GOBLIN SLAYER

VOLUME 3

KUMO KAGYU

Illustration by
NOBORU KANNATUKI

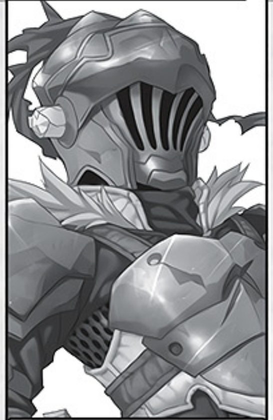
YEN ON
NEW YORK

©Noboru Kannatuki

GOBLIN SLAYER

Character Profiles

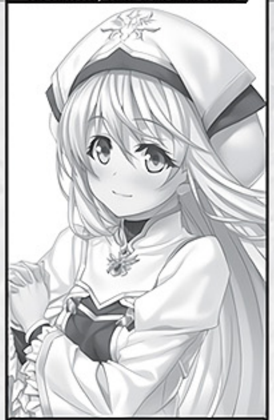
"I am to goblins what goblins are to us."



GOBLIN SLAYER

A strange adventurer active on the frontier. He is famous for reaching Silver (3rd) rank hunting only goblins.

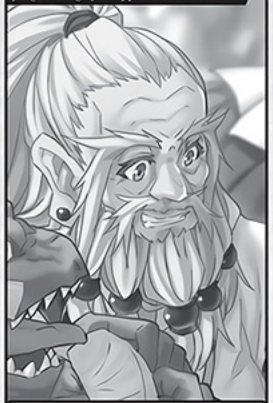
"Protect, heal, save."
—The Three Holy Tenets of the Earth Mother



PRIESTESS

Works with Goblin Slayer. A sweet young woman who must put up with her partner's antics.

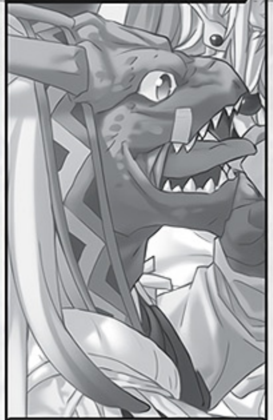
"Before they're polished, jewels and precious metals all look like rocks. No dwarf would judge a thing by its appearance alone."



DWARF SHAMAN

A dwarf spellcaster who adventures with Goblin Slayer.

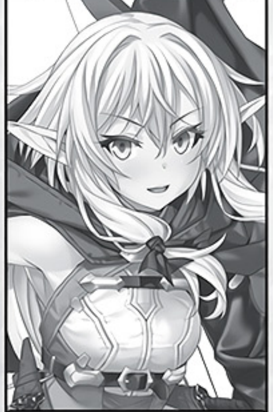
"A Naga does not run."



LIZARD PRIEST

A lizardman priest who adventures with Goblin Slayer.

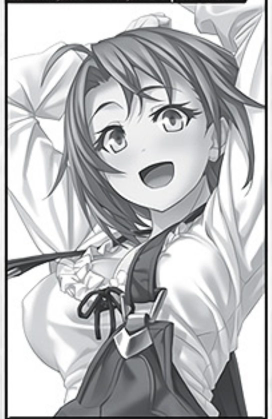
"Ignorance is bliss, for learning is the highest joy." —Elven proverb



HIGH ELF ARCHER

An elf girl who adventures with Goblin Slayer. A Ranger and a skilled archer.

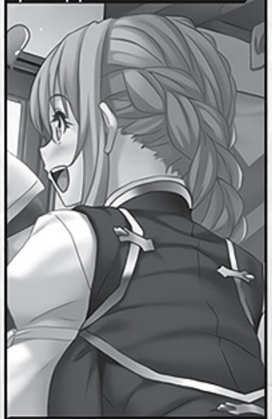
The only things that matter to her are the weather, the animals, the crops…and him.



COW GIRL

A girl who works on the farm where Goblin Slayer lives. The two are old friends.

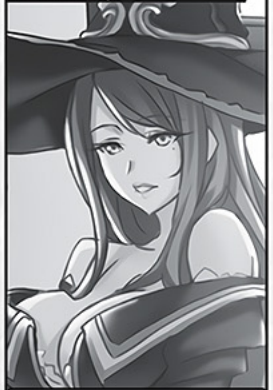
"How can you go adventuring without pen and paper?"



GUILD GIRL

A girl who works at the Adventurers Guild. Goblin Slayer's preference for goblin slaying always helps her out.

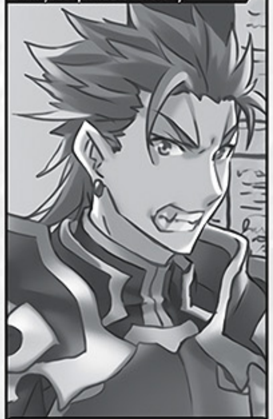
"Only a tangled skein awaits those who carelessly spin tales about love or the universe's mysteries…not to mention a woman's beauty."



WITCH

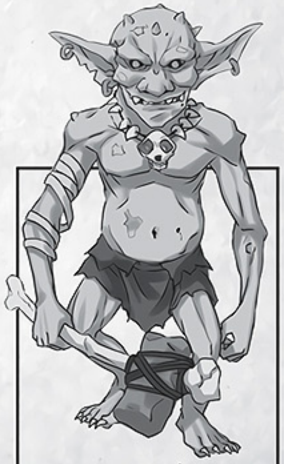
A Silver-ranked adventurer at the frontier town's Adventurers Guild.

"I won't make friends tomorrow with an enemy I respect. I'll do it today."



SPEARMAN

A Silver-ranked adventurer at the frontier town's Adventurers Guild.



GOBLIN SLAYER

HE DOES NOT LET ANYONE ROLL THE DICE.

Life’s a roll of the dice

Roll them day after day

And it’s always snake eyes

Someone said luck is fair

Nothing changes 'til the day you die

Laugh or cry, it’s all the same

Snake eyes come up again today

Oh snake eyes snake eyes!

Show me a duodecuple tomorrow!

汚い海賊

CHAPTER 1

HARVEST MOON

A lone wisp of smoke trailed into a pallid sky.

One could trace it back down to find its source, a small hilltop farm.

Specifically, a small, brick building on the fringes of the farm.

Smoke billowed from the chimney into the air like an upward brushstroke.

A young woman stood at the stove in the little building, blowing mightily as she wiped sweat from her brow.

Her skin had the healthy glow of a person raised in the sun. She was plump in all the places a girl should beð but she was not soft.

ñHmmé About like this?ò

Cow Girl wiped soot from her cheeks with the cloth draped across the shoulder of her work apron and squinted contentedly.

Her bright eyes were fixed on some pork hung neatly inside the shed, visible through the window.

The smoke enveloped it, gradually bringing out the fat along with an irresistible aroma.

Smoked bacon.

Every year they took pigs that had grown fat on acorns and daisies and smoked them like this.

There was plenty of pork in the little building, and they would let it smoke all day. They would keep up the process for several days—bacon was a labor-intensive product.

So usually, *he* would lend a hand around this time, even if he did it silently.

“Well, I guess when you have work, you have work,” Cow Girl said to herself, then laughed as if this didn’t bother her one bit.

She knew him, after all. He would come home safely, no question about it, and then he’d help like he always did.

This belief came so naturally to her she almost didn’t have to think about it.

“Hup!”

It felt good to stretch as she rose, after crouching so long to watch the fire.

She stood, arms outstretched, ample chest bouncing, cracking her joints and letting out one more great breath.

As she raised her face, a corona of light danced over the dark forest huddled on the horizon.

Dawn. The sun. The start of a new day—although in fact, her day had already been well under way.

Beyond the hill, the wheat fields that ran along either side of the road caught the sun’s rays and sparkled. The wind bent the crops gently, creating ripples in a sea of gold. The rustle of the stalks sounded not unlike the ocean.

Or so Cow Girl imagined, anyway. She had never been to the seaside.

Soon the farm’s roosters noticed the morning’s approach and began to crow.

Their calls coaxed townspeople from their slumber, and thin streams of smoke appeared on the horizon. There were quite a few for such an early hour.

The morning light revealed just how vibrant and lively the town was.

Banners waved atop buildings, streamers in the shapes of dragons or gods whipping in the gust.

The same wind made its way over to Cow Girl, brushing her cheeks as it passed.

“Wow…” She trembled a little at the chill.

The air felt good against her sweaty skin, but it was less cool and more uncomfortably cold.

The sun striving to rise past the horizon radiated with a soft light.

It was fall.

The harvest season had come. Summer was over, and it was time to prepare for winter.

Farm and town had both grown busy.

Lively and prosperous, it was one of the world’s beautiful seasons.

Though to Cow Girl, the world was always beautiful.

She knew everyone was working hardð including him.

Yet she also knew he would come and help her. And when he didð yes!

ñIôll make him some stew with our fresh bacon!ò

First, she would have to make sure he was full and rested.

Just the thought lightened her heart, and she all but skipped on her way back to the main house.

After all, fall was also the time for the festival.

Ä

The fifth goblin fell around noon.

A stone whistled through the air and caught him in the eye socket, crushing bone and finally striking the brain.

The goblin crumpled where he stood with a thump.

The sun shone on a tunnel entrance resembling a massacre.

ñé é é Hmph.ò

A warrior watched vigilantly from the shadows of some nearby rocks.

He wore grimy leather armor and a cheap-looking steel helmet. At his hip dangled a sword of a strange length, and a small shield was on his arm.

This shabby-looking warrior was Goblin Slayer.

All he had done so far was subdue the guards, and he was already up to five goblins.

That was not to say, however, that he had hurt his opponents very much.

It had been more than two weeks since the goblins had taken over the mine, which was this villageôs only source of resources.

Who knew how many more might be hiding beyond the jaws of this tunnel entrance?

Some local women had been kidnapped. It hadnôt been long enough for any potential offspring to provide reinforcements. But hostages meant fewer options were open to him. And because the villagers would need to use this mine in the future, ploys involving poison gas or flooding were no good, either.

Presumably, the remainder number fewer than ten. As he considered, his hands nimbly set another stone in his sling.

He stood by a pile of excavated earth, where there was no fear of running out of ammunition.

With close attention to the battlefield, it was possible to use a sling for an entire fight.

ñWh-what do you think, Goblin Slayer, sir?ò

Beside him stood a youthful maiden tightly grasping a sounding staff with both hands.

She was slight and willowy, dressed in plain but pure white vestments. It was Priestess.

Goblin Slayer answered without looking at her.

ñBy ówhat,ô you meané?ò

ñI mean, um, how does it look to you? What do we do?ò

ñI donôt know yet.ò

As he spoke, he slung another missile through the air.

ñGOORB?!ò

It split another goblinôs skull, one that had ventured out to investigate the guard bodies.

ñSix.ò

The goblin fell prone and rolled into the tunnel. Goblin Slayer counted off softly.

It was simple, drawing like to like.

Not that goblins ñlikedò each other in any meaningful sense. Most likely the one that had come out had simply drawn the short straw and been forced to go look.

But the principle was the same: use dead or wounded foes as bait to draw out other enemies, then kill them.

That was how heôd reached six total kills so far. He reloaded his sling in a businesslike manner.

ñBut in any case, this is a problem.ò

ñMeaningé?ò

ñThey have equipment.ò

ñéOh.ò

Now that heôd mentioned it, she could see it, too.

Crude though they may have been, the dead goblins all wore armor and carried weapons.

A sword, a pickax, a club, a hand spear, a dagger. Some of goblin construction, some simply stolen.

ñDidnôt they say three young women had been kidnapped?ò Priestess asked, unease clear on her face. ñWe have to hurryéò Still, she made no move to rush in herself.

It had been more than six months since sheôd become an adventurer.

More than six months since she had narrowly escaped death on that first quest. Months in which she had gone on to face death in battle many times.

She was still just Obsidian, the ninth rank, but in many ways she was no longer an amateur. When she heard goblins had kidnapped some village women, she no longer panicked.

Or perhaps she had simply grown numbé?

Anxiety, born of her ever-growing experience, spread through her small chest.

All the more reason she closed her eyes and clung to her staff, praying to the all-compassionate Earth Mother. She prayed the dead goblins would reach postmortem bliss, and that the captured women would be safely rescued.

ñIt took too long for the request to reach usé Hey.ò Goblin Slayer waited quietly for her to finish her prayers, then spoke up. ñCan you search their corpses?ò ñHuh?ò She raised her head in surprise, but her eyes met only his expressionless helmet.

ñI want to collect their equipment.ò

ñOh, umé ò Priestess wasnôt able to answer immediately, glancing back and forth between corpses and the helm.

Of course, it was not that she was afraid, or that the bodies were impure. Goblins or no, corpses were still corpses.

She wouldnôt condemn whatever action he chose to takeð but could she, a member of the clergy, desecrate those bodies?

ñIf you canôt do it, then back me up.ò

ñOh, yes, sir.ò Priestess nodded. ñIf possible, Iôd ratheré ò

Goblin Slayer made no sound of acknowledgment, but immediately set off running.

Still in the same spot, Priestess heaved a sigh. She kept thinking she was used to this, but somehow she never was.

Sweat beaded on her forehead despite the increasingly chilly wind. She was incredibly alert. She wished their usual companions were with themð especially the elf.

While they were all technically a party, they didnôt always adventure together. That was how things had turned out today. Stillé

ñ*Sigh*é ò

Priestess found herself letting out yet another groan.

She had too many things to think about, too many things to do.

But Goblin Slayer is still fixated on goblinsé

Discussing things wouldnôt always be fruitful, of course, but with him you could hardly even get that far.

ñO-oops, need to concentrateé!ò

She came back to herself suddenly, giving a quick shake of her head.

This was no time to be getting distracted.

She held her staff under her arm, preparing her sling. She took a deep breath.

ñAreé Are you all right?ò

ñYes.ò

The faint but firm answer drifted back to her.

Goblin Slayer approached the corpses with his usual agile yet unconcerned gait.

ñHmmé Just as I thought,ò he murmured. ñBut thereôs no time to look around here.ò

He had no use for their armor or helmets. He looted a sword, scabbard and all, from one goblinôs hip, drew anotherôs dagger, and collected the pickax from a third.

Pilfered equipment in hand, he headed straight back the way he had come.

ñGORB! GRROOOORB!!ò

ñGoblin Slayer, sir! Theyôre hereé!ò

Goblin Slayer drove on while Priestess fumblingly fired a rock from her sling.

Immediately behind him, a goblin and its reeking breath scrambled out of the mine entrance.

The adventurers werenôt the only ones who could use the goblins as bait. The surviving monsters probably thought they had used their companionsô bodies to draw the human out.

But Priestessôs stone hit the goblin on the shoulder, and he let out a great screech.

ñGood.ò

Far be it from Goblin Slayer to let such an opportunity go to waste.

With a speed belied by his full armor, he flung something over his shoulder with his right hand.

It was the sword from his waist.

ñGBBR?!ò

It pierced the throat of the goblin with a dull *thock*. Goblin Slayer hadnôt even turned around to throw it. The sword heôd stolen was already in his hand by the time the creatureôs back hit the cavern floor.

ñSeven. Others?ò

Goblin Slayer dove among the shadows of the rocks, tossing his prizes onto the ground.

ñAs far as I can see,ò Priestess said, surveying the entrance to the tunnel, ñnone.ò ñAll right.ò

He quickly focused on sorting through the stolen weapons.

He attached the empty scabbard to his belt, using it to resheathe the sword he held. The dagger, too, went by his waist.

Treating the goblins as an armory was his classic strategy.

ñWeôre moving.ò

ñWhat? Moving?ò

Now re-equipped, Goblin Slayer stood.

Priestess, still crouching, blinked up at him in bewilderment.

ñI thought this mine only had one entrance.ò

ñIt did. Until two weeks ago.ò Goblin Slayer hefted the pickax and thrust it out at her.

ñEek!ò

The casual motion was easy to mistake for an attack.

Priestess glared reproachfully at the helmet.

ñGoblin Slayer, sir! B-be careful with that!ò

ñLook.ò

ñWhat am I looking até?ò

Puzzled, she obediently leaned toward the pickax, studying it intently.

It was well used, old and dirty, probably left in the mine. Its edges had been dulled from relentless use. They bore dark crimson stainsé and particles of earth.

ñé ?ò

Priestess probed the soil with her white fingertip. It was still moistð brand-new.

ñGoblin Slayer, sir, does this meané ?ò

ñYes.ò

Goblin Slayer nodded and rested the pickax on his shoulder.

He was well aware that goblins had no knowledge of metallurgy.

They didnõt dig holes to find resourcesð at least, not yet.

This could mean only one thing.

ñI would dig a side tunnel and plan a sneak attack.ò

Ä

He turned out to be exactly right.

Goblin Slayer set off to the formerly undisturbed side of the mountain.

But now, they found a new tunnel thereð along with goblins, crawling out of the hole like worms.

All of them were filthy with mud, tired, and clearly wearyé In other words, a perfect opportunity.

ñGUAAUA?!ò

ñEight.ò

Goblin Slayer calmly flung the pickax, claiming his next life. The tool may have been blunted, but it was still sharp enough to shatter the creatureôs sternum and pierce its heart.

At the sight of their fallen companion, the other goblins started a terrible racket.

And who could blame them? This was to be expected.

These fellows had gone on raids in what was their equivalent of nighttime, and then they had been forced to dig this ambush tunnel.

They were unable to sleep, lousy with fatigue, and the higher-ranking goblins were cracking the whip behind them. They had been told their reward would be a young priestess girlð but they figured by the time their turn came around, they would not find her much different from any other prisoner. Naturally, all this sapped their morale.

Goblin Slayer preferred ñtwilight,ò but ñmidnightò would work, too.

Otherwise, what was the point of this tactic?

He quickly took stock of the goblins, thrown into confusion by his ambush.

ñOne spear, one pickax, two clubs, no bows, no spell-casters.ò

And just two adventurers.

ñLetôs go,ò he said.

ñY-yes, sir!ò

Nodding, Priestess followed him as best she could.

He had never and would never be so foolish as to throw away the initiative he gained through a sneak attack.

Goblin Slayer flew like an arrow at the foe while Priestessôs staff was raised high.

ñO Earth Mother, abounding in mercy, by the power of the land grant safety to we who are weak!ò

An invisible field gave him additional protection beyond his shield, repelling the spears of the goblins finally collecting themselves.

This was the miracle of Protection.

ñGRRORG?!ò

ñNineé Ten.ò

Goblin Slayer had never stopped moving.

His sword flashed as he eliminated the hand spear goblin, then sliced open the pickax ownerôs throat.

Priestess coordinated with Goblin Slayer without so much as a word between them.

This was the result of half a year together. Gripping her staff in one hand, she readied her sling with the other.

ñGOORB?!ò

The spear split in half against the force field, and the goblin, now weaponless, soon found a sword in its skull.

Goblin Slayer didnôt so much as spare a glance as the creature collapsed, its brains staining the blade, but with a kick he flipped the pickax up into his hand.

He didnôt like two-handed weapons, but at least his shield was strapped to his arm. He wouldnôt have any trouble swinging.

ñNext.ò

Goblins were feeble monsters, the weakest of the weakð nothing to fear.

They boasted the size and cruel intelligence of children, perhaps the most common monster in the entire world.

Yesé indeed.

Fighting a few of them outdoors, Goblin Slayer could see where someone might believe that reputation. It was no wonder that many a village tough tried their hand at adventuring after chasing a few of the little creatures out of their village.

A goblin came at him with an awkward swipe of its club, and Goblin Slayer caught both its arms, then its heart, with his pickax.

Filthy blood hissed from the wound.

ñGOOROROROGB?!ò

ñEleven.ò

He didnôt even bother to spend time pulling the pick back out. He simply let it drop with the corpse.

As he turned toward the last goblin, a stone whizzed past.

ñHié yah!ò

ñGBBOR?!ò

The goblin yelped stupidly as the rock collided into its cheek with a dull thump.

The creature slumped down. Goblin Slayer jumped on it without hesitation and thrust his dagger into its heart.

ñTwelve.ò

He gave a violent twist of the blade to be sure, then held down the goblin until it stopped twitching.

Finally, he exhaled.

Whatever advantages one might have, there was no time to relax when outnumbered.

But at last, there was a lull.

ñUm, Goblin Slayer, sir?ò Priestess pattered up to him, fishing in her bag for a waterskin. ñWant something to drink?ò

ñI do.ò

ñHere you go.ò

He casually took the leather bag, made from a farm animalôs stomach. He removed the cap and chugged through his open visor.

Their long acquaintance had led Priestess to fill the skin with a dilute grape wine.

ñYou have to make sure you get enough to drink.ò

ñTrue.ò

As far as she could tell, he was maintaining a good physical condition—in his own way. Still, it only seemed to be the absolute minimum.

I guess it would be strange to say I’m trying to take care of him…

Though she certainly believed he was someone worth taking care of.

Glug, glug. As he drank, she thought to herself.

“That was a good shot,” he muttered.

She didn’t immediately grasp what the comment meant and gave him a puzzled look. But she soon realized he was talking about her sling.

“Oh… I’ve been practicing.”

She made a fist near her little chest and nodded firmly.

Not that she took any pride in learning deadly arts. But in a certain sense, she was doing it to help people—so perhaps it could be considered one of her trials.

If she were completely helpless in the face of danger, she would only be a burden to her companions. She had begun learning the sling simply to protect herself, but the weapon had proved remarkably versatile.

Goblin Slayer finished his single-minded drinking and replaced the cap.

“Good job.”

…Oh!

He tossed the words off casually, but they made her heart swell.

Her cheeks, her whole face, were suddenly hot.

Heé just praised me, didnôt he?

She could hardly ask him to repeat it, as unusual as it was.

But Goblin Slayer kept talking as though nothing strange had happened.

ñWeôve seriously reduced their numbers. There are probably just two or three left, including the hob.ò

ñAé A hobé?ò

Priestessôs voice weakened, not pleased with this scenario.

ñWe havenôt seen any totems,ò Goblin Slayer said with an easy nod, calmly holding out the waterskin to her. ñHere, drink.ò

ñHuh? Ohé ò

Priestess accepted it with a certain hesitancy. She touched her lips thoughtfully with a slim, pale index finger.

ñR-righté ò

Goblin Slayer ignored her reluctance to put her lips to the waterskin. Instead he used the tattered rags of a nearby goblin to wipe the fat from his dagger, then returned it to his hip. Next was his sword, still buried in its victim.

He braced against the corpse and extracted the blade, checking the edge and cleaning off the grime before sheathing it.

He confirmed his packôs contents, the state of his equipment, and finally nodded.

ñAre you ready?ò

ñOhð yes, sir.ò

ñThen weôre going in.ò

A hobgoblin. Two bodyguards. Fifteen monsters altogether.

What became of them was not hard to imagine.

Amazingly, there was some small light to be found among such darknessð all the women were safe.

But how should they go about finding happiness again after being violated by goblins?

Priestess could not imagine.

Ä

ñHe doesnôt use enough words! At all! Ever!ò High Elf Archer pounded the table with her mug. ñ*I see. Is that right? Thatôs right. Goblins, goblins, goblins*ð Thatôs it!ò

Her ears bounced up and down, mirroring her sloshing cup of wine.

Her face, normally almost translucent, was bright red while her eyes began to roll.

It was an unbecoming state for a high elfð that is to say, she was drunk.

Night had fallen. Though located in a frontier town, the tavern at the Adventurers Guild was well attended.

Most of the customers had either just finished a job or were preparing to go out on one, and passionate shouts to eulogize the fallen or hearten the wounded punctuated the din.

Given all this, High Elf Archer and the angry steam rising from her ears hardly merited attention. But whether the mood of the bar and her inebriation went well together was another question.

Spearman—by then a familiar face—took a swig of ale from his huge mug and said, “You’re upset about this now? How long have you known him?”

“When I ask him if he has plans, I don’t really care if he says, ‘*Goblins.*’” She wasn’t bothered. High Elf Archer nodded to someone—though nobody was actually there. “He’s Orcbolg, right? I’m happy to overlook that. But!” She pounded her mug again, sloshing the wine to leave a red stain on her chest. “That is *not* the answer I expect when I ask for a little help!”

“In other words,” Spearman said, dragging a bowl of nuts away from High Elf Archer, “he dumped you.”

“He did not!”

She slammed her mug down, though this time she put her whole body into it and heaved a veritable tidal wave of wine from the cup. Spearman ducked to avoid the flying froth.

High Elf Archer pursed her lips and made a sound of displeasure, perhaps regretting the waste.

“That’s the problem with you humans. You’re so good at making everything about one thing!”

ñBut he did turn you down for your little adventure, didnõt he, lass?ò

ñQuiet, dwarf!ò

She swung the cup at him. But thanks to his minimal height, she connected with only air.

Perhaps because her aim was bad, despite being both an elf and an archer—or perhaps because she was roaring drunk.

Dwarf Shaman was as red-faced as always. Stroking his white beard, he said with immense seriousness, “If you ask me, I’d say you ought to be offering him help.”

“If I’m always doing that, he’ll start thinking I *want* to help him.”

“And don’t you?”

“No!”

She sat sulkily and muttered to herself.

“*Goblin this, goblin that. Get your clothes dirty! Don’t look at my items!* Every single time…”

Dwarf Shaman merely shook his head at the tantrum.

“Never seen someone get so drunk on a single cup of wine. At least she’s easy on the coin purse.”

“Is it not best to relax from time to time?”

The last remark came from Lizard Priest, who was happily taking bites out of an entire round of cheese. The sight robbed him of the gravitas that usually accompanied a lizard clergyman.

“Nectar! Sweet nectar! If all the world had a bed and a meal as fine as this, there would be no more wars.”

“That and wine, perhaps. And then we would fight over what to eat with it.”

“Nothing is ever easy in the material world.”

Lizard Priest seemed to mull over his words, his eyes wandering the tavern.

ñFor once, milord Goblin Slayer has gone alone with our dear priestess. Perhaps some feel threatened by this.ò

ñThere are, many, rivals, yes?ò said a voluptuous woman elegantly savoring her wineð Witch wore a faint wisp of a smile.

She filched a bit of food from Spearmanôs plate while her eyes turned meaningfully to her neighbor.

ñIôm sure I donôt know what youôre talking about,ò Guild Girl said with a chuckle.

She was still in her uniform, though her workday was over. Perhaps she had simply stopped by the tavern before heading home. Her cheeks were flushed from drink.

ñMy, howé easygoing.ò

ñNo, not exactly.ò Guild Girl played with the cup in her hands, hoping to distract them a little. As she spun it gently, miniature waves lapped up in the wine. ñIôm justé waiting for my chance.ò

ñWaitingé for five years, no?ò

There was nothing Guild Girl could say. She just took a sip from her cup with an unreadable expression.

When she had been assigned to the Guild branch in this town, he was one of the adventurers placed in her charge.

How could she help but notice him as he quietly went about doing what needed to be done?

She saw him off when he left, then waited for his return. There was nothing dramatic about it, to be sure, but—

People’s feelings and affections built up in this kind of day-to-day as well.

Though in that sense, I can understand this man’s approach, too.

She glanced at Spearman, who Witch interrupted every time he tried to say something. Even Guild Girl could tell he was clearly trying to hit on her.

He was rather handsome, outgoing, and kind to women. The one flaw in the diamond was his tendency to flirt.

He was intelligent, strong, kindhearted, and cheerful. He made good money, and while he could be rough around the edges, he was never unbearable. Objectively speaking, he seemed like a decent man. Guild Girl didn’t specifically dislike Spearman. Barring the times when he used to make fun of Goblin Slayer.

But, well, she didn’t fall in love with every halfway decent man she saw. Nor was she obliged to respond in kind simply because someone else had become infatuated with her.

“Hmm.”

But perhaps, she thought, this made her a rival in love.

It is often said that the friendship of women is fickle, but Guild Girl wasn’t so sure.

Spearman’s party member, Witch, sat without her characteristic hat but with an inscrutable smile.

“It, is most, demanding.”

“For both of us.”

The two women exchanged wry smiles, then amicably nodded at each other. The man didn’t seem to notice.

“It seems like there have been an awful lot of demon-related quests lately, given that the Demon God was supposed to have been defeated.” Spearman took a swig of his ale, perhaps finally brought to heel by Witch. “What’s going on?”

Maybe she could talk to him about this. Guild Girl felt a little bad for him, and adventuring was a safe topic.

“My superiors seem to think maybe our heroes missed some of the bad guys.”

“I guess just doing in the enemy higher-ups doesn’t mean everyone can come right back home.” Spearman grabbed a nut and popped it into his mouth, chewing noisily. “Demons are bad news.”

“They can disguise themselves as humans, among their other stratagems. They do not make for easy work.” Lizard Priest nodded deeply at Spearman, putting his palms together in a strange gesture. “I was most grateful for your help in this instance.”

“Don’t mention it! There was a quest out, and I took it.” He waved away Lizard Priest’s gratitude. “And when your adventure doubles as a date, that ain’t bad, either.”

As Lizard Priest had said, this time the five of them had dealt with a demon in human form.

The quest itself had been terribly mundane: investigate a new cult that had spread through a town.

The small town still boasted a temple of the Supreme God—

but it seemed they had lost their sacred implement. The quest involved getting it back. When the question of whether goblins were involved came up, however, the answer was a firm *no*.

It was not a goblin-slaying quest.

ñI will go goblin slaying, then,ò said Goblin Slayer, and Priestess followed after him with a *ñSorryò* and a bow of her head.

ñFine, weôll handle it ourselves!ò High Elf Archer had exclaimed, but even she knew they would be less prepared for combat without him.

Just as they were deciding how to address this issue, Spearman called out to them.

It was perfect. The five of them formed a temporary party and set about their investigationé

Naturally, they found ample evidence of kidnappings, drug running, theft, and extortion.

By the time they found the stolen implement, a blue diamond cut to look like an eye, they knew full well what was going on.

Finding the cultôs headquarters, where they practiced their bizarre rituals, and capturing their leader was only a matter of time.

ñUUUUUUUé! AKAATERRRAAAABBBBB!!!ò

In the light of the diamond, the cultôs second-in-command revealed himself to be the real ringleaderð a demon. Of course.

And finally, the demon shed its disguise and engaged the adventurers in an epic battle.

“As you’ll recall, it was my arrows that struck the final blow.”

“Yes, we know. It’s all clearly written in the report.” Guild Girl noted High Elf Archer’s testimony in her paperwork.

Now the markswoman was dramatically illustrating the battle with wild gestures.

Guild Girl never tired of watching her. The elf was easily 2,000 years older than her, yet felt like a little sister.

“Maybe you’ve had enough…”

“It’s okay. I’m fine! It’s just one cup of grape wine. Easy peasy!”

High Elf Archer was completely soused and clearly not “fine.”

Well, everyone needs to experience a good hangover once in their lives. Guild Girl wore a dry smile and resolved to help the elf get upstairs once the alcohol wore off, then took another glassful herself. She tilted it back delicately, enjoying the sensation of the wine on her tongue. She thought back to Witch’s words from a few minutes earlier.

Many rivals.

Compared to the priestess, who could go with him on adventures, it was true that Guild Girl was at a disadvantage because all she could do was wait.

What disadvantage? Don’t be silly.

Around here, even a receptionist could take the offensive.

Yet somehow, she was a tiny bit scared of taking that step…

She was surprised how much she enjoyed their relationship as

Guild employee and adventurer. But if it were to stop thereé?

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Witch chiding Spearman as he tried to call, ñAre you troubled, miss?ò

Guild Girl found herself breathing a small sigh. And at that momenté

ñð?ò

The swinging door to the building creaked open.

Then came the sound of casual, indiscreet footsteps.

High Elf Archerôs ears perked up, like a hunter catching the sound of a rabbit.

Then they saw him: an adventurer in ridiculously second-rate equipment. Equipment so pathetic it caused a stir even among the Porcelain ranksð the complete beginners. An adventurer whose unique outfit was known to one and all at the Guild.

Goblin Slayer.

ñIôll take care of the paperwork. You rest.ò

The blunt instruction was directed at the priestess following behind him.

She hardly seemed able to bear her fatigue. Her head bobbed up and down, eyelids half closed.

A priestôs spells were called miracles because, exactly as the name implied, the caster made a direct supplication to the gods in heaven. The effort this demanded was no less than a frontline warriorôs, and it had taken a serious toll on this willowy young woman.

ñéYeess, siréUméò

ñWhat?ò

ñGood nighté Goblin Slayer, siréò

She nodded heavily at Goblin Slayerôs words and weaved her way up the stairs.

He waited for her to safely reach the second floor on her unsteady feet before setting off.

But the others could hardly just watch him walk up to the front desk.

ñHey, Orcbolg, over here!ò High Elf Archer called out at the top of her lungs after she recognized her distinctive companion through the haze of alcohol. She stood up and waved her wine cup madly at him, splashing its contents into Spearmanôs snack.

He wearily chewed on a wine-soaked nut, earning Witchôs giggle.

Goblin Slayer came over to the table and took in the scene.

ñWhat is it?ò

Dwarf Shaman and Lizard Priest shared a glance and shrugged.

They werenôt sure whether or not they found it comforting that Goblin Slayer was exactly the same immediately after an adventure as he was at any other time.

ñYou know perfectly well what!ò High Elf Archer, however, did not seem pleased. She smacked the table repeatedly and glared up at the steel helmet. ñWhen you get back from an adventure, you ought to at least say hello!ò

ñIs that so?ò

ñIt is!ò

High Elf Archer snorted. Guild Girl smiled at her, then slid aside. She gestured Goblin Slayer to sit down, which he obligingly did. She turned her smile to him and said, ñWelcome back, Mr. Goblin Slayer. How did it go?ò

ñI will make my report,ò he said, then cocked his head. ñIs your shift not over?ò

ñOh, come on,ò Guild Girl said, pursing her lips with a touch of annoyance. ñIôm always the first to hear about your adventures. Why not tell me?ò

ñHm.ò Goblin Slayer folded his arms and thought. Then he declared, ñThere were goblins.ò

ñWow, who could have guessed?ò Spearman growled. He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head as if to say, *This guy doesnôt get it.* ñWhat our dear Guild Girl is asking is, does what you did stack up against what we did?ò

Goblin Slayer lapsed into thought again.

ñWe slaughtered fifteen of them.ò

Spearman knew better than to expect some detailed anecdote about Goblin Slayerôs adventure, but even he hung his head in disappointment.

ñCome on, Goblin Slayer. Throw us a bone, here!ò

Witch squinted absentmindedly and put her glass to her lips.

ñPerhaps, thereôs no bone, to throwé ò

ñWhen Beard-cutterôs been about, I suppose there wouldnôt be.ò

ñWe do speak of milord Goblin Slayer. He has his quirks.ò

ñThey had equipment.ò

Dwarf Shaman and Lizard Priest nodded knowingly at each other, but Goblin Slayer shook his head.

ñThe kidnapped women were all safe.ò

ñReally?ò Guild Girl blinked. ñThatôs wonderful, buté quite unusual.ò

She had been working here for five years, and she rarely heard of such a thing.

Though she lacked actual experience adventuring, she had heard more about it than anyone else. Certainly more to do with goblins. Sometimes the information came before the women were kidnapped, sometimes immediately after. Sometimes two weeks after.

ñWere they being kept for foodé? Or did someone in command want them as hostages?ò

ñNo.ò He shook his head. ñThey were injured, and terrified.ò

ñThis was in a mine, wasnôt it?ò

ñTargeting a mine was strange enough.ò

ñMeaning they werenôt after food. Hmmé ò

Guild Girl demonstrated how she was among the few who could follow Goblin Slayerôs conversation. She tapped a finger against her lips as she digested the bits of information he shared.

She hardly even noticed Spearman exclaiming, ñMaybe I should just study up on goblins, then!ò

In cases involving goblins, the creatures would abduct young women eight or nine times out of ten. But this was largely to use them as sexual slaves, playthings to vent their anger.

The same way most people found goblins repugnant, goblins couldnôt abide humans.

Guild Girl knew many examples of brutality that, as a fellow woman, made her wish she had neither heard nor read about them.

One might have expected her to be thrilled at hearing news of the rescue.

ñéHmm. So we really donôt know enough to say anything yetéò

Something seemed to bother Guild Girl. She tilted her head, trying to grasp what it was.

Maybe it was the same for Goblin Slayer. He said dispassionately:

ñThatôs my preliminary report. Iôll file a more detailed one later. Have a look at it.ò

ñSure. Of course, my shift is over for today, so itôll be first thing tomorrow morningéò

ñThatôs fine.ò

ñNot by me, it isnôt!ò High Elf Archer broke in.

Laid out on the table, she glared up at Goblin Slayer, struggling to make her heated glare appropriately threatening.

ñé Who cares about your dumb report? You should greet your friends and companions first! é I know goblins are more important to you, though,ò she muttered.

The armored man slowly shook his head.

ñYou already know Iôm here. Thereôs no need.ò

ñIt doesnôt matter. You should do it anyway.ò

ñIs that how it is?ò

ñé Everyone was worried about you.ò

This provoked a murmured ñé Were they?ò from Goblin Slayer. ñI will change.ò

ñThatôs good.ò High Elf Archerôs face melted into a mellow smile, finally content.

Her ears flicked with her bettered mood.

She swore that by the time they reached 2,000 years old an elf was considered an adult, but she certainly didnôt act it. *Frankly, she might be something of an embarrassment to her high elf ancestors.*

At least, thatôs what Dwarf Shaman was thinking when Guild Girl moved quietly.

She leaned nonchalantly and put her hand on Goblin Slayerôs knee.

The motion was strikingly natural, and she appeared completely serious.

ñBy the way, Mr. Goblin Slayer.ò

ñWhat?ò

ñThe, um, the harvest festival is the day after next.ò

ñYes.ò

Guild Girl breathed in and out with a soft sigh. She put her hand to her chest, as if trying to physically restrain her pounding heart.

ñDo youé have any plans?ò

The atmosphere changed instantly.

Even the adventurers chattering and drinking nearby stopped to listen, never mind the people at their table.

She felt her nerves tighten the way they did upon entering a dungeon.

Witch used Silence to prevent Spearman from exclaiming, ñIôm free!ò

High Elf Archerôs eyes were open, but her inebriation allowed her to offer only a sluggish, incoherent murmur.

And at the center of that indescribable mood, Goblin Slayer spoke.

ñé Goblins.ò

ñAh, I meané any *non*-goblin plans?ò

ñéé Hm.ò

With that single sound, Goblin Slayer lowered his head as if lost in thought.

Or perhaps at a loss for words. Either would have been an unusual sight.

As everyone around them waited with bated breath, only Guild Girl still had a smile on her face.

After a moment, Goblin Slayer said, ñé No, I suppose not.ò

ñYou know, Iôm taking off the whole afternoon that day.ò

She seemed to be waiting for some kind of response.

Itôs now or never!

It was festival season, and she had been planning for this moment. He had just finished a goblin-slaying quest, and the reward for her unstinting hard work allowed her to take time off when it really mattered.

There was also the wine. Borrowing strength from the alcohol, she figured this would be her best chance.

ñIé I thought m-maybe youôd like to goé see the festival with me.ò

ñéò

ñIð I mean, the festivalé it might not be completely safe, righté?ò

One of her fingers drew meaningless shapes in her palm. Guild Girl watched the steel helmet.

That same cheap thing he always wore hid the face behind it.

The only way she could reach him was to keep talking, though her voice was increasingly strained thanks to her racing heart.

To Guild Girl, every second he was silent felt likeð a minute? No, an hour.

ñé All right.ò

Goblin Slayer nodded.

His voice might have been dispassionate, almost mechanical, but there was no mistaking what he said.

ñYou are always a great help to me.ò

ñAh, rightð Ið Thank you,ò she said with a bow, flinging her braid into the air.

Whoops. Do you say ñthank youò in this situation?

She was a bit concerned, but it was a small thing, completely overwhelmed by the joy spreading quickly through her heart.

ñAhð oh, right! Mr. Goblin Slayer, would you like something to eat?ò

ñNo, Iôm fine.ò With a firm shake of his head, Goblin Slayer rose from the bench. As always, he checked his armor, weapons, shield, and gloves with a practiced eye, then nodded.

ñOnce I make my report, Iôll go back for the day.ò

ñO-oh, Ié I see.ò Guild Girl felt a strange mix of emotions, disappointed but also pleased with this very characteristic answer.

ñIn that case, umé ò

ñThe day of the harvest festival, at noon, in the square. Will that do?ò

ñYes!ò

ñAll right, then.ò

Goblin Slayer nodded, then surveyed everyone at the table.

ñWhat will all of you do?ò

Guild Girl managed to keep her head out of her hands, but her face clearly betrayed her sentiments. She should have seen this coming.

Lizard Priest and Dwarf Shaman felt the same way. They merely shrugged and decided to do what they could to help.

ñIt is my intention to spend that day enjoying a meal with Master Spell Caster.ò

ñAh, yes! Iôve always wanted to drink Scaly under the table once. This will be a good chance.ò

Dwarf Shaman pounded himself on the belly, then rubbed High Elf Archerôs back.

ñCome with us, Long-Ears. No matter what they say, elves and dwarves belong together!ò

ñBwah?ò A noise of disagreement left her mouth. It was the sort of formless sound a child made to protest getting out of bed.

ñAh, come nowð Iôll treat you to a cup of wine!ò

ñé Okay.ò

ñI see.ò Goblin Slayer accepted their answer with his usual coolness, then made to leave.

Spearman opened his mouth as if to say something, but Witch interrupted. ñThe two of us have a date.ò

ñIôll be going, then.ò

Not so much as a word of farewell. As always.

He headed for the front desk and flagged down the nearest employee to make his report, then went outside.

His bold stride contained no hint of hesitation, as always.

He was a somewhat strange adventurer.

The group watched him go, unable to say anything.

ñGracious me,ò Lizard Priest said, letting out an admiring breath. ñA most impressive strike.ò

ñHehé Ah-ha-haé Iôm just glad it went well.ò Guild Girl blushed shyly and played with her braid.

ñIndeed.ò Witch smiled, giving ashen-faced Spearman a little pat. ñYou, tried hard, too.ò

Dwarf Shaman let out an exasperated breath. ñAnvil-chest here could learn a thing or two from you.ò

ñAw, shut yer yap.ò High Elf Archer turned, slowly and cumbersomely, to glare at the dwarf. ñI just want to go on an adventure together. That moron wonôt even come with me!ò

ñYes, lass, youôve failed quite miserably.ò

ñWaé Waaaah!ò

ñAh, come now. Here, have a drink.ò

He poured a copious amount of wine into her cup. She spared him a quick glare before putting the cup to her mouth with a little nod.

Guild Girl, watching all this, knitted her brow apologetically.

ñUm, Ié Iôm sorryé ò

ñPfft. Like I care. I told you, I donôt think of him that way.ò High Elf Archer took dainty sips of her drink, watching Guild Girl. ñHey,ò she said.

ñYes?ò

ñThat was a good line: óAny *non*-goblin plans?ô Can I use it?ò

Ä

When Goblin Slayer left the Guild, a sweet aroma enveloped him.

Now what could this scent beé ?

Even as he was wondering, a gust of cool breeze carried the smell away.

As the sun set, the dayôs warmth receded as though it had never been.

The night approached. He stared up at a cold sky dotted with stars.

The twin moons, full with the promise of a rich harvest, gleamed with a light that was somehow metallic, inorganic.

ñHm.ò

It was autumn already.

But it meant very little to him.

After the harvest, goblin raids on villages would probably increase.

There was a style of fighting appropriate for springð as well as one for summer, for winter, and, yes, for autumn.

He scanned the silent streets.

The banners and streamers hanging in anticipation of the festival, along with the wooden towers, cast a complex network of shadows on the ground. Goblin Slayer weaved between them as he walked.

These were streets he knew well, but each time he passed a shadow, he reflexively made a fist.

Perhaps there was nothing skulking in the darkness. But goblins could appear at any time and any place.

Not all preparations were helpful, but one could never be too prepared.

This was one of Goblin Slayerôs most cherished principles.

ñOh, there you are!ò

Thus he could take the unexpected, but familiar, voice in stride.

The bright, friendly greeting didnôt quite match the nightð though perhaps he needed the light.

ñOh,ò Goblin Slayer said. ñYou came to meet me?ò

It was, of course, Cow Girl.

ñHeh-heh!ò With a smile on her face and a bounce in her chest, she pattered quickly toward him. ñI wish I could say I did. I just happened to be in town. Work, you know.ò

ñIs that so?ò

ñYeah, it is.ò She nodded firmly. The grimy helmet followed her intently.

ñA delivery?ò

ñUh-uh.ò Cow Girl shook her head. ñTalking to a client. Uncle told me to handle it so I would learn about the business side of things.ò

ñIs that so?ò he said again, nodding.

The sun was absent and the town dark, leaving the two alone in the blackness. The street outside the town gate was even more lonely and dark.

ñé Shall we go home?ò

ñYeah, letôs.ò

They set off, falling into step beside each other.

They followed their own shadows stretching out along the flagstones and silently headed home.

Not in a hurry, but not taking their time.

The lack of conversation didnôt bother them. Sometimes it was quite nice.

“Ah…”

With a whoosh, the cool wind blew again and brought that pleasant fragrance with it.

Goblin Slayer couldn’t quite seem to remember what it reminded him of.

A single flower petal danced through the air, accompanying the breeze and smell.

Goblin Slayer looked up. He saw a tree blanketed in golden flowers.

“Oh, it’s fragrant olive.” Cow Girl followed his gaze upward and used her hand to shield her eyes from the brightness of the leaves. “It’s blooming already. I guess this is the season.”

It had been a flower’s aroma.

“So it is,” murmured Goblin Slayer, now that he knew where the odor was coming from.

It was strange how the frame of pale yellow flowers made even the cold moons seem warm.

As he started walking away, he suddenly felt a soft sensation surround his left hand.

Cow Girl had clasped his gloved hand in hers.

She was blushing just enough to be visible, her eyes averted ever so slightly.

“I mean… It could be dangerous, to walk while you’re looking up like that. It’s… It’s dark.”

“…”