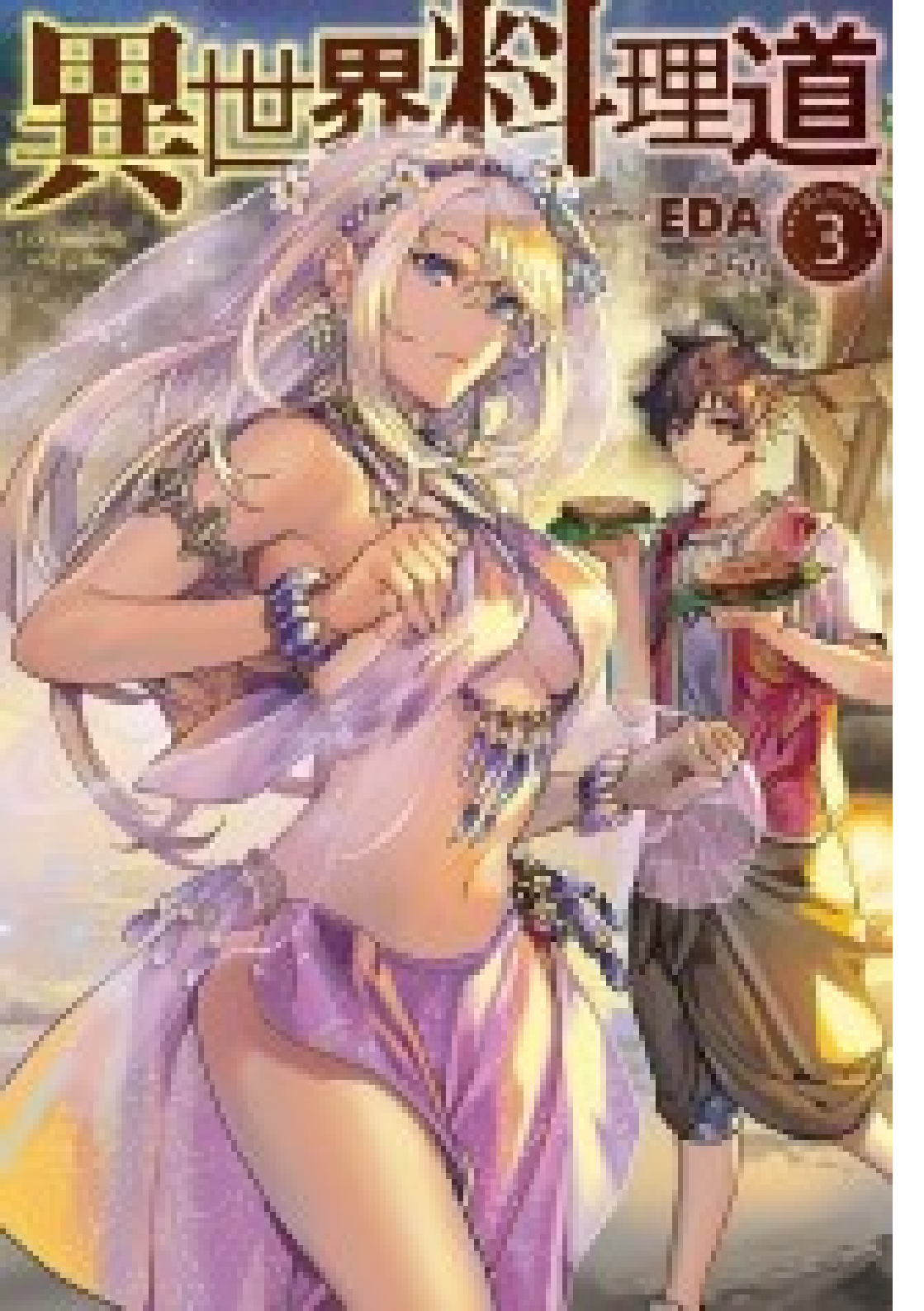
異世界料理道

EDA

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Cooking with Wild Game (LN)

Isekai Ryouridou ,異世界料理道

Synopsis:
Main protagonist is Tsurumi Asuta. 17 yrs old, 2nd year high schooler.

He was working as an apprentice cook at [Tsurumi-ya], managed by his father.

One day a fire broke out in [Tsurumi-ya], for the sake of his father's cherished knife [Santoku Houchou – the japanese kind] he ran back inside to retrieve it and thus met his end. Before he knew it he awoke to an unknown environment. He was then attacked by a beast resembling a boar but a girl named 'Ai Fa' from the [People of Morihen] saved him. It was then that he realized he was really in different world...

Author(s): Eda

Artist(s): Kochimo,こちも

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Table of Contents

Introduction i
Vol. 1 : Chapter 0: Prologue 2
Vol. 1 : Chapter 1 13
Vol. 1 : Chapter 2 84
Vol. 1 : Chapter 3 150
Vol. 1 : Chapter 4 234
Vol. 1 : Chapter 5 321
Vol. 1 : Chapter 6 377
Vol. 2 : Chapter 0: Prologue 452
Vol. 2 : Chapter 1 460
Vol. 2 : Chapter 2 525
Vol. 2 : Chapter 3 607
Vol. 2 : Chapter 4 685
Vol. 3 : Chapter 0: Prologue 788
Vol. 3 : Chapter 1 803
Vol. 3 : Chapter 2 901
Vol. 3 : Chapter 3 959
Vol. 3 : Chapter 4 1065
Vol. 3 : Chapter 5 1154
Vol. 3 : Chapter 6 1231
Vol. 4 : Chapter 1 1277
Vol. 4 : Chapter 2 1332
Vol. 4 : Chapter 3 1441
Vol. 4 : Chapter 4 (Part 1) 1541
Vol. 4 : Chapter 4 (Part 2) 1589
Vol. 5 : Chapter 1 1640
Vol. 5 : Chapter 2 1738
Vol. 5 : Chapter 3 1824
Vol. 5 : Chapter 4 1898
Vol. 6 : Chapter 0: Prologue 2013
Vol. 6 : Chapter 1 2041
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Vol. 1 :

Chapter 0: Prologue

Chapter Prologue
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 1 Prologue & Chapter 1



Translator: Skythewood

Editor: Deus ex-Machina, Rockgollem

When I came to, I found myself inside an unfamiliar forest.

I was lying with my limbs spread out amidst these unknown trees.

□Strange…?□

I propped myself up and surveyed the surrounding with giddy eyes.

This was a forest.

I was inside an unfamiliar forest.

No, I grew up in a prosperous city, so I didn’t have a □forest I was familiar with□ anyway. But this place felt like the Amazon rainforest, and didn’t feel like Japan at all.

The trees had weird twists and turns.

Giant fern-like vegetation.

Exotic flowers that looked poisonous.

Bird calls I had never heard before.

Layers of leaf canopies blocked out the sky. I couldn’t even tell what colour the heavens was.

Where the hell am I?

Most of my body was hidden beneath the thick undergrowth. I started inspecting myself.

I was dressed in white, with white chef uniform, apron and shoes.

There was a black logo on my chest, and it reads □Shop Tsurumi□.

My hair was wrapped in a bandana, this was my usual attire.

Why was I lying here dressed like this?

I crossed my legs and sat down, trying to recall what happened before I lost consciousness.

And—— While I was shifting my body, my hand touched something.

It was hard and smooth, and felt like polished wood.

I pulled that thing out of the grass—— It was a Santoku knife in a pure white sheath.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santoku>

Its black handle fitted my palm well. The blade was 21 cm long.

I recognized the knife without needing to draw it out of its white wooden sheath. This Santoku knife was a prized product from the old knife shop in Kyoto 「Shop Sakaki」. My dad treasured this knife more than his own life.

The moment I laid eyes on this knife, I remember the entire incident.

I’m Tsurumi Asuta.

My family name’s kanji Tsu of Tsugaru, stay and see. My given name could be read as 「becoming fat tomorrow.」

Seventeen years old and in my second year of a public high school. 170cm tall, 58kg and not exceptionally fat. I was born in Kanto Chiba, not in Tsugaru city.

My family runs a diner called 「Shop Tsurumi」. Our business wasn’t bad, or rather, it always had been good until those guys showed up last

month.

The building besides us was set to be renovated into a composite entertainment complex, and the new owners requested us to sell the diner to him.

On the surface, his reason was: □I want to build a carpark here□.

But his real thoughts were: □I plan to build a food court inside the entertainment complex, and the popular diner right besides me would probably be bad for business.□.

We had no reason to accept his one-sided request, and rejected him firmly. But the other party wasn't that simple, and appeared to have connections to the underworld. Rumours said that he seized control of his building from the original owners through nefarious means.

And so, when the building renovation sta

rted, they started harassing us.

The steel shutter of the shop was vandalized with the words □Horribly Polluted□, constant phone calls with no sound, carcass of cats being dumped at the shop entrance… classic coercion methods.

Only one of their harassment methods kept up with modern times. They left comments on review websites, spreading rumours that □customers

visiting this diner often suffer from food poisoning.

And of course, our usual patrons wasn't fazed by such rumours and dined here as usual. But new customers and the number of university students visiting after class fell, and this reflected on our account book.

Surprised by how much influence such website had made me depressed.

Even so, my dad still said with a smile:

People actually believe such garbage. It is their loss to miss out on my dish.

What happened sometime later finally took his smile away.

It should have been just a few hours ago.

Dad instructed me to prepare the ingredients for the evening crowd and went out to stock up on supplies. He had an accident with a pick-up truck and was rushed to the hospital.

After receiving an emergency call from the hospital, I rushed there in my chef attire.

My dad was still smiling on his hospital bed.

Although he was smiling, his legs suffered complex fractures.

His arm and head was wrapped in bandages which were stained with blood in a few spots. A van traveling at 80km/h collided with my dad. Even the doctor was surprised and said: “It’s a miracle he survived.”

It was a hit and run. Many witnesses said the car plate had been removed, and the driver wore a knit cap and shades, concealing his face.

It was a carefully planned perfect crime.

Even so, my dad was still smiling. If they really want to kill him, they probably need a dump truck.

“So, when I can be discharged?”

When the heavily injured patient asked with a smile, the young doctor looked troubled.

“No, well, instead of being discharged, you need to undergo a brain scan and operations on your legs…”

“Alright. But when can I be discharged?”

「I can’t really tell at this point… Both of your legs have complex fractures, who knows how long rehabilitation alone would take...」

「I see. I will leave this to you then, but I need to attend to my shop. I don’t mind using a wheelchair, but please discharge me as soon as possible. If I leave my shop to this dumbass, it will close down.」

The dumbass my dad mentioned was me of course.

My dad was a man who would work to his death with his knife even if he needed a wheelchair or crutches.

Even I felt like laughing when I thought about that.

At this moment—— I received a call from my childhood friend Reina.

She told me 「『Shop Tsurumi』 is on fire!」

When I told dad about that, the smile was gone from his face for the first time.

「Asuta! The knife! At least save that knife from the fire!」

I charged out of the room, and returned with a faster speed than my

journey to the hospital.

Dad valued that Santoku knife from 【Shop Sakaki】 more than his own life. A real chef will be able to satisfy his customers no matter what ingredients or tools he has! Although dad always says that, he will always say this about the knife purchased at the traditional knife shop 【Shop Sakaki】 in Kyoto and passed down from the previous generation: 【But, I can't do it without this guy】.

Only that knife—— keep it safe.

Despite the harassment, truck hit and run, fracture in both legs and the terrible business, my dad's heart didn't waver—— But if he lose the Santoku knife from 【Shop Sakaki】, his heart would shatter.

That's why I ran with all my might.

But when I reached the shop, it was already surrounded by dozens of people, and the fire brigade was already here to put out the fire.

However, 【Shop Tsurumi】 was still surrounded by flames, and the smoke rose into the autumn sky of June.

No matter how much more water was sprayed, the shop would definitely be burned completely.

That was how intense the fire was.

Just like a nightmare.

□Asuta-chan…□

Reina stood with a blank stare. When she saw me, she leaned on to me with a crying face.

I grabbed her slender shoulders and nodded—— then charged into the sea of flames.

Vol. 1 :

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Chapter 1. The Absolutely Horrendous Dinner

Part 1

And now, I was here.

I shook off Reina and the firefighters and charged into the flames, and now, I found myself in this unfamiliar forest alone. When I made it through the sea of flames back then, I reached the kitchen in a perilous situation and picked up the Santoku knife.

The next instant, the building made an intense sound and started to collapse—— I should have been buried together with the Santoku knife and cooked under the fire and smog.

But there wasn’t any burns on me, or even any scorch marks at all.

And I had the knife that should have burned to crisp with me in my hand.

“This… must be the world after death.”

I tried pinching my cheeks, and it still hurt as expected.

That was only natural, and even if this was the world after death, it didn’t feel like a dream or delusion.

A warm breeze came from the grass.

It was hot and humid.

I felt sweat drip down my cheeks.

The smooth sensation of the wooden sheath.

…… This was definitely not a dream or delusion.

“I’m really dead!”

I shouted and sprawled down onto the ground again.

It couldn’t be help that I died. It was impossible to survive after charging into such an intense sea of flame.

However—— I couldn’t just watch idly by back then.

I only did something so foolish because I didn’t want to see my dad’s look of despair.

In the end, I couldn’t protect the Santoku knife and even lost my life. That wouldn’t do.

A decade ago, his wife fell to illness. Now, he lost his shop and his son. If he also loses the Santoku knife from 「Shop Sakaki」 —— what then would dad live for?

With the sheathed Santoku knife in my hands, I closed my eyes tightly and gritted my teeth.

If I didn’t do that, I think I would burst into unsightly tears.

Reina is probably crying right now…

I couldn’t see my childhood friend who was like a sister to me, or my only living relative, my dad again. My dad lost everything, and everything was taken from me.

… Just what is the meaning of my life?

As I was thinking about that, I heard rustling from the trees beside me.

After that was a burst of ‘Puruuruu’… That was definitely a grunt of a wild beast.

I stayed on the ground and slowly moved my gaze towards it.

From the shadows of the trees, there was a pair of crimson eyes burning.

What the… is a ghost or demon going to come out?

It might look like a tropical paradise here, but maybe this wasn’t heaven, but hell?

I couldn’t help thinking that those eyes look hostile.

Give me a break. I don’t remember doing anything bad in my previous life.

I got up slowly, trying my best to not agitate that thing.

And then—— that thing appeared slowly.

Uwah...

It was a wild boar.

Or something that looked like a wild boar.

That creature was a quadruped that looked like a boar with a giant body weighing roughly 90kg..

Its brown bristles that looked black were as hard as steel wires, and its m

ane extend from its head all the way to its back like a punk head.

It had short limbs, but they were very thick.

Two sharp tusk protrude out, flanking its flat nose.

Beady eyes were on either side of its face.

Its large round body was short and fat.

The more I looked at it, the more it looked like a boar.

But it wasn’t a boar after all.

Because it had a pair of ivory horns protruding out from its forehead, which were as long as the tusks growing out from its jaw.

…Uwah!

I caught a glance of its hind legs kicking off the ground, and it charged at me.

From what I knew, boar could reach up to speeds of 40 km/h, but what about this guy?

As far as I know, boars were omnivorous, but it didn’t have the habit of eating live prey, what about this guy? I thought as I ran with all my might.



I had a hectic time running around when I was still alive, and I still need to run when I’m dead?

I’m dead, so I didn’t need to be afraid. But being stabbed by the sharp horns and tusk of beasts would probably be more painful than my cheeks being pinched.

And so, I was running for my life like a headless chicken.

With no time to look back, I jumped over shrubs, brushed aside branches as I weaved through the trees, running forward without stopping.

I ran and ran -- and catastrophe struck again.

□Uwahhhh!□

The ground sunk rapidly.

It was a trap hole.

The world started spinning and I felt dull pain all over my body.

I fell into the depths of the hole in confusion.

□That hurts…. Damn it, what the hell, that hurts!□

My body laid prone at the bottom of the hole, and I lifted my head.

The forest scenery looked as if it had been cut into a circular shape. It looked roughly 3 metres deep.

If this was dug by humans, it was impressive work.

□Damn it! This joke is going too far. Really…□

Fortunately, that boar like creature didn't fall into the hole with me. I kept the Santoku knife I was holding tightly in my right hand into my shirt, and tried to stand up.

That instant, I felt a burning pain in my right ankle.

I seemed to have sprained my ankle when I fell.

I was thrown into the depths of the forest in a state of confusion, ran into an unknown creature that chased after me. In the end, I fell into a hole and sprained my leg.

This was the worst bullshit. The situation was so bad that I couldn't help laughing.

「No, now isn't the time to laugh!」

As this was not the time to laugh, I tried getting mad.

「Damn it all! I don't know if you are a god or the devil, but what did I do wrong!? Are my sins really that grave? The way I died might not be worth boasting about, but I don't remember doing anything that deserve such harsh punishment! If you have a problem with me, then banish me to an even harsher hell!」

「... You're a really noisy man.」

I was surprised, as if someone had hit the back of my head with a metal baseball bat.

In the circular piece of sky above my head, a dark figure appeared.

「... Why're you being so noisy in a place like this?」

The other party spoke with a tone of a man, but sounded like a young woman.

Her voice was a little deep and hoarse. Her tone might be cold, but it sounded nice to me.

Sparse sunlight through the branches illuminated her from behind, which made it hard for me to discern her face.

So humans exist in this world too. I felt relieved, and decided to reply first:

"As you can see, I fell into a hole. I don't know who dug this hole or why they did it, but this prank has gone too far."

After a moment of silence, the girl said with an even colder tone:

"... This trap is set by me."

"Eh?"

"I can't fill my stomach even if I catch a human. This is meant to trap Kiba beasts. You know how much effort I put into digging this hole?"

"Eh? No, this is... my bad? Should I apologize to you?"

"....."

"Hmm, but I'm really sorry about messing up your work. I will apologize to you, so could you help me out of this hole?"

「... It's just this deep, you should be able to climb out yourself.」

That figure seemed to be leaving, so I continued in a hurry:

「No, I actually sprained my ankle when I fell! It's not that serious, but I can't get out by myself. Sorry to trouble you, but can you lend me a hand?」

「... Who cares. Just starve to death here.」

That figure vanished.

「Wait! That's too cruel! Hey, save me!」

She didn't answer.

Was she really planning to leave me to die?

「Hey! Please! I will really starve to death here! If you have even a little bit of conscience left, then come back!」

「... You're a really noisy man.」

I couldn't see her, but I definitely heard that girl's voice.

After that, something weird fell in.

It was vines growing all over the forest.

Five of them were bundled together. I gave it a tug, and it felt really secured.

□... Hurry and climb up.□

Huh, so she was planning to rescue me from the very start.

What a cheeky girl. In modern terms, she was a □Tsundere□.

No matter what, I felt her compassion, and considering the strange situation I was in, her actions made me even more grateful. I should give my sincere thanks once I climbed up. I thought as I stepped onto the wall.

My sprained ankle still stung, but it wasn't unbearable. Although the crumbling dirt made it hard to scale, I still climbed with all my might.

But... this situation is really confusing.

If this was hell, why would a saviour appear when I was at a loss? That

was strange.

What I felt through my senses were very realistic too, just like when I was alive. I couldn’t tell that I was really dead.

Nevermind, things would sort themselves out in the end. With the last bit of my strength, I finally reach the surface.

I escaped the hole safely.

Nightfall was probably imminent, and the surroundings were turning dark.

That hurts… Thank you. For saving my life.

I collapsed onto the grass, and lowered my head in thanks to the girl saviour who rescued me.

That girl stood with feet apart, crossing her arms as she waited for me. She then quietly pointed the thing in her hand towards my nose.

It was a sabre, with a glint in its silver blade.

Part 2

So, who exactly are you?

The glimmering sabre stopped right before the tip of my nose.

This sabre was no joke, 80cm long and 10cm wide. It was ruggedly made, as if it was modified from a hatchet. Even so, the blade was grinded to a razor sharp edge. With this sabre, she could probably cut through the bones and sinews of her prey.

Now wasn't the time to be impressed.

"W-What's the matter? Greeting me like this suddenly is dangerous! I already told you that I will apologize for messing up your trap!"

"Shut up. Hurry up and answer my question."

The girl was calm and collected… But her cool demeanour was making me afraid.

I sighed, and alternated my gaze between the girl's face and the sabre's blade.

"I want to ask you first, where is this place? This doesn't feel like the world after death…"

"This is the foot of Mount Morga, called Forest's Edge."

<TL: モルガ>

「... Mount Morga?」

「This is Western Kingdom Selva, territory of Duke Genos... Where the hell did you come from?」

I was completely lost.

But I could only answer honestly.

「I came from a country named Japan. Chiba prefecture of Japan. Do you know?」

「Japan... Chiba prefecture...?」

She never heard of that before. How could she have?

This world had nothing in common with 「Japan」 in all sorts of ways.

In the world I lived in, boars didn't have horns and girls wouldn't walk around with huge blades on them. Furthermore, that girl's looks —— I had never seen someone who looked that way.

Her skin tone was dark, as brown as dark chocolate.

But her hair was dark blonde.

And her eyes were deep blue.

That girl's brownish blonde hair was very long, and was tied up with straps into a strange pattern. In the dim light, her blue eyes looked strong and sharp.

Her facial features were well proportioned.

The corners of her eyes were raised a little, like those of a cat's. She had a thin nose and small pink lips —— the lines around her cheeks were soft, making her look young. She should be about my age.

Her looks were really outstanding.

I wouldn't hesitate in calling her stunningly gorgeous.

Personally, I think her brown skin matched with her pink lips looked really sexy.

But what was with her attire?

A thick fur cape draped down her shoulders —— cloth with beautiful patterns were wrapped around her chest and waist.

The intrinsic patterns on these two pieces of cloth didn’t feel cheap at all, but her dressing was a little too sexy.

Aside from her clothes, she had a necklace filled with beast horns or tusks. She had bangles of nuts on her wrist, and a sheathed knife hung on her shapely waist. Those were all that she wore, and the rest of her smooth brown skin were laid bare. There were some strap-like things on her feet, which should be shoes.

Even though this mesmerizing and scantily clad girl was standing before me, my only thoughts were She sure is scary.

Although her facial features were cute, her expression was fierce.

A fire burned in her eyes, and just like a real cat, her cute lips were pursed together tightly.

She was tall for a girl, and appeared rather slender.

But she didn’t feel weak at all.

The girl showed her arms, legs, shoulders and abdomen, and they were as tight as a whip, without a single bit of fat. There were also plenty of

white scars on her skin, which reflected how tough her life had been.

She was filled with powerful strength, or should I say primal life force. Modern men had become slaves to technology, and would never exhibit such power.

Even so——

What was that smell?

My heart was filled with questions when I came face to face with this extraordinary girl.

It was a complicated fragrance.

A bitter sweet smell, akin to completely ripe fruits.

It had a mysterious feel to it at the same time, like budding flowers on the verge of blooming.

The fragrance was refreshing and soothing, just like herbs.

But it had a violent nature, like a strong spice.

It also smelled like the meat and oil of animals, a bloody scent.

These scents mixed together in a complicated matter, stimulating my nasal cavity.

I didn’t want to brag, but since I was young, my dad let me apprentice in the kitchen, so my sense of smell was more keen than others. More importantly, this smell was making me hungry… When I thought this far, my body seemed to know what I was thinking, and my stomach growled.

The girl’s raised blade wavered a little.

“What are you scheming?”

“I’m not scheming anything… I’m just hungry.”

My stomach rumbled again.

How unsightly.

The girl raised her beautiful brow, and showed a ferocious face.

“Hey, stop kidding around. Are you making fun of me?”

"I'm not kidding. This is a normal body reaction, I can't help it. Because you have a delicious scent, so my stomach is reacting."

"What do you mean? I don't have any food on me. Because of you, I couldn't get anything today."

"Well, I will apologize for wasting your efforts…"

My stomach went "Growl" again, overlapping with the ending of my sentence.

My stomach was making too much noise.

Sigh, this was bad. The girl scowled her face further, and her shoulders started trembling.

Was I going to face death again for such a dumb reason?

"Anyway, I have no intention of making trouble on your turf. I got left in this place with no idea what is happening. I'm confused too. If you don't like it, I can leave right away…""Growl!"

This was really bad.

No matter how sincere my apology was, my stomach kept interrupting

me.

As I was thinking all that—— the girl suddenly turned her head.

Her right hand was still threatening me with her sabre, but she was covering her mouth with her left hand.

Her shoulders were trembling harder.

□... What's the matter?□□Growl?□

Her blade drooped onto the ground.

The girl's face was blushed.

□Hey? Are you feeling unwell?□□Growl? Growl growl?□

□Pfft□, the girl made a strange sound.

She was staring at me through the tears in her eyes.

□Enough... Stop that...□

Even her voice was turning weak.

That worried me even more.

□Even if you ask me to stop...□□Growl. Growl growl growl...□

The girl sat down on her butt with her hand still on the hilt of the sabre.

She then started laughing out loud, □Bwahahaha!□

Ara, her smiling face looked so cute.

So she was just trying to hold back her laughter just now.

After she laughed for a while, she wiped away her tears and stood up. She pointed her sabre at me and spit out these words:

□... I will kill you.□

□Why?!□

I was still sitting on the ground, and backed away in a panic.

But the maw of the hole I crawled out from earlier was still waiting behind me.

The steel blade inched towards my nose.

“This is the most shameful moment of my life… I will definitely kill you.”

Even in the night, I could see that her face was beet red.

Was this her feeling of shame? Or the ultimate in tsundere? That couldn’t be!

No matter what, I couldn’t die here.

When my hand touched the edge of the hole, I raised both hands in surrender.

“If my obnoxious stomach hurt your pride, I apologize! This is all the fault of my stomach being empty! Speaking of which, I haven’t ate since noon!”

“……”

“I’m really confused! I don’t know where I am, and why I’m here, all of this just confuses me! I am completely befuddled, if you kill me, then

why the hell did I…

Why did I jump into the sea of flames at the cost of my life?

When I thought about that, my throat tightened and the words didn’t come out.

I was at a loss, and could only look back at the girl.

There was a sort of glint in the girl’s blue eyes, as if she was looking at an unfathomable creature.

… I don’t understand what you’re saying either.

She lowered her blade a little.

Aren’t you a citizen of the Rock City?

Rock City? Like I said, my home is a country named Japan.

… I have never heard of a country by that name. So, you’re not a citizen under Genos’ rule huh.

The girl finally lowered her blade after saying that.

But the doubt and suspicion in her eyes lingered.

However… I felt a complicated wavering emotion that seemed to be hidden behind her fierce eyes.

「… Tell me more.」

The girl said softly.

「Let’s head to my place. If you are not willing to come, I will leave you here.」

「… You’re willing to bring a man of unknown origin like me home?」

「Night is falling. I don’t have time to answer your question here… Let me tell you first, if you don’t prepare a fire beforehand, you will lose your life if you stay inside the forest.」

The girl picked up the leather sheath she dropped by her feet, and sheathed her sabre. I looked at the girl’s majestic figure, then propped myself up with my hands and stood up.

「I understand, I will do as you say… By the way, I haven’t introduce myself. I’m Tsurumi Asuta.」

□Suroomi… Yazuka?□

□No, Tsurumi Asuta.□

□Choorumi Yasuka……□

She was too cute.

Because the subject was saying this with a serious face, she looked even cuter.

□Hmm. If it’s difficult for you to pronounce, just Asuta would do. What’s your name?□

□……Ai Fa.□

She left her name and turned her back to me.

She had a slender body, but she was shorter than me. Around 167-168 cm.

She was about average height, thin and slender, so how did she lift that scary sabre with just one hand? Maybe she had different muscle or bone density, and the structure of her body was unlike any people I know.

As I was thinking leisurely about all that, the girl glared at me sideways.

“What are you doing? Don’t your feet hurt? Hold onto my shoulder.”

“Huh, is that fine?”

“Time is precious, hurry up.”

I was a little hesitant, but I still put my right arm over Ai Fa’s right shoulder.

The next second, she elbowed my chest.

“I didn’t tell you to put your arm around me. I just told you to grab my shoulder.”

“Uwah… I see.”

I patted my chest softly as I grabbed Ai Fa’s left shoulder with my right hand.

I wasn’t hurt that badly, so this was enough to help me walk.

The girl was wearing a thick fur cape anyway, so I could only feel the

rough sensation of her cape.

“... You’re hiding a knife in your chest?”

“Eh?”

I stopped in surprise.

When I put my arm around her, my chest lightly brushed her back. She could feel that even through such a thick piece of hide?

Compared to her elbow to my chest, this reaction was much scarier.

“You noticed in that short amount of time? I have no intention of harming you, so don’t worry.”

“Why do I need to worry? If you want to hack me down, you can give it a try.”

Ai Fa glanced back at me, and said with an icy gaze:

“But if you tried that, I will cut your windpipe ahead of you. If you think I’m bluffing, you’re free to try me... Asuta.”

Part 3

And hence, Ai Fa and I advanced through the forest in the evening.

It was almost night fall, and the surroundings were dark.

"All because you wasted so much of my time. We need to leave the Kiba beasts' activity zone quickly."

My hand was on Ai Fa's left shoulder as I took care not to strain my sprained right ankle and inched forward. I asked back: "Kiba beast?"

"You set that trap in order to catch those things? Are you referring to that boar like creature?"

"... Boar?"

"Yes. Dark skin, round and stout with horns..."

"That's a Kiba beast, you saw one?"

"I saw one, or rather, it was chasing me. That's why I fell into that trap."

□How laughable. When a Kiba beast is attacking you, you should climb up tall trees. That’s common sense.□

□Like I said, I don’t know such common sense.□

I said as I looked at the shoulder I was holding.

□I want to ask, is that fur cape made from the hide of a Kiba beast?□

□Of course. I’m a denizen of Forest's Edge. People of the Forest's Edge will routinely hunt Kiba beast, eat their meat and make a living selling their horns, tusks and hide.□

Ai Fa carefully pulled aside the shrugs, and glared at me with annoyed eyes.

□... And those citizens of Rock City, mock us, the people of Forest's Edge as □Kiba eater□.□

□Hmm? But why? Boars are delicious.□

I wasn’t trying to brag, but during winter break during my second year in middle school, I participated in a farm life experience organized by hunting hobbyists, and butchered boars and deer over there. The boar stew I ate back then was absolutely delicious.

…It’s not a boar, it’s Kiba beast. Kiba beast meat are tough and smelly. They say the people of Forest's Edge who eats the Kiba beast, have the same stench.

You’re not smelly at all, your smell is very fragrant.

Ai Fa’s eyes looked even more unhappy.

Well, girls around this age were hard to handle.

For the sake of Ai Fa’s reputation, I need to make it clear that she didn’t just smell like meat and oil. Her scent was mainly that of bitter sweet fruits and refreshing herbs, which complement the fragrance of the meat perfectly, and kept stimulating the part of my brain that control my hunger.

But seriously, my sense of smell is really keen. Kiba beast must be delicious.

…There’s no distinction of food being delicious or not.

Ara, that was rude. I might still be apprenticing, but I was still a chef. Were those words a challenge against me?

But in this situation, it would be useless to preach about my world view. So I kept my mouth shut and focus on walking quietly.

We walked in the forest like this for about 15 minutes—— Suddenly, my field of vision became wide.

We walked out of the forest.

The sun was about to set.

The orange light illuminated the settlement in the valley.

Ah… So people really lived in this world.

I was overwhelmed.

The surrounding was dark, so I couldn’t see very clearly, but this stony clearing was made by clearing the forest, and wooden houses were spread sparsely across the place. Red light could be seen inside those lodgings, and white smoke from the cooking of dinner rose into the sky.

… See, don’t it smell delicious?

The fragrance from the protein of meat and spices melded into the air.

In order to not agitate Ai Fa, I tried my best to suppress my stomach’s growling.

"It feels serene outside the forest, not bad. Roughly how many people live here?"

"How would I know… Probably less than five hundred."

"Five hundred? This is an enormous settlement. I couldn't tell that there're so many families."

"… The settlement where the people of Forest's Edge live is a strip of land stretching from the north to the south, between Mount Morga and Genos' territory. It would take at least half a day to travel from one end of the forest to the other."

I see, as the land was narrow, there would be quite a distance between each houses. It's more comfortable to live with less people, but I think the way the houses were spread didn't really fit with the term "settlement". I tried asking for more information, but an unexpected guest appeared.

"Yo, Ai Fa. Where did this weakling come from?"

A low male voice interjected suddenly.

That surprised me, but Ai Fa just clicked her tongue softly.

"... None of your business, Diga Tsun."

"Of course it's my business. The Tsun House is the ruler of everyone in Forest's Edge."

A large figure approached swiftly.

It was a young man who was dressed similarly to Ai Fa.

He was tall and well built. I apologize, but I could only use the measurements in my world to describe it, and he was about 180 cm. His frame and muscles were lean, and was about 80 kg in weight.

His dark brown hair was cut really short, with light brown skin and a pair of blue eyes. Aside from hair colour, he was similar to Ai Fa.

He had a fur cape on his huge body and cloth material, and a large sabre as well as a knife on his waist. A large number of beast tusks and horns hung from his neck, many more than Ai Fa.

He blocked our path, stopping us from advancing and observed me without reservation.

"Hmmp, your clothes are really weird. Where do you live?"

His voice was rough, but he spoke slowly. Listening to him felt uncomfortable.

Although his eye colour was similar to Ai Fa, his eyes looked murky.

He was the second human I encountered in this different world, but I don’t feel any good will towards him.

As far as I could remember, I had been helping out with my family business. If a punk like that could rustle my jimmies, that meant I didn’t have what it takes to be a business man’s son. With that in mind, I wanted to be as friendly as I could——

“none of your business.” Ai Fa said before I could reply.

“Let me tell you, Diga Tsun, I don’t owe anything to the Tsun House. Not just that, you keep finding trouble with me. I don’t want to talk to you at all. Take your useless big body with you and disappear from my sights.”

“What did you say…”

Although that man’s face turned stiff, Ai Fa continued:

“Diga Tsun, if you have a problem with me, we can have a duel any time. If you don’t want to, then don’t show yourself before me again. You are an eyesore.”

Ai Fa walked away briskly after saying her piece.

As I needed to hold on to her shoulder, I had to keep up with her with a jog. That young man was trembling from anger, and when I passed by him, I still nodded in greeting.

"You ostracized weirdo! You better watch your back, and don't get mistaken for a Kiba beast and get your head hacked off!"

The voice of the man who lost his composure echoed throughout the entire foot of the mountain.

His yell completely spoiled the poetic scenery.

"Can I ask you a question? An outsider like me shouldn't be asking this, but shouldn't you have cordial relations with your neighbours?"

"... The night my father passed away, that man Diga Tsun ambushed me in my room, and planned to assault me. So after I beat him off, I threw him into the river."

"....."

"Because he will be the next Tribal Chief, everyone think I was the one that shamed him. No one in the settlement is willing to have anything to

do with me… You want me to have cordial relations with such a person?

I take that back. I shouldn’t have nodded at him. Should I give him a punch?

After I said that, I relaxed my grip on Ai Fa’s shoulder and stopped. The next instant, Ai Fa grabbed my right wrist tightly.

Her slender but powerful fingers dug into my hand.

What idiocy are you saying, such a man is not worth your time to beat up.

But you have been shamed because of him, right? That is too unfair.

I am not living in shame. I don’t like interacting with people outside my family anyway, so this is more relaxing.

She looked at me with anger, her blue eyes had the strong light of righteousness in them, the man just now couldn’t hold a candle to her.

However, since I brought you to the settlement, I would need to take responsibility if you harm anyone from House Tsun. I might get exiled by the settlement because of that… You want me to live in the wild?

「Ah… That's true. I'm sorry, I didn't consider your position. I'm probably hungry, that's why I got angry so easily.」

After saying that, my stomach seemed to agree with me and made 「growling」 sounds.

Ai Fa was still grabbing my hand, and her shoulders started trembling again.

「… You're doing that on purpose? You want me to dump you into the river too?」

「I-I'm not good enough to make my stomach growl on command. By the way, if you want to laugh, just laugh.」

「Shut up!」

Ai Fa let go of my hand and walked off in large strides.

I grabbed her left shoulder in a hurry.

I watched her ears and the nape of her neck that was completely red, and thought about something trivial —— 「The humans in this world are the same too, their body feels warm」.

Part 4

After walking for another 10 minutes, we reached Ai Fa’s residence.

Like the other lodgings, Ai Fa had a wooden house built on even grounds with some shrubs around it.

From what I observed on the way here, all the houses were rather far apart. But Ai Fa’s house was exceptionally isolated. It was so quiet that it was discomforting.

However, from Ai Fa’s wild attire and the words 「Denizens of Forest's Edge」, I thought her residence would be more primitive. On a closer look, the style of the house was unexpectedly nice.

「Oh, your place isn’t too bad.」

It wasn’t as fashionable as a cabin in a vacation resort, but this house was built delicately with bare boards and logs, and was spacious and felt cool. The space alone could match 「Restaurant Tsurumi」.

As the sky had darkened, I couldn’t observe too clearly. Anyway, the special thing about this house was its roof that tilt slightly from left to right. It seemed to be made timber-frame construction, without using any nails or screws.

A ditch about 50 cm wide and deep was dug around the building, with a log bridging it leading right to the entrance. Was it used to stop wild

animals from entering? Or drainage for rain? I started to think.

…… What are you doing? Hurry on in.

That’s right, sorry sorry.

The door at the entrance was a horizontal sliding door that felt really Japanese.

I followed behind the Mistress of the House and entered timidly.

Sorry for intruding…

It was darker inside the house.

However, I could still tell that it was really spacious.

The floor was covered with brown fur. Ai Fa took off her leather slippers at the entrance, and I followed her lead.

I didn’t know what to do about my socks, but I think it wouldn’t matter even if I don’t wear them, so I took them off.

I walked barefooted on the rough fur, and it felt a little itchy.

A heavy thud came from behind me.

Ai Fa had barricaded the door to the entrance with a large piece of wood.

No one will rescue me no matter how much I scream now.

I prayed in my heart that it wouldn’t be necessary to do that, and surveyed the room again.

The room was rectangular, about 12 tatami in size. The walls to the left and right had large windows. And of course, the windows didn’t have things like glass, but it did have thin vertical wooden bars about 20 cm apart, which served as a window grill.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatami >

The inside of the house was separated by a wall, and I could see three doors.

The ceiling was high and the supporting beams could be seen in clear sight. Like what I saw outside, the roof was tilted slightly to the right. I wasn’t sure, but this design was probably meant to block out the elements.

However… To be honest, instead of the visual information, I was more

interested in what my nose was telling me.

Of the complicated fragrance on this girl, there were three of them that lingered in the house strongly.

They were the scent of meat, spice and herbs.

…Does your leg still hurt?

Eh? It’s not a big deal. It feels hot, but there’s no swelling. Even if it’s not treated, it should heal by tomorrow.

…I see.

Ai Fa walked to the middle of the room and seemed to be thinking.

I want to ask you some things, but I’m hungry too. I will prepare dinner.

Please go ahead… Erm, I have no way of repaying you, but can I have dinner with you?

…If your stomach keeps rumbling, how can I ask you anything?

She didn’t need to say that through gritted teeth though.

But since she was treating me to a meal without asking for anything in

return, I was very grateful. With the fragrance in the house, I might faint if she forbid me from eating.

So, dinner preparation was beginning. The moment I stepped into the house, I immediately confirmed the space that served as a kitchen, which was the area near the window to the right.

It was a square about 2m in each direction. That was the only place that didn't have any fur rug, and had white stones covering the ground. And yellow stones formed a trapezoid base right over there.

The base reached to about my waist, and there was an empty black hole right at its front. And on top of that base was —— A black gleaming metal pot.

It's design might be simple, but this base was definitely a □stove□.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamado >

Beside the stove was bundles of small wood, which was probably firewood.

So this house had an in built kitchen.

Everyone cooks together and eat together. That might be their custom.

However —— In this spacious house, there was just me and Ai Fa.

"By the way, are your family away?"

"... I already told you that my father is dead. My mother on the other hand has been dead for a long time."

There was a water jug beside the stove. Ai Fa scooped used a long ladle to scoop up water and pour it into the pot as she spoke.

I still didn't know the common sense and reasoning of this world, and could only answer "I see".

While we were talking, Ai Fa started the stove fire.

How did she do that? I should have watched her actions more carefully.

Anyway, the room was gradually turning brighter.

"... Why are you standing there? It's an eyesore, hurry up and sit."

"Oh, well, where should I sit? I'm sorry, but I don't understand this land's culture and custom at all."

Ai Fa stood up and looked at me in surprise.

“It’s just sitting down, what has that got to do with culture? You are a strange man.”

I noticed a small light between her hands, which intrigued me.

It was a small plate-like wick stand with a handle.

After the sabre and the pot, this wick stand was the third metal I saw in this world.

The fuel burning inside must be animal fats. A smell that stimulates my appetite started drifting inside the room.

Ai Fa walked through the room. After placing the wick stand at the left and right windows respectively, she slowly took off the fur cape she was wearing.

Ai Fa’s body line was illuminated by the new light sources in the room —— I felt my heart pounding.

After all, she was just wearing the clothes covering her chest and waist right now. Aside from her necklace, her exposed skin was on the level of wearing a swimsuit or a lingerie.

She had a cold personality, but she was still a girl.

And a beauty at that.

Her body was slender, but looked well trained and was as lean as a whip. Her elegant body line was very feminine, and these two characteristics were perfectly compatible. How should I put this... she was beautiful and full of charm.

After taking off that crude cape, her attack power doubled.



「… Hey.」

「Yes! Is there anything!?」

「Don’t need to be so loud… Give me that thing in your chest.」

Ai Fa hung her cape onto the wall, leaned her sabre against the wall under the cape, and then glared at me.

「A weak man like you can’t harm me even if you have a blade. But as a guest in someone’s house, you have to deposit your blade with the owner. This is the rule of the people of Forest's Edge.」

I was dumbfounded.

Ai Fa narrowed her eyes and walked towards me with a dangerous aura about her.

That knife was still on her slender waist.

「I will say again, if you are sincere about following the rules of Forest's Edge, then give me that knife.」

「Wait, what you mean is… This custom is to confirm the trust between people?」

Ai Fa reached out her left hand towards me in silence.

After troubling over it for three seconds, I made my decision.

"I understand. But this is important to me. And instead of a hunting tool, it is meant for more delicate work, please use it with care, alright?"

"... Are you mocking me? Everyone in Forest's Edge treats blades with care."

"No, that's not what I mean. I'm saying that you need to be careful when using that knife. It is hard to repair the blade if it is damaged. If you understand, I will hand it over to you."

I took out the Santoku Knife that was in front of my collar, and handed it to Ai Fa handle first.

Ai Fa looked at the black knife handle, and she was the one who stopped this time.

"...Is this knife a memento from your late parents?"

"Yes, you can say that."

The one who died was actually me, but it was certain that I won't see my

dad ever again.

Ai Fa took the Santoku knife, and walked deep into the house with it clutched tightly in her arms.

…Everyone in Forest's Edge cherishes their family.

She muttered and opened the rightmost door, and disappeared behind it.

When Ai Fa came out, the Santoku knife was no longer in her arms, and was replaced by a large number of foodstuff.

I walked to the stove curiously.

After getting closer to the pot, I realized the size of the pot was incredible.

The pot had a round bottom, diameter about 60 cm wide and 30 cm deep. It was a deep pot, like a sphere being cut right in half.

The pot was half full, and was about to boil.

What's the matter? Preparation will take some time, just sit down somewhere.

I'm interested in the food culture of this world. After all, that's my family business.

Ai Fa was doubtful, but she didn't say anything and placed the ingredients by my feet.

Oh, it feels rather luxurious.

There were two unfamiliar vegetables.

One had a green luster, but the size was really close to an onion.

What about the other? It was a ball about the size of a fist with an uneven surface. If I really had to describe it, it looked a little like a potato. But it was cream colour and didn't have any stems, so it wasn't vegetable dug up from the ground.

However —— A thick piece of meat overwhelmed the presence of these vegetables.

The meat was probably from the hind leg of that creature called Kiba beast.

It was cut off from the hip joint area. It probably wasn't the first cut, but there were still plenty of it to go around, and that piece alone was at

least five kg.

Ai Fa had already cut off the hide, and she sprinkled something that looked like black sawdust, which had a strong fragrance of black pepper. That was definitely a spice serving as a preservative.

Beneath the meat was a large leaf that was as large as a banana leaf. Only the meat was placed on top of that smooth leaves, the other vegetables were placed directly on the floor.

Tonight’s dinner was definitely filling enough.

…How is this luxurious? You don’t understand the daily lives of Forest's Edge at all.

Ai Fa muttered disinterestedly and picked up that meat.

Holding it by the trotter, she lowered the meat into the steaming pot.

She isn’t going to dump the entire thing in right? As I stared at her, she drew out the knife from her waist and started slicing the Kiba beast’s meat.

She slowly sliced the surface of the meat, like the hawker selling Shawarma in the streets.

<TL https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shawarma >

The thin slices of meat fell into the hot water.

Ai Fa seemed to be prioritizing in cutting away the place covered in spice. The red meat beneath the spice was gradually exposed.

No matter how I looked at it, that knife was a hunting knife, but it was very sharp.

The blade of the knife was about 20 cm long, 7 to 8 mm thick and the back of the blade had jagged teeth. The appearance of the blade was just like a survival knife.

Like the sabre the hilt of the knife was wrapped in leather that prevent slippage, but had no guards.

She sliced thin pieces of meat with that hunting knife, what a pure cooking method.

I was the heir of an economical priced restaurant after all. I wasn't interested in high class dishes, and I wouldn't mind what method they used to cook, as long as it was hygienic.

The most important thing about food was it's tastiness.

In order to let the diner enjoy the food, we would be mindful of its presentation. Because no matter how delicious the dishes were, it was

meaningless if it was harmful to the body. That was why we emphasize on hygiene during cooking.

To express my thoughts in simple terms —— Just looking at Ai Fa's practiced movement as she sliced the meat made me hungrier.

…Why do you look so happy?

Eh? I just think this looks delicious.

…There's no distinction of food being delicious or not.

Ai Fa said something rude again and covered the pot with a lid. I called it a lid, but it was just a rectangular piece of board. She put a rock on top of the board.

The Kiba beast's leg meat still had plenty of meat on it, so Ai Fa put it back into the food store. After checking the fire, she nodded with an Hmm.

She then turned to me.

The meat will be cooked in a while… Before that, let me ask you questions.

Part 5

That's right, listening to my story after the meal might not be good for digestion. Let's get the troublesome matters out of the way first.

When she heard my reply, Ai Fa sat down beside the stove with a hmmp.

She sat down crossed legged, with one knee propped up.

Ai Fa's sitting posture looked authoritative, but girls who were dressed so scantily weren't suited for such a posture.

... I will relax a little too, aright?

After announcing that, I unbuttoned my apron.

The temperature here was similar to early summer in Japan. Adding the fire that was going, it was rather hot.

But after taking off the top half of my chef uniform and apron, I only had a T-shirt on me. The night breeze blowing in through the windows felt really comfortable.

... Your attire is really weird. I had never seen such clothing even in the Post Station Town.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shukuba >

"Hmm, well, it's the same for me. I have never seen someone dressed like you before."

I faced Ai Fa and sat cross legged like her on the rough fur.

"Well? What do you want to ask me? To be honest, I don't understand my situation too, so I'm not confident that I could explain things clearly though."

"... Where did you come from?"

This was the second time she asked me that.

I'm from a country named Japan, from Chiba prefecture in Japan... Even if I explain it that way, I wouldn't be able to continue.

Ai Fa's eyes had a gleam like a cat in the darkness. I looked at her and said:

"Ai Fa, not only did you saved me, you even brought me to your house as a guest. Thank you for bringing me home, I'm very thankful for your compassionate actions. What I'm about to say do not contain a shred of falsehood."

Ai Fa tilted her head, as if she was asking "And so?"

So, I will tell you the entire truth. I will let you decide whether you believe me or not.

I was confused myself, but I still told her everything.

I lived for seventeen years in a country that was relatively peaceful.

One day, a catastrophe happened, and I had to jump into a sea of fire.

I thought I was dead, but I unexpectedly woke up unscathed in that forest just now.

It might look similar to my world, but everything was fundamentally different.

... considering the possibility, maybe I am still in my own world, but ended up in an completely unknown place. I should be dead, so being still alive should be the biggest question. No, even if I ignore that, there are too many contradictions.

I tried telling her the questions clouding my head.

For example, the language I'm using now. Ai Fa, have you heard of a country named Japan before?

... Never heard of it.

Hmm, just this point confused me. If you never heard of Japan, then it’s impossible for you to be fluent in Japanese. So how are we communicating so smoothly?

……

Aside from the people in Forest's Edge, there are the Rock city and Western Kingdom, right? How large are these nations?

… I have never visited Rock City or other cities, so I don’t know. I have only visited the Post Station town outside the Rock City in order to sell the Kiba beast’s horns and tusk, I learn everything I know through hearsay.

At this point, Ai Fa groaned a little and said quietly:

I remember… there are several thousand people living in the castle town inside the stone walls, that’s the territory of the Western Kingdom Selva. I heard that Selva’s citizens living in their towns are as numerous as the stars…

I see. The scale is quite large… Do you know which gods the people in Rock City worship?

Ai Fa looked surprised when she heard my question.

"Do you even need to ask? The citizens of Selva worships the God of the West Selva of course. There are four major kingdoms in Amusehorn continent. Similar to the four kingdoms, there are four major gods. Without the protection of the four major gods, the people of Amusehorn won't be able to survive. If the people lose their faith in the gods, they would be reduced to mere beasts… Asuta, are you telling me you don't know such common sense?"

"Unfortunately, I really didn't know. I have never heard of this continent, these Kingdoms or these gods."

I smiled wryly and scratched my head that was wrapped in a towel.

"Be it a tribe of 500 hunters or horned boars, if I never heard of such trivial matters, it would probably be due to my ignorance, and had never dabbled into such fields… But that explanation wouldn't work now. It's regrettable, but I have made my conclusion."

I didn't place much hope in that small possibility in the first place, so it wasn't a huge let down.

However, this means I couldn't see my dad or childhood friend again, and the reality of that hit me again.

I looked into Ai Fa's blue beautiful eyes and said:

"I will tell you the conclusion I made... Maybe it's the whim of the gods or some other reason, but I got thrown into this world from mine. Maybe the gods pulled some tricks, allowing me to communicate with you so smoothly."

"....."

"I don't know if this is far into the past or the distant future, or a parallel world that represent one of the possibility of my world, or this is an entirely different world... simply put, this isn't the world I grew up in."

"....."

"I'm a human who came from another world."

After saying this unfamiliar term, I shrugged depressedly.

"Or I hit my head, and is retarded enough to treat my delusion as reality. I think these are the only two answers."

"... You admit that you are crazy?"

"I don't think so. To me, the seventeen years of my life is my everything. If they are delusions, then my existence would be a lie."

I gulp down the sigh I was about to exhale, and said with conviction.

I had no other choice but to accept this.

「Just to be sure, let me ask you one thing. Aside from me, no one else encountered the same thing, right? Did the people who died in my world all transported here…?」

「Such a retarded thing is impossible.」

「That's true. If there is such a system, this world would be flooded by people.」

I mimicked Ai Fa and propped up one knee, placing my arm on my knee and supported my cheek.

「That's all I can tell you. I will let you judge for yourself.」

「… I understand.」

After Ai Fa glared at me one last time, she stood up slowly.

「… Well then, it's almost time.」

「Hmm?」

「The meat is almost done.」

Ai Fa then picked up the rock on top of the lid and took the lid off.

A white mist spew out from the pot.

「Uwah, it smells delicious.」

I stood up hurriedly and looked into the pot over Ai Fa's shoulder.

The soup and meat pieces were moving inside the pot.

A large amount of steam kept coming out from the pot, and plenty of foam appeared. There was so much bubbles, as though a bar of soap had been tossed in there.

「… I know dinner is important, but don't you have other questions?」

When she heard me, Ai Fa glared at me from up close.

「You're either from another world, or a lunatic who completely believes in your delusion… I know this two things.」

"Even though you say that, but are you willing to believe something so incredible?"

"... At the very least, I know that you have no intention of deceiving me."

Ai Fa averted her face and picked up the vegetable by her feet. It was that onion like object.

When she cut open that vegetable, the bright green insides could be seen. The entire thing felt just like an onion.

Ai Fa only peel off the dried outer skin, cut it in half and then tossed it into the pot.

"You don't look like a liar, so you're probably a lunatic."

Thomp, thomp.

She tossed 5 to 6 fake onions into the pot.

This scene was just like a "hot pot from hell". I stared inside the pot and muttered "Thank you".

"What do you mean, you're happy to be called a lunatic?"

That’s right. Instead of being called a liar, I prefer being called a lunatic. And this means you believed me.

… I don’t understand you at all.

Ai Fa’s voice had a hint of anger. She picked up the cream coloured fake potato this time. She then peeled it, and just toss it into the water after making a cut on its surface.

The pot was deep, but the foam almost reach the brim of the pot.

Ai Fa picked up a thick wooden rod and stirred the pot, and then glared at me with ferocious eyes.

… So, what do you plan to do from now on?

Hmm? Do? What do you mean?

I mean what are your plans for the future? Do you want to search for a way to go back to your old world?

Well, should I really do that? If I return to my world, I might go back to that burning place. Turning into a ball of fire the moment I get back is as good as suicide.

But if I could return the Santoku knife to my dad, it might be worth sacrificing my life. However, if I turn into a ball of fire, the Santoku knife would probably suffer the same fate.

I still can't figure things out. Or rather, no matter how much I worry about it, I wouldn't be transported back to my world out of the blue. After all, I don't know how I triggered such an interesting phenomena, or the logic behind it in the first place. So I won't be fazed no matter what happens in the future.

... I see.

If you regret bringing a troublesome guy home, you can just tell me. I will leave right away. Fortunately, the weather is great, so it won't be too harsh to camp outside...

If you spent the night outside the house, you won't just be stomped to death by the Kiba beasts, your corpse will also become food for the wild beasts. By morning, only your bones would be left.

Ai Fa said, as if she was trying to stop me from continuing.

Also, Diga Tsun already saw you together with me. If a person who don't even know about the four major gods commit any serious taboos, I would need to take on the responsibility.

“Eh? But then…”

“Just stay within my sights for now, and don’t move around on your own.”

Ai Fa said in an unhappy tone. She stirred the metal pot, and looked just like the witch in fairy tales.

“At the very least, you need to remember the logic of this world and the rules of Forest's Edge. After remembering that, you can die out there if you wish.”

“I understand… Ai Fa, I’m very grateful.”

“Hey! Why are you thanking me at this moment for! Are you happy about me telling you to die out there?”

“I’m happy. At least you aren’t chasing me out right now.”

I tried my best to make my tone sound less serious.

I then took a step away from Ai Fa.

If I continue to look at her from so close, I was afraid that I wouldn’t be able to hold back and hug her.

That was how uneasy I felt about my future.

After losing everything, that was how much despair I was in.

But Ai Fa wanted me to stay here, and even said that I couldn’t be a liar.

Despite the trials and tribulations fate had thrown at me, I was truly thankful that the first person I met in this world was such a caring girl who was also a little weird.

…It’s done.

Ai Fa said in an unhappy tone and turned her back to me.

She disappeared behind the door in the middle. When she returned, she had two sets of bowls and spoons, and an oval ladle —— the utensils for soup. And of course, all the utensils were made from wood.

The entire pot of soup were white from the heat and foam. Ai Fa used the ladle to scoop up soup and poured it into the containers, and passed it to me in silence.

Thank you.

I was filled with gratitude, but my stomach was empty.

I received the container gratefully and sat onto the fur rug.

As I waited for Ai Fa to prepare her own portion, I inspected the content of the container intriguingly.

It was a bowl of thick white soup.

It looked like butter clam chowder soup, but it had the fragrance of a boar stew.

I could catch a glimpse of the coffee coloured meat and green vegetable through the snow white surface.

The fake onion broke down into an adequate size, while the fake potato —— was gone. It had completely dissolved in such a short amount of time?

Speaking of which, this bowl of soup, or rather, stock, was cream in colour, just like that fake potato.

They might look similar, but that isn’t a real onion or potato, how does it taste?

Even though there was so much foam, Ai Fa didn’t scoop them away, which made me concerned. But when in rome, do what the romans do.

Even though the foam would affect the taste, it also held the essence of all the ingredients. There wasn't a need to get rid of them excessively.

This way probably has its own unique cooking method. A man from an alternate world like me is not in the position to say too much.

As I was thinking about that, Ai Fa sat down beside me.

"Why aren't you eating? Did you change your mind, and think that Kiba beast is unpalatable after all?"

"That's not it, in the world I was from, we have the tradition of everyone eating at the same time. This looked delicious."

Ai Fa shrugged nonchalantly, and started muttering to herself, as if she was chanting a spell. She then started to eat.

Seeing her dig in, I also said "Bon apetit", and picked up my wooden spoon.

I scooped up the white soup together with the coffee coloured pieces of meat.

This was my first dinner in this otherworld.

Vol. 1 :

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Part 1

That night, I had a dream.

It was my recollection of my participation of the farm life experience organized by the hunting hobby group.

That pot of boar stew was really delicious.

With white miso as the soup base, vegetables such as enoki mushrooms, shitake mushrooms, cabbage, carrot, burdock and yam were added in, and I couldn’t taste the rumoured boar stink at all. The meat were sliced thickly, but the texture of the boar were softer than pork, not too oily, so I could wolf it down no matter how much there was.

It was december back then, and winter break for me.

It was my first time experiencing what it was like for □my freezing body to warm up from the inside□.

Before our meal, they taught us how to slaughter the boar.

I had only butchered chickens or ducks before this, so I was tensed and excited.

It might sound cliche, but that experience made me realize once again that □so that's what goes behind the preparation of animal meat as food□.

Unfortunately, the butchered meat had to be put aside for several days for it to age. And so, the meat I ate was the boar prepared by the hunter hobbyist group in advance.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanging_(meat) >

Even so, it was absolutely delicious.

The farm life experience was three nights of on-site camping. On the second night, dad and Rina came to visit me.

When she saw the boar I butchered, Rina almost fainted from anemia. But when we had boar stew for dinner, she ate almost as much as I did. I couldn’t figure out whether Rina was really strong or really frail.

But there isn’t any chance to butcher boar meat in our shop.

My dad said with a laugh.

I want to eat the meat Asuta-chan prepared!

Rina laughed too.

I was probably all smiles too back then.

Was there any meaning in closing the shop for three days to participate in the farm life experience? I was doubtful in the beginning, but I really

enjoyed those three days, so it was meaningful for me.

…… Hey, wake up.

I will be butchering a deer tomorrow.

When she heard me boasting about that, Rina’s big sparkling eyes widened.

Can we eat venison? Isn’t the deer pitiful?

How could that be? You ate so much boar meat, it’s unfair to say that.

Eh? But boars are no different from pigs!

Rina puffed her cheeks angrily after saying that.

I told her that was the unfair part.

Have you looked at boars and pigs carefully before? If I have to said, I think they are cuter than deers.

Stop saying that! I won’t be able to eat pork in the future if you say that!

The meat eating culture in many other countries were hard for Japanese to accept too. I wanted to tell her about that, but she looked so pitiful so I didn’t.

…Hey, just how long are you going to sleep. Wake up!

So noisy.

Ah, speaking of which, the boar stew I ate back then was delicious.

The miso soup base was thick, so I wanted to try other method of cooking that could bring out the taste of the

boar more clearly.

Soup stock made by cooking the bones of the boar must be incredible.

「I did ask you to stay in this house, but I have no intention of letting you laze around! Hey!」

Ara, someone was shaking my shoulders violently.

Leaving that aside for now, I probably like the unique taste of the meat.

I only had it a few times, but I like mutton a lot, and I had always like the smell of the fats on meat. I even wondered if I was a carnivore in my previous life.

It was the same for ramen, my favourite was Tonkotsu Shoyo Ramen. Naturally, a bowl of ramen that was oily wouldn't be delicious, and I would pass on that too. But I intend to take over the family business, and I was already planning in secret to add Tonkotsu Ramen to the menu in the future.

<TL: 豚骨醤油ラーメン, pork bone soy sauce >

Hey… Don’t get too cocky, you will get it from me.

Right, this was the taste. Who said that Kiba beast stinks?

Hmm? No, what were Kiba beasts?

Anyway, this smells nice.

I was just feasting on pork stew, and I got hungry again.

After all, the dinner last night was horrendous.

These two words didn’t really match though.

Forget it, doesn’t matter.

Anyway, I’m hungry, so I will dig in first.

The meat felt rather tender, and stimulate my teeth and tongue

comfortably. The next instant, a flash of white light exploded before my eyes.

□... Strange?□

It took some time before I understood the situation.

The fragrance of meat and spice stimulated my nasal cavity.

The morning sun light shone in through the windows.

The sensation of the rough fur rug.

Wooden walls and the ceiling where the beams were clearly visible.

Oh right, it had been one night since I came to this other world.

This wasn’t my house. But the house of a Forest’s Edge denizen, Ai Fa.

Right now, that Ai Fa had her arms crossed, and standing before me with her feet wide apart.

Her left palm was placed on her neck, her pretty face was blushing. She had drawn her knife and was pointing it at me. This was my benefactor, Ai Fa.

Wait… Wait! My meat definitely taste bad!

I woke up immediately, and rolled to the wall behind me.

The steel blade shone brightly as it reflected the morning sun.

Ai Fa’s right arm raised her knife high and was trembling, as if she was suppressing her agitated emotions.

… I will kill you.

Why!? Why’re you doing something so dangerous this early in the

morning…

As I yelled, I felt a dull pain on the top of my head.

Hmm? Speaking of which, someone seemed to have hit me while I was dreaming.

Ah, were you the one who hit me? How mean, what are you thinking, hitting someone who is sleeping?

… Ask yourself.

Ai Fa’s cheeks were beet red from rage.

She was the same yesterday, acting all cool but angering so easily.

But on the other hand, she wasn’t someone who would have an outburst for no reason, did I do something wrong?

Sorry, but what did I do? I was groggy from my sleep and can’t remember anything. If I did anything rude, please do forgive me.





“… You did do something wrong.”

“Huh?”

“You tried to eat me!”

Ai Fa roared. This was the first time she spoke so loudly since we met. She raised the knife in her hand once again.

On her smooth neck she was covering moments ago —— was a set of healthy looking teeth marks.

I knock my fist downwards onto my palm as I sounded out in realization.

“I remember now, I was eating something in my dream. Because you smelled so nice, I couldn’t help biting down.”

“… I will kill you.”

Uwah wait! I was wrong! It’s my fault! I apologize, please spare my life…!

Shut up!

And so, my second day in a another world began really loudly.

My actions were lowly, but fortunately, it didn’t awaken any hidden cannibalistic tendencies within me.

Part 2

… After you finish eating, we will set off immediately.

Ai Fa said with an expression more unhappy than usual.

But it was natural for her to act like this, since I irked her. However, I wish she would let it go since she hit me with the handle of her knife five or six times already.

By the way, the breakfast she gave me was Kiba beast jerky.

This was another ordeal. Like dried squids snacks that goes with beer, it needed to be tore into thin strips before consumption. But it wouldn’t dissolve no matter how much you chew it, just like rubber that taste like meat.

It also had the lingering taste of animal odour, probably because its blood wasn’t drained properly.

Ai Fa leaned against the wall with a heavy aura that seemed to say □don’t come near me□. So I stood beside the stove as I chewed on Kiba beast jerky.

I looked at the iron pot that had been washed sparkling clean and thought about yesterday’s dinner.

Dinner last night —— was horrendous.

To me, that was like some sort of torture.

No matter what, that meal is too much…

This might be the first time in my life that I said 「tastes nasty」 after eating someone's dish. I had fallen into the vicious cycle of self loath after having misspoke.

But the subject herself —— Ai Fa didn't seem to mine, and so I escaped unscathed.

「... There's no distinction of food being delicious or not.」

I heard this rude remark for the third time yesterday.

For the people of Forest's Edge, was dining just a way of obtaining nutrition?

That might be so...

That might be so, but that dish was too much.

First of all, the Kiba beast meat.

The Kiba beast meat was too tough.

And the animal stink was heavy.

Be it pork or beef, no matter how terrible the quality, they wouldn’t stink so much.

Next, because the meat was cooked very thoroughly, it wasn’t so tough to the extent of being unchewable. However, despite the surface of the meat being tender, the sinew was still inside, so it felt like half melted rubber… Simply put, the texture was terrible.

On the other hand, the fake onions had excellent texture.

I like how crisp it was.

But that was it’s only good point.

My only comment was, “Onions aren’t suitable for hot pot after all.”

And of course, onions were very suitable for things like beef intestines pot or kimchi pot, but my family didn’t have the habit of putting in onions when we cook hot pot.

And also, the fake potato was a huge problem.

What exactly was it?

It melted completely into the soup. After throwing it into the water, it turned into a powdery cream coloured liquid that destroyed the balance of the entire dish.

The best way to describe it was □flour that dissolves in water□.

Please imagine.

Thick stock with flour mixed into it.

Onions with crispy texture.

Lumps of soggy meat that stinked.

Flavoured solely with black pepper.

Will that taste good?

Sorry to say, but I don’t think it was nice at all.

And the most horrible thing for me was ——「This dish smelled delicious」.

The fragrance was excellent, so the freshness of the meat and fats had definitely dissipated into the white murky liquid. Complemented by spice such as black pepper, I could wolf down several bowls of rice with this smell alone.

Even so, the dish tasted horrible.

When I scooped the meat slices and soup into my mouth, the animal stink made the fragrance disappear without a trace.

That was why —— it was so tormenting.

The central nervous system controlling my appetite was stimulated by

the fragrance, but the thing invading my mouth was completely the opposite of that appetizing smell. To be honest, if not for my gratitude for the food and Ai Fa, I probably wouldn't be able to eat half a plate of it.

I ate three plates of that damn thing. Towards the end, I was battling my urge to puke.

And so, even though I ate til my stomach bulged, my brain had been nagging "when can I eat?" right until I fell asleep. That was probably the reason for my dream last night.

"... Why are you dazing off? It's time to go."

I raised my head when I heard her sarcastic tone and found Ai Fa with her cape on and her blades on her waist, ready to go.

"Ah, wait for me! What about my Santoku knife?"

"...Santoku ...?"

That knife. The one I handed over you last night.

Ai Fa gestured towards the inside of the door with her chin in silence.

I remembered that she brought it to the door on the right, so I walked that way.

In the end, Ai Fa and I both slept in this big room, so I didn’t have the chance to visit those three rooms.

I opened the door cautiously and slowly —— A strong smell assaulted me in an instant.

Uwah… this is unbearable.

As I expected, it was the food store.

There were many gunny sack-like bags that looked heavy, and I caught a glimpse of the onion and potato like vegetable inside.

Various plants were hung on the wall, one of it had withered and turned black like seaweed, another one was lustrous green with thin long leaves, hanging in the cramped space.

Further in, a space about 2 meter square was segregated by squarish boards, which were filled to about my knee level with black powder.

The smell came from there.

It was the black pepper like spice which were sprinkled onto the meat of the Kiba beast.

Leaving whether it was fragrant or not aside, it was too stimulating. There wasn’t any windows, so the smell mixed with the air heavily. If I wasn’t careful, this would probably hurt my eyes, nose and throat membrane.

I see, so that’s how they preserve Kiba beast meat.

Despite the danger, my innate curiosity still prevailed, and I decided to observe further while blinking away tears.

The Kiba beast’s meat was probably sealed inside this pile of spice. They use pepper instead of salt to cure their meat. Since there wasn’t any freezer, they had to use this method. The climate here was similar to early summer in Japan, so meat and other food stuff would rot quickly in the open.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curing_(food_preservation) >

Hmm… Is this dried leaf the ingredient?

The wilted leaf hanging on the wall looked like seaweed that had turned black. When I touched it, the leaves fell off in crumbs.

I see. After it is dried, the leaves would become a spice like black pepper. If the europeans during the age of sail saw this, they would probably faint from joy.

As I made my bold deduction, someone behind me suddenly said: “What in the world are you doing?”

Ai Fa was standing at the entrance of the food storage room. The morning sun illuminated her from behind, and I could only see her silhouette.

She leaned against the wall with her arms crossed before her chest. Her head was tilted slightly and she had a questioning gaze.

"The knife is here. Hurry on out, the smell will leak away."

"Ah, sorry. A lot of things in there piqued my curiosity."

Ai Fa rushed me out of the room, and the morning sun outside was already very strong. I was only inside the room for tens of seconds, but I felt I was turning into peppered meat.

"Uwah, my nose hurts! The smell of that spice is too strong."

"... Are you retarded? You can't eat that, and don't want to anyway, what's the point of staring at them?"

"Because it's interesting. I did tell you that I'm a son of a chef yesterday, right?"

…There are only chefs inside Rock city. If you want to make a living with that, then learn the rules of this world faster and leave Forest's Edge.

Ai Fa said unhappily and pushed the Santoku knife onto my chest.

I don't know anything about this world, there's no way I can become a chef… But why did you put my kitchen knife in a room with such a strong smell?

Although the blade won't rust or get damaged from the smell, I was worried that the scent would linger on it.

…That is the only room without windows. Not everyone is as despicable as Diga Tsun who breaks through windows, but the food store is the safest place.

I see. You really cherished it… thank you.

Ai Fa raised her brows.

She seemed unused to accepting other people’s thanks.

“... We are wasting time. Before the sun rise to the middle of the sky, we will forage for Pico leaves and firewood. If you don’t want to be called a freeloader, then contribute a little.”

“Understood!... But before we start work, I have a request, can you hear me out, Ai Fa?”

Ai Fa showed an annoyed look.

Given how beautiful she was, this was a pity.

“Just how much trouble are you going to give me? Asuta, I didn’t know you are such a shameless man.”

“No, I want to ease your load as much as possible... Starting from tonight, can you let me cook dinner?”

Ai Fa’s face was tensed, but her expression looked bewildered after

hearing what I said.

She looked really cute like this.

“What do you mean? Cooking isn’t a hassle, even a ten year old could do it.”

“Erm… So this isn’t really lessening your load huh… But I still want to try preparing the ingredients in this world with the cooking method from my world.”

Ai Fa lowered her brows doubtfully as she appraised me.

That look in her eyes was like someone watching a dog walking on two legs.

Not everyone would like her current expression, but I think she looked really cute.

“I don’t understand… Do all “chefs” feel the same way?”

“I’m just an apprentice chef though. But all chefs would probably feel the same.”

“... Do as you like. For me, cooking isn’t that important.”

Ai Fa walked towards the entrance after saying that.

I exhaled in relief and followed her slender figure.

My actions just now was as good as telling her directly: “your cooking is terrible, let me do it”. I had already braced myself for her to swing her knife at me.

However, Ai Fa seemed to seriously think that the content of the meal was “of no importance”. I felt conflicted, my emotions a mix of joy and sadness.

But this really sparks my will to challenge this.

I want to wipe away the dissatisfaction and melancholy I felt last night away.

I was sure that I could cook the Kiba beast meat and make it more delectable.

This ingredient gives off an amazing fragrance, but its horrible taste could be seen as the desecration of food.

I had not found a way to tackle the fake onions and fake potatoes, but I was certain that the potential of the Kiba beast had not been brought out yet.

As for the way to cook boar meat, I only knew the scratch of the surface. If I put them into action, just how much tastier could I improve the Kiba beast meat? Just thinking about this hyped me up and made me hungry.

On top of that...

I muttered as I peek at Ai Fa tying her shoes onto her feet.

I want her to taste the dishes I made.

As an apprentice chef, the only contribution I could make was to serve dishes that could somehow pass the mark.

Ai Fa seemed uninterested in eating, so all this might seem meaningless to her. But no matter who it was, everyone would feel happy when they taste delicious food.

This girl was always showing a displeased face, so if I could make her look a little happier, it would be considered a passing grade. Should I use this as the baseline?

I want to cook the Kiba beast’s meat, and make my benefactor happy when she eat it.

It might be a little extreme to put it this way, but I had found my goal for my life now.

When I thought about that, the clouds in my heart seemed to clear a little.

…Speaking of which, is your leg alright?

Ai Fa asked me offhandedly after putting on her shoes.

“Yes, I can walk fine now… Thank you for your concern.”

“Who cares about you. If you tell me “I can’t walk anymore” after we go into the forest, I will just leave you there.”

She spat her words out unhappily, and then added “… so, if you feel anything wrong, don’t hold it in and tell me right away.”

Repaying this benefactor was a worthwhile effort.

After I told her “I got it”, we walked forth into this different world where the morning sun shone brightly.

Part 3

“… The Pico leaves grow along the water inside the forest. There is a river called Lanto in the woods, and its vicinity is the best place to forage for Pico leaves. The Tsun House’s turf is upstream, so we will be heading downstream.”

Yes captain.

We walked along the path we took yesterday and headed into the forest.

We set off a bit late because of the various distractions, but the other houses in the settlement was still very quiet. I would see a person or two occasionally, but no one walked along this path.

Hmmp. No one wants to enter the forest early in the morning. Everyone uses the time in the morning to settle miscellaneous tasks, such as tanning hide or chopping wood.

But captain, why are you heading into the forest so early in the morning?

... I usually won't go into the forest so early either. But I have another mouth to feed now, so I'm worried that my firewood supply wouldn't be enough.

So it's this lowly one's fault! Words fails to express the shame I have wrought!

「... Speak normally or I will cut your tongue off.」

「Okay, I’m sorry.」

Ai Fa seemed displeased, so I decided to behave myself.

The scenery of this world appeared before me in the morning light for the very first time.

I couldn’t see the surroundings clearly because of the dim lights yesterday. But the scenery here was really epic.

There was a light mist in the air around Mount Morga that raised up into the clouds. The mountain range extended to its left and right, leaving me in awe of its massiveness.

Our destination was the depths of the forest.

Aside from this area that had been cleared for the settlement,

everywhere else was shrouded in lush greenery.

The air was clean and fresh without any hint of smog.

The birds soared in the sky.

Everywhere I looked was filled with the grandness of nature.

It wasn’t too warm right now, so it felt comfortable to wear my long sleeved chef uniform.

I surveyed the scenery around me, and the morning dew on the trees glimmered under the bask of the morning sun.

If this was a camping trip I would be completely satisfied.

I want to ask, what exactly are Pico leaves?

I asked when we reached the border of the forest. Ai Fa answered annoyingly that 「it's that thing you were so happy to see just now.」

「Eh? You mean that spice? That is a cute name.」

「... After about a month, the Pico leaves will lose their effectiveness. We need to gather enough of it before that happens. Without Pico leaves, the meat will spoil in less than two days. If you don't want to eat rotten meat, then work hard.」

「Understood... So the vegetables we ate last night also grows in the wild and can be foraged?」

Ai Fa stepped into the dense forest as she shook the things hanging on her necklace.

「The tusk and horns of a Kiba beast is worth ten days worth of Aria and Poitan. Which means five days worth for two people... So we need to hunt one Kiba beast every five days, or our meals will be reduced to just the meat of the Kiba beast. Things are still fine for now.」

「Is that so? But with how huge this mountain is, you should be able to

gather all kinds of ingredients here, right?

… We can’t take the resources of Mount Morga, that is a taboo.

Huh?

If we harvest the resources of Mount Morga wilfully, the famished Kiba beast will attack the farmlands in Genos’ territory. Kiba beast don’t eat herbs like Pico leaves and Lilo, and the Grikee fruit that has potent poison. That’s why they only permit the people of Forest’s Edge to harvest these plants.

On whose orders? The mountains and forests shouldn’t belong to anyone, correct?

Both Mount Morga and the forest are under the dominion of Selva, the Kingdom of the West. Eighty years ago, we the people of Forest Edge fled from the war in Southern Kingdom Jagaru to this forest… And we made a pledge with the Kingdom of the West not to wilfully harvest the resource in the mountain, and to only hunt Kiba beast. We were only granted permission to stay under these terms.

“This is an outrage. The mountain and forest are enormous, the Kiba beast won’t starve just from harvesting some of the resource.”

“That’s not true. Kiba beast are creatures that only lives at the foot of the mountain. Deep in the mountain lurks the giant Madarama snakes and Valb wolves which even the Kiba beasts feared. Ferocious barbarian also lives there. We people of Forest’s Edge and the Kiba beasts can only live in the relatively safety at the foot of the mountain.”

“I see…”

I could understand the rationale, but I couldn’t agree with it.

Kiba beast could only live at the foot of the mountain because of the fight for survival. But in order to protect other people’s farmland, the people of Forest’s Edge could only hunt Kiba beast… This arrangement felt really forced.

Ai Fa told me yesterday that those people mocked them as “Kiba eaters”, which irked me a lot.

“… The people of Forest’s Edge are refugees from the Southern

Kingdom after all. We turned our back on the God of the South Jackal, and offer our sword and souls to the God of the West Selva. But even so, for the citizens of Rock City, we aren't their people, but outsiders.

Ai Fa seemed to realize how I felt and muttered emotionlessly.

Even for outsiders, your people have lived on this land for eight decades right? It isn't too much to fight harder for your own rights.

... Just like how I refuse to seek the protection from the Tsun House, the people of Forest's Edge don't ask for aid from the Kingdom. Instead of tending farmlands, our characters are more suited for hunting Kiba beast.

I see, but to the people of Forest's Edge, I'm a complete outsider, so I don't have any say in this problem.

What I said seemed to have angered Ai Fa and she glared at me fiercely.

No, I'm not refuting your way of life. But I think I definitely can't get along with the citizens of Rock city.

"... Hmmp. A weak man like you is more suited for Rock city, not Forest's Edge."

Hearing Ai Fa's sarcastic words, I glared back. I suddenly thought about something.

"Wait, you said that the horns and tusks on one Kiba beast can be exchanged for ten days worth of food? So for a family of ten, they would need to hunt one Kiba beast — Hey hey hey, there're five hundred people here, so that would mean 50 Kiba beasts everyday?"

Ai Fa tilted her head as if she was asking "So what?"

Hey, this was the biggest issue.

"In this 80 years, the people of Forest's Edge had been hunting 50 Kiba beasts every day? If you hunt them at such a rate, won't the Kiba beast go extinct?"

"It's impossible for the Kiba beasts to go extinct. In recent years, their numbers had been growing instead, and they had destroyed even more

farmland. The Kiba beasts numbers aren’t so thin that we can wipe them out. This is a vast forest after all.

I see… That’s incredible.

In that case, I believe even more firmly that the Western Kingdom had imposed a great responsibility on the people of Forest’s Edge with a cunning excuse. And the system meant the people of Forest’s Edge could only hunt Kiba beasts and not any other food, which reeks of malicious intent to me.

The people of Forest’s Edge couldn’t collect the natural resources of the forest or go into agriculture, and could only hunt Kiba beasts — The other party probably gave such an order.

If that was the truth, then it would be even more maddening for them to mock the people of Forest’s Edge as Kiba eaters behind their back.

… And so, it is prohibited for anyone to take from the forest. Anyone who break this taboo would get their head scalped. Remember this well.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scalping >

…Okay.

After I said that, Ai Fa stopped and grabbed me by my chest.

Hey, your attitude towards me is terrible. If you have any complaints, say it out clearly.

I'm not angry at you! I'm just unhappy about how the people in the Kingdom and that city handles things.

Ai Fa's eyes were like a boiling pot of Kiba beast meat, but she cooled down after hearing what I said.

What do you mean? You are not a part of Forest's Edge, why are you angry about this?

Do you even need to ask? Just thinking about their actions objectively would make my blood boil. And I'm in your care, so I will naturally think about things from your perspective.

…You really are a weirdo.

Ai Fa unhanded me and strode forth again, the grass rustling under her foot steps.

And what you said is illogical. They didn't threaten us with force when we made these terms. I don't like the people in the city, but we take pride and honour in keeping them safe. If we leave, then other people would need to leave their jobs to fight the Kiba beast… We have already offered our swords to the Western God Selva, when we hunt the Kiba beast, we are also contributing to the prosperity of the Kingdom.

Erm… I'm not born in Forest's Edge, so I don't really understand this feeling.

We live proudly in Forest's Edge. Not only are these tusks and horns our wealth that can be used to secure food, it also represent honour. The shameless act of stripping the forest of its resources will endanger the entire Kingdom, and is also as good as trampling on the pride of the people of Forest's Edge. Remember that.

I understand. The situation in the Kingdom has nothing to do with me, but in order to protect the honour of the people of Forest's Edge, I'm willing to abide by this rule.

Actually, I was a bit unwilling, but I could only accept it right now.

Ai Fa pulled away the branches and quickened her pace. She then turned her gaze towards me.

“……Asuta, you are a strange fellow.”

The strange thing was, Ai Fa’s unhappy expression since this morning vanished without a trace when she said that.

We walked for dozens of minutes more, and when the sun was completely up, we reached our first destination.

This was Lanto river, where the Pico leaves grow.

The river was about five metres wide. The flow was gentle since it was downstream, but it was quite deep. Sunlight shone through the branches and leaves, making the scene look majestic.

However, the banks around the river were rocky without any grass.

I didn’t know if I should continue forward and look back at Ai Fa. She was actually taking off the cape on her shoulders.

“… Before I look for the Pico leaves, I want to bathe.”

“What? Bath?”

“Is there a problem? My body is covered with the fats of the Kiba beast, and it feels uncomfortable after I sweat.”

Even though Ai Fa had regained her composure, her personality was cold as usual. She spoke to me in a crude tone, then handed the cape she took off to me.

Oh, it wasn’t light at all. On closer inspection, the insides of the cape had several small pockets filled with unknown fruits, needles and a bundle of rope. The entire weight was between two to three kilograms.

…I will leave this in your care too.

Ai Fa even took off her necklace of tusks and horns and handed it to me.

But dear princess, your servant’s hands were already occupied by your cape.

Lower your head.

Ai Fa kicked my leg.

Don’t need to kick me, I will do so if you ask.

I said and bent my waist slightly. Ai Fa took off her necklace with both hands and walked before me.

Ah, she was very close. Aside from that matter this morning that I couldn’t remember, this was probably the first time we were so close… As I was thinking about such pointless things, my gaze fell onto her neck naturally.

On the left of her slender neck was clear bruises in the shape of a bite mark.

I actually did something so horrible to her body.

By the way, Her Highness had a nice scent after all. And her face was so close to mine, her skin was really smooth. Her pink lips were so sexy… Was this a new type of punishment game?

Ai Fa didn’t notice my foolish thoughts and pulled away after hanging the necklace around my neck.

“Alright… The Kiba beasts are still sleeping at this time, but there might be deviants that wander around early in the morning. If you sense any Kiba beast in the forest, alert me immediately.”

“Got it. I just need to watch the forest.”

Even though I was acting casually, Ai Fa stilled looked at me with an icy stare.

“... Just to be safe, let me tell you one thing. You must not look at the naked body of an unwed woman, that’s a taboo.”

“Huh? So it’s fine if the woman is married?”

“... Only a husband may see the bare body of his wife.”

Ara, I should have kept my mouth shut. I felt Ai Fa’s eyes had turned icier.

“... Go and keep an eye on the forest.”

“... Got it.”

I looked for the largest boulder there was, and leaned on it to surveil the forest.

But she just told me that necklace was an important source of wealth and pride to the people of Forest Edge, yet she entrusted it to me so readily. She also trusted me to not peek at her, so I should feel

honoured.

However, I don’t really understand the actions of this girl Ai Fa.

I thought she would be incredibly guarded, but she trusted someone like me so easily. Whenever I felt impressed by her care and compassion, she would ignore me coldly.

I think her nature was kind and gentle, but her personality was also eccentric with big mood swings.

But no matter what, she is reliable.

Just when I was thinking that…

“Yaahh!” Ai Fa’s panicked scream broke the serenity.

Part 4

“Hey! Ai Fa, what’s wrong!?”

I got up on one knee and shouted from behind the boulder.

I can’t act rashly, maybe she just slipped. If I check on her just for that, I will be dead meat.

But Ai Fa didn’t respond.

I heard the sound of water splashing violently reverberating in the air.

“Hey! I’m coming to check on you! If you’re fine, answer me within three seconds!”

I was worried that she didn’t understand the concept of “second”, so I kept shouting.

But she didn’t respond.

I endured the anxiety that made my heart hurt and counted to three.

「One… Two… Three!」

I stood up and looked towards the river.

There — wasn’t anyone there.

But on the bank some distance away from the river, I saw the familiar clothing and one large and small blade. And water was being splashed violently in the water over there.

I put down the cape and jumped over the boulder I was leaning against earlier and charged in.

At the same time, Ai Fa’s face appeared on the surface of the water.

Her expression was twisted from pain.

「Ai Fa!」

Ai Fa was gasping desperately for oxygen, but water flowed into her mouth mercilessly.

The river was about waist level, but Ai Fa couldn’t push herself to the surface.

“What’re you doing! Grab onto me!”

I stood at the river bank and extended my right hand.

Ai Fa struggled fiercely as she looked at me with weak eyes.

“Don’t… Come…”

Her voice was weak and hoarse.

She was drifting slowly downstream.

「Stop kidding with me! Hey! Grab my hand!」

Since it has come to this, I have no other choice.

I stepped into the water with my right feet. Steadying myself to not get washed away, I reached out to grab Ai Fa.

The moment my fingers was about to touch Ai Fa——

Something coiled up my right arm.

「Uwah!?」

At the same time, I felt a stabbing pain in my right arm, and I could clearly hear my bones creaking.

Something was grabbing onto my right arm and holding it with amazing strength.

It was about as thick as my arm and covered with dark bluish scales. This strange object was — the tail of a humongous snake.

When I realized its true identity, Ai Fa groaned painfully.

「Ugghh—」

The splashes became more violent and Ai Fa’s arms came out from the water.

Her fingers were clasped around the snake’s neck.

The head of the snake was twisted in the shape of a scythe and about the size of a rugby ball. It was snarling its teeth at Ai Fa.

So Ai Fa was wrestling with this giant python in the water.

「Damn it…!」

I endured the pain in my right arm and steadied my footing even further.

The ankle I twisted yesterday was still stinging, but it wasn’t the time to mind it right now.

Even though its monstrous strength could probably crack my bones, it worked just fine for it to grab onto me, which allowed me to drag it out of the water.

The river flow was gentle, and I could guess Ai Fa’s weight, it can be done — No, I had to drag it out even if it cost me my life.

Ughh…!



Using every ounce of strength in my body, I dragged that snake together with Ai Fa onto the river bank.

My right leg was out of the river. Ai Fa’s hands was still on the neck of the snake, and I reached my left arm over.

Next would be my skills in lifting weights.

Although I didn’t have any experience in weightlifting.

…Hah!

Using all the strength I had, I finally dragged Ai Fa’s body onto the shore.

Ughhh…

Ai Fa moaned weakly.

The snake had coiled several loops around Ai Fa’s naked body.

It was around Ai Fa’s breast, waist and right leg, the rest of its body was over her shoulder and on my right arm.

The thickest part of the snake was about the size of my thighs, it’s girth and length were both extraordinary.

On closer look, the dark bluish scales of the snake was covered in cracks and wounds. If not for its injuries, the snake would have already crushed Ai Fa.

“Alright! Ai Fa, don’t let go!”

I grabbed a rock nearby and smashed at its head.

The snake’s body covered in shiny scales started spasming.

“Snakes can’t feel pain” was just a myth, it will feel pain if you hit it hard enough.

Ai Fa held the head of the snake still in the air, and I repeatedly bashed it with my rock.

After about five hits, red blood spilled out. At the same time, Ai Fa howled in pain.

The snake was also squeezing my right arm.

Damn it! Don’t constrict! Release her!

Even though Ai Fa was steadying the snake’s head, it was held in the air and hard to strike with full force.

In that case, I switched target to its stomach!

I aimed for the part where the snake touched the ground and bashed with all my might.

I could feel the sensation of meat being crushed under my rock.

「……!」

The snake finally relaxed its hold.

I immediately grabbed Ai Fa’s body, and kicked the fleeing snake into the river.

The snake sunk into the river with a heavy thump.

After making sure it had swam downstream, I called out to Ai Fa.

「Hey! Stay with me! Are you okay! Please don’t die on me, Ai Fa!」

I laid Ai Fa down on a rocky platform and shook her bare shoulders hard.

Ai Fa moaned weakly, then vomited a lot of water.

The blonde hair she usually tied up in a bun was now sticking to her wet face and breasts.

Ai Fa was very frail right now, unlike her usual self. Both her eyes were shut and her nails bit into the back of my hand.

"You don't feel well? Still need to throw up the water in your system?"

I rolled the weak Ai Fa to her side and patted her back firmly. She threw up even more water.

"Ugh… A… Suta…?"

"Are you alright? I threw that motherfucking snake off this motherfucking plains! It's fine now!"

Her blue eyes still didn't focus as she looked my way dully.

She looked very frail.

But she was still alive.

I propped Ai Fa’s upper body up, and hugged her slender body tight with both arms.

Thinking about it after the fact, Ai Fa had just broken out of the snake’s bounds, how could I do this to her so soon? Even though I reflected on it now, I was too caught up in the moment back then.

“Great… Don’t make me worry so much…”

I was drenched immediately, but I didn’t care.

But —— Ai Fa pushed my chest away with an unexpectedly powerful brute strength.

“Unhand me… let go!”

“Ehh?”

I was shocked and loosened my hold.

At the same time, Ai Fa bumped my chest hard and I fell onto my butt.

“W-What’s the matter?”

There seemed to be a fire burning in Ai Fa’s eyes.

She grabbed the hilt of her sabre that was by her feet.

“W-What is it? What happened?”

Her drastic change scared me out of my mind. Ai Fa drew out her sabre before me.

Her face looked as weak as a sick child just a moment ago, but it was filled with killing intent now.

Did I strike a nerve with Ai Fa?

Was it because I saw her in the nude? But that was an accident.

Or was it because I hugged her unconsciously?

But… If this is so serious that she needed to kill me, I can’t do anything about it.

Too many things were happening and my mind couldn’t keep up.

But instead of watching Ai Fa die, I would rather die by her blade. Such a silly thought filled my mind.

The naked Ai Fa was down on one knee, her sabre pointed at my throat.

She was using the back of the blade instead of the sharpened edge. But with how thick the blade was, even the blunt edge of the blade would be enough to kill me.

I stared into Ai Fa’s eyes.

But — Ai Fa wasn’t looking at me.

Blue flames seemed to be burning in her eyes. She wasn’t looking at me, but the space behind me.

Gurururu… Noise that sounded like the low hum of an exhaust pipe came from an unexpectedly close distance.

There was something — behind me.

□Hah!□

A ferocious yell came from her mouth.

The sabre left a silver trail in the air.

And then, something pressed onto my body.

…Ugghh.

Something heavy fell from the sky suddenly.

It was hard and rough, and emitted a thick animal scent.

Ai Fa collapsed onto the ground with a sigh.

Her blue pupils glared at me as usual through her head of messy blonde hair.

You can’t let your guard down even after making through one crisis. If not, you can’t survive in Forest’s Edge.

She was still naked, but her tone was haughty.

But I finally understood what happened.

That heavy thing on my head and back was the huge body of a Kiba beast. It was in its dying spasms right now because Ai Fa smashed its skull in with her sabre.

Vol. 1 :

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Part 1

…Maybe you're the incarnation of disaster.

After she tied her hair, dressed herself and put on her cape with a smooth move, she made that comment.

I'm honoured by your words, but what makes you say that my lady?

Giant Madarama snakes won't appear at the foot of the mountain normally, but one got washed to this place by the river. The sun have not yet reached above our heads, and a Kiba beast was already roaming in the woods and even attacked us. What a series of ill fortune.

Oh I see.

By the way, there were more than two ill fortune. You had yet to marry, but I saw your naked body. I wanted to retort that, but I didn’t want to die, so I held my peace.

My judgement seemed to be on point.

Because when Ai Fa saw me fell silent, her expression changed, as if she regretted what she said.

“... It was unexpected, but I was still careless to not notice that Madarama. And you did save me — I want to thank you for that.”

Ai Fa lowered her head a little, but her eyes were looking up at me as she fidgeted with the necklace on her chest. She said in a soft voice that was barely audible to humans and said: “... Thank you.”

Her actions were just like that of a child.

My heart raced for some reason and I replied stiffly:

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it. I should be the one saying that, I didn’t notice the Kiba beast that was so close to me. You saved me… Thank you.”

As long as Ai Fa got her spirits back, nothing else matters.

If that snake killed Ai Fa… I feel like dying just thinking about that.

“No matter what, this is still a Kiba beast. Let’s deal with it while it is fresh.”

The head of the Kiba beast was smashed by Ai Fa, and it was still lying by my feet while spasming.

Compared to the Kiba beast I ran into yesterday, this one was smaller. But it was still about 150 cm long and 70 kg heavy. It had huge horns and tusks, but Ai Fa defeated it in just one blow.

“That’s true, let’s cut off it’s leg first.” Ai Fa raised her blade, but I stopped her in a hurry.

“Wait wait, before dismembering it, we need to bleed it out first. Don’t just cut it up so suddenly.”

“Bleed it out… What do you mean?”

“What!? You have never bleed them out before? No wonder their meat stinks so much!”

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exsanguination >

Ai Fa had a face of complete bewilderment when she heard my yell.

Yup, I love her bewildered look the most. For the people of Forest’s Edge, this was a huge problem.

“Let me tell you then. The reason why meat stinks, is because of the blood. By bleeding them out, the Kiba beast’s meat will not be so pungent.”

“… I don’t understand what you’re saying. Wouldn’t the blood flow out during dismemberment?”

You can’t get it all out that way… Now isn’t the time to discuss this leisurely. It will be too late if the Kiba beast’s heart stop pumping. Hey, I will explain later, lend me your knife.

Ai Fa handed me her knife with a face full of doubt. The Kiba beast was down on the ground on its side. I bent down behind it.

Well then — Despite acting all professional, I had only seen the members of the hunter hobbyist group perform exsanguination before. And I wasn’t sure if the internal makeup of the Kiba beast was similar to a boar, everything was dependent on luck.

The position of a boar’s artery and organs are similar to that of a human.

Recalling the words the hunter said, I leaned onto the huge body of the Kiba beast.

I aimed the blade at the point where the Kiba beast’s thick neck connected with its chest.

And stabbed in one go.

Blood — Only a few drops came out.

It failed.

Well, things usually won't be so smooth.

With no other choice, I slid the knife slowly down its chest.

I just need to cut the carotid artery or the aorta.

As I struggled against the Kiba beast's tough hide and inched my blade forward — fresh blood finally flowed out.

I pulled out the knife in a hurry, and more darkish red fluid gushed out.

If I didn't wound the heart directly, then it probably… worked.

“The heart is an organ that will circulate blood around the entire body. By cutting a large artery and not hurting the heart, we can bleed the beast out efficiently.”

Hence, it would be better to slit the carotid artery, but it was risky. If I hurt the throat or breathing organs, the Kiba beast would suffocate to death, and its heart would stop pumping.

“It is actually better to hang it from a tree, but lifting this fellow would be a lot of work. This should be enough!”

As she didn’t reply, I turned my head back and found Ai Fa with a confused expression.

“… We’re just bringing the meat on its legs back, why do we need to bleed out its entire body?”

“Hmm?”

“If we bring back a Kiba beast of this size, the meat would spoil before we can even finish. Large families would bring an entire Kiba beast back

in order to skin its hide, but everyone else will usually just take the legs.

Leaving such a delicacy is such a waste!

If we leave the rest of the carcass here, the Manto that only eat rotting meat and other beasts would finish it. If we bring it home and it rots before we can finish it, that will be a graver sin.

I see, then there’s no problem. But why bring back the leg meat? Thigh meat aren’t bad, but there are many other parts that are more delectable.

That’s not true. Kiba meat is very pungent, and its hind leg doesn’t taste as strong.

I understand now. If they didn’t know about bloodletting, then the torso would indeed be more pungent than the limbs. After all, its veins would be cut when they take the legs, and a lot of blood would flow out.

Even so, after spending eighty years hunting Kiba beasts for a living, they must be really crude to not even consider draining the Kiba’s blood. Since the meat taste bad, they should spend more effort to make it

more delectable. Such greed and ambition was the reason why the food culture of humans could develop so rapidly.

As I was thinking about all that, the blood stop flowing.

The Kiba beast that was spasming had completely stopped.

It was dead.

I offered it a prayer in my heart.

The fur of the Kiba beast was covered in mud, grass and its own feces. After I cleaned it with water from the river, I turned to Ai Fa:

“Okay, time for the next step… Erm, can I insist on my own view and bring it back whole?”

“Do what you want, just don’t damage the Horns and Tusks.”

Ai Fa showed a complicated expression, not sure if she should be excited or not care at all, and just shrugged.

I ignored her reaction and stabbed the knife into the Kiba beast’s belly.

This knife was sharper than the one I used during the farm experience camp. Careful not to cut too deep, I carved open the Kiba’s stomach.

In order to extract its organs.

This wasn’t hard, but there was one point to take note of. That was to not cut the large intestines, gall and bladder which had a horrible stench. If the stench from these organs got onto the meat, it would render the blood letting meaningless.

I cut into the diaphragm with my blade and started taking out the organs.

First were the small and large intestines.

Next were the guts, liver, pancreas, lungs and heart.

I extracted them one at a time easily.

The Kiba beast’s body structure was not much different from a boar.

After emptying its upper torso cavity, the hardest part awaited me in the lower cavity. Its bladder.

I moved my knife cautiously, careful not to break that organ.

… Hmm?

There was an organ I had never seen before beneath the bladder.

Was it an organ unique to the Kiba beast?

I carefully cut off that organ.

The oval organs were huge, with one on either side and felt really solid.

… Ah.

These were probably its testicle.

The one I dismembered before was female, so it didn’t have such an organ.

I placed the testicles on a boulder to show my respect.

And the extraction of the organs came to an end.

I turned back and Ai Fa still had a look of surprise.

“This looks just like the ritual performed by the rumoured voodoo priests. Is this process necessary for the sake of eating meat?”

“It is. But I can’t perform the next step here. We need to find a way to

bring it back like this... how can we do this?

Ai Fa sighed, and disappeared into the woods after saying wait right here.

While she was gone, I used the river water to wash the Kiba beast's empty cavity.

Fortunately, there wasn't creatures like leeches here. The Kiba beast's body temperature was falling, so if they were here, they would probably jumped onto me since my temperature was higher.

Here, use this.

After about five minutes later, Ai Fa came back. In her hands were a long wooden stick that was about my height.

The stick had a deep colour, looked really straight and there were signs of branches being cut from its surface everywhere. It was about the thickness of my wrist.

“This is Krilee tree. It’s hard and won’t break easily.”

“Alright. How do we use it to carry the Kiba?”

Ai Fa bent forward quietly and took out the ropes from the inside of her cape. She then tied the limbs of the Kiba beast onto the Krilee tree.

“I see now! Your movements are really practiced.”

“I’m just imitating others. The men from large clans would use this method to bring home an entire Kiba beast to skin their hide.”

“Okay. Aifa, don’t you need to tan hides too? The cape on you is made from the Kiba beast’s hide too, right?”

“Tanning hides requires effort from a lot of people, and that’s women’s work.”

“You’re a woman too.” I didn’t say it out loud, but I was probably showing it on my face, so Ai Fa stiffened her face as if I was annoying.

I can buy tanned hides with the Kiba's tusks. So, instead of wasting time tanning the hides, it is wiser to hunt Kiba beasts. In the first place, I will starve if I don't hunt Kiba beasts… Also, there's no one at home to tan the hide with me. You got any problems with that?

I have no problems of course. I'm just thinking… You said that tanning hides is the task of women, and hunting Kiba beast is the job of men?

Of course. Women won't hunt Kiba beast.

B-But you're a woman.

In the end, I still slipped my tongue.

Ai Fa looked away unhappily and started tying the Kiba's forelegs.

I might be a woman, but I'm also the head of the Fa House. My father taught me how to make a living by hunting Kiba beasts, so I could support myself.

□I see.□

But what kind of emotions did Ai Fa’s late father harbour when he taught his daughter the skills to □hunt Kiba□?

That night when Ai Fa’s father passed away, she offended Diga Tsun, who had authority in the settlement, and was ostracized the next day.

And so, Ai Fa lived by herself without relying on anyone. Thanks to the skills to hunt Kiba imparted to her by her father, she didn’t fall into despair! Did her father foresee his daughter being ostracized after his death? That was unlikely.

Don’t… Don’t need to think too much about this.

I was the same, my old man taught me how to cook since I was young. He even encouraged me to find something more interesting than cooking. Every parent would want their children to learn more skills.

But she…

Unlike me, she probably didn’t have a choice.

She could only make a living by hunting Kiba beasts like a man.

Even though she was such a beautiful and gentle girl—

“... Hey you, why are you looking at me with weird eyes.”

Ai Fa said as she stood up slowly.

A fire was burning in her cat-like eyes, and her brown cheeks were blushing a little.

“Listen up, you commited a grave taboo. You can’t complain even if I gouge out your eyes. I’m only not pursuing the matter on the account of you saving me from my desperate situation. Don’t get the wrong idea, or you will suffer one day.”

“What?”

I tilted my head and denied frantically.

"I-I'm not thinking about your naked body! Just who do you think I am? I had already buried this in the deepest part of my mind, but you are making me remember again!"

"Shut up! You want me to cut off your tongue before I gouge out your eyes?"

"Sigh, just let it go, it's retarded! We are all set, right? Let's bring it with us!"

To flee from the fuming Ai Fa, I bend my waist in front of the Kiba.

The pile of organs entered my field of vision.

"I would like to cook these, but we don't have a refrigerator. And with my skills right now, I couldn't handle these organs."

…Are you serious?

Of course, aside from it's grunts, every part of the Kiba beast can be eaten.

<TL: Proverb from Okinawa.>

This proverb should be talking about pigs, not boars. But no biggie.

After putting the front of the stick onto my shoulders, I could feel an astonishing weight.

As expected of something on the level of 70 kg,

If you complain about being tired mid way, I will leave you behind.

Ai Fa picked up the rear end of the stick deftly, and the weight on my shoulders lightened slightly.

I will work hard for the sake of a delicious meal. What about you, is your body fine after going through that unfortunate incident?

“Shut up! Don’t bring that up again!”

Hmm, did that incident scarred Ai Fa more than I expected?

Even though her skills in “hunting Kiba” could rival a man, she was still a girl going through puberty. Leaving the taboo aside, she would naturally feel embarrassed.

Leaving that aside for now, I would need to do the preparations for a delicious dinner soon.

“Let’s go! I will cook something delicious to reward you for the hardship you suffered today, look forward to it!”

Part 2

A few hours later, inside Ai Fa’s place.

“Alright! Let’s get started!”

I stood before the large body of the Kiba beast and yelled. Ai Fa sat cross legged and leaned against the wall, muttering “whatever” unhappily.

She probably wasn’t unhappy and was just tired. Actually, I felt exhausted too.

First, carrying that Kiba beast back home from the river was already a demanding task. After that, we had to complete our original job — collecting pico leaves and firewood, and returned to the river bank.

No further mishaps happened after that, but it was almost noon when we finished.

Which means to say we had been working diligently from morning to noon, aside from that deadly duel with the giant Madarama snake episode in the middle.

Our schedule for noon was supposed to be hunting Kiba beast, and there wasn’t any other pressing tasks at hand. Hence, I could start dealing with the Kiba beast we encountered in the morning.

Ai Fa started the fire in the stove as I requested. After finishing her task, she sat down heavily and munched on some jerky, her expression saying very clearly that “what happens next is none of my business”.

After peeking at Ai Fa, I raised the knife she loan me.

As bloodletting was done and the organs were extracted, the next step would of course be “skinning”.

There was a broken door in the store room, so I used it as my working platform. As there wasn’t any furniture that looked like a table in the house, I had no choice but to sit on the floor and proceed. I turned the belly side of the Kiba to face up, and placed the wood I prepared beforehand on either side to steady its posture.

I started with its hind leg first.

Using the knife, I went one circle around the ankles of its trotters, and cut from the inside of its leg up to its stomach.

Next, I slice the skin off its meat, removing its hide.

Hmm, it had plenty of fats.

The fats between the meat and the skin was about 1.5 cm thick.

Appraising it as an ingredient, the condition was excellent, but it also made the job more difficult. For animals with less fats such as deer, skinning could be done faster.

But this was for the sake of enjoying a delicious meal. I turned my knife and stripped away the hide quickly. I tried my best to not cut into the skin and not remove the fats.

The meat on both hind legs were finally unveiled.

The thigh meat covered by snow white fats bulged out under the stripped hide. This was an interesting sight.

At this time, the blade of the knife turned rather dull.

It was covered with sticky fats.

I dipped the blade into the boiling water inside the iron pot to dissolve the fats.

This was the reason why skinning couldn’t be done in the wild.

The house was filled with the thick scent of blood and meat.

After wiping the knife with the cloth Ai Fa gave me, I continued with my work.

Using the same method, I skinned the fore legs.

It might sound easy, but it actually took me an hour.

But this was just the beginning. After finishing the limbs, it was time to deal with the torso.

Since I already gutted the Kiba beast, I started working from the cut I already made.

Similar to how I skinned the limbs, I slit the blade between hide and meat, then peel away the hide as I cut.

However, the surface area of the torso was much bigger than the limbs. The fats made the handle slippery, so my hold was less firm than before, making it harder to strip away the hide.

In that case, I had to make holes at the edge of the hide for my fingers to grip onto.

Because the hide was very thick, it wouldn’t tear easily even if I pull at it with all my might.

I repeatedly clean off the fats on the blade as I peel away the hide.

When the right half of the Kiba beast was finally stripped clean, I was already covered in sweat.

My body told me that about two and a half hours had passed. The light shining in through the window was still bright.

"Phew. Time for a break."

I placed the knife beside the head of the Kiba and sat down on the rug exhausted.

I looked back at the family head — Ai Fa, who was showing a shocked expression as expected.

Her eyes were wide open which looked really child-like. It felt healing just looking at her.

Because she always had a fierce expression, the difference felt really wonderful.

"...Asuta, your hands sure are nimble."

"Yes, but only when I'm cooking."

“And you are really serious in your work.”

“Yes, but only when I’m cooking.”

“… There’s no need for such troublesome procedures. Kiba meat can be eaten after cooking it. Why are you putting in so much effort for such unnecessary work?”

Her words didn’t upset me, I wasn’t that narrow minded.

And so, I replied to her in a mature manner: “I just like to eat delicious food, and cooking them for others to eat.”

I would ask her to judge if this was an exercise in futility after she had tasted my dishes.

“Alright, time to continue.”

I thought of something while I was resting.

Before skinning the left half of the torso, I needed to do one more thing.

To cut off the Kiba’s head.

It had many organs on its head, such as the eyes, mouth and nose.

Hence, it was hard to skin.

So I had to chop off its head, it would be easier to deal with the head separately from the body.

And so, I started the preparations to cut off its neck.

This Kiba’s skull was smashed in, dying in a horrible way. After thinking in my heart 『I will make you delicious』, I stabbed the knife into its jaw.

The Kiba beast’s carcass was stiffening gradually, compared to the time I bled it out, it felt much harder.

And when I cut it open, a large amount of blood gushed out.

This couldn’t be helped. Even though I drained its blood earlier, that didn’t mean all the blood was gone. Furthermore, I didn’t have any experience before this. I was just an apprentice chef who was working haphazardly from my memory three years ago.

A seventeen years old apprentice chef who tried dismembering a boar just one time. The only tool I had was just a hunting knife, no work station and I had to prone on the ground and work hard in cutting off the Kiba’s neck.

Not just Ai Fa, anyone who saw me like this would probably laugh.

But I was happy.

Despite being covered in sweat and animal blood, I could feel that I was alive.

If they heard what I just thought, some people might think I have some sort of fetish. But the fact was, I hate lunatics who dismember animals

just for the fun of it, and not for the sake of eating them.

I like cooking.

I had grown up watching the back of my father. When I entered primary school, I was already helping out in the restaurant. Maybe I didn’t choose this path out of my own conviction, and maybe I was just walking on a path someone else paved for me. But even so, I have no complaints.

And then, my dad’s catch phrase was “go find something more interesting than cooking”.

“If you can’t find any, then it can’t be helped. You will have to take over the family business.” My old man would say with a smile. He made me attend high school because he was worried about this.

However, I spent all my time in the kitchen.

Cooking was so interesting, so why would I need to go out of my way to find another hobby? I couldn’t understand the need for that.

I spent all my days cooking dishes that would impress my dad.

I really love cooking.

□Phew, this is tiring.□

When I cut the Kiba beast's neck halfway, I poured out a lot water from the water flask to drink.

As I was drenched in sweat, even lukewarm water tasted great.

Time to continue.

The back of the knife was jagged, probably used to cut the Kiba's tusks and horns. I used it to cut its collar bone.

And so, I cut off the rest of the parts and that head fell onto the broken door.

After a groan, I only skinned the parts I needed, and took the meat around and neck and cheeks.

Other parts could be eaten too, and the tongue was also enticing, but I could only cook these ingredients. If I knew, I would have asked the hunters to explain more thoroughly.

Next, I skinned the left half of the torso, flipped the Kiba over and peeled off the hide on its back.

The skinning was finally complete.

There were holes all over the place, but the I managed to peel off the entire hide beneath the neck.

Because this Kiba was 150 cm long and about 70 kg, spreading out the entire hide looked impressive.

The body of the Kiba beast was covered in fats, a looked like a huge lump of white meat.

A lump of white meat that was missing the head.

It was impossible to tell what animal it was like this.

This was also an impressive sight.

But I didn’t have time to indulge myself in this. It was finally time for the final steps.

After the skinning was done, the last task would be 「dismembering」.

I laid the bare body of the Kiba beast on its back once again, and stabbed into the inside of the hip joint.

I cut into the joint between the hip and the hind leg. After reaching a certain point, I twisted the joint in the opposite direction. With a dull crack, the joints between the pelvic bone and femur became visible.

The unveiled bare bones looked white and beautiful.

I sliced off the rest of the muscles and tendons, then pulled in the other direction, and the meat started coming off.

The right hind leg was cut off after I run the blade across the joint.

It was a huge piece of thigh meat, about 10 kg heavy.

After the right hind leg, I worked on the left hind leg.

After the left foreleg, I worked on the right foreleg.

The forelegs weren’t connected to a complicated joint like the pelvic bone, and could be removed after cutting through the ligaments.

It was time for the final climax.

I didn’t know how much time have passed, but the sun was turning a shade of orange.

It had been four to five hours since I started this project.

"... Oh right. Ai Fa, where is the saw?"

It had been a while since I looked at Ai Fa. When I turned towards her, it was a pity that she didn't show a confused expression.

Or rather, the moment I turned back, she was looking back blankly, and didn't show her usual face.

"Were you sleeping? Sorry for waking you up."

"I'm not sleeping! Who will sleep when the sky is still so bright!"

If that was so, why was she so angry? Ai Fa stood up with a pout, and disappeared behind a door.

She went into the room in the middle. That should be the place where the utensils and kitchen wares were stored.

When Ai Fa walked out from the room, she was holding a saw with a blade about 30 cm long. If this saw was kept inside a sheath, it would look just like a sword. I could only tell it was a saw if it was drawn out.

The saw was about 5 cm thick and 5mm wide. I had never seen such a thick saw before. But it should be fine, since the people of Forest's Edge used it to build their stylish houses.

After I finish this, the job will be done for today. Wait for me a while more.

I told Ai Fa that after receiving the saw from her. She turned her head away with a hmmp, and didn't answer me.

I really don't get women.

Anyway, I disinfected the saw with the boiling water in the iron pot.

This was the climax of the dismembering, vertical cut.

I will be sawing the backbone in half.

Not top and down halves, but left and right halves.

The carcass would then be split into the left and right half. This was 「splitting」.

After doing this, I would be able to dismember the rest easily… This was something I learned directly from the hunters.

This animal was huge, so it would be best to use an electric saw. But it couldn’t be help since there wasn’t even electricity here. No matter how physically strenuous it was, I had to accept it.

And so, I started my work.

As expected, this was the most strenuous part.

I worked hard with my saw in hand, and regretted my actions. No matter

how difficult it was, I should have hung the carcass up before starting, it would have made this task much easier.

The saw was sharp and performed perfectly. If I was a weekend carpentry hobbyist, this would probably be a piece of cake.

But I didn’t have such a hobby and fell into a tough battle. The fats on the backbone was very slippery, and sawing it in half was unbelievably difficult.

I would dissolve the fats on the saw with hot water from time to time, and took several breaks — I took at least an hour to finish the work. I kept separating bones from meat, picking out the back bone sawed off by me. I pulled out the ribs one at a time, and the waist was mostly meat so I just need to cut it off.

And finally —

□… It’s done!□ After yelling that, I laid down with my limbs spread out, then stood up immediately.

The job was finished, but I still needed to take care of the aftermath.

Well then, it took so much work to cut the meat, I have to prevent it from spoiling and cure it with Pico leaves immediately.

With Ai Fa’s assistance, I marinated the mountain of meat with spices.

From the 70 kg Kiba, I cut out more than 40 kg, but less than 50 kg of meat. For an apprentice chef that’s not a professional yet, this was great results.

Ahhh, I’m beat! I can’t raise my hands!

I could finally lay down sprawled out on the ground.

The light shining into the room was that of an evening setting sun.

From noon to evening, I worked for five to six hours. From my estimate, the time difference wasn’t too big. A day in this world should be around 24 hours. I thought blankly as I laid down exhausted.

"... Hey, how are you going to deal with all this?"

I turned my head when I heard someone talking, and Ai Fa was standing beside the stove with her feet wide apart.

On the broken door beside her feet was a large hide folded in half, a head with its cheeks carved out and a pile of bones.

"Oh right. It's a pity, but we can only throw the bones away... How do you usually deal with the hide? Even if you only take the legs, you will still peel it off, right?"

"I will strip off the fats on it and throw away the rest."

"So you will throw it away, what a waste. The other families tans hide, right? Can you give it to them?"

"... If they get involved with me, that means antagonizing the Tsun clan. No one will offend the Tsun clan for the sake of some hide."

"Tchh, such narrow minded people... Ah, fats can be used as fuel, right? How do you strip it off?"

I wanted to prop myself up when I said that, but Ai Fa stopped me coldly from getting up.

"Asking an exhausted person to help will just be trouble for me. Just lie down."

"But..."

"My job is to strip the fats and collect the tusks and horns. Your job is to prepare dinner. Rest now before that."

Her tone was cold, but her words made me grateful.

I had been working since morning, and I was literally exhausted now.

To be honest, my eyelids felt really heavy since a while ago.

I couldn’t even tell if I said out loud□you are really gentle□, and doze off into my dreams as if I was knocked out.

Part 3

When I opened my eyes, it was already dark.

Ai Fa lit the light stand with fire from the stove, and threw a sharp glare my way.

□You’re finally up. If you slept any longer, I would have thrown water on you.□

□Don’t go that far… How long did I sleep?□

Ai Fa tilted her head in silence and threw firewood into the stove.

Maybe the people of Forest’s Edge didn’t have the habit of demarcating time. They work when the sun rises and sleep when the sun sets, which was probably the unspoken rule of their routines.

I threw the remains of the Kiba beast into the valley and spend some time washing the board… I'm getting hungry.

Understood. Then it's my turn to work.

Splitting work this way wasn't too bad, and I walked happily to the food store.

Six fake onions.

Four fake potatoes.

And one Kiba hind leg was placed on what looks like a rubber tree leaf.

It goes without saying that this wasn't the preserved Kiba meat from before, but meat from the one I slaughtered earlier.

By right, I should use the preserved meat first, but I want Ai Fa to experience the joy of tasty food as soon as possible, and how delicious

my cooking could be. So I ask her to let me use the freshly prepared meat.

"Are these vegetables the standard portion for one day?"

I wasn't sure if she understood what "standard portion" means, but Ai Fa simply answered "We will die if we only eat meat."

If humans didn't eat a balanced diet, they would fall ill.

However, I had not studied how to deal with these vegetables yet.

Nevermind, I will just give my best shot.

I washed the board used as a pot cover with water, then placed the Kiba meat on top of it.

And then — I picked up the Santoku knife from "Tsurumi restaurant".

This knife was a symbol of my old man's soul.

Grabbing the black handle, I drew it out from the plain white sheath to reveal its steel body.

The blade was 21 cm long. Despite over two decades of usage, the carefully crafted blade didn’t warp at all. On the blade was the words Tsurumi restaurant.

Dad, I will be using this.

I placed the blade on the Kiba meat.

Compared to aged pork, this meat was hard. The Santoku knife — sinked into the meat without any resistance.

I was filled with joy when I looked at the sharp blade, but my movement was steady when I carved the meat off the bones.

Although white fats covered the surface of the meat, the inside of the thigh was a deep red.

In order to keep the blade from touching the bone, I kept a generous distance. After carving out the meat, I sliced it as thin as possible.

The texture of the meat might be hard, it was still raw meat in the end and couldn’t be sliced too thinly. At my current skill level, 7 or 8 mm was the limit. This thickness should be just nice for a hot pot.

After cutting out around 500 grams, I placed the rest of the meat back into the storage room. I just need to to carve out the remaining meat on this large femur, and it would be enough for the two of us to eat.

Right, I forgot to ask you one important thing. Ai Fa, is there any other ingredients or seasonings in this house?

Ai Fa was observing my every move quietly, but she raised her head in surprise.

If you eat Kiba, aria and poitan, you won’t fall sick.

Yes, but there is another scent on your body. I can’t tell if it is a flower, fruit or herb, but you’re using something else, right?

When she heard me say that, Ai Fa’s cheeks turned red.

“Asuta, I wanted to tell you since yesterday, don’t say things like “you smell nice”, it’s weird.”

“It’s not a big deal. Telling someone that they smell nice is a compliment.”

“… But I can’t take it if I almost get eaten!”

Ai Fa pressed the left side of her neck with her palm and stood up with a start.

That bite mark was still there. I felt a little embarrassed.

Ai Fa then disappeared into the food store with crude steps. She then returned with something strange in hand.

It was a round pot with a huge lid, and a fake rubber tree leaf that had

been curled up into a ball.

The pot had a volume about 1 litre, and that ball of leaf was about a size of a human fist.

This is fruit wine and salt.

Salt!

Ai Fa looked displeased when I shouted loudly.

I use the salt to make jerky. One Kiba horn worth of coins can only be exchanged for this much.

A horn sounded in my mind when she opened that leaf ball. Inside it was pieces of beautiful blue crystals. This was probably rock salt.

I had only seen pink and yellow rock salt before, but I did hear that a type of blue rock salt exist.

I scraped off a small piece with my nails and after licking the powder, a strong salty taste exploded in a tiny region of my mouth. It taste great. Maybe because I sweated the entire day and loss plenty of salt, so I thought it was delicious.

“… Salt is expensive, don’t waste it.”

“You are absolutely right! And this is fruit wine?”

I pulled out the cork made from softwood, and grape wine fragrance that had a strong hint of sourness whiffed out.

“Give me that.”

Ai Fa snatched it from my hands after saying that. After taking a large swig, she shoved it back to me.

“Eh, by the way, how old are you, Ai Fa?”

After saying 「Seventeen」, she licked her lips.

「I see, I’m seventeen too. We are the same age. Is this fruit wine expensive?」

「If I have spare coins after buying my necessities, I will change it for fruit wine. I don’t like to bring coins back to the settlement…. There is nothing that is more valuable than salt and food ingredients.」

「Okay. I think the fruit wine would be of great use too… But all these seem unrelated from the scent on you.」

「Who knows! Aside from these, I only touched fruits that keep poisonous insects away, and the herbs used for making jerky!」

She didn’t have to be so mad.

But from the looks of it, these ingredients would be enough. I was really happy to see 「salt」 appearing.

□Ai Fa, can I borrow your knife again?□

After getting the knife from the stiff faced girl, I carved off the remaining meat on the bones.

And we were all set.

The thigh meat on the Kiba was about 500g.

The meat carved from the bones was about 400g.

Fake onions, 6.

Fake potatoes, 4.

One dry Pico leaf that smells like black pepper.

And rock salt.

That was the ingredients for today.

And under Ai Fa’s instructions, I grounded the rock salt into powder, and poured one large spoonful of it into the boiling pot.

That amount should do for today. Even with just one spoonful, adding salt would bring out a completely different taste.

Like last night, the pot was half filled with water. I think having less water would be better, but I could only figure things out regarding this through trial and error.

I then tossed the 900g of Kiba meat into the pot.

The red and white meat slices danced in the boiling water.

Ah, Ai Fa, don’t add firewood for now.

Ai Fa was walking towards the stove, and she turned her head my way in

surprise.

"If the Kiba meat isn't cook thoroughly, it will be very tough."

"Yes, I plan to cook it with a small fire to make stew."

Ai Fa started a large fire and cooked it for about twenty minutes.
Although the meat was soft enough to chew, the texture was like rubber.

Boar meat would become softer the longer it was cooked.

That was the largest difference from pork raised in farms.

"Uwah, it's here."

Tens of seconds after putting the meat into the pot, a large amount of foam appeared.

I took out the wooden ladle and container I prepared beforehand and carefully scooped out the foams and bubbles.

Because the meat was filled with fats, the amount of foam was much greater than yesterday.

Yes — Thinking back now, the thigh meat last night was all red without any fats.

It was the same for Kiba and boar, they only have fats in their thigh between the meat and skin. When Ai Fa cooks, she would slice the meat starting from the surface, so she would exhaust all the fats from the very beginning.

Boar meat without much fats wasn't suitable for hot pot (it should be the same for Kiba). That was why last night's meat was like rubber. As I kept on scooping up the foams, such thoughts filled my mind.

Okay, the problem is, how should I deal with these.

After clearing most of the foam, I replace the lid and left it alone for a while.

I sat in a position where I could check the stove fire, and faced the vegetables that looked like potatoes and onions.

"Fake onions, no, this is aria. It looks likes an onion, so there should be a way to deal with it. This one is the problem — I want to ask, what exactly is a poitan?"

"… It's a poitan."

Ai Fa sat down with her back against the wall again. She supported her cheek with her hand and kept a stiff face.

"Two poitan, three aria and Kiba meat seasoned with Pico leaves. Eating these will provide you with the energy to work for one whole day. This is the knowledge we gain after living in Forest's Edge for eighty years."

They probably get their salt from the jerky they eat during the day.

"Hmm."

I nodded,

"By the way, how long is the average life expectancy of the people in Forest's Edge?"

"Average life expectancy? If you want to ask how long everyone lives, it's different for everyone. Many of us lose our life because of attacks by Kiba and other beasts, not because of illness or old age."

Ai Fa lowered her gaze.

She was probably thinking about her father.

"Leaving that aside... aside from those who starved to death or died in the forest, everyone should live more than 60 years. The grand elder of Forest's Edge is Jibae from the Wu Clan, she is more than 80 years old."

"I see. Compared to my world, the people here live quite a long life."

Her brown skin glisten under the glow of the orange light. There were white scars on her skin, but she still looked really soft.

With a “Hmm”, I reached out to check how tender her skin was.

The next instant, she hit me in the head with her fist.

“My bad. Your muscles is tight and soft, very impressive. For athletes, this type of muscles is the best.”

I wanted to make the mood less solemn with a joke, but I seemed to have gone about it the wrong way. In the end, it only made Ai Fa show a vicious face, like a wild cat.

“I just want to know the health of the people living in Forest’s Edge. At the very least, your diet isn’t a problem.”

As expected, they eat the required amount of vegetables every day.

“Hmm, that will be my homework! I will study how to deal with poitan

tomorrow. I already spent today working on Kiba beast.

Ai Fa's eyes were still fierce, so I immediately fled back to the stove. I scoop up the new foams, add firewood, and kept the fire from becoming too weak. I repeated these tasks for quite a while.

… I'm hungry. When can we eat?

hmm? I think it will take 60 to 90 minutes… About three to four times as long as yesterday.

Ai Fa showed a shocked expression, and sighed depressedly.

Sorry, I'm hungry too… I should have started preparation for dinner right after the butchering was done.

… I was the one who asked you to rest, and left the dinner preparation to you. You don't need to feel responsible.

Ai Fa said seriously. But her expression look really sad.

Was she that hungry? I think that was really amusing.

An empty stomach was the best seasoning.

If I couldn’t satisfy her, then my cooking skills would be too terrible.

Would I win or lose? In another hour or so, the match would be decided.

Part 4

Alright, it’s finished!

Going by my rough gauge of time, it had been one hour and twenty minutes since I threw the Kiba meat into the pot. I finally announced its completion.

During this time, I scooped up the foams, adjusted the fire, checked the toughness of the meat, soothed the starving Ai Fa and occasionally talked about serious matters with her — These 80 minutes were happy and at times frustrating.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the Kiba meat.

It smelled stronger than the hot pot last night. Having fats played a huge role as expected.

But these trivial stuff didn’t matter. Anyway, let’s dig in!

Sorry for the wait, have as much as you want.

I stirred the pot with a ladle and filled one bowl for Ai Fa.

In the end, I didn’t throw the fake potatoes, also known as poitan, into the pot.

After cooking for 60 minutes, I tried throwing slices of fake onions (which was aria) and fake black pepper (or Pico leaves) into the pot.

But even so, the soup stock was still very white and murky. The translucent bowl of soup was filled with the essence released from the

meat. Yes, this wasn’t a 「Kiba beast pot」. I dubbed it as 「Kiba meat soup」.

On second thought, this dish was indeed soup stocking from cooking meat, seasoned with just salt and spices. Instead of 「pot」, it was more fitting to call it 「soup」.

Since it was 「soup」, it was fine to complement it with onions. If only poitan was just like its appearance and be just like a potato.

Anyway, self suggestion played a big part in enjoying food too.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autosuggestion >

And so I presented this dish that I secretly dubbed 「Kiba meat soup」 to my beloved mistress.

「… It feels strange to not add poitan.」 Ai Fa smelled the soup suspiciously after saying that.

However, the hot pot yesterday smelled delicious too. Everything up until now was not very different from yesterday.

After scooping my own portion, I sat down opposite Ai Fa.

"This is my experimental work number one. I'm actually not very confident. I plan to use this dish to set my foundation and improve on it in the future. Please tell me your honest opinion after this."

"...I don't think food being tasty matters at all. It will be useless for me to tell you my comment."

"I get it I get it... Then I'm digging in."

Ai Fa closed her eyes, her left finger moved to her mouth and drew a line to the side as she mumbled to herself..

In this world, that gesture probably mean "I'm digging in". But I don't remember her making this gesture yesterday. Forget it, I was fine with it either way. It would be depressing for a chef if a world didn't have the concept of "I'm digging in" or "Thank you for the meal".

Anyway, let's eat.

I scooped up a spoonful of soup.

The black powder was spread out in the soup and could be seen everywhere. That was the powder from the pico leaf.

Both the presentation and fragrance was excellent.

However, things weren't that different from dinner last night so far.

I already test tasted a few times, but what kind of flavour would be brought out after the ingredients were combined? With a heart filled with expectation, I drank a mouthful — It was a success, very delicious.

This soup was rather plain, without any miso or soy sauce. The unique taste of the kiba meat and pico leaf were full of flavour. It was faint, but the stock was very fragrant and stimulated my appetite.

About a third of the water I poured into the pot had evaporated. The soup was rather thick. And the result of not adding water was a delicious pot of soup.

The next important thing was the kiba meat.

I only used a stick in lieu of chopsticks to checked its toughness, and this was my first time tasting it.

I didn’t scoop up the pieces of meat I carved off from the bones, only going for the thigh meat for now. It had been dyed the colour of ivory, and the white fats were shaking minutely in a cute manner.

The thigh meat was squarish and its sides were about 4 cm long, and 5mm thick. I sent it to my mouth in one go.

After chewing, the tender meat spread quickly.

How soft, the texture was softer than I expected.

But it was rather chewy.

The rubbery fats mixed came together with the elastic lean meat, and the fresh taste kept spreading in my mouth.

Ah — As expected, this was a high class ingredient.

Even though the meat wasn't aged, its taste could rival the boar pot I ate three years ago.

And of course, this was the crystalization of my effort in the slaughtering process, the day's hard labour and famished stomach, that's why it was so delicious — Even so, I wouldn't change my evaluation of this dish.

I could taste the fresh flavour of the meat directly because I didn't use any seasoning.

The primal taste unique to wild animals gave off a strong sense of presence… I had tasted wild beasts only a few times so it might be arrogant to say that, but just thinking about it in my heart shouldn't be going too far. I tried the aria too, and it was just right for the soup since I cooked it softer than yesterday.

When I sent the aria, meat and soup into my mouth at the same time, the taste became more complex. This onion (although it wasn't an onion) had a more prominent sweetness than spiciness. As its taste and texture wouldn't overwhelm that of the main dish, it greatly increased its quality.

Hmm, for experiment dish number 1, this is great.

When I thought this far, I looked in front of me and saw Ai Fa stood up with her dinnerware.

Her face was serious as usual as she walked to the stove in silence.

She already finished a bowl?

I’m happy to see that she found the food appetizing, but I was worried that she didn’t savour the taste properly.

After refilling her bowl, she returned to her seat.

Ai Fa didn’t meet my eyes at all.

At this point, the uneasiness in my heart had already grown to an unbearable stage.

"Let me ask you, what do you think? I think I cooked it really well."

Ai Fa took a sip and tilted her head confusedly.

"What do you mean…? I already told you, it is meaningless for me to give you my opinion."

"That might be so…"

I felt a sense of quivering from somewhere near my pelvis.

As if an unknown feeling was squirming about, seeking an exit.

Was it anger, sadness, depression or uneasiness — I wasn't sure what that exact feeling was, it was definitely "negative".

"J-Just to be sure, after I spent so much time cooking this meal is it… meaningless…?"

Ai Fa’s expression turned even more confused.

She then looked into the content within her bowl.

The orange light made the shadows of her long eyelashes waver on her cheeks.

What should I do?

My heart was racing.

An ominous feeling creeping in my mind.

…For me, eating is just for survival, and there isn’t any difference whether its tasty or not.

…Yes.

“I will feel troubled if you ask me to comment on the taste of your food, I won’t know how to express it.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

“But one thing is clear to me…”

Ai Fa raised her head slowly, her beautiful blue eyes staring straight at me.

“This is probably… what deliciousness feels like.”

Her pink lips revealed these words slowly.

“Eating is enjoyable now… comfortable… blissful. Is this how it feels to eat something delicious?”

I was speechless.

Ai Fa frowned a little painfully.

"I finally understand why you put in so much passion into cooking, and is stupidly serious about it... I think I understand now, it might be arrogant for me to think so, but at least I won't refute your actions."

"Ai Fa..."

"I don't know how to express this. I can only say this much, but I think you did the right thing."

It was slight but Ai Fa... raised the corner of her beautiful lips.

"So, don't show such a pained expression. This dish is delicious."

I nodded in response, and focused on eating quietly.

I couldn't understand anymore.

The uneasiness from the depth of my guts had vanished, and had been replaced with the inside of my neck heating up and my back turning cold.

If I wasn’t careful, I would have difficulty breathing.

I was probably — overjoyed.

The wide emotional swing made my emotions intense.

I must be hoping very much for Ai Fa to acknowledge me from the bottom of my heart. The intensity of this thought was stronger than I imagined.

In this world, only Ai Fa understands me.

She was my benefactor, and I hope she could acknowledge me.

On the surface, this mysterious beauty called Ai Fa might appear

eccentric, forthright and barbaric like men. But she was gentler than anyone I knew. She probably had an emotional scar deep within her heart, so she didn't want to rely on anyone and live by herself. She was strong, beautiful, brave and delicate — And I hope she would accept me.

Damn it… But that's not my full power yet!

This spurred my competitive spirit and I chewed crudely on the Kiba meat. My fight wasn't over yet.

With my resolve set again, I glared at the enemy.

The fake potato — poitan was left on the ground beside the stove.

Intermission: Everyday life in Forest's Edge

The day in Forest's Edge settlement begins early in the morning.

The people start work at dawn, beginning immediately after getting up from bed.

Their work varies, but if they didn’t have any pressing work at hand, they would start by tidying up last night’s dinner.

They would place the used pots, utensils and cloth stained with fats into an iron pot, and clean them to the water source to wash. As for why they didn’t clean it the night before? Although this was the territory cleared out by humans, they might still encounter dangerous wildlife when night falls.

The Kiba beasts were cautious and didn’t appear often. But if they were hungry, they would still invade the residence of the humans. They would pass through Forest’s Edge and head to Genos’ western territory where the farmland was.

Aside from the Kiba, there was also the Manto, also known as the □rotting flesh scout□, which had the appearance of a giant rat. Furthermore, venomous snakes and scorpions were very dangerous too. There wasn’t any large predator that prey on humans, but a bite from these beasts would cause illness that would be hard to recover from.

And so, they would clean their kitchenwares in the morning, at the water source nearest to their respective homes. For Fa House, that would be one of the streams that branches out from Lanto river, about ten minutes walk away.

The stream passes through a stony riverbed. It might be a stream, but it was just like spring water that flowed through the mountains.

They would clean their pots and kitchenware there, using something like a brush, made by securing dried Kiba bristles. The pots and wares might be stained with oil, but they could be cleaned unexpectedly well after brushing it with the short bristles.

The stained clothes would be cleaned during this time too. As they had more time to spare, the denizens would use this time to do laundry too.

When their water flask run dry, they would refill it during this time too.

As the iron pots and water flasks were heavy, they would use something call a □tow board□.

It was a large piece of wooden board used to carry cargo. The denizens would stick bristles on the reverse side, and coat it with solid fats.. They would then braid vines into ropes, securing them to the board and create handles from similar material. It could then be slung over their shoulders to tow the board.

As the board had been greased, the friction was reduced which ease about half the load. But if the water flasks were full, it would weigh about a hundred kilogram, and would be tough to pull.

The people from other families that I would run into at the water source were all women.

Most of them were middle aged housewives stronger than I was, but there were lots of old grandmothers and young girls too. Even they could pull the boards nonchalantly. I was sure that out of everyone there, I showed the most strained expression.

“What a weak man.” And of course, that was the words of my dear mistress of the house.

By the way, early in the morning at the water source was the place where we could come into closest contact with other families. But as I expected, no one came near Ai Fa. Some women would greet her, but won’t communicate further than that. We didn’t hold much expectation either. The Tsun clan ruled Forest’s Edge after all, so doing that would probably incur their wrath.

On top of that, a weak man suddenly appeared by Ai Fa’s side, wearing

a white chef uniform and T-shirt that was out of place with Forest's Edge, so the other denizens looked at Ai Fa with even more suspicious eyes — I thought that would happen, but no one did that. Everyone only looked from afar at me who was staying by Ai Fa's side, but no one met my eyes.

This might be a little off topic, but all these women were dressed in pretty clothes like the one Ai Fa wore. In order to not appear too prominent, most clothes had dull hues such as dark green or brown as its base colour. However, they made use of these colours to add complicated spiral patterns on their clothes, giving them a traditional yet fashionable look.

The married women would wrap their body with a large piece of cloth, covering themselves from their chest to their knees.

Unmarried women would dress just like Ai Fa, covering their chest and waist with two separate pieces of cloth.

And of course, the other women didn't wore capes or secure large blades to their waists. Except when entering the forest, Ai Fa would carry a knife when she leaves the house. A lot of young girls would carry knives too. Even if they didn't hunt Kiba, these knives could be used to harvest herbs or cut vines, a very practical tool.

Everyone in the settlement had brown skin. They had varying hair and eye colour, but the most common was light brown hair and blue pupils. I had seen redheads and black hair too, there were many blondes like Ai Fa too. There should be women with black or brown pupils too, but they kept a distance from me, so I couldn't confirm.

However, no one had yellow skin like me.

Anyway, after finishing the work at the water source, what's next would be house chores.

We would maintain our blades every day.

We would check the condition of the blade and hilt. And if necessary, we would repair it. Grinding stone in this world looks like obsidian, a rough rock with a dark glister about it.

After that, we would check the ingredients in the food store.

Checking the aria and poitan was important too, but the main focus was still the Kiba meat.

As we checked the Kiba meat for damages, we would use the pico leaf to rub and knead them. If the pico leaves were just left there, it would absorb the moisture from the meat, so we needed to knead it once a day. This stops the meat from losing too much water to the pico leaves, which in turns depletes its preservation effectiveness.

Like the meat, the jerky was also buried in pico leaves. We would cut the needed amount of jerky at this time, and finally have breakfast. As we chew on the rubbery jerky, we would head into the forest.

Our goal was to collect herbs, firewood and to bathe.

The sun would have risen completely by this time.

Which means that Ai Fa did all these chores when I arrived at Ai Fa’s place. In order to head into the forest, she completed all these chores before waking me.

However, not only did I slept so deeply, I even did something mean to her, a terrible shame. When I apologized again after the fact, she kicked my leg thrice. Damn, that hurts.

After dealing with all that, we headed into the forest.

First, we headed downstream of Lante river to bathe.

Yes, bathe.

The consecutive attack by the Madarama snake and the kiba the last time traumatized us. But my beloved mistress told me “it is almost impossible for that to happen again”, and even looked at me coldly, as if contemplating how weak this man from another world was.

However, that Madarama snake was indeed the nemesis of the kiba. Because of its presence in the mountains, the kiba could only stay at the edge of the forest at the foot of the mountain. If the Madarama snake appears near the foot of the mountain, the kiba could only escape elsewhere, or their numbers would dwindle sharply.

Hence, it was rare to find Madarama snakes near the foot of the mountain. The one we saw probably lost its footing — or rather, its scalings and fell into the river. It was probably washed here by the current. What a troublesome snake.

After concluding that, I could finally enjoy my bath.

The average temperature here was about 30 degrees, and bathing in this climate was really comfortable.

I didn’t have the habit of showering in the morning, but after a short while, I find this bathing time to be really blissful.

Going off topic again, I want to emphasize that since that accident, I had not breached any other Forest’s Edge taboo. I swear on my very soul that I would not do that again.

After finishing our bath, we would forage for herbs.

The crucial pico leaves.

Pico leaves were our preservatives, and its effectiveness would deplete when it absorbed the moisture from the meat. Even if we stir it every day, it would last for just a month at most.

The meat storage was about 2m x 2m x 30cm. As we need to replenish such an amount of pico leaves monthly, we would collect a certain amount every day.

Without pico leaves, there would be no meat. This concerns our survival, so we needed to keep a careful count every day. If we didn't meet the necessary amount, we would prioritize our time to forage for pico leaves.

After foraging pico leaves, we would collect krilee fruits and lilo leaves.

Krilee fruits were used as repellent for harmful insects.

Many poisonous insects and venomous snakes lurk in the forest. In order to protect themselves, the denizens of Forest's Edge would weave wrist bands with these fruits. It gets in the way of my cooking, so I hung them around my neck. And by scattering them around the house, it would keep such insects and snakes from invading the house, so we needed to pick these plants periodically.

Lilo leaves were herbs needed to make jerky.

By the way, one of the fragrances from Ai Fa came from this herb. Its scent was calming and refreshing, and smelled elegant enough to be perfume. It also neutralized the stimulating smell of meat and fats, which was great.

However, I didn’t tell Ai Fa all this. She would kick me if I did.

After the foraging was done, the last part was to gather firewood.

If there were enough branches on the ground, we would tie them up with vines growing nearby and bring them home. If not, we would break off smaller branches from the trees and leave it to dry at home.

There would be sudden downpours several times a day.

This natural phenomenon was unpredictable, and would sometimes drench all the firewood we gathered. But we weren’t disheartened and would continue to gather more branches. Even if they got drenched by rain, we just needed to dry it. Such optimism were needed when living in Forest’s Edge. And my cooking method would use up more firewood, so gathering them was an important task.

Which meant — all the work we do were important.

Even though I emphasized the importance of the pico leaves, it was just a matter of priority. If we didn’t go about each tasks in order, we wouldn’t be able to survive here.

Be it washing dishes, drawing water, grinding blades, food stock management, foraging herbs, gathering firewood or hunting kiba beasts, all this was for the sake of survival.

If we skip even one of these steps, we wouldn’t be able to survive.

For the sake of survival, labour was mandatory. We can only survive after working the entire day.

Because the denizens of Forest’s Edge lived such a life, they never thought about □raising the quality of their food□.

Be it meat, aria or poitan, all this could be eaten after cooking them in a stew. No other procedure was needed. Eating was just for survival. Just like the other jobs, this was just a □means□ to live on. It didn’t hold any value as entertainment. The □taste□ wasn’t important.

They will die if they don’t eat, so they eat. There’s no other reason.

For living beings, that was the correct attitude.

Be it the kiba pot prepared by Ai Fa or the kiba meat soup cooked by me, both had nutritional value. Hence in this world, opting for the convenient and faster way was the right choice.

But I’m from a different world. I came from a world that understands the joy of □eating□.

Therefore, I will strive on in my own path.

My battle in this different world was just beginning.

Vol. 1 :

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

□Ugh.□

How many times have I moaned today?

The annoying poitan was rolling right before me.

It was noon, my fifth day in this different world.

Today, after we washed the dishes, took care of the food store and other routine chores, we made jerky.

This might sound a bit unnecessary, but these wasn’t normal jerky, but

smoked jerky.

Let me explain further. We used rock salt and pico leaves to knead the surface of the kiba meat, then used the fake rubber leaf (speaking of which, I haven't confirmed its actual name) to wrap it up. On the third night, we washed off the salt and herbs, and left it to dry til morning. The next morning, we hung the meat on a tree outside the house and lit a fire underneath it. Pico leaves and lilo were burned to smoke it until noon. And smoked kiba jerky was made.

This was the fourth morning of the smoked jerky making process. So Ai Fa didn't ask me to forage for firewood or herbs, and asked me to smoke kiba meat.

My job was simple, to add firewood and herbs so the fire wouldn't go out. But I need to watch it for several hours, and it wasn't a relaxing task. Even so, there wasn't any incident before noon and I successfully made a large amount of smoked meat.

Ai Fa went to the forest to forage like usual, and I stowed the smoke jerky into the food storage as I waited for her return, ending my job.

I worked until a bit after noon, and Ai Fa permitted me to study the poitan between noon and evening.

During this time, Ai Fa would head into the forest again in order to hunt kiba. Even though there were still piles of kiba meat, but in order to obtain poitan and aria, she had to hunt one kiba every five days. However, I didn't have any experience with hunting kiba and would just be in the way if I went with her, so I got this period of time to myself.

Ai Fa haven't hunted any kiba during this five days. Before I came here as a guest, she just needed to hunt one kiba every ten days, and hunting kiba wasn't an easy task. We got one kiba five days ago (although it's an accident). Ai Fa said that it would be great if she could hunt one kiba either today or tomorrow.

And next, regarding my challenge.

I was busy with the butchering of the kiba on the first day. In the next four days, I work hard on my study of poitan — But the enemy was tenacious

Simply put, I didn't know what it was.

This plant probably didn't exist in my world.

It looks like a potato, although it was a hue lighter than a potato, the texture on its surface and its shape was just like a potato. However, its inside was completely different.

I tried eating it raw, and it was bitter and powdery, completely unsavoury. As it lacked moisture, I suspect that it wasn’t even a plant.

As everyone knows, boiling poitan in water would dissolve it into tasteless muddy water.

I tried adding it into my □Kiba meat soup□, but there wasn’t any improvements.

However, it seemed to contain nutrients necessary for humans. In the past four days, after we finished the meat and aria, I would add it into the soup before drinking it.

Using the soup from a hot pot to cook gruel should be exciting, but after adding in poitan, the entire pot of soup taste so nasty it felt like a kind of punishment game. Why do we have to drink this mud wa

ter? I was in despair.

That was why I was so troubled — I had yet to find a solution up til now.

Ai Fa permitted me to use one poitan a day for my research, but all my experiments ended in failure.

Boiling it in water would turn it into gruel.

Grilling it would turn it powdery and cakey.

It remained the same even if I soaked it in water.

When I fry it with animal oil, it produces a plate of powdery oil.

I even tried crushing it, frying it without oil, sunning it, I tried everything and still had no idea what to do.

Ugh— I didn’t know how many times I had made that sound.

The next instant, someone hit my head from behind.

“Shut up. Can you be quiet when you are troubled?”

And the one who hit me was of course Ai Fa.

She still haven’t set off into the forest yet, and had been ransacking the storage room until now. But she seemed to have resolved the matter. She was dressed lightly as usual, with just cloth covering her chest and waist as she glared at me with her feet wide apart.

“That hurts. I don’t want to sigh like that either…”

Midway through my sentence, I discovered something under Ai Fa’s armpit. What was that? It seemed to be a bundle of beautifully dyed cloth.

Ai Fa noticed my gaze and spread out one of the cloth.

「These are the cloths my father left behind.」

I see. It was a sleeveless shirt with the front wide open. I should call it a vest. There wasn't any buttons on it, and it had strings at the bottom that could be tied together. The design was simple, and despite the colourful spiral designs, it looks rather fashionable.

「Wah, that's nice. It suits you」

Even though I said that sincerely, Ai Fa blushed for some reason.

「H-How can I wear this!? I might be the head of the house and a 「kiba hunter」, but I'm still a woman!」

「Ehh? I don't mean you should just wear this.」

I couldn't tell if this counted as a vest, but the front was designed to be open, just like the attire Aladdin wore. If she put this on without anything else — No no! That would be a slight against proper customs.

"If you want to wear this, you should put it over the clothes you are wearing right now! And you're too beautiful for me to think of you as a man…"

"Shut up! I want you to wear this!"

It had been a while since Ai Fa turned so raging mad, and she threw the clothes onto my face.

"Your attire is too prominent! When I'm out there with you, everyone will look at us with suspicious eyes, it's discomforting!"

Oh, I see. I also felt really prominent with my white attire at the water source in the morning.

And because I didn't have a change of clothes, I would switch between my t-shirt and chef uniform every day. As for my pants and underwear, I would wash it and then put it on while it was still wet.

But then, it was rather hot here, and the clothes would dry in just a few hours. Even if I didn't wash my clothes, it would rain heavily all of a sudden and drench me completely. Hence, I have already given up! But

because I needed to work in the forest, I couldn’t help feeling down as I watch my white chef uniform getting more and more dirty.

And so, I bowed deeply to my enraged mistress to express my thanks.

“I will accept this gratefully. But this must be important to you, right?”

“… If no one wears it, it will just be rubbish no matter how important it is.”

Ai Fa reached for the knife at her waist with a sour face.

I took a step back involuntarily, but Ai Fa handed that knife together with its sheath to me.

“My father left this behind too.”

On closer inspection, there was another knife on Ai Fa’s waist.

“This knife… Can I really have it?”

“I’m just lending it to you! You always make my knife all oily, it’s troubling for me! If the blade rust because of your negligence, I swear I will cut your ears off!”

“I get it. Thank you. I’m very thankful, I will treasure your late father’s belongings. I promise.”

Ai Fa averted her face unhappily. But she didn’t leave and just sat down beside me heavily.

“… So, have you found a way to turn poitan delicious?”

“I’m stuck at a bottleneck. After all, there wasn’t similar vegetables from the world I was from. Kiba is similar to boars, aria looks like onions, but nothing is close to poitan.”

“In that case, you’re giving up? There’s nothing wrong… with staying this way.”

Ai Fa kept her head turned stubbornly and I looked at her profile from an extremely close distance.

「You're satisfied with that? I'm not satisfied at all! The 「kiba meat soup」 is getting closer to my ideal, but this thing made all my efforts a waste! I might still be an apprentice, but it trampled on my pride as a chef!」

<TL: pride is in english here.>

「...Puraido?」

「Honour, or dignity.」

「I see... Recently, I have been thinking that eating delicious food is better than eating nasty tasting food. But you can't keep wasting the ingredients.」

「Yes, I know that...」

「These horns and tusks can be exchanged for things other than ingredients. If a knife breaks, it can be used to get new ones. Be it replacing torn clothes or medicine when we're ill, we will need these to exchange for them.」

Ai Fa touched the necklace on her chest.

"In the past, I just need to hunt one kiba beast every ten days for enough aria and poitan to survive, so I managed to save up some tusks and horns. But from now on, I will need to hunt one kiba every five days. I'm afraid my savings will deplete… in that case, we should cherish the ingredients."

"I see, but you still agreed to let me use one poitan a day."

That might be so, but I have already wasted four.

All because I was too useless.

"In that case, let's not waste this poitan today. I can eat one less, and use it to research…"

"You can't."

Ai Fa's voice was unexpectedly firm, she leaned in close.

I told you many times, you have to eat two poitan and three aria every day. This is the minimum requirement for the denizens of Forest's Edge to maintain their health. If you cut down on these, you will fall sick no matter how much kiba meat you eat.

A blue fire seemed to be burning in Ai Fa's eyes.

The ethical concept of Forest's Edge probably didn't allow people to sacrifice their health for the sake of research.

No — Not just Forest's Edge. As a chef, I shouldn't do so either.

If a chef couldn't manage his own diet well, that would be like a doctor who didn't pay attention to his-well being or a dye worker who wears white clothes.

Of course I know that...

Chefs have to provide customers with delicious and nutritious meals. No matter how tasty the dish might be, it would be meaningless if it was harmful to the body. However, it was pointless for food to be nutritious if

it tastes bad. The objective of a chef was to take care of both these criteria. I didn't know about other chefs, but my old man and I were chefs that took care of both factors.

And of course, some dishes prioritize the preference of the customers over nutritious value. I myself likes oily tonkotsu ramen.

But I couldn't do that for normal meals.

We would only eat junk food occasionally, that was why it tastes so good and exhilarating.

Because food contains the nutrition human needs, our body crave for food. However, since humans didn't live by our instincts, we might have lost this feeling — but even so, we shouldn't go against this fundamental condition.

Kiba meat really taste great.

I could actually feel that it has the nutrients my body needs.

I could actually feel the nutrients merging into my flesh and blood.

There might be people who would mock me that this was just an illusion, but I was serious about this.

I want to continue making such dishes — Food that could give me such an impression.

I want the people important to me to taste delicious food beneficial to their body.

Eating poitan should be beneficial to the body. Ai Fa is the best proof of that.

Among the people I know, Ai Fa was the strongest and full of life.

If Ai Fa was nourished by the kiba, aria and poitan — then there must be a way to dine on them happily.

Poitan definitely contain nutrients beneficial to the human body…

...Hmm?

Beneficial nutrients?

Necessary for the human body?

Which means—

「I see! I see, so that's how it is!」

I yelled unconsciously, and grabbed Ai Fa's shoulders without thinking.

「I thought something was amiss! That something wasn't there! Damn, so that's it...!」

「... Why are you going crazy all of a sudden.」

When the troubled Ai Fa tried to move away I pulled her back my way unconsciously.

Thanks to you, I found the answer! Ai Fa, you are wonderful!

I swear all this was done unconsciously.

I hugged Ai Fa’s body unconsciously, holding her slender body that was as tight as a whip.

And of course, my head was hit repeatedly a few seconds later, but I was lost in the moment because of my triumph.



Part 2

“Ai Fa I will be challenging a new menu today.”

Even though I announced that after the sun set, Ai Fa just said “Whatever” with a sour face.

Was she still holding a grudge for the lapse in my behaviour in the afternoon? Well, my actions was a little overboard — And I would definitely lose the court case if she accused me of sexual harassment. So it couldn’t be helped if she became suspicious of my character.

“Although the “kiba meat soup” isn’t bad, you will still grow tired of eating the same things everyday. Ai Fa, I will give you a big surprise this time, look forward to it.”

“Whatever.”

“… By the way, I wore your father’s clothes right after borrowing it. How do I look? Does it suits me?”

“It doesn’t. Looks funny. I shouldn’t have loaned them to you.”

She was still throwing tantrums.

Nevermind, she will become happy when she eats delicious food.

By the way, it felt impractical to wear just a vest and a cloth around my waist, so I wore my t-shirt under my attire too. It might look a bit weird, but I was afraid of scalding myself when I cook, so I hope everyone could accommodate me. Please treat the white towel wrapped around my head as my standard equipment.

Let me be frank then. I already prepared the poitan. It used up a lot of firewood, but I will pick more tomorrow, so please don't mind me.

Ai Fa was expressionless and silent. She couldn't be bothered to even answer me.

After beating me up, she headed into the forest like usual. She shouldn't have seen how I cooked the poitan, wasn't she curious?

Never mind, it's still early, but can I start cooking now? If you aren't hungry yet, try making yourself hungry.

Unlike the stoic Ai Fa, I was feeling agitated. Because I was looking forward to challenging this new menu very much.

I plan to challenge grilling meat.

Not just a normal grill, I thought of many different ways of going about it, such as steaming it or grilling teriyaki style. But I wanted to try a dish I'm good at since I verified the poitan's true identity, so I will try the other ways another time.

I have no plans on being a tease. The dish today would be □Kiba meat hamburg steak□.

Or □kiba steak□.

I walked to the food store as I hummed, and carried the necessary ingredients to the stove.

Kiba thigh meat and breast meat, 500g each.

Six fake onions, or aria.

Two branches of pico leaves.

Fruit wine.

Rock salt.

And the magical essence obtained from the poitans.

As the essence wasn’t much, I folded a fake rubber leaf as a container for it.

Well then, time to start cooking.

First, I took the thigh meat and cut off about a cm of fat from the top.

It was a bit of a pity, but I needed to use it as frying oil. All the fats on the fur had already been used to make candle, I will make sure to save some for cooking next time.

It has been five days since the butchering, and there wasn’t any sign of decomposition on it at all. The preservation effect of pico leaves were excellent.

Even though the pico leaves were effective, I heard the meat would slowly rot after 15 to 20 days.

By that time, the meat could only be preserved by smoking them. There was still a mountain of meat that I butchered five days ago, and I was troubled every day, wondering if there was a better way to utilize them.

Anyway, time to start cooking.

I started a fire in the stove and diced two aria while I waited for the iron pot to heat up.

After finishing that, I prepared the meat.

I cut the thigh and breast meat into small pieces, then dice them even further with the kitchen knife.

I started by using Ai Fa’s late father’s knife.

And then with the Santoku knife that represented my old man’s spirit.

Although there was about a kilogram of meat, it was a piece of cake. Hamburg steak was a popular dish in 「Tsurumi restaurant」, and I was already used to this kind of work.

In less than 10 minutes, the kiba minced meat was done.

I turned to look at Ai Fa, and she was looking at me unhappily with the posture of the reclining buddha.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reclining_Buddha >

She would usually sit quietly as if to show her respect for the chef. But it seems like her mood was terrible today. Didn’t she have any comment about the kiba meat turning into small pink piles?

Suppressing the unease in my heart, I checked the fire.

I drip one drop of water into the pot, and it vaporized immediately.

It was time.

I threw in a piece of fat, and used a wooden spatula (which I made myself) to spread the fats evenly in the pot. I then threw in the two diced aria.

Unlike a flat saucepan, I couldn’t toss the content of the iron pot. It was a bit tough, but I didn’t give up, and kept stirring the pot with my wooden spatula.

When the colour of the aria changed, I poured in fruit wine.

I stirred carefully until the alcohol evaporates.

After frying the green aria until it turned brown, I shift it into a container with the spatula.

When we made hamburg steaks in my shop, we would put in a quarter onion for every 200g of minced meat. Adding two whole onions for a kilogram of minced meat was a bit much. But kiba has a strong taste, so adding more aria wouldn’t be a problem.

As I needed to wait for the hot aria to cool down to proceed with the next step, I used the time to cut the remaining aria. I didn’t dice them this time and cut them into thin slices along the grain.

If I want to boil and soften it, I should cut it across the grain. But I want to bring out its texture this time, so I cut it this way.

I cut a total of four aria, and the pieces of aria piled on top of the fake rubber leaf like a small hill… This might be an extravagant wish, but I hope I could get a better container.

As I was bustling around, the aria had cool down. I placed the diced and fried aria and the kiba minced meat onto the fake rubber leaf.

I then sprinkled rock salt and pico leaf — at this moment, the magical essence made its debut.

I poured a certain cream coloured sticky substance onto the pile of meat.

Next, I just needed to mix it well.

After kneading it with my hands for a few minutes, the minced meat turned sticky as expected.

Even though I cut off the fats from the thigh meat earlier, the breast meat still had plenty of fats. Both the tenderness of the minced meat and its luster were impeccable.

Feeling that my triumph was at hand, I felt a chill down my spine.

Brushing off the meat patty from my palms, I rubbed the excess fats from the kiba onto my palm to prevent the patty from sticking onto them. I will be kneading it into shape next.

If the patty was too big, it would be hard to control the temperature accordingly. I squeezed out about one sixth of the minced meat and kneaded it into an oval. Splat splat splat, I didn’t forget to toss the meat

between my hand to push out the air inside.

I made six mini hamburg steak, each was about 160g.

How cute. It was a beautiful pink colour, and I felt like biting it just like that.

Leaving that for now, how’s the fire?

Hmm, it’s a bit too strong. I removed some firewood to adjust.

I could only gauge the intensity of the fire by sight, which was the biggest difficulty in making this dish.

Using strong fire in the beginning and reducing its strength — I couldn’t make accurate adjustments like this, so I had a tough time. But it couldn’t be helped, and I had to use my brain to decide this match. I needed the flexibility and imagination of my brain, followed by my judgement.

I threw in a piece of fat into the iron pot, and waited it to turn crisp and release its oil. After that, I finally put the hamburg steak in.

With a sizzling sound that was music to the ears, an appetizing fragrance filled the house.

As this was a round pot, I had to be careful about not letting the steaks stick together as I placed all six pieces into the pot quickly, and waited a few seconds.

It would be a waste of effort if I failed at this juncture. Paying attention to the change in the smell, I used the wooden spatula to check the heat.

Seemed that there wasn’t any need to weaken the fire earlier. The steaks were about 60% cooked.

But that was better than burning the meat. Even if some juice leaks out, it could serve as part of the sauce. I believe that the kiba juice wasn’t that limited.

After another few seconds, when the heat side turned just the right colour of being cooked, I flipped the steaks.

Well, time to prepare for the next phase — When I backed away, I bumped into an obstacle.

Ai Fa was standing behind me and staring at the iron pot before I realized it.

Uwah, you scared me! So you're here, Ai Fa!

... Why would I leave my own house?

No, that's not what I mean... Ah, sorry, I need to prepare a few things.

I went around Ai Fa to grab the bottle of fruit wine, and the fake rubber leaf filled with arias.

I faced the iron pot once again, put down the bottle and checked the colour of the hamburg steak.

The surface was about 80% done, it was about time.

□Be careful Ai Fa, the oil might splash around.□

She didn’t reply, but I didn’t have time to hesitate. I poured the fruit wine into the pot and covered the lid.

Psshh, splat splay, loud dull sound came out.

This was a unique way of cooking □kiba steak□.

When making hamburg steak, strong fire would be used to grill both sides quickly to prevent the juice from being lost. To cook the inside of the steak completely, it would be grilled slowly over a small fire, or toast the steak in an oven. That was the right way of preparing it.

However, it was impossible for me to use either of these methods, so I opt to steam it. By doing so, I could cook the inside thoroughly before the hamburg steak got burned.

Hence, the patty I kneaded was thin and small.

As I couldn’t tune the heat finely, and I needed to grill the surface of the steak with a strong fire — I had to go through the entire process with a strong flame. I had no choice but to knead the patty smaller and get it done quickly.

But even at this size, I would burn it if I tried to grill the entire steak until it’s completely cooked. In that case, I could only use steaming to accelerate the heating.

It was a simple and logical conclusion.

“Alright, it should be ready now.”

I opened the lid, and the fragrance from the fruit wine burst out instantly.

I tried to split one steak in half with my spatula.

The inside was a beautiful ivory colour, without a shred of red.

Ai Fa, can you pass me the plates?

I focused on keeping the other hamburg steaks from getting burned with my spatula. When Ai Fa heard what I said, she passed a wooden plate to me quietly.

I quickly scooped three hamburg steaks into the plate, took a new plate and rescued the remaining three steaks.

Alright, only the aria is left now.

The sauce made from the juice from the meat, fats and fruit wine boiled inside the iron pot.

I sprinkled in rock salt, and toss in pico leaves and the slices of aria.

I just need to fry the aria until it turns soft — and the job will be done.

Ai Fa, pass the plates back to me for a while.

When I said that, she passed the plates with the steaks back to me again.

Hmm? I was concentrating on the iron pot so I didn’t realize it, but was she holding on to the plates with both hands and waiting for me?

She sure was considerate. Despite how cold she normally acts, I could feel her sincerity and kindness from the things she does.

Leaving that aside for now, back to the topic.

I divided the aria between the two plates, poured sauce over it with a wooden spoon, and the 「kiba steak」 was finished.

「Ah, please sit a while and wait for me.」

I rushed into the food store and took out the poitan I had left there for a long time.

However, I don’t think anyone could tell it was poitan.

Ai Fa stared at the thing on the fake rubber leaf and tilted her head in confusion.

It was a flat, round, cream-coloured object, with signs of being grilled.

If someone from my hometown was to see this object, they might think it was an indian □nan□, or an □Okonomiyaki without any toppings□.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naan , https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okonomiyaki >

It’s true identity was a poitan.

□Let’s eat it while it’s hot! I will explain it to you later.□

Part 3

Let me start from the conclusion.

Poitan — should be a type of □cereal□.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cereal >

This was my speculation. I didn’t have any means to confirm this.

Anyway, after I made that assumption, I finally found a way to cook it, and succeeded.

The hint was □nutritional value□.

It wasn’t complicated at all, a grade schooler should be able to understand.

Kiba meat represented protein and fats.

Aria was a yellowish green vegetable, representing vitamins and fibre.

Then, what about carbohydrates? This question was like a divine

revelation.

I wasn't sure how the body structure of people in this world was. But they looked similar to us, so I could use my common sense to probe this question.

Ai Fa was a healthy girl.

Her skin was beautiful and lustrous, and her body was like a sculpture, with arms stronger than mine.

Only a balanced diet could build a body like Ai Fa's.

And Ai Fa eats meat. She also eat vegetables. In that case, it would be unnatural for her to not consume carbohydrates.

Carbohydrates were a source of energy.

Ai Fa's energy could rival wild beasts, and she was always full of life. Therefore, I was certain she consumes carbohydrates.

□Poitan is a cereal, and a carbohydrate.□

Another factor leading to my conclusion was the poitan's □texture□.

When I first ate it, I thought it was □just like flour water□.

Flour was made from grinding wheat, a type of cereal, into powder. A type of cereal powder.

I didn't need to grill it, fry it or eat it raw. The answer was before me right from the start.

I should have paid more attention to Forest's Edge's food culture. Because □boiling□ it was the only answer.

Doing so would remove the bitterness of the poitan, and dissolve it in water.

That would make the poitan edible.

But that would just turn it into tasteless mud water. Putting it in a more pleasant way, flour water.

Since that’s flour water, I just need to turn it into flour.

After thinking it through, I started attacking the poitan.

I boiled it with a small amount of water, turning it into sticky and thick poitan juice. I then heat it as much as possible, and when it was about to be burned, the poitan became a slime-like semi liquid state.

I then sunned it for about an hour, and it finally solidified.

I knock it apart and tasted it — it was tasteless and powdery.

As expected, it was similar to □flour□.

In that case, I will just use it like flour.

My prediction turned true.

I dissolved the powdered poitan into water, and heat it up. It didn’t boil like raw poitan, but started to bubble and solidify, like an Okonomiyaki without any toppings.

I still had some sample on hand, so I tried grilling the semi fluid poitan that wasn’t dried in the sun. However, they wouldn’t solidify at all. After the water evaporates, only burnt powder was left behind.

The key was to dry it completely.

And of course, I didn’t know what kind of changes happened to the molecular arrangement of the poitan, and I didn’t want to know.

Anyway, I found the answer I was after.

And so — I finally conquered poitan, and while I immersed myself in the jubilance of victory, I also felt happy and hyped up. As flour had the □binding□ property, the □hamburg steak□ I wanted to challenge in the future was within my grasps.

Binding served to hold the minced meat together.

To do so, egg yolks and bread crumbs were usually used.

And of course, it was possible to make hamburg steak without the binding factor. I heard that adding ingredients to bind the hamburg steak was a culture unique to Japan. There was all kinds of theories, some say 「just adding salt will be enough」 and others say 「there is no need to add anything, just mixing it evenly would be enough」.

Even so, 「Tsurumi restaurant」 would still add binding ingredients. I would always add binding ingredients whenever I cook hamburg steak, so I wasn't motivated to make this dish all this while.

However, it was another matter if there was binding ingredients.

I could challenge steaming dishes or teriyaki-style dishes whenever I wish, these cooking methods were simpler than boiling.

So I thought, I might as well make a hamburg steak.

Hamburg steak was a type of processed food. It was a meat dish that didn't retain the original form of the meat. It was a common dish for me,

but it would definitely look incredible to the people in this different world.

If I could make a hamburg steak successfully, how surprised would Ai Fa be — When I thought this far, my emotions got hyped up like a girl in love.

After several twists and turns, we started enjoying dinner on the fifth day.

□It might look completely different, but this is poitan. It doesn't have any taste by itself, so you can tear it into small pieces and eat it together with the meat. You can accept this way of eating it, right?□

Both of us had three small □kiba steak□ each, with a side of sliced aria and large amount of fruit wine sauce.

And there was also a round grilled poitan, that looked like an okonomiyaki. It was about 30cm across, and 1 cm thick.

□Alright, I’m digging in.□

Ai Fa drew a horizontal line across her mouth with her left finger, mumbled something and then picked up the plate and spoon. She stared at the □kiba steak□ on her plate with a confused face.

As I peeked at Ai Fa, I cut open the steak with my wooden spoon.

Well, the toughness wasn’t a problem. The opened surface was juicy, it was well made.

But there was a problem with this hamburg steak, whether the ingredients meshes well.

People seldom make hamburg steak with boar meat.

Probably because boar meat wasn’t suited for cooking hamburg steak.

Boar meat was softer than pork, but this property would only surface

when □boiled in water□. I remember the reason was tied to how much fats it have. Anyway, boar meat had the property of turning softer the more it was cooked.

If it was cooked in another way, boar would be classified by humans as tough meat.

Assuming boar meat was processed and cooked in the right way, it wouldn’t be so tough and be as tender as beef or pork.

Hamburg steak was usually made with beef.

A mixture of pork and beef minced meat was a popular choice for hamburg steak too.

I seldom heard about pork being used to make hamburg steak.

Boars were a similar species to pigs, so the texture of its meat should be similar.

Boar meat was definitely not suited for hamburg steaks — and kiba meat was similar to boar meat. So how would the hamburg steak made from kiba fare? Even if it surprises Ai Fa, would I be satisfied with the results? — It was time to decide the match.

I scooped a spoonful of 「kiba steak」 and sent it into my mouth.

The juice was hot and spread in my mouth, almost scalding me.

My first impression was —「sweet」.

Why was it like this, the meat was sweet and tasty. The unique taste of the meat and the fragrance of the fruit wine spread — I think this dish was delicious.

For a hamburg steak, the texture was rather chewy. I already worked hard to mince it, but it still had such a texture.

But it wasn’t an unpleasant feeling. Instead of being tough, it was closer to being chewy.

And with its bite, more juice would flow out, the freshness and juice spreads in my mouth,

… Oh no.

As expected, I prefer meat with unique taste more than other people.

Be it boar meat, mutton or duck meat, I really like meat with its strong unique flavour.

And so… I really think it was delicious.

I couldn’t judge it objectively.

In short, I felt this dish was delicious!

I sent another piece of meat into my mouth, together with the sliced aria and a large amount of sauce.

Delicious.

Super delicious.

I would probably give the same evaluation if I tasted boar meat hamburg steak.

I actually rated a dish I made so highly. It was embarrassing, but it was really tasty.

If I had to point out a flaw, that would be the thickness of the steak. It would be better for it to be thicker.

Compared to the cooked surface of the steak, the proportion of the juicy part in the middle was too little, this was the only point that dissatisfied me. I tore off some poitan and put it into my mouth, it tastes nice too.

Having rice to eat with this would be the most ideal. Meat needed a sides of vegetables and carbohydrates to complement it after all. Many nations wouldn’t match these food together, but my country and family would do so. I feel that vegetables and carbohydrates were the perfect match for meat. Each of these components was necessary.

It had been a long time since I ate such tasteless carbohydrates.

I could feel my craving for carbohydrates exceeding my imagination.

The grilled poitan wasn’t as soft as bread or naan, and it tasted like okonomiyaki that didn’t have any eggs or toppings. Even so, I felt it was delicious.

One grilled poitan was too little for the three hamburg steak. Because the “kiba steak” had a heavy taste, I should be able to eat two pieces of poitan.

Not so long ago, I thought poitan was such a hated existence, and couldn’t help laughing wryly. Someone retorted coldly: “What are you smiling about?”

Ai Fa finally opened her golden mouth.

This wouldn’t do. I was too engrossed in dinner and didn’t realized Ai Fa’s action.

My appetite was too strong, and I reflected on that a little.

"Oh right, how does it taste, Ai Fa?"

I looked at Ai Fa's way, and she had eaten more than half of the poitan and was about to finish her second "kiba steak". How fast, I just finished one.

After Ai Fa swallowed her food, she said "it's good."

"Thank you very much... ! But can you describe your comments in more detail?"

When she heard my question, Ai Fa said "Don't wanna."

"... Don't wanna?"

"Don't wanna. I don't wanna tell you my comment."

"Eehhh, but why? Are you still bearing a grudge over what happened this afternoon?"

"What happened this afternoon?" Ai Fa tilted her head.

"Ah, you mean that mean thing you did to me because you got too caught up? I already forgot about that."

"You forgot… Then why won't you tell me what you think?"

"Shut up! I don't want to talk about it, that's why!"

Then something I couldn't understand happened.

Ai Fa blushed, she lowered her head and covered her face with her plate.

"Enough! Stop looking at me!"

I didn’t get it at all.

Never mind, Milady’s emotions were a bit unstable today, I will ask her again a few days later. Despite her adamant refusal, she did say “it’s good” — Just these words made me very happy.

When I was thinking about that…

A voice came from an unexpected place.

“Hey, what’re you eating?”

Ai Fa and I looked that way in surprise.

The voice came from the window beside the stove.

It was dark outside — and a small face appeared behind the window.

“I’m asking you two something! It smells nice, is that kiba? What is that white thing?”

“Rimee Wu… I told you to stay away from my house.”

The surprise on Ai Fa’s face vanished. Seeing her answer nonchalantly made me sigh in relief. If she knew her, then it’s not a problem. We weren’t doing anything unsightly anyway.

By the way, who was this child?

As she was very short, I could only see her reddish brown hair and big round eyes through the window, but not her face.

“I don’t wanna! I finally get to see you, why do you have to be so mean…? Answer my question! What are you eating? What does it taste like? Who made it? Is that man your husband?”

“What nonsense are you saying!? Why must I marry this weakling of a man!?”

Her words stabbed into me deeply.

However…

Even though Ai Fa was shouting that, her face had turned extremely red.

Hmm.

Since I got to see her like this, I would pretend I never heard that.

“Hey, who is this child?”

Even though I was asking Ai Fa, the girl was the one who answered me.

“I’m Rimee Wu! Youngest daughter of the Wu Clan! I’m a good friend of Ai Fa!”

“Don’t joke with me. I don’t remember being your friend, Rimee Wu.”

Ai Fa picked at her last piece of hamburg steak and said in an exceptionally cold tone.

"I hate noisy kids like you. Scram on home."

After she said that…

The kid called Rimee Wu's eyes looked shocked.

The next instant, her emotions exploded.

"Uwaaahhhhhh!"

She started wailing loudly.

"Hey Ai Fa, don't be so childish when you talk to kids…" Even the sound of me admonishing Ai Fa was drowned out by her wailing.

Her wail was incredible, and my ear drums hurts.

"But I like Ai Fa so much ahhhhhh!" I finally made out one of her sentence.

No matter what…

The young daughter of Wu Clan, Rimee Wu will have a decisive impact on my fate in the future. And that was how I met her.

Part 4

"I really like Ai Fa, and Gill Fa. When Gill Fa was still alive, he and Ai Fa would often play with me!"

A few minutes later…

The mysterious guest Rimee sat between me and Ai Fa and said with a smile.

She looked completely different from her wailing face earlier.

Anyway, in order to stop her from crying, we ushered her into the house. But no matter how we tried soothing her, we couldn’t stop her tears from falling.

But when Ai Fa nursed her temple and said as if she was suppressing a headache: “... What I said was a lie, I don’t hate you.”, Rimee Wu stopped crying immediately.

“But I offended the Tsun clan, so it’s better for you to stay away from my house. I already explained that to you many times.”

“The Tsun clan is not scary at all! My daddy says so too! He says the Tsun clan successor is an idiot, and they will lose their position soon! The Wu clan will definitely become the leader of Forest’s Edge!”

“The head of the Wu clan, Donda Wu is combative, this will just worsen the situation. If the Tsun clan and Wu clan starts a war, the Forest’s Edge settlement might get destroyed.”

After Rimee Wu stopped crying, Ai Fa’s attitude turned colder than normal once again.

Even so, Rimee Wu was still all smiles.

Her smile was really cute.

Rimee Wu was probably seven or eight. She looked cute and petite, her height didn’t even reach my chest. Her reddish brown hair was cut very short, and looked fluffy like a dandelion. Her skin was chocolatey brown of course. Her eyes were the clear color of water, filled with light like the sky in spring.

She wore a large piece of cloth with beautiful patterns. It covered her right shoulder and waist, looking just like a mini dress with just a single strap. Her slender arms and legs were bare. As she was still young, this dressing looked pure and innocent.

A necklace swayed on her chest, with three pieces of either horns or tusks linked together.

I didn’t think a child this small could hunt kiba, so this was probably an amulet or decorative accessories.

…Hey, you are an outsider, right?

She stared at me with her big eyes.

Her blue eyes were really pretty.

Even though both of them had blue eyes, her's were different from Ai Fa's deep blue pupils that would look like they were burning from time to time.

Daddy Donda told me before! A suspicious person dressed weirdly had appeared in the Fa House. He might be an outsider, and will bring disaster. Before his identity is known, I mustn't go near the Fa House!

Is that so. But you are here even after he said that.

Although half my mind was on the kiba steak that was getting cold, I still answered warmly.

I didn't come earlier! But I saw you wearing Gill Fa's clothes today! So

that means you’re not an outsider anymore.

I had a feeling it was so, but Ai Fa’s father was really Gill Fa huh.

She kept bringing that name up, was it appropriate to do so? I couldn’t judge.

I want to ask! Since you gave the clothes from your family to this man, that means you accepted him as a your family, right? But he is not your husband?

Who knows such archaic customs!? He was an eyesore with his shabby clothes, so I just gave him some spare clothes!

Ah, that hurts.

But Ai Fa’s face was blushed.

I pray that her face wasn’t red from rage, but I got to see such a cute side of her, so I would just pretend I didn’t hear her rude remarks earlier.

Rimee Wu, go home! I don’t want to start a war between the Tsun clan and the Wu clan. Go home and don’t come here again.

I don’t wanna. Daddy Donda only told me to not go near outsiders. Since this person isn’t an outsider anymore, it is fine.

Rimee Wu was all smiles, and Ai Fa said whatever after glaring at her, then picked up her plate of food.

Rimee Wu’s naive face was filled with intrigue.

Hey, what is that? Why does it smell like that? Is that kiba meat? What is that flat thing that has the same colour as poitan?

Ai Fa didn’t answer and ate quietly.

Then me too — When I picked up my utensils, the girl turned her face my way with a start.

"You two carried a kiba back together, right? That kiba turned into this meat? Why is it this shape? Where is the poitan soup?"

"Erm… This is made by me… Its shape might be weird, but this is kiba meat, and that is poitan."

My personality couldn't ignore such an innocent child, so I answered her.

Curiosity flashed across Rimee Wu's eyes once again, and she said something that I was already expecting.

"What does it taste like? I want to try!"

Suppressing a sigh, I turned towards Ai Fa.

"Ai Fa, is it a taboo to share my food with someone from another clan?"

"… There's no such taboo."

Although Ai Fa looked very unhappy, she didn’t stop me.

In that case, it should be fine to give this girl a bite. I was dedicated towards food, but I wasn’t that gluttonous. Besides, the opinions of a third party was valuable to me as a chef.

“Well then, I will let her have a bite. It should taste completely different from kiba meat, so don’t be surprised alright?” After I said that, I offered my plate to her. But she just smiled and opened her mouth wide.

“Ahh.”

She wasn’t on guard against me at all?

I felt Ai Fa’s icy gaze on my right cheek as I cut a mouthful of steak with my spoon. I added two slices of aria and sent it into the girl’s small mouth.

The girl shut her mouth shut strongly with a snap.

She then started to chew.

Her blue eyes blinked a few times, and widened even more.

□Erm, how does it taste...□□Ah.□

She wanted more.

Nevermind, I could turn a blind eye to two mouthfuls.

But if she ask for more, it might affect onii-chan’s nutritional needs.

As I thought about all these, I scooped up the same food and tore off a piece of grilled poitan for her.

Rimee Wu shut her mouth with a snap.

Chew chew.

Swallow.

She blinked her eyes.

Her thoughts were written on her face, I seldom see a child who fits the onomatopoeia so well.

「Good...」

「Hmm?」

「It taste good!」

She grabbed me tightly.

Ah, I felt so panicky when grabbed by a person who had lost themselves. I started reflecting on what I did to Ai Fa earlier.

No, now wasn’t the time for reflection.

Rimee Wu’s small fingers grabbed my t-shirt, and she shook my body with unimaginable strength.

“It’s tasty! Very tasty! Why is it so tasty!? Is this really kiba? Why is it so soft!? Hey, why!?”

On the first night, I worked so hard to make Ai Fa say “taste good”, but this little girl repeatedly said this phrase so easily.

But hearing her praise this dish felt blissful to me as a chef.

By the way, this girl has surprising strength. As a tribe of hunters, even the muscles of such a child was different from normal people.

“Stop it, don’t bother our meal.”

At this point, Ai Fa spoke out to save me.

Before I realized it, she had finished her portion. She pulled Rimee Wu by the back of her neck and pulled her off me with ease.



Eating is for the sake of living. If you get in the way of someone’s meal, that is as good as threatening his life. That’s a taboo, didn’t your clan

head taught you that?

… Sorry.

Rimee Wu lowered her head and apologized as Ai Fa held her up in the air.

Her expression turned sullen suddenly.

It is really delicious, thank you. Sorry for disturbing your meal, I… At this point, she tilted her head and blinked a few times.

Her actions really fits the onomatopoeia.

… I don’t know your name. What’s your name?

I’m Tsurumi Asuta. If it’s hard to pronounced, just call me Asuta.

Chooroo… Asuta. I am very thankful to Asuta of house Fa.

She seemed to respect me more now. I waved at her warmly.

“It’s fine, I was just surprised. Thank you for your compliment… Ai Fa, thank you for stopping her.”

Ai Fa sat back down with a hmmp.

After Ai Fa unhanded Rimee Wu, Rimee Wu sat down and hugged her knees in silence.

… I don’t get the denizens of Forest’s Edge at all.

This girl gets all excited over trivial things. But after living in this different world for five days, this was the first time I met a denizen of Forest’s Edge who didn’t shun Ai Fa.

The other denizens fear the Tsun clan and didn’t interact with Ai Fa. In contrast, Rimee Wu didn’t hide her affection for Ai Fa at all, which made me glad and I hope they could get along.

In the end, Ai Fa and Rimee both fell silent, so I had to eat my dinner quietly.

Although the food was cold, it still taste wonderful. Personally, I was satisfied with the results.

「I'm full… Well then, it's already dark. Rimee Wu, can you get home by yourself?」

When I asked that, Rimee Wu who was hugging her knees seemed to remember something and raised her head.

I thought she would stand up with a start, but she knelt on the rug and reached out to me with both hands.

「Rimee Wu of the Wu clan has a request for Asuta of House Fa! Can you lend me a hand?」

I was troubled and glanced Ai Fa's way.

Ai Fa got up on one knee and frowned confusedly.

"Please make this incredible meal for the Wu clan's grand elder Jiba Wu… She will die if things don't change!"

Large tear drops fell from Rimee Wu's blue eyes.

But she didn't wail loudly this time! Rimee Wu couldn't stop her tears, she covered her face and sobbed.

Part 5

"…Asuta, are you going to the Wu clan?"

Night has fallen.

"I will be back tomorrow morning."

Rimee Wu bowed to us and went off home.

She only said to me “You can give me your reply tomorrow” and “I will convince my family tonight.”

I put the used utensils and kitchenware into the iron pot, and my job was done. Usually, we will chat and then sleep — But tonight, Ai Fa merely fell silent without any expression.

I had to learn the common sense of this different world. So Ai Fa would spend some time before we sleep to tell me about the rules and taboo of Forest’s Edge, legends of the kingdoms and the gods, or about the post station town in Genos’ territory I had not visited before. She told me many things, but she was silent tonight.

After maintaining this status for some time, she finally said those words.

Ai Fa leaned against the wall and didn’t look at me, her eyes gazing into the darkness outside the window.

The fire in the stove was out, and only the candlelight was left. I stared at her cold profile in the dim light and answered quietly:

I want to go — That's how I feel right now.

Jiba Wu was the grand elder of the Wu clan, and Rimee Wu hope I could cook for her — even though all of Rimee Wu's actions were exaggerated, what she described wasn't complicated.

The elderly grandmother Jiba Wu was 85, and almost all her teeth had fallen due to old age, so she couldn't eat properly.

And now, it took a lot of effort just for her to eat the diced kiba meat and boiled vegetable stew. And the amount she consumes decreases every day.

... There is no point in drinking these mud water-like thing every day in order to survive...

She said as she wept every day.

Despite being healthy a few years ago, she had grown weak and even her spirit was gradually weakening.

She really loved the youngest Rimee Wu, and her suffering must really hurt Rimee Wu.

When I think about how Rimee Wu feels, I want to make a trip to the Wu clan.

"But you don't agree, Ai Fa?"

When she heard my question, Ai Fa answered emotionlessly:

"... Although the Tsun clan led Forest's Edge for generations, the Wu clan could rival them. There had been bad blood between the two clans a few generations ago."

"Bad blood?"

"About twenty years ago, there was a girl supposed to marry into the Wu clan, but people from the Tsun clan abducted her. The men from Wu were furious and stormed into the Tsun clan. The previous Tsun clan head said that the girl committed adultery despite being betrothed to another, and they had punished her according to the rules. The corpse of the girl was returned to the Wu clan."

「……」

「The girl probably killed herself before the other party could sully her. But there wasn't any evidence, so the Wu men could only curse and swear as they sheath their blades… If the Tsun and Wu clan fought, a war that would rend Forest's Edge in two would break out. And both parties would suffer tremendous losses. If the Tsun clan don't hand over the girl, the Wu clan would probably start a war anyway. But since the girl was dead, we won't fight for dead people. The two clans broke off all contacts, and they had not resolved their difference even now.」

「How discomforting. Are all Tsun clansmen such terrible people?」

「Who knows. At least the men who inherited the bloodline of the clan head are all bad.」 Ai Fa didn't change her expression as she said these in a cold manner.

「And when I got into a dispute with Diga Tsun two years ago, the Wu clan head suggested that I marry into the Wu clan.」

「M… Marry into the Wu clan?」

Donda said to me with a smile:That way, the Tsun clan won't go after you. Even if they tried, I would end the Tsun clan... I rejected his offer and cut off ties with the Wu clan.

Ah... So that's what you mean when you say you don't want to spark off a war.

Even if the Wu clan don't help me, I won't yield to Diga Tsun. I shouldn't have any dealings with either family.

I see. I understand now. From your position, since I'm living under your roof, you won't tolerate it if I help the Wu clan.

I sighed deeply.

Ai Fa then turned her head away, the corner of her mouth twisted as if she was mocking something

Such a smile didn't suit her.

"But even so, you still want to help Rimee Wu, right? That's the kind of man you are, Asuta."

"Hmm…? That is true. That girl Rimee Wu looks like a good kid, and I want that grandmother to relive the joy of eating."

"Yes. In that case, just do what you want to do."

"Huh?"

"This is a simple matter. If you wish to help Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu, you have need to cut off relations with me. After that, you can just ask the Wu clan to take you in… It's simple, right?"

"What? I can't switch targets so easily, I'm not a frivolous girl."

I shrugged, unable to understand what Ai Fa's true intention is.

"I'm not as troubled as you think. I feel sorry for Rimee Wu, but I will

reject her proposal.

… What?

Even though Rimee Wu is an endearing child, I just met her, and I have never met that grandmother before… You might think this is cold of me, but if doing this puts you in a difficult position, then I won't be able to help after all.

… Why?

Ai Fa snapped her head back.

She seemed to be very surprised.

This expression isn't like her, I thought as I act natural.

You are asking me why. Compared to someone I didn't know and never met, you are more important to me… Don't make me say something so embarrassing, dummy.

□……□

□What is it? Isn't it great that I won't have anything to do with the Wu clan?□

□It isn't anything important, but if you save a member of the Wu clan, Donda Wu might ask me to marry into his clan again in the name of repaying a favour. If I reject him again, he will definitely think I'm insulting his clan and vent his anger on me.□

□What a difficult old man… By the way, does the young men from Wu clan lack charisma? He wants you to marry Rimee Wu's brother, right?□

I asked with half envy and half curiosity, and Ai Fa only answered coldly: □I have already decided to live by □hunting kiba□□.

□Women have to live a life weaving grass and tanning hides while waiting for their men to return. That doesn't suit my character. I want to be a hunter that lives in the forest and dies in the forest. I decided that when I lost my father Gill.□

“Well, it’s a pity since you are so beautiful.” She didn’t retort despite my sarcastic comment.

An unknown emotion lit the fire in Ai Fa’s eyes.

“Anyway, you don’t need to worry. I will reject Rimee Wu’s request, nothing will change. Even if I reject Rimee Wu, the Wu clan won’t bear a grudge towards me.”

Rimee Wu said to me just now “I will convince my father!”.

Which means this request came from Rimee Wu’s own will. Even if she told her family about this, they might be suspicious about me and not be willing to accept my help.

“Why? If you end your relationship with me, you will be free to do as you please. In that case, why aren’t you doing what you want? Instead of being together with an eccentric person like me, you probably want to help the Wu clan more.”

“I don’t feel like helping them at all. You took so much care of me, just the thought of leaving you for such a reason to live with an unfamiliar

family displeases me… Hey, you have been acting weird just now, just what do you want me to do?

Ai Fa didn’t answer me.

So I stood up, and sat cross legged before her.

Ai Fa lowered her head, an agitated flame still burned in her eyes.

Ai Fa, if you think I’m a burden and want me to go, I will do that. But you don’t think so, right? In that case, tell me what you really think.

……

I can’t tell what you are thinking, just tell me honestly. I will do what you wish, in a way you like.

Ai Fa lift her head and stared at me straight.

Her eyes still had that blue flame — but she was a little teary.

"My father — Gill Fa passed away two years ago."

Her pink lips formed these words quietly.

"Before father passed away, I was on good terms with Rimee Wu. Even though I didn't have much dealings with the Wu clan, Jiba Wu dotes on Rimee Wu and I had seen her a few times when I was young."

"... I see."

My heart tumbled when I saw her tearful eyes, and could only answer this way.

Ai Fa frowned a little painfully.

"I don't want to have anything to do with the Wu clan. But if Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu suffers... I will be sad too."

“In that case… what you want the most is for me to break off my relationship with you and help Rimee Wu?”

When I said that, she grabbed me by the chest.

Her eyes burning with blue flames stared right at me.

And then…

A droplet slid quietly down from her tearful eyes.

“I also…”

Her voice was quivering a little.

“I also… don’t know what to do.”

How could she not know?

I just need to break my relationship with her, and I would be able to help Rimee Wu.

If she didn’t want to have any dealings with the Wu clan and wants to help Rimee Wu, this was the only way.

However…

Ai Fa’s fingers grabbed my chest tightly.

She seemed tensed, as if I would disappear if she let go.

“I see.”

I placed my hands on Ai Fa’s shoulders.

I felt her bare shoulders, her smooth skin and the warmth underneath that — and also her quivering.

I pulled her shoulders towards me.

Ai Fa’s slender body fell onto my chest without any resistance.

“It can’t be helped since you don’t know. But it would be more appropriate if I didn’t know what to do either.”

I could smell my favourite scent from Ai Fa, which stimulates my nasal cavity.

I felt that fragrance fill my heart, and said quietly:

“But, I know what I want to do the most… If you don’t tell me what to do, can I do it my way?”

“……”

“I want to help Rimee Wu. But I don’t want to leave you. So I will help the Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu you like so much officially as someone

staying in the Fa house.

After I said that, I patted Ai Fa’s hair that had been tied up into a complicated braid.

The dispute between the Tsun and Wu clan isn’t important at all, right? Why should I abandon someone I cherished for such a stupid dispute? The important things related to the future of the settlement should be left to the old men who are responsible. Don’t overlook your own feelings for such things.

.....

Let’s help Rimee Wu together. Who cares what Rimee Wu’s father says. If he brings up the matter about marriage again, just tell him to find a man more delicious than a kiba for you!

Ai Fa couldn’t answer.

But her fingers grasped my chest tightly and her tears continued to to wet my t-shirt.

Vol. 1 :

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Part 1

And so, we decided to head to the Wu clan’s main house.

I was happy about reaching a conclusion, but this also created some problems. The next morning, Rimee Wu appeared before us as promised which made me realize the problems.

After completing our work at the water source, Rimee Wu came over when I was at home maintaining my blade. When I told her about agreeing to help, she shouted 「Thank you!」. Her smiling face made other people around her blissful too.

She then told me:

「In that case, come over to my place before sunset! I will prepare the ingredients.」

I tilted my head confusedly.

“What ingredients are you talking about? I plan to cook in this house, then deliver the finished product to your place.”

“You can’t do that! The food you cooked here can only be eaten here!”

I didn’t really get it, and after further questioning, I realized this was a rule in Forest’s Edge.

The actual explanation was:

“The one cooking and the ones eating must enjoy the same meal in the same place.”

Simply put, this was an order to prevent others from making food harmful to the body.

“I don’t really get it, but I just need to cook the meal at your place, and dine at the same place as Grandma Jiba Wu right?”

Heading to an unfamiliar place to cook was a little pressuring, but I wouldn’t back down because of such trivial matters.

However, the real problem came right after that.

"Yes, but you won't just be cooking Grandma Jiba's share. My family is large and it will be tough, but I will work hard together with you."

"Ehh? I won't just be cooking for Grandma, but everyone else too?"

"Yes, because we will be entrusting the hearth to you. Isn't that so?"

"Is that so?"

"Yes it is! Asuta, you're really weird."

Even a child 7 or 8 years old thinks I'm weird.

Spare me, I'm still learning the rules of Forest's Edge.

"I understand. I just need to prepare everyone's share, right? I'm willing to cook for everyone. The more people who eats my cooking, the more driven I would be… How many people are there in the Wu family?"

"Hmm…" Rimee Wu started counting her fingers.

When she counted all ten fingers, I couldn't help retorting in my heart.

…… Hmm, including me, there are thirteen!

T-Thirteen!? What a large family.

Ah, but Kota Wu is just one year old, and can only drink milk. So you just need to prepare food for the twelve of us. The women who are supposed to caretake the hearth will help you too!

Twelve huh… such a number won't be a problem for me. Can I cook the same dish as yesterday for everyone?

Yes of course! I'm looking forward to it too!

I see. But I don't think I can solve the issue by cooking for Grandma just once. I need to hold a lecture for the Wu clan women to learn how to cook those dishes, then I can rest easy…

What is a lecture?

What I mean is, I can't use the stove at your place every day, right? So from tomorrow onwards, you all will cook the delicious food for Grandma.

Ehh? I can make such delicious food too?

「The temperature for that dish yesterday is a bit hard to control&

hellip; Ah, by the way, you have 13 people in your family, so there's more than one pot, right?」

「Pots? Our house have 4 pots.」

「Four!? That's great!」

In the end, I became excited.

Using four pots to cook for a dozen people — No, including me and Ai Fa, it would be 14.

My adversary was an elderly person without teeth, and the people in the settlement who bore hostility towards me because I'm an outsider.

This development spurred my spirit as a chef instead.

「I understand. I will prepare the kiba meat here, can you prepare enough poitan and aria for everyone? And also rock salt and fruit wine.」

「Ehh? We have plenty of meat at my place.」

The meat is the key. If there is a chance, I want to teach you the right way to slaughter that would make the meat taste good.

I started thinking about the dishes in my mind.

Rimee Wu then walked towards me, and tugged the corner of my shirt a little hesitantly.

Asuta, I'm really grateful. Now, Grandma Jiba won't cry about wanting to die… Thank you for accepting such a difficult task.

Don't cry. Dummy, we don't know if we can solve the problem yet.

Don't say that! It will be fine! The food you cooked tastes really good!

Rimee Wu then turned towards Ai Fa who had been working on her blade in a corner of the house.

Ai Fa, thank you too. When Grandma Jiba gets better, let's play together again. I'm going off first, see you in the evening!

Ah, my dish would require some time to prepare, can I intrude on your place before sunset?

After I replied on behalf of the silent Ai Fa, Rimee Wu said Yes! I got it!,

showed us a brilliant smile and left.

Really, in a sense, she was full of life just like Ai Fa. I raised the corners of my lips.

「… Why are you smiling by yourself. What a disgusting man.」

「Ohh! Ai Fa! You're finally willing to speak with me! Although what you said was rather rude, but I feel relieved now.」

「… Shut up.」

Ai Fa sat with her back to the wall and didn't even look at me. She had a serious face as usual as she inspected the knife that had a silver glint.

However, I got to see her weak side yesterday and she must be feeling really troubled. I could tell how she feels very easily.

「But to think we have to dine with them too. Ai Fa you knew that from the start, right?」

「Of course. That's what entrusting the hearth to you means.」

Yes. The denizens of Forest's Edge thinks that caretaking the hearth was a job that required responsibility. I think this was a great rule.

"But in that case, we will need to face Rimee Wu's father… Ai Fa, you will come with me, right?"

"Are you retarded? You don't even know the rules of this world, how can I let you go to another house alone!?"

She roared and glared at my feet.

"… If you don't plan to cut off ties with me, then of course I will accompany you."

"That's true. If I went alone, I will be scared. It's great that you can accompany me."

I walked a few steps towards Ai Fa and sat down. I kept some distance away from her, just out of arm's reach.

Ai Fa didn't avert her eyes. She was looking at my feet just now, but has shifted her gaze to my chest now.

I put my hands on the ground and lowered my body in an attempt to meet her gaze. Not only didn't it work, she turned the point of her knife my way.

"Sorry, I was just kidding around."

“Can the Wu clan… really entrust their hearth to a man like you?”

She looked at me after keeping her knife.

Frankly speaking, this was the first time Ai Fa looked me in the eye properly after I woke up today.

Her sensitive cheeks blushed again, but she didn’t hold back and said to me in a rough tone:

“Entrusting one’s hearth to another is equivalent to putting the lives of their family in your hands. If someone from the Wu clan fell ill after eating your food, they won’t let us off so easily. They might cut off our ears, pull out all our teeth or banish us from Forest’s Edge!”

“Ehh, working the stove is so important but you gave me the job so easily.”

“I don’t care about such an archaic custom! But many people in Forest’s Edge still hold such an opinion!”

“I know, who do you think I am, I won’t let them get food poisoning.”

You are just a seventeen year old apprentice chef, right? … I was hoping Ai Fa would retort like that, but she just pursed her pink lips shut and fell

into silence.

Her cheeks were tinted red, like a kid who didn’t want to admit her loss.

But this was just like her.

The sullen Ai Fa last night was completely unlike the usual her. But she was cuter the way she was now.

After a short silence, Ai Fa said: “I’m telling you to not let down your guard.”

“I know how good your cooking skills are. If it’s you, then you should be of help to Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu. But you have to watch your steps.”

“Uwah… I feel so moved.”

I want to go near her and hold her hand. But with how she was right now, she might really kill me if I did that. So I decided to restrain myself.

“Since you already said that, there wouldn’t be a problem. Don’t worry, I swear on what little honour I have that I will help Rimee Wu.”

And I have another reason now, which was “For the sake of Ai Fa”.

In order to help Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu whom Ai Fa treasures, I will pick up my kitchen knife and fight hard.

Under such conditions, how could I be careless or arrogant?

I felt my body filled with hype and fighting spirit as I looked at Ai Fa who still had an unhappy face.

I will definitely complete this job properly.

For the person I respect the most in this different world.

Part 2

Oh… So this is the Wu clan's courtyard.

I said in awe.

It took about an hour to walk from the Fa house to the Wu clan. From the position of the sun, it was located some distance to the south of Fa house.

The Wu clan didn't have any building that was larger than the others. In place of that was many buildings in close proximity of each other. After coming to this world, this was the first time I saw such a sight.

Although these buildings had ample space and there was quite some distance between them, their difference from other residence was clear at a glance.

In the center of the buildings were a flat brown plaza, about half the size of a field found in schools. Seven wooden houses were built at its edges, surrounding it.

All the buildings were about twice as large as Ai Fa’s house.

But even for a family of thirteen, they didn’t need so many rooms — As I tilted my head in confusion, Ai Fa explained to me as she held the 5kg of kiba thigh meat wrapped in fake rubber leaves carefully:

「… The head of the clan would inherit the main house, if the brothers of clan head is to wed, they would build a new house near the main house. Several of them are the residence of the clan head’s brothers.」

I was also carrying 5kg of Chuck Flap in my arms, and answered with a nod: 「I see.」

<TL: http://lamtc.com/latest/new-products/miyazaki-wagyu-a5-chuck/ >

「Why is there a plaza in the middle? It looks big enough to hold a sports meet.」

Sports meet…? This space is for celebrations or funerals. If everyone related to the Wu clan are to gather here, there would probably be more than a hundred people.

Of the 500 denizens in Forest's Edge, a fifth of them were related to the Wu clan.

But thinking about it the other way, there were just 500 people in this settlement. If outsiders didn't come in, the village would be filled with one's relatives in no time.

Enough talk. Let's go.

Ai Fa said and started walking forth. I chased after her and entered the plaza.

When we reached the center of the plaza, a tiny figure appeared from the back of the house right in the center, and ran towards us.

Ai Fa! Asuta! Welcome to the Wu clan! You are here really early.

That figure was of course, Rimee Wu.

By the way, the time was right between noon and evening.

I felt it was about 3pm in the afternoon.

“Are we too early? I wanted to have more time to get things done.”

“No problem! Dear guests, please give me your knives for safekeeping!”

Ai Fa handed both her blades over silently.

I did not expect that and panicked a little.

“Rimee Wu, I want to ask. Is it okay for me to cook with my own knife?”

“Hmm? But we have many knives for cutting meat at our place too.”

“But my knife is a bit special.”

I drew out the Santoku knife at my waist, as if I was acting in a yakuza film.

But the way, my attire today was a t-shirt with a colourful vest over it. I wore a cloth around my waist, but had white shoes on and a white towel on my head, a mixture of many different elements.

To be honest, the white chef uniform represents the honour of a chef and I very much want to wear it. But I didn’t want to dress like a foreigner too much, hence my strange get up.

Rimee Wu observed my Santoku knife curiously and said 「I see」, then tilted her head confusedly.

「In that case, please give me your knife first, I will return it to you at the stove! If you have the knife on you, I can't usher you in!」

I sighed and handed over the Santoku knife and my other knife.

One sabre, two knives and the Santoku knife. Rimee Wu took the four blades with respect, then turn around.

「This way please.」

What would happen next? I braced myself and prepare to meet the Wu family. A group appeared from both the entrance and the back of the building — all of them seemed to be frail women.

Oh right. During this time, all the men would head into the forest.

About six women stood in a line before us. I was surprised, but Ai Fa's attitude was calm as usual.

「I brought the guests! They are Ai Fa and Asuta from the Fa House!」

Six pairs of curious eyes watched us without reservation.

During these five days, the other people all politely ignored my existence, that was why their actions surprised me. Not only did they not ignore me, they even focused their gazes on me.

This was a large family of thirteen, so it wouldn’t be strange for more than half the household to be women. But their imposing aura still surprised me.

Three of them were married and wore a long dress made from one piece of cloth.

Three of them were unwed, their long hair draped over their shoulders, with two pieces of cloth covering their chest and waist.

One of the married woman was an old lady. But she probably wasn’t Grandma Jiba. She was plump and looked energetic. She also had the smell of fats about her.

Another one was a middle aged woman. She should be about my parents age. She looked healthy and robust would be a more appropriate way to describe her. She was also rather tall, and appears to be a strong mother.

And then — the other girls were all young.

Two of them looked older than I was. They should be about twenty years old.

One of them wore a long dress and had a really small baby in her arms.

Another one of the girls was about my age, and one more was a bit younger than me.

A total of six women.

Including the baby and Rimee Wu, there were eight people in total.

"This is grandma Ditto Min. Beside her is Mommy Mia Lei. Next is Sati Lei, she is my brother Jiza's wife, and the baby is Kota. Over there are my sisters Vena, Leina and Lala!"

"Hey, if you introduce in one go like that..." My heart started racing suddenly.

"... Hey, did you say Leina?"

<TL: Same pronunciation, but different way of writing.>

"What?"

The girl who was about my age tilted her head confusedly.

She had a head of black hair, which was rare in Forest's Edge. Her hair was tied at her left and right shoulders in a low ponytails. She was short and petite, and her innocent face resembles Rimee Wu a little… And of course, she had brown skin and blue eyes.

… Right. What am I thinking?

This girl just happen to share a name with my childhood friend.

But she looked completely different from Reina. Reina was more childish with short hair, and didn't look so prominent. The only thing they had in common was their small stature, their height only reaching my shoulders.

"Sorry, it's nothing. Because my friend had the same name as you, so I couldn't help reacting like that."

"You know someone who has the same name as me?"

She showed an innocent smile which looked a little like Rimee Wu's smile.

Ah — Her smile was a bit similar to Reina. Reina was more childish than she looked, which also applies to this girl before me and Rimee Wu.

…I am the head of House Fa, Ai Fa. This man is a member of my house, Asuta. We are here on Rimee Wu’s bequest, to temporarily caretake the Wu clan’s hearth.

Ai Fa announced in a voice stiffer than usual.

Ai Fa and Asuta from House Fa, we welcome you.

The old lady who smelled like fats said to us. Her voice was just like her appearance, steady and gentle.

The Wu clan welcomes your visit. Lala, safekeep the hunter’s cape from our guest.

Eh? You want me to do it!? The girl who looked the youngest said unhappily.



She was about thirteen or fourteen, and looked as tough as a boy. Although her limbs and body were slim, she was taller than Leina. She had bright vermillion hair just like Rimee Wu, and tied her ponytail high on her head. Her eyes were bright blue like an ocean.

This girl named Lala walked forth reluctantly and received Ai Fa's fur cape. Grandma Ditto Min ignored her and smiled gently.

"Since you wish to use the stove as soon as possible, we finished our job to extract fats as fast as we could. You can use the room now. Who's scheduled to caretake the hearth today…?"

"Rimee, Grandma Ditto Min and Leina sis!"

"Right. Then Rimee, Leina and I will assist you."

"Okay, thank you."

This was unexpected.

I had braced myself for my visit into enemy territory, but the people here were — how should I say it, warm and rather friendly.

Only that red haired Lala looks a little displeased, everyone else had a smile on their faces. Compared to the people I encountered at the water source and on the road, their attitude was obviously different.

Ai Fa once rejected the demand of their clan head — Donda Wu, refusing to marry into the Wu clan. And I was an unknown foreigner (actually from another world). They don't seem to mind us much though.

"Well… Before we get to work, I want to confirm one thing…"

Someone said suddenly with a seductive voice.

It was the young girl who was older than me and not carrying a baby.

She tied her brown hair to the right, and because she only covered her breasts and waist with two pieces of cloth, it brings out her sexy curves even more.

"Asuta of House Fa… You came from a foreign country, right? But you didn't state your place of birth, is there a reason for that…?"

"No, I have no intention of hiding this."

I already discussed this part with Ai Fa earlier.

I had no way of proving my identity, and what role I should play in my life in this world. As I didn't have much options, the decision was made easily.

□The people here seem unfamiliar with my birthplace… I came from a nation called Japan.□

Ai Fa and I chose to □Tell everything honestly□.

□Six days ago, I woke up at the foot of Mount Morga. However, I had no idea why I was here. The people here don't know about Japan, and I have never heard of the Amusehorn continent. But we could communicate clearly. I'm still confused about this and don't know what's going on.□

If I lied, I will be found out one day. And in the off chance that someone in this world had the same experience as me, I would miss the opportunity of learning that.

So I decided to share my experience, and be honest about what I didn't know — I only hid one thing. □I died, but revived in this world□, that would sound too unbelievable.

□I see… A foreigner who had never heard of Amusehorn…? Why did someone like that appear in the middle of this continent so suddenly…?□

This sister would pause for a bit in mid sentence, and her misty eyes made her more alluring. However, since she asked this, it means that she was the most guarded of the group, and has the quickest wit. I made a mental note of that.

"I really have no idea. After meeting Ai Fa in the forest, she took care of me and even worry for me. She says it is too dangerous for me to wander around without knowing the rules of Forest's Edge."

"I see… Ai Fa of House Fa, your personality isn't bad… I thought you're only interested in hunting kiba like the men…"

Her words weren't malicious, but her tone had taunting undertones which made Ai Fa stiffen her face.

And of course, Ai Fa didn't reply. This sister looked at Ai Fa with coquettish eyes and laughed softly.

"No matter what, I'm looking forward to today. And you're here for our precious family grandma Jiba, right…? Although father Donda showed an annoyed face after learning that, I welcome you very much and is very grateful… I really mean it…"

"Eh, you flatter me."

I gave a laughable response. When she saw how I was, she put her finger on her full lips and her laughter was like silver bells.

Every move of hers permeates a sexy charm, that should be her unique characteristics.

…I am Vena Wu, eldest daughter of clan Wu… The second daughter is the black haired Leina, the third daughter is the redhead Lala, and the youngest daughter is Rimee… I will introduce my brothers to you when the men return from the forest…

She then gestured her well proportioned arm towards the older group of women.

This is the wife of the previous family head, Ditto Min, she will assist you later… Which means, she is my grandmother… Beside her is my mother, Mia Lei, the wife of the clan head Donda… And that is Sati Lei and her child Kota, the spouse of my oldest brother Jiza… The person you are helping is my great grandmother — Jiba, she is resting in the house right now… Ai Fa and Asuta from Fa House, nice to meet you…

Part 3

…This way please.

The one leading us was the second daughter of the Wu clan, Leina Wu.

Rimee Wu entered the house to keep the guest's blades. The grandmother — Ditto Min still need to clean up for the fats extraction work too. The other women went back to their own work, and they left quickly.

The stove room was situated at the back of the building.

Large houses like this would separate the rooms and kitchen. They erected another building behind the main house that was half its size. There was a stove room, food store and kiba slaughter room.

「hmm? There's stoves over there too?」

There were two heavy stone stove beside the building, similar to the one in Ai Fa's place.

These two stoves were situated outdoors, and even had a beautiful wooden roof erected over it. The opening of the stoves faced each other, like two faceless monster glaring at each other.
<TL: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noppera-b%C5%8D >

But there wasn't any iron pots on top of the stove.

「These stoves are used for grilling meat. My father Donda prefers grilled kiba meat.」

The petite girl who tied her black hair into two low ponytails smiled.

「I see! When you grill the kiba, there should be an astonishing amount of smoke. This thing is great. I will use this stove today then.」

「Eh?? Asuta, do you want to grill kiba meat?」

I was surprised for some reason and looked into the girl’s round eyes.

Why was that? When I heard this girl with the same name as my childhood friend call my name, I felt a little strange.

However, Reina calls me 「Asuta-chan」 even in high school.

「... That’s right, I planned to use grilling, it there any problem?」

「Well, Rimee told me that the meat she ate was very soft. So I thought you would cook a kiba stew...」

「I see. But I will be grilling the kiba meat. You might think my cooking method is weird, but I will take care of the troublesome steps, I will be counting on you for the other areas.」

「Okay! To me, Grandma Jiba is an irreplaceable family. I am very grateful for your help, Asuta! I will work hard!」

This girl was really similar to Rimee Wu. She was cheerful, innocent, energetic and had sincere eyes.

Furthermore — Although this was unnecessary information, it was clear that she had inherited the same genes as that sexy eldest sister.

Her arms and thighs were rather thicc, and the curves on her breasts and hips were very feminine. Because she had a slim waist, she didn’t look too fat — But I didn’t know where I should look when I speak with her.

The girls in this settlement were too scantily clad. They seemed to think just covering their chest and waist was good enough. And the cloth they wrapped their body in was too thin, making the shape of their body clear at a glance.

And unlike the women I met in the settlement, they would wear 「accessories」.

Bangles made from Krilee fruits seemed to be their standard equipment. Other than that, they would wear shiny silver hair accessories, ear rings, ankle bracelets and—

「…Ah. That necklace.」

「Huh?」

「All of you are wearing three tusks or horns on your necklace. Is that some kind of charm?」

「Yes. Because women can’t hunt kiba, the men will gift tusks and horns to us as a blessing for a safe life in Forest’s Edge.」

The necklace swayed before her bold clevage. She held the necklace to her chest and smiled blissfully.

“Fathers would gift them to their children, husbands would gift them to their wives. The men won’t give an entire set of horns and tusks, holding one back to signify that the kiba wasn’t hunted by the women.”

“I see, what an interesting tradition.”

As I was answering Leina Wu, I felt a stabbing pain on the back of my neck. I turned back and found Ai Fa leaning against the wall, staring at us with icy eyes.

I didn’t forget about my task at hand. My mistress, I was merely distracted by the outdoor stove.

“Erm, there are four stoves, huh? Let’s start a fire in one of them.”

“Alright, please follow me.”

Leina Wu smiled again and walked towards Ai Fa.

She nodded towards the serious faced Ai Fa, then pulled open the sliding door beside her.

「This is the stove room.」

「I see.」

I walked forth as I answered Leina. I wanted to talk to Ai Fa, but my dear mistress averted her face strongly and stepped in before I did.

What was going on? I was confused, but felt that things would become troublesome.

Leaving that aside, I stepped into the room.

「Oh, this is cool.」

This room was only 8 tatami big, but it looked vast as there wasn't many items placed inside.

There were four stoves in a cluster right in the middle of the room. A working platform propped up by a log was placed beside each stove, along with a flask full of water. I was impressed.

The floor wasn't covered with rugs. The wooden walls and bare ceiling and beams were similar to Ai Fa's place.

However, there were an assortment of kitchen knives, ladles and stirrers hanging on the walls. The closet that didn't have a door was filled with plates, spoons and other utensils.

This was how a stove room, kitchen and food preparation room should look like.

I could feel my emotions getting hyped.

As I admired these kitchenwares, Leina Wu stood before the stove and showed a carefree smile as she said: "Can I start the fire? Pray tell when you are ready." She actually used the term 'pray tell'.

Although she had a pure and innocent personality, she was very elegant.

By the way, they way they start a fire was just like Ai Fa. They would tie a dry leaf called karakara to the tip of a thin stick, then create friction by rubbing it against another firewood. The karakara would then burn like a matchstick.

They would take care not to let the fire go out, and wait for the other firewood to catch fire.

I also tried using this method to start a fire before, but would fail every two out of three attempts. Leina succeeded in just one try.

□Yes, can you help me boil half a pot of water? Use strong fire.□

Leina Wu acknowledged and started filling up the water.

… I could feel someone staring at my back, but I didn’t do anything wrong this time, right?

□Okay, Ai Fa, give me the kiba meat. Miss, can I put the meat on that table?□

□Yes, of course… Excuse me, you can call me □Leina□.□

□Yes, you are right. But you have the same name as someone I know, so it feels weird.□

I took the pack of kiba meat from Ai Fa, and opened the fake rubber leaves wrapped around the meat.

Leina Wu then stood beside me, smiling close to my face.

□Asuta, that person must be important to you, that’s why you can’t bring yourself to address me with her name.□

□… That’s not it.□

If not, then why? I didn’t know either.

But, speaking of which — Aside from my family, I spent the most time with Reina. I didn’t think of her as a love interest, but the thought that I could never see her again — still made my heart ache. That was the type of person she was to me.

That was why I didn’t want to mention or hear her name.

I didn’t think I should tell this to someone who shared her name.

「…Huh?」

As I was unwrapping the meat from the leaf, a small brown hand held my hand.

I was surprised and looked to the side. Leina Wu who was smiling just now looked down, as if she was about to cry.

「I’m sorry Asuta, I said something I shouldn’t have. Your eyes look so sad…」

「No! It’s nothing! I’m really fine! I’m just thinking about something!」

What was going on? I didn’t come all the way here to act out a romantic

comedy drama!

Ara, the back of my head hurts. As if someone stuck a pick made of ice into my brain. To think I could feel a person’s gaze so clearly, did I have the talent to be a sword saint?

At this point, I heard a voice behind me saying 「Sorry for the wait, Asuta! Here’s your knife!」, and someone poking my back, which made me scream.

「Uwahh!」

I thought a certain 「someone」 took the kitchen knife on the wall and stabbed me.

「Rimee, don’t do that! You can’t play with knives!」

「Eh? What’s the harm, there’s a sheath!」

I wiped away my cold sweat and grabbed the Santoku knife from Rimee Wu’s fingers.

「A-Alright then, I need to cut the meat. Can you help me take enough poitan for everyone? After the water in the pot boils, help me throw them all into the pot.」

「I got it! Leina sis, let's go to the food store!」

「Okay.」

After the two close sisters left, only me and my mistress was left in the stove room.

I patted away the pico leaves stuck to the thigh meat, and cut through the surface of the meat. I then stole a glance at Ai Fa.

My mistress was leaning against the wall, with her legs crossed and one knee raised high.

「... Seems like I won't be of any help.」

「That's not true! You are my mental support! I could only focus on cooking because you are sitting there watching over me!」

「... Why are you so flustered?」

I wasn't flustered. If I was, it must be due to your voice being colder and lower than usual.

However, this was a precious opportunity to talk with Ai Fa in private. Her icy gaze was scary, but I still shared the thoughts I was harbouring

in my heart.

「... The Wu clan is friendlier than expected. I thought they would be a more hot blooded tribe of hunters.」

「Who knows. Aside from Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu, this is the first time I met them too.」

「Ah, have you seen their men before?」

「... When Donda Wu came to my house to propose a marriage, he brought all three sons with him. If you want to meet hot blooded people, just wait til evening.」

「No, I don't really want to...」

We exchanged just these few words when the two close sisters came back.

They held something like a sieve in their hands which contained a pile of fake potato, which was poitan. Each of the fourteen people need two, so there was 28 in total.

That was why the sisters had another helper. It was the grey haired and plump old lady, Ditto Min Wu.

Sorry for the wait, I’m here to help… Ara, what a large piece of kiba leg meat.

Her face was filled with wrinkles, but she seemed well. She turned towards Ai Fa with a smile.

Ai Fa of House Fa, I heard that you watches over the Fa house by yourself. Did you hunt this kiba by yourself?

… Yes, that’s right.

Her tone might be cold, but Ai Fa still stood up politely and nodded.

That’s really impressive, didn’t the Fa house break off all relationships with the other families? I couldn’t imagine how a girl like you could defend your own home without relying on others.

… It’s not difficult. My father taught me how to hunt kiba. He taught me the important points on surviving in Forest’s Edge. I can live on without relying on anyone else.

Live alone and then die alone?

A smile appeared on the old lady’s face, as if she had seen through everything.

Ai Fa opened her mouth, but closed it without saying anything.

「If a woman is responsible for 「hunting kiba」, she can't bear and raise children, right? Live alone, die alone, and let the Fa house die out… Ai Fa of Fa house, are you satisfied about this?」

「… Many houses in Forest's Edge died out like this. Not everyone is as powerful as the Wu clan.」

「What? We aren't that capable. Leina, Rimee and I can't hunt kiba. No, even those men probably can't hunt kiba by themselves. Speaking of which, there are few who are as capable as you.」

「That's…」

「But the Fa house will die out, and the Wu bloodline will carry on, why is that… Maybe the Fa bloodline can be passed on too?」

「… What is Grandma Ditto Min talking about?」

The bored Rimee Wu who was poking the poitan asked me with a confused face.

The old lady looked my way and narrowed her eyes happily for some reason.

“Rimee, you will know after you grow up — the water is boiling.”

“Ah… I will put it in!”

When members of the same family address each other, they seem to omit the family name. Following Rimee Wu’s energetic announcement, she took a slim kitchen knife from the wall.

She then looked at the boiling pot and tilted her head confusedly.

“Isn’t there too little water? And you are cooking so many poitan with just one pot?”

“Yes, this is enough. If you want to eat the poitan you had yesterday, then throw it all in.”

“Okay!”

She took a poitan from the pile, slit on it with a knife, then threw it into the pot. As she was working through the pile, I was almost done with all the thigh meat.

I cut off the fats, and prepared to used it to cook. To make it more convenient to make mincemeat, I cut the red meat into adequate sizes. This wouldn’t take much time, the meat was just about 5kg.

Grandma Ditto Min turned to me and smiled this time.

“Asuta of House Fa, your knifework is more nimble than a woman’s.”

“That’s right. I’m actually an apprentice chef in the country I was from.”

“Is that so.”

When she heard my reply, Grandma Ditto Min narrowed her eyes.

“A woman who hunts kiba partnered with a man who is good at cooking. What an interesting combination. Looks like I shouldn’t say too much.”

“I agree, Grandma Ditto Min, it’s better to not meddle in other’s family affairs.”

Leina chided her in a childish tone.

This feels rather warming.

But I wasn’t too relaxed.

When I turned my heart out of concern for how Ai Fa was faring, the female head of our house just showed a displeased face.

Part 4

Alright then, time to switch up the mood and focus.

I had been disturbed by the noise around me since just now and letting it affect my work a little. This wouldn't do for me who was on the lowest rung of the chef hierarchy. Father would never permit me to use his Santoku knife while being this flustered.

「... Cooking poitan this way is simple. If this dish fits Grand elder Jiba Wu's taste, then everyone can try making it from tomorrow onwards.」

While I was announcing that, the poitan was boiling inside the iron pot. I stirred it with a ladle, careful to not let it burn. The poitan had turned rather gooey at this point.

「Sorry, but are you planning to boil it until all the water evaporates?」

Leina Wu asked.

When I nodded to affirm that, her big round eyes showed her confusion.

「But, won't the poitan turn into a mud-like solid? I think it's hard to eat that...」

"Ehh? Leina Wu, you tried cooking poitan like this before?"

Leina Wu showed a surprised expression momentarily, then her eyes sparkled.

"Yes! I tried many ways to make poitan more palatable, but everyone scolds me for wasting food."

For some reasons, she had a blissful smile on her face.

Why would she show such an expression at this juncture? Because I called her by her name for the first time? No, I need to focus, focus.

"Well then, I will leave the poitan to you, Leina Wu... It might be rude to ask, but do the people of Forest's Edge study cooking methods like this too?"

"Yes. We feel troubled after Grandma Jiba's body become like this... Can I let all the water evaporate?"

"Yes, be careful not to let it burn."

"Okay!"

There was still some time before evening, so let’s get the necessary task out of the way before then.

“Alright, first, I will prepare the kiba meat. The heat for this dish is hard to control. If possible, please remember this, it can be used on other dishes in the future too.”

After saying that, I opened the pack of chuck flap.

Rimee Wu then uttered: “Hmm.”

“The shape of this meat is strange! Is this really kiba meat?”

“Hmm? What’s strange? This is the meat from the back and shoulder of a kiba.”

“Ehh!? I never ate this type of meat before!”

“What? Your family have so many people, don’t you bring the entire kiba home?”

“We only bring the entire beast back in order to skin them. Asuta, we only eat their hind thigh meat.”

Grandma Ditto Min replied.

“Why? Your family is huge, there shouldn’t be enough thigh meat, right?”

“No, the men of Wu clan would hunt two kiba everyday. Even just taking the hind legs would be so much that we have to let some of these meat rot.”

“Two in just one day…”

I was shocked.

She was right. If one kiba is about 70kg, then the hind legs alone would be 20kg. Two kiba would be 40kg… Which couldn’t be consumed in one day. Even if you include the parts to be smoked, they would just need one leg.

But I realized one thing. One kiba’s tusks and horns could only be traded for 10 people’s worth of aria and poitan.

And since the Wu clan had a dozen people (and one baby), hunting one kiba a day wouldn’t be enough. There would be extra meat, but hunting two kiba would be the appropriate course of action.

And of course, I know that such a system would result in leftover meat. It was clear from the food store at my place too.

The kiba Ai Fa hunted six days ago still had about 45kg of meat left. After preserving it with pico leaves, it had shrunk to 40kg due to moisture loss. But Ai Fa and I could only eat one kilogram per day. As they could only be preserved for 20 days, I would need to smoke more than half of these meat.

And in the meantime, Ai Fa also need to hunt one kiba every five days for their tusks and horns. The carcass of the kiba she hunts during this time would be left in the forest as food for the wildlife there.

Smoking the meat I spent so much time to bleed out was such a waste. That was why I felt rather happy that I could expend 10kg of meat in one go — However, learning that even such a large family would only eat the kiba's thigh meat made me a little sad.

While I was slicing the chuck flap, I glanced at grandma Ditto Min before me who looked really happy.

"So after hunting the kiba, you will skin them, cut off their tusks, horns and hind legs, then throw the rest away?"

"Yes, and to prevent the people of Forest's Edge from getting them, we will toss them down the valley. Monta builds their nest at the bottom of the valleys, and will guide the spirit of the kiba back into the forest."

"... prevent the people of Forest's Edge from getting them?"

That’s right. If the people who can’t hunt kiba finds these meat, they will just live on the meat cast away by others. Then people without honour will appear in Forest’s Edge.

So that was the so called honour of Forest’s Edge.

Being from a different world, I couldn’t understand this.

The thing I disagree with the most — was how they treat the delicious chuck flap and pork belly like garbage! Maybe my values were a little weird.

If the men of such families get injured or become too old to hunt kiba, what will happen to them? I’m just asking for reference.

If anyone loses their strength, they will have to rely on their family. If their family is unable to render aid, they will need to rely on a more powerful clan. Even if they can’t hunt kiba, that person will have the right to eat kiba meat if he can assist in other jobs.

I see.

After hearing their explanation, I agreed with their ethical views a little more.

I understand now, thank you… After slicing the meat like this, we will

be mincing them with the knives.

I focused on cooking once again.

This wasn't the time for me to collect information.

We will use a big knife at first, it will be easier that way. Don't use too much force, use the weight of the knife itself to mince the meat evenly.

What is that!? It looks interesting! I want to try too!

Hmm…? Alright, I can let you handle it if it's just mincing meat.

There was still a lot of time left. I could still finish the job for her if need be, so there wasn't any problem. And they would need to do this themselves in the future, so I want to teach them how to cook delicious kiba meat as much as possible.

Uwah, it's all gooey, so fun!

Rimee Wu might sound like she was playing, but the way she handled the kitchen knife wasn't dangerous at all. She might be young, but she was used to helping with house chores.

E-Excuse me Asuta, I want to try it too!

And of course the only one who talked to me like this was Leina Wu. She turned her head and peeked at my hands as she stirred the poitan juice.

I reserved 7kg of meat to make hamburg steak for 14 people. She didn’t need to ask so desperately, she could mince as much as she wanted.

“Ah, the poitan is almost done. Erm, can we move the iron pot?”

“If we pass a stick through the pot handles, two people can move the pot together!”

“That’s great. Well then, Ai Fa…”

“I can move it move it.” Leina Wu smiled at me with a Krilee stick in hand.

In that case, then Ai Fa and Leina Wu… I considered it, but my instincts told me that I must not let the two of them work together.

And so, taking care not to get scalded, I picked up the handle on the side of the pot and pass the krilee stick through it. Leina Wu and I took some effort to carry the pot outside.

Ai Fa’s gaze wasn’t as icy as before, but after she spoke with Ditto Min, she turned quiet and her eyes were filled with sorrow.

I really hate seeing Ai Fa looking so depressed.

So, what should we do with this pot of thing?

Ah, we need to put it in a place with plenty of sun and let it dry. Let’s sprinkle some water on the outside of the pot to keep the poitan from getting burnt.

Okay!

Although Ai Fa made me feel uneasy, the work ethics of the girl named Leina Wu was worthy of respect. She worked quickly and understand things fast, able to infer further things from my teachings. Rimee was this way too, she really wants to learn these skills quickly for the sake of grandma Jiba.

After we brought the poitan outside the room, I let Leina try cutting the meat, and she performed even better than Rimee Wu. The meat was minced so well that I didn’t need to mince it any further.

As there were several knives, the 7kg of kiba meat was turned into a pink pile in no time after Ditto Min entered the fray.

They were really an excellent class of students.

Hmm? Asuta! There are more meat here! Don’t we need to make them gooey too?

Ah, just keep those meat like that. I need to use it for other dishes.

Since she had problems with her teeth, I think I should prepare a soup. Aside from the 7kg of meat for hamburg steak, I need 3kg of chuck flap for that. When she heard what I said, Rimee Wu pouted:

Tch!

I reversed the order, but we will need to deal with the aria next. I also need other ingredients, so Rimee Wu, can you bring me to the food store?

Yes!

Ahh, can you help me start the fire in the other stove…? Ai Fa help me carry the things.

Ai Fa left the wall lethargically.

We handed the stove over to grandma Ditto Min, and the four of us headed to the food store.

There were three doors in this house, from right to left was the stove room, the food store and the dismembering room.

We opened the center door and stepped inside under Rimee Wu’s lead. I let out a sigh in awe.

I never expected the inside to be such a scene.

It was filled with unfamiliar ingredients.

“What are these? This is incredible, it’s like a treasure trove!”

I shouted upon seeing this sight.

Cupboards without any doors lined the space inside this 8 tatami big room. There were pumpkin-like fruits that was as red as a tomato. A green vegetable with leaves arranged like a rose. A mysterious bundle that looked like a coiled snake. Aside from these, there was a green skinned fruit with durian like thorns — anyway, it was filled with ingredients that weren’t aria or poitan.

The familiar pico leaves and lilo leaves hung on the wall. However, there was a plant about two meters tall leaning on the wall, right beside these herbs. It was as thick as a bamboo, and full of wool like a burdock. Something that looked like dried yellow persimmon was also hanging on the wall.

I couldn’t see any kiba meat. There was a door inside the room, that was probably the meat store.

The eight tatami wide space was filled with ingredients I had never seen before, it was like a paradise.

「Asuta! Here are the arias!」

Rimee Wu moved quickly between the shelves and ran to the right side of the room.

There was a large number of aria and poitan there.

「... There are so many vegetables in this world.」

「World...? Yes! If you throw them into the pot, the taste will change too, it’s interesting! I like Tarapa. Leina likes Tino leaves!」

「But Rimee Wu, humans will be able to live just by eating aria and poitan.」

「Hmm? Yes, I think that’s true! But you will get sick of the taste if you eat the same thing every day, right?」

I see, these ingredients were probably luxury items, only powerful clans

could afford them.

No — these ingredients should be full of nutrients. Even if they were luxurious food, it also served as proper food and not just for indulgence.

By the way, aside from Rimee Wu and Lala Wu, the other women had fleshy bodies and looked very healthy.

Ever since I realized that poitan was a cereal, I thought the only vegetable in this world was aria and was a little depressed. From the looks of things, the women of the Wu clan supplement their nutrients by eating other vegetables.

But… In the end, no matter which vegetable, they are just tossed into the kiba pot along with the poitan, right? What a waste.

With so many ingredients, just how sumptuous of a meal could be made!? Just thinking about it made me tremble from excitement.

「If you wished to, you can use any of the ingredients here.」

Leina Wu smiled faintly at me.

When I heard her say that, I felt tempted, but I still rejected her firmly.

"I don't have time to taste test them. It's a pity, but let's not use these ingredients for now. If I use unfamiliar ingredients and destroy the taste of the dish, then it would be a waste of effort."

I already spent four days to research poitan after all. My honour as a chef and Ai Fa's feelings were at stake today, I couldn't take the risk.

Speaking of which… I turned towards Ai Fa, and the mistress of my house was glaring fiercely at those things with a cold expression.

… That's right. We need to hunt a kiba every five days to secure the minimum amount of food. It's useless to envy people who are better off than we are.

I grow up in a family that operates an economical restaurant, ingredients like caviar or foie gras. Commoners didn't need to eat such extravagant food. I thought that way to change my mood.

<TL: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caviar, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foie_gras >

And so, we carried enough aria for fourteen people, pottery bottles of fruit wine and a bag of rock salt and left the food store.

At this moment —

They appeared.

What the hell is this? Kiba feces? Don’t block the path with that thing!

A hoarse voice came like thunder from inside the room, which hurts my ear.

A hint of tension flashed across Ai Fa’s face.

Hmm? Daddy Donda, welcome home! You are back early today!

With a bottle in her arms, Rimee Wu ran towards the voice with a cheerful shout.

The moment we stepped out of the food store, four men with intense feral aura appeared before us.

A burly man stood at the very front, looking unhappily at the pot filled with cooked poitan placed along the pathway. That man looked over Rimee Wu’s head and glared at us.

Ho, so you’re that outsider at Fa House? Everyone says your skin is white, so you’re actually a weak pale skinned brat huh!

The burly man had a face full of beard, even his breathing was like a beast—

And that man was of course the head of the Wu clan, the father of Rimee Wu and the others, Donda Wu.

Vol. 1 :

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Part 1

The group of men had an incredible aura about them.

They were the four men of the Wu clan.

Standing at the front was probably the clan head Donda Wu. Judging from both age and his demeanour, that should be him. He was above 180cm tall, and should be over 90kg.

He had a cape made from kiba fur, a sleeveless shirt and a piece of cloth tied around his waist. Around his neck was a necklace with a huge amount of tusks and horns. On his feet were shoes tied with strings, and he also had a large sabre and a knife — The four of them were dressed similarly.

But Donda Wu was exceptionally imposing.

Be it his arms, shoulders, thighs and calves, his muscles bulged like mountain ranges. His chest muscles were incredibly thick, and his waist looked powerful, just like a tree trunk.

His appearance was imposing too, his messy dark brown hair looked rough like a kiba, and a beard covered the lower half of his face. His eyes, mouth and nose were large, and the wrinkles on his face were as deep as cracks on boulders.

He was getting on in years, but his blue eyes were full of spirit. His large body that look as if it was carved from stone was brimming in life and give off a real sense of pressure to others.

If I had to describe him in one sentence — This large burly man was just like a kiba in human form.

In contrast...

The men behind him felt more like human.

Especially the one standing to Donda Wu’s right, he felt gentle and kind.

He wasn’t as bulky as his father, but his body was still solidly built. His arms was as thick as my calf, and he was carrying a 50kg young kiba with one arm easily.

That man had a similar face as his father, as hard as a boulder. But his brown hair was shaved really short, and his eyes were narrowed to a slit as if he was smiling. He had a very calm expression.

He might look gentle and kind, but his large body emitted an intangible prowess different from his father. I had a faint feeling that I must not anger this man.

He was a bit old too, while the other two men were younger.

One of them should be a few years older than me. He had a tall built and solid muscles, like a young wolf.

His face was a bit long and the bridge of his nose was high, with his mouth shut in a serious manner. He was handsome with black hair seldom seen in the settlement, and his long hair tied behind his neck.

However… his narrow eyes under his thin brows had a beast-like light about them, very similar to his father. In terms of the aura emitted, he resembled his father the most.

The last boy was younger than me. In my world, he would be in middle school.

Slightly shorter than me, he was slender when compared to the other men, but didn’t feel weak at all. He was carrying a kiba that weighs

about 100kg with a krilee stick together with the younger man I mentioned earlier.

He had mid length yellowish brown hair, with eye colours that was lighter than his hair. If not for his delinquent-like rebellious expression, he could be considered cute. The red haired girl who received Ai Fa’s cape reluctantly resembles him a lot.

By the way, while carrying the kiba on one shoulder, he slung a bow and quiver on his other shoulder. This was the first time I see someone from this world carrying this weapon.

Anyway — This were the men of Wu clan.

Clan head Donda Wu and his three sons.

Oh Rimee, what a considerate wa

y of welcoming me.

Rimee’s father picked up the fruit wine his daughter was carrying with his stout fingers.

Ah, you can’t, that is for culinary use!

Hmmp! Culinary? Don’t use those smartass terms.

Donda Wu had white and tough teeth, just like a kiba. He bit off the cork off the bottle, and swig the red fluid down his throat.

Fruit wine wasn't as concentrated as red wine, but it still had a substantial amount of alcohol content. He emptied it in one go and tossed the bottle by his feet.

"Yo, the female hunter of House Fa. We haven't met since your dad died two years ago. It's been a long time, aren't you even going to greet me?"

His glowing eyes stared at Ai Fa.

Ai Fa pushed me behind and walked to the front of that burly man.

"Head of the Wu clan Donda Wu, long time no see… On Rimee Wu's bequest, my family member Asuta and I are here as temporary caretakers of the Wu clan's hearth."

"Hmmp, you're an unlikable brat as usual. If your eyes didn't look so sharp, you would be a beauty just like your mother."

Donda Wu had a large face, looking just like a cross between a kiba and a lion. He leaned his face near Ai Fa's nose.

"You are actually wearing the horns of a kiba like a man. But no matter

how brave you are, you are still a weak girl, seems like you still can’t understand this, huh? Ai Fa of house Fa?

I will watch over my home as the head of house Fa. I already told you that two years ago.

I was surprised by how unfazed Ai Fa was in the face of such a scary man.

I couldn’t see Ai Fa’s expression from the angle I was standing from. But a fire that could rival Donda Wu was probably burning in her eyes.

This was like a scene of a wild cat facing off against a horde of kiba.

Hah! Darum, how about it? Why don’t you marry into the Fa house then? Then the Fa lineage will carry on. But you will need to be the hearth caretaker and raise the children then!

The burly man leaned back and laughed thunderously.

The second youngest man who had eyes just like his father reacted.

His eyes that had a dangerous gleam turned towards Ai Fa, his gaze filled obviously with mockery.

She has eyes like a beast, I don’t want to marry such a woman. No, that’s not a man or a woman, just a garbage.

When I heard that, I wanted to step forward on reflex.

But Ai Fa who was standing diagonally before me, restraint me quickly.

"We still need to prepare dinner. We will talk after it's done."

"That's right! We are about to start cooking! Don't bother me!"

In the eyes of a daughter, this beast like giant was just a father. Rimee yelled as she waved the empty bottle around without any fear at all.

On the other hand, Leina Wu held the sieve with the aria as she looked troubledly at the men facing off with Ai Fa. After looking at his daughters, Donda Wu turned and left with a "Hah!"

"All of you are really ridiculous. Delaying your other work in order to prepare dinner so early? It's just eating the life of the kiba, there is no need for unnecessary work!"

"I already told you! We are cooking for the sake of grandma Jiba! Asuta's food is soft and delicious!"

The next moment, Donda Wu turned his back to his furious youngest daughter and changed his tone a little.

…If we can’t consume the meat of the kiba, only death awaits the denizens of Forest’s Edge. Even a Wu or the greatest grand elder can’t violate the law of the forest.

His giant figure walked away slowly.

And then, something incredible happened.

Rimee Wu kicked her father’s back.

Daddy Donda you dummy! Why did you say something so mean to grandma Jiba!? You also cherish her a lot!

That’s right! Grandma Jiba is the grand elder of the entire Forest’s Edge, not just the Wu clan. How can the Wu clan head say something so reckless?

Even Leina Wu yelled at her father’s back with teary eyes.

…Hmmp. Donda Wu grunted disinterestedly and disappeared into the depths of the building.

Alright, let’s take care of the kiba meat.

Someone said nonchalantly with a deep voice.

The dangerous atmosphere chilled down.

Ah, I haven't introduced myself. I'm the eldest son of the Wu clan, Jiza Wu. Ai Fa and Asuta of house Fa, I am very grateful to you two for making a trip here for grand elder Jiba Wu's sake.

And of course, the one who spoke was the tall man who looked kind with narrow eyes .

... But the Wu clan handing over the caretaking of the hearth to an outsider is an important event, right on the level of us offering our blades to the western god selva. I beg your understanding that our clan head Donda Wu can't just welcome you without any reservation.

Hmmp! Father always spoils that brat Rimee too much!

The youngest boy with yellowish brown hair commented.

Rimee Wu glared at him immediately.

What, you wanna fight? Bratty Ludo!?

The boy and the girl glared at each other like two puppies.

Compared to that scene earlier, this was much more heartwarming.

This shorter boy is my youngest brother, Ludo Wu. And this is the second son, Darum Wu. Jiba Wu's condition hurts all of our hearts. If you can save Jiba Wu's soul, we will show you our utmost gratitude and respect.

He smiled slowly.

However, I couldn't read his emotions because his eyes were narrowed to a slit.

... But if you harm the Wu clan's hearth or the lives of the Wu clan, we will have to cross swords. I hope you can keep that in mind. I will take my leave... Let's go, Darum, Ludo.

The three brothers went into the dismembering room with the two kiba.

I sighed in relief after their figures were completely gone.

Ara... They sure are intimidating. This is the first time I have seen the men of Forest's Edge from up close. Is everyone like them?

... The Wu clan is exceptionally powerful in the Forest's Edge settlement. It is only natural that the men who supports the entire clan

is extraordinary.

It had been a while since Ai Fa looked at me straight in the eye like this.

Asuta, you can’t back down now even if you’re scared.

Don’t worry, I live under the same roof with a scary mistress, so I’m used to it… that stings.

She kicked my leg.

That old man might be scary, but the most intimidating should be the eldest son. But what he said did stir up my fighting spirit.

When I said that, the two close sisters looked my way at the same time.

Asuta, you’re amazing!

Ehh?

Jiza-Nii is the most scary when he gets mad. If Jiza-Nii scolds me now, I will definitely cry like a child.

<TL: Nii suffix means older brother>

「I-I see.」

「Also… When Rimee Wu wants to invite you and Ai Fa to our place, the one who objects most vehemently wasn't father, but Jiza-Nii. Jiza adheres to rules strictly, he can't accept outsiders caretaking the hearth in our house.」

「… Thank you for your valuable information. My fighting spirit is burning more intensely now.」

I felt like scratching my head, but I couldn't do that with my hands full of aria.

「Well then… Rimee Wu, are there more fruit wine in the food store? To be honest, it will be bad if there isn't any.」

「Don't worry! There're loads! Father will drink 3 or 4 every day. We need to trade for it in the post station frequently, it's so tiring!」

Excellent, looks like I could safeguard my head.

No matter what, the things I needed to do remained the same. To use the ingredients I have to cook the best dish I could.

Not just grandma Jiba, I also need to make that father who is as large as a kiba, and that big brother who looks kind but is actually the hidden

boss, speechless. Or else my life will be at peril...

With such a strong clan head and successor, I think the Wu clan's future would be smooth sailing.

Ah, speaking of which...

This wasn't the first time I met a man in Forest's Edge.

That first night when I came into this different world, didn't I encounter a burly man?

That burly man once visited Ai Fa who was depressed because of her father's death with ulterior motives. He was beaten up badly and thrown by Ai Fa into the river.

... That's the successor of the Tsun clan?

In that case, the match was already decided if war ever breaks out between the two clans, right?

I thought about these things and returned to the stove room with the other women and my mistress.

Part 2

「Ara… have you already finished dinner preparation…?」

When this person appeared, the dinner preparation was heading into its climax.

Right now — We have prepared the aria and kiba meat soup. The poitan for everyone had been grilled, and we were about to start grilling the hamburg steak and aria.

「Oh? What is it, Vena? It’s rare seeing you in the stove room when you’re not on duty.」

Ditto Min who was in the kitchen with everyone turned her head back.

The person standing at the entrance looking at us — was the eldest sister of the Wu clan, Vena. She twirled her long brown hair lazily and revealed a sexy smile.

「I didn’t have any task at hand right now, so I came to take a look… But seems like my help isn’t needed…」

As she could see, dinner preparation was almost complete even though there was still some time before sunset.

Rimee Wu, Leina Wu and grandma Ditto Min were more efficient than I expected, so work progressed this quickly.

This was a good miscalculation.

"After that, we just need to grill the kiba meat and we will be done, no problem…! Vena-Nee, you will burn it if I leave it to you, so no thanks."

"Rimee, don't say that… we have guests…"

Vena Wu squirmed her elegant body bashfully.

This big sister was one sexy girl.

"But, I'm a bit worried… Father Donda looked even more unhappier than yesterday…?"

"Ignore him! Ai Fa and Asuta only took this tedious job for the sake of grandma Jiba!"

Rimee Wu stood beside Ai Fa and said with her cheeks puffed out.

By the way, Leina Wu stood beside me.

Vena Wu's crimson eyes looked between me and the second daughter of the Wu clan.

「That might be so, but if you incur the wrath of father Donda and Jiza-Nii, things will become complicated… What do you think, Leina…?」

「It will be fine. Asuta's cooking is amazing! I think grandma Jiba will be happy to eat it!」

Leina Wu announced. Her eyes was filled with her confidence in me, which made me embarrassed.

「Hmm…」

Vena Wu muttered as she looked at her sister, then revealed a cheerful smile.

「Since Leina who is good at caretaking the hearth said that, I can be at ease… But what is that pile of thing over there…?」

「Ah, that's poitan. After cooking the poitan, I dried it under the sun. After dissolving it in water and grilling it, it become like this.」

When she heard my answer, Vena's droopy eyes opened wide.

「This is poitan…? The shape of these meat is also strange…」

"This is because we minced the kiba meat before kneading them into this round shape. The tough kiba meat will turn soft like this."

Vena Wu muttered "Hmm..." again after hearing my reply, and fell into deep thought.

"I have never seen such strange dishes even in the Genos post station... You really are from a nation far far away..."

"Yes, this is a common way of cooking in the place where I was born."

After I answered like that, I turned towards Leina Wu beside me.

"But it should be difficult to remember this cooking method in just one day. From tomorrow onwards, you can just mince the meat like this and toss them directly into the soup."

"Tossing the minced meat into the soup?"

"Yes, if you do that, you don't need to chew much. You can just drink the soup together with the meat. You can grill the meat before adding it into the soup, it will add more flavour and make the soup tastier."

"After mincing the meat, grill it a little then add it into the soup? Do we need to cook it over a slow fire like today?"

Yes. Add in the minced meat and aria at the very end, but add in the sliced meat at the beginning and cook with a slow fire. You can then get the essence release by two types of meat, making the stock more delicious.

I see. Thank you… Asuta, you are really knowledgeable, that surprises me.

Not at all, my family makes a living through cooking, so I would know a little about this.

Her gaze filled with respect only made me feel embarrassed, and even a little painful. I was just a half assed apprentice chef.

However, since grandma Jiba who Ai Fa treasured so deeply had turned so frail, I have to work hard so she could find joy in eating again.

Eating is for the sake of survival — Ai Fa once told me that.

Even though this brave and simple tribe didn't care about how food tastes, they would be able to derive joy from it if they just paid a little more attention from eating.

Ai Fa and Rimee Wu both complimented the food I made, saying it's delicious.

They acknowledged the value of tasty food, and experience it’s joy too.

In that case, even though I was raised in a completely different environment and had vastly different values would be of use too.

I didn’t know whether my arrival in this world was a prank by fate, but I want to live on here while maintaining my own way of doing things.

Culinary skills were the only thing I was proficient in. If my abilities could help a person Ai Fa treasures live a serene and fulfilled life, it would fill me with the utmost joy.

“Hmm…”

As I was thinking that — Vena Wu moaned at the same time and muttered:

“Asuta, you’re really an unfathomable man… I heard the chef profession only exists in cities surrounded by stone walls…”

“I’m not born in an incredibly prosperous city though. This is probably just the difference in culture between our worlds.”

What was Vena Wu’s objective?

The men led by Donda Wu showed clear hostility. I didn’t feel that from Vena, and she didn’t seem to be to guarded towards me. However — I have a feeling that she was observing me very calmly.

"But I don't know anything about cooking… If grandma Jiba can feel the joy of living, I will be very glad… Please work hard then…?"

Vena Wu left after saying these words.

After the source of excessive pheromones left, I sighed in relief.

"The lady named Vena Wu is an incredible person."

"That's right, of the seven siblings, she is the most eccentric."

Grandma Ditto Min's tone became friendlier and answered me spryly.

"She isn't a bad kid, but it's hard to tell what she is thinking at times. Although she is already twenty, there's still no sign of her marriage."

"I see, that's strange since she is a very charming woman."

The instant I said that, everyone's gaze gathered from all directions.

Well, there was just five people including me in the stove room, so all directions might be too much of an exaggeration.

"…Asuta, so you think Vena-Nee is very charming."

One of the five people, Leina Wu looked at me with very sad eyes.

"Hmm? No, I'm not commenting subjective based on my perspective, I'm saying this from the view of normal people."

"... Yes. Although she is my family, I think she is charming too."

Then why did she looked at me with those eyes just now?

"But Vena-Nee is already twenty though. Asuta, you're seventeen just like Ai Fa, right?" Rimee Wu said.

Surprise was written all over her face.

"T-This has nothing to do with my age, right? By the way, why're you paying so much attention to my words? I don't understand."

"... If you compliment a woman so openly, everyone will think you intend to take her as your wife."

Even Ai Fa who had been quiet all this while said such things to me.

I couldn't rebuke her icy tone and gaze, and changed my attitude immediately.

So that’s what’s going on. That was rude of me. I still don’t know the etiquettes of Forest’s Edge well, please forgive me… I don’t mean anything else when I said that.

Don’t worry, of course we won’t mind hearing you compliment our family.

Despite what grandma Ditto Min said, Leina Wu still showed a sorrowful face, while Rimee Wu stared at me incredulously. Ai Fa averted her face and seemed to be in a bad mood.

I really don’t mean it…

Considering my current circumstances, I didn’t have the mood for romance.

But this was a different world.

Their concept of love and marriage would probably be very different from my world, so I have to be more careful.

But no matter what—

Right now, Ai Fa was the only one in my heart.

What was this feeling then? The urge to repay my benefactor? A sense of closeness that develops naturally towards a housemate living under the same roof? Respect for her kind personality? I couldn’t figure it out myself.

However — I wanted to live a proper life in this world because Ai Fa was here.

There was no question about that.

“… Well then, let’s begin the last job.”

Following my announcement life returned to everyone’s faces as they snapped out of their pondering expression, and they looked dependable and cheerful.

We were from different families and circumstances, but we worked together towards the same goal.

For Jiba Wu — the grand elder of the whole Forest’s Edge to regain peace in her heart.

Part 3

It was finally time for the match.

Dusk, the time between day and night.

Inside the large hall within the Wu main house, candles were lit in all directions.

Accompanied by Leina Wu, the grand elder of the Wu clan Jiba Wu appeared with unsteady steps — And so, everyone was present.

This hall was about 20 tatami mats large, roughly twice the size of Ai Fa's house.

The room setup was not much different from Ai Fa's place, but many items adorned the walls in the hall. The men's blade and bows, fur capes and a spear-like weapon with a short handle all hung on the hooks made from kiba bones.

The clan head sat in the seat of honour, with a monstrous kiba hide hung behind him, as well as an ominous looking skull.

This Kiba was gigantic, it should weigh several hundreds of kilogram when it was still alive.

As a chef, I wouldn't be fazed even if I saw the hide or skeletons of animals. But that piece of hide was incredibly big it struck fear into my heart.

Hmmp, everyone's present.

Donda Wu took generous swigs from his fruit wine bottle as he said haughtily.

Jiba Wu sat down carefully beside him.

She looked really small probably because the man beside her was too massive.

Aside from the long dress married women would wear, she had a something like a shawl draped over her shoulders. She also had decorative items on her that seemed to be related to witchcraft. Her body had shrivelled so much that she looked like a piece of dried fruit.

Her back was hunched, so I couldn't tell her height, but she was definitely more petite than Leina Wu. Her head covered in silver hair was about the same size as Rimee Wu.

Jiba Wu's hair that had lost its colour pigment was tied into two low pigtails, similar to Leina Wu beside her. Her face was just like a monkey with plenty of wrinkles. I couldn't tell where her eyes were as she had too many wrinkles.

Her slim fingers extending out from her shawl was weak and boney like dried twigs. Her existence was as frail as a fog in the open plain. As if she would crumple if Leina Wu who was sitting down with her was to let go.

… Fortunately, she still have the strength to walk.

But letting an old lady eat meals centered around meat was asking for a bit too much.

But the die had been cast. We could only await the results.

Two longish stove was situated inside the hall, and the iron pot on the stove was making cute bobbling sound. These small stoves were not meant for cooking, but to keep the food warm.

Cooking wasn’t done in the hall, and the food store was situated in another building, so there wasn’t any smell of fats in the room. Hence, the fragrance of the food we cooked filled the room.

Fourteen people sat around the stove in an oval

At the top of the oval, which is the seat of honour, were Donda Wu and the grand elder Jiba.

Ai Fa and I were seated opposite the two of them some distance away, at the seat of least honour.

From my perspective, to my right were the three brothers, Jiza, Darum and Ludo.

Further in were the third sister Lala and youngest sister Rimee.

To my right was the wife of the previous clan head grandma Ditto Min, spouse of the clan head Mia Lei, wife of the eldest son, Sati Lei, and the eldest daughter Vena. To the left of Vena were Leina Wu's utensils.

Leina Wu was the representative of the hearth caretaking group today, and needed to help Jiba Wu eat. She could only dine after her work was done. Not just today, someone needed to take on this task every day. The elderly Jiba Wu was too weak, and couldn't eat by herself.

By the way, behind Sati Lei Wu was her baby, Kota Wu, who was sleeping soundly in a crib.

…We offer thanks for the forest's grace…

Even though Donda Wu looked like a beast he still announced with a serious tone.

He placed the fingers on his left hand that was as thick as a baseball glove before his mouth that was covered by his beard.

…We offer thanks to Sati Min, Leina, Rimee, Ai Fa and Asuta for tending the fire in the hearth, so our lives can be extended tonight…

Everyone repeated what he said, and drew a horizontal line with their fingertips.

This action — was exactly the same as what Ai Fa did every night before dinner.

Ai Fa always said it softly, so I couldn’t hear what she said. So she was praying to god like this.

The thought that Ai Fa had been saying my name secretly every night made a weird feeling rose up in my heart.

And then—

After the short prayer ended, everyone started eating suddenly.

They didn’t even wait for me and Ai Fa to pick up our spoons. If we had poisoned the food, they would be dead now.

They believed that we wouldn’t do that — This was what 「tending the hearth」 meant.

That was why we couldn’t afford to fail.

Specifically, I couldn’t fail.

The five of us cooked this meal, but I was the one in charge. If there was any problem with dinner tonight, I would need to take full responsibility. Even if they spoke up for me, I was still prepared to take all responsibility for this.

I wouldn’t like anyone else be harmed, be it Rimee Wu, Leina Wu or Ditto Min Wu — And of course, Ai Fa too.

Please, Leina Wu. Help grandma Jiba.

I finally reached for the utensils as I cheered Leina Wu on in my heart. She was a few metres away from me, right next to grandma Jiba.

I made the same dish as last night as per Rimee Wu’s request.

The menu was □Kiba hamburg steak with fruit wine sauce and a side of grilled aria□.

However, on top of the □grilled poitan□, I also prepared □kiba meat soup□.

As the soup wasn’t the main dish, I reduced the amount of meat and aria in them. This soup was meant to complement the main dish. Right now, the iron pot being heated up was filled with this soup.

After the pre meal prayers had been said, everyone started eating in silence. Grandma Ditto Min stood up immediately and poured soup into everyone’s bowl.

During this time, Leina Wu who was beside grandma Jiba remained still.

Everything was going according to my plan.

I used this chance to check how dinner was and observed everyone’s reaction — Simply put, everyone was just moving their spoons quietly.

Before dinner, when the five people in charge of cooking started filling the plates and serving them, everyone yelled loudly like Rimee Wu did yesterday. □What is this?□□Is this kiba?□□What is this flat thing?□. But after my simple explanation about the dishes, I taught them how to eat these and what to look out for and they turned silent. The atmosphere was like a farewell party.

Some of them looked very unhappy, some were excited, some had sparkling eyes and those who decided to keep a straight face throughout. Their reaction all varied, but they were all very quiet as they waited for Jiba Wu to take her seat.

Then everyone turned quiet and concentrated on moving their spoons a little too anxiously.

Kiba hamburg steak, aria and kiba meat soup and grilled poitan. These three dishes was one set meal.

As the women had less appetite than men, I adjusted the portion when I was cooking. The hamburg steak for women used about 300g of minced meat, while the 700g was used for men. Ai Fa and I had normal 500g portions. Grandma Jiba had a smaller portion of about 200g.

Worth mentioning was that these weren't mini hamburg steak, but normal sized ones.

As there were several stoves in the Wu clan, I could cook hamburg steak in a normal way. I started by grilling the surface of the steak with a strong fire, then cook it thoroughly with a small flame. The women had one piece of steak, while the men's 700g steak was divided into two pieces. Every steak was thick and filling.

In the end, I still use fruit wine to steam them to add flavour. However, the decision to change the size of the steak made this product vastly different from yesterday. 「The hamburg steak not being thick enough」 was the only thing I was dissatisfied about yesterday, and I have finally overcome this.

This was the right call. The hamburg steak increased to about 3cm thick, and was juicier than the steak I made yesterday. As a bigger portion of it wasn't grilled, it was more tender and juicy.

I was very satisfied by this dish.

As for the Wu clan — They remained silent as expected.

Some of them had a sour face like they did before the meal, some were smiling happily and some turned expressionless. There were all sorts of reactions, but no one expressed their views. Ai Fa was like this too, maybe they weren't used to chatting during meals.

By the way, the representative of the sour faces was the clan head Donda Wu. The representative of the happy faces was the eldest daughter Vena Wu, and the representative of the expressionless group was the second son Darum. The others could probably be categorized under being expressionless.

And of course, Rimee Wu eating nonstop with a big smile, but her blue eyes would turn grandma Jiba's way every now and then.

"Grandma Jiba, time for dinner. The dish today is very special. Our guests helped us cook a delicious meal."

Leina Wu said as she moved her spoon towards grandma Jiba's mouth.

In the spoon was kiba meat soup. Leina tore off a piece of poitan and soaked it into the soup.

This was a method I thought up.

"This meat is soft, grandma Jiba should be able to eat this!" Even though Rimee Wu said this encouragingly, I was from another world, and thought that "hamburg steak is too greasy for an eighty year old grandma".

So I decided to take it step by step.

First, let her eat the poitan soaked in soup.

Then the aria in the soup.

When both were done, then move on to the □kiba steak□.

But the hamburg steak has to be soaked in the soup. That way, the minced meat would dissolve in her mouth even without chewing.

When she had tried all of the above, and she could eat the normal hamburg steak, then just feed it to her.

I didn’t know how many teeth grandma Jiba had left. If she couldn’t eat it, I don’t think it’s necessary to feed her hamburg steak.

Hence, I prepared the □kiba meat soup□.

I served this dish for grandma Jiba’s sake.

In terms of menu planning, it would be better to have a soup complement the meal, and I think the others would be able to enjoy this soup too.

However, this soup was still specially made for grandma Jiba.

I sliced the aria thinner than what I preferrred, and boiled it until it was so soft i couldn’t feel the texture. As I used a lot of kiba meat on the hamburg steak, I only used a little meat for the soup.

The purpose of the kiba meat soup was to soften the poitan and hamburg steak.

This was actually the dish I prepared specially for grandma Jiba.

Ah… Rimee Wu gasped.

I noticed it too.

Grandma Jiba kept shaking her head unhappy no matter how Leina Wu coaxed her. But she seemed to have given up now, and started sipping the soup in the spoon.

It’s tasty, right? There’s still plenty more.

Leina Wu said happily as she tore another piece of poitan and tossed it into the bowl.

But grandma Jiba didn’t react.

It might be rude to say this, but she seemed to have ascended to the heavens after that mouthful — And didn’t move at all.

“What’s the matter? It’s tasty, right? This is made by Rimee, grandma Ditto Min and me.”

Leina Wu seemed a little anxious and moved the spoon a bit forcefully near the old lady’s mouth.

No, there’s no need to rush. Let her eat at her own pace. As I said that in my heart — Grandma Jiba’s mouth opened slightly.

Leina Wu seemed relieved as she pushed the spoon into the mouth that looked like a crack in the ground.

“Well then, how about some aria? It’s soft and delicious too.”

When we were cooking, Leina Wu tried all the dishes.

This was my suggestion. If we want to coax grandma Jiba who didn’t want to eat, it would be better for the one feeding her to know how it tastes.

“Asuta put in so much thought for the sake of grandma Jiba you have never met before…” Although Leina Wu’s eyes had turned red, as a chef, I think this was only natural.

I was also doing this for the sake of Rimee Wu and Ai Fa who cares about grandma Jiba. And as a chef, I also hope everyone can enjoy the dish I prepared. If a chef didn’t consider all these, then he wasn’t fit to be a chef.

“It’s delicious right? How about some meat? The meat is also very soft.”

Leina Wu finally reached for the “kiba steak” with her spoon, and soaked about a half mouthful into the soup.

How would Jiba find it?

I cut the aria in the hamburg steak a little smaller than usual, but it was cooked in basically the same way.

I instructed Leina Wu to avoid the slightly charred surface, and feed grandma Jiba the tender meat inside the steak as much as possible. But if all her teeth had fallen off, she might choke on the minced meat and aria. I warned Leina Wu on the danger of this very clearly.

Leina Wu sent the meat and soup into grandma Jiba’s mouth.

Her wrinkled mouth moved slowly.

And then—

A clear liquid flowed from where her eyes should be.

“This meat is delicious… Is this really kiba meat…?”

Grandma jiba’s raspy voice reverberated inside the quiet hall.

Part 4

“Yes, this is kiba meat. It’s tasty, right? Please have some more.”

Leina Wu’s voice was choking a little.

Rimee Wu and the others held their plates and wept quietly.

And Ai Fa —

Stopped eating and lowered her head slightly with her eyes closed.

“Well then, let’s try eating just the meat. The red gravy is fruit wine essence, it’s very sweet and tasty.”

After a few mouthful of meat soaked in soup, Leina Wu cut off the “Hamburg steak” directly and sent it into the old lady’s mouth.

All her front teeth had probably fallen off. Grandma Jiba opened his black hole like mouth and ate the 「kiba steak」.

She chewed the meat, her jaws gradually moving more and more powerfully.

「This is really delicious… Really delicious. Kiba is actually so tasty…」

「What's so good about this thing? It's as soft as rotten meat, not fit to be eaten by humans!」

An angry roar erupted in the hall.

It was the clan head Donda Wu.

Donda Wu finished his meal faster than anyone else, then threw the empty plate onto the floor and took large swigs of fruit wine.

「Adding the fruit wine into the dish makes it disgustingly sweet. The aria is soggy as if it's rotten! Hey! You say this isn't just kiba thigh meat, you also used meat from the shoulder and back too, right?」

Donda Wu was furious, his face which was as hard as a boulder squeezed out a vicious wrinkle.

"Only Monta that feast on rotten meat will eat the torso of the kiba! You think we are beasts lurking in the forest!? We are humans! We are honourable and proud hunters of Forest's Edge! And you're making us eat Monta feed!? What are you thinking!?"

"You are really a noisy child… Aren't behaving like you did before becoming clan head…?"

Grandma Jiba's eyes that were hidden behind her wrinkles looked slowly towards the clan head.

Donda Wu might be the clan head — But he was also the grandson of the grand elder.

The burly man glared at the old lady who was less than half his size.

"… If this is the food of Monta, than the Monta is more high class than humans… But maybe that is the truth of this forest…"

I wasn't sure if it was my imagination, but the old lady's voice seemed to have more strength in them.

"… Clan head Donda, it's fine for you to think this way. Everyone is free to decide what is right or wrong… but for your grandmother, this meat is fine…"

Amazing… Grandma Jiba is talking spiritedly like before…

Rimee Wu muttered.

Grandma Jiba’s eyes which I couldn’t discern the whereabouts of, turned toward Rimee this time.

Rimee helped in this dish too huh… It tastes wonderful. Thank you, Rimee…

You’re welcome!

Rimee Wu shook her head hard and shoved the rest of her hamburg steak into her mouth in tears.

After looking at Rimee for a while, grandma Jiba asked: Ai Fa… where are you?

The shoulders of Ai Fa who was beside me quivered.

I’m sorry, but my eyes are getting bad. I can’t see anything in this dim light… If you’re here, can you come over so I can look at you…?

Hey.

As Ai Fa didn’t move, I elbowed her sides.

Ai Fa glared at me and stood up slowly… But for some reason, she grabbed my wrist tightly.

“Huh? Hey? Wait!!” I yelled as I put my bowl of soup onto the ground.

She pulled me with a strength that refused me to break her restraint, and made me kneel beside grandma Jiba together with her.

Donda Wu glared at us with menacing eyes.

“Jiba Wu… I’m Ai Fa of house Fa. This man is a member of my family, Asuta.”

And of course, Grandma Jiba didn’t even look at me. Her wrinkled fingers reached for Ai Fa’s face.

Her rough fingers that seemed to be just skin and bones touched Ai Fa’s smooth cheeks.

“Ah… It’s been a while… How many years has it been… Ai Fa, I wanted to see you…”

Observing grandma Jiba from up close, I could see that she wasn’t dried fruit, but a proper person.

Her face and fingers were filled with wrinkles, and her large nose and thin lips were carved with the chasm that marks her age. As her front teeth had all fallen off, I had a hard time understanding what she was saying.

But hidden under her drooping eyelids were blue eyes that had an unexpectedly sensibility in them. Her dried fruit-like face showed a face of kindness and affection.

She looked really gentle.

Her expression was really warm.

This was the first time in my life that I have seen an old lady smiling so blissfully.

「Leina Wu, have a taste of these delicious food too… Ai Fa, will you please feed me…?」

「… If you wish me too, I will gladly do so.」

Ai Fa took Jiba Wu’s arm gently. Leina Wu wiped the tears from her eyes and stood up.

"What do you want to eat? The meat? Or poitan?"

"Kiba meat… This meat tastes really good…"

Ai Fa remained expressionless as she send the wooden spoon to the old lady's mouth with slightly clumsy movements.

"Ah, this is really good… Ai Fa, did you make this for me…?"

"No, I only watched from the sides. This is cooked by your family and Asuta over there."

"…Asuta…" She narrowed her eyes to a slit and looked my way.

If I could face that eldest son, Jiza Wu, from so close — Maybe I could catch a glimpse of his thoughts.

The old lady narrowed her eyes, and an obvious light of joy appeared in her eyes that could barely see.

"Asuta of house Fa… You made these dishes…?"

"Yes. Rimee Wu asked me to cook these… In a foreign country far away, my father works as a chef. I might just be an apprentice helping him, but

I will be glad if these dishes suit your tastes.

Grandma Jiba’s hand groped about in the air.

Ai Fa looked at me calmly, and I timidly took grandma Jiba Wu’s hand.

She held my fingers. Her fingers seemed drier than dry twigs, but there was warmth within her rough fingers.

Thank you… I already feel that living is very painful… I couldn’t walk properly nor eat tasty food… I’m now just some old bones that troubles my family… I feel sad every day, and wish that god will send my soul to the heavens right away….

We don’t feel troubled at all…

Rimee Wu shouted midway when her red haired sister beside her knocked Rimee’s head, making her shut up.

I came to this forest when I was five… I was one of the one thousand people who abandoned the southern god Jaguar and offered our souls to the western god Selva.

— Yes.

"But I couldn't bring myself to like Forest's Edge… The southern forest had a wealth of resources. Although there were animals like large apes and poisonous snake that would attack humans, we could pick fruits any time we want… We would dig up insects burrowing in the ground, and grill colourful lizards before eating them… The people from the city mocked us as savages, but I was really happy back then…"

Grandma Jiba wasn't looking at me or Ai Fa.

She was looking into empty space, her clear eyes were filled with tears.

"But soldiers burned our tribe's forest… We fled to the west, and moved into the forest here. The people from the western city ordered us to hunt kiba, and prohibited us from touching the forest's resources… Even so, everyone was happy in the beginning. We didn't need to eat lizard meat any more. Or pick rotten fruits or fungi. We could eat all the kiba meat we wanted and taste the crops planted by others…"

"Yes…"

Maybe I didn't need to answer in the first place.

The scenes from the past was probably flashing across the old lady's eyes.

"But Forest's Edge was a terrifying place… In the first year, a hundred men was killed by the kiba. Another year passed, and another hundred

men fell. As the men fell, the same number of women and children died from hunger with them. In the first years, we lost more than half of the one thousand people we had…

I see.

The Gazze House fell. Then the Lima House fell. The Tsun clan and Wu clan leads our people after that, and we established our current lives now… We hunt kiba, eat their meat, sell their horns and tusks to buy crops. And so, we learned how to survive in Forest's Edge… However, I always wanted to return to the forest where I was born.

When I realized it, everyone had finished their meal and was listening to the grand elder's speech quietly.

But our forest was burned and those who knew that forest had all passed on, only I was left… I feel lonely and sad, even though I have so many family with me, my heart still longs for that forest, not Forest's Edge… Kiba meat don't taste good at all, and neither were the crops. As I thought about all this, my teeth fell one by one, and I couldn't eat kiba meat any more. I realized I angered the god of the west… But I can finally be reunited with everyone… I harboured such thoughts in my heart… and keep wishing to return to the forest in the south…

Her rough fingers that was full of cracks held my fingers with unexpected strength.

And suddenly, her clear blue eyes stared at me once again.

I kept reminiscing my dead family and the forest that was gone. But now, I can finally think of my living family and this Forest's Edge. I can finally give my soul to the god of the west, Selva; not the god of the south Jaguar. I made up my mind to dine on kiba with my living family and live on... I have to live on... I can finally think of something that is so natural....

... You must be depressed because you couldn't eat tasty food when your teeth fell off earlier.

Ai Fa looked tensed when she heard my casual reply.

This couldn't be helped, I was just an apprentice chef, I didn't know how to hold a elegant conversation with the grand elder of Forest's Edge that lived through hardships for 85 years.

Before you became depressed, you must have cherished the people around you a lot. If not, Ai Fa and Rimee Wu wouldn't have worked so hard to help you and make you remember the joy of living. Because they harboured such thoughts, I also wanted to contribute what meagre abilities I have to help you.

Grandma Jiba turned towards Ai Fa quietly.

Ai Fa bit her lips gently and stared back at grandma Jiba as if she was angry.

“If you want to offer thanks, please thank them. I’m already satisfied after you said that my dishes were delicious.”

“It’s delicious… very delicious… I hated kiba meat the most, and think that poitan isn’t food that people should eat. But I found the appetite to continue eating… To continue living in this forest…”

Grandma Jiba smiled quietly, then muttered:

“Ai Fa, take my necklace off for me.”

Ai Fa still looked angry as she took off the necklace as requested, and placed it in the old lady’s small hands.

Grandma Jiba took out the kiba tusks and horns with her trembling twig-like hands.

“Jiba Wu of the Wu clan wish to gift blessings to Ai Fa from Fa house and her family Asuta… Please accept this…”

Out of the three tusks and horns on the necklace, she took out one each for Ai Fa and me.

“Hey, grand elder, this—”

With her back facing Donda Wu who was shouting, grandma Jiba smiled brilliantly.

"The tusks and horns of the Kiba holds the fate of the denizens of Forest's Edge… I am indebted to the two of you, and I hope that this tusk and horn will become a part of your flesh, your blood and your life… Jiba Wu of clan Wu bless your souls."

This was the first time in this different world — that I received a tangible reward for my work.

Intermission: Wu Clan's Youngest Daughter

On the 25th day of the yellow month, Rimee Wu encountered that foreigner for the first time.

That morning, Rimee Wu completed her chores at the water source, then ran on the flat yellow path towards the Fa house. It was rare for her to not have any chores before the sun reached the middle of the sky, so she got permission from her mother to go out, and charged out of the Wu clan village.

As Ai Fa had to complete the chores at her place alone, she was much busier than Rimee Wu. Ever since Ai Fa's father Gill Fa passed away two years ago, it was hard for Rimee Wu to meet her.

When was the last time she met Ai Fa?

Maybe it had been about ten days.

Just the thought of seeing Ai Fa after such a long time brought a smile naturally to Rimee Wu's face.

However — the Fa House was empty.

Was she washing up for last night's dinner at the water source? Rimee Wu made a trip to the water source, but Ai Fa wasn't there.

Did the Tsun clan abducted her? — Rimee Wu felt a strong sense of uneasiness, and went to the house closest to Ai Fa's place to knock. She remember that this was the Fou house.

"Excuse me! I'm Rimee Wu from the Wu clan! Is anyone home?"

Someone pulled open the door slowly, and a skinny woman who didn't look well poked her head out.

"What's the matter? Why is someone from the Wu clan here at the Fou house…?"

"Sorry! I'm looking for Ai Fa, do you know where had she gone off to?"

Rimee Wu had met this woman a few times.

But now, her figure was frailer than what Rimee Wu remembered, and her eyes had turned so sad.

Rimee Wu remember that she was always carrying a baby the previous time they met.

The Wu clan also have a baby named Kota, but the baby in this lady's arms was smaller than Kota.

That baby was too little… anyone who see the baby would worry, wondering if the baby would be able to grow up properly.

"Ai Fa, huh… Ai Fa went into the forest early in the morning…"

The woman who was really skinny answered in a weak voice.

"Forest? She went in so early?"

"Yes… She brought that foreigner no one knew with her…"

「Foreigner…?」

Rimee Wu didn’t know what that means.

She could see countless foreigners by going to the post station town, but they wouldn’t take a single step into Forest’s Edge. The people there were afraid of the kiba and Forest Edge’s denizens who hunt kiba, as if they were monsters.

「What do you mean by foreigner? What is Ai Fa doing with someone like that?」

「I don’t know either… Ai Fa and that foreigner were walking in the Forest’s Edge settlement last evening too…」

「… Hmm?」

Rimee Wu was confused, but it was better to ask Ai Fa directly. So she bowed and thank that woman.

「Thank yo! I will wait for Ai Fa to come back at the Fa house!」

「Ah… Sorry… Is Ai Fa still refusing to marry into the Wu clan…?」

"Huh? Yes… what about it?"

"In that case… You are a part of the Wu clan, so it's better for you to not get involved with her, right…?"

A glimmer of life appeared within the woman's lifeless eyes.

"The eldest son of the Tsun clan was loitering around the Fa house… If the Tsun clan and Wu clan clashes, it will lead to the destruction of Forest's Edge…"

"This has nothing to do with me or Ai Fa!"

Rimee Wu yelled, and that woman showed a frightened expression and shirked away.

This woman was fearful of the two most powerful clans in Forest's Edge.

So she didn't want anything to do with Ai Fa who was on bad terms with both the Tsun and Wu clans.

And that was why Ai Fa was ostracized.

Rimee Wu felt a little sad. She nodded at the woman and said "Good bye".

But that woman spoke again:

“Please wait… I couldn’t help being a busybody, but not just Ai Fa, the Wu clan shouldn’t get involved with that foreigner either… You should check with your clan head properly first…”

The image of her father Donda Wu, the Wu clan head appeared in Rimee Wu’s mind.

Donda Wu did mention quite often to “not get involved with foreigners”. Rimee Wu basically wouldn’t leave Forest’s Edge, so she had no chance to meet foreigners. Hence, she didn’t know how serious the taboo was.

If Rimee Wu made the wrong judgement, her family might forbid her from interacting with Ai Fa.

She didn’t want that to happen.

… I just want to get along with Ai Fa…

And now, even Ai Fa wants to break off relations with Rimee Wu.

Her reasons were the same as what that woman said earlier.

Ai Fa was on terrible terms with the Tsun clan, so the Wu clan shouldn’t have any relations with her.

And Ai Fa even refused to marry into the Wu clan.

They weren’t on hostile terms, but Rimee’s father couldn’t care less about Ai Fa after this incident.

Ai Fa marrying into the Wu clan — it felt really unreal to Rimee back then, so she didn’t think it matters much when Ai Fa turned down the proposal. But now, no one wish to see Rimee Wu continuing to get along with Ai Fa, which troubles her a lot.

Ah…

The woman from the Fou house gasped softly.

Ai Fa and an unfamiliar foreigner was walking along the path before their eyes.

On their shoulder was a krilee stick, and a large kiba was hanging on it.

She hunted a kiba so early in the morning, Rimee Wu was in awe, and concentrated on observing that foreigner.

Foreigner — He was indeed one through and through.

He had black hair and eyes, and compared to western people, his skin was yellowish ivory.

He looked young, and should be around Ai Fa’s age.

His clothes was strange. Both his clothes and shoes were white, with only the skin on his face and hand exposed. He also wrapped a white piece of cloth around his head.

How should I say this… He looks really weak.

Even though the two of them was carrying the kiba, that foreigner looked out of breath and had unsteady footsteps, as if he would fall with just a slight poke.

But — That foreigner seemed to be in high spirits.

His face lacked any distinct features and was as pale as the people in the city. But his black eyes were strong and shining.

Only his eyes were different from the people in the city.

That might be so, but he didn’t look like someone from Forest’s Edge

either.

The foreigner was different from any person she had seen, and had a strange aura about him.

Never mind… He doesn't seem to be a bad guy…

But he was still a person from the city.

Forest’s Edge denizen and the people of Rock city didn’t get along.

Why was such a person acting together with Ai Fa? Rimee couldn’t understand.

Ai Fa and the foreigner didn’t notice Rimee and company, and disappeared from their sights.

Did you see that? There had never been a foreigner in Forest’s Edge before, this might be an ominous sign…

In that case, I have to help Ai Fa!

Rimee Wu crossed her arms and lowered her head in deep thought. But no matter how she thought, she couldn’t find an answer.

She was just eight and her capabilities were limited. She didn’t even know what she could say or do to help. She needed to find out about taboos related to foreigners after all.

Although she made the trip here, she had to return home without even speaking with Ai Fa, which felt like a pity to Rimee Wu. But she couldn’t find any other way even if she stayed.

The woman from house Fou showed a worried expression, and returned the way she came when Rimee Wu bade her farewell.

「Hmm? Rimee, where did you run off to?」

When Rimee Wu returned to the Wu clan village, her third brother Ludo was loitering lazily in the plaza.

Even though the men didn’t have any work before noon, Ludo Wu always got up early.

Rimee Wu ran all the way back from Fa house, and she grabbed her brother’s arm with ragged breath.

「I want to ask you! I think a foreigner is staying in the Fa house! What should I do?」

「… Ah? What are you saying?」

Rimee Wu didn’t know how to explain either.

But she told everything she saw this morning and everything she heard to Ludo Wu.

“I don’t really know either, but why is that woman Ai Fa getting involved with a foreigner… By the way, you haven’t broken ties with that woman yet?”

“Of course! Ai Fa and I will be friends forever!”

“Right. Whatever. Anyway, if you want to solve the problem about that foreigner, you have to tell father about this. If Rock city is related to that man, it would violate a serious taboo.”

“… Ai Fa has to obey that weak man because of that?”

Rimee Wu looked up at Ludo Wu with a desperate face. Ludo then scratched his yellowish hair and said: “What nonsense are you saying?”

“That woman is very self centered, and didn’t even want to care about our father and the Tsun clan. It’s impossible for her to listen to the people from the city. She probably grabbed someone from the city to work for her…? That didn’t make sense either.”

“That’s true. What is Ai Fa doing with a man from the city? I have been

wondering about this since just now, but I couldn’t find the reason.

Hmmp… but she can only rely on the people from the city now, right? She made enemies with both the Wu and Tsun clan, and the other people all fear her and kept their distance.

The Wu clan is not Ai Fa’s enemy!

Even though Rimee Wu was shouting angrily, her mean brother just shrugged and ignored her.

Even if she isn’t our enemy, she still refused to marry into our clan. We can’t have any relations with her now. No matter how much you scream, we won’t go rescue an outsider.

I don’t want to talk to you anymore! Ludo is a brat! Dummy!

Rimee Wu stamp her foot angrily and ran into the house.

You are the brat! Rimee Wu heard her brother yelling behind her and pulled open the door.

She didn’t see her father.

He was probably still sleeping. In the room was her eldest brother Jiza Wu and his wife Sati Lei Wu. They were chatting softly with their son Kota Wu sleeping between them.

"Ara, what's the matter Rimee?"

Sati Lei Wu shooked the cradle made from woven grass and smiled at Rimee.

Rimee Wu was so anxious that she didn't even take off her shoes. She sat down before the three of them.

"I want to ask you! I think a foreigner have moved into the Fa house! What should I do?"

Her eldest brother Jiza Wu was scarier than her father Donda Wu.

However, her brother was more adamant on following the rules of Forest's Edge than anyone else. At a time like this, her brother should be able to tell Rimee what she and Ai Fa should do.

But — when her brother heard Rimee's explanation, his words was hard for Rimee to accept.

"Rimee, don't come into contact with the people from the village as much as possible. Before that foreigner leaves, don't go near the Fa

house.

But why? If that foreigner is a bad guy, won't Ai Fa be in danger!?

Be it the people from the city or the denizens of the forest, they won't fall into danger if they obey their respective laws. Since the head of the Fa house claims to be a hunter, she won't lose to the people from the city.

But…

The head of the Fa house must have thought it through before bringing a man from the city into the settlement. If there isn't any problems, then no one can blame her actions. But if you get involved and upset their relationship, then the head of the Fa house would need to take responsibility for any problems that arises.

Jiza's face remained calm as he explained.

So Rimee, you shouldn't get involved.

Rimee Wu couldn't agree at all.

But Donda Wu who appeared later only said: Don't get involved with foreigners.

Donda Wu looked displeased, she was lucky that he didn't ask Rimee to break off relations with the Fa house. Rimee Wu didn't argue with her father.

Why isn't anyone worried about Ai Fa?

That was what saddens Rimee Wu the most.

Two years ago, the Wu clan once asked Ai Fa to marry into their clan.

Before that, only Rimee Wu and the grand elder Jiba Wu had interacted with Ai Fa before. But when Donda Wu heard that Ai Fa harshly punished the eldest son of the Tsun clan, he jokingly said he want Ai Fa to be wed to his second son Darum Wu.

It was sudden, but no one objected to this. Only Jiza Wu appeared unhappy about this.

Ai Fa lost all her family at the age of 15, and also had a falling out with the Tsun clan that rules Forest's Edge. Everyone sympathizes with Ai Fa's circumstances and would be happy to see this forthright and strong woman marry into the clan — Most of them was supportive of this.

For Rimee Wu, Ai Fa was her childhood playmate, and she becoming family made her feel bashful and uneasy. At this time, Jiba Wu couldn't walk too well and couldn't visit Ai Fa. As everyone thinks this wasn't a bad idea, she agreed to this proposal.

However — Ai Fa turned down the marriage. She said she will become the head of the Fa house, and make a living through hunting.

When Rimee Wu heard her say that, she felt relieved.

When Ai Fa's father Gill Fa was still alive, he often brought Ai Fa into the forest as a hunter to assist him. Ai Fa looked very happy back then, and Rimee Wu couldn't imagine her abandoning her work as a hunter and becoming a housewife.

Rimee Wu was just six, and couldn't organize her thoughts too well. But when she heard that Ai Fa turned down the marriage, her feeling of relief outweigh that of regret.

They might not be relatives, but Rimee Wu still treasure Ai Fa deeply.

She hope they could maintain the relationship they had.

But Ai Fa changed.

She said that she was on terrible terms with the Tsun clan and shouldn't have any relations with the Wu clan, and kept her distance from Rimee Wu.

And her family also lost interest in Ai Fa.

When they heard that Ai Fa turned down the marriage proposal, some people felt angry or disappointed. Everyone slowly stopped talking about her.

Even though she didn't become a member of the Wu clan, her circumstances remained the same — she didn't have anyone to rely on and was an enemy of the chief clan. Ai Fa survived alone, but no one sympathized with her or felt sad for her.

Only herself and Jiba Wu had the right to call themselves Ai Fa's friend.

But Jiba Wu couldn't walk anymore.

So only she could stay by Ai Fa's side now.

With this in mind, Rimee Wu kept visiting the Fa house no matter how cold Ai Fa treated her.

This carried on for two years — and then, that foreigner appeared.

Just who was that foreigner?

Even though her father and elder brother told her not to go near the foreigner, she couldn't just stand idly by and watch. So she had been running to the Fa House every day since she first saw that foreigner.

If they didn’t notice her when Rimee Wu goes near their house, it won’t be a problem.

And Donda Wu and her brother only warned Rimee Wu not to go near the foreigner, so she wanted to wait until Ai Fa and that foreigner was apart before grabbing Ai Fa and questioning her.

But that chance never came.

Be it morning or night, they always stick together like glue.

When the sun reaches the middle of the sky, Ai Fa would head into the forest alone to hunt. It was a good chance, but Rimee Wu have chores at home during this time.

Time flies, and before Rimee Wu could take any action, five days passed in a flash.

It’s getting late too...

It was getting dark outside, Rimee Wu was running fast.

She had to help her family tan hides, so she was held back much later tonight.

She wouldn’t be able to make it for dinner now, and her father would definitely yell at her. But even so, Rimee Wu wouldn’t be able to sleep soundly if she didn’t check on Ai Fa.

What does Ai Fa plan to do with that foreigner?

After observing the two of them, she realized the atmosphere between them wasn’t sinister.

They might fight at times, but neither side seemed to be angry for real.

Even so, she still didn’t know why Ai Fa let that foreigner stay at her place.

Was that foreigner trying to take Ai Fa as his wife?

Was that why he barged into Ai Fa’s place?

But if Ai Fa wasn’t willing, she wouldn’t let him into her home. But if she was willing, she would probably take other actions. At the very least, Ai Fa didn’t trim her long hair that symbolizes a unwed woman, or wore a long dress that covered her entire body.

… I don’t want Ai Fa to leave Forest’s Edge…

That’s what worries Rimee Wu the most.

Ai Fa had broken ties with the all the denizens of Forest’s Edge. Only Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu think of Ai Fa as a friend. But now, she wanted to break off relations with the two of them too.

Could she really live on alone?

Rimee Wu couldn’t imagine that.

So if Ai Fa grew tired of Forest’s Edge and wanted to head towards a faraway land, it wouldn’t be a surprise.

All that matters is that Ai Fa is happy…

But she didn’t want to say goodbye to Ai Fa forever.

She didn’t want this to be goodbye while they grew further and further apart.

That was probably why Rimee Wu visited the Fa house every day.

Like what Ludo Wu and Jiza Wu said, she didn’t think Ai Fa would be defeated by a weakling from the city. But Ai Fa might abandon Forest’s

Edge and elope with the foreigner — As Rimee Wu couldn’t wipe away this feeling of unease, she had to confirm Ai Fa’s presence everyday.

When the sun shifted to the west of the forest, Rimee Wu arrived at Ai Fa’s place.

She sighed in relief when she saw the candle light through the window.

Great… She’s still here.

She just needs to make sure she was safe, then she could go home for the day. Rimee Wu thought as she approached the window with quiet movements.

Ah…!

When she reached the window, Rimee Wu almost gasp in shock.

Ai Fa was having dinner with that foreigner.

That foreigner — was wearing Forest’s Edge clothing.

He had a white cloth wrapped around his head and wore white clothes. But clothes from Forest’s Edge was definitely draped on his body! Those were clothes Gill Fa wore when he was alive.

Does this mean Ai Fa had accepted this foreigner into the Fa house? Is this foreigner going to become Ai Fa’s husband?

Unease and doubt suddenly filled Rimee Wu’s heart.

This meant that this foreigner was compatible with Ai Fa? She felt confused and uneasy about this.

Rimee Wu tried her best to make herself taller, and peeked at the two of them through the window.

She was good at keeping her presence hidden, even the sharp Ai Fa had never detected her before.

The two of them seemed to be quarreling.

Eehhh, but why? Are you still bearing a grudge over what happened this afternoon?

The foreigner couldn’t keep his voice down.

Aside from his pale skin, there wasn’t any distinct features on his face.

His body was as slender as a woman, which was similar to the people in the city. So that wasn’t really distinct either.

But his black eyes were still sparkling and appeared rather forceful.

What strange eyes.

Even though his eyes were sparkling, there was a hint of unease in them.

His eyes were as gentle as a woman and as strong as a man, so it was hard to categorize him.

However — Rimee Wu didn’t hate his eyes.

“What happened this afternoon…? Ah, you mean that mean thing you did to me because you got too caught up? I already forgot about that.”

Ai Fa answered in a quiet voice.

What was that mean thing? Rimee Wu tilted her head confusedly, and the expression of the foreigner changed drastically. His face was panicky just now, but it turned into surprise.

“You forgot… Then why won’t you tell me what you think?”

“Shut up! I don’t want to talk about it, that’s why!”

Ai Fa suddenly yell loudly, surprising Rimee Wu.

The foreigner seemed shocked too.

That foreigner has an expressive face, so it was easy to tell what he was thinking.

But Ai Fa’s face was even more obvious.

Her face was blushing for some reason, and she was lowering her head a little and covering her face with the wooden plate in her hands.

The foreigner was sitting opposite Ai Fa, and probably couldn’t see her expression. But Rimee Wu was observing them from the side, so she could see very clearly.

Ai Fa — was showing a bashful face.

Enough! Stop looking at me!

Ai Fa usually wouldn’t show her expression to others.

Be it happiness or sadness, it was possible to see some hints from Ai Fa’s brows and eyes, but she wouldn’t show how she really feel. Since Gill Fa passed away, she tend to do this even more.

That was why Rimee Wu was very shocked when she saw Ai Fa showing so much emotion.

On the other hand, the foreigner fell into deep thought with a sigh of pity.

So — he didn’t notice.

He didn’t notice Ai Fa lowering her plate and staring at him.

There seemed to be a faint smile on Ai Fa’s face.

Her cheeks were still a little red, and she stared at the foreigner with a look of satisfaction and happiness.

Ai Fa was just like how she was when Gill Fa was still alive — Rimee Wu really likes the warm and gentle light in her blue eyes.

Ai Fa...

In this two years, Ai Fa had never shown such an expression.

Ai Fa’s face was always cold and stiff, as if a part of her had died along with her father.

Is this the person who made her show such a face?

It didn't matter where he was from. Foreigner or not, if he could make Ai Fa feel comfortable and at ease, that would be enough.

Rimee Wu thought as she gaze at that foreigner — he was also smiling with his head slightly lowered too.

He had a disappointed face earlier, but his black eyes were filled with satisfaction and happiness just like Ai Fa now, as he stared at the weirdly shaped meat in his wooden plate.

He probably shared the same feelings as Ai Fa.

So this was family.

Even though Ai Fa lost Gill Fa, refused to marry into the Wu clan, she still needed family.

Living alone like this was too depressing.

Rimee Wu wiped away the tears in her eyes with the back of her hand, and tried saying in the most cheerful voice she could:

□Hey, what are you eating?□

Volume 1 end

Vol. 2 :

Chapter 0: Prologue

Chapter Prologue

Prologue



Translator: Skythewood

Editor: Deus Ex-machina

One night, I had a dream after a long time.

A dream when I slept really soundly, and dreamt about things I had long forgotten.

And when I woke up, I would have no memory about them.

When I occasionally remember the scenes in my dream, it would have already ended.

In my dream, I was still a child in elementary school.

Dad watched TV as he drank beer and cheered for his favourite baseball team.

Mother cut some sort of vegetable in the kitchen, probably onions.

Our family runs a restaurant, so this must be the off day that happens once a week. If not for this, it was impossible for our entire family to be around for dinner.

It was a family scene commonly seen in Showa period dramas.

I wasn’t interested in baseball, and asked Dad during the commercials:

「Dad, your culinary skill is better, but why is mother always the one cooking dinner when we are home?」

「Damn it, you——」

Dad leaned in close in a panic:

「Why are you saying this all of a sudden? What if your mother hears this?」

「That’s why I’m asking so softly… Why?」

"You… Asuta, do you dislike the meal cooked by your mother?"

"No, I like it."

The six years old me shook my head firmly.

I was a likeable child back then, even I myself thought so.

"But I like the dishes prepared by Dad more, because your food is the most delicious."

A line that I would never say now.

Also because I have lost the person who I could compliment.

"Well… Because I'm a professional chef… My job is to cook delicious meals…"

Dad had a troubled and complicated expression. He was just past 30 back then.

He was probably wondering if he should deal out judgement with his fists after hearing my answer. But after hearing a six years old give such an answer, he stayed his hand and admit his defeat.

"By the way, you have been eating the food I cooked everyday, right? Don't you want to eat mother's home cooked meal once a week?"

"I didn't say I don't want to, I'm just curious."

The match had started on the television.

But Dad was still facing me, with his arms crossed and troubled.

"Your thinking is still wrong. When we're home, mother should cook."

"But why?"

“You ask me why… Because I’m a chef.”

Dad said with a stern face:

“The chef’s job is to cook for customers, and cooking for a family is a mother’s job.”

“Hmm…?”

I was just six and didn’t fully understand the significance behind his words.

Since his words appeared in my dream in this way, that means it left an impression on me.

One year later, my mother passed away. I said in tears:“I wish I can taste my mother’s cooking a little more.”

Vol. 2 :

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: Interlude under the Moon

1

Grand Elder of Forest's Edge Jiba Wu praised my cooking, saying that it made her remember the joy of living and gave her blessings to Ai Fa and me.

I was very happy about this. Even calling this the □best outcome□ couldn’t describe what I was feeling. Grandma Jiba Wu was someone Ai Fa cherished very much. I was honoured to have the chance to be present in such a moment of her life, and was deeply moved.

However—— a few hours later, I felt troubled as I stayed by myself in an empty room.

Ai Fa wasn’t here.

Neither was Rimee Wu.

In this silent room, I was drowning in rage and humiliation, and rolled around in agony.

Damn it! Why does it feel like an utter defeat!?

I wasn’t being held against my will. Because Ai Fa and Rimee Wu were chatting inside Jiba Wu’s room, they ordered me to watch the house.

This was a house inside clan Wu’s village, and the owner was supposed to be either Donda Wu’s brother or nephew. Several years ago, the number of clan members decreased and their life became hard. They moved in with another family and this place became empty.

“The Fa house is far, so rest here for the night.” We accepted the Wu Clan’s hospitality gratefully —— But I was very very unhappy.

Despite that, I didn’t know who I should vent my emotions to.

Strictly speaking, I was the one at fault.

I rolled around by myself in agony while harbouring these unvented feelings.

A few hours earlier, we were in the the hall of the Wu clan’s main house.

“...Ai Fa, why don’t you spend the night in the Wu village...?”

While Grandma Jiba Wu was having her meal, she asked Ai Fa.

“It’s already dark outside... traveling at night is dangerous, so just rest in an empty house for tonight.”

"No, there's no need for that. We just need a fire and we won't face any danger. Just lend me a candle stand."

"Ara ara… You have become an outstanding hunter. But for the sake of this old lady, please stay the night, Ai Fa…"

"But…"

"You must have plenty of work to do as a House head, and can't visit the Wu village often, right? I don't have the strength to walk to the Fa house anymore… In that case, at least accompany me for this night. It has been a few years since we finally get to meet again…"

Even the stubborn Ai Fa couldn't turn down this request.

I was completely fine with it. The Wu clan clan head Donda Wu has no intention of asking Ai Fa to marry into the Wu clan now. Hence, Ai Fa could rekindle her relationship with Grandma Jiba and Rimee Wu——such a foolish thought sprung up in my mind.

The real problem didn't lie here.

But right after that.

Forest's Edge seemed to have the custom that they could only leave the room after everyone had finished their meal. Rimee Wu was accompanying Grandma Jiba for her meal now, while Ai Fa and I returned to our seats to eat ours.

During this time, clan head Donda Wu kept raging about my cooking.

□This is not hu

nter's food.□□How dare you serve me Monta feed.□□This corrupts my life.□ His complaints fell like the rain.

However, I think this brutish man was only tarnishing my cooking for a reason. For example, resistance towards an outsider, or his position as clan head compelled him to do so. That was why I wasn't too concerned. Grandma Jiba already gave me the best compliment possible, so I could still keep my cool and jubilant feeling.

After Ai Fa finished her meal and ate the last bit of my food, something caused a crack in my mood.

Are you done!? Why are you demeaning Asuta’s cooking so maliciously? Isn’t it true that Grandma Jiba enjoyed her meal?

Leina Wu who finished eating slightly earlier than we did shouted.

Donda Wu’s blue eyes were burning as he glared impatiently at the lovely second sister of the Wu clan.

I’m merely stating the facts, what’s wrong with that? Grand Elder also said that everyone can have an opinion of what is right or wrong. This food is like the feces of Monta beasts, only old people who have lost all their teeth will eat this with gratitude.

Leina fumed and was quiet for a short moment—— she then stood up slowly.

Then took off the tusk and horn from her necklace, and walked slowly to Ai Fa and me.

Hey…

A dangerous gleam came from Donda Wu’s eyes, but Leina was not bothered at all. With both knees on the floor, she offered the tusk and horn to Ai Fa and me respectively.

“Wu clan’s Leina Wu offer her blessing to Fa house’s Ai Fa and Asuta. Thank you for saving Jiba Wu’s soul and bringing serenity to the lives of the Wu clan.”

What? Hey, is this really fine, Leina Wu…?

I wanted to whisper that to her.

But before I did that, Ai Fa poked my shoulder.

“Just accept it graciously. For the denizens of Forest's Edge, the act of gifting the tusks and horns of Kiba beast is sacred. If you turn her down, you would be trampling on her dignity and pride.”

Ai Fa told me that, then accepted the white tusk after saying “I’m honoured by Leina Wu’s blessing.”

I had no other choice but to mimic Ai Fa’s actions and thank Leina.

“Leina… Are you trying to tarnish the Wu clan’s name?”

Donda Wu said quietly. But his voice sounded deep and clear, which reminded me of the tremors before an earthquake.

“You are presenting a sham blessings to others for the sake of mocking me? Do you think I will allow you to do that…?”

Even though Leina Wu’s face was green from terror, she still looked at her father with determination:

“This is no sham blessing! Even without Grandma Jiba’s incident, I also think from the bottom of my heart that Asuta’s cuisine is amazing, this is the first time in my life that I have tasted such delicious Kiba meat. Food is life —— Just like Grandma Jiba, I felt the joy of living very strongly.”

“Are you… insane?”

Donda Wu muttered.

I was shocked by how surprised he sounded.

Before I realized why I felt so shocked, Rimee Wu stood up with a start and said: 「Me too!」

Rimee Wu looked by at Grandma Jiba, who nodded and said: 「Don't worry.」. Rimee then left Grandma Jiba's side and ran to us.

On her childish face was her usually brilliant smile.

「Asuta! Ai Fa! Thank you very much for today! The food was very very delicious, so I want to gift you my blessings too!」

She placed the third blessing gifts —— Describing it this way might be too casual… onto my and Ai Fa's hands.

「That's right… This meal is outstanding, and worthy of my blessing.」

With an overly sexy voice, the eldest daughter Vena Wu stood up slowly.

"I learned for the first time that "delicious food" exist in Forest's Edge... As a denizen of Forest's Edge, I have to offer you my blessings..."

"You are absolutely right, Vena."

Grandma Ditto Min stood up next.

"Unbelievable! What's going on!?"

Donda Wu yelled again.

The emotions in his hoarse voice —— wasn't rage, but shock.

"Have my family gone crazy? Was Apaz poison that will make one lose his reason added into this shit-like food? But if that is so, everyone here should be mad too!"

I clasped the five tusks and horns in my hand and observed Donda Wu carefully.

Donda Wu seemed to be genuinely confused.

He really doubted the mental state of his family.

Is there anyone who doesn't dare to stand up out of fear for my lectures? Don’t hold back, just do what you want!

After he said that, the wife of the eldest son Jiza, Sati Lei Wu planned to stand up timidly.

She was about Vena Wu’s age, with her bright brown hair cut to shoulder length. A woman with a pure temperament about her.

Before she stood up, she looked her husband’s way. When she saw his frank and open smile, she showed a face of relief and walked towards us.

Wu clan’s Sati Lei Wu wish to offer my blessings to Fa house’s Ai Fa and her family Asuta… Thank you for your incredible meal.

After she returned to her seat, a plump woman beside her stood up this time.

There was a bit of grey mixed into her red hair, and she had dark brown eyes that seemed deep. Her bare arms and shoulders were big and tough, and she looked like a woman in her prime who could deal with any surprises calmly.

She was Mia Lei Wu. Mother of Rimee Wu and her siblings, and also Donda Wu’s wife.

I don’t really get it, but isn’t it fine to express ourselves honestly when we taste delicious food? I’m so moved that my legs are turning weak.

After glancing at her husband who was as still as a statue, she walked our way with firm footing.

Mia Lei Wu had a refreshing smile when she gifted us with a tusk and a

horn.

“Your dishes are wonderful. Thank you for doing this for Grandma Jiba… Really now, why is our clan head so stubborn.”

Her smile seemed to be a representation of the phrase “mothers are strong.”

Out of everyone present, seven of them were bored by her, which I find really impressive.

Anyway, this was the seventh blessing we received.

“… Dad, you are serious, right? Don’t single me out for punishment later, alright?”

—— The youngest brother Ludo Wu said with a voice that still bore a hint of childishness and stood up.

He scratched his head of blonde hair, walked fearlessly to us and sat

down crudely.

Hey, just who exactly are you? I heard there is a group hailing from the Eastern kingdom who seems to be sorcerers. Did you use magic to turn kiba meat delicious?

This isn’t magic, I just used kitchen knife… knives and fire. It’s just a skillset.

Ai Fa was silent, and this was obviously a question directed at me, so I answered him like this.

After grunting disinterestedly, he turned his pale eyes towards Ai Fa and said:

Fa house’s Ai Fa, you have turned into a good woman. It’s a pity, if you are more feminine, I don’t mind marrying you even if you can’t be wed to my brother.

……

Never mind. What they said isn't an exaggeration, this is a delicious meal. Frankly speaking, just the thought of having to drink that never changing poitan soup from tomorrow onwards makes me feel like crying. If you are not Ai Fa's husband, then marry into our family.

T-That's fine, the woman of your family have the rights to choose their spouse too.

Hmmp, aside from that brat Rimee, pick anyone you like.

Ludo said this last part quietly, then removed his necklace. He had lots of spoils of war, and was on par with Ai Fa.

Dinner is absolutely delicious, so I want to gift you my blessing. This is the first time I am doing this, so be grateful.

When the arrogant youngest brother returned to his seat, there was a strange silence in the hall.

... Anyone else?

Donda Wu stroked his beard as he swept his gaze across the hall.

So only three other person feels that this is not fit for human consumption.

I don’t think the dish is that bad, don’t judge everything by your own standards.

The third sister Lala Wu said unhappily.

Lala Wu had her red hair tied up at the top of her head, and her arrogant personality was on par with the youngest brother. Amongst the seven siblings each with their unique personalities, only the third sister and youngest brother seemed a little similar in appearance and temperament. She should be younger than Ludo Wu, and was at most twelve or thirteen years old.

I think the grilled poitan and kiba meat soup are good, but the kiba meat that should be the main dish was gooey and look disgusting, so I don’t feel it’s good enough for me to gift my blessing… To be honest, just what they did for Grandma Jiba is already worthy of my blessing. But everyone seemed to think this thing is delicious, so I didn’t do so.

"I see... Darum, what do you think?"

"I have nothing to say."

The second brother whose style seemed as sharp as a wild wolf refused to comment.

"Hmmp, what about you, Jiza?"

"……Clan head Donda, please don't mind it. No matter how the appearance of the food is like or how they taste, kiba will still be kiba, and poitan will still be poitan. No matter how much effort is put into it, they are the same once they are eaten."

"You don't need to tell me that now!"



A fire was burning in the eyes of the clan head.

The eldest brother looked at his father with slit like eyes, and smiled with ease.

“Are you asking me if it is tasty? Just like what Lala said, I never imagined there is such a way to eat poitan, which surprised me. The soup didn’t have the stink of the kiba, but I could feel the life of the kiba clearly from it… But the kiba meat with red sauce on it is too soft, I didn’t feel like I was eating kiba at all. If I eat this meat everyday, it feels like my teeth will gradually lose their strength, which gives me the chills.”

“Yes—— That’s exactly it! That’s why I think this isn’t food fit for the hunters of Forest's Edge!”

Donda Wu had an enlightened look, and life crept back into his face.

“My teeth exist for the sake of tearing through tough kiba meat! Just like my arms that hunt kiba, and my legs that allow me to sprint in the forest, my teeth are one of my survival tools in Forest's Edge! If I don’t use my tools often, they will rust. The food you serve me is an inferior meal that will corrode my life!”

“That’s…”

I wanted to refute, but Ai Fa quietly grabbed my arm.

Her steady blue eyes were telling me to shut up.

“And since I’m a man of Forest's Edge, a hunter of Forest's Edge, this food is harmful to me… But for toothless elders, this is the best meal.”

An arrogant smile slowly returned to Donda Wu’s face. He turned to the old woman and said:

“My grandmother, and the Grand Elder Jiba Wu, what you said is right. Since this food rekindled your spirit, I will take back what I said. This isn’t the feed of monta beast, this dish saved my beloved grandmother who had lived the longest in Forest's Edge, and had contributed generously her entire life, this dish is a medicine! It’s a treasure!”

“Hmmp… clan head Donda, you are more forthright than usual…”

“I’m always this forthright! Right is right, and when I’m wrong, I will admit it! If I don’t have this resolve, I won’t be able to take on the role of clan head.”

He turned his fierce eyes towards Ai Fa and me, then said:

“Ai Fa of house Fa, and family member Asuta! You have saved the Grand Elder of clan Wu, Jiba Wu! As the head of clan Wu, I apologized for my earlier rude actions, and I offer you my thanks once again!”

Ai Fa acknowledged the other party with her gaze.

As the feelings in my heart gradually turned clear, I was at a lost on what to do, and stared right at Donda Wu.

Donda Wu had a cheerful smile on his face.

He had a refreshing face, as if he had finally figured out doubts that had haunted him for years.

Your cooking is poison to us, but good medicine for the Grand Elder. Just eating this poison for one night won't corrode our souls, so I won't hold you accountable for serving me poison. The tusks and horns you obtained are blessings you rightfully earned. You don't need to feel bad about it, so utilize them fairly to become your flesh and blood!

2

Back to the present.

After telling me to sleep first, Ai Fa went to Grandma Jiba's room, while I spent the night by myself. I laid in the large open room and annoyedly hugged my head.

How dare he say my cooking is poison! That damn kiba old man... showing such a smirk face by himself!

Donda Wu probably felt uneasy when he saw his family present us with their blessings one after another. He was suspicious of his family's mental well being—— or if he was the one who had gone mad.

After hearing what the eldest brother Jiza said, he finally understood why

his family acted this way. Like what Grandma Jiba said in the beginning, 「everyone has their own interpretation of what is delicious.」.

And so, he understood that his family didn’t go mad and was relieved.

However—— That meant he really thinks that the 「Kiba Hamburg Steak」 was unpalatable.

Everyone has different taste! Some people just hate Hamburg Steak. And that meal is meant for Grandma Jiba whose teeth aren’t good in the first place!

That’s what I thought.

However, I was the one who decided on hamburg steak for dinner.

After Ai Fa and Rimee Wu gave raving reviews for the hamburg steak, I selected hamburg steak as the main course without hesitation—— and served up this other worldly dish in Forest's Edge as if this was only natural.

If I put more care to consider the content of the meal, then I should serve other types of meal other than hamburg steak. And so, I was the one at fault.

But, even so——

Even so, was my cooking that terrible?

Compared to the kiba hotpot which the denizens of Forest's Edge usually ate—— made from kiba without bloodletting and gooey poitan soup, was my cooking really that bad?

That must be the reason why I felt so defeated.

Was I too arrogant to think that way?

Was there something wrong with my attitude to feel a sense of defeat because of this?

As I gritted my teeth and placed my hand onto my chest, the necklace Rimee Wu made for me —— which chained eight tusks and horns together made a pleasant clinking sound.

This necklace was the first wages I obtained in this different world.

Out of twelve people, eight thought my cooking was 「delicious」, which means I should be proud of myself. I didn't want to exchange these tusks and horns for poitan or aria, but maybe letting it become part of my flesh and blood is the right way of using it. But I think it will be some time before I can resolve myself to do so.

This was evidence that the other party acknowledged my existence.

They think there was value in my existence.

I was overjoyed.

I was proud.

I could live on in this different world —— I felt that I have been given permission by them.

However, my work had also been refuted.

It made me so mad.

I was filled with regret.

As if my entire existence had been denied.

Everyone have different taste, this normal reasoning couldn’t liberate me from my depressed mood.

Furthermore, I didn’t settle the matter of Grandma Jiba’s meal adequately too.

I taught the women of clan Wu how to make minced meat. They could continue to make easy to chew meals for Grandma Jiba who had weak teeth.

However, I didn’t teach them about bloodletting, so they couldn’t improve the taste of the food.

And this had to be done right after capturing a kiba, or there would be no meaning in doing this. So this wasn’t the job of the women, but the men.

Judging from the current situation, Donda Wu had no intention of learning this technique.

In this sense, I also messed up—— I had completely lost.

I wasn’t thorough enough in my thinking.

But, what else should I have done——?

While I was thinking about that…

Knock knock knock—— Someone knocked the door three times.

“I’m here, please come in.”

I thought that was probably Ai Fa. But would she even knock?

By the way, so the action of knocking exists in this world. I learned about this for the first time.

Which means, that might not be Ai Fa.

I didn’t bar the door, please come in.

I had no choice but to stand up as I said that.

Who could it be? While I was thinking about that, Leina Wu’s innocent smile appeared in my mind.

The second sister of the Wu clan who had a head of lustrous black hair looked at me with eyes of admiration during dinner preparation and after we finished our work. My relationship with everyone else was still shallow, so I couldn’t think of anyone who might visit except for her.

However, she had a cute face, great figure and was dressed in an enticing outfit. I was hesitant about meeting such a girl alone so late into the night —— and opened the door slowly with a groan.

However——

"S-Strange? It's you?"

The one standing outside the door wasn't Leina Wu, but in a certain sense, someone much more dangerous.

"Thank you for opening the door for me… I'm really glad, Asuta…"

I knew who that was just by listening to this sexy voice.

From the small gap of the open door, a body so good that it borders on foul play slipped into the room.

"W-Why are you here, Vena Wu——?"

I thought about adding "Miss", but stopped myself. In this world there didn't seem to be a custom of adding honorifics.

I wanted to see you, Asuta… I have something to ask you…

You have a question for me?

Vena looked at me with a teasing and flirty gaze, then took off her leather shoes that was simpler in design than the men’s. I didn’t give her any permission, but she was already bent on entering my room.

Great, Leina didn’t come before me. I was so worried, wondering what should I do if you were busy…

L-Leina Wu has no reason to visit me, right? I only cooked a meal together with her once.

And my relationship with you is even shallower! That was what my answer was implying, but Vena Wu simply laughed flirtatiously.

Fufu, you have completely captivated that child’s heart. Do you really not know? Asuta, you are really dense…

“No, what I’m saying is…”

“Don’t worry. I’m not here to persuade you to marry into my clan… Anyway, let’s sit down and talk…?”

Her body shape was just right, with adequate muscles and the right amount of fats on top of the muscle. Her right hand which was nice to look at and serve practical use smoothly wrap around my left arm.

WARNING, WARNING, an alarm sounded off in my head.

Anyway, this woman was letting out an excessive amount of feminine charm. Her limbs were filled with sexiness, and her body had serious curves. Just describing one of her arms would require a bunch of unnecessary terms to quantify it. I could only close my eyes to keep my sanity. Her entire existence was like pheromones itself.

She narrowed her eyes sleepily, her pink lips seemed to have just the right amount of volume to them. Her oval and smooth face, slender neck and clear collar lines with her long brown hair flowing down her tender right shoulder —— at such a close distance, I couldn’t shift my gaze down from her upper body. I felt that I would be done for if I did that.

「…Let’s sit down.」

She said again, and pulled me into the room.

As expected of a denizen of Forest's Edge who performed hard labour every day, she was really strong. If I resisted, my left arm grabbed by her might touch a dangerous part of her body, so I could only go along with her.

She stopped right by the window where the candle was lit, and her center of gravity shifted down smoothly.

Because of the reasons I described earlier, I could only follow suit—— In the end, I found out that my worries were in vain.

As I leaned onto the wall and sat down, Vena pushed her body onto me as if she couldn’t wait any longer.

「Erm, hey, wait!」

After shouting needlessly, her beautiful finger that was like a piece of art rested on my lips softly:

"Quiet… I don't want my family to hear what I'm about to say next…"

Light breathing entered my ears with these words, which was enough for me to break into goosebumps. And it wasn't because this was unpleasant, but the opposite.

But no matter how I felt, I wasn't acting out of my own will, but was being forced by the other party. This filled me with an emotion akin to fear. In the dim light, a big sister who was the personification of sexiness and pheromones leaned in on me and blew air into my ears—— The remnants of my sensible side just felt that this experience was terrifying.

Ahh—— did she smoked kiba meat during the day?

This sudden thought flashed across my mind, as if I was escaping reality.

Actually, this was trivial and not worth mentioning. I only thought about this because the fragrance from Vena Wu's hair and body was entering my nasal cavity. There was the refreshing smell on lilo and the sweet but

stinging scent of pico leaves.

Smell nice… but something is lacking…

As I was thinking about this, a pair of burning cat-like eyes seemed to be staring at me in my mind.

My sensible side was on the verge of breaking down, but my sense of tension picked up all of a sudden.

I didn’t know when will Ai Fa be back. In such a situation, I couldn’t be so relaxed.

“What do you want to ask me? Since you don’t want your family to know, is it something dangerous?”

“Yes… I’m here to ask you something dangerous…”

She kept her left arm behind her body, and she placed something onto the floor with a thud.

It was a bottle of fruit wine.

I could smell a fragrance from Vena Wu, which was also mixed with the sweet scent of fruit wine.

"Sorry, I'm a little ditzy… I value my family very much… If I don't drink, I won't be able to muster the courage…"

"W-What are you saying? I don't want to get into any trouble."

It seemed safer to make her think I'm an unreliable man.

But Vena Wu shook her head slowly, and rested her head onto my shoulder.

"Asuta… Just who are you…?"

"—— What do you mean?"

"We often visit the Genos post station town, so we are used to foreigners… But your cooking is incredible… I tasted what happiness tasted like and felt like I have been reborn…"

So she wanted to ask about cooking. I didn't mind, but I wish she could keep an adequate distance away. I managed to recover my reason, and the dangerous sensation pressing on my left arm was making my rational side scream.

"You said so before, right? You don't know about the western kingdom and never even heard about the Amusehorn continent…? You are not from this land, but a faraway nation, right…? Just what kind of country is that…?"

"I-I don't know. I come from an island nation, so it should be on the other end of the ocean. But since I don't even know the name of this continent, naturally, I can't find my way back!"



Island nation... an island nation where...? ...That's wonderful...

Vena Wu’s warm finger tip pushed against my chest.

I felt a chill run through my body.

“Asuta… Will you take me back to your incredible home town…?”

After she said that—— Vena Wu started to entangle her body onto mine, like a giant Madarama snake.

3

“Wait, Miss Vena Wu…!”

I was so frantic that I unconsciously added in honorifics.

During this time, her smooth skin was wrapped around my body.

Her body was soft and tender, and huge strength was hidden within her lovely body.

Please don’t marry into the Wu clan… Leina is a cute girl, but I’m not that bad either…right?

No, this is bad! But on a completely different level!

She pushed me down onto the rug and groped my entire body. She didn’t use her fingers, but grind her entire body against mine. The soft but crude sensation feels as though my entire body was going to shatter.

Something that felt like fear kept me from feeling my back muscles.

At the same time, a strong feeling that was totally different from fear engulfed me.

My heart was beating so hard that it hurts, and I couldn’t catch my breath.

A sweet scent that differs from that of herbs gradually numbed my brain cells.

At this moment, I was like a lighter, swimming casually in liquid fuel.

Once the fire spreads—— I will lose myself.

"As a woman of the Wu clan, I had to meet all sorts of men for matchmaking… But I dumped them all… Because if I take someone into the Wu clan as my husband, or marry off to be someone's wife, I won't be able to leave Forest's Edge forever…"

Each word she said brushed against my neck with her hot breath.

"I don't want to spend my entire life here… After eating your dish, my feelings are the complete opposite of Grandma Jiba… After tasting your cooking, it feels like there is another world out there. I want to visit that world… I want to go to your world with you…"

The sensation of the scorching heat slowly moved away from me?.

Vena Wu pushed herself up.

She was making the preparation to head for her goal.

"Let me be yours... and you be mine...?"

While illuminated by the orange light of the candle, Vena Wu reached for the cloth wrapped around her chest.

My rational side that had almost vaporized gathered once again, and I grabbed her wrist from below.

"You can't! It's a taboo for unwed women to bare their body, right? You can't do that."

Her pale brown eyes stared right at me.

Her eyes reflected the wavering flame... and was filled with tears.

I couldn’t tell if she was really on the verge of tears. But Vena Wu didn’t shake off my fingers or open her mouth, and just looked at me quietly——

Then, she finally moved away from my body.

「... Was my charm lacking...?」

She sat down slanted to one side, half her back facing me and her gaze on the ground.

I slowly got up and answered :「I think this has nothing to do with charm.」

「I don’t even know why or how I came to this unfamiliar place. Maybe I’m just retarded and all this is just my imagination. In this situation, I can’t... make a promise I don’t know whether I can fulfil, or get into a relationship with others.」

「... So you have no intention of marrying Ai Fa...?」

My heart that had finally calmed itself started racing again because of a strange feeling.

This night wasn’t good for my heart.

“How should I put this, I don’t really know either. But she is very important to me.”

“You are so honest… this is like asking me to die…”

“I-I don’t mean that.”

“Is that so… But in Forest's Edge, women who haven’t wed by 20 either have a nasty personality, or are harmful to their family…”

She pulled at the rug with angry fingers.

“I have been holding on to my chastity and even endured curious eyes. But when I want to give it up, you rejected me so coldly, I really feel like killing myself…”

"E-Erm, Vena Wu...?"

"If you really marry Leina, I might really kill the two of you..."

While Vena Wu said something horrifying so easily, she stood up with her fruit wine bottle in hand.

"If you take Ai Fa as your wife, what should I do... I might be killed if I made an enemy out of that girl... The best way to obtain happiness will be to entice you, and die together with you..."

"No, like I said..."

"Knocking three times and asking the other party out is an old tradition, which means setting a wedding engagement with each other..."

Vena Wu took smooth strides towards the entrance.

"To accept, you let the visitor in, if not, you turn her down directly.

That’s the custom of Forest's Edge…

She put on her shoes and opened the door. With half of her body leaning outside, she turned her face sideways towards me:

You accepted me, so I won’t give up… Sweet dreams, Asuta, don’t forget our promise.

She closed the door gently and the room turned quiet once again.

I collapsed onto the ground tiredly.

Ah, really now, why is the elder sister the one who came!? I don’t understand her personality at all! I really wish she can give me a break…

I had my fill of kiba just now, but the calories from that seemed to have been completely taken away.

While lying sprawl on the rug, I shook my head that still had some lingering lewd thoughts and snap back to my senses.

Now is not the time to indulge in relationships! My pride as a chef has been shattered...!

As I tried to steer my thoughts in the right direction——

Someone knocked on the wall.

What is it now!?

I took heed from the lesson earlier, and merely answered in my heart.

However, the sound came from the wall instead of the door.

It was the wall opposite me, away from the candle stand.

Since knocking the door three times was a code for wedding engagement, what did knocking the wall once mean? A signal for me to bring food over? Or some sort of protest against us getting too intimate?

No matter what, someone was knocking on the wall of this building. The cook house was behind, so they couldn't have mistaken this. Someone had knocked his hand or feet on the wall. Was there some meaning behind this action?

Darkness engulfed the world outside the window, and I couldn't see anyone.

Forget it! If you have business with me, sound out! Sound out!

I laid sprawled onto the ground once more.

After that, there wasn't anymore sound from the door or the wall, and the serenity of the night returned to the room.

The next moment—— soft speaking sound could be heard.

Someone was definitely out there.

I couldn't hear the content, but it sounded like an argument.

It was a man and a woman.

Did someone saw Vena Wu exit from here and was questioning her?

If that was so, there was more reason for me to not get involved. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. The candle was still lit, Ai Fa will take care of it when she comes back.

Speaking of which, Ai Fa sure is slow…

For the denizens of Forest's Edge, this was already late into the night. Grandma Jiba’s body is frail, so they shouldn’t push her too much. Or was Grandma Jiba the one stopping Ai Fa from leaving? As I thought about that, I drifted off into my dreams——

I suddenly sat up with a start.

I realized that might be Ai Fa’s voice.

I don’t think anyone will take a stroll in the middle of the night. But if someone laid in wait here for Ai Fa to return from the Wu main house, then everything fits.

After this thought arose in my heart, I didn’t think I could sleep if I didn’t check personally.

After all, the voice outside was obviously a man and a woman arguing.

I will just take a peek. If it’s not Ai Fa, then see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

After making up my mind, I walked towards the entrance.

I quietly opened the door, and slipped out under the moonlight.

The voices came from the left side of the building where the Wu main house was.

I sneakily made my way to the wall on the left.

I peeked in the direction of the voices—— And the person was indeed Ai Fa.

She had her back to the wall, arms crossed over her chest and glared fiercely at the person facing her.

Opposite her was the second brother of the Wu clan, Darum Wu.

With eyes were just like his father, he was a handsome man like a young wolf—— He was leaning with one hand on the wall, looking down at Ai Fa’s face from up high.

So that sound just now was his kabedon.

<TL: http://tokyogirlsupdate.com/kabe-don-cafe-experience-20141130159.html>

Ai Fa was just shy of 170cm, but that guy was about 180cm tall, taller than her by half a head. Even so, Ai Fa showed no fear and glared at the other party coldly. That guy had a smile on his face.

It wasn’t a gentle smile, but one of mockery.

The cold man who was usually expressionless was smiling mockingly at Ai Fa.

“… Ai Fa, everyone just think it’s amusing that a woman like you is pretending to be a hunter.”

I could hear his faint voice.

“Everyone is laughing at you, saying a girl has been possessed by the dead spirit of her father, wearing kiba fur and pretending to be a hunter… Hey, why are you alienating the Wu clan?”

“……”

“You’re just lucky that this couple of years went well, but such a life won’t last long. If you look for someone to rely on now, you can live the rest of your life comfortably. No one will care about you if you become a old woman…”

Heated emotions squirmed in my heart. If his face gets 1cm closer to Ai Fa, I will speak up and stop him. After I made this decision, I managed to suppress the feelings in my heart.

A powerless man like me would just get in her way if I tried to help. I knew this very well, so don’t get any closer to her, damn it.

“Could it be… you didn’t resist the eldest son of the Tsun clan that night? That’s why you are reluctant to give up on that fool, and can’t bring yourself to marry others…”

“Hey, your delusions has gone too far!”

When I came back to my senses, I had already lashed out at him.

Darum Wu didn’t move at all.

But I couldn’t stay silent.

“Asuta, what are you doing?”

Ai Fa looked at me coldly.

“Go on home stupid, didn’t I tell you to sleep first?”

Ai Fa’s reaction was just as expected.

As for that man——

He treated me like a pebble on the roadside, just glancing my way once before turning back to Ai Fa.

“Ai Fa, if I’m not wrong, then just tell me honestly. No matter what, I won’t sympathize with that guy’s used goods. But if you really…”

“That guy is just a wimp, there’s no way Ai Fa would let him get his way! Are you blind? Or are you taunting Ai Fa? Are you wooing her? Or picking a fight? If you don’t make yourself clear, Ai Fa won’t know how to react too!”

——You monta, don’t talk with a tone of a man. If you can only tend hearths, then just shut up and keep cooking your food.

He didn’t even look at me and said all that as if I was an annoyance.

I took a few steps their way.

Are you referring to me when you say monta? I have never seen that animal before, so I won’t get mad even if you describe me as such. Enough, just leave. Can’t you tell that Ai Fa is troubled even though you are so close to her?

Darum Wu twisted his lips coldly and leaned even closer towards Ai Fa.

So close that their nose were almost touching.

My agitated emotions turned into words, and spat out from my mouth:

Hey! Then let me tell it to you straight! Since all you can do is hunt, then shut your mouth and hunt your kiba! Don’t pretend to be almighty

and woo girls!

Darum Wu turned expressionless.

His hand left the wall, and his balance that was leaning forward was straightened.

And then—— His fingers reached for the knife on his waist.

Monta, are you making a fool of the hunters of Forest's Edge?

I’m not making a fool out of you all! You asked me to keep cooking my food, are you mocking me then? That’s right, I will tend to the hearth! That’s my job. If you can’t handle this job, then don’t go around wooing girls!

Why you…

Right now, I’m tending to the hearth in Ai Fa’s house. But until six days ago, Ai Fa was the one tending to the hearth! She hunts kiba and tends

to the hearth by herself! She completed the task for both a man and a woman by herself, can you do that?

I punched at the wall that was innocent.

If you can’t, then don’t mock her!

Monta. Are you… taunting the Wu clan…?

His words lacked anger and was filled as if he was dumbfounded instead.

I’m not complaining about the Wu clan or the people of Forest's Edge, I’m saying this to you alone, Darum Wu. Ai Fa is my benefactor, so you can’t be so insolent towards her.

… Enough Asuta, you can shut up now.

After saying that resignedly in a quiet voice, Ai Fa’s back moved away from the wall.

She uncrossed her arms, walked past Darum Wu who was clutching the hilt of his knife and came to me.

“Wait, Ai Fa! I’m not done yet...!” Darum Wu said.

“I already understand very well. No matter what you say, my answer remains the same.”

Ai Fa stood beside me and acknowledge the other party with her usual stiff face and clear eyes.

“I’m honored by your proposal again. But I have decided to live as a hunter, so I can’t marry into the Wu clan.”

“You...”

“Also, going by the rules, the head of both house should decide on any marriage. I’m the head of the Fa house, but the head of the Wu clan is Donda Wu. If you wish to propose in the future, please do so together with your clan head... I will bid my leave.”

Ai Fa grabbed my arm and left in wide strides as if she was dragging me along.

Darum maintained the same position as his body shook and he stared into the air.

“Hey, is it fine to leave him like this?”

Ai Fa didn’t answer, she advanced along the wall, turned around the corner and shoved me into the open door. She then went in, shut the door and put up the bar lock. She was finally ready to lecture me.

“You moron! Why did you push that kind of small fry to the edge!? What are you going to do if he comes at you with his knife!? I’m a guest, and don’t have my knife with me!”

“Because he is too unreasonable...”

“He is spouting nonsense, so just ignore him! Without permission from his clan head, he doesn't have the guts to do anything dumb! But you incited him...”

Ai Fa pushed me onto the door and grabbed my chest hard.

The furious Ai Fa leaned in close to me, our distance was similar to how she and Darum Wu was just now.

Ai Fa’s scent that was a mixture of sweet fruit, refreshing herb and delicious meat entered my nose—— and my heart started to race.

It seemed that Vena Wu’s impact on me had yet to subside. I have to snap back to my senses, this was too dangerous.

Ai Fa didn’t understand my worries at all, her strong eyes stared right at me.

“... When I heard you say “shut your mouth and hunt your kiba”, I really felt like punching you, Asuta.”

“D-Did you hear what I said completely? I’m trying to say that all jobs are equally important.”

“If I didn’t, I would have punched you.”

Ai Fa suddenly pulled away. Her fingers grabbing my chest had shifted to my right hand.

She grasped my hand tightly, and pulled it to about chest level.

After punching the wall just now, my hand was a little red.

“... Your hands exist for the sake of tending hearth fire, correct?”

She gently covered my palm with her other hand.

“If you hurt your hand and that stopped you from working, what will you do? Don’t be rash... This pair of hands saved Grandma Jiba after all.”

The anger gradually faded from Ai Fa’s voice.

She held my right hand with both of her hands and looked up slightly at me.

“Asuta, even though this is temporary, you are still a member of the Fa house.”

“Hmm? Of course. I’m the guest member tending to the Fa house’s hearth.”

My right hand felt really warm.

As if Ai Fa’s body warmth was injected into my body through her hands—— This incredible feeling felt really comfortable. Even though I felt a chill on my back when Vena Wu was on top of me, Ai Fa’s warmth calmed me down.

Ai Fa held my hand, looked into my eyes and said softly:

“That’s why I didn’t offer you my blessing. As a family, we can’t gift our blessings so easily… But you saved Grandma Jiba’s soul, as well as Rimee Wu and me.”

「Yes, I’m glad I was of help.」

「I’m very grateful, but I can’t give you any tangible reward—— However, I hope you can believe that’s how I really feel.」

We were some distance from the candle stand, so the light was dim and I can’t see Ai Fa’s expression clearly.

But her bright blue eyes and quiet words were warmer and gentler than usual, but had Ai Fa’s unique strength in them at the same time.

That warm, gentle and strong feeling was injected into my body alongside her body warmth, and slowly satiate my heart.

「I believe you. I’m very happy to hear you say that.」

I said this naturally.

Ai Fa gripped my hand tightly one last time before slowly letting go.

「... These hands saved the Grand Elder of Forest's Edge, so don’t hurt them because of that foolish man. In that sense, you are still a half-baked guy.」

“Of course, I’m a proper half-baked guy! That’s why I need to work harder.”

I smiled brilliantly, but when I recalled the green face Darum Wu made at the very end, I started to worry.

“Hey, was I being a busybody? Did I make him angry unnecessarily?”

“… You are a busybody a lot of the times, and does plenty of unnecessary things too. But what you said isn’t wrong, that’s why that man’s face turned green and he couldn’t say anything.”

Ai Fa lowered her eyes slightly, her gaze turned my way through her long lashes.

“But… I had been listening to him nag about these boring matters all this while, and felt better after seeing what you did.”

“I see, then my actions aren’t a complete waste.”

Ai Fa snorted, then reverted to her usual self and started taking her string-tied shoes off.

She asked as she took off her shoe.

"By the way, why was the eldest daughter of the Wu clan here?"

"... What?"

I tilted my head and cold sweat covered my back.

"When I came back, that woman just left the room. I wanted to speak with her, but that second brother suddenly pulled me to the shadows, so she didn't notice that I was there."

She kept her waist bent and started taking off the other shoe.

I watched the back of her beautiful blonde head and could only squeeze out the words "I see."

“Well, I don’t really know why she was here, she seemed to be drunk.”

“I see, she really did have a fruit wine bottle in hand.”

Ai Fa finally took off both shoes and stood up slowly.

She then put her hand heavily onto my shoulder.

“Then, what did she mean by “promise” just before she left?”

Reflected in Ai Fa’s beautiful blue eyes was a figure of a pitiful youth whose face was twisted from surprise.

And the day ended on a happy note—— let’s pretend that’s what happened.

Vol. 2 :

Chapter 2

Chapter 2
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 2 Chapter 2

Where is the Signpost?

Translator: Skythewood

Editor: Deus Ex-machina, Ruzenor

1

The next morning

I opened my eyes, but couldn’t find Ai Fa.

The clan Wu vacant house we were staying in was twice the size of Ai Fa’s place and was grand and spacious. The floor was laid with rug, and

we slept on the floor as usual. But Ai Fa was nowhere to be found.

Hmm?... Where did Ai Fa go?

I got up anxiously and knocked the doors in the house.

I checked the rooms, and still couldn’t find her. All the rooms were empty.

Where did she go?

I felt uneasy.

Did that second brother came to find trouble with her again?

I couldn’t sit still with that thought in mind.

I grabbed the white towel I took off before I turned in, and hurried to the

entrance.

The bar lock had been removed.

… Which means, she left out of her own will.

The sun had just risen over the hills.

Normally, we would have washed our clothes by this time. But as we were staying here as guests today, we escaped the hassle of doing house chores for the time being. I got even more confused on why Ai Fa left.

Outside the house was an empty plaza surrounded by seven houses. I walked there and looked around me.

Inside the plaza, a stout woman was carrying an iron pot, an old lady was drying pico leaves on a large piece of cloth, and a group of young children was either helping or getting in their way.

Each family was getting on with their morning chores, but there wasn't anyone in the Wu clan main house situated at the deepest end. I didn't see Ai Fa here either.

However —— judging from the atmosphere here, it didn't seem like anyone had taken Ai Fa away by force. With such a serene scene before me, I felt stupid for holding such dangerous delusions.

In that case, what is going on? Did she leave me here and went back by herself?

I couldn't string together a cohesive statement about that incident with Vena Wu last night,

In the end, I insisted on the point that she was drunk and I wasn't sure what she said, so Ai Fa shouldn't be mad about this. Even though Ai Fa was suspicious and cold towards me, I didn't think she was angry enough to just leave me here.

Or was she actually that angry?

I had a guilty conscience because I was hiding things from Ai Fa. Did she see through me?

Sigh, if I knew I would be so troubled, I shouldn't have kept her in the

dark. I should confess everything—— no, I should change some slight detail—— and report all of it to her!

… No matter what, I think I’m panicking too much?

I was like a toddler separated from my parents.

However, it was true that I felt more uneasy from such a situation in this different world.

Oh… Speaking of which, last night was the first time I acted separately from Ai Fa.

If I included the times I watched the house, we often acted separately. However, I promised Ai Fa that I would 「only act under her supervision」, so I had never wandered around outside by myse

If.

And even if we were apart, we didn’t have anyone else to interact with aside from each other. We spent five days in this small world where we only had each other.

But Rimee Wu appeared and destroyed this balance.

After the balance broke, it led to this incident.

Vena Wu proposed to me, and Darum Wu wooed Ai Fa.

This must be fate.

… Wait, now wasn't the time to talk to myself!

I had to find where Ai Fa had gone.

Anyway, I had to visit the Wu main house.

But if Ai Fa had bid them farewell and went on home, then I could only chase after her in tears.

…… Yo, why are you standing there by yourself, guest?

When I was about to take a step forward, someone called out to me from behind.

I turned back and a blonde youth was looking at me confusedly.

That was the youngest brother of the Wu clan, Ludo Wu.

Ah hello… you too young chap, what are you doing here?

I was in the Wu main house which was in the innermost part of the plaza. Since he was standing behind me, that means he came from the outer part of the village.

Hmm? For some reason, I got up really early tonight, so I strolled around aimlessly. If the women finds me, they will nag and ask me to help.

Ludo Wu gave a big yawn after answering.

My height was exactly 170cm. This youth was shorter and thinner than me, and had a cute appearance.

And of course, he might be slender, but didn’t look weak at all. He was like a young deer, swift and nimble.

His round eyes had a tenacious light about them, and his expression always seem fearless.

“The women’s job should be done by women. They kept ordering me around just because I’m the youngest man… So, what are you doing guest? You’re Asuta, right?”

“Well, Ai Fa was gone when I woke up, so I came out to find her. Young chap, have you seen her?”

“Don’t know, she is probably helping the women with chores. They should be doing the laundry at the water source at this time… This way, follow me.”

Ludo Wu walked towards the Wu main house with brisk strides.

Although he spoke in a casual tone, his nature might be unexpectedly kind. Out of the Wu men with unique personalities, this youth felt the most righteous, and he was the only one who acknowledge my cooking.

"Are you two really going back today? What a shame, I want to eat more delicious meals."

His words filled me with joy. My affection for him kept rising.

"I have taught the cooking method to the women of your clan. They will definitely cook delicious meals for you even if I wasn't here."

"The women of my clan aren't that skilled! And dad won't permit them to make that "hamburg steak" dish. Even if they do cook a delicious meal, only Grandma Jiba will get to taste it."

He looked at me with eyes of dissatisfaction.

"Asuta, you really don't want to marry into our clan? Whether it's Vena-nee or Leina-nee, just pick one and devour her."

“Aren’t you their brother? You actually said something so scary… young chap, are you fine with your important sisters being treated so badly?”

“They will marry sooner or later, so it’s the same anyway. And instead of marrying away from the family, they can stay in the Wu clan forever if they take in a husband. So doing this will be better.”

Hmm, looks like he really care about his sisters. But as someone from a different world, I find it hard to understand his thinking. If a man laid his hands on the sister he treasured so much, could this really respect and treat that man as his brother-in-law?

“Leina-nee is already seventeen and Vena-nee is already twenty. The people around us are really noisy, asking why the women of the Wu main house has yet to wed at their age. They want them to marry soon, increase our clan members and nurture the next generation. That’s an important task of women too, right?”

“Right. By the way, how old are you young chap?”

“I’m fifteen. Finally old enough to get a wife… And can you stop calling me “young chap”? It gives me goosebumps.”

Sorry about that. Ah, is the water source that way?

This way.

What a friendly youth.

Aside from the third sister Lala Wu, I have spoken with every other member of the Wu clan now. The personalities of the siblings in this family varies very widely.

The intimidating eldest brother Jiza Wu, whose personality was hard to figure out.

Like a feral wolf with dangerous eyes, the second brother Darum Wu.

The youngest brother who seemed wild but was actually cheerful.

Vena Wu, the eldest sister overwhelming with sexiness.

The pure and serious second sister, Leina Wu.

The only woman who refuted my □kiba steak□, Lala Wu.

The innocent and cute Rimee Wu.

This family had all sorts of personality.

I was really curious about how one couple could give birth to children that were so different in character.

□You don’t intend to marry into our clan? In that case, I just have to help you entice Leina-nee and the others.□

We passed by the houses and walked down the path to the right where there were more trees.

□Or maybe you can barge in while Leina-nee is bathing. You know about that weird rule, right? If a man saw the naked body of an unwed woman,

they will need to take her as his wife, or be rendered blind. Leina-nee actually has a weak personality, and she will definitely split hairs and think she has to marry you.

I don’t want Leina Wu to split hairs over this! I think I will just be blinded for this anyway.

Instead of assaulting and impregnating her, this will be simpler, right?

I think your precondition is already wrong… Ludo Wu, you should really think seriously about what you need to do to bring happiness to your sisters.

But this is happiness too. That way, she can eat delicious meals everyday!

His words were cunning, but I couldn’t bring myself to hate him when he mix in praises when he speaks… Was my thinking too shallow?

Donda Wu completely refuted my cooking last night, and that left a deep scar in my heart. And what Ludo Wu was saying right now heals the wounds.

“Hmm, that leaves the final method… Getting my stubborn dad to acknowledge you.”

“Didn’t I already told you? I have no intention of marrying…”

“I’m not talking about that, I mean making him acknowledge that your cooking is delicious.”

I looked closely at the youth’s side profile.

Ludo Wu didn’t notice my gaze, placing both hands behind his head as he walked in large strides and swinging his legs out forcefully.

“I think that kiba meat is super delicious, but my dad complains that it is too soft and sweet, right? So if you make a meal that isn’t soft or sweet, then dad won’t be able to complain about it. If dad acknowledge your cooking skills, he won’t protest if our clan’s women copied your cooking —— This method is the least likely after all.”

Even if it was hard to pull off, I still wish things could develop in this way.

But I didn’t know how to do that.

“… But Donda Wu won’t let me tend to the hearth anymore.”

“Hmm? That’s not true. If you tell him “I will make a delicious meal for you, so let me take care of the hearth”, he will definitely agree. If my dad hears that, he won’t let the matter rest.”

“… Is that so?”

“Hey hey, don’t do it! One wrong move and your fingers might be sliced off! Then I won’t be able to eat your cookings ever again… I don’t want things to turn out like this.”

I really felt like kissing his smooth cheeks.

However, I would be troubled if this kiss open a brand new world for me or the youth, so I didn’t do that.

I see... If he accepts, then I can restore my honor with another dish...!

While my motivation was burning, Ludo Wu sighed beside me and said:

"From the current situation, the simplest way would be to let you marry into the clan. I recommend Leina-nee, you two are the same age, right?"

"No, even if we are the same age, it is strange to marry for such a reason. I wish to be more true to myself in living my life."

Being true to oneself.

True to my heart.

Ludo Wu answered lazily:"Right."

"Ah, you see that board erected over there? Behind it is the water source. I don't want them to give me chores, so I will be leaving first."

I got it. Thank you… Ah, it’s a bit late to say this, but thanks for the tusk and horn you gave me yesterday, it made me very happy.

What do you mean? Those are the blessings I gave you, and you’re thanking me? You earned those blessings through proper means, right?

He stuck his tongue out a little wilfully, then turned and left.

They were blood related after all. Just like his cute youngest sister, he was lively and suited for onomatopoeia. Alright time to move on. I looked before me and saw several boards leaning against trees and forming a wall.

I didn’t know why they left these boards here, but there were sounds of water splashing and rowdy voices of women on the other side.

I need to get Ai Fa’s permission before going on about regaining my honour.

I walked towards the water source as I thought about how to convince her.

The voices sounded really cheerful. That was probably Rimee Wu laughing, she’s lively so early in the morning.

“Sorry, but is Ai Fa here?”

I looked in from the shadow of the boards.

The next instant, the subject herself was standing before me.

Ai Fa was right there.

She was rubbing her golden locks with a large piece of cloth, and looking at me in surprise.

Ai Fa’s entire body filled my vision without any gaps.

Her skin had a smooth chocolatey colour that filled my entire vision.

—— After coming to this different world, the first person I met was Ai Fa.

That’s why I thought in the beginning that Ai Fa was a standard denizen of Forest's Edge.

I was absolutely wrong. Ai Fa wasn’t a standard denizen, but a very special existence.

This woman actually wield her sabre and hunt kiba beast deep in the forest. Aside from Ai Fa, no other women did this..

I had never met anyone like Ai Fa. She had the eyes of a wild cat, and her movement was as decisive as a man. In Forest's Edge, there wasn’t any other girl as brave, strong and full of life and fighting spirit as Ai Fa.

Just her appearance was completely different from the others.

The women of this settlement, especially the young unwed girls were always wearing clothes that show a lot of skin, so I could easily tell that she was different from any of them. No one except Ai Fa had such a shapely body figure.

And of course, since the other women also needed to pick firewood and herbs from the forest, chop wood and carry heavy pots and water flasks, no one was fat out of laziness.

Even so, they were still different from Ai Fa.

In order to sprint in the forest and wield a steel sabre to hunt the ferocious kiba… Ai Fa had to keep training to keep up with these demands. Her body looked as if it had been forged from iron.

In actual fact, Ai Fa's stature was slender, and her arms, legs and torso wasn't too thick. She wasn't as well built as a man.

But her body was trained and filled with strong muscles with live combat experience.

There wasn't any fats on her, just like a leather whip.

She didn't go through any unnatural diet, and maintained her slender figure through hard work as a hunter.

However, she didn’t lose the softness of a young woman. Her strong back muscles, small waist and the curves of her legs gave a sense of agility. Her figure made my heart thump.

Ai Fa was beautiful, like a wild leopard.

Her body was graceful like an athlete.

Ai Fa was a woman filled with charm.

No matter if you look at her as an animal, a human or a woman —— her body was beautiful and well proportioned. I had always thought so.

And then…

Ai Fa’s wonderful body filled my entire vision.

Even though there were faint white scars all over her brown body, there was still a smooth luster about her and there wasn’t any impurities. And now, her body was shown right before me.

Simply put, Ai Fa was naked.

With her legs apart as she stood on top of a boulder, Ai Fa was using a large cloth to dry her wet hair, and stood stiffly still. Ai Fa’s front was exposed before my eyes.

There were several nude girls playing behind her. When they noticed me, several of them screamed, but I wasn’t aware of all that.

Want to know why?

Like a high speed reel, the mistress of my house quickly blushed, her face a complicated mixture of shame and a demon. With all her might, Ai Fa struck my temple with a right hook.

2

□You really stir up a lot of trouble…□

This was an empty space some distance away from the Wu residence. Someone sighed heavily.

Standing over 180cm tall, a well toned body, slit-like eyes and a smile that made it difficult to read his thoughts —— This was the eldest brother of the Wu clan, Jiza Wu.

The youngest brother Ludo Wu stood beside him and looked into the hills in the distance, as if this didn't concern him at all. Ai Fa and I stood before the two of them.

This scene was like a disciplined master lecturing Ai Fa and me. In reality, the seriousness and urgency was on a completely different level. This secret meeting would decide the future of the Wu clan and the Fa house.

「Seeing the naked body of an unwed woman is a serious taboo, do you understand that?」

「... Yes, I know that very well.」

「According to the rules, to redeem for one's crime, those who infringe on this taboo has to hand over an eye or marry the girl, and watch over her for her entire life. Unfortunately, we don't even know where you hailed from, so we can't let you marry anyone from the Wu clan.」

「… Yes, that is clear to me.」

「Vena, Leina, Lala and Rimee, all four sisters were there. We can't let all these girls marry you.」

「…Yes, I wouldn't dare do that.」

「That might be so, but you don't have four eyes. So what should we do…」

「W-With regards to that, I already told you right in the beginning!」

Even though this was a secret meeting, I couldn't help raising my voice.

「I only saw Ai Fa's naked body!」

Someone kicked my foot.

Because Ai Fa blocked my entire view, I only saw Ai Fa’s naked body!

I was kicked again.

Because my attention was attracted to Ai Fa’s naked body, I didn’t see anything else around me! I only saw Ai Fa’s naked body!

She kicked me in quick succession.

But I would be very sad if my eyes or any body parts were taken from me, so I dispute this desperately.

By the way, after my left temple was hit by that full powered right hook, I could still feel a sharp pain. There wasn’t any bleeding, but I was worried about any hair fracture in my skull.

Hey, don’t get distracted by the woman from your own family. Wouldn’t that waste my effort for this plan?

Ludo Wu muttered without any concern about the seriousness of the situation. Jiza Wu turned towards him slowly.

Ludo Wu, do you know how serious the consequences are?

He narrowed his eyes to a slit and looked at his younger brother quietly.

Ludo Wu was shocked and after shrinking away for a moment, he raised his brows and said:

"What!? This is making a mountain out of a molehill! This is just an archaic rule made a long time ago. Frankly speaking, no one follows this meaningless regulation in the settlement anymore!"

"You might be right, but with the Tsun clan that leads the entire tribe becoming decadent, we the Wu clan has to be an example for Forest's Edge. Even if the rules are archaic, we must not take them lightly."

I couldn't see any changes to Jiza Wu's expression. His face was gentle, and no matter how stern his words were, he still had a smile on his face.

But after hearing what Jiza Wu said, the face of Ludo Wu who acted like a barking puppy suddenly turned deathly green.



"I... I get it. It's my bad... I already said I was wrong! Jiza-nii, don't get so mad!"

"I will deal with you later."

Jiza Wu ignored his pitiful brother and faced us once again.

All of a sudden, I could feel an invisible force pressing on my head.

Where did this man's intimidation aura came from? The pressure was heavy, and I felt as if I was facing a very skilled martial arts practitioner.

"Ai Fa of House Fa, what are your thoughts on your family member who violated this taboo? I will decide after hearing what you have to say."

Jiza Wu said quietly.

"To block views from the outside, there are door boards set up at the water source. The door board represent the door of a house, and no one is permitted to enter through the door without permission from a family member, which is a rule in Forest's Edge. So Asuta of House Fa broke two taboos—— If it was you, how would you punish him?"

「……Asuta is a foreigner. As the head of House Fa, I accepted this foreigner into my house, but allowed him to visit another house before teaching him all the rules of Forest's Edge. The fault is mine.」

Ai Fa said emotionlessly, then lowered her head quietly.

「If there is a need to atone for this crime, I’m willing to offer my own eyes. But I won’t be able to live on as a hunter in Forest's Edge without both my eyes, so please allow me to give up just one eye...」

「Hey, Ai Fa!」

When I started shouting, Jiza Wu stopped me with a gesture, and held his firm jaw with his hand.

「Ai Fa of House Fa, are you mistaking something? If you lose an eye, you won’t be able to make a living by 「hunting kiba」. The forest isn’t a playground.」

「... If I fall in the forest because of this, then I will accept that fate.」

「I see.」

Jiza Wu nodded and looked at the anxious me.

「I will ask one more time. Asuta of House Fa, did you see the naked body of the Wu clan's women?」

「I only saw Ai Fa's naked body!」

Even at this juncture, she still kicked me.

「I see.」

Jiza Wu exhaled.

「Asuta, I will believe what you said then… Since you claim to have only seen Ai Fa's naked body, then that will be Fa house's problem, and nothing to do with the Wu clan.」

…You forgive him?Ai Fa asked.

I’m not forgiving him, I’m believing him.Jiza Wu answered.

Ai Fa, you are a trustworthy person. Since Asuta is from the Fa house where you are the house head, I will believe what he said… Asuta, you mentioned that you didn’t take one step beyond the door boards, right?

Yes! Because Ai Fa was standing right behind the door board without any clothes on!

She kicked me again.

I was relieved for being vindicated and didn’t mind.

If Ai Fa had to offer one of her eyes, I would rather they take both of mine.

Since this matter didn’t cause any harm to the Wu clan, I won’t pursue

it further… If blood is spilled over something so trivial, we will be accused by others of using devious schemes to harm the members of another house.

After Jiza Wu said that, he turned towards Ludo Wu who had turned rather docile.

Ludo Wu, do you understand now? Your actions not only caused trouble for the Fa house, but will also bring harm to the Wu clan too. You are already an adult who can tell right from wrong, so you have to abide by the rules as a member of the Wu clan.

Yes…

Ludo Wu answered simply, making him look more pitiful

W-Will he be punished harshly?

Hmm? Asuta of house Fa, why are you asking that?

Because... Even if he deserved it, I still feel bad about this. If I was smarter about this, I wouldn't have caused such an incident.

Hmm... I won't punish him. If I do that, then this matter will reach the ears of the clan head.

Even though the sun was up, clan head Donda Wu was still sleeping.

No matter what the rules are, if my father Donda Wu learns this, he will never forgive you. He really dotes on my youngest sister Rimee Wu. Not just your eyes, he will ask for your beating heart.

...I see...

If things turn out this way, outsiders will think the clan head is a bloodthirsty man and look down on the Wu cla. I hope you can keep this from my other family members aside from the clan head Donda Wu.

I could only answer: I hope you can do the same.

Not only was their clan reputation at stake, it could cause our house members to lose our life too.

"Well then, let's make peace. The clan head is still resting, so I, Jiza Wu will bid you farewell. May both our houses be safe."

What he meant was "if you have no other business then get out".

I was a little sad that I couldn't bid Rimee Wu and the others farewell, but it couldn't be helped in such a situation. We quietly walked towards the Wu main house with our heads low to collect our blades.

"Oh right, clan head Donda Wu has a message he wants me to relay to you. In order to deliver it accurately, I will repeat exactly what he said."

With his usual kind smile on his face, Jiza Wu stopped us.

""Thank you for your nasty tasting meal. Thanks to you two, the Grand Elder is saved. I offer you my blessings for the medicine that corrodes the hunter's soul"... That's the entire message."

3

□Hey, Ai Fa!□

I called out but she didn’t answer.

We have already collected our blades and cape, and were on our way back to the Fa House.

This dirt path in Forest's Edge had been packed tightly by the constant travel of its denizens, and we met a few other people along the way.

This place was about an hour away from the Fa House, and this was the first time I met the people from around here. Every one of them looked at me in surprise. No matter where I was, foreigners in Forest's Edge attire was an intriguing sight for everyone.

I wasn’t concerned at all.

For the current me, the most important thing was Ai Fa who was walking

in large strides, and had an air of anger and rejection about her.

I had something to discuss with her, but couldn’t find the chance to speak.

… Even if I keep quiet, that won’t solve the problem.

After making up my mind, I said to the back of the enraged Ai Fa:

“Listen! If you are angry about what happened just now, I admit it’s my fault! I’m really sorry. But I don’t want this incident to fracture the trust in our relationship. Given all these days we have spent together, can you give me a chance to explain?”

“……”

“I didn’t mean to do that. Ludo Wu told me the water source was there, I never imagined that the Wu clan water source is an incredibly wide river, and big enough to bathe in. I thought everyone was washing the dinner utensils happily, that’s why I looked inside.”

□……□

□And this is the first time I heard about the marriage part… This is the second time I have seen you naked, how I should take responsibility for that?□

Even I myself felt embarrassed and troubled after saying that.

That wouldn’t do. I tried to say in a frivolous voice:

□If I can marry a beauty like you, I will be so blissed. As you know, I’m not in a position to have this honour! But if this is against the rules, I don’t mind marrying into your house…□

My end is nigh.

Ai Fa turned towards me, kicked off the ground and pounced. Her explosive burst was incredible, just like her blow that killed the kiba beast seven days ago.

I was pushed down easily. Ai Fa put her knee onto my stomach, and grabbed at my chest with all her strength, which pressed onto my neck, making it hard to breath.

□H-Hey, Ai Fa…□

□Shut up! You— You jerk!□

I have completely stepped on her landmine.

There was an intense fire burning in Ai Fa’s eyes. She bit her lips tightly as if she was going to draw blood, and her face was completely red.

□You… Do you know how much resolve it took in order for me to live my life by □hunting kiba□? And you say you want to marry so easily—□

Ai Fa’s voice was trembling from her pain, and she kept tightening her grip on my chest.

When I saw the substance slowly dripping from her eyes, my heart was filled with regret.

□I’m sorry! It’s my fault, I shouldn’t have joked with you! I just want to

lighten the awkward mood! I don’t mean any harm!

This was 200% my fault. There was no question about it, it was obvious.

Not because of a proper argument or friction from clash of emotions. I made a girl’s eyes filled with tears because of my frivolous tone. I have lived for seventeen years, and felt a very strong sense of guilt over this action.

I’m sorry! I’m really sorry! The guilt from making a strong girl like you cry is suffocating me! Please don’t cry!

Stop kidding around! Who’s crying!?

Ai Fa shouted when a drop of warm substance fell onto my cheeks.

The emotional fire in Ai Fa’s eyes was like the flames of hell, I even thought that her tears would evaporate because of that. Unfortunately, such a miracle didn’t happen, and my heart breaks with each drop of her tears.

I thought I was going to die.

If Ai Fa broke down and wail like Rimee Wu the day before yesterday, I would definitely die from pain and regret over my own foolishness.

But the honourable female hunter Ai Fa didn’t wail loudly. She pushed me away, then after walking some distance away, she turned and wiped away her tears.

I slowly pushed my upper body up, and called out to Ai Fa who was sat down with her back facing me.

“Eh, Ai Fa…?”

“I’m not crying.”

“Yes, you’re not crying! I saw it wrong! I heard that when someone is strangled tightly, his vision will become blurry due to the lack of oxygen!”

Ai Fa stood up quietly, rubbed her face with her arm and continued striding forth.

After a heavy sigh, I chased after Ai Fa.

Fortunately, there wasn’t any other pedestrian during this period of time.

That’s right, she isn’t a woman who only has a cold side.

Ai Fa just stared ahead and alternate her footing.

There wasn’t any more tears in her eyes, but her cheeks were still blushed and her expression was more bitter than usual.

I didn’t plan to say anything unnecessary to her before she revert back to her usual fearless expression. After making this decision, I cast my gaze to the front.

As if she was waiting for me to avert my gaze, Ai Fa whose mouth was shut unhappily opened:

…Why have you been showing a face as if you are splitting hairs since just now?

“Ehh? Because I’m troubled, and wondering how I can make up with you.”

“I’m not asking that. Are you troubled by something else? If not, you wouldn’t be filled with so much regret.”

Even though she was really mad, she still noticed that, which surprised me.

“Yes, I actually have something I need to discuss with you. But it is a little complicated, so I will tell you when you regain your composure.”

“Stop kidding me! I’m always calm and composed!”

Her tone felt even more childish.

Would this really be fine? I was worried, but started talking in order to respect her wishes:

Erm, then I will begin. It will sound very sudden, so don’t be mad. If you stop me, I will just give up the idea.

… It had been just a few short hours, but I feel that I have been provoked for years. Are you going to continue with your nonsense?

If you think there isn’t any need, don’t hesitate to stop me… I want to let Donda Wu taste my cooking again.

Ai Fa narrowed her eyes slightly, and cast an icy gaze at me.

I tried to describe my feelings sincerely.

If Donda Wu don’t acknowledge my cooking, the Wu clan won’t learn how to bloodlet. Then from tomorrow onwards, Grandma Jiba will have to eat meat with a strong stench again, right? Leaving that aside, I feel vexed that someone criticized my food to be poison and foul tasting.

Ai Fa didn’t answer.

Her eyes were half closed as she glared at me.

"Things have finally ended nicely, and I also know it's better to not be too involved with that clan. Aside from Grandma Jiba and Rimee Wu, it's better to not get too close to the other members of the Wu clan… But, it's still very vexing."

"…So that's it."

"Hmm?"

"After hearing someone put you down that hard, it will be strange to not be troubled. It's not something worth nagging about."

"That's right. But we can't get involved with the Wu clan right? That's why I'm troubled."

"…Don't be." Ai Fa said.

She then continued: "Just do what your heart tells you to."

「Huh? You mean you won’t mind if I give that eccentric old man a challenge letter?」

「If you wish to, I won’t stop you.」

「Why are you acting like it doesn’t concern you!? You will be troubled if you fail, right?」

「If you don’t want to trouble me, then sever your relationship with me.」—— Will she say that again? If she did, I will protest even if she shouts or cries.

But she didn’t bring that up at all.

「Donda Wu doesn’t intend to let me marry into the Wu clan anymore. Going by that man’s nature, he won’t permit a girl to hunt Kiba. All that I feel from that man is hostility and mockery.」

「Erm, since he is hostile towards you, then we shouldn’t get involved with him right?」

“Why? Since he is the enemy, we just need to make him submit, right?”

Ai Fa said without hesitation.

When she saw how troubled I looked, Ai Fa snorted.

“I’m not asking you to defeat Donda Wu with a sabre. I’m asking you to subdue his heart with your delicious cooking—— Isn’t that true?”

“Instead of subdue, that’s getting him to acknowledge me, right? Never mind, I’m full of drive right now.”

“In that case, do as you wish,,, I also hope that Grandma Jiba can continue to taste delicious meals in the future too.”

Ai Fa’s voice got softer towards the end, and I couldn’t hear her unless my ears were right beside her.

“However, before you explain the reason why you are doing this, I have

to ask you one thing.

The gleam in Ai Fa’s eyes became more dangerous.

Can you win?

My chances huh…

After considering it for two seconds, I answered There is a chance.

There is?

Yes. I still need to research it for a bit more, but there is still plenty of meat left at home for me to do so.

Then, can you win?

Hmm? Ara, sometimes, it’s a matter of luck…

“You have to win. You are not permitted to lose.” Ai Fa turned her face away.

“When I heard him disparage your cooking with such terrible words, I almost couldn’t stand it anymore. If Donda Wu shows such an arrogant attitude again… I will definitely blow my top, I don’t know what I will do.”

When she saw me stare with my eyes wide open, Ai Fa blushed again.

“Do you know how humiliated I felt when I listened to what that man said last night? I felt like splashing his face with the boiling soup in the iron pot.”

Didn’t you show a cold expression the entire time yesterday?

I thought about it again. Ai Fa’s mood swings wildly, but she would always seem expressionless when facing different people, and even look a bit cold.

She actually had such burning passion under her pure and cold exterior.

“But, we’re dining in the house of someone else—— and the Wu clan at that. If I acted so insolently, the Fa bloodline will have ended right then. And so, if you want to challenge this task, be prepared to shoulder the reputation of the Fa house.”

“I got it.” I nodded firmly.

I felt a warm itch squirming in my heart.

“Thank you, Ai Fa. I didn’t know you were so upset.”

“Hmmp! Because you are still a member of the Fa house for now! As the house head, it’s only natural for me to be mad when others disparage my house member unreasonably!”

After Ai Fa said her piece angrily, she pouted like a child.

“... And no matter what nonsense other people say, that dish is definitely delicious.”

Why did she say that?

Was Ai Fa trying to make me cry to get back at me for earlier?

I didn’t cry, and was all smiles instead.

“Ai Fa, you always give me a push at the last crucial moment. I could feel fighting spirit overflowing from my heart.”

“…Hmmph.”

“Well, it’s great that boring incident didn’t harm the relationship between us. I will be in your care from now on too, Ai Fa!”

“…You violated two taboos and still have the cheeks to say they are boring.”

The way she scowled her nose make her look like an angry wild cat. Ai Fa was already back to her usual self.

I became even more happy at the sight of her scary face.

That’s right, there’s no way it can be boring since I saw your naked body, Ai Fa! That’s my sincere thoughts!

I was getting too conceited and Ai Fa whacked me in the back of the head with her full force.

4

In the following days, I spent my time researching the ways to grill kiba meat—— When I put it this way, it might sound like I just kept grilling meat all day without rest, which was not the case of course.

In Forest's Edge, if you don’t work, you don’t eat. So I have to finish my daily chores properly. And I also need to gather the materials in order to conduct research and perform a lot of physical labour.

For example securing firewood.

Without firewood, I wouldn’t be able to grill meat.

Filled with drive, I wanted to use this opportunity to find a way to adjust the heat in a stove.

It would take years to make it work, but I couldn’t take it so easily.

First of all, there was only one stove in the Fa house, and I have to cook under such a restricted setting. If I boil the 「kiba meat soup」 with strong fire, I would need to reduce the number of firewood I add later, and let it boil slowly. This was the limit of my heat control.

However, the Wu clan has many stoves. By shifting the pot around during cooking, I would be able to use strong and weak fire respectively. That was why i didn’t make any mini hamburg steak during dinner in the Wu clan, but normal sized one—— 「maintaining a weak flame」 was difficult for cooking.

This was different from using a flat frying pan on top of a gas stove. The shape of every piece of wood differs, and the amount could only be a rough gauge by eye. The iron pot used in Forest's Edge was thicker than flat frying pans too, and the heat transfer was slow. But once it heats up, the intensity was very strong. This was a troublesome feature too.

My focus yesterday was to not let the hamburg steak get burned. There wasn’t any failure, but was the fire too weak, resulting in the juices

leaking out? I couldn’t wipe away my uneasiness. I hope I didn’t need to be so worried the next time I see Donda Wu.

Hence, the first obstacle for me was adjusting a weak flame.

How much firewood should I add? How big a fire should I raise? I need to watch how much firewood I use, how intense the fire and smoke was and grasp the condition of the grilled meat at the same time. This was a match of patience, and beginning of a journey with no end in sight.

Anyway, I kept burning firewood and grilling meat.

The entire house was filled with smoke and it was hard to breathe.

I really envy the Wu clan’s environment during times like this, allowing them to build an outdoor stove. But it was useless to envy the rich——So I could only keep staring at my hand like Takuboku Ishikawa . But someone wasn’t pleased about this.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takuboku_Ishikawa>

That person was my only other housemate, the mistress of this house, Ai Fa.

That afternoon after returning home from the Wu clan, Ai Fa finished her hunter’s work and came home. When she saw the terrible state of the house that had been smoked by firewood and meat, she roared:“What the hell are you doing!?”

In order to defeat that kiba old man, I have to research. I protested in a soft voice, and tried to use my natural cuteness to curry the female house head. But she didn’t care and lectured:

“Are you stupid? Just make a stove outside.”

Ai Fa said as she flicked her blonde hair back.

I felt enlightened.

Forest's Edge didn’t have carpenters, architects or interior designers. The denizens made the houses and furnitures by hand.

“We will starve to death without stoves, so I more or less know how to build one.”

Ai Fa’s father passed away two years ago, and she was fifteen at that time. She then broke off ties with everyone else and lived by herself. Having came from a different world, I never imagined she was so knowledgeable.

And I didn’t think every fifteen year old youth in Forest's Edge would know how to erect a stove.

Ai Fa’s father seemed to have foreseen that he would die young, and hastily imparted all his knowledge to his daughter—— Such a thought even occurred to me.

But there wasn’t anyway to confirm this now, and I have no intention of doing so.

I just keep praising Ai Fa:□you are amazing□, and felt blissful for her existence.

And so, one day after we returned from the Wu clan, Ai Fa and I started working hard on erecting a stove.

I knew it would be tough, but this was really back breaking work. We pulled our tow board to a quarry, and bring back rocks that was the right size. We kept bringing back rocks and piled them on the ground. It was a battle of stamina and determination.

We erected a stove right behind the Fa house.

We needed to keep adding firewood into the stove while the sun was still high in the sky. To keep it away from the gaze of outsiders, it would be prudent to build it in a place not visible from the main road. More importantly, there was a tall tree behind the Fa house, which could protect the stove for us even if it rains suddenly. I planned to erect a roof in the future with this tree as its base.

We kept ferrying rocks.

And piled it higher and higher.

We piled it in an oval shape, like a small hill. It had holes in the front and on top, and the center was completely empty. Obviously, it was impossible to erect a stove just by piling rocks. Ai Fa brought back □sticky clay□ from the forest and used it to plaster every rock.

The grey stone she brought back could only be found in a special quarry. After smashing the rock into pieces and dissolving it in water, it would be ready for use. As it would make our hands sticky, we had to struggle with it as we pushed it into the gaps between the rocks. When the stove’s outline had somewhat been formed, we tried burning some firewood.

If it wasn’t airtight or if some parts crumbled when the fire was burning, we would reinforce it with more clay.

After repeating this for five to six times, we finally stopped the smoke from leaking out from the crevices. We then mixed in sand into the clay, and after making it gooey, we applied it evenly to the inside and outside of the stove.

We then baked the entire stove, and the erection would be complete when the clay hardens.

「Uwah!! I’m covered in sweat! This took us half a day.」

The sun was at the western edge of the sky, and white smoke of family cooking their meals were rising all around us.

「……Asuta, I’m hungry.」

Ai Fa who was sitting down couldn’t hide her fatigue.

「That’s true. We built a stove today, so let’s cook with it. Do you want meat soup or hamburg steak?」

「Hamburg steak.」

With my body still collapsed onto the ground, I turned towards Ai Fa.

Ai Fa showed a scary face and asked: 「What?」

「Nothing, I just thought your answer is really quick. But we ate hamburg steak last night too, and this will be the fourth night in a row eating the same thing. Is that fine?」

「…… It’s fine.」

You don’t need to answer after such a long pause.

I already took some time off during the stove construction to grill poitan, so she could pick any dish she wanted. Mincing the meat would be slightly more of a hassle, but Ai Fa spent half a day to erect this stove for me, so cooking that dish for her as thanks for nothing given my gratitude towards her.

While I was groaning, Ai Fa called out to me again.

「Asuta.」

「What’s the matter Ai Fa?」

「The hamburg steak we ate in the Wu house two days ago was bigger.」

「Oh, in my hometown, that’s the normal size.」

「... Why is the hamburg steak you make in the Fa house so small?」

「Oh, didn’t I tell you? In order to make it that big, I would need to grill it twice with both a strong fire and a weak fire. If I only use a strong fire, the surface would be burnt. Just using a weak fire would make it hard to cook, and the juices would leak out. So I can only make it into the small and cute size.」

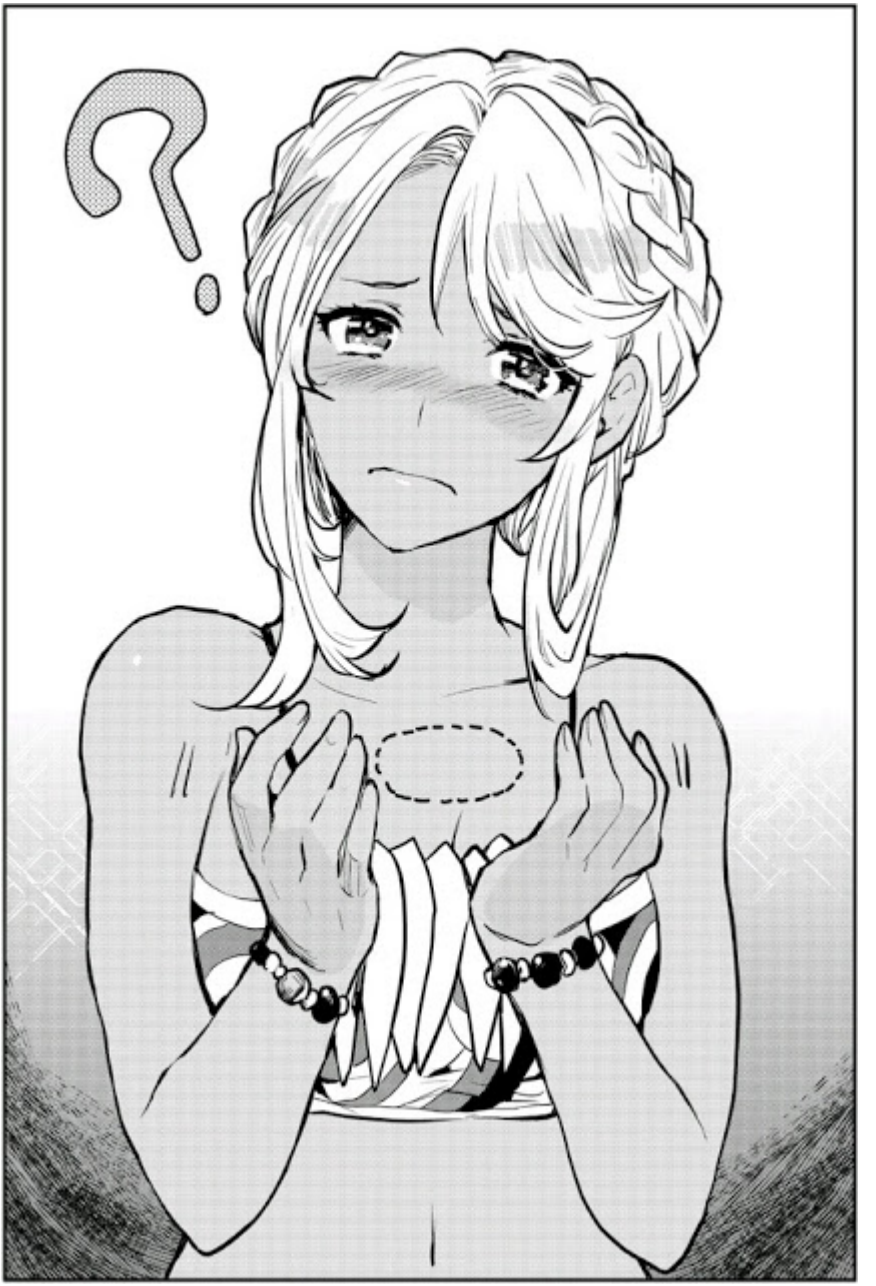
「So that’s why.」

「Yes, that’s the reason.」

「Asuta.」

「What is it, Ai Fa?」

「... The Fa house has two stoves now.」



Yes, I’m really happy about that. But one is inside the house, and the other is outside, so it will be hard to shift the iron pot. It will be hard to use these two stoves separately when cooking one dish.

That also meant I wouldn’t be able to use my skills to maintain a slow fire in cooking. This would be a problem. As I was thinking about that, Ai Fa’s eyes were burning with the setting sun as a backdrop.

And so, we erected a second outdoor stove the very next day.

I collapsed onto the ground in front of the two stoves standing side by side like twin brothers.

Uwah! I’m completely beat! Building stoves for two days in a row is too tiring! My arms are swollen! Can I even cook like this?

After I laid down on the ground and whine, Ai Fa whose eyes were moving around suddenly stared right at me.

It’s fine, I will still cook. I will serve up a large hamburg steak for you… so don’t cry.

Who's crying!?

That's great then... And I can finally start researching grilled cooking tomorrow. Ai Fa, I'm very grateful.

Hmmph.

By the way, from tomorrow onwards, I want you to try the grilled food I will be making to defeat Donda Wu. This will be the last hamburg steak for quite a while.

Last meal...

If you want to eat that, I will cook it for you in the future... Hey, don't cry, alright?

Who's crying!?

Right. You really like hamburg steaks. If you eat hamburg steak

everyday, your jaw strength will really degrade just like Jiza Wu says...

At this moment, I felt something was wrong.

Jaw strength, degrade...?

If it degrades...

What would happen?

I see.

I pressed the middle of my brows and fell into deep thought.

That's... true...

What's the matter, Asuta?

Ai Fa leaned in with a serious face.

Her golden brown hair was sticking to her sweaty face a little, and how should I put this—— she looked a little sexy.

「I-It's nothing! I'm just confirming the direction my cooking should take. I will work hard to make something chewy and as tasty as hamburg steak, so look forward to it.」

As the tentacles of my thoughts spread in all directions, I asked Ai Fa something that had been troubling me:

「Speaking of which, we have spent two days building the stoves, you have been a great help, Ai Fa. But is your hunting going well? It has been about ten days since we have hunted down a kiba, right?」

「It's fine, I got an unexpected reward in the Wu clan.」

Ai Fa clasped the necklace hanging before her chest.

Like me, Ai Fa obtained eight horns.

Ai Fa was already wearing a large number of tusks and horns, so she kept the additional ones in the pocket of her cape.

“Eigh horns is equal to two kiba beast, or twenty meals of aria and poitan… this is an incredible amount for tending the hearth just once.”

“This is an adequate reward for you.”

Ai Fa stared at the fire burning in the stove and said softly:

“If it is the lull season for kiba, I won’t be able to hunt any kiba no matter how long I walked in the forest. The forest might be vast, but the area we can venture into are limited. The furthest we can wander is restricted as we have to return home within the same day.”

“Yes, that make sense.”

“But if we hunt down all the kiba around the settlement, and the fruits and small animals which the kiba likes start to flourish, the kiba hiding deeper in the forest will move in to forage for food. There will then be a never ending supply of kiba to hunt.”

“I see, it has become a fixed cycle.”

However, Ai Fa’s burden doubled after I appeared, so I don’t think this matter was this simple.

Just hunting one kiba every ten days was enough to sustain one person, but hunting one every five days would be needed for two people. May the bountiful season come before Ai Fa’s saving decreases—— I prayed in my heart.

The next day, Ai Fa came home with huge horns and tusks in tow.

“A kiba fell into the trap you were caught in last time.” she said.

The day after, she came home with large horns and tusks again.

“It’s a big one today, my knife almost broke.”

She needed to risk her life to hunt kiba.

I felt ashamed for praying for her to have a bountiful season.

Another day passed—— Ai Fa actually carried a 50kg young kiba home.

I tried bloodletting like you said. It bled and spasmed for quite a while, it should be okay.

I was burning firewood in the stove outside at that time. Ai Fa collapsed onto her butt.

She was covered in sweat and dirt, and seemed to be in pain as she panted.

Of course she would be so tired. Even a small kiba weighed at least 50 kg, which should be around Ai Fa's weight.

A-Are you okay? You did something so reckless...

“I’m fine… water.”

I hurried into the house and scooped up a full ladle of water.

When Ai Fa tried to take the ladle, I noticed that her arms were shaking. So I moved the ladle right to her lips, and tilt it slightly.

After Ai Fa finished it in one gulp, she exhaled and laid sprawled onto the ground.

Her shapely breasts rise and fell violently. I was a little troubled, and wondered where I should look.

I shifted my gaze to the kiba beast laying side by side with Ai Fa.

The head and throat of the carcass were stained with blood, and its small eyes seemed to be shut tightly in sadness. It wasn’t very tall, but it was chubby and round, and probably full of fats. As its horns were bigger than its tusks, I assumed that it was a young male kiba.

“… We still have half the meat left, you don’t need to force yourself.”

After I said that, Ai Fa continued to lay sprawled out as she looked at me

unhappily:

"What are you talking about. The meat will start rotting in another five days."

"Right. In that case, you can just bloodlet it in the forest and just bring the legs back——"

"Aren't you the one who was always yammering about "discarding the torso is a waste" , right?"

Ai Fa said with her eyes closed and breathing still a little ragged.

"Why are you finding fault with me? Did I do something unnecessary?"

"Not at all…! I'm very grateful, thank you Ai Fa."

Ai Fa opened her eyes and glanced at me:

「... If you want to thank me, then show it through action.」

「H-Huh? What should I do?」

Ai Fa got up slowly, and with her mouth slightly pouting, she looked up at me.

「... I want to have hamburg steak tonight.」

I only asked her to eat grilled meat for two days, and she was already showing withdrawal symptoms.

I nodded firmly:

「Got it! I will start preparing it after butchering it! Just wait for me and look forward to it!」

Ai Fa nodded. She looked a little weird.

Her expression was rather unnatural, as if she was suppressing her smile.

When I saw her like this, I could feel my motivation burning. I looked up to the sky and sighed.

5

Ten hectic days passed in a flash

Which means, it had been two weeks since I got transported to this different world.

I spent the first five days with Ai Fa alone, and met Rimee Wu on the 5th night. We visited the Wu clan on the sixth day, and went home the very next day. Another ten days had past—— to be more precise, it had been sixteen days.

I felt I had been in this world since a long time ago. On the other hand, I was surprised that it had been so many days.

No matter what, this had been a busy sixteen days.

Especially this week, I spent every day burning wood and grilling meat. I finally figured something out, and planned to visit the Wu clan tomorrow morning to issue my challenge letter.

No matter how hard I try, there was no end to the study of flame intensity. I needed to find the right moment to stop, and that time was now.

Ai Fa’s dinner tonight was my final prototype. She tasted it, and guaranteed that: “It’s as tasty as a hamburg steak”.

A meal befitting the denizens Forest's Edge—— a dish that the denizens of Forest's Edge could enjoy happily. That was the key of the dish I came up with. When I see Ai Fa’s contented expression I sincerely thought: “This dish will definitely be fine.”

“To be honest, if I didn’t meet you, I would have died somewhere without achieving anything.”

After dinner, I tidied up the utensils and laid on the rug contentedly, then said this out of nowhere.

Ji ji ji… The soft sound of the candle burning could be heard. Ai Fa showed an unhappy face:

“If it’s you, no matter how dire the situation you end up in, or who brings you home, you will definitely be able to overcome it… Is that what you want me to say?”

“I don’t think so highly of myself, and I don’t plan on underestimating this world either. You are the first person I met in this unfamiliar land. How lucky is that? After spending two days here, I was very aware of this fact.”

“… Why do you always start talking about serious things at night, or bring up melancholic topics? It’s troubling to be influenced by you one sidedly.”

Ai Fa flicked up her blonde hair under the candle light.

When it was time for bed, Ai Fa would always let her hair down.

I watched her beautiful long hair gleaming in the candlelight and smiled.

“Is that so? I have been in this world for some time, but I couldn’t shake off my habits of my life in the other world. To me, talking quietly with someone in the dark isn’t something that happens naturally, so I will definitely feel melancholic.”

Speaking of which, I feel as if I was participating in a graduation trip everyday.

I couldn’t see her face clearly under the orange candle glow, but we still chat slowly until we drift off to sleep. Since I think this situation was unique, that means I haven’t gotten used to this world yet.

“If you think I’m gloomy and it makes you unhappy, I apologize. But when I talk to you with this feeling in my heart, how do I put it—— it feels comfortable.”

“… Didn’t I tell you? This serious tone don’t suit you at all, it feels disgusting.”

Ai Fa leaned against the wall lazily, and and kicked at me who was lying even more lazily on the rug. In order to conserve the candle, we would light only one candle after dinner. And to keep each other in sight, we would usually stay close to each other.

With Ai Fa relaxing beside me, this feels really comfortable.

I felt uneasy about spending the night with a girl, but it was calming now. After living together for a long time, a sense of family was budding between us. Ai Fa's existence was as natural as the air itself—— but that wasn't the reason.

It did plays a part, but I don't completely think of Ai Fa as family. If she was my family, I wouldn't be so shaken when I see her beautiful face, smooth brown skin, her occasional sad expression and childish actions.

I was from another world—— If not for this negative element, I would fall in love with Ai Fa right away.

No, I have probably fallen for her.

In the seventeen years of my life, aside from my family and childhood friend, no one has occupied my heart like she did. We have only been together for a few days, and she managed to make me fall head over heels for her.

However, I still didn't want to break the relationship between us.

I couldn't predict what tomorrow might bring—— I might be pulled back

to my original world one day, and be engulfed in flames. With such worries and fear in mind, I didn't intend to take any irresponsible actions.And so, even if Ai Fa's bewitching body would cause a stir in my heart, I could still spend the night peacefully.

Why did these feelings of mine become so clear? The sexy Vena Wu assaulting me probably played a part.

How did the members of the Wu clan spend this night?

Aside from Rimee Wu, I have only spent one night together with the other Wu members.

I think they weren't bad people.

And of course, the second brother Darum Wu wasn't someone I could open my heart to, and I have reservations towards the eldest son Jiza Wu and the eldest daughter Vena Wu.

But except for them—— I have not spoken to many others, and they didn't leave too bad of an impression on me.

The wife of the clan head Mia Lei Wu was a bold and generous mother.

The spouse of Jiza Wu, Sati Lei Wu was a quiet and gentle woman.

Grandmother of the seven siblings, Ditto Min who tended to the stove together with me, was a warm and dignified grandmother.

Second sister Leina Wu was a cute and honest girl.

The youngest brother Ludo Wu gave me a lot of trouble, but I still find it hard to hate him.

I had almost no contact with the third sister Lala Wu and never seen her smile at all. But my impression of her wasn't bad.

I think Rimee Wu is a good kid. Just seeing her smile was enough to cheer me up, that's how lovable she was. And she was an important person for Ai Fa. I really hope her character will stay the same when she grows up—— Rimee Wu makes others feel this way.

And next, Grandma Jiba—— their most important Grand Elder.

This grandmother was incredible, like a character straight out of a tale. Her turbulent life was hard to imagine, and coming into contact with her in such a great way made me proud and happy.

And the leader of the Wu family was the clan head Donda Wu.

Personally, this man shattered my pride as a chef.

I want to fill the Wu family's dining table with happiness to redeem for the mistake because of my shallow thoughts. Similarly, the urge to surprise that eccentric man was equally strong—— I don't deny that.

In that case, I feel that I shouldn't handle this matter with a heart of anger and hate.

Even if that burly man was not as violent and arrogant as his appearance suggests, I wouldn't want to become close friends with him. But he was still Rimee Wu's father, and Jiba Wu's grandson.

And a chef shouldn't bear any hostility in the first place.

I wanted to have this battle for the sake of my pride and dignity as a chef. But I wasn't aiming to subdue that man, but to be acknowledged by him.

Also—— I have never heard of a chef barging into someone else's house and forcing the other party to eat his cooking. I'm still a half baked chef that couldn't suppress the regret in my heart. And so, I hope to at least bring a harmonious atmosphere to his family, not create a rift in their relationship.

What kind of ending was awaiting us?

That would depend on our meeting tomorrow.

…Hmm?

I heard the sound of a soft object plopping down. I raised my head and saw Ai Fa who was leaning against the wall had laid down.

Oh, you are sleeping? If you want to sleep, I will turn off the light.

No… I'm still up.

There wasn't any need to be stubborn over such a trivial matter. I smiled wryly, pushed my body that was exhausted from the day's work, and

closed the candle stand by the window.

Darkness engulfed my vision immediately —— my eyes adjusted to the moonlight in no time.

Ai Fa remained in the same position, leaning by the wall.

Her long golden locks spread on the ground softly under the pale moonlight.

Careful not to step on her hair, I laid down some distance away.

…If it’s you, no matter how dire the situation you end up in, or who brings you home, you will definitely be able to overcome it…

I could hear a hardly audible voice say that.

I replied in the same volume that’s not true, then closed my eyes.

We spent some of our time quietly like this, and some of times noisily as we work towards the moment we settle our differences with Donda Wu.

Vol. 2 :

Chapter 3

Chapter 3
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 2 Chapter 3

Pact and Reunion



Translator: Skythewood

Editor: Deus Ex-machina, Ruzenor

1

…I thought I would never see you two again.

This was the Wu main house.

Donda Wu bit hard on black jerky and sat cross legged with one knee up. Behind him was a large, prominent and elegant kiba skull and pelt.

It had been eleven days since we left the Wu house.

Now was right around noon.

Only the eldest son Jiza Wu stood beside the clan head.

Aside from the clan head’s wife Mia Lei Wu who welcomed us in the beginning, we didn’t meet any other women. They were probably making rugs, extracting fats or busy with other work.

We handed over our blades and sat at the bottom seats. Donda Wu faced Ai Fa and me and continued:

"You two are actually here at a time like this. Head of the Fa house Ai Fa, can you afford to neglect your important work as a hunter?"

"It's fine. I have hunted four kiba in half a month. There's just the two of us in our house, so we can manage."

By the way, one month was thirty days in this world.

There were twelve months in one year, and about 360 days. But there was a thirteenth month every three years, and I still didn't really get how the calendar works over here.

Anyways, after hearing Ai Fa's answer, Donda Wu just glared at her, exhaled and said:

"So? You don't have any business with me, right? If you want to visit the Grand Elder, go on ahead."

「Please let us visit her later. Before that, Fa house member Asuta would like to apologize to the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu.」

「... Apologize?」 Donda Wu said with his lips twisted grumpily.

I went into a seiza position, and bowed deeply:

「Some days ago, the meals I served displeased the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu. I offer my sincere apologies to the Wu clan. This is because my skills in tending to the hearth is still immature, so I would like to apologize to everyone for that.」

「Hmmp, what nonsense are you saying? I don't understand at all, hearth caretaker of the Fa house.」

The malicious mocking came from the top of my head.

「You saved the soul of Grand Elder Jiba Wu, so I won't pursue your crime of letting me eat food that would corrode the soul of a hunter. I already let the matter rest and you are still here to apologize, I don't know how to answer you.」

Yes, that’s why Asuta of Fa house have a request for the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu.

I raised my head and straightened my back, then stared right at Donda Wu’s burly face:

Can you let me tend to the Wu clan’s hearth one more time?

… What did you say?

The reason I tended to the hearth here last time was for the sake of letting Grand Elder Jiba Wu’s heart find peace. I’m happy to have achieved that goal, but my cookings made clan head Donda Wu and his family unhappy instead. I’m glad that you have forgiven my transgression, but I don’t mean to upset everyone.

<

p>A fierce glaring gleam appeared in Donda Wu’s eyes.

He unleashed an enormous amount of pressure, and I felt as if I was

facing a beast.

Even so, I looked back at him with tenacious eyes and said:

“Please allow me to tend to the Wu clan’s hearth again. This time, I will bring peace and satisfaction to all the members of your house.”

“Every member of my house, huh…After eating that rotten kiba meat, eight out of twelve members have already given you their blessings, and you are still not satisfied?”

Donda Wu’s voice surprised me.

Before I understand why I felt that way, a ferocious smile appeared on his face.

“Brat, food has no distinction of being delicious or not. Just eating kiba meat, and ingredients we used the kiba tusks and horns to exchange for is enough to bring peace and satisfaction to my soul. These two things were only lacking when you serve me that unpalatable dinner that night.”

Yes. In that case… I promise you that I will make you feel more peace and satisfaction.

… Promise?Donda Wu’s lips twisted once again.

Brat, you want to make a promise with the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu?

Yes.

If you don’t fulfill this promise, do you know what will happen to you, brat?

… Do what you wish.

At this moment, the eldest son Jiza Wu interjected:

Father, head of the Wu clan Donda Wu. Even though he said that, the Fa house isn’t wealthy and can’t compensate us with money. If they fail to keep their promise, they can only repay with their body. If blood is

spilled over such a reckless matter, the reputation of the Wu clan will plummet.

Hmmp. That brat isn’t a denizen of Forest's Edge, but a pale skinned outsider, right?

But he is a member of the Fa house now. Even if he is a foreigner, he is still a denizen of Forest's Edge.

He was worried about our safety—— that wasn’t the case.

Jiza Wu was very serious about the rules of Forest's Edge, and didn’t want others to tend to his family’s hearth, or for the clan head to perform any violent act.

Hold on, I’m not that violent that I would make someone bleed because of the quality of food. On the precondition that they don’t serve me poison that will corrode my hunter’s soul

A smile of a hunter who found his prey appeared on Donda Wu’s boulder-like face.

“But it is boring to set a promise without anything at stakes… Hey brat, do you have the resolve to serve the food you are so proud of to the people from another house?”

“What?”

I didn’t get what he meant, so I tilted my head confusedly. The burly man before me who was like the reincarnation of a kiba showed a gleeful face:

“In ten days, the kin family of the Wu clan, the Lutim house will be holding a wedding. Three nights from now, the head of the Lutim house will visit here to arrange the wedding preparation. The Wu clan will have an extravagant feast to pre-celebrate the wedding—— I’m asking if you have the resolve to tend to the hearth on that day.”

“Clan head, that’s too…”

“Shut up Jiza.”

The Wu clan successor had an imposing aura about him, but even he couldn’t go against the clan head.

Jiza Wu narrowed his eyes and sighed. I glanced his way, and then asked:

"How many attendees would there be?"

"Not many, just three from their side. The head of the Lutim house, his eldest son and the bride."

"Eldest son of their main house..." Ai Fa muttered softly.

"That's right, the eldest son of their main house."

Donda Wu laughed and said:

"He's the successor of the Lutim main house. He's getting married, and this is the happiest affair for the Lutim house... By the way, of all the kin house of the Wu clan, The Lutim is the largest. Not only do they have many men, they have the closest relations with the Wu clan. If you enraged them, then the Wu clan will have no choice but to break off ties with the Fa house."

“Break off ties?”

I turned towards Ai Fa.

Ai Fa listened quietly to Donda Wu’s words.

“The Wu clan will break off all interaction with the Fa house. Even if the Fa house come to the Wu clan for aid, the Wu clan won’t lend a hand… This don’t just apply to the Wu main house. Be it the Wu branch house or the six houses that are tied by blood to the Wu clan, over a hundred of our kin will break all relations with the Fa house.”

“Why…?”

I asked

Ai Fa didn’t even bat an eye.

“Ai Fa of house Fa, you turned down the wedding proposal of the Wu clan before. But are you misunderstanding something? Did you think you can live so liberally in Forest's Edge because of your smarts and wits?”

Donda Wu leaned his arm on the knee he had propped up, and leaned forth:

“Those guys from Tsun clan only refrained from laying their hands on you because they think you have ties to the Wu clan. In the end, you didn’t marry into the Wu clan, but they still think you have relations with the Wu clan… Since it’s the delusion of those morons, you don’t need to worry about it. I’m not trying to sell you any favour, but since it will bother the Tsun clan people, I’m not so kind that I would clear their doubts. That’s why I didn’t give this matter much thought.”

“… So?”

Ai Fa tilted her head slightly.

The light within her blue eyes grew a little stronger.

“So?… So, if the Wu clan declares that we will break all ties with you, that means there will be nothing stopping those bunch of people from the Tsun clan from doing what they did two years ago. For them, bullying a little girl without any backing is easier than killing a baby kiba.”

「Does Forest's Edge permit such lawlessness?」

「Without power, what’s the use of talking about law? In Forest's Edge, abducting or bullying girls are taboo. But if the one breaking these taboos are the chief Tsun clan, then who can hold them accountable and punish them? Other than the Wu clan, which other house can match them in martial prowess?」

I maintained my kneeling position and clenched my fists.

My gaze passed through this burly man, and an emotion bordering killing intent towards the subject of his speech welled up within me.

「Furthermore, you don’t have any other family or kin, the only other member of your house is that outsider kneeling there. Even if someone abducts you, the residents nearby won’t even notice. That’s why that moron broke the taboo two years ago and barged into your home, right? After what happened that night, he will be back with a few other men next time.」

「... Who cares how many people he brings? I will defeat them all.」

Fire was finally spewing out of Ai Fa’s eyes.

She glared at the huge man who was like a beast, her eyes were as intense as the other party.

“Is this the conditions given by the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu? If my family Asuta can’t satisfy the members of the Wu and Lutim family, the Wu clan will declare that they will break off ties with the Fa house… I accept. As the head of the Fa house, I accept this condition.”

“Hey, Ai Fa!”

I yelled, and Ai Fa looked at me with angry fire in her blue eyes.

“What? Are you going to tell me that you’re not confident? I already told you to have the resolve to shoulder the reputation of the Fa house and accept the challenge.”

Ai Fa was furious.

After spending so much time with her, this might be the first time —— that she showed such rage.

She probably wasn't this mad because of Donda Wu's unreasonable request.

But because she had not depended on the sympathy of the Wu clan in all her time living in Forest's Edge—— she felt that her dignity had been trampled by him.

Ai Fa…

To be honest, I didn't want to make this agreement with him.

Leaving the situation of the Tsun clan aside, we had finally started interacting with Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba again. If we broke off all ties with the Wu clan, we would have to break all relations with the two of them again.

If Ai Fa could be saved by throwing away my pride, I wouldn't hesitate in throwing all of it away. Using Ai Fa's happiness and safety as chips in a match was too foolish.

However…

Even if I run away from this challenge, Ai Fa wouldn't be saved either.

I wouldn’t be able to save her noble and tenacious spirit.

If I back down here, Ai Fa would think I wanted to trample on her honour and pride instead and become raging mad.

Asuta… she called out to me softly.

She stared at me with her blue burning eyes.

Her brows were furrowed in a deep frown, and after she called out my name, her lips were tightly shut—— and her shoulders started trembling a little.

Even you don’t believe me…?

I won’t give in to this, don’t you trust me…?

I could feel her fiery eyes telling me this agitatedly.

"... I understand."

I muttered softly, then turned to Donda Wu and said:

"I accept these conditions."

Donda Wu became expressionless.

Fingers as large as a baseball mitt brushed through his unkempt hair.

"You accept? Do you know what you are saying?"

"I accept these terms."

I repeated myself firmly.

Donda Wu's eyes were filled with rage, and he said:

"Very well, I will make this pact with you, hearth tender. If the thing you

cook can’t satisfy me, then give the thing you are wearing so proudly on your neck back to the Wu clan… A fool who breaks his promise is not worthy of the Wu clan’s blessings.

I understand.

I remained calm on the surface and nodded in reply.

Was this really fine? I glanced to the side, and Ai Fa’s head was slightly lowered, her eyelids shielding her burning gaze.

If I wasn’t mistaken——

Her lips seemed to be raised in a satisfied smile.

2

Oh, have you finished your discussion?

After leaving the Wu clan’s hall, we saw two women about to walk into the house entrance with sieves in hand.

They were the wife of the clan head Mia Lei Wu, and the spouse of the eldest son Sati Lei Wu.

Inside the sieves were a pile of pico leaves, they were probably drying them in the sun.

By the way, the necklace of tusks and horns hanging on their chest numbered three again.

Both of your faces are scary, did our clan head make some boring taunts again?

Mia Lei Wu was about my parent’s age, and a rather plump mother.

Even someone from the relatively wealthy Wu clan had to work hard everyday. Even though I described her as plump, she wasn’t fat because of laziness, she was just big boned.

Other than being big boned, her body was filled with muscles, and covered with an adequate amount of fats. Her arms and shoulders were fleshy, even though she was shorter than me, she was definitely stronger.

I met this mother earlier, but it’s the first time I met Sati Lei Wu today. She smiled and said: 「Long time no see.」

「Welcome to the Wu clan, Ai Fa and Asuta of the Fa house. What brings you here today?」

The young wife has a head of bright brown hair and dark eyes. She was about twenty, and I couldn’t tell she was already a mother with her slim figure and fine features.

「Well, how should I put this —— Isn’t the Lutim house having a pre-wedding celebration three days later? I will be tending to the hearth that night.」

「Really!?」

After I gave this answer, the two housewives leaned forth with sparkling

eyes.

Our eccentric clan head actually agreed to this!? But that grilled poitan made Donda dumbstruck after all. He probably wants to pretend that grilled poitan is invented by him, and boast about it to the Lutim house members.

Mia Lei, I'm looking forward to it! Leina and Rimee worked hard, but their cooking can't compare with Asuta at all. And that tender kiba meat—— will you cook it for us again?

Please look forward to it on the actual day. No matter what, my cooking won't lose to the previous time.

The two of them were as gleeful as little girls.

I didn't need to tell that discomforting agreement to these two innocent housewives. After all, my intentions was to not leave any shadow of disharmony in the Wu clan.

By the way—— The spouses of Donda Wu and Jiza Wu we just met were actually so cheerful and gentle. The thought of this makes me feel

complicated.

In order to gift blessing onto the women for them to have a safe life, parents and husbands would gift them with kiba tusks and horns. The new tusks and horns hanging on their chest were probably gifted to them by their spouses.

The tense battle atmosphere just now was too different from the happy family scene before me, which made my head feel giddy.

…Why do you look so troubled?

Someone whispered into my ear and poked my flank.

Ai Fa was right by my side. She glared at me and said:

Don’t worry, you just need to satisfy that eccentric man with your cooking.

Even though she was glaring at me, her gaze no longer had those emotional fire, and her expression was warmer than usual.

She had already gotten over it, which almost made me sigh.

But—— Ai Fa really trust me, she wasn’t worried about me losing to Donda Wu at all.

If I lose, she would be dragged down along with me. However, she was already resolved to do so. There wasn’t any doubts or hesitation in Ai Fa’s face.

Damn it! Why are you so strong, Ai Fa?!

I thought while the depths of my belly was boiling over like a pot of kiba meat soup.

It wasn’t a negative feeling.

It was a soup that condenses my fighting spirit, and means: 「I definitely won’t lose!」

However, my real enemy wasn’t Donda Wu.

The adversary was my past self—— I had to defeat that shallow thinking and arrogant self, who caused this dissatisfying result, and take back my honour.

…Don’t let out such an aura. If you are so hyped up now, can you last for three days?

She poked my flank again.

We were close enough to whisper, so her long blonde hair had been brushing against my cheek the whole time.

After calming down, I finally realized that we were too close to each other.

Just as I was thinking that and shift my gaze back, the housewives were looking at us with innocent smiles.

I felt embarrassed and pulled an adequate distance away from Ai Fa.

「B-By the way, what is Rimee Wu doing? I haven't seen her today.」

「Rimee? Strange? She was just with us, I even told her that you two are visiting us... Hey, Rimee?」

Mia Lei Wu shouted confusedly.

I looked around me, noticed that Ai Fa's gaze was fixed in one direction and followed her line of sight——

A red head was peeking out from behind a wall to the side, but hid quickly again.

「Ara, she's over there? Thanks for your help, Rimee. We are done over here, so you can go play with Ai Fa and Asuta.」

The two ladies bidded farewell with a look, and went off to the other end of the house.

Grandma Jiba was still napping, and it would be a while before she wakes. Hence, the Wu clan permitted us to stay for the time being. We

spent an hour to get here, so I hope to chat with Rimee Wu a little.

But Rimee Wu only showed her fluffy red hair from the shadows of the wall, and didn’t want to come near.

“Rimee Wu, what are you doing? Is this some sort of game in Forest's Edge?”

After I asked that, Ai Fa looked at me with cold eyes and called out to her:

“Rimee Wu.”

Rimee Wu remained unmoved.

“...Asuta, what’s that?”Ai Fa pointed behind me.

“Hmm?”

When I turned around, I heard the ‘patapata’ sound of footsteps.

When I turned back, Rimee Wu was hugging Ai Fa tightly.

Rimee Wu’s petite hands wrapped around Ai Fa’s slender waist over her cape, and her small head pressed against Ai Fa’s breasts.

That hurts! Rimee Wu, stop. Ai Fa said with her face blushing a little.

Really? Though it didn’t look painful at all. That’s what I want to say, but I didn’t want to be kicked by her, so I held my peace.

Rimee Wu, long time no see. I thought you will come and visit the Fa house. How have you been?

I greeted her for a smile.

The next instant, Rimee Wu shivered, her back shaking as she stood stiffly.

「What's the matter? Did you forget my face?」

Rimee Wu clinged tightly to Ai Fa's chest, and turned slowly towards me.

She looked at me timidly, and her face —— was terrified.

She wasn't just terrified, her face was redder than Ai Fa.

Rimee Wu's round eyes were tearful, and her lips were trembling. She was very expressive as usual, very suitable for onomatopoeia. But did she look as if she was about to cry?

「Asuta…」

「Hmm?」

「Asuta, did you see me naked?」

I was shocked, as if the a bolt of judgement from the gods hit me right in

the head.

「W-W-What are you saying, Rimee Wu? W-W-What naked?」

「...Asuta, didn't you peek at the girls bathing? Did you use that chance to see Rimee's naked body?」

She's referring to what happened in the morning ten days ago!?

After that incident, I busied myself researching cooking every day, and had already shoved my memory about it into a drawer in my brain——but it wasn't so for this child?

No, no matter what, Rimee Wu was just a seven or eight years old little girl! Never mind the other girls, making such a young child show such a tearful expression —— I felt like a complete criminal!

I shouted with all my might once again:

「I only saw Ai Fa's naked body!」

Ai Fa didn’t kick my leg this time, but my butt.

It was a roundhouse kick she put her weight into, and I thought my pelvic bone would crack.

A few minutes later, we headed to the stove room behind the house.

The men should have gone off to the forest by now, so I managed to avoid Darum Wu whom I had bad blood with.

…Didn’t we already agreed? We can’t let Donda Wu or the other family members know about this, and you actually shouted so loudly right in front of the house!

Ai Fa scolded me angrily. Rimee Wu was still hanging tightly to her left arm.

Her face was slightly red because these unnecessary memories had been dug up.

"I only claim to have seen you naked, so there's no problem… Wah, sorry, spare me! If you kick me again, I won't be able to walk any more!"

"Hmmp!"

After looking at Ai Fa's red face, Rimee Wu's face turned even redder and said softly:

"Asuta, did you only see Ai Fa naked? Will you become Ai Fa's husband?"

She spoke quietly, but it was clear to us.

"I don't need a husband, and I won't permit a jerk who breaks the taboo to be my husband!"

Give me a break. I will reflect for the entire day like a real criminal.

As we were chatting, we reached the back of the house.

After greeting Grandma Ditto Min who just finished chopping wood, we moved on ahead and found two girls in front of the kitchen, working hard on something.

They were the second sister Leina Wu and the third sister Lala Wu.

They had placed a large board onto the ground, laid a kiba pelt on top, then kept stepping on it with their bare feet. They circled in a clockwise manner, as if they were chasing each other's shadows. This must be one of the tasks necessary for making fur rug.

As I was thinking that—— Leina Wu noticed us with her blue eyes and widened them.

Her lovely face was turned rose coloured.

Leina Wu had brown skin, so how could her skin turn rose coloured? Anyway, her face was beet red. Leina Wu bowed her head slightly as she stomped on, and the third sister Lala Wu appeared before us next.

She was middle school age (which doesn't exist in this world). And she

was always showing a haughty attitude, so she wouldn’t react so strongly —— this faint expectation I bore fell completely short.

Her face that was beginning to change from that of a child to a teenager turned red with an amazing speed. She furrowed her brows fiercely, bared her white teeth and reached for the knife on her waist as she came towards me barefooted.

「How dare you show yourself so shamelessly before us!? Your luck has run out, hand over your life!」

「Y-You can’t, Lala! Look, Grandma Ditto Min is right there! If you cause a ruckus, then… then what happened that morning will be exposed…?」

While Leina Wu was struggling to restrain Lala Wu’s arm, her face turned redder as she shy away even further.

Leina Wu tied her hair in a low twin tail, and was a petite, lovable and charming girl with a well proportioned figure.

On the other hand, Lala Wu tied her hair in a high ponytail, and was already taller than her elder sister. She looked as strong as a boy, and

was a really cute girl.

The sisters whose appearance contrasted with each other were blushing and losing their composure because of embarrassment.

Even though I would be kicked, I want to use this chance to clarify the misunderstanding. When I was about to speak, Rimee Wu did so before me:

□H-Hey everyone! Asuta only saw Ai Fa’s naked body! S-So, we don’t need to marry him!□

The sisters froze in place.

Their faces remained red from embarrassment, with different emotions flashing in their eyes as one glared at me, and the other looked at me.

□It’s true! I only saw Ai…□

I was hit midway.

She hit my forehead with her palm, a refreshing new move.

It gave me a mild concussion, and I held onto the wall of the kitchen house and groaned.

…Asuta, watch your tongue.

I started reflecting on my actions after seeing Ai Fa’s expression from my blurry vision.

How could I sacrifice Ai Fa’s sense of shame for the sake of soothing the other girls? Who was the most important person to me? It was Ai Fa. Ah, I’m such an idiot. In order to protect myself, I relied on Ai Fa’s strong personality.

I wanted to apologize to Ai Fa properly, but I couldn’t do that as my world was spinning.



3

"...Erm, I'm really sorry about what happened a few days ago. I swear that I didn't see any of you unclothed. But I wish to apologize again for the stress I caused to your mental well-being."

Several seconds later, I bowed to the women of the Wu clan after I recovered from my concussion.

The three women, Leina, Lala and Rimee, stood in a row according to their age before me. All three had different expressions——

Leina Wu was at a loss.

Lala Wu was furious.

Rimee Wu smiled bashfully.

But despite their differing expression, all of them looked deeply embarrassed.

Leaving Ai Fa aside for now, I really didn't see the bodies of these girls, so why should I feel so guilty then? It was a little illogical, but I still made these young girls panic, and that was a heavy crime. This only happened because of my carelessness and foolishness, I lowered my head in apology.

"E-Excuse me! Please don't be so bothered by this, Jiza-nii already told us the entire story. You only acted that way because of Ludo's prank, right?"

Of the three, Leina Wu appears the most embarrassed. I felt even worse when I saw her speaking up for me.

"Hmmp! Jiza-nii is too naive! He should have gouged his eyes out and leave him in the forest! The monta that eats rotten meat will finish him up cleanly, and we can pretend that none of this happened!"

Lala Wu said something really chilling, but her blushing face still stirred up my feelings of guilt.

"B-But Asuta isn't a liar! He definitely didn't see us naked…! This is embarrassing, let's just take that he is telling the truth."

What Rimee Wu said made me speechless. The thought that I caused some mental trauma in the heart of this little girl make me feel like

killing myself.

"... Women of the Wu clan, let's stop this. I can only apologize for my family member's foolishness. I came to visit the Wu clan because I wish to tell you all something."

After her blush faded away, Ai Fa's face was colder than usual as she spoke to mediate.

"Ai Fa, you have something to tell us?"

The eldest of the girls present, Leina Wu asked. Ai Fa nodded a little and said:

"Yes. Before that, aren't you working? I will feel bad if I disturb your work, so I hope you can listen to me as you work."

"Alright, we will get back to our task——" The elder sister patted away the dirt on her feet, and started stamping away at the pelt.

"Why are you doing that?"

When I asked that, Leina who had finally reverted to her usual pure and innocent self answered: Because the pelt will turn soft after we stamp on it.

I wanted to learn more about making fur rugs, but we still have matters to attend to. The other party only permit us to stay until Grandma Jiba wakes up, so our time here was limited.

It has been ten days since Asuta tended to the hearth. How are your meals so far? Is Jiba Wu lively?

Yes! Grandma Jiba will eat a lot and take many small bites… But our cooking still isn't as good as Asuta.

Rimee Wu answered:

Everyone is good in grilling poitan now. But even Leina-nee can't make that hamburg thing well. After grilling it, the meat will sometimes break apart, get burnt or remain raw inside… And it still have a stench! Both the grilled hamburg and the soup without poitan have the stench of kiba in them.

「Have you tried washing the meat?」

「Yes! We did what you said, and wash the meat with salt water! But there will still be some lingering stench.」

I did tell them the way to remove the stench, but if bloodletting wasn't performed when hunting the kiba, it will be hard to remove the stench completely. I have confirmed this in the Fa house too.

「How annoying! I think that Leina-nee will get better with more practice, but Papa Donda won't permit it. He even chided us about wasting kiba meat to play, how mean. And so, we will only grill hamburg steak for Grandma Jiba.」

「I can't do it as well as Asuta after all. Asuta, you are amazing!」

Leina Wu's black pupils sparkled like a scene from a shoujo manga.

I felt honoured, but a stare coming from another side was pricking at me painfully.

"We still have so much meat left at home! Uggh~ I want to eat hamburg steak. I don't want to eat jerky anymore, I want to eat hamburg steak all the time!"

"That's right Rimee, I feel the same too."

Leina Wu showed a lonely smile.

I felt a little scared when I looked at this pair of sisters.

How should I put this —— hamburg steak was much more addictive than I imagined.

Donda Wu and Jiza Wu didn't like the hamburg steak, but Rimee Wu, Leina Wu and the others were completely captivated by it. For the denizens of Forest's Edge, the tender meat they knew of was the meat in kiba soup that had been boiled into a mush. When they tasted the hamburg steak, the new sensation and texture was too strong a stimuli for them.

My next dish will shatter their fantasy towards hamburg steaks —— such

a thought rose in my heart once again.

"But I have something to ask you. When the Wu clan grill meat, how do you handle the meat?"

"Handle them? We just swish swish swish and cut them up."

I didn't understand at all.

Leina Wu helped her explain:

"Just like what you did, we will cut the meat off from the bones, slice them into thin slices and grill them. We will leave the white fats evenly on each piece."

In that case, the way they prepare the kiba meat was the same as how pork and boar meat were prepared in my original world. Aside from the outer layer, the thigh meat of the kiba didn't have much fats. If the meat were cut from the outside in like what Ai Fa did, only the lean meat would be left by the mid point.

"By the way, how thin did you slice them?"

「Ehh…? About this thin.」

It was slightly less than a centimeter. I could understand, it was hard to slice raw meat after all.

Also, she didn't use one hand, but both of them to show the thickness of the meat, how sly. Because Leina Wu looked innocent and cute, she was very endearing when she acts like this. I couldn't help smiling, and a sharp gaze pricked my cheek——

「Asuta, why did you ask?」

「Hmm? Well, it's just for reference. Because I will be tending to the hearth here three days later.」

「Ehh, really!?」「Is that true!?」 Of the three girls, two of them were overjoyed like the housewives earlier.

Only the third sister had a look of disgust, and said angrily as she stomped on:

“What, that guy’s tending to the hearth again? Whatever, just don’t let me eat that mushy meat again.”

She was disguising her rant against me in the form of muttering to herself.

I turned my head towards her quietly.

But she was always on the move, so it was hard to meet her gaze.

The third sister of the Wu clan, Lala Wu. Of all the women, she was the only one who didn’t acknowledge my cooking.

I wouldn’t change my plan even if she told me her opinion. Even so, I still want to hear her thoughts.

“Lala Wu, I want to ask you. Instead of tender meat, do you prefer tougher ones like the men?”

“What?”

She shot her gaze my way.

Her face had calmed down, but it was blushing a little again. So her eyes weren’t that frightening.

“What, peeping tom. Can you not talk to me so causally?”

“L-Let’s not talk about that for now. I might be an apprentice, but I’m still a chef. To me, what the customers think is very important. Of everyone here, your comments are the most specific, so I hope you can tell me what you think.”

“What do you mean, tending to the hearth is a woman’s job, right?”

“Not so for my country. Most of the chef there are men.”

For a short while, Lala Wu kept a straight face and stepped silently.

Finally, she glared at me with a red face and said:

“What!? Are you going to stay here until I say something!? I don’t want to talk to a peeping tom like you!”

"Ehh? I can apologize as much as you want for that incident! But, can you help me?"

"... No matter how many times you apologize, I still feel embarrassed."

She lowered her head a little and bit on her lips.

Maybe... This girl was the same type as Ai Fa.

When I was thinking that, the gaze on my left cheek intensified.

My body broke out in cold sweat and I continued:

"I-I will be going home soon. Before that, can you tell me your thoughts? I remember that you said the grilled poitan and soup aren't bad?"

"You are really noisy! I just hate that gooey meat! I think that thing sprinkled on top of the meat is like warm fruit wine and taste nice. The aria is crunchy and delicious! But the important thing is the kiba meat,

the kiba meat!

She yelled in reckless abandon and direct her piercing gaze towards me.

She was still blushing red.

What do you want? Are you angry because I didn’t offer you my blessing? That can’t be helped! I really hate that meat… I wanted to bless you for saving Grandma Jiba, but if all the girls side with you, Papa will be humiliated! That’s right! In the end, it’s the fault of Leina-nee who was the first one to bless you!

E-Ehh? Me?

Sorry, but sisters shouldn’t fight…?

You must have wooed Leina-nee when you two were cooking together, right? That’s why she gift you her blessings first. Leina-nee, you always look so serious, but act so underhandedly!

That’s not true! I really think it tastes delicious!

「Erm, like I said…」

「I think it’s delicious too!」

「Rimee brat, shut up! Let me say this first Leina-nee. Men are only trying to get on your good side because of your thicc figure! If you don’t marry while your tummy is still flat, you will be left on the shelf.」

「W-Why must you say something so mean!? And right in front of Asuta too, how mean!」

「I’m not a brat! Lala you tomboy!」

Ahhh… They’re not stopping at all.

And the gaze on my left cheek turned sharper and colder. Was she pushing the blame for everything that happened today under my name?

「… What are you quarreling about?」

At this moment, the messiah appeared!

It was the youngest brother Ludo Wu!

Guests, Grandma Jiba is awake… Enough already. That's why I want you to pick one of them and marry into the family.

Shut up, Ludo!T-That's rude, Ludo!Bratty Ludo get lost!Even after hearing the choir of protest, Ludo Wu just waved his hand and said:Ah noisy… and was unfazed. He gestured at Ai Fa and me with his chin, asking us to follow him.

His expression was solemn today. The quiver and bow slung on his left shoulder mean he was about to head into the forest.

I yelled at Lala Wu who was gritting her teeth:

Lala Wu, I won't serve mushy meat next time, and will prepare something with more bite. Look forward to it..

Shut up! No matter what you serve up, I will never gift you my blessing!

With that parting shout, we headed to the entrance of the room.

"... Are you eying for a brat like Lala? She's two years younger than me, and can only marry after three more years."

"I-I don't plan to do that! Can you please change the topic?"

The mistress of my house was staring at the back of my head now, and it felt just like a steel blade. Ludo Wu, even though you were the one who dragged me into this mess, I didn't want to pursue your crimes. But please, stop using the term 'marry' right now.

"Hmmp" whatever!" After saying that, he used his lean and strong arm and put me into a side headlock.

"If you prefer Lala over Vena-nee or Leina-nee, then just lay your hands on her... But if you lay a finger on the brat Rimee, I will kill you."

I could feel genuine killing intent within his quiet voice.

I could only pray that Rimee Wu’s future husband candidates may rest in peace.

And then—— when I walked casually outside of the house, I stopped in my tracks with a gasp.

Standing before the house weren’t the men from the Wu main house, but over 20 □kiba hunting□ warriors.

□Ludo, you are back—— Good, alright men! Like usual, we will plunder lives from the forest today!□

Ohh—— The men’s roar seemed to shake the very earth.

All of them wore kiba fur and a large sabre at their waist. Some of them brought arrows or javelins. There were old men and youths about Ludo Wu’s age. A few had bandages on their head, and there was even a man whose arm was bent the wrong way.

Without doubt, they were the hunters of Forest's Edge.

The young and the old, fit and wounded, all of them had a fire burning in their eyes like beasts. A glaring fighting spirit burned within them, and they headed into the woods.

And standing before them was of course, the clan head Donda Wu, but he ignored our presence.

“I’m going off now!” Ludo Wu ran towards the group after this parting words. His eyes were just like a beast.

The figure of these hunters inspire valor just like a scene out of a mythological tale—— for a while, I couldn’t speak or move.

“... They are the men from the Wu branch family, they are also living in this village.”

Ai Fa put her hand on my shoulder gently.

I turned back unconsciously—— She was probably affected by the men’s aura, when she looked at me, there was a blue flame burning in her eyes.

“They are Donda Wu’s younger brothers and their sons, as well as the younger brothers of Donda Wu’s parents and their scions. All of them are led by the head of Wu’s main house, Donda Wu.”

Her fiery cat like eyes looked right into my eyes.

“And there are six kin house that follows the Wu clan. They are Lutim, Mamu, Min, Lei, Lilim and Mufa. Numbering over a hundred in total… Asuta, does that frighten you? What you are doing is taunting this group of men.”

“No—— it should be fine.”

I replied. I probably succeeded in squeezing out a smile:

“Don’t worry, I’m more convinced about what I need to do next. I probably —— am doing the right thing.”

Ai Fa raised her brow in surprise.

She then showed a brave smile, something she rarely did. She also did something she usually won't do—— ruffling my head that was wrapped in a towel.

4

It was almost time to visit Grandma Jiba. They had permitted us to visit her, but it was a taboo to step into someone's house without being ushered by a family member.

Maybe Rimee Wu was still squabbling with her sisters and was nowhere to be found. The older women who had gone to sun the pico leaves were gone too. Aside from Grandma Jiba, was there anyone else at home? With no idea how the situation was, I could only call out: Excuse me, is there anyone home?

Someone was home.

We have not met three members of the Wu clan. Aside from the second brother Darum Wu, there were two others. After we called out, the two of them appeared after the door at the entrance opened.

One of them was —— the baby Kota Wu.

And the eldest sister Vena Wu who was standing at the other side of the door in surprise. Kota Wu was being held tightly in her voluptuous chest.

To me, this was an awkward reunion.

Before that nude incident, I rejected her temptation with all my might.

With how open she was, she shouldn't be too embarrassed about someone peeking at her bathing —— When I was thinking about that, her cheeks that was as smooth as porcelain turned bright red.

Hey hey hey, weren't you a femme fatale who took the initiative to expose your body to me!? While I was screaming futilely in my heart, Vena Wu used the baby wrapped in a blanket to cover half of her face. Her dreamy eyes had signs of shame, and her body started squirming as if she was trying to avoid my gaze painfully.

Ah, it's Asuta… Ai Fa too… I was thinking who was visiting, so it's the two of you… I-I'm watching over Kota in Sati-lei's place, and didn't notice at all…

Her voice turned high pitched.

Like before, her body gives off plenty of pheromones, filled with sexiness and charm. But, how should I put this? This sexy big sister was squirming her body from embarrassment, but trying her best to look nonchalant —— what troubled me was that she didn’t seem to be pretending at all.

“E-Erm… Jiza-nii told me what actually happened, so I understand… Sorry. Erm, can you not stare at me…”

Towards the end, Vena-nee even used the baby to conceal her entire face.

Kota Wu has his mother’s eyes. He looked straight at me, and made baby noises with his head tilt.

Don’t! Don’t look at the me today with such innocent eyes!

“Y-You’re here to visit Grandma Jiba, right? She is in her bedroom. This way please…”

Vena-nee didn’t walk with her usual sassiness, but rushed inside hurriedly.

I was surprised. When I turned back, I saw Ai Fa looking at me with an icy stare.

L-Let’s go and visit Grandma Jiba.

I didn’t think I needed to be this panicky, but I couldn’t calm my heart.

No matter what, we should visit Grandma Jiba first.

There were two passages to either the left or the right of room, and Vena Wu headed down the one to the right. The straight corridor wasn’t wide, allowing just two people to walk side by side. There were three doors along this 10 metres corridor.

If the left corridor had the same structure, then there would be six rooms in this house.

It was wider than I imagined. In that case, even a large family of twelve

plus one baby could live comfortably here without needing to sleep in one large communal hall.

Vena Wu opened the innermost door and stood squeamishly before it.

"Grandma Jiba, sorry for intruding." After Ai Fa said that, she quickly went in.

Then I will—— As I was about to follow Ai Fa, something I sort of expect happened. Vena Wu grabbed the hem at my waist.

She acted so panicky to make me let my guard down, how was she planning to tempt me? I turned around guardedly to find Vena Wu with her head down. I almost couldn't see her first, and her moist eyes stared at me through the brown fringe of her hair.

"A-Aside from the engagement promise, you have to follow the rules of Forest's Edge too, alright…?"

If I only heard these words alone, I would have thought this was a declaration of love.

But her movements looked so frail, like an inexperienced weak girl

roleplaying as a femme fatale. I didn’t know how to react after hearing her declaration.

“Erm… Why are you acting like this since just now?”

In order to not let my voice be heard inside the other room, I kept my voice down and asked her back. Vena Wu’s shoulders trembled again, and she covered her face with Kota Wu once more.

Stop abusing the baby.

“I-I told you to not look at me… I-I will let you off today…” Vena Wu squeezed these words out and hurried away along the passageway.

I was exhausted, and after entering the room with weak strides, I pulled the door close behind me.

Ai Fa was already chatting with Grandma Jiba.

“Oh, it’s Asuta…? Thank you for coming, I’m really glad…”

The Grand Elder’s eyes and her smile was as pure as a baby, which made the me today feel even more terrible.

And of course, I couldn’t tell her that. I walked forth and knelt beside Ai Fa.

The room was about six tatami wide.

As for furnitures, there was a large shelf, with unfamiliar fruits, faggots of twigs, animal bones, wooden mask and other decor. Aside from these, there wasn’t anything else.

Grandma Jiba sat on a bed with several layers of sheets, beautiful coloured shawls covered her shoulders and feet.

As the weather here was similar to a tropical rainforest, the temperature during the day was similar to Japan in early summer. However, the thoughts of such a petite old woman sleeping in such a barren room gives me the chills.

…… At night, Ditto Min will sleep here with me. Her husband passed

away a long time ago…

She seemed to have seen through my thoughts, which surprised me.

With the help of Ai Fa, Grandma Jiba sat up, and held my hand with her hands that looked like dried twigs.

She was an old lady filled with wrinkles, and looked like a small monkey.

Her stature should be rather small even before she lived to this ripe age.

Although her slit-like eyes were almost covered by her drooping eyelids, there was still a glimmer of sense in them. On her face that was like a prune, she showed a kind and warm expression.

Compared to the last time I met her, Grandma Jiba was more lively.

That makes me glad.

Asuta and Ai Fa, thank you for what you did last time… since that day, I have been eating properly. It wasn't as delicious as your cooking, but

Leina and Rimee worked hard...

That is wonderful. I'm happy to see you acting so energetic too, Grandma Jiba.

Ai Fa was still expressionless, but her eyes were unlike her usual self and filled with a warm glow.

When we ran into the Wu Clan going off for their campaign, Ai Fa's eyes had an intense flame. But her expression was gone like a dream, along with the cold eyes glaring at me earlier.

...It was rare to see Donda drop by. Are you visiting the Wu clan three nights later...?

Yes, we will be tending to the hearth again. Asuta will serve you something delicious!

Ai Fa glanced at me.

「You are indeed a man who excels in cooking.」

She didn’t say 「only excels in cooking」, was it out of sympathy?

「I will do my best to serve you enjoyable meals!」 I replied politely.

「I’m glad… But that night is the pre-wedding celebration for the Lutim house, correct? Donda told me that with a smile…」

After saying that—— Her eyes that were almost covered by her eyelids shone with a clear light, and she alternated her gaze between me and Ai Fa.

「Ai Fa… Just what is Donda scheming…?」

「Scheming?」

「The head of the Lutim house and Donda have similar personalities, they both have brusque personalities, like the giant apes lurking in the southern forest… If you serve the same dish as last time before this

group of hot blooded men, he will definitely be more triggered than Donda, and the feast will become a mess…

… He probably wish to see Asuta and me being humiliated? Because Donda Wu detest us a lot.

Detest… Because you rejected his proposal right, Ai Fa…?

Grandma Jiba fixed her gaze on Ai Fa.

Ai Fa frowned a little painfully.

It can’t be helped, women have the right to pick their husbands too… But Donda must like you a lot last time. If not, he wouldn’t have asked you to marry his cherished son. He probably admires the way you bravely fought back against the Tsun clan successor… But you turned down his proposals and insist on living on as a kiba hunter…

……

"I'm not blaming you… You just need to live in the way you deem right… But Donda takes pride in being a hunter, and arrogant about being a man. He thinks the women's job of watching over the family is important too… That's why he can't stand seeing you choose the path of a hunter even though you are a woman…"

"……"

"Ai Fa, that is an important night for the Wu clan, and Donda is asking you to tend to the hearth that night… what is he scheming…?"

Her eyes very clear, and after hearing her question, no one could turn her down.

Hence, Ai Fa bit her lips tightly like a child, and finally said:

"If we can't satisfy Donda Wu and the head of the Lutim house, Donda Wu says he will declare the Wu clan is breaking ties with the Fa house."

Grandma Jiba was silent for a moment.

Finally, she said quietly 「I see…」 She then closed her eyes and repeated 「I see…」

「Ai Fa, and Asuta, can’t you reject this condition…?」

「That’s impossible. We might be the ones who brought it up, but Donda Wu added this term himself.」

Ai Fa said with a firm and strong voice.

Grandma Jiba slowly turned her gaze towards me and said:

「I see… I didn’t expect things to get so serious. But it’s too late to do anything about it now. And I think this is necessary for the Wu clan.」

After thinking about it, I answered:

「I originally thought of such a tedious plan because of my competitiveness and my pride. But there is more reason than that now. For the sake of the Wu clan, I hope Donda Wu can acknowledge me…

It’s difficult to express in words, but that was how I feel.

I see… Grandma Jiba muttered again.

This must be the right path for you… In that case, my old bones… If that child Donda really act so heartlessly, I will leave the Wu clan…

Eh?

I’m saying that I will abandon the family name of Wu… Head of the Fa house Ai Fa, if I do that, will you be willing to accept me into the Fa house…?

Grandma J-Jiba, what are you saying!? How can I do that!

Of all the time I had spent with Ai Fa, I have probably not seen her look so frantic.

It was normal to react this way, I was surprised too.

However—— I could understand the implication of what Grandma Jiba said.

「Ara ara, are you going to turn away a homeless old lady…? If I leave the Wu house, and the Fa house abandons me, then my remains will just be exposed to the wild…」

「I'm saying you don't need to do this! Why must you leave the Wu clan? That's too strange!」

「It's not strange at all… If the Wu clan declare that they are breaking ties with the Fa house, I won't be able to see you like this again, correct? And the Tsun clan will be even more bold, and they might do terrible things to you… This old bones won't allow that to happen…」

「Even so, you don't need to leave this house! Even if you are here, those people from the Tsun clan will still——」

「The one I disapprove of isn't the Tsun clan, but Donda who forced you to bear such a fate…」

Grandma Jiba said softly, but her voice was very clear.

"Donda's father is my son, and my blood flows in my grandson's veins. If he made such a declaration, it would force you into a terrible fate, I can't permit him to do that… That's why I want to break off my ties with the Wu clan, that's all…"

"That's too foolish… What about Rimee Wu? Leina Wu? Jiza Wu? Your blood flow in their veins too, aren't they your important family members too?"

Ai Fa's face was on the verge of tears.

"Of course, they are all my important family. Be it Jiza, Vena , Darum, Leina , Ludo, Lala, Rimee, Kota… Or the wife of the former clan head Ditto Min, Donda's wife Mia Lei, Jiza's wife Sati Lei, everyone is my important family… However, Donda is the clan head. If I don't wish to follow the clan head's orders, I can only leave this house…"

"I already said…" Ai Fa was choking up by now.

A drop of tear she couldn't hold back fell from her eyes.

「Donda says he will break off ties with the Fa house, and I will never allow that. Doing that is a huge mistake… As the Grand Elder of the Wu clan, I have to let Donda know this is the wrong choice through action…」

Grandma Jiba wiped away Ai Fa's tears with the tip of her finger.

「And that's why, leaving this house is my only choice… do you understand, Asuta?」

「I sort of understand.」

When I answered that way, Ai Fa glared at me with scary eyes.

But I didn't intend to take back my words.

「No, you are an amazing person and I don't think I can understand you so easily. However, if I switch places with you—— If my family wants to do something awful to a person I care strongly about, I won't permit that either. I don't know if I'm strong enough to leave my own family, but I understand why you think this way.」

Asuta, you——Ai Fa grabbed my shirt by the chest.

But her grip was weak. I covered her hands in mine and said:



Ai Fa, Rimee Wu might think the same way as Jiba Wu. Do you think she will permit her own father destroying the life of Ai Fa who she likes the most? Rimee Wu will leave her family together with Jiba Wu —— even if she can't do that, she will hate her father for the rest of her life.

Ai Fa's face turned green from shock.

Her sullen face breaks my heart, but I continued:

We agreed to a match with serious consequences. If you don't wish to see that happen, we should give up on this match even if it means humiliation. That will mean… we are only concerned with our own glory and life.

Especially Ai Fa.

Ai Fa need to understand how much she was loved by the people around her.

"No matter what happens to her, no one will feel hurt or angry." She spent two years believing such a fact.

I think her strong personality was impressive, and I respect her tenacious soul that remained uncorrupted despite her solitude.

However—— Ai Fa made a mistake.

Even if she ostracized herself, Ai Fa still cares about Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu. If that was so, then the other party might feel the same for Ai Fa as strongly too. Ai Fa needs to realize that.

Only someone who couldn’t care about others would obtain true solitude.

If she possess a heart capable of loving others, than she shouldn’t expect to live a lonely life.

…Ai Fa, what we need to do remains the same.

I grabbed Ai Fa’s hands tightly.

We need to win this match and earn Donda Wu's acknowledgement. Then no one will get hurt. Jiba Wu won't leave her family and Rimee Wu won't hate her father. I just need to cook a delicious meal and satisfy Donda Wu.

If we apologize to Donda Wu right now, we might lose our honour, reputation and standing, but we wouldn't lose Jiba Wu and Rimee Wu.

However —— I don't think that was enough.

I hope to get along with the Wu clan in a better way.

After visiting then and meeting quite a number of them, this feelings had grown stronger.

Asuta, can you tell which is the right way…?

Grandma Jiba muttered softly. I turned to her and smiled as steadily as I could and said:

I don't know if this is the right way, but the only thing I can do is

prepare a delicious meal. Jiba Wu, please look forward to dinner three nights from now.

Vol. 2 :

Chapter 4

Chapter 4-5
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 2 Chapter 4 & 5

Culinary path of a Half baked chef



Translator: Skythewood

Editor: Deus Ex-machina, Ruzenor

1

This day has finally come.

Tonight, the Wu clan will be hosting guests from the Lutim house for a pre-wedding celebration.

In Forest's Edge, during the seven days before the wedding, friends and relatives will usually hold a private celebration ahead of the main event.

Tomorrow, it would be with the groom’s family, the Lutim house. The day after tomorrow would be the bride’s Min house. The day after that would be with their closely related Lei house…

They will be celebrating several days in a row.

I felt like saying “thank you for your hard work” to the newly wedded couple. But personally, tonight was more important to me.

The first day of the pre-celebrations would be held in the house with the

highest standings among all their kins—— which is the Wu clan that is hosting them tonight.

I had to tend to the hearth tonight, a heavy responsibility to bear.

On top of that, Ai Fa and I made a pact with Donda Wu.

If my cooking couldn't satisfy Donda Wu and the head of the Lutim house, then the Wu clan and all their kin house would break ties with the Fa house.

If the Wu clan declare they would sever all ties with the Fa house, the successor of the Tsun clan Diga Tsun might assault Ai Fa again.

If Donda Wu follow through with his announcements and force Ai Fa to face such a terrible fate, then the Grand Elder of the Wu clan Jiba Wu will leave her house and become a Fa member.

The Wu clan's youngest daughter Rimee Wu cherish Ai Fa deeply just like Jiba Wu, so there was no telling how much pain that would cause her.

With how messy the entire affair has become, I couldn't help sighing.

But there was only one thing I could do now——

Prepare a delicious meal and earn Donda Wu’s recognition.

Everyone, I will be in your care today.

I bowed deeply to everyone in the Wu clan’s stove room.

A white towel was wrapped around my hair that had grown slightly longer. I wore a white T-shirt with an aladdin-like vest draped over it. Eight pieces of blessing glimmered on my neck along with a necklace of kili fruit. I had an exotic waistband and wore white shoes. My body had gotten used to this mixed dressing.

On the working table was the Santoku knife that had been imbrued with my dad’s soul.

All preparations were complete and I was revving to go.

Ai Fa stood beside me, with three ladies standing opposite us.

They were Donda Wu’s wife——Mia Lei Wu.

Their eldest daughter, Vena Wu.

And their second daughter, Leina Wu.

A total of three ladies.

“Only Leina Wu assisted me the last time.”

“Yes…! Today is actually Lala’s turn, but she felt unmotivated, and I hope Asuta can teach me more cooking skills… So I switched tomorrow’s shift with her.”

“That’s a big help, just having one more person understand th

e procedure would raise the efficiency onto a different level.”

I wasn’t saying that out of courtesy, but a logical reasoning. But Leina Wu blushed and Ai Fa shot her icy gaze at me sideways.

However, I had made up my mind and won’t be distracted.

And of course, I didn’t take things easily because of any distractions the last time I tended to the hearth. But I have decided to take on this challenge with an unfaltering spirit.

After all —— the fate of several people were tied to my culinary performance tonight.

What? You mean we are not reliable? How rude! In terms of tending to the hearth, I won’t lose out to Leina Wu.

The one laughing boldly was the spouse of that scary Donda Wu, Mia Lei Wu.

Her skeletal frame was big and she had a plump figure. There were bits of white hair mixed in her red hair, and her brown eyes were attentive and lively. The one piece long dress she was wearing signified her status as a married woman. She was a dependable mother.

Be it hair colour, eye colour, body shape and appearance, Vena Wu was completely unlike her mother. She was like the incarnation of sexiness,

but she was just fidgeting with the fringe of her hair boredly right now.

Her eyes were sleepy, lips full and her body curvy and thicc, releasing large amount of pheromones. This big sister seemed to be born for the sole purpose of mesmerizing men.

When she saw me, her cheeks were no longer red, and she showed none of her natural flirtatious demeanour. Instead, her attitude was lackluster.

No matter what, from the way they looked, they probably didn't know about the blood culling pact we made with their clan head.

Alright then, I will explain the plan for today. The number of diners are the twelve members of the Wu clan, the three guests from the Lutim house, Ai Fa and me, a total of seventeen people. I would also be serving a special dish to Jiba Wu too.

I started explaining officially.

Dinner tonight would be the kiba soup pot and grilled poitan that was served last time, as well as a grilled kiba dish. I will prepare hamburg steak for Jiba Wu as dinner. Erm~ I would like to know, when you cook

the kiba soup for dinner, do you prepare a special meal for Jiba Wu separately so she could eat it easily?

Yes, to make it easier for her to eat, I will finely dice the aria and cook it in a separate pot. We will shift all the meat into our pot, since the hamburg steak has enough meat for Grandma Jiba.

Mia Lei Wu answered with a smile.

Leina Wu leaned forward seriously, as if she didn't want to miss a single word I said. As if she was trying to balance out with Leina, Vena Wu sexily stiffled a yawn.

I see, then I will follow suit. Regarding cooking—— who is better at preparing kiba soup, or grilling poitan?

Leina is the best at grilling poitan. The kiba soup doesn't have much difference no matter who cooks it, but the worst at tending to the hearth is Vena here.

I see, then I will leave the poitan to Leina Wu, the kiba soup to Mia Lei Wu, then Vena Wu and I will prepare the meat dish and support the

others..

... I will just be a hindrance to you. Should I change my shift with Grandma Ditto Min or Rimee...?

This was the first time Vena Wu spoke today, and her voice sounded a little testy.

Simply put, she felt useless compared to Leina Wu and Mia Lei Wu who were proficient in the kitchen.

This big sister has a complicated personality. With that thought in mind, I smiled at her.

No, no need for that. You are a woman of the Wu clan too, so let's work hard together. I plan to finish my own tasks too.

.....

Alright then, Leina Wu, can you please start grilling the poitan? Vena

Wu, please help her carry the ingredients.

Vena Wu really showed a testy expression this time, and left the stove room side by side with Leina Wu.

Asuta, what should I do?

Mia Lei Wu, I have something to ask. Ever since I tended to the stove last time, grilled poitan would be served at dinner every night, right? When you cook the kiba soup, do you also add all sorts of ingredients from the food store in too?

Of course. If not, the taste wouldn't change… Actually, we couldn't remove the kiba meat stench in the kiba soup no matter what we did. So we needed to add tarapa or lilo to conceal the scent.

Eh? You even add lilo? Wouldn't the fragrance be too strong?

Thanks to that, it could more or less suppress the kiba stench… Hey, what's the deal with the meat you brought over? The hamburg is tasty, but that kiba pot that didn't have any stench really surprises me! Just what magic did you cast to turn kiba meat so delicious?

"I didn't use any magic. I only use bloodletting immediately on the kiba I caught… But that's not the job of the women, but the responsibility of the men."

"I see… it can't be helped then. Those stubborn men will never listen to you."

I looked at the depressed Mia Lei Wu and continued:

"I heard that you would treat the guests more lavishly during feasts. In Forest's Edge, what is considered lavish? Do you use all sorts of ingredients in your store?"

"That's right, we will put in loads of vegetables that are more luxurious than aria and poitan into the pot. But doing so without thinking will make the entire thing unpalatable."

"I get it. You only decide which vegetable to add after tough and thorough thought… It's fine even if it is your personal preference, but what do you think should be added into the kiba soup with less of a stench to make it tasty?"

“Ehh? Well, Tino leaves goes well with anything. If the soup doesn’t have any stench, then there’s no need to add lilo and tarapa… Gigo won’t work either. The entire soup would become very thick, just like adding in poitan. Even though it’s a little bitter, Pula would work too. But Ludo and Lala would probably sulk at the sight of them.”

This long string of words mixed the names of ingredients and people together. If I accidentally added Lala instead of pula into the pot, the Wu clan would be furious.

“So tino leaves and pula is better? Then let’s add these two for tonight.”

“Ehh!? Don’t do that! It’s a rare chance for you to come, won’t it be bad if my nosiness messed up the taste!? Our guest from the Lutim house will be here too.”

“It’s fine, we need to be more adventurous. If we don’t put in the effort to innovate, our cooking will never improve.”

I glanced at Ai Fa when I said that.

Although my words were the complete opposite from my previous time tending to the hearth—— Ai Fa still watched over me with her silent and

strong gaze.

I told Ai Fa my plans for the cooking tonight right from the start.

Even though Ai Fa was surprised, she merely told me: “I leave it entirely to your judgement.”

I want to repay her trust in me.

“… By the way, how is the clan head recently?”

Mia Lei Wu was moaning with a troubled face, but let out a funny “Hmm?” sound. She seemed to be simulating the kiba soup cooking process in her mind, and I felt sorry for interrupting her thoughts.

“You are asking how the clan head is doing? Didn’t you meet him just three days ago?”

“Yes, I want to know if anything about him changed. What do you think?”

“He is still the same… Now that you mentioned it, he looks a little

grumpy since that night, and will visit Grandma Jiba in her room from time to time. Grandma Jiba has probably lectured him.

No, that wasn't it. Grandma Jiba knew Donda Wu's character very well, since it has come to this, she would not lecture him. The sensible Grand Elder has already decided on her path, and would have nothing to say to Donda Wu.

In that case—— Did Donda Wu went to negotiate with Grandma Jiba, and want to dismiss this foolish competition of ours? I hope so.

Donda Wu, Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba were blood relatives—— He wasn't planning to destroy Ai Fa's life for real—— I sincerely hope that was how he thought.

No matter what, the die had been cast.

Whatever the truth might be, the thing I could do, and the thing I should do remains the same.

I stiffened my emotions again and focused on my task at hand.

Well then, I will start preparing the meat dish. After the poitan is done, we will start cooking the soup, there is more than enough time. For the sake of Grandma Jiba, let's revise the cooking method for hamburg steak.

After saying that, I opened the kiba meat I brought over. I only brought

thigh and chuck flap meat last time, but I prepared meat from three different parts this time.

To be honest, because I worked too hard on my grill meat research, there weren't enough quantity of some parts for everyone, so Ai Fa and me might have to skip out—— I almost fell into such a pernicious situation. I didn't expect that two days ago, Ai Fa brought back that 50kg young kiba, and wiped my worries away.

And so, there were more than enough meat now. After carefully categorizing the meat, I laid them out on the work platform.

In the next instant, Mia Lei Wu asked worriedly:「Is that meat from the kiba's torso?」

「This meat is tastier than thigh meat. We already know that the last time you tended to the hearth. However, the Lutim house will be visiting this time, isn't it better to use thigh meat?」

「Eh? The Lutim house head don't like eating meat from the torso?」

「I'm not sure about that. But since our clan head showed such a disgusted expression, then the Lutim house head will probably react the same way. And the Lutim house head is quicker to anger than our clan head, so it's better to be careful.」

He’s more easily agitated then Donda Wu… how scary.

If we only use the thigh meat, there wouldn’t be enough to go around, and the variety of dishes would be more bland.

“But when you and the others did not resist eating meat from the torso that much, correct? Why does Donda Wu detest it so much?”

“I have no idea why either. But Jiza and Darum did not object to what the clan head said, so there must be a good reason why the men think this way.”

A good reason for the men…

I remember Donda Wu rambling that: “Only the montas that feast on rotten meat will eat flesh off the kiba’s torso!” For the honourable Forest's Edge hunters, they probably felt outrage that I even dare serve them that.

However, Ai Fa was a hunter too, but she had no hesitation about eating the kiba’s torso.

What exactly was going on? When I turned back towards Ai Fa —— my house head had an expression even more troubled than mine. She then said with a groan:

“Mia Lei Wu, there’s something I would like to ask—— Is house Lutim the next most powerful kin house right after the Wu clan?”

It was rare to see Ai Fa taking the initiative to talk to others. Mia Lei Wu looked a little happy as she nodded and replied:

“That’s right, the Lutim house can rival the Wu clan, their house head Dan Lutim is also an outstanding hunter. There is no question about this.”

“I see, that’s why—— they think the torso of the kiba is monta feed.”

After Ai Fa mumbled to herself, she showed a determined expression and said to me:

“Asuta, you don’t need to mind this and just follow your plan. If the head of the Lutim house hates the torso of the kiba as much as Donda Wu, I can convince them otherwise.”

Eh? Ai Fa, you know the reason why they hate that body part?

Yes, I can understand… Anyways, you can’t finish your cooking without using these parts, right? In that case, you don’t need to worry about it and just do your best.

Ai Fa showed no hesitation in her eyes.

In that case, I won’t hesitate either.

This wasn’t just my personal battle, but a fight that will affect the fate of the Fa house.

In order to not drag others into this decision we made ourselves and bring about tragedy, we had to give it our all.

2

A few hours later——

We finished the cooking with plenty of time to spare.

Of the four stoves, kiba pots were boiling in two of them. Going by my naming conventions, they would be 「kiba soup」. The soup has been brought to a boil, and mountains of poitan had been piled onto the plates. We just needed to wait for the guests' arrival before grilling the meat.

「Sigh, Asuta… Is this really fine…?」

Vena Wu sat lazily with her back to the wall and one knee in her arms as she called out to me worriedly.

She plays an important role in my plans this time.

「The pre-wedding celebration feast is important… I don't have any confidence…」

「It's fine. There's no problem at this point in time.」

「In that case, I…」

「Please proceed as planned.」

Vena Wu hugged her knee tightly, and glared at me grudgingly.

Her knee deformed her large breasts, and I could see the twisted shape even though there was a layer of clothing covering it, a truly erotic view. If everyone knew what I was thinking right now, they would definitely question my character.

“Asuta, are you… using me as a sacrifice so they won’t complain against you…?”

“What do you mean? I have no reason to do that to you.”

“Because… I’m a burden to you right…?”

The other ladies were resting outside the stove house to cool down.

That was why Vena Wu brought up this topic. I was a little frantic since the door was open.

“I-I don’t think you are a burden. Didn’t we talk about this before? My thinking remains the same. Vena Wu, I really hope you can abandon your strange thinking.”

“But… Even if I change my thinking, my feelings can’t be changed…”

Her smooth cheeks blushed a little again.

“You think everything I did is a scheme…? I’m already a 20 year-old virgin, you think I can do that…?”

“Noo, what I mean is…”

“Really now… the heir to house Lutim who is visiting today proposed to my family before, and is one of the men I turned down…”

She covered her face with her knees this time.

“If I messed up during this man’s pre wedding celebration… and the house head of house Lutim lash out at me… Ahh, I want to die…”

“I-I told you it will be fine! If you fail, I will take all the blame! It will all be my fault! But if it succeeds, then it will be your glory, alright?”

Vena Wu’s eyes were cast my way from the shadows of her knees

“You might say that now, but you are planning to betray me in the end, correct…?”

“I won’t betray you! I promise on this Santoku knife!”

After saying that, her brown eyes drooped a little, and there was a gleam of coquetry in them.

“How sly… How can I change my feelings now…? You are cold to me at times, and kind to me at other times. I feel like a puppet dancing to your tunes…”

Then what do you want me to do!?

At this moment, a cold voice came from behind me:

“What are you rambling about by yourself?”

It seems like I raised my voice unknowingly. I felt a chill down my back

because of my carelessness.

Ai Fa stood at the entrance of the stove room, and alternated her sharp gaze between Vena Wu and me.

"The guests from house Lutim are here, it's time, right?"

When I heard that, I became tensed.

I nodded, turned to Vena Wu and said:

"Good! Let's begin! Vena Wu, please proceed as we planned!"

"Oh! So you are that outsider staying in the Fa house!"

When I carried the kiba meat soup out together with Mia Lei Wu, someone welcomed me with a loud voice.

He was an unfamiliar large man sitting at the seat of honour.

A tall and burly man, he was on par with Donda Wu seated besides him.

Aside from being tall, he was also broad and thick. He was wearing a vest similar to mine, but he was merely draping over his shoulders, and his beer belly protrude out wide.

By the way, he had a shiny bald head, thick brow and all his facial features were big. An orange beard grew from his wide chin. His brown skin matched his exotic dressing really well, and he totally looked the part of an arabian demon god.

He might be smiling now, but if he ever gets mad, not just Vena Wu, even I would want to die.

I placed the iron pot onto the stove used to keep it warm, kneeled before him and said with a bow:



I'm Asuta from the Fa house, I will be tending to the hearth together with the women from the Wu clan.

I see. I heard the dinner you will serve is different from the other houses, so this will be a joyous feast, no? Kiba meat will all be the same after putting them into our stomach, but this will definitely be an interesting topic! I'm looking forward to you, Asuta of house Fa!

I hope dinner will suit your taste.

I replied in rather sloppy polite speech, then got up after saying I will take my leave.

I was just an apprentice chef in a family restaurant after all, not the head chef of a french restaurant or the lady boss of a high class Japanese restaurant. My family only taught me to say welcome when greeting the customers.

Mia Lei Wu who brought in the kiba meat soup with me stayed behind to chat with the guests, and I returned to the entrance of the room.

I used this chance to observe the other guests.

To the left and right of the seat of honour were an unfamiliar couple.

That should be the heir of the Lutim house and his fiancée.

I remember the groom’s name was Kaslan Lutim.

He seemed like a righteous man, and his body stature could rival the eldest son of the Wu clan, Jiza Wu… Or rather, Jiza Wu himself was seated beside him, and the two of them seated side by side could only be described as “spectacular”.

The two fathers were too well built, and their heirs both had proportionate and toned bodies. They both had a quiet dignity about them, and their style and aura befitted their positions as the next house head.

Kaslan Lutim’s appearance was deeply influenced by his father, and all his facial features were large. His face was squarish with a chiselled jaw, and couldn’t be considered handsome.

However, his brown hair had been cut refreshingly short and tidy, and his deep blue eyes had a quiet shine. His figure looked competent and honest, and I guess that he would make a good husband.

On the other hand, I remember the name of the bride was Ema Min.

Amongst the kin house of the Wu clan, Min was behind Wu, Lutim and Lei, right in the middle. Grandma Ditto Min came from the Min house.

Which means, women would keep their family name behind their given

name when they marry out of their house to show their birth origins.

After Ditto Min marry into the Wu clan, she became Ditto Min Wu. Seven days later, this lady would turn from Ema Min to Ema Min Lutim, and so on.

Ehh…

□Ai Fa- Tsurumi…□

A foolish delusion arose in my mind as I thought about this, a secret I would take with me to the grave.

If this day really comes, I would probably become □Asuta- Fa□ instead. No matter what, delusioning about impossible things was a wasteful effort.

I looked at the bride Ema Min before me.

This girl wasn’t fat or thin, of average height and looked healthy. She sat really straight and looked like a girl with good upbringing.

Her black hair was bundled up high, and her light blue eyes shone brightly. She looked pure and serious, and didn’t seem intimidated at all as she waited quietly for the feast to begin.

She was about my age, but had such a mature air about her. Was this a calm demeanor all women about to be wed share in common? She made me and Leina Wu who was the same age look childish.

For a half-assed seventeen year old guy like me, I prefer pure and cheerful girls over those who looked more mature than their age suggest. If I had to be more specific, I like girls who would normally show a cold face, but has a straight personality, will kick other people's legs, and has eyes like a wild cat—— I know, that's not important.

No matter what, the young couple looked wonderful together!

And we were using their pre-wedding celebration feast to hold such a strange contest, which makes me feel bad.

And just like what his wife said, the subject who set up this match looked unhappy.

When I greeted the person beside him, Donda Wu averted his eyes and started taking large swigs of fruit wine.

Don't drink so much that you can't tell the taste of the dish. I prayed in my heart. When I continued walking forward, I felt a sticky gaze coming from the side.

—— It was the second son of the Wu clan, Darum Wu.

When we visited the Wu clan three days ago, he was the only one I didn’t meet.

Which means, this was a reunion after two weeks. He had an aura as fierce as a wolf, has a well toned body and inherited his father’s eyes.

If not for his fierce eyes and expression, he would probably be the most handsome man in the Wu clan. Because of what happened between Ai Fa and him, I couldn’t open my heart to this young man.

Hence, I glared back at him with a bit of force—— When I did that, he averted his eyes a little unnaturally.

Why did that happen? His stubborn profile looked dismayed and disgusted.

To his side was the youngest brother leaning his cheek onto his palm, and the third sister who got tired of waiting and turned her head to one side. The energetic youngest sister between them waved at me. I nodded at her and headed for the exit.

At this moment, Ai Fa, Leina Wu and Vena Wu brought in the other pot and a plate filled with poitan.

「Ohhh!? What's that? Is that really food!?」

When Dan Lutim's surprised voice came from behind, I was already on my way to the stove room.

The sky had already turned dark, but there were several candle stands along the path to the back of the building, providing safe passage.

When I finally returned to the stove room, I waited for the women to return with the nervousness of an imminent battle.

「Sorry, I couldn't help chatting with them. Everyone was pleasantly surprised by that poitan.」

Everyone came back with the energetic mother of the Wu clan.

And so, the curtains were drawn for the opening battle——

「They will probably have plenty of comments. I will serve the plate to

the seat of honour then.

After saying that, I reached for the plate containing the main dish, but Mia Lei Wu stopped me.

Hey, is that really fine? The clan head already look unhappy, I’m worried.

Her face that was always lively and cheerful had an intimidatingly serious expression right now.

This was the dignity of a mother of seven in charge of all matters of chores within the house.

If my mother was still alive, the two of them would be about the same age. As I was thinking about that, I said:

If I don’t speak up to defend myself, I will lose all ties to the Wu clan, and I don’t want that. This might be brusque, but I have decided to pick a quarrel with the clan head.

Mia Lei Wu’s expression changed from surprise and dumbfoundedness—— to a smile.

“I get it! I can’t antagonize my own husband, but I will cheer for you and protect you from being murdered. Go quarrel with him as much as you want!”

She smacked my back loudly.

It hurts a lot, but it made me hyped up.

“I’m going then.”

Picking up the plate with both hands, I walked out of the stove room.

Ai Fa who was holding a similar plate chased after me.

“Wait, don’t go alone. If that bunch of burly men suddenly started raging, what will you do? You can’t protect yourself, so don’t act by yourself.”

“I’m going to quarrel with them, but not brawl with them.”

“If they suddenly hit you, do you think you can escape unscathed?”

“... I will probably die.”

“In that case...” Ai Fa leaned in closed and said:“don’t leave my side.”

If a next life exist, playing the role of a princess wouldn’t be bad at all. Ai Fa’s face looked brave and reliable, just like a prince. That made me think up such a delusion.

Or rather, this is my next life right now.

This second life wasn’t bad either.

Such a thought actually welled up within me, making me feel that I was really blissed.

Sorry for the wait, this is the last dish.

I stepped into the hall alongside Ai Fa,.

Donda Wu and Dan Lutim sat at the seat of honour.

To their right were Kaslan Lutim, Jiza Wu, Darum Wu and Ludo Wu. Followed by Lala Wu and Rimee Wu.

To their left were Ema Min, Ditto Min Wu, Sati Lei Wu. Three empty seats for those tending to the hearth followed. Kota Wu laid in the cradle behind Sati Lei Wu and made loud baby noises.

Aside from this baby, eleven pairs of eyes welcomed us. Some were sparkling from expectation, a few looked displeased, and the others appeared unmoved.

Ai Fa and I headed to the seat of honour while basking in their gaze.

I presented the plate to the two house heads, and Ai Fa served her plate to the two heirs.

The instant they laid eyes on the contents of the plate——

Donda Wu’s eyes burned intensely, and Dan Lutim lashed out loudly:

□The heck is this!?□

3

□This is grilled kiba meat.□

Fortunately, he didn’t punched me.

He just glared at me with fiery eyes, and roared angrily.

The other three ladies also followed us into the silent room, and started serving the seats to the right. Even though everyone kept their voices down, mumbling voices were starting to become audible.

Ema Min whom I was meeting for the first time stared with her eyes wide and said □Ara.□

Kaslan Lutim remained politely expressionless.

I didn’t serve any strange dish. Even so, it caused a huge uproar——probably due to a certain ingredient. It was clear from a glance that I used □meat from the torso□.

Intense flames burned in Donda Wu’s eyes.

Thick veins appeared on the bald head of Dan Lutim, and his thick lips were trembling slightly.

"Donda Wu! What's going on! Explain this to me!"

His mouth wide as he roared for a second time.

He then quietly turned to us and said:

"This—— This kiba meat—— is from the kiba's torso!"

As expected, the Lutim house only eat the thigh meat too.

This development was just like what Mia Lei Wu predicted.

"... It appears so."

Donda Wu answered with a deep voice.

His emotion had transcended rage, and his agitation was clear from his sombre voice. Just hearing his voice was enough to make my liver shrink from fear.

It appears so? What do you mean!? This is a pre-celebration of the eldest son of house Lutim! What are you trying to do, serving me monta feed! The kinship between the Wu clan and house Lutim is stronger than the other kin houses...!

I know nothing about this.

Just the aura behind these words was enough for Dan Lutim to swallow back his accusations.

As if he was looking at something unbelievable, he stared at Donda Wu with his large round eyes.

Know nothing... What do you mean, Donda Wu?

For the Wu clan, this is a joyous feast of the utmost importance. I merely ordered that brat to tend the hearth for this feast. I know nothing about anything that happens after.

When he heard Donda Wu say that, Dan Lutim turned to me hard.

His movement was so intense that his cheeks wobbled for a bit.

□Hearth tender! The head of the Wu clan ordered you to tend to the hearth—— despite knowing that this is a pre-celebration for the Lutim house, you still served us monta feed!?□

□This isn't monta feed. This is □kiba steak□. I prepared meat from three body parts for everyone, which are the spare ribs, the shoulders and the thigh.□

As I was explaining, Mia Lei Wu and Vena Wu headed to the stove room to take the other plates. Leina Wu disappeared down the deep passage of the hall to bring Jiba Wu.

And——

There were large plates placed before everyone, and the dish in the plate were still steaming hot.

As I announced, this was □kiba steak□.

Since they placed so much emphasis on the bite, I needed a dish that was full of that—— and I came up with this dish to fill that role.

And of course, this wasn't the only reason why I chose this dish. However, speaking of the most common meat dish, spare ribs naturally comes to mind.

As this was spare ribs, I didn't use any special cooking methods, and just carefully grilled them.

Like the name implies, thigh meat came from the kiba's leg.

shoulders were the back and shoulders of the kiba.

And the spare ribs—— were the rib bone and the meat around it.

There were large rib bones with plenty of meat on everyone's plates.

And so, it was impossible for anyone to mistake that for thigh meat.

This—— monta feed——Dan Lutim's lips started trembling again.

For a non Forest's Edge denizen like me, the spare ribs look delicious.

The visual impact of the shoulders and thigh steaks were not far behind the ribs. They were about 2.5cm thick, a rather sumptuous serving.

Handling steaks of such thickness required an equivalent amount of effort.

Starting from the ingredient preparation, there were tendons in many parts, and I needed to cut them open before hand. The ratio of lean meat in the thigh was higher, so I was worried that it would be too tough after grilling. Thus, I knocked the thigh meat with a clean bottle to destroy its fabric.

Next, I sprinkled salt and pico leaves on one side of the steak, and after letting it sit for 10 minutes, the prep work was done.

After this, I toss some fats onto a preheated iron pot, and after rolling it over the pot's surface, I placed the side with the garnishing facing down into the pot.

When the gridded surface turned golden brown, I shift the steak onto a pot with weak flame.

Depending on the intensity of the fire, red meat juice would surface after a minute or two, which was the cue to flip it over.

Up til now, these were the steps to prepare a beef steak set meal (800

yen) in 「Tsurumi restaurant」 back home. However, the dish I was preparing was kiba, not beef. I was a bit worried that the center wasn't completely cooked. Ai Fa also said that 「half cooked meat is worthless」.

Normally, I will continue to grill the beef steak with weak fire until it was done. But now, I had to put the steak back into the pot with strong fire.

Since I didn't just want to grill it to medium rare or medium, using a weak fire would take too much time. Well done steak wasn't juicy in the first place, so the juices would be lost if I grill it for too long.

Therefore, I cooked the other side with strong flame too, and added in fruit wine at this point to cook it with steam. The heat would penetrate the entire steak, so I chose to use the same method I used for handling hamburg steak.

When the alcohol evaporates completely, I open the pot. When the other side turns golden brown, I would place the steak back to the pot with weak fire.

When clear coloured juice comes out from the grilled surface, the dish was done.

—— So the cooking method was decided.

After that was repeated experiments to find the thickness which this method worked best on.

If the meat was too thick, it would take a long time to cook the center of the steak. The juice would be lost slowly, and the meat would become dry.

But if it was too thin, then the dish would be no different from the grill meat usually served in the Wu clan.

The results of the experiments showed that thickness to be 2.5cm.

It was rather thick for a steak.

As the steak were completely cooked, it should be tough to bite, which wasn’t a problem for the denizens of Forest's Edge who always chew on jerky. Ai Fa confirmed that for me.

It was a kiba steak that challenged the limits of its thickness.

I had decided to decide the match with Donda Wu with this dish —— but before that, I needed to deal with the Lutim house head who was even more brusque than Donda Wu.

…Only the monta who eats rotten meat would feast on a kiba’s torso!

Dan Lutim roared again.

“Aside from monta, only weak households who couldn’t hunt the kiba properly would eat this meat!”

Dan Lutim yelled as he shifted his gaze to Ai Fa and said:

“Ai Fa of house Fa! I see many things hanging from your neck, are those tusks and horns just decorations!? Even though you hunted plenty of kiba, you still need to deprive the monta of their feed!?”

A rather scary expression appeared on Dan Lutim’s round face.

If he had a sabre at his waist, his fingers would definitely be on the handle.

“No, that is impossible. Which means, you are mocking my house? You think monta feed befits the Lutim house…?”

"Lutim house members are fellow denizens of Forest's Edge, Asuta and I have no intention of mocking anyone. Head of house Lutim, can you please calm down?"

Ai Fa's voice was very calm in contrast.

Her blue eyes were colder than usual.

"I have a question for you, head of house Lutim. Do you think eating the torso of a kiba is an act of weakness? Is that why you are so agitated about parts from the torso being used for dinner?"

"Isn't that obvious? If we hunters do our job well, just eating thigh meat would suffice for us! A hunter that needs to eat the torso of a kiba to survive is proof of a weak hunter!"

"As I expected."

While Dan Lutim's voice got more and more agitated, Ai Fa's voice became calmer.

Not just calm, she was ice cold like a steel blade.

"In that case, the way the Wu clan and the Lutim house does things differs from the Fa house. This is ill consideration on our part, and I apologize… The Wu clan and Lutim house are resourceful and powerful, the Fa house can't even begin to compare."

In the face of the raging Dan Lutim, Ai Fa stared at his scary face and continued:

"For example—— when I was little, there was a time when my father Gill hurt his leg and couldn't hunt. The tusks and horns we had decreased quickly, and we could only eat jerky towards the end. At this time, a young kiba fell into a sub standard trap set by me, so my Mother Mei and I carried that small kiba back home."

It was rare for Ai Fa to talk about her parents.

As I listened with bated breath, Ai Fa besides me continued to speak with a quiet and strong voice.

"Back then, my mother didn't only cook the thigh meat, she also cut off the meat from its back and grilled it for us. When you mentioned "depriving a monta of its feed to survive", this was how desperate such a lifestyle was."

「... That’s right. Some of those famished people will even eat the kiba’s torso and head, the denizens of Forest's Edge can’t permit such acts of weakness!」

「I can understand. When our family fell into such a desperate state, it was true that he was a weak hunter then. Within that period of time, my father Gill wasn’t even qualified to be called a hunter. I knew how anguish my father felt, after all, weakness itself is a sin for the hunters of Forest's Edge.」

Ai Fa left these words.

And then —— she did something I never expected.

I thought she would become agitated like Dan Lutim, but the corners of her lips rose and she smiled instead.

「Head of the Lutim house, your kins disposed the torso of the kiba into the forest because they are worthless to you. You have already done your part as a hunter dutifully, so there is no shame even if you consume these meat. These meat are delicious, and suitable for such a joyous occasion. That’s why we are serving them to everyone here.」

"You are saying these meat are delicious and suitable for joyous occasions——?"

Before this burly bald headed man started shouting, his son calmly said:

"Father Dan Lutim, no matter what we are served, the food reflects the hospitality of the Wu clan, demeaning them goes against the law of Forest's Edge. Be it monta feed of rat intestines, the hearth tender will taste the same dish, and we have to feast on the forest's grace."

"But Kaslan..."

"If you think the fault lies with the other party, please raise it against them after having a taste."

His voice was calm from the beginning to the end, but he kept his head lowered as if he was concealing the emotions in his blue eyes.

Speaking of which, when I tended to the Wu clan's hearth earlier, Donda Wu didn't complain before finishing his dinner. He only started making noise after finishing his food, saying that was monta feed and poison that would corrode his soul.

Someone once told me that tending to the hearth was to tend to life for that night.

Hence, since I was the one tending to the hearth, no one could complain no matter what food I served.

However, if the food being served ever tarnish the life and soul of the diners—— it meant the hearth tender had betrayed the trust of everyone, and need to be persecuted.

If someone tarnish the soul of his financée, what would this righteous youth do? Just thinking about this stresses my heart out.

"Thank you for waiting..." At this moment, a raspy voice of an old lady could be heard.

Just like that night, Grandma Jiba entered the hall while accompanied by Leina Wu.

Although his face was still as red as a cooked octopus, Dan Lutim still grabbed his left shoulder with his right hand like his son and bowed. Ema Min did the same, but with her left hand on her right shoulder.

"Well then, the banquet will begin now. Everyone return to your seats."

Donda Wu announced with an angry and serious voice.

4

"... We offer thanks for the forest's grace..."

Donda Wu's voice rang out once again.

This might be a banquet, but there’s no special speech and everyone started eating as usual.

…We offer thanks to Mia Lei, Vena, Leina, Ai Fa, Asuta for tending the fire in the hearth, so our lives can be extended tonight…

Everyone recited the same thing, but Dan Lutim and the others were on the verge of exploding with rage. We wouldn’t be able to calm his anger no matter what we said.

In order to let him learn the value of this meat, we could only do so by eating it.

The menu today were kiba steak, kiba soup and grilled poitan.

There were three types of steaks; thigh, spare ribs and shoulders.

We reduced the quantity of meat in the kiba soup, and including aria, we added three types of vegetables.

Replicating the plate lay out for these few nights, we placed all the poitan onto three big plates and piled it up high. Instead of okonomiyaki, it looked closer to pale coloured hot cakes. Each piece was made from two poitan, equivalent to one day’s worth of nutrition. The men could eat two to four pieces in one go.

Let’s dig in——

I was concerned about the reaction of the others, but I had to taste it for myself first.

I reached for the spare rib.

I picked up the fork I borrowed from the Wu clan meant for grilling meat to stab into the meat, held the bony part with my other hand, and bit into the meat that was still warm.

As it was well done, there wasn’t much juice in them.

The fats were almost all gone.

However, the ribs were where the fats was, so it remained juicy even after grilling it for so long. If I had to compare it to pork, this was the three layer meat we were all familiar with. As it wasn’t sliced thinly, it had a heavy taste.

The meat was slightly tough while the fats were soft. When I put it in my

mouth, the texture felt just right and the bite it had felt great. I love pork ribs and Okinawa pork, so this was a wonderful taste.

I felt that the spare ribs were cooked really well.

I tried a bite of the poitan to rest my taste buds, then attack the next dish—— the shoulder roast.

It was filled with fats too.

However, it was a thick slab of meat unlike the ribs, so it had more bite to it.

And it was 2.5cm thick.

After putting it in my mouth and chewing it, the thick fresh taste spreads in my mouth.

Despite losing so much juice during the roasting, this type of meat had plenty of fats and wouldn’t dry up.

Meat! This was meat… That was the feeling it gave.

If my stomach wasn’t strong enough, the sight of it would probably turn me away.

But I still felt this meat was delicious —— my jaw was getting tired though.

Next, I enjoyed the kiba soup Mia Lei Wu served for me with satisfaction.

The two ingredients she picked for me, tino leaves and pula, were added into this soup.

I already taste tested it. Tino leaves were like roses made from lettuce. It had a faint taste of grass, but it was barely noticeable, and mainly added for the texture it had.

As for the texture, instead of lettuce, it was closer to cabbages. It turned soft and mushy after cooking, but it would absorb the soup and its wonderful taste. The taste was as good as aria which resembles onions.

On the other hand, pula had a rich bitter taste.

Its appearance was like thick ginkgo, about its size and had a dark green hue.

I didn’t think it taste good, but after trying it in a dish, its bitterness that other ingredients didn’t have made it an effective garnishing.

It didn’t soften even after cooking it. We already sliced it thinly, but it was still firm and chewy.

If I had to compare its unique taste with ingredients I knew, that would be green pepper.

No matter what, it enhanced the taste of the kiba soup.

As several vegetables had been added, the soup had a deep taste about it.

But if vegetables that didn’t mesh well were added to this kiba soup, it would definitely destroy its taste.

Even in this different world that wasn’t too concerned with 「eating」, mothers were still strong. The soup was this successfully thanks to Mia Lei Wu’s effort.

And so—— I tasted most of the dishes.

Only the 「thigh steak」 was left.

For me, this was a difficult enemy to take down.

But I still needed to try it first.

As I mustered my courage and was about to bite down——

At that instant—— a voice pierced the room.

「What… What is this!?」

It was a voice that had completely lost its reason.

The one who shouted was Dan Lutim.

He remained still with his hands on the spare ribs.

His large mouth was stained with oil.

"Hey! You! What meat is this!?"

He stared with wide open eyes at me who was seated at the lower seats.

Ara, I thought they would only comment after the meal? Even though that was what I thought, I still answered:"I already said, this is kiba rib."

I then asked a little deviously:"What about this meat?"

Ughh… His oil stained lips started to tremble.

… Delicious!

He said with a volume bordering on a roar and took a large bite of meat.

He was so aggressive that he looked as if he want to chew the bones too.

Delicious! This meat is delicious! But why? Why is the ribs of a kiba… Even though this is monta feed!?

This isn’t monta feed. There is an animal similar to kiba in my country, and we will cook every parts of its body.

B-But, the torso of the kiba should have such a strong stench and is unpalatable…!

That’s because you don’t know the proper way to slaughter them yet… Or rather, you don’t need to learn the way to slaughter kibas. For the

denizens of Forest's Edge, kiba aren’t hunted for the sake of eating them in the first place.

I never imagined that I would need to explain this during the meal. Never mind, my jaw was getting tired so this suited me just fine.

I heard that kibas are a scary and harmful beast. Even if 50 kibas were hunted every day, their numbers wouldn’t fall. In order to protect the farmland of the western kingdom, the denizens of Forest's Edge had to risk their lives to keep on hunting kibas—— hence, there would be left over meat no matter how much was consumed. That’s why the denizens of Forest's Edge think slaughtering kiba is a hassle, and will leave behind the torso that had a strong stench and think of them as monta feed. This habit probably formed naturally... However, all the parts of a kiba are delicious, that’s why I prepared these dishes in the hope that everyone can understand this.

Dan Lutim was like a sleepwalker, listening to me with a blank expression as he took large bites of meat.

Donda Wu beside him didn’t seem to be listening as he chew on the steak quietly.

Everyone had different reactions.

Rimee Wu stared at me as she took small bites to satiate her hunger; Jiza Wu was probably alternating his gaze between me and the clan head, but I couldn't be sure as his eyes were too narrow.

Leina Wu who was accompanying Grandma Jiba stared at me warmly, while the housewives ignored the shocked Dan Lutim and enjoyed their meal harmoniously.

Worth mentioning were the reactions of Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min.

As they ate quietly, their eyes would meet from time to time and smile at each other. This atmosphere brings to my mind the thought that 「Ara, it's great that the two of you looks so blissful.」

And finally, Ai Fa——

Ai Fa bit on her meat as she carefully observed Donda Wu.

「... head of the Lutim house, Dan Lutim, have you tried the thigh steak?」

Giving a monologue by myself in a silent hall makes me feel like a

retard, so I tried throwing out a topic.

“I’m eating it right now, the thigh steak is delicious too.” the Lutim house head said and nodded.

His smooth head and beer belly made him feel like a giant baby, I thought quietly in my heart.

“The thigh steak don’t have any stench because of the same reasoning. Most of the stench can be removed by bloodletting. So a delicious meal can be prepared even with just thigh meat alone. However, my main goal is to let everyone know that the other parts of the kiba is tasty too.”

“Delicious! This is really delicious! I like this meat sticking to the bone! But the thigh meat is tasty too!”

His attitude and demeanour were completely different.

I felt a little embarrassed because of how forthright he was.

If a house don’t have enough men, they wouldn’t be able to carry the huge kiba home, so they can only bring home the thigh. If the entire kiba is brought back to skin their hide like what the Wu clan does, but only the thigh meat is eaten and the rest treated as monta feed, I think that is a waste.

My house brings the entire kiba back too! I—— I actually left something so delicious to the monta…!

He was too forthright and made it hard for me to keep up the conversation.

And so, if everyone bloodlet the kiba when you hunt them, and slaughter them in the appropriate fashion after skinning the hide, everyone can taste this delicious meat. It’s not difficult, even a brat like me can do it. Anyone who put their mind to it can…

Why must we go through such a hassle?

Someone interjected——

Donda Wu had finally spoken.

He actually finished all the meat in such a short amount of time.

I only took a few bites of the ribs and shoulders.

“Our goal is to hunt the life of the kiba, there is no need to spend that much effort. Hunters don’t need to do such unnecessary things to survive.”

His voice was rather composed.

The fact that this man could speak so calmly surprised me——

On a second look, everyone including the members of the Wu clan all had an expression of shock.

Rimee Wu and Ludo Wu were still chewing their food passionately, but everyone else had stopped.

That was how abnormal his actions were.

Which meant——

This was the crucial moment.

「... If it is only for survival, that is true.」

I could feel the sweat on my back.

This time, just increasing the flavour of the dishes would not be enough.

I needed to use 「words」 to make this man acknowledge my cooking, and feel satisfaction.

To be honest, this was too heavy a burden for a mere apprentice chef.

But I had to finish it.

This was for the sake of Ai Fa beside me. Her eyes were burning quietly.

"If we only eat and sleep, we will be no different from animals—— I won't describe everyone this way. After all, the denizens of Forest's Edge don't just eat and sleep. Everyone work hard and help each other in order to survive, and find happiness in our daily life. This lifestyle might be very different from life in my country of birth, but the foundations are the same… That's what I feel."

"Hmmp, what are you rambling on about, brat? You sweet talked my family with that nimble tongue of yours, and now you are trying to fool me?"

"My tongue isn't nimble at all. To be honest, I have ran out of things to say. And I have no intention of fooling your family."

I swept my gaze across everyone in the hall.

The twelve members of the Wu clan.

Two members of the Lutim house, and a daughter from the Min house.

And Ai Fa.

Except for Ai Fa, everyone else showed expression of doubts, and wasn't sure what I was trying to do.

I was picking a quarrel.

And then I'll apologize to him after coming to a mutual understanding.

That was my current thoughts.

I wasn't fooling your family. I'm just hoping they can feel happy after tasting delicious food. When I first started doing this, my intention was to encourage Jiba Wu to eat. However, Rimee Wu complimented my cooking, so I wanted the entire Wu clan to enjoy a tasty meal—— such an arrogant attitude appeared in my mind.

.....

In the end, I received blessings from many people which made me rather happy. However... I felt frustrated at the people who didn't praise my cooking. Especially Donda Wu, you disparaged my cooking so I detested you the most. I asked you to let me tend to the hearth once

more because I wanted a rematch.

I know what you want to say, so you don’t need to keep nagging about it.

No, even so, please bear with my nagging. What I’m about to say is really typical, but I can finally say my sincere thoughts.

After saying that, I changed my posture from sitting crossed legged to kneeling, and bowed deeply like I did three days ago and said:

An immature chef like me actually made the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu consume poison that corrodes the soul of the hunter. I wish to apologize for this once more.

5

… What tricks are you trying to pull? Donda Wu’s deep voice echoed in the hall.

This is no trick. I said the same thing three days ago, but I will say it again today more sincerely.

I lifted my head while maintaining my kneeling position, and faced Donda Wu:

For hunters, my cooking will really become poison. The eldest son of the Wu clan Jiza Wu told me this.

Jiza Wu turned his head towards me in surprise.

It seemed that I wasn't just a minor character since I managed to make this man panic.

Like Jiza Wu said, the cooking I served that night is poison for hunters... That is too much of an exaggeration, isn't it, I should describe it as might become poison to be more accurate.

Asuta, hold on. What are you talking about? What did I say to you?

“Don’t you remember? If you eat this tender meat every day, you feel that your teeth will lose their strength and slowly fall off. You are probably right.”

“What!? I will become toothless like Grandma Jiba?”

Rimee Wu held her plate with both hands and remained stiff. I smiled gently at her and said:

“No, if it was just once or twice, it will not have much effect. Even if it was a hundred or two hundred times, it will be fine. Even a thousand or two times should be okay.”

“Huh! Then there’s no problem! That’s great…”

Rimee Wu sighed in relief rather forthrightly.



Be it a man in his prime or a seven, eight years old girl, everyone had actions that befits their age.

By the way, that bald old man who had regressed to a toddler was biting on the meat and nodded in agreement… For someone who didn't know about 「hamburg steak」, this should be a topic that had nothing to do with them.

Anyways, I continued speaking with Rimee Wu:

「Hmm, there's no need to worry… But Rimee Wu, did you remember what you said three days ago? You said you don't want to eat anything else but hamburg steak for every meal, right?」

「Yes! Because hamburg steak is tasty!」

I stole a glance at Donda Wu.

The head of the Wu clan was still glaring at me with a fire raging in his eyes.

… That old man who kept nodding his head besides Donda Wu was really irritating.

“Rimee Wu, that’s not good. If you eat hamburg steak all day, your teeth might become weak. Even if your teeth are fine, you might give birth to a child with weak teeth. If that child continue eating hamburg steak all day, her child might possess even weaker teeth… That was how the teeth and jaw strength of the citizens of my country got weaker and weaker.”

I weaved in some lies into my vague memories.

I continued sincerely:

“Allow me to confess. For me, the meat dish is a failure… It is hard for me to eat.”

Everyone stared with their eyes wide.

—— Except for the men from the Wu clan, minus Ludo Wu.

Because the meat is too tough. I can’t bite into it. I think the ribs are great, and I can still eat the roast shoulders that is filled with fats, but the thigh steak is too tough for me. If the thickness is reduced by half, it will be just right for me.

You’re lying! The thigh steak is chewy, but not that tough! I love this meat the most!

In that case, can you eat my share, Rimee? I haven’t touch it yet… I really can’t eat it.

I returned my gaze back to Donda Wu, and found him still expressionless and silent.

This was the first crucial moment.

That’s how weak my family is, so there is no way that I can become a hunter. For example, some of the people in my country took on jobs that are physically demanding erm—— it’s a sort of simulated battle. They don’t use swords or shields, but compete with bats and balls. These group of men earn a living by winning in this competition.

Even if it was just vague words, I still hope to convey my thoughts to them properly.

What I just described was 「professional baseball players」.

「When they wield their bats and throw the balls, the men will use all their strength. When they do so, I heard that they will grit their teeth so hard that it chips or loosen. And so, they will put adequately strong fillings in their mouth and bite down on it in place of their teeth.」

What I was describing was a mouthguard.

I actually wasn't sure what the actual fact was. But I often hear my dad talking about such tidbits of knowledge as he pretended to be an expert.

Therefore, teeth was important. Not just baseball players, boxers too——the topic expanded even more.

And so, I expounded on the topic:

□—— There is another competition that is more direct, where two competitors hit at each other with their fist. To protect their teeth, they will also put strong fillings into their mouth. This is not related to what I am saying, but I heard the punching power is very much different if they bite down on this filling. They can exert more strength than normal when they can bite down as hard as they can.□

Everyone continued their meal a little hesitantly as they listened to me with a troubled face.

Donda Wu was still expressionless.

□And so, □bite□ and □exerting one's full strength□ is closely related. Actually, the nutritional values of food will also affect the hardness of teeth, so it might not be adequate to describe this as □teeth weakening□. However, if you keep eating soft food, then the roots of your teeth, biting power and jaw strength will become weaker. That's why I have been thinking about what Donda Wu and Jiza Wu said—— that this is poison that corrodes the hunter's soul. That eating this will cause your teeth to lose their strength and fall out. I have been thinking about the meaning behind these words.□

□……□

And of course, Donda Wu and the others didn’t think this deep when they said that. Lala also mentioned that she hates soft meat, so this might just be personal preference. However —— if Donda Wu accepted my cooking and lavish it with praise, what will happen? Such thoughts surfaced in my mind.

What I was about to say wasn’t the vague memories from my mind or lies.

It was my sincere thoughts.

My confession without any shred of lies.

I should have thought about this half a month ago before preparing the meal for the Wu clan.

I used a technique that didn’t exist in Forest's Edge in my cooking. Thanks to that, most people complimented my dishes. But if everyone accepts my cooking unconditionally—— Maybe they will really eat hamburg steak all day. Just the thought of this gave me the chills.

This thought has been on my mind for quite some time now.

Because of Ai Fa’s obsession with hamburg steak.

While it made me overjoyed, it also filled me with unease.

Aside from the hamburg steak, she would still chew on the tough jerky, so her jaw wouldn’t degrade so quickly.

Even so, obsessing over hamburg steak still wasn’t a good thing.

If the change of diet deprives Ai Fa of her life force—— I would want to hang myself. This also applied to the members of the Wu clan.

Fate brought me who was from another world into contact with the Wu clan, so I felt a strong urge to convey these thoughts to them.

Under such circumstances, I witnessed that scene three days ago——

In order to hunt kibas, the men headed into the forest with drive and determination —— when I saw how much wild energy filled their bodies, I was certain of one thing.

—— For the people of this world, my cooking might be a poison.

「My next example is something that happened in my home nation: if you gift wine to a tribe that has no idea what wine is, over time, more than half of the tribesmen will become alcoholic. I heard something so horrific had happened before. I'm not sure if my cooking is that powerful, but I still felt terrified. Because my food has the chance of being a negative influence to others.」

Did I convey my thoughts to everyone?

Rambling on like this wasn't like me, so it was time to head for the climax——

「That's why I wish to share my knowledge to everyone here. Eating soft meat all the time will risk weakening the teeth and jaw power. The torso of a kiba isn't monta feed, and can be turned into a delicious meal with some effort. I hope everyone can keep this two points in mind and understand the joy of enjoying tasty food.」

On a closer look, Ai Fa had finished her meal before I realized it. She didn't look Donda Wu's way, but was staring at me.

I felt that her eyes were filled with a gentle light.

“Well then, it’s about time for me to reveal the secret. Actually, the only dish made by me today is the hamburg steak Jiba Wu is eating right now.”

“What!” Dan Lutim shouted.

Aside from a select few, everyone started chattering.

“The poitan is made by Leina Wu, Mia Lei Wu prepared the soup, and the meat is grilled by Vena. I only instructed them the cooking method. Some of the meat got burnt, but it’s fine since I brought extra meat with me. I think this meal has been cooked perfectly.”

Everyone shifted their gazes around, many of them lingering on Vena Wu.

These were all looks of praise, but Vena Wu concealed her face with her long fringe, and I felt she was glaring at me right now.

This dish only requires grilling steak and is really simple. But I spent a lot of time to figure out the ideal heat and steak thickness. After finding the answer, I can share it with everyone, and it won't take as much effort as making hamburg steak. You won't need to sacrifice the time for other work to serve this meal.

I felt a warm gaze coming from somewhere.

But things like gazes were intangible in the first place. So I dismiss it as me thinking too much, but——

I felt that Grandma Jiba Wu who was seated beside Donda Wu seemed to be staring at me.

I ended my speech to Grandma Jiba, Donda Wu and everyone else present.

This time, I tried thinking up a menu that is suitable for the hunter's tribe—— the denizens of Forest's Edge. Even without me, this delicious meal can be cooked if the entire family work together. I hope this will deepen the bonds between the Wu clan. That way, an outsider like me will also be a medicine to Forest's Edge, and not poison—— With this thought in mind, I worked hard for ten days, trying out the methods to grill delicious meat.

I put my knees together and said with a bow:

“As a chef, it’s really ridiculous that I can’t confirm the taste of my own cooking. In a sense, this result is a failure. However, I think these dishes are suitable for a family to enjoy together, so it’s a rather successful family meal, and I’m proud of that. I hope this dish can be a medicine for everyone—— My apologies for rambling on so much during such an important banquet. Please enjoy your meal.”

Final Chapter

I spent another night in an empty house located within the Wu clan village.

The three guests from the Lutim house would be heading to the house of Donda Wu’s nephew whom they were closed with to retire for the night.

However, there was still a party going on in the Wu main house.

After dinner, the Wu family members except for unwed women drank and make merry with the three guests.

After Ai Fa and I cleaned up the aftermath of dinner, we went together with Rimee Wu to Grandma Jiba’s room to chat, then finally returned here to rest.

I sprawled out on the floor right after entering the room and made an 「Uwah」! sound.

「Not only was the meat tough, I also made such a long speech, it made my mouth really tired! I can’t speak another word tonight!」

「……」

「If that is so, stop talking to yourself so loudly…… aren’t you going to retort like this?」

I turned back to look at Ai Fa. My mistress was sitting crossed legged by the wall with one knee up, and her expression was solemn.

「What’s the matter? In the end, Donda Wu didn’t give his comment, does that worry you?」

「……」

「It will be fine! If he didn't acknowledge my cooking, he would have told us on the spot. And the guests from house Lutim looks satisfied, so there is no way the Wu clan can convince all their kin house to break ties with the Fa house.」

「... I'm not thinking about that.」

When we were at the banquet and Grandma Jiba's room, her eyes looked so calm. But she was too quiet now, and looked glumly.

I really hate seeing her like this.

「What's the matter? What are your thinking? Don't dwell over it alone, you can tell me anything.」

I crawled towards her after saying that.

If it was the usual Ai Fa, she would angrily retort 「don’t act so disgustingly!」, but she didn’t react at all.

I felt like a retard.

But that wasn’t wrong either.

「Asuta, you——」

「Hmm?」

「Are you planning to leave Forest's Edge?」

Ai Fa said suddenly.

I was seriously surprised.

「What are you saying all of a sudden? I don’t get it at all.」

“The things you said at the banquet is like a farewell speech to everyone. You wish to leave behind medicine, not poison before you are gone—— to me, that’s what you are saying.”

The candle lighted up half of Ai Fa’s face as she slowly looked my way.

“Am I right?”

“Not really… But, something like that.”

It was unsightly to talk while lying down, so I sat crossed legged like Ai Fa too.

“Like I told you quite some time ago, my feelings remain the same. I don’t know why I have been thrown into this world, but since there are humans here too, I hope to keep a cordial relation with everyone. Instead of being harmful, I hope I can help everyone instead, and I was just explaining how I really felt.”

“……”

「But like I said before, since I got thrown into this world out of nowhere, I might get thrown back one day too. If I go back, I might get squashed by the house or burned by the fire. Therefore, I want to live without regrets since that might happen one day… I don't really know myself, but I probably showed such an emotion, right?」

「… Do you think about this all the time?」

「No no, that's impossible! I will get a mental breakdown! But this isn't something I can just forget, so I will show these feelings occasionally.」

Ai Fa looked at me a little gloomily, then said with her head tilted slightly:

「… I have never thought about it.」

「Hmm?」

「I have never thought about you disappearing suddenly one day.」

Ai Fa said quietly.

Her reaction wasn’t cold—— she said it calmly.

“… Because you don’t think I’m from another world in the first place, right? It must be hard for you to imagine someone can disappear and appear just like that. Or rather, even I find it hard to imagine.”

“……”

“But, I won’t leave if such a ridiculous supernatural phenomenon don’t force me to! I’m afraid of being abandoned by you instead… That’s why, if I ever disappear without a trace, it must be the work of gods or demons, so don’t forget to wish me RIP in Peace when the time comes.”

Ai Fa opened her mouth, when she made the shape of saying “I”——

But I didn’t hear what she said next.

Because the door was knocked.

Cock, cock, two knocks.

Ai Fa stood up slowly and stopped before the door.

“Who is it?”

“... Head of the Wu clan Donda Wu.”

He came.

The demon king himself.

I considered the possibility that he will come personally, but was still surprised when he really did.

Ai Fa removed the door bar silently, and opened the door.

A large shadow slipped into the room like a huge predator.

After saying 「sorry to intrude」, he started taking off his shoes.

I checked for a sabre on his waist.

He wasn’t armed, and had a bottle of fruit wine in his left hand instead.

Donda Wu wished to have a cordial meeting—— I probably could interpret it this way.

His huge and heavy body walked towards me, and he sat down near the candle stand by the window.

Donda Wu’s large eyes surveyed the room boredly.

「You two don’t drink, so what are you doing in the middle of the night?」

「We are about to turn in.」

「Hmmp.」

He bit open the cork and took a swig of fruit wine.

He just finished a drinking session and he started another one. He was good with alcohol.

As his face looked fierce all the time, I couldn’t discern his feelings, but he didn’t seem to be showing intense emotions.

His pair of beast-like eyes were lively and guarded, his gaze was probably always this strong.

He looked more composed than usual.

But we were too close.

He would usually sit in the seat of honour with an arrogant face, but our proximity was close enough to share the light from the same candlestand. I could feel enormous pressure from him just sitting there.

After replacing the door bar, Ai Fa sat at a place that formed a triangle

with me and Donda Wu.

We were so close that our knees were almost touching.

Donda Wu pushed the bottle towards the tip of Ai Fa’s nose and said: “Drink.”

“Drink it, and swear… swear that you will only speak your true thoughts.”

Ai Fa drank the fruit wine quietly without hesitation.

She coolly took a large swig of alcohol.

And then passed the bottle to me.

The mood right now didn’t seem to permit me who was underage to refuse. To avoid choking, I carefully tilted the bottle, and took a mouthful of fruit wine.

Ara, it tasted sour and sweet.

「... Brat, what are you actually scheming?」

Donda Wu started his talking:

「The Wu clan is not related to you by blood nor your benefactor. So why are you spouting nonsense about bonds with the Wu clan? Just what are you scheming?」

No matter how composed or quiet, he was still a burly man who looked like the incarnation of a kiba. His eyes were bright in the dim night, and his huge body emitted pressure.

I don't have any schemes —— When I was thinking about answering that way, I held back and realized I couldn't speak like that.

Since he forbid me from lying, the best option was to confess everything truthfully——

「Instead of scheming, I was driven by one thought. That's to earn your acknowledgement, Donda Wu.」

「... Acknowledgement?」

「Yes. No matter what cuisine I served, I will only cook dinner for one night. I'm the hearth tender for the Fa house after all, and the Wu clan won't let me tend the hearth that often. But if that is the case—— if I only serve you a delicious meal for one night, can you grasp the meaning and value of these cooking? I started to doubt that.」

I never thought I would be making another speech tonight.

But this was the reason behind everything I did today, so there was no other way.

「For example, if I put in a lot of effort to prepare a delicious meal, will you receive calm and satisfaction from that? If I'm a restaurant owner and you are a guest, then things might be settled like this. But if I barged into your house to serve you food because you said 「there's no distinction of food being delicious or not」? And then you say adamantly 「it's tasty, but so what?」 Then everything ends」

「……」

“You are the head of the Wu clan, if enjoying delicious food is something you did together with your family—— if the dishes are made by your family instead of some weird outsider—— if you yourself can tell it is delicious, I think your soul will be more serene and satisfied than ever before.”

“……”

“That’s why I prepared three types of meat, it’s a way to earn your acknowledgement. If I only prepared steak or hamburg steak, some might think hamburg steak is delicious, and will be unhappy if they can’t taste it again. In that case, I want these three type of meat dish to compete with the hamburg steak. That way, everyone will be able to easily understand what you and Jiba Wu meant by “Everyone has different opinion on what is right, and what is delicious”.”

“Why exactly… are you doing this, what do you stand to gain? To bet the life of you and your house head for this?”

Donda Wu said with a deep voice.

I sighed and said:

“You are the one who said anything about breaking off ties, right? Ai Fa and I are more headstrong than you think… After all, we are so stubborn that we didn’t listen to Grandma Jiba’s advice, which probably had you worried too, right? If you announce that you are breaking off ties with us, Rimee Wu and the others will definitely hate you.”

Donda Wu’s knees shook.

Just that was enough to make me feel that I was in mortal danger. But I was furious about what happened this time and continued:

“I don’t know what your true intention is, and don’t want to ask you either, but please be careful about risking your bonds with your family. You think Ai Fa and I will flee if you bring up the Lutim house and escalate this incident? If we fail, the Wu clan will have to break ties with the Fa house, and there will friction in your relationship with Rimee Wu and your other family members, isn’t that serious? I can’t ask you to think much of an outsider like me, but if you make things difficult and arduous for others because of an idea you thought up on a whim, and risk the bonds with your family, that will be too foolish.”

“Brat, you little…”

“It’s fine for you to hate Ai Fa and me. But Rimee Wu and Jiba Wu cherish her deeply and think of her as family. Please don’t forget that… If you still think of yourself as the head of the Wu clan.”

I decided to tell him what I think was right.

If I had a bit of doubt or fear in my actions—— I probably would have lost control of my bladder, wailed out in tears or burrow my head into the ground.

That was how intense Donda Wu’s gaze was. He had already abandoned his composure and was burning up like a beast.

I witnessed these eyes three days ago. The group of hunters heading into the forest all had these eyes of a warrior.

“I—— still don’t understand Forest's Edge.”

As his eyes seem to be scorching my very soul, I put together my words subconsciously:

"All of you are different from the people I know… Honestly, I won't be able to understand or empathize with you in the future either. However, I still hope to be a medicine, not a poison. That's what I sincerely think. My only good point is knowing how to cook… I hope I can stay true to myself and live here in Forest's Edge."

What kind of expression was Ai Fa showing?

The intensity of her gaze was probably as strong as Donda Wu—— but I couldn't pull my eyes away from this large man to confirm.

"Like what I described earlier, chefs are not needed to cook a family meal. What you are after isn't the cooking of a chef, but the serenity in your soul when you enjoy your time with your family—— If there is anything wrong with this conclusion I made, I will return all the blessings I received from the Wu clan to you."

The shadow—— stood up slowly.

Ai Fa quickly stood between me and the shadow.

"… I will ask you again. Why are you willing to risk your life for this?"

Perhaps he was overwhelmed with rage, his voice lacked emotion and sounded cold. It echoed in the room like thunder.

“Because I’m a chef. Just like you being a hunter, I’m a chef… Although I’m just an immature half assed chef.”

I tried to answer humorously.

After a few seconds that seemed to last an eternity——

Donda Wu finally turned his back to me and said:

“I’m a hunter, I can’t fathom the thoughts of the likes of you.”

He muttered quietly without any emotions, then headed for the entrance.

He picked up his shoes with his right hand and didn’t put them on. After removing the door bar, he said quietly:

“… Speaking of unfathomable, that stupid old man from house Lutim wants me to pass a message.”

“Eh?”

“He wants you to tend the hearth for the wedding seven days later… The head of the Lutim actually said something so outrageous, looks like their house’s days are numbered.”

I couldn’t close my wide open mouth.

What was that old man thinking?

As I was in a daze, something rolled to my feet.

Donda Wu tossed something over from the entrance.

That was —— A tusk and a horn that was white as snow, with a majestic bend on them.

“Those are blessings.” After saying that, Donda Wu’s large body

disappeared into the darkness.

…So this incident has finally ended.

I picked them up, and handed one of them to Ai Fa.

My fingers were still shaking, how shameful.

.

Ai Fa accepted it in silence, and stood up to bar the door.

Sigh… I feel like my lifespan has shortened by several years.

Leaning on the wall, my eyes followed her figure.



I had been breaking out in cold sweat all this time.

However, I have finally —— put an end to this dispute.

It all started with my willfulness, a once in a lifetime battle of the tongues.

However, is the part about me tending to the hearth for the wedding a joke? No matter what, that's too heavy a responsibility! I have to turn this job down.

Ai Fa didn't answer, and walked back after setting the door bar.

She had been quiet for quite some time now.

By the way, Ai Fa didn't speak at all when Donda Wu was here.

While I was looking at Ai Fa with doubtful eyes, she came towards me with smooth strides.

She then —— sat down right before me.

Her pink lips slowly formed the word 「I」.

「... I don’t want.」

「W-What?」

「I don’t want you to suddenly disappear.」

Her voice was calm as usual, and didn’t raise her volume.

There was no tears in her wild cat-like eyes either.

Her fingers didn’t touch me.

Her shoulders weren’t trembling.

Ai Fa just looked into my eyes quietly.

Vol. 3 :

Chapter 0: Prologue

Chapter Prologue
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 3 Prologue & Chapter 1

Prologue: Gorge



Translator: Skythewood
Editor: Deus Ex Machina

A terrifying scene appeared before me.

We were at a deep stony valley, about thirty minutes from the Fa house by foot.

After passing through the water source we always used, I looked up at the Morga mountain to the right and walked towards the steep hills, this majestic and terrifying sights appeared before my eyes.——

It was a gorge.

An unknown river appeared below the steep cliffs, and the sound of the fast flowing river could be heard.

The sound actually came from quite some distance away, at least 20 meters separate the edge of the cliff we were standing at and the river flowing below.

20 meters—— In the world I was from, that was roughly equivalent to a five storey building.

I was a little scared of heights, but it wasn’t the crippling kind. Just looking at the rapids from the cliff wouldn’t make my legs tremble.

The truly terrifying thing wasn’t the cliff.

It was the fragile hand made 「suspension bridge」 that made me panic.

「… Are you kidding?」

When I asked that, my beloved mistress tilted her head and asked: 「What do you mean?」

She’s actually asking what I meant—— I sighed.

This primitive suspension bridge was about ten meters long and one meter wide, built from old logs and brown dried vines.

Even though there wasn’t even so much as a breeze, the bridge was still shaking slowly. Just the thought of stepping onto this bridge filled me with dread.

…… I’m uneasy about the stability of this suspension bridge.……

I tried articulating my opinion.

After coming to this different world, this was probably the first time I showed such a tense face, and my mistress was getting more and more confused.

Ai Fa was a denizen of Forest’s Edge, and also the head of the Fa house.

It goes without saying that she was my benefactor, my housemate and a brave hunter.

Her long blonde hair seldom seen in Forest’s Edge was tied up into a complicated hair style.

Strong light could be seen in her deep blue eyes.

Her brown skin was as smooth as chocolate milk, and her slender body was like an intrinsic sculpture.

Although her height was average, her proportionate body was filled with dazzling life force and energy.

Draped on Ai Fa was the proof of a hunter —— a cape made from kiba hide, and brightly coloured clothes that only cover her chest and waist. On her slim waist was a large sabre and a knife, and her feet that had beautiful curves wore shoes tied with strings.

On her shapely bosom was a necklace filled with large numbers of tusks and horns, on her slender wrist was a bangle of kili fruit that repels poisonous bugs.

Ai Fa was dressed like usual.

Last night—— We completed our job of preparing the pre-wedding celebration for the Lutim house, and Ai Fa was not like herself when we were in the room allocated to us. But after one night, sh

e was back to normal.

A happy ending.

It was great that she had returned to normal—— but did I convey my unease to her properly?

「Asuta, are you worried about this bridge?」

Ai Fa said quietly.

「If my guess is correct, then don't worry. The vines used to build this suspension bridge are called Flehaba vines, it might look thin, but it doesn't break easily. Even when it's dried up like this, it is still as strong as human hair.」

Even if she compared it to hair which was unexpectedly strong, it didn't ease my worries at all. Compared to the tough vines which looked fragile, I would prefer for the denizens of Forest's Edge to use something thicker and sturdier to erect this bridge, even if the toughness was a notch lower. This way, my heart would be more at ease.

「... This bridge is here before I was born, and there have never been any problems with it, so it is completely safe.」

「No, even if there isn't any problem before, it doesn't mean that it will be safe today! And since this bridge has such a long history, that means it is really old, right!?」

「That's why you have to carefully inspect the vines to check for damage when you cross it. Anyone who spotted any damage is responsible for repairing it. This suspension bridge only lasted for decades because everyone adheres to this rule.」

「... House head Ai Fa, I can't wipe away the unease in my heart. Isn't there a safer and more comfortable way?」

「... This route is the quickest from my house to the post station town. Going any other way would require twice as much time.」

That's right, in order to exchange the kiba tusks and horns for food, we were on our way to the post station town.

Our aria, poitan and fruit wine were almost depleted. Ai Fa would usually head to town when there was more food to spare, but we were busy with the match with Donda Wu. That match finally concluded yesterday. We returned home early in the morning, forage for pico leaves and after finishing the minimum chores, we left our home.

It has been twenty days since I arrived in this different world, and I

would finally step into the world outside the forest.

My heart was trembling because of the expectation and unease of the unknown world.

But right now, my body was trembling for another reason.

"Enough. If we spend any more time here, the sun will set before we accomplish our goal."

"Please wait! Erm… Can I please hold your hand?"

Ai Fa frowned and rejected with: "I absolutely refuse."

"What's the use of doing that? If we fall, you will still die even if you held my hand. If you want to grab onto something, grab the vines on the bridge."

"T-That's not it, this humble one yearns for a sense of security! House head Ai Fa, to this humble one, you are more reliable than these frail vines!"

「... Stop that annoying manner of speech at once, or I will cut off your tongue.」

「Sorry.」

「Anyway, there's no use in holding my hand, so I refuse. If you feel that uneasy, then grab the hem of my cape.」

After saying that coldly, she walked towards the suspension bridge with her cape flowing behind her.

I grabbed a corner of her cape that flew up.

「O-Okay, it's fine! Let's go then!」

Ai Fa sighed heavily without even looking at me, then strode forth unhesitantly.

I could only move slowly like the auxiliary spacecraft in a 2D shooter game, and followed her slowly.

Ai Fa stepped onto the plank.

The suspension bridge shook a lot.

I made up my mind and followed her onto the plank.

The bridge shook intensely again.

□... Uwah□□

□Shut up.□

□W-Wait! At least hold on to the hand rails! Both my hands are on your cape!□

□I told you to shut up!□

Ai Fa walked with her usual confident strides, advancing without any hesitation.

The bridge kept shaking and shaking.

I couldn’t even look down, I was afraid of my body becoming crippled if I did.

The suspension bridge was about ten metres in length, and while I was panicking, I had already covered five metres. If I continue staring at the back of Ai Fa’s head, I should be able to make it through.

However…

「… Hmm, this vine is breaking.」

When I heard Ai Fa said that unconsciously, the reason and sensibility in my heart flew off hand in hand into the horizon.

「Uwahh! Wahh!」

I yelled and grabbed Ai Fa’s body with all my might.

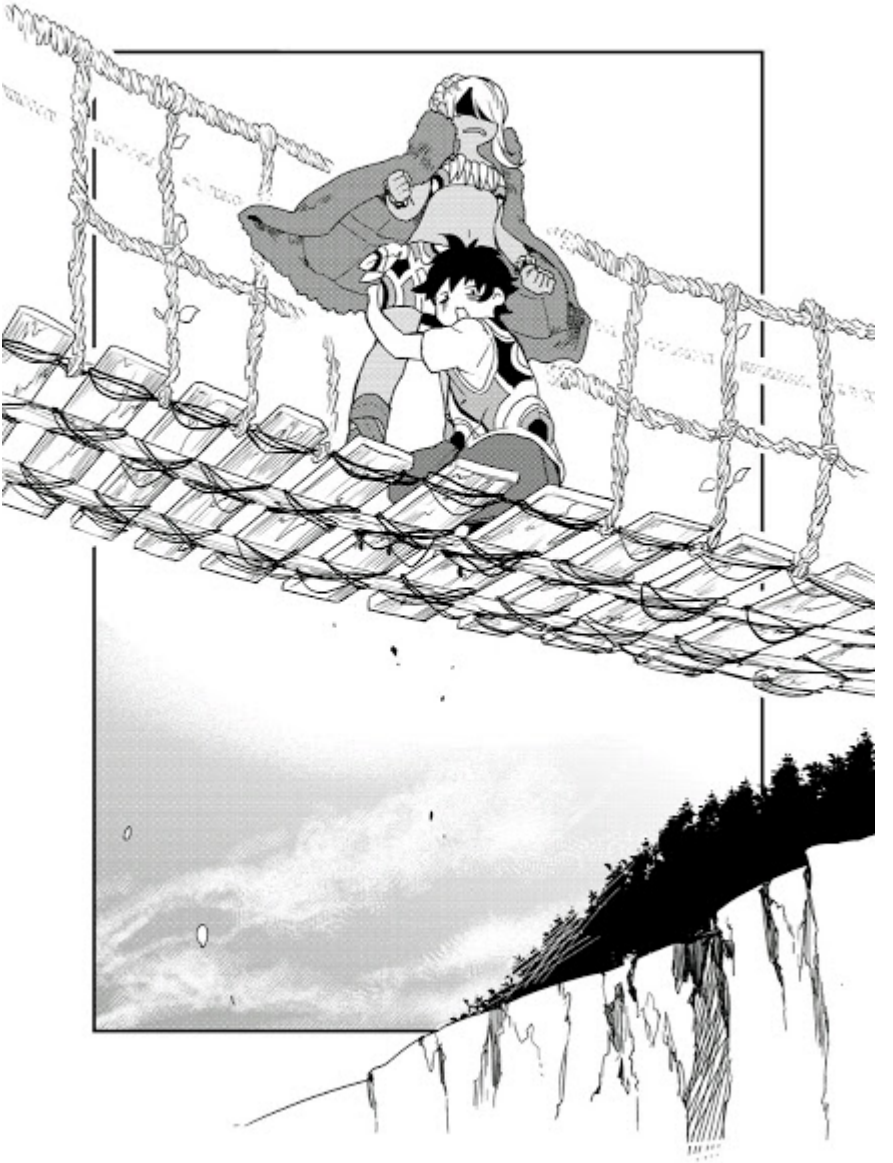
The bridge shook wildly, and my feet almost slip off the plank.

“Uwah! Uwah!! Uwah!!!”

“Moron! Unhand me! Do you really want to die!?”

Ai Fa’s angry roar reverberated in the gorge.

Her voice was like a ceremonial cannon that pulled open the curtain to this long day.



Vol. 3 :

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: The Post Station Town of Genos

1

Genos was a territory of the Western Kingdom Selva.

The Western Kingdom took pride in its vast lands, and Genos was situated on the eastern borders, slightly to the south. It was founded at the foot of Mount Morga, a city at the borders.

For the Selva Kingdom, Genos was located at its borders, but the territory was rather close to their friendly nations—— the Southern kingdom Jaguar, and the Eastern Kingdom Simu, and was an important trade hub.

It also had temperate climate, rich water sources and fertile farmlands.

The center of this territory was called 「Rock City」. The central city was protected by sturdy stone walls, and entry wasn't permitted without a pass.

To the north of Rock City were the noble's orchard, to the south were the peasant's farmland.

A stone paved road stretched from the south to the north, splitting the Genos territory from the Morga mountain range—— and many citizens set up stores on either side of the road.

In the gap between the city and farmland was a post station town where travelers and merchants could visit freely.

And that was the Genos post station town.

「Uwah…」

I was dumbfounded right from the start.

After betting my life and overcoming that terrifying bridge, the world suddenly turned wide open after walking for half an hour. Even after adding in the time we walked from the Fa house, it had just been an hour.

Physically speaking, this felt about the same distance from our house to the Wu clan.

Despite that —— the world completely changed.

What a huge surprise… This feels like another world…

After recovering my speech capability, I squeezed out something unimportant.

That was how drastic the change before my eyes was.

Don’t be so surprised. The denizens of Forest's Edge lived there in order to protect the farms of Genos from being destroyed by the kibas.

That’s why our settlement is so close to Genos.

Ai Fa still sounded unhappy in her reply, but such a one sided explanation couldn’t suppress my shock.

The denizens of Forest's Edge wore fur cape and hunt kibas in the forest for a living. And these brave hunters were actually so close to such a civilized land, it was hard for me to accept this fact.

The buildings here were built with wood too.

But almost all of them had two floors, instead of a single storey building.

Some of them even used stones and cement, and were sturdily built.

White stones paved the path beneath my feet.

This was the so called stone paved road.

The road was about 10 metres wide, and was flanked tightly by buildings on either side, stretching in a straight line from north to south.

And this town was filled with people.

All kinds of people could be found here, but none were dressed like hunters.

A slightly plump man hurried down the street, with a small cylindrical hat on his head. He had a yellow shirt, loose cream-coloured pants and a large bamboo basket on his back.

One woman walked elegantly in the crowd, her chest covered by a piece of cloth

and a wide shawl on her shoulders. A long skirt covered her waist to her ankles. She wasn’t as beautiful as Vena Wu, but was also very sexy.

A burly man walked slowly along the path, his shirt was cut out of a camel-coloured hide, and was clearly not from a kiba. A piece of cloth was wrapped around his waist and he wore leather sandals, so his clothing was similar to the denizens of Forest's Edge. On his waist was a hand axe and leather pouch.

There were a large variety of people here, and there was no way to describe the attire of each and every person.

A skinny old man in grey robes with a bandana wrapped around his head.

The children wore clothes made from tattered rags and ran around.

Strong well built men carried cargo half naked.

There were some men in hoods and cloaks that hid their faces.

Most of them had ivory coloured skin like that of a Japanese, or tanned yellowish brown skin. But their hair wasn’t limited to black, and mainly ranges between dark brown to chestnut brown. Their facial features were prominent, very much different from people of my hometown.

Aside from them, there were a small group that had white skin with a slight red tint, and another small group that had skin tones darker than the denizens of Forest's Edge.

They meandered busily through the streets, moving nimbly and taking care not to run into others.

Aside from the wide variety of people, the density of buildings and people was also shocking.

「Uwah—— What is that!?」

A thin object could be seen sticking out from the crowd, about a meter taller than everyone else. It bounced up and down slightly as it approaches us.

「That's a Totos Moa.」

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moa>

Ai Fa said nonchalantly.

Before my eyes was a huge bird 3m long, which looked like an enlarged ostrich.

Its long neck was just like an ostrich’s, and its round body was supported by thick legs—— but it was covered by dark brown feathers.

Leather belt was tied around its sharp beaks, and reins were tied to the bottom of its neck. A large man with yellowish brown skin held its reins, and the man only had a piece of cloth around his waist, and a cloth hat on his head.

Large luggage covered in cloth hung on either side of its body.

“There are only inns in this zone, the food stalls are further to the north.”

“Wait—— Wait for me, Ai Fa.”

Before Ai Fa could walk into the crowd, I grabbed her hand on reflex.

Ai Fa whose face showed hints of anger wanted to shake off my hand, but she suddenly came near me and asked:

“Asuta, what’s the matter? Your face is pale. Are you unwell?”

“I’m fine. I’m fine… Just give me some time.”

I could feel Ai Fa’s body warmth with my finger tips, and tightly closed my eyes.

It was hard to breathe as I wobbled my head. When I realized it, my heart was pumping intensely and the artery in my temple was beating strongly along with the rhythm of my heartbeat.

My sense of reason was rejecting this scene.

This place was too similar to another world.

Forest's Edge’s environment was very different from my world. After all, the people in Forest's Edge will wear the hides of their prey and hunt in forest. To me, such a lifestyle was no different from a story in a light novel.

But, how should I put this—— the denizens of Forest's Edge will use weapons forged from steel, erect wooden houses and cook food with stoves. They were civilized, but they live as one with nature. Instead of living in a different world, I felt closer to living in an uncharted land deep in the dense forest.

But this post station town was different.

They erect houses with planks, but the ground was properly laid and paved with stones. The eyes of the people didn’t burn intensely like feral beasts. They looked like they were enjoying a stable lifestyle as they meandered hurriedly along the road.

I was familiar with this scene.

This place was very similar to the world I was used to.

There definitely weren’t any electrical facilities in this town, and the development of their metallurgy was probably limited. The level of civilization was closer to the middle ages of my world.

But this was still very similar to me.

It might be similar, but it was also filled with the exotic style of a different world.

This wasn’t the city enclosed in stone walls, and was just a crude and messy post station town near the road. Even so, it was still a □town□. These people didn’t need to hunt for a living, and could obtain food

through the trades. That makes them 「townsmen」.

This place was too similar to my world, and that made me confused.

So this isn't my original world. I'm in an unfamiliar different world, I—— can't go back to my world anymore——

「Asuta——」

I felt a powerful force on my nape.

I felt someone pulled me hard to the side and shoved her mouth to my ears.

「Are you fine? If you are unwell, then lie down for a while. You—— you look like you are going to die.」

「I… I'm fine. Just a little dizzy…」

I answered unconsciously and slowly opened my eyes.

Ai Fa’s blue eyes were very close to mine, which surprised me.

My nasal cavity that had grown numb from the stuffy crowd was now filled with Ai Fa’s fragrance.

Ai Fa didn’t need to tend to the hearth now, so the smell of meat on her grew fainter. Ai Fa’s fragrance—— the smell of sweet fruit and refreshing herbs was stronger. Her scent was comforting, and gradually soothed my numb mind.

By the way… I still don’t know what that sweet scent is…

I could smell the fragrance of lilo from a lot of people and their homes in Forest's Edge, the stinging scent of pico leaves, and the smell of meat and fats.

However, I couldn’t smell this fragrance from anyone else.

What exactly is that? What an incredible scent. I think it’s some sort of fruit, but why do I only smell it on Ai Fa…?

When she held my fingers tightly, that thought slowly fade from my mind.

“Are you really okay? Don’t push yourself… Can you see me?”

“I can see you—— I’m really fine. It’s okay now.”

My vision suddenly turned clear.

Aside from her eyes, Ai Fa’s face that was blurred became sharp and focused. Ai Fa’s slender nose bridge, soft brown cheeks, pink lips and her blonde fringe covering her forehead were all reflected in my retina with a firm sense of reality. My right fingertips that Ai Fa touched was starting to heat up.

My wobbly legs could feel the hardness of the stone path once again, and I finally snapped back into reality.

“The light has finally returned to your eyes. What happened, Asuta?”

Ai Fa’s hand left the back of my neck, and she moved away.

But she still held my hand, allowing my exhausted heart to calm down.

“This is a little hard to explain. The atmosphere in this post station town is very similar to my hometown… Even though the atmosphere is the same, the streets and people are completely different, so my head was a complete mess.”

Ai Fa frowned, and looked like a grade schooler stumped by her teacher’s difficult maths question.

“I don’t really understand, but your face looked really bad. Don’t make me worry so much.”

I was surprised by her forthright words.

Ai Fa grunted and averted her eyes. She then quietly let go of my hand and said:

“Since you have recovered, we will now head to where the stalls are.

Don’t ever leave my side.

Got it. If there is an emergency, I will hug you from behind again.

I finally recovered enough to crack jokes, and Ai Fa kicked my leg hard mercilessly.

2

Contrary to my expectation, the street scenery didn’t last too long.

After walking for about ten minutes, the wooden structures were gone, and replaced by a market area set up like a flea market. Compared to earlier, this scene was incredibly messy.

The streets continued to extend northwards, and the trees on both sides of the roads had been cleared. In their place were stalls with wooden tables and makeshift roofs. There were stall owners who laid their wares on a rug on the ground. They peddle their goods to the pedestrians passing by.

Wah, amazing.

Most of the goods sold here were food stocks, mainly vegetables.

All sorts of vegetables I saw in the Wu clan food store—— including those that helped me a lot last night, like the cabbage like tino leaves, pula that looked like thick ginkgo leaves, a bright red fruit that seemed to be a hybrid of a pumpkin and tomato. Burdocks that was taller than me, and a disgusting vegetable that looked like a coiled up snake… All these could be found in any stalls.

On top of that, this was a post station town built along the road, and their customers were mainly travelers. The stalls also sold large chunks of smoked jerky made from an unknown kind of meat, capes made from hides, cutlery made from wood or steel, pots, daggers, bows and arrows.

The Totos Moa I met earlier wasn't a rare animal, and it could be seen around these parts often. Some of these Totos even towed large wagons, and seemed to be the equivalent of cattle or horse in my world.

I was still a little dizzy, but I could observe this world from the perspective of curiosity and research now, not fear or horror any more.

And finally—— I realized one thing.

In this post station town, Ai Fa was more prominent than me.

As people of various skin colours and dressing were gathered in this town, I could understand why I didn’t stand out.

But even though Ai Fa’s attire felt wild and primitive, she shouldn’t stand out too much.

There was nothing strange about clothing made from hide, and there were many people with blades on their person. Many of the women had flimsier clothes than Ai Fa, and I even saw someone wearing the fur of a feline carnivore on top of their head.

But despite that, the gaze of many of them fell on Ai Fa, and their eyes weren’t friendly.

A middle aged man frowned and looked away.

A woman hid inside her stall after showing a shocked expression.

One of the men had a devious smile, and whispered to his comrade.

Some of the people walking in our direction that was surprised and detoured around us.

In this place, Ai Fa was more out of place than I was.

And of course, when they saw me sticking so close to Ai Fa, they also cast their curious gazes on me. But compared to their reaction after seeing Ai Fa, this was nothing.

A wolf walking amongst sheeps is a befitting description for this.

Ai Fa continued striding forth silently.

Her face showed no signs of anger, and she didn't do anything to intimidate the people around her. She just walked naturally like a nimble leopard.

In this crowded town, there will definitely be some ruffians.

Such as scums that drink and make merry in the middle of the day, groups wearing tattered armour and picking out flaws in a merchandize loudly. I would catch occasional glimpse of such people.

But even they were not treated as coldly by the others compared to Ai Fa.

Is everyone… looking down on □kiba eaters□?

If that was so, then it was really infuriating.

Or rather, I could feel a rage welling up within me.

I heard that the denizens of Forest's Edge migrated here from the Southern Kingdom, and had the blood of foreigners within them. Were they all citizens of the Western Kingdoms? Even if that was true, the denizens of Forest's Edge already offered their souls to the Western God eight decades ago, so they were actually comrades.

As someone from another world, I didn’t understand all this very well. But even so, it still made me so mad.

While I was still fuming, Ai Fa said 「This is the place」, and stopped before a stall.

It was a small wooden stall outfitted with a tented roof.

An elderly person was sitting inside, too old for me to discern the gender.

It was bright and sunny, but the elderly person still wore a hooded cloak, with a large number of accessories that seemed to be associated with curses wrapped around the fingers and wrist. They looked really weird to me.

I observed the face hidden under the hood, and found the person's features to be unexpectedly flat, with one corner of the lips raised in a creepy toad-like smile. One of the eyes was completely white and seemed blind, the other eye stared at us with its light green pupil.

「Tusks and horns from kibas? How many beasts worth?」

Even after hearing the voice, I still couldn't tell the gender.

This stall didn’t seem to be selling anything. Hides from all sorts of beasts were hung on the pillar behind the old person, with no other wares in sight.

“Four of them.”

Ai Fa answered, and took out a string of them from her cape’s hidden pocket.

One kiba has two horns and tusks. So four kiba’s worth would mean 16 pieces. However, Ai Fa already hunted five kiba in this half month, adding the nine blessings the Wu clan gave us on top of that, she should have plenty more left inside her cape.

The elderly person took the string and carefully scrutinized them with one sparkling eye. As the elderly person caressed the white surfaces of the horns and tusks, a creepy smile finally appeared on that elderly person’s face.

“There’s some good stuff mixed in here. Did you hunt all these?”

“Yes.”

Which meant that all nine blessings we received was still on her chest or in the cape.

I thought she would just exchange them in the order of receipt, but this discovery filled me with joy.

“Amazing, the foundations of our lives are built on skilled hunters.”

The elderly person said, then bend down and disappeared beneath the table.

The next moment, crisp clinking sound could be heard and the elderly person finally got up again with a small bag and three small metal slabs in hand.

The slab had turned black from oxidization, but I guessed it was bronze. Roughly 10cm long and 2cm wide, it was flat and about 5mm thick. There was some sort of emblem carved at the center, but the fingers of the elderly person blocked it, so I couldn’t see very well.

“This is my bonus for you. First will be four white and eight red, please confirm.”

Ai Fa accepted the bag, then emptied it onto the desk.

The slabs inside the bag were the same as the ones on the elderly person’s hand—— No, instead of slabs, they were closer to plates. The small plates clinked as it fell onto the table.

I could finally see the emblem, but they were just meaningless spirals to my eyes.

Ai Fa counted the plates nimbly with her fingers.

Four dark silvery plates.

And eight dark reddish plates.

「... Hmm, the numbers are correct.」

「Alright then, I will give you this too.」

The elderly person placed the red plates on top of the pile.

□It isn’t much.□

Ai Fa muttered, then returned those plates into the bag.

□It is getting dangerous around here, take care not to let anyone rob you. Really now, those people in town is only thinking about squeezing us dry. Haven’t they heard the phrase □a dead Kiwi bird lay no eggs?□□

Sorry, I never heard that before either.

□I will make a move first.□

Ai Fa turned and left after saying that.

I wanted to follow, but the raspy voice of the old person stopped me.

□Hey, you are a townsman, but dressed like a □kiba eater□. This is the first time I have seen someone like you… Is that beautiful female hunter threatening you?□

Even the old person trading with the denizens of Forest's Edge also

discriminates them.

I was furious, but I used my natural social skills and said with a thumbs up:

“Kiba is delicious. Try it if you have the chance… I will make a move first then.”

When I left the stall, Ai Fa was waiting for me two metres away.

“What are you doing? Don’t leave my side. Those things on your neck are like copper plates. No one will be foolish enough to rob others of their tusks and horns in Forest's Edge, but we are on the Rock City’s turf now.”

“That’s true, I’m walking on rocks right now.”

I stomped the stone paved road with my heel, making a thumping sound.

By the way, my shoes were completely worn out.

「... Next will be aria and poitan.」

Ai Fa continued striding forth.

The crowd was thinning out.

The stalls were more spaced apart, and our field of vision widened.

「Ah...」

After that, I saw something amazing.

Looking in the direction we were headed, there were a row of trees behind the marketplace, and on the other side of the trees —— I could see a grey wall.

Even though it was some distance away, I could see bits of grey from the gaps in the trees.

「... That’s the stone walls of the Genos castle town.」

Ai Fa glanced that way, then said emotionlessly.

「The nobles lived within those stone walls and rule over Genos.」

「Oh」...」

I didn’t feel anything special.

I couldn’t help feeling enraged when I realized the people in there were the ones forcing the denizens of Forest's Edge to hunt kiba.

The denizens of Forest's Edge couldn’t forage for wild plants and fruits in the woods, couldn’t cultivate plants, and could only hunt for kiba—— Not just that, the people in the city even call them 「kiba eaters」 mockingly.

The people of Forest's Edge protect the farmlands of Genos, so the efforts of the farmers wouldn’t be destroyed by the kiba. Since they contributed to the prosperity of this town, why must they be treated so

coldly? The denizens of Forest's Edge was not dissatisfied about this and still lived proudly, but I couldn’t accept this.

So the people inside are the nobles of Rock City… If possible, I don’t want to ever come into contact with them.

I muttered quietly in my heart as I strolled along the streets with Ai Fa.

As a mortal, there was no way for me to know—— after falling into this different world and finding a place for myself in a corner of the settlement of Forest's Edge, I will come face to face with the highest authority of Genos living in Rock city in the near future.

3

□… Oh, a customer from Forest's Edge.□

A middle aged man welcomed us with a stiff smile.

We arrived at a small vegetable stall at the northernmost corner of the market place.

It was a simple and plain stall. The owner laid a piece of cloth on the ground, and displayed his vegetables on it. The roof structure looked really frail.

Behind him was a large wagon with many full bags.

“Thanks for your patronage. If you all didn’t visit once every three days, the aria I picked would have dried up.”

He was in his early forties, and had a white cloth tied around his head like me. He also had a cloth on his waist, and wore sandals. His hair, eyes and beard were all dark brown in colour, and had yellowish brown skin. His body was well built, and he looked strong.

But his eyes turned as cute as a pom pom dog in front of Ai Fa.

“So, are you here for aria and poitan today too? The price is the same as before, how much plates worth are you getting?”

“I want two white plates worth of poitan, two white and four red plates worth of aria.”

“Wow, that’s a lot! I guess I can close shop for the day now.”

That man was warm and acted like a businessman, but the smile on his face was still very stiff.

When interacting with the denizens of Forest's Edge, the fear in his heart overwhelms his contempt.

“Two white and four red… Alright, please check.”

He placed a heavy hemp bag onto the grass besides the stall.

That’s quite an amount—— Just when I was thinking that, he placed another bag that was roughly the same weight onto the ground.

The bag was rather big —— it wouldn’t be strange to find it on the back of Santa Claus.

“Hey hey, Ai Fa, how many days of food did you buy?”

「Twenty.」

Ai Fa sat down crossed legged before the bag.

Looks like we have to count the amount of merchandize.

Ai Fa exchanged four kiba's worth of tusks and horns. One kiba yields ten meals, so two people for twenty days would be forty meals, the maths worked out.

But if we eat three aria and two poitan in one day, twenty days would be... 60 aria and 40 poitan? 120 and 80 respectively for two people?

「Wait! Why are we buying so much? It will take an hour to walk home from here right!?」

As I was saying that, I realized that the concept of clocks might not exist in the settlement of Forest's Edge, but there should be sundials.

No, that's not important at all. By my calculations, the aria and poitan was 200g each, which means——

120 aria weighs 24kg.

The 80 poitan was 16kg.

Considering the distance between Forest's Edge and the post station town, buying so many goods could only be described as rash.

…Stop caring so much and count. If we keep staying here, other people won’t want to come near.

Ai Fa said to me quietly as she counted.

The middle aged man pretended he didn’t hear that as he arranged his vegetables.

Given the current atmosphere, there was no way for the buyer or seller to change the quantity.

I sighed and sat down besides Ai Fa.

Okay, the poitan is fine.

I glanced at Ai Fa chugging the poitan back into the bag, and laid out the aria onto the grass ten by ten.

When I got to number 30, I stopped.

Shopkeep, I think aria was soaked in water.

He looked shocked.

But he made no attempt to walk to us.

That’s impossible. I picked that two days earlier, and it will remain crispy for an entire month.

But the texture isn’t right. You can’t tell from its appearance, but I think it is rotten.

D-Don’t make any trouble here. Even if you are from Forest's Edge, you have to follow the post station town’s rules.

「The post station town's rules…? Hey Ai Fa, can't we complain to the stall owner even if we bought rotten food?」

To be on the safe side, I checked with Ai Fa quietly. He was some distance away, but the middle aged man seemed to have heard that. He was still unwilling to come over, and said agitatedly:

「Hey! I-I cultivate those aria through hard work! I have eaten those that turned out sub par myself! If you have a problem with my aria, t-then don't come again!」

He shouted fiercely and looked ready for a brawl.

Ai Fa frowned and took the aria from my hand.

「Hmm… it's a little soft?」

「No, it's inedible now—— Mister, let's cut it open. If it's rotten, can you change one for me? If it's fine, I will apologize properly to you.」

「W-Whatever!」

After getting the owner’s consent, I used Ai Fa’s late father’s knife and cut that aria in two.

As expected, the bottom half of the aria had turned purple and soft to the touch. And so, the bottom half can’t be used anymore.

“See, it’s rotten. Sorry for troubling you, but can you exchange one for me please?”

I extended my hand his way to show him the splitted halves of the aria. The owner’s pale face immediately lost all its colour.

“S… Sorry! It’s my fault! You are right, please forgive me! I-I will give you back your money, please spare my life…”

The middle aged man prostrated onto the ground and offered us the metal plates.

He seemed to be emotionally unstable.

「...Ai Fa, what should we do at a time like this?」

「Who knows? We can't accept the food if we don't pay.」

「That's right. Eh, mister, please raise your head. We don't want the metal plates, but the aria. My teeth isn't tough enough to bite through something that hard.」

Maybe Donda Wu could bite off the metal plates. I thought to myself as I shook the thick shoulders of the middle aged man.

「You... You're not a denizen of Forest's Edge...?」

「My birth place is different from them. As you can see, I'm under the care of Forest's Edge right now.」

He looked up at me, his eyes were like a pom pom dog facing a pitbull.

「... You will forgive me?」

"If you exchange a new aria for us, we will forgive you."

The middle aged man grabbed an aria displayed on his groundsheet, and hand it to us.

"Alright, thank you… This might be a bit nosy, but if you are very confident in your work, maybe you should confirm the situation before getting mad? Otherwise, it won't be good for your business."

"… If you are not from Forest's Edge, I would have already done that."—— I seemed to hear the owner whispered that, but his voice was too whimsical for me to tell.

The other arias were fine, and the number was correct. So we stuff all of them into the bag.

Ai Fa then took out a bunch of dried vines from the pocket in her cape—— that should be Flebaha vines —— and tied the openings of the two bags tightly.

She then held on to the excess vines, compared the weight of the two bags, and heaved the bag of aria onto her left shoulder.

Let’s go.

Since she already bore the bag that was twice as heavy as mine, I couldn’t complain even if I was a frail hearth caretaker. I still sighed and wondered how I could traverse that bridge, and heaved that bag over my shoulder to act like an out of season santa claus.

Well then, we will make a move first. We might visit again in twenty days, please take care of us when that time comes.

The stall owner glanced our way with gloomy eyes, and didn’t answer.

My feelings were still wavering, and I wasn’t sure if I should sympathize with him or be angry.

Asuta, including the bonus the grandma at the exchange stall gave us, we have quite a bit of copper plates left over. Do you need to buy anything else?

Ai Fa stopped in a space between the stalls and asked me.

I immediately put my bag down by my feet and answered: “I need fruit wine.”

“One red copper plate can buy one bottle of fruit wine. Even if we buy two, there will still be five copper plates left.”

“Hmm~ I don’t know the prices of things here at all. What about rock salt?”

“The rock salt would be three red copper plates… That’s true, we need to use rock salt aside from making jerky, so we should get some.”

I discussed about what to buy with Ai Fa while walking through the crowds, which felt incredible to me.

And of course, I didn’t dislike that at all.

“Well then, two copper plates left… How about buying some tino leaves and pula we tried in the Wu clan last night? I don’t know how much we can buy though.”

“I’m fine with anything, so you decide.”

She entrusted me with shopping duties.

While I was tilting my head in deep thought when my stomach grumbled cutely.

“Ah! Ai Fa, how about buying some snacks at the stalls for a quick bite?”

The stalls not only sell smoked meat, many of them also sell simple snacks that could be eaten right away.

When Ai Fa heard what I said, she widen her eyes in surprise.

“If you are hungry, I have some jerky with me.”

“I don’t mean that. Aside from visiting the post station town, we don’t have any other chance to try different food right…? Ah, is this a taboo violation in Forest's Edge?”

"We are free to use the copper plates we earned by trading in our tusks and horns, but there isn't anyone in Forest's Edge who will spend copper plates for that."

I see, that made sense. After all, there wasn't any concept of cuisines in Forest's Edge.

"

Since you aren't interested in the food, let's go back after buying some tino leaves."

"I already said that I will leave this to you. You can do whatever you want."

"Hmm" we used the money you earned to get poitan and aria, I will feel bad if we waste the rest fo the money on my hobby."

"... What are you saying? I'm the head of the household?"

Ai Fa narrowed her eyes immediately.

I possess nine tusks and horns, but I didn’t use any of it to make payment, which gave me a sense of inferiority. Was my concern harming the dignity of the house head?

After getting peacefully all this time, I didn’t want to anger Ai Fa.

“Alright, I will use one copper plate to buy a new vegetable, and the last one to purchase some food that can be eaten on the spot, okay? To be honest, I’m curious about the food culture in this world.”

When she heard that, Ai Fa relaxed her brows and said “Up to you.”

It seemed that when I was with Ai Fa, I have to play the role of the girlfriend being spoiled. Because our roles were the hearth caretaker and house head, this relationship probable made sense. But as a man from Japan, I still found it a little uncomfortable.

However, Ai Fa’s look of satisfaction was very soothing for me.

4

Okay, let’s get going. Time is precious, so let’s pick something out along the way.

Yes, I will buy something that smells the tastiest.

We went back the way we came, and brought rock salt and fruit wine along the way.

The rock salt was stuffed into my bag, and Ai Fa tied up the fruit bottle and carried it by hand.

As we continued along, I saw a vegetable stall and studied its wares.

It was too risky to buy completely unknown ingredients, so I should stick with tino leaves or pula. After asking the girl whose eyes were obviously wavering, I found out that a copper plate could buy two tino leaves or three pula. The price of these two vegetables were almost double that of aria and poitan.

Could I really buy something so extravagant? I looked up at Ai Fa, and before I could speak, she said Up to you.

Since she said that, I chose the tino leaves.

Tino leaves were a vegetable that had a similar texture to cabbage, while pula had a bitter taste akin to green peeper. Both these vegetables had their own charms, but tino leaves were more practical.

After stuffing in the two tino leaves, my bag was bulging as much as Ai Fa’s.

“Let’s go.”

After Ai Fa turned around, I also rushed to follow.

The two bags might look the same, but the density of the contents were very different. Even though Ai Fa was burdened with 24 kg of weight, she didn’t slow down at all. I was impressed.

Her body must be really well built. As a hunter, she had to move freely in the difficult terrain of the woods, that’s how she trained her well toned body. Now, it’s finally time for the snack I was looking forward to——

“Ah, let’s pick that one.”

I stopped at the stall besides the smoked meat seller.

When I passed by here just now, this stall stimulated my sense of smell.

The business here wasn’t bad, and a little girl was waiting for her food there right now.

Ai Fa nodded, and walked towards the stall without hesitation.

“How much is the food here?”

The stall was tended by a plump middle aged woman with dark brown hair and brown eyes.

Her fat face frowned on the sight of Ai Fa.

…The small one is one red copper plate, the big one is two red copper plate.

Give me a small one then.

The woman didn’t answer and returned her gaze to her hands.

I looked over the head of the little girl in line, and observed the interior of the stall.

A something brown was stewing in a rather large iron pot. I knew nothing about the food sold in this stall, but I could see bite sized meat and vegetables in there. More importantly, the fragrance of the gooey stuff was appetizing, just like the smell from garlic. I never smell anything like that in Forest's Edge.

Besides the pot was a pile of ingredients that looked like grilled poitan.

It was whiter than poitan, and the texture seemed more chewy. There were two sizes, about 20cm and 30cm in diameter respectively, and about 5mm thick. After woman wrapped the content of the pot with this ingredient, she twisted the excesses at the top hard, making it into a

shape of a deformed pouch.

If I had to to describe it with a term, that would be ‘meat bun’.

“Here, careful it’s hot.”

“Thank you!”

The little girl who was about Rimee Wu answered happily and reached out her hands.

I got out of her way for her to pass through easily.

The girl then turned our way energetically—— she was surprised when she saw Ai Fa, and stood stiffly in place. The bun she just bought fell from her hands because of its inertia.

“Uwah.”

She was lucky that I caught that bun on reflex. If I didn’t put down my luggage besides my feet, I wouldn’t have caught it.

“Here, careful.”

The little girl’s eyes were timid, but she still nodded, snatched the bun and ran off.

“… Your ordered a small one right?”

The woman said coldly and started making our share quickly.

Her skills weren’t bad, but from a customer service perspective, her attitude was discomforting.

After paying the copper plate, we found an open space to sit down.

“Hurry up and eat. We are going back when you are done.”

“Okay, I’m digging in.”

I finally encountered another unknown dish after Ai Fa cooked her kiba pot for me.

Back then, the kiba pot smelled really nice, but the taste completely went contrary to my expectation. Therefore, I didn’t dare to relax this time, and took a bit bite after bracing myself.

It taste——

Hmm…

“Is it good?”, Ai Fa asked disinterestedly.

As for me, I could only say “average”.

How should I put this… It was so so.

It wasn’t delicious, but not nasty either, very normal.

From the fragrance coming out from the stall, it was clear that plenty of spices were added to this snack, and smelled like a mixture of garlic and parsley. It tasted different, but wasn’t unappetizing.

The meat inside the wrap was white, and the fats had completely melted. It tasted as bland as chicken breast meat.

The diced red and green vegetables were soft, and wasn’t much different from cooked aria. Maybe there was aria in there.

The brown gooey ingredients should be stewed vegetables. The taste was a little sweet, and wasn’t too unique to interfere with the taste of the other ingredients.

The white outer skin that reminds me of poitan was as chewy as they looked. Their texture was closer to compressed indian naan instead of buns.

The ingredients complements and contrasted with each other, forming an average taste.

“Well, it’s quite palatable, and satisfies my curiosity.”

The quantity wasn’t much, so I could finish it easily. And it wasn’t too unacceptably exotic.

If I had to pick a flaw, it would be it being too pricey, being equivalent to one bottle of fruit wine, or two tino leaves, or four poitan.

"Ai Fa, you want a bite?"

"No."

I tried asking her, but Ai Fa turned me down.

"Hmm" I ate something boring, are the people here actually satisfied by this? I don't understand why they look down on the denizens of Forest's Edge and call them <kiba eaters>. Kiba meat is much more delicious compared to this."

"...Asuta, did you forget the kiba pot you ate on your first night here?"

Of course I didn't forget.

However, that was because the proper blood letting technique didn't

exist in Forest's Edge.

The people in Genos lived here longer than the denizens of Forest's Edge, did they not consider a good way of eating kiba meat?

"... Before the denizens of Forest's Edge moved here eighty years ago, a large number of kibas lurked in the forest, and would attack people and farmlands. For the Genos citizens back then, kiba represented disaster."

They weren't worthy of a taste because they were signs of disaster?

What a waste.

"I don't know the details, but they probably had plenty of meat back then. That Totos we saw had plenty of edible parts."

"What~ they eat birds like that...? It doesn't look nasty to eat, but.."

"Anyways, the people in town fears kiba. They also fear the denizens of Forest's Edge that kills and feed on kiba. And now, they have forgotten the terror of the kiba, and the denizens of Forest's Edge is gradually replacing it as the symbol of terror... Grandma Jiba once told me that."

"So it's just a baseless discrimination. Why didn't the denizens of Forest's Edge try to resolve this misunderstanding?"

"... Even if they fear us, we won't be inconvenienced by that."

Was that really true?

I didn't think their unwillingness to resolve the misunderstanding was praiseworthy.

The denizens of Forest's Edge being treated coldly by the people in town was partly their fault—— I felt unhappy to come to this conclusion.

"But——"

When I was about to rebuke Ai Fa, I suddenly stopped because I noticed something in the corner of my eye.

—— It was that girl from earlier.

The little girl sat on the other side of the road by herself, biting into the bun I ate earlier.

There wasn’t anything special about that, but when I looked her way, she would turned her head quickly like a nimble squirrel.

She will then slowly look my way.

As the road was about ten meters wide, I couldn’t discern her expression in detail. But she looked really curious.

“... She probably think it is incredible seeing a pale skinned man like you in Forest's Edge get up.”

Ai Fa seemed to noticed the little girl and said so casually.

“I see.”

I answered as I watched the little girl from the corner of my eyes.

She was about Rimee Wu’s age, maybe seven or eight years old.

Her dark brown hair reached up to her shoulders, and her skin was yellowish brown. Her orange dress was a one piece, and not a cloth wrapped around her. She had a pair of leather sandals on her feet.

Her torso and limbs were thinner than Rimee Wu, and the way she bit into the meat bun looked cute too.

I tried turning my face her way again.

My attack was sudden, and the little girl couldn’t avert her gaze and remained still.

I smiled at her, and the girl looked as if she was choked by her bun. She then showed a gentle smile.

“… What are you doing?”

“Nothing, I just think that girl is really cute.”

「……」

「Hmm? You misunderstand! What's with your eyes? Just what kind of person do you think I am?」

「Shut up. Don't be so flustered… You like kids?」

Contrary to my expectations, Ai Fa's attitude returned to normal. My agitated emotions suffered a sudden over shoulder throw.

「If I have to say, I guess I like them. Many children will visit my dad's shop, because a lot of families will visit us.」

「… I see.」

Hmm? Did I misunderstand where this conversation was going?

I don't want you to disappear suddenly —— Ai Fa said this uncharacteristcally last night. I was a little flustered when I recalled how

she looked back then.

It would be better to not mention my original world for the time being.

Acting calm, I tried saying in a cheerful tone:

“By the way, it feels depressing at the thought of carrying so much luggage back home. Isn’t twenty meals too much?”

“I always buy this much. Or——”, Ai Fa suddenly averted her eyes and added:

“You don’t need twenty meals worth of food?”

“Hey Ai Fa——”

I can’t tell what my future will bring either…! Thankfully, I didn’t yell that out loud.

However, I couldn’t find something else to say.

Ai Fa lowered her eyelids quietly, unwilling to show me how she really felt.

“Ai Fa, I…”

I had to say something.

Before I could sort out my thoughts, I spoke——

But an unexpected roar and noise drowned out my words.

“Say it to me clearly if you have any complains! Aren’t you the arrogant citizens of Rock City!?”

It was a voice of a young man who had lost his composure.

There was also a loud sound of something being damaged, and screams.

Including the voice of that little girl.

"W-What? Something happened?"

I couldn't understand the situation.

The remains of a broken wooden crate was scattered on the streets, along with an unknown yellow fruit. Two men was wrestling in the middle of the scattered items.

They were really close to that little girl.

The other people had retreated away to not get caught in the dispute, only that girl was sitting weakly on the ground with a fearful face.

"Hey, is that...?"

Before I could sound her out, Ai Fa had stood up deftly.

There was an intimidating gleam in her eyes as she glared at the men.

One of the two men fighting on the road in broad day light—— was from Forest's Edge.

5

It was an unfamiliar young man.

But he was definitely a denizen of Forest's Edge.

He had a kiba cape draped over him, a shirt and waist cloth with complicated swirling designs, and two blades on his waist. He was also wearing a necklace of tusks and horns.

He had a messy head of dark brown hair, light tanned skin and blue fiery eyes.

The man wasn’t too tall, had a body of solid muscles and a serious face like a stone lion.

This young man from Forest's Edge grabbed the chest of a plump man who seemed to be a merchant. He made that man’s round face turned red by constricting the man’s neck.

“Asuta, stay here.”

Ai Fa left these words and walked quickly into the crowd. She was still holding onto the bottle of fruit wine for some reason.

I couldn’t just watch idly by. I wasn’t suited to mediate a dispute between parties, but I couldn’t leave that poor little girl alone.

Ai Fa pushed through the wall of people and strolled into the center of the encirclement. On the other hand, I ran around the wall of people and quietly went towards the little girl.

“Say it again. Who is the “stinky kiba eater” you are referring to? You said “even the food in my hand stinks now” right? Say it louder so I can hear you clearly, oh great citizen of Rock City.”

This young man from Forest's Edge seemed to be drunk.

He held a familiar bottle in one hand, and his red face and shrill voice was definitely not because of his rage.

Someone is actually so drunk in broad daylight, don’t he need to hunt kiba?

I thought as I quickly rush towards the little girl.

I was five meters away from my goal when another series of screams came.

Along with an ominous shattering sound.

The man from Forest's Edge tossed aside the bottle filled with fruit wine, and pull out a knife.

It was a knife, but the blade was as thick as a machete, and about 20cm long. This weapon could even cut through kiba hide and meat, and was rather dangerous.

He actually draw his blade! That’s too unreasonable!

I couldn’t take my time going the long way around. I pushed aside the gawkers and charged out.

The girl’s half eaten bun fell to the ground, and the two men fighting trampled all over it. They were that close to her.

At this moment —— another sound erupted.

Ai Fa hit the back of that man’s head hard with the fruit wine bottle in her hand.

The bottle shattered and the fragrance of the fruit wine spread across the road.

That man stumbled and fell onto the ground—— I grabbed the little girl before he fell onto her.

Retard, if you like wine so much, you can have my share!

Ai Fa cold steely voice tore through all the noise.

It is a serious taboo for the people of Forest's Edge to cause any trouble

in Rock City. You are a disgrace to Forest's Edge.

That man held the back of his head while he squatted. He lift his head and looked up at Ai Fa.

Intense hatred and grudge welled up within his murky eyes, as if he had seen something he loathed.

You are the female hunter from house Fa… How dare you do this to me, you think I will let this go so easily…?

Who is the one that failed to follow the rules of Forest's Edge? There is no shame in my actions.

Uwah… What a cool girl.

The one who said that wasn’t the man from Forest's Edge.

It was an unfamiliar man, who knelt beside me before I even noticed.

「This is the first time I have seen a female hunter. If that necklace is the real thing, that's really praiseworthy.」

「W-What do you want?」

In order to not get in Ai Fa's way, I got up and moved away from the center of the dispute, and asked the man following behind me.

「Me? I'm just a normal pedestrain. I wanted to protect that poor girl over there, but you got ahead of me.」

That man had a whimsical presence.

He had a head of golden brown locks I had never seen in Forest's Edge or the post station town before. His skin seemed untainted by the sun and was ivory in colour. His pupils had a tint of purple.

Because he had button up his long cloak, I couldn't see his body. But he had a long face and immense height, and was slouching to bring his face near me.

He had a pair of drooping eyes, high nose bridge and messy hair and beard. His strangely coloured pupils had both the maturity of age and a childish glow, making it hard to discern his age.

“Ara, looks like the lazy officials have finally made their move.”

I followed the man’s extended finger, and saw a group of men with spears hurriedly moving through the crowd.

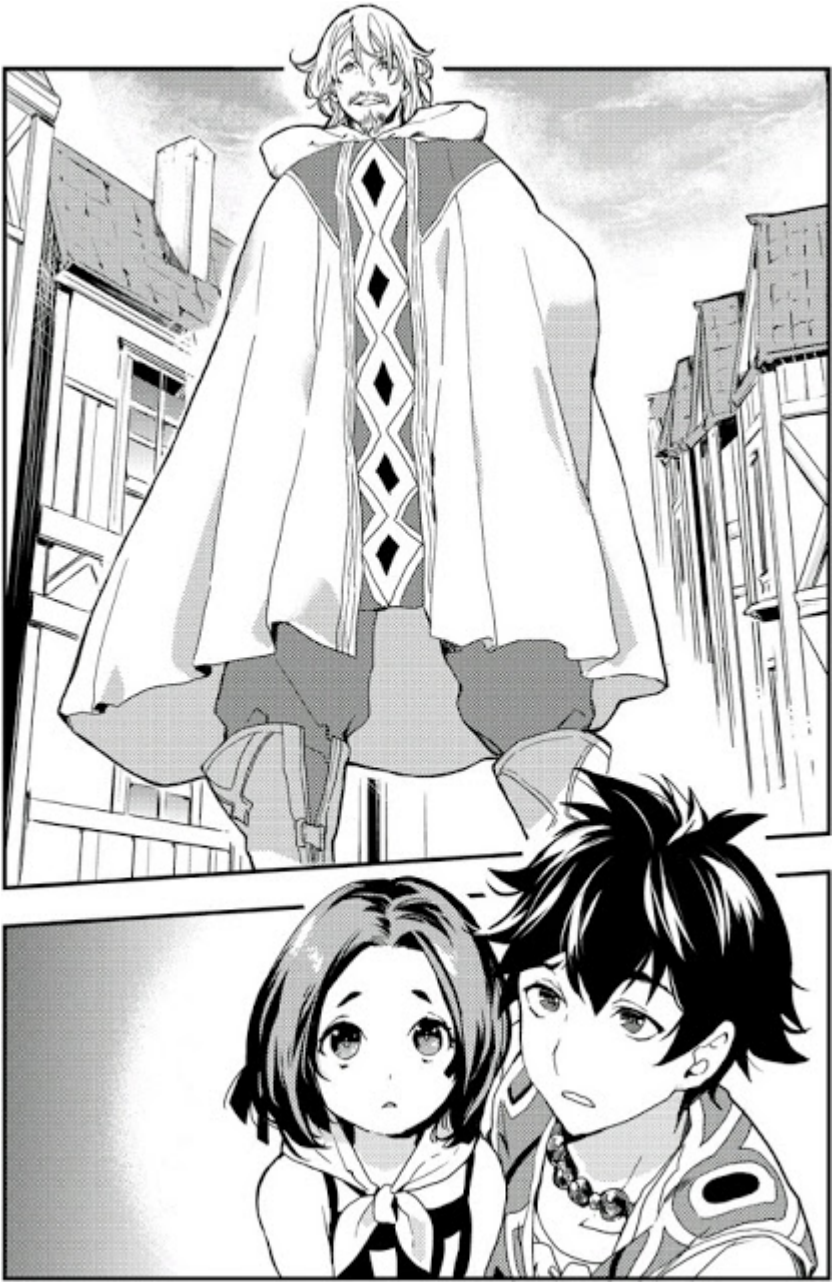
“What are you lot doing in the middle of the road!?”

The group of strong men wore leather helmet, leather chest protectors and had yellowish brown skin. From their professional dressing, they were probably the guards that maintains the peace within the city.

When I was about to sigh in relief—— I saw them point the sharp end of their spears at Ai Fa, which made me stood stiff.

The girl in my arms were trembling.

Denizens of Forest's Edge... Hey! You are prohibited from causing any incidents in this post station town! Is the people of Forest's Edge trying to violate the agreement you made with Marquis Genos!?



It seemed a prerequisite of being a guard was to not be fearful of denizens from Forest's Edge.

However, I feel that their eyes and faces were a little too agitated.

…… In order to honour that agreement, I even went as far as to hit that retard who broke this taboo.

Ai Fa glared at the steel blade at her nose, and said emotionlessly.

The guards shift their gaze to the man squatting down.

That man—— showed an incredibly ugly expression.

Guards of Rock City… I’m Doddo Tsun from the Tsun clan.

His voice was like venom that dripped from his ugly lips onto the streets.

"Even lowly officials like you know me too right? I'm from the ruling Tsun clan of Forest's Edge… arrest that woman."

The guards looked at each other confusedly.

The man who called himself Doddo Tsun glared at them and continued:

"That woman suddenly attacked me when I was walking along the streets! You can understand just by seeing this situation, right? I'm not at fault at all! It's this dumb woman who violated the taboo of Forest's Edge, and broke the agreement between Forest's Edge and Genos!"

"It's a Tsun clan member…", I was taken aback when the guards retracted their spears.

Their spears were still pointed at Ai Fa.

"Woman, come to the guards room with us, we will interrogate you about your crimes… Son of the Tsun clan, we need you to make a trip down with us, do you agree?"

「Of course…」, Doddo Tsun stood up and licked his lips.

I couldn’t help but shout——

But someone did so before me.

It was the little girl in my arms.

「No! That man is the one who started the trouble, and that woman stopped him!」

The entire street turned dead quiet.

It seemed—— that there was something ominous about this silence.

「… Son of the Tsun clan, what’s going on here?」

One of the guards looked Doddo Tsun’s way with a stern face.

Doddo Tsun then said with a smile:

「This is baseless slander. Why don't you ask the people around you. Since things had gotten this serious, there should many who saw how the entire scene unfold.」

Then, something unbelievable happened——

The crowd that was watching on all frowned and slowly left.

「Ara ara, that's wrong.」

The man in a long cloak muttered dumbfounded.

He stood up straight and was almost a head taller than me as expected.

In terms of height, he should be comparable to Donda Wu. But he hunches his back and slouches his shoulders, and with his rather slender built, he felt like a frail mantis.

But that wasn’t important now.

“Damn it—— Oh right, where is that guy being grabbed by him…?”

“When that drunkard got sent flying, that guy left hurriedly without even saying thanks. This is a problem.”

I gritted my teeth and decided to confront the guards.

At this point, Doddo Tsun’s murky eyes gaze my way.

His face was twisted with glee, and it sent a chill down my spine.

“Guards of Rock City, that brat is a foreigner, but became a part of Forest's Edge recently. He is probably a comrade of this fool, is he forcing that girl to say those foolish things?”

The blade that was at Doddo Tsun nose earlier was now pointed my way.

「Hey, put down that girl.」

The next instant the girl grabbed my neck tightly and said:

「Don’t wanna! This onii-san saved Tara! That man is the one who did bad things, so why don’t you believe me!?」

「I will interrogate them in the guard house later. Enough, run on home.」

「Don’t wanna!」

「Well well, it’s because of this bureaucratic style that is stopping you from earning the citizen’s respect. You think it’s troublesome to deal with the Forest's Edge denizens, so you don’t spend the effort to seek out the truth. That isn’t encourageable.」

Someone interjected suddenly. And of course it was the cloaked man.

Everyone acted before I could, so I didn’t have any chance to speak at

all.

“What do you want? Those not involved should just stand aside.”

“Unfortunately, I’m not involved with this incident, but I witnessed the entire thing. I might be just a bystander, but my testimony still have some value and reliability correct?”

After the man said that with grandiose, he continued:

“The fruit wine seller here and his friend who seemed to be a merchant were quietly pointing fingers and laughing at that gentleman from Forest's Edge. This gentleman became agitated, grabbed that merchant and threw that box of fruit wine onto the streets. The fruit wine seller fled and this gentleman yelled:“Say it to me clearly if you have any complains! Aren’t you the arrogant citizens of Rock City!?”, or something like that.”

The little girl snickered.

Because his voice was too lacking in tension.

□Hmm? Was my impression not good enough? Never mind… They then started quarreling. □I-I didn’t say anything.□ □Liar!□ □It’s the truth!□ □I heard you say that, the ears of denizens from Forest's Edge are built different from rotten ears like yours!□ □S-Save me!□ □Say it again. Who is the □stinky kiba eater□ you are referring to? You said □even the food in my hand stinks now□ right? Say it louder so I can hear you clearly, oh great citizen of Rock City.□… That’s the gist of what happened.□

The shocking thing was, this man recalled their conversation completely.

The guards looked troubled, and Doddo Tsun glared at that man with eyes like wild dogs.

And Ai Fa——

This was the most surprised expression I have ever seen her made.

□This gentleman toss the wine bottle in his hand aside, and pulled out a knife from his waist. That sweet smelling thing over there is the remnants of the bottle, and his knife is right over here.□

Doddo Tsun and the guards shifted their surprised gaze to our feet.

And a knife without any crossguard was right there.

A leather sheath was still hanging on Doddo Tsun’s waist.

At this point, that lady appeared on scene. She smashed her fruit wine bottle into the back of his head, then calmly said:Retard, if you like wine so much, you can have my share!

The little girl couldn’t hold it in any longer and laughed out softly.

His voice was really amusing.

Ai Fa’s surprised face suddenly turned gloomy.

She then said:It is a serious taboo for the people of Forest's Edge to cause any trouble in Rock City. You are a disgrace to Forest's Edge... That should be enough. Gentlemen, can you take this into consideration when you perform your interrogation?

All the guards showed an annoyed face. One of them turned to Doddo Tsun and said:

"Son of the Tsun clan, what that man described——"

"That's all nonsense! Baseless slander!"

Doddo Tsun's blue eyes turned bloodshot and he let loose a shrill yell.

But it seemed that —— the officials were not convinced.

"If that is so, then you need to have a logical explanation. You should be the only one here who refutes what I said. Since you claim that I'm lying, then explain the smashed box over there, the broken fruit wine bottle and why your knife is on the ground."

He said something vicious, but his expression remained casual.

Unlike Jiza Wu whose thoughts could not be read, this man had an easy

going attitude—— He was calm and explained his thoughts leisurely.

「... Enough. I will take all of you back to the guards office, so all of you have to report there.」

「What? That's troubling. I have an appointment with Marquis Genos later.」

The man said something incredible.

The guards were scared shitless.

「It's already passed the agreed time, I will feel bad if I go any later. If you want me to go with you, can you relay that to Marquis Genos first?」

「Why you... No, sir, may I know...?」

「Don't be so afraid. I'm just a friendly commoner. I'm Kamyua Yost, a guardian that ensures the safety of travelers.」

After saying so, that man showed a necklace hanging on his neck from the gap between his cloak.

It was a silver chain with a brightly coloured stone similar to agate. It was an elegantly crafted necklace.

「I happened to be working as a guardian for Marquis Genos when he was traveling to the capital, that's how we get to know one another. I don't have any titles or peerage, so fear not… Ah, this is the Genos castle town pass bestowed to me by Marquis Marustein Genos.」

He then took out another item. It was a thin and flat glimmering silver plate, which was completely different from the copper plate I saw earlier. It was the size of a credit card, with unfamiliar designs carved on it, drawing attention to its glamourous status.

When the guards saw that silver plate, they stood stiff with their face pale.

At this moment, I noticed one thing ―― This uncle was rather mischievous.

Even though everyone present were looking at this slender man who call himself Kamyua Yost with complicated expressions, he was still smiling easily and happily.

6

So, isn’t it great that things are resolved smoothly?

After the guards left with Doddo Tsun, the strange man named Kamyua Yost stayed behind with us.

We sat back at that empty place we were at earlier. Seated between the tensed Ai Fa and the troubled me was Kamyua Yost who was smiling carefreely.

...Thank you for helping us in our time of need.

Ai Fa said stoically, and lowered her head politely in thanks.

"You are really cautious." the man said with a smile.

"I didn't help at all, I merely stated what I witnessed. As a citizen of the western god Selva, it is my obligation to do so."

In the end, the guards didn't bring us to the guard house.

They only took Doddo Tsun with them. However, Doddo Tsun wouldn't be punished at all.

"It's not that big of a deal right? A denizen from Forest's Edge did something unreasonable, and someone else from Forest's Edge stopped him. It was wrong of him to pull a knife, but there is no need to escalate this matter right?"

The guards agreed with Kamyua Yost and the incident was concluded.

They took away Doddo Tsun. Their official statement was to wait for him to wake up from his stupor, but they would probably just detain him for a short while.

Hurry on back to Forest's Edge—— the eyes of the guards were saying that to us strongly.

But we didn’t leave, and sat opposite this strange man we met for the first time.

“Erm… Don’t you have an important matter to attend to?”

“What?”

Kamyua Yost shook his head in response:

“You mean that matter with Marquis Genos? That’s a lie. I do have an appointment with him, but I just need to show up at dinner, and there’s still plenty of time.”

He was a sly man indeed.

A cunning smile appeared on Kamyua Yost’s thin face, and his eyes suddenly glanced to the side.

“That is quite a troublesome matter. Little Miss, are you hurt?”

「No! Because this onii-chan saved me!」

The one answering was the little girl who called herself Tara. And 「onii-chan」 meant me.

Tara bit into a bun with a big smile. Doddo Tsun trampled all over the bun she bought, so Kamyua Yost bought her a new one.

「Oh, right, this thing too——」, Kamyua reached inside his cloak.

And as if he was performing magic, he pulled out a fruit wine.

He uncorked it with his boney fingers, took a sip, then replaced the cork before handing the bottle to Ai Fa.

「As you can see, it’s not poisoned. Will you accept this?」

「... I have no reason to receive your charity.」

"You are really cautious! I'm deeply moved by your selfless act of protecting the order in the post station town and the rules of Forest's Edge! Can't that be the reason?"

Ai Fa showed a disgusted face.

Kamyua Yost was still smiling as he gently patted Tara's petite head.

"It's the same for Tara. I'm moved by how this child muster her courage to help her benefactor, that's why I treated her to a Kimilz meat bun… Tara, is it good?"

"Yes! Thank you uncle!"

"Uncle huh… it's right to call me that, I'm almost thirty."

So he wasn't thirty yet—— I was a bit surprised.

Speaking of which, if he shave off his messy beard, he would look

young… No, not at all. His expression and demeanour were casual, instead of an uncle, he looked closer to being an old man.

So, what do you think? Will you accept this fruit wine…? Or are you still vexed about that brute not having to answer for his crimes? He is from the Tsun clan after all, I think it’s better not to escalate the matter.

What he said shocked me again.

Was the situation in Forest's Edge within his grasp too?

Hmm? What’s so strange about that? I have never stepped into the Forest's Edge of Morga before, but I still know the name of the Chief clan in Forest's Edge. I like this post station town a lot, and often see the denizens of Forest's Edge here… But this is the first time I’m speaking with a denizen of Forest's Edge.

His big mouth under his long thin nose rose in a satisfied smile.

On top of that, you are a really beautiful female hunter, which made me even happier. As a sign of respect to your beauty, I hope you can accept this bottle of fruit wine.

I looked at Ai Fa’s face timidly.

Ah… She was beyond furious, and her brows tightly knotted in a frown.

"Hmm, did I say anything that offended you? I only praised your looks, said that you're beautiful and compliment your noble actions."

"……"

"It's useless… Then, what about you?"

"W-What?"

"They call me "Whirlwind of the north", but you rescued Tara before I did, and I wished to show my respect and compliments. Will you accept this?"

Judging from the current mood, I shouldn't accept.

"By the way, what does whirlwind of the north mean anyway?"

"That's a nickname my colleagues gave me. This hair colour is rare in the west… Because my birth place is in the north."

Ai Fa's face changed a little when she heard that.

Her cat-like eyes stared right at Kamyua Yost with some lingering hostility.

"Kamyua Yost, Did you come from the northern kingdom Mahyudora?"

"Just call me Kamyua… Speaking of which, I still don't know your names. It's fine even if you make wild lies, can you tell me how to address you?"

His tone would definitely trigger Ai Fa. She raised her brow and said:

"I'm head of the Fa house, Ai Fa."

"Ah, I'm a member of the Fa house, Asuta."

"Ai Fa and Asuta huh. Nice names… Right, I'm from the north. My mother hails from Mahyudora while my father is from Selva. Since a century ago, the north and west bore deep animosity towards each other, and I'm a child born from these two nations. I spent my childhood in the north until my mother's death before coming here to the west. I couldn't find proper work because of my heritage, so I had to scrap for a living as a guardian."

On Kamyua Yost's waist was a sword that had a long and thin blade.

"Speaking of which, Ai Fa, your hair colour looked rather similar to mine."

Kamyua's purple eyes narrowed as if he was looking at something glaring, and he said to Ai Fa:

"I heard that the people in Forest's Edge are the descendents of refugees who escaped from the south. Given how far apart the north and south are, it's unlikely for them to have any blood relations. So why do you have a head of blonde hair?"

"… There's no special reason for this. People with this hair colour will appear in Forest's Edge from time to time, my mother also had blonde hair."

「I see. It’s the same with my mother.」

Kamyua Yost smiled innocently, and Ai Fa turned her head away as if she was annoyed.

I felt that somehow—— Ai Fa’s attitude was a little strange.

「Anyway, I have been interested in the denizens of Forest's Edge for a long time now. They offered their souls to another god while they were still alive, there are few who have experienced anything like that. So I feel close to them one sided. Therefore, I’m very glad that the first people from Forest's Edge that I get to speak to are people like you.」

「……」

「So, what’s your business with us?」

Ai Fa seemed uninterested, so I had to interject.

「Thank you for helping us out of a bind, but we have work to do back in Forest's Edge. It’s about time for us to go now…」

「Is that so? It’s regrettable, so let’s get into the topic… Actually, I took a job to guard a caravan in Genos heading to the eastern kingdom. When the time comes, we hope to be granted passage through the Forest's Edge settlement.」

I was very surprised by this, but Ai Fa’s reaction was very cold.

「… The chief Tsun clan is responsible for this job.」

「Yes, of course I know that. But after meeting the son of the Tsun clan today, it was regrettable, but I dismissed the idea of asking them to do this. They aren’t trustworthy at all.」

He had an innocent expression, but Kamyua Yost didn’t mince his words.

「Well, I already warned Marquis Genos before that every time an incident happens in the post station town, it’s always because of the Tsun clan. The denizens of Forest's Edge keep to themselves and follows the rules stubbornly, but the Tsun clan are nasty and disregards the rules. This makes me wonder if the Marquis’ side are part of the problem too…」

It’s the people of Rock City that made the Tsun clan so depraved.

Ai Fa cut off Kamyua Yost.

A blue flame rages in her eyes.

The people inside the city made the Tsun clan wealthy, which in turn caused them to discard the pride of Forest's Edge, not hunting kiba properly. They will drink and make merry all day and engrossed themselves in pleasures of the flesh. The people in the city needs to take full responsibility for this.

By making them wealth, do you mean the bonus paid out to them once every three months? That is such a meagre sum though.

The Tsun clan hoarded all of it. They spend that money on lavish pleasure.

I was probably the one who was most surprised here.

Tara had a blank face after finishing her bun, while Kamyua Yost looked as if he already knew.

"I guess as much. That money is meant to be a reward for protecting Genos from the threat of kibas, but the chief clan didn't share it with the people of Forest's Edge who devoted themselves to this work, and only benefited his own family to party... Why haven't the denizens of Forest's Edge revolted yet?"

"We don't need the charity from Rock City, we hunt kiba simply for the sake of survival."

"What a noble personality...! You are really stubborn though."

Kamyua Yost smiled wryly again as he ruffled his messy blonde hair.

"If you wish to restore order in Forest's Edge, I might be able to give you a hand."

"....."

"And of course, I wouldn't agitate the Tsun clan rashly, they are still the chief clan of Forest's Edge after all. If the power of Forest's Edge to hun kiba wanes because they lose their chief clan, it will be terrible. The kiba will rampage in the Morga forest once more and destroy the farmlands… That's why Marquis Genos don't dare to act even if he can see that the Tsun clan is a little depraved."

"……"

"Hence, I need to ask you a question. If the Tsun clan loses their standing, are there any other clans that can rule over Forest's Edge in their place?"

Speaking of a force that could rival the Tsun clan, the existence of the Wu clan immediately surfaced in my mind.

But Ai Fa didn't say a word.

Glimmers of hate gradually shone in her eyes.

"After all, Rock City can only interact with Forest's Edge through the

Tsun clan, so they cut off all negative news against them. Furthermore, they seldom appear outside the city walls, so a commoner who knows Marquis Genos like me, and someone who isn’t close to the Tsun clan like you, our meeting will be like erecting a bridge between Rock City and Forest's Edge.

What good does that do for you?

Kamyua Yost laughed again when he heard me say that.

Gains and losses aside, aren’t we all children of the western god Selva? In that sense, we are brethren, and it is only natural to lend a hand to a brethren in need.

……

That’s just pleasantries. Like I said, I have an one sided sense of camaraderie towards the denizens of Forest's Edge. I feel that way because of your virtuousness. I don’t respect lazy bums who got drunk at noon and don’t hunt kiba properly—— That’s how it is.

I was confused.

His words are insincere —— I didn’t think that way, but he likes to act the goat too much, so I couldn’t tell what he was really thinking.

As for Ai Fa, a strong defiance was burning in her eyes.

“Kamyua Yost, you are from Rock City. If the people from Rock City wants to harm the denizens of Forest's Edge—— you will become an enemy of Forest's Edge.”

“Is that so, does that applies to the decadent Tsun clan too?”

“If the Tsun clan have to be punished, they should be by the hands of the Forest's Edge denizens. The disgrace of Forest's Edge should be cleansed by Forest's Edge itself. And finally—— It’s the people from Rock City that led to the Tsun clan becoming depraved.”

Ai Fa then spat out fiercely:

“The people of Rock City… cannot be trusted.”

Her fiery eyes signifies her pride as a hunter.

But even so, Kamyua Yost still said casually with a smile:

"You are really a noble and virtuous person. Ai Fa, you are beautiful."

"... Are you ridiculing me?"

"I'm complimenting your beauty, how is that ridiculing you?—— Ara, look, you made Tara scared."

I was surprised after hearing that. I turned my head and found Tara holding tightly to Kamyua Yost's arm and shaking.

"Can't be helped then, let's call it a day. If we are too careless, the son from the Tsun clan might appear again."

"... It's just for today. Be it tomorrow or the day after, we won't ever meet again."

“Who can be sure? You can’t wait for a chance to come, you have to create one yourself.”

Kamyua Yost picked up the sword with his right hand, held the little girl’s hand with his left, then stood up and said:

“Ai Fa and Asuta, I’m really glad to have met you both today. I will place the fruit wine right here to commemorate our meeting today. If you don’t need it, then let it return to the earth… See you around.”

Vol. 3 :

Chapter 2

Chapter 2
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 3 Chapter 2

Remuneration and Resolve



Translator: Skythewood

1

“Ah, I can see the water source, it feels that we’re finally home.”

I muttered to myself with ragged breath, and Ai Fa who has been quiet all this while finally turned back.

“What’s with your voice? Asuta, your stamina is just like a ten years old child.”

“Yeah, I just need to beat Rimee Wu in that… Ai Fa, you are finally willing to talk to me.”

“Hmmp.”

Ai Fa faced forward again and sped up.

“Ah, wait for me! At least let me drink some water! My throat is completely patched since just now!”

I just hiked through the hill for an hour with over 16kg of load after all. The ropes had cut into my shoulder, and my legs and waist was trembling. I over exerted myself physically today, maybe even more than that day when we erected the stove.

By the way, how I did I cross that scary suspension bridge? In order to carry my baggage, Ai Fa made two trips, and she even went another time to guide me over while holding my hand. She was probably worried that her panicky family member would hug her again. Anyways, there were plenty of embarrassing things in my life that I didn't want Rimee Wu to know.

Let's hydrate myself first.

What a wimp...

While Ai Fa's words stabbed deep into my head, I scooped up the clear water flowing between the rocks and drank it.

Absolutely refreshing.

Ai Fa who didn’t speak with me for a long time changed her tone and continued:

“…Asuta, why aren’t you asking anything.”

“Hmm? You mean what that uncle said? I have loads of things to ask, but you will tell me things about this world every night.”

I rubbed my hands on my knees, and looked up at Ai Fa’s face as I caught my breath

“You will choose what to tell me based on your judgement. I won’t find any faults in your judgement, since I don’t really understand this world too well yet.”

“……”

“However, if you are already calm, then I want to discuss something with you… What do you think about that uncle?”

I cast my gaze to my feet when I said that.

Over there was a large bag filled with poitan and tino leaves, and bottle of fruit wine.

Ai Fa wanted to leave the fruit wine behind and go back, but I think the fruit wine wasn’t at fault in the first place, so I volunteered to bring it back. The bottle’s design was different from the usual kind, which made me curious what kind of wine this was.

“He is a weird guy, but I don’t think he is a bad man. I’m a bit curious about what you think of him.”

“… Not worth mentioning.”

“You’re going already? Hey, wait!”

With no other choice, I heaved up the bag and chased after Ai Fa painstakingly.

Despite her heavy baggage, Ai Fa’s strides were steady.

“I won’t force you if you don’t want to talk about it, but you seemed really tense. You’re

not good with guys like him?”

“… I have nothing to say with people from the city.”

“But you said plenty. Now that you mentioned it, I’m more of an outsider compared to that uncle, right? If you try talking to him, you two might get along well.”

“… You think I get along with you?”

“Ahaha! I already noticed, but you are still angry! The things you have been saying made my heart aches!”

“… I don’t mean it.”

Ai Fa’s eyes turned gloomy.

“Am I acting weird?”

“Weird or not huh… I thought you were in serious thought about something. You seemed troubled after we set off from the post station town.”

“I don’t know. This is the first time I spoke with someone from the city, my mind is a mess.”

She looked at me with gloomy eyes.

Like a little kid who was lost.

“Am I weird?”

“… No, you’re not weird at all.”

I said firmly.

"It's only natural for you to be confused after hearing someone say that so suddenly. I only half understand what that guy said, but for you—— For the denizens of Forest's Edge, this will affect your future."

"……"

"I already told you a long time ago, you don't need to shoulder such a big responsibility. If you don't think you can handle it, then just forget it ever happened."

What I said was rather irresponsible.

But half of it was my sincere thoughts.

If what Kamyua Yost said was true—— the Tsun house will lose power, and the Wu house will take over Forest's Edge, things might end peacefully.

However, things wouldn't proceed so smoothly.

We had yet to understand Donda Wu. If that burly and violent man replaced the Tsun house and rule Forest's Edge in their stead, he might be more of a tyrant than the Tsun house. And we wouldn’t be able to raise our head before Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba.

On the other hand, what that uncle said might be just a load of rubbish. Kamyua Yost seemed to have a good grasp of the situation in Forest’s Edge. He might be trying to tease us on a whim, so we couldn’t believe him so easily.

I want to believe his words, and I hope he had the authority to strip the Tsun house of their chief status.

That way, we wouldn’t need to look out for that despicable Diga Tsun. And we made an enemy with another Tsun house member today.

The man who called himself Doddo Tsun was a small fry like Diga Tsun, but someone so shameless was more scary. He got drunk in the afternoon and create trouble in the post station town. It was hard for me to imagine that someone so crude was living in Forest's Edge.

They were not qualified to rule Forest's Edge—— That was definitely so.

Darum Wu of the Wu house might be a problematic character, but he isn’t as bad as these guys. If Darum Wu is a wolf, then they are just wild dogs… No, that will be rude to the wild dogs.

In the end, he is still 「human」.

Probably someone 「poisoned by civilization」.

「... You also turned quiet too.」

A voice of a girl throwing a tantrum reached my ears.

I was wondering who it was, but it was just Ai Fa.

「Asuta, you’re so troubled too, but you want me to forget about this.」

Ai Fa would sometimes show an expression that looked younger than her age.

Moments like this always made me waver—— I was rather flustered now too.

“No, I’m not troubling over something that deep. I’m just thinking that dogs exist in this world too.”

“Dogs? You mean the descendents of Farbu wolves that lived amongst humans being friends of mankind? That’s just a legend in the western kingdom, there’s no telling if it is true.”

Ai Fa pouted.

“If you want to eat that dog thing, then go to Rock City. I don’t want any part of that.”

She turned her head to the side really hard.

My mind was a mess, wondering if I should be angry or soothe her.

“I get it! I get it! Let’s talk about happy things! Since our match with Donda Wu is over, I want to try out new dishes. We have been taste testing steaks this few days, so my jaws are tired.”

Ai Fa kept her head turned and glance at me sideways.

"... Will the new dish be tastier than hamburg steak?"

"We will only know if we try. By the way, the steaks are delicious right?"

"That's true... But I still prefer hamburg steak."

"Huh!? You told me that the steaks are as tasty as hamburg steak right? That's why I made up my mind to use steaks in my match with Donda Wu."

"Steaks are as tasty as hamburg steak... But I still prefer hamburg steak."

I was planning to rebuke her, but I forgot what I wanted to say from surprise.

Because I realized that this was the first time Ai Fa used the term

□prefer□.

Ai Fa once said that □food has no distinction of being delicious or not□, but not only did she said □tasty□, she even used the term □prefer□.

To me, this was a dramatic change.

□... You once said that eating soft meat all the time will make our teeth weak, but there's no need to worry about it if I continue to chew on jerky.□

Ai Fa lowered her face that was turned away a little, then looked up at me sideways with her mouth slightly pouting. That expression of hers was so sly.

It was even worse since she didn't show that face on purpose.

□So, I still prefer hamburg steak.□

□I-I get it. I will make hamburg steak tomorrow, so let's try out a new

dish today first.

Ai Fa lowered her head further, she seemed to be suppressing a smile.

I could only say that it was a good thing that both of my hands were full.

We just concluded our match with Donda Wu, even though there were new troubles in our hearts, it shouldn't be too much to ask if we spent this day leisurely right? We could then rest up and worry about Kamyua Yost's issue tomorrow! When we reached our home with this in mind, another new problem was there waiting for Ai Fa and me.

It came in the form of a matching couple.

They were Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min who would be wed in six days.



2

“Head of the Fa house Ai Fa, and house member Asuta, we have been waiting for your return.”

Kaslan Lutim’s face was squarish, and he had a pair of large eyes and a large nose. He wasn’t handsome, but emitted an air of honesty and sincerity. He said after a deep bow:

“It’s great to see you, it’s almost time for us to return to the Lutim house.”

Ema Min bundled her dark brown hair up tidily, and her mature face showed hints of intelligence and cheerfulness. She bowed too.

“Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min. What are you doing here?”

Ai Fa had not switched to her house head expression yet, and asked them puzzledly. The two of them smiled and answered as if they had agreed on this in advance:

We have some urgent matters for the two of you, so we came to visit.

To be honest, I had an ominous feeling when I heard him said that.

We have already asked Donda Wu to turn down the matter of tending the hearth for the wedding when we went home in the morning.

But even so, the ominous feeling persisted.

It’s too conspicious to stay here, come on in… Asuta, care take their steel.

Ai Fa grabbed my bag of poitan with her hand that was holding the fruit wine, and hurried into the house.

I was momentarily surprised, and quickly took the long and short blades Kaslan Lutim proffered to me.

P-Please come in.

Ever since Rimee Wu’s visit quite some time ago, we finally have some guest.

I didn’t know how to receive them at all.

Ai Fa finally returned from the food store, and sat down in the seat of honour in the large room. The two guest sat down an adequate distance away opposite Ai Fa.

I was at a loss, and finally knelt down besides Ai Fa, with the blades placed right beside me.

Since no one complained, my actions probably didn’t violate any customs of Forest's Edge.

“First, we want to thank you both. Ai Fa and Asuta of house Fa, thank you for the amazing feast you prepared for us last night.”

“That’s right, dinner last night was delicious. For us, this irreplaceable pre wedding celebration was a joyous night we will never forget.”

When I hear the honest and sincere thanks from the both of them, I wanted to thank them too.

Or rather… I just came back from the motley post station town, so the sight of these two who represented innocence and purity gave me an entirely different impression from last night.

Kaslan Lutim was a young man with such forthright eyes.

Ema Min was actually a woman with such a bright and clear expression.

I wasn't sure if it was just their family, or this differs by the individuals, but many of the Wu house members emits dazzling life force. But these two had a more stable quality, as tenacious as a rooted tree.

Ai Fa finally reverted to her serious expression as a house head. Sitting with one knee up, she looked at them and said:

"We are glad to tend to the Wu house's hearth too—— But what are you referring to when you mentioned you have a request for us? We have already rejected the request about the wedding through Donda Wu."

After Ai Fa got right to the point, the two of them said “yes” at the same time, and lowered their heads:

“That’s the matter we would like to discuss with you two! Back then, it was my father Dan Lutim who proposed this matter which goes against the customs of Forest's Edge when we heard his proposal…”

“We also think it is a wonderful idea. If it comes through, it would be a truly blissful night.”

Their hearts were so in sync even before the wedding.

Their expressions and eyes were filled with pure longing and joy—— I could feel their honest character from how they try their best to convey their thoughts.

But these were two different matters.

Of all the kin house of the Wu house, Kaslan Lutim was the heir to the strongest Lutim main house. It would be too heavy a responsibility for me to care take the hearth during his wedding.

I could only count on Ai Fa’s decisiveness.

“Neither the Lutim house nor Min house has deep relations with the Fa house, so the Fa house can’t bear such a heavy responsibility. A family joyous occasions should be shared with your kins… Asuta already said that last night.”

She was right.

I nodded in agreement.

The next instance, Kaslan Lutim looked at me with his forthright eyes.

“Asuta, I heard that you are a Fa house member, but didn’t come from Forest's Edge, but a foreign country. And that you work as a chef in your hometown.”

“Yes, I might just be an apprentice helping out at home, but what you said is true.”

"I don't understand what that job entails in detail. Simply put, it's similar to the merchants peddling cooked food in the post station town, correct?"

"Yes, you are correct."

"In that case—— can you sell me the dishes you prepared?"

"... What?"

I didn't understand what he meant.

Selling dishes—— How do I sell them in Forest's Edge?

"I'm not asking you to care take our hearth out of your good will, friendship or kinship, we will trade for your work with proper remunerations. Just for one night, we hope to purchase your cooking skills, knowledge and labour—— That is our wish."

And I——

Was dumbstruck.

Asuta, you are a member of another house, so we won’t demand for your blessings. And we just met last night, so we can’t force you to offer us your kindness and generousity. In that case, we can only pay for you to render help.

If that is so… But——

I plan to pay you with everything I have, your cookings is worthy of me doing so. I want to share the joy of eating I experience that night with Ema Min and my father Dan Lutim, with my family and kins. Asuta, I need your strength.

When Kaslan Lutim said that, he took off the tusks and horns hanging on his thick neck with a crisp clinking sound.

On the necklace was several layers of horns and tusks, far greater than the number of Ai Fa’s neck.

Ema Min took off her necklace with a calm smile.

On it was the three tusks and horns gifted to her by her family.

They offered these necklaces that represents the pride of hunters and the love of their parents before me.

"Not just the Lutim, the hundred odd kins of the Wu house will also attend this banquet. I know this isn't enough to pay for everyone's meal, but every participant will gift us with one blessing each. That will be two hundred for Ema Min and me. If that still isn't enough, I will hunt kiba until it is enough…"

"Wait! That's too much, I can't accept this!"

I felt an emotion close to terror, and yelled loudly:

"I-I'm just a immature half-baked chef, I can't take on such an important job… And I'm an outsider, and don't know the rules of Forest's Edge too well yet, if you leave such an important job to me…"

"You have already shown us your capabilities, we are not worried about that."

"B-By capabilities, you mean yesterday's steaks? Like I said, it's a dish a family can finish on their own. I will tell you the menu right now——"

"According to what you described, in order to reproduce the taste, we have to start from hunting the kiba right?"

"I will teach you! I will teach you how to bloodlet and slaughter them! Actually, I have only slaughtered three kibas. You already possess the skill to skin them, so you will learn it in no time."

"The hamburg steak that was brought up repeatedly last night——"

"It's fine even if you don't try it. It will be harmful to your bodies if you get addicted to that dish."

"We are not that foolish."

Kaslan Lutim—— suddenly smiled.

It was a strong smile, filled with the pride and dignity of a man.

"If that dish will harm the body of a hunter, I will not touch it at all. But

you said that there wouldn’t be any effects even if we eat it one thousand or two thousand times, isn’t that right Asuta?

T-That’s just my assumption, I don’t know the actual facts. However, it is certain that eating soft food all day will definitely make one’s teeth and jaws grow weak.

If someone allows their soul to corrode even after hearing your words, then they are the ones who are too weak. You don’t need to feel gloomy about this. You are telling us this to warn us right?

Kaslan Lutim gently placed a fist onto the floor and leaned forward.

The righteous youth didn’t show any changes on his face, but his emotions might be getting heated up quietly:

I’m a hunter, so I can’t explain as clearly as you—— Anyway, I want to share my feelings with everyone. If there is more joy in life, we will have a stronger will to live. The happiness you brought to us gave Ema Min and me strength, and I want others to know this strength too. Not just house Lutim, I want to share it with the Wu house, Min house, Lei house, Mamu house, Lilin house and mufa house—— In the face of such a situation, we need to obtain a greater strength to fulfil our obligations as hunters.

The situation he was referring to—— was it about the Tsun clan becoming depraved?

But I couldn’t think about so many things at the same time.

“T-That’s why I told you… that I will impart all of my skills to you. Including bloodletting, slaughtering, grilling poitans and how to cook the steaks you ate yesterday. Give me six days, I will teach everyone the details. I have already taught some of the skills to the women of the Wu clan——”

“… And the hamburg steak?”

“There’s no need to go out of the way to learn that dish. Hamburg steak takes too much effort to prepare, and doesn’t really fit the denizens of Forest's Edge right?”

“It might be rude for me to say this, but whether hamburg steak is suitable for the denizens of Forest's Edge should be decided by the denizens of Forest's Edge… No, you’re already a member of the Fa house, and a part of Forest's Edge now. I’m not taking your words lightly, but I wish to choose my own path.”

If we can get tremendous joy out of this, we will choose that path no matter how much extra efforts it will take.

Ema Min finally chipped in.

What should we do in order to live? Forage for firewood? Dry pico leaves? Tan hides? What are the things we should do and which path should we take? Eighty years ago, our forebears also considered these things, and impart them to us. One day, I will bear Kaslan's children—— And I hope I can guide them down a path that leads to greater happiness.

No one will neglect their other chores just for the sake of cooking. But if anyone is willing to put in the extra effort, that means there is value and meaning in doing so. If someone finds the value in hamburg steak, then she is definitely willing to spend the time make them. If not, then she wouldn't bother… that's how simple it is

But you have not tried hamburg steaks before, so why are you adamant about it?

We are not only after the hamburg steak, we are hoping that you can give it your all.

Kaslan Lutim said.

That’s why we are asking you. I won’t ask the people who learned from you, we just want to ask you. Just for one night, we hope you can do everything you can for us—— and this is the payment for our job request.

Please wait. I——

But I didn’t say anything more.

My mind was more confused than I thought, and I was wavering.

The next moment, Ai Fa who was quiet all this while said:

Asuta seems to be tired, he’s stamina is no different from a ten years old child after all. Just carrying the goods back from the post station town was enough to leave him exhausted… I’m sorry, but can we give our reply tomorrow?

I see, of course it’s fine—— Well then Asuta, we have one last thing to ask of you.

... Pray tell.

Last night, you said that you want to be a medicine, not poison—— and I sincerely hope so too. Your strength must not become poison. If it becomes medicine, then the denizens of Forest's Edge might obtain more joy, bonds and strength to continue living. I rushed here because of this thought in my mind. May we pick the same path—— Alright then, we will take our leave.

3

The sun sets.

We met Kamyua Yost in the post station town at noon, and after returning to Forest's Edge, we had a long discussion with Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min. This had far exceeded my brain capacity, so I immersed myself in cooking as a brief respite from reality.

The menu for today was simple. Not counting the time to grill poitan in, it was finished in less than an hour.

Aria and tino leaves were boiled inside the iron pot.

On the fake rubber leaves were additional aria and tino leaves. The aria was cut into either round or semi-circle slices, while the tino leaves that had the texture of cabbages were cut into bite sizes.

Besides the vegetables were the kiba meat. There were belly meat, shoulder meat and thigh meat. I tried my best to cut the meat into 5mm slices, and arranged them into a beautiful circle.

A thick red liquid was glistening on the wooden plate, a condiment made with fruit wine as its base. After bringing the fruit wine to a boil and the alcohol evaporates, I added salt and pico leaves to flavour it slightly. It had a tangy sweetness to it which will definitely make Donda Wu complain if he eats it.

Alright! Ai Fa, it’s done!

Ai Fa looked at me with an expression that says: What’s this?

That’s right, this was just a plate with raw meat slices displayed on top, so a denizen of Forest's Edge wouldn’t understand.

“This is Shabu shabu, a dish where you can cook and eat the meat yourself.”

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shabu-shabu>

Even after hearing my explanation, the question mark on top of Ai Fa didn’t disappear.

Instead of explaining with words, it was simpler to show by hand. I took out the secret weapon I prepared for this day——

After slicing the krilee branches that has almost no taste into thin sticks, I dried them and made them into “chopsticks”.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chopsticks>

“First, put the meat into the pot like this.”

“Uwah!”

I turned my head because of the strange noise, and found Ai Fa covering her mouth with her face red for unknown reasons.

「What? Something happened? I didn’t do anything that will make you embarrassed.」

「S-Shut up! What kind of disgusting movement is that!」

「Hmm」? That’s how you use chopsticks.」

I opened and close the chopsticks a couple of times, and Ai Fa continued her 「Uwah, uwah」. Her face was getting redder… She seemed embarrassed that she couldn’t suppress her cries.

「I will carry on with the demonstration—— Put the meat into the soup like this, and slowly move it from side to side, until the slices aren’t red any more. Shabu~ shabu~」

「… What sort of spell is that?」

□It’s a spell to make the meat turn tastier.□

I then placed the well cooked belly meat onto Ai Fa’s plate.

After that, I picked up a piece of aria and tino leave floating in the pot for her.

□The problem is that it will take some time to finish three arias. Ah, try it first. If you don’t like it, I will change it into a normal meat soup.□

□……□

After she finished mumbling to herself—— I already know what she was saying softly. After Ai Fa gave thanks to the grace of the forest and to me, she picked up the plate suspiciously.

She scooped up the meat and aria coated in the condiment, and ate it.

□Shabu□shabu□... how does it taste?□

「… it’s tender.」

「Belly meat is tender right? Here, this is thigh meat.」

「… It’s tougher than the meat in meat soup.」

「Shabu「shabu」」, I was getting tired of saying that.「And finally, shoulder meat.」

「… It’s soft.」

「Like I said, our intense match with Donda Wu is over, so we don’t need to care about the toughness of the meat. If it don’t fit your taste, I will cook some meat soup instead. What do you think?」

Ai Fa fell into deep thought with a troubled face.

In the meantime, I said 「shabu shabu」 repeatedly and cooked some belly meat for myself.

“Don’t be so troubled, just tell me what your honest thoughts are.”

Despite what I said, she still didn’t reply, so I placed a slice of belly meat into my mouth.

Ah.

Delicious.

For the past ten odd days, our dinner was either steak or hamburg steak, so the texture and refreshing taste of the thin pieces of meat felt delicious.

I drank plenty of meat soup at the Wu clan, but food cooked from “simmering ” and “dipping” still have some difference.

On top of that, dinner tonight was Shabu shabu. Aside from the aria and tino leaves, only a bit of salt was added into the soup. The only condiment was the fruit wine sauce, so it couldn’t conceal the taste of the meat.

There wasn’t any need to conceal the taste of the kiba, I could feel the energy from these meat. The kiba was juicy and tasty, and the juice spew out every time I chewed, so I didn’t know when I should swallow.

There was still a bit of a stench in the meat, and it was tougher than pork, but it would be fine if I slice it thinly like this. When I tried the thigh meat which was the toughest body part, I could actually chew and enjoy its wonderful texture.

“Wow, it’s really good…! That’s what I think, what about you?”

Ai Fa thought for a moment, then said: “it is delicious.”

“But… I can only eat a little at a time, this is too slow.”

“Yes, I know how you feel. I will often feel it is troublesome towards the end, and throw it all into the pot. Especially pork—— No, kiba meat has to be completely cooked, until it loses its red colour.”

“If that is so, why not cook it all from the start?”

「Hmm? Well」 cooking it all from the start is one way of eating it. The advantage of cooking one piece at a time is that we can eat freshly cooked and steaming hot meat. To be honest, I don't eat this too often either.」

「I see.」

「That's right, and our restaurant don't have Shabu shabu either. We seldom eat out, when my mother…」

I couldn't help stopping, but I had to finish it since I already started the sentence.

「… When my mother is still alive, we will eat this occasionally.」

I told myself in the post station town that I shouldn't tell Ai Fa about my world in too much detail. Was that the right thing to do?

Ai Fa squint her eyes a little, and cast her gaze on the pot that was boiling.

I ruffled my head, and threw a small piece of wood into the stove.

“... How old were you when your mother passed away?”

“Hmm? About seven, what’s the matter?”

“That early?” After she said that, Ai Fa lift her head and ask in surprise:

“Which means you tasted this dish before you are seven?”

“Probably, yeah. It’s too lonely to have hot pot with just me and my dad... Ah, no, I won’t feel that way when I eat hotpot with you though.”

“.....?”

“Damn it, I’m digging my own grave...! It’s nothing, simply put, this is a standard home cooked meal for an entire family... So when a family of three becomes two, it makes me feel that eating hot pot feels lonely! Sorry for saying something so depressing!”

Ai Fa blinked her eyes, and didn’t seem to understand what I was saying completely.

“I don’t understand. Will it make you unhappy to eat this dish with me?”

“I wouldn’t have prepared this dish if I feel that way.”

“I see. That’s great… Looks like I don’t need to beat you up.”

“That’s a relief!”

“… Lend me that.”

Ai Fa reached out her right hand.

“Hmm? The chopsticks? Don’t you find them disgusting?”

“Then why did you make another pair?”

She found out.

I prepared another pair of chopsticks, and had placed it quietly in the shadows of the plate and ladle used to remove foam from the soup.

“I made another pair for you of course. But it’s not easy to use though.”

“If you can use it, so can I.”

Ai Fa pouted again.

So as I kept an eye on the aria and tino leaves so they didn’t overcook, and gave a simple lecture on how to use chopsticks.

“Hmmp, that’s simple.”

Three minutes later, Ai Fa picked up a piece of aria successfully.

Hmm

Nevermind, it works if she can pick up food firmly —— I told myself.

In the end, Ai Fa didn’t learn the right way to hold chopsticks. She held one stick with her thumb and index finger, and the other stick with her ring finger and pinkie. And she was better at it than me.

The positioning looks perfect though, so let’s keep it at that.

Okay, let’s continue eating! Eat more aria okay? If there are leftovers, I can fry some meat with them.

Yes.

After seeing Ai Fa, I added another firewood, then ate some grilled poitan.

Asuta, what meat is this?

“That’s the meat from the shoulder and back.”

“I see.”

Ai Fa dipped the meat into the iron pot——

“Shabu~shabu~”, she started mumbling.

I couldn’t help spitting the poitan I chew half way out, and choked on my food.

“What are you doing, don’t waste food.”

Ai Fa said as she glared at me, then continued: “Shabu~shabu~”.

I tried my best to stifle my laughter and decided to wait until I had thoroughly enjoyed her demeanor before telling her “You can just say it in your heart if you think it is a hassle”—— I promised to myself in my heart.

4

The peaceful dinner ended smoothly.

We tidied up the cutlery as usual, put out one of the candles, and it was time to think over the troublesome matters properly.

“...Asuta, I will be blunt.”

Ai Fa lifted her hands to let down her blonde hair as she said quietly:

“What Kaslan Lutim said earlier was meant for you. As the house head, I will tell you my opinion. But you have to make the final decision yourself.”

“Yes, I know.”

“And also, you don’t need to worry about the Fa house’s position for this matter.”

“Huh?”

“This is a proper trade. Even if you fail, no one will be punished. If you succeed, the Wu clan and the Fa house won’t get any closer. Aside from the remuneration, we won’t be affected at all.”

Her hair swayed in the darkness.

Unwed women didn’t cut their hair, so Ai Fa’s hair was rather long.

“… But what will happen to the two of them? If I fail, how will that affect them?”

“Nothing much, they will just lose their kin’s trust, and be mocked. Everyone will say that the heir of the Lutim house messed up the entire ceremony, and is a fool who tarnished the pride of a hunter for some retarded game.”

“Uwah. I’m glad that you don’t hold back at all during times like this… Ah~! What should I do!”

“Be quiet… What are you so worried about? To me, this is a safe bet with nothing to worry about.”

Ai Fa leaned against the wall and tilted her head confusedly.

Kaslan Lutim’s request is for you to cook the dishes you made before, but create anything new. Kiba steak, hamburg steak, meat soup and grilled poitan… You just need to serve these dishes, and the guests will be surprised and awed.

That might be so… but they would add all sorts of vegetables into the pot lavishly during banquets right? Mama Mia Lei mentioned this yesterday. That’s why I didn’t hesitate in adding tino leaves and pula into the meat soup meant for the guest.

Ai Fa flicked her hair again.

The candle was probably too dim, and I couldn’t see her face as clearly as usual.

And so, no matter how great the dish I served was, there will be people unhappy about the bland palatte of ingredients, feel that something is amiss and get angry. Not just that, if my cooking isn’t to their liking—— Then it will mess up the banquet they were looking forward too, right?

……

And this is a formal wedding ceremony. There might be old men with archaic thinking, or people more stubborn than Donda Wu who prefers the poitan pot stew usually served at banquets. Everyone have their own

preference after all, and I keep forgetting something so obvious. That’s why my pride as a chef was hurt when I heard Donda Wu disparaging me. I don’t think everyone will accept my cooking unconditionally anymore..

Asuta, what exactly… are you afraid of?

Ai Fa’s voice was a little puzzled..

Even though all that might happen, Kaslan Lutim still wish for you to care take their hearth. This is an important banquet for him, but he wants you to tend to the lives of his irreplaceable family and relatives. Isn’t this a great honour?

It is a great honour. I’m so afraid because I’m not worthy of it. Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min believe me from the bottom of their heart and want to entrust me with such an important task. I could feel that—— and it makes me afraid.

… I still don’t understand.

Ai Fa shrugged in the darkness.

I stood up, walk to Ai Fa and sat down.

"... What's the matter?"

Ai Fa looked at me quizzically.

She was frowning, but her eyes were calmer than I imagined.

"Sorry, I feel uneasy if I can't see your face. If you feel uncomfortable that we are too close, I will light another candle."

Ai Fa shook her head slowly and said:

"Asuta, you already finished the agreement you had with Donda Wu successfully, so why are you still so worried? This is the first time you act so timid about your own cooking."

"... What happened back then was because of my ideals and emotions. I want to give Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba more strength, and to be

acknowledged by Donda Wu. I only took on these seemingly impossible matches because of this strong feelings—— But it’s different this time.

I looked into Ai Fa’s beautiful blue eyes and said:

I don’t have any bonds with Kaslan Lutim, and I don’t know if what he said is true. Even though it has nothing to do with me, I can’t decide if it is right. Because I——

You want to say that you are not from this world?

There was a gleam of displeasure in Ai Fa’s eyes.

……Asuta, your eyes are gloomy today. When we met Donda Wu, you found the right path forward. But now, you can’t see anything.

W-What do you mean?

Don’t you get it? You don’t need to worry about favours or blood relations, there’s no right or wrong about this either, and the decision

isn’t made by you. Kaslan Lutim already told you right? They just want to borrow your strength.

Ai Fa suddenly grabbed my arm.

Her face was already to close to mine, and she was right at my nose now.

The aftertaste of dinner was overwhelmed —— by Ai Fa’s fragrance.

Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min will decide your value, not you. You don’t need to worry about favours, blood relations, goodwill and generosity. They acknowledged your capabilities, and wish to purchase your strength for one night with money.

That’s because…

It doesn’t matter if the results meet your expectation, that’s the responsibility of the buyer, the seller don’t need to worry about that. Asuta, you——

Ai Fa seemed to be in deep thought, and then said:

「……Asuta, you bought some food in the post station town today right?」

「Yes. It wasn't delicious, but it's not horrible either.」

「Why did you spend copper plates to buy them?」

「Hmm? That's because… It smells great and looked fine.」

「Do you think the taste was worth it?」

「No, it's the price of a bottle of fruit wine, that's too expensive for me.」

「In that case, are you going to complain to the shop and ask them to refund you?」

I——

My vision turned clear.

"You found value in that food and paid the price. Kaslan Lutim also found the value in your cooking and wants to pay you for it. The customers are free to think whatever they want after buying the product. But even if they are unhappy, they won't grumble about that."

"Ai Fa…"

"Furthermore, Kaslan Lutim and the others already tried your cooking. They are after the taste of your dishes, and are willing to pay the price. You also make a living by cooking and selling food back in your hometown, so why are you turning them down…? This is what confuses me."

"I get it—— I get it now, Ai Fa. I finally understand what I'm so afraid of."

Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min were just normal "patrons".

I had no links or bonds with them. Even if I turn them down, they had no grounds for complains. Even if they find faults with my dishes, I wouldn't

need to take any responsibilities.

That was why—— I was so afraid.

Seeing a 「price」 set for my cooking, and sold as 「merchandize」—— This filled me with fear.

「I… never had a shop of my own before. The shop owner was my father, and I'm just helping him.」

To make the thoughts in my mind clearer, I tried articulating them.

Ai Fa listened to me quietly.

「Back then, the customers are paying for my father's dishes. Even if I cooked the rice, roast the meat and cut the vegetables—— the dishes were still my father's cooking, not mine. That's what I always thought.」

「Yes.」

「And after coming to this world, I met you and started preparing the

dishes for you and myself. I then met Rimee Wu, Grandma Jiba and Donda Wu. I then cooked for many people—— but that wasn’t selling my cooking. I only cooked for them because I wanted them to try it.

Yes.

Hence, I didn’t prepare the dishes for Donda Wu personally last night. Because they didn’t need me as a chef. Hence, I think that only the home cooking prepared by his family can satisfy the heart of that old man.

Yes.

And this time—— it is the opposite from the last time, they needed me as a chef.

A chill ran down my spine.

It was cooler at night than in the day, but we could still manage with our thin clothings—— and my knees started quivering badly.

That’s the thing—— that frightens me.

……

This is different from the blessings given to me by the Wu family members. I’m just a half baked chef, and isn’t sure if my cookings has any value. The thought of people unrelated to me judging my cooking calmly—— makes me very uneasy.

Even if you say that——, Ai Fa who pulled had her face away leaned in again.

Lights is coming back to your murky eyes.

Yes… This is the first time anyone has placed their faith in me as a chef. It scared me—— but it also filled me with pride.

Then, will you accept their job request?

… I want to take the job. I squeezed out these words.

My stomach was constricting, and the meat and poitan I ate looked as if they were going to be pushed out.

Since they trust me that much… I want to work hard to properly earn the remunerations they are offering. As a chef, I hope my skills won't bring me shame.

My whole body was shaking.

I was really going to puke.

I was shocked, I never thought I was so cowardly.

The next instant —— Ai Fa brush her palm over my cheeks. Her eyes looked into mine from an extremely close distance.

… I'm very proud. Ai Fa said quietly.

Under Ai Fa's gaze—— My trembling finally stopped.

Vol. 3 :

Chapter 3

Chapter 3
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 3 Chapter 3

Preparation Work of the Half Baked Chef



Translator: Skythewood
Editor: Rockgollem

The next morning Ema Min visited the Fa house alone.

We were cleaning the cutlery, maintaining our blades and checking our food stock.

The timing of her visit reminded me of Rimee Wu’s visit last time.

“I can accept your proposal after confirming some details.”

We sat in the same position as last night, facing the guest together with the house head.

Ema Min asked calmly:

“Confirmed? What would you like to confirm?”

“There are too many matters that are too vague. I want to check the details, as well as the quality and quantity of the dishes. Cooking for a hundred guest is a huge undertaking.”

Ai Fa and I sat side by side and faced Ema Min. I told her the contents of what I thought last night.

First, you just want me to serve the dishes I cooked the previous time. However, I don't know how many people will be satisfied after tasting it, which leaves me worried. There are only five days before the banquet. There isn't much time, but I want everything to be done as perfectly as possible.

Alright.

And so, since you are willing to buy my culinary skills, I hope you can buy not just that night, but these five days too.

That's fine… What should we do specifically?

Specifically, I hope you can provide the ingredients and a place for me to research my cooking. I need many stoves, prepared ingredients and firewood. Finally, people to taste test it for me… And of course, I can't be the only one cooking on that day right?

Yes, going by past precedence, there will be more than ten women cooking that night.

That’s wonderful. In that case, I hope the women who will be tending to the hearth that day will help to taste the food. On top of that, I hope they can help me research the dishes without getting in their work, and learn the cooking techniques.

Alright, I can arrange for that, I think it’s necessary too.

Thank you. Next is the kiba meat, I need enough of them for these five days, and for the banquet. I can’t slaughter all the kiba by myself, so I hope the men from the Lutim house can assist me—— If you want to taste delicious meat in house Lutim in the future, then everyone has to learn this technique.

Yes, we want to ask you to do that too.

Well then, will you agree to my terms? Aside from the ingredients for these five days and the banquet, I also want adequate remunerations.

Of course. We are after your skills and knowledge, so we will naturally prepare the ingredients you need.

She began each sentence by agreeing with me, showing this woman’s honest nature.

Ema Min then straightened her back, looked right at me and said:

“Asuta of House Fa, what is the price you are willing to accept in exchange for lending us your aid?”

“Yes. I—— hope to make this deal with you for the tusks and horns of twenty kiba beasts.”

The next moment, Ema Min’s cheerful face turned gloomy.

>

“Twenty kiba beasts… which is eighty kiba tusks and horns right? We can’t set a price on your ability… But the price is too cheap. Like we said yesterday, all of our kin will gift us a blessing each, and after gathering all that——”

“I can’t accept two hundred tusks and horns, I’m still a half baked chef.”

I scratched my head and added on:

“To be honest, I’m troubled too. I don’t think I can find anyone who knows what is a fair price for this job.”

“That’s true. There’s probably no one in Forest's Edge who will ask someone who isn’t their kin to tend to the hearth for their wedding.”

Ema Min smiled gently.

Not only was she a bright and cheerful girl, she also had a flexible tenacity about her. I felt this way about her once again.

“To be honest, I have something I wanted to buy at the post station town. I heard it cost 20 kiba tusks and horns, that’s why I decided on this price… But I feel that this is adequate payment, so I definitely won’t cut corners.”

I looked right into Ema Min’s eyes.

"I promise to do everything I can to prepare for this banquet for this remuneration. Are you willing to buy my culinary skills at this price?"

"We requested for your help because of this personality of yours."

Ema Min smiled leisurely.

Her smile was filled with motherly love, making it hard to believe that she was the same age as me, Ai Fa and Leina Wu.

"Well then, we will use the tusks and horns of twenty kiba beasts to exchange for your capabilities——"

"Ah, hold on! I have one more thing to ascertain."

I spoke while glancing at the side profile of Ai Fa sitting besides me.

She was sitting cross legged with one knee up, her expression filled with dignity.

"I'm the hearth caretaker of the Fa house, I don't want to neglect my work in the Fa house either. That's why… For the next five days, I wish to bring Ai Fa along with me to the house that will be hosting me for taste testing and dinner. I won't ask house Lutim to prepare a bed for us, but can you reserve a seat for me and the head of my house?"

"I see, that's part of our obligation too… Hmm…"

When Ema Min said that, she tilted her head slightly with her index finger on her cheek, and fell into deep thought.

Ah, so this kind of gap moe exist too—— Such a strange thought welled up in my mind, but my face was still serious.

"I think… that shouldn't be a problem. After all, house Lutim is close with the Wu clan…"

"What? What has this got to do with the Wu clan?"

"The wedding will be held in the Wu clan's village."

Oh no.

"And the women of the Wu clan will be tending to the hearth that day."

Oh no oh no oh no.

"Members from house Lutim and house Min had to prepare other things, so they couldn't tend the hearth. You will be starting your research later today right? I'm planning to head to the Wu main house to discuss the details of borrowing the stove room and ask the women of the Wu clan for help."

Oh shit.

"B-But, isn't the Wu clan your "Elder family"? Can you ask them to take care of such trivial matters?"

"We are doing this because they are our elder family. Taking care of the juniors is the job of the seniors."

She was absolutely right.

But I would prefer working in a place without too much worries.

"Therefore, if your family wish to dine together at the Wu clan, you have to get permission from the Wu clan head Donda Wu. With how close the Wu clan and Fa house is, this will definitely be fine."

No, there might be good relationships, but there were bad ones too.

Speaking of which, I said not too long ago to the Wu clan that "home cooking should be left to one's family", so this development would be too ironic.

"Is that so? So you will spend this time cooking delicious meals? That's a wonderful opportunity for the Wu clan. I'm so envious of the Wu clan women. Many of their kin will want to learn from the Wu clan in the future."

I see, for the sake of Grandma Jiba and Rimee Wu, this might be a more adequate arrangement. Leina Wu learned fast, Grandma Ditto Min and

Mama Mia Lei were just as skilled too. The three of them would definitely master the cooking techniques in five days.

Besides, I could use this chance to impart the bloodletting and slaughtering techniques to the Wu clan.

In a sense, wasn't this the development I wanted the most?

But what should I do about Donda Wu, Jiza Wu and Darum Wu?

Dining for five nights with these dangerous people—— Just the thought of it filled me with worries.

In contrast, the shabu shabu last night was so relaxing!

… But this is also part of the job.

Considering the efficiency, since the women from the Wu clan will be tending to the hearth for the wedding, I should instruct them directly. It would be quite stupid to stop my research at dusk and return to the Fa

house. I should keep private matters and business apart during times like this, and tackle the Wu clan’s dinner boldly.

Furthermore, aside from cooking the food for taste testing, the women also needed to prepare dinner—— Since I was considering about working in some other place, that meant I wanted to avoid the Wu clan.

Hmm speaking of which… I’m rethinking the menu in order to let more people enjoy my cooking. Hence, inflexible people like Donda Wu would be most suited for the role of taste tester. The same applies to Jiza Wu whose thinking is old fashioned, and Darum Wu who has a bad impression of me—— I have to do my best to make them acknowledge my cooking.

「Asuta… Are you alright?」

Ema Min leaned forward worriedly.

「I’m fine. We still needed permission from the Wu clan, but do you agree to the terms I mentioned—— and buy my culinary skills? The price is the tusks and horns of twenty kiba.」

Yes. Asuta of Fa house, please give us your full support.

Ema Min smiled gently——

It was a deal.

2

And so, I started my work.

The first is a lecture on bloodletting.

I need to explain the process of bloodletting to the men of the Wu clan and Lutim house.

The men will head into the woods at noon, and I have to take care of this task before studying for a new dish.

You took on a difficult task, suffering a little in the beginning will make the latter part easier!—— That seemed to be the arrangement made by god.

When my soul gets summoned back to heaven, I will beat that god up.

Even though Kaslan Lutim bequested this job to me, I had to explain to his family and be wary of the men from the Wu clan who opposed this work.

This job was really bad on the stomach.

Yo Asuta, everyone’s here.

Out of this entire group, Ludo Wu was the only oasis for my spirit. He told me this fact causally.

Standing before me—— were twenty odd ferocious hunters of Forest's Edge, including seventeen men from the Wu clan I saw a few days earlier.

They stood at the plaza in the Wu village, and emitted an air of feral beasts. Their age varied widely, but all of them were hunters with well built bodies.

They were about to head into the forest, so all of them had a sharp killing intent about them.

"... First, let me greet everyone here."

Kaslan Lutim walked to my side.

"I'm the eldest son of the Lutim main house, Kaslan Lutim. Everyone probably knows that I'm requesting for everyone's help to prepare for the wedding between Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min five days later. Thank you, head of the Wu clan, Donda Wu and my fellow kinsmen for heeding my request. I wish to thank you all once again."

Donda Wu, standing to the right of the group, remained with his arms crossed and without any reaction.

He actually agreed to this proposition.

Maybe his high position meant he couldn't turn down the request of his junior?

I have requested Asuta from house Fa to care take the hearth during the wedding. As Asuta had no previous dealings with house Lutim, so I will buy his capabilities with copper plates for one night. And why did I do something that goes against the custom of Forest's Edge? I can’t explain this very well, so I won’t say too much. However, know that I made this decision as the eldest son of house Lutim.

The men weren’t stirred by this.

Did they hold any grudge? Or any other emotions—— They were like beasts waiting to be unleashed, their eyes glimmering quietly.

Donda Wu’s brothers and their sons were here.

And the brothers of Donda Wu’s parents—— his uncle and their family were here too.

The thought of this filled me with fear. But looking at this from another perspective, everyone here were tied to Grandma Jiba by blood, and a relative of Rimee Wu.

As for the preparation work for the banquet—— Asuta will be using the

techniques he learned in his hometown to process the kiba meat used for the banquet in a special way. We need to perform this task before the kiba is completely dead. Asuta will now explain the details.

It was finally my turn.

I nodded and walk to the front.

I'm Asuta from house Fa, thank you everyone for your help—— I will get right into it. I would like everyone to help with Bloodletting. That is to catch a kiba and before dealing the fatal blow, drain all of its blood. The place to cut is between the chest and head, closer to the chest side. Above the kiba's heart is an artery, we have to cut it with a knife. Once the artery is cut, a lot of blood will spray out, so you can tell if you did it successfully. Please take care not to hurt the kiba's heart or air pipe, that will kill it.

Silence.

No reaction.

Well… The important thing is to not let it die. Even if you break its

skull or deal a mortal wound, it can still survive for some time. If its artery near its heart is cut while its heart is still beating, 「bloodletting」 can be done swiftly.」

「I have a question.」

Ludo Wu raised his hand.

I felt my soul being healed and answered:

「What's your question?」

「So I can't cut the kiba's neck? I always kill them this way, and it will make them bleed a lot.」

「If you do that, it might die before it completely bleeds out. If you are lucky and cut its artery without hurting its respiratory system, then it will be fine. If not, there might be blood residue in the veins of the meat.」

「... What are you saying, I don't understand! So I can't cut their throats?

Hmmp~ the throat is no good, the heart is no good either. It’s difficult to capture a kiba when we encounter one.

That’s right, so don’t push yourself. Just capturing a few kiba will be enough to feed all the banquet guest. And it is foolish to risk one’s life just for the processed meat.

Asuta, only you will risk your life for something like that… By the way, why are you using such a respectful tone when you talk to me? It’s uncomfortable, don’t make me kick you.

Please don’t kick me… The next steps will be done after carrying the kiba home and skinning it. I will explain further during that time. That’s all I have to say for now.

Aside from Ludo Wu, the other men didn’t say a word. More than half of them turned and left quietly.

They didn’t bid farewell, or shout together like they did five days ago. With Donda Wu and Jiza Wu leading them, the seventeen Wu clan men left the plaza quietly.

"I will make a move first. Asuta, I will be looking forward to a delicious meal on my return."

Finally, Ludo Wu turned his head back towards me, a feral-like fire was burning in his eyes too.

This youth was petite and had an adorable appearance, but he could put on a hunter's face instantly. I felt a chill every time I saw this, and also felt attracted to it for some reasons at the same time.

"Thank you, your explanation is easy to understand."

Kaslan Lutim said with a smile.

Only five men remained, all of them were men from house Lutim. As the Lutim village was some distance away, they formed an elite task group to learn the steps to process meat from me directly.

"It is not my place to worry about this, but don't the Wu clan members oppose this? Will this deteriorate the relationship between the Lutim house and the Wu clan?"

"Deteriorate? I don't understand what you are saying. I asked the Wu clan for a favour as a member of the Lutim house, and since the clan head Donda Wu agreed to this, the men will obey his orders, there won't be any problems."

"I see. But there is no way for us to know how each individual feels right?"

"The feelings of individuals are not related to the will of the clan. The members will follow the decision of the clan head, and do their jobs. Hence, the Wu clan members will do their best. The Wu clan is powerful, so I'm not worried at all."

"That's true..."

"That aside, Asuta, I have something to discuss with you."

Kaslan Lutim's face was honest, and an even more sincere expression appeared on his face now.

"I asked Ludo Wu about the relationship between the Fa house and Wu

clan. In order to save Jiba Wu who was losing her appetite, the Wu clan asked you to make a trip to their home. And you successfully saved Jiba Wu’s soul… Is that true?

Yes, she was pleased with my cooking.

I see. Jiba Wu was more energetic than I heard during the pre-wedding celebration! Asuta, thank you very much. I am grateful for what you have done.

Huh? Why?

Don’t you know? Jiba Wu’s daughter married into the Lutim house, so house Lutim and the Wu clan became relatives. Out of the six kin house, we have the longest relationship with the Wu clan.

I see.

Which means—— As the heir to the Lutim main house, Kaslan Lutim was Grandma Jiba’s great grandson

Yes. Jiba Wu’s daughter’s son is my father Dan Lutim. Jiba Wu’s blood flows as thickly in my veins as Jiza Wu and Ludo Wu.

I see…

I should separate my personal matters from my professional conduct.

However —— Grandma Jiba’s blood flowed in the youth before me, so wishing him well for his wedding shouldn’t be going too far.

Asuta, you once said that we don’t owe each other anything, but it seems that I’m in your debt. I’m very happy to have met you this way.

Kaslan Lutim said as he reached for the inner pockets of his cape.

He took out a string of tusks and horns more plentiful than yesterday, held it to my nose and said:

Asuta, please take this. It’s half the promised remuneration, the tusks and horns of ten kiba. I will give you the remaining half after the

banquet.

It’s fine, you can give them to me after the job is done. Maybe I will—— well, die in a freak fire while cooking and not complete my work.

I don’t know when I will return to my original world—— I couldn’t tell him that, so I made a joke instead. But Kaslan Lutim’s face remained serious.

In that case, it’s the same for me too, I don’t know when I might succumb to the forest. And so, I’m giving the remuneration to you know as a sign of my trust in you. Please accept this.

I regretted joking about it so lightly.

I couldn’t tell him the truth because of my personal issues. But I shouldn’t trample over this serious youth’s sincere attitude just to cover up that truth.

I understand, I will accept this—— and work hard to repay your trust.

Kaslan Lutim smiled gently and passed me the necklace.

There might be 40 tusks and horns from ten kiba, it didn’t weigh that much—— However, I could feel a weight surpassing it when I accepted that necklace.

3

When the sun was at its peak, I saw off the men heading into the forest, bid farewell to Kaslan Lutim, and finally started researching my cooking.

I went around to the back of the Wu house and headed for the stove room. Two women were already waiting for me there.

They were the wife of the eldest son Jiza Wu, and the third daughter Lala Wu.

Asuta, we were waiting for you. The two of us will assist you today.

The young wife Sati Lei Wu had short brown hair and black eyes. She was slender and had a pure face. She smiled at me maturely.

"Uwah, where did you get so many tusks and horns…? Who did you steal them from?"

Lala Wu, who was twelve, tied her ponytail at the top of her head. She was sarcastic towards me as usual.

"This is the downpayment for my job this time. Erm, where should I put this?"

"If you don't mind, I will help you keep it in the house. It will be terrible if it falls into the stove."

Sati Lei Wu took the necklace from my hands and walked out of the stove room.

She was thoughtful, but if she did that, I would have to be alone with this unfriendly girl.

As I expected, Lala Wu started speaking sarcastically:

"Hmmp! I thought the heir of house Lutim would be more dependable than the house head, but he asked you to care take the hearth for this important wedding. Is he mad!? House Lutim will become the laughing stock of Forest's Edge now. It's troubling for the Wu clan who is their elder house too!"

"I see, then I have to do my best so they will laugh softer."

I knew it was useless to be angry to the nasty words of a girl five years younger than me, so I could only joke about it.

Furthermore, I felt a little guilt towards the four Wu sisters, so I couldn't do anything even if she hated me… It looked like I have to bear this cross for the rest of my life.

"No matter what, I will be in your care today… Don't you need to take care of other jobs? I'm the one who asked for your help, but I didn't expect the Wu clan to send two helpers right away."

"I don't have a choice! Mama Mia Lei decided this. I don't want to see your face at all!"

Lala Wu suddenly showed a sinister face, frowned and took large strides my way.

"... Your tusks and horns."

"Hmm?"

"Turned from eight to nine. Did Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min gift you with their blessings?"

"Well... I don't know if I can say it... Erm, never mind that."

"What! If you don't tell me, I will tell Papa Donda what happened that morning!"

"T-That will be troubling for me... Your Papa Donda gifted this to me."

Lala Wu boyish face burned with intense anger.

That’s impossible! Do you know how much Papa Donda hates you? He will never gift you any blessings! If you lie about this, I will really make that day’s incident public!

I-I’m telling the truth. He didn’t ask me to keep it a secret either, so I will just say it honestly. After that pre-wedding banquet, Donda Wu gifted me this blessing.

When she heard me say that, Lala Wu was still furious. But a short while later, her anger turned into surprise.

... You are telling the truth? If you lie to me, I will confirm this with Papa Donda you know? If you lied, I will tell him what happened that day!

Ahh, then I can only pray that Donda Wu will tell the truth. I can only hope he isn’t someone who will lie for the the sake of his pride.

Could you be... telling the truth?

Yes.

After I nodded, Lala Wu exploded again:

"I can't even! This is unbelievable! I intentionally didn't gift you any blessings because I was worried about Papa Donda's feelings! Why did he bless you! That makes me look so stupid! Damn it! What is he doing!"

"Erm, please calm down… Papa must have done it through tough and thorough thought."

"Don't you call him Papa too! That's disgusting!"

"Sorry… But gifting a blessing is decided by the individual. Even if Donda Wu gift me a blessing, you don't need to mimick him too."

"What do you mean!? You don't want my blessing?"

My words infuriated this girl.

I was probably fated not to get along with her. After sighing, the girl

suddenly shoved her hand towards my nose——

On her palm was a tusk or a horn.

“... The dinner you cooked last night was delicious. And you also saved Grandma Jiba’s life. So Lala Wu wish to bless Asuta from the Fa house.”

She looked really angry when she gifted me her blessing.

But I still took her white blessing with gratitude and said:

“Thank you, I’m really glad.”

“Hmmp!”

Lala Wu hmmped loudly and turned her face away.

She must really hate me. For someone like that to acknowledge my

existence, felt just as exhilarating as someone who likes me gifting me their blessing —— I could feel this fact.

And so, I received ten blessings from the Wu clan.

Aside from the toddler Kota, only Jiza Wu and Darum Wu didn’t gift me.

I probably will not receive blessings from them for my entire life… As I fell into deep thought, Sati Lei Wu returned to the stove room.

“Sorry for the wait… Ara, you haven’t started yet?”

“Yes, we are going to start now. Can I take a look at the vegetables in your food store?”

“I understand… By the way, where did Ai Fa go? You two came over together right?”

“Yes. I still don’t remember the exact position of the Wu clan, so I asked Ai Fa to bring me here. She should be chasing kiba in the woods right

now.

I can’t neglect hunting kiba during these five days.

Ai Fa went home after saying that. There was still lots of kiba meat at home, and plenty of tusks and horns too. But even so, hunters still needed to do their best to hunt kiba.

If the hunters of Forest's Edge don’t do their job properly, the excess number of kiba will spill out of the forest and attack the farmland of the western kingdom. The duty of the denizens of Forest's Edge is to stop them—— That seemed to be the consensus of everyone in Forest's Edge, but the chief clan seemed to have forgotten that goal.

Kamyua Yost… I have to meet that man who likes pretending to be stupid, and listen to what he has to say

I plan to spend these five days in the Wu clan village up until the wedding day and research my cooking. Aside from hunting, Ai Fa also need to handle the Fa house chores such as managing the food store and collecting pico leaves. Hence, we will spend the night in an empty house at the Wu clan after dinner, and will then work separately from morning until evening.

Even Diga Tsun who got thrown into the river by Ai Fa didn’t come to seek vengeance against Ai Fa, which shows that the Tsun clan couldn’t act too nastily. But whenever I recall Doddo Tsun’s stray dog-like eyes—— I would still feel worried.

But even when I stayed in the Fa house, Ai Fa still needed to head into the forest to hunt, so we still ended up acting separately. So this wasn’t too different from our norm.

But I still didn’t think we should maintain this status quo.

——Asuta, what’s wrong?

I quickly snapped back to reality when I heard Sati Lei Wu called out to me.

Nothing, let’s head for the food store.

No matter what, I’m still working at the moment.

The remuneration I get from this job will naturally become the commonwealth of the Fa house. For Ai Fa’s sake, I have to make this work.

I entered the food store with the two ladies.

I couldn’t find any vegetables I knew displayed on the shelf.

I visited the post station town yesterday, so I was starting to become familiar with these vegetables.

Well then—— which vegetables will get along with us?

“I want to share my idea with you two.”

After inspecting each vegetable, I said to the women standing behind me:

“I want to subdue the poitan.”

"You're saying... poitan?"

"Yes. I want to find a way to make poitan stew delicious. I think I need to start my research from here."

"But why? Grilled poitan is tasty. I can eat several grilled poitan by itself without any other vegetables or meat."

Ara, it seems that Sati Lei Wu was rather infatuated with grilled poitan.

I understand how she felt, but I still think this research was important.

"There would be many eldery people attending this banquet. If we served food that looked too strange, I'm afraid the guest will not be willing to accept them. I will still include grilled poitan in the menu, but I want to cook it in a way that both the young and the old can enjoy."

"I see..."

Sati Lei Wu gave a short reply.

Her voice didn’t sound too surprised, so I will proceed with this plan.

“I think the end goal is to find ingredients to complement the poitan. Do you two have any recommendations? Or any ingredients you hate?”

“Pula.”

Came a crude voice.

And of course, it was Lala Wu.

“Hmm… Now that you mentioned it, I remember that you and Ludo Wu don’t like pula. Do you hate bitter food?”

“Shut up! I already answered you, why must I get nagged by you!?”

「Sorry sorry. Please tell me the food you hate.」

「... I don't like Lilo, Tarapa and Zozo.」

「Okay. Lilo is a herb used in smoking meat, what is tarapa and zozo?」

「Tarapa is that giant red fruit, zozo is the brown lump beneath the tarapa.」

I looked in the direction Sati Lei Wu was pointing in, and saw that tarapa was a vegetable the size of a pumpkin with a rough surface. Zozo was like a coiled up snake, and seemed to be a fruit like a beehive.

I could remember them easily because of their prominent appearance.

「I see. Sati Lei Wu, what are your views on the tarapa and zozo?」

「Well... tarapa is rather sour, while the zozo has a strong aroma. I'm fine with these ingredients—— I think putting the tarapa into a soup without poitan will be tastier.」

"I see."

"Tarapa is very sour, if you add it into soup without any poitan, it is smooth and easy to swallow. As for zozo—— It doesn't matter if there is any poitan, if the meat has no stench, it will overwhelm the other ingredients and make the food nasty to eat."

"Amazing! Your comments are very specific!"

"Because you showed me what is a "delicious meal". Before this, I didn't even care what the difference between the taste of tarapa and zozo was."

Sati Lei Wu smiled gently.

Lala Wu besides her had a raving mad face as she shouted:

"I can't even! You don't need me at all! You can just work happily with Sati Lei then!"

Lala, even if you can’t describe your thoughts clearly, you don’t need to be anxious.

Sati Lei Wu placed her hand gently on the little girl’s shoulder.

You might be very sensible and observant, but you can’t express yourself easily. I might be able to say what is on my mind clearly, but my emotions doesn’t change as much. If we work together, we will definitely help Asuta more than we can alone.

Out of all the Wu clan members, my relations with Sati Lei Wu was the faintest—— but I could tell she was a kind and mature girl from what she just said.

As expected of Jiza Wu’s spouse! I felt a chill when I thought this far. What kind of person would Jiza Wu and Sati Lei Wu’s child be nurtured into?

Hmm? By the way, is Kota Wu a boy or a girl?

They looked surprised that I asked that.

“It’s obvious from the name right? Kota is a boy.”

I see, he do have the air of a boy.

“Yes, he might be small, but he is a boy. We were childless for some time, so I’m glad that my firstborn is a son.”

Sati Lei Wu replied with pride and joy on her face.

And one day, Kota Wu will become the clan head, following the footsteps of Donda Wu and Jiza Wu.

How should I put this —— even after realizing this, my heart was filled with lament.

“… Ah, zozo has a really strong aroma. Instead of being an ingredient, it’s closer to being a spice. If it’s added into the soup, it will definitely wipe away the taste of the other ingredients.”

I pulled myself back into reality.

“Yes. If we can eat kiba without any stench in the future, it won’t be needed anymore. Lilo and zozo are mainly used to remove the stench.”

“I see, I will strike these two ingredients off the list for now. What about tarapa? There’s an ingredient called tomato in my home country that has the same colour, and it has a variety of ways to cook it.”

“Is that so. Tarapa smells nice, but I hate its sourness. I think it will taste better when added into a soup without any poitan.”

“Ah, that’s true…”

A soup with poitan in it was like flour water. I imagined adding tomatoes into the flour water to neutralize the taste, and felt the strength sap away from me.

There might be a myriad of ways to cook with it, but it couldn’t be of use this time.

□Then I will scratch off the tarapa. On the flip side, do you have any vegetables to recommend?□

□Hmm□□

They both moaned after hearing that.

□If it’s a soup without poitan, I can think of a few good ingredients. But if it is a stew with poitan…□

□That’s right. If we think it’s good, we would have added it into the soup in the past. In the end, no matter what you add in——□

Lala Wu turned silent at this point.

□What’s the matter?□

Sati Lei Wu asked gently.

Nothing… It won’t change the soup’s taste… but I do have a vegetable I like.

Ara, what is it?

No, pretend I never said that! I don’t even know why I like it! The soup’s taste won’t change even after adding it!

I’m curious what vegetable you are talking about. Can you tell me what it is?

Maybe I sound too anxious, Lala Wu’s face looked a little uneasy, unlike her usual rowdy self.

Her slender finger pointed to the innermost part of the food store timidly.

Huh, that? I was speechless.

This ingredient was placed quietly in a corner of the dim food store,

waiting for its moment to shine—— It had an impressionable appearance, and could rival that of zozo and tarapa, burning a strong presence in my heart. It was the giant two metre tall burdock, called 「Gigo」.

4

A few hours later. When the sun was starting to move past its midpoint—— I could feel an out of place chaotic air closing in to the stove room fast.

When I was still troubled about that, a short figure charged in through the door that was open to facilitate air flow.

「Yo! Hearth caretaker, how's it going?」

「Uwah, that scared me…! L-Ludo Wu, what happened to you?」

Before me was Ludo Wu who went into the woods earlier.

However, the men out for a hunt would usually return around evening,

and right now, Ludo Wu was—— covered in fresh blood.

His blonde hair, kiba cape, round face and limbs were covered in blood.

The youth smiled, his fiery eyes of a hunter were still burning.

“This is the blood from a kiba and someone else, there’s no way I will get injured! Hearth caretaker, don’t worry about that.”

“Someone else… Who?”

“It’s the branch family’s Ryada Wu… He’s done for, the kiba’s horn stabbed right into his leg. Even if he lives, he can’t enter the forest anymore.”

My face probably turned very pale.

When he saw my face, Ludo Wu showed his feral smile again.

"Didn't I tell you not to worry? This has nothing to do with the work you requested us to do! The kiba usually won't herd together, but we were attacked by three of them at the same time today. Ryada Wu bore the brunt of their attack. My bow also broke and I almost died. I had no choice but to slit its throat. The kiba died immediately, so we couldn't bloodlet it."

"I see..." That was all I could say.

On a closer look, Sati Lei Wu and Lala Wu who were waiting for the water to boil looked at their family member with a peaceful face.

They were glad that Ludo Wu returned safely, but were also mourning the misfortune that befell their kin— Their quiet aura made me realized that the denizens of Forest's Edge made a different kind of resolve from myself, and I could feel how strong they were.

Ludo Wu wiped away the blood on his cheek, and clicked his tongue disinterestedly.

"Hmmp! We gained many tusks and horns thanks to them. In order to bring the kiba and Ryada Wu back, five men had to return early... It might be the peak season for kiba, but there's too many of them! Asuta, the Fa house is further to the north right? How is the forest there?"

He finally called me Asuta, and not hearth caretaker.

He was probably in an excited state earlier? The hunter with feral eyes had slowly turned back into an arrogant youth.

「W-Well, I don’t know about the forest. But I could feel that more kiba had been caught. Erm… In this ten or so days, we hunted four kiba.」

「Huh?」

「Hmm?」

「The Fa house don’t have other family members or kin right? Asuta, are you joking? How could you hunt four kiba in ten days?」

「Huh」? Did I remember it wrong? We came back from the Wu clan and erected a stove the next day—— So it should be about twelve to thirteen days, and we hunted four kiba.」

「That’s the same!」

He finally retorted fiercely.

After erecting the stove, Ai Fa hunted her third kiba, and caught another one a few days later, I definitely didn’t miscount it.

“Asuta, is it true? One person can’t surround and hunt kiba, and can only wait for kiba to fall into traps, or run into kiba in excited states like today. Or else, there is no way she could hunt four kiba in ten days.”

“No, not ten days, but twelve or thirteen…”

“I told you it’s the same…! Did she use the “sacrificial hunting style”?”

When I hear this youth spoke so seriously for the first time, and I feel that my heart was beating irregularly.

“L-Ludo Wu, what is the “sacrificial hunting style”? Is it a taboo in Forest's Edge?”

"No, it's an ancient way of hunting that nobody uses anymore. If you are curious, you can ask your house head directly."

I got it, I would do that.

At this moment, Sati Lei Wu said with a calm voice:"Ludo Wu."

Ludo Wu turned and looked outside with one eyebrow raised.

"Huh, you are already back? How is Ryada Wu?"

Before I realized it, a few men was standing outside the entrance that Ludo Wu was blocking.

The youngest one with the smallest stature walked to Ludo Wu.

"My father Ryada will live. But the tendons in his leg has broke, so he can't enter the forest anymore."

"Right. Then you will be the house head tomorrow right? Shin Wu."

"Yes, I will inherit my father's house."

The man who spoke looked about Ludo Wu's age—— which means he looked younger than me.

He had a long head of dark brown hair, and deep brown eyes. His face seemed more mature than Ludo Wu, but their body was almost the same.

Ludo Wu turned and looked at that youth's smiling face, then said:

"You are taking it so easily. You will have to support five people by yourself… Hey, aren't you in a pinch?"

"It will be fine. My younger brother will be old enough in two years… Before that, I hope you can lend me a hand."

"It doesn't matter if it is before or after, aren't we blood kins?"

Ludo Wu pretended to be mad and bump into the youth’s shoulder.

The next moment, a clumsy smile appeared on Shin Wu’s face, and he said:

“Ludo Wu. Thanks to you, my father Ryada managed to survive. I am proud to be your blood kin.”

“Don’t put it that way! You are so annoying!”

“… Leaving that aside, Asuta of house Fa.”

“Huh? What?”

“We brought one kiba with us. Out of the three kiba we hunted, only one got “bloodlet” successfully. We are to follow your instructions next, that’s Donda Wu’s orders.”

After saying that, Ludo Wu jumped up.

"Wait! I can't work like this! I will clean myself up at the water source, so wait for me!"

Ludo Wu pushed Shin Wu away coldly, then turn to me and said:

"Listen up! Don't start without me! I will punch you all if you do that!"

The bloodied youth then sprinted away.

The youth and men left behind by him stood outside the building and stared at me.

"Ehh, can you make the preparation for the skinning? I will be right there after completing my work here."

"—— Understood."

"Then, I will bring you all there."

Sati Lei Wu walked out of the stove room.

Only Lala Wu and me were left, and Lala Wu who had been quiet said with a sigh:

"Really now, even Ryada Wu got attacked by a kiba. Only women and children are left in Ryada's house, Shin Wu will have a hard time."

"... How are they related to your family?"

"Hmm"? Ryada is Papa Donda's youngest brother. Aside from Shin, there's just his mother, sister and two younger brothers. Shin is the only man who can hunt kiba right now."

Her expression was serious, but her tone was forthright.

She was sincerely worried about the future of that youth Shin Wu.

"Their sister should get a husband to marry into their house soon, or

else their family will need to be taken in by another house. He won’t be able to watch over five family members after becoming the house head at sixteen.

As an outsider, this wasn’t a problem I could interfere with.

However, since Ludo Wu had kins like Lala Wu, that meant this youth wouldn’t be crushed by the cruelty of fate—— I sincerely hope so.

Well then, I’m going over first. This might take a while, so you can use this chance to grill some poitan for dinner?

... What do we do with these things?

The results of my two hours of research was placed on the work platform made from logs, with faint steam rising from them.

With the gigo suggested by Lala Wu as the main ingredient, we tried pairing it with all sorts of vegetables, and cooked many pots of soup that uses poitan as the soup base.

To be honest… More than half of them was bordering on being strange food.

"Well, you can evaporate the really bad soup and make them into grilled poitan. We can't throw these food away."

Grilling the poitan that had been cooked wouldn't make it more tasty, but I think it would be easier to eat it in a solid state.

"You are amazing, it's the first time I see someone turn food into garbage."

"I admit my cooking skills is still immature, but please don't treat half complete works as trash! I will eat them properly!"

When I feel that the ingredient combinations was risky, I would just cook one or two person's portion. But I never thought it would be such a hard sell.

There were so many prototypes left behind because Lala Wu refused to eat after seeing my painful expression when I ate them. I hope to share this sin with everyone together, so I should make rock-paper-scissors

popular in Forest's Edge.

"Thanks to you, I have found the gist of the way forward, just a little more before I finish this. Can I count on you for the rest of the day too?"

"Hmmp!"

I left Lala Wu who had turned her head away behind, and walked to the kiba butchering room. The food store was next to the stove room, and the butchering was right next to the food store

I just stepped into room when Sati Lei Wu stepped out. After greeting her, I entered the room.

"Uwah… It's a big one."

A kiba about 90kg hung from a beam from the ceiling.

Its length was about the average height of a woman. Its horns and tusks protruding into the sky had a beautiful curve, it was a male kiba. They

had washed the fur, as the dark brown hide was wet.

I had only saw the butchering from the outside before. It was a room without any decorations, with blades of various sizes hanging on the wall and a thick rope made from vines. There was just a stove that could heat a small pot, and no other furniture in sight.

Four men stood inside the room and looked at me silently.

They were Shin Wu, a man who was rather old and two men in their primes.

Aside from Shin Wu, everyone else had a burly body. They waited quietly for me to speak.

Thank you for your hard work... Well then, let's start off by skinning it. Ludo Wu should be back soon. When he returns, we will start dismembering the kiba.

One of the man nodded and pulled out a thick knife.

“Wait… Can you let me take care of the skinning?”

Shin Wu said:

“My father Ryada Wu couldn’t move for the time being, so I have to skin the beasts by myself during this time. I know the steps to do so, but I want to use this chance to understand how tough this job is.”

The man who drew his blade turned towards the older man.

After seeing the older man nod, the man sheathed his knife.

“You have my thanks.”

Shin Wu said and drew his knife.

“Asuta of Fa house, can we skin it in our usual way?”

Well, can you please leave as much fat on the meat as possible? Just to the extent of not damaging the hide..

—— Got it.

The right hind leg of the kiba was tied with a rope, which hung the kiba up.

Shin Wu used his knife nimbly and cut from the inner right thigh all the way to the throat.

His blade glide across the limbs of the kiba. When the knife reached the trotters, he drew a circle around its ankles.

The steps he used to skin the beast was not much different from mine.

In order to dissolve the fats on the knife, they prepared hot water beforehand. Even for a culture from a different world, people still reached the same conclusion in order to achieve the goal of skinning.

If not for the incredible numbers of the kiba, and if people were only hunting them to eat their meat—— they would definitely think about ways to「cook the meat deliciously」.

When the denizens of Forest's Edge were living in their old home in the southern jungle, they only ate lizards or bugs. After coming to the Morga forest, they had to hunt kiba to obtain tusks and horns, and to safeguard the farmlands. And now, I plan to improve their technology in terms of meat processing.

The values of someone from another world like me allowed the denizens of Forest's Edge to make this improvement, and realize the concept of 「eating delicious food will make one happier」—— the thought of this send a chill down my spine.

No one acknowledge my ways of doing this, no one admires my policies and no one agreed to my intent. I was just a lowly apprentice chef, while Forest's Edge have roughly 500 denizens. Will god really permit me to influence their food culture?

… If god doesn’t allow it, then send me back to the scene of the fire.

If I had permission, then I will continue live in my own way.

If I suppress my personality, drink nasty poitan soup everyday and keep foraging for herbs and firewood—— That’s not the life I want to live. I would rather die in a fire.

Ai Fa once complimented my cooking, saying it was 「delicious」. She claim she 「likes」 my cooking and ask me 「not to disappear」, she permit me to live in this world. I want to stay true to myself and live on with her.

While I was thinking that, Shin Wu already started to skin the kiba’s hide, exposing its white inside.

He might be young, but he was still a denizen of Forest's Edge, his arm strength was on a completely different level from me, and he worked really fast.

Before I realized it, Ludo Wu was already standing beside me with his arms crossed as he looked at his kin.

Shin Wu had pulled off the hide from the limbs.

Next would be the real test.

This was a 90kg kiba after all. If it was me, I would probably need to spend 2 or 3 hours to handle this. Even with the arm strength of a hunter of Forest's Edge, this was no easy task.

Even so, no one complained or left the room. In front of this youth who will be a house head starting tomorrow, everyone just watched quietly as he skinned the kiba hide tediously.

5

"Alright then, everyone will usually cut off the legs and throw everything else away correct?"

I stood before the kiba that had been stripped bare, and started explaining the butchering process.

"However, I want to use the meat from the torso in my cooking, so I will start to dismember the entire kiba. Right now, the most important part is taking out the organs."

Ludo Wu, Shin Wu and the other three men listened to me with eyes so serious that it was bothering on being scary.

I didn’t feel any disgust or hostility from them. I don’t know the details, but I know these people wouldn’t show too much emotions when they were working.

Since the clan head ordered them to work with me, the Wu clan members would remain professional even if they bore any ill will towards me. They were so meticulous that I had to think it that way.

“The kiba’s organs are almost the same as that of a human. Heart, lung, liver, pancreas, kidney, stomach, large and small intestines and others—— Out of all these organs, I would like you to pay more attention to the large intestines, bladder and the gallbladder attached to the liver. If these parts got damaged, the bile and filth would leak and stink up the meat, and waste all the effort of blood letting.”

“…Asuta, I have only heard of the heart and stomach out of all this.”

“Yes, so you just need to commit them to memory after seeing the actual organs. Alright then, I will cut open its abdomen.”

「Wait, let me do it.」

Ludo Wu took a butcher knife hanging on the wall.

「You're right. Then, cut from the abdomen to the chest… Ah, don't cut from the bottom, but from the middle of the abdomen. The large intestines is in the lower abdomen, be careful not to damage it and just slice open the meat part.」

「Got it.」

Ludo Wu slowly push the knife tip into the kiba's abdomen.

「Then slowly cut to the chest, be careful when cutting the lower abdomen.」

Beads of sweat appeared on Ludo Wu's forehead.

Even though we opened the windows and doors, the room was very warm as there was a fire in the stove.

The room was filled with the stench of blood and fats, making it hard to breath.

Ludo Wu steadied the kiba’s body encased in white fats with one hand, and carefully moved his blade.

Yes, that’s great. Then cut the diaphragm between the meat and the organs, yes, that membrane. You can eviscerate it after cutting the diaphragm.

Ludo Wu nodded, then reached into the open cavity with his arm and knife.

He didn’t seem to be bothered about reaching into the insides of an animal.

This youth was surprisingly capable.

He wasn’t doing this for the sake of tasting delicious meat, but because of the deep respect he had for his work.

I cut it. What's next?

Alright, take out the organs, start from the bottom abdomen. The large intestines there don't break easily, so just grab it out with your hands. Further in is the organ called bladder, be careful not to touch it.

Alright.

He pulled the entire lump of intestines out.

The intestines got caught by the stomach mid way, so I cut it with my knife.

Ludo Wu carefully placed the intestines on a piece of fur laid out on the floor.

He then took out the heart, lungs, liver, testicles and bladder.

Phew, the bladder breaks easily so be careful. If you have a small bag

at home, you can cover the bladder with it before cutting it.

The men nodded silently.

Well then, we will start dismembering it. Since you have hung it up, let’s cut it in half… Ah, no, scratch that. We need to cut off the head first.

Shin Wu skinning technique was better than mine, he skinned the body below the head rather cleanly.

So it was better to cut off the head then cut the body in half.

Cut the neck with a knife, then saw the bones. There should be a woodcutting saw around here right? Sterilize it with boiling water first.

I didn’t know what germs or diseases existed in this world, but the denizens of Forest's Edge were very wary of raw and rotten meat. In such an environment, I had to pay attention to hygiene.

After sawing off the head, we cut the spine in half.

This was handled by the denizens of Forest's Edge who were stronger

than I was, their movements were fast and precise.

Next, we cut off the limbs, cut across its waist. After dismembering the hip bones and other parts, the dismemberment were done.

Next would be the head, cut off the meat at the neck and cheek—— Hmm, let's challenge kiba tongue another day.

What's kiba tongue?

The beast's tongue. In my home country, many people loves to eat this part. I think the organs can be made into a delicious dish too, but I don't know how to do so, or how long the pico leaves can keep it fresh. I have to leave such matters to another time.

Is that so? You even eat the organs huh. In that case, everything except the bones and hide can be eaten.

Not just that. After burning off the fur, the hide can be eaten too, and the bones can be used to brew soup. Now that you mentioned it, aside from the tusks and horns, all parts of it can be cooked.

It will be terrible if you guys eat the tusks and horns too.

The entire room was filled with the suffocating stench of blood, flesh and organs, but Ludo Wu still laughed out cheerfully.

His smile is really brilliant. As I was thinking that, I continued 「Then—」 I used this term plenty of times today.

「That's all for the dismemberment. As for the bloodletting, we will only know if it was done completely after we eat it, but the butchering is done splendidly. Just hunting another two or three kiba would be enough meat for all the wedding participants. But in order to serve one spare ribs to everyone, we will need to hunt even more kiba, so I will be counting on your aid from now on too.」

The men nodded quietly.

「Okay, let's put the butchered meat into the pico leaves. Shin Wu, please cut off the tusks and horns.」

「Got it.」

「…Asuta, will the meat really become tasty like this?」

Yes, if the blood letting is done properly.

I nodded. We piled the mountain of meat onto a board, and carried it into the food storage.

Let’s try it tonight, I’m looking forward to it.

...I bloodletted this one. Ludo Wu smiled bashfully.

If the meat become delicious, doesn’t that mean I’m really awesome?

That’s right... Speaking of which, you two are really siblings.

Huh?

Your smile just now was just like Rimee Wu.

The next instant, Ludo Wu’s face turned beet red.

“What are you saying!? I’m not like that brat at all! Don’t joke like that! Stu~pid!”

He was just like Lala Wu when he gets agitated.

Lala Wu who was very similar to him poked her head out from the stove room next door and asked:

“What’s with all that ruckus? Asuta, the poitan for dinner is done.”

“Oh, really? I will come over right after settling this…”

Before I even finished, another group appeared.

Jiza Wu and Darum Wu were carrying a kiba that weighed about a hundred kilograms.

Asuta, we hunted three more kiba, but only this one was bloodletted successfully. What should we do next?

Huh, oh, please skin it first, I will be right there.

Got it.

Wait! Asuta, what should we do over here? We got lots of your trash like poitan soup over here!

Don’t call them trash! I will be there after finishing…

Asuta.

Even Kaslan Lutim appeared too.

His strong arms were carrying a 50kg young kiba.

「I brought the kiba we hunted over, the bloodletting should be done correctly.」

I was speechless.

「I understand! We will deal with the two of them at the same time! Please use the butcher room there, and skin it!」

「Asuta!」

「I get it! Erm, please cook the soup for dinner tonight! I will come over to instruct you on cooking the meat later!」

After assigning the tasks, I finally stepped into the food storage.

「... Aren't everyone back too early? And to hunt three kiba in just one day!」

「I don't know about house Lutim, but the Wu clan hunted six already, and bloodletted two. We aren't that stupid.」

Getting six in one day is plenty. Your kins in this village number less than sixty right?

Including the main and branch houses, there are 38 of us. So just hunting four kiba will yield enough aria and poitan for us. But things will slow down after the peak season. Dad and the others are probably still inside the forest.

I see.

In that case, there will be enough meat for the banquet in no time.

I can then distribute the excess meat to the Wu clan branch family, and let everyone understand how delicious blood letted meat taste. They would then be free to choose if they want to use this bloodletting and butchering technique in their everyday life.

This must be what Kaslan Lutim meant when he said show them a path.

They would make their own choice.

Without forcing anyone.

“What’s the matter Asuta? Regretting about taking on this heavy job?”

The Wu clan’s meat storage space was three times that of house Fa, Ludo Wu leaned his face my way as he pull apart the pico leaves.

“No, I’m really glad to have taken on this job, although it’s very tough.”

Ludo Wu smiled gently when he heard me say that, and elbowed my arm as he said:

“I’m glad too. I’m looking forward to dinner tonight and the wedding. Asuta, don’t let me down.”

“I understand, I will work hard.”

The work for this first day was coming to an end.

6

And then—— the sun set.

This was the third time I ate dinner at the Wu clan.

The Wu clan family was already seated, and the plates laid out.

Dinner tonight was Chuck steak and thigh steak, soup brewed with chuck flap, aria and tino leaves, and a mountain of grilled poitan—— and also 「poitan soup」 prototype number one.

After Grandma Jiba finally got into her seat, I told everyone:

「This pot of soup near the bottom seat is the test dish I made for the banquet. Please don’t think of this soup as dinner, and whoever want to try it please do. To be honest, this is still work in progress, and I have not decided on the menu yet.」

「……」

□If no one tries it, my research won't be able to progress. So I hope everyone will try it and tell me your comments. That will be a big help.□

□... What are you yammering about?□

The clan head said with an annoyed face:

□Lutim asked us to help... Lala, distribute the soup to everyone.□

□Ehh□!? Why me?□

□You are tending to the hearth today right? And you're the closest to the soup, so give it out to everyone.□

Despite reluctance written all over her face, Lala Wu still poured the □poitan soup□ into the plates swiftly.

□... Hearth caretaker of the Fa house.□

「Yes, what is it?」

「You have an agreement with the eldest son of house Lutim, and the Wu clan heeded to house Lutim's request. That's all, the Wu clan don't have anything special relationship with you.」

「Yes, you are right.」

「... If you know that, then do your work properly.」

He was probably saying this to stop me from worrying about unnecessary things. As his words had his usual intimidating tone, it made me a little flustered.

I was probably holding back towards the Wu clan. Donda Wu saw through that.

Understanding this made me even more angry... I felt angry about my immaturity.

…We give thanks for the forest's grace…… Donda Wu recited the familiar words.

…We give thanks to Mia Lei, Sati Lei, Lala and Asuta that our lives are extended for this night.…

And so, the dinner cum taste testing session began.

Because I had to help with the butchering of two kiba, dinner tonight was mainly done by the Wu clan members.

Including the hamburg steak for Grandma Jiba, I also instructed them on cooking the meat, but dinner was prepared by the Wu clan's women.

Only prototype one was made entirely by me.

The first one to sound out was Rimee Wu:

Hmm? Everyone only has one bowl?

Rimee Wu leaned towards the iron pot that was placed at the bottom seat and asked in astonishment.

That’s right, this is just a test sample, so everyone’s portion is about two thirds of a poitan.

Oh, I see.

She didn’t look disappointed and put down her empty plate.

How does it taste?

Hmm? Erm I don’t know.

Okay, it couldn’t be helped if she didn’t know.

Poitan soup that had cooled taste even nastier. This idea had already taken root in everyone’s heart, so the Wu clan finished the sample as soon as possible.

I peeked at everyone’s expression—— Grandma Ditto Min has a face of doubt, Vena-nee was expressionless, the second daughter Leina Wu had a troubled face, and Ludo Wu had an obviously grumpy face—— This made me feel uneasy about the future.

By the way, the three hearth caretaker who had already taste tested it commented that 「something seems to be missing」.

I couldn’t predict how these men would think.

Ai Fa ate quietly like the others, then put down her plate.

On a closer look, she had finished the sample dish.

「Ah, Ai Fa, how does it taste—」

「Terrible.」

Weird?

She seemed angry.

As I spent the entire day in the stove room, and this was the first time we spoke since noon. Did something happened when I wasn’t around?

“… So, what did you add into this poitan soup?”

A few minutes later, when more than half the people finished their meal Grandma Ditto Min asked me.

“I’m researching on how to make the poitan soup more palatable. I only added Gigo, Tino leaves and salt.”

“You added Gigo? I can’t tell at all.”

I still didn’t know what Gigo was.

But I think it was very similar to “Japanese Yam”.

Boiling Gigo in water would dissolve it, and turn it into a viscous Gigo soup. It might smell fragrant, but would taste very bland. And there were some fibres left as I didn't ground it up.

When cooked together with poitan, its viscosity would overwhelm the powdery texture of the poitan, making it easier to drink. After several attempts to cook it with other vegetables, I chose the safest tino leaves, and seasoned it to taste with rock salt.

This was just the soup base —— Below were everyone's comments:

"Well... It's drinkable." Grandma Ditto Min said.

"I don't hate it." Mama Mia Lei Wu added.

"It don't feel like food." Sati Lei Wu commented.

"I don't really know..." Vena Wu said.

"It's easy to swallow." Leina Wu concluded.

"It feels unfinished." Lala Wu said.

"... I still don't know." Rimee Wu said.

This was just the soup base, so it wasn't finished yet. But it was hard to comment on a dish that wasn't delicious or bad.

Speaking of which, I also described the bun I bought in the post station town as "average".

"I don't know. Why do I have to eat this. Don't cook something so boring, I was looking forward to it."



Ludo Wu complained, he seemed to be the most dissatisfied.

But he showed a bright smile immediately after:

"But this grilled poitan is great, I already ate three."

"Ah, yeah! It's tasty! It's soft and bouncy, Rimee ate a lot too!"

Rimee Wu seemed bored and kept changing seats. She was beside Ludo Wu right now, and heaped on praise for the poitan.

"Well, I added Gigo in it. After grilling the failures of my research, I discovered that its texture turns smooth."

Speaking of which, I heard that adding yam into okonomiyaki will make it more fluffy and soft. No matter what, this was an unexpected great find—— But the problem this time was poitan soup.

Everyone then praised the grilled poitan and the meat dishes, and had already stopped commenting on the test dish.

By the way, Ai Fa was helping Grandma Jiba dine, and Mia Lei Wu who was accompanying Grandma Jiba was still eating. Once she and

Grandma Jiba finished dinner, then the meal would be done.

"This might just be a test dish, but I still apologize for letting everyone eat something so bland. I hope no one is fazed, and will continue your support tomorrow."

I was planning to conclude the session with these words, but Jiza Wu who had been quiet all this while called out my name:

"Asuta, we are helping you because clan head Donda already made an agreement with house Lutim, so don't worry too much. However… can I give you my opinion of that poitan soup?"

"Yes, of course."

"I can't tell if it is good or bad. But if you want us to eat that, you might as well cook the old poitan soup instead… the other dishes like grilled poitan won't make me think that way."

"I see…"

This dish was really unpopular.

Was my efforts being put in the wrong direction?

The room then turned silent. When Grandma Jiba finished dinner and Ai Fa was about to stand—— that voice rang out:

「... Why didn’t you add meat?」

It was Donda Wu.

I was stumped momentarily because of surprise, then I answered:

「T-This is just a prototype, my goal is to fix the soup base, that’s why I didn’t add any meat. I also didn’t consider if the soup will go well with the meat.」

「What do you expect to hear when you serve something so half hearted?」

He didn’t sound like he was admonishing me, but his voice was unhappy as usual.

“The denizens of Forest's Edge will put all the ingredients into the soup, because this is the easiest way to cook. Even if we grill meat, we will still put meat into the soup. We might eat meat by itself, but we will never drink soup that only has vegetables in them… Don’t serve such things to the table.”

Donda Wu slowly got up and said:

“Dinner is over… I’m turning in.”

That was the cue for dismissal.

The hearth tenders started tidying up, and the other family members returned to their rooms. As I was keeping the dishes gloomily, Ai Fa walked over, her annoyed expression could rival that of Donda Wu.

“Grandma Jiba is looking for you.”

After saying that, she grabbed her fur cape on the floor and quickly left the house.

Since Ai Fa wasn’t tending to the hearth tonight, she didn’t need to clean up, but didn’t she need to repay the host for the meal and board? Or was it rude for the guests to clean up the cutleries? No matter what, I had to ask her why she was so unhappy. With that in mind, I walked towards Grandma Jiba.

“Asuta, thank you for your delicious cooking today… Your food taste really delicious…”

“No, Mia Lei Wu cooked the hamburg steak today, and it used the meat that Ludo Wu slaughtered. I merely instructed them and didn’t do anything myself.”

“Is that so…? Mia Lei Wu didn’t mention it at all…”

“She probably is just too shy to say so.”

Or maybe she wasn’t the type to strive for credit.

In any case, that really suit that mother’s style.

“So it won’t be a problem tomorrow. Jiba Wu, you have to taste plenty of delicious food and live a long live.”

“I’m really glad… Asuta, I’m really really glad…”

Grandma Jiba held my hand with her bony and warm hands.

Leina Wu stood at the side so she could accompany Grandma Jiba back to her chambers later, and her eyes were moist.

“You brought light to the Wu clan. Not just me, everyone deeply feels the joy of living… The number of tusks and horns on your necklace is now ten. Did Donda gift one to you…?”

“… Yes.”

When I nodded, Leina Wu opened her eyes wide, and seemed to be sincerely surprised.

「Even that stubborn Donda acknowledge your strength… You are incredible, Asuta…」

「Not at all, I'm just an immature half-baked chef.」

When I said that, Grandma Jiba's frail back suddenly started to tremble.

「What happened? Do you feel unwell?」

Leina Wu held on to Grandma Jiba in a hurry—— but to me, Grandma Jiba was just laughing.

「……Asuta, that's not for you to decide, but for the people around you to consider… You just need to live as you please. Asuta, just keep things the way they are now…」

「Thank you.」

I bowed.

I will probably feel uncomfortable if anyone overestimated me. But when someone like Grandma Jiba says that to me, I could feel a warmth in my heart.

「... Next, about what Donda said...」

「Hmm?」

「For us, tossing all the ingredients into a pot is a representation of life... A young girl like Leina wouldn't know, but when we drink the soup with kiba meat and the grace that had been exchanged with kiba horns and tusks, our lives get to be extended for another night... So when we taste a soup without kiba meat, it will feels like something is missing...」

「... Yes.」

「Asuta, if you want to cook a soup that old bones like us can enjoy... then you should factor this in too.」

「I will. Thank you—— very much.」

Something squirmed in my mind.

Meat, it was meat after all.

Maybe the denizens of Forest's Edge wasn’t seeking palatable soup.

Compared to the soup, the meat was more important to them. Without meat, there would be no kiba pot.

The key to the kiba soup lay with complementing the meat with the vegetable.

If I didn’t set the right way to go about my research—— I might not be able to complete the menu in 4 days.

“... I will take my leave now. Asuta...”

“Yes, good night, Jiba Wu.”

After bidding farewell to Grandma Jiba and Leina Wu, I tidied up the cutleries.

Meat—— meat, meat, meat…

I placed the emphasis on the vegetables, but had to go back to research on the kiba meat.

Kiba was a worthy ingredient in the first place, it tasted great and had plenty of uses.

… By the way, I never imagined that Donda Wu’s word would give me this hint.

I felt complicated, a little frustrated and happy at the same time.

In the end, only the second son Darum Wu kept quiet the entire meal, so this was a fruitful taste testing session. I would keep up this pace for the remaining days and work hard. With such intense emotions in my heart, I completed the clean up and left the Wu main house.

I lighted a borrowed candle stand I borrowed and walked through the quiet plaza.

Speaking of which, Ai Fa didn’t go to Grandma Jiba’s room, and returned to our room right away.

While I was thinking about that, I reached the house Ai Fa was waiting in.

I opened the door and found that the room was pitch dark.

“Hmm, Ai Fa, are you here?”

I raised the candle stand inside the room.

And Ai Fa was right there.

She was lying near the wall where the window was, with her back towards me.

Was she feeling unwell? Were there days when the energetic Ai Fa felt under the weather?

I felt worried, and rushed to Ai Fa’s side without even locking the door.

“Ai Fa… are you sleeping?”

No reaction.

I realized that Ai Fa’s back that was curved beautifully didn’t move at all.

According to my past experiences, people who were asleep would have larger breathing animations, but I didn’t know if this was correct.

Anyway, I was worried, and even though I was a little hesitant, I decided to wake Ai Fa.

“Hey, Ai Fa——”, my hand touched her bare shoulder.

The next instant, her palm hit hard at the back of my hand with lighting speed.

"That hurts! Are you awake? Then answer me!"

"... I'm sleeping."

"You are awake! Hey, what's with you? Are you unwell?"

No matter what, I felt relieved after hearing Ai Fa's voice.

When I realized it, my back was drenched in sweat and my T-shirt was sticking to my back. I was more worried than I imagined. It was only natural for me to react like that, since Ai Fa had never acted so weird before.

If Ai Fa was really throwing a fit over something trivial, I will definitely protest. With such a thought in mind, I sat down beside Ai Fa.

"Hey, if you're not unwell, then look at me. You are acting strange right now, what happened?"

…I said, I’m asleep.

But you are not! Can you stop that, I’m going to be angry alright?

…You will get angry?

Weird.

Was I imagining things? Ai Fa’s lean, beautiful and feminine back seemed to have an air of anger behind her.

No, it was just in my mind. Even though I could feel the rumbling of anger going Vroommmm…, but that was impossible since this wasn’t a manga.

…You say that you will get angry?

Uwah.

She propped herself up slowly in a smooth manner, like a leopard.

As she had untied her hair, her locks flowed down her shoulders and back sexily.

But she looked really scary, and I couldn’t utter such praises.

“...I should be the one getting angry.”

Her glimmering blue eyes looked my way over her smooth shoulder.

Great, she hasn’t shown the eyes of a hunter completely yet.

But I could still tell that she was angry.

“W-Why are you so mad? We have been working separately the entire day right? I didn’t do anything to agitate you before we splitted at noon right?”

Maybe Ai Fa took a peek into the stove room before going back to our room when we came here last evening? I considered the possibility.

Even so, I didn’t do anything that would anger Ai Fa.

The three ladies stayed by my side, and I didn’t encounter anything special. Mama Mia Lei Wu who joined after that was the same as usual, and I got along well with Sati Lei Wu and Lala Wu too.

「Well, I didn’t do anything wrong! If you’re angry, then at least give me a reason!」

「……」

「Well? What is it?」

「……hamburg steak.」

「Hamburg steak? What about hamburg steak?」

「... You said that tonight's dinner will be hamburg steak.」

What?

When I realized it, Ai Fa was already pouting like a kid.

Ai Fa's eyes were burning with fiery rage, and her lips pouted childishly.

「W-Wait! When did I promised that? Ema Min came here early in the morning...」

「... You promised me on our way home yesterday.」

Ah.

I remember now.

On our way back from the post station town, when we passed the water source and was about to reach our home, I did say:Let’s have hamburg steak tomorrow.

After all, she asked me for this with the face of a child throwing tantrum like this.

Y-You are right. Sorry! I was too engrossed in my research, and completely forgot about this. I had to explain the slaughtering process to the men, it was a busy day!

... I don’t want to talk to idiots who break promises.

Ai Fa turned her back to me again.

What breaking promises!? You’re exaggerating too much! It’s only hamburg steak, why you heff to be mad…? That hurts!

When I placed my hand on her shoulder, she hit me again.

Hey! I apologize, it’s my bad! Tomorrow! I will cook it for you tomorrow! I definitely won’t forget! Ai Fa! Ai Fa-san!

And that was that.

The first day of the wedding banquet preparation ended peacefully.

Vol. 3 :

Chapter 4

Chapter 4
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 3 Interlude & Chapter 4

Interlude: An Unexpected Reunion



Translator: Skythewood

Editor:Rockgollem

The four days before the banquet went by in a flash.

I worked hard to develop new dishes, taught the men to blood let and butchering, and impart my cooking skills to the women. I even need to figure out the work flow for the banquet, and it was hard to describe how busy I was.

Even so, the men and women of Forest's Edge were very diligent and quick to learn. They weren’t exceptionally smart and capable, but because everyone did their very best. It stemmed from their strong sense of belonging to their □family□, which affected their attitude towards □work□.

They worked tirelessly. For their family and for survival, they didn’t have any complains. They didn’t give the impression of a machine working coldly. When they do their work seriously as if it was their second nature, they showed emotions of joy and pain.

□Work□ and □Survival□ were closely related. They were so honest because they were a tribe of hunters living in Forest's Edge.

No matter work, I’m very satisfied with such a work environment, and I think they are the best companions.

Worth mentioning were the women of Forest's Edge.

On the second day of the wedding preparation, aside from the Wu main

house, the branch houses also sent a few women to help me.

However, their workload were very heavy. A platform and simple stoves had to be erected for the wedding, and people were needed to gather firewood and stones. As the men had to hunt in the forest, this job fell squarely onto the women.

Despite their heavy and laborious workload, they still needed to take time out of their schedule to learn some unknown cooking from me, which showed me deeply how much thought and effort they put into this. As a normal banquet only needed to serve the usual kiba soup and grilled meat, so they would just need to prepare the ingredients, and ensure there were sufficient food and firewood. There were probably many who thought that I brought them unnecessary hassle for the preparation of this wedding banquet.

However, after they test tasted the steaks and hamburg steak, they were astonished and happy, and started helping me in earnest.

As the men would bring two or three successfully bloodlet and butchered kiba everyday, I obtained enough meat for the banquet in no time. In the end, I gave the excess meat to the five branch families of the Wu clan, and the women almost cried tears of joy.

Compared to the men, the women cared more about □delicious cooking□. I felt the same way when I stayed in the Wu main house last time.

This wasn’t anything surprising. If their work could bring happiness and serenity to their family, it would be a great joy to the subjects themselves. If everyone shares this feelings with their family, their job

would feel meaningful. As an outsider, I worry all the time that I would bring about an negative impact to the food culture of Forest's Edge ——But now, the satisfaction I feel was far greater than my fear and unease.

I had probably chosen the same path as Kaslan Lutim.

I hope everyone could be happier, and have deeper bonds with their families—— after hearing me say something so overreaching that night, he probably wanted to use his wedding to prove those words.

The men hunted kiba, bloodlet, skin and butcher.

The women forage for firewood, pick herbs, raise hearth fires and cooked the meat.

Without just one of these steps, and there wouldn’t be any delicious dishes.

Everyone had to work together to achieve this goal.

That youth wanted to share this joy with his hundred odd kin, and obtain deeper bonds and greater strength.

I had to give it my all to meet his expectation.

In order to give greater joy to even more people in such a harsh environment, I felt a deep obligation to do my work properly.

Two days before the banquet, a small incident happened—— On the third afternoon of my stay in the Wu clan village.

「A-A-Asuta! It’s terrible! Come with me for a while! The men are in trouble!」

Rimee Wu was the one who informed me of that commotion.

That day, I shut myself inside the stove room in the morning, and when the sun was at its apex, I started teaching the women how to make hamburg steak.

「What happened to the men? They will be setting off for the hunt soon right?」

Five women were in the stove room. They were Leina Wu, Ditto Min Wu and women from the branch houses.

Rimee Wu charged in with teary eyes.

「A strange man is here! There’s a dangerous air between him and the

men Darum-nii already drew his blade! It, it’s really bad!」

A feeling of tension rushed through my chest.

「Who is that strange man? Is he from the Tsun clan?」

「No! It’s someone from Rock City!」

「… What?」

「That man has a head of beautiful hair like Ai Fa! He even asked us where is the Fa house!」

I stood stiffly in shock.

A man from Rock City with blonde hair—— That must be Kamyua Yost. I couldn’t think of anyone else.

But why was that man in Forest's Edge?

「—— Sorry, I need to leave for a while. Ditto Min Wu, can you explain to everyone to the best of your knowledge?」

「I can do that, but——」

Asuta, it’s dangerous for you to go!

Leina Wu pulled at my hand.

Her expression was even more teary than Rimee Wu.

I regulated my breathing a little, then gently pulled away her soft shoulders.

It will be fine, I won’t do anything dangerous. Don’t worry, I will be back.

Rimee Wu and I charged out of the stove room.

We ran past the Wu clan’s buildings, headed into the plaza and saw that scene immediately.

The entrance to the plaza was filled with people.

It was the time for the men to head into the forest. Since Ryada Wu retired, the Wu clan’s men had been reduced to sixteen. They were all gathered here.

And then —— I could see the colour of that familiar cloak from between

the group of strong men.

"Wait—— Please wait!"

I shouted as I ran.

However, no one turned back or responded to me.

I could only feel Donda Wu who was a head taller than the others stole a glance at me.

"... Get lost! This is not a place a man from the city should visit!"

I finally heard a familiar voice.

It was the second son of the Wu clan, Darum Wu.

Darum Wu raised his sabre and faced off against that man.

And that man——

He was about Donda Wu's height, but he was really skinny, his body covered by a long leather cloak. This weird man who had the eyes that looked like an elderly and a child at the same time —— Kamyua Yost

stood casually there.

「... Hi, we finally met, Asuta of the Fa house.」

He stared at the blade at his nose as he answered in a pretending to be retarded tone.

Darum Wu was close enough to lop off his head in just one step.

Despite that, Kamyua Yost still didn't reach into his cloak, and was still smiling leisurely.

「I'm just asking for the location of your house, but the situation became like this. I'm still glad to see you though. Ehh, we haven't met for four days right?」

「Shut up! I'm talking to you right now!」

Darum Wu roared.

A fire seemed to be burning in his eyes, which gave the image of a feral wolf twisting its face agitatedly. His entire body was giving out dangerous killing intent.

I went around the human wall formed by the men, walked to a position

where I could see the two person facing off and stopped.

The next moment, Rimee Wu grabbed onto my left arm.

She actually followed me here. I turned my body to keep her petite body behind me.

"Asuta, can you plead for my case? I have no intention of harming them. As a "guardian", I just want to scout out the route, and pay you a visit since I'm in the area."

"Stop talking! That will only complicate things!"

I might be panicking, but I wasn't retarded enough to speak with Darum Wu directly. I looked up at Donda Wu's gigantic body and said:

"Donda Wu! I have met that man once before! Four days ago, we got acquainted when we visited the post station town to procure food ingredients! I don't know if he is a good or evil —— but I don't think he is the type who will resort to violence!"

"Hey hey, you are saying a model citizen like me is——"

"Enough! Didn't I tell you to not speak?"

Donda Wu cast a sideway glance my way, then walked to Darum Wu’s side.

“City man, you said you came to the Forest's Edge settlement for work.”

“That’s right. I will be escorting a caravan from Genos to the eastern kingdom. I plan to pass through this settlement for the trip.”

Even though Donda Wu was intimidating as usual, Kamyua Yost maintained his normal attitude.

Their heights were similar, but the girth of their body had two times the difference. This was like a black bear facing off a praying mantis.

“I had not seen anyone so naive for ten years. Those people from a decade ago were also attacked by kiba during their journey there and got wiped out.”

“Yes, I heard a starving kiba would even attack the provisions of travelers… But who knows if that group was really attacked by kiba.”

Donda Wu narrowed his eyes.

His face and attitude didn’t change, but just closing his eyelids slightly was enough to increase the sharpness of his gaze.

「Hey, what are you doing, retards?」

At this moment, someone poked at my head from behind.

I turned back, and saw Ludo Wu standing behind me. He pulled at our arms, his eyes almost turning completely into that of a hunter.

「Back off a bit more. Don't go so near someone who had drawn their blade—— Bratty Rimee, what are you doing!」

「S-Shut up!」

A smile appeared on Kamyua Yost probably because he heard our conversation.

This made Darum Wu's expression turn into more ferocious, and Donda Wu's eyes became even more narrow.

「... The chief Tsun clan is responsible for works related to the city. Why are you wandering around here without anyone guiding you?」

「They did offer to be my guide, but I told them 『It's fine, I'm just here to scout out the road, so I will go alone today.』 They agreed to this unhesitantly. Didn't the Tsun clan contact you?」

Anger immediately flared in Donda Wu’s eyes, he was probably referring to someone not present when he cursed: “Damn you.”

“So what business do you have with the Fa house? What’s the relations between you two?”

His latter sentence was directed at me.

I had to make a choice here.

Should I spin a harmless tale? Or be direct and spill all the beans—— Which choice would be right for Ai Fa?

“……Asuta, you can just say the parts that is convenient for you.” Kamyua Yost said to me quietly. And of course, everyone else could hear that.

With the thought “Damn it, things will be much easier if Darum Wu cut him down right here!” flashing across my mind, I made my decision.

“… When we were in the post station town, Ai Fa and someone from the Tsun clan got into an argument, and we were almost arrested by the guards. Mr Kamyua Yost here mediated for us.”

The next instant —— the blue flame in Donda Wu’s eyes exploded.

Despite that, he still asked in a collected and low voice.

“What’s the Tsun clan member’s name?”

“He call himself Doddo Tsun. He wasn’t tall, but was rather bulky. A young man with an indistinct face.”

“Doddo Tsun—— the second son of their main house.”

Donda Wu’s beast-like eyes shifted from me to Kamyua Yost.

A happy smile appeared on Kamyua Yost’s face.

“Asuta, aren’t you being too humble? You didn’t explain it clearly, so no one knows whether Ai Fa or Doddo Tsun was in the wrong… Well that Doddo Tsun was drunk in broad daylight, and brandished a knife against someone in town. And Ai Fa stopped him—— that’s the truth behind that incident. It was wrong for the people in town to talk behind his bad, but drawing a blade is still too much. The laws in Genos prohibits such actions.”

“……”

“That man from the Tsun clan then abused his privilege and attempted to deceive the guards by pushing the crime on Ai Fa. When that happened, I testified what actually happened to the guards, and the

incident ended peacefully. That’s the gist of it.

… So, what business do you have with the Fa house?

Ara, spending time with Ai Fa and Asuta is very comfortable, so I wanted to meet with them and chat some more… Ah! I forgot to tell everyone that Asuta acted bravely and rescued Tara! Asuta, Tara wants to see you again too.

I felt like screaming at him:Enough with you, shut your mouth.

This man didn’t tell any lies, but the words he said sounded so superficial.

… This brat still needs to work, he don’t have time to speak to a man like you.

Ah, I see. That’s a pity.

Scram on home.

You are right. In that case, I will give up on that thought… Can I visit the Fa house another day?

… According to the rules, citizens of Rock City can’t enter Forest's Edge as they please.

「I see. Then I will make up a work related reasons the next time I visit.」

「Why you…」

Darum Wu said through gritted teeth.

When Kamyua Yost was speaking with us, Darum Wu’s sabre was pointed at his nose.

However, Kamyua Yost just smiled at me as if it was nothing.

「Asuta, when will your job end?」

「The day after tomorrow. But——」

「Then, I will come again three days later.」

Kamyua Yost’s strange purple eyes stared at Donda Wu.

「I’m a citizen of the western kingdom, the 「guardian」 Kamyua Yost. Hunter of Forest's Edge, can you tell me your name?」

「… I’m the head of the Wu clan, Donda Wu.」

“Wu clan’s Donda Wu, thank you. I hope we can have a drink together some day.”

Kamyua Yost stepped back nimbly.

When Darum Wu wanted to pursue, Donda Wu’s thick hand fell on his shoulder.

“Well then, I wish everyone to stay safe and healthy.”

Kamyua Yost left just like that.

Not just me, his appearance created a large ripple in the hearts of the Wu clan’s men.

Chapter 4: The Lutim Banquet (First Half)

1

The sun rose from the east.

It was finally the day.

The wedding between Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min—— My first job has finally started.

"Yo... Oh, you're already up?"

When I woke up in an empty house within the Wu clan village, Ai Fa was already seated cross legged in the middle of the room and braiding up her blonde hair.

"... You are awake? It's still too early for work, sleep a while more."

"No need, I can't sleep again once I get up. My fatigue is completely gone."

I said while I stretched my back.

It was a nice morning.

And I was in a great mood.

"The banquet will last deep into the night. You won't have a chance to rest from afternoon until the banquet ends, so sleep a while more."

Hmm, she was gentler than usual.

She was probably concerned because of my heavy responsibility today.

I had only woken up and her attitude made me really happy.

“It’s fine, compared to the hardship for the past five days, this is nothing. We just need to follow the plan… That might be so, but completing the planned tasks isn’t that simple.”

“In that case, you should conserve your energy. Just sleep.”

Strange?

I felt that she wasn’t being considerate towards me.

“By the way, Ai Fa, you will be focusing on helping me today right? You won’t have anything to do either if I don’t get up.”

“……”

“Where are you going so early in the morning?”

“… Before work starts, I plan to borrow their water source to cleanse my body.”

Her wild cat-like eyes glared right at me.

So, go and sleep.

Hey… Since you have told me that beforehand, that previous accident won't happen again right? Do I look like a man who will repeat the same mistake?

……

You think I do!? What a shame…! I get it. If I violate that intolerable taboo again, I will hand over my eyeballs like the rules dictate.

… Who will want your eyeballs.

You want me to marry into your family then? —— Before I let these words slip, I stepped out of the room alongside Ai Fa.

Speaking of which, Ai Fa was planning to stay in the Wu clan village until this morning, and then return to the Fa house until the next morning. She said: I'm from the Fa house, and don't have the rights to attend the Lutim house banquet.

Hence, I told her:That's too retarded!, and appointed her as my assistant chef in an attempt to make her stay.

While Grandma Jiba and Rimee Wu were both participating in this grand banquet, Ai Fa would be home alone, drinking the kiba pot she cooked for herself... Just thinking about this scene breaks my heart.

When I told Kaslan Lutim about this, he agreed without hesitation and said:"Let's do what you proposed." He was even surprised about this, and seemed to think that Ai Fa was going to attend the banquet in the first place. Kaslan Lutim was willing to let someone not related to him by blood to tend to the hearth on his wedding day, and was part of the reformist denizen of Forest's Edge. Compared to him, Ai Fa was stubborn and inflexible.

Ai Fa was reluctant at first, but after I sincerely implored her to:"Let me perform the task of a Fa house hearth tender on that day.", she finally relented.

And so, we could head to the Wu clan now side by side.

We surveyed the plaza that had been prepared for the banquet, then strode forth slowly.

There were about ten stoves in the plaza.

All of them were simple stoves erected from white stones.

Their design would result in the heat leaking out, and couldn't meet my

requirement for heat control. Hence, the family members would cook the dishes at their own homes, and these stoves were only used to keep the food warm.

A large stage for the newly wedded couples were erected in front of the Wu main house. As a bonfire would be needed for the ceremony, planks were piled up inside the plaza. These were all made by the Wu clan women during these few days.

This space was about the size of half a school field, and would definitely be a crowded event if a hundred or so people came in here.

Just the thought excites me.

So my emotions got even more tense.

That many people would taste my dishes.

I felt gleeful about that—— and fearful at the same time.

My heart started racing, but I calmed down when I glanced at the side profile of Ai Fa walking besides me.

Ai Fa had her usual expression.

「Hmm」... Can I say something mushy?」

「Allow me to refuse.」

「Spending time with you from morning made me feel at ease.」

「... Which means, you want to follow me to the water source?」

「Not that! You should forget about that already!」

Ai Fa shrugged, unlike her usual self and answered:

「That's because these five days are special. We will be back to our usual routine tomorrow anyway.」

「Yes, that makes me glad too.」

Ai Fa glared at me with her face slightly blushed.

It was rather embarrassing for me to say that too, but I felt that I had ed about saying that too, but it felt like a victory for me.

「But Kamyua Yost will probably visit the Fa house tomorrow.」

「That’s right… Speaking of which, he actually dare enter Forest's Edge alone, just how thick insensitive is he? He might really get cut down by Darum Wu.」

「……」

「Hmm?」

「Darum Wu can’t kill that man.」

It was so early in the morning, yet the conversation was heading in a scary direction.

While we were chatting, we went around the two meter tall stage and reached the Wu main house. We ran into Grandma Ditto Min who was just walking out of the entrance with a hand axe.

「Ara, it’s Ai Fa and Asuta, you two are early today. The girls had gone off to the water source, aren’t you going too, Ai Fa?」

Ai Fa’s gaze stabbed hard into my cheek.

I will absolutely not go there! I wanted to emphasize that, but Grandma Ditto Min was here too, so I couldn’t rebuke openly.

“Asuta, you are going to the stove room right? I’m on my way to the back of the house, so I will bring you there.”

“Thank you. You are chopping wood so early in the morning…? Sorry for burning so much wood.”

“That’s right, it’s the first time I have seen the firewood deplete so fast. No matter how much I chop, I couldn’t keep up with your rate of burning.”

“I’m very sorry.”

“I’m just kidding, this is all for the sake of delicious food.”

Grandma Ditto Min smiled a little, or should I say smiled gently? Anyway, it was a relaxed smile.

My father was on bad terms with his family, and my mother’s parent passed away early, so I didn’t have any memories of my grandparents. Grandma Ditto Min was always gentle, kind and always composed, giving off an air of silent dignity. I think she was an incredible grandmother.

Grandma Jiba’s son married Grandma Ditto Min, and fathered Donda Wu. Donda Wu and Mama Mia Lei then had seven children. Their eldest son Jiza Wu and Sati Lei Wu sired Kota Wu—— The Wu clan’s bloodline thus passed down through the generations.

When the other six children marry, I hope to care take the hearth just like today.

But as long as Donda Wu remained as the clan head and Jiza Wu was still the heir, this was unlikely to come true. In this five days, I have grown to respect and like the Wu clan members, that was why I had such a daydream.

“Well then, I will be intruding the water source for a while.”

Ai Fa glared at me once last time before disappearing at the end of a path covered in vegetation.

This wasn’t laying the foundation for something or anything ominous, but I swore in my heart that I would not go near the water source before they come back.

Grandma Ditto Min didn’t know what I was thinking and open a small gap to the stove room, food store and butcher room. She then told me: “Please use them as you like.”

This practice was a bit cumbersome, and a family member had to open the doors for me so early in the morning. But as the doors in Forest's Edge wasn’t locked, there was such a custom.

Well then——

The banquet will start in the evening.

And so, I had to cook all the food before evening. At this point of time, I had to prioritize one job.

Which was the new dish I developed just for today—— 「Kiba and Tarapa stew」.

What should I do to make the liquid poitan delicious?

This was the answer I found.

In the end, the tomato-like 「Tarapa」 became my companion instead of the yam-like 「Gigo」.

Compared to the other dishes, this stew needed to be cooked for a longer time, so I had to prepare it early. Once it was done, it just needed to be reheated when the banquet begins, a dish suited to be prepared early.

I brought out the bag I prepared yesterday from the food store. It was filled with the aria I picked yesterday, and all of them needed to be diced.

Adding these aria was for the sake of increasing its fragrance, but the amount of aria needed was astounding. There was more than a hundred guests, so I had to start by dicing 50 aria.

Even if it was just one plate, I hope all the participants could taste this dish. With that in mind, I estimated that this dish would require four pots.

I repeatedly cut the onion-like aria. If they were real onions, I should be crying my eyes out now. But aria didn't sting the eyes, so I worked hard in dicing them.

After ten or so minutes, I realized something after dicing all the aria——

There was no pots!

Right, the women would wash the previous night's cutlery when they went to bathe.

Yes, that was right, and if I head to the water source now, they would think I'm an absolute madman. Fortunately, Leina Wu whose hair was dripping wet brought over a freshly cleaned pot in a panic, so there wasn't any tragedy.

「S-Sorry! I heard that you have started cooking, so I washed one pot first and brought it over!」

「Thank you Leina Wu, you are a big help.」

She probably haven’t finished bathing, her long black hair wasn’t tied in her usual low pony tail, but flowed down her shoulders freely. Her completely different look surprised me.

She covered her body with one large cloth like a married woman, which felt really refreshing.

“Ah, s-sorry! I’m dressed so shabbily…”

Leina Wu said with a red face, although her dressing was less exposed than usual.

“Erm… I will bring the rest of the cooking wares back after I clean them all…”

“It’s fine, I won’t go near the water source.”

Leina Wu sighed in relief, then hurried out of the stove room after saying “I’m going off now.”

She was that worried… While I was feeling a little hurt, I started a fire in the stove to heat the pot. After adding in kiba fats, I tossed the diced aria into the pot.

As 50 aria was really too much, I split them into five batches.

I carefully fry the aria until they were caramel coloured. To add fragrance, I poured in fruit wine, and scooped everything out once the alcohol evaporates.

After repeating five times, it was time to deal with the meat.

I prepared 15kg of thigh meat and shoulder meat each, totalling 30kg. It was an amazing amount, and I cut them all into bite size.

When I chopped all the meat, an iron pot wobbled in.

Rimee Wu was hiding beneath it.

"Sorry for the wait! The others will bring the other two pots later!"

"Yes, thank you."

Rimee Wu seemed to have bathed properly. Her red hair looked really soft, and she was wearing her usual attire.

"You are already preparing the stew? Rimee will help too!"

"Ah, really? In that case, can you help bring the Tarapa over? I asked for eight more yesterday."

「Tarapa huh, got it…! Heehee.」

「Hmm? What is it?」

「Nothing. Asuta, you are a nice person. That’s great.」

Rimee Wu said that, and then ran off into the food store.

Hmm?

Because I started working so early in the morning?

It would be great if that was so… I started grilling the kiba meat.

I just need to grill the surface of the meat until it becomes golden. I nimbly grilled the meat with the large pot, and then scoop up the grilled meat onto the wooden plates.

I might sound simple, but there were 30kg of meat. After a while, the entire stove room was filled with the thick aroma of meat and fats.

Next would be aria. These complements the stew, and wasn’t added to increase the fragrance. There were fifty of these too, and I repeatedly cut them into semi circles.

While I was doing this, eight tarapa were placed on the other work station thanks to Rimee Wu’s efforts.

They were a vegetable that looked like tomato, but had the size of a pumpkin.

It had an uneven surface, so it looked really similar to a pumpkin.

But it had the taste and colour of a tomato.

I originally said that this vegetable wouldn’t play a big role this round, but in the end, it formed the main taste of this dish.

「There are so many aria! Should Rimee help to cut them too?」

「Ah, can you help me bring the tino leaves and chachi over? Bring everything packed in a bag.」

「Got it!」

It was still early, but Rimee was really energetic, forthright and cute. If she was my daughter or sister, I would definitely dote on her.

While I was thinking that, the other sisters of the Wu clan and Ai FA returned with the pots and cutlery.

Seemed like I didn’t need to gouge my eyes out.

“Look, we brought it back… Really now, when we heard that you have started preparing the food, we got really nervous.” Lala Wu whispered to me.

So they really heard about this, and sent Leina Wu over—— I showed a vague smile.

“… You didn’t visit us today huh…?” Vena-nee said softly into my ear.

What was she saying? If I really showed up, she would be blushing til her ears turn red though.

“I will switch with Mama Mia Lei. We will help you when we are finished over there.”

“Thank you, Lala Wu.”

“… You should know right? Mama Mia Lei and the others will be showering next.”

Of course I know, I know that from the bottom of my heart.

Speaking of which, who did they think I was?

「Phew, it’s heavy.」

At this moment, Rimee Wu came back.

Her bag contains six tino leaves. Each tino was about the size of a slightly larger cabbage. But Rimee Wu could carry an iron pot, so such a weight wasn’t too much of a problem for her. The bag was probably too bulky, which made it hard for her petite body to carry.

There wasn’t anyone more likeable than her.

「Asuta, sorry for the wait! Next is the Chachi right?」

「I will get it. Rimee Wu, why don’t you help him cut the vegetables?」

「Yes!」

Ai Fa walked quickly to the food store, and Rimee Wu took a vegetable knife from the wall.

That was how diligent the denizens of Forest's Edge was.

Once they grasp the steps, they would proceed with the task with amazing efficiency.

Rimee Wu, I will leave the tino to you, you know what size to cut it?

Yes, bite saizu! I don’t know what saizu means though!

Rimee Wu wield the kitchen knife happily.

After settling the crockery the three older sisters went out of the door. Ai Fa who pass by them came back with a bag of Chachi.

Is this Chachi? What should I do?

Ah, please peel them. It can be peeled easily by hand.

Chachi was a fruit that was very similar to mandarin with yellow skin.

After peeling it, the smooth white ball on the inside would be revealed.

When Ai Fa squeezed it unintentionally, the white liquid inside ejaculated out.

Uwah!

Ai Fa screamed, then kicked my leg.

「Why did you kick me!?」

「... Shut up.」

「Ahaha!」

Rimee Wu laughed.

When I realized it, only me, Ai Fa and Rimee Wu were in the stove room.

I felt more at ease now, so I will ignore her unreasonable kick.

「After peeling them, wash it with water until the sticky fluids are gone.」

Chachi was a new member I discovered in the food store.

It had the appearance of a mandarin, but the content was like that of a potato. Ignoring poitan that looks like a potato, chachi had the exact same texture and taste of a potato.

After splitting the chachi Ai Fa washed, I cut them into bite size of about 3cm wide.

And so, the preparation was complete.

After dicing the fifty aria, I fried them before hand to enhance its aroma.

The other fifty aria was cut into semi circles.

Thirty chachi was cut into bite size.

The 6 tino was also cut into bite size.

The kiba shoulder and thigh meat that had been grilled on the surface weigh 30kg in total.

And—— eight giant tarapa.

Before dealing with the accursed poitan, I needed to handle this smaller items.

Conversely speaking, I couldn’t tackle the poitan if I didn’t use that many ingredients.

I already did what I can.

The poitan soup that was like flour water, thick and hard to swallow.

Why was the poitan so difficult to deal with?

I first assumed that the variety of spices available in Forest's Edge was too limited, so the poitan soup tasted so bland.

Aside from rock salt and pico leaves, the only other seasoning in Forest's Edge was fruit wine. Hence, their food had a lighter taste. They could cook high quality stock from the meat and vegetables, but that wasn’t enough to neutralize and unique texture of the poitan.

At this moment, I remembered the existence of vegetable stew.

Vegetable stew made used of flour to give it a thick texture.

It would be difficult for me to make beef stew or cream stew with the ingredients in Forest's Edge.

Right then —— I noticed the tarapa’s strong taste.

Tarapa was even more sour than the tomato I tasted in the past, but by using aria that enhance the aroma of the dish, fruit wine that was similar to grape wine, and pico leaves which was akin to pico leaves, I could replicate a tomato sauce like taste. I decided to use this taste as the foundation to cook a unique vegetable stew.

In other words, I combined the popular □beef stew□ and □hamburg steak

with tomato sauce that were popular in Tsurumi restaurant, and create a completely new dish.

Okay, please help me start the fire in the other stoves. It has to be strong, but not too strong.

As I said that, I tossed in about a quarter of the ingredients into the heated pot.

They were the aria which was a substitute for onion, the substitute for cabbage tino, and the replacement for potato Chachi, these three vegetables.

After the aria softened, I put the kiba into the pot, and added an entire bottle of fruit wine, filling the entire stove room with a sweet fragrance. After the water was brought to a boil, I scooped up the foam and added large amount of water with a ladle.

I added water until the pot was 80% full.

After adding a certain amount of water, I weakened the stove’s fire.

I had to cook this dish for two hours, and evaporate half of the content.

Since Forest's Edge didn’t have ready made stock for sale, I had to make full use of the ingredients.

I dealt with the three iron pots one after another, but stopped when I reached the last one.

"Erm, Rimee Wu, I plan to use this fruit wine in another dish. Sorry, can you give me another bottle of fruit wine?"

"Hmm? Huh? Now you mention it, the shape of the bottle is a little different."

In her hands was the fruit wine Kamyua Yost gifted to us.

I had been thinking about how to use it to cook. I asked Ai Fa to bring it here from home three days ago, and it will still be some time before this thing makes its debut.

After pouring in another fruit wine Rimee Wu got for me, the last pot was done, and the work was finished for now.

We wiped away our sweat and cooled off at the door.

As we needed to scoop up the foam and add firewood periodically, we couldn't go too far away from the stove room.

"This is great. Not only did you add poitan, you also put in tarapa! This is the first time Rimee see a kiba pot with so many vegetables."

That’s probably so. We will be celebrating tonight, so I added a bit more.

The pot that cooked all the meat and vegetables together was a representation of life.

The aria and poitan were vegetables the denizens of Forest's Edge had to eat in order to live healthily.

As these two vegetables were cheap, this practice took root in the life of the people of Forest's Edge—— however, this had been passed down in Forest's Edge for eighty years, and I had no intention of changing it. What I should do, was to cook the unpalatable ingredients into delicious food.

That was why I thought of grilling the cooked poitan instead of boiling it in the pot. However, poitan in solid form might look very alien to people who had only drank poitan soup.

I racked my brains for their sake—— after that, Grandma Jiba and Donda Wu told me that cooking all the ingredients in one pot is a symbol of life, inspiration struck me, and I came up with this kiba and tarapa stew.

Right now, I was using the techniques of cooking beef stew to simmer these vegetables.

Next, I will be cooking tarapa next to make tarapa sauce, which would become the base of this dish.

After that, I will add poitan and create the texture of a stew.

I thought of adding cream in the flour to make coffee coloured batter, but had no luck so far. After all, there wasn’t anything like cream in Forest's Edge. When I tried frying the powdery poitan with kiba fats, it would just burn the poitan.

However, even if I add the poitan into the soup, it could still achieve the thickening effect.

Furthermore, this also match the concept of □cooking the symbol of life□.

I felt that doing this was too frivolous, but the end product was rather good. As long as the ratio of poitan was right, I could achieve the texture of a vegetable stew.

Within the five days limit, this was the answer I got after doing all I could.

This dish was an appetizer.

Before serving the hamburg steak, spare ribs and grilled poitan that might look weird to them, I plan to use this dish to open their hearts.

Only god knows how this would end.

"I normally won't use large amount of expensive vegetables to cook lavish dishes either. I only relented because this is an occasion worth celebrating for."

"I think it's great! This dish is super tasty… Of all the dishes you taught us, this might be Rimee's favourite!"

"I see. Then when your sister marries, you can cook them for everyone."

"Huh! Asuta, won't you cook it for me!?"

Rimee Wu was taken aback with surprise written all over her face.

"You know too right? Considering the temperament of your Papa Donda, he will never let me tend the hearth when the Wu clan host a wedding."

"Ah! It's fine! Because…" the innocent girl said with a mischievous expression:

"… The day before yesterday, when Papa Donda ate the vegetable stew, did you see his expression? He said "Woah" you know?"Woah".

He did make a sound, I thought he was going to flip the pot over from rage.

Not at all! Because the vegetable stew was too delicious, that’s why he made a sound! He almost said delicious!

Really? That’s hard to imagine.

That must be it! Rimee knows very well…! When Rimee marries, you must cook it for me alright?

I was at a loss for words.

I stole a peek sideways—— Ai Fa was watching the small flame within on hearthstone quietly.

As Rimee Wu looked at me with expectant eyes, I placed my hand on her small head and said:

That’s true… when the time comes, I will definitely cook it for you.

If I was still in this world when that day comes.

2

The three of us chatted mindlessly, and added firewood into the stove occasionally. A while later Lala Wu and Leina Wu came back.

"Hey, we brought the pots here!"

Like what they said, each of them had an iron pot in hand.

This was the iron pot they borrowed from the Wu branch family.

Of the seven Wu houses, the main house has the widest stove room, so I used this place as the base. But there were only four of the crucial pots here, and I had to use pots to cook the stew first, so we decided to gather all the people and pots from the branch houses in the main house.

So far, the women from the branch house had been taking turns to help, but all of them would be available on this day. They were already drying the poitan and cutting vegetables in their own homes right now.

I had to set up a roster for this, and assign the dish each house would be responsible for. I also needed to estimate the crockery and number of people needed, and calculate when the dishes would be done. For me, this was the hardest job.

"What will these pots be used for? Making the tarapa for the stew?"

That’s right. Since we have enough people, let’s do this first. After finishing this, we can relax a while before noon.

I left the job of simmering the vegetables to Ai Fa and Rimee Wu, and followed Lala Wu and Leina Wu outside to make tomato sauce, no, tarapa sauce.

A lot of tarapa would be used, but the cooking method was rather simple.

I mixed the fried diced aria, large chunks of Tarapa and fruit wine together to simmer, and seasoned it to taste with salt and pico leaves, and its done.

I think adding some garlic and lilo would make it better, this was already acceptable sauce. Making this into stew requires quite a bit of effort, but I hope the Wu clan could make use of it in the future by pouring it onto their meat dish or simmering vegetables with it.

How incredible! That super sour tarapa is so tasty now.

Lala Wu said quietly as she stirred the contents to avoid the boiling red tarapa from burning.

This is thanks to the aria and the sweetness of the fruit wine. I should have thought up this dish sooner.

In this five days, Lala Wu’s hostile attitude gradually softened.

She always speak sarcastically because of her nature, but if you don’t anger her, she was a frank and cute girl.

“Ah, Lala Wu, you mentioned that you hate tarapa right?”

“Yes, but now, it’s my favourite.”

That was how she was.

I thought she hated me with a passion, but talking to her now filled me with warmth.

At this moment —— I felt a vicious gaze fell on my cheek, and turned to check.

Leina Wu averted her gaze with a lonely expression on her face.

… How should I put this, I thought glaring at me coldly during situations like this was Ai Fa’s trademark.

While I was feeling troubled, Ludo Wu appeared with a yawn.

"What, you all have started working already? It's so hot—— hey Asuta, let's go and bathe. The girls already bathed right?"

"No, I will go later. After I finish the dish, I can take a break."

"There are only two stoves, why are the three of you sticking together here? Or they can't help at all if Asuta isn't here? All the men learned how to butcher the kiba already you know?"

"Shut up! Go bath if you two want to! We don't need Asuta!"

Why must I suffer damage in this situation?

"Please go, we'll watch the pots."

Leina Wu's eyes had a hint of loneliness and gloom, but she still spoke to me with a smile.

"I get it, I will accompany you… Have the mothers finished bathing?"

"If it's a wedded woman, you can't marry into the family okay?"

"What I mean is…"

「You will just be killed by dad and Jiza-nii.」

「That's why I'm checking with you!」

「E-Erm, Sati Lei and the others have already come back, that's why we can come here…」

Leina Wu blushed a little, as she said timidly.

No good, out of everyone present, she was the one who will suffer in silence the most, I should hurry on to the water source.

After telling Ai Fa and Rimee Wu who were also in the room, I left the building with Ludo Wu.

「Ludo Wu, it's rare for you to invite me to the bath.」

「Well」 I wanted to ask you something.」

Ludo Wu walked as if he was kicking out his legs alternately, and looked at me with her pale coloured eyes.

「Have you asked that thing yet?」

「Ask what?」

□□Sacrificial hunting style□.□

□Ah.□

Oh no.

I completely forgot about this.

That was careless of me!

I was really busy recently, but that wasn’t an excuse.

Ai Fa hunted alone, but her kiba kill count was rather high. Ludo Wu hinted that Ai Fa might be using the □sacrificial hunting style□—— and if I wanted to know what □sacrificial hunting style□ was that I should ask her.

How could I forget something so important? I wanted to grab my head and shout because of my own retardedness.

I still didn’t know how serious this matter was. The phrase □sacrificial hunting style□ sounded ominous, and Ludo Wu’s abnormally serious expression when he said this term made me uneasy.

In that case, I could only interrogate the person who made me worried.

“Sorry, I completely forgot about that… Can you tell me what “sacrificial hunting style” is?”

“If you didn’t ask, then forget it. Ask your house head if you want to know.”

“There will be people around me for this entire day, is it fine for others to hear about it?”

“It’s fine for the woman to hear it. They won’t know what that is anyway… But I will suggest you don’t let dad learn about this.”

“Then I can’t ask Ai Fa, I don’t want to seal Rimee Wu’s lips.”

Ludo Wu glanced at me sideways again.

He was making an incredibly annoyed face.

“Really now…“sacrificial hunting style”, is an archaic way of hunting by using fruits that attracts kiba. When those fruits are smashed, it will release a scent that the kiba loves, and lure them out. That’s all.”

“Hmm? It sounds simple, but it has a terrifying name.”

「... I heard that the kiba will become ferocious when they smell that scent. Normally, they would flee if they saw a man appear from far away. But if that man had this scent on him, they would attack agitatedly.」

「What...」

「This hunting method uses yourself as a living sacrifice, that's why it's called 「sacrificial hunting style」. It doesn't matter how many lives you have if you resort to this method. Hence, no one uses it anymore.」

「.....」

「It is unlikely for Ai Fa to use that method, but she managed to hunt so many kiba. I'm curious how she managed to haul in so many wild games.」

「... The fruit that lures in kiba...」

「Hmm?」

「Does it have a sweet flowery fragrance?」

Ludo Wu didn't just look my way, he turned his entire face towards me.

He narrowed his eyes slightly in surprise.

“Who knows, I have never seen that fruit before.”

“That’s true…”

I have only smelled that sweet flowery fragrance from Ai Fa.

If that was the scent of the fruit that lures in kiba…

“Dad hates people who don’t cherish their lives the most. If a hunter ever use it, he will definitely show a face of scorn.”

“… Yeah.”

“But I respect someone like that. I think anyone who will go so far for the sake of hunting kiba is amazing. Acting like this might seem foolish, but it is also cool, so I will respect such a person.”

“……”

“Asuta, listen to me.”

Ludo Wu suddenly grabbed me by the chest and pulled me over.

The youth’s face was right before me.

“If you encounter such hunters, you should respect them. Not worry, but respect.”

“... I know.”

Ludo Wu let go without hesitation and sauntered forth once again.

I couldn’t help sighing, and scratched my head through my bandana.

At this time, we could see the wooden board that represents the Wu clan’s water source.

“Ah” looks like today will be a hot day.”

Ludo Wu said and went to the other side of the board.

I thought about Ai Fa who was waiting for me in the stove room, and went in after Ludo Wu——

And I almost screamed.

「Hmm? Jiza-nii, Darum-nii, you are here too?」

Yes, Jiza-nii and Darum-nii were here.

In a way, the eldest son and second son of the Wu clan were harder to get along with than Donda Wu.

Ludo Wu tossed his clothing aside without hesitation, then carefully placed his necklace on the ground.

This was a knee deep stream.

The terrain in the vicinity were rocky. Behind the stream was a tall cliff, and the woods could be seen on top of it. The two hunters were sitting in the stream and using a palm size cloth to wipe their bare brown bodies.

「Wah, icy!」

Ludo Wu jumped into the stream and yelled excitedly.

I wasn’t excited at all.

Jiza Wu glanced at me, then quietly wiped his body.

A fire burned in Darum Wu’s eyes, and he wash his body silently too.

Who could get excited in such a situation?

I couldn’t flee just like this, and had no choice but to strip.

I took off my vest, t-shirt and the rest of my clothes, then placed my necklace onto the ground.

I walked downstream to the back of the two men, and sat down quietly.

Darum-nii, why are you showing such a scary face!? Today is a day of celebration!

After saying that, Ludo Wu kicked out his right leg that was in the water.

The huge amount of water all splashed onto Darum Wu’s head.

Arrggghhh, I almost fainted from panic.

Darum Wu stopped all his movement for an instant, then continued wiping his body nonchalantly. I couldn’t see his face from where I was, so that was even more terrifying for me.

Even if I couldn’t see his face—— the bodies of the Forest's Edge men were really shocking.

In this one month, my body loss its fats due to hard manual labour, and my muscles grew. Although my body turned lean, my weight increased, and I became a hunk for the first time in my life. However, compared to the men of Forest's Edge, I was just a skinny monkey.

First of all, our skeletal structure was completely different. The men of Forest's Edge had wide shoulders, thick chests, long and slender necks and limbs.

Their build was lean, but they had incredible back muscles.

Because their muscles were balanced, their bodies feels proportionate when they were clothed. Their body only had necessary muscles without any fats. Like Ai Fa, their torso was a combination of functional beauty and streamlining.

On a closer look, their wrists were thick and had big hands. Not only were their fingers long, their palm were massive too. They could definitely crush my hands easily in a handshake.

However—— just like Ai Fa there were numerous white scars on their brown skin.

Getting gored by a kiba was likely to be a mortal wound. These injuries were probably inflicted when they were moving in the dense woods or rocky terrain.

They were hunters of Forest's Edge.

"Why are you dazing out? This is an once in a lifetime big project."

With these words, a torrent of water splashed onto me.

Ludo Wu jumped into the water in front of me.

"Wash your body thoroughly! This is a day of celebration for the Lutim house!"

"I-I get it... Ludo Wu, you are energetic so early in the morning."

"Hmm? Fufufu. Of course! I get to eat delicious food everyday, which fills me with energy! I feel that I can lift a kiba with one hand!"

Ludo Wu had a happy smile on his face.

When he make this face, he looked as cute as a girl.

Even though his body was toned like a feral beast, he was shorter than me, and not as buffed as his brothers. Even though I was weaker than him in strength, his child-like appearance made me feel at ease.

「The Wu clan women are fine now. I didn't do much for dinner these five days, and they had practiced how to make hamburg steak repeatedly. From tomorrow onwards, they will definitely continue to cook delicious meals for you.」

「……」

「Hmm? What's the matter?」

「Asuta, no matter what you say, you will do so on the precondition that 「things will be fine even if you are not around」, that makes me so mad.」

「Huh? But I shouldn't be tending to the Wu clan's hearth in the first place. Isn't it a good thing that the Wu clan women can cook a delicious meal?」

「I know! That's not what I mean!」

Splash—— Ludo Wu slapped the water surface.

He really was like a child.

「Asuta.」

At this moment, Jiza Wu spoke for the first time.

「I was thinking about discussing something with you today.」

「Alright, what is it?」

「... You will be meeting that man from Rock City, Kamyua Yost right?」

Jiza Wu turned his burly body halfway, and looked at me with his eyes that was as narrow as a slit.

「Yes. If he comes to visit, I will meet with him.」

「I see... Forest's Edge didn't have restricted areas. We made an agreement with the lord of Genos to stop anyone from entering Forest's Edge wilfully, but that is for the sake of keeping the people from the city safe. If that man visits again, we won't have any authority to stop him.」

「... Yes.」

「However, I won't permit anyone from the city to interfere with Forest's Edge. You should have realized after seeing the people from the Tsun clan right? The city's culture would only lead Forest's Edge down the

path of depravement.

.....

Asuta, I could feel the aura of a city dweller from you. You should be living inside Rock City—— That’s what I feel, am I wrong?

Jiza Wu talked about the treatment I should receive.

Kaslan Lutim went against the custom of Forest's Edge, just what did Jiza Wu think of this matter? Was he against this even more than Donda Wu—— Such a thought arose in my mind.

I don’t know if you are right or not. But—— compared to the post station town, I prefer the Forest's Edge settlement.

I could only give such an answer.

I see.

Jiza Wu stood up.

To me, Kaslan Lutim is a very important kin. I wish more than anyone else for his wedding to proceed smoothly.

After that, Jiza Wu used a cloth hanging on the door board to wipe his body, then left after putting on his clothes.

"...Asuta, you actually dare to talk to Jiza-nii in such a situation. I couldn't do that."

Ludo Wu said in an exasperated tone.

"Well, I still don't know what's so terrifying about him. Aside from his outstanding aura, I don't know what I should be afraid of."

"What do you mean? Compared to Dad, Jiza-nii is much more dangerous... Darum-nii, why do you detest Asuta? He cooks tasty food for us, and there are some things I don't really get about him, he is still a nice guy."

Ludo Wu's words reached the depths of my heart. But seeing Ludo Wu interacting with Darum Wu fearlessly, I felt he was much stronger than me. They were brothers after all, so it was a given that they would get along.

As I expected, Darum Wu didn't answer. He didn't even look at me and left the water source just like Jiza Wu did.

"Hmm"Asuta, they really detest you."

「Yes, I’m aware of that.」

「How should I put this... Asuta, Darum-nii seemed to be afraid of you.」

「What? Impossible! No matter how hard I try, I won’t be able to beat him.」

「The men in Forest's Edge will never lose to you… unless it isn’t a contest of strength.」

Ludo Wu sat crossed legged in the water, then turned to face me.

「How strange Asuta, you are so weak, but don’t fear anyone. That night during the pre-wedding banquet, you looked even stronger than my Dad」

「Ahaha, I’m honoured.」

「Hand.」

「Huh?」

「Let me see your hand.」

「Hand?」

I reached out my right palm.

Ludo Wu placed his palm on top of mine gently.

"Your hand is small, just like a woman."

I felt my face showing astonishment just like Rimee Wu earlier.

Ludo Wu was shorter than me, but his fingers and palm was twice my size.

In a year or so, I might need to look up at Ludo Wu. Just the thought filled me with gloom.

But even so—— How blissful it would be if I was still in Forest's Edge one year later.

3

After two peaceful hours, the food in the four pots were successfully cooked.

Half of the water had evaporated.

At this moment, I added in the tarapa sauce.

The content of the pot was slightly red because of the fruit wine, but it was completely crimson now.

Even though aria food was added for taste, the strong sourness and aroma of the tarapa still spread inside the stove room.

Alright, I will be adding the poitan now. Don’t mess up the numbers okay?

Ten poitan had to be added to each pot. If we exceed that number, the texture would be powdery and terrible.

I slit the skin of the potato-like poitan, and toss them one after another into the pot.

Even with the small fire, the poitan break apart and dissolved immediately.

What an incredible ingredient.

It bore some resemblance to flour, but it was as close as kiba was to pork, onions to aria or tomatoes to tarapa.

Which means—— I wouldn't have tasted this food if I didn't arrive in this world.

As there wasn't any food that resembles it in my old world, I was troubled about how to cook it; and being so troubled made it hard for me to give it up.

As I was in deep thought, the ten poitan melted away without a trace.

The tomato red gradually turned into a colour between pink and orange.

After carefully stirring it and adding rock salts and pico leaves to taste——

It was finally done.

After simmering it for two hours, even the inside of the chachi turned soft and tender.

Tino and aria were soft, and it melts in my mouth without even needed to chew it.

Next was the kiba meat.

The bite sized meat was really tender.

The shoulder meat slowly melts in the mouth, while the thigh meat retained its toughness.

The strong sourness of the tarapa complemented the taste of the ingredients on many layers—— which spreads an indescribable fresh taste in my mouth

As expected of a dish that took so much time and effort, of all the kiba dishes I had developed, this stew might be the best of them all.

However, this was a luxurious dish prepared for a banquet, not a family meal.

Such a lavish meal could only be ate during a banquet.

This dish would make the wedding even more joyous.

For the sake of enjoying high quality food, the people of Forest's Edge would perform their jobs as hunters even harder to earn copper plates—— That was the idea I had in mind.

I wish to convey this to Kaslan Lutim and his kin.

「Okay, put out the fire after a while more. Everyone, please stir it carefully so it won’t get burned.」

Ai Fa, Leina Wu, Lala Wu and me stood in front of the four pots respectively.

The idling Rimee Wu was staring hard at me.

She didn’t say a word, but her large eyes were sparkling.

“... You want to try——”“I wanna!”

She cut off my words.

I used the spoon for taste testing to scoop up some stew. I looked down, and found the cute girl waiting for me with her mouth open.

Ara, this reminds me of that night when I met Rimee Wu for the first time—— I felt nostalgic as I send the spoon into her mouth.

“It... It’s yummy...”

She was squinting from her smile.

She then stared at me again.

Now that I think of it, she also pestered me to feed her a second time when we met for the first time.

Rimee Wu wasn’t greedy, so she wouldn’t ask for a third time. As I was thinking that, I added some thigh meat and chachi pieces onto the spoon. When I was blowing to cool it, someone whacked the back of my head.

“Don’t spoil that bratty Rimee! We won’t have enough for the guests!”

“I’m not eating that much! Tomboy Lala…”“Don’t fight, don’t fight.” I said as I stuff the spoon into her wide open mouth.

Rimee Wu held the spoon in her mouth with an expression as if she was melting. Lala Wu raised her eyebrows and said:

“I can’t even! How sly! I have been bearing with it and not steal a bite!”

“Huh? You are restraining yourself? You should at least try the taste, that’s the privilege of a hearth tender.”

“Tell me that sooner! Bratty Rimee, hand over that spoon!”

“Ah”? Let me think about it.”

Even trivial arguments like this were cute. As I watched them happily, someone tugged at the corner of my t-shirt.

Leina Wu was looking carefully into the pot next to me just now, but she was looking at me bashfully.

「... Erm, I already said it is fine to try right?」

Leina Wu's face lit up.

This atmosphere feels rather comfortable.

However, we could only take it easy now. In the afternoon, this place will turn into a warzone. I probably wouldn't suffer any retribution for spending some heartwarming moments with these three close sisters.

「... Is the morning's work done?」

Ai Fa finally spoke.

「That's right.」

When she heard my answer, she nodded and waved Rimee Wu to her.

"I will make a trip home then. Rimee Wu, can you take over for me?"

"Okay! What are you going to do at your place?"

"I have to turn over the meat in the food store. If left alone for the entire day, the pico leaves would get damaged."

I see, so there were chores to do at home too.

"Wait, I will finished soon. Let's go back together."

"But why?"

Ai Fa tilted her head quizzedly.

"I'm just turning the meat, so I can do that alone. You can rest for now."

After saying that, Ai Fa left the stove room quickly.

"Hmm"... Does Ai Fa dislike us?"

Lala Wu asked.

“No such thing.”

I refuted her.

“She don’t dislike you. Ai Fa is just slow to warm up to people.”

“But aside from Rimee Wu and Grandma Jiba, I have never seen Ai Fa speak with anyone else. If she don’t dislike us, then she is just uninterested in us.”

Lala Wu’s showed a displeased face.

Was Lala Wu hoping to get closer to Ai Fa?

“Speaking of which… Lala Wu, you know about that marriage proposal two years ago? After that day, the relationship between Donda Wu turned awkward, that’s why she got used to keeping her distance from the Wu clan.”

“But your attitude towards us is normal.”

“Because I’m retarded.”

“Yes, I know.”

So she already found out.

"But Papa Donda didn't mentioned that marriage thing again. Since she already got along well with Rimee and Grandma Jiba, so she has no reason to avoid us. Therefore, she must not be interested in us."

"Not really, like I said—— she's slow to warm up to people."

"Did you get along well after spending a lot of time…? Or rather, are you two close at all?"

"Hmm" What a troubling question!"

Leaving how close we were aside, I had never felt trouble about not getting along with Ai Fa. I even told her anything I want without hesitation, even though we didn't know each other for very long.

Even though we stayed under the same roof as if that was the most natural thing, when I first came to Forest's Edge, I only decided to stay in Ai Fa's house temporary to avoid getting into trouble which would make Ai Fa responsible.

That might be so, I had only known Ai Fa for a week, and I already said I wanted to surprise Donda Wu with my cooking. That must be a troubling action for Ai Fa—— But Ai Fa actual bore the same grudge, and was maybe even more agitated than I was. When she heard Donda Wu disparage my cooking, she was angry on my behalf.

Ai Fa always show a cold face, but her mood swings a lot, so I think this is only natural. But speaking of which, Ai Fa seldom showed her emotions to a group.

Ai Fa once told me——「I don't want you to suddenly disappear.」

Hmm~... This is bad.

I don't think I could explain the relationship between Ai Fa and myself clearly.

And discussing such things when Ai Fa wasn't around felt like I was betraying her.

I could only apologize to Lala Wu:

「Sorry, I don't know how to explain it.」

Lala Wu clicked her tongue, then turned her gaze to her sister tending to the pot diagonally away from her.

「Leina-nee, what do you think? We seldom talks to Ai Fa right?」

I thought Leina Wu would be troubled by this question, but her answer was faster than I imagined.

And her answer actually was:I still hope Ai Fa can marry into the Wu clan.

But why?

When she heard Lala Wu’s surprised question, Leina Wu smiled with her teeth visible, and glanced momentarily at me.

Because Rimee and Grandma Jiba admires her, and I think she is an outstanding person… Furthermore, the Fa house will become a kin of the Wu clan

Hmm… Doubts arose in my heart once again.

I was happy that Leina Wu opened her heart to me, but compared to Rimee Wu and Lala Wu who had a big age gap from me, I wasn’t sure how to interact with Leina Wu who was my age.

I couldn’t thank her sincerely after hearing what she said.

Rimee thinks it’s fine.

Rimee tried her best to stir the pot Ai Fa entrusted her, and said cheerfully:

Even if Ai Fa and Asuta aren’t our family or kin, I still like them! It will be great if our houses are nearer!

That was what I like about Rimee Wu.

I hope she could stay by Ai Fa’s side forever and spread her cheerful smile.

If you get along with the other party, you will naturally become friends.

After giving this mediocre advice to Lala Wu, I ended this topic.

4

After that, the war started.

Noon just passed.

Well then, we will proceed as I explained yesterday, team Ditto Min Wu will cut the meat, team Leina Wu will dice the aria, team Mia Lei Wu will grilled the poitan.

Eleven women gathered in the Wu main house.

Half of them were the women staying in the Wu clan village.

I splitted the eleven people into three groups to handle different task.

Grandma Ditto Min, Vena Wu and three others was responsible for cutting the steak and preparing the hamburg steak.

Leina Wu, Rimee Wu and two others will dice the aria to be used in the hamburg steak.

Mia Lei Wu and Lala Wu will use the stoves outside to grilled the poitan.

Sati Lei Wu will head to a house with young children, and they would take turns watching the children and grilling poitan.

There would be a hundred guests today after all.

And the men could eat almost twice the amount of a woman.

Just calculating it this way, I had to prepare enough meat and grilled poitan for 150 people.

I added a lot of ingredients in the vegetable stew, but I didn’t know how the guests would allocate the meat in the stew. If I calculate the poitan

in the stew, everyone would have less than half a poitan.

I heard that the custom in Forest's Edge was to provide more than sufficient food during big feasts, so I decided to omit the ingredients in the stew from my calculations.

The denizens of Forest's Edge usually live a plain and simple life, but it was different during a banquet.

In that case, I had to keep grilling the food.

And so, assuming there were one hundred and fifty guests——

Allocating 500g to one person, that would be 75kg.

One person would require two poitan, so that was three hundred.

So I decided to grill that many poitan.

On top of that, I asked next two biggest branch houses to cook the simple new dish 「fried vegetables」.

Since the ingredients in the stew was omitted, and everyone needs to eat three aria, we had to expend 450 of them.

After boiling it or frying it, the aria would shrink a lot. But just using one ingredient would not be appetizing for everyone.

And so, I chose a few vegetables that were suited for frying, being tino that resembles cabbage and pula that looks like green pepper to complement the aria. I fried a large amount of vegetables as a side dish for the steak and hamburg steak.

As everyone needed to consume three aria a day, the numbers still fell short even if I fry them. Having just one stew as a soup made me uneasy too. So I decided to add a soup with the three aforementioned vegetables and meat, so everyone could consume one entire aria from this soup.

And of course, kiba meat was also added to this soup. We used more than 120kg of meat in the soup, meat dishes and stew.

Going by rough estimates, there were 800g of meat for each woman, and 1.6kg for every man. I think—— this was a very sufficient amount.

The menu for today were as follows——

·Kiba steak（thigh, shoulder, ribs）

·Kiba hamburg steak

·Vegetable stew made from various vegetables, tarapa and kiba meat

·Grilled poitan with gigo mixed in

·Three types of fried vegetables

·Soup with three vegetables and kiba meat

As the hearth care taker for this wedding banquet, this was my final conclusion.

Given how oily and simple the dishes were, I considered adding a cold dish of kiba meat. But I feel that it didn't seem to fit well with the banquet of a hunter tribe. After discussing with the Lutim house, they told me that 「compared to cold food, everyone prefers hot food more」, so I gave up on that idea.

By the way, when I asked them if we should removed the bones from the ribs, Dan Lutim said「you absolutely can't!」, and completely rejected my proposal.

「Eating it with the bone is what makes it good!」

I was worried that someone would make a scene like Dan Lutim that night when they see the torso of a kiba. But Dan Lutim even said:「If there are any leftovers, I will eat them all!」, seemed like I was worried over nothing.

In this five days, the concept that 「throwing the torso of the kiba away is a pity」 had gradually taken root in the Wu clan village. The women from the branch family here to learn and practice cooking took back the leftover meat happily, and cook it for their family, and succeeded in clearing the stubborn views of the men.

As the representative of the reformist Kaslan Lutim obviously wouldn’t ditch the kiba’s torso when they hunt kiba. And so, I didn’t need to worry about the Lutim house.

When I discovered that Ai Fa didn’t have the view that “the torso of a kiba is monta feed”, I realized only the Wu clan and the equally powerful Lutim house harbours such views.

There would be guest from seven houses, with over a hundred people. Of these seven houses, only the Lei house could match the Wu clan and Lutim house in scale. The Min and Mamu house were significantly smaller, while the Lilim and Mufa house were even smaller. These houses probably wouldn’t mind that.

“If the Lei house people don’t eat, then I will!”

Dan Lutim roared loudly.

Simply put, if everyone could only get one ribs, the guests would probably feel dissatisfied.

In the end, we prepared 150 spare ribs as a service for the father of my client.

And so—— noon passed, and the Wu clan village turned into a war zone.

□Asuta! We finished cutting all the aria!□

□Wah, that’s fast! Please mince the meat next!□

□Mince meat! Got it!□

Rimee Wu’s knifework could rival her mother and sister, and she started mincing the meat.

I set the weight of each hamburg steak to be 200g.

If eaten together with the steaks, this portion would be plenty. But the men might hold reservation on this dish. So far, I had only tried making this dish in the Wu main house, and two of the four men there gave negative reviews. Hence, I was mentally prepared that half the men would not be able to accept this dish.

That being said, I still thought up a new way of eating it.

If they didn’t like the soft hamburg steak, I would suggest they put the hamburg steak into the soup, and return it into minced meat.

That was the result of my research.

On the second day of my research, in order to fulfill my promise with Ai Fa, I decided to serve hamburg steak for dinner, but I didn't want to have different dishes for the men and the women.

Research aside, dinner was still dinner, and I think a family should eat the same meal.

And so, I developed hamburg steak soup.

Everyone was free to decide if they want to put the hamburg steak into the soup. If they do, they should stir the hamburg steak so it breaks apart before eating them.

They only like to eat tough meat when eating meat by itself. When they cook kiba pot, they would boil it with strong fire, and eat the meat that had turned mushy.

It was ruse I thought up, but the Wu clan men didn't express any dissatisfaction.

When I tried it, the meat soup would have the aroma of grilled hamburg steak, which increase the complexity of its taste.

And so, I decided to use this eating method in the banquet.

I also prepared fruit wine sauce, so those eating hamburg steak could add the gravy freely, and the same would apply for the banquet.

And so, as I cooked dinner for the Wu clan, I gradually completed the menu for the banquet.

Returning to the topic.

Back in the Fa house, I would mix in a lot of diced aria into the hamburg steak. But as the Wu clan village had many pots, I wouldn't be troubled over how the aria was used. And so, I would only use a quarter of an aria for every 200g of hamburg steak. This was the same ratio used when cooking hamburg steak in 「Tsurumi restaurant」.

Next, I prepared one hundred 200g hamburg steak. To preempt any that get burned during cooking, I prepared 20 more as spare, so that would require 30 diced aria.

「We will fry the aria. Ai Fa, please start the fire in a stove.」

Ai Fa nodded, then raise a fire in a stove nearby.

When so many women were gathered together, Ai Fa's presence became diminished, but she was actually supporting everyone. As the Wu clan's women were trained by me, Ai Fa couldn't use a kitchen knife as nimbly as them. Her job was to start fire, carry the ingredients and

other miscellaneous work.

She brought a large number of ingredients from the food store, then carried the prepped food back into the food store, shift the heavy pots and refill the water in the flasks ——Ai Fa took on all these unglamorous but tough work.

“Thanks, you are a big help.”

I said quietly into Ai Fa ears. She tilted her head, then mimicked me and whispered into mine:

“Since these are the dishes that will be served in the Lutim house’s banquet, we should let their kin do the cooking right? That will be better for me.”

I tilted my head in doubt, then said quietly to her again:

“That might be so, but I’m not their kin either.”

Ai Fa tilted her head and moved her mouth even closer to me:

“You are working for them because you are paid to right? Don’t lump our position together.”

While we repeatedly argued over this, Rimee Wu who was working hard on mincing meat suddenly interjected:

"What are you whispering about?"

"Nothing, it's a secret meeting."

"Huh!? How sly! Rimee wants to have a meeting too!"

"Just kidding, we are just chatting idly. We are just lowering our voices so we won't disturb the others."

I answered with a smile —— and locked eyes with Leina Wu who was staring at us.

Leina Wu was acting strange.

I was just whispering with Ai Fa, she didn't need to look at me with such sad eyes. I greased the heated pot with fats, put the diced aria into the pot, and felt a little gloomy.

Leina Wu was a capable girl. She was honest, innocent, kind, good at studying and has an outstanding appearance.

To be honest, if this charming and capable girl expressed a liking to me

beyond friendship, it would make me feel more terrible than the allures from Vena Wu.

I didn’t plan to find a partner in this world, and if I really settle on anyone here—— that person would definitely not be Leina Wu or Vena Wu.

…Don’t you need to add fruit wine?, Ai Fa’s voice pulled me back to reality.

Uwah, I forgot! Ai Fa, can you——

She waved a bottle of fruit wine before me.

This is the first time I saw you make a mistake while cooking.

When I hurriedly poured the fruit wine onto the aria that was turning caramel coloured, Ai Fa’s laughing voice echoed in my ears.

What kind of face was she making when she said that!? When I wanted to check, Lala Wu yelled:Ai Fa, please bring the additional poitan over!, and she disappeared from my sight.

Damn it! I’m so uncool!

I used the spatula I made myself to scoop the fried aria onto a wooden plate.

After doing so, I raised my head and——

Leina Wu who was mincing the meat looked at me once again with a pitiful face.

Vol. 3 :

Chapter 5

Chapter 5
Cooking with Wild Game Volume 3 Chapter 5

The Lutim Banquet (Second Half)



Translator: Skythewood

Editor:

1

The sun slowly set into the west.

In less than two hours, darkness would engulf this world.

When the sun touch the western edge of the forest, the bride and groom would reach the Wu clan village, and the banquet would begin.

Right now, they were visiting the every house of their relatives, and accepting their blessings.

After gifting their blessings to the newly wed, the kins would also head to the Wu clan village.

Almost thirty of their relatives had already gathered in the plaza.

Children under the age of five didn't have the rights to participate in the banquet, and these poor toddlers would be gathered inside a branch house, and the women would take turn to look after them.

Of the men gathered in the plaza, I could only see elderly men and youth younger than thirteen.

Even on a day like this, the hunters still needed to venture into the forest.

To avoid any misfortune, the hunters wouldn’t push themselves, and return early. Aside from the Lutim house and Min house, the men from the other five houses were completing their obligations as hunters.

If they could present tusks and horns they hunted on that very day, it would be the greatest blessing.

That’s how selfless, pure and brave the denizens of Forest's Edge was.

Alright—— we are all set.

After completing about 70% of the preparation, I wiped away the sweat on my brow.

The poitan had been grilled.

The three vegetables has been fried.

The stew and meat soup were done.

The fruit wine sauce for the hamburg steak had been poured back into the empty fruit wine bottles.

Only the meat needed to be grilled.

Piles of hamburg steak and a portion of the steak filled the stove room of the Wu main house.

There were six stoves in the Wu main house, and to differentiate between strong and weak fire, only three pairs could be used at the same time.

As the pots were big, five hamburg steak could be grilled at the same time.

It was almost time.

Well then, time to start grilling.

On my word, everyone put the hamburg steak into the pot. The stove room was filled with the appetizing aroma of fats and meat being cooked.

Grilling the hamburg steak was the most difficult to master, so Leina Wu, Mia Lei Wu and I took on this task.

The women in the main house all headed to the branch houses to grill the steaks there.

The branch family women without any assigned tasks stayed in the Wu main house to carry the iron pots.

The mother and sister of the youth Shin Wu stood besides me with a Krilee stick in hand.

Okay, please proceed.

The two of them used the Krilee stick to shift the iron pot to the stove with the weak fire.

After the red juice ooze out from the surface of the meat, I had to flip it over and return the pot back to the stove with the strong fire. I will then pour in fruit wine and cover it with a lid.

The fragrance filled the entire stove room before I cover the lid.

Mia Lei Wu was using the stoves behind me, and Leina Wu was using the stoves outdoor, everything was proceeding smoothly.

...Asuta, I'm honoured to be of help.

At this moment, someone said to me quietly.

It was Shin Wu’s elder sister—— Shela Wu.

In Forest's Edge, this girl was really slender and had a frail air about her. She should be slightly older than me.

“After my father Ryada lost his ability to hunt, my younger brother who is just sixteen had to take on the mantle of house head, and our family felt gloomy about our future… But after tasting the dish you taught us, we were filled with happiness, and wants to stay strong and live on. We’re very grateful to you.”

“No, you are too kind. Your knifework is excellent, and is as good as Leina Wu.”

I opened the lid to check on the hamburg steak, and smiled at her:

“You have to keep making delicious meal and bring happiness to your family. That’s something only you two can do… It’s almost time to shift back to the weak fire stove.”

“Yes.”

The mother and daughter worked together again to move the iron pot.

After it was done, we finished the first batch.

“Asuta, you are an incredible person. My brother once said that you looked as ferocious as a hunter when you tend to the hearth.”

“That’s flattering me too much, I’m not that great.”

“No, it’s true. You can control the flame at will, and turn the tough and smelly kiba meat into a delicious meal… You are just like a magician from the eastern kingdom.”

“That’s the job of a chef. There’s no need to send out magicians, there are plenty of chefs better than me in the city… alright, it’s done.”

Fake rubber tree leaves were placed on the working platform, and I placed the hamburg steak onto it.

After that, I used the wooden spatula to clear away the stains, and put the pot back onto the strong fire stove. After throwing down some fats, I put in five more meat patties. While I was doing that, Ai Fa placed another layer of fake rubber tree leaves on top of the hamburg steak, flat stones were placed on either side of the plank for support, and another board was placed on top.

We kept piling up the completed food this way.

“Ah, Ai Fa, what trees does these leaves come from? I use it often, but I don’t know what it is actually called..”

Fate rudder tree.

Huh?

These are leaves from the fate rudder tree.

Ah, I see.

I will just call them fake rubber tree leaves then… I smiled wryly.

These leaves were bigger than two of my palms put together, didn’t have any weird smile and had a smooth surface. Whenever there was a need to grill large amount of meat, this was an indispensable tool.

The guests would bring their own plates and skewers, so I used the thin planks as a tray, and the fake rubber tree leaves as plates. For the women, both making the thin planks and foraging hundreds of fake rubber tree leaves were a tedious workload.

But all of their expression were cheerful.

How surprised and happy would their family and kins be when they saw all these dishes? Their faces were bright from anticipation, and even though the head chef was me, these were made together by everyone.

It would be great if this dish could deepen the bonds between the whole family.

I hope everyone could enjoy this happiness.

And I hope that Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min would have a great wedding.

"Asuta! We have finished grilling the hamburg steak here! I will start grilling the steaks now!"

"Okay, please go ahead!"

"I'm back!! Asuta, things are going smoothly in the other houses too!"

"Thank you, Rimee Wu. It's about time to heat up the vegetable stew, can you help me tell that to everyone?"

"Got it!"

The work was progressing smoothly.

After that, I heard there was an accident when shifting the pot, and five steaks were ruined. But the women from the branch family immediately came over to cut more meat, sprinkle salt and pico leaves on them, then left in a hurry.

「Oh no! This time, Vena-nee spilled the pot of aria soup!」

「What!? Is anyone hurt!?」

「No! But Vena-nee is about to cry! Or rather, she is already crying!」

「Don’t need to cry! Everything except for the vegetable stew can be salvaged! This is a long banquet, tell her not to panic and take it slow, and make another pot in the usual way…! Ah, do anyone in that house know how to cook the soup?」

「I don’t know! But if there isn’t, Rimee can help!」

「Okay! I’m counting on you!」

I was already prepared for such sudden incidents.

While we were busy with various matters, the Wu main house grilled all the meat.

After that, we filled the pot with water, and piled as much food on top of the pot as possible. It didn’t have much effect, but it could keep the food warm.

Okay, things are fine here. I will check on all the other houses.

Got it. Well then, Leina Wu and the other girls can go change. We will keep watch over here.

After Mama Mia Lei Wu said that, Leina Wu, Shela Wu and the other young girls answered:Yes. and left the stove room.

When this mother noticed my puzzled expression, she smiled gently:

It’s a banquet after all. For the unwed girls, this is a chance for them to stand out. Many people got engaged during such an event.

I see… So that’s how it is.

In that case, I better not go near Vena Wu or Leina Wu unless it was work related.

Only one unwed woman remained in the stove room. When I looked at Ai Fa, she stood majestically with a scary expression, then glared at me and said:I’m from the Fa house.

I didn’t really get it, but Ai Fa didn’t seem to need to dress up.

I felt relieved and a bit of pity at the same time, a complicated feeling.

“Well then, let’s go. If there are any problems, we will come back here immediately.”

Ai Fa and I walked out of the stove room together.

The sun was going to touch the western forest soon, so time was short.

“Alright then, the job is now half done.”

I glanced at the plaza where more people had gathered, then walked to the branch houses to the side.

“Half? Aren’t most of the food done?”

“After finishing cooking, we still need to serve the food to the customers. Our job is only done when the bride taste the last steak and hamburg steak.”

The situation in the branch houses were fine.

Some houses were filled with fried vegetables, others had piles of grilled poitan, while another had tons of steak. Some of these houses were heating up the vegetable stew that was moved over there.

When we reached the last house, we saw Rimee Wu working hard to scoop up the foam in the soup by herself.

“Rimee Wu, thank you for your hard work. I see, this is the culprit that made Vena-nee cry.”

The stove besides Rimee Wu was wet, with aria and pieces of meat scattered all over.

“Where did everyone go?”

“They all went to change, all of them haven’t marry yet.”

“Then, what about you? Don’t you need to change?”

“Yes, I will change after this soup is done.”

I see. I definitely have to see Rimee Wu all dressed up.

“I will switch with you. The bride’s group should be reaching the Wu village soon, so you should hurry up and change. Ah, can you go help Mama Mia Lei after you have changed?”

“Got it! Thank you…! Hmm, Ai Fa, don’t you need to change?”

“I’m from the Fa house. I’m not a kin of the Lutim house that is hosting this wedding, I shouldn’t dress for the occasion.”

“I see… I wanted to see you in banquet attire though. See you later then!”

Rimee Wu charged out of the stove room in a flash.

The moment she stepped out, Shin Wu stepped in. That’s right, this was Shin Wu’s home.

“Yo, you are back, Shin Wu. Good to see that you have returned safely.”

“Yes… How are things on your side?”

“No problem, your mother and sister are working hard.”

I wasn’t paying lip service.

The two of them were very dependable, which was why I asked them to help make hamburg steak in the main house instead of staying home. Not just carrying the pots, they were also a great help in making mincemeat and meat patties.

Also—— I really like this quiet, cold and clumsy youth. Whenever he

bickered with Ludo Wu who was his complete opposite in personality, my soul felt at ease.

Shin Wu stared at his Ai Fa with his eyes that were a bit narrow.

「… So you are Ai Fa from the Fa house.」

Speaking of which, this was the first time the two of them met.

「I'm the head of this house, Shin Wu. Sorry for being so sudden, but there is something I would like to ask you.」

Huh? I alternated my gaze between the two of them.

They were both expressionless, and I couldn't garner any intel with my naked eye.

However, just seeing the two of them standing still quietly filled me with unease.

「Ai Fa, you——」, when Shin Wu was about to continue speaking——

「Shin, you are back?」

Shela Wu’s voice could be heard.

「Ara…」

She stopped when she stepped into the stove room

「So you are here too. Ai Fa and Asuta, welcome to my humble abode.」

We didn’t separate with Shela Wu for long, and she had already changed into the so called banquet attire.

Uwah… I was a little surprised.

Shela Wu looked frial, and her appearance wouldn’t leave a strong impression. But she looked really graceful and delicate, completely different from her usual self.

Her hair was dark brown like her brother. She didn’t tie them up, and let them flow gently onto her back.

She wore a few flowers and berries on her hair, and had a translucent veil on.

The orange sunlight shone onto the veil, and it glittered like gems. So such a fabric existed in this world too! I was dumbstruck.

She probably changed the clothe covering her breasts and waist too, I didn’t remember too clearly. The swirly patterns of them seemed more intrinsic, and the colours more vibrant.

A purple translucent cloth were also tied around her waist, which drapes to her ankle. Aside from the krilee fruit to repel bugs, she also wore accessories made from a colourful assortment of wood and metal on her neck, wrist and ankles ——Shela Wu had become mesmerizing.

“Ah, is this the new pot of soup? If it is fine with you, please let me take over the stove.”

“Is that fine? I will leave it to you then… Be careful not to burn your clothes.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Her smiling face looked so gentle and charming.

When I turned towards Shin Wu, that youth shook his head calmly and said:

“My apologies, you are in the middle of work right? I will find you again after your work is done.”

“I see, then I will make a move first.”

Ai Fa left the stove room unhesitantly. I had no choice but to nod at the other two and follow her.

“Hey, do you know why Shin Wu want to ask you?”

“I don’t know.”

Ai Fa answered icily.

“He’s a man from the Wu branch house right? I don’t know what he wants to talk to me about.”

“That’s true.”

Never mind, Shin Wu wasn’t a bad guy, he wouldn’t plan anything nefarious. Even though there was doubts in my mind, I still needed to do my job.

When we walked into the plaza——

Cheers erupted the very next moment.

The bride and groom were here.

A group of thirty slowly moved towards the plaza. They were the family of the Lutim and Min house.

An elderly man stood at the very front.

He was probably the elder of the Lutim house. His was bald, and a long white beard flowed down his chest. I guess he must be very old, but his back was straight, strides were steady and he was wearing the clothes of a hunter.

Two children stood on either side of him.

One boy and one girl, both of them were younger than Rimee Wu.

They might be young, but the boy was already in hunter’s attire, puffing out his chest and lifting his head up proudly.

The girl was dressed like Shela Wu, a translucent veil covered her head, and a brilliant smile on her face.

Their smalls hands carried a basket decorated with flowers and berries, a large number of white kiba tusks and horns were piled on it. These were probably the blessings for the newlyweds gifted by their kins. The men who had yet to offer their blessings walked to them quietly. After greeting the elder leading the group, they placed their tusks and horns into the basket.

Surrounded by an entourage of men in hunters wear and women covered in sheer fabric—— the stars for today entered the plaza.

Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min.

Naturally, Kaslan Lutim wore a hunter’s attire.

The only difference was the kiba fur cape that was wrapped around his muscular body.

That was definitely a kiba fur cape—— Because the kiba head was still attached to the cape.

The kiba head was placed on Kaslan Lutim’s broad right shoulder, as if it was biting him. The tusks and horns on the head protrude out prominently, giving the impression of it being alive.

The cape covered the right side of his body. As the left side of his body was bare, his large and small blades hung openly on his waist.

They were probably custom made for a wedding. The sheath of the blades were covered in leather, marked with a brand and decorated with brightly coloured stones.

He wore a simple grass crown on his head of brown hair, but that was

enough to make the heir to the Lutim house look braver and stronger than usual.

The bride walked quietly besides him, her head covered by a veil that glittered like gems.

However, the bride’s veil was different from Shela Wu and the other women. It had two or three layers, and a crown woven from grass just like the groom’s was placed on it.

The veil covered her face, even though the glitter obscured her expression, it was still clear that the bride was smiling blissfully.

The translucent fabric draped down from her shoulders and waist, covering her brown skin in a gentle layer of light.

The clothe around her chest and waist had a colourful swirling pattern, and the accessories on her neck and limbs were bright and eye catching—— The glow of the stones on her body were more special and beautiful than anyone else.

The cheers blessing the couple kept going on, shaking the very air in the plaza. After that, a laugh that covered all the cheers.

It was the father of the groom, Dan Lutim.

The burly bald man led a posse of men and was laughing for unknown reasons.

I didn’t know why he was laughing—— but he must be feeling really glad.

He must be filled with happiness and glee.

His son had grown to be an outstanding man, and married such a beautiful wife. That must make him extremely happy.

His beer belly wobbled, and the fats on his face also shook.

The children who saw that burst out laughing.

When Dan Lutim saw those children, he laughed out loud again.

It was some distance away so I couldn’t see clearly, but there seemed to be tears in his big round eyes.

Asuta. Someone tugged my arm gently after calling me.

I turned my head and found Ai Fa staring at me quietly.

I nodded and clenched my fist.

“It’s finally time for the second half.”

The banquet —— was about to begin

2

“Please bring the vegetable stew to the plaza! It’s hot, so take it slow, don’t need to rush!”

What awaited me was chaos.

The Wu clan erected a stage in front of their main house, and after the bride and groom were ushered up, Dan Lutim gave an opening speech. But we didn’t have time to listen to him. The moment the speech ends, we had to start serving out the dishes, so the guests could start dining.

The first thing on the menu was vegetable stew.

Ten makeshift stoves were erected around the plaza in a circular shape. We shifted the four pots as far apart as possible, and started a weak fire.

After that, we brought over six pots filled with water, and set them on the remaining stoves. These were used to keep the food warm. We started a medium fire in the stove, placed the board that acted as a

table on top of it, and then put the steaks and fried vegetables there. For the steaks, I chose to serve the thigh meat and Chuck flap that wouldn't start any controversy.

The women from the Wu clan stood guard besides every stove, and I asked them to distribute the food. I felt sorry about it, but they had to take turns to eat their dinner. From what I could observe, none of the women showed any unhappiness about this.

The women in charge of the steaks had pile of poitan in their hands. Whenever someone came over to take the meat, they would give them a poitan and tell them:「This is poitan.」

The ladies handling the vegetable stew would pour the soup for the guests, and tell them:「There's only one bowl for each person.」

People would grilled and cook large amount of food in the usual banquets, and everyone was free to take as much as they like. Was my way of doing things too stingy?

However, I didn't think that just grilling and cooking meat without stench was enough. I hope to bring even greater joy to everyone, that the delicious food could make them forget their troubles for the moment.

My job was to move between the houses and relay instructions. Towards the end, I lost track of where each of the women was. Even Ai Fa who was by my side was gone after Grandma Ditto Min called for her.

「Well then, the banquet will now officially begin——!」

Dan Lutim’s deafening voice came from the stage.

“Offering our blessings to Kaslan Lutim from the Lutim house, and Ema Min from the Min house!”

“Offering them our blessings!”

After the hundred odd kin said these words at the same time, the ceremonial fire was started in the wood piled in the center of the plaza.

Torches were also placed on the stands erected around the stage, which drove away the darkness.

Illuminated by the bright orange light, the people picked up their cutlery and skewers.

“Drink wine and feast on the meat! The women from the Wu clan worked very hard to prepare for this day, let us offer them our blessings!”

As Dan Lutim had been shouting all this time, his voice had turned hoarse.

Spurred by his shouts, the people grabbed fruit wine bottles—— and picked up meat on the fake rubber tree leaves.



Their strong white teeth tore the meat apart.

They drank the vegetable soup in their plates.

And hesitantly put the grilled poitan into their mouth.

I had no way to check what kind of face the guests were making—— I could only rush around between each of the houses.

「Next will be the spare ribs in this house! Are you ready?」

「No problem. The meat we served in the beginning got gobbled in no time.」

The mother in this branch house said with a laugh, but I still couldn't remember her name.

「We should set off now. The girls taking the first shift wants to taste the vegetable stew too, and is getting impatient.」

This mother's arms were bigger than mine. Each plank had seven plates worth of spare ribs, and she could carry three planks at one go.

「I'm going to relief their shift—— Hey, this vegetable stew is amazing.」

Oh, you already tried it?

It will be a tragedy if I didn’t. I rushed back here after finishing the stew. The other girls will be back soon, so you should eat something too alright?

It’s fine, I will eat them. I will be counting on you then.

Alright.

The mother went off.

After that, a roar came from outside:

It’s here, this is the spare ribs of the kiba! Those who are brave enough, come take a bite!

It was the right decision for me to work behind the scene for the entire banquet. Even if an outsider like me appeared before everyone, it wouldn’t make the food taste any better.

Sorry for being late! We will bring out the rest!

Several unfamiliar girls in beautiful attire rushed into the stove room.

“All the steak that was served in the beginning got gobbled up, there is just a little bit of vegetable stew left!”

“Alright, the soup will be next. Thank you everyone.”

Shin Wu house and their neighbour was responsible for the soup.

After rushing into Shin Wu’s house, I found Shela Wu tending to the hearth alone.

“Hmm? You’re alone? Your mother should be here too right?”

“She went to try out the vegetable stew, I already tried it earlier.”

Shela Wu had a frail smile on her face.

“This vegetable stew taste really good… I’m about to cry from happiness.”

“I see. Please let me cook this for you when you hold your wedding.”

When she heard that, Shela Wu’s face was covered in sorrow, and she shook her head.

“I’m born with a weak body, although I’m of marriageable age, I still didn’t marry. A woman who can’t even carry a water flask by herself will just be a problem in the house.”

“That’s not true! Even if you can’t move a water flask, you can still carry an iron pot. You can tend to the hearth if you possess that much arm strength.”

I was a little flustered at the moment and even winked at Shela Wu.

“On top of that, your culinary skill is outstanding, you will definitely be a bride that excels in cooking. When the men understands the merit of delicious food, they won’t be able to stop laying their eyes on you.”

“Not at all…”

Shela Wu was blushing.

At this moment, her mother came back.

“The vegetable stew is almost gone. Shela, it’s time for us to go.”

“Yes.”

The steady mother and frail daughter carried the iron pot together with a Krilee stick.

After they left, I walked to the house next door.

The rest of the soup should be placed there.

After entering the stove room, I realized someone had already moved the three pots of soup. The stove was put out and there was only an iron pot with stew stains placed on it. And—— a girl was standing alone in the vast stove room.

It was Vena Wu.

Asuta…

She widened her sexy eyes that was drooping a little.

Vena Wu was in banquet attire too.

She wore a translucent veil, and her waist was covered with the same sheer fabric—— Even in usual times, her hair and limbs were decorated more extravagantly than other women, and there were even more accessories now.

Her chestnut coloured hair she would tie around her right shoulder was let down, making her even sexier.

However, I couldn’t fall for her beauty trap today.

So the soup here had been moved to the plaza. Alright then, I need to attend to other works.

I turned to leave.

Wait!

Vena Wu’s yell echoed behind me.

This was the first time I heard her yelling so loudly. In the face of such an abnormal situation, I couldn’t help stopping and turning to look at her.

Vena Wu slouched her shoulders like a child, then said with her head low:

Asuta… Are you angry…?

Hmm? Why should I be angry?

"I… spilled the aria soup…"

"Ah, it's about that. It's fine, the new pot of soup was done in time. It's just a small matter, I'm glad you aren't hurt."

"… You aren't angry…"

She looked up at me in the eyes.

As I couldn't tell when she was playing around or being serious, I really didn't know how to get along with her.

"I'm not angry… Instead of such trivial matters, you should enjoy this banquet. You are in charge of distributing the vegetable stew right? In that case, you don't have any other work for the time being?"

"I hate banquets… A lot of men will propose to me…"

You could accept one!

I wanted to say that, but I felt that it would make things more complicated, so I held my peace.

"Alright then, I'm going now."

"Wait!"

She raised her voice again.

Vena Wu hugged herself with her arms and squirmed her body.

"Erm... I want to leave this house... But I don't hate my family..."

"What?"

What was she saying?

It was almost time for me to go to the next place.

"I actually love my family more than anyone else... I love everyone of my family... And I hope they can be happy..."

"What are you talking about?"

"I don't want to hate my family..."

What Vena Wu did next surprised me again.

She knelt down while hugging herself, then looked up at me as if she was pleading:

“It’s fine if it is Ai Fa… I can hate Ai Fa… But if you get together with Ai Fa I will try to seduce you and destroy everything…”

“What the hell are you talking about!”

“I don’t want to hate Leina.”

Vena Wu said to me clearly for the first time.

“Please don’t get together with Leina… I don’t want to hate my family…”

I was completely confused.

I could tell from Leina Wu’s attitude that she has feelings for me. But even if we moved to the stage of marriage, the other Wu clan members wouldn’t permit it.

Vena Wu looked sullen, utterly different from her usual self.

After troubling over it for a moment, I ran to Vena Wu and placed my hands on her soft shoulders.

“It’s fine. I don’t know what you are worried about, but you won’t ever face such a crazy future.”

Luckily, I could say this sincerity without hiding how I felt.

Vena Wu looked up at me with teary eyes.

“I won’t marry Leina Wu. So you don’t need to hate her —— I can promise you that.”

I held Vena Wu’s shoulders firmly and nodded forcefully. I already did my best to console her.

“... Sorry for interrupting your work...”

“Not at all, please proceed with the ending part as planned... I’m going off now.”

To escape from Vena Wu’s gaze, I charged out of the stove room.

My heart was filled with guilt which made me flustered.

I didn’t have time to console Vena Wu as I had to hurry to the next spot.

Was the guilt that I was feeling part of the job description?

In that case, I could only bear with it.

As I was thinking about that, I had already ran around the outside of the plaza.

The sun had already set without me realizing it, and the world was only illuminated by the range flames

From some distance away, the people were just black shadows to me.

I couldn’t see their expression at all.

However, they were emitting a large amount of heat.

The plaza was filled with the heat and life of the denizens of Forest's Edge —— it could even rival the raging ceremonial flame.

What a beautiful world.

A world full of life and energy.

I kept running, as if this amazing life force was pushing my back.

My next destination was the Wu main house that was far away.

The bride and groom sat quietly on the stage opposite the Wu clan main house. Dan Lutim stood beneath the stage with spare ribs in both hands, laughing out loudly.

Of all the dark figure in the dim lighting, he was the only person I wouldn’t get wrong.

“You don’t want to eat? If not, then I will eat it all!”

Please give everyone who wants a spare ribs a chance to try them—— I prayed as I jogged to the stove room.

The next dish was finally hamburg steak.

“Ah, I finally see you, Asuta!”

There were about ten women in the stove room.

These were the rear guards who had already enjoyed the banquet, and will start working now.

Rimee Wu was one of them too. She stood at the entrance with ribs in both hands.

“Heehee, I’m mimicking Dan Lutim.”

“No no. Never mind that old man, if you also eat so much, there won’t be enough for everyone. Actually, everyone is suppose to eat just one.”

“That’s why I picked the smaller ones…! Is not no good too?”

Rimee Wu’s dejected face was just like a puppy. I patted her head and said:

“You are really cute, so it’s fine. Your clothes are nice too.”

“Really? I’m so happy!”

The little girls’ banquet attire were just like the adults. Rimee Wu wore a glittering veil, and had all sorts of accessories and bangles on her. She was definitely the cutest one here.

The large red flower on either side of her temples were exceptionally prominent. This accessory suits the red headed Rimee Wu really well.

“Oh right, have you seen Ai Fa? I didn’t see her around right after the banquet started.”

“Ai Fa? Grandma Ditto Min, you called for her right?”

"I only told her that the grand elder is looking for her. I didn't see her after that either."

Grandma Ditto Min was also part of the hamburg steak team.

My lieutenant, and also the only other guerilla member, just where was Ai Fa hiding?

"Erm, If you are looking for the female hunter from the Fa house, I saw her carrying out the steaks just now."

Donda Wu's second brother's daughter in law said.

"I see, thank you."

It would be fine if she was acting on her own initiative without my instructions.

I also realized that running around by myself was the most efficient way.

"Looks like it is time for hamburg steak to go. That means everyone ate half of the dishes… Are things progressing too quickly?"

"Your dishes are delicious, so everyone finished it in no time."

「Ara, I think most of it is eaten by the head of the Lutim house.」

The older ladies chatted cheerfully.

I wanted to laugh along with them, but unfortunately, I couldn’t.

「After the hamburg steak goes out, everyone will just have one more steak each. Maybe we will need to cook more meat?」

「It’s possible, it seems that this much food isn’t enough. Both the men and the women are eating heartily and fighting over the meat.」

Was this the so called finding joy in work?

If there really wasn’t enough food, we had already made preparation for additional grilled meat. But we didn’t have more vegetables or poitan, and the most we could manage was more aria and tino.

「I understand. Please move the hamburg steak out, I will start cutting the meat. I will slice them thin so it could be grilled with just strong fire.」

「Alright, we are off then.」

Grandma Ditto Min gave the word quietly, and everyone carried out

about 120 hamburg steak and many bottles filled with fruit wine sauces.

"Ah, Rimee Wu, when you are free, can you check on Vena Wu? She should be in the stove room of the house with three pots of soup."

"Vena-nee...? Ah, Vena-nee always drinks by herself during banquets. Got it! Rimee Wu will help you bring out the hamburg steak first!"

"Thank you, I will be counting on you then."

After the rear guard brought the hamburg steak out, the stove room immediately turned spacious.

Only the steak that will be served last was left behind.

On order to keep the steaks warm, I shifted them to the stove and closed the lid, then scooped up some water with the ladle to drink.

I felt exhausted.

And incredibly hyped.

I was a bit worried about Vena Wu, but other then that—— everything was proceeding smoothly.

I didn’t know what kind of faces the guests would make when they dined, but I knew there was nothing to worry about just by looking at the women’s faces.

There wasn’t any major accidents.

I just need to work hard for a bit more, and my job would be done.

I stretched my back, and walked to the food store to bring out the additional meat.

I wonder if Ludo Wu and Shin Wu enjoyed this banquet. I hope Ai Fa tried the vegetable stew.

I picked up the candle stand at the entrance, and entered the food store.

The meat storage should be further in.

We used the vegetable storage space to store the cooked food for the time being, and pushed all the shelves to the wall.

Almost all the vegetables were gone from the shelves.

Only the back up vegetables in case of any mishap during cooking was there, along with the ingredients not used in the dishes today.

I heard the Wu clan and Lutim house would split the cost.

Would this deepen the bonds between the two families? Or would it deepen any gulfs? I didn’t understand the personality of Donda Wu and Jiza Wu too well yet, so I had no way of knowing.

However —— I just needed to finish my work.

I walked into the meat storage as I pondered.

The next instant——

The opened door was shut with a bang.

□Huh?□

I turned around, and a petite and soft thing pounced at my chest.

Despite being small and soft, it had plenty of strength.

I fell back onto the floor just like that.

The silver lining was that the candle stand didn’t topple when I fell.

The light of the candle—— illuminated the complicated expression of Leina Wu.

3

「L-Leina Wu? What happened?」

Leina Wu in banquet wear was on top of me.

She stick close to my chest and looked at me with gloomy eyes.

「Asuta…」

Her petite and sexy lips squeezed out a raspy voice.

「Asuta, I have something to ask of you…」

「M-Me?」

「Please become a Wu clan member.」

Her blue eyes that was right before me had a serious glean as she

stared at me.

"Please leave the Fa house and be a Wu clan member... Please become a part of our family."

"W-Why are you saying this all of a sudden? There's no way Donda Wu and Jiza Wu will permit that."

"I will convince father and Jiza-nii—— If I discuss this with them properly, they will understand."

I didn't think so at all.

Or rather, I didn't want to do that.

"Why are you saying this so suddenly? Leina Wu, I don't understand what you are thinking at all."

"I want to be with you! I want you to be our kin! When a house loses its strength, they will usually join another house. The denizens of Forest's Edge has always relied on each other to survive."

Leina Wu grabbed the chest of my t-shirt tightly.

"Father has definitely acknowledged your strength. Once the clan head

make his decision Jiza-nii can’t go against it. After that, I will spend my time to convince him!

That’s impossible. I won’t leave Ai Fa and become a Wu clan member… How can I do that?

Just what kind of face was I showing now?

Leina Wu burrowed her brows painfully.

I already told Ai Fa how I felt. It’s fine even if it isn’t Darum-nii, there are plenty of unwed men in the branch family. If she lay down her sword and resolve herself to marry… Ai Fa has a charming character, even Papa Donda wanted her to marry into the main house. Normally, no one would propose marriage to a house without kin like the Fa house…

But Ai Fa turned you down right?

She actually said that to Ai Fa during the banquet.

As the door was closed, the noise from the banquet seemed so distant.

After that—— a sorrow-like emotion filled my chest.

… Even so, I still want to be with you.

Leina Wu buried her face in my chest.

「Ai Fa is strong, incredibly strong. She wouldn't waver on this. However… Ai Fa can live by herself, that's how strong she is.」

「You are right.」

Ai Fa had lived by herself for the past two years.

If she didn't met me, she definitely would continue her life in solitude.

However——

We met.

「Ai Fa is a hunter. She chose to hunt kiba and wither away in the forest instead of nurturing the next generation, In that case—— there's no meaning for her to take in a man like you right? The Fa house's bloodline will end with Ai Fa, why don't you become a Wu clan member——」

「Leina Wu.」

I held her soft shoulders.

Thank you for your kind thoughts. I’m grateful to you for worrying about my future… But I can’t do it.

Leina Wu raised her head in surprise.

I looked at the tears welling up in her blue eyes and continued:

I have no intention of leaving the Fa house. Even if Ai Fa can live alone, I can’t do without her—— I’m sorry.

…But why? Even the stubborn men from the branch family acknowledge your strength now. If I have time to convince Jiza-nii, the entire Wu clan will…

I also like everyone in the Wu clan. But I still want to be with Ai Fa.

I pushed Leina Wu’s body away as gently as I could, and propped myself up.

Leina Wu’s body back away heavily onto my knees, her tears finally fell.

I’m sorry… And thank you.

Leina Wu stood up crying.

A strong gleam appeared in her teary eyes, and she looked straight at me.

…I won’t give up.

She rushed out of the door after saying that.

The rowdy sound of the banquet crept in through the opened door once again.

I pushed my incredibly heavy body and stood up.

For Leina Wu, is this the right path to take?

She wanted to accept someone with dubious origins like me into her home, and to live together with her.

If the one who picked me up in the beginning was Leina Wu, instead of Ai Fa—— I would have been so blissed and happy. But the one I met first was Ai Fa.

I couldn’t imagine living my life apart from Ai Fa.

I hit my temple hard a few times, then walked into the meat storage.

And then—— I stopped again.

A woman’s scream came from the other side.

Was it Leina Wu?

No, several women was screaming at the same time.

Had there been an accident?

Could it be —— After serving the steaks and hamburg steak that looked alien to them, had the men finally lost their temper and started rampaging?

I didn’t thought about it any further and dashed out of the food store.

I raced pass the houses, around the stage and into the plaza.

The plaza was in an uproar.

The joyous chatter earlier was like a dream—— negative emotions filled the tensed plaza.

Everyone was looking in the direction opposite the stage.

It was the entrance of the plaza.

Did the Lei house or some other big houses left the plaza in a rage?

I avoided the crowd standing in the plaza as much as possible, and rushed to the side of the ceremonial fire in the center of the plaza.

The next moment—— an unbelievable sight appeared before my eyes.

W-What’s going on here…?

My mind couldn’t process what I was seeing.

Just what happened to cause such a mess? I couldn’t imagine at all.

The stove nearest to the entrance had collapsed.

The hamburg steak and fried vegetable on it was scattered all over the ground.

And then——

A dead kiba had crashed into the ruined stove.

It was a massive kiba and was around a hundred kilograms.

But it seemed to be rather old, its fur had lost its luster and one of its horns was broken.

Several wooden spears had pierced its massive body.

Huge amount of blood stained its dark brown hide, which gave off a terrible stench.

As the stove fire wasn’t completely out yet, the fur on the kiba’s head was scorched crisp black.

The feral kiba, blood and scorched fur—— the plaza was filled with these stench, as if someone had tarnished this night of blessings with malicious intentions.

Did the kiba crashed into the stove, and was hunted down by these men?

The kiba might have a ferocious nature, but they were timid, and would only attack if they encounter humans in close quarters. Normally, they would flee at the sight of a human.

It was unlikely for it to barge into a plaza with over a hundred people, and ram into a stove which had a fire burning prominently

I was confused, but I realized that my line of thought wasn’t wrong.

Because there was a flat piece of board beneath the carcass of the kiba.

On the board was handles made from vines.

That was a towing board used to transport iron pots and water flasks.

The kiba didn’t die here, someone carried the carcass here and hurled it at the stove.

Someone did so with malicious intent——

“What’s the matter? This is a joyous occasion, so why is everyone so quiet?”

A nefarious voice of a man rang out.

This shrill noise was made by a young man.

It sounded familiar—— the deep tone and slurred voice.

I slowly lifted my vision.

On the other side of the dark fumes—— were three men.

One of them was a tall and burly young man.

He shaved his dark brown hair really short, and had blue eyes. Aside from being tall, he had no other prominent features.

There was another young man who was slightly shorter.

He might have a smaller stature, but his body was filled with muscles, had a bland face, and his expression was like a stone lion. He had messy hair, eyes that had the glint of a wild dog, and had dark brown hair like the other man.

As for the last person—— His body was as big as Donda Wu and Dan Lutim, and was like a meat balloon.

Given his height of almost two meters, just how heavy was he? I wouldn’t be surprised if he weighs 200 kg. His face, arms, belly and legs were bloated. With how round his body was, he might be able to move quicker by rolling instead of walking.

His hairline had receded greatly, and he only had black curly hair

besides his ear.

This made him looked old—— but his round face looked rather childish, so he seemed a little disgusting.

This was the first time I met this meat balloon like man, but I remember the other two man.

One of them was the heir to the Tsun clan I met one month earlier, Diga Tsun.

The other was the second son of the Tsun clan I had a run in with seven days ago, Doddo Tsun.

There’s no mistake, there were from the Tsun clan that rules Forest's Edge.

…Where’s the house heads? Where is Dan of the Lutim house and Donda of the Wu clan hiding? The Tsun main house is here to offer our congratulations, and the house heads aren’t even going to greet us? Huh?

Diga Tsun shrill voice echoed in the plaza along with a stench.

These fellows—— was probably drunk and making trouble.

That eldest son and second son were both holding fruit wine bottles.

Are you unhappy with the blessings we are offering? We brought such a huge kiba, this is an impeccable gift right? It has three tusks and horns on it ehh? These are the blessings from the Tsun clan's main house eldest son Diga Tsun, second son Doddo Tsun and youngest son Mida Tsun for house.Lutim, so accept it with a heart of gratitude!

Youngest son—— Did he just say youngest son?

Then that meat balloon was the youngest. Even the oldest Diga Tsun looked younger than twenty.

No—— That wasn't important.

I clenched my fist and observed the people around me.

The women were nervous.

The men—— was furious.

All the men showed their hunter eyes, and took the stance of one. If anything happened, they would draw the sabre on their waist.

That was a natural reaction.

After all, the men from the Tsun clan was tarnishing their kin’s banquet.

Even if these despicable people hailed from the chief clan, the proud hunters would not permit them to barge into the banquet in such a way.

But none of them moved.

The sound of the men gritted their teeth so hard that the very sound of that could be heard. They clenched their fist so hard that blood almost burst out as their fury rages quietly.

I heard that —— If someone went up against the chief Tsun clan openly, it would lead to a civil war that tears Forest's Edge apart, and the denizens might lose their lives.

Was that why no one protested against this?

Was Donda Wu and Dan Lutim fuming in a corner of the plaza too?

But I couldn’t stay silent.

Since I wasn’t from the Wu clan or Lutim house, I felt I was qualified to engage them.

I went around the kiba’s carcass, through the fumes and faced off against those men.

The next moment, fiery fires burned in the eyes in two of the three men.

But their eyes were still murky.

“What do you people want!?”

I lashed out at them.

Their eyes turned more ferocious.

“I didn’t hear that there will be any other guests! I’m only supposed to provide a meal for the Wu main house, and the hundred odd kin of the Lutim house. I never heard about any last minute additions!”

“Outside… You foreigner leeching off the Fa house!”

Diga Tsun took a step forward.

He had a saber tied to his waist, but we were far enough away that he couldn’t reach me even if he pounce my way—— or that was what I guessed.

Members of the Wu clan! Members of the Lutim house! What's going on here, you will host this outsider for your banquet, but not invite the Tsun clan!? Eighty years ago, the Min house was also a kin house of the Tsun clan—— If you invite outsiders, then the Tsun clan has the right to send their blessings too!

Please discuss this with the Wu clan and Lutim house heads! I'm tending to the hearth for this banquet in exchange of the payment made by the Lutim house! I won't allow anyone to disrupt my work!

I tried to pass the initiative to Dan Lutim and the others.

Since these despicable people were at fault, I will rebuke them with proper logic, then the situation would be to our advantage. That was what I planned in my mind! But I couldn't help speaking my mind, turning the rage in my heart into words and forcing them out of my mouth.

I pointed at the pitiful carcass of the kiba.

Clean up the carcass of the kiba right now! We will talk after you are done! Can you enjoy kiba meat while staring at the carcass of a kiba? Can you drink kiba soup heartily while smelling the stench of the kiba's blood? I won't accept this for a banquet I'm in charge of! Get that kiba out of here right now!

You brat——!

“After that, if you receive permission from the head of the Lutim house, I will serve you food. However, I can’t remake the food that you have ruined! If you disrupt my work any further, I will ask for remuneration from the Tsun clan!”

Diga Tsun’s entire body shook.

Doddo Tsun who was standing besides him—— draw his blade.

The women scream rippled through the crowd.

“Retard! How can you draw your saber in a banquet!”

A steel and icy voice cut off the screams of the women.

The strength in this voice overwhelmed that of the retarded sons of the Tsun clan and me, filled with pride and rage——

Ai Fa’s voice echoed through the entire plaza.

“My family member Asuta and I attended this banquet because of a trade we made with the eldest son of house Lutim, Kaslan Lutim! Outsiders don’t have the rights to criticize this! I will let the head of the Lutim house deal with you—— but I won’t permit you to draw your blade against a member of the Fa house!”

Ai Fa walked forth from a dark corner with strong strides.

She raised her head and puffed her chest with determination, and glared at the intruders with fiery eyes—— while dressed in elegant banquet attire.

4

Ai Fa——

Her blonde locks fell slowly to her waist.

She wore a veil that shimmered like gems on her head, with flowers and berries adorned on her hair.

Accessories made from berries and metal were placed on her neck, arms and ankles, a thin piece of purple sheer fabric swayed on her hips.

She was in banquet attire like the other women.

Even though she was dressed just like them —— Ai Fa was more glamourous and beautiful than anyone else. At least that was how she appears in my eyes.

The only difference she had with the other women was the sheathed blade in her hands, and the stern expression of a brave hunter on her face.

“Ai Fa… I haven’t seen you for a long time…?”

Diga Tsun held back his younger brother who had drawn his blade, then turned towards Ai Fa.

“What happened, you are dressed like a woman… You’re finally considering marriage…?”

Diga Tsun’s murky eyes had the gleam of unhappiness. A despicable smile appeared on his relaxed face.

When I saw his face that harbours ill intentions—— I almost lost my cool in rage and wanted to pounce on him/

Do not —— look at Ai Fa with those murky eyes!

Not only did this man insulted my work, he also plan to tarnish someone important to me?

Ai Fa was unusually calm in the face of these hateful gazes, completely unlike me.

Hmmp. It would make the other attendees unpleasant if an unwed woman didn’t put on banquet wear. After hearing this advice, I had to put on this veil. Eldest son of the Tsun clan, after I threw you into the icy river two years ago, you should know very well that I don’t need a husband.

Why you…!

No need for talk, keep your blade! Barging into a banquet without any invitation, disrupting the peace and attempting to commit harm. Are these actions a member of the chief clan should be doing? Since you are from the chief clan, then you should act as a model for the denizens of Forest's Edge!

Diga Tsun and Doddo Tsun glared at Ai Fa with agitated emotions.

The meat balloon like youngest brother was standing besides them, but his gaze lies elsewhere. He then said with his strange voice out of the blue:

Hey, something smell nice… Mida is hungry…

His voice was as high pitched as a toddler.

Normally, the larger a body was, the deeper the voice would be. But was he so fat that his voice box was being squeezed?

His existence seems to represent how far the Tsun clan had fallen.

"Shut up! You mentally challenged kid!"

The youngest brother turned silent unhappily after his brother yelled at him.

This might be a good chance, so I probed the three of them for a reaction:

"Since you insist that you are here to gift your blessings for this wedding, then sheath your blade and take care of this kiba. If you receive permission from the head of the Lutim house, I will prepare food for you —"

"Who will allow that!?"— the one who answered wasn't from the Tsun clan.

A man emitting killing intent approached from behind me.

I turned back, and behind me were—— Dan Lutim and Donda Wu.

Dan Lutim was still holding a large spare rib in his hand, and veins were bulging out from his bald head.

Donda Wu had a fruit wine bottle in hand, his feral face had a faint smile.

Fire were burning in both their eyes.

The two heads were more furious than anyone else present.

"You brats... you dare desecrate my son's wedding!?"

Never mind Donda Wu, this was the first time I have seen that uncle from house Lutim being so furious.

His round eyes were so wide that they were almost going to pop out, his thick brows were raised up high. His loose facial muscles were cramping, white teeth could be seen through his open mouth and the thick artery on his temple was throbbing.

Compared to now, his anger towards me in the past was akin to that directed to a puppy that pissed in the wrong place. Right now, he was truly like an arabian demon god.

Could the Tsun clan people keep their cool after seeing the fury of the Lutim house head? When I turned my gaze back to the front——

Diga Tsun stood stiffly with a pale face.

Doddo Tsun tightened his grip on his blade with trembling hands.

And Mida Tsun—— He just stood there confused.

"Who wants to accept blessings from despicable people like you! Who the hell will treat you despicable lot to a delicious meal!"

As Dan Lutim roared, he bit the ribs in his hand, and threw the leftover bones onto the ground.

Donda Wu also took a large step forward.

"Brats of the Tsun clan… You think you squits can be our opponents? If you want to taunt the Wu clan and Lutim house, then bring your clan head and all the men with you!"

His roar was like a clap of thunder.

I heard a shrill scream from Diga Tsun faintly.

"Given how old this kiba is, is its meat even edible? Who wants blessings from brats like you!"

Dan Lutim strode forth, and grabbed the kiba in the stove by its fur.

The next second, something unbelievable happened——

Dan Lutim lifted the massive kiba that weigh almost a hundred kilograms over his head with his bear hands.

This kiba might be about Dan Lutim’s weight, his brute force was incredible.

「Uwah, uwahh!!」

Diga Tsun kept backing away.

Doddo Tsun looked like he wanted to flee.

Even Mida Tsun screamed 「Wahh」.

「Get lost!」

Dan Lutim threw the entire kiba.

「Uwahh!」

Diga Tsun and company grabbed their heads and scampered away.

The kiba’s body rolled pitifully on the ground. When the spears on its back snapped off, it had rolled to the entrance of the plaza.

Diga Tsun and his group had already disappeared into the night.

“A bunch of retards!”

Loud cheers drowned out Dan Lutim’s roar..

The thunderous cheers—— proved how much they detested the Tsun clan, what they thought and how they usually suppress their agitated emotions.

“Dan Lutim—— sorry for being too rash.”

I took off the towel wrapped around my head and bowed to Dan Lutim.

His demon god-like face instantly turned into a gentle smile.

“Mr Asuta, what are you saying!? I merely couldn’t moved for a while because I was so mad that I couldn’t breath! You said what I was thinking at that moment, and that was what made me regain my senses!”

Did he just said—— Mr Asuta?

When I realized it, Ai Fa was standing besides me.

She was showing her usual cold face.

But her attire was completely different.

“Those brats only came here because the alcohol got into their heads. If their actions are sanctioned by the clan head, they would have brought the men from the branch family with them.”

Donda Wu’s eyes still had remnants of rage, and he finished his bottle of fruit wine in one breath.

“Hey! Return that old kiba to the forest! The monta will wipe away the mistakes made by those brats.”

Several men nodded, and rushed to that pitiful kiba.

When he saw this scene, Dan Lutim’s brows drooped in sorrow.

“Ara, I feel bad for that kiba. If you get reincarnated into a kiba again, I will properly eat you next time!”

I couldn’t help but laugh. Dan Lutim turned to me and said:

Mr Asuta! After venting my rage, I’m hungry now! Is the next dish ready yet?

When his large hands were about to grab my shoulder I backed away quickly——

Your hands! Please wash your hands! You grabbed the fur of the kiba just now! Don’t grab the ribs by your hands to eat them!

The ribs are all gone. Mr Asuta, are there anymore ribs?

Dan Lutim pouted his thick lips.

His face was just like a toddler throwing a tantrum.

If there are any left, I will grill them. So please wash your hands and wait—— Alright then, I still have work to do.

Okay! Thanks, Mr Asuta!

I glanced at Ai Fa.

Ai Fa nodded, turned around and said:

□I will take care of the damaged stove.□

I looked at her long blonde hair and her beautiful figured wrapped in a translucent cloth. A short while later —— I ran to the stove room.

Time passed, and the banquet finally reached its climax.

The bride and groom sat on the stage and watched the banquet this entire time. And now, guided by the elders from the Lutim house and Min house, they walked down the stage.

The elders led the two to the stove erected opposite the stage.

Jiba Wu held Vena Wu's hand, and waited for them.

The couple knelt before Jiba Wu, the groom grabbed his right shoulder while the bride grabbed her left shoulder, and they both lowered their heads.

Herbs were burning in the stove. Jiba Wu removed the grass crown with trembling fingers from their heads, and heated them with the smoke coming out from the stove.

She then placed the groom's crown onto the bride, and the bride's

crown onto the groom.

After the two got up slowly, Jiba Wu removed two tusks and horns from her necklace, and gifted one to each of them.

"I gift my blessings to you two... Tonight, Ema Min will become the wife of Kaslan Lutim of the Lutim house, and is bestowed with the name of Ema Min Lutim. This will deepen the bonds between the Min and Lutim House, and lead Forest's Edge to greater prosperity and strength...."

"The forest bestows Ema Min Lutim to Kaslan Lutim."

"The forest bestows Kaslan Lutim to Ema Min Lutim."

All their kins erupted in cheers once more.

The women from the Wu branch house carried an iron pot through the cheering crowd, and placed it on the stove that was burning the herbs.

In the pot was a hamburg steak that was not finished yet, a piece of steak left specially for the couple.

The women added firewood quickly and brought the stove to a raging flame. Even a "strong fire" wasn't enough to describe the heat right now.

After that, the women took Jiba Wu’s hands and took a step back.

Vena Wu walked to the front this time.

According to the customs, the oldest unwed woman of all the kin house will offer this meat to the bride, which represents the first piece of meat the bride would accept after changing her family name.

Vena Wu stood in front of the stove, and grabbed the fruit wine hanging on her waist.

The bottle only contained the necessary amount.

Vena Wu poured the content into the pot nimbly.

The next instance, a bright red flame erupted, and then vanished without a trace.

Uwah… the kins all cheered.

Vena Wu took a step back and pointed to the pot gracefully.

The women shifted half of the firewood to adjust the fire.

The bride and groom walked to the stove, took the skewers from the women and pry open the hamburg steak.

As I watched the bride stuff the meat into her mouth, my work was officially done.



Vol. 3 :

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

“Here it comes, this is really the last meat!”

The additional grilled meat was sent to the plaza.

Just how much meat did everyone eat today? I already lost track, but the men and women all cheered and gathered.

I stood at the side of the Wu main house, watching over the scene as I said to the girl besides me:

“...Lala Wu, aren’t you eating?”

“No, I’m already full. If I eat too much, I will get fat.”

I think she could fatten up a bit more. Compared to her two elder sisters, she was too slender.

Lala Wu was twelve, and from her body type, she would probably grow taller. A few years later, she would surely be a charming lady that rivals her sisters.

"Ah, the flame during the last part is impressive. What is that?"

"It's a strong liquor that will burn when lighted, not the usual fruit wine."

And that of course, was the fruit wine Kamyua Yost gave to us as a present.

I couldn't think of any other way to use it, so I just used it to liven up the last part of the banquet.

"That's true."

Lala Wu said disinterestedly, closed her eyes and said:

"Ema Min Lutim looks so stunning. She is a beauty, and the wedding dress made her even more glamourous."

"That's right. I'm surprised too… But, Lala Wu, your dress is nice too."

Lala Wu was also in banquet wear of course.

She might be young, but when she let her hair down, she looked very feminine.

I carefully avoided complimenting her looks and just her clothes, but she still punched my back hard.

The intense pain stung my exhausted body.

That hurts… So, you are looking for me?

Hmm? It’s nothing special… Have you seen Shin Wu?

Shin Wu? I don’t know, he should be hanging out with Ludo Wu.

Ludo Wu is with my other brothers. Strange, I just saw him with Shela Wu.

It couldn’t be helped, this was a banquet with over a hundred people after all.

Even after my work was done, I still haven’t met Ai Fa.

Yo, Asuta, thanks for your hard work. Not only did you need to tend to the hearth, you also had to deal with the retards from the Tsun clan, it

must be tiring right?

Speak of the devil. Ludo Wu suddenly appeared before us.

If Jiza-nii wasn't beside me, I would have beat them all up by myself. Well, forget it, it's a Lutim house banquet after all, we should show some respect for the father of the Lutim house.

Bratty Ludo, don't cause trouble. You better not get involved with the Tsun clan.

Shut up tomboy… And so? What are the two of you doing? Asuta you want to take this thing of ambiguous gender as your wife after all?

When the enraged Lala Wu wanted to slap Ludo Wu, he dodged her nimbly.

Don't fight, this is a wedding… Ludo Wu, do you know where Shin Wu is?

Shin Wu? Ah, he is in the empty house you are staying in right now.

When he said that, Ludo Wu frowned a little unhappily and continued:

Speaking of which, Ai Fa is with him too… Damn it, I hope Shin Wu

won’t say anything unnecessary.

Unnecessary?

I found a missing piece of the puzzle in my tired mind.

What do you mean? Wha

t did you instigate Shin Wu to do? By the way, why do Shin Wu want to speak with Ai Fa?

Shut up, it has nothing to do with you.

Ludo Wu looked at me.

I nodded, and pulled back my shoulders that were leaning against the wall.

Lala Wu, let’s go take a look. I’m also looking for Ai Fa.

Hmm? Okay…

Lala Wu showed a weak expression. I grabbed her arm and walked to the plaza.

“Hey, what happened? What’s going on between Shin Wu and Ai Fa?”

“I don’t know yet. I don’t teally know Shin Wu’s temperament. Lala Wu, please help me talk to him.”

I went through the crowd with the puzzled Lala Wu, and headed to the empty house.

Everyone looked very pleased.

After the banquet ended, I could finally see everyone’s faces.

The men who always wore serious expression was smiling red faced now.

Meat and wine, family and kin, the orange burning flames, the strong groom and beautiful bride—— There was plenty of things for them to be intoxicated by.

I was happy to have taken part in this banquet.

I was proud for finishing my job.

In this world, only Ai Fa could share this feeling with me.

□Ah…□

Lala Wu raised her voice.

The plaza was bright, but the empty house was very dim, with no one in sight. Ai Fa and Shin Wu’s figure appeared behind the empty house.

Shin Wu’s figure mixed into the crowd, and only Ai Fa was left behind.

□Shin! Shin Wu!□

Lala Wu shook off my hand and ran in the crowd.

And I naturally ran towards Ai Fa.

□Asuta…□

Ai Fa opened her eyes wide in surprise.

□What’s the matter? Did something happened?□

□No, we are fine.□

I stopped in front of Ai Fa.

The next instant, my right knee buckled.

Before I fell, Ai Fa’s strong arms supported me.

“What’s wrong? Are you feeling unwell?”

“No… I’m just too tired. In the end, I just grabbed some random things to eat.”

“Retard, you didn’t eat properly even though you have to do so much work?”

Ai Fa said angrily, then guide my body to lean against the wall.

“Wait here, I will bring some meat.”

“No, it’s fine. I can’t eat yet.”

I grabbed Ai Fa’s arm in a panic.

“The job is finally done, let me bask in the moment for a bit longer.”

After saying that, I slide down slowly and sat on the ground.

Ai Fa looked a little troubled, but she chose to sit besides me in the end.

But she didn’ prop up one knee like she usually does, but sat cross legged.

“Ai Fa, since you already dressed up, it will be fine if you acted more femininely.”

“Even you are saying such weird things. I only put this on because Grandma Jiba was very adamant about this.”

Ai Fa flicked her veil with her slender finger.

“I might be a woman, but I’m still the head of the Fa house, and a hunter. Others will just think it is hilarious if I put this on.”

“That’s not true. You might be the head of a house and a hunter, but you are also a woman.”

Seeing that Ai Fa looks unhappy, I smiled at her and said:

“This clothes really suits you. I’m not just paying lip service, you look

really nice like this.

Ai Fa’s cheeks didn’t blush. She looked as if she had choked on something, and looked very surprised.

Finally, she said:

Don’t say something so ridiculous.

She looked towards the plaza which showed no signs of ending any time soon.

... Your work is done.

Yes, it’s over.

I don’t know what the future might bring, but you completed your job.

Yes.

Asuta, that’s your strength.

Ai Fa had a thousand yard gaze.

How strange.

Up until just now, Ai Fa had been acting normally. But now, her existence felt very far away.

「Asuta.」

「Yes.」

「You should stay in the Lutim house.」

I stared at Ai Fa’s side profile.

Ai Fa still wouldn’t look my way.

「Kaslan Lutim acknowledged your strength. Even Dan Lutim did so. They might not let you marry into their main house, but just like how you are staying in my house, they will welcome you to be a part of the Lutim house even if you are not related to them by blood.」

「Hey.」

「When your bonds with them deepen, they might be willing to let you marry into the branch house. And then, you will have a place in Forest's Edge——」

「What are you talking about? Why are you saying this all of a sudden?」

I pressed her for answers.

Ai Fa still wouldn't look at me.

「... Let me ask you instead, why are you staying in the Fa house?」

「You are asking me now...?」

「The Fa house isn't as well off as the Wu house or Lutim house. I don't want to eat such lavish food either. You can only use aria, poitan, kiba and just a bit of vegetable as ingredients, and cook meals for two——will that be enough to satisfy you?」

「I'm very satisfied. I'm not cooking for you as a head chef, but as a family and Fa house hearth tender. The job of a hearth caretaker is to serve up a meal within the limited budget.」

「And you are satisfied just with that?」

「Yes.」

I answered unhesitantly.

Working as a chef makes me glad. I feel happy, elated and blissed. But I don’t want to tend the hearth for the Wu clan or Lutim house, but the Fa house. You are the one who I want to taste my meat the most.

.....

There might be another madman who wants me to care take their hearth for one night. I will welcome such a job. I hope to keep that anticipation in mind and continue cooking for the Fa house.

But...

Ai Fa looked somewhere else and muttered softly:

I deepened the grudge with the Tsun clan again today/

Me too.

I’m strong enough to protect myself. But when I enter the forest, I won’t be able to protect you who will be home alone.

In that case...

But the Lutim house and Wu clan can protect you. Even if they look for

trouble like today, the Tsun clan won’t have the guts to clash with the Wu clan and Lutim house.

.....

Asuta, it’s too dangerous for you to stay in the Fa house.

... Is that what you think?

I pressed Ai Fa again.

But she didn’t waver.

It’s too late for that now right? We already ran into Doddo Tsun seven days ago. So why are you only saying this now?

... Since that day, you have been staying in the We village.

That’s right. But you just told me this morning that we will go back to our usual lives tomorrow, so why say all this now?

... We deepened our grudge with the Tsun clan again today. And you showed your capability to the Lutim house.

"Is that all?"

"... Someone told me that you shouldn't stay in the Fa house."

"Was it Leina Wu?"

"....."

"That's what I thought. I should be grateful to her for being concerned about me, but..."

Leina Wu's sorrowful face flashed in my mind.

"That's how she feels, not me. I just want to act according to how you and I feel."

"....."

"I already made up my mind, I want to stay in the Fa house. Unless you feels frustrated by it and wants to chase me away, then I will leave."

"... If I tell you to get lost, would you?"

I grabbed Ai Fa's shoulder that was further away from me angrily, and

forced her to face me.

Ai Fa could have brushed away my arms, but she didn’t resist.

Her blue eyes finally looked my way.

“I want to stay by your side. Until you grow tired of me, I don’t want to leave. If you want to chase me away, you can try with all your might… Although your strength is greater than mine.”

“……”

“You said you didn’t want me to disappear, was that a lie?”

A fire burned in Ai Fa’s eyes.

“I don’t want you to disappear, or for you to be in danger. That is why I am asking you to become a member of the Lutim house.”

“Is that so? Even if that is what you think, I still want to stay by your side. If—— the Tsun clan becomes a real danger, we will think of something. In the worst case, we can ask Kamyua Yost for help.”

“… That man is a citizen of Rock City.”

□ If you are not willing to, I will give up on that thought. If not, I will prostrate to the Wu clan and Lutim house, and beg them to protect me who isn't their kin—— I'm willing to go that far in order to not leave you.□

The fire in Ai Fa's eyes started wavering.

Was she angry? Or did some other emotions she herself didn't understand had sprout forth?

Even though she was a woman, Ai Fa had the air of a hunter about her.

The female hunter Ai Fa was an unique existence in Forest's Edge.

And I ——

□... Why was Shin Wu looking for you?□

□What?□

□You spoke with him just now right? Did he asked you about □sacrificial hunting style□? In order to feed his five family members, he wanted to use the □sacrificial hunting style□ too—— Did he find you in order to discuss this?□

□.....□

□Ai Fa, how did you answer him?□

□... I told him that □sacrificial hunting style□ was too dangerous. If he succumbs to the forest, then who will protect his five family members?□

□I see. But you have me as your family too, but you are still using the □sacrificial hunting style□ right? Is the sweet scent on you from the fruit that attracts kiba?□

Ai Fa’s face turned a little pale.

Despite her agitated emotions, she still felt embarrassed when I mentioned her scent.

I like the scent on her——

The sweet smell of the fruit that attracts kiba.

The refreshing aroma of herbs.

The stinging scent of the pico leaves.

The gentle fragrance of the Krilee fruit.

The delectable smell of meat and fats.

All these smell combined into the Ai Fa’s scent—— and I like this scent.

It was a scent unique to Ai Fa.

The unique scent of Ai Fa who took on the jobs of both the men and women by herself.

Only Ai Fa would have this smell that merges both the forest and a home.

“Don’t do something so dangerous for the sake of hunting—— Ai Fa, you won’t want anyone to tell you that.”

“……”

“It’s the same for me. I don’t want anyone to tell me that caretaking the hearth in the Fa house is a dangerous job.”

Ludo Wu’s words echoed in my mind.

—— Don’t worry about her, respect her instead.

Ai Fa craved hunting kiba so much that she resorts to such a dangerous method.

In order to live as a denizen of Forest's Edge—— to live as a hunter.

If she stop using the 「sacrificial hunting style」, she would need to give up on her identity as a hunter. And marry into some other houses as a woman.

If Ai Fa wants to reject this fate and live on as a hunter——

If Ai Fa could only become a strong, noble and elegant existence by doing so——

Then I wouldn't refute Ai Fa's choice.

I was attracted to her because Ai Fa was such a person.

Ai Fa had both the scent of a forest and a home, possessing the tenacity of a hunter and the gentleness of a girl. I want to stay by her side because that was the kind of person she was.

「I will think about how to deal with the Tsun clan. Ai Fa, let me stay by your side. I want to be with you.」

Ai Fa turned quiet for a moment.

She looked at me with the intense light in her eyes, as if she was probing my intent.

After who knows how long——

Ai Fa averted her face and muttered 「do whatever you want.」

She pouted her lips a little.

Her cheeks were still slightly blushed.

She was finally back to her usual self.

At this moment, a large figure walked towards us with a crisp sound of metal ringing out.

「Sorry for disturbing at such a busy time. Asuta and Ai Fa, can I have a bit of your time?」

The man before us was actually Kaslan Lutim.

This brave hunter wearing a cape that had the head of a kiba attached looked down at us silently.

“Ah, hello, we aren’t busy.”

When I answered, I realized I was still grabbing Ai Fa’s shoulders, and unhand her in a hurry.

Ai Fa had turned her face away with her cheeks beet red and lips pouting. No matter how you looked at it, we were in the middle of something.

And this guy could actually talk to us at such a moment, he was really brave.

“My apologies. It’s hard for me to leave the main event, so I still came to greet you despite it being rude.”

“Ah, it’s fine.”

I stood up.

Ai Fa also stood up, and elbowed my sides really hard.

“I don’t know if I can see you two tomorrow, so I want to bring you your payment tonight.”

He took out the outstanding payment—— the tusks and horns of ten kiba.

It must be a part of the blessings he received for the wedding. He strung them up carefully with a rope.

“Thank you for your delicious cooking. I believe I made the right decision after seeing how blissed my kin looked.”

“I want to thank you for believing in me… And congratulations on your wedding.”

“Thank you.”

The groom showed a bashful smile.

“Regarding the matter with the Tsun clan—— I’m sorry that you have become the subject of their scorn. Father Dan and Donda Wu both drew their blades in rage, and the men around them had to suppress them in the meantime.”

“No, we made a stand of our own conviction, I’m just afraid that this will bring trouble to the Lutim house.”

“No matter how much we worry, trouble will still find us at any moment.

I realized this tonight.

Kaslan Lutim’s honest eyes showed a strong gleam.

However, the Tsun probably couldn’t do as they please. Even if they think we are an eyesore, there wouldn’t be anyone hunting the kiba without us. To protect their peaceful life, they won’t clash with the Wu clan or Lutim house.

I see, are you refering to the prize money given to them by the city…? I can’t believe those people are actually from Forest's Edge.

You’re right—— But you are different. The Fa house only have two members, so the Tsun clan won’t hesitate in exterminating you.

Kaslan Lutim said in a heavier tone:

However, if the Wu clan and Lutim house are close to the two of you, they wouldn’t dare to go too far… That being said, they still did something so outrageous tonight. Ai Fa, Asuta, please take care of yourself.

Alright, we will keep that in mind.

Kaslan Lutim nodded, and then looked at the necklace I received from

him.

“By the way, is twenty kiba really enough? I wouldn’t mind giving you all the blessings I received tonight.”

“It’s more than enough. I’m very happy! I will spend it unhesitatingly in the next few days.”

After saying that, I turned to Ai Fa whose cheeks were still a little blushed:

“We can buy a new pot now! The Fa house can have soup and grilled dish at the same time. House head, all that hard work is worth it right?”

Ai Fa continued to pout and kicked me lightly.

Mid Meal Snack: The Young Sage

This youth has a strange air about him ——Kaslan Lutim harboured such a forthright thought in the beginning. This was the first impression Kaslan Lutim had of Asuta. During the pre-wedding party, Asuta of the Fa house tended to the Wu clan’s hearth.

The youth had dark hair, black eyes and ivory skin. His appearance was obviously that of a foreigner. Compared to the hunters of Forest's Edge,

he was skinny and had a face as gentle as a woman. He probably couldn’t hunt kiba. From his frail appearance, Kaslan Lutim think he must hail from Rock City.

However, his eyes was different from the citizens of Rock City Kaslan Lutim saw in the past. He had a bright and shiny gleam in his eyes.

He wasn’t afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge.

That was why he had such an unfathomable air about him.

This man from the city was staying in the Forest's Edge settlement, and was cool and composed despite being surrounded by the denizens of Forest's Edge. And he wore the attire of Forest's Edge, and claim to be a member of a house of Forest's Edge. With how the denizens of Forest's Edge were alienated in Genos, this was unbelievable.

But since this youth appeared before me, that means it actually happened.

Why did Donda Wu let someone like this tend his hearth? Kaslan Lutim couldn’t understand.

Since just now, his father Dan Lutim was enraged, and Ema Min lowered her gaze troublingly.

If this continued, the relationship between his father and Donda Wu might fracture.

That worried Kaslan Lutim the most.

In order to stand up against the nefarious Tsun clan, they needed to muster more strength. Hunt more kiba, bear more children and get more kins. They need to defeat the Tsun clan one day, If the elder Wu clan sour their relationship with their most powerful kin house the Lutims, the future of Forest's Edge would be shrouded in darkness.

However… Donda Wu looked just as mad as father Dan.

The young man named Asuta just had to serve the torso of a kiba as a dish for the pre-wedding.

There was nothing wrong with eating the kiba’s torso. Like what the head of the Fa house said—— the opinion of the rumoured female hunter Ai Fa.

Calling this body part as monta feed was an insult to the powerless houses. Even though □weakness is a sin□ was the unwritten rule in Forest's Edge, disparaging the weak was no different from what the Tsun clan was doing. The weak should serve as a lesson that compels one to obtain greater strength. There wasn’t any meaning in insulting others repeatedly.

That might be so, he still couldn’t understand why they insist on him eating the kiba torso meat too.

“This meat is delicious.”

Even though the head of the Fa house said that, he still couldn’t understand what that means.

When he took a bite of the kiba spare ribs in this heavy atmosphere, he realized what she actually meant.

Kaslan Lutim put the meat in his mouth without much thought as he was concerned about his father and Donda Wu’s reaction, and felt an incredible impact——

This is…

It tasted different.

There wasn’t any stench.

What was this red and sticky liquid? It had the sweetness of fruit wine, and the fragrance of rock salt and pico leaves changed the taste of the kiba dramatically.

So this is… delicious meat?

The foreign taste spread in his mouth.

This was—— joy.

This was happiness.

The happiness of living.

Kaslan Lutim wasn’t exaggerating, this thought actually emerged in his mind.

When he see the happy faces of his family, when he hunt a huge kiba, when he lay his exhausted body in bed—— and when he hold his lovers in his arms, a feeling of joy would flow through his body. And now, a similar feeling of bliss had exploded in his mouth.

Before his brain could even understand it, his body and soul could already feel the bliss. It was an incredible sensation.

When he was thirsty, water and fruit wine would taste really good.

When hungry, meat and vegetables would be exceptionally delicious.

But what Kaslan Lutim was feeling wasn't such routine emotions, but something deeper—— a bliss and happiness that shook his very soul.

He felt a gaze, and found Ema Min smiling at him when he turned his head.

She must be thinking the same thing.

Kaslan Lutim couldn't digest the shock and impact to his heart, and when he realized it, he was smiling in return too.

He still couldn't grasp what was happening at that moment.

But the premonition that a grand revolution was about to begin took hold of Kaslan Lutim's soul.

The next day, Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min visited the Fa house together.

They were here to ask Asuta to be the hearth caretaker for their wedding.

When he heard his father Dan Lutim proposed that, Kaslan Lutim thought in surprised that his father had another outrageous idea. But strangely, when his father was turned down by Asuta, it sent a strange

tremor through his emotions.

Asking someone not related by blood to tend to the hearth for your wedding was against the customs of Forest's Edge.

Even though it goes against the customs, there might be greater significance to found—— this thought made Kaslan Lutim feel uneasy.

When he shared how he felt with Ema Min, she answered:「I feel the same way too.」

And so, the two of them visited the Fa house.

They never thought that Asuta would reject them so adamantly.

「... I’m sorry, but can we give you an answer tomorrow?」

When they heard the head of the Fa house said that, Kaslan Lutim returned to the Lutim village with Ema Min.

「Don’t worry, we definitely conveyed our feelings to Asuta.」

Ema Min said on the way home.

"Asuta might be from another country, but I could feel a soul befitting a denizen of Forest's Edge within him. That's why it definitely won't be a problem."

"Yes… He really is an amazing person."

"Is that so?"

Ema Min answered:

"I can easily imagine Asuta being a fellow denizen. It will be more natural if Ai Fa is a man and Asuta is a woman."

"That's right. A woman who is a hunter and house head, and a man that tends to the hearth… Life is strange."

"But they look very happy. In that case, maybe that is the way things should be."

Ema Min laughed out softly like a child, contrary to her usual self.

"Do you remember how they looked when they just reached home? Ai Fa's expression was unexpectedly gently, just like a normal girl. She will only show that face to her family member Asuta."

“Hmm? I didn’t realize at all.”

“I see. I thought Ai Fa is a strong hunter who is stubborn and unapproachable. If a family like that is with her, she should be able to live a peaceful and stable life.”

Ema Min said. She had a smile on her face as she looked up at Kaslan Lutim.

“If I never met you, I might envy them a lot.”

“I see.”

Kaslan Lutim gave a short answer.

As Ema Min strode forth, she quietly embraced Kaslan Lutim’s arm.

“If Asuta takes on this job, how blissful our wedding day would be. If they still reject us tomorrow, I will keep visiting the Fa house until he agrees.”

Luckily, Asuta agreed to take on the job of hearth caretaker.

Kaslan Lutim relayed his terms to Donda Wu, who accepted readily.

"Kaslan Lutim, I have heard! You asked Asuta to be the hearth caretaker for your wedding right? It must be tough to make that resolve!"

Inside the Wu village, Ludo Wu came to chat with Kaslan Lutim.

He had always been a cheerful youth, and now, a big bright smile could be seen on his face.

"And Asuta will be tending the Wu clan's hearth everyday before the wedding right? I'm super happy!"

"I see. I asked Donda Wu to accept such a forceful request, so I feel more at ease after hearing you say that."

"The way you speak is still so deadpan…! But you are going to gift twenty kiba worth of tusks and horns to Asuta right? He will gladly accept this job even if you didn't do that."

"But in that case, it wouldn't sit right with our rules. I asked a non blood kin to tend to the hearth for my wedding, so i have to make the payment."

"Is that so? We didn't pay him anything though? We only gave him a tusk or a horn each as a blessing."

…… Speaking of which, why did the Wu clan ask Asuta to tend to your hearth in the first place?

And so, Kaslan Lutim learned for the first time what transpired between the Fa house and Wu clan.

Including how Ai Fa was good friends with Jiba Wu and Rimee Wu, how the Wu clan proposed to Ai Fa after she lost her father—— he learned all this for the first time.

So Asuta's cooking saved Jiba Wu…

That's right. But even so, Jiza-nee and Darum-nii still wouldn't accept Asuta. But that night's dinner seemed to have changed my dad's mind.

Kaslan Lutim groaned for a while, then decided to talk to Jiza Wu and Darum Wu.

The sun was about to rise to the top of the sky soon, and Asuta will be reaching the Wu village at that time. He had to complete this task before that.

Jiza Wu, Darum Wu, can you bother you for a moment?

The two of them happened to be in a corner of the plaza.

To prepare for their hunter’s work for the day, they were resting under the windy shade of a tree, and were chatting.

“It’s you, Kaslan Lutim. I wanted to speak with you too.”

Jiza Wu stared at him with his slit like eyes.

“Our clan head Donda just told me about the arrangement for the wedding… Why are you entrusting something so important to Asuta of house Fa?”

“I think doing this will bring strength to our blood kin.”

Jiza Wu’s face was gentle as always.

But Kaslan Lutim knew very clearly that there was cruelty and passion in his heart, and such a character befits the heir of the Wu clan very well.

“If it could deepen the joy of living, it will strengthen our will to survive. I don’t think that is wrong—— but Asuta of house Fa is a foreigner.”

“Yes. But isn’t he a member of the Fa house now?”

“If the house head agrees, anyone can become a family member.

However, in the eighty years since we moved to the edge of Morga’s forest, no foreigner had ever been taken in as family before.

That’s right, Asuta just happen to be the first foreigner to do so. Since there are no rules against this, there shouldn’t be any problems right?

……Asuta learned his skills from outside Forest's Edge. Can you be sure that it will bring positive change to Forest's Edge?

I can’t tell if this change is in the right direction, but that doesn’t mean it is wrong. Hence, I will choose to believe it its right.

Jiza Wu crossed his arms without any change in his expression.

Darum Wu stared at Kaslan Lutim without any hint of hostility, and remained silent.

Jiza Wu, I understand your concerns, I’m also worried about this too. However, continuing to reject strength from the outside world might not be the right move either. The world outside Forest's Edge is boundless, we can’t dismiss everything out there to be wrong.

All our brethrens will only spend their live in Forest's Edge. The outside world has nothing to do with us.

Is that so? Jiza Wu, we are born in Forest's Edge and bred in Forest's

Edge, but we didn’t spring out from the trees.

He knew that even if he said that, the other party wouldn’t agree with him, but he couldn’t help voicing it out anyway.

To Kaslan Lutim, Jiza Wu was an important kin, and the heir to his elder clan. Even if he acknowledge the other party’s views and feelings, he couldn’t hide what he thought and reach a compromise with him.

Eighty years ago, when our ancestors still lives in the forest of Jaguar, they have never gotten involved with the people in the city before, and lived by ourselves in the forest. After moving into the Morga forest, they started selling kiba tusks and horns to the Post Station Town, and lived by the laws of Genos. Even so, we still stubbornly refused to mingle with the people in the city—— is this really the right path?

Your judgement is sound. However, hasn’t the Tsun clan that is closely related to the Tsun clan fallen into depravity?

That’s exactly why we have to interact with the city. We can’t harvest the grace of the forest, so we have to erect a bridge to the outside world in order to survive. In that case, we have to build our relationship with the outside world in a more correct manner.

Is that the reason—— why you accepted Asuta?

I didn’t thought that far. I just think it isn’t right to reject Asuta because

he hails from a foreign land.

Jiza Wu sighed softly, then shook his head that was supported by his powerful neck.

No matter what, the clan head Donda has already acceded to your request, and we will follow the clan head's orders. I can only pray that you are right, and that Asuta wouldn't bring us disaster.

If anything untoward happens, I'm willing to pay with my life.

And finally, Kaslan Lutim tried talking to the quiet Darum Wu:

Darum Wu, do you harbour the same doubts as Jiza Wu?

I—— don't understand such difficult things.

Darum Wu answered unhappily.

I just can't stand the sight of that pale skinned guy.

This seemed to be a simple problem.

Darum Wu was just being difficult like a child.

… Speaking of which, Donda Wu wanted Ai Fa to marry Darum Wu back then.

He probably still bear a grudge about that.

Kaslan Lutim would be marrying in a few days, but he still don’t understand boy girl relationship very well.

No matter what, I have already chosen this path.

He could only believe in himself and strive on.

Kaslan Lutim bid farewell to the two of them, and waited for the visit of his fellow denizen from a another nation.

The busy day went by in a flash, Kaslan Lutim could finally stand before Asuta with a heart of bliss and satisfaction. The wedding has concluded successfully.

“I’m relieved that it ended peacefully.”

Asuta said after taking the necklace that served as payment.

He seemed completely exhausted, his eyes half shut with his back against the wall, as if he would fall at any moment.

But a satisfaction that was on par with Kaslan Lutim could be seen in his eyes.

Ai Fa’s face was red for some reason and her face turned away. But the same emotions filled her eyes too.

… When she’s dressed like this, she don’t look like a female hunter at all.

Ai Fa was in banquet wear, and more glamorous than before. And she seemed to have opened her heart to Asuta.

The female hunter Ai Fa and the hearth caretaker Asuta. In Forest's Edge, they were the most unique couple. But Kaslan Lutim also realized that they were family with their soul closely connected.

Asuta, you are amazing.

Kaslan Lutim felt the incredibly rowdy banquet behind him, then said:

You are a foreigner, but I think of you as a fellow denizen of Forest's Edge. Even though your strength, character and appearance are all

different from someone in Forest's Edge—— that is the most incredibly point for me.

I see. I’m amazed that everyone can accept someone like me too.

Asuta said in a sleepy voice.

It’s all thanks to Ai Fa. She took me in, and that threaded my bonds in Forest's Edge.

Shut up.

Ai Fa said with a sneer.

Her soft cheeks were still dyed red.

I see... If Ai Fa didn’t met Asuta, he wouldn’t be here today.

If anyone else discovered a foreigner in Forest's Edge, it was unlikely for them to take him home. Normally, they would just leave him where he was, or at the most, send him to the Post Station Town. Any outsiders who encounter ill tempered hunters would face even worse fate.

After Ai Fa took him in, he got to know the Wu clan and Lutim house because of the bonds between Ai Fa and Grandma Jiba—— and so, I get

to meet him.

How would this encounter influence Forest's Edge in the future?

Kaslan Lutim wasn’t a prophet, and he had no idea what the future might bring. Even so, he had a premonition.

Asuta and I chose the same path.

Kaslan Lutim could feel this very clearly during the banquet.

Asuta brought him great joy and happiness, and had become an irreplaceable existence in his heart.

This had nothing to do with blood relations. Asuta of the Fa house might not be his kin, but he was a fellow denizen of Forest's Edge.

I will stand shoulder to shoulder with Asuta and head into the future.

He didn’t know what awaited for him ahead.

And instead of a premonition, this feeling was closer to being a deep belief.

If anyone attempts to harm Asuta, I will be his shield. If they reject him, I will speak up in his stead. After all, Asuta brought me such a great harvest today.

Tonight, Kaslan Lutim got a beautiful wife and an important friend, there wasn’t anyone more happy than him. He chewed on this thought quietly in his mind.

“Asuta, you——”

“Sorry, he’s asleep.”

Ai Fa cut off his words.

On closer look, Asuta had collapsed on the ground before he knew it, and fallen into deep slumber as he leaned on the wall.

His face was as innocent as a child, and filled with satisfaction.

“In the end, he slept without a word. He’s still half baked in this sense.”

Ai Fa said slowly.

But her eyes were filled with love.

"Sorry for disturbing you when you are so tired, please have a good rest."

"Yes... Is the banquet still going on?"

"Yes. No one will sleep until the last drop of fruit wine is finished."

"I can't stay up that long. I will make a move first then."

Ai Fa put her head under Asuta's arm, then heaved him up.

Asuta was still sound asleep, and breathing steadily.

"Ai Fa, I want to thank you."

"Hmm? We received proper payment for this job, you don't need to thank us over and over again."

"No, not for tonight. I want to thank you for bringing Asuta to Forest's Edge."

"About that... You don't need to thank me either."

Ai Fa pouted and averted her face.

If Asuta wasn’t here, she wouldn’t be showing such a face to Kaslan Lutim either.

“Alright then, I’m going now.”

Their relationship with the Tsun clan had grown more adverse, and there was also that mysterious man from the city——Kamyua Yost… There will be more troubles waiting for them tomorrow.

Kaslan Lutim will not hold back and help them whenever he could.

Today, he just hope they could rest safely in the Wu village, and prepare to face what tomorrow might bring.

Kaslan Lutim thought as he burned the figure of his friends into his eyes, then turned and return to his lovely wife.

The ceremonial continued spewing out crimson flames, as if it was going to engulf the very night sky.

Vol. 4 :

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

After finishing work that comes up once in a lifetime—— house Lutim’s banquet, the next day——

Ai Fa and I walked on the solid yellow ground.

After ending the job that lasted six days, we bid farewell to the Wu clan village and headed home.

Really now, I wanted to help clean up after the banquet too.

I couldn’t help but complain on our way home.

I overslept and didn’t take part in cleaning up the aftermath of the banquet.

The sun would reach the top of the sky soon.

After coming to this different world, I followed its principle of sleeping and rising early. But I was too exhausted yesterday, and I felt really bad about not getting up.

Ai Fa walked energetically and glanced sideways at me.

“You’re still talking about that? Your job is to cook the dishes for the banquet, you don’t need to mind these trivial matters.”

“No, this has nothing to do with my responsibility, I just wanted to work together with everyone until the very end.”

When morning came —— which was just an hour ago, I woke up and rushed out of my rented room, but there was no trace of the banquet left at all.

The makeshift stoves made from stones, the stage for the newlyweds, the tall stands for the torches and the ceremonial fire—— all that had been cleared away. The space before me was vast and empty, as if the banquet last night was just a dream.

After asking Ai Fa, I learned that the entire village got up after sunrise to clean up the place after the banquet.

“It feels lonely after the rowdy festival ended, and now, I felt as if a hole had been opened in my chest.”

Furthermore, I would be bidding farewell to the Wu clan village that I had been staying in for the past six days.

In the past six days, I made many friends.

I didn’t know how to interact with the men from the Wu clan in the beginning, but after teaching them about the bloodletting and dismembering process, I felt it hard to describe the sense of closeness and trust between them and me. Even more so for the Wu clan women who worked hard to cook the dishes with me.

This made the depression I felt even stronger.

“Never mind, Ai Fa, as long as you are by my side, everything will be fine!”

After I announced how I felt loudly, Ai Fa who was walking besides me kicked my leg.

“It’s about time for you to change your mindset. There’s another troublesome matter awaiting us today.”

“Yes, I know.”

About an hour later, we reached our home after being away for six days—— There was a blonde man in a cloak waiting there for us.

“Hi, Ai Fa and Asuta, I’m glad that you both look well.”

The man was tall and skinny, just like a mantis.

Messy blonde hair with a scuffy beard to match.

A narrow face, nose, drooping eyes and an always smiling face.

This man had incredible purple eyes, the innocence of a child and the maturity of an elderly man.

This mysterious man of unknown origins was Kamyua Yost.

"I have come to visit as promised. Can you speak with me?"

"Yes, thank you for making the trip here, we wanted to discuss something with you too."

Kamyua Yost replied with a happy smile in response to me.

"I'm glad for your hospitality. Beautiful female hunter, I hope that you are well too."

"....."

"Please don't spoil my house head's mood... Let's talk inside. I'

ll take care of your blades."

"I see. Is that a custom of Forest's Edge? That's good. I couldn't help smiling at the prospect of having my curiosity satiated."

Kamyua Yost said carefreely, and removed the sword on his waist, and handed it to me, scabbard and all.

His sword was longer than the saber in Forest's Edge. But it was thinner, so it weighed about the same as a saber.

By the way, what was this sword used for?

…This way please.

Ai Fa, me, and the guest went through the door in that order.

The Fa house was still the same.

Ai Fa took off her shoes, hung her cape on the wall and sat in her usual seat of honour.

But she didn’t let down her guard. She placed her saber which she usually leans against the wall by her side.

I sat beside her, and placed the guest’s sword besides me just like her

Kamyua Yost showed no intention of removing his cloak, and sat at the bottom seat.

… What a strange uncle.

Kamyua Yost helped us when we were in trouble in the Post Station Town. After that, he created an uproar in the Wu village that almost led to bloodshed. This was the third time we met.

No matter how many times I meet him, I couldn’t tell what he was thinking from his frivolous smiling face.

「Alright then—— I would like to apologize to you two.」

「Apologize?」

As I tilted my head quizzedly, Kamyua Yost's lips turned up in a smile.

「When we first met in the Post Station Town, I said many unnecessary things that confused you. I have no intention of being hostile to the chief Tsun clan without being provoked.」

He suddenly cut to the chase.

「And so, I hope you won't think of me as an enemy, and misunderstand me as attempting to attack a denizen of Forest's Edge. I'm here to visit because I want to build a relationship with the denizens of Forest's Edge. Will you believe me?」

Ai Fa didn't say a word, keeping one knee up as she sat with her legs pulled in, giving off a dignified aura.

I didn't know what Kamyua Yost thought of the silent Ai Fa, but he continued talking smoothly:

「Back then, I progressed the topic a little too fast. I have always been curious about the denizens of Forest's Edge, and when I got the chance to speak with the two of you, and a beautiful lady like Ai Fa on top of that, I might have acted imprudently. I hope you can forgive me.」

After hearing that, Ai Fa remained expressionless and didn’t say a word.

This was the second time Ai Fa had met Kamyua Yost. She had already braced herself, and could ignore his frivolous words.

My job was to probe what he was really thinking through dialogue.

“Kamyua Yost, can you tell me what is your objective?”

“Just call me Kamyua… What do you mean by objective?”

“I know you are visiting Forest's Edge since you are in the vicinity for your work, but why go out of your way to visit us? You are not here just to chat right?”

“No, I’m just here to chat today.”

Kamyua Yost opened his eyes wide in surprise.

“I have always thought of the denizens of Forest's Edge as my own brethrens. But my feelings are one sided. To you all, I’m just an outsider of dubious origin. Of course, you won’t take my words on the rules of Forest's Edge and the deprivation of the chief clan to heart. I’m here in order to deepen my friendship with you.”

Kamyua Yost took out a bottle of fruit wine from his cloak.

"It's a little gift from me. Please try it tonight... Oh right, poison test."

He took a sip of the fruit wine like he did the previous time.

"Hmm~I think you still haven't answered my question properly. I don't understand the reason and motive behind you getting closer to the denizens of Forest's Edge."

"What? I just want to deepen my friendship with everyone, is there a need for motives and reasons...? If I have to think of one, it's because the denizens of Forest's Edge were forced by circumstances in the past, and had to switch the god they worship. This resonates deeply with me. I respect how noble the denizens of Forest's Edge acts in the Post Station Town. I'm also intrigued and feel goodwill towards the two of you. My visit here is based on these three reasons."

He had a way with words.

His thoughts were sound and orderly, but his expression and tone were frivolous.

"Since you agreed to host my visit, that means you are curious about me too right? After all, the people in town all fear the denizens of Forest's Edge, but I actually had the gull to come to Forest's Edge, so you couldn't just ignore me right?"

"Thank you for articulating our thoughts… By the way, about the job you mentioned before, have you gotten permission from the Tsun clan?"

"Yes, I have reflected on my actions. If I skip the Tsun clan and contact the denizens of Forest's Edge directly, it would be a slight against the Tsun clan and cause unnecessary tension."

This man's job was the escort of a caravan that would be leaving Genos for the Eastern Kingdom Semu.

When the time comes, the caravan hopes to travel through the Forest's Edge, so he had to ask the Tsun clan for a guide, and settle other related issues.

"Even though you had a run-in with the Tsun clan, they actually gave their permission so readily."

"Yes, even though I gave my name clearly, they accepted without any hesitation. As expected of the chief clan, even though they are corrupted, they are really magnanimous."

Kamyua Yost had a smile of satisfaction.

It might be bad for me to say this, but I couldn't trust him at all when he makes such a face.

“By the way, it will be quite some time before I set off for work. As it is a large caravan, the preparation work is tedious. And the members are very superstitious, so we will only set off on the 15th of the month. That would be twenty-odd days from today.”

I didn’t know the calendar of this world yet, so even if I hear him say that, I still have no idea what date it was.

In order to not let him realize that, I nodded vaguely and said:“I see.”

“When we set off for the eastern kingdom, it will take us two months to come back. That’s why I hope to deepen my friendship with the two of you as much as possible in these 20 odd days. Ai Fa, Asuta, thank you for accepting a suspicious man like me.”

“Our friendship aren’t that deep.”

“Solid friendships that are formed in no time are worthless. Only after going through a series of hardships will our friendship become sturdy.”

It might sound like he was saying something profound, but it just sound superficial when it came out from his mouth.

When I was at a loss and moaning, my stomach suddenly growled.

Ai Fa was staring at Kamyua Yost, but she was now looking at me coldly.

Are you hungry? If this is meal time, you don’t need to mind me.

No, we didn’t eat much during the day, I was just too busy last night to eat dinner…

That won’t do! You’re too skinny Asuta, you should eat more.

This thin pole was actually telling me. Despite the retort I made in my heart, this man might only look exceptionally slender because he was too tall.

As he had a long cloak on, I couldn’t tell his body type, but the wrist he was showing looked solid. If I wasn’t wrong, his long fingers and big palms didn’t lose out to Jiza Wu and Darum Wu.

It’s just past noon. Hmm… it’s too unbearable to hang on until evening with meat jerky alone. Ai Fa, can I cook some meat and aria?

Up to you.

When I heard Ai Fa’s reply, I walked to the food store.

At this moment, the eyes of the guest sparkled, and he called out to me:

Wait, is the meat you are talking about kiba meat? If I’m right, can you

let me try some?」

Ai Fa had been calm all this while, but she now showed a shocked expression.

「You are from Rock City—— but you want to eat kiba meat?」

「Hmm? Is that strange? Only the locals in Genos had the strange idea about fearing kiba and the denizens of Forest's Edge right?」

Kamyua Yost had a cheerful smile on his face.

「I’m not a local of Genos, or even this country. I think kiba is just a normal vermin, and the denizens of Forest's Edge are brave hunters that exterminate these vermins. Travelers from the east and south don’t fear you two right? Please don’t be so surprised.」

I couldn’t tell the easterners from the southerners apart.

I only remember—— most of the people who fear and view Ai Fa in contempt had yellowish skin.

「Aside from the denizens of Forest's Edge, no one else ate kiba. I don’t know about the south or the east, but in the western territories, the kiba can only be found in the Morga Forest. As a citizen of the western kingdom, this will be a fulfilling trip if I can taste some kiba meat today.」

His eyes were sparkling like a child

On the other hand, Ai Fa was clearly troubled.

In the last eight decades, denizens of Forest's Edge was viewed as Kiba Eaters, and seen in contempt. This development shocked Ai Fa deeply.

Ai Fa, what should we do? You are the house head, I will follow your lead.

I bent over slightly and asked, then Ai Fa grabbed me by the chest suddenly.

I almost slipped, and Ai Fa leaned in so fast to me that I thought she wanted to bite my ears.

I—— I can’t decide. What do you think, Asuta?

We were so close together, but I could barely hear her voice.

She didn’t want the guest to hear this.

I pulled away in surprise and was stunned when I saw Ai Fa’s expression. Her icy expression was stiff, but her blue eyes were as childlike as Rimee

Wu, and she looked at me uneasily.

She was that surprised by this.

Using my body as a shield, I blocked the guest from seeing her face and leaned near her ear:

“This wouldn’t violate any taboo in Forest's Edge, so it’s fine. Let’s treat him to kiba meat and aria as thanks for his fruit wine.”

Ai Fa grabbed my chest again and pulled me in.

“…Asuta, I will let you decide.”

Ai Fa’s lips touched my ear lobes, which made me blush.

I turned to the guest and nodded magnanimously in order to not let him see Ai Fa’s reaction.

“With the house head’s permission, I can cook you a simple meal. How large a portion should I prepare? This is to return the favour for the fruit wine, so you don’t need to hold back.”

“Then, I will have the same amount as you!”

He was acting like an old dog wagging its tail happily.

This might be a good chance. Eating the same food was a good way to get him to open up to us. I might be able to glimpse into the mind of this suspicious man. With that in mind, I headed into the food store.

During this time, Ai Fa had to face the rambling Kamyua Yost alone. She closed her eyes and didn’t make a sound.

2

Sorry for the wait.

It was still early, so I had no intention of cooking anything tedious.

I cut the kiba belly meat into thin slices, then fried it together with sliced aria. After seasoning it with rock salt and pico leaves, I poured in fruit wine, and this simple meat fried with some vegetables was done.

Asuta, you are skilled in cooking. Did you work as a chef in the city before?

Yes, that’s correct.

I handed the spoon and plate to the guest.

The portion was about a quarter of the dinner.

As there wasn’t much, he should be able to finish them all even if it doesn’t suit his taste.

「Ara, I’m so happy. I often travel around the western territories, and at times needed to journey to the eastern and southern kingdom. But I have never seen a beast like the kiba. I have always been curious about its taste.」

So there aren’t anything like the kiba in this world. In my world, aside from the wild boars in the mountains, the other species had also gone extinct.

Ignoring that for now, let’s have a taste.

「I will help myself then.」

Kamyua Yost nodded and picked up the plate with a smile.

He scooped up the kiba meat and aria, then ate them.

Kamyua Yost chewed the food, his jaw covered in a scuffy beard moved up and down. He then swallowed the food——

Kamyua Yost’s narrow face suddenly went expressionless.

I was shocked, and almost let my spoon fall to the ground.

When Kamyua Yost stopped smiling, his casual face turned serious, like that of a death god or killer.

His brows rose high, his eyes sunken and his cheeks were thin, as if someone had cut off the meat on his face. I had never noticed such details, which filled me with fear.

Ai Fa was calm when I was preparing the meal, but she was staring at Kamyua Yost now, not missing a single shred of change.

During this time, Kamyua Yost picked up his spoon and kept sending the food into his mouth. The plate was empty in an instant.

When I saw how he was, I put down the spoon after eating one mouthful.

…What is this?

He opened his thin lipped mouth slightly, and said suddenly. This was the first time I found his voice to be so deep.

Didn’t I already said, this is kiba.

That’s right. This is the first time I ate such a meat.

He stared at me with his purple eyes.

His gaze was sharp.

「This is incredibly delicious.」

「I see. You flatter…」

「This is kiba meat?」

「Yes…」

「I have never tasted such a tasty meat before.」

「Guest! I’m sorry but you are making a scary face!」

「Eh? Really? Sorry!」

Kamyua Yost suddenly covered his thin face with his large palms.

「No no, I was too shocked and showed my hidden side! Don’t misunderstand, no matter which side you see, they are all the real me.」

I wouldn’t misunderstand, and I didn’t want to know either.

I thought we could know each other better by dining together, but I never imagined that it would make Kamyua Yost more suspicious.

"Ara, this is really delicious! I'm really moved! The tribe in Forest's Edge is actually monopolizing such tasty meat? How sly!"

Even though his hidden side was concealed again, he was still as suspicious as before.

I looked towards Ai Fa who was besides me, and she exhaled deeply.

When I saw her let go of the saber by her feet, I was shocked.

The man before us emitted such a dangerous air, it made Ai Fa grab her blade tensely.

"The people in Genos didn't know how tasty the kiba is, and actually mocked the denizens of Forest's Edge, calling them "Kiba Eater". How retarded! Are you monopolizing such tasty meat to get back at them?"

"No, no such thing."

I answered, then picked up my spoon to eat a second mouthful.

At this moment, Ai Fa tapped my knee with her fist.

「Asuta, the aroma of the food made me a little hungry.」

「What? Didn't I ask if you wanted some when I was cooking just now?」

I scooped up some meat and aria with my spoon.

「Here, open up.」

I was hit in the head.

Ai Fa snatched my plate, ate two mouthful, then returned the rest to me.

That was mean, house head.

「Yes, I'm really moved! Asuta, thanks to your exemplary culinary skills, the food taste so delicious. This dish is seasoned just right, and the fruit wine made it very appetizing. Asuta, did you learn under a famous chef?」

「No, my home was a small restaurant.」

「From which country? I have visited many nations, but I have never seen such a cooking style.」

I never thought this would come up.

No matter who it was, I wouldn’t change my stance.

“It will take some time to explain the entire thing. I come from an island nation called Japan. Before arriving in Forest's Edge, I had never heard of the continent Amusehorn before. When I came to one day, I found myself inside a forest, at the foot of Mount Morga.”

“… You had never heard of Amusehorn?”

Kamyua Yost opened his eyes wide in surprise again

That was a natural reaction. If a foreigner in Japan says he never heard of the country Japan before, I would feel surprised too.

“What do you mean? From your appearance, I thought you were a mixed blood of the east and west nations.”

“Hmm? Are mixed bloods from the east and west common?”

“No, they are rare, but the two nations are on friendly terms. If you choose which nation’s citizen to be from the very start, you won’t be prosecuted—— Asuta, so you don’t even know such basic things?”

“Sorry, I don’t.”

We were busy recently, so Ai Fa’s lecture on the world of Amusehorn had stopped for now. After we would eat dinner, we would chat idly, and I would fall into slumber before I realized it.

By the way—— Because the Forest's Edge settlement was a unique enclosed space, Ai Fa couldn’t possess extensive knowledge in such an environment. Ai Fa was merely regurgitating the information her parents and Grandma Jiba told her onto me.

“I see. So even though you are a foreigner, you decided to live on as a denizen of Forest's Edge. The people from the west think the denizens of Forest's Edge are incarnation of disaster, and the southerners brand them as the tribe of traitors that forsake their gods. The northerners are the forsaken rivals of the western people—— That’s why I presumed that you hailed from the eastern kingdom.”

“My hometown was also called the far east island. Do the easterners look like me?”

“Not at all. The easterners also have black hair and eyes, but their skins are dark. You must have seen such people in the Post Station Town right? Those are the people from the Eastern Kingdom Simu.”

I see, my common sense wasn’t applicable on this land after all.

“I’m confused too, you can just think of me as a retard who believes in his strange delusion after hitting his head.”

“Got it, I will do just that.”

I didn’t expect that reply, and I almost fell over in surprise.

“Don’t misunderstand, I don’t think you are a retard. Hmm~ but I was still shocked, to think that kiba meat is so tasty… Word on the street of Genos is that kiba meat is stinky and tough, and unpalatable.”

“Someone must have tasted kiba that wasn’t prepared correctly, which led to such a rumour. Kiba is actually very delicious.”

“Yes! I could feel that point! Normally, only travellers will eat aria and poitan as their staple food, which led me to think that the denizens of Forest's Edge aren’t too concerned with food, and live ascetically. This presumption was horribly wrong. The denizens of Forest's Edge aren’t like that at all, it would not be arrogant to call yourselves the “Gourmet Tribe”. Yeah~ I’m so surprised.”

“Ah, wait. Your impression of the Forest's Edge tribe isn’t wrong. I’m a foreigner, you can’t use me as the standard.”

“Is that so? After eating such tasty kiba meat, I can’t think of the denizens of Forest's Edge as pure-hearted and with little desire anymore. No wonder they can be satisfied with the cheap aria and poitan. Yeah~ this is so interesting!”

What should I do?

I didn’t plan to tell everything about Forest's Edge to this suspicious

character yet. But he was acquainted with the Count of Genos, so it didn’t feel right to give him wrong information too.

“Kamyua Yost, sorry, but can you give me some time?”

“Hmm? What is it?”

“I came from a foreign country, and am not familiar with the taboos and customs of Forest's Edge. To be honest, I don’t know if I should tell you about the situation inside Forest's Edge. I need to discuss with my house head about this.”

“I see, no problem! After all, you are the only one talking to me, it will turn into my monologue if you keep quiet…! Alright then, I will leave for a moment. Actually, my scouting work isn’t finished yet, I want to take a visit to the south.”

“South… That’s where the Wu village is.”

“I won’t go near the Wu clan today. They don’t seem to welcome me, and I realized that I should be careful when I interact with the denizens of Forest's Edge.”

He actually had such a thought, looked like Darum Wu drawing his blade on him wasn’t a complete waste of effort.

But I hoped he would have realized that before the blade was drawn.

“But from the terrain, you will definitely pass through the Wu village if you head south. This is an elongated settlement after all, and there is only one path.”

“Don’t worry, I’m good at concealing myself. I hid myself pretty well last night too right?”

“… What?”

“I hid in a corner of the woods and watched that banquet quietly. When the young men from the Tsun clan showed up, I broke out in cold sweat. Fortunately, everything ended peacefully.”

Kamyua Yost gave a big casual smile after leaving with these words.

3

“I want to ask your opinion about that uncle?”

I asked Ai Fa as I boiled the poitan soup.

“When I talked in depth with him, I found him hard to grasp. Maybe we should stop getting involved with him?”

「... I don't know.」

Ai Fa sounded tired.

「I have no intentions of mingling with the citizens of Rock City in the first place, but what that man said is right. Even though his attitude is so frivolous.」

「Which is to say, everything will be much easier if we can trust him... Although that guy and Jiza Wu are always smiling, their personalities are miles apart. I might not see eye to eye with Jiza Wu, but I know how serious he is.」

「And he—— ate the kiba meat.」

Ai Fa muttered, her eyes gloomy.

「That surprised me the most. I thought no one from Rock City would ever do that.」

「I see. I'm not born in Forest's Edge, and had only visited the Post Station Town once. But I agree with him on that point.」

「... What do you mean?」

Ehh? My thinking is similar to that uncle, that only people who are from Genos would believe the superstition that kiba and the kiba hunters are signs of disaster. Genos' farm is often attacked by kiba, so the locals would naturally have skewed views about kiba and have misunderstandings. But the other people don't think much about kiba, and so they don't fear them. Furthermore, it had been decades since the locals think of kiba as a sign of disaster.

.....

Almost all the stalls in the Post Station Town are operated by the Genos locals, so when the denizens of Forest's Edge go there, they will basically come into contact with people that fear them. If there are more foreigners setting up stalls in the Post Station Town, and they don't mind the aura of the Forest's Edge denizens and their preference to keep to themselves like that uncle, maybe there won't be such a misunderstanding.

...Asuta, you are saying difficult things.

Ai Fa couldn't help saying in frustration.

That dignified Ai Fa actually said that.

Even if you are not from Genos, you must be from Rock City. Your words are as unfathomable as Kamyua Yost.

Compared to Forest's Edge, my birthday is indeed more similar to the Post Station Town. However, even if the topic I'm talking about is difficult, you can't give up on understanding each other——

「You think I’m not putting in effort?」

Ai Fa’s weak voice surprised me, and I turned back.

She leaned against the wall near the stove, her expression looked unexpectedly and her eyelids were half closed.

「I don’t really understand you, but I still tried my best to do so. Are you blaming me because I understand too slowly…?」

「N-No, that’s not it! It’s my fault! Please don’t cry!」

「Who’s crying! Who did you think I am!?」

Ai Fa was saying things that was supposed to be my lines, and her face was blushed.

Instead of being on the verge of tears, this expression suited her better.

「Let’s decide on the steps first. How much of the truth should we tell that uncle? What must we tell him? What can’t we tell him? We need to decide carefully.」

「I understand.」

After Ai Fa said that, she stood up slowly for some reason and went behind me as I continued cooking the poitan.

While I was wondering what happened, she placed her hands on my shoulders and whispered into my ears: Asuta, what do you think?

As I was a little taller, she had probably straightened her back. Although she only touched my shoulders, I could feel Ai Fa’s body warmth on my back faintly.

W-Wait! We already chased away that uncle, why do we have to whisper?

We can’t be sure that man has really left. He might be eavesdropping outside.

Even if that was true, did she plan to stick close to me for the next few hours?

W-Wait! The poitan has dried up, let me deal with that first.

I felt the body warmth fade away quickly.

Really, her actions were more unnerving than Vena Wu.

I shifted the dissolved poitan onto a fake rubber tree leaf folded into a boat shape, and quietly wiped the sweat on my brow.

There were six poitan, or enough for three portions.

Kamyua Yost would be back before sunset, he suggested that we should dine together.

"I won't ask to stay the night! But I'm very intrigued by the food culture in Forest's Edge! I'm willing to pay!"

I have no intention of soliciting payment from the guest that brought high class fruit wine as a door gift. Ai Fa showed a complicated expression, but she still acceded to his request. That was why I'm preparing dinner for three.

"Before our secret talk, let's decide our dinner."

I used a spatula to scrape away the charred remnants of the poitan, and turned to Ai Fa who had retreated behind me.

"What should we have for dinner?""Hamburg steak."

That was fast!

When she saw my stunned face, Ai Fa said again:"... Hamburg steak."

You didn’t need to repeat that

"I see. On second thought, we need to consider our dinner carefully."

Ai Fa walked over briskly, grabbed my neck so our heads were at the same level, then asked softly:

"What do you mean?"

She was actually serious?

"We shouldn’t let him think that the hamburg steak is a normal dish in Forest's Edge right? If we need to explain this dish, it will bring up our relationship to the Wu clan and Lutim house. We should decide what information we should make public first."

I had to whisper to Ai Fa too. We were extremely close, and no matter how hard I tried to hold my breath, the fragrance still snuck into my nose. I just ate, but Ai Fa’s scent stirred my appetite again.

Ai Fa didn’t realize how I was feeling at all, her lips went near my ears again..

「… Why?」

「Hey, since we aren't saying anything important, there's no need to whisper right!?」

「That's true.」

Even though she answered that way, Ai Fa still leaned in with her ear.

I still need to whisper after all.

「Well, that uncle has a special status, he knows the Landlord of Genos right? If we gave him wrong information, it might lead to misunderstandings. Furthermore, he isn't on good terms with the Tsun clan, so it's inappropriate to tell him too much about the Wu clan and Lutim house right?」

「… That men already met Donda Wu, and knows that we are involved with that banquet right?」

Ai Fa whispered.

My right ear lobes felt as it was melting.

「That's true. The important thing is… Given the chance, Donda Wu will

bring down the Tsun clan. Can we say this to that man?

A question worth pondering over.

I exhausted too much stamina, so I sat on the ground and poked at the aria that was waiting for its moment to debut.

That man——

Uwah!

What is it retard, that scared me.

Y-You are the one scaring me, retard! Don't whisper to me so suddenly from behind!

… You can't even notice this much movement?

Regrettably, I'm not a hunter, and my senses are not that incredible! When you approach me, please do so from my field of vision!

What a naggy man…

Ai Fa said unhappily, then squatted before me.

She grabbed my chin, turned my face to the side and leaned in.

Since that man might approach Donda Wu in the future, hiding the truth won't be of much help… But we are not obligated to feed him the information either.

I finally realized that I had nowhere to run.

The gods must be trying to test my reason and humanity.

This was too troubling.

I get it. Let's tidy our thoughts. Ai Fa, what information do you think we can't tell that man?

Ai Fa groaned again.

Her face was 10 cm away, if one of us were to move, our knees would touch.

I couldn't stay calm at all.

Ai Fa finally raised her head. I turned my face to the side in a panic, and she caressed my ears with her gentle whispers

“… Nothing.”

“You actually have nothing!”

I almost whacked Ai Fa’s head on reflex.

In such a close distance, Ai Fa pouted as if she was throwing a fit.

“You are the one who suggested this secret talk, so you have something in mind right? Just tell me what you think.”

She turned her head away hard.

Strange, my fatigue was comparable to the huge project I undertook yesterday.

“You think the Tsun clan is the disgrace of Forest's Edge, but you can’t stand the people in the city criticizing them. Then—— if that uncle punished Doddo Tsun and the others for their crimes, would he become an enemy of Forest's Edge?”

Ai Fa frowned troublingly.

She didn’t lower her voice as she answered:

If the Tsun clan violates the laws in the city and gets punished, then it is their fault. And naturally, the people in the city won't become our enemy… However, if the people in the city try to pin a crime on them by saying they violated the rules of Forest's Edge, that would be humiliating to us. If the people in the city mess with the denizens of Forest's Edge that way, I would think the entire thing is a scam.

I see. It was a bit hard to understand what she said, but the gist was that when the denizens of Forest's Edge violate the laws in the city, they should be judged by the people in the city. But if their crimes were breaking the rules of Forest's Edge, their sentences should be meted out by the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Hmm~… but the Tsun clan keeps breaking the rules in Forest's Edge right? No one in Forest's Edge are holding them to task right?

What are you saying, I have never turned a blind eye to the Tsun clan's wrongdoing.

I know. I think you are incredible… But not everyone in Forest's Edge is like you, and dares to defy the Tsun clan right? When the Tsun clan came to pick a fight yesterday, everyone could only sit by and endure the Tsun clan's tyrannical ways until Donda Wu and Dan Lutim took action.

Without permission from the house head, no one can defy the Tsun clan wilfully. Since I am the house head, I can do what I wish.

What I'm about to ask might sound unpleasant… Do the smaller houses not related to the Wu clan have any choice other than suffer the Tsun

clan’s violence quietly?

Ai Fa bit her lower lips, raised her head and said while staring at me:

Tsun clan is the chief clan, but if they openly commit such violent acts, the people will definitely lean towards the Wu clan. In order to prevent that, those retards will still restrain themselves.

Since they can’t do it openly, they will do be discreet about it.

……

Ai Fa, you are strong. When Diddo Tsun and Doddo Tsun do bad things, you can punish them. But those not as strong as you can only suffer in silence—— when I think about this, I still can’t forgive them.

… My prowess are limited, so I can only stop the violence I can see with my eyes.

Ai Fa grabbed my chest again.

Her actions weren’t violent, and she seemed to be leaning into me instead.

I can only protect myself, that’s why…

That was why she always lived alone.

That was why I might become a burden to her.

I nodded, and held Ai Fa’s hand that was at my chest.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t blaming you. No one could accept such violent behaviour. That’s why the Wu clan and house Lutim are so mad… By the way, is the Tsun clan really that powerful? Since they are on par with the Wu clan, that means they have close to a hundred kinsman, and all of them follow the Tsun clan’s lead right?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know all of the Tsun clan’s kin house.”

“I see… Those kin house isn’t as depraved as the Tsun clan right?”

“I have no idea… But if all one hundred of the Tsun clan’s kin were neglecting their hunting duties, then the kiba would already have overrun the entire forest.”

“That’s true. If a hundred of the five hundred denizens of Forest's Edge lived a depraved life, that would be——”

I remembered something I heard before in mid sentence.

“… Now that you mentioned it, Ludo Wu told me,“There’s way too many kiba.” Kiba are normally solitary, but three of them suddenly attacked the hunters at the same time, resulting in Shin Wu’s father suffering a

serious leg injury. He also asked me how the Fa house’s forest is doing…

Ai Fa still held onto my chest, her expression turned serious.

Asuta, I already mentioned this the next day after I met you.

Ehh?

You asked me, Forest's Edge denizens hunts kiba everyday, won’t the kiba go extinct? But then, I answered you that the kiba’s population won’t go down, and has been increasing instead.

……

The number of kiba is increasing. It’s the hunting season for kiba, but the numbers are still incredible… To be honest, with that many kiba lurking in the forest, I don’t even need to use the fruits that attracts kiba.

Eh? Ai Fa, you are not using sacrificial hunting style?

Not for these past few days. Despite that, I still caught a kiba every other day.

I see. Hmm, that’s strange? So that fragrance isn’t from the fruit that attracts kiba?

Ai Fa immediately blushed, and she put more strength into the fingers on my chest.

“When the fruit that attracts kiba get into my hair, it’s hard to get rid of it! Asuta, I have told you to not joke around with my body scent!”

“No, I’m praising you…”

“Shut up…! Anyways, the number of kiba has been increasing through the years.”

“Okay. Ludo Wu wasn’t sure of it, but he thought that was the case.”

“… The Wu village is to our south. The Tsun clan is to the north.”

Ai Fa’s cheeks were still a little red, and there were hints of fire in her eyes.

“You might not understand the relationship between the terrain and kiba. If the Tsun clan continues to neglect their work as hunters, the north of Forest's Edge will be affected the worst.”

“…Ai Fa, you think the number of kiba’s are increasing too?”

Maybe—— the situation is already much more serious than I imagined.

Leaving my insignificant sense of moral and justice aside, if everyone continues to turn a blind eye to the Tsun clan’s depraved actions, the meaning behind the existence for the denizens of Forest's Edge—— might be gone?

“...Ai Fa, this matter might be beyond our capability. Kamyua should build a relationship with the Wu clan or Lutim house, and not us right?”

“There’s no point in doing that.”

“Huh? But why?”

“Think about Donda Wu’s temperament. If the Tsun clan’s depravity goes beyond their limit, he won’t hesitate in using force to settle things. He will uphold the order in Forest’s Edge, and won’t depend on Rock City—— I can understand where he is coming from.”

Ai Fa sighed, and seemed completely different from her usual self.

“Because I know how he feels, I don’t want to ignite this dispute. If the Wu clan and Tsun clan start a war with all their kin, we will lose many good hunters, and the order in Forest's Edge would be on the brink of collapse.”

“Even if it comes to that, you still don’t want to depend on Rock City...”

I sighed too.

With how dangerous the situation was getting, Ai Fa and I met someone who was acquainted with the highest authority in Rock City.

There were only two members in the Fa house. Just what kind of burden did the gods or demons want us to bear?

As a weak hearted caretaker, the most I could do was mince the meat for the house head and guest.

4

Hi, sorry for being late.

When the guest sauntered back into our house, the sun was just touching the western edge of the forest.

Even though there are just five hundred denizens, this settlement is incredibly vast. This is my second time visiting Forest's Edge, and I still couldn’t grasp the scale of it all.

Do you need to do that?

「Hmm, well, the scope of my job is vast too.」

A few hours had passed, but Kamyua Yost was still very suspicious.

「Speaking of which, this smells really nice! Luckily, I restrained myself and didn't eat any jerky! Ah, here's my blade for your safekeeping.」

「This way please. I just finished preparing the food.」

I didn't plan to disrupt my routine for the guest. If Kamyua Yost didn't return in time, we would have started without him.

When I saw him return right before we were about to dine, I was worried he was eavesdropping outside just like what Ai Fa said.

It was fine for him to hear what we said, but I wouldn't be able to take it if he saw how pained I was because of Ai Fa's unintentional body contacts.

「Uwah, impressive! Why did the kiba turn into this round shape?」

「I minced the meat and moulded it into this round shape.」

「I see. Why did you bother to do that?」

「Because it tastes better this way.」

It seemed that dishes similar to hamburg steak didn’t exist in this world.

Or maybe this uncle didn’t know about it.

「Anyway, let’s dig in. We’re hungry.」

「Yes, let’s eat.」

I decided not to rack my brain over the menu, and let the guest eat a classic meal of the Fa house.

Which was the three following dishes: kiba hamburg steak, fried aria with tino and grilled poitan.

I hoped to get a new pot soon, so I could prepare one more soup dish.

「Hmm? Is this fuwano? I heard that the staple food in Forest's Edge is poitan.」

「That is poitan. What’s a fuwano?」

「The wrapped meat bun that Tara was eating back then. Westerners

normally eat fuwano together with meat and vegetables—— Eh? This is poitan? Why? How can this be poitan?

It seems like this way of eating poitan had not been invented outside Forest's Edge yet.

His reaction intrigued me, so I leaned forward.

Can you tell me how the people in the city eat poitan?

No one in the city eats poitan. Poitan is normally packed for travels. Unlike fuwano, poitan could be preserved for a long time, and eaten right after cooking. It is cheap and suitable for long journeys… The only downside is its unappealing taste.

That’s regrettable.

After I answered, Ai Fa tugged the corner of my t-shirt. She must be reaching the limits of her hunger.

Please enjoy your meal. I hope you won’t show your hidden side again.

I will do that… ! I will help myself then.

Rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub.

□……□

The three of us got in place and picked up our plates.

I minced a mountain of hamburg steak just yesterday, but it’s been awhile since I tasted one. After grilling so many hamburg steak, I felt that my control over the heat had gotten better, which made me gleeful.

The hamburg steak today was huge, almost 500g. Eating the meat, which was beaten and then cooked in the fruit wine, made the juices come out with just a bite, stimulating my mouth comfortably.

When I chewed, the taste of the meat and fats spreaded throughout my mouth—— Ah, kiba meat was really suited to be made into hamburg steak. I realized this once again.

The seared surface and the tenderness inside had an adequate balance. After eating a large amount of hamburg steak, the mini hamburg steak couldn’t satisfy me now.

The aria side dish had the texture of onions, and the tino was like cabbage. Both of them complemented the meat really well. Tino would spoil within a few days and couldn’t be kept for long like aria and poitan, so we should consume them as soon as possible.

Well then——

I lifted my head to observe the guest dining, and fortunately, he didn’t show a death god-like face this time.

But his face was wavering, as if he was on the verge of tears.

I didn’t want to interact with him right now, but I still asked out of politeness:“Is the food alright?”

“It’s great.”

He asked in a teary voice.

“I’m working hard to keep my composure. How’s that? I look fine, right?”

“I don’t know what your standard for “fine” is, but at least you don’t look scary.”

“I see. That’s great.”

Kamyua Yost took a bite of the grilled poitan.

His expression went blank the next instant. I almost screamed in

surprise.

"Didn't I tell you that's scary!? What is it? Are you trying to joke here?"

"I didn't mean to do that. You are the one who surprised me."

His voice was heavy, which made me feel that his next words would be: "And so, I have to kill you."

Is this uncle really fine?

Ai Fa didn't care about the faces Kamyua Yost was showing, and kept eating her hamburg steak.

Someone not from Forest's Edge daring to eat kiba meat should make Ai Fa uneasy, but she showed no signs of wavering at all—— no, she was probably just lost in her world of the hamburg steak.

I didn't know if it was just my imagination, but compared to kiba steak or kiba soup, Ai Fa looked exceptionally blissed when she eats hamburg steak. If I didn't plan the menu properly, she would probably eat hamburg steak everyday, how scary.

But I still—— felt really happy.

The women of the Wu clan and Lutim house must be feeling the same bliss too.

Aside from Ludo Wu, the men of the Wu clan didn't really care about me. But their family must understand the inner world of that group of crude men acutely.

I hope my guess was right.

"Hey, this is too good! What a delicious and unique taste! Asuta, just who are you?"

After finishing his meal, Kamyua Yost finally reverted back to his unpredictable mode, and said:

"I have never tasted such an incredible food! You mentioned that you minced the meat, then moulded them into a round patty again? How did you come up with such an interesting way of cooking it?"

"I don't know. This is a common cooking method in my home country."

A few centuries ago, the horse meat in mongolia was really tough, so the people minced them before cooking them. This was said to be the origins of the hamburg steak. I didn't remember the details, and this information probably didn't exist in this world either.

"Hmm~ What a delicious and impactful taste. This is the first time I have eaten such a delicacy."

"You are exaggerating. Haven't you dined with the Lord Count in Rock City before?"

"Those are the food for the nobles. It might be unique and interesting, but I couldn't tell if it tasted good… However, your cooking is definitely delicious."

"Whirlwind of the North" Kamyua Yost crossed his arms and heaped on praises.

He was exaggerating a little, but it wasn't annoying.

"Asuta. I think whether something is delicious is not decided by the taste alone."

"Eh? Yes, that's true."

"I heard kiba meat is tough and stinky, but I never thought it would be this tender and tasty. And the mud water like poitan got turned into the shape of a fuwano. Finally, you only used aria and tino, but the meal is so delicious—— these are all details that made the dish more delectable."

"I see."

"If these dishes were served in the castle, I would just think "Oh, what a unique dish", "It must be expensive" and would be not as surprised. If one is willing to pay, it is only natural for them to serve up dishes that are hard to make. However, the ingredients here are kiba, along with aria and poitan, two ingredients people thought to be cheap and

unappetizing. That really surprises me!

Huh? Everyone thinks aria is cheap and unappetizing?

Hmm? No, people in the city often eat aria. After all, aria is cheap and nutritious, so aria and fuwano are the staple food of the citizens. Aria can’t be found in the castle town though. The residents there think such cheap vegetables are a sign of poverty, so aria became the staple food of the Post Station Town and farmers.

I see, so aria is a staple food of the peasants, and the nobles won’t eat them.

That’s right. But, leaving my surprise aside, your cooking is still delicious. Asuta, the people in Forest's Edge let you cook for the huge banquet because of your outstanding culinary skills right?

He suddenly started an important topic.

I was very curious about the topic of food this strange man had brought up, but now wasn’t the time for such idle chatter.

Sorry, but I forgot to ask you. Why did you peek at the Lutim house banquet last night? To be honest, that is a really low move.

My bad my bad, I couldn’t suppress my curiosity. As you know, when I

met you in the Wu village, the plaza was set up for a banquet. As you said that you are busy with a job two days later, I presumed that there will be a festive event on that day. Hence, I sneaked into Forest's Edge two days later.

I don’t know if your action is considered a crime or not, but where did you hide?

In the woods right in front of the plaza. I know it wasn’t appropriate of me to enter the plaza… But I never expected those scums were braver than me, and barged right in.

… You knew they are from the Tsun clan because Doddo Tsun was with them?

Yes. I learned that you cooked the food for the banquet after hearing your conversation.

I held my breath.

In that case—— He must have heard Dan Lutim and Donda Wu’s angry roar.

I couldn’t hide too much from him now.

Speaking of which, Ai Fa looked really stunning back then! I have no complaints with her attire right now, but she will only dress up like that for banquets right?

Ai Fa tilted her head slightly, as if she was asking:Do I need to answer?

She was starting to understand how she should deal with the man before her.

Her heart must be filled with doubt and confusion when she heard that man praise the kiba meat repeatedly, but she looked calm on the surface.

On the other hand I was—— still groping.

No matter how hard I tried to understand this man’s thoughts, he kept slipping away like an eel. It would probably take quite some time to understand him.

However——

Alright then, I should take my leave.

When I saw Kamyua Yost preparing to stand, I almost fell onto the ground while seated.

Y-You are going back?

「Yes. Didn’t you say that the denizens of Forest's Edge will sleep early after dinner? I’m a night owl, and I would feel bad about making you stay up with me.」

「Kamyua Yost… why exactly are you here?」

「I already said right at the start. I’m here to deepen my friendship with the two of you.」

This was bad.

As expected, I didn’t understand him at all.

I wanted to use this man’s strength and position to stop the Tsun clan from falling deeper, and in turn protect the safety of Ai Fa and me. But I couldn’t see through his thoughts at all—— his thoughts were too liberal.

I should wipe the existence of the man from my mind.

「Oh right, I have one last thing to discuss, or rather, suggest to you.」

「What is it?」

I answered disinterestedly.

He probably wanted to say something inconsequential. If he talks some rubbish, I will use this chance to break off all ties with him—— Even though I harboured such a thought, his madness far exceeded my imagination.

"Would you like to open a stall in the Post Station Town?"

At the very end, he said these shocking words.

Vol. 4 :

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

The next day after we met Kamyua Yost, Ai Fa and I visited the Lutim village early in the morning.

To be honest, Ai Fa and I couldn’t handle that madman by ourselves anymore.

After heading to the south of the Wu village, we found five large houses grouped tightly together. This was the Lutim village, and I had visited this place several times before the wedding to consult the newlywed’s opinions.

Fortunately, Kaslan Lutim was already up when we visited the massive main house.

Hey, it’s Ai Fa and Asuta. What’s the matter?

Kaslan Lutim received us with a smile.

The house head Dan Lutim was still fast asleep. But that was fine since Kaslan Lutim was the one with an earnest character, and a flexible, open mind. We needed to consult him now.

“Sorry for visiting at such a time.”

“It’s fine, the custom of the Lutim house dictates that husband and wife don’t need to work three days before and after the wedding. I’m very happy about your visit.”

Kaslan Lutim had a calm smile.

Even so, I still felt guilty about visiting the groom two days after his wedding.

But we were very confused and had to seek the opinion of a third party.

“Yesterday, when Kamyua Yost visited the Fa house, our conversation developed in an unexpected manner.”

When Kaslan Lutim brought me into a large hall that was on par with the Wu clan in terms of size, I started the topic.

What we wanted to discuss was the insane idea proposed by Kamyua Yost last night.

"Why do we have to open a stall in the Post Station Town?"

When I answered in a panic, Kamyua Yost didn't seem bothered at all.

"For the sake of making the denizens of Forest's Edge stronger and more prosperous of course."

I sighed, then scratched my head on reflex.

"If I open a stall, why would the denizens of Forest's Edge obtain more strength and become more prosperous? I don't get the logic behind your words."

"Why? Asuta, you might have come from a foreign land, but you are now a member of Forest's Edge. When you become wealthy, that means life in Forest's Edge will be more prosperous too, right?"

"Don't think so. The earned copper plates will only make the Fa house richer. Furthermore, there are only the two of us in the Fa house, with no other kin or family. No one will share our gains."

"Hmm? What do you mean?"

I started explaining to the uncle that the denizens of Forest's Edge was a tribe that deepened their bonds through blood ties.

He probably knew, but I still told him that "commerce" didn't exist in Forest's Edge. And so, money would stay within relatives.

Still,there was a faint smile on Kamyua Yost's face.

"I can't agree with that. Going by what you said, the denizens of Forest's Edge don't care about anyone except their family. What I mean is, do you think everyone but your family is insignificant?"

"That's going too extreme. Of course we have friends too. But even if we become wealthy, it will have nothing to do with their lives."

"That's only if you hog all the wealth like the chief clan."

At this point of the conversation, Ai Fa had completely showed her hunter's eyes.

That was a natural reaction. I wasn't angry yet, but my distrust of this u

ncle had been pushed to the limits.

「I’m just chatting about something that flashed across my mind, I never thought you would be so resistant against it.」

「... Of course. Even for idle chatter, that came out of nowhere.」

「Is it? I think this sudden inspiration isn’t bad at all. After all, opening a stall in the Post Station Town isn’t that hard.」

Kamyua Yost said casually. He was about to get up, but he sat back down and stroked his stubby beard.

「I got it. I will explain to you from the very beginning. The first thing on my mind is the value of the kiba meat.」

「... The value of the kiba meat?」

「The people in Forest's Edge sell kiba horns, tusks, and hides in exchange for food. In that case, why not sell kiba meat?」

「The people in the city don’t eat kiba meat, right? They fear the kiba, and even mock the Forest's Edge denizens as 『Kiba Eaters』.」

「Only the locals in Genos fear kiba. The travellers and migrants are just influenced by them.」

「No, that might be so——」

「Let me ask you, do you think it is right for the people in Genos to discriminate Forest's Edge denizens as 「Kiba Eaters」 and fear them? Will that make the denizens of Forest's Edge happy and proud? If the denizens of Forest's Edge don't mind, then it's okay. I can understand why you don't want the people in the city to know how delicious the kiba are. You are free to ignore my proposal… But if that isn't what the denizens of Forest's Edge really think, I really can't imagine a reason why you won't sell the kiba meat.」

The denizens of Forest's Edge discovered the delectability of kiba only recently, in this very month—— There wasn't any point for me to rebuke him like this.

Since we could peddle kiba tusks and horns, there wasn't any reason why we couldn't sell kiba meat.

「You want me to open a butcher shop in the Post Station Town? Is that really profitable?」

「You won't earn money in the Post Station Town if you start with a butchery right off the bat. We need to let them know how tasty kiba meat is. That's why I suggested for you to open a stall… Not a butchery, but a food stall.」

「……」

「If you succeed, the kiba meat could then be sold as merchandize. Everyone thinks that kiba meat is nasty and stinks, but if your delicious food becomes popular in the Post Station Town, you can overturn this misconception. When everyone will be willing to pay for kiba meat with copper plates, your success will lift up Forest's Edge, right?」

Kamyua Yost looked really chirpy, as if he just wanted to chat.

「The tusks and horns from one kiba could be exchanged for at most one silver plate. The hide goes for about the same amount. The hunters in Forest's Edge risk their lives to hunt, so this pittance is too unreasonable... I found this unsettling since a long time ago.」

「However—— the denizens of Forest's Edge lived for eight decades this way. If we destroy this pattern now——」

「Asuta, what I'm going to say might be a little rude. You just became a denizen of Forest's Edge, right? I asked my friends in the Post Station Town, they have never seen a foreigner in Forest's Edge clothing in the past.」

「... And so?」

「I just want to tell you that I might be more familiar with life in Forest's Edge than you.」

Kamyua Yost had an arrogant smile.

「There are plenty of hunter's pride hanging on Ai Fa's neck. The Wu clan has many kin, and there's also the Tsun clan hogging all the prize money… Asuta, have you ever interacted with the other houses before?」

No.

Why did Kamyua Yost ask that?

「The answer is simple. When you know what kind of life the average denizens of Forest's Edge are living, you won't be against the idea of improving their lives.」

「The average—— Forest's Edge denizen? You are not even a denizen of Forest's Edge, how would you know——」

「I'm not a denizen, so this is just my guess. If I'm wrong, I hope Ai Fa will correct me.」

Ai Fa didn't say a word.

However —— I sensed another agitated emotion other than rage in her fiery eyes.

「Most of the Forest's Edge denizens only eat aria and poitan because they couldn't afford other ingredients. Only a minority of the Forest's

Edge denizens has as much savings as Ai Fa, most of them are suffering in poverty. Their homes are empty, and not because they wish for an ascetic lifestyle. Many couldn’t afford aria and poitan, and couldn’t eat anything except kiba meat, leading to a premature death—— That’s my assumption. From the information I garnered in the Post Station Town, and inspecting Forest's Edge personally, that’s the conclusion I arrived at. Ai Fa, am I wrong?

… The capable houses lead wealthy lives, and the powerless families lead impoverished lives. That is just the way things are.

Which means, there really are people who only live by eating meat in Forest's Edge, and die prematurely. There are even those who fail to hunt kiba and starve to death. Is that true?

… To avoid being forced to such an end, we have to work hard and become stronger. That’s what I have been taught since young.

Since the denizens of Forest's Edge teach their children this concept, that means such a risk exists.

Why did things end up like this?

I started deluding—— that compared to Ai Fa who seldom mingled with the other denizens, Kamyua Yost from the city understood the situation in Forest's Edge better.

Outsiders have a clearer view.

Kamyua Yost smiled again, but his expression changed this time.

He narrowed his drooping eyes, and a clear light appeared in his purple iris, like an elderly philosopher—— Even though he was clearly suspicious, his eyes were as intelligent as Grandma Jiba’s.

The denizens of Forest's Edge live a honest life… If the kiba gets hungry, it would charge out of the forest and destroy the farmlands of the Genos. To keep the kiba from starving, the people in Forest's Edge are not allowed to forage food from the forest. As a mere man, I couldn’t understand why they would rather starve to death than violate such an unfair agreement. Not just that, the kiba that the denizens of Forest's Edge risked their lives to hunt is only worth a silver plate or two. I don’t agree to such a way of living. I think the people in Forest's Edge should have a more prosperous life.

But… Excessive wealth will make one depraved. Just like the Tsun clan…

Their wealth was obtained by unjust means without any effort. I don’t think Ai Fa and Donda Wu would become depraved because of wealth. Even if the necklace on Ai Fa’s neck increases by a hundred, she won’t give up on being a hunter, right?

Ai Fa—— she definitely won’t give up.

It was the same for Donda Wu.

The Wu clan would hunt large numbers of kiba everyday, but they would just use the copper plates to buy vegetables or accessories for their daughters. They won’t squander any of it, or neglect their hunter’s work. They spent all their time hunting kiba and felt proud about that.

The figure of Shin Wu appeared in my mind.

That youth had to support five family members.

And of course, they wouldn’t starve if he could rely on the other kin in his village. But for the sake of protecting his family, he would go as far as to adopt the dangerous 「sacrificial hunting style」.

If instead of being from the Wu clan, he would be like Ai Fa and come from a family with few blood kins—— he would need to hunt a little more than one kiba every two days to provide enough aria and poitan for his family.

「What do you think? My opinion is that the people in Forest's Edge should live with more abundance. Do you believe that is unreasonable?」

「... From what I have seen, I don’t think the denizens of Forest's Edge are living a life of misfortune.」

I have met the women of Forest's Edge at the water source before, and also saw small groups of men heading into the woods. Even though I never mingled with the other houses, I often saw them walking around Forest's Edge. Their eyes were clear and bright, although not to the extent of the Wu clan.

They might be poor and discriminated in the city, but they didn’t seem to be living a life of misfortune.

「I agree with you. The denizens of Forest's Edge are a tribe that keeps to themselves… That is why I hope they can live a more prosperous life.」

Kamyua Yost closed his eyes, concealing his unfathomable gaze.

When he opened his eyes again, he smiled casually again.

「I’m just sharing what I thought on a whim. I will let the two of you judge the rest. Only the denizens of Forest's Edge can decide the future of Forest's Edge. Please choose a path you think is right, and strive forth.」

「… Are you still insisting this is something you just thought up?」

Agitated emotions came over me, and I glared at Kamyua Yost’s unfathomable face.

「After knowing I was the chef for yesterday’s banquet—— you requested

to have dinner at my place in order to ascertain my cooking skills?」

「You flatter me, I'm not that brilliant... However, when I saw the blissful faces of everyone feasting on the kiba, I was confused. Since kiba is so delicious, why don't they sell meat along with the tusks and horns?」

Kamyua Yost mentioned casually.

My head was a mess.

It was probably the same for Ai Fa.

This man—— just who was he?

「Asuta, after dining with you, I'm certain that your cooking will sell in the Post Station Town. But what I think isn't important. The crucial thing is, which path is the right one for the denizens of Forest's Edge?」

Kamyua Yost stood up briskly, his cloak rustling in the air.

「It is your freedom to choose whichever path you like. If you wish to discuss further details, you are welcome to visit me anytime. I will be staying in the 「Kimyusu's Tail Inn」 until the 15th of next month. I will also visit you when I come to Forest's Edge to scout again—— only if you still welcome me.」

Kaslan Lutim remained calm the entire time, and didn’t interject at all before I finished.

At the very end, he commented——「What a surprise」.

「No one from the city ever interacted with the people of Forest's Edge in such a way before. How surprising.」

Ema Min Lutim had excused herself, so only the three of us were left in the room.

I leaned forth and asked:

「What do you think? After listening to Kamyua Yost’s words, what should we do?」

「That will depends on what you think. If you want to know my views——」

This is too retarded… If Kaslan Lutim were to answer like this, Ai Fa and I might have an easier time.

But reality was cruel.

「—— I think his proposal makes a lot of sense.」

Kaslan Lutim said with certainty.

「I see...」

「Yes. It’s not against the rules to exchange kiba meat for copper plates. If we plan to do so, the residents in the Post Station Town have to taste the kiba meat first. Regarding a prosperous life for the denizens of Forest's Edge—— I concur with that man’s opinion.」

Kaslan Lutim showed no hesitation in his eyes.

If Kamyua Yost would have had these eyes, I might have agreed to his proposal without any hesitation.

This couldn’t be helped. Leaving aside the fact that everyone has different personalities, Kaslan Lutim was a denizen of Forest's Edge, while Kamyua Yost was from Rock City, their background was drastically different.

「Excessive wealth will make people depraved—— That’s how I feel. Do the denizens of Forest's Edge think this is an insult?」

「No. After all, you already know about the depraved Tsun clan, so having such thoughts is unavoidable. However, this is similar to hamburg steak, right?」

H-Hamburg steak?

That’s right. Those who are not disciplined will be obsessed with the taste of hamburg steak, and allow their teeth and jaw to turn weak. Medicine will become poison if taken in excess. In my eyes, excessive wealth is the same thing.

Kaslan Lutim smiled quietly.

For example, eight decades ago, the people in Forest's Edge suffered greatly from poverty. They didn’t have proper weapons and didn’t know the habits of kiba. They were prohibited from foraging the forest for food —— Many either died from fighting the kiba or hunger. That’s what I learned from Jiba Wu.

… Yes.

Even so, the people in the past still lived in Forest's Edge proudly, and learned the skills and knowledge of hunting kiba. They sold the kiba’s tusks and horns to buy steel, pots, food, and cloth, successfully building the lives we have now. The Wu clan and Lutim house are wealthier, and are purchasing other types of ingredients and accessories for the women on top of daily necessities. Grandma Jiba and the others knew how tough the past was, and are satisfied with their current life. As long as people like that exist—— a wealthy life won’t make us depraved.

Yes.

That’s all I could muster.

After hearing Kaslan Lutim’s words, my feelings became clearer.

Ai Fa listened to our conversation quietly. What were her thoughts about this?

“… I want to make an assumption…”

Kaslan Lutim continued speaking seriously.

“Asuta, If your work in the Post Station Town is successful, and the kiba meat is sold for copper plates—— As only the kins of the Wu clan has learned bloodletting from you, we will be the only ones who can peddle meat.”

“That’s right.”

“If the Wu clan’s wealth increases with time and surpasses the Tsun clan in the future, wouldn’t the people think that hunting kiba is the right path to a prosperous future?”

I was shocked.

Kaslan Lutim smiled.

“I don’t know what Kamyua Yost is thinking. Going by what you said, he is planning to weaken the Tsun clan’s power. And so I wondered what I would think if I were in his shoes —— and so, I tried thinking what kind of impact the selling of kiba meat will have on the Tsun clan. But in order to arrive at the conclusion I stated earlier, he needs to know that “Only the Wu clan and their kins have learned bloodletting”.”

That man probably knew that already.

Compared to Kamyua Yost’s schemes, Kaslan Lutim’s conclusion surprised me more.

“Kaslan Lutim. You… You are incredible. I can’t think that far ahead.”

“I’m not that good. My only strong points are thinking and hunting kiba.”

Kaslan Lutim stared at me with his honest eyes.

“However, I have not seen Kamyua Yost in person before. I can’t trust someone I have never met. But I trust you, Asuta and Ai Fa… What are your thoughts about this?”

Ai Fa answered his query.

There was a strong light in her blue eyes as she looked at Kaslan Lutim’s earnest face.

"Kaslan Lutim, I can't talk about such lofty aspirations like you. No matter what happens in the future, I don't think the Tsun clan can regain their guts as a denizen of Forest's Edge."

"Yes."

"However—— If Asuta and my decision can benefit life in Forest's Edge a little... I will feel pride in that."

"... I see."

Kaslan Lutim smiled gently.

He turned towards me.

"I concur with what Ai Fa said. But we don't understand Kamyua Yost enough, and can't agree to his proposal so easily. We need to check for any traps in his suggestion."

"That's true, you are right."

Kaslan Lutim nodded firmly.

"Ai Fa, Asuta, when you find the right path and need any help, don't

hesitate to visit again if you need the aid of house Lutim. You might not be kins of house Lutim, but you are good friends that are trustworthy. House Lutim will always welcome you.

Yes, Thank you. I’m very grateful.

I reached out my right hand unconsciously, then pulled it back quickly.

Sorry. In my country, shaking hands is a sign of friendship. I don’t think there is such a custom in Forest's Edge.

I just need to shake hands?

Kaslan Lutim tilted his head quizzically, then extended his right hand.

I gripped the hunter’s big strong hand with all my might.

He grasped my hand with equal strength.

Asuta, your capability might far exceed my imagination. I hope you can be a medicine for Forest's Edge.

After Kaslan Lutim said his piece, we left the Lutim house.

2

After leaving house Lutim, we headed straight for the Post Station Town.

We wanted to end this preposterous issue as soon as possible, so we decided to visit Kamyua Yost during our trip to buy a pot.

Ai Fa placed a necklace worth 20 kiba into a bag usually used for vegetables, and hung it under her underarm.

After Kaslan Lutim told us the shortest route from house Lutim to the Post Station Town, we passionately—— actually, we weren't that hot blooded—— walked towards the Post Station Town.

「... The more I think about it, the more ludicrous this proposal seems.」

I said to Ai Fa on the way there.

「It is surprising that down to earth Forest Edge denizens like you and Kaslan Lutim actually agreed to this. However, everyone wishes for the denizens of Forest's Edge to live a more prosperous life after all.」

「That's only natural. I experienced the pains of such poverty too.」

Ai Fa looked away, and muttered:

「I told you before, right? When my father Gill couldn’t do his work as a hunter due to a leg injury, the Fa house almost got wiped out. The Fa house didn’t have any kins. If my shoddy trap didn’t capture a young kiba—— at that time, we would have starved to death.」

「Oh right… You did mention that.」

「When the entire family was forced to the brink, I understood how terrible my father felt. I don’t think anyone should undergo such pain.」

「… Hmm.」

「This idea might be coming from a citizen of Rock City, but, as long as we earn the money by our own means, even Donda Wu who hates Rock City won’t be able to complain about this. This is a match between Forest's Edge and Rock City.」

Ai Fa finally glanced my way.

Her voice was heavy, but her eyes were clear..

「… As long as you are by my side, we will have the upper hand in this fight.」

「What, I won't give you anything even if you flatter me you know?」

I felt so proud that my heart was almost bursting. In order to hide how I felt, I intentionally showed a cheerful face.

「But we need to investigate Kamyua Yost first. If that uncle has any schemes, things will be bad. We need to ask about opening a stall in the Post Station Town, and try our best to probe what his true intentions are.」

「… You are right.」

Ai Fa's expression became serious and she turned to the front.

Letting the people in the city understand the value of kiba meat is a ludicrous fight.

But since Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim found great meaning in it—— I was willing to fight this uphill battle.

First, we need to face the man of dubious origins again—— Kamyua Yost.

The first step of this battle was to determine if this man will be a medicine to Forest's Edge or a poison.

And so, we went to the Post Station Town once again.

The sun had already gone past the peak, compared to our last visit, we arrived later, and there were more people in town.

Before us was a 10 m wide stone street, with tall buildings erected on both sides of it. All sorts of people in various attire were walking around. The huge Totos Moa were pulling wagons. The crowded streets were hot, noisy and full of heat from the people.

The crowded Post Station Town made me dizzy. I turned to Ai Fa as I walked in the crowd.

"Let's settle the troublesome matter first. Besides, I don't want to visit the inn with an iron pot."

Where was that "Kimyusu's Tail Inn"Kamyua Yost was lodging?

On a closer look, almost all the buildings here had gigantic signboards, with curvy hieroglyphs drawn on them.

I asked Ai Fa what the signs said, and she answered:"How would I know."

I could only ask a pedestrian.

And so—— We started observing the people in the city once again.

The pedestrians were roughly divided into four skin colours, yellowish brown, ivory, black and white. Yellowish brown and ivory were about equal in number. Blacks and whites were relatively fewer.

Most of the people who were looking at Ai Fa with suspicious eyes had yellowish brown skin.

Those with ivory skin had similar reactions.

In comparison, the whites and blacks didn’t show any fear or disdain in their eyes—— However, their attitude wasn’t friendly. Some didn’t care about us at all, while others stared at Ai Fa curiously.

I thought it would be more appropriate to talk to someone that looked similar to me, so I decided to talk to a ivory skinned youth.

□Excuse me, do you know about an inn called □Kimyusu’s Tail Inn□?□

The youth had short brown hair. He stopped in surprise, and alternated his gaze between Ai Fa and me suspiciously.

His face—— showed no signs of fear.

Or any obvious hint of disdain.

He seemed troubled and confused.

「……「Kimyusu’s Tail Inn」 is that building with red roof tiles.」

「I see, thank you.」

The youth quickly turned and left.

I have nothing to do with the denizens of Forest's Edge! He seemed to be doing his best to express this fact.

That was a natural reaction, so I scratched my head.

「Alright, let’s go.」

Most buildings here were built from wood, and at first glance, the bare wooden planks could be clearly seen. But there were also many walls and roofs that were painted either red or green.

Were they decorations or some form of preservatives? Maybe both? I couldn’t tell.

No matter what, we have arrived at our first destination.

This large building had two floors like the other houses. I saw a cursive drawing on the sign board, a part of it resembled the feathers of a bird..

When I tasted a meat bun in the Post Station Town last time, Kamyua Yost said that was a kimyusu meat bun. The meat inside the bun tasted as bland as chicken fillet, so that was probably the name of a type of bird.

□……Ai Fa, are you alright?□

□What's the matter?□

□Nothing, just that this is probably the first time you entered a building inside the Post Station Town.□

Ai Fa shrugged silently.

Her gestures were implying:□There isn't any place more dangerous than the forest, is it?□

However, I think the real threat to hunters weren't the horns of the kiba but the blades wielded by humans. But if we were to leave now, there wouldn't be any progress.

The door to the inn had metal hinges instead of a sliding door. As there wasn’t any handles on the door, I placed my hands on the double door and pushed it open gently.

“Welcome…”

The other party’s voice stiffened midway.

A middle aged man sat behind a waist high counter and looked at us in surprise.

He was a slightly plump man with yellowish brown skin.

I couldn’t tell his stature since he was seated behind the counter, but he didn’t seem to be too tall.

He had a cylindrical shaped hat on his head, wore grey clothes and a grey apron. I often saw such a style of clothing on the streets.

“… Here for a meal?”

You ain’t here for lodgings, right? The store owner’s large eyes seemed to be intimidating us.

The contempt in his eyes exceeded his fear.

"No, we are here to visit Kamyua Yost who should be lodging here."

"Kamyua?"

The middle aged man opened his eyes wide in surprise again, with still a hint of caution on his face.

He then muttered:"That madman..." and turned his neck to gaze the inside of the inn.

"Kamyua! You have guests! Can I let them in!?"

There was a restaurant inside the inn.

It was afternoon, meal time had already passed and the crowd in the restaurant was sparse. There were three long wooden tables and chairs inside. The atmosphere here wasn't bad, and reminded me of the cabins in ski resorts.

However—— the men seated inside had a dangerous air around them.

They had different hair and skin colour, but all were burly built with sinister faces. Three out of the five had leather chest armour and steel

gauntlets. They had weapons like blades, axes and maces on their waist—— and they were drunk.

If they could earn a livelihood, I wouldn’t mind them drinking in the afternoon. However, I found their gazes to be unpleasant when they turned their faces our way.

Curious gazes.

Looks of contempt.

Suspicious stares.

And—— lustful leerings.

They didn’t fear Ai Fa.

Some of them acted as if they were looking at something filthy, others showed a malicious smile like Doddo Tsun.

The atmosphere was terrible.

「Hey, Kamyua, are you there? Are you asleep!?」

The middle aged man yelled again.

“Yes!”

At this moment, a cute voice rang out.

A boy with light brown hair ran out from the depths of the restaurant.

The boy was about ten years old and had a pair of brown eyes filled with intelligence.

“Are you Ai Fa and Asuta from house Fa? Welcome! I’m Kamyua Yost’s disciple Leito. This way please.”

Disciple?

In what sense?

The boy’s light brown hair was rather long, and his face was gentle.

He wore a sleeveless shirt and long pants, with a small pouch and knife on his waist, and leather boots on his feet. His dressing was tidy and looked kind and docile, if I was his family, I would definitely tell him not to get involved with that suspicious looking uncle.

But I was a guest and not his family, so I could only follow the boy’s lead and meet with Kamyua Yost.

“Hey, since you are in my restaurant, you have to place an order.”

The middle aged man called out to us.

“Oh, that’s right. What would you like to have?”

The boy turned towards us.

“Hmm? It’s my first time in a place like this, I’m not too sure——”

I whispered to the boy:

“Also, I don’t have any copper plates right now.”

“I see, I got it.”

The boy smiled gently and turned towards the owner.

“I want to order two zozo tea. Please add it to our tab. We will be sitting at the usual place.”

Alright.

The middle aged man waved his right hand.

As I looked at the stairs leading to the second floor, the boy, me and Ai Fa entered the inn in that order.

The eyes of the men drinking alcohol followed us.

Fortunately, they didn’t taunt us when we passed by their table.

At the end of the passage, I saw an entrance without any door. After passing it, I saw a room which was about the size of the restaurant. The tables were smaller, but much more numerous than the other room. The other furnishing was about the same.

I saw the familiar golden locks in the furthest seat.

That was Kamyua Yost.

He was sleeping soundly.

He leaned against the wall behind him while seated in his wooden chair, with his long legs resting on the table rudely. He breathed steadily during his slumber.

There weren’t any other guests in the room.

“Kamyua, your guests are here! The guests from Forest's Edge you have been waiting so eagerly for. Get up!”

The boy sat beside Kamyua Yost and clapped loudly before his nose.

“Nyaa.”

Kamyua Yost made an unhappy grunt.

I’m sorry, but that wasn’t cute at all.

“Ughh, what is it? I still want to sleep more… Hmm? Ai Fa? Asuta? You are here so soon!”

He opened his slightly drooping eyes, and a gleeful smile appeared on his long face.

“That was unsightly of me. Please have a seat! Leito, get them some tea.”

「I already asked the inn owner to send some over. You can put your legs down now.」

「Ah, sorry sorry.」

The feet in leather boots disappeared from the table, and the boy wiped the table nimbly with a rag.

「Please have a seat.」

「Thank you.」

After sitting down, I realized that Ai Fa was a little hesitant.

Speaking of which, I had never seen a chair in Forest's Edge.

Even so, Ai Fa still sat down coldly with her cape flowing behind her.

「Oh, I never imagined that you would visit just one day later. Ai Fa, Asuta, I’m really happy.」

Kamyua Yost gave a big yawn after saying that.

「Sorry sorry, I was working the entire night and lack sleep.」

「I see. What work did you do after that?」

「Hmm? I was scouting out Forest's Edge the whole night.」

「... Aren't you afraid of the Gizu biting your legs?」

「Compared to kiba and hunters, those Gizu are nothing.」

By the way, the Gizu they mentioned were about the size of weasels. They were nocturnal and had a likeable appearance, but ate rotten meat like munto. It was said that wounds from their bite would rot.

「Since you made the trip to visit, have you seriously considered my proposal?」

「We hope you can provide us with some information to help us make our decision. However, the main reason we are here in the Post Station Town is for shopping, and this is along the way.」

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, since he was taking things so lightly, I responded with the same attitude.

We couldn't let him lead us by the nose.

「Here, the zozo tea you ordered.」

The previous middle-aged man came over.

He placed porcelain cups before Ai Fa and me.

The grey round cups had handles with wavy patterns carved on it. It looked like a beer mug.

「Oh, the owner is serving us personally, thank you for your hard work.」

「What choice do I have, my daughter is too scared to come here.」

That man glared at Ai Fa and me.

He wasn't tall, but he was stout and burly, and should be quite strong.

「Kamyua, anyone who places an order is a customer in my shop. But in case of any disturbance, I will have to ask you to leave.」

「Have I ever caused any trouble before? You worry too much.」

「... Whatever. But this is still a restaurant, go back to your room if you want to sleep. You have to order something if you want to sit here.」

「Ah, you have a point. Leito and I will each have a zozo tea—— and also give me one person’s portion of Kimyusu salted meat.」

「There’s four of you, but you are only ordering one portion.」

The man turned and left after saying that.

Even though he was in the service industry, the middle-aged man was very rude. Was it because he dislike the denizens of Forest's Edge? Or was he always so brusque towards Kamyua Yost…? Probably both.

When I fell into deep thoughts, Ai Fa scrawled her nose as she sniffed the tea. Just like an animal.

「… What is this?」

「Since it’s called zozo tea, it’s probably tea made from that shriveled snake-like vegetable.」

I remembered this herbal fragrance. Maybe zozo wasn’t an ingredient meant for cooking.

「Should your reaction mean that Forest's Edge doesn’t have the practice of drinking tea? Please have a try, just think of it as experiencing a different culture.」

「…Kamyua Yost, I have no reason to accept your offerings.」

「Didn’t you treat me to a meal yesterday? This is just me returning the favor.」

「That was in exchange for the fruit wine you brought. We have no debts between us now.」

「…Asuta, what should we do?」

Kamyua Yost looked my way.

I fell into deep thought.

「In that case, Ai Fa, let’s give him something in return? Since we didn’t bring any copper plates with us, we can barter with him by offering something of similar value.」

After tilting her head slightly, Ai Fa took out a palm-sized package wrapped in fake rubber leaves.

「This is kiba jerky, are you willing to accept this in exchange?」

「Kiba jerky! I’m intrigued! Leito, this is kiba jerky!」

「Uwah, let me try some later.」

Ai Fa looked at the two of them as they conversed.

She met two citizens of Rock City that didn't shun kiba meat. As Leito was a disciple of Kamyua Yost, his reaction wasn't a good reference, but we still made a mental note about this.

By the way, after I took a sip of zozo tea, I found the strong fragrance of the tea very palatable, I didn't mind its taste.

Sitting in a chair and sipping tea made me a little nostalgic of home.

「Well then… it's about time to go into the main topic.」

Resting his elbow on the table, a smile appeared on Kamyua Yost's thin face.

3

「It's easy to open a stall in the Post Station Town. Erecting a new shop is tedious, but everyone can peddle their merchandize in the market after paying a cheap venue fee.」

「Cheap venue fee?」

「Yes. Just one white copper plate for ten days, a great bargain, right…? That's about one kiba worth of tusks and horns.」

「One kiba can be exchanged for one white copper plate… Wait, how many red copper plates are in one white copper plate?」

When he heard my question, Leito who was seated beside Kamyua Yost opened his eyes wide.

That was only natural. My question was like asking how many ten yen coins a hundred yen coin could be exchanged for.

「Ten red copper plates are equivalent to one white copper plate. You remember the kimyusu meat bun Tara ate? You can make the money back by selling ten of them. Increasing the number of stalls in the market will also improve the prosperity of the Post Station Town. The venue fee is just a small token.」

「Please wait, let me think… One kiba can be exchanged for ten meals of aria and poitan… Hmm? I see, a serving of our meal costs about one red copper plate.」

「Dinner last night was too sumptuous, if you want to operate a food stall, the portion needs to be half of dinner. Or even less. It will be best

to set the price at two red copper plates. If it is too cheap, it will earn the ire of other stall owners.

And so, assuming the ingredient cost is also half of dinner last night, that will be half of a red copper plate. Calculating simply, selling one portion will yield one and a half red copper plates as profit—— We just need to sell seven of them in ten days to offsets the fees.

Yes. But if you need to rent a stall, you will need to pay another white copper plate as rental.

Even with the stall rental, we just need to sell 14 portions to break even. What an easy business.

… Assuming that the pedestrians were willing to eat kiba.

Meat is usually more expensive than vegetables. Everyone uses higher quality vegetables than aria or poitan. Assuming the owner of that meat bun stall wants to make a profit, she needs to sell ten to twenty meat buns daily. But with the traffic in Post Station Town, this is not difficult.

Kamyua Yost smiled gleefully.

How about it Asuta, do you understand why I proposed for the two of you to open a stall? With your culinary skill and the power of the kiba meat, I don’t think you will fail.

"If our business flourishes, the citizens of Post Station Town will acknowledge the value of kiba meat and their discrimination towards Forest's Edge will gradually fade. I see, there are plenty of benefits in running this business."

I imitated Kamyua Yost and propped my elbows onto the table and leaned forward.

"Well then—— Kamyua Yost, what do you stand to gain?"

"Hmm, do you think I want to earn some profit? Let me think—— How about giving me a tenth of the pure profits, excluding the ingredient and venue fees to me as thanks."

"This has nothing to do with money. We just want to know your objective."

"I already said that I just want to satisfy my own sense of camaraderie! As long as the denizens of Forest's Edge are no longer seen as avatars of horror and the hunters gain more profit, I will be satisfied."

His uniquely colored eyes looked Ai Fa's way.

"Ai Fa, did you think my actions last night were out of pity for the denizens of Forest's Edge? I didn't mean that. I just really like the denizens of Forest's Edge. I can't be a part of your tribe, so I can only share my ideas with you. Can you understand my feelings?"

「... I don’t think you are pitying us. I believe you are having fun at our expense.」

「That’s great! ——Hmm? Is that a good thing?」

「Don’t mind it, Kamyua. You are always distrusted by others.」

The boy said something mean with a smile.

After hearing that, the subject himself said with a smile 「That’s true.」 Since he already admitted it, we two as bystanders couldn’t add anything.

「Hmm... I see...」

「What are you so troubled about? I already told you plenty of times, only the locals in Genos would be afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge and kiba for no reason. Besides, the threat posed by the kiba isn’t causing any major catastrophe, and the denizens of Forest's Edge just treat them as harmful pests. The people of Genos already lost their fear of kiba. Instead of the kiba, they are afraid of the people of Forest’s Edge.」

Kamyua Yost pulled his gaze away from Ai Fa and looked my way again.

「It might sound strange, but if the denizens of Forest's Edge would set

up a stall in the Post Station Town, no one will dare to visit. But you look similar to the people in the Post Station Town. When they see you selling kiba cookings, they will be confused and curious about you. The southerners and westerners will not hesitate to try your kiba dish. As your cooking is perfect, you will definitely draw in the people in Genos by word of mouth.

I see...

To be honest, I don't think such a trivial matter will wipe away their discrimination against the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Kamyua Yost narrowed his eyes in a smile.

When he smiles like this, his expression becomes similar to grandma Jiba, as if he could see the way the world works.

The denizens of Forest's Edge have beast-like eyes, extraordinary strength and keep to themselves, that's why they are feared and respected. This has accumulated over 80 years. Actually, their nature doesn't fit the impression which the citizens have of them. I don't mind the people in the city fearing the denizens of Forest's Edge. After all, I have no expectations of the people in the city working happily with the denizens of Forest's Edge.

What—— do you mean by that?

「The hunters from Forest's Edge can continue to be aloof. Hunters are not suited for a peaceful town… I don't want to see depraved hunters… However, I will be angry if anyone looks down on hunters and think of them as a lowly existence. The citizens can fear and respect hunters, but they should think of them as a sacred existence, not as evil monsters.」

「……」

「We need to wipe away the wrong misconception the citizens of Genos have and stop them from seeing the denizens of Forest's Edge as 『lowly kiba eater』. Who exactly are the ones protecting the fields of Genos, stopping the harassment of the kiba and contributing to the prosperity of Genos? I hope they can figure that out.」

「… I wish you were always showing such a face when talking to us. It would make me believe every word you say without any doubts.」

I remained cautious in my words.

「To be honest, I don't think you are lying. But I still don't understand why you are still so persistent with regards to the denizens of Forest's Edge… May I ask, is changing one's faith a huge matter in this continent?」

The boy Leito was surprised again.

Kamyua Yost's eyes remained clear.

“It’s very big. Only those who had experienced it will understand how it feels.”

“I see… Eight decades ago, the denizens of Forest's Edge abandoned the southern jungles and moved to Morga Forest. It has been a long time since then, are the denizens in Forest's Edge able to understand how you feel?”

“Of course. That’s why my sense of camaraderie will always be one-sided… It has been eighty years after all. There isn’t anyone older than eighty in Forest's Edge, right?”

Grandma Jiba is probably the only one who was that old.

I still didn’t trust this man enough to bring up Grandma Jiba.

I answered with a vaguely:

“Who knows?”

“…Asuta, since you insist that you are not someone from this continent, you don’t worship the four gods either, right?”

“You are correct. But I’m a denizen of Forest's Edge, so my faith lies with the western god, even if only in name.”

Hmm, from this perspective, you fit really well in Forest's Edge. The denizens of Forest's Edge used to worship the god of the south Jaguar but switched to the western god Selva. However, their faith lies elsewhere right from the beginning—— What they worship is the forest, not the gods. They see the forest as an irreplaceable existence. Perhaps, it is their simple and selfless lifestyle that draws them to me.

Kamyua Yost closed his eyes, hiding his incredible light under his eyelids.

A difficult to describe calm filled the entire room—— At this moment, a third party broke the silence.

Here’s the zozo tea and the kimyusu salted meat you ordered.

With a thud, the third party placed a giant plate on the table.

The middle-aged man had served our orders.

Kamyua Yost watched the man as he turned and left quickly, and an elusive smile appeared on his face again.

Asuta, try this. This is a dish sold in the Post Station Town. You worked as a chef before, so this will pique your interest, right?

... I already tried a Kimyusu meat bun at a street stall.

I see. But this dish tastes different from that meat bun.

I shifted my gaze on to the dining table.

There was a large plate filled with stewed meat and vegetables.

The vegetables were completely dried up, and a translucent, gooey sauce covered the white meat and several types of vegetables.

On closer inspection, I found diced aria and pula in there, as well as mashed chachi.

This dish had the refreshing fragrance of herbs similar to lilo.

Several pieces of white wraps, which looked like the wraps used in dumplings. This was probably used to wrap the dish before eating it.

The presentation and the aroma of the food weren’t bad.

Please try some. If you don’t have any appetite, just a bite will do. Please do have some, since the zozo tea alone can’t compare to your delicious jerky.

I wanted to try it out of pure curiosity.

I glanced at Ai Fa to confirm with her, then picked up the spoon and the small wrap.

Making a rough estimate of the number of wraps and the number of vegetables, I scooped two spoons of it onto the wrap.

After rolling it up into a small crepe, I took a bite——

It was very salty.

The flavoring relied completely on the herbs and their fragrance.

The aria was overcooked, the chachi wasn't cooked enough, and the pula had a hint of bitterness—— with a side of kimyusu meat that was as tasteless as chicken breast.

On a whole, it wasn't too bad.

A simple taste.

The meat had been pickled to extend its shelf life. The chef then cooked it together with the vegetables. The chachi will taste better if it was cooked a little longer. Aside from that, this dish didn't have any flaws worth mentioning.

However—— If you asked me if I was willing to pay money for this, I would be hesitant.

□kimyusu salted meat is the most popular dish in this inn. It has a strong taste and is well suited to be a snack with beer. I think it costs three red copper plates. The people here will eat something light in the day, and when night falls, this inn will be filled with patrons. Everyone will show a satisfied expression when they eat this dish.□

Kamyua Yost smiled like a Cheshire cat.

□The dishes in the Post Station Town are mainly extensions of a home-cooked meal. They are made by the wives and daughters of the inn owners. In Genos, chefs can only be found inside the castle walls.□

□... I see.□

□Asuta, can you rival this salted meat dish and kimyusu bun with your cooking?□

□Are you taunting me? I'm not that retarded, and will not act rashly.□

It was about time to leave. After finishing that piece of kimyusu salted meat, I drank the rest of my zozo tea.

I then whispered to Ai Fa:□Do you want to ask any questions?□. She just shook her head quietly.

「I will discuss with my house head again, and with our friends in Forest's Edge. If there aren't any problems—— I will then take you up on your suggestion.」

「Asuta, you are really careful! That is a good point about you.」

It's your fault that I'm so cautious. I shrugged.

「Kamyua, if we make up our mind to open a stall in the Post Station Town, can we discuss this with you again?」

「Yes. You can also speak to the relevant person directly. One of the managers for the marketplace is the boss of this inn, Milano Mast. Anyway, you will be fine if you come over to the 「Kimyusu's Tail Inn」.」

「Thank you. We have not made our decision yet, but your suggestion made me think about many things. Even if we don't open a stall, in the end, I'm still glad to have spoken with you.」

「I'm happy to hear that… Are you going already? Leito, I leave the rest to you. After finishing this salted meat, I will take a little nap.」

「Alright. Asuta, Ai Fa, let's go.」

I looked a little confused at the boy who was all smiles.

Go? Where? We are going back to Forest's Edge after buying our things.

It won't take too much of your time. Tara's father wishes to thank you. He runs a stall in the marketplace, I will bring you there.

During my first visit to the Post Station Town, I met a girl called Tara.

Back then, Doddo Tsun was drunk and stirring up trouble in the Post Station Town, and Tara was almost dragged into it. Ai Fa and I intervened and saved her.

That was already ten days ago. I felt a little embarrassed that her father wanted to thank me.

Why don't you go and meet him? Tara is a good kid, she will be a beauty in a few years. Now is a good time to befriend her.

The one who made such a retarded speech was not the boy of course, but his mentor.

I wasn't Hikaru Genji, so I smiled wryly and stole a peek at Ai Fa... And for some unknown reason, she was staring at me coldly.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hikaru_Genji>

Just what kind of person did she think I was?

□Alright then, I will take my leave.□

□Yes, I look forward to meeting the two of you again.□

In the end, no other customers came into the room aside from us, and we headed to the entrance.

The group of men we saw earlier were still drinking in the inn.

One of the men looked our way, his gaze looked drunker than earlier.

□Hey, black-haired kid! How did you make a □Kiba Eater□ woman your thing? Can you tell us how you managed to do that?□

Hmm, they probably wouldn't let us go so easily.

I had one rather bad habit. I wouldn't mind others insulting me, but if they were to make fun of Ai Fa—— I would lose my cool.

□Instead of hunting kiba, she realized hunting men is an easier way to bring in money! Hey □Kiba Eater□, can I buy a night with you with two copper plates?□

I turned towards the men.

Two things happened at this moment which held my roar in my throat.

Ai Fa who was walking behind me grabbed my arm, and the boy Leito walking in front of me said quietly:

"Please stop. They are my mentor's guest. A slight towards them means a slight towards my mentor, understand?"

The voice of the boy had yet to break, and his high pitched words didn't bore a shred of emotion.

He looked at the men. I couldn't see his expression, but I did notice the changes in the appearances of the men.

The two men who were making the crude remarks stood stiffly with their bottles in their hands.

Their faces—— looked as if they saw a ferocious beast in the jungle, their eyes wide and face stiff.

"What's wrong with you guys?"

The other men shook their companion's shoulders.

Leito glanced at them sideways, then smiled at me.

「Sorry about that. Let's go.」

As expected from a disciple of that man.

After I started walking with a sigh, Ai Fa poked my back.

「Hey, I already told you not to get agitated since you can't protect yourself. You are too reckless sometimes.」

「...Ai Fa, you become reckless as well when hamburg steak is mentioned.」

「That has nothing to do with what I'm talking about right now.」

She then poked me a few more times as we left the 「Kimyusu's Tail Inn」.

4

After exiting the building, the sun was still high in the sky and the streets crowded.

「What are you planning to buy?」

「Hmm, I want an iron pot. It's sold in the marketplace.」

「Iron pot, huh. How big?」

「It's quite large, about this size.」

The diameter was about 60 cm, and about 30 cm deep. I used my arms to make a half circle.

「The iron pot is heavy. Can I bring you to Tara's stall? It's located at the edge of the marketplace.」

「Erm, well, Ai Fa, is it fine?」

「Whatever.」

I couldn't see any change in emotion on Ai Fa's face.

But she looked a little tired.

That worried me a little, and I asked her softly:「What are you thinking about?」

“After listening to what he had to say, my impression of him remains unchanged. I don’t think he intends to deceive us, but—— in my heart, he is still a suspicious character.”

“I see.”

I could understand how she felt.

I didn’t think Kamyua Yost was lying.

That man harbored deep feelings towards the denizens of Forest's Edge.

But his passion was too intense, which felt out of place to me.

Besides, there are other issues aside from that guy.

Leito led us along the stone paved path as I thought:

If I open a kiba snack stall in this city, will there really be business?

We just stepped outside when the gazes from the passersby fell on Ai Fa. Not all of them are negative, but the denizens of Forest's Edge would always be out of place in the city.

Even though Kamyua Yost said carefreely that□Just target the travelers in the beginning□, would it be that simple?

If the business were to fail, we would only lose our copper plates. But acting rashly might deepen the animosity between Forest's Edge and the Post Station Town, which would be terrible.

Even if Kamyua Yost had no intention of tricking us, he might still have misjudged the situation. We needed to investigate further.

I wondered if there is anyone who is neutral in the Post Station Town. I wanted to learn their opinion.

While I was still feeling troubled by it, we reached the marketplace.

A familiar woman was inside the stall, making meat buns for the kids.

It had just passed noon, the time when people start to eat a light lunch. On a closer look, I realized that the food stalls around the area were all crowded.

A youth was eating as he walked, having a white wrap in his hand that held brown meat and green vegetables.

A group of men was drinking along the side of the road and snacking on food that looked like bird claws.

I heard a rowdy chatter and looked that way. What I saw was similar to an outdoor restaurant, with a wide roof over it. People sat on chairs and chatted as they sipped on stew in wooden bowls.

"... Why are you looking all over the place?"

"Well~ I'm doing market research."

I didn't know how things would turn out.

If I want the development to be to our advantage, I needed to gather more info.

Besides—— I was the only one in Forest's Edge who could do that.

If someone like me didn't appear in Forest's Edge, Kamyua Yost would never have thought up such a crazy plan.

With some practice, the women of the Wu clan would be able to cook a dish on the level of that salted meat.

However, I don't think the denizens of Forest's Edge would be capable of "running a business". They bartered kiba tusks and horns for copper plates, then used the plates to exchange for food. On the surface, this was definitely a form of commercial trading, but the denizens of Forest's

Edge didn’t think of it as such.

In the first place, selling wild games they hunted to traders was different from doing business with an undetermined number of customers.

If I could be of use in such a way, I will do everything within my power.

Since Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim thought this was the right path, I won’t hesitate in walking down it.

To stop them from making the wrong choices, I had to look carefully at the places they couldn’t see, listen to the sounds they couldn’t hear and convey these to them accurately.

“Oh, that’s the stall. Tara is there too.”

When I heard Leito saying that, I raised my head and found myself at the end of the marketplace.

Before us was a road flanked by trees, and the stone walls surrounding the castle town could be seen far off to the left.

We passed by this place the last time too. As I thought about that—— a surprised voice from a girl came from the left.

「Asuta onii-chan! Leito, you really brought him here!」

Tara appeared before us.

She was wearing an orange one-piece dress today too as she stood under the roof of a certain stall and waved at us.

That stall—— only had a flimsy roof, with a large piece of cloth laid out on the ground and vegetables arranged on it, a simple vegetable stall—— Ai Fa and I bought aria and poitan here before.

A burly man stood beside the girl as he waited for us with a stiff smile.

After Ai Fa and I looked at each other, we walked towards them behind Leito.

「Asuta onii-chan, long time no see! Thank you for saving me the previous time!」

「It's nothing, no need to thank me. You helped me a lot after that too.」

「I can't do that! If not for onii-chan, Tara would have been squashed like that bun! Thank you!」

Tara had shoulder length dark brown hair, and her dark brown eyes were

lively. An energetic eight-year-old girl.

The middle-aged man stood beside Tara, his hair and beard were similar in color to her, and both of them had yellowish brown skin.

This color combination could be commonly seen in the Post Station Town, so I didn’t notice the resemblance between them earlier.

The hair and eye colors of the Wu clan vary widely, so I thought the people of this world wouldn’t be affected by genetics in such a way and overlooked this detail.

No matter what, this was the second time I have met them.

The middle-aged man stood up straight and took off the white cloth wrapped around his head. He lowered his head, covered in unkempt hair and streaks of white, towards Ai Fa and me in a bow.

E-Excuse me, you saved my daughter Tara a few days ago… I-I’m very grateful. I wanted to t-thank you in person, so I troubled you to make a trip here…

Cold sweat rolled down his rounded face.

Even though the denizens of Forest's Edge terrified him—— he still wanted to thank us.

“You are welcome. Tara has also been a great help. When we were almost taken away by the guards, we managed to avoid being interrogated because Tara testified for us.”

“D-Don’t mention it, it was nothing…”

He was burlier than the inn owner we met earlier. He mentioned before that he grew his aria himself, which meant his work straddled both agriculture and peddling.

People born and bred in Genos would probably fear the denizens of Forest's Edge—— I felt bad about him showing such a face in front of his daughter.

Tara also had a blank expression, as if she felt lost.

“… Your daughter only met with danger…”

Ai Fa said suddenly.

“Eek!”

The middle-aged man grabbed Tara’s shoulder and backed away.

Tara also looked at Ai Fa with an uneasy gaze.

「... because I hit that drunkard without any forethought. I knew she was right beside them, but I still acted first to suppress the scum as soon as possible. If Asuta didn't rush to her aid, that man's big body would have fallen on her and injured her.」

Ai Fa bowed quietly.

「That was careless of me. I should apologize to you for that.」

「I-It's fine, well...」

「Uncle, you don't need to be wary, they aren't reckless people. When some drunkards insulted them earlier, I was the one who got enraged instead.」

The boy quickly eased the mood with a smile.

Enraged—— I couldn't tell that he was angered just now.

「Mr. Asuta might be setting up a stall around here in the near future. You will be neighbors then, so now will be a good time to clear up any misunderstandings.」

「Eh? Asuta onii-chan, are you going to open a stall!?」

Tara's reaction was more intense than the middle-aged man.

「It has not been decided yet... If I do set up a stall, will it be located around here?」

「Yes, there isn't any more space down the other road. Since you will also be a new stall tenant, your stall will be located in the northern zone.」

「Uncle, are you a new stall owner too?」

「Huh? No, I have been here for twenty years. I will need to bribe the ones in charge to get a spot in the crowded central zone, so I chose to stay here instead.」

Even though he was panicking, the uncle still mustered his courage and answered.

As expected, he was good-natured.

「I still haven't made my decision. If I really set up a stall here, I will be in your care. I will be buying the food ingredients from you then.」

「W-What will you be peddling?」

Oh right, he was a Genos local, not related to Kamyua Yost. I could use this valuable chance to ask for his opinion.

This might be a chance Kamyua Yost arranged for us—— would it be too nefarious for me to think of it this way?

Let’s do some market research.

「I will be frank, I’m planning to sell food made from kiba meat… Do you have any opinions about this?」

He opened his eyes wide in surprise.

「T-That kind of thing… won’t sell, right?」

I see.

He was shocked, no, he was stunned, but he didn’t seem to be disgusted.

It appeared that peddling kiba food in the Post Station Town wasn’t on the level of announcing that 「I want to open a shop to sell food made from spiders」.

"Will it make the neighboring stalls unhappy? Will anyone become furious and demand me to not sell kiba food near his stall?"

"I-It's not for us to decide… but…"

"But?"

"I-If the kiba food were to give off a terrible stench, it would be troubling for us."

"Kiba dishes don't have a stench. If you try it, you will be able to taste its unique flavor. Kiba meat that has been properly prepared won't have any foul taste."

"Kiba are harmful pests that damage the farms, right? Will their meat really taste good?"

Tara seemed intrigued.

Kiba were classified as "harmful pests" from the perspective of farmers, and has nothing to do with the taste of kiba… Tara probably didn't understand this yet.

"I think they are delicious, but that's a matter of personal preference. Kiba do have a unique flavor, and some people might find it hard to accept."

「I see, that’s amazing. Tara wants to try some too.」

「B-Be quiet…」

Midway through his sentence, the uncle’s eyes started wavering again.

「Excuse me for my late introduction. I’m from the Fa house of Forest's Edge, my name is Asuta. This is the head of the Fa house, Ai Fa. Can you tell me your name, please?」

「… I-I’m Dora.」

The girl was Tara, and the father was Dora. Were they easy to remember, or hard to recall? But the name Dora did suit this middle-aged man.

「Uncle Dora, we are still hesitant about opening a stall. We will suffer heavy losses if our product wouldn’t sell. And most importantly, we don’t want to cause any confusion to the people in the Post Station Town. Uncle, can you share what you really think? For example, do you think 「opening a kiba food store here will cause trouble for me」, or 「no one will ever eat that」? I will take your opinions into consideration before proceeding with starting up the stall.」

「I-I wouldn’t mind if you set up a stall. As long as there isn’t any stench… A-Also… it’s bad if there are frequent commotions…」

He started to stutter towards the end.

But he still answered my question clearly.

Uncle Dora was usually a straightforward man, when I told him 「the aria is rotten」 last time, his heated reaction told me this much.

「Commotions huh. If I open a stall here, will the citizens find trouble with us?」

「No.. No one dares to pick on the denizens of Forest's Edge…」

He stammered once again.

「Who knows? When we were at the inn just now, some men taunted us. I’m worried that people might stir trouble at our stall if we do open for business.」

「I-Is that so? I wouldn’t dare to do that.」

He really thinks of the denizens of Forest's Edge as dangerous beasts.

Those ruffians in the inn only showed contempt.

Even though they were living in the same environment, their emotions towards things were different.

And—— Tara said she wanted to try to eat some kiba.

She had been stealing glances at Ai Fa, trying to see what kind of person this scary onee-san was.

So, how do you feel about kiba dishes? Are you against trying them no matter what?

I-I won't spend money to eat kiba meat; I heard kiba meat is tough and they stink. I don't want to confirm this point.

Will you give it a try if it's free?

If there's no choice, I can try it…

Do you think kiba meat is disgusting and dirty?

Kiba isn't like munto or gizu, and won't eat rotten meat, right? In my mind, kiba is a detestable creature that ravages the farms.

The uncle made up his mind and looked towards Ai Fa.

"I-I respect the denizens of Forest's Edge for risking their lives to fend off Kiba and am very grateful. However, many of the elderly think... that, that... after eating the meat of the ferocious kiba, you obtained their violence and strength. Also..."

Aside from fear, there was another emotion in the uncle's eyes.

That should be—— rage?

"... Also, the denizens of Forest's Edge do act violently."

Ai Fa looked at the middle-aged man in silence.

The uncle's yellowish face seemed to be drained of blood, and he was trembling.

"Y-Your people rob our farm products, assault travelers and kidnap girls from the city. Not everyone from Forest's Edge is like that, but they do exist. The man you lectured by the roadside that day is one of them, right? If people like him still exist..."

Both sides wouldn't be able to come to an understanding.

He wanted to say more, but held his peace.

Ai Fa shook her head slowly.

“All I can say is… My conscience is clear.”

She didn’t refute the other party.

Robbing farm products, attacking travelers and abducting girls from the city—— They had actually fallen so low.

I started getting dizzy from the rage I was feeling.

Even among denizens of Forest's Edge, the difference between individuals was as vast as night and day.

Forest's Edge had many denizens that were as kind as Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim, yet those people—— The chief Tsun clan was actually that depraved.

I couldn’t understand at all.

“Be it the city or Forest's Edge, there are all sorts of people around.”

I turned my head in surprise when I heard the boy’s voice.

Leito was still smiling even at a time like this.

I was reminded once again that this boy was the disciple of Kamyua Yost.

「I need to go back to Kamyua soon. What about the two of you?」

「Ah, we need to get going. We can't keep intruding on your stall… Thank you, uncle Dora.」

「You are welcome…」

「Asuta, Ai Fa, I'm going off now. I'm looking forward to the kiba dish, good luck!」

In the end—— my head was still in a mess.

5

An hour later, we stood before the Lutim house once again.

Ai Fa and I were carrying a super heavy iron pot.

「Ara, it’s Ai Fa and Asuta! What’s the matter? You have a big pot with you! Are you here to cook dinner for us!?」

「Dan Lutim! Are you already back from the forest?」

Less than three hours had passed since noon. The head of the Lutim house had already put away his cape and blades and welcomed us in casual attire.

「There are too many kiba recently. We already got enough tusks and horns for today. A youngster from the branch family suffered some light injury, so we came home early! What will you cook for us today?」

「No, we are here to discuss something with Kaslan Lutim…」

「Oh, is that so.」

The house head's shoulders that were tense with excitement started drooping depressedly.

The head of the Lutim main house Dan Lutim was bald, wore a brown beard and had a beer belly, resembling that of an Arabian genie. He was energetic today too.

「Dan Lutim, since you are home now, can you join our discussion? I have many things I wish to consult with you.」

「I don’t mind joining the talk…」

He pouted like a toddler.

Please don’t infringe the trademark of my house head.

「Asuta, Ai Fa, you are here. How did your talk with Kamyua Yost go?」

Kaslan Lutim appeared from behind Dan Lutim. They were father and son, but I couldn’t see any resemblance at all.

I nodded and greeted him in a hurry.

「Sorry for intruding on you again. Hmm? Where’s Ema Min Lutim——?」

「In order to master the skills to cook delicious food, she went to the Wu clan with the other women. So I was left behind.」

「I see, that’s really…」

「Don’t mind me, please come in… Will that be alright, house head?」

「Okay…」

He was actually that reluctant.

The head of the Lutim house was regressing towards a child-like state.

And so, Ai Fa and I handed the blades and pot to the Lutim house for safekeeping and visited their place once again.

「—— That’s the gist of what happened.」

There were many things I needed to recount.

「Yes.」

Kaslan Lutim nodded with his arms crossed.

「My impression of Kamyua Yost remains unchanged. But I can feel his strong feelings towards Forest's Edge from his words and action—— or I should say, obsession. I don’t think he plans to deceive you.」

「Yes. I still need to observe the situation in the Post Station Town a little longer. There won’t be any big issues despite opening a stall in town. We might even make a tidy profit… As for the objective of making them recognize the commercial value of kiba meat, I will only know the results after opening the stall.」

After bidding farewell to Leito and uncle Dora, we visited quite a number of stalls to conduct our market research.

In the end, based on the information we garnered, a light meal sold in every stall was priced from one to three copper plates, and they could sell between twenty and fifty portions a day. The peak period was around noon.

If that was the case, we could give it a try—— That was how I felt.

Kaslan Lutim nodded again.

「Hmm, I don’t think there’s a problem either… Do you see any problems, house head?」

「Nothing. That man from Rock city is too nosey, why is he interfering with the future of Forest's Edge? Since he is a citizen of Rock city, he should pave roads from rocks until it reaches the edge of the world… Nevermind that. Hey, Asuta.」

After saying his thoughts unhappily, he looked up at me innocently.

He had the same expression as my house head when she wanted me to do something for her.

"Are you going to serve food to those city folks, but not cook for me?"

"No, I'm just here to ask for everyone's opinion… Because of the position I'm in, I can't just open a stall in the Post Station Town so haphazardly, right?"

"Who cares. The head of the Fa house is the one to decide, why are you asking us?"

"You are right. I just wanted to confirm if anyone in Forest's Edge will be unhappy about us opening a stall in the city… Also, I heard that the Tsun clan is in charge of liaising between Forest's Edge and the city. Can we open a stall in the town without going through them?"

"… The Tsun clan you say?"

Dan Lutim's large eyes started to shine.

"Who cares about those retards! If they dare to complain, the Lutim house will make them suffer! Asuta, are you planning to make an enemy out of them?"

"Please don't be so happy about that! We are here to discuss this because we don't want to stir up any trouble!"

"Huh, boring."

Dan Lutim switched gears into low energy mode again.

Kaslan Lutim said easily:"You don’t need to worry about that."

"The Tsun clan is responsible for the communication between Forest's Edge and the Genos castle. If you want to open a stall inside those rock walls, you will need to go through the Tsun clan. There won’t be a problem if you set up shop in the Post Station Town."

"Got it… Is doing this really not a violation of the rules or taboos of Forest's Edge?"

"You don’t need to worry. We can’t forage for food from the Morga mountains or farm the land and promised to never stop hunting kiba. These are the terms we agreed to in order to live in Forest's Edge. In other words, Rock city only permits us to sell kiba."

"I see…"

"Asuta, this has no direct relation to you, but we are facing a troublesome situation."

"Eh? What happened?"

"The meat—— We can’t expend it all."

It was rare to see an awkward smile appear on his face.

"The Wu clan used up a large amount of meat in that banquet, but house Lutim didn't have that chance. We bloodlet and butchered two kiba a day, so even the food stores of the branch families are filled with meat. Since we are out of storage space, we will have to throw all that meat into the forest tomorrow."

"Ah… There's no other way."

The meat from the kiba Ai Fa hunted was also piling up in the Fa house, and isn't depleting at all. Even if we were to cover the meat with pico leaves, it could only be preserved for 15 to 20 days at most. We had no choice but to smoke them into jerky, but our stock of jerky was increasing too.

"If we could barter that meat for copper plates, our lives would be more prosperous. Furthermore —— after realizing how delicious processed kiba meat is, we couldn't bear seeing that meat turning into munto feed. Just the meat from the kiba we failed to bloodlet will be enough for the munto to have a great feast."

"We will continue to bloodlet tomorrow! Even if the kiba meat keeps piling up, the ribs are still limited!"

The house head laughed heartily.

His son smiled sheepishly again, then nodded.

"... And so, we will need to abandon the meat other than the ribs into the forest. All of them had been bloodlet and eviscerated from the thigh, shoulders, and back."

"Uwah, that's such a pity!"

"That's right. We can't share this meat with the other houses. That will make the powerless houses give up on hunting kiba tusks and horns, and eat meat all day."

Kaslan Lutim showed a serious expression and leaned forward.

"Asuta, we are planning to share the skills you taught us with the Min house, Lei house, and other kin houses. I think that all the denizens of Forest's Edge should learn these techniques in the future."

"Eh? Including the Tsun clan?"

"Of course. If this can make them pick up their effort to hunt kiba again, then everything would end on a happy note."

That was true. I wasn't truly a member of Forest's Edge yet, and only thought of the Tsun clan as an "unforgivable enemy".

「However, it's too dangerous to do this right now. We can teach this skill to the large clans like the Tsun and the Wu, but not to the smaller houses.」

「Huh? But why?」

「Kiba meat is too delicious. The smaller houses have always had the thinking that 「meat from the kiba's body is unpalatable」, but once they have a taste of properly prepared meat—— As kiba is difficult to hunt, they might give up on the tusks and horns, and live on just kiba meat.」

Would that really happen?

Since meat from the kiba's body had too strong of a stench, everyone was only willing to eat the thigh meat and did their best to hunt kiba. 「Delicious meat」—— would that really make them relax so much?

That wasn't impossible.

Since Kaslan Lutim said so, the possibility might exist.

I wasn't a hunter, so I couldn't blame those who were weak.

「I think that's the poison of wisdom.」

「Poison of wisdom huh…」

「Yes, if you take in too much strong medicine, it will become a poison. Under such circumstances, I think your abilities will also become a poison.」

When I heard him say that, my heart started to race.

My abilities will become a poison——

「I think this skill shouldn't be taught to the smaller houses that aren't kins of the Wu clan. When kiba meat can be exchanged for copper plates in the Post Station Town, they can then use meat to barter for aria and poitan and have a normal diet, lead a normal life and improve their capabilities as hunters.」

「Yes…」

「When that time comes, your abilities will become normal medicine.」

Kaslan Lutim showed a confident smile.

「Asuta, if the path that you and Ai Fa find will lead to opening a stall in the Post Station Town, I will wish for your success more than anyone else and do what I can to aid you—— Because you two are my friends.」

Kaslan Lutim. Thank you… Very much. I will think about it tonight before making my decision. I will inform you of my choice then.

Was I worthy of being a friend of such a great man?

If I am not worthy now, I will have to work hard to be have this right.

When I met Kaslan Lutim for the first time that night—— I never imagined that he will occupy such an important place in my heart.

The strings of fate work in a strange way. My meeting with Ai Fa led to my encounter with Rimee Wu. I then got to know the members of the Wu clan and became acquainted with Kaslan Lutim and Dan Lutim.

And Kamyua Yost——

Will that man become poison or medicine for Forest's Edge? Ai Fa and I had to make our judgment.

I made up my mind to have a long talk with Ai Fa.

Kaslan Lutim, I’m very grateful. I’m glad that I discussed this with you.

I’m honored to hear that, Asuta… are you heading back already?

「Yes, I’m sorry for intruding so many times today.」

「What, are you really going back!?」

Dan Lutim yelled.

「The sun is setting soon. The Fa house is very far, right? Why not stay the night at my place!?」

「I-I can’t trouble you so much…」

I then realized mid-sentence.

The journey home will take about an hour. It will be some time before it gets dark, but we won’t have time to dry the poitan.

I had not mastered the skill to make poitan in liquid form taste good yet, so I could either replace the poitan with the herb-like gigo or spend some time to cook poitan stew.

「Asuta, the women of house Lutim are still at the Wu clan. They only started learning to cook from the Wu clan yesterday, so their techniques aren’t refined yet… Will you please tend to our house’s hearth tonight?」

Kaslan Lutim probably realized something from either his father or my expression and persuaded me to stay too.

"... Let me discuss with my house head."

I tried to make a straight face as I leaned near Ai Fa's ear.

"Ai Fa, if we eat dinner at home tonight, we will have no choice but to drink poitan soup."

Ai Fa nodded seriously, then whispered to me:

"Don't wanna."

And so, I became house Lutim's hearth caretaker tonight.

6

Contrary to my expectations, the Lutim main house didn't have many people.

Aside from Dan Lutim, Kaslan Lutim and Ema Min Lutim, the only ones present were the previous house head Raa Lutim and the youngest sister Molun Lutim.

Dan Lutim actually had plenty of children. In addition to Kaslan Lutim and Molun Lutim, he had another son and two daughters, but they had all moved out with their spouses.

The second son of the Lutim house stayed right beside the main house and lived together with his wife and two children. The daughters were married off to a Wu branch house and the Lei house. Before Ema Min Lutim moved in, the Lutim house had only four people.

As the Lutim village had more men than women, everyone would work together to tend the hearth and perform other chores, and wouldn't be segregated by their houses.

"After all, only eleven of the Lutim house members are women. Normally, the females would outnumber the males."

"That shows how tough the men of the Lutim house are! And the people in the Wu main house all marry too late! They have seven scions, but only the eldest son had gotten a wife!"

Dinner at the Lutim house was very lively.

It was mostly because of the noisy house head.

The tall and skinny elderly man leading the Lutim house procession during the wedding was the former house head Tsu Lutim, the Grand Elder of the Lutim house. He was younger than seventy, bald, and wore

a long white beard with sharp eagle eyes—— He took in Grandma Jiba’s daughter as his wife.

This was the first time I met with the youngest daughter of the Lutim house, Molun Lutim. She was fifteen years old, had a plump body, and had an adorable appearance. Now that I think about it, she resembled her father. She was just fifteen, but she already had the air of a kind mother.

The grand elder didn’t speak much, and everyone got along together noisily. It was a harmonious scene, worlds apart from the tense atmosphere in the Wu clan.

I learned how to grill poitan today, but I couldn’t cook for my family because I returned too late. Asuta, Ai Fa, you are a great help.

When we visited this morning, we already greeted Ema Min Lutim. She showed her trademarked calm smile.

Ema Min always had a pure and refreshing air about her. After the wedding, she seemed gentler and more mature than us.

She had cut her dark brown hair until it reached just the back of her neck. Such a bold short trim was a rare sight in Forest's Edge.

As a sign of marriage, her healthy and slender body was covered with one large piece of cloth.

Ara, this is really delicious! I can’t get tired of ribs no matter what, but the poitan you grilled is exceptionally tasty! After trying grilled poitan, normal poitan soup is impossible to drink!

He was right, Ai Fa and I stayed in the Lutim house and tended to their hearth because we wanted to avoid drinking this poitan soup.

No matter what, dinner for tonight—— ribs, thigh steak, grilled poitan, and kiba soup with aria and pula—— was served.

After chatting for a while, everyone went back to their rooms to rest.

Ai Fa, Asuta, do you want to sleep in the same room? We have two spare rooms right now.

Yes, we have plenty of things to discuss.

I answered naturally. When the other party led us to our room, I felt a sudden dissonance.

It was a three tatami big square room, without any furnishing.

The floor was covered with rugs, with a small folded pile of cloth at the innermost side of the room. That was the thing that made me feel that something was off.

Ah, you need one more bedding; I will go to get it.

After Molun Lutim who led us here said that, Ai Fa answered:There’s no need.

It’s fine; we usually don’t use beddings.

I see. I’m going off then.

Molun Lutim left with a smile.

We were assigned to the room on the rightmost edge of the house, right beside the newlywed couple.

Ah… Does something feel off?

Why?

Ai Fa entered the room quickly and placed the candle stand she borrowed by the window.

She then sat on the bedding.

The bedding was right beside the window, so her movement was very natural.

I closed the door behind me, walked to the other side of Ai Fa, and sat down on the rug.

Room for one person.

Bedding.

Someone else’s house.

Is that the reason? The distance between Ai Fa and me was the same as usual, but my heart started to race.

I decided to write 「Serene heart」 on my palm, then swallowed it.

<TL: 平常心, http://folklore.usc.edu/?p=9517>

「What are you doing?」

Ai Fa asked me in surprise, but I couldn’t answer her.

「We have gathered all sorts of information in these two days. Ai Fa, what are your thoughts about this?」

Ai Fa moaned for a moment, then untied her long hair.

She spoke as her golden locks flowed down her shoulders and chest:

“I think... there’s no problem.”

“That’s true.”

“Yes, even if the business fails, we will only lose our copper plates. I can make up for this by hunting kiba—— fortunately, there’s a terrifying number of kiba during this season.”

“Yes.”

“I’m only worried about one thing. The one who suggested that we open a stall in the Post Station Town is Kamyua Yost.”

“It’s hard to place our trust in that man.”

“Instead of trust—— it’s hard to understand him. I can’t grasp what he is thinking. The more I converse with him, the messier my head becomes.”

Ai Fa’s eyes were a little uneasy, and she leaned forward.

I wanted to back away on reflex, but luckily, I restrained myself.

Ai Fa came near me very naturally, if I shy away, it will make Ai Fa troubled and unhappy. If our roles were switched, I would feel really hurt.

But I still couldn’t stay calm.

「That man ate kiba meat. I have never seen anyone from the city doing that. I was shocked and thought I would trust this man more—— but I found him more suspicious instead.」

「I see. I can’t understand how you feel, but you have got that right. We can’t understand him at all.」

「Asuta, do you feel the same way too?」

「Yes.」

「Oh… That’s great.」

Ai Fa sighed as if she had been relieved of a great burden on her heart.

She usually wouldn’t show such a face.

「If our thoughts were different, I would think I couldn't understand you… I'm so glad.」

「T-That's true. After listening to uncle Dora and Kaslan Lutim's advice, it seemed that opening a stall in the city wouldn't cause much trouble. We don't need to worry if Kamyua Yost has some ulterior intentions, we just need to do as we planned… Isn't that right?」

「I was planning to do just that. No matter what choice we made, the two of us will share the responsibility.」

「But I don't want the stall to be a burden to you.」

Ai Fa was calm, but she was showing a hint of anger now.

Her angry expression was more like Ai Fa's style, but that meant I said something wrong, right?

「Asuta, the ingredients in your stall will use the meat from the kiba I hunt, and ingredients bartered from the kiba tusks and horns, right?」

「Yes, I will use my money too, but I will need your help of course.」

「In that case, why are you separating our positions when you consider these things?」

I realized from her expression that she wasn’t angry, just anxious about something.

Her blue eyes were wavering as if she didn’t know what emotions she should be showing.

“When you decided to tend to the hearth for the Lutim wedding, you did it on an individual basis with Kaslan Lutim. This time, do you still have no intentions of opening the stall as a member of the Fa house? Do you still plan to shoulder the load alone? In that case—— why do you call yourself a member of the Fa house?”

“I-I’m sorry. Do you think I’m too considerate? You know, I’m from a foreign country, so the way I treat my family will be a bit different from Forest's Edge. I didn’t mean to neglect you.”

I cast aside my whimsical thoughts from earlier and couldn’t help leaning forward.

We were about 30 cm apart. Ai Fa looked straight into my eyes as if she was probing.

“… When you are happy, I’m also happy.”

“Yes.”

“When you are sad, I will feel sad too.”

“Yes.”

“If not, why should we be family?”

Ai Fa averted her gaze quickly.

If the atmosphere had been relaxed like usual, Ai Fa would definitely be pouting now—— but she was just whispering with her pink lips.

“If we can’t share everything, we don’t need to become family. Just why did you stay in the Fa house, instead of becoming a member of house Lutim?”

“Because I want to stay with you… Sorry, in my hometown, we have a habit of not troubling our family. I didn’t know my actions would make you so unhappy.”

In order to stop Ai Fa from showing such a sad face, I grabbed her hand.

Ai Fa’s fingertips weren’t that soft, but it was smooth. She gently grasped my hand.

“I want to go through joy and sorrow together with you. Our intentions

are the same; please forgive me. I will pay more attention and not make you feel uncomfortable.

.....

Ai Fa, as time passes, we have gotten to know each other better, right? We might be from different countries or maybe even different worlds, but I hope our understanding of each other will improve.

... Do we have that much time?

Ai Fa said quietly.

I don't know when I will succumb to the forest. You might disappear from this world at any moment... Do we have time to get to know each other?

We do. Until the moment we die or disappear, we will have time. We will continue to work hard, until the day we have to part.

I gripped Ai Fa's hand tightly, and she looked at me.

Her eyes that had yet to calm down stared at me.

If we spend all day worrying about how much time we have, we will

lose the will to work hard for the sake of tomorrow. I dislike living like that. Pondering about the current moment is important, but we shouldn’t neglect what might happen in the future.

Of course… I know that.

The corner of her lips twitched for a moment.

She seemed to be smiling, or maybe crying—— her expression was complicated and vague as if she couldn’t even control her own emotions.

Retard, I don’t need you to tell me this now. If I hadn’t even understood that, how could I have become a hunter?

Ai Fa then did something unexpected.

She pressed her forehead hard onto my right shoulder.

H-Hey, Ai Fa…?

Don’t look at me right now. I will return to normal soon.

She didn’t cry like last time.

She just rested her forehead on my right shoulder and stopped moving.

Ai Fa’s body warmth was transmitted to me from my shoulder and my fingers.

Her hair cascaded down to my crossed legs.

Although she wasn’t using 「sacrificial hunting style」 recently, her hair still had a sweet fragrance.

A few seconds later ——Ai Fa lifted her head steadily and shook off my fingers brusquely.

「...Asuta, what do you think?」

She kept her head lowered, her hair concealing her eyes.

From the lines of her mouth, I could tell she had her usual serious expression.

「I already shared with you my thoughts. Do you think we should open a stall in the Post Station Town?」

「Well, I... want to give it a try.」

Although I was worried about Ai Fa, I still answered frankly.

「I agree that we can't perceive what Kamyua is thinking. I have never witnessed or experienced the impoverished life in Forest's Edge before, so I have no idea what it's like. However… before I met Kamyua, I already felt indignant about the city people calling the denizens of Forest's Edge 「Kiba Eaters」. I want them to know how delicious kiba is.」

「Yes.」

「And there are still good people in the Post Station Town, like Tara and uncle Dora. Even if we can't work harmoniously together, we can still try interacting with each other. I think opening the stall is a good chance to promote the relationship between Forest's Edge and the Post Station Town.」

I scratched my head.

「I'm just an outsider, is it really fine for me to be involved with the future of Forest's Edge? I'm troubled about that—— opening a stall will affect the future of Forest's Edge, I hope that I can bring benefit to Forest's Edge by doing so. Since Kaslan Lutim and you agreed to this, I want to try and do it.」

「I see, you still think of yourself as an outsider. Your attitude really makes me angry sometimes.」

Ai Fa said coldly and turned her face away.

Her words and actions might have returned to normal, but her hair was still covering her eyes, so I couldn’t guess what she was feeling.

“You are a member of the Fa house. You are staying in Forest's Edge and living here. You have to express your thoughts from the perspective of a denizen of Forest's Edge.”

“Yes. Even from the perspective of a denizen of Forest's Edge, I still want to take up the challenge of opening a stall. I don’t know what the results would be, but I want to test the limits of my mettle.”

“... It’s decided then.”

Ai Fa kept her head turned and said quietly:

“I will hunt kiba as usual and prepare the meat and copper plates. You can use them to take care of your work.”

“I got it... I will do my best.”

“Hmmp, don’t neglect your work as a hearth caretaker just because you are serving food to the people in the city.”

“I will be selling the food, not giving out free treats.”

Since Ai Fa decided to revert to her usual attitude, I followed her lead.

I forced myself to answer cheerfully:

“That said, after deciding on opening the stall, there will be a mountain of problems for me to worry about. Aside from the ingredients we have on hand, we also need to calculate the cost of other ingredients. How will we transport the ingredients and iron pot to the Post Station Town? That is a difficult problem. It’s not as easy as it sounds.”

“So you have thought that far. Asuta, leaving the opinions of others aside, did you actually really want to open a stall, right?”

“Not really. I’m just having fun imagining it. Looks like I will have plenty to discuss with Kaslan Lutim tomorrow.”

“You are so pragmatic.”

With those words, Ai Fa laid down on the bedding.

In the end, she still wanted to sleep on the bedding. I smiled wryly.

“I will organize my thoughts properly. Since we have decided to take up

the challenge of opening a stall, I will definitely make it work.

When I was about to lie down on the rug, Ai Fa who was lying down on the bedding called out to me.

Asuta.

What is it?

After my answer, she propped up her upper body with her elbow and scooted a little towards the wall.

This bedding is unexpectedly soft and really comfortable. Come here to rest too.

… What?

I tilted my head anxiously.

Ai Fa laid down again and extended both her arms:

It’s really comfortable. They went through the trouble of preparing the bedding for us; it would be a waste not to use it.

「N-No need, please enjoy it yourself. As long as there are rugs on the floor, I can sleep comfortably.」

「... Don’t you believe me?」

「It’s not like that. The people in my country also use bedding. I know how comfortable it is to lie on one.」

「Since you know, then come over.」

「No, no. The bedding isn’t big enough for the two of us. Don’t mind me, good night.」

「... Why are you so adamant about rejecting me?」

Ai Fa muttered quietly as she laid still.

「Did I do anything to make you unhappy?」

「That’s not it! In my country, only parent and child, or wedded couples sleep in the same bedding.」

「... This is Forest's Edge, not your country.」

Uwah, I started stammering and couldn’t say anything.

I didn’t know if Ai Fa intentionally covered her eyes with her long hair, which made it hard to tell what she was thinking.

If her eyes didn’t revert to her usual calm and kept wavering uneasily—— just that thought pained my heart.

This had to be some sort of test.

Really, I already had enough of such trials!

…… If you are that unwilling, then do what you want.

Ai Fa turned towards the wall, hiding her face from me.

It was time for me to make my decision.

However—— No matter what I thought, I knew very well that Ai Fa wouldn’t let me marry into the Fa house. There was no way anything would happen between us.

We had always been sleeping together, and we were very close to each other too. I was only so conscious of this fact because there was the bedding on the floor. Now that I think about it, even if I lie on this

bedding with Ai Fa, the distance between us would just be tens of cm closer than usual. Enduring this distance would put Ai Fa at ease, so I didn’t need to be that hesitant about this.

I steadied my breathing, did my best to calm my heart, then crawled to the bedding.

「Excuse me.」

Ai Fa didn’t move.

I tried my best to not look at Ai Fa’s beautiful back and laid gently on the bedding.

This bedding had just the right softness and felt really comfortable. I really missed having a pillow, but I couldn’t be picky here. As I thought about the plan to open a stall in the Post Station Town, I closed my eyes and decided to sleep early.

The next instant, Ai Fa turned her body towards me.

「… Asuta, you still came over in the end.」

「Y-Yeah, you invited me after all.」

Ai Fa rested her head on her right arm, laid on the rug sideways and stared at me.

There wasn’t any sadness or unease in her eyes, but instead they were filled with joy.

“... You should have listened to me obediently from the start.”

I couldn’t joke with her right after seeing her honest display of happiness.

Ai Fa’s face was very expressive and would either be angry, sulking, or pouty towards me. But it was rare to see her show joy—— Maybe this was the first time I have seen her like this since I first met her.

As I was panicking because of Ai Fa, she spoke quietly:

“Asuta, in terms of cooking, you are immeasurably powerful. But we have no way of knowing if opening the shop in the Post Station Town will have a happy ending like what Kaslan Lutim predicts.”

“Yes... You are right.”

“No matter what, I won’t regret this. You just need to do what you usually do.”

Yes, I plan to do that.

... I'm proud of you, happy to have met you and take you in as a member of the Fa house.

Ai Fa closed her eyes.

She had a blissful smile on her face.

I'm going to sleep. Let's talk tomorrow...

A steady breathing came from beside me mid-sentence.

Ai Fa's face looked as naive as a child, and looked at ease.

... That's my line.

I thought in my mind, but I couldn't move my gaze away from her lovable face or close my eyes, so I ended up staying up all night

Vol. 4 :

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

The Fa house has decided to open a stall in the Post Station Town.

Even though the decision had been made, we still had a mountain of things to consider. As there were too many issues to address, I didn’t know where to start.

After thinking about it carefully, I summarized them into three main issues.

The points were as follows——

One, could we balance work and house chores?

Two, how would we transport the goods?

Three, what was the sales target?

I need to figure out these three questions before I could work on the menu.

To be honest, I already got a gist of the menu, and just needed to work out my plan based on which dish I would be serving.

First, could we balance work and house chores?

My schedule had not been consistent lately, but my tasks were centered around dawn and dusk. Till now, I used the time around noon to practice my cooking, so it wouldn't be a problem if I filled this time to commute to work and open the stall.

However, if I were to spend too much time on preparing the food, I would need to shorten my operation time.

In order to run the business smoothly, I had to think of an airtight plan.

Next was how to transport the items.

This was a difficult one.

Since I wanted to sell steaming hot food, I had to bring the iron pot and firewood to the Post Station Town. I needed someone to help me, but it couldn't be Ai Fa.

Ai Fa was a hunter, after all, so she needed to hunt and couldn’t stay in the Post Station Town for long. If she were to help me ferry the goods, she would need to make two trips to the Post Station Town. A one-way journey from Forest's Edge to the Post Station Town required an hour. I couldn’t let her neglect her hunting work for such a menial chore.

And so—— that's where things started to get interesting. I had to hire someone to 「work」.

No matter what, it was too risky to tend the stall by myself. I would need to leave the stall because of miscellaneous matters from time to time, and leaving the stall unattended in the Post Station Town where people discriminate against Forest's Edge was dangerous. There might be ruffians hostile towards the denizens of Forest's Edge who would sneak into the stall.

Hence, I needed to get at least one more person to help.

Finally, how should we set the sales target?

That was another tough question. I think it would be good enough not to lose money. Considering our long-term goal, the price of the merchandise couldn’t be too low.

One of our goals was 「let the people in the Post Station Town recognize the value of kiba meat」, we hoped that kiba meat could have comparable value with the other meat sold in the Post Station Town.

If not, we would disrupt the market prices.

If we set the price of kiba meat too low, it might force the other meat stalls to the brink.

And so, I arrived at a conclusion. No matter what my profits were, I would sell a product at the same size and volume as a 「Kimyusu meat bun」.

The last thing to consider would be the calculation of ingredient cost and profits.

In order to ask Kaslan Lutim for his opinion, I visited his room with the above plan early in the morning. I didn't expect my actions to make him so confused.

「Asuta, I'm sorry. I don't understand at all…」

「Eh? What don't you understand

?」

「I get what you are saying, but even if you ask me about revenue, price and working hours—— I'm at a loss too, and don't know how to help you.」

It seemed that I explained too many unnecessary things.

Even if I asked him about operation hours and price setting, he couldn’t do anything about it, so I just needed to worry about them by myself.

“Sorry, you are right. I’m here to discuss with you about getting helpers to tend to the stall. If I want to open a stall in the Post Station Town, I will need helpers. I can’t transport a pot full of ingredients alone, and I also want someone to look after the stall at times. So I will need the help of the women in Forest's Edge. I can use kiba tusks and horns to compensate them for their time and effort.”

Kaslan Lutim’s serious face showed signs of hesitation.

I have never seen him make such an expression.

“That shouldn’t be a problem. But won’t Ai Fa be with you after opening your stall in the Post Station Town?”

“Eh? No, Ai Fa is a hunter, she has her own work to attend to, so she can’t help me. If Ai Fa were to stop hunting kiba, we would lose everything.”

“If you earn copper plates in the Post Station Town, you can exchange them for aria and poitan, right?”

“Only if my business is successful. If the business were to fail, we would lose all our savings. Besides, we will need to hunt kiba to get the meat

for the stall.

House Lutim can provide meat for you. Like I said yesterday, we have piles of meat and can't use them all.

Alright, when the business gets on track, I will be counting on you for that. But what we need right now are copper plates, we need them to buy the vegetables required for the dishes.

I wasn't sure why Kaslan Lutim had such a reaction, but I continued:

It might not be easy to sell kiba meal in the Post Station Town, so it's better to plan for the worst. It's even possible to have no sales within these ten days. If that were to happen, we would lose all the tusks and horns Ai Fa had earned so far. And so, I think Ai Fa should continue hunting—— and most important of all, Ai Fa has no intention of giving up her job as a hunter.

Ai Fa who was beside me nodded.

Kaslan Lutim sighed softly.

That's true. Asuta, you are right. You already set your mind on opening a stall in the Post Station Town and will go as far as to risk losing all your horns and tusks in order to achieve this goal. My thinking is too shallow… Unfortunately, house Lutim is short on women help, and we even need to get other houses to lend us their aid. Like I mentioned

yesterday, house Lutim doesn’t have many women…

I see, then I will need to discuss this with the Wu clan—— considering Donda Wu’s temperament, he will probably turn me down. If we really can’t find any helpers, my only option will be to sell food that I can carry alone.

That won’t do.No way. The two of them said at the same time.

W-Why not?

Ai Fa who was beside me closed in on me angrily.

Think about it carefully, if the business succeeds, can you walk around in the Post Station Town with copper plates on you? if the ruffians in the Post Station Town were to attack you, would you be able to protect yourself?

Eh… You are correct. But the women in Forest's Edge also need to buy things in the Post Station Town, right? If they are fine, then I…

… Do you think you are stronger than the women of Forest's Edge?

I was dealt a huge blow.

I might not be as strong as Mama Mia Lei, but I wouldn’t lose to Leina Wu or Lala Wu—— at least I hoped so.

“Ai Fa is right. Even if you are stronger than the women of Forest's Edge, going about alone in the Post Station Town is still very dangerous.”

“W-Why, Kaslan Lutim?”

“In the Post Station Town, no one dares to use violence against the denizens of Forest's Edge. It’s the same for the elderly, women and children. The people in the city already learned what will happen to them if they laid a hand on the denizens of Forest's Edge—— we have already proven this point decades ago.”

Kaslan Lutim’s tone was calm, but his words were intimidating.

Could it be—— something incredibly terrifying happened several decades ago?

“... However, even though you wear the garbs of a denizen of Forest's Edge, your appearance is closer to the people in the city. If the ruffians in the Post Station Town were to think you are not a real denizen of Forest's Edge, you would be in danger.”

“I see...”

“Furthermore, you might run into the people from the Tsun clan in the Post Station Town. Compared to the ruffians in the Post Station Town, I’m more worried about them.”

After Kaslan Lutim said that, Ai Fa nodded firmly.

“I already considered this possibility—— but even the depraved Tsun clan won’t use violence openly in broad daylight when they are in the Post Station Town, right?”

“... Didn’t the second son of the Tsun clan Doddo Tsun brandish his saber in broad daylight that other time in the Post Station Town? During my wedding day, he also drew his blade against us.”

“Well... You are right... But if he really were to hurt anyone with his blade, he would be punished too, right?”

“That is only natural. Both the city’s law and the rules of Forest's Edge forbid the act of drawing one’s blade and hurting others. Anyone who breaches this rule will have to pay for his crime with his life.”

Kaslan Lutim leaned forward unconsciously.

“If anything were to happen to you and the criminal is executed, that still won’t solve anything. We can’t exchange the life of a ruffian for your wellbeing.”

Kaslan Lutim’s eyes were troubled, and Ai Fa’s raging gaze made me realized how naive I was.

I was too unaware of the dangers.

“Of course, no matter how lawless the people of the Tsun clan is, they won’t commit such grievous crime so easily in public. They know this will lead to their own destruction… But Asuta, think about it. During your daily commute to the Post Station Town, there will be plenty of chances for others to attack you. If the ruffians were to ambush you during your journey from Forest's Edge to the Post Station Town——”

“W-Wait, even if I were to be in the company of women from the Lutim or Wu clan, our position would still be precarious, right?”

“No, the Tsun clan don’t have the guts to do so right now. If any kin of the Wu clan is harmed, all the pent-up rage Donda Wu is bottling up will explode.”

I noticed there is a stern light in Kaslan Lutim’s eyes that I have never seen before.

“If that happens, the Tsun clan will be destroyed, and the Wu clan’s kin will suffer heavy losses—— And it will be only a matter of time before the Forest's Edge settlement gets wiped out.”

“… Yes.”

The head of the Tsun clan knows Donda Wu’s temperament very well. He is probably very unhappy that his sons taunted the Wu clan. After all, the head of the Tsun clan’s goal is to protect his own stable life.

... Those people actually barged into the wedding under such a situation.

Yes, they are too retarded, even going against their clan head’s will.

This was the first time I heard this earnest young man showed scold someone so plainly.

I experienced many things for the first time this morning.

According to my observations, even if the three sons from the Tsun clan are incredibly retarded, they still have no intention of bringing Forest's Edge towards destruction. The second son Doddo Tsun only brandished his blade during the wedding to intimidate you. I already said this before, but the Fa house isn’t a kin of the Wu clan. So the Tsun clan will lose control very easily when they face the Fa house.

Yes...

Since Ai Fa is capable of protecting you, I don’t think the Tsun clan would be a threat to you two. But Ai Fa can’t move together with you this time—— You can only rely on Donda Wu. If you can afford to pay

and hire the women from the Wu clan, they would be able to ensure your safety.

I see… So there won't be any danger if I employ the women from the Wu clan? I'm not worried about myself, but for the safety of the women from the Wu clan.

No—— I can bet my life on that. After all, I'm the most unwilling to see Forest's Edge head towards destruction.

Kaslan Lutim's eyes showed no hesitation at all.

Unlike the careless me, Kaslan Lutim was a great man, he wouldn't show any openings to the Tsun clan. His unwavering eyes made me believe that.

This steeled my heart even more, but Ai Fa was still glaring angrily at me from the side.

Asuta, you are too careless and don't think about protecting yourself properly. I won't let a frail man like you leave Forest's Edge alone.

Stop emphasizing me being weak. I know that very well…

It can't be helped. Hunters will hunt, hearth tenders will take care of the hearth. The Wu clan and Lutim house have their own responsibilities

too, which is to be on guard against the Tsun clan’s violent acts. The Fa house’s duty is to open a stall in the Post Station Town—— We might not be related by blood, but for the sake of a more prosperous life for everyone, we need to make up for each others shortcoming. That’s how things should be.

Kaslan Lutim finally smiled.

Ai Fa, is it the Fa house’s style to shoulder everything by themselves and not to rely on others? In that case, then you and Asuta are really alike. Both of you have no regards for your own well-being for the sake of achieving your goals.

Kaslan Lutim was a great man as expected.

After all—— Ai Fa pouted her lips vexingly after hearing that.

This was the first time I have seen Ai Fa showed such a face to someone else.

While I was impressed by Kaslan Lutim magnanimity—— something akin to jealousy welled up in my heart.

Just how narrow-minded was I? I could only sigh at myself.

2

Before noon, we estimated the time Donda Wu would rise from bed, and left the Lutim house.

With our new pot in tow, we set off together with Kaslan and his wife.

"I want to see Kota Wu." Ema Min Lutim used this reason and asked us to take her along.

"Didn't you visit the Wu clan village yesterday?"

"I went to learn cooking and didn't see Kota Wu."

"But you will be visiting the Wu clan to learn cooking later too, right?"

"That's right. All the women are attending; if I miss out, I would be the worst cook in house Lutim. Kaslan, are you fine with that?"

"But…"

"Also, if we don't go to the Wu clan together, I will only see you at dinner. If you are okay with that, I can go back to house Lutim now."

“I-I’m not saying you should go back.”

In these thirty minutes, we had the rare chance to listen to the conversation between newlyweds.

I could only say that I was envious.

We reached the Wu village as we chatted.

There might have been only three days since the wedding, but it seemed like it happened such a long time ago.

The women in the branch houses were doing all sort of chores. Upon seeing us, they all waved.

I spent six days in this village after all, so this was like my second home.

“Ara ara, what’s the occasion, you are actually visiting us together! Even bringing a pot too! The feast is already over, isn’t it?”

Mama Mia Lei received us cheerfully at the main house.

She seemed surprised and intrigued and had a happy smile on her face. Her smile felt very nostalgic.

“I’m here to discuss something with Donda Wu. Is he awake?”

“Ah, he is chewing on jerky in the hall. Jiza and Ludo are with him… I will safekeep your blades, can you put the pot around here, please?”

“Alright.”

Mama Mia Lei took Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim’s sabres and also my Santoku knife with her strong arms.

“Alright then, welcome to the Wu clan… Clan head, you have guests!”

After entering through the door, we found the clan head and his sons sitting opposite to each other in the center of the hall.

“Hmm, Asuta, it’s you! What brings you here!?”

Ludo Wu stood up nimbly when he noticed my presence.

Only then did the clan head and his heir turn their heads slowly our way.

They—— seemed rather unhappy.

“What, it’s you damn brats again. Nothing good ever comes from seeing

you.

Kaslan Lutim bowed towards Donda Wu. The other party was obviously displeased, almost to the point of being hostile.

Head of the Wu clan Donda Wu, sorry for intruding, but could we have a bit of your time?

Donda who was in the seat of honor snorted, then sat up straight.

Jiza Wu and Ludo Wu also sat down opposite to us.

Mia Lei Wu, I want to visit Sati Lei Wu and Kota Wu, are they in?

They are in their rooms. That's right, let's leave the troublesome matters to the men.

After Mama Mia Lei placed our blades beside the clan head, she walked along the corridor to the right together with Ema Min Lutim.

It's almost time for everyone to head into the Forest, so I will be brief… The Fa house wanted the Lutim house to help with a job. But our house didn't have means to do it, so we are here together to request for assistance from the Wu clan.

「… A job?」

「That’s right—— Asuta, please explain.」

「Alright. I will be frank; I’m planning to open a stall in the Post Station Town.」

「What!?」

Ludo Wu shouted in surprise.

「What is this about! Hey, Asuta! Are you leaving Forest's Edge!?」

「No, I’m planning to set up a stall to sell kiba meat meals as a denizen of Forest's Edge… People might think this is ridiculous, but we have made up our mind. I’m here to discuss this with everyone… Because I hope the Wu clan will let me borrow a woman to help me.」

Donda Wu already had a displeased face, so his expression didn’t change much.

Jiza Wu’s thoughts were as elusive as ever.

Ludo Wu—— started laughing out loud.

「What? You want the people from the city to eat kiba? The people who mock and call us 『kiba eater』? You really are an interesting man! How

did you come up with such an outrageous idea?

That's complicated and will take a lot of time to explain… Donda Wu, what are your thoughts about this?

… Is this your idea?

Donda Wu went straight to the point.

I straightened my back unconsciously.

No. The one who suggested for me to do that was Kamyua Yost, the citizen of Rock City from last time.

I knew it. Did that fool show up at the Fa house as promised?

Yes. But I didn't collude with him on this. When he gave this suggestion, I couldn't understand what his intentions were. After hearing him out, I realized that running a stall wasn't impossible, and decided to give it a shot.

I thought Donda Wu would react more strongly.

If I had to say—— Jiza Wu who was sitting quietly at the side started emitting a dangerous aura instead.

「After I treated him to a meal at the Fa house, he commented that kiba was delicious, and it was a pity not to sell it. If we can barter kiba meat for copper plates, the lives of Forest's Edge denizens will be more prosperous. In order to let the people in the city understand how delicious kiba meat is, I need to open a stall in the Post Station Town——that's the conclusion I arrived at after our discussion. I also visited the Post Station Town to conduct plenty of research, and check if this incredible proposal is really feasible.」

Repeating what I told Kaslan Lutim yesterday, I explained my thoughts and feelings of the past two days.

Even if we sold kiba food in the Post Station Town, it wouldn't upset people too much.

If it works, we might really be able to pull this off in the Post Station Town.

I still couldn't understand Kamyua Yost, but it was true that he admired the denizens of Forest's Edge and had no intentions of deceiving us.

「What an elusive man. But your cooking is really delicious! I can't wait to see the faces made by the city people when they try kiba meat!」

「Shut up, Ludo.」

Donda Wu snapped at him.

He wasn’t in a good mood, but his expression remained calm.

He might actually agree to this—— just when I was thinking that, Jiza Wu called my name:

“Asuta, you look just like a man from the city, and it wouldn’t be strange for you to do business in town… Why don’t you become a Post Station Town citizen, wouldn’t that simplify the matter?”

“Jiza Wu, I know how you feel. I also answered you before that I like Forest's Edge. Given two choices - either remaining in Forest's Edge or opening the stall, I would choose Forest's Edge.”

“Hehe.”

I heard a strange noise, and when I shifted my gaze, I found Ludo Wu laughing while facing away.

He had an incredibly cheerful smile on his face.

“… What a joke.”

Donda Wu muttered.

I don’t think the people in Rock city will eat kiba happily, trying to barter kiba meat for copper plates is a ridiculous idea.

Yes. I can’t imagine earning any profits from the stall. But I still want to give it a shot.

I leaned forward a little and stared at Donda Wu’s chiseled face.

Just Ai Fa and I alone can’t run a stall in the Post Station Town. We will need helpers to operate the stall, and I have been advised that it is too dangerous for me to move around in the Post Station Town alone. I might also run into the Tsun clan, so it is better for me to enlist the help from the kin of the Wu clan.—— After listening to my words, will you please consider this?

Hmmp…

I won’t ask you to believe that this business will be successful. Be it success or failure I will pay the agreed remuneration. After discussing with Kaslan Lutim, I have set six copper plates as the wage for one day of work—— which is one tusk and one horn of a large kiba.

I heard that two women needed half a day to make one piece of fur. The price of the fur was equivalent to two tusks and horns—— between eight to twelve copper plates.

Kamyua Yost said that the tusks and horns from one kiba were worth ten

copper plates. After checking with Ai Fa and the others, I found out that the price of the tusks and horns would differ according to their sizes.

I needed a woman to help me for half a day, so I thought the price I was offering matched the market price.

"As the Fa house and the Tsun clan have had some bad blood in the past, please take that into consideration too. Kaslan Lutim told me that the Tsun clan won't lay their hands on me as long as a kin from the Wu clan is with me. However, Doddo Tsun is reckless, and I can't be sure what he will do if he gets drunk."

"You don't need to tell me that, brat… Don't look down on the women from the Wu clan."

"Clan head."

Jiza Wu was stopped mid-sentence by Donda Wu.

"If I lend you my woman for half a day, you will give me one horn and tusk. That's not a bad deal. The Wu clan does have the people to spare."

"Yes."

"I have a condition."

"A condition?"

「If you conspire with that retarded blonde man to harm Forest's Edge, I will take your right arm.」

I felt a chill running down my spine.

I wasn’t looking Ai Fa’s way, but I could feel murderous intent from her.

「If you agree to this, I will lend you a helper.」

「... I don’t have any malicious intentions, but I’m not sure about Kamyua Yost.」

「If that man has any schemes, I will lop off his head. If you collude with him, I will cut off your right arm.」

A heavy silence shrouded the hall.

I gulped.

「I’m willing to swear that aside from the thoughts and feelings I described earlier, I have no other intentions—— However, if Kamyua Yost does have ulterior motives, I won’t be able to prove my innocence when his schemes are uncovered.」

“I don’t need you to be a smart alec. If you got fooled by him, I will just laugh at you for being retarded… Kaslan Lutim, head of the Fa house.”

“Yes.”

Kaslan Lutim answered quietly. Ai Fa was silent as she glared at Donda Wu.

An angry fire burned in her eyes.

“Do you believe what this brat is saying?”

“Of course. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t have come.”

“What about you, head of the Fa house?”

“… Isn’t it obvious? As the house head, how can I not trust my own family?”

Her voice was trembling with rage.

Donda Wu was unusually calm in front of Ai Fa.

“If the two of them believe in your innocence until the very end, I will let

you off. If they are certain that you have betrayed Forest's Edge, I will take your right arm.

I accept this term.

I wiped away the cold sweat on my brows and answered:

I vow to never betray the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Will you swear on your right arm?

I do, I swear on my right arm.

The next instant, Ai Fa proclaimed loudly:

Hold it; the Fa house is the one that decided to open a stall in the Post Station Town, not Asuta. If anything happens, the house head should be responsible.

Ai Fa’s cat-like eyes burned with an intense flame.

Donda Wu stared at her silently.

If I do anything against my conscience, I will give you my arm.

「Hey, Ai Fa——」

「Head of the Fa house, I don’t need your arm.」

Donda Wu cut me off sternly.

「Someone like you won’t collude with the people of Rock city. But this brat came from a foreign land, I just want to know his true intentions and resolve.」

「But…」

「Didn’t he give his answer? I only want to know whether he will attempt to deceive us. He won’t lose his right arm unless he betrays us.」

The light in Donda Wu’s eyes intensified a little as he stared at the furious Ai Fa.

「He already made his resolve, are you going to trample over his efforts…? Or do you actually doubt him?」

Ai Fa tried to stand up.

I grabbed her arm in a panic.

Calm down, Ai Fa. I won’t betray the denizens of Forest's Edge; it will be fine.

This was probably an unnecessary precaution.

Donda Wu was the head of the Wu clan’s main house and had the future of Forest's Edge resting on his shoulders. He shouldn’t believe me so easily.

Even so, he was willing to let Kaslan Lutim and Ai Fa judge me.

Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim were his tribe mates from Forest's Edge. Even if he didn’t trust me, he could trust them—— I felt that Donda Wu’s decisiveness was very straight to the point.

However… Donda Wu always hid his intentions with crude words, which I think was a bad point.

Even so, I still understood his actions.

Ai Fa glared at me for a moment, then sat down again.

She lowered her head to conceal her agitated emotions and eyes and bit on her lower lips.

「... Looks like we have a deal.」

Donda Wu muttered.

「Well then, who shall we send to help you—」

「Ah, the job includes transporting the ingredients and iron pot, as well as tending to the stall. My helper will need to be capable of traversing the hilly terrain with the ingredients and pot.」

「Hmmp...」

「Women from the main or branch houses are fine; I will leave the choice to you.」

As I was speaking, my heart turned gloomy.

I had yet to meet Leina Wu and Vena Wu since the wedding.

Vena Wu asked me to take her along and journey to a faraway place.

Leina Wu wanted me to leave the Fa house and become a member of the Wu clan.

I could fulfill neither of these two wishes.

I didn’t want to avoid them forever and hoped to build a stable relationship with them again. Unfortunately, I still didn’t know how.

Who would he dispatch? My heart raced as I waited for his answer—Donda Wu finally said:

“Let’s send Vena then.”

3

After a series of events, this was my third visit to the Post Station Town.

I was talking with Donda Wu in the Wu main house just a short time earlier.

After leaving the Fa house yesterday, we visited house Lutim, went to the Post Station Town, returned to house Lutim again and stayed the night there. The next day, I’m here at the Post Station Town after visiting the Wu clan—— my itenary was fully pack for these two days.

I visited the Post Station Town two days in a row.

I had slowly gotten used to the messy streets.

Ai Fa wasn’t with me today.

The Lutim house marriage was already three days ago, Ai Fa had to hunt the forest today, so she went home alone with the iron pot.

And accompanying me in her place— were Vena Wu and Ludo Wu.

An unexpected trio.

“Hee hee, it’s been so long since I came to the Post Station Town! This place is still so stifling!”

Ludo Wu said excitedly.

“I like the Post Station Town… But, I don’t like how everyone stares at me, it’s a bit unnerving…”

Vena Wu was all smiles too.

On the night of the wedding, when we were together in the stove room of Shin Wu’s house, Vena Wu begged me in tears not to be together with Leina Wu. Her figure back then was still fresh on my mind—— and Vena

Wu was walking beside her brother on the stone paved path right now, her face showing a more cheerful and pure smile than usual.

On the other hand, I felt a bit tired.

In order to execute the plan in my mind, I had to visit the Post Station Town again. As Ai Fa couldn't accompany me, Donda Wu lended me two members of the Wu clan. I was grateful for Donda Wu's help, but he had a condition; he wanted me to introduce Kamyua Yost to the two of them.

As Kamyua Yost was too hard to understand, Donda Wu probably wanted the two of them to get to know his thoughts as much as possible.

Would the meeting between them and Kamyua Yost end smoothly? I was worried.

□L-Ludo Wu, don't you need to do your work as a hunter?□

After asking that, Ludo Wu said that the Wu clan won't be entering the forest today.

The reason was simple—— there were kiba everywhere in the forest.

With the increase in the number of kiba, the Wu clan already hunted enough for two days during their trip yesterday. A few men from the

branch family and Darum Wu also suffered light wounds.

They already lost Ryada Wu, so they couldn’t afford to be reckless and risk losing more hunters. Hence, everyone gets to rest for a day, and not hunt kiba—— we just happened to arrive when the Wu clan reached this conclusion.

The situation in the Wu clan was even more dire than house Lutim.

This made me worry about Ai Fa who went into the forest today, but the brave huntress from my house wasn’t fazed as expected.

“This probably meant that the kiba group is slowly moving south. There are only smaller houses in our vicinity, so they couldn’t hunt all the kiba. After the kiba eats all the food in the area, they will continue moving down south.”

“I see…”

“When they had eaten all the food in the south, they will head to village and ravage the farms. This might be a worse disaster than usual.”

Ai Fa was calm, but angry flame burned in her blue eyes.

“I can only do what what I can to hunt the kiba and do my job… Asuta, go and do your job too.”

「I got it.」

Ai Fa and I act separately.

I headed to the Post Station Town with the eldest daughter and the youngest son from the Wu clan——

「Uwah, that's a Totos, a Totos! It looks as funny as ever! Asuta, what does the Totos taste like?」

「L-Ludo Wu, don't be so loud.」

「Asuta… I never thought that I would get to work with you for ten days in a row, this is like a dream… Thank you for giving me such a wonderful job…」

「T-This is work alright? You have to work properly okay? Please keep private and work matters apart!」

We just reached the Post Station Town, when the two of them started talking loudly.

The gazes on us were different from the previous two times I visited.

By the way, Ludo Wu was wearing his cape and dressed like a hunter as usual. Vena Wu had a different attire today. She had a translucent veil on her head, a shawl covered her shoulders and a cloth with swirly patterns covered her waist down to her ankles.

"Girls have to be careful. The people in the city aren't our tribe mates, I can't bare my skin before them…"

Her effort was commendable, but regrettably, such a thin piece of cloth couldn't conceal Vena Wu's thicc figure.

Her deep cleavage was very visible, and the slit down the cloth covering her waist revealed the beautiful curves on her legs, which was even sexier than baring them— the lusty eyes of the men were centered on her, surpassing those of disdain and fear.

"I don't know if we will see those retards from the Tsun clan, but if they draw their blades in front of me, I will break their arms!"

"Don't! Ludo Wu, please don't make a scene!"

"What? You think I'm a retard who will create a trouble without being provoked?"

He wasn't retarded, but he fulfilled all the conditions of starting trouble.

Ludo Wu was loud, have big movements and attract a lot of attention. But Vena Wu was on par with him.

However— I was happy about a certain quality Ludo Wu has.

In Forest's Edge, Ludo Wu was a carefree youth. He left a good impression on me, and I had never thought he was noisy or undependable. Instead, I think he had many good points, lively and pure.

The buildings and people in the Post Station Town were more densely pack, so for Ludo Wu, this town was too cramped.

He needed a big space for him to spread his limbs.

「Wah, it’s people from Semu! They are still so black! I wonder if he knows magic.」

But I really wish he wouldn’t point at pedestrians and shout!

「L-Let’s go! Let’s meet Kamyua first!」

I had to drag those two and hurried towards the 「Kimyusu’s tail inn」.

「Really now… Ludo, you are too loud, that makes us even more prominent…」

「What are you talking about Vena-nee! It’s because of the flirty way you walk!」

「Don’t say that, Asuta will hear you…」

This was probably the first time I hear them converse properly.

This scene calmed me down a little, but I still prefer enjoying such a heart warming interaction in Forest's Edge.

「Welcome… Oh, it’s you again.」

The owner of 「Kimyusu’s tail inn」—— I remember his name was Milano Mast—— received us with a sour face again.

「Oh~ so this is an inn.」

Ludo Wu looked around the room curiously. His actions made me nervous, and I asked:

「Is Kamyua Yost here?」

「No. He left early in the morning. I don’t know if he left for work or pleasure.」

He wasn’t here.

I felt relieved, but I was in a dilemma. I couldn’t carry out my promise with Donda Wu now.

At this moment, the boy Leito came out from inside the restaurant like he did last time.

“Asuta, you came to visit again…! And they are?”

“They are denizens from Forest's Edge, Vena Wu and Ludo Wu from the Wu clan.”

“I see, they are from the Wu clan.”

Leito smiled.

Seemed like Kamyua already told him their names.

“… And who are you?”

Ludo Wu squainted a little.

“Ah, I’m Leito, Kamyua’s disciple. Pleased to meet you both.”

"Disciple in what?"

"Disciple in being a "Guardian" of course."

I still don't understand the entire scope of Kamyua Yost's job, but since he needed to ensure the safety of travelers, he probably gets embroiled into fights a lot.

"Kamyua is out to discuss details about a job next month. He left early in the morning, and won't be back too lack."

"I see. I will come over to find him after we finish buying our things."

After giving this reply, I turned to Milano Mast who had turned his face to the side.

I had business with him today.

"Excuse me, Kamyua told me that this place handles the market place rental, and the lease of pushcarts. Can you lease a pushcart to me?"

"What?"

Milano Mast turned and faced me.

If you are willing to pay, I will lease you my pushcart. What will you be selling?

I want to sell food made from kiba meat.

The next moment, the man grunted unhappily.

I don’t care what you are selling, but don’t make my pushcart stink, or I will force you to buy it. Can you accept that?

I will be selling food, so there will be some smell. Does this rule apply to the other renters too?

It’s fine if you sell Kimyusu or karon. But if the stench of the kiba gets on the pushcart, it can’t be used again.

He mentioned an unfamiliar term in his reply.

What was a karon?

You are really naggy, uncle! You don’t know how delicious kiba is, so don’t say so much alright? If you got a problem, then try eating some kiba first.

Milano raised his thick eyebrow when he heard what Ludo Wu said.

"Then have you eaten karon or kimyusu before? You only think the stinky kiba is delicious because you have never tried them. If you don't want to hear me nag, then don't bring that meat into town!"

Even though Ludo Wu didn't seem to be bothered, I felt that I should intervene.

"I'm sorry, but everyone has their own preferences, so there's no point in debating about food you have never tried before. I tried Kimyusu a few times before, and I think kiba is on par with that."

"... You used to be from the city right?"

"Yes, but I'm not a resident of Genos."

"I can tell that much from your pale face. Even you think that kiba is delicious?"

"Of course its delicious. If not, I won't be opening a stall here. I tried all sorts of meat back in my hometown. I think the taste of kiba is top notch."

"... How is that possible. Were you eating Munto or Gizu meat?"

It was hard to get through to this uncle.

When I fell into deep thought, Leito suddenly interjected:

「Excuse me, Kamyua let me safekeep the kiba jerky he got yesterday. After trying it, the kiba meat is different from karon, and is tasty in a unique way.」

And of course, those were made from kiba that had been blood let. It was great that he likes them.

Milano frowned doubtfully.

He then shook his head and gave up on the debate.

「… Anyway, I'm running a business here. If you don't stink up my pushcart, I can lease you as many as you like. The marketplace rental and pushcart lease will be two white copper plates.」

「That will be for ten days right? By the way, what are the dimensions of the pushcart?」

「Go look for yourself at the marketplace, there's a few pushcart leased out by me there. My inn's name is engraved on them.」

□Understand. I will come visit in a few days.□

I should leave for now.

□Please inform me when Kamyua returns.□

After I said that to Leito, I left the □Kimyusu's tail inn□ with my two companions.

□Asuta… you are awesome. You really are a man of the city…□

Vena Wu leaned close to me.

□I can't get along with someone like that… I might lose my cool and punch him, just like Ludo…□

□Vena Wu, I'm hiring you to tend to the stall alright?□

□Yes… I'm willing to endure all sorts of humiliation for your sake, you know…?□

What humiliation?

Could I really work together with her for ten days? I already felt uneasy

about the future.

"Let's go shopping…? Hmm? What's the matter, Ludo Wu?"

"Nothing… That kid just now…"

"Ah, you mean Leito. He's a strange kid."

"I don't mean that— I think he is very pitiful."

"Pitiful? Why?"

Leito's mentor was a suspicious character, so I could sympatize with his situation. But Ludo Wu didn't know how Kamyua's character was.

"It's fine, nothing to do with me. We should hurry. It's been a while since I came to the Post Station Town, I want to shop for weapons."

We set off on our incredible journey again.

I felt strange seeing these two walking so naturally in the Post Station Town.

"We are going to change for copper plates. Asuta, didn't you rob those

blessings from us? Are you going to use them?

Who robbed you…? Well, I was planning to use those blessings. But the tusks and horns you gave me aren't on this necklace.

There were ten tusks and horns on my necklace.

When Ai Fa and I splitted up at the Wu clan, he passed this necklace to me.

I was planning to use the tusks and horns I earned to buy the ingredients I needed in town, but Ai Fa was unhappy when she heard that.

… You want to shoulder the entire burden yourself?

I'm planning to do that! Just ten tusks and horns isn't enough to pay the initial cost right? I don't want you to bear the entire cost.

… I'm the house head.

I know… But… If I don't bear any of the cost, it will feel like I'm dumping everything onto you.

Ai Fa fell into deep thought.

Ai Fa then took out a necklace from his cape. After adjusting the number of tusks and horns to ten, she gave it to me.

"Take this. Give me your necklace."

"Okay… What do you want to do?"

"If the business in the Post Station Town fails, we will lose all our copper plates. I will then use your necklace to buy aria and poitan."

Ai Fa put away the necklace I handed to her carefully.

"If the business is a success, we will get more copper plates. I will give you your necklace back then."

"I see… I'm fine with that. But you—"

"It feels really awful to see someone shoulder all the responsibility. You made me realize that last night."

Ai Fa's face looked really scary.

"You don't have any complains now huh… Besides, you don't want to trade in the blessings Grandma Jiba gifted you for copper plates right?"

「Ah, yes, you actually knew. I don’t remember telling you that.」

「I can tell from your expression. I don’t know why you think that way——but if it won’t trouble others, you don’t need to suppress how you feel.」

Ai Fa said to me. Her eyes had calmed down a little.

「... What are you thinking about...」

Something warm wrapped around my right arm.

「Do you feel lonely after separating with your beloved mistress...?」

While we were walking in the Post Station Town, Vena Wu clinged onto my right arm.

I wanted to pull my arm away, but as expected of a denizen of Forest's Edge, she wouldn’t budge at all.

「Excuse me! I told you just now too, I hope you can act properly when you work—」

「I know that... But I’m not working today right...? We are in the Post Station Town to buy our own groceries...」

She was right. Donda Wu already told me that I didn’t need to pay any wages to the Wu clan today.

“B-But, Ludo Wu is here too? Is that fine?”

After I whispered that to Vena Wu, she winked at me sexily like usual.

“It’s fine, Ludo wants you to marry into our clan… Asuta, do you like my dance…?”

“Dance?”

“The dance during the banquet… I dance so hard for your sake…”

What was she talking about?

I don’t remember such a prominent event during the banquet.

“After everyone finish all the meat, all the unwed women got together to perform a dance of blessing…? I always attract the attention of all the men, so I would usually abstain from such an activity. But I did so for you…”

After all the meat was eaten…

I was probably talking with Ai Fa and Kaslan Lutim during that time.

I received the necklace as remuneration, spoke to them a little then fell asleep. Ai Fa then carried me into the empty room.

After I fell asleep— the unwed women then performed the dance of blessing.

"Did you… not see my dance…?"

"Eh, that's not it. I was really busy that day, and fell asleep right after I finished my work."

Vena Wu was stunned. After she closed her eyes, she gripped my arm tightly.

Her monstrous strength was on par with a madarama snake.

But I also felt an indescribable softness.

"Too much… Asuta, you are too much…"

"It hurts! It hurts so much! My arm is breaking! Vena Wu, wait!"

I felt intense pain, and I seemed to have touched some places I shouldn’t have.

We were walking along the streets and it was broad daylight, so this wasn’t the appropriate way to act.

“… You must never tell Leina about this…”

“It hurts…! Ehh? What is that about Leina Wu?”

“Her dance was like the blazing flame… Leina is a docile child, and I never knew she had such passionate emotions in her heart… You have stolen her heart completely…”

Vena Wu released my arm nimbly, then sighed.

“Asuta, I have already gotten over the fact that you are not willing to take me far away. I was thinking that it’s fine for you to marry into the house… This is bad… Leina will hate me…”

She glanced at me sideways sorrowfully.

“… Sinful man…”

I don’t remember committing any sins.

I knew that Leina Wu harboured special feelings towards me.

Leina Wu hoped that I could join the Wu clan, but I couldn’t do that. How should I face her in the future, and how would our relationship be?

I looked up at the cloudless sky, but the answers weren’t written there.

4

Despite the complicated question without any answers lingering in my heart, I still needed to finish my work.

I need to find that old person with a toad-like smile, and exchange for copper plates at his shop.

“Asuta, you only changed a little.”

“Yes, we just bought aria and poitan recently, so this much would be enough.”

I had six copper plates in my hand.

I picked one larger tusk and horn, and got the funds I needed for today.

「You changed so many, as expected of a family of twelve.」

The duo from the Wu clan traded in five kiba worth of tusks and horns.

We had the same number of copper plates, but theirs were white, worth ten times that of the red copper plates.

「Fufu… This is just enough for three days worth of food…」

「Ehh? Then you need to visit the Post Station Town once every three days?」

I was right.

If they had manpower to spare, they would send three person to purchase five days worth of food.

The Fa house only had two people, so we could buy enough for twenty days. They had six times our numbers, so five days is the limit.

I calculated, the Wu clan will need 108 aria and 72 poitan.

The Fa house consume 120 aria and 80 poitan in twenty days, which was comparable to the Wu clan’s purchase.

“We still need to buy fruit wine for dad. I don’t understand what he likes them.”

“We have five red copper plates left… What vegetables should we buy…?”

It felt refreshing to discuss what things to shop for with the denizens of Forest's Edge inside the Post Station Town. It was the same feeling I had when I visit this place with Ai Fa.

The eldest sister and youngest brother were about the same height, and the way they were chatting looked so warming. When the people from the Post Station Town looked at them with fear and disdain, there was a sense of dissonance with this scene.

If no one provokes Ludo Wu, he won’t give off a dangerous aura like the other men from Forest's Edge. On a closer inspection, his face is likeable, and not scary at all.

Ludo Wu’s actions made me nervous at first, but I realized that I didn’t need to worry after all.

Ai Fa was Ai Fa, Ludo Wu was Ludo Wu. I knew they were full of charm. No matter what others think, this fact would never change.

I decided to not be bothered by other people’s gaze.

“Let’s shop for vegetables. There’s someone who runs a stall at the northernmost end…”

“Ah! Wait! I want to go to the weapon shop! Maybe there will be something interesting there!”

Ludo Wu parted the crowd and charged towards a stall.

More accurately speaking, he didn’t part the crowd, the crowd parted themselves.

“… Sorry. He is already fifteen, but still acts like a child… Never mind, I’m twenty and still unwed, so I don’t have the right to say that…”

In a sense, of all the time I knew Vena Wu, she look the most charming when she said that with a smile.

If she was so happy being with her family, then she didn’t need to yearn for the world outside— I thought to myself and walked to the stall. Ludo Wu pick up a machete and yell childishly.

“This is a machete? It looks like a murder weapon.”

□... Hahaha, during war, the army will need to bash through the woods as they advance. If they encounter the enemy, the soldiers will engage right away with these machetes.□

The uncle with ivory skin said with a slightly stiff expression.

Ludo Wu call this store a □weapon shop□, but Genos was very far from their enemy nation Mahildra, so it was impossible for a battle to break out. This stall mainly sells blades for everyday use, such as machete, axes and knives.

□Ah, is this a cooking knife?□

I enquired from the side, and the uncle showed a confused face.

□Why is this pale brat wearing clothes from Forest's Edge?□ His expression was saying this clearly:

□This is a knife for cutting vegetables.□

The blade on this knife was thinner than my dad’s Santoku knife, but was incredibly sharp.

I had seen this knife in the stove room of the Wu clan and house Lutim, and I felt overjoyed when I saw it for sale.

Dad already used his knife for twenty years. If it cracks, I won’t be able to use it anymore. I can borrow Ai Fa’s knife to cut the meat, but I still want to buy a knife for myself one day

“... This knife is priced at four white copper plates and five red copper plates.”

The uncle said cautiously.

It’s about four kiba’s worth of tusks and horns

I will buy this knife when I have more money to spare.

“Thank you. Ludo Wu, it’s about time for us to shop for vegetables.”

“Hmm? Wait a minute.”

Ludo Wu walked out of the stall.

With the thick machete still in his hand.

“H-Hey, wait!”

He ignored the uncle’s shout, and stood on the road fiercely.

“Excuse me! Don’t come near me for now!”

Ludo Wu shouted. The pedestrians wouldn’t go near a man from Forest's Edge in the first place. They made a detour with sour faces.

“Asuta, Vena-nee, stay back too!”

Ludo Wu swung the machete after saying that.

He then pull the blade up with the sound of it cutting through the air.

As if his strike was burning the air itself.

The blade stall owner’s face turned green.

So did the pedestrians.

Some stopped in their tracks, while others turned around and leave.

Ludo Wu didn’t care about the troubled and fearful gazes on him, and continued swinging the machete quickly. Finally, he yelled: “I like it!”

Looks like this machete can smash a kiba’s head in one hit! Uncle, how much is this?

E-Eight white copper plates.

This machete was cost the tusks and horns of six large kiba, an extravagant price.

Considering the fact that eight white copper plates could buy sixty meals of aria and poitan, I realized once again how cheap these two ingredients were.

Got it! Asuta, hold on to this, don’t let anyone buy it! I will be right back!

Ludo Wu shoved the machete into my hands and ran off with haste.

The crowd splitted again, just like how Moses parted the sea in the ten commandments.

... He is still a kid...

Vena Wu smiled. I didn’t think a kid could wield this chunk of steel.

The machete was around 1cm thick, 10cm broad and 30cm long. It was sturdily built and the blade was curved slightly, weighing more than 1kg. This machete— could really smash the skull of a kiba.

… He was smaller than I am, how is he able to swing this machete?

The arm strength of a hunter was fearsome.

Ludo Wu charged back and bought the machete. After he secured it to his waist, we finally set off for the vegetable stall.

And of course, we visited Uncle Dora’s stall.

“W-Welcome!”

When he saw someone from Forest's Edge who wasn’t Ai Fa, his smile turned a little stiff. But he still welcome us cheerfully.

“So it’s this stall huh… I was right. There aren’t many stalls that sell sacks of aria and poitan after all…”

Vena Wu stood before the uncle, it seemed that this wasn’t her first visit.

“One hundred aria and poitan please…”

“Alright, the aria is two white copper plates, and the poitan is two white and five red copper plates.”

□Hmm? You are buying so many poitan?□

I whispered to Ludo Wu in surprise, and he replied:□Because Dad and Darum-nii eat a lot.□

According to Ai Fa, the denizens of Forest's Edge would consume three aria and two poitan every day. That was □minimum number to stay healthy□, but a lot of the men from the Wu clan would eat three or four people's share of poitan.

□Here, one hundred poitan and aria. Please check.□

The uncle placed the heavy sacks on the ground, and the siblings started counting them harmoniously.

I also used this chance to complete my goal.

□Uncle Dora, can I ask you something?□

□Y-Yes, what is it?□

□Can tino be eaten raw?□

Tino was a lettuce-like vegetable that had the shape of a rose.

It was about the size of a lettuce, and had the taste and texture of a cabbage.

"Of course. But I prefer to cook them."

"I see, so do people usually cook the tarapa before eating them?"

Tarapa was a red fruit that had the size of a pumpkin.

It was very sour, and taste like tomato after it was brewed.

"Well, there are people who eat it raw, but it is too sour, so it needs to be cooked with other vegetables before eatng it. I like to make tarapa stew with aria."

"Aria has a sweet taste after all. After dicing aria and frying it, you can bring out its sweetness by cooking it with tarapa."

Dora opened his eyes wide in surprise.

"Y-You are very familiar with the vegetables."

"Not at all, I don't even know which vegetables can be eaten raw... By the way, can aria be eaten raw?"

「Of course.」

「Next is… Gigo. Does your stall sell gigo?」

「No, my farm isn't suitable for gigo…Grandma Misill sells big and sweet gigo, they are popular around here.」

「Eh? Where is grandma Misill's stall?」

「I-It's in the central zone. Between the fine leather works and the cloth shop. A petite grandma runs a stall there by herself, you will know it when you see it.」

「I got it! Thank you!」

I was probably smiling unconsciously.

The uncle also showed a relaxed smile for the first time.

「Alright, the number is correct. Asuta, aren't you buying?」

「That's right. Uncle, I want two tino and three tarapa.」

「Ehh? You are buying so many tarapa?」

Yes. I plan to use them to cook the food I will be selling… Oh right, after cooking the tarapa, must it be finished on the same day? And if I cut a tarapa in half, how long can I keep the other half?

Hmm~ After cooking it, you can keep it for two days at the most. As for the tarapa that has been cut, it will lose its moisture if you leave it for too long. But if you add water when you cook it, the taste will be the same.

I see. Thank you, you have been a big help.

As the tarapa and tino were large, just five of them filled up the entire bag.

By the way, the price for one tarapa and two tino were both one red copper plate.

I was left with two red copper plate.

Only the gigo and fruit wine were left.

Hmm~… What should we buy… How about another tino…?

The tino is too big! But something smaller.

「... Pula then...?」

「Pula is unnecessary!」

「What should we buy then...? I like tino...」

「Buy chachi, chachi! Vegetable stew taste great if you add chachi in!」

「But chachi needs to be cooked for a long time before it turns soft...?」

Chachi was a vegetable that had the texture of potatoes.

The Wu clan used to cook kiba soup with strong flame in a short time. Cooking it this way would turn the outside of the chachi mushy while the inside remained crispy, and wouldn't bring out its sweetness.

「Don't worry. You boil the soul with a small fire right? The texture will be the same as the stew we had last time this way. Don't wait for the water to boil before adding the chachi, please toss them in before you even start to boil the water.」

After I interjected, Ludo Wu shook Vena Wu's shoulders triumphantly.

「See, even Asuta says so! Buy chachi!」

Alright. If chachi can be cooked deliciously, I won't have any complains… Hmm, so don't wait for the water to boil before putting them in, we have to put them in before starting the fire…?

Yes.

Hee hee!

Ludo Wu put his sister in a headlock.

That hurts…

Vena Wu squirmed her body sexily.

I didn't know this pair of siblings were so close.

… Huh? There's no chachi here? You don't sell them?

G-Grandma Misill does.

The uncle replied timidly, then alternate his gaze between Ludo Wu and Vena Wu.

Y-You two are really special. This is the first time I have seen the

denizens of Forest's Edge pick out vegetables based on their own preference.

Huh? I hate pula! Sell chachi, don’t sell pula!

T-those are grown on trees, so it’s hard to grow them from the start.

Hmm, there are many types of vegetables huh.

Ludo Wu and Vena Wu acted as they usually did, but the expression on the uncle’s face changed drastically.

He was stunned.

And then confused.

After that— he was all smiles?

Even though he feared the denizens of Forest's Edge, he was observing Ludo Wu carefully now.

When he heard the denizens of Forest's Edge discuss their preference for vegetables, he was so happy.

□Food has no distinction on being delicious or not□, these words filled me with regrets.

He must had felt the same as I did all this while.

While I was in deep thought, the voice of a girl rang out from my back.

□Ah! Asuta-nii!□

Tara was standing behind me.

She had a Kimyusu meat bun clasped tightly in her hand as she ran towards us with short strides.

However, she stood stiffly in place when she saw Ludo Wu and Vena Wu.

□Hmm? Who is this brat?□

□She is Tara, the stall owner’s daughter. I told you about her before right?□

□Ah, the brat you saved, who helped you later right?□

Ludo Wu took nimble steps towards the girl standing stiffly in place.

It felt like seeing a german shepherd approaching a kitten, which made me nervous. The poor uncle who had a surprised face was now turning green.

"Brat! You are about bratty Rimee's size. How old are you?"

"Eight… Eight years old…"

"That's the same as Rimee. But you are much thinner, so you look younger."

Ludo Wu squatted down, and looked between the girl and the bun.

"Smell nice. Is it good?"

"… Yes."

"I guess so."

"You… You want to try?"

Tara offered the meat bun she was holding carefully in her hands to Ludo Wu timidly.

Ludo Wu tilted his head quizzically.

「Can I eat that?」

「J-Just a bite!」

「I see, then I will do that.」

After saying that, Ludo Wu bit down on the meat bun in Tara's hand.

He bit really hard, as if he was trying to take off Tara's fingers too.

The uncle screamed.

Ludo Wu didn't chew too much before swallowing. He then scratched his yellowish brown hair and stood up.

「Well, it taste bad.」

「T-Taste bad?」

「Not good at all. Asuta's cooking taste much better.」

「R-Really?」

Tara looked at me with a expression that seemed to be a mixture of smiling and crying.

I sighed, then walked towards them.

「Everyone has their own preferences. I don't know if my cooking will be the city people's liking, but I will be setting up a stall around here.」

「I see! Please let Tara try your cooking when you do.」

「As I will be running a business here, I will need to charge for the food… But I will let you and uncle have a try, please tell me your thoughts then.」

「Yes!」

What an adorable child.

Fortunately, Ai Fa wasn't here, so no one would give me strange looks when I talk to other girls.

As I turned my head with that thought in mind, I found Vena Wu standing before the stall and watching me and Ludo Wu closely.

I really don’t get women.

“Well then, we only need to get fruit wine and chachi. What about you?”

“Hmm, I need fruit wine and gigo.”

“Ah, gigo! Vena-nee, let’s buy gigo too! Grilled poitan will only turn fluffy if you add gigo right?”

“Don’t worry… Even if we buy ten fruit wines, we will still have five copper plates left…”

Before Vena Wu could even finish, the last character made his appearance.

“Hi Asuta, I’m really glad that I get to meet you three days in a row. Have you finally made up your mind?”

Kamyua Yost appeared before us.

He walked out of the crowd without a word and came towards us with his cloak flicking in the wind.

“Leito told me about your visit, so I went off to find you. You are at Uncle

Dora’s place as expected.

Yes, I’m already done with my chores. It’s good to see you, Kamyua.

I stole a glance at Ludo Wu.

Ludo Wu was expressionless.

However— his fingers were tapping on the sheath of the machete on his waist rhythmically.

Vena Wu walked briskly over, and stopped diagonally behind her brother.

Oh right, they are—

Vena Wu and Ludo Wu of the Wu clan. Leito already told me. I would hate to have missed you, so I asked Leito to stay put at the inn.

His expression was as elusive as ever.

His purple pupils that resembled both an elderly and a child were filled with glee, as he switched his gaze between them.

Ludo Wu, I saw you at the Wu village before. Allow me to introduce myself again. I’m Kamyua Yost, my job is a guardian that ensures the safety of travelers. I’m a citizen of the western nation that roams freely and calls all the Post Station Towns I visit my home.

Hmmp~

Ludo Wu answered half heartedly.

He continued tapping on his machete.

Milano Mast already told me what happened. He agreed to rent you his pushcart.

Yes. I will prepare the stall after I’m done with the menu.

You finally made up your mind, I’m so happy! I’m willing to visit everyday if I can eat your cooking everyday.

I will prepare alluring food to attract your patronage everyday.

That was all I need from Kamyua Yost today, to report this matter.

After Ludo Wu realized this fact, he spoke nonchalantly:

「Kamyua Yost. My father, the head of the Wu clan Donda Wu has a message for you. Will you listen to it?」

「Of course! Do tell me.」

「...Forest's Edge will clean up after our own shame. If you interfere, I will lop off your head— That's all.」

「Understood, I will keep that in mind.」

Kamyua bowed in an exaggerated manner.

Ludo Wu kept a straight face, then glanced my way.

「Asuta, let's go buy chachi and gigo. The sun will set if we take our time.」

「That's true... Sorry about that, Kamyua. Thank you for making the trip here to see us, but we still need to do some shopping...」

「It's fine it's fine! After you open your stall, we can meet for ten days in a row. Asuta, I wish you the best of luck in your business.」

「Thank you.」

After he appeared quietly, Kamyua went off silently.

Somehow—— I felt that Kamyua didn’t have much of a presence today, and was like a ghost.

「… That man pissed me off.」

Ludo Wu said all of a sudden.

「Huh?」

「My blade is meant to cut kiba, I don’t intent to use it against people— however, I still feel pissed off when I’m facing an opponent I can’t defeat. On top of that, he’s from the city.」

「L-Ludo Wu? What do you mean—?」

「Darum-nii and I isn’t a match for him. Jiza-nii probably can’t beat him either. Only Dad can cut off his thin neck.」

Ludo Wu clicked his tongue as he ruffled his yellowish brown hair.

5

An hour later, I finally reached the Fa house.

I had been away for more than 24 hours.

The two close siblings accompanied me. In order to prepare for her job in the Post Station Town, Vena Wu need to remember where my place was. More importantly, they were afraid that the Tsun clan might do something nefarious.

Hmmp, looks like we won't run into retards who gets drunk in broad daylight.

Ludo Wu had the largest baggage out of the three of us. He checked the surroundings with keen eyes.

... By the way, you need to cross such a deep valley from the Fa house to the Post Station Town. no wonder you need helpers.

Yes. If I head to the Post Station Town from the Wu village, I will have an easier time.

The Forest's Edge settlement had several routes leading into the Post Station Town. The shortest path was from the Wu clan, and would take just 40 to 50 minutes., with no bridges and a comfortable road.

However, it would take an hour to travel from the Fa house to the Wu

clan, a distance that makes me hesitate. On the other hand, carrying the goods and crossing the suspension bridge was much easier.

On the way home, we used the sacks of vegetables in the place of an iron pot, and did a trial run. If I could muster my courage, the two of us could really cross the suspension bridge with the iron pot.

This was our first try, and I spent quite a long time to gather my courage and resolve — if Vena Wu lose her infatuation with me because of that, I would have an easier time. But I'm afraid that I would lose her respect as a boss.

It was hard to tell if this was a blessing, but even after Vena Wu saw how terrified and unsightly I was, she continued to flirt with me.

"We are leaving now… I'm looking forward to the day when work starts…"

"Send Ai Fa our regards… Asuta, let us try your cooking once in a while, don't just cook for the people in the city."

After the two close siblings said that, they left.

Even though Ludo Wu was carrying 70 percent of the load, Vena Wu still had a hundred aria on her back. Her strides were nimble and quick, and didn't miss a beat. As expected of a woman from Forest's Edge.

Ai Fa was right, I shouldn’t look down on the abilities of the women of Forest's Edge. Their muscular and skeletal structure must be very different from mine. Any women as tall as Vena Wu would definitely be stronger than me.

With the difference in the environment we were raised in, this couldn’t be helped— but I still couldn’t hold back my sigh.

If I eat kiba everyday, will my body change too?

I headed into the Fa house while lost in thought.

The sun was midway between its peak and the horizon.

It seemed that I had plenty of time to grill poitan.

Ai Fa was still hunting kiba in the forest. I had to prepare a sumptuous dinner for her. After sorting out my mood, I renewed my grip on the sack of tarapa and tino, as well as giant burdock gigo the stall helped me cut into a metre, then opened the door.

And— I saw Ai Fa’s cape on the wall.

□Hmm?□

It was still early, but she was already back.

She probably caught a kiba already, so I didn’t need to be alarmed. But where was she?

“Ai Fa, are you there?”

I called out as I walked into the food store.

I opened the door— and Ai Fa wasn’t there.

Setting aside the bounty I got today, I checked the other two storage room.

Ai Fa wasn’t there.

“Hmm?”

The new pot was already placed beside the stove.

There wasn’t anything that stood out besides that.

No—

On a closer look, I realized the sabre wasn't there, even though the cape was there.

Unless she was sleeping, Ai Fa would always carry a knife with her. After she comes home, she would take off her cape and sabre, and lean it against the wall.

What was going on here?

She didn't put on her cape, and only had her knife with her. Beside washing her clothes at the water source, I had never seen Ai Fa left the house without her cape.

Did she went to the water source?

No, the pots and water flasks were still in the room. We didn't need to go to the water source unless it was early in the morning.

With a thumping heart, I charged out of the house.

Was she sunning the pico leaves?

No, I don't smell the fragrance of pico leaves.

Instead, a stench entered my nostril.

It was mixed with rust— this was the stench of blood.

A chill immediately ran down my back.

… Where did this smell come from?

Where was the source?

Behind the house.

I hit my knee caps that was starting to tremble, and went to the back of the house.

It will be fine— I started deluding. Even if those people from the Tsun clan were lawless, it was impossible for them to commit such retarded acts in broad daylight.

Retarded acts—

No, I didn’t dare to imagine it.

When I realized it, my heart was beating hard, and I was out of breath.

It was fine.

Ai Fa would be fine.

It was impossible for tragedies to happen.

I kept telling myself that as I walked along the walls—

I braced myself and stepped to the backyard.

And.

— I saw a kiba that was hung up, completely skinned.

……

Asuta, you're home.

Ai Fa was looking at the hanging kiba as she sat on the ground with her back against the wall.

I took big strides towards Ai Fa, bend forward, then grabbed her bare shoulders tightly.

「Don’t— Don’t scare me!」

Ai Fa widened her eyes confusedly.

「...Asuta, are you crying?」

「Who’s crying!」

I headbutted Ai Fa.

「That hurts.」

I heard her complaining, but I still press against Ai Fa with my head.

「Asuta, what’s wrong? Why are you so flustered?」

「Shut up! You made me so worried... Why are you skinning the kiba!? I was so terrified when I smelled the blood!」

「... Skinning is part of the hunter’s job right?」

Ai Fa replied displeasedly.

As we were too close, I couldn’t see her expression.

“The men from the Wu clan and house Lutim all take cares of the skinning work, but I haven’t learned it yet. That vexes me. I’m practicing with a kiba that I hunted. I have watched you skin the kiba several times after all.”

“If that is so… then tell me… I thought my heart was going to burst…”

“Just why were you so panicky?”

“… You don’t have your sabre with you, and I smell blood from outside the house. I thought something happened, and my mind was filled with ominous imagination.”

With my forehead sticking closely to Ai Fa’s forehead, I gave a deep sigh.

“I have my knife right here. Don’t worry, I know that ruffians might appear at any time, so I will always watch my surroundings.”

Ai Fa’s spoke in an irate tone.

“Were you imagining the Tsun clan men killing me? I won’t lose to those despicable people.”

「I know…」

「… You understand my feelings now?」

I was surprised, and lifted my head.

Ai Fa averted her eyes and pouted.

「Ever since I took a frail man like you into the Fa house, do you know how worried I was? If you know, then don’t act rashly in the future.」

「… Yes.」

「Getting worried over nothing is fine, but you even lectured me. I took care of such a tedious task, you should be thankful.」

「No, that… it’s my bad.」

「What I want isn’t your apology.」

「… Thank you?」

「Hmmp.」

Ai Fa stood up.

She crossed her arms arrogantly with a smug grin.

Could it be— she thought my eyes would sparkle after I see her skin the kiba, and tell her with wild joy and excitement:"How did you learn that? That's amazing!". When I see Ai Fa made that childish face, I couldn't help deluding.

I sighed again, steeled myself and stood up.

I patted Ai Fa's blonde hair and said:"good girl good girl", and was greeted with a sharp strike into my solar plexus.

"I don't know what are the next steps. What do I do after cutting open the stomach?"

While I was still struggling to breath, Ai Fa's voice came from above me.

A few seconds after I fell into an oxygen deprived state, I got up again.

"That hurts…. You are asking because you want to carry out the entire butchering process?"

"The men from the Wu house had all learned the steps after this."

She scrowled her nose and showed a scary face. It had been a while since she showed her cat-like expression.

"I got it, I will teach you... If you butcher the kiba in the future, that will lighten my load. But won't the burden on you increase?"

"Don't be ridiculous. What will happen if you go to the Post Station Town? Will you have time to take care of the kiba and poitan after coming home? I don't want to drink the easy to prepare poitan soup any more."

I fell into deep thought again.

I was planning to get up earlier to grill the poitan for dinner and the merchandize. But it would take me at least three to four hours to dismember one kiba. No matter how much time i have, it would delay dinner time.

Ai Fa always notice the finer details than me.

No, when Ai Fa acts, she really think of "running the stall" as a job that involve both of us.

I still hold the attitude that "I shouldn't over rely on Ai Fa" deep in my heart. My values told me that this was correct— But I was in Forest's Edge now, not my world in the past.

I shouldn’t think about things through my own value.

I shouldn’t rely on her for everything, but I should do so at the right time.

What I should be doing was to go through thick and thin with Ai Fa.

“I understand. What you said make sense. Since you will be responsible for skinning and butchering the kiba, I will work hard on the other tasks.”

“Hmmp.”

“My house head is really dependable… In order to not get left behind, I will have to give my best.”

“Don’t joke with me. I’m just doing my work as a hunter.”

Ai Fa still looked a little unhappy as she pulled out her knife.

“No one can replace your work. You have to work hard in cooking delicious food.”

“I know, but——”

Not just me, Ai Fa’s work was irreplaceable too.

Ai Fa had to take care of the chores of the Forest's Edge women early in the morning, then enter the forest to hunt in the noon. In all of Forest's Edge, only Ai Fa was capable of doing that.

6

「... I did some calculations.」

After dinner, I told Ai Fa the plan I had organized in my mind.

「The ingredients I will be using are aria, poitan, tino, tarapa, and poitan mixed with gigo. Considering the issue of making profits, we can use the cost effective aria and poitan, but the people in town won’t want to buy that. So I decided to focus on how the people in town feels.」

「Yes.」

「Kamyua told us that we will be selling light meals to be eaten in the day, not dinner. I don’t need to be worried about the nutrition intake. And so, I will use aria to add to the fragrance, and use just one poitan for each portion. I will also throw in tarapa and tino. It should be as nutritious as the meat bun I tried last time.」

Yes.

I did a rough estimate, one portion is about 0.65 red copper plates. As half a day worth of aria and poitan is about 0.55 red copper plates, it’s not too big a difference. Hence, I want to use other ingredients to garnish its taste and appearance.

… Ugh.

0.65 red copper plates is the ingredient fee for making ten portions a day, but making ten portion will leave a lot of tarapa over. If I make twenty portions, I will just need 1.5 times the tarapa. As tarapa is the most expensive ingredient, I can push the cost down to below 0.6 red copper plates if I make twenty portions a day. If we make 30 or 40 portions, the ingredient cost will gradually fall too.

…… Yes.

Next would be the other expenses. The venue and pushcart rental for ten days is two white copper plate, or twenty red copper plates. There’s also the wage I need to pay Vena Wu. We can’t dismiss this wage too. We are paying her a tusk and a horn for one day of work. That will be six red copper plates, and sixty red copper plates in ten days. The initial cost and her wages will be eighty red copper plates. Hence, we need to sell at least 40 portions, or we won’t make any profit.

Yes.

After setting the ingredient cost to the highest estimate of 0.65, we will need to sell sixty portions in this ten days to break even. That’s six portions a day. Most people in the Post Station Town have yet to experience the tastiness of kiba. Furthermore, the people in the city finds kiba meat repulsive, so the sales for the first few days might be terrible, we just have to wait to build our customer base through word of mouth slowly.

…Asuta.

Even if we sell just one or two portions in the beginning, we can make money if we can sell 20 portions in the last three days. I think the situation is favourable to us. According to my research, the a stall in the Post Station Town can sell between 20 to 50 portions a day. I hope we can achieve the minimum target at the very least.

Asuta, Asuta.

Even if the situation is in our favour, there is still risks. We can’t just compete on taste alone, the important thing is to improve the prejudice the people in town has towards kiba and the denizens of Forest's Edge. If that didn’t work, we might not even sell a single meal. So we shouldn’t overestimate ourselves, and just prepare ten portions for the first few days, and keep the ingredient cost as low as possible—

Asuta!

Yes? What is it?

When I realized it, Ai Fa was leaning against the wall, tilting her head

and glaring at me.

What’s with her? She wasn’t sitting cross legged, and she look really cute with her slanted sitting position.

“… Are you torturing me intentionally?”

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

I tilted my head in quizzingly.

As the room was dim, I couldn’t see very well, but I noticed Ai Fa’s eyes were teary.

“I don’t understand what you are talking about! My head is hurting!”

“W-Was my explanation too hard to understand? Sorry, I will make it simpler…”

“No need! I will leave it all to you! My head hurts!”

The way she throws her temper reminds me of Lala Wu.

Even though Ai Fa was very emotional, she seldom lose control.

"D-Didn't you ask me to explain to you properly? This is our work, so you should know the details..."

"I said no need meow! My head hurts!"

Meow!?

Did she just say meow!?

J-J-Just what happened to her? Did Dan Lutim's toddler regression virus got her?

As I was panicking, Ai Fa rest her forehead on the wall, and collapsed onto the floor.

"... My head hurts..."

"Uwah, are you alright!? Hey, Ai Fa!"

When I saw Ai Fa collapsed onto the floor weakly, I picked her up.

When I put my hand on her forehead, it felt rather warm.

"D-Did you overexert your brain? Hey, does it hurt? I will get you some

water.

No need... You are too loud...

Ai Fa frowned painfully, and closed her eyes.

Don’t move... My head hurts...

I-I understand.

I rest Ai Fa on my lap, and wait for her to recover slowly.

Under such circumstances, I obviously couldn’t have impure thoughts. But it was the first time we were so close together, and Ai Fa’s body warmth made it hard for me to stay calm.

... Are you alright?

... Just a while more.

She grabbed my t-shirt tightly.

Her breast’s covered in the garments of Forest's Edge started heaving hard.

She seemed to be in a lot of pain.

“I’m sorry being so detailed… You don’t need to worry about the accounting. After all, I don’t know how to hunt kiba too, so just leave these matters to me.”

Ai Fa didn’t answer, and kept grinding her head on my chest.

Her head was probably still throbbing.

“If the business fails, I will try my best to minimize our losses. I won’t waste the kiba that you hunt at the risk of your life.”

“… If the business fails, how many tusks and horns will we lose?”

Ai Fa asked, she had calmed down a lot.

I was relieved, and answered:

“If we can’t even sell one meal in the next ten days, we will lose twelve kiba’s worth of tusks and horns. It’s hard to imagine right?”

“It’s hard to imagine.”

That’s right. The venue and pushcart rental cost less than two kiba. Half of the balance is the ingredient cost, the half is the wages for Vena Wu. If it comes to that, we can only cut the ingredient cost.

…Yes.

When I was in the Post Station Town, I didn’t see any stalls that only sell cooked meat alone. Some stalls will roast the thighs of birds and some vegetables, which seemed to be drinking snacks for the people in town. I have to compete with the other stalls with my light meal… If I just want to earn a quick buck, I just need to sell grilled meat or jerky.

There’s no point in doing that. We already have enough copper plates to survive.

Ai Fa pulled her necklace with her other hand, which made jingling sounds.

The tusks and horns on her neck and in her cape far exceeds twelve kiba. The Fa house only has two members, if she could hunt a kiba every two days, we didn’t need to worry about copper plates.

This was proof that the number of kiba was increasing, and that Ai Fa was in even more danger. Ai Fa wished to use the tusks and horns she earned by risking her life, and challenged the citizens of the Post Station Town的人民.

Our goal was to make Forest's Edge even more prosperous— The Fa house suffered in the past because of poverty. For the sake of the other tribe members suffering in silence in Forest's Edge, we had to give it a shot.

"I can't talk about a grandiose dream like Kaslan Lutim… However, I won't regret it even if we lose many of our tusks and horns. Asuta, you just need to try your best. Just like that time when you faced off against Donda Wu, and when you agreed to tend to the hearth for the wedding."

"Yes, with the reputation of the Fa house on the line, I will aim to be the very best that no one ever was… Does your head still hurts? If you feel better, why don't you sleep earlier today?"

"…Yeah."

Ai Fa nodded in agreement, but she still didn't move.

"Ehh… Should I put you down on the floor?"

"If you think I'm heavy, you can put me down."

How could that be? Her weight only made me feel comfortable.

If she didn't want to, I didn't want her leave my arms.

"... When will you open the stall?"

"Four days later. Three days later, the Wu clan will head into the Post Station Town to buy groceries. I will work on the merchandize and improve it for this few days... By the way, your only comment is "delicious", anything else that needs to be improved?"

"No."

"I see... That dish and normal hamburg steak, which taste better?"

"... They are both good."

"If you have to choose one?"

"... Are you trying to make my headache worst?"

Ai Fa grumbled then turned on my knees.

She didn't turn away from me, but towards me.

"If the people in the city thinks that dish taste bad, their tongues must be rotten. You should stop running your stall and just cook for me then"

I will be happy to live like that too… But I will do my best to achieve success.

Yes.

Ai Fa nodded.

Asuta, when you are happy, I feel happy.

That’s right.

Seeing you succeed— makes me proud.

Ai Fa mumbled. As she was lying on my chest, it looked like she was whispering to my heart.

… It will be fine.

There would be mountains of problems waiting for me after I set up my stall.

After all, we went into this battle so lightly.

For the past eight decades, the citizens of Post Station Town

discriminated against the denizens of Forest's Edge and kiba, how far could I overturn this preconception of theirs?

I will do everything within my powers.

For the sake of the people I cherished and their hometown, I will do all that I could.

I hope that I could raise my head high and tell the entire world that I was a part of Forest’s Edge.

When I realized it, Ai Fa had already fallen asleep in my arms.

… As long as you are by my side, everything will be just fine.

I muttered in my heart as I feel the calming weight and warmth on my body.

Vol. 4 :

Chapter 4 (Part 1)

Chapter 4.1

I was prepared for my war.

The pot was filled with ingredients, with a piece of cloth covering it like a lid. The underside of the cloth had fake rubber tree leaves sewn into it for waterproofing, and we even used fuibaha vines to secure the entire pot.

I used a clean piece of cloth to wrap up the grilled poitan and put the tino and aria into the sack for vegetables.

I put the wooden spatula for stirring, a small spatula for scooping the ingredients, a chopping board made of krilee wood, two plates and the santoku knife into the same bag.

The other bag was full of firewood, a small machete and rana grass to start fires.

I already put the red copper plates used as change, and the white copper plates for Milano Mast into the pouch on my waist.

Everything was set.

I cleared the cutleries for dinner early in the morning, forage for herbs and firewood, and cleared all the morning chores. The time was between dawn and noon.

All there was left was to wait for Vena Wu to reach the Fa house.

"This day has finally come."

Ai Fa said.

"Yes, it's finally time."

I replied.

"We have to make it through these ten days first."

"Yes, I will do my best."

"We will have to live like this for ten consecutive days."

"If this kind of life ends after ten days, that means our effort has been wasted."

"You will be together with the eldest daughter of the Wu clan for half a day in these ten days."

"Huh?"

"Anyway, work hard."

“Yes, I will work hard!”

“She’s your betrothed after all.”

“Not at all! There’s no such thing!”

I turned and look at Ai Fa in shock.

“W-Why are you bringing this up now? Your expression didn’t change at all when Donda Wu named Vena Wu as my helper right?”

Ai Fa put her hand on my shoulder nonchalantly.

“Don’t panic, I’m just kidding.”

“Ughhh…”

□Do your job properly, I will do my part too.□

Ai Fa’s expression remained calm and collected, and there was a gentle light in her eyes.

□... I will await your safe return.□

Vena Wu arrived on time. We used a krilee stick to carry the iron pot and cross the terrifying cliff, and reached the Post Station Town.

The first destination was the □Kimyusu’s tail inn□.

Milano led us to the back of the inn, and we met with the pushcart that will be battling alongside us for the next ten days.

That was a mobile pushcart.

About 2m tall, 1.5m wide and 80cm deep, the structure was made from wood, and a leather sheet covered the roof of the stall. The front and sides were covered with wooden boards, and reach up to my waist. Only the wall on the inside had a door that could be opened.

I opened the door and find it empty, and the interior walls were covered in clay.

A charcoal brazier shaped depression was right in the center.

<TL: https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E4%B8%83%E8%BC%AA>

I neede

d to start a fire in the brazier and heat up the pot.

I placed the pot on the wooden board that had a hole in the center, and it fit in snugly.

There were air holes to the right side of the board to expel the smoke.

The structure of this pushcart was simple.

Since it was simple, using it would be a hitch.

"... Please take care not to damage the pushcart."

I gave a friendly nod to Milano Mast who was showing a sour face the first thing in the morning.

Vena Wu turned her head away nonchalantly.

"Okay then, follow me."

With Milano Mast leading us, we walked on the streets.

This was the first time I visited the Post Station Town before noon, there was about 30% lesser people on the streets.

As Vena Wu and I pushed the pushcart forward, countless gazes watched us. Their eyes were filled with confusion and shock, as if they didn't understand why the denizens from Forest's Edge were pushing

the cart.

Yellow skinned people.

The ivory skinned crowd.

Black skinned men.

White skin citizens.

People of all races and creed were staring us.

A foreigner in Forest's Edge clothing and a denizen of Forest's Edge who was like the incarnation of sexiness. Vena Wu and I were the most prominent duo. As we were pushing a cart painstakingly, they couldn’t just ignore us.

How annoying... We are more prominent than usual...

"It's fine, this will serve as our advertisement."

In that case, news of the "denizens of Forest's Edge are setting up a stall" would spread through the city. It was fine for them to think of us as a joke, I didn't mind them being curious or fearful. I just hope that more people would know about us.

We passed through the lodging zone, and when we reached the marketplace, most of the stalls had already up and running.

The gazes of the stall owners were also focused on us.

In the entire Post Station Town, only the Totos Moa were unmoved by us.

"Hi, so you are really opening a stall here."

Uncle Dora who sells vegetables greeted us along the way.

"That's right. I will be in your care for this ten days."

As Milano Mast didn’t stop, I had to greet him while pushing the cart.

Uncle Dora’s smile was much more natural. He sent us off with his gaze as we continued north.

Milano Mast brought us to the furthest fringe of the marketplace.

In order to set up the marketplace, the Post Station Town cleared a path through the woods. And our stall was in the northernmost end.

Our stall was on the right side, facing the north.

If another two or three stalls were added, they would be right at the edge of the woods. They would need to clear more of the forest then. No matter what, our stall was at the extreme corner of the marketplace.

The pedestrians here were sparse.

There wasn’t any stall opposite us.

Our neighbour was an old man with dubious accessories placed on a cloth on the ground. When he saw us, he looked dumbfounded like a child.

「I already told you these rules yesterday. Take note of these two main points: You can't tout for customers loudly, and you can only start a fire in the brazier… Also, you must report to me if you see anyone break these rules.」

「I got it. Thank you for your help.」

「Hmmp… Next will be the signboard. Hey, what do you want to write on it?」

「Ehh? Signboard?」

There was a signboard on the cart, but it was blank. It only had a hieroglyphs or logo at the bottom right corner that says 「Kimyusu's tail inn」.

「You have to write down what you are selling on the signboard, or your

customers will be clueless. What do you want to write?

Milano Mast took down a small leather pouch tied to his waist and opened its strings.

Inside the pouch was a gooey green fluid, and a small stick. The fluid had a stinging smell, a bit like grass. I guess it was a dye made from vegetation.

Well then, please... help me write Kiba.

... I guess so.

Milano Mast sighed and started writing a large symbol with his pen and dye.

The symbol was a combination of ovals and curves and had four curvy lines extending upwards. They bore some resemblance with the tusks and horns of a kiba.

It looks great, it feels very kiba.

... You have to push the cart back to the inn every day. I want to check it for damages.

Alright. We are also planning to close the stall before dusk.

Milano Mast grunted one last time before leaving.

The old man was still looking at us with a blank expression from the side.

Let’s start with the preparation.

I asked Vena Wu to help me undo the pot sealed with fuihaba vines.

When I took off the lid made from cloth and fake rubber tree leaves, Vena Wu cheered.

「No wonder I keep smelling the scent of tarapa… is that vegetable stew…?」

「No, we don’t have the time or the budget. This is just tarapa sauce.」

As I used two whole tarapa, the pot was sixty percent filled with bright red sauce.

Tarapa had the sourness of tomato. After I cooked it with diced aria and fruit wine, then season it with salt and pico leaves, the special tarapa sauce was done.

「I’m starting the fire. Vena Wu, can you help me open that sack?」

「Okay.」

After glancing at Vena Wu who nodded in acknowledgement, I started a fire in the brazier with rana grass.

The sauce was already cold, so I need to start a big fire.

Considering the size of the brazier and the distance from the brazier to the pot, the fire should be smaller than the one in the makeshift stove used during the wedding. In order to heat the entire pot evenly, I had to use strong fire.

I brought all the firewood we had over, and they would probably be used up before we close the stall. I would then have to forage for firewood then. That was why I brought a machete along.

I estimated the operation hours would be five hours.

We left the house between dawn and noon and planned to head home between noon and dusk. I also had to account for the two hours traveling time.

According to my biological clock, dawn was six, noon was twelve and dusk was seven. We would open the stall at 10am and close the stall at 3pm in the afternoon.

Hmm… Now that I think about it, I find this incredible… I never imagined that I will be peddling merchandize in the Post Station Town, I never dream that this would happen…

I feel the same. But the time we spent in Forest's Edge are incomparable, so this feeling must be much stronger for you.

Maybe Donda Wu sent her to help because he knew that she yearns for the world outside.

No, if he knew how Vena Wu felt, he would forbid her from going out.

Anyway, Vena Wu was very cheerful today. Compared to the last time she came with me, she looked much happier.

But will this really sell... There are so few people...

This is the edge of the Post Station Town after all.

From this stall I could see the people enter the Post Station Town from the north, and those who are leaving the Post Station Town and heading north. There was barely anyone who came all the way here to buy goods.

"This is our first day, so we can take it easy. The goal for this two days is to let everyone know that we exist."

The news of denizens from Forest's Edge selling kiba meals in the Post Station Town would definitely spread in the entire city. Over time, there would be curious people here to take check us out. In the first few days of our stall opening, we had to grasp these customer source tightly.

The tarapa was starting to bubble, so I used the spatula Vena Wu handed me to stir the iron pot.

"Vena Wu, please help me stir the sauce later. There are many hamburg steaks in the sauce, take care not to break them."

"Got it… smells nice… it is still daytime, but I'm starting to get hungry…"

"Ah, if you can still eat, please try one later."

When she heard that, Vena Wu's eyes started to shine.

“Can I…? Isn’t this merchandize…?”

“This is the merchandize we are selling, so we will have to try its taste first. I made some extra for taste testing.”

Vena Wu was squatting by the stall and taking things out from the sack. But she stood up and quietly walked to my side.

When an ominous feeling appeared in my heart, Vena Wu gripped the excess cloth on my waist tightly and said:

“I’m so happy… thank you, Asuta…”

“Y-You’re welcomed. This is also part of the job.”

Vena Wu was very serious during the wedding banquet preparation too, so she wouldn’t take any inappropriate actions during work. In this regard, she really was a model denizen of Forest's Edge.

In that case— I could probably get along well with this colleague.

Good, it’s heating up. Please help me stir.

I placed the black krilee chopping board on the right of the work platform, then placed the tino, aria, plates and santoku knife on top.

The leaves of the tino overlaps in the shape of a rose and was a vegetable that resembles a lettuce in appearance.

It had the texture of a cabbage. I plucked a large leaf and chop it to shreds.

I then cut the aria which had the texture of onions into thin slices.

After cutting these two vegetables, I moved them onto the plate and mixed them together.

I then placed the grilled poitan that was wrapped in a cloth onto the working platform, and the preparation was done.

Vena Wu, please remember how to make this, it’s not difficult at all.

Ara… What a small poitan…

Yes. I only used half a poitan for each of these grilled poitan.

The Wu clan would usually grill two poitan at one time, its diameter was about 30cm.

The grilled poitan here only used a quarter of that amount and was about 14 to 15cm wide.

I added gigo, so the grilled poitan was fluffier, and the thickness was about 1.5cm. It looked as small and cute like a cream coloured muffin.

「We will first put a layer of tino and aria on the mini poitan. It should be slightly thinner than the poitan. We will then put a hamburg steak on top of it.」

After I scooped up the hamburg steak soaking inside the pot, Vena Wu gasped in surprise again.

Normally, the hamburg steak would be meaded into an oval, but this one was circular.

It was about 180g.

It was 12cm in diameter, and 3cm thick.

The hamburg steak was covered in red tarapa sauce. After adding shredded tino on top, I covered it with another poitan.

The product of this stall 「Kiba burger」 was complete.

「Isn't it simple? Please try it.」

I took the stirring spatula from Vena Wu and handed her the 「Kiba burger」.

「... It looks...」

「Hmm?」

「I think, it looks tasty...」

「It's delicious, I love hamburgers.」

「... It's not dinner, so I don't need to say grace right...?」

「I guess? I don't know either.」

Vena Wu stood haplessly on the spot, as if she couldn't bear to eat the hamburger in her hands.

She then finally made up her mind and open her lustrous lips— and took a big bite out of the 「Kiba burger」.

「Be careful not to spill the fillings. It's better to hold it sideways.」

She nodded, then took another big bite.

The women in Forest's Edge uses both hands to hold the hamburger. The way they chew with satisfaction looked very adorable. I realized that when I let Ai Fa taste test it.

Ai Fa was always calm and collected, but she looked very pure and adorable when she eats a burger. It was the same for Vena Wu who was overflowing with sexy charm, they were both equally cute.

After Vena Wu finished her burger, she lowered her head slightly again, and grabbed my waist band tightly.

「... This is really delicious...」

「I-I see. That's great!」

Instead of the flirty Vena Wu who squirms her body, her childish actions make her doubly charming

But there was nothing to gain from analysing that.

「What are your thoughts? Will it sell?」

「I don't know... If the people in town thinks this burger is unpalatable, that means they are not worthy of eating Kiba...」

Her comments were the same as Ai Fa.

I think they were exaggerating too much.

The people in the city thinks that kiba meat was 「tough and smelly」. To

wipe away that ill impression, I wanted to use 「Kiba burger」 as my first weapon. This was a changeup pitch.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Changeup>

Since there wasn't any food like hamburger in town, they would be intrigued by it. But if I want the people in the city to understand how tasty kiba meat actually was, I would need to rely on the strength of simple meat dishes like steaks and grills.

By the way, moulding hamburg steak was very time consuming, and I could carry twenty of them in one pot. If I used another container to transport pre-grilled hamburg steak, and make the balance sauce in the stall, I could stock up to 40 hamburgers. But that was just my first pitch in my attack of the Post Station Town.

My thinking was very simple, hamburger was the symbol of a light meal. In the Post Station Town, the Kimyusu meat bun and other light meals consist of meat, vegetables and carbohydrates, so I decided to follow this model.

Tarapa has a strong fragrance. As we couldn't tout for customers loudly, the 「fragrance」 was exceptionally important. The tarapa sauce made from tarapa, fruit wine and the aria to enhance its flavour had an alluring aroma, which would definitely stimulate the appetite of any passers-by.

When the 「Kiba burger」 attracts enough customers to visit, I will upgrade my menu— and sell food that was less tedious to prepare, and slowly share the deliciousness of kiba meat with the residents of the Post Station Town.

These ten days would decide the progress of the next step.

If I could sell 20 to 30 portions before the final day, I will push out a new menu for the next ten days, which would be a great sales record.

Today was the opening day. To save on ingredient cost, I only prepared ten burgers. I would be satisfied if I sold all of them.

"Alright, we are starting our battle soon!"

The instant I announced that—

With a donk, something hit the roof.

And as if a hole had opened in the sky, rain poured down suddenly.

"Hya."

Vena Wu yelped without any tension, then swiftly carried the sack with our goods under the roof.

This was a sudden downpour commonly seen in Forest's Edge.

As Forest's Edge was just an hour away, the weather was very similar.

However—

When the sudden rain stopped without any warning, even the sparse pedestrian before us were gone.

2

"I see!"

That was all I could say.

The people in the city was used to sudden downpour like this, some of them dash across the streets, while others hid under the trees to minimize their losses.

The old man selling accessories beside us picked up the cloth with his wares in a flash, then escaped into the woods behind him. His reaction and nimble feat was amazing.

After the rain stop, everyone came out onto the streets haplessly— the northern side where we were located was deserted.

I looked to the left of the stall, and the southern streets had already reverted to its crowded state before the rain.

As very few people would come here to buy things, everyone had

already moved on to other places, and the place turned desolated.

「... All the pedestrians are gone...」

「It can't be helped, this is natural disaster. The crucial timing is the period right after noon, so let's rest up for now.」

Thanks to Vena Wu's quick reactions, the firewood didn't get wet. The rain was also kept out of the pot. We had not run into unsalvageable accidents yet, so we could only accept this fact graciously.

「... So, we will just stand here until the afternoon crowd shows up...?」

「Yes. Waiting so also part of our job.」

「... I'm sorry that you are paying so much salary...」

「Don't mind that. Carrying the goods, stirring the sauce, replenishing firewood, I can't do all that alone. Our work is just beginning.」

However, there was still two more hours before noon.

In this two hours, we could only watch the fire with a hollow feeling.

I could use this chance to gather firewood, but the rain just stopped, so that was useless. The dripping wet branches would dry in an hour or two, so we decided to settle this chore later.

Which meant we had nothing to do.

「Ehh... Let's chat?」

「Alright...」

「Vena Wu, which one of your family are you closest too?」

「... Do you think that is an interesting topic...?」

「I think it's rather interesting.」

Vena Wu sighed softly, then fiddled with her brown hair.

「I get along with Rimee and Ludo the best... I feel happy when I'm with

Darum too…

Ah, Darum Wu?

Yes… Even though he is quiet and quick to anger… He looks really cute when he is mad.

W-Wait. You are older than Darum?

Yes. But we are just one year apart…

I had the habit of grouping the men and the women in the Wu clan apart, so I never thought about their age as a whole before.

Of all the Wu clan siblings, only Vena Wu and Darum Wu's position in the family was hard to differentiate.

Darum Wu was a year younger than Vena Wu, and was nineteen. I recorded this information in my mind.

By the way, how old is Jiza Wu?

Jiza-nii is 23…

Oh! He's younger than I thought! Rimee Wu is eight, right? Then… they are 15 years apart! That's a lot!

Is that so…? Well, some girls have children when they are fifteen, so their age difference is comparable to a parent and child…

Vena Wu looked at me adorably.

I want to ask… Is this topic really interesting?

Very.

The denizens of Forest's Edge spent most of their day busy with chores, they probably felt that idling around was something unbearable.

… I want to hear your story…

Ehh? I don't know anything interesting?

「... I want to know about your country...」

I turned silent for a moment as I stared at the red tarapa.

「I'm sorry, I don't want to talk about my hometown too much... My heart turns heavy whenever I do.」

「Ara, but why...?」

「... After I disappeared suddenly, I don't know if my father is able to accept that fact and live on.」

After a short moment of silence, Vena Wu muttered:「Sorry...」

The air between us was unexpectedly heavy.

And then—

「Asuta onii-chan!」

With that energetic voice, my little saviour charge here through the puddles.

Tara appeared before us.

「Amazing! You are really opening a stall here!」

Tara put her hand on the pushcart and looked up at me.

She then turned timidly towards Vena Wu beside me and smile.

Vena Wu smiled back.

「The tarapa smells nice! Is that the kiba meal?」

「Yes. I don't know if you will like it.」

「I want to try! I want to buy one!」

「This is a portion for an adult, it cost two red copper plates each.」

「I see. I will ask Dad for the copper plates!」

「Ah, wait, it will be bad if you don't like it. Try some first...Vena Wu,

there’s a sack with a plate inside, can you bring it here?

While I was instructing Vena Wu, I searched for something inside the pot.

It was some mini hamburg steak I mead for the sake of taste testing.

The mini hamburg steak was one size smaller than the normal merchandize. I split it in half within the pot, then scooped half a mini hamburg steak onto a plate.

I then split that hamburg steak into three parts and took out my secret weapon— I sliced off some krilee branch, dried it and made this— toothpicks. I pick up one hamburg steak with it.

Here, please try it.

Tara just stood there when I offered her the plate.

… Do you need copper plates?

This is a way my countries sell food. We will ask the customers to try before they buy it. I have already gotten permission from the venue and stall rental. Don’t hold back, try one.

I see… Thank you! I will help myself then!

Tara grabbed one toothpick bravely and send the small hamburg steak into her mouth.

… how is it?

My heart was pounding at this moment.

Almost all the denizens of Forest's Edge had nothing but praise for my cooking.

However, everyone understood the concept of cooking in Rock City and the Post Station Town, would my seasoning and culinary skills be of use— Leaving Kamyua Yost of dubious origins aside, this was the first time someone from the city will be commenting on my food.

Tara she—

Stood stiffly with the toothpick in her mouth.

She stared at me with her eyes opened in surprise.

「What is this…」

She finally squeezed out in a shocked voice.

Her small yellowish-brown face burst out in joy.

「Asuta-nii, this is delicious! Really delicious!」

I almost collapsed right there.

I was so scared that I almost had a heart attack.

But… I finally got through the first stage.

「It's great! I want to eat more! I will get some copper plates from Papa!」

「Ah, wait! Tara, I want your father to try it too before I can accept your copper plates with ease… Eh, I don't have many picks like this, can you reuse it?」

「Yes!」

Tara nodded vigorously and used the toothpick to take another piece of hamburg steak. She then took brisk steps as if she was relaying a holy flame and returned to her father.

Uncle Dora's vegetable stall was a short distance away, and we could just manage to see the leather roof of his stall from here.

「…Asuta, that's wonderful…」

「That's right! That's wonderful…! Ara, the light of hope seems brighter now! If the taste is acceptable, we just need to worry about attracting the customers to visit!」

「That's the hardest part…」

"It's fine, we are providing free samples to do draw them in! When the crowd increases, I will provide samples mainly to the southerners and easterners!"

However, I only grilled two mini burgers for taste testing. Each piece could only be divided into six, so there were only twelve portions.

If the hamburger meant to be merchandize couldn't sell, I plan to give them out as samples too. Our goal was to let more people know how delicious kiba was. I wouldn't mind even if we only gave out samples if our merchandize fail to sell

"Asuta… I don't really want to talk to the people in the city proactively…"

"Hmm? Ah, I will receive them! Please help me watch the fire."

"No, that's part of my job… Please don't be angry if I don't do it well at the start okay…?"

As expected, the denizens of Forest's Edge take their work very seriously.

The streets remained deserted, but my emotions became more heightened.

While I was chatting with Vena Wu, Tara ran over briskly again.

"Papa says it taste great! He is very surprised too, and can't believe that is what a kiba taste like."

Tara handed over some copper plates.

The dull red copper plates— there were four of them?

"I want two! One for Tara, one for Papa."

To be frank, I almost cried right there.

I was handsomely paid for the wedding banquet, but seeing a customer complimenting my cooking in front of me— my tear glands would definitely be stimulated.

To keep my pride as a man, I couldn't cry here. I replied:「You are welcomed!」 and started cutting tino and aria.

I placed the cut vegetables onto the grilled poitan, stacked a meat patty covered in tarapa sauce on top, and top it off with another grilled poitan.

「Here, thank you for waiting…! The fillings fall off easily, so hold it horizontally when you are eating it.」

「Yes! Thank you! It looks so yummy.」

I should be the one thanking her.

After passing the merchandize to Tara, I accept her copper plates.

Four red copper plates.

This was the first sale of our stall.

「… You have to sell one more burger to earn my wages, right? Is your business really sustainable…?」

「Of course! Although she is only here because we are acquainted, but the fact a Genos local is our first patrons fills me with hope.」

「I see… Ah, Asuta…」

She tugged on my waist band again.

I looked up, and someone dressed like a traveler was walking over from the north. He was looking at Tara who was jogging away and our stall in surprise.

He had a cloak, and a hood concealed his face. But I caught glimpses of his dark skin.

He was from the eastern kingdom Semu.

It was a good chance to do some promotions. I started offering the plate in my hands towards him.

But before I could even react, he walked quickly to our stall.

When he came near us, he pulled back his drenched hood.

He was a citizen of Semu, with black hair, eyes and skin.

He was a bit different from the African Americans from my world. The corners of his eyes were high, and he also had thin nose and lips. His facial features were similar to Orientals, while his body was slender and slim.

He tied his long black hair behind him, and accessories made by stringing up stones sparkling with beautiful colours adorned his neck and wrist. I couldn't guess his age, but he seems to be young.

The youth from the eastern kingdom stopped before the stall and looked at the signboard with a stunned face.

He then pointed at the pot and asked:□Kiba?□

□Yes, this is food made from kiba. Would you like to try some?□

I took out a pick and scooped up the last piece of hamburg steak on the plate. The youth just tilted his head puzzledly.

□Asuta…□

Vena Wu whispered to me:

□Maybe this man from Semu can't speak the language of the west…?□

□Huh! The four kingdoms each has their own unique language?□

□Only the eastern and northern language are different from us… Asuta, you don't even know that…?□

I wasn't aware at all.

If I woke up in the eastern or northern kingdom instead, would I experience a language barrier there? Or did some omnipotent power smoothed over this barrier?

Now wasn't the time to worry about this, and I wouldn't get an answer no matter how much I rack my brains over this. It was rare to see

someone show interest in us, so I had to figure out a way to make him agree to eat the sample.

"Asuta, can you put more meat on the plates…? And give me one of those picks…"

"Ehh? alright."

I scooped up the half mini hamburg steak inside the pot and split it into threes.

Vena Wu nodded, walked out of the cart and to the side of the youth.

When the youth back away guardedly, Vena Wu smiled at him, and gracefully pick up a sample and placed it in her mouth.

She then pushed the plate slightly towards the youth.

The youth raised his hand above the plate.

He cast a probing glance at Vena Wu.

Vena Wu smiled again, and the youth picked up the toothpick with a nod.

And then— He picked up all the hamburg steaks and put it in his mouth.

The youth chewed the hamburg steak, and after nodding with satisfaction, he made a strange gesture with his fingers and bowed towards Vena Wu and me. He put up his hood again and left with nimble steps.

After a few quiet seconds, Vena Wu apologized with a whimsical voice:

"… Sorry…"

"Not at all! You made him eat the sample hamburg steak, that's incredible! The Post Station Town stalls had never provided sampling services, so this sort of things might happen."

To encourage myself, I answered in a loud voice. Vena Wu started sobbing and hugged a pillar of the stall.

「… I want to die…」

Vena-nee was unexpectedly frail.

No, now wasn't the time to have fun at her expense.

「It's fine! There is still one sample left! Our battle will only start in the afternoon! Let's do our best together okay?」

「…Asuta onii-chan, what's the matter?」

Tara appeared before the stall suddenly.

「Nothing. Is the 「Kiba burger」 good?」

「That's a Kiba burger? It's yummy! Asuta-nii, will you be opening the stall here every day from now on?」

「Yes, I made a ten-day contract. The next ten days will have to depend on how business goes.」

「Yay! I will come buy this every day! Papa also says he want to eat this everyday too! He is really surprised!」

「Thank you, seeing you look so satisfied makes me happy.」

If Tara and her father really buys two burger a day, I could sell twenty burgers in these ten days. I needed to sell 60 burgers to break even, so their support was a great help.

「Asuta…」

Vena Wu called out to me.

Her voice was slightly different than usual.

「What is it?」

I turned my head and noticed the abnormal situation without needing her to explain.

「Uwah…」

Tara yelped, and hid on the other side of the push cart.

A group of people came from the crowded southern side and walked briskly to our stall.

□W-What do you want?□

A group of men in cloaks surrounded my stall.

Tara trembled a little and cling to my leg.

Vena Wu— stayed close to me, quietly gripping the knife on her waist.

There were seven of them.

They were all tall and wore hooded cloaks that concealed their faces and body.

However— the lower half of their faces that could be seen were all dark in colour.

□Kiba.□

The men in the centre pushed passed his companion and walked to the stall.

He took off his hood and revealed his slender face. He was the Semu man who ate all the samples just now.

□W-What" Is there any problem with us selling that?□

Even though he couldn't understand, I still asked on reflex.

The youth continued pointing at the pot and muttered:

□Kiba.□

□Yes, this is kiba. What about it?□

□Kiba. Red. One, two, three?□

□…What?□

After I tilted my head quizzingly, the youth reached inside his cloak troublingly.

Vena Wu wanted to pull me away— But what he took out was dull red copper plates.

「Kiba. Red, one, two, three?」

When I still didn't answer, the youth's eyes showed a tint of sorrow.

「... White?」

「No! It's red! Two!」

The youth nodded, then took out another copper plate and placed both on the stall table with a clink.

He stared right at me.

「...Vena Wu, please help me stir.」

I was so frightened that I forgot to stir the sauce.

I handed the spatula to Vena Wu, and quickly started to chop the tino.

After making one 「Kiba burger」, I handed it to that young man.

「Please enjoy.」

The youth nodded firmly and received the merchandize.

I observed him as I timidly reached for the copper plates— fortunately, no one stopped me. They were just normal customers after all.

My heart was filled with gratitude.

But, just who were these people standing unmoving around the stall?

「Asuta onii-chan...」

「I-It's fine. I think... they are just customers.」

The youth ate the 「Kiba burger」 with large bites.

He held the burger with one hand at the start, but when he noticed the tarapa almost dripping out from the other end, he held it with both hands instead.

He then bit into the burger again.

Strange, even though he didn’t feel like a cold person, his expression remained blank.

It wasn’t to the extent of being creepy… but it still felt uncomfortable.

The youth quickly finished the burger, made a strange gesture with his fingers again and bowed quietly.

He then nodded to his companions.

The group of tall men nodded at the same time and reached into their cloaks.

Clink clang clink— they all placed their red copper plates onto the stall table.

Six persons’ worth, a total of twelve red copper plates.

I cut the tino quietly and finished all the 「Kiba burger」 one by one.

I handed the finished products to them, and they received the burgers with their black fingers one at a time.

There was silence.

I didn’t speak, the customers were quiet, Vena Wu and Tara didn’t make a sound either.

After a few minutes, the six 「Kiba burger」 all ended up in the men’s stomach. In addition to the first man, I collected 14 copper plates in total.

Like the youth earlier, the six hooded men made a gesture with their fingers, bowed, then left at the same time.

「Hey Asuta, your cooking sure is popular!」

「Uwah, that scared me!」

I didn't even notice that a slender blonde figure was standing beside the stall.

It goes without saying that was Kamyua Yost.

「W-W-Where did you come from? Please don't appear in such a heart attack inducing way!」

「I didn't want to get in the way of your business, so I had been watching over you quietly from the side. I was in the shade of those trees all along. Didn't you notice?」

I really felt like punching this guy who was pretending to be retarded.

Vena Wu also rolled her eyes at Kamyua Yost who was all smiles. Her gaze appeared to be much less sexy.

Only Tara was excited.

「Uncle Kamyua, you are here! Asuta onii-san's burger is really delicious!」

「That's right, it looks tasty. You are using tarapa as an ingredient huh. Your cooking with just aria and tino is already delicious, the food this time looked even more appetizing.」

He complimented with a casual tone like usual.

「... Who were that group of people earlier?」

「Hmm? Probably travelers from the eastern kingdom Semu. Considering their numbers, they are likely related to a large merchant caravan.」

「You didn't bribe them?」

「Bribe? What do you mean? You think I hired people to act like customers in an attempt to raise your stall's reputation?」

Kamyua Yost smirked and shrugged his shoulders that was covered by his cloak.

If I want to use such a plan, I will arrange for a better performance! The crowd is sparse here, your stall's fame won't increase even if I send a large group of people over. Look, no one even know you have sold seven meals in one go.

He was right. As we were quite some distance from the bustling south, even if someone observed what happened here, they would just see a cloaked group surround the stall, then left quickly.

Only the old man selling accessories beside us was staring with a dumbfounded face.

Most easterners are like that. They aren't a race that closes themselves off, but they only focus on their own objectives and ignore others… They think it's rude to show their emotion. But if you talk with them, you will find them interesting. Unfortunately, they have no intention of learning the language of the west.

I see…

But not all easterners are like that. Some of them understand the customs of the west. If you open a stall in the Post Station Town, you will slowly understand the characteristics from the various different places.

Kamyua said as he reached inside his cloak.

Well then, can I place my order now, Asuta? I want two meals, one of them is for Leito.

Well… We only have one left.

Ehh? Tara bought two, the easterners bought seven, you only sold nine, right? Why are you already sold out?

Just when did this uncle started spying on us?

The more time I spent with him, instead of understanding him more, I find him even more suspicious. This was the first time I met someone like that.

「I thought my sales for the first day would be low, so I only prepared ten portions. I didn't want to waste the ingredient costs after all.」

「How could you do that!? Your cooking is delicious, it's impossible that you will only sell ten! You brought such a big pot, but you are only selling ten portions! I'm so disappointed, Leito and I were both looking forward to your meal!」

「I'm sorry. There's still some samples left, I will give them to you okay? I grilled some extra poitan too.」

「Yes! Sell them to me! I won't allow any other patrons to take them away!」

His anxious expression seemed genuine.

I understood him less when I saw him make such an expression.

I used the last hamburg steak and the mini hamburg steak to make two 「Kiba burgers」, and collected two copper plates from Kamyua. The mini burger was given to him free of charge.

「Thank you! I will share this delicious meal with Leito! I will head back to the 「Kimyusu's tail inn」 first, I will tell you my comments later!」

Kamyua quickly disappeared without a trace.

Vena Wu and I looked at each other, our heart filled with a sense of powerlessness.

「Erm… We are done for the day.」

「Yes… Can I put out the fire…?」

「Yes please.」

This must be how it felt to be completely clueless.

In the first day battle in the Post Station Town, we didn't even last until noon, and closed shop in less than an hour.

3

「... I'm back.」

After opening the door, Ai Fa who was seated with her back to the wall received me with a surprised face.

「What happened? Was there some incident in the Post Station Town?」

「No, we sold all our food, so we came back.」

「That... too early. It's not even noon, right?」

「Yes. I went to quite a number of places before coming back.」

I brought the ingredients for tomorrow, chatted with Uncle Dora for a while, went to 「Kimyusu's tail inn」 to return the pushcart and asked for feedback from Kamyua and Leito. After coming back to Forest's Edge, I washed the pots at the water source before returning to the Fa house.

I didn't even spend much time heating the tarapa sauce. I gave the leftovers to Vena Wu, and she bought a leather pouch Post Station Town to take the sauce. She then went back home happily.

I put the rest of the firewood with the pushcart and returned it to the inn. With just the ingredients and cooking utensils, I came home without much load.

I put the pot back onto the stove, kept the tarapa, gigo and other vegetables into the food store, then sat down opposite Ai Fa.

「All ten burgers I prepared got sold out. After accounting for all the expenses, I made about five red copper plates today. The first day of business is a success.」

I didn't know why, but I felt dissatisfied with today's result.

To make Ai Fa understand how I felt, I told her everything that happened today.

「Yes... everything was sold out because they acknowledge your culinary skills, right? Just be happy about your accomplishments then.」

“You’re right, but we don’t know how long those easterners will stay in the Post Station Town, so I can’t predict how business would be in the coming days.”

To be honest, I failed to “make a name” and “become the talk of town”.

Just what did the people in the city thought when they saw us pushed the cart back painstakingly after opening for less than an hour? Did they think we caused some problem and had no choice but to close shop?

My persecution complex was probably playing tricks on my mind, but the gazes from the citizens did feel painful.

On top of that, the easterners weren’t fluent with the western language, so there wouldn’t be much word of mouth effect.

“… Running a business is really complicated.”

Ai Fa scratched her blonde hair and leaned in close to me.

“That might be so, but you still completed your job. Be happier about it.”

“Yes…”

“I’m telling you to be happier about it.”

Ai Fa suddenly reached out and pinched my left cheek hard.

“It hurts it hurts! You are going to pull my cheek off! Why did you pinch me!?”

“I told you to be happier, but you wouldn’t listen.”

Ai Fa had a gentle smile on her face.

“I’m really happy you know?”

“Ai Fa, you——”

“Hmm?”

“You have been smiling a lot more recently…? It hurts it hurts!”

「Hmmp!」

Ai Fa's rare smile was gone. She stood up and took down the cape hanging on the wall.

「It hurts ahh… Oh, it's already time for you to head into the woods?」

「Yes. Asuta, what are you going to do now?」

「Oh right. It's too early to prepare the ingredients. I will think about the future plans, then go chop some wood.」

「I already chopped the wood. Never mind, you are free, so chop more then.」

After saying that, Ai Fa came near to the seated me.

「I'm off… be careful today alright?」

「Yes, if any strange drunkards approach me, I will run away.」

「Okay.」

Ai Fa nodded with a strong gleam in her eyes.

After the Lutim wedding banquet, she would always show such a gaze when she leaves me behind and head into the woods.

Ai Fa then left for the forest, and I was home alone.

It's noon…

I should be in the Post Station Town that was starting get bustling and give out samples. But now, I'm sitting inside the house alone.

The powerlessness in my heart far exceeds my sense of pride and accomplishment.

「Never mind, there's no use in mulling over it. The battle starts tomorrow, tomorrow!」

It was a bit risky, but I decided to grill twenty meat patties for tomorrow.

If business turned out terrible, I will change it back to ten portions the next day.

If I sell them quickly tomorrow too, I will slowly increase the numbers day by day. To minimize the ingredient cost, I had to adapt quickly.

There is no need to be anxious. Unless the losses are too heavy, I can set up stall in the Post Station Town for the next ten to twenty days, and slowly work towards getting good results.

When I saw Ai Fa being sincerely happy for me, my thinking became more positive.

The situation developed unexpectedly, but I thought the sales on the first day would be terrible, and I sold everything instead. I should be happy about this.

Besides, even though I knew most of my customers, Tara, Uncle Dora, Kamyua Yost and Leito all had nothing but praises for the 「Kiba burger」.

I shouldn't be so uneasy and should face tomorrow's work with a heartful of hope.

「Okay…! Let's chop some wood!」

I took out the machete and a bundle of wood from the store room and prepared to leave the house.

When I was about to push the door open— someone knocked on the door twice.

(— A guest?)

After I living in the Fa house for a month, aside from Rimee Wu and the Kaslan couple, there had never been any other guest.

Noon had just past, and everyone knew the hunters had entered the woods to hunt, so Ai Fa wasn't home.

As I was thinking about it, there was another two knocks.

I placed the firewood and machete by me feet and press my hand onto my chest to regulate my breathing.

「... Who is it?」

Silence.

I slowly reached for the door bar leaning against the wall.

Should I barricade myself in, or escape outside? The more options I had, the better it was.

When my hand was almost touching the door bar, a voice came from the other side of the door.

「I'm... Celice Von Fou from the Fou house.」

An unfamiliar name.

From her voice, she should be a frail woman.

After hesitating for a few seconds, I gently pulled open the door.

A young, slender woman was standing outside.

She was covered from her chest to her knees with a single piece of cloth and held a baby younger than Kota Wu in her arms.

I finally let down my guard.

「I'm a member of the Fa house, Asuta. Do you have business with Ai Fa?」

「Yes... No... H-Has Ai Fa gone into the forest?」

「She just left. I can pass a message if you need.」

「I see... Excuse me, this is for you two...」

The woman picked up the bag by her feet, which was full.

The bag was big, but pressed flat and looked light.

「What is this?」

「Erm… This is… pico leaves…」

The woman before me seemed more guarded than I was.

Well, the residents around here probably think I look suspicious, so it couldn't be helped.

「Pico leaves huh. Why are you giving us pico leaves?」

「Actually… the thing is… Ai Fa gave us a lot of hides…」

「Hides?」

I was confused.

「You mean kiba hide?」

「Yes… About a month ago, we received numerous hides… My house, which is the Fou house, didn't have many men, and can't hunt enough kiba. But ever since the Fa house gifted us with these hides, this child finally has enough to eat…」

「I see— This is the first time I'm hearing this. So my house head do interact with our neighbours.」

Celice Von Fou's eyes looked troubled as she hugged her baby tightly.

「No… We didn't interact… Our house head forbid the Fou house from fraternizing with the Fa house…」

「Ehh?」

「After relations deteriorate between the Fa house and the chieftain house, our house head thinks that the Fou house would get on the bad side of the chieftain house if we fraternize with the Fa house… So two years ago, he forbids us from interacting with the Fa house…」

「I see. I have heard about that.」

And so, Ai Fa deliberated broke off ties with the other houses.

So why did she gift the hides to the Fou house?

…Ai Fa always leave the hide at our doorsteps quietly.

Celice Von Fou stared at me.

Her pale blue eyes were teary.

I didn't know who put the hide there, and felt it was creepy… But in order to fill our stomachs, we had to accept them. We tanned the hides, traded it for copper plates, and bought aria and poitan… And now I'm able to nurse this child…

… I see.

A few days ago, the men from the Fou house saw Ai Fa placed a freshly skinned hide at the door steps of the Fou house… And so, we finally learned the identity of our benefactor. But even so, the head of the Fou house was still unwilling to renew relations with the Fa house… So all the women begged the house head, and asked him to at least let us give Ai Fa a gift as thanks…

Celice Von Fou closed her eyes.

The Fou house do not have sufficient copper plates and can't give a luxurious gift. But you can never have too much pico leaves… This is foraged by all the women of the Fou house.

I see…

I know such a trivial gift isn't enough to repay Ai Fa's kindness, but I still want to give her my thanks. Even though the Fou house broke off ties with the Fa house out of fear of antagonizing the Tsun clan, she still did so much for us… We feel so ashamed…

Please don't mind it. The Fa house don't have enough people to tan the hides anyway. Besides, my house head has no intention of letting you know this.

But…

I'm grateful for your kind gesture. If the chance arises, I hope you can

talk to her personally. I don’t know the entire story, so I can’t say anything on Ai Fa’s behalf.」

「… Alright, thank you.」

Celice Von Fou left the squashed bags behind and left.

I opened them, and found it packed with pico leaves. This was the volume Ai Fa and I forage in a day.

After foraging pico leaves for their house, it must be difficult to pick so much more for us.

…Ai Fa gave them our excess hides, not meat. Doing this won’t make the denizens of Forest's Edge depraved.

If anyone criticize Ai Fa’s action, I will do everything I could to defend her.

One month ago— That was when Ai Fa took me in.

After butchering my first kiba, Ai Fa must have gifted it to the Fou house. Ai Fa had always been responsible for the disposal of the kiba’s hide and organs.

A prosperous life huh…

As a mere mortal, I couldn’t understand Kaslan Lutim’s grand vision.

And Kamyua Yost might not have any such ambitions at all.

However— I didn’t think an impoverished life where one was so famished that they couldn’t even nurse a child was normal.

Furthermore, when there were people starving, there was some who took the money that should be dispersed to the people and live lavishly.

Unfortunately, my prowess is limited, and I can’t be of much help.

After keeping the pico leaves into the food store, I started wielding my

machete to chop the firewood I needed to use tomorrow.

Vol. 4 :

Chapter 4 (Part 2)

Chapter 4.2

The second day of operation of the kiba food stall operated by the Fa house.

Although all the food was sold out on the opening day, the helplessness I felt was far stronger than any sense of pride and accomplishment. But it also spurred me on, so I felt hyped early in the morning.

I prepared twenty burgers today! It will be incredible if everything is sold out today! Vena Wu, let's do our best!

Yes... Asuta, this is all done by you...? Don't you need to handle the other chores...?

I made them all myself. I realized that making twenty burgers isn't hard at all. I don't mind preparing the food every day.

I wasn't pushing myself.

Yesterday, I prepared the tarapa sauce and meat patty ahead of time.

I prepared the food while making dinner and continued to finish my work after dinner was done. Before opening the stall, I would always chat idly with Ai Fa after dinner, but now we would do that while I prepare the food.

And so, I just need to grill the poitan and hamburg steak.

After the tribulations of the banquet at the Wu clan and the Lutim wedding, I accumulated a lot of experience in cooking large amount of food. Now, I could prepare twenty burgers in no time. Even if I push myself to the maximum limit for one day— forty burgers, I could finish them easily without sacrificing time for sleep or stall opening.

「It's no problem at all! Let's work hard!」

「... But there aren't much people during this time...」

There wasn't any sudden rain today, but the streets remained deserted.

Our stall was in the northernmost edge of the Post Station Town. Aside from the Genos city, only the stone paved road and the woods could be seen if one ventured further north. Only real travelers would pass by here.

The south of the Post Station Town was filled with farmland, so there were many farming villages. Hence, many of the stalls were concentrated in the south. The inn was also located in the south, so those lodging there would head directly to the bustling south to purchase their goods. No wonder the southern side was so crowded.

Before the number of pedestrians increases in the noon, we can only focus on the few sparse passerbys.

「Oh yah, other than the castle down to the west, where else does this road lead to?」

「I don't know...? Probably the northern kingdom Mahildra...?」

「Mahildra is the kingdom in the northernmost edge of the continent, right? Genos is in the western kingdom, located in the southern side. That means there would be many cities along the way towards the north, right?」

「I don't know... If I keep thinking about that, I might set off on a journey before I know it, so I try not to think about it...」

「... I see.」

□Yes… I see, so there are all sorts of cities in the western kingdom… If we head to the other cities, people won't call us □Kiba Eater□ right…□

Vena Wu looked to the north with a melancholic face.

□Vena Wu, you want to go to a faraway place because you don't like the people in the city calling you a □Kiba Eater□ right?□

□No… Not because of that… Well, maybe… Anyway, I just want to live nakedly…□

□N-Nakedly?□

□Yes… In Forest's Edge, I'm the eldest daughter of the Wu clan… In the Post Station Town, I'm a □Kiba Eater□… only my family accepts the real me… I hope more people knows the naked me… That's why I want to go to a faraway place…□

She glanced at me sideway with a flirty look.

□That is why I'm attracted by you… You are not bound by the common sense of Forest's Edge and the Post Station Town… You can see the real me…□

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p>□W-When you did that barbaric act last time, you actually thought this far? I didn't speak much with you back then.□

□Yes… I was drawn to you in the beginning because you came from a faraway place, and didn't even know the name of this continent… However, I wouldn't have acted that way if you didn't have a certain level of charm…□

Vena Wu was hardworking, but when she became idle, she would become mischievous.

I really hope Tara could come find us to play at a time like this. As I thought about that quietly, I scanned the road before us.

At this moment, I found a good target.

“Ah! That person looks like a foreigner, is he a resident of Genos?”

The target was a man didn’t have brown or ivory skin, but white skin with a tint of red.

He had a plump body with short limbs, and dark brown hair. I couldn’t see his facial features clearly as he was some distance away, but I could tell he had a beard.

The man wore a sleeveless shirt and long pants. This western attire was similar to what Leito wore, and he kept heading north as he browsed the stalls on either side of the street.

“Which country do the white skinned people come from?”

“Ehh…? They are from the southern kingdom Jaguar…”

My guess was right.

The western kingdom and the northern kingdom were enemies, so people from the north wouldn’t appear in this town. Through the process of elimination, this person must be from the southern kingdom. The denizens of Forest's Edge came from the south and had light brown skin, so I thought they would have similar skin tone with the other southerners.

“The yellowish-brown skin people are locals in Genos. There are many ivory skinned people too, where are they from?”

“They are both citizens of the western kingdom… When I was young, Grandma Jiba told me that Genos was exceptionally wealthy in the western kingdom, so many people will migrate to this land to search for job opportunities.”

I see.

This meant that the ivory skinned people only settled down here in the past decades, and some of them were even born here. They didn’t look

as uncaring as the southerners and easterners when they were facing the denizens of Forest's Edge, and didn't show fear or disdain like the Genos locals.

Hence, I should set my customer group to be the ivory skinned people. I might be able to get through to the Genos locals through them.

That asides, the pressing thing right now was to run my business.

The man gradually approached us from the south.

He didn't have any large luggage, so it was impossible for him to head off to the north. I quietly cut the mini hamburg steak samples and prayed in my heart for him to come near us, so we could have a chance to talk with him.

"Asuta… It's better for you to receive the southerners…"

"Ehh? But why?"

"Many elderly southerners still hold a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge… They think we are traitors of the southern god Jaguar…"

Not disdain or fear, but hostility.

In the Post Station Town, the southern white people and the eastern black people were roughly equal in numbers, but I had never seen any southerners showed hostility towards us.

"Well… The east and south are enemies, so they have their hands full being hostile to the town that is filled with Semu people…?"

"Ehh? The east and west kingdoms are on bad terms?"

"…Asuta, you really don't know anything…"

Vena Wu smiled, her tone was part shock and part joyful.

"Since ancient times, the east and south has been enemy nations, just like the west and north… As the west maintained cordial relations with both kingdoms, the east and south citizens are prohibited from causing

any trouble here… Those who break this law will not be permitted into the western kingdom again, so such incidents are rare…

As the Fa house didn't have much kins, Ai Fa didn't have the chance to obtain such information. In contrast, the Wu clan were well-informed because of their many relatives.

Enough about that, let's focus on business for now.

That southerner seemed to have plenty of time, but he didn't seem like he was looking for anything specific and was just browsing each stall carefully.

When he finally reached the old man's accessory stall beside us, I clenched my fists in a victory pose in my heart.

Awesome!

At this moment— my eyes met with that man.

He was older than I thought, probably above fifty years old.

The man had a large head, plain face and short body. He looked bulkier than the Genos locals, and a beard covered his mouth.

Under his bushy brows were a pair of green eyes with a frightening sharp gleam.

He walked passed the accessory stall and took large strides towards us.

Kiba…? You're selling kiba?

I wanted to reply with a smile, but he didn't give me the chance and continued:

Are you retarded? Who will eat the tough and stinky kiba meat? Only people like you can stomach it. You even used tarapa on it, how arrogant. You don't even understand what cuisines taste like, so aria and poitan is enough for you. I suggest you close shop and go home before you spend all your tusks and horns.

His words flowed like a machine gun, not giving me any opportunity to interject.

After saying what was on his mind, he started turning to leave.

"Excuse me, but I can tell you that kiba meat is delicious! Do you want to try it?"

"What?"

The man turned his head and glared at me unhappily.

"Are you retarded? Why must I eat kiba meat? The city has Kimyusu, karon, and all sorts of meat that taste a hundred times better than kiba. Kiba won't sell, retard. My skin will turn as black as yours if I eat kiba, and everyone will roll their eyes at me."

"T-That's just a misconception. I also ate plenty of kiba meat, but my skin tone is still the same."

I already predicted that I would encounter terrible customers like him.

This man didn't fear or detest the denizens of Forest's Edge, so maybe he could be considered one of the better ones.

"... Why is a brat like you wearing clothing from Forest's Edge and selling kiba? Did you get seduced by that sexy Forest's Edge lady? Are you retarded? Never mind, no matter how retarded, that's a life that you chose. Since you like women from Forest's Edge, then just stay in the forest and no one will have any complaints."

"No, kiba meat is really delicious! It's a waste for just the denizens of Forest's Edge to eat them, so I decided to set up a stall here. The samples are free, why not try it? It's fine to think I'm tricking you."

My retail smile was perfect.

The man sighed, then stood before the stall.

He leaned towards the sample plate on the table, then said:"Even the presentation is bad."

He had been making disparaging comments since the beginning, but his tone was calm, so I didn't feel any obvious hostility or malevolence.

I wasn't angered by his attitude, but couldn't help lamenting in my heart:He look like a boorish man, but he is so well spoken.

This is free right? I won't pay copper plates for this.

Of course, it is free.

I nodded with a smile.

He frowned his pale forehead and picked up the toothpick.

After tossing one sixth of the mini hamburg steak into his mouth, he chewed carefully and swallowed it.

He glared at me once again.

... It tastes terrible. You lied to me.

Ehh?

Kiba meat didn't stink like I imagined, and it isn't too tough. But it is gooey and has horrible texture. I can feel a strange taste going up my nose. It can't be compared to kimyusu and karon. Your tarapa is cooked well, it's a waste to pair it with kiba. Are there really people who will pay for this thing? You actually thought that this food taste good, no wonder everyone mocks you people as Kiba Eater.

Could it be — this dish was really not to his liking?

Both the texture of the hamburg steak and the how the kiba meat taste.

I thought this might happen, but I didn't imagine things would go bad so fast.

...Asuta.

At this moment, Vena Wu tugged on my waist band

I still felt a little shocked, and after following Vena Wu's gaze—

The familiar cloaked group was approaching with brisk steps.

5

"W-What do you want!? Are you trying to start trouble inside the western territories?"

The Jaguar man yelled.

The cloaked group stayed some distance from us and surrounded us in a semicircle.

Their numbers had clearly grown.

"... We no intent, start trouble."

One of them answered in stiffly in the language of the west.

"We, want buy, kiba meal. Now, queuing."

That person walked to the front and took off his hood.

He had dark skin, the corners of his eyes were high, the bridge of his nose was thin, and he had thin lips.

He looked very similar to the youth who visited yesterday— but this man's hair was silvery white, just like Grandma Jiba.

But he was a young man, with no sign on his face. This was probably his natural hair color.

"We, queue. We, buy, ten."

"A-Are you all retards? You are willing to pay for such nasty tasting meat, you must be insane. That's like throwing copper plates into the brazier. Kiba meat is food for the denizens of Forest's Edge. Your skin can't get any darker, so eating bad tasting meat will just be a pain."

The young silvered hair man tilted his head quizzingly.

"I, yet to try. But, seven, brethren, yesterday try. All say, tasty. So, ten brethren, come... Please, ten meals."

□Okay, thank you for your patronage.□

I was a bit shocked that someone disputed the tastiness of kiba, but I still started chopping tino.

At this moment, the ten customers quietly placed their copper plates on the table with loud clinking sounds.

□This is unbelievable. Can't Semu people tell the taste of meat? This isn't food normal people will eat. If you want to eat meat, then eat kimyusu and karon.□

This man kept disrupting my business, but his attitude was calm and wasn't scolding anyone loudly. The Semu people were expressionless and ignored him. As the stall owner, I was at a loss.

Anyone, I started making ten □Kiba burger□.

The young silver haired man was the first to take the meal. After finishing it with a blank expression, he nodded firmly, then turned towards the southerners

□Kiba, delicious. Red, two, satisfied.□

□How can something so retarded happen? There must be something wrong with your tongues… Hey, get over here you guys!□

He shouted again.

A group of white skinned men walked over, probably in response to his order.

The cloaked group quickly squeezed together and gave up the space to them.

With the □Kiba burger□ still in their hands.

“What’s the matter Pops? It sure seems tense here.”

When the group of southerners got here, a young Jaguar man said in a crude tone.

This young man had brown hair and green eyes. He wasn’t tall, but he was burly.

All the men from Jaguar had small stature. Including the middle-aged man earlier, this group had eight people, and only two of them was taller than me.

But all of them were buff, with wide shoulders and faces.

Their hair color and age vary, but most of them had bushy beards.

“Look at this lot. They claim that kiba meat taste good. I tried it just now, but I don’t think it’s worth paying money for. Can’t people from Semu differentiate good and bad tasting food?”

He sounded very indignant.

He was probably really triggered.

“Pops, you actually ate kiba meat? How can that ever taste good.”

The Jaguar youth stole a few glances our way, then grabbed his companion’s thick arms.

“... Besides, let’s not get involved with the denizens of Forest's Edge. They are more troublesome than those Semu people. We don’t know what will happen if things go out of hand.”

“I’m just preaching the truth. They are the ones who are weird... If you think I’m lying, then try it too.”

“I don’t want to eat kiba meat.”

“Alright, just try it... Hey you, let these guys taste the kiba meat.”

His demands were unreasonable.

However, this was a precious opportunity.

There might not be many Jaguar people in town, but things would be serious if they couldn’t accept the taste of kiba on a biological level.

“Kiba burger” was just a changeup pitch. If people didn’t like its unique texture, I could just switch and sell simple grilled meat instead.

I already used the strong taste of the tarapa in my cooking, but“Pops” still complained about the taste of the kiba meat.

Was this the personal preference of Pops, or were all Jaguar people unable to accept kiba? Even though his tone was rude, I couldn’t let this chance go since he asked for samples.

I scooped up the mini hamburg steak lying in the bottom of the pot, put it on the plate and divided it into six.

There were still five samples from the first batch. I placed the plate onto the platform, and prepared toothpicks to match the number of people.

“Please take one.”

The three older Jaguar men took the sample without any hesitation.

Pops had to push the other young men and urged them to try it before they took the toothpicks.

By the way, the cloaked group had already finished their “Kiba burger”, but didn’t leave for some reason. They didn’t look curious at all, and just stood by the side with a blank expression.

“How is it? It tastes horrible right?”

Pops crossed his arms and surveyed his companions.

And the men… showed all sorts of expressions.

“Just be honest, if you think it taste bad.”

Only two men answered him.

An older man said:Taste bad. A youth said:Don’t taste good.

Only two of you?

Pops said with his eyes wide in surprise.

He was just like Donda Wu some days ago.

What do you think? You really think it taste good?

Another older man shared:... It’s not awful. Some other youth commented:It’s kind of good.

And finally, the tallest of the older trio, a youth who looked younger than me, and the young man who spoke in a crude tone at the very start just stood quietly there.

... It’s good.

The crude young man muttered.

W-What is this? Hey, is this really kiba?

Yes, it’s 100% kiba. That’s not karon or kimyusu.

My heart was tense, but I still answered with a smile:

It’s priced at two red copper plates. Would you like to buy one?

Two red copper plates huh.

The tall man pushed the youth aside and walked over.

He had a burly figure and was rather old. His face was as fierce as Pops.

He handed over the copper plates and said:Give me one.

Thank you! Please wait a moment.

Hey Arudas! You are willing to pay for this nasty tasting meat?

The man named Arudas turned towards Pops impatiently.

Pops, I know the meat doesn’t suit your taste, but you can’t holler in

front of other people’s stall. The guards might take you away.」

「B-But…」

「You think it taste bad, but it’s heavenly to me. Everyone has different taste, so don’t be so alarmed.」

Everyone has different taste—

That’s right, the taste of the kiba was unique. I think kiba was more delicious than beef, pork and kimyusu. With so many people here, it wouldn’t be surprising to find some people who didn’t like kiba meat.

I already told myself that way ahead of time.

But even so, I still felt a heat well up in me— I was still a half-baked chef after all.

「Hey, give me one too.」

The youngest Jaguar man who was standing there stiffly also handed copper plates over to me.

「Thank you!」

I answered and handed a finished burger to the older man who ordered earlier. At this moment, another man walked over and said:「It looks delicious.」 It was the youth who said「It was kinda good.」 earlier.

「Bro, I want one too.」

「Okay! Thank you!」

「M-M-Me too!」

The youth with the rude attitude finally made up his mind and handed over the copper plates.

Of the seven men— No, there were eight including Pops, only four of them bought a 「Kiba burger」.

Half of them acknowledge my cooking.

I accepted this result a little vexingly.

It is popular with all the easterners, but only half of the southerners think it is good. The taste they one prefers would differ depending on one’s country of origin.

Lost in deep thought, I started chopping the tino and aria.

At this moment the tall Jaguar man Arudas who was the first to buy a 「Kiba burger」 said with a sigh:

「Uwah, this is delicious!」

His wide face that looked as hard as a rock was now showing pure bliss and surprise.

「Kiba actually taste this good. Strange, why do people say kiba is tough and stinks. It tastes much better than karon.」

I stole a glance at the leader of the group, Pops. He was scratching his head with a frustrated look.

「The tarapa is great too, the sourness is just right. What’s that thing mixed together with the tino?」

「That’s sliced raw aria.」

「Raw aria! It’s a bit spicy, but it complements the meat really well. I suddenly feel an urge to drink fruit wine.」

「That’s right. Hey, I didn’t see you here at noon yesterday. You don’t open in the evenings?」

「Yes. As Forest's Edge is some distance away from here, we close the shop in the afternoon.」

「Such a pity. Dinner in the inn cost four red copper plates, I would rather eat two of these.」

The southerners looked fierce when they were quiet, but they were more expressive than the easterners.

When I see people eating my food happily and saying 「delicious」, my heart would sway with them.

「Ahh, this is too delicious! Hey, will you be opening your stall around this time tomorrow?」

「Yes. We will be open for at least eight more days.」

「I see. We will stay in this town until next month's end. I will visit every day.」

「Thank you! I will await your patronage!」

The southerners turned and left.

Seeing how grumpy Pops looked, Arudas bumped Pop's shoulder with his fist.

「Pops, let's go. It's almost time for work.」

However, Pops still wouldn't move. He called out to me with a scary expression.

「Hey, your tarapa is good, I will be willing to pay if you use kimyusu or karon meat instead.」

「... I'm sorry, but I don't plan to use anything other than kiba meat for now. But I will introduce a new kiba dish in the future...」

「As long as you use kiba meat, that will just be a waste of effort.」

Pops left after uttering these words.

Then— I quietly shifted my gaze, and found the cloaked group standing in the same place without moving.

The young silver haired man standing at the front of the group walked over briskly.

「They claim, kiba taste bad, strange. I think, delicious.」

「Thank you. Please come again.」

「Every day, will come. Nine days, passed, stop business?」

「No. If possible, I hope to keep the stall running permanently.」

「I'm happy, you continue operate. We, every day come. We, entire blue month, stay here.」

Blue month— he probably meant the next month.

Kamyua did mention his work will begin in the fifteenth of the next month, so this month should be ending soon.

「I, leader of 「Silver Vase」 merchants, My name, Shumimaru Ji Sadumutino.」

「Ehh?」

「Shumimaru Ji Sadumutino. Your name, tell me?」

「Oh… I'm Asuta of the Fa house.」

「Asuta, thank you. I come every day.」

With these words, the Semu group left quickly.

「Incredible… You sold ten and four burgers just now…?」

Vena Wu stirred the sauce in the pot quietly, and finally spoke.

「There are six left…? We can sell them right…?」

「That's right, I'm really happy now.」

「… But, why do you look troubled…?」

「It's nothing… I just feel vexed when someone say kiba taste bad. The last time I heard that was when Donda Wu claim that hamburg steak is poison.」

「The people who think kiba taste bad are the weird ones… Papa Donda just don't like the soft texture of the hamburg steak. But from that man's tone, he really thinks kiba taste bad… There must be something wrong with his taste buds…」

「That’s not it. Everyone has their own preferences.」

After my duel with Donda Wu, I experienced this obvious fact.

The denizens of Forest's Edge and the people of Semu probably only find it delicious because of the influence of their food culture.

I knew that very well.

But even so— my heart was still filled with a sense defeat.

I was depressed not because my pride as a chef was wounded, but because someone disparaged something I like, so my head was filled with childish frustration.

In that case, I should bury this feeling into the bottom of my heart… It’s strange, the southerners should be less bias than the westerners, but he still thinks that kiba meat is unpalatable. I must keep this in mind and think of a countermeasure later.

「Ah… Asuta, the vegetable peddler is here…」

「Ehh?」

I lifted my head and saw Uncle Dora and Tara walking over from the southern street.

I smiled with relief, and suddenly felt troubled.

Two unfamiliar men was following behind Tara and him.

They both had yellowish brown skin and was about Dora’s age.

They wore a stiff smile, just like when Uncle Dora first met me.

「Hi Asuta, how’s it going?」

「Hello, business isn’t too bad today. I already sold 14 meals.」

「Ehh? You are almost sold out?」

「There are six left. It’s still some time before noon, but I already got my hands full.」

「I see, that's great. Sorry… but you provide samples, right? Can you let them try?」

After they stood before me, the faces of both men were tense from nervousness.

「Of course, if they don't mind, I would want everyone to try my cooking… And they are?」

「They are my old friends. This guy over here runs a cloth stall, and that guy is a pot dealer.」

「Ah! Did I buy a pot from you before?」

「Y-Yes. You have good memory.」

Most men in Genos had burly built, but the pot dealer was skinny, so he left a deep impression on me.

「They don't believe that kiba meat is tasty, so I dragged them here. Can you let them try some?」

「Of course! Please wait a moment, I will heat it up.」

There just happened to be two samples left on the plate. After dipping it in the boiling hot sauce, I placed it onto the plate again.

The pot dealer and the cloth stall owner seemed unsure if they wanted to cry or laugh, then looked at each other.

Tara didn't care about them and kept tugging her father's arm.

「Papa, I'm hungry…」

「Right. Asuta, give us one each please.」

「Thank you. I'm really happy that you like it.」

「I'm… happy to be acquainted with someone from the Forest's Edge too.」

Uncle Dora stole a glance at Vena Wu.

Vena Wu showed a troubled smile.

□We are all citizens of the west, but I can't think of the Forest's Edge denizens as fellow countrymen. When I see the terrifying figures of the men of Forest's Edge, my knees will still go weak... But even so, I'm glad that there are kind people like you two in Forest's Edge.□

Uncle Dora received the □Kiba burger□, and showed his teeth in a smile.

□Do visit our stall again, I hope you can try the aria I grew.□

□... Yes, I will tell my house members...□

Dora bit into the □Kiba burger□ with a gleeful smile.

□Oh... This Kiba burger taste wonderful. Asuta, you actually made such a delicious meal from my vegetable, that fills me with bliss.□

□No, I can only serve great tasting food because the ingredients are fresh. Uncle Dora, I will be counting on your tarapa and aria in the future too.□

□I will be proud to serve.□

Uncle Dora turned towards his two friends.

□Well? How long are you going to just stand there? You even left your work behind to come here, so at least try the sample.□

□Y-You are the one who dragged us forcefully here.□

The pot dealer chided Uncle Dora, and finally reached for the sample kiba meat.

With his slightly trembling fingers, he grabbed the toothpick and send the small piece of meat into his mouth.

□H-How is it?□

The cloth stall uncle grabbed his arm.

□Delicious... No, the taste is strange...□

□Ah, I minced the meat, meaded them into a round patty and then

grilled it. So the texture is a bit unique.

The pot dealer’s eyes started to waver.

Then, as if he had made up his mind, he reached his thin fingers into his shirt.

I-I want one! I need to eat some more to understand its taste.

Okay! Thank you.

H-Hey, are you serious…?

The cloth stall owner took the toothpick too.

Uwah, it’s actually this good!

He opened his eyes wide in surprise, and carefully studied the content of the pot.

Is this really kiba meat…? The tarapa is amazing too!

Of course, this tarapa is grown by me.

The cloth stall owner smiled when he saw Uncle Dora puff his chest proudly:

Why are you acting so smug? A-Alright, I will buy one too…! I-I want to ask, will I grow horns, and will my skin turn black if I eat this…?

You still believe such superstition? I have never seen horned denizens of Forest's Edge before. My grandmother said that their appearance hasn’t changed since they migrated here from the southern jungles.

I-I get it! Give me one!

… Thank you.

I could finally thank him sincerely.

When I hear people talk badly about kiba, my mood would sour; when I hear people praise kiba, I would feel elated. My emotions swung because of the comments by others, proving that I was just a half-baked chef

after all.

No matter what, the fight was just beginning.

Starting from tomorrow, I would prepare 40 Kiba burger.

It was much earlier than I expected, but after the sales of the burger rose to a certain extent, it was about time to prepare a menu.

There were countless problems that I needed to work through.

After a moment, Kamyua Yost appeared like a spirit, bought a share for himself and Leito, and we were sold out in less than an hour of operation.

6

The next day.

The third day since my stall opened— at dusk.

I laid sprawled out in the main room of the Fa house. Someone knocked the door twice.

Asuta, it's me.

Ai Fa's voice came inside the room.

I was indescribably tired, but I still got up from the rug, walked to the entrance and took down the door bar.

When I opened the door, my beloved house head I hadn't seen for half a day lashed out:

Why are you showing such a good-for-nothing face? No one patronized your stall today? Even if that is the case, you don't need to make such a face, it irks me just to look at you.

Ugghhh, what about you? How's the situation? Has the number of kiba decreased at all?

I got a kiba. But it suffered too many unnecessary wounds, so I couldn't

blood let it successfully.

I see. Thank you for your hard work, it’s great that you’re not hurt…

Just why are you showing such a face? You better stop that, or I will really get angry.

Leave me alone, I’m just a little tired. If I’m with you, I will cheer up in no time…

Don’t joke with me. Your face is spoiling my mood, cheer up right now.

My house head was merciless.

Just what happened? You looked so sullen, there must be a reason, right?

I don’t know if this is a valid reason… But I was taken away by the guards today.

What? What happened?

Ai Fa suddenly grabbed me by the chest.

What kind of trouble did you get into? I thought you were working seriously?

I’m very serious! I sold all 40 burgers because of my serious attitude…! But that is also why I got taken by the guards.

… I’m still confused. Tell me the reason, quick.

She unhanded me, hung her cape on the wall and leaned the sabre against the wall.

My eyes followed her figure as she sat down beside the stove.

When I opened the stall today, the southerners and easterners were all crowded there. All twenty burgers I prepared were sold in no time.

Yes.

I prepared additional ingredients today. When I made twenty more

burgers, Tara came and bought four burgers for Uncle Dora and friends.

Yes.

So there are 16 left… At this moment, the Silver Vase merchants and a group of Jaguar people appeared at the same time, with ten people in each group.

Hmm? Didn't they visit before the shop opened?

No. The customers who visited early in the morning were all unfamiliar faces. They came to shop upon the recommendation of these two groups. To avoid seeing each other, people from these two nationalities had inn they would usually lodge in. Kiba burger became a hot topic in those inns.

…Yes.

We only had 16 burgers, but each group had ten customers. I had no choice but to sell ten burgers to the Silver Vase who came slightly earlier. When I told the southerner customers:I'm sorry, there's only six burgers left— They started making a scene and demand me to divide the 16 burgers between the two groups evenly.

Yes.

But the easterners wouldn't budge… Since I failed to quell the commotion, a passerby alerted the guards.

Is that so, then the guards have to punish the ones who started the unrest.

Yes~ But they didn't do that. In the end, the guards think I'm the one at fault, and must take full responsibility. I was almost barred from entering the Post Station Town ever again.

… Did they reach that conclusion in accordance to the rules of the city?

Rage was flickering in Ai Fa's eyes.

I-I'm not sure. But don't worry, I already convinced them to let me off.

It was my negligence for not preparing the adequate amount of food… I have already reflected on that.

That… is a difficult problem.

Ai Fa gently shook her head, her anger extinguished.

It must be hard on you— Asuta, I’m hungry.

… House head, you are really cruel to me….

I did comfort you. I know why you are so exhausted… Alright then, stop being depressed and cheer up.

Was my expression really that sullen? I pinched my cheeks with my hands.

I used up all my stamina and wits in the guard room before I was released, and my energy was completely used up.

I needed to consume nourishment during times like this.

Okay! I will start preparing dinner!

… I want you to cheer up, not be overly cheerful.

I see.

I added wood into the stove obediently and heated the soup I had already cooked.

This is the third day since you started selling Kiba burger, and you have already sold 40 of them in one day, isn’t that an amazing accomplishment?

Ai Fa sat crossed legged beside the stove with one knee up. She asked quizzically.

But you don’t look happy at all?

Of course I’m happy that sales were beyond my imagination. But I can’t afford to be happy, my position is already precarious.

「Precarious?」

「Our main objective is to let the people in the Post Station Town understand how delicious kiba is correct? So far, only four Genos locals had tasted the 「Kiba burger」. The easterners and southerners held the 「Kiba burger」 in high regards, but they will leave the Post Station Town after some time. Even if we earned some petty cash, we still can't achieve our goal.」

After being interrogated by the guards, I finally learned the identity of my customers.

Like what the Semu group informed me before, they belonged to the merchant group 「Silver Vase」. They hailed from their home nation in the east with precious metals and other merchandize, and visits the city in the west and north, spending a year traveling and conducting business.

The Jaguar group were famed architects, and many of the buildings in the Post Station Town was erected by their hands.

「Pops」 who rejected the kiba meat completely was the boss, and this just happened to be the time for their annual visit to the Post Station Town to repair the aging buildings.

「Next month, the 「Silver Vase」 and the architects will leave the Post Station Town. Ninety percent of the customers who bought a 「Kiba burger」 were travelers passing by Genos, or here for odd jobs or labour, and not local residents. Very few Genos locals actually tried our burgers.」

「But— you wanted to promote the 「Kiba burger」 to the southerners and easterners in the first place, right?」

「That is true. But before the cooking can spread by word of mouth, all that will be for nought if I get taken away by the guards again. If there is another commotion, I will really be barred from entering the Post Station Town… My situation is precarious after all.」

The icy gazes of the guards and Milano Mast was engraved deeply in my heart.

Their eyes seemed to be saying:「Denizens from Forest's Edge are abnormal after all and will just disturb the peace in the town.」

That was illogical. If we weren't denizens of Forest's Edge, we wouldn't be treated so harshly.

However, we were denizens of Forest's Edge, and we had set our mind on running a business in enemy territory.

I couldn't afford to fail again.

The enemy in this battle was the entire Post Station Town, I learned this fact once again.

「... You have finally reverted to your usual expression.」

Ai Fa's voice was very close to me.

I turned my head in surprised and found her right beside me.

「Asuta, I didn't know you are so greedy.」

「G-Greedy?」

「How much copper plates have you earned in these three days?」

「Hmm? I sold seventy meals in three days, so that's 140 red copper plates. Minus the set-up cost, three days of labour and ingredient cost, the profit is 77 red copper plates.」

「So that's like hunting more than 6 kiba in just three days?」

「You can't compare it like this. No matter how many copper plates I made, the number of kiba will not go down. My work can't be compared to that of a hunter.」

By the way— My target was to sell at least 60 portions in the first ten days.

I never thought that I would reach this goal in just three days.

As I was stirring the soup, Ai Fa smiled beside me.

「This is how the denizens of Forest's Edge think. The people in the city also worked hard to earn copper plates, right?」

「Our objective isn't earning money anyway. I'm glad that we can buy new pots and knives with the copper plates though.」

「... You are really greedy.」

Ai Fa said with a laugh. A calming light could be seen in her eyes.

But I still felt unhappy.

「Why would you think that? Because I don't look happy about the sales exceeding my expectations? I don't think I'm a greedy person.」

「Not that. You don't care about how many copper plates we earned and strive single mindedly at our primary goal. I think you are a man who pursue success greedily.」

「... In that case you can describe me with the term 「ambitious」. Being greedy sounds terrible.」

I complained as I stirred the pot that was slowly heating up, Ai Fa replied 「I understand」, then walked to me.

He reached for my head. I already took off the towel on my head, so she ruffled my hair directly and lean her face towards me.

「Asuta, you are really ambitious.」

She showed a mischievous smile, and her white teeth was visible.

It was rare to see Ai Fa show such a smile, which reminded me of Ludo Wu.

On top of that, she usually wouldn't show such an obvious smile, so that surprised me.

「... Asuta, I'm hungry.」

「Oh right. The soup is heated up. I will grill the meat; can you help me carry the pot over?」

I just cooked the kiba soup earlier. The pot was still hot and there was only two person’s worth of soup, so it got heated up in no time.

There was a board behind the stove, and we moved the pot onto it. I put the new pot onto the stove, took out the plates full of food. Ai Fa looked at the content curiously.

“What are we having for dinner? There is an unfamiliar smell.”

“That’s right, I bought a new ingredient today. No, it’s actually a kind of spice.”

The kiba abdomen meat was inside the plate, soaking in a red marinating sauce.

That was a sauce I made from fruit wine, diced aria, and the new ingredient, myam.

“Myam?”

“Yes, Myam. Remember the kimyusu meat bun I ate? This was added in it.”

This herb had the fragrance of garlic and coriander. It had a complicated aroma that rouses one’s appetite.

Myam had green straw-like stems and was really spicy when eaten raw. After I cut it together with aria into a pulp and added it into the marinating sauce.

“I had always been curious about this ingredient, but I didn’t know its name. After asking Uncle Dora, I finally figured it out. Myam is suitable to be added into the tarapa sauce.”

I explained to Ai Fa as I fried the thin slices of aria.

After the aria turned soft, I spread out the marinated meat, and put them into the pot.

The next instant, the room was filled with the fragrance of fruit wine and Myam.

「How is it? You don’t hate this fragrance, right?」

「… I feel even hungrier now.」

I know, right? I didn’t know coriander very well, but I think the fragrance of garlic and grilled meat was the best stimulant of one’s appetite.

In my old world, there was many people who dislike such a strong smell. But Myam was different from garlic and eating it wouldn’t give you bad breath. Women and children also likes kimyusu meat bun after all. Hence, I decide to use this stimulating spice in my cooking.

By the way, this spice had to be bought at the stall that sells rock salt and dry goods, and not the vegetable stalls. I have never seen this ingredient in the Wu food store either.

「Okay, the meat surface is seared, I’m adding it in.」

I poured the rest of the marinating sauce into the pot.

This dish was cooked the same way as ginger roast meat.

Could I dub it 「Myam roast kiba meat」? I thought to myself quietly.

「Asuta.」

「Hmm?」

「I’m hungry.」

「Hmm, that’s the fourth time you said that. It’s already done, please wait a moment.」

When the kiba was completely cooked, I scooped the meat and aria onto the plate.

The kiba meat was sprinkled with rock salt and pico leaves, so it didn’t need any more seasoning

After drying the sauce remaining in the pan a little, I poured it onto the meat and aria, and it was done!

「Ah, the grilled poitan is in the food store. Sorry, can you help me get the kiba soup?」

「Yes.」

I hurried to the food store, then carried the poitan I grilled in the morning and the tino shreds I just chopped onto the dining table.

「This is the raw tino used in kiba burger, right?」

「Yes, I think it suits this dish very well.」

Ginger roast meat had to be paired with cabbage shreds.

So Myam roast meat and tino shreds must go together well too.

However, that was what I thought as someone who grew up in another world, I wonder if the people in this world would feel the same.

「Alright! Let's dig in.」

「...Asuta, there isn't much meat in your plate?」

「Ah, right, I was comparing the ratio of aria and myam, and adjusting the marinating time. I ate plenty of meat during my sampling sessions, so this much is enough.」

Ai Fa was surprised.

「You spent so much effort on developing this dish...? Are you planning to sell this in the Post Station Town?」

「Oh! You have keen senses. That's right, making more than 40 『Kiba burger』 takes too much effort, so I have decided to start selling this dish tomorrow. Let me explain how to eat it.」

I grilled the poitan thinner than the one used in 『Kiba burger』, spread a layer of tino shreds, added the meat and aria, and rolled it up from below like a crepe. And the 『Myam roast meat』 was done.

「Ai Fa, we are having dinner, so you have to eat too. I will use the rest of the aria to make soup, so don't leave anything behind.」

「... Denizens of Forest's Edge don't leave leftovers.」

「Yes. I just want to try saying that line. Here, eat this.」

Ai Fa nodded, and after saying grace, she picked up the Myam roast meat.

When she noticed my gaze, she frowned a little.

「... Don't stare at me.」

「Oh right, my bad. I'm just curious about your reaction.」

「Hmmp.」

Ai Fa turned her face away and bite into the 「Myam roast meat」.

She grabbed the grilled poitan with both hands and looked adorable when she did this.

Leaving that aside— how's the taste?

I think, it wasn't too bad.

As there weren't any ginger, cooking wine and soy sauce in this world, so I didn't expect the dish to taste like meat grilled with ginger. The kiba meat was soaked in sweet fruit wine and spicy Myam, giving it a sweet and spicy taste after it was grilled. It was suitable to be eaten together with tino and grilled poitan.

The meat was less than 5mm and full of bite. If I messed up the heat, the people in the city wouldn't be able to bite into it, so I had to be careful about that.

「How's the taste?」

I asked Ai Fa for her comment as I made a wrap for myself.

「Delicious.」

Ai Fa’s answer was curt as usual.

No matter how the food tasted, Ai Fa, wouldn’t use too much words to express her comments. I had no way of making her speak her mind more—

“This dish has a great fragrance, and the overall seasoning suits the kiba meat well. It’s as tasty as eating steak… Does steak match this kind of seasoning too?”

It was rare for her to give such a specific comment.

“But… steaks probably don’t match the sweet taste that well. I don’t want you to season the hamburg steak this way either. As for the Kiba burger and tarapa… I’m not too sure about that.”

“I-I see. Amazing, this is the first time you gave me such detailed feedback.”

And I agreed with all the points she raised.

Ai Fa closed her eyes again, as if she was searching for the appropriate words.

“Also… this is delicious, but my throat is patched after eating it. If… the seasoning is not so strong, I think it will taste better.”

“I see. After all, the denizens of Forest's Edge don’t use any seasoning aside from rock salt when making jerky. The taste is probably too strong for you. Sorry, I will adjust the seasoning time when I cook dinner next time.”

Ai Fa sighed a little tiredly, then stared at me again.

“… That’s all I have to say. Don’t ask me anymore question, I head will hurt if I think anymore.”

“I got it. Thank you! Your comments are a valuable source of reference to me.”

“… Didn’t you already decided to sell normal grilled meat after the kiba

burger? You mentioned that only those dishes can bring out the tastiness of kiba.」

「Yes, I did plan to do that.」

I sat down properly again.

「I told you already right? When I let my customers try the hamburg steaks yesterday, they didn't complain about its soft texture, but the unique taste of the kiba meat itself. That's why I'm trying such a seasoning and flavour. I want to find a way to suppress the unique taste of kiba without destroying its deliciousness.」

「Yes.」

「There were as many southern customers as eastern customers today. They probably came after hearing others discuss the tastiness of kiba. No one complained to me about the taste directly, but there must be some who felt dissatisfied. If I'm unlucky, maybe half of them didn't like my cooking.」

Besides, the easterners were always expressionless and silent. I couldn't tell how many of them were actually happy with the food I was serving.

My patrons were increasing, but I don't know how many repeat customers there would be. Furthermore, not only do the easterners had similar appearance, they often concealed their face with a hood, making it harder for me to tell them apart.

「Anyways, even if I used the strong tasting tarapa in the 「Kiba burger」, there is still customers who dislike the unique taste of the kiba. Instead of steaks where the taste of the meat takes CenterStage, I think we should present a dish that suppresses the kiba's unique taste. Since the salted meat I tasted in the 「Kimyusu's tail inn」 was very salty, the townspeople are probably alright with strong seasonings.」

「... Hmm. You already thought that far.」

Ai Fa quickly finished the first 「Myam roast meat」, and stared at me.

「Then, why were you so depressed just now?」

「Hmm? I was just tired. I still need to finish this dish quickly after that commotion in the afternoon. And there are also many things for me to consider.」

I started making another 「Myam roast meat」 for Ai Fa, and leaned towards her.

「Ai Fa, I didn't expect my stocks to run out just by selling to the southerners and easterners. I have decided to supplement the 「Kiba burger」 with this new dish tomorrow, but that wouldn't solve the root of the issue.」

「… Hmm?」

「We only have one cart right now, so I have to wait until the 「Kiba burger」 sells out, and then start selling 「Myam roast meat」. But that would make having two different dishes meaningless… It's earlier than I predicted, but I'm seriously considering about renting one more cart.」

Ai Fa accept the 「Myam roast meat」, then nodded seriously.

「If that's what you think, then give it a try. I trust in your judgement.」

「This is an important thing, right? If we increase the number of stalls and helpers, our cost will go up too—」

「But you think this is a shortcut towards success, right?」

Ai Fa looked at me quietly.

「I trust in your judgement. Don't make me say that so many times.」

「… I understand. Thank you.」

After nodding firmly, a serene smile suddenly appeared on Ai Fa's face.

「… You are really a greedy man.」

「Like I told you, greedy is—」

□You are an ambitious man.□

Since she changed her phrasing, I didn't need to refute her.

Because of my inadequate planning, the results in these opening three days wasn't as good as expected.

If my judgement was wrong, the entire plan would fail. I learned that from the commotion that happened today.

The southerners and easterners bought all my food, and the westerners didn't get to taste my cooking. It was rather strange to be troubled by something like this.

If business was good for the first ten days, I will introduce a new dish. That was the original plan, but I couldn't afford to take it so easy. Demand had outstripped supply on the third day of the opening, so I had to solve this issue fast.

I already shared my thoughts with Vena Wu.

Once Donda Wu permit this, the Wu clan could send me new helpers from the day after tomorrow.

If I could make it through tomorrow, I would be able to fight back the next day.

□Alright! Time for round two!□

□What is a □raundo□?□

I turned back when I heard Ai Fa's voice. She was sitting with one knee up, resting her arm on her knee and supporting her chin, staring at me.

□Ehh? Ai Fa, you are already done?□

□You are too slow. You still have work to do later right? If you don't act faster, you will lose out on sleep?□

□Don't worry. I already used the excess time to mead the □Kiba burger□ patty. I just need to cut the meat slices for the □Myam roast meat□,

making the tarapa sauce, just trivial stuff. Grilling the poitan tomorrow morning is the hardest part.

……

Hmm? What’s the matter?

… I thought I will be the only one to benefit if you stay in the Fa house. That’s why it’s better for you to stay in house Lutim.

W-What are you saying? Y-You’re not chasing me out right?

You think I will say that now?

Ai Fa’s gaze was calm and steady.

I sipped on the cold soup and scratched my head.

Then why bring that up? Don’t make me feel uneasy.

I’m glad that you want to stay in the Fa house… I’m also happy that you found a job that utilizes your strength even though you are staying in the Fa house.

Ai Fa crawled towards me as she said that.

She ruffled my hair again.

When I patted her head last time, she punched my solar plexus. But she was doing something so intimate without any hesitation.

Y-You know, whenever you do that, I feel like I’m treated like a child.

Is that so? My father Gill will always do this when he praises me.

It had been a while since I saw her pout.

Ah, it doesn’t make me uncomfortable, I just feel a little embarrassed.

… I see.

Ai Fa lowered her eyelids.

Did I say too much? I started reflecting on myself.

The next moment—

Ai Fa knelt on one knee slowly and hugged my head with both arms suddenly.

Ai Fa's body warmth, fragrance and strength engulfed my body and soul.

"I'm so happy that I didn't lose you that night… I'm so happy you chose the Fa house."

"Ai… A-A-Ai Fa?"

My voice was breaking from surprise.

She hugged me with all her might, her soft hair brushed against my cheeks.

My heart almost stopped.

There was a rainbow color glow in her eyes.

If this continues for a few more seconds, a nerve inside me might just break— as I was thinking about that, her warmth, strength and fragrance suddenly left me.

Ai Fa sat down again and rubbed her nose childishly.

"… That's how I feel now."

"D-Don't… scare me like that."

I collapsed onto the floor and had to propped myself up with my arms.

"Y-Your father is really passionate right?"

"Hmm? What's that about father Gill?"

"Ehh?"

"I'm doing this because I want to, it has nothing to do with him."

"……"

"If my actions irked you, I will be more careful in the future. But I can't

hold back my emotions… Sorry for interrupting your meal. Eat up, I feel sleepy.

I Fa said nonchalantly, then pointed at my plate.

This girl… is a million times worse than Vena Wu!

Ai Fa didn’t notice me screaming in my heart and let her down.

I think you already accomplished a lot. Since you don’t think so, then work doubly hard then… I told you before that you may use the copper plates you have as you wish. Tell me if you don’t have enough.

… Can I really believe your words? What if I buy a new hair accessory for you?

I will beat you up.

I see… I get it! I will decide if I should expand to two stalls depending on the sales tomorrow! So, don’t regret it okay?

Why are suddenly so angry?

Ai Fa who had let her hair down leaned in immediately.

… So, I did make you unhappy?

She still looked a little dissatisfied and uneased.

I still didn’t start eating and sighed heavily.

I’m not angry. Sorry…

… You really are a strange man.

I wasn’t strange at all.

However, I couldn’t refute her when I saw Ai Fa’s relieved smile.

No matter what— our war was just beginning.

Mid Meal Snack: A Girl in the Post Station Town

「Tara, listen carefully. Don’t get involved with the denizens of Forest's Edge so easily okay?」

After Asuta and the others left the stall, Dora said with a slightly stern expression.

Tara couldn’t accept what her father said and asked:

「But why? Asuta onii-chan is a good person, that’s why you thanked him right? Why can’t Tara be friends with Asuta onii-chan?」

「Asuta isn’t a bad person. Even though he was wearing the garments of Forest's Edge, he probably came from some other city… Ai Fa who was beside Asuta must be a brave huntress. But getting close to the denizens of Forest's Edge is still dangerous.」

Dora leaned in close to Tara.

「You also saw the denizens from Forest's Edge who caused all those troubles right? There are many barbaric people in Forest's Edge, so don’t go near them carelessly.」

「But… Not just the denizens of Forest's Edge, anyone who drinks and stir up trouble are scary.」

Despite Tara’s rebuttal, Dora still shook his head and dismiss Tara’s protest.

「Even when the denizens of Forest's Edge commit crime, the guards will still let them off, that’s why they are acting so wilfully. If you get involved with such dangerous characters, we will suffer too… I have already thanked them for saving you, so we need not approach them directly in the future.」

Dora stuck his head out of the roof and checked the position of the sun.

「It’s almost two. It’s still early, but help me promote our goods to our customer’s stall. Don’t run around okay?」

…Okay.

Tara left the stall. She still wasn't convinced by his answers.

The streets were filled with all sorts of people. Aside from the residents of Post Station Town, there were some who came from the farms to work here just like Tara — there were also travelers from the south and the east, so there were a huge variety of people.

The denizens of Forest's Edge were a common sight too. The numerous people living in Forest's Edge often purchase their groceries in the Post Station Town.

Almost everyone from Forest's Edge were women, and hunters wearing kiba capes were a rare sight.

Ten days ago, Tara was very frightened when she encountered a hunter from Forest's Edge.

That hunter started drinking in the afternoon, drew his blade in town, and roared like a beast. The light shining in his blue eyes were no different from a beast.

And the one who saved Tara from that ruffian were denizens of Forest's Edge.

It was Asuta who looked nothing like a denizen of Forest's Edge even though he wore their garments, and a young woman with outstanding looks, who wore a kiba cape despite being a girl, Ai Fa.

Ai Fa's eyes shined like a beast too. To be honest, Ai Fa's gaze was tougher and more terrifying than that ruffian.

Ai Fa stopped the ruffians violent act and rescued Tara.

But the guards treated Ai Fa and Asuta like criminals and attempted to bring them to the guard room. If the traveler called Kamyua Yost didn't stood up for them, the guards would have released the ruffian and convicted Asuta and Ai Fa of the crimes.

Why is this happening? The drunkard claims to belong to the chief clan… Is the chief clan the bad guys in Forest's Edge?

Tara thought as she walked on the road.

Asuta had black, shiny eyes like the Semu people, and Tara liked them a lot.

Even though Tara felt Ai Fa was a little scary, she also thinks she looks cool.

Her father Dora didn’t detest them, but still instructed Tara not to go near the denizens of Forest's Edge. Tara couldn’t understand why and felt gloomy.

I want to try Asuta’s kiba cooking.

Dora would never permit her to do that.

Tara walked by herself in the crowded Post Station Town and sighed softly.

The next day, after Tara was done with her chores in the morning, she played with the kids in the city like usual.

As Tara worked in the Post Station Town, she played more often with the children in the city than the kids in the village.

The ones playing with her today was a boy from an inn and a girl from a kimyusu stall.

“You know, my brother working in the castle town came home yesterday.”

After they got tired of playing tag, the boy spoke as they rested.

“And he bought meat from the karon’s back as a gift! Isn’t that amazing? Not thigh meat, but meat from the back.”

The Post Station Town only sold karon thigh meat. Meat from its chest

and back were expensive, and only sold in the castle town.

「The meat is soft and yummy! After eating that meat, I don't want to eat thigh meat anymore!」

「Is that so? There is meat softer than kimyusu?」

「Ah~ they are about the same. But not only is the meat soft, how do I put it… Anyways, it is super tasty!」

「Really? But the skin of the kimyusu is yummy too.」

The girl seemed to be competing with the boy.

「Meat with skin on them is expensive, no one will buy them, right? But if you roast the meat along with the skin, it is incredible tasty.」

「Kimyusu skin is used to make jackets and leather bags. Karon is definitely tastier!」

「Not! We will splurge on ourselves by eating meat with skin once a month! If you don't believe me, then try it next time!」

Tara listened to their conversation happily, then remembered what happened yesterday and interjected:

「Do you think kiba taste good?」

The two of them looked surprised and looked at Tara.

「You mean the kiba that destroys the farms? How can that taste good?」

「That's right! You will grow horns and your skin will be as black as the denizens of Forest's Edge you know?」

「Ehh~ Is that true?」

Asuta's skin was the same as the other westerners, and he didn't have horns.

His hair and eyes were black, but Semu people were black even though they don't eat kiba. Even if her skin turns black, so what?

"I heard that kiba meat is tough and stinky, Only the denizens of Forest's Edge will eat them. How pitiful."

The boy laughed out loud. At this moment, a woman fetching water happened to pass by and knocked the boy's head.

"Hey, don't say that so loudly. If the denizens of Forest's Edge hear you, they will drag you into the forest."

Tara felt gloomy again.

She then yelped, stood up and said:

"It's already noon! I need to return to the stall! See you tomorrow!"

"Yes, bye bye!"

Tara waved her hands and quickly rushed to the north.

She bought a kimyusu meat bun along the way. In the entire Post Station Town, the meat bun is Tara's favourite snack.

… I want to know what kiba taste like.

She couldn't get that thought out of her mind.

Karon thigh meat was tough, and she didn't like karon meat unless it was a stew that had been cooked for a long time.

Was Kiba meat tougher than karon thigh meat?

Kimyusu meat was soft and easy to swallow. But it didn't have much taste and had to be eaten together with Myam and herbs to give it flavor.

Was kiba plainer than kimyusu?

Tara probably couldn't ever taste karon loin meat or kimyusu meat with skin. Only a minority of the Post Station Town residents could enjoy such luxurious delicacies.

Even so, just getting to eat kimyusu and karon everyday was already

very fortunate. Her father kept saying that when they were poor, they couldn’t even afford meat and could only eat kimyusu egg all day.

… I want to try eating kiba meat.

Tara kept thinking about that as she ran on the streets.

When Tara finally reached her father’s stall, she saw the figure of a black-haired youth.

“Ah! Asuta onii-chan!”

She shouted happily.

She stopped suddenly when she saw the person beside Asuta.

It wasn’t Ai Fa.

It was a hunter from Forest's Edge who was about Ai Fa’s height.

The young hunter was shorter than Asuta, wore a kiba cape with a sabre and machete on his waist. He had yellowish brown hair and light chestnut colored eyes

With gaits as smooth as a wild beast, he walked towards Tara.

“Brat! You are about bratty Rimee’s size. How old are you?”

His voice was loud.

He studied Tara with a strong gleam in his eyes.

But Tara wasn’t scared at all.

Asuta stood behind the youth, and was smiling even though he was looking at them worriedly.

Tara squeezed out a reply.

“Eight… Eight years old…”

“That’s the same as Rimee. But you are much thinner, so you look younger.”

The youth squatted down before Tara.

He alternated his shining eyes between Tara and the meat bun, as if he was curious.

As Tara was thinking about something, she had not bitten into the meat bun yet.

“Smell nice. Is it good?”

“… Yes.”

Tara nodded.

“I guess so.”

The youth stared at the bun.

He looked hungry.

So, Tara asked if he want to eat it.

A stranger expression appeared on the youth’s face, but he still took a bite.

“Not good at all. Asuta’s cooking taste much better.”

The youth complained after taking a bite.

“R-Really?”

Tara wasn’t scared of him, but his lack of hesitation in criticizing the meat bun stunned Tara.

The young hunter was shorter than Asuta, but he seemed tougher than even the adults in town.

Is this why everyone’s afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge?

And of course, Tara couldn’t keep her cool completely.

But the admiration in her heart outweighs her fear.

She thinks Ai Fa and this unknown youth were both looked heroic and

cool.

She didn’t know why. Both had forthright eyes, wasn’t fazed by how others saw them, and seemed so righteous.

After that, Kamyua Yost appeared too. They chatted a while, then Asuta and company went home.

Tara didn’t understand what they were talking about, but Asuta seemed to be planning to open a stall in the Post Station Town.

“That’s amazing, Asuta is really going to open a stall.”

“Yes…”

After Tara said that, Dora only gave a vague response.

Dora’s face was already troubled, and now, it looked bitter.

“What’s the matter? Do you feel unwell?”

“Ehh…? No, it’s nothing. I’m just thinking that there are all kinds of people in Forest's Edge.”

“Yes. The people with Asuta are so cool.”

“Cool huh.”

Dora shook his head weakly.

Even though his father’s appearance made Tara worried, she wanted to tell him something.

“Tara wants to try Asuta’s cooking.”

Dora shook his head with a gloomy face:

“Even if we tried kiba meat, we won’t find it good. If Asuta goes around and keep telling people that kiba taste good, everyone will think he is a conman.”

Her father’s voice was filled with worry.

Tara held her father’s thick arms and leaned toward his depressed face.

“We need to try it before knowing if it tastes good. Can I buy Asuta’s cooking with Papa’s copper plates?”

After staying quiet for a moment, he patted Tara’s head with his large hand.

“Tara, when you help me with my work, the copper plates I give you is your wages, you can use them as you wish… But you can’t miss work with stomach ache as an excuse.”

“Yes! Thank you, Papa!”

Tara looked up at her father’s face and smiled.

Four days later, Asuta opened his stall in the Post Station Town.

After the short downpour ended, Tara rushed to Asuta’s stall.

“Amazing! You are really opening a stall here!”

Asuta’s expression seemed more lacklustre than usual but received Tara with a smile right away.

A girl from Forest's Edge was working with Asuta, she had a gentle smile on her.

Tara met this girl before, and she was more cold and indifferent. But she looked really kind and gentle when she smiled.

“The tarapa smells nice! Is that the kiba meal?”

“Yes. I don’t know if you will like it.”

The tarapa in the pot was boiling.

Aside from the tarapa, Asuta also used many other ingredients. The fragrance was really appetizing.

When Tara wanted to buy one, he asked her to try a sample first, and

offered her a plate.

It was a strangely shaped meat, covered in red tarapa sauce.

The meat was flat and circular in shape. After Asuta cut it into small pieces, he placed it on the plate. The cut section of the meat seemed uneven, which was strange to Tara.

Oh right, what kind of animal is a kiba?

Tara had never seen a kiba before.

The traps around the farm would catch kiba sometimes, but Tara and her mother had never seen them. The old women living in the vicinity once said:「You would be cursed just by seeing a kiba.」

Kiba meat looked tasty.

The fragrance stimulated her appetite.

Tara put that meat into her mouth without any hesitation.

She then felt a great impact.

「What is this…」

The sourness of the tarapa was strong, but it was tastier than the tarapa she ate at home. Just like the small tarapa that could be bought in the castle town, they were sweet and wonderful.

The diced vegetable cooked together with the tarapa must be aria. Did the aria brought out this sweetness?

Tara felt a tinge of spiciness and deduced that pico leaves were added into the sauce too. She heard that there were plenty of pico leaves in the Morga Forest.

To sum it up, Tara had never tasted such a delicious sauce.

However— the taste of the kiba was strong and on par with the sauce.

The kiba wasn’t tough and didn’t stink. It broke apart with a gentle bite

and mixed together with the tarapa sauce. A strong taste spread inside her mouth.

Tara never imagined that such delicious meat existed in this world.

The taste lingered no matter how much she chewed. She only had a small piece, but her heart was filled with happiness.

Neither kimyusu nor karon were this tasty.

Could the kimyusu meat with skin or the karon loin meat taste as good as kiba meat?

"Asuta-nii, this is delicious! Really delicious!"

Asuta's expression looked a little uneasy, but the lines on his face relaxed after hearing what she said.

"Ah, wait! Tara, I want your father to try it too before I can accept your copper plates with ease… Eh, I don't have many picks like this, can you reuse it?"

"Yes!"

Tara nodded firmly, then ran on the street.

There was still happiness lingering in her mouth.

Tara could feel this happiness slowly spreading through her entire body.

Dora would definitely be overjoyed after tasting it.

Her father had been acting strange these days, as if he was troubled about continuing to interact with the denizens of Forest's Edge. He was drawn to Asuta and the denizens of Forest's Edge around him, but was hesitant about getting along with them so naturally.

Dora had his worries too.

Tara's mother and elder brothers who worked in the village also said: "Don't get involved with the denizens of Forest's Edge."

When Tara refute him, Dora would always fall into a bitter silence.

A complicated feeling that Tara couldn’t understand was troubling Dora.

There won’t be any problems now.

Asuta wasn’t a liar.

“The chief clan” was the violent ruffians who conned others.

After tasting the kiba meat, the gloomy face of her father would relax too. Tara was filled with joy just imagining that.

She dashed through the streets, splashing the puddles on the ground and finally made it to her father.

Dora was sitting under the roof and looking at Tara with a blank face.

“Look, this is Asuta’s cooking! He used the vegetable you grew to cook such a delicious dish!”

Dora took the piece of kiba meat on the toothpick with a weak smile.

How surprised would her father be? Tara waited in anticipation.

Vol. 5 :

Chapter 1

A+ A- Chapter 1

It was the fourth day since the stall opened.

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

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

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

A guard stood between as if he was mediating between the two camps.

When we approached the rented spot, he glared at us:

“Hey, did you prepare enough food?”

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

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

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

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

“Alright, let’s start off with the “Kiba burger”. Vena Wu, please start the fire.”

“Okay.”

Vena Wu seemed to be in a great mood.

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

“Ahh, the fruit wine smells nice… Is that the new dish…?”

“Yes. Aside from the fruit wine, I also used a herb called Myam in it. I dub this dish “Myam-roasted meat”.”

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

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

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

“I will let you try the“Myam-roasted meat” when business quiets down.”

“Alright… Fufu, I’m looking forward to it…”

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

“Oh…? The fragrance in this pot smells different from the past few

days…

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

Hmm, it smells nice… I’m starting to get hungry again…

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

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

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

There are so many people… as if all the Jaguar

and Semu people have been all gathered here…

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

I have decided to rent another pushcart from tomorrow onwards and

push out a new menu. I prayed quietly in my heart for us to make it through today peacefully.

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

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

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

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

"... Hey, sorry for the commotion yesterday."

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

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

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

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

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

I answered as I made the 「Kiba burger」, and his face turned sour.

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

I felt the same way.

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

Arudas’ stern face broke out into a smile.

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

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

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

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

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

「Hmm? Got it, I will tell him.」

「Hey, is it still not done yet?」

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

I then started making 「Kiba burger」 repeatedly.

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

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

while.

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

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

Asuta, do you need strong fire…?

Yes, please.

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

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

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

Fufu… This reminds me of house Lutim’s wedding…

That’s right, the atmosphere is bustling just like that time.

I’m not good with tending to the hearth… But I like doing it, when I get to do it with you…

I felt honored by her words.

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

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

Okay, it’s almost done.

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

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

These leather pouches were expensive, each costing 15 red copper plates. But they had a large opening and were convenient to use. They were meant to carry fruit wine, and were specially made so that the smell of food wouldn’t linger on them. After discovering this convenient

container, I made up my mind to sell 「Myam-roasted meat」 in my stall.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As expected, long silver hair appeared before me.

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

「Kiba, not sell out, yet?」

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

「Eight…」

Shumimaru fell into deep thought as he looked at me.

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

「Left, three?」

Shumimaru came forth and asked again.

「Yes. What's the matter?」

「... I wait.」

「What?」

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

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

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

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

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

Kamyua Yost appeared before us.

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

“Thank you for your support… Sorry that you made an empty trip yesterday.”

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

I explained what happened to Kamyua Yost when we returned the cart to the “Kimyusu’s Tail Inn” yesterday.

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

“Here, kiba burger for two. Sorry for the wait.”

“Thank you. Work hard from now on too!”

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

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

“… That man, a friend?”

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

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

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

「That’s right.」

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

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

Shumimaru looked as if he was deep in thought again.

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

「That’s right.」

I could only give the same reply.

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

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

「Hey! It's not sold out yet!?」

「Yes, there's just one left.」

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

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

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

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

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

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

□Yeah□□

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

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

□Ehh…□

Vena Wu was on the verge of tears.

I laughed at the sight of her sorrowful face.

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

□Asuta… How mean of you…□

Vena Wu puffed her cheeks.

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

…How adorable.

Shumimaru muttered at this moment.

Huh? Did you say something?

She is adorable. And beautiful.

Easterners would keep a straight face when they compliment women.

Thank you very much…

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

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

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

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

samples.

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

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

「The myam smells nice.」

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

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

「Okay.」

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

It would be great if we could use charcoal. I started making five portions

of 「Myam-roasted meat」, and the rest would be the samples.

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

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

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

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

「What? Are you taking turns to eat?」

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

In conclusion, they liked this dish.

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

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

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

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

「Asuta, can I, ask, one question?」

「Yes, what is it?」

「Asuta, she, wife?」

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

「That’s a secret…」

「I see, excuse me.」

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

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

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

"Thank you for your patronage."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There are still 25 "Myam-roasted meat" left. If we sell them all, I will

carry out the plan I told you about yesterday.

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

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

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

Vena Wu sighed softly.

Sigh… This will be our last day alone together… these four days were so blissful…

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

Because… Leina will be picked from the main house, right…?

I had already braced myself for that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh… They are here already… That sure is early…

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

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

The two approaching us straight from the south was the second sister

and second brother of the Wu clan main house.

2

Long time no see, Asuta.

Leina Wu greeted me first.

Her face was calm.

Yes, it’s been a while… Ten days have passed since our last meeting.

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

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

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

Leina Wu stood before us with a calm smile.

Her pure childlike smile was gone now.

.

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

"Ah, thank you… was it heavy…?"

"Not at all."

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

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

"What's that? It looks like firewood."

"It's firewood… I collected them in the past three days…"

I was confused.

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

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

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

She threw a grudging sideway glance at me.

“Asuta, I wanted to give you a surprise, so I didn’t tell you… but you were so mean and teased me…”

“S-Sorry. I was just joking. I’m really happy about this, thank you.”

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

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

“Thank you, Darum… Don’t you need to rest at home…?”

Darum Wu didn’t answer.

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

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

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

Shut up.

Darum Wu said in a low voice.

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

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

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

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

cool with him now.

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

“Thank you very much for your kind assistance.”

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

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

“Really now, you are so stubborn… Are you going to mimic Papa Donda in such a way too…?”

Vena Wu laughed softly.

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

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

“… I’m not that so depraved that you of all people need to worry about me.”

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

Vena Wu said to me quietly.

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

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

Leina Wu interjected solemnly.

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

Ahh… Lala Wu and Shela Wu huh.

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

Leina Wu smiled gently.

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

peaceful.

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

“…Asuta, is that your new dish?”

Leina Wu looked at the plate used for sampling.

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

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

Leina Wu lowered her eyelids and smiled gently.

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

“Asuta… Can I try it…? Can you make one for me now…?”

“Eh? Of course, no problem.”

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

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

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

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

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

"I see."

Darum Wu continued staring at Vena Wu and nodded.

"What about that Kamyua Yost guy?"

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

"… Is that so."

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

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

「Alright, I'm making it now.」

I tossed the aria and the meat into the pot, and made one 「Myam-roasted meat」.

「It looks delicious…」

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

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

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

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

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

□Leina… This is my share, so no need to hold back… Do you want a bite…?□

□Ehh, but…□

□If you don’t, I will eat it all…□

Vena Wu took another bite after saying that.

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

That was the Leina Wu I knew.

□Then, just one bite…□

Leina Wu carefully reached out her hands.

She gently bit the □Myam-roasted meat□— and couldn’t help smiling blissfully.

□It’s… wonderful. The taste is really strong…□

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

Asuta, you are incredible… I really want to help too…

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

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

Yes, that’s true.

Leina Wu smiled shyly.

She then looked at me timidly.

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

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

After hearing my answer, Leina Wu smiled brightly.

Her smile somehow made my heart ache.

At this moment Darum Wu said anxiously:

"If we are done here, then let's go."

"Oh Darum, want to try a bite...?"

"Who wants to eat that thing?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

□Shut up, don’t cling to me.□

Darum Wu shook off his sister crudely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

□Hmm? W-What happened?□

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

Well… Something did happen…

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

……

Asuta… It’s about time you get married with Ai Fa, right…?

What kind of face was I making now?

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

… Will things have a happy ending if I do that?

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

What?

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

“That’s not a happy ending at all!”

“... I think this is the only way I can be with you...”

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

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

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

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

Ai Fa proposing to me— seemed so unrealistic.

But what if that day will come?

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You are… not wrong…”

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

I kept mum.

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

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

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

If that time comes— what would I do?

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

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

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

An unfamiliar face said in an unfamiliar voice.

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

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

A group that similar dressing and was about his age were gathered behind him. There were five of them, and only one was a girl.

…Welcome.

I received him with a smile.

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

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

Kiba is really delicious you know? How about giving it a try?

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

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

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

He probably came over to mock me because he felt fearful and disdain for the denizens of Forest's Edge. Even though he said these words

cockily, his gaze was wavering. He was smiling but didn’t look happy. From the air he was giving us, my guess is these delinquents were here taunting the denizens of Forest's Edge, to test their guts.

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

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

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

“Only the poor people from the south and east will think this thing taste good! You are an eyesore, get lost!”

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

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

“… That’s interesting, go on and try it.”

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

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

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

“Don’t joke with me, why do I have to eat kiba meat?”

“Why not? If it’s good, we will have some too.”

“Then you try it! If it’s good, I will eat it too.”

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

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

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

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

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

The two of them fell silent the next instant.

As if they were pulled by invisible strings, the youth snickering behind all gathered before the stall.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The five youths and one girl all showed troubled expressions.

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

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

"It looks... really tasty..."

"R-Retard, that's kiba meat."

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

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

"He added myam, it smells so nice."

「Right… But it really looks so delicious…」

「You are right! It looks really good!」

Hmm?

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

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

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

「Oh right, Tara, when to try a sample?」

「Uwah~!」

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

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

「It’s delicious」! This isn’t as soft as Kiba Burger! But it’s yummy! Asuta onii-chan, I want four!」

“Thank you! Don’t your dad and the others need a sample?”

“They told me to hurry up and buy it if I think the sample taste good!”

I was very moved.

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

And it was Vena Wu and Ludo Wu who helped made Uncle Dora open his heart to me.

I smiled at Tara as I was thinking all that:

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

“Yes!”

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

I thought I heard one of the teenagers’ gulps.

Now that I thought about it, my first Semu customer was only interested

in our stall because he saw Tara buying 「Kiba Burger」. Was this child destined to be our lucky star? I wondered to myself.

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

「Yes! Thank you!」

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

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

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

「Okay… I will try it.」

The only girl in the group reached for the plate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Uwah…

H-Hey, are you okay?

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

She muttered:

Absolutely… delicious…

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

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

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

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

But our efforts were finally paying off.

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

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

One of the youth said menacingly and took a toothpick.

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

「Uwah…」

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

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

The girl said arrogantly.

The other four took the samples too.

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

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

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

「Yes.」

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

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

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

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

“Aren’t cha buying? Let me say this first, I won’t share a single bite with you all.”

The youth looked at each other confusedly.

The girl shrugged arrogantly and stared at me again.

“Hurry up, you are making me hungry.”

“Yes! Please wait a moment.”

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

But I quite enjoy being this busy.

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

“Vena Wu, I will leave the brazier to you.”

I turned to her with a smile.

But she didn’t move at all.

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

“Vena Wu…?”

Was she actually dozing off at such a busy time?

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

I never expect Vena Wu to show such dangerous eyes.

Why was she acting like that?

And she was looking at a direction I didn’t expect.

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

I slowly shifted my gaze.

So did the customers before me.

We both felt a sense of horror.

Because a terrifying existence appeared in that direction.

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

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

3

□Uwahh!□

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

The others backed away with their faces pale.

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

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

□Huff~puff~□

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

□… What are you doing…? It smells nice… Just what are you doing…□

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

□Hiee!□

The youth on the ground let out a frail scream. That was how disturbing Mida Tsun’s appearance was

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

proportion all wrong.

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

“Ehh… Mida is hungry… it smells nice here…?”

The pillar kept creaking.

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

“W-What are you doing!? Are you trying to destroy my cart!?”

“Mida… is hungry you know…?”

Mida Tsun looked down at me unhappily.

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

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

Calm down— I had to handle this calmly.

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

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

In short, I had to follow the law.

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

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

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

I explained with simple words.

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

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

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

If I didn’t say anything wrong, he wouldn’t turn to violence… I hope my guess was right.

「……Tay Tsun has copper plates…」

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

「I see.」

I wiped away the cold sweat on my brows.

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

「… Yes…」

「Where is he now?」

「... I don’t know... He was with me just now...」

Weird, this felt like talking to an ignorant child.

「...Because I smelled something nice, so Mida ran over... it smells really nice...」

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

As I was about to offer some samples to him in the meantime—someone appeared.

「...Mida Tsun, what’s wrong?」

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

The next instant, Mida Tsun exhaled loudly.

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

"I see."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"... How much is this food?"

The man— Tay Tsun asked quietly.

“Two red copper plates... Are you buying?”

“Yes.”

“T-There are samples on this plate, you can try it first.”

“No need.”

There wasn’t anything strange about our conversation.

But that still gave me goosebumps.

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

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

... Apparently not.

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

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

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

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

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

「I see.」

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

「Excuse me, I want five.」

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

□… Uwah… It looks yummy. Tay Tsun, it looks yummy…□

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

□That’s true.□

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

He hid his emotions even better than the easterners.

No— Did this man really have emotions?

Kamyua is probably going to sit this one out.

I hoped he won’t interfere.

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

「Here, sorry for the wait.」

I handed the completed 「Myam-roasted meat」 to Yumi.

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

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

「... Uwah...」

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

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

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

He ate the 「Myam-roasted meat」 in one bite.

This was a scene right out of a nightmare.

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

「... Yummy... So yummy...」

「Thank you.」

I squeezed out a smile.

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

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

「The copper plates are all gone.」

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

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

His allowance was given monthly!

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

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

「...Mida wants to eat more.」

「Then come again next month.」

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

「Pardon our intrusion, we are leaving now.」

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

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

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

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

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

Just what is with those guys…

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

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

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

I didn’t know anything.

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

“Sigh…”

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

“Enough already… Why is the youngest son of the Tsun clan in town…? Ugghh… I feel like vomiting…”

“A-Are you okay? Vena Wu, get a hold of yourself!”

“How do I do that… I can’t stand that youngest son of the Tsun clan the most… Just looking at his fat body makes me disgusted…”

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

“I can’t let the Tsun clan see my ugly side… Sigh, I feel really uncomfortable…”

“… You are incredible, as expected of a woman from the Wu clan.”

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

"W… Who was that monster just now…?"

Yumi muttered to herself.

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

After I answered, Yumi's shoulders quivered.

She returned to her senses and stared at me.

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

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

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

The other dazed youth also snapped back to reality.

"I saw him once before. I was very surprised when I saw him for the first

time.

I tried to mediate with a smile.

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

Ah, yes...

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

She opened her eyes wide with surprise again.

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

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

Yeah... it's very tasty.

Yumi looked up at me with demure eyes.

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

Ehh? Please don't mind, I understand that the people of Genos have a

deep hatred towards kiba. I’m very happy to see you try kiba today.

I used this chance to give her a friendly smile.

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

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

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

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

Are you retarded? Stop spouting nonsense. I’m just stating my honest opinions.

She was right.

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

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

how retarded.

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

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

The girl stole a glance my way.

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

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

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

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

Even in Forest's Edge, he is a unique existence— I was about to answer when someone interjected:What are you arguing about? If you are not a customer, then scram. I won’t allow you to disturb this bro’s business!

It was a Jaguar man who looked a little fierce.

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

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

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

The next instant, he was all smiles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Two red copper plates."

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

He laughed, then glared at the western youth.

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

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

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

The Jaguar man said impatiently and waved his hands as if he was

chasing flies away.

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

"Yes, thank you."

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

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

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

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

"Hmmp, I paid before they did."

The Jaguar man gave a dangerous look.

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

「Ah... I want to buy one more.」

Yumi who finished her 「Myam-roasted meat」 gave me more copper plates.

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

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

This girl seemed to be planning something malicious.

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

「Thank you for your patronage!」

I tossed four portions of aria into the pot.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Only ten percent of the customers were westerners.

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

“I can increase the number of stalls with east tomorrow.”

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

“Yes… but I’m worried about the youngest son of the Tsun clan… Asuta, be careful not to be abducted by him, okay…?”

“Abducted? Me?”

“Yes… That youngest son is capable of something that retarded…”

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

“Yes. If he gives chase on the way home, just run off by yourself… I will

try to bring the things back home somehow…

We did need to be prepared for such a situation.

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

Ehh, how disgusting… I can’t stand his baby like face and voice… Asuta, you know how old he is…?

I don’t want to know, don’t tell me.

… He is younger than Ludo, you know…?

I said don’t tell me!

I felt a chill run down my back.

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

We need to be more aware of the situation around us from tomorrow onwards…

□That’s true.□

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

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

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

4

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

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

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

□Great, you returned home safely.□

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

Ah, yeah… Ai Fa, did you hunt that kiba…?

… Why else would I be bringing it home?

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

The huge thing on her shoulder seemed incredibly heavy.

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

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

Okay.

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

With the predicted sales increasing, the ingredients we had to bring back from the Post Station Town also increased. The fruit wines and gigo

that looked like gigantic burdock was especially heavy, so the things we load on our return trip was about the same as our trip to town.

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

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

Yes…

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

What’s the matter? Are you worried about something?

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

Eh? I-In what way?

The fact that a woman can hunt such a huge kiba is just unbelievable to me…

Vena Wu sighed.

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

Vena Wu was really good at imagining things.

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

"Well, I'm going back then… See you tomorrow…?"

"Alright, thanks again."

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

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

"Hmm? What's the matter?"

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

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

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

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

"I see, do rest well."

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

"You are back very late today… No, this is the time you are scheduled to return, right?"

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

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

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

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

"So, how was your business?"

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

"What?"

Ai Fa turned tense.

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

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

Ai Fa nodded sternly, then tilted her head quizzingly.

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

"Hmm? It should be right after noon passed."

"…Did you sell 70 meals that quickly?"

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

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

“… What’s the matter, Ai Fa?”

“Nothing, I almost grabbed your head unconsciously again.”

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

“That was close.”

I see.

She actually didn’t have to restrain herself.

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

Besides, why did she described a head pat with the verb “grab”?

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

"Shela Wu?"

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

"Ah... That coquettish woman with dark hair."

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

"She's really charming, huh."

"Ehh?"

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

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

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

“Hmm, her culinary skills are excellent, she is a perfect support. I’m looking forward to tomorrow.”

“……”

“Hmm? What is it?”

“Your look completely different from your depressed self yesterday. Your eyes and face are both filled with strength.”

“Don’t bring up what happened yesterday please, I was just tired.”

I scratched my head and smiled wryly.

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

Her face closed in on me quickly and stopped suddenly.

“A-Ai Fa, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing, I almost hugged your head again.”

Ai Fa nodded firmly with a serious face.

That was close.

I see.

Was she serious?

But there was no way she could joke.

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

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

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

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

Hmm… Is that the smell of the fruit that attracts kiba?

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

“Asuta, how many times do I have to tell you—”

“No! I’m not talking about your body scent! You are using the “sacrificial hunting style”, correct?”

Ai Fa pouted with her face still red.

“I didn’t use the “sacrificial hunting style”, I just put it in the traps I set. That fruit has a strong smell, so it would get on me somehow.”

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

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

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

There were only two people in the Fa house, so just hunting one kiba

every five days would be enough. However, Ai Fa had hunted several times this amount in these twenty days. She didn’t have to use the dangerous fruits that attracts kiba—

Ai Fa still pouted unhappily.

“I already told you, I’m not using the “sacrificial hunting style”. I have been using that fruit in my traps before I even met you. Don’t keep complaining.”

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

“… What of it?”

“No, I mean… I’m worried about you getting injured.”

“Hmmp!”

Ai Fa averted her head.

She glanced at me sideways.

“Let’s discuss this when I really get injured.”

"But…"

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

"I see."

I could only nod in agreement.

"I understand. Sorry, it's my bad… I didn't have enough resolve."

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

Her tone turned gentle and her eyes were bright.

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

"So that's what you are concerned about."

I couldn't help smiling wryly.

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

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

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

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

Ai Fa reached out and grabbed me.

Her face was red with embarrassment.

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

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

I raised my hands in surrender in a panic.

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

"... You are too sly."

"Sly?"

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

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

"... Then, I can do as I wish?"

Ehh?

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

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

Our conversation was too weird.

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

"... Hmmp."

Ai Fa unhanded me.

Was she going for a hug?

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

“I’m not like you. You are an unreasonable fool, but I will follow my own principle to the end.”

She was exaggerating too much.

I still apologized to her anyway:

“I’m really sorry. I will be more careful in the future and not make you uncomfortable… We should end this meaningless squabble and start on our work.”

“Hmmp.”

Ai Fa snorted, and walked to the entrance.

“What are we eating tonight?”

“Anything is fine. What do you want to eat?”

Ai Fa suddenly stopped.

After a while, she replied smugly:□Hamburg steak.□

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

□That's right. We ate □Myam-r Roasted mMeat□ yesterday, and shabu shabu the day before. Let's have normal hamburg steak today then.□

□Yes.□

Ai Fa started wearing her shoes.

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

Hmm, what was I doing… Right, preparing the meat patty for □Kiba Burger□.

I had to dice the aria.

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

The next moment— someone hugged me tightly from behind.

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

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

“Retard, you are full of openings.”

Ai Fa laughed cheerfully.

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

No.

Dear house head, that wasn’t it.

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

Vol. 5 :

Chapter 2

A+ A- Chapter 2

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

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

So slow… If they don’t hurry, there will be another commotion.

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

It’s fine, let’s prepare as slowly as possible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I already calculated everything related to this.

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

“Earning 13 kiba’s worth in one day… I feel dizzy just hearing that…”

“No, we can’t sell everything today. I don’t think that is possible.”

“Really…? It’s hard for me to imagine the scene of us not selling out…”

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

“Excuse me, let me through!”

Reinforcements have arrived.

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

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

“You are very punctual. We were probably too early. Let’s meet up

behind the inn tomorrow.

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

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

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

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

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

I heard that Shela Wu had a weak constitution. But

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

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

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

□Okay□□ □Yes!□□Alright.□

The three of them answered one after another.

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

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

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

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

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

For the sake of Vena Wu's reputation, I had to explain that she wasn't

clumsy at all. She did burn the meat sometimes when she tended to the hearth, but she had not made any mistake while tending to the stall in town.

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

Lala Wu looked at the dozens of customers fearlessly.

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

"It's almost done."

I tossed the diced aria into the heated pot.

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

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

"Uwah, it smells great— So this is myam?"

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

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

Lala Wu blinked her sea blue eyes.

Asuta… you looked really happy.

Ehh? I-Is that so?

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the guards ran over in a panic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I turned to the stall responsible for the 「Kiba burgers」.

「Vena Wu, are both of you ready?」

「Yes, we are...」

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

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

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

「Okay!」

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

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

「Sorry, please wait for a moment!」

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

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

"Sorry, please wait for a while..."

They sold 20 portions too.

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

"Shela Wu, are things going alright?"

"Things are fine right now..."

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

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

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

「Vena Wu, let’s trade places.」

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

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

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

「Hey.」

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

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

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

「Sorry! Please wait just a bit longer!」

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

Incredible… I did hear about it, but I didn’t expect business to be so good.

Shela Wu said to me quietly:

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

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

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

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

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

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

As I was thinking about that, the meat patties were cooked. I muttered

Well done! and called for Vena Wu again.

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

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

The wall of people was starting to thin.

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

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

This Wu clan woman showed no mercy in her words.

But she was very reliable.

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

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

The customers who completed their purchase stood right behind them to

enjoy their meal. This place was still incredibly crowded.

I sold more than 30 「Myam-roasted meat」 in the morning… isn't that a little too popular?

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

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

But could we really last 5 hours like this?

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

「Asuta onii-chan, I want two!」

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

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

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

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

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

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

「Ehh? Is he not feeling well?」

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

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

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

「Thank you…! Ah, nice to meet you!」

「Hmm? Ah, oh? Hello…」

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

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

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

"Yes! See you next time!"

Tara ran off quickly.

The next customer was the architect Arudas.

"Hi, I overslept a little today… Oh, so this is the new product?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the second day of opening, this man criticized the 「Kiba burger」 very thoroughly.

「… Thank you for making the trip here!」

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

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

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

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

□Alright! Please wait for a moment!□

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

□Hmmp.□

Pops grunted and reached for the toothpick.

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

Pops put the meat into his mouth.

The other three did the same reluctantly.

□Uwah, this tastes great.□

Arudas cheered.

□Just the fragrance alone is so appetizing, and it tastes amazing! I thought nothing can surpass that tarapa kiba meat, but I was wrong. I'm

going to buy this dish from tomorrow onwards.

Thank you!

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

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

… This is bad.

The young Jaguar standing beside him muttered.

My heart started to race.

That’s right, really bad.

Another elderly Jaguar man shook his head.

So— they couldn’t accept it after all.

After receiving their complaints, I had not met any other Jaguar people who had problems with the kiba meat. It seemed that this group of

people couldn’t accept the taste of kiba meat no matter what.

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

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

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

Arudas’ laughter drowned out my voice, and he happily bit into his 「Myam-roasted meat」.

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

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

Pops remained silent.

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

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

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

He handed his copper plates to me.

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

「Eh…? Ah, a-alright!」

I grabbed a grilled poitan frantically.

Another Jaguar man gave me his copper plates.

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

「T-Thank you.」

As I made another 「Myam-roasted meat」, I stole another glance at Pops.

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

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

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

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

As I was about to thank him—

「What kind of joke is this!」

Pops' furious voice drowned out my voice.

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

「Hey, what the hell is this!?」

「W-What do you mean…?」

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

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

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

I answered Pops as I prepared food for three.

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

Another elderly Jaguar man interjected.

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

“T-Thank you.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ah, it's so tasty!

Yeah, this dish is delicious.

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

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

When he heard what they said, Pops finally spoke:

「..... Can you prove that this is kiba?」

「Ehh?」

I was shocked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

「Maybe it is Madarama snake or Barb wolf!」

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

Arudas said with surprise.

「… That’s true.」

Pops muttered to himself, his voice had turned whimsical.

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

「So, this really is kiba meat…?」

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

I confirmed what he said. I didn’t know what Pops was thinking at all.

Pops sighed deeply.

「… I was wrong.」

「What?」

「I thought kiba wasn't tasty at all, but I was wrong. The dish last time was unpalatable, but this dish is splendid. The problem must lie with your culinary skill, it's not the kiba's fault.」

He might be right, but I didn't understand why he was so depressed.

「I only like thinly sliced karon thigh meat.」

「Eh? Ah, yes.」

「Boiled kimyusu meat isn't even worth mentioning. Roasted kimyusu is the best.」

「Yes…」

「Kiba doesn't taste bad, the important thing is how it is cooked.」

Pops sighed again as if it was the end of the world.

「But I said something retarded, and thought that kiba meat has no value… I'm ashamed of my own retardedness.」

「C-Customer, please don’t mind such a trivial thing!」

Jaguar people were very emotional, so that was how they were like when they become depressed.

I consoled him in a panic:

「To be honest, I thought that 「Kiba burger」 which was a rare dish would draw the interest of the townspeople. However, I realized that this dish wasn’t suitable for people trying kiba for the first time. I only realized my mistake after you told me about its flaws.」

「But…」

「It’s the same with seasoning. Aside from you, no one else told me their complaints so readily. Your words were kind advices for me.」

I didn’t know if what I was doing was right, but I couldn’t help saying them out.

「When you complained that the 「Kiba burger」 tastes bad, I was really frustrated. And thanks to you, I did all I could to think up a solution. I’m very grateful.」

「… I see.」

Pops muttered softly:

“Thanks to you, it’s my turn to feel frustrated.”

“Ah… Sorry…”

“No need to apologize. I admit that I was wrong, but I won’t apologize to you.”

He then knocked the counter gently.

When he removed his hand, I found two red copper plates on the counter.

“I’m willing to pay for this delicious meal. Hurry up, we need to start working soon.”

Pops said to me with a smile and showed an arrogant face again.

2

The first half of the battle was over.

That might be so, but we got over the morning peak period in just an hour. During this time, we sold 34 「Kiba burgers」and 37 「Myam-roasted meat」. The speed was about one and a half times that of yesterday.

Normally, the crowd would be sparse at this time. However, things were unusual today, and the road was filled with people.

A group was gathered at the corner of the streets, whispering to themselves. A few girls were browsing the accessories in the neighboring stall and would steal glances our way at times. A middle-aged man stood in the center of the road and stared at our stall. All of them were westerners with yellowish-brown or ivory skin.

Until yesterday, the crowd would disperse when the customers left. But it seemed that the westerners couldn't ignore me anymore. Why were the southerners and easterners so engrossed with kiba food? They probably felt it was unfathomable.

「Looks like things are slowing down~ Asuta, will there still be customers later?」

「Yes, the crowd will only be here when it is noon. That would be the time for us to make money.」

The easterners and southerners gathered early in the morning out of fear of the merchandise getting sold out. If we are open until the afternoon today, the customers will spread out their visiting time. So it

depends on whether we can operate until noon.

“Hmm… I should have prepared more “Myam-roasted meat”. To think that we almost sold 40 of them in just the morning…”

“Didn’t I tell you…? We will definitely sell out today.”

Vena Wu in the stall next door said with a gleeful smile.

“The customers consist of only southerners and easterners. Aside from that brat, I didn’t see any other westerners.”

Lala Wu swept the stone paved road a little agitatedly.

“Why do they keep staring at us if they don’t want to buy anything, how unpleasant.”

“That’s fine. We need to get them curious, then they will try. I think this is a big improvement.”

“Hmmp””

Lala Wu seemed reluctant to accept that.

「Since there aren't any customers, do you want to try the food? Are you hungry?」

「Ehh… I'm hungry from the smell of the food. But shouldn't you leave the extra portions to the townspeople?」

「These aren't excess portions, but the samples I prepared and accounted for. I also grilled some poitan for sampling use.」

I took out the poitan from a cloth pack.

「Uwah, what's that? It's so tiny!」

「This is the poitan for the staff to sample.」

The sample poitan was one size smaller than the 「Kiba burger」, about 10 cm in diameter and thinner. I only used a third of one poitan for this.

「I will be done right away, please tend to the stall.」

I took out the smallest patty from the leather pouch, which was about 8 cm big. As the mini meat patty was about 2 cm thick, it looked plump and cute.

After heating up the meat patty in the pot, I made two mini 「Kiba

burger.

"Sorry for the wait. Many customers are looking at us, can you eat outside of the stall?"

"Thank you... It looks delicious."

Shela Wu was all smiles.

I walked back to the "Myam-roasted meat" stall and handed the sample to Lala Wu. She laughed happily just like Ludo Wu did.

When the two of them headed to the empty space to the right to try the samples happily, Vena Wu looked at me sorrowfully.

"Vena Wu, I also prepared your share. Please bear with it for now, I can't let all three of you go at the same time."

"Ehh... I can eat too...?"

"Yes. Since we have gotten additional helpers, I will prepare staff lunch every day."

After I answered, Vena Wu who was standing two meters away reached for me with her right hand.

…I can’t reach…

Of course, you can’t.

By the way, did she have the habit of reaching for my clothes when she was happy?

I put the brazier back into the cart and heated up the meat and aria on the plate.

I then took out a wrapping made with half a poitan and made a mini Myam-roasted meat.

Lala Wu, this is your first day on the job, so I hope you can try both dishes. Can you still eat?

When she heard me, Lala Wu ran over to hit my back and said:Of course I can!

Lala Wu probably thought that physical contact was a sign of friendship, but all I felt was pain.

After that, Vena Wu and I ate one staff lunch each to stave off our hunger. During this time, only one Jaguar man came to buy theMyam-roasted meat.

However, I realized that more and more westerners were on the road. The rules of the Post Station Town forbid me from touting for customers loudly or leaving the stall to advertise. As I was wondering how I could get these people to come over, a familiar group approached us from the north.

There were five of them, and all of them were cloaked. Four of them walked towards the 【Kiba burger】 stall, and only one stopped before me.

He took off his hood, and it was Shumimaru of the 【Silver Vase】 as expected.

【Asuta, I’m late.】

【Welcome, are you buying 【Myam-roasted meat】?】

【No, today, rotate to other dish.】

In that case, why did he come here? As I was about to ask, he said: 【Asuta, stall owner, greeting.】

Shumimaru nodded at Lala Wu who he met for the first time, and his black pupils suddenly focused on my working platform.

「... That knife.」

「What?」

「Unfamiliar shape, from the west?」

「No, this is from my hometown.」

「Your hometown, where is it?」

「... A country named Japan. No one seemed to have heard of this country.」

「Japan, don't know.」

Shumimaru kept staring at the Santoku knife as we spoke.

「This knife, beautiful. Can I, observe closely?」

「Ehh...? No, this is a tool I'm using to cook, so I can't let any customer touch it.」

「I no, touch. I can, see?」

What was going on?

I didn’t think there was anything suspicious about Shumimaru. But he was a Semu who concealed his expressions, so I still felt a little uneasy.

After hesitating for a few seconds, I grabbed the black handle, pointed the tip downwards, and lifted it before my chest.

The tall Shumimaru bent over slightly and stared at the body of the Santoku knife.

「... Beautiful. Incredible craftsmanship.」

「Thank you.」

「I know, you cherished it deeply. Excellent tools, if no cherish, will blunt.」

The one who cared for it wasn’t me.

I also used all the knowledge and experience I had to maintain it with the unfamiliar whetstone of this world. However, the one who maintained this knife carefully for twenty years was my Dad.

I felt melancholic from Shumimaru’s words. I quietly put the Santoku knife onto the work platform.

「Steel, Jaguar, renowned. Jaguar, produce, many steel. Semu, few steel.」

「Ah, I see.」

「Semu, steel, precious. So, steel, important.」

As he spoke, Shumimaru took out a knife from his cloak.

It was about 20 cm and kept inside a black leather sheath. The length of the blade was similar to the Santoku knife, but it was twice as wide as the Santoku knife. The handle was made from ebony wood, and swirly patterns were carved into it.

「Because steel precious, Semu, bladesmith, bring life to the blades.」

No matter how abundant steel was in a nation, the work done by the bladesmiths remained the same.

However— this knife was very attractive.

「We, sell knives, in Genos.」

「Ah, so this knife is your merchandise.」

「Steel, knife, Jaguar, renowned. But Semu, knife, excellence.」

Semu people didn’t show their emotions, so this was probably a way for him to show his competitive side.

Shumimaru blinked troublingly.

「Genos, many chef, use, Semu knives.」

「Chefs…?」

At this moment, I realized it.

I heard that the Post Station Town didn’t have any professional chefs. They could only be found inside the rock walls.

「Is this a kitchen knife?」

「Yes.」

「Are you— doing business inside the Genos castle town?」

「Yes.」

Speaking of which, Shumimaru’s group came from the north.

On the first day of business, when a member of the 「Silver Vase」 visited our stall, they came from the same direction.

They were returning to the Post Station Town from the castle town to the north.

「... Do the chefs in the castle town use Semu knives?」

「Not all. But many.」

「Can I look at the knife?」

Shumimaru rose the corner of his lips a little.

「I’m happy, you asked.」

He turned the handle towards me and pushed it my way.

No matter what kind of knife the chef in the Post Station Town used, it had nothing to do with me. Being just an apprentice chef, I couldn’t differentiate how good a blade was.

However, Shumimaru took out this knife after complimenting Dad’s Santoku knife, as if this was the pride of the Semu. He had my curiosity, and now he had my attention.

I drew out the blade from the black leather sheath with bated breath.

It was a single-edged knife, and the blade was almost rectangular.

With a breadth of 8 cm, it was thinner than normal vegetable knives. The tip of the knife was slightly curved, and the shape resembled the scythe style vegetable knives commonly found in the Kansai region.

On closer inspection, I saw an intrinsic whirlpool design on the side of the silver blade. The design was detailed, and I couldn’t feel any groove at all. This decoration did not affect the cut surface of the food at all.

「... Is this a vegetable cutting knife?」

「Yes.」

A single blade knife with a thin body. My guess was right.

This knife was beautifully made.

The handle that was similar to ebony wood was smooth and easy to wield.

「Please, cut.」

「Ehh? Isn't this your merchandise? Can I try it?」

「No cut, no know, sharpness.」

Not just Semu, steel was expensive in this world. Compared to food, steel was very expensive. So I couldn't buy a cutting knife without any hesitation. However, I did want to test the sharpness of this beautiful knife.

「Well then, I will try it a little—」

I took out some tino that wasn't cut yet, folded the leaves in half, and started shredding them.

The sharpness was flawless.

I tried the Wu clan's knives when I tended to their hearth, and those couldn't compare to this knife at all. To be honest, this knife could even rival my father's Santoku knife.

This was a knife specialized for preparing vegetables, so the blade needed to be stiff and sharp. In contrast, the vegetable knife of the Wu clan was not as sharp as the Santoku knife.

「... This is indeed an excellent knife.」

Shumimaru nodded. He had a small cloth in one hand and extended his other hand to me.

I placed the knife on a clean plate and pointed the handle towards Shumimaru.

He cleaned the knife gracefully.

「I can only buy this kitchen knife when I earn more money... How much is that knife?」

「Twenty, white copper plates.」

This knife was just as expensive as the iron pot I bought a while back.

The vegetable knives sold in the Post Station Town were priced at 4 white and 5 red copper plates. The price of a high-quality product was incredible. But I thought it was a reasonable price.

「…Asuta, if you buy, white copper plates, 18.」

「Ehh?」

「We, blue month, stay in Genos. If you want, tell me.」

「… I understand, thank you.」

I nodded with a smile.

Shumimaru raised the corner of his mouth slightly again— and then reverted to being expressionless swiftly.

「I'm, hungry. I want 「Kiba burger」, eat.」

「Alright, thank you for visiting us every day.」

Shumimaru nodded, then walked to the stall next door. Lala Wu watched him leaving guardedly, then spoke to me quietly:

「What? He wants 18 white copper plates for just a knife? Isn't that too expensive?」

「Yes. But I want that knife very much.」

…Buy it then? You already earned several hundred copper plates, right?

Even if I earn a hundred copper plates, I will only be left with half after accounting for the operational cost.

So what? You earn so much every day. If you don’t spend it, the copper plates will crush the flooring in your house.

She was exaggerating too much. However, if I continue to run this business successfully, I might really earn enough money to buy that knife.

No, now wasn’t the time for material desires. We were still walking on a tightrope and needed to stabilize our lives first.

But I couldn’t help wondering:

Is the only desire I have in this world are culinary tools!?

Was there anything that Ai Fa wanted?

Ai Fa only bought daily necessities. She was worse than me at figuring

out how to spend those excess copper plates.

If I secretly buy a hair accessory for her, will she really beat me black and blue?

After the morning rush was over, the Tsun clan didn’t assault us. So I fell into delusion and had a peaceful morning.

3

After 【Silver Vase】 and Shumimaru left, Shela Wu called out to me.

【There’s only one 【Kiba burger】. Can we take out the additional tarapa and heat them up?】

【Ah, please do. Do put the leftover hamburg steak and the samples onto the plate.】

【Alright.】

【Lala Wu, please watch the stall.】

【Yup.】

I went over to the 「Kiba burger」 stall to observe Shela Wu's and Vena Wu's work.

When the 「Silver Vase」 appeared, they had already chopped the tarapa. Vena Wu deftly added wood into the brazier, and Shela Wu placed the tarapa into the pot.

「...Asuta, there is a lot of tarapa left. Isn't adding two of them a little too much?」

「You are right. One should be enough I guess?」

「I think so too, so I only cut one.」

Shela Wu smiled.

「In that case, the amount of aria and fruit wine will need to be halved too, right?」

「Yes, please.」

We started cooking the tarapa sauce.

I added a little of myam into the sauce today, and the fragrance got even stronger.

Will this aroma draw in the westerners crowding the streets? As I was wondering about that, a group came over as if they were answering my thoughts.

「Hi, I came today too. I even brought my friends.」

The one who appeared was the only girl of the delinquent from yesterday—Yumi.

「Ah, thank you very much…」

My voice faded off mid-sentence because I saw the group of young girls her age standing behind Yumi.

There were four of them, and they all had ivory skin. They were dressed like Yumi, with a colorful tube top, and a dress that flowed down to their ankles. Was this the standard attire of the girls in western cities?

「Ehh? This is tarapa. It smells like you have added myam, it’s not the dish I had yesterday, right?」

「No. The stall next door sells the 「Myam-roasted meat」 you had. This dish is called 「Kiba burger」, I’m making additional portions right now. Will you try it when I’m done?」

□Yes! I want to try.□

I thought she was a fierce girl yesterday, but she gave a completely different expression when she smiled. Even though her body was giving off a sexy air, her expression was pure and innocent.

□Asuta, the tarapa is done.□

Shela Wu called out to me softly.

□I know. Just the seasoning is left…□

As I was preparing to handle that, I stopped.

□… Can you do the seasoning for this?□

□Ehh?□

When I saw Shela Wu open her eyes wide, I went closer to her while maintaining a polite distance away.

□Shela Wu, please add in salt and pico leaves as you deem appropriate. If it is too bland, I will adjust it. If it tastes too thick, I will add a bit more tarapa.□

…Yes, I understand.

Shela Wu probably knew that this was part of her job, and she didn't show any hesitation in her eyes.

I nodded and turned to the customers.

Well then, would you like to try the dish you had yesterday?

That's great. I already tried it, so let them try the sample.

One of the girls looked at us timidly, and tried to stop us:

W-Wait, Yumi…

Don't worry! I already explained to you, right? It's super tasty. Just think of it as me tricking you and try it.

But…It's still…

The girls squirmed their ivory skinned bodies reluctantly.

The same thing happened when Uncle Dora brought the clothing stall owner and the pot dealer to try the sample. But why was the

atmosphere completely different from back then?

Speaking of which, only the adult men from the south and east were here to make a living in the Post Station Town. Hence, the only young female customers I had were Tara and Yumi.

That was why I appeared so lost in front of this group of young girls.

I had never considered this sort of problems. I might have been influenced by the simple lifestyle in Forest's Edge for the past month.

Ignoring my situation for now, from what I knew, every denizen from Forest's Edge had honest and simple personalities. It was the same with their women. I was surrounded by many women from Forest's Edge when I caretook the hearth. Hence, the girly actions and screams of the city girls were a heavy burden to me.

But they were my customers, so I said to them □This way, please.□ with a smile, and guided them to the stall selling □Myam-roasted meat□.

I then said to Shela Wu quietly:

□Have you seasoned it?□

□Yes… Please try it.□

Shela Wu asked me to sample it with a tense face. I nodded and picked up the spoon to do a taste test.

No problem.

Shela Wu only tried the tarapa sauce a few times, and she could already reproduce the taste of the sauce. She seemed to have a natural affinity for cooking. In Forest's Edge that didn't place much importance on culinary skills, I think Shela Wu was a valuable existence.

"Well done. Now cook the meat patty, please."

"... Okay."

Shela Wu sighed in relief.

Compared to the other women in the Wu clan, I made Shela Wu work the hardest, so I should give her the remuneration she deserves one day.

"Well then..."

I turned to the customers. The girls were still squirming and saying: "But..." "I don't wanna..."

Stop squirming. I couldn't help venting in my heart. It seemed that I was

still not mature enough.

Yumi flicked her long brown hair impatiently.

「Really now, you all are so timid. Hmm… W-What's your name?」

「Me? I'm Asuta.」

「Asuta huh. What an interesting name. Asuta, please let me try the sample again. If I do that, they will finally make up their minds.」

「Okay, thank you for your kind actions.」

After I answered with a smile, Yumi frowned a little.

「…Asuta, how old are you?」

「What? I'm 17.」

「You are just one year older than me. You don't need to be so polite.」

「How could I do that! You are an esteemed customer of mine, I can't be rude…! This way, please.」

「…Tch.」

Yumi clicked her tongue as if she was throwing a fit. She walked towards the 「Myam-roasted meat」 stall.

The four girls gave chase in a group, as if they didn’t dare to leave Yumi’s side.

「Hmm? Lala Wu, did you already start the fire?」

「Huh? I thought you wanted to heat up the kiba meat, so I prepared ahead of time. Was I too nosey?」

「No, your judgment is correct. Please wait a moment.」

On the plates were enough kiba meat for the girls to sample.

I tossed the meat in the plate into the pot, poured in some sauce, and the aroma of the myam and fruit wine burst forth.

「See? It smells nice, right?」

Yumi looked at the girls smugly.

The girls all squeezed together and continued to squirm.

They might have looked terrified, but from my observations, they weren't that afraid of the kiba meat. The cloth stall owner and pot dealer who visited the other day were more scared than them.

How long they stayed in Genos, their gender, and their age— all these factors determined how much the residents of the Post Station Town were afraid of kiba.

「Sorry for the wait, please help yourselves.」

「Yes, thank you.」

Yumi put my meat into her mouth fearlessly.

「Ah」 as I expected, it's delicious. Hey, compared to the kiba meat cooked with tarapa, which one tastes better?」

「Everyone has their own preference. Girls would probably prefer the tarapa one.」

「Then I will try both dishes...! Are you really not trying? Do you really believe the superstition that your skin will turn dark if you eat the kiba?」

The girls were still uneasy after hearing what Yumi said.

At this moment, someone walked to the stall from behind them.

「I want to ask... is trying the samples free?」

Two youths with ivory skin asked.

They were asking Yumi, not me.

「Hmm? That’s right. Try a sample, then pay to buy one if you like the taste.」

「I see...」

The youths looked at me meekly.

I started smiling.

「Please try this. These two kiba stalls have completely different seasoning. Do compare them.」

「What do you think?」「What should we do?」

The youths were hesitant.

「Asuta, the meat is done.」

「Yay!」

When Shela Wu told me the meat patty was cooked, Yumi rushed over happily.

「Kiba is delicious, and I’m confident about both… Uwah!」

「Hyaa!」

「Kyaa!」

The youths and I both screamed.

While they were lowering their heads troublingly, a totos moa stretched its long neck in between the youths.

「Excuse me.」

An emotionless voice came from above.

I couldn’t see where the voice was coming from because of the roof. When I bent down, I found a Semu man in traveling attire riding on the back of the totos.

「Hey! Riding on totos is prohibited in town!」

After Yumi shouted energetically, the man said 「Pardon me!」, then jumped onto the stone-paved road.

He wore a cloak and had a dark face covered in sand. He was probably a traveler who came from the north. This Semu man looked at the signboard and then the sampling plate.

「... Kiba?」

「Yes, this is a kiba dish. Do you want to try a sample?」

I said bravely and pointed at the plate.

This Semu traveler seemed to understand western language. He nodded and took a toothpick.

「The other stall is also selling kiba dish. It’s a seldom seen dish that uses tarapa.」

The traveler nodded again and left the stall while holding the reins of the totos.

At this moment, someone shouted crudely from the direction he was headed:

「Uwah! Don’t browse the stalls with your totos, put it in a totos stable!」

Before I realized it, a Jaguar man appeared in the stall next door and bought a 「Kiba burger」.

The Semu man said 「Excuse me!」 again, and reached for the sample.

「Really now, the Semu are always a problem...」

The Jaguar man avoided the totos while muttering detestedly to himself, and walked over.

「Huh? Oh, you are selling a kiba dish here too?」

「Yes. From today onwards, we will be expanding to two stalls.」

「I thought I smelled myam, so it’s from this stall! Are the dishes different?」

「Yes. Would you like to try a sample?」

The man walked over, pushed aside the hesitant youth, and took a toothpick.

His eyes opened wide in surprise after eating it.

「Uwah, this stall is delicious too… I didn’t notice this place and bought the kiba dish from the stall next door.」

「Sorry about that. Would you like to change your dish?」

「But I want to eat the one I just bought…」

He lowered his head frustratedly and stared at me.

「Nevermind! I know! I will get this one too! You will close your stall at dusk, right? In that case, I will eat a good one now, and have a lighter dinner! How much is one?」

「T-Two red copper plates.」

「Such a budget price. Awesome, two of these just cost four red copper plates.」

He placed the copper plates on the counter with a satisfied smile.

「Thank you for your patronage, please wait a moment!」

At this moment, I heard a crude voice.

「What, you are actually selling kiba food?」

Three yellowish brown-skinned men were before the stall next door. They had sabres and axes on their waist and were dressed like gangsters.

「Who will buy such things in Genos? You can earn a tidy amount of copper plates by using your beautiful face and sexy body, right?」

Not only did they have sabres and axes, they also held fruit wine bottles in their hands.

I felt the urge to help them out, but Lala Wu grabbed my arm.

「Asuta, leave them be. You won’t be of any help even if you go. Leave it to Vena-nee.」

「But…」

□When the women of Forest's Edge walk alone in town, they will often encounter such a situation. Those men are just small fries, Shela Wu and I can shoo them off too.□

□... A bunch of retards. They don't even have the resolve to make an enemy out of the denizens of the Forest's Edge.□

A Jaguar customers also ate his □Kiba burger□ calmly.

□Don't be bothered about them, and make my food quick. I need to go back to work after I'm done.□

□A-Alright...□

I put the aria into the pot and felt my heart hanging in the air.

I couldn't hear what Vena Wu said, but those men were yelling barbarically:□What did you say?□□Are you kidding me!□

When I roasted the meat and finished the □Myam-roasted meat□, those men had already left somberly with□Kiba burgers□ in their hands.

□Didn't I tell you? Vena-nee gets harrassed very easily, so she's used to it.□

Vena Wu was impressive. I sighed, and the two hesitant youths suddenly called out to me with a weak voice.

"Excuse me... C-Can we try a sample...?"

"Of course!"

I checked again, and the girls were already eating the "Kiba burger" from the next stall. Yumi had bought her food ahead of the others and was chatting happily with Vena Wu as she enjoyed her "Kiba burger".

"Uwah... It tastes great.""It's a bit tough, but it's not gamey at all."

The two western men discussed their impressions.

What an introverted pair of youths.

"Please try a sample in the neighboring stall too."

At this moment, a Semu man walked over and quietly took out his copper plates.

"W-Welcome! Please hold on for a moment!"

It suddenly got busier.

I looked up, and the sun was already at its peak.

Two and a half hours had passed before I knew it, and the second half of the battle had begun.

At the same time, I could see that the goal was in sight.

When the two youths and four girls decided to buy the 「Kiba burger」 and 「Myam-roasted meat」, there were less than 20 of each product left.

「So this is the kiba dish that is the talk of the inn.」

Jaguar people crowded over. An equal number of Semu men approached quietly. It wasn't to the extent of the morning crowd, but the stall was flooded with customers.

When they saw the customers gathering, some ivory skinned people also came over.

And of course, not everyone who came bought the merchandise. Half of them went off without sampling, and a small number left as if they were fleeing after trying a bite.

However, there were still a few who bought the food worriedly.

"Hey, is this kiba?"

A group of children asked me.

They were younger than tara, about 5 or 6 years old.

"Yes. Would all of you want to try some?"

When I offered them the plate, the children laughed and scattered.

After a while, they gathered again and timidly approached the stall timidly.

"The samples are free. Do you want to try?"

"But... I will grow horns if I eat kiba, right?"

"Our skins will turn black too."

"Hmm"? I have been eating kiba for a whole month, but I don't have any horns."

I then pointed at Lala Wu besides me.

“Look, this onee-san doesn’t have horns, right? It will be fine.”

After the kids tried the sample, they yelled:“It’s delicious!” and then ran to the other end of the street.

“... They are so young, so they won’t have copper plates on them, right?”

“It’s fine. I will be happy if they think it tastes good.”

The amount of food gradually decreased.

The “Myam-roasted meat” sold out first. An hour after the second half began, we were left with two “Myam-roasted meat”. Three Semu men came at this time.

“I’m very sorry! There’s only two left. The stall beside us is selling a kiba dish cooked with tarapa, they should have some left...”

The Semu men talked quietly among themselves expressionlessly.

One of them then headed to our neighboring stall, and the remaining two took out their copper plates

□Thank you for your patronage. Please wait a moment.□

We finally reached the endpoint.

We could probably close shop successfully in a short while.

After handing the last two □Myam-roasted meat□ to the customers, I asked the Lala Wu to take care of the fire and walked to the neighboring stall briskly.

□Shela Wu, how many are left on your side?□

Before Shela Wu could answer, a western youth who just tried the sample shouted:

□A-Alright, give me one!□

Shela Wu deftly made a □Kiba burger□, Vena Wu handed it to him in exchange for the copper plates.

After the customer left, the two of them smiled at the same time.

□All sold out.□

“All sold out, huh…”

It had been just three hours since morning, and still two hours before my scheduled closing time. Despite that, the fifth day ended with all 120 portions sold out.

4

After putting out the fire, we quickly closed the stall.

As I put the chopping board, plates, and the leftover vegetables into the bag, Vena Wu said to me with a smile:

“… As expected, we sold everything, right…?”

“That’s right. To be honest, this doesn’t feel like reality at all.”

It might not feel real, but the pile of copper plates was. Almost none of the customers paid with white copper plates, so the money pouch was filled with red copper plates.

We sold 120 portions and earned 240 red copper plates.

A staggering amount.

“Let’s return the cart… Ah, this is too much money, I will go to the copper plate exchange place.”

Two hundred-odd copper plates weighed about 1.5 kg; I had to exchange them for white copper plates as soon as possible.

Even though no one would dare to rob denizens of the Forest’s Edge, I couldn’t let my guard down and walked carefully on the stone-paved path.

The Post Station Town was extremely crowded in the afternoon, and we were quite prominent pushing our cart. This was the fifth day of the stall opening, so I was used to it.

“Hi, you are closing already? You were open until so late today, huh.”

“Hey, I’m counting on you tomorrow too, alright?”

The Jaguar people greeted us warmly.

Men from Semu would nod at us.

“Ah, Uncle Dora, are you well? I will drop by your stall after I return the cart.”

□Hi, good work today… Don’t worry, I’m healthy.□

Uncle Dora was in his usual spot, peddling vegetables laid out on a piece of cloth. His face was frail and his smile was weak.

I was worried about him, but I still needed to exchange the copper plates and return the cart.

The copper plate exchange was located in a sturdy building, right between the marketplace and the lodging facilities. A guard stood watch there most of the times. Even though I called it a copper plate exchange, it was actually a place that provides loans.

Exchanging copper plates was free of charge. Obviously, the money lenders didn’t provide this service out of goodwill or hobby. They were requested by the Genos landlord to provide currency exchange services so copper plates could circulate in the Post Station Town smoothly.

Just what did the money lender think when they saw our business growing day by day? He tried his best to conceal his emotions and changed 200 red copper plates to 20 white copper plates.

We headed to □Kimyusu’s Tail Inn□ to return the carts and deposit our goods there for the time being. After getting glared at by Milano Mast, we returned to the marketplace.

Speaking of which… Did Kamyua Yost came today…?

Ah, that’s right. Today was too busy, so I even forgot about him.

Kamyua Yost and the Tsun clan people didn’t come today, so there wasn’t any ridiculous commotion. The 120 meals were all sold out, what a peaceful day that matched my ideal day perfectly.

Vena Wu walked with large strides through the bustling city and shrugged sexily.

Never mind, it’s better that he didn’t show… But even if he didn’t show, he might still be planning something nefarious secretly. So it’s fine either way…

Vena Wu, do you dislike Kamyua?

I hate elusive people… That’s why I like you the most…

Was I that easy to understand?

Anyways, I decided to head to Uncle Dora’s stall.

Hi, you brought so many people with you today.

Uncle Dora welcomed me and the three girls. He looked a little frail, and Tara wasn't here.

"You don't look well... Are you ill?"

"I would never fall ill."

He shook his head weakly.

"I will be frank... This morning, I found a kiba that had fallen into a trap I set."

"Ehh?"

"To stop the kiba from eating my crops, I set several traps around my farm. Even so, I still found a lot of my vegetables damaged in the morning... And today, one retarded kiba fell into the trap."

"... I see."

"That's right. Since we caught it, we had to put it down. Everyone stood outside the trap and stabbed it to death with spears made from krilee... On a day like this, I couldn't eat meat. I could still hear it's miserable screams... Just thinking about it makes me shiver."

His plump body really started to shake.

"The hunters of Forest's Edge are amazing. Encountering a kiba in the forest must be a nightmare. My knees go weak just at the sight of them… I can't fight with those monsters."

"I can't either. Hunters really are amazing."

Will Ai Fa be safe today?

I wanted to hurry on home and see Ai Fa's energetic face.

"By the way, the number of kiba had increased dramatically since last month. Our farms are still fine, but those near to the Forest's Edge suffered heavy losses. The farmers can't even make a living. When it really gets bad, the kiba will even eat aria and its root before it is ready for harvesting."

He shook his head depressedly.

"In recent years, the damage to the farms was turning worse. Will it become like my grandfather's generation, where the kiba will come out of the forest all day…?"

"I don't think you need to worry about that. However, the number of kiba is definitely increasing."

Did the number of Forest's Edge denizens who gave up on hunting increased? We had no way of knowing the truth.

"Before the denizens of Forest's Edge shifted here, the farmers once banded together to hunt the kiba. Back then, many of them were gored to death… My grandfather's leg was injured, and he had to spend the rest of his life on a crutch. I don't want to do that… I absolutely don't want to hunt kiba."

"Uncle…"

"Ah, sorry. The denizens of Forest's Edge risk their lives hunting kiba every day, so I shouldn't be saying this to you. I will be counting on your delicious meals from tomorrow onwards."

"Yes, I will be in your care too."

So that was what happened. No wonder he couldn't tell Tara how he felt.

Even though he had a cheerful expression, I couldn't ignore his words as a denizen of Forest's Edge.

How many kiba did the Tsun clan hunt? Maybe they didn't hunt at all… After all, a member of the Tsun clan got drunk in the afternoon, and even came into town to buy snacks!

The Tsun clan was as big as the Wu clan; if they didn’t hunt properly, it would have dire effects on their surroundings.

「…Asuta, don’t make such a heavy face. What are you buying today? How many?」

I decided to change my mood to not worry Uncle Dora.

All I could do was to do my best and make this business a success.

「Sorry, I want 200 tarapa, 30 aria… and 150 poitan.」

「You are finally buying 150 poitan! So, you will be preparing 150 portions tomorrow?」

「Yes. This is the limit of what the four of us can prepare.」

Aside from that, as the 「Kiba burger」 was more tedious to prepare, I decided to increase the「Myam-roasted meat」 to 90 portions. I want to try in the remaining five days whether we can prepare these dishes properly.

「Oh right, the Fa house’s meat store is about to become empty.」

I said to Vena Wu as I counted the poitan.

"The day after tomorrow, I hope the Wu clan can let me have some meat. Can you relay this to Donda Wu and Mia Lei Wu?"

"Yes, I understand…"

I already negotiated with the Wu clan about the kiba meat.

I had to rack my brains hard to set a price for kiba meat.

The Wu clan village hunted more than enough kiba meat, so Mia Lei Wu told me:"Take as much as you need, no need for payment." But I had no idea how long my stall would run, and I couldn't keep accepting them free of charge. I insisted on paying an adequate price for the bloodletting work, and they agreed.

We were at an impasse on the price. The buyer kept raising the price, while the seller kept lowering the price. After such an interesting negotiation, we came to a compromise and used the "price of kiba horns and tusks" as the standard.

A large kiba would be 12 red copper plates, and the smaller ones, 8 plates. But the price was still too low, so I will have to adjust it to a more reasonable value in the near future.

"Alright then, I will be counting on you the day after tomorrow. Sorry, I would need you to carry a lot of things when the time comes."

I asked Vena Wu to bring over the kiba meat I would need the next day when she will visit the Fa house in the morning. Vena Wu smiled as she put the poitan she counted into the sack.

"I will bring the meat from the Wu clan to the Fa house with a tow board, it's not much trouble… The work Lala and Shela Wu need to do when I'm on my way there is more tedious…"

"That's right. Make Vena-nee work hard sometimes too."

Even though Vena Wu and Lala Wu didn't talk much at work, they were still very close. Shela Wu also smiled quietly beside them.

Everyone had faces of satisfaction.

After a tiring day, everyone felt a great sense of pride and accomplishment.

At least, I felt very satisfied.

5

“Well then, I will be counting on you tomorrow.”

I put down the pot in front of the Fa house and bid Vena Wu farewell.

We spent a bit of time to close up and buy ingredients, but there was still four hours until sunset. Hence, I did have more than enough time to do my preparation.

I’m making 150 portions, so we should be staying until the scheduled closing time in the Post Station Town tomorrow. I will be returning later tomorrow, so I have to increase the efficiency of my preparation work.

I reached for the door.

But it was barred.

“Hmm? Ai Fa, are you home?”

I called out to Ai Fa and knocked on the door.

After a long silence, Ai Fa answered:

“Wait.”

But Ai Fa still didn’t open the door. After about 30 seconds, I heard the sound of the bar being moved, and the door gradually opened.

I held my breath in surprise the next instance.

“Ai Fa, what happened to you!?”

I didn’t know what happened, but Ai Fa had never shown such a pained expression. Her face was filled with pain and cold sweat. Her blue eyes were burning like that of a wounded beast.

“Don’t be so loud… hurry on in.”

Ai Fa’s figure quickly disappeared behind the door.

I grabbed the bags and the pot and entered the house.

Ai Fa was wearing her cape and, while holding her left arm, she squatted behind the door.

“… Bar the door.”

I hurried and did that, then squatted down beside Ai Fa.

“What happened? Does your arm hurt? Did the Tsun clan attack you?”

At a glance, Ai Fa didn’t have any obvious injuries.

But the last time Ai Fa made such a pained expression, was a long time ago when we were attacked by a Madarama snake.

“There’s no one from the Tsun clan I would let to get me… The bone in my arm shifted out of place when I was hunting.”

Ai Fa finally squeezed out these words.

Bone— shifted?

Did she dislocate her arm?

“W-Which arm? The left arm? The shoulder? Or the elbow?”

“I told you not to be so loud… The left elbow. Don’t worry, I already shifted the bone back into position.”

“O-Of course I will worry. Since it got dislocated, shouldn’t we secure your arm? Is there anything that can act as a brace…”

Ai Fa head-butted my chest.

As she couldn’t move her arms, she could only protest this way.

“It’s useless for you to be so noisy… I know what to do, you just need to help me.”

“I-I got it. What should I do?”

“… Help me take off my shoes.”

I did that quickly.

Just how intense was the pain of dislocating an elbow? And she moved the bone back herself! Even if I knew what to do, I probably wouldn’t have the courage to follow through.

“I-I took them off.”

“Alright… Let’s go over there…”

Ai Fa bit her lips and got up slowly.

The next instant, her body started wavering, and I held her shoulders as

gently as I could.

How could this be… She really got injured…

I could feel her incredibly hot body even through the thick cape.

…Take off the cape.

Okay.

I loosened the hook holding the cape in place.

It slid onto the ground, and Ai Fa squatted by the wall.

…Bring that unused rag here.

I carried out her instruction obediently.

I then secured her forearm with a piece of plank, tied torn strips of cloth to her arm, and slung her left arm below her neck, securing it in place. The way she handled a dislocation was similar to my world.

That will do… There are Lome leaves in my cape, bring it here.

There were many hidden compartments sewn on the inside of the cape, and one of them was stuffed with a few black leaves shaped like maple leaves.

"This is medicine to bring down a fever… Add some water and crush it with a spoon… Just one leaf will do…"

Ai Fa leaned on the wall weakly and her voice was soft. She wasn't overwhelmed by the pain, her rising temperature made her lose her strength.

"I crushed it, do you want to drink it?"

I stood beside Ai Fa and fed her the Lome leaf with a spoon.

Ai Fa drank the mashed black leaf that looked nasty tasting.

"Okay… I will sleep for a while, wake me up for dinner."

"What will be easier for you to eat? There's gigo at home, I can make poitan soup?"

"… Grilled poitan taste better…"

Ai Fa pouted a little.

My chest tightened a little as I looked at her pained expression.

「Well then, I will help you prepare the dish that Grandma Jiba usually eat. If it doesn't taste good, you can soak the hamburg steak and poitan into the soup.」

「... We already ate hamburg steak yesterday, is that fine?」

「Don't mind that during times like this, idiot.」

I wet the other rag with water from the flask, squeezed them dry, and wiped away the sweat from Ai Fa's face.

「Kimochi.」

Ai Fa closed her eyes quietly.

「Asuta, it's great that you are here... I suffered a similar injury one year ago. Back then, it took all my strength to tend to my wounds...」

「... Should I be optimistic, and be glad you didn't suffer a more serious wound?」

「Yes. Tis but a scratch, I will be better in a few days... I will be in your

care in the meantime.

Leave it to me.

I scooped up some water to wash the cloth, then put it on Ai Fa’s forehead.

It was just room temperature water, but it was better than nothing.

I will sleep now… Go do your work.

Got it. Holler if you need me, okay?

Even though that was what I said, I couldn’t pull my eyes off Ai Fa.

Dislocation wasn’t a light wound, but I was still relieved. I was glad that Ai Fa didn’t suffer any mortal wound.

If I lose Ai Fa now, what should I do? Leaving the means to survive aside, I definitely wouldn’t be able to accept the fact that I lost her.

Just how much resolve did the women of Forest’s Edge had to make when they send their men off into the forest?

「Don’t worry… I will be able to move freely tomorrow… don’t worry about the Tsun clan…」

Ai Fa mumbled as if she was sleep talking.

I was going to the entrance to sort out the baggage, but I return to her side and squat down when I heard that.

「I understand. Rest well, I will prepare a delicious cuisine, so you can recover quickly.」

Ai Fa smiled with her eyes closed.

「…Asuta, I want to eat hamburg steak sooner…」

I nodded and held Ai Fa’s hot cheeks with my hands. I then stood up and prepared dinner and the food for tomorrow’s business.

Vol. 5 :

Chapter 3

A+ A- Chapter 3

After that, we didn’t meet with any other crisis and ended work for the day.

There was also a small number of westerner patrons today. We were open until the very last moment and sold 141 portions.

This was the sixth day of business, and I have finally figured out the maximum number of customers. I didn’t know if this number would change in the future, but we were heading towards our goal at a faster than expected speed.

I hoped that one day, the denizens of Forest's Edge could use kiba meat to exchange for copper plates. I hoped the denizens of Forest's Edge could rise out of poverty. We took on the reckless challenge of opening a stall in order to achieve this goal.

I did not wish to be hindered by anyone.

"To think that the Tsun clan raised such a retarded demand…"

Donda Wu held a fruit wine in one hand and squeezed out these words unhappily.

After the Wu clan finished their dinner, we stayed in the hall illuminated by kiba wax candles. The ones present were the 4 men from the Wu main house, Mama Mia Lei, Vena Wu, Ai Fa, and me. Kaslan Lutim also rushed over from his village to attend.

"They want Asuta to tend to the hearth during the house head conference. It's a pity that the Tsun clan is hosting it, or else there wouldn't be any problems. The real issue is that we still don't know their motive behind this demand."

Kaslan Lutim who I had not seen in ten days muttered quietly.

Dan Lutim wasn't interested in us opening a stall in the Post Station Town, so he delegated his mature and steady heir to handle everything

related to this.

“Excuse me, can you tell me what is this house head conference? I heard it’s a grand meeting held once a year.”

“Yes. We hold a house head conference annually. During that time, all the house heads will gather at the Tsun clan village and share about their lives. The Forest's Edge settlement is very vast, so everyone uses this chance to learn how others are doing.”

The house head conference was held on the tenth day of the blue month— which was eight days from now. Ai Fa intentionally mentioned “blue month” this morning, she probably happened to remember this event.

“The house head conference is set to be held in the afternoon. After everyone spends a night in the Tsun clan settlement, they will return at dawn… The Tsun clan wants you to tend to the hearth during that night.”

“Hmm~ I don’t understand. The thing about Mida Tsun is probably just an excuse, they must be after something else… Why would the Tsun clan want me to go there?”

We have no way of knowing. Asuta, do you have any clues?

Kaslan Lutim looked at me calmly, and I nodded.

Yamiel Tsun knows about my stall’s revenue. I think she got the information from the money-lenders.

Money-lenders?

Yes. The Wu clan and Lutim house don’t interact with the Tsun clan, and this should be the same for the residents of Post Station Town too. However, the money-lenders are operating in the Post Station Town under the orders of the landlord. They might have informed the Tsun clan.

I visited the money-lenders to exchange the copper plates every day, so the owner had a good grasp on the business of my stall. The Tsun clan was the chief clan of the tribe and had close relations with the lord of Genos. The Tsun clan might have gras

ped how well my business was doing through the money-lender.

"The Tsun clan already knows how much wealth my business can bring. I think that is the main reason why they are inviting me. What do you all think?"

"That is plausible… No, that's the most logical explanation. Zuro Tsun is the head of the Tsun clan and also the tribal leader of Forest's Edge . His goal must be the wealth Asuta can earn."

After Kaslan Lutim said that, Ludo Wu yelled:

"What nonsense! Never mind, that's how the Tsun clan would think. They want to spend their days swimming in copper plates."

"Yes. I was thinking that we need to prepare countermeasures against the Tsun clan monopolizing all the wealth when everyone will be able to trade kiba for copper plates. It seems that just the profits brought in by Asuta alone are enough to entice Zuro Tsun."

"But, what is the reason for making me tend to the hearth? Does he want to steal my kiba cooking skills?"

I had no intention of hiding my cooking methods in the first place.

Kaslan Lutim slowly shook his head.

“With how depraved the head of the Tsun clan is, he won’t think about such a roundabout method. Zuro Tsun’s target is you… He probably wants you to marry into the Tsun clan and become a member of the Tsun clan.”

“Marry in… as Yamiel Tsun’s husband?”

Just the thought sent a chill down my spine.

Never mind, even if it wasn’t that creepy woman, I didn’t plan to marry into any other houses.

“But will they let a foreigner like me marry in for such a reason? That’s too rash.”

“Marrying in is just an example. Zuro Tsun definitely wants you, that’s the kind of man he is.”

「How boring...」

Donda Wu started mumbling this time:

「What a bore, I can't even yawn about this. How could the chief clan allow this pale foreigner to marry into their house?」

His tone was calm, but an agitated flame burned in his eyes.

When the Tsun clan was involved, Donda Wu would be more agitated than usual.

「So… Brat, what are you going to do?」

「D-Don't joke with me, I won't marry into the Tsun clan. I'm already very reluctant to tend their hearth… However, I might get chased out of the Post Station Town if Mida Tsun makes a scene in town.」

「Why? The one at fault is Mida Tsun, not you.」

"Technically you are right. But when the Semu people and Jaguar people had a commotion because I didn't have enough food to sell, I was almost chased out of the Post Station Town. The guards and Milano Mast who supervise the marketplace rental probably think I'm an eyesore."

"... Did they make this judgment according to the law of the city?"

"No, that probably depended on the mood of the guards and Milano Mast."

"Ho" I didn't know the people in the city take things so lightly. Instead of the law, they prioritize their mood?"

After Ludo Wu interjected happily, Donda Wu stared at him irately.

"That's the pot calling the kettle black, Ludo. Have you ever respected the rules of Forest's Edge before?"

"I abide by the more important ones!"

Ludo Wu rebutted childishly.

Ignoring the parent-child dialogue, I continued:

"Like I already mentioned before, when Ai Fa and I had an incident with Doddo Tsun in the Post Station Town, the guards ignored us and only listened to the Tsun clan. With that in mind, even if Mida Tsun was the one who started it, I will be the one that gets punished. Yamiel Tsun probably knew that and will incite Mida Tsun to act against me."

Actually, instead of what I really think, this was closer to what I was hoping for.

I hoped that Mida Tsun wasn't really chained up at home, and that Yamiel didn't really want her brother to be killed by guards.

The Tsun clan had already abandoned the honor of the denizens of Forest's Edge. If they were also cruel to their own family, then they would really be beyond redemption.

"Hmm... Ai Fa, you don't want Asuta to have anything to do with the Tsun clan, right?"

Kaslan Lutim asked Ai Fa for her opinion again.

There was a dangerous gleam in Ai Fa’s eyes, and she remained silent. She had been sulking ever since we met Yamiel Tsun.

“I understand how you feel. During the house head conference, Ai Fa won’t be able to be by Asuta’s side all the time. Besides, the kins of the Tsun clan will also attend this conference. In a way, the kins are more dangerous than the Tsun clan… Asuta, do you still plan to open the stall in the Post Station Town?”

“Yes. The business is doing better than I expected, I want to keep working on it and achieve my primary goal.”

“Hmm… I guess we have to find a way to solve the problem at its roots.”

Kaslan Lutim supported his chin with his muscular hand and fell into deep thought.

Ludo Wu looked at his profile and said aggressively:

“Let’s turn down the Tsun clan’s proposal. If they coerce that human meatball to stir up trouble, we can just fight back. I can’t use a blade in the Post Station Town so it will be a tough fight, but I can break his legs if another man works together with me.”

“In that case, we will have to wait for Mida Tsun to commit violence. If the other party doesn’t attack first, the people in the city will arrest us if we attack preemptively. Even if they acted first and we were able to stop Mida Tsun, Asuta might still be expelled from the Post Station Town.”

Kaslan Lutim was deep in thought as he continued logically:

“Besides, we don’t know when Mida Tsun would appear and can’t send two men to protect Asuta all the time. The men wouldn’t be able to perform their duties as hunters this way.”

“This is such a pain. What should we do then?”

“Well… We can accept their request for now, and let Asuta tend to the hearth for the house head conference.”

Ai Fa’s eyes were filled with rage again when she heard Kaslan Lutim’s words.

“It’s dangerous for Asuta to go alone. We don’t know what they are scheming and need a plan to protect Asuta.”

“Hmm? Since it’s the house head conference, Dad, Dan Lutim, and the male followers accompanying them will be there too. But men can’t enter the stove room, how will we protect Asuta?”

“We will let the woman protect Asuta then.”

Kaslan Lutim alternated his gaze between Donda Wu and Mama Mia Lei.

“We can let the women from the Wu clan and house Lutim accompany Asuta to the Tsun clan… I think this can be our condition for accepting their request. What are your opinions on this?”

“Hmm? Are you are saying that we should tend to the hearth for the house head conference together with Asuta?”: Mama Mia Lei didn’t seem surprised in her response.

Donda Wu glared at Kaslan Lutim, as if he was probing with his gaze.

「There would be 80 participants for the house head conference. Asuta's cooking is unique in style, and he can't prepare such a large quantity alone. We can argue that the women from the Wu clan and house Lutim have already mastered these techniques and can assist him… On the other hand, we will force the Tsun clan women to help, no matter if they like it or not, and make them learn Asuta's cooking.」

「I see. This way, the Tsun clan will be able to satisfy Mida Tsun even if I'm gone.」

「Correct. Not just that, we want to let them know that the Wu clan and house Lutim also learned the skills to cook kiba in a delicious way. That will divert some attention away from you, and Zuro Tsun won't just target you alone.」

I thought this was a brilliant plan.

「Kaslan Lutim, your words are hard to understand… But I will be happy to assist Asuta.」

Mama Mia Lei showed her teeth in a big smile. Her smile was just like Ludo Wu and Lala Wu.

Their appearance might be dissimilar, but they truly were parent and child. Such an untimely thought arose in my heart.

"And we can use this chance to lecture the women of the Tsun clan. It is not just the fault of the men that the Tsun clan became so depraved. It is the female duty to keep men in line, and I'm eager to teach those Tsun clan women a lesson."

"Hey, you are supposed to lead the Wu clan's women. Are you going to ditch your work and go to the Tsun clan?"

Donda Wu complained unhappily, and Mama Mia Lei said with a smile:

"What's the problem? There won't that many people at home for that period, so Ditto Min and Rimee can handle the chores... By the way, who do you intend to bring there, clan head?"

"Hmm... I should be taking Darum with me."

Donda Wu looked at the second son of the Wu clan.

Darum Wu had already taken off the bandage on his head, and only one piece of bandage covered the middle of his face.

There are still eight days until the house head conference… It will depend on how fast Darum recovers from his injuries.

If Darum-nii can’t attend, then the one going will be me, right?

Ludo Wu cheered.

Hmm? Why was Jiza Wu left out as a potential candidate? While I was showing a baffled face, Kaslan Lutim looked my way with a face full of regrets.

According to tradition, the heir to the house has to keep watch over his home when the head is away for the house head conference. Smaller houses that have few men are not restricted by this rule, but the Wu clan and Lutim house need to abide by this custom. The second son of the house Lutim will accompany my house head.

"I see... by the way, there are 80 people including the house heads and followers. So there are 40 house heads. Since Forest's Edge has 500 people, isn't that number too small?"

"Only the house head from the main house can attend the house head conference. The branch houses are not included."

Speaking of which, the second son of house Lutim was already married with kids, and was himself the head of a Lutim branch house.

However, the Fa house didn't have any branch houses, so did Ai Fa attend the conference alone last year too? So she stayed by herself in the Tsun clan she was bad terms with and didn't seek help from anyone.

My house head sure was strong.

"Darum."

Donda Wu looked at the second son of the Wu clan with stern eyes.

That carefree brat is not reliable. Recover from your wounds, and make sure you can move freely in 8 days.

I got it.

Whatever.

Darum Wu nodded in acknowledgment, while Ludo Wu grumbled with puffed cheeks.

In that case, the four staying home will be Jiza, Ludo, Jiba and Sati Lei. Ditto Min and Rimee can tend to the hearth then. I will take Vena, Leina, and Lala to help Asuta. I can get 2 or 3 more helpers from the branch houses.

House Lutim can lend out a few women too. We should be able to gather ten helpers. With that many women by his side, the Tsun clan won't be able to do anything devious to Asuta in the stove room. Do the two of you agree to this?

Kaslan Lutim asked Ai Fa and me.

In the end, we should be the ones deciding.

Should I accept the dubious request from the Tsun clan? If I agree to this, the Wu clan and house Lutim would provide the aforementioned assistance.

The significance of me working in the Post Station Town was big and will affect the future of the Forest's Edge. Hence, the Wu clan already agreed to help without needing me to ask for assistance.

But Ai Fa— bit her lips with a pained expression.

"Do we... have no other choice but to accept the Tsun clan's suggestion?"

"Yes. Compared to the Post Station Town, it will be safer to protect Asuta in the stove room. Even if we fended off Mida Tsun, you will still live every day in fear if Zuro doesn't stop his obsession over Asuta."

Kaslan Lutim stared at Ai Fa's frustrated profile.

Since it has come to this, let’s announce why the Fa house is opening a stall in the Post Station Town during the house head conference. We can also tell everyone about the importance of bloodletting and how to butcher the kiba.

Ehh? Are we telling them at such a time?

After hearing my question Kaslan Lutim nodded firmly.

We have no other choice given the circumstances. We need to let all the houses know that hindering your business in the Post Station Town means obstructing the prosperity of Forest's Edge. If we can affix a value to kiba meat, we won’t even need to set up a stall, and we will be able to earn more copper plates than you. We can then divert Zuro Tsun’s attention.

Kaslan Lutim smiled.

After we announce this at the house head conference, everyone will taste your cooking personally. This will make our words more convincing. When they understand how delicious your cooking is, they will know why the people in the city are buying kiba meat.

Kaslan Lutim planned to turn around the crisis and gain control of the initiative in Forest's Edge in one go.

"The best defense is a good offense"— Kaslan Lutim's decision-making capabilities were terrifying good.

"However, this is just the best resolution method I could come up with. Donda Wu agreed to this plan after thinking it through. However, you two will be the ones making the final decision."

"Hmmp… I'm not helping because of your pretty speech. I will only lend you helpers if you pay an adequate price."

Donda Wu said coldly.

"If you want the women of the Wu clan to help manage the house head conference, you have to pay for their work. That's the only thing I have to say."

"Our clan head sure is stubborn."

Mama Mia Lei retorted, and Donda Wu averted his face after saying: Shut up..

And then— Ai Fa glanced my way.

I nodded firmly.

I get goosebumps just thinking about tending the Tsun clan's stove. But caretaking the stove for the house head conference is a different matter. I can also correct the Tsun clan's ways together with the members of the Wu Tang clan and Lutim house— there is a big significance in that.

.....

I can't stand the Tsun clan interfering with my business. It's fine if my business fails due to my incompetence. But I won't allow the Tsun clan to disrupt my business for their personal gains.

I felt another strong surge of emotion squirm in my abdomen.

I tried my best to suppress it and looked at Ai Fa.

"... I see."

"... The Fa house is neither the kin of the Wu clan nor house Lutim, so I feel bad that you are doing so much for us..."

"You are too reserved! You saved Jiba's soul and taught us how to make delicious food. You even prepared the house Lutim wedding banquet so splendidly! Ai Fa, Asuta, you are our important friends."

Mama Mia Lei said loudly with a smile.

"Besides, if we leave the Tsun clan be, Asuta won't be able to do his business. Consequently, Vena and Lala will lose their jobs. The Wu clan helping you is protection of our own wealth too. Don't be so reserved, just keep that in mind and choose the right path."

"Then… Can I borrow your strength?"

Ai Fa clenched her right hand into a fist, pushed it onto the floor, and stared at Mama Mia Lei.

"I can't go near the stove room during the house head conference… Can you protect my family member on my behalf?"

"We will definitely protect him, and not let the Tsun clan lay a finger on him."

Vena Wu sat beside Mama Mia Lei and nodded seriously.

Ai Fa was quiet for a moment. She then lowered her head quickly.

"Alright then… I … accept Kaslan Lutim's proposal."

A pained expression appeared on Ai Fa's face. She must be unwilling to let someone else hold our fates in their hands.

But we could no longer open the stall in the Post Station Town by ourselves. If we were adamant about not receiving anyone’s help, Ai Fa and I had just to stay in the Fa house and live a plain and simple life.

We only opened a stall in the Post Station Town to bring a better future to Forest's Edge. If we didn’t want to slowly slide back to our original route, we had to work together with the Wu clan and house Lutim.

I wanted to convince Ai Fa with these reasons, but she arrived at the same conclusion after thinking about it for a long time.

I enjoyed this joyous feeling secretly in my heart.

□It’s decided then… We will discuss the details in the morning. I’m turning in.□

Donda Wu’s deep voice ended the secret meeting between the three houses.

After the Wu clan members returned to their rooms, the three guests headed to the entrance. Like what he did during the pre-wedding

celebration, Kaslan Lutim headed to a Wu clan branch house, while Ai Fa and I stayed in an empty house.

When Kaslan Lutim left, I waited for Ai Fa to tie her shoes with one hand. At this moment, Mama Mia Lei came to us.

“Ai Fa, I just remembered something. Would you like to stay in the Wu clan village temporarily before the house head conference?”

“… But why?”

“Isn’t it obvious? We still need to discuss the details over a few meetings. Besides, the women of the Wu clan can learn to make the food for the house head conference too. In that case, won’t it be more convenient to stay in this village for now?”

“But…”

“You just need to bring over all the meat and vegetables from the Fa house. You won’t need to keep running home then… Don’t worry about how Darum or Leina feels. Even if you are not here, their pain won’t be reduced.”

「M-Mia Lei Wu, what are you…」

I butted in frantically, and Mama Mia Lei smiled smugly.

Kamyua Yost often smiled like this too, but the warmth of her smile was very much different.

「I can tell what my children are thinking with one glance. They are just like me and Donda when we were young. I don’t understand Jiza and Vena sometimes though… Anyway, the Tsun clan is a troublesome opponent, so we have to be prepared. Can we count on you for this?」

Mama Mia Lei then returned to her chambers without waiting for our reply.

Ai Fa and I looked at each other with complicated feelings.

「… Today, I learned how magnanimous Mia Lei Wu actually is.」

Ai Fa sighed softly and tied her shoes.

We went out of the door and found Kaslan Lutim who was waiting outside.

“Ai Fa, Asuta, thank you for your hard work. You still have to do your business tomorrow, so let’s end our discussion for today.”

“It’s fine, we will be sleeping very soon.”

I had already prepared the ingredients for tomorrow inside the Wu clan’s stove room. With the Wu clan women helping with dinner, my food preparation work was smoother than usual. Staying in the Wu clan wouldn’t affect my business at all.

“I never imagined that Zuro Tsun will become aware of your existence so soon… or that you will earn so much money in such a short time.”

As we walked towards our rooms under the clear moonlight, Kaslan Lutim smiled calmly at us.

“Asuta, I thought I knew how capable you are, but I underestimated you. I’m ashamed of my foolishness.”

“The business wasn’t successful because of my capability, but because of the kiba. When I started this business, I also undervalued the power of the kiba.”

“... When your prowess combines with the kiba’s strength, it will definitely guide the denizens of Forest's Edge to prosperity. For the future of Forest's Edge we have to stop the Tsun clan’s tyranny.”

Kaslan Lutim looked at me and Ai Fa with his sturdy and strong gaze.

“I still need to discuss something amidst my father and Donda Wu. I want to tell the Min, Lei, Mamu and the other kin houses about selling kiba meat and ask them to cooperate with us. Ai Fa, Asuta, let us overcome this obstacle together.”

“Alright. I will be in your care then.”

The Tsun clan was a threat, but as long as the Wu clan, Lutim house and Ai Fa stayed in Forest's Edge, we wouldn’t need to submit to the Tsun

clan.

My prowess might be trivial, but there wouldn’t be a problem as long as allies were with me.

I, too, had to do what I could and not allow anyone to destroy my stall through unethical means.

I swore again in my heart with determination. I looked up at the star-filled skies, which painted a scene that was different from my original world.

4

Well, it’s decided then…

The next day, which was the third day of the blue month, we opened our stall for the seventh time.

Yamiel Tsun came as she promised, and left with a satisfied smile on her

face.

Mida can be saved now. I will warn my brother not to do anything retarded, so please don’t worry… I’m looking forward to the house head conference.

She agreed to all the terms I raised.

Be it the Wu clan women accompanying me and assisting me with the hearth, or the demand for the Tsun clan women to participate too, Yamiel Tsun agreed to all that.

The entire thing was going too smoothly, which felt a bit chilling instead. However, we could now rest easy for the time being.

Alright, I need to change my mood and focus on business… Since the troublesome person is gone, I can start peddling my secret merchandise.

Ai Fa retreated to the woods behind us, and I smiled at Vena Wu. It was her turn to tend to the Myam-roasted meat stall today.

The secret merchandise was kiba jerky, a staple food of the denizens of Forest's Edge.

The important thing about jerky was how long it could be preserved and not its taste. Unless it was absolutely necessary, people wouldn’t buy jerky. To be honest, the taste of salt and pico leaves were really strong for the jerky, and it was extraordinary tough too. I had to hold it in my mouth and wait for it to soften before I could bite it into pieces.

However, there were many travelers in the Post Station Town, and many of the stalls sold jerky. Such jerky only focused on being practical instead of the taste. Kimyusu jerky was soft, but only had the taste of the spices. Karon tasted like high-class beef jerky, but it was tougher than kiba jerky.

Just selling light meals isn’t enough for you, and now you want to earn money by selling jerky huh — others might feel unhappy about me venturing into this business. I also had to be ready to compete directly with others. In order to make the people in the Post Station Town recognize the value of kiba meat, I did everything that I could.

By the way, karon jerky was more expensive than kimyusu jerky, so I used the price of the karon jerky as the standard. Two hundred gram cost 3 red copper plates. In the Post Station Town, they were sold in chunks between 400 to 600 g.

According to my calculations, the meat and vegetables in Post Station Town are rather cheap. Assuming one red copper plate is 100 yen, then aria which is like onion cost 20 yen. The cabbage-like tino is 50 yen, karon jerky is priced at 150 yen per 100 g. In comparison, one kitchen knife cost 4,500 yen, and a pot is 24,000 yen.

Food wasn’t ridiculously cheap, but it was much less expensive when compared to cloth or leather products.

Besides, jerky had to be specially processed, so it had a higher price point while the fresh meat was cheaper. Based on what I heard from Uncle Dora, he paid less than one copper plate for 100 g of meat when he bought them for his own consumption. Kamyua Yost did mention that 「meat is more expensive than vegetables」, but compared to my old world, the meat here wasn’t so expensive that it was impossible to buy.

That’s why no one even thought about eating kiba. I hope that in the future, kiba meat can be sold for about the same price as karon meat.

I sliced out some jerky for sampling use while I thought about this. Then, a Semu man in a hooded cloak came over right then, his long silver hair visible inside his hood.

「Hmm? What's the matter, Shumimaru?」

He was already here to buy 「Kiba burger」 early in the morning.

Shumimaru stared at the thing in my hand with his dark eyes.

「... Jerky, kiba?」

「Yes. I will be selling this starting from today. Please feel free to try a sample.」

I offered him the plate with the jerky, and Shumimaru took a bite after nodding.

「... Copper plates, how many?」

「I'm planning to set the price to be similar to karon jerky. This size is about 6 copper plates.」

「... Now, you have, how many?」

「Ehh? Well, I prepared ten chunks of jerky today.」

I had prepared ten chunks of jerky about 400 g in weight, so 4 kg in total.

Jerky was dried food that was easy to carry, and only travelers would buy them. I had no expectations of it selling well.

I will try making kiba bacon that has a shorter shelf life but tastes better.

As I fell into deep thought, Shumimaru asked expressionlessly:

「Jerky, last, how long?」

「If you store it properly, it can last for half a year.」

「I see.」

Shumimaru reached for the insides of his cloak.

「Please, all, give me.」

「Ehh?」

「Total is, 6 white copper plates?」

「P-Please wait! 『Silver Vase』 will stay in the Post Station Town until the end of the month, right? Why are you buying such a large quantity of jerky?」

「I want, other cities, sell it in.」

Shumimaru tilted his head and asked confusedly, not understanding why I looked so flustered.

「Genos, food, cheap. Food, we buy, in other cities, sell .」

So he was planning to resell it.

I understood. They not only sold merchandise from their home country, they also toured the other cities and reselled their specialties to other places. This had to be the way they conducted business all this while.

「Kiba meat, rare. Other cities, definitely sell. I, more jerky, want.」

「I see… How much do you want exactly?」

Shumimaru lowered his eyelids in deep thought.

「… If can, I want buy, 60 white copper plates.」

60 white copper plates— that’s about 40 kg.

The Wu clan and house Lutim still had plenty of leftover kib, so this amount wasn’t a problem.

“Alright then, why don’t I hand the goods over to you on the day before the “Silver Vase” leaves Genos then? I will make it right before the deadline, so the merchandise can be preserved for six months from that time.”

Shumimaru squinted his eyes happily.

“Your way, big help. Thank you.”

“Not at all, I should be thanking you! Thank you for visiting every day and making such a great request.”

“”Silver Vase”, Asuta, good terms. Thank the Eastern God Semu.”

Shumimaru suddenly looked beside me.

Vena Wu was staring at the streets mindlessly.

「...Asuta, you, Vena Wu, calls. Your name, Vena Wu, is?」

「... So what if it is...?」

Vena Wu glanced at him impatiently.

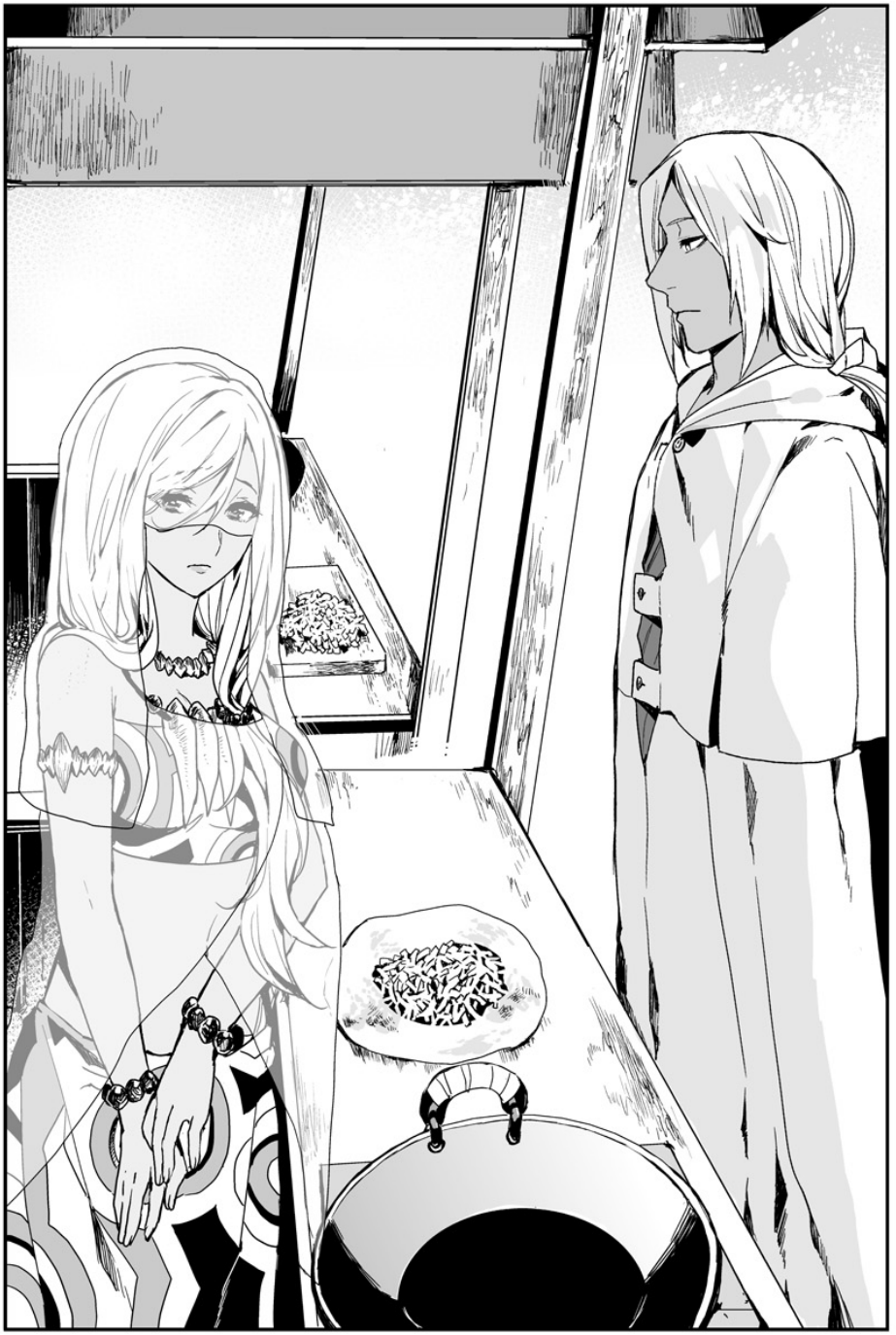
Shumimaru shook his head with a blank face.

「No, beautiful name, I just think... Well then, my leave, I take.」

Shumimaru put on his hood, turned, and left.

Vena Wu crossed her arms haughtily, and I sighed.

「Hmm~ I feel so crestfallen... Shumimaru is becoming more and more important to me.」



That’s what you think Asuta, but not me… I said this before right, I don’t like elusive people…

Is that so? You are actually comparing Shumimaru with a dubious character like Kamyua, that’s being mean to the former.

He’s completely different from that man, but anyone who shows his emotions so directly is more charming…

When Vena Wu said that, she peeked behind her worriedly.

Ai Fa was still resting under the tree shade 5 meters behind us.

She looked a little more listless today.

…Ai Fa always hides her true feelings, and I’m not good with her type too…

Hmm, but don’t you feel really happy when they occasionally open

their heart to you?

…Asuta, since you said that, do you think a woman like Ai Fa is full of charm…?

I-I don’t mean that.

As we were chatting, the streets gradually turned crowded.

It was almost time for the second half. When I was thinking that, two familiar figures approached at the same time.

Asuta onii-chan, I want two!

Asuta, I want two, alright?

They even placed their orders simultaneously.

Tara and Yumi appeared before me at the same time.

The child with yellowish brown skin and the ivory skinned young girl who was two heads taller looked at each other in surprise.

"Ah! You are the kid who was here last time!"

Yumi yelled, and Tara looked confused.

"When was the last time?"

"You don't remember, huh... Never mind. So you know Asuta very well."

"Yes! Asuta onii-chan is my savior!"

She was exaggerating. In retrospect, Doddo Tsun appeared before me when I met Tara. Mida Tsun came when I met Yumi. I sighed at the strange workings of fate and started frying the aria after putting pot on the brazier.

"Hmmp" so even a child born in Genos patronizes your stall. You really are something special. That girl over there even sold "Kiba burgers" to some drunkards, right?"

She was referring to Vena Wu of course.

Vena Wu shrugged gracefully.

"You are really incredible. This stall is at the edge of town, but it earns more than the other food stalls. Many westerners visit your stall too, right?"

"Yes, it's all thanks to you. Two of your friends visited earlier too."

"Fufu~n, I helped you advertise a lot. Many of the young people came here after hearing my recommendation."

Yumi said arrogantly. When she heard that, Tara also said loudly:

「Tara also told many of her friends!」

But she looked dejected after saying that.

「... But everyone says that the kiba is scary, and don't want to eat kiba. They are afraid of their parents scolding them too...」

「It can't be helped. The longer they stayed in Genos, the more adamant they are against eating kiba. We can only wait for time to dilute this prejudice.」

I consoled Tara while I grilled the kiba.

The next instant, Yumi leaned forward.

「Hold it right there! This kid is also your customer, right? Why are you so formal only to me, that's not fair.」

「Eh? There is a big difference in age between you two... Oh right, I already knew Tara before opening the stall. Isn't that right?」

「Yes!」

A smile returned to Tara’s face, and she nodded firmly.

「Uwah」 I can’t accept this!」

Yumi grumbled unhappily.

「... Oh right, Asuta, for how long your stall was operating?」

「Ehh? The stall beside us has been opened for seven days, and three days for this stall.」

「I see. What about the future? You won’t close shop after just ten days, right?」

This girl was familiar with the information about the marketplace. I nodded and said:

「Yes, if possible, I want to keep the business going.」

「Then, would you like to sign a contract with us?」

「What?」

「My family operates the 「West Wind Inn」 and also manages part of the marketplace. My father is stubborn, but my mom knows how delicious kiba is, so we will treat you just like a normal vendor.」

Her proposal was unexpected.

「The uncle running the 「Kimyusu’s Tail Inn」 bears a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge, so his attitude is terrible, right? Don’t you want to run your business happily?」

「W-Wait, Milano Mast who operates the 「Kimyusu’s Tail Inn」 bears a grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge?」

Yes. But I don’t know the details. I heard that a denizen of Forest's Edge killed relative or friend. In the end, the case made no headway because of the lack of evidence.

There was a competitive gleam in Yumi’s eyes.

The denizens of Forest's Edge would stir up trouble from time to time, so not everyone can trust them. If I didn’t see you talk to that monster, I wouldn’t want to befriend you too… You are right, only time can heal all wounds.

… Yes, I think that too.

I swallowed the sigh that almost escaped my mouth and started making four portions of Myam-roasted meat.

As for the contract, I will discuss it with Milano Mast. But I don’t intend to go out of my way and keep my distance from him. I will choose to respect his feelings, is that alright?

Of course, it’s fine, just do what you think is right. If I can eat your delicious cooking, I won’t have any complaints.

Yumi showed an innocent smile again and received the 「Myam-roasted meat」. Tara cheered too.

When she saw Tara running to the stall selling 「Kiba burger」, Yumi opened her eyes wide.

「Ehh? You're still buying?」

「Yes! The 「Myam-roasted meat」 is for the cloth stall owner and pot dealer! Papa and I will have 「Kiba burger」!」

「Hmm」 you are capable despite your young age.」

After Yumi said that, she accompanied Tara to buy the 「Kiba burger」, and the two of them went off together.

Their skin color differed, but they were like sisters with a big age gap. I watched them go and remembered that it would be the tenth day of opening in another three days.

Just selling 20 to 30 portions will be good enough. That was my thinking

in the past. I never imagined that I could expand my stalls and that sales would reach almost 150 portions a day.

I got a temporary respite from the threat of the Tsun clan and could focus on running the stall for now.

There were still seven days before the house head conference. I had to get even better results before that day came, so that the denizens of Forest's Edge would know that a better future was possible for them.

I won’t let the Tsun clan do whatever they wish!

With that thought in mind, I picked up the leather pouch filled with kiba meat.

5

After selling 145 portions, the seventh day of operation ended.

We could definitely sell the remaining 5 meals if we waited ten or so

minutes, but I had to honor the contract I made with the Wu clan. When the sun reached the middle between the peak and the horizon, we started packing up quickly.

By the way, we also sold 800 g of jerky which yielded 12 red copper plates. But making jerky only required rock salt, so the ingredient cost was cheap. With how low the cost was, even without the special case of the 「Silver Vase」, the jerky would be a strong addition to our menu.

And so, work for today ended smoothly too. I wanted to discuss the next contract with Milano Mast, but he stayed in the kitchen the entire time, and only his daughter who was afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge tended to the counter alone. The talk with him had to wait for the next time.

Kamyua Yost wasn’t in the inn too, and Leito had been running errands for him for the past two days. Our problem with the Tsun clan had worsened, while Kamyua Yost grew more distant from us.

Was he taking Donda Wu’s words to heart and intentionally avoiding us? Or did he have other motives? Or was this all just a coincidence? Only heaven knew.

Never mind, this is better than him interfering mindlessly.

After convincing myself, Ai Fa, Vena Wu, and I went home.

We had to take the necessities from the Fa house. Specifically speaking, they were the ingredients from the food store, a change of clothes, whetstone, ropes, all the copper plates, and other daily necessities.

We now owned more than 60 white copper plates. After reaching 100 white copper plates, we will be able to finally change it to a □silver plate□. Before that happened, we had to keep the heavy plates at home or on us

□... We will have to leave the house for seven days.□

Ai Fa looked at the barren food store and muttered emotionlessly.

This was the second time I would be staying outside for a long stint, but it was the first for Ai Fa.

I packed as many things as I could into the pot, and the balance was put on a tow board for Ai Fa to pull. We started heading towards the Wu clan village, and it felt a bit like us shifting house.

「Ah, welcome back!」

When we headed to the stove room after depositing our blades with the Wu clan, Rimee Wu and Leina Wu were preparing dinner inside.

「Heehee, are you really moving into the Wu clan village?」

Rimee Wu said to Ai Fa and me with a smile. We didn't have a chance to speak with her yesterday.

「Yes, I will be in your care until the house head conference seven days later… Are you having hamburg steak for dinner?」

「Yes! Leina-nee and Rimee are already good at making hamburg steak! It's yummy, so look forward to dinner tonight!」

Rimee Wu's smiling face made me want to smile at her too.

Leina Wu stood beside Rimee Wu and was chopping the aria. She smiled at me graciously.

“Welcome to the Wu clan. Asuta, are you going to work here too?”

“Yes, I will do my work in the corner.”

After answering, I placed a large number of meat, vegetables, and fruit wine onto the work platform.

I was planning to buy kiba meat from the Wu clan from today onwards, but since we will be moving into the Wu clan temporarily, I decided to use up all the meat from the Fa house.

I used about 27 kg of meat in a day, and the Fa house’s meat would be spent in another two days. I had to buy meat from the Wu clan to tide over this period until Ai Fa recovered.

“Let’s get to work.”

When I picked up the Santoku knife, Ai Fa called out to me.

Asuta, I’m a little tired. I will chat with Grandma Jiba, then rest in the empty room before dinner.

I understand. Are you alright? Do you have any fever?

I’m fine.

Vena Wu went back to her house, so only Rimee Wu, Leina Wu, and I were left in the stove room. Grandma Ditto Min was scheduled to tend to the hearth, and she was using the outdoor stove to grill poitan.

There was still an hour and a half before sunset. Last night, the Wu clan women had to prepare dinner in a hurry because of the sudden decision to have a meeting in the Wu clan, and I used the chance to finish my preparations work too. Normally, I wouldn’t be able to finish everything before dinner if I only started at this time. I will probably need to stay in the stove room after dinner.

In order to finish up the most tedious meat patty first, I started dicing aria.

Ai Fa looks listless. Does her arm still hurt?

When I used the pot to fry the diced aria, Rimee Wu asked worriedly.

"I don't know. It has been three days since her injury, it shouldn't hurt too much now. But I have never dislocated my bones before, so I can't really tell."

"... You are still having a meeting after dinner, right?"

"No, we don't have anything specific we need to discuss. Have you informed house Lutim about the results of our negotiation with Yamiel Tsun?"

"Yes. When Lala and Shela came back, Ema Min Lutim just happened to be in the stove room. I have already informed her."

"Oh? Ema Min Lutim is still learning to cook here?"

When I turned to face Leina Wu, I found her smiling brilliantly, which surprised me.

W-What happened? Is Ema Min Lutim fine?

Ehh? What do you mean?

Leina tilted her head quizzingly, with a blissful smile still on her face.

Leina-nee, why are you smiling so happily?

When Rimee Wu pointed that out, Leina Wu stopped smiling and blushed.

W-Was I smiling? Excuse me, it’s nothing…. I just didn’t have a talk with Asuta for a long time, and felt really happy…

It had been just three days since we last spoke.

Three days ago, when I met Leina Wu, she only showed her innocent smile when she bidded goodbye. And her smile right now seemed to be from the pure bliss she was feeling.

I heard about the house head conference from Mama Mia Lei. I will be happy to assist.

That’s great! Why can’t Rimee go and help!? I want to go to the Tsun clan with everyone too.

No way. There are many brusque men in the Tsun clan, and Papa Donda will never agree to that.

Leina Wu suddenly looked at me seriously:

Asuta, we will definitely protect you. No matter what schemes the Tsun clan might have, we won’t let them lay a finger on you.

T-Thank you.

I kept chopping the aria.

At this moment, Leina Wu’s expression changed again, and she looked gloomy.

“Oh right… What kind of person is Yamiel Tsun? Vena Wu said she is a suspicious woman with outstanding looks…”

“Yamiel Tsun? In a word, she’s a woman who sent chills down my spine. I think she is even creepier than the youngest brother of the Tsun clan.”

“I see.”

Leina Wu started smiling again.

Was it my imagination? Leina Wu’s mood seemed to be swinging wildly. This was more prominent after Ai Fa left.

I feel bad whenever I think about the feelings she is hiding in her heart… But she really is a girl with extreme emotions.

Never mind, Leina Wu and I could only normalize our relationship slowly.

After that, Rimee Wu chatted idly with us. When I finished half of the

meat, it was time for dinner.

I went into the hall where the Wu clan members were gathered and sat in the bottom seat like the night before. Dinner was hamburg steak, grilled poitan and kiba meat soup with aria and chachi. Aside from that, I gifted them about 1 kg of 「Myam-roasted meat」 and the leftover tarapa sauce.

The hamburg steak and meat soup tasted flawless. The culinary skills of the Wu clan women were improving every day.

「That's all? Asuta, there's only a little left today?」

Ludo Wu grumbled with dissatisfaction. He inspected the meat covered with tarapa sauce on a plate carefully.

「Yes, about half of yesterday's. Sorry that the portion isn't enough.」

「This isn't enough for everyone, what should we do!?」

You are such a noisy child. Eat more if you like it. There are so many of us here, and you are the only one complaining.

Grandma Ditto Min cautioned Ludo Wu with a cheerful smile.

The atmosphere was tense during last night's dinner. But since Yamiel Tsun accepted our terms without any objections, the mood had softened.

Aside from Ludo Wu, the other Wu clan men were always showing a serious face, and now wasn't an exception. Jiza Wu was especially quiet recently, and that makes me worried.

However, when we pour the tarapa sauce over the meat slices Asuta gave to us, it does taste better than putting on normal meat. It will be great if the taste can be less strong.

Jiza Wu's spouse— Sati Lei Min chipped in quietly.

I marinated the meat with fruit wine, aria, and myam. I already told Shela Wu how to make them—

At this moment, I remembered that I had forgotten to tell the Wu clan about an important matter, and turned to Mama Mia Lei.

"Mia Lei Wu, sorry to bother your meal. I still need to take care of some work later, so I can only discuss this with you now."

"Hmm? What is it?"

"My stall is going to reach its tenth day soon, and I'm planning to close for a day to hold a cooking seminar for the house head conference. Is that okay?"

"Hmm? So you are saying that you will be teaching us to cook for that entire day?"

"Yes. Mida Tsun tried a dish named "Myam-roasted meat" at my stall, and I hope everyone can learn to make that... This dish isn't hard to prepare, but I'm busy with the stall and can't make much time. Hence, I plan to teach everyone on that day."

"That's fine. So all the women going to the house head conference have

to make time for you too?

I will be free the entire day, so everyone can take turns to come over and learn. I will ask the women from house Lutim to attend on that day too.

I turned to Donda Wu who was eating the hamburg steak soaked in the soup.

Considering the effort the women of the Wu clan will have to make, I think the remuneration paid by the Tsun clan should be evenly distributed to everyone who will tend to the hearth on that day. Is that fine?

... What did you say?

Donda Wu stared at me with an impatient face.

You are the one who decided to take up Tsun clan’s retarded request, right?

That’s correct. But the work this time can’t be compared to the house Lutim banquet. Besides, the women from the Wu clan and Lutim house have to protect me while they help me with the hearth. With this in mind, it’s more appropriate to divide the remuneration evenly.

.....

Furthermore, other than doing the tedious work of tending to the hearth, they also have to instruct the Tsun clan women who know nothing about my cooking. So Mia Lei Wu and the others will be working as hard as me. I think we should split the money equally.

Donda Wu grunted:Whatever, and Mama Mia Lei said with an awkward smile:

You are so reserved. Is being reserved the way the Fa house does things? Asuta, like I said yesterday, you two are important friends to the Wu clan and house Lutim.

I’m happy to hear that, and I am also cherishing everyone in the Wu clan and Lutim house.

I felt embarrassed, but I said my honest feelings:

"That's why I don't want to owe a debt to the people I cherish. I hope everyone will help to resist the Tsun clan as equals. It might shameless of me to say this, but I'm the same as everyone else, just a denizen who is concerned about the future of Forest's Edge."

"You are not being shameless."

Grandma Ditto Min who was seated beside Mama Mia Lei told me:

"You might be from a foreign land, but compared to the Tsun clan, you are the real denizen of the Forest's Edge... I'm sure of it after seeing all that has happened."

"... Ditto Min Wu, thank you."

"Ahh!"

As I was answering, Rimee Wu yelled out loud.

The bowl of soup slipped from Ai Fa’s hand, and the food inside spilled onto the floor.

Ai Fa’s body swayed, and I held her shoulders quickly.

“Sorry… for wasting the precious food…”

“Ai Fa! You have a fever again!”

I noticed that she was burning up just by touching her bare shoulders.

Ai Fa supported herself by placing her right hand on the floor and scowled her brows painfully.

“… I will lay out the bedding in Jiba’s room.”

Mama Mia Lei stood up.

“… It’s fine.”

Ai Fa squeezed out that line.

"I have Lome leaves on me, if I rest after drinking one... I will recover."

As I supported Ai Fa's body, I turned towards Mama Mia Lei.

"Sorry, it's still in the middle of a meal, but allow us to retire first... Rimee Wu, there're Lome leaves inside Ai Fa's hunter's cape, can you bring one over?"

"Yes!"

"Ai Fa, can you walk?"

"... Yes."

I put Ai Fa's right arm around my neck.

I grabbed her wrist with one hand and supported her waist with the other, then got up as slowly as I could.

Leina Wu was feeding Grandma Jiba, and she looked at us with a complicated expression. But it was an emergency, so I couldn’t be considerate of her feelings.

“Excuse me, I’m taking Ai Fa back to rest.”

“That will be better. Rimee, go mash up the Lome leaf, then bring it to them later… Ah, Asuata, you haven’t finished your food. We will send two portions to you later, so go already.”

“Alright, thank you.”

We walked to the entrance with me supporting Ai Fa’s shoulders.

Ai Fa couldn’t wear her shoes, so I slipped my shoes on and stepped outside.

I let Ai Fa sit down for a moment.

Ai Fa didn’t have the strength to walk by herself.

“Are you alright? It wasn’t so serious before dinner, right?”

I had an idea why Ai Fa was feverish.

It was probably triggered by her overexerting her brain.

Ai Fa looked troubled since last night, so my deduction should be right.

Aside from that, I wanted to hurry and take Ai Fa away from the crowd. Ai Fa wouldn’t want others to see her frail side.

“… I’m so useless.”

Ai Fa muttered weakly.

“That’s not true.”

I wiped away the sweat from her forehead.

“You are unwell, but you still had to worry about so many things, that’s why you turned feverish again. You are really bad at using your head.”

Ai Fa leaned on my chest and pouted unhappily.

“Stop talking and let’s hurry back to the empty room… I don’t want Rimee Wu to see me like this…”

“I see. Then please bear with this for now.”

With my left arm holding Ai Fa’s back, I reached for the underside of her knees with my right arm.

I then counted “one, two, three” in my heart, then stood up slowly.

“Yes, this is as tough as I expected.”

I was about the same height as Ai Fa, and considering the muscle and bone density, we should be about the same weight. My arms and legs were shaking just from lifting her up.

“… What are you doing?”

After lifting her in a princess carry, Ai Fa rested her head weakly against my shoulders and looked up at me in a daze.

“Why do you need to ask, we need to hurry back to the empty room, right? Then this is the only way.”

If her left arm wasn’t injured, I could carry her on my back and spend a bit less effort. But it was just several tens of meters from the Wu main house to the empty house, so I could manage.

In order to not drop Ai Fa, I took careful steps forward.

"... Wouldn't I be even more humiliated if you do this...?"

"Not at all. We are family, and have to help each other during times of need... And I wouldn't want some other guy to carry you back."

I kept advancing under the bask of the moonlight and broke out a sweat in no time.

Fortunately, I had been carrying heavy loads to the Post Station Town every day, or I would have needed to rest midway.

"Ai Fa, you need to rest well and get better. I really need you... I only have the drive to work hard because you are with me."

"... Is that true...? I think you can already live proudly as a denizen of the Forest's Edge..."

"Definitely not."

As expected, she was troubled about this.

I felt it since last night.

“Denizen of Forest's Edge or not, you are just not used to relying on others. That’s why you can live by yourself for two years, and achieve impressive results. You don’t need to feel ashamed at all.”

“……”

“I’m not as strong as you. I have to work with the people around me everyday… It happened quite a long time again, but I did mention that I wasn’t good at relying on my family.”

I didn’t think there was any contradiction in my words. Because I wasn’t used to relying on others, so I couldn’t differentiate between “reliance” and “dependence”.

The reason why Ai Fa wasn’t good at relying on others was completely different from me— she was too strong.

Even though the reasons were complete opposites of each other, Ai Fa and I had some similarities.

“I can’t live like you did. On the flip side, you can’t live like me either.”

I was getting out of breath, but I still smiled at Ai Fa.

“In that case, we just need to make up for each other’s shortcomings, right? It will be great if we can do that.”

“… Don’t say such difficult things when I’m feverish…”

Ai Fa bumped her head against my cheek.

She then rubbed her hot forehead against me.

“That hurts… Anyway, I’m glad to have been of help. After all, you usually don’t require my assistance.”

…You are so retarded…

Ai Fa muttered, her conscious was fading away.

…I’m the one who needs you…. So, forever…

I didn’t catch what she said at the very end.

So I quietly told her how I feel:

Ai Fa, let’s stay together forever.

Vol. 5 :

Chapter 4

A+ A- Chapter 4

This day has finally come.

The 6th day of the Blue Month was the tenth day we were working in the Post Station Town.

On the eighth day of opening we sold 138 portions.

On the ninth day, 142 meals were sold.

The cumulative sales until yesterday were 1652 red copper plates.

The profit was 1011 red copper plates.

Calculating the copper plates in terms of tusks and horns, that would be about 84 kiba. If the Tsun clan wanted to drown in copper plates, this number would definitely make them dizzy.

The four of us earned this massive amount of money. In just ten days, we made the equivalent of 84 kiba. Even if we included the price of the hide, that would still be 42 kiba.

But we couldn’t start our business if the hunters didn’t hunt the kiba, so we had to account for the hunter’s effort too. Even so, the amount was still staggering. On the other hand, despite the immense value the kiba meat was worth, there were many denizens who ditched them into the forest.

From this perspective, I had not done enough.

Kiba meat was valuable.

It wasn’t limited to dishes from kiba. If kiba meat itself could be traded for money, the denizens would be lifted out of poverty.

We were working so hard in the Post Station Town because of this goal.

□Morning, Milano Mast.□

Along with Vena Wu, Lala Wu, Shela Wu, and Ai Fa who will recover in two days, we headed for the □Kimyusu’s Tail Inn□. Milano Mast was already waiting behind the building.

Milano Mast was a yellowish brown skinned man born and bred in Genos. He was tall, but his body looked as stout as a bull. His face always looked sour, and he received us unhappily today too.

"You are finally here… The guards came just now."

"Eh?"

"I heard that a large number of Jaguar and Semu people had gathered. Isn't it a mistake to put up "that notice"?"

"That notice" referred to the small board beneath my signboard. I couldn't read it, but it said "Blue month, 7th till 11th, closed".

According to my schedule, tomorrow I had to conduct a cooking seminar to prepare for the house head conference. The 10th was the house head conference, and I couldn't prepare the food for the next day either, so on the 11th the stall would be closed too.

"If we don't inform them early about the closure, I'm afraid that there might be backlash… Are there really that many people?"

"Who knows? I told the guards not to interfere."

Milano Mast's thick fingers stuck into the pocket of his dark apron, and he took out eight red copper plates.

When I told him about the planned closure, he said that he will refund the venue and cart rental for the 「Myam-roasted meat」 back to me. Since I will be renting both stalls at the same time, it would more convenient for their contract date to be the same. And so, our contract at the 「Kimyusu's Tail Inn」 came to end.

— The problem would be the stall rental two days later. There wasn't much time left, but Milano Mast still didn't give me any response with regards to the contract.

「I will decide after business ends for today. It won't inconvenience you, right?」

「It's fine, we don't mind.」

I couldn't see through Milano Mast's mind, and that made me feel uneasy.

Milano Mast snorted, then glared at everyone.

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「Get lost. If another commotion happens today, we won't need to talk about the contract, your kiba stall will end for good today.」

He was cold and distant as usual.

With no other choice, we could only head to the marketplace docilely.

"That man's attitude is as bad as ever. If he hates the denizens of Forest's Edge so much, he can just break off ties with us right now."

Lala Wu whispered to me as we pushed the cart.

"Hmm… Milano Mast might have his own circumstances too. I hope he can think it over and reach a conclusion that is acceptable to him."

Yumi once told me that a relative or friend of Milano Mast was killed by a denizen of Forest's Edge. If what she said was true, then what kind of emotions did Milano Mast have when he interacted with us?

If he was willing to let go of his grudge and treat the denizens of Forest's Edge like normal customers, I wished to continue my contract with the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn".

Anyway, for now, we need to tide over today.

No matter how the situation changed, our responsibility remained the same. The tenth day of opening was a milestone, but we still had to work hard in selling the kiba food as usual.

The only thing different from usual was the 80 portions of 「Kiba burger」 I prepared.

As we have shifted our base from the Fa house to the Wu clan, Vena Wu had two more hours of free time. She used this time to help me prepare the ingredients and made twenty more portions.

Ever since the notice for the closure was put out, I would hear the customers expressing their regrets about this. Therefore, I assumed there would be a huge increase in sales the day before and after the rest day. But only god knew what would actually happen.

「Uwah!」

Lala Wu suddenly yelped when we were walking along the street.

I raised my head and found the reason for it. This was the first time such a massive crowd appeared around the slot that we had rented.

People from Semu and Jaguar, and westerners that were either customers or gawkers almost blocked the entire street. No wonder the guards took action.

「Hi, there are more people than usual today.」

I turned and saw Uncle Dora at his stall, talking to me with a smile.

Tara also looked at us with a smile.

“Even if there are loads of people, you won’t be sold out in the morning, right? We will buy some later.”

“Alright, thank you… can you give me 4 tarapa and 30 aria?”

“Okay, that will be 12 red copper plates.”

I placed the vegetables into the sack and quickly got on my way.

“Work hard, Asuta onii-chan!”

With Tara cheering me, we walked to the customers.

“Excuse me, sorry for the wait!”

When they heard my voice, the Jaguar people cheered, then quieted down right away. As the guards were standing by at the side, they restrained themselves.

Recently, only 20 to 30 customers would queue early in the morning. The crowd today was twice the usual numbers. They squeezed in front of the space before the stall so early because they knew we were taking an

off day tomorrow. I felt honored by this.

Please wait a moment, we will start preparing right away.

We put the lighted brazier into the cart and stirred the tarapa sauce.

We then shifted the meat in the marinating sauce into another leather pouch.

After that, the tino was shredded and the aria diced.

Everyone was very familiar with the workflow.

... I feel a little excited.

Lala Wu said with a cheerful smile.

This job is interesting. Compared to tanning hides at home, I prefer working here.

I see, that’s great.

What will happen the day after tomorrow? Will the other women from the Wu clan switch places with us?

I don’t know either. I hope we can keep the same lineup.

Lala Wu’s elated expression turned sullen immediately.

Are you saying you don’t want to work together with Leina-nee?

…Eh?

Leina-nee really wants to work with you. Are her feelings troubling you?

Lala Wu’s sea blue eyes stared at me.

She was very sensitive and observant, so she must have seen through Leina Wu’s and my feelings.

That’s not what I mean… But I think I shouldn’t go near Leina Wu thoughtlessly.

Will everything work out fine if you don’t go near her?

… Sorry, I don’t know either. Maybe that will just drag out the problem.

You don’t need to apologize to me. Things will eventually turn out fine.

Asuta, just do what you think is right.

And finally, Lala Wu showed her trademark smile.

I switched up my mood, and tossed the aria into the heated pot.

We are open for business! Please queue up in fives!

Pops, Arudas, and the architects were our first batch of customers.

Morning, you are early today.

That's right. After work starts, we can only make time in the afternoon. That's why we rushed over so early in the morning. You will be taking tomorrow off, so we can't miss out on this meal.

Arudas laughed heartily, while Pops showed an unhappy face.

That's right, it's all your fault. You are the ones who are taking days off. If you close, your income will fall, right? We will only stay in Genos until the end of the month, and you are going to close for three days…? You are not allowed to close anymore for this month. Do that after we return to Jaguar.

Haha, sorry… We will try not to rest anymore this month.

I added almost 3 kg of meat into the pot

The aroma of the fruit wine and myam spread, and Pop’s expression softened.

“Hmm, the smell sure is appetizing… You are resting tomorrow, huh…? Hey Arudas, what should we eat tomorrow?”

“We have no choice but to do what we usually do, and eat karon fuwano rolls. It’s your favorite food, right, Pops?”

“We can eat all the karon we want at dinner. Ahh, I want to eat kiba.”

Arudas who was a head higher than Pops smiled.

“Right… Bro, a man named Naudiz might visit later, please talk to him when he does.”

“Naudiz? Is he your friend?”

“Not a friend, but we had been acquainted for a long time. He had finally decided to take action.”

I didn’t understand what he meant. But before I could ask, I had already

finished the 【Myam-roasted meat】 they ordered.

【See you two days later then. Take care of yourself and don’t take any more days off, do you hear?】

【Alright, thank you for your patronage.】

I then kept preparing meals.

Fifteen portions of 【Myam-roasted meat】 were gone in a flash.

【Sorry! Please wait a moment!】

The morning of the fifth day was the busiest time we had, and today was even busier.

The additional orders were sold in no time, and we prepared another set of 15. When half of them were sold, the crowd gradually dispersed.

I turned to observe the 【Kiba burger】 stall. Shela Wu just happened to turn my way and our gazes met.

【We made another set of 20, and there are just five left. Should we prepare another set?】

「Hmm, let's observe a bit longer. We can start making the next set when there are three left... Ah, welcome.」

After selling a portion of 「Myam-roasted meat」 to a Semu customer, there were 52 of 「Myam-roasted meat」left, and 45 「Kiba burgers」 remaining. There weren't many western customers, but sales had been climbing steadily.

During these three days, the number of westerners kept increasing, and there were more than 30 westerners who made a purchase yesterday.

Kiba food gradually integrated into the life in Genos. I had to tell Kaslan Lutim about this tomorrow.

At this moment, a cloaked group appeared before me. And of course, they were the 「Silver Vase」 led by Shumimaru

「Welcome! Thank you for coming every day.」

The ten Semu people split into two equal groups as usual and queued in front of the two stalls.

The leader Shumimaru bought 「Myam-roasted meat」 every other day. He took off his hood like he always did, and greeted me politely.

「Tomorrow, close, unfortunate. Day after tomorrow, come again.」

「Okay, thank you.」

「...Asuta, buy thing, decided?」

「Yes. I have discussed this with the house head. After my work is done, I will visit your shop.」

We had earned more than a thousand red copper plates. That exceeded a hundred white copper plates which were enough to be exchanged for one silver plate.

However, money was meant to be spent in the first place. We didn't need to save up and buy anything expensive, so it was about time to spend them. After consulting Ai Fa, I received permission from her to do so.

「Very happy. Before dusk, in shop, I.」

Shumimaru squinted his eyes.

Just hearing me say I would head to his shop made him show such a happy expression. In these few days, I felt a sense of trust and friendship from Shumimaru.

「Well then, see you later.」

「Okay, see you.」

And so, we sold 40 「Kiba burgers」.

After making another 20 「Kiba burgers」, we decided to take a break.

「... I think the easterners are similar to the denizens of Forest's Edge.」

「Lala Wu, you think so too?」

「Yes... A long time ago, Grandma Jiba once said that the denizens of Forest's Edge might be the mixed blood of the easterners and southerners.」

「Ehh? Is that true?」

「Well, Grandma Jiba doesn't really know either. Before war broke out between Semu and Jaguar, the people exiled by both nations met in the southern forest, and became the ancestors of the Forest's Edge denizens... That is the legend of Forest's Edge.」

「Oh, incredible...! No wonder I feel an affinity for most of the Semu and Jaguar people.」

□Is that so? If we had known this when Grandma Jiba and the others left the southern forest, we should have gone to the eastern kingdom instead.□

□Hmm~ but we can't speak the eastern kingdom language. Besides, the east and the south were already enemy nations back then, so they could only rely on the western kingdom that was on good terms with the south.□

□Ah, that's true… Never mind, our lives won't change no matter what we say now.□

While we were chatting idly, the stall next door finished the preparation for the □Kiba burger□.

I had delegated the taste of seasoning the tarapa sauce to Shela Wu.

□Alright, let's rest for a while… Since the meat here is grilled, let's take a break.□

□Yes!□

I took two □Kiba burgers□, Lala Wu brought the □Myam-roasted meat in tarapa sauce□, and we walked to where Ai Fa was.

Ai Fa was sound asleep. When we were about two meters from her, she

opened her eyes and lifted her head.

“Were you asleep? Sorry, I brought some food over, do you want to eat?”

“Yes.”

Ai Fa’s fever had subsided.

Just to be safe, she didn’t follow us to the Post Station Town for the past two days. There were six days since her elbow injury, and she could remove the brace stabilizing her left elbow tomorrow.

According to Ai Fa, it would be some time before she could enter the forest again, but she should recover before the house head conference.

The house head conference will be in four days. Ai Fa couldn’t head to the Tsun clan with her left arm in a sling. I felt happy to see her injury getting better.

“Oh right, after we close the stall, you will be taking the copper plates to buy some things, right? What are you buying?”

Lala Wu asked excitedly as she ate her food deliciously.

“Erm, I’m planning to buy a kitchen knife and a steel griddle.”

「... Steel griddle.」

「Yes, steel griddle! It's a new product that the pot shop just imported! It looks really practical!」

「... That's all?」

「Yes, I just need to buy these two things.」

I looked excited, but Lala Wu seemed uninterested.

「... Both are cooking equipment.」

「Yes. Just these pieces of equipment will cost 33 white copper plates though.」

We have saved about a hundred white copper plates. Ai Fa and I decided to keep half of them with us and to spend the other half. And so, I would be using 18 white copper plates to purchase the Semu kitchen knife, and another 15 to buy the Jaguar made steel griddle. So I intended to spend 33 white copper plates in total.

「Ah, are you going to buy the knife that silver-haired Semu man showed you? Asuta, it looked like you really wanted to buy it back then.」

□Yes, that’s true!□

□... Well then, what about Ai Fa?□

After staring at me with eyes that said □What a hopeless cooking nerd□, Lala Wu turned her head towards Ai Fa.

□I don’t need anything.□:Ai Fa answered curtly while eating her mini □Kiba burger□ preciously.

□Eh? Are you not buying anything?□

□Yes. My blades are still usable, and my medicine and attire are still sufficient.□

□In that case, you can buy clothes and accessories for banquets. The one you wore last time was Grandma Jiba’s old clothes, right?□

□I won’t ever wear that kind of raiments in the future.□

□Ehh□ There might be other people requesting you to cook for their banquet.□

□... I will deal with them when the time comes.□

Ai Fa said coldly.

Lala Wu looked unhappy.

“I can’t even. Only Asuta gets to enjoy”

“That’s right. This is the Fa house’s money after all, so I hope the house head can use these copper plates too. Not including the earnings for today, we can still use another 17 white copper plates, you know?”

“Don’t mind me, just buy what you want… By the way, you are just buying cooking equipment, huh? I’m not asking you to splurge, but you can buy something you like too.”

“Hmm~ in that case, can I buy something other than cooking equipment?”

Ai Fa didn’t seem to be unhappy when she heard that and said with a satisfied face:“Buy what you want.”

“Asuta, I’m telling you…”

Lala Wu glared at me a little angrily.

She appeared to have read something from my face, and muttered…
Never mind. and then shoved her food into her mouth.

2

While we were taking turns to rest, the customers still kept coming.

Before I knew it, there were 34 Kiba burgers and 38 Myam-roasted meat left.

Business is really good today, looks like we will sell everything, right?

When I returned from my break, Shela Wu who was manning the Myam-roasted meat stall in our stead said with a cheerful smile.

That's right. I thought business would be better after our off day. It's lucky that we prepared more Kiba burger just in case.

We prepared 170 meals today, right? How many should we make for the day after tomorrow…?

At this moment, Shela Wu opened her eyes wide in surprise.

I scanned around me in a panic and sighed in relief when I saw familiar

figures.

“They are from the Wu clan main house. They had to do their grocery shopping today, so I asked them to send some firewood over too. Didn’t I tell you?”

“No… I heard about it…”

In that case, why was she so surprised? In the other end of the street were the second son, second daughter, and youngest daughter of the Wu clan main house.

When they came nearby, I understood the reason why Shela Wu was so shocked. Darum Wu had finally removed the bandages on his face.

“Sorry for the wait, here is the firewood you need.”

Leina Wu was smiling brilliantly like a flower, and she put the baggage on her back beside the stall.

“Hehee, I happened to be free, so I came over to play.”

Rimee Wu stacked her baggage on top. It was exactly half the size of Leina Wu.

And finally, the silent Darum Wu dropped three bags to the ground.

There was an ugly scar on his face. I was worried about his injuries, looked like it was really serious.

The scar went across his right cheek, extending to his nose and under his ear. The cut was deep, the scar had a frightening flesh color, and the stitches could still be clearly seen. His already fierce face looked even more ferocious, and he seemed 50 percent more intimidating.

Darum Wu was a handsome man, his fiery eyes and fearless expression were the main reason why he left an impression of being ferocious on others. I couldn't help thinking that obtaining a scar was a pity.

…Why the hell are you staring at me?

Darum Wu glared at me with wolf-like eyes.

He was about to yell at me, but Shela Wu shouted nervously before that:

I finally met you… Are your wounds alright?

Darum Wu looked at Shela Wu impatiently:

…You are the eldest daughter in Shin Wu's house. What about my

injuries?

I heard you have not entered the forest since the day you got wounded. Our entire family feels really bad about that… Thank you for saving Shin.

I heard that Darum Wu got wounded because he protected someone from the branch house, so that man was Shin Wu.

Darum Wu scowled his face unhappily.

Are you stupid? It’s only natural to protect one’s blood kin.

No, if you didn’t come to his aid, we would have lost our house head. I want to thank you.

Darum Wu clicked his tongue, then scanned around him.

When he found Ai Fa staying at the back, he narrowed his eyes.

…Leina, wait here.

Ehh?

Leina opened her eyes wide and stood where she was. Darum Wu went around the stall and walked straight towards Ai Fa.

Hey, hey, what do you think you are doing? I wanted to follow, but a Semu man just happened to visit the stall.

「Kiba?」

「Ah, yes, this is kiba food. Please feel free to try a sample.」

Leina Wu and Rimee Wu quickly left the stall and watched the Semu man sample the kiba curiously.

「The stall beside us is also selling kiba food. We are selling roasted meat seasoned with myam and fruit wine, theirs is a special meat dish covered in tarapa sauce.」

After the customer nodded, he walked towards the stall selling 「Kiba burger」.

「Amazing! Someone from the city is really eating kiba! Although he is an easterner and not a westerner!」

「Hey Rimee, you are too loud... Sorry for disturbing your work. We are done with our task, so we will go now.」

「Ehh」 Rimee wants to chat with Ai Fa.」

Didn’t you chatted a lot for the past two days…? Then I will go buy something first, you accompany Ai Fa. I will come pick you up after I’m done shopping.

Yes! Thank you, Leina-nee!

Leina Wu turned to me and said with a happy smile:

I’m sorry, please take care of Rimee. If she disrupts your work, feel free to discipline her.

A-Alright, I understand.

I thought Leina Wu’s smile was getting more brilliant with each passing day.

To be honest, I didn’t know if I should be happy about this.

Sorry for the wait.

At this moment, Darum Wu walked over.

I turned my head in a panic and saw Ai Fa sitting nonchalantly under the tree shade.

□Well then, see you later.□

The second son and second daughter of the Wu clan left.

And obviously, my heart was filled with unease.

The customer from earlier walked back and handed over some coins, so I still couldn't leave the stall.

□Thank you! Please wait a moment!□

Focus on your job! I told myself quietly and grabbed a piece of poitan.

During this time, I heard someone saying faintly:

□... What business did Darum Wu have with Ai Fa?□

□Ehh?□

On a closer look, I realized that Shela Wu had lowered her head depressedly.

Could it be that it was what I was thinking?

No, I shouldn’t assume everything was like that.

I quickly made the 【Myam-roasted meat】, handed it to the customer and called out to the little girl beside me.

【Excuse me, Rimee Wu, can you call Ai Fa over?】

【Hmm? Okay!】

Rimee Wu dashed away nimbly, her red hair trailing behind her.

After that, two ivory-skinned westerner youths walked over timidly.

【E-Excuse me. We want two.】

【Thank you, please hold on for a moment.】

If I remember correctly, these two youths were with me when the Totos Moa suddenly appeared at our stall and screamed together with me. They would now visit every other day.

There was still some time before noon, and the sales were already steadily climbing.

After I setted their meals, Rimee Wu brought Ai Fa over.

“What is it? You want me to buy groceries?”

“No, not yet… What did Darum Wu talk to you about?”

Ai Fa tilted her head puzzledly and replied:“Don’t know.”

“You don’t know? You were talking with him just now, right?”

“We didn’t talk, he kept rambling on by himself and then left. The second son of the Wu clan sure is annoying.”

“… Can you tell me what exactly did he say?”

Ai Fa tilted her head the other way.

“What did he say… He mentioned that he will be going into the woods tomorrow. And hunters who don’t go into the woods are useless. Since I can’t hunt right now, he was probably mocking me.”

“Haha, Darum-nii is so childish.”

It seemed that the women from the Fa house and Wu clan wasn't fazed by that guy.

I thought back to one night about a month ago, Darum Wu was also mocking Ai Fa arrogantly. So it was the same today. However, it sounded amusing when Ai Fa put it that way.

Also, Vena Wu once said that 「Darum still hopes that Ai Fa will marry him」. Considering all that, I thought Darum Wu was like a clumsy boy trying hard to approach a girl he likes.

In the end, Shela Wu and I remained moody.

「... It's almost time for the second half. Shela Wu, let's work hard together.」

「... Yes, of course.」

Shela Wu nodded firmly as if she was cheering for herself.

At this moment, another customer came. It was someone we knew, Tara.

「Asuta nii-chan, I want three!」

"Ah, thank you for today too, Tara! You really came every day."

"I want to eat delicious food every day! It's a pity you are closed tomorrow."

Her caramel-colored eyes caught sight of Rimee Wu's figure:

"Uwah, it's a girl from Forest's Edge!"

Rimee Wu looked at Tara in surprise.

Tara bowed squeamishly.

"... Nice to meet you."

Rimee Wu smiled immediately and said energetically:

"Nice to meet you!"

When she heard Rimee Wu's reply, Tara showed her usual innocent smile.

"I thought only the adults from Forest's Edge come to town! I'm Tara."

“I’m Rimee Wu! Rimee is too small and can’t carry heavy things, so I don’t come here often.”

“Is that so? The denizens of Forest's Edge are strong! You all can carry 200 poitan in one go, that’s incredible!”

The two of them created an indescribably peaceful world.

Ai Fa stood beside Rimee Wu, her expression blank and eyes wavering.

I was grilling meat for Tara right now and couldn’t save her.

Work hard, Ai Fa! I cheered for her in my heart.

“How old are you, Rimee Wu? Tara is 8 years old now.”

“Rimee is eight too! We are the same!”

“The same!”

“Tara, you are from Genos. Aren’t you afraid of the denizens of Forest's Edge?”

“Hmm… Of course, I’m scared. But the people around Asuta onii-chan

aren’t scary! By the way, I just saw a scary man from Forest's Edge walking by just now.

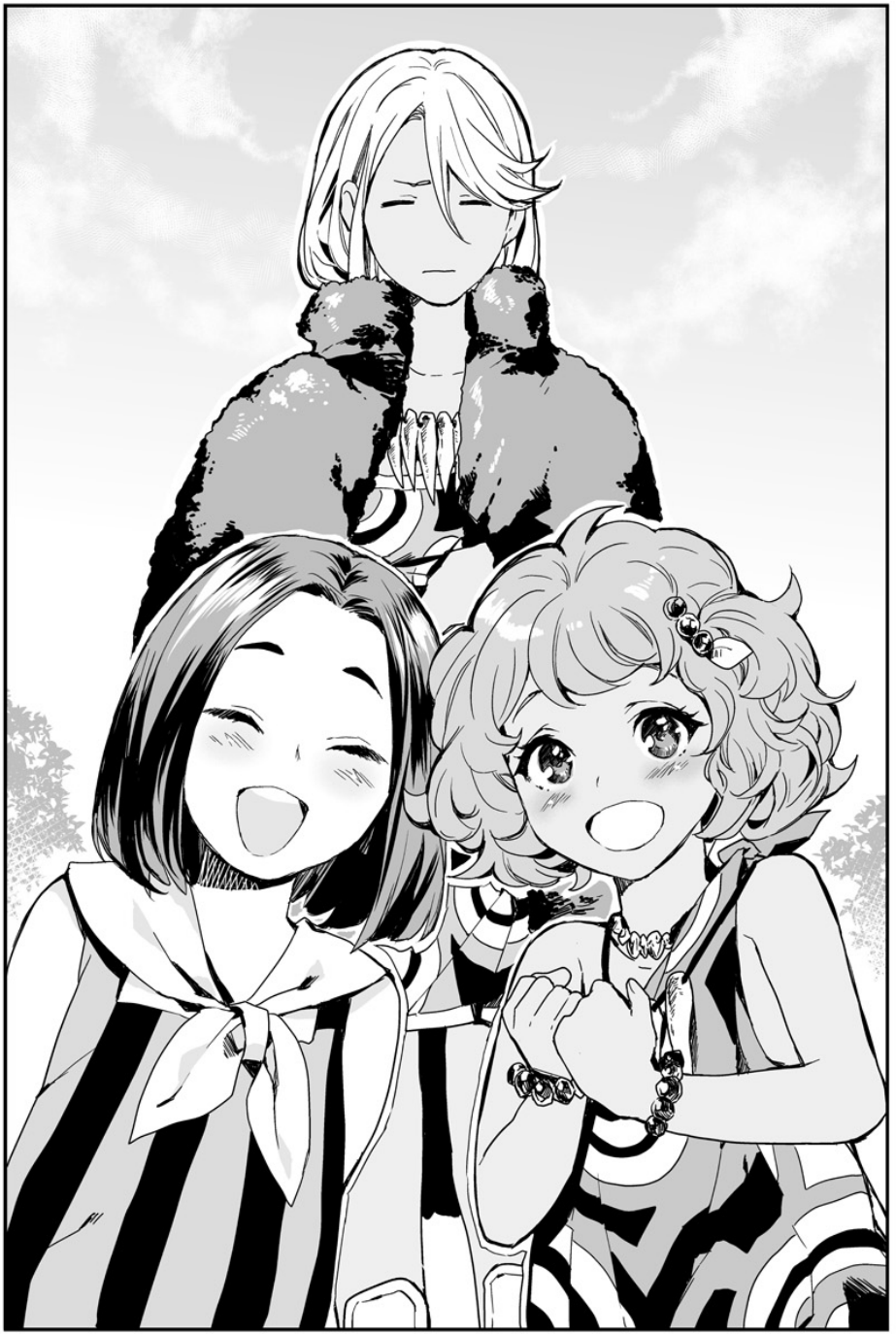
Haha, that’s probably Darum-nii, he’s my brother.

Ehh Is that so! Awesome!

It’s fine. Even other people from Forest's Edge are afraid of Darum-nii. He is actually not scary at all.

Not just their age, the two little girl’s height, hair length and adorable appearance were all very similar. Just the sight of them calmed my heart.

Those two in the stall there are Rimee Wu’s sisters. Also, didn’t you let a boy eat a bite of your meat bun last time, Tara? That’s Rimee’s brother, Ludo Wu.



□Amazing!□

Tara cheered.

□You have so many siblings! Tara has two older brothers, but they are always working at home.□

□I see. Work is very important.□

□That’s right!□

Ai Fa finally pleaded for help with her gaze.

As a lowly member of the Fa house, the only thing I could do was to finish the □Myam-roasted meat□ and present it to Tara.

□Sorry for the wait. That will be six red copper plates.□

□Thank you! Here, for you!□

□Thank you for your patronage! Aren’t you buying two of each today?□

□Yes! Papa is eating □Myam-roasted meat□, and I’m having □Kiba

burger! Papa realized that if both of us ate half, we will get to taste both the dishes.

Tara puffed out her chest proudly.

It took them seven days to realize this, what a warming scene.

Bye bye, Asuta-nii…! See you next time, Rimee Wu!

Yes! Bye bye!

And so, the two young girls became acquainted.

Ai Fa sighed deeply, then placed her right hand on Rimee Wu’s fluffy head.

Rimee Wu, I’m tired. Can we go over there and rest?

Yes! We have to chat properly before Leina-nee comes back!

And so, we finally had the chance to idle.

What a busy day.

But the nonstop flow of customers was a perfect end to these ten days… While I was thinking about that, Yumi came over. She was accompanied by teenage girls from Genos today too.

「Hi, Asuta, business is good today too, huh.」

「Welcome! Thank you for visiting every day.」

「Too bad! Everyone wants to eat 「Kiba burger」 today!」

「I see.」

I didn't feel vexed or anything though.

「Ah, sorry, can you help me buy one?」

Yumi said that to her friends and slipped over from the stall next door.

「Asuta, have you decided on the things I mentioned last time?」

「Ah, about the new contract from the day after tomorrow? Milano Mast said he will tell me after I close shop for the day.」

「What? Why does he want to make you wait so long? It's either yes or no, no need to think about it so much.」

Yumi suddenly looked to the side.

"How disconcerting. Why is he just standing there like that?"

"Ehh?"

I followed her line of sight and found Milano Mast standing beside the street.

"Hmm… I didn't notice him at all. When did he start standing there?"

Shela Wu lowered her voice and said to me:

"Asuta, are you referring to that mister from the inn? He had been standing there and watching us even before Leina Wu and the others came over."

"I see. Hmm~ why is he doing this?"

"Who knows? Strictly speaking, the venue manager will need to hand all the venue rental fee to Rock City, so all they are earning will be the pushcart rental fee. If he really wants the rental fee, he just needs to recontract with you. There's no reason to deliberate for so long."

As we were talking, Yumi’s 「Kiba burger」 was done, and one of her friends brought it over for her.

「Ah, thank you. I need to discuss something with him, go on and eat first.」

At this moment, another new customer approached us.

Was he a southerner?

No, despite his stout and strong appearance common among Jaguar people, his skin had a deep shade of ivory.

「Fufu, so this is kiba food.」

He was a man in his prime and had an amiable attitude in spite of his serious face.

He had brown hair and beard, but his eyes resembled bright emeralds. It was a color that matched Jaguar people. He was about Yumi’s height.

「I see, so the meat here are samples?」

「Yes, please have some.」

The man picked up the meat nimbly with a krilee toothpick and sent it into his mouth after inspecting it carefully.

「... Yes.」

「The stall beside us is also selling kiba food. Please feel free to compare them.」

「I see, I see.」

The way that man sauntered to the 「Kiba burger」 stall looked a little amusing. Yumi looked at his back with a troubled face.

「That man... I can't recall who he is.」

「Huh? You know him?」

「No, but I have seen him somewhere...」

Yumi ate her 「Kiba burger」 and fell into deep thought. At this moment, that man wobbled back here.

「The dish next door tastes fascinating. But I want to eat your dish first.」

“Thank you, that will be two red copper plates.”

“Oh, two red copper plates for such a big piece? That’s cheap.”

He nodded and handed over the copper plates.

I reheated the kiba and aria, then handed the merchandise to that man.

“Hmm.”

The man inspected the “Myam-roasted meat”, then bit into it.

“… Whoa.”

Seeing that he showed no intention of leaving, I asked him warmly: “Does the taste suit you?”

“Very delicious. I can’t imagine this is kiba. I was surprised when I heard how popular kiba food was. I even suspected that the food had been spiked with drugs to numb the tongue. This dish is really sumptuous.”

“Thank you.”

“The seasoning is excellent. The sweetness of the fruit wine meshes

perfectly with the spiciness of the myam. Who is the person that seasoned this dish?

I did that personally.

Oh, impressive for a young chap… But the texture of this fuwano sure is special. It is firm but smooth to the bite.

Ah, this is poitan, not fuwano.

Huh?Ehh?

Not just that man, even Yumi was dumbstruck.

Poitan? You mean the poitan that is eaten by travelers? How can it be? That thing is gooey like mud water.

Ah, this one is different. After boiling away the water, we dried it completely and then grilled it.

Speaking of which, when Kamyua Yost heard about the steps to process the poitan, he looked as surprised as when he tasted kiba.

Hmm?

The man inspected the half-eaten 「Myam-roasted meat」 even more carefully.

「The color does resemble poitan… are you serious? You are not joking with me?」

「Yes. I also added a little gigo.」

Poitan was cheap just like kiba for a completely different reason. Should I avoid bringing this up?

「… Poitan is a very cheap food ingredient, right?」

「I don’t know the price of fuwano. Is the price difference really big?」

「Using this dish as an example, one red copper plate worth of fuwano can make three of these.」

「I see, I can make five with poitan.」

「… Oh!」

The man let out an exasperated sigh, and tossed the rest of the 「Myam-roasted meat」 into his mouth.

Yumi shouted at the same time:

“Ah! I remember now! You are an innkeeper, right? No wonder you look familiar, I have seen you before in the innkeeper conference!”

“Oh, you just realized that? You are the daughter of the “West Wind Inn” innkeeper, right? I’m the innkeeper of the “Big Tree of the South Inn”, Naudiz.”

His name sounded familiar.

“Oh right, you know the architect Arudas?”

“Yes, they lodge in my inn every year. As you can see, the blood of the south flows in my veins, so the people of Jaguar take good care of me.”

This meant that he was a mixed blood between westerners and southerners.

Kamyua Yost once said that only children of mixed heritage between the west and north, or east and south would be persecuted. A mixed blood between the west and the south wasn’t a problem.

“Your cooking is well-received in my inn and is a hot topic. They were right, I admit my loss.”

“T-Thank you.”

「... And so? What do you want to do? Are you trying to get Asuta to sign a contract with your inn?」

Yumi interjected unhappily, and Naudiz tilted his thick neck puzzledly.

「Ohh? This is a pushcart from the 「Kimyusu's Tail Inn」, right? There isn't much difference no matter which venue manager you sign a contract with. I have business with the owner of this stall.」

「Are you looking for me?」

「Yes... Can you let me sell your cooking at my inn?」

Naudiz asked politely.

3

「Just what... do you mean?」

「I mean what I literally said. I hope to provide your cooking for dinner at my inn. I can't hire you as a chef like what the castle town does. I'm willing to buy your cooking and add it to my menu... Ah, excuse me.」

When I realized it, I found a Semu customer standing quietly behind Naudiz.

"Welcome. Would you like one?"

At this moment, another Semu man showed up behind him. The two of them looked very similar, like twins. They presented copper plates from both sides.

"So two in total? Thank you for your patronage."

Naudiz stroked his brown beard apologetically.

"It's almost noon. I should have come earlier, but I have work to do in the morning."

"It's fine... Can you hold on for a moment? I can leave the stall for a while if I grill more meat in one go."

I said this to him as I made the "Myam-roasted meat", and Naudiz replied:"That's fine, of course." and retreated to the side of the counter.

Yumi followed and stared at Naudiz quizzedly.

"Hey, what do you mean by selling Asuta's cooking? You want to buy what he made and sell them during dinner?"

"You are correct. The Jaguar people praised the cooking from this stall and ate the dinner provided at my inn unhappily. They kept saying they want to eat kiba. As the boss of an inn, I felt ashamed."

"In that case, you will have to inflate the price if you want to make money, right? But if that happens, who will want to buy it?"

"That's hard to say. It's true that I will need to increase the price to make a profit. However, if the kiba food is just a little more expensive than the other food, I don't think sales will fall too much."

"But your profit margin will fall, right?"

"That's correct, the money we bring in with food will fall drastically. However, we can still make a profit if more customers lodge with us."

I peeked at the two of them as I grilled the meat. Naudiz looked stern, but his expression was gentle. Yumi was the opposite.

The brusque temperament of the southerners and the delicate personality of the westerners. I could see these two natures mixed in a complicated manner in Naudiz.

"For example, if I set the price of the kiba food at 5 red copper plates, karon food at 4 red copper plates and Kimyusu food at 3 red copper plates, some customers will be willing to pay for the more expensive

kiba food. If I can also sell the other food, my earnings won’t fall too much.

Hmm… You have given it much consideration.

I made this decision after agonizing over this over several days. Ever since my Jaguar customer recommended this dish to me, I had been troubled about this.

At this point, the meat was finally done.

Sorry, please tend to the stall, I will be back soon.

After saying that to Shela Wu, I walked to Naudiz.

Sorry for the wait… Ms. Yumi, thank you for speaking out, that helps me tidy up my thoughts.

Don’t use honorifics, that’s disgusting.

Sorry… As I need to prepare the food and tend to house chores, I need to return home before dusk every day. You just need my cooking, and I don’t need to be present, right?

Yes. If possible, I hope you can prepare some food that can be served

after heating them up, just like the dish being sold next door. I also want it to be dinner, not a light meal like this. For a start, I just need 30 to 50 portions.

I see, dinner needs to be more filling… How much do you need for one portion? How much are you willing to pay?

Well, it should be 1.5 times that of a light meal. Three red copper plates per meal… It will be great if it is cheaper. I think 25 red copper plates for 10 would be an appropriate price, what do you think?

After doing a rough calculation, this price would not put us in the red.

In order to achieve the goal of making the deliciousness of kiba well-known, that was a tempting proposal.

I tried probing further:

… This might be a little rude, but can you tell me what is the price of karon meat?

Karon meat? We sell one portion for about 1 red copper plate.

Ehh? How much is one portion? Is that 1.5 times bigger than of our shop?

「Yes, you are right.」

I had to do some calculations.

I used about 180 g of kiba in each portion.

1.5 times that would be 270 g.

270 g for one red copper plate… which means 0.37 red copper plate per 100 g. Since that was for bulk purchases, that should be half the retail price for normal consumers.

On the tenth day of opening, I have finally figured out a specific figure.

「I see… I look forward to working with you too. However, it is very tedious to grill poitan. If you can use fuwano to complement my dish, I can provide 50 portions for you.」

「Ohh? Then my price will be adjusted too.」

「Yes, you can deduct the cost of the fuwano. One red copper plate of fuwano is enough for three light meals. As dinner is larger in portion, one red copper plate of fuwano should be enough for two dinners, right?」

Poitan was cheaper than fuwano, so I was losing out. But considering the

complicated work of grilling poitan, it wasn’t too great of a loss.

「However, my schedule for the next two months isn’t certain. Besides, other inns or restaurants might want me to provide meals too.」

「Alright, it’s true that many inns in Post Station Town have southerners as regulars. On top of that, there are many inns with easterner regulars too.」

Naudiz nodded calmly.

「When our inn starts selling kiba food, others will emulate us too… That is just a matter of time.」

「I see. I’m very honored— but my time is limited, so I can’t complete everyone’s request.」

「… That’s what I thought.」

Naudiz squinted his eyes.

He probably thought that I intended to increase the price with that excuse.

However, I had other plans in mind.

□When I can’t spare the time, I hope everyone will buy the kiba meat directly instead of my cooking.□

□Ehh!?□

The one who yelped was Yumi, not Naudiz.

□Hence, I hope the □Big Tree of the South Inn□ can consider buying the kiba meat directly in the future and cook it yourself. Please consider adding this to your long-term plan. The kiba meat will definitely make you a good deal of profit…□

□Wait! If everyone sells kiba food, your business will plummet you know!?□

Yumi grabbed my arm in a panic:

□Selling the food alone should be more profitable…! Asuta, is selling the kiba meat directly a better deal?□

That wasn’t true.

Yesterday, the Fa house’s kiba meat was all used up. From today onwards, we would need to buy kiba meat from the Wu clan. If I just wanted to focus on the interest of the Fa house, it would be more

advantageous for us to continue selling my cooking.

However, my goal in running a business in the Post Station Town wasn't to earn copper plates.

I smiled at Yumi.

"It's too complicated to explain, but personally, my goal is for everyone to buy the kiba meat directly."

"Is that so…? Then there isn't any problem…"

Yumi let go of my arm, but still seemed unable to accept this.

Naudiz stroked his beard and said:

"Yes, that sounds interesting. But for a start, we will be happy just to sell your cooking. Let's leave all that to the future."

"Alright, thank you… Well then, is it alright for us to discuss the details after I close shop? It's almost noon."

"That's true. I should return to the inn… I will inform the innkeeper of the "Kimyusu's Tail Inn" to avoid any misunderstanding."

Naudiz sauntered away slowly.

As I watched Naudiz walk away, Yumi clicked her tongue.

「He wants to sell kiba food in his inn, huh… I want to do that, but our customers are mostly westerners, there are almost no southerners or easterners. It's unlikely for the westerners to order kiba food.」

「That's right, it's not possible for now.」

The westerners wouldn't accept kiba food straight away.

I also couldn't wipe away the prejudice the westerners held towards the denizens of Forest's Edge in one week.

However, I captivated the southerners and easterners with the kiba.

I built up a bridge that will lead towards our final goal.

Next, it will depend on whether our collaboration with 「Big Tree of the South Inn」 would work.

「What's this? Even if your contract with the 「Kimyusu's Tail Inn」 ends today, my inn will have no chance to debut… Never mind, it doesn't matter which manager you pay your copper plates too, as long as your

cooking is delicious.

In the end, Yumi showed her usual innocent smile and smacked my arm hard.

I'm going now! My friends are probably getting tired of waiting. I will continue visiting two days later.

Alright, thank you.

After bidding Yumi farewell, I returned to my stall.

Shela Wu who was tending the Myam-roasted meat stall alone showed a composed smile.

Welcome back... there are 26 Myam-roasted meat left.

Eh? You sold quite a lot.

24 Kiba burgers here...: Vena Wu said to me from the next stall.

So exactly 50 portions... Looks like we can close shop early.

I just finished saying that, when more customers came over.

Three men appeared before the stall, they had yellowish brown skin and looked menacing.

"Welcome."

I received them with a smile.

I remembered these customers. A few days ago, they were looking for trouble at the "Kiba burger" stall. But Vena Wu served them, and they even bought a merchandise when they left.

They came with malicious intent on their first visit, but they were now our regular customers.

"Hmmp... business seems good today, bro."

"Yes, it's thanks to everyone."

"Really now, a guy like me is actually buying kiba meat, how did I stray into this path?"

They didn't seem to be drinking today, and despite their brusque tone, their expressions were calm.

□Sorry for the wait.□

Shela Wu handed the merchandise to the three of them. One of them frowned and leaned in close to me.

□By the way, there are many beauties in Forest's Edge. Kiba is delicious and the women are fair, no wonder you moved into Forest's Edge.□

□Haha, that’s not the reason why I’m staying in Forest's Edge.□

□How can that be? The woman you touched is also helping in the stall, right?□

□No, no such thing! This humble one will never do something so despicable.□

I stole a glance at Shela Wu, and her face remained urbane, ignoring the customer’s teasing.

The three customers left with their □Myam-roasted meat□, and I exhaled. I wasn’t sweating, but I still wiped my forehead with my hand.

□What a cheerful bunch. Sorry about that, Shela Wu.□

□You don’t need to apologize, Asuta… Many people were mistaking me

for your wife.

Eh? R-Really?

Yes. Every day there will be someone who asked me that. The people in the city sure are strange, how can a clumsy woman like me be your wife?

No, I'm the clumsy one! Why would an excellent woman like you ever marry me... Uwah!

Someone tapped my shoulder suddenly, making me yelp.

I turned to find Ai Fa standing behind me with a displeased expression, holding several aria in her right arm.

Don't shout so suddenly, that surprised me.

Y-You are the one surprising me! Don't walk behind me without making any noise!

Do I have to intentionally make noise when I walk now? Don't talk nonsense.

Even though we were squabbling, Shela Wu was unfazed as she received

the aria from Ai Fa.

“Thank you… Asuta, you were busy just now, so I asked Ai Fa to do the last bit of shopping.”

“T-Thank you for your kind help… Huh? Did Rimee Wu already go back?”

“When you left the stall to discuss business with the customer, the second daughter of the Wu clan fetched her back.”

As we spoke, Ai Fa stared at Shela Wu and me.

“A-Ai Fa, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing… Looking closely, you two do look like a wedded couple.”

So she heard everything!

I was wondering how to answer when Shela Wu said with a smile:

“That’s not true. Asuta would never choose me to be his wife… I respect and trust Asuta, but I won’t pick him to be my husband.”

“… I see.”

After saying that, Ai Fa turned and left.

When Ai Fa sat down under the tree shade, Shela Wu whispered to me with a hint of guilt:

“I’m sorry for saying something so rude… But I think I should tell Ai Fa what I really think.”

“I think you made the right call… and I trust and respect you too.”

After Shela Wu showed a cheerful smile, she quickly turned her face back. Another customer was here.

It was almost noon, and the crowd was bigger than usual.

There seemed to be a trend of the westerners increasing.

“Shela Wu, there are just two “Kiba burgers” left in the pot… Can you switch places with me…?”

“Alright.”

Shela Wu went to the “Kiba burger” stall, and Vena traded places with her.

I prepared 80 「Kiba burgers」 today, and we were down to the last 20. Only 23 「Myam-roasted meat」 remained.

「After a few days, we will finally be sold out again… Selling everything does feel better than not selling all of it…」

The customers kept coming, as if they were responding to Vena Wu’s words.

On the tenth and final day, the speed of the sales was incredibly fast.

The merchandise was sold one after another, and only three 「Myam-roasted meat」 were left by noon.

「Uwah, looks like we will finish first.」

It was tiring and tough, but I still cheered. Someone approached us.

It was Milano Mast.

「Ah, hello.」

This was the first time Milano Mast came near my stall during operational hours.

He looked at the remaining meat on the plate and snorted:

"Will you be done after selling this much more? How many portions did you prepare today?"

"Today, we prepared 90 "Myam-roasted meat", and the neighboring stall prepared 80 "Kiba burgers", a bit more than usual."

"A total of 170 meals. What an incredible number."

Milano Mast took out and gave me two red copper plates.

"Ehh? Do you want to buy my food?"

"That's right."

"Thank you for your patronage... would you like to try the sample here..."

"Shut up. I already gave you the money, so hurry up with the food. No need for samples."

His tone was unhappy as usual, he even added:"This will be the last day anyway."

□What do you mean by that last bit—□

At this moment, a westerner couple came over.

□Look, here it is. It says kiba on the signboard, right? That’s the kiba food that is the talk of the town.□

□Uwah, disgusting… let’s not eat it…□

□That’s what I thought too! But the kiba food is surprisingly delicious!□

The youth handed four red copper plates to me a little cockily.

□Hey, give me two.□

□Alright, thank you for your patronage.□

Cooking the portions for these two plus Milano Mast’s share meant that the □Myam-roasted meat□ will become sold out.

After making three portions, Vena Wu handed the completed □Myam-roasted meat□ to them one by one.

Milano Mast quietly walked towards the bustling south.

□……Vena Wu, please help me put out the fire.□

After saying that, I chased after Milano Mast.

□Milano Mast, please wait.□

He didn’t stop.

But he didn’t quicken his pace either. I caught up to him not far from the □Kiba burger□ stall.

□Excuse me, what did you mean by □last day□ just now?□

Milano Mast ate his □Myam-roasted meat□ and continued walking with his expression the same as usual.

□… There’s no need to be that surprised, right? You will be signing a contract with the □West Wind Inn□ tomorrow.□

□Well… About that…□

□Are you signing with the □Big Tree of the South Inn□ instead? It doesn’t

matter which inn will you sign with. The cart rental fee is just enough for my daughter’s allowance. Stop brooding over it so much and sign with an inn that values you.

Milano Mast walked to the street side and stopped.

He shot his displeased gaze from below.

I detest the denizens of Forest's Edge, and my daughter is fearful of you. We have no reasons to stop you from jumping ships.

Regarding that… If you want us to sign with another inn, we will do so…

In that case, why didn’t he tell us about this two days ago?

And — Why did his expression look so heavy when he was eating the kiba food?

… Even if it is on the level of my daughter’s allowance, I can still earn one white copper plate from the cart rental. As a businessman, I shouldn’t let this money slip away. Even if I bear a deep grudge against the denizens of Forest's Edge, I shouldn’t lose money over it… I once thought this way, but I have gotten over it now.

So… Since you had gotten over it, that means you are going to hand my contract over to another inn?

It was a pity, but I had to respect Milano Mast’s wishes.

Milano Mast looked at the half-eaten 「Myam-roasted meat」 and said: 「That’s not it.」

「Ehh? Then what is it?」

「As a businessman, I think I should sign a contract with you. But there’s no point in making each other uncomfortable… My daughter and I will never forgive the denizens of Forest's Edge.」

Milano Mast was still looking down and said quietly:

「A denizen of Forest's Edge killed a good friend of mine, and my wife also passed away because of this. That was ten years ago… So I wish a horrible death upon all the denizens of Forest's Edge. I don’t give a damn about the farms, all the hunters are scum.」

「But—」

「I won’t have any complains if the criminal is brought to justice. But the denizens of Forest's Edge acted with impunity and the landlord backed them up. When my friend fell off a cliff, he died while grasping a necklace in his hand. On it were tusks and horns from a kiba. Despite the glaring evidence, no denizen of the Forest's Edge paid for the crime.」

I clenched my fist quietly.

Yumi once said that 「the case was closed because of a lack of evidence」. But there actually was evidence. But despite of that, no denizen from the Forest's Edge was questioned for this crime.

As my emotions started simmering, Milano Mast remained strangely calm. His brown eyes showed a hint of sadness, but not rage.

「When my friend died, my wife overexerted herself, got bedridden and passed away shortly… He was an old friend of mine, and also my wife’s older brother who raised her in the stead of their parents. That’s why my daughter and I will hate the denizens of Forest's Edge for the rest of our lives.」

「But… That’s…」

Uncle Dora once said that the denizens of Forest's Edge would attack travelers, commit robbery and abduct women. Ai Fa didn’t refute that either. There were such evil people inside the Forest's Edge settlement.

Is all this the doing of the Tsun clan…?

I had no way of knowing.

The relationship fracture between the Tsun clan and the Wu clan happened twenty years ago, when their previous clan heads were leading them. Back then, the Tsun clan abducted a woman who was supposed to marry into the Wu clan, forcing her to commit suicide. This meant that even at that time the Tsun clan was already corrupted.

But even so…

I shut up mid-sentence.

But even so, not all denizens of the Forest's Edge were villains. I couldn’t stand having him treating Ai Fa, the Wu clan, and house Lutim as being in the same league as the Tsun clan.

At this moment— the image of a frail woman carrying an infant appeared in my mind.

She was Celeste Von Fou, and I had met her once.

The weaker houses in Forest's Edge weren’t strong enough to hunt kiba, and would sometimes starve to death. Celeste Von Fou once said that her child wouldn’t have milk to drink if not for the hide Ai Fa secretly gave to the Fou house.

There were many edible fruits in the forest, but to avoid letting the kiba starve, the denizens of the Forest's Edge could starve themselves,— and in order to honor the agreement they made with the landlord of Genos,

they gave up their lives for the sake of their pride as hunters.

The prosperity of Genos was built on such heroic sacrifice, but the citizens of Genos only felt hatred, fear, and contempt for the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Wasn’t that too stupid?

The evil minority and those who sheltered them weren’t suffering at all. Be it Forest's Edge or the Post Station Town, only the powerless majority was oppressed.

To be frank— from the looks of the situation, the Genos management and the chief Tsun clan were colluding and reaping all sorts of benefits, while other people had to suffer greatly.

“What did you want to say? That not all the denizens of Forest's Edge are malicious people?”

Milano Mast spat out quietly.

“You don’t need to tell me that. There are five hundred denizens in Forest's Edge, if they were all villains, the people in town would have died many times over. Everyone knows that, which is why I was willing to sign a contract with you in the beginning.”

After Milano Mast finished saying that, he tossed the last bite of 「Myam-roasted meat」 into his mouth.

「Besides, the people in the Post Station Town aren't retarded. If you were a violent man, they wouldn't have bought your cooking… And so, I won't stop you from jumping ships, and won't chase you away either. If the 「Big Tree of the South Inn」 or the 「West Wind Inn」 finds value in your talent, there's no need for you to rent the carts in my inn, right?」

「No… Since you have no intention of chasing me out, I want to renew the contract with the 「Kimyusu's Tail Inn」 two days later.」

「What?」

Milano Mast became dumbstruck.

「But why? You don't have anything to gain from doing this.」

「I'm not sure how to answer either… I'm just happy that you are willing to try my cooking.」

Besides, Milano Mast actually thought over it for three days before making this decision.

In the end, he decided neither to retain us nor chase us away. Since he made such a decision, I had no reason to stop business with the

Kimyusu’s Tail Inn proactively.

I’m just a rookie stall owner and have many shortcomings. But I will do my best, so I will be in your care two days later too.

I took off the towel on my head and bowed.

... You are really an unfathomable young man.

Milano Mast said exasperatedly.

No need to thank me. If you want to spend money to suffer, then do what you want.

Yes! Thank you!

I lifted my head, and Milano Mast had already turned his back to me and strode off.

I tied the towel on my head again and hurried back to the stall.

My emotions were still hyped up.

Diga Tsun and Yamiel Tsun are still young, they can’t be involved with

what happened ten years ago. But the criminal is definitely from the Tsun clan.

There was no way for me to know the truth.

However, if we continued to let the murderer get away scot-free, we wouldn’t be able to mend the gulf between the citizens of Genos and the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Even if our stall could become a bridge between the Post Station Town and Forest's Edge, and make most of the citizens of Genos taste kiba without any fear,— the actual victims of violence by the denizens of Forest's Edge, and people in the same circumstances as Milano Mast wouldn’t be able to rest their grudges.

Criminals had to be brought to justice. If the higher-ups of Genos weren’t willing to resolve this matter which was common sense, the denizens of Forest's Edge and the people of Genos wouldn’t be able to understand each other.

What should I do—

With troubled emotions in my heart as I mulled over this question that didn’t have any answers, I walked to the stalls.

Upon reaching there, I saw a tall and scrawny blonde man standing before the □Kiba burger□ stall.

□Hi, long time no see, I finally have the chance to visit.□

Kamyua Yost has appeared before us.

A boy with brown hair followed right beside him.

□Kamyua Yost, it’s been a while. I’m glad to see that you are well.□

After giving a slight nod, I went around into the inside of the cart.

The next instant, Lala Wu showed her teeth with a smile.

□This mister is our last customer, the □Kiba burger□ are sold out.□

A little over an hour after noon, all 170 portions were sold.

4

The ten-day battle was over, but we couldn’t let down our guard yet.

I had to close up shop, buy ingredients for the day after tomorrow, then head to the □Big Tree of the South Inn□ to discuss our collaboration.

When I get back to Forest's Edge, there were still loads of work waiting for me.

"You sold 170 meals today? Incredible. And you are also a denizen of Forest's Edge selling kiba food…! This is a historical accomplishment."

Kamyua Yost looked at us as we packed up. It was rare to see him hang around instead of leaving.

In that case, we had to settle the matters on hand too. I called Ai Fa who was resting under the shade over.

Ai Fa stood beside quietly, and Kamyua Yost showed a satisfied smile.

"Ai Fa, you are in town today too! I heard Leito mentioned that you didn't enter the forest, so I intended to see you. Unfortunately, my recent schedule was too hectic for me to make time."

"… I have no business with you though…"

Ai Fa said coldly, and Kamyua Yost checked her out.

"Great, you seem to be getting better already."

Ai Fa was still concealing the injury on her left arm with her cape. But no

matter how well she hid it, she couldn’t escape Kamyua Yost’s eyes.

“Ai Fa, give me the copper plates.”

“Yes.”

Ai Fa hid her injury carefully as she pulled her cape, and took out a heavy pouch from inside.

These were our profits from the past nine days.

I took the pouch from Ai Fa and started counting.

“Well, we sold everything today along with four portions of jerky… That will be 12 and 9 plates.”

I took out twelve white copper plates and nine red copper plates, then placed them into a separate bag before holding it next to Kamyua Yost’s chest.

“…Hmm?”

Kamyua Yost tilted his thin face quizzingly.

「This is a gift for you as thanks. Our profits over these ten days totaled 129 white copper plates, so here's a tenth of it.」

「W-Wait. What do you mean? There's no reason for me to accept your money.」

I was shocked when I heard that.

「What are you saying, wasn't this your idea? You said that you wanted ten percent of the profit minus all expenses as a gratuity. Did you forget?」

「I did. I really don't remember saying that!」

The boy Leito looked up at the flustered Kamyua Yost and chuckled:

「I remember it too. Kamyua Yost, that's the price you proposed at the start. But you were probably joking.」

「Eh, really? That's bad, I don't remember it at all… Leito is right, even if I did mention that, I was probably just kidding. Asuta, keep the money away then.」

「You have to accept it. If you didn't suggest that we set up shop in the Post Station Town, we wouldn't have earned so much copper plates. This is your just reward, so please take it.」

「No, but…」

「We will be troubled if you don’t accept. I hope we can have a cordial relationship without owing each other anything.」

I proffered the pouch again.

「You might be a respectable friend or a damned traitor in the future, and I don’t want to owe you anything in either case. I hope you can empathize with us.」

Kamyua Yost sighed deeply, then alternated his gaze between Ai Fa and me. He then reached out his slender arm reluctantly.

「I understand. In order for us to be friends on equal standing, I will treat this sum of money as a necessary process… What a waste. The copper plates you gave me would just be spent by me on a bunch of worthless things.」

「If you are aware of that, please restrain yourself a little.」

And of course, Leito was the one who retorted.

「Ai Fa and Asuta, just this once okay!? No need to cut me a share anymore! Please cherish the wealth you earned, it belongs to the Fa

house after all.

Got it, thank you.

I offered my thanks without hesitation, and Ai Fa acknowledged him with her gaze.

What a pain… Well then, I’m going back to the inn. Since you will be taking tomorrow off, I will see you two days later then.

Yes, I will await your visit.

Right, I’m looking forward to eating your cooking again… Oh right, can I ask one last thing?

What is it?

Have you run into any trouble lately? Anything I can help you with?

I looked up at Kamyua Yost quietly.

Ai Fa probably had the same reaction as me.

Kamyua Yost squinted his eyes with a smile. His unique purple eyes

were narrowed into a seam, which made him look old yet young at the same time.

… I can’t ask for his help yet.

I suppressed the chaotic emotion in my heart.

At this junction, I couldn’t request for Kamyua Yost’s aid yet.

This man has dealings with the landlord of Genos. I still didn’t know him too well, but if he gets involved— it might cause irreversible damage to the relationship between Forest's Edge and Genos.

I pretended to be oblivious just like he was, and shook my head.

「… We have not encountered such a situation so far.」

Kamyua Yost showed a satisfied smile once again.

「That’s great. See you the day after tomorrow then! Good work, beauties from the Wu clan!」

Kamyua Yost and Leito disappeared at the other end of the crowd. I sighed in relief.

At this moment, Lala Wu called out to me from behind.

"Hey, are you done? We have already finished closing up."

"Ah, sorry…! Lala Wu, Vena Wu, and Shela Wu, thank you for your help today. Not just today, I only made it through these ten days because of your support."

They showed innocent smiles after I said that.

"Why are you being so formal? Even though tomorrow is an off day, we will still need to work two days later, right?"

"… I hope I can work with you two days later too…"

"That's right, that's what I think too."

I was still a half-baked chef and spent these ten days bustling around. But everyone still smiled cheerfully.

In these ten days, we sold more than a thousand portions. Total revenue had finally surpassed 2000 copper plates. Excluding the costs and the sum paid out to Kamyua Yost, the profits were 1169 red copper plates. In other words, about 97 kiba tusks and horns.

We had attracted the patronage of many westerners.

And not just the stall, we even managed to sell our cooking in the inns too.

After this, we had to settle our issue with the Tsun clan,— and then we could strive steadily towards our goal.

「... What is it, Asuta?」

Ai Fa walked towards me a little angrily.

「What's eating at you? Tell me everything.」

「I will tell you... but it's complicated, so I will tell you tonight.」

Ai Fa was quiet for a while. She stared at my first, then retreated to the side after saying 「I understand.」

「Alright then, let's go home!」

We pushed the two carts down the stone-paved streets.

The crowd was at its peak during this time.

Some familiar passersby greeted us.

Some pedestrians still showed expression of detest or shock.

There were those who stood stiffly in place from surprise. They were probably travelers who just arrived at Genos today.

I enjoyed the scenery in the Post Station Town as we slowly walked back.

"Hi, you have already closed? Are you going back so early?"

When we were passing by Uncle Dora's stall, he said to us with a smile.

Tara was also smiling as she stood beside him.

Just like the scene this morning.

On closer thought, they were the first customers of our stall. Followed by a member of the "Silver Vase". We also got to know Pops, Arudas, Yumi, and Naudiz. And finally, we reached where we were today.

I hid my emotions in my heart and smiled at them.

"Yes, today was really a spectacle. I will be opening the day after tomorrow and will drop by to buy vegetables later."

"Alright, we will wait for you."

It had only been ten days, but that was how our lives were right now.

I'dn't've anyone destroy this.

"Oh, right!"

As we continued pushing the cart forward, Lala Wu suddenly yelled.

"Asuta, you need to buy something else aside from the vegetables, right? We will return the carts, you can go ahead and buy your things."

"Huh?"

I turned back and found Lala Wu looking at me with a smug smile.

"That's true."

That little brat! I cursed in my heart.

「Alright, I still need to make a trip to the 「Big Tree of the South Inn」 later, so I will buy the things for my personal use.」

「Yes. Ai Fa, take care of Asuta.」

After Ai Fa and I stopped, the two carts disappeared in the other end of the crowd.

「... You are buying a kitchen knife and steel griddle, right?」

「Yes. The steel griddle is heavy, let's get the knife first.」

I already checked yesterday. The 「Silver Vase」 was located at the center of the marketplace, right beside Grandma Misill's vegetable stall.

They laid a black cloth onto the space of two stalls and put out a variety of merchandise on it. A roof had been erected to cover the entire space, making the shop really dim.

There were three Semu people there.

「Excuse me... Hmm, Shumimaru isn't here?」

The shop attendants had taken off their hoods, but I don't see

Shumimaru who had silver hair.

A Semu man who was very tall made a strange gesture and bowed towards Ai Fa and me.

「Shumimaru, busy, will be, back soon.」

「I see. I pre-ordered something from him, do you know where it is?」

「Shumimaru, the merchandise, have… Wait, please.」

I had no choice but to wait.

I squatted down together with Ai Fa and browsed the merchandise laid out on the sheet.

「…Why is this shop selling all sorts of weird things?」

Ai Fa whispered to me.

I knew how Ai Fa felt as I looked at the products before us.

Should I describe these items as weird? Anyway, the merchandise was laid out haphazardly. Aside from the blades made with steel that was

precious in Semu, there were a variety of teapots, wooden boxes with intrinsic designs, and overly decorated bows and quivers. There were also accessories that glittered with a silver gleam and bundles of extravagant cloths. All the items were carefully carved and looked very high-class. However, the merchandise was just laid out randomly on a sheet.

Never mind, compared to laying them out orderly, there was a different charm in this messy display. The atmosphere in the shop was like an antique stall found in a flea market.

“Ah, isn’t that a gown for banquets?”

The rainbow-colored fabric glittered in the dim shop.

“This steel art piece looks similar to the accessories worn by the women from the Wu clan. So these are imported from Semu.”

“… These are all things I don’t need.”

Ai Fa said coldly, then yelped with her eyes wide open in surprise.

“Asuta, what’s that?”

“Oh? That’s probably— a wine-cup.”

Judging from the shape, it was some sort of container.

The unique thing about it was that it was made of glass.

So there is glass in this world too. That surprised me.

This is called glass? It’s so pretty.

The sparkling light was reflecting in Ai Fa’s eyes.

... Glass, for wine. White five plates.

The youth we saw earlier informed us quietly.

So it really is glass... Ai Fa, it costs five white copper plates.

Hmm? It is pretty, but I don’t need a wine glass to drink fruit wine.

That might be so, but Ai Fa’s eyes were still filled with life. She poked the glass with a finger on her right hand.

Ai Fa didn’t want to buy the wine glass, but I felt glad that she could appreciate beautiful things.

At this moment, Shumimaru came back.

Asuta, sorry. Long, you wait?

No, I just got here.

I stood up to receive Shumimaru. Ai Fa remained squatting and kept poking childishly at the wine glass.

I quietly walked a few steps away from Ai Fa.

We have closed our shop, I’m here to buy the goods I pre-ordered.

Yes, I’m happy.

Shumimaru nodded and reached inside his cloak.

His black eyes darted suddenly towards me.

Knife, white, 18 plates.

Yes, thank you.

Stone, white, 10 plates... Stone, decided?

「... Yes, I want to buy it.」

Shumimaru squinted happily, and retrieve the merchandise from his cloak.

「Total, white, 28 plates.」

He glanced at Ai Fa who was squatting down.

「Beautiful lady. Asuta, wife?」

「No... But she is the most important person to me.」

「I see.」

Shumimaru nodded. I received the merchandise, then handed over 28 white copper plates.

「I will start using this knife in my cooking from two days onwards.」

It was a vegetable knife kept in a black sheath. This knife would be a great help when cutting tino in the stall.

「I, honored, am… Thankful to Semu, Selva, for Asuta, me meet, letting.」

「It’s an honor for me too. It is already the sixth day of the blue month, I will be in your care for the remaining days.」

After showing him my sincere smile, Shumimaru squinted his eyes happily.

「I still need to buy some other things, so I will take my leave now.」

「Okay. The day after tomorrow, forward, looking.」

Shumimaru walked into the back of the shop, and I poked Ai Fa’s shoulder.

「Sorry for the wait. I’m done with the purchase.」

「Hmm? I see.」

Ai Fa stood up, and we left the 「Silver Vase」.

Ai Fa looked at the knife in my hand curiously.

「So this is the kitchen knife that cost 18 white copper plates, huh. It

must be sharp.

That’s right. This knife won’t lose out to my dad’s Santoku knife when it comes to chopping vegetables.

At this moment, Ai Fa showed a gentle expression and smiled:

… It must be an excellent knife then.

Yes, it is.

I nodded and walked to an empty space between two stalls.

I stopped and looked at Ai Fa.

And so… I mentioned to you this afternoon that I bought something not related to cooking.

Oh? What did you buy?

Ai Fa’s face was very peaceful.

What kind of face will she show a few seconds later?— After bracing myself, I presented the item I was hiding in my hand to Ai Fa.

「... What is this?」

Ai Fa frowned in surprise.

The thing I was holding in my right hand— was a necklace with a blue stone.

The stone on the necklace was about the size of a thumbnail, stuck onto a piece of silver plate. There was a string braided in a complicated manner on it, so it could be worn on a neck.

「As you can see, this is a necklace.」

「Necklace... An accessory, huh.」

Ai Fa’s eyes wavered uneasily.

「.....Asuta, so you want to wear accessories like a woman?」

「No... Ai Fa, I bought this necklace for you.」

「Oh?」

Ai Fa narrowed her eyes.

“Which means… you ignored everything that I said?”

“I know what you said. If I use the important copper plates to buy accessories, you will beat me up, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Ai Fa slowly walked towards me.

I gulped quietly, then continued:

“You can start your beating after I explain. This is a talisman to ward off disasters.”

“… Ward off disasters?”

“Yes, this is a Semu talisman that can allegedly ward off all sort of disasters. Since the “Silver Vase” is selling it in a western city, that means it doesn’t matter which god the bearer believes in. Everyone from Semu wears this talisman to keep them safe from harm.”

Ai Fa’s eyes remained unchanged.

Never mind, I had already braced myself to be punched once or twice.

「I don’t know how effective this talisman is. But you will definitely be mad if I gifted you an accessory. You don’t lack daily necessities, but I still wanted to buy something for you, so I chose this necklace by my own accord… It might be a talisman, but the stone grafted on it is beautiful, right?」

It was a small dark blue stone.

When Shumimaru showed me this stone yesterday, I was smitten by it at first sight. Its color was exactly the same as Ai Fa’s eyes.

「… How much did you spend on this talisman?」

「Ten white copper plates.」

「…Ten… white… copper plates…」

Ai Fa half-closed her eyes and seemed to be sorting through her thoughts.

「I know you are reluctant to depend on a talisman, but you face danger very often, and even suffered a serious injury. The men of Forest’s Edge would gift their family three tusks or horns to bless them with a healthy life. I want to gift you something too.」

I held the string of the necklace and made it into a circle.

「If you are still not satisfied, you can beat me off later, but can you accept this necklace first? This is a gift from your family who wishes safety and health upon you.」

Ai Fa closed her eyes and sighed deeply.

She then stared right at me.

「... The men of Forest's Edge would hunt kiba with their own strength, and gift the tusks and horns to their family to as a blessing to keep them safe and sound.」

「Yes.」

「You worked in the Post Station Town, and used the copper plates you earned to bless your family, so it’s not wrong... Is that how I should think?」

「P-Please, do so.」

「... Hmmph.」

Ai Fa pouted.

“I feel like I had fallen into a trap for a kiba. Is my family scheming against me?”

“Not at all. My only wish is for you to be safe from harm.”

Ai Fa grunted again.

She then took one step towards me.

And lowered her head a little.

“… What are you just standing there for?”

“Huh?”

“According to the customs of Forest's Edge, you have to present the gift to your family personally.”

“I have never heard about this.”

I placed the blue stone necklace onto Ai Fa’s neck.

The stone was slightly higher than the necklace of tusks and horns, and the blue stone was shimmering.

Ai Fa held the necklace in the palm of her right hand. After looking at it for a while, she looked up as if she had just remembered something.

"Oh right, I have something for you too."

"Huh? For me?"

"Yes."

Ai Fa reached behind her.

After searching through the hidden pockets in her fur cape, she pulled out a necklace with ten tusks and horns.

"Oh, that's the necklace I gave you for safekeeping."

"Yes. We won't need these tusks and horns anymore. You performed your duty and can put on this necklace now."

After saying that, Ai Fa kicked my leg.

“Lower your head.”

“Hey… Can you speak first before kicking?”

Despite complaining about it, I still lowered my head docilely.

Ai Fa took off the necklace around my neck nimbly and carefully placed the necklace she took out earlier on me.

These were the ten sets of blessing gifted to me by the Wu clan. If our business in the Post Station Town failed, we had to use them to make up for our losses.

“It will take some time for the denizens of Forest's Edge to head towards a prosperous future, but I believe you can carry this out.”

“Not just me, it’s our responsibility.”

“Yes… and also the Wu clan and Lutim house.”

Ai Fa suddenly closed her eyes.

The troubled look on her face was gone, but in its place was a hint of childish unease.

"And finally, it will be the responsibility of all the denizens of Forest's Edge."

I smiled at Ai Fa.

"Starting from today, we will buy meat from the Wu clan. Before long, when the Wu clan runs out of meat, we will purchase them from house Lutim… When everyone can sell kiba meat at the Post Station Town, all the denizens of Forest's Edge will compete to sell kiba meat. With that in mind, we are just doing this slightly earlier than the other denizens."

In order to forge a path to a such a future, the denizens of Forest's Edge had to work together and strife forth.

The chief clan was supposed to lead the denizens of the Forest's Edge properly, but not only did they not do that, they even harmed the pride of Forest's Edge instead. I couldn't forgive their transgression.

"… That's true."

Ai Fa eyes looked down, and picked up the blue stone on her neck again.

"What's the matter? Do you still want to beat me off?"

"No… This might be a talisman, but a necklace is still an accessory. I feel uneasy about wearing this."

I see... But isn’t the stone beautiful?



Ai Fa slowly lifted her head.

She smiled in a childlike manner.

“Yes, the stone is sparkling beautifully.”

Her smile was so pure and innocent that I couldn’t help holding my breath.

Our work was just starting, and there were mountains of problems waiting for us, but after seeing Ai Fa’s smiling face, I felt a sense of peace and satisfaction I had never felt before.

This marked the end of our first foray into the Post Station Town.

Mid-Meal Snack: The Hearth Caretaker of the Wu Branch House

Shela Wu was born with a weak constitution.

She was sickly and frail during her childhood, and smaller in size compared to her peers, which resulted in her timid personality.

The denizens of Forest's Edge placed a lot of emphasis on physical ability, which also applied to the women. Without a certain level of

strength and endurance, the women wouldn't be able to do all the house chores. When a person couldn't fulfill her own responsibilities, her heart would be filled with sadness.

And of course, the people around her didn't bully her because of her physical condition. The other houses might do so, but no one in the Wu clan village was so heartless.

Her heart was filled with self-reproach. Even though she wasn't of much help, the people around her didn't admonish her, which deepened her sense of guilt.

Be it chopping wood or tanning hides, Shela Wu needed twice the time to finish these tasks. Not just that, she couldn't even fetch water by herself. As their clan was prosperous, almost all the women in the Wu clan were strong and healthy, making her more conscious of her shortcomings.

The frail Shela Wu liked tending to the hearth.

Tending to the hearth didn't require too much brute strength. She was strong enough to carry a pot. Furthermore, only her family entered the hearth, so no one compared her with anyone. Because of these various reasons, Shela Wu felt most at ease inside the stove room.

It wasn't clear if it was fortunate or not, Shela Wu was the eldest daughter and had three younger brothers. Her mother Tali Wu could be considered petite, but she was tough and strong and could handle most

of the heavy lifting. Even though Shela Wu lamented her in-capabilities, she still busied herself in the stove room.

As her family had shouldered part of Shela Wu’s work, she felt that she had to put her effort into tending to the hearth. Normally, the work related to the hearth involved cutting meat and vegetables and cooking. But Shela Wu spent additional effort to take care of small details that couldn’t be clearly seen.

When dealing with the meat, she would cut along the grain so the meat will be more tender. Aria became too soft when overcooked, and too tough with a hint of spiciness when undercooked. When she cooked, she kept attempting to find the optimal heat and cooking time and derived joy from doing so.

And obviously, her family didn’t realize the effort she had put in. No matter what she served up, her family would eat that all gratefully. This was a responsibility of the denizens of the Forest's Edge in the first place. The Forest's Edge did not permit anyone to be picky about the taste of the food.

Shela Wu spending so much effort in tending to the hearth was just for her own self-satisfaction. However, she still felt really happy when her mother praised her cooking.

“No one can tend to the hearth better than you. Teach me how to adjust the heat again.”

Tali Wu probably said that because she realized the sense of guilt Shela Wu was feeling.

But even so, Shela Wu felt glad.

After that, both mother and daughter put even more effort into the way they cooked their food.

Shela Wu was secretly a fan of the Wu main house sisters.

Of the hundred-odd kins in the Wu clan, the four sisters from the main house had the capabilities and charm that befit their status.

The eldest Vena Wu was a gorgeous beauty. Not just her appearance, her personality was very charming too. There were hordes of men asking for her hand or volunteering to marry into her family.

The second daughter Leina Wu wasn’t far behind. She was petite and had a kiddish face. She might not draw as much attention as her elder sister, but she was as charming as Vena Wu Unlike the hard to fathom Vena Wu, Leina Wu had a cheerful disposition and was gentle and kind. She was the ideal women in the minds of the denizens of Forest's Edge.

The third sister Lala Wu was twelve and had a forthright personality and a smart and sensitive side to her. She was great friends with Shela Wu’s

brother Shin Wu, so Shela Wu interacted with her the most and learned about her unknown side early.

The youngest Rimee Wu was a pure and adorable eight years old girl. Just the sight of her brought a smile to the face. She was so cute, how blissful would it be to have her as a sister or daughter? Shela thought about that from time to time.

Shela Wu yearned to be like these four girls.

As their status was above hers, Shela Wu didn't feel any jealousy towards them. She was proud of them as a relative.

However, she wondered sometimes.

Why was she so useless?

The four girls were related to Shela Wu by blood. Shela Wu's father Raa Wu was the younger brother of the girls' father, Donda Wu.

Raa Wu was an outstanding hunter, and her mother Tali Wu was the perfect spouse. Her younger brothers would become brave hunters one day. The oldest brother had already started hunting alongside their father.

Shela Wu wasn't as strong as her other family.

She was 18, but no one had asked for her hand in marriage or to marry into the family. That was how miserable her capabilities were

She wasn’t bedridden with an illness like during her youth, but she still couldn’t carry a water flask on her own. Her looks weren’t particularly outstanding either, so it was a given that no denizens of the Forest's Edge wanted to marry her.

At most, she could marry to a kin house of the Wu clan. Less prestigious houses like Lilim and Mamu would be happy to take in a woman of the Wu clan in marriage. The Wu clan was their elder house after all.

And when they realized not all women from the Wu clan were strong and tough, they would be utterly disappointed.

Despite being of marriageable age, Vena Wu and Leina Wu didn’t rush to marry. They must be waiting to pick a good husband. They were from the main house after all, no one would turn down a marriage with such excellent women.

However, Shela Wu was already 18. She had not been wed for three years. Even though her house only had two women, her and her mother, there were plenty of women in the Wu clan village. So even if Shela Wu married out, they wouldn’t be shorthanded. It was about time for her to make up her mind and marry into a kin house.

But I—

Even if it was just for a while more, she wanted to stay in the Wu clan village.

She wanted to see how the future pans out for a certain person.

Once Shela Wu will see him taking in a wife, she would be able to steel herself. She would resolve her will to leave her family and life in the Wu clan village.

Shela Wu hid this idea deep in her heart and continued living her peaceful and unchanging days. At this time, two persons suddenly turned up at the Wu clan village.

They were Asuta and Ai Fa from the Fa house.

Anyway, that's what happened. Grandma Jiba had gotten more energetic lately.

Lala Wu said to Shela Wu.

Rimee Wu brought the Fa house people to the Wu clan village. After preparing dinner, the members of the Fa house reinvigorated the grand elder Jiba Wu.

When she heard that, Shela Wu was stunned.

“Lala Wu, you ate what Grandma Jiba did, right? What kind of food did they cook?”

“Hmm, well… I’m not sure how to describe it. The taste was unbelievable.”

“An unbelievable taste…”

“Even though it was kiba, I couldn’t tell at all! The grilled meat and boiled meat were both so fragrant… No, I can’t describe it properly.”

“Anyway, his cooking is very outstanding, right?”

“But I can’t praise him to the heavens like the other members of my family. Papa Donda got mad too, saying that this kind of cooking will corrupt the soul.”

“I see…”

Half a month later, when Lala Wu visited Shela Wu’s place, there was an indescribable expression on her face.

Asuta and Ai Fa visited last night. The dinner was incredibly delicious… Sigh, I'm so troubled, I can't even!

How did delicious food taste like?

Shela Wu's feelings became agitated again.

The next day, she received a notification from the head of the Wu clan that Asuta from the Fa house will be tending to the hearth for the wedding between house Lutim and house Min.

Five days before the banquet began, Asuta started lodging in the Wu clan. Four days before the wedding, Shela Wu was called over to help prepare for the banquet.

Ah, did you come from the branch house to help? Nice to meet you, I will be imposing on you.

Asuta was an incredible man.

He was skinny like a woman and had a kind and polite face and attitude. He had yellowish skin just like the westerners from the Post Station Town. But his hair and eyes were black, just like an easterner.

The air about him was different from the citizens in the Post Station Town. Shela Wu didn't know how to describe this feeling, Asuta wasn't

like the people from any place, and fit the term “foreigner” perfectly. That was how strange he was.

Asuta’s cooking was equally shocking for Shela Wu.

Lala Wu was right. After processing it with the special technique of “bloodletting”, the kiba meat had definitely become tasty.

Not just that, Asuta created all sorts of flavor with just fruit wine, pico leaves and rock salt, just like magic. He boiled away the water in the poitan, then dried it in the sun before grilling it. The soup without any poitan was very palatable. He also used different cooking methods and turned the aria, tarapa, and chachi into never seen before dishes.

There was so much that could be done when tending to the hearth.

Compared to Asuta, her effort was no different from child’s play.

With this feeling in her heart, Shela Wu quietly helped Asuta. And then—

“Shela Wu, your knife work is impeccable, and you are great at controlling the heat.”

Two days before the banquet, Asuta praised Shela Wu.

"On the day of the banquet, I would like to invite you and your mother Tali Wu to cook the hamburg steak in the stove room of the Wu main house."

Of all the dishes Asuta showed them, the Hamburg steak was the toughest to cook.

While Shela Wu was still dumbstruck, her mother Tali Wu smiled:

"We are honored. My daughter is better at tending to the hearth than anyone else. Thanks to her, my culinary skills have improved greatly."

"Yes, you are right. Shela Wu has excellent cooking skills."

Asuta smiled gently.

"Even if it was just cutting meat, I could feel how much effort she put into it. I want to borrow her strength."

Shela Wu felt light-headed.

She never imagined that the greatly skilled Asuta would acknowledge her hearth-tending abilities.

When she used the skills Asuta taught her to prepare dinner, her family

was surprised and happy. Her younger brothers were rowdy and said it was □yummy□, the quiet Raa Wu and Shin Wu also ate Shela Wu's cooking with a face of satisfaction.

So she could bring joy to her family in such a way.

If this joy can bring more strength to the denizens of Forest's Edge, my existence will be good medicine, and not poison — Asuta once said.

Asuta might be a foreigner, but he used his incredible prowess to find his place in Forest's Edge.

Shela Wu respected Asuta's confidence and determination.

Shela Wu was a full-blooded denizen of the Forest's Edge, but she was hesitant and troubled. Asuta was a foreigner, but he could cook proudly and the people around him acknowledged his strength.

He might look scrawny, but Asuta was brave and decisive and wasn't inferior to the hunters of Forest's Edge in his confidence.

Maybe—

Maybe she could be like Asuta, and live her life proudly.

Even if Shela Wu wasn't as strong as the other women, her culinary skill wouldn't lose to anyone. She wanted to take pride in this and hold her head up high.

After the banquet for house Lutim's wedding ended, Asuta left the Wu clan village. But this thought lingered in Shela Wu's heart.

And then, ten or so days later—Lala Wu came to inform Shela Wu:

"Asuta is running a business in the Post Station Town, and he needs helpers! Mama Mia Lei wants the both of us to assist him, will you go?"

Shela Wu couldn't give an answer right away.

Why were they willing to let someone like her shoulder such an important responsibility? Her heart was filled with doubt, but the thought of working together with Asuta again filled her heart with joy.

"Asuta wants us to send at least one woman who is good at tending to the hearth, so we chose you!"

"But… Leina Wu from the main house is great at caretaking the hearth too, right?"

"Hmm" the main house already sent Vena-nee to help Asuta. If both elder sisters were gone, we could become overwhelmed with house

chores. If you turn this down, we will have to partner Leina-nee with another woman from the branch house and ask the branch house to help with the chores of the main house.

Lala Wu stared at Shela Wu, her eyes were filled with hope and unease. Lala Wu had already opened her heart to Asuta, so she must really want to go to the Post Station Town to help.

However, we will need to carry iron pots and other baggage to the Post Station Town, and that will be tough. Shela Wu, you have to decide for yourself!

Shela Wu was very troubled.

She didn't think that she was capable enough to take on the job. However, a sense of pride had just sprouted in her heart.

If she didn't provide sunlight and water to the sprout, it would wither away in no time.

Hence, Shela Wu looked at Lala Wu as sincerely as she could manage.

.

I'm willing to take on this job.

Shela Wu hoped that she could live proudly just like Asuta.

She didn’t want to hide the feelings in her heart.

With this conviction in mind, Shela Wu took another step forward.

Vol. 6 :

Chapter 0: Prologue

A+ A- Chapter Prologue

It was the next morning after finishing our ten days of business in the Post Station Town.

Inside my temporary lodging inside the Wu clan village, I stared mesmerizingly at the two items of kitchenware I bought yesterday.

Yesterday, I bought a Semu kitchen knife and a Jaguar-made steel griddle.

This was a vegetable cutting knife, about 20 cm in length and 8 cm wide. It was a thin single-edged blade, which didn't have any curvature like utility kitchen knives or meat-cutting knife. The body of the blade was rectangular instead. It had an appearance similar to Usaba bocho which I was familiar with.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usuba_b%C5%8Dch%C5%8D >

As the blade was straight, it closed tightly with the chopping board, making it ideal for cutting vegetables. However, sharpening it required

special care as it was a single-edged knife, so I had to be careful. The blade was thin and cracked easily, but it was extremely sharp, worthy of its price of 18 white copper plates.

Next was the steel griddle.

It hailed from Jaguar renowned for its steel products. I heard that most of the steel products sold in Genos came from Jaguar.

The griddle was 70 cm wide, 50 cm long and 6 mm thick. The four edges of the griddle protruded 3 cm up, and there were no other decorations aside from the handles on either sides. The simple and manly design was mesmerizing.

I already did a griddle opening process yesterday which was heating up the griddle and then smearing oil on it. This made the griddle surface shiny and smooth.

I had stayed in Forest's Edge for almost half a month. During this time, I grilled and roasted food by using a pot. Now that I had the griddle, it would be much more convenient. The efficiency in poitan and meat patty would also improve.

The pot I usually used was about 1 cm thick and weighed more than 30 kg. Compared to that, the griddle was only about 12 or 13 kg, making it more portable too.

Furthermore, the griddle being thinner meant it had better heat conductivity. It wasn't as thick as the iron pot, but the griddle was already plenty thick. (The iron pot was actually incredibly thick in the first place). Given the practicality of using this griddle, I could cook a wider variety of food too. I couldn't stop smiling at the thought of that.

The Semu kitchen knife that was as elegant as decoration and the incredibly practical Jaguar griddle. I ogled at these two items of kitchenware basking under the sun.

"... What are you doing, Asuta?"

Ai Fa who went to the water source early in the morning came back to the room, and I turned to look at her.

"Hi, you are back so early. How's your left arm?"

"It doesn't hurt at all, but it had grown weaker. It's fine if my opponent is human, but I feel uneasy about taking on kiba with my condition like this."

Ai Fa flexed her left arm that could finally move freely after six days. Ai Fa dislocated her elbow while hunting and was recuperating.

"My strength isn't back yet, so my bones might shift out-of-place if I pushed myself. I will need to observe it for a few more days... Asuta, what were you doing?"

「I'm not doing anything, just zoning out and admiring the kitchenware I bought yesterday.」

「... Hmm?」

Ai Fa tilted her head slightly, then came over and sat beside me.

Her slightly damp blonde hair was tied into a complicated pattern like last time. Tying her hair up simply to the side had its charms, but an hairstyle in which it was easy to move suited Ai Fa the best after all.

「When I was cleansing myself and washing the utensils, were you just sitting here?」

「That's right. This is the first kitchenware I bought with my own money, and I can't get enough of it.」

My face was probably filled with love like a grandfather receiving his first newborn grandchild.

Ai Fa frowned a little sadly.

「Asuta, you...」

Yes?

No, it’s nothing.

What’s the matter? It’s rare for you to be hesitant to speak, Ai Fa.

Nah, it’s fine.

I turned my body towards Ai Fa.

There’s definitely something. I’m curious. If you have anything on your mind, don’t hold back and tell me.

Even if we are a family, we can’t ignore social courtesy. That’s why it’s nothing.

No, you are making me even more curious! Didn’t we talk about this before? We shouldn’t keep anything from each other. Our thinking and emotions are a little different, so we need to be honest with each other about everything in order to understand one another better.

After my passionate speech, the sorrow on Ai Fa’s face grew even deeper.

It’s nothing that complicated. I just… don’t want to upset you.

□It will be fine. Didn’t you say something like this? □If I feel uncomfortable, I will just beat you up, so there is no need to hide how you feel□.□

□... Do you want to beat me up?□

□I wouldn’t dare do something so scary.□

□... Won’t you get mad?□

□If your words correspond to your beliefs, I will debate with you until I am satisfied with the conclusion.□

□I see. I understand, your argument makes more sense.□

Ai Fa sat

on the floor cross-legged, straightened her back, and looked at me with a serious face.

□I just thought that you were a bit disgusting.□

□.....□

□Are you mad?□

□No, not at all.□

I almost broke down in tears though.

□Anyway, your eyes were filled with love when you were looking at these tools made from steel and wood, as if you were looking at a human. That felt a little disgusting…□

□Ah, I understand very clearly, so no need to hit me when I'm down…□

□I see… Are you mad?□

□No, I'm not mad at all.□

□Okay.□ Ai Fa nodded.

She had an innocent smile on her face.

□I should say what I really think after all. I feel much better now, Asuta.□

□That's great.□: I said with a vague smile.

If my sorrow could cheer Ai Fa up, then our fortunes and misfortunes would be balanced, and the world would be able to operate normally.

"You have cheered up a lot too. Your face looked so sour last night."

"Ah, I have just gotten over it. I need to take care of the work before me in order to settle the troublesome matters."

The work before me… Three days later, we will tend to the hearth for the house head conference held at the Tsun clan. We will have a seminar today to prepare for that.

The Tsun clan was the chief clan of Forest's Edge and was also infamous here.

They monopolized the money granted by Genos, indulged in leisure all day, did their jobs as hunters sloppily, and disturbed the peace in the Post Station Town. On top of that, they were also colluding with the nobles of Genos, so the crimes they committed in the Post Station Town went unpunished. These examples made it hard to imagine that they were the chief clan of the pure and righteous Forest's Edge denizens.

Milano Mast also told me one shocking matter.

Simply put, a denizen of Forest's Edge murdered Milano Mast's brother-in-law who was also his good friend, but the criminal wasn't brought to justice. Milano Mast's harsh criticism against the denizens of Forest's

Edge felt unbelievable.

I didn’t have any solid evidence that the criminal was a member of the Tsun clan.

However, my suspicion of the Tsun clan was steadily increasing.

The only thing I could do was to prepare as much as possible for the house head conference.

「Well then, I will visit the water source. Today will be a busy day too.」

「Yes. Will you be instructing the women in cooking?」

「That’s right. Additionally, I have to prepare for the stall tomorrow. And I will need to decide on a dish for the inn. Looks like I’ll be busy the entire day.」

「... I’m envious.」

Ai Fa pouted a little.

「I can only forage for firewood. My health is neither too good nor too bad, so it feels terrible that I can’t enter the forest.」

Hey, hey, don’t get reckless now, alright?

I warned her worriedly, and Ai Fa pouted even more.

You think I’m that retarded? I will rest when it is time to rest. This is necessary for hunters.

Ah, sorry. You looked really unhappy about it though.

I might be unhappy… but I will only show this face to you, so stop complaining.

I hoped Ai Fa could open her heart to more people— but even so, I felt as if my heart was going to explode from joy when I heard her saying that.

… It’s so early in the morning, but thank you very much.

Why do you need to thank me?

N-No, it’s nothing! Why then, I will go wash up before I start work.

The day off that was just as busy as a normal business day has begun.

Alright then, we are holding this seminar for the sake of tending to the hearth during the house head conference. I have already planned the workflow for that day.

There were two seminars, one in the morning and another in the evening.

If too many people gathered at one time, I wouldn't be able to attend to them all. I didn't want to ask all the Lutim house to come over early in the morning, hence the arrangement.

There would be eight women assisting me in tending to the hearth during the house head conference.

The roster was the following. The four helpers from the Wu clan were Vena Wu, Leina Wu, and Lala Wu. The branch house dispatched two assistants, Shela Wu and Tali Wu. The reinforcements from the Lutim main house were Ema Min Lutim and Molun Lutim.

Tali Wu was Shela Wu's mother. On the day of the house head conference, this strong pair of mother and daughter will be away from the house, so Shin Wu's place would be left unattended. Women from the other branch houses would go over and help instead. After the Lutim house banquet, not just Shela Wu, even Tali Wu's culinary skill improved remarkably. That was the reason Mia Lei Wu recommended them strongly.

I met Molun Lutim once before. She was Ema Min Lutim's sister-in-law—Kaslan Lutim's sister and Dan Lutim's daughter. She had a similar appearance to her father and was a charming and energetic girl.

Right now, five of the helpers had gathered.

They were three sisters of the Wu main house, Mama Mia Lei, and Shela

Shela Wu.

As Mama Mia Lei and Shela Wu would be the team leaders of this elite group, I requested for them to attend both sessions of the seminar. I looked at the five reliable figures and continued:

"Aside from the cooking, we have to let the women of the Tsun clan learn these cooking techniques. On the day of the house head conference, I hope for everyone to show as much as possible, and let the Tsun clan women do the actual cooking as much as possible. Like what I did the second time I tended to the Wu clan hearth."

"Ah, you mean the pre-wedding celebration for the Lutim house wedding where you made me cook the steak for the house head to eat? We were the ones who did the actual cooking that time."

Mama Mia Lei nodded vigorously on behalf of the others. She sure was lively today.

"But the number of guests this time is about the same as during the Lutim house wedding, right? Will that actually work?"

"Don't worry, the menu won't be as sumptuous as in the wedding, and we won't need to worry about food distribution either… I'm planning for four dishes this time, which are "Myam-roasted meat", kiba steak, grilled poitan, and aria meat soup."

"Huh? Are we not adding other vegetables to the meat soup?"

Lala Wu asked.

"Yes, we need to subtract the ingredient cost from the amount they are paying us. Aside from aria and poitan, we will also be using myam and fruit wine. Hence, I have decided to make the menu simpler."

This was the agreement I made with Yamiel Tsun.

On top of that, the Tsun clan didn't need to pay directly for the hearth caretaking— the 40 sets of kiba tusks and horns would be collected from the house heads attending that conference.

That sounded infuriating, but we had our own circumstances too and didn't complain too much.

We wanted to use this chance to let the denizens of Forest's Edge

understand the importance of □delicious food□ and a □prosperous life□.

No matter what the Tsun clan were planning, our viewpoints were right. We wanted to emphasize this point.

□Besides, if we serve food that takes too much effort, they would think that the food being delicious is a given. I think it will be more convincing if we let them taste dishes that can be easily prepared.□

□Hmm~ you have given it much thought.□

Lala Wu shrugged as if she was saying:□Do what you want.□

I smiled at her, then continued with my briefing.

□I plan to start with making grilled poitan on that day, then the kiba meat soup followed by other meat dishes. I don't want to prepare different dishes at the same time, so we will do the dishes one by one. The grilled poitan and meat soup shouldn't be a problem. As for the meat dishes, I hope everyone can practice until you are able to instruct the women of the Tsun clan by yourself.□

I looked at Shela Wu who was standing quietly by the side.

□Shela Wu, this doesn't concern the house head conference, but I hope you can finish the □Myam-roasted meat□ by yourself after the special training today.□

「Ehh…? But why?」

「We will be opening for business in the Post Station Town again tomorrow. When I'm not around, I hope I can leave the 「Myam-roasted meat」 stall to you.」

Two days after the house head conference, which was the 12th of the Blue Month, I will be providing dinner for the 「Big Tree of the South Inn」.

However, I didn't have enough time.

If I started the preparation work for the inn after closing shop, it would delay my return trip significantly. I wouldn't have enough time to prepare the meals for the next day in that case.

「Therefore, at noon when the 「Kiba burgers」 sell out, I will head to the 「Big Tree of the South Inn」 to prepare their meals. During this period, I hope you can tend to the 「Myam-roasted meat」 stall.」

「… Can I do it? Controlling the heat is important when cooking 「Myam-roasted meat」, correct?」

「That's right. If you overcook it, the meat will be too tough. If you marinate it too long, the taste will be too strong. I think you can do it after practicing for a few days.」

Is that true…?

Yes. Since I will be increasing your workload, your pay will double too. I have already discussed this with Mia Lei Wu.

Shela Wu looked shocked and turned her head towards Mama Mia Lei. Mama Mia Lei ruffled Lala Wu hair with a smug smile.

I asked Lala and Vena for their opinion, and they both agreed that only you can accomplish this, so I have decided to leave this to you. After all, they are not very good at tending to the hearth.

Shut up, Shela Wu is the one who is too good! We can’t replicate Asuta’s cooking completely!

That’s right… I want to try too, but I lack the conviction to roast the meat at the stall.

When the two girls were answering, the light of admiration was flickering in their eyes.

At this moment, the person who had been quiet all this time finally spoke:

Mama Mia Lei, I think of myself as

myself as a capable hearth caretaker too… Will the ones going to town tomorrow still be Vena-nee and Lala?

It was the second daughter Leina Wu.

Leina Wu held her hands in front of her breasts and looked at her mother with pleading eyes.

Mama Mia Lei showed a troubled smile.

The clan head was the one who picked Vena at first. If both Vena and you are away, it will affect the chores at home, right…? And before we figure out the Tsun clan's scheme, I think we should let Vena stay with Asuta. Your sister is the best at dealing with others.

But…

For example, if a man in a drunken stupor from the Tsun clan were to look for trouble at the stall, Vena could deal with him smoothly, right? After the decision to tend to the hearth at the house head conference we are confident that the Tsun clan won't lay their hands on Asuta. However, the clan head might change his mind. Bear with it before that.

… I understand.

Leina Wu puffed her cheeks slightly.

Vena Wu had a complicated expression on her face. She turned her head to the side and fidgeted with her chestnut hair.

And then Shela Wu looked at me with a face of determination.

"I understand. Asuta, I hope to meet your expectation to repay your trust in me. I will be in your care."

"Thank you… Let's start the practice then."

The morning practice seminar ended without any incident.

After two hours, the session ended. I left the stove room and stretched my arms.

Rimee Wu and Grandma Ditto Min were sunning pico leaves and chopping wood.

"Hi, Rimee Wu, is Ai Fa still not back?"

"Yes. But she should be returning soon."

Ai Fa went to the fringe of the forest to forage for firewood.

There was still some time before noon. I was wondering what to do during this time when an unexpected person came to me.

It was the eldest son of the Wu main house, Jiza Wu.

“Asuta, if you are free now, can I talk with you?”

“Do you — want to talk with me?”

I had not seen Jiza Wu around lately, but he suddenly came to me at this moment. Honestly, I didn’t think it was anything good.

Mama Mia Lei followed me out of the stove room, and she looked at the eldest son of the Wu main house a little suspiciously.

“Jiza, you actually have something to discuss with Asuta, what a surprise… Are you unhappy with the decision made by the clan head?”

“The clan head’s decision is absolute. Do you think I will violate this principle as the eldest son?”

His face remained warm and gentle.

When his slit-like eyes met Mama Mia Lei’s gaze, Mama Mia Lei sighed gently.

“Both you and Asuta still have work to do, don’t stress each other out.”

“Alright.”

Jiza Wu nodded and walked to the side of the house.

My only option was to follow.

“…Asuta, it’s been a long time since we last had a proper chat.”

“That’s right, since the morning of the Lutim house wedding banquet, we had not spoken at all.”

“Less than twenty days… In such a short period of time, the situation around us had changed drastically.”

Jiza Wu stopped and turned towards me.

He wasn’t wearing his cape or his blades, and only had simple clothes and a sash around his waist.

However, Jiza Wu was buffed and could take me down easily without any blades. When confronting him, I had to be as careful, as if facing a member of the Tsun clan.

"You are now the central figure in Forest's Edge. Whenever you act, the future of Forest's Edge changes too… I can sense this very strongly."

"That's not true. I know that many of the incidents were caused by me—but for better or worse, I can't do anything with my powers alone. If not for the help of Ai Fa, Kaslan Lutim, and Donda Wu, I couldn't be involved in the future of Forest's Edge at all."

"Who knows? If you weren't here, things wouldn't have turned out this way."

A formless pressure as heavy as a mountain assaulted me.

This was the lead-like pressure that the Wu clan siblings feared so deeply.

"You have a point. But I think the other people also wield similar influence. If not for Ai Fa, Kaslan Lutim or Donda Wu, the situation would be completely different. That's how the world is."

"…Asuta, you have changed."

Jiza Wu’s voice became deeper.

“You were meeker in the past. You didn’t know what kind of existence you were and didn’t try to wield your power dangerously in a reckless manner.”

“I see…”

“However, you have grasped your own capabilities and are attempting to influence Forest's Edge with your powers.”

Was it just my imagination? Jiza Wu’s bulky body looked even more buffed now.

The pressure was gradually increasing.

“You are dangerous. You might be a foreigner, but can affect the future of Forest's Edge from the inside. Compared to Rock City’s Kamyua Yost, I think you are the most dangerous person.”

“You only feel this way because you still don’t see me as a denizen of Forest's Edge, correct?”

I replied. I wasn’t afraid, but an uncomfortable and suffocating feeling assaulted me.

I sincerely wish to be a denizen of Forest's Edge. But my

Edge. But my time in Forest's Edge is still short, so I feel uneasy about the drastic changes in Forest's Edge brought by decisions I had made. I decided that this is the best path only after consulting with Ai Fa, Kaslan Lutim, and Donda Wu... Jiza Wu, you don't want the Wu clan to interact with the Post Station Town and Tsun clan in such a way, do you?

If you are asking my opinion— of course, I don't want that. I think the future of Forest's Edge should be decided by the denizens of Forest's Edge.

Hmm... in that case, you can think of this as Donda Wu and Kaslan Lutim using me like a tool to forge open a path for the future of Forest's Edge. That's how I feel anyway...

Even if you are just a tool, the one controlling you is neither the Wu clan nor Lutim house.

Jiza Wu's eyes were still narrowed into a slit and shone with a dark light.

The light was sharp, like a black blade.

The one manipulating you is the head of the Fa house. Speaking of which, the head of the Fa house who doesn't have any kin has the future of Forest's Edge in her hands.

"You're mistaken. Ai Fa isn't the only one I hold dear to me. Besides, Ai Fa is acting in the best interest of Forest's Edge, not for personal gain."

And that was why Ai Fa changed her mindset and decided to rely on the Wu clan and Lutim house.

The day after, Ai Fa even caught a fever from worrying too much — and even so, she still believes that Kaslan Lutim's judgment was correct, and chose to accept his opinion.

To me, that was the Wu clan, Lutim house and Fa house working together to pave the future of Forest's Edge— but Jiza Wu didn't think so.

"... This wouldn't have happened if Ai Fa married Darum two years ago."

Jiza Wu said in a calm tone.

"If Jiba and Rimee didn't forge a bond with Ai Fa... If Ai Fa didn't meet you in the forest..."

"I think these were happy scenes but are they an unfortunate occurrence to you?"

I tried to endure the formless pressure and mustered the strength in my joints.

□If that is true, it’s too sad.□

A stinging current seemed to be flowing in the air.

My knees felt like they would turn to jelly if I relaxed for a moment.

The pressure he was giving out was a match for Donda Wu when he gets mad.

The pressure Donda Wu exerted was the venting of his emotions. But I couldn’t feel any emotions in the pressure that was coming from Jiza Wu.

The core of this pressure didn’t stem from emotions like rage or hatred, but something that was the furthest from me— a sense of duty, a sense of belonging to the tribe, the pride of a hunter, etc.

Anyway, the pressure he was giving out was really scary.

I could only grit my teeth and endure, and not yield to this pressure.

I didn’t know how much time had passed—

Ai Fa’s voice came from behind Jiza Wu, disrupting our standoff.

"Asuta, what are you doing there?"

The pressure from Jiza Wu disappeared without a trace.

When he turned his body slightly to the side, I could see Ai Fa carrying a faggot of firewood tied up with ropes on her back.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faggot_(unit)>

"If you are free now, come help me. You will need more firewood tomorrow compared to yesterday, right?"

"Ah, yes, right... I understand, I'm coming."

Ai Fa walked slowly to me.

Jiza Wu bowed at her, then shifted his gaze to me.

"I should get going too. It's great that we finally got to talk after such a long time."

I nodded slightly and couldn't find the right words to say.

After Jiza Wu left, Ai Fa came over.

“Asuta, what were you doing?”

She had a scary expression when she was close.

“That was the first time I saw that eldest son emit such an intense killing intent. When I’m not around, don’t go near that man alone.”

“B-But he wanted to talk, and I couldn’t turn him down.”

“You have to reject him no matter what… I can’t tell what the eldest son is thinking, or how to be on guard against him.”

Ai Fa leaned in closer and looked into my eyes. Our noses were almost touching.

“Hmmp… I could never imagine how fearless you are when shrouded in such terrifying bloodlust. Your strength might still be lacking, but your courage has grown.”

“Hey, are you praising me or making a dig at me? Can you choose just one?”

“In that case, I will praise you.”

Ai Fa pressed her forehead against mine.

“Asuta, even a man from Forest's Edge would find it hard to stay calm under the incredible pressure emitted by that eldest son. For a weak hearth caretaker, you sure are cocky.”

“Hey—”

“I complimented you, so you can be proud of yourself.”

Ai Fa showed a fearless smile.

“Since you are so brave, then the men from the Tsun clan would be nothing to be afraid of. I can relax a bit more before the house head conference… Asuta, let’s gather more firewood. I need to let my dull body get back to its original condition.”

Vol. 6 :

Chapter 1

A+ A- Chapter 1

To say that nothing of note happened between the seminar and the house head conference wasn’t really truthful.

We opened the stall in the Post Station Town one day after the seminar and sold two hundred meals.

Sales dropped on the very next day— because we only prepared 170 portions, which were sold out too.

After one day of rest, we opened for two days and closed for two more days. The irregular operating hours stimulated the demand for our merchandise. Before this, I couldn’t sell 150 meals even if I did prepare them.

Our customers were still mostly southerners and easterners, but kiba food was steadily becoming the talk of the Post Station Town. When we start selling food at the inn, the fame of kiba food would spread even further.

No matter what the schemes the Tsun clan had, we must make this business succeed.

As I worked hard with these feelings in mind, the 8th and 9th day of the Blue Month flashed by— and it was now the day of the house head conference.

…… The Tsun clan village sure is far.

As I walked on the solid dirt path inside Forest's Edge, I whispered to Ai Fa.

Ai Fa walked with smooth strides like a leopard and answered quietly:

The Tsun clan village is located at the end of the northern side, while the Wu clan village is situated in the middle of the southern side, so of course it’s far.

The Forest's Edge settlement was a long piece of land that stretched from the south to the north.

A vast forest was between the Morga Mountain to the east and the wide territory of Genos to the west, resulting in such a shape.

Tsun clan village was at the extreme north end, while the Wu clan and Lutim house villages were to the south, with the smaller houses like the Fa house between them. From the bearings of the sun, I realized we had walked for two hours, but the scenery remained the same.

"Hmm… This means that the Tsun clan people actually walked so far on the night of the Lutim house wedding to pick a fight with us."

After whispering to Ai Fa again, she nodded and leaned her face towards me.

"Yes, because they don't perform their duties as hunters properly, they have that much free time. How infuriating."

"That's right. If they have the time to walk so far, they might as well go hunt kiba."

"… By the way, Asuta."

"Hmm? What's the matter, Ai Fa?"

"Why are you whispering?"

Ai Fa didn't know my intention but had been whispering to me all this while.

“It’s nothing serious. I simply think the atmosphere right now doesn’t feel good for an idle chat.”

We weren’t the only ones heading to the Tsun clan. We had set off together with the Wu clan and their kins.

The Wu clan had six kin houses related to them by blood. They were Lutim, Lei, Min, Mamu, Lilim, and Mufa. Each house head brought along a male follower to attend the house head conference. Together with the women helping with the hearth, we had a large group of 24 people.

The male attendees were strong elites too, so the term “intimidating” was very fitting. Everyone present had attended the banquet at the Lutim house, but I only knew three people, namely Donda Wu, Darum Wu, and Dan Lutim.

They were helping to carry the ingredients needed for the banquet tonight. No one had any complaints, but I still felt bad about this.

“... Sigh, I’m getting sleepy.”

Someone suddenly spoke loudly beside me.

I turned and saw the youngest man in the group yawning.

“I have not gotten up so early in a long time. Donda Wu, can I sleep for a while when we reach the Tsun clan village?”

“Whatever.”

Donda Wu replied coldly.

“Great. I will get up right away if anything happens, so give me a break… Hmm? What are you looking at, hearth caretaker of the Fa house?”

“Ah, it’s nothing, pardon me.”

“There’s nothing to pardon though, I just want to know what are you looking at.”

The youth didn’t look unhappy, but he didn’t seem to be the calm type either.

As I was wondering how to answer, the youth sped up and started to walk beside me.

“Speaking of which, I still don’t know your name. I’m Rau Lei. Hearth caretaker of the Fa house, what’s your name?”

“Nice to meet you, I’m Asuta.”

He might be younger than me, but I still decided to answer him with a humble attitude.

At this moment, the youth showed an unhappy face.

“Asuta, I’m seventeen. How old are you?”

“Ah, I’m seventeen too.”

“In that case, you don’t need to be so reserved, you can just speak to me normally.”

The youth said the same thing that Yumi did, but he had a dignified air about him.

His light-colored hair that looked almost blonde were tied behind him, the corners of his eyes were high and their pupils were light purple. With his high nose bridge and thin lips, he looked like a matured version of Ludo Wu. He looked androgynous and had a prideful expression.

He was a little taller than me and could be considered skinny compared to the other men from Forest's Edge. He looked young and wasn’t buffed, but the aura around him could rival that of the other men.

Never mind, Kaslan Lutim mentioned to me that you are running a business in the Post Station Town, I’m not sure about the details though. But if the Tsun clan tries to pick trouble with you, I will do everything I can to help.

Yes, thank you very much.



“... Didn’t I tell you not to be so reserved?”

“I didn’t mean to, it’s probably because of my business in the Post Station Town, so it’s more relaxing for me to speak this way.”

“I see. If you talk to me in such a formal tone again, I will punch you.”

“.....”

“Are you really the hearth caretaker of the Fa house?”

The youth named Rau Lei leaned in close suddenly.

“When the Tsun clan barged into the banquet, didn’t you tell them off loudly? You are acting like a completely different person now.”

“No, I was just acting on impulse back then.”

“In that case, you should act on impulse today too. If the Tsun clan sees how meek you are, they will exploit you all they could.”

It seemed that this youth’s concept on how to deal with aggression was completely different from mine.

I thought the first thing that needs to be done during a dangerous situation was to calm down.

"Asuta, Kaslan Lutim taught the Lei house the techniques how to bloodlet and butcher the kiba. The kiba meat did become delicious, but it still couldn't match the dishes you served at the banquet. What do we need to do to turn the meat into that soft and gooey form?"

"Ah, you mean hamburg steak? It needs mincing and molding the meat into a circular shape… That dish is hard to explain with words. The women from the Wu clan and Lutim house have learned the cooking method, you just need to learn from them."

To avoid being punched, I answered in a normal tone, and Rau Lei turned to look diagonally back.

"Ema Min Lutim, teach the method to the women of the Lei house. I want to eat that dish at home too."

Like everyone else, Ema Min Lutim was carrying a large bag of vegetables on her back. She bowed politely at Rau Lei.

"I understand. My skill is still lacking, but I hope the women of the Lei house and I will improve our skills together."

"… Ema Min Lutim, how old are you?"

Rau Lei, I’m 17.

In that case, your tone doesn’t need to be so formal, just speak casually like Asuta.

As a kin of the Wu clan, I can’t speak to the head of the Lei house in such a rude manner.

This youth— was he the head of the Lei house?

After becoming the house head, the attitude of the all women became like this… Asuta, you might be a hearth caretaker, but you are still a man, so talk to me normally.

Looks like I got acquainted with a youth I wasn’t sure how to get along with.

I looked Ai Fa’s way quietly, but my house head averted her face nonchalantly.

What’s the matter? Does the head of the Lei house like hamburg steak? I don’t think hamburg steak tastes bad, but spare ribs are the best, right?

The head of the Lutim house interjected.

He walked towards us as he swayed his large tummy. Was he going to get me out of this mess? Probably not.

"Spare ribs, huh. They're delicious— but isn't it a pain to eat them together with the bone?"

"What nonsense! It's delicious because we are eating it off the bone! If possible, I want to eat the kiba thigh with its bones too!"

Cooking the meat thoroughly seemed hard.

However, if I researched steam grill techniques, it might be possible to realize his dream.

"Those who like hamburg steak are mostly women and children. It's admirable of you to become the house head at such a young age, but you still have a childish side, huh."

Dan Lutim laughed out loud. Rau Lei immediately showed a sour face.

"Is the Lutim house trying to provoke the Lei house? Aren't you going too far to treat a grown-up hunter as a child?"

"If you don't want others to think of you as a child, then don't complain and eat the spare ribs. That delicacy suits hunters the best!"

Dan Lutim didn’t care about the raging Rau Lei, and turned his large round eyes my way.

“Asuta! Did you prepare any spare ribs for us tonight? That myam and thin slices of meat might be savory, but they can’t compare to the tastiness of spare ribs!”

I see. Ema Min Lutim and Molun Lutim learned how to cook “Myam-roasted meat” during the seminar three days ago and used their culinary skills to prepare dinner immediately.

That was a wonderful thing, but I couldn’t help tilting my head puzzledly when hearing that.

“Some of the meat here is from the Lutim house, right? Are there any spare ribs?”

“I don’t know. Kaslan did tell me something, but I was too sleepy and didn’t hear anything.”

“… I see.”

“Just the thought of the Tsun clan tasting this delicious meat fills me with rage. But if that bunch will change their ways, I will let them off! If they want to eat delicious meat, they need to hunt down kiba seriously! I’m going to kick them in the butt!”

「No, erm, can you try to calm down…?」

「Hmm? Why do you look so worried? I don't mean it literally, there's no way I will act so recklessly!」

Was that true? Allow me to sigh quietly.

I couldn't relax at all since I had seen him raging at the Tsun clan during that wedding banquet.

「… But if they lost their reason and tried to do anything to you, there's no telling what I might do.」

Dan Lutim laughed heartily, and the face of a hunter flashed momentarily across his cheerful face.

「I have no qualms about going to war with the Tsun clan, but it would be pointless if you died. The most important thing is that you must live. Do you get that, Asuta?」

Dan Lutim seemed uninterested in my business in the Post Station Town.

He didn't understand Ai Fa's, Kaslan Lutim's, and my goal of 「Letting the denizens of Forest's Edge live a more prosperous life」.

However, when Kaslan Lutim told him that the Tsun clan seemed to be targeting Asuta, he was so enraged that he wanted to go to the Tsun clan village and tell them off. That's what Kaslan Lutim told me.

I thought he was only infatuated with the taste of spare ribs and didn't care about me at all. I felt ashamed for harboring such thoughts.

Yes, thank you.

In return to my embarrassed gratitude, Dan Lutim laughed loudly again and slapped my back hard.

Don't worry, the women will protect you in the stove room, leave the other places to us! Asuta, you just need to relax and prepare a delicious meal!

His words were filled with strength, and so were his physical actions.

I thought I heard my ribs creaking, but fortunately, they didn't fracture.

Hmmp, there is no need to fear the Tsun clan, the ones we need to be wary about are their retarded kins. A scrawny man like you is no match for them, so don't ever agitate those people.

Even though Rau Lei didn't mince his words, he still said that out of

concern.

I never thought the kins of the Wu clan would be so friendly to Ai Fa and me.

Aside from Rau Lei, I had yet to speak with the others. Everyone else had a serious face, and despite the additional work I had imposed on them, no one had any complaints.

They had such an attitude because they didn't want to let the Tsun clan act with impunity. Even though Ai Fa and I weren't the kins of the Wu clan, but, judging from the atmosphere right now, everyone seemed to accept us readily.

Maybe the reason was the Lutim house wedding banquet Rau Lei mentioned just now.

When the three stooges from the Tsun clan gate tried to crash the Lutim house banquet, all the men were fuming with anger. And some of those men traveling with us now.

In order to defeat a common enemy, people will become united. This trope also applied to Ai Fa and me.

If that is the case, it will be even better.

There weren’t any misunderstandings between both parties.

I might not be a kin of these men, but our detest for the Tsun clan made us the same.

As I thought about these matters, Donda Wu who was walking at the head of the group muttered:

“The village is in sight…”

I cast my gaze to the front in a hurry and held my breath a little. I could see a vague image of an incredible structure on the other side of the trees.

No, that house wasn’t big enough for the term “structure”. It looked like a huge pile of straws in the middle of an empty space. The appearance was similar to a half-cave building from the stone age.

But the scale of the house was exceptional. It had a dome shaped like an inverted bowl, with a diameter of over 20 m. It might look flat from outside, but the peak of the bowl was about two stories high.

The entrance was a rectangular hole in black color. The roof on top of the bowl was like a triangular hat, with a square hole right on top for ventilation.

The workmanship was crude, but considering the impoverished state of the Forest's Edge, erecting such a large building was a testament to the Tsun clan’s power and influence.

“That’s the Tsun clan’s Ceremonial Hall.”

Ai Fa explained.

The house head conference would be conducted in this hall.

With the Ceremonial Hall as center, more than 10 familiar wooden houses were scattered around the vicinity.

“... Welcome to the Tsun clan village.”

A man appeared before us nimbly.

This middle-aged man had his grey hair combed behind him and wore a grey beard. He had a buffed body but had a lifeless and quiet air about him. He was Tay Tsun.

“You are very early. I thought only the hearth caretaker would be here at noon.”

“Hmmp, how can the women carry so much baggage by themselves?”

Donda Wu answered Tay Tsun with a deep voice akin to a tremor.

"Take us to the stove room of the main house. We will greet the tribe chief after that."

"Yes… Before that, can we collect the tusks and horns from everyone?"

When Yamiel Tsun and I reached an agreement, all the houses were notified to pay a tribute of one kiba's worth of tusks and horns when they attend the house head conference.

In the Post Station Town, two large tusks and horns could bring in twelve copper plates. This wasn't much for the Fa house, the Wu clan, and their kins, but for the smaller houses that could miss meals every so often, this was a matter of life and death.

Even though the forest had plentiful resources, the landlord of Genos forbade the denizens of Forest's Edge from foraging fruits in the forest or cultivating the land. They could only exchange the tusks, horns, and hides of kiba for copper plates.

After all the houses submitted the tusks and horns to the Tsun clan, the Tsun clan then passed this money to us, the hearth caretakers, as payment. I thought that by asking a fee we only increased the burden on the smaller houses.

In order to correct the Tsun clan’s twisted ways, we could only go along with their plan.

In that case, I had to do everything I could to bring them hope that could make up for their losses.

“This way, please…”

Tay Tsun accepted 8 sets of kiba tusks and horns, strung them all up, and walked to the village.

He was as lifeless and meek

as usual.

By the way, I don’t think a hunter should be an usher, so why was this man always taking care of such trivial matters?

… Hmm? We don’t need to hand over our blades?

According to the rules in the Wu clan village, I had to hand over my kitchen knife before heading into the stove room. But the Tsun clan didn’t make such a request.

Never mind, that’s one less hassle to worry about, but it also made me realize that the discipline in the Tsun clan was very lax.

…Still as creepy as usual.

Rau Lei muttered when he walked by me.

Was he complaining about Tay Tsun or this village— maybe both? It was almost noon, but I didn’t see a single soul.

I heard no sound of wood being chopped.

Nor I saw anyone drying pico leaves.

There weren’t any women chatting idly or children running around happily.

It was like a deserted village.

As I looked closely along the way, I found the large Ceremonial Hall to be in terrible shape. The structure had been reinforced, but the walls covered in straws were rotting away. There was plenty of rain in Forest's Edge, so the design of this building wasn’t ideal. My guess is that the denizens of Forest’s Edge used to live in houses like this in olden times when they were still staying in the southern jungle.

When this building was erected, the Tsun clan was still a tribal chief clan capable of leading their people down the right path.

That was my personal opinion. Only the people from Grandma Jiba’s generation would know if that was true.

“Over here…”

Hidden behind the Ceremonial Hall that was like the corpse of a dinosaur, we could see a grand building on par with the Wu clan main house.

This had to be the Tsun clan main house. I started turning tense.

This was the home base of the enemy— the base of the nefarious Diga Tsun with whom we experienced numerous bad run-ins.

Tay Tsun walked in perfect strides like a robot and went to the back of the building.

“… This is the stove room.”

The stove room of the Tsun clan was just like the Wu clan, a small building situated behind the main house.

The scale matched that of the Wu clan too, they also had two outdoor stoves.

“Where are the Tsun clan’s women?”

Mama Mia Lei asked, and Tay Tsun bowed towards us with his usual hollow eyes.

“Please wait a moment, I will call them over.”

After Tay Tsun disappeared, everyone piled the ingredients at the entrance.

Over 90 kg of kiba meat.

More than 400 aria and almost 300 poitan.

Fruit wine and seasonings such as rock salt and myam.

Kitchen cutleries and fake rubber leaves to serve food.

When all the ingredients were piled at the same spot, the amount looked staggering.

There would be 79 people attending the house head conference, 41 people from the Tsun clan village and 9 hearth caretakers— adding ten additional portions for Mida Tsun, there was enough food for 139 pax.

On the surface, the men’s work had concluded. There was still two to three hours of free time before the house head conference began. They planned to stand by around the stove room for now.

“… Even after the house head conference begins, the Tsun clan branch house members can still move around freely. Asuta, don’t get careless now, alright?”

Ai Fa instructed me quietly. She had reminded me of this several times already.

“I understand. No matter what, I won’t act alone… Ai Fa, you be careful too.”

“Hmmp, I won’t be in any danger. But I think it’s a pity that Kaslan Lutim won’t be attending.”

That’s right, Ai Fa had to explain what led her to make the decision of having the Fa house open a business in the Post Station Town. According to the customs of Forest's Edge, the eldest son who was the heir had to protect the house when the house head conference was in session, so Kaslan Lutim was absent today.

Donda Wu and Dan Lutim wouldn’t be much help, and the second son of Lutim house wasn’t as well-spoken as Kaslan Lutim.

Speaking of which, Kaslan Lutim was the one who was too special. I had

never met anyone in Forest's Edge who spoke as rationally as he did.

This was the nature of the denizens of Forest's Edge. They had strong feelings towards their kin and tribe, so I had never met anyone with a more realist trend in their thinking. Among my small circle of friends, only Kaslan Lutim and Grandma Jiba was the realist type— Jiza Wu's, Sati Lei Wu's, and Ema Min Lutim's personalities also leaned towards being realists.

「... It will be fine. The important thing is to convey your feelings to everyone.」

I whispered to Ai Fa.

「No matter how well-spoken people like Kamyua Yost and I might be, I won't be able to convey my feelings to the denizens of Forest's Edge. You are a member of Forest's Edge, so you will definitely do better than us.」

「... How can you say that after spending so much time with me? I don't understand. Never mind, at least you aren't refuting my abilities.」

Ai Fa said brusquely, then rubbed her nose.

「I will do my best in my task... Asuta, it's time for you to work.」

I followed Ai Fa’s gaze and saw Tay Tsun coming from the back of the house again.

Ten women followed him. One of them hastened her pace, passed Tay Tsun and appeared before Ai Fa and me.

“Ai Fa and Asuta of the Fa house, we have been awaiting your visit. The clan head Zuro and my brother Mida had been looking forward to your arrival.”

The eldest daughter of the Tsun clan welcomed us with these words.

This was the first time we met her inside Forest's Edge.

When Yamiel Tsun went to the Post Station Town, she covered her body with veils and shawls. And right now, she was dressed lightly before us, with just a tube top, cloth around her waist and metallic accessories on her wrists. Compared to meeting her in town, she looked more beautiful— and even more creepy.

Her brown hair was braided into dreads.

The corners of her eyes were high and her pupils were black.

Her body shape and limbs were long and slender, and her body figure was on par with Vena Wu. However, there was a strong rotting odor on

her body.

Ai Fa and Vena Wu didn’t have such a scent.

The only thing I was better at than the denizens of Forest's Edge was my keen sense of smell. The denizens of Forest's Edge not only had outstanding physical abilities, their eyes and ears were exceptionally honed too. However, my sense of smell was still a little better than theirs.

That was why Yamiel Tsun put me on edge the most. That might not be human blood, but the blood stench from her did obviously make me uncomfortable.

“... By the way, I need to inform you something.”

Yamiel Tsun said with a cold smile:

“The payment to the Fa house will be 36 kiba worth of tusks and horns instead of 40. Can I seek your kind understanding about that?”

“What...? We can only decide after listening to the reason.”

“It’s very simple. During this past year, the number of houses had decreased from 40 to 36. Four houses had died out, or joined other houses before dying out... Thus, you may decrease the number of

portions to prepare by 8, and we hope to amend the remuneration to 36 kiba worth of tusks and horns.

… Compared to an increase, it is definitely easier to handle a decrease in numbers. But an agreement between denizens of Forest's Edge can’t be amended so easily, right?

Indeed, that’s why we are sincerely asking for your understanding.

What sincerity? Don’t make me laugh. I shrugged. They definitely had a way of informing us once they knew the number of houses had decreased. Her words reeked of so much hypocrisy that I felt retarded for treating her seriously.

However, I could only fight within my own realm.

We have no intentions of carrying this huge amount of luggage back either. However, we will need the Wu clan and Lutim house to agree to this, since we will be splitting the remuneration equally.

The money isn’t important. Let’s get right to work.

Mama Mia Lei wasn’t fazed at all and walked in front of Yamiel Tsun.

Yamiel Tsun glanced at her coldly and seemed disinterested.

"Asuta of the Fa house, I will leave the rest to you. You can order these 15 women around as you wish."

Fifteen, that was quite a big number.

I heard the Tsun clan village had 41 people, and they seemed to have gathered all the women. After looking at them…

I was dumbstruck.

… What's going on?

It was a group of Forest's Edge women of various ages.

The eldest was around 50, while the youngest was ten. There was a mixture of wed and unwed women. There was nothing strange with their appearance.

However, all their eyes looked blank and hollow.

Be it middle-aged housewives or young children, their eyes were all murky just like Diga Tsun's.

The women's brown faces didn't have any expression. I couldn't feel the unique energy and life force of the Forest's Edge denizens from them.

They didn’t seem to have any problems with their health and body. They didn’t look skinny or sickly. Instead, the women were lackluster and lifeless.

Be it the Post Station Town, or the world I was from— I had never met anyone as lifeless as them who resembled flawed mud dolls, standing blankly in place.

「I have other works to attend to, so I will take my leave now… Ah, the clan head is still resting, would the men please visit him later?」

Yamiel Tsun turned and left after showing a venomous snake-like smile.

As if it was expected, Tay Tsun followed her.

After seeing them off, Mama Mia Lei clapped loudly.

「Alright, everyone, go bring in the ingredients. Please start with the poitan!」

Tsun clan didn’t answer and walked slowly towards us.

They weren’t particularly slow, but the entire group looked like walking corpse.

「… Who was that disgusting woman?」

Dan Lutim muttered unhappily as he stood behind us.

Even though he seemed to be saying to himself, I still answered:

「She is the eldest daughter of the main house, Yamiel Tsun.」

「A woman from the main house, huh. She seemed more competent than the three stooges, but I don't want to eat dinner with anyone who has such an awful stench.」

「Ehh?」

I looked up at Dan Lutim's huge body in surprise, and he kept twitching his round nose.

「Why was the smell of rotting blood on that woman? She looked so scrawny and didn't seem to be doing any skinning work.」

「… Dan Lutim, your nose is really sharp.」

「Hmm? When I enter the woods, I can determine where the kiba is with my nose. In the Lutim house, only me and my father Raa can do that.」

He shook his tummy proudly and rubbed his round nose.

“Anyway, I don’t like her. I despise everyone from the Tsun clan, but I find her exceptionally detestable. Asuta, you must never trust that woman.”

“Yes, I agree with you completely.”

I nodded and grabbed a sack of poitan.

I then turned towards Ai Fa.

“Alright then, I’m off to work… Let’s both work hard.”

Ai Fa nodded silently with a serious face.

The curtains to our battle at the Tsun clan were drawn quietly.

2

There were eight women from the Wu clan and Lutim house who came with me to the Tsun clan to help.

The Tsun clan dispatched 15 women to assist.

We had to prepare 130 portions of meal, so the numbers were adequate. The question was the quality of the helpers.

「Ermm, who here is from the Tsun clan?」

I asked after carrying all the poitan and cooking wares into the stove room.

As the stove room was too cramped for 24 people, I shifted my base to the entrance of the stove room.

Ai Fa, Donda Wu, and the others sat on the ground some distance away, keeping a close eye on the stove room as they chewed on jerky.

「... No one from the main house is here.」

One of the older women answered in a monotone voice.

「Is that so? That is troubling. For the sake of Mida Tsun, I wanted the women from the main house to learn how to cook these dishes.」

「.....」

“What’s the matter?”

“… The women from the main house don’t need to tend to the hearth.”

“Ehh? Then who tends to their hearth?”

“… We tend to the hearth in their stead.”

“I see… But there are three women in the main house, right?”

Kaslan Lutim once told me that aside from the eldest daughter Yamiel Tsun, the Tsun clan main house had one more daughter. The third female was the spouse of the clan head.

That woman only repeated:“… We tend to the hearth in their stead.”

“Alright, I understand. Well then, let’s get started… First, start the fire in all the stoves. I only see four pots, can you get three more from the branch houses?”

The women from the Tsun clan didn’t answer and started moving slowly.

Vena Wu whispered to me as she looked at their lifeless figures:

This is really unsettling… Maybe it will be more efficient if we just tend to the hearth without them.

Yes. But we can’t do that, which is a problem.

There were many factors which made us decide to let the Tsun clan women learn my cooking techniques.

First, since Mida Tsun had no immunity towards delicious food, they would need to satiate his appetite.

Next, even though Asuta from the Fa house was capable of cooking delicious meals, it shouldn’t mean that I was a unique existence. We had to let the head of the Tsun clan Zuro Tsun understand this.

Finally, delicious food could bring more strength to the denizens of Forest's Edge and lead to a more prosperous life. We had to let all the house heads know this.

However, given how lifeless these women were, could I teach them how to cook?

Compared to the wedding banquet for the Lutim house, tending the Tsun clan’s hearth was an extremely arduous task.

Please pour in water until the pots are six tenths full. Make the fire

bigger… When the water boils, put in 40 poitan into each pot.

There were five stoves in the room, and I assigned ten Tsun clan women, the three Wu clan sisters, and Tali Wu there.

I let the five Tsun clan women and the Lutim house ladies handle the two stoves outside.

This wasn't just to instruct the Tsun clan women, but also for the Wu clan to watch their every move. We had to make sure they didn't sabotage the food. As the Tsun clan would be eating them, so it was unlikely for them to poison the food. Yet, we had to be extra careful when dealing with the Tsun clan.

When the poitan starts drying, please stir it, keeping in mind not to burn it… Alright then, let's check the next steps.

I asked Mama Mia Lei and Shela Wu to come to the stove room entrance.

According to the plan, we should be using the branch house's stove to make meat soup after the poitan is done. Vena Wu and Lala Wu will team up with me. Mia Lei Wu, Ema Min Lutim, and Molun Lutim will be in another team. Shela Wu, Leina Wu, and Tali Wu will be the third team, is that fine?

That's fine. But you want to leave the dried poitan here while we are cooking soup, right? That worries me the most.

I feel uneasy too, but we can’t prepare such a large amount of food in one place. We can only check the taste of the dishes frequently to make sure they are not pulling any pranks.

That’s true… but why are all the women from the Tsun clan like this…

Before Mama Mia Lei finished, the yell of men came from outside.

I followed the origin of the sound and found several unfamiliar men beside Donda Wu and the others.

Uwah… what is that?

Even from this distance, I could clearly see the weird outfit of that group.

Six men were yelling at Donda Wu’s entourage.

Four of them wore kiba hides over their heads, while the other two were actually wearing kiba skulls.

They are from the northern side of Forest's Edge. The ones with hides are from the Zaza and Jean houses. The ones wearing skulls are from the Dom house… They all are the Tsun clan’s kins.

So they are the Tsun clan's kins...

That's right, in a sense, they are more troublesome than the Tsun clan. They are even more short-tempered than our clan head.

Ehh? They are more stubborn than Donda Wu!?

After saying that, I thought to myself This is the end.

The wife of the stubborn clan head laughed cheerfully.

Their heads are as hard as rocks, and still swear their allegiance to the chief clan. The Dom and Zaza villages are at the northernmost end and some distance away from the Tsun clan, so they don't realize how depraved the chief

chief clan has become.

I see... That's really tricky.

That's right, what a pain. They might even think the Wu clan and Fa house are disrupting the peace in Forest's Edge by going against the chief clan.

That would be really, really problematic.

I had gotten cocky since the men from the Tsun clan main house were all mob characters. I even thought that Donda Wu and Dan Lutim won't ever lose to them even if the Tsun clan acted with impunity.

The fierce and intimidating Tsun kins got right in the faces of the Wu clan's men.

The men wearing hides and skulls were as buffed as Donda Wu and Dan Lutim. They looked like giant kiba standing on their hind legs because of the outrageous get-up they were in.

They showed no fear even though the six of them were going up against Donda Wu's entourage of 15. I didn't know why they were so agitated, but the atmosphere was really tense.

「Uwah, I already told you to be careful not to burn them!」

At this moment, Lala Wu's panicking voice could be heard.

「You can't just stir mindlessly! Enough, move over for now!」

「…Ohh.」

The other party responded lacklusterly.

I stole a glance at the stove room and saw Lala Wu snatching the spatula from a young Tsun clan girl and starting to struggle with the poitan in the pot.

"Sorry, Asuta! The poitan is badly burned! Should we move the pot away for now?"

"Yes, otherwise the charred part would be mixed with the parts that are still fine. Shift it down even if it's not all done—"

"Uwah!"

At this moment, there was a sudden scream.

Followed by the sound of something heavy falling onto the ground.

It came from outside.

Mama Mia Lei and I rushed out and saw Molun Lutim sitting on the ground and Ema Min Lutim standing beside them with a troubled look. Most of the poitan in the pot had been spilled. Two Tsun clan women were standing blankly with a krilee stick used for carrying heavy items at the side.

"Ema Min Lutim, what happened?"

“Ah, Asuta, sorry. Our poitan have dried, so I asked them to bring the pot down, and this happened.”

While Ema Min Lutim was nursing her temple as if she had a headache, Molun Lutim who was sitting beside a middle-aged lady roared:“I was almost scalded!”. Her usually amiable face was now red with anger.

“Why is your posture so unsteady? How can you tend to the hearth if you can’t even move a pot!?”

She resembled her father when she was raging.

“Ohh.”

The Tsun clan women nodded with their usual lifeless expression.

“… This will be a long day.”

Mama Mia Lei sighed deeply beside me.

“The house heads are having a hard time, but we can’t spare the effort to worry about them. The Tsun clan women can’t even handle the simplest poitan, can we really ask them to prepare the meat soup and steaks?”

That’s right. I need to rethink this.

I wanted to see how capable the Tsun clan women were with this dish, but it seems that I couldn’t afford to take things so easily.

After stealing a last glance at Ai Fa’s group who were facing off against the Tsun clan’s kins, I returned to the stove room.

Lala Wu! Bring the pot with the burned poitan here! And the ladle from the water flask too… Shela Wu, take over Lala Wu’s role and assist Leina Wu.

Alright.

I placed the pot brought by Lala Wu and a Tsun clan woman together with the pot from team Lutim.

Use the ladle to move the poitan that isn’t burned into this pot. Then bring another new pot, no, two new pots over. We will use one of those pots to replace the spilled and charred poitan.

From the looks of things, It might be lucky that the Tsun clan canceled 8 orders of food.

We did bring extra ingredients in case any mistakes were made, but I

didn’t expect such a huge mishap.

Are they doing this intentionally to hold us back? — Probably not.

It would make sense if they could shift some blame to us for the mistakes, but all they were doing was wasting food and getting all the blame.

I thought they were just hopelessly lacking in motivation.



Alright, let’s use all the poitan we brought today. Lala Wu, please demonstrate and handle everything.

Yes, I don’t want to waste more poitan… Why are all of you looking so listless, just what do you think these important ingredients are? These are poitan bought with kiba tusks and horns, which the men risked their lives to obtain.

Sorry

After Lala Wu lectured them angrily, the Tsun clan women apologized emotionlessly.

I walked back to the stove room with those not involved here. Aside from the pot Lala Wu was in charge of, everyone else had finished their tasks.

But Vena Wu and Leina Wu looked a little dejected.

These poitan have dried up, right? Then please shift the pot outside to a sunny spot! Be careful and don’t spill it!

A few seconds later, the Tsun clan women grabbed the krilee sticks.

When everyone brought the pots outside and Lala Wu finished the additional portions, I gathered everyone to the stove room entrance again.

Poitan that had been dried needs to be sunned until all the moisture is

gone. Meanwhile, we will prepare the kiba and aria soup. Before we work on the soup, I want to confirm the work we need to do… Would the ladies from the Tsun clan please come into the stove room.

I glanced at the women moving silently, then grabbed a sack of kiba meat piled beside the door.

Vena Wu, can you come with me? Everyone else, please watch by the door.

Even though the Tsun clan's stove room could rival that of the Wu clan, it was crowded with Vena Wu, 15 Tsun clan women, and me inside.

The other members who couldn't squeeze into the stove room made faces that seemed to say What are you trying to do?

I placed the sack on the working platform near the stove and surveyed the women who were lined up.

This is the kiba meat we brought from the Wu clan and Lutim house. We will be cooking dinner with it.

The Tsun clan women looked at me absentmindedly, their eyes were like dead fish.

This meat had been specially processed to remove its stench. I am

selling food made from this meat in a stall in the Post Station Town, have you heard about that?

… No.

I asked a woman standing near me, and she answered.

I see. Then do you know the background on why I who has no relations with the Tsun clan was asked to tend to the hearth here?

… I don’t know.

Okay. Ten days ago, the youngest son of the Tsun clan visited my stall and bought my food. He rather liked my cooking. And so, the head of the Tsun clan Zuro Tsun asked me to tend to the hearth, even if it was just for one night.

The women didn’t have any reactions.

They didn’t seem to be very afraid of the members from the Tsun clan main house.

I have to prepare food that will satisfy Mida Tsun. But that will be meaningless if it is only for one night, right? Since you will be tending to the Tsun clan’s hearth every night, I hope you can learn to cook delicious meals… Are you willing to do so?

I passed the topic to another lady.

The older woman answered in an emotionless tone:

“... I have no reason to decline.”

“I see... do you want to try eating delicious food?”

“... I don’t know what that means.”

“I see, what about you?”

I turned my attention to the young girl beside her.

“... We need to be thankful for all the food, the taste doesn’t matter.”

This was the model answer in Forest's Edge.

Ai Fa, the Wu clan, and Lutim house all felt the same way in the beginning.

“You are absolutely right. But as you see, I’m from a foreign land. In my hometown, I worked as a chef. My job is to cook delicious food. As the

head of the Tsun clan will be paying me, I have to finish this job no matter what.

I looked at another woman.

Will you help me complete this job?

... We have already promised Yamiel Tsun that we will help you.

Thank you, everyone... But things had blown up now, so not only do I need to prepare dinner for Mida Tsun and the main house of the Tsun clan, I also need to serve the participants of the house head conference too, as well as the Tsun clan branch houses— that means you and your family.

And finally, I took out a pack of meat from the sack.

I opened the fake rubber tree leaves and laid out the meat covered in pico leaves onto the working platform.

This was a kiba's right rear thigh meat.

Vena Wu, can you heat the pot up with a strong fire?

Yes, got it...

While she was heating the pot, I started slicing the meat with the Santoku knife.

Even though I bought the Semu made kitchen knife, I still needed to use this Santoku knife when cutting meat.

「You might be uninterested in delicious food, but my job is to let everyone enjoy a delicious meal. It's fate that we get to work together, so I hope we can get along well.」

「... Are you angry because we burned the food and dropped the pot onto the ground?」

The oldest woman whose hair was half white asked in a calm voice.

「If that made you unhappy, I will apologize you. We will be more careful and not repeat the mistake.」

「You don't need to apologize, I just hope everyone can work hard together.」

I observed that woman's exhausted face.

「Why do all your faces look so lifeless? Do you hate tending to the hearth? Or are you unwilling to help a foreigner like me?」

…… No one is unhappy about this job……

It felt like I was talking to an old dog that refused to communicate.

These women were just like Tay Tsun.

That listless and uncaring Tay Tsun who didn’t show any emotions.

Speaking of which… Tay Tsun and these women are from the branch house.

From what I knew, the Tsun clan main house members didn’t look so dead.

There must be a huge gulf between the main house and branch houses.

I didn’t know the reason, but if this goes on, our work would end in failure.

……Asuta, the pot is heated……

……Thank you.……

I put down my knife.

I then held a kiba thigh meat, which was about 5 mm thick, high up before the Tsun clan women.

“I’m going to grill this meat. I only seasoned it with pico leaves. The fats on the meat are equally spread out, I will grill it right now.”

I announced as I placed the meat into the pot.

There were 15 pieces of meat.

The aroma of the meat spread in the stove room along with white smoke.

“Vena Wu, a plate and spoon, please.”

“Yes…”

The slices of meat were thin and were cooked in no time.

I moved all the meat onto the plate and offered it to the eldest woman.

“Please taste one piece of meat. This is kiba meat after bloodletting.”

The woman ate the grilled meat with the spoon.

She didn’t show any emotions, but her eyebrows twitched a little.

The next woman had no reaction.

The third closed her eyes quickly.

The fourth opened her eyes slightly wider.

The fifth didn’t react.

Everyone had different reactions.

The one who reacted the strongest was the youngest girl who was about ten.

She frowned uneasily and looked at her kins on both sides of her.

But no one responded to her.

I don’t know if this meat suited your taste, but you can tell it is different, right? The Wu clan and Lutim house think this meat is

□delicious□. In my time in Forest's Edge, I often heard people say that □There is no distinction between food being tasty or not□. But I think if we are going to eat, we should try to eat delicious food.□

That was all I had to say.

They would need to experience the rest personally.

□We will be preparing more delicacies. In order to let Mida Tsun eat delectable food, I hope everyone can help… Well then, I want everyone to split into three groups to prepare the next dish.□

3

When I left the stove room, the men were gone.

Where did they go? As I was pondering about that, Leina Wu came over quietly.

□The men went to the Ceremonial Hall. There is still some time before the house head conference begins, but the kins of the Tsun clan were complaining due to them loitering around the village with blades on them.□

I see.

I nodded.

Asuta, what should we do next?

We will stick to the plan and split into three groups to prepare Kiba meat soup. From then on, I hope you all can let the Tsun clan women taste-test the dishes at every critical stage of the cooking process.

Taste-testing?

Yes. And please talk to them when you are working, even idle chatter is fine. The mood is important when cooking. If they continue to cook lifelessly, the dishes will taste bland.

Ah... I understand that. The dish will turn delicious if the one cooking wants to make the food delicious.

You are absolutely right.

I nodded firmly, and Leina smiled blissfully.

I get it. We are too tense because they are from the Tsun clan. As fellow women of Forest's Edge, we all wish for the men to taste delicious

food. I will work with them with this thought in mind.

Leina Wu was smarter and more considerate than others.

I told the same thing to Mama Mia Lei and Shela Wu and met up with my team members.

My team consisted of Vena Wu and Lala Wu.

Well then, would the ladies from the Tsun clan please divide into three groups. Please try to team up with your family and people you are familiar with.

We formed groups of eight, with 5 Tsun clan women and three people from our side in each group. We brought the aria and meat we needed and headed to the stove room of the branch houses.

Let's cut the aria. Please cut them into crescent shapes, like this.

Every portion of Kiba meat soup required two aria and around 150 g of kiba meat.

Each group would need to prepare 44 portions of meat soup, which was 88 aria and 6.6 kg of kiba meat.

"By the way, we are preparing ten portions for Mida Tsun because he is so big. But isn't ten portions of soup a bit too much?"

I said to a woman from the Tsun clan. I was more cheerful than how I acted in the Post Station Town while operating the stall.

The woman cutting aria answered listlessly:

"Well... I don't know..."

"Never mind, it's better to have leftovers instead of having not enough. I planned to make the presentation better... Is Mida Tsun at home? Or in the woods?"

"Well... I don't know..."

"I never met the head of the Tsun clan Zuro Tsun before. He is not just the head of the Tsun clan, but also the tribal chief of Forest's Edge. What kind of person is he?"

"...Zuro Tsun is a great man..."

Was this a waste of effort?

Vena Wu and Lala Wu couldn't find anything to talk about either and turned quiet.

I decided to change my goal.

「Hey, what do you think about the meat just now?」

That girl who was about ten was in my group.

She chopped the aria mechanically and glanced at me.

「... It tastes completely different from normal kiba.」

「I know, right? We let out all the blood from a kiba before it dies, then took out its innards with proper steps. That way, we can eat the delicious torso meat on the kiba.」

「... Yes...」

「Does the Tsun clan discard the torso of the kiba into the forest too? Kiba thigh does taste nice, but there are many parts of the torso that are delicious too.」

The girl shook her head expressionlessly.

「... We don't throw away the torso.」

□Ehh?□

□We eat the head and the torso… Compared to thigh meat, these parts have a stronger stench.□

□Oh□ so that’s how it is.□

I said in an amiable tone, but a sense of dissonance was growing in my heart.

So even the Tsun clan branch house eats the head and torso of kiba… Isn’t that strange?

Ai Fa said the Tsun clan hogged all the prize money from Genos and didn’t fulfill their duties as hunters properly. This meant that the Tsun clan used the prize money to buy aria and poitan, and when they hunted down a kiba, they ate the entire thing. Was that their diet? In that case, they could minimize their work as hunters and spend their time leisurely.

But only the Tsun clan main house would do that, right?

Were the branch house of the Tsun clan living a lazy and depraved life too?

After thinking about it, this assumption was too unrealistic.

After I started running my business in the Post Station Town, I obtained the habit of calculating the expenses.

Was the prize money from Genos so

Genos so grand?

After taking on this job, I learned the number of people in the Tsun clan.

The Tsun clan main house had eight people, together with the 33 members of the branch houses, their clan consisted of 41 people.

Assuming none of them hunted any kiba.

The minimum requirement is two aria and three poitan a day. That would be 1.2 red copper plates.

For 41 people, that would be 49.2 red copper plates.

According to Kaslan Lutim, Genos gave out prize money every three months.

Three months was ninety days, and the Tsun clan would need 4428 red copper plates during this time.

In order to obtain the minimal amount of meat, they would need to hunt kiba. I included the meat into my calculation.

Assuming 500 g of kiba meat for each person, and 40 kg of meat from each kiba… They just had to hunt one kiba every two days to feed everyone.

If they sell the kiba tusks, horns, and hide, they can earn 24 red copper plates every couple of days.

That’s 360 red copper plates per month.

And 1080 red copper plates in three months.

Deducting 1080 red copper plates from the 4428 red copper plates, there would be 3348 red copper plates left.

3348 red copper plates every three months meant 13,392 red copper plates a year.

If the 41 people wanted to enjoy life every day, they would need such a huge amount of red copper plates a year.

Kamyua Yost once said that the prize money was trivial.

And Ai Fa responded:□That’s why the Tsun clan hogged the prize money.□

But — could this amount be considered □trivial□?

And this was the sum needed for the Tsun clan to survive. The Tsun clan main house members weren’t living such frugal lives.

Doddo Tsun drank himself silly with fruit wine in the afternoon.

Mida Tsun had an allowance of ten red copper plates every month.

Besides, they also had to maintain their blades and buy miscellaneous items such as clothing too.

Hence, the Tsun clan wasn’t just surviving on the prize money alone, and also hunted plenty of kiba— but that girl just said that they would eat the head and torso of the kiba, which contradicted that.

Looking at it another way, if the prize money was lower than my earlier estimate, that meant the Tsun clan had to hunt more than one kiba a day. Then there would definitely be excess meat.

I felt uneasy.

The entire thing felt off.

I was starting to understand why the eyes of the branch house members looked so dead. I thought they were lifeless because the Tsun clan main house kept all the prize money to themselves, and forced the branch house members to keep it a secret. Maybe that wasn't the case?

"... Asuta, the aria is done..."

Vena Wu's voice pulled me back to reality.

"Alright, we will then take care of the kiba meat. I will use the kiba thigh meat and loin meat for soup."

I shook my head slowly and focused on the task before me.

I didn't know how much the prize money was, or how many kiba the Tsun clan actually hunted. I wouldn't get an answer no matter how hard I thought about it.

But— I still saved this doubt in a corner of my mind.

"Like the meat slices I cut earlier, please distribute the white fats when you cut the meat, it should be about this thick."

No one answered.

I suggested that we should chat idly with the Tsun clan women, but this was the first time we met, and they had such a lifeless attitude, so what should we talk about? I decided to play dumb and ask them about the situation within the Tsun clan main house. As I was thinking about that…

「Uwah!」

Lala Wu yelled.

「T-That surprised me! Who are you and when did you come in!?」

「I was here a long while ago. You are the one who is slow for not realizing my presence.」

She spoke with a sharp voice like birds chirping.

I was shocked too. An intruder suddenly appeared in the stove room that had eight people.

That was a petite girl.

I couldn’t tell her age.

She was a head shorter than Lala Wu, in other words, her height was at

most 130 cm.

The limbs and body of the girl were skinny, but her head was disproportionately large. Her brown hair was tied at the top of her head, resembling an onion.

She had large eyes with small pupils that had a dangerous glint in them. Her nose and mouth were small, and her chin had a shape of a sharp triangle.

She was wearing a one-piece dress on her small body for some reason. The dress had swirly patterns, which were the type of clothing found in the city.

「... So you are the foreigner living in the Fa house?」

She stared at me with her sanpaku eyes.

<TL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanpaku >

「Hmmm, from your appearance, you are a citizen of the west, right? But you have the hair of an easterner, are you a mixed blood from the east and west?」

「No, I came from a nation even further away. Who are you?」

I could already guess her identity.

If the stereotype 「Tsun clan main house people are proud and arrogant」 was correct, the answer was obvious.

The girl's answer was just what I expected.

「I'm the youngest daughter of the Tsun clan Zwei Tsun… Isn't it basic courtesy to introduce yourself when you ask someone else for their names?」

「Ahh, I'm Asuta from the Fa house. Are you here to help?」

I just said that when the little girl called Zwei furrowed her brows a little and admonished me:

「Why should the main house member help in the stove room? That's the work of the branch house, right? Don't say something so ridiculous!」

「Is that so? So the Tsun clan had such a rule.」

Seeing that a member of the main house had shown up, I raised my guard to the highest level. However, the little girl was different from her siblings, and didn't leave too bad of an impression on me.

She didn't seem kind or honest, but her humorous appearance felt approachable. Just looking at her gave me a sense of deja vu. Wasn't there a character like this in a manga or an anime?

「Hmmp! Very well, I forgive you since you're a foreigner… Hmm? Is this the magical kiba meat?」

「No, I'm not a magician.」

「What are you saying!? Didn't you sell the kiba meat in the Post Station Town of Genos!? The people in the city absolutely detest kiba meat, so you must have cast some spell on them!」

She screamed hysterically, then narrowed her eyes and glared at me.

「Are you… really a man who earned 200 copper plates in one day? I find that hard to believe…」

「In that case, then don't believe that.」

「Enough idle talk, answer me properly! And don't lie, I will know the truth if I just check!」

She might be approachable, but she sure is noisy.

How did everyone feel when watching a scene like this? I looked around me—

Vena Wu squinted her eyes sleepily and stared at the intruder’s profile.

Lala Wu frowned unhappily and glared at her too.

And— the women from the branch houses hung their head lifelessly and cut the meat quietly. They didn’t react when they saw Zwei Tsun.

“Hey… How long have you run your business in the Post Station Town?”

Zwei Tsun came near to pressure me.

“Mida started crying nonstop since ten days ago. Which means you have operated for at least ten straight days, right?”

“Around there.”

I actually worked consecutively in the Post Station Town for 13 days and took one day off in between. But I had no obligation to tell her all these details.

“Ten days in a row! Assuming you earn 200 red copper plates a day, you have earned 2,000 copper plates now!”

“No, half of our revenue is used to buy ingredients, and I didn’t earn 200 red copper plates right at the beginning either.”

I quickly corrected her, but she wasn’t listening.

The eyes of the girl had turned into a completely different person.

What was going on? Her eyes were shining with obsession, like a famished beast.

“2,000 red copper plates… That’s 200 white copper plates… And in silver plates? Two silver plates!”

“Ah, well, like I said, not all the copper plates we earned belong to me…”

“This is like a dream! With you around, the Fa house won’t have to worry about copper plates for the rest of their lives…! Hmmp, so it’s true…”

“Wait! Can you let me explain? What’s so great about copper plates?”

“What’s so great? The point of living is to earn copper plates. You are the number one hero in the Forest's Edge! You earn 200 red copper plates a day, which is more than hunting 8 kiba! I even added the money from tanning the hide in!”

<TL: 勇者>

This girl was good at mathematics, which was impressive.

The obsession in her eyes— was it her obsession for copper plates?

"You think people live for the sake of earning copper plates? That doesn't sound like something a denizen of Forest's Edge should say. The hunters in Forest's Edge are hunting kiba for the sake of protecting the farms in Genos, right?"

"What are you preaching? The hunters are hunting kiba for the sake of copper plates! If any hunter refutes that, then he doesn't have the right to sell kiba tusks and horns! No matter what you say, men can't live without copper plates!"

"What you say is true but..."

"If the number of kiba increases, they will attack the farms and trouble the farmers? Because the kiba will ravage the crops? And the farmers won't be able to earn copper plates by selling their crops? See, in the end, it's all for the sake of copper plates! Humans are living in order to earn copper plates! If we don't do that, we can only abandon the gods and live as savages in the Morga mountain!"

Savages were a type of humanoid that competed with Barb wolves and Madarama snakes for supremacy in the Morga mountain.

Anyway, this Zwei Tsun girl didn't have any pride and dignity of a

denizen of Forest's Edge.

"May I ask... I don't think it's true, but is your mother from the city?"

"Huh? You are talking nonsense again! How is it possible for someone from the city to marry into Forest's Edge!"

"Indeed. But your clothes are similar in style with the people in the city. And the way you speak is like the people there too."

"That's because— I don't like the clothes in Forest's Edge, so I modified this dress."

Zwei Tsun pouted her lower lips unhappily.

The obsession in her eyes finally started dimming.

At this moment, I suddenly remembered. Back in the days, there was an anime about a hippo-like fairy, and Zwei Tsun was like the noisy girl who appeared there.

Never mind... Compared to the others in the Tsun clan, her personality isn't that bad.

I might be thinking that way because I wasn't a real denizen of Forest's

Edge.

If she was from the city, I wouldn’t feel any dislike for her even if I couldn’t understand her. At the most, I would just shrug and think: “There’s no need to be so obsessed with money.”

However, her thinking was too strange for a denizen of Forest's Edge.

Vena Wu squinted her eyes and appeared to be more on guard.

Lala Wu looked extremely unhappy too.

If anyone refuted the pride of hunters, they would lose the respect of the denizens of Forest's Edge.

“Excuse me… We have cut all the meat…”

One of the branch house women said emotionlessly.

They all ignored Zwei Tsun.

“Thank you, everyone. Well then, let’s start the fire in the stoves.”

We poured the water from the flask into the pot and lighted the firewood

with rana grass.

While we waited for the water to boil, Zwei Tsun didn’t shut up.

“Really now! After Mida ate your cooking, he kept making a scene every day! He did quiet down if we fed him, but he nonetheless started crying when he got hungry! Of course, Diga and Doddo got mad! You probably didn’t want to come here, but you caused this problem, so you better take responsibility!”

“Responsibility, huh… By the way, did you all really chain him up?”

“Hmm? When he started throwing fits, he almost went to town by himself, so maybe that’s true.”

“You aren’t sure either? At least you didn’t see him getting chained up, right?”

“I didn’t. Only Yamiel’s house has chains.”

Yamiel Tsun’s house?

“Did Yamiel Tsun move out from the main house? Isn’t she wearing the garments of an unwed woman?”

She isn’t married. But we have too many houses, so Yamiel and Diga have their own houses.

I see. In that case, the only one who could chain up Mida Tsun and restrict his movement would be Yamiel Tsun.

How strange. I felt great discomfort when I heard about this from Yamiel Tsun, but then, I wasn’t that bothered when I listened to this girl describe this event. Maybe I will get along unexpectedly well with Zwei Tsun.

As I was tidying my thoughts, the water started to boil.

Alright, please put the kiba meat into the pot… There will be white foam forming on the surface, please scoop it out with a spoon. The soup will taste delicious if you do that.

It had been a long time since I instructed others to cook Kiba meat soup.

Lala Wu was teaching two Tsun clan women at the other pot, while Vena Wu and I were training the other three.

… By the way, how old are you, Zwei Tsun? I’m seventeen.

I asked while the soup was cooking, and Zwei Tsun pouted her lower lips

unhappily.

“I’m twelve. What about it?”

“No, I was wondering whether you are older than Mida Tsun.”

She was too petite for a twelve-year-old, and I didn’t expect such a young child to say something like:“People live for the sake of earning copper plates”, which surprised me.

“Hmmp… How can I be older than Mida? I was born after Mida’s mother passed away.”

“Ehh?”

“Mida’s mother died during childbirth. My mother only gave birth to me.”

“Ah… is that so?”

Many hunters die young because of the nature of their work. So I have heard of many women who lost their husband remarry… But it was the opposite for the Tsun clan main house.

What Zwei Tsun said next shocked me.

"Yamiel's mother died shortly after childbirth. So did Diga Tsun and Doddo Tsun's mother. Only my mother lived for so long, how strange. My mother isn't that strong though."

"Ehh? So all of you have different mothers?"

"That's right. What about it?"

"Nothing... But I didn't know the women of Forest's Edge are so short-lived."

"Hmm? The Tsun clan is probably cursed."

Zwei Tsun shrugged when she said something so terrible and didn't seem concerned.

"Maybe they didn't long for this boring world... All of you always show such lifeless expressions, you won't live long if you keep frowning your faces."

The latter half of her words was directed at the women from the branch house.

They just kept on scooping the foams and grunted absent-mindedly in reply.

"Ah" how annoying! I will feel moody just by staying with you all!"

"... You can leave then..."

Vena Wu couldn't help saying that.

"You have no intention of tending to the stove, so you don't need to be here, right...? Just what do you want...?"

"Hmmp! I only came here to see the number one hero in the Forest's Edge!"

Zwei Tsun looked up and glared at the sexy face high above her.

"Before the foreigner Asuta appeared, the number one hero in Forest's Edge was the clan head Zuro! That's why the Tsun clan can rule over Forest's Edge...! But in the future, it might be the Fa house who will rule Forest's Edge."

"... Looks like I can't converse with you properly..."

"Hmmp! Because you haven't seen the truth of this world yet!"

With these words, Zwei Tsun dashed nimbly out of the stove room.

For quite a long while, an unbearable silence shrouded the room.

□... The Tsun clan main house sure has interesting people.□

I said to a branch house woman, and she answered curtly with a □Yes.□.

Zwei Tsun was easier to get along with.

□... Okay, after scooping up the foam, cover it with a lid and wait for a moment. We will cook it with a small fire, then add in the aria.□

One of the women picked up a squarish board to cover the pot.

But the board slid from her hands and fell into the pot.

□Ah!□

The youngest girl screamed and backed away.

The boiling soup splashed onto the girl’s face and arm.

□Hyaa!□

The girl crashed onto the working platform, and some of the cut aria fell to the ground.

Now wasn’t the time to care about the aria. I quickly grabbed the ladle in the water flask.

“Are you alright!? Don’t move!”

I yelled loudly and splashed the water in the ladle onto the girl.

It was a crude way to do this, but I had no choice.

“Ahh…”

The girl lost her strength and collapsed onto the ground.

“Are you okay? Did it get into your eye?”

“… It’s fine…”

The girl pursed her lips tightly as she held her left arm.

Her left shoulder, upper arm, left cheeks, and

left cheeks, and throat were all red.

「Uwah, that looks painful! Here, hurry and cool it.」

Lala Wu pressed a piece of wet cloth onto the girl's cheek.

「... Thank you...」

The girl lowered her eyelids weakly.

「... Sorry, Tulu Tsun.....」

At this moment, an emotionless voice came from above.

「Are you really sorry!? What are you going to do if it leaves a scar on her face!?」

Lala Wu blew her top and stood up.

She always had a short fuse, but this was the first time I saw her this mad.

The woman who made the mistake stood at the side with a blank expression. Tulu Tsun pulled Lala Wu's arm and said:

…I’m fine… It’s my fault, I shouldn’t be dozing off there… And I dirtied the precious aria… I’m very sorry…

The aria doesn’t matter… No, the aria is important too!

Lala Wu scratched her head, and I sighed deeply.

We had stepped on the aria that was spilled, and most of it couldn’t be used again.

It can’t be helped. We will cut more aria to make up for the shortage. Never mind that, I’m worried about your injury, you should put some medicine on it.

It’s fine… We can’t waste the precious medicine for such a small injury…

But—

…It’s really fine… Thank you…

Tulu Tsun looked at us with tearful eyes.

Her eyes were wavering uneasily— but compared to her dead fish-like eyes, this made her more human.

"Looks like we will need to cut ten more aria… I will get more from the main house's stove room…"

"No need."

I shook my head in response to Vena Wu.

Aside from me, I didn't want the other women to move alone if they could help it.

"The main house is too far away, let's use the aria from this house first. Ermm, whose house is this?"

At this moment, Tulu who was squatting before me said:

"… This is my house…"

"I see. Excuse me, can you share ten aria with me? I will return the same amount to you later."

"… We don't have any aria…"

"Ehh?"

"We had just used up all our aria… Sorry…"

The light in Tulu Tsun's eyes faded away rapidly.

Just like clear water contaminated by mud.

I looked at her eyes that had turned murky again, then turned to the woman who toppled the pot lid.

"What about your house, can you share some aria with us? Your house is closer than the main house, right?"

"… Sorry… The aria in our house is used up too…"

I stood up and looked at the other three ladies one by one.

"Anyone's house is fine, can you lend us some aria?"

"… Sorry…"

"Our house has run out of aria too…"

"If there wasn't a house head conference, we were planning to buy

some from town…

I see.

I smiled gently.

I’m surprised that the aria in all the houses had run out. Is it the custom in the Tsun clan to buy more groceries after all the ingredients had run out?

… Yes…

By the way, can I borrow some poitan?

… No… The poitan is used up too…

I see.

I said again.

Alright then, let’s take the aria we brought here. We brought extra aria with us, so it’s not a problem. Can you two please go to the main house and bring ten aria here?

□Alright…□

The two women slowly exited the stove room.

I looked at their back and the dissonance I sealed away in my heart started bloating up again.

Something was wrong.

Something was out of control.

Was this really a village in Forest's Edge?

If Vena Wu and Lala Wu weren’t with me, I would definitely fall into panic, thinking I stumbled into yet another different world.

Everything here was incredibly twisted.

4

Two hours later, we completed the □Kiba meat soup□ in each of the branch houses and gathered in the stove room of the main house again.

Next, we had to grill the dried poitan and cook the meat dishes.

The sun just reached the midpoint between its peak and the horizon. We still had 3 and a half hours, everything was proceeding smoothly.

At this time, all the men had more or less gathered in that Ceremonial Hall and started the house head conference.

I prayed for Ai Fa and the others to have a good fight and started instructing the Tsun clan women how to grill the poitan.

The poitan will solidify after being sunned, so add some water to dissolve it, making it gooey again. You can add water slowly with a ladle, but take care not to add too much.

We didn't have any more extra poitan, so we had to be extra careful not to burn them.

I asked Shela Wu to demonstrate, and tore the poitan apart for everyone to try some.

How does it taste? It's completely different from the poitan that had been cooked into a goo, correct?

Half the Tsun clan women showed a slight change in emotions, and the other half was obviously startled.

They should find the grilled poitan tasty.

I could only pray that the poitan could move their hearts.

□Just the bloodlet kiba meat and grilled poitan will be enough to completely change how dinner tastes. Alright then, everyone please help me grill delicious poitan.□

By instructing them one-to-one, we let all of them try grilling poitan.

The 15 Tsun clan kins kept taking turns grilling poitan. If a poitan was about to be burned, the instructor would quickly assist. As the instructor was right beside them, it was quite difficult to fail.

And so, we spent an hour to grill 130 people worth of poitan.

After finishing the poitan, it was finally time for the meat dishes.

First, we had to make the marinating sauce for the □Myam-roasted meat□.

□This is myam. We will be dicing the myam and aria, and mix it with fruit wine. A bottle of fruit wine will need one myam and 1.5 aria. We need to make plenty, so please make the marinating sauce in the pot, and put the meat into it.□

One portion of 「Myam-roasted meat」 required about 200 g of meat, which was about the same as the ones sold in the stall.

The 「Myam-roasted meat」 had to be served with one spare rib, 200 g of thigh steak, and fried aria.

While we were marinating the 「Myam-roasted meat」, we started slicing the meat for the steak. There were two more hours before dusk.

Everything was going smoothly.

I included additional buffer time for cooking, so I could use this chance to carefully prepare each dish.

「We should be able to finish before the conference ends... But can the Tsun clan women cook these dishes tomorrow?」

Mama Mia Lei said to me quietly.

「Hmm... I hope some of them will want to after having dinner...」

The future was dim.

Or rather— how much 「concern」 and 「will」 still lingered in these

women’s heart?

“If the Tsun clan village wasn’t so far away, we could supervise them every day.”

Even Mama Mia Lei looked a little dejected.

Mama Mia Lei wanted to visit the Tsun clan village to teach the arrogant women like Yamiel Tsun or Zwei Tsun a lesson. But she didn’t expect to face such a situation.

These women were like mud dolls, no matter how we admonished them, they wouldn’t feel any pain. We couldn’t change their attitude in one day.

“We have to see how the main house members and men will react. No matter what, Mida Tsun will be demanding for delicious dinner, and they need to satisfy him.”

If they want to enjoy tasty kiba meat, they would need to learn how to bloodlet and butcher, and finish their work as hunters properly. This required a change in the will of the Tsun clan men. What would the final results be?

I wondered if things were going smoothly on Ai Fa’s end.

□Asuta, we have cut all the kiba meat and aria.□

Shela Wu notified me.

□Thank you… The marination is almost done, go ahead and grill the meat. Everyone, please gather at the stove outside.□

A large amount of smoke and aroma would come out when cooking □Myam-roasted meat□, so we decided to do the demonstration outside.

□We will put the meat into the pot, stir it with a spatula, and take care not to burn it. A small amount will be fine for a start. Shela Wu, would you please?□

□Okay.□

Shela Wu grabbed a small piece of meat and placed it into the pot.

The fragrance of myam and fruit wine spread out, and the shoulders of several women quivered in surprise.

□It smells nice, right?□

I asked Tulu Tsun who was standing beside me with a warm smile.

Tulu Tsun’s glass-like eyes wavered mindlessly.

“... It’s very fragrant.”

“Yes, I have yet to meet a denizen of Forest's Edge who hates this smell.”

Myam had a strong aroma similar to garlic and was beloved by all the denizens of Forest's Edge.

“After grilling, pour some marinating sauce on it. That will make the taste stronger.”

By the way, I sliced the meat thicker than the ones I sold in the Post Station Town, and I reduced the marination time a little.

Besides, the participants for the house head conference only bought bowls for drinking soup, so I had to use fake rubber tree leaves in place of plates to serve “Myam-roasted meat”. Hence, I had to prepare a large amount of sauce right now for each serving.

“Alright, it’s done. Everyone, please try a bite...”

I heard a strange noise mid-sentence.

“Woaahhh...” It had a very high pitch, like a bird on the verge of death.

“What’s that sound?”

I walked away from the crowd and listened carefully.

The sound was heading straight for the stove room.

Ah! Could it be…!

The moment that idea appeared in my mind, my ominous prediction turned true. A large object akin to a meat bun rolled out from the shade of the houses.

It was about ten meters away from me.

The meat bun was aiming right for me.

“… Whhoooaahhhh…”

He charged as he yelled.

At the same time, someone yelled:“Asuta!” and pounced on me.

I fell to the ground and felt an incredibly soft object holding me tightly.

I could see the vague figure of the meat bun through the strands of black hair in my field of view.

I will be trampled!

While I was paralyzed by fear, someone appeared with a black and long object.

It was a krilee stick used to carry pots.

A woman with chestnut hair threw the stick to the legs of the meat bun gracefully.

With a sharp 『Swoosh!』, the krilee stick tangled the elephant-like leg of the charging man.

『Whoaahhhh!』

The meat bun shouted again and fell to the ground.

He kept rolling right by us and stopped after hitting a tree.

『What the… Is he really human…?』

Our savior muttered angrily and then turned her drowsy eyes our way.

“It’s fine now… You better get up before he does…”

“Yes… Thank you, Vena-nee.”

The person on top of me got up slowly.

“Asuta, are you fine?”

I was correct, the one smiling at me right now was Leina Wu.

“I-I’m alright, what about you?”

“I’m okay. Sorry for bumping into you so suddenly.”

She lowered her head in apology while straddling my stomach.

That body’s warmth and soft sensation.

No matter what, this posture reminded me of what happened during the wedding banquet in the Lutim house.

And finally, Leina Wu stared at my face and intentionally got up slowly.

「How retarded… the way you protected him will just get the both of you trampled…」

「Yes, Vena-nee. I’m no match for you after all.」

Vena Wu looked unhappy while Leina Wu lowered her head bashfully. After glancing at the two sisters with complicated feelings in my heart, I got up quickly.

「Both of you, thank you. You saved my life.」

After Vena Wu glared at me sharply, she looked at the meat bun.

The meat bun— Mida Tsun— propped up his huge body with a blank expression, then stood up.

「Huh… What was Mida doing…?」

His voice was as shrill as a toddler.

It was Mida Tsun.

That was definitely him.

Great, he was safe. But he still looked like a monster.

「... Ah! That’s right! Nice smell! There was a nice smell, so Mida rushed over here to see...?」

「You can only eat dinner after dusk! Before that, please wait patiently!」



A strong voice cut off Mida Tsun’s puzzled words.

It was Mama Mia Lei.

Mida Tsun kept scowling his flat nose and got up by pulling on a tree.

“But… Mida is hungry…?”

“If you are hungry then chew on jerky! The other men are also bearing with it, you won’t get any special treatment!”

Mama Mia Lei spoke sternly and stood before Mida Tsun.

Among the women of Forest's Edge, Mama Mia Lei could be considered burly, but she was like a petite child before Mida Tsun.

Even so, Mama Mia Lei still held her head and stared at the scary Mida Tsun who was two heads taller than her without being fazed.

“You are so uncultured! I have been meaning to ask, isn’t your figure too outrageous? If you keep stuffing down food whenever you are hungry, you will mess up your body! Learn restraint!”

“… Uhmm…”

Mida Tsun grunted as if he was throwing a tantrum.

"But Mida…"

"No buts! The sun is still high, what are you doing!? The hunters should be in the forest chasing kiba now, right?"

She was right.

Mida Tsun puffed his round cheeks which made his face shake a little, and said unhappily:

"Today's job is done… Didn't Mida catch a large kiba?"

"Hmm? Is that true? Where is the kiba?"

"It's hanging in Yamiel's house… Look, Mida is telling the truth…"

Mida Tsun reached for the club on his waist suddenly, and I unconsciously strode forward.

Leina Wu grabbed my right arm and Vena Wu grabbed my left.

Mida Tsun moved the tip of the club to Mama Mia Lei’s nose.

“Hmm… I see kiba fur and blood on it.”

“That’s right… the kiba fell into a trap, and Mida finished it off…”

When she heard him say that, Mama Mia Lei smiled and slapped Mida Tsun’s trunk-like arm.

“You did your job as a hunter properly. We will prepare a delicious meal for you, so wait patiently in your house. We are going to roast the meat now.”

“Hyyee……”

Mida Tsun made a revolting sound, and his cheeks started shaking again. He was too fat, so there wasn’t much change in his facial expression.

Vena Wu was still grabbing my left arm, and her grip was so strong that it hurt terribly. She was probably holding her emotions in.

And then, Mida Tsun looked my way.

His little pig-like eyes seemed lively.

…You are really here… Yamiel didn’t lie to Mida…

…Hello, it’s been a while.

Mida is so happy… You will make yummy food for Mida, right…?

Yes. In order to let you eat delicious food from now on, I’m teaching the Tsun clan the way to make food more delicious.

Mida Tsun seemed to understand what I was saying, and repeated himself:I’m so happy…

If you understand me, then go home and wait patiently. We still have loads of work to do.

Yes…

After hearing Mama Mia Lei say that, his jaw shook a little.

He probably wanted to nod, but the fats stopped him from moving his neck.

Promise…? Will you prepare loads and loads of yummy food for Mida…?

Yes, look forward to it.

Mida Tsun slowly turned and started to leave.

I sighed in relief in my heart—

At this moment, inspiration struck.

Mida Tsun! I want to buy aria from you with copper plates, does the main house have any?

Mama Mia Lei turned her head back in surprise.

Mida Tsun turned his entire body towards me.

We spilled aria onto the ground by accident, so we are a little short. I want to buy any extra aria you have... Is that okay?

... The food store is barred...

Mida Tsun said in a high-pitched voice.

To stop Mida from stealing the food, they barred the food store...

「I see, that's a pity… Aria tastes good, right?」

Mida Tsun blinked his animal-like eyes which didn't show any emotions.

「… Mida doesn't know the name of the vegetables though…?」

「I see. The food you bought in the Post Station Town had aria in them.」

「… Yes…」

Mida Tsun pouted his small mouth disinterestedly.

「… If you want to take down the bar, Mida can get Yamiel to come over…」

「Ah, it's fine. We will try to make do with what we have on hand, thank you.」

「Mida is hungry…」

Mida Tsun muttered depressedly, then turned and left.

「He isn't a bright kid… But he has an adorable side, right?」

…Don’t joke with me…

Vena Wu was still clinging to my arm as she slid down onto the ground.

Ugghhh, how disgusting… Why is that youngest son always showing up…

Haha, Vena-nee really hates the youngest son of the Tsun clan.

Leina Wu showed an innocent smile as she held onto my right arm.

By the way, Asuta, are we really short on aria? We should have enough to complement the meat dishes, right?

Mama Mia Lei asked puzzledly, and I squeezed out a smile in a hurry.

That’s right, it’s fine even if the Tsun clan doesn’t have any aria. We can manage with our supplies.

As eight portions had been canceled, there was still plenty of aria in stock.

The two beautiful sisters still clung to my arms as I looked behind me.

The food store beside the stove room was always closed.

He said that the food store is barred… Then how do they access it?

The unanswered question in my heart started taking vague shapes.

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