

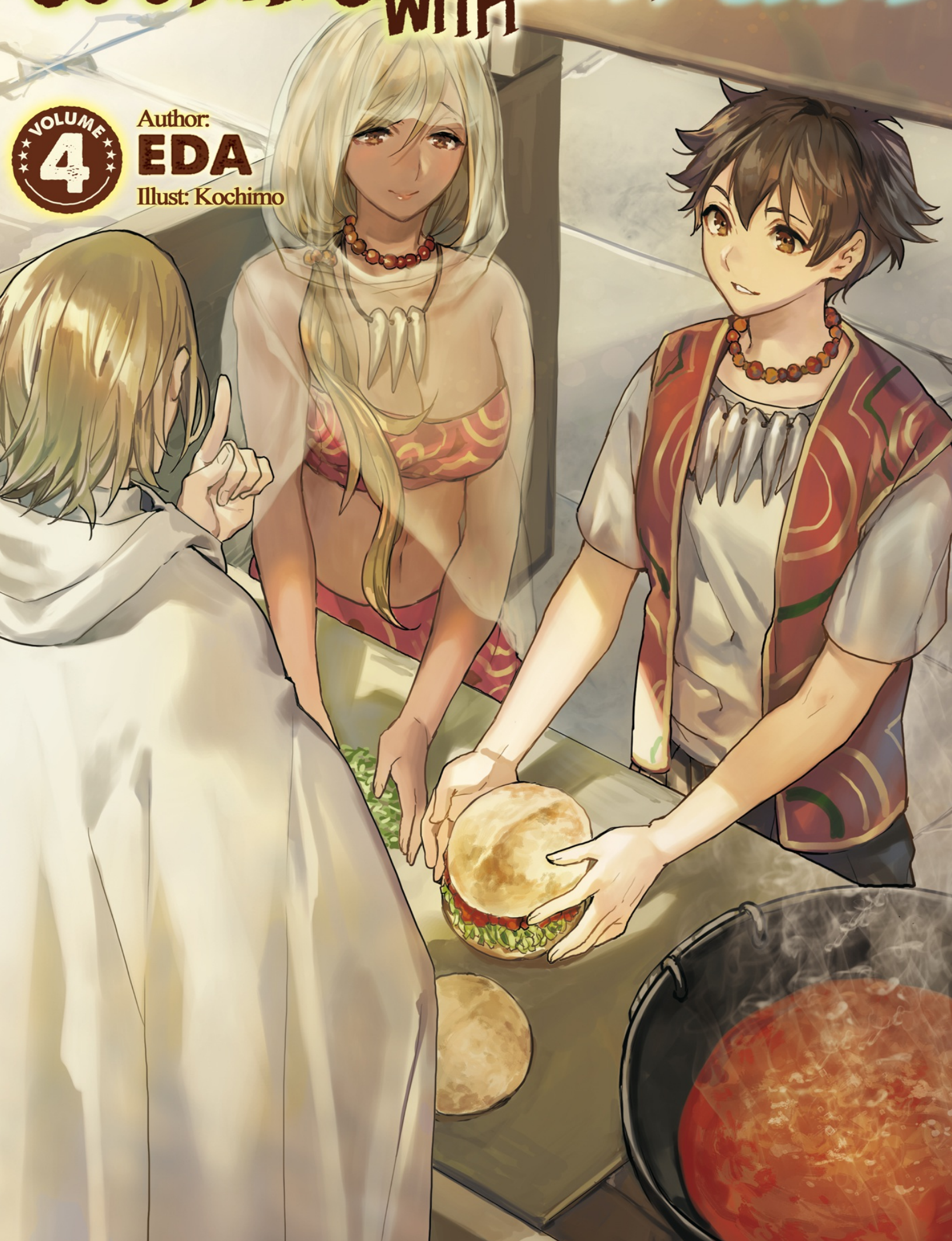
COOKING WITH WILD GAME

VOLUME
4

Author:

EDA

Illust: Kochimo



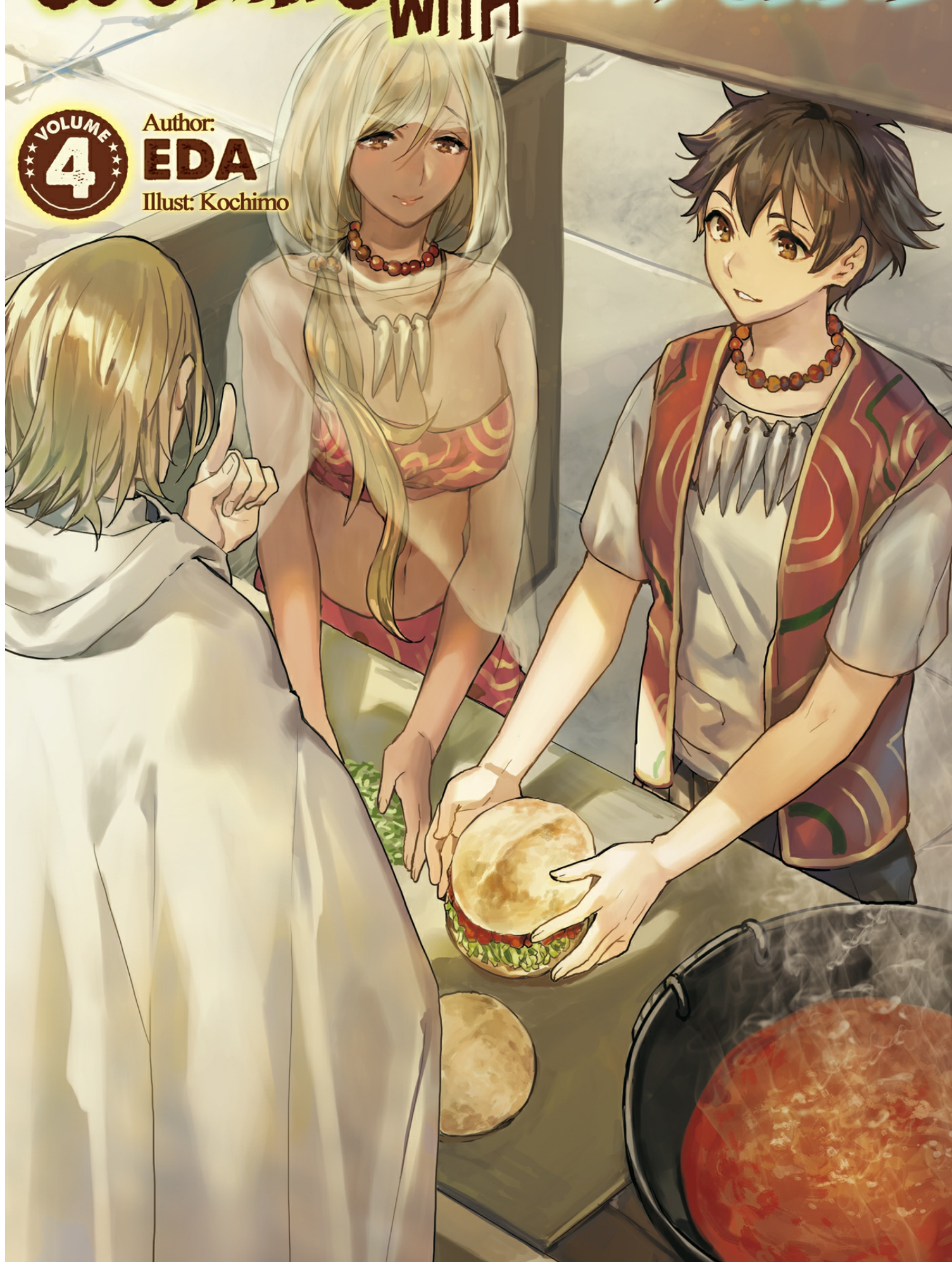
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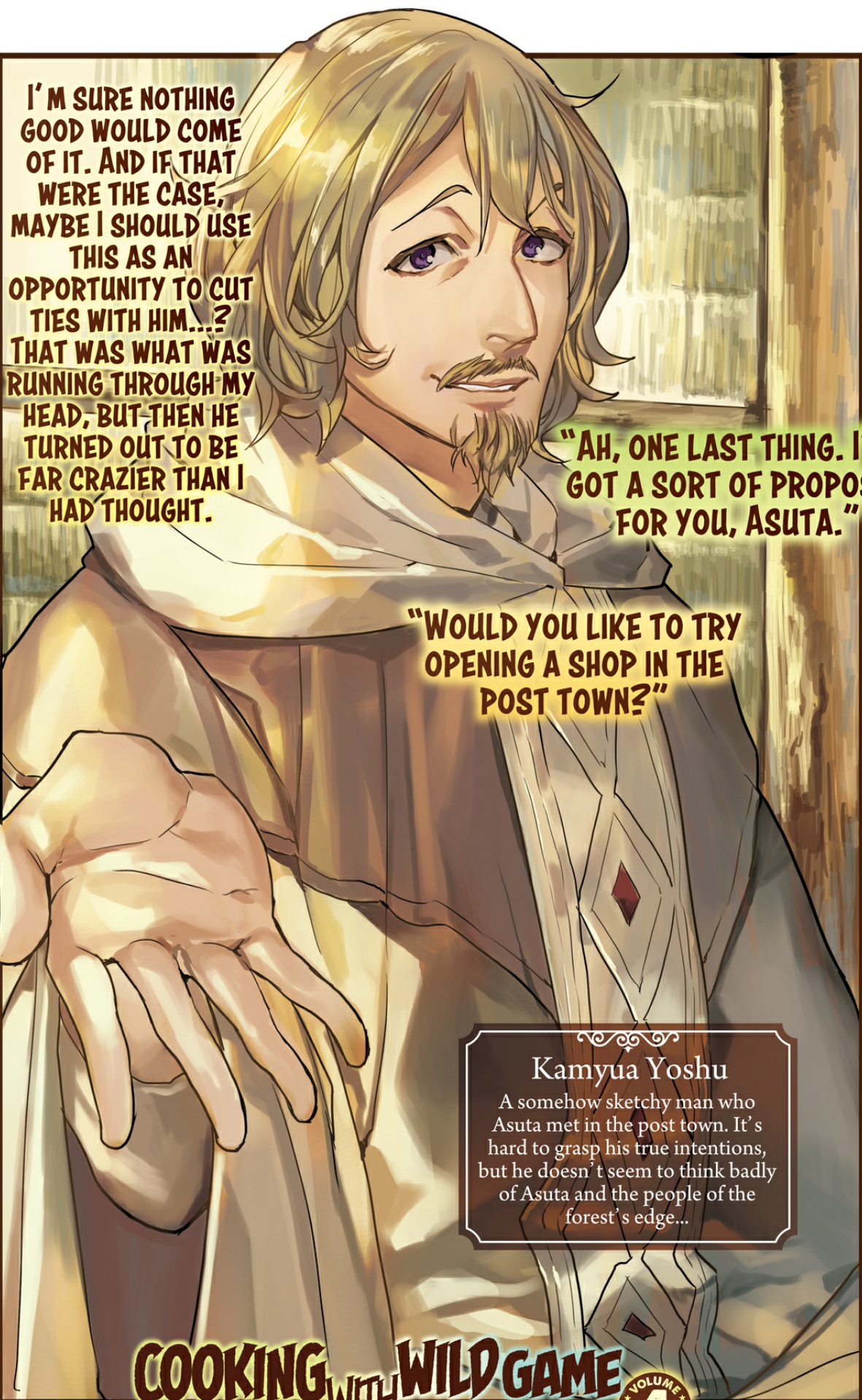
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I'M SURE NOTHING GOOD WOULD COME OF IT. AND IF THAT WERE THE CASE, MAYBE I SHOULD USE THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CUT TIES WITH HIM...? THAT WAS WHAT WAS RUNNING THROUGH MY HEAD, BUT THEN HE TURNED OUT TO BE FAR CRAZIER THAN I HAD THOUGHT.

"AH, ONE LAST THING. I'VE GOT A SORT OF PROPOSAL FOR YOU, ASUTA."

"WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY OPENING A SHOP IN THE POST TOWN?"

Kamyua Yoshu

A somehow sketchy man who Asuta met in the post town. It's hard to grasp his true intentions, but he doesn't seem to think badly of Asuta and the people of the forest's edge...

COOKING WITH WILD GAME

VOLUME
4

WHILE THE PEOPLE THERE INTERACT WITH THE PEOPLE OF THE FOREST'S EDGE, THEY BEAR TERRIBLE PREJUDICE. DESPITE BEING THE NEAREST TOWN TO THE FOREST'S EDGE, IT REMAINED A DISTANT NEIGHBOR. BUT WHAT TYPE OF CHANGE MIGHT BE BROUGHT ABOUT BY ASUTA'S PRESENCE...?


Ai Fa

The head of the Fa clan. She hunts to maintain her house despite being a woman. She's quite fond of Asuta's hamburgers.

Asuta Tsurumi

A chef trainee who finds himself lost in a whole other world. Learning of the merits of spreading giba meat to the post town, he's left troubled as to whether or not to open a shop.





**SHE SEEMED TO
MAKE UP HER MIND
BEFORE TOO LONG,
THOUGH, AS HER
SENSUAL LIPS
OPENED WIDE AND
SHE BIT INTO THE
GIBA BURGER.**

"IT WAS TASTY..."

**WAS VINA RUU SOMEHOW
EVEN MORE CHARMING WHEN
SHE WAS ACTING A BIT
CHILDISH RATHER THAN
SHOOTING FLIRTATIOUS
GLANCES AND WRIGGLING
HER BODY?**

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Chapter 1: A Chaotic Day

1

It was the day after the biggest job of my life, the wedding banquet...

I was walking along a stamped down yellow trail through the forest's edge next to Ai Fa. We were returning to the Fa house from the Ruu settlement, having completed our six day long task.

"Man, I really wish I could've seen the banquet all the way through to the end..." I unintentionally let slip, grumbling as we walked.

I overslept this morning despite rarely doing so, so I missed the chance to help clean up.

The sun was already nearing its peak.

Even before coming to this other world I was a firm believer in "Early to bed, early to rise," but I was just plain exhausted. It really was regrettable.

Ai Fa glared at me from the side as she kept on walking ahead in long, gallant strides.

"You're still saying that? Your job was to prepare the food for the banquet, so there's no real need for you to worry yourself about such matters."

"No, it's not about responsibility, I just wanted to stick it out with everyone till the very end."

When I finally woke up this morning (or should I say an hour ago) and went flying out of our borrowed lodgings, I found no trace left of the prior night's banquet.

The simple stoves made of stone, the stage where the bride and groom had sat, the stands for the torches, and even the burn marks left by the bonfire... It had all been cleaned up neat and tidy, making for a sight that made it feel as if the previous night's banquet had been nothing but a dream.

From what I was told, apparently everyone got up along with the sunrise and took care of cleaning everything up.

“It’s just, the aftermath of a festival like that feels kind of sad. It’s sort of like a hole got ripped open in my heart.”

This was also the day I said farewell to the Ruu settlement after living there for six days. Over that period of time, I had grown close to a whole lot of folks. I didn’t know how to deal with the men at first, but as I taught them about bloodletting and the dissection process, I started feeling a tinge of trust and affection towards them. And it went without saying how I felt about the women I cooked together with.

Suddenly, I was feeling a whole lot more lonely.

“Well, as long as I have Ai Fa, there’s nothing to worry about!” I loudly proclaimed, shouting out my earnest feelings and earning myself a kick in the leg.

“Cut that out and just move on, already. Some new trouble is surely waiting for us today, after all.”

“Yeah, I know.”

An hour passed in that way before we finally arrived back at our nostalgic home for the first time in six days... only to find a blond haired man in a long cloak waiting for us there.

“Hey there. I’m glad to find you looking well, Ai Fa and Asuta.”

He was tall and spindly, like a praying mantis. His blond hair and goatee were unkempt. He had a long and narrow face and nose. The outer corners of his purple eyes drooped down, making it look like he was always smiling. And also, those eyes strangely had both the innocence of a child and the calm of an old person about them.

Yes, it was Kamyua Yoshu, a capricious man whose true nature was still a complete and utter mystery to me.

“I came, just as promised. If it’s alright, could we talk for at least a bit?”

“Yeah. I’ve been wanting to talk things over with you properly too, so I’m

grateful for the opportunity.”

Kamyua Yoshu gave a satisfied smile upon hearing that.

“And I’m very much grateful to hear that *you’re* grateful. I’m also glad to find you in such a good mood, oh lovely female hunter.”

Ai Fa didn’t give him so much as a single syllable.

“Please don’t go smashing my clan head’s good mood to bits... And if we’re going to talk inside the house, you’ll need to let us take charge of your blade.”

“Ooh, is that a custom amongst the people of the forest’s edge? Sounds good to me. I just can’t stop smiling when imagining how much my curiosity will be satisfied today alone,” Kamyua Yoshu said, playing dumb both in words and expression, then offered up his longsword in its leather sheath without a hint of hesitation. It was notably longer than the savage blades wielded by the people of the forest’s edge, but it was also a good bit thinner, so there wasn’t much of a weight difference.

What was this blade meant for cutting, though...?

“...Well then, please come this way.”

Myself, Ai Fa, and our guest passed through the door, in that order.

The Fa house didn’t seem to have changed at all.

Ai Fa kicked off her footwear, hung her fur cloak on the wall, and then sat in her usual position. However, rather than leaning her blade against the wall like she normally did, she kept her guard up and left it near at hand.

I sat down beside her, leaving our guest’s sword nearby as well.

Kamyua Yoshu, meanwhile, gently seated himself without so much as removing his cloak.

He really is a strange fellow...

He saved us from that predicament back in town, and then things almost turned to bloodshed when he showed up at the Ruu settlement. This was my third time meeting the man.

No matter how many times I saw him, though, I could never tell what he was

thinking with that aloof smile of his.

“Now then... First off, I would like to offer an apology.”

“An apology?” I repeated, tilting my head. With that, Kamyua Yoshu smiled even brighter.

“When we first met in the post town, I went and ran my mouth unnecessarily about all sorts of stuff and confused you two. I don’t especially want to actively go against the Suun clan, who lead your people.”

We were suddenly striking at the heart of the matter.

“So could you please cut it out with glaring at me like I’m trying to go up against the people of the forest’s edge? I mean, I came here in the first place because I want to get along with your people. Can’t you believe me?”

Ai Fa had one knee raised and was sitting there solemnly and silently. Regardless of how he may have been taking that, Kamyua Yoshu just smoothly continued on.

“I rushed ahead too much when discussing things back then. I just couldn’t help myself because I was finally getting a chance to interact with people from the forest’s edge, who I had admired for so long, and one of them was a beautiful woman like you, Ai Fa. Please, forgive me.”

Even so, Ai Fa remained silent and expressionless.

This was Ai Fa’s second time meeting him and she had a chance this time around to get her thoughts in order, so perhaps she could now just let a bit of his talkativeness pass her by.

But regardless, it was my job to exchange words with this man and search out his true intentions.

“Well then, let me just ask... What are you after, Kamyua Yoshu?”

“You can just call me Kamyua. And what am I after...?”

“You claimed it was related to work, but you went and came all the way out here just to meet with us. It couldn’t just be to shoot the breeze, right?”

“No, but you see, I really did just want to chat with you...” Kamyua Yoshu said,

staring in amazement. “I’ve felt a kinship with the people of the forest’s edge for a while now. But that was all one-sided, and to you all I’m just some suspicious outsider. It’s only natural that you wouldn’t listen when someone like that comes around and starts talking about the laws of the forest’s edge or the corruption of the clan that leads your people. And so, I came here hoping to start out by deepening my relationship with you two.”

With that, Kamyua Yoshu pulled out a bottle of fruit wine from within the folds of his cloak.

“This is a gift, to drink at nighttime or whatever suits your fancy. Ah, right, gotta show it’s not poisoned,” he said, taking a swig of the fruit wine.

“Hmm... I still don’t feel like that answers my question, though. You say you want to deepen your relations with the people of the forest’s edge, but I still have no idea why or for what purpose.”

“Huh? Do you need some sort of reason or purpose for wanting to get along with others? If I had to say... I suppose it would be the empathy I feel towards your people for having to change their gods, the respect for the solitary hunters of the forest’s edge I’ve seen about the post town, and the personal interest and fondness I have for the two of you. I think those three things form the core of my actions.”

He sure could talk. But though his logic was quite sound, his tone and the expression on his face came across as flimsy.

“But you all must have some interest in me to invite me into your house like this, right? I mean, you’re not fond of townsfolk by nature, are you? Is it just hard to ignore it when someone like me comes here to the forest’s edge?”

“Thank you for putting in the effort to acknowledge our feelings... By the way, did you discuss the matter of your job with the Suun clan?”

“Ah, yeah. If I were to try to bypass them and handle it through some other clan, it would trample on their honor and could cause some unnecessary strife, which I would feel bad about.”

This man’s job was to guard a group of merchants heading from Genos to the Eastern Kingdom of Sym. And in the process he wanted to pass through the

settlement at the forest's edge, so apparently he had requested to have the Suun clan help lead the way or something.

"I'm surprised things went smoothly. I mean, considering how you got involved with their main household..."

"Yeah. I made sure to give my real name, but there weren't any problems at all. I guess you have to be broad-minded to lead a people, even if you are corrupt," Kamyua Yoshu said with a grin. While it may not be nice to say so, it was honestly hard to trust that face.

"It'll still be a while before that job comes to pass, by the way. It's a rather massive group so it'll take a whole lot of time to prepare, and they also seem to be a rather superstitious crowd. The lucky day for departing on a journey is said to be the fifteenth day of a month, so there are still over twenty days left from today."

Now that he mentioned it, I still hadn't learned how the calendar worked in this world, or even which day of what month it was currently.

But so nobody would pick up on that, I just said, "I see," and gave a vague nod.

"So, it'll take two whole months between leaving here for the Eastern Kingdom of Sym and returning. That's why I want to form as much of a bond with you all as possible in these next twenty days. Thank you for accepting a suspicious guy like me rather than just rejecting me, you two."

"Well, it's not like we've formed a firm bond just yet, though..."

"There's no value in a bond formed so easily. A bond becomes strong enough to last by overcoming countless trials together."

He may have had some nice lines, taken at face value, but there really was something flimsy about them when they were coming from him. As I wondered just why that was, my stomach suddenly broke the silence with a *gurrrgle*.

Ai Fa's glare had been fixed on Kamyua Yoshu, but now it coldly turned my way.

"Are you hungry? If it's mealtime for you all, then don't worry about me being

here.”

“No, I don’t really normally eat much during the day. It’s just last night I didn’t really get a chance to have a proper meal...”

“That’s not good at all! You’re already so thin, so you need to make sure you eat properly.”

I didn’t exactly want to be told that by such a spindly guy, but maybe he only looked so thin because he was so incredibly tall.

It was hard to tell because of his long cloak, but he seemed to have a firm build from the wrists on up, and if I wasn’t mistaken, his fingers were long enough and his palms thick enough that he wouldn’t lose out to Jiza or Darmu Ruu.

“The sun only just hit its peak. Hmm... I suppose it really would be rough eating nothing but dried meat till sunset. Ai Fa, is it alright if I use up just a bit of meat and aria?”

“Do as you please,” she replied, so I headed towards the pantry.

Our guest called out, “Um, excuse me...” with sparkling eyes and stopped me. “When you said ‘meat,’ did you perhaps mean giba meat? If so, would you mind if I eat just a bit, too?”

In that instant, a crack ran through Ai Fa’s calm expression.

“Someone from the city of stone... wants to eat giba meat?”

“Hmm? Is there something strange about that? It’s mainly just the people of the Genos domain who have such feelings of dread and aversion towards the people of the forest’s edge,” Kamyua Yoshu said with a cheerful smile. “I wasn’t born in the Western Kingdom at all, much less Genos in particular, so to me the giba are nothing but a pest, and the people of the forest’s edge are just brave hunters who take them down. The travelers from the south and west wandering around the post town don’t look at you with such fear in their eyes, right? So this should be nothing to feel surprised about.”

He said all that, but I didn’t even know which ones were the people from the east or the south or wherever. However, I got the impression that there were a

lot of yellowish brown skinned folks amongst those who looked at Ai Fa with fear or contempt in their eyes.

“Still, it’s true that no people but those of the forest’s edge eat giba meat, I believe. I don’t know about the south or the east, but at least when it comes to the western lands, giba don’t exist outside of the Morga forest’s edge. If I can have the honor of being the first person of the Western Kingdom to eat giba meat, then that alone would be enough to make my trip out here today worthwhile!”

His eyes were seriously sparkling like those of a child.

Meanwhile, Ai Fa still clearly had a troubled look on her face.

This must have been quite a shocking development, considering how the people of the forest’s edge had been derided as “giba eaters” for nearly 80 years.

“What do you think, Ai Fa? You’re the clan head. I’ll abide by whatever you say,” I asked from my half-risen posture, only to be suddenly grabbed by the collar. I just barely avoided falling over, while Ai Fa came in close in a way that made it look like she was about to bite my throat.

“I... I cannot make a decision. Asuta, what do you think?”

She was so close to me, but she was whispering so quietly that I could just barely hear her. She must not have wanted the guest sitting right in front of us to hear, no matter what.

I moved back in surprise, and then when I saw Ai Fa’s face, I was even more shocked. Her expression remained stiff and chilly, but there was a childish unease in her blue eyes.

Was it really that shocking?

I used my own body as a shield to hide that face from our guest, then drew in close to whisper in her ear.

“As long as it doesn’t brush up against any of the forest’s edge’s taboos, I don’t especially mind. How about if I offer him some meat and aria as thanks for the fruit wine he brought as a gift?”

She yanked me closer by the collar again.

“...I leave the decision up to you.”

Ai Fa’s lips touched my earlobe, causing me to feel a little flustered.

While making sure to hide how I was feeling, I turned back towards our guest and gave an easygoing nod.

“My clan head gave her permission, so I’d like to serve you a light meal. It’ll be as thanks for the fruit wine, so I would like to prepare as much as you’d like rather than just a bite.”

“Then I’ll take as much as you’re having!”

It sort of felt like a huge old dog was happily wagging its tail at me.

But still, this may prove to be a good opportunity. Sharing a meal really was an effective method to have a heart-to-heart talk with someone, after all. And so, I headed towards the pantry again, thinking it would be nice if this let me see inside this suspicious fellow’s mind at least a bit.

In the meantime, Ai Fa gently closed her eyes, showing no intention of responding to Kamyua Yoshu as he blathered away.

2

“Thanks for waiting.”

Considering the time of day, I didn’t exactly feel like making any sort of elaborate dish.

And so, I just cut giba rib meat to an appropriate thinness, heated it up together with sliced aria, then added some fruit wine after flavoring it with rock salt and pico leaves, making for a simple stir-fried meat and vegetables dish.

“You sure seem skilled at that. Were you a chef in town in your past life or something, Asuta?”

“Ah, well, something like that.”

As I replied, I offered our guest a wooden spoon and plate.

It was about 1/4th the size of my usual dishes. That was what I went with because I figured he would eat all of it even if it wasn't to his taste.

"My, I sure am happy! I've run all around the western domain, and I've even visited the Eastern and Southern Kingdoms now and again, but I've never seen another animal like the giba. I've been interested for a while now in what such a gallant looking animal's meat tastes like."

I see. Apparently in my world wild pigs aside from boars had all died out, but did such animals not even exist in this world to begin with?

At any rate, we went ahead with our light meal.

Kamyua Yoshu said, "Thanks for this blessing," while picking up the wooden spoon with a wide grin on his face. And then, he used it to scoop up a bit of giba meat and aria and chuck them in his mouth.

His unshaven jaw moved up and down greatly as he chewed, and then he swallowed it down.

And then, the expression completely vanished from Kamyua Yoshu's long, narrow face.

I almost dropped my wooden spoon in surprise.

As soon as the thin smile pulled back from his face, Kamyua Yoshu's aloof expression shifted to the ominous countenance of an assassin, or the Grim Reaper.

His eyebrows were raised while his eyes were caved in, and it looked like the flesh had been shaved away from his cheeks. Up until now I had paid no attention to the shading of his face, but suddenly it felt downright terrifying.

Ai Fa had regained her composure as I was cooking, but with this change she was staring at Kamyua Yoshu as if she didn't want to miss a thing.

In the meantime, Kamyua Yoshu kept on moving his spoon until he had eaten up the contents of his plate in no time at all.

Thanks to all that, I hadn't moved my spoon at all since eating my first bite.

A voice lower than the one he had used till now slipped out from his thin, wide lips.

“...What is this?”

“Ah, I mean, it’s a giba dish.”

“Yes, that’s right... This is my first time eating meat like this.”

His purple eyes looked towards me with a sharp, piercing light in them.

“This is insanely delicious, isn’t it?”

“Ah, really? I’m honored...”

“So, this is giba meat?”

“Yes...”

“This really is the first time I’ve ever eaten meat that was this tasty.”

“Um, sir! Your face is seriously scary!”

“Huh? What? Really? Sorry!”

With that, Kamyua Yoshu suddenly wrapped up his long, slender face on both sides with his large palms.

“That’s no good! I was so surprised that my hidden face slipped out! Both my public and hidden faces are the real me though, so don’t misunderstand!”

I not only wasn’t worried about misunderstanding, I didn’t even want to understand in the first place.

Rather than coming to understand one another through eating together, it had only made him seem all the more suspicious.

“Man, that sure was tasty! I’m moved! Your people have been keeping this delicious meat all to yourselves? That’s no fair!”

He had put away his hidden face or whatever, but he was still just as suspicious as always.

As I shot a sideways glance her way, I caught Ai Fa sighing. It scared me a little to notice that she was removing her grasp from the sword at her feet, which was partway out of its scabbard.

This man really had given off a seriously sinister aura.

“So the people of Genos have been calling you all giba-eaters while knowing

nothing of this delicious flavor, huh? How utterly stupid! Did you all decide to keep this wonderful meat to yourselves as an act of revenge against them?"

"No, that's not it at all," I replied, then finally took my second bite of food.

When I did Ai Fa nudged me with her fist, her knee still up in the air.

"Asuta. I'm a little hungry now too thanks to that smell."

"Huh? There's nothing I can do about that now, though. I mean, that's why I asked if you needed any back when I was making it..." As I said that, I scooped up some meat and aria with my wooden spoon. "Here. Say 'aah.'"

The top of my head was hit with a jab. Then my plate was ripped away and she stole two bites before thrusting the remains back at me.

That was just plain mean...

"Hmm... I'm impressed! Still, this deliciousness is thanks to your skill too, isn't it? The amount of salt is just perfect, and the fruit wine flavor is great too. Asuta, did you study under a famous chef?"

"Not at all. My family just owned a small restaurant."

"In what country? I've never seen anything like it in any of the nations I'm aware of."

So, the conversation shifted that way, huh?

Well, no matter who I was dealing with, my stance on that matter wouldn't change.

"It would take a while to explain, but I was born in an island nation known as Japan. I'd never even heard of the Amusehorn continent, but one day I suddenly found myself waking up in the forest at the foot of Mount Morga."

"...You'd never heard of Amusehorn?" Kamyua Yoshu questioned, his eyes opening wide once again.

Well, that came as no surprise. If I met a foreigner in Japan who had never heard of the nation, I'd probably be just as surprised.

"What do you mean? I was assuming you were of mixed blood from the east and west, judging by your appearance..."

“Ah, are people with mixed heritage from the east and west common?”

“They’re rare, but the countries are on friendly terms, after all. It needs to be firmly decided which nation they’ll belong to from the start, but they aren’t especially persecuted... Wait, are you saying you didn’t even know that much, Asuta?”

“Sorry, but I honestly didn’t.”

We had been far too busy lately, so Ai Fa’s lectures on the history of Amusehorn had to be called off. After all, I ended up drifting off to sleep whenever we were chatting about trifling matters after dinner.

Actually, Ai Fa herself was part of this unique isolationist tribe at the forest’s edge, so she didn’t seem to be all that knowledgeable to start with. When it came to matters concerning the world at large, she just passed on what she had heard from her parents or Granny Jiba.

“Hmm... So that’s why you decided to live as a person of the forest’s edge despite being a foreigner? To the people of the west, the people of the forest’s edge are symbolic of disaster, to those of the south they’re a tribe of traitors who abandoned their god, and to those of the north they’re sworn enemies... That’s why I had you pegged as having been born in the Eastern Kingdom, Asuta.”

“My kingdom was called the far eastern island nation. Do a lot of folks from the east look like me, perhaps?”

“Not really? A lot of them do indeed have black hair and eyes, but their skin is also often real dark. There were a lot of folks like that walking around the post town, right? They’re from the Eastern Kingdom of Sym.”

I see. Apparently there was no point in trying to apply my old common sense here.

“Well, I don’t really get it at all myself. I don’t mind if you just think I’m a fool who hit his head and started believing in some strange delusions or whatever.”

“Got it. That’s what I’ll do, then.”

I was seriously taken aback.

“Ah, but I don’t think you’re a fool, though. Hmm, still... It sure was a shock. I never imagined giba meat would be this tasty... The rumors about Genos all said that giba meat stunk and was hard, making it practically inedible.”

“I’m sure those rumors were spread by folks who had eaten meat that hadn’t been properly prepared. But giba meat is delicious.”

“Yeah! I’m well aware, now! A part of me had believed that since they primarily subsisted on aria and poitan, the people of the forest’s edge didn’t have much interest in food and just kept on living in honorable poverty. Preconceptions sure are frightening. Rather than living in noble poverty, it wouldn’t be strange at all for you to introduce yourselves as a race of gourmands. Hmm, this sure is a shock...”

“Ah, hold on a second. I was born in another nation entirely, so please take that matter into account. I believe your impression that they’re a race that lives in noble poverty with little interest in food was right on the mark.”

“Is that so? But this giba meat is just so delicious, so I don’t think the term ‘poverty’ suits them. Though I suppose even if they have such tasty meat, they otherwise just eat cheap aria and poitan, huh? Hmm, how interesting!”

What should I do here?

I didn’t feel like telling this suspicious guy everything just yet, but with that said, I also got the feeling that it would be dangerous to let him feed Duke Genos false information.

“Kamyua Yoshu, my apologies, but could I ask that you give us a little time?”

“Hmm? For what?”

“I was born in a foreign nation, so I still don’t fully understand the rules and taboos of the forest’s edge. To be frank, I’m not able to judge how much I should be talking to you about internal matters here at the forest’s edge. And so, I’d like to privately discuss that matter with my clan head.”

“Yeah, go right ahead! You’ve been the only one chiming in as I’ve been blathering on, anyway. So if you were to stop talking, I’d just be talking to myself! In that case, if you want, shall I leave for a few hours? To be honest I still haven’t finished my preparations for my job, so I wanted to check things

out a bit further south, too.”

“South... The Ruu settlement is in that direction, isn’t it?”

“I won’t go near there today. It seems I’m not especially welcome, and I learned in the process that I really need to be a bit more careful in how I handle the people of the forest’s edge.”

In that case, I guess something good came from Darmu Ruu pointing a blade at him. Though with that said, I think it would have been better if he had realized it before things had come to that...

“But if you’re heading south, you won’t be able to avoid passing in front of the Ruu settlement. The settlement is set up as one long, narrow path, after all.”

“It’ll be fine. I’m skilled at hiding. I did a good job of it yesterday, didn’t I?”

“...What?”

“I stealthily watched the banquet yesterday from the shadows of the forest. It caused me quite a fright when those young folks from the Suun clan showed up, but fortunately things didn’t end up turning violent.”

Kamyua Yoshu didn’t look shy in the least about saying that, and he even gave a big smile.

3

“Hey, seriously, what do you think of that old-timer?” I asked Ai Fa while simmering poitan. “I felt like I had less and less of a grip on him the more we talked. Would it be smarter to just not get involved with him any further?”

“...I don’t know,” Ai Fa replied, her voice sounding a bit listless. “I never had any intention of forming bonds with anyone from the city of stone, but that man didn’t say anything particularly illogical. It’s just that his attitude wasn’t serious in the least.”

“That’s for sure. It certainly would be a whole lot easier if we could just trust that old-timer... He’s like the complete and utter opposite of Jiza Ruu, who’s

always super serious even if we don't see eye to eye. And both of them have eyes that make it look like they're always smiling..."

"And that man... He ate giba meat," Ai Fa muttered with a gloomy look in her eyes. "I never imagined someone from the city of stone would do such a thing. That was what surprised me most of all."

"Really? I wasn't born at the forest's edge, and I've only ever been to the post town once, but that old-timer's words made sense to me."

"...What do you mean?"

"Huh? I mean how he said giba and the people of the forest's edge who hunt them are only seen as symbolic of disaster by the people born in Genos. The folks of Genos had their fields attacked so that leaves plenty of room for misunderstandings and misconceptions, but people born elsewhere have no reason to fear you all, right? Plus it should have been decades since giba were last actually causing such disasters anyway..."

Ai Fa was silent.

"And the majority of the folks doing business there must be Genos natives, so the people of the forest's edge have probably mostly just dealt with folks who were afraid of them. If there were more foreigners out there who could ignore the strength and slightly isolationist nature of the people of the forest's edge like that old-timer, maybe those misunderstandings never would have spread around as much as they have."

"...Asuta, it's hard to understand what you're saying," Ai Fa whined. Yes, Ai Fa went and offered such a feeble complaint, shockingly. "You really were born in a city of stone, even if it wasn't Genos. Your words are just as confusing as those of that Kamyua Yoshu fellow."

"Yeah. It's true that the place I was born and raised really was closer to that post town than this forest's edge. But just because something's hard to understand, doesn't mean it's alright to neglect the effort to—"

"Who are you saying is 'neglecting the effort'?"

The frail tone of voice she used seriously took me aback.

As she sat against the wall by the stove, Ai Fa was making an even sadder expression than I had thought, casting her eyes downward.

“It’s difficult to understand, but I’m trying to do so. Are you blaming me for being slow to understand...?”

“N-No, I’m not! Sorry! I was wrong there! So I’m begging you, please don’t cry!”

“As if I’d cry! Just what sort of person do you think I am?!”

That practically sounded like a line I would yell, and Ai Fa’s face was a little red as she said it. Still, that was a whole heck of a lot better than her looking like she was going to cry.

“Well at any rate, let’s at least decide on a plan for now. How much should we be opening up to that old-timer? Is there anything it’d be bad to let him know? And is there anything we really *should* tell him about? I think it’d be good to at least firmly decide on those matters.”

“Understood,” Ai Fa replied, and then for some reason she suddenly stood up and circled behind my back as I heated up the poitan.

As I was wondering what was going on, she suddenly placed her hands on both my shoulders and whispered into my ear, “What do you think, Asuta?”

I was a bit taller than her, so she must have been standing on her tiptoes. And she wasn’t touching anything but my shoulders, but I could vaguely feel the warmth of her body running all the way down my back.

“H-Hold on a second! Why is it like we’re talking in secret even though we already drove that old-timer away?”

“It’s not certain that man has gone away from this house, is it? What if he’s listening in from the other side of one of these walls?”

Even so, did she really intend to spend the next few hours this close and personal?

“H-Hold on! It looks like the poitan are done heating up. I need to deal with them.”

The warmth from Ai Fa’s body quietly withdrew.

Seriously, this was worse for my heart than dealing with Vina Ruu.

As I transferred the dissolved poitan into a little boat made from a pseudo rubber tree leaf, I stealthily wiped the sweat from my brow.

I had used six poitan, enough for three people.

Kamyua Yoshu was going to return before sunset, so he asked if he could join us for dinner.

“I’m not asking you to let me stay the night! I’m just suddenly very interested in the cuisine of the people of the forest’s edge, is all! And if you need me to pay, that’s no problem!”

The fruit wine he had brought seemed to be especially high class, so I had no intention of asking him to pay. And Ai Fa gave her permission, albeit with a complex expression on her face, so I ended up preparing dinner for three.

“Now then, before we talk things over in secret, why don’t we decide on tonight’s menu?”

While scraping off the burned dregs left by the poitan with a wooden spatula, I turned around and looked Ai Fa’s way.

“What do you want for dinner?”

“Hamburgers.”

That was quick!

I looked shocked, and then Ai Fa restated, “...Hamburgers.” I mean, even if you say it again...

“I see. Now that I think of it, though, this menu may require some thought too...”

Ai Fa approached me from the side, placed a hand on my neck, brought herself up to around my height, and then whispered, “What do you mean?”

Was she being serious with all this?

“I mean, it might not be such a good thing to give him the impression that hamburgers are a regular meal at the forest’s edge, right? But if we explain in detail, that’ll involve expanding the conversation to cover our relationship with

the Ruu and Rutim. And I think it would be good to decide in advance just how much of that information we should reveal.”

I had no choice but to ask Ai Fa, but she was currently so incredibly close that the aromatic particles coming off of her invaded my nasal cavity even if I held my breath. And even though I had just had a snack, Ai Fa’s aroma was igniting a fresh hunger in me.

Knowing nothing about that mental state of mine, Ai Fa brought her lips up to my ear once again.

“...Why?”

“Hey! If you’re just going to add a little interjection like that, then you don’t need to whisper, right?!”

“I suppose that’s so,” she replied, turning her ear towards me again.

So I really did need to whisper, huh?

“Umm... That old-timer seems to have some sort of connection with the lord of the Genos domain, right? Feeding someone like that false information could lead to further misunderstandings, and besides, he doesn’t seem overly fond of the Suun clan, so doesn’t it seem like a bad idea to tell him too much about the Ruu and Rutim?”

“...But that man has already met Donda Ruu, and he knows of our involvement with that banquet, doesn’t he?” Ai Fa whispered.

It somehow felt like my right earlobe was on the verge of just up and melting off.

“That’s true. And so, the important thing here is... The question of whether we should hide the fact that Donda Ruu is ready to move to crush the Suun clan as the opportunity presents itself, or if we should reveal it.”

This question required a bit of contemplation.

Having exhausted my stamina, I plopped down on the floor and nudged the aria awaiting its turn to shine with the tip of my finger.

“Still, though—”

“Uwah!”

“What is it? Don’t go scaring me like that, you fool.”

“I-I’m the one getting scared here, dummy! Don’t go suddenly whispering at me from behind like that!”

“...You should be able to sense my presence at least that much, right?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t have the sort of first-rate detection skills you hunters do! So I’m begging you, please approach from where I can see you!”

“So fussy...” Ai Fa muttered in dissatisfaction, moving around in front of me and squatting down. Then, she grabbed my jaw, turned my head sideways, and moved in close.

“But still, as long as the possibility exists of that man having further contact with Donda Ruu, it would also be foolish to try to hide things carelessly... Of course, we have no duty to actively tell him anything.”

I see. So I’ve got nowhere to run. I’m sure this was a case of God testing my reasoning or nature or something.

What a serious pain.

“Got it. Let’s hit on the key point, then. Ai Fa, what do you think we shouldn’t tell that Kamyua Yoshu guy?”

Ai Fa was lost in contemplation once again.

We were close enough that I think if I moved the tip of my nose just 10 centimeters, it would bump into her knee.

I seriously just couldn’t feel calm in this situation.

Before long Ai Fa looked up, then hurriedly whispered into my ear, “...Nothing in particular.”

“Nothing?!”

I reflexively almost wanted to dope slap the back of her head.

Ai Fa pouted her lips, right up close and personal to my face.

“You’re the one who brought up the idea of this secret talk, aren’t you? You

must have your own thoughts, right? If so, then let me hear them.”

Then, she turned away in a huff.

What the heck? I was already feeling just as worn out as I was from the big job yesterday...

“I mean, you said that you thought of the Suun clan as the shame of the forest’s edge, but you also couldn’t stand townsfolk trying to deal with them, right? So for example, if that old-timer were to have Doddo Suun executed for his crimes, would that make him an enemy of the people of the forest’s edge?”

Ai Fa furrowed her brows, looking puzzled.

Then, she replied not in a whisper, but in her usual voice.

“If a member of the Suun clan is judged for breaking the laws of the city, they are the ones at fault. In that case, there would be no need to try to get vengeance for them... But if someone from the city were to dare to judge them based on the laws of the forest’s edge, and were using the people of the forest’s edge for their benefit in the process, that would seem to be nothing but a crafty scheme to me.”

I see. The explanation was a little tricky, but ultimately she was saying that if someone breaks the laws of the city then its citizens should judge them, and if someone runs afoul of the laws of the forest’s edge, then the people of the forest’s edge should judge them, huh?

“Hmm... But in actuality, the Suun clan is breaking laws left and right, aren’t they? But currently, there isn’t anyone in the forest’s edge to cast judgment on them, right?”

“What are you saying? I haven’t let the Suun clan’s tyranny slip by even once.”

“I know, and I think that’s amazing... But everyone at the forest’s edge can’t behave the way that you do, right? Just yesterday, everyone was just standing there and bearing that atrocity from the Suun clan with serious anger on their faces, at least until Donda Ruu and Dan Rutim made a move.”

“There’s no way they would ever display hostility towards the Suun clan

without permission from the head of their clan. I'm free to behave as I wish, though, because I'm the head of my own clan."

"Then, I hate to ask this, but... Do the people from small clans without any ties to the Ruu just have to keep on bearing the Suun clan's tyranny?"

Ai Fa bit her lip a bit and glared up at me, then replied, "Even if they are the clan that leads our people, if they were to openly act in a tyrannical manner, all of our people would have no choice but to turn to the Ruu clan. And so, those fools have been exercising some small amount of self restraint so that things wouldn't come to that."

"In other words, they keep their evildoing in secret because they can't let it be out in the open, huh?"

Ai Fa let those words stand.

"Ai Fa, you're strong. Because of that, you were able to rein in Diga and Doddó Suun's wrongdoing. But if folks who lack your strength just have to choke back tears in the shadows... I really don't think I can just accept that."

"...I only have the power to stop tyranny happening in front of me," Ai Fa responded, grabbing me by the collar again. It didn't feel violent, though. More like she was clinging to me a bit.

"I can only manage myself. And so..."

And so, she had lived on her own?

And so, I became a burden for her?

I nodded and placed my own hands over Ai Fa's.

"I'm sorry if it came across like I was blaming in you. Nobody would ever forgive something so inhumane. I mean, that was why the Ruu and Rutim folks were so furious, too... By the way, is the Suun clan's power really all that great? They may have nearly 100 men under them just like the Ruu, but would everyone under them just do as they say?"

"I don't know. I don't even know all of the clans under them."

"Ah, I see... But those folks under them can't all be corrupt, right?"

“I have no way of knowing that, either... But if all hundred of them under the Suun clan were neglecting their giba hunting duty, the forest would have long since been overflowing with the beasts.”

“That’s true. I mean, if a hundred out of the five hundred living in this settlement were corrupt like that...” I started to say, only to remember some ominous words I had heard. “...Now that I think of it, Ludo Ruu told me there were too many giba around. Shin Ruu’s dad had his leg done in because three giba charged them at once, even though they don’t usually attack in packs. And then he asked how things were with the forest around the Fa house lately, but...”

A somewhat intense expression crossed Ai Fa’s face, and her hands kept gripping my collar.

“You should have been aware of that matter since the day after we met, Asuta.”

“Huh?”

“You asked me if the giba would be wiped out if we kept hunting them each and every day. And at that time, I replied that rather than decreasing, the number of giba was growing year by year.”

I was silent.

“The number of giba is clearly increasing. It’s obviously an abundant period at the moment, but even so, it’s a bit odd how many there are... To be honest, there are currently so many giba filling the forest that I don’t even need to use the giba summoning fruit.”

“Huh? Then you’re not doing any sacrificial hunting?”

“For the last few days, I haven’t been. Even so, I’ve still been taking down one every two days.”

“Really? That *is* odd. Then this sweet smell isn’t from the giba summoning fruit?”

Ai Fa’s face immediately flushed beet red, and her fingers grasping my collar grabbed on tighter.

“The scent of giba summoning fruit doesn’t disappear easily once it gets in my hair! And I’ve told you for a while now to stop spouting such nonsense about my smell, haven’t I, Asuta?”

“No, but I was just complimenting you...”

“Silence! At any rate... the number of giba continues to grow year by year.”

“I see. Still, Ludo Ruu didn’t go and state it so clearly. He ultimately just said he got that feeling.”

“...The Ruu settlement is located farther south than my home. And the Suun settlement is north of here.”

While there was still a bit of red to her cheeks, a raging flame had been lit in Ai Fa’s eyes.

“Which is to say, if the Suun clan were to keep neglecting their duty as hunters, the effects may appear more strongly to the north.”

“...So as far as you can tell, the number of giba has continued to grow?”

This may be more urgent of a situation than I had been thinking.

Even setting aside my petty morals and sense of justice, ignoring the corruption of the Suun clan may lead to the downfall of the people of the forest’s edge in general, huh?

“...Ai Fa. This may be too big for us to handle. Shouldn’t that Kamyua Yoshu guy try to form a relationship with the Ruu or Rutim rather than us?”

“That would be pointless.”

“Huh? But why?”

“Consider Donda Ruu’s disposition. That man is prepared to take up his blade without a hint of hesitation as soon as the Suun clan’s corruption crosses the line. He would say that we don’t need help from the city of stone, and would wish to restore order to the forest’s edge by our own hands... And I can’t say I don’t understand that feeling.”

Then, though it was rather unlike her, Ai Fa gave a sigh.

“It’s precisely because I understand that feeling that I didn’t want to become

the spark that lights up a conflict. A great many hunters would be lost in an all out battle between the Ruu and Suun, and order at the forest's edge would surely collapse."

"But even so, you won't rely on the city of stone's aid...?"

I couldn't help but sigh myself.

The situation was so incredibly tense, and Ai Fa and I had a chance encounter with someone who seemed to be connected to the greatest authority in the Genos lands.

Just what sort of role did the gods or devils or whatever have laid out for our tiny clan of two?

For the time being, all I could think to do as a mere powerless chef was to slice off some meat for my clan head and our guest.

4

"Hey there, sorry I'm late."

Our guest came wandering back in just around when the sun touched the treeline to the west.

"Only 500 people live here, yet this settlement sure is vast. It's my second time visiting, but I still haven't grasped the full picture of its scope."

"Is there a need for you to do so?"

"Ah, no, well, I mean, it *is* a big job, after all..."

A few hours may have passed, but Kamyua Yoshu still seemed just as sketchy as always.

"Still, that sure is a wonderful smell! It was worth not chewing on dried meat along the way so I could get nice and hungry! Ah, right, here's my sword."

"Please, come this way. I just finished preparing."

We weren't really planning on throwing our schedules out of whack, so we had been planning on just going ahead and eating if Kamyua Yoshu was late to arrive.

And then, he went and returned with such perfect timing that I couldn't help but worry that maybe he really had been listening in on us this whole time.

More so than any concerns about him overhearing what we had discussed, I really just didn't want to imagine him seeing Ai Fa unwittingly trap me in such close proximity like that.

"Whoa, this is amazing! Why is the meat in such a round shape?"

"This is made by dicing up the meat and then balling it back up."

"Hmm... So why go through all that trouble?"

"Because it's delicious."

Did no dishes like hamburgers exist in this world?

Well, maybe it was just that this old-timer wasn't aware of any.

"Anyway, let's eat. We're good and hungry by now, too."

"Yeah! Let's go ahead and do it!"

I had decided to stop thinking so much about dinner, and just went ahead and treated him to the Fa house's staple dinner. That meant giba meat hamburgers, stir-fried aria and tino, and baked poitan.

I really wanted to hurry up and buy a new pot so I could add soup to the menu, too.

"Hmm? Is this fuwano? But I had heard that the people of the forest's edge ate poitan as a staple dish..."

"It is poitan. What's fuwano?"

"The skin of that manju Tara was eating was made from it. In the west, it's frequently eaten along with meat and vegetables, so... Huh? This is poitan? Seriously? How?"

So even outside of the forest's edge, nobody had discovered this way of eating poitan?

My curiosity was flaring up a bit, so I leaned forwards.

"Um, by the way, how do they eat poitan in town?"

“Nobody eats poitan in town. People just keep it in reserve to eat when they’re traveling. You don’t have to worry about it going bad like with fuwano, and when you want to eat it you just have to heat it up in warm water. Plus, it’s cheap, making it the perfect food for a long trip... But it’s not tasty or anything, which is the one issue with it.”

“That’s an unfortunate issue,” I chimed in, only for Ai Fa to tug on the sleeve of my t-shirt. Apparently her hunger had reached a critical point.

“Well then, go ahead. Just please try to restrain that hidden face of yours if at all possible.”

“I’ll handle it! Well then, I appreciate this blessing.”

“Let’s dig in!”

“...”

Having each kicked off the meal in our own way, we picked up our wooden plates.

I may have prepared a whole ton of hamburgers yesterday, but this was the first time in a while that I was actually eating one. But it seemed like after making so many, I really had controlling the flames down pat, which made me a little happy.

I went with a big size for them, around 500 grams each. As I bit into the fruit wine sauce-coated patty, warm meat juices came flowing out and satisfyingly filled my mouth. And as I chewed more and more afterward, the deliciousness of the meat and fat kept on spreading... Ah, giba meat really does suit hamburgers.

The balance between the grilled outer surface and the soft inside was incredibly pleasing. Tasting this really was enough to make miniature burgers seem somehow lacking.

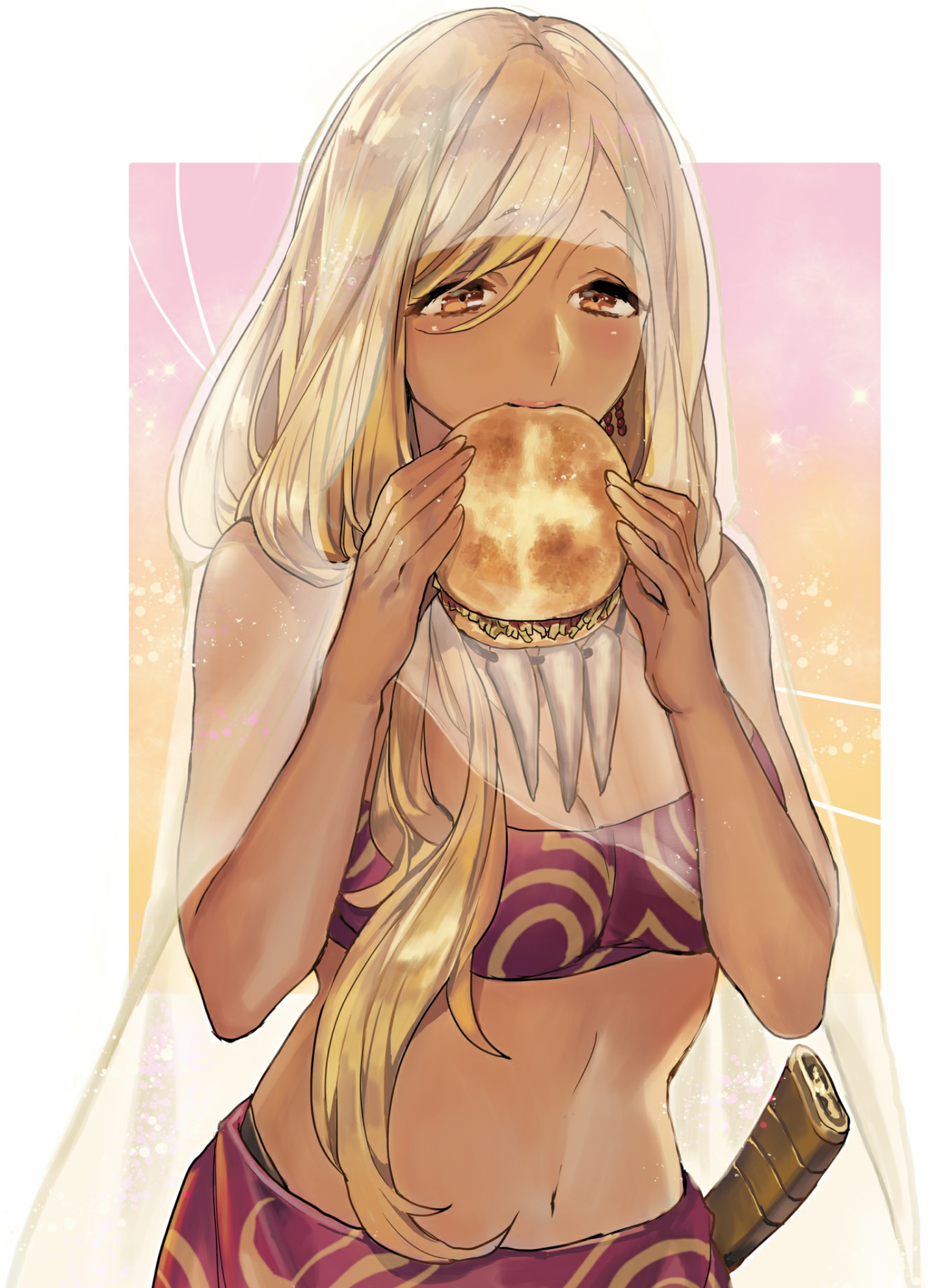
And the onion-esque aria and cabbage-like tino I added as toppings were also a great match for the meat. Tino apparently didn’t last as long as aria or poitan, so I had to keep on using it up like this.

Now then...

When I looked up to check how our guest was doing, I fortunately wasn't greeted by the face of the Grim Reaper. However, this time around he was making a sort of relaxed, teary face.









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Cooking with Wild Game: Volume 4

by EDA

Translated by Matthew Warner Edited by Adam Fogle

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