

Saving
80,000
Gold
in
Another
World
for My
Retirement

Story by
FUNA

Art by
Keisuke
Motoe

Character Design
Touzai

5



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Lephilia Trading is founded.

“Like I said, I’m hoping to work with a new company started by you, not with the company your father owns.”



“I’ll do it! Please let me enter business with you! I’ll put my life and pride on the line to fulfill your expectations!”





The Envoy of the Goddess?

“Greetings
to the crew
of the forty-
cannon
Vanelian
warship,
Aeras! I am
the Envoy of
the Goddess!
Please listen
to what
I have
to say!”

“OH NO!
SHE’S COMING
FOR US!!”

Smooth talker

“I hail from a land called Japan, Your Majesty.”

“Japan...? I’ve never heard of it.”

“It could be known by another name in this region. It’s called different things depending on the country. Some examples are Nihon, Nippon, Yapan, and Zipang. Japan’s not the only country like this—there’s a country called England that’s also known as Great Britain, the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth, and more.”

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KODANSHA



Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 5

A VERTICAL Book

Translation: Luke Hutton

Editor: Momo Fukazawa

Production: Grace Lu

Proofreading: Kevin Luo

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KODANSHA

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Chapter 51:

Gathering Information—After Dark

Mitsuha world-jumped to a port town in the kingdom of Vanel—the same town where the naval base was.

Where's the ship I'm looking for? Let's see... She scanned the fleet. There it is! The Leviathan! One, two, three... thirty-two cannons on one side. Vanel's state-of-the-art sixty-four cannon ship! Without a doubt!

She arrived at the harbor around the same time of day and sat on the same bench as her last visit.

After waiting for about an hour and a half, she still saw no sign of the soldier boy. *I guess catching him again won't be that easy.* Not surprising, as they made no plans to meet that day. She figured he'd wake up, eat breakfast, and go into town at the same time every day he had off, but a lowly sailor like him was unlikely to get permission to leave the ship more than once or twice a week even when the ship was moored.

Oh well, I've got plenty of time. No rush.

While she was on the bench, a handful of young sailors came up to her one after another. Mitsuha tried to shoo each of them away by saying she was waiting for someone, but a few of them were persistent; they sat down anyway, nagging her for a chat while she waited. None of the sailors she spoke to were as knowledgeable as the soldier boy. They weren't gentlemanly or funny, either. It turned out she just got lucky with her first catch.



Surely there were plenty of older, more knowledgeable sailors than the soldier boy. But at least among the sailors who came up to Mitsuha—the fourteen-to sixteen-year-olds who probably thought she was twelve or thirteen—there wasn't anyone as well-versed.

Each of the boys sat with her for about twenty to thirty minutes before making their next move with some variation of "It doesn't seem like he's coming. How about you and I go out?" Mitsuha rejected them all, pretending to get mad each time saying she couldn't leave, but another boy was always waiting to swoop in and sit down as soon as the last one left. It was never-ending.

Are guys finally starting to notice me? Am I hot now?!

Don't answer that. I know they think I'm twelve...

An hour and a half per day is the limit, Mitsuha decided. If the soldier boy doesn't come after waiting that long, I'll try again the next day. Every sailor who docked at the port had to pass through this spot. If she didn't see him, that meant it wasn't his day off.

He didn't show up on the second day either. Then on the third day...

"Mitsuha!" Someone was running toward her. It was the soldier boy.

"Hey! Long time no see!" she called back.

"H-Hi, M-Mitsuha..." By the time he got to her, he was completely out of breath.

Wait. He was way too far away to recognize me when he yelled my name. It's as if he knew I was here.

"Uh, did you know I was here?"

“Yeah. One of the older sailors on shore duty yesterday said there was an exotic-looking pretty girl sitting on a bench by the pier, waiting in vain for her boyfriend. I was sure it was you.”

Whoa, me? Pretty? I've gotta have soldier boy deliver a present to that sailor.

Mitsuha's purpose for this meeting was to ask the soldier boy some questions and fill in the gaps of the knowledge she'd gained from her conversations with high-ranking naval officers—people who were way above the soldier boy's station. The kind of questions she wanted to ask would've raised an officer's suspicion. She also just wanted to maintain her connection to the boy.

On to the restaurant we go—

Uhh... Mitsuha noticed the piercing glares all around. They were coming from other sailors who were around the same age as the soldier boy. Some were older.

Didn't he want to avoid being seen with me by the older sailors and officers? He's got a smug grin on his face... Is he gonna be okay when he gets back to the ship?

Mitsuha hadn't eaten breakfast yet, so they ate a light meal as she fished for infor—made pleasant conversation.

“Wow, a practice sea voyage lasts that long...?” Mitsuha said. “How long can the ship fight before it runs out of cannonballs and gunpowder? And how many enemy ships can it handle at once?”

“Oh, the cannons themselves are the same as the ones on the forty-cannon ships from two generations ago? Then it's just the number of cannons and the hull that gives it such a big advantage? I see...” she gulped.

These were the questions that Mitsuha was scared to ask the high-ranking

officers. She asked the former prisoners who had naturalized to her country, but they grew untalkative when she asked them for anything beyond common knowledge. They must've felt that sharing too much would be like betraying their family and friends back home.

She didn't want to force them to talk. There was a chance they'd just make stuff up anyway. She'd already caught some inconsistencies and contradictions in the testimonies some of them had volunteered to her.

Besides, it was unlikely that lowly sailors like them would have all the details she was looking for. She couldn't expect much from the officers either—those men were sent by Vanel to take on a high-risk voyage, after all. A lot of time had passed since they left Vanel, too.

That made the soldier boy—who was more than happy to share all the latest information with her—very valuable.

All right, I'll give him the present as planned. It's just a pocketknife from Earth, but a seafarer like him surely will have some use for it.

Mitsuha parted ways with the soldier boy before noon, just like last time. She didn't want to take up too much of his day off. She paid for the meals again, of course; it was only right when she was the one troubling him.

Mitsuha gave him the wrapped present and left without telling him what was inside. She hoped he'd like the pocketknife. The custom in this country was apparently to open presents on the spot and say thank you, but she didn't want to stick around for that. Hence why she gave it to him as she left.

The soldier boy once again wanted to make plans before they parted, but when she pointed out that lower-ranking sailors like him weren't informed of their ship's schedule—which would make planning their next meeting

impossible—he had no argument.

He knows that I waited multiple days for him this time and rejected droves of guys who approached me, so that should set him at ease. I'm sure he thinks I'm "his girl."

You'd better be careful, bud! Girls are not objects a guy can own!

Anyway, I could jump back to Japan or my county, but since I'm here, I might as well browse some shops and investigate the town. It's important to put my nose to the ground and learn what I can... Besides, I love window shopping.

Night fell. Mitsuha decided to investigate after dark this time.

She was prepared. She'd spoken to high-ranking naval officers and got recommendations for restaurants in this town. All those parties she attended in the capital weren't just for fun.

I sacrificed a lot to gain this information. Well, technically I gained a lot...of weight. Why couldn't all that fat go to my chest instead of my belly!

...Regardless, I have to make good use of these recommendations. I didn't sacrifice my slim figure for nothing.

Damn it all.

Kla-Kling.

The door chime rang. The elderly barkeep and the regular customers instinctively glanced at the entrance. Their eyes grew wide.

This small bar was frequented by musky old men, most of whom were naval soldiers. It was a favorite spot for high-ranking officers; officers of lower rank

and sailors tended to avoid it—not that there were any rules. Over the years, it gradually became a sort of exclusive club for senior officers. That unfortunately made civilians shy away, but the elderly bartender who owned the place was satisfied with the clientele. There was a high population of high-ranking officers thanks to the naval base that was nearby. They could be trusted to spend money, and they didn't start drunken fights.

The bar had been like that for a few decades now. At this point, there was no reason to complain. It was a calm watering hole for gentlemen to relax in.

But that night, a foreign element walked into the bar. She trotted over to the counter, sat down, and ordered a drink.

“Mixed juice with two olives. Shaken, not stirred.”

“WHAAAAT?!” the regulars all cried out.

I've always wanted to say that line ever since I read 007. “Mixed juice” doesn't have the same impact as “medium dry vodka martini” though...

The bartender's face twitched, but he got to work without saying a word. No one had ever ordered “mixed juice” at the bar, but it couldn't have been hard to make. It was probably like a nonalcoholic cocktail. He used fruit juices he stocked for such drinks, and trusted his instincts to fill his shaker with the appropriate amount of each flavor. He could've fulfilled her order by mixing just two fruit juices, but he chose three and began to shake them.

Shake. Shake. Shake. Shakeshakeshakeshakeshakeshakeshake!

He poured the mixed juice from the shaker into a tumbler with ice—a cocktail glass would've been too small—and silently slid the drink across the counter.

The foreign element accepted the glass and said, “Keep the change,” as she took a coin out of her pocket and slipped it to the bartender.

The bartender—who was known for his calm and collected personality—was visibly shocked. She'd given him a gold coin. That was like receiving a hundred dollar bill.

“Who d’you think you are? Captain Wellardal?!” the bartender cried, unable to contain himself. It'd been years since he'd disgraced himself by getting riled up in front of his customers like that.

“Oh, do you mean old Tirad?” the foreign element casually responded.

Tirad Wellardal once served as a warship captain in this town before he was promoted to fleet commander. Later on, he moved away to the capital for further career advancement. Despite being a noble, he didn't put a “de” before his last name when introducing himself. “A military man like myself has no need for such fancy particles in my name,” he believed.

Captain Wellardal—though he was an admiral now—was known as a great man, but he had one weakness. He was a total lightweight when it came to alcohol. He was a non-drinker.

One's tolerance for alcohol was determined by a number of factors including physical constitution, genetics, and health. The choice to drink or not wasn't a valid reason to mock someone. Neither was it a reason to pressure them into fraternizing or proving his manliness. Forcing a person who couldn't drink to do so was no different than forcing them to drink poison. It very well may be a criminal charge of bodily harm or attempted murder.

It could even lead to a full-on murder charge if the person died from acute alcohol poisoning, an accident while under the influence, or suffocation from choking on vomit.

To sailors in this era, however, being a heavy drinker equaled being a man.

Perhaps it was a final crutch for men who couldn't beat others at anything other than holding their alcohol.

It was in that kind of culture that Captain Wellardal came up with a way to maintain his dignity at bar scenes, which were hotspots for exchanging information and negotiating. His solution was to confidently order a nonalcoholic drink—suave and cool, as if he was going for something complicated—and significantly overpay.

The first drink Captain Wellardal ordered at this bar was, “Pure milk, two limes. Stirred.” He, too, paid one gold coin and told the bartender to keep the change. The foreign element's order was enough to remind the elderly bartender of that man, and judging by her response, she knew him.

“You know the guy?” the bartender asked.

He didn't use overly formal language with his customers. All were equal at his bar—jobs and ranks didn't matter under his roof.

“Yeah, but I'm not his daughter or granddaughter or anything,” the foreign element answered. “He just told me about this place. Horveal, Arithums, and Kellebachter recommended it too.”

Pffft!

Cough, cough!

The bar erupted with the sounds of men spewing booze and choking.

“Those are all big names in the navy... Just who are you, little girl?” questioned the bartender.

The foreign element seemed delighted.

Here's a chance for me to use another line I've always wanted to use! I never

thought this day would come! she thought, trembling with excitement.

“Sometimes, I’m a sculptor. Other times, I’m a shopkeeper. At times, I may even be a noble. But my true identity is Mitsuha, a girl who likes navy officers and older men!”

“Uh...huh...”

Once Mitsuha had the regulars at the bar hooked, she slipped among them and grilled them with questions. No one rejected her company. How could they? She was an acquaintance of their colleagues and superior officers, a big fan of the navy, and was young enough to be their granddaughter. They probably found it amusing that a little girl like her had marched into the bar on her own. She was like a brand-new toy to them.

Her self-introduction—and paying a gold coin for a cup of juice—also led the men to think she was a noble. Considering her parents and the likelihood of her marrying into another noble family in the future, a young navy sympathizer like her was a valuable figure.

They probably assume I’m from a navy-faction family, anyway.

Mitsuha endeared herself to the men by slightly disparaging the army and heaping praise onto the navy. This excited them and sped up their drinking, which loosened their lips considerably. *These little birds sure love to chirp.* She piled on the questions:

“Are there any research fleets currently at sea?”

“How often do you send them out in a year?”

“So if we find a continent and conquer it, we’ll enslave all its people?”

I can’t ask anything like this in the capital. I’m known as a foreign noble there, so it would draw suspicion. But here, I can ask anything I want!

The old men in the bar were thrilled by her curiosity and love for the navy, and were more than happy to answer. They might've drawn the line at military secrets and political data, but that wasn't what Mitsuha wanted from them. She didn't need to ask them about Vanel's political relationships with its neighboring countries or anything like that. She was already getting that information in the capital.

Mitsuha ordered more drinks throughout the night—including “single milk on the rocks” and “two fingers of orange juice, straight”—paying a gold coin for each one. She tried to be cool one time and flicked the coin across the bar, but it flew in the wrong direction and everyone had to help look for it. That took more skill than expected.

After a while, she decided to withdraw. She didn't want to stay until closing time. When she announced she was heading out, the bartender returned all her gold coins but the first one, as well as nine small gold coins in change. “Making a young girl pay that much for soft drinks would leave a bad reputation for the rest of my life,” he argued. She had no choice but to take them back.

“Thanks for everything today!” Mitsuha smiled. “I had a blast—oh, I almost forgot!”

She had brought a gift to thank them for their hospitality, as well as to leave a good impression. It was unlikely they'd accept anything too expensive, and that would've been tactless anyway. There was only one appropriate gift at a time like this.

And that's alcohol, of course! There's no better way into a heavy drinker's heart!

“Don't worry, I'll pay the corkage fee,” she said to the bartender as she pulled a bottle of alcohol out of her bag.

There was no way Mitsuha was going to bring a bottle for each man here. She couldn't carry them all, for starters. Instead, she was going to pour them each a little from the one bottle so they could sample it.

"This is a drink from my homeland. Wanna try it and tell me what you think?" She opened the bottle.

Whoops, that sounded too casual. Eh, whatever. I don't think these guys would get mad at a little girl.

Just as she was about to go around to pour it into each person's cup, the bartender brought out new glasses for everyone.

"Let me taste it too," he said. "I won't charge a corkage fee."

Now that's what I'm talkin' about!

Each man picked up his glass, held it to the light to admire the color, swished it around to enjoy the aroma, then took a sip. After a few seconds, they swallowed the liquid.

"Whoa..." They were astonished.

Mwahaha, behold! This is a Hakushu 12 Year Single Malt Whiskey, one of the greatest drinks of my homeland! They also sell 18 Year and 25 Year but those are way out of my budget!

It was clear by their reactions that they enjoyed it. That would cement her good reputation and ensure she could expect reliable information from them next time.

"Well, bye!" Mitsuha said, leaving before they could react. She thought she heard some men call after her as she walked out, but she ignored the drunken officers and kept walking.

“After her!”

“Yessir!”

The men couldn't allow a girl to walk the streets alone at night. Especially not a cute noble girl like her who was favorable to the navy. A couple of men dashed out of the bar to escort her home, while the rest stayed inside to relax and sip their whiskey drop by drop. It would've been a waste to drink it all at once.

It wasn't long before the men who left the bar returned.

The officers who stayed behind jumped out of their chairs. “Wha... Where's the girl?! Why'd you come back without escorting her home?!”

Their anger was understandable; letting a young lady wander the town alone this late at night was a strike against a gentleman's honor. It'd only been a few minutes since the men ran out after her. They returned way too soon to have taken her home.

“Uh... Well,” one of them started. “We saw her enter the first alley to the right. We ran after her, but when we turned the alley, she was gone.

“We scoured every direction she possibly could've gone, but we saw no trace of her. There's no way a kidnapper could've picked her up and gotten very far in that time, no matter how small she is. We didn't see any carriages or people. Not even a container you could hide a child in.

“Besides, how long do you think it took us to run into that alley?! It was ten seconds at most! Do you think someone could kidnap a child in an alley that quickly without a carriage and without her crying for help?”

No one answered. What could they say? There was no guarantee she was kidnapped. In fact, all evidence pointed to the contrary. And unfortunately, all

they knew was her first name.

“We sent a group of men to chase after a little girl we just met and lost sight of her.” If they submitted such a report to the guard station, the guards would immediately act...by detaining the suspicious mob of men for hounding a little girl.

“...Nope. There’s nothing we can do.”

In truth, the men weren’t particularly worried. Through their conversations with the girl, they’d gotten the sense that she wasn’t a naive fool, that she seemed at least somewhat aware of the port town’s safety level, and that she was quite bold. She also disappeared very quickly after leaving the bar. Knowing all that, it was unlikely she was kidnapped. It was much more logical to assume that she prepared a safe way home before coming to the bar.

One of them muttered aloud what was on everyone’s mind: “Just *who* was that girl...”

They all returned to silently sipping the whiskey the girl had given them, basking in its unbelievably rich aroma. That included the bartender, of course.

Chapter 52:

Abduction

Mitsuha was done with gathering information in the New World for now. She couldn't afford to spend every day on espionage missions. She certainly didn't want to think about how big her stomach would get from all the food and soft drinks she'd consume at parties.

I'm fine with spoiling myself. But I'm not okay with spoiling my figure!

Anyway, that was why Mitsuha decided to take Colette and Sabine to Earth for some overdue sightseeing. She hadn't had much time for them recently because of how busy she was with the New World and her new shop. They were both getting cranky, and she needed to do something to cheer them up.

Mitsuha started by jumping the girls to the Wolf Fang base. She had to check in every now and then, anyway.

"Anything new happen, Captain?"

"Oh, it's you, li'l lady—nah, not really. You got a lotta emails, though, so go clear 'em out. None of 'em are urgent or important."

"Yes sir..."

Wolf Fang used to receive regular mail for Mitsuha as well, but those were annoying to deal with, so she switched to email only. Emails were much easier to respond to, and she could even sort and search through them.

She had the captain manage her email account and check her new messages in case any of them were urgent or important. He responded to the ones that

only required a receipt confirmation, and Mitsuha answered them afterwards. Sabine and Colette would have to wait for a bit as Mitsuha took care of her emails, but they'd be able to leave as soon as she finished since world-jumping took zero time. The girls probably wouldn't complain.

Most of the emails were invitations to parties and events. The dates had already passed for some of them because Mitsuha was gone for quite some time. She responded to the invitations with a nonacceptance or an apology as appropriate. The academic institutions that were examining her samples from the other world had been sending her regular reports. She replied to those with words of acknowledgement and encouragement.

Oh, one of the countries I kicked out of the W2W2 meeting for trying to sneak in a recording device sent me an email. It's an apology and they're asking to have their membership reinstated. It was a golden opportunity to get them off my back. No way I'm letting them back in!

Mitsuha spent a little while longer getting back to emails.

"All right, time to go!" she declared when she finished.

Their first stop would be the dessert café in the town closest to the base. It'd become a tradition to stop there first when she took Sabine and Colette to Earth.

"Lemme get a beer on tap for now," is what an old man would say at a bar after a hard day's work. Here, we say, "Lemme get some cake for now!"

Mitsuha had picked a good spot for jumping near the café. It was a safe area where no one would ever go. If anyone did happen to see them appear, Mitsuha could just jump away immediately. The witness would either assume their eyes were playing tricks on them or that they saw a ghost. It was unlikely

any rumors would start.

Fortunately, they made it to the café without such an incident.

“I’ll have the sweet melon parfait and a strawberry shortcake!” Mitsuha ordered.

“One chocolate banana sundae and a jumbo parfait!” Sabine followed.

“Triple scoop ice cream and a fruit parfait, please!” Colette completed.

“That’s all for now!” they grinned.

Their order was as humongous as always, but they were regulars at this point so the waitresses weren’t surprised by the size of their portions. They ate each dessert as they arrived and continued to add to their tab with reckless abandon.

Then the inevitable happened.

“Urk...” The three girls heaved as their stomachs growled loudly.

We’ve learned, I swear! You know how ancient Roman nobles would stick their fingers in their mouth or tickle their throat with a peacock feather right after eating so they could vomit and keep eating forever? Well, we’re gonna do that, but from the other end!

Despite how that sounds, I hear it helps with constip—you know what, never mind!

“I’m going first!” Mitsuha announced.

There were only two stalls in this café’s bathroom. One was occupied, leaving only one stall open. Mitsuha wasted no time claiming it.

“Go ahead, girls. Both stalls are open,” Mitsuha said when she returned to the table. Sabine and Colette leapt out of their chairs and charged for the bathroom.

Mitsuha sat down to relax and think about her plans for the day. A few minutes later, the sound of glass shattering at the entrance snapped her back to reality.

“AHHHH! KIDNAPPERS!” a woman screamed.

Before Mitsuha could think, she was out of her chair and heading for the entrance.

The bathrooms were a little to the right of the counter, which was in front of the entrance. You couldn't see the area between the bathrooms and the entrance from the customer seating, and the employees at the counter could only see the doorway.

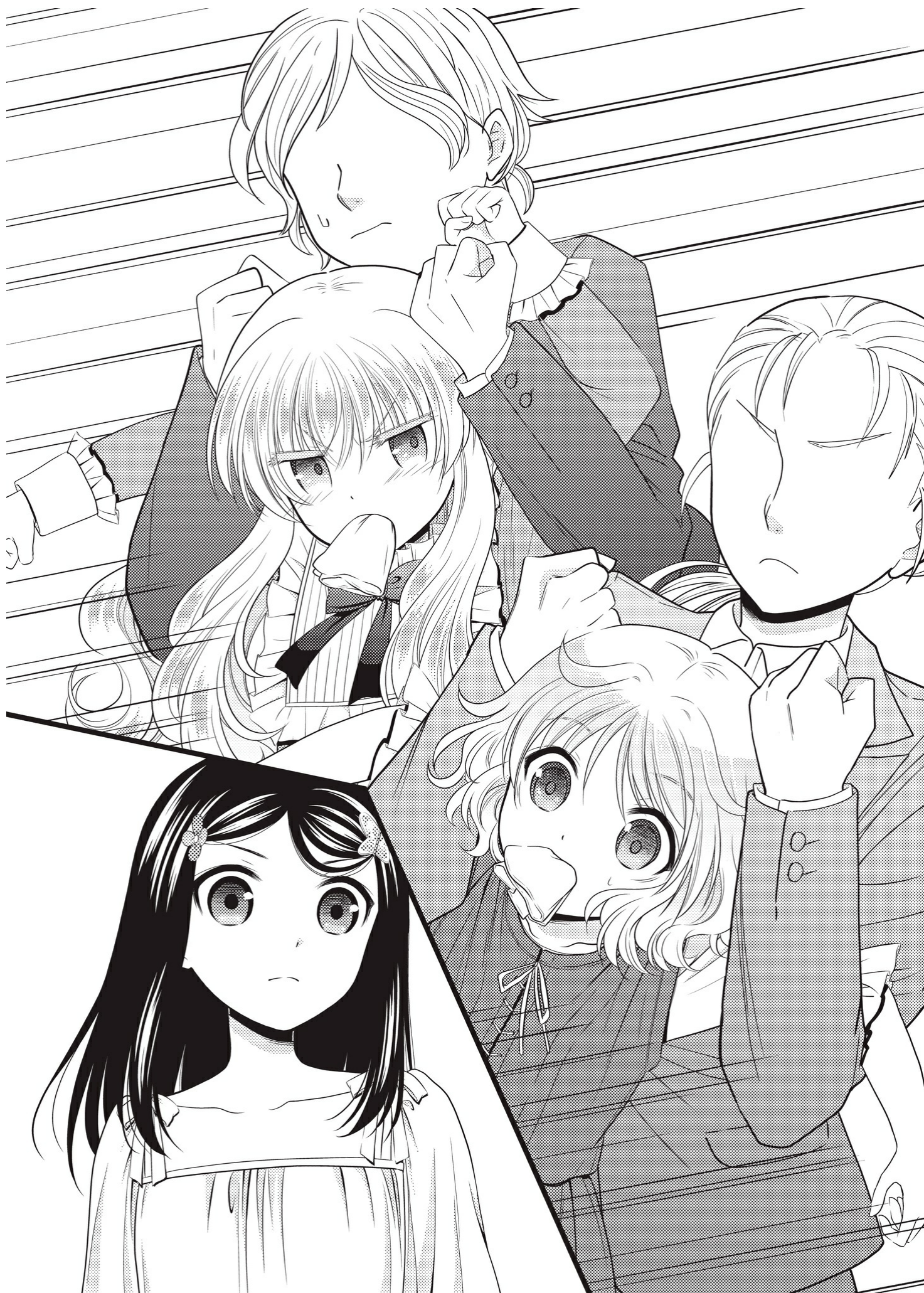
The scream came from the employee at the register. No one would try to abduct an adult woman in a busy café, so the kidnappers weren't targeting her. The victim has to be someone here, right now. And Sabine and Colette were just in the bathroom...

While her mind was racing, her legs had already carried her to the entrance. The slow-moving automatic door agitated her as she darted outside. She glimpsed a shard of porcelain on the floor just before she stepped out. Whoever was being carried out of the café must've kicked a figurine or something to the floor and shattered it. That was probably when the employee looked over and witnessed the crime taking place.

Knocking someone out with a few drops of chloroform in a handkerchief is the stuff of fiction. Chloroform doesn't have an immediate effect and it's pretty toxic. The safest and fastest way to sneak a couple kids out of a café would be to stuff their mouths with something to keep them quiet and lug them away, Mitsuha thought as her body raced outside and turned a corner into the parking lot.

The kidnappers will need a car to get away—there they are!

There were five women—two carrying Sabine, two carrying Colette, and an additional woman to help—and one man in the back seat trying to pull Sabine into the car. There was probably someone in the driver's seat too, although Mitsuha was still too far away to see. Sabine struggled fiercely, but she didn't stand a chance against multiple adults who were holding her down by all four limbs. She was forced into the car, and so was Colette.



Mitsuha kept her cool as she watched them. There was nothing to worry about as long as she had eyes on the girls. She highly doubted the kidnappers had any intention of hurting them. They were likely given strict orders not to harm them even if they scratched and bit in retaliation. As long as they were in sight, Mitsuha could hold her breath a little longer.

After the five captors managed to force the girls into the car, one of them got in the back seat and another took the passenger seat. The remaining three women climbed into a second car parked nearby. There were way too many actors to fit into one car. They had come prepared. The second car could also obstruct any pursuers in the event of a chase. They were probably willing to sacrifice a few members to ensure the success of the mission.

You're wondering why I'm just standing here? Watch this.

Thud!

Vroooooooooom!

The engines roared, but the cars didn't move an inch. How could they? The cars had no tires... Not a single one.

Just as the cars took off, Mitsuha jumped all the tires to the yard of her county residence. The cars dropped about a foot to the ground, but the drivers stepped on the gas anyway, causing the engines to rev in vain. No more than a few seconds later...

"Oh hey, it's Mitsuha!" Sabine exclaimed.

"Mitsuha!" Colette cried.

...she used successive jumps to bring Sabine and Colette to safety. There was nothing to fear as long as they were in her field of vision and in no immediate danger. If the criminals had been deranged and violent, she would've saved

them right away. But she saw that the kidnappers weren't the emotionally unstable type, which gave her the leeway to wait for the right moment. She probably would've flown into a rage if the girls had been in serious danger.

The thing I was most afraid of was the criminals getting away and taking the girls completely out of my sight before I could reach them. The broken porcelain is the only reason that didn't happen... I can get the criminals to pay for that instead of me, right?

Mitsuha pulled her phone out of her pocket and dialed a number. The leaders of this country told her to call it immediately if she ran into any trouble. *I'll bet scary-looking men in black suits are gonna rush to the scene*, she thought.

Her prediction turned out to be correct, but she wasn't expecting four cars full of them to arrive in under three minutes. That barely gave her any time to talk to the employee and the other customers who rushed out of the café.

Mitsuha found out from one of the men that they had a station in this town, and that they took turns staking out the Wolf Fang base from their cars. They knew Mitsuha and the girls frequently visited the town, so the station was always ready for an emergency dispatch to help her. Due to the urgency of the incident, they woke up all the men who were napping and sent out every crew.

I appreciate it...

The reason the kidnappers didn't abandon their cars and flee was because Mitsuha did more than jump away the tires; she also removed a few parts inside the doors. The handles were now incapable of unlatching. She also jumped out the parts needed to open the windows, as well as all the communication devices, guns, knives, and other dangerous items. That included poison—likely meant to be used for suicide. The kidnappers probably hadn't noticed that yet, though.

The criminals looked dazed and didn't resist while the men in black restrained them. They must've realized that their weapons had all disappeared.

I wonder if they look so out of it because they tried to drink their poison bottles only to find them empty. Attempting suicide as a last resort only to fail would leave anyone in a state of shock.

Oh—I reattached the door parts just before the men in black opened the car door. I only needed one millisecond to jump everything away; if anyone saw, they probably just thought their eyes went blurry for a moment.

Almost forgot! I need to jump the weapons back into the car. I don't want their sentence getting lightened because there was no evidence they were armed.

The men in black left after Mitsuha and the employee who witnessed the scene gave their testimonies. The kidnappers were seized and escorted away in the four cars. They were probably going to be taken to the national intelligence agency's underground interrogation room or something.

Mitsuha tried to get the men in black to pay for the broken figurine, but to her chagrin, they said it was outside of their responsibility and fled. She relented and tried to pay for it herself, but the store manager didn't let her. "It was a cheap store-bought figurine. The thing would've been honored to be broken in order to stop two girls from being kidnapped," the manager assured.

Now that I think about it, it would've been weird to make the victims of a failed kidnapping pay reparations. The café's reputation would take a major hit if word of that spread. Thinking is still not my strong suit...

Regardless, I need to return to the café, pay for the desserts we ate, and apologize to the other customers. We caused a big commotion, and a lot of the

customers are gonna go back inside to melted ice cream... Actually, that's their fault. There's no way anyone would expect me to pay for their ice cream, right?

“...So, what happened, exactly?”

Once Mitsuha made sure Sabine and Colette weren't injured or emotionally scarred, she jumped them to a place where they could talk quietly: the Yamano County residence. She poured them tea, set out rice crackers, and asked them to recount the incident.

Sabine started, “I used the bathroom, got out of the stall, washed my hands, and waited for Colette. Then when Colette left her stall, the group of women walked into the bathroom.”

Makes sense. It would've been outrageous if they sent men into the women's bathroom... Not that being female makes kidnapping someone in the women's bathroom any less of an issue.

She went on, “The women pinned our arms behind our backs, stuffed our mouths with some sort of fabric, carried us under their arms so that the employee at the register wouldn't see us, and went straight for the entrance—”

“Hold on!” Mitsuha interrupted.

Sabine's account just revealed a very important piece of information!

Mitsuha quickly grabbed Colette's right wrist. She was holding a rice cracker.

“Go wash your hands!”

Colette still hasn't washed her hands after using the bathroom! That's not okay!

They took a short break as Colette went to wash her hands.

Once she returned, Sabine continued the story. "...I wanted *someone* in the café to realize what was happening, so I didn't resist until we reached the entrance area. Then I flailed and kicked a figurine next to me as hard as I could!"

Oh, I knew it! But I expected it to be Colette who kicked the figurine, not Sabine...

Colette added, "I scratched their faces and headbutted them as hard as I could! They clearly looked like they were in pain, but they didn't utter a sound. It had to have hurt. They were really tough."

It's probably a part of their job to put up with all that. Their country's dignity and their own lives depended on the mission's success.

I guess I know the rest already, Mitsuha thought. I'm so relieved. Thank goodness they weren't hurt and that they have no signs of PTSD. I'm glad I got to them before the kidnappers escaped.

But Sabine and Colette being unhurt in the end doesn't undo what just happened. Kidnapping someone for financial gain is a serious crime, even if the attempt fails. I'll teach them what it means to pick a fight with Viscountess Yamano.

Witness the wrath of the Yamano family!

"...Anyway, they challenged me to a fight, and I've decided to accept it. I'm counting on your support!" Mitsuha declared.

"Uh, I don't know how to respond to that." The captain looked baffled.

Mitsuha ignored him and barreled on with her demands.

“First, I want to ask the leaders of this country for a meeting with the kidnappers. Whatever country that sent those crooks are going to regret it. And I want your help with that!”

“Slow down, li'l lady... Sheesh. But this whole incident is partially our responsibility, too. Guess I've got no choice...”

Huh? What does he mean by that?

“How are *you* responsible for what happened?”

The captain scratched his head. “I realized why the li'l munchkins were kidnapped as I was listening to your story. Or rather, I realized the method the kidnappers used. It's basic stuff. This happened 'cause y'all fell into a pattern.”

“Fell into a pattern? What does that mean?”

“It means that you guys've been doin' the same thing every time. You always come here first to respond to your emails, which lets all your recipients know that 'the princess is in town.' And anyone would soon realize after tailin' you a few times that you always go to the same café, eat and drink so much you wreck your stomachs, and take turns goin' to the ladies' room. It's easy to figure out the best moment to attack a person if they're always following the same pattern.”

“Ah...”

Damn it! I'm so stupid! It's Bodyguard 101 to not let the person you're protecting follow a fixed schedule! I got careless because I didn't think anyone would attack us after all my threats and warnings! My mistake could've easily gotten Sabine and Colette killed! Arrgghh...

Why didn't I give them personal safety alarms or GPS trackers?! I need to get some right away...

“You’re an amateur, after all. We shoulda made sure to teach you all that. Sorry, this was our failure,” the captain said.

He’s being kind, but this was clearly my fault. Crap...

Mitsuha picked up her phone to make a call.

“Hi, I’m Nanoha,” Mitsuha introduced herself with her fake name.

The handcuffed woman in the cell didn’t say anything. She was one of the kidnappers. She and the rest were all imprisoned separately to prevent them from getting their stories straight. It also enabled the interrogation tactic of telling each one that the others had already confessed.

This wasn’t a prison, by the way. It was a bit of a...darker place.

“What country are you from?” Mitsuha asked in English.

Any spy was likely to have mastered English and the language of the country they were infiltrating.

The old me would’ve had no chance of becoming a spy! Not that I had any desire to be one. But now, I’m a super-agent who can speak any language fluently, appear and disappear at a moment’s notice, and steal anything I want.

...I’m still not gonna be a spy though.

The woman didn’t respond, but Mitsuha had already gotten what she needed.

Before she left the cell, Mitsuha said, “Ah hope ya can find it in yahself tuh repent fah yah crimes, find a husban’, ’n live happily ever aftah!”

“Wh...?” The woman froze, wide-eyed.

Mitsuha spoke in the dialect of the woman’s hometown, which she acquired

just now. The languages the woman knew and her natural dialect all but confirmed what country she was from. But just to be safe, Mitsuha intended to speak to the rest of the kidnappers.

I don't need to question her about anything specific. I just want to know what country they're from... So I know who to unleash my counterattack upon.

"Captain, I figured out what country they're from. Can you get some information for me? I wanna know the locations of their intelligence agency's headquarters, the homes and villas of the leaders of the intelligence agency and the government, and more."

"Are you outta your mind?! Only the intelligence agencies of major powers and rival countries would know that kinda info."

"Good. Then you know who to ask."

"Whuh?"

The captain stared at her blankly.

Mitsuha began to explain. "I know there's no way an ordinary mercenary group from another country could figure all that out. So ask someone who would know, but don't introduce yourself as mercenaries; call yourselves 'the representatives of Princess Nanoha, a visitor from another world.' I think they'll tell you. You can contact someone from the World-to-World Meeting participant list.

"Hmm, let's see... You can tell them that for each good piece of information they share, you'll donate samples of seaweed and marine life that aren't in Earth's encyclopedias."

The captain looked stunned. "Are you an evil genius or are you just stupid?!"

That's rude, Captain!

“What?! The operation failed?!” the man exclaimed after hearing his subordinate’s account. “Was the analysis unit’s conclusion wrong?! Can those girls actually wield magic that could kill in an instant?! The team was confident the princess was bluffing to prevent anyone from harming them, suggesting her willingness to do anything to protect them! That’s why I authorized this operation in the first place!

“But... I suppose there’s nothing to worry about even if those children *can* use magic and our agents get killed. The princess won’t get a confession out of them... Whether their lives end in murder or suicide. They know what it would mean for their friends and family back home if they betray our country.

“Now... Tell me exactly what happened.”

The man in charge of the operation was receiving a report of its failure from his subordinate. The source was trustworthy; the witnesses were fellow agents stationed in other cars in the parking lot who were posing as ordinary customers.

“Hmm... There was no evidence that the two girls used this so-called instant-death magic, huh. That could mean the analysis unit was right about that after all... So the girls were rescued inexplicably just as the car tires vanished and the agents were trapped inside the vehicles. Then the agents were taken away before getting a chance to finish themselves off...”

Some agents would’ve committed suicide in that situation, but it wasn’t strictly necessary. As long as they didn’t talk, it was acceptable for them to buy time and wait for a chance to escape. They could choose suicide later if it

became clear that escape was impossible or if they felt they couldn't withstand the torture any longer. There were plenty of ways for them to kill themselves even if their poison had been confiscated—they could bite their tongue, smash their head against a wall, or use a fragment of something to cut an artery open.

“Ah well, we can live with one failed operation. There is no evidence to implicate our involvement, and even if the captured agents confess, we'll insist they made everything up and that another country is trying to frame us. We're sure to succeed next time.

“We *will* capture that princess and obtain wealth from the other world! If we could just get her to transport one of our mid-class military troops over there, no one would be able to stop us. We could even exchange our out-of-date weapons that are tucked away in storage for their gold and jewels.

“What's that? She said that teleporting between worlds costs her life force? Why should we care?! That's the price she'll have to pay for removing us from the negotiating table! Get to work on the next plan, now!”

The subordinates hurried out of the room.

“So this is the intelligence agency building...”

It was late at night. Mitsuha jumped in front of an eight-story building that was being used as the headquarters of a certain country's espionage agency—although they used the word “intelligence” because it sounded better.

Mitsuha had never been here before, but she was able to jump by using pictures, satellite images, and geographic coordinates that were provided by an ally country. A convenient method like this could only be utilized on Earth. In the New World, she was only able to jump to new locations she saw during the

aerial reconnaissance. But it was still only on a small part of a massive continent. They only flew over a few countries.

It was a mistake not to have them fly over the Old World a little too. Why didn't I think of that... I should arrange another reconnaissance flight, in both the Old World and the New World. Now that I've been to the New World, I can jump the aircraft straight there and spend the whole fuel tank flying over land.

...Whoops, this isn't the time to think about that. I need to get to work.

Despite the late hour, the lights in most of the building's windows were on. *Are they a twenty-four-hour operation? Or are they just working overtime? –never mind! That has nothing to do with me! Let's get started!*

“Jump!”

Mitsuha grabbed everyone on the eighth floor and jumped. She took them to a deserted island in the other world and returned to the intelligence agency building alone.

“Jump!”

Next she jumped everyone on the seventh floor to the island and returned by herself.

“Jump!”

She repeated the process with the sixth, fifth, fourth floor, and all the way down to the third level basement. There was a decent amount of people in the building despite the late hour.

Why would I go through the trouble of jumping them one floor at a time, you ask? 'Cause if I jumped them all at once, the people from the higher floors would fall to their deaths. I'm not evil.

Finally, Mitsuha jumped the entire empty building to Yamano County. She'd already dug a hole in the ground large enough for the building—including the three basement levels—to fit perfectly. Actually, the first-floor entrance ended up pretty high above the ground because she got the depth slightly wrong, but that hardly mattered. She wasn't going to leave it there forever, and definitely had no intention of living in it.

There was no concrete pile to support the building. No water or electricity either, which meant it was dark inside, the bathrooms weren't usable, and the elevators wouldn't move. The thing was essentially useless.

Then why did I bring the building here, you're wondering? 'Cause of what's inside. It's full of classified documents, computer drives, and servers full of data. Maybe even a hidden safe in the basement, too...

I'm gonna take all of it and sell the computers, servers, and documents to a certain country. I'll keep the safe full of treasures for myself, obviously.

Oh, I forgot the last step.

Mitsuha returned to the deserted island—where the intelligence agency workers had fallen into mass hysteria—and jumped everyone back to Earth. She placed them inside the giant gaping crater where the building had been. Intelligence officers typically had to give up their cell phones at the door, but if there were any phones among them, Mitsuha's jump would have excluded the devices. That meant it would take a while for the news to reach the country's leaders.

All right, that's enough chaos for one day!

“What?! The entire intelligence agency disappeared?!” the leader of the

country roared in response to his panicked subordinate's report. "Slow down! You're not making sense! Was it a fire? Or an explosion?! What country is responsible for this?!"

"Uh... Well, the building simply vanished from Earth!" the underling said, having no idea that the building was, literally, no longer on Earth.

"What does that even mean?! Anyway, what happened to the people inside the building?!" The leader wasn't actually worried about the intelligence officers; he just wanted to know if there were any eyewitnesses who could testify.

"There is no need to worry, sir! There were zero casualties." The subordinate was touched that the leader cared so much for the lives of his people. The leader ignored his misunderstanding and urged him to talk.

"They said they were working late when suddenly they found themselves standing on a beach," the subordinate began. "Everyone on the eighth floor was the first to experience this. Then the crew on the seventh floor, the sixth floor, and so on until everyone was on the beach. It took less than ten seconds. The next moment, they found themselves at the bottom of a giant hole... No one had a cell phone, so it took hours for them to be found.

"They then realized that the hole was where the intelligence agency building had been. The place was a mess because of the severed water pipes, sewer pipes, and gas pipes..."

"What...the hell..."

There was only one person who could've pulled such an absurd stunt.

"No way... But could it be...? That damn girl!"

The country implemented a nationwide media blackout the next day. Shortly

afterward, the same phenomenon occurred at the Department of Defense. Its civil officials and military officers stood at the former site of the building, dumbfounded.

The next day, the homes and villas of high government officials disappeared one after another, along with their hidden safes. Next to go were the homes, company buildings, and hidden safes of financiers who were colluding with the politicians.

When a statue of an eminent figure in the capital's large public square disappeared and was replaced by a statue of an eerie-looking monster, it became impossible to hide what was happening from the public any longer.

"Please convey this message to Her Highness! It seems there's been a colossal misunderstanding. I want to explain the situation!" the country's minister pleaded over the phone.

The Wolf Fang captain's response was dry. "You should've already been informed that all forms of contact other than the designated email address are prohibited, and that we will permanently sever communication with any country that violates the rule. That includes phone calls."

"Th-This is an emergency! We don't have time for that! And I'm not calling to negotiate, I'm calling to inform Her Highness of her mistake and to warn her!"

The captain paid his words no heed. "Ah, I do remember the princess saying she's responding to a surprise attack—there wasn't any formal declaration of war—and that the king gave her territory permission to retaliate. She also said she probably won't return here until the enemy country surrendered."

"Wha... Then how can we contact Her Highness?"

“You can’t. Not until she shows up here again.”

“Then we can’t negotiate... We can’t even surrender!”

The captain thought this a good moment to borrow one of Mitsuha’s pet phrases.

“Not my problem... Now, as you’ve been warned earlier, I am permanently severing communication with your country. Best of luck to you!” With that, he hung up.

The captain immediately blocked the number and their email address. The country’s officials would probably just use other numbers and email addresses, but this conveyed Wolf Fang’s intention to cut off all communication. They could easily block and ignore the other contacts.

“You’re brutal, li'l lady...” the captain muttered. “You don’t got an ounce of mercy in you...”

“Well, this is a problem. What to do...”

Mitsuha crossed her arms as she scanned the mansions, warehouses, and office buildings lined up before her.

“There’s way too much stuff to call a junk removal service. I guess I could return them once this is all over—no, that’s not an option! I told the countries of the world that large-scale transfers take life force. Using my powers for an attack is one thing, but there’s no way I’d waste an equal amount of life force just to put it all back... All right, I’ll sell the furnishings and break up the houses for scraps! I’ve been wanting to build a new warehouse. What can I do with the office buildings, though...”

Mitsuha didn’t have any use for mansions, but at least they could be scrapped

for parts. The offices would've been way too dangerous to utilize given the lack of concrete piles needed for foundational support. They were built with electricity, water, and elevators in mind. Demolishing them would be difficult too, and there'd be no use for the rubble.

"I know! I'll use them as an artificial reef! I'll set them up so the buildings' top floors emerges above sea level. That way, fishing boats will know to avoid them and not get their fishing nets caught, and the fishermen could use them as evacuation sites if they run into trouble. A ferry could even take people there to use them as fishing spots. This is a great idea!"

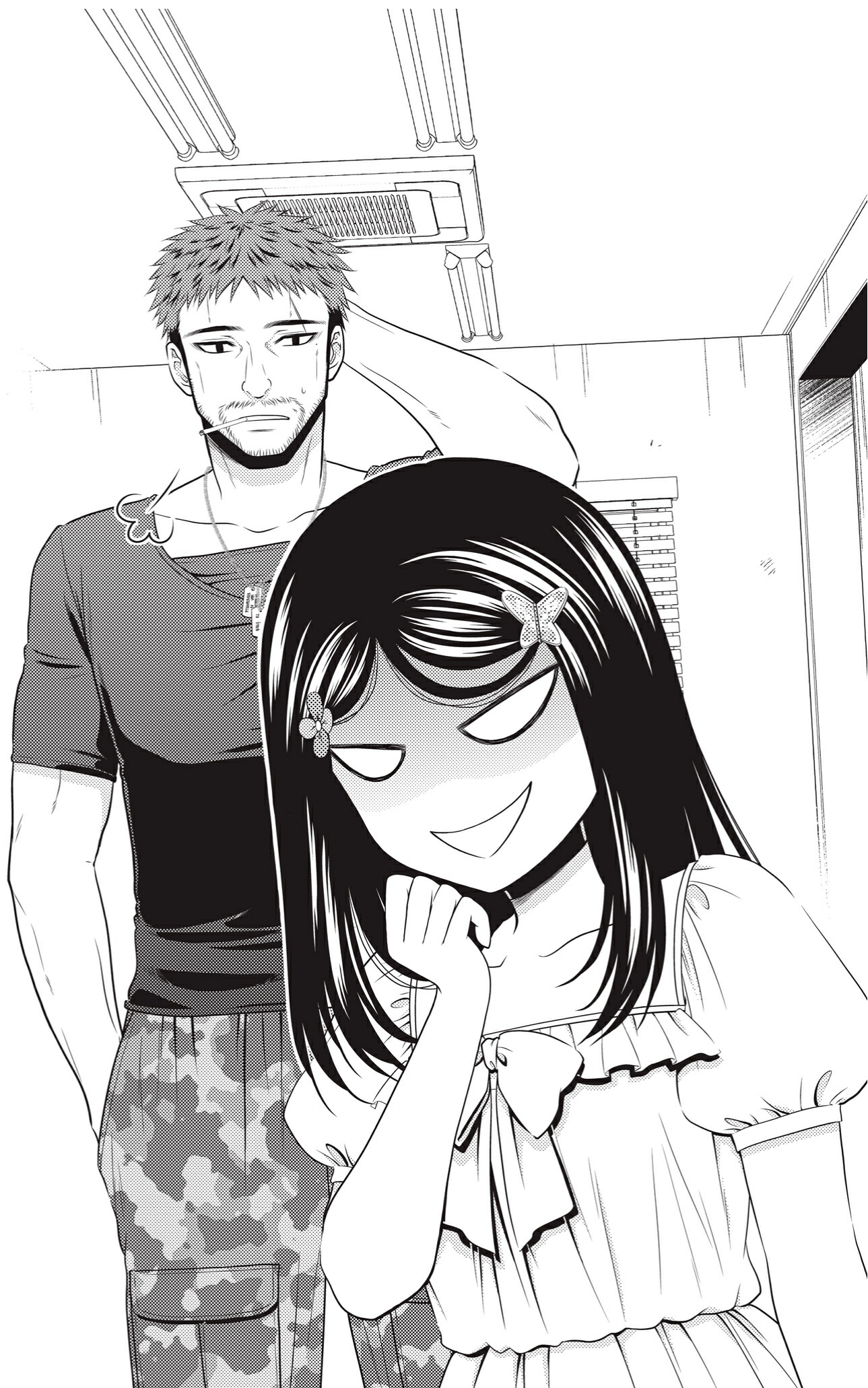
Mitsuha was relieved she found a way to recycle the buildings.

"I wonder what's happening on Earth..."

"Please! Pass this message along to Her Highness! Please let me explain to her that she's wrongly punishing our country for something we had nothing to do with..."

The country's leaders seemed to realize that their overbearing approach was backfiring and that their bombardment of calls and emails were getting them nowhere, so they sent a soft-spoken and likable diplomat directly to the Wolf Fang base. However...

"I'm tellin' you, there's shit all I can do 'til she comes here," the captain shrugged. At this point, he'd dropped his polite act. "Also, you should stop calling her 'Her Highness.' She renounced that position, so you'll just upset her. You should call her 'Lady Viscountess...' Or just 'Milady.'"



“Um, uhh...”

The diplomat was forced to leave without obtaining any word of promise or assurance. He handed the captain a letter and asked him to give it to the princess when she arrived.

“Hmm, so that’s their move...”

Mitsuha entered the room once she made sure the diplomat had left the building. She then read the letter the captain was given.

She hadn’t just arrived at the Wolf Fang base; she’d been eavesdropping on the conversation from the next room with a Littman stethoscope. *These are super useful.*

“What does it say?” the captain poked out of curiosity.

Mitsuha shrugged. “It just says that if I won’t give them a way to contact me, they’ll send a message publicly on TV and in the newspaper.”

“Huh? Isn’t your existence a secret known only to a select few in each country?”

“Yep. It’s blackmail. What they’re saying is, ‘You don’t want the world to learn about you, do you?’ But they can’t send that message without letting the whole world know about what they did, that one small girl is wrecking their country, and that she stole all their top-secret documents and data... Their own citizens will learn the whole truth. There’s no way they’ll actually do it.

“But I might as well play along. I’ll make it look like I panicked in response to their threat,” Mitsuha snickered villainously.

The captain sighed in exasperation.

“All of our government-managed broadcast equipment and backup systems have vanished! Power lines have been disconnected throughout the country, and our emergency generators and fuel tanks disappeared too!”

“Whaaat?!”

“Newspaper companies have also lost their machinery—even their emergency rotary press equipment is gone! All national media—including television, radio, and newspaper—had been completely shut down!”

“That’s absurd! Why would she react that way?!”

The country’s leader was baffled. It was the complete opposite of what he expected.

“The threat worked! She clearly fears her existence becoming public knowledge—”

“You fool!” The leader was furious at the minister’s misread of the situation. “We wanted to threaten her and lure her to the negotiating table, not make her more defensive! And it won’t just be our citizens who notice that our national media halted completely, but the rest of the world as well! Get them restored as quickly as possible! Prioritize television!”

He decided that the first thing he needed to do was to deliver a televised speech to calm the populace. It was the correct decision, but he couldn’t have foreseen the extent of the damage the girl had caused.

“The test broadcast failed! The oscillator won’t work!”

“What happened to the circuit board?!”

“It’s missing electronic parts? How is that possible?!”

“Why is the memory card missing?”

The restoration effort progressed at a snail's pace.

"It'll be easy. All I have to do is go to all the broadcast stations and printing press shops once every few days," Mitsuha said.

The captain said nothing.

"Can you please send the email with the text I just gave you?" asked Mitsuha.

Once again, the captain didn't respond.

Mitsuha had given him a text file in a thumb drive as soon as she arrived at the base. It was a message containing a full explanation of the current conflict, and it was addressed to all the countries that participated in the World-to-World Meeting.

The message contained the following details: the enemy country had attacked and kidnapped two civilian girls. Although the girls were immediately rescued by Mitsuha, they technically *were* kidnapped, so she judged it was not an "attempted kidnapping."

Mitsuha interpreted the sneak attack as a declaration of war, and the viscountess's territory was responding with full force. This was a full-fledged war. Therefore, she would regard any country who sold or offered the enemy country military supplies to be an ally of theirs. The same went for sharing information about her.

The message also noted that Mitsuha used magic to discover which country was behind the kidnapping, which, in her country, was deemed acceptable as evidence. She also claimed that her magic could detect any countries that allied with the enemy country, and that she would immediately consider them enemies too. Last but not least, she emphasized that it was impossible for her

magic to be wrong.

This email was to be sent to all the countries at once.

Mitsuha expressed to the captain, “It might be best to maintain hostilities with that country on paper even after I stop harassing them. Most countries won’t be able to completely sever trade with them, which will give me a reason to complain and threaten to treat any country as an enemy nation if they make a demand I don’t like. Pretty much any trade goods can be considered military supplies, including metal, oil, and even food.

“If they ask for proof, I can just say I used my magic. I don’t need proof that satisfies the other country since I’m the one stepping away from them. That’s perfectly within my rights. Also, perpetually remaining at war with that country will allow me to get away with attacking them and stealing war resources whenever I want.”

She didn’t actually intend to go that far. Unless the enemy country tried to harm her or the girls again, that is.

“Oh, I’ll need to take back the dragon parts and samples I gave to that country and retrieve all their research results. Their documents...and computers too.”

The captain was growing a little scared of Mitsuha. Just a little, but scared all the same.

A few days later, the soft-spoken diplomat returned to the Wolf Fang base with another letter. Mitsuha’s immediate response to the last threat gave away the fact that she was visiting the base. Not that she had any intention of hiding it.

The very next day, Mitsuha jumped to the base and read the letter.

“What does it say?” the captain asked.

Mitsuha contemplated how best to answer. “Hmm, to summarize it briefly, I guess it says, ‘We won’t contact you by television, radio, or the newspaper, so please, for God’s sake, have mercy.’”

“You just boiled down all those pages to one sentence...”

“What should I do... It might be about time to stop.”

The captain looked worried. “Aren’cha afraid they might try to assassinate you if you take this too far, li’l lady? Well, I guess you’re already past that point... I wouldn’t be surprised if they send out one or two dozen assassin squads after the embarrassment and damage you’ve caused them. Are you gonna be okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine! I’m Sergeant Thunder, after all!”

“What the hell does that mean?!”

The captain didn’t know about the code name Mitsuha used when she fought for her territory or about the brave war hero she borrowed it from. The name was a pun on the word for “three dozen” in Japanese, but her internal translator didn’t seem able to handle that, rendering the joke incomprehensible in English. Mitsuha understood the joke, though, and that was good enough for her.

“I’ll use the X attack if I have to...” she mumbled to herself.

...And that was a reference to Jun Sanders from an old Japanese manga called *Sain wa V*.

“Anyway, I want you to send another message to all the W2W countries. Include the enemy country this time.” Mitsuha handed the captain another USB thumb drive.

“Couldn’t you give them to me all at once?” he grumbled as he took the thumb drive and inserted it into his computer. “Holy crap...”

The message said that next time a country attacked anyone connected to the viscountess’s territory—or was caught preparing to do so—she would retaliate with her full, merciless might. To give them an idea of what that could mean, Mitsuha offered an example: to steal the contents of their army’s ammunition depot or missile silo and drop them above their capital city, their military bases, and the homes of their rulers. She also warned that attacking her would prove difficult for anyone without magical powers due to her detection and self-defense magic. Next, she gave another ominous warning that if the worst were to happen to her in this world within the next few years, certain information would be leaked to a certain party. Those in the know would understand what that meant.

She ended the message by expressing in no uncertain terms how angry she was about how much life force she’d had to waste over this ordeal.

“...Can you really do all that?” the captain asked.

“Hehehe...” Mitsuha chuckled.

She could. For some reason, one of the ally countries included satellite photos of the target country’s military base in the documents they shared. She’d be able to jump to them and take the explosives. The shells stored in the ammunition depots probably had fuses, though, and she doubted the safety mechanisms had been released. They likely wouldn’t explode when she dropped them. That was probably true of the missile warheads too. But she had no need to explain that.

The part about Mitsuha’s “self-defense magic” was a bluff, but she declared it with confidence, and no one had reason to believe she was lying after the

tremendous power she'd demonstrated. Just thinking about the consequences of a failed assassination was probably enough to deter any countries from trying.

"We can't go back to that town, though..." Mitsuha grieved.

Returning to the town near the Wolf Fang base would've been way too dangerous. In the future, they'd have to venture to a much farther city if they wanted to go out as three ordinary girls.

Well, we were always supposed to be three ordinary girls, and it's not like going to a city farther from the base will cost any extra time or money. That's not a big deal. Also, Sabine and Colette won't have any difficulty as long as it's a place where you can use English or Japanese. Sucks that we won't be able to go to any of our usual stores anymore, though...

She decided to take out her frustration on that country. Occasionally, a few bottles of expensive wine might disappear from the government leader's cellar. On other occasions, maybe a meal prepared by his personal chef would vanish into thin air before it reached his dining table.

Mitsuha was at war with them. It was only natural that she cut off their supplies.

For a while, the captain continued to receive emails and letters from them crying and begging for forgiveness, but Mitsuha ignored every last one of them.

"Huh? What's going on?"

Mitsuha was in Vanel. She'd jumped to the New World after things calmed down on Earth and found a commotion at the naval port.

Did something happen? Where's my source when I need him... Actually,

there's no way a lowly sailor on a capital ship like him would be allowed out at a time like this—oh, never mind! There he is!

“Mitsuha... Long time...no see...” he wheezed.

There's no reason to get all sweaty just to see me ten seconds faster... I wonder if he checks to see if I'm here first thing on all his days off. He's like a dog waiting for his master. It's adorable.

Well, I'm glad he's here. Off we go to the usual café...

“There was a shipwreck?”

“Yeah,” the soldier boy answered, “a warship got caught up in a storm and lost its mast. The hull suffered massive damage too, so it can't sail. The word is it's just drifting on wind-driven surface currents and the wind—oh, did you know the world is round, Mitsuha? Wind-driven surface currents are caused by the world's rotation, and the tilt—”

“Nope! Don't wanna hear it!”

I didn't come here to learn about oceanography.

“Just give me the gist,” she said.

“...A ship is adrift at sea.”

They both fell silent.

“...Sorry. Can you give me a little more?”

In the end, what Mitsuha learned was just that: a ship was adrift at sea. Word of the disaster had reached the naval base because some soldiers on the warship took a gamble with the ship's sole surviving cutter. Sailing through the turbulent sea on a small boat... That must've taken guts. They miraculously

reached the coast a few days later, and rescue ships were dispatched to search for the wrecked ship. However...

“That doesn’t sound good,” Mitsuha said.

“Yeah. The storm changed the direction of the wind significantly, and we don’t know how far the cutter drifted before it reached land. To make matters worse, the crew had probably lost track of the warship’s position before the cutter even set out. The storm tossed the ship around for hours, and it’s been drifting ever since. Their celestial navigation devices were thrown overboard too, which means their estimated position could be way off. It’ll be hard for the rescue ships to find them. And...”

“And?”

“Only three ships were dispatched for the rescue search.”

Mitsuha didn’t say anything.

That was unsurprising to hear. The warship was heavily damaged and was on the verge of sinking; a sailing ship was going to have a hard time towing it long-distance, especially if it had to do so on still-choppy seas and against the wind. Even if they did manage to recover the warship, it’d be faster to build an entirely new ship than to repair a damaged one.

It’d probably hurt to lose the shipmen, but human lives were expendable in this kind of society. Replacing enough low-ranking sailors to man a forty-cannon warship was easy; a military draft would gather servicemen in no time. There would be no lack of recruits during a time of peace.

The navy’s leaders surely regretted losing the officers and the most skilled of the sailors, but they likely decided it wasn’t worth it to send out a great number of ships for the rescue effort. Mitsuha couldn’t say if that was the right decision

from a political, economic, or humane standpoint.

Even if they dispatched half the fleet, there was no guarantee they'd find the lost ship. The leaders didn't necessarily want to abandon the crew. Actually, sending out three ships was a sign that they *hadn't* abandoned them. It was probably the most they could do. Not sending a single ship would hurt the navy's morale. Someone high in rank must've protested for the rescue mission.

"The *Leviathan*—that's my ship—isn't being sent out. Size and firepower won't matter for a search mission. Speed and saving money are more important... Well, a larger ship would have the advantage of a higher viewing platform, but that wouldn't make too much of a difference."

That was a good point. No navy would send out a state-of-the-art warship for a rescue operation. A high-speed warship would be sufficient.

The soldier boy seemed composed, but his expression was a little dark. Even if it wasn't his ship, it had to be depressing knowing that fellow navy soldiers were in distress.

"My friend and one of my past mentors are on that ship..."

Ah. That makes sense. Soldiers get transferred and reassigned all the time.

Mitsuha started to get a tingling in her heart. *I... I remember this surge of emotions!* It was the same feeling she had when she first met Marcel the young chef.

"Hey," she said, "which ships are being sent out for the search? When are they departing? And how far away did the wreck happen?"

Chapter 53:

Search and Rescue

“Huh? What do you want to know all that for?” the soldier boy asked.

Whoops, I threw that in too soon.

“Oh, I was just wondering if my friend’s dad’s ship is going to be sent out. I’m also worried about how long the drifting crew’s water and food will last...”

“You’re so kind, Mitsuha.”

You make this way too easy, soldier boy!

She tucked her hands under her chin and made a cute face. He fell for it hard.
I didn’t even have to bring out the fake tears.

That was The Double-Knuckle Beam—one of the 48 moves in Micchan’s playbook, “How to Knock a Boy’s Socks Off.” It’s unbeatable! According to her, beams shoot out of your eyes when you do it.

Mitsuha spent a while squeezing all the details she could out of the soldier boy.

All right, that’s enough exploitation for one day!

“Umm... Thanks for the present you gave me,” the soldier boy said.

Oh yeah, I forgot I gave him that pocketknife. I felt bad about taking up so much of his time on his days off.

“Can you get more of those?” he asked.

Huh? Mitsuha stared suspiciously.

“D-Don’t worry, I’ll pay for them!”

The soldier boy waved his hands frantically and launched into an explanation. An officer saw him using the peculiar knife for a little task and demanded the soldier boy let him borrow it. He refused, knowing there was a chance the officer would never give it back. The two of them were heading toward a shouting match when the captain walked by and requested to let him see it. Shortly afterward, the fleet commander did the same.

“They said they’d pay three gold coins for it, but I said no. I could never sell a present from you, Mitsy. They asked if I could get any more of the same knife, and offered to pay for them.”

Ah... I guess the Gerber knife was a little too impressive for this society... Well, it’s not like anyone’s gonna be able to copy a manufacturing process that took decades to perfect. If that was possible, all the knife manufacturing companies in the world would be as good as Gerber, Loveless, Buck, Randall, and G. Sakai. Knives aren’t gonna make a difference in a war, anyway.

“...Fine. I’ll get some more.”

Her annoyance must have shown on her face because the soldier boy immediately tried to cheer her up. That only annoyed her more.

If the commander is on the Leviathan, I wonder if that makes it the flagship... It is the navy’s most cutting-edge ship. Makes sense.

Also, did he just call me ‘Mitsy’? That’s a little bold... Eh, whatever. I’m not offended.

Oh, right!

“Can you do something for me in return?” she asked.

If I’m gonna go out of my way for him, he’d better be prepared to do the same

for me!

The soldier boy looked confused at Mitsuha's request but he said it wouldn't be a problem.

Heck yeah! It's time to commence the operation!

"Hey, it's me. Can you help me with something?" Mitsuha asked over the phone, realizing as she said it that she sounded like a scammer targeting a grandparent.

The countries of Earth knew her as "Nanoha," but she didn't like using the fake name herself, so she avoided saying it. She didn't mind when other people called her by it, though.

Mitsuha was using her cell phone that the captain signed up for under his name. She was making a call to the diplomat from the country who let her take their tanker aircraft to the New World.

"Yes. I actually have another request... Oh, the scholars loved the Cambrian era-looking fish I gave them last time? I'm glad to hear it. I was worried it might be something that was already on Earth. Uh, yes.

"Anyway, about my request... Really? It would be your pleasure? Thank you very much! I'm actually going to need the navy's assistance this time..."

Okay, the Vanelian search party just departed... Let's do this!

Jump!

"Hi! Thanks for your help!" greeted Mitsuha.

"Ahhh!—oh, s-sorry..." the diplomat sprang up.

Don't worry about it, man! Anyone would react that way if someone suddenly appeared behind them in a secluded place!

The diplomat and Mitsuha took a car to the navy base.

“Welcome, Your Highness! We’re honored to have you here!”

The countries around here held royalty in high regard. The title of princess—even if Mitsuha was from another world—was going to earn her major preferential treatment.

She greeted the base commander, and he led her straight to the runway apron. This was a naval base, but it wasn’t a harbor. It was a naval air station.

The planes parked along the apron were maritime patrol aircrafts. Water surface searches were handled by the navy rather than the air force. Maritime patrol aircrafts were primarily known for anti-submarine warfare, but that wasn’t their only use. They were equipped with an anti-surface search radar, and the crew was trained for visual searching as well. Looking for wrecked ships was one of their regular duties.

That made a maritime patrol aircraft the best choice for this mission.

Mitsuha received full VIP treatment as she was driven to the foot of the plane. If a foreign princess wasn’t a VIP, who was?

The aircraft was surrounded by mechanics—the crew was already on board. A guide led Mitsuha to the aircraft’s boarding steps, and two crew members emerged to help her up. She didn’t have much to carry and the steps had railings, but the crew probably would’ve been executed by a firing squad if anything happened to her.

Man, there are a lot of people in the plane... Oh, they’re the same scholars from last time. Makes sense they’d want to come again...

Mitsuha gave everyone a brief hello, got in her seat, and fastened her harness. The aircraft departed soon after.

“Set course for true north!”

Mitsuha took off her harness once the plane leveled out and instructed the pilot through her headset.

“Roger that! Head course true north!”

She was adjusting the aircraft’s heading to Earth’s magnetic north so she could jump them facing the magnetic north of the other world. She discussed these steps with the pilot when she visited the base the day before. There was no way they would’ve been able to take off so quickly if this was their first meeting. He probably spoke with the air force pilot from last time too.

“We jump in thirty seconds! I am Nanoha, crosser of dimensions in the name of a wandering god...”

Tension grew among the crew members.

“Ten seconds... Five, four, three, two, one, warp!”

Jump complete. The plane was in the other world. No cool special effects accompanied the phenomenon.

“Alter course 293 degrees!”

“Veering to 293 degrees!”

The pilot steered the plane to the left and then leveled it out again.

“Keep steady!”

“Roger that!”

They were flying over the sea toward the search area. The nautical chart—of Vanel and its surrounding ocean—was made by the cooperating country, using aerial photographs they took last time. The Vanelian ships that Zegleus captured had maps too, but Mitsuha couldn't use those. Her excuse for the last flight was wanting to chart the land. Besides, the crew would probably feel much safer using their own map than one drawn with different draftsmanship and scaling. But most of all, topography was irrelevant over the ocean.

The chart was marked with the last known position of the ship. Mitsuha obtained that information from the soldier boy in exchange for more pocketknives. He surely would've refused if she asked him to find out something related to combat, but there was no need to hide information about a search and rescue operation during peacetime. Even enemy nations were willing to help on such occasions.

If the soldier boy asked the officers in the chart room about the lost ship and mentioned that he had a friend and a former mentor aboard, they'd tell him out of sympathy. Nothing suspicious about that, figured Mitsuha. And that was exactly what happened.

All ships, whether they were a part of the search or not, were informed about the shipwreck as well as its estimated position. It was possible one of the ships could pass through the area on an unrelated mission and discover the remains. Being physically and mentally ready in case of an emergency dispatch was expected of them. At least, based on the soldier boy's account and Mitsuha's older brother's extensive ramblings.

Anyway, Mitsuha converted the location data into bearing and distance measurements used on Earth and plotted it on the chart.

Why didn't I use latitude and longitude, you ask? That would've been pointless

'cause I don't know the size of this planet.

Time to fly past the rescue ships and head for the site of the shipwreck!

“Standby for the target area... Mark! All hands transition to a wide-range search! Keep your eyes peeled!” the captain, who was also the tactical coordinator—or TACCO—commanded.

The radar operators—or SS3s—weren't the only ones searching for the target ship; all crew members near a window were scouring for it as well. They'd started before they reached the epicenter of the search range, but the TACCO was probably just giving his order to boost morale.

On maritime patrol aircrafts, the person with the higher rank between the senior pilot and the TACCO served as the captain. In the Imperial Japanese Navy, a scout would occasionally be the captain. It must've been normal for navy aircrafts to have captains who weren't also piloting.

Mitsuha wasn't worried about the search. The crew was trained to find submarine periscopes and snorkeling masks; there was no way they'd miss a giant sailing ship, even if it didn't have a sail or a mast. Unless the location data she received was way off, they were bound to find it.

“Radar contact! It's 63 miles away at 326 degrees!” an SS3 called out.

“Target locked!” the TACCO ordered.

“Roger! Turning right to 326 degrees!” the pilot answered.

The SS3 detected something on the radar and guided the pilot. The TACCO marked the spot on his tactical display, which synced with the pilot's screen.

There's no guarantee that this is the ship we're looking for. There are many other ships sailing the ocean. It could even be driftwood or a whale.

“The target is in sight! It’s a large wooden ship, and I don’t see a sail!”

Well never mind, then! That was fast!

“It appears to be the forty-cannon warship detailed in the document. And it’s drifting without a mast!”

Crew members announced more details as they approached it. The ship was drifting. Not sailing, but not taking a nap either. It was still moving due to the ocean current and wind.

It was, indeed, the ship they were looking for.

Now that I think about it, there can’t be many ships sailing the open seas alone in this era of civilization. The only other thing it could’ve been was a whale.

Okay, time to board the wrecked ship!

“On to phase two! Prepare for emergency evacuation or emergency return!” Mitsuha dictated.

Mitsuha warned the crew to prepare for two scenarios. The first was if she jumped back into the aircraft. The second was if she jumped them all back to Earth without returning inside the aircraft. She’d have to do the latter if she failed to jump directly into the aircraft as it moved. There was no danger to the crew in either scenario, but she wanted to prepare them so they didn’t panic when they suddenly ended up back on Earth.

Mitsuha reexamined her own belongings.

Frilly dress? Check! I’m not wearing a flight suit this time. It wouldn’t have worked for this operation.

Blonde wig? Check!

Wireless radio? Check!

Megaphone with a strap? Check! Trying to yell loudly enough for everyone on the windy deck to hear me would destroy my voice.

“Here I go!” Mitsuha said into the mic and took off her headset. “Beam me up!”

It was unlikely anyone heard the last part, minus the few nearest to her—she didn’t say it over the intercom—but she felt like yelling it to go out in style. She thought the older male crew members would appreciate “beam me up” more than “jump” or “warp.”

...Huh?

Mitsuha jumped onto the wrecked deck to find it empty. She was caught off guard at first, but quickly remembered: there was nothing to do on a deck with no mast or sail. Staying inside would be better for conserving food and water. Avoiding sunlight and wind was the wise thing to do.

Guess I’ll just shout.

She clawed her way up to a high spot on the ship and grabbed her megaphone.

“Greetings to the crew of the forty-cannon Vanelian warship, *Aeras*! I am the Envoy of the Goddess! Please listen to what I have to say!”

Huh? No one’s responding. Are they all dead?

Bam!

Mitsuha received her answer when doors and hatches all across the ship swung open and droves of men stampeded out.

“I have a message from the Goddess—”

“OH NO! SHE’S COMING FOR US!!”

Well, yeah, but not in the way you guys are thinking...

“Hey, if she was sent by the Goddess, that means we’re goin’ to ‘eaven!” one of the sailors exclaimed. “Can you guys believe it?! Us! ‘eaven! We’ll be surrounded by the Goddess and all ‘er beautiful babe angels... We all did lotsa bad things, but the Goddess didn’t abandon us!”

“YEEEEAAHHH!” the other sailors cheered.

Hold on, guys. Listen to me. And are all angels thought to be hot babes in this world?!

“HOORAY FOR THE GODDESS! HOORAY FOR THE GODDESS!” they started chanting.

“LISTEN TO ME!” Mitsuha screamed into her megaphone.

The screech of the audio feedback pierced everyone’s ears. The deck finally went quiet.

That’s better.

“I have good news and bad news. I’ll start with the bad news.” The sailors looked up anxiously. “Unfortunately, your admission into heaven was denied!”

“WHAAAAAA?!” the sailors moaned in despair.

Just wait, you guys! You’re gonna like this next part!

“Now for the good news... Rescue ships are on the way. I assure you I will guide them here as quickly as possible. I apologize, but it is not yet your time to go to heaven...”

The sailors stared at her blankly. Their brains probably hadn't processed what she said.

After a short lag...

"HOORAAAAAAAY!" they cheered.

Mitsuha sighed. *It doesn't look like they're gonna listen to me for a while...*

"So, to summarize—you have enough food and water for now, and the hull will be fine unless there's another storm. Is that right?" Mitsuha asked.

"Yes, Holy Messenger!"

Her blonde wig wasn't much of a disguise, so she didn't descend from her spot and didn't let the crew approach her either. She maintained a distance as she spoke to the captain and exchanged information.

I have my megaphone, but it can't be easy for him to yell like that. His voice is probably shot... Actually, he's probably used to shouting. He's been on the sea for decades. I'm sure there are military drills and marching song practices! I saw that in a promotional video for the Japan Self-Defense Forces!

"Very well, I shall go and tell the rescue ships of your position. Stay focused and behave yourselves as men of the sea should. So long!"

With that, she focused her mind on the maritime patrol aircraft overhead... and jumped!

"Mrrnggh!"

There was something stuck in her mouth.

"Gragagagah!" Mitsuha flailed in a panic.

A scholar rushed to remove the object.

“S-Sorry!” he apologized, “I thought there might be some kind of unusual reaction where you teleported from.”

It turned out the scholar had set up his sensor equipment where she jumped from to see if he could detect traces of radiation or a disturbance in gravitational waves. Mitsuha jumped back into her seat in case she appeared without the forward momentum of the aircraft. She landed right in front of the equipment and got a mouthful of the sensor’s antenna.

Hey, calm down. You don’t need to apologize. You were just doing your job. Accidents happen. I’m pretty forgiving of people who work hard. I mean that.

The scholar removed the part that got caught in her mouth, bagged it up in plastic, and put it into a portable refrigerator.

I wonder if I messed up his equipment. Sorry.

Next, they were going to pay a visit to the three rescue ships they’d passed along the way. The ships’ locations, courses, and speeds were already entered on the tactical screen. According to the radar, they could fly straight there in no time. For Mitsuha, though, even that was a waste.

“Warp!”

She jumped the aircraft to Earth and back right to the rescue ships’ estimated locations. Her jump was slightly off, but it wasn’t a problem; there were three signals on the radar. She made sure to position the aircraft at a high enough altitude so the seafarers below couldn’t hear the engine.

“What do you see on the crow’s nest?” Mitsuha asked over the intercom.

The ordinance man—the most skilled of the crew—scanned below with his binoculars. “There is one lookout.”

“Got it. Beginning phase three!” Mitsuha directed before repeating the steps in her head.

Earth, mast, lookout to Earth, lookout to the deck, Earth, mast. I need to do all that before the lookout knows what hit him. Okay, let's do this!

Mitsuha put down her microphone and took off her headset.

“Beam me up!”

“Woah!” the sailor on lookout duty yelped. His panic was understandable. His surroundings shifted from the lookout to the deck in the blink of an eye.

Mitsuha took his place on the crow's nest. *Sweet, I pulled off that chain of jumps perfectly. I didn't accidentally forget him on Earth or anything.*

Her inertia from riding in the maritime patrol aircraft was negated by the jump, so she didn't go flying off the platform when she appeared. She could also maintain her inertia when she appeared. By contrast, it seemed like her jumps could also grant her some kinetic energy. That was what allowed her to jump inside the aircraft without her face smashing into the seat.

...How does all that work, you ask? No idea! Go ask the “thing” that fused a piece of itself to my soul or mind or whatever. I'm not gonna sweat the small stuff.

Mitsuha checked on the flustered lookout from her perch above the mast and grabbed her megaphone.

“It is I!”

The deck was too large and cluttered for the sudden appearance of the lookout to cause a stir. But an unfamiliar girl's voice—one that carried through the strong ocean winds and reverberated to every corner of the ship—was sure to get everyone's attention.

Chaos broke out on the deck. Mitsuha wasted no time getting to the point. She didn't want to give them any time to think she was a devil or a demon and start firing their weapons at her.

"O Brave Sailors. The forty-cannon Vanelian warship *Aeras* is holding strong! Go forth and save your comrades! Veer thirteen degrees starboard to set yourself on the right course!"

"YEEEEAAHHH!" the sailors cried.

"It's the Goddess! The Goddess has appeared to save the crew of the *Aeras*!"

Just the reaction I expected!

Sailors were deeply religious people. Their job put them in a constant sense of helplessness. The deeply mysterious ocean. Violent storms. Unknown sea beasts. Enemy warships. No one could handle facing such threats on a daily basis without praying to a god.

Besides, praying was free—aside from the contributions that miserly churches pestered their believers for. It didn't hurt to give faith a try, and if it brought a man peace of mind, there was no greater bargain. Which was why many sailors were religious.

Staring into the ocean during watch duty at night would turn even the crudest of men religious. The vastness of the ocean, the crashing waves, and the soft blue glow of bioluminescence. All of these things created a fantastical beauty that felt almost ethereal. On top of that, there were the hallucinations sailors saw when they'd sneak some rum or dream of when they nodded off, and the uncertainty whether they were real or not. If that didn't make a person believe in a higher being, they'd be crazy.

...At least, that's what my brother said.

If a girl appeared out of nowhere on the crow's nest and announced herself to be a messenger of the Goddess, the deeply religious sailors were obviously going to do what she said.

Mitsuha didn't know if the captain ordered it or if the helmsman did it on his own, but she felt the ship's bearing change slightly. She pulled out a portable compass. This wasn't the cheap kind; it was an orienteering compass—the cool kind with a fluid-filled housing and a magnifier lens and whatnot attached. *Oh, the soldier boy would probably lose his mind if I gave this to him—no, that's a bad idea. He'd ask me for ten more...*

Mitsuha checked the compass and confirmed that the ship was veering. The crew trusted her.

Oh, they're waving semaphore flags. Let's see... They're saying, "Follow us." Was that really necessary? I'm sure the other ships were already going to follow this one until they arrived at the search area, and then split up to cover their assigned range. The course change was pretty insignificant too. Maybe they were just so excited about receiving an oracle from the Goddess that the flag signaler wanted to do a little hurrah?

Eh, whatever. It doesn't matter.

Oh, are you surprised I can read semaphore? How many naval soldiers do you think I've spoken to by now? Yup, my internal translator seems to treat it as a language too.

Mitsuha's appearance at the wrecked ship and the rescue ships were probably enough to turn their crews into devoted worshippers of the Goddess. The rescue mission was said to be nearly impossible. But if all four ships returned with every crew member as a witness, the higher-ups would have no choice but to acknowledge the miracle.

Actually, now that she thought about it, the superiors were definitely going to use this incident to spread the word that the Vanelian navy had the Goddess's protection, which would raise the kingdom's prestige. It'd be a powerful weapon to wield against the populace and other countries. It could even strengthen the navy's authority over the army and allow them to seize more of the national budget.

I wonder if I've just disadvantaged Marquis Mitchell. He's in an army faction... Well, I had to do it. I'm trying to—slowly but steadily—sow the seed to gain followers. If I gain enough naval sailors who trust the Goddess's oracle, they might ally with our kingdom should a conflict arise.

There's nothing slow and steady about my plan, you say? Whoops.

...Hold on! Will this end up giving the navy more voice than the army? That would lead to an increase in their budget, which would strengthen their military power. Their exploration voyages would become much larger in scale and more frequent. Did I just speed up the arrival of their next fleet to our kingdom? Was this all a huge mistake?! Goddamn it!

Slow down, Mitsuha, she thought as she took some deep breaths. It's not time to panic yet. Breathe in, breathe out...

Anyway, retreat!

"I shall return to give you course adjustment instructions. Do your duty and save your comrades. So long!"

Mitsuha jumped back to the aircraft and appeared in her seat without incident this time. She put on her headset to address the crew.

"Today's mission is complete. As planned, we'll spend the rest of our time surveying," she said. She waited for the captain and pilot to give their

affirmation, and jumped.

The rest of the flight's fuel was going to be spent flying above the Old World, specifically to parts of the continent that the delegation did not travel to. This would enable her to easily jump anywhere on the continent should her duties once again take her out of the country.

The aircraft was cruising at 500 miles per hour. At that pace, it would take only one hour to travel the distance that a carriage covered in 20-27 days going 18-25 miles per day. Her field of vision was also much wider because she was looking down from the sky. It was amazing how much land they would cover in just a few hours.

Let's go, go, go!

The aircraft touched down at the base back on Earth.

"Thank you very much! See you again in two days!"

"We will await your return, Your Highness."

Mitsuha would've felt bad about taking up the crew's time every day, so she settled on flying out once every two days to guide the ships. The day the rescue ships rendezvoused with the wrecked ship was going to be a flight day regardless of the schedule. That was all she needed from the naval base for that day. The mission had already taken long enough, so she decided to go home by jumping. She bowed to the flight crew, the scholars, the base commander, officers, and the diplomat who came to see her off, and jumped.

She expanded her traversal range—wide enough to cover the entire base—to jump any loose hairs and skin cells that were stuck to her seat and anything else she touched. She also did this before the flight by swiftly making successive

jumps to leave nothing behind in the buildings she walked through. Anyone who saw a flicker of her figure probably thought their eyes were playing tricks.

That last jump should've cleared away even the DNA and fingerprints left on her coffee cup.

It's common courtesy to clean up after yourself!

"Noooo, I can't find anything!" A scholar was heard wailing. "There isn't a single molecule left behind on the surface! Is she even a living human being?! What's her body made of?! Is she some kind of fairy?!"

Woeful cries echoed throughout the laboratory that day...

"Thanks for helping me again," Mitsuha said.

It was day two of Mitsuha's "Goddess-Believer Acquisition Plan." Or more accurately, flight number two.

Takeoff went the same as last time. Mitsuha jumped the plane to the previous location of the rescue ships, and they flew toward their estimated location. It would take the maritime patrol aircraft just thirty minutes to travel the distance the sailing ships covered in two days.

The sailing ships' top speed was relatively fast, but they could only achieve it when the winds were favorable. When sailing into a headwind, they had to tack by zigzagging back and forth to maintain their speed through water, which drastically slowed them down. The sailing ships may have been able to travel at their top speed occasionally, but their average speed on the journey was around five or six knots at most.

The aircraft's crew was the same as last time. The navy probably decided it'd be best to assign the same team every time because they were all familiar with the mission. *It's a good thing I decided not to fly every day.*

Mitsuha had it easy as she was a guest. The rest of the crew members likely had to go through a briefing and prepare for each flight, and file a report when they got back. And that was in addition to all the deskwork they had that was unrelated to the flight.

Flying couldn't have been their only job; the officers especially had a lot of other responsibilities. Flying every day would've really inconvenienced them.

They quickly found the rescue ships and flew above them. The aircraft was flying high enough that the sailors wouldn't hear the engine. Not that it would matter if they saw it. They'd probably think it was a heavenly bird carrying the Goddess's envoy.

Damn it, I just realized something. I called myself the Envoy of the Goddess to the wrecked ship's crew, but the rescue ship called me the Goddess... I don't think I introduced myself to the rescue crew, though. In that case, that's their misunderstanding. Envoy of the Goddess is the title I'm going with.

If I'm just an envoy, I can claim that I was originally a human, or that I'm a living human who sometimes runs errands for the Goddess. Having to pretend to be the Goddess would be a pain in the butt, and it wouldn't be long before my cover gets blown. There'd also be a discrepancy if I ever have to mediate between Vanel and the Old World.

"Envoy of the Goddess" has a lot of similarities to the "Lightning Archpriestess." I'll make it work!—Oh, there's the wrecked ship Aeras!

All Mitsuha had to do was follow her routine—descend to the ship, say

something encouraging to lift the crew's morale, and return to the aircraft. She'd already prepared a script.

Mitsuha finished up her job on the *Aeras*. The rescue ships were next.

Beam me u—huh?

Eh, whatever. Beam me up!

She jumped the aircraft above the rescue ships and gave the rescue crew a visit. She made sure to call herself the Envoy of the Goddess this time and gave them a slight course adjustment. She was about to jump back up to the aircraft when she hesitated. Something was bothering her.

One of the scholars was giving me a weird look when I jumped down from the aircraft. It didn't feel like he was trying to watch the moment of my jump... It was more like he was studying my body... Or maybe my posture or my pose. I don't know...

Well, I've already confirmed I can jump into a flying aircraft without getting thrown to the floor, so I'll jump a few feet away from my seat this time.

Beam me up!

Mitsuha appeared in the aircraft to find a curious sight. One scholar had his back turned to her, pointing a stick-like object at her seat where her mouth would've been if she appeared in it. Another scholar was standing behind the seat and holding his hands out in front of his chest.

Mitsuha was facing the scholar who was behind her seat. Naturally, they locked eyes. Neither said anything. Beads of sweat started to form on his forehead.

The air conditioner's working fine, you know.

And you with the suspicious stick. I know you're concentrating on your work, but your coworker is acting really strangely. He's right in front of you, too. You need to notice these things.

Oh well.

Mitsuha tapped him on the shoulder.

No response.

She tapped his shoulder two more times.

"Hey, knock it off. I'm doing something impor...tant..." He turned around.

Dead silence.

Gaah, this is so awkward! Probably more awkward for them than me...

No, Mitsuha! Don't feel bad for them! You're angry right now!

"...What are you doing?" she asked.

No response.

"What are you doing?"

They looked away uncomfortably.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

"We're sorryyy!"

After interrogating them, Mitsuha learned that the scholars weren't acting on orders from above, but were instead going rogue. The one with the stick claimed it really was a coincidence when she landed with the sensor in her face the first time. He thought that he obtained cells from her mouth that day and was thrilled to return to the lab and study superhuman DNA from another

world, but ended up finding nothing on the sensor.

He just couldn't give up and orchestrated a second "coincidence."

Mitsuha was furious. "How in the world could *that* have been a coincidence?!"

The other scholars on the plane averted their eyes, as did the intelligence agents who were on board to handle emergencies, political officers, and everyone else on board. Every single person turned a blind eye. Nobody wanted to end up on the list of people who made her mad. That was an offense they could be fired for.

Wait, why are the intelligence agents staying silent? Shouldn't they be trying to mediate? Isn't that the exact reason they're here?!

"...We're going back!" Mitsuha snapped.

Their plan for the rest of the day was to fly above the New World, but she had had enough. There was always next time, anyway.

"We might be down two people when we return to the other world... Who knows?" she muttered to herself. The two scholars went pale, but she didn't care.

Yeah, you'd better be scared!

Oh, turns out the scholar who was holding out his hands from behind the seat was going to pretend to help me when I appeared with the stick around my mouth, while actually holding me in down in case I put up a fight so the other scholar could collect a sample.

...I sure as hell would put up a fight!

Mitsuha filed a complaint about the incident when they returned to the base and gave strict orders to ban the two scholars from joining any more flights. They weren't bad people, probably. Maybe they were just really passionate about their research. But from Mitsuha's perspective, what they did was an act of hostile betrayal.

This was serious enough for Mitsuha to consider severing relations with this country and reach out to another for assistance. It'd be a pain having to negotiate a deal all over again, and the charts and workflow compiled with them would go to waste. It also wasn't like the country or the military betrayed her, and another country might try something significantly worse. Switching out the collaborator wasn't really an option.

This was one of the more honest countries in the world. Mitsuha would consider the case closed if they just removed those two scholars from the expeditions. She wasn't about to demand any legal punishment, but she made sure they'd pay for their actions by never allowing them to join a research team associated with her again. She also firmly stated that if anything like this happened again, she would never ask the country for help or share any more gifts with them.

The scholars probably let their passion for their research get the better of them but letting them off the hook would just lead others to aim for a second or third "coincidence." Showing kindness would be the worst thing she could do.

They did this to themselves. I'm not gonna feel bad for them.

After a few more trips in the aircraft to help the ships navigate, the day of the actual rescue had finally arrived.

Mitsuha didn't forget to have the crew fly her over the New World. They didn't fly over every inch of the continent—only the important countries that neighbored Vanel. It'd be very helpful should she ever need to meddle in those lands as well.

“Four degrees to the left! The *Aeras* is near!” Mitsuha commanded.

“YEEEEAAHHH!” the sailors cheered.

After dropping by the *Aeras*, Mitsuha went to the lead rescue ship and settled down on the mast right beneath the crow's nest. She got there by world-jumping, not by clawing her way up. She chose to be in the nook under the crow's nest because she wanted the rescue ship's crew to be the first to spot the *Aeras*. That way, the moment would be more dramatic for the whole crowd. Their celebration probably would've been muted if the Envoy of the Goddess spotted it for them.

Mitsuha relayed the course adjustments that she received over radio from the aircraft crew.

It was dusk. The sky was growing dark.

Just as the sun disappeared below the horizon, a glare of light flashed in the sky.

“What's that?!” a sailor shouted.

“Is that the Goddess's light?” another asked.

It was indeed the Goddess's light—commonly known as a flare. A flare attached to a parachute had been dropped from the aircraft. Illuminated against the darkness was the silhouette of...

“It's the *Aeras*! We found the *Aeras*!” the lookout on the crow's nest cried at the top of his lungs. His voice was heard through the entire deck.

“YEEEEAAHHH!”

“HOORAY! HOORAY! HOORAY FOR THE GODDESS!”

Okay, it's time for me to leave!

Disappearing just before the main event felt like something the elegant Envoy of the Goddess would do. That would leave a bigger impact on the ship's crew. When the sailors looked up at where the envoy was sitting just a moment before, they'd see nothing but the sail fluttering in the wind...

Yeah, that's what I'm going for! Jump!

Glowing between the pitch-black sea and sky was the sight of the rescue team boarding the *Aeras* sailors onto their lead ship. Important things like maritime logs and the contents of the safe were also salvaged. The *Aeras* crew would be split up and sent to the other two rescue ships in the morning, but for now, getting them all safely off the *Aeras* was the priority.

“How is the *Aeras*?” the commander of the rescue fleet asked.

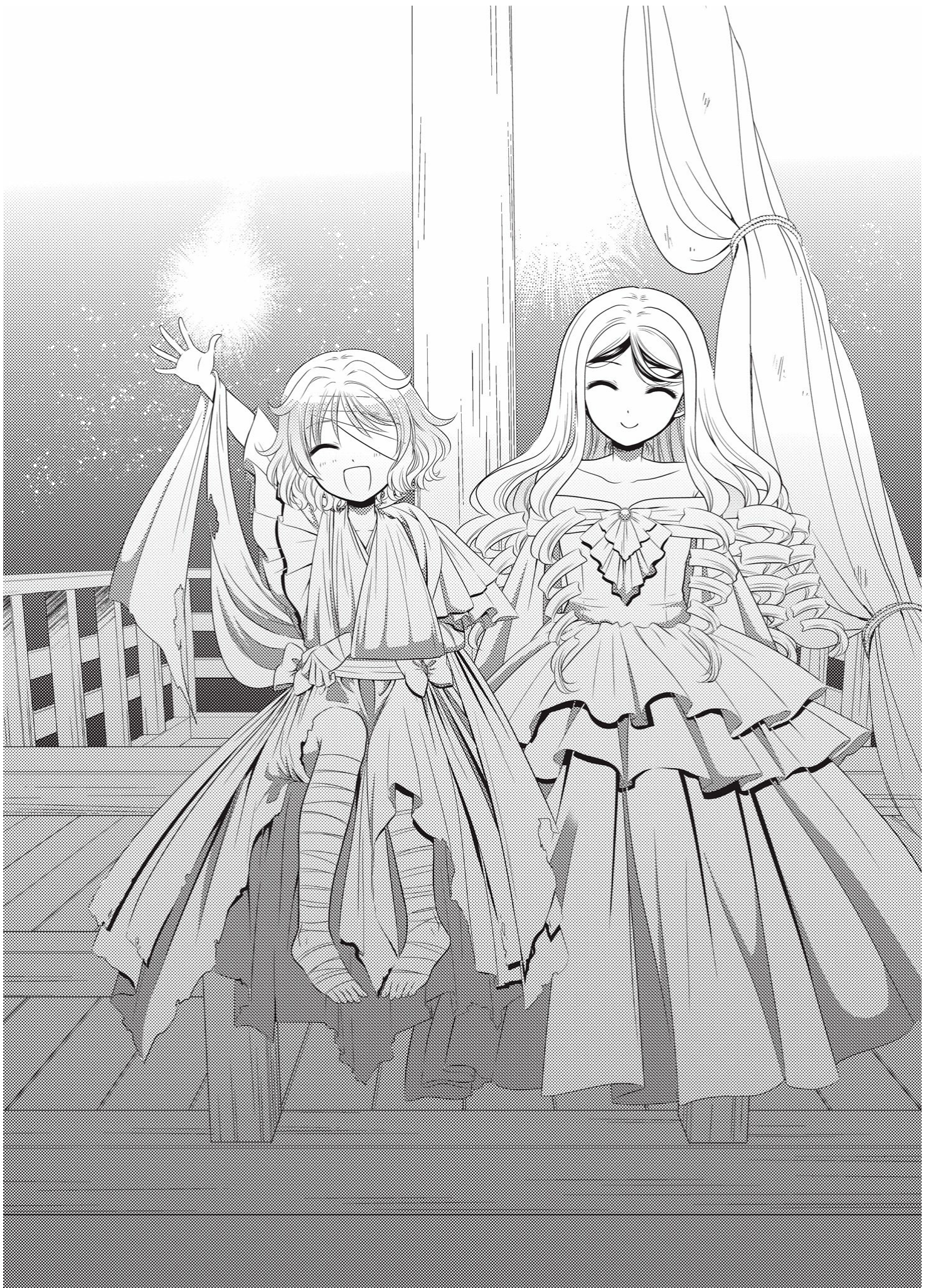
“There is nothing wrong with the keel, sir, but the damage to other areas is significant. Repairing it would cost as much as building a new ship,” answered the captain of the *Aeras*.

“I see. Towing it was going to be difficult anyway. We'll abandon it, then. I'll give the order to scuttle it.”

The captain shook his head. “That won't be necessary. The *Aeras* has already found a home. She will be departing on an eternal voyage with her new master.”

“Huh? What are you saying?”

The *Aeras* captain ignored the commander and, after confirming that all his men had boarded the rescue ship, left the stern and pulled something out of his pocket. He fiddled with it a little, gripped it with his right hand, and pointed it to the sky.



BANG!

A bright orange ray of light shot out of it.

“Wh-What’s that?!”

The captain ignored him again and stared up at the sky. Balls of light like the one that appeared when the rescue ships found the *Aeras* soared into the air and lit up the poop deck of the *Aeras*.

“Whoa... Whoaaa!” the rescue ships’ commander gasped.

Sitting on the roof of the poop deck were two small silhouettes. One was the graceful envoy who gave the captain the divine instrument he just used. The other was a peppy little girl who looked around ten years old. Her clothes were ragged, her left arm was in a cloth sling, and her legs were bandaged. She was waving vigorously with a big grin on her face.

“WHOOOAAA! IT’S AERAS! AERAAAAAS!” the crew of the *Aeras* cheered from the rescue ship deck.

They needed no explanation to understand who the little girl was. She was *Aeras*, the spirit of the *Aeras*.

“AERAS! AERAS! AERAS!”

Then, as the crew of the *Aeras* cheered and the rescue team stared in dumbfounded silence, *Aeras* disappeared—both the spirit and the mastless ship.

“She’s with the Goddess now,” the captain of the *Aeras* explained. “*Aeras* faithfully carried out her duty to the end. She fought for her country. She braved the storm to protect her crew. The Goddess is bestowing her mercy, and as a reward, adopting *Aeras* as her personal envoy.”

This was an immeasurably great honor for both the captain and the spirit of

the ship. *Aeras*'s joy must have been too great to even imagine.

The rescue fleet commander realized tears were streaking down his cheeks. But he didn't feel the least bit embarrassed; if a man couldn't cry now, when could he? There probably wasn't a man within a hundred nautical miles who wasn't shedding tears.

The rescue ships' crew members spent a while savoring the moment before raising sail and beginning the journey home. Their joyful expressions stood in stark contrast to the grim faces they wore when they departed the harbor for the rescue operation.

The captain of the *Aeras* realized that the Goddess's divine instrument had disappeared from his hands, but that didn't surprise him. It was common in myth for items bestowed by gods to vanish after they fulfilled their purpose.

"Heck yeah! It's heavily damaged, but I just scored the latest forty-cannon warship!" Mitsuha cheered, high-fiving Colette. "Good job, Colette!"

"Uh, I don't really know what happened, but that was fun! Tell me if you ever need help with anything like that again!" Colette grinned in her ragged clothes, bandaged legs, and arm sling. Indeed, it looked like she had fun.

People from the fishing village were heading their way in a fishing boat. Mitsuha had arranged for them to tow the *Aeras* to the pier. Jumping the ship too close to the pier would've caused a tidal wave that could hit the village, so she jumped a little off the coast.

It was low tide right now, which meant high tide was coming. And luckily, the wind was blowing toward land. What's more, the chances of the wind blowing toward land in the morning was high because the land would be warmed up by

the sun. Towing the ship to the pier should be manageable.

Even if the wind did change directions and blow toward the ocean, all Mitsuha had to do was jump the ship away. She could take it to the Bozes County harbor where there would be plenty of people and fishing boats to tow it.

The desire to save hundreds of sailors was a part of my motive, of course. But it was also a perfect chance to obtain this world's state-of-the-art warship for free. I earned the sailors' appreciation and got a ship out of it! Jackpot for me!

The captured ships also had forty cannons, but those were the prototypes—the most powerful Vanelian navy ships at the time. By now, they were old and close to being decommissioned, which was why the navy was fine with lending them to the slave trader for his reckless expedition. The *Aeras* was relatively new compared to those.

Navies made more than just giant warships—they also needed cruisers and destroyers. The *Aeras* may have been smaller than the sixty-four-cannon warship, but it was made with the same cutting-edge technology. It'd make a good reference point for their own shipbuilding. Repairing it was going to take as long as building a new ship, but the chance to study a completed ship was worth the hassle. Mitsuha was going to deliver it to Bozes County for research and repair.

I'm gonna negotiate with the king first, though. I want to see how much he's willing to pay for it. I'm not running a charity here.

Mitsuha was the lord of Yamano County, hard as that was for her to believe at times, and she needed to make money for her people. There were a number of development projects she wanted to invest in, including searching for mineral resources and building fishing boats. She also wanted to pay the soldiers who

were on active duty at least a little, if possible.

It's all about the moolah!

Oh, are you wondering why I had Colette play the role of the Aeras's spirit? I thought it would give the sailors' Goddess-encounter story greater impact, and the belief that ships having spirits might make people less willing to decommission them. That'll slow down Vanel's shipbuilding business and the advancements of their technology. Maintaining ships costs a lot of money too, so it's not like expanding their fleet is easy.

Yes... All according to plan.

All right, time to return to the aircraft. It's still circling above the rescue fleet.

Jump!

"What?!" the king of Vanel exclaimed. "The *Aeras* was found, and its entire crew was rescued?!"

"Yes, Your Majesty. Several of the men were swept away by giant waves during the storm while trying to protect the mast, but the rest were all saved," the messenger answered.

"I see... Arrange for unpaid wages and condolence money to be sent to the families of the lost men. If you catch any of the middlemen trying to pocket the money, severely punish them."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The king was overjoyed by his messenger's report. Hundreds of sailors had been saved from a ship that was almost certain to be lost forever. There were officers from the nobility on that ship.

The king wasn't a bad man. At least, not toward his own people. The citizens of enemy nations and the small countries he exploited likely saw him as a monstrous villain. That was only part of his duty as a king, however, and had nothing to do with his moral character. He worked very hard to improve the lives of his citizens, even if that involved disadvantaging people from other lands. His people couldn't blame him for that.

"Was the ship scuttled?" the king asked.

The messenger hesitated to answer. The king had expected a simple "yes."

"Well, was it?" he pressed. "The ship couldn't have been close enough to land to tow it. Are you hiding something?!" The king jumped out of his chair, sensing the messenger's suspicious behavior. "Answer me! Withhold no details!"

The messenger had no choice but to tell the king what happened, no matter how unbelievable the truth was.

"T-The *Aeras* is gone. B-But it is in the heavens, not the bottom of the ocean. The, uh, Holy Envoy delivered it to, um, the Goddess's land!"

"...What?" The king was dumbfounded. There was a long stretch of silence before he managed to speak again. "Are you out of your mind?"

The messenger was no common foot soldier—he was a navy admiral. That made it all the more outrageous to hear him mention the "Goddess" and a "Holy Envoy" in his formal report to the king. The Goddess was part of Vanel's national religion, so that wasn't too shocking on its own. It was his claim that the *Aeras* was "in the heavens" that was truly baffling.

"Do you mean to say that the *Aeras* disappeared before everyone's eyes?" the king questioned.

"That is precisely what happened, Your Majesty."

“Wha?!”

The admiral told the whole story from the beginning. The king was unable to believe the report, so he summoned the captain of the *Aeras* and the commander of the rescue fleet, but their accounts were the same. He then summoned and questioned navigators, boatswains, and even petty officers, but all of their testimonies were consistent. Rumors of the event were spreading like wildfire among the navy, the army, and the general populace.

That was inevitable. Over a thousand crew members from four ships were telling the same miraculous tale throughout the port town, and all who heard it were retelling it to everyone they knew as well.

“The Goddess will save righteous ships and their crew.” No one would be disadvantaged by the spread of this claim. The crew members of the *Aeras* had suddenly become the men of the hour.

“Mwahaha, it’s all going according to plan...” Mitsuha cackled.

The story of the *Aeras* continued to spread, and its former crew members were being invited to parties all over the country. They were in such great demand that the lower nobles even invited officer cadets and boatswains to their parties. This led to the rumors spreading on an even larger scale. The tale grew in the telling as the crewmen shared it again and again, and they even convinced themselves that their embellished version was what actually happened.

Furthermore, the claim that the spirit of the *Aeras* was a little girl led many sailors throughout the navy to believe that their slightly older ships must be sixteen-or seventeen-year-old girls. The crews of ships that were scheduled to

be decommissioned soon begged for remodeling to extend their ship's life, bewildering some of the higher-ups. Most of the higher-ups were former sailors who grew up loving ships, however, and the same went for the naval architects and shipbuilders. There was no way they were going to stay quiet after learning that the vessels they poured their hearts into possessed souls and even took the form of young girls.

Demands for refurbishing old, broken-down ships grew. Plans for building new ones were looking to be canceled. People who worked with ships for a living traveled to naval ports to visit all the ships they had a hand in creating, causing naval affairs to stagnate.

Heh heh heh, all according to plan, Mitsuha thought. Consider the navy's power diminished. Now I need to siphon away the extra money that was meant for the shipbuilding budget to prevent it from being spent on research and whatnot that might improve the country. I'll take that in the form of gold coins, please.

Actually, Vanelian gold coins don't have a lot of gold content, so ingots would be better. I can just convert the coins to gold. I'll also sell products that have absolutely no value beyond their immediate use and therefore won't contribute to this country's technological or industrial development. Mwahaha!

Vanelian high society and the political world were in a frenzy over the *Aeras*, and the financial world was a mess dealing with the cutback of shipbuilding projects. This would be a major blow to the trade, and many skilled craftsmen would lose their jobs and be forced to make a career change. Regaining valuable personnel and technology wouldn't be easy. The future of the Vanelian shipbuilding industry would be bleak.

Vanel apparently had the strongest navy in this part of the world, but that

could change when the second or third strongest country caught up. The kingdom would also have less leeway to take risks like sending out research fleets—a costly investment that had no guarantee of success. Mitsuha hoped so, anyway.

I'm gonna pass on spending any time in Vanelian high society for a while, she made a mental note. It's pretty hectic right now. Besides, it'd be a good idea to stay away while the Aeras's sailors are being invited to parties. I was disguised in a blonde wig, I didn't let anyone get close to me, and I made sure to only speak through the megaphone, but it's best to be safe. I'll tell Micchan's family that I'm gonna spend some time traveling in other nearby countries.

Yup, I'm laying off the New World for now!

“What?! Viscountess Yamano isn’t scheduled to attend any new parties?!”

The king had his own plan for forging a connection with Mitsuha, who’d been continually avoiding him. His plan was to corner her by showing up at a party unannounced and forcing his way in. No sponsor would reject a visit from the king, no matter how sudden.

The *Aeras* incident had thrown the kingdom into a state of frenzy and, at the same time, a diplomatically favorable situation. It allowed Vanel to proclaim they had the favor of the Goddess and get aggressive. This was as good a situation as ever to initiate talks with countries they didn’t have much exchange with.

The king had already played out his interaction with Mitsuha in his head: He’d approach her in the guise of an ordinary noble and get her to open up. Once he earned her trust, he’d reveal himself as the king of Vanel. Mitsuha would be

embarrassed and horrified by her impolite behavior to His Royal Majesty, but at the same time think, “What an approachable and thoughtful king for taking the time to connect with the nobles.” The positive impression would lead her to trust him and then share details about her home country.

The chancellor was astounded by the stupidity of the plan, but it wasn’t like its failure would cause any major damage or international scandals. As such, he’d responded with a simple “I see...” to avoid incurring the king’s displeasure. But just when the king was about to put his plan into action, the chancellor reported that Mitsuha wouldn’t be attending any functions.

“What do you mean? Is she ill?” the king asked.

The chancellor checked with Marquis Mitchell—who was rumored to be managing Viscountess Yamano’s party plans—to find out. The answer he got was, “She’s currently traveling abroad.”

“What?!” cried the king. “We can’t let other countries establish diplomatic relations with her first! Why did the marquis let her get away?!”

Despite his complaints, detaining a visitor from a foreign country and preventing them from leaving without reason wasn’t an option. Especially not if they were nobility or royalty—that would lead to diplomatic trouble. The king’s foolish plan was why they were at a disadvantage in the first place.

“There is nothing we can do...” the chancellor responded. “She left her commodity shop intact. It seems she simply went abroad for a bit of sightseeing. It’d actually be strange if she traveled all this way from her homeland only to settle down in one country and never leave it. I don’t believe there is any reason to worry yet.”

“Hmm, you have a point... No matter. Our country has the favor of the

Goddess. No country will dare to ignore or oppose us. Hahaha!” the king laughed, ignoring the chancellor’s use of the word “yet.”

The chancellor didn’t say anything, but in his heart, he was shrugging his shoulders.

Chapter 54:

Puzzling Prosperity

Having finished her business in Vanel for the time being, Mitsuha decided to check on Earth and Sabine Kingdom. *Uh... What's the official name of that kingdom again?*

Mitsuha had been frequenting her house in Japan, making sure to check her mail and greet her neighbors regularly to show them she was doing just fine. There were no problems there.

She didn't have to worry about responding to emails at the captain's base either—she'd publicly announced that she used a lot of life force while getting revenge for the abduction, so she wouldn't be coming to Earth any time soon. She also told them that she didn't want to waste any more of her life force, so the next time someone attempted to harm her she'd annihilate their country in one blow. No more holding back.

The captain retorted, "How in the world were you holding back last time?!" but Mitsuha ignored him. *Hmph, I have first-class certification in the art of ignoring!*

Next, Mitsuha paid a visit to her gallery café, Gold Coin. She arrived in the evening—which would be their busiest time on a weekday—and took a peek through the window.

Wow, there's way more customers than I expected! Why, though? Don't get

me wrong—I'd rather this place be bustling and turning a profit than be perpetually deserted, but I wasn't even thinking of making money when I started this place.

I mean, I hired a thirteen-year-old girl whose only cooking experience was making food for the other children at her orphanage and a weird seventeen-year-old girl whose selling points were self-defense martial arts and "good core stability so I'll be able to move through a crowd without bumping into people. I can do waitress-like things...probably." It would've been delusional to have any expectations. Neither girl is particularly affable, either. I didn't think they'd be too popular with customers. So why the heck is...

Oh well, it's not like Rudina's a terrible cook. I guess a cozy space with cheap and decent food is more than enough to attract a good chunk of customers. Will this place actually be profitable even after paying the necessary expenses and wages?

Hell yeah! I didn't expect the café to make money right away without the help of the gallery portion! Those two must be working really hard for their ten percent share of the gains...

Guess I'll go inside.

Mitsuha had repeatedly requested her two employees to treat her like an ordinary customer when she visited. She didn't want to disrupt their work while they were busy, and it might frustrate other customers to see her get special treatment.

There was also a safety concern. People probably assumed that, while the manager and waitress were very young women, the owner was an adult. If word spread that the owner was a little girl too, the place would be targeted by delinquents and gangs.

Mitsuha opened the café near a police station and networked with the officers—gift in hand—to combat that risk. Such a practice was not yet considered a problem in this country. Police officers and soldiers were treated as respectable public servants who endangered themselves to serve the country and its people. No one had an issue with giving them donations or gifts.

Now that she thought about it, however, she probably didn't have to do that. The police had likely been given special orders by the government to look out for the café. The country's leaders authorized Mitsuha to be tax-exempt and did background checks on prospective employees; there was no way they weren't also taking measures to keep her café safe. It was even possible they'd stationed lookouts around the café.

However, if a customer suddenly got violent or pulled a weapon to steal the scant amount of money in the register, the girls would have no way to stop them. Mitsuha had ordered them to just hand over the money without protest in such a scenario—although that would risk the café of becoming an ATM for the robbers to raid every day.

To counter that, Mitsuha installed security cameras everywhere to make local criminals think twice before trying anything. The cameras wouldn't prevent crime entirely, but she'd be able to use the footage to identify and punish any perpetrators later. Their friends, their organization, and anyone else the money passes through will be destroyed. Any leaders of the criminal organizations she hounded down would be on the verge of tears as they ordered their henchmen to never mess with the café again.

That ought to keep the café and my employees safe.

Kli-li-ling!

The door chime rang as Mitsuha stepped in. Sylua—the waitress—glanced over

and quickly went back to her chore without batting an eyelid.

Restaurants in Japan welcomed every customer that walked in with a set phrase, but that wasn't the custom in this country. The door chime already clearly announced the arrival of a new customer to the employees, and a needless greeting would just attract unwanted attention from the other diners. That was how people thought around here. Mitsuha tried to teach Rudina and Sylua the world-renowned Japanese hospitality, but the girls overruled her.

Well, when in Rome, and all that. I'll leave it to their judgment.

Mitsuha picked the corner seat at the counter. She wasn't audacious enough to occupy an entire table when the café wasn't empty. *Ahh, corners are always nice.*

She opened the menu. "A Venn diagram...?"

The first page had a picture of three overlapping circles—one of those charts you learned in school that help visualize the relationships between multiple groups. There were three colored circles in this Venn diagram: a red circle labeled "Cheap," a blue circle labeled "Healthy," and a yellow circle labeled "Large Portions." Names of dishes were listed in each area, and details about each dish were written on the next page. They really thought this through.

Toast, pasta, curry... Nice. Those are staples of any café.

Rice porridge, dumpling soup, steamed potatoes... Uhh... Hm. I wonder if those are what she made at the orphanage.

Fried rice, pizza... Didn't Rudina say she's only good at low-cost dishes that you can make in large batches?—wait, are these frozen foods?!

Oh well, frozen foods are pretty good nowadays, and frozen fried rice is especially tasty if you heat it on the stove instead of in the microwave...

“Can I please have the rice porridge and a croquette, and a black tea after my meal?” She placed her order when Sylua came over with a glass of water.

Rice-based meals were rare in the other world, and cooking rice at home wasn't easy. It didn't cook properly if you only made one cupful; two cups would've been way too much, which Mitsuha would've had to store in the freezer. She often ended up buying two or three small ready-made side dishes at the supermarket when they went on sale. She rarely ate rice anymore. Rice out of the freezer just wasn't worth it.

“I got an owner! One rice porridge, one croquette, and black tea!” Sylua called out.

“Got it!” Rudina shouted from the kitchen.

Rudina cooked the easy dishes behind the counter, but she went to the kitchen in the back to cook meals that required shaking a skillet, flambéing a pan, or using a large pot for soups, curry, and stew. At least, that was what she wanted customers to think—in reality, she was heating prepackaged foods.

There probably aren't any customers who expect serious cooking from a small restaurant managed by a little girl, but she can't shatter a man's fantasy of enjoying a woman's cooking. She even modified the microwave so it wouldn't beep.

By the way... What are these four tiny holes on the counter in front of me? Mitsuha thought. They were spaced about a quarter of an inch apart in a perfectly straight line. And they were a dark reddish black color.

She studied the holes with concern.

It wasn't long before Sylua brought over the food. “Thank you for waiting,” said the soft-spoken waitress. Rice porridge and croquettes were relatively

quick to make.

Can't she show a little more enthusiasm when she's serving? She's so expressionless... Eh, never mind. The number of customers here suggests it's not a problem.

Just as Mitsuha picked up her fork to dig into the croquette, a thought popped into her mind. She held the prongs of her fork over the four small holes in the counter.

They match perfectly... But why are they that color? Even the insides of the holes...

That line of thought took Mitsuha's mind to some scary places, so she stopped herself. It was only then that she realized Sylua used a code to signal to Rudina who the order was for: "I got an owner!" instead of the usual, "I got an order!"

That's hardly code at all!

Mitsuha eyed her porridge. "This is...a lot of food..." It was probably the portion Rudina always wished she could eat when she lived at the orphanage. She could see why it was located in the center of "Large Portions," "Cheap," and "Healthy" on the Venn diagram.

Rice porridge is relatively healthy, but definitely not at this volume. Advertising this as healthy is questionable...

Mitsuha tried a spoonful. It was better than she expected, and it didn't seem like they were spending much money on ingredients. They could definitely make a profit even at its low price.

Good job, Rudina! Though she probably just added a couple ingredients to the recipe she used at the orphanage...

Mitsuha finished the tasty meal and paid.

“That was delicious. Keep up the good work!” she said as she accepted her change.

For a second, it looked like Sylua’s cheeks spasmed.

“Wow, Sylua just smiled!” a customer nearby whispered. “That’s only the second time I’ve seen it!”

“It’s my first time... Man, I’m impressed you realized that was a smile...” another man said.

Mitsuha was amazed.

Why, you ask? For three reasons! I’m shocked that the spasm was a smile. I’m shocked that those customers knew it was a smile. And I’m shocked that Sylua barely ever smiles in the first place! I figured she was just nervous around her boss. I never imagined it was just her default look.

Mitsuha looked back toward the counter and saw that Rudina had emerged from the kitchen. She was probably going to spend some time cooking at the counter next. She smiled at Mitsuha and bowed slightly.

At least Rudina knows how to be friendly with customers.

“OH MY GOD! That’s a real smile from Rudina! Not the usual forced one!” someone else gasped.

Huh?! Rudina usually fakes her smiles?! How can that customer even tell the difference?!

...Whatever. I guess it means the girls have fans. I sure hope they’re not stalkers...

Mitsuha turned around to leave, and noticed four small holes in the wooden

door that were spaced a quarter of an inch apart in a straight line. She looked around and found the same holes in two more places around the door.

That's ominous... I'll come back next time after hours to ask about them. Maybe they have something they want to talk to me about. I said I'd leave the café to them, but I might've been way too laissez-faire.

All right. Before I go home, I'm gonna take a walk to see how the other restaurants in the area are doing. Maybe the food businesses here are always thriving.

That turned out not to be the case. It was evening, so there were a good number of customers in the nearby restaurants that had decent food and prices, but none of them were packed like Gold Coin. Those restaurants had young waitresses too, and Mitsuha couldn't imagine that the unfriendly Sylua and the bosom-less Rudina were any more adept at drawing customers than them.

So why was the brand-new Gold Coin so popular? They weren't even doing much to advertise.

It was a mystery.

"Oh..."

Mitsuha went to the captain's place to check her emails and paused when she found one from a certain country that read:

"We would like to use our tickets for a trip to the other world."

Yikes, I forgot all about that! I totally gave two tickets each to the countries that won the rite of tribute at the first and second World-to-World Meetings... This email is from the first country. They must've been saving it for the right

moment.

But if that's true, I wonder why they decided to redeem it now. It's right after the war and my announcement that I won't be coming to Earth for a while... Oh, it's fine. They're doing some favors for me—analyzing plants and animals and whatnot. And the diplomat is a good person. I'll contact them.

I'm going right back to the other world after this, so it doesn't matter that this email will tell them I'm here. I don't think this country would get any dangerous ideas, anyway. I'm alone, too; I won't have to worry about Sabine's and Colette's safety. I'll be fine as long as they don't try to kill me instantly with a long-range snipe or a bomb.

...I sure hope I didn't just speak that into reality.

"It is a pleasure to meet you." The young bureaucrat bowed. He was in his late thirties—that was young for someone in his position.

Standing next to him was a short man with white hair and a white beard. Apparently, he was the king of the small country.

I'm a pro at dealing with kings by now. There's no reason to get flustered.

"I apologize for saddling you with an old man like me," the king said. "I wanted to send someone young for the sake of our country's future, but everyone insisted that I go." He was surprisingly humble.

Mitsuha had asked the diplomat in advance why they chose to use their tickets now after she announced she wouldn't be coming back to Earth for a while. He would've risked incurring her displeasure by refusing to answer, so he told her the truth: the king didn't have much time left.

The elderly king looked chipper for his age, but he was ill. His subjects wanted

him to form one last memory while he still had the energy.

I'd need a heart of stone to turn that down!

"I tried again and again to give up my spot to someone who has more time to make use of the experience," the king repeated, "but everyone insisted I go."

He didn't seem to know that Mitsuha was aware of his illness. If he wasn't going to bring it up, Mitsuha would feign ignorance. That felt like the right thing to do.

"Okay, let's get going... Jump!"

"Wow! So this is the other world..." The king was awed.

"It doesn't look much different from our country..." The bureaucrat sounded underwhelmed.

Mitsuha jumped them to Yamano County, which did feel like the countryside of a small developing country. It had mountains, a coastline, sprawling fields, farming villages, and a fishing village. There was also a little town in the middle of a narrow plain. That was pretty much it.

The town's small enough for most people to consider it a village, but it's technically a town and the official capital of Yamano County... Don't make me say that twice! It's embarrassing!

"Welcome, Your Majesty!"

"Welcome to Yamano County!"

"Wow..." The king was stunned at what he saw as he walked down the main road.

The villagers were waving small flags and greeting him from both sides. They

were the flag of the king's country, mass produced by printing them on copy paper and gluing them to chopsticks. She also had each of the villagers memorize a greeting phrase. The old man seemed to appreciate the gesture.

He's the king of the country that gave me the small rowing boats, so I thought he'd prefer a more modest welcome over a lavish banquet. This is way less expensive too!

Mitsuha led the king to her county residence as he waved back to the villagers. Everyone who attended the World-to-World Meetings knew about this world's technological level, and it wasn't surprising to see modern-day Earth's gadgets around her county. Plus, the king and the bureaucrat couldn't communicate with anyone from this world without her to interpret, so there was no risk of them learning anything she didn't want them to. There was nothing to hide.

The Yamano County residence was the first stop of the tour. It was an old-fashioned building, but it had a solar and propane power system and running water. *The water just comes from a water tower. Water for my general store is replenished by an electric pump, but here I have people carry it from a well. This would provide safe, strength-building jobs for my village. Even a child who's lost their family breadwinner could do it. There are more important things than cutting labor costs.* The wireless radio system she had in her home looked quite out of place for this era of civilization. The two guests knew Mitsuha was knowledgeable about Earth's technology, though, so that shouldn't surprise them.

After the relatively boring residence tour, Mitsuha took them to the fishing harbor.

"Wow. Would you look at that..." the king said.

Mitsuha had instructed the fishermen to do seine fishing that day. And the reason for that was...

“Those are the boats we gave you as a gift!”

The two boats his country gave Mitsuha were being used to cast the fishing nets. The boats were the reason they won this trip, and they were performing wonderfully as the lead. The sight was surely filling him with joy.

The king and the bureaucrat’s eyes then drifted to the *Aeras*, which was moored at the floating pier.

“Uh...” Mitsuha sweated.

Yeah, that clearly contradicts my description of this world... There’s no way we’d need small fishing boats if we already had a big sailing ship like that. Whoops...

“W-We found that recently!” she said.

“You found it?” the two men said.

Wow, they’re in perfect sync!

“Y-Yes, we found it drifting at sea. It was unmanned.”

She wasn’t lying. The sailors had already evacuated the ship when Mitsuha jumped it to the harbor. Besides, it was beaten up and clearly not in any condition to sail.

They stared at the ship in silence.

Mitsuha continued the tour. The king was treated as a state guest—or a county guest—everywhere they went, and they finished the day with dinner at the residence. To make the meal feel otherworldly, she chose rare dishes for the course, including horned-rabbit steak, ginger orc, simmered anomalocaris, and

deep-fried hallucigenia. The king seemed to enjoy the horned rabbit, and muttered something about breeding them for their meat, pelts, and horns to manufacture local specialty goods.

Oh yeah, I gifted them a breeding pair of horned rabbits. Those mean little buggers are hyper reproductive and aggressive. Please don't let them escape and destroy Earth's ecosystem.

Mitsuha was the only one at the dinner who spoke their language, so she spent the entire time talking to them. The king and the bureaucrat were good people, but they knew this trip could benefit their country; they occasionally threw in intense negotiation offers during the amicable conversation.

“Would you like our country to help with repairing that sailing ship? We'll send you shipwrights. You can pay us with gold, jewels...or perhaps samples of this world's plants and animals,” the bureaucrat made his move.

“Hmm, that is a good idea. It'd be challenging for a country with no sailing experience to make sailcloth and rigging from scratch,” the king completed the combo shot.

“To my knowledge, your country doesn't have the technology to build large sailing ships,” Mitsuha countered.

Even today, only wealthy countries had the ability to build and operate large sailing ships—Japan, England, the United States, Russia, Germany, Poland, Mexico, Norway, the Netherlands, and some cities and local governments. You might think that developing countries still relied on sailing ships, but that wasn't the case. Instead, they bought old destroyers from the World War II era for the price of scrap iron.

Well, those are probably decommissioned by now. Regardless, building sailing

ships required skilled engineers with knowledge of the traditional craft, and because they had no use in combat, only wealthy countries would have the time and money for such luxuries. That meant the king was planning to poach engineers from other countries to do the work for them.

Mitsuha glared at them, and they shifted uncomfortably. Silence stretched.

Eh, I guess that's fine. Subcontracting and sub-subcontracting are a part of business. It's a necessary system, and there's not really anything bad about it. I prefer to cut out the middleman and directly hire the company that will actually do the work, though. Having too many people in the middle can muddle your intentions, create too many obstacles, and increase expenses.

The king and the bureaucrat also asked if Mitsuha needed any agricultural help or if she wanted any weapons from them. They were probably just trying to sell off obsolete weapons that were collecting dust in their warehouses. It was also entirely possible they were making the offer with no ulterior motives, and genuinely thought those weapons were the best choice for this country. New weapons would be more expensive and difficult to maintain. Judging an M-1 Garand to be more suitable for a developing society than an M16 rifle was perfectly reasonable.

Mitsuha initially dodged those proposals, but after hearing them out and taking some time to consider, she decided three of their offers were worth accepting. The deals would be with just Yamano County, though, and not her country.

They seemed disappointed when they saw how advanced Yamano County's salt-making equipment was; they must've wanted to make inroads into the salt market.

Mwahaha, my homeland Japan has the best salt-making technology in the

world! There are more advanced methods out there, but the one I've implemented is feasible with this world's technology and we're producing salt at a fast enough pace to make a sufficient profit. There'd be no merit in introducing a system that requires constant support from Earth.

They spoke late into the night and decided to save the rest for the next day.

On day two of the otherworld tour, Mitsuha took the king and the bureaucrat to the capital. A tour of nothing but boring rural landscapes would've been a bummer.

She chanted a spell to set the mood and... "Jump!" she shouted, taking them to Mitsuha's General Store—or the Yamano capital residence, as she now called it.

The pre-jump incantation was to spread the false idea that she needed time to prepare her magic. That would increase her chances of catching any assailants off guard. This was the kind of precaution that was necessary to ensure her own safety.

"Here is my residence in the capital city. It's also a shop."

She chose to appear in front of the store counter on the first floor. She wasn't going to let them upstairs because the third floor was her private room, and turning off the security system would've been a pain in the ass. The first floor looked just like an ordinary general store from rural Earth, so she took them outside without explaining anything.

"Wow..." the king gasped.

The streets didn't look much different from a rural European town, but it was differentiated by the adventurers—no, mercenaries and soldiers—walking around

with swords on their hips and the dried orc heads hanging from the eaves of a nearby butcher's shop. *It's sort of like the pigs' heads that are sold at the Makishi Public Market in Okinawa. They sell them by the "kin"—some sort of measurement of weight. How the heck is anyone supposed to know how much a "kin" weighs?!*

The street had enough of an otherworldly vibe to make the king and bureaucrat ogle around in amazement. A frail old man gawking like a tourist would normally be targeted by local delinquents, but he was perfectly safe as long as Mitsuha was close by. No one in the capital would pick a fight with her—actually, that went for anyone in the kingdom who heard of her.

Mitsuha guided them around the capital, taking them to famous sites and her favorite restaurants. The king and the bureaucrat looked like they were having fun, but she occasionally noticed them sharply observing their surroundings. They were probably trying to find things in this world that would benefit their country.

Oh, it's almost noon. She should be here any minute now—"There she is!"

It was Sabine. The young princess appeared to be walking alone, but there were, in fact, multiple guards tailing her. Sabine was low in the line of succession, which meant no one had any reason to kill her and risk sending the king and Mitsuha into a rage. It was much more likely for her to get kidnapped. Considering that, it was okay for her guards to be several yards away.

...At least, I think. I'm no expert. The king's not dangling Sabine as bait to flush out enemies, is he? I can't imagine him doing that. Well, regardless, laying so much as a finger on her would risk suffering the full wrath of my revenge. No one's gonna try anything.

"Okay, let's go!"

The king and bureaucrat were getting a tour of the royal palace with Sabine as their guide. While they were there, Mitsuha figured her two guests may as well meet the king of Zegleus. Being able to say they met the king of Mitsuha's country should give them a big advantage over other countries on Earth. They wouldn't actually gain anything from the experience, but if they could convince the rest of the world they did, it'd strengthen their country's position. She also wanted to prove to the visiting king's citizens that they made the right choice by sending him on the trip instead of a scholar or another young bureaucrat. She could claim that her king would not have agreed to meet with a couple of commoners.

I could've entered the royal palace and shown them around without Sabine, but she really wanted to give the tour. I made an appointment with my king, of course. It would've been impudent of me to show up unannounced with another country's king.

Referring to both of them as "the king" is gonna get confusing... I'll call my king "His Majesty" to differentiate. The king I invited from Earth is just "the king."

"This is Princess Sabine, the third princess of our country. She's here to escort us to the royal palace," Mitsuha introduced.

"How wonderful! I cannot imagine a greater honor than being escorted by a lovely young princess."

Sabine didn't understand what he said, but she curtsied in thanks. She probably inferred the meaning from his attitude and tone. She always knew how to behave on formal occasions like this. When she engaged "princess mode," it was difficult to believe she was the same girl who lazed around and acted like a spoiled child at Mitsuha's General Store.

That just goes to show how comfortable she is around me... It's a happy thought.

The plan was for Sabine to show the king and the bureaucrat around the palace and then meet His Majesty for lunch. Mitsuha informed His Majesty she was having a guest—a king from a country near her homeland—come to visit her, and he insisted she invite him over to the royal palace. His Majesty initially wanted to throw a lavish welcome party, but Mitsuha talked him down to a humble lunch and informal tea party. He then tried to convince Mitsuha to at least let him throw a dinner banquet, but she rejected that, saying she didn't want to deal with all the nobles.

Who do you think is going to be stuck playing interpreter for everyone the whole freakin' night?! No thank you, not me!

After the tour, it was time for lunch. The king and the bureaucrat couldn't speak to anyone from this world without Mitsuha to interpret. There was no risk of anyone learning something she didn't want them to. She ended up spending the meal conveying His Majesty's jovial small talk and stories of Mitsuha's accomplishments in this country, leaving out or heavily altering anything that would inconvenience her.

I guess you could say it was a fun time.

Once they finished eating, they met with His Majesty's family (minus his oldest son who was away), Chancellor Saar, and three ministers.

...I don't remember anyone saying this tea party would be used for setting up trade between the two countries, or that I would mediate for them. So why are they trying to steer the conversation in that direction?

I mean, I get it. Of course both sides have their ulterior motives. They're both

very enthusiastic about setting up diplomatic relations. But I don't like how this is going. A lowly viscountess normally wouldn't be able to interfere with a conversation between two kings, but this is hardly a normal situation.

"That agreement is a nice idea, but who's going to carry all that equipment?" Mitsuha asked the king.

"Uh..."

"And Your Majesty, the machinery is complex and will break down without regular maintenance. Who's gonna fix it if something goes wrong?"

"Uh..."

"You won't be able to read each other's contracts, anyway."

The kings both fell silent, looking defeated.

Sweet, I won!

Now they won't be able to negotiate without me—wait, what am I saying? Their talks can't get anywhere without me interpreting anyway. Sabine and Colette can speak a little English, but I doubt they'd betray me. Besides, exchange between the two countries would be impossible without my world-jumping power. If His Majesty starts making ridiculous demands, I can leave this country and settle down elsewhere. He knows that, so there's no chance he'll do something to upset me.

I might end up having to flee anyway if someone stages a coup and usurps the throne... Hopefully that won't happen.

The tea party came to an end.

"That was so much fun." The king sighed in satisfaction.

Huh? It was? Meeting the ruler of a country in a less developed world doesn't

exactly gain anything for his country. I was worried he'd be bored. He did look like he was having fun at the lunch and tea party, but I thought he was just being polite.

Mitsuha set up this meeting because His Majesty demanded it after learning of the king's visit, and because she wanted to boost the king's prestige by giving him the accomplishment of having spoken to a king from another world. His Majesty was a good man, but it was hard to believe a conversation with a stranger from a totally different culture would be any fun when you had to rely on an interpreter.

"Yes, it was," the bureaucrat nodded. "This trip was like traveling back to our country as it was decades ago... I'm sure this has been nostalgic for you, Your Majesty."

"Indeed, it has. The king of this country worries and suffers over the same issues that I've had. It takes me back to the days of my youth."

Mitsuha had heard that the king inherited the throne at a young age. At the time, his country was so poor and had so few resources it could hardly even be said to be developing. There were many places on Earth even just forty or fifty years ago that lacked electricity, gas, and sufficient water. Actually, that was probably still true today.

Mitsuha researched all the leaders of the smaller, earnest developing countries before she selected which ones would attend the first World-to-World Meeting, including this king's. She learned that he took the throne in his mid-twenties and had spent his rule suffering an endless string of hardships. He'd had to deal with famine and starvation caused by droughts and crop failures, an epidemic, and political pressure from neighboring countries that were backed by major powers.

Swap out the swords for bolt-action firearms, and this country probably looked just like his did in the past. Seeing it must've felt nostalgic to him.

The king had devoted his life to his country and his citizens, and now that his humble nation was finally stepping up to join the fourth-rate nations, his death was approaching. Decades of stress had probably made him look much older than he really was, and now, he was suffering from the same endemic disease that had taken so many of his citizens' lives.

I pray that he catches the attention of a god and gets reincarnated in another world with special abilities so he can live for himself instead of other people...

"Okay, the tour is almost over. We'll finish with the customary 'souvenir-shopping' time. You're free to walk around as you wish," Mitsuha said.

They wouldn't technically be free to roam about because Mitsuha still had to follow them around for their safety and to interpret, but she was going to let them choose where to go.

The lunch and tea party both ended up going long, so they only had two or three hours until the stores closed at sunset. Having to interpret every conversation took up a lot of time.

"This is for you." Mitsuha took a drawstring pouch out of her pocket and took out some coins, then split them up between the king and the bureaucrat. "This is the local currency. I gave both of you five silver coins. One silver coin is worth about ten dollars... Meat and vegetables are cheap, and tools and clothes are ridiculously expensive. Handicrafts and other types of art are all over the place. Think about your choices carefully and buy whatever you like."

"...What's this, an allowance? Is there a two-dollars-and-fifty-cents max cap on the snacks?!" The king was grinning cheek to cheek.

The bureaucrat was smiling too. *Did I remind them of their childhoods or something?*

Mitsuha gave them ten silver coins combined—which was worth about one hundred dollars—to prevent them from buying anything too significant. It could cause her problems if they splurged and brought home a veritable trove of unique items from this world. She'd essentially given them a child's allowance, but they'd have to deal with it.

"I want to buy this!" The king pointed at a knife in the first store they entered.

Did you listen to a word I just said?! Those are expensive in this country! I don't think you could buy that for a hundred dollars on Earth, let alone here. I've never seen that kind of metal on Earth, either.

I mean, it's not like I know every metal that exists on Earth. I never even touched gold until I got gold coins here, and I've only seen platinum in ring catalogs. I've never seen cobalt, and I don't know anything about rubidium or francium beyond their names. Maybe I've seen them somewhere and just didn't know it... But I don't think this one is any of those.

There were several factors that limited the number of metals that were being used to make knives, including the characteristics of the metal, the cost of obtaining it, and the manufacturing challenges. And judging by this knife's appearance and lightness, Mitsuha was pretty sure it was a metal that wasn't well known on Earth. Regardless, it was definitely way too expensive to buy with the money she gave them. She gave them ten silver coins combined specifically to prevent them from bringing back anything novel like the knife.

Despite Mitsuha's warning that it was out of budget, the king insisted on speaking to the store's owner and asking for the price. The owner unsurprisingly said that ten silver coins wasn't nearly enough, and Mitsuha

conveyed that to the king and the bureaucrat.

The king then took a different pouch out of his pocket and began counting gold coins.

“Is this enough?” He grinned.

“Whuh?” Mitsuha froze.

“It’s only common sense to prepare local currency when going to another world, is it not? There are tens of thousands of these gold coins circulating on Earth. They’re fairly easy to collect as long as you’re willing to pay the price.” The king brandished his stuffed pouch.

“Your Majesty, we must hurry!” the bureaucrat urged. “Let’s buy all the minerals, plant seeds, and animal meat we can carry! Finding a live specimen might be hard with so little time left, but we can go to a butcher and buy the ones that are as close to their original forms as possible! Our scientists will be able to study the DNA.”

“I...” Mitsuha choked.

“I...?” repeated the king and the bureaucrat.

“I’ve been had!”

A few hours later, the two smug visitors were lugging an unconscionable heap of “souvenirs” on their backs.

...Crap.

At least she didn’t give them those items as part of a deal. That meant she’d be free to give other countries the same items as bargaining chips. She also forbade them from sharing anything that they bought with other nations and

made them sign an agreement that said she had the rights to all of those items and that if any discoveries were made using them, she'd be entitled to royalties.

I could just refuse to transfer that stuff, but a proper lady knows when to graciously admit defeat. Besides, no matter which country gets the goods, it's all the same to me. But I'd much rather see the GDP of a small country rise ten percent than a major power's GDP rise 0.0001 percent.

Take your souvenirs, you thieves! You've earned them!

"Okay, ready to go?" Mitsuha jumped them back to Earth, thus concluding their trip.

Mitsuha didn't know what the king's illness was. It was common procedure for her to remove all the pathogens and parasites from anything she jumped back to Earth; she didn't want any of that dangerous stuff spreading. Getting rid of toxins, so to speak. Naturally, she did the same for the king and the bureaucrat. It was just out of habit.

She also didn't want them getting sick and blaming the air, water, or food from the other world. That would give the other world a bad reputation.

I pray that after devoting his life to his country's development, the king will live to see the fruits of his labors...

Chapter 55:

The Mysterious Gallery Café

The king's trip to the other world had ended without incident. Today, Mitsuha decided to go to Gold Coin to do an after-hours inspection. She went during peak dinner hour last time, and wanted to follow up to see if Rudina and Sylua were having any issues managing the business.

She couldn't leave the café entirely to them and do nothing but collect her share of the profits. She was the owner, not a sponsor.

Mitsuha arrived at Gold Coin at 7:20 PM—forty minutes before closing time. The plan was to eat dinner, wait until all the other customers left, and then hold a business meeting. The girls would end up eating later, but that was probably easier on them than making their boss wait while they ate. They could relax and discuss the meeting over their dinner after Mitsuha left.

Mitsuha chose a seat at the counter and opened the menu.

...I didn't notice it last time, but this menu doesn't exactly scream "café." Gold Coin is supposed to be a gallery café—a café that doubles as a gallery. And isn't a café a place where customers can enjoy a sophisticated chat over coffee, tea, and some light meals?

But this menu was way too extensive. There were some items like toast and pasta that sounded like small bites...until you looked at the pictures on the menu. The portions were on the large side.

"Toast" got you eight thick slices of bread, a salad, a boiled egg, a giant bowl

of cereal, and even an apple and a banana. “Pasta” looked like ten ounces of dry noodles’ worth, which was considered enough for three people in Japan. As for “rice porridge,” the serving size was twice what any reasonable person should eat. “Steamed potato” had a picture of three whole, rather giant potatoes.

A café shouldn’t be a place to pig out like this. It should be a chic, stylish, cute place full of young ladies and female professionals... Yet when Mitsuha looked around, she didn’t see any women having a strawberry shortcake paired with a coffee or fruit juice; instead, she saw filthy men gorging themselves on gargantuan servings.

This place was more of a public cafeteria than a café.

Sylua came over with a glass of water. Just like last time, she didn’t utter a word. “Oh, can I please have fried rice?” Mitsuha ordered.

The waitress turned toward the kitchen and belted, “One owner of fried rice!”

She sure can raise her voice when she wants to... Can you try talking to the customers too?

Mitsuha ordered the fried rice to gauge Rudina’s skill as a chef. She knew it was frozen. There was no way an amateur could make authentic fried rice—the kind you make with a wok and a commercial stove—and it was unlikely that the people of this country ate much Chinese food.

So yeah, I know it’s frozen, but I’m checking to see how well Rudina’s preparing it. Even frozen food can be improved or ruined depending on how it’s cooked. Time to see how good a chef she really is! ...With frozen food, anyway.

This is kinda pointless, isn’t it...

The jumbo fried rice arrived.

I ordered the normal fried rice—I'm just calling it jumbo because of the absurd volume piled onto the already large bowl.

Mitsuha scooped it up with a spoon and took a mouthful.

“Oh...? Ooh! Whoa!”

This is delicious! It's way, way better than I expected!

Rudina had coated the rice in egg yolk to prevent the grains from sticking together and absorbing the oil. Such a feat could only be achieved by adding the rice into the pan before the yolk hardened (a brief ten-second window) and stirring it evenly. It was impressive that she knew how to do that.

“Is this made from scratch?” asked Mitsuha.

“No? It's frozen,” answered Rudina.

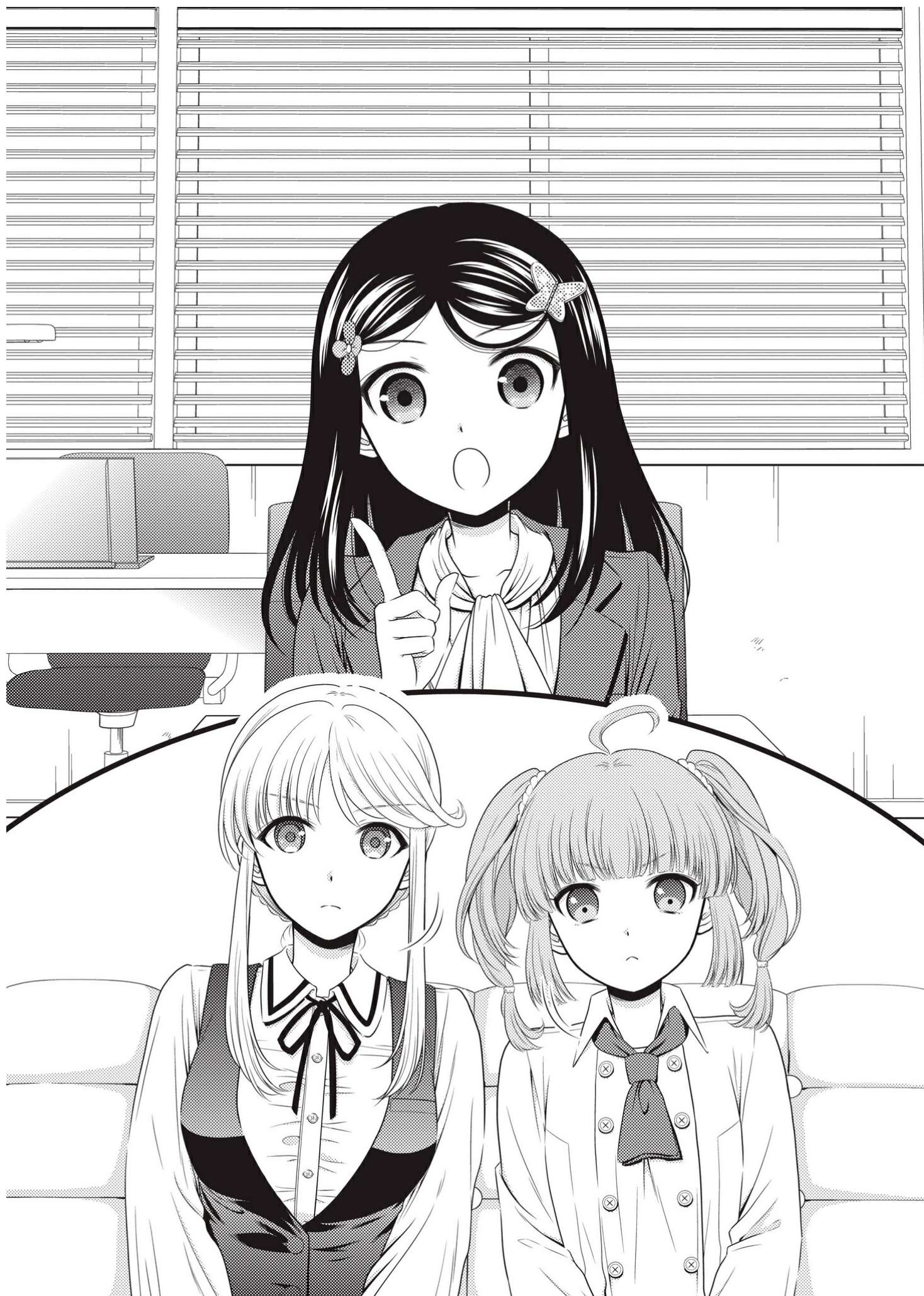
The rice grains were apparently machine-sprayed with lard and other cooking oils before they were frozen, which was what kept them as light and dry as homemade or even Chinese restaurant-tier rice. Many restaurants used the same frozen ingredient. It was so popular that it had fine-dining restaurants' chefs in tears; they couldn't even attempt to recreate it.

It turned out that most restaurants around here that served frozen foods had fried rice on the menu.

I was surprised to find fried rice on a menu in this country, but I guess that explains it. This frozen rice is better than a mother's homemade recipe. Man... It's terrifying how far science has come!

After downing the jumbo fried rice, Mitsuha slipped past the few remaining customers to the employee entrance and went upstairs.

“Our business meeting for Gold Coin begins now,” said Mitsuha. “Feel free to speak your mind. Don’t hold anything back. Otherwise, this meeting will be pointless, and it’ll bring nothing good for the café. Say what you want to say, even if it’s something hard to share. It’ll benefit all of us and Gold Coin. Think of ‘speaking your mind’ as a part of your job.”



Rudina and Sylua nodded. Given how committed they both were, Mitsuha was sure that would get them to open up.

“My first question is for Rudina. How are sales?”

“We’re making a profit. I am not counting the initial investment of purchased equipment and other things, but even if you deduct necessary expenses like the cost of ingredients, consumables, energy, and our base salaries, we are making a sufficient profit. Next, we’ll have to consider things like how much our equipment will depreciate in value and the building’s rent,” Rudina explained as Mitsuha looked through the account book.

“Wow, I did not expect this amount of profit! Oh, and I own this building, so you don’t have to worry about rent!”

“Huh...” Rudina was puzzled.

Oh, I guess owning the building won’t stop it from depreciating. I did buy it for a lot of money. Either way, I don’t have to pay property taxes, so it’s not a big deal. You know me—I don’t sweat the small stuff!

Also, my main goals for founding this place were to disguise the money I’m sending to Japan and to have a shelter I can use in case of an emergency. The café is just a bonus. I don’t care if it loses money, so long as it doesn’t do so pitifully that people wonder why it doesn’t go out of business. This amount of profit is more than enough for me!

...Oh, I promised to pay ten percent of the profits to each of the girls, didn’t I?

Mitsuha looked up from the account book at Rudina and Sylua. Their mouths twitched as if they could tell what she was thinking.

Are they trying to hold back their smiles...? They must think I’m going to pay them commission.

Which I am, of course—huh?

Mitsuha's gaze landed on another group of numbers in the account book. Rudina looked over and explained.

"Oh, that's the sales for the art."

"Whaaaat?!"

Wait, why am I acting so surprised?! I displayed them specifically for the purpose of selling them. And they sold—nothing strange about that.

But wow... People are actually buying them... Lortor and Tiras are real artists, but they're newbies who haven't found any success yet. They're also from the other world, so their artistic sensibilities are probably different from artists on Earth.

But again, wow... People are buying them...

Huh? What do W, S, and M mean?

"I split the art that's sold into three categories. They stand for wood, stone, and mysterious," Rudina said.

Oh, I see. They're referring to Lortor's wooden sculptures, Tiras's stone sculptures, and... Which ones fall under mysterious?

"Uh, what do you mean by 'mysterious'?"

"Oh, those are the weird sculptures that no one can tell how they were made. Some of them are wooden or stone, but they were clearly made by a different artist than the other sculptures. The same person made all of those, right?" Rudina asked.

...Yeah, I guess even a child could figure that out.

But man, the ones I made are selling pretty well.

Mitsuha began to giggle to herself.

I, Mitsuha Yamano, who always got the worst grades in arts and crafts, am selling sculptures that I made. At decently high prices, too.

More giddy giggling.

Wait, I shouldn't be happy about this! The sculptures are only selling because they're bizarre novelties that no one understands! ...Which is what I was aiming for, though, so I guess I shouldn't complain.

Hmm, I am happy about it...but also not really...

All the sculptures and other works of art at Gold Coin were shipped from Colette's Sculptures in Japan. This way, Mitsuha could have it on record that she was dealing art. That was the only part that mattered—she didn't actually care if Gold Coin never sold the art, or if it was sold for less than she acquired it for.

Now I don't have to lie when explaining my business... Not that intentionally leaving out details is the same as lying. And I can even tell people that my original works are selling! How exciting is that!

"Perfect. Perfect, perfect, perfect!" She was grinning like a goon. Rudina and Sylua looked happy for her...though it was hard to tell from their facial expressions.

The sculptures sold for a tenth of the price that Gold Coin paid Colette's Sculptures—which was a business in name only and registered to Mitsuha's home address—but they were priced at the other world's market value, so the two sculptors would probably be happy to hear that they sold. Not that their price at Gold Coin had anything to do with what she paid to acquire them.

Now that Mitsuha was done checking the finances, it was time to ask them if they were having any trouble operating the café.

“How is business going? Are you having any problems, or is there anything you want to improve? Any difficult customers?”

Rudina and Sylua tensed up.

Huh? Is there something they want to—

“No issues,” Rudina answered.

Oh come on. Get that out of here! Something definitely happened. I noticed that awkward pause.

“Be honest!” Mitsuha glared at them. Rudina’s expression wavered for a second.

“Umm, we’ve had some incidents. Maybe because we’re two girls, they thought they could take advantage of us. A customer falsely accused us of food contamination and demanded that we pay him reparations. Like showing us a perfectly intact bug on his finished plate. The bug wasn’t covered in food or oil or anything.”

“Oh, people like that aren’t ‘customers.’ You can kick them out. I don’t care if they never come back... Actually, that would be preferable. Thugs like that would drive away honest customers. Does this happen a lot? Do you want me to eliminate them? I have the police in my back pocket.”

Nothing would’ve stopped Mitsuha from protecting Rudina and Sylua. Connections and money were meant to be used. If not now, when?

“No, that issue is already dealt with. Sylua used a fork—er, a forklift... No, a fork dance...” Rudina fumbled.

...Ah, I see. I know exactly what those holes are now.

“Do you mean a folk dance? Did Sylua win them over by doing a little jig?”

Mitsuha asked.

They nodded vigorously.

Do I look like I was born yesterday?!

Oh, whatever. I shouldn't think too hard about it. Maybe the fork itself started dancing. It could've started on the countertop and boogied its way through the air to the door. Anyone would back down to a dancing fork.

That concludes that!

"Moving on... Business seems to be booming, but can you tell me why?"
Mitsuha asked point-blank.

"...Because the food is good?"

"...Because the waitress is cute?"

They didn't seem to have the answer.

"Have you had any other incidents or accidents? Have you lost any expensive equipment?"

"There have been two failed attempts to steal the art on display, one failed attempt to steal a customer's bag, and one person who demanded that we pay them protection money, but all the criminals were captured and handed over to the police. Sylua stopped them all with a for—er, with a formula. You know, like, we have a protocol..."

The holes in the door flashed in Mitsuha's mind.

They're really adamant about hiding the fork thing, but it's not like I care... I guess most girls would be pretty shocked, though. I wonder if they're worried that I'd be scared of them. I carry a Walther PPS when I'm in this country. A throwing knife—or throwing fork—isn't gonna spook me.

I have a license to carry that gun, of course. I didn't officially apply for one; the government just gave it to me upon my request. I carry a gun in most countries other than Japan. Only in countries where I obtained a license, though—I carry weapons that are legally allowed otherwise, such as a stun gun or a knife that's within regulations.

Why a fork, though? It would be just as easy to reach for a knife. They're much sharper and easier to throw—oh! Because knives feel too much like a weapon? She's using forks to be mindful of how the other customers would feel. That's smart, Sylua!

"It's strange, though," Rudina tilted her head. "Everyone knows that the police in this town won't touch the Rousas Clan. But when we called them, they didn't hesitate to arrest the delinquents who used the gang's name. We've also received compensation for the broken plates by the end of the day. I just don't get it..."

The police officers and their bosses probably determined that this country's intelligence division and special forces were more dangerous to upset than the local gang. The Rousas Clan were probably given the same orders to leave the café alone. There was no way the gang would've paid damages so quickly otherwise. Regardless, Rudina and Sylua's situation had clearly gotten safer.

...Wait. Is the café popular because it's safe?

The employees were capable of stopping robberies, preventing delinquents from causing trouble, and even scaring away criminal organizations to keep their customers safe from danger. And for some reason, the police—who are normally susceptible to pressure, threats, and bribes from gangs—were actually doing their job at this café.

This country wasn't like Japan where fresh water and public safety were a

given. Gold Coin might have become a haven for average civilians who were powerless to protect themselves from criminals. They could truly be at ease here.

Mitsuha glanced at the girls. She could think of one other reason for the café's popularity. While Rudina wasn't the prettiest girl, she was appropriately cute and earnest for a thirteen-year-old, and her diligence as an orphan was inspiring. Seventeen-year-old Sylua was expressionless and difficult to read, but she seemed sincere in her own way. And judging from the customers' comments the other day, they occasionally—very, very occasionally—gave genuine smiles instead of fake ones. Only experts could tell the difference, though.

Experts of what?! Face-watching?! That's creepy!

Eh, whatever. It doesn't seem to be a problem. My gallery café, Gold Coin, is functioning perfectly fine as my money-laundering business and emergency shelter. I think I can leave it to the girls again for a while. If anything happens, this country's intelligence division will contact the captain. You've got this, Rudina and Sylua!

...Oh, I need to pay them their share of the profits.

Mitsuha was having their regular pay automatically transferred into their bank accounts, but that wasn't an option with their commission pay.

Should I pay them extra for catching thieves too?

Anyway, I'm glad there are no major issues at Gold Coin.

"Do you have any requests before I leave?" Mitsuha asked.

"Um..." Sylua wanted to say something.

"What is it?"

“Can I...live here too?”

As a live-in employee, Rudina wasn't paying rent or utility bills. Sylua had to pay for both in her current living situation, which resulted in her netting substantially less money than her coworker. She was still doing well compared to most people in the area, but Mitsuha had been wanting to correct that. There was a vacant room on the second floor, and two residents at night would be safer than one.

...Now that I think about it, it's really dangerous for a young girl to live alone in a restaurant! What if someone targeted her?! Two people will be much safer, and Sylua knows self-defense. The water and energy bills will go up, but only by a negligible amount compared to the water and energy used during business hours. I don't mind paying a tiny bit more to keep my employees safe.

“Approved!”

All right, I'll leave the café in their hands again for a while. In other words, I'm pawning off all the work to them.

Chapter 56:

As the Crow Flies a Roflcopter

“I’ll buy three of Lortor’s sculptures and three of Tiras’s.”

Mitsuha was in the capital, buying art to restock her gallery at Gold Coin. She decided to buy the sculptors’ works from the small private-owned art shop instead of directly from them. That way, their works would be displayed in this world too and potentially be bought by other customers. It’d be better for their careers if their art became popular in their own world.

All Mitsuha had to do was choose a few unsold pieces. It’d be great publicity for Lortor and Tiras if word spread that Viscountess Yamano was buying their art. She wanted to support the elderly art dealer too. His shop was small, and he couldn’t have been making much money while giving up limited shelf space to new and unknown artists.

He uses his small shop to support young artists... That’s so nice. It’s just like the old movie Portrait of Jennie.

I love a good ol’ win-win! Everyone’s happy!

Just as Mitsuha was thinking that, Sabine rushed through the entrance of Mitsuha’s General Store.

“Mitsuha, Princess Remia called on the radio and asked for your support!”

“Huh?!”

Remia was the princess of the next kingdom over, Dalisson. Mitsuha thought they’d wiped out all the latent enemies among her subjects. Was there a

foreign threat, then? Now of all times—when the continent needed to band together and prepare for the inevitable invasion from the New World?

Damn it, what idiotic country did this... I'll wipe them off the map!

“She’s trying to hold a reversi tournament, but she’s getting more participants than she was expecting. They can’t manufacture the boards and pieces fast enough to keep up with demand. She doesn’t know how to host a tournament either, so she wants your help,” Sabine explained.

That’s...not my problem. And who gave her the right to make her own boards? I guess my rule that you can only join a reversi tournament with one of my boards and my threat of divine punishment from the Lightning Archpriestess doesn’t have much effect abroad. I’m gonna lose my hold on the foreign market. I messed up...

Merchants have probably been exporting boards out of the country for a while now. It was only a matter of time before someone else started making them. At least I still have playing cards as a business opportunity—sturdy cards that can withstand the wear and tear are much harder to manufacture here. I’d better get on that before someone gets the jump on me...

Mitsuha sold the *Aeras* to the king. Or to the kingdom, rather. For a decent price, too.

To the Vanelians, the ship was essentially oversized garbage in its current state, but to this kingdom, it was the perfect chance to learn and acquire cutting-edge shipbuilding technology. It’d be much easier to repair a large battleship than to build a new one from scratch. Vanel would’ve elected to build a new one instead of repairing the *Aeras*, but for this kingdom, the

restoration would be a good learning experience.

Mitsuha put the money into her county treasury instead of keeping it for her personal savings. She didn't have much of a choice—a lord had to separate their county budget and personal wealth. If a new lord were to take over and all the money was cleared out by the previous lord, the county would go bankrupt.

She considered keeping the money for herself, but there were a number of projects she wanted to invest in, including searching for underground resources, looking into manufacturing iron, and building fishing boats and nets.

Don't cry, Mitsuha... It's for your county's benefit.

Mitsuha also asked for a trade upon the king's purchase of the *Aeras*. She'd mentioned this before, but she wanted the small sailing boats that were being built as practice. They'd be perfect for sailing between her fishing harbor and the Bozes County naval port. Naval training was underway, and the three captured ships were nearly operational. The kingdom probably didn't have much use for the three small vessels once they fulfilled their roles as trial projects. The navy was now ready to start building large ships. Mitsuha had more use for them, and they could be used for training new sailors.

Her county had been working on agricultural production and increasing fishing hauls. The ships would give them a route to sell the products. The Bozes County fishing village was seeing a massive influx of immigrants looking for opportunities involving shipbuilding and naval training, and just as many merchants, waitresses, and more were flooding in to make a profit off them. It was growing into a naval port town.

Food trade is going to boom. I just know it! The only problem was figuring out how to quickly transport short shelf-life products like seafood and leafy greens in bulk. But the ships will solve that!

Public order in Bozes County is about to take a hit from the influx of ruffians, beggars, and criminals, which is exactly why I noped out of having the naval port in my county. Good luck with that, Count Bozes!

It won't be too bad. His county will experience stable growth once it gets through the initial rough patch. I believe in you, Count!

Mitsuha went to Vanel next. Her work on Earth and in her county was done for now. It was time to focus on her business in the New World. The plan was to establish herself as a merchant who sold expensive but useless items to Vanel and its surrounding countries in hopes of reducing their strength as nations. That would hold them back from making progress. She also wanted to make them waste labor and productivity on useless things.

There's a conspiracy theory that the Soviet Union sold Tetris throughout the world to lower the productivity of America and other capitalist countries during the Cold War. That's basically what I'm doing here. I'll be a snake in Vanel's bosom. I'm gonna crawl into a whale's stomach and devour it from the inside.

It's time for some pira—no, conspiracy!

Urgh, I've had it with those pigheaded jerks...

A girl who looked about fifteen or sixteen years old was stomping down the main street.

My dad and brother are way too stubborn! she seethed. *Utilizing ships for large-scale international trading is going to be the next big thing! A mid-sized company like us will get left in the dust if we keep clinging to the old ways...*



Her father was the third-generation president of their family-run mid-sized company, and her brother was the heir. Neither was a fool, but they didn't believe in taking risks when the company was already making a profit. Why fix something that wasn't broken? If profits ever did start to drop, they could figure out why and change course then. That was how they felt. No one could predict the future, so there was no reason to change what was working.

...Which certainly was a valid way of thinking. However, it wasn't the way a highly ambitious entrepreneur would think. She tried to convince her father and brother with that argument, but they ignored her.

It was often said that companies died on the third generation, but her father and brother were both competent and responsible with the company's funds. *We can't afford to keep doing the same thing, though. We'll get left behind by the ti-*

"Ah!"

She bumped into a girl carrying a large box, knocking her to the ground.

"Oh, sorry!" she apologized, realizing that she was so caught up in her anger that she hadn't been watching where she was going. The girl looked like she was in too much pain to get up; she might've fallen on her tailbone. "A-Are you okay?!"

The girl looked around twelve or thirteen years old, with black hair and slightly exotic features. Her clothing looked expensive, which could mean she was the daughter of a foreign noble or other influential figure. Injuring her could have major consequences.

This could be an international scandal. The older teen felt her blood draining from her face. *She might've just fallen on her butt. Maybe she doesn't handle*

pain well because she was brought up as a sheltered rich girl. Please be okay!

“...My name is Lephilia. I’m the daughter of the president of the Seltz Company.”

“I’m Mitsuha von Yamano.”

Sh-Sh-Sh-She’s a noble! And the “von” means she’s a foreign noble! I’m finished... She was nearly in tears.

Lephilia and the foreign girl were at a nearby café. She couldn’t just flee while the girl sat on the ground holding her butt, and with the large box in tow, she couldn’t walk very far while lending a shoulder to the injured child. Walking to the closest restaurant—while praying that the girl only had a bruise and not a broken tailbone—was the best option.

They ordered drinks at the café so they could sit down, and Lephilia’s worst fears were confirmed when they introduced themselves to each other. The girl called herself “*von Yamano*”; that meant she was a noble of a foreign country. Lephilia figured the girl had to be rich, but she didn’t think she’d actually be nobility. Injuring a noble could end her life.

Nooooooooo! Lephilia screamed in her head. *I’m so sorry, Father! I’m so sorry, Brother!*

“I-I-I would like to apologize to y-your parents,” she squeezed out.

“Oh no. That was my fault,” the foreign girl replied. “It was a terrible idea trying to walk with that giant box. I’m sorry... And my parents aren’t here. I came to this country alone.”

“Huh?”

“Also, I don’t use ‘von’ because of my parents. I’m a viscountess with my own peerage.”

“Ah...” uttered Lephilia.

“Ah?”

“AHHHHHHHHH!”

The “Transfer Student Running with a Piece of Toast in Her Mouth Plan” went off without a hitch, bringing Mitsuha into contact with Lephilia of the Seltz Company. After thorough research, Mitsuha had found the perfect prey. And now that the prey had fallen into her trap, there was no letting go.

“P-P-Please don’t kill me! And have mercy on my fami—”

“What am I, a tyrant?!” Mitsuha interrupted Lephilia’s begging.

Is that the norm in this country? Mitsuha wondered. For nobles to crush commoners like ants for the slightest offenses—no, that doesn’t matter right now.

“I’m not gonna hurt you or anybody else! Anyway, did you say your father runs a company? Do you mind if I ask you for some advice?” Mitsuha rummaged through her big box and pulled out a small jar. “I brought these items from my country with the intention of selling them. Do you think they would be successful products here?”

“Huh...” Lephilia’s eyes were glued to Mitsuha as she pulled out jar after jar. They contained pepper, chili peppers, salt, sugar, and other condiments. She even took out ten-ounce bottles of whiskey and brandy.

The salt is refined sea salt, of course, and the sugar is made from sugar beets.

I also brought all kinds of herbs and spices.

Wanna know my favorite kind of spice? Cinnamoney.

...Sorry, no more cinnapuns...

Anyways, consumables—things that get eaten and disappear for good. No one will be able to figure out how to cultivate or produce them by studying them. They're cheap in Japan but expensive in this world. Salt isn't that expensive here, but cheap and high-quality salt entering the market will wreak havoc on existing trade routes and producers.

This is how I'm gonna squeeze gold—not gold coins, actual gold ingots—from this kingdom and weaken it. The money I make is still circulating in their kingdom...or so I'll have them believe. When the moment is right, I'll restrict my resources, make a killing, and take everything I earn—gold, silver, pearls, and all—out of the country.

Mwahaha. Mwahahahahahaha!

...Whoops, I'm getting ahead of myself. First, I need to trap—err, trick—I mean, win over Lephilia!

“Ho-Ho-How...”

Huh? Is Lephilia turning into Santa Claus?

“Ho-Ho-How much...”

Score, she took the bait!

Mitsuha pitched, “I think these can be sold for much cheaper than the existing versions on the market in this country. Splitting up the merchandise among multiple clients would be a pain for me, though, so I'd like to sign an exclusive contract with one company—”

“I’LL BUY IT!”

Gotcha! Hook, line, and sinker!

“Huh?”

“Like I said,” Mitsuha said, “I’m hoping to work with a new company started by you, not with the company your father owns.”

“Huuuuuh?!”

There were too many drawbacks to working with a hard-headed middle-aged man who knew his way around the business world.

The first drawback: he likely wouldn’t take Mitsuha seriously because she was a little girl. He might not listen to her, he might break promises and act without consulting her, and even make ridiculous demands. The second: she’d be only one of his many business partners, and he might try to exploit her. The third: there was a chance he would see through her scheme.

Mitsuha was looking for someone with little experience—someone who’d be blinded by the excitement of a business opportunity. This deal would be the backbone of their business, which would make them easy to manipulate. Mitsuha had been researching all the young daughters of mid-sized companies to find the ideal business partner and perfect prey. She chose Lephilia to fill that role.

“I’ll loan you the funds to start your business. I have money in the bank I barely touched that was converted from thirty ingots of gold, so we can use that. I’ll sell you the first batch of products on credit, though, so you won’t need too much money. All you’ll need to do is rent a storefront with decent warehouse space. I plan to focus on non-bulky, high-quality items that we can

sell in small amounts.

“I have connections among the nobility, so I can introduce you if you’d like. How does that sound?”

A shop... A company...of my very own? Lephilia thought.

The Seltz Company was founded by her great-grandfather, managed by her father, and was going to be inherited by her brother. They all had one thing in common: they were men. As a girl, it didn’t matter how talented Lephilia was. She couldn’t inherit the company, and no one would take her opinions seriously. She’d only be regarded as an unpaid employee to be married off in a few years to a client or someone in the same trade. She was nothing more than a pawn on a game board.

Her wishes, her abilities, and her dreams would all be trampled upon...as an expendable pawn.

“I’ll do it! Please let me enter business with you! I’ll put my life and pride on the line to fulfill your expectations!” Lephilia declared.

There was no other reasonable response. Mitsuha pushed the giant box on the floor toward Lephilia.

“Use these as samples. I’m confident in their quality.” Mitsuha smiled.

Lephilia smiled back. “You have my gratitude and my loyalty, Lady Viscountess...”

The girl wasted no time getting to work. She stopped helping with her father’s company and got started on founding her own. She didn’t hesitate to use bribes to speed up the process—the small losses were worth it to get her company on track as fast as possible.

Her father and brother laughed at her, thinking she couldn’t possibly hope to

accomplish anything without funds or connections, but before they knew it, she had completed all the necessary paperwork, acquired a small storefront with storage space, and cultivated a market for herself. Their jaws hit the floor at her finesse. According to Lephilia, Viscountess Yamano's name and the products she handed out cleaved through all opposition like a holy blade. Her abundance of funds didn't hurt, either.

Lephilia didn't have to work too hard to promote her business once her name became relatively known. Her initial samples had made such a splash that even the owners of other shops personally visited her to buy her stock, even though she was still in the promotional phase and hadn't yet received her first shipment of goods.

And thus, Mitsuha acquired a foreign partner for Mitsuha's General Store. The business was Lephilia's at the end of the day—Mitsuha wasn't an owner, a shareholder, or an investor. She was simply a business partner who lent Lephilia money and sold her product on credit with the promise of being repaid later. That meant Mitsuha had nothing to do with the founding of the company and would not be liable if it ran into any legal trouble. And no one would have a right to complain if she suddenly decided to pack up and return to her homeland with all her wealth.

I have no intention of abandoning Lephilia... Not yet at least. But if I'm ever forced to do so, it won't cause any problems for me.

Not like I need to take such safety measures anyway. If something happens, I can just abandon my position here and jump away with all my wealth and property. No one is capable of capturing me or stealing all my possessions...and if anyone tries to do the latter, they'd better not complain when I do it right back to them. I don't care if they're a dirty businessman, a noble...or even the ruler of

this country.

It was late at night. On the pier stood the silhouette of a petite figure.

“All clear... Jump!”

A small boat suddenly appeared on the water. Waves rippled across the sea, but they weren’t big enough to disturb the docks. The moored ships rocked a bit, but any drowsy sailors who jumped out of bed to inspect the darkness wouldn’t be able to tell what caused the wave.

The silhouetted girl ordered the crew to dock their small boat. She had permission to use the dock, of course. Once the boat was tied, the men disappeared—literally—and the girl returned to the inn where she’d booked a room.

“All right, load them up in order. Hey, slow down and be careful. If you drop one of those boxes, that’s a year’s worth of your income we lose!”

The employees who were moving the cargo straightened up and started handling them more gently. Lephilia was directing the men as they transferred the cargo from the small boat into a carriage. Mitsuha wanted to give the impression that Lephilia Trading—the new company founded by Lephilia—was in charge here, not Viscountess Yamano.

Lephilia Trading was the name that Lephilia settled on. She tried very hard to insert Mitsuha’s name, but the viscountess staunchly refused. A young woman was running the company. Of course you’d put her name on the store sign. She chose the word “Trading” instead of the standard naming convention of “Company” or “Shop” as a dig at her father and brother who were passive

about international trade and to emphasize what set her company apart.

She was a teenage girl; it was almost certain that people would try to scam and threaten her to steal her supply routes. They'd taken a number of measures to prepare for that.

The first was hiring a capable ex-military soldier to work for the company. He'd apparently been forced to resign from his job as punishment for an incident that wasn't his fault. His former bosses, peers, and subordinates took pity on him, and they were all glad to hear that he was hired by Lephilia Trading at a high salary. That meant Lephilia could expect help from active soldiers if she ever ended up in danger.

She also hired an advisor who worked as a clerk at a large store until the owner's idiot son inherited it and unfairly fired him. The son couldn't handle the clerk's criticism and even badmouthed him so that he wouldn't be able to find a job anywhere else. The former clerk had felt a debt of gratitude toward the previous owner, but now felt he no longer owed him anything because the owner did nothing to help when his detestable son fired him and obstructed his efforts to find another job.

The presence of a skilled advisor like him would ensure that Lephilia didn't fall for a scam and have her supply routes hijacked. Though that wasn't going to be a problem since Mitsuha was the supplier.

In the case of any emergencies, Mitsuha would be there to help. If a rival company were to encroach, within legal grounds, on Lephilia Trading's business, the famed Viscountess Yamano would step in. If a rival company were to launch an illegal assault on Lephilia Trading, it'd be time for Phantom Thief Mitsuha to put her mysterious teleportation ability to use. She could ruin any company without them having a clue what hit them.

Perfectamundo!

The day then came to announce the launch of Lephilia Trading and stage the unloading event to make it look like cargo was being sailed here from a distant land. It was likely that rival companies were sending their underlings to try to figure out the supply route, so Mitsuha wanted to give them a show.

It went without saying that Mitsuha used one of the three small trial boats built in Bozes County. The boats hadn't entered service yet, but that didn't matter as there was no need to actually sail to the pier. She borrowed the boat for the day from Count Bozes and asked Yamano County's fishermen to perform the docking.

Nothing I do should surprise my citizens at this point. After all, I pulled off stunts like "build the breakwater in one day," "renovate the harbor in one day," and "rebuild the highway in one day" in front of them. Even before any of that, I captured three enemy warships... Not to mention slaying an ancient dragon, repelling the imperial army... I've sure kept myself busy in this world.

Mitsuha didn't intend to jump a boat to the harbor every time she restocked her inventory. That would've been a pain. She just wanted to make a spectacle of the unloading process. If anyone got suspicious, she could claim that she was using a different harbor every time to be safe or that the boat arrived and unloaded in the middle of the night, then left before dawn.

She also placed Lephilia in charge at the pier so everyone could see that Lephilia Trading was handling the distribution from the unloading stage, reducing the chances that Yamano Commodities would be watched. It was unlikely her shop would avoid attention completely, though.

In the future, Mitsuha was going to jump the goods from Earth directly to Yamano Commodities or Lephilia Trading's storehouse. On the books, however,

Lephilia Trading was contracted to transport the goods from the harbor to Yamano Commodities' storage. Lephilia had a separate contract to purchase some of the stock and transport it to her own storehouse. That was the illusion they were going for.

The process sounded like more trouble than it was worth, but no one would doubt Lephilia if she claimed that it was done on Mitsuha's insistence. Viscountess Mitsuha was viewed as a naive foreign girl and an amateur in business.

Keeping the supply route a secret would've been impossible with bulky goods like wheat or coal, but with small-quantity, high-dollar items, no one would find it strange.

And with that, Mitsuha's business relationship with the new company Lephilia Trading had begun.

"...The products are flying off the shelves. Not that I expected any different. I'm only selling to the businesses that accepted our terms and conditions: to abide by the maximum order quantity per store, to refrain from reselling to other local or foreign businesses, and to refrain from leaking the details of the contract. If they break any of those conditions, our contract is annulled, and I cease doing business with them.

"A lot of companies have been trying to curry favor with me by buying goods I acquired, not just from yours, Mitsuha, but from other vendors as well. My supply already can't keep up with the demand. Heh heh heh..." Lephilia tittered with a drooly grin.

The girl initially tried to call her "Viscountess Yamano" or "Lady Mitsuha," but

Mitsuha talked her into using her first name. Being called “Viscountess” or “My Lady” by a girl who looked older than her would’ve drawn attention. She also wanted to avoid showing her face and becoming too recognizable.

“Any new activity from the company that was trying to sell imported goods for exorbitant prices?” Mitsuha asked.

“Yes. They’ve been tailing me and my workers, sending spies into my store disguised as new hires, and trying to bribe my staff. Unsurprisingly, they don’t seem to have the courage to directly interfere with Lephilia Trading, your exclusive distributor... For now, anyway.”

“For now” was right. That didn’t mean it was never going to happen. There was also a possibility that they’d directly approach Mitsuha; she was the supplier, after all. Larger companies were likely to have connections and a noble or two that they could blackmail.

But Mitsuha had connections too. If a company approached her for an innocent business negotiation, she was going to reject them or find a way to utilize them. If they insisted on belittling her, she had a plan to deal with that as well.

Mitsuha advised, “If you have the chance, spread the word that we’re not just business partners, but personal friends as well. No one will find it surprising if I completely annihilate any companies that try to come between us... Besides, you won’t be lying. We really are friends.”

“O-Okay!” Lephilia responded, looking both surprised and happy.

She’s the second friend I’ve made in this country—no, continent—Micchan being the first. Now that I involved her in my affairs, I’ll have to look out for her safety... As long as she doesn’t betray me.

“Viscountess Yamano started a business, you say? But she opened her commodity shop some time ago.” The king was dubious about his subordinate’s report.

“I am not referring to the shop she rarely opens and uses to sell a small smattering of items. She recently started a large-scale wholesale operation. According to reports, she is importing goods on a small high-speed boat from her country and selling them exclusively to a newly founded company,” the subordinate explained.

“What... So they’re following the legal procedures?”

“Yes, an established company from this country is purchasing the goods and going through the proper tax procedure.”

That meant this was a job for the department in charge of such affairs, not the king. If anything, his meddling would only cause problems.

“Then there’s no need for concern. If the viscountess wants to make a small profit while contributing to our kingdom with goods and taxes, she’s free to do so. Even if she loses money, it won’t harm our kingdom at all. More importantly, can’t you find her home country by tracing her shipping route? –And I suppose this means she’s done traveling. I wonder if she’ll resume attending parties...” The king began thinking of his next move but was interrupted by his subordinate.

“I assigned people to investigate as soon as I heard the rumors. The small sailing boat that was used to transport goods from her home country appeared to be brand-new—the hull and outfitting were pristine. It entered the port in the middle of the night and departed late the next night, and no one saw which

direction it came from or left to... No one managed to speak to the crew either, so we learned nothing from them. We don't even know what language they speak.

"The cargo was unloaded and transported by the company she signed an exclusive contract with, and we couldn't learn anything from them either. The employees have been told nothing about where the cargo came from, and the person in charge won't speak. They're obviously not going to risk losing such a valuable client. I presume it's much too early to arrest them on false charges and torture them into confessing?"

"You fool! You will do nothing of the sort!" The king immediately shot down the absurd suggestion.

The subordinate flippantly ignored the king and continued, "Anyway, as for the imported goods..."

His suggestion seemed to be a joke. It took a brave—or reckless—man to make such an audacious comment to the king. But he was definitely not an idiot. He wouldn't be in this position if he was.

"...they consist of herbs and spices, other flavorings, and a number of high-grade grocery items. Some are exotic and scarce in this land. Others are familiar to us such as salt and sugar. They also have alcohol and rare delicacies that have a long shelf life. The problem is each item is fine enough to compete with upscale shops that cater to nobles. That applies not just to the rare spices, but also the alcohol, salt, and even the sugar..."

"Wh-What do you mean?!"

"On top of that, she's selling them for below market value."

The king fell silent. After some thought, he suddenly realized something.

“Doesn’t the import declaration form include a column for the country of origin? What does it say?” he asked.

The subordinate’s response was less than helpful. “Yes, Your Majesty. The exporting country was listed as...‘Japan’.”

“Japan? I haven’t heard of it. Where is it located?”

“I have not heard of it either... I had some diplomatic experts research the name, but no one found anything. By our laws, however, merchants are allowed to import goods from distant lands no one has heard of as long as they pay taxes. They aren’t doing anything illegal.”

Importing pillaged goods was acceptable in Vanel—it didn’t matter where items came from as long as they brought profit to the country. Even if the goods were looted from a foreign country or ship, there was no issue as long as the country they originated from didn’t have diplomatic relations with Vanel and there was no actual evidence that the goods were stolen. Whether or not this “Japan” actually existed was irrelevant as long as she paid taxes.

“So she still intends to conceal her country’s name,” the king pondered. “Well, it hardly matters. If she’s initiating a large-scale business, it’s only a matter of time before her country reaches out to establish diplomatic relations and officially begin trade. The girl is likely experimenting—advertising her country’s products and testing the credibility of our merchants. Monitor the situation closely to make sure no foolish merchants attempt to obstruct her business. If you find anyone meddling with her, warn them off. And if possible, arrange for anyone belonging to the royalist faction to have their pockets lined from her business endeavors.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

As king, he was not in a position to run a business himself or give preferential treatment to any specific merchants. There were, however, nobles who were connected to merchants, nobles who employed merchants to work in their territory, and even nobles who owned businesses. Directing profit toward the companies of such nobles who were favorable to him greatly contributed to loyalty and unity. The king was very accommodating to nobles.

The subordinate looked pleased—he, too, was in a position to receive a small share of the profits. The king was aware of this and willingly turned a blind eye; he wasn't technically embezzling money, and such gestures ensured the allegiance of those who served him.

“Very well then, I will attempt to meet Viscountess Yamano at a party. Find out the next one she is attending and arrange with the host to have Count Wondred's and Viscount Ephred's RSVP a secret.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

It's been ages since my last party, Mitsuha thought. I'm actually able to hook my skirt now, so my diet must be paying off a little. Still, I'll need to be careful not to overeat or drink too much juice this time...

Mitsuha was attending an army-faction party, but the count who was hosting it belonged to a different faction than Marquis Mitchell's. It was well-known that the marquis chose the parties she attended. It would've been too blatant if she only attended parties thrown by nobles in his faction, so she occasionally attended parties from other factions too.

I wonder if this is like when a cabinet of the Japanese government has to choose ministers from an opposing faction in the same party... It's a tricky choice

to make.

Mitsuha fully expected that all anyone would want to talk about was her new trading venture. She planned to dodge any proposals by saying that she signed an exclusive contract with Lephilia Trading in order to save the trouble of splitting up her stock and juggling relations with multiple companies in the same country. She was a noble, not a merchant: it was perfectly understandable for her to be annoyed by the idea of crafting meticulous deals for a slight increase in profit.

Marquis Mitchell was going to attend the party with her this time. He was worried about sending her to another faction's party alone. Someone might try to force her into an unfavorable agreement or set her up with their idiot son.

...So basically, he's coming along to make sure no one steals me from him. He's not just being overprotective.

Members of different factions didn't necessarily treat each other as mortal enemies. There were factions that were relatively friendly or neutral toward each other. Some people even had friends, relatives, and coworkers in the army or navy across faction lines. As such, there was no rule that you could only attend parties in your own faction, and factions were entirely irrelevant at birthday parties for children who were old enough to marry.

The host of today's party, however, was a member of a relatively unfriendly rival faction.

Which sounds stupid to me, but I guess that's why the marquis is coming. At least I get to ride with him instead of chartering a carriage. He got mad at me when I said I walked to his residence. I don't see the problem—my shop isn't far from his place. I don't need a carriage. And I'd draw attention if I took a horse-drawn cab while dressed for a party.

Anyway, off we go!

Chapter 57:

Punishment

And here we are!

Mitsuha and Marquis Mitchell climbed out of the carriage and headed to the party venue. It was unlikely anyone at the estate knew her—this was her first time meeting them—but she was with the marquis. Nobody questioned her presence. There wasn't a gatekeeper, guard, or guide who didn't know his face.

Marquis Mitchell led Mitsuha around the party to greet the host and other important guests. The crowd was a mix of new and familiar faces she'd met at other parties.

I don't like the way everyone's eyes light up when they see me... It's freaking me out!

Mitsuha was sure they were looking at her that way because of the goods she was importing. It was possible some of the party attendees wanted a piece of her profits, but these were nobles, not merchants—they probably just wanted to try the delicacies and get their hands on the latest trending goods to boost their status.

She imported a large quantity of spices to Vanel. Well, she didn't actually bring that much, but it was enough to satisfy the demands of rich families. Spices weren't consumed in great quantities like wheat, so she was able to obtain all she needed by purchasing them as an individual in Japan and other countries without buying in bulk. She also had the option of ordering spices online. There was no worry of a supply shortage.

Mitsuha didn't want her products to be seen as unobtainable delicacies. She was planning to spread her business to the general market as well. She would, however, limit the supply of alcohol and finer food ingredients she brought to intentionally create a demand on the market and give them a sense of luxury. Commoners would do just fine without those items, and as there were already domestic, less expensive versions available, it wouldn't matter if they were scarce.

I obviously wanna make a profit from the goods, but I also want some stock for myself. They're low-cost and effective bribes that'll keep me on the nobles' good side. That was the intention, anyway...

As much as he wanted to, Marquis Mitchell couldn't stick by her side for the entire party. He eventually had to back away and monitor her from a distance, and as soon as he did, she was swarmed by nobles asking if they could buy pepper, caviar, fruits that were exotic to this country, and of course, alcohol. Some wanted to do business. Others only wanted just enough for their household. The rest wanted to know the market price for precious metals and gems in her homeland.

Mitsuha responded to these requests by saying that they should go to Lephilia Trading if they wanted to make a business deal, and that she'd be happy to introduce them. Others simply requested a few bottles of alcohol for their personal enjoyment, and she delighted them by saying they could send a messenger to her commodity shop to purchase them.

She spent her time socializing with the guests and avoiding making any big promises. That must've set Marquis Mitchell at ease, as he eventually took his eyes off her. As soon as he walked away, however, *they* approached her.

The group was led by a well-dressed older man with a little beard and a

haughty young man. The duo was surrounded by six henchmen with swords—an unsavory attire to a party. It was Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred, the cocky hoodlums Mitsuha had been carefully avoiding.

...Why are they here? I hired a messenger boy this morning to confirm with the host that they wouldn't be attending.

Mitsuha looked to the party host and locked eyes, but he quickly averted his gaze. He'd been staring at her since the hoodlums approached. That could only mean...

Yup, it was a setup. Goddamn it! You've got to be kidding me!

Mitsuha tried to retreat to the food corner, but two of the six henchmen blocked her path.

Crap!

The nobles and servants near them all backed away, leaving no one between her and the men. *This is a trap.*

It was at that moment that Mitsuha saw red. *If that's how I'm gonna be treated, I can respond in kind.*

"Excuse me, everybody!" Mitsuha shouted as she turned her back to the approaching hoodlums. She heard them stop in their tracks right behind her. "It seems that I've been deceived, set up, and sold, so I'll be taking my leave. I am quite unhappy about this treatment and am hereby wiping clean all of the agreements I made tonight. Goodbye!"

She dashed through a sliver between the crowd and reached the window at the end of the room. She opened it before anyone could stop her and jumped through with impressive strength, falling into the yard below. The estate's floor was quite high, so the window was seven feet above the ground.



“WHA?!” the guests gasped.

Mitsuha heard their voices but paid them no mind. Once her body disappeared below the window frame and out of view, she jumped to Earth. Falling all the way to the ground would’ve been asking for a sprained ankle.

She crash-landed in her brother’s room in Japan which she’d left untouched except for one addition—a futon on top of his bed to give her an extra soft landing to fall on.

I figured out that I can cancel out kinetic energy, but this jump was sudden, and I didn’t want to mess anything up. I’ll never forget the pain in my back and butt from landing on those billiard balls at the captain’s place after the battle to defend the capital!

She headed straight to the first floor and rummaged for some gifts. She loaded up a few nice goodies and jumped to her commodity shop.

“Good evening!” Mitsuha announced after arriving at the guard station next door. “I brought some souvenirs.”

She handed a small cardboard box and some paper bags to the older guard.

“You’re always too kind... Oh, wow!” His eyes widened when he looked inside. It contained six more bottles of the expensive brandy she’d gifted them before.

“YEEEAHHH!” the other five men celebrated.

Their reaction wasn’t surprising; this brandy was so good that even Marquis Mitchell was crazy for it. Being a neighbor of Mitsuha’s, the guards’ superiors probably told them about her new trading efforts, and that one of her commodities was top-shelf alcohol.

“I’ve already started importing and selling this brandy, so I don’t mind if you

show it to other people. You can even sell the bottles for some extra money—they're pretty valuable, so don't let anyone trick you and beat down the price," Mitsuha said.

"There's no way we'd sell these!" they all yelled in unison.

Oh, it's that good?

"Anyway, I'm gonna be gone for a while. I think I've caught the attention of some unpleasant people... If anyone tries to sneak into my shop while I'm gone, please feel free to throw them in jail."

"You got it!"

Next—just to be safe—Mitsuha returned to Yamano Commodities and jumped the shelves full of goods to a private storehouse she'd built in Yamano County. She always kept plenty of space open for such an occasion. The second floor of the shop was empty to begin with. Nothing from Earth was in the building. The shop might as well have been a vacant house; there was no reason to even lock the door.

...I did lock it, though.

All right, I'm not coming back for at least a month! They're gonna write about me in the newspaper!

Maybe I'll make it into Vanel-ty Fair...

Can I stop punning already?!

"Wh... Wh-Wh-Wh-Wha..." The count who was hosting the party was flabbergasted. "Hurry! She might be hurt!" he cried when he regained his composure.

The window was a little high for a delicate noble lady like her to jump out of and land safely. A sprained ankle would be lucky; it was entirely possible she'd broken a leg. The count didn't want to think about what would happen to him if rumors spread that he'd let a foreign noble get seriously injured. And given her announcement before she left, it wouldn't be surprising if all the blame for this incident fell on his shoulders.

He went pale as he imagined her enraged parents come tearing into Vanel or a diplomatic protest being staged by her home country. He looked at Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred and saw that their faces were also white. They didn't seem like they'd be any help.

"Sir..."

"My lord..."

Before the count knew it, he was surrounded by his guests.

"What just happened?" one of them started. "I convinced Viscountess Yamano to sell me some high-end alcohol from her country, but it sounded like she just undid all the agreements she made today. Why would she do such a thing? Care to explain?"

Another noble joined in. "She promised to deliver me alcohol and novel foods from her country for my birthday. Can I no longer expect that? Who is to blame? I demand some clarification to better understand the situation."

"What did the viscountess mean when she said she was 'deceived' and 'set up'? Just what did you do? Don't tell me you actually plotted to trap her in some way..."

The guests all addressed him politely, but it was obvious they were repressing intense anger underneath their plastered smiles. It was also obvious that the

girl was very, very angry.

Marquis Mitchell stood outside the mob of men circling the count. Despite his tense expression, he felt a wave of relief wash over him.

Thank goodness this happened at another faction's party...

He tiptoed his way toward the door to avoid getting caught by the other guests. They were bound to swarm and beg him to be their mediator between the viscountess.

"Huh? Where is this coming from all of a sudden?" the salesclerk of a mid-sized company asked, dumbfounded.

"My supplier was deceived by a count into meeting with a group of questionable individuals, and she is quite infuriated about it. She says we are now forbidden from dealing with the count's family or any of his dependents. The same goes for any companies connected to them. This applies not just to wholesale, but to retail as well. Angering my sole supplier would be the end of my company. I'm sure you understand why I cannot go against her demands."

"Wha..."

A few days later, the capital was in an uproar. To the average citizen, the city appeared perfectly normal, but beneath the surface, gossip was circulating throughout the merchants' and nobles' networks.

"Working with *them* means you won't be able to do business with Lephilia Trading."

"A large store had their contract severed after delivering alcohol and spices to *that* noble family."

“It’s the supplier who is furious. No amount of begging Lephilia Trading will do any good.”

The rumors spread.

The count who hosted the party was being lambasted by his extended family and the other nobles in his faction, and was at a loss for what to do. The king and the prince were taking a verbal beating behind their backs for their devious attempt to trap the viscountess. Marquis Mitchell and other nobles who’d been building a friendly relationship with the viscountess were growing visibly uneasy about her disappearance.

And as for Viscountess Yamano, who stood in the middle of this controversy...

“Man, I’ve been working too hard recently. I need a break. Oh, I should take Colette and Sabine on a hot spring trip. My shoulders have been really stiff lately. Couldn’t tell you why, though—it’s not like they have to carry any weight from my chest! Ah-haha... Hey, that’s rude!” Mitsuha snapped at her self-roast.

She really did seem tired...

“And here we are! Arima Onsen!” Mitsuha announced.

“Wow!” Colette and Sabine, in their yukatas, were ecstatic. It’d been a while since they last got to spend an entire day with Mitsuha.

“At least two nights,” was Mitsuha’s rule for onsen trips. Arriving at the inn after dark and leaving the next morning hardly would’ve been relaxing. Staying two nights was essential so you could have an entire day to laze around and take a dip in the hot spring whenever you wanted.

...I could’ve just jumped us here first thing in the morning. That would’ve given us plenty of time for a relaxing day trip, but whatever! Don’t sweat the small

stuff!

Anyway, bath time!

Mitsuha warned the girls, “No jumping into the water, no swimming, no submerging, and no rubbing soap on your belly to slide across the tile floor!”

“We can’t swim in the first place!”

Ah. Right. It’s a given that everyone in Japan can swim, but that’s not the case in the other world. There are no pools, recreational beaches, or swimsuits. There are monsters in the rivers and ocean, and most people would have to travel for days to reach the coast from their home... I doubt anyone but martial artists who specifically learn the skill for training purposes can swim at all.

“It’s time for some *kaiseki-ryori*!” Mitsuha said.

There were two kinds of *kaiseki-ryori*—traditional Japanese multi-course dinners. One referred to a full-course meal made up of small dishes, while the other referred to a light meal before tea. Mitsuha and the girls had just been served the former.

Those weren’t the only famous Japanese cuisines. *Honzen-ryori*, for example, was a precursor to *kaiseki-ryori* and was typically served on legged trays, and *shojin-ryori* was a Buddhist vegetarian cuisine that was made without meat, fish, or the vegetables known as the “five pungent roots.”

“Oooh!” Colette and Sabine gawked at all the colorful dishes. It was evident that a lot of time and effort had been put into preparing and arranging them.

Western food definitely takes time and effort too, but it’s typically harder to tell how much at a glance. No amateur is gonna look at consommé and know that it was simmered for seven days. French food can also be meticulously arranged—not to mention delicious—but the impact of seeing all the colorful

Japanese food put out at once is probably what Sabine and Colette are so impressed by.

Anyway, Mitsuha ended up sharing peaceful and lazy quality time with her family (?) at the hot spring resort. She gave the girls some time on the final day to buy plenty of souvenirs for their parents and the Munchkin Maids, and jumped them back to the other world.

“...That is what I heard, Your Majesty.”

The king was listening to his subordinate’s report in his office.

“Are you saying that no one with any affiliation to the royal palace is being allowed to purchase goods from Lephilia Trading—and therefore cannot enjoy Viscountess Yamano’s imports—because Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred were put on the exclusion list?” the king asked with a sour face.

“That is correct, Your Majesty. It is common knowledge among nobles and major merchants that those aliases belong to you and the prince. If Viscountess Yamano or Lephilia Trading happen to know this as well, they’ll add anyone who’s dealt with the royal palace to their exclusion list... That does not mean, however, that we should reveal who Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred are to Lephilia Trading.”

That was not an option. Their true identities may be common knowledge, but there was an unspoken agreement not to discuss it. Using those titles in public would only make the royalty a laughingstock.

There was also no telling if revealing Count Wondred’s identity would have any effect on an enraged foreign noble. She was not from this kingdom and had no obligation to follow the king’s orders. She could also just leave this country

and start a business elsewhere. Then another country would benefit from her spices, salt, sugar, high-quality food ingredients, and alcohol... Not to mention her gems and precious metals. Vanel would be forced to buy her goods on resale for exorbitant prices.

“Lephilia Trading has forbidden all its clients from reselling their products abroad. It’s likely that the viscountess would apply the same rules in another country...” the subordinate added.

The king slumped his shoulders. “...We have no choice but to change plans. Invite Viscountess Yamano to the royal palace. As a foreign noble with goods to share from her homeland, she’s granted an audience with the king. I shall meet her as the king rather than as Count Wondred. As for the count—who has some royal blood in his veins and bears a slight resemblance to me—he’s left the capital to travel. That sounds good, right?!” He puffed his chest proudly.

His subordinate shook his head. “I believe it is much better than your last plan. There’s just one problem—it relies on the reappearance of Viscountess Yamano. We’ve tried visiting her commodity store and reaching out to Marquis Mitchell, but to no avail...”

The king fell silent. It seemed like it’d be a while before the king officially got his hands on the goods from Viscountess Yamano’s homeland. Until then, he’d have to scrape by with the scalped goods they bought at a much higher price.

“Damn it, where did I go wrong...”

“The capital has been in chaos...under the surface,” Lephilia reported.

“Under the surface, all right,” Mitsuha repeated, smiling despite herself.

No one messes with me and gets away with it, she thought. People in this

world won't hesitate to swarm you if they think you're easy prey. Which means I'll have to crush anyone who tries to undermine me, even if it means a bit of damage or loss on my end. It's a small price to pay to prevent more predators.

If you thought Gorgeous Irene was cold-blooded, wait 'til you meet Gorgeous Mitsuha!

Nobody had seen Mitsuha around town or even in her commodity shop lately...or so it seemed. She'd been sneaking into Lephilia Trading's storehouse at night with a spare key she'd borrowed and replenishing their stock. Otherwise, they'd run out. She explained to Lephilia that the dangerous men would come after her again if she was spotted... Which wasn't a lie.

Replenishing Lephilia's stock was simple—all she had to do was jump near the storehouse, enter with the key, make sure no one was inside, jump in the goods, then walk out and lock the door behind her. Easy as pie. She entered the storehouse from the outside in case someone was working inside at night; she didn't want anyone to see her materialize out of nowhere.

There was also no need to restock every day. It was unrealistic for a trading company to receive daily shipments from sailing boats, especially in this world. Once a month would've been the norm, but that'd lead to problems with storage space and foods expiring. She had no choice but to deliver them in smaller increments. That didn't mean anyone had to know how often the shipments came in, though; that was a secret known only to her and Lephilia Trading's leaders.

"I trust you can handle the situation at your discretion," Mitsuha encouraged Lephilia. "I recommend you apply the rules harshly to hostile companies and show some leniency to friendly companies in order to maintain a good business relationship with them. They're your weapons—make good use of them!"

“Yes, Your Highness!”

Why the hell did she call me that?! I wonder if she was joking or if she actually thinks I’m a princess... Well, to a commoner like her, there’s probably not much difference between nobility and royalty. Heads can fly—literally—by offending either one.

“Anyway,” Mitsuha said, “I’ll keep replenishing your stock when I can. Keep up the good work! Show Charlolia Terrace what you’re made of!” She’d translated, summarized, and delivered a passionate oration of the famous novel *As the Crow Flies* to Lephilia. And just like the main character of that story, the girl had set her sights on the wealthiest shopping district in the capital: Charlolia Terrace.

...I bear no responsibility for how this turns out.

Lephilia’s father and brother both knew that Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred were aliases for the king and the prince. Lephilia herself, however, had no idea. She studied how to run a business and helped out with the store, but had little real-world experience; she never visited a customer to negotiate or socialize, and had never been to a noble party. Mitsuha, naturally, was also ignorant of their true identities.

As a result, neither girl had any idea that the royal palace was being completely cut off from Lephilia Trading’s products.

All right. Colette and Sabine are cheered up, Lephilia Trading only needs to be restocked once a week, and I can trust Gold Coin in my capable employees’ hands... A little loss wouldn’t hurt anyway.

So what does that leave me with? Managing Yamano County!

Mitsuha was self-funding her operation in the New World and acting on no one's orders. The initial gold the king gave her was a loan, not a payment, which meant she would have to pay it back. As such, her efforts over there were essentially volunteer work.

Managing her county, however, was the duty she received with her peerage. It wasn't something she could neglect. The lives and safety of her citizens were her first priority. After her own, anyway.

I let myself get way too busy, she thought. It's past time for an extended stay at my county residence. I'll be going to my house in Japan and the capital every now and then, but the county's gonna be my base.

Just as she was about to get to work, Colette ran up to her and made an absurd declaration: "I claim exclusive rights to Mitsuha!"

Mitsuha was baffled and asked what she meant.

"Leah, Noelle, and Ninette are plotting to steal you away from me. I've been bragging every day about how amazing you are. They think it's unfair I'm the only one who gets to spend time with you..."

"Then you shouldn't have bragged. You only have yourself to blame!"

"But..."

Leah had just turned five and was the daughter of Rachel, a maid and business advisor. Noelle was a maid who had narrowly escaped a long-term apprenticeship—also known as human trafficking; Mitsuha was pretty sure she had just turned eleven. Ninette was a maid from the fishing village. She hadn't had a birthday since Mitsuha hired her, so she was still twelve.

Ninette's physique was developed for a twelve-year-old, and she was already slightly taller than Mitsuha.

She's almost thirteen...and Caucasian... It's probably genetics. Everyone at my residence receives a nutritious and plentiful diet, so there's no avoiding her height and chest blowing right past me. It's not my fault! It's genetics!

Dammit... she steamed.

Anyway, Noelle, Ninette, Leah, and Colette are the four girls who make up the Yamano estate's esteemed Munchkin Maids! One of them isn't a maid at all and a couple are getting too big to be called munchkins, but whatever! I don't sweat the small stuff!

"You don't even sweat the big stuff, Mitsuha!"

Huh? Colette, can you read minds?

"You're saying all this out loud!"

Oh...

Mitsuha summoned the leaders and advisors of Yamano County for a meeting. She'd been checking with all of them periodically, but it was time to sit down and reassess all of their current projects.

"Randy, what's the latest report?" She kicked off the meeting with a question to Randy who was in charge of the county's research and development.

"Yes ma'am. First off, developing guns. We've been trying to implement the 'hook rifling' method you told me about, but..." he trailed off.

"Let me guess," Mitsuha continued for him, "you're having trouble maintaining the barrel in place as it rotates, inserting the cutter inside the barrel, and making a cutter strong enough to carve the rifling."

In other words, they'd barely made any progress. Building rifled guns when

they were still having trouble reproducing smoothbore guns may have been a bit too ambitious.

Mitsuha had dumped the task of developing cannons to Bozes County—there was no way a backwater county like hers without any iron could've handled that—and it was going smoothly along with the sailing boat development. Cannons were probably easier to replicate based on samples. The rifling would be relatively simple to implement if they used the La Hitte system.

There was still plenty of time to work on weapon development. The chances of Mitsuha dying prematurely due to injury or illness were slim. She'd be able to defend the county in the event of an attack—unless an accident, an assassination, or banishment removed her from the picture. The citizens had time to prepare before they'd have to fight off invaders without her. She just had to keep sharing knowledge from Earth and hope they'd figure out how to make rifled guns, rifled cannons, and explosive shells before then.

“There's no need to rush things. You'll get there in time. It's not like you're making zero progress—okay, I want reports on agriculture, forestry, fishing, and the town next.”

The county had an abundance of funds from selling two-thirds of the captured vessels' ownership to the kingdom and Count Bozes. They'd also sold the *Aeras* to the kingdom, but that money shouldn't be relied on. Nonrecurring income would be best used as an investment into new projects—mineral research, iron manufacturing, fishing boat construction, and improvement of agricultural land to name a few—just like how you shouldn't rely on gambling payouts to pay your bills.

Before all else, that money was for the county and its citizens—not for Mitsuha's personal retirement fund. The ships technically weren't her property

either, as she had seized them under the pretext of war between her county and another country. The king permitted her to take the ships in exchange for a share of their ownership.

War sure is profitable... We made a bunch of money from the battle to defend the capital too. How do you get a nation to wage war on you, personally, without involving your county or kingdom? Asking for a friend.

Chapter 58:

County Affairs

Next on the list was agricultural development.

The sandy soil made this region less productive than others, but it was perfect for introducing the Norfolk four-course system. Mitsuha decided to increase it to a six-course system by adding barley and clover to the rotation. It'd be a while before they saw the results, though. They'd have to make do with mulch and compost prepared from powdered seafood waste for a few seasons.

Producing profitable crops such as maize was going well, as well as *mizuame* manufacturing. It wouldn't be long before they could start sending the small trial boats to make deliveries to Bozes Harbor.

All right, smooth sailing for agriculture!

On to forestry.

It'd take years to see the results of their tree-planting efforts. There was still plenty of virgin forest, though.

Board game production and shiitake cultivation were progressing without issue. They also began selling paper in the capital while exploring ways to improve their pulp production. Mitsuha was going to have them search for maple trees to make maple syrup next.

She was concerned about the environmental damage that iron manufacturing would cause, but that process couldn't even start until iron ore was discovered. It might be time to use some of the county budget for ore deposit exploration.

The odds of finding a mine were slim, however, given the small size of the land. If they didn't find any, she could ask Count Bozes for permission to probe his territory and import ore. The problem with that would be the expensive shipping charges; iron ore was heavy and about half of it would be ordinary stone.

Maybe I should go with iron sand instead...

Up next: fishery.

The fishing village was doing better than ever. There had been a dramatic increase in hauls thanks to the new fishing boats, and the nets and gear from Japan. Salt production had boomed, which meant the same for processed foods. The newly improved roads also resulted in a sharp rise in delivering fish to inland territories and even the capital. Local production of fishing nets and fishing gear had also begun.

I could disappear tomorrow and the fishing village would be just fine.

And finally, Mitsuha received the report for the town. More people were visiting from other lands to shop at her general store, which meant more foot traffic for the local inns, restaurants, and other shops. Sales of local specialties such as the board games, mizuame, and Lightning Archpriestess dolls were favorable.

Wait, what was that last one?! This is the first time I'm hearing about it!

"Development in the town has been lackluster compared to the villages. Aside from the success of a few shops, it is largely unchanged. The town should *not* be falling this far behind. Please do something to bolster it!" protested Miriam. She was Mitsuha's financial advisor.

...I kinda saw that coming.

Improving the villages didn't take much because they all relied on the same primary or secondary sectors. All they had to do was increase production. The town, on the other hand, was saturated with a variety of occupations. Expecting significant growth from the service industry would be unrealistic. Their population was small so their clientele was limited.

Is there anything that would have a major impact on a secondary or tertiary sector in the town... Nope, I can't think of anything. The only consistent source of income for a small rural town like that is gonna be money spent by visitors from other territories. Those visitors come specifically for our local specialties. They're unlikely to spend money on anything else. The town needs a source of income that doesn't depend on tourist shopping...

Hmm. Hmm. Hmm...

"Mitsuha, there's no need to hold it in! Just go!" said Colette.

I don't have to go to the bathroom, damn it! Now everyone probably thinks I've been groaning 'cause I have to take a deuce! Thanks a lot, Colette...

The problem with developing the town was that it could lead to a sudden influx of ruffians similar to what Bozes County was currently experiencing. That would negatively impact the county by lowering public morale and drastically increasing the population.

Mitsuha's duty was to protect the people of this county. Did that duty extend to people who moved from elsewhere hoping for a lucrative career? Did she need to risk the safety of her people and use the county budget to improve the quality of life for people who might abandon the county to seek another opportunity as soon as the economy tanked?

No, I don't, she decided.

The only people she had a duty to protect and improve the lives of were those who'd always lived in this county or moved here after marrying into a local family. She was willing to do whatever she could to avoid a dramatic influx of people from other territories. Plus, the lords from other territories would complain if their people moved to her county without permission. She wanted no part of other lords getting mad at her and demanding indemnities because someone else broke the rules.

What can I do to help the town... Oh, I know! I'll start a business! No, not like my general store where I sell a select few items from Earth. That only lines my pockets and those of a few associates. Besides, that sort of business will die as soon as I disappear.

I need something on a larger scale. And it's imperative that the products are made here instead of on Earth. It's extremely easy for me to jump products from Earth, but it's a crutch I shouldn't rely on. I have to place limits on myself so I don't hinder this world's development, or put too much pressure on existing industries, or bring misfortune to anyone (except for villains), or leave my people in trouble—in case I suddenly disappeared...or walked under any ladders, or broke any mirrors.

...I'm a little 'stitious, okay?! Don't judge!

Anyway, what I need are products that originated in a country from this world. That'll remove the risk of influencing this world with goods and technology from Earth. And those products will happen to be delivered using a slightly avant-garde transportation method. Sweet, that won't cause any problems!

Even if I were to disappear, the business will still survive. I'm sure my people will pilfer the tools and skills to create their own version of the products by then. I want the business to be centered on light industry rather than primary-sector

products like wheat or meat. We'll have to leave heavy industry to the kingdom—things like shipbuilding, real iron production (as opposed to tatara iron), and coal. We're a small territory; heavy industries would instantly destroy our natural environment. Either way, it's out of the question; we don't have the natural resources or workers.

To get started, we'll need experts in the field. Technological prowess is the only way for a small territory with no resources to prosper. Fortunately, I have an expert in mind. On top of that, we won't have to worry about budgeting for the time and cost of transporting the processed materials. All that's left is to steal the material-processing technology and make sure my people learn to harness it.

Heck yeah! This is gonna work!

"...Are you done?" Colette asked out of the blue.

"Huh? Done with what?"

"Daydreaming."

Hey, shut up! First the captain, now her... Can't a girl think in peace?! I guess I did go quiet and leave them all hanging. They've been waiting patiently for me to say something. But it's not like I was dozing off. I was coming up with a solution to the problem Miriam brought up!

Mitsuha straightened herself up to explain her idea.

"The people of the town will use imported goods from foreign countries to manufacture profitable goods. Eventually we'll be able to replace the imports with resources grown in Yamano County to brand the products as fully local-made."

What Mitsuha had in mind was a slightly advanced version of a cottage

industry. On top of that, she had a trump card. It was the same card that Japan used to acquire foreign currency back when they were technologically behind: sericulture. They were going to farm silkworms to produce silk.

Mulberry trees would grow just fine in this climate. With ample knowledge and some hearty TLC, the workers may be able to make up for the lack of technology to raise the silkworms. The mulberry tree leaves were a popular feed for silkworms. The berries could be eaten by people, the root bark could be used for medicine, and the wood could be used for papermaking. *Zero-waste tree!*

Ain't nobody and their ilk gonna match our smooth silk!

Uh, maybe I shouldn't rap...

"Mitsuha, I received a message through my father that the king of Vanel wants to meet you in the royal palace," Lephilia said.

"Ugh..."

Mitsuha was at Lephilia's office. She was summoned by the young owner via a note tacked on the wall in the storehouse. She'd spotted it while she was there to restock the goods.

Not that there's any reason to be nervous about meeting with a king, she thought. I have plenty of experience in interacting with royalty. I've even picked fights with kings.

Besides, she could always jump the moment she felt she was in danger. This country wasn't her base in this world, so she had no reason to stick around. Getting shot in the head without warning was unlikely to happen. The king had nothing to gain from killing her—if anything, he was probably hoping to profit off

her business. There was no reason to fear for her safety.

The royal palace probably reached out to Lephilia because she was Mitsuha's sole business partner and the only person who might be able to contact her during her disappearance. Her father couldn't possibly turn down a request from the royal palace, and Lephilia couldn't go against her father.

"I haven't replied yet. I should turn it down, right? By saying I can't reach you either."

"Yep, I'm gonna pass! I mean, I left this country in a rage and I'm busy exploring other lands. It wouldn't make sense if you could contact me. So yeah, turn it down for me!"

"Ahaha, that's what I thought... Are you actually going to other countries?"

Makes sense she'd worry about that. It's the businesswoman in her.

"Yeah. This country can't be my only sales base. If anything were to happen, I won't be able to stand up for myself, and I'd be in trouble if a political disturbance or a war screwed up the economy—oh, don't worry. I won't price anything to put Lephilia Trading at a disadvantage," Mitsuha assured her.

"Please keep to that..."

The newly founded Lephilia Trading would quickly go out of business if Mitsuha were to abandon it now. Thanks to the Yamano imports, the company had made a meteoric rise to the top of the market, but Lephilia would have to establish the groundwork sooner rather than later so it could survive without Mitsuha's goods.

Good luck with that!

Anyway, Mitsuha couldn't figure out why the king would want to summon her. She was just a foreign noble, a young viscountess at that. It didn't make

sense.

“What would the king want with me, anyway?” Mitsuha wondered aloud.

“Are you serious?!” Lephilia was exasperated. “I’ve heard the rumors! About the pearls, the ruby, the emeralds... And now, every noble and merchant in the capital—no, the whole country—is talking about you, the supplier of alcohol, spices, and the richest food ingredients. Don’t tell me you’re surprised the king took an interest!”

Geez, take a chill pill... There’s no reason to get upset...

“But only a select number of people know I’m connected to your company, right?” asked Mitsuha. “Shouldn’t most of the rumors be about a beautiful young merchant who took the trading industry by storm, and her exclusive rights to sell these new luxurious imports?”

“Urgh...” Lephilia had no argument.

I knew it. Part of the reason I picked Lephilia was so she could act as a smokescreen and keep attention off me. This means she’ll have to bear the brunt of the criticism. Mwahaha!

“And I’m fine with that,” Mitsuha said.

“You are?!” Lephilia looked like she wasn’t done with that conversation, but Mitsuha bulldozed past her. It was time to bring up the true purpose of her visit.

“Would you be willing to export something to me?”

“Whuah?” Lephilia let out a funny sound.

Trade required a give-and-take of goods; it was hardly a balanced relationship if one side supplied nothing but gold. Mitsuha explained her idea.

“...And for that reason, I want to buy something from you from now on. I don’t want to keep sending back empty boats—that hurts my cred as a merchant!”

“Oh, you’re absolutely right! You know your stuff, Mitsuha!”

Sweet, she bit!

“Here’s what I think would sell for a good price in my country...”

Mitsuha told Lephilia about the export—which would be an import from Yamano County’s point of view—that she wanted. She’d surveyed the market in preparation for such an occasion by visiting shops to see how advanced Vanel’s industrial products were, what the average shop sold, what the specialty shops like wholesalers and workshops sold, and what ordinary people were unable to obtain.

She instructed Lephilia to buy in bulk at wholesalers instead of retailers and to haggle down the prices. She gave her permission to use whiskey and brandy as gifts to speed things along. It’d be silly not to make use of their weapons.

I’m not equipped with the standard “woman’s weapon,” so I have to find ways to make up for it... Don’t comment on that!

Now all Mitsuha had to do was build a storehouse at Yamano Harbor—that was what she named the fishing village’s floating pier to compete with Bozes Harbor—and jump the cargo there, pretending it was delivered by boats overnight.

Next, she jumped to her Japanese house, changed into her regular clothes, and went out. Her destination: the degenerate dressmaker’s—or Madame Degenerate’s—shop, Dresses for Maidens.

“Hello! Would you be willing to become a sister shop to a store in a foreign country?” Mitsuha asked.

“EX-EX-EXCUSE MEEEE?!”

Her dresses are guaranteed to be popular in the other world, Mitsuha thought.

The kingdom in the other world was already importing a small amount of silk, but it was absurdly expensive and the quality was lacking. And while Mitsuha was planning on farming silkworms in Yamano County, she didn’t know how many years it would take after planting the mulberry trees before they could begin. England failed repeatedly for years at raising larvae.

That was why Mitsuha was going to get her county started by importing silk from Earth for relatively cheap. The townspeople could use it to make and sell products. Simply reselling the textile wasn’t good enough. The business would die as soon as the import from Earth stopped. The silk would be made into clothing, bags, wallets, parasols, and more.

Those products would undoubtedly sell. For high prices, too.

They’d still have to compete for sales with existing businesses, but that was inevitable. Currently, there was only a small amount of silk products on the market, and they were imported from other countries. It was unlikely the import merchants relied on sales of silk alone, and the export merchants had plenty of other countries to sell to. Besides, one small town could hardly make enough products to have an impact on worldwide demand. The limited amount of extremely luxurious products made at Yamano County wouldn’t travel very far or have much effect on the general market.

Once the townspeople realized that silk was as valuable as gold, they’d

devote themselves to mulberry tree cultivation and sericulture. Mitsuha had to show them how much money they could make first. Spending years growing mulberry trees and taking care of silkworms without a copper coin to show for it would harm morale.

To get people to work, you gotta dangle the carrot.

The town would start by importing silk textiles and making products. They would then import raw silk thread to make fabrics. And once their sericulture became operational—*I have the order all backwards, you say? Who cares!*—they would stop importing silk from other countries and switch to entirely locally made raw materials. By then, the business would survive even if Mitsuha suddenly disappeared. As long as the next lord wasn't exploitative.

No worries there, either. I'm gonna teach my people how to drive away a wicked lord so they don't have to suffer under their rule. I'm not talking about a peasant uprising—I'll show them how to spread word of the lord's wrongdoing to the king and to other territories and peacefully destroy that lord's name. That'll make room for a new leader to come and take over. They're bound to get a good one eventually if they repeat the process enough times, or at least land a guy who's willing to cooperate.

...What's that? There's no peaceful way to destroy a name? I see...

Well, moving on.

Mitsuha elaborated, "I'm planning to open a shop in a foreign nation selling custom-made silk dresses for noble ladies and other silk products. It's going to be in a rural area with no electricity. I need someone to train capable personnel. I eventually want to turn the business into a main industry for the county, and a source of revenue for the nation. Would you be willing to offer advice and technological instruction? And help me buy processed silk and raw silk thread?"

“Once the shop becomes famous, you might even be invited to noble parties for your contribution to the shop as a skilled foreign designer... And if you get recognized for bringing great profit to the country, there’s at least a 0.5% chance you’ll receive an honorary peerage.”

“Ah...” the dressmaker uttered.

“Ah?”

“AAAHHHHHHH!” she screamed.

Oh, she fainted...

Eons later—actually, it was just a little under a month—a small storehouse was built in Yamano Harbor to stash the “imported” silk. A dressmaking workshop had also been constructed in the town. The latter was both a workshop and a training facility. Mitsuha had the townspeople start by practicing with cheap cotton instead of expensive silk.

We could sell the failed...err, defective...um, non-sale worthy products to the locals for cheap or donate them to the orphanage or street urchins in the capital.

She wouldn’t tell anyone where they came from, though—having low-quality products associated with Yamano County would hurt their future brand name.

Mitsuha was training the workers to become dressmakers for women rather than tailors that made suits and coats for men. She planned to add a tailoring branch in the future if they could afford it. The workshop had been built, but the inside was empty.

The dressmaker was finding supply routes for cotton, hemp, and silk. She didn’t need to close her shop or move to Yamano County to train the workers;

she would continue her business in Japan as usual and give advice when Mitsuha asked for guidance on design and sewing. As far as the dressmaker knew, the shop was located in a developing country on Earth. She'd write down or relay the instructions to Mitsuha, who would then translate it to the other world. Very occasionally, Mitsuha took her own seamstresses to the dressmaker's shop for direct instruction with her interpreting.

I'll have to be careful to avoid mentioning where they're from, just like when I brought Adelaide here to get measured... I can also purchase some of the dresses she made with her Japanese equipment to sell as our stock. Establishing our dresses as a luxury brand should be easy. I think.

They were taking sericulture slowly. It was a long-term project, and no good would come from rushing. The degenerate dressmaker wouldn't be of any help there—she may be a pro with fabrics, but it was unlikely she knew anything about raising silkworms. Producing silk required much more than knowledge of its history—it required years of hands-on experience. Reading a book wasn't enough to understand what to do when the silkworms got sick or when they lost their appetite, what temperature and humidity was best for them, or how to pick out mulberry leaves they'd find appetizing. Mitsuha would eventually have to find an expert to learn the trade.

There were still many people on Earth who practiced sericulture using old-fashioned methods. There could be a few retirees who stepped down to make way for the younger generation but were feeling unfulfilled. If Mitsuha offered them a well-paying job as a trainer for passionate young workers—and told them their names would go down in history in the country where they worked, and even have products named after them to be sold all over the world—they might jump at the chance. Even if it required being flown to an unspecified developing country on Earth and being away from their families for a few years. They

wouldn't be able to call or send emails to their loved ones, but Mitsuha could deliver letters for them. And her claim that the products would be sold "all over the world" wouldn't be a lie as she never mentioned said "world" wasn't Earth.

Once they figured out sericulture, they'd then have to tackle the next major hurdle: silk reeling. On modern-day Earth, machinery was used to dry, store, sort, simmer, and boil the cocoons, reel the silk, and re-reel it onto a larger frame. They would need experts to do all of that while managing the temperature and humidity, and applying the right amount of work in each step. Replicating all of that in a world without air conditioners, boilers, lighting equipment, or automatic silk-reeling machines would be quite a challenge.

People did manage it in the past without modern machines, though. There's silk in this world too, so I know they're getting by somehow.

She could learn the silk-reeling technique being used in this world, but it was unlikely anyone would share their knowledge. Silk workshops probably treated their craft as closely guarded secrets. It might be simpler to research the modern method on Earth and try to recreate it. Even if they couldn't replicate it completely, they'd end up producing higher quality silk than what was currently being made in this world. Hopefully, anyway.

There was little point in figuring all that out until they knew they could sell the silk products. They shouldn't jump the gun before they'd even established a market. Mitsuha would import processed silk for the time being, and then start acquiring raw silk thread from countries like China, India, and Brazil to weave and knit their own textile. It'd be years before they started sericulture.

I wonder if we should start weaving using old manual looms... Obviously, the dressmaker has no experience with those. She's gonna teach everyone how to stitch pre-made silk fabric purchased on Earth. That'll get things started faster.

The townspeople weren't going to start manufacturing textiles until they reproduced old-fashioned manual looms, so it'd be a while before they started making products. She planned to build the most efficient non-electric loom that could be made with this world's technology. *Everything else should fall into place afterward*, Mitsuha hoped.

The workers would start by using a manual loom from Earth. But where could you find one of those? In a foreign country? A museum?

Hmm. I want engineers who can make machines! We also have the guns to figure out, and it'd be great to have iron-processing machines and the personnel to manage them...

*What about my blog, **Help Me Out! Running Your Land as a Viscountess?** Should I ask for ideas or recruit people there? No, that might be a bad idea. What if it becomes too popular and someone who knows me as "Princess Nanoha" sees it? Or if someone realizes this is another world and sells information about me or cooks up some other nefarious scheme?*

There aren't many people like the degenerate dressmaker who will remain doggedly loyal as long as they get to do their dream job. But there's no way I can figure all this out on my own.

Mitsuha groaned, deep in thought, but came up with nothing.

Well, there's no need to rush things. I'll take it slow! I'm bound to break down if I try to go all out on every single project.

The town was already in much better shape than other rural towns in the country. Nobody was starving to death. Nobody was killing children or selling them into slavery just to have one less mouth to feed, or abandoning old people in the mountains, or fleeing to other territories. That alone was impressive in

this world. Overly rapid change or a dramatic economic disparity with neighboring counties could cause needless friction. She shouldn't force development if she wanted to avoid that.

I have more project ideas like ceramics, but we're short on hands... I really do want more engineers... Should I recruit people from Earth? No, that should be my last resort. As I told Dr. McCoy in the past, what if something happened to me while my guests from Earth are in this world? What would they do? They might lose their minds from the despair of not being able to go home, or grow ambitious and try to abuse their Earthly knowledge to conquer the world.

Actually, that sounds like an exciting drama—I mean, no!

There was no reason to rush. Humble rural towns didn't handle rapid change very well, typically. A sudden increase in wealth would lead some of the community to indulge in luxuries, drinking, and gambling. It could also attract gangs and swindlers. Everyone said that no one would attempt crime in the Lightning Archpriestess's county, but they were underestimating the evil of man—the levels to which people were willing to stoop for money or power.

There was no guarantee that everyone who moved here would be from this country, either. Some foreigners might see her as nothing more than an overhyped paper tiger. This territory had historically been seen as a poor rural land with no value—which was the truth—and never had to deal with sleazy predators. An increase in wealth would attract them in droves.

It's not my style to overlook petty criminals, let alone serious felons. We're a tiny county of less than seven hundred people—we can't support criminals and freeloaders who contribute nothing to society. That goes for government officials who take bribes and turn a blind eye too. Doesn't matter if the criminals are sly and leave no evidence of their wrongdoing. After all, I am the legislative

branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch all in one.

Separation of powers? Nope, never heard of it!

This is my jurisdiction and as long as I don't do anything that would affect the country at large—enough for the royal palace to get involved in—I'm free to rule it how I see fit. I don't need evidence to dispose of villains. My will is all that matters. I just need to avoid inciting my good citizens to rebel, but even then, I'd still be able to do whatever I want. At least when it comes to handling criminals.

Viva feudal system!

It'd been about a month since Mitsuha began her new project in the town. She occasionally returned to the New World to restock Lephilia Trading's storehouse, but she had no idea what was going on over there. Lephilia herself had apparently gained quite a reputation as a businesswoman, but she was a commoner and would never be invited to a noble party. She didn't talk about the nobility with other merchants, either.

Lephilia might have been taking the world by storm with her new business full of highly attractive products, but she was still a teenage girl. It made sense that other merchants wouldn't want to discuss noble affairs with her. She was young enough to be the daughter or granddaughter of most of her peers, and she had little more experience than a common clerk. The nobility was a delicate and dangerous topic, especially given her direct connection to the chaos that was unfolding among the upper class.

On that note, it was time for Mitsuha to check in on her exporting business. She also wanted to penetrate the market further and increase her influence.

"Are you going to be busy again?" Colette asked, seeming to deduce

Mitsuha's intentions from her expression. She was a sharp girl.

"Oh, yeah..."

Mitsuha had given Colette a simple overview of her endeavors in the New World. She hadn't said anything to Sabine—if she did, there was a good chance the girl would tell the king and even confront Mitsuha, not as a friend, but as the royal princess. That would invite unnecessary trouble.

She didn't spend a lot of time in the New World for safety reasons and for bathroom reasons. She didn't jump there every day either. It wasn't like she was neglecting Colette and Sabine completely.

"I'm your vassal candidate, so I want to help too! It'd be a good learning experience for me!" Colette insisted.

There were a couple of problems with taking Colette and Sabine to the New World. First, they didn't speak the language, and second, they'd have too much value as hostages. Mitsuha couldn't risk it unless it was for a very short visit.

"You don't speak their language, Colette. I'll take you to Japan on occasion. That'll have to be good enough..."

"I can speak the language," she said in the New World tongue.

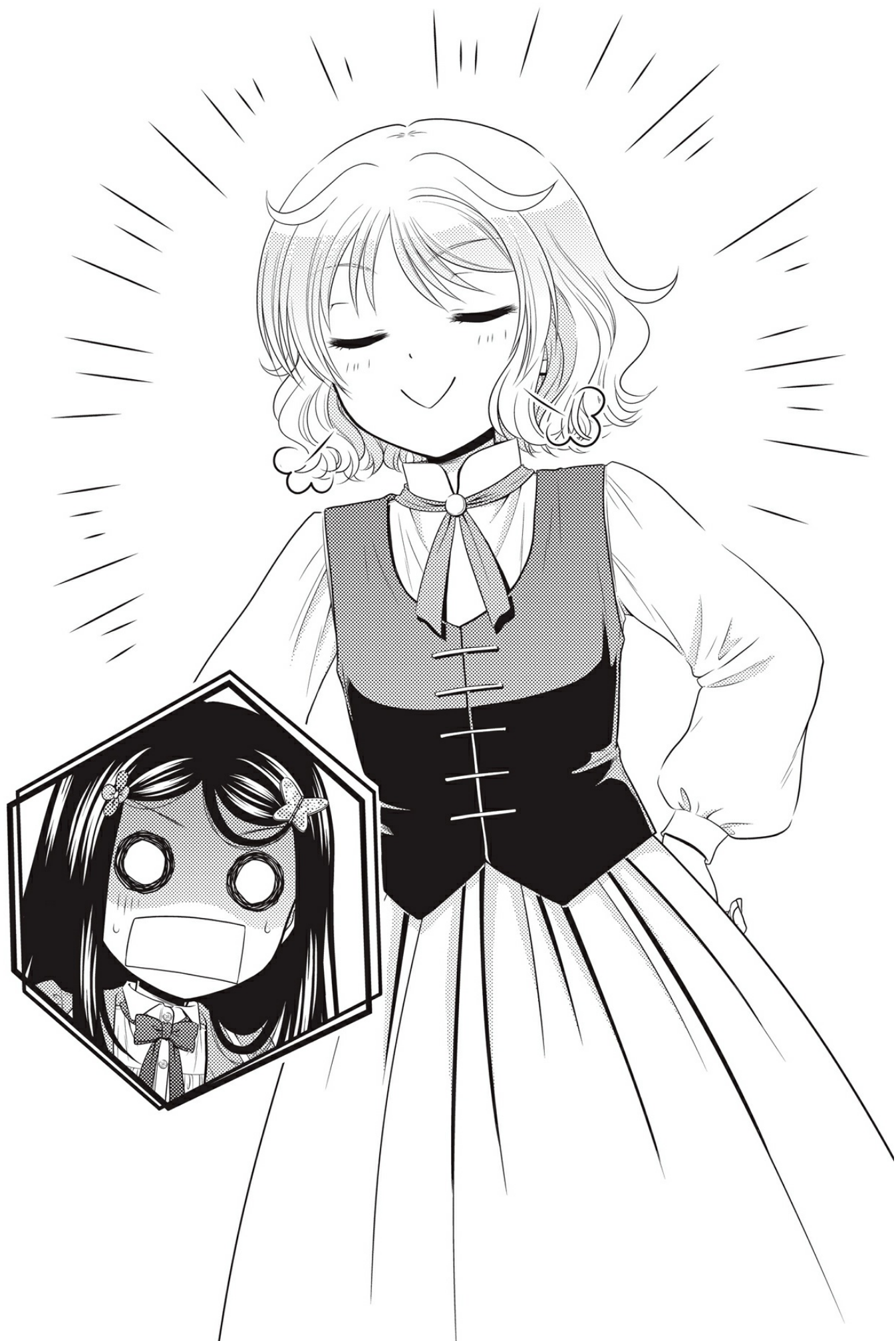
"Wha—?"

"I learned from the sailors who naturalized. Did you really think I only study what you tell me to?"

"Holy cow!"

Her sentences were broken, and her pronunciation was a little off, but Mitsuha's automatic language processor conveyed Colette's speech into her mind as the New World's language, and she was perfectly understandable.

...How the hell did she manage that?!



Chapter 59:

A Falling Out

“Hello-o-o!” Mitsuha greeted.

“Oh, you’re safe, Lady Mitsuha!” said one of the guards at the station next to her commodity shop.

This world was dangerous, so it was perfectly natural to worry for someone’s safety if they went on a long trip or hadn’t been seen in a while. Bandits, injuries, illnesses—the people of this world were just a hair away from death.

“Your shop got a lot of visitors, as usual. We saw messengers from nobles and merchants, and even butlers and maids looking for a job... The latter bunch were clearly no rookies. They looked experienced. You know what that means, right?”

Yep. They were sent by their employer to cozy up to me.

“I already have enough spies.”

“Hahaha...”

Mitsuha took out some gifts. “These are souvenirs from my trip, so they’re a little fancier than the usual.”

She’d bought them whiskey, brandy, steamed cakes, chocolate-coated almonds, and cookies. The expense was more than worth it as payment for protecting her shop for a month.

I made the cookies, by the way. My feminine skills will get rusty if I don’t bake

every now and then. I'm not exactly feminine on the outside, so I have to compensate somehow... Oh, shut up!

"Whoaa!" The guards seemed delighted.

"Make sure to leave some for the other four!"

Four of the guards were out on patrol, and only two were watching the station. She meant that comment jokingly—she knew they weren't the type to hog the gifts all to themselves.

"So... Who's the girl?" One of the guards looked over.

I, uh, brought Colette with me. I folded! She threatened me. That was downright dirty...

"This is my little sister, Colette. She followed me here."

"I am Colette. Nice too meet yoo," she fumbled her words.

He looked impressed. "N-Nice to meet you too, little miss!"

It was clear from Colette's accent that it wasn't her native language. To think she studied the language just to follow her sister across the world demonstrated an absurd level of ambition for a little girl who was likely raised pampered. This world didn't have proper language-learning materials and DVDs to work on pronunciation, so what she did was truly astounding. It was no wonder the guard was impressed.

Colette relied on anime and language-learning DVDs to learn Japanese and English, but she had no such materials for the New World language. That one was genuinely self-taught. Her only resources were talking with the naturalized sailors and studying the simplified dictionary Mitsuha made for them. This ten-year-old did all that while learning Japanese *and* English on the side.

Her tenacity is terrifying... It was probably her desire to be by my side and help me that drove her to do it, though. She cares about me that much, huh...

“Mitsuha! Snap out of it!” Colette yelled.

Oh, whoops. I got emotional and zoned out...

Mitsuha had taught Colette proper etiquette and gotten her used to wearing slightly posh clothes so that she could at least pass for the daughter of a big-city merchant. It wouldn't be hard for anyone to believe she was a tomboyish lesser noble or the third daughter of a high-ranking noble family who was intentionally acting a little unmannerly so she could travel incognito.

This enabled Mitsuha to claim that they were sisters. It was perfectly common for nobles to have half-siblings. Her own appearance made it likely she was the daughter of a third consort from a distant land who married for politics, or even a mistress's child. Also, being sisters would let her and Colette act like the BFFs they were while in the New World. She only wanted them to act as lord and vassal when strictly necessary.

“Anyway, thank you for looking out! I appreciate your help while I'm gone!” Mitsuha said.

“Why, of course! It's our pleasure!”

All right, I can check the guard station off the list! I'm sure these two will inform the other four guards about Colette. Next up...

“Hello-o-o!”

“...Please wait a moment.”

Good ol' Micchan's place. The New World Micchan, specifically. Mitsuha had

been to their estate enough times that the young guard recognized her and didn't even ask for the purpose of her visit. He would normally direct the guests to set up an appointment, but he was probably going to announce her arrival directly to the marquis.

Sweet, it seems like he's gotten pretty used to me.

"Mitsuha! You shouldn't make normal people adapt to your ways!" Colette chided.

...You think so?

"Right this way, my lady. Marquis Mitchell will see you," the guard said upon his return. He led Mitsuha and Colette straight to the reception room.

"Where in the world have you been?!" the marquis exploded.

"Hyah?!" Mitsuha yelped. "What are you so mad about—"

"How could I *not* be mad?!"

Man, he's furious! But why?

"Why would you disappear for a month without ever contacting me?! I figured you'd refrain from attending parties for a while because of what happened. But to vanish the way you did and go a whole *month* without delivering me any kind of message... You'd better have a good explanation!

"I've been sending messengers every day to your commodity shop, Lephilia Trading, your bank, and anywhere else you might be only to find no hints as to your whereabouts. Do you have any idea how worried we've been?"

Ah... Well, I feel bad for making them worry, but...

Mitsuha replied, "I didn't contact you because you were the one who recommended I attend the party where I was tricked into meeting with those

shady hoodlums. Do you have anything to say for *yourself*, marquis?"

"Urgh..."

"I know you were aware of how those men treated me and how I've been avoiding them. And yet, I didn't see you do anything to defend me when I was surrounded."

"Urk..."

All right, I have him on the ropes... I can't let him think he can yell and take advantage of me because I'm a little girl.

He may have outranked her as a marquis, but she was from another country; she didn't have to listen to him. It'd be ridiculous if nobles could order around nobles from other countries just because of their rank. Count Bozes had scolded her countless times, but only because he was genuinely worried about her. The marquis was only thinking of his own interest. That was what he meant when he said they were worried. It wasn't about Mitsuha's safety; it was about losing his benefits.

I came to him first upon my return to high society even after what happened at the party he brought me to, and not only were the first words out of his mouth not an apology, but he also decided to yell at me. Big mistake, marquis. Big mistake.

Mitsuha glared at him without a hint of guilt in her eyes. The marquis fidgeted, looking surprised by her reaction. He had probably intended to gain the upper hand by yelling at her and steering the conversation in a direction that favored him.

But Mitsuha had had enough. She felt bad for Micchan, who was standing pale-faced next to the marquis. She was hoping for this to be a win-win

relationship that benefited both sides. If he was going to yell and try to assert dominance without apologizing for what he did, she wanted nothing to do with him anymore.

“We’re leaving,” Mitsuha turned around to head for the door. She had no intention of staying and sitting down for a discussion.

After a short pause, “...W-Wait! What do you think you’re doing?!” the marquis panicked. “His Majesty has granted you an audience. I want to discuss that matter...”

Ah-hah, so that’s the reason for his behavior. The royal palace had reached out to him as well as Lephilia... But why’s he acting so heavy-handed? He could’ve just told me. Why yell at me and try to back me into a corner?

There’s something fishy going on here... Well, I only have one response!

Mitsuha spun around to face him and declared, “I refuse!”

“...Huh?” the marquis gaped. One normally wouldn’t reject a summons from a king.

She continued, “I’m not a subject of this country’s king. An invitation would have been one thing, but I have no reason to follow his orders. Also, introducing myself to another country’s king under the title I’m using now and being pressured into demands from him could cause all kinds of problems back home.”

“Oh...” A light flicked on in the marquis’s head.

Mitsuha truly was a viscountess, so she didn’t lie when she introduced herself as such. However, she’d also been dropping hints that could be interpreted to mean she had another position as a member of her country’s royal family. The king of Vanel treating Mitsuha like a lesser noble and twisting her arm with

oppressive demands would look bad, and as a royal of her own country, she couldn't simply yield to his wants. Therefore, an audience with the king was less than ideal at her current position.

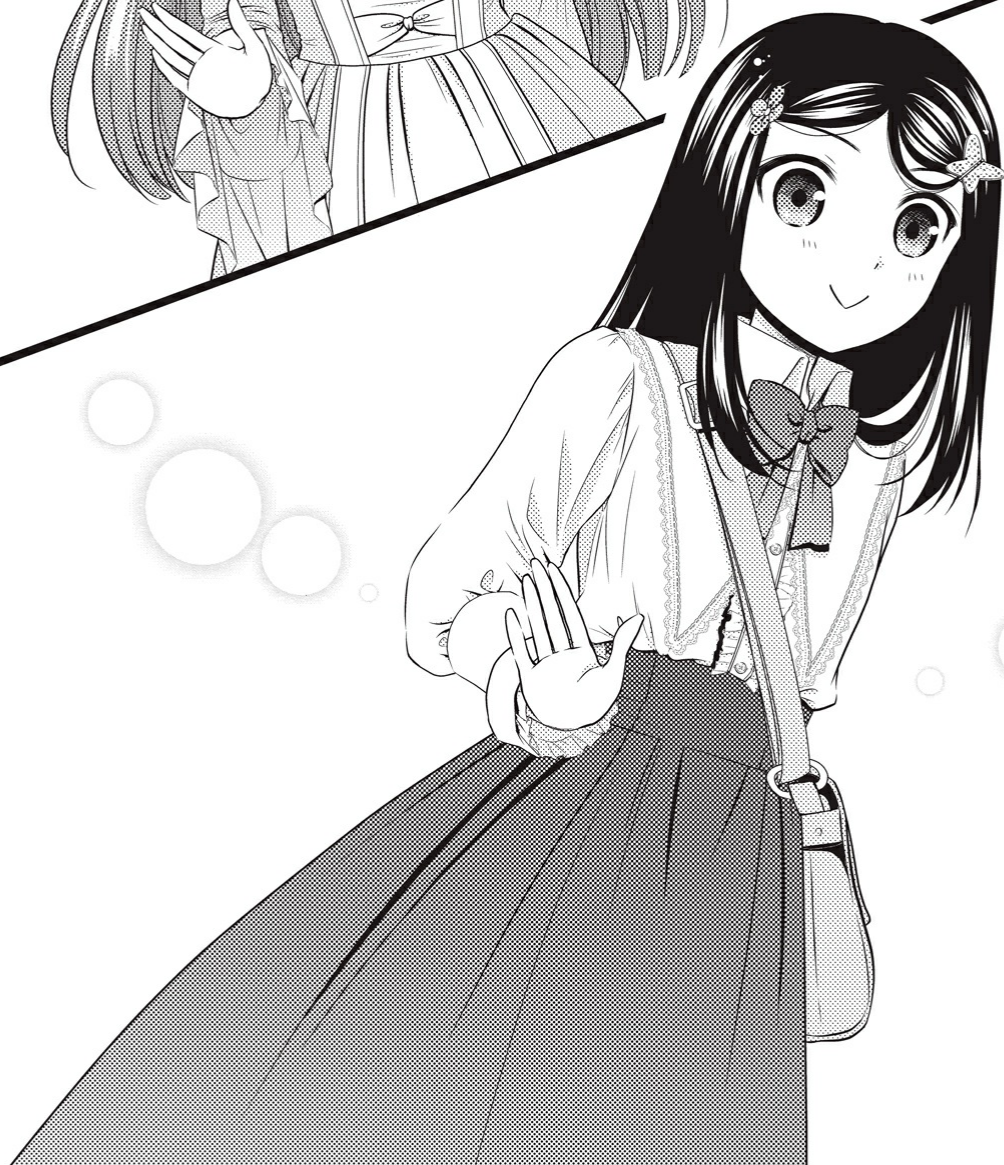
I haven't told a single lie. It's their fault for misinterpreting my words and jumping to conclusions.

The marquis seemed too stunned to utter a word. Her answer was reasonable.

Time for the knockout blow!

"If you insist I meet him anyway, I'll find someone more sensible, perhaps from another faction, to help me out or I might move my trading base to another country."

"Wha?!" The marquis's face went from pale to white. He'd be in a lot of trouble if he drove her out of his faction, or even worse, out of the country.



“Now then, we’ll be taking our leave.” She turned to Micchan, who looked like she was near tears. “See you later, Micchan!” she grinned.

That was to cue that I may be cutting ties with the marquis, but she’s still my friend. After all, I didn’t befriend her because she’s the marquis’s daughter—it was the other way around! Our friendship is not about peerage. The standoffish girl I met turned out to be a kind-hearted, stand-up gal. She rescued me from my own lame joke at a party. The marquis is just some guy who happened to be her dad. I wouldn’t have gotten acquainted with the marquis if he weren’t Micchan’s father.

Micchan was keen; she inferred the meaning of the gesture right away and smiled meekly. She waved her hand slightly at her waist. She was doing a tiny version of the “fare thee well” wave that noble ladies do. Mitsuha gave her a tiny wave back.

We’re heading out!

“Ohhh my Goddess, I’ve done it! I’ve really done it now!” Marquis Mitchell cradled his head and bawled after Mitsuha left. “But it’s not my fault! I don’t know how to act around a young foreign girl like her! I spoke with her as any marquis would to a viscountess. I occasionally took a rough tone with her, but I was polite all around... What made her suddenly turn on me like that?”

Micheline, his daughter, wasn’t in the reception room when Mitsuha was shown in. The marquis didn’t want her to see him reprimand the viscountess in an attempt to gain the upper hand. But as soon as she heard that her friend returned, she rushed to the reception room. Micheline heard the latter half of their conversation but it wasn’t her place to interject when two noble lords

were speaking. However, now that it looked like the viscountess might be cutting ties with her father, she had no reason to hold back. As Mitsuha's friend, she now held much more influence over the girl.

"Father... Are you stupid...? She's mad because you were trying to take advantage of her, obviously. Mitsuha is much smarter than she looks. She was chosen—with good reason—to scout Vanel and send back information that will influence her country's policy toward our land. She might be the daughter of a concubine or a mistress, but she was clearly groomed to become a secret weapon, unlike her sisters who were reared as pawns in political marriages. It's evident she was raised with affection, and not as a tool. Are you telling me you figured none of that out after all the time you've spent with her?"

Marquis Mitchell was aghast. Not because of his daughter's speculation about Mitsuha, but because his sweet beloved Micheline just called him stupid. The cute little girl who had always respected him as a marquis and followed him around whenever he was home had just insulted him... It was as if his whole world had just shattered.

For the first time, his daughter's favorite person was a friend rather than a family member. That was the moment you knew your child was ready to spread their wings and spend more time out of the nest. It should've been a joyous occasion. And yet, Marquis Mitchell couldn't repress his overwhelming feelings of sadness and frustration.

"By the way, who was the girl with Mitsuha?" Micheline asked.

"Huh?"

It seemed Colette's introduction to the Mitchells would have to wait...

“Mitsuha, wasn’t that person your guardian in this country? Was it okay you did that?” Colette was concerned.

“We have no formal arrangement, and I don’t owe him anything... I just let him help me out and benefit from doing so because he’s my friend’s dad. I have no problem with cutting him off if he’s gonna misinterpret our relationship and get impudent like that.”

“Oh, that’s all he meant to you? That’s really different from the way I see *our* lord.”

Who?

“Oh, sorry! I’m talking about Count Bozes!”

Oh, okay—wait a minute, I thought I was your lord! You better not be cheating on me, Colette!

Anyway, all Mitsuha said was that she might find another faction, or she’d move out of the country if he tried to take advantage of her again. The keywords were “might” and “if,” implying she wasn’t going to do it right away, and that she was willing to give him another chance. She was okay with resuming their relationship if he reconsidered his attitude and never tried to twist her arm like that again. She didn’t necessarily want to sever ties with Micchan’s dad.

It was true, however, that she already knew plenty of good-natured nobles—some of whom led powerful factions of their own—and wealthy merchants. She knew she had options.

Starting up business in neighboring countries had already been on Mitsuha’s mind. Instead of working solely from Vanel and exporting to its neighbors, she could build a base and found a trading company like Lephilia Trading in each

country. She wouldn't own any of the companies, but she could still have complete power over them. Threatening to sever business with them and sell her products to a different company was a death knell. Rightful ownership and legality meant little compared to that.

That would allow her to do whatever she wanted in each country without taking on any legal or financial responsibility. It would enable her to pack up and leave at any time. She'd also be free to conspire with foreign companies when necessary.

Man, this is exciting! I can create the secret evil economic empire of my dreams! I'll call it the Foundation, and it'll follow in the footsteps of big-name evil organizations like Necrime, Gorgom, the Hyakki Empire, Shocker, and Panther Claw.

I can feel my ambitions growing...

"WHAT?!" The king almost jumped out of his chair in response to his subordinate's report.

"Lephilia Trading is continuing to insist they haven't received any contact from her. And as for Marquis Mitchell..."

"...He finally made contact, but they had a falling out after he upset her..." the king finished the subordinate's sentence.

"Yes, Your Majesty. And the relationship frayed because..."

"The marquis made an aggressive attempt to convince her to meet with me. I can hardly be angry at him for that."

The king's every attempt to interact with Mitsuha had been a disaster. It was hardly a surprise, then, that his tactic to send Marquis Mitchell as the

middleman not only failed, but caused the man to lose the trust and the beneficial relationship he built with the girl. Guilt overrode any anger the king might've felt.

Silence stretched between the king and his subordinate.

"Well, Viscountess Yamano had only just returned," the king began to deduce. "Marquis Mitchell was likely the first person she contacted. We can expect her to visit Lephilia Trading, the bank, and other acquaintances. And she'll go to parties too. It's not time to panic yet. If we go through Lephilia Trading—and are very careful with our wording—she will not be able to refuse me out of hand. It's too early to fret... I feel bad for Marquis Mitchell, though. I'll have to make it up to him somehow..."

The king had his own ideas. But were they any good...?

"What?! You had a fight with Marquis Mitchell, Lady Mitsuha?!" Lephilia exclaimed. She was so distraught that she accidentally threw in an honorific "Lady" onto Mitsuha's name.

I guess it's hard to see us on the same level after I told her what I just did to a marquis.

"Yeah. Girls have to stand up for themselves if someone tries to take advantage of them!"

"Not when you're talking to a marquis! Why couldn't you just stay seated?!"

Mitsuha had just made her official return to Lephilia's Trading. Lephilia was mortified when she told her about her split with Marquis Mitchell.

"You're overreacting."

“No I’m not! He’s a m-marquis! A marquis! A hundred viscounts don’t stand a chance against a man of that rank!”

“Sure, but I’m not from this country. His peerage is irrelevant to me.”

“Ah...” Lephilia seemed to calm down a little. Emphasis on “a little.”

I wouldn’t be able to oppose him if I was from this country. Differences in political strength, wealth, and personal connections play a big role in relationships with other nobles and even vassals within the same house—not to mention the leaders of factions, nobles from neighboring territories, and wealthy merchants... But none of that matters to me. I don’t have territory in this country or agricultural or industrial businesses that my income relies on. I’m not bound by the shackles of human relationships. I can cut them off, pack up, and move to a different country whenever I want.

“I’d be perfectly fine with leaving this country, but what would *you* do after that, Lephilia?” Mitsuha asked a bit cattily.

“What else? I’d leave the country with you and refound Lephilia Trading abroad! Then we’ll bleed Vanel dry for driving us away! As long as you’re in good health, Lady Mitsuha, we can resurrect the company as many times as we wish!”

“I had a feeling you’d say that!”

The girls laughed together.

Yup, I’m a bad influence on Lephilia...

“Anyway,” Mitsuha said, “please don’t treat Marquis Mitchell’s family any differently because of what happened. Micchan—er, Micheline is my friend, and they did help me out a lot. Can you continue to treat them the same? With slightly favorable attention?”

“Understood!”

Okay, that’s enough about the marquis for now. Next up...

“Any update on the royal palace?”

Lephilia hesitated to answer. “Yes, actually... They haven’t contacted me directly, but they’ve been persistently reaching out through my father. They’re still adamant about summoning you to an audience with the king. My father’s face goes pale every time I tell him I can’t get in touch with you either...”

Lephilia may have disagreed with the Seltz Company’s business philosophies, but that didn’t mean she had a bad relationship with her father. It was perfectly common in this country for a father to spend time preparing his sons to inherit the family business and not involve his daughters. She probably felt bad about all the stress this deal was causing her father.

This should cheer her up.

“Next time they reach out, tell them I accept. Say I did so reluctantly because the request came from you. Feel free to emphasize your dad’s part in this too—he did relay the request, after all.”

“A-Are you sure?! Thank you so much! That will mean so much to my father!”

No problem! I don’t mind helping out the family of an important business partner!

I’m not necessarily against meeting with the king. Of course, I wouldn’t go out of my way to see him—I have no desire or need to do so—but he must have a decent reason for summoning me. And I can’t imagine anything good would come from antagonizing a king. The best option here is to meet with him as an ordinary foreign noble without revealing my real position (lol) or making any promises. I’m gonna convince him I’m harmless and avoid answering any

questions. He'll eventually lose interest in me.

Why did Marquis Mitchell take that hostile approach with me...? It was so unnecessary. Weird.

"All right, let's get down to business. We're gonna review the sales data and reassess which items to stock and how many of each. We'll also shortlist our wholesaler clients to strengthen Lephilia Trading's position and prevent a price collapse. Now, how are my products doing?"

Business was much more important than paying a courtesy call to the king.

The day of the audience with the king arrived. Marquis Mitchell typically would've been the person to escort Mitsuha to the royal palace, but she accepted the request through Lephilia's father. It was unheard of for the president of a mid-sized company to escort a viscountess to an audience with the king, so she decided to go alone.

She slipped into one of Madame Degenerate's custom dresses and gracefully made her way to the royal palace...on her own two feet.

Yeah, I know it's atypical, but I don't know if a run-of-the-mill chartered carriage would be allowed into the royal palace without an inspection, and the coachman's jaw probably would've hit the floor when I told them my destination, Mitsuha thought. When entering a Japan Self-Defense Forces base or a US military base in Japan, you need to prepare documents like an automobile inspection certificate and proof of mandatory or voluntary vehicle insurance. If you take a taxi, they'll inspect the inside of the car, the trunk, and the bottom of the car... I'm walking to avoid all that fuss.

The gatekeeper's eyes practically popped out when she arrived at the royal

palace gates.

Noble girls don't normally just walk up to the royal palace? I see... Well, Mr. Gatekeeper, it doesn't matter to me as long as you let me in.

Huh? You're gonna escort me? You'll get in trouble if you let a noble girl wander the royal palace alone? That makes sense...

Sorry!

Mitsuha was shown to the reception room. Now she just had to wait to be summoned into the great hall. He was the king; she was just a foreign viscountess—it'll probably be a few hours before he was ready to see her.

The summons came just a few moments later, much earlier than expected. It was time to meet the King of Vanel.

I've met more than a few kings at this point. Sabine's father was the first, and I talked to many more during the journey in the Good Ship Lollipop for the preparatory treaty talks. Some were good people, and others were insufferably arrogant. What kind of person would this king be...

"Raise your head," the king commanded.

Mitsuha had to keep her head down as she entered the great hall and approach the king and wait for his instruction to look up. She looked up and saw his face for the first time.

"Huh?"

Mitsuha recognized him.

"Count...Wondred?"

She stared dumbfoundedly at the man on the throne.

“Hm? Do you know him? He has royal blood, but he comes from a line that has fallen to subject status. I’ve heard he resembles me.”

Oh, he’s a relative. That would explain the resemblance... Their hair and beard are slightly different now that I think about it. I had no idea that old hoodlum was related to the king. Is that why the other nobles let him do whatever he wanted...and why Marquis Mitchell couldn’t oppose him? Hmm... Extenuating circumstances—maybe I should give him a break.

“Viscountess Yamano,” the king addressed, “I’ve heard you are selling products from your country in my kingdom. Where are you from?”

Whoa, he’s not wasting any time! He didn’t even bother with self-introductions... I did expect that question, though. It’s probably the reason he summoned me.

“I hail from a land called Japan, Your Majesty.”

“Japan...? I’ve never heard of it.”

Of course you haven’t.

“It could be known by another name in this region,” she said. “It’s called different things depending on the country. Some examples are Nihon, Nippon, Yapan, and Zipang. Japan’s not the only country like this—there’s a country called England that’s also known as Great Britain, the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth, and more.”

Well, “England” refers to the constituent state rather than the larger nation, but people get it mixed up all the time, so whatever. I’m just trying to confuse the king anyway.

“Uh, hmm... I suppose Vanel is known by multiple names as well.”

I’ll bet that’s true of most countries.

“I gave you my country’s name because you asked, Your Majesty, but it’s not yet time to officially announce where I’m from. I have orders from my country to operate using only my own name and resourcefulness, so I am afraid I won’t be able to share any more details with you today... I would also appreciate it if the name I just gave you didn’t leave this hall.”

The king surely already figured through investigations that Mitsuha didn’t want to share her country’s name, and her current attitude should’ve made that even more clear. He was likely already familiar with the name Japan—she’d been writing it on import declaration forms—but figured she made it up, and was planning to play it off as “one of the many names” in case of future diplomatic relations.

Anyone who can take a hint would back off now. He wouldn’t try to make me point it out on a map, would he? A man who became king surely isn’t that idiot—

“Someone!” the king shouted. “Bring me a map!”

...What. The. Hell???

The chancellor—Mitsuha figured that was who he was—grimaced, but the other lower ranking men in the room scrambled out as if competing to score points with the king.

Mitsuha sighed.

So... Okay. That’s how it is... He’s gonna try to squeeze information out of me without any regard for my circumstances. I suppose I should’ve expected that from the king of an aggressive state. I’m used to my king, so I assumed they’d all be calm and dignified like him... Though that’s the last thing I’d describe the king of Zegleus as when he’s being pushed around by Sabine—oh yeah, and the king of the second country I visited with the delegation was really cocky.

Anyway, I'm not gonna let him domineer over me. If I give him what he wants right now, his demands will only escalate. Besides, I couldn't show him on a map if I wanted to, anyway. Japan's not on it. Not even Sabine's country is on their map. I could point at a random chunk of land, but it would only take a question or two from an expert to expose my lie. That would just give them a reason to interrogate me.

Just seconds later...

"I brought a map, Your Majesty!" one of the men came huffing in.

That was way too fast. They probably prepared it beforehand.

"Excellent. Bring it here!"

That was a bit unusual—normally an attendant would take the map and hand it to the king, but the king gave the man permission to enter his presence. It was a show of trust, which would've been a tremendous honor for a man of his position.

"Viscountess Yamano, come forth," the king ordered. Mitsuha wouldn't be able to point at the map without approaching him.

I feel bad for ruining the map guy's moment, but...

"That's not necessary," said Mitsuha.

"...Huh?" The man with the map froze in his tracks.

The chancellor looked horrified. The king stared at her in puzzlement.

"I just told you that I was given orders to withhold details about my home country. It was out of respect for you, Your Majesty, that I decided to share the name anyway. And how do you respond? By demanding more information from me. You must know that to reveal more would be to betray my country and risk

serious punishment, and yet you prioritized your own curiosity.

“It makes much more sense for me to leave this country than risk being executed for betraying my homeland. So that’s what I’ll be doing. The location of my country is no longer of any relevance to you.”

“Huh?”

This is the obvious move. I told him that I was ordered not to share anything about my country, and he completely ignored me. That’s no way to treat people! I can see how he’s related to that hoodlum duo at the party.

“As per my original principle, I must immediately leave here and move my base elsewhere if their ruler demands that I share information they know I’m ordered not to divulge. You’ve left me no choice. And now if you’ll excuse me.”

I’m sorry, Lephilia. I didn’t think I was going to leave the country this quickly.

She began to leave the great hall.

“Wait! Stop right there!”

Mitsuha heard the king yelling from behind her, but she paid him no mind. She wasn’t from Vanel and had no need to follow the orders of some geezer she just met. She accepted the king’s summons out of courtesy and had no intention of sticking around if he was going to try to force her to do something against her will. Who was she, his slave? She didn’t owe him anything.

I’m gonna withdraw all my money from the bank first...

“I said wait! Stop her, now!”

A guard with a spear blocked her path.

“What’s your name?” Mitsuha asked.

“Huh?” The guard blinked.

“By threatening me with that weapon, you’re declaring war against my country. I’m going to write your name on the document stating we accept your war and that we’ll commence hostilities. If many people die in this war, it should be known that their blood is on your hands and the king’s.”

“Eek!” the soldier squealed. He turned pale and jumped back.

What a wuss.

No one in the room moved or spoke. You could’ve heard a pin drop. Did the king think he could unjustly detain a foreign noble to make her reveal her country’s secrets without consequences? The fact that he thought she was royalty made his actions even more inexplicable.

Do you think you can eat me for lunch ‘cause I’m a little girl? I’m selling spices. You’ll burn your tongue.

...Am I actually starting a war, you ask? Technically, our country’s been at war with them for a while. Now I’m starting a different war representing the Yamano Kingdom (population: one). I could capture warships, seize goods and property... I like the sound of that. I should get a letter of marque from Sabine’s dad just in case...

“W-Wait... Please wait!” The king finally broke the silence when Mitsuha reached the door.

That was the third time he told her to wait, so she ignored him again. The guards stationed by the doors showed no signs of opening them for her, so she reached for it herself.

“You have the wrong of it! I’m not ordering you to freeze, I’m asking you to listen to me! I’m sorry! I take everything back! Please hear me out!”

Whoa! Did I hear that right? I can’t believe the king is apologizing to

me—someone he believes to be a foreign low-ranking noble, possibly with royal blood—in front of his subjects.

The vassals and guards looked shocked as well. The king was more magnanimous than she thought. *So the king is capable of doing more than just roar...*

Mitsuha was willing to talk if the king admitted his mistake and took everything back. Fighting with him and leaving the country wasn't necessarily something she wanted to do. She preferred to continue to operate in Vanel if possible. Moving her base would mean losing all the personal connections and trade routes she'd established, as well as her commodity shop... Though the latter was a rental, so losing it wouldn't matter.

She was going to withdraw all the money in her bank account and buy gold ingots—or have Lephilia do that for her—after she left the country. Lephilia would've had to wait to flee the country until Mitsuha secured a new base for her.

If they froze my bank account, I would've just stolen gold ingots directly from the bank's vault and royal palace...and grabbed some extra for the breach of contract. I'm not gonna leave any Cat's Eye calling cards or receipts, so no one will know it was me. The city would be abuzz with talk of a mysterious phantom thief.

Starting over in another country wouldn't actually be that hard. It'll take some time and effort, but this would be my second lap around the block; it'll probably go smoother because I know what I'm doing. The main reason I don't want to do that is because...of my friend. There's only one Micheline and she lives here. I could make a killing with this war, but cutting ties with Vanel when conflict was avoidable wouldn't rest easy on my conscience. I'll back down.

“...Thank you for the apology.” Mitsuha turned around to face the throne.

The king looked relieved, but she didn’t see what the big deal was. Why should he be worried about offending a little girl from another country? He probably assumed Mitsuha’s homeland was a small distant country that posed no threat to Vanel in terms of land or naval strength. If anything, a war would be a perfect opportunity to colonize her country. His timidity didn’t make sense.

“I’m going to pretend this meeting didn’t happen,” said Mitsuha. “I spent all day in bed on the second floor of my commodity shop today. I didn’t go outside; I didn’t see anyone. Maybe I had a dream that I met the king, but it was just that: a dream.”

“Y-Yes... Exactly! A dream! We will have to meet in real life on another occasion.”

You think you can summon me again?! In your dreams, pal! Well, this is a dream too, so I guess he can say what he wants, Mitsuha thought. I know better than to say that out loud. We just barely avoided a catastrophic break in relations, and I’m sure the king learned his lesson about trying to push me around. I shouldn’t reject him out of hand if he acts with moderation—he is a king, after all.

...I realize that’s rich coming from the person who’s secretly trying to sabotage Vanel’s development.

The king seemed to decide that it wouldn’t be smart for him to try to restart talks right now. It made more sense to try another day when he hadn’t done anything to upset her. Besides, even if Mitsuha made some agreement that day, she could feign ignorance by saying that she spent the whole day lazing in bed at her commodity shop. He knew talking with her would be pointless.

Maybe he's not as dull as I thought. Not the sharpest either, though.

Anyway, my business here is done. Time to leave the royal palace!

Mitsuha took her leave of the great hall. A guard was leading her to the royal palace gates. She would've gotten lost on her own, and a foreign noble couldn't be allowed to wander the royal palace unsupervised.

She followed the guard silently until someone up ahead caught her attention.

Hm? That guy looks familiar...

"Huh? Viscountess Yamano?" the man approaching said.

What the hell?! It's him! Viscount Ephred, the hoodlum son of Count Wondred! He's the sexual harasser who ridiculed my elegant and modest physique! Why the heck is he here? Well, he has royal blood, so I guess it's not that surprising...

Wait, don't fall for that, you dummy! This is way too big of a coincidence! I was tricked, goddamn it!

The king's hair and beard weren't that different from Count Wondred's. He could've easily changed his hair or put on a wig or a fake beard. I might not be the sharpest tool in the shed either, but running into this guy wandering alone in the royal palace is a dead giveaway!

You've done it now, Count Wondred... Or should I say, Your Majesty!

The prince wasn't wearing a disguise, which hinted that this encounter was by coincidence. The king may have kept him in the dark about her visit so he wouldn't screw it up. Which the prince managed to find a way to do anyway. The presence of both the king and the prince gave away the king's lie.

To be fair, this wasn't really the prince's fault. He didn't know Mitsuha was

coming, so he couldn't be blamed for running into her. This was both his workplace and his home, so of course he was free to roam the corridors.

That didn't mean Mitsuha had to be friendly to him, however. He was still "Viscount Ephred," the man who made her extremely uncomfortable by verbally assaulting her. There was also a good chance the king would order him to spy on her if she started associating with him.

Discretion is the better part of valor, as they say. I'm gonna give him the cold shoulder.

"...Is something wrong?" said Mitsuha. "Hurry up and lead me to the gates!"

The guard was stupefied by her order. He only stopped because he couldn't ignore the prince's attempt to speak to her, but he hastily led the way at her urging. After what just happened at the great hall, he realized that if she was willing to pick a fight with the king, she would have no qualms doing the same with the prince. He decided that ignoring the prince was better than starting another dangerous argument.

That was the right choice, Mr. Guard! You've got the wild instincts to survive the treacherous beast's lair AKA the royal palace.

The prince was yowling something in the background, but Mitsuha ignored him. He'd only been introduced to her as "Viscount Ephred." She had no reason to treat him any differently than she always had. She just happened to pass the viscount in the hall and gave him the cold shoulder because she was still upset that he insulted her in front of all the other nobles. No one could blame her for that.

Time to leave the royal palace!

“...What? You saw Viscountess Yamano?!” the king exclaimed.

“Yes, I just passed her in the hallway...” answered the prince. “Why didn’t you tell me you had summoned her?!”

The king slumped his shoulders in disbelief. “After all I’d done today... Managing to undo the damage with Viscountess Yamano and even recovering from the mistake I made today and starting anew... Despite all that—I’m sure she’s figured it out. There’s no way she’s that stupid. Urgh, what can I do now...”

The king had a rocky road ahead of him.

Chapter 60:

An Uncharted Island

A man had just arrived in a county in the countryside. He was ordered by his lord to investigate the small territory owned by a viscountess. It was in the middle of nowhere, at the border of the Zegleus Kingdom, which was itself at the edge of the continent. Not long ago, the land was ruled by an insignificant baron and produced only minimal yield.

The man was one of his master's most trusted and skilled vassals. Why, then, was he sent to a place like this? Because it was the territory of Viscountess Yamano, otherwise known as the Lightning Archpriestess.

Viscountess Yamano—the girl who arrived in Zegleus out of nowhere and saved a village girl by singlehandedly wiping out a pack of wolves, and soon after, secured the future of a young lady from a rising noble family by planning her debutante ball and turning it into a rousing success. That was only the beginning. After that, she saved the life of the kingdom's third royal princess, helped rejuvenate a diner, and finally revealed herself as the Lightning Archpriestess when she saved the kingdom from a hopeless crisis. The girl became a hero to the land.

As a citizen of Zegleus, the man was grateful to her. But his feelings were irrelevant. His lord had given him a job to do. He wasn't planning to harm her, though—he was only there to gather information. It was a trivial offense that the Goddess would be sure to overlook. He had nothing to fear as long as everything went according to plan.

At least, that should've been the case. The man couldn't have known how horribly wrong his mission was going to go.

He observed the vertical salt farm, the treadmill waterwheel, and their supports from a distance without incident. He sensed the villagers' watchful eyes on him, but that was to be expected—he was sure to attract some attention as an outsider scrutinizing their facilities. Nothing happened when he went to observe the fishing village or the storehouse by the coast either.

Later that night, however, he turned his sights on the Lightning Archpriestess's residence. It was rumored to stay illuminated even after dark, and the glow didn't look like it was coming from a candle or a lamp. He also heard the Archpriestess stored her many divine treasures including lightning wands and the Goddess's Voice at her residence. He crept into the yard with the intention of infiltrating the home when...

Click!

Just as he heard a contraption go off, a burst of light suddenly flashed at him. His eyes—used to the darkness—were blinded by the brightness, and his body froze for a moment. That was a failure unbecoming of a professional like him.

The glare was followed by a deafening sound. It wasn't a gong or a drum, but some sort of drilling noise he'd never heard before. The incessant ringing hindered his ability to think.

"A mole, huh? Who sent you?" he heard a girl's voice mutter. "Eh, I guess it doesn't matter."

Before he could process what the voice meant, he found himself standing alone on a beach.

...Yamano County is on the coast, the man thought. But I was in the backyard

of the viscountess's residence! That's hundreds of yards from the ocean!

It was completely dark outside. The starlight would've illuminated the houses in the distance, but the village was nowhere to be seen, let alone the Yamano County residence. He didn't remember the beach next to the fishing village being this scenic, either.

Don't panic yet! I need to keep a cool head!

Wandering around aimlessly in the dark in an unfamiliar place would be suicide. The best course of action would be to stay calm and wait until morning to assess his situation. That was how professionals operated.

I should find a safe place to rest...

The next morning, the man climbed down from the large tree where he'd spent the night and returned to the sandy beach. He took a good look around.

"Is this...an island?"

The coastline curved out gently on both sides, which meant he was either on a peninsula or an island. The lack of any sign of human habitation made the latter more likely.

"H-How..." he stuttered, but he knew there was only one explanation.

Traversal. The Lightning Archpriestess's miraculous ability that let her travel to distant locations in an instant.

There was also that voice of a young woman he heard in the backyard last night. There were other girls living in the Archpriestess's residence, including a couple of maids and an apprentice chef. But that girl didn't sound scared or panicked about finding a suspicious trespasser in the middle of the night. If

anything, she sounded annoyed. It certainly wasn't the way a servant would've reacted. That meant it was...

"The Lightning Archpriestess..."

The man had already figured this out, of course. He just wanted to study the terrain and assess his situation before confirming his deduction. His long, sleepless night up in a tree gave him enough time—more than enough time, really—to think.

"He-e-e-ey!"

Someone was calling from behind. He whirled around and instinctively reached his right hand into his pocket but stopped himself. He studied the man ahead of him. If the stranger intended harm, he would've snuck up on him instead of calling out from a distance.

He relaxed and allowed the man to approach...while preparing to draw his knife at any moment.

The stranger smiled wryly as he approached. "I get why you'd be on edge, but there's no need to worry. If I wanted to hurt you, I would've shot you with an arrow already or have you surrounded by a fully armed gang."

That's a good point, the man thought. He would've captured or killed me already if he had anything to do with bringing me to this island. I'll let him take the lead for now...

The stranger continued, "I'm sure you already have an inkling, but this was the Archpriestess's doing. She immediately snuffs out anyone who tries to harm her citizens—plucks 'em like weeds. Anyone who crosses a line trying to gather intelligence, whether they mean any harm or not, she sends here. Essentially, this island is a dumping ground for enemies who aren't worth killing."

“D-Dumping ground?”

The man surmised this was an island. But a dumping ground? Did the Archpriestess really just take offenders who didn’t deserve to be killed and leave them here? What about interrogating them for the identity of their employer or their objective?

He asked these questions to the second man.

“She doesn’t seem to care about any of that. If an invader doesn’t mean harm, she dumps them here. If they do, she makes them confess the identity of their employer and, well... *Pluck!*”

“You’re kidding...” the first man said. Not even worth the effort, her actions seemed to imply. “How long does she leave us here before she releases us? Surely the kind Archpriestess wouldn’t neglect us for too long...”

“No idea.”

What?

The second man continued, “We’ve all been here since the day we ended up here. No one has ever left the island. The first guy who was dumped here is... still here.”

“What?! D-Does the Lightning Archpriestess come here to interrogate us, at least?”

“Nope. Once she leaves us here, she’s done. We’re all on our own, which means we have to fish, hunt, and gather plants and fruit to survive.”

“No! I have a wife and kids! And my employer isn’t the Archpriestess’s enemy! He just wanted me to find some hints to help him develop his own territory! I just need to tell her who my employer is!” the first man cried desperately.

“Not her enemy, huh?” the second man said with a bitter, almost longing smile. “Let me tell you something. I was acting on the orders of Count Bozes. The Archpriestess considers him her most trusted ally in the country! The Bozeses have a family-friend relationship with her. And yet, she’s never once given me a chance to tell her that.”

You...can't be serious...

“Come with me. I’ll introduce you to everyone. We worked together to build a hut and a farm over there. Are you good at fishing? How about hunting or construction work? Any special survival skills?” the second man asked.

The first man didn’t answer.

“Oh, there’s one more thing I should tell you. Our former nationalities, positions, and names don’t matter here. We’re all equal prisoners. Here, we discard our old names and call each other by numbers. That puts unknown rookies and famous elite spies on the same level—well, I guess there’s no such thing as a ‘famous elite spy.’ Any spy who allows themselves to become famous is third-rate at best, hahaha...

“Anyway, your new name is Number 28. I was the sixth person dumped here, so I’m Number 6. We’re both prisoners on an island that I doubt is on any of our countries’ maps...”

The man knew one thing for sure: his long, long days of island life was just beginning.

Chapter 61:

Mitsuha Shares the Third Floor

“...And so, I demand you open up the third floor!”

“What do you mean, ‘and so’?! ”

Mitsuha had just delivered Colette back to the county residence from Vanel and returned to her general store in the capital. Sabine had been waiting for her outside.

“You took Colette somewhere again without me, didn’t you?! I demand that you make up for it!”

Oh, she’s upset because she thinks Colette is getting preferential treatment, Mitsuha thought. Now she wants something to level the playing field. I don’t think she’s gonna back down here. What to do...

“I’ve already seen your Japanese house, so I don’t see the problem with going up to the store’s third floor!”

She had a point there. There wasn’t anything on the third floor that surpassed what Mitsuha had in her Japanese house. Her unused weapons were stored in a room she was renting at the Wolf Fang base. All that was up there was a TV, a Blu-ray player, an air conditioner, a refrigerator, some game consoles, and other things Sabine was already familiar with.

There was a laptop but it wasn’t like there was any internet to connect it to in this world. Not even the clever Sabine would be able to figure out how to use it on her own. Besides, Sabine would stay away from anything she was firmly

warned not to touch. Mitsuha could trust her.

“If you give me permission to enter freely, I’ll be able to keep the store open for you. Of course, I’ll leave the shop operations to my maids. That’ll free me up to do other things! You’re too busy to give the place proper attention, right? This will make life much easier for you,” Sabine bartered.

Grk! That’s pretty tempting... She’ll have her hidden guards with her, so I won’t have to worry about her safety. There won’t be any issues as long as I make the second and third floors off limits to all but Sabine.

Hmm... Hmmmmmm...

That does sound tempting. On second thought... Still sounds tempting!

Mitsuha thought long and hard about Sabine’s proposal.

“Oooh... Y-You’re such an animal, Sabine...”

The Lightning Archpriestess Gives in to Temptation!—Wait, that sounds like an 18+ manga!

And so, Mitsuha yielded to the whispers of the devil.

“...And that’s how you change the settings on the security system,” explained Mitsuha. “I dismantled the automatic crossbow shooter and other lethal weapons, but the emergency alarm can still go off. If that happens, a siren will blare inside my county residence and even through the county’s loudspeaker. It’s *really* annoying, so please don’t do anything stupid! Worst case, I’ll have to revoke your access pass!”

“O-Okay! I won’t!” Sabine answered firmly. She realized Mitsuha was serious.

“Also, you’re the only person allowed on the third floor! Your maids and

guards must remain on the first floor unless there's an emergency—a fire, bandits, or your life is in danger. You're not allowed to enter the second floor other than to use the staircase to reach the third. The rest of the floor is off limits. I'm telling you this for your own safety. I only use it for storage, but I set burglar traps all over the place. Got it?"

"Yes!"

And that was how Mitsuha hired a manager (and the manager's personal staff) for her Yamano capital residence, also known as Mitsuha's General Store.

"Oh! I have one request, Mitsuha," the newly appointed manager exclaimed.

"What's that?" *I suppose I could grant a request or two; she would be working for free.*

"Um... Would it be okay if I take Leuhen and Chii up to the third floor too?"

"Huh?"

Leuhen's her adorable little brother, and I think Chii is the nickname for her favorite older sister, the second princess. Watching DVDs and Blu-rays alone on the third floor might get lonely, actually. Leuhen and the second princess—whatever her real name is—won't be able to understand the movies and shows they watch, but they could have fun if Sabine translated for them.

I doubt Sabine will bring them every time. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to focus when she's watching something new. Hmmm...

"You're not going to bring the crown prince or the first princess, right?" Mitsuha asked.

"No, I won't!"

That was a fast answer. Man, she's cold... Well, she probably said that

knowing I wouldn't give permission for them to enter. Those two would try to use what they find on the third floor to benefit the kingdom. Which is their duty as royals. They're just doing what's right for them. Sabine knows I wouldn't respond well to any demands to share my technology, so she didn't even try to include them. It had nothing to do with how she feels about them... I think.

Oh, I just can't say no to you, Sabine...

"Approved!"

And so began Lucifer's (Sabine's) takeover of Mitsuha's General Store...

"Appear!" Mitsuha jumped—this time with a catchphrase—to the second floor of her general store.

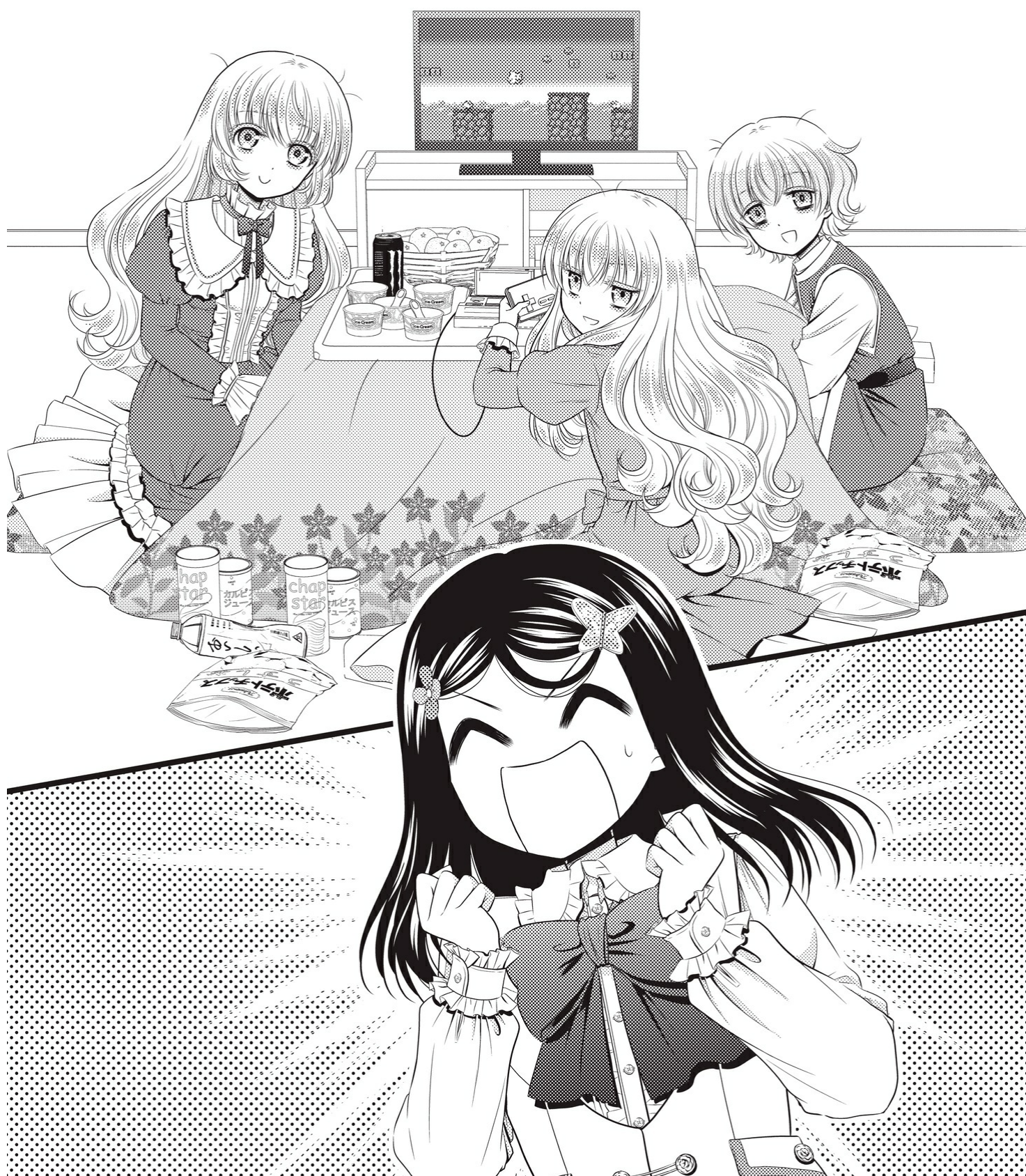
It's from a manga that was published on the short-lived magazine Weekly Shonen Takarajima... I wonder if anyone remembers.

She jumped to the second floor to avoid startling Sabine in case she was on the third. A heart attack was unlikely, but the girl just might spew hot tea everywhere or spill it all over her clothes. To save the princess from burning herself or ruining her very expensive dresses, Mitsuha decided to jump to a corner on the second floor every time. It was packed with booby traps, but she'd set them herself and knew how to avoid them. The place was off limits for Sabine, though.

Mitsuha tiptoed through the piano wires and the motion sensor-activated projector (the kind that projected a ghost and made spooky noises), and headed for the stairs. When she opened the door to the third floor living room...

"Oh, hello. Thank you for letting us visit," the second princess smiled and bowed her head. Her eyes were bloodshot.

In the room, Sabine, Leuhen, and Chii the second princess were eating tangerines and playing an RPG with their legs under the kotatsu. Scattered all around them were empty snack wrappers, soda cans, and bottles.



Mitsuha choked, “Y-You...”

“You?” Sabine and her siblings tilted their heads.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me! How long have you all been here?!” she screamed.

She proceeded to set a strict schedule to limit their gaming and DVD screentime. Sabine vehemently protested...to no avail.

Bonus Chapter:

I'm Gonna Start a Dry Cleaner!

Mitsuha had a revelation one day.

"I could use my talent to open a dry-cleaning service."

She couldn't believe she hadn't thought of it before.

The impetus for the idea came while returning from the orphanage. She'd gone over to bring food but ended up playing with the younger kids. By the time she left, her clothes were filthy. She snuck off to a secluded place where no one could see her and jumped to her Japanese house. She didn't want to walk through the city to her general store with soiled clothes.

Mitsuha thought the following when she jumped: *Ugh, I hate dirty clothes. I need to remove the dirt quickly so they won't leave stains.* But when she appeared in front of her washing machine in her house, her clothes were spotless.

That caught her off guard, but she should've known it would happen. If she could world-jump while removing all the pathogens and harmful bacteria from her body, why wouldn't she be able to remove dirt from her clothes?

...I made a mistake. I threw away that bloodied dress! I could've just cleaned it by wishing for the blood and dirt to be left behind! Goddamn it! Big mistake, Mitsuha!

There was nothing she could do about the past. She decided she might as well turn her eyes to the future and think about what she could do with the new

discovery. And this is what she came up with: start a dry-cleaning service.

Oh, come on! There's gotta be something better than that! Something like... Uh...

Huh? You're asking if I don't want to start a dry cleaner because I'm bad at ironing things? No, that's not it—wait!

Mitsuha had another revelation. If she jumped while wishing for sweat and grime to be left behind, would she not need to take a bath?

Noooo! I need to forget I ever had that idea! That's not all baths are for! Baths are so much more than just washing off dirt!

Yet another thought occurred to her: she wouldn't have to go to a hairdresser. She could just wish for her hair that grew over the last month to be left behind when she jumped.

Wait. Hair grows from the roots. Leaving behind my newest hair would mean I'll be bald... Leaving behind a pile of loose hairs where I was standing.

Motherfucking shirtballs, that would've been a disaster! I was one ill-advised jump away from losing all my hair! Thank goodness I realized that!

Mitsuha panted as she took a moment to calm down. She'd almost fallen straight into the classic trap that people blessed with great power slip into.

Leaving behind earwax and mucus should be safe. Blackheads on my nose too. I could even wish for my poop to be left behind to save myself a trip to the bathroom... I'll never have to fear constipation or diarrhea again! She was spiraling.

Oh no... My own thoughts are starting to scare me...

It was then that Mitsuha received another flash of inspiration. Could she jump

with raw meat and leave behind ninety percent of its moisture? She could coat it in spices and make beef jerky. That stuff was expensive.

Oh, wait. That wouldn't age the meat at all. I'm pretty sure it takes more than removing the moisture to make dried fish or bonito flakes. The rich flavor comes from a long process of chemical breakdown... Protein turns into...amino acid? Or something like that. Anyway, it's not as simple as jumping moisture away.

Besides, I don't need to make dried meat myself. It's not like I'm always in the other world where food is limited. Gathering the ingredients and prepping would take forever, and the end result wouldn't be nearly as good as what I could just buy at a store on Earth. I'm fine with leaving that to the professionals!

The thought of removing moisture gave her another idea.

Could I use this to dry my laundry regardless of the weather? Normally I have to wait for a sunny day to hang my clothes outside. I'd never have to worry about panties getting stolen again or hang up bras that are one size too big for appearance's sake... Hey, don't judge!

Then she was struck with her best idea yet.

I can go to an all-you-can-eat buffet and eat forever by jumping the contents out of my stomach when I get full! I could last for an entire Manchu-Han Imperial Feast! Man, I'm a genius! A genius, I tell you!

H-Hold on... Calm down, Mitsuha. Calm down... She tried to catch her breath.

Oh!

Oh no... I just got a really dangerous idea. What would happen if I jumped and wished for ten percent of my body fat to be left behind?

Talk about a dream diet! I would be able to eat as much as I want at parties. I wouldn't have to worry about being unable to zip up my skirt or fit into my

dress. And I'll never have to worry about the never-ending ups and downs of my chest to belly ratio.

Ooh, this is so exciting!

—No, wait! Considering the buzz cut I almost gave myself, I should take a moment to think. Maybe start with an experiment...

Mitsuha bought some grade-five marbled beef—the kind with fat weaved in the meat like an intricate lace. It was the very best beef you could buy.

Five being the highest grade is confusing! Anyway, I'm gonna use this for my experiment. Not to see if I can make beef jerky, but to see what would happen if I left body fat behind!

Mitsuha was going to hold the beef, jump to the other world normally, then jump back to Earth leaving out twenty percent of the fat. That way, she wouldn't have to deal with the mess of cleaning the fat off her kitchen floor.

Okay, successive jumps coming up! Ready... GO!

"Ahhhhhhh!" she screamed.

Thus concluded Mitsuha's experiment.

What happened, you ask? I don't wanna talk about it... she whimpered as she stuffed her diet gadget (which she impulse-bought) into the storage room.

Damn it. I'm gonna pawn this off to Princess Remia for one gold coin!

Afterword

Hey, it's FUNA. It's been a while.

Saving 80,000 Gold has reached volume five at last.

Keisuke Motoe, the artist for the manga adaptation, is going to work on the light novel illustrations from now on. He's drawing for the webcomic magazine *Suiyobi no Sirius* as well as the hardcopy of the manga and the illustrations for the novel. He's a very busy man. All those deadlines...

It's also been four years since the publication of volume one! It is all thanks to you, the reader, who picked up this book. You're the reason this series has continued for so long. Thank you very much.

I hope I can count on your future support.

Colette was quite the hero in this volume—fighting spies and pretending to be the spirit of a ship!

Mitsuha kept herself busy on Earth and in the New World! I wonder if her county will be okay...

In the next volume, Beatrice will make an appearance along with a group of other young noble girls called Society! Will Mitsuha be able to handle them all? Stay tuned to find out!

The other world, Mitsuha's Earth, and the real-world Earth are facing a lot of difficulties right now. All we can do is keep doing the best we can. And there's really no point in worrying after giving the best we could offer.

Que sera, sera! What will be, will be! Let's all meet again in good health for volume six!

My sincerest thanks to my editor, the illustrator Keisuke Motoe, the binding designer, the proofreaders, the printing, publishing, distribution, and sales staff, the administrators of *Shosetsuka ni Naro*, everyone who pointed out writing errors and gave me advice in the comments section, and of course, everyone who picked up this book.

Thank you very much!

FUNA

FUNA

Even if you can't go outside physically, Your heart can go on a journey to another world.

Come with me, Let's go kick some snobby nobles' and haughty kings' butts!

Illustrator

Keisuke Motoe Hello. I am Keisuke Motoe, the artist for the manga series *Saving 80,000 Gold*. I'll be working on the illustrations for the light novel from volume 5 and onward as well.

Pleased to make your acquaintance!

Manga artist. Originally from Aichi prefecture.

Honorable Award recipient of the eighth Sirius New Artist Awards in 2007.
Author of *Ojousama wa Butou-kai de Odoru* volume 1. Illustrator of *Hamamura Nagisa no Keisan Note* (Author: Aito Aoyagi) volumes 1~10.

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 5

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