

Rimee Wu's smiling face made me want to smile at her too.

Leina Wu stood beside Rimee Wu and was chopping the aria. She smiled at me graciously.

「Welcome to the Wu clan. Asuta, are you going to work here too?」

「Yes, I will do my work in the corner.」

After answering, I placed a large number of meat, vegetables, and fruit wine onto the work platform.

I was planning to buy kiba meat from the Wu clan from today onwards, but since we will be moving into the Wu clan temporarily, I decided to use up all the meat from the Fa house.

I used about 27 kg of meat in a day, and the Fa house's meat would be spent in another two days. I had to buy meat from the Wu clan to tide over this period until Ai Fa recovered.

「Let's get to work.」

When I picked up the Santoku knife, Ai Fa called out to me.

「Asuta, I'm a little tired. I will chat with Grandma Jiba, then rest in the empty room before dinner.」

「I understand. Are you alright? Do you have any fever?」

「I'm fine.」

Vena Wu went back to her house, so only Rimee Wu, Leina Wu, and I were left in the stove room. Grandma Ditto Min was scheduled to tend to the hearth, and she was using the outdoor stove to grill poitan.

There was still an hour and a half before sunset. Last night, the Wu clan women had to prepare dinner in a hurry because of the sudden decision to have a meeting in the Wu clan, and I used the chance to finish my preparations work too. Normally, I wouldn't be able to finish everything before dinner if I only started at this time. I will probably need to stay in the stove room after dinner.

In order to finish up the most tedious meat patty first, I started dicing aria.

「Ai Fa looks listless. Does her arm still hurt?」

When I used the pot to fry the diced aria, Rimee Wu asked worriedly.

「I don't know. It has been three days since her injury, it shouldn't hurt too much now. But I have never dislocated my bones before, so I can't really tell.」

「... You are still having a meeting after dinner, right?」

「No, we don't have anything specific we need to discuss. Have you informed house Lutim about the results of our negotiation with Yamiel Tsun?」

「Yes. When Lala and Shela came back, Ema Min Lutim just happened to be in the stove room. I have already informed her.」

「Oh? Ema Min Lutim is still learning to cook here?」

When I turned to face Leina Wu, I found her smiling brilliantly, which surprised me.

「W-What happened? Is Ema Min Lutim fine?」

「Ehh? What do you mean?」

Leina tilted her head quizzingly, with a blissful smile still on her face.

「Leina-nee, why are you smiling so happily?」

When Rimee Wu pointed that out, Leina Wu stopped smiling and blushed.

「W-Was I smiling? Excuse me, it's nothing.... I just didn't have a talk with Asuta for a long time, and felt really happy...」

It had been just three days since we last spoke.

Three days ago, when I met Leina Wu, she only showed her innocent smile when she bided goodbye. And her smile right now seemed to be from the pure bliss she was feeling.

「I heard about the house head conference from Mama Mia Lei. I will be happy to assist.」

「That's great! Why can't Rimee go and help!? I want to go to the Tsun clan with everyone too.」

「No way. There are many brusque men in the Tsun clan, and Papa Donda will never agree to that.」

Leina Wu suddenly looked at me seriously:

「Asuta, we will definitely protect you. No matter what schemes the Tsun clan might have, we won't let them lay a finger on you.」

「T-Thank you.」

I kept chopping the aria.

At this moment, Leina Wu's expression changed again, and she looked gloomy.

「Oh right... What kind of person is Yamiel Tsun? Vena Wu said she is a suspicious woman with outstanding looks...」

「Yamiel Tsun? In a word, she's a woman who sent chills down my spine. I think she is even creepier than the youngest brother of the Tsun clan.」

「I see.」

Leina Wu started smiling again.

Was it my imagination? Leina Wu's mood seemed to be swinging wildly. This was more prominent after Ai Fa left.

I feel bad whenever I think about the feelings she is hiding in her heart... But she really is a girl with extreme emotions.

Never mind, Leina Wu and I could only normalize our relationship slowly.

After that, Rimee Wu chatted idly with us. When I finished half of the meat, it was time for dinner.

I went into the hall where the Wu clan members were gathered and sat in the bottom seat like the night before. Dinner was hamburg steak, grilled poitan and kiba meat soup with aria and chachi. Aside from that, I gifted them about 1 kg of 『Myam-roasted meat』 and the leftover tarapa sauce.

The hamburg steak and meat soup tasted flawless. The culinary skills of the Wu clan women were improving every day.

「That's all? Asuta, there's only a little left today?」

Ludo Wu grumbled with dissatisfaction. He inspected the meat covered with tarapa sauce on a plate carefully.

「Yes, about half of yesterday's. Sorry that the portion isn't enough.」

「This isn't enough for everyone, what should we do!?!」

「You are such a noisy child. Eat more if you like it. There are so many of us here, and you are the only one complaining.」

Grandma Ditto Min cautioned Ludo Wu with a cheerful smile.

The atmosphere was tense during last night's dinner. But since Yamiel Tsun accepted our terms without any objections, the mood had softened.

Aside from Ludo Wu, the other Wu clan men were always showing a serious face, and now wasn't an exception. Jiza Wu was especially quiet recently, and that makes me worried.

「However, when we pour the tarapa sauce over the meat slices Asuta gave to us, it does taste better than putting on normal meat. It will be great if the taste can be less strong.」

Jiza Wu's spouse— Sati Lei Min chipped in quietly.

「I marinated the meat with fruit wine, aria, and myam. I already told Shela Wu how to make them—」

At this moment, I remembered that I had forgotten to tell the Wu clan about an important matter, and turned to Mama Mia Lei.

「Mia Lei Wu, sorry to bother your meal. I still need to take care of some work later, so I can only discuss this with you now.」

「Hmm? What is it?」

「My stall is going to reach its tenth day soon, and I'm planning to close for a day to hold a cooking seminar for the house head conference. Is that okay?」

「Hmm? So you are saying that you will be teaching us to cook for that entire day?」

「Yes. Mida Tsun tried a dish named 『Myam-roasted meat』 at my stall, and I hope everyone can learn to make that... This dish isn't hard to prepare, but I'm busy with the stall and can't make much time. Hence, I plan to teach everyone on that day.」

「That's fine. So all the women going to the house head conference have to make time for you too?」

「I will be free the entire day, so everyone can take turns to come over and learn. I will ask the women from house Lutim to attend on that day too.」

I turned to Donda Wu who was eating the hamburg steak soaked in the soup.

「Considering the effort the women of the Wu clan will have to make, I think the remuneration paid by the Tsun clan should be evenly distributed to everyone who will tend to the hearth on that day. Is that fine?」

「... What did you say?」

Donda Wu stared at me with an impatient face.

「You are the one who decided to take up Tsun clan's retarded request, right?」

「That's correct. But the work this time can't be compared to the house Lutim banquet. Besides, the women from the Wu clan and Lutim house have to protect me while they help me with the hearth. With this in mind, it's more appropriate to divide the remuneration evenly.」

「.....」

「Furthermore, other than doing the tedious work of tending to the hearth, they also have to instruct the Tsun clan women who know nothing about my cooking. So Mia Lei Wu and the others will be working as hard as me. I think we should split the money equally.」

Donda Wu grunted: 「Whatever」, and Mama Mia Lei said with an awkward smile:

「You are so reserved. Is being reserved the way the Fa house does things? Asuta, like I said yesterday, you two are important friends to the Wu clan and house Lutim.」

「I'm happy to hear that, and I am also cherishing everyone in the Wu clan and Lutim house.」

I felt embarrassed, but I said my honest feelings:

「That's why I don't want to owe a debt to the people I cherish. I hope everyone will help to resist the Tsun clan as equals. It might be shameless of me to say this, but I'm the same as everyone else, just a denizen who is concerned about the future of Forest's Edge.」

「You are not being shameless.」

Grandma Ditto Min who was seated beside Mama Mia Lei told me:

「You might be from a foreign land, but compared to the Tsun clan, you are the real denizen of the Forest's Edge... I'm sure of it after seeing all that has happened.」

「... Ditto Min Wu, thank you.」

「Ahh!」

As I was answering, Rimee Wu yelled out loud.

The bowl of soup slipped from Ai Fa's hand, and the food inside spilled onto the floor.

Ai Fa's body swayed, and I held her shoulders quickly.

「Sorry... for wasting the precious food...」

「Ai Fa! You have a fever again!」

I noticed that she was burning up just by touching her bare shoulders.

Ai Fa supported herself by placing her right hand on the floor and scowled her brows painfully.

「... I will lay out the bedding in Jiba's room.」

Mama Mia Lei stood up.

「... It's fine.」

Ai Fa squeezed out that line.

「I have Lome leaves on me, if I rest after drinking one... I will recover.」

As I supported Ai Fa's body, I turned towards Mama Mia Lei.

「Sorry, it's still in the middle of a meal, but allow us to retire first... Rimee Wu, there're Lome leaves inside Ai Fa's hunter's cape, can you bring one over?」

「Yes!」

「Ai Fa, can you walk?」

「... Yes.」

I put Ai Fa's right arm around my neck.

I grabbed her wrist with one hand and supported her waist with the other, then got up as slowly as I could.

Leina Wu was feeding Grandma Jiba, and she looked at us with a complicated expression. But it was an emergency, so I couldn't be considerate of her feelings.

「Excuse me, I'm taking Ai Fa back to rest.」

「That will be better. Rimee, go mash up the Lome leaf, then bring it to them later... Ah, Asuta, you haven't finished your food. We will send two portions to you later, so go already.」

「Alright, thank you.」

We walked to the entrance with me supporting Ai Fa's shoulders.

Ai Fa couldn't wear her shoes, so I slipped my shoes on and stepped outside.

I let Ai Fa sit down for a moment.

Ai Fa didn't have the strength to walk by herself.

「Are you alright? It wasn't so serious before dinner, right?」

I had an idea why Ai Fa was feverish.

It was probably triggered by her overexerting her brain.

Ai Fa looked troubled since last night, so my deduction should be right.

Aside from that, I wanted to hurry and take Ai Fa away from the crowd. Ai Fa wouldn't want others to see her frail side.

「... I'm so useless.」

Ai Fa muttered weakly.

「That's not true.」

I wiped away the sweat from her forehead.

「You are unwell, but you still had to worry about so many things, that's why you turned feverish again. You are really bad at using your head.」

Ai Fa leaned on my chest and pouted unhappily.

「Stop talking and let's hurry back to the empty room... I don't want Rimee Wu to see me like this...」

「I see. Then please bear with this for now.」

With my left arm holding Ai Fa's back, I reached for the underside of her knees with my right arm.

I then counted 「one, two, three」 in my heart, then stood up slowly.

「Yes, this is as tough as I expected.」

I was about the same height as Ai Fa, and considering the muscle and bone density, we should be about the same weight. My arms and legs were shaking just from lifting her up.

「... What are you doing?」

After lifting her in a princess carry, Ai Fa rested her head weakly against my shoulders and looked up at me in a daze.

「Why do you need to ask, we need to hurry back to the empty room, right? Then this is the only way.」

If her left arm wasn't injured, I could carry her on my back and spend a bit less effort. But it was just several tens of meters from the Wu main house to the empty house, so I could manage.

In order to not drop Ai Fa, I took careful steps forward.

「... Wouldn't I be even more humiliated if you do this...?」

「Not at all. We are family, and have to help each other during times of need... And I wouldn't want some other guy to carry you back.」

I kept advancing under the bask of the moonlight and broke out a sweat in no time.

Fortunately, I had been carrying heavy loads to the Post Station Town every day, or I would have needed to rest midway.

「Ai Fa, you need to rest well and get better. I really need you... I only have the drive to work hard because you are with me.」

「... Is that true...? I think you can already live proudly as a denizen of the Forest's Edge...」

「Definitely not.」

As expected, she was troubled about this.

I felt it since last night.

「Denizen of Forest's Edge or not, you are just not used to relying on others. That's why you can live by yourself for two years, and achieve impressive results. You don't need to feel ashamed at all.」

「.....」

「I'm not as strong as you. I have to work with the people around me everyday... It happened quite a long time again, but I did mention that I wasn't good at relying on my family.」

I didn't think there was any contradiction in my words. Because I wasn't used to relying on others, so I couldn't differentiate between 「reliance」 and 「dependence」.

The reason why Ai Fa wasn't good at relying on others was completely different from me— she was too strong.

Even though the reasons were complete opposites of each other, Ai Fa and I had some similarities.

「I can't live like you did. On the flip side, you can't live like me either.」

I was getting out of breath, but I still smiled at Ai Fa.

「In that case, we just need to make up for each other's shortcomings, right? It will be great if we can do that.」

「... Don't say such difficult things when I'm feverish...」

Ai Fa bumped her head against my cheek.

She then rubbed her hot forehead against me.

「That hurts... Anyway, I'm glad to have been of help. After all, you usually don't require my assistance.」

「... You are so retarded...」

Ai Fa muttered, her conscious was fading away.

「... I'm the one who needs you.... So, forever...」

I didn't catch what she said at the very end.

So I quietly told her how I feel:

「Ai Fa, let's stay together forever.」

Chapter 4 - Tenth Day - Renewed Determination

Part 1

This day has finally come.

The 6th day of the Blue Month was the tenth day we were working in the Post Station Town.

On the eighth day of opening we sold 138 portions.

On the ninth day, 142 meals were sold.

The cumulative sales until yesterday were 1652 red copper plates.

The profit was 1011 red copper plates.

Calculating the copper plates in terms of tusks and horns, that would be about 84 kiba. If the Tsun clan wanted to drown in copper plates, this number would definitely make them dizzy.

The four of us earned this massive amount of money. In just ten days, we made the equivalent of 84 kiba. Even if we included the price of the hide, that would still be 42 kiba.

But we couldn't start our business if the hunters didn't hunt the kiba, so we had to account for the hunter's effort too. Even so, the amount was still staggering. On the other hand, despite the immense value the kiba meat was worth, there were many denizens who ditched them into the forest.

From this perspective, I had not done enough.

Kiba meat was valuable.

It wasn't limited to dishes from kiba. If kiba meat itself could be traded for money, the denizens would be lifted out of poverty.

We were working so hard in the Post Station Town because of this goal.

「Morning, Milano Mast.」

Along with Vena Wu, Lala Wu, Shela Wu, and Ai Fa who will recover in two days, we headed for the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》. Milano Mast was already waiting behind the building.

Milano Mast was a yellowish brown skinned man born and bred in Genos. He was tall, but his body looked as stout as a bull. His face always looked sour, and he received us unhappily today too.

「You are finally here... The guards came just now.」

「Eh?」

「I heard that a large number of Jaguar and Semu people had gathered. Isn't it a mistake to put up that notice?」

「That notice」 referred to the small board beneath my signboard. I couldn't read it, but it said 「Blue month, 7th, 10th, and 11th, closed」.

According to my schedule, tomorrow I had to conduct a cooking seminar to prepare for the house head conference. The 10th was the house head conference, and I couldn't prepare the food for the next day either, so on the 11th the stall would be closed too.

「If we don't inform them early about the closure, I'm afraid that there might be backlash... Are there really that many people?」

「Who knows? I told the guards not to interfere.」

Milano Mast's thick fingers stuck into the pocket of his dark apron, and he took out eight red copper plates.

When I told him about the planned closure, he said that he will refund the venue and cart rental for the 『Myam-roasted meat』 back to me. Since I will be renting both stalls at the same time, it would more convenient for their contract date to be the same. And so, our contract at the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 came to an end.

The problem would be the stall rental two days later. There wasn't much time left, but Milano Mast still didn't give me any response with regards to the contract.

「I will decide after business ends for today. It won't inconvenience you, right?」

「It's fine, we don't mind.」

I couldn't see through Milano Mast's mind, and that made me feel uneasy.

Milano Mast snorted, then glared at everyone.

「Get lost. If another commotion happens today, we won't need to talk about the contract, your kiba stall will end for good today.」

He was cold and distant as usual.

With no other choice, we could only head to the marketplace docilely.

「That man's attitude is as bad as ever. If he hates the denizens of Forest's Edge so much, he can just break off ties with us right now.」

Lala Wu whispered to me as we pushed the cart.

「Hmm... Milano Mast might have his own circumstances too. I hope he can think it over and reach a conclusion that is acceptable to him.」

Yumi once told me that a relative or friend of Milano Mast was killed by a denizen of Forest's Edge. If what she said was true, then what kind of emotions did Milano Mast have when he interacted with us?

If he was willing to let go of his grudge and treat the denizens of Forest's Edge like normal customers, I wished to continue my contract with the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》.

Anyway, for now, we need to tide over today.

No matter how the situation changed, our responsibility remained the same. The tenth day of opening was a milestone, but we still had to work hard in selling the kiba food as usual.

The only thing different from usual was the 80 portions of 『Kiba burger』 I prepared.

As we have shifted our base from the Fa house to the Wu clan, Vena Wu had two more hours of free time. She used this time to help me prepare the ingredients and made twenty more portions.

Ever since the notice for the closure was put out, I would hear the customers expressing their regrets about this. Therefore, I assumed there would be a huge increase in sales the day before and after the rest day. But only god knew what would actually happen.

「Uwah!」

Lala Wu suddenly yelped when we were walking along the street.

I raised my head and found the reason for it. This was the first time such a massive crowd appeared around the slot that we had rented.

People from Semu and Jaguar, and westerners that were either customers or gawkers almost blocked the entire street. No wonder the guards took action.

「Hi, there are more people than usual today.」

I turned and saw Uncle Dora at his stall, talking to me with a smile.

Tara also looked at us with a smile.

「Even if there are loads of people, you won't be sold out in the morning, right? We will buy some later.」

「Alright, thank you... can you give me 4 tarapa and 30 aria?」

「Okay, that will be 12 red copper plates.」

I placed the vegetables into the sack and quickly got on my way.

「Work hard, Asuta onii-chan!」

With Tara cheering me, we walked to the customers.

「Excuse me, sorry for the wait!」

When they heard my voice, the Jaguar people cheered, then quieted down right away. As the guards were standing by at the side, they restrained themselves.

Recently, only 20 to 30 customers would queue early in the morning. The crowd today was twice the usual numbers. They squeezed in front of the space before the stall so early because they knew we were taking an off day tomorrow. I felt honored by this.

「Please wait a moment, we will start preparing right away.」

We put the lighted brazier into the cart and stirred the tarapa sauce.

We then shifted the meat in the marinating sauce into another leather pouch.

After that, the tino was shredded and the aria diced.

Everyone was very familiar with the workflow.

「... I feel a little excited.」

Lala Wu said with a cheerful smile.

「This job is interesting. Compared to tanning hides at home, I prefer working here.」

「I see, that's great.」

「What will happen the day after tomorrow? Will the other women from the Wu clan switch places with us?」

「I don't know either. I hope we can keep the same lineup.」

Lala Wu's elated expression turned sullen immediately.

「Are you saying you don't want to work together with Leina-nee?」

「...Eh?」

「Leina-nee really wants to work with you. Are her feelings troubling you?」

Lala Wu's sea blue eyes stared at me.

She was very sensitive and observant, so she must have seen through Leina Wu's and my feelings.

「That's not what I mean... But I think I shouldn't go near Leina Wu thoughtlessly.」

「Will everything work out fine if you don't go near her?」

「... Sorry, I don't know either. Maybe that will just drag out the problem.」

「You don't need to apologize to me. Things will eventually turn out fine. Asuta, just do what you think is right.」

And finally, Lala Wu showed her trademark smile.

I switched up my mood, and tossed the aria into the heated pot.

「We are open for business! Please queue up in fives!」

Pops, Arudas, and the architects were our first batch of customers.

「Morning, you are early today.」

「That's right. After work starts, we can only make time in the afternoon. That's why we rushed over so early in the morning. You will be taking tomorrow off, so we can't miss out on this meal.」

Arudas laughed heartily, while Pops showed an unhappy face.

「That's right, it's all your fault. You are the ones who are taking days off. If you close, your income will fall, right? We will only stay in Genos until the end of the month, and you are going to close for three days...? You are not allowed to close anymore for this month. Do that after we return to Jaguar.」

「Haha, sorry... We will try not to rest anymore this month.」

I added almost 3 kg of meat into the pot

The aroma of the fruit wine and myam spread, and Pop's expression softened.

「Hmm, the smell sure is appetizing... You are resting tomorrow, huh...? Hey Arudas, what should we eat tomorrow?」

「We have no choice but to do what we usually do, and eat karon fuwano rolls. It's your favorite food, right, Pops?」

「We can eat all the karon we want at dinner. Ahh, I want to eat kiba.」

Arudas who was a head higher than Pops smiled.

「Right... Bro, a man named Naudiz might visit later, please talk to him when he does.」

「Naudiz? Is he your friend?」

「Not a friend, but we had been acquainted for a long time. He had finally decided to take action.」

I didn't understand what he meant. But before I could ask, I had already finished the 『Myam-roasted meat』 they ordered.

「See you two days later then. Take care of yourself and don't take any more days off, do you hear?」

「Alright, thank you for your patronage.」

I then kept preparing meals.

Fifteen portions of 『Myam-roasted meat』 were gone in a flash.

「Sorry! Please wait a moment!」

The morning of the fifth day was the busiest time we had, and today was even busier.

The additional orders were sold in no time, and we prepared another set of 15. When half of them were sold, the crowd gradually dispersed.

I turned to observe the 『Kiba burger』 stall. Shela Wu just happened to turn my way and our gazes met.

「We made another set of 20, and there are just five left. Should we prepare another set?」

「Hmm, let's observe a bit longer. We can start making the next set when there are three left... Ah, welcome.」

After selling a portion of 『Myam-roasted meat』 to a Semu customer, there were 52 of 『Myam-roasted meat』 left, and 45 『Kiba burgers』 remaining. There weren't many western customers, but sales had been climbing steadily.

During these three days, the number of westerners kept increasing, and there were more than 30 westerners who made a purchase yesterday.

Kiba food gradually integrated into the life in Genos. I had to tell Kaslan Lutim about this tomorrow.

At this moment, a cloaked group appeared before me. And of course, they were the 《Silver Vase》 led by Shumimaru.

「Welcome! Thank you for coming every day.」

The ten Semu people split into two equal groups as usual and queued in front of the two stalls.

The leader Shumimaru bought 『Myam-roasted meat』 every other day. He took off his hood like he always did, and greeted me politely.

「Tomorrow, close, unfortunate. Day after tomorrow, come again.」

「Okay, thank you.」

「...Asuta, buy thing, decided?」

「Yes. I have discussed this with the house head. After my work is done, I will visit your shop.」

We had earned more than a thousand red copper plates. That exceeded a hundred white copper plates which were enough to be exchanged for one silver plate.

However, money was meant to be spent in the first place. We didn't need to save up and buy anything expensive, so it was about time to spend them. After consulting Ai Fa, I received permission from her to do so.

「Very happy. Before dusk, in shop, I.」

Shumimaru squinted his eyes.

Just hearing me say I would head to his shop made him show such a happy expression. In these few days, I felt a sense of trust and friendship from Shumimaru.

「Well then, see you later.」

「Okay, see you.」

And so, we sold 40 『Kiba burgers』 .

After making another 20 『Kiba burgers』 , we decided to take a break.

「... I think the easterners are similar to the denizens of Forest's Edge.」

「Lala Wu, you think so too?」

「Yes... A long time ago, Grandma Jiba once said that the denizens of Forest's Edge might be the mixed blood of the easterners and southerners.」

「Ehh? Is that true?」

「Well, Grandma Jiba doesn't really know either. Before war broke out between Semu and Jaguar, the people exiled by both nations met in the southern forest, and became the ancestors of the Forest's Edge denizens... That is the legend of Forest's Edge.」

「Oh, incredible...! No wonder I feel an affinity for most of the Semu and Jaguar people.」

「Is that so? If we had known this when Grandma Jiba and the others left the southern forest, we should have gone to the eastern kingdom instead.」

「Hmm~ but we can't speak the eastern kingdom language. Besides, the east and the south were already enemy nations back then, so they could only rely on the western kingdom that was on good terms with the south.」

「Ah, that's true... Never mind, our lives won't change no matter what we say now.」

While we were chatting idly, the stall next door finished the preparation for the 『Kiba burger』 .

I had delegated the taste of seasoning the tarapa sauce to Shela Wu.

「Alright, let's rest for a while... Since the meat here is grilled, let's take a break.」

「Yes!」

I took two 『Kiba burgers』, Lala Wu brought the 『Myam-roasted meat in tarapa sauce』, and we walked to where Ai Fa was.

Ai Fa was sound asleep. When we were about two meters from her, she opened her eyes and lifted her head.

「Were you asleep? Sorry, I brought some food over, do you want to eat?」

「Yes.」

Ai Fa's fever had subsided.

Just to be safe, she didn't follow us to the Post Station Town for the past two days. There were six days since her elbow injury, and she could remove the brace stabilizing her left elbow tomorrow.

According to Ai Fa, it would be some time before she could enter the forest again, but she should recover before the house head conference.

The house head conference will be in four days. Ai Fa couldn't head to the Tsun clan with her left arm in a sling. I felt happy to see her injury getting better.

「Oh right, after we close the stall, you will be taking the copper plates to buy some things, right? What are you buying?」

Lala Wu asked excitedly as she ate her food deliciously.

「Erm, I'm planning to buy a kitchen knife and a steel griddle.」

「... Steel griddle.」

「Yes, steel griddle! It's a new product that the pot shop just imported! It looks really practical!」

「... That's all?」

「Yes, I just need to buy these two things.」

I looked excited, but Lala Wu seemed uninterested.

「... Both are cooking equipment.」

「Yes. Just these pieces of equipment will cost 33 white copper plates though.」

We have saved about a hundred white copper plates. Ai Fa and I decided to keep half of them with us and to spend the other half. And so, I would be using 18 white copper plates to purchase the

Semu kitchen knife, and another 15 to buy the Jaguar made steel griddle. So I intended to spend 33 white copper plates in total.

「Ah, are you going to buy the knife that silver-haired Semu man showed you? Asuta, it looked like you really wanted to buy it back then.」

「Yes, that's true!」

「... Well then, what about Ai Fa?」

After staring at me with eyes that said 「What a hopeless cooking nerd」, Lala Wu turned her head towards Ai Fa.

「I don't need anything.」 :Ai Fa answered curtly while eating her mini 『Kiba burger』 preciously.

「Eh? Are you not buying anything?」

「Yes. My blades are still usable, and my medicine and attire are still sufficient.」

「In that case, you can buy clothes and accessories for banquets. The one you wore last time was Grandma Jiba's old clothes, right?」

「I won't ever wear that kind of raiments in the future.」

「Ehh~ There might be other people requesting you to cook for their banquet.」

「... I will deal with them when the time comes.」

Ai Fa said coldly.

Lala Wu looked unhappy.

「I can't even. Only Asuta gets to enjoy」

「That's right. This is the Fa house's money after all, so I hope the house head can use these copper plates too. Not including the earnings for today, we can still use another 17 white copper plates, you know?」

「Don't mind me, just buy what you want... By the way, you are just buying cooking equipment, huh? I'm not asking you to splurge, but you can buy something you like too.」

「Hmm~ in that case, can I buy something other than cooking equipment?」

Ai Fa didn't seem to be unhappy when she heard that and said with a satisfied face: 「Buy what you want.」

「Asuta, I'm telling you...」

Lala Wu glared at me a little angrily.

She appeared to have read something from my face, and muttered 「… Never mind.」 and then shoved her food into her mouth.

Part 2

While we were taking turns to rest, the customers still kept coming.

Before I knew it, there were 34 『Kiba burgers』 and 38 『Myam-roasted meat』 left.

「Business is really good today, looks like we will sell everything, right?」

When I returned from my break, Shela Wu who was manning the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall in our stead said with a cheerful smile.

「That's right. I thought business would be better after our off day. It's lucky that we prepared more 『Kiba burger』 just in case.」

「We prepared 170 meals today, right? How many should we make for the day after tomorrow...?」

At this moment, Shela Wu opened her eyes wide in surprise.

I scanned around me in a panic and sighed in relief when I saw familiar figures.

「They are from the Wu clan main house. They had to do their grocery shopping today, so I asked them to send some firewood over too. Didn't I tell you?」

「No... I heard about it...」

In that case, why was she so surprised? In the other end of the street were the second son, second daughter, and youngest daughter of the Wu clan main house.

When they came nearby, I understood the reason why Shela Wu was so shocked. Darum Wu had finally removed the bandages on his face.

「Sorry for the wait, here is the firewood you need.」

Leina Wu was smiling brilliantly like a flower, and she put the baggage on her back beside the stall.

「Hehee, I happened to be free, so I came over to play.」

Rimee Wu stacked her baggage on top. It was exactly half the size of Leina Wu.

And finally, the silent Darum Wu dropped three bags to the ground.

There was an ugly scar on his face. I was worried about his injuries, looked like it was really serious.

The scar went across his right cheek, extending to his nose and under his ear. The cut was deep, the scar had a frightening flesh color, and the stitches could still be clearly seen. His already fierce face looked even more ferocious, and he seemed 50 percent more intimidating.

Darum Wu was a handsome man, his fiery eyes and fearless expression were the main reason why he left an impression of being ferocious on others. I couldn't help thinking that obtaining a scar was a pity.

「... Why the hell are you staring at me?」

Darum Wu glared at me with wolf-like eyes.

He was about to yell at me, but Shela Wu shouted nervously before that:

「I finally met you... Are your wounds alright?」

Darum Wu looked at Shela Wu impatiently:

「... You are the eldest daughter in Shin Wu's house. What about my injuries?」

「I heard you have not entered the forest since the day you got wounded. Our entire family feels really bad about that... Thank you for saving Shin.」

I heard that Darum Wu got wounded because he protected someone from the branch house, so that man was Shin Wu.

Darum Wu scowled his face unhappily.

「Are you stupid? It's only natural to protect one's blood kin.」

「No, if you didn't come to his aid, we would have lost our house head. I want to thank you.」

Darum Wu clicked his tongue, then scanned around him.

When he found Ai Fa staying at the back, he narrowed his eyes.

「...Leina, wait here.」

「Ehh?」

Leina opened her eyes wide and stood where she was. Darum Wu went around the stall and walked straight towards Ai Fa.

Hey, hey, what do you think you are doing? I wanted to follow, but a Semu man just happened to visit the stall.

「Kiba?」

「Ah, yes, this is kiba food. Please feel free to try a sample.」

Leina Wu and Rimee Wu quickly left the stall and watched the Semu man sample the kiba curiously.

「The stall beside us is also selling kiba food. We are selling roasted meat seasoned with myam and fruit wine, theirs is a special meat dish covered in tarapa sauce.」

After the customer nodded, he walked towards the stall selling 『Kiba burger』 .

「Amazing! Someone from the city is really eating kiba! Although he is an easterner and not a westerner!」

「Hey Rimee, you are too loud... Sorry for disturbing your work. We are done with our task, so we will go now.」

「Ehh~ Rimee wants to chat with Ai Fa.」

「Didn't you chatted a lot for the past two days...? Then I will go buy something first, you accompany Ai Fa. I will come pick you up after I'm done shopping.」

「Yes! Thank you, Leina-nee!」

Leina Wu turned to me and said with a happy smile:

「I'm sorry, please take care of Rimee. If she disrupts your work, feel free to discipline her.」

「A-Alright, I understand.」

I thought Leina Wu's smile was getting more brilliant with each passing day.

To be honest, I didn't know if I should be happy about this.

「Sorry for the wait.」

At this moment, Darum Wu walked over.

I turned my head in a panic and saw Ai Fa sitting nonchalantly under the tree shade.

「Well then, see you later.」

The second son and second daughter of the Wu clan left.

And obviously, my heart was filled with unease.

The customer from earlier walked back and handed over some coins, so I still couldn't leave the stall.

「Thank you! Please wait a moment!」

Focus on your job! I told myself quietly and grabbed a piece of poitan.

During this time, I heard someone saying faintly:

「... What business did Darum Wu have with Ai Fa?」

「Ehh?」

On a closer look, I realized that Shela Wu had lowered her head depressedly.

Could it be that it was what I was thinking?

No, I shouldn't assume everything was like that.

I quickly made the 『Myam-roasted meat』, handed it to the customer and called out to the little girl beside me.

「Excuse me, Rimee Wu, can you call Ai Fa over?」

「Hmm? Okay!」

Rimee Wu dashed away nimbly, her red hair trailing behind her.

After that, two ivory-skinned westerner youths walked over timidly.

「E-Excuse me. We want two.」

「Thank you, please hold on for a moment.」

If I remember correctly, these two youths were with me when the Totos Moa suddenly appeared at our stall and screamed together with me. They would now visit every other day.

There was still some time before noon, and the sales were already steadily climbing.

After I setted their meals, Rimee Wu brought Ai Fa over.

「What is it? You want me to buy groceries?」

「No, not yet... What did Darum Wu talk to you about?」

Ai Fa tilted her head puzzledly and replied: 「Don't know.」

「You don't know? You were talking with him just now, right?」

「We didn't talk, he kept rambling on by himself and then left. The second son of the Wu clan sure is annoying.」

「... Can you tell me what exactly did he say?」

Ai Fa tilted her head the other way.

「What did he say... He mentioned that he will be going into the woods tomorrow. And hunters who don't go into the woods are useless. Since I can't hunt right now, he was probably mocking me.」

「Haha, Darum-nii is so childish.」

It seemed that the women from the Fa house and Wu clan wasn't fazed by that guy.

I thought back to one night about a month ago, Darum Wu was also mocking Ai Fa arrogantly. So it was the same today. However, it sounded amusing when Ai Fa put it that way.

Also, Vena Wu once said that 「Darum still hopes that Ai Fa will marry him」. Considering all that, I thought Darum Wu was like a clumsy boy trying hard to approach a girl he likes.

In the end, Shela Wu and I remained moody.

「... It's almost time for the second half. Shela Wu, let's work hard together.」

「... Yes, of course.」

Shela Wu nodded firmly as if she was cheering for herself.

At this moment, another customer came. It was someone we knew, Tara.

「Asuta nii-chan, I want three!」

「Ah, thank you for today too, Tara! You really came every day.」

「I want to eat delicious food every day! It's a pity you are closed tomorrow.」

Her caramel-colored eyes caught sight of Rimee Wu's figure:

「Uwah, it's a girl from Forest's Edge!」

Rimee Wu looked at Tara in surprise.

Tara bowed squeamishly.

「... Nice to meet you.」

Rimee Wu smiled immediately and said energetically:

「Nice to meet you!」

When she heard Rimee Wu's reply, Tara showed her usual innocent smile.

「I thought only the adults from Forest's Edge come to town! I'm Tara.」

「I'm Rimee Wu! Rimee is too small and can't carry heavy things, so I don't come here often.」

「Is that so? The denizens of Forest's Edge are strong! You all can carry 200 poitan in one go, that's incredible!」

The two of them created an indescribably peaceful world.

Ai Fa stood beside Rimee Wu, her expression blank and eyes wavering.

I was grilling meat for Tara right now and couldn't save her.

Work hard, Ai Fa! I cheered for her in my heart.

「How old are you, Rimee Wu? Tara is 8 years old now.」

「Rimee is eight too! We are the same!」

「The same!」

「Tara, you are from Genos. Aren't you afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge?」

「Hmm... Of course, I'm scared. But the people around Asuta onii-chan aren't scary! By the way, I just saw a scary man from Forest's Edge walking by just now.」

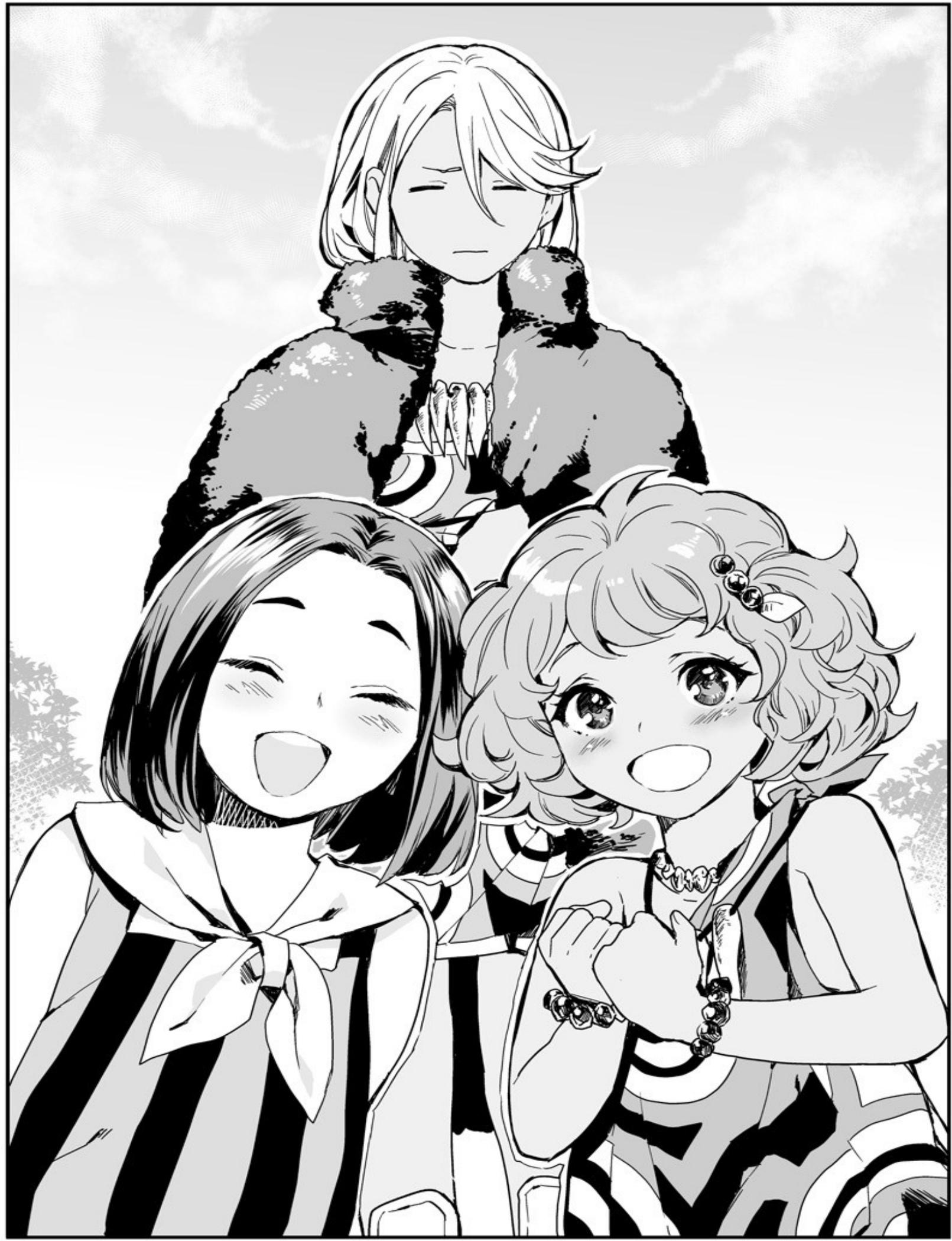
「Haha, that's probably Darum-nii, he's my brother.」

「Ehh~ Is that so! Awesome!」

「It's fine. Even other people from Forest's Edge are afraid of Darum-nii. He is actually not scary at all.」

Not just their age, the two little girl's height, hair length and adorable appearance were all very similar. Just the sight of them calmed my heart.

「Those two in the stall there are Rimee Wu's sisters. Also, didn't you let a boy eat a bite of your meat bun last time, Tara? That's Rimee's brother, Ludo Wu.」



「Amazing!」

Tara cheered.

「You have so many siblings! Tara has two older brothers, but they are always working at home.」

「I see. Work is very important.」

「That's right!」

Ai Fa finally pleaded for help with her gaze.

As a lowly member of the Fa house, the only thing I could do was to finish the 『Myam-roasted meat』 and present it to Tara.

「Sorry for the wait. That will be six red copper plates.」

「Thank you! Here, for you!」

「Thank you for your patronage! Aren't you buying two of each today?」

「Yes! Papa is eating 『Myam-roasted meat』, and I'm having 『Kiba burger』! Papa realized that if both of us ate half, we will get to taste both the dishes.」

Tara puffed out her chest proudly.

It took them seven days to realize this, what a warming scene.

「Bye bye, Asuta-nii...! See you next time, Rimee Wu!」

「Yes! Bye bye!」

And so, the two young girls became acquainted.

Ai Fa sighed deeply, then placed her right hand on Rimee Wu's fluffy head.

「Rimee Wu, I'm tired. Can we go over there and rest?」

「Yes! We have to chat properly before Leina-nee comes back!」

And so, we finally had the chance to idle.

What a busy day.

But the nonstop flow of customers was a perfect end to these ten days... While I was thinking about that, Yumi came over. She was accompanied by teenage girls from Genos today too.

「Hi, Asuta, business is good today too, huh.」

「Welcome! Thank you for visiting every day.」

「Too bad! Everyone wants to eat 『Kiba burger』 today!」

「I see.」

I didn't feel vexed or anything though.

「Ah, sorry, can you help me buy one?」

Yumi said that to her friends and slipped over from the stall next door.

「Asuta, have you decided on the things I mentioned last time?」

「Ah, about the new contract from the day after tomorrow? Milano Mast said he will tell me after I close shop for the day.」

「What? Why does he want to make you wait so long? It's either yes or no, no need to think about it so much.」

Yumi suddenly looked to the side.

「How disconcerting. Why is he just standing there like that?」

「Ehh?」

I followed her line of sight and found Milano Mast standing beside the street.

「Hmm... I didn't notice him at all. When did he start standing there?」

Shela Wu lowered her voice and said to me:

「Asuta, are you referring to that mister from the inn? He had been standing there and watching us even before Leina Wu and the others came over.」

「I see. Hmm~ why is he doing this?」

「Who knows? Strictly speaking, the venue manager will need to hand all the venue rental fee to Rock City, so all they are earning will be the pushcart rental fee. If he really wants the rental fee, he just needs to recontract with you. There's no reason to deliberate for so long.」

As we were talking, Yumi's 『Kiba burger』 was done, and one of her friends brought it over for her.

「Ah, thank you. I need to discuss something with him, go on and eat first.」

At this moment, another new customer approached us.

Was he a southerner?

No, despite his stout and strong appearance common among Jaguar people, his skin had a deep shade of ivory.

「Fufu, so this is kiba food.」

He was a man in his prime and had an amiable attitude in spite of his serious face.

He had brown hair and beard, but his eyes resembled bright emeralds. It was a color that matched Jaguar people. He was about Yumi's height.

「I see, so the meat here are samples?」

「Yes, please have some.」

The man picked up the meat nimbly with a krilee toothpick and sent it into his mouth after inspecting it carefully.

「... Yes.」

「The stall beside us is also selling kiba food. Please feel free to compare them.」

「I see, I see.」

The way that man sauntered to the 『Kiba burger』 stall looked a little amusing. Yumi looked at his back with a troubled face.

「That man... I can't recall who he is.」

「Huh? You know him?」

「No, but I have seen him somewhere...」

Yumi ate her 『Kiba burger』 and fell into deep thought. At this moment, that man wobbled back here.

「The dish next door tastes fascinating. But I want to eat your dish first.」

「Thank you, that will be two red copper plates.」

「Oh, two red copper plates for such a big piece? That's cheap.」

He nodded and handed over the copper plates.

I reheated the kiba and aria, then handed the merchandise to that man.

「Hmm.」

The man inspected the 『Myam-roasted meat』, then bit into it.

「... Whoa.」

Seeing that he showed no intention of leaving, I asked him warmly: 「Does the taste suit you?」

「Very delicious. I can't imagine this is kiba. I was surprised when I heard how popular kiba food was. I even suspected that the food had been spiked with drugs to numb the tongue. This dish is really sumptuous.」

「Thank you.」

「The seasoning is excellent. The sweetness of the fruit wine meshes perfectly with the spiciness of the myam. Who is the person that seasoned this dish?」

「I did that personally.」

「Oh, impressive for a young chap... But the texture of this fuwano sure is special. It is firm but smooth to the bite.」

「Ah, this is poitan, not fuwano.」

「Huh?」 「Ehh?」

Not just that man, even Yumi was dumbstruck.

「Poitan? You mean the poitan that is eaten by travelers? How can it be? That thing is gooey like mud water.」

「Ah, this one is different. After boiling away the water, we dried it completely and then grilled it.」

Speaking of which, when Kamyua Yost heard about the steps to process the poitan, he looked as surprised as when he tasted kiba.

「Hmm~?」

The man inspected the half-eaten 『Myam-roasted meat』 even more carefully.

「The color does resemble poitan... are you serious? You are not joking with me?」

「Yes. I also added a little gigo.」

Poitan was cheap just like kiba for a completely different reason. Should I avoid bringing this up?

「... Poitan is a very cheap food ingredient, right?」

「I don't know the price of fuwano. Is the price difference really big?」

「Using this dish as an example, one red copper plate worth of fuwano can make three of these.」

「I see, I can make five with poitan.」

「... Oh!」

The man let out an exasperated sigh, and tossed the rest of the 『Myam-roasted meat』 into his mouth.

Yumi shouted at the same time:

「Ah! I remember now! You are an innkeeper, right? No wonder you look familiar, I have seen you before in the innkeeper conference!」

「Oh, you just realized that? You are the daughter of the 《West Wind Inn》 innkeeper, right? I'm the innkeeper of the 《Big Tree of the South Inn》, Naudiz.」

His name sounded familiar.

「Oh right, you know the architect Arudas?」

「Yes, they lodge in my inn every year. As you can see, the blood of the south flows in my veins, so the people of Jaguar take good care of me.」

This meant that he was a mixed blood between westerners and southerners.

Kamyua Yost once said that only children of mixed heritage between the west and north, or east and south would be persecuted. A mixed blood between the west and the south wasn't a problem.

「Your cooking is well-received in my inn and is a hot topic. They were right, I admit my loss.」

「T-Thank you.」

「... And so? What do you want to do? Are you trying to get Asuta to sign a contract with your inn?」

Yumi interjected unhappily, and Naudiz tilted his thick neck puzzledly.

「Ohh? This is a pushcart from the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》, right? There isn't much difference no matter which venue manager you sign a contract with. I have business with the owner of this stall.」

「Are you looking for me?」

「Yes... Can you let me sell your cooking at my inn?」

Naudiz asked politely.

Part 3

「Just what... do you mean?」

「I mean what I literally said. I hope to provide your cooking for dinner at my inn. I can't hire you as a chef like what the castle town does. I'm willing to buy your cooking and add it to my menu... Ah, excuse me.」

When I realized it, I found a Semu customer standing quietly behind Naudiz.

「Welcome. Would you like one?」

At this moment, another Semu man showed up behind him. The two of them looked very similar, like twins. They presented copper plates from both sides.

「So two in total? Thank you for your patronage.」

Naudiz stroked his brown beard apologetically.

「It's almost noon. I should have come earlier, but I have work to do in the morning.」

「It's fine... Can you hold on for a moment? I can leave the stall for a while if I grill more meat in one go.」

I said this to him as I made the 『Myam-roasted meat』, and Naudiz replied: 「That's fine, of course.」 and retreated to the side of the counter.

Yumi followed and stared at Naudiz quizzedly.

「Hey, what do you mean by selling Asuta's cooking? You want to buy what he made and sell them during dinner?」

「You are correct. The Jaguar people praised the cooking from this stall and ate the dinner provided at my inn unhappily. They kept saying they want to eat kiba. As the boss of an inn, I felt ashamed.」

「In that case, you will have to inflate the price if you want to make money, right? But if that happens, who will want to buy it?」

「That's hard to say. It's true that I will need to increase the price to make a profit. However, if the kiba food is just a little more expensive than the other food, I don't think sales will fall too much.」

「But your profit margin will fall, right?」

「That's correct, the money we bring in with food will fall drastically. However, we can still make a profit if more customers lodge with us.」

I peeked at the two of them as I grilled the meat. Naudiz looked stern, but his expression was gentle. Yumi was the opposite.

The brusque temperament of the southerners and the delicate personality of the westerners. I could see these two natures mixed in a complicated manner in Naudiz.

「For example, if I set the price of the kiba food at 5 red copper plates, karon food at 4 red copper plates and Kimyusu food at 3 red copper plates, some customers will be willing to pay for the more expensive kiba food. If I can also sell the other food, my earnings won't fall too much.」

「Hmm... You have given it much consideration.」

「I made this decision after agonizing over this over several days. Ever since my Jaguar customer recommended this dish to me, I had been troubled about this.」

At this point, the meat was finally done.

「Sorry, please tend to the stall, I will be back soon.」

After saying that to Shela Wu, I walked to Naudiz.

「Sorry for the wait... Ms. Yumi, thank you for speaking out, that helps me tidy up my thoughts.」

「Don't use honorifics, that's disgusting.」

「Sorry... As I need to prepare the food and tend to house chores, I need to return home before dusk every day. You just need my cooking, and I don't need to be present, right?」

「Yes. If possible, I hope you can prepare some food that can be served after heating them up, just like the dish being sold next door. I also want it to be dinner, not a light meal like this. For a start, I just need 30 to 50 portions.」

「I see, dinner needs to be more filling... How much do you need for one portion? How much are you willing to pay?」

「Well, it should be 1.5 times that of a light meal. Three red copper plates per meal... It will be great if it is cheaper. I think 25 red copper plates for 10 would be an appropriate price, what do you think?」

After doing a rough calculation, this price would not put us in the red.

In order to achieve the goal of 「making the deliciousness of kiba well-known」, that was a tempting proposal.

I tried probing further:

「... This might be a little rude, but can you tell me what is the price of karon meat?」

「Karon meat? We sell one portion for about 1 red copper plate.」

「Ehh? How much is one portion? Is that 1.5 times bigger than of our shop?」

「Yes, you are right.」

I had to do some calculations.

I used about 180 g of kiba in each portion.

1.5 times that would be 270 g.

270 g for one red copper plate... which means 0.37 red copper plate per 100 g. Since that was for bulk purchases, that should be half the retail price for normal consumers.

On the tenth day of opening, I have finally figured out a specific figure.

「I see... I look forward to working with you too. However, it is very tedious to grill poitan. If you can use fuwano to complement my dish, I can provide 50 portions for you.」

「Ohh? Then my price will be adjusted too.」

「Yes, you can deduct the cost of the fuwano. One red copper plate of fuwano is enough for three light meals. As dinner is larger in portion, one red copper plate of fuwano should be enough for two dinners, right?」

Poitan was cheaper than fuwano, so I was losing out. But considering the complicated work of grilling poitan, it wasn't too great of a loss.

「However, my schedule for the next two months isn't certain. Besides, other inns or restaurants might want me to provide meals too.」

「Alright, it's true that many inns in Post Station Town have southerners as regulars. On top of that, there are many inns with easterner regulars too.」

Naudiz nodded calmly.

「When our inn starts selling kiba food, others will emulate us too... That is just a matter of time.」

「I see. I'm very honored, but my time is limited, so I can't complete everyone's request.」

「... That's what I thought.」

Naudiz squinted his eyes.

He probably thought that I intended to increase the price with that excuse.

However, I had other plans in mind.

「When I can't spare the time, I hope everyone will buy the kiba meat directly instead of my cooking.」

「Ehh!?」

The one who yelped was Yumi, not Naudiz.

「Hence, I hope the 《Big Tree of the South Inn》 can consider buying the kiba meat directly in the future and cook it yourself. Please consider adding this to your long-term plan. The kiba meat will definitely make you a good deal of profit...」

「Wait! If everyone sells kiba food, your business will plummet you know!？」

Yumi grabbed my arm in a panic:

「Selling the food alone should be more profitable...! Asuta, is selling the kiba meat directly a better deal?」

That wasn't true.

Yesterday, the Fa house's kiba meat was all used up. From today onwards, we would need to buy kiba meat from the Wu clan. If I just wanted to focus on the interest of the Fa house, it would be more advantageous for us to continue selling my cooking.

However, my goal in running a business in the Post Station Town wasn't to earn copper plates.

I smiled at Yumi.

「It's too complicated to explain, but personally, my goal is for everyone to buy the kiba meat directly.」

「Is that so...? Then there isn't any problem...」

Yumi let go of my arm, but still seemed unable to accept this.

Naudiz stroked his beard and said:

「Yes, that sounds interesting. But for a start, we will be happy just to sell your cooking. Let's leave all that to the future.」

「Alright, thank you... Well then, is it alright for us to discuss the details after I close shop? It's almost noon.」

「That's true. I should return to the inn... I will inform the innkeeper of the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 to avoid any misunderstanding.」

Naudiz sauntered away slowly.

As I watched Naudiz walk away, Yumi clicked her tongue.

「He wants to sell kiba food in his inn, huh... I want to do that, but our customers are mostly westerners, there are almost no southerners or easterners. It's unlikely for the westerners to order kiba food.」

「That's right, it's not possible for now.」

The westerners wouldn't accept kiba food straight away.

I also couldn't wipe away the prejudice the westerners held towards the denizens of Forest's Edge in one week.

However, I captivated the southerners and easterners with the kiba.

I built up a bridge that will lead towards our final goal.

Next, it will depend on whether our collaboration with 《Big Tree of the South Inn》 would work.

「What's this? Even if your contract with the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 ends today, my inn will have no chance to debut... Never mind, it doesn't matter which manager you pay your copper plates too, as long as your cooking is delicious.」

In the end, Yumi showed her usual innocent smile and smacked my arm hard.

「I'm going now! My friends are probably getting tired of waiting. I will continue visiting two days later.」

「Alright, thank you.」

After bidding Yumi farewell, I returned to my stall.

Shela Wu who was tending the 『Myam-roasted meat』 stall alone showed a composed smile.

「Welcome back... there are 26 『Myam-roasted meat』 left.」

「Eh? You sold quite a lot.」

「24 『Kiba burgers』 here...」 : Vena Wu said to me from the next stall.

「So exactly 50 portions... Looks like we can close shop early.」

I just finished saying that, when more customers came over.

Three men appeared before the stall, they had yellowish brown skin and looked menacing.

「Welcome.」

I received them with a smile.

I remembered these customers. A few days ago, they were looking for trouble at the 『Kiba burger』 stall. But Vena Wu received them, and they even bought a merchandise when they left.

They came with malicious intent on their first visit, but they were now our regular customers.

「Hmmp... business seems good today, bro.」

「Yes, it's thanks to everyone.」

「Really now, a guy like me is actually buying kiba meat, how did I stray into this path?」

They didn't seem to be drinking today, and despite their brusque tone, their expressions were calm.

「Sorry for the wait.」

Shela Wu handed the merchandise to the three of them. One of them frowned and leaned in close to me.

「By the way, there are many beauties in Forest's Edge. Kiba is delicious and the women are fair, no wonder you moved into Forest's Edge.」

「Haha, that's not the reason why I'm staying in Forest's Edge.」

「How can that be? The woman you touched is also helping in the stall, right?」

「No, no such thing! This humble one will never do something so despicable.」

I stole a glance at Shela Wu, and her face remained urbane, ignoring the customer's teasing.

The three customers left with their 『Myam-roasted meat』, and I exhaled. I wasn't sweating, but I still wiped my forehead with my hand.

「What a cheerful bunch. Sorry about that, Shela Wu.」

「You don't need to apologize, Asuta... Many people were mistaking me for your wife.」

「Eh? R-Really?」

「Yes. Every day there will be someone who asked me that. The people in the city sure are strange, how can a clumsy woman like me be your wife?」

「No, I'm the clumsy one! Why would an excellent woman like you ever marry me... Uwah!」

Someone tapped my shoulder suddenly, making me yelp.

I turned to find Ai Fa standing behind me with a displeased expression, holding several arias in her right arm.

「Don't shout so suddenly, that surprised me.」

「Y-You are the one surprising me! Don't walk behind me without making any noise!」

「Do I have to intentionally make noise when I walk now? Don't talk nonsense.」

Even though we were squabbling, Shela Wu was unfazed as she received the arias from Ai Fa.

「Thank you... Asuta, you were busy just now, so I asked Ai Fa to do the last bit of shopping.」

「T-Thank you for your kind help... Huh? Did Rimee Wu already go back?」

「When you left the stall to discuss business with the customer, the second daughter of the Wu clan fetched her back.」

As we spoke, Ai Fa stared at Shela Wu and me.

「A-Ai Fa, what's wrong?」

「Nothing... Looking closely, you two do look like a wedded couple.」

So she heard everything!

I was wondering how to answer when Shela Wu said with a smile:

「That's not true. Asuta would never choose me to be his wife... I respect and trust Asuta, but I won't pick him to be my husband.」

「... I see.」

After saying that, Ai Fa turned and left.

When Ai Fa sat down under the tree shade, Shela Wu whispered to me with a hint of guilt:

「I'm sorry for saying something so rude... But I think I should tell Ai Fa what I really think.」

「I think you made the right call... and I trust and respect you too.」

After Shela Wu showed a cheerful smile, she quickly turned her face back. Another customer was here.

It was almost noon, and the crowd was bigger than usual.

There seemed to be a trend of the westerners increasing.

「Shela Wu, there are just two 『Kiba burgers』 left in the pot... Can you switch places with me...?」

「Alright.」

Shela Wu went to the 『Kiba burger』 stall, and Vena traded places with her.

I prepared 80 『Kiba burgers』 today, and we were down to the last 20. Only 23 『Myam-roasted meat』 remained.

「After a few days, we will finally be sold out again... Selling everything does feel better than not selling all of it...」

The customers kept coming, as if they were responding to Vena Wu's words.

On the tenth and final day, the speed of the sales was incredibly fast.

The merchandise was sold one after another, and only three 『Myam-roasted meat』 were left by noon.

「Uwah, looks like we will finish first.」

It was tiring and tough, but I still cheered. Someone approached us.

It was Milano Mast.

「Ah, hello.」

This was the first time Milano Mast came near my stall during operational hours.

He looked at the remaining meat on the plate and snorted:

「Will you be done after selling this much more? How many portions did you prepare today?」

「Today, we prepared 90 『Myam-roasted meat』, and the neighboring stall prepared 80 『Kiba burgers』, a bit more than usual.」

「A total of 170 meals. What an incredible number.」

Milano Mast took out and gave me two red copper plates.

「Ehh? Do you want to buy my food?」

「That's right.」

「Thank you for your patronage... would you like to try the sample here...」

「Shut up. I already gave you the money, so hurry up with the food. No need for samples.」

His tone was unhappy as usual, he even added: 「This will be the last day anyway.」

「What do you mean by that last bit—」

At this moment, a westerner couple came over.

「Look, here it is. It says kiba on the signboard, right? That's the kiba food that is the talk of the town.」

「Uwah, disgusting... let's not eat it...」

「That's what I thought too! But the kiba food is surprisingly delicious!」

The youth handed four red copper plates to me a little cockily.

「Hey, give me two.」

「Alright, thank you for your patronage.」

Cooking the portions for these two plus Milano Mast's share meant that the 『Myam-roasted meat』 will become sold out.

After making three portions, Vena Wu handed the completed 『Myam-roasted meat』 to them one by one.

Milano Mast quietly walked towards the bustling south.

「……Vena Wu, please help me put out the fire.」

After saying that, I chased after Milano Mast.

「Milano Mast, please wait.」

He didn't stop.

But he didn't quicken his pace either. I caught up to him not far from the 『Kiba burger』 stall.

「Excuse me, what did you mean by 『last day』 just now?」

Milano Mast ate his 『Myam-roasted meat』 and continued walking with his expression the same as usual.

「… There's no need to be that surprised, right? You will be signing a contract with the 《West Wind Inn》 tomorrow.」

「Well... About that...」

「Are you signing with the 《Big Tree of the South Inn》 instead? It doesn't matter which inn will you sign with. The cart rental fee is just enough for my daughter's allowance. Stop brooding over it so much and sign with an inn that values you.」

Milano Mast walked to the street side and stopped.

He shot his displeased gaze from below.

「I detest the denizens of Forest's Edge, and my daughter is fearful of you. We have no reasons to stop you from jumping ships.」

「Regarding that... If you want us to sign with another inn, we will do so...」

In that case, why didn't he tell us about this two days ago?

And — Why did his expression look so heavy when he was eating the kiba food?

「… Even if it is on the level of my daughter's allowance, I can still earn one white copper plate from the cart rental. As a businessman, I shouldn't let this money slip away. Even if I bear a deep grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge, I shouldn't lose money over it... I once thought this way, but I have gotten over it now.」

「So... Since you had gotten over it, that means you are going to hand my contract over to another inn?」

It was a pity, but I had to respect Milano Mast's wishes.

Milano Mast looked at the half-eaten 『Myam-roasted meat』 and said: 「That's not it.」

「Ehh? Then what is it?」

「As a businessman, I think I should sign a contract with you. But there's no point in making each other uncomfortable... My daughter and I will never forgive the denizens of Forest's Edge.」

Milano Mast was still looking down and said quietly:

「A denizen of Forest's Edge killed a good friend of mine, and my wife also passed away because of this. That was ten years ago... So I wish a horrible death upon all the denizens of Forest's Edge. I don't give a damn about the farms, all the hunters are scum.」

「But—」

「I won't have any complains if the criminal is brought to justice. But the denizens of Forest's Edge acted with impunity and the landlord backed them up. When my friend fell off a cliff, he died while grasping a necklace in his hand. On it were tusks and horns from a kiba. Despite the glaring evidence, no denizen of the Forest's Edge paid for the crime.」

I clenched my fist quietly.

Yumi once said that 「the case was closed because of a lack of evidence」. But there actually was evidence. But despite of that, no denizen from the Forest's Edge was questioned for this crime.

As my emotions started simmering, Milano Mast remained strangely calm. His brown eyes showed a hint of sadness, but not rage.

「When my friend died, my wife overexerted herself, got bedridden and passed away shortly... He was an old friend of mine, and also my wife's older brother who raised her in the stead of their parents. That's why my daughter and I will hate the denizens of Forest's Edge for the rest of our lives.」

「But... That's...」

Uncle Dora once said that the denizens of Forest's Edge would attack travelers, commit robbery and abduct women. Ai Fa didn't refute that either. There were such evil people inside the Forest's Edge settlement.

Is all this the doing of the Tsun clan...?

I had no way of knowing.

The relationship fracture between the Tsun clan and the Wu clan happened twenty years ago, when their previous clan heads were leading them. Back then, the Tsun clan abducted a woman who was supposed to marry into the Wu clan, forcing her to commit suicide. This meant that even at that time the Tsun clan was already corrupted.

「But even so...」

I shut up mid-sentence.

But even so, not all denizens of the Forest's Edge were villains. I couldn't stand having him treating Ai Fa, the Wu clan, and house Lutim as being in the same league as the Tsun clan.

At this moment, the image of a frail woman carrying an infant appeared in my mind.

She was Celeste Von Fou, and I had met her once.

The weaker houses in Forest's Edge weren't strong enough to hunt kiba, and would sometimes starve to death. Celeste Von Fou once said that her child wouldn't have milk to drink if not for the hide Ai Fa secretly gave to the Fou house.

There were many edible fruits in the forest, but to avoid letting the kiba starve, the denizens of the Forest's Edge could starve themselves, and in order to honor the agreement they made with the landlord of Genos, they gave up their lives for the sake of their pride as hunters.

The prosperity of Genos was built on such heroic sacrifice, but the citizens of Genos only felt hatred, fear, and contempt for the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Wasn't that too stupid?

The evil minority and those who sheltered them weren't suffering at all. Be it Forest's Edge or the Post Station Town, only the powerless majority was oppressed.

To be frank— from the looks of the situation, the Genos management and the chief Tsun clan were colluding and reaping all sorts of benefits, while other people had to suffer greatly.

「What did you want to say? That not all the denizens of Forest's Edge are malicious people?」

Milano Mast spat out quietly.

「You don't need to tell me that. There are five hundred denizens in Forest's Edge, if they were all villains, the people in town would have died many times over. Everyone knows that, which is why I was willing to sign a contract with you in the beginning.」

After Milano Mast finished saying that, he tossed the last bite of 『Myam-roasted meat』 into his mouth.

「Besides, the people in the Post Station Town aren't retarded. If you were a violent man, they wouldn't have bought your cooking... And so, I won't stop you from jumping ships, and won't

chase you away either. If the 《Big Tree of the South Inn》 or the 《West Wind Inn》 finds value in your talent, there's no need for you to rent the carts in my inn, right?」

「No... Since you have no intention of chasing me out, I want to renew the contract with the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 two days later.」

「What?」

Milano Mast became dumbstruck.

「But why? You don't have anything to gain from doing this.」

「I'm not sure how to answer either... I'm just happy that you are willing to try my cooking.」

Besides, Milano Mast actually thought over it for three days before making this decision.

In the end, he decided neither to retain us nor chase us away. Since he made such a decision, I had no reason to stop business with the 《Kimyusu's Tail Inn》 proactively.

「I'm just a rookie stall owner and have many shortcomings. But I will do my best, so I will be in your care two days later too.」

I took off the towel on my head and bowed.

「... You are really an unfathomable young man.」

Milano Mast said exasperatedly.

「No need to thank me. If you want to spend money to suffer, then do what you want.」

「Yes! Thank you!」

I lifted my head, and Milano Mast had already turned his back to me and strode off.

I tied the towel on my head again and hurried back to the stall.

My emotions were still hyped up.

Diga Tsun and Yamiel Tsun are still young, they can't be involved with what happened ten years ago. But the criminal is definitely from the Tsun clan.

There was no way for me to know the truth.

However, if we continued to let the murderer get away scot-free, we wouldn't be able to mend the gulf between the citizens of Genos and the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Even if our stall could become a bridge between the Post Station Town and Forest's Edge, and make most of the citizens of Genos taste kiba without any fear— the actual victims of violence committed by the denizens of Forest's Edge, and people in the same circumstances as Milano Mast wouldn't be able to rest their grudges.

Criminals had to be brought to justice. If the higher-ups of Genos weren't willing to resolve this matter which was common sense, the denizens of Forest's Edge and the people of Genos wouldn't be able to understand each other.

What should I do—

With troubled emotions in my heart as I mulled over this question that didn't have any answers, I walked to the stalls.

Upon reaching there, I saw a tall and scrawny blonde man standing before the 『Kiba burger』 stall.

「Hi, long time no see, I finally have the chance to visit.」

Kamyua Yost has appeared before us.

A boy with brown hair followed right beside him.

「Kamyua Yost, it's been a while. I'm glad to see that you are well.」

After giving a slight nod, I went around into the inside of the cart.

The next instant, Lala Wu showed her teeth with a smile.

「This mister is our last customer, the 『Kiba burger』 are sold out.」

A little over an hour after noon, all 170 portions were sold.

Part 4

The ten-day battle was over, but we couldn't let down our guard yet.

I had to close up shop, buy ingredients for the day after tomorrow, then head to the 《Big Tree of the South Inn》 to discuss our collaboration. When I get back to Forest's Edge, there were still loads of work waiting for me.

「You sold 170 meals today? Incredible. And you are also a denizen of Forest's Edge selling kiba food...! This is a historical accomplishment.」

Kamyua Yost looked at us as we packed up. It was rare to see him hang around instead of leaving.

In that case, we had to settle the matters on hand too. I called Ai Fa who was resting under the shade over.

Ai Fa stood beside quietly, and Kamyua Yost showed a satisfied smile.

「Ai Fa, you are in town today too! I heard Leito mentioned that you didn't enter the forest, so I intended to see you. Unfortunately, my recent schedule was too hectic for me to make time.」

「... I have no business with you though...」

Ai Fa said coldly, and Kamyua Yost checked her out.

「Great, you seem to be getting better already.」

Ai Fa was still concealing the injury on her left arm with her cape. But no matter how well she hid it, she couldn't escape Kamyua Yost's eyes.

「Ai Fa, give me the copper plates.」

「Yes.」

Ai Fa hid her injury carefully as she pulled her cape, and took out a heavy pouch from inside.

These were our profits from the past nine days.

I took the pouch from Ai Fa and started counting.

「Well, we sold everything today along with four portions of jerky... That will be 12 and 9 plates.」

I took out twelve white copper plates and nine red copper plates, then placed them into a separate bag before holding it near Kamyua Yost's chest.

「...Hmm?」

Kamyua Yost tilted his thin face quizzingly.

「This is a gift for you as thanks. Our profits over these ten days totaled 129 white copper plates, so here's a tenth of it.」

「W-Wait. What do you mean? There's no reason for me to accept your money.」

I was shocked when I heard that.

「What are you saying, wasn't this your idea? You said that you wanted ten percent of the profit minus all expenses as a gratuity. Did you forget?」

「I did. I really don't remember saying that!」

The boy Leito looked up at the flustered Kamyua Yost and chuckled:

「I remember it too. Kamyua Yost, that's the price you proposed at the start. But you were probably joking.」

「Eh, really? That's bad, I don't remember it at all... Leito is right, even if I did mention that, I was probably just kidding. Asuta, keep the money away then.」

「You have to accept it. If you didn't suggest that we set up shop in the Post Station Town, we wouldn't have earned so much copper plates. This is your just reward, so please take it.」

「No, but...」

「We will be troubled if you don't accept. I hope we can have a cordial relationship without owing each other anything.」

I proffered the pouch again.

「You might be a respectable friend or a damned traitor in the future, and I don't want to owe you anything in either case. I hope you can empathize with us.」

Kamyua Yost sighed deeply, then alternated his gaze between Ai Fa and me. He then reached out his slender arm reluctantly.

「I understand. In order for us to be friends on equal standing, I will treat this sum of money as a necessary process... What a waste. The copper plates you gave me would just be spent by me on a bunch of worthless things.」

「If you are aware of that, please restrain yourself a little.」

And of course, Leito was the one who retorted.

「Ai Fa and Asuta, just this once okay!? No need to cut me a share anymore! Please cherish the wealth you earned, it belongs to the Fa house after all.」

「Got it, thank you.」

I offered my thanks without hesitation, and Ai Fa acknowledged him with her gaze.

「What a pain... Well then, I'm going back to the inn. Since you will be taking tomorrow off, I will see you two days later then.」

「Yes, I will await your visit.」

「Right, I'm looking forward to eating your cooking again... Oh right, can I ask one last thing?」

「What is it?」

「Have you run into any trouble lately? Anything I can help you with?」

I looked up at Kamyua Yost quietly.

Ai Fa probably had the same reaction as me.

Kamyua Yost squinted his eyes with a smile. His unique purple eyes were narrowed into a seam, which made him look old yet young at the same time.

... I can't ask for his help yet.

I suppressed the chaotic emotion in my heart.

At this junction, I couldn't request for Kamyua Yost's aid yet.

This man has dealings with the landlord of Genos. I still didn't know him too well, but if he gets involved— it might cause irreversible damage to the relationship between Forest's Edge and Genos.

I pretended to be oblivious just like he was, and shook my head.

「... We have not encountered such a situation so far.」

Kamyua Yost showed a satisfied smile once again.

「That's great. See you the day after tomorrow then! Good work, beauties from the Wu clan!」

Kamyua Yost and Leito disappeared at the other end of the crowd. I sighed in relief.

At this moment, Lala Wu called out to me from behind.

「Hey~ are you done? We have already finished closing up.」

「Ah, sorry...! Lala Wu, Vena Wu, and Shela Wu, thank you for your help today. Not just today, I only made it through these ten days because of your support.」

They showed innocent smiles after I said that.

「Why are you being so formal? Even though tomorrow is an off day, we will still need to work two days later, right?」

「... I hope I can work with you two days later too...」

「That's right, that's what I think too.」

I was still a half-baked chef and spent these ten days bustling around. But everyone still smiled cheerfully.

In these ten days, we sold more than a thousand portions. Total revenue had finally surpassed 2000 copper plates. Excluding the costs and the sum paid out to Kamyua Yost, the profits were 1169 red copper plates. In other words, about 97 kiba tusks and horns.

We had attracted the patronage of many westerners.

And not just the stall, we even managed to sell our cooking in the inns too.

After this, we had to settle our issue with the Tsun clan, and then we could strive steadily towards our goal.

「... What is it, Asuta?」

Ai Fa walked towards me a little angrily.

「What's eating at you? Tell me everything.」

「I will tell you... but it's complicated, so I will tell you tonight.」

Ai Fa was quiet for a while. She stared at my first, then retreated to the side after saying 「I understand.」

「Alright then, let's go home!」

We pushed the two carts down the stone-paved streets.

The crowd was at its peak during this time.

Some familiar passersby greeted us.

Some pedestrians still showed expression of detest or shock.

There were those who stood stiffly in place from surprise. They were probably travelers who just arrived at Genos today.

I enjoyed the scenery in the Post Station Town as we slowly walked back.

「Hi, you have already closed? Are you going back so early?」

When we were passing by Uncle Dora's stall, he said to us with a smile.

Tara was also smiling as she stood beside him.

Just like the scene this morning.

On closer thought, they were the first customers of our stall. Followed by a member of the 《Silver Vase》. We also got to know Pops, Arudas, Yumi, and Naudiz. And finally, we reached where we were today.

I hid my emotions in my heart and smiled at them.

「Yes, today was really a spectacle. I will be opening the day after tomorrow and will drop by to buy vegetables later.」

「Alright, we will wait for you.」

It had only been ten days, but that was how our lives were right now.

I could not have anyone destroy this.

「Oh, right!」

As we continued pushing the cart forward, Lala Wu suddenly yelled.

「Asuta, you need to buy something else aside from the vegetables, right? We will return the carts, you can go ahead and buy your things.」

「Huh?」

I turned back and found Lala Wu looking at me with a smug smile.

「That's true.」

That little brat! I cursed in my heart.

「Alright, I still need to make a trip to the 《Big Tree of the South Inn》 later, so I will buy the things for my personal use.」

「Yes. Ai Fa, take care of Asuta.」

After Ai Fa and I stopped, the two carts disappeared in the other end of the crowd.

「... You are buying a kitchen knife and steel griddle, right?」

「Yes. The steel griddle is heavy, let's get the knife first.」

I already checked yesterday. The 《Silver Vase》 was located at the center of the marketplace, right beside Grandma Misill's vegetable stall.

They laid a black cloth onto the space of two stalls and put out a variety of merchandise on it. A roof had been erected to cover the entire space, making the shop really dim.

There were three Semu people there.

「Excuse me... Hmm, Shumimaru isn't here?」

The shop attendants had taken off their hoods, but I don't see Shumimaru who had silver hair.

A Semu man who was very tall made a strange gesture and bowed towards Ai Fa and me.

「Shumimaru, busy, will be, back soon.」

「I see. I pre-ordered something from him, do you know where it is?」

「Shumimaru, the merchandise, have... Wait, please.」

I had no choice but to wait.

I squatted down together with Ai Fa and browsed the merchandise laid out on the sheet.

「...Why is this shop selling all sorts of weird things?」

Ai Fa whispered to me.

I knew how Ai Fa felt as I looked at the products before us.

Should I describe these items as weird? Anyway, the merchandise was laid out haphazardly. Aside from the blades made with steel that was precious in Semu, there were a variety of teapots, wooden boxes with intrinsic designs, and overly decorated bows and quivers. There were also accessories that glittered with a silver gleam and bundles of extravagant cloths. All the items were carefully carved and looked very high-class. However, the merchandise was just laid out randomly on a sheet.

Never mind, compared to laying them out orderly, there was a different charm in this messy display. The atmosphere in the shop was like an antique stall found in a flea market.

「Ah, isn't that a gown for banquets?」

The rainbow-colored fabric glittered in the dim shop.

「This steel art piece looks similar to the accessories worn by the women from the Wu clan. So these are imported from Semu.」

「... These are all things I don't need.」

Ai Fa said coldly, then yelped with her eyes wide open in surprise.

「Asuta, what's that?」

「Oh? That's probably— a wine-cup.」

Judging from the shape, it was some sort of container.

The unique thing about it was that it was made of glass.

「So there is glass in this world too. That surprised me.」

「This is called glass? It's so pretty.」

The sparkling light was reflecting in Ai Fa's eyes.

「... Glass, for wine. White five plates.」

The youth we saw earlier informed us quietly.

「So it really is glass... Ai Fa, it costs five white copper plates.」

「Hmm? It is pretty, but I don't need a wine glass to drink fruit wine.」

That might be so, but Ai Fa's eyes were still filled with life. She poked the glass with a finger on her right hand.

Ai Fa didn't want to buy the wine glass, but I felt glad that she could appreciate beautiful things.

At this moment, Shumimaru came back.

「Asuta, sorry. Long, you wait? 」

「No, I just got here. 」

I stood up to receive Shumimaru. Ai Fa remained squatting and kept poking childishly at the wine glass.

I quietly walked a few steps away from Ai Fa.

「We have closed our shop, I'm here to buy the goods I pre-ordered. 」

「Yes, I'm happy. 」

Shumimaru nodded and reached inside his cloak.

His black eyes darted suddenly towards me.

「Knife, white, 18 plates. 」

「Yes, thank you. 」

「Stone, white, 10 plates... Stone, decided? 」

「... Yes, I want to buy it. 」

Shumimaru squinted happily, and retrieve the merchandise from his cloak.

「Total, white, 28 plates. 」

He glanced at Ai Fa who was squatting down.

「Beautiful lady. Asuta, wife? 」

「No... But she is the most important person to me. 」

「I see. 」

Shumimaru nodded. I received the merchandise, then handed over 28 white copper plates.

「I will start using this knife in my cooking from two days onwards. 」

It was a vegetable knife kept in a black sheath. This knife would be a great help when cutting tino in the stall.

「I, honored, am... Thankful to Semu, Selva, for Asuta, me meet, letting. 」

「It's an honor for me too. It is already the sixth day of the blue month, I will be in your care for the remaining days. 」

After showing him my sincere smile, Shumimaru squinted his eyes happily.

「I still need to buy some other things, so I will take my leave now.」

「Okay. The day after tomorrow, forward, looking.」

Shumimaru walked into the back of the shop, and I poked Ai Fa's shoulder.

「Sorry for the wait. I'm done with the purchase.」

「Hmm? I see.」

Ai Fa stood up, and we left the 《Silver Vase》.

Ai Fa looked at the knife in my hand curiously.

「So this is the kitchen knife that cost 18 white copper plates, huh. It must be sharp.」

「That's right. This knife won't lose out to my dad's Santoku knife when it comes to chopping vegetables.」

At this moment, Ai Fa showed a gentle expression and smiled:

「... It must be an excellent knife then.」

「Yes, it is.」

I nodded and walked to an empty space between two stalls.

I stopped and looked at Ai Fa.

「And so... I mentioned to you this afternoon that I bought something not related to cooking.」

「Oh? What did you buy?」

Ai Fa's face was very peaceful.

What kind of face will she show a few seconds later?— After bracing myself, I presented the item I was hiding in my hand to Ai Fa.

「... What is this?」

Ai Fa frowned in surprise.

The thing I was holding in my right hand— was a necklace with a blue stone.

The stone on the necklace was about the size of a thumbnail, stuck onto a piece of silver plate. There was a string braided in a complicated manner on it, so it could be worn on a neck.

「As you can see, this is a necklace.」

「Necklace... An accessory, huh.」

Ai Fa's eyes wavered uneasily.

「……Asuta, so you want to wear accessories like a woman?」

「No... Ai Fa, I bought this necklace for you.」

「Oh?」

Ai Fa narrowed her eyes.

「Which means... you ignored everything that I said?」

「I know what you said. If I use the important copper plates to buy accessories, you will beat me up, right?」

「Yes, that's right.」

Ai Fa slowly walked towards me.

I gulped quietly, then continued:

「You can start your beating after I explain. This is a talisman to ward off disasters.」

「... Ward off disasters?」

「Yes, this is a Semu talisman that can allegedly ward off all sort of disasters. Since the 《Silver Vase》 is selling it in a western city, that means it doesn't matter which god the bearer believes in. Everyone from Semu wears this talisman to keep them safe from harm.」

Ai Fa's eyes remained unchanged.

Never mind, I had already braced myself to be punched once or twice.

「I don't know how effective this talisman is. But you will definitely be mad if I gifted you an accessory. You don't lack daily necessities, but I still wanted to buy something for you, so I chose this necklace by my own accord... It might be a talisman, but the stone grafted on it is beautiful, right?」

It was a small dark blue stone.

When Shumimaru showed me this stone yesterday, I was smitten by it at first sight. Its color was exactly the same as Ai Fa's eyes.

「... How much did you spend on this talisman?」

「Ten white copper plates.」

「...Ten... white... copper plates...」

Ai Fa half-closed her eyes and seemed to be sorting through her thoughts.

「I know you are reluctant to depend on a talisman, but you face danger very often, and even suffered a serious injury. The men of Forest's Edge would gift their family three tusks or horns to bless them with a healthy life. I want to gift you something too.」

I held the string of the necklace and made it into a circle.

「If you are still not satisfied, you can beat me later, but can you accept this necklace first? This is a gift from your family who wishes safety and health upon you.」

Ai Fa closed her eyes and sighed deeply.

She then stared right at me.

「... The men of Forest's Edge would hunt kiba with their own strength, and gift the tusks and horns to their family to as a blessing to keep them safe and sound.」

「Yes.」

「You worked in the Post Station Town, and used the copper plates you earned to bless your family, so it's not wrong... Is that how I should think?」

「P-Please, do so.」

「... Hmmph.」

Ai Fa pouted.

「I feel like I had fallen into a trap for a kiba. Is my family scheming against me?」

「Not at all. My only wish is for you to be safe from harm.」

Ai Fa grunted again.

She then took one step towards me.

And lowered her head a little.

「... What are you just standing there for?」

「Huh?」

「According to the customs of Forest's Edge, you have to present the gift to your family personally.」

「I have never heard about this.」

I placed the blue stone necklace onto Ai Fa's neck.

The stone was slightly higher than the necklace of tusks and horns, and the blue stone was shimmering.

Ai Fa held the necklace in the palm of her right hand. After looking at it for a while, she looked up as if she had just remembered something.

「Oh right, I have something for you too.」

「Huh? For me?」

「Yes.」

Ai Fa reached behind her.

After searching through the hidden pockets in her fur cape, she pulled out a necklace with ten tusks and horns.

「Oh, that's the necklace I gave you for safekeeping.」

「Yes. We won't need these tusks and horns anymore. You performed your duty and can put on this necklace now.」

After saying that, Ai Fa kicked my leg.

「Lower your head.」

「Hey... Can you speak first before kicking?」

Despite complaining about it, I still lowered my head docilely.

Ai Fa took off the necklace around my neck nimbly and carefully placed the necklace she took out earlier on me.

These were the ten sets of blessing gifted to me by the Wu clan. If our business in the Post Station Town failed, we had to use them to make up for our losses.

「It will take some time for the denizens of Forest's Edge to head towards a prosperous future, but I believe you can carry this out.」

「Not just me, it's our responsibility.」

「Yes... and also the Wu clan and Lutim house.」

Ai Fa suddenly closed her eyes.

The troubled look on her face was gone, but in its place was a hint of childish unease.

「And finally, it will be the responsibility of all the denizens of Forest's Edge.」

I smiled at Ai Fa.

「Starting from today, we will buy meat from the Wu clan. Before long, when the Wu clan runs out of meat, we will purchase them from house Lutim... When everyone can sell kiba meat at the Post

Station Town, all the denizens of Forest's Edge will compete to sell kiba meat. With that in mind, we are just doing this slightly earlier than the other denizens.」

In order to forge a path to a such a future, the denizens of Forest's Edge had to work together and strife forth.

The chief clan was supposed to lead the denizens of the Forest's Edge properly, but not only did they not do that, they even harmed the pride of Forest's Edge instead. I couldn't forgive their transgression.

「... That's true.」

Ai Fa eyes looked down, and picked up the blue stone on her neck again.

「What's the matter? Do you still want to beat me?」

「No... This might be a talisman, but a necklace is still an accessory. I feel uneasy about wearing this.」

「I see... But isn't the stone beautiful?」



Ai Fa slowly lifted her head.

She smiled in a childlike manner.

「Yes, the stone is sparkling beautifully.」

Her smile was so pure and innocent that I couldn't help holding my breath.

Our work was just starting, and there were mountains of problems waiting for us, but after seeing Ai Fa's smiling face, I felt a sense of peace and satisfaction I had never felt before.

This marked the end of our first foray into the Post Station Town.

Mid-Meal Snack - The Hearth Caretaker of the Wu Branch House

Shela Wu was born with a weak constitution.

She was sickly and frail during her childhood, and smaller in size compared to her peers, which resulted in her timid personality.

The denizens of Forest's Edge placed a lot of emphasis on physical ability, which also applied to the women. Without a certain level of strength and endurance, the women wouldn't be able to do all the house chores. When a person couldn't fulfill her own responsibilities, her heart would be filled with sadness.

And of course, the people around her didn't bully her because of her physical condition. The other houses might do so, but no one in the Wu clan village was so heartless.

Her heart was filled with self-reproach. Even though she wasn't of much help, the people around her didn't admonish her, which deepened her sense of guilt.

Be it chopping wood or tanning hides, Shela Wu needed twice the time to finish these tasks. Not just that, she couldn't even fetch water by herself. As their clan was prosperous, almost all the women in the Wu clan were strong and healthy, making her more conscious of her shortcomings.

The frail Shela Wu liked tending to the hearth.

Tending to the hearth didn't require too much brute strength. She was strong enough to carry a pot. Furthermore, only her family entered the hearth, so no one compared her with anyone. Because of these various reasons, Shela Wu felt most at ease inside the stove room.

It wasn't clear if it was fortunate or not, Shela Wu was the eldest daughter and had three younger brothers. Her mother Tali Wu could be considered petite, but she was tough and strong and could handle most of the heavy lifting. Even though Shela Wu lamented her in-capabilities, she still busied herself in the stove room.

As her family had shouldered part of Shela Wu's work, she felt that she had to put her effort into tending to the hearth. Normally, the work related to the hearth involved cutting meat and vegetables and cooking. But Shela Wu spent additional effort to take care of small details that couldn't be clearly seen.

When dealing with the meat, she would cut along the grain so the meat will be more tender. Aria became too soft when overcooked, and too tough with a hint of spiciness when undercooked. When she cooked, she kept attempting to find the optimal heat and cooking time and derived joy from doing so.

And obviously, her family didn't realize the effort she had put in. No matter what she served up, her family would eat that all gratefully. This was a responsibility of the denizens of the Forest's Edge in the first place. The Forest's Edge did not permit anyone to be picky about the taste of the food.

Shela Wu spending so much effort in tending to the hearth was just for her own self-satisfaction. However, she still felt really happy when her mother praised her cooking.

「No one can tend to the hearth better than you. Teach me how to adjust the heat again.」

Tali Wu probably said that because she realized the sense of guilt Shela Wu was feeling.

But even so, Shela Wu felt glad.

After that, both mother and daughter put even more effort into the way they cooked their food.

Shela Wu was secretly a fan of the Wu main house sisters.

Of the hundred-odd kins in the Wu clan, the four sisters from the main house had the capabilities and charm that befit their status.

The eldest Vena Wu was a gorgeous beauty. Not just her appearance, her personality was very charming too. There were hordes of men asking for her hand or volunteering to marry into her family.

The second daughter Leina Wu wasn't far behind. She was petite and had a kiddish face. She might not draw as much attention as her elder sister, but she was as charming as Vena Wu. Unlike the hard to fathom Vena Wu, Leina Wu had a cheerful disposition and was gentle and kind. She was the ideal women in the minds of the denizens of Forest's Edge.

The third sister Lala Wu was twelve and had a forthright personality and a smart and sensitive side to her. She was great friends with Shela Wu's brother Shin Wu, so Shela Wu interacted with her the most and learned about her unknown side early.

The youngest Rimee Wu was a pure and adorable eight years old girl. Just the sight of her brought a smile to the face. She was so cute, how blissful would it be to have her as a sister or daughter? Shela thought about that from time to time.

Shela Wu yearned to be like these four girls.

As their status was above hers, Shela Wu didn't feel any jealousy towards them. She was proud of them as a relative.

However, she wondered sometimes.

Why was she so useless?

The four girls were related to Shela Wu by blood. Shela Wu's father Raa Wu was the younger brother of the girls' father, Donda Wu.

Raa Wu was an outstanding hunter, and her mother Tali Wu was the perfect spouse. Her younger brothers would become brave hunters one day. The oldest brother had already started hunting alongside their father.

Shela Wu wasn't as strong as her other family.

She was 18, but no one had asked for her hand in marriage or to marry into the family. That was how miserable her capabilities were

She wasn't bedridden with an illness like during her youth, but she still couldn't carry a water flask on her own. Her looks weren't particularly outstanding either, so it was a given that no denizens of the Forest's Edge wanted to marry her.

At most, she could marry to a kin house of the Wu clan. Less prestigious houses like Lilim and Mamu would be happy to take in a woman of the Wu clan in marriage. The Wu clan was their elder house after all.

And when they realized not all women from the Wu clan were strong and tough, they would be utterly disappointed.

Despite being of marriageable age, Vena Wu and Leina Wu didn't rush to marry. They must be waiting to pick a good husband. They were from the main house after all, no one would turn down a marriage with such excellent women.

However, Shela Wu was already 18. She had not been wed for three years. Even though her house only had two women, her and her mother, there were plenty of women in the Wu clan village. So even if Shela Wu married out, they wouldn't be shorthanded. It was about time for her to make up her mind and marry into a kin house.

But I—

Even if it was just for a while more, she wanted to stay in the Wu clan village.

She wanted to see how the future pans out for a certain person.

Once Shela Wu will see him taking in a wife, she would be able to steel herself. She would resolve her will to leave her family and life in the Wu clan village.

Shela Wu hid this idea deep in her heart and continued living her peaceful and unchanging days. At this time, two persons suddenly turned up at the Wu clan village.

They were Asuta and Ai Fa from the Fa house.

「Anyway, that's what happened. Grandma Jiba had gotten more energetic lately.」

Lala Wu said to Shela Wu.

Rimee Wu brought the Fa house people to the Wu clan village. After preparing dinner, the members of the Fa house reinvigorated the grand elder Jiba Wu.

When she heard that, Shela Wu was stunned.

「Lala Wu, you ate what Grandma Jiba did, right? What kind of food did they cook?」

「Hmm, well... I'm not sure how to describe it. The taste was unbelievable.」

「An unbelievable taste...」

「Even though it was kiba, I couldn't tell at all! The grilled meat and boiled meat were both so fragrant... No, I can't describe it properly.」

「Anyway, his cooking is very outstanding, right?」

「But I can't praise him to the heavens like the other members of my family. Papa Donda got mad too, saying that this kind of cooking will corrupt the soul.」

「I see...」

Half a month later, when Lala Wu visited Shela Wu's place, there was an indescribable expression on her face.

「Asuta and Ai Fa visited last night. The dinner was incredibly delicious... Sigh, I'm so troubled, I can't even!」

How did delicious food taste like?

Shela Wu's feelings became agitated again.

The next day, she received a notification from the head of the Wu clan that Asuta from the Fa house will be tending to the hearth for the wedding between house Lutim and house Min.

Five days before the banquet began, Asuta started lodging in the Wu clan. Four days before the wedding, Shela Wu was called over to help prepare for the banquet.

「Ah, did you come from the branch house to help? Nice to meet you, I will be imposing on you.」

Asuta was an incredible man.

He was skinny like a woman and had a kind and polite face and attitude. He had yellowish skin just like the westerners from the Post Station Town. But his hair and eyes were black, just like an easterner.

The air about him was different from the citizens in the Post Station Town. Shela Wu didn't know how to describe this feeling, Asuta wasn't like the people from any place, and fit the term 「foreigner」 perfectly. That was how strange he was.

Asuta's cooking was equally shocking for Shela Wu.

Lala Wu was right. After processing it with the special technique of 「bloodletting」, the kiba meat had definitely become tasty.

Not just that, Asuta created all sorts of flavor with just fruit wine, pico leaves and rock salt, just like magic. He boiled away the water in the poitan, then dried it in the sun before grilling it. The soup without any poitan was very palatable. He also used different cooking methods and turned the aria, tarapa, and chachi into never seen before dishes.

There was so much that could be done when tending to the hearth.

Compared to Asuta, her effort was no different from child's play.

With this feeling in her heart, Shela Wu quietly helped Asuta. And then—

「Shela Wu, your knife work is impeccable, and you are great at controlling the heat.」

Two days before the banquet, Asuta praised Shela Wu.

「On the day of the banquet, I would like to invite you and your mother Tali Wu to cook the hamburger steak in the stove room of the Wu main house.」

Of all the dishes Asuta showed them, the Hamburg steak was the toughest to cook.

While Shela Wu was still dumbstruck, her mother Tali Wu smiled:

「We are honored. My daughter is better at tending to the hearth than anyone else. Thanks to her, my culinary skills have improved greatly.」

「Yes, you are right. Shela Wu has excellent cooking skills.」

Asuta smiled gently.

「Even if it was just cutting meat, I could feel how much effort she put into it. I want to borrow her strength.」

Shela Wu felt light-headed.

She never imagined that the greatly skilled Asuta would acknowledge her hearth-tending abilities.

When she used the skills Asuta taught her to prepare dinner, her family was surprised and happy. Her younger brothers were rowdy and said it was 「yummy」, the quiet Raa Wu and Shin Wu also ate Shela Wu's cooking with a face of satisfaction.

So she could bring joy to her family in such a way.

If this joy can bring more strength to the denizens of Forest's Edge, my existence will be good medicine, and not poison — Asuta once said.

Asuta might be a foreigner, but he used his incredible prowess to find his place in Forest's Edge.

Shela Wu respected Asuta's confidence and determination.

Shela Wu was a full-blooded denizen of the Forest's Edge, but she was hesitant and troubled. Asuta was a foreigner, but he could cook proudly and the people around him acknowledged his strength.

He might look scrawny, but Asuta was brave and decisive and wasn't inferior to the hunters of Forest's Edge in his confidence.

Maybe—

Maybe she could be like Asuta, and live her life proudly.

Even if Shela Wu wasn't as strong as the other women, her culinary skill wouldn't lose to anyone. She wanted to take pride in this and hold her head up high.

After the banquet for house Lutim's wedding ended, Asuta left the Wu clan village. But this thought lingered in Shela Wu's heart.

And then, ten or so days later—Lala Wu came to inform Shela Wu:

「Asuta is running a business in the Post Station Town, and he needs helpers! Mama Mia Lei wants the both of us to assist him, will you go?」

Shela Wu couldn't give an answer right away.

Why were they willing to let someone like her shoulder such an important responsibility? Her heart was filled with doubt, but the thought of working together with Asuta again filled her heart with joy.

「Asuta wants us to send at least one woman who is good at tending to the hearth, so we chose you!」

「But... Leina Wu from the main house is great at caretaking the hearth too, right?」

「Hmm~ the main house already sent Vena-nee to help Asuta. If both elder sisters were gone, we could become overwhelmed with house chores. If you turn this down, we will have to partner

Leina-nee with another woman from the branch house and ask the branch house to help with the chores of the main house.」

Lala Wu stared at Shela Wu, her eyes were filled with hope and unease. Lala Wu had already opened her heart to Asuta, so she must really want to go to the Post Station Town to help.

「However, we will need to carry iron pots and other baggage to the Post Station Town, and that will be tough. Shela Wu, you have to decide for yourself!」

Shela Wu was very troubled.

She didn't think that she was capable enough to take on the job. However, a sense of pride had just sprouted in her heart.

If she didn't provide sunlight and water to the sprout, it would wither away in no time.

Hence, Shela Wu looked at Lala Wu as sincerely as she could manage.

「I'm willing to take on this job.」

Shela Wu hoped that she could live proudly just like Asuta.

She didn't want to hide the feelings in her heart.

With this conviction in mind, Shela Wu took another step forward.