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[New Life+]

Young Again in Another World

Mine

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The excessively upbeat young girl appeared out of nowhere. At her command, all the party poppers went off together. Alarms went off inside Renya's head.

This is not good...

**"DOO-DO-DO-DOO!
CONGRATULATIONS!
YOU'VE BEEN
GRANTED THE
PRIVILEGE OF BEING
REINCARNATED IN
ANOTHER WORLD!"**

[New Life+] 1

Young Again in Another World



Girieli

Used to be "Nameless Subordinate Angel A," but after being bestowed a sense of self by God, she becomes Renya's guardian angel.

God (Young Girl)

The one who sent Renya on his merry way to another world. Though stoic and hard-working, her constantly flippancy demeanor often conveys the wrong image.

Rona Chevalier

A priest who accompanies Shion. She weaponizes her good looks against Renya, but she might harbor a hidden motive...

Shion
Femme-Fatale

An apprentice swordsman who is attacked by fellow Adventurers in the forest but is saved by Renya. She is a tad naive.

Renya Kunugi

After a peaceful death, he is transported to another world at the request of God. As a result of his previous life being perhaps a bit more exciting than is entirely appropriate, his physical capabilities are abnormally high.

The heat, the weight, and the softness all congealed into a wave of sensation that threatened to relieve Renya of his wits.

"I'M SURE WE BOTH KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS, SO... SHALL WE BEGIN?"



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Prologue: I Lived Long and Prospered, or So It Was Told

“Doo-do-do-doo! Congratulations! You’ve been granted the privilege of being reincarnated in another world! This is an extremely rare opportunity. So rare, in fact, that it’s like winning the lottery! That’s right, you just hit the jackpot! Are you happy? You must be happy! All right, I’ve decided that you’re happy, so let’s get this show on the road! Party poppers, at the ready!”

“Huh?”

The young girl appeared out of nowhere. She had blond hair and wore a simple tunic. Her excessively upbeat entrance was accompanied by the equally sudden appearance of a massive crowd of similarly blond-haired, tunic-donning ladies that stretched for as far as the eye could see. Spreading from each of their backs was a pair of white wings. In their hands, they each held a gadget that resembled a slightly larger version of those confetti poppers used at parties. They also seemed to share the same look of discontent. Nevertheless, moving in perfect unison, the endless ranks of ladies all brought their poppers before their chests.

“Fire!”

At the young girl’s command, they pulled the cords. An uncountably vast number of party poppers roared all at once, creating a deafening rumble that shook the very ground they stood on. The overwhelming display sent Renya Kunugi reeling and he fell on his behind.

“Discard poppers! Band members, take out your instruments! Clappers and chorus members, at the ready!”

Despite the deep scowls on the ladies’ faces, the young girl continued to issue orders with undiminished enthusiasm. Half of the countless winged blondes brought out various musical instruments from nowhere in particular and readied them. Half of the remaining ladies got ready to clap, while the other

half clasped their hands before their chest and prepared to sing. Alarms went off inside Renya's head.

This is not good...

The poppers that had just gone off were loud enough. This time, it was an orchestra, complete with chorus and clapping. If they all sounded at once, ruptured eardrums would be the least of Renya's concerns; it might just blow the sanity straight out of his head. Therefore, he decided that he had to do something to stop that from happening, and he had to do it *now*.

"A Song of Celebration, on my mark! Ready... and... GAH!"

From his position on the ground, Renya shot to his feet and dashed toward the orchestra's conductor. Without the slightest hint of mercy or hesitation, he took aim at the cheerful young girl who seemed to be having the time of her life and threw all his weight behind a front kick. The girl, not expecting to be attacked, took his kick right in the face and was forced to perform an elaborate sequence of backflips through the air.

Then, hindsight struck. It occurred to Renya that the countless ladies who surrounded him on all sides were obeying the girl's orders. In other words, it could be said that the girl was their commander, and they were her troops. Surely, they would not stand idly by after he just attacked their commander. He looked around him, but found that not a single one of them budged. He wondered if these were perhaps the kind of people who could not move unless ordered to, but soon dismissed the idea after seeing a number of them grin and give him the thumbs up. Some even quietly waved their hands at him. The ladies were, apparently, very reluctant followers.

"Wh-What was that for?!"

The girl, who was sprawled on the ground after her tumble, got up on her feet and loudly protested her treatment. During her previously supine position, her clothes had been left in a state of significant disarray. Her choice of dress — a tunic — meant that a number of things, none of which were publicly decent, had been in full view from where Renya stood. He was, however, in no mood to mention that.

"To shut you up! Your party poppers were already loud enough! What did you

think was going to happen if you got this many people to sing and play all at the same time? Are you trying to blow out my eardrums?!”

“So you decided to kick a little girl in the face?!”

“I’m against age discrimination!”

“But I’m a girl!”

“Gender equality, then!”

Renya thrust his chest out confidently, which precipitated a round of hushed murmurs and the odd bout of applause.

“Did I just hear applause?!” cried the girl incredulously. She glared angrily at the mob of ladies. As if on cue, they all averted their gazes in a distinctly “wasn’t me” fashion. Squaring her shoulders, the young girl turned to face Renya, who was watching their back-and-forth with a baffled look.

“Ugh... Maybe I picked the wrong person,” said the girl.

“What are you talking about? And where is this place, even?” asked Renya as he looked around. There was nothing but winged people as far as he could see. Turning his gaze upward, he found not a blue sky, but rather an empty space glowing faintly of white light that stretched endlessly into the distance.

“This is the land of God!” announced the girl proudly as she puffed out her poorly-endowed chest.

“Uh huh,” replied Renya flatly.

“Renya Kunugi, you have passed away!”

“Sure.”

“And what a way to go! At the age of 94, you have truly lived long and prospered! Great job with the whole dying peacefully thing and all! Nothing beats good health and wellbeing, does it?”

Despite the certainty of her tone, Renya did not believe a word of what she said. If she was telling the truth, that would mean he had already lived through a whole 94 years of life, and at the end of which had died not through accident or disease, but purely of old age. He had absolutely no recollection of this.

“Of course, it’s a pain to deal with wrinkly old grandpas, so I just reinitialized all your settings in that regard and set your mental state to around eighteen years old.”

In a most casual manner, the girl proceeded to divulge more details. Renya felt a flash of anger at what he heard.

“Hey, you...”

“I mean, you could argue there’s some “gap moe” trope about a loli-shota-looking kid who talks like an old geezer, but honestly, it’s just plain creepy. Like, seriously, just stop daydreaming about loli grandmas and shota grandpas.”

“Hey, cut it out!”

Realizing that it would be a bad idea to let the girl ramble on, Renya tried to cut her off. However, the girl paid him no mind.

“But I digress. Let us leave the topic of niche fetishes in the proverbial trash can for now.”

“Then why’d you even bring it up in the first place?”

Renya’s quip fell on deaf ears.

“All right, back on topic. As I was saying, you have been granted the privilege of being reincarnated in another world.”

“No thanks.”

The girl had barely finished speaking before Renya butted in with his answer. The girl froze, seemingly at a loss for words. Paying her no heed, Renya continued.

“I’m not really interested. It also sounds like a lot of trouble. Plus, it’s so obvious that all these over-the-top theatrical shenanigans are smoke and mirrors and you’re trying to hide something.”

“I-I have not the slightest idea what you’re talking about!”

With the girl clearly flustered, as evidenced by her wavering voice and shifty eyes, Renya went in for the finishing blow.

“You told me I lived long and prospered, right? In that case, I clearly died with

no regrets. I guess I can't say for sure since I don't remember, but I assume all that's left is getting shipped off to either Heaven or Hell and having all my memories erased, right? I'd rather not go to Hell, though."

"Th-That's right! If you say no, then you'll get sent to Hell!" said the girl with the most obvious I-came-up-with-that-just-now look on her face.

"What am I guilty of, then?" asked Renya.

"Guilty of?! U-Um, well, you know... Uh, murder! That's right! You're guilty of murder!"

"That's strange. I seem to recall being told I passed away peacefully after a nice, long life. Did I die without ever being caught for my crime?"

The girl's expression stiffened. Her cheeks trembled a little.

"Um... You died in prison!"

"Wow, I must have committed a crime pretty late in life, then. Or maybe I killed a whole lot of people? Still, to think that I just sat in prison until I finally got too old and croaked... Must have been quite the body count in the end. How many was it?"

"Erm... O-Oh, it's that! Um, you know! All men sustain their own lives by taking the lives of other creatures! In other words, you have sinned!"

"So, you're telling me there is no Heaven? That the whole world is but Hell eternal? Man, religious people are going to lose their minds."

"W-Well, there's always vegetarianism..."

"Ah, I take it you're one of those people who think the concept of 'life' doesn't apply to plants, then? Or perhaps you believe some lives are worth more than others? Whales are smart, so it's wrong to eat them, but cows and pigs are A-okay. A dolphin can be your friend, but never a chicken. Is that the kind of person you are?"

Even as Renya rattled off question after question, he knew that his verbal offensive was on shaky ground. While it seemed like he had the momentum, he realized that if his opponent truly had any intention of retaliating, she could easily just ignore his rambling and force the issue. To someone like her, the

value of a life probably rounded to zero.

“I’m so sorry. If you’ll give me a chance to apologize, I’ll start over and explain properly, so please listen to what I have to say.”

If the girl was aware of Renya’s concerns, she did not show it, because she proceeded to drop to her knees and humbly prostrate herself before him. There was another stir in the crowd, more noticeable than before, followed by a round of applause.

“Damn it, people! Why do you always clap whenever something bad happens to me?!”

Leaping to her feet, she glowered at the ladies surrounding her, but found no one willing to meet her gaze. With her teeth bared, she continued to throw menacing glances at her followers until Renya got her attention with a quick cough.

“I’ll listen,” said Renya, “provided that you give me a proper explanation. Whether or not I actually go along with your plan, though, is still up in the air.”

“Hnnngh, fine. Firstly, I am that which you people refer to as God. The concept, the being, whatever. It’s me. Next would be these perverted ladies standing all around you. They’re what you would normally call ‘angels.’ They’re perverts, by the way. Did I mention that? Yes? Good.”

Her comment prompted a round of booing. She silenced it with a glare.

“You *are* all perverts! Are you gonna try to deny it? Who went around making babies with humans? Whose yuri exploits got so out of hand that they actually tried out a virgin birth? Who was it, huh?”

In response, a number of ladies put on innocent expressions and looked off in some other direction.

“I swear, the only thing you people are good for is complaining...” grumbled the girl.

“Whatever. Keep explaining,” said Renya.

“Huh? No quip? No witty jab at me?” asked the girl in surprise.

“Nah. How you introduce yourself is your choice, after all. You’re God, right?”

So, which god? The Jesus one? The Buddha one? Or the eye for an eye one?"

"Please. Don't liken me to their lot. They're the result of people's overactive imaginations," said the girl with an irritated grimace. "I, on the other hand, am simply me. No more, no less. I created all, I guide all, and I rule over all."

"Wow, I think I'm about to pass out from amazement. So, why'd the creator of all things decide to grace Random Creation A with her godly presence?"

Renya's sarcastic tone did not go unnoticed, earning him a scowl from the girl.

"You don't believe me, do you? Fine, whatever. To answer your question though, I do of course have a very good reason for appearing before you. You see, I have a favor to ask of you."

"What's that got to do with being reincarnated into another world?"

In a complete attitude reversal, the girl looked up at Renya with an almost jarringly meek expression and said, "Actually, that *is* my favor. You see, there's a particular world I'd like you to go to."

"And why exactly does it have to be me?" asked Renya. It was, in his opinion, the obvious follow-up question. Reasons were important, after all. It wasn't like he was the protagonist of one of those cheesy "you are the chosen one" scenarios.

"Because you are the chosen one!"

"All right, that's it."

"I lied. I'm so sorry. Please don't hit me."

Seeing Renya's dark glare and the threatening gesture he made with his fist, the girl immediately backtracked and began apologizing profusely, lowering her head again and again. This was met with another round of applause from the crowd.

"Damn it, what is it with you people? Do you have a problem with me or something?" screamed the girl at her onlookers, the majority of whom nodded deeply in affirmation.

They did, Renya figured, have a problem with her. In fact, judging by their reactions, it seemed like they had built up a fairly sizeable repository of such

problems. The sight caused the girl to fall to her knees, her expression defeated.

“Okay, just... just go away please. I can’t handle you people anymore. I’ll explain the rest myself. It’ll be faster that way. And it might let me keep a little bit of my sanity.”

Slightly surprised by how little it took to make God herself throw in the towel, Renya watched the ladies around him wave and smile at him. Slowly, they disappeared without a trace. It was a peculiar sight — one that made him question whether or not this was even reality. After all, having people literally vanish into thin air before one’s eyes tended to make them doubt such things. Just then, he noticed a row of words appearing out of the corner of his eye.

《 **Notification: You gained the blessing of the angels.** 》

Renya raised an eyebrow, wondering what the message meant. However, seeing that the girl had somehow managed to get back on her feet, he redirected his attention towards her.

“Okay, so, uh,” said the girl. “What I said wasn’t entirely a lie. I mean, the part about being the chosen one was, but the rest of it was sort of true. You can’t just pick some random person off the street, hurl them across the boundary of a world, and expect them to continue to exist in the new one. It doesn’t work like that.”

“In other words, I happen to be someone who can withstand crossing that boundary?”

“That’s right. Other conditions included being reasonably well-built, in good health, ideologically sound without any deviant beliefs, and free of any lingering regrets in the original world. You happened to meet all my criteria.”

Renya considered pointing out that “lived long and prospered” and “lingering regrets” were fundamentally contradictory, but ultimately decided to keep quiet.

“Are you sure I’m ideologically okay?” asked Renya. He was about to mention how he just sent God flying with a kick, but the girl stopped him with a shake of her head.

“While I certainly didn’t anticipate you jamming your foot into my face, it’s

not really a problem either. There's no shortage of atheists out there, and the fact that I look like a little girl didn't seem to arouse you in any way when you kicked me. Plus, it's not a bad thing to support gender equality."

"For future reference, you mind telling me what kind of beliefs are not okay?"

"In short, rape, pillage, and burn, I suppose," said the girl, who proceeded to laugh in a stereotypical villain-like fashion. Had she spiked her hair and painted her face white, it would have been a pretty good impression of a certain musician who claimed to be a demon.

"So, what exactly do you want me to do after I cross over into the other world?"

"Huh? Nothing, really," said the girl with a blank look.

Renya drove his fist into her head. There was a dull thud. She wordlessly crumpled into a squat with her hands covering the point of impact.

"Dead people aren't your toys. Don't bother us for no good reason."

"Judging from your tone, you seem to have come to terms with being dead surprisingly quickly."

"I'd been alive for almost a century. That's plenty. I don't remember a damn thing about it, but if I had to guess, I'd say I had enough."

"I admit that it's pretty harsh to ask someone who just got done with the whole thing to embark on another journey of life, but please bear with me. There's a favor I'd like to ask of you."

"Didn't you just say there was nothing for me to do?" demanded Renya.

From her hunched position on the ground, the girl looked up and was just about to nod when she noticed Renya's tightly-curved fist. She shuffled backward a few steps before continuing.

"I don't need you to do anything once you're there, but I do need you to go! The point is in getting you across, okay? Good? Please don't hit me."

"I demand an explanation."

"The reason is that the world I'm trying to get you to go to has a Resource

deficiency.”

The girl’s terse explanation went straight over Renya’s head, but he gave her a look that urged her to keep talking.

“There’s not much else to say about the reason. I mean, that’s all there is to it... Uh, let’s see here,” murmured the girl. She scrunched up her face into a frown, as though contemplating something. Then, she threw her arms outwards. As if on cue, a semi-transparent window opened up right in front of Renya’s eyes. He stared at it in surprise. The girl quickly flicked her hand, and the window then displayed a map.

Renya was certain he had never seen a map like it before. He did not know the scale, so there was no way for him to tell how big anything was, but the landmass he saw was roughly in the shape of a four-leafed clover. Each of the leaves were positioned neatly in the cardinal directions.

“So can I assume that the top is north?”

“No worries. This map was drawn with the common knowledge of your world in mind, so you can safely assume the top of the map is north.”

“I see. I don’t think I’ve ever seen somewhere that looked like this on a map. What is this place?”

“The people who live there refer this land as the Eldorean continent. It’s the only landmass in this world that I want you to live in. To give you some sense of scale... you see how it’s shaped like a four-leafed clover? Assume one of those leaves is more or less the size of Eurasia.”

“Wait, what?”

Renya did a double take and looked at the map more seriously. Assuming the girl was telling the truth, this continent must be gigantic. It would have a horizontal distance the equivalent of two Eurasias put side by side.

“That’s insane!”

“Well, them’s the facts, so take it or leave it, I guess.”

“How big is the planet, then?! With a continent that big, it could probably fit a bunch of Earths inside!”

“Oh, it’s not a planet.”

“What?”

The girl opened a separate window and showed it to Renya. Displayed in vivid colors was a blanket of mist and a colossal waterfall the size of which dwarfed anything he had ever seen.

“Do you see it?” asked the girl. “So, how things work in this world is that all of the water and land — the world itself, essentially — sits on top of a big round tub and all along its edge are waterfalls, past which is a deep plunge into nothingness.”

The girl finished up her explanation with a perfectly serious expression. For five whole minutes, Renya remained speechless. Then, after the bewilderment wore off, he yelled:

“Are you *freaking* kidding me?! How backward do you have to be to believe that about the world? That’s from, like, the Dark Ages!”

“Such a belief would certainly be primitive on Earth. Not to mention entirely wrong. In this world, however, it’s reality. So, if you kept going in the same direction, you wouldn’t eventually end up where you started. You’d just fall off the edge into oblivion.”

“Is the one who created this world stupid or something?” muttered Renya. It was his honest opinion. The girl, however, protested loudly.

“Who’re you calling stupid? I’m standing right here, you know? Me! God! Don’t call me stupid!”

“You *are* stupid! Look at the ocean and how it’s literally falling off the edge of the world! How’s all that water getting replenished?!”

“From the streams and rivers that flow across the continent, obviously!”

“How the crap does the water cycle work, then?! Does it even exist?!”

“What do you think, dumbass? Of course not! You think everyone goes around recycling their planet’s water like you?”

“Isn’t that why there’s a Resource deficiency, then? Because of this shoddy system you’ve got going?” asked Renya. Being called a dumbass by the girl

caused his temper to flare, but he managed to catch himself before resorting to more violent forms of retaliation. He could have shut her up with a good smack to the noggin, but somehow, that felt like admitting defeat. Instead, he opted for a pointed remark. The girl visibly paled.



“Since the water isn’t being recycled,” continued Renya, “you must be wasting energy somewhere to create more water, right? I mean, just look at how much water is pouring over the side. Even if some of it evaporated and floated back to land, you still have to replace it sooner or later. Otherwise, wouldn’t this whole world just shrivel up?”

“Th-Th-That’s... That’s totally not true. Nope. No siree...”

“Hey, kid, look at me when you talk.”

“I-I mean it! Seriously! That’s really not it! I’ll admit that it’s wasting some energy, but that’s got nothing to do with the problem at hand! I swear to God!”

Aren’t you God, damn it?

Renya forced down the urge to take a swipe at the girl. In return, he continued to glare coldly at her. Her gaze darted left and right, trying desperately not to make eye contact.

“Well?”

“Moving on with the explanation. As you can see, the Eldorean continent is divided into five sections,” said the girl, who pretended to not hear Renya and changed the topic. He could have forced the issue, but saw no benefit in interrogating her any further, so he went along with the act.

“North, south, east, west... and the center, huh?”

“That’s right. To the east are the humans, and west are the elves. North and south are occupied by the mixed races and the dragons, respectively.”

“And the center?”

“The demons.”

As the girl spoke, the map changed to display the continent in five different colors.

“Okay, so, I’ll spare you the details, but basically, life is pretty harsh in this world. It’s not an easy environment for anyone to survive in. In fact, they’re fighting wars all over the place,” said the girl, a sense of exasperation seeping into her tone. Renya proceeded to ask the obvious question.

“And why exactly is it like that?”

“Probably because the people living there haven’t realized what’s going on yet. There are five Administrators in this world, and to kill time, they’re fighting turf wars—”

“Make! Them! Stop!”

“Ack, wait, not the throat! Stop strangling me! And you’re not even going for my windpipe! What’s with this pinpoint focus on my carotids?! Stop it! I’m gonna pass out!”

After desperately struggling against the hand grasping her throat, the girl broke free and rushed to distance herself from Renya, who had no intention of letting her go. With a slow but menacing pace — the kind that suggested if he did not like her answer, he might just skip the strangling entirely and break her neck — he advanced toward her. Renya figured that there was a big difference between the two, as the former involved asphyxiation, whereas the latter was a traumatic and fatal spinal injury.

“As if! You think I’ll just watch while you people fight wars for fun?”

“I completely understand why you’re upset, but I also can’t do a thing about it!” shouted the girl as she backed away step by step. Her expression, however, was desperately earnest.

“Aren’t you supposed to be God?”

“I handed off my administrative privilege. I can take it back by force, but there’ll be severe consequences for the world. Specifically...” The girl took a break from fleeing and, her hands still placed defensively around her neck, paused to think. “If you’re okay with sinking eighty percent of the continent, then I can fix this right now.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Too bad, then. In that case, there’s nothing I can do. Unless, of course, the Administrators decide to give me back my administrative privileges,” said the girl.

Hearing the tone of finality in her voice, Renya stopped chasing her around.

“And that would be why,” she continued, “the reincarnation system is breaking down in this world.”

“What do you mean?”

After taking a moment to confirm that Renya had indeed stopped moving, the girl turned to face him and continued her explanation.

“It’s not much of a problem for the souls that died of disease or old age, but consider a battlefield. Being killed normally there might still be okay, but what about the ones who were cut to shreds? Or got munched on by a dragon? Or had their homes raided by a bunch of orcs or goblins or bandits who indulged in various eighteen-plus activities at their expense and took multiple thrusts down there before taking a final sharp one up here? Do you think those souls would want to go back to the same environment?”

“That’s definitely not happening.”

“Right? That’s why there’s been an increase in the number of souls who refuse to go back to their original world.”

There was an air of profound fatigue about the girl. It made even Renya feel a little sorry for her, and he was the one trying to strangle her a few moments ago.

“I’ve tried persuading the Administrators, you know? And tempting the souls who refused with a nice benefits package if they changed their mind. I’ve tried all sorts of things, but the lack of results is pretty frustrating.”

“Huh. So you have been trying.”

“I sure have. But without any results to show for it, there’s not much I can say if the denizens of this world decide to blame me. Even if they tried to strangle me, I’d have no choice but to just take it.”

It occurred to Renya that since he lived in a different world, it was okay for her to resist his attempt to strangle her. Nodding to himself in comprehension, he motioned for her to continue.

“So, thanks to the increase in souls who either transmigrated to a different world or just decided to fold and retire from reincarnation, this world is facing

an imminent Resource deficiency.”

“Is there even any point to saving a world like this? Why not just let it implode?” asked Renya, who considered his proposal quite reasonable. In an environment where Administrators weren’t even bothering to do their jobs properly and the population just kept dropping, decline leading to destruction seemed inevitable. The girl, however, shook her head.

“The thought had crossed my mind, but after considering how many lives would be lost in the process, I decided I couldn’t just throw the baby out with the bathwater,” she replied. After that, she muttered something about remaking and angels and everyone dying from overwork.

“What about moving everyone to a different world?”

“I lack the capacity. First of all, most souls aren’t even aware that they get reincarnated. There are only a small number of souls who reach a high enough level to even refuse.”

Normally, souls who had reached a certain degree of quality would consume some amount of a world’s Resources and be reincarnated in the same world. That was how a world maintained its total Resources. When they opted to transmigrate to a different world, the Resources consumed in that process would not be restored in the original world, causing the total amount to continuously fall. Furthermore, the average souls would never know any of this and had no choice but to keep walking down this path that would gradually lead to their destruction.

“Well, that’s a real downer of a story,” said Renya.

“Tell me about it,” replied the girl. “I’d love to be able to convince the Administrators to get their act together and point this world toward a better direction, but that’s going to take time, as well. That’s why I need your help.”

“So, you want me to go to this world carrying a bunch of Resources and buy you some time.”

“If I could send the Resources through by themselves, I’d have done it already, but it’s sort of like how you can’t send an attachment without the email. Currently, I can’t move any Resources over without attaching it to

someone's soul."

"Isn't there something like a file sharing program?"

"That would be worth making if there's someone on the receiving end. Unfortunately, the Administrators don't seem realize this is happening, so they're stopping me from interfering..."

In other words, she could send the file, but there was no point if nobody was there to receive it. The thought brought a wry smile to the girl's face. According to her, if the Administrators realized their own world was on the verge of destruction, they might change their stance. However, since they were not aware, they saw her requests as nothing more than unnecessary meddling.

"Did you try to explain the situation to them?"

"They told me it was nonsense and refused to hear another word."

"This is clearly a case of choosing the wrong people for the job."

"You're absolutely right. I have no one to blame but myself."

Renya watched as the girl hung her head. He sighed. If he didn't know, he wouldn't have cared, but now that he did know, it felt a little wrong to play the "not my problem" card. Despite his desire to avoid being burdened with a load of trouble, he made up his mind.

"All right. I'll help you."

"I'm terribly sorry for dragging you into this mess, but I'm glad you said yes. Please accept my sincerest gratitude, Renya," the girl said with a deep bow. In the back of his mind, Renya noted that it was times like these when he really wished she did not have the appearance of a young girl. He wasn't doing anything inappropriate, but having a young girl lower her head at him like that made him feel like he was.

"Okay, enough with the bowing already. You can get up," urged Renya, whose voice sounded just a little flustered. He figured, however, that this was inevitable. In response, the girl bowed even more deeply before slowly getting back up.

"My deepest apologies for the trouble, but thank you. If you said no, I would

have had to look for another suitable candidate,” said the girl, then she added, “Which would have been such a pain...”

This piqued Renya’s curiosity.

“By the way, what are the chances of finding a suitable candidate?”

“One in five billion six hundred and thirty million.”

Renya let out another sigh at the number. Statistically, that meant there was only one person on Earth who fit the bill. It was, he thought, quite the stroke of misfortune for him.

“So, how exactly is it going to work when you send me to this world? I assume I won’t have to start over from being born, right?” He made sure to emphasize the latter part of his sentence. While it was an odd worry considering all his memories were gone, he still felt some resistance at reliving his life from the toddler years. In fact, if he had to do the whole baby thing with his current mental faculties intact, he might actually die from embarrassment.

“If I tried to drop you into the reincarnation system, they might use their administrative privileges to bounce you back, so I’ll be using my power to force you into the world. That means you won’t be getting reborn. I’ll have it set so that if you die over there, you’ll automatically come back here. Once that happens, I’ll honor your wishes for your next reincarnation. You’ll be free to choose for yourself.”

Knowing that he would not have to remain indefinitely at his destination was a relief for Renya. After all, it didn’t sound like a world he would enjoy a long stay in.

“As for issues with family registers and your identity and such, if anyone asks, just tell them you’re a Wanderer. It’ll make sense to them.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“There are actually a fair number of people in this world who drifted in from other worlds. The world itself is unstable, so it’s not uncommon to see rifts to other worlds pop open randomly from time to time.”

“So much for the conditions. Didn’t you have to meet a bunch of them before

crossing a boundary?”

“One’s crossing a boundary and the other’s falling down a hole. They’re not the same,” replied the girl. The window she was showing Renya disappeared after she flicked at it with her finger. Then, she opened up a different window.

“Now, then. Once I send you over, I’ll need you to live there for a couple of decades. To prepare you for this endeavor, I, *God*, shall bestow upon you my blessing.”

The way she emphasized the word “God” made Renya clap his hands together, as though suddenly remembering something.

“Oh, right. Now that you mention it, you’re God, aren’t you?”

“Yes-I-am! And don’t you forget it! That’s the most important part!”

“Well, you can’t blame me, can you? I mean, look at yourself. You’re like the least God-looking thing around.”

The girl pouted in response. Seeing the sullen look on her face, Renya became slightly worried that he said something he should not have.

“So much for appealing to your instincts to protect the weak. That was the whole reason I went with the look-I’m-a-delicate-snowflake appearance, too...”

“Seriously? This is all calculated?” asked Renya incredulously. He could not help but feel his gaze toward her growing colder.

“What else was I supposed to do?” yelled the girl, her fists clenched tightly at her sides. “You can take the high road and preach all you want, but in the end, all that matters to humans for their first impression are looks. When a cute guy puts his arm around a lady’s shoulder, it rarely becomes a problem, but if some creepy otaku did that, it’s suddenly sexual harassment and indecent assault and police sirens are going off all over the place. Isn’t that how reality works, huh?”

“It is, but— Ugh, forget it! More importantly, what about the blessing? Weren’t you going to give me something?!” Something told Renya it was a very bad idea to let the girl continue her rant, so he quickly cut her off. It proved effective, as the girl relaxed and clapped her hands together.

“Oh, right. First, allow me to grant you your first blessing: Wakasa.”

“...You mean the place with the nuclear generators?”

“...Not that Wakasa. You’re heading to an alternate world, for God’s sake. What’s the point in gifting you a chunk of Japan?”

Despite his generous lead-in, the girl barely made an effort at a witty comeback. He was actually hoping for her to play the straight man for once, considering she had been spewing no small amount of bile at people for the past while, but his attempt did not pay off. His offer to trade roles was met with much indifference.

“I meant the other Wakasa, the Japanese word for youth! I’m saying I’ll take your decrepit 94-year-old body and use my power to dial it back to a perky eighteen.”

“Isn’t the 94-year-old body better for me? That way, I’ll die almost immediately and get sent back here for reincarnation.” From Renya’s perspective, he had nothing to do there once he dropped off the Resources, so he had no reason to live a long life. While the idea was indeed impressively efficient, the sheer jaded nature of it left the girl speechless, her mouth hanging open in shock.

“It’s not like I have anything to do there, right?” he said.

“W-Well, I guess that’s true... But we’re talking an alternate world here! Swords and shields! Robes and wizard hats! A world filled with riches and adventure! You can probably have your own harem there if you try hard enough! What’s with the degenerate attitude, you old fart?”

“Well, attitudes aside, I *am* old...”

He was, after all, 94 years old. Upon being reminded of this fact, the girl found herself at a loss for words.

“Huh? Oh, uh... Hm...” She rapidly stroked the window she just opened with her fingers, her face a mask of deep thought. The semi-transparent nature of the window made it hard to read, and Renya could not make out its contents from where he stood. After poking at the display for a little while, the girl seemed to find what she was looking for. Her expression lit up and she turned toward him.

“Renya, here’s something you might want to know. That world actually has many delicious foods that didn’t exist in your original world.”

“Oh?” Renya soon caught on to the girl’s intention. Presumably, she was trying to dig out some information that would motivate him, or at least make him want to stay alive. Despite remembering little of his previous life, the words “delicious foods” had an irresistible pull. He figured he was probably a foodie in his previous life.

“Of course, while there are things that are both cheap and tasty, there are also wonderful delicacies that’ll cost you an arm and a leg. Tasting all of them will require a large amount of money. Making a large amount of money is impossible for a 94-year-old geezer,” proclaimed the girl with her hands folded firmly into fists.

“Fair point. I’ll take you up on it. Going in a young body is fine, then. Now, how about you tell me the honest reason? Hiding things from me won’t do you any favors.”

“After I attach the Resources to your soul, it’ll probably take a few decades for them to disperse. I can’t just drop you there and be done with it. Dead bodies don’t disperse Resources. That’s why I’d really appreciate it if you lived for as long as possible. That’s the whole of it, honest. God’s honor.”

At Renya’s urging, the girl parted with the truth surprisingly quickly. Apparently, she really did realize that it did no good to hide things from him.

“This isn’t much of a blessing, then, is it? More like a necessary protocol.”

“Hnnngh... Normally, as soon as I tell them they get to be young again, they’re all, like, ‘Omigosh thank you my lord’ and stuff, and then I have them dancing in the palm of my hand...” The girl, with the most innocent downcast gaze and watery eyes, muttered some terribly wicked words.

“If you’re going to call it a blessing, give me a real gift. Stuff to keep me alive and disperse Resources are more like necessary expenses, right?”

“Hmph, what kind of blessing do you want, then?” asked the girl, completely abandoning the effort of thinking and throwing the question to Renya instead. “Let’s just say my blessing will be ‘The right to be granted that which you,

Renya, deem necessary.’”

“Money.”

His sudden reply startled the girl and she drew back in shock.

“Also, an impenetrable home base that’s guaranteed to be safe and unbelievably overpowered fighting skills.”

“Please, no... Think about the balance... oh, the poor balance. It’d be so broken, the world would probably collapse from that first.”

The girl managed to chain her startled lurch into a full prostration. It was honestly an impressive sequence. She then proceeded to rub her forehead against the ground. The display was so pitiful that even Renya felt guilty.

“They would have been nice to have, but I guess I can’t expect that much.”

“It’s not impossible for me to make you a ludicrously large mountain of rare metals, but it’d cause a breakdown of the global currency system. I can give you enough power to flatten a country on your own, but nothing good can come of that. The impenetrable home base, I can also make, but the secondary activities that are possible upon settling down there...”

“Okay, I get it. It was just a thought, so you can get up already,” said Renya to the girl who had nearly curled up into a ball. He supposed she felt ashamed at being made to eat her words so soon. “Well, since I get to be young again, it’d be nice to stay healthy.”

Judging that spending any more time in their current situation would only make things more awkward, he quickly rattled off whatever came to mind, trying to give priority to the simpler ones first.

“R-Right. Good health. Check.”

“Plus, I’m apparently pretty fond of eating and drinking, so I need a stomach and liver that can take plenty of abuse.”

“I see. Alcohol resistance and a voracious appetite.”

“I also need to make money, so I’ll want some sort of ability for doing that. You said this was a sword-and-magic world, right? I assume the fastest way is through more dangerous work?”

“Indeed. I’ll just add a few things here and there for fighting prowess...”

The girl listened intently as Renya spoke. She also pulled out a notepad from somewhere and was frantically taking notes on what he said. He took a moment to acknowledge the mismatch in what he was witnessing. For someone who could materialize windows from thin air, her notetaking was jarringly analog.

“I also want to try making something,” he continued. “I don’t know why, but the thought of being a blacksmith — a swordsmith, specifically — appeals to me.”

“Mhm. Oh, speaking of which, I do believe you used to be a ranked kendo practitioner.”

“Is that so? Wait, you erased those kinds of memories, too?”

“The skills are probably still with you, though. As muscle memory.”

“Let’s see... If there’s magic in the world, I’d like to be able to use it. I won’t ask to wield every form of magic available, but I’d prefer to at least excel in one type.”

“I see, I see. By the way, which do you think is more important: damage or attack speed?”

“Attack speed, obviously. Is there a point to this question?”

The way Renya saw it, “devastating if it hits” was the same as “useless if it doesn’t.”

“Certainly. It’s for reference.”

“Also, I don’t expect to be the strongest man alive right off the bat, but try to make it so training pays off a lot for me. And I think that’s about it.”

“Hmm, I see. Oh, do you have any requests regarding your physical appearance?”

The question caught Renya off guard. He gave the girl a questioning look. She continued unperturbed.

“Your original body, having met its end in its original world, has been

cremated and is now lying in a grave somewhere. When I send you to the other world, I'll have to fabricate a new body for you to inhabit."

"Oh, I see."

"For this, there's a little bit more leeway, so I can be more accommodating of your demands. A dashing Casanova whose gaze alone can cause the ladies to swoon? A luscious beauty before whom lies countless men fallen to the ground in unmoving prostration after a single look? Whatever you want, feel free to hit me with it."

"I can swap genders?"

"It's a new body, after all. I'll be making it from scratch, so either way is fine."

Renya had the distinct notion that he was male. The framework of his memories had been reset, so he could not say for sure. Even from his name, however, he doubted he was female. With that in mind, he pondered his options. It was, honestly, not rocket science. The question was simple: did he want to thrust or be thrust upon? Simple, but most certainly crucial. After a moment, he made up his mind.

"Male, please. As long as I'm not ugly. The kind of normal person you can find anywhere."

"Understood. An average physical appearance that neither offends nor charms."

After scribbling all the way down to the bottom of the page, the girl ripped it from the pad, scrunched it up into a ball, and placed it on her hand. She puckered her tiny lips and blew a small breath at the paper ball. It burst into flames in her hand and soon turned to ash.

Renya watched it happen, wondering what she was doing with the note she spent so much effort writing. Just then, he saw a message appear out of the corner of his eye. It was the same kind as when the angels disappeared.

《 **Notification: You gained "Healthy Body," "Super Regen," "Alcohol Resistance," "Voracious Appetite," "Blacksmith," "Sword Mastery," "Physical Mastery," "Magecraft Mastery (Aptitude: Wind)," "Quickcast," "High-Speed Recharge," "Simulcast," "Limit Break Leveling," "Appraisal," "Foreign World**

Language.” »

“What the heck is this?”

“Uh, you can think of those as skills you get in video games— Oh, I suppose a 94-year-old wouldn’t have played games.”

“Actually, I sort of get it.”

Thanks to his memory wipe, he could not recall whether he took up playing games in his senior years to keep himself from getting bored, but got the gist of what the girl was trying to say.

“Really? I guess I don’t have to explain, then. In any case, I’ve given you the skills that you asked for. Please try out each of your skills and learn how to use them. Aside from the skills, I’ll also provide you with a hotline to me that you can use once per day. I can’t promise I’ll answer everything, though. Just keep that in mind, please. To use it, just visualize it in your head.”

“I see. Okay, when are you going to send me there?”

“Anytime. We can get going as soon as you’re ready,” answered the girl. A faint orb of light, elliptical in shape and as tall as a person, appeared beside her. Renya figured it was probably the gate that led to his otherworldly destination.

“Well, I guess I’m off. How long do you think until we meet again?”

“If things go awry, immediately. Normally, it should be a few decades later. If things go well, it’s possible we might never meet again.”

“Are you telling me there’s a way to gain immortality? Huh. Well, if I like what I see there, maybe I’ll try looking for it.”

“I cannot answer that. I do think it’s worth looking around, though.”

With a resigned smile, Renya gave the girl a look that said, “Seriously? That might as well have been a yes.” He turned around and, waving casually back at her, walked toward the gate.

“All right. See you, then.”

“Please allow me to apologize once again for dragging you into this. I wish you well, and hope that your new life will be a good one.”

As he stepped through the gate, Renya saw the girl give a quick bow. A line of words appeared in his view.

《 **Notification: You gained the blessing of the Creator.** 》

Thus did Renya Kunugi, who neither wanted nor wished for any of this, take his first step toward a brand new world and his new life.

Interlude: The First One, or So It Was Told

“And there he goes...” whispered the girl to herself as she watched the figure disappear into the glowing gate. “God I am, yet God I’m not. If I were truly all-powerful and all-knowing, I wouldn’t have had to ask a human child to do this for me.”

“Have we still heard nothing from the Administrators over there?”

A figure suddenly appeared behind the girl. It was one of the blond-haired beauties with wings she’d shooed away a while ago.

“Not even a peep. I swear, it’s not like I bite, and I told them I don’t want the administrative privileges back, but they just refuse to believe me. Is the throne of a god really that appealing?” asked the girl with a shrug, her tone slightly incredulous. The lady shook her head.

“I cannot comment on the throne,” she replied, “seeing as I have never sat upon it.”

“You haven’t? Really? You wanna try one somewhere?”

“Surely, you jest. That is a task far too onerous for the likes of one such as myself,” said the lady, declining the offer with a small bow.

“True,” the girl said, nodding in agreement, “that’s probably the wise answer. It’s a lot of trouble for no gain. In fact, if someone offered to do my job for me, I’d take them up on it in a heartbeat. I’d love to live as a carefree human.”

“You wish to surrender your infinite lifespan and near-omnipotent powers to step into the cycle of reincarnation with a life of barely one hundred years and your wisdom and experiences wiped clean each time?” the lady asked with mild surprise. She was met with a blank look that clearly suggested the girl did not see the question coming.

“You think it’s weird?”

“I certainly cannot see myself considering the same.”

“How long has it been since you were brought into existence?”

“If my memory is correct, I believe approximately a millennium ago,” answered the lady as she searched through her vast store of memories, trying to dig up its singular origin. As she did, the expression on the girl’s face gradually shifted from blankness to comprehension.

“Mmm, I guess you wouldn’t understand, then.”

“Is that so?”

“In my case, it’s been about eleven billion two hundred and sixty million years since I formed. That’s what I remember, anyway. A lot of things have happened during that time, and I still remember every last one of them down to the smallest detail. And in case you’re wondering, yes, it’s nothing but pure agony.”

The girl let out a sigh. It was a small one, but it was also deep. There was a weight to that sigh, coupled with a darkness in her eyes when she glanced up, that sent a chill down the lady’s spine. At once, she realized that for her, a being of mere millennia, the sheer depths of that gaping abyss she saw was entirely unfathomable.

“I’m tired... I’ve had enough... Such emotions, I’ve already forgotten. I’ve forgotten how long ago I’ve forgotten. I simply create, destroy, and create again. I’m but a vessel of memories — a mere construct of remembrance — for all that has and will transpire. If this is what it means to be God, then... is there anything left to do but laugh?”

“That is...”

The lady tried to speak, but no words came. She bit her lip, realizing the true extent of the girl’s existence and the immeasurable vastness of her time. There were no words she could say that the being before her had not already heard. There was no comfort she could offer.

“With that said, though, there is a high note every once in a while. Taking a boot to the face, for example. Even for me, that’s definitely on the rarer side of things,” said the girl in a noticeably lighter tone. It was obviously an attempt to change the topic and brighten the atmosphere, but the lady decided to play along.

“By rarer, do you mean to imply that it has happened a few times in the past?”

“Well, it’s a first for a human child. If we’re talking about angels, I’d say maybe once in a millennium or so...”

“So, some basic arithmetic would deduce that you have been kicked over a million times.”

“Yeah. Can you believe it? I gave birth to them, for God’s sake. So heartless.”

While the lady thought that the girl could drastically decrease her incidence of foot-to-face encounters simply by acting more reasonably, she had the good sense to keep that to herself. After all, mobilizing eighty percent of the entire angel population just to welcome a single human child was guaranteed to garner some ill will. While lower-ranked angels might have been indifferent, her close aids would definitely have felt the urge to give her a good kick or two.

“Let’s put those issues aside and discuss something else. We should figure out what equipment we’re going to give Renya. We can’t send him there empty-handed and expect him to survive. That’d be just cruel.”

“True. But since this is you we are talking about, I assume you have already prepared a list of items?”

“Yeah, I guess I have. Wanna take a look?”

The lady was not surprised. She had been dealing with the girl for a good number of years and was intimately familiar with her definition of “figure out,” by which she meant “inform of the fact that appropriate items have been selected and probably already sent to the corresponding world.” At this point, being shown the list was often a formality and she had no actual say in the matter. Resisting the urge to point out that she was not even in any position to say no, the lady approached the girl, who was poking at a new window she’d just materialized. She eyed its contents.

“That is a surprisingly unremarkable list.”

It contained medicine and food, some cash on hand, as well as weapons and armor. Quite ordinary. So much so, the lady thought, that she saw no need to seek another’s approval.

“Personally, I’d have given him maybe a weapon from around here. Some godly thing, you know? But my aides, ugh, they were like, no, there’s this and that and blah blah blah. I told them that considering we’re the ones asking him to cross over into that world, we should give him some amount of power to guarantee his safety, but nope, they just wouldn’t listen.”

“It would be a problem if whatever you gave Renya remained in that world after his death,” the lady pointed out. As far as she knew, the people in the world that Renya traveled to believed that Artifact-class items were created by the gods, but they were wrong. Items like those had only two possible origins: they were either created by the Administrators and left in the world, or made by humans through some miraculous coincidence and people just decided to believe it was a gift from the gods. If real gods actually went and made a weapon with their own hands, its power would defy the comprehension of mere humans. Were such a thing left behind in a world, it would almost certainly be the cause of much trouble. In that sense, the opposition of the girl’s aides to her idea was doubtlessly justified. With those thoughts in mind, the lady’s gaze stopped on a certain row of the list.

“Uh... What might this ‘shinai’ item be?”

“It’s a bamboo sword. Some parts of Renya’s old world used it as a practice weapon. It’s light and tough, but it’s about as non-lethal as weapons get. Renya has experience in kendo, so he should be familiar with how to handle it.”

“Have you shown this list to your aides?” asked the lady. Her voice shook a little.

“Yeah. Why?” The girl replied once again with a blank look.

“Did they read the detailed explanation of each item?”

“Nah, they sort of skimmed it and were like, ‘K, this looks fine.’”

The lady looked at the list again, her mind reeling with shock. It was likely that the girl’s aides knew what a shinai was. For those angels, it was probably just some piece of bamboo, so when they saw it in the list, they just waved it off and gave their approval. For her, however, she had no idea what it was. Therefore, she had to read the appended explanation properly. That was how she noticed.

“This bamboo sword has got the ‘Indestructible’ property on it, yes?”

“Well, duh. You realize regular bamboo swords are literally just bamboo, right? They’d break if you hit anything with them.”

From the girl’s perspective, it was a mere compromise — one made reluctantly after her aides’ objections — to sending Renya a proper weapon. In a world where people swung around weapons with actual sharpened blades, she doubted there would be much point to carrying a stick of bamboo. Its lightness limited its power, and it would last only a few hits at most in a clash against a real sword. Worst case scenario, the opponent’s blade might just cut clean through it. For a gift from God herself, it was pitifully feeble, and she was not okay with that. Therefore, she added the “Indestructible” property to it. Even if it was made of bamboo, as long as it did not break, it would stand a fair chance against a real sword. Of course, being hit by it would still hurt exactly as much as a piece of bamboo, which is to say, not very much at all. Since kendo practitioners also used the shinai to block attacks, she figured that as long as Renya could land hits without getting hit himself, he would be fine. She was, in fact, a hundred and twenty percent confident in his ability to do exactly that.

“Could you perhaps enlighten me,” said the lady, acutely aware of the mistake in the girl’s logic, “of what happens when an object with the ‘Indestructible’ property collides with a destructible one?”

“Well, it’d— AH!” After a short moment of consideration, the girl shrieked as realization dawned on her. “Okay, so, when an indestructible object collides with a destructible one, the destructible one breaks without exception, right?”

“That is correct. Without. Exception. Let that sink in for a minute. In other words, the bamboo sword you gave Renya is imbued with the ability to shatter absolutely anything and everything, be it physical or ethereal. So long as it is destructible, if he keeps hitting it, he *will* destroy it! Do you see the problem here?!”

“Right. That means he can walk up to literally anything, whack it with his bamboo, and watch it crack. Castle walls, dragonscale, mithril and orichalcum, it’d rip through all of them... He can even nullify magecraft by wiping out barriers, spells, and seals!”

“You did not give him a weapon. You turned him into a walking armory! Is there anything you can do to fix it right now?!”

“I already sent the damn thing over! I can technically still change the properties of an item in another world, but I’d have to override the Administrator, and that’d have some serious repercussions for that world. Ugh, I’m such an idiot!”

The girl squatted down with her head in her hands. Seeing the regret on her face, the lady decided that maybe she had been too hard on the girl. At least she recognized just how serious the issue was and reflected on her mistake. Her repentance would not fix the terrible problem she caused, but it was worth something. Or, it would have been, were it not for the girl’s next words.

“What was I thinking, putting such an awesome ability on a bamboo sword of all things?!”

“That is not the problem!”

Her gaze fixed on the crouching girl, the lady pulled up her leg and swung it forward in a wide arc. The hem of her clothes rolled all the way up to the top of her thighs, but she paid it no mind, instead focusing all her attention on unleashing a full-blown soccer kick at the girl’s head. In terms of pure muscle power, there was a considerable difference between Renya and her. He was a human. She was an angel.

With no time to block, the girl took the kick squarely in the head and shot up into the sky. Spinning like a soccer ball, she spiralled wildly through the air before landing back on the ground with a heavy thud.

“Wh-Who’d have thought this would happen twice in such a short time...” groaned the girl as she crawled back with one hand pressed against the spot where she was kicked.

“To be fair,” said the lady, “some things such as iron or mithril can probably take a few hits and still survive. Not everything is going to melt like butter. Human bodies, though, will! Skin, muscle, bone, whatever. It will chew right through them! Non-lethal? No. That thing is going to be *very, very lethal*.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Being indestructible, it might as well be a club. An

insanely sturdy club that's light enough to be swung like a bamboo sword. Man, I definitely botched this one."

"On top of that, things produced by magecraft have no physical toughness, so they will be falling apart left and right."

"Some might be a little more resistant depending on the scale and strength of the spell, but yeah. Ultimately, there's nothing it can't destroy, so it can technically nullify all forms of magecraft. Pretty crazy."

"Just so you know, nothing in that world has the 'Indestructible' property. No such object exists there."

That meant it was impossible to find another item like the bamboo sword in question in that world, no matter how hard one looked. Its rarity alone would make it priceless. Such concerns, however, seemed to have gone right over the girl's head.

"Indestructibility is a doozy, huh. I mean, it's on every single weapon around here, so it never occurred to me how significant it was."

"The only silver lining in all this is the fact that the sword is not sharp."

Otherwise, it would be an unstoppable blade that never dulled. It was terrifying to imagine the effects that would have on the world.

"Hmm, I guess there's no point crying over spilled milk. Still, seeing the 'Indestructible' property on some dinky little bamboo sword offends my artistic sensibilities. That needs to be remedied."

"For the love of— Ugh, whatever. I don't care anymore," mumbled the lady.

"It's gotta look cooler! I need to remake it into something awesome! You know those swords protagonists use in those games? Yeah! Something like that!"

"Go choke on your stupid swords, you dumbass deity!"

For the third time in one day, the girl who styled herself God was sent flying through the air by a kick to the head.

Chapter 1: There Was Trouble on the Double, or So It Was Told

“Oh, okay. Cute gimmick. I get what this is. This is one of those ‘Hey, look at how NOT like your original world this is’ moments to drive the point home. Yep, doesn’t get much more not-my-original-world than this.”

Almost immediately after stepping through the gate of light that materialized beside the young girl who called herself God, Renya found himself in a forest somewhere. He was standing on well-trodden ground that appeared to be a road. Deep woods flanked the road on both sides, and there was nothing to see in either direction but trees. Above him was a clear sky, beautifully blue. Renya glanced up. If he still harbored any doubts about whether this was the same world in which he previously lived for 94 years, they were dispelled by the two suns glowing brightly overhead.

While the existence of two suns definitely shocked him, he found some relief from the fact that the sky was still blue. It was at least a familiar color. If this alternate world had decided to show up with a purple sky or something, he would have had to either accept a disturbing new reality or part ways with his sanity. He did not want to find out which would have happened first.

He looked at the trees surrounding him. He had no idea what any of them were, but then again, he was no connoisseur of trees. Judging from their basic appearance, however, they did not seem too different from the ones in his old world. It seemed that some of his common sense was still applicable here, and that made him feel better. The reset may have wiped his memories clean, but the skills and experiences ingrained in him were a good deal more resilient.

He was wearing a clean white shirt along with pants and simple leather shoes. Realizing that he had forgotten to ask about how dangerous this place was, he checked around and found that he was not armed in any way. Walking around in an unknown forest of a foreign world with nothing but the clothes on his back seemed like a bad idea. Just then, the word “Inventory” appeared in his

field of view. He focused his gaze on it as though selecting it with a cursor, and a semi-transparent window appeared before him. It was the same kind as the one the young girl had used to show him the map. A fifteen-by-fifteen grid was displayed on the window. There were tiny little icons in some of the spaces. One of the icons looked like money, so he touched it with his finger. Immediately, information began to stream into his head.

《 **Currency: 10 Gold Coins** 》

Apparently, it really did mean money. Figuring that this was some sort of parting gift from God, he examined each of the other icons. In total, the items he found in his inventory window included: ten gold coins, twelve packets of emergency rations, six basic medicinal herbs, three bandages, one bamboo sword, one set of leather armor, and one water bottle — water included.

While the leather armor made sense, he could not for the life of him figure out why there was a bamboo sword. As he poked at the icon, a passage of explanatory text flashed across his mind.

《 **Bamboo Sword: Class 10 (Artifact), “Indestructible”** 》

He raised an eyebrow, wondering what “Artifact” meant. The answer appeared almost immediately.

《 **Notification: Help Activated - Artifacts are lost relics. They refer to handicrafts of a quality unachievable by the hands of man. All such items are categorized as class 10 without exception.** 》

Well, that's convenient. I think I can get used to this, thought Renya to himself as he took a moment to appreciate his new body.

Apparently, the bamboo sword hailed from the land of God and, despite its conspicuous bamboo-ness, was of a correspondingly high level of quality. Following that line of logic, he tapped the icon of the leather armor, as well, wondering what godly wonders lay therein.

《 **Leather Armor: Class 2, Generic Item** 》

Well, then. So much for being utterly invincible. Feeling a tad disappointed that his armor was mere garden variety, Renya moved his hand to the top of the inventory window and double-tapped an icon there. Two indicators

appeared: “Equip” and “Take Out.” He immediately selected Equip. The leather armor icon vanished from the inventory, and his body began to glow faintly. When the light faded, his torso was protected by a chest piece that appeared over his shirt, and arm guards were covering his arms from elbow to wrist. Apparently, they came as a set. His head and lower body remained unguarded, which he was not entirely satisfied with. As the saying goes, however, beggars can’t be choosers, so he put it out of his mind and equipped the bamboo sword as well.

The sword turned out to be exactly the same as he remembered. It was a little over a meter, a length known as “Sankyu.” The term meant three-nine, which referred to its length in traditional units of measurement — three shaku and nine sun. This put it on the longer side, and such a sword would normally be employed by taller people. Regardless, it remained light and easy to wield. Therefore the longer the better, in Renya’s opinion.

As he held it in his hand and regarded it, the question came back to him: why a bamboo sword of all things? In response, a message appeared in his mind again.

《 **Notification: Help Activated - I actually wanted to give you some kind of short sword, but all the weapons around here are class 10 and the angels refused to let me grab one. I figured that since you had kendo experience in your previous life, you’d feel right at home with a bamboo sword, so I sent you one instead. —From God** 》

After reading the explanation from the help function that apparently moonlighted as some sort of messenger service, Renya felt a little less miffed by the piece of bamboo in his hand. There was, after all, some thought put into it. He had to give her credit for that. It did not explain why there was a bamboo sword in the land of God, but that question was likely to remain unanswered in the foreseeable future, so he pushed it out of his mind and started thinking about what his next step should be.

As soon as he set foot into this world, he had basically completed the girl’s request already. *Oh, wait, “God’s” request.* He insisted on putting air quotes around that word in his head. All that remained, in a manner of speaking, was to chill for a couple of decades and wander around, disseminating these so-

called Resources that were somewhere in his body. His goal was a long stretch of an empty highway away, and he had cruise control. With that in mind, he figured he might as well enjoy these few decades ahead of him. To that end, he was going to have to procure the things necessary for a nice and easy life.

“First, I need to find civilization. Everything starts from there.”

He had no idea whereabouts he was in relation to the map he was shown before coming here, but since he was standing on a road, as long as he kept walking along it in one direction, he would doubtlessly find a town sooner or later. The only issue was which direction he should head in. Even if he heavily rationed his supplies, they would last him a few days at most. The worst was that he only had one bottle of water. That meant every drop of it had to be used as drinking water, which left nothing for other tasks such as certain hygienic practices of the hands, face, and body. As a Japanese expat, said hygienic practices were of paramount importance. He had, therefore, a serious problem.

“Ugh, I guess I’ll have to just deal with it. Damn it, why’d she have to drop me in the middle of nowhere? That freaking loli, I swear...” muttered Renya under his breath. Despite being aware that she probably chose somewhere uninhabited so no one saw him appear, he could not help but curse at her. As he uttered a string of frustrated expletives, the emptiness of swearing out loud in the middle of a forest with no one around to hear slowly caught up with him and he stopped. He took a small branch lying at the side of the road and propped it up on the ground.

“Not the most original idea, but whatever. Let’s see which way you fall,” he said as he surrendered his decision to God. Then, he remembered who God was and reconsidered. The thought of relying on that little girl irked him, so he instead decided to leave his choice up to random chance.

“All right, let’s see what *random chance* has in store for me,” he said as he let go of the stick. As it began to fall, the surrounding silence was broken by the faint sound of a human voice. He turned toward its direction. The stick fell the other way.

“God damn it, I hate random chance...” mumbled Renya as he stared as the

stick, perfectly aligned with the road but pointing in the exact opposite direction of the sound. If he kept to his original plan, he would have to follow the stick, but the sound he heard was unmistakably a person's scream. He probably had little time to hesitate, but hesitate he did. On the one hand, there was the stick. On the other, the source of a scream and likely some sort of trouble. Ignoring the scream and heading off in the other direction felt like running away. However, he'd just arrived in this world and was a stranger to everyone around, so he had no obligation to act, either. After chewing on the choice for a little while, he ran off in the direction of the scream. Asking himself why he did, he found that he had no answer. The best he could come up with was that a voice meant a person, and a person — hostile or not — meant the chance to ask for directions to a town. At worst, he could just ignore whatever was happening and walk away. With his mind set, he quickened his steps toward the source of the voice, bamboo sword held firmly in his left hand.

The speed at which he ran surprised him. Thanks to the girl, physically, his body was indeed young and fresh and devoid of any old memories. Mentally, though, it was still inhabited by a 94-year-old soul who kicked the bucket after racking up a whole lot of checkmarks on its list. Somewhere in that soul was the distinct impression that his legs had not felt so light when he was alive. The pleasure of such an experience alone might be worth the price of admission. Feeling rather glad he took God up on her offer, Renya kept up his brisk run. He gave an appreciative nod toward his body, which had not even broken a sweat, and trained his eyes on the fast-approaching source of the scream.

He could faintly make out a number of darker-skinned men in leather armor off in the distance. They stood in a circle surrounding two women. One had blond hair and wore a robe like that of a nun. Beside her was the other one, who stood with her back toward the first woman in a protective stance. The second woman had her long black hair in a ponytail and was brandishing a long sword. She was not fully armored, but wore metal plates over the vital points of her body. Seeing their relative positions to the men, Renya immediately decided that walking away was not an option.

There was a part of him that honestly wanted to stand by and watch how things played out. It would be a morally questionable choice, but no one could

fault him for being a bystander right now, and it was not the kind of situation one often had a chance to see. Given the circumstances, he figured it was a reasonable thought to have. He was, after all, a 94-year-old zombie in some ways. Surely, he could afford to be a little more degenerate. Something about acting his age and such.

The group of people he was racing toward quickly noticed him, as well. At first, the men were cautious, but their expressions soon turned mocking as they dropped their guard. The women's expressions, which originally lit up with a glimmer of hope, also shifted to disappointment. Suddenly, it felt awkward for him to jump in now, but it felt equally awkward to stop, turn around, and run back the other way. With no better choice available, he continued his approach.

Even Renya could figure out the gist of what they were thinking from their expressions. The men had their guard up for a moment, thinking a new enemy might have appeared. When they got a good look at Renya, they probably decided immediately that he was not a threat. For the women, it must have looked like help had arrived, but upon closer inspection, they realized that he was unlikely to be of much help at all. It was probably the crude leather armor and the bamboo sword. They were a little lacking in the intimidation factor. Renya comforted himself with that thought.

“Actually, that’s not why I was going to decline the invitation. There’s another reason.”

Something had been bugging him ever since he met the two, and he decided he might as well ask now. Surely, they were already past the point of propriety. After an attempted seduction, anything was fair game.

“After I hear the explanation, assuming it clears up my concern, then I’d be open to accepting the invitation. Without your *services*, even.”

“I’ve got a creeping suspicion that whatever you’re about to ask is something I’d rather not answer.”

“It’s nothing complicated. Just treat it like we’re comparing answers. I show you what was bugging me, and you show me what you know.”

Rona tilted her head, her face a mask of innocent incomprehension. Her gesture was so natural and charming that any other guy would have doubted his own words, figuring he must have said something strange. Renya was not convinced.

“You can play dumb all you want, but I’m going to start talking,” pressed Renya.

“As you wish. I’m listening,” she replied smilingly.

“The first thing goes back to when we first met,” Renya said as he dug through his memories. “Something doesn’t add up. If we assume you were on a mission to investigate the forest as you told me afterwards, that party composition makes no sense.”

“Does it not? What was wrong with the party?”

“You don’t think there’s anything wrong with a party of two girls joining a party of six guys for the same mission? That just screams danger. If you were originally an eight-person party, then sure. But you weren’t. You were two separate parties that knew nothing about each other. That’s like slapping a wolf on the nose with a piece of meat.”

“Hmm...”

“Granted, the two of you might have been master adventures who could

handle six guys in your sleep. In that case, it would be understandable. But then you declared that you were both apprentices.”

Rona continued to watch Renya from the bed. Her expression was unchanging, shielding her thoughts from him.

“Continue, please.”

“...The second thing is your appearance. No matter how you look at them, your clothes don’t fit you. If you tell me it’s for some religious purpose, or if that’s just your taste in clothes, then I’ll take it. To me, though, it looks like you’re purposefully emphasizing the curves on your body by wearing clothes that are a size too small.”

“Is that how you were looking at me? How lewd.”

Rona squirmed, as though she was embarrassed. To Renya’s suspicious gaze, however, her swaying mounds no longer enticed him. If anything, it seemed more like a deceptive trick meaning to draw his attention. Skeptically, he kept his eyes on her as she wriggled around. After a while, she stopped, apparently noticing that it was having no effect.

“Are you wondering why I’m doing that?” she asked.

“Back in my world, we call that a form of misdirection. To put it simply, it’s a technique that pulls the attention of people around you toward yourself. For women, they’d purposefully dress lightly, wear short skirts, or show a lot of skin.”

“Your world doesn’t have it easy either, does it?” said Rona in a profoundly sympathetic tone.

Renya did not entertain the tangent, choosing instead to continue on.

“The third is your names. This is only a hunch, since I don’t know much about how things work in this world, but the two of you have both a first name and a family name. In Shion’s case, her family name is extra complicated. It seems like a compound name or something.”

“What’s the matter with that?”

“There are these things in my world called novels that we read. According to

them, when a name is long, it tends to be long for a reason. Or, it could be a sign of nobility.”

“I definitely wasn’t aware of that. Granted, I was also sweating a little when Shion just went and blurted out her whole name. Wasn’t expecting that, to be honest,” said Rona. She kept smiling, but she also let out a small sigh.

“And the fourth is the sword I borrowed when we fought the goblins.”

“Ah, right. That, uh... Even I thought that was a problem.”

The slightest hint of a grimace marred her smile, but it passed quickly.

“The blade itself was nothing special,” continued Renya, “but the hilt was something else. Then, Shion said it was an heirloom, after which you said it should be fine if I’m a Wanderer.”

“You don’t forget, do you?”

“Putting all of that together, I figured that the emblem of the two dragons carved into it was some sort of family crest. Specifically, Shion’s family crest. And the reason you said it should be fine was because you thought a Wanderer wouldn’t recognize where it came from. Any objections?”

“Why couldn’t they have just passed down through her family as a piece of art? Maybe they just appreciated the craftsmanship,” argued Rona in a tone that suggested even she was not convinced by her own words. Renya, of course, saw that coming.

“Then she sure as hell wouldn’t be carrying it around as a backup weapon, now, would she?”

“Ah... Right. She did say it was a backup weapon.”

“Okay, the fifth...”

“...There’s more?”

The smile had completely faded from her face. She now regarded him intently, her expression serious. It did not faze him, and he fully intended to press the assault. He had good reason to — Rona had yet to officially confirm any of his hypotheses.

“The name on the adventurer card. I only caught a glimpse of Shion’s, but it had just a single name on it. She verbally told me her full name, but the card only had her first name. Maybe it was nothing. But maybe it wasn’t, in which case it only provides further evidence for my third point. In other words, she’s from a special family — the kind that if anyone who knew her family name saw it on her card, they’d know exactly who she was and where she’s from.”

“I’m surprised you saw that. I must not be jiggling them enough...” she said as she wrapped her hands around her breasts and bounced them up and down. This had the irresistible effect of pulling his eyes toward them, no matter how conscious of her intent he was. Seeing this, Rona grinned and said, “Aha. Progress.”

Renya blushed a little. “Shut up. I’m a guy, too. Moving on. The sixth thing.” With a concentrated effort of will, he peeled his eyes away from her bouncy breasts and kept speaking. “The guard hesitated for an instant when he was giving your cards back.”

“I’m sure that was because he was loathe to part with the pleasant warmth of our bodies on the card.”

“Yeah, half of me wants to agree with you. But that’s not true, is it? I believe what actually happened was that the guard recognized one of you.”

Rona made no reply. Gone was her playful grin. She fixed Renya with an intent stare.

“Well? That wraps up the list of things about you two that were bugging me. Anything to say for yourselves?”

“I’m not sure what to say... I thought I was being careful, but I suppose I was only fooling myself.” She looked down and gave a conciliatory shrug. “But to answer your questions... Number one, I took up a mission like that on purpose so Shion can learn to be more careful.”

“I guess she hasn’t been adventuring for very long?”

“That’s right. She’s been at it for about a month. I swear, that girl has no sense of danger. I figured it might do her some good for her to be in real danger for once.”

While he understood the intention, her particular method of doing what amounted to shock therapy seemed far too risky. Renya's appearance was pure coincidence. She could not have accounted for his help when she was cooking up this plan. That meant she was expecting an attack, and she had meant to handle it with just the two of them.

"Oh, just to be clear, I *am* a knight. Used to be, anyway. That was my original profession. I can mop the floor with six guys like them barehanded. You don't get assigned as a bodyguard just by looking pretty. You need the chops."

Rona appended an explanation after seeing the doubt in his expression. The revelation surprised him, but it also helped explain how she'd managed to pin him down just moments before. He nodded in understanding. Basically, he was dealing with a case of falsified professional identity. To his chagrin, he also realized that meant she was vastly underperforming during the goblin attack.

"The fact that I'm a knight is top secret, so... Unless we're in seriously dire straits, I'll always be doing the priest thing."

"Geez, thanks... Then, the reason you can't use magecraft is..."

"If I could use magecraft on top of being a knight and a priest, I might as well go save the world!"

Presumably, what she meant was that she would be far too overpowered. Also, while it was not her real profession, she technically *was* still a priest.

"As for the second question, you're absolutely correct. This is actually pretty uncomfortable, you know... but, well, it comes with the job," she confessed as she gently stroked her own chest. Whether she meant it was physically constricting or psychologically embarrassing was unclear. Maybe both.

"Question three. You're correct in assuming that Shion is of noble blood. I cannot, however, reveal her full identity to you at this time."

Renya nodded and prompted her to keep going. So long as his position remained unclear, he could not expect her to divulge everything.

"Question four. You're right about this, as well. That emblem is a symbol of Shion's lineage."

"Which means my fifth question is..."

“Yes. Registering her with her full name would cause all sorts of commotion.”

“Then, the sixth question...”

“If I’m to be picky, I’d point out that technically, the guard did not recognize one of us. He probably recognized both.”

Rona smiled at him and told him that she has answered all his questions. He leaned against the wall and placed his hand on his forehead before speaking.

“So, let me get this straight. Shion is a princess from some noble lineage whose identity needs to be all hush-hush. You, Rona, are a knight-slash-apprentice-priest assigned to be her bodyguard. I don’t know how the two of you ended up in this position, but being new to this whole adventuring business, you figured some help would be useful. And that’s where I come in. You saw that I seemed fairly competent and decided to nab me for your purposes.”

“Yes, but mind you, those are my reasons for doing this. I doubt Shion gave it this much thought. She probably just sees you as a strong and reliable guy whom she can trust, and she wants you to be her ally and her friend.”

With an innocent grin, she offhandedly mentioned how glad she was that she let Renya do the honors when they were trying to figure out a compromise to Shion’s stubborn insistence to help the settlers’ village. He glared at her. If gazes could kill, he would have had blood on his hands by now.

“In other words, you’re the evil mastermind behind all this.”

“And I’m quite proud of it.”

“The smell of trouble around you is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Don’t drag me into your problems.”

“Aww. Don’t be like that. If you’re mean to me, I’m going to sit here for the whole night, and then go cry in front of a bunch of people about how you had your way with a poor, defenseless girl like me.”

“Damn it, woman! In that case, I might as well just go ahead and take you for a spin, then! How about that, huh?!”

“About time. Come on, then! Show me what you’ve got! Give me some

lovin'!"

Rona spread her arms wide on the bed and invited him to approach by curling her fingers at him. The hopelessness of his situation dawned on him and he looked up at the ceiling. The girl in front of him was all in on this bet from the start. She was ready to wager everything she had. Renya, on the other hand, was not. Be it in negotiating, gambling, or fighting, the strongest contestant was he who had nothing to lose. In other words, this match was decided the minute Rona set her eyes on him. He was not going to win. At this point, the most he could do was damage control and try to wrestle the most favorable conditions out of her. With that in mind, he raised both hands in a sign of surrender.

“Okay,” he said, eyes still fixed on the ceiling, “you got me. I give. No promises about how much I can do for you, though.”

He glanced at the bed. Rona beamed at him, her expression entirely satisfied.

Epilogue: A Party Was Formed, or So It Was Told

“I need money. And not just any amount. I need *lots* of it. And I’ll need it regularly.”

“W-Wait, what? Huh? What do you mean?”

A night had passed since Rona had made her advances on Renya. Rendered helpless before her complete and utter lack of regard for the sanctity of her own body, he’d quickly capitulated to her demands. The following morning, he had arrived early at the cafeteria for breakfast and was waiting for the two girls to show up. As soon as they sat down at his table, he threw out his demands without the slightest lead-in or context. The outburst left Shion gasping and stuttering in confusion. Beside her, Rona watched the proceedings with a perfectly placid expression. The panache she’d displayed when she barged into his room last night was nowhere to be seen.

Renya was well aware that such an abrupt entry into the topic would confuse Shion. Nevertheless, he went with it because a confused Shion would ask fewer questions. He was hoping to settle the matter before she started wondering how he had arrived at his conclusions.

“I spent some time by myself thinking about it. In the end, I decided that it would be overly optimistic to assume I’ll be okay on my own. I’m going to need someone’s help.”

“O-Okay...”

“However, being a Wanderer, I know next to nothing about this world. I’m not brimming with talent either, and I have no friends. Under these circumstances, it’ll take an immense amount of effort to find the friends I’ll need to make money.”

“I... I guess so,” replied Shion. In her daze, a stuttered affirmation was the most she could manage. She was barely managing to keep up with the quick pace of the conversation.

“Therefore, the offer you made yesterday is extremely appealing, and in fact, I’m thinking of accepting your invitation. That leaves us with one last condition you have to accept, which is that my primary objective is making money. If you’re okay with that, then we have ourselves a deal. What do you say?”

“U-Um... Huh?” When prompted for an answer, Shion went into full panic mode.

“What exactly is the purpose of making all this money?” interrupted Rona. At a glance, it seemed like she was giving Shion some time to think, but her true aim was to subtly redirect the conversation toward what Renya intendeds to use the money on. It was a convenient change of topic for him, but it was separately and equally convenient for her.

You wily witch, he thought as he tried to convey his disgust through his glare. *You foxy fraudster*. Eventually, he had to turn back to Shion, who was waiting for his answer.

“I need a foothold. A home base of sorts. Specifically, I want a house with a workshop attached. It has to be the kind of place where I can really work on something and not disturb anyone else.”

“And why might that be?”

“The circumstances at the settlers’ village being what they were, I just had to put up with it. But now we’re back in the city and there are still too many things that I can’t stand. The city isn’t going to change to please me, though, so I want a space to myself where I can fix those problems.”

“A stand-alone home with a fair bit of land, huh. Add in a workshop and it’ll probably cost you around a platinum.”

Rona seemed to be commenting on Renya’s demands, but she was also discreetly informing him and Shion of the market price without sounding unnatural. It went without saying that he had no idea of the cost, but Shion was probably also clueless about how much money would be required to fulfill his wish.

“Well, we can look into the price later, but that’s the gist of my reply. So?”

“H-Huh? Um... uh, right. Hmm...”

Shion had yet to recover from his rapid-fire demands, but put on the spot, she took only a moment to think before nodding.

“All right. Good idea. I would have been fine with just making a living, but we’ll aim for buying a house, then. It’ll be good motivation to work, too.”

“Buying the house is *my* goal, by the way...”

“Saving up a platinum by yourself is really hard, though. Since we’re going to be in this together, why don’t we just make that the home base for our party?” said Shion, as though it were the simplest answer in the world.

Speechless, Renya looked to Rona, who immediately averted her gaze.

What happened to making her more aware of danger, huh?

Even he knew he should not be blaming Rona, but he continued to gripe at her with his gaze. He could not do it to Shion, after all. Who else was he supposed to complain to? Rona, for her part, kept her eyes steadfastly trained on things that were not him. Eventually, he gave up and turned back to Shion, choosing his words carefully before he spoke.

“Okay, look. I assume you’re old enough to understand what it means when a man and a woman live together under the same roof, right?”

“What’s wrong with that? We’re going to be good friends. It’ll be a family, right?”

A couple of descriptors flashed through Renya’s mind: innocent to the core, needs more sex ed, clueless about her own beauty, and hopelessly trusting of others. While she was completely different from Rona, she was also a handful. For the second time in 24 hours, he felt like raising his hands in surrender. It was likely that she would have to be put in a serious incident that went almost all the way — or maybe just a teeny bit past — before she would learn.

“...Whatever. We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it, I guess.”

Procrastination. Man’s best friend. Or maybe worst enemy. Who knows? That could be figured out later.

“Huh? I’m not sure what you mean. Anyway, making money will be our main goal, right? That’s no problem. I’ll help out, too. Is that okay for you?”

There was a distinct decrescendo to her voice toward the end. She looked up at Renya nervously. Meanwhile, Rona was doing that freaky thing where she was smiling with everything but her eyes again. The intent was clear: “Say no now, and you’ll wish you hadn’t.”

“Well, it’s hard to tell if everything will work out, but let’s say yes for the time being.”

He had barely finished speaking when Shion leapt out of her seat and took his hands in hers. She shook them up and down, beaming.

“Yes! You said yes! Thank you, Renya! I’m sure we’ll be the best of friends!”

“Huh? Oh, uh, sure?”



This time, it was Renya who could not keep up with Shion's sudden exuberance. Shion paid him no mind as she worked herself into a frenzy of enthusiasm.

"You're a lifesaver! The whole night, I was worrying about what I'd do if you said no. I'd have to start approaching strangers, maybe go to the guild and ask every single man there if they'll join my party..."

"Okay, you'd just be annoying people if you did that..."

He tried to mention that they would take her invitation to mean something else, but she was no longer listening.

"I'm so glad you said yes... It really means a lot to me. This way, I get to keep adventuring, and it solves the issue at home, too. I won't have to worry about them dragging me ba—"

"Shion?!"

Having heard something that finally crossed the line, Rona jumped up and slammed her hand over Shion's mouth. With Renya's hands still in hers and Rona's hand over her mouth, Shion's eyes went wide as she realized what she had done. Renya smiled awkwardly, trying very hard to not yell.

How the hell am I supposed to smooth this one over?!

His head hurt. Shion was way too close for him to pretend to not have heard.

Were he an aurally-challenged protagonist of a romcom, he would simply act as if he did not hear. Unfortunately, he was not in a romcom, nor was he an actor. And he definitely was not hard of hearing. On the other hand, what he heard was undoubtedly the kind of thing that would immediately raise suspicions. Time slowed to a crawl as he frantically scrambled for a way out. With the gears in his head spinning in overdrive, he squeezed out more brain juices than he had ever done before, and after a long second, he spoke.

"What was that about a dragon?"

"Huh?"

Both girls raised their voices in concert.

Okay. Don't laugh. Don't sweat. Don't make a scene. Just keep everything nice and under control.

He heard something he was not supposed to hear, and he could not pretend he did not hear. That left him with only one option; he had to sell them on his mishearing. Trying his hardest to sound puzzled, he slowly worked through his thoughts out loud.

“Uh... Well, you said something about home and dragons. What, you keep one as a pet or something?”

“Wh-What? No, of course not. There's no dragons...”

“You must have heard wrong, Renya. Right, Shion?”

“Yeah, it must be just you, Renya. I didn't say a thing.”

“Really? Huh, I guess it's just me, then. Sorry.”

Putting on his best I-could-have-sworn-I-heard impression, he scrunched up his face into a frown and made conspicuous thinking noises. All the while, he kept his gaze wandering from one point on the ceiling to another, making sure to avoid Shion in the middle. Otherwise, he feared that he might see something he was not supposed to see next. Ultimately, he could avert the focus of his vision, but he could not shut off its peripheries. As he expected, out of the corner of his eyes, he spotted a flustered Shion, wide, nervous eyes flitting about on her reddened visage. Drops of sweat rolled down her forehead. Rona rushed to dab them away with a handkerchief. At the same time, she whispered something in Shion's ear, making sure her voice was soft enough for Renya to be out of earshot.

All things considered, it was perfectly understandable for Shion to be nervous about whether or not Renya was going to join their party. That was fine. Being overwhelmed by relief and blabbing all her secrets to everyone, however, was not fine. In the end, all she really did was transfer her nervousness to Renya, who began desperately hoping he would not regret his decision to join the party today.

Chapter 0: On a Certain Day, in a Certain Time, at a Certain Place, or So It Was Told

There is a story about the princess of a certain kingdom. About her meeting with a visitor from another world. And about how their escapades led to them barging straight into an epic battle that drew in the hero, the demon lord, and even the gods high above.

This is not that story.

This story... happened just a little bit before.

Known as the bulwark of the human kingdoms, the Principality of Triden lay at the western end of the human territories. Among all its cities of at least medium size, the Merchant City of Kukrika was again westernmost. With a population of approximately ten thousand, it stood as a city of reasonably large scale. Due to its unique position on the map, however, a considerable amount of traffic was constantly crossing its borders. At any given time, it was likely that the number of visitors in the city outnumbered the locals.

To call the city lively, while technically accurate, would also be slightly euphemistic. After all, its bustling streets accordingly implied the presence of many shadier folks who gained entrance through less than proper means. While the perpetual presence of a large number of guards at the city's entrances, coupled with tough inspections, greatly limited the number of dangerous or suspicious people who entered or exited, no inspection was perfect. There were always oversights or loopholes, and the issue was a never-ending source of headaches for the local police force.

Off to the side of the city, away from its central street, was Shion. She wore a white, robe-like shirt, tucked into a pair of puffy black trousers that was long and dress-like (similar to what one would call a "hakama" in Renya's home world). She stood amidst an air of boredom.

As the population of a city grew, more entertainment facilities would spring up to meet the extra demand. Such facilities tended to be open during evening hours and were often the likes of taverns, drinkeries, and other establishments of a decidedly more adult tilt. However, the cities in the Principality of Triden shared an odd quirk: they all contained many facilities that entertained women during the day. Whether this reflected the tastes of the ruling class or was due to other reasons, Shion did not know. In any case, the store that stood before her was one of those female-oriented locations.

For a female-oriented location, however, the store's decorations were on the blander side with darker colors dominating its palette. Shion searched through the rather empty recesses of her mind and pieced together the few bits of wisdom she had. She came to the conclusion that the store's design was meant to enhance its sense of mystery and secrecy. Probably. Then, after taking another look and carefully scrutinizing its appearance, she shrugged.

Personally, Shion thought the store's design was an utter failure.

She was not the type to comment on other people's tastes. Being well aware of the diversity in people's preferences, she had no intention of claiming her own opinion to be the singular truth. Plenty of people probably liked how it looked. For her, however, cheesy places like these always felt like scams.

The obvious thing to do was about face and walk away, but circumstances did not allow her that option. With her teeth clenched, she pushed down the resentment that was bubbling up from within and drew a folded piece of paper out of an inner pocket. Unfolding the paper revealed a few lines of neatly written text, its meticulously formed characters a reflection of the writer's own personality. Its contents contained an address that pointed the reader to a location within Kukrika, and it also specified the name of a store:

Parlor of Fortunes, Lux Infinitus.

For a name, it was on the ostentatious side. If the explanation she heard beforehand was to be believed, however, its function was far more mundane. It was supposed to be a simple fortune-telling place marketed to ladies. She looked at the name inscribed on the paper. Then the sign on the store. Then the paper. Then the store again. Finally, she sighed. There was no denying it. This

was exactly where she was instructed to be.

She folded the paper and put it back into her pocket. The door was wide open, beckoning her to enter. Standing at its entrance, she peered in. Unfortunately, the store seemed intent on remaining consistent in its somber design, and the bright daylight made it nearly impossible to make out any details in the darkness inside.

Shion folded her arms and frowned. She was not familiar with this kind of thing, and the atmosphere in the store was not making it any easier to set foot inside by herself. On top of that, the person who made her come here was nowhere to be seen. After a period of contemplation, she struck her palm with her fist and, with the deliberate tone of someone who had made up her mind, said, “Okay, let’s go home!”

“How in the world did you manage to arrive at that conclusion?” said someone in an exasperated tone. The voice was familiar.

Shion jumped — quite literally — and lurched forward a few steps before spinning around to the sight of a girl. Her golden hair fell over a blackish robe that covered her voluptuous figure. The girl stood confidently. Her arms were crossed as well, and this had the effect of emphasizing her already-massive bosom.

The pair of voluminous protrusions, already a good two sizes larger than Shion’s, were just short of perfectly round, as they were being pressed against the robe by the arms underneath. Struggling against the confining fabric, they emphatically decried the injustice of their mistreatment. The plight of her breasts, juxtaposed against the maidenly image of the priest robe — the very symbol of chastity — was a feast for the eyes of almost violent proportions.

Even Shion, a fellow girl, could not help but feel her gaze drifting towards them. For male observers, their faces instantly turned beet red as they looked away and desperately pressed their hands to their noses in an attempt to stave off the oncoming tide of bodily fluids. Passersby, mesmerized by the sight, walked blindly into walls and store stalls, knocking over mountains of goods. Panicked onlookers quickly dashed into the shadows of buildings or alleyways. Hell itself broke loose all around her, but the girl in question paid it no mind.

She stood staring at Shion, a hint of anger in her eyes.

It made Shion uncomfortable. She tried to say something, but her mind drew a blank. A few moments and a frantic search through her vocabulary later, she managed to piece together a response that she thought was appropriately noncommittal to break the ice.

“H-Hey, Ro, taking the twins for a walk? Man, what’re you feeding them to make them grow like that?”

“Silence is golden, you bubbly ignoramus. If you can’t think of something to say, just don’t say anything.”

Ro — Rona, as she is called by others — sighed, and her expression progressed through a rapid sequence of changes that would have been a perfect representation of the five stages of grief had it ended with acceptance instead of profound resignation. She, shoulders slumped in surrender, was both the one who called Shion here and the reason she could not simply leave.

While their coffers were not exactly bursting, they could afford some luxuries here and there. With the recent drought of adventuring gigs still ongoing, Rona had proposed to Shion that it would be good for the two of them to take a day off and head out for some fun. The thought of a “girls’ day out” carried universal appeal to young ladies in their adolescent years, and Shion was no different. There was, however, a problem, and it was the kind of problem that she did not want to draw attention to. Her atypical upbringing coupled with her timid nature doomed her to be entirely clueless about such topics. Rona was fully aware of this, which was why, being the slightly more informed of the pair, she’d offered to pick their destination. As a result, there they stood.

“...And this is the place you chose?” grumbled Shion, dismay clear on her face.

“What, not good enough for you?” asked a slightly offended Rona.

“I’m no expert, so I can’t say if it’s good or not. Still, doesn’t this place look a little too sketchy?”

Without the slightest unease, Shion began spewing borderline slander about the store while standing right in front of it. Her voice carried to the inside of the store, and Rona immediately sensed that reproachful gazes were being thrown

their way. In response, she uncrossed her arms, raised her right hand, and smacked Shion across the head. There was a satisfying sound of impact, and the strike sent Shion lurching forward.

“You know,” said Shion as she rubbed the place she was hit and straightened herself, “I’ve been wondering something for a while. Is it just me or is that not the kind of strike you’d expect from a priest?”

“It’s just you. Now keep your mouth shut for a while,” said Rona. Then, with her right hand, she pressed her index finger into the bridge of Shion’s nose. “What do you mean sketchy? They’re operating in broad daylight. These are honest people running an honest business of fortune-telling.”

“Fortune-telling’s an honest business?”

“If you disagree, then present your evidence, Shion.”

Rona withdrew her outstretched arm. She curled both hands into fists and placed them at her hips before puffing out her chest. The gesture caused the features of her chest to be displayed prominently, which in turn had the repeated effect of drawing the attention of all the onlookers. Again, she did not seem bothered.

Meanwhile, a contemplative Shion was trying with limited success to keep her eyes off the pair of protrusions on her friend. It was hard when they were so prominently in view. After a span, she lowered her head in honest conciliation.

“Sorry, I have no evidence.”

“Good. Then give the store your heartfelt apologies. But do it in your head so we can get a move on already.”

Rona placed her hands on Shion’s shoulders and spun her around. Before she could complain, Rona began pushing her inside. While there was no reason to refuse, she felt a natural urge to resist when pushed against her will, and she looked over her shoulder at her friend to voice her dissent.

“You don’t have to push—”

“Yes I do! With that attitude of yours, how else are we going to get you to go in?”

For a priest, Rona had strong arms — strong enough, in fact, to overpower Shion — and Shion was under the impression that *she* was the swordsman of the two. She lost the shoving match and was forced through the store's entrance into its murky interior.

The air suddenly felt cool. Despite the wide opening at the front, the store's layout somehow allowed nearly no sunlight to reach the inside. A hazy source of light functioned as the replacement, providing barely enough illumination to see the ground underfoot and allow for safe walking. The building must have had thick walls, as outside noises were inaudible and a quiet stillness permeated the room. Hovering in the air was the scent of some sort of perfume. Put together, the effect was fairly authentic. If someone had told Shion that this was what mystery looked like, she would have believed it.

Many shelves could be found inside the store, which held various trinkets and charms that gave off a dull, metallic glow in the dim light. Shadowy forms wrapped head to toe in hooded robes drifted to and fro. They were probably the store staff. Thick, heavy curtains separated a number of rooms in the far wall. When customers approached a room, they would gently pull aside the curtain, take a peek inside, and then either enter directly or try a different room.

"You see those curtained rooms? The fortune tellers are inside," whispered Rona, her lips mere inches from Shion's ears.

It tickled a little and Shion jerked away. She would have complained, but the subdued atmosphere inside gave her pause.

"Would you like to give it a try? What kind of fortune do you want told?" asked Rona with a smile. Shion looked at her. Even in the dimly-lit confines of the parlor, Rona could see the blank expression on her friend's face. She let out a deep sigh.

"What's with the sigh?"

"Shion, when I ask you what kind of fortune you want told, I never want to see that dumb look on your face ever again. That was Girls 101, and you just failed."

"I... I failed?"

Taken aback, a disheartened whisper escaped Shion's lips. Rona, however, nodded firmly.

"Yes. You failed spectacularly."

"What was I supposed to do? I don't know the first thing about any of this," lamented Shion. There was a tremble in her voice, and her fists tightened.

"Don't worry, Shion," said Rona, her voice softening, "I've got you covered. I've done the research already."

"Ro..."

"Every activity, you see, has an established set of practices. A *protocol*, if you will. Whatever you're doing, as long as you follow the protocol, you won't crash and burn. Too badly, anyway." Rona patted herself in the chest confidently, as though telling Shion to leave it to her. They were gentle taps, but even those sent her supple mounds bouncing up and down.

Suddenly, a thought occurred to Shion, and she began worrying if Rona was actually wearing undergarments. Her friend's breasts were certainly gorgeous and well-shaped, but they were just so *big*. Was it possible that, unable to find one that fit her size, she had no choice but to go without them? After all, even a light touch made them jiggle so vigorously. Surely, that was the only explanation.

"Uh... Shion?"

"Ro, next time we take a day off, let's go shopping for clothes."

"Huh? Where did that come from?"

"The way they jiggle so much, Ro, I'm seriously worried they might just bounce right out."

"What the heck are you talking about? We're here for fortune-telling, okay?"

Some annoyance crept into Rona's voice before she caught herself and moderated her tone. Nevertheless, her admonishment had the effect of jogging Shion's memory, who vaguely recalled that there was indeed some mention of fortunes before she'd veered off on her wild tangent. Rona's lecture continued as she twirled the index finger of her right hand in a most teacherly fashion.

“Now, do you know what the protocol is for this particular situation? No? Then listen up. As a girl, you are to have your love life foretold.”

“N-No way...”

Shion trembled, dumbstruck by how casually those two words rolled off Rona’s tongue. They spoke of matters wholly foreign. Matters, Shion thought, that would also remain foreign to her for no small amount of time. She was yet a budding adventurer, her inexperience written plainly on her face. Currently, she could not even support herself. Work was not bringing in enough money, and she was chewing through her savings. Surely, there was no place for romance in her life when she had yet to figure out how to keep herself fed. Rona, however, seemed to have different ideas.

“You’re overthinking this. Lighten up. Just have a go at it.”

“B-But...”

“As for me, I’m going to go do some window shopping. Maybe ogle some jewelry. You just go and get your fortune told, okay? Consider it practice. Go on, pick whichever room you like. Oh, and don’t worry about paying. I’ve got that covered,” Rona said. She gave Shion a pat on the shoulder and smiled. Shion tried to argue, but before she got a word out, Rona was already browsing the shelves.

Left on her own, Shion found herself at a loss. She had no idea what she was supposed to be practicing, but it felt wrong to dismiss the recommendation of her good friend. After some deliberation, she decided to keep an open mind and give this fortune-telling thing a go. Maybe it wouldn’t be that bad. Once she made her decision, she was quick to action. Peering through the dimness at the curtained partitions, she wondered which chamber to choose. In the end, she settled on the one with the blandest curtain. Gently, she parted the cloth and poked her head through the slit.

A mild fragrance hung in the air. The wavering light of a lone candle revealed a table draped in purple cloth, upon which sat a large transparent orb the size of a child’s head. Across the table, gray rag-like cloth covered the short form of a person from head to toe.

“A customer, I presume?”

There was something in the voice that compelled Shion to enter, and so she did. The figure gave a low, throaty chuckle.

“Now what do we have here? An adorable little missus, I see. Come, come, make yourself seated.”

“Uh, sur— Wait, what? Between the two of us, I’m pretty sure you’re the little missus here.”

Though there was some motion to the human-shaped bundle of rags, the figure inside gave no indication of having heard what Shion said, instead fidgeting with the cloth until there was enough of an opening for a small sliver of a face to peer through. She looked Shion in the eyes.

“Welcome to my chamber in the Parlor of Fortunes, my dear little missus. This old maid is happy to receive you...”

“Okay, no. Just, no. There’s no way you’re going to pull off an old maid with a voice like that.”

The voice coming from the bundle of rags was indeed kept very low. Spoken through the cloth, it was also muted and slightly hard to hear. However, at the distance of a mere table apart, it was quite impossible to mistake the voice of a young girl for that of an old lady. Despite Shion’s remark, though, the enshrouded figure seemed intent on sticking to the old lady act and paid it no mind.

“Gazing into the annals of knowledge eternal, I have seen with mine own eyes the great mysteries of the cosmos. What then, little missus, would you have this old maid tell for you today?”

“Okay, I get it. That’s part of this whole routine of yours. I guess it is what it is, but there sure are some heartless parents out there, huh? Making a little girl like you work, I mean. Are they forcing you to do this? If you need any help, just let me know. I’ll do what I can.”

Silence.

Shion was aware that there existed some parents who preyed on the kindness

of others. These people would try to draw the sympathy of customers by forcing young children to work. She worried that the tender-voiced fortune teller before her pretending to be an old lady was one such example.

“I’m not trying get your parents in trouble or anything. I’m just saying there are organizations in the Principality of Triden that support young children so they’re not forced to work. If you don’t really want to be doing this, you can talk to me about it, okay?”

As a matter of fact, such support groups were quite common in Triden. It was, perhaps, another reflection of the interests of the higher ups. Being a principality that saw frequent battles with monsters, there was never any shortage of orphaned children or widowed wives. In order to make sure the victims of such misfortune were not forced onto the streets, the Crown poured a generous amount of funding into support groups. As a result, the Principality of Triden saw the least amount of poverty amongst the human kingdoms.

“So, feel free to let me know if you’re—”

“Ah, shut up, you dumbass.”

Shion was cut short by the girl’s frigid remark. Left speechless by the fact that a young girl just called her a dumbass, she watched with her mouth agape as the girl ripped off the veil of rags on her head. A stream of golden hair appeared, flowing smoothly past the rather striking features of her face and down her back. She looked to be about five or six years old, but her gaze was sharp as she glared at Shion.

“Do you even know how fortune-telling works? You gotta *talk*, lady. This job’s all about the delivery. You think you can just grab a kid and force her to do this? Give it a rest with your moral high ground crap.”

“Oh, I— What? Huh? Um, sorry, I guess?”

With chin in hand and elbow on table, the girl launched into a grumbling tirade. Realizing that she had apparently wronged the girl in some way, Shion apologized.



“Well? What’s it gonna be, lady? Are you gonna get your fortune told or not?”

“U-Uh, sure. I’ll do it.” Shion nodded.

After that exchange, it was hard to imagine a less mysterious atmosphere, but seeing as she was the cause of it all, Shion compliantly lowered herself into the chair at the table.

“So, what do you want to know?”

“Um... About my love life, I guess?”

“*Huh?* Are you frigging serious? Dumb *and* horny. Man, you’re a piece of work, lady,” said the girl in a tone that suggested she had never heard a stupider question.

A vein bulged in Shion’s temple. Even she had her limits, but she forced down the anger, reminding herself that she was dealing with a little girl.

“Whatever. Hey, lady, put your hand on that crystal ball.”

Shion could almost taste the boredom in the girl’s voice, but she complied and placed her hand on the crystal ball at the center of the table. The girl stared at it for a while. Nothing happened. Then, the girl simply looked back at her.

“Looks like you haven’t met your soul mate yet. He’s probably gonna show up soon, though. The forest’s your lucky place, but it’s also where you’ll run into trouble. But, I mean, what’re you gonna do? That’s fate, right? If worse comes to worst, you’re gonna get beaten up and violated before getting dragged away for your underground debut. It’s all in the timing. With that said, though, it might not be smooth sailing for you down the road even if things do work out.”

“That sounds pretty bad...”

“Also, watch out for the busty blonde. Don’t let her snatch your prize.”

“Hm?”

“And against the breastless blonde, win the spec war. As for the rest, don’t lose on characterization.”

“It’s... a little weird how that’s so specific and yet so vague.”

“As they say, doubt my words at your own peril.”

With a “hah!” the girl proudly thrust out her chest. Its smooth contour betrayed the smug look on her face.

“I thought that fortune-tellers had... I don’t know, a different manner of speech. More mysterious, maybe.”

Something about what she just witnessed felt a little too different from what she was expecting. Her opinion seemed to irritate the girl slightly, who struck back.

“Lady, I can throw all sorts of big, mysterious words at you, but are you gonna understand?”

“Can I snap now? I feel like I should be allowed to snap now... A-Anyway,” said Shion as she suppressed her anger and changed the topic, “p-putting that aside, about the soul mate thing... Do you mean that’s someone who I’ll spend the rest of my life with?”

“Oh? What, is that turning you on? Looks like someone’s in heat.”

The comment caused a vein to throb angrily over Shion’s furrowed brows, but the girl could not seem to care less. She propped up her chin on the table with her elbow and smirked. There was a jarring maturity to that smirk that belied her childlike appearance. Shion felt a chill at the contrast and pulled back a little.

“Should you cross paths with your true love, you will surely experience one fantastic adventure after another. Magical tales with fairies abound, epic myths woven by gods, and lores and legends sung by devils, all these comedies and tragedies — these stories that enrapture the heart of man — shall be yours to see. And you’ll get front row seats, too, with that person at your side.”

“Wow, that sure sounds like a breathtaking series of adventures.”

“Breathtaking series of adventures, huh. Lemme remind you that reading about it isn’t the same as living it. If you want out, now’s your chance. Speak up or forever hold your silence. Decision time, lady. What’ll it be?”

The girl spoke eloquently as if in song. Despite the fact that there was a strange verisimilitude to her words, Shion pushed herself forward onto the table and looked the girl in the eyes before answering. She was not sure why,

but something in her told her that she could not back down here.

“If that is true, it would be a waste to pass up the chance to experience a life far beyond what’s possible for a mere mortal. I shall humbly accept what comes.”

Seeing that Shion rose to the challenge, the girl fixed her with a measuring glance.

“Even if you might die?” asked the girl again as if testing her opponent. Shion lips curled upwards at the question.

“I was prepared to die the day I became an adventurer,” she answered. There was no fear or doubt in her voice.

“So be it... Dauntless adventurer, allow me to welcome your participation.”

The girl sat back and leaned into her chair. She spread her arms wide, as though she were beckoning Shion to come.

“Here and now, the choice has been made. Now, then... Please enjoy.”

A clap echoed.

With a gasp, Shion realized she was standing in the middle of the fortune-telling parlor. She had a vague feeling that she was talking to someone just a moment ago, but the strange hazy feeling in her head kept her memories out of reach. Absently, she looked at the far wall. Nothing was there except for an empty patch that felt oddly out of place.

“Shion? Did you get your fortune told already?”

Turning to the direction of the voice, she found a curious Rona looking back at her, various jewelry in and hanging off her hands.

“Uh, hmm... Fortune... right, fortune-telling.”

“Are you okay? I don’t think they’re burning any weird incenses here, but every so often there’ll be someone who gets overwhelmed by the atmosphere. Do you feel sick?”

“I’m fine. I’m... fine.” Shion smiled in an attempt to calm her worried friend.

“Are you sure? Should we take a few more days off? I mean, technically, we

did agree to investigate the Miasmal Forest as our next mission from the guild... and they'll probably fine us if we cancel now."

"No, it's fine. Forest... We're investigating a forest, huh. Sounds good. I'm up for it. Don't worry."

Something stirred in the back of her mind, but she could not put her finger on it. It was not an ominous or unpleasant feeling. If anything, it felt almost like a sign of good things to come. Shion put out her hand and patted a concerned Rona on the shoulder to reassure her.

"It'd be a waste to cancel the mission and pay a fine. Once the vacation's over, let's head back to work."

"Really... Well, if you say so. On that note, so, I was looking at this amulet, right?"

After presumably deciding that everything was okay, Rona lightened up and began recommending the heap of jewelry she held in her hands. While Shion had no interest in accessorizing, on her friend's suggestion, she picked up a few trinkets and tried them on.

As the hours rolled by, the two girls cheerfully enjoyed the rest of their day off.

There is a story. It happened somewhere not here, and sometime not now. This is that story.

"Man, I put in so much damn work there! I worked *hard!* I worked so hard I could have raised myself out of systemic poverty! But damn that was close. I just barely managed to make the pieces fit together!"

"Master... I believe this is what most would refer to as 'dropping the ba—'"

"No! This is not! This is called setting the stage!"

"Okay... But you have yet to select the candidate, right? Is there any guarantee that the one you send will be male?"

"Wha— U-Um... if it's a girl, then we'll just keep it platonic."

“I see... Well, try your best at finding someone to cross the boundary, then. I will be rooting for you.”

“Hweh?! You’re not gonna help?”

Somewhere, sometime, there might or might not have been a conversation like so.

There is a story about the princess of a certain kingdom. About her meeting with a visitor from another world. And about how their escapades led to them barging straight into an epic battle that drew in the hero, the demon lord, and even the gods high above.

This is not that story.

This story... happened just a little bit before.

A few days later, the two of them would go on to form a party with six other men and investigate the Miasmal Forest.

Afterword

This is a story of the happenings on a certain night.

The red letters signifying a new message popped up in my inbox. Was it a typo report? A reader comment? Or, oh god, maybe a warning from the admins? Was the story I wrote that dangerous?! Terrified, I opened my message box, only to find an odd message from the admins. The gist of it was that there were some weirdos out there who wanted to turn my work into print, and if I was interested, I should get in touch with them.

Could this be the rumored “publication offer” I’d heard so much about? No way. I thought that was an urban myth.

At some point, I replied to that sudden message I received, and before I knew it, the book was in stores and people were calling me “sensei.” It was the stuff of legends.

Countless writers had dreamed of seeing such a message in their inbox, only to fade into obscurity as they chased after a pie in the sky. I thought the whole point was to give young aspiring novelists a sliver of hope and raise their expectations, only to drop them back down afterwards. It was meant to be a trap, right? A tried-and-true and highly efficient trap? Was I wrong?

Such thoughts were *not* racing through my head as I penned my response. I merely read the message like any normal person would and replied as instructed. And now we’re here.

Then again, even as I’m writing this, I technically haven’t seen the finished product yet, so there’s still a slim but non-zero possibility that this could all be some epic trolling. Maybe this is all staged.

Where’re the cameras?! Where’d you hide the mics?! Is someone eventually going to show up holding a big “FOOLED YA” sign?

Man was not made to live seriously all the time. There is a need to throw a

few gags in at times. I think some famous person said that at some point.

That aside, firstly, let me thank you for reading this book. I would also like to express my deep gratitude for those who purchased it. Thank you very much. For those who haven't, I'd really appreciate it if you just held onto it until you head to the cash register. I'll cry tears of joy if you do that.

All right, now, I'd like to say hi to those who are reading this for the first time. If it's not your first time, well, hi anyway. I'm Mine, the author of this book. Pleased to make your acquaintance. This work, which was originally serialized on the novel uploading site, "Shosetsuka ni Naro," has been published in print thanks to Hobby Japan. I'm so thankful that I can't go to sleep with my feet facing them.

Hobby Japan's probably south of where I am, so I'd have to have my pillow on the north side of the bed. That's probably not going to happen, so I'm good to go. These days, not a whole lot of people seem to care, but pillows to the north is supposed to bring bad luck. Be careful, everyone.

Normally, there'd be a short explanation about the work here, but I'm going to purposefully not mention anything. I ask that you just go and give the book a read. What's written there comprises the contents of this work. Rather than the author rambling on about how this part was actually like this, it's better for people to simply read it and form their own opinions. I'm sure of it.

Personally, I'll be happy if this story is even the slightest bit of fun to read. To know that I brought the slightest smile to a reader's face. Nothing would make me happier. And for that to keep happening, I intend to keep writing.

Man was not made to live seriously all the time. There is a need to throw a few gags in at times. I think some famous person probably did not say that at some point. Still, it's necessary to be a little more serious at times. Balance is important in everything.

Let's wrap this up, then.

To Hobby Japan's editors, as well as all the proofreaders, sales people, and designers. To Kabocha, who blessed this work with wonderful illustrations. To K, the project manager, who first came to me with the offer, and then stuck with me through the whole process until the final publication.

Allow me to not crack some cheap joke in an attempt to avoid being all serious and saying thank you, and actually say thank you. You have my deepest gratitude.

It was thanks to all of you that this book saw the light of day. Your efforts made all the difference. I have no idea if or when I can repay you, but I'll try to keep getting better until I can. As for when that happens, only God knows.

One last thing. To my readers.

To those of you who read this work on "Shosetsuka ni Naro," as well as those of you who posted comments and pointed out any typos, and finally, also all of those who took this book in their hands, I'd like to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Mine

Bonus In-Store Exclusives

Toranoana Special Short Story

There is a saying: God does not play dice.

While I am aware that those words originated from a fairly famous being of a certain parallel world, I can't help but smile wryly at their every mention. God is overrated.

That is, I am overrated.

This saying is based upon the view that nothing in the world is random — a view that I absolutely do not subscribe to. Supporters of this view go around espousing the idea that all phenomena are deterministic, and our inability to see their intrinsic determinism is due to the limited nature of our own existence as observers who cannot measure, or indeed, comprehend some crucial factor of the universe. This factor, or perhaps system of factors, govern the most fundamental workings of all existence, but its secrets are privy only to those possessed of infinite wisdom, a being of utmost omnipotence — God herself.

If I could be allowed to say one thing to them, it would be this: people, please stop invoking my name for everything and throwing all your problems to me.

After all, I play dice, too. Look, I'm rolling some right now.

"Master, I think you should stop using dice to determine the factors used for the worlds you create."

So said the angel I'd brought with me for record-keeping. I glared at her. The effect was underwhelming, considering my appearance was still that of the young girl, which I had used when I talked someone into crossing a world

boundary for me a little while ago. Nevertheless, it was intimidating enough for the angel's face to visibly pale.

"Geez, chill. I don't bite."

With a sigh, I rolled the dice in my hand again. They were dice of many, many sides — so many that at a glance, they looked like simple spheres. In fact, even I couldn't remember just how many sides they had. After they left my hand, they continued spinning for some time until finally coming to a rest.

"It appears to be another world of sword and sorcery, Master. Are you sure you did not rig the dice?"

I shook my head, equally baffled by the skewed results.

As a matter of fact, so many things baffle me that sometimes I wonder if I'm maybe not actually the being people commonly refer to as "God." Maybe I'm something else entirely. It'd be nice if that were true, actually. It'd make things a lot easier for me.

"Run a simulation with the results of the last roll."

"Cases 1 through 1305 collapse at the order of 32 billion with a margin of error of 0.001%. Cases 1306 and beyond do not even reach the order of 16 billion. Only case 2705 continues to persist at the order of 35 billion."

"Begin world creation with only case 2705. Destroy the rest after logging the data."

The data I'd acquired after endless iterations of dice rolls was almost entirely useless. That was a bitter pill to swallow. The sheer harshness of reality made me bury my face in my hands. It wasn't completely fruitless, though; there was one. At least there was that. It was a comforting thought, and clinging onto it made me feel a little better.

Then, the angel rained on my meager little parade, perhaps as payback for earlier.

"Master, the rate of creation is not keeping up with the rate of collapse."

To me, worlds are like cells, and like cells, they go through a cycle of creation and collapse. When the rate of collapse is faster, maintaining the whole system becomes impossible. To use the same analogy, I could continuously produce cells with short lifespans. But that would be the equivalent of having a chronic disease — a far cry from good health.

“Continue as directed.”

I watched the angel wordlessly lower her head. Then, in a fit of something — stubbornness or desperation, I didn’t know — I started rolling the dice again

Maybe, just maybe, one of these days I’ll produce the perfect world, or at least a near-perfect one.

...God, I swear, if anyone wants to trade jobs with me, I’d do it in a heartbeat.

So went another average day in my life.

Standard Bookstore Short Story

Sunlight streamed in through the window and onto the bed, rousing Rona from her slumber. She opened her eyes.

A trained knight, Rona was very much a morning person. In comparison, her dear friend Shion, whom she both loved and respected, was *not* a morning person. In fact, Shion was so bad with mornings that Rona worried about her hurting herself by accident sometimes.

Rona sat up in bed, clothed in a loose-fitting nightgown. The motion caused the two prominences on her chest to sway a little.

She looked at them.

Not long ago, she had firmly believed that a quick jiggle of those would bring any man to his knees. Now she knew better; some people were immune. That knowledge, however, came at the cost of some of her confidence. She figured

that it wasn't necessarily a bad thing. In a way, it was proof that that person was trustworthy.

It had still dented her pride, though.

Further brooding seemed liable to do nothing but make her depressed, so she shook those thoughts from her head and changed into her priest robe to head out.

When she arrived at the inn's dining hall, she found that Renya and Shion were already having breakfast. Rather, Renya was having breakfast, alternating between grimaces and scowls as he battled with the stiff, black bread. Meanwhile, Shion was snoozing happily with her face planted firmly in her own share. Rona thought it rather unbecoming of a nice young maiden in her prime, but it wasn't exactly an uncommon occurrence. If anything, there was a comforting familiarity to the sight.

After confirming with Renya that they had no particular plans that day, Rona headed out into the city. A number of figures quickly approached her. They were all secret agents who, normally, would be on various other missions. Exchanging information with them through signals and memos was a crucial process in ensuring Shion's safety. It was an important job that Rona took seriously, and she tried — with limited success — to maintain some semblance of regularity in the frequency of these meetings.

A quick lunch came next, followed by another round of exchanges with secret agents in the afternoon. This time, it was with people sent by various sources such as nobles or the guild. At times, she felt a strong urge to tell them all to bugger off. Nevertheless, she diligently continued her work, reminding herself to accept the fact that reality did not allow for such an outburst.

By the time her work was done, the sky had already taken on an orange hue as the sun neared the horizon. Willing her tired body to keep moving, she made her way back to the inn, where she was greeted with a warm welcome from Shion. That alone made her steps feel lighter. In the dining hall, Renya —

whether through intent or simple coincidence, she wasn't sure — also seemed to be waiting for her. The sight of him waving at her brought a resigned smile to her lips.

The menu for the evening consisted of bread and rather meaty stew, along with grilled meat and some salted leafy greens. Rona, being quite partial to meat, was very pleased with the lineup — but it apparently failed to satisfy Renya, who had been whispering a steady string of grumbling complaints. He probably meant to keep it to himself, and maybe he was quiet enough for Shion, but Rona heard him loud and clear. His complaints, however, turned out to be valid criticism instead of mindless slander, so she chose to let him grumble to his heart's content.

Upon finishing dinner, she headed to the inn's bathhouse, not forgetting to tease Renya with an invitation to join her in her room afterwards. Once she washed herself, she changed into her nightgown. Unless there were plans to enjoy the town's nightlife, sundown signaled the conclusion of her day. With much of her work taking place during the day and little for her to do in the evening, turning in early was often the prudent choice. She put out the light and climbed into bed, then reflected on the events of the day.

It was truly an ordinary day. An ordinary, peaceful day. She prayed that such days would continue, but little did she know that her prayer was not only not heard, but would soon be turned on its head.

Melon Books Special Column

Thank you very much for picking up the first volume of [New Life+] *Young Again in Another World*. I received a request from Melonbooks to write something about this series. After mulling over what that “something” might be, I responded with the idea that I would write a few short blurbs about the main characters, and so it was settled.

First up, Renya Kunugi, the indisputable protagonist of this series.

Renya was a dangerous man — so dangerous that back in his original world, if there were a Guinness Book of World Records entry for “Most Kills,” it would

almost certainly have listed his name. Despite that, after leaving his mark in the fields of swordsmanship and art, he lived a long life and passed away peacefully of old age.

Oh wait, if we're talking about kill counts in terms of our world here, I guess he'd still lose to a certain bearer of a certain Knight's Cross. Of course, that guy flew a dive bomber.

I designed his character to have not only enjoyed a long life, but also to be fairly overpowered. There is a reason for this. When I first started writing this series, many of the alternate world stories on the "Syousetsuka ni Narou" website began by having the protagonist getting hit by a dump truck, dying of some disease, jumping off a building, and such; they were all deaths that came suddenly. The protagonist would then go on to receive ridiculously broken abilities. Seeing this, I racked my brain trying to figure out a different character and a different way to start the story. Renya was born as a result of those mental struggles.

On that note, I pulled the name "Renya" out of a hat and went with it mostly because it sounded cool. I was originally going to name him "Main" (魔韻). That's "ma-in," pronounced similarly to the English word "mine." However, due to the fact that my alias is also ma-in (まいん), I had to change it. That's how I eventually settled on its current form.

Up next has to be heroine number 1, Shion Femme-Fatale.

Ponytail with traditional Japanese(-like) clothes. Totally my thing. Yep, this character was designed entirely on the author's whims.

At first, she was supposed to be a swordsman with the whole aura of an honorable warrior about her and everything, but over the course of writing this story, she seems to have turned into an oddball character who's a few cards short of a deck. Out of all the heroines in this series, she's the most deserving of the phrase, "How? How did this happen?"

Both her name and her appearance came rather easily to me. Before I began uploading my works to the site, I had been writing novels on my own homepage. The heroines in those stories had always been Shion, and she had

always sported a black ponytail. Honestly, out of all the characters in this series, she was the easiest one to come up with.

By the way, her last name, “Femme-Fatale,” is supposed to mean “fated woman” in French (I think)? Of course, it also has connotations of being wicked or enchanting...

Seriously, what the heck happened to this girl? I swear she was cooler when I started writing— Erm, never mind. Pretend you didn’t read that.

She’s a troublemaker with a cute side that you’ll glimpse at times. If you stretch the definition of “enchanting” a little, I’m sure it fits her, too. Right?

Lastly, we have heroine number two, Rona Chevalier.

Long blond hair and a dynamite body. Tried and true, right? She’s a priest, and she’s got no qualms about using her charms to her advantage. She’s also been trained as a knight, so she’s no pushover. Normally, you’d think she’s a downright winner at life, gifted with both looks and talent, but her luck ran out the day she was assigned to guard Shion. Had she kept quiet and remained a knight, a perfectly competent person like her probably would have quickly climbed the social ladder. Instead, she is now relegated to the role of eyeball magnet, wearing clothes a size too small for her and hanging around Shion to attract people’s attention. Life has certainly given her lemons, but she takes it in stride. She treasures her master, Shion, and works diligently to further her interests.

Appearance-wise, she’s the very archetype of a Big Sis character. Her last name is pretty straightforward: Chevalier is French for knight. She’s also got a scheming side, and she’s probably way more of an enchantress than Shion. But in this series, she falls firmly in the zone of “a normal person who’s competent.”

Since this is the first time, I’ve focused on the main characters and given my thoughts as the author. Whether or not there’ll be a second time is up to God. And, I suppose, the good graces of you, the readers. May you continue to favor [New Life+] with your time.

I hope there’ll be a volume two. If there is, let us meet again.

Yours truly,
Mine



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[New Life+] Young Again in Another World: Volume 1

by Mine

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