



Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 6

A VERTICAL Book

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Publication rights for this English edition arranged through Kodansha, Ltd., Tokyo. English language version produced by Kodansha USA Publishing, LLC, 2024.

Originally published in Japan as *Rougo ni Sonaete Isekai de 8-Man-Mai no Kinka o Tamemasu 7* by Kodansha, Tokyo, 2022.

ISBN 978-1-64729-365-9

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

www.kodansha.us



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Chapter 62:

Not My Problem

"Seriously?!" Lephilia screeched in dismay. She was so bug-eyed that her eyeballs could've rolled out their sockets.

Mitsuha had just finished telling the young business partner about the incident at the royal palace and filled her in on the truth about Count Wondred–lol–and Viscount Ephred–lol–for full context.

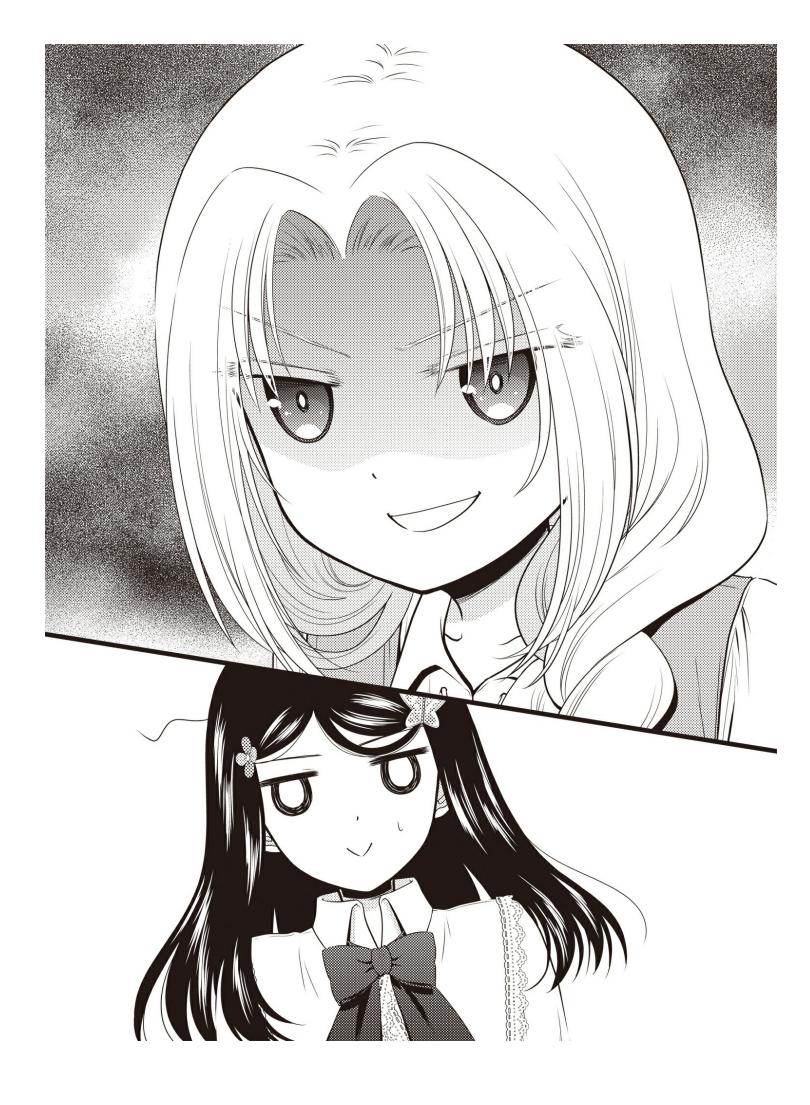
... Yeah, if that doesn't shock you, not a lot of things will, Mitsuha thought.

But Lephilia's shock only lasted for a second. "...So how should we deal with them going forward?" She settled back down to her usual self. Well, usual except for the villainous grin on her face.

Man, she's grown really wicked... I-I mean, she's really grown...

Lephilia had singlehandedly started up her company, Lephilia Trading. It was growing steadily—actually, that was an understatement. It was growing explosively. The young boss had to be feeling invincible.

She'd better not forget who put her in that position. I won't take all the credit, but 99.999% of her success is because of my products and name value. I'll need to watch her so she doesn't get too big-headed and fall flat on her face.



"Nothing," answered Mitsuha. "That's not my problem. I now know that they've been lying to me, and they know that I know that they've been lying to me. And because they know that I know that they know that I know that they've been lying to me, I imagine they'll want to—"

"Um, uh... Huh? They know that you know that they...?"

Lephilia looked like she was about to blow a fuse.

"In other words, I'm gonna wait and see what they do. There's no need for me to make the first move. That's on them."

In boxing terms, a counter. Mitsuha would lay low and wait for the opponent to initiate, and once they launched their attack and were no longer able to adjust course, she'd dodge it and strike them with a deadly finisher. They won't know what hit 'em!

"I see... While it may look like they have the upper hand, they're actually dancing to our tune... You're so smart, Mitsuha!" lauded Lephilia. "Anyway, who's this girl?"

"Oh, she's my little sister. I wanted to introduce you to her!"

"Nice to meet you!" smiled Colette who spoke with a slight accent.

Mitsuha didn't bring her the last time she visited Lephilia Trading, so this was their first meeting. She left Colette behind previously because she knew it wouldn't have been any fun for the little vassal-in-training to sit in on a lengthy and jargon-heavy business discussion, which would've been hard to keep up with for a non-native speaker. Mitsuha decided to wait for a better day.

I figured Colette should know about my company. Both the company I keep and the company I run—or help run. Anyway, back to introducing her!

"She's my half-sister, as you can see... I have another half-sister, but she's not here today," Mitsuha said. She thought it'd be best to go ahead and claim Sabine to be her sibling too. Bringing her to the New World for some sightseeing was bound to happen sooner or later.

She's gonna beg and beg and beg until I fold! It won't be long before she takes offense that Colette is accompanying me on trips regularly while she stays home... Sabine's been so busy with her princess duties, though. She has to take social etiquette lessons, memorize noble family trees, go to dancing classes... When's she gonna find time to learn the Vanelian language? That's not realistic. She doesn't have Colette's fierce persistence.

Wait, she'd have no way of learning the language anyway. There are a few Vanelian speakers in Yamano County and Bozes County, but none in the capital! What was I thinking... Oh well, hopefully she'll settle down and do her princess things for a while. If she starts to go berserk, I'll just ask the king to deal with it. He can be my bumper!

Lephilia was initially thrown off by the sudden meeting with the half-sister, but she quickly warmed up, speaking slowly to accommodate Colette's clumsy Vanelian and patting her on the head. I wonder if Lephilia realizes that being my half-sister would mean Colette is also of noble blood. Anyway, back to the king.

Mitsuha had learned that Count Wondred wasn't a cocky hoodlum trying to get a bite of her profits; he was actually a cocky *royal* trying to get a bite of her profits.

Yeah, that's practically the same thing.

It also dawned on her that if the entire nobility knew that Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred were the king's and prince's alter egos, that likely meant it was an open secret among the merchants as well. The only ones in the dark were Lephilia, who was a newcomer to the business world, and Mitsuha.

Lephilia Trading had already given public notice to their clients that they were "forbidden from dealing with certain noble families and any of their dependents. The same goes for any companies connected to them." The "certain noble families" referred to the last party's host as well as Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred. This, in effect, prevented merchants from supplying their goods to the royal family. If any of them did, they'd risk losing business with Lephilia Trading.

Someone probably snuck a few products for the royal family by selling them as supplies for servants or as ingredients for the guards' meals. What should I do about that...? Eh, whatever. I'll just leave things as they are. It's the king's and prince's fault for trying to deceive me, and it's not like I want to get close to them anyway.

This also meant that Micchan's father and the noble who hosted the last party were only acting on orders from their king. There could be grounds to forgive them. Doing so might send the wrong message, though—if word spread that Viscountess Yamano easily forgave those who deceived her, she'd be inundated with schemers trying to get in on her profits. The only way to prevent that would be to at least continue to act like she was angry.

Sorry to the count who hosted that party, whatever his name was, and sorry to Micchan's dad!

What should I do about my party attendance from now on? Continuing to attend parties of Marquis Mitchell's choosing would send mixed messages. But who else could I elect to fulfill that role? I can't pick anyone without the entire nobility assuming I have complete faith in that person, but there's no one in this country for whom that'd actually be the case...

Hmm... Oh!

It was then that Mitsuha had an epiphany. It seemed so obvious now that she thought about it. Why did she have to keep attending parties at all? Her initial motive was to infiltrate Vanelian noble society so she could gather information and make connections, but she'd learned enough, and was becoming quite famous. Lephilia Trading had been able to utilize that fame to carve itself a sizable and solid market.

Yeah. I don't see any reason to keep going to parties.

Mitsuha doubted anyone would find it strange if she stopped appearing in noble society. They would simply assume it was because of the incident at her last party. She could easily turn down any invitation.

Most of the high-ranking officers in the military were nobles, so she already had plenty of influence there. Worst case, she could pull the almighty "Goddess Mode" in case of emergencies. All she had to do was world-jump onto a mast and deliver a divine message through a megaphone. The story of the *Aeras* had spread far and wide, so her words would be heeded without question.

Cutting parties out of her life would save her a lot of time and mental energy. She could stop spending a fortune on dresses, too. What ruler decided that the same dress shouldn't be worn twice at parties?! Well, since we're in Vanel, it was probably the Vanelian royal family... Apparently, women from less affluent barons' families can get away by slightly modifying the same dress or pairing it with different accessories, but I'm supposed to be filthy rich. That wouldn't work for me...

If Mitsuha ever wanted to learn something or needed help for a particular venture, she could make an appointment and meet with any noble or military officer personally. She didn't need to go to a party to see them. As for

increasing her influence in the financial and business circles, she could leave that to Lephilia Trading.

Being a strong independent woman doesn't mean doing everything by yourself. Entrusting work to my subordinates and mentoring them is my duty as a person in a position of authority. I am definitely not just passing the buck to Lephilia 'cause I'm lazy. ... Nope.

I haven't even mentioned the biggest benefit of not going to parties anymore: my waistline will stop bloating like a balloon! Why can't those extra inches go to my chest instead... It's not fair that my belly grows but not my height or my chest!

Are "growth" and "corpulence" two different things?

Curse you, world!

"...So no one's seriously injured or sick? And Number 9 'fessed up the details of his employer's instructions?" asked Mitsuha.

"Yes, my lady. He was commanded to do nothing more than to steal a divine instrument and was expressly forbidden from harming you or your dependents. It would seem he had no malicious intent."

"He hired a spy to break into my home, snoop around for secrets, and steal my valuable possessions. And you're telling me he had 'no malicious intent'? If that's not malicious, what would he have done if he *did* have malicious intent? Besides, if he's claiming he did no wrong, that means he'll keep committing crimes without feeling a shred of guilt. I understand you're trying to defend Number 9 and his employer, but you're just making them out to be monsters who have no conscience."

Mitsuha was talking to a mole. Not the burrowing animal kind, of course, but the kind that lived among the enemy to gather information, perform assassinations, and aid allies. Some moles had no other role than intelgathering, which made them virtually undetectable.

And I'm not above making use of them myself.

Mitsuha was currently talking to Number 6, an assassin sent by Count Bozes.

Oops, he's a spy—not an assassin. Oh, Count Bozes, why'd you even do such a thing...

As soon as the man was seized and taken into questioning, he confessed who his employer was under the overly optimistic assumption that the viscountess would release him once she heard the name. He even admitted that the count gave him express permission to reveal his boss's identity, believing that Mitsuha would set him free. "But if that happens, you'll be rewarded with only half of the agreed amount," the count had warned him. The spy was sorely disappointed when Mitsuha tossed him into a county prison, which she'd built specifically for captured spies.

The prisoners were isolated from each other in soundproof cells that were sixty square feet and had a toilet (which was just a jar). The prison reached capacity surprisingly quickly after its construction, and the expenses—which included meals, caretakers' salaries, washing the prisoners' clothes and blankets, and more—placed a major financial burden on the county. It was then that Mitsuha had a brilliant idea: why not dump the prisoners someplace remote where they could look out for themselves? She picked out a few islands off a map she got from one of the Vanelian research vessels and asked a country from Earth to fly her over them, giving her the ability to world-jump to

them whenever she wanted.

Mitsuha also had the pilot fly her over the waters surrounding the kingdom, adding a great number of islands to her world-jumping arsenal. She figured it might be fun to take her friends on a beach trip to one of the uninhabited islands someday.

She chose an island of moderate size that had just enough water, animals, and plant life to live off, and jumped prisoners Number 1 through Number 4 there over the course of a few weeks. She then waited a few days and transported Number 5 and Number 6 together. Every spy she'd caught since was sent directly to the island.

She took a lot of care in dispatching the first few prisoners; establishing a settlement safely required a fair number of people. She also wanted to integrate Number 6 in a way that wouldn't seem suspicious. Number 6 was her mole, and he gathered information for her as he served his own sentence.

Mitsuha didn't actually care much about the information; that was just a job she gave him to keep him motivated. What she really wanted was for him to alert her if any of the prisoners were seriously injured or ill or if there were any unmanageable crises so she could provide necessary aid. Then I'll eventually use the details of his reports to write a novel... Err, um, forget I said anything!

"All right," she said, "I'll pack a wooden crate full of rusted knives and axes, some strong foreign alcohol, a few other knick-knacks, and let it drift ashore tonight. Have someone discover it tomorrow morning. Consider it a bonus."

"Oh, wow! Thank you so much!" said Number 6. "Could you pack a lot of alcohol, if you can? Enough for twenty-eight people to get at least tipsy. Fishing lines and hooks would be great too. We've been making hooks out of bones, but they're too brittle..."

"I'll do what I can to fulfill your request. A box full of undamaged glass bottles drifting to shore is kind of a stretch, though... But I'll think of something. Good luck with everything!" Mitsuha turned to jump away.

"Thank you—oh, wait!" Number 6 called out just as she was about to leave. "Have you heard anything from Count Bozes? Has he given you any message for me?"

"Nope. I haven't heard a peep from any of your bosses. I'd be happy to release you guys if your employers reach out to apologize and offer something in exchange. I'm not contacting them, though. If I do, they'll just say, 'I've never heard of that person in my life! How dare you accuse me of spying!' and make me look like the bad guy."

"Count Bozes... Why-y-y..." Number 6 looked dejected beyond words.

You should've known what you were getting into when you chose to become a spy. Give it up, man.

Let's try this again...

"Mitsuha, out!"

For real, this time!

"What?! Viscountess Yamano has withdrawn from all the parties she planned to attend?!" exclaimed a count.

"I think we all know why..." a marquis hinted.

Another count interjected, "Actually, she was summoned to the palace after that incident. I wonder if His Majesty hit her with some unreasonable demands..."

"She's cutting off all exchange with Vanelian nobles despite being sent here by her homeland to make connections? What in the world could the king have done?!"

...Such rumors seemed to be going around in high society. And you know what I have to say to that? Not my problem!

Mitsuha had no way of investigating the rumors because she hadn't met with Marquis Mitchell–Micchan's dad–since their falling-out. Lephilia was the daughter of a mid-sized merchant company. The girl herself was the owner of what was still considered a small business, so she hardly had the status to attend noble parties or visit their estates. The situation was too delicate to send a subordinate for some snooping. They could end up overhearing nobles speaking ill of the king. If the names of those people leaked, there could be serious trouble. Mitsuha could get away with voicing opposition to the king because she was a foreign noble, but the same action was too risky for a Vanelian aristocrat or merchant.

It sounds like no one has approached Lephilia to bring up the subject, which is good. Everyone probably thinks she's too young for such a dicey and sensitive topic. You wouldn't want to share unnecessary gossip with a youngster and give them any ideas...

Despite Mitsuha's presumption, she received a letter addressed directly to her. She would've rejected it out of hand had it been a party invitation from an individual noble, but it was signed by multiple names. They expressed concern by asking how she was doing, but she knew the letter was a carefully disguised attempt to get a handle on the situation.

Some of these signatories are important connections. I can't really afford to be

rude... Oh, fine. I'll write a reply...

I am tired of being harassed by Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred, and as they can, apparently, show up at any function without warning, I've made the decision to refrain from attending parties. I learned from the last one that I cannot rely on the support of the host or the other attendees. It is evident I cannot appear in high society without putting myself in danger.

Going forward, all communications with this country will be made through my associated merchant.

I am also considering leaving this country and moving my base to a nearby nation.

Yup, that should do. It sends a clear message: pester me and I'll move to another country. That should get them to leave me alone.

...Or so Mitsuha thought. It wasn't long before she received another letter.

We will mediate to help you make amends with them. Don't do anything hasty!

They're telling me to calm down and reconcile with those dogs? These nobles are a few quarters short of a buck!

Maybe this'll do the trick...

I have been told that Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred have royal blood, so I doubt they will listen to ordinary nobles such as yourselves. I will reconsider my stance under one condition: the count and the viscount swear on the Goddess's name and their own honor that they will never mess with me, talk to me, or come within twenty feet of me again, and do so in the presence of the king and crown prince.

Take that, you fools!

That was the end of the letters. The nobles had nothing to counter with.

Mwahaha, checkmate! They didn't call me "Mitsuha the Tripper" or "Mawata Mitsuha" in middle school for nothing! Well, I got the first nickname not because I was always tripping up other people, but because I was always tripping over my own feet! And the second nickname wasn't because I'm fluffy and pure like white mawata silk, but because I had a reputation for nagging people as if I was slowly strangling them with threads of mawata silk. But I don't have to tell anyone that!

By the way, mawata silk looks like cotton but it's not. Cotton is harvested from the Gossypium genus of plants, while mawata comes from defective silkworms that couldn't be used to make ordinary silk. People tend to get the two confused.

Okay, I've already visited the guard station next door to deliver snacks and tell the guards that I'll be away from my store for a while. Other than replenishing Lephilia's stock and purchasing some products from her, I can forget about It was time to get back to county management. Mitsuha would always put her own personal safety, happiness, and wealth first and foremost, but her next biggest priority was the safety and happiness of her loved ones. That didn't include Sabine's, though—she had more security and wealth than whatever Mitsuha could provide. The people who fell under her umbrella of protection were Colette, her vassals and servants at the Yamano estate, and the citizens of her county.

I don't just mean physical protection from monsters and invaders, of course. I want to protect their ability to lead healthy, happy, and fulfilling lives. And I'm going to do that with... Drumroll please... The dressmaking workshops!

I'll say yes to any dress that makes me money! This is gonna be sew amazing! ...Oh, shut up!

Of course, it'd be years before Yamano County got a handle on sericulture—the people weren't even ready to farm mulberry trees, reel silk, or weave threads. As such, they were going to start by making the dresses with fabric imported from Earth—first with cheap cotton—because her citizens would probably need some time to figure out how to assemble dresses properly.

Those dresses would be sold in Yamano County at an affordable price or donated to orphanages in the capital. Mitsuha couldn't give them away to orphanages in other counties without risking conflict with the local lords. That could easily be interpreted as an accusation that the leader was too incompetent to provide aid for their own impoverished population.

Oh, I found something amazing on the internet the other day—a store that sells

old-fashioned spinning wheels and looms! You really can find just about anything if you look for it... The shop also sells all kinds of wool and dyes, and as if that's not great enough, it offers classes too. And it's in Japan! Hmm... So that's what real spinning wheels and looms look like...

The machines were made of wood, which meant they wouldn't be hard to recreate in Yamano County if she purchased a few samples. The replicas would be a little lower in quality, but that wasn't a big deal. The store might've had a patent on the production of their machines, but Mitsuha could ignore that. They were in a whole other world where not even international law could reach them, and she *was* going to give the Japanese store a good number of sales.

Because of the language barrier, Mitsuha was the only person from her county who'd be able to attend the classes, unfortunately. It sounded fun, though, so she didn't mind. She also had much more free time now that she was stepping back from her business in the New World.

She'd start by buying a few sets of spinning wheels and looms for her people to practice with. They'd first have to practice spinning and weaving with the equipment from Earth; it'd be a while before her people learned to build their own.

I wonder if the shop has enough stock for me to buy thirty or fifty at a time...

...On that note, it's time to buckle down on the actual project! We're gonna start by making dresses. From there, we'll figure out weaving, spinning, and finally, sericulture. Yep, backward steps. I feel like the three legendary founders of Tomioka Silk Mill in Japan are gonna rise from their graves and deck me...

Mitsuha would get the ball rolling by instructing her people to make a few dresses using their own traditional methods. She then planned to show the results to the degenerate dressmaker and figure things out from there. The

woman wouldn't be able to give any advice without having an understanding of their current technology and skill level. That sounded like a good starting point.

Oh man... Holy cow! You wouldn't believe how many people have applied to become dressmakers. They just keep coming. What should I do...

Mitsuha was being flooded with applications not just from women in the town, but also from the farming villages, the mountain villages, and the fishing village. The idea of making dresses indoors probably sounded sophisticated compared to the harsh physical labor required in the villages. It was also possible that they had high hopes of gaining skills that could help them start their own business or find employment in the capital.

Oh, you sweet, summer children. Life ain't that easy. Not that they'd want to hear it from a young girl like me...

Ah, that reminds me. I had a birthday, so I'm nineteen now. I'm not telling anyone, though. I can't mention my birthday without everyone asking how old I am now, and I just know Count Bozes would've wanted to throw me a massive party. I'm too old for all that fanfare.

Anyway, I have no intention of abusing my workers, but they have to understand that any job is going to be difficult. I can't create too big of a disparity between dressmaking and other jobs in the county. That said, I do want the conditions to be nice enough for people to want to work for me... What to do...

"Appear!" Mitsuha shouted as she struck a dramatic pose.

Striking a pose after a world-jump was her latest "thing." She tended to get

fixated on one thing, whether it was making nothing but curry for a week or buying the same snack over and over again. Then once she got tired of that "thing," she'd move on to the next.

The pose she chose this time was an homage to Andro Umeda from *Tekkaman*. The catchphrase was from the manga, *Mask the Bohken*. Not that there's anyone here to appreciate my entrance. Then again, I'm only doing it because I'm alone.

Mitsuha was standing outside Lephilia Trading's storehouse. The time was late at night, of course. She was in casual jeans that day. She was making the usual rounds—scout the storehouse for anyone working late, then when the coast was clear, jump in the goods to restock. There was no need to wear a dress to do menial labor work with nobody watching.

She approached the storehouse and was shocked by what she saw.

"What in tarnation?!"

Why did she scream like an old farmer from the deep countryside? There was a gaping hole in the storehouse wall, and the inside was completely empty.

"...I'll deal with this later."

It was late at night. It also looked like someone had cleaned up around the storehouse. That meant the folks at Lephilia Trading already knew about it. Lephilia was probably exhausted from spending all day trying to deal with the problem, so there was no reason to wake her up. It was better to let her rest.

But tomorrow... Payback shall begin. Hehehe... Mwahahahal Behold the wrath of the Yamano family!



Chapter 63:

Counterattack

"...Explain this. Now." Mitsuha was seething. She could almost feel her veins bulging from her temples.

Lephilia was shrinking away at the sight of the viscountess's displeasure.

"I'm not mad at you, Lephilia. Just tell me what happened. Start from the beginning."

The young company owner explained that a group of thieves invaded the storehouse two nights prior and stole their entire inventory.

"How many casualties were there?" Mitsuha asked.

"Um, there were twenty thieves, half of them armed with swords or spears. They hid their faces with masks. The guards didn't resist and surrendered immediately because they had no chance against them, which is exactly what they were taught to do in that kind of situation. The thieves beat them, leaving one guard with a broken bone and three others with bruises. But no one died or suffered serious injuries."

Mitsuha was relieved to hear that. Human lives may have been devalued in this world, and the guards may not be official employees of the company, but she didn't want anyone working for her to be put in a position where they might have to risk getting permanently injured or lose their lives.

The guards might've reacted differently if the thieves hadn't been masked. Hiding their faces meant that they weren't going to kill if they didn't have to.

Mitsuha had instructed the guards not to resist in such a scenario. If the thieves had been planning to kill everyone, they wouldn't have bothered to conceal their identities. Masks also made it difficult to breathe and see, which would handicap them in a fight or during a looting.

It was ideal to leave no witnesses, but murdering the guards would've led the police to pursue them much more aggressively, and their punishments would've been significantly worse if they were caught. And if they burned down the building to destroy evidence, they'd have to deal with Onihei and the Arson Theft Control... Well, if this was Edo Japan, anyway. There probably was a similar kind of agency in this country, and if the thieves caught their attention, it'd mean death for them. The only question was whether they'd be hanged or decapitated.

So yeah, both the thieves and the guards chose the route with the least victims. It's a win-win! Not exactly the correct use of the term, though...

For Lephilia Trading, however, this incident was far from a death blow. Suppose someone ran off with one book from a bookstore in Japan—actually, no, I shouldn't trivialize a crime. Theft is theft, larceny. So if a thief stole one book...

Bookstores have a profit margin of about twenty percent per book. They'd have to sell four books to recover the money they lost from the stolen book, and they end up getting none of the profit they should've received from selling five. Add in rent, utilities, and labor expenses... Shoplifting could lead to major loss that might even put a store out of business.

Lephilia Trading, by contrast, had much higher profit margins on its goods. It wouldn't suffer any losses as a result of this incident either, other than the cost of repairing the storehouse.

Mitsuha wasn't careless enough to hand out spare keys to the storehouse

guards, of course. That would allow thieves to break in easily just by threatening a guard or taking their key. In this world, even guards couldn't be trusted not to steal or take bribes. What she really wanted to prevent, though, was honest employees getting killed because they refused to hand over the key. Such unnecessary sacrifices wouldn't happen if they never had a key in the first place.

This decision resulted in the thieves breaking through the wall instead of bothering with the heavy iron door, but Mitsuha would much rather pay repair costs than have a human life on her conscience.

"Okay, this is Scenario C-3. We're going to retaliate with Response K," Mitsuha said.

She'd devised an emergency scenario flowchart and incorporated the English alphabet in the notations. Lephilia wasn't familiar with the letters, so she memorized them as symbols.

Why did I use the alphabet from Earth, you ask? Because it feels like a cool secret code in this world!

"Wha..." Lephilia gasped.

"Scenario C" referred to an armed attack, and the variation "3" meant that the assailants were hired mercenaries and thugs rather than regular troops belonging to a country or the nobility. That meant these thieves were likely hired by an individual noble or merchant in order to cover their tracks.

Well, well... Whose lands are about to be scorched so thoroughly that not a blade of grass will ever grow there again?

Mitsuha directed, "Response K means that the Yamano family will be responding head on with full force. Lephilia, go and leak information to the

other merchants that'll steer public opinion in our favor and against the enemy's."

"Yes, sir!"

Why'd you give me a military salute, Lephilia...

"Did you hear? Someone stole Viscountess Yamano's wares..."

"Yeah. It wasn't on the road, either. The thieves attacked the storehouse smack in the middle of the capital..."

"A foreign noble falling victim to thieves in the heart of Vanel is going to ruin the capital guards' reputation! It's a huge embarrassment for His Majesty, too! I'm sure they're going to open a major investigation..."

So said the soldiers.

"What?! Viscountess Yamano's storehouse was attacked?! What idiot would do that?! Find out who it was, immediately!"

"This is a disaster! The viscountess is going to abandon us and move to another country for sure! We must find out who was behind this as fast as possible! The capital guards are unreliable. We must band together and take care of this ourselves!"

So said the nobles and the merchants.

"U-Unbelievable! Why is this happening..."

So said the king.

"Wh-What do you mean?!" exclaimed a man, "The storehouse we raided belongs to Lephilia Trading! They already purchased those goods from Viscountess Yamano. That means they're the ones who lost money here, not the foreign girl!

"The plan was for the newbie merchant girl to go bankrupt after having all her expensive goods stolen by thieves, and for Viscountess Yamano to lose her business partner. That's when we, Delaitre Company, approach her with a new deal to take over her trade routes. We'll slip the stolen goods among the stock we acquire from the viscountess, and no one would suspect a thing.

"It was a perfect plan. But why is everyone acting like Viscountess Yamano was the one who was robbed instead of Lephilia Trading?! That ruins everything!"

...So said the owner of a certain trading company.

His subordinate answered, "From what I learned, sir, Lephilia Trading is purchasing stock from Viscountess Yamano on credit. Lephilia Trading had not yet paid for the goods in the storehouse, so technically, they still belonged to the viscountess. Which means all the loss from this incident falls on Viscountess Yamano's shoulders..."

"Th-That's absurd! I've never heard of selling on credit on such a scale!"

"Even so, that seems to be the nature of their contract. Both parties submitted a police report, and because their guards were injured, this incident is being investigated not as a mere 'robbery' but for 'armed robbery and attempted murder.' And, as per the viscountess's petition, in addition to the capital guards, the capital army, even a section of the palace guards are also

involved. Even nobles and merchants are using their guards and hired hands to carry out their own investigations."

"…"

They were being cornered from all sides.

The owner gulped, "Which means that even if we dilute the condiments with our lower-grade products and claim they were acquired from a different route..."

"They'll see right through it."

"What about sneaking them out of the country to sell abroad...?"

"All shipment carriers are on a watch list, and I'd imagine the markets in neighboring territories are also being monitored. Besides, we wouldn't make it out of the capital—all cargo leaving the city is being thoroughly inspected."

"Damn it! How could this happen... Never mind. There's no need to worry. They can't search a merchant's storehouse without any proof. The merchants' guild will never allow such a precedent to be established. We'll just have to wait until this storm blows over..."

That was the conclusion the trading company owner arrived at. Little did he know just how naive he was. The public—no, Viscountess Yamano—wasn't going to let him get away with this.

"What's the situation?"

Lephilia gave the report: "We came up with a few lists: merchants who seem to have their own market research system or unsavory reputations, thugs who would accept this kind of job, apprentices and salesclerks who weren't in their

shops that evening, and store managers who didn't go home that night. After hiring people and throwing money around to speed up the detective work, we narrowed the candidates down to three stores.

"Those stores were investigated further by looking to see if any had increased their storehouse's security or if they'd bite on a fake offer to buy Lephilia Trading's goods on the black market at a markup of 300%. That singled out one store... I'm pretty sure they're the ones behind the incident..."

Hearing Lephilia's report, Mitsuha grinned with vengeance.

Good job, guys. Money exists to be used. What's the point in having money if you don't spend it when you need to? On a regular day, I'd pinch my pennies just to buy groceries, but when I spend, I splurge. Every woman worth her salt knows that!

Lephilia added, "Unfortunately, we've only found circumstantial evidence so far. There's no definitive proof..."

"Don't need any!"

"Huh?" Lephilia stared blankly.

That's right—all I need is enough evidence to be convinced of the truth. There's no need for me to present a case to anyone.

Plaintiff: me. Prosecutor: me. Chief Justice: me. Executioner: me. Who decided all of that? Me, of course.

I have a very particular set of skills. Skills that make me a nightmare for people like you...

I'm out for revenge, and someone is about to learn a very important life lesson.

It was the dead of night. Mitsuha world-jumped onto the roof of a building located next to the property in question. Their sturdy-looking storehouse stood adjacent to the shopfront. From what she could observe, there were five or six figures guarding it. They all looked awake and alert, not that Mitsuha was worried about being seen. She was a good distance away from the store's property line, lying on her belly as she peered down. It was unlikely the guards would see her in the dark even if they looked in her direction.

With that many guards outside, it was safe to assume there were none in the storehouse. The only reason to have so many guards would be to prevent a band of twenty thieves from forcing their way in. They likely weren't there to prevent the storehouse's stock from getting stolen, but rather to prevent anyone from getting inside and witnessing what was being stashed.

Merchants normally didn't assign that many guards on night duty. Even if they were to spot any thieves, the protocol was to shout and wake their peers. Merchants' guards were typically quartered in an annex attached to the main building. The owner family would sleep and keep their safe in the main building. The guards only patrolled the storehouse's perimeter a few times throughout the night.

...And that was exactly how Lephilia Trading's guards were overpowered. The thieves ambushed them during their patrol and neutralized them before they could holler a word, and then did the same to the guards who came to check on them. Once the thieves suppressed the guards' annex and the main building, they were free to take whatever they wanted.

Lephilia Trading's property was rented and had limited living quarters, so most employees were daily commuters. As a result, they had very few guards who were fit for combat. The guards from that night assessed the situation was too risky and decided not to resist. That was the right decision, and it was what store employees in Japan were taught to do in the case of a robbery as well. It was better to train employees to relinquish the cash; the loss of an employee's life would be much more damaging to a company than the loss of a small amount of sales.

Anyway, it appeared as though this store's owner hadn't given his guards a storehouse key either. Either he didn't trust them, or he didn't want them to see what was inside.

Mitsuha estimated the height of the storehouse's floor based on the stone steps leading to the entrance, then jumped to a slightly higher elevation just to be safe. I don't need to actually have seen a location to jump to it. I can jump anywhere as long as I'm clearly aware of the coordinates.

It was pitch-black inside—not even a sliver of starlight. The windows were likely closed too. But there was nothing unusual about shutting the windows. Leaving them open all the time would let in rain, bugs, and pests that could destroy the goods.

Mitsuha took out a small LED flashlight from her pocket. She'd also brought a glow stick—a much dimmer source of light—in case the flashlight's beam could be seen from outside, but the sealed windows meant it was safe to use the flashlight. Even if someone saw it and raised a fuss, she'd still have plenty of time to jump away before they came in.

Mitsuha started looking around under the light. *Jackpot! They're here!* Containers full of Yamano County products had been stacked carelessly across the storehouse among the company's own inventory. The prime suspect turned

out to be the culprit—no plot twists there.

Oh come on, that's no fun! I was hoping for some kind of surprise to keep things interesting! I guess the truth tends to be nothing more than just that...

One truth prevails! Case closed!

...Shut up!

The products Mitsuha was selling to Lephilia Trading were being bought on Earth and repackaged in her county. The original packaging would've been horribly out of place in this world. The products bearing the Yamano County mark were strewn all over the darkened storehouse. It looked like the company was in the process of repackaging them to destroy evidence and left the job unfinished. They were also in the middle of mixing the stolen goods with theirs so they could bulk up the stock and claim it was all their own.

That would explain why they weren't working at night—it was easier to make mistakes in the dark. Either that or they were simply trying to save money on oil and candles. *Eh, whatever. I've confirmed that this company is the culprit. That's all that matters. Let's do this...*

Jump!

Mitsuha blipped the items to Earth and then into a warehouse in Yamano County. She took not only the goods that were stolen from Lephilia Trading, but the culprit's entire inventory.

You shouldn't steal unless you're ready to be stolen from yourself! Actually, I could've ended that sentence after the first three words.

I investigated that storehouse first because it was heavily guarded, but this merchant actually owns multiple warehouse buildings. I'm gonna check out the others too! I probably already recovered everything he stole from us, but why

stop now?

Mitsuha proceeded to empty all the other storehouses of their inventory.

That left one final touch:

"I want one slice of each building! Follow my lead, walls!"

In the darkness, without a sound, a small slab from the side of each storehouse disappeared without making a sound. It was unlikely anyone would notice right away unless they happened to be looking at the building at the exact moment it occurred. The guards had their backs turned while they were scouting the perimeters—not staring intently at the wall.

...That's what I expect, anyway. It'll probably be a while before the guards realize they've been robbed. Not that it matters—it's not like I need time to make my escape.

And with that, my work is done! Phantom Thief Mitsuha strikes again!

"Wh-What the heck?! The inventory we stole from Lephilia Trading all disappeared?!"

"Y-Yes, sir..."

The owner of Delaitre Company was dumbfounded when the head clerk and the guards' chief brought the news first thing in the morning.

"What the hell were the guards doing?! Is Lephilia Trading behind this? Did they take back what we stole from them?! There's no other possible explanation for the timing of this!" he roared, red as a tomato.

The head clerk stammered, "U-Um, sir... We didn't just lose what we stole from Lephilia Trading... We lost all of *our* inventory too. And not just the goods

in Storehouse 3 where we hid them, but from all of our storehouses... It's all... All gone..."

An uncomfortable silence stretched. The stupefied owner was mouthing something, but he couldn't utter a peep.

"How are they reacting?" Mitsuha asked when she visited Lephilia Trading's office a few days later.

"They submitted a damage report, but apparently, they didn't include the stuff they stole from us on the list of items that went missing," answered Lephilia.

"Haha, that wasn't an option..."

It was expected. Mitsuha figured Delaitre's boss would submit a damage report and that they'd suspect Lephilia Trading. However, they had no proof. Their only basis for suspecting Lephilia Trading in the first place was because they assumed it was done out of revenge. They could hardly make a complaint like "They stole from us because we stole from them!" to the authorities.

Fingers were being pointed at the same band of thieves that robbed Lephilia Trading, which escalated the cases as a serial robbery. Delaitre was initially listed as a suspect, meaning there was a possibility that their robbery was staged. The investigation would inevitably end up focusing on them. There was no way they could refuse a search for their storehouses or interviews with the employees if the authorities framed it as taking the victim's statements. Refusing to cooperate would only invite more suspicion upon themselves and cause the investigators to press them for the reason of refusal. Eventually, the truth was bound to come out.

How long would the apprentices and clerks—likely the ones who transported the stolen goods—hold out against intense questioning? And the hired thugs? None of them were trained professionals in resisting interrogations. They wouldn't stand a chance against the leading quizzes and threats from seasoned veterans.

This isn't modern-day Japan. Human lives are expendable, and human rights weigh less than paper. Torture is accepted, threats are expected. The severity of this investigation will depend on how important this country views me, my home country, and Lephilia Trading. I'll leave the rest to Vanel's justice system.

"All right, I'm gonna send a bunch of my goods to your storehouse early tomorrow morning," said Mitsuha. "I'll leave them in an empty lot outside the capital tonight. Shuttle them to your storehouse using wagons bearing the Lephilia Trading flag and the Yamano flag. I want as many citizens as possible to witness it."

The demonstration would convey that Lephilia Trading wouldn't be cowed by thieves, as well as reemphasize the company's strong connection with Viscountess Yamano. It would also advertise their resumption of trade—much more effectively than posters and shouting the headline on the street.

"If you're going to transport the goods that far, couldn't you just have your troops carry them through the capital to my storehouse? It'd be a more convincing way to demonstrate your grandness to the people..."

"Nah, I'd rather not. I'm not quite ready to share information about my home country yet, ahaha ..."

Jumping her county citizens here and letting them see this city would spark too many questions she didn't want to answer. Lephilia Trading could transport the goods themselves.

Ah, I'll borrow a couple of the younger Wolf Fang mercenaries to guard the inventory outside the capital. It should be a piece of cake for them. But first, I'll have to jump back to the Yamano County warehouse and repackage the goods I stole back. As for the ones that got mixed with the merchant's, I can use my world-jumping power to separate theirs from mine.

Yeah, that's another way to use my ability. World-jumping sure is convenient...

Let's do this!

"...Is that really all ya want us to do, li'l lady?"

"Yep!"

The men at the Wolf Fang base swarmed Mitsuha when she showed up to hire a crew of four or five men for the gig. The captain chose four men in addition to himself, but...

"What about fighting off an enemy?! What about the monsters?! Ogres! Dragons!!" they bawled.

How many times do I have to tell you? No monsters this time!

"Like I said, all I want you to do is spend one night guarding some goods!"

"Come on, can you blame my guys for gettin' their hopes up?! First you had us exterminate some dragons, then you had us shoot up ogres. It's only natural to expect the third job to be just as thrilling..."



Not my problem... I'm sorry that you're disappointed but I made myself very clear from the start that I just want a few hands to watch over some stuff for a night.

What's that? They assumed this job would require some fighting because I chose to hire mercenaries with modern weapons? I mean, that makes sense, but it's still their fault for letting their imaginations run wild... So, yeah. Not my problem.

Despite all that, the mercenaries accepted the job and guarded the goods overnight without any issues. The next morning, Lephilia showed up with her wagons, guards, and hired loaders. Mitsuha handed off the products. The Wolf Fang captain and his men—who were ordered to stay silent and keep their guns hidden behind their backs—looked on. Lephilia then left half her guards at the site and had the other half accompany the wagons as they made the first of multiple roundtrips to Lephilia Trading. She had people waiting at the storehouse to unload, so the loaders also stayed behind with the remaining goods.

The coachman, half of the guards, and Lephilia herself accompanied the wagons through the city. Lephilia sat up front with the coachman of the lead wagon for publicity—which wasn't really necessary because the Lephilia Trading and Yamano flags were flapping in the wind on every wagon.

They chose to transport the goods in the morning when the capital was bustling with people. Once the wagons were unloaded at the storehouse, they were driven back out to be reloaded. Lephilia assigned her subordinates to carry the goods into the storehouse so she could stay with the wagons and draw more attention. Cute young girls like her were advantageous in any world.

This spectacle would ensure that the public witnessed Lephilia Trading

receiving a substantial bulk of goods from Viscountess Yamano's lands. The act sent a few messages in the process: Lephilia Trading could be restocked by Viscountess Yamano very quickly even if they lost all their inventory. Viscountess Yamano retained ownership of the goods until they were sold, which meant that if anything happened to them before then, the entire loss fell on her shoulders. And finally, Viscountess Yamano would not blame Lephilia Trading for such an incident and would instead direct her anger entirely at the party that wronged her.

In the current state of affairs where nobles, royals, and major merchants were desperately trying to reach Viscountess Yamano and curry favor with her, being discovered to have staged an attack on Lephilia Trading would be a death blow to the culprit's reputation.

A rumor was already spreading among the nobles and the merchants: an idiotic businessman had picked a fight with Lephilia Trading and Viscountess Yamano, and he'd done so by stooping to the unthinkable level of committing an armed robbery. Not only did he heinously break the law, but he also had the gall to pretend he was another victim of a serial robbery in an attempt to throw off the investigation.

Who could be bold enough to pull a stunt like that? Who'd recently been a victim to an attack similar to Lephilia Trading's case? Only one merchant checked those boxes. His name was on everyone's mind...

"Will you expedite the shipment of the goods I purchased?"

"You must pay me for the stock I supplied you the other day."

"I demand that you return the money I loaned to your company right this

instant!"

"Sorry, do you mind waiting a little longer for my payment...?"

Clients and partners were scrambling to avoid going down with the sinking ship. Companies who purchased goods but hadn't yet received them, companies who'd supplied goods but hadn't been paid yet, companies who'd lent money, and companies who had payments due all made their moves to recover or save as much money as possible. People who were owed products or money wanted to collect before it was too late, and people who owed money themselves hoped that if they waited long enough, the company would go bankrupt, leaving no one to pay back.

Everyone cemented their business strategy in the same way. The buyers were pressuring Delaitre Company for greater quantity and speed than initially promised, and the suppliers were cutting them off entirely. Yet their storehouses held not a single barrel of ale nor a single grain of wheat...

"...The noose is tightening, isn't it?"

"Yep, they're finished..."

Three girls were enjoying an elegant afternoon tea break.

"Why did that merchant think it was a good idea to make you mad, Mitsuha?" Colette was puzzled.

Because the people of this country don't know the might of the Lightning Archpriestess. Not yet, at least...

"What the hell is happening?!" The owner of Delaitre Company was furious.

"We still have days before our clients' delivery dates. Can't they scrounge up goods from wholesalers and other shops to get by?! They have cash and bonds in their safe to pay with! And why does everyone suddenly want us to repay our loans now?! We have plenty of time before the due dates! And don't get me started on all the people who owe us money. What makes them think they can just ignore their payment deadlines?!"

Despite his words, he wasn't an idiot and knew full well the answers to his questions. He was simply lashing out and yelling at anyone who would listen.

"Damn them all! How dare they write us off under the assumption that we're going bankrupt! I suppose I can understand the clients who are worried they won't receive what they're owed out of fear of Delaitre going under. But there's no excuse for the assholes ignoring their payment deadlines and hoping their debts will be forgotten in the hubbub! If we happen to not make it through this dilemma, the IOUs will be the first thing to be seized! There's no chance the collectors who oversee our bankruptcy will miss them. Don't they realize how bad they'll have it if the contracts end up in the hands of gangsters who buy them out for pennies..."

The owner had no patience for the clients who were ignoring their payment dates in the hopes of saving money. That was rich coming from someone who just committed grand larceny on a rival company's storehouse, which is a significantly worse crime than violating a contract.

"There's no way we're going bankrupt over this! All we lost was our warehouse inventory. We still have the money and bonds in our safe, as well as our goods still in circulation. This is nothing more than a rough patch. Delaitre Company will not falter!" The owner widened his gleaming eyes and spat, "Besides... We can always steal back what was stolen from us!"

...But his thinking was clearly beyond rational.

"Do you have any update?" Mitsuha asked.

"Yes. I'm only selling your goods to companies I trust," answered Lephilia. "I also bought a massive quantity of comparable goods from the general market. This will cause retail prices to increase slightly and create a temporary shortage of stock. If anyone were to buy in bulk right now, they'll end up wasting money when we release them back out which will cause prices to drop."

Excellent, Mitsuha thought.

Lephilia Trading acquired the goods before the price hike, and would sell them again before the price drop, so they wouldn't lose anything at all. A few unlucky shops would end up suffering a little because of this, which was unfortunate, but there was nothing they could do to prevent that.

Mitsuha's main goal was to deliver a financial blow to the robber company by cornering them into buying goods at inflated prices to fulfill their ongoing contracts. They'd likely purchase more than needed out of the expectation that their contribution to the shortage would cause prices to go up even further, having no idea that Lephilia Trading was about to put them back on the market.

I could've simply jumped away the company's safe full of money and bonds. But they only stole merchandise, so I decided to do the same...at a much larger scale, though. Causing them to lose money by outwitting them at business will be much more satisfying than stealing it, anyway. They're not gonna lose enough over this to go bankrupt, but this is just one body blow of many to come. The mental damage will rack up with each hit.

The authorities will make them pay for the crime they committed, too. The

company's storehouses would probably get raided by the police. Maybe I should plant some of our goods with the bags they were using to repackage them just to make sure those crooks get caught.

"...So anyway, I want to get started on some land fill construction!" Mitsuha announced with vigor.

"...And what do you mean by, 'So anyway'?" responded Count Bozes, exasperated by her abrupt proposal.

Mitsuha was currently at the Bozeses' estate. She'd barged in unannounced to make her request, or rather, to inform them of something she'd already decided on.

The children had been sent away because this was "lord business," a serious matter. Mitsuha, Count Bozes, and his wife Lady Iris were the only ones in the room. The maid, too, had promptly left after setting the tea. Iris quietly sipped away as the two county leaders talked.

"I want to build a small island made of reclaimed land off the coast between our counties and share ownership of it," Mitsuha said.

"...For what purpose?" the count uttered the obvious question.

"If we both own the land, we'll be able to perform free trade there."

"Ah..."

Count Bozes was an experienced lord. That was all he needed to connect the dots and grasp Mitsuha's intention.

She explained, "I can't just set different tariffs for different counties. Other lords would be sour if I exempted your county from tariffs but not theirs. They'd

pester me to give them the same treatment. But if an island emerges right between our lands, it'll call for territorial disputes. Then we could 'compromise' by declaring it a part of both of our counties..."

"...And we wouldn't have to set tariffs for goods exchanged on our shared land," Count Bozes finished.

They both knew this was a convenient technicality, but counties were free to do as they wished with taxation. The royal palace would not intervene as long as they collected the taxes that were due. As such, this was a great opportunity for Bozes County to establish a beneficial trading relationship with Yamano County without angering other lords.

Yamano County itself had low production capacity and consumer population but Count Bozes was already informed about her plan to import goods from other lands. She'd explained that the imports would be massive in quantity and that she wanted Bozes County—which was becoming a major consumer market—to be one of her patrons. Unlike Yamano County, they had the human resources to take on the management for storage and export to surrounding counties and the capital. Count Bozes found that idea quite enticing.

"Would you be willing to let us sell the items for you as well?" he asked, seeking as much profit from this arrangement as possible. Before being Mitsuha's ally, he was a lord first, and he had to do all he could for his land, his people, and his family to prosper. Mitsuha was well aware of that, as she was doing the same thing for her county.

"Hmm... I do want to get Petz in on this as a reward for supporting us when we were still a poor rural county. But he won't be able to move all the products himself, which is why I'm asking you for help. Your involvement will ward off merchants and nobles who might throw a fit in hopes of getting a share of the

profits... Okay, I'll entrust some of the imports to you!"

Count Bozes's grin slowly faded at Mitsuha's response, but he quickly composed himself.

"While the business opportunity sounds appealing, building an artificial island would surely require a colossal amount of funds, manpower, and time. This project will be difficult to justify no matter what benefits it could bring to our territories. The burden would be great even if you got the royal palace to approve it as a national project, and I doubt they or other territories would endorse it considering only we stand to benefit. I've been going along with your proposal because I can see the perks, but I do not believe it to be realistic," he said grimly.

Mitsuha waved her hands to ease Count Bozes. "Don't worry," she smiled. "It doesn't have to be a big island. Just enough space for one headquarters building and two or three storehouses. All we need it for is to establish the fact that our goods passed through it. We'll just set up a paper company on the island that acts as a center of distribution between our counties. If we want, we could actually use the island to load and unload cargo, or we could just do the paperwork there and do the loading elsewhere.

"The island would also make a good base if we're ever invaded by another country or county—think of it as an unsinkable battleship, a fort. The ocean will be an insurmountable bulwark if we're invaded by land. Soldiers won't be able to swim there with heavy armor and weapons, and if the enemy approaches on small boats, we could just snipe them from the island! Mwahaha!"

Count Bozes stared at her with contempt, needing a moment to collect his thoughts.

He finally said, "You'll need ships to carry all that sand before you could even

begin trading on the island. We don't have the resources to build such things... Shouldn't our priority be developing sailing ships to defend ourselves against invasion from the sea?"

"Oh, that won't be a problem. I'll build the island myself in five seconds—oh... Whoops!"

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!"

Count Bozes and Lady Iris jumped out of their chairs, their faces twisted with rage as they towered over her.

Mitsuha had previously told Count Bozes that she exaggerated the danger of her traversal ability to the royals and other nobles, and that if she used it only on herself once in a while, it barely made an impact on her life force. Emphasis on "only on herself." Even a small island would require a gargantuan amount of sand to build, which, as far as Count Bozes and Iris knew, would expend a significant chunk of her life force. And Iris still only knew the version Mitsuha had told at the royal palace.

"I should've led with that topic, damn it!" Mitsuha cried.

Chapter 64:

Hollow Needle Island

"Th-Th-There's nothing to worry about!" Mitsuha pitched in desperation. "I'll draw a magic circle, wait for the stars to align, prepare some magic stones, absorb energy from the earth's ley lines, and incant 'Elohim, essaim!' It's a user-friendly dark art that doesn't require life force! You absorb magical energy from the earth! I'll cast the Diacute spell too, of course!"

All right, I think they're willing to hear me out! Me and my big mouth... I made this way harder than it needed to be...

"...So in short, with ample preparation—buying a bunch of magic stones, amulets, other divine tools, and waiting for the right day when the stars align—I can cast the spell without shortening my lifespan or suffering any other negative consequences. All I'll need is a day's rest in bed, and I'll be fine," Mitsuha said.

Count Bozes and Lady Iris were eyeing her skeptically, but they seemed to calm down.

"You'd better be telling the truth..." scolded Lady Iris.

"I hope you're not making this up..." followed Count Bozes.

Ouch, they don't trust me... Well, I can see why. They believe I'll do anything for my county and my people—even shorten my own lifespan. In reality, I'm not as selfless as they think. If anything, I'm more like the cold and cruel Gorgeous Irene or the reserved and commanding Mai Shibamura. I'd do anything to

achieve my goals. I'll even cut down bandits to protect a little girl!

...Oh, anyone would do that? Right. Duh.

Well, anyway, I'll play the part.

"Of course it's the truth! I'll be fully prepared to build the whole island in an instant! And I'll be careful not to damage the coast!"

Dumping a giant mass of sand into the ocean near the shore would be sure to cause a giant wave, even if she chose relatively shallow waters. *But I'll figure* out the details later.

Mitsuha had one more request for them. "Also, if it's okay with you, I'd like to appoint Beatrice as the owner of the new company we'll establish on the island..."

"Huh...? Huuuhh?? HUUUHH???" Count Bozes and Iris were wide-eyed as they shrieked.

Yeah, that's a reasonable reaction...

I have a reason for choosing Beatrice, of course. A lot of reasons, actually.

First off, I'm busy. Like, absurdly busy. I don't have the time to manage this island. I'll need someone to take over. Someone with a high social standing who the nobles and merchants would think twice about pushing around. Someone you'd hesitate to bring up bribery and crookery to. Someone you wouldn't even dare try to honeytrap. Someone intelligent and trustworthy... Someone who won't betray me or Count Bozes. And lastly, someone who is Beatrice.

The last reason was all I needed, really. Alexis is a viscount now in the next region over, and Theodore is probably gonna be the next Count Bozes, which means he'll get to live with his family. Beatrice, though? Her situation is different.

As a female noble, Beatrice would be expected to marry young, possibly even shortly after her debutante ball. The rapid development of Bozes County was spawning rumors of an inevitable rise to marquis for Count Bozes, which would make Beatrice all the more desirable as a marriage partner. She was also the little sister of Alexis, who was currently the most popular man in the kingdom after sacrificing himself to save Mitsuha and Marquis Eiblinger during the battle to save the capital, and as a reward for his heroism, given his own noble house.

I'll bet the ladies can't get enough of him. Congrats on achieving your dream of becoming a chick magnet, Alexis...

As if all that wasn't enough, Beatrice was also friends with the Lightning Archpriestess. Not to mention her cute looks, righteous character, intelligence... and well-developed chest. She was going to be flooded with marriage proposals at her debutante ball, no doubt. She could get hitched within two to three years, despite being a child by Japanese standards.

That would be fine if she married into a good family, but what if she ended up with some sleazy idiot noble who abused his position to force her into marriage? Or a perverted middle-aged man on the fringes of the royal family tree? Or a corrupt noble who was merely pretending to be virtuous only to show his true, wicked nature later on?

Count Bozes wasn't the kind of person who'd sell off his daughter for a political marriage, but as a noble and a lord, he'd probably do anything to protect his house, his land, and his people. Even if he knew it would make his daughter unhappy. That was what it meant to be the head of a noble family.

Nope! Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope!!! I can't allow Beatrice to suffer that fate! That's why I want her to live close to me, Count Bozes, and Lady Iris! This important role will keep her here, and her husband will have to marry into the

Bozes family rather than the other way around! Any man who makes Beatrice unhappy while Lady Iris is watching will end up in an early grave... No man would dare.

Mwaha... Mwahahaha! And like hell I'm gonna let Beatrice, Sabine, Colette, or Micchan 2.0 get married before me! Mwahahaha!

"...Are you done?" Count Bozes asked.

"Huh? Done with what?"

"Daydreaming."

Oh, screw you!

"...So yeah, as I said, I want to give that position to Beatrice."

Mitsuha wasn't about to tell Count Bozes and Lady Iris her true motive for nominating Beatrice. She'd take that to the grave... Not that she intended on dying any time soon.

"I should've known that's what you wanted," Count Bozes said.

"Honestly, Mitsuha..." sighed Lady Iris.

They both looked beyond exasperated as they harmonized:

"You just want to keep Beatrice close by, don't you?"

Wow, they're in perfect sync! Talk about relationship goals!

...And you probably thought they believed me, but nope, Chuck Testa!

"Well, I suppose Beatrice is your only friend..."

Holy cow, count! That was really rude!

"I have friends! There's Colette, and Sabine, and..."

And... Umm...

"Is that all? Colette is your servant, and Princess Sabine is royalty. Neither one can be considered an ordinary friend, no?" Count Bozes said.

"Grk..."

When Mitsuha told Count Bozes she wanted to hire Colette as a servant, she'd said it was because the girl saved her life. He probably would've taken issue with Colette's transfer to Yamano County if Mitsuha had spilled that she saw potential in Colette as a lord's vassal. She explained Colette's participation in the orc trip by saying it was a good chance for her to visit her parents. The count had good reason to assume their relationship was that of master and servant, not of equal friends. *Urgh, I wish I could deny it...*

An up-and-coming viscount calling the royal princess a friend could be considered treason. She couldn't tell him about Micchan 2.0, and that went double for Micchan 1.0. The count would probably dismiss the Munchkin Maids as nothing more than servants, too. What about the orphans? No, I doubt he'd count them either!

"...I'm sorry!" Mitsuha shirked, unable to manage a better response.

"Why are you apologizing?"

Oh, right. He expects me to be depressed about having no friends. But why should I care what the count thinks? I don't need his approval to know who my friends are!

"...Now why do you suddenly look smug?" the count asked.

Can you stop being so judgmental?!

The discussion went through a couple of unexpected detours, but in the end, Mitsuha gained approval from Count Bozes and Lady Iris to build the island. They accepted her proposal about Beatrice as well.

Why did they get on board with the Beatrice thing so easily, you ask? Because they had the same concerns as me, of course. They didn't want to marry her off to some scum in a faraway land either. At least if her future husband marries into the Bozeses, he'll be much more likely to end up unhappy than her. That said, Theodore was the second son and the heir to the family. Under normal circumstances, Beatrice had no reason to take a husband into her own family.

The Bozeses weren't facing any difficulties managing their county. As such, they had no need to offer Beatrice to a wealthy noble family in exchange for bolstering their finances. What they were worried about was high-ranking nobles who were facing economic difficulties or whose factions were losing influence abusing their rank to force them into marriage talks.

Bozes County was becoming the epicenter of the shipbuilding enterprise in the kingdom and the site of the new naval organization. An elevation to marquis for the head of the family was seen as an inevitability. High-ranking nobles, low-ranking nobles, and even royals would want a piece of that pie. It'd be hard for Count Bozes to refuse if a royal demanded Beatrice's hand in marriage, no matter how far on the fringes of the bloodline they were.

That was where Mitsuha's plan came in. This new island would become the economic hub between the rapidly developing Bozes County and the great Lightning Archpriestess's Yamano County, as well as a strategic location to protect the country from naval invasion. Being placed in charge of the company that managed all that would make Beatrice a powerful figure—not to mention a very rich one.

Count Bozes would then have an excuse to turn down any marriage proposal. "I can't afford to send my daughter away. She's indispensable to the well-being

of my territory. Any husband of hers will have to marry into our family and work for Bozes County..." he could say. If he became a marquis, he probably wouldn't even have to entertain marriage proposals for sons who weren't heirs, no matter how high their family's ranks were. Instead, he'd be able to wait for a promising young man who Beatrice liked and have him marry into the Bozes family.

I feel bad for the future husband... thought Mitsuha. Living under Count Bozes's and Lady Iris's watchful eye... But I'm sure Lady Iris will play nice...at first. Mwahaha!

Count Bozes turned to the door and shouted at the maid on the other side. "Bring Beatrice here!"

The three of them locked eyes, grinned, and nodded.

"Yes! Absolutely! I'll do it!" Beatrice was immediately on board as if she thought she'd never receive such an opportunity again.

Unsurprisingly, women's careers were just as limited in this kingdom as they were in Vanel. The most a noblewoman could hope to do was help her husband make connections and gather information at parties. Some women were probably content with that, but the ones who weren't had to find their lives incredibly boring. Beatrice clearly fell into the latter camp.

The offered post was a very important one and a request from Mitsuha. Beatrice was never going to say no. Another major motivator was probably Count Bozes's comment, "You might be able to marry for love." Marrying purely for love was a dream within a dream for a noble girl.

I caught that sneaky "might," Count Bozes. I'm sure he wants to reserve the

right to veto in case Beatrice invites a weirdo over for dinner.

I already decided on the design for the company flag. It's a squirrel riding on the back of a bear. The bear represents Bozes County, and the squirrel is Yamano County. The squirrel looks like it's saying, "Protect me and I'll share my knowledge!" It's perfect! The flag also has a hidden meaning that no one from this world would ever figure out. It's a play on English and Japanese words.

A bear and a squirrel.

A bear and a risu (squirrel in Japanese).

Bear-to-risu.

Beatrice...

Oh, shut up! I know it's bad, okay? You can't expect artistic talent or a knack for coming up with good names from a Yamano! I already hired the schemer girl from the orphanage to design the flag. She knocked it out of the park, as usual.

After getting permission from Count Bozes, Mitsuha ordered everyone in the fishing village and on the coast to evacuate and move their fishing boats and anything else they could. She decided to do it during the day. Safety was a higher priority than having her powers be exposed. Doing it at night would've had fewer witnesses, but she couldn't ask the villagers to evacuate at such an inconvenient hour, and the darkness would've made it difficult to confirm the sea level.

Mitsuha waited until there was no one on the coast, then jumped—with a layover on Earth—to a rocky area by a river in her county that she'd scouted in advance.

"Follow me, giant boulder!"

Next, she jumped a massive chunk of the jagged terrain to a spot about five hundred yards off the coast. She'd already confirmed the sea level and made sure the tip of the boulder would appear just above the surface. She then immediately jumped the volume of seawater where the boulder was placed to Earth and then jumped it further out to sea, letting it cascade back into the ocean. Waves spread out, but there were no islands or continents nearby, so it shouldn't have caused any damage.

Mitsuha felt bad for the fish she relocated along with the seawater, but she couldn't leave them behind to get smashed by the giant rock or hammered by the gush of water from all sides when she created the gap in the ocean. She didn't want all those fishy deaths weighing on her conscience. They stood a much better chance of surviving being dropped into the ocean along with the seawater.

Without taking a moment to rest, Mitsuha returned to the spot where she set the massive boulder. She'd suspected that removing the seawater beneath it wouldn't completely prevent a disturbance to the ocean's surface, and she was right—tall waves were rippling out from the center. She focused on the waves that were heading for the shore and jumped the water. She dumped it further out at sea. She then jumped high above the boulder to make sure there were no more big waves, then returned to the coast.

That was exhausting... Mentally exhausting, that is. World-jumping itself doesn't tire me, but the pressure of performing a task that allows for zero mistakes took the wind out of me.

She intentionally carved out the boulder to be uneven all around. Giving it a clean spherical or rectangular form would've made it unstable on the rough ocean floor, so she made the bottom of the boulder jagged for a better fit. *Still*

not stable, though.

Mitsuha jumped back next to where she extracted the huge boulder...

"One more giant piece of rock, come with me!"

...and jumped out a bedrock that was about five hundred square feet and six feet tall. She then dropped it over the boulder, hammering the jagged bottom into the ocean floor to stabilize it.

BOOOOOOM!

The bedrock crashed into the boulder with a thunderclap and broke apart on impact. Mitsuha jumped the fragments back to where she extracted the boulder and dumped them next to the gaping rectangular hole.

"All right, time for the finishing touches!"

She jumped back above the rock mass in the ocean and sliced a chunk off the top to create a flat surface. The remnants were, again, jumped to the dumping ground.

"Next up..."

Mitsuha returned to the deformed hunk of boulder protruding from the sea and gouged a deep, narrow hole in the flattened surface. She filled it with a cylindrical rock, then cut notches that spiraled down to make a staircase, and bored the top for a place to set a cannon. That's right, she was constructing an artillery battery. The cannon would be visible to the approaching enemy for intimidation.

She was going to install replicas of large-caliber cannons for show, but the actual cannons to be used were going to be 30-40mm autocannons. Battleship cannons in the New World had a range of one mile, whereas these had a range of close to three miles. That was more than enough. Even better, the

autocannons required fewer hands to operate, they could be fired quickly, and the in-vehicle and towed versions were compact in size. They were much easier to use overall.

Large-caliber cannons were a challenge because of their complicated loading system. They would've been an atypical purchase for Wolf Fang, which would raise suspicion. They were expensive too. It was unlikely the people of this world would be able to operate them, anyway. Autocannons were more than enough.

Self-propelled anti-aircraft guns were out of the question. They cost tens of thousands of dollars, and the reason was because it was an armored vehicle frame equipped with missiles, heavy machine guns, radar, a fire-control system, and more. They hardly needed anything like that to sink big and slow sailing ships. Mitsuha figured she could save money by asking the captain to dig around for cheaper secondhand weapons.

The next thing Mitsuha installed were defensive rock plates with embrasures for shooting down smaller boats that approached the island. She didn't put them around the entire perimeter of the island, but instead at regular intervals so that marksmen would still have enough to shield themselves from enemy fire. Placing them around the whole island would've looked ugly, and Mitsuha didn't plan on letting the enemy get close enough to the island to necessitate that many anyway.

She planned to jump over M2 Browning machine guns and set them up in each embrasure. It was an old but reliable model, and probably easy to find secondhand because of how many were made. Over three million of them have been manufactured in the last century! Surely the captain can find me ten.

Mitsuha continued to design the island with her world-jumping ability.

Eventually, only one step remained: buildings. She was going to use the mansions and warehouses she confiscated from the rich figures in the country she went to war with on Earth—the one that kidnapped Colette and Sabine. She'd broken down most of the buildings for scrap materials, but she left some intact hoping they might come in handy someday. It would take ages to construct new buildings from scratch; reusing those made much more sense.

Mitsuha had jumped the mansions and warehouses to this world along with their underground foundations and surrounding dirt, so first she'd have to carve out pits in the island to mount them into. I'm gonna do that with world-jumping, of course. It'd take decades to do that with bare hands. Props to whoever made the Aonodomon Tunnel back in the day, but I don't have that kinda patience...

And so Mitsuha trucked along on her construction project, making liberal use of her world-jumping ability.

"I'm finally done..."

Before Mitsuha's eyes—or rather, beneath her feet—was her new island. The two-hundred-and-twenty-yard diameter island made of rock was situated roughly five hundred yards from the coast. While it had a roundish yet slightly jagged, organic shape, the top was unnaturally flat. The strangest feature was the structure looming in the center of the island—an impossibly cylindrical...hill.

"Tower" was probably a better word. Such a thing never could've formed naturally. A grand mansion stood in front of the tower, and there were three warehouse buildings close by. The island was only about thirty feet above sea level on all sides, but the only easy way up was the staircase and wagon slope leading up from the wharf.

"Perfectamundo!"

The distance out to sea made an attack from land nigh on impossible. Armored soldiers had no chance of swimming five hundred yards, and the muskets used in the New World had a range of fifty yards at best. Even if their enemies figured out guns with internal rifling and cylindro-conoidal bullets—like a Miniè rifle from Earth—they'd still only have an effective range of about three hundred and thirty yards. Their maximum range is about eight hundred yards but those numbers mean little if the enemy already breached the land with their cannons; it may as well mean the kingdom was done for. The only option at that point would be to flee, likely by world-jumping with Mitsuha or by boarding ships that have been prepared for an escape to sea.

Mitsuha decided to hollow out a bunker in the island to hide a small cruiser. A cruiser should have enough power to go straight to another country and seek refuge. The motorized boat would only be for emergency use when she wasn't around. Beatrice would have no trouble learning the basic controls.

...I'm sure I can get away with hiding a cruiser without affecting this world's development. There'd be only one of its kind; you can't replicate its technology. To the future archaeologists who discover my bunker and the out-of-place artifact concealed within, I pity thee! That's gotta be a head-scratcher. Mwahahaha! They'll probably think it's a flying ship, an Utsuro-bune, or a vimana. Actually, they'll have motorized boats long before they develop the technology to excavate ruins. They'll tear their hair out trying to figure out how someone had one in this era, though.

It was a plan-she'd acquire a pre-owned cruiser and teach Beatrice how to pilot it. You needed to study the COLREG among other regulations to get a small boat license in Japan, but that wasn't necessary in this world. Simply learning how to operate the vehicle was enough. And that part was easy. Mitsuha could take it to Earth whenever it needed maintenance.

The mansion would require a little more work. Its foundation was fitted into the rock. The building was already proofed for salt damage because it was originally a beachfront home. However, it was built with electricity, gas, and running water in mind. The bathrooms and kitchen were unusable. Mitsuha would have to build a water tank at a higher elevation and connect it to the pipes—not to mention figure out the bathing situation.

I can't let Beatrice live in a place without warm baths! She may only be living here on paper, but it'll need to be opened to the public on occasion. People might come to inspect the building or make a courtesy visit, too, and it's possible she'll have to evacuate from her home and bunker here for an extended period of time. You know, to hide from any idiot nobles who come to Bozes County begging for her hand in marriage until they give up and leave.

Mitsuha had no idea what to do about acquiring potable water and plumbing. She could always jump fresh water there herself, but she wanted to establish a system that would work without her in case she died, had to go into hiding, or somehow lost her world-jumping ability. The last one was unlikely, though. One of the fundamental policies for her development of Yamano County was ensuring that it didn't rely on her presence. She wanted the same for this island.

They could transport fresh water to the island by boat. That would work during peacetime, but relying on water to be delivered while taking refuge on the island would be dangerous; the enemy could easily attack the delivery boats.

What about making clean water from seawater? A multi-stage flash

distillation system would require oil or gas to power it, and reverse osmosis would require electricity for the high-pressure pump. It'd take three kilowatts to make one ton of water. The water would need to be sterilized too, and without adding minerals, it'd taste horrible. That wasn't a great option either.

This wasn't some convenient adventure novel where you'd find a roaring river of clean water directly beneath a mansion on a cliff. You'd have to dig through the giant boulder island and into the ocean floor before there was a chance of finding water, and even then, it'd probably just be seawater.

...Oh well. I guess I'll just set up a few water tanks from Earth and have them replenished by boat for now. That would create more jobs and become another source of income for the fishing village. Count Bozes would pay for it, of course. The booming economy in his territory from the shipbuilding and naval development had surely left him with some money to spend.

There wouldn't be a ton of people living on this island anyway, and there was no way Beatrice would actually spend much time here. She'd be lonely, and her parents would never allow it in the first place. Making the occasional and necessary day trip with her servants was all it had use for. She'd obviously stay home when the sea was rough. The island was simply a symbol, a geographic excuse for Bozes County and Yamano County to perform free trade. There was no need to actually do any work there.

I'll prepare an office for Beatrice in my county residence. And a bedroom too.

She'll blend in with the Yamano County residence team in no time and I'll steal
her away from the Bozeses before they even know what happened! Mwahaha!

I shouldn't do all the work on the island myself. I'll let the count figure out the rest. There's more stuff to consider including whether I should build a pontoon bridge connecting to the mainland, but I'll save that for another day.

The next day, Mitsuha took Randy to the giant holes in the ground where she extracted the boulder and bedrock. The scraps of bedrock were piled high next to the craters. She figured they might as well investigate the holes to see if there were any promising minerals. As the local metalworking specialist, Randy was sure to have the expertise she was looking for. He has a better shot of helping me with this than anyone else in my county, at least.

Randy investigated the soil but didn't find any valuable minerals. Yeah, I figured. If you could just dig a hole in any random spot and find profitable resources, being a miner would be the easiest job in the world.

But I'm not giving up! It's time for me to use the ace up my sleeve and summon a mining specialist who can recognize metals that the people of this world don't have the technology to discover yet!

That specialist was Mountain King, a regular on her **Help Me Out! Running Your Land as a Viscountess** blog. He responded immediately when she reached out to him and was ecstatic to accompany her to the other world. Mitsuha paid him for his service this time since it was a specific task; she would've felt bad making him spend his whole day off and only compensating him with free lunch and dinner. She decided not to give him gold. He would've been thrilled by that, but she didn't want to give the intelligence agents of Earth's major countries anything that could link her to the blog.

Mountain King set to work and ended up finding...nothing.

Damn it, I was hoping for something! Oh well. Gotta move on!

Mitsuha paid Mountain King 25,000 yen for the work; it was what this

kingdom's gold coin was worth. That way, he was at least being paid one gold coin in value. Sorry... That's the best I could do...

Later, Mitsuha decided to forge a waterway from a nearby river to the giant boulder hole; she was going to turn it into a pond. She then carved another waterway from the pond to the river so the water would circulate and prevent the pond from getting dirty. She hoped that once aquatic plants grew and fish followed, the waterhole would eventually turn into a good fishing spot for the locals.

Her true purpose behind creating the pond was to acquire irrigation water for the county's farmland. If the river were to suffer a drought, they could use the pond water to hold out. That was why she chose to extract the rocks near the river.

I thought this through, believe it or not!

Next, Mitsuha jumped sand into the five-hundred-square-foot hole that she extracted the bedrock from, filling it about halfway. The wind would've blown the sand everywhere if she filled it to the top.

Presenting Yamano County's new giant sandpit! Yay! Kids, cats, and dogs are gonna love it. The cats and dogs better not use it as a toilet, though!

Mitsuha originally shaped the hole to make it into a pool, but regulating the water quality and temperature and maintaining safety measures would've been too much work. She didn't have a clue how to control the water quality without chlorine, and she wouldn't have been able to bear it if the pool became a source of disease or if a child drowned to death. She gave up on the pool idea.

Thus, she went with a giant sandpit instead. No one was going to die while playing in a sandpit that was only three feet deep. A human could drown in a

foot of water, so this was the much safer option.

Okay, that's a good stopping point. I'll pop over to check on the New World next. It's about time there's some development in the case...

Chapter 65:

Expansion

"How's it going?"

"Oh, hey Mitsuha! The authorities have zeroed in on Delaitre Company. They're still being treated as a victim...for now." Lephilia's tone suggested that everything was going just as they planned—er, expected.

"But the investigation is actually for gathering evidence against them?" Mitsuha suggested.

"Exactly. Once the authorities start treating them as full-blown suspects, they'll be done for. They dug their own grave when they involved so many employees and thugs to carry out their scheme—a handful are bound to talk.

"The honest and weak-willed employees will break and give up the schemer's name as soon as the interrogators threaten them with the death sentence or a lifetime of penal labor for taking part in the crime. Or maybe the authorities will threaten them that their families will be ostracized for being related to a criminal and that their sisters will never be able to marry. They might get offered a lighter sentence if they answer honestly and say they were acting under orders.

"Some of the thugs will talk too if they're arrested and tortur—I mean, questioned for a different crime. Ripping out a few fingernails or stabbing a red-hot needle under their nails should loosen their lips," Lephilia said.

The girl was right on all counts. The merchant behind the thievery probably

thought his crime would be nothing more than a simple robbery. However, multiple guards were beaten and injured, and half of the robbers had weapons. That meant the case would be treated as a violent crime organized with the intent to murder Lephilia Trading's guards and employees.

I mean, the damage report I submitted was written in a way that the authorities would come to that conclusion. The punishment for an armed robbery with intent to kill was significantly harsher than something like burglarizing an empty house. The offender would be convicted as a murderer. The fact that no one was killed didn't matter; he became guilty the moment he hired armed men who wouldn't think twice about committing homicide if necessary.

The perpetrator's other misread was his assumption that the victim in this case would be Lephilia Trading instead of Viscountess Yamano. He ended up making an enemy of the royal palace, the capital guards, the nobles, and the other people in the same trade. Even the merchants' guild, which would usually oppose the authorities' investigation by claiming unjust obstruction of business, was complying with the capital guards.

Everyone's on our side because they value me and Lephilia Trading, who I've developed a strong friendship with, more than Delaitre Company—they value us as a potential source of revenue, that is. I doubt the investigation will go on for more than two or three days.

"Sounds like this case is as good as over," said Mitsuha. "Let's move on! We're gonna open Lephilia Trading's partner stores in the surrounding lands. One store in each country will be exempt from my 'no sales outside Vanel' rule. We're gonna entrust them to young, gifted merchants like you who'd never have a chance to inherit their family company. I'll loan them funds to open their

store and supply them with Lephilia Trading's goods. They should rise to the top of their country's market in no time. Lephilia, you've been through this before and know what it takes, so I want you to guide them."

"I'll do it! I promise I won't let you down! Lady Mitsuha, please... Make the world your own..."

Oh shoot, she's calling me Lady Mitsuha again... And I've heard that line somewhere before! Somewhere galactic and heroic...

Three days later, a rumor was going around that the owner of Delaitre Company, several of his employees, and a group of thugs were arrested by the capital guards. Mitsuha sent a subordinate to verify, and it turned out to be true. Oh well, it was only a matter of time.

They were being tortured into confessing the location of the stolen goods, but nobody had said a word. Not because they were valiantly enduring the torture, but because they simply had nothing to confess to. "The stolen goods were stolen from us, so we don't know," they cried. The interrogators, however, were convinced that the goods were still hidden somewhere because they weren't mentioned in the original damage report. Besides, the authorities believed that incident was staged by Delaitre Company.

I'm sure other businesses are circling like piranhas to snap up their trade routes, but we-er, Lephilia Trading is staying out of it. I don't want this company to soil its reputation of being a righteous and self-sufficient business.

Lephilia Trading keeps their promises and will ruin anyone who meddles with them. They're a fast-growing company that has the protection of the Goddess and the leadership of a beautiful young merchant. They also have the full support of a gorgeous woman from the streets of a distant land. Even the royal palace, influential nobles, and the merchants' guild have their backs.

Yeah, I don't think anyone's gonna mess with Lephilia Trading for a while.

Wait, I misspoke! I meant that I have street smarts, not that I'm a woman of the... Oh, shut up!

It didn't take long for Lephilia to filter through the children of merchants in Vanel's neighboring countries to scout for prospective talents. Money could be used to speed up just about anything. Mitsuha was a firm believer that money existed to be used; the economy would crash if everyone kept their earnings tucked away in drawers, after all.

...What's that? Saving 80,000 gold? Deep pockets? Jumping gold to Earth? Hmm, I don't know what you're talking about!

This is one of those situations people like to call, "This is this, that is that!" and "Rules for thee but not for me!" Don't worry about it. Worrying will only make you lose your hair.

Mitsuha looked over the list of people Lephilia put together. Most of them were girls, which was expected. Family-owned businesses were passed down to the oldest or second oldest sons. Even third sons and younger who were unlikely to get that chance could still expect to play key roles or even run branch stores. Women, on the other hand, were only used as tools no matter their talent. All they could anticipate was a life of childrearing and homemaking after being married off for the family's benefit—sometimes to a man who could be significantly older than them.

Up until not long ago, that was the kind of life that awaited Lephilia. It made

sense that most of the people who fit Mitsuha's criteria would be girls, and that Lephilia would seek out girls who were in similar positions to her. And it wasn't like the gender disparity would cause any problems.

I don't want any obnoxious guys with big egos, or guys who might try to usurp Lephilia Trading, or guys who are plotting to cozy up with me. It might actually be better to go with all girls to avoid that. An international network of female business owners? Sounds like a plan!

Thump!

"Yow!" Mitsuha yelped as she staggered back and landed on her butt.

"Oh dear! Are you okay, big sis?!" Colette cried. Mitsuha had told Colette to call her that in public while in the New World to keep up appearances.

"Ohhh, I'm so sorry!" apologized the girl who collided with Mitsuha and made her fall.

"No, it's my fault for carrying all that load at once. I was stumbling. Don't worry about it... Ow-ow-ow! Sorry, do you mind helping me up? I'm in too much pain to get up myself..." Now all Mitsuha had to do was get the girl to lend her a shoulder and lure her to a nearby café where she'd dive into her sales pitch.

Nothing like the reassurance of battle-tested strategies... My tailbone is gonna pay before this is over, but I'll just have to trust in my body's natural healing ability.

"So this is how you scam people, Mitsuha..." mumbled Colette.

"Hey, that's not true! I didn't tell that girl a single lie. I really am a foreign

viscountess, I really am selling all my imports to Lephilia Trading in Vanel, and I really am looking for another company to do the same thing in this country! You can't call that a scam!"



"I guess not..."

Indeed, Mitsuha told the girl no lies. Rumors of Lephilia Trading and the source of its products had already spread to other countries in the New World. Naturally, the children who were helping their parents' business had heard the tale. Lephilia's meteoric rise from a simple merchant's daughter to the owner of a famous and highly successful company had made her an inspiration to other daughters of merchants. The girls who were recruited had to feel over the about being approached person of Lephilia's moon by the key success-Viscountess Yamano-with the proposal to start a Lephilia Tradingequivalent in their own country.

As a result, the talks went smoothly. Mitsuha forbade the new girls from selling abroad, just like she did with Lephilia. There was no way to stop customers from buying them and taking them abroad themselves, though. A small amount of Lephilia Trading goods had made it out of the country in that manner; customers would purchase as much as they were allowed, insisting it was for personal use, then take it across the border.

That meant nobles and wealthy people in other countries were already aware of the quality of Lephilia Trading's goods, removing the need to rely on connections for promotion like when Lephilia Trading got started. If the up-and-coming merchant simply advertised that her products were from Yamano County and proved that she had a deal with Viscountess Yamano, she'd find a total seller's market.

Once Mitsuha elected the owners of the new partner stores, she told them to contact Lephilia Trading in Vanel for instructions. She hardly had time to manage all the companies she'd established throughout the New World; Lephilia could do that. She'd gone down the same road. Her experience made

her much more qualified to mentor them. If all the girls bonded and formed an alliance with Lephilia as their leader, that would be all the better.

As for product procurement, each company owner would place an order with Lephilia Trading. Lephilia would then look over them and give advice. She'd then pass the orders on to Mitsuha, who would sneak the deliveries to their storehouses. Having Lephilia execute deliveries through normal means wasn't really an option; Vanel would charge tariffs to export the goods, and the caravans—loaded with high-end products sold to nobles and affluent people—would be at great risk of being attacked by bandits.

The financial loss would suck, but I don't want any caravan workers to get hurt or for anyone to think they can take advantage of me and Lephilia Trading. That'd be a death blow for all female merchants. It's essential that people take us seriously, which means I'll need to crush anyone who tries to take advantage of us, no matter the cost... But it'd be better to prevent the need for that in the first place.

It was unlikely the Vanelian royals, nobles, or merchants would complain about Lephilia compiling the orders of their partner stores. She'd only be mediating for Mitsuha; Lephilia Trading wouldn't actually be trading with the other stores or shipping inventory through Vanel. Even if anyone did voice opposition, Mitsuha and Lephilia could just ignore them.

Communication between the partner companies and Lephilia Trading would take time, but there was nothing they could do about that. Mitsuha would have to clone herself if she were to give each company the same attention she's been giving Lephilia Trading. The deliveries would at least be quick once Lephilia Trading received the order forms. The partner stores would just have to be patient.

Under normal circumstances, the distributor would write to the supplier after compiling the orders from all the retail stores. The supplier would then contact their home country for the goods to be shipped across the ocean, and then transported on land. But with Mitsuha's world-jumping ability, the orders would be fulfilled at impossible speed. *I'll visit each company in person every now and then, too.*

"Okay, on to the next one!"

"Aye, aye, ma'am!" trilled Colette.

"Mitsuha, out!"

Shortly after a third company (led by another young lady) sealed a deal with Viscountess Yamano and made its debut in the industry, there was a sharp uptick in incidents where girls carrying large bags were getting body-slammed by daughters of merchants. The cause of this strange phenomenon was anyone's guess.

"...So yeah, I'd like you all to run the business for me."

"What do you mean, 'So yeah'?" The captain made a face.

Mitsuha was in the conference room of Wolf Fang's headquarters—which at this point was like a second home to her. Nearly every member had been gathered in the room.

"Well, you know... It's just that I've been making some money by selling alcohol and spices I bought from big-box retailers on Earth, but my business has grown to the point that I can't keep up anymore... And I need your help!"

The captain and his men stared at her in disbelief.

There's only so much one person can buy in bulk at specialty stores. Hence why I'm trying to outsource the menial tasks...

"I'm not asking you to promote and carve out a market! I just want you to start a small company to procure the stock I need. You don't have to promote or face customers. The goods are guaranteed to sell, so there's no risk of losing money. Can you please do this for me? There's no one else in this world that I trust!"

"...We can do it for the li'l lady, can't we? I don't got a problem with it," one of the mercenaries said.

"Yeah, she's made us a helluva lotta money. We owe her. And we're getting a cut of her profits, right? Sounds like this job is way safer, too. We definitely got enough free time..."

Hey, the mercenaries are on board! Mitsuha thought. And the captain's verdict is...?

"Raise your hand if you're on board," the captain said.

Ooh, that's everyone! Heck yeah!

"...Well, there ya have it. We'll get a business license or whatever right away, so make us a list of the things you want and their quantities. Come back in three days once we've figured out what our share should be. This is new ground for us, so you're gonna hafta be patient."

That's fair. I can't expect an immediate reply after asking mercenaries to start a new business for me. But the Wolf Fang crew will figure it out, I'm sure.

I'm counting on you guys!

"Wh-Wh-Whaaaat?! Are you kidding me?! And you approved it just like that?!" screeched Princess Sabine.

"S-Sorry... I have no idea why you're mad at me, but sorry..." The king was cowering before his daughter's outrage.

She continued, "You're telling me that this 'Hollow Needle Island' appeared out of nowhere? And Mitsuha founded a company? And she entrusted it to the young Beatrice Bozes?! If she wanted a young girl for the position, she should've chosen *me*! Then I would've been the one to live in Yamano County with her! Whoever runs the company is just going to have their subordinates do the work anyway... I shouldn't have let myself get distracted with other things. Grr..." Sabine couldn't stop fuming, but she knew she was too late. "I got caught up with sending servants to Yamano County to copy the dictionary Mitsuha made, and using it to talk to the prisoners. Urgh, I was so focused on learning the New World language that I had no idea what she was up to! I'm *so* mad at myself!"

Mitsuha had written a translation dictionary for the crew members of the captured Vanelian ships and many handwritten copies had been made since. Sabine was using one of them to study the language and converse with the Vanelian landing party that was being imprisoned in the capital. She disguised herself as a commoner and gave them food to get them to chat. Many of the sailors engaged with her out of hope that she'd put in a good word to someone in a position of power, but also because they were bored and grateful for the food. In fact, they were so excited to help her study that they fiercely competed for the privilege of who'd get to speak to her next. As a result, Sabine had been making steady progress learning the New World language.

"First Colette gets the jump on me, and now Beatrice of all people?! This is humiliating! I will not stand for it! MITSUHA BELONGS TO *ME!*" the young princess screamed.

The king sighed, wishing he could hear those words from one of his two sons.

Oblivious to Sabine's efforts to learn the New World language, Mitsuha mumbled to herself, "I've left the outfitting to Count Bozes, so I don't need to do any more work on Utopia Republic for now..."

Outfitting is a phase of the shipbuilding process that takes place after the body is built and the ship is launched. It involves the interior construction—installing the main engine and operative machinery. If Hollow Needle Island were a ship, Mitsuha would have built the body and everything above deck (the mansions and storehouses) and launched it. She left the outfitting—getting running water in the mansions, building the stone steps leading up from the harbor, and other tedious tasks—to Count Bozes. That was more than reasonable considering that the island was under both their management and that Beatrice would be running the company.

In simpler terms, Mitsuha took on the heavy-lifting manual labor which wouldn't cost her anything, while Count Bozes would handle the details that required time and money.

Utopia Republic was the name of the manmade island in a novel that Mitsuha found in her brother's room. The fictional island was located right on the border separating Japan's territorial waters and the open sea, making it a paradise unbound by Japanese law. Anyone could enter it without a passport. However, it wasn't the actual name of the island Mitsuha had just made. That one was only known as Hollow Needle Island.

"All I've got left is to install the usual: a generator run by solar energy and propane gas. I can practically do that in my sleep at this point. Might as well throw in a fridge as a bonus. As for the pontoon bridge connecting the island to shore... I'll have to ask the count for his thoughts. All right, on to the next thing!"

"What?! Viscountess Yamano has started doing business in other countries?!" The king of Vanel jumped to his feet.

"Yes, Your Majesty," answered the chancellor. "She's appointed companies akin to Lephilia Trading in various countries to be her sole vendor and representative of the land. She is also prohibiting her products from being moved across borders, just as she did in Vanel. That means this is unlikely to have much impact on international trade—"

"You fool!" thundered the king. "This isn't about the smattering of alcohol, food, and spices that Lephilia Trading is selling! Have you forgotten why Viscountess Yamano left her homeland and traveled here alone?! She's researching her potential market and building a foundation for full-scale trade in the future! Not just food goods but valuables like gemstones—at a much larger proportion! We're at risk of having that opportunity snatched by other countries. Where's your sense of urgency?!"

It took everything the chancellor had to resist saying what was on his mind: And exactly whose fault is it that Viscountess Yamano withdrew from Vanel and stopped attending parties, leaving only her ties with Lephilia Trading? Why, he's standing right in front of me and spewing spittle across the dais.

"We need to convince the viscountess that we're her most reliable and friendly trading partner in this part of the world. And that she has more friends here than in our surrounding countries. Then we'll flaunt our overwhelming strength as a nation and sway her into favoring us!"

That just might work, thought the chancellor. As long as you don't get out of line and anger her again...

"Heya Micchan, let's hang out!" Mitsuha popped over to Micchan Mk-II's place.

It'd been a while since the last disastrous visit, so she'd been wanting to come over to make amends—with Micchan, that is. Mitsuha couldn't care less about the Marquis Mitchell and made sure to arrive at noon when he'd be away. His three sons were absent too. They were probably at work or school. The only people at home were Marchioness Mitchell, Micchan, and their servants.

Trust me, that was no accident. This world is full of loose-lipped people who'd trade information for connections or money. Orphans would camp in front of a gate all day long for some spare change. Like I said, money exists to be used.

A maid led Mitsuha into the estate. Viscountess Yamano was known by all the staff, so she was shown in without question. She didn't even have to wait for someone to confirm her identity. If the marquis were home, her visit could've meant she was here as a noble lady, but today, she was here simply as a friend of his daughter's. There was no need for ceremony.

What's that? You still think it doesn't make sense for a visitor to be led right into a noble estate without even being announced? Yeah, I guess. Maybe the marquis ordered the servants to show me in and try to prevent me from leaving. Given the current position he's in, I wouldn't be surprised.

"Mitsuha!" Micchan exclaimed. The look on her face was a mix of both happy

and hesitant. She probably heard about it all from her father. The girl was the only connection he had remaining with Mitsuha, and his last thread of hope.

"Hey! I brought a bunch of shortcakes!" Mitsuha showed off the four boxes of goodies she was carrying.

"Whaaaa?!" Micchan and her mother reacted in perfect sync.

Wow, the apple didn't fall far from the tree!

Each box contained six shortcakes, making two dozen in total. Mitsuha handed three of the boxes to the maid who'd already poured them tea, leaving one box for herself, Micchan, and the marchioness.

"Here. These are for all the servants to share," Mitsuha offered the maid. It was rare that a young noble would come bearing extravagant food as gifts for common servants. Mitsuha hoped this would increase her popularity among them. Small gestures like these were sure to pay off down the line. I don't expect them to betray their own boss, but maybe they'll start going out of their way to help me. Even if they're just hoping for another gift.

"Whuh..." the maid, Micchan, and her mother gasped. The maid looked like a deer in the headlights while the two noble ladies stared at the cake boxes with murder in their eyes.

I don't blame the maid for being scared... They look like they're about to rip her head off...

"Take them, please. I mean it," urged Mitsuha. "Or are you going to make Micchan and Marchioness Mitchell eat them all as a part of an evil plan to make them fat?"

Micchan's and her mother's faces twitched.

The marchioness muttered with anguish, "G-Go on, take them..."

The maid clutched the three boxes and *whooshed* out the room. That was hardly appropriate behavior for a marquis's maid.

Mitsuha understood how she felt, though. Not even Japanese girls could resist these magical shortcakes, and they were far better than the meager sweets that could be found in this country. Maids probably had a hard time affording sweets, too.

Well, I'm sure the marquis's maids come from well-off families. I doubt they're orphans or children who were given up as loan collateral. Could they be daughters of lower-ranking nobles who are apprenticed to learn etiquette and make connections...? Actually, no, I doubt that's true for these maids. They're not court ladies at a royal palace or personal attendants for a noblewoman... Anyway, I bought these shortcakes as a cheap investment that could have major returns in the future.

Mitsuha, Micchan, and Marchioness Mitchell each had a plate with two shortcakes and a teacup in front of them as they began to chat.

"Micchan, do you have any plans to lead a faction of your own?" Mitsuha asked.

"HUUUH?!" the girl and her mother shrieked.

Micchan probably figured Mitsuha's visit was simply to convey that they were still friends despite her falling out with the marquis. The girl likely also had orders from her father to remain close with the viscountess and help repair the relationship.

But Micchan's a righteous noble lady who wouldn't butter up to someone just because her father told her to. That's why she looked so conflicted when I showed up... Until the shortcakes jettisoned all other thoughts from her mind, at

least. And just as she was getting over the massive disappointment of only getting two pieces of cake, I surprised her with that question. Talk about an emotional roller coaster.

"A f-f-faction? M-M-Me?"

Her father led a faction, so she knew full well what that entailed. She'd even told Mitsuha when they first met that talking to other girls her age risked forming unwanted factions; she obviously had a good understanding of how politics among the nobility worked. She avoided making friends because she didn't want to get wrapped up in all that. Then I blow it all up by asking her if she wants to go out of her way to start one. Yup, that's gotta be a bolt from the blue.

"Don't worry. I'm talking about a real faction complete with complicated power dynamics and personal stakes, not a group of kids playing make-believe," Mitsuha clarified, intending to calm her down.

"How is that supposed to make me feel better?!"

The marchioness was so flabbergasted, she'd turned into a statue.

"Explain yourself! Now!" Micchan's cheeks were turning bright red.

Aww, she's so adorable-focus, Mitsuha!

"I uh, just wanted to ask if you had any intention of leading a faction—"

"You already said that!"

Yeah, okay. That wasn't helpful...

"Honestly, I'm tired of dealing with adults..." said Mitsuha. "I want a faction with friends my own age or younger—people I can relax and have fun with."

"Then you start a faction! You could easily gather a small group by luring them

with products from your country!"

Well, sure, but...

"A foreigner starting a faction in Vanel would start trouble..."

"Uh, well, I suppose..." Micchan wavered, seeing Mitsuha's point.

"Besides..."

"What?"

"Forming a faction myself sounds like a pain in the butt. Why do that when I could have someone else to do the hard work while I reap the benefits?"

"Am I hearing you correctly? Do you have no filter whatsoever?!"

Honesty has always been my greatest virtue.

Mitsuha ignored Micchan and continued, "That's why I want you to form a faction and recruit daughters of high-ranking noble families and wealthy merchants. We'll form a 'Society,' as they call it. We can bait the girls into joining with my rare foreign sweets, which we'll enjoy over some tea as we form friendships and exchange information.

"All members would also receive exclusive rights to purchase novel jewelry, accessories, and other items at discounted prices. For personal use only, that is. They'll also have first dibs on shampoo, body soap, perfume, liquor, and other goods to share with their families—only in small amounts. Resale will be forbidden. I'm even considering rewarding dresses and other items from my country to members who render excellent service to our group."

"What?! Do you realize how many girls are going to want to join a faction with that kind of incentive?! It'll be chaos! Every noble girl and merchant's daughter in Vanel will be racing to our doorstep!" She has a point there. Not only will every eligible girl in the land want to join Society, but their parents will also convince them to try. Hmm...

Mitsuha suggested, "We'll handpick new members through a stringent selection process and keep the faction small. Society will consist only of the true elite, those who will be useful to me, and those who will line my pockets!"

"Why do you keep saying exactly what you're thinking?! You really have no filter whatsoever, do you?! You need to learn how to communicate with tact!"

All that yelling is going to damage your throat, Micchan.

"AND WHOSE FAULT IS THAT?"

Oh, did I say that out loud?

"...Micheline, you should accept her proposal," Marchioness Mitchell piped up. The smile on her face was radiating.

"Huh...?"

Mitsuha was not surprised by the marchioness's reaction. This may have been a patriarchal society that favored firstborn sons, but there was no mother who didn't love her daughter. That went double for a daughter who could have access to lavish foreign alcohol, shampoo, soap, and perfume.

Moreover, it was typical for noble girls from high-ranking families to be married off to domestic or foreign nobility, wealthy merchant families, or possibly even royalty. Micchan was being offered a leadership position of an exclusive club of elite young ladies that had nothing to do with their fathers' factions; there was no telling how much influence she could have both in Vanel and abroad after a decade or two. A noble's wife like the marchioness would never let a chance like that pass her by.

The woman lauded, "Ah, an exclusive club for the young blooming ladies of

nobility! 'Society' sounds like heaven. Where were you twenty years ago, Mitsuha?!"

Not even born, ma'am...

And so Project Society had begun, whether the new faction's leader wanted it to or not. A noble girl like her can't disobey her mother, especially on a matter that could greatly boost her family's wealth and influence. Good luck, Micchan! —oh, her eyes are lifeless like a dead fish's...

"I'll leave you to take care of the rest, Micchan! You're free to choose the members and plan whatever activities you please. Just tell me the location, number of attendees, and the amount of goods I should bring a few days before each meeting—er, tea party, and I'll send what you need. I'll also give you some good tea leaves in advance, so make sure your maids practice the best way to prepare them—oh, and you can have these. Bye, Micchan. So long!"

Mitsuha tossed a few packs of chocolate-covered almonds and coffee flavoring-covered peanuts (all bought at a hundred-yen shop) on the table and darted out of the room.

"Huh-hey, stop! You're not getting away! Someone catch her!" yelled Micchan.

Yeah, right! You may be the daughter of their employer, but no servant is gonna risk grabbing and detaining a foreign noblewoman for such a trivial matter! Mitsuha thought as she made her escape. Hopefully her mother will get her on board with Society. She's gonna use this to live vicariously through her daughter, isn't she... Stay strong, Micchan.

I didn't get to introduce Colette to Micchan this time either... Oh well. It wasn't really the best timing.

"...I can't believe you had the gall to ruin my life, flee, and then return the next day," sighed Micchan.

"Uh, well... I kinda forgot something, haha," Mitsuha dodged the accusation with a nervous laugh. *That's a Japanese specialty!*

"Oh, whatever... Mother is still losing her mind, and Father was so excited he was clinging to me all day after hearing about your visit. There's nothing I can do to escape this now..."

Sweet, she's trapped! All according to plan...

"Anyway, setting that aside. Micchan, look over here and smile!"

"Huh? What's that weird thing you're holding?"

"Don't worry about it! Just look at me and smile, just like that..."

Click!

"Let's do one more!"

Click, click!

Okay, that's enough harassment for today!

Chapter 66:

Society

"Welcome to Society's tea party number zero!" Micchan announced. Despite how vehemently against Society she seemed to be, she was taking her hosting role seriously. She's so dutiful... Must be her noble upbringing, thought Mitsuha.

They decided to call this tea party "number zero" instead of "number one" because it wasn't an official Society tea party, but rather a trial. The point of it was to gather a select group of girls and give a simple introduction to Society without any pressure to join.

They were gathered in a small hall at Micchan's place. Some of the girls she reached out to refused to attend because their families belonged to different factions, or because they didn't want to be beneath Micchan, and for a myriad of other reasons. But that was expected. There were plenty of prosperous noble families in Vanel–including other marquis families and even some count families who were just as wealthy. She didn't expect everyone to hasten to her doorstep.

More girls would've come if Micchan had given more details of Society upfront, but she wanted to keep it simple on the invitation. She didn't even mention the benefits that Mitsuha would provide. According to her, she didn't want any girls there purely out of self-interest. Her proclamation that her faction had nothing to do with her father's faction meant she couldn't exclude anyone from families of a certain rank or higher, so she hoped that by not mentioning the incentives, only the right kind of girls would show up.

Well, you know what they say. The real threat is not a competent enemy, but an incompetent ally. I don't blame Micchan for having no interest in attracting an enemy or a fool.

Out of the girls who were attending, the ones who'd volunteer to officially join Society were going to be the founding members. They'd receive favorable treatment over those who joined later. That was just common sense—they couldn't treat the people who jumped on board after the faction found success the same as those who joined when no one knew if it would sink or swim.

Society would also become significantly harder to join over time, as new applicants wouldn't be allowed into the faction unless they were approved unanimously by all the members in an anonymous ballot. Those who had a history of using their family status to bully others would have no chance.

That's why I'm here today. If I wanna use this faction, I've gotta get in on the ground floor. I brought Colette too—she's gonna be accompanying me a lot in the New World, so I want everyone to get to know her. This way, they'll be more likely to help her if anything happens.

Society will be a tightknit group with strong bonds... That's what I'm hoping for, at least.

Micchan announced, "And now, Vice President Mitsuha von Yamano will give you a detailed explanation of Society."

Huh, me? Vice president? No one told me about that! Wait, why is Micchan giving me the evil grin... Is this...revenge?! Damn it Micchan, I thought we were friends!

Well, I guess I set her up first. I kinda deserved this. I'm in charge of supplying the perks, so it's a fitting position.

Mitsuha elaborated on the new faction, touching on the various benefits the members would receive. They'd form friendships, exchange information, and help each other in times of need. The members would become like sisters, which meant an enemy of one was an enemy of all. The sweets and drinks offered were guaranteed to be delicious, and members would receive first dibs and discounts on Yamano County products for themselves and their families. Those who rendered excellent service to Society would be rewarded with dresses and gems not even a princess owned. Lastly, membership was free with complementary drinks and snacks. (Yamano County products not included.)

How's that?! Did I just blow all your pretty little minds?

The attendees stared at Mitsuha in shocked silence. Micchan didn't mention anything in her invitation about the benefits the viscountess would provide. I've got 'em right where I want 'em.

"Bring out the tea and snacks!"

On Mitsuha's signal, a team of maids began to set the table with drinks and plates full of shortcakes, toffee, fruit cakes, potato chips, ice cream, and more. They were all from Japan, of course. Buying anything in Japan was a pain because she had to replenish her funds with earnings from abroad, which she had to pay taxes for. However, it was worth it in this case. She was fine with buying most things from overseas, but snacks just had to be from Japan.

I'm just not a big fan of those American cakes they serve at house parties—the kinds that are so sweet that you're practically chewing grains of sugar, or those chocolate candies filled with goo so cloying that it makes your teeth hurt. It's possible the people in this world would like those, but I'm in charge of the snacks and I choose Japanese.

Mitsuha decided to serve regular black tea this time because it was familiar to

the people of Vanel, but in the future, she would serve hot chocolate, 100% real fruit juice, soda, and more. And by 100% real fruit juice, I mean the stuff that's concentrated five times and can be diluted five times, resulting in 100%.

Wait, does that math make sense? I think it does... Hmm, something doesn't feel right about that.

I swear I know the difference between straight fruit juice and fruit juice from concentrate. The latter is cheaper because of the overall cost of storage and transportation, and it has a longer shelf life. And the math adds up because all they do is add or remove water content from 100% real juice. I guess they do add flavoring, strengtheners, and acids because the aroma and taste get lost in the concentration process... But whatever! It's cheaper, and that's all I care!

"Anyway, these snacks are from my-hey, listen to me!" Mitsuha yelled.

The girls were rushing to the table, pushing and shoving each other and wolfing down whatever they could get their hands on.

Wow, look at them... Are you sure these are highborn girls, Micchan?

It took some time, but order was eventually restored. The girls' cheeks were flushed as they stared sheepishly at the floor, embarrassed by their improper behavior. Well, at least this was a good demonstration of how Japanese sweets will be received here.

Mitsuha rummaged in her bag for her next weapon.

"I made these myself. I don't know if you'll like them..." she said.

She held up three printed pictures of Micchan—the ones she took a few days ago with a digital camera. She didn't edit Micchan's face at all, but she did go all out on color correction, editing the background, and adding light beam effects. The results made her look positively angelic. Her skin tone was evened out, but

there was nothing false about it—Micchan could easily look like that with some makeup. Along with the traditional pose where the model looked poised, there was also a slightly peeved version and a pouty version—expressions you'd normally never see in a young noble lady. The three pictures as a set depicted snippets of an incredibly charming young lady.

"Wh-Wh-Wha...?!" Micchan's face was bright red and she was stumbling to find her words. Whether that was because she was upset about the two pictures where she wasn't smiling or because she was overwhelmed by the quality of her pictures, Mitsuha couldn't tell.

She really is adorable...

"I'll be accepting orders for personalized pictures just like these. There will be a fee, of course, and they'll only be available to members of Society. Oh, please take these home to help explain to your families," said Mitsuha.

She distributed the sample prints in standard size (4 inches x 6 inches) to each of the girls. No father would be able to resist owning such pictures of their own daughters to use for marriage talks. All Mitsuha had to do was print them out so she could fulfill multiple orders at no cost to herself. No, that's not true; I'm hiring a professional to edit them. But I'm still gonna make bank.

I'd better make my next move before Micchan pulls herself together and blows up at me...

"This is my little sister, Colette. Please welcome her."

"I am Colette. Nice to meet you," Colette said in her slightly broken accent.

No one uttered a word... Not because the girls were ignoring her. In fact, all eyes were on her as they gaped in stunned silence with one thing on their minds: she's the most adorable little girl ever! Many of the young noble ladies

had been stealing glances at Colette while Micchan and Mitsuha were speaking, and now that they were finally able to get a good look at her, they were awestruck.

Colette was undeniably a cute, spirited girl, but her cuteness came from the fact that she was a child. She didn't have the natural fairy-like beauty that would impress a highborn girl blessed with generations of hitting the genetic jackpot. So why were they so captivated by her?

There was an easy explanation for that. She was wearing makeup. Mitsuha took her to a cosmetic professionals' battleground: the first floor of a Japanese department store. She had one of the saleswomen apply natural-looking makeup on Colette. The woman was ecstatic when she saw Colette's proportionate face, which had a lot of potential for enhancing—as well as the generous sum Mitsuha paid her with—and ended up transforming her into an angel on Earth.

Mitsuha let the girls get a good long look at Colette's face...

"Now!"

...and passed a wet towel to Colette, who then began to rub her face with it. It was a cotton towel moistened with liquid makeup remover.

"Huh...?" The girls were dumbstruck.

When Colette lowered the cloth, she revealed...a cute yet perfectly ordinary little girl's face. The noble girls turned as white as the ice cream on the table. You could say they're in a Häagen-Daze.

"Everyone who joins Society will have access to these highly advanced cosmetics."

Mitsuha wasn't nearly as skilled as the professional makeup artist who

worked on Colette, but she did have experience putting on makeup...once. She learned at a free class offered to students who were about to graduate high school. It was an hour and a half long seminar hosted by the vendor. The students were split up by gender—the boys learned about suit-fitting and business manners and such, and the girls learned about makeup.

The vendors who held the free seminars traveled through rural towns to promote their products. It led to gaining future customers, so it wasn't exactly unpaid work. The girls who tried on makeup for the first time in that class were likely to go out and buy the same brand. Many students ended up moving to big cities after graduation, but a small portion stayed or returned after finishing college, making the class a low-cost, yet highly effective investment. The local schools were happy to invite the seminar instructors because it was helpful for the students who wanted to work right after high school. It was a win for everyone.

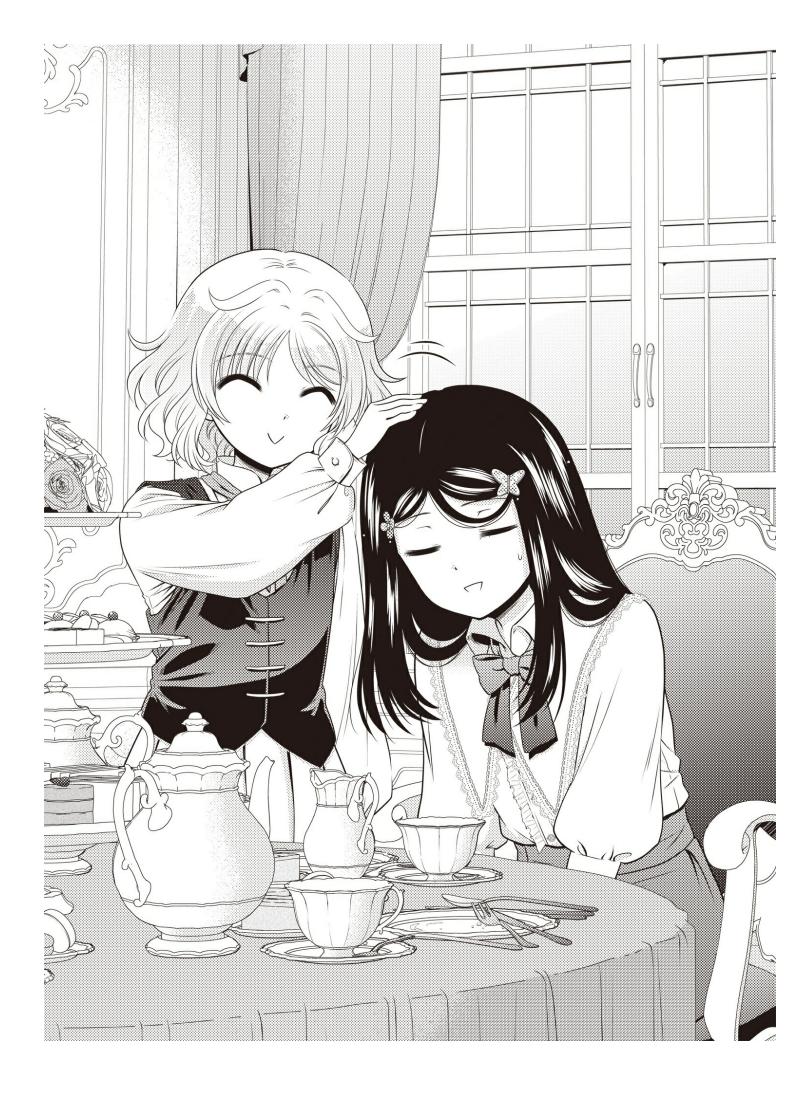
Anyway, that's why I know the basics of makeup. Even if I've only actually tried it once. I read a ton of books and online articles to prepare for today and printed sample images of girls wearing makeup. My live demonstration with Colette should remove any doubts as to its effectiveness. The girls can play around with it and use my instructions and images for reference.

Now to see how effective my pitch was...

It was...a little too effective. Utter pandemonium... Don't even ask how many of them agreed to join Society. I think you can figure that part out.

The last thing Mitsuha did was ask the applicants-members, now-to let her measure their fingers. She didn't explain why, but it was pretty obvious: she was going to make them rings. They'd be like club rings or college rings that

symbolized the faction's unity and pride, promoting a sense of camaraderie. Every girl who wore the piece would be ready to help each other at a moment's notice.



I've always wanted to be a part of something like that...

Membership rings weren't very common in Japan, so Mitsuha was going to order them from America. She needed a large quantity and they'd each be engraved with a different string of characters, which would end up being very expensive if she didn't go to a company that specialized in making personalized rings.

Honestly, the biggest reason I don't want to buy them in Japan is because I'd have to replenish my funds by selling art, which would necessitate paying massive taxes. Buying them abroad to avoid that is a no-brainer.

The company might end up charging extra because the Vanelian characters will be treated as customized symbols rather than as letters, though... Damn it!

And thus, tea party number zero came to an end. Mitsuha gave each of the new members a gift bag full of candy, travel-size bottles of shampoo and conditioner, ten-ounce bottles of brandy, and some cosmetics to practice with. They'd be able to order more if they liked them.

I'm gonna end up spending a fortune on the club rings and everything else, but I'm making more than enough money from Lephilia Trading to cover it.

Dismissed!

"Mitsuha, over half of the girls who joined Society came to my house crying..."

Micchan said when Mitsuha visited her place three days later.

"Huh?! I expected that of the girls who declined your invitation, not the girls who joined! What happened?" Mitsuha was baffled. *That doesn't make any sense...*

"They all want more cosmetics because their mothers and older sisters snatched the products from them while they were practicing."

Oh, I see...

"I'll order more right away..." said Mitsuha.

I'm not surprised by that. No girl is gonna be able to accept their younger sister having access to better makeup than her. Same goes for mothers with their daughters.

"Also, everyone ordered the portraits—or as you called them, pictures—even though you never even mentioned the price... I guess it's an asking price. How much do you plan to rip them off for?"

Oh, I guess "portrait" would be the more natural term here... The Old World language didn't have a word for "portrait" so I called them "pictures" to the girls. But I guess the New World has a direct translation for portrait.

"Also, I'm getting bombarded with requests from noble girls who want to join Society! News of the faction spread like wildfire," said Micchan.

Yup, yup. As expected.

"I even received one from each of the princesses..."

"Nope! Not happening!"

"That's what I thought..."

Having a princess join Society would be awful. No one would be able to oppose her, essentially putting her in charge of the faction and placing it in the king's hands. *Micchan was right to think I'd be against that idea*.

This was exactly why Mitsuha implemented the rule that a new member couldn't join without unanimous approval through anonymous voting. *This*

would create the excuse, "Don't know who downvoted but oh well! Too bad!" If a girl were to use her family's position to force her way into controlling Society, Mitsuha and Micchan would just resign and start a different faction. We could call it Gorgom or Black Ghost.

How many members would stick around in a group that lost all its benefits because a person of high social standing elbowed their way in? And what would happen if a new group formed that inherited all the benefits of the last? It wasn't hard to imagine. Society relied on Viscountess Yamano's presence, so there was nothing to worry about. It was impossible for anyone to hijack Society.

Micchan also vetoed any girls in the initial list of candidates who seemed like they might try to take over Society or had the sway to do so. She did the same for any girls who were significantly older or had a higher social standing. She really thought everything through. Either way, any effort to dominate the faction will be rendered pointless when I leave the group.

"Well, we'll put it to a ballot at the first official tea party... And we already know two of the votes will be vetoes, so that's that," Mitsuha said.

Micchan's lips curled up slightly. She clearly knew what to do. *Highborn girls don't miss anything, do they...*

"Anyway," Micchan said firmly. "Can you replace their cosmetics as soon as possible? I don't want there to be any drastic disparity among the members at the next tea party."

She's exactly right. The inequality could turn into a huge problem among noble girls. The tea party could turn into a bloodbath.

"Aye-aye, ma'am!" Mitsuha answered. What else could she say?

The day of Society's first official tea party arrived a few days later. Mitsuha managed to supply a new set of makeup to all the members before then, and it looked like they were all wearing it. Some of them had clearly applied it more successfully than others, but everyone looked nice. They must've had their maids help or studied it with their families. Impressively, none of them wore so much that they looked like clowns.

Girls are superheroes... There's nothing they can't do when they get serious.

Once Micchan addressed the group, Mitsuha gave each girl a finger ring. Whoops, that was unfortunate wording. I guess I'll call them club rings instead.

It was a pigeon blood ruby ring with a white gold band. Engraved around the stone setting was the name of the faction, along the band was the date the member joined, and on the inside of the ring was their name.

All who wore the ring were a part of a sisterhood that would never betray each other. Their friendships would be forever, no matter what disputes arose between their families. That's the kind of vibe I'm going for with this circle. But I'm a God Sider, so I'm not bound by the rules of the game. Mwahaha!

...Hey, that sounds like something a Devil Sider would say!

Why do I always feel the need to retort against myself?

White gold is an alloy of gold and at least one other white metal like palladium—usually about seventy-five percent gold and twenty-five percent palladium. It looks like platinum, but it's not. Mitsuha chose white gold because it looked more reserved. Pure gold would morph and wear down over time because of how soft it is. *Besides, these cost less*.

The club rings weren't a gift; they were loans. They symbolized the girls'

membership in Society, and they were to be returned to Mitsuha when the wearer left the group. They couldn't be reused because each one was engraved with the members' names and join dates. They were a one-of-a-kind piece created for one person in the world.

The girls were mesmerized by their rings when they received them. The rubies used as the center stone were obviously synthetic, but that didn't mean they were fake. Their composition and crystal structure were identical to a natural ruby's; the only difference was whether they were created by the power of mother nature or humans. In this world, this pristine ruby was lauded as an exquisite gem, not as a common synthetic.

Silence reigned as the girls continued to stare at their new jewels. This wasn't something that was handed down from their mothers and meant to be passed on to their future daughters, nor was it a gift from their parents. It was their very own ring. The engraved name indicated that the ring was made for that girl alone. It was almost as if the crimson color of the pigeon blood ruby was consuming their very souls...

Once they overcame their initial shock, they began to chatter over sweets. Mitsuha called these gatherings tea parties because she wanted them to be fun. They'd eat, drink, and have a good time whether they were discussing serious matters or simply joking around. She had no desire for stuffy, straight-faced conferences.

Eventually, it came time to vote on the new member applicants. There were quite a few, so Mitsuha made a ballot list; each name was assigned a number. She passed out pieces of paper and asked the members to write down only the numbers of the applicants they didn't want to welcome. They could write down as many numbers as they wanted, and any applicant who didn't get written

down was considered accepted.

Mitsuha instructed everyone to put their anonymous votes in a ballot box and revealed the results to the girls in the interest of transparency. She read aloud all the numbers that were written down, marking an X next to the applicant's name on her list.

Unsurprisingly, the members all ended up voting against girls who seemed like they'd try to use their social standing to take control of Society. Girls with snobbish personalities, girls who were older than most of the current members, and girls from families that might cause political trouble stood no chance. Micchan and I did research beforehand to make sure none of those girls would pass, so I wasn't worried.

"Only one girl will be admitted: Falenia de Garvelark, a count's daughter," Micchan announced when they were done going through the ballots.

I'm so sorry, first, second, and third princesses! Better luck next time!

Falenia was apparently the adorable, pure-hearted type of girl who you couldn't help but want to protect. She was the people's little sister. *Like I need any more of those! I already have Colette, Sabine, and the Yamano County Munchkin Maids!*

By the way, the ballots were supposed to be anonymous...but I have a few ways of keeping track of who submitted which paper—hey, don't judge me! Do you really think schools and companies that hand out anonymous surveys don't pay attention to who wrote what?! I would never answer those truthfully—you know what, never mind!

I'd have to be an idiot to pass up the chance to learn about the relationships between these young noble ladies and their families. I can figure out who wrote

which one by their handwriting and a few other tricks. I'll use these to make a relationship chart later.

Next, Mitsuha held a photoshoot for the glam pictures—or portraits—that the members ordered. The girls smiled for the camera, but they also made funny faces and got creative with their poses. They were quick to grasp from Micchan's portrait set that trying a variety of expressions was more compelling than following convention.

Mitsuha elected to avoid explaining how her camera worked, and instead told the members she was looking at them through the viewfinder to help memorize their faces, which she'd then describe to the painter. Otherwise, they'd find out she was gouging them for something that took just moments to produce.

Well, I am paying a professional to edit the pictures. It might take them only a day to touch up the portraits, but it took decades of study and expenses for them to gain their skill. They deserve to be paid for their hard work. It's always okay to try to save money, but you shouldn't haggle if you want a pro to give you good results. Refusing to pay someone properly for their skill means you don't respect them. No one will pour their heart and soul into their work for that kind of client.

Anyway, that's why I don't want them to know how easy these portraits are to create. The members can order as many as they want, but I'm charging per print regardless of whether they're copies of the same picture or not. I was hoping to make some profit that way, but unfortunately the girls all ordered one of each photo... So much for that, damn it.

Oh well, I would've been profiteering anyway. Not a problem. Some of the girls ordered as many as five or six pictures, so I'd still make a profit.

Afterward, Mitsuha took merchandise orders from all the members for things

like alcohol and bar snacks for their fathers, shampoo, makeup, and sweets for their mothers and sisters, and various trinkets for themselves. She also handed them the goods they ordered at the last tea party. They didn't ask for much last time other than makeup because they weren't yet familiar with Mitsuha's products, but this time, they all came prepared. They'd researched what was available at Lephilia Trading and placed an order for as much as they were allowed.

Man, I was right to limit the quantity they could buy at these discounted prices... The orders would've been really hard to fulfill otherwise. I don't want them buying enough to resell, either.

After that, they resumed chatting over tea and sweets. They discussed fun topics like romance, gossip about noble society, popular plays and actors, humorous novels, romantic novels, and more. The girls talked on and on and on, as if they never imagined they'd be able to discuss such things so openly with their peers. It felt like it would never end.

Hmm, this gives me an idea... What if I translated popular Japanese novels and published them here? And set prices at nobility rates. Writing them all by hand would suck, though. It might be worth investing in a computer with a custom font and keyboard made for the New World language. I could do the same for the Old World.

All right, I'll put that idea on pending and think about it if I have time. I could outsource some of the work. There's no reason for me to do it all myself. What do I have money for? Professionals gain skills to render their services for amateurs who can't do the work themselves. Everyone knows that if you want beef, you go to the place with the meat.

And so the first Society tea party came to an end as a rousing success.

"...Mitsuha, we're getting an endless stream of letters from the royal palace," said Micchan. "They read, 'Why won't you let the princesses join Society?' 'This is an act of disrespect,' 'You are being suspected of committing treason against the royal family.' Each one sounds more threatening than the last..."

"Haha..." Mitsuha laughed dryly.

Not my problem.

Well, actually...

"Are they really accusing us of being traitors for not letting a few girls into a play group?!"

"This should come as no surprise, but we're receiving strong demands from powerful nobles and merchants to admit their daughters into Society."

"Hmm. But the girls from all the powerful families in the kingdom ignored or outright rejected our initial invitation. Do they really deserve another chance?"

"No way!" Mitsuha and Micchan chimed.

What's that? The girls who rejected our initial invitation are rolling on the floor throwing hissy fits? Not my problem... I'm sure they chose to decline the invitation after carefully considering all the information available to them. I can understand self-reflecting on their lack of research and careful consideration, but they shouldn't have any regrets.

Let it go, let it go!

"Also, one of our members, the daughter of Count Shilebart, is requesting our assistance. She wants help getting acquainted with a boy whose birthday party is coming up soon," Micchan said rather coldly, as if she believed this was

something the girl should figure out herself. Mitsuha, however, was considerably more excited.

"Hell yeah! Oh, this is perfect! This is a chance to show the might of Society and my products to the whole kingdom!"

"...Huh?"

Mitsuha ignored her clueless friend and continued, "Please get in touch with her right away. I want as much time as possible to measure her dress size and figure out our strategy."

"Seriously?!"



"OH MY GOD! OMIGOD, OMIGOD, OMIGOD!"

Mitsuha paid a visit to the one person she always turned to when she needed a dress made fast: Madame Degenerate, the dressmaker. She could always count on the woman to put off her other work and pull all-nighters to fulfill Mitsuha's commission. *There's no need to rush this time, though.*

Mitsuha explained the concept for this dress as "a battle armor (ball gown) for a foreign noble girl who wants to wage war against (put the moves on) a boy."

"I'LL DO IT! I WON'T LET YOU DOWN!"

Chill out, lady... Don't get a nosebleed over this...

Next up...

"...Huh?" The woman who looked around twenty-eight years old was staring blankly at a piece of paper in her hand.

She was the makeup artist who gave Colette a makeover. Mitsuha had returned to the booth of the department store where the woman worked to thank her and slipped her an envelope. The woman probably expected cash, but instead, it contained a letter:

I wish to hire you personally for a job as a makeup artist. The location will be in a luxury hotel room in the city. The client is a young lady from a foreign country. I will purchase all the necessary cosmetics from your store's brand, and if they are well-received in the client's

country, I may return to purchase more.

The client is up against a 16-year-old boy of a noble family and the attendees of his party. You will be paid 100,000 yen.

She left her cell phone number at the bottom of the letter. Ten minutes after the department store's closing time, Mitsuha received a phone call.

That was fast. Not that I'm surprised...

Mitsuha brought the client in question to Dresses for Maidens for measuring and to give the dressmaker a good idea of her style, just like they did with Adelaide, and invited the makeup artist to meet with them too. It would've been a bad idea to have the makeup artist work on the girl without meeting her beforehand, as her appearance and skin type would likely determine the cosmetics and tools that should be used. Mitsuha coordinated with the makeup artist to arrange a time that worked for her. *The dressmaker is self-employed, so her schedule is flexible*.

The girl showed no fear whatsoever when the makeup artist used a strange device to evaluate her skin. Whether that was due to her dignity as a noble or because of her determination to do whatever it took to win the battle, Mitsuha couldn't say.

Mitsuha also asked the members of Society for their cooperation during the next tea party, dangling the privilege of attending the makeup artist's session as a reward. Unsurprisingly, they all bit. *I only asked the girls who were invited to the birthday party, of course.*

This is getting fun!

"...Right this way, please," Mitsuha led the makeup artist to the door of a suite at the city's most luxurious hotel.

That wasn't saying much—this was a small city in the countryside, so the hotel wasn't that impressive. Mitsuha chose the venue because it was a safe place where she could ask the following question without scaring the makeup artist:

"Do you mind if I blindfold you for a second?"

"What?"

I probably would've freaked her out if I said that at a cheap hotel, Mitsuha thought.

The woman eyed her dubiously.

Oh, shoot... I guess a nicer hotel didn't make it any less terrifying. I thought me being a scrawny and young-looking girl instead of a man and bringing Colette along would get her to relax, but I guess that was naive. Any woman would get scared of being blindfolded by someone they just met and being led into an unfamiliar room. She has no idea who or what could be waiting inside.

But if I was really trying to deceive her, I'd simply tell my accomplice to hide in the bathroom, hidden from the entryway. They could jump out and block her escape once I led the victim into the room and closed the door behind us. It wouldn't make sense to get her guard up by blindfolding her before that.

Besides, I'm sure she could tell that the degenerate dressmaker and I are longtime acquaintances when the three of us met with the client. She has no reason to think I'm suspicious...

"...Okay." The makeup artist finally relented as if she'd read Mitsuha's thoughts. She took the eye mask from Mitsuha and put it over her face.

Wow, she's bold.

Colette held the makeup artist's hand, Mitsuha unlocked the door, and the three of them stepped inside. The door closed behind them, and Mitsuha latched the door chain as the door auto locked...

Jump!

The three appeared in a drawing room in Micchan's estate, which was so large that if you were in the back of the room, you couldn't see the doorway.

The drawing room of a marquis's home is no joke. It's in another league compared to the ones in Japanese houses—you know, the kind of house your average white-collar dad would build on a loan...

Mitsuha took the makeup artist's eye mask off.

"What in the world?!" the woman gaped. "This is amazing! I had no idea a hotel in the suburbs had such a spacious, luxurious room like this! Maybe I should treat myself by staying here once a year!"

Sorry, but you won't find any suites like this listed in the hotel's pamphlet. Maybe a five-star hotel in a major city would offer this kind of luxury. A rich acquaintance I used to be friends with said she once got to stay at the nicest suite of a famous hotel by the port—called Hotel Orca, or something like that—and considering how she described it, the room must've cost at least 100,000 yen a night. Anyway...

"Please follow me," Mitsuha guided.

"Ah, right!" The makeup artist hurried after Mitsuha and Colette. Her heavy shoulder bags rattled as she walked.

The bags were packed with cosmetics and tools. Each item was new, and they were going to be purchased after being used that day. The makeup artist might

even gain a repeat customer, which would greatly increase her sales record at the brand she worked for. There was no way the woman wasn't going to jump at this opportunity.

They walked a few feet in where they could get a better view of the room. In the back, eight noble girls were sitting at a table, each one of them dolled up in a dress.

"Wh-Wh-Wh-Wha..." The makeup artist was starstruck.

Given how excited she'd been by Colette, Mitsuha figured the makeup artist would lose her mind when she saw these eight beautiful girls who were the result of top noble breeding. She was excited when she saw Kaleah–Count Shilebart's daughter—at the dressmaker's shop too, but she was able to contain herself in the presence of one pretty girl. Eight of them at once, however, was apparently enough to overload her brain.

"HOLY MOTHER OF GOD!"

Her genre is a little different, but she has a lot in common with the dressmaker...

Mitsuha had asked the makeup artist to go all out with Kaleah, unlike the natural look Colette was given. The young woman lined up an array of cosmetics to fulfill that request.

The other seven noble girls were here so they could observe the makeup process as their reward for a certain favor, but also because Mitsuha wanted to show the woman the current makeup skills and trends of this world. The makeup artist decided to start by studying the girls' faces before working on Kaleah. The eight girls would be heading to the party venue in Marquis Mitchell's carriage after this. They had plenty of time.

I'm not going to the party, by the way. My presence would cause a ruckus and I'd steal too much attention away from Kaleah. She's a member of Society, and I don't want to ruin what could be one of the most important nights of her life.

The makeup artist took her time studying each of the girls' faces. She eventually spoke up with a sparkle in her eye.

"Let's begin!"

Show us what a professional can do!

...Is she a goddess or a devil?! I can't decide!

Kaleah stared at a full-length mirror, dumbfounded by the angel staring back. The other girls were equally stunned by the goddess's work. The goddess spoke, and Mitsuha translated her words for the girls.

"She's asking if she can give you girls a touch-up since we still have time before the party..."

Pandemonium erupted. I've been witnessing this a lot since I formed Society...

It was time for the goddess to return from whence she came. Her shoulder bags were empty, as Mitsuha had purchased all her cosmetics. The Society girls saw her off with a respectful forty-five-degree bow.

Mitsuha told the girls to wait at the table where they couldn't see the door and once again handed the eye mask to the makeup artist. She looked confused but blindfolded herself as Mitsuha gestured, probably assuming it was some kind of ritual or game.

Okay... Jump!

Kchk!

Mitsuha opened the hotel room door as she and Colette guided the makeup artist through. The door shut behind them.

I paid for that room just to spend a total of five freaking seconds in it! Who does that?! Well, Kaleah paid for the room, but still... The frugalist in me is crying...

"Thank you very much for today," said Mitsuha as they reached the hotel lobby. "Here's your payment for the job and for the cosmetics I purchased. Any future orders will hinge on the results of tonight's party." She handed the makeup artist an envelope stuffed with cash.

The young woman grinned as she accepted the money. Seeing the girls amazed by her work must have been so rewarding. Women who are confident in their abilities are so cool.

She counted the money and gave Mitsuha a receipt she prepared in advance. It was only for the cosmetics; no mention of the extra 100,000 yen reward. Maybe she's not allowed to have side jobs? Or that could be for tax eva—ahem, never mind!

And now I wait... Kaleah has all the best cards: the dress from Madame Degenerate, the makeover from the makeup artist, and last but not least, the secret attack I taught her: jab, jab, jab at his heart until he can't think of anyone else! It's actually the first rule straight out of Micchan's playbook, "How to Knock a Boy's Socks Off."

...I accept no responsibility if she takes that literally. Good luck, Kaleah!

Mitsuha jumped back to Micchan's place. She wasn't going to the party, but she still wanted to be near and ready should anything happen. She was even willing to force her way into the venue if necessary. A girl's future was at stake here; this wasn't the time to hold back or worry about embarrassing herself or harming her own reputation. There was little in this world more important than protecting a girl's happiness.

Mitsuha gave the girls important lectures in preparation for the party. She taught them phrases and mannerisms that would capture boys' hearts, gestures that boys find attractive, and more. She also firmly reminded them that their role at the party was to be a wingwoman for Kaleah, and how guys will notice girls who put their friends first, and what they'd think of girls who tried to hog the attention.

Mitsuha even told the girls that if this went well, she'd give them all rewards points for helping a fellow member of Society. The points could be traded in for goods that weren't in the official sales catalogue. For larger achievements, she was going to offer jewelry with small synthetic gems. But doing personal favors for friends only earned them a few points, maybe even a small convenient trinket as a bonus.

Fingers crossed, Kaleah!

The birthday party was for the oldest son of Count Solbein, who was turning sixteen. As was typical of birthday parties, families from all factions were invited. Children who hadn't yet received a debutante ball attended as well. Just when everyone assumed that all the guests had arrived, a group of eight girls stepped into the party hall.

Silence. The room went so quiet you could hear a pin drop. These were no

ordinary girls; they were *angels*. The young lady at the center of the group was the most beautiful of them all, which was saying something, because they were all stunning. The adults at the party thought they looked familiar, but they couldn't quite place a finger on where they might've seen them. The teen girls may or may not have received their own debutante balls, but they certainly would've attended a birthday party or two by now. How could anyone ever forget the faces of such heavenly beauties?

"...Whose daughters are they?"

"How could there be eight of such lovely looking girls?"

Whispers flurried around the room. The boys at the party, including the birthday boy, were enraptured. Their gazes gathered at the middle of the group: Kaleah de Shilebart.

The six girls who were there to support Kaleah–Micheline Mitchell wasn't a part of it—all had the same thought: *Looks like our job here is done.* Doing nothing, though, would impact their rewards points and hurt their chances in negotiations to acquire more of the prize makeup from completing the operation. Wanting to avoid that, they carried on with the plan.

"Oh my!" one of the girls said loudly. "I had no idea how far Lady Kaleah's altruism extended... I'd heard rumors of her helping common children in need, but that's only scratching the surface of what she does. She's so kind..."

Three girls were chatting behind the oldest son of Count Solbein—the birthday boy—praising Kaleah to high heaven and making sure he heard every word. Three other girls were doing the same near his parents. They were pulling a PR campaign. The claims weren't false, though. Mitsuha had organized such charitable events before the day of the party. Sure, they may have been staged and exaggerated, and a few of the participants may have been paid actors, but

the events were held. No lies were told.

"She's so much more than just her beauty, kindness, and intelligence. She has a mischievous streak too, and a slightly ditzy side that only makes her more captivating—I mean, I worry about her sometimes."

"Everyone loves her, though. So many girls only act kind to impress boys, but she's genuinely well-liked by fellow girls..."

It was rare to hear a girl praise another girl at a birthday party—it was more common for them to put each other down to make themselves look good. Only a truly special and beloved girl could inspire her peers to speak of her that way.

Kaleah's beauty was unrivaled, too. The six other girls—who dressed their best with the help of their maids and were given a final touch-up from the makeup artist—looked like absolute dolls. However, the makeup artist understood the assignment and made sure that Kaleah's beauty far surpassed the rest.

The birthday boy rushed to Kaleah before any of the other boys at the party could approach her.

"Welcome to our estate. I would be honored to have your first dance..." he said.

The other six girls were quickly hounded by other boys requesting a dance as well.

The Society girls grinned, excited for the rewards points they'd receive for completing their mission. The boys were a fine perk too.

Kaleah de Shilebart was smiling from ear to ear. This party couldn't have been going any better for her.

However, the other girls and their mothers attending the party were at a total loss. They knew these eight girls, and they could do nothing but gawk and

wonder where their sudden transformations had come from. The girls have always been pretty, but no more than the average noble girl. They all racked their brains for what could possibly explain this, and then realized one thing the girls had in common.

Society.

The girls who rejected their invitations crumbled to the floor in despair. The girls who were forced to decline by their fathers—who belonged to factions outside of Marquis Mitchell's—broke down crying. One girl who tried to join but was denied was seething, digging her fork into her plate until it cracked. A few of the fathers rushed to placate their daughters, but most weren't even looking at their own children; their eyes were trained on the eight angels in the center of the room.

The girls' mothers handled the situation no better. They'd heard rumors of Society, and their faces froze with fear as they thought about its implications. These eight girls and the other members of Society had obtained a method of achieving greater beauty, which would likely be shared with the women in their families. And those with no connection to Society would be completely left out.

They could imagine no greater hell.

The enemy has been defeated! Do not deploy the second wave.

Ooh, I got a message from my task force! Mitsuha thought. She'd drilled each of the six support members how to deliver a message if anything happened: slip away to the bathroom and pass a note to a maid stationed nearby. That would allow Mitsuha to give them orders if anything went wrong with the plan, but it sounded like that precaution had been unnecessary.

My army is invincible! I'll just chill out here, then.

Mitsuha was at the party venue in case of an emergency. Well, I stayed in the carriage outside, but still. They took two carriages, one was for Mitsuha and the other eight girls, and the other was crammed with guards. The Mitchells didn't let Micchan go anywhere unguarded, and they would've been in big trouble if anything were to happen to the seven girls from other families.

Mitsuha did not assign Micchan to act as a member of Kaleah's support team. It would've stretched belief for a marquis's daughter to gush openly about a count's daughter, and she might've stolen the attention of the birthday boy. She was cute and her family was much more prominent than Kaleah's. The makeup artist fixed her makeup too, so she didn't get left out of that. She just wasn't a part of the mission. She's probably off on her own in there, which is something she's "more than used to," as she described it.

Wanting to avoid the boredom of waiting alone, Mitsuha decided to join the guards' carriage for a chat. Guards were sometimes allowed inside during parties and offered light meals in a separate room, but birthday parties attracted a lot of guests, and the venue was too crowded this time. Some people also believed that guards shouldn't eat or drink while on duty, or that they should stay with the carriage to prevent anyone from tampering with it.

Anyway, the guards were all waiting in the carriage, and they were quite surprised when Mitsuha climbed inside. They assumed all the girls were attending the party, and they definitely weren't expecting one to squeeze herself into a stuffy carriage full of older men.

You should've figured it out when you saw that I'm not even in a dress...

The guards were stiff and polite with Mitsuha at first, but they quickly warmed up to her and started calling her "missy" instead of "Viscountess

Yamano." It was the usual for her. Before long they started telling her stories about Micchan. As in, stories about Micchan giving the guards a hard time. She sure can be a handful...

The party had ended. Kaleah and her support team looked elated as they waited by the entrance for their carriage. The mission couldn't have gone better.

Looks like a decisive victory for my army, Mitsuha thought as she observed the girls. Micchan looked a little shaken by the overwhelming strength of the weapon (makeup) they'd been gifted. She already spends every party getting hounded by noble boys. Her makeup probably drove them to an unbearable frenzy. She must be exhausted. That said, I doubt she's gonna stop wearing it and let the others leave her in the dust.

What do you value most, Micchan? We'll soon find out! Mwahaha!

Three days later, Mitsuha visited the makeup artist and placed a bulk order for cosmetics. The woman was positively beaming.

"What was that room at the hotel called? Was it a suite? Or a presidential suite?" she asked.

Oh, shoot... She probably wants to spend the night there with her boyfriend for Christmas or her birthday...

"Uh, that room is special... It's for members only. General guests can't stay there..."

Some hotels really do have rooms like that. They'll put pictures in their pamphlets to make the hotel look elegant but then say the room is occupied

whenever commonfolk try to reserve it for weddings or other events. The truth is that the room is probably vacant, but they only let celebrities and certain VIPs reserve it. I'm talking about luxury hotels in Japan. They actually exist even today. But I guess members-only and referral-based establishments have always been a thing.

"Oh..." The makeup artist seemed crushed by Mitsuha's answer.

I'm sorry! Staying in a room like that would've cost you as much as 400,000 yen for one night, though. You'd be better off spending that money on twenty different full-course meals. The best I could do is help you with your sales commission...

Chapter 67:

Pandemonium

Mitsuha shared the results of the mission to aid Kaleah de Shilebart at the next Society tea party. She congratulated Kaleah for capturing her prey—er, wooing her crush—and gave the six girls who assisted her rewards points. She also praised the members of Society for achieving such a decisive victory in their first ever operation and commemorated the occasion by making the cosmetic products used in the operation available for the whole group to purchase.

The other members, who'd been gawking at the eight girls since they arrived, rushed to question the reason for their improved makeup skills. They wanted to know every detail of how they achieved such stunning transformations.

These girls have studied with the help of their entire families and learned how to wield their new cosmetics. They've far surpassed my shoddy makeup skills. Which is hardly my fault! I don't have any experience with it other than that ninety-minute class back in high school! That and watching the makeup artist work on Colette and Kaleah... Damn it!

Mitsuha jotted down everyone's orders. The makeup artist would probably kick and scream with joy.

The eight girls from the mission could be counted on to teach the other members how to use the new products. These girls normally would've been rivals who competed for the attention of noble heirs, but Society had united them as comrades who fought together to stand out from other noble girls.

None of them should have any doubts about the advantages of sisterhood after this mission.

Next, Mitsuha handed out the portraits the girls ordered. They were all framed so a stack of them was pretty heavy. The girls all came in horse-drawn carriages accompanied by guards, of course. It wasn't like they had to lug them through the capital on foot to take them home.

The girls squealed with delight when they saw their portraits. The natural and lighthearted expressions captured their personalities so much more than the boring and formal portraits they'd always known. They looked like angels, and not because their faces were touched up, but because the skilled photo editor had brought out their natural beauty.

The members who were amazed by Colette and Kaleah's makeup seemed to come to a collective realization—if they honed their makeup skills, they could look as gorgeous as they did in the portraits. *That* was their true form, and their current appearance was only temporary.

That's the kind of self-confidence a girl should have!

"...Mitsuha, the royal palace and the nobles are trying to force us into selling them cosmetics," Lephilia said when Mitsuha visited her office. The poor girl looked utterly drained.

Lephilia Trading did not sell cosmetics. Mitsuha hadn't found a reliable route to purchase in massive quantities, and cosmetics had the risk of triggering a negative physical reaction depending on the person. It'd be a disaster if noble ladies throughout the land started suffering skin problems because of her makeup, which was why she was afraid of selling them unless she could

personally teach the customers how to use them and follow up.

"What should we do?" Lephilia whimpered with tears in her eyes. "Some of the—no, most of the requests from the queen, the princesses, and noble ladies are starting to sound more like threats and blackmail..."

Hmm... I'll need to restrict access to this makeup for safety reasons and to give Society prestige. The other women and girls in Vanel aren't responding well to the exclusivity of the dramatically effective beauty products, though. Blood might run in the streets...

I might've created a real problem, here...

Mitsuha decided to consult the members of Society for advice. *This is their world, so I figured they'd know best!*

"What if you sold cosmetics of lower quality, or just the basic ones in small amounts...but didn't teach how to use them?" one of the girls suggested. "Those who invest their time to experiment around or have a knack for it will end up with decent results, if not as good as ours. That'll prevent anyone from complaining, because they'll assume it's their own fault that they can't figure out how to fully utilize the same product everyone else has."

That was the compromise the group landed on. *Girls of good upbringing are* quite something. They really think things through.

The girls surely wanted to keep the makeup to themselves, but they knew their opposition would never stop making a fuss as long as the overwhelming disparity in beauty existed. It wasn't hard for the girls to imagine what they might do if they were on the other side. Worse case, they might even hire thieves, bribe maids, or take family members hostage to get their hands on the

makeup.

This was a decision the girls could never have landed on without firm confidence that as long as they had a slight advantage in the quality of their makeup, they could still rely on their application technique to dominate their opposition. It was also proof of their trust in their own abilities and each other.

Society is unbeatable! Mwahaha!

I guess I'll choose makeup that's marketed for sensitive skin and include a manual with precautions to make it clear to "use at your own risk." I'll sell only one of each type of product, so I'll have as few items as possible. If I receive even one complaint, I'll stop selling cosmetics altogether. It's not something worth putting up with unhappy customers for... And the person who made the complaint? Well, they'll just have to fend for themselves when they receive backlash...

It was then that Mitsuha came to a harrowing realization.

Wait a second. Am I sure about this? I don't mind launching affordable goods. That's not an issue. But would I be setting a dangerous precedent by giving into the threats against Lephilia Trading? Will that make people believe they can browbeat me into getting whatever they want?

That could have terrible consequences... I need to think about it.

"Huh...?" The man who looked around forty years old stared at Mitsuha, wide-eyed and speechless.

Mitsuha was visiting a small cosmetics shop in a commoner district of the capital. It sold makeup like lipstick and face powder, but also combs, hair clips, and other beauty goods. It was more of a beauty supplies store. The place

looked like it was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. The owner was a kind and honest man, but his good nature was a handicap in the business world.

The store's inevitable demise was exactly why Mitsuha chose it.

"D-Did I hear that right? You want my small store to sell Y-Yamano County cosmetics?"

Man, even this small storeowner has heard of my products. Guess I shouldn't be surprised...

Mitsuha nodded firmly.

One day, a notice was posted on Lephilia Trading's front entrance:

We were in talks with Viscountess Yamano to sell cosmetic products from her county, but due to recurring threats, she has decided to prioritize Lephilia Trading's safety and has nullified the proposition. As a result, we will not be selling cosmetics. Additionally, a list of names of all those who made demands of the cosmetics has been passed on to Viscountess Yamano, so she will handle this matter from now on.

The news spread across the capital in a flash, leading to ugly disputes and blame games as no one was willing to accept responsibility for what had happened.

Three days later...

We have formed a partnership with Viscountess Yamano to sell cosmetics from Yamano County.

A small notice was hung on the eaves of a nameless store in a commoner district. It continued as follows:

Available by order only. To be delivered directly to the purchaser's home. Limited quantity per customer. In the interest of our safety, we will not be able to sell to anyone who's made threats to Lephilia Trading, anyone who is caught reselling Yamano County products, or anyone involved with such parties. These are direct orders from Viscountess Yamano, and it is not in our position to dispute. We ask for your understanding.

Nobles and wealthy merchants were the target audience, as the cosmetics would be too expensive for most commoners to afford. One thing was clear to everyone in the capital: if anyone tried to threaten or take advantage of this little store, Viscountess Yamano would never sell her makeup again.

"How's it going so far?" Mitsuha asked.

The cosmetics storeowner answered, "I received enough preorders to meet the first batch of incoming stock. Twelve people on your blacklist also placed orders, which I rejected. There are a few other names I accepted orders from but seem like suspicious folk."

That was exactly what Mitsuha expected.

"I'll take care of the deliveries. Mark the order forms of the ones you find suspicious. I'll look into them later."

"Yes, ma'am!"

Mitsuha chose a store that was unaffiliated with her or Lephilia Trading to sell cosmetics. Everyone should've gotten the message by now: neither this store nor Lephilia Trading had any authority over distributing cosmetics, and that pestering either company would get them blacklisted from accessing Yamano County and Lephilia Trading products. The products would be delivered directly to the customers' homes, which would prevent people from ordering under other names to get around the quantity limit.

They wouldn't be able to order extras to share with other families, either. Each customer's limit would be determined by the number of women and girls in the household and would be reduced in the unlikely event that one of them was seen never wearing the makeup. The wives and daughters of the family would never allow their makeup to be resold. The head of the house couldn't—they'd be too busy trying to get a hold of extra goods to satisfy their nagging mistresses.

Mitsuha wouldn't tolerate anyone confiscating the youngest daughter's set to sell for profit. That would immediately earn the family a spot on the no-sell list. She was going to send spies to monitor households and make sure they weren't breaking her rules. She would hire professionals for jobs that were slightly risky and appoint orphans to perform simple lookout duties. She was even entrusting some tasks to members of Society who were short on spending money.

Most members of Society were from counts' families, but some were daughters of marquises, viscounts, or even barons. Mitsuha didn't want to be the only one whose house was low in rank, although the peerage of one's

parents was not supposed to matter in Society. *Plus, there are a few other reasons for having lower-ranking nobles in the faction.*

I have no desire to let in the daughters of dukes. Their connection to the royal family gives them too much influence, and they might try to dominate the faction. Their attempt would be pointless, of course. Society wouldn't survive without my full support, and I would never—ever—abandon Micchan to side with another girl.

Anyway, the lower-ranking members of Society were more than willing to accept Mitsuha's tasks—little things like gathering gossip and keeping an eye on other noble daughters' personal affairs. They didn't just do it for the money; they also felt it would help Society by regulating the distribution of its greatest weapon, cosmetics.

And the reason I'm using orphans is because... Well... Someone's gotta feed them! And when they grow up, I can recruit them as my personal arm—I mean, have them work at Lephilia Trading.

This new system would be enough to control the circulation of cosmetics and save Lephilia a headache. Unlike Mitsuha, she had strong ties to Vanel. It would've been hard for her to maintain a good relationship with her family, the family business, and the friends she grew up with.

Well, I think I'm done dealing with my trusty asset (cosmetics) for now. I guess I'll give Sabine some attention until my other projects bear fruit. I've been neglecting her lately, and she clearly knows I've been taking Colette places without her... If this were one of those old dating sims, the bomb icon on her stats would be at a dangerous level...

"Mitsuha, you should see Sabine soon..." Colette said.

Wow, Colette's feral-child instincts never cease to amaze! She can sense when danger is near.

Mitsuha said goodbye to the storeowner with Colette and left the building.

After taking a look around and making sure there was nobody in sight...

Jump!

"Why haven't you fixed this yet?! You're the king, for Goddess's sake!"

There was only one person in the world who could yell at His Majesty the King of Vanel like that. It was none other than his wife, Her Majesty the Queen, and she was letting him have it like never before.

"She's right! You need to take responsibility for your mistakes!"

"I heard that this is all your fault, Father!"

"Death is the only suitable punishment..."

Actually, make that four people. His three daughters were just as willing to ignore his title and tear him a new one.

"I'm the queen! I cannot show myself in public in this disgraceful state! I refuse to attend any more events until you acquire Yamano County cosmetics!" his wife demanded.

"So do we!" his daughters huffed in unison.

The king buried his face in his hands. He might be able to survive the queen skipping official functions, but all three of his daughters? That would be a disaster. They were all reaching the age of marriage. The king had to find them suitable partners soon.

The first princess in particular was approaching the threshold age. She

wouldn't have ended up in this situation if not for her insistence on a man who not only had wealth and social standing, but was also young, beautiful, tender, and gallant. The last one was certainly a desirable quality in men, but weren't youth, beauty, and tenderness traits that a man would commonly seek in women?

As much as he hated to admit it, though, the king could see why his wife and daughters were upset. He'd seen the girls of Society and their sisters and mothers many times at parties. They were hardly recognizable now, to the point that he couldn't believe they were the same people. Their facial features hadn't really changed, but there was something noticeably different about their presence. The men in the nobility probably appreciated seeing their transformations, but for the women, it had to be torture.

The queen and her three daughters hissed:

"I'll have nothing to do with you until you do something about this!"

"Same here!"

"Me too!"

"If you ever want to see me, that'll be one gold coin per meet..." The third princess seemed to be the odd one of the family. Does this girl sound like Mitsuha to anyone? They'd probably get along.

With that, they all stormed out of the room.

"WHAT DO THEY EXPECT ME TO DO?!" the king wailed as he slumped into his chair. He had no problem being cruel toward enemy nations, but he was hopeless when it came to his wife and daughters. "Help me, chancellor!"

"I wish I could..." the chancellor responded.

If he had a solution, he would've already offered it to the king. He'd also

heard that the reason the royal family was blacklisted was because the queen, the first princess, and second princess sent aggressive letters to Lephilia Trading. It was a well-deserved consequence.

The third princess sent no such letters and was simply paying for the actions of her mother and sisters, but that was life. Sometimes, it just wasn't fair.

And so the queen and three princesses spent their days scheming or wallowing in misery.

"Mitsuha, Baron Wennard's territory is on the verge of complete disaster," said Lephilia.

"Oh, hell yes! That's great news!" Mitsuha celebrated, jumping for joy.

"We don't have any direct contracts in that territory, so its collapse won't affect us...but are you sure about this plan?" Lephilia looked at her mentor with concern.

Mitsuha smirked, "Totally. We're not out to make money here. We can't just hoard all our profits; we've gotta return some of it to the market too!"

Lephilia idolized Mitsuha but she didn't believe her words for a second. You couldn't fool a full-fledged merchant that easily, and that was exactly what Lephilia had become.

Chapter 68:

Society's Grand Operation

"Is something wrong, Cherlia?" Micchan approached one of the girls who was looking down. They were in the middle of a Society tea party.

Aw, Micchan is such a caring girl, Mitsuha thought. Well, I did kinda put her up to it this time.

Cherlia was one of the few girls in Society who came from a baron's family. The group mostly consisted of counts' daughters, which was important for Mitsuha's true purpose for starting the group.

There weren't many daughters of marquises in the group because there weren't many marquises to begin with. Most of the marquises' daughters they reached out to turned down their invitations because accepting it would've implied that they were placing themselves below the Mitchells, when in fact their family held equal status. Some also refused because their fathers led an opposing faction. Because of Society's method on how they recruit new members, none of those girls had been allowed into the group after its founding.

Mitsuha and Micchan didn't invite any daughters of dukes or royals because they surely would've caused trouble by trying to wrestle away control of the faction. "Society is nothing more than a gathering of girls from families with modest peerage." If anyone questioned them, that was their excuse.

The inclusion of barons' and viscounts' daughters was necessary to convey that social rank didn't matter in Society. They chose girls from families that were prosperous for their rank or virtuous of character. I also didn't want to be the only girl from a viscount's family or lower. Not that anyone would've looked down on me; they all believe that viscountess is my own title, and that my parents have a much higher position, or are even part of a royal family. The peerages of the girls here don't actually belong to them.

Anyway, the daughters of the barons and viscounts happily accepted their invitations to Society. They were honored to be part of a circle mainly consisting of counts' and marquises' daughters, and the merits of becoming close with higher-ranking girls would be immeasurable to their families. Their parents never would've let them turn down such an opportunity.

And finally, today, Mitsuha's main purpose for inviting barons' daughters was coming to fruition.

"I-It's nothing..." Cherlia, the daughter of Baron Wennard, hunched her shoulders timidly.

It was going to take more than that for Micchan to let it go.

"Don't lie! Have you forgotten? We all made a vow to never abandon a fellow Society member in need!"

She's a hell of an actress...

"B-But... This isn't a personal matter like a crush. There's nothing you can do. Our families may be nobles, but we're just powerless girls who can't do anything of actual—"

Now!

"Stop right there!" Mitsuha interrupted and stepped toward her. She reached into her shoulder bag—which she'd prepared for this exact moment—and pulled something out.

"Is that...an arrow?" asked Cherlia.

It was indeed a small arrow meant for a small bow. A large arrow wouldn't have fit in the bag.

"That's right. I want you to try and break it."

"Huh? O-Okay..."

Cherlia was confused, but she took the arrow from Mitsuha, figuring she had something in mind, and bent it in half.

Snap!

"Now take these," Mitsuha revealed three more arrows from her bag, "and try to break them at once." She handed them to Cherlia.

"Okay..."

Cherlia took the arrows, held them together, and bent them...

Snap!

Whaaaa she broke them?! How is she so strong?! Does she work out?

The room went quiet as Mitsuha stared at the splintered arrows in shock. Cherlia and the others could tell from her reaction that that wasn't supposed to happen.

The stillness was jarring.

No need to panic! I came prepared for this!

"Now do the same with these." Mitsuha regained her composure and took more arrows out of her bag. She grabbed everything she had left: six arrows. Four or five might not have been enough.

Only an idiot sends their army in small increments. That's just asking for them

all to get slaughtered.

Thank goodness I brought a lot of spare arrows.

Cherlia accepted the six arrows from Mitsuha.

"Hold them together and try to break them."

That's right, we're gonna pretend that last one didn't happen.

"O-Okay..." Cherlia gripped the arrows and pressed...but they didn't break.

Mitsuha said, "As you can see, a single arrow is feeble, but six arrows together are strong. The same is true of Society, and we number far greater than six. We may be helpless alone, but together we're invincible!"

"Wow!" the girls all shouted in amazement.

That was easy! But I wonder how many girls noticed that the arrows creaked when Cherlia started to bend them...and that she quickly stopped to avoid them breaking in half.

Seriously, Cherlia, do you work out?!

"...So in short, a famine might kill a lot of people in your family's territory?" Mitsuha asked.

"Th-That's correct..." Cherlia started to speak. "And to make matters worse, our neighboring territories are all having a poor harvest season. They're not struggling as much as us, but it still means we can't purchase food from them. Even if we could, prices are extremely high right now. We could buy food from farther territories, but the transport would cost time and money, and it's inevitable the carriages would be robbed while passing through other lands that are experiencing hardship. But if we don't do anything, our people will..."

The other girls listened to Cherlia with somber expressions. This kind of misfortune could strike any of their territories. Harsh weather, disease, pests, drought, or even war could affect crop yield. These were common disasters, and there was nothing young girls like them could do to help. They were, indeed, powerless.

"Very well," Micchan broke the silence. She took off her wide-brimmed hat and set it upside down on the table. She then carefully removed her ring and necklace, tossed them into the hat, and slid it toward Mitsuha. "Could this be of any help to charter Yamano County ships, a caravan for land transport, and guards to accompany them? As well as purchasing food from Lephilia Trading..."

Mitsuha removed the pendant around her neck and put it in Micchan's hat before answering, "Yes, of course. I'll do anything for my friends in Society. Throwing off my boats' operation schedules, import projects for wheat, potatoes, corn—none of that holds a candle to our friendship."

"Wha..." Cherlia stared speechless at Micchan and Mitsuha, unable to comprehend what just happened.

Within seconds...

Clink!

Clang!

Fwip!

Rustle!

...The other members of Society were tossing their accessories into Micchan's hat as well.

Yeah, there was no way they weren't going to follow our lead. They're all proud nobles, close friends, and most importantly, members of Society!

...And also naive suckers who yearn for a fairytale friendship straight out of a novel, but don't tell them I said that part.

Their donations weren't as generous as one might expect of jewelry worn by noble girls. They were essentially children's accessories, and hand-me-downs at that. They were expensive from a commoner's perspective, but not worth much to a noble. That made giving them up for this urgent matter easier to stomach.

However, if the jewels were recut, polished, and given new settings on Earth, they could become quite valuable. Mitsuha could also sell just the natural gemstones on Earth, use that money to buy artificial gems in bulk, and make a killing by reselling them here.

I'm fine with losing money on this operation, though. My main purpose here is to perform a publicity stunt to show that Society is an ally to the people, and that anyone who opposes us is an enemy to the masses. If any nobles, royals, or wealthy merchants attempt to interfere with or take advantage of Society, I'll leak their misdeeds all across the nation and make sure they face a barrage of criticism.

It's not hard to imagine whose side the public will take if word gets around that a bunch of dirty adults tried to take advantage of cute girls who've done nothing but help the community.

Mwahaha...

Mwahahahahahaha!

"Hmm-hmm-hmm, I'm a genius!" Mitsuha whispered to herself.

"You know... I think people should call you Mitsuha con Yamano," Colette jabbed.

Colette awakened to the power of bad puns recently, much to my chagrin.

Couldn't she have unlocked a cooler and more magical skill that you'd expect of

a cute little girl from another world?!

"What's that over there?" Someone pointed as he watched a procession of

carriages advancing down a main street in the capital. They appeared to be a

caravan of modest size, heading for the countryside.

It was usual for produce and other bulk goods to be transported from the

countryside to the capital, rather than the other way around. This was because

the capital was the largest consumer market for food in the kingdom. Most

shipments from the capital to the outer provinces consisted of luxuries and

manufactured items.

These carriages, however, were transporting wheat, barley, potatoes, corn,

fodder, and the like out of the capital. This was made apparent by the giant

banner tied to each of the carriages that read:

Free Food Assistance Caravan to Wennard Barony

Sponsor: Society

Supplier: Lephilia Trading, County of Viscountess Yamano

"Wennard Barony... I hear they're suffering a bad harvest... At least that's

what they're claiming. But the rumor is it's so bad that people might die from

famine. There's no way you could make any money selling food there..." one of

the spectators said.

"Use your eyes, man! It says, 'Free Food Assistance'!" another exclaimed.

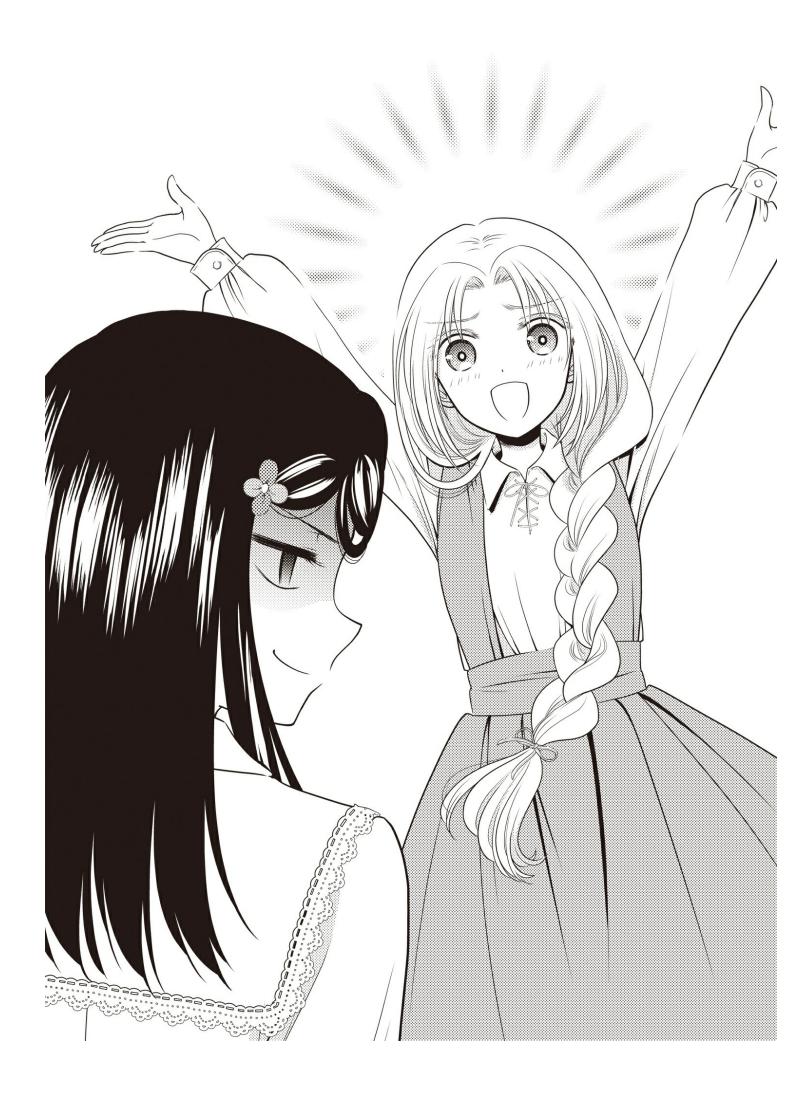
"Free? So they're just giving all that away? That's absurd! They're gonna lose a fortune on this! What fool would do such a thing..." The first man shook his head in disbelief.

The second man pointed at the caravan. "Whaddya mean? It says it right there on each carriage! The sponsor is some group called 'Society.' And Lephilia Trading and the County of Viscountess Yamano are providing the supplies."

"'Society'? What the heck is that? I've heard of Lephilia Trading, but what country is the County of Viscountess Yamano in? You're telling me that while the nobles of Vanel are sitting on their asses doing nothing to help, a noble from a foreign country was willing to shell out and give aid to Vanelian citizens?"

"Look at those coachmen and guards. They're beaming with pride..."

"It's not often you get a job you're genuinely proud to risk your life for!" Society.



Lephilia Trading.

County of Viscountess Yamano.

As the caravan drove along, the three names spread like wildfire across the capital, throughout the rest of the country, and even abroad.

"The relief effort is a major hit with the people!" said Lephilia. "All the locals are talking about Society and trying to figure out what it is! Lephilia Trading and Yamano County have also become household names among the general populace instead of just in nobles' and merchants' circles!"

"All according to plan..." A vicious grin spread across Mitsuha's face. This is going perfectly.

The caravan alone wouldn't have been able to deliver enough food in time to save the people of Wennard Barony from starvation, so Mitsuha was also shipping a heap of goods to the nearest coast. She negotiated with Baron Wennard to have him handle the transportation from there. He didn't trust her at first, but Cherlia argued in her favor, and the whiskey Mitsuha sent as a greeting seemed to help win him over.

Mitsuha used her own ships to transport goods to the coast, of course. They had to deviate from their normal schedules, so the fleet was going to depart as soon as they were unloaded in the night...was their cover story. She hired Wolf Fang mercenaries to guard the cargo on land until Baron Wennard's transport convoy arrived. The mercenaries were used to camping in tents, and she instructed them to notify her over the radio when the convoy arrived. They didn't speak the local language, so she'd have to jump over there when the time came.

Mitsuha had also hired some Wolf Fang men to accompany the caravan. They were dressed like local merchants to blend in and were only carrying a few weapons for self-defense. She didn't want a full security squad traveling with the cargo. The mercenaries were merely assigned as messengers who'd call her on the radio if something happened.

She set up antennas on the roof of her commodity store and stationed two mercenaries on the empty second floor to wait for any pings. They would call her on a walkie-talkie as soon as they received an alert. She also gave them fireworks and sirens in case they had trouble reaching her.

That means I can't leave the city while the goods are in transit. We put a lot of prep into this operation. If it still fails, well... We gave it everything we got...

Earlier that day, Society held a send-off ceremony outside Lephilia Trading for the caravan's departure. Mitsuha wanted to do it during the day so curious passersby would gather in the streets and watch. She gave a grand speech to the young merchant who was commanding the caravan, the coachmen, and the guards about the integrity of the mission. Micchan spoke for Society and gave them words of encouragement. Cherlia shook the hands of the caravan crew with tears in her eyes. And finally, the members of Society— none of them wearing jewelry—handed out small glasses of brandy to the crew.

I made sure to explain the admirable reason they're not wearing any jewelry during my speech.

Once Mitsuha confirmed that everyone was holding a glass—including the members of Society—she led a toast.

"Cheerio!" everyone said.

One small glass of brandy won't get anyone drunk. I think.

Watching a group of young noble ladies raise a toast to them had to be surreal for the coachmen and guards. Given the significance of the operation and the fact that the girls sold their jewelry for it, and how Cherlia tearfully shook their hands, it was just as likely their stomachs were burning from a surge of emotion as from the brandy.

The caravan departed shortly afterward. The crew was beaming with pride as the crowd showered them with cheers.

...Yeah, there's no doubt they're gonna give their all to this mission. All it cost was a few bottles of inexpensive brandy. The lip service was free. Society knows how to do more with less.

And so it was revealed that Society funded the free food assistance for Wennard Barony, as well as how those funds were raised. The commonfolk now knew who Society was and why they chose to provide this relief.

There's no way a few dozen noble girls could raise enough money to save a territory from famine, obviously. If it was that easy, the baron would've done so himself long ago. I paid for most of this operation with my own money. But it was a necessary expense and an up-front investment, so I'm not really losing money.

Sometimes in business, you have to lose a dime to make a dollar. But on a much larger scale, of course. And not only will this operation make me a fortune in the long term, but it'll also boost my reputation. Spending the money was a no-brainer.

"Your Majesty, there's something you must know about the social group called Society led by Viscountess Yamano and Marquis Mitchell's daughter..."

the chancellor started.

"Huh? Have they caused trouble?" the king asked nervously.

"They are sending food assistance to Wennard Barony to help the citizens through a bad harvest. One of the group's members is Baron Wennard's daughter."

"Oh, how wonderful. Be the contribution a small one, the effort is heartwarming. We should tell everyone of their good deed." The king smiled at the unexpectedly wholesome news. He braced himself for trouble when the chancellor mentioned Viscountess Yamano's name, but this sounded like nothing to worry about.

The chancellor continued, "The members of the group sold their own jewelry to fund the relief effort. This impressed Lephilia Trading, who decided to gather and donate a large quantity of food for free. Viscountess Yamano then offered to transport them with her ships, knowing it would fully disrupt her own county's trade plans. Word of their good deeds spread quickly, inspiring merchants and lords with financial leeway to also gather funds and send goods to Wennard Barony. The girls' efforts would've been insignificant on their own, but they triggered an unprecedented torrent of aid that will make a real difference..."

"That is marvelous!" The king was wide-eyed. "The spirit of generosity remains strong in my people... Ah, this news brings me such joy!"

The king clapped gleefully, and then noticed the coldness in the chancellor's eyes.

"...What's wrong? You don't seem happy about this."

The chancellor answered calmly. "There is one problem: the royal family has

shown no signs of this 'spirit of generosity.'"

"Wh-What?"

"It is the duty of the government to aid citizens in need. And yet, it was a group of girls who sold their belongings, a small up-and-coming trading company, and a foreign noble who stepped up to help Wennard Barony and inspired others to do the same. Meanwhile, the royal family and the government have done absolutely nothing. The girls are being celebrated for their acts, as they should be. And if there's anyone the masses would speak ill of... Well, I'm sure you can imagine."

The king was no fool. A certain level of intellect was required to run a country.

As such, he understood completely what the chancellor was hinting at.

"Help me, chancellor!" the king pleaded. Unlike the last time he asked for help, this was a matter the chancellor could actually offer advice on.

"You can start by loaning money to Wennard Barony and the surrounding territories at no interest. Then you can sell the country's food reserves at prices before the increase. We can also allocate some of the stock set aside for the military. After that..."

"Go on."

"You can donate money from your personal funds."

"I...suppose there's no other choice..."

It was a lord's duty to feed his citizens. A lord who couldn't do that didn't deserve their title. The government was always happy to provide aid when requested as long as the recipient was willing to pay moderate interest and accept some level of penalty, of course.

That policy now appeared callous, however, in comparison to a group of

virtuous girls who'd offered aid without any compensation. The royal family could kiss goodbye to any popularity and goodwill they had among the populace. That was an undeniable fact.

"Commodity fair to the li'l lady! Level 5! Level 5!" warbled Mitsuha's walkietalkie.

No one in this world released radio waves other than Mitsuha and the people she'd given radios to, which meant that if she set the squelch properly, her walkie-talkie could play back messages clearly and remain perfectly silent when there was no signal. How blissful it was to never have to deal with the sound of static breaking up communication.

...No time for fun facts. If I don't respond right away, they'll think I'm having trouble with the radio and send up fireworks or blare their sirens. Level 5 means lives are at risk! This is a true emergency.

"Mitsuha here! Fill me in."

"The caravan's being attacked. Assailants are blocking the road ahead and from behind, and they're currently approaching the carriages! The coordinates are CE257-321."

"CE257-321, Roger that! Response C-7!"

Mitsuha scribbled down the coordinates so she wouldn't forget them and jumped to the Wolf Fang base. The coordinates indicated that the caravan was just outside of Wennard Barony, which meant it was in another lord's territory. It'd be an embarrassment for that lord if an emergency aid caravan for another territory was attacked on his own turf, so Mitsuha doubted he'd take issue with whatever damage she caused in self-defense. If he did complain, he'd face a

barrage of criticism from the higher nobles and the commoners alike.

The "commodity fair" team didn't have to do anything for Response C-7, so Mitsuha left them waiting.

"Response C-7!" Mitsuha yelled as soon as she appeared in the room where the rapid response team was standing by.

The mercenaries on duty threw their playing cards on the table and bolted out. There was no time to waste—their comrades' lives were in danger. They were already geared up. *And that's why you hire professionals.*

Everyone climbed into the two fully equipped vehicles parked outside. The last person to get in was Mitsuha—the only amateur in the group. Once she joined them, she put on a wig as she shouted, "Jump!"

Mitsuha pinpointed the location based on the coordinates. She'd flown over the route during one of her reconnaissance flights. As long as she knew where the caravan was along the route, she had no trouble jumping to it. The coordinates could end up being slightly off, but if the caravan was in view, she could immediately jump closer.

The sun was almost down when the tactical vehicles appeared along the darkened road. Mitsuha caught sight of the caravan's silhouette surrounded by shadows of what looked like the bandits.

"Targets spotted! I'm jumping again!"

She jumped the two vehicles to Earth, and then to the tail of the caravan. She then left one vehicle behind, jumped the one she was riding back to Earth and instantly to the front of the caravan. Finally, she grabbed the microphone connected to the car speaker and shouted: "Appear!"

Nope, I'm still not bored of saying that.

The bandits were apparently in the middle of warning the caravan crew to surrender in order to avoid unnecessary casualties on either side. They were still about a hundred yards away, both to grant the caravan some space and to avoid getting skewered with arrows.

The bandits didn't seem to react to the vehicles that appeared suddenly out of nowhere without a sound. Well, they probably did and just assumed they were seeing things.

"The assailants are bandits. They've given us a summons to surrender. All clear to annihilate!"

The voice came from a portable speaker propped up on one of the carriages. At this distance, it was faster to communicate through the speaker than go back and forth with a walkie-talkie. Everyone in the vicinity could hear the conversation that way, rather than only a few people in front of one radio.

"Roger that!" Mitsuha acknowledged through the speaker in her car.

She didn't really need to respond, but using the same communication method as the guards would convey to the bandits that she was an ally of the caravan, even if they couldn't understand what was being said. I should speak in this kingdom's tongue too, just to be sure...

"To those who would threaten my devout servants on their noble mission, feel my wrath!"

Mitsuha handed the microphone to one of the mercenaries and switched on all her gear: light-up toys. A spinning halo above her head, giant color-changing stars bouncing on her shoulders, and a multicolored flashing pendant around her neck. She even had a magical wand. Yup, these are all cheap novelties you see at festivals and night carnivals. I stashed a bunch of disguise goodies in the

car. This is my nighttime set.

She emerged from the vehicle's sunroof in the outlandish getup—carefully watching for arrows in the darkness—and grabbed the microphone.

"If you put down your weapons and surrender in the next five seconds, I will spare your lives. Five, four, three, two..."

...Now that I think about it, they're probably too stunned to process what I'm saying. But if I let them go now, they'll just attack the caravan on its way back. And maybe even the next caravan or other merchants or even public coaches. It'll never end... Don't show them mercy!

It's not like this is their first offense. These bandits are vicious killers.

Apparently, there aren't a lot of people here who primarily make a living on banditry, unlike in the Old World. They're likely just farmers who'd lost their earnings, trying to survive by stealing the caravan's goods. But this being a part-time gig doesn't excuse their actions. It's all the same for the victims.

"...One, zero!"

Da-da-da-da!

The sound of 5.56mm light machine guns echoed in the dusk as they mowed down the enemies.

The bandits knew what guns were, but the kind they were familiar with were single-shot muzzleloaders that fired spherical bullets. Machine guns to this world were practically laser beams shooting out of a UFO to Earth.

Gunfire resounded from behind the caravan as well. Mitsuha had ordered the mercenaries in the other vehicle to begin firing when her vehicle did.

The surviving bandits were scrambling for their lives. There's no need to kill

them all, I guess. We should take down just enough so they can no longer function as a group. The survivors can spread the word about what happens to bandits who attack a caravan.

Mitsuha grabbed the microphone to address the emergency aid crew with a word of encouragement. She also wanted the fleeing bandits to hear and tell the others.

"The Goddess is pleased by your deeds. Fulfill your mission with pride in your hearts!"

The crew members of the caravan cheered in response, which was exactly what Mitsuha expected. She was the holy envoy who'd just presented the Goddess's divine message. How many people in this world would be able to deliver such a gift?

...And now, these men's lives are fully committed to the cause. This is the birth of a sacrificial pawn. Soldiers who are posted in useless stations for the sake of filling a spot? Those are expendable pawns. A sacrificial pawn isn't a waste; it's a dedicated soldier who's committed to die for the greater good. For their country, for their comrades, and for their families. And the ickiest one of all is... for their religion.

I feel really gross...

Mitsuha and the mercenaries escorted the caravan for a while in case of another ambush and withdrew once they confirmed the coast was clear. They were close to their destination, and Baron Wennard's army would take over from there. The caravan wasn't going to make camp until they crossed the border and joined up with the army, so it was unlikely they'd be attacked again.

There was no guarantee that the bandits weren't Wennard's own citizens who were dabbling in a little side job. His territory's reputation would suffer if word got out that the people who attacked the caravan and stole its goods were his own citizens, and he'd be unlikely to receive aid again in the future. That was a scandal worth sending his own soldiers to prevent. He had to wait until the caravan reached his borders, though; sending his men into another territory would've caused its own set of problems.

Mitsuha decided to retreat before arriving at their border to avoid Baron Wennard's army seeing the mercenary vehicles or exchanging words with her. She gave a speech to the caravan before she and the mercenaries left. Nobody would recognize her as the viscountess because she wore a wig, spoke through a speaker, and illuminated herself with flashy lights in the dark. She even had her back turned to the carriages when she addressed them.

It was the mysterious envoy of a deity who came here, not me. Nothing to do with Viscountess Yamano.

Okay... Jump!

"Hey, did you hear what happened with the caravan delivering food to Wennard Barony?"

"Yeah. Bandits ambushed it, but the Goddess's envoy appeared with divine soldiers and kicked their butts. The bandits were thwarted, and no one from the caravan was hurt. One of the guards who accompanied the caravan told me at the bar, so it has to be true!"

"Even the Goddess was moved by the kindness of those Society girls... That's the most incredible thing I've ever heard..."

Society's first caravan had returned to the capital, and it wasn't long before everyone heard what happened on the journey.

"Mitsuha, you'll never believe this! Everyone's treating the crew of the caravan and its guards as heroes. And they're calling the members of Society saints!" Lephilia exclaimed as soon as her business parter walked into her office. She was so excited that she was spitting all over the place.

"Can you turn off the sprinkler...?" Mitsuha pleaded.

"Ah..." Lephilia grew pink as she settled back down.

"So, what are you talking about?"

Mitsuha could guess without asking, but it was important to verify her conjecture.

"Well, the caravan returned yesterday, and, um... The crew members are claiming they were saved from a bandit ambush by the Goddess's envoy and her divine soldiers. I know that sounds crazy...but they're all testifying the same thing, including the merchant who was in command. The guards and coachmen just got paid, so naturally they're making their rounds to local bars and spreading the same extraordinary tale..."

Yep, that's about what I expected.

Lephilia continued, "The rumor spread through the entire capital by this morning, and the traveling merchants who heard about it have probably set out to retell the news throughout the country. It'll only be a matter of days before every Vanelian has heard about what happened to the caravan..."

I, uh...saw that coming too...

This isn't me worrying if I overdid it this time... Not at all...

"Mitsuha, you should be honest with yourself," Colette said.

How do you always know what I'm thinking, Colette?

"Fine..." Mitsuha gave in. "I went too far, damn it!"

"Mitsuha, knockoffs are turning up!" exclaimed Lephilia.

"Huh..."

Mitsuha had warned Lephilia about potential problems like counterfeit production and black-market sellers. There was no way anyone could've done it so quickly, however. None of her products were easy to imitate.

"What are they making imitations of? My alcohol? My delicacies? Don't tell me it's my cosmetics..."

It'd be a big problem if someone tried to sell knockoff versions of the makeup. It's not losing money I'm worried about—it's the damage it would do to my brand. Historically, makeup used to contain a lot of ingredients that are harmful to your health.

"No, the knockoffs aren't of your goods," said Lephilia. "A marquis's daughter started a group of young noble girls called 'Sorority.' A count's wife started a group of nobles' wives called the 'Courage Club.' They're supposed to be gatherings of strong women who won't back down to any man... That's like the same thing as Society!"

Oh, I see. I can hardly take issue with that...

Mitsuha couldn't claim exclusive rights to the idea of starting a club. The other groups were probably capitalizing on Society's popularity, but that wasn't

really a bad thing, and definitely not against any laws. She had no right to complain, nor did she intend to. *I wish them well*.

Society would be just fine. It was a group of pretty girls who were adored by the public, and they just happened to have the power and wealth of the nobility. Only a fool would make an enemy of them, and the emergence of copycats made it less likely anyone would take issue with the existence of such a club.

It was probably the lords who were proposing the clubs and making their wives and daughters start them, anyway. Complaining about one club would be an attack against all other clubs, each consisting of tightknit high-ranking noblewomen who wouldn't respond well to such a thing.

The formation of these imitations was essentially public acknowledgement and support for these clubs. There was no taking that back now, even if those groups failed and split up.

The other clubs' members were likely chosen purely based on status, unlike Society, whose members were carefully selected based on "unlikelihood of starting conflict."

That meant the imitation clubs would mostly consist of people who craved the limelight, validation, money, and power.

Compare that to Society, a group of true friends who'd do anything—even sell their own possessions—to help each other out of difficult spots... Not to mention the perks of ample operating funds, rare goodies, delicious food, and first dibs on purchasing Yamano County products. Would anyone really be satisfied with the merits and comfort of another club when they knew how much better the members of Society had it?

I truly hope these new clubs full of self-interested, vainglorious women and girls can get along...

"Huh?" uttered Mitsuha.

"What's wrong?" Colette asked.

"Oh, nothing. I was just surprised to see a name I don't recognize on this list."

"Okay..." she said dryly and went back to reading. She was immersed in a Japanese novel targeted for upper elementary schoolers.

I can't believe she's already come this far in her Japanese studies... While cramming English, the New World language, vassal training, math and physics using Japanese textbooks, and so much more.

She's a freaking genius!

Colette's probably far surpassed Sabine in education by now. Maybe I should arrange with Sabine to hire Colette as an advisor at the royal palace should anything ever happen to me. I'd hate to have her return to the old village and let her talents go to waste just because I died.

...I don't think she could ever go back to the village life, anyway. As the Imperial Japanese propaganda went–luxury is the enemy.

Once you get a taste of it, you just can't live without it.

Sorry for ruining you, Colette...

Chapter 69:

New Members

"Based on the votes, only one girl was accepted this time: Neleah de Wechter," Micchan announced.

The girls of Society applauded.

She continued, "It's been long enough since we founded Society, and adding any more members would only make it harder to act as a group. Recent events have increased our popularity to the point that nearly every noble girl in the kingdom is applying to join. Considering that, I propose this to be the last ballot for a while and stop accepting new applicants except under special circumstances. All who agree with this motion, please raise your hand."

Every single girl raised her hand, unanimously passing Micchan's proposal.

Most of the young women from high-ranking noble families had already applied and been rejected. The current members had reached out to everyone they wanted to invite. That meant the only applicants they were receiving now were girls whose parents initially opposed Society because they belonged to a rival faction, girls from less prestigious noble families who were trying for a long shot, and daughters of wealthy merchants who had the brass to believe they were as prominent as nobles. The club may as well save time by closing the doors on new applications.

Society may have been very selective with its screening process, but taking on additional members would've only made the group less manageable. The members also had no desire to admit girls who were only applying because of

the group's fame and perks.

Mwahaha! Underhandedness has no place in Society! Long live Team Micheline!

...Anyway, we're gonna keep the group members as-is for now. We'll invite someone new if one of them resigns... Not that that's ever gonna happen. I doubt anyone would leave even if they got married.

That suits me, of course. They're all loyal subordinates I can send into the heart of noble society as I please. I'm not letting them go anywhere!

"It's time to introduce you all to our new members. Please come forward!" announced Micchan. Two girls stepped up and lined up next to her. "This is Falenia from Count Garvelark's family, and this is Viscountess Neleah de Wechter."

Micchan introduced the two girls slightly differently for a reason—Falenia was simply a noble's daughter while Neleah held her own peerage. She was a viscountess with her own noble house.

Yep, she's just like me. I can't imagine she's also the first generation of her family, though. It's more likely that her father died young, and she doesn't have any male siblings, or that she received one of her parents' multiple peerages.

Falenia was the first member to be admitted into Society after its founding, and Neleah was the last. They were also the only two to be admitted by a ballot. Falenia was with her family back home when she was voted in, so this was the first tea party for both her and Neleah.

Micchan motioned them to introduce themselves.

"My name is Falenia de Garvelark. I'm thirteen years old. It's nice to meet

you," said the cute, softspoken girl. She had the pureness of a fairy—not a wicked bone in her body. She reminds me of Sabine before she showed her true nature...

Neleah's turn was next.

"...'m Neleah..." she mumbled.

Wuh? Is that it?

The other members all looked taken aback too.

Maybe she was the sole survivor of a horrible accident, fire, or bandit attack that robbed her of her family? Some children develop speech impediments after experiencing traumatic events like that.

Well, whatever the case, no one voted against her. That means no one thinks she'll cause any trouble. Maybe they all feel bad for her and want to help her. Man, our members are such good girls... Mitsuha was touched.

"...Y-Your Highness?" quavered one of the girls.

Beg par?

"Um... You're the third princess... Aren't you, Your Highness?"

"Yep," nodded Neleah.

Uhm, what the hell?!

"I knew it... I've seen you from a distance when I visited the royal palace."

"That's why I didn't recognize your last name when I saw it on the list of applicants!" Mitsuha let her mouth run without even thinking. "I have most noble families memorized, so I knew that didn't make any sense! None of us put an X next to your name because none of us recognized it! We all assumed someone else would vote you out if they knew you were a problem! You tricked





"Smirk," Neleah said as she did just that.

"Who the hell says their sound effects out loud?!"

...A formidable enemy approaches. But what to do?

I can't boot her out because of her social position after she's already been admitted. That'd violate one of the most important values of Society—that we're all equal regardless of rank. Plus, she seems to want to use her peerage as Viscountess Wechter here, which means she's not really lying about her position. I can't criticize her for that when everyone thinks I'm also using my personal peerage to hide the "status" of my parents.

Hurmmm...

"The third princess could be useful to us. We should take her in!"

"Hyaw!" Before Mitsuha even realized it, Falenia was leaning in and whispering in her ear.

Hey, what's with the evil smirk?! Et tu, Falenia?!

In the end, Princess Neleah—or rather, Viscountess Neleah de Wechter—was officially admitted to Society. She'd be considered a viscountess and nothing more. Falenia, of course, was admitted because there was nothing wrong with her. Supposedly.

Are we gonna be okay? Did a blue whale (Society) just swallow an orca (Viscountess Neleah)? Is she gonna chew through our stomach and destroy us from the inside? Dun dun duuuun!

"Mitsuha, we should throw in a new ally to counter her. If we don't, it'll be a disastevantage for us..." said Colette.

You mean disadvantage...

"But Micchan's the only girl in this country I could trust..."

All the members of Society were benevolent girls who cared about their friends and their citizens. But what if conflict arose between their lands? What if their families' interests ended up at odds? It was obvious whose side each girl would choose. After all, they were distinguished and educated Vanelian nobles. Mitsuha could trust them to an extent—as long as they were playing "friendship circle," but once real stakes were involved, circumstances could change drastically.

So who in this country can I truly consider an ally...? Oh, what about Lephilia? The girl worships me, and would probably follow me anywhere, even if it meant leaving Vanel. She might do that primarily for business and monetary reasons, but still.

No one from Earth or the Old World would be able to help. I need someone who can speak with nobles on equal footing, has the understanding and charisma to steer conversations, and most importantly...

Mitsuha sighed, "Someone who would side with me no matter what. Plus, they'd need to speak the Vanelian language. But I don't know anyone like that."

The language barrier limited the pool to people from the New World, and she knew there was no one here who fit the criteria. There was no point even thinking about it.

"There is one person, actually," Colette pointed out. "That person obtained a copy of the dictionary you made in Yamano County and is frequently visiting—with a gift in hand—and chatting with the Vanelian prisoners."

"WHAAAT?!"

That could be really dangerous! What if they're a foreign spy or a crook who wants to help the prisoners escape in return for some money? The language barrier was the biggest thing preventing the prisoners from escaping or plotting anything...

"Who are you talking about, Colette?!" Mitsuha was panicking.

"She happens to have the same title as Neleah."

"You mean 'Viscountess'?"

"No, the other one. 'Third princess.'"

"DAMN IT, DO YOU MEAN SABINE?!"

How did I not notice she was studying Vanelian?! I'll regret this forever!!

Chapter 70:

So Busy...

Mitsuha was done with her business in the New World for a while. She'd stopped attending parties thanks to a certain royally idiotic father-son duo. Lephilia Trading and Society were smooth sailing for the time being. All she had to do was pop over there on occasion to deliver their orders. The Wolf Fang mercenaries were now handling inventory procurement on Earth.

She had essentially accomplished her original goals in the New World of gathering information and gaining enough influence to cause a disturbance in the case of any threats to her home. Her connections would tell her just about anything other than military secrets. If Vanel planned to send out another research fleet to discover new land, she'd probably hear about it before the public did. She could also use Lephilia Trading, its partner companies in other countries, and her own status to lobby the government policymakers to some extent.

The three ships that Mitsuha captured were nearly operational. The sailors had enough naval training under their belts, and the ships had been given new names. It would be the kingdom's very own fleet.

What's that? You think it's a stretch to call three ships a fleet? Well, you're wrong! All you need is two ships for a fleet!

Though, to be fair, a country with an actual fleet would probably call ours a squadron. Like a destroyer squadron or a torpedo squadron.

According to Military Terminology and Structure published by the Japanese

Naval War College in 1907, a squadron is defined as "a military unit that acts as one group under one command and can carry out a variety of combat missions."

That means two ships can make up a squadron.

Which also means two Super Sentai heroes can be called a squadron. Very important, I know.

It'd be a long time before the *Aeras* was ready for the front line. The ship had no ammo beyond what was on board when Mitsuha acquired it and no replacement cannons, which meant it could only be used in combat once. She had her people work on making breech-loading rifled cannons along with cannonballs, gunpowder, and explosives to rectify that. It'd likely take years before another research fleet hit their shores, so they had plenty of time.

For all Vanel knew, the current research fleet was still on their expedition and would one day return. They'd eventually have to accept its disappearance, and the massive loss of money and personnel should discourage them from sending out another one for a while.

If the Vanelian navy dispatched another research fleet faster than expected despite Mitsuha's attempts to hinder them, three ships would probably be enough to ambush them and drive them away. It wasn't ideal that they didn't have enough gunpowder for live-fire training, but they'd figure something out. Mitsuha was willing to use her world-jumping ability in battle to keep the three ships in a favorable position, if necessary, even if it would give away some of her ability's secrets.

There's no reason to worry as long as I'm alive. The real concern is what the people of this kingdom will do after I'm gone. That's why I'm going out of my way to investigate the New World and have my people build ships and cannons. I wouldn't bother with any of that if I didn't care what will happen to this land

after I die.

I have to do what I can to ensure that Colette, Sabine, and the many other people who count on me will be safe. I'm also spending more and more time living in this world. I only go to Earth to run errands at this point. When I come here, it feels like I'm returning home.

...Yeah, this is "my country"—where I belong. I'd feel that way even if the king hadn't entrusted me with land and citizens. On that note, I need to get back to my territory and Mitsuha's General Store in the capital. It's been too long...

"I'm baaaack!"

Mitsuha stayed in the New World during the entire aid operation for Wennard Barony, so it'd been a while since she returned to her county. She'd usually pop over to her residence and Mitsuha's General Store when she went on trips or stayed in the New World or on Earth, but this time, she really did spend every minute in Vanel.

She didn't have any need to return to the Old World during that period—she took Colette with her to the New World, and no one would dare to cause trouble in her county while she was gone. It'd be literally impossible for a coup to succeed in Yamano County considering the fierce loyalty of her vassals and citizens, the presence of allies—Count Bozes and Alexis the viscount—on either side of her borders, and even the support of the royal family.

Bandits knew better than to attack carriages traveling to Yamano County. Everyone understood it was the Lightning Archpriestess's domain and that she showed no mercy to bandits and other threats. It was also a guarantee that Bozes County, other nearby territories, and the royal palace would immediately

dispatch soldiers—and way more than necessary—should any harm come to Yamano County or to any merchants traveling there.

Nearly all the former soldiers from the empire who'd turned to banditry had been wiped out.

Besides that, Yamano County was a small, remote territory on the edge of the continent. It lacked natural resources, and it didn't border any other nations. It was technically a viscountess's territory, but the scale of it was more fit for a baron, and a poor one at that. There was little reason to fear anyone trying to usurp Mitsuha's position—the reward was not worth the risk.

Just wait and see, though. It'll develop! And my efforts are already paying off.

"Oh, w-welcome back, my lady!" Noelle noticed Mitsuha emerging from her room with Colette and hurried off to tell everyone of their master's return.

I think she's eleven now, Mitsuha thought. She was quiet and reserved at first, but she's really opened up...

Noelle's parents were about to sell her into an apprenticeship in exchange for twenty years' worth of wages before Mitsuha intervened. What her parents were trying to do was essentially human trafficking. The poor girl's shorter than Colette despite being two years older...probably because of a lack of nutrition and exercise.

Mitsuha was keeping an eye on Noelle's parents. They seemed to be raising their two sons with care, as the oldest stood to take over as head of the family and the younger was next in line, but there was a significant disparity in the quality of food and number of chores they gave to Noelle's little sisters. That was normal in this world, however, and not even a local ruler like Mitsuha could do much to interfere.

That said, they'll get no more mercy from me if they try to sell another one of their children into slavery, and I warned them as much when I took in Noelle. And if they attempt to steal Noelle's money—which she's been saving in a trust fund that I set up for her—or seek to get her adopted into some other territory's merchant family that's after my goods, or marry her off without her knowledge ...

My Beretta 93R will have to make an appearance!

Okay, time to check on my county...

The fishing village was doing great.

The farming villages had devoted small patches of farmland to experimenting with different fertilizers and planting methods, and they were finally starting to see decent results. They wouldn't implement any of these changes until next year, but they'd already adopted some infallible methods that Mitsuha taught them and expected another sizable increase in yield this year. Some of the fast-growing vegetables had already been harvested using the new and improved methods, which had the farmers very excited. Their hard work was finally starting to pay off.

As for the mountain villages, the board game sales were slowing down. Only shiitake cultivation was trending upward.

That reminds me, the farming villages got mad at me for entrusting shiitake cultivation to the mountain villages instead of them. The farmers took issue because they claimed that they should handle all vegetable cultivation. Mitsuha explained to them that the shiitake is a fungus, but they wouldn't listen. She understood their frustration—while their new farming methods had yet to yield

any results, the fishing village saw a dramatic increase in earnings practically overnight. They were hoping the shiitake mushrooms could help them achieve something similar. Fortunately, the farmers eventually backed down and they were now satisfied with how their crops were growing.

Reforming primary industries took time. Fishing was an outlier. You needed money to invest in new equipment and human resources. Mitsuha could raise the money, but finding workers in a county of less than seven hundred people was difficult. She had no intention of recruiting staff from the capital or other territories, though. Headhunting citizens from other lands without their lord's permission was illegal.

Mitsuha didn't want to increase her population, anyway. She was developing the county only for the residents she was entrusted with. None of the county's profits would go toward her personal funds—she was doing this work out of a sense of duty toward her citizens and nothing else.

Why would I willingly shoulder burden as a ruler? That just sounds like a pain. I especially don't want to look after people who are coming to sponge off the county after hearing about its new development.

That was why Yamano County closed its borders to immigrants. The only people Mitsuha welcomed were those she recruited for specific skills, and she made sure to go through proper procedures with their local lords or the post they belonged to in the capital. It was an expensive process, but worth it to obtain capable personnel.

Mitsuha's goal was for the county's primary industries to make enough money for the citizens to live comfortably. She wasn't particularly concerned with business expansion. Manufacturing, which was part of the secondary industry, was how she planned to make a profit for her county.

I want to get into mining too, if possible, but I haven't found any valuable mineral resources yet. I guess that'd be about as likely as winning the lottery, given the size of my land... Eh, mining is destructive to the environment anyway. Not to mention the public nuisance all the pollution would cause. It's probably a good thing we don't have any mineral resources, right? Right?

Whatever, it's not like I'm missing out on something sweet... Darn it!

What about trading? Is that considered a tertiary industry?

Or how about war?

What's that? War can't be an industry because it doesn't produce anything? I see... War is so profitable, though...

Anyway, on to the next. I'm gonna check on our secondary and tertiary industries—

"Mitsuha, stop neglecting me!"

Whoa, Beatrice! Where'd she come from? I guess she's upset 'cause I've been gone since I gave her the cool new job...

The mansion that Mitsuha stole as one of the spoils of war and placed on Hollow Needle Island was now livable. Count Bozes had installed a water supply and functional bathrooms.

The idea to build a pontoon bridge was still on hold. Building it was the easy part—line up three columns of logs spaced evenly, shave one side down to make them smooth and flat, and put a board over them. One long row of them would connect the coast and the island. A pontoon bridge would be crossable regardless of the tide. However, it'd require a lot of logs, and they'd get broken and washed away on rough seas. That'd be a lot of money wasted.

If they did install a pontoon bridge, they could also build small shuttle

carriages with customized wheels that fit along the outer logs. The wheels would have to be wide and made with softer material, so they didn't abrade the wood. Having the bridge would create a lot of new jobs. It'd even prevent dangerous goods from being imported because the cargo would get sorted as they were being loaded on and off the carriages.

Well, the island's just an excuse to circumvent trade taxes between Bozes County, so there probably won't be much cargo to send there. We'd only need to do it under special circumstances or to put up a front. If we ever actually need to deliver a large amount of cargo to the island, I can just jump them. We can use boats for smaller shipments in the meantime.

Maybe I should buy some small boats from Earth. Cheap secondhand row boats—the kind that you'd see in a pond at the park. That shouldn't cause any problems in this world, right? They're just rowboats.

Oh, what about those pedal boats that are shaped like swans? I love that idea! It's not like they're gonna be as important as the fishing boats, so I can get away with having a little fun. If the swan boats ever break after I die or disappear, my people can just build regular row boats instead.

...Wait, now's not the time to think of all this! Beatrice is gonna blow a gasket!

"Sorry! I've been busy with work... Do you like the rooms I gave you?"

Mitsuha asked.

"Yes! They're perfect! No complaints there."

Mitsuha gave Beatrice an office and a bedroom at her county residence. She got her an expensive bed from Earth, which was way more comfortable than the ones in this kingdom. *She's probably never slept better in her life!*

The mansion on Hollow Needle Island was nothing more than window

dressing. There was no way anyone would let Beatrice live there all alone. She'd only visit it occasionally for the sake of keeping up appearances.

Most of her time would be spent at the Bozeses' mansion or Mitsuha's residence, and the people at either location would simply assume she was on the island when she was gone. Only Mitsuha's vassals and Beatrice's parents knew the truth about this living arrangement. Even Alexis and Theodore were kept in the dark. Who knows when or where they'll let something slip?

Mitsuha installed a mini-fridge and a small fan in Beatrice's room and supplied her with two packs of Japanese snacks per day. She didn't give her an electric water boiler—those consumed too much electricity, and she didn't want to steal work from the maids. It was much easier to heat something in this world than to cool it, so she figured the fridge and the fan would make better gifts.

Mitsuha implemented the daily limit on snacks for health's sake. Count Bozes and Lady Iris would kill her if they noticed their daughter was gaining weight since the regular trips to the Yamano residence.

Giving Beatrice DVDs wasn't an option. She didn't know any Japanese, anyway.

So yeah, if she's got all these benefits and still complained, I'm out of ideas. She also has Colette and the rest of the Munchkin Maids to play with, so staying here is probably much more fun than spending all her time with her family back home.

The old staff-er, older staff-know that playing with Beatrice is part of the Munchkin Maids' job. I didn't put it that way to the Munchkin Maids themselves, though-that would've made them feel obligated to hang out with Beatrice, kind of like businessmen wining and dining a prospective client. That wouldn't be fun

for anybody.

Time to give Beatrice some work. That should boost morale...

Mitsuha proposed, "Beatrice, a shipment of goods from my home country is going to arrive soon. I want to entrust Bozes County with transporting it to the capital and selling it. Can you arrange that for me?"

"You got it! After fourteen years of blood, sweat, and tears... The day has finally come for Beatrice Company to take the world by storm!"

Blood, sweat, and tears, my butt! And you just turned fourteen! What hardship have you had to deal with during that time?

"Beatrice Company" was the name of the new enterprise. That got no points for creativity, but at least the name would give the impression that the business couldn't function without her leadership, which was why Mitsuha wanted to give her the job in the first place. Actually, that's probably why Count Bozes and Lady Iris chose the name.

Mitsuha was importing some tools and consumer goods this time. It wasn't going to be a recurring shipment to sell regularly; these high-quality tools and products were going to be offered as samples for the craftsmen in this country, which would inspire them to "improve" their technology—in other words, imitate. Expensive and advanced imported goods are bound to be copied and mass produced locally. They could sell their own version for a great profit because of the lack of shipping expenses.

The people of this kingdom currently had no chance of copying Earth's heavy industry products, so Mitsuha decided to solidify their technological foundation first with light industry goods. That was why she chose items that would be easy to counterfeit as well as the tools for making them. They were gathered from

both Earth and the New World.

Importing food was out of the question. Mitsuha didn't want anyone relying on large imports of consumables that would cease as soon as she disappeared. At the very least, she wanted Yamano County to be entirely self-sufficient when it came to food and even have surplus to sell. Fortunately, the small county was blessed with farmland, a coast, mountain resources, and rivers, making it well-equipped to feed itself. *That's why I chose this place, after all.*

The people here are very grateful that I settled on their territory, but I didn't do that out of any desire to help them. The land just happened to meet my criteria. But how we met is irrelevant at this point. This is my land now, and these are my people.

Meaningful relationships can begin in many ways. Some people fall in love after a chance encounter. Others might've been set up by a matchmaker and end up deeply devoted to each other. Similarly, I came to cherish my citizens once I was given this territory, and we became tied at the hip.

We have a long future ahead of us that I'm sure will be filled with many hardships. Looks like I'm gonna be alive for a long time, though, so I'll do everything I can to develop this land until I'm overthrown in a coup, banished as a villainess, die in an accident, or get assassinated.

If any foreign countries or continents think they can invade us, they're in for a rude awakening! We'll tear their soldiers to shreds with M45 Quadmount "Meat Choppers," 20mm, and Bofors 40mm guns! We won't even need to bring out the Otobreda 127/64 compact gun to sink a wooden sailing ship! Mwahaha!

[&]quot;...Are you done?" Beatrice asked.

[&]quot;With what?"

"Daydreaming. Colette gave me the rundown on how to troubleshoot you."

"What the hell?! That's rude!"

Anyway, it'd be a while before light industry was fully established in Yamano County. Mitsuha also wanted to boost the kingdom's overall power. In order to do that rapidly, she wanted to jumpstart their industrial development with something unaffiliated with her own county. A basic level of technological prowess was required to engineer large sailing ships and rifled cannons.

It's time to start mass importing foreign goods that would stir up the technological advancement in this country! I only want the weapons to progress just enough to repel invasions from overseas. I'm not aiming for any nuclear missiles. Weapons from the good of days that reek of gunpowder will be good enough.

One of the biggest reasons I want to develop this country's technology is to prevent its gold and jewels from being used as currency to buy imports from Earth or entering the New World. The more wealth this country can contain within its borders, the brighter its future will be.

...That means I'll need to raise my county's funds by working as their ruler. I can't keep any of it for my personal wealth. I'll have to pay taxes to the king, too. Urgh, this is gonna be hard...

"Money makes the world go round!"

Chapter 71:

Imports

New Products Available.

In the heart of the capital, so declared a new poster on the window of Mitsuha's General Store.

"What is the meaning of this, Mitsuha?" Sabine asked as she dubiously eyed the bill.

"Hehehe! Just sprinkling some ammo to light up this industrially stagnant country's butt!" Mitsuha gestured at the tools and metal parts she had Lephilia Trading procure in Vanel and various other goods she brought from Earth.

The items consisted of shipbuilding tools as well as hardware items that were a grade or two above what the people here were capable of making...but might be able to recreate lower-grade versions of.

The hardware parts from Earth were much more advanced. The people in this world had zero chance of reproducing them any time soon. Nevertheless, they'd serve as guideposts and ultimate goals to strive toward. She selected the most basic things—measuring tapes, screws, nuts, bolts, screwdrivers, wrenches to name a few.

Screws were invented on Earth a long time ago. The most common theories credit their invention to Archimedes, Archytas, or Apollonius of Perga, and they'd already been invented in this world as well. Invented...but not

widespread. That was to be expected. Screws didn't become a central figure in manufacturing on Earth until fairly recently—the sturdy, detailed, mass-produced versions as we see today.

This world hasn't reached that point yet, which is why the screws here aren't very good.

Components like screws were obviously important for manufacturing goods, but you also needed tools and measuring equipment that were made under a unified spec. Mitsuha intended to distribute standardized measuring tapes, vernier calipers, gauges, and more.

I hate it when the same product comes in inconsistent sizes. Can't fix something because the spare part from a supposedly identical product doesn't fit? Anyone responsible for that should be thrown off a cliff with a bungee cord that may or may not be too long to stop them before they hit the ground. Consistent measurements are important, damn it!

Anyway, Mitsuha was going to sell standardized measuring tools and screws that were made with precision that this country's engineers couldn't match. She'd start by selling a small number of samples for cheap and then jack up the prices when they were officially on her store shelves. The expense would encourage customers to try to make their own screws, even if they couldn't match the quality of hers.

Mitsuha couldn't let Yamano County carry the burden of the entire kingdom's industrial development. That was why she decided to scatter some hints and examples around the kingdom and count on the hard work and ingenuity of millions of people. Her purpose for this project was to increase the country's manufacturing productivity and improve its technological prowess. *I'm gonna make sure these tools and screws end up in as many hands as possible!*

There wasn't any patent system in this world, so trying to create a monopoly in the market would've been impossible. The average factory worker would've easily divulged their company's manufacturing process in exchange for a few gold coins.

The first "hint" to scatter was the screw—the cornerstone of manufacturing. Breech plugs for muzzleloader guns were usually screw shaped. It was even said that screws were introduced to Japan through the *Tanegashima* matchlock rifle.

Why were screws never invented in Japan when other parts of the world had them for ages? Oh, but I guess there are similar examples throughout history; some societies didn't figure out the wheel until much later.

Mitsuha decided to only sell slotted screws. In Japan, Phillips screws were the majority, but they had a number of disadvantages. The cross-shaped hole could get rusted or clogged with dust, making it impossible to fit the screwdriver head. If you're screwing something in a narrow space, getting the screwdriver in a vertical angle was difficult. You also had to press down as you screwed. Screws made of softer material wore down—or stripped—easily, making it impossible to unscrew. They weren't suitable for manufacturers with low-grade metal and technology.

On the other hand, a slotted screw could be tightened with a bronze coin even in a narrow space, and as long as you were careful, there was little chance the slot would get stripped. They were the only screw on Earth for a long time, but the evil, heavily flawed Phillips screws dethroned them for one reason: they were much easier to fit a screwdriver into and turn. It saved the hassle of having to line up the driver with the hole, which cut down on production time.

I couldn't tell you how many times I've had my day ruined by a stripped Phillips screw... There's no doubt those awful plus-headed devils will eventually

descend upon and dominate this world too, but I'll do what little I can to delay that day.

"In conclusion," explained Mitsuha. "I've imported a bunch of measuring tools, screws, and other stuff from Japan. I'm gonna use them to give the craftsmen of this country—nay, the whole continent—the greatest culture shock of their lives!"

"Are you sure about this? I feel like this is going to go horribly wrong somehow..." Sabine furrowed her brows.

Don't fret, Sabine-no one gets more excited for new technology and toys than the engineers!

"Holy moly! What're these?!" Kunz was like a kid in a candy store. "You're offerin' a major discount on the first purchase?! Gimme a little bit of everything!"

Thanks for your patronage! I knew these would make him happy. He's always eager to perfect his craft.

"What is this stuff?!" exclaimed a blacksmith. He made tools rather than weapons.

I wonder if he'll buy a bit of everything like Kunz.

"This is heresy! An insult to my trade! No experienced engineer should need to make use of such dubious trinkets!"

Darn, he left...

"What in the world... How is that possible..." A different customer was muttering under his breath.

Oh, that's a new reaction.

"There's no way I could make something like this..." he sighed as he hung his head low.

Darn, he left too...

More customers came to Mitsuha's store, but they all reacted in one of those three ways. Not many showed Kunz's enthusiasm, and the ones who did were carpenters like him.

"I tried to tell you, Mitsuha..." said Sabine. "Shoving something so advanced under people's noses without proper explanation will make them either reject them out of hand or get overwhelmed and discouraged."

Sheesh, Sabine. Again with the criticism, thought Mitsuha.

"But Kunz and a few other carpenters were quick to embrace them."

Each person reacts differently. Not everyone has to like these products right away. If I can just get a few people to use them... Then I'm sure the stubborn and conservative older folks will quickly see how useful they are and get on board too.

Sabine retorted, "That's because Kuntz and the other customers were carpenters. They only *buy* the tools and metal parts to help them with their woodwork. They don't have to think about how they're actually made."

"Ah..." Mitsuha felt her heart sink.

Sabine had a point. Even in Japan, carpenters didn't make planes, saws,

carpenter's squares, or nails themselves. Those were all produced by professionals in that field—the exact people who'd just rejected them or left her store crestfallen.

"Do you see what you did now? I don't think any of the craftsmen who came to the store today are going to approve of your tools or try to make their own versions any time soon."

Oh, goddamn it! I underestimated how stubborn craftsmen can be... So all I've accomplished today is make some metalworkers dig their heels and crush their spirits...



"They all walked out without saying anything because you're the Lightning Archpriestess, but they're probably upset. You summoned them here to check out new products, and this is what you showed them..."

No-o-o-o!!!

"Wh-What should I do...?" Mitsuha panicked.

"You could ask Father to release a statement ordering people to adopt these new tools."

Mitsuha appreciated the suggestion, but that wasn't an option.

"Absolutely not! There's nothing craftsmen hate more than being forced to change their methods by someone above them! That would cause them to completely rebel and quash the goal of adopting these as standards!"

That's what makes them craftsmen. According to my brother.

"I could keep selling the tools for cheap to penetrate the market, but then no one will try to make knockoffs since my prices wouldn't be worth competing against. Another option would be to sell all the goods, as well as the samples, at low prices for a while and then jack them up without warning, but that would pull the rug out from under my repeat customers. That's not a good look for my shop... I guess I'll just sell them to Bozes County for now..."

Bozes County had a shipyard where the four surviving shipwrights from the Vanelian fleet and the rest of the naturalized sailors were helping to build ships. They'd be happy to use tools from their homeland. The young engineers from this kingdom who looked up to them would surely follow their example and use the tools too.

Then Bozes County can be the epicenter of technological innovation instead of the capital!

There were already some tools on the captured vessels, but those were meant for repairing ships, not building new ones. They were also limited in quantity and variety, so the tools Mitsuha acquired should be helpful. *I'll have wasted a hell of a lot of money if they're not!*

Bringing over large shipbuilding cranes from Earth wasn't an option. The people of this world had their own shipbuilding methods anyway. The naturalized citizens could figure all that out. There might not have been any marine engineers among them, but some of the sailors and shipwrights had to at least know the gist of constructing a ship.

I guess that means technology will progress from Bozes County instead of the capital... I wonder if Bozes County will eventually become the true center of the kingdom, stripping the capital of its importance. I don't wanna hear any complaints from the engineers in the capital when that happens. I gave them first dibs on my hardware goods—they can blame their own stubborn selves for not accepting them.

"I-I don't believe it..."

"You're a lifesaver! These are the same ones we used back home! If we can get these made here, they'll replace our apprentices' outdated tools and make our lives easier!"

Mitsuha brought the hardware tools to Bozes County and showed them to the naturalized Vanelian sailors. They reacted just as happily as she expected.

One person, however, was quiet. He was intently inspecting one of the tools.

"Hey, miss..." he began hesitantly.

"What is it?" Mitsuha asked.

"This is from Rosatz Machinery, isn't it? The trademark and company name are engraved here. This serial number indicates that it was made recently..."

Yikes! Well, I guess I can't explain my way out of this one...

"Yeah, the Goddess's miraculous power transported me over to Vanel, and I bought these tools with the Vanelian currency you exchanged. What about it?"

There was no lie in that answer. Telling the truth was important for maintaining trust.

The former Vanelians grew dead silent. They reached this continent after a long and grueling journey that took them far from their homes, knowing they'd never be able to return to their families and friends again. And now Mitsuha just told them she sauntered over there as casually as if she'd gone shopping in a neighboring town. There was no way they were going to respond well to that.

The silence was jarring.

"Uh... Um..." Mitsuha stuttered.

Pressure was building.

"Er, well... Haha, ha..."

They probably didn't expect her to take them home, but a few must've been hoping she'd at least deliver letters to their families and friends to let them know they were okay. There was no way for her to do that while maintaining secrecy, though, and they likely understood that.

"Uh... Well, that's all I came here for! If you want more of these, let me know the quantity. And if there's anything else you want, tell me the product name. I want to start making these tools here too, so if they're non-urgent, can I ask you to wait a bit longer and maybe cooperate with the production planning? See you later!" Mitsuha hurried out of the room, trying to escape the tension.

She felt like they were about to blow up with requests—the kind she could probably easily do, but not without putting her own kingdom in danger.

Her next destination was Count Bozes's mansion. She had some business to discuss.

I'm not gonna give these tools away for free! Of course I'm gonna cash out on them. We also need to figure out how to get his citizens to start making imitations. And I want him to know that my goal isn't to monopolize them; I just want these tools to be normalized throughout the country and eventually across the entire continent.

The count's a wise man. I'm sure he'll understand that now isn't the time to worry about his county's or country's profits...

"Understood. I'll organize a vendor selection process to decide which workshop would be entrusted with the project," Count Bozes said. He was quick to pick up on Mitsuha's intentions.

"Um, like I said, I don't want us to monopolize these tools. I want them to spread to as many people as possible. Is that okay?" she asked.

"Of course. We can hardly raise the technological prowess of the country if we are concerned with exclusivity and profits."

He really is sharp...

"But you're going to offer me other sources of profit in exchange, right?"

Crap! A little too sharp...

"Beatrice is currently taking in inventory of the shipment from my home country. Can I ask you to arrange a caravan to transport them to the capital?"

Mitsuha said.

The caravan would be dispatched from Bozes County to Yamano County, loaded up with the exports—as well as produce and processed seafood made in Yamano County—and then depart for the capital. Not only was the caravan going to be shipping Yamano goods to the capital, but it was also transporting Bozes County goods to Yamano County. Each carriage would display the Yamano County and Bozes County flags.

Carriages associated with the Lightning Archpriestess's territory had virtually no chance of being attacked by bandits, so they'd save money on guards. We're still assigning some guards, of course—we just don't have to hire that many because the risk of an attack is low. It's kinda like how health insurance premiums are cheaper the healthier a person is.

"I've also been thinking of turning Bozes Harbor into a tourist destination," said Mitsuha. "I'm sure there are plenty of people who want to see a warship up close. We could set up tours of the shipyard, have the former sailors who learned to speak our language recount the story of their harsh voyage to the visitors, and sell marine-themed souvenirs. We can also promote local cuisine like rice bowls topped with fish, seafood *okonomiyaki*, *takoyaki*, *ikayaki*, and healthier options like seaweed dishes. The only coast in this kingdom is here along the north side, mostly in Bozes County, Yamano County, and Alexis's territory. We should take advantage of that and make as much money off the ocean as we can!"

"Tell me more about this plan, Mitsuha!" Lady Iris was the one to bite.

Wow, she jumped on the idea faster than the count...

Can you please stop vice-gripping my shoulders? I'm not going anywhere...

Owwww... Your nails are digging into my skin!

Mitsuha discussed her idea further with Count Bozes and Lady Iris.

"We could build luxury inns, deluxe public bathhouses, and fine dining restaurants to encourage nobles and wealthy tourists to spend a lot of money. We'll provide more reasonable options for commoners too, of course. Having a variety of attractive facilities will lead visitors to regard Bozes Harbor as a vacation destination and more than just a place to see some ships. We want our guests to keep coming back—"

"A deluxe...public bathhouse?" Lady Iris interrupted Mitsuha.

"It's a hot spring where people can enjoy a warm bath. I guess you can build one without a natural hot spring, but it's best if there is one. They're popular in my home country not just for washing yourself, but also for health and relaxing."

"They're popular in your country?" A glint ignited in the woman's eye.

"Y-Yes. It has skin lifting effects, so it's popular among women-"

"Skin lifting effects?!"

Eek! Shoot, she's gonna pester me about it later...

Mitsuha scrambled for more ideas. *How do naval port towns in Japan make money...?*

Cruises around the harbor? No, we don't have the right type of boats for that.

Trying to steer a boat with no manual propulsion would be dangerous in a port full of warships. The harbor only has four ships and three wharfs anyway. You hardly need to get on a boat to get a good look at them.

Local cuisines... What about curry? Oh, that won't work either. If I stopped

jumping spices to this world, they won't be able to replicate the flavor with local ones. The business would collapse immediately. Nope to that idea!

Nikujaga, then? I think we can manage that much with the seasoning and ingredients from here. A nikujaga dish doesn't have to be identical to the Japanese kind as long as they're vaguely similar in taste. Imoni would be fine too. They're similar stews—the key difference being that nikujaga uses potatoes while imoni uses taro roots. I'll "stew" on that one for a bit... Haha.

We'll have to be careful not to start a potato versus taro war or a pork versus beef war... Those aren't a joke like the mushroom versus bamboo shoot war in Japan. Lives could be lost...

It was then that Mitsuha received a sudden strike of inspiration.

"We could also sell meals that the sailors ate on their voyage!"

"Meals for sailors? Is it really that good?" Count Bozes asked.

"No, it's vomit-inducing."

"Why would it sell, then?" The count seemed peeved by Mitsuha's grimace.

"Don't worry, it will!"

Sailor cuisine mostly consisted of stale bread crawling with weevils, barely salted bean soup, and half-rotten pickled pork that only someone on the brink of starvation would eat. *But I know it's gonna kill!*

Uh, I don't mean that literally!

It's human nature to want to try unusual foods. People are so weird they'll eat space food and meals that expedition teams in Antarctica would eat—and pay decent money for it too. Even if the food doesn't end up being that gross, the experience is what satisfies them. "Wow, so this is what they eat out there. They

sure have it rough. I guess that goes to show how hard food transportation and storage is," they'll say, and leave it at that—ignoring the fact that the versions they're eating weren't hard to procure at all.

You know how there are people who like to buy those expensive military field rations? They're not just military nerds, either. Perfectly ordinary people, both men and women. I suppose it's all about the experience, kind of like how people will pay stupid high prices for disgusting festival food they'd never eat otherwise. Does anyone actually finish those candy apples?

Anyway, the best part about selling "sailor food" is that we'll be able to sell old beans and rotting pork as valid products!

Mwahaha... Mwahahahal!

"You're plotting something right now, aren't you?" Count Bozes sighed.

Shut up!

Oh yeah, there's one thing you can't forget when it comes to a sailor's diet!

I'm talking about... You guessed it. Rum! The preferred drink of seafarers everywhere.

To make rum, you farm sugarcane and then extract molasses—no, that's not right. Molasses is a byproduct of refining sugarcane juice into sugar. No one grows sugarcane for the sole purpose of obtaining molasses! I mean... I guess you can't completely rule out the possibility of having a sugarcane farm just to make rum...

Regardless, we're gonna need sugarcane to make rum here. They aren't grown anywhere north of Shizuoka Prefecture in Japan. I know that because I considered sugarcane when deciding what crops to grow in Yamano County. I think the climate here will just barely work.

...Actually, wait. Yamano County and Bozes County are both on the sea, so the wind might be too salty. But Bozes County is pretty long. We might be able to plant it in the southern—wait a minute, I'm an idiot! Okinawa, the Nansei Islands, the Amami Islands, and parts of Shikoku are famous for growing sugarcane in Japan! They're all close to the ocean! Sugarcanes wouldn't grow in those regions if they can't handle a salty breeze!

Okay, I'll look into the temperature and precipitation in the northernmost part of Japan where they're grown and—

"...Please come back to us, Mitsuha," Count Bozes nudged.

Ah... Whoops...

"Oh, I was just trying to figure out how to produce a new type of alcohol here. I wasn't daydreaming or anyth—"

"DID YOU SAY, 'NEW TYPE OF ALCOHOL'?"

Yeek! I just dug my own grave!

"So yeah, sugarcane!" Mitsuha declared.

"You realize you haven't explained a single thing to us yet, right...?" Miriam, Mitsuha's advisor on county affairs, sighed but her comment fell on deaf ears.

Mitsuha had gathered her vassals and the mayors of the three farming villages. She didn't summon the mayors of the fishing village or the two mountain villages, as the topic of discussion only concerned the farming villages.

The three farming villages combined had a greater population than the town (which was officially called the county capital, but no one, including Mitsuha,

called it that because it was too embarrassing). The three were responsible for agriculture, which used to be the county's most prominent industry.

Note the "used to be." That was no longer the case now that the fishing village had exponentially increased its haul and started producing salt, and the mountain villages had started making board games and growing shiitake mushrooms. The town would make more money once it started its dressmaking business—skipping the sericulture, silk reeling, and weaving steps for now—and other new industries got off the ground.

Mitsuha was supplying fabric from Earth for clothing production, which meant it was the only one of her ventures that was susceptible to collapsing if she disappeared. She wanted to get sericulture, silk reeling, and textile weaving established as soon as possible, but that would take years. The only thing she could do was to develop other industries in the town to create more jobs in case clothing production went up in smoke.

The farming villages were already starting to see the results of their agricultural reform through vegetable farming, but the wheat harvest was a while off. And no matter how effective the reform turned out to be, a slightly larger harvest size wasn't going to exponentially increase their profits. Well, if we're talking about the tonnage of the harvest, the potato section might be doing great, but the earnings obviously won't be proportional to the weight.

By contrast, the fishing village was crushing it thanks to the dramatic growth in fishing haul, the increasing demand for processed seafood products, and market expansion due to their long shelf life. The mountain villages were doing great too, despite board game sales slowing down. Shiitake mushroom sales were booming, and Mitsuha was having to fight hard to prevent the overly ambitious villagers from expanding their farmland too quickly. And now, the

county capital...or town was enlivened by the new income opportunity.

The three farming village mayors had to be vexed watching the rest of the county prosper, leaving them in the dust. But now, Mitsuha had come to them for a new business proposition, and one that involved sugar—which was considered luxury goods—and a new kind of alcohol.

Their reaction was hardly surprising.

"You can entrust the trial cultivation of the sugarcane to my village!"

"No, my village!"

"What are you two saying?! As the mayor of the first farming village founded in this county, it is my duty to act as the leader and shoulder the risk of new challenges. Don't worry, Viscountess–I won't let you put your people's livelihoods at stake. You can leave this up to my village..."

"Shut up, you old fart!"

I should've seen that coming...

Mitsuha thought about holding a vendor selection contest to decide which village would get to grow the sugarcane, but she felt like that could lead to actual bloodshed. Instead, she decided to split the job up evenly between the three. She expected them to clear new land and cultivate them to avoid affecting the growth of other crops, but all three villages decided to start the trial farming in fields they've been preparing for another crop. The new fields were going to be tilled for other things like potatoes. It made sense to use proven fertile soil for the trial ground and start anew for the potatoes. The villagers meant business.

Mitsuha would get sugarcane seedlings from the northernmost point in Japan where they grew because they were more likely to endure a colder climate.

Sugarcane harvests typically came twice a year, but they might as well plant them in the spring first when the weather was ideal.

She was planning to start them with tree cuttings, which only required the simple act of planting sugarcane branches into the ground. Growing them was the hard part. All they could do for the time being was wait until planting season.

Okay, I guess that's all I need to do for now... The Bozeses are probably gonna badger me about this later because of my big mouth, but there's no need to rush. Growing a new crop can take years.

"Lady Mitsuha, a messenger has arrived from Count Bozes's mansion to discuss a certain new project of yours..."

Good lord, that was fast!

The Bozes County caravan arrived at Mitsuha's territory, was loaded up with Earth and Yamano County products, and then departed for the capital. Mitsuha hadn't charged for the goods yet. It wasn't that Count Bozes was strapped for cash; he actually offered to pay upfront, but she insisted on selling them on credit. The caravan would be safer that way.

This was the same method she used in the New World–goods that hadn't been paid for still belonged to Yamano County. That meant anyone who attacked the caravan or swindled them into handing over the load would be picking a fight with the Lightning Archpriestess. Mitsuha would retaliate in full, and Bozes County and other ally counties would send out soldiers to wipe them out as well.

Mitsuha made sure the carriages flew the Yamano County flag in addition to

the Bozes County flag so the assailants wouldn't have any excuses. I highly doubt anyone would pick a fight with the rapidly developing Bozes County either, though, be they bandits or underlings of nobles disguised as bandits...

Beatrice was overjoyed when the loaded caravan departed. It was the first shipment she ever cataloged. It was extremely rare for children–especially girls—to be placed in charge of such an operation in this world. Even in Vanel, where women were treated much better than in this kingdom, the talented Lephilia would've been nothing more than a merchant's daughter and later a merchant's wife if she hadn't bumped into a mysterious girl carrying a large box.

As for whether Beatrice will be remembered as an icon who inspired change in society for women and helped them rise from menial workers to key operators, we'll have to wait for the opinions of future historians...

...What about me, you ask? I guess I'm technically a shop owner... But Mitsuha's General Store is a tiny business with one employee. No matter how low women are in a society, there's always a handful of female innkeepers and general store managers. Besides, my store is considered a "lord-owned business"; it's not an independent shop run by a female commoner. A female noble or local ruler will always rank higher than a male company owner of working-class origin. The class system takes precedence over gender.

Beatrice is a noble too, but she doesn't have a peerage like me. Until recently, all she could've expected out of life was to marry into another noble family. She never would've been given an opportunity to truly distinguish herself in society.

Well, now that Count Bozes will inevitably be elevated to marquis and his county is becoming key to the kingdom's defense, Beatrice could even end up marrying into the royal family. Count Bozes and I are going to do all we can to

prevent that from happening, of course.

By the same token, there's now essentially no chance she'll ever marry a vassal's son. Her value has risen too high for that. Apologies in advance to any vassals' sons who fall in love with her...

"I actually like the idea of marrying a prince... I think even Father would approve of that," Beatrice piped up from behind.

"What the heck?! How did you know I was thinking about that?!"

How long has she been standing behind me?! And how did she read my mind?! Is she some kind of telepath?!

Any man who tries to force her into an unwanted marriage is gonna meet her telewrath!

"You were saying all that out loud!" exclaimed Beatrice.

Oh... Was I now...

Well, I don't care about what Beatrice wants. Count Bozes, Lady Iris, and I are gonna do whatever it takes to keep her here forever! And as if I'm gonna let her get married before me!

"If I wait for you to get married first I'll end up old and alone!"

Oh, can it! And stop reading my mind!

"Like I said, you're saying all of this out loud!"

Oh... That seems to be the case...

"Anyway, about the caravan, Mitsuha..."

Whoa, you get straight to the point, don't you, Beatrice.

"...I think we could reduce the number of guards by another twenty percent.

No bandits or civilians from other territories are going to be dumb enough to attack our caravans. The main roads are also 'cleansed' regularly, so there's no risk of monsters beyond small packs of goblins or kobolds, or the occasional stray ogre. All the caravan needs are a couple of guards with decent combat experience. The coachmen and merchants should be able to handle goblins and kobolds, too."

"Uh..." Mitsuha was speechless.

"Also, can you increase the amount of salt you're shipping? I know you're trying to be considerate of existing merchants, but they're selling rock salt. That's totally different from your sea salt. Plus, it's your duty as a merchant to meet demands, even if doing so hurts your competition. Selling it at the current price and quantity will lead to a scarcity, which will only encourage people to buy it all up and resell it...

"It's not the merchants who produce the rock salt, anyway. If it stops selling, they'll just pivot to a different product; it's not their only commodity. Rock salt is produced abroad too, so it's not a big deal if sales drop in this country. And if selling your sea salt does end up causing a rift, then well, I don't see how that's our problem."

Holy cow...

"Also..."

She has more?!

"I'd like to accompany the next caravan as its commander..."

"Count Bozes and Lady Iris would kill me!"

Mitsuha figured she'd consult with Miriam, Petz, and Count Bozes about downsizing the guard staff and selling more salt. As for the matter of Beatrice

leading the caravan...

"Absolutely not!"

There are some things in this world you just can't allow. Especially if your life is at stake. Count Bozes and Lady Iris would be out for my head if I gave Beatrice the okay for that...

Oh, wait! I know an easy way out of this!

"Go ask your parents for permission. That caravan is from Bozes County. I'm only in charge of supplying the goods, on credit at that—I don't have any authority over the caravan itself," Mitsuha said.

"Grr..."

Sweet, I win! I give Beatrice a 0.01% chance of breaching the Fortress of Count Bozes and Lady Iris. There's nothing to worry about.

Problem solved! And it solved itself!

"Mitsuha, Mother and Father said I can command the next caravan!"

"WHAAAAAT?!"

How could this happen...?

Bonus Chapter:

Partner Stores

Lephilia Trading had partnerships in the countries surrounding the kingdom of Vanel. Each country had one partner store. Lephilia Trading mediated between them and Yamano County, virtually acting as the managing director. Each shop was owned by a promising young female merchant selected by Mitsuha von Yamano herself.

...That's right—they were all girls. Each girl was fortunate enough to have been saved from her fate of being used as a pawn and married off to a stranger for the benefit of her family business. They were given the chance to make meteoric and miraculous debuts in the professional world.

That was why people started calling them the "Miracle Girls."

The girls themselves complained that they weren't referred to as the "Miracle Ladies," but they were all in their mid-teens to early twenties; they were much too sprightly and youthful to be considered sophisticated women. Try as they might, Miracle Ladies didn't stick.

The person who brought about the miracle for these girls was none other than the girl who'd become the biggest topic of conversation among merchants in the last few months: Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano.

No one knew where she came from or how powerful her family was. Rumor had it she was the daughter of a high-ranking noble or even a king, and that she was sent to this part of the continent to investigate the market and promote her county's—or country's—products. If that was true, her family clearly had

great trust in her.

The girls she scouted were all daughters of mid-sized business owners, and she gave them funds and exclusive rights to sell her products, which practically guaranteed them success. Other merchants' children grew jealous and prayed that they'd be chosen too, but unfortunately for them, the viscountess only selected one person from each country, and they were always young women.

Was it a coincidence that all the talented young merchants she chose were girls? Or was that her plan from the start? No one knew, but it was likely related to the fact that Viscountess Yamano herself was a young lady.

Thud!

"Ack!"

A girl who looked about seventeen bumped into a twelve-or thirteen-year-old girl. The younger girl fell backwards and landed on her bottom, dropping the bags she was carrying. She must've fallen on her tailbone—she was writhing in pain, unable to get up or even cry out.

The older teen, however, didn't look concerned at all.

Instead, she said, "Oh, how careless of me! Let me take you to that café over there!" She was grinning as she grabbed the younger girl's hand, helped her up, collected her bags, and began pulling her toward a nearby café.

"...Huh? Uh, wait... Where are you..." The perplexed victim dragger her feet as she whimpered, "Um, what...? I... HUH?!"

"Mitsuha, there's been a sharp uptick of incidents where ten-to fourteen-

year-old girls in our surrounding countries are getting knocked down and injured while carrying an armful of baggage," Lephilia reported.

"Really? I should be careful, too, then. That's an oddly specific thing to keep happening, though... Are these girls being hunted by a pervert with a very niche fetish?"

Lephilia looked annoyed by her response. "Don't you realize who caused this?! It's your fault!"

"Huh? Me?"

The viscountess stared blankly.

"Think about it, Mitsuha. You approached the owners of all our partner stores with the same tactic you used with me. That's why young women throughout the continent are now hurling themselves into girls carrying loads of baggage, hoping that you've chosen them too! Some of the girls have suffered injuries from getting knocked over. Fortunately, I haven't heard of anyone being permanently disabled. But it may only be a matter of time..."

Mitsuha was horrified, and not just because of what was happening to those poor girls. She had no clue that Lephilia knew she bumped into her on purpose.

"...I'm not an idiot, Mitsuha. I only had to talk to a few other partner store owners before I realized that you used the same method on all of us! We always end up talking about how we first met you—oh, I'm not mad! Please don't look so horrified. I'm beyond grateful that you chose me for this rewarding job and saved me from my fate. I love that I get to take on this important role for you. You have my eternal loyalty, Lady Mitsuha."

She called me Lady Mitsuha again... I guess I can ignore it given the context.

"O-Okay..."

The young merchant's words set Mitsuha's mind at ease.

Mitsuha had undeniably tricked her, but she only did it to create an excuse for them to meet; she meant no harm. Besides, she ended up helping Lephilia out of a rut and giving her a career where she could make full use of her talents. It made sense that the girl was so grateful. Mitsuha let out a smile.

The next second, she instantly switched gears.

"First things first," the viscountess asserted. "Send one gold coin's worth of our products to all the girls who were injured! Do the same for their parents. An additional gift of sweets, alcohol, and cosmetics—one gold coin in value—I'm sure they had to go through a lot of trouble for their daughters. Also, hire a few hands to find out if there really are no girls who've been scarred or disabled! We can't trust hearsay alone!"

"Y-Yes, ma'am!"

Word of these incidents wouldn't have reached Lephilia if the attackers hadn't already been questioned and made to confess. That meant the parents knew why their daughters were injured. It was necessary to apologize to them too.

Mitsuha knew that it was the assailants who were the ones at fault, not her. But she couldn't ignore it after learning what her actions had incited. Many girls got hurt because of her. If necessary, she was willing to take responsibility by taking any seriously injured girls to Earth for treatment and then getting them jobs within her sphere of influence. Hopefully Lephilia had heard correctly that no one had been hurt that badly.

Regardless, Mitsuha greatly regretted using the same M.O. over and over again. That was not the smartest thing she'd ever done...

"I'll show them! The Goddess—no, Lady Mitsuha—has given me a miraculous, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I won't allow myself to screw up and waste it! The Goddess may forgive me, but I sure couldn't! I'm going to devote my entire life to this role. I will succeed and give hope to the thousands of young girls whose prospects for the future were just as hopeless as mine!"

Several girls throughout the New World were turning to the sky and roaring these sentiments.

"For starters, I'll pick out the product lineup for my store's launch. The sales data that Lephilia Trading shared should help me. Then I'll adjust the quantities based on the local customers' tastes, habits, and the current market trends. Lephilia Trading and its products are already famous, so I'm in a significantly better position than where Lephilia started... As long as I watch out for enemies, I'll have no chance of failure!"

It wouldn't be long before word of the new partner stores spread and shady opportunists flocked to hound the girls for a piece of the pie. Some might even try to usurp the stores entirely. The number of predators would swell significantly once it became common knowledge they were being run by young girls.

"I won't let any scumbags prey upon me. This job is more important to me than my life, and I'm gonna fight like hell to protect it!"

Each of the partner store owners rented a storehouse nearby where they'd receive the goods ordered through Lephilia Trading. Strangely, the shipments always seemed to appear out of nowhere. The owners were only ever informed

of their delivery by a messenger boy who knew nothing beyond what he was told to recite. The partner store would then send employees to the storehouse to collect the goods.

The owners placed orders by leaving their purchase order form in a safe in the storehouse. The purchase orders were usually collected when the next shipment arrived, but they were also collected at other random times when no goods were delivered. Occasionally, a note from Lephilia or Viscountess Yamano would be left in the safe.

This led the owners to assume that Viscountess Yamano must've hired someone to regularly make the rounds between their countries. They didn't understand the need for putting the purchase order inside a safe in the storehouse; it would've been so much simpler for everyone if the person collecting the orders came to their stores directly. The owners would've welcomed them, and they would've been able to exchange information.

The partner store owners voiced this to Lephilia and Viscountess Yamano multiple times, but neither ever agreed. Their argument was that the shipment carriages sometimes arrived at night, and they didn't want to waste any time waiting until morning for the store to open. They wanted the deliverers to finish their business quickly and make the rest of their rounds through the night.

The orders were, indeed, fulfilled astonishingly fast. The purchase order forms were apparently being sent to Lephilia Trading in Vanel, and then to the distant Yamano County where the goods were picked and transported to the partner stores. That should've taken at least a month, yet the goods always arrived in less than ten days. It made no sense.

The only logical explanation for the quick turnaround was that the orders were being shipped, not from Yamano County, but from a distribution center in

a nearby country or island.

"She has fearsome technological prowess... She's immensely wealthy, impossibly resourceful, and endlessly caring... She would make for a terrifying enemy, but there's no one I'd rather have as my ally. I'm so blessed to have met Viscountess Yamano, and I value my connections to Lephilia Trading and the other partner stores as well."

Each of the storeowners across the continent whispered into the sky:

"I'll use my position to reach out and offer jobs to other talented and ambitious girls who didn't have the fortune of being chosen by Viscountess Yamano. Someday, there will come a new era where every brilliant woman is free to spread her wings and chase her dreams.

"Make the world your own, Lady Mitsuha..."



Afterword

Hey, it's FUNA.

This is volume six of Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement.

As my Japanese readers will see on the band around this book, a *Saving* 80,000 Gold anime has been announced!!

This will be the second anime adaptation of my works. The first was *Didn't I*Say to Make My Abilities Average in the Next Life?!

I've daydreamed of this happening, but I never thought the day would actually come! It's so amazing. I can hardly believe it...

All three series that I've written have been printed into novels and manga, and now two of them have received anime adaptations!

This couldn't have been made possible without the support of my readers.

Thank you very much!

Kaoru: "First Mile, now Mitsuha...? How come they both got anime adaptations and not me...? I came before both of them! It's not fair!"

Mitsuha: "What are you talking about? Our first volumes were published at the same time, Kaoru!"

Kaoru: "Our titles were both published in June 2017, but mine was on the 2nd, and yours was on the 30th! And mine was the first title published on a

brand-new label. You were second in line!"

Mitsuha: "Oh, if you want to play that card, well then, let me educate you! My

story was published first on *Shosetsuka ni Naro*. That makes me your senior!"

Kaoru: "Huh? What are you talking about! We were posted at the same

time!"

Mitsuha: "Oh no, no, my first chapter was posted on November 2, 2015 at

5:44pm. Your first chapter was posted the next day, November 3, 2015 at

10:21pm. That means...I'm older than you by one day, four hours, and thirty-

seven minutes!"

Kaoru: "Grk!"

Mile: "Hey now, let's all get along..."

Kaoru & Mitsuha: "Shut up! I don't want to hear anything from you, Mile! You

got the first novel adaptation, manga adaptation, and anime adaptation even

though you came after both of us!"

Mile: "Sorry..."

In this volume, Mitsuha bands together a group of young noble girls. In the

next volume, a large naval battle finally breaks out! How will she respond?

Mitsuha: "Feuer!"

Sabine: "Are you speaking German? Your pronunciation is off."

Mitsuha: "Mwahaha! Not German, Sabine. It's the Imperial language of the

Galactic Empire!"

Mitsuha will be very busy on three fronts: the Old World, Earth, and the New World. Why does she insist on giving herself so much work?! Slow living is all the rage these days! Stop with the sneaky ploys and take it easy for a bit...

Check out the newest chapters on the webcomic magazine, *Suiyobi no Sirius* (http://seiga.nicovideo.jp/manga/official/w_sirius/), on the second and fourth Fridays of each month!

My sincerest thanks to my editor, the illustrator, the cover designer, the proofreaders, the printing, publishing, distribution, sales staff, and of course, everyone who picked up this book.

Thank you so much!

I hope to see you again in the next volume...

FUNA

FUNA

I generally don't leave the house except to go grocery shopping.

Meanwhile, my dreams are in another world running around freely...

Novelist. Originally from Hyogo prefecture, currently residing in the Kanto area.

Traveled from Hokkaido to Okinawa and everywhere in between.

Other works include Didn't I Say to Make My Abilities Average in the Next Life?! and I Shall Survive Using Potions!

Illustrator

Keisuke Motoe Saving 80,000 Gold is getting an anime adaptation!

This is the second one of FUNA's creations. Amazing!

I'm looking forward to it!

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 6

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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English digital edition published by Kodansha USA Publishing, LLC, New

York.

www.kodanshacomics.com

ISBN: 9798894782942

Digital Edition: 1.0.0