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Seeking Sister!

Ultimate  
Vampire Princess  
Just Wants  
Little Sister

Plenty of Service  
Will Be Provided!

Author: *Hiironoame*  
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# Prologue: The Self-Proclaimed Normal Girl Flies the Coop

The continent of Ephenia was once a marvel of progress. Although lost in the modern day, there used to exist magic beyond Level Three spells as well as incredible technology. Tribes who wielded these spells and technology were prevalent over the lands.

Even though several tribes tried to take reign over the continent, the times were relatively peaceful. And that was all due to a family of vampires who reigned supreme, outstripping the abilities of the other tribes—the True Bloods.

However, those peaceful times were nearing their eventual end.

“...Wait, what was that? Ristia, what are you even talking about?”

In the throne room of the castle where the True Bloods resided, the King of the True Bloods opened his eyes wide in disbelief as he sat atop his throne. Reflected in his fiery red eyes was... a young girl, swinging her jet-black hair. She was the Princess of the True Bloods, a girl who captivated the hearts of anyone who laid eyes on her. She was also the King’s darling and beloved daughter. The Princess—Ristia, as she was called—was spreading her balled fists apart and throwing a temper tantrum.

“I told you, I want a cute little sister~!!”

“I was hoping you’d clarify, but alas. A ‘cute little sister’ is emblematic of yourself, is it not? You’re saying that *you* want *yourself*, Ristia. So I ask: What in blazes are you even talking about?”

“Father, you are the one whose words aren’t making sense, not *me*~!”

“An adorable figure, lovely mannerisms, and a voice produced by a pair of sweet lips that soothes the souls of all that hear it. Someone literally as cute as an angel. And that someone I’m speaking of is *you*, my dear.”

“I am *not* an angel; I am a *vampire*. And a normal girl, for your information!

Also, I don't want to be the one being coddled; I want to be the one doing the coddling~!"

Ristia was going to be seventeen this year. To the True Bloods, who were capable of living several thousands of years on end, she was no more than an infant barely out of the womb. It was practically inevitable that both her parents and her older sisters would coddle Ristia, the child born not even a decade and a half ago. However, contrary to their desires, Ristia was a precocious and very clever child.

In spite of that, Ristia's older sisters were true to doting sister form, often times mobbing up and coddling Ristia (the baby sister) while showering her with praises to her cuteness. And because of that, Ristia herself had developed a desire for a little sister of her own.

"Wait! Don't try to change the subject here~! I want a little sister, plain and simple!"

"I cannot imagine a little sister cuter than yourself being born. Therefore, I do not plan on having another daughter. Even if that weren't the case, children do not just grow from trees. It is not so cut-and-dry." One could say that this was the drawback to their family being able to live for millennia and possessing near immortality. Only one child could be born every decade, or every century, if the cards did not work in their favor.

"I'm not asking you to make one, Father~! Just give me your permission, and I'll make one on my own."

"—You wha...?! Wh-Wh-Wh-Why, you...! Are you saying you already have a partner for that?! Unacceptable, simply unacceptable!! Who is this louse?! They are as good as dead!!"

"...What are you on about? I'm *going* to be finding a partner—preferably now."

"You're going off to find one? You leave me no choice, then. This means war. I will massacre every single last man in this world!" The True Blood King said, making an outrageous declaration. However, Ristia didn't flinch; instead, she simply cocked her head in a confused yet adorable manner in response to his statement.

“Huh? But I’m making them my little sister, so my partner would be a younger girl.”

“...Hm? What are you talking about?”

“I wanna get a human or an elf or someone from the dog-eared tribe, make them a kinsfolk, and baby them as my little sister~!”

““K-Kinsfolk?””

“That’s right~ Well? Well? You’ll let me, right~?” Ristia was persuading her father in earnest desire, like a child begging their parents to keep a pet. It was a sight that proved positively adorable for the True Blood King, who found himself ready to give her the blessing she needed.

—That is, until he shook his head and stopped himself at the last second.

“...I believe you’re mistaking kinsfolk for a pet or something of the sort, are you not?”

“Oh, don’t be silly. I am not~ I will make sure to seek a girl with no relatives and make sure to gain their permission before turning them into kinsfolk.”

“No, that is not the issue at hand. ...They’ll be *kinsfolk*. Kinsfolk of a True Blood’s daughter, no less.”

The True Blood King was showing his disapproval, but Ristia wasn’t backing down from this; in fact, she looked up at the king with her glittering red eyes.

“Will you, please? If you say okay to this, then Mother and all of my sisters will consent to making a little sister. So, pretty please, Father~?”

“Well, it’s like I said. I, well, you know...”

“Please? Can I~?”

“Mnghh...” *My daughter is far too innocent and adorable*, the True Blood King groaned to himself.

As Ristia’s doting father, he felt compelled to grant his daughter’s wishes, but, nevertheless, there were reasons why he couldn’t allow himself to comply.

For one: True Bloods did not possess the weaknesses that a regular vampire



would, making them literally the ultimate family—the strongest of them all.

For another: Kinsmen also gained power proportionate to their master. This was in addition to the fact that True Bloods dwarfed other races in the amount of technology they possessed. With all of those benefits, there would be no shortage of people wanting to be brought into the fold.

And the proverbial icing on the cake: Ristia was completely clueless, but being seventeen years of age, she already was instilled with abilities that put her at the top of the True Blood tribe. Basically, any humans, elves, dog-eared people —no matter what race she picked from, it would be no exaggeration to say that any girl that gained Ristia’s favor would rule this continent. There was no way he could frivolously give the okay to his daughter to create a kinsfolk little sister, all things considered.

“Why not? I swear I’ll take extremely good care of them.”

“No means no.”

“And I’m asking why. I want to know the reason~”

“If I say that no means no, then it means no. Plain and simple.” In order to explain why he was forbidding her, he would need to also explain that Ristia’s powers towered above the entire tribe. Although he was fairly confident that it wouldn’t happen in Ristia’s case, he couldn’t guarantee that she wouldn’t grow arrogant if she was aware that she was the strongest of them all. Hence why her father could not reveal his reasoning, opting to staunchly refuse her instead. Ristia had been practically begging her father, but the unreasonable response he displayed was starting to irritate her.

“Grrrrr, you’re being mean, mean, *mean*~! You’re being a big meanie and *I hate you*~! If you’re not going to say yes, then I have an idea that’ll change your mind~!”

“‘H-Hate’ me?!”

The True Blood King was positively shocked. His beloved daughter had just screamed that she “hated” him. It was enough damage to nearly turn the mighty ruler to a frail pile of ash.

“I’m going to run away! And I’m not coming back until you let me make a little

sister!!”

“R-Run away?! But I won’t be able to shower you with love and affection if you do that to me! *Wait*, wait just a minute! *Ristia?!*”

Taking a glance at her father as he scrambled to keep her in check, Ristia flew from her family’s castle.

—After that, Ristia gave her pursuers from the family the slip, using magic to fly to an underground labyrinth located in a corner of the continent. While technically a “labyrinth,” Ristia herself was the one who had created it. She had dug out the passages for this labyrinth while practicing her Eighth-Level magic, and inside of it existed a location unknown to anyone else.

“The nerve, after I told him that I would find one on my own and take care of it. Father is an uncaring jerk! Now that it’s come to this, I’ll fight this injustice to the bitter end!” Ristia said, spewing remarks in an abrasive yet adorable manner as she pondered over how she would go about making her new little sister.

The first thing she brainstormed was creating her sister without her father knowing. There was always the option of going to an inhabited town, picking up a girl with no relatives off the street, and giving her as much love as she could muster.

“That... isn’t going to work.” Ristia abandoned that plan.

With Ristia’s power and energy, the act of making her little sister was a simple task, but if she made a little sister fueled by rage just to have her family object to her, it would probably just make her new sister sad. Those thoughts drove her against the idea.

Ristia had a rather outrageous personality, but she was a kind-hearted girl by nature.

Ristia decided to move on to her next idea: Playing the long game. She could stop time with her with chrono magic, and either a little sister would be born, or she would continue to sleep until her father cracked.

“That’s... actually an option.” Ristia decided to carry out that plan. With her

powers, stopping time for herself was a simple task. If she kept that up for a few decades, then even her father would crack and allow her to create a little sister for herself. Those thoughts drove her to do it.

Ristia was a kind-hearted girl by nature, but she had a rather outrageous personality.

She then put her pointer finger to her cheek, cocked her head, and started to concoct the details of her plan while waving her long black hair. As long as she had her True Blood power, stopping time for herself was easy. The flipside to that, however, was that Ristia's family could just as easily break the spell. To start with, she needed to apply a seal to fend off against that happening. There was naturally a chance that even that seal might be broken as well, but they would still need considerable time to brute force the seal off. Even if they employed a sorcerer with skills greater than her own, it should buy her at least a few decades worth of time. Plus, even if they were to immediately crack the seal, all she needed to do was repeat the process again until her father cracked. That was the conclusion she drew since she herself was clueless to the fact that she was the strongest among the True Bloods. She also couldn't overlook the chance that her potential little sister might be born while she still had time stopped for herself. It would also be unbearable for her if her sister were to be born and grow older than her while she had her own time halted.

Ristia then decided to take measures for that part of her plan. All that was left was to stop time for herself, but... stopping time was a wearisome task. Although it was unlikely, there was also the chance of her little sister coming to meet her, so she figured that she should prepare just in case she had to greet her. She pulled out the materials for her spell from her Item Box and started preparing the Eighth-Level spell which she was well-familiar with by now. She compressed the carbon under high temperatures, forming a transparent cage that reflected rainbow light and encompassed herself within.

“Crystal Cage, complete~♪”

Since she used high-temperature compression on carbon, it was actually a diamond cage, but Ristia thought that “Crystal Cage” had a snappier ring to it than “Diamond Cage.” It was material quality fraud at its finest. “Hmm, maybe I should have my eyes shut when I put this seal on myself?” While having time

stopped only felt instantaneous to the person involved, to any visitors' eyes, she would basically appear asleep, so she took that part of the process into consideration, as well.

“Right, let’s see... I’ll make it so that, if a certain condition is met, the cage will shatter into a million pieces. Theatrics are important, after all.”

The conditions for her waking up, her sleeping pose, et cetera—all things she was trying to take into account for a perfect execution. Finally, seemingly satisfied, she ran her fingers through her tresses to straighten out her hair and assumed a praying pose.

“Eheh, now we’re all set. Yup.”

With the perfect pose all picked out, Ristia used the highest level magic she had to stop time for herself, hoping that she would have a younger sister awaiting her when she next awakened.

Seasons then passed, and passed, and passed some more. A countless number of years rolled by into the ether.

“These are ruins from a once-prosperous ancient era... if I’m not mistaken.”

A band of adventurers appeared in Ristia’s constructed labyrinth.

# Episode 1: The Self-Proclaimed Normal Girl Awakens from Slumber

“I had my hopes up 'cause I heard these were ancient ruins, but what the *hell's* this?! Not a single piece of freakin' furniture, forget treasure!”

A middle-aged man clad in swordsman attire spewed vitriol as he traversed through the most inward part of the underground labyrinth. His name was Gawain, a member of the reconnaissance team dispatched to investigate this labyrinth.

“P-Please settle down, Gawain. We still have yet to search the entire area; there might be something hidden away somewhere.”

“In that case, you go and freakin' find it! Cocky little shit trainee; don't forget that I let you come aboard on this trip out of pity!”

“Eek! I-I'm sorry...”

The person that was trembling as a result of Gawain chewing them out was Nanami, a frail-looking girl clad in sorcerer's robes.

Nanami was young at a tender fifteen years of age; a greenhorn adventurer. The reason she was selected for this reconnaissance team was because they recognized her skills and was not out of pity, however, due to her frail personality, she just couldn't find it in herself to object to Gawain's statement. She was a member of the reconnaissance team just like Gawain, but the team itself was a mishmash formed throughout the guild, so the sense of camaraderie was lacking. To top it off, they had finally reached the lowest level of the labyrinth. They were assaulted by the dragon that dwelled on the floor, wiping out the rest of the members. Gawain and Nanami were the only two who had managed to run into this room. To make matters worse, the dragon blocked their path out, so there was no turning back. In spite of his coarse personality, Gawain had superior skills and technique, so there was no way that Nanami could oppose him. Plus, Gawain had been trying to keep himself alive,

even abandoning his comrades to do so.

*Unless I deal with this situation, he's going to use me as bait and leave me to die to escape this,* Nanami thought, having her misgivings. Nanami searched around the room, looking for anything she could use to overturn the situation. And so, she traversed into the adjoined back room—which is where she found it.

Right in the middle of the relatively empty room stood a transparent cage reflecting all the colors of the rainbow. The cage, illuminated by an unknown light source, seemed to be tremendously valuable even in just beauty alone, but easily the most shocking aspect of it was what was encased inside. Long jet-black hair, effervescent white skin—and while her eyes were closed, her nose was slender, and her lips were beautiful and decorated in what seemed to be pink lipstick. Since it came across as prepared to an excessive degree, there was a sense of incompleteness in it as a work of art. That was just how beautiful the mannequin contained in the transparent cage was.

“What... is this...?” Nanami found herself captivated by its beauty despite being of the same sex. And as Nanami stood dumbfounded, Gawain took notice of her.

“What? You found something?”

“Um, in the next room...”

“—Outta the way!” Gawain shoved Nanami away and dashed into the adjacent room. Nanami took a tumble as a result. Rising to her feet, looking as if she was about to cry, she chased after Gawain.

“...What in the hell is this?”

Just like Nanami a few seconds ago, Gawain found himself captivated by the young girl in the cage.

“I do not know, Sir. But my guess would be that it's... some sort of Artifact.”

“An Artifact?!”

“I'm not certain, but... I can feel some kind of mana from it.” “Artifact” referred to relics from ancient times, as their name implied. Specifically, they

referred to magic items created by ancient civilizations and enchanted with a bevy of different magical abilities. While their abilities were wide and varied, word had it that there were some Artifacts that could reduce a whole area to cinders. That was why Gawain's eyes lit up once Nanami told him that this might be an Artifact.

"Alright, I'm taking out this mannequin!" Gawain started to touch the transparent cage in an attempt to open it, but there was not a single seam on it, much less an entrance or opening.

"Grk, what the hell's going on here?!" Gawain exclaimed, irritated as he slashed at the cage with his sword. The shrill ching of his sword against the cage echoed throughout the room.

"How could you even think to do that?!"

"Whazzat?" Gawain glared at her with disdain, but this was something that not even the normally introverted Nanami could sit idly by and watch transpire.

"What would you do if you put too much force into your swing and damaged the mannequin inside?"

"If the mannequin was an Artifact, then why the hell would a simple swing from a sword break it?"

"Even so, there's no absolute guarantee that it *wouldn't* break, is there?"

"Goddammit, you're getting on my nerves. Look, I didn't even make a scratch on this damn cage to begin with!" Just as Gawain stated, there was not a scuff on the cage—not a single millimeter. However, that was wisdom out of hindsight. ...No, what Gawain said just might have been true. He very well might have held back on his swing so as to not damage the mannequin in the first place. Nevertheless, Nanami was concerned for the doll within the cage.

*...Wait, my life is in jeopardy right now, and here I'm worried about this thing? What is wrong with me?* Nanami bashed herself, having come back to her senses.

"Hey, you."

"Oh, huh? Y-Yes?"

“You’re pretty much a sorcerer, so use your magic and do something about this dumb cage!”

“Th-That isn’t possible, Sir.” It was true that Nanami was hailed as a talented individual. However, not even modern-day geniuses held a candle to sorcerers from the ancient eras. Nanami was in a superior class for a novice mage, but there was no way she could stand a chance.

“Whatever, just do what I told you! If you’re not gonna serve *any* purpose, then I can just throw your ass out in front of the dragon as bait!”

Nanami fell speechless. It may have been a reprehensible option, but there would be no salvation for the two of them at this rate. Thinking in that regard, threats were meaningless. Nanami knew that, should things continue like this, she was bound to be used as bait, considering how weak she was. However, even though there was no other option, whether or not she would accept it was a different matter. *I don’t want to get devoured by that monster*, Nanami thought, shivering.

“Please. Please, anything but that.”

“Please, shmease! Who the hell cares ‘bout that now?! I’m telling you that if you don’t want to end up dragon food, you’ll do something about this damn cage!”

“O-Okay.”

If Nanami hadn’t accepted this job, just like her older brother had told her, she wouldn’t have been in this mess. That thought ran through her mind, but regretting her decisions now wasn’t going to help her situation. *I just have to focus on getting out of here alive*, Nanami thought as she decided to inspect the cage.

“...Huh?”

“What? Did you find something?”

“Text is written here.” It was also written in standard language. It was the language which tribes, including humans, had used forever, so Nanami was capable of reading them without any problems, given her history of studying them. That being said, Nanami read the inscription aloud. “It is written here



that, ‘The only one who can break this seal is a little sister.’”

“Little sister? If I remember correctly, you’re Rick’s little sister, aren’t you? In that case, you should be able to open it. Try touching the cage.”

“...Okay, I will.”

Rick was Nanami’s stepbrother who took care of her, not her actual brother. Nevermind the fact that, thinking about it rationally, this enscription must have been intended for a blood relative of whoever had written it. There was no way it applied to just any little sister.

That was what she figured, but she was afraid of angering Gawain, so she did as she was told. Effectively, it ended up being the right answer, because the moment that Nanami grazed the cage with her hand, the beautiful crystal cage shattered into a million tiny pieces.

“—Eeek?!”

“What the hell?!”

There, in front of the shocked pair’s eyes—the beautiful mannequin, freed from the restraints of the cage, slowly yet elegantly sat herself down on the floor, as if ignoring the laws of gravity.



In the next instant after freezing time for herself, Ristia sensed that the Crystal Cage was shattering. Regardless of how much time had actually passed in the outside world before her release, since time was frozen for her, it all felt as though it happened in a second. Having realized that fact, Ristia deliberately sat herself down in a slow manner, all for one vital reason.

It was because slowly sitting down made for a more appealing look.

However, in her mind, she was madly excited. Ristia sensed that her seal had been broken in a natural way. That basically meant that her little sister who broke the seal was potentially right before her. Filled with expectations, Ristia slowly opened her crimson eyes.

Standing there was an enchanting, adorable—no, in fact, an *absolutely* adorable girl with long chestnut hair and green eyes. She had a slightly scared

expression as she looked down at Ristia.

*A-A little sister! No doubt about it, she's my cute little sister! Yay, a little sister! My first little sister! Yay, she's so cute! She's cute as a button~!* Ristia thought, overjoyed and giddy, knowing that if her family were around, they'd interject, "Blast it, child, you're *far* cuter!" She then was about to get up and go give her presumed little sister a hug, but... she stopped still just before she did. She realized that a distinguished older sister shouldn't be doing anything childish in front of her little sister. Ristia smiled at her presumed little sister with a composed expression.

"Pleased to meet your acquaintance. You must be my little sister," she spoke in a dignified tone with an elegant smile on her face. She was doing a perfect job of acting how a kind older sister should. *Now I'm a big sister!* Ristia thought to herself. However...

"Th-The mannequin talked—?!" The girl's reaction wasn't quite what Ristia had expected.

"Um, pardon, but.... what are you talking about? I am no doll."

"O-Oh, you're not?"

"I am not. Or do you happen to know of any mannequins that speak like this?"

"Well, no... I don't."

"As I expected." Ristia nodded in a satisfied manner, clearing her throat. "Well then, once again from the top."

"Huh? From the what?" Her presumed little sister was befuddled at her words, but Ristia cleared her throat with an adorable little *ahem*. Sitting on her knees, she looked up at her presumed sister and elegantly smiled.

"Pleased to meet your acquaintance. You must be my little sister."

"N-No, I'm not."

".....Huh? Y-You're not?" Ristia asked her presumed sister with the intentions of a fresh start, but she was denied, which unsettled her.

"Um... yes. My name is Nanami. I am not your little sister."

“N-No way~...” The image of a refined and kindly older sister was but a fleeting memory now. Ristia took a dip in her mood so hard that anyone watching would be sympathetic as she slumped onto the diamond shard-covered floor. She could hear a squabble going on as she did. A man asked, “Hey, why didn’t you pretend to be her little sister?!” and the girl replied, “I couldn’t tell such an obvious lie.” Nevertheless, Ristia was in a slump, and it barely tripped her attention. Ristia started fiddling around with a diamond shard with her finger.

“Wait, you’ll certainly hurt yourself if you touch those shards!” A flustered Nanami pulled up Ristia’s upper body. Nanami’s behavior seemed like that of a busybody little sister worrying over her older sister.

“Um, are you sure there’s no chance of you being my little sister?”

“...Oh, erm... I’m sorry.”

“...What a flop,” Ristia said, literally flopping over in disappointment. Her prim face, contorted with sadness, was enough to stimulate the parental instincts in anyone who looked at it. It was hard to explain why—maybe it was the extreme expressiveness, or maybe it was just conveyed as being *too* much to handle. Although, things like that were probably why her parents and older sisters would always coddle and shower her with affection.

“Hey, what’s with the dilly-dallying and chit-chat?!” Suddenly, a coarse voice resounded. Ristia had been so infatuated with the prospect of a little sister that the middle-aged man hadn’t even registered in her eyes, yet there he stood in the room.

*He seems to be about... the same age as Father. A few millennia old, perhaps?* Ristia, not realizing that the both of them were humans, thought to herself, misinterpreting the situation. Of course, upon inspecting them with a more level head, she should have known that they weren’t True Bloods, but... Ristia had nothing but thoughts of her little sister in her head. *He’s not younger than me. Heck, he isn’t even a girl,* thought Ristia as she once again shut the man out of her mind. She then started thinking about her next moves.

In truth, she already knew the reason why she was awakened despite the lack of a little sister. She never expected that anyone other than relatives of hers

would come to visit this labyrinth, so she set up the seal so that it could be broken by anyone so long as they were a girl younger than herself. She had to launch a countermeasure to this... Then again, maybe she could get away without one. After all, people rarely came here, and stopping time for herself was an all too simple matter for her. Ristia then stood up and started to reconstruct her Crystal Cage.

“Hey, don’t you ignore us! Hey, Nanami, do something!”

“Eek!”

The man yelled at Nanami, causing her to jump in fear. With that drawing her attention, Ristia looked over to Nanami.

“Um, Nanami, was it? Nanami, are you in a bind of some kind?”

“Huh? Wh-Why do you think that?”

“I mean... I can see you shivering.”

“O-Oh, well... erm...”

“If you’re in a bind, I can help you out.” She wasn’t her little sister, but it didn’t change the fact that Nanami was cute. It was inevitable that Ristia, a fan of all things cute, was interested in Nanami. However, despite Ristia asking her in a kind manner, Nanami was still shivering.

“It’s a dragon. A dragon is outside causin’ us issues!”

“...A dragon? That’s the reason for Nanami’s current predicament?” She asked back to the man whose name she didn’t care to catch.

“Yeah, that’s right! We got chased by that damn dragon and ran into this room. Now it’s waiting outside, and we can’t get outta here!”

“You were chased by the dragon... and ran into this room?!” The dragon that came to Ristia’s mind was the type that stood a few dozen meters tall and could turn an entire area into a sea of flames with its breath. And upon hearing that there was a giant dragon inside the labyrinth, the only way Ristia could picture it was to imagine a boneheaded dragon that got itself stuck in the narrow corridors of the labyrinth so snugly that it couldn’t even move. ...*Hee hee, I would like to see that. I can’t imagine that a lowly dragon could ever ruin the*

*labyrinth that I constructed, but perhaps I should check just to be sure?* Ristia thought as the man once again opened his mouth.

“Hey, who are you, anyway?”

“Who am I? ...Just a normal girl.”

“A normal girl?! Tch, you’re no use. Don’cha at least know a back way out?”

“There is no back way out.”

“Hmph, you really *are* useless.”

“But I *can* slay a simple dragon for you.”

Right after Ristia declared that, the man’s face took a dumbfounded turn... before showing anger.

“Are you tryin’ to screw with us? Or are you just out of your goddamn mind? You’re not even an adventurer, little girl. There ain’t no way you can beat that monster!”

“—Nanami, will slaying that dragon help you?” Ristia asked the frightened Nanami.

“Slay it... Don’t tell me that you plan on defeating that dragon?!”

“I do. What of it?”

“Y-You can’t! Dragons are fearsome foes who can only be defeated by a combined effort of several of trained adventurers!”

“Ehehe, you’re showing concern for me, I see. Thank you.” Ristia found herself pleased, kindly petting the head of the shorter Nanami.

“Th-This isn’t a matter of ‘concern,’ per se. But wait, why are you petting me?!”

“Because your display of concern has made me happy. But don’t worry. I will be fine. Defeating a dragon is light work. Once I defeat that dragon, will you tell me whether or not that helps you out, Nanami-chan?”

“Well, it would make me happy if you were really able to defeat it, but...”

“Mm, okie dokie, then.” Ristia replied with a composed expression as she

thought to herself in a calculated manner. *If I defeat the dragon, she'd be happy. In other words, if I defeat the dragon, Nanami will be impressed. She might even call me 'Big Sis'!* And as those thoughts ran through her head, she opened her Item Box and pulled out a magic rapier that she had made via some of her past enchantment practicing.

“Wha? Wh-Where did you get that from?!”

“Hm? From where? My Item Box, silly.”

“I-Item Box? You mean that legendary storage magic?!”

“...Legendary? Hmm, but it's just a regular old Item Box, isn't it?” To Ristia, an Item Box was Level Four Magic and not rare at all, much less legendary. She never imagined someone would ever treat it as such, so it made her tilt her head in perplexment. *Well, anyway, all I have to do is beat that dragon,* she thought, turning herself around and heading toward the door leading outside the room.

“Wait just a second, please! As we said, there is a dragon right outside the room!”

“I appreciate the concern, but I'll be fine.” Nanami reached out to try and restrain her from leaving, but Ristia nimbly avoided her and put her hand on the handle of the door leading outside. Incidentally, everything this labyrinth had to offer was being protected by Ristia's magic, so nothing would easily break so long as it wasn't rotted out. That was why the ancient door opened slowly without even a single creak, leading to the expansive floor. The floor that Ristia used for her magical practice was meters wide, and plopped right in the middle... was a five-meter tall dragon.

“...What is that?”

“The dragon! I told you that just a second ago!”

“...You mean a dragon's... child, correct?”

“In what way?! That is an adult dragon, no matter how you slice it!” Nanami argued vehemently that it was an adult, practically with tears in her eyes, but what Ristia saw inhabiting the floor was a young dragon, only about a few centuries old, no matter how she looked at it. While it was true that the dragon

was a few centuries older than Ristia, it was still a child in draconic terms. It was no big threat, but... Nanami seemed to honestly be afraid of that baby dragon.

*Being afraid of a dragon of this caliber is obviously strange!* Ristia thought hard about it, took another long look at Nanami, and came to the realization that she was a regular human being. *A human being? A human girl... in a bind...? If I impress her, she will surely adore me as a result. If she does, she might allow herself to be a kinswoman and my official stepsister! Oh yes!*

Holding onto that faint hope, Ristia stuck her rapier into the ground, pulled a normal ribbon from her item box, and tied her long, glossy hair together. Not because she thought it would get in her way, but because she thought it made her look cooler. Truth was, it actually made her look less cool and more obscenely cute.

“Alrighty, we’re all set and ready to go~!”

Ristia once again took up her rapier and started her stride toward the dragon.



“I’m telling you, it’s dangerous! ...Wait, why won’t you let me grab you?!” Avoiding Nanami’s hand reaching to stop her, the young girl was headed on to challenge the dragon with reckless abandon. Gawain saw this, thinking this to be their chance, and grabbed on to Nanami’s hand.

“Hey, let’s make a break for it while that girl is getting attacked!”

“Wh-What are you talking about... Are you saying we abandon her?!”

“Whuh?! Then do *you* wanna be the bait? There’s no beatin’ that dragon either way. In which case, sacrificing someone is the only way!” Gawain shouted in anger, causing Nanami to wince in fear. Seeing Nanami’s weak display, Gawain clicked his tongue in disgust. A dozen or so experienced adventurers attacking all at the same time were needed to defeat a dragon. And even if you did have that many, you had to be prepared to take some hefty losses. No matter how many weak-willed sorcerers and weird little girls were present, all they could do was serve as shields. *Of course I’m choosin’ the option where as many people as possible can get away!* thought Gawain.

Naturally, the reason he was urging Nanami to escape was to use her as his

next piece of bait if he wasn't able to run away while the weird girl was getting herself killed. He was ultimately prioritizing survival for himself.

"Anyway, let's get out of here!" Gawain tried to pull on Nanami's arm and start their escape. Nanami, however, resisted his advances.

"...What do you think you're doing?"

"U-Um, I..."

Perhaps it was the guilt of leaving the girl behind to escape and the fear of dying at odds with one another that was making her freeze in place. Deciding that any further argument would be a waste of time, Gawain decided to abandon Nanami and leave by himself.

"Fine, do whatever you want. I'm out of here!" The second Gawain started to turn around, the dragon's gigantic body lunged forward to attack the mysterious girl.

"Watch out!!"

Gawain's eyes shot back over once he heard Nanami's warning cry, which came while the dragon was right in the middle of its charge toward her. In response to the dragon's rushing advance, the young girl prepped her rapier to about hip level, ready to strike. *You freakin' moron! You're not gonna make a dent on a dragon with some flimsy rapier! If you're going to do any attack that worthless, then you might as well try to avoid an attack or two and buy me more time to hightail it outta here, for crying out loud!* In his mind, Gawain was spewing as much abuse as he could think up.

However...

"Hee-yah!"

The girl swung her rapier with a cute little cry. After which... all hell broke loose.





The whole floor was engulfed in a red light as the sound of an explosion and a wave of heat reached all the way to where Gawain was. He averted his eyes at the massive shockwave, and it wasn't long before the floor was overtaken... by silence. Once Gawain looked back, what he saw was... the black-haired girl, standing still and silent. And around said girl, pieces of floor that she should never be able to destroy were upturned and strewn about—all the way to the corners of room.

As for the dragon? It was nowhere to be seen.

*Hold on, what in the everloving hell?! She obliterated a dragon in one shot?! No way, no how, that's crazy talk! A monster that would only be taken down by several hundred attacks from a dozen veteran adventurers getting taken down in one shot by some dainty little girl is about as unbelievable as it gets! Give me a break over here!*

It didn't make sense.

It didn't make a *lick* of sense, actually.

Obliterating a dragon in one shot was impossible to begin with, much less it being from the attack of a dainty girl doing an adorable little “*hee-yah*.” Sure, there were heroes from stories who would belt out a cry before launching their spirited attacks, but this was just some angelic girl waving around a darling little rapier going “*hee-yah*.” That was it. Despite that, the floor was in shambles, and not a trace of the dragon remained.

“...What the hell? Am I dreamin' or somethin'?” The situation he was faced with was so utterly unbelievable that Gawain felt himself instilled with an indescribable sense of fear.

—2—

The aftermath of Ristia obliterating the dragon in one shot caused a mighty gale to blow throughout the area. Right in the middle of the floor, Ristia was letting the hem of her skirt dashingly flutter in the wind as she smugly gloated on the inside.

“...Eheh, ehehe.”

*Perfect! I was simply perfect! I am confident that this was enough of a display to make Nanami call me 'Big Sis'!* Ristia thought to herself as she turned herself around to see Nanami standing before her, wide-eyed and positively beaming—actually, more like wide-eyed and positively horrified.

*...Wh-What? Why is she looking at me like that? Maybe that was all a little overkill, so she thinks that I'm some sort of freak? Perhaps I should have been more precise and killed it with as little power as possible instead?* Human girls weren't capable of one-shotting a dragon in the first place, but that was something that Ristia, now flustered, did not realize. As such, the adventurer man timidly opened his mouth to speak to the bewildered Ristia.

"H-Hey, what was all that just now?"

"What was all... what?" Not really catching on to the situation, Ristia cocked her head in confusion. She looked incredibly cute, but her actions just a moment ago made her seem more creepy overall instead. The male adventurer's fear reached its limits.

"D-Don't play dumb! I'm obviously talking about that attack that slaughtered the dragon in one hit! I'm asking how in the *hell* you managed to launch a monstrous attack like that!"

"M-Mr. Gawain!" Nanami desperately tried to stop the bent-out-of-shape adventurer—his name apparently being Gawain. And it wasn't out of concern for Ristia; it was because she didn't want to rile Ristia, the very same girl who one-shotted a dragon. Ristia herself, on the other hand, couldn't have cared less about the reasons. There were more pressing matters, after all. Ristia was starting to panic now that she had picked up on the fact that what she'd done *was* overkill and had scared the other two. That much was obvious from that little back-and-forth they'd had.

*A-Ah, right. Considering that baby dragon was enough to scare them, they are bound to find someone who takes it down in one shot scary. Must have come as a shock. Sh-Shoot, I should have put up more of a struggle~!* Ristia panicked and tried to think of a good follow up...

"O-Oh, that? That was... um... Y-Yes, it was thanks to this rapier!" She ended up insisting that it was all the rapier's power.

“It was... the rapier?”

“Y-Yes, that’s right! This rapier has effects that elevate physical abilities, as well as increase the force of attacks, which is why it’s this rapier that’s the incredible one; I’m just a normal girl!”

“That weapon has that sort of ability...?” Gawain’s eyes became pinned to the rapier. Ristia, upon seeing that, thought to herself in hope, *Could it be that he’s buying my story?*

“S-Sorry, but are you really a normal... girl?” Nanami asked timidly in place of the now-silent Gawain.

Ristia grabbed Nanami’s hand and brought the girl’s fingers to her cheek.

“Wh-What are you doing?!”

“I figured that you could tell I’m a normal girl if you gave me a touch. See how soft I am? If I weren’t being powered up by something else, then I would bruise immediately, just like anyone else. I’m telling the truth.” She was trying with every fiber of her being to make the case that she was just a normal girl. If Ristia’s family were here, they would take one look at Ristia’s desperate pleading and faint from cuteness overload. However, there wasn’t much difference between the physical abilities of humans from the past and present. The only noticeable difference, in fact, was that their magic and various technologies had been far more advanced than it was now. The pair, who both would have never even dreamed of the possibility that Ristia could be a True Blood princess, bought her story that it was all the weapon’s doing and not hers. And so, that misconception was a crossroad of destiny for the man—for Gawain.

“Don’t tell me that weapon is... an Artifact.”

“Huh? It’s nothing that extravagant. It boosts physical attributes and has increased cutting abilities. Oh, it also has self-restorative properties, and upon swinging it, it unleashes flames which roast through enemies, but that’s really all there is to it.”

“That’s a goddamn Artifact if I’ve ever of heard one!”

“Huh...?” Ristia was confused. The image of an Artifact that came to Ristia’s

mind was a genuine sacred treasure, the sort of item that, in one shot, could carve out a canyon so large that it would need to be plotted on maps. There was no way this weapon that she herself created during her enchantment practice could pass as an Artifact. But to the humans of this era, Ristia's description of the rapier's abilities classified it as a genuine Artifact, if not almost beyond that category—which sounded like a pipe dream. Therefore...

“Will you let me see that rapier?”

“Huh? Well... sure? I don't mind.” Ristia readily passed the weapon over to Gawain.

“H-Hey, are you sure about that?” A tug on her sleeve prompted her to turn around to see a bewildered Nanami staring deep into her eyes.

“Oh, um... is something the matter?”

“No, ‘Is something the matter?’ isn't quite the right response to this... Are you sure you should have just given it to him, no questions asked?”

“Huh? What do you mean by that?”

“...She means this!!”

*Shunk!* A blunt sound echoed as Ristia was stabbed from behind. At the same time, a slight pain coursed through her chest area. Ristia wondered what was going on as she turned her attention downward to see a rapier sprouting from her upper torso.

“A-Aah...”

Upon seeing the reality of the situation, she let out a bitter moan.

“Mr. Gawain, how could you?!”

“Keh, keh hah hah hah! Now the Artifact is all mine!” Gawain yanked the rapier out, instantly causing a gush of bright red blood to burst from Ristia's chest. Then...

“Y-You put a hole in my favorite dreeeeesss—?!”

Ristia screamed with intensity from the depths of her heart.

“P-Please, just hang in there! I’ll use some healing magic on you right away!” Nanami was about to cast a spell in a massive panic... but she realized the oddity in Ristia’s shriek halfway through and stopped herself before she did. “.....The hole in your dress?”

“That’s right~! Jeez, this dress was one of my *favorites*~”

Watching Ristia pout and sulk, the two were both shocked and baffled. “W-Wait, wait a second, hold on, back up a second. You shouldn’t be throwing a tantrum about your dress, you just got *stabbed* through the *chest*.”

“...Oh, yes. And?”

“And... I mean, you got stabbed. *Through the chest*. He stabbed you... right?”

“Gah, he sure did~! And thanks to that, I’ve got a fresh hole in my dress, like I said.”

“No, what I mean is...”

“*And you normally die when you get a fresh hole through the chest!*” was the common sense-driven comment that Nanami wanted to utter, but she couldn’t find it in her to actually voice it. Mostly because she realized that the initial gush of blood was starting to stop all on its own.

It was worth mentioning that Ristia, being a True Blood, was practically immortal. Without any of the weaknesses that normal vampires possessed, even if you were to blow away her heart, it wouldn’t amount to much, if anything at all. Be that as it may, blood flow and other normal results still came as a result of getting stabbed, so she would still get hurt just as a normal girl would if she weren’t already powered-up. That was a fact... Well, “fact” was subjective, so it was safer to say that it wasn’t necessarily a lie. It was just a matter of the unbelievable speed at which she regenerated after getting hurt like a normal girl could. Those were all thoughts running through Ristia’s mind, but they were simply that—Ristia’s thoughts. Nanami and Gawain, both simply normal people, started to suspect that Ristia was far from normal. And it was Gawain who was the one most shocked by that fact. His whole plan was to kill Ristia, a regular girl, and steal the Artifact for himself. In spite of that plan, Ristia remained fine even after being stabbed with her own rapier.

“What the hell?! What in the hell *are* you?!”

“Huh? I told you, I’m just a normal girl, silly~”

“Like *hell* you are!!” Gripped with fear, Gawain lost his cool.

“Please, calm yourself, Mr. Gawain.”

“Shut your trap! I’m telling you to stay out of this, you good-for-nothing!”

With his temper spurred, Gawain lightly swung the rapier. That simple swing was enough to not only cut through the staff Nanami held, but gash up her body, as well.

“Oww!!” Nanami collapsed as blood flew everywhere. Ristia witnessed this and was surprised, kneeling by Nanami’s side.

“Nanami, are you okay? Can you... regenerate?”

“...A little, if I use magic. But, aah, my staff is broken.” Nanami replied, her voice weak as tiny red flowers started to bloom across the floor of the labyrinth. It was a wound that Ristia could mend instantaneously if it had happened to her. However, the same probably couldn’t be said for Nanami. Realizing that possibility, Ristia found herself getting uneasy.

“Keh, keh heh heh... looks I was right in thinking this was an Artifact. In that case, the reason you didn’t die before was because you’re hiding a different Artifact on you. That’s gotta be it,” Gawain stated with a shrill cackle. Gawain had, of course, caught on to Ristia’s abnormal nature, but since he wasn’t strong enough to just accept reality for what it was, he was trying to give a more convenient explanation for himself. “From what I see, you don’t have any kind of jewelry on you, so that rules that out. And judging from your reaction a minute ago... Yeah, now I get the picture. Your dress is the Artifact.”

“My dress? Well, it is enchanted.”

“Keheh, so I was right. In that case... strip, unless you want me to kill you.” The middle-aged man was attempting to get the adorable young maiden’s clothes off her. This had turned into a full-blown dilemma. Ristia didn’t really feel anything from the line he delivered, however. On the contrary, she figured, *So if I hand over my clothes, maybe that will convince him that I really am a normal girl?* But that had to wait.

“Sorry, but that will have to come later. Right now, seeing to Nanami’s wounds comes first,” she declared over her shoulder while sitting in front of Nanami. Ristia had been asserting that she was a normal girl because she didn’t want Nanami to be frightened of her, but all of that would be pointless if Nanami were to die on her. Prioritizing Nanami was the obvious choice.

“Quit screwing with me! No way in hell I’m giving you the time to do that! Off with the dress! *Now!*”

“I just told you that I would remove it if you’d just be patient, did I not?”

“Tch! If that’s how it’s gonna be... I’ll just have to get it off you by *force*.” Gawain settled into a stance with the rapier, holding it at hip height. Reacting to his intent to attack, the rapier activated the ability it was enchanted with, causing Gawain’s physical abilities to skyrocket.

“Have a taste of my newly-obtained power, bitch!” Gawain shouted, swinging the rapier at full force. It was nowhere near the level it had been when Ristia wielded the blade, but the attack was still imbued with mana nonetheless—an attack that was directed right at Ristia. But that was when it happened...

Just as soon as Gawain made his strike with the rapier, Ristia put a spell of her own into action. The Level Four offensive magic that Ristia deployed engulfed Gawain’s attack... along with Gawain himself, incinerating his entire body without so much as leaving a single speck of soot behind. The only thing that remained were the echoes of Gawain’s final cries reverberating throughout the expansive floor.

“Okie dokie, that’s squared away.”

Ristia had just wiped a human being off of the face of the planet, yet she showed not an ounce of sentiment or care as she once again turned herself toward Nanami. Nanami was bleeding out profusely. Her face was already pale and almost lifeless. She was on the fast track to death’s door. As those thoughts coursed through her mind, she reached out to Nanami, until...

“D-Don’t touch me!”

“Whuh?!”



Nanami so bluntly shooting her down despite her labored breathing was a huge blow to Ristia. It was such a huge shock, in fact, she found herself kneeling down on the floor in despair. *U-Ughhh... I can't believe Nanami hates me now. This shakes me to my very core~! Maybe erasing that guy was a mistake? But I was afraid that if I didn't act fast, Nanami would die... I mean, if I don't act fast, Nanami will die. I don't want her to hate me even more than she probably already does, but it's better than having her die!* Ristia thought to herself as she mustered what little remnants of mental fortitude she had left and reached over to Nanami.

"S-Stay back. Stay back!"

"I'm sorry. You must be terrified. But try to contain your fear a bit, okay? I'm going to heal your wounds for you."

"...Huh? Y-You intend to heal... my wounds?"

"Mm-hmm, that's just what I'm going to do." To Ristia, humans weren't much different from any other animal. If it was cute, then she'd dote over it. If it was just minding its business, she would not put her hands on it. And if it posed a threat to her wellbeing, she would fight back without mercy. That was her mindset.

Right now, this younger girl absolutely fell into the 'wanting to dote over' category for Ristia.

"So on that note, do you mind if I use magic?" she asked kindly. Hope formed in Nanami's once scared and forlorn eyes.

"Please... help... me..."

"Yup, just leave it to me."

Now that she had consent, Ristia placed her hand over Nanami's gaping wound and cast the most powerful healing spell she was capable of, a Level Eight regeneration magic. A divine light wrapped around Nanami as her wound was instantly cauterized. But that wasn't the only thing it did. It also removed any abnormalities in her body and replaced the blood she lost. In addition, it removed any smudges or specks on her clothes and strengthened her dainty body. Before long, the light returned to Nanami's dimmed and unfocused eyes,

and her complexion was even better than normal.

“W-Whoa...” Nanami started to check her body with an expression of utter disbelief.

“Well? Are you nice and healed?”

“Y-Yes. Everything... Everything is healed. Even the scars I’ve had since my childhood. Positively everything. Also, my body feels extraordinarily lighter now.”

“Great, that’s wonderful news~” Ristia celebrated as if it were for herself, and once Nanami caught sight of that, her cheeks started to flush.

“Erm... um, thank you very much. Uh, for saving my life, that is!”

“Mm-mm, you needn’t thank me.” *So long as you’ll adore me as your loving older sister, then that’s thanks enough!* Ristia thought, but she naturally didn’t say so out loud. There was no point to any of this if she was having her call her ‘Big Sis’ out of obligation over a favor. She wanted Nanami to call her ‘Big Sis’ of her own free will. That was how she wanted things to work out.

In exchange, she introduced herself with the best appeal she could muster.

“My name is Ristia.”

“Ristia. Okay, Miss Ristia.”

“Miss... Ristia...” She hung her head in disappointment.

“Huh? W-Was I not supposed to call you that?”

“Um... no, I don’t mind, it’s just that...” Ristia had held out hope that maybe she would call her ‘Big Sis Ristia,’ so she was a little down in the dumps about that, but she scraped together her energy and tried to play it off.

“So what exactly are you, Miss Ristia?”

“Huh? Why, I’m a normal girl.”

“A ‘normal’ girl does *not* walk away fine from getting stabbed in the chest with a sword!”

“Grr...” Ristia started to look peevish. As far as Ristia was concerned, walking away fine from a little stab through the heart was perfectly normal. In fact,

dying as a result of getting cut up a little would be more odd. However, seeing as how Nanami couldn't even imagine that being the case, she let out a sigh.

“You cannot sweep this under the rug with cute pouting. A moment ago, you said that it was all the rapier's doing, but Mr. Gawain had that rapier, and you blew him to kingdom come. Am I wrong?”

“Was blowing this Mr. Gawain away, by any chance, not okay?”

“W-Well... he was the one who tried to accost you, so it isn't necessarily not okay... I think.”

“Ah, okay...” Nanami's expression as she said “I think” looked rather unsure. Basically, it was technically okay, but it was considered overkill. That was the way that Ristia perceived it.

“...Wait, so back on topic, you're not going to sweep things under the rug that way, okay? Now, Miss Ristia, tell me. What *are* you?”

“But I'm just a normal girl...”

“Okay... allow me to change my phrasing. Miss Ristia, you are *not* human, are you?”

“I mean, I...”

Ristia was in a sticky situation. After all, she knew that if her small display of strength was enough to scare her, then coming out as a True Blood princess would probably serve to scare her even more.

“I'm assuming that you don't want to say it? I'm... right, aren't I? After the heinous things that Mr. Gawain was trying to do to you earlier, I guess I cannot blame you for not trusting me.” Nanami was paying consideration for the savior of her life in her own way. She would be lying if she said that she didn't have her concerns, but she ultimately came to the conclusion that putting the person who saved her life through the wringer with questions was rude. Although, despite that... Ristia was sweating bullets over Nanami's interaction. After all, Ristia knew that getting Nanami to call her 'Big Sis' would be a complete dead-end if Nanami believed she was withholding facts just because she was being cautious of her.

“This is absolutely not a trust issue!”

“You don’t have to force yourself. You were just stabbed with a sword, so it’s only natural you would have your doubts about me.”

“Unghh, I’m telling the honest truth! Nanami, I do not suspect you of *anything!*” Ristia was desperate; she wanted to get close to this girl. “I honestly swear to you, I do not suspect you. It’s just that, um, well... you know. If I told you who I was, then you might get scared of me like before... maybe.”

“Scared? Do you mean that I would get scared even though I’m the one who asked you who you are?”

“M-Mm-hmm. You mean, you... *won’t* get scared?” She asked Nanami with nervous puppy dog eyes. With Ristia’s gaze upon her, Nanami’s cheeks reddened.

“I-I will admit that you do come across as somewhat intimidating, but I owe my life to you, nonetheless. I will not be getting scared.”

“...Really?” Ristia timidly asked.

“I’m sorry for being out of my wits earlier. I might end up surprised or what have you, but you will not see me afraid as I was then. I promise.” Ristia’s looks and behavior were entirely too cute, which was why Nanami scrambled to encourage Ristia, who seemed nervous and uneasy. As a result, the good-natured Ristia bought Nanami’s words wholeheartedly.

“Oh, thank you~! The truth is, I’m the youngest daughter of the True Bloods.”

Nanami was petrified.

“.....Huh? T-True Bloods? By ‘True Bloods,’ you wouldn’t happen to mean... the first vampire tribe that ruled this continent up until a millennium ago... would you?”

“Yup! I’m vampiric royalty!”

Nanami’s face froze up in a way that it never had before.

“Huh? Um, pardon... something the matter?”

“O-Oh, nothing! Not at all! I’m not the least bit... scared... Nope!” Nanami fought to state that as she shivered all over. She was obviously scared, but she was probably trying to feign it for dear life because she had promised she wouldn’t feel any fear.

“Um, erm... I’m sorry?”

“N-No, I should be the one who is sorry. You saved me, so I know you have no intentions of killing me, and yet...” Nanami murmured, then gasped when she realized what she had said. She then nervously looked at Ristia. “U-Um, would you mind if I asked you one thing?”

“Huh? You don’t have to stop at one thing. You can ask me as much as you’d like, but... Yes, what is it?”

“Lady Ristia, you’re the youngest daughter of the True Bloods... which would mean you’re a vampire princess, correct?”

“...Lady Ristia...”

She sighed, lamenting her siblingship slipping further away from her grasp.

“...Um, is something wrong?”

“No, no, it’s nothing. Erm... you’re basically asking if I’m a vampire, right? That I am. I am the True Blood princess. A vampire.”

“Then, could it be that... you saved my life because you are going to, um... make me your kinswoman?”

“*Huh?! W-Well, um, err...*”

Seeing as how Ristia had slightly considered asking her, “Would you mind becoming my kinswoman and my little sister?” she hesitated to tell the truth. Once Nanami saw this visible hesitation, her face was filled with a sort of despair—as if she knew that the world was coming to an end. This was where tragedy struck.

Becoming the kinswoman of Ristia, a True Blood, would mean being nearly immortal, possessing advanced physical abilities, as well as a long lifespan with almost no vampiric impulses. It meant gaining the ultimate body. However, in Nanami’s mind, becoming the kinswoman of the lower-grade vampires that

currently haunted the lands meant gaining slightly-enhanced physical abilities, but also introduced a host of weaknesses and meant needing to drink people's blood for even a chance at survival—and, in worst case scenarios, it meant even losing your sanity. It was a matter of becoming what was practically a living corpse.

There was an overwhelming disparity in what sprung to mind when it came to vampire kinsfolk for the two. Unfortunately, Ristia hadn't considered that aspect adding into the equation, so upon seeing Nanami fall into despair, she believed Nanami was rejecting her.

"S-Sorry, you don't like the idea of kinsfolk, yes?! It's okay, I won't be making you into a kinswoman!"

"R-Really?"

"Uh-huh, uh-huh! I assure you, I will not do anything that you do not want, Nanami!" *Waaah, making this promise means I can't make Nanami my little sister~! But, but... Nanami looked really freaked out, so I definitely cannot afford to make her do something she doesn't like. I would be a failure of an older sister otherwise. I don't like it, but that's life. A sisterless life... Sniff...*

Ristia cried internally as she swore up and down that she wouldn't turn the girl into a kinswoman.

—3—

"A-Are you really, really, *really* not going to turn me into your kinsfolk?"

"I really, really, really, *really* mean it!" Ristia said, trying to desperately soothe the worried Nanami, causing her adorable voice to ring throughout the labyrinth floor. Her perseverance eventually prevailed, as it helped Nanami settle her nerves a little.

"...All right, then. I will believe what you say, Lady Ristia."

"Well, I thank you for believing in me." Ristia breathed a sigh of relief.

"By the way, Lady Ristia? Why were you asleep in that cage back there, anyway?"

“Oh, that? Well... A little sister was...”

“A little sister?”

“Um, no, it’s nothing. Just forget it.”

“Oh, okay...”

Nanami remembered what was written on the pedestal and decided not to delve any deeper, assuming that the reasons behind it were too complicated. The truth of the matter was that Ristia was just too embarrassed to tell her, “*A little sister was what I wanted. So much so that I ran away from home.*”

“Is that all you’d like to ask?”

“Well... one more thing, then. What do you plan on doing now, Lady Ristia?”

“What do you mean...? ‘What do I plan on doing’?”

“Erm, you know... wiping out humanity? Stuff like that?”

“I’m... quite curious as to what you’ve been taking me for this whole time, my dear Nanami.” *I’m a totally normal girl, so why does she think I’d do something so wicked?* Ristia pondered, cutely cocking her head to the side.

“You are the princess of the True Bloods, who reigned supreme over all other tribes in an era far more prosperous than ours. And you’d massacre any tribes that you disliked, right?”

“Um, no?!”

“You didn’t?”

“I certainly did *not*~! I mean, if anyone ruined or disturbed places I liked or something, I’d give them a little slap on the wrist, sure.”

It was worth noting that, if things like that did happen, Ristia would descend upon the battlefields of warring tribes, shouting, “Trampling all over the flowerbed I worked so hard on? You’re *all* going to *get* it!” as she pummeled everyone into the dirt—that was the level her pleasant little “slaps on the wrists” would reach. That was just what Ristia thought; it was taught among many different tribes that one must *never* anger a True Blood, but... it could be overlooked.

“So... you’re not going to destroy all humans...?”

“No, I’m not~! ...Wait... did I just hear you say ‘an era far more prosperous than ours’?” It took her a second to register, but Ristia realized what that meant.

Ristia had only planned on a slumber that would last a few decades’ time. This entire time, she was under the impression that she had only slept a couple of years, since she was awakened by some unforeseen incident. *But, what if...*

“Um, please hear me out, and try not to be startled. Lady Ristia, if you say that you are a member of the True Bloods, then as it stands... I think, well... At least a millennium has passed since your time.”

“...Huh? A-A millennium?”

“Y-Yes, Ma’am. The True Bloods disappeared a thousand years ago. It’s just my guess, but I would say that has to be the case...”

She had no good reason to lie. Plus, it was hard to imagine Nanami lying anyway, given the current circumstances. Which meant that even if the True Bloods disappeared right after she went to sleep, a millennium would have already gone by. This was why Ristia was surprised. *Shocked*, in fact. Enough so that she thought, *How much of a jerkface is Father? Not creating another offspring in over a whole darn millennium?!* Of course, there were a bevy of things odd about all this in terms of human sensibilities, but Ristia was extremely serious about things in her own way.

True Bloods were preordained with a lifespan of several millennia. What was supposed to be a few decades’ worth of sleep ended up being a whole millennium through an oversight. This was a mistake that Ristia acknowledged as less of a catastrophic *shock* and more of a slightly-above-average *startle*.

What was worth mentioning here was that barely an hour had passed in Ristia’s mind since she began her slumber. She was not yet over the rage from her spat with her Father, the most important issue in her eyes still being that she had no little sister.

However, that was exactly why she had to accept the facts. The decades she had planned around had turned into a millennium. Basically, if that much time



had passed and she was still sister-less, then the chances of one being born during a potential second sleep were slim.

*Hmm, maybe I should just make a little sister myself, then~? Okay, so my last plan was kind of a dud, but surely my next attempt will go much smoother. I'm sure I can find a girl who will be my little sister so long as I just keep the fact that I'm a True Blood a secret and grow close with her normally.*

“Um, are you all right?” Nanami called over to Ristia as she was pondering her next course of action, snapping her back to her senses. Once Ristia was once again aware of her surroundings, she noticed that Nanami was looking up at her with concern.

“Huh? Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm just fine. You asked me what I'd be doing from now on, right? I'm going to take a little trip to a village full of people.”

“A village full of people? And what might you do there... if I may ask?”

“Uh... Saving children in need?”

“Saving children in need, Ma'am?”

“Uh-huh. I want to search for a child in need and provide them help.”

“Um, and... Why, pray tell, would that be your goal?”

“Well, I... Um, you see...” Ristia struggled to find her words, smiling but obviously somewhat embarrassed—looking very much like an angel sent from the heavens above. “Because I want to save a child in need; that's why.”

What that really meant was that she wanted to save a child—particularly a young girl—and eventually turn her into a kinswoman, as well as her new little sister. It was an underhanded scheme, but... based off of just her words and behavior alone, one would never be able to make out her true intentions.

“Like... some kind of angel.”

“E-Excuse me? I'm no angel; I'm a normal girl.” Ristia was rehashing the same back-and-forth that she shared with her father what felt like a few hours ago, but unlike that time, the person comparing her to an angel had a very different degree of sincerity to her words.

“I've misjudged you. Wishing to save children in need is incredibly,

wonderfully *fantastic*! The True Bloods that appear in legends are described as devils, but you're practically an angel, Lady Ristia!" It seemed that Nanami had gotten entirely the wrong idea, and in a spectacular fashion, at that. The same girl who was once terrified of Ristia was now being moved by Ristia's angelic utterance. Ironically, this explanation was mostly created out of concern for the fear Nanami had shown earlier. Completely changing her tune, Nanami started to adore Ristia as if she had happened to meet a real-life angel. "Um, would you mind letting me guide you around? I mean, please let me guide you around! I beg of you!"

"Huh? You intend to show me the way?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I will be your escort... although I doubt you need it. You'll still need a guide nonetheless, right? I want to do this as a token of gratitude for saving my life. So... may I?"

"Hmm, let's see~ If you insist, then maybe I should take you up on your offer?"

"Thank you ever so much, Lady Ristia!"

It seemed that instead of being fawned over as an older sister, Ristia was being worshipped like a divine entity. That was a tad unfortunate, but she found the feeling of being adored by someone not so bad, regardless. More importantly, Ristia had always been surrounded by her older family members ever since she was born, so while she couldn't convince Nanami to become her little sister, she was starting to enjoy time spent with her anyway. Ristia decided that she would act together with Nanami for the time being.

"Okay, I'm going to get ready, so don't go anywhere~" Ristia quickly scurried back to the other room. She cleaned up the Crystal Cage that lay shattered on the floor, loading the shards into her Item Box.

"Now, what else? Oh, I should change my clothes. Yup." With a cute little grunt, she threw off her hole-ridden, bloody dress. With her clothing now reduced to only her matching light blue bra and panties, Ristia went fishing through the assortment of dresses she had personally designed and stowed away within her Item Box as her slim figure remained exposed to the cold dungeon air. Once she made her selection, what she pulled out was an adorable

sundress with colors very reminiscent of spring, promptly wriggling herself into it. The last thing she did was check over her appearance in the full-length mirror she'd pulled out from the Box in a similar fashion. Letting down her tied back hair, she returned to the floor where Nanami awaited her.

“Okie dokie, sorry to keep you waiting~”

“It’s no problem at all. Welcome back, Lady Ristia. Oh my! You changed your outfit, I see!” Nanami’s eyes positively lit up once she saw the spring-style sundress.

“Mm-hmm. My old dress had a hole in it, and I figured this would work better if I’m going to be walking around. So? So? How is it? Does it look good on me?” Ristia showed off with a quick turn. She flipped her jet-black hair and the hem of her skirt, looking at Nanami from over her shoulder. Her glittering crimson eyes were extraordinarily captivating.

“You look perfect!”

“Ehehe, thank you~ Oh, that reminds me. Your clothes got ripped up as well, didn’t they?” Nanami had taken a bad gash around her chest area, which left her outfit looking quite promiscuous. Upon noticing her current state of dress, the girl yelped a charming little “*EEK!*” and pulled at the cloth around her chest. “I can give you an outfit of mine. If you don’t mind wearing my clothes, that is.”

“An outfit of yours, Lady Ristia? You wouldn’t be offering me... an Artifact, would you?”

“Why, of course not.”

“Really, Ma’am?” Ristia felt the young girl’s stare casting copious amounts of doubt upon her.

“Why are you so doubtful?”

“I mean, you said that the dress you were originally wearing was enchanted, correct? So I’m guessing that the sundress you’re wearing is also enchanted in some way, shape, or form?”

“Yes, well, it is enchanted to a normal degree. It only has, um, let’s see... It reflects ultraviolet rays above a certain degree, has built-in temperature

control, along with the abilities of making the inside of the skirt invisible and being able to mend itself, but that's really all."

"That's *absolutely* an Artifact!"

"Wha...?" It was the basic enchantment that Ristia always gave to clothes she made. *I don't know about calling them Artifacts just because of that...* Ristia thought, feeling at a loss. "Either way, you don't need to worry."

"I-I couldn't possibly! I will be fine. I have a change of clothes with me, so if you'd be so kind as to wait..." Nanami hurriedly started to change her clothes.

"But... you really don't have to worry..."

*Yay, me and Nanami get to be twinsies!* Ristia had initially thought, but she found herself murmuring disappointedly instead. Before long, Nanami had changed into a simple outfit and called out to Ristia.

"Thank you for waiting, Ma'am."

"Oh, not a problem. Then, if we're all set, let's go above ground."

"Right... Oh, you don't seem to be carrying any luggage."

"I have all of my essentials in my Item Box, so I'll be just fine."

"You never cease to impress, Lady Ristia!" It seemed that Nanami's respect had reached the level of religious devotion. *Though, I sure would like her to fawn over me like a sibling and not a servant...* Ristia thought, slightly disappointed.

"Lady Ristia? Is something the matter?"

"Oh, no. It's nothing. Right, to the surface. Shall we?" Ristia took the lead and started to trek onward. Nanami scrambled to catch up to her, taking her place by the princess's side.

The underground labyrinth Ristia had burrowed out with her magic seemed to be just an enormous yet otherwise run-of-the-mill cave at first glance, but the walls could withstand any attack thrown at them. To be more accurate, they wouldn't withstand an attack the magnitude of what Ristia dished out earlier, but they would easily stay sturdy against normal attacks since magic was protecting the entire cave. And Ristia and Nanami made their way through that

very cave. Along their way, they were attacked by the occasional monster dwelling within the dungeons, but Ristia made short work of all of them. She was highly motivated in doing so, thinking, *Protecting Little Nanami here is totally Big Sis material!*

“By the way, Nanami?”

“Yes? What is it, Ma’am?”

“It’s... well, that. The way you’re speaking. It’s so stiff and formal. You’re free to dial it back to something more casual, you know.”

“I shall do no such thing!”

“You *won’t*?!” Not prepared to be so quickly shot down, Ristia was hit hard. “B-But why?”

“Because it would be inconcievable of me to address you, an angel, in a casual manner.”

“A-Angel? That’s quite a jump from simile to metaphor, don’t you think?” She was no longer “like an angel”; Rista was now a full-blown divine being, whether she liked it or not. *Don’t tell me she actually has me mistaken for an angel... Is that it?* Ristia thought, a single line of sweat dripping from her brow.

“Don’t worry. I am not misconstruing things.”

“Well, as long as it’s not...”

“You are undoubtedly an angel, Lady Ristia.”

“That *is* misconstruing things, though!” Ristia vehemently denied, but Nanami appeared to be turning a deaf ear, continuing on. “Even seeing you be modest is incredible! I’d expect nothing less from you, Lady Ristia, what with you being both an angel and a True Blood!”

*But you’re wrong~! Wrong, wrong, wrooong~! I’m just a True Blood vampire princess; I swear I’m a normal girl!* Ristia screamed inside of her mind, completely unaware of how utterly bizarre a premise that was. However, at the same time, feelings of resignation started to set in within her. If she were to aggressively deny Nanami’s assertion, there was a chance that Ristia might scare the poor girl again. She came to the conclusion that it was safer to let

things run their course, considering that risk.

“...Gah, okay, *enough*~! ...Anyway, why did you come to this labyrinth in the first place, Nanami?”

“We were a reconnaissance team sent on a mission by our guild to investigate the ruins of this labyrinth.”

“Reconnaissance? Here?” Ristia’s face shifted into a look of confusion upon hearing that Nanami had been doing an investigation on the labyrinth she built during her magic practice.

“My apologies. Having your home invaded and investigated must not feel good at all.”

“Well, this isn’t my house, so I really don’t mind. It’s just... you know there’s nothing here, right?”

“No, there was an angel hidden away here, Lady Ristia. That’s you.”

“O-Oh, stop, you. But aside from that, there’s nothing else here. Right?” Ristia felt like the more she denied that claim, the more she would sink even further into the quagmire, so she tapped into her small reserve of zen-like patience and moved along.

“You are correct that this dungeon is shockingly barren as far as ruins go, but the reconnaissance team did not come here to find anything in particular.”

“Hm...? Mind explaining what you mean?”

“The guild found the entrance to a set of magic-protected ruins—what seemed to be a labyrinth from the old era—on land scheduled to be recultivated, so we were ordered to do reconnaissance to determine whether or not it presented any danger,” Nanami said, adding in a whispered tone, “but, granted, there seemed to be many party members who had their eyes on reclaiming treasure from here.” She was probably implying that that was the goal of Gawain and the others, causing them to act with reckless abandon and suffer huge losses as a result. However, Ristia seemed to be more interested in something else Nanami said—the words “land scheduled to be recultivated.”

“...Recultivated? There are humans? Out here?” When Ristia originally built

the labyrinth, no humans lived in the vicinity because it was situated within a forest that housed relatively combative tribes like dragons and whatnot. *So, have the humans spread their influence out over the past thousand years?* Ristia pondered. “That reminds me: What state is this era in?” she asked while continuing to muse to herself inside her head. *Considering that they mistook that fledgling for a full-grown adult, I’m guessing that dragons have taken a hit in power and influence...*

“Um... I believe that humans have reign over this continent.”

“...Huh? Is that so?” They were a tribe similar in appearance to her own, but humans were weaker by leaps and bounds. In fact, they were the *weakest* of all the tribes Ristia knew of. It was a shock to hear that those same humans had taken control over the continent.

“Naturally, there are places that people have declared off-limits due to the threats that inhabit them, so it isn’t as though humanity is the strongest. But nowadays, humans live on a majority of the continent.”

“Hmm... Then, this business about the True Bloods disappearing. You did mention that earlier, correct?”

“Well... it’s precisely as I said. The story goes that they suddenly dropped off the face of the map a millennium ago.”

“Dropped off the face of the map, huh?” Ristia’s family being wiped out by another tribe was simply unimaginable. *Maybe they packed up and moved someplace elsewhere?* she thought, tilting her head.

“Incidentally, they say that war broke out between the tribes not long after.”

“Aah... That seems likely to happen.” Even in Ristia’s time, all of the more powerful tribes were trying to expand their territory, which was why she wasn’t all that surprised to hear that war broke out as soon as the True Bloods disappeared. Even so, that still left some questions unanswered. “So, how did the humans come to rule the continent?”

“Well... they say it’s due to a human’s life being so short.”

“Hmm...? Oh. *Ooh...* So I see.” Ristia pieced it together from that single statement.

The True Bloods lived long and rarely gave birth to children. In fact, it was so rare that the only children born to the True Bloods in several centuries were Ristia and her elder sisters. That being the case, if there was a huge population drop, then they would need centuries upon centuries to return their numbers back to normal. It seemed that something similar had happened to the other tribes, like dragons and demonkin. Basically, some sort of battle royale among the strong tribes reduced their numbers across the board, and as a result, humans managed to conquer the vacant continent with a boom in their population over a few hundred years.

And that also meant that... *There are a whole bunch of cute and likely candidates to be my little sister around here!* Coming to that conclusion, Ristia was overjoyed.

“I bet there are a lot of children in need.”

“Why, yes. The sudden rise in population has been causing a multitude of issues as of late. Things like food shortages, the gap between the rich and poor widening, et cetera...”

“Is that so? In that case, I’ll just have to save every last one of them.”

“You are a marvel, Lady Ristia!”

Nanami was again misinterpreting Ristia’s simple desire for a little sister in stupendous fashion. Be that as it may, Ristia was not attempting to extend help merely as pretense so she could trick a girl into becoming her sister. She was honestly trying to help children in need so that they would come to adore her as an older sister. So she couldn’t say that Nanami’s appraisal was necessarily mistaken... Far be it from that. If she predicted what Ristia would be doing from now on, it would probably be an underestimation. That was because Ristia, the vampire princess unaware that she was the strongest around, would never hold herself back if it meant helping her little sister. That being said... she *did* vaporize a dragon to save Nanami, meaning she didn’t comprehend the fact that she possessed abilities far removed from that of humans in the slightest. There would be no way for Ristia to go out into human society and *not* cause some sort of blunder. Unfortunately, there wasn’t a soul around in the dreary labyrinth that shared that prediction.



“Oh, I see the exit!” They hit the surface—a sight that Ristia perceived as having seen only a few hours prior. However, what spread before Ristia’s eyes was the unknown landscape of the human world after a thousand years.

Praying that there was a little sister out there waiting for her in a ray of hope, Ristia dashed forward.

## Episode 2: The Self-Proclaimed Normal Girl Descends Upon Civilization

The pair exited the labyrinth to the surface. There, a dense forest expanded before Ristia's eyes, making them light up in awe.

"Wowie... A long time really *has* passed, hasn't it~?"

"Did this area look different a thousand years ago, Ma'am?"

"Yes, most definitely. Back in my times, this whole place was one big plot of scorched earth."

"Scorched earth...? Was there some sort of war that transpired?"

"Mm-mm, nope. It was just that this area was inhabited by dragons."

"Oh... dragons. Right." The dragons that came to Nanami's mind were several meters tall, just like the one in the labyrinth. The dragons that Ristia spoke of, however, were ten times *bigger* than that, which was something that Nanami couldn't even fathom, so she had a look of disbelief draped across her face. Seemingly unaware of Nanami's expression, Ristia stretched her arms and started to bask in the light shining through the tree branches.

"Mmm~ The soft sunlight feels so good~"

"Yes, quite... Oh, Lady Ristia?! Are you okay with just *bathing in the sun*?!"

"I'm not okay. I'm actually so happy that I feel like breaking out into song and dance." Ristia smiled, putting her index finger over her lips and saying, "Keep it a secret." The pair were the only ones around, so it was a mystery as to whom she was keeping that a secret from, but Ristia's gesture was cute, nevertheless. Nanami found herself captivated by Ristia's display. That was, until...

"No, wait, wait, wait. That wasn't my point. Isn't the sunlight a vampire's weakness...?"

"Mm-mm. Our physical abilities drop to about half of they are at night when

exposed to sunlight, but it's not particularly a weakness."

"...Are you saying your abilities being cut by half *isn't* plenty reason enough to call it a weakness?" she said, making a logical point to the best of her knowledge, but Ristia returned with a perplexed look. "Why?" she asked.

"'Why' ...? That basically means that being exposed to the sunlight puts your strength at half-capacity compared to nighttime, correct?"

"Mm-mm, not at all."

"...Then what does it mean?"

"I mean that I only use a fraction of my strength normally anyway."

"You *whaaaaat*?!"

Nanami was flabbergasted that the "*hee-yah*" with just a fraction of Ristia's power behind it was enough to obliterate that dragon.

"That's why it's not necessarily a weakness."

"W-Well, when you put it that way... Yes, I suppose so."

If she only used a fraction of her power normally, then she would be perfectly fine even if her max physical abilities were halved. And to top it off, thinking about how she turned that dragon into ash back there with her fraction of a "*hee-yah*" made it hard to imagine that a day would come where Ristia would ever need to fight at her full power. Perhaps it was reasonable that Ristia herself never considered it a weakness.

"But I have heard about there being vampires who can't deal with the sunlight. Like, when it hits them, they become visibly weaker, or they even turn to ash in some cases. Rare cases, that is."

"Rare cases... I feel like I'm losing track of what's the norm as I converse with you, Lady Ristia."

"Why? I'm a normal girl." She cocked her head to the side in confusion. Her jet-black hair swayed as her pair of crimson eyes below her bangs pushed up from the smile set on her lips.

"Yes, silly me..." *I mean, what even is normal, anyway?* Nanami thought to

herself, unbeknownst to Ristia. “Ehehe...” Nanami adorably chuckled, coming to an agreement.

“Alrighty, then. Let’s head to town~”

“Yes, Ma’am. I will lead the way. It’s to the west of here. By foot, it would be about... a three day trek.”

“Okie dokie~” Ristia gave a sprightly nod as she started to walk in the direction of the town. After proceeding for a while, Ristia started to lead the charge. The dense forest was supposed to be a relative challenge to traverse on foot, but there Ristia was, walking in a sundress with the greatest of ease. Nanami was accustomed to going out on journeys, with the extra added bonus of feeling lighter than usual after being enchanted by Ristia’s healing magic. Despite that, it was Nanami who started to panic, as she felt as though she was about to get left behind.

“L-Lady Ristia! Please...” Before she could finish saying *“please wait a moment,”* Nanami cut herself off. Mostly because she knew she couldn’t be the one dragging the party down after she had been the one to volunteer her services as a guide. However, in the next moment, Nanami found her panic stemming from something else—that something being that the thicket surrounding her legs was avoiding her. That wasn’t a figure of speech, either. The grass and ivy were *quite literally* pushing themselves away from Nanami’s path—an otherworldly phenomenon that would be normally impossible.

*Could Lady Ristia, by any chance, be doing this for me?* That was what the girl thought as she looked back up to see Ristia walking a short ways ahead, checking up on her from over her shoulder.

“Are you alright, my dear Nanami? If you’re having a hard time, don’t hesitate to ask for my help,” she said with the kind smile of an angel.

“Thank you very much!”

*So kind and cute... Lady Ristia truly is an angel!* thought Nanami, *I would be oh-so happy if a girl like this were my big sister.*

However, the sentence engraved on the pedestal of the labyrinth room and Ristia’s own words came to Nanami’s mind. She never was able to really ask for

the exact reason Ristia lay sleeping in that cage, but apparently she was searching for her little sister. In other words, Ristia had a little sister that she parted with in life—or possibly even in death. There was no way she could just waltz up to her and ask if she minded being called “Big Sis.” Of course, she was totally misunderstanding the situation. If she were to propose that idea to Ristia, the princess would nod her head, jumping for joy all the while, but seeing as how there was no possible way for Nanami to know that, her thought process was led down a different avenue. It was the start of a series of unfortunate miscommunications.

At any rate, Nanami and Ristia proceeded through the forest at an abnormally fast pace, but clearing an ordinarily three-day hike in the span of one afternoon would be an impossible task for anyone. The sun started to set amidst the trees. That was also exactly when Nanami remembered something of great significance.

“Lady Ristia, I’m sorry, but I’ve forgotten that I don’t have any food left.” In addition to wasting several days that weren’t scheduled in the labyrinth, she cleared out her inventory to escape all the monsters, which left her without rations. She flew into a panic, thinking, *I can personally bear the hunger, but I cannot allow Lady Ristia to suffer in suit.*

“Hm? Dinner? Oh, right. I guess it is about time for dinner. But first...” Ristia said, waving her right hand. As soon as she did, the plot of land before their eyes was cleared out.

“...Excuse me?” Nanami was dumbfounded at the supernatural phenomenon. She had wiped out all the plants and vegetation that were in front of them and instantly created an empty plot of land. Nanami had never heard of a spell capable of this. Not only that, but Ristia hadn’t even drawn out a magic circle beforehand to do so. Normally, one would need to draw a magic circle and recite an incantation in order to use magic, but... it was said that you could omit the incantation and circle part from the highest-level of magic that one could use to about two levels down. Ristia was using a Level Four Item Box while omitting a magic circle, so she predicted that she was capable of at least using Level Six magic. However, her magic just now was without an incantation and was clearly above Level Four. *Perhaps Lady Ristia is able to use Level Seven*

*magic, the level the True Bloods were said to have reached before they went missing*, thought Nanami.

“Item Box, oooooopen on up~!”

While Nanami was standing around in surprise, Ristia used her Item Box with a drawn out voice. Then, in the empty plot that she just made, a small house popped into existence.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What is this house?!”

“Huh? If it were any bigger, it would destroy a lot of the trees here, so I decided on a smaller one, but... Would a bigger house have been better?”

“No, that wasn’t what I meant! I was... Haah, forget it.”

It was said that an Item Box’s storage capacity was proportionate to the user’s mana and magic skill levels. Nanami was told that the max storage capacity was about the volume of a wooden box carriable by human hands. With logical consideration, the idea of a house coming out of one of these was absurd. Yet, Ristia asked Nanami whether a bigger house would have been better, which meant that there was the possibility of there being other houses stowed away inside, but... Nanami just looked off into the distance, telling herself, *Thinking about it sure won’t help me here*.

“Okay, let’s head on inside~” Ristia adorably suggested as she went inside without a second’s hesitation. Nanami followed behind her timidly soon after.

“W-Well, here goes nothing... Oh, wow...”

Upon viewing the interior, Nanami had her breath taken away. The room was decorated with cute yet simple designs and also had a big bed and table.

“There is no kitchen, but there’s a shower and toilet in the back.”

“A... shower?”

“Yup. You can wash yourself with nice hot water~”

“Wait, I can *what?*” Usually, commoners would clean themselves with water from a bucket, so showers were a luxury. Aristocrats were able to take hot baths, but she had never heard of washing one’s body with hot water while camping in the forest. *She really is beyond the norm*, Nanami admired and let

out a slightly amazed sigh.

“Oh, but a house doesn’t necessarily have food. I will go out and search for something around the area, so would you mind waiting here? Actually... what do you eat, Lady Ristia?”

“What do I eat? Normal dishes.”

“Do you not need blood? If you do, then, um... would you care to drink my blood?”

To clarify, if Nanami were becoming a vampire’s kinswoman, she would not have to have her own blood sucked, but would instead need to drink the blood of the vampire in question. So in this case, she meant it purely as a way of offering sustenance. In the beginning, Nanami would have never offered up her own blood, but in the short time they’d spent together, she realized that Ristia was a kindhearted angel sent from the heavens above. Now, she adored her so much that she was willing to let Ristia drink her own blood if she needed it.

“Thank you, but I’ll be fine.”

“...Oh, you will?”

“Yup, I have heard that if I drink live human blood, then my physical abilities double for a few days, though.”

“...You’ve ‘heard,’ Ma’am?” Nanami asked, puzzled.

“Yup. I said so earlier, but I only use a fraction of my power anyway.”

“Ooh... So you don’t need the power, is what you’re saying. In that case, do you not have any vampiric impulses or anything of the sort?” she asked, thinking to herself, *Since she calls herself a vampire, drinking blood would be a common trait. In fact, you can’t really call someone a vampire unless they do suck blood.*

“I’d heard from Mother that I would have the impulses once I hit puberty or whatever, but... at the time being, I haven’t had anything like that.”

“Oh wow, is that so? In that case, if you do want to drink blood, please let me know. So long as my blood will do, I would not mind you drinking it whenever you need it.”

“Thank you, but even if that urge were to come over me, I don’t quite think I’d want to drink your blood, Nanami.”

“Huh? Does my blood seem gross, Ma’am?!” *If so, that’s a little bit of a shock*, Nanami thought to herself. Ristia, however, gave her a wry smile, ensuring her that wasn’t the case.

“Well, Nanami, sucking blood is for food, right? So, yes. I simply don’t wish to think of you as food.”

“...Lady Ristia.” Ristia didn’t exactly tell her that the full reason was Nanami being her special someone, but regardless, Nanami did get the impression that she thought of her in a special manner, which pleased her to hear.

“At any rate, I can eat normal food just fine.”

“I see. Okay, then. I’ll go hunt up an animal of some kind,” said Nanami as she was about to exit the house before Ristia stopped her, telling her to wait.

“There is food hot and ready right here, so you needn’t worry about that.” Ristia gently spread a tablecloth and started to skillfully put dishes on the table, including bowls of soup, a dish of meat, a bowl of salad, and a plate filled with bread. Steam was rising from the spread on the table, and it definitely looked freshly-made, but... an Item Box being a storage shed and the laws of time not applying to whatever was inside were things Nanami had never heard of. Although, that went without saying at this point.

*Guess that’s Lady Ristia for you...* Nanami thought, getting more and more acclimated to being around Ristia.

“All right, shall we eat before it gets cold?”

“Oh, it is all right if I eat?”

“But of course~ Come now, sit next to me.”

Nanami did as Ristia suggested, taking a seat right beside her. They were extremely close to one another, giving Nanami a good view of Ristia’s beautiful side profile, causing her to go flush in the face.

“Right then, let’s dig in~”

“Y-Yes, let’s,” Nanami said, but there appeared to be several spoons and forks



laid upon the table. Being the commoner that she was, there was no way that she would know proper cutlery manners, which was getting her extremely flustered.

“It’s okay. It makes me happy just to have you you share a meal with me, Nanami. So don’t worry about manners, and just enjoy your meal.”

“O-Oh, thank you very much. Well, then... Mm! Oh, wow. This is delicious!” Nanami took a bite of the meat and found it so delicious that her eyes went wide like saucers. “Th-This is simply delectable. I’ve never eaten a roast so delicious in my entire life!”



“Eheh. Why, thank you,” Ristia said with a very, very pleased smile. Little did Nanami know that Ristia was having a field day in her mind, thinking, *Omigod, Nanami just complimented me. I’m so happy!* However, she *did* know that her comment pleased Ristia, which was as good as it got.

“Did you happen to make this, Lady Ristia?”

“Uh-huh, I sure did. I had hoped to have my little sister share this meal with me one day.”

“Little sister... So you do have a younger sister, then?” she asked, thinking this a prime opportunity since Ristia herself had brought up the subject that was weighing on Nanami’s mind the whole time. However, as for Ristia’s response...

“...Mm-mm, not right now,” she said with a sad smile.

What she meant by that was Ristia’s extreme and intense desire for a little sister drove her to prepare dishes before her little sister would be born and preserve them with magic, but there was no way Nanami would have possibly perceived the same interpretation. Instead, Nanami intensely regretted ever asking. *She made this dish for her little sister, but that little sister isn’t here anymore. And she said that in such a sad tone. That could only mean that she was separated from her sister in death,* Nanami thought. She was a kind person, as well as her literal lifesaver. And despite the fact that Ristia was so much older, Nanami felt like she shouldn’t leave her side. She wanted to support Ristia any way she could.

*‘Lady Ristia? If you wouldn’t mind, could I possibly fill in for your little sister?’ Dream on. A mere human like me couldn’t dare ask for something so shameless. But if the time ever came where Lady Ristia did ask me to become her little sister, then in that case...* Nanami thought, keeping those ideas a secret as she partook in the lovely meal Ristia had prepared.



On the other hand, sharing a meal with Nanami had overwhelmed Ristia with emotion, since this was the first time she had ever shared a meal with a girl younger than her. Ristia had only ever eaten with her parents or her elder sisters. She was always on the receiving end of their love and comments of how

cute she was, but she was never the one giving the love. Hence why... she had interests. Interests that said, *I want to be a big sister! I want to dote over a little sister!* She had been prioritizing that so much that she didn't have a real concrete idea about how she wanted to go about actually getting a little sister. However...

“Lady Ristia, your cooking is stupendous! Amazing!”

Nanami was so innocently complimenting the meal Ristia had prepared, which was so cute that she couldn't even stand it. *I want to protect this girl. I want to turn her into my kinswoman and spend the equivalent of forever with her.* Those emotions were practically bursting from her chest. The feelings overwhelming her made her realize all at once, *Ah, shoot... This is probably how my big sisters felt about me.* Ristia also figured that if she could feel such bliss with Nanami now even though she *wasn't* her little sister, she would probably be in even more bliss if she *were*.

*I want a little sister. I want to make Nanami my little sister. Sweet Nanami, become my little sister!* Ristia thought, putting the emotions trapped in her heart into words and almost letting them fly out of her mouth, but Nanami was offering to show her to town to repay Ristia for saving her life. She even offered up her own blood if Ristia needed it. Nanami was returning a favor to Ristia. At this point, if Ristia had actually asked Nanami to become her kinswoman, the girl would probably obediently and instantly reply, *“If that is your wish, Lady Ristia, I will gladly do so,”* and become her little sister. But... that wasn't right.

What Ristia wanted was a girl who would fawn over her older sister earnestly, not a girl who was playing the part of a little sister out of obligation. *That's why I can't find it in me to ask her to become my little sister,* Ristia thought, swallowing down her sister-seeking request. But that didn't mean that she was giving up on making Nanami her little sister; she was going to expend as much effort as she could to make certain that Nanami would offer to take that role on her very own. Ristia kept her decision to herself as she watched Nanami gleefully eat her meal.

The following afternoon, Ristia and Nanami made it to a spot where a city

enclosed by stone walls was visible in the distance.

“Lady Ristia, the city you see over there is the one I live in, Sistania!” Nanami was ecstatic. She gave off the impression that she was a docile and introverted girl at first, but over the past two days, she had become a lot more exuberant. She just wasn’t adoring her as an older sister, but worshiping her like an angel, which was a source of discontent for Ristia... but Nanami wasn’t quite picking up on that.

*I’m glad that she’s adoring me, but it’s not supposed to be this way!* Ristia thought, unable to help herself from lamenting her situation.

In any case, the two girls managed to reach the entrance of the city. That was when an older man dressed like a knight performing visitor checks came up to them.

“Welcome to Sistania, Young Miss. What brings you to this city?”

“Saving people!”

“...Pardon?” The soldier looked dumbfounded at Ristia’s unhesitant response.

“Like I said, I’m here to save children in need.”

“You’re... seriously saying that?”

“Lady Ristia is an angel!”

“Angel? What in the... Wait, Nanami? My word, you’re actually safe!” the man exclaimed, running over to Nanami.

“Ooh, it really is you, Nanami. Thank goodness. So you were safe after all. Everyone was worried since the reconnaissance team didn’t come back on the day they were supposed to!” Nanami bit her lip and hung her head in regret. The soldier made a doubtful expression in response to Nanami’s shift in attitude. “Speaking of which, where are the other members?”

“...Everyone was killed.” Nanami’s words took the man’s breath away, but his expression soon tensed up to brace himself.

“...What happened?”

“Monsters were living in that labyrinth. One by one, everyone was picked off.

The only reason I'm alive is thanks to Lady Ristia here."

"Lady Ristia'? Well, I'm not sure what you mean, but I'm glad that you're safe, regardless. I'll go ahead and contact the guild, so you just hold tight, okay?" The soldier said, running off somewhere. Ristia watched him do so, pointing her eyes over to the streets visible from the other side of the gate. Lining the main street were buildings of stacked stone. Even in comparison to the humans of Ristia's generation, they hadn't made much progress. In fact, it seemed as if they'd *regressed*. However, the scale of the city was overwhelmingly larger than any city that Ristia knew of.

"This city sure is huge~"

"Believe it or not, it isn't very large as far as cities go."

"Wowie, humans truly have grown in number, I see. So how many people live in this city?"

"I've heard about twenty to thirty thousand."

"That sure is a lot to me~" *Even if the human lifespan was a century long, they would produce two to three hundred people per generation. Half of them might be girls, but by my calculations, that means there are easily a thousand candidates to be my little sister in this city!* Ristia thought to herself. At the same time, she formulated a plan to find herself a little sister in this city.

"Nanami, I have a request."

"Please, leave it to me."

"Right, but I haven't told you anything yet. It's not good to accept a request when you don't even know what you're going to be asked, you know?"

"It's no problem, Ma'am."

"It *is* a problem..." Ristia let out a slight sigh.

Not asking Nanami to become her little sister was the right option. At this rate, if she were to pretend to be her little sister out of obligation, the situation would have been unsalvageable. Instead, she planned on not rushing her relationship with Nanami, taking her time and building up their bond little by little.

“So, what would you like me to do for this request of yours?”

“The request is in regards to my identity. I’d like you to keep it a secret from others as much as possible.”

“But why?! You’re asking me to hide the fact that you’re an angel to everyone, Lady Ristia?!” she blurted out in a scream. Ristia was bewildered by Nanami’s reaction.

“I’m sure you already know, but I’m not an angel, okay? But that’s not the point. What I want you to keep secret is the fact that I’m a True Blood. I want to live as a normal girl.” As a result of letting Nanami know that she was a True Blood, it scared the girl and made Ristia promise not to make her a kinswoman. Ristia considered that a failure, which was why she wanted to behave like a normal girl—a normal, *human* girl—making sure that her true identity was kept a secret until she built up a relationship of trust.

“Live as a normal girl, Ma’am...?” she said, almost as if she wanted to ask if that was even possible.

“I may be a True Blood, but I am basically just a regular girl, so I’ll be fine if you just keep quiet about that fact, Nanami.”

“I think you should come to realize a bit just how powerful you are, Lady Ristia,” Nanami said with a disappointed face, causing Ristia to sink her shoulders.

“You think it... won’t work?” she dejectedly asked, the resulting cuteness being enough to utterly captivate Nanami, despite being of the same sex.

“No, it *will* work! I will keep your secret with every fiber of my being!”

“...Really?”

“Please, just leave it to me!”

“Oh, yay! Thank you!” Ristia innocently smiled with an eagle grip on Nanami’s heart. Unfortunately, there was no one around to interject and tell her that she wasn’t going to make for much of a big sister with the kind of attitude she had on display. The older man who had just run off not that long ago came back to Ristia, who was now in a chipper mood.

“Sorry for the wait. The guild sent out an envoy, so he should be here to escort you soon,” the soldier informed Nanami before turning his attention back to Ristia. “So, you’re the one who saved Nanami’s life, Little Lady?”

“Um, well...”

“This is my savior, Lady Ristia!” Nanami emphatically affirmed.

“...Well, you heard her,” Ristia confirmed with a wry smile.

“I see. Then, you have my thanks, as well. I appreciate you saving Nanami’s life.”

“Mm-mm, think nothing of it. I wanted to help save her, so I did; that’s all,” Ristia said, this time with a more untainted and pure smile. The man looked at that innocent smile and exclaimed in adoration.

“...Seems that you being here for saving children isn’t a lie. Are you some kind of holy woman on a pilgrimage, or something, by chance?”

“Not at all. I’m just a normal girl. But I’m telling the truth when I say I want to help the kids!”

“Hmm... I don’t quite get what’s going on, but you don’t seem to be ill-willed. In that case, I’ll issue your identification papers.”

“‘Identification papers’?”

“Yeah, we check for any suspicious people here every day. Identification papers serve as proof that you’ve taken your check here.”

“Oh? Is that a fact?” The True Blood family was so few in numbers that it was no exaggeration to say she was familiar with every last member. That was why, since it was natural that they did not have such a system put in place, Ristia found the concept novel in a sense.

“I’ll print your name and occupation on the tags, so would you mind telling me what those are?”

“My name is Ristia Granshes. My occupation is... Normal Girl?”

“...Hmm. Well, I guess that’ll work.” The soldier embossed her name and occupation onto the tag using a magic tool. “And that should... do it.”



Registration fee is one silver piece.”

“By ‘silver piece’ ... you mean money, correct?”

“That’s right, but... I’m assuming you don’t have any?”

“Um, well... Yeah.”

The soldier man looked surprised. A silver piece was by no means a high price. It would have been a different story if it were a random child, but it was hard to even imagine that a traveler, much less a well-kempt young girl like this, would be penniless.

“Lady Ristia, I will pay for you!” Nanami said, offering to bail Ristia out. However, Ristia herself seemed troubled. It was because, as someone trying to be a respectable big sister, she couldn’t allow herself to get spoiled by one of her little sister candidates.

“Say, Mister? In place of money, can I... give you something else?”

“Something else? Well, you did apparently save Nanami’s life. If you have something equivalent to a single silver piece, then I’d be willing to take it. But... what are you offering?”

“Um, well... How about this?” Ristia pulled out a leather satchel from her Item Box.

“Hm? Where did you just pull that... Wait, forget that, you *did* have a purse this whole time.”

“Mm-mm, this isn’t a purse; this has a catalyst used for magic items in it~” From inside, she pulled out a small, jet-black stone. It was cut into seventeen sides, known as a “simple cut.” It was, as the name implied, simple—yet very delicate by the standards of this world at the same time.

“W-Wait a second, Lady Ristia?” Nanami sheepishly asked, tugging on the hem of Ristia’s dress. However, not wishing to be spoiled by her would-be little sister, Ristia cut Nanami off before she could say anything. “Sorry, it’ll have to wait.” She then handed the soldier man the black stone.

“What the? It’s mighty pretty, but is it some kind of gemstone?”

“It’s an artificial one that I made.”

“Oh-ho... So you did, Little Miss?”

If there were any aristocrats there, they would have been captivated by the stone’s beauty. And if there were any sorcerers there, they would be dumbstruck by the mana levels the stone contained. In fact... Nanami, a budding sorcerer herself, already found herself dumbstruck. For better or worse, the soldier man only recognized it as a pretty stone.

“So you’re going to pay the toll with this stone, then?”

“Yup. Oh, is that... okay?”

“Hmm... I don’t see the harm. I don’t really know how valuable it is, but I’m pretty darn sure it can’t be less than a silver bit. I’ll make it into a pendant and gift it to my wife,” the soldier whispered with a kind look in his eyes.

“...Mister, you have a wife?”

“Sure do. A wife and a daughter.”

“A... daughter? Just one? You’re not going to make a second?”

“...Well, it would be nice if we could. My wife isn’t in the best condition, y’see.”

“Is she sick or something?”

“Something like that, yeah...”

“Oh, I see. Okay, then. Wait just a second.”

She pulled out some material from her Item Box and cast a spell of Sixth-Level magic—the highest level of magic one could use without a magic circle or incantation. Nanami and the soldier’s eyes drew toward Ristia’s hand, where the materials changed shape before their eyes and turned into a pendant with a piece of black magic stone.

“Eheh, all right. Your pendant is all done~”

“Wait just a second. Just now, what in the world did you...”

“Oh, it’s just my treat~ This is enchanted to improve your wife’s condition, so once she gets better, make sure to get to work on that second child, okay~?”

“Young Miss, I... Thank you! Here, take these as tokens of my gratitude.” The

soldier held her wrist, making her open her palm. Inside of it, he deposited two silver pieces.

“But...”

“My treat to you, Miss. That will at least get you through a night’s stay.”

“Thank you, Mister~!” Ristia thanked him with an unadulterated smile.

“Hahah, boy, it seems that Nanami wasn’t fibbing when she said you were an angel.”

“I’m just a normal girl, though~!”

“Okay, okay. I get it. So then, Little Miss ‘Normal Girl’, I have a favor to ask.”

“Hm? Yes~?”

“While you’re taking stay in this city, I’d appreciate it if you’d make friends with my daughter if you ever get a chance to meet her. She’s been wanting a sister for a while now.”

“...!! Oh, yes, yes! The feeling’s mutual!” *Yippie! A candidate for my cute little sister~* thought Ristia with a smile from ear to ear.

“Alright, you two better get along. You’ll be up the creek if you don’t snag a place to stay before it gets dark.”

“Okay, thank you, Mister~” The soldier man saw the pair off as the two walked through the city’s front gate.



*Boy, she was quite the odd young lady. Innocent and naive... and Nanami called her an angel, but what in the world is she actually?* The older soldier that saw Ristia and Nanami off, named Kurz, thought to himself as he performed traveler checks.

“Kurz, you around?”

“Yes, right here. Anything the matter, Sir?” The gatekeeper captain called him, prompting him to immediately jog over.

“No, nothing in particular. I just came to tell you that you’re free to head out soon.”

“...Are you sure, Sir?” There was still some time left until the scheduled bell rang.

“Well, it’s not like we’ve got a ton of travelers today. You hurry on back home to your wife.”

“...Yes, thank you very much, Captain,” Kurz said in gratitude to his captain before hurrying on his way back home.

He made it to a small single house tucked in the corner of the city. Kurz took a breath, straightened his face out into a smile, and entered his home.

“Oh, welcome back, Dad. You’re back home early.”

“Yeah, the captain let me off my shift early out of consideration. Where’s Anna?”

“Mom? She’s sleeping in her room.”

“Ah, alright. I’m going to go check up on her.”

“Yup, feel free.”

His daughter, Remi, watched him walk off as he headed into his bedroom, where his wife was sleeping. There on the bed was Kurz’s wife, Anna, resting.

“...Welcome back, Dear.”

“Sorry, did I wake you?”

Anna shook her head in response in a rather feeble manner. Her being in that state it wasn’t unreasonable, given the circumstances. Anna had fallen victim to a monster attack in the woods about a month ago and sustained massive injuries. The injuries were so massive, in fact, that not even magic could help to cure them; it was a miracle that she had made it out with her life. But as a result, she grew gradually weaker, and she was told that she might not live for very much longer.

“Dear, what is that you have in your hand?”

“Hm? Oh, this? It’s a present for you.” Kurz walked over to her bedside and showed his wife the pendant that he bought off of Ristia.

“Oh my... it’s gorgeous. And you’re giving it to me...?”

“Sure am. Looking back, I realized I’ve never actually given you a present before.”

“Thank you so much, Dear. Could I bother you to put it on for me... please?” Anna asked him with a slightly troubled expression. Upon seeing that, Kurz felt like kicking himself for being so tactless. Anna had lost her arm as a result of her massive injuries, and she wasn’t able to operate her other arm all that well. Kurz bit his lip for a second, but quickly put on a face as if nothing was wrong and proceeded, saying, “Of course I’ll put it on for you. Let’s see... Hmm, like this, I guess?” as he closed the clasp of the pendant around Anna’s neck.

“Hmm, yup. It looks perfect on you.”

“Hee hee, flattery will get you nowhere, Dear.”

“Flattery, my foot. It’s the truth.” Even Anna’s face had severe scarring. In spite of that and the other injuries, her good-natured personality remained the same. Kurz thought, from the bottom of his heart, that Anna was the world’s best wife.

“This is such a delight, Dear. I’m truly blessed to have been your wife.”

“...You big dummy. Don’t go saying stuff like things are already over.”

“I’m sorry... But I just wanted to make sure you knew. I’m pretty sure I don’t have long. So... hey, Dear? Once I die, please take care of our daughter.”

“Stop it. *Please*, just stop.” Anna was a kindhearted woman who everyone adored. She used to go looking for medicinal plants for the sake of others—a truly compassionate woman. *Why in the hell did this have to happen to Anna of all people?* he thought, cursing fate. Kurz stood shaking with his fist balled up tight as Anna did nothing but smile in a slightly forlorn manner—at least, she was until surprise suddenly came over Anna’s expression.

“Wh-What is this? My face feels hot for some reason... No, not just my face. My whole body is burning up... Aah, my wounds. My wounds are burning!”

“What? Anna, are you alright?! Urk, Remi, come here! *Quick!*” Kurz started to panic once he saw Anna suddenly writhe in pain. Remi dashed into the room after she heard Kurz’s scream.

“What’s wrong, Dad?!”

“I don’t know. Anna just started suddenly started saying something about her wounds burning.”

“Burning? Mom! Are you alright?!” Remi ran over to Anna’s side... and had her breath taken away. “Dad, look... look at this.”

“What? What’s wro—” Kurz looked over to the spot that Remi was pointing to only to have his breath taken away, as well.

The terrible scars that were on Anna’s face were wrapped in a rainbow-colored light and started to disappear right before his eyes. Witnessing this sight caused him to go dumbfounded.

“Y-You’re... What is that? What’s going on?”

“I don’t know what... Oh my, the burning sensation has finally subsided.” Anna sat up in bed in a lively manner before stretching out wide with a refreshed expression and tiny grunt, “Mm~!” It was an unbelievable sight that left Kurz and his daughter Remi’s jaws on the floor. “Oh my, why are you two making that face?”

“W-Why are *we*? What about *you*?! A-Are *you* okay?”

“Huh? Oh... Now that you mention it, I do feel pretty good.”

“N-No, you’ve got the wrong...” Before he could finish his sentence with “idea,” his daughter’s hysteric shout cut him off.

“M-M-M-M-Mom! Your arm! Look at your arm!”

“What’s with my arm now? ...Huh?” Anna held out both of her hands in front of herself... and her eyes opened wide. There before her were both of her arms—both completely unscathed. It was something fundamentally impossible. Mostly because Anna had lost her right arm when that monster assaulted her.

“Why is my arm back to normal?!”

“I-I don’t know. But I think that light a second ago helped you grow a new arm!”

“G-Grow? What are you talking about? Arms don’t just grow on bodies.”

“But it *did* grow. The proof is right there!”

As he watched his wife and child fly into a frenzy, Kurz was the only one who realized the source of this miracle. He had caught a glimpse of the pendant around her neck shining once Anna’s wounds did the same. It prompted Kurz to think to himself, *I can’t believe it... That young lady really was an angel this entire time.*

—3—

Stone buildings lined the sides of the main street as Ristia and Nanami arrived. It was bustling with people transporting goods via horse-drawn carriage and people who seemed to be going home from the day’s work.

“Wowie... so many people~” The most Ristia had seen of humans was a small settlement. This was the first time she was able to see so many people living their daily lives like this. Ristia spread her arms and started turning around, stating how amazing it all was. However, just then...

“Lady Ristia, we need to talk.”

“Huh?”

“Just come over here.”

Nanami grabbed her by the arm and brought her over to the edge of the road.

“What’s wrong?”

“‘What’s wrong?’ Don’t give me that. That pendant earlier was enchanted, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, and?”

“‘Yes, and’? Don’t do this to me~...” Nanami clutched her head, stumped, as she had to repeat herself, leading from one headache to another. “Lady Ristia, you want to behave like a normal girl, right?”

“I’ve *been* a normal girl from the start.”

“A normal girl *doesn’t* just effortlessly enchant things like that!”

“Huh? Then, should I... put more effort to enchanting them?”

“More effort isn’t going to help!”

“Then, should I... put *a lot* more effort into it?”

“Okay, let me be frank, Lady Ristia. Just like how a person will never be able to fly on their own regardless of how hard they try, there are just some things in this world where effort alone amounts to nothing.”

“...Huh? But I can fly.”

“And I’m telling you that is *not normal*...” Nanami was getting discouraged.

Ristia had no clue herself, but even a millennium ago, humans were said to only be able to use up to Fourth-Level magic, and it was said that humans of this era were considered top class if they were able to use Third-Level magic. Of course, Level Three had enchantments as well, but the level at which they could handle them was altogether different. Essentially, it was common for a skilled sorcerer to take a long time in crafting an enchanted item. They weren’t the type of things that could be quickly popped out in a few seconds under any circumstances.

“By the way, what kind of abilities did you enchant it with?”

“I believe it was regenerative magic. Holding it in your possession will heal all wounds.” Before Ristia reached the end of her sentence, Nanami’s eyes, glued to her cute face, squinted dubiously at her. Seeing that, of course, made Ristia begin to think that she may have overdone it again. “Did I do something... bad, by any chance?”

“It is most certainly odd, to say the least. If that was some sort of healing enchantment, then it would normally help seal a wound on a finger for entire day, at the very most.”

“...Huh? But can’t that just instantaneously happen without even using an enchantment?”

“For a normal person, that alone would take several days.”

“O-Oh, you don’t say...”

Even if her body were reduced to cinders, Ristia would recover in few seconds, so to her, the fact that a simple wound on the finger took a few days to heal was outside of her realm of understanding.



“Then was having it heal any wound in a matter of seconds going overboard?”

“‘Overboard’ is one way of putting it, but I’d say it reaches into Artifact territory. If you were to sell it, you could afford more than just a stay at an inn. You could have several full mansions erected on its value alone.”

“Wha? It’s *that* remarkable?” *Shoot, I could easily mass produce those if I wanted to...* Ristia humored the ridiculous thought, but she had the good judgment not to utter that aloud.

“Should we go back and have him exchange it for something else?”

“...Hmm, would it be bad otherwise?”

“I’m not certain. The enchantment was *just* for regeneration... right?”

“Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. That was all.”

“In that case... I think it should be alright. If all it does is heal some slight bruises and illnesses, then it will probably be able to pass as an especially effective good luck charm.”

“Mm, I see... What if he gets it appraised, by the way?”

“I can’t say that would be impossible for him to do, but he didn’t seem to suspect anything, so I doubt he would go through the trouble of going to get it appraised. Now, if his wife were severely injured, it would be a different story, but I’m going to go out on a limb and say things will be just fine,” said Nanami decisively. Of course, she was clueless to the fact that Kurz’s wife *was indeed* severely injured, just as she described. Agreeing with the conclusion Nanami had come to, Ristia casually nodded her head.

As a result of Ristia’s actions, a huge uproar did occur—but it was one that Ristia and Nanami only caught wind of much later down the road.

“Then we’ll let it be.”

“The value of it doesn’t concern you, Ma’am...? I’m certain its value is through the roof, after all.”

“Nope. He was a kindly older man, so I want his wife to get nice and healthy.” In reality, Ristia had helped out so that the couple could raise a potential little sister, intending to help along her search with their only daughter... Well, not

that Nanami knew about any of that. In her eyes, this only fortified her reverence for Ristia, making her think, *She truly is an angel!*

“Nanami!” A voice suddenly echoed as a young man came running toward the young girl. Upon seeing that, Ristia scooped Nanami up into her arms like a fairy-tale princess.

“Nanami—Whoa?!” Having lost his target, the young man hugged nothing but air, taking a headfirst dive into the ground below. Or so it seemed, but he managed to brace his legs and stop himself just before it could happen.



“L-Lady Ristia?!”

“...Is this an acquaintance of yours, perchance? If so, I’m sorry. I saw you running toward her out of nowhere, and I was reminded of what happened with Mr. Gawain.”

“N-No, that is understandable... b-but I cannot believe y-you’re carrying me in your arms p-p-p-princess style. I, um... Hngh~” Her entire face went red as can be while she went into a panic in Ristia’s arms. Ristia felt her heart go aflutter as she laid eyes on the nape of Nanami’s neck, facing away from her, from up close.

“Hey, you! Who are you?!” Suddenly, she was asked for her identity by a blunt voice.

*...Huh? What was I doing just now...?* Ristia regained her senses, turning her attention over to the direction of the voice. There stood the young man who had tried to charge at Nanami just a few moments ago, glaring a hole through Ristia. He seemed to be a few years older than Ristia—perhaps in his twenties—with powerful facial features.

“I’m Ristia.”

“Okay, Ristia. And who are you to Nanami?”

“What am I to her?”

Ristia looked down at Nanami, then back to the young man.

“...What *am* I to her?”

“I’m the one who asked *you*, dammit!”

“Stop it...! Don’t charge at Lady Ristia!” Nanami interrupted their bickering, having come back to her senses.

“Lady Ristia, you can let me down; everything is okay.”

“Oh, um... ‘Kay.” Ristia slowly placed Nanami down on solid ground.

“Lady Ristia is the person who saved my life, so don’t be rude to her, Big Brother,” Nanami spoke clearly.

“She saved your life...? Saved your life how?”

“‘B-Big Brother’...? Nanami, you had a big brother this whole time?!” Next to the perplexed young man, Ristia was unbelievably shocked. *Th-This is unreal. Nanami already had an older brother! Does that mean that, no matter how hard I try, I can never become her older sister?! J-J-J-Just, just gotta calm down. Just because she has an older brother, it doesn’t mean I can’t be her older sister. Yeah, it’s alright. I got this!*

“...Um, Lady Ristia?”

“O-Oh. Don’t mind me. Just a little surprised because I didn’t know you had an older brother.”

“Aah... Um, Rick is my stepbrother. He took me in when I lost my relatives, and he saved me from being sold to slave traders.”

“He took you in...?! *Stepbrother?! B-But that’s...*” Ristia’s eyes widened in disbelief as she looked at the young man named Rick. Rick, on the other hand, had a discontent look on his face for some reason.

“Okay, let me clarify. Me taking Nanami in was just how things played out; I didn’t have any nefarious reasons for...”

“You have my respect!”

“...You what now?”

“I mean, you took in a lost girl off the streets and made her your stepsister, didn’t you?! I think that is a very, very big deal. It’s an amazing accomplishment, in my opinion!”

“O-Oh, then you understand my struggle?”

“Of course!” Ristia emphatically agreed with her eyes lit bright. Well, she agreed through the context of her own standards. *Searching for a lost girl on the street is a big deal, gaining their trust even if you do find one is a big deal, and getting her to agree to be your little sister is, needless to say, a very big deal. But being able to do that in spite of all the factors weighed against you is incredible. I am so jealous!*

“So, err, Lady... Ristia, was it?”

“Just Ristia is fine~”

“Be that as it may, Ma’am, I, uh...” Rick turned his eyes toward the clothes Ristia was wearing. Nanami was adding the title to Ristia’s name, so he seemed to think she had an appropriate reason to do so.

“I’ve been telling Dear Nanami here to speak to me in a more casual tone.”

“I could never do something so ostentatious.”

“...As you can plainly see, I’m just a normal girl, though~” Ristia had been trickling out appeals every so often to the girl with a sentiment that suggested, *I’m trying to tell you that I don’t mind if you call me ‘Big Sis’ and fawn all over me.* However, Nanami describing the idea as ‘ostentatious’ was the harsh blow that struck that idea down.

“...Mnghh~” Ristia grumbled, pouting her lips.

“Okay... Can’t say I get the whole picture, but anyway... So, Ristia...”

“Grr...” Nanami launched a death glare at Rick so intense that it was hard to imagine it coming from someone as sweet and innocent as her. The pressure coming from her stare caused a drop of sweat to drip from his cheek and prompted him to clear his throat.

“I-I mean, Ms. Ristia. Nanami said that you ‘saved her life,’ but would you mind explaining that? Does that have something to do with the recon team not coming back on the day they were scheduled to return?”

“Well...”

“...I’ll elaborate on that, Big Brother.” Nanami prefaced her story, revealing that the labyrinth they were meant to investigate was a den of monsters and how there was a dragon in the deepest regions of the labyrinth that wiped out nearly the entire reconnaissance team.

“Wait, a dragon?! You mean that you’re safe and sound after a run-in with *that?!?*”

“I am safe and sound, seeing as I’m back home now. Although, if Lady Ristia hadn’t saved me back there, I probably would have been a goner.”

“Hold on, then what you’re telling me is... Ms. Ristia here *beat* that dragon?” Rick pointed his eyes toward Ristia in utter disbelief as the mysterious girl gave

off a rather wry smile in response. The angelic smile she flashed caused Rick to blush.

“...Hey, Big Brother?”

“R-Right. Uh, what were we talking about again?”

Rick hastily turned his attention back after being addressed by a slightly displeased-sounding Nanami. Ristia was privy to the fact that Rick couldn't take his eyes off of her back there. *It doesn't help that Rick seems to view me as younger than him, and a potential little sister, to boot. I can't say I blame Nanami for being jealous and worrying since she's already his little sister. But you needn't worry your pretty little head. I'm not going to be a little sister. I'm going to be an older one!* Ristia thought, completely missing the mark on just about everything.

“So, as I was saying about Lady Ristia... Oh, before I get into that, actually— Lady Ristia has yet to decide on her lodgings for today. So... would it be okay?”

“Hm? Oh, sure. I don't mind, but you think it'll be okay having her stay at our place?”

“I think it'll be okay.”

“Alright, no problems with me, then.”

“Thanks, Big Brother!” It appeared that Ristia's accommodations had been settled right under her nose.

“What was that about?” she asked, looking at Nanami.

“Would you like to stay at my house today, Lady Ristia?”

“At your house, Nanami?”

“Yes. To be more accurate, I simply stay there, but... there's still no shortage of rooms.”

“While I appreciate the sentiment, wouldn't I be intruding? I do have money for an inn.”

“You'll be penniless if you spend that money... Plus, I want to talk things over with you about how much I should tell my brother and whatnot.” Nanami drew

her face closer, stood on her tiptoes, and whispered into Ristia's ear. It was a sight so cute that Ristia found her arms wrapped around Nanami in an embrace.

“Eek! L-Lady Ristia?!”

“Oh, sorry about that. You were so cute I got the sudden urge.”

“C-Cute...? Hnff... U-Um, so, will you be staying with us?”

“I certainly appreciate it, but...” Ristia pointed her eyes over to Rick for confirmation to make sure their plans were really fine.

“If you're Nanami's savior, then you're a savior to me. Don't feel like you'd be putting us out. Also, there's a bunch I'd like to talk to you about.”

“Right, thank you. If that's the case, then I appreciate the hospitality!”

—4—

They eventually came to the house in which Nanami's family lived. It was a small magic item shop that was located a short ways away from the main street.

“This is our house. It's tight on space, but please come on in.” Rick entered the shop with Nanami and Ristia following right behind him.

“Welcome to th' sho—oh, shoot, it's just you, Rick. Brought yerself back, eh?”

“Yeesh, don't sound so excited, Mom. Anyway, forget that. Look, Nanami is back home,” Rick said, moving a step to the side. Once he did, Ristia and Nanami were able to see the woman tending to the shop.

While Rick called her ‘Mom,’ she looked more like a younger woman in her late-twenties. And since Rick also looked to be in his twenties, seeing them in a mother-son dynamic didn't quite click. Then again, once True Bloods reached a point where they became self-reliant—in other words, when they started looking like young boys and girls—they would start aging at an extremely slow rate. Given that, Ristia did not find anything particularly peculiar about the two.

“...Nanami? Nanami!” The woman looked at Nanami, stood up with some clatter, and rushed over to her at breakneck speed.

“Nanami! Oh, thank God! Yer safe ‘n’ sound!”



“Wah-phh! Urgh~ Can’t breathe~” Nanami squirmed around, having her air supply cut off by the ample bosom hugging her *extremely* tight.

“*Hah...* Really, thank the lucky stars yer safe ‘n’ sound. Y’didn’t come back home when your team was s’posed ta, so I got worried t’death.”

“...Aww. I’m sorry, Mom.”

“Y’really put my heart through the wringer. So... what in th’ world even happened?”

“Well, the reconnaissance team got wiped out...”

“The recon team got wiped out?!” Nanami went on to explain that the reconnaissance team was attacked by monsters, demolished, and that she was rescued from danger. Her mother was shocked to hear the news, but she hugged her, glad that she at least had made it out in one piece. It was a heartwarming scene of family love, a scene that reminded Ristia of her own family as she looked on.

Ristia’s family wouldn’t fall to decay over the course of a mere thousand years, and it was impossible to think that another tribe could have wiped them out. However, it was equally impossible to think that they would just abandon her for over the course of a thousand years, as well. *They should be alive somewhere, but what they’re doing and where is the question. I should probably go looking for them soon,* Ristia thought.

“So who is that lil’ lady who’s been standin’ there this whole time?”

“That is Lady Ristia.”

“Uh... Lady Ristia?”

“My savior from the explanation I just gave. I wanted to thank her, and I asked that she follow me back home. So would it be okay if she stays over at our... Um, Mom?” Nanami tilted her head in confusion partway through her introduction, realizing that her mother wasn’t giving her any sort of reaction. Rather, the young lady remained frozen once she looked at Ristia, for some reason.

*What happened to her?* pondered Ristia, tilting her head as well.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Who is this girl?! Oh my God, she’s as cute as can be! Is she some sort of doll? Is she some sort of livin’ doll?!”

“Um, I am not a doll; I’m a normal girl.”

“*Haaaah*, and with a voice as cute as a button, t’boot! Can I hug you? Oh, hell, I’m gonna hug you whether y’like it or not! Bring it in! *Huuuuugs!*” She kept true to her words, giving Ristia an intense hug.

*Now that I’m getting smooshed by this lady’s breasts, she really is the spitting image of my sisters,* Ristia mentally noted.

“Hey, look, Nanami. Ms. Ristia isn’t flinching at all.”

“That’s Lady Ristia for you!” Also, for some reason, she received a boost to her reputation. That encouragement made Ristia think, *If it will get Nanami to call me ‘Big Sis,’ then I’ll gladly raise my reputation myself in their eyes.* As she thought that, she waited for the young lady to get her fill from the hug.

A short time passed, and she finally let go.

“*Haah~* Best hug I ever did have. Okay, so, you’re... Lady Ristia, I reckon?”

“Ristia will suffice~ I’m just a normal girl, after all,” Ristia uttered innocently.

“Oh? Is that a fact...?” the young lady whispered with an exhale. “Not only did I get th’ jump on ya by not mindin’ my manners, I hugged your lil’ guts out. But you don’t look angry in th’ slightest. Huh... Here I was, thinkin’ you were some pompous aristocrat girl, but I guess I got proved wrong.”

“Yup, I’m certainly no aristocrat.” She wasn’t going to go out of her way to say, *‘Why, yes, I am a True Blood princess.’*

“Hey, hold up, Mom. Were you testing her, thinking she was an aristocrat? What were you gonna do if she actually did get angry?”

“Hah! Obviously, I’d grovel for forgiveness, Son,” she said with a sweet smile. Rick sighed in response.

“Well, even so, I’m glad to see you like her. Me and Nanami are gonna go report to the guild, so could you keep Ms. Ristia here company in the meantime?”

“Huh? Big Brother? Wait a second, I need to talk to Lady Ristia.”

“Save it for later.”

“Whaa? L-Lady Ristiaaaa...” Nanami looked over to Ristia, hoping she would bail her out. She’d mentioned earlier that she wanted to discuss with her how openly she should speak about the whole dragon-slaying business, so it probably meant trouble if she got dragged off to the guild before they could get their stories straight. Hence why Ristia smiled and told her that she’d leave things up to her.

“No, that isn’t my point here. Well, it is, to some degree, but... Lady Ristia, please have some self-control, okay?”

“Mm-hmm, it’s alright. I’ll sit here patiently and wait for you to come back.”

“That really doesn’t sound ‘alright’ in the slightest, though.”

“C’mon, let’s hurry up and go.”

“Waaah, okay, okay! I’m coming! I’m coming, so stop dragging me~!” Rick proceeded to haul Nanami off.

*This kind of... How should I put it? It kind of makes me realize that forceful older siblings run across the board, regardless of tribe,* Ristia thought in a carefree manner.

“Now then, Ristia, m’dear... Oh, is the ‘dear’ part too much?”

“Why, of course not, oh... um...”

“Name’s Eindebelle. Belle’s just fine.”

“Got it, Sis. Belle it is.”

“S-Sis?!” Eindebelle seemed shaken.

“Is that off-limits...?”

“N-No, that’s not what I meant by that. It’s just that Rick and Nanami are always treatin’ me the way they do, y’know? So I kinda braced up ta get treated like an old lady.”

“The way they do? What way?” Ristia cocked her head in confusion, not all that privy to what she meant.

“Ah, right. They didn’t fill y’in on that. All I did was take in those two and raise ‘em. So, y’see, I’m not their real mom.”

“So you’re not their mom, but they call you... Mom? Not ‘Big Sis,’ or something like that?” Ristia was shaken, since if she were the one with a younger girl under her care that loved and adored her, she would have naturally had her call her ‘Big Sis’ instead.

“I know that the age gap would warrant them treatin’ me like an older sister, yeah. But, well... those kids probably ended up wantin’ a mom more than a sister.”

“That... must be tough, I’m assuming.”

“So ya understand my struggle?!”

“Why, yes! Of course I do!” she replied, in a rare case of comprehending the situation—so far.

“Ristia, m’dear, you’re a darling. Wanna be my lil’ sister?”

“I appreciate the offer, but I have two older sisters of my own. Sorry.”

“Oh wow, y’got two of ‘em, huh?”

“Yup, I’m not really sure where they are right now, though.”

“...! Ah, hey, sorry ‘bout that...”

“It’s okay. It doesn’t bother me,” Ristia said with an adorable smile, simply thinking that they were off wandering around somewhere just like she was. However, since Eidebelle had no idea about her situation, she mistook that as there being some deeper reason at play. She wiped the forming tears from her eyes, thinking, *She’s got it so rough, but she’s still able to keep an open heart for others? This kid is too kind, I tell ya.* Ristia was completely oblivious to this misunderstanding, however.

“Gettin’ back on topic, Nanami said ya were the one who saved her life. Thank ya. And I mean that from the heart.”

“Oh no, I just so happened to be around; that’s all.”

“Even so, you saved her all the same, and that’s what counts here. Thank ya

so much. I really mean it.” Eindebelle hadn’t yet been told about the part of the story where Ristia defeated a dragon singlehandedly, but she was told that Nanami would have been in grave danger if Ristia wasn’t around, so she gave her heartfelt gratitude as a result. “Is there anythin’ that’s got’cha down? I’ll try my very best to help ya out.”

“Got me down...? Oh, now that you mention it, I don’t have any money.”

“Well, dang... You’re straight ta the point, ain’cha?” Eindebelle said with a wry smile on her face. She probably would have taken that as a shake down for a reward if Ristia wasn’t the one who’d said it.

“To be accurate, money is the only thing I don’t have. Do you know of any shops that will buy and sell?”

“Hmm? What are ya fixin’ ta sell?”

“An enchanted catalyst, or maybe a completed enchanted item.”

“Oh, shoot, Girlie, if that’s what yer lookin’ for, y’can just sell your stuff here instead.”

“Huh? Are you sure?” She had been a tad bit hopeful ever since she arrived at this shop, considering that this place dealt with magical items and had all sorts of different potions and enchanted items lining the display shelves. *If I can ask for her services, then...* Ristia thought, pulling out the leather satchel she’d shown the soldier earlier.

“Huh...? I feel that leather bag just popped outta thin air. Am I just imaginin’ things?”

While Eindebelle was perplexed, Ristia didn’t pick up on it, instead proceeding to line up the catalysts in her bag one by one on the counter.

“A leaf...? Never seen this type of leaf before, but it sure is oddly chock full o’ mana.”

“Ah, that’s a leaf from the World Tree.”

“A-Ahh, the World Tree, right. ...Beg pardon? World Tree?” Eindebelle started throwing up question marks all around her. It was so utterly absurd that she wasn’t able to wrap her head around it, but... Ristia herself hadn’t realized that,

and she continued lining up other catalysts next to her.

“...Hey, that’s a magic stone! And it’s holdin’ a crazy amount of mana! You could make a fortune offa this alone!”

“Oh, really? I have a bunch of those, so that’s a relief.” Ristia pulled out a new leather satchel and poured a heap of similar-looking magic stones out onto the counter. The sight made Eindebelle’s jaw hit the floor.

“W-Wait just a second! What? What the hell?! One o’ these magic stones can build a new house, so how are you comin’ up with so damn many of ‘em?! This ain’t right!”

“I make magic stones myself, so I have a lot of them.”

“Y-You made them?! The hell?! What d’ya even mean?!”

“I put in a lot of practice~” Ristia said in a cutesy manner, but it went without saying that a normal human would never be able to produce magic stones. If one wanted magic stones, they either had to go hunting around for them or fish around for them in ancient ruins. That being said, Ristia declared that she had created the magic stones she was producing. She pulled out yet another leather satchel from her Item Box as if it were completely normal to do so.

“Hold on, I thought I was just imaginin’ things, but you *are* using an Item Box, aren’cha?!”

“Yes, I am. Out of convenience.”

“Uh, I’m not debatin’ the convenience here. Y’realize that’s an Item Box, right? Y’know, *legendary* magic?!”

“By the way, my greatest masterpiece is this one. Pretty, don’t you think?” Ristia had pulled out a black, several hundred-karat magic stone, which sparkled a ridiculous amount from taking in the surrounding light.

“Are you listening to me when I sai—Wh-What in the hell?!”

“Huh? Like I said, it’s a magic stone I made.”

“You’ve gotta be kiddin’. I’ve never seen or heard of such an extraordinary magic stone in all my years,” Eindebelle exclaimed, flabbergasted.

Eindebelle was actually an enchantress capable of handling Third-Level magic, putting her in an elite class among humans of this era. However, that was all the more reason why Eindebelle's blood curdled upon coming into contact with the mind-blowing stone. This tremendous magic stone was akin to those described in legends—incomparable to any other conventional item. The stone was obviously national treasure-grade material, and it was definitely not something you would find a mere girl carrying around.

“...Okay, spill. Who are you?”

“I'm just a normal girl.”

“A-A normal girl does *not* go around with stones like these!”

“Whaa?! R-Really?!” *I didn't knooow!* she thought, displaying her shock plainly. She appeared to be normal; abnormally cute, as well. In fact, she seemed to be nothing more than that. Nevertheless, her conduct was clearly abnormal all around. This young girl had such an imbalance that it struck Eindebelle with an indescribable sense of unsettlement.

“I'm gonna ask you one more time. ...Who are you?”

“U-Um, well... you see, I'm just a normal girl who is, uh, a tad good at making magic stones?”

“Nope, nope, nope, back up. We're past the point of 'a little' here, Missy! First off, a normal girl ain't gonna be able to use an Item Box, and even if yer not normal, you're still not gonna be able to make magic stones!”

“...What a mess,” Ristia said, literally flopping her shoulders in disappointment after being told that she was nowhere near the realm of normal. She looked frail and adorable, like a small animal abandoned on the streets.

“Oh...” Eindebelle looked at Ristia, now obviously in a rut, and let out a sympathetic groan. “Wh-Why are you so down on yourself? Yer makin' it seem like *I* did something bad here.”

“Huh? O-Oh, no, that's not true at all! Belle, you've done nothing wrong. I'm just getting down on myself for no real reason! Please, don't worry about me!” Ristia gallantly proclaimed as tiny droplets of tears formed in her eyes. This was

a huge blow to Eindebelle, as she felt like completely scum for what she'd apparently done.

"H-Hey now, I'm sorry. You're a regular girl, Ristia. Honest, ya are."

"Huh? Really? Do you really mean that?"

"Y-Yup, cross my heart. I ain't just sayin' that out of guilt or anythin'."

"Yay, that's great~ I'm doing normal girl things!" Watching Ristia prancing around and chuckling while choking back her tears was so cute that Eindebelle came to her own silent realization.

"Well, nothin' wrong with sayin' Ristia's a normal girl. We'll just go with that."

In her mind, however, she also came to the conclusion, *And besides, I can always press Nanami for details.*

Nearby, Ristia was none the wiser to any of this deliberation, as she was too busy jumping for joy. And that was how Nanami gained yet another thing to worry about.

—5—

"So, will you be able to sell these catalysts at your shop?"

"A-Are you asking me to sell these here?" A long drip of sweat trailed down Eindebelle's brow as she answered Ristia, the adorable girl from parts unknown. Every single catalyst from the stack in front of Eindebelle was worth more than the entire stock of her shop. She'd casually offered to sell them in the girl's stead, but this was drawing some serious red flags.

"That's right, and if you need it, I can always craft these into enchanted items."

"What the—? You can even make enchantments?! At your age?!" Eindebelle asked in shock for the umpteenth time.

Creating magic stones was a skill straight out of fairytales, so it was hard to swallow, but enchantments were Eindebelle's area of expertise. She had dedicated herself to her craft since she was a child, so she knew better than anyone. She knew that a girl in her mid-teens like Ristia being able to create enchanted gear with the stack of catalysts in front of her was absolutely



impossible.

Nevertheless...

“...Oh, right. I’m a normal girl, so I can’t make enchantments,” Ristia commented in an aloof yet adorable manner, sending shivers down Eidebelle’s spine. She shouldn’t be able to make them, logically speaking. She *shouldn’t*, but her comment made it certainly seem as though she very well could if she wanted to. Eidebelle then decided to play a little trick.

“Y’know, Ristia. Normal girls nowadays *can* do stuff like make enchantments.”

“Wait, they can?”

“Sure can. I’m a girl m’self... and I even run this here enchantment shop, right?” *And the only reason I’m capable of that is because of the almost twenty years of training I’ve put in since I was a tyke. I know I called myself a normal girl to cover that up, but it’s got me feelin’ pretty bad...* thought Eidebelle.

Ristia then responded, “You have a point... All of the enchanted items here are your work, after all.”

*How the heck does she know that?* suspected Eidebelle, but she let that slide in order to accomplish what she set out to do. Ristia continued.

“I see. Got it. That just means that Nanami had the wrong idea this whole time, huh?” she said with an angelic smile. Eidebelle simply looked on and thought to herself, *This girl is... kind of a pushover, ain’t she? The way she put that caught my interest, though. I’m figurin’ that Nanami put that idea into her head. And that means Nanami knows who this girl really is and told ’er to keep it a secret, I reckon? Pretty sure I’m not far off the mark.* That was Eidebelle’s conclusion on the matter.

It was also at that point that she could have let well enough alone, as tricking an innocent little girl was racking her with guilt. Unfortunately, her curiosity got the better of her.

“So Ristia, ya actually *can* make enchantments, can’cha?”

“Uh-huh, that I can.”

*I knew it!* Eidebelle internally exclaimed in excitement. If she was just

capable of making enchantments and really just that, then this would simply end with her being a gifted child and nothing more. Then again, what if? What if Ristia were at a level where she could use the catalysts stacked up in front of them both?

“Would’ja mind showin’ me an item you’ve enchanted, Ristia, Dear?” Eindebelle asked, trying to play it cool while her heart was beating out of her chest.

Ristia, on the other hand, suspected nothing and smiled, replying, “Sure thing~”

*What kind of fantastic enchanted item does she have in store for me?* Eindebelle wondered, her pulse instantly shooting up. Much to her dismay, what Ristia pulled out was a white mass of metal.

“An’ that is...?”

“This is platinum. I was planning on making a brooch.”

“...Planning? Are you sayin’ you’re gonna make a brooch right now?” That was a process that could take several weeks. She had wanted Ristia to show her an already-completed enchantment, if possible, but she found herself unable to finish that thought aloud.

That was because her eyes caught a glimpse of the unbelievably elaborate magic circle which popped up around Ristia’s body.

“What in the...? Is that a...”

Regarding the magic in this world, one would need to draw a magic circle out of mana to act as a circuit, which would allow you to insert your own magical force and pull out whatever effect you so desired. Level One magic acted as the foundation, composed of just one magic circle. Level Two magic added another circle with a different effect to the first. Level Three magic added two circles with different effects to the first, and so on and so forth. The more you climbed in levels, the more intricate the layout of the circle became.

The complex magic circle that Ristia had drawn with little effort contained seven magic circles within it. Which meant...

“This is... Level Eight Magic.”

Impossible. Inconceivable.

Mankind had only managed to reach up to Level Four. There were tales of there being sorcerers who had reached Level Five, but those were basically fairytales. There was no possible way that a human being could use Level-Eight magic. No, that impossibility didn't just stop at humans. Even the rulers of the fabled eras of the past, the True Bloods, were said to have reached their limit at Level Seven. There shouldn't have been a lifeform on this planet that was capable of a Level Eight spell. Even though there shouldn't have been, there stood Ristia, casting her spell right before Eindebelle's eyes. The metal she called “platinum” took the form of an asymmetrical open heart. Its center held a magic stone shining all the colors of the rainbow.

“I can tone it down with the enchantment; just nullifying any bodily ailments will do. Give this the protection to wipe away any and all dangerous elements... Enchant.”

*Nullifying bodily ailments is already Artifact territory, Girl!* That comment barely raised above a raspy whisper before...

“Ehehe, all done~” Ristia proclaimed with an innocent grin, unaware that Eindebelle was gripped with shock and awe. In her palm sat the open-heart jeweled brooch. The stone that it contained could fetch an outrageous price just as a piece of jewelry alone. Eindebelle gazed at it, completely awestruck.

“You said this'll nullify bodily ailments?”

“Uh-huh, it will nullify any and all physical ailments.”

“...Any and all? Y'mind if I give it a little test run?”

“Sure, be my guest~” Casually, Ristia presented her with the work of art, which Eindebelle took with hesitant and shaky hands.

“Erm, so... all I gotta do is put my own mana in this?”

“Nope, since you're using a magic stone, all you have to do is hold it, and it will activate.”

“Ah, y-ya don't say.”

Typical enchantments were disposable, or they would require the user to provide their own magical essence to help power them. However, that rule didn't apply for high-power magic stones. It was possible to make them activate automatically by using up the stone's own mana supply as opposed to periodically charging them. Eidebelle had experience handling magic stones before, albeit none with this ridiculous level of power. It was common knowledge that enchanted items that carried magic stones did not require the user to provide mana to activate it. Apparently, she was so shaken up about this that she blanked on that very basic fact.

"R-Right, here goes nothin'." Eidebelle pulled a potion with a numbing agent from the shelves and took a tiny sip of it while holding the brooch. Normally, she would have felt a tingling sensation in her mouth, but... she felt nothing of the sort, and instead, the brooch emitted a small rainbow-colored flash.

After Eidebelle swallowed the bit of potion, she proceeded to boldly chug the rest of it down. Despite that, the feelings of numbness or paralysis never set in, and the brooch in her hand glowed once more. Eidebelle was now convinced that the brooch had eliminated the effects of the numbing agent.

The truth was, she was also fully capable of creating an enchantment to negate the effects of a numbing agent, but not only would she have needed to put in a lot of work to create it, its effects wouldn't have been as fast-acting as this. It also helped nullify *all* bodily ailments, not just some. Creating such a broad-spectrum enchantment was out of her reach. While she didn't test for other ailments, if the item canceled out the effects of the numbing potion she had randomly picked, then it was a safe bet that it would get rid of pretty much anything. That meant that the brooch was basically an Artifact, and its creator, Ristia, was a walking legend.

—*Who in the world are you?*

The same suspicion from earlier resurfaced in Eidebelle's mind, but she didn't speak those words out of consideration for Ristia and her insistence on being a normal girl. Instead, she asked a different question.

"Lemme ask: What is it you're here for?" With powers like these, Ristia was capable of ruling this city—no, the entire continent as she saw fit.

But instead, Ristia replied, “I want to help children in need, which is why I need money to sustain myself. So it would sure help me out if you were to buy that brooch off of me...”

The answer that Ristia produced with that untainted smile completely subverted Eindebelle’s expectations. Her answer was so unexpected that Eindebelle just stood there, blinking in surprise.

“Do ya really mean what yer sayin’?”

“Mm-hmm! I super mean it!” Ristia’s big crimson eyes were clear and pure. It didn’t seem to Eindebelle that the girl was lying to her, at the very least. And even if Ristia were plotting something, Eindebelle—no, humanity had no means of stopping her and her Level Eight magic. Putting that into consideration, there was no reason for Ristia to lie. And more importantly, Ristia had no intention of hurting Nanami, so Eindebelle was willing to let the matter slide.

That was when Rick, who was supposed to be en route to the guild, rushed into the shop.

“Mom, are you okay?!”

“What’re ya bargin’ in like that for?”

“First, get away from that girl. On the way to the guild, I started asking Nanami for some info about her, and she is clearly *not* normal. That’s why I rushed back home.”

“...Huh?” Ristia was shocked at the assertion that she wasn’t normal.

*There’s gotta be a reason why she’s so fixated on bein’ normal, right?*  
Eindebelle pondered.

“Are you listening, Mom?!”

“Hm? Oh, yeah, I’m a-listenin’. Mind explainin’ what ya mean by this girl not bein’ normal?”

“She apparently slayed a dragon when she saved Nanami. It was five meters tall and wiped out the recon team, but she beat it in *one shot*.”

“Huh... Boy, that’s something else.”

It was rare to see a dragon in real life in these times. Sure, hearing that there was a dragon living there to begin with was a shock, but it wasn't unreasonable for a dragon to wipe out that reconnaissance team. And it definitely wasn't a shock that Ristia defeated said dragon. Seeing as how Ristia could use Level Eight magic, she would make quick work of a simple dragon.

"Mom! This is no time to be singing praises. She one-shotted a freaking dragon!"

"Uh-huh, uh-huh, I get the picture. So, what did Nanami say? Did she say that Lil' Ristia here is a dangerous monster?"

"Uh, no... Nanami said she's not dangerous. In fact, she said she was an... angel." Rick looked like he was at a loss. He was a doting stepbrother, so he wanted to believe what Nanami told him, but he was most likely conflicted over the whole 'angel' assertion. Even so, Eindebelle thought the phrase fit the girl perfectly.

"If Nanami says Ristia's an angel, then she's an angel."

"Now *you're* saying it too, Mom?!"

"Rick, if ya just talked to Ristia, you'd get it yerself. Girl's practically an angel." It was hard to imagine Ristia's sheer innocence as being just an act. If Ristia were just putting on a mask, then Eindebelle wouldn't know what to wake up and believe anymore. That was why she then presented the brooch back to Ristia. "This brooch is too expensive to be sellin' here at the shop. Here ya go, Hun. Take it back."

"Oh, okay..." Ristia took back the brooch with a face that screamed reluctant acceptance. Seeing Ristia slump her shoulders in disappointment brought a cheeky smile to Eindebelle's face.

"In exchange, I'll ask one of my connections t'buy it off ya. And as for your costs of livin' at the moment, I'll take care of ya."

"I do appreciate it, but are you sure...?"

"Course I am. Y'can repay me by gettin' along with Nanami, okay?"

Ristia stood dumbfounded, blinking her eyes, before she replied with a big

smile.

“Okay!”

Seeing that pleased smile was enough to reaffirm to Eindebelle that Ristia was indeed a good and honest girl. Her overwhelming cuteness was giving her the urge to give the girl another big hug, but Rick interjected before she had a chance.

“Wait just a second, Mom. Are you being serious?”

“Darn straight, I’m bein’ serious.”

“Okay, but...” Before Rick could begin his dissatisfied sentence, Eindebelle cut in.

“Now, see ‘ere, Rick. If Ristia was trying t’do somethin’ to Nanami, what point would bringin’ her back here to us serve?” If she did have something nefarious in store for Nanami, then there was no need to prove to Eindebelle or Rick that she was still alive. After all, if the reconnaissance team was wiped out, then there would have been no way to know if Nanami got taken away, anyway.

“You do have a point there...”

“Now, it’s all well ‘n’ good that y’dote over Nanami, but losin’ sight of what’s around ya as a result is somethin’ ya gotta work on, Rick.”

“Urk... S-Sorry.”

“Shouldn’t be apologizin’ t’me, Son.”

“R-Right. Um... I’m sorry if I said anything to offend you, Ristia. Uh, *Ms. Ristia.*”

“Mm-mm, don’t worry; it didn’t bother me,” said Ristia with a grin. She listened to their entire conversation with an extremely bored expression, making it clear that she was saying that out of consideration. Upon realizing that, Rick let out a slow groan out of guilt. That was when...

“*Hah, hah, hah...* Big Brother! Rick! Wait! Don’t leave me behind like that!”

“N-Nanami?!” Nanami came back home at the worst possible time from Rick’s perspective.

“Big Brother, you aren’t being rude to Lady Ristia, are you? If you are, I don’t care if you are my brother, you’ll pay the price,” Nanami declared, her words after her late arrival back home forcing Rick further and further into a corner. It was a sight that made her suspicious, so she instead turned her attention toward Ristia.

“Lady Ristia, he wasn’t being rude to you, was he?” Posed with an extremely sticky situation, Rick started to sweat bullets until...

“Nope, everything’s fine. These two really do love you, Nanami.” Ristia didn’t tattle; on the contrary, she gave both Rick and Eindebelle high praise.

“Ms. Ristia...” Rick looked at Ristia, as if feeling sentimental that the person he treated so poorly was returning his rudeness with kindness. Eindebelle’s glimpse of his face going slightly red was most likely not just a figment of her imagination.

*Looks like spring is here and love is in the air for you, Rick. Well, I’d like t’say that, but I reckon that this is one girl that’s too much for you t’handle, Son.* Eindebelle thought to herself, ruminating over Rick’s future hardships with an awkward smile.

—6—

The following morning after Ristia was taken in at Nanami’s house, Ristia was partaking in breakfast with the rest of the family.

“By the way, Ristia?”

“Hm?”

Just as breakfast was winding down, Eindebelle addressed Ristia, who responded curiously.

“It’s ‘bout introducin’ you to my magic item seller connection. I’m gonna get in contact with him, so d’ya mind waitin’ a few days while I do? Yer more than welcome t’stay as long as y’like in the meantime, of course.”

“I don’t mind waiting, but I do plan on straightening out my living situation.”

“Wha? Lady Ristia, you don’t want to live here?!” Nanami seemed surprised at the sudden news, but Ristia thought otherwise. She couldn’t overstay her



welcome at Nanami's house, since it would set a bad example of her goal to be a good older sister.

"Maybe you would have a better idea. Are there any kinds of jobs where you can help children in need?" Ristia asked, thinking that she could kill two birds with one stone by finding a child to love her as an older sibling and earn living wages.

"Work to help children in need, eh? Hmm, thing that springs t'mind first is the orphanage, but..." Eindebelle said, curiously muddling her words.

"When you say 'orphanage,' I assume you mean a facility where they raise children with no living relatives?" In other words, it was a gathering place for children in need. *If I could work there, then that really would be killing two birds with one stone!* Ristia thought, overjoyed. However, there was bad news.

"Ms. Ristia, if you're thinking about working at that orphanage, I would just give up on that idea," Rick disapproved, speaking up from the seat diagonally across from Ristia after a long stint of silence during the majority of breakfast.

"How come?"

"There are some unsavory rumors about that orphanage."

"Unsavory rumors in what way, exactly?"

"The director of the orphanage embezzling the local lord's grants, cases of missing children—those kind of rumors."

"Oh wow... So then, is this orphanage taking applications?"

"It's got a bad rep, so the townspeople stay away from it. I'm guessing they're pretty short on hands there, but... Hello? Were you listening to what I said?"

"Of course. Basically, the kids there might be in need of help, right?" *If the director of the orphanage is a bad person, then all the kids living there must really need someone's help. That just gives me all the more reason to head out there,* Ristia thought to herself, only to be met by shocked faces from Eindebelle and Rick.

Nanami, on the other hand, complimented her. "Benevolent as always, Lady Ristia. Mom, what do you think?"

“Well... since this is Ristia we’re talkin’ ‘bout here, I’m pretty sure she’ll be fine.”

“Good point. If it’s true that she one-shotted that dragon, then even if there is trouble, I doubt it’ll get the best of her.”

“Pretty much. That bein’ said, I’ll tell ya where it is if you’re set on the idea, but make sure t’be careful there, y’hear, Ristia?”

“Loud and clear! Thank you so much!” Ristia said with a satisfied grin as Eindebelle proceeded to tell her where the orphanage was located.

“Okay, then! If Lady Ristia is going to this orphanage, so will I!”

“No way, Nanami,” Rick interjected faster than Ristia could even squeeze out a reply.

“Aww, how come?”

“You need to report to the guild with me; that’s why. Since we didn’t end up going yesterday, we need to go today, or else getting chewed out is going to be the least of your problems.”

“Urk, r-right. I almost forgot. Ughh... Lady Ristiaaaa~” Nanami said with a pleading look toward Ristia, to no avail; the situation was out of her hands.

“If you need to report, then it is necessary to report.”

“But... Lady Ristia, there is a chance you might not come back to our house, isn’t there?”

“I’m not sure about that, but I’ll make it a point to tell you even if I do end up staying elsewhere, okay?”

“...Really?”

“Yup. After all, I want us to form a good relationship and keep it that way.”

“Lady Ristia, I... I appreciate that so much!” Seeing Nanami in so much joy brought happiness to Ristia, as well. She had someone who really adored her, which brought a smile to her face.

Ristia set out afterwards, climbing to the top of a hill on the outskirts of town. She eventually arrived in front of the orphanage, a stone-constructed building

that looked far from sturdy. There were several spots that were damaged all over, giving the impression that it might collapse at any moment. Normally, one would have cold feet about coming near a place like this, but Ristia was just the opposite. She was excited, thinking, *My future sister might be here, in need of my help!*

“Hello~? Anyone home~?” She humbly knocked on the door a few times. After a few moments of waiting, the wood-crafted doors slowly creaked open, and out stepped a brown-skinned young girl. Judging from her height, she was probably younger than Nanami, possibly around her mid-teens. Regardless of that, she projected a somewhat bewitching aura—a young girl of captivating beauty, to say the least.

“...Who are you, Sister?”

“Sister!”

*Ohmigod, the first time I've ever been called 'Sister' by someone younger than me! Sure, it's missing the 'Big' part, and there's zero love behind it, but it's a fantastic start!* Ristia was excited, feeling she made the right choice in coming to the orphanage. Eventually, it occurred to her that the girl was giving her a weird look, so she quickly and cutely cleared her throat to compose herself.

“I'm sorry for startling you. I'm Ristia. I'm here because I want to work at this orphanage.”

“You want to work here...? Listen, I don't know what the big idea is, but you better go back to wherever you came from right now.” Despite the girl telling her to buzz off, Ristia retained her smile.

“Why do you say that?” she asked with a perplexed tilt of her head. The brown-skinned girl's face took a sour turn to that question, and she proceeded to scan the nearby area around her before bringing her face a little closer to Ristia's.

“...You haven't heard the rumors about this place, Sister?”

“By 'rumors,' do you mean...”

“Maria! What are you doing over there?” A rebuking male voice echoed. When they turned toward the source, they found a plump, middle-aged man

glaring them down.

“...! Nothing. This girl was just asking for directions.”

“Not quite. I’ve come here because I want to work at the orphanage.”

“Darn it, you...!”

“Oh-ho, well, well. Aren’t you an adorable young lady? You’re saying that you want to work here?”

“Yes, Sir!” Ristia energetically nodded, and the portly man smiled.

“Oh, have you now?”

Next to her, the brown-skinned girl covered her face, saying, “...Oh, God. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” It was yet another comment that Ristia paid no heed to.

“Now, why don’t we talk in the back?” said the pudgy older man, inviting her in. She obliged and stepped foot inside the orphanage.

Traversing the hallways while being led by the man, they both entered the room at the very rear of the building. The rather old-fashioned nature of the building was apparent as soon as one stepped through the front door, but the room Ristia found herself in was in stark contrast to that. It was extremely tidy and in order. It made the gears in Ristia’s head turn. Was it kept this way out of consideration for any guests that would drop by? Or perhaps the director had spent the money so he would have a comfortable living environment for himself? It wasn’t clear which of the two it was.

“Please, take a seat over there.”

“Yes, thank you, Sir.” Ristia pulled out the chair for herself and rested down in an elegant fashion. Following in suit, the chubby middle-aged man took a seat in the chair across from her.

“Let’s start with some introductions, shall we? My name is Georg, and I’m the director of this orphanage.”

“Thank you for the courteous welcome. My name is Ristia, Director Georg.”

“Hmm. You seem to be quite a well-mannered young lady. Mind if I ask about

your background?”

“I’m just a normal girl.” Ristia calmly proclaimed that she was a normal girl while basically being appraised by the older man. Despite what she insisted, even her mental fortitude alone was obviously abnormal. Director Georg naturally came to the same conclusion and started to look her over with a suspicious gaze.

“...And if I may ask about your past experience?”

“I just ran away from home a little while ago.”

“Oh-ho... You ran away from home. So, would that mean you’d like to work here since you have nowhere to go and nowhere to stay?”

“No, I am not after necessities. Of course, if I were able to work here as a live-in employee, that would be ideal. I wish to help children in need,” answered Ristia with a smile from ear to ear. It was one answer that Director Georg probably wasn’t expecting. His eyes widened in surprise.... followed by a throaty yet silent chortle.

“...Um, Sir?”

“Sorry, where are my manners? You’re so young, yet you have such a splendid mindset. I would love to have you work here.”

“...Do you mean that?” Ristia was taken aback at how easy it was to convince him.

“Absolutely. Someone such as yourself is more than welcome to grace our halls by working here. However, we cannot offer much in the way of pay if you will be a live-in worker... I hope that’s fine with you?” Director Georg prefaced the offer before giving the suggested rate... which Ristia was honestly clueless about, concerning whether it was a meager or significant amount. The pay, however, was not what was important to Ristia here, so she nodded and replied, “I have no problems with that, Sir.”

“Great, I’m glad to have you onboard, then.”

“I’m glad to be onboard, Sir!”

“Good to hear. I will be counting on you to serve this orphanage well, Ms.

Ristia,” Director Georg said with a smile on his face as he clapped his hands. Immediately after he did, the brown-skinned girl Ristia met in the entryway walked into the room.

“...You rang?”

“Yes, this girl—Ms. Ristia here will be working here starting today. Introduce her to the children and show her the ropes, if you would.”

“She’s wha...? Sister, you don’t...” Maria looked at Ristia with a condemning look, until...

“*Maria.*” Director Georg grabbed her shoulder, which made Maria’s body tremble in surprise.

“...O-Okay, I get it,” the brown-skinned girl blurted out in a hurry before glancing at Ristia.

“Follow me; I’ll show you around,” she said as she practically ran out of the office.

“Hey, wait for me. Director Georg, if you’ll excuse me,” Ristia said before showing herself the door, chasing after the brown-skinned girl.

She thought that the girl may have just left her behind, but fortunately, the little brown-skinned was waiting just outside the room. However...

“This way.” Upon confirming that Ristia was there, the brown-skinned girl quickly started walking.

“...Hey, would you mind telling me your name?” Ristia asked as she walked beside the girl, only to be met with no response. “Hey, hello? I’m asking...” she tried asking once more, but before she had a chance to finish her thought, the brown-skinned girl stopped at the corner of the hall and looked up at Ristia sternly.

“I thought I told you to turn back, Sister. Why didn’t you do that?”

“Because I won’t. I want to help children in need.”

“...I see. Then I won’t say another word. I want to help the children myself,” the brown-skinned girl said in an evocative tone.

Her expression was tinged with gloom in a way rather unlike an ordinary fifteen-year-old girl. She gave off the impression that she had lived several times longer than that. *Maybe she's not a human being?* Ristia thought to herself as she scanned Maria's body with magic. The data she received back told her that she was one-hundred percent human, but it did reveal some other concerning information. There were several small abrasions on her lower body and, to make matters worse, they were all infected. Infections like these mainly afflicted grown adults, with rare cases occurring amongst children, but few symptoms would ever show up in girls. She probably didn't even realize that she had an infection. Ristia reached out to cast a healing spell over the young girl, but as soon as she did, the girl screamed, "Don't touch me!" and brushed Ristia's hand away. The unexpected reaction made Ristia's eyes widen.

"Umm... I'm sorry. I must've startled you by just sticking my hand out like that."

"N-No, I should be the one who's sorry. I just got a little startled." The young girl said that she was just a "little startled," but she still seemed wary of being touched. Ristia decided to give up on using any healing magic for the time being. She then tried searching for another topic, figuring she should lighten up the mood.

"Oh, right, I never did catch your name. Would you mind a little self-introduction?"

"...I'm Maria. I'll be fifteen this year."

"Maria? Such a sweet name."

"Yes, Maria. And sugar is sweet; not my name."

"...Uh, right. Duly noted, Maria." The brown-skinned girl answered with just her name and age, nothing else. It was a very blunt, no-nonsense self-introduction, but once Ristia saw Maria's expression, she realized that wasn't the case. It was likely that this girl never had a chance to say anything else in the past.

So Ristia replied in a similar manner. "I'm Ristia, and I'll be seventeen this year."

“...Is that all?”

“Well, I was hoping you’d get to know the rest over time.”

“...Sister, you’re an oddball.”

“I’m not odd. I’m a normal girl.”

“Heh heh... and you’re funny.” For whatever reason, she laughed at her. Ristia was disappointed, since she never intended to make the girl laugh, but Maria seemed to be enjoying herself, so it satisfied her regardless.

“Okay, Maria, you’ll be showing me around, I hope?”

“Are you *really* sure about this?”

“Yup, sure as sure can be.”

“...It’s strange. A little part of me is telling me that you’ll definitely be alright,” Maria said, tacking on under her breath, “Yeah... Even though there’s no way it could be.” It was an incredibly small murmur, but Ristia heard it crystal clear, being the True Blood that she was.

“I’ll be alright, you know? I swear.”

“*Hah*... Fine, I get it. I’ll start off by introducing you to everyone who lives at the orphanage, then.”

—7—

“So on that note, this will be the new girl taking care of everyone.”

Ristia was led to a large common room in the orphanage where she met face-to-face with all twelve orphans—Maria included—who lived in the institution. There were four boys and eight girls. While she marveled at how young Maria was when she first saw her, the other children were all even younger than her. From what Maria told her, anyone past twelve usually “graduated” from the orphanage. In any case, there were twelve children, every one of them likely a diamond in the rough. With their little heads peeking up, they looked at Ristia with a combination of hope and worry painted across their faces. Ristia kneeled down in front of them and spoke at eye-level.

“Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ristia. I want to help children in



need, so I'll be working here at the orphanage from now on. Would everyone mind telling me their names?" She flashed that angelic smile of hers, which fascinated the boys and fired up their protective instincts. It was a smile that was so effective at reassuring the younger children that the majority of them, who had been on their guard, started to give way to its charms.

"My name's Mew!"

"I'm Ayane!"

"Name's Glen!"

A chorus of self-introductions all fired out at the same time.

"Come on, you guys. If you all speak over one another, you're going to confuse the lady," Maria spoke up, reprimanding everyone for their manners. Once she did, they all apologized in unison before going silent. "Sorry, Big Sis Maria!"

"Whoa..." Ristia looked at Maria, her gaze filled with respect. In her mind, she thought, *'B-Big Sis Maria! You're incredible, Maria! Every one of these kids adores you like a big sister! I'm older than you when it comes to years, but you're more rich in experience! I have so much to learn from you! I'll do my best, but I'm not going to fall behind, either!'* Ristia found herself motivated.

"Thank you, Maria, but it's okay."

"Huh? What do you mean it's 'okay' ...?"

"It's okay, because I've memorized everyone's names."

"What are you talking about? Remembering a bunch of names yelled at you at the same time is crazy ta—" Before Maria could finish the word "talk," Ristia pointed her eyes over to the girl standing the furthest in front.

"This adorable, tomboyish dog-eared child is Mew." Ristia smiled, petting Mew's furry, blue canine ears, prompting Mew to let out a tiny "woof" and smile in delight. "And the slender girl here is named Ayane. Her violet eyes are simply beautiful." In regards to Mew, the children didn't seem too convinced by Ristia's claim, but as she continued and started to accurately call off more of their names, they gradually began to look astonished.

“Th-Then what about me?”

“Black hair just like mine? Your name must be Glen,” Ristia said, petting Glen’s head in a very natural manner. He was just a ten-year old, but being on the receiving end of Ristia’s beautiful smile was turning his cheeks beet red. And so, as a result of her display—

*“You’re amazing, Sis!!”*

Ristia was met with the applause and unanimous praise of the children. She began to celebrate inside her head. *Ohmigod, I just got called “Sis”! By a room full of kids! And soon enough, I’ll have all of them adoring me. I won’t just be “Sis,” I’ll level up to “Big Sis Extraordinaire”!* Ristia thought, getting herself pumped up. In any case, Ristia had accurately named ten out of the eleven kids.

“And last but not least is you. You never did introduce yourself, though,” she addressed the boy that was looking off into space a small distance away. Despite her trying to speak to the boy, the brown-haired child simply twitched in response, refusing to face forward.

“Come on, now, Allen. You know better.” Not willing to let this go by, Maria grabbed ahold of the boy’s shoulders and looked him straight in the eye.

“Big Sis Maria... How could you say that? This girl is friends with the director, isn’t she?” What was he implying by that? If he meant that Ristia was a “colleague” working at the orphanage, then that would make perfect sense... but Maria ended up shaking her head.

“I don’t think she is, at the very least.”

“How can you be so sure?!”

“How?” Maria started, peeking over at Ristia.

“Well, because... she’s kind of an airhead, and she seems pretty unreliable, I guess.”

*Unreliable?! Maria thinks that I’m unreliable?! Ristia flung herself to the floor. Ungh, my poor heart. What a dreadful shock~ It’s not uncommon for someone you’ve just met to not fully rely on you, but I can’t believe she feels that way about me from just our first meeting alone. W-Well, if that’s how it’s going to*

*be, I'll turn up the heat! No more holding back! I'm going to follow through to the hilt and make sure Maria absolutely adores me! She'll be saying, "Big Sis, you're incredible!" in no time!* Ristia thought, solemnly vowing in secret. In hindsight, this was probably the moment that decided the fate of the orphanage—no, the entire town. However, there was not a soul present that realized that fact.

There was only one child who thought, *It was weird enough when she suddenly hung her head, but now she's balling her hands into fists. What's wrong with her?*

"...Hey, Sis, are you alright?"

"Th-Thank you for asking, but I'm alright, Ayane." Ristia pretended to be unaffected in hopes of not being considered any more unreliable... That didn't stop her from getting a tad misty-eyed, though. "Anyway, do you happen to know what he meant by 'friends with the director'?" Ristia asked Ayane as she let Maria and Allen argue, but the girl just shook her head in reply.

She did, however, whisper, "It might have something to do with Allen hating the director."

"...Why does he hate him?"

"Well, see, Allen likes Big Sis Maria, but Big Sis Maria is close with the director."

"They're close...?" Ristia pondered, thinking back to the two interacting earlier. It didn't give her the impression that there was any contempt, but they certainly didn't seem close, by any means.

"You know, I see the director coming out of Big Sis Maria's room sometimes when I'm going to the bathroom late at night."

"...Oh, is that so?" Ristia seemed to have an idea of what was going on and thought to ask for some more details, but...

"Hey, Ayane, no. We got told never to talk about that, remember?"

"Oh, right. So yeah. Sorry, Sis."

"Mm-mm, no. *I'm* sorry." Ristia backed down from the subject and turned her

attention back to Allen and Maria as they continued their spat.

“Point is, I don’t buy that flimsy nonsense reason at all!”

“I told you, she’s not the kind of person you think she is, All—” Ristia touched Maria’s shoulder and smiled.

“Thank you.”

“...Huh?”

“Thank you for standing up for me, but it’s okay.” She meant that less in the sense that she didn’t mind being suspected, but more in the sense that she was reliable enough to handle the situation herself. Regardless of the interpretation, Ristia faced Allen.

“Wh-What? You’re not gonna trick me like you did the others, understand?”

“Yeah, I don’t blame you for not being able to trust me. This is our first time meeting, after all.” Ristia finished her sentence, then simply gazed into Allen’s pair of blue eyes. Those eyes were glaring at her pensively, but she knew it was because he was worried for Maria. “It’s alright. I’m cruel to those who do bad things to people I care for, but I’m never cruel to those who don’t,” Ristia said, pulling Allen into her chest for a hug. With Ristia’s serviceably ample breasts, Allen’s whole head flushed red.

“Wah?! Wait a, wh-what are you doing?!”

“‘What’? Well, I just thought this would help you relax.”

“R-Relax? That’s not what I’m talking ab—” Allen snapped back to his senses and pushed Ristia away from him. “I-I’m saying that I’m not just gonna up and trust you!” Allen spat out his parting remark before rushing from the room. Ristia watched him do so, lamenting, *Oh no, he hates me...* Despite her hurt feelings, she decided it was a bad idea to just leave him be, so she tried to chase after him, but Maria stopped her before she could.

“I’ll talk to Allen. You entertain the rest of the kids, Sister.”

“But...”

“Don’t worry. He was just a little embarrassed.”

“...Embarrassed? Why?”

“Never you mind that. Just handle things here.”

“Well... I’m not sure what’s going on, but okay. Make sure Allen is alright.”

After thinking things over, Ristia decided to do as Maria suggested. After all, Maria was so mature beyond her years, and she seemed to know how the kids operated rather well. And so, she made the call to let Maria handle Allen while she would entertain and play with the others.

Ristia asked the children about various things here and there after that. And after dinner had concluded...

“Would it be okay if we rebuilt this orphanage?” Ristia asked, having come to Director Georg’s office to speak to him directly.

“Ristia... What are you even asking me?”

“I’m asking if I can rebuild the orphanage. I spoke to the children, and they told me that it can get terribly drafty here. Besides, it seems a lot of things are falling apart here, so... erm, may I?” Seeing the shocked expression on Director Georg’s face, Ristia toned herself down. Her initial plan was to gain permission to rebuild the place first, and then she and the director would discuss how she could go about fixing up certain things. Since her plan was so set, she felt it quite unexpected that she would run into a hurdle right out of the gate.

“Listen, Ristia, just from today, I can understand your love for the children in spades. However, there are certain things in the world that you can and cannot do. You should first focus on what you *can* do.”

“...Yes, Sir. My apologies.” *But rebuilding a house is something that I can do!* Ristia thought to herself, but she wasn’t childish enough to object aloud. Granted, she wasn’t enough of an adult to just meekly give up on her idea, either.

“At any rate, you did fine work today, my child. How did it feel to work here for a whole day?”

“It was so much fun spending time with the children!” Ristia said, beaming with joy. Director Georg, on the other hand, was seemingly befuddled.

“Is that... so? It seems that you are suited for this job, then,” Director Georg said with a jolly smile as he took a bottle and two glasses off of a shelf. “Ristia, can you handle liquor?” She had never drunk before, but she didn’t know what it was like to be drunk off of alcohol in the first place—which is why she replied affirmatively.

As a note, Ristia was seventeen years old, but since this world wasn’t bound by any laws stating that minors couldn’t consume alcohol, this was all perfectly fine by those standards. Speaking of standards, she was a True Blood princess, so human laws were pointless to her anyway.

“Well then, it isn’t much, but let us celebrate your arrival with a drink.” Director Georg turned away and started to pour the contents of the bottle into the pair of glasses. When he turned back around to Ristia, he presented the glass meant for her, which she accepted. The beverage appeared to be a wine of some kind, and it filled a good portion of the glass.

“Let us toast to your new future.”

“My new future, Sir?”

“Why, yes. I hope that you give yourself up for the children.”

“Yes, Sir. I will try my best to meet your expectations!” She raised her glass and mimicked Director Georg’s gestures before taking a swig of the wine. The wine’s mellow aroma and subtle astringency spread throughout Ristia’s palate. This was Ristia’s first time drinking alcohol, but she found herself partial to this wine.

“Ehehe, this is quite good.” Ristia proceeded to down the rest in delight. *This really is good! I’ve never made liquor before, but maybe I will next time I get the chance...* Ristia thought to herself as she began to analyze the ingredients of the wine with her tongue. *Let’s see, this “wine” drink seems to be grapes fermented with alcohol. Hmm... Yes, grapes and ethanol seem to be the key ingredients. What else? Let’s see... That astringency is coming from tannin. There’s also amino acid, and... Hm? Isn’t this... extract from medicinal plants with a sleeping agent? So that was the cause of the slight bitterness. It doesn’t seem to be necessary for the flavor, but... maybe it’s in here so you can have a good night’s sleep? Either way, it doesn’t affect me, so maybe that ingredient isn’t necessary*

*for experiencing the sheer joy of wine.*

That single ingredient was enough to knock a normal girl completely unconscious, but for the self-proclaimed normal girl, Ristia, it barely had the same effect as a soothing herb, and she remained largely unaffected. And so, she proceeded to down her wine as Director Georg suggested as she engaged in chit-chat with him.

“You’re so young, but you can really guzzle it down.”

“Thank you, Sir. This is my first time drinking wine, but it is more delicious than I ever imagined.”

“Well, isn’t that a treat? Still, I believe it is about time we stop for tonight. It would be terrible if it were to impede on your work, after all.”

“You’re right, Sir. Well then, I’ll just go... Oh, umm...” Ristia was informed that this would be a live-in position, but she suddenly remembered she was never shown her quarters. Georg seemed to remember and assured her not to worry.

“Your quarters are right next door. From today onwards, that will be where you stay, so please make yourself at home. Now, retire to your quarters and rest well, my child. ...Yes, extremely well.” He handed her the key to her quarters. *Maybe I should go back to Nanami’s house and give her an update on what’s going on?* Ristia initially thought, but it was already late, so she reconsidered. *I can do that another time.*

“Hmm... So this is my room,” Ristia whispered to herself in an impressed tone, stepping into the room as she was told. Thinking about it, Ristia had always lived in a castle—and a castle that was constructed with technology far beyond the scope of humans of this era, to boot. While it was probably a sentiment that would hurt a person’s feelings if said aloud, Ristia was slightly enjoying all of this, as it felt like a quaint excursion to the countryside to her.

*Oh, but I might not be able to sleep on a bed this hard. This room also smells kind of moldy... Maybe I should do a little interior decorating.* Ristia used her magic to disinfect and dust off the room. Then, she put the old bed into her Item Box and rolled a soft and fluffy carpet out on the floor. After putting up a set of lace curtains over the window, she placed her trusty princess-style bed right in the center of the room. Finally, she installed a magical chandelier

illuminated with magic stones and placed a magic item capable of temperature, humidity, and air purification on the wall.

*That should do it. Now, all I have to do... Oh, that reminds me, is there a bath here?* Ristia adorably pondered with, naturally, no answer—or rather, even if she did get an answer, it certainly wouldn't be an affirmation. *If there's none here, maybe I should whip one up?* Ristia considered, but she reconsidered, since any construction now would most likely wake the children. *I'll just hurry off to sleep and start really renovating the room come tomorrow.* She then decided to cleanse her body with magic for tonight. After she did, she changed into a cute camisole for her pajamas, turned off the lights, and threw herself into bed. However, it wasn't soon after that...

“Is there someone outside the room...?” As she laid in bed, Ristia noticed that she had an uninvited visitor just outside her door.



## Episode 3: The Self-Proclaimed Normal Girl Does This and That to the Orphanage

As Ristia laid in bed within her assigned living quarters at the orphanage, the door to her room opened with a tiny creak, and in stepped two men. One man held a lantern, illuminating the room.

“...Hey, y’don’t think we got the wrong room, do you?”

“What’re you talking about? This is definitely the right room.”

“But this room looks like some aristocrat’s daughter lives in it.”

“What in the hell are you talking about? This orphanage wouldn’t have a room like—*Whaaaa?! Wh-What the hell is all of this?! None of this was here before!!*”

“Did the girl bring it all with her?”

“No, Ristia didn’t come with a single piece of luggage, from what I remember.”

Ristia thought, *I don’t know what’s going on, but entering a girl’s room while she’s sleeping sure is rude*, and woke up.

“...It’s so late; did you need something?”

“Wha? Ristia! Why didn’t that drug work on you?!” the man exclaimed in an abrasive tone. She was trying to place that familiar voice this whole time, but it ended up being Director Georg’s.

“What exactly is the matter, Director Georg? You don’t sound yourself.”

“Grk, I mean, well... Um, what I meant to ask was, ‘Why are you still awake, my child?’”

“I’m not sure what you mean by ‘why’...”

*What in blazes is going on?! She drank that powerful sleeping agent with the wine, so she should be knocked out cold until morning!* Georg thought to

himself, but with no way of knowing what he was thinking about, Ristia cocked her head in bewilderment.

“Hey, Georg, what are we going to do?”

“Doesn’t matter. She’s not going to put up much resistance anyway. Using a little force is fine every once in a while.”

“Heh, you got a point. Gets a little stale when they can never put up a fight, after all.” The burly man that came in with Director Georg flashed a lecherous grin. That had affirmed Director Georg’s goal in coming to Ristia’s room, and her face took a very displeased turn.

“Heh, looks like you finally realize the situation you’re in. Too little, too late, though. The Director gave me an offer I couldn’t refuse. Now I’m gonna have my fun and then some with that beautiful body of yours!” the burly man said, a perverted grin stretched across his face as he made his way up to the bed where Ristia was sitting. He then reached his hand out and tried to forcibly touch Ristia’s breasts—to which she gave him a chop with her hand.

“...Huh? Wh-What’s this? My arm... Why isn’t my arm moving?!”

“H-Hey, th-that thing. Is that your...” Director Georg stammered, pointing at the man’s feet.

Atop the now-crimson-stained carpet was a dismembered part of the man’s body.

“E-Eek! Why?! Why is my arm down there?!”

“Stop that. If you shout like that, you’ll wake up the children.” Ristia isolated the room so that no stray voices would slip out using her magic. Her crimson eyes glowed in the wavering flames of the lantern as they glared straight at Georg and the other man.

“Sh-She’s a sorcerer?!”

“H-Hey, Director! You never told me she was a goddamn sorcerer!”

“I was never told either! Grk, whatever, just run!” Director Georg turned heel and tried to make a break for the door, but as he turned and rattled at the doorknob, he found it wouldn’t open.

“Hey, what are you doing, Georg?! Hurry and open the damn door! Please!”

“I’m trying, but it won’t budge!”

“There’s no point trying. I made it so the door wouldn’t open when I isolated the sound of this room earlier.” Ristia responded as she climbed off of her bed and robbed the man of his consciousness with magic. Immediately after doing so, the man crumpled to the carpet limply. His severed arm was still spewing blood profusely, and guessing that he would die if he kept bleeding out like that, she stanching the wound.

“Wh-Who are you? Some spy sent by the local lord?!” Director Georg shouted in a shivering, violent tone, most likely mustering his best possible bluff, as to not give in to his fear. Conversely...

“I’m just a normal girl.”

“Bullshit! In what world is someone like you considered normal?!”

“What a flop...” Ristia flopped her shoulders in disappointment after being told that she wasn’t normal in regular fashion.



However, Director Georg looked at how Ristia was acting and perceived it as being something other than plain madness, so he asked her, “What do you plan on doing with us?”

“What do I plan on doing with you? No, that’s my line here. What were *you* planning on doing, coming into my room?”

“W-Well...”

“I was half-convinced from what I heard, but you... *did* do something to Maria, didn’t you? No, you’ve been *doing* something, haven’t you?”

“She talked?!”

“Judging from that reaction, that was your handiwork... No, the handiwork of you and the *others*, Director Georg. What kind of immoral acts did you people subject her to?”

“W-Well...”

“Well, what?”

“Well... take this, bitch!” Suddenly, Director Georg caused his right arm to flash. The moment Ristia identified the flash as coming from him tossing a small magic item, the item emitted an intense light, which enveloped the room in white.

“Hahahah! You let down your guard! You may be a sorcerer, but you can’t do a damn thing if you can’t see! I’m going to make tears run down your pretty little face until you regret ever screwing around with me!” Director Georg grinned perversely, pulling out the knife he had concealed at his hip. He then circled to Ristia’s flank and sprung at the girl. Much to his dismay, Ristia maintained regular vision throughout all his actions, stopping the tip of the knife between her fingers.

“What?! How can you react to my attack?!”

“‘How’? Because I can see it just fine...”

“Impossible! That flash hit you dead-on!”

“You thought seeing a flash would disable my vision?” *Sure, it got bright all of*

*the sudden and startled me, but that wouldn't stop my eyes from working properly... right?* Ristia pondered as she looked on, confused.

“Wh-Who in the devil are you?”

“I told you a second ago. I'm a normal girl.”

“Like *hell* a normal girl like you exists!”

“Grr... I *am* a normal girl, though.” Not only did he call Ristia “not normal” yet again, but the knife was threatening to rip up her favorite camisole, which angered her enough to smash the knife caught between her fingers. The shattered pieces of the weapon flew about, slicing up Director Georg's cheek.

“L-L-L-Like hell someone like you is normaaaaaal!!” He screamed from the depths of his soul. Being able to make such a quip in this situation showed rather strong confidence, but the truth of the matter was that his fear had simply reached past its limits. As Director Georg quaked in his boots, Ristia dragged him down to the ground.

“Damn it all! What are you going to do with me?!”

“I'll decide on that after you tell me what *you* did. Now... what did you do to Maria?”

“Y-You think I'm just going to talk?”

“Of course I do.” Ristia squinted her eyes, using her vampiric charming powers. As soon as she did, the light of reason started to disappear from Director Georg's eyes. “Now, tell me what you did to everyone... and I mean *everything*.”

“What I did was...”

Once turned into her servant, Director Georg went into detail about his catalogue of reprehensible acts. Apparently, Maria was taking the full brunt of the damage in order to protect the other children, but his vile acts didn't stop there. With the exception of Maria, every child in the orphanage had to be under the age of twelve, or they were forced to “graduate” from the institution. Director Georg was using the orphanage as a front for an illegal child slavery ring, and the man that had accompanied him was apparently an accomplice

with many other crimes under his belt. After pulling all that information out of him, Ristia was on the verge of raging out of control, but she was suddenly reminded of Nanami's reaction from when she had killed Gawain. That memory caused her to regain her cool and release the charm spell she'd cast over Director Georg. It wasn't long before Director Georg was back to his senses. He understood that he was being controlled by some mysterious ability and had spilled the information about all of his crimes, making his face twist in fear.

"P-Please! Spare me! I swear I won't go against you! You can have this orphanage!"

"Huh? You're giving me the orphanage?" The unexpected offer made Ristia blink in surprise.

"Sure, you can call yourself Director and do whatever you want. Also, I swear that I'll never bother you ever again! So, please, let me off the hook!"

"You'll never do anything bad ever again?"

"I won't! You have my word."

"If you mean that, I won't kill you."

"Really?!" Ristia nodded her head in reply to Director Georg's question. That was her decision, made out of consideration for the children's happiness. In her mind, she needed to do something for the children, and that wasn't killing Director Georg; it was securing a place where they could live in peace. Hence, Ristia made a deal with him—a deal that she would spare his life in trade for ownership of the orphanage, under the condition that he repented for his crimes and vowed never to commit them again. Ristia then followed Georg to the Director's office, where he transferred the deed to the orphanage over to her and also wrote her a letter of authorization, bestowing her the title of Director.

"That makes the orphanage one-hundred percent yours. So hold up your end of the bargain!"

"Yup, a deal is a deal. And I never go back on one. That being said... if going back on your word is *your* intention, then you're dead. Am I clear?"

"Yes, of course! I promise!"

“So you say... But what do you really think?” She once again used her charm powers, ordering him to tell her his true intentions.

“Hah! I’m obviously just saying whatever to make you believe me. You think I’d ever give up on having the time of my life? Also, mark my words, I’m going to get my revenge on you.”

“...As I figured. I’m relieved that you didn’t have a change of heart. I made that deal out of consideration for the kids, but I personally found you beyond sparing.”

“What are you...? W-Wait, that was a, um... a misunderstanding!” Director Georg started to panic after being freed from the charm, but Ristia’s crimson eyes flashed as she set an offense-oriented spell into action.

“No, stop!! ...Huh, what? Nothing happened. Hahah, don’t scare me like... that...?” Director Georg made a complete one-eighty from fear to relief, but he suddenly found himself on his rear.

“What’s going on? I suddenly lost my balance and... My toe! What the hell? What’s going on?!” Director Georg’s toe was starting to fade away into particles of light, and once he noticed what was happening, he shrieked in distress.

“It’s an offensive spell that will gradually disintegrate you from the toes up, eventually erasing even your soul from existence. That should be enough time... until you die. Reflect on your past actions before your life ends in the meantime.” Ristia put the letter and the deed into her Item Box, turned herself away, and was about to exit the room when Director Georg let out a pathetic yell to stop her.

“W-Wait! Please wait! I gave you the orphanage like I said I would, so this goes against what you promised!”

“What are you talking about? Our agreement was that I wouldn’t kill you if you would repent for your crimes and never commit them again, and I upheld it.” Her agreement with Director Georg was that she wouldn’t take his life if he gave the orphanage to her and vowed to reform himself, never falling back onto the same sins. She had planned to hand him over to the city officials, sparing his life as she had agreed to if he held up his end of the bargain, but... he didn’t. Ristia didn’t have a single reason to compromise with him now.



“Killing you if you broke our agreement was *part* of the agreement.”

“You can’t... be serious... W-Wait, please! I was wrong! I swear I’ll change my ways this time! So please, I’m begging you, spare me!”

“...I bet you scoffed at Maria’s pleas when she was at your mercy, didn’t you? But it’s fine. I’ll make it so that your voice won’t be heard outside of this room, so shout all you’d like,” Ristia declared in a cold and solemn voice as she shut the door to the director’s office behind her with a slam, also casting a spell over the door so that it would temporarily remain shut.

“Now then... That leaves the other one.” Ristia returned to her quarters and forced the unconscious man awake, intending to put him through the same interrogation process as Georg—which led to her disintegrating both that man’s body and his soul in a similar fashion.

—2—

“Aah... I feel terrible.”

Maria awoke in her simple bed and looked up at the low-hanging ceiling, letting out a deep sigh. Last night was the night Maria was supposed to be forced into volunteer services, but despite that being the case, that nightmare never came to pass. Of course, she wasn’t always scheduled for volunteer services on fixed dates. It was just the opposite; things would be conducted on dates that weren’t fixed, as well. It was actually rare that she wouldn’t have her services scheduled to someone. And the night Ristia showed up happened to be one of those rare days. It basically meant that the nice young lady that turned up at their doorstep with an angelic smile might be singing a sadder tune today. Despite Maria’s repeated warnings, Ristia just wouldn’t listen to her. If she’d tried any harder to dissuade her, Director Georg might have taken it as disobedience, and the other children would be put in danger. That was the reason that she couldn’t warn her in a more direct manner... but, be that as it may, it didn’t change the fact that Maria silently knew that something terrible would happen to Ristia. That fact still tormented the fifteen year old girl’s heart.

*I’ll at least go fetch a bucket and towel for her,* Maria thought to herself, but... it wasn’t just so she could atone for her actions. If Ristia walked around the orphanage after being “violated,” then the other children might end up

knowing about the dark secret of the orphanage Maria fought so desperately to keep under wraps. Plus, Maria was alone in keeping this secret from leaking to the other children, so she might be able to share the pain with Ristia, seeing as how she went through the same turmoil. With all that serving as her purpose, she visited Ristia's room with a bucket and towel in hand... only to find an angel sleeping soundly on a princess-style canopy bed.

"...Huh? What? What's going on here?" Her mind was literally boggled. She had expected the fact that Ristia would be asleep, of course, but the way she pictured it was more... unconscious—a slumber brought on from mental and physical exhaustion. She certainly wasn't expecting her to be sound asleep in a spotless, untainted bed. In fact, the room as a whole was odd. There was a fancy chandelier hanging from the ceiling, the room was warm, and the air inside of it was fresh. Not only that, but a soft and fluffy carpet adorned the floors, lace curtains hung from the windows, and the plain and rather firm bed had been replaced by a bed fit for a princess. "...What in the world is going on here?" Maria whispered to herself, as this was something she was seriously lost on. However...

"Good morning, Maria," Ristia, the girl that was snoring a second ago, greeted Maria in reply to her murmur, making her practically jump from her skin.

"R-Ristia, you were awake?!"

"No, just woke up."

"Oh, um... do you mean that I woke you up?"

"Yes, but don't worry about it~ I can normally function without a few days' worth of sleep." Maria, who couldn't have possibly known that Ristia *literally* didn't need sleep to function, thought that Ristia was just trying to console her, which made guilt wash over her face.

"I really don't mind. Plus, you were worried and came here to check on me, right?"

"Huh? Does that mean that they...?" she asked, implying the question of whether Director Georg came to her room last night or not.

"Yeah, they were here. Director Georg and another person—a burly-looking

man.”

“...!” Maria found herself biting her lip. Director Georg was bad enough, but that other man was someone Maria hated, since he was especially violent. She lamented Ristia’s misfortune of being forced to deal with both of those unsavory characters right from the start.

*...Huh? But if that’s the case, then why does Ristia look so unaffected? Is she just really experienced with all this and just doesn’t show it?*

“Hey, Sister, would you happen to be in *the business*?”

“I’m just a normal girl.”

“Then... how are you doing so fine?”

“Because what you think happened never happened.”

“What in the hell do you mean by...” It was worth noting that Maria’s un-fifteen-year-old-like conduct was a sort of defense mechanism. In her mind, since she was an older sister to everyone else, she had to endure the work for their sakes. And as a result of deceiving herself like that, the mature way she spoke to others just stuck with her. Maria was still a child on the inside, however, and she found herself confused by what Ristia was saying. To make matters worse...

“I’ll get right to the point, then. As of today, I’ll be running this orphanage.” Ristia ended up saying something even more incomprehensible.

“Um, um... What do you mean by that?”

“I mean exactly what I said. Director—Former Director Georg handed over the position of Orphanage Director to me. That’s why, as of today, you’re under my supervision~”

“I... see...” Maria was confused, but the fact sunk into her. If Ristia was the director here, then all of the despicable acts she was forced to endure this whole time might cease. She was relieved that, at the very least, comfort levels would be at a newfound high. Once that all processed in her mind, Maria made a sigh of relief. “.....Huh? Ristia, Sis, you’re the director?”

That was when she finally realized that the statement that Ristia had

inherited the title of director in itself made no sense. Maria had come here in the first place to console Ristia, thinking that she went through the same terrible experience she herself had, so why the topic suddenly shifted to being about how Ristia took over as director of the orphanage made absolutely no sense.

“Umm, I’m sorry. I’m afraid I don’t follow, Sister. So, Ristia, you’re going to be the new director?”

“Indeed I am~ Got the letter of authorization and everything. See for yourself.”

“This does look like the director’s handwriting, but... No, wait, wait, wait. ‘Indeed I am~’? Cut it out! What in the world happened that led to this?!”

“What happened? Well, he lost his right hand, for starters?”

“...Pardon?” Maria would never assume that a person had literally lost their arm, and she instead took that to mean that Ristia had found a weakness in the man who served as Director Georg’s righthand man.

“Anyway, the orphanage is mine now, and that’s a fact. There might be people who will say something about the switch, but I’ll deal with them if that happens, so don’t you worry.”

“...Really?”

“Yup, *really* really.” Maria rushed out of the room to verify whether Ristia was telling the truth or not and knocked on adjacent door leading into Director Georg’s office, but what she received was...

“No response, right? That room is empty now,” Ristia told the girl after chasing after her. Despite her assertion, Maria wasn’t so easily convinced. It stood to reason, considering the years upon years of hell the director put her through. And so, Maria rushed in through the door inside to find... not a single person inside, just furniture and whatnot that was slightly strewn about.

“The director... where did he go?”

“Director Georg left town after regretting all of his crimes.”

“Left town after regretting his crimes...?” The idea of the director she knew

regretting his crimes was *incredibly* unbelievable, to say the least, but it was also unthinkable that Director George wouldn't be in his office around this time of day, under normal circumstances.

*Reason aside, the fact that he skipped town may be true.* Maria thought, putting things into perspective and finally considering that Ristia might be telling the truth.

"Then... you're the director here now, right?"

"Yup, sure am."

"Th-Then... um, then what about all of the... *volunteer service* that I was forced into doing this whole time?"

"If that 'volunteer service' was something that Director Georg forced you into doing, then you don't need to ever do it again. And even if anyone else were to tell you to, I wouldn't ever allow it to happen."

"B-But he said I have to keep working, or we won't have the money to feed the others..." — *We won't be able to make the money to feed the children unless you work. Otherwise, the only other option is to put the other children to work or throw them out.* That was the threat Director Georg posed to Maria which made her bend to his will. And the financial difficulties of the orphanage weren't going to be changing even if the one taking charge as director did, but...

"Don't worry. Even if that was the case before, I promise that I will make do for you all." That brilliant, angelic smile illuminated Maria's inner darkness.

"...I really, *really* don't have to do that stuff anymore?"

"You really, really, *really* don't." Ristia extended her right arm toward Maria, and once the girl saw it coming toward her, she brushed it aside, just like the first time they interacted. It wasn't based on a hatred for Ristia, either; it was simply a reflex brought about from memories of all the repugnant acts she had to perform night after night.

"I-I'm sorry. But, um... you shouldn't try to touch me. I'm, um... not like you, Sister. I'm tarnished."

"It's okay."

“It’s not okay. You may not know this, but I’m...” Maria started her sentence, but wasn’t able to finish—because Ristia’s thin and supple fingers gently patted Maria’s head. At the same time, a genial warmth started to seep its way through Maria’s body.

“...Ristia?”

“See~? You’re all fine.” Your scars, infections, every last bad mark on your body—*every single one*? I got rid of them. So, Maria, my dear, you’re no longer ‘tarnished’.” She didn’t understand what that meant, but... it was made clear to her not long after. Both the fatigue that punished her for the past few days along with the lingering pain in her lower half disappeared completely. She almost felt like—no, she literally felt as if she had been reborn anew.

“...Sister, who in the world are you?”

“I’m just a normal girl.” That was a clear lie. She was probably intent on not divulging the truth behind who she was, which was why Maria knew that Ristia was not the normal girl that she claimed she was—she was far from it. But she didn’t care who Ristia really was, because, at least to Maria, Ristia was the angel sent from above who helped save her from her plight—a fact that brought tears streaming from the young girl’s eyes.

“Thank... you... Thank you, Sister. Thank you, Ristia,” Maria said with tears pouring down her face as Ristia softly took her into her embrace. That tender warmth washed away all the doubt that Maria still had left in her.

With all of the bad emotions out of her system, Maria’s tears finally came to an end. “S-So, what do you plan on doing from now on?” Maria asked, pulling herself apart from Ristia, having regained her composure after crying her eyes out. Her cheeks were pink from the embarrassment of shedding tears.

“Well, I guess turning around the orphanage.”

“Turning around the orphanage... Yeah, that’s a much-needed step.” Maria was so impoverished that she had to go around and volunteer her services, so it was obvious that a turnaround of their financial situation was necessary in order to get the institution in shape. Maria never would have thought that Ristia meant ‘a literal turnaround of the building, complete with renovations,’ so it was a total misunderstanding.

“I’ve already got a lot of ideas lined up for turning this place around. I’ll set everything up, so don’t you worry about it.”

“...You already thought up ways to fix things? The mayor that the aristocrats put in charge of town is a renowned cheapskate, so I don’t think he’ll be willing to give us any financial aid.”

“Financial aid? No, I’ll have the funds needed, so that won’t be necessary.”

“...Are you serious?”

You needed to pull money from *somewhere* in order to perform a massive upgrade of an orphanage. Basically, that meant what you needed was a way to actually pull in money in the first place... or so one would think, but Ristia was saying that money was never an issue from the get-go.

*There’s no way she’s planning on making the kids do the same kind of work I did, right? She said I wouldn’t have to service anyone. I want to believe that Ristia really means that, but all signs are pointing to that as the only other option.* Ristia’s overly optimistic attitude was filling Maria with uneasiness.

“In any case, you don’t have to worry about how I’ll be turning things around here. Actually, there’s something that I want to ask you, Maria.”

“...What’s that?”

“I made your body as good as new. That is a fact without a shadow of a doubt. But I assume your mind still holds some terrible memories, right?”

“Yes... it does.” Although she felt like a massive load was off her shoulders, that simple bit of implication was enough to give her flashbacks of her time working, making Maria unconsciously hug herself.

“If you’d like, I’ll wipe all of your memories of that.”

“Wipe... my memories?” Maria looked up at Ristia in confusion.

“Yup, I’ll use a spell to wipe the bad memories and any memories linked to it out of your mind.”

“...Sister, are you a sorcerer?”

“I am, and it’s a secret, okay?” Ristia said with a mischievous grin. That angelic

smile met Maria's eyes, and she thought to herself, *Is she some sort of sorcerer of justice?* If there were a connoisseur of magic present, they would probably be screaming, *"Yeah, right! As if there's some kind of demonic magic around that would wipe someone's memories clean!"* However, there was indeed magic like that, so it was a moot point regardless of the noise or actions of this hypothetical person. Now, whether or not it was within the realm of human capability was a different story...

"You're saying that your spell could erase my bad memories?"

"Yeah, I can erase just your bad memories... is the right way of putting it, I guess? In order to do a thorough wipe, I would need to erase a lot of your normal memories so as to not cause any inconsistencies, so I think some related memories will end up getting wiped, as well." Maria wasn't able to completely comprehend the drawbacks of doing that, but there was one thing that she did understand—that she would forget the fact that Ristia saved her if she were to wipe her memories right now.

"...I'll be fine without a memory wipe, if you don't mind."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, if you wipe my memories, it's likely that I'll forget you saved me too, right?"

"...That's right."

"Right. In that case, don't wipe them."

"Maria..." she said, probably understanding Maria's intention of wanting to preserve her memory of Ristia as her savior. Ristia looked absolutely, positively delighted.

"D-Don't get the wrong idea. If you were to wipe my memories, then there wouldn't be anyone around to confirm whether you're holding up your end of the promise, right? That's why I'm just going to be by your side to make sure you're keeping everyone safe!" Maria said in a blunt manner, trying to hide her embarrassment.

"Okay, I plan on making this orphanage better than it's ever been, so I'd appreciate you helping me out, too, Maria." Ristia smiled, casually extending



her hand to the girl. Looking at her white, slender, and spotless hand, the gears in Maria's head started spinning. Honestly, she wasn't sure about Ristia's claim that she had become the director when she woke up this morning, so she was also uneasy as to whether this would all work out, but if Georg continued to be director for another six months, then he may have ended up recruiting the other girls to offer their services alongside Maria. And even if he didn't, he would have made a few of the children "graduate," for sure. The fact stood that Ristia saved all of them from that fate, which was why...

"I'll help you. Look forward to working with you, *Director* Ristia."

She called Ristia "Director" with the utmost respect. Instead of calling her "Sister" like she usually did, adding the title to her name showed that she recognized her as the director of the orphanage and was willing to cooperate with her in her future endeavors. Be that as it may... Ristia still found herself hitting the floor in disappointment.

—3—

"What a flop..." Ristia said, flopping her shoulders in her depression unusually hard. Pretty much all the children at the orphanage called her "Sister" or "Sis." They meant that as a term of endearment because she was older than them, but she believed that if she tried hard enough, she could promote herself to a loving "Big Sis" status. She believed that, but all her hard work and gaining ownership of the orphanage gained her was being called "Director" instead. And it wasn't just Maria calling her that, but *every* child in the orphanage who knew the situation. It was proof that the children adored Ristia and accepted her into their lives, but seeing as how Ristia just wanted them to call her "Big Sis," it was devastating to her. Those factors led Ristia to be in the extreme slump she was in now, just after breakfast. However, she couldn't afford to be down in the dumps forever.

Considering that Maria had vowed to help turn around the orphanage and rebuild it, it meant that Ristia needed to hurry up and plan things out. Ristia then decided to check the orphanage grounds, taking her to the back of the facility. Perhaps it was because the orphanage was on the outskirts of town, but the facility grounds were quite vast. There was enough surface area for two or three orphanages, but... it seemed as if absolutely no groundskeeping had been

done for a while. It was disheveled with weeds growing amok.

*Hmm... Maybe I should build something next door since they'll need somewhere to live while I'm doing renovations?* Ristia thought as she mowed the weeds growing in front of her with magic and collected them in one location. With Ristia's magic, she would be done in an instant. In fact, it was entirely possible for her to even dig a plot, manufacture lumber, and construct an entire house. However, building a house all by one's self was something that would clearly be considered abnormal. That was how she came to the conclusion that she was going to hire a carpenter for the rebuilding process, and to do so, she was going to have to sell the enchanted item through Eidebelle's connection.

"I'll be stepping out for a bit, so could you mind the children while I'm gone?" Ristia called Maria to the entryway, leaving her to babysit. This was nothing out of the ordinary for Maria. She was the oldest out of all of the orphans, so it was apparently always her duty to watch over the other kids. Although, it was probably more accurate to say that since the former director had never done his job to begin with, the task of taking care of everyone had inevitably fallen upon her. At any rate, she asked Maria, knowing that she could comfortably leave her in charge, but for some odd reason, Maria seemed nervous.

"...Maria, what's the matter?"

"Um... you'll be back before lunchtime, right?"

"Hmm, I'm going out to procure the money for rebuilding the orphanage, so it might be a bit hard to come back before lunch. I do plan on coming back by dinner, though."

"Oh... you will?"

"Sure will. I've left ingredients in the kitchen, so could you use those to whip something up to eat?"

"Well... sure. Okay, then. But... um..." Since she had worked yesterday, she basically understood how a day around the orphanage went. She knew that the children made the meals, so she had stocked the kitchen in advance with meat, vegetables, and other ingredients she had in her Item Box. Her going out should have been no problem, but Maria seemed nervous about something regardless.

“Really, though. What’s the matter?”

“Erm, well.. I was worried about what would happen if Director Georg were to come back...”

“Ah, so that’s what’s wrong.” Director Georg had left town—and since not even his soul was still around, the “town” he was headed off to was “the afterlife.” But all she had told Maria was that he had simply “left town,” so it was natural that she would be worried about him possibly coming back. As Ristia considered what she could do for her, Maria suddenly clung to her tight. It was something that Ristia had never experienced before, so she was taken aback.

“M-Maria?!”

“Um, so... I know you have things to do, but I’d like it if you could stay next to me...” Maria said, opening up her worries while still clinging to Ristia. Normally, she carried herself in a grown-up manner and acted as everyone’s older sister, but right now, she was showing her vulnerabilities. It was a sight that Ristia couldn’t help but find cute, and it was piercing her dead through the heart.

*I want Maria as my little sister. Her brand of cute is different from Nanami’s and I want it all to myself.* As soon as that thought ran through her head, an impulse similar to the time she’d carried Nanami in her arms assaulted Ristia. With Nanami, it had happened so fast she couldn’t tell what it was, but... now Ristia knew the true identity of that feeling. It was a feeling that Ristia shouldn’t have experienced from Maria holding onto her—her vampiric impulses to feed.

*But... why? I’ve never had these impulses drive me before, so why now?* Ristia bit her lip, trying to keep those vampiric impulses in check as she slowly pulled Maria away from her.

“...Director Ristia?” Maria looked at her with uneasy eyes.

“O-Oh, don’t worry. Nothing’s wrong,” Ristia assured her, pretending that she was fine as she shook her vampiric impulses off. She then desperately worked her brain, trying to think up a way to help Maria from her worries.

“...Let’s see. Oh, maybe that would do. Wait just a second.” She procured a few materials from her Item Box. Gritting her teeth and using some

enchantment magic, she created a magic item capable of telepathic communication.

“Huh? I feel like you just pulled a bunch of things out of nowhere,” Maria said, rubbing her eyes in disbelief before Ristia took her hand and placed a tiny hairclip in her palm. “Oh, uh... What’s this?”

“It’s a magic item that communicates the thoughts of whoever touches it straight to me. This will be yours, so make sure to put it in your hair. Any time you call for me, I’ll come rushing back.”

“...Thank you,” Maria said with a wry smile. —*Heh heh, I’ve never heard of a tool that lets you communicate thoughts to another person, not even in fairy tales. But she’s trying to get me to relax because she knows I’m worried. Director Ristia really is too kind.* The hairclip transmitted Maria’s thoughts to Ristia, since it was sitting in the palm of the girl’s hand. Ristia didn’t have it in her to point that out right now, but she was willing to settle with that for the time being since she knew that Maria felt a little more at ease.

“I’ll be off, then.”

“Okay, take care!” Maria said, seeing Ristia off as she began to walk away from the orphanage. Immediately after that, she heard Maria’s surprised thoughts. “*Wha?! All the weeds in the yard suddenly got mowed?!*” Ristia ran away before Maria had a chance to pelt her with questions about it.

She eventually made her way back to Eidebelle’s shop.

“Welcome on in... Oh, if it isn’t Ristia!”

“Good afternoon, Belle.” Eidebelle, running the shop, smiled at her. Soon after, hurried footsteps could be heard from the back as Nanami came running up to the front.

“Lady Ristia, you *are* safe!” Nanami shouted as soon as she saw Ristia’s face, jumping at her. She caught Nanami’s small body in her arms.

“Good afternoon, Nanami. I’m sorry. Did I make you worry?”

“Yes, I was worried. That orphanage has a bad reputation, and you went there and spent the whole night out.”

“I see... Thank you for being so concerned for me.” Nanami knew that Ristia was a True Blood, the ultimate lifeform which no human could ever stand up against. She knew that fact well, but she was still concerned for Ristia’s wellbeing. *So this is what it would feel like to have a little sister*, Ristia thought in bliss. However, as Nanami stared up at Ristia in her arms, her face started to take a sulky turn.

“Lady Ristia, I said I was worried about you, so why do you look so gosh darn happy?”

“Huh? Oh, well, you see... Um, I’m sorry?” Ristia apologized, but her face was all smiles, which made Nanami puff out her cheeks and pout. Eindebelle saw all this happen and let out a laugh.

“Nanami, Ristia here is a-smilin’ ‘cos she’s happy that you were so worried for her.”

“Huh...? Is that true?” Nanami peered into Ristia’s eyes.

“Yeah, I was so happy that you were concerned for me... but I’m sorry.” Ristia apologized again, this time looking genuinely apologetic. She then pulled out her Item Box and created the same type of hairclip that she’d given to Maria as an apology. “Just touch this magic item and think something to yourself, and the words will be conveyed to me.”

“Huh? Oh, thank you very much... Wait, Lady Ristia?!” Nanami panicked and peeked at Eindebelle. Nanami didn’t know that Ristia had made an enchanted item in front of Eindebelle before, so she was worried that Ristia had screwed up again. However, having witnessed it yesterday as well, Eindebelle was outright impressed, nevermind surprised.

“*Hah...* Unbelievably skilled, as always.”

“‘As always’? Wait... Mom, you too?”

“Hm? Oh, yeah, I know ‘bout how skilled Ristia is with magic.”

“Lady Ristia... did you not say you were going to be a normal girl?” Nanami said with a disappointed look in her eyes as Ristia looked back at her as calm as could be. Her reason?

“So, listen, Nanami. Nowadays, even normal girls can make enchantments.”

“...Did Mom tell you that?”

“She... did...? Why?” Ristia answered, prompting Nanami to look at Eindebelle. Seeing that Eindebelle quickly turned her eyes away, Nanami looked up at the heavens.

“Umm, is... something the matter?”

“Well, you see... Okay, I’m about to tell you something, so please prepare yourself for this.”

“U-Uh-huh?”

“As I told you before, a normal girl cannot make enchantments.”

“Huh? But Belle told me they could.”

“That was a *lie*. Mom tricked you, Lady Ristia.”

“...Huh? Is that so?” She looked over to her to confirm that, but Eindebelle kept her eyes averted. Ristia now knew that she had been deceived.

“...Grr, why did you feed me that lie?” she asked Eindebelle, who was still averting her gaze and keeping her head turned to the side. Eventually, the woman found herself unable to bear the stares and silence, and she looked at Ristia straight on.

“Um, y’see... I wanted to see yer enchantments, Ristia.”

“So basically, you figured out that I could use enchantments and tricked me into confessing?”

“W-Well, if I hafta be blunt...”

“So I see...” Realizing that she had been tricked, she let out a sigh.

“Oh, Ristia, I’m sorry, Dear.”

“Lady Ristia, my mom is sorry.”

The two of them bowed their heads in collective apology, but Ristia gently shook her head at them in response.

“Please do not apologize. I am in the wrong here.”

“Huh? But...”

“I was the one who couldn’t figure out that I was being had. That also means that I was being so obvious that I could be duped like that. I don’t blame Belle,” she said benevolently, like an angel with an angelic smile.

“Ungh, God, I feel so guilty... I was... I was wrong! Just don’t look at me with them pure eyes!” Eindebelle said, holding her ample chest in distress. An awkward smile formed on Ristia’s face as soon as she saw her act that way, because she remembered that her older sisters would oftentimes react in a similar manner.

“I seriously don’t blame you, Belle. It’s just...”

“It’s just what?”

“Next time, please just be honest with me, okay? I can show you as many enchantments as you want as long as it’s for your sake.”

“Huh? Y’mean it, Hun?” Eindebelle said, the look in her eyes suddenly taking an earnest turn.

“I do. You are Nanami’s family, after all.”

“Are you sayin’... yer willin’ to do that fer me because I’m family with Nanami, who’s someone ya trust?”

“That is right. I have told Nanami who I really am.”

“...Who y’really are?”

“Yes. You see, I am—” Before she could reveal her true identity, Nanami came rushing at her at lightspeed to cover her mouth. She proceeded to drag her off to a corner of the shop.

“You need to stop right there, Lady Ristia.”

“...I do?”

“Yes. Please give it a little more time before telling them the truth.”

“...Well, if you insist, Nanami.” Ristia nodded her head obediently, thinking, *I don’t really have any real reason to refuse*. Once their discussion had ended, she turned back around to Eindebelle. “So as I was saying, I am a very, very

normal girl.”

“...Yeah, well... That’s good t’hear.” She certainly didn’t seem like some ordinary person, but that didn’t change the fact that she was the person who had saved Nanami’s life. With that knowledge in mind, Eidebelle said that as long as she told her when she was ready, that would be good enough for now. “But I sure would like ya to show me what ya got regardin’ enchantments.”

“Yes, of course~”

“And, well, I sure’d appreciate it if ya not only showed me, but did a lil’ tellin’ here and there ‘bout it. If that’s okay...?” Eidebelle looked at her with a hungry look in her eyes, probably unable to contain her desire. Not considering for even a second to hoard her techniques, Ristia nodded and assured her she didn’t mind at all. “...Y’mean that?!”

“Yes, but I’m here today to sell my enchanted items, so would you mind terribly if we deal with that matter first?”

“Aah, yer here just in time for that. Got word from ‘em that they’re gonna be over t’pick up the stock today, so I think they’ll be here in a lil’ bit.”

“Oh, that’s great news. I need the money as soon as possible, so that will be a big help.” Ristia let out a sigh of relief and smiled softly... However, Eidebelle and Nanami looked at one another, doubtful expressions on their faces.

“Nanami, what’dya think?”

“Lady Ristia is strong, but she is a bit of a ditz...”

“Yeah, that’s the worryin’ part.” Ristia had a feeling that they were badmouthing her, so Ristia pouted her lips cutely.

“Are you two thinking something rude about me?”

“Naw, Child, we ain’t thinkin’ anything of the sort. It’s just that we’re a lil’ worried that the director of that orphanage is trickin’ ya.”

“...You two *are* badmouthing me. I would never allow myself to be tricked by that director.” It was an extremely valid argument, but since neither of the two knew her current situation, they weren’t buying it.

“Y’say that, but sayin’ y’need the money quick clearly means y’need it for the



orphanage, right?”

“...Well, yes.”

“Then, I also assume y’need the money to do renovations on the orphanage or somethin’ like that, right?”

“Yes, that is also true...”

“And goin’ off that, are we talkin’ about the director givin’ the word and y’coughin’ up the money?”

“Yes, well, that is true, but... I am not being tricked, okay?” Ristia tried to plead her case, but the stares on the two girls’ faces had already went from doubtful to sympathetic.

“What are we going to do, Nanami? Li’l Ristia here is completely clueless.”

“I never thought that Lady Ristia was so much of a natural airhead.”

“Nanami, you too? You’re all terrible~! I’m not a ‘natural airhead’ or whatever,” Ristia said, puffing out her cheeks in annoyance. That adorable sight stirred up their desires to protect her.

“Ristia, I do think yer a little clueless here. The director’s pulled the wool over yer eyes for sure.”

“They did not~! Why would *I* pull the wool over *my own* eyes?”

“Ristia, I get that ya wanna think that way, but... Hm? Wait, *you* pullin’ wool over *yer own* eyes? What’dya mean by that?” Eidebelle blinked in confusion at Ristia.

“That’s obviously because I’m the director of the orphanage.”

“.....Pardon?”

“Like I just said, last night, I inherited the position of director from Director Georg.”

“Ooh, y’don’t say... Wait, *whaaaaaat*?! What the ‘ell?! What d’ya even mean?!”

“Like I said, I’m the director, so there’s no way that I can get tricked by myself.”

“No, not that; that’s the only part I get! What in the heck happened where ya got th’ position of director in a single night?!”

Right next to Eindebelle, struggling to understand what Ristia was saying, Nanami looked at Ristia, saying,

“You *did* get into trouble, then.” Ristia had no intention of getting into trouble, but she disclosed that the orphanage’s director had been perpetrating crimes, so she erased him, soul and all. That ultimately led to her telling people that he had left town.

“...Holy smokes, you *really* got into the thick of things.”

“I *knew* you got into trouble.” After hearing her explanation, their impressions did not change. In fact, it pretty much convinced them instead—something that did not please Ristia in the slightest.

—4—

“Lord Gratt, we have arrived at Ms. Eindebelle’s shop.”

“Yes, thank you. We’ll be ironing out negotiations, so you wait right here, Misty.” He was the president of Gratt Commerce, a company that was starting to distinguish itself in the imperial capital. Gratt ordered his secretary to wait in the carriage as he made his descent down. He then patted himself down and fixed up his appearance before entering Eindebelle’s shop. Eindebelle’s enchanted merchandise had a great reputation in the capital, so they were goods that the Gratt Company simply had to broker deals for. That was why he naturally had to give due consideration. At least, that was the story Gratt was sticking to. Although according to his secretary Misty, that was nothing more than a pretense, because it was a well-known fact that Gratt had a thing for Eindebelle. Whatever the case was, Gratt psyched himself up and made his way into Eindebelle’s shop.

Once he stepped inside, he realized there was another unknown young girl in addition to Eindebelle and Nanami. Perhaps she was a customer who had gotten here before him, but Eindebelle was talking to her about something. Gratt decided to wait at the entrance of the shop so that he wouldn’t disturb Eindebelle while she carried out her business. He couldn’t keep from twiddling his thumbs, however.

Gratt looked at the three engaging in their conversation in an unaffected manner. First, he set his sights on Eidebelle. Her red hair flowed loose, and her blue eyes were those of an intellectual. A woman filled with maternal love, her expression was alight even moreso than usual. Gratt found himself taking a sigh at her sheer beauty. Next, his eyes went to Eidebelle's adopted daughter, Nanami, who was getting cuter and cuter with each passing day. Like mother, like daughter—even though the two of them weren't related by blood. She would probably be quite a beautiful woman in a few years' time. That left the other person, the young girl that he assumed was a customer. Out of the three, she stood out the most. The good-looking young lady could only be described as being beautiful in the purest sense. This girl, possessing undeniable beauty from head to toe, had her jet-black hair bundled casually. Seeing her so dressed down put her beauty and cuteness in perfect harmony. Maybe she was an aristocrat, or royalty in disguise. The one thing that was abundantly clear, at the least, was that this girl was *no* commoner.

*...Well, I still believe Ms. Eidebelle to be more beautiful, regardless.* Gratt thought to himself as he decided to come back when she wasn't busy. He figured that just waiting off in the wings while dealing with a high-class customer could interfere with business. However, the young girl turned toward him as if she sensed his presence in the room.

"Oh, Belle, it looks like you have a customer."

"Who th' heck is it? We were just gettin' to the nitty gritty—Oh, it's Mr. Gratt!" Eidebelle exclaimed once she saw Gratt, her cheeks blushing slightly. She hadn't at all noticed that Gratt appeared discouraged upon hearing what she said, thinking that he really *did* come in at the wrong time.

"My apologies. I seem to have come in while you're in the middle of something. I will come back again later." Just as he was about to turn back toward the door, Eidebelle frantically rushed toward him.

"Hold it, hold it! I was just a lil' engrossed in enchantment chat; that's all. You're not gettin' in the way of anythin', Mr. Gratt."

"You aren't just saying that out of consideration?"

"Course not. I appreciate you always takin' the time to come out."

“Oh, no. Ms. Eidebelle, coming to your shop is worth the trip.”

“Teehee, flattery’ll get you everywhere,” she commented, blushing and clearly fairly pleased. He knew that Eidebelle turned into a different person when it came to enchantments, and it seemed as though that explained what happened a moment ago. Realizing that it wasn’t because she disliked him, Gratt breathed a sigh of relief. He then instantly switched gears, putting his business-focused merchant face on.

“Ms. Eidebelle, you told me that you had something interesting in today’s stock?”

“Yeah, I did, but lemme introduce her first off. This lil’ lady is Nanami’s savior, Ristia. And the somethin’ interesting I got was from her.”

“Oh-ho...” *Now it’s making sense. So it was no coincidence that this young, stand-out lady is here.* Gratt thought to himself, pointing his attention toward Ristia once again. Her clear red eyes met Gratt’s line of vision head on. Looking at her up close was starting to make her look less and less like an ordinary individual. *If I let down my guard, I’m bound to get overwhelmed,* Gratt thought to himself, attempting to get back into the swing of things. “Pleased to meet you, Lady Ristia. My name is Gratt. I establish places of business in the imperial capital.”

“Very nice to meet you, Mr. Gratt. I’m just a normal girl.” Ristia stood up from her seat and elegantly curtsied in front of him. Gratt found himself holding back a chortle as a result. A normal girl would never go out of their way to address themselves as normal, yet here she was, making such a dainty show of respect in the most refined manner and explicitly proclaiming herself as such. That was practically the same as her shouting that she was *not* normal.

*...No, wait. There is no way that this girl wouldn’t know that herself. If this girl is introducing herself as normal knowing that full-well... I see. She’s trying to gauge my reaction.* She was probably going to pass Gratt off as an unreliable business man if this slight inconsistency was enough to make him disparage her. With this possibility in mind, Gratt acknowledged Ristia as a business partner not to be taken likely. Hence, there was only one reasonable way for Gratt to handle this. *Remember. You just have to interact with her in good faith as a*

*business partner, regardless of what her social standing is*, he concluded, warning himself of his own conduct.

“Well then, Lady Ristia, I was told that you have some goods you’d like to show me today?”

“Yes, that would be correct. I asked Belle to introduce me so that I might interest you in buying the items I created today.”

“Very well. I’d like to start off by viewing the merchandise, so... Ms. Belle, would you mind if I took a seat?”

“Course, help yerself.”

“Much obliged,” he thanked her, taking a seat next to Eidebelle and across from Ristia. Gratt was slightly embarrassed to be sitting right next to Eidebelle, but he locked off that happy-go-lucky thought since he knew that he was conducting business.

“The item I was hoping that you would buy off of me is a brooch that I made,” Ristia said, pulling the brooch out of seemingly thin air. Witnessing this, for a split second, Gratt thought, *That couldn’t have possibly been an Item Box, could it?* That would explain a lot, but there wasn’t a human being alive capable of using an Item Box. It was probably some form of sleight of hand. Most likely, it was some strategy to distract Gratt away from the brooch. What was essential right now was appraising the brooch she presented him. Gratt understood that and quickly turned his attention toward it, and it wasn’t long before his breath was taken away by its beauty.

“...Would you mind if I were to examine it by hand?”

“No, be my guest.”

“Much obliged.” Putting his rashness in check, he used a piece of cloth he had on him to take the brooch. It was an open heart brooch with differing sizes on both sides. However, the difference in sizes seemed to be done in a perfectly calculated way. It was asymmetrical, yet it maintained a certain balance. Most importantly, its contours were superb—beautiful, with not a single irregularity. Gratt had never seen contours as aesthetically pleasing as this. And the stone set in its center... was a magic stone, without a doubt. The rainbow-lustered

magic stone held exquisite potential even as far as jewels went. Furthermore, the silver-colored material that made up the brooch intrigued him. At first, he thought it was silver, but once he held it in his hand, he noticed it had some considerable weight.

*I can't estimate an accurate weight since it has a magic stone in it, but my guess is that it's about double the weight of silver.* He racked his brain, coming to the conclusion that this was made out of platinum. To be frank, the brooch was simply sublime. But that was the reason why it was hard to believe that a girl this young could ever make it. With that thought in mind, Gratt decided to trick her to get to the bottom of this.

"This is quite a beautiful design. You seem to be superbly skilled."

"Ehehe, thank you very much," Ristia said, her lips curling into a soft smile. He didn't sense an ounce of nervousness from her; in fact, he felt an air of confidence.

"Still, this is truly beautiful. Is this metal silver?"

"No, that would be platinum."

"Platinum, you say?"

"Yes, it doesn't oxidize as easily as silver. Also, I've mixed in other metals to harden it."

"...Oh-ho, is that so?" Gratt said, essentially back-channelling while in a state of complete shock on the inside. Even Gratt knew the difference and features between platinum and silver, but he wasn't privy to the act of mixing in other metals to harden it. If that were true, that would be a trade secret among trade secrets even for metal carvers. Considering that Ristia knew about it, there was a chance that she was a top-class metal carver herself. But if she were a top-class metal carver, then there was no way she would so easily divulge trade secrets. He was clueless as to who it was he was dealing with here.

"Mr. Gratt. Lil' Ristia 'ere made that right in front of my very eyes."

"Oh-ho. Did she now?" Gratt had shared quite a long relationship with Eindebelle, so he didn't think that she was lying. Which only meant that it was true that Ristia had made this brooch herself. That piece of information came to

Gratt's rescue since he was so clueless to all of this. While there was a lot he didn't understand, it didn't seem as though the brooch was stolen property, at the very least. He decided that as long as he knew that, he could safely put all other factors aside for the time being. It was a decision that seemed to come a little too late, however. Ristia had noticed that she was being suspected, as her face adorned an awkward smile. "My apologies. I am running a business here, you see. I need to be extremely careful about how I handle my products."

"Yes, I understand, which is why I'm not worried about it."

Despite Gratt and his worries, Ristia gave a tender smile in response. With her display of tolerance, the young girl ended up one step ahead of Gratt. Gratt rebuked himself. *I can't afford to mess this up any further.*

"So then, Sir... are you interested in buying it?"

"Ah, right. I'll have a definitive quote for you after I confirm this item's materials, but how does thirty gold pieces... no, fifty gold pieces sound?" Fifty gold pieces was enough to build a fine house. It was a relatively high asking price, but the tagline of "hardened platinum" was bound to attract the interests of the aristocrats and nobles, so he set it high based on that idea. He thought that it was a transaction that was more than satisfactory. However...

"Now hold it right there!" Eindebelle unexpectedly shouted to halt the proceedings.

"Ms. Eindebelle... are you not satisfied with this price?"

"You're darn right I ain't satisfied. No chance I'm sellin' this for that price." Gratt had always conducted honest business with Eindebelle, and he thought that she saw his appraisal skills as reputable, as well. So her outburst was shocking to him, seeing as how he never expected her to so vehemently find fault in one of his offers.

"...You have my dignity as a merchant that I only sought to offer you a reasonable price."

"That price is only reasonable goin' off its aesthetic merits, ain't it?" It took a second to process what she meant by that, sending Gratt's eyes quickly back to the brooch. Shining in the center of the piece of jewelry was a beautiful magic

stone. Gratt was then struck with a sudden realization. He had thought that the magic stone was set up so that the buyer could install whatever enchantment they'd like, but...

“Do you mean this magic stone is already enchanted...?”

“That’s the gist of it. And I’m sayin’ I’ve assessed this brooch as an enchanted item.”

“So I see. This was a joint project between the both of you, then? Your enchanted items have always been popular, Ms. Eindebelle, so the price would indeed have to increase.” Using high-quality magic stones yielded stronger effects, but they were also that much harder to produce. Therefore, it would take a considerable amount of technique and effort to enchant a magic stone of this caliber. Gratt reflected on his ignorance, seeing that Eindebelle was reasonably upset that he had only viewed the item as a piece of jewelry. That was when Ristia spoke up.

“I’m the one who enchanted this brooch~” she declared in a very matter-of-fact manner, which threw Gratt for a loop. As explained earlier, a considerable amount of technique was needed to enchant a magic stone of high value. He was surprised that a girl so young was capable of enchanting anything, but... unfortunately, any person capable of purchasing a piece of jewelry this fine could also request a well-known enchanter to enchant it the way they wanted. Basically, an amateurish enchantment applied to the brooch would actually *diminish* the value. An enchanter enchanting something was natural, and it was understandable that one would like to provide their own enchantments, but it was a bad move from a merchandise perspective.

Nanami, probably understanding that, made a reproachful look, simply saying, “Lady Ristia...”

*That’s right. Please, tell her for me. Me telling her might make things even worse, but since Nanami seems to be on good terms with her, if she were to tell her, things would work out peacefully.* Gratt hoped, watching patiently over the pair’s interaction.

“...Huh? Are you saying I shouldn’t tell him?”

“I’m not saying you shouldn’t, it’s just...”



“Naw, he’s gonna figure it out once he looks into its effects anyway. Mr. Gratt is a reliable connection, so it’s better to tell it to ’im straight and get him on our side,” Eindebelle said, positively reinforcing what Ristia said. Gratt hadn’t at all been anticipating this interaction between the three of them. He wasn’t sure why, but it seemed that there was not a single person present that was willing to explain that an amateurish enchantment would lower the value of an item. Gratt breathed a sigh and decided to break the news himself.

“So Ms. Ristia, you were the one that enchanted this?”

“Mm-hmm, I sure did~”

“I see. Well... I should start by telling you that many of the customers who would buy such a high-priced accessory make requests for enchantments that they themselves want.”

“Oh... I didn’t know that.”

“Hence, well... I would like you to be informed that the price of this brooch could very well drop depending on the effects of your enchantment.” The gist of Gratt’s roundabout phrasing was that a poor enchantment would negatively affect the value. It ran close to saying, “Your enchantment isn’t going to cut it,” which had the potential to rub Ristia the wrong way, but his appraisal value would make his sentiment clear to her either way. That was why he wanted to make sure to hammer that point home while he still had the opportunity...

“Oh, now I get it. So I should have taken the person’s request and *then* enchanted it, right? If that’s the case, then should I rewrite the enchantment so it does whatever the person wants?” But the point did not seem to reach Ristia. In fact, it raised an even bigger concern. Rewriting something that was already enchanted shouldn’t have been possible.

*Normally, being capable enough to enchant a magic stone of this quality would take a considerable amount of knowledge and skill... so why is it that she doesn’t know something so simple?* Gratt asked himself, confused. It was almost as if they had come to a mutual understanding, yet they were worlds apart at the same time.

Perhaps witnessing the two miscommunicate was hard to watch, because the nearby Eindebelle provided some recourse. “Hey, Ristia? Why don’cha explain

to Mr. Gratt what kinda enchantment you put on this here thing.”

“Oh, good idea. The enchantment nullifies bodily ailments.”

“Oh-ho! That would put it in demand, if that is so.” *I may not know the extent of the effect, but we’re heading in the right direction here*, Gratt thought, slightly relieved. Regardless of whether they were aristocrat or merchant, any person with money needed to be careful of poison, so any enchantment that would mitigate bodily ailments of any kind would receive positive reviews.

“Right, so what kind of ailments does this enchantment help mitigate?”

“The conditions are less ‘what kind,’ and more ‘every kind.’ It targets every ailment.”

“...Huh? ‘Every’? Are you saying it helps mitigate every bodily ailment?”

“No, it doesn’t mitigate. It nullifies.” Gratt blinked in disbelief. Soon after, he laughed.

“Goodness, you’re quite the comedian, Young Lady.” If an enchanted item produced the same effect every time, then it would have more effective abilities the further its scope was narrowed down. Based on that premise, it targeting “every bodily ailment” was so broad that it was infeasible. And even if one was to restrict the scope of what it helped, it couldn’t have enough power to *nullify* bodily ailments. For example, even if you were to limit it to specific poisons, the best it could do was mitigate the effects of the poison. Setting weak poisons aside, nullifying the effects of poisons in general was simply impossible. Basically, it would be a high-end item if it were able to pacify even just half of an ingested poison, and if it had an ability to completely nullify even a single type of poison, then it was practically an Artifact. Nullifying any and all bodily ailments was the sort of thing one would only find in fairy tales.

Eindebelle remarked with an awkward smile, “Yeah, can’t blame ya fer thinkin’ that...”

Nanami, on the other hand, had an obvious tension in her brow. “Lady Ristia, you’ve fouled up, haven’t you?”

Gratt then realized that something here was off. If what Ristia claimed was the truth, then that would mean all of their stories fit into place, leading to

quite the unbelievable predicament. Gratt looked at the brooch in his hands for a second time, then shot his eyes back to Ristia.

“Huh? Does it really have the power to nullify all bodily ailments?”

“Indeed it does.”

“...D-Do you mind if I appraise it?”

“Go right ahead~” Ristia said in an easygoing tone. Upon hearing that, Gratta used his treasured Artifact, a magic crystal tool that appraised enchanted wares. And the moment he did—the magic crystal tool shattered into pieces.

“...*Goodness!*”

“Oh, no. A tool that low-grade simply won’t cut it. Wait just a second.” Gratt was taken aback at what had just happened, but it wasn’t soon after that Ristia pulled out a countless number of crystal-like shards seemingly from thin air. Then, an unbelievably complex magic circle deployed around Ristia, and the shards transformed into one solid, transparent orb.

“Ehehe, voila. An appraisal crystal that will appraise any and all enchanted items~” Ristia said with an innocent smile. However, the words that came from those beautiful glossy lips never entered Gratt’s ears—because the phenomenon that had just unfolded before his eyes transcended his comprehension.

“*Wh-Wh-What... What* did you just do?”

“‘What’? Just what it looked like. I made an appraisal crystal.”

“You *made* one? Just like that?” A simple enchantment took several hours, and some even took several *months*. Also, an appraisal crystal was an Artifact, an item that could never be created in the modern day. So, unable to believe what he was told, Gratt tried appraising the enchanted item in his hands with the crystal he was just handed. Displayed on the crystal was an effect he was familiar with... along with a detailed supplementary explanation. The explanation far exceeded the appraisal crystal that had just broken moments ago, which caused his jaw to hit the floor.

“I can’t believe it... Is this a genuine article?” *No, impossible. This cannot be...*

Gratt thought as he checked other enchanted items to test, but it provided the correct ability and a detailed explanation for each one. This was his first time meeting Ristia, and not even Eindebelle knew of every enchanted item that Gratt walked around with, which meant there was no way this could have been set up in advance. He couldn't suspect them now that he was faced with all these facts. The appraisal crystal was the real deal. *So that means...* Gratt thought as he timidly appraised the brooch, and it gave him a detailed explanation. In addition to the ability to nullify any and all bodily ailments, it was also enchanted with self-restorative abilities. Even if the owner had a fast-acting deadly poison enter their system, it would immediately nullify it, and even if the brooch was smashed into a million pieces, it would restore itself as good as new. This was a brooch crafted by a normal girl.

“...Haha, hahaha,” Gratt let out a dry chuckle, perplexed as to where he should even begin pointing out the lunacy.

—5—

In the corner of Eindebelle's shop, Mr. Gratt the merchant sat in astonishment as he looked at the brooch that Ristia had brought to him. It seemed that the enchantment Ristia had placed on it had him in a state of shock. That being said, Ristia had started to realize that her own enchantment abilities did stick out a bit—a *teensy* bit—after that lecture she gave both Eindebelle and Nanami earlier before Gratt showed up. Even so, the reason she was trying to sell the brooch in the first place was because she needed money for the orphanage. That was why Ristia waited for Gratt to regain his composure and carried on with the proceedings, asking, “So how much would you be willing to buy that brooch for, Sir?”

“R-Right... If I am to be honest, I'm completely unqualified to buy this from you.”

“...Huh?” Ristia was confused at his unexpected answer.

“Please, do not get the wrong impression. I am not saying that this brooch holds no value. On the contrary, I am saying that it holds *too much* value for me to make you a reasonable offer.”

“There's no need to worry about that.” Ristia didn't want the money for

herself; she just wanted the money because she needed it for renovations to the orphanage.

*I think she would settle for an amount that would net her a small fortune, but...* Gratt trailed off, shaking his head.

“No, my dignity will not allow me to purchase this at the meager price that I can provide.”

“Oh, I see...” Even Ristia was pleased that he held the brooch she made in such high regard. While it did put her in a difficult situation, she couldn’t find it in her to ask him to buy it regardless. Gratt was not finished with his statement, however.

“...That being said, I can represent you in selling this brooch, Lady Ristia.”

“Um... what does that entail, exactly?”

“Once a month in the imperial capital, they hold an auction. What do you say to me selling the brooch on your behalf and taking a small commission from the sale?”

“An auction once a month...” Ristia had no idea where the imperial capital was, but she worried over whether it would take a considerable amount of time until she could receive any money, which showed on her face.

“Pardon me asking, but do you need the money immediately?”

“I want to rebuild the orphanage.”

“I must say... That is quite noble.”

“No, I just want to help the children. Nothing necessarily noble about it,” Ristia gently denied. Gratt, on the other hand, was touched, taking it as a show of modesty and virtue. “You are like an angel, Milady.”

*I’m a normal girl who just wants a little sister, after all. And I don’t need Nanami jumping into the conversation saying stuff like, “She is not like an angel, she is an angel,” either,* Ristia thought to herself, but since she decided to not to say that she wanted a sister aloud, she kept it to a whispered comment, “But I am a normal girl...” It was a comment that he laughed off for whatever reason.

“So, the only orphanage in this town I recall is the one that sits on that hill,

correct? That would be the same one with all the unsavory rumors about it, if I remember correctly.”

“Oh, well, um...”

She wasn't sure how much of the situation she should expand upon, but Eindebelle advised her from the sidelines.

“Mr. Gratt is a reliable guy, so ya can tell ‘im the whole story, Dear.”

Given the okay, she disclosed that the director running the orphanage was operating illicit activities out of the facility, and she explained how she had exposed him and taken over the position of orphanage director herself.

“You took over the orphanage...?”

“Yes, indeedy. He signed off on a letter of authorization and everything. ...Oh, right. Would you mind taking a look at the letter to make sure everything is in order?” Ristia asked, pulling the letter of authorization out from her Item Box.

“My pleasure,” Gratt said as he took the letter and scanned his eyes over what the agreement detailed. After he finished checking the letter from top to bottom, he looked back at Ristia. “...This letter of authorization has an intentional drawback built into it.”

“Huh? Does that mean that... it *doesn't* make me the owner of the orphanage?” *If they kick me out of the orphanage... What should I do? Do I take the kids with me and move to someplace that's available...? Or do I create an orphan town outside of this one?* Ristia pondered, thinking well outside the box. Plus, if Ristia did build another town outside the town they were already in, the town's greatness would cause people to start migrating there, which would lead this town to ruin in the not-so-distant future. However, that wouldn't end up happening—for better or worse.

“You can relax, Lady Ristia. This still gives you ownership of the orphanage.” Her fears weren't going to come true, thanks to Gratt's welcome news.

“Oh, but, umm... You said there was a drawback, right?”

“This letter of authorization includes a clause that states that if the bestower petitions within the span of six months, the transfer will be null-and-void.”

“Aah... so that’s what you meant.” It meant that Director Georg never had any intention of handing over the orphanage. If he had made his escape back then, he would have objected after Ristia used the letter of authorization to reclaim ownership.

“So essentially, everything is fine so long as you make certain that the predecessor cannot file for the transfer to be null-and-void, but...” Gratt said with a implicative look shot Ristia’s way. She hadn’t explained what happened to Former Director Georg, but... maybe Gratt had already realized that he was no longer in this world.

*This man sure is one capable merchant...* Ristia thought as she answered him. “If that is the case, I don’t see any problems arising.”

“Ah, I see. Well, I can get this squared away, if that is all right by you.”

“...Are you sure?” Ristia was not very privy to human law. She appreciated the prospect of Gratt doing things in her place, but she was also not sure whether she should have him put himself out like that.

“Also, my shop has a branch in this town as well, so my business will help front any expenses that you may need for the orphanage.”

“While I do appreciate that, Sir... are you really sure about all this?”

“Certainly. Even the lowest bidding price I have in mind for your item is enough to help build a few *dozen* orphanages, so just think of it as a down payment.”

“Oh, thank you so much!” Despite the rocky start, they hammered out the details and finalized their agreement. After which, Ristia shared a short chat with Nanami and Eidebelle before going back to the orphanage.

“Hello, everyone! I’m back~”

“Oh, Director! Welcome back~” When she announced her return in the entryway, the children came rushing in from the back and glomped Ristia, which caught her off-balance and made her totter. It wasn’t because she was physically knocked off-kilter, but because she was being surrounded by a group of adorable younger children.

“Whoa, whoa! Director, you okay?” Mew, the tomboy, asked with a concerned look in her eyes.

Ristia crouched down and assured her, “I’m fine, my dear. Thank you for being so concerned,” gently petting her dog-eared head.

“Woof...” she said with a delighted-looking smile. That sparked a chorus of pleas from the other children.

“Me next!”

“No, me!”

Ristia was in so much bliss that she could die.

“Alright, you guys. Break it up! You’re going to give Director Ristia a hard time if you don’t cut it out.”

“Okay!”

Maria rushed from the back of the crowd right into the scene of the crime and let out a thunderous roar. The children obediently broke away from Ristia, albeit in a slightly reluctant manner. In response, Ristia did not flop her shoulders like she normally would, but instead smiled sweetly.

*Maria sure is cute. Has me jealous. Ehehe. It’s okay. I’ll give Maria’s pretty little head the headpats she deserves.* Ristia thought as she gave Maria’s head a gentle stroke. As a result, Maria’s brown skin turned a subtle shade of red.





“D-Director Ristia?!”

“Heehee, the way you turn red is adorable.”

“D-Don’t make fun of me, please!”

Ristia was, of course, not making fun of the girl at all. She was simply doting over an adorable younger girl with extreme sincerity. Then again... it was pretty much like being made fun of from the young girl’s perspective, so to each their own.

“Uh-oh~ Big Sis Maria’s blushing~”

“She is! She’s blushing~”

“Blushing~ Blushing~ Whole face is flushing~”

Seeing Maria, the same Maria who acted as their older sister this entire time because she was the oldest, blush gave the children material to start teasing her. That was when Maria had had enough.

“Alright, all of you! Quit it with all your nonsense and get back to your chores in the room!”

“Oh, man! Big Sis Maria is mad!”

“She’s mad~!”

“Mad~ Mad~ Sure not glad~” the children chorused, making merry, as they scampered into the back of the room. Among them, Ristia could see the standoffish boy, Allen, with a slightly complicated expression on his face. It was just her guess, but he was probably trying to assess Ristia’s personality just as he’d declared he would. His actions had a very adult-minded manner despite his age. She had felt him stare at her a lot ever since then, too. Once he looked Ristia in the eyes with that extremely, incredibly serious expression, it made him turn his head and blush.

“Teehee, kids are so cute...”

“...While I agree with you, I would like it if you didn’t project that onto me, too.”

“What are you talking about? You’re one of those cute children, aren’t you,

Maria?”

“~~~!! Okay, seriously, the poking fun at me needs to... Oh, whatever,” Maria started, but probably noticed that Ristia’s smile wasn’t mean-spirited in any way. Maria turned her head in an attempt to cover up her embarrassment.

“By the way, Maria, was lunch alright?”

“Right! About that! What the heck was up with those ingredients?!” she said, storming at her at lightning speed.

*I left the ingredients out in a rush before I left, so maybe I made a mistake along the way?* Ristia thought, anxious. *If I remember correctly... I left fifty kilograms or so of the highest quality meat, as well as ten kilograms or so of fresh vegetables like carrots and cabbage. I also left them an assortment of spices with it, so I don’t think there should have been anything wrong, right?*

“Oh... do you not eat meat due to religious reasons?”

“That’s not the issue here!”

“...Then, do you hate carrots?”

“I’m telling you, that’s not the issue! Plus, we don’t have the leeway to be picky like that.”

“...Then, I assume it’s the amount?”

“You don’t have to assume anything. That *is* the reason.”

“Sorry, it was too little, wasn’t it...?”

“It’s too *much!*”

*Boy, kids sure do eat a lot,* was Ristia’s initial thought based off of her impressions, but Maria completely shut that down. “Oh, okay. A little too much, huh?”

“Considering that we only ate a little of it, I would say it was ‘way too much,’ not just ‘a little.’”

“Oh, really?”

Her idea was to get everyone to eat since they all looked so thin. She was the type of girl that, if she kept a pet or something of the sort, she would feed it

until it was nice and plump.

“So, yeah, we’re starting to take the leftover meat and dry it out for storage.”

“Aah... so that’s what you meant by ‘chores.’”

“Yes. I thought about confirming it with you, Director Ristia, but it was too much as a whole, and it likely would have spoiled if we didn’t act fast,” Maria said, looking slightly anxious. Ristia didn’t mind since her intent was to have them eat it all anyway, but Maria probably thought that she went out of line in her actions.

Taking this into consideration, Ristia looked at Maria with a smile and said, “Thank you.”

“...Director Ristia?”

“I didn’t give you clear enough directions. Thank you for coming up with a backup plan.”

“Huh? Oh... um, I just did what was natural!” Maria replied, looking away in a bashful manner. Incidentally, while Ristia would have no way of knowing, Former Director Georg was the type to scold Maria for acting out of line if she did things independently and get angry and tell her to act on her own if she didn’t. Hence, Ristia not only applauding Maria’s decision, but being thankful as well was enough to fill her with indescribable emotion. That was the main reason why she turned her head away in such a bashful manner. “So, yes... Should we be drying out all the meat?”

“Right, about that... Truth is, there’s actually a way to store it raw.”

“Huh? There is? Have we just been wasting our time, then?”

“Not at all. There’s plenty to go around. You guys dry all the meat out, or I can store it for you—either way works.” Those ingredients were also collected by Ristia before she ran away from home, making them all a millennium old by this point. But since she had stored them in her time-freezing Item Box, there was no problem when it came to their freshness. If there was a problem, it was that the meat was from animals that were long since extinct in this era, but that was relatively tame by comparison.

“I’m not quite sure where I should point out what’s wrong with that statement.”

“Every word is true.”

“...If it is true, then can we dry out all the meat?”

“Of course. I don’t mind, but can I ask your reason why?”

Maria seemed a little anxious as she asked that question, but she didn’t give off the impression that she was doubting what Ristia said to her. Be that as it may, there shouldn’t have been any need to hurry and dry out all the meat if she did believe Ristia’s words. Ristia was curious as to the reasoning Maria had in wanting to preserve everything regardless.

“Um, you may be aware of this, but the reason why I volunteered my services was because we didn’t have the money to put food on the table for everyone. Of course, they don’t know that, but they do know that life has been tough.”

“...You are so kind, Maria.”

With a surplus of dried meat, then everyone could rest easy knowing that they didn’t have to starve. Upon figuring that out, Ristia smiled and said, “In that case, you can go ahead and dry it all out, then.” It was worth noting that, as described earlier, what they were turning into dried meat was high-quality cuts of already extinct animals. If there were any aristocrats around, they would find turning this high-quality meat into jerky unfathomable. They would probably be screaming, *“I’ll pay you whatever you’d like, but for the love of all that’s sacred, sell it to me raw!”* However, for better or worse, there were only the orphaned children and a True Blood princess here.

With that settled, Ristia went to join the children in their work. They managed to boil each piece of meat pickled in salt water one by one and leave them to dry in the sun.

—The next day rolled in, and after breakfast, Ristia asked that everyone remain in their seats. The children looked worried as their young eyes fell upon her. “The reason I had you all stay is because I want to ask your honest opinions.” Ristia’s ice-breaker was met with a line of confused stares from the children, followed by a chorus of chatter questioning what they were giving

their opinion on. Ristia, however, expected this would happen, so she turned to Maria. For the past two days, Ristia had been casually explaining what she was going to talk about to Maria alone since she realized that everyone trusted her like their older sister.

“Alright, now. All of you, pipe down. Director Ristia wants to ask all of you about renovations to the orphanage. She wants to ask your opinions on how we should shape things up around here.” Maria said, looking at Ristia and thinking, *That’s about the gist, right?* Ristia promptly nodded in affirmation.

“As Maria just explained, I plan on renovating the orphanage. So I would appreciate it if you could all chip in and tell me how you’d like to spruce things up~” Ristia said with a soft smile, upon which the children’s face lit up like supernovas. And what followed was...

“I want a yard so I can play with everyone!”

“Oh, wow! Then gimme a room to myself~!”

“No fair. I want a room to myself too!”

“I want a small hot spring!”

“Ah, I’d like to take a hot bath~”

One after another, the children started firing off their requests.

Ristia listened to each one with a smile.

“Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, good idea.”

However, Maria was starting to get flustered from the sidelines.

“Wait, wait, everyone, hold your horses. Don’t get the wrong idea here. By ‘renovations,’ she doesn’t mean renovating the building, she means renovating the finances of the orphanage.”

The moment Maria corrected the statement, she was met with a collective disappointed, “Aww...”

“...Guys. I don’t know how to break this, but, well, this orphanage is in bad financial shape. I’ve kept it a secret this whole time, but to be honest, it’s a wonder that this orphanage wasn’t shut down a long time ago.”

“...Huh? The orphanage is gonna shut down?” Little Mew asked with a teary-eyed expression.

“No, we’ll be fine. Director Ristia will be taking care of everything, so this orphanage isn’t going to get shut down by a long shot. But you still shouldn’t be making all these demands.” Maria’s warning helped them understand their current state of affairs.

“Oh, right...” some of the children said with solemn expressions. They then started to apologize. “Sorry for being selfish.”

It looked as if things were getting explained extremely well, but after hearing what Maria said, the question marks went flying over Ristia’s head as she asked, “Maria, what are you talking about?”

“‘What’...? The point of this was to get everyone to pitch in and economize because renovating finances here on your dime alone would be impossible... Uh, right...?” Maria asked, looking more and more uneasy with each word because she had predicted the worst case scenario, but... Ristia replied in a casual and indifferent tone.

“Nope, not at all. I’ve already got the money to renovate the orphanage, so the point of this was to ask everyone how they wanted the building to look.”

“...Uh, what? Wait, huh? No, I mean, um... You have the money to renovate the facility itself? You’re not talking about our immediate living expenses?”

“Yup, yup. It’s all good to go.”

“Wha...? Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa...?!” Maria screamed in disbelief while the children all cried in celebration nearby.

—6—

“Director Ristia, how many fingers am I holding up?” Maria came up to Ristia holding up three fingers, which made her pout her cheeks.

“Just so you know, I’m not going insane, okay?”

“Yeah, but you said that you already got the money needed to renovate the orphanage... Does that mean you’re some kind of aristocrat, Director Ristia?”

“I’m just a normal girl, though...”

“...Normal girls don’t take over an orphanage and gain enough money to rebuild said orphanage literally overnight.”

“I’m a normal girl who just has ways to get ahold of an orphanage and a lot of money?”

“That’s *not* being a normal girl, either.” Maria let out a huge sigh in response.

*Shoot! All signs point to me being normal because I am normal, but I’m having such a hard time being considered a normal girl in everyone else’s eyes...* Ristia thought to herself.

“Just to make sure one more time, did you *really* get the funds?”

“Yup. I don’t have it on me right now, but the costs needed for the renovations are going to be covered by a company. The carpenters should be here any moment, so you can ask them when they arrive.”

“...Right, I’ll go ahead and ask.”

*And that takes care of convincing Maria,* Ristia figured. She prepped a blank blueprint atop the table and started to draw plans with everyone’s ideas incorporated into it.

“And there, and there, you’ll each get your own room, so I’ll make it accommodate extra space if we adopt new orphans... which leaves the playroom and the mini hotspring. And a playground in the yard, right? That, and I’ll make my quarters a two person room...” Ristia thought to herself, planning for the event in which she would get her younger sister. All the while, she handled a ballpoint pen in her slim and supple fingers to sketch up a set of blueprints so pristine it was like she used a ruler the entire time.

“Wow, Director, that’s so cool!”

“Ehehe, thank you~” In high spirits from the children’s praise, Ristia added some separation and drew in a large bathroom, following up by making the entire orphanage a two-floor building and putting in additional rooms.

“And... here’ll be fields for crops. But maybe I should open up a shop, too...” Ristia drew up her plans without an ounce of hesitation, setting up three buildings in a right-facing half rectangular pattern. She then took out another



piece of paper and drew in water-supply lines and air-conditioning ducts, finishing it all off with a water-sewage pipeline and heating-cooling systems using magic tools. Finally, deciding on the materials for the building and penning in the load factor—the house’s upper limit in terms of weight—Ristia had completed a perfect blueprint in practically no time at all.

“This is just the testbed, so it’s subject to change based on whatever you guys want~” A perfect blueprint that was just a testbed. The children excitedly scanned the blueprints, but they ended up making some rather doubtful faces. Ristia looked at this in confusion, clueless as to what the issue was, but the children stared on, bewildered, without providing an answer. Ristia looked to her trusty Maria for help in this situation.

“Did I do something wrong?”

“Um, well... How do I put this? Can you really build a place this incredible?”

“I’m not going to build it; the carpenters are.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. I mean, is it financially possible? Also, what is this ‘magic-tool plumbing system’ stuff?”

“A system that draws water from underground with magic tools?”

“No, I mean, the system in general is... Ugh, you know what? Forget it. I’ll ask the carpenters later.” Getting the feeling that she was being treated like the awkward child of the family, Ristia flopped her shoulders in disappointment, deciding to try her very hardest so that Maria and the other children would be singing even more praises of her awesomeness. Unfortunately, she hadn’t noticed that she was going overboard and turning them off from her instead.

Her blueprints now completed, Ristia led the children outside the orphanage, this time without Maria, who had been acting as her bulwark this entire time by her side. Maria had since stepped out to Gratt Commerce in town to confirm whether it was fronting the costs of the operation. Ristia’s conduct was illogical in every sense of the word, and while it was commendable that Maria was being so straight-laced and confirming the facts... it left Ristia in a bit of a slump. *Poo, she doesn’t trust me...* However, she couldn’t allow herself to stay in this slump for long. There were twelve children around her, and if she impressed them enough, they would probably tell her, “*Big Sis, you’re amazing!*” Maria

was also going to come back from her check sometime soon. If Ristia were able to change up a bunch of things before Maria got back home, then she might praise her, *“You did all this while I was away? Big Sis, you’re amazing!”* Motivated by that idea, Ristia decided to get started with her work.

“First... I guess I can start by moving the old building out of the way.” She used a search-type spell to confirm the foundation of the old orphanage building, and the results showed her that it was sitting underground, barely touched at all. *Oh, this should be easy, then,* Ristia thought, activating her spell without an incantation. She then removed the soil from a corner of the orphanage grounds the same size as the width of the building and about thirty centimeters deep, stuffing it inside her Item Box.

“Whoa! The ground just caved in?!”

“Wait, what? What’s going on?!”

The children started to panic in unison. And seeing that, Ristia felt sorry for startling them with the sudden display.

“Everyone, calm down. I just removed the soil with magic; nothing to be shocked over~” If there was a person here with the tiniest inkling of magical knowledge, then they would have really laid into that comment with a quip. *“Just removed it? Yeah, right! Like that’s even possible!”* But none of the orphans there had that particular knowledge on-hand.

“Wow, Director, you’re a sorcerer!”

“Director, you’re amazing!”

The children’s genuine surprise was followed by multiple amazed cheers. The moment those cheers graced Ristia’s ears, she was overjoyed. *Yes! I did it! I got them to call me amazing! Just a little more before I get them calling me “Big Sis!”* This time, she kept in mind not to startle the children as she cast her magic circle. It was a thoughtful gesture, but the tremendously-sized and breathtaking magic circle only managed to startle them all even more; it was a slight mishap, but it was neither here nor there in comparison to what she did next. She made the orphanage levitate, foundation and all, over to the space she cleared out just seconds ago and gently placed it down.

“The whole house moved!”

“Director, you’re amazing! Really amazing!”

The children cried as they clung to Ristia, who was jumping for joy on the inside.

*Yay! I’ve captured everyone’s hearts. I’m the happiest girl around~ Ehehe~*

Unwilling to let that very un-older sister-like behavior show to the children, Ristia petted everyone’s heads with a docile, “Why, thank you.”

As mild and level-headed she seemed on the outside, she couldn’t deny the fact that she was absolutely estatic on the inside. Ristia decided to proceed with even more of this and that.

“Alrighty, next order of business~” Digging up where the construction site would be made it so that the groundwork could start as soon as possible. Ristia followed this up by using a search spell a few thousand meters underground and checking for any underground water sources or hot springs. She pierced her way underground, proceeding to thrust pipes made of orichalcum in that very location. If a scholar had witnessed what she was doing, they would probably go into a frenzy, yelling, *“You made plumbing pipes out of a legendary metal?!”* But, in Ristia’s mind, the material was nothing more than extremely resilient non-rusting metal. She devised a setup wherein they could draw hot spring water or regular water by installing a magic stone-powered pump. Of course, she didn’t forget to run the hot water through the rooms, as well, to supply the mini hot springs she promised.

“Next... a sewage system.” Ristia then connected the pipes in the locations she marked on her blueprints of where the sewage would drain, and then she installed a magic stone-powered filtration system that would process the unclean water and deposit it into a nearby lake. The pipes were, of course, also made out of orichalcum, and if that same hypothetical scholar from before found out, then they would probably have had tears in their eyes. *“Using a legendary metal as sewage pipes? Blasphemy...”* But, true to form, that wasn’t an issue to Ristia. As such, Ristia finished up her work lickity-split and took a breather to look at the children’s reactions, but she was met with blank stares all around. Apparently, they were only able to visually confirm the fact that she

had dug up the foundation, but a lot of what she did was out of their sight, so they couldn't wrap their heads around what had just happened.

“Director, what did you just do?”

“Um, well, I pulled out an underground water source and a hot spring.”

“Underground water and... a hot spring?”

These children, born and raised in the orphanage, were so far removed from society that they probably didn't know what went behind making a hot spring.

Ristia gave the children a comforting look as she went into detail. “You see, I took what we call a ‘non-volcanic hot spring,’ which is hot water trapped deep underground, and I brought it up to the surface with magic.” It was a detailed explanation that the children only understood half of, but they seemed to understand that magic was amazing, and their Director was awesome for being able to use it. Everyone gazed upon Ristia with reverence in their tiny eyes.

Ristia thought to herself, *Go ahead, tiny ones! Now's your time to call me “Big Sis!”* But they looked up to her as the director of their orphanage, so regardless of all the amazing stunts Ristia pulled, the chances of them calling her their Big Sis were slim to none—chances that Ristia was naturally oblivious to.

“So, hey, Director? Real hot springs are basically big bathtubs, right?” asked the red-headed girl, Ayane, her purple eyes alight with hope. She was still only nine years old, but she was the precocious tyke with the most knowledge of the real world behind Maria. Judging from what she had said earlier about baths and her question just now, she must have come to the conclusion that a hot spring meant warm baths.

“You guessed right, Ayane, my dear~ I'm making a bathing place for you all,” Ristia said, pointing to the place that would serve as the bathhouse as she explained the recessed area would be the actual bath, and there would be a changing room nearby... but as she did, Ayane's expression grew dimmer.

“Huh? Is something wrong with that?”

“Oh... no. It's just that, um, I'm wondering if this is a bath just for you, or not.”

“What? Oh, no, this is for everyone to enjoy.”

“...Really?” The child seemed surprised for whatever reason. While Ristia couldn’t guess why Ayane and the other children were so surprised upon hearing that, she looked back at them with a reassuring smile.

“When I’m finished with it, let’s all take a dip in the hot spring together.”

“‘All together’ meaning... just girls?”

“Oh, I meant everyone who’s here.”

The second that Ristia uttered those words, the faces of the boys in the crowd turned beet red, and the girls started to panic. Incidentally, this wasn’t a problem for reasons so readily apparent. In fact, if it were *just* the children, it wouldn’t have been a problem at all. They’d never had a real bath before, with their only means of bathing being wiping down their bodies with a pail of water, so they never had the luxury of separating the boys and the girls. That was where Ristia fit into the equation. She had the grace and beauty of a nobleman’s daughter. The thought of taking a bath with someone as lovely as Ristia naturally turned all the boys’ faces flushed and inevitably had the girls panicking, as well. For the girls, their behavior didn’t stem from jealousy of Ristia, but from them disliking the idea of the Director’s beautiful and graceful nude form being exposed for all the boys to see. Ristia herself didn’t think that, thinking to herself in a carefree manner, *These kids sure are precocious.*

The girls picked up on Ristia’s ignorance and all shared the same thought. *We’ll have to look out for Director Ristia since she’s so vulnerable.* It was a group decision that would bring Ristia to tears if she heard it aloud. Afterward, Ayane and the other girls admonished Ristia, which made her promise to separate the bath into boys and girls.

As she created a personal vegetable garden in the corner of the orphanage grounds, among completing other work, the carpenters finally arrived.

“Thanks for being so patient. I’m Wood, the lead carpenter. We’re here on orders from Gratt Commerce.” One of the carpenters stepped up in front of Ristia. He was a man with a firm physique for someone in their late thirties or so that exuded an aura of leadership.

“Pleasure to meet you. I am Ristia, the person in charge of this orphanage.”

“Oh-ho... So it’s true that management of this orphanage changed hands.” His face looked oddly pensive. Ristia tilted her head in confusion, wondering if something was the matter.

“Oh, no. Not trying to be rude. The former director was a real nasty fellow. I was planning on declining this job if he was involved, but... looks like that’s not the case.”

“If you mean Former Director Georg, then he left town after telling me to take things over,” she explained, promptly lying through her teeth. Ristia was a bit of a naughty girl, so to speak.

“...Left town, huh?” Wood whispered with an expression that was difficult to put into words. He then looked down at the mob of children encircling Ristia’s legs and kneeled down to meet them at eye-level.

“You little guys like this young lady?”

“Yeah, we love her! And she doesn’t do bad things like the last director!”

“She’s really nice!”

The children answered in unison, bringing a smile to Ristia’s face, “Ehehe.” That reaction was all Wood needed.

“I see. Seems you’re a stand-up gal, Little Lady,” he said, nodding. “Alright, we’ll take the job.”

“Thank you so much. I look forward to working with you and your men,” Ristia replied, smiling toward the carpenters. The carpenter men, who had been watching everything unfold, formed goofy grins on their face as soon as they saw Ristia’s beaming smile.

“Well then, hate to be so up-front, but did you have any specific way you wanted things built? It seems that you already have some groundwork started here...”

“Oh, that? I was just getting things ready. As for specifics... If you could, I would like it built to the specifications on these blueprints, but is that doable?” Ristia presented the blueprints to Wood, who then looked at her with a troubled expression.

“Uh, right. Little Lady? I should warn you in advance, but houses have these things called ‘load factors,’ or the max threshold for the materials we use, so it’s not like you can arrange things all willy-nilly like... Hey, wait, these blueprints have a ton of detail.” Wood’s gaze fell upon the blueprints, and he started to check what was written down, enthralled. The other carpenters started to peek at the blueprints as well, making a bevy of different faces as a result. Before long, Wood’s attention went back to Ristia after he finished scanning through the plans. “You sure are skilled. I can’t find a single slip-up on here anywhere.”

“In that case, will you be able to build it to specifications?”

“No, that’s impossible.”

“...Um, I don’t follow.” Despite there not being a single slip-up, he couldn’t build it according to the plans. Ristia stared back at him blankly, unable to understand what he meant.

“If we followed what was written down on these plans, there’d be no issue. But the materials written down are odd. If we went by the values here, we’d end up making an orphanage that could withstand a siege engine.”

“Yes, I designed it with that in mind.” Ristia’s frank response to Wood’s concerns left him at a loss for words.

“...Little Lady, I’m going to be frank: there is no material in this world capable of doing what’s on this blueprint.”

“Ah, don’t worry; I’ll have that ready for you. I’ll prepare some columns for you in the meantime.” As soon as Ristia pulled out some orichalcum from her Item Box, she manufactured it into the shape of columns and stacked them up in a corner of the orphanage grounds.

“...Huh?” Wood and the other carpenters went wide-eyed.

“W-Wait, did you guys see hunks of metal just come out of literally nowhere?”

“Yeah, I saw the same thing. I feel like I saw the metal turn into columns, too.”

“But... that’s not physically possible, right?”

“Yeah, no way in the world. That’s probably just the exhaustion kicking in for

us.”

The carpenters rubbed their eyes and took another look at the corner of the grounds. There, they saw Ristia right in the middle of stacking a new set of columns in the same spot.

“Is this real life...?”

“What the hell’s going on?!”

“Hey, Little Lady! What are those?!”

The carpenters all belted out in unison, crowding around Ristia. However, Ristia was a True Blood princess, and she was determined to not keep repeating the same blunder forever, which is why she turned to the carpenters and gave them a docile smile.

“Gentlemen, this isn’t magic, so there’s no need to be startled.”

“I mean, you say it’s not magic, but I don’t even think you can do that *with* magic...”

“That’s correct. I am a normal girl, so I wouldn’t be capable of performing magic.”

“Uh, right. I mean, is that right? I’m not sure what’s going on here, but if you’re not using magic, then how did you manage to bring out those materials?” Wood asked her, trying to gain a grasp over the situation in spite of his confusion.

Ristia then gave the same docile smile as before in response, explaining, “This is just sleight of hand.”

“...Excuse me?”

“Just as I said, sleight of hand. A trick.”

“Aah, that makes sense. Sleight of hand. All just a trick, eh? Nothing strange about that, then—*Yeah, right!*” he replied, the other carpenters joining in to quip at the same time. They didn’t pursue the topic any more than that for some reason, though. That led Ristia to believe that they had bought her story about it all being sleight of hand, but that wasn’t the case by a long shot.



There was no way that Ristia would know this, but since Nanami had predicted that Ristia would mess *something* up, she gave Gratt some advice, which he used to prime the men. Wood and the other carpenters were not to talk about what they observed to anyone else and not to pursue any various oddities that may occur. That also kept them from calling Ristia abnormal. The self-proclaimed normal girl who was often called an angel was being protected by a couple of actual angels. However...

“I’m back... Wait, the orphanage moved?!”

“Yeah, the Director moved it~”

“What the heck does that even mean?!”

Maria conversed with the children upon her return as the carpenters all formed a unanimous opinion amongst one another. *That girl is absolutely not normal.*

—7—

The reconstruction of the orphanage started promptly. Although, because the work didn’t finish instantaneously as it would have if Ristia had used magic, she and her children continued to live in the old orphanage until the reconstruction work was complete. That continued until one day—a day where Maria came to Ristia with some news.

“A suspicious man has been wandering around here?”

“Yes. He’s been scouting out the orphanage and going around asking about stuff. It’s making me worried about the kids...”

According to Maria, she saw a certain man several times over the past few days. A normal person would have thought that they had come to scout out the orphanage due to its sudden rise in prosperity, but Ristia, on the other hand, wondered to herself, *Could they be here to look for little brother or sister candidates?*

“Don’t worry. I won’t let him get to the children, mark my words!” she shouted, her inner intentions declaring, *I’m going to be everyone’s Big Sis! I won’t let anyone who comes after me get to them! No way, no how!* In that moment, Ristia was assaulted by some light vampiric impulses, and she

furrowed her long, thin eyebrows.

Maria was oblivious to this, however, and smiled, “I kind of figured you might say something like that, Director Ristia.” All at once, the two of them were both on the same wavelength and having entirely different conversations. However, despite the crossed wires, they ended up finding a middle ground, both of them none the wiser. After that discussion...

“I have a present for you guys today~” Ristia said with a big smile for the children after they finished lunch.

She placed jewelry on the table—enough for several people. They were brooches with a design that depicted three fruits lined up on a leaf. It was a neutral design that even the boys could wear.

“Wow, they’re so pretty and sparkly...”

“What are these? They’re awesome.”

The children’s eyes lit up as bright as the brooches in front of them.

“These are my presents to all of you. They’re brooches I made.”

“Huh? You made these, Director?! These are so *awesome*! Wait, you’re giving these to *us*?!”

“Yup, that’s right~” These brooches were made with one goal in mind, that goal being: *“These children are boys and girls that I’m trying to make into my younger siblings. I’m not giving anyone an opportunity to steal them after everything I’ve done!”* Now I’m all set against that suspicious man! Ristia thought as she gleefully watched the children affix the brooches to their clothing. However, she realized that Maria was casting a doubtful look upon her and looked her way.

“...Um, problem?”

“Less a problem with me and more like there being too many problems for me to point out.”

“But I took your report into consideration.”

“Then I’ll just go ahead and say it: If we put on these expensive-looking brooches, it’s essentially the same as telling people, ‘Please pick us out as

targets.”

Maria had a point. The children were already cute by default, so adding any kind of allure with the brooch would obviously cause anyone to want to take them in as a younger sibling even more. There might've even been some people who wouldn't be able to contain themselves and might try to take a child home with them. Warranted concerns, but Ristia replied simply.

“No need to worry about that.”

“What do you mean?” Maria asked curiously. Before Ristia even had a chance to answer her question, the children started to stir.

“H-Huh? The bruise on my hand is going away.”

“And I think I can see kind of clearer. Everything far away has been all blurry 'til now!”

“My stomachache is gone!”

“My whole body feels lighter!”

“Wow, I feel stronger!”

Upon surveying the children, Maria asked, “What did you do this time?”

“I just enchanted the brooches I made. A boost to physical ability, and wound regeneration. Also, something to nullify bodily ailments, so they'll be okay even if someone suspicious does accost them!” It was one of Ristia's enchanted items, created with a bit of effort. If Ristia was the same as she had been before, she would've modestly claimed she was just a normal girl, but with the children showering her with praise, that humble attitude had disappeared. According to her, she was “just a normal girl who was capable of some slightly fantastic enchantments.”

Knowing for the past few days that pointing out the contradictions in her stories was no good, Maria replied, “If you can assure everyone's safety, then fine,” and put on her own brooch.

“Oh, it's true; my body *does* feel lighter. This is a handy little brooch.”

Maria was steadily adapting to Ristia's illogical ideas and behavior. It helped that the children, who were raised behind the isolated walls of the orphanage,

didn't find Ristia's antics unbelievable as much as they did plain incredible. Even Allen, who was on his guard like no tomorrow toward Ristia at first, had entirely softened up to her as of late and was just as impressed as everyone else.

"What the heck is this? This is awesome!"

It was a piece of cake getting him on her side—or rather, the blessings Ristia was bestowing them were so incredible that suspecting her of ill-intent seemed ridiculous. That was the truth of the matter. As such, Ristia continued to establish her normal—objectively speaking, extremely abnormal—territory on the outskirts of town.

Then, one fateful day, Gratt paid her a visit.

"Good afternoon, Lady Ristia. I am here to see you about the auction today."

"Good afternoon to you, Mr. Gratt. Please, come inside, if you would," Ristia said with a soft smile, inviting Gratt into the parlor of the old orphanage.

"My... I heard the rumors floating around, but this is quite the incredible room," Gratt said in an impressed tone, scanning the room.

*I really didn't do anything much; I just prettied things up so that they would be about the same as my own room back home. Mr. Gratt is clearly just flattering me,* Ristia thought with a wry smile.

"I just did some last-minute redecorating; giving me such high praise is going to make me blush."

"Hahaha... Last-minute, was it? That's what you seriously consider all of this, I see."

"...Huh?"

"Oh, no. Just talking to myself. Now then, first things first: I will be returning the appraisal crystal you allowed me to have." Gratt tried to return the appraisal crystal that Ristia made, but Ristia just glanced over it and declined the offer, even though it was made from a diamond fragment of her Crystal Cage.

"But I let you have that, Mr. Gratt."

"...Wha? Are you out of your mind?! This appraisal crystal is on par with, or

even greater than an *Artifact!*”

“Oh, come now~ I made that in less than no time; even you saw me do that, didn’t you, Mr. Gratt? It’s nothing as grandiose as an Artifact. It’s a regular enchanted item~”

“I don’t know where to start picking that argument apart... but you *are* serious about what you’re saying.”

“Of course I am serious. So, please, don’t be so reserved and accept it as my gift.” The whole reason that Gratt’s old appraisal crystal had broken was due to the brooch Ristia made, in any case. Her thought process wasn’t based off of assuming responsibility for breaking his possession, but since she could easily make a replacement for him, she didn’t see the harm in giving it to him.

“...I say, as of late, I feel like my financial know-how and general common sense is going by the wayside. Normalcy as I know it is flying straight out the window...” She didn’t quite understand why, but Gratt looked exhausted. Ristia wasn’t all that interested in anyone other than likely candidates to be her little sister, but she did have enough kindness in her heart to care for someone who had been such a big help so far.

“Would you care for another enchanted item as a present, as well? One that helps with fatigue?”

“I beg of you, please stop! My sense of normalcy will never end up coming back!” he pleaded with her with tears in his eyes, for some reason.

“Um, well... If you mean to say you don’t need it, then I’ll give up on the idea. But please, at least accept the appraisal crystal. Otherwise, I’ll end up feeling guilty for breaking yours.”

“...Very well. I will graciously accept your kind gift. In exchange, I shall foot all of the expenses and commission used for this month’s auction. The construction costs, as well, of course.”

“...Are you sure?”

“As sure as can be. I am making out with quite the hefty profit, after all. Please, do not worry about it. It will be my concern now, so I’d appreciate it.”

“...Okay, then. Thank you for all your help,” Ristia said, her smile full of gratitude.

“I should be the one showing my appreciation around here. Let’s see... So the highest bid in the auction was eighteen-hundred large gold pieces.”

“Oh, I see. Thank you so much, Sir.”

Eighteen-hundred large gold pieces was the equivalent of eighteen-thousand gold pieces. That was a price that would make any regular person—no, even an aristocrat—go wide eyed in surprise, but Ristia was indifferent, considering she had no sense of the currency of this era. Her lack of reaction prompted Gratt to comment, “Not very surprised, as I expected,” with an awkward smile.

“Surprised? About what?”

“Uh, well... if it’s all right by you, shall I bring the money here...?”

“Sure, I don’t mind... but why ask me?” she replied, cocking her head in confusion over why he went through the trouble to inquire.

“Well, bringing a large amount of money to the orphanage would be dangerous... Under normal circumstances, that is.”

“Ooh, that makes sense. But I’ll take good care of it, so it’ll be okay.” There was no safer place than Ristia’s Item Box, so Ristia accepted the large gold pieces.

“Also... there is something I want to tell you,” Gratt said, his face turning stern, suggesting he was getting to the heart of the matter.

“...You want to tell me something?”

“Your brooch, as I expected, has become a big enough topic to shake up society. Even at the auction, the highest bid went to the person who had the most money to give out of all the other auction-goers at the time.”

The auction floor went dead silent once the brooch was introduced. The auction-goers bid on it one after another, eventually driving the bid to exceed the funds most people had on hand and causing them to drop out. The ultimate result was that the person who had the most money on them at the time won the bid. It was a result that caused many of the other auction-goers who

couldn't win the bid to lament, saying that if they had known about the brooch beforehand, they would have prepared the funds even if it meant taking out a mortgage on their house. That meant that if he had made an announcement in advance, the highest bid would have been even *higher*. Under normal circumstances, one would be lamenting not making said announcement in advance. Ristia wasn't fixated on selling the brooch for a high price, and if they made a grand announcement that made the brooch the target of a huge organization, there was a chance that not even Gratt Commerce could completely fend them off. That was Gratt's decision. It was a decision that would have made Ristia happy, but...

"Truth is, the people who didn't win the bid have been probing around for information on the exhibitor." These people had an enchanted item on par with an Artifact bought out from under them, so several speculations flew by as a result. He explained that with all the discussion, there were people with intentions to negotiate business themselves if there were more items of that nature to be sold. "Of course, protecting my client is part of the agreement. I tried my best to hide your identity from them, but the aristocrats have taken this seriously."

"...Do you mean you couldn't keep it a complete secret?"

"Right now, there are no signs that the cat's out of the bag, but..." Gratt offered as a preface. He continued by telling her that, while no one batted an eye to him dropping in every now and then because of his branch store in the same town, keeping the fact that said branch was supporting the rebuilding of the orphanage under wraps was a daunting task. There was also the fact that the position of the orphanage's director had just recently changed hands. If there was anyone who could connect those dots together, it wasn't impossible that they would learn that Ristia was the brooch's original exhibitor. "You have my apologies. I have been thinking up ideas for that aspect, as well," Gratt admitted his failure, bowing his head.

"Please lift your head, Sir. If I had tried to handle matters all on my own, things would have assuredly turned out sour, so you have my gratitude, regardless."

"...Thank you very much, Milady. I'm rather relieved to hear that from you. I

would actually like to set up some security for you and your children myself, but would you...”

“That won’t be necessary.”

“...Right, I see. Wouldn’t help that if I provided guard detail, then it would be like outing the auction’s exhibitor on my own. I understand, then. Should anything go awry, please come consult me right away.”

“Yes, thank you. I’ll do just that if the time arises.”

—A few weeks passed, and the construction of the new orphanage was proceeding swimmingly. One day, during the mid-afternoon, Ristia handed out drinks to the hardworking carpenters as she always did.

“Thanks as always, Little Lady.”

“No, I should be thanking all of you. I’m so grateful,” Ristia answered, a smile on her face and appreciation in her heart. Ristia was dressed in a cool sundress with her jet black hair tied casually behind her. Despite her clearly coming from an affluent upbringing, she socialized and chatted with the rather rough-and-tumble-looking men. That quality made her a big hit among the carpenters. It resulted in some of the men deciding, *After construction is over, I’m gonna confess my love to her.* Naturally, Wood’s ever-prevalent eye loomed over his men, so Ristia hadn’t even noticed that that was the case.

“By the way, Little Lady, there’s something that’s been on my mind... Y’mind if I ask you about it?”

“Of course I don’t mind. What would you like to know?” Ristia asked, tipping her head in curiosity.

“Rebuilding the orphanage and the bathhouse are things that I get, but... what do you plan on using this building in the front for? It looks like a cafeteria, but it’s way too big for that, isn’t it?”

“Oh, that? I plan on opening up a shop.”

“...A shop?”

“Yes, a public cafeteria that specializes on light meals.”

“A cafeteria? But you’re not going to be able to make much of a profit with it



being in this location, you know?”

“That doesn’t bother me one bit. Letting the children work is my goal, after all.” Ristia’s explanation that she wanted the children to work with no concern for profits made Wood and the others’ eyes open wide.

“I... see. So you’re trying to get them to work while they’re kids to teach them a trade? Boy, Little Lady, you really are looking out for those kids.”

Normally, there were no businesses that would let young children—especially orphans—work, but with Ristia being the one building it, there was nothing to worry about. Wood was touched, since she intended on letting the children gain experience while they were still young so that they could work properly for businesses in the future. Ristia had another plan in mind pertaining to all of this, but... that was another story for another time. The fact remained that she had the children’s best interests in mind, so she let it pass with a smile.

“Hey, Ristia! Ristia!” A relatively younger member of the carpenter crew called out to Ristia.

“Yes? What is it?”

“That cafeteria of yours. Can commoners like us come and eat at it?”

“Why, yes. Of course you can.”

*“Whoooooa!!”*

The carpenters let out cries of joy. It wasn’t just from the younger carpenters, either; Ristia was even popular among the middle-aged ones, too. Some of them could even be heard saying, “I sure wish I had a girl like her.”

“When you open up shop, I’m coming to eat for sure!”

“Yeah, me too!”

“Ehehe, I hope I get to see all of you there.” Ristia smiled adorably. Once she did, the carpenters’ thoughts all merged into one—they were going to go to the cafeteria every day once it opened and get cozy with Ristia. It was a sentiment that Ristia didn’t even have a clue about, however.

“Alright. If that’s how you want it, then let’s get back to work on the double!”

*“Yeah!!”*

The carpenters returned their cups back to Ristia’s tray after they were done drinking and returned to the construction site with revitalized faces.

“You’ll have to excuse my men.” Wood was the last one to return his teacup to the tray, and he gave her an awkward smile. While the apology was for his men’s suffocating appeals for Ristia’s attention, Ristia was left completely clueless, so she looked back inquisitively. She then cleaned up the cups on her tray with magic and placed them into her Item Box.

“By the way, is there anything I can help you with?”

“No, but the sentiment is appreciated. This is our job to do.”

“Oh, is that so? Please, don’t hesitate to ask me if you need anything, though. Personally, anything to speed up the process is greatly appreciated.”

“Hmm... Well, there is one thing I can ask of you. The materials you provided us are pretty heavy, you see. And carrying them up to the second floor is going to be a tall order. If you could move them to where we need, then...”

“Aah, I follow. If that’s your request, then I just have to move them to a more convenient location.” As soon as he finished his request, Ristia piled up and hardened the soil she had put in her Item Box from the groundwork she’d done right next to the under-construction orphanage, creating a sloped path that continued to the second floor portion of the facility.

“Hey, wait a second. What did you do this time?”

“Some more slight of hand, of course.”

“...Right, slight of hand. Can’t argue with that, can I?” It seemed that Wood had come to his own personal conclusion, accepting the supernatural phenomenon with little objection. Leaving Wood and the others to their business, Ristia, with the construction blueprints committed to memory, easily hoisted the materials up with one hand and carried them up the hill to the second floor with a casual stride.



Ristia took her time leisurely moving the materials. Any passers-by that saw

that sight would never think that Ristia was carrying anything heavy, but Wood and the others knew that the material she was handling was well over a hundred kilograms. As a result, Wood and the rest of his men shared the same idea: *“Yeah, this little lady isn’t ordinary. Period.”* But just then...

“Whoa~ Director, what are you doing~?” Several of the children came over to Ristia as she transported the materials.

“I’m carrying the materials that they need to rebuild the orphanage up to the second floor.”

“Then, I will too!”

“And me! Me, too!”

The children circled around Ristia. The first thought that came to Wood and the others, upon seeing them, was that having kids on the construction site was dangerous, so they rushed themselves over to Ristia to disperse the crowd of children, but before they could...

“Okay, then, why don’t we all do it?” said Ristia, making Wood’s eyes go wide in shock.

“Wait, a second! What’s the big idea, Little Lady? There’s no way in the world that...” Wood barely reached the end of his sentence before Ristia casually chucked the over-one hundred kilogram building materials to the dog-eared girl, who caught them with a cute little, *“Heave-ho.”*

*“...Wha?!”*

The likeminded carpenters that were heading toward the children all stopped and made the same dumbfounded exclamation.

“Now, carry it nice and carefully. And make sure not to inconvenience the others, okay?”

“Mm-hmm, gotcha~” said the supposedly prepubescent dog-eared little girl as she proceeded to carry the crushingly heavy batch of materials up to the second floor.

“Wh-What? What the heck is going on here?”

“I-Is it because she’s from the dog-eared tribe?”

“Well, I have heard that beast-men are stronger than humans, but... one that young?”

Amidst Wood and his men’s confusion, they caught a glimpse of Ristia passing off materials in similar fashion, this time to a human boy, and sure enough, he also proceeded to transport the materials without even a hint of an issue. The brooches on their chests glowed the entire time, but clearly, nobody gave that detail much attention. At any rate, faced with the sight before them, Wood and his carpenter team were positive—positive that it wasn’t just the girl that wasn’t normal, but the whole orphanage itself.

—8—

One day, about two months after construction had started on the new orphanage, Ristia’s long-awaited bathhouse was completed. Per the children’s specifications, it was split into two sections—one for boys and one for girls. And, of course, it was promptly opened for the children, as well.

“Let’s have a bonding session, everyone~” Ristia said, trying to invite everyone to come bathe together with her, regardless of gender. However, the girls were staunchly opposed to this idea. Ristia was still young herself, but the orphans were even younger. She was convinced that they were still too young to be aware of sexual interests, so Ristia was impressed by their reaction, thinking, *My, everyone is so precocious.*

Late that night, Ristia found herself in the changing room. The day didn’t fatigue her at all, but she still wanted to take a relaxing soak since she hadn’t had a bath in ages. She first removed her blouse, cast some cleaning magic over it, and threw it into her Item Box. Then, she took off her bra, panties, and skirt and put them away in a similar fashion. Now in her birthday suit, Ristia tied up her long hair into a bun and headed toward the bath.

“Ehehe, a nice, big bath is such a welcome treat after so long~” Ristia said to herself in high spirits. Adhering to pre-bathing manners and customs, she used cleaning magic to cleanse herself of any filth before soaking in the water. While that eliminated the need for her to really get in the bath to begin with, doing this was a matter of principle. She proceeded to pour some of the water on herself before entering the tub proper. Soaking her lower body first, she

gradually submerged her upper body, as well. Now with the water up to her shoulders, Ristia laid herself down in the wide open space of the tub. Maybe it was from the components of the spring, or perhaps it was just a placebo effect, but Ristia found herself significantly more relaxed.

*“Hah... This feels fantastic~” How long has it been since I’ve had a real bath?* Ristia absentmindedly thought to herself, but she could only recall bathing with her sisters before she took her thousand-year sleep. “I wonder what my big sisters are doing right around now... And where...?” She hadn’t taken in a little sister for herself yet, but she’d figured out both what it meant to be a little sister, and the realization of just how much her older sisters cared for her. *It’s been so long; I sure would like to see them...* Ristia thought. But even for someone as capable as Ristia, seeing as how she didn’t know where in the world her family could be, it wasn’t possible for her to search for them. Although, if they were to intentionally use a large amount of power, she could at least isolate the area they might be in. That way, she could search for them, and would probably even find them in due time.

*I sure would like to have a little sister to introduce to my big sisters before I see them again...* As that thought ran through her head, the door to the changing room opened without a creak. Out from the door appeared a brown-skinned girl.

“Oh, you’re here, too, Maria~”

“Who’s... Oh, it’s you, Director Ristia. I was wondering where you went, but I guess you were taking a bath this whole time. Am I... disturbing you?”

“Goodness, no~” Ristia said with a soft grin as she rose from the bath.

“...Are you getting out already, Director Ristia?”

“Nope, I just figured I would help wash you off, Maria.”

“Huh? Oh, um, well... I can do that my...” she started protesting, shrinking herself in wariness. Perhaps it was a combination of the memory of being violated haunting her in addition to her lingering fear of being touched by others, but that would explain why she didn’t bathe with the others and waited to do so by herself this late at night. Understanding Maria’s mindset, Ristia gave her a comforting smile.

“You’re so pretty, Maria. Plus, I don’t mind if you’re still nervous about me. We’ll take it one small step at a time. Okay?”

“...Director Ristia, um, if you insist... then I’d appreciate it.”

“Sure thing, just leave it to your Big Sis, my dear!” Taking on the role of older sister for a bit, she sat Maria down on a stool at the washing station. Ristia took to her knees behind the girl at an angle and picked up the shower nozzle.

“Okie dokie, here comes the hot water~”

“Eeek?! Wh-What? What is this?!” Maria seemed unfamiliar with what a shower was. The hot water that spurted out from the shower made her shiver in surprise.

“This is called a ‘shower,’ and it’s a tool that can efficiently spray hot water~” Ristia said, spraying hot water from the shower to the shaken Maria’s side to demonstrate. Seeing that Maria’s fear was starting to diminish, she spritzed some hot water on her leg to further introduce her to the concept.

“...! It... tickles. Mm.”

She was still shivering, but it wasn’t out of fear like a few moments prior. Confirming that to be the case, Ristia slowly started to run the shower over Maria’s entire body. The hot water pelted off of Maria’s young and vivacious skin—a result of Ristia’s magic regenerating her body on a cellular level.

“It feels so good... but... using hot water this way is extremely frivolous.”

“It’s a blessing from nature. I say it’s fine to reap as many benefits from it as we’d like.” The hot spring being a blessing from nature was... *technically* not incorrect. So long as one was to turn a blind eye to the Artifact-level tools here and there that Ristia had used to power her way thousands of meters underground, of course. In any case, Ristia could see that Maria’s body was getting to the right temperature, so she pulled out a specially-made body soap and sponge, squeezed the soap onto the spongy surface, and started to lather the girl up.

“Alrighty, now I’m going to get to your back.” She gently applied the sponge to Maria’s back.

“...!” Maria’s body stiffened up in response.

“Are you okay, Maria?”

“...I’m fine. I’m flinching out of reflex, but I know not to be afraid of you, Director Ristia.”





“I see... In that case, I’ll wash you nice and slow, so if there’s any discomfort, just let me know, okay?” She scrubbed gently, as to not cause her any fear, yet with enough force to disperse any grime from the girl’s body. Ristia could have easily eliminated the grime with cleaning magic, but if Ristia had learned anything from her older sisters, it was that an older sister should wash their younger sister’s body, so she was staying loyal to those teachings— which was a complete lie. Ristia doubted her sisters’ methods, always washing her body without the use of cleaning magic, up until today, but as she washed Maria with her own hands, she felt herself overcome with tender emotions, which finally gave her insight as to why her sisters always wanted to wash her so badly. In short, it was a moment of sheer bliss. But as she finished washing Maria’s back, she pondered where she should wash next—That was when her eyes fell upon the back of Maria’s captivating neck. Once Ristia’s eyes met her nape, her heart started to throb loudly, and vampiric impulses stronger than any she’d had before welled up from inside of her.

“—Ah, khh...” She bit her lip to subdue the impulses. But while that would normally quell the problem in an instant, it instead only proved to make them *stronger*. The urges ran through her mind, making her think, *I want to scoop up Maria right now and sink my fangs into her neck*. Then, suddenly...

*—No, I... can’t! Maria is precious to me. She’s a candidate for the role of my little sister. And she is most definitely not food! She’s also had terrible things done to her by Director Georg. She means so much to me; I couldn’t throw myself on her like that!*

She bit her lip until it started to bleed in an attempt to keep her compulsion from rising up to the surface.

“...Director Ristia?” Before she even realized it, Maria had already turned around and was looking up at her. With her defenseless, naked body spread before her eyes, Ristia found herself taken aback. “...Director Ristia? Is something wrong? Are you alright?”

“Huh? Ah, yes, I’m alright. You can wash the rest of yourself, right? Or do you want me to do the front, as well?”

“D-Don’t put words into my mouth!”

“Heehee, okay, then.”

Maria turned beet red as Ristia tried her hardest to give her a mischievous smile in retort. As such, she quickly washed off the remaining suds, said, “Okay, I’m going to get out. See you later,” and fled the bathhouse.

*“Hah...! Uh-ah... Why...?”*

Ristia had run off into her quarters, squatting in her bed and clutching her chest. Even after returning to her room, her vampiric impulses weren’t settling down a single bit. Of course, she had several kinds of food in her Item Box, some of which included meat dripping with fresh blood... or, in less crass terms, meat that was uncooked and undrained. However, Ristia’s body wasn’t satisfied with that variety of blood. What Ristia thirsted for was the fresh blood of Maria, Nanami, and the children of the orphanage. And that was the reason she was in so much turmoil. She wasn’t resisting the act of drinking blood as sustenance itself, but she considered Maria, Nanami, and all of the orphans precious parts of her family. In spite of that, she looked at that family like food. It was a conclusion that rocked her to the core.

*“Ah-uh...! Hah... What do I do...?”*

She desperately worked her brain, but she wasn’t coming up with any ideas. At this rate, she was bound to assault Maria eventually, but if that were to happen, Maria would develop scars on her heart that would persist for a lifetime. Of course, assaulting the other children was out of the question, as well. Considering Nanami knew about her situation, she wouldn’t have to worry about frightening her. If she explained her reasoning, then she would gladly let Ristia drink her blood, but... Ristia didn’t want to view Nanami as food. Faced with dire straits, her only other recourse was possibly getting away from the city for a while. Once that idea started rolling in her head, there was a sudden knock at her door.

“...Who is it?”

“It’s me, Maria... Can I come in?”

“Maria...” *Of all the times for her to show up...* Ristia thought, half in tears. Maria’s voice from the other side of the door seemed worried, and Ristia didn’t have it in her to refuse the girl once she heard her tone. And so, Ristia said,

“Yes, of course. Come on in.” Ristia allowed Maria in as she chomped at her lip, trying to pretend like nothing was wrong.

“Okay, I’m coming in now, so... *Huh?* What’s the matter?!” Maria, clad in thin pajamas, saw Ristia squatting in her bed and ran over to her side to check.

“Oh, it’s... nothing,” Ristia replied, feigning her calm demeanor with a smile.

“You liar. It certainly doesn’t *look* like nothing. What’s the matter? Do you have a fever?” Maria climbed onto her canopy bed and placed her palm on Ristia’s forehead. The sight of Maria worrying for Ristia clad in her pajamas was lovely. The second that thought ran past Ristia’s mind, her vampiric impulses became even stronger.

“Khh...”

“Well, no fever... So why are you acting so...”

“It’s... nothing.”

“Like I said, this doesn’t look like nothing!” Maria stated, raising her voice. Having never seen Maria act like this before, Ristia’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Director Ristia, I’ve known that you suffer from time to time.”

“Y-You have?”

“Yes, I have. So why aren’t you telling me? Why are you saying it’s ‘nothing’? Am I *that* unreliable in your eyes?”

“No, that’s not it... Not at all.” Despite being so delicate and frail, she was going beyond the call to provide for the other children, so Ristia would never think of Maria as unreliable, but considering how precious she held the girl, she still couldn’t bring herself to speak about her situation. That was what she thought, until...

“In that case, *tell* me. This making me sad!” Maria urged her frantically. Ristia was taken aback, temporarily forgetting about her vampiric impulses and staring at Maria.

“...Maria? Why are you... ‘sad’ about this?”

“I’m so disheartened that you’d ask me that. Director Ristia, you saved me

from the darkness. If you start acting weird, then it's only natural that I would be concerned, isn't it?"

"Meaning you feel... indebted?"

"That's right. But not out of duty or anything like that. I'm just really, *really* grateful to you, Director Ristia. So I want to help you in any way I can. That's how I feel from the bottom of my heart."

"Maria..." Maria was sincerely worried about Ristia, yet she was looking at the girl as sustenance. Her conduct was betraying Maria's emotions, a fact that brought pain to Ristia's heart. It caused her indecision over whether she should disclose the truth or not... but only for a second. If considering Maria a food source was betrayal, then refusing Maria's request for Ristia to disclose the situation was nothing short of betrayal, as well. While she couldn't control her vampiric impulses of her own volition, she could certainly decide whether or not she should disclose the situation to Maria. Hence, Ristia made the judgment call to confess her sins.

"Truth is, I... want to take you so bad that I can't help it."

"...*Wha?!*" Maria exclaimed in a hysteric voice. After she darted her eyes around the room, she scooted back to the edge of the bed and hugged herself. Maria hugging at her stomach in her single piece of sleepwear emphasized her breasts, which were quite ample for someone her size and age. It gave her a somewhat alluring appearance.

"D-Director Ristia, you want to *take* me? Does that mean, um... Are you being serious?"

"Yes, I want to take you right now."

"O-Oh, I... see. Erm, um, well, you have helped save my life and, um, I've been violated, but if you're saying that you want me, then..."

"But, you see, at the same time, I don't want to view you as sustenance because you're so important to me, Maria."

"I-If you want, Director Ristia, I don't mind being sustenance for one night... Huh? Sustenance? What do you mean by that?" Maria asked, her head cocked in confusion.

“Um, well, what I mean is... I’ve had these impulses urging me to drink your blood as of late, which have made me almost jump all over you.”

“...Um, blood? Could you elaborate?” She was obviously dumbfounded. It dawned upon Ristia that she had yet to reveal her true identity to her.

“Erm, so basically... I’m a vampire,” she said covering up the fact that she was a True Blood, remembering Nanami’s reaction and thinking that telling Maria she was a True Blood would shock her even more than telling her she was just a vampire. Despite her consideration, the fact that she was a vampire alone was more than enough to shock Maria.

“A vampire...? Huh? Are you being serious with me?”

“I am. I’m not a human; I’m a vampire.” Right after Ristia repeated herself, Maria’s body went into shivers. *So I did freak her out after all*, Ristia thought regretfully.

But... that was when an anxious-looking Maria’s small hand grabbed onto Ristia’s sleeve.

“...Maria?”

“Director Ristia, why did you save all of us? Because you wanted to drink our blood?”

“N-No! I never once had that idea!”

“You... didn’t?”

“Not at all. I came to this orphanage to help children in need and build relationships with them.”

“But now you want to suck my blood?”

“Well... yes, I do.”

Ristia feebly nodded in reply to Maria’s pursuit on the topic. She knew she couldn’t really excuse herself; no matter how nuanced her motives were, the reality of the situation was that the end result remained the same. With that stacked against her, she couldn’t blame Maria if she ended up hating her, and she had to accept any verbal abuse she might hurl her way as a result. That was what she was prepared for, until...

“So, correct me if I’m wrong, but... Vampires don’t make kinsfolk by sucking blood, do they? It’s by giving blood, right?”

“That’d be correct.”

“In that case, I don’t mind you drinking my blood.” She had the same reaction as Nanami, and in a certain sense, an offer that Ristia had expected, but that was exactly why Ristia quickly declined.

“Why? You want to drink my blood, don’t you?”

“While I do, I don’t want to at the same time.”

“...What is that supposed to mean?”

“Let me explain. I do have the impulses that urge me to drink your blood, but I consider you too important, Maria... I consider you family. So, you see, I don’t want to view you as my sustenance,” she said, opening up her heart to her.

“I never knew you thought of me that way,” Maria smiled gently in response to Ristia’s heartfelt sentiment.

“So, hey, Director Ristia? Why do you want to drink my blood?”

“Why I want to drink your blood specifically?”

“Yeah, you want it just because it’s my blood? Or will any person’s blood do?”

“Well... I’m not quite sure myself. For whatever reason, whenever I see you or Nanami, I’m suddenly overcome with vampiric impulses...”

“Whenever you see me or Nanami?”

“That’s right, whenever I think about how cute you two are, this vampiric impulse tries to get the better of me.” Ristia’s disclosure made Maria assume a thinking pose before replying,

“So... why do vampires suck blood in the first place?”

“Um, well, they suck blood to increase their physical abilities, so it carries the implication that the target is food.”

“Really? It’s not a sign of affection or something like that?”

“No, it’s nothing like that. I mean, if it was, then I wouldn’t be so torn up

about it.”

“But you said that your vampiric impulses start coming up when you think about how, um... *cute* me or Nanami are, right? If that’s the case, then it’s most likely an expression of love instead, right?”

“That’s simply...”

“Impossible? You can’t say that for sure,” Maria cut Ristia off mid-sentence, denying her statement before she could finish it.

“...Why do you think so?” Ristia questioned, but after a slight pause for thought, Maria started to explain herself.

“There were a lot of people who had a warped way of showing me their affection when I was offering them my services. And no matter how twisted that stuff was, they definitely were their ways of showing their affection— as one-sided as it may have been.”

“So, um, do you mean to say that... the way I express my love is warped?” Ristia asked, caught off-guard and hard-pressed to respond.

“I don’t know about how normal vampires work, but... you can’t entirely say that sucking blood *isn’t* a form of showing your affection, right?”

“Yes, you may have a point, but...”

“It isn’t a matter of *may*. I mean, it doesn’t matter either way, honestly speaking. I’m interpreting it as affection,” Maria declared, lowering the shoulder on her pajamas and showing Ristia the bare nape of her neck.

“M-Maria?”

“If drinking my blood will help relieve you, then I don’t care what the reason is. I want you to drink it, Director Ristia. Even more so if those impulses are being brought on from your care and consideration for me,” Maria declared in a slightly bashful manner. Seeing Maria present herself started to send the vampiric impulses inside of Ristia back to the surface. And before she realized it, she already had Maria pinned down to the bed.

“Hngh... Director Ristia, please be gentle.”

“...Mm, I’m sorry. Anyway, I’ll be sucking your blood now.”

Maria was probably still afraid, even after all of that. Her body trembled slightly as she showed her neck. Seeing this, Ristia gently caressed the young girl's cheek, starting off by planting a tiny kiss on the nape of her neck.

"...D-Director Ristia?"

"I'm going to numb your neck so that you don't feel any pain." Ristia ran her tongue over the course of Maria's neck with a numbing agent infused into her saliva.

"Ee-aah... Mm, it... tickles."

"...Mm. You'll be fine now. Alright... I'll be drinking your blood now, okay?"

"Uh-huh... Do it, Director Ristia." Maria held out her arms and wrapped them around Ristia's neck. Leaving herself to sit in Maria's arms, Ristia sunk her fangs into Maria's neck.





“Ah... mm...”

“*Smch*, mm, *smch*...” Ristia proceed to run her tongue over the blood coursing out of Maria’s neck, lapping it up into her mouth. Accompanying that, an unbelievable amount of euphoria started to wrap itself around Ristia. Her love and consideration for Maria swelled as a result. Ristia found herself entranced, running her tongue over the young girl’s neck.

“*Hah... ah-mm... hah, hah...* D-Director Ristia, you’re not, *ah...* done yet? At this rate, I might just... *ah-ungh*,” Maria stuttered, her body shivering all over and her breathing becoming more and more strained. The sound of Maria’s voice brought Ristia back to her senses as she healed the wounds on Maria’s neck with healing magic, lapping up the leftover blood with her tongue until her neck was clean.

“Maria... Um, I’m sorry. Did that hurt?”

“O-Oh no... I’m fine. I mean, forget it hurting, it was actually... um, no, never mind. Anyway, are *you* okay now, Director Ristia?”

“Me? Um, I’m...” Posed with the question, Ristia checked her own condition. She was enveloped by a huge wave of euphoria, power surged throughout her entire body, and the vampiric impulses that mimicked starvation which haunted her this entire time were gone without a trace.

“Thanks to you, Maria, those impulses seem to have gone away.”

“Great... I’m glad that I could be of service, Director Ristia.”

Maria’s adorable comment caught Ristia’s attention, which was a trigger for those same impulses—one which thankfully did not activate again. But remembering the euphoric rush that she felt when she sucked Maria’s blood did give Ristia a tiny craving. She seemed to be faring well for the moment, but the possibility existed that the craving might come back again eventually.

“Um, so... Maria? If you wouldn’t mind, um...”

“I don’t mind. If you want me, Director Ristia, feel free to ask me at any time.”

“...Thank you, Maria.”

With that, the issues caused by the vampiric impulses that had been

tormenting Ristia this entire time were resolved for the time being.

## Episode 4: The Self-Proclaimed Normal Girl Runs a Normal Cafeteria in the Orphanage

Rebuilding the orphanage would need six months to complete. At least, that was what Maria had thought, but the job was ultimately completed in one third the time. A contributing factor to that was all the help Ristia provided the carpenters here and there. Not only that, but the old orphanage was removed in literally a second—the blink of an eye. She said that she would bring it back out if they ever wanted to reminisce on the past, a statement which neared the lines of insanity in itself. It was all logically impossible, yet normal to Ristia. Maria and the others were slowly but surely adapting to this illogical form of reality presented to them. The important thing was that the orphanage was officially rebuilt. On the night of its completion, Ristia told all the children, including Maria, to gather in the cafeteria, and they did as instructed. They were told to come there dressed in the clothes that she gave to them, but Maria was handed a maid outfit with a short skirt. She had amassed a lot of trust toward Ristia in the past two months, so she wasn't going to refuse changing clothes, but she pondered why she was given a maid outfit in the first place.

“Thanks for waiting, little ones. Ah, I see you're all finished changing.” Ristia herself arrived late to the shop floor of the cafeteria, clad in a gothic dress. Leaving her silky smooth black hair natural, she had the appearance of a regal princess. Maria found herself entranced by Ristia's appearance despite being a girl herself.

“Maria?”

“...Huh? Y-Yes?” Maria said, flustered, realizing that Ristia was now staring straight at her face.

“I was asking you if there were any problems with the outfit.”

“O-Oh no... It's fine. It's extremely comfortable. But... why a maid outfit?” Maria asked out of curiosity.

Incidentally, the other girls were also in maid outfits, and the boys were dressed as butlers. It seemed that the children liked the choice in clothes, but... Maria was still unsure as to why these clothes were the attire for a cafeteria, and so...

“‘Why’? I mean, when you think of a cafeteria, you think maids and butlers, don’t you?” Ristia replied as if she was questioning why she would even ask that. She had lived in a castle all of her life, so her perception of cafeterias included maids and butlers on staff. Ristia had said it in an extremely earnest way, but since Maria wasn’t familiar with her upbringing, she was left clueless as to what she meant.

“Well... I’m going to be in the kitchen anyway, so it doesn’t really matter.” When Ristia delivered the news that they would be working in the cafeteria, Maria panicked. Even among other girls, she would end up reflexively brushing away any hand that came near her if someone suddenly touched her. It also didn’t help that she would panic if any person of the opposite sex and older than her so much as came near her. In all, Maria was extremely unconfident that she would be able to work the floor. Ristia, however, seemed to take her feelings into consideration and taught her how to cook so that she could work in the kitchen. She broke the rules of logic in many regards, but she was an extremely considerate and kind older sister-type of girl—that was Maria’s assessment of Ristia. Granted, she would never call Ristia, her savior and the person managing the orphanage, ‘Big Sis’ or anything informal like that, so she kept her true feelings a secret and called her Director Ristia instead. If Ristia knew, she would have pleaded in honest tears, *“Just call me ‘Big Sis,’ then!”*

“I had a few goals in mind in building this cafeteria.” As soon as Ristia broke the ice and started talking, all of the children closed their mouths and gave her their undivided attention. In these past few months, Ristia had won over the trust of all of the orphans.

*Wish it didn’t take so much longer for me, though,* Maria thought, a tiny bit jealous. And above that, she felt proud that Ristia, the person who saved her, was such an incredible person.

“The first goal was for you all to gain some working experience.” Ristia started by explaining that she was trying to teach the children a trade for later in life. It

didn't seem to immediately click with the other children, but the reasoning made plenty of sense to Maria. The orphans would have to eventually leave the nest; the same went for Maria herself. And when that time came, the number one problem they would face was finding a place to work. But if they gained experience while they lived in the orphanage, it should be easier for them to work in the future. To Maria and the others, it was extremely welcome news, but their orphanage was smack dab atop a hill on the outskirts of town. Not only did it seem that people stayed away from the orphanage due to the unsavory rumors surrounding it, it was pretty much in the worst spot for traffic. It was extremely hard to think that they would gain enough customers to even turn a profit. Although, knowing Ristia, she seemed likely to say that she didn't care about turning a profit—it was an obvious fact that Maria had already predicted. The problem was that if no customers showed up, none of this would serve as any kind of work practice. Just as Maria started to brainstorm how to alleviate that issue, Ristia started to speak.

“I am establishing one rule to everyone working on the floor. That is that you *must* call every customer who comes to our establishment ‘Big Bro’ or ‘Big Sis,’ respectively!” Ristia boisterously declared.

The other children had blank stares in response, but the moment that Maria heard that, on the other hand, she was impressed.

*Very smart, Director Ristia.* Maria believed that because, after the countless number of times she was made to volunteer her services, she knew from experience that the older men enjoyed it when she called them “Big Bro,” “Daddy,” and similar nicknames. The children in the orphanage were wrangled up as prospective child slaves for the purposes of illicit volunteer services, so they all had a lot of hidden potential. In addition to that, Ristia's intervention allowed these children to come out of the rough and shine like the diamonds they were, transforming the facility into an orphanage filled with beautiful young girls and boys. If people were being called “Big Bro” or “Big Sis” by those children—especially Ristia—they would come even if it was on the outskirts. As a note, Maria used to be forced into calling people “Big Bro,” so various things concerning that sparked up some tough memories for her. However, Ristia had arranged it so that Maria could work in the kitchen, and if anything were to

happen, Maria had faith that she would protect her. With the events over the past few days, Maria's trust in Ristia had grown exponentially. *I'm sure she's doing this out of consideration for me as a rehabilitation process to help me recover from my trauma.* That was her interpretation of Ristia's actions. *A beautiful, kind, considerate soul with a wellspring of ideas—I want to always be by my big sister Ristia's side,* Maria thought from the bottom of her heart. And so, with a heart full of respect for such an honorable person, she replied, "I read you loud and clear, Manager Ristia."

It was a reply that, for whatever reason, made Ristia wilt and collapse.



It was grand opening day. Ristia sat in the cafeteria's waiting room, shoulders flopped in disappointment. There were a number of patrons who came out of curiosity, but they still hadn't pulled in many—that wasn't what had Ristia down, though. What had her in a rut was that none of the children were calling her "Big Sis." She went from the casual "Sis" to the more formal "Director," and from "Director," she moved to the business-like "Manager." This trend was making her end goal of "Big Sis" slip further away from her grasp—something she could have never dreamed would happen. Needless to say, it was an unimaginable flop and disappointment. Of course, she only told them to refer to the *customers* as "Big Bro" and "Big Sis" and never intended for them to start referring her to that as well, as a result. Ristia had thought that she would have them call her "Big Sis," and she would be able to build upon that, but they ended up throwing a wet blanket over her plans in a grand fashion.

*Sigh... I wonder if Maria even thinks of me like an older sister. I think of everyone else as my little sister and brothers, though... I miss the days when they called me "Sis" and "Sister," even if it was just a casual nickname...* Ristia griped to herself. Of course, it would be easy to just force them to call her "Big Sis," but Ristia didn't want them to just call her "Big Sis" out of *duty* and *obligation*; she wanted them to call her "Big Sis" out of *love* and *adoration*. That goal would never be realized if she coerced them into doing it.

"Manager Ristia, I have a little something to discuss, but... Are you too tired, by any chance?" Maria asked her as she popped into the waiting room. Upon hearing her question, Ristia quickly straightened herself up and put a smile on

her face.

“I’m fine. I’m happy to discuss anything you’d like.”

“O-Oh, thank you.” Maria’s cheeks went a little flush. While she was clearly attracted to Ristia’s kind words and beaming smile, this was something common among most people who talked to Ristia—something that Ristia herself was oblivious to.

“So what did you want to discuss?”

“Well, we had a customer ask if it were possible to request a specific maid.”

“‘Specific’? What do you mean?”

“You know, usually it’s one person per table, and they take the customer’s orders, right?”

“Aah... Right.”

Currently, they had their staff wait on tables in order, so the child the customer was served by would be random, including their gender. There were probably requests about getting to choose who waited their table, especially in regards to that.

“Tell them that they can specify their server if it’s within our capabilities. However, feel free to kick out any customers that cause any problems.”

“...Thank you, Manager Ristia.”

*If Maria is happy, then I’m happy,* Ristia thought to herself before Maria continued on.

“Then, you’re the first one up, Manager Ristia.” Ristia didn’t understand what she meant by that.

“Um... I’m what?”

“The carpenters from the construction team are here, and they want you to wait on their tables.”

“...They want *me*?”

“Yes, Ma’am. If you have no intention of doing so, I’ll go tell them no, though.”



“Hmm...”

Since Ristia had older sisters herself, behaving like someone’s little sister wasn’t necessarily out of the question, but Ristia’s ultimate goal was to be loved and adored by the children as their older sister. She pondered on what her best course of action to achieve that dream would be.

The result? She decided to work as a maid herself.

Ristia’s logic was that she was currently their manager, but if she were to be a maid like everyone else, then she would become their senior *coworker*, meaning that it would put her closer to being a Big Sis than a Big Boss.

“That’s fine. I’ll go get changed right away, then~”

“Okay. I’ll go tell them that you’ll be down shortly.” Maria turned around and exited the waiting room. Ristia waited until Maria was completely out of the room before she grabbed the shoulder portions of her dress and threw it off of herself. Now down to a pair of cute blue underwear, Ristia stored the dress in her Item Box and pulled out a maid uniform of her own in its stead. She then wrapped her vivacious body in the outfit. Lastly, she untied the tie that bundled her hair casually at her back, letting her lustrous black hair flow down freely without a single mark from the tie.

“Ehehe, I was right in making this just in case,” said Ristia, turning around and checking how she looked in the full-length mirror as a tender smile formed on her lips. Her appearance made her worthy of being called an “angel.” Ristia, however, murmured to herself, “Yup, no matter how you look at me, I look like a normal girl, alright.” She then went down to the floor with a sweet smile on her face, catching the attention of the children and the customers alike. They were positively glued to her lovely figure, but Ristia remained unfazed and walked to the tables where Wood and the other carpenters were seated, not with a regal and aristocratic stride, but with a light and casual pep to her step. She reached Wood and his men and greeted them.

“Ehehe, welcome back, Big Bro~” Ristia’s angelic smile, beaming while she was clad in her maid uniform, instantly captivated anybody who saw it. Perhaps it was too much of a shock to their systems, because Wood and his men all froze up.

“Big Bro Wood, are you ready to order?”

“Uh, oh, um... Little Lady, the age gap is making this ‘Big Bro’ thing kinda awkward for me. Do you mind calling me something else, if you could?”

“Um... then, Big Brother? Big Brother Wood?” she asked, cocking her head, prompting Wood to get the shivers.

“I-I can’t put this feeling into words! What is it?! I’ve always wanted a girl like this!”

“Hey, no fair, Boss! Hey, Ristia, call me ‘Big Bro,’ too!”

“Okie dokie, Big Bro~”

“Oh *maaan*, this is freaking great!” After Wood, the second carpenter started to writhe.

“Starting today, I’m gonna come here every day!”

“Thank you, Big Bro~”

“Holy crap, I’m so happy I could drop dead and I wouldn’t care!” The third man then fell. One after another, the carpenters started to drop like flies to Ristia’s charms. They’d turned into Ristia’s fans, eventually founding the Self-Proclaimed Normal Girl Watcher Association, and they would come to spread their influence over the entire continent, but... well, that was another story for a more *normal* time.

“Is there something—anything that I can do for you?! You name it, I’ll do it!”

“Gosh, well, I sure would like it if you’d order~”

“*You got it!!*”

They all replied in unison as Ristia proceeded to take Wood and his men’s orders and relay them to Maria in the kitchen.

“Manager Ristia... Did you ever run a business like this in the past, by any chance?”

“Huh? Nope, this is my first time. Why?”

“Really? For your first time, you seem oddly right at home...” Maria was perplexed, but Ristia was being mostly honest in her reply. Naturally, calling the

men “Big Bro” and whatnot was just her fulfilling part of their request, but Ristia had only ever been around older aristocratic types her entire life. It meant that while Ristia had an older sister persona when she talked to Maria and the other younger children, the more cutesy and immature way she spoke to the carpenters back there was positively normal for Ristia.

“In any case, how are you holding up, Maria? Is there anything that you’re not quite getting?”

“Thank you for asking, Manager Ristia. My skills don’t hold a candle to yours, but I’m fairing just fine so far. No issues to speak of.”

“I figured. You’ve always adapted quick, after all.”

In the few months that the orphanage had undergone renovations, Ristia had Maria and the other children take cooking lessons. And out of all of them, Maria had naturally adapted the quickest, seeing as how she originally had helped put food on the table for the orphanage. She gradually absorbed Ristia’s recipes like a sponge. Ristia had asked that question just to be sure everything was alright, but it seemed that was a needless worry.

“Just know that if you *do* need anything, you can feel free to ask,” Ristia said with a smile. And as she watched Maria cooking, she heard a voice call her from the floor.

“—Manager Ristia, you have a customer~!”

“Coming~” Answering Ayane’s call, Ristia speed-walked to the floor. She headed toward the designated area to find Nanami, Eindebelle, and Rick all sitting in a booth together.

“Oh, Belle, Nanami, Rick. All of you made it.”

“Naw naw, yer doin’ it all wrong, ain’cha?”

“...Huh?” Ristia was taken aback by the immediate critique.

“I was told this here establishment calls their customers ‘Big Bro’ and ‘Big Sis.’ So you gotta call me ‘Big Sis Belle.’”

“Big Sis Belle?”

“That’s right! I’m yer Big Sis, my lil’ Ristia!” Eindebelle declared, suddenly

jumping at her. Ristia avoided her advances with practically no effort. “Wait a sec, why’re ya avoidin’ me?!”

“No touching the maids allowed~”

“Nice rule, but I’m yer friend, Ristia!”

“That doesn’t help you, either. If I started making exceptions, then it would put the other kids in an awkward place.” Basically, if any guy were to see Eindebelle hugging Ristia and get the idea in his head to start hugging the maids, then it would mean big trouble—a fact that Eindebelle most likely understood.

“Alright. If that’s how it’s gotta be, them’s the breaks,” she said, conceding. “Oh, but in that case, all I gotta do is do it when we’re not in the cafe?” Basically, she was demanding that she be allowed to hug Ristia outside of the establishment. Ristia let out a tiny sigh.

“Geez... Well, since you insist. Big Sis Belle, you’ll be my *special* exception. ‘Kay?” she said, putting her index finger to her lips and smiling mischievously. Eindebelle saw that and started wriggling.

“Ohmigod, I feel like somethin’ in me is awakenin’!”

Ristia left Eindebelle to monologue and turned her eyes toward Rick.

“Um, should I be calling you ‘Big Bro’ as well, Rick?”

“Huh? Oh, no, I’ll pass...”

“Teehee, don’t go bein’ a stick in the mud; just go ahead and let her call you how you want.”

“Sh-Shut up, Mom. I’m fine with just ‘Rick,’ thank you. So yeah, Ms. Ristia, I’m fine the way you’ve been addressing me this whole time.”

“Okie dokie, Rick,” she said, referring to him the same as always, but in a more friendly tone. Coupled with a flash of Ristia’s pure smile, Rick’s face was aflush in no time.

“Okay, everyone, are you ready to or—Hey, Nanami, what’s the matter?” Ristia cut herself off and tilted her head in confusion upon noticing Nanami sitting with a sulky look on her face.

“Lady Ristia, today, I am one of your customers.”

“Yes, I’m aware of that, but why... Huh? Correct me if I’m wrong, but do you want me to call you ‘Big Sis’?”

“...Is that not allowed?”

“Well, it’s not *not* allowed, but...”

Nanami’s fawning look was putting Ristia in a bind. Of course, Ristia’s fondness of Nanami meant that she didn’t mind if they conducted themselves like siblings, but Ristia was working toward being her *older* sister, not the other way around. *Does she really find me that unreliable?* Ristia wondered with a flop of her shoulders, but she quickly shifted gears, thinking, *Well, if Nanami is the one asking, then I suppose I could.*

“I get it. In that case... Big Sis Nanami.”

“Oh my goodness... Thank you so much, Lady Ristia!”

*And yet, the way she talks to me remains the same...* Ristia remarked to herself with a bitter smirk, also adding, *But, if Nanami is enjoying herself, then I’ll deal with it.*

“By the way, Ristia, what’s yer house specials?”

“Mm~ Yeah, let’s see... I think that the lunch set is yummy, but... I personally recommend the shortcake.”

“...Shortcake?” The three of them looked at her like she had three heads.

Maria and the other children were clueless when she told them, too, but she had thought at the time that it was a result of their upbringing in the orphanage, but now that she saw that Eindebelle’s party didn’t know either, it was a different story. It would seem that the humans of this era weren’t too familiar with types of confectionery. Ristia confirmed that much when the cake she’d made as an example was a super-popular treat among the children. Given that, she confidently pulled a shortcake out from her Item Box and showed them.

“This is a shortcake. It’s sweet and yummy. Go ahead and try it for yourselves.” She cut it into three pieces, which she placed onto plates with

forks, and set them down before everyone's eyes.

"Well, I'll be... So this is shortcake, huh?" Eidebelle poked at the whipped cream with her fork in curiosity. The three showed some slight hesitation, but they eventually found the courage to take a bite... upon which, their eyes shot open all at once.

"What the heck? I mean, this is *super* sweet and yummy!"

"My, goodness, Lady Ristia. This is *delectable!*"

"I've never eaten anything like this either!"

The eyes of all three of them lit up in their own ways. Before long, Nanami said, "I want to eat more of this," but Eidebelle called out and stopped her.

"Ristia, Ain't there a whole heap of sugar in here?"

"Let me recall, hmm... it has enough for ten slices, so I'd say one piece has about... *fifteen* grams?" The cake was baked with a light amount of sweetness, taking into consideration that nobody seemed to be used to flavors like that... but Eidebelle cast her eyes at Ristia in shock.

"Th-There's that much in here? Don'cha think that's a really darn *high* amount?"

To humans of this era, sugar wasn't exactly a luxury item for aristocrats and nobility, but it didn't change the fact that it was *quite* the high-quality commodity, so it wasn't unreasonable for her to be so surprised upon hearing that one slice contained *fifteen* grams. However...

"Umm... well, it's only this much," Ristia said, adorably lifting a finger.

"Erm... that mean a bronze piece? Don'cha mean a silver piece?"

"Nope, just an iron piece."

"*Wha?!*"

Eidebelle, along with Nanami and Rick sitting beside her... as well as all of the other customers within earshot, all made the same reaction. Ristia's suggestion was about as expensive as the price of lunch, but it was unbelievably cheap, considering that sweets were essentially luxury items.

“Mind if I ask why you’re chargin’ that cheap?” Eidebelle asked aloud, looking at her with a look that screamed, *You’re not doin’ anything logic-defyin’ again, are ya?*

“It’s because we grow our own ingredients in fields in the back,” Ristia said very straightforwardly.

“...You grow ‘em?”

“Uh-huh, homegrown~”

While it was true that, in the back fields, she was growing some selectively-bred sugar beets that could grow even in relatively warmer areas... they wouldn’t make sugar right after being grown, and they wouldn’t provide nearly the amount she needed. She was only using that as a front to use the massive stock of sugar she had stowed away in her Item Box. She planned to make it a properly self-sufficient piece of farmland, but that just wasn’t possible at this point. The customers that had heard her explanation naturally shared the same thought once they caught on—that this cafeteria was not at all normal. At any rate, the customers were able to partake in a rare dessert that would normally be off-limits to them at a price that didn’t break the bank in the least. With none of them wanting to let this amazing opportunity pass them by, they all started putting in shortcake orders at once. And so, word quickly spread, and the orphanage cafeteria started to gain popularity in the blink of an eye.

—2—

This young girl with gentle and wavy blonde hair with clear blue eyes was named Charlotte. She had participated in the auction held in the imperial capital, and luckily, she was the lone daughter of the House of Count Warren, who owned the land of the town that Gratt Commerce’s branch was located in. That was why she was able to pick up on Ristia’s presence so quickly. After discovering that there was a girl putting up Artifacts for sale in the territory of the House of Count Warren, Charlotte decided to have her servants investigate into the rumors surrounding Ristia.

At first, it was to satisfy a mild curiosity. If she possessed an Artifact or an equivalent enchanted item, then she planned to ask Ristia to let her see it—maybe even ask to purchase it, if things went well—but, all in all, it was just a

passing fancy at best. That was, until... Charlotte realized that none of the information she was receiving made any sense.

Her servant reported that Ristia had rescued the survivor of a wiped out reconnaissance team and took on a dragon, who dwelled in the labyrinth they were searching, blowing it to smithereens. Next, he reported that she had traded an enchanted item to compensate for the identification paper issuing fee upon entering town, going on to state that the severely injured wife of the gatekeeper, who had accepted that item, was perfectly healthy by the next morning. He suspected the enchanted item in question was an Artifact of some kind. After that, he reported that the next day after she had arrived in town, she headed to the orphanage and filled the seat of director. The shady former director went missing and was presumed eliminated. Considering this, she didn't have any plausible ties with the mayor. Also, she seemed to be a daring, by-any-means-necessary type of girl, but was extremely popular among the children. Then, he reported that she had spent an enormous amount of her own money to help rebuild the orphanage, apparently "wanting to help all the needy kids," in her own words. It was believed that the reason she had sold off the brooch at the auction was to fund this endeavor.

Continuing on, he reported that while rebuilding the orphanage, Ristia had moved the old orphanage off to a corner of the facility grounds, as well as carried over a hundred kilograms' worth of materials with the greatest of ease. That led to the report that the new orphanage utilized all sorts of unknown technology, with rooms always maintaining a comfortable temperature and being able to pull water by the twist of a faucet-like item. Following up on that, he reported that the cafeteria that had opened in the orphanage was selling a number of gourmet confectioneries packed with sugar at prices so unbelievably low that any person off the street could purchase them. Lastly, he reported that the cute little Ristia in question was an angelic little sister, and that the next time he visited the cafe, he would definitely ask for Ristia to serve him—et cetera, so on and so forth.

There were a number of other things written down in the report, but Charlotte couldn't really make heads or tails of them.

"...I mean, what exactly was his final impression, then?"



The more rumors she gathered, the less sense it all made. Now finished reading the report, Charlotte suddenly looked exhausted. But if even half of the rumors written here were true, then she wasn't dealing with just anybody. She had to go assess whether or not Ristia was going to be a help or a hindrance to Count Warren's territory. There was a chance that she might introduce her into the fold... or, circumstances permitted, rub her out of the picture. Charlotte was hesitant, however, wondering what the best way to assess that possibility was. That was when her eyes fell upon the information about the orphanage cafeteria. It said that Ristia was working there as well, so going undercover and making contact with her was an option. Charlotte rang her bell and informed her maid that she would be heading to the town Ristia resided in.

A few days then passed. Charlotte, now disguised as a commoner, found herself at the front door to the orphanage. She ordered the bodyguards she'd brought along to keep watch over the perimeter as she stepped inside the eatery.

"This is... the cafeteria of an orphanage...?"

Charlotte scanned around the inside of the establishment and was blown away by the interior design. Not even a single wall made any sense. Bricks, stones, or even wood boards would have been normal, but the walls here were made out of some sort of cloth with elaborate patterns drawn on it. She found herself touching it and discovered it had elasticity.

*...This material is somewhat peculiar. Why would she use this sort of material to begin with? So that it doesn't hurt if you should bump into it? Or perhaps... for insulation?*

Educated in the ways of a statesman, Charlotte made her analysis from the environment of the room and came to a relatively accurate conclusion. It left her astonished that the director of this orphanage could possibly have this level of technology and knowledge.

*This is truly incredible. Now that I have a better look, the walls are not the only thing peculiar here. What is that transparent glass in the window about? I've never seen that before. Not even in castles. Also, this vase standing over here has such a brilliant luster, and... Yes, it is quite heavy, to boot. What in the*

*blazes is it even made of?*

Noticing that each and every furnishing, including the glass of the windows, was more flawless than the works of art in her family's estate, Charlotte stood dumbfounded.

"I'll surely become overwhelmed if I do not keep up my guard."

"Welcome home, Big Sis!"

"—Wh-Whuh?!"

The sudden greeting from over her shoulder caused Charlotte to flinch in surprise. As soon as she did, she lost her grip on the vase in her hands.

—*Ka-shhh!* went the artistic-looking vase made of mysterious material as it hit the floor and shattered into pieces.

"O-Oh, no... This is terrible. This is a disaster."

"Oh, goodness... Is everything alright?"

"It's far from alright! I cannot believe I was so careless as to break a vase in... I mean...! I sincerely apologize!" Charlotte went pale over breaking the piece of art that was fascinating enough to catch her eye, even as the daughter of a count, but...

"No, I'm not talking about the vase. I meant you. You're not hurt, are you, Big Sis?" said the voice in a tone more concerned over any damage to Charlotte than the furniture. Finding that odd, Charlotte finally turned around to face the source of the voice. There stood a smiling girl around the same age as her, clad in a refined maid outfit with jet black hair shining in the light pouring in from the window—making her seem like an angel.

"...What's wrong? You look out of your wits. Did you actually hurt yourself?"

"Oh, I-I'm sorry. No, I am not hurt, but I did break your vase. I will make sure to reimburse you for the damages!" Charlotte replied after coming back to her senses, apologizing frantically yet sincerely.

"You don't need to reimburse me. It will self-repair soon enough."

"But I must. Anybody with eyes can estimate that it will take a few hundred

gold pieces to... Wait, self-repair?”

*What in the world does she mean by that?* Charlotte thought, as out of the corner of her eye, a pale light emanated from the area where the vase lay scattered in pieces across the floor. Charlotte glanced over and was absolutely shocked. The smashed vase was restoring itself whole, all while emitting a pale light. Although, she didn't find the sight of the vase regenerating unbelievable. Her shock was due to her having a hint as to why that phenomenon occurred.

“This can't be... This can't possibly be...! An Artifact enchanted with self-mending abilities?!”

It was said that, in the fabled era, there existed even greater pieces of artistic beauty than in the current day, and among those pieces were items enchanted with self-mending abilities. It was part of a series said to be made by the youngest daughter of the True Bloods, who existed in that fabled era. Possibly because she disliked having her name in the limelight, all of the art pieces said to be made by the youngest daughter of the True Bloods were unsigned. Normally, you wouldn't be able to tell who made something if it was unsigned, but the youngest daughter of the True Bloods was said to have always enchanted her work with a self-mending ability. Therefore, the items that she made were part of what they referred to as the Unaccredited Series. Due to their inability to decay, while there were a fair number of them around, they were treated as national treasures for the most part, considered amazing works of art. In fact, this was the first time that even Charlotte had seen one with her own eyes.

*What is such a precious item doing in the corner of a cafeteria of all places...?* Charlotte thought, her blood curdling, until...

“Nope, just a vase that I made in my spare time.”

“...Huh?”

She couldn't comprehend what she was just told. And as she desperately tried to put her confused mind into action to figure it out, she realized it was in reply to the exclamation Charlotte herself had made a few moments ago. It was an answer... that didn't answer anything.

*Saying she “made it in her free time” implies she isn't a trained professional*

*and made it for fun. That ultimately implies that it is a vase made by an amateur, but... its beautiful appearance is clearly that of a work of art worthy of being a national treasure. Not only that, but it is enchanted with a self-mending ability that was only supposed to exist in the fabled ages of old anyway, so it was undeniably an Artifact. So what did she even mean by saying that she "made it in her free time"? It's almost as though the girl before me actually made this work that rivals the Unassigned Series herself. ...That does not seem likely... No, not at all. I must have misinterpreted things. The vase just has a slightly uncommon design; it should still be shattered across the floor even as we... Charlotte paused and rubbed her eyes to look at the vase, but there it was—completely restored in all of its glory. ...H-How very odd. It very clearly seems to be fixed. And I can clearly only consider it to be a stunning piece of work.*

"Is something the matter, Big Sis?"

"No, it's just, um... I feel like that vase should be broken, but it's back to normal..."

"Huh? What's the problem with that?" the girl asked in response with a blank stare. Her phrasing made it seem as though the vase repairing itself was the obvious truth, a matter of fact.

"Erm... are you, um, saying that the vase actually repaired itself?"

"Yes...? I am?"

"Yes, you are... Wait, that shouldn't normally be possible!" Charlotte said, unable to contain herself and raising her voice. That was the moment where the girl's smile faded and she started to look flustered.

"Y-Yes, you're right. That normally isn't possible. But don't worry. This isn't because of magic, Artifacts, or anything like that; it's just some sleight of hand."

"Sleight of hand...?"

"Mm-hmm, yep. That's what it is." The girl smiled, the picture of innocence. Honestly speaking, Charlotte didn't quite understand what the girl was talking about, but... she thought even that was more plausible than the illogical concept of her making something on par with the Unassigned Series in her free time. Given that...

“...Well, I suppose a bit of sleight of hand is better than nothing,” Charlotte muttered, a detached look on her face.

“By the way, Big Sis?”

“Erm, that has actually been on my mind for a while now. What is this ‘Big Sis’ business about...?” Aristocrats were trained to never forget an acquaintance’s face, so she would never forget a person she met, even if it were just once—a bit of an exaggeration, but she knew that she would never forget a girl as positively adorable as this one. Charlotte pondered that over in her mind before remembering that she was supposed to be posing as a commoner. And seeing as how she was faking her identity, she wouldn’t have any acquaintances. “You’ll have to excuse me, but this is the first time we’ve met, correct?”

“Yup, I’ve never met you before now, Big Sis.”

“...Pardon?” The words “what are you talking—” reached the tip of her tongue, but Charlotte stopped herself before she could finish her question with an “—about.” It was because she started to recall the various things written in the report that, at the time, she’d found incomprehensible.

“...If I may ask, do you happen call female customers in this establishment ‘Big Sis’?”

“Yup, that’s right. Females are ‘Big Sis,’ and males are ‘Big Bro.’ But if you have other requests, I can change my behavior or how I refer to you. For example, I can play the big sister role instead...” the girl said with a smile on her face that was practically asking how she felt about that idea. Charlotte was left at a loss for words. Actually, she didn’t know which of them was older, but there was no justification for a waitress to address her as an older sister, so she replied that she was fine with the current status of things.

“...What a flop.”

“Huh? Is something wrong?”

“Uh-uh, nope. It’s nothing, Big Sis. Anyway, let me show you to your seat~”

“Oh... Wait just a moment, please!” she quickly yelled to stop the maid as she turned around. She stopped in her tracks and looked back over her shoulder. The beauty of the girl fluttering her long black hair took Charlotte’s breath

away.

“What is it, Big Sis?”

“I-I actually want to ask if Ms. Ristia would serve me.”

“Ehehe, I appreciate the selection, Big Sis,” the girl in front of her replied with a smile to her request for Ristia. Which meant...

“Pardon my ignorance, but are *you* Ms. Ristia?”

“Yup, that’s me~ ...You asked for me, not knowing?”

“Oh, um, well, I’ve heard rumors of you.” *I’ve already screwed up*, Charlotte thought as she bit her lip. *If this has already tipped her off, then my whole plan is ruined*. She was visibly worried, but Ristia just gave her a grin.

“I suppose that makes sense,” she replied. “Now, let me show you to your seat~” Ristia then proceeded to happily lead the way, and Charlotte hurried to follow behind her.

Once she was escorted to a table and seated, Ristia presented her with a menu and a cup of water. Charlotte found herself shocked at the mysterious material used for the menu and flabbergasted at the ridiculously expensive-looking glass Ristia so casually set down before her. Shivers went down her spine once she realized that the maid had been empty-handed the entire time before that.

“What in the world has been going on...?”

“Big Sis, what’s the matter?”

“N-No, it’s nothing. All that aside, what are your specials for today?”

“Right, well... which would you prefer: An actual lunch, or sweets?”

“A-Ah, yes, I’ll go with sweets, then.”

“Okay then, how about some Darjeeling served straight and vanilla ice cream?”

“Vanilla ice... what? I’ve never heard of that before.”

“It’s cold, sweet, and my favorite kind of dessert.”

“You say this is your favorite? W-Well then, I’ll go with that.”

“Okay, an order of Darjeeling straight and vanilla ice cream. I’ll be right back, so don’t go anywhere,” Ristia said with a smile before disappearing off into the kitchen. Charlotte watched her leave and took a sigh of relief. Since Charlotte had a strict upbringing as the only daughter of a count, she’d never before had anyone interact in such a friendly and casual way like just now, so it was an extremely refreshing change of pace.

*That does remind me that I’ve always wanted a little sister... No, snap out of it. Now is not the time to be thinking about that; learning about Ms. Ristia’s personality takes priority.* Charlotte thought, renewing her resolve, but...

“Ah... it’s so cold and sweet. Light, yet dense with a full-bodied taste, and the way it melts in your mouth is superb. So this is... This is... vanilla ice cream!!”

She soon fell victim to the delights of the vanilla ice cream Ristia brought for her.

“I cannot believe...! I cannot believe that a sweet so delicious could exist in this world! I have never seen nor heard of such a treat, let alone eaten one!” Not even Charlotte, the daughter of a count, had ever eaten something this delectable. If royalty ever found out about vanilla ice cream, then they would probably employ the chefs at this establishment at any costs. That basically meant that it wasn’t impossible to become enormously wealthy if one were able to keep the recipe of this vanilla ice cream to themselves. It could very well help expand Count Warren’s territory in huge ways—that was just how shockingly delicious it was. “You will have to excuse me for my ignorance regarding this ‘vanilla ice cream,’ but where on earth did you ever get the recipe for it?” she asked to make idle gossip—to the untrained ear, at least, but in reality, it was a casual form of prying for information.

“I’m not too sure myself, but it’s a recipe that my ancestors brought from their homeland.”

“Then, this vanilla ice cream is normally sold in this faraway land, I take it?” she asked, thinking that she could likely use that as a point to investigate further, but contrary to Charlotte’s expectations, Ristia told her that might not be possible with an awkward grin.

“...Not possible? But why?”

“I’ve heard that the homeland of my ancestors isn’t a part of this world.”

“Oh... I understand now. Terribly sorry to ask that.” That suggested that... the land was extinct. That was how Charlotte interpreted the statement, and she offered a heartfelt apology. However, at the same time, she frantically spun her gears to think of her next course of action. In one hand, she had a recipe for a sweet treat unknown to these lands; in the other, Ristia, the only one who knew about it. Either Ristia was the only one with this knowledge, or there was a very select group of people who also had it. It was a recipe she now desired at any cost.

“But, Big Sis, why do you ask? Are you interested in learning how to make vanilla ice cream, by any chance?”

“Huh? Uh, no. Why, I wouldn’t...”

*Oh, God. The jig might be up!* Charlotte panicked. *This is an issue that requires the utmost care and discretion. If she were to find out that I was after that recipe by any means, then there would be no telling what kind of unreasonable demand she would throw my way in exchange. I’ve got to smooth this situation over immediately,* Charlotte thought hard until she was presented with a thin piece of material similar to the menu.

“Wh-What might this be?”

“It’s called paper, a substitute for parchment.”

“‘Paper’? I see... Something this thin and smooth is an incredible piece of technology.”

“Well, I’m hoping you get to look at what’s written *on* the paper, as opposed to the *paper itself*.”

“Written on the paper? Oh, indeed, there does seem to be something written down here that is... *Whaaa?!*”

The sentence scribbled onto the paper took Charlotte’s breath away, because on the very first line were the words: “How to Make Delicious Vanilla Ice Cream.”



“Don’t tell me that... this is...” Although she considered the idea preposterous, Charlotte scanned the recipe written on the paper. Regardless of whether it contained the real recipe or not, it certainly had the process for making vanilla ice cream on it.

*—What is she trying to pull here? Is this some sort of trap? Or is this a fake recipe to throw me off the trail? ...Yes, there many ingredients here I’m not familiar with, so I can’t be sure if it’s the genuine article or not just by looking over it. Since she divulged the recipe so readily, there’s always the possibility that she’s trying to give me the runaround, implying that it’s my fault if I can’t replicate it,* thought Charlotte to herself.

“Something you don’t understand on there, Big Sis?”

“Huh?! Y-You’re just going to... *tell it to me?!*”

“Sure. We’re not very busy with customers right now, so it’s fine.”

“Th-Then would you mind explaining what this ‘vanilla extract’ is?”

“That? You just cure a seedpod of a plant called ‘vanilla,’ and...”

Ristia began her explanation, but Charlotte barely understood any of it. That was why she was convinced that she was just attempting to bamboozle her with no real intentions of telling her how to make vanilla ice cream for herself. That was, until...

“Oh, I know. Would you care to watch it being made in the kitchen?”

“Y-Y-You’re going to simply l-l-let me *see?!*”

“Yup, sure am. Also, I’ll share a vanilla seedling if you need it.”

*“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa?!”*

Ristia was holding out a literal money tree to her without an ounce of hesitation. Charlotte couldn’t imagine what her angle was behind doing this no matter how hard she thought. She was then shown to the kitchen as promised and taught the proper process, so the entire situation was making even less sense as it went on.

*—Is this a dream? Or did I get forced into a deal with the devil without knowing? Will I be able to make it out of here alive?*

Ristia was simply teaching Charlotte a little of this and that, addressing her as an older sister while secretly assuming the role of older sister herself. It was a sentiment that Charlotte would never be able to guess, so she was left in a state of utter confusion.

“Wh-Why did you go through the effort of teaching me the recipe?” The fear that she might not escape from this place with her life was practically crushing her soul, but she fought with herself to get her question out. As for Ristia’s response...

“If I see a child in need, I want to help them; nothing more, nothing less.” Ristia’s crimson eyes squinted from her big smile. It was a simple and clean smile with tenderness that enveloped Charlotte in the midst of her panic attack.

“Wh-Who in blazes... are you?”

“Me? I’m just a normal girl.”

“A normal girl... you say?” That was the epitome of a cruel joke. This girl was more elegant than Charlotte and her noble upbringing, and despite having knowledge that would produce a fortune, she lacked any monetary desire. All of that was bundled with a personality rich in benevolence, not willing to turn a blind eye to a child in need.

*There is no way in the world someone like that is a normal girl,* Charlotte thought.

“Manager Ristia, can you come here?”

“Okie dokie~ Oh, um... sorry, got to go. If you still want to look around, feel free to peruse all you’d like. And if there’s something you don’t get, Maria is always open to questions,” Ristia said before returning to the floor. Even though she saw her life flash before her eyes, Charlotte was left unattended with no consequences. She looked on as Ristia walked off, dumbfounded by the whole ordeal.

“Hey, Sister... Uh, I mean, Big Sis. If there’s something you don’t get, ask me, okay?” Charlotte jumped from hearing the voice addressing her so suddenly from behind. When she hurried to turn herself around, there stood a brown-skinned young girl with silver hair. She exuded an extremely mature and

captivating aura in contrast to her youthful appearance, but she evoked a much more normal image than Ristia, which calmed Charlotte down ever so slightly.

“Um, you would be Ms. Maria... I take it?”

“Yes, that’s me. So... who are you?” Charlotte’s eyes widened as the girl got straight to the point.

“That reaction tells me something is up.”

“...Why would you assume that?” Considering she had seen that she was obviously shaken, excuses weren’t going to prove very effective. It took all Charlotte had within her to even reply with that question aimed back at Maria.

“...Reason? It was... by chance?”

“‘By chance’...”

She was nervous, thinking that the vague reason she gave had trapped her.

“You know, the former director forced me into selling a delicate flower of mine.”

“A delicate flower? What do flowers have to do with... Oh, God, you don’t mean...?!” Picking up on the context and realizing the worst possible possibility, Charlotte took a second look at Maria. Her second look put that same captivating aura of Maria that was disproportionate to her stature into a different light.

“It means what you think it means. But I’m just fine now. Director Ristia saved me from that life.”

“Yes, but...” Charlotte started, still trying to argue her point, but Maria held out her hand and cut her off.

“I’m really fine. But it’s all because of Director Ristia coming here. That’s why I may not know who you are, but if you plan on doing *anything* to Director Ristia, then...” *...Then you’re going to regret it*, Maria’s look up at Charlotte communicated, finishing her sentence for her. The wordless pressure emanating from the young girl caused Charlotte to take a huge gulp that rang from her throat.

“...I will take your warning to heart.”

“I see. In that case, I have nothing to say. Oh, right, I will answer any questions you may have about the kitchen, though.”

“No, I will be taking my leave. Please tell Ms. Ristia that I will be back.”  
Charlotte paid her price for the meal, along with a little extra, before leaving the cafeteria.

Afterward, the orphanage and Ristia both stayed on her mind. She made her way back home, thinking about what she could do in the best interests of not only the House of Count Warren, but the people of the territory as well.

—3—

About a month had passed since the cafeteria’s grand opening, and its popularity instantly spread through word of mouth, which started a boom for the establishment. One day, before sundown, Ristia was teaching Maria how to make crepes in the kitchen.

“...Um, like this?”

“Uh-huh. You’re a very quick learner.”

“...Compliments will get you nowhere,” Maria said in a blunt manner, looking slightly bashful. It was an adorable sight, which brought a grin to Ristia’s face, but that moment of bliss was interrupted by a boorish voice. From the direction of the floor echoed the pushy-sounding calls of a man.

“I’ll go check on what’s going on.”

“Okay, just try not to overdo it, Manager Ristia.”

“...I won’t~” *No faith in me at all...* Ristia flopped in disappointment as she headed to the floor. That was when she ran into Mew, who came running. Mew rushed straight to Ristia as soon as she spotted her.

“Waah... *Sniffle!*” Slightly teary-eyed, she clung to Ristia. Her normally perky, wagging dog ears were flopped down and drooping.

“What’s the matter, Mew?”

“...Is it bad that I’m here?”

“Most certainly not.”

“...Really?”

“Yup, *really* really. Why would you ask something like that?” she asked, gently patting her blue-tinted hair and peering into her jade-like eyes.

“They told me that beast-people being around makes human towns filthy and told me to get out of town,” she replied in a hushed tone with a sad expression.

“Oh, did they now? There’s someone who said that... is there?” she said as a tremor rocked the town for some unexplained reason—the less said about that the better. Ristia stifled her groundshakingly violent emotions and consoled Mew, saying, “You don’t have to worry; I would never dream of saying anything so ignorant to you.”

“...Really?”

“Of course. I would never ever dream of kicking you out, my dear Mew.”

“...Thank you, Manager Ristia.” That instilled the girl with a bit of relief. Ristia left Maria to take care of Mew while she headed to the cafe floor to confirm the identity of the rude customer who brought Mew to tears. When she arrived, the normally packed floor was empty, aside from a single middle-aged man with two soldiers in tow. He had a rather built physique that suggested he was trained in battle, but his clothing seemed to be quite high-quality—going by human standards of the current era, naturally.

“Manager, those guys showed up and kicked all the other customers out.” Ayane ran over to Ristia once she realized she was there.

“I see... But they didn’t do anything bad to you, did they, Ayane?”

“Mm-mm, I’m okay. But they did say some bad things to Mew, which made Allen ready to go fight them...”

“Aah... So that’s why.” She then realized why Allen was in the corner of the cafeteria, with Luc and the others restraining him in a full nelson. “Ayane, take the others and wait in the kitchen.”

“But...”

“It’ll be okay. I’ll protect everyone. You all just wait in the back,” Ristia said, giving Ayane a smile which helped relieve her some. Once Ristia saw that Ayane

and the others retreated with relatively little protest, she turned her attention toward the group of men. “Now then, who might you three be? You don’t seem to be customers.”

“...A maid? I told them to go bring me the director of the orphanage.”

“I am Ristia, the new director at the orphanage.”

“Oh-ho. So you’re Ristia, eh? You’re as much of a looker as the rumors made you out to be.”

“...As I asked, who are all of you?”

“I’m Jein, and I rule this town.”

“Is that so? Then, before I ask you what I can help you with, may I ask you one thing?” Ristia asked, flashing a serene smile while trying to contain her silent rage. The unknown sense of pressure made Jein take a huge gulp.

“...What? Go ahead, spit it out.”

“One of my girls came to me crying just a moment ago... Was that your handiwork?”

“—Hahah! That brat ran off crying?!” The one who let out that chortle was a soldier standing behind Jein.

“...Were you the one that made her cry?”

“So what if I was?”

“I demand an apology.”

“Hah! And I *decline*.”

“...I see.” Ristia had expected him to react that way, and she now pondered over what course of action she should take. She had the option of making him regret ever saying anything derogatory to Mew without Mew finding out about it—Mew or anyone else, for that matter. But she knew that would only serve as self-satisfaction. Alternatively, it would be a simple task for Ristia to make him apologize to Mew with her powers. In fact, it would be a simple task to make him tearfully beg for a chance to let him apologize. But doing that wouldn’t help heal the wounds left on Mew’s heart.

*Either way, it might be necessary to make him regret he was ever born just so he never does something like this again,* Ristia thought, but Jein spoke up.

“Alright, hold on.”

“Geiz, this is an orphanage, so there’s nothing odd about seeing a beast person around. In fact, it’s appropriate that a bunch of tribes would be here. You’ve got it all wrong telling them ‘get out.’”

“—Sir! You are absolutely right. My sincerest apologies!” The soldier accused of disparaging remarks against Mew, apparently named Geiz, quickly backtracked on his statements and apologized. But there was still a smirk stuck on his face, making it clear that his apology was superficial at best. It didn’t help that Jein’s word choice was pretty suspicious to begin with. But she was sure that delving any deeper into the matter wouldn’t end up pleasing Mew.

“Very well. If you mean that you won’t repeat the same mistake, then I accept your apology. Be warned, however... I will not be so kind next time.” Ristia stared silently at Geiz, her crimson eyes glinting with killing intent.

Coming head-to-head with enough bloodlust that would send dragons running, Geiz was finding it hard to breathe and began sweating bullets. Ten seconds passed... then twenty. Once Geiz’s face began turning purple, Ristia finally drew her killing intent back in. Released from the terror, Geiz collapsed where he stood, his breathing obviously distressed. However, the other two looked confused as to why he suddenly sank to the floor. Ristia pretended like she didn’t know despite being the root cause, shifting her aim toward Jein.

“So what are you here for?”

“A-Aah, yeah. There’s only one reason I’m here today. I’m here inquiring about how you haven’t paid the taxes on the orphanage or this business.”

“...Taxes?”

It wasn’t that Ristia was unfamiliar with the system of taxation. After all, they collected taxes under the pretense of the fee for making identification papers when she first got to town, and she also knew that they charged the citizens taxes to let them reside in this town, as well. But an orphanage was a facility to take care of children without families, and they were meant to be tax exempt.

At least, that was what Eidebelle had let her know.

“But orphanages don’t need to pay taxes, do they?”

“That was the case when the orphanage was poor, yes. But now you’ve built this fancy building, and I am sure your business is booming, as well.”

“Aah, and you’re saying that is why we now owe taxes.” Ristia figured that if it was a rule of the city, then she might as well abide by it, so she proceeded to ask, “How much will it be exactly?”

“Hmm, let’s see... A hundred gold pieces per year should suffice.”

*If I make a necklace equal to the brooch I sold at the auction the other day and manage to sell that, it’ll be enough for about a hundred eighty tax payments. Shouldn’t be a problem if I do that,* Ristia figured, her thought process slightly askew.

However, Jein saw Ristia’s silence and chuckled to himself.

“Heh heh heh... Don’t look so shocked. I don’t know how much of a nest egg you’ve got, but I do know that you probably don’t have enough to pay off that amount of taxes.”

“...Oh, um, really?” Ristia was about to pull out one hundred large gold pieces—not the smaller gold pieces, but enough to pay off ten years’ worth of taxes—but Jein’s assumption that she wouldn’t be able to pay it off put her in an awkward position. *I wonder if I’d end up breaking his pride if I gave him ten years’ worth of taxes right here and now? Maybe I should take a few days to get it ready, at least...* Ristia thought, giving care to his situation. Granted, if that did happen, Jein would be going home positively ecstatic. Unfortunately for Jein, that wasn’t meant to be. Jein had a different objective in mind from the very start, so he proposed an alternative plan for the hundred gold pieces.

“In exchange the orphanage paying its taxes, let the girls do some volunteer work.”

“...Volunteer work, you say?” When Ristia realized what those words were suggesting, a tremor rocked every corner of the continent. It was a tremor that only occurred just once, and it was small. Certainly not strong enough for anyone to take notice. Ristia was a girl with plenty of self-control, after all.



“That’s right. The previous director, Director Georg, would kindly offer a girl who would volunteer her services. But I’ve been in a hard place due to that idiot suddenly up and leaving. I don’t know under what circumstances you inherited the orphanage, but it’d be in your best interest to shoulder the work he left behind.” *I sincerely doubt she’ll be refusing me*, he thought, letting loose his vicious intent. But calling that “vicious intent” was presumptuous. To Ristia, it was simply a sense of discomfort. That was why she was at a loss as to her strategy from here. Of course, she had no intention of letting the crew that put Maria and the other children through hell off the hook, but at this point, Jein was nothing more than a small animal barking in bluster. She was at a loss... as to whether or not to kill someone like that.

*Killing him right here in a straightforward manner... wouldn’t be a good idea. Just remembering Nanami’s reaction when I killed Gawain... Mm-hmm, definitely a bad idea. In that case... I could just punish him by chopping his arms and legs off... On second thought, no, Former Director George was really freaked out by that. The kids would be freaked out, too, I bet.*

“Hah, you can bluff all you want, you’re just a little girl in the end. You’re so afraid that you’ve lost the ability to speak, haven’t you?”

“...Huh? Are you talking about me?”

“Who else is there besides you?”

*Uh, I’m not afraid of him at all, though...* Ristia commented to herself, but Jein seemed to be convinced that she was terrified. He had a truly amused expression on his face.

“Right, then. I’ll offer you another alternative. In place of the orphans, *you* can engage in volunteer services. I’m betting there’ll be high demand for someone with your looks.”

“...And why would I have to do that?”

“You value the children, right? If you keep up your bellyaching, then you might get my men mad, and they’ll end up attacking those precious children of yours.” The obvious threat of sicking his men on the children made Ristia’s brow furrow. “Heh, no need to look so anxious. That’s only in the case you don’t follow orders. If you do, then everything will wrap up neatly. You don’t want to

see those children getting hurt either, now do you?”

“Well...”

He was right. If they were to attack the children, the children would undoubtedly fight back. And since the children didn't understand their own strength, thanks to the brooches Ristia had given them as gifts, they would most likely pulverize the trio into the dust. Of course, Ristia could revive them if she didn't wait too long after the children beat them to a bloody pulp, but... going so overboard would probably leave scars on the children's hearts.

*What a terrible threat to throw out,* Ristia thought, her blood curdling. She had to end this quietly if she were to consider the children, but her offering her own “volunteer services” was definitely not happening. She wished that they would just accept the money and leave it at that, but if soliciting her services was at the heart of their visit, then it seemed like a tough deal. That being said, the only idea that popped into her mind was massacring Jein and his crew. But if she did that, the children would probably come to dislike her. Ristia had to be prudent in her decision here. Just as Jein had mentioned, she was being left with very few options.

*What should I even do...? Ristia desperately thought. For example, I could kill him with a slow-acting poison. Then no one would know that I did it. That way, the kids wouldn't come to fear me, right? Hmm... no. They might not come to fear me, but the kids might still get scared if they see these people in pain. What about just destroying their spirits, then? I feel like that's doable, but... Oh, I got it! All I have to do is just instantly erase them without a trace. That way, I can fudge it by going, “Huh? Now, where did Mr. Jein and the other gentlemen go~?” Yup! That should do the ticket. Let's go with that.*

Ristia concocted an outlandish plan to put into action—until a girl clad in a dress came in through the entrance. Her outfit was vastly different from the last time she'd come, but her gently sloping, wavy blonde hair and cool blue eyes were unmistakable. It was the customer that asked for Ristia during her previous visit.

“I'm sorry, Big Sis. The orphanage cafeteria is closed; I'm a little busy right now.”

“Yes, so it seems. But I’ve come here on separate business today, so it shouldn’t be an issue.”

“...Separate business? Oh, um... in that case, what may I help you with?” Ristia switched off her little sister waitress mode and went back to speaking normally. The moment Ristia dropped her speech, Charlotte’s face went a bit sad. At least, that was how it seemed.

“You can help me by letting me speak. I was hoping to speak to you truthfully.”

“...Truthfully? Who exactly are you...?” Ristia asked in confusion, which prompted the girl to pinch the hem of her dress and curtsy elegantly.

“My apologies for the late introduction. My name is Charlotte. I am the eldest daughter of the House of Count Warren, and I govern this area.” Once the blonde girl introduced herself as Charlotte, the general mood froze up for some reason, but Ristia was unaffected and responded normally.

“Oh, is that so? Does that mean that you are here to discuss the orphanage as well, Lady Charlotte?”

“...Oh my, you are very perceptive.”

Ristia found herself discouraged. Charlotte had a different quality from Nanami and her cuteness or Maria and her mature nature for her age; she was an elegant and attractive girl, which instilled within Ristia a strong desire to make her take the role of little sister, but she also suspected that Charlotte was in league with Jein. That was, until she spoke up...

“Ms. Ristia, I heard that you used your savings to rebuild the orphanage. I am unsure as to whether this will be of any help, but I have given an assistance grant to the mayor here.”

“Assistance grant...?” What she said was the polar opposite of what Ristia expected, so Ristia found herself extremely confused.

“Yes, in addition to a monthly grant, I’ve paid a grant to help with the costs of renovation. The sum is written on this parchment, which you can verify, if you would like.” On the parchment, there were two totals: one was thirty gold pieces for the renovation assistance grant, and the other was another thirty

gold pieces for a monthly assistance grant. As Ristia scanned over the parchment, Charlotte slightly tilted her head and whispered,

“Truth is... there are rumors that the mayor has been embezzling money.”

“Embezzling?” Ristia parroted in reply, which made Jein and his men visibly shudder, but she ignored that for the time being and continued her conversation with Charlotte.

“Yes, embezzling. However, it has been hard to pin down any evidence that leads back to him. Would you mind reporting to me if the value of the grant you’re receiving is different from the one logged here?”

“Just report it to you?”

“Yes. If you can obtain any evidence, then seeing that his head will roll would be a simple task.” Charlotte continued, “But, then again, I would assume he has been paying you the proper amount once you took over as being the director of the orphanage. Otherwise, he would be found out right away. And I wouldn’t think that he would be so dumb as to do that...” She flashed a self-deprecating smile at the very thought. Ristia returned with a rather wry smile of her own, because she had finally gained a grasp on the situation.

“The monthly assistance grant written down here is supposed to be paid every month? Not all at once a year?”

“That is how it’s supposed to be, but... Don’t tell me...”

“I’m afraid so. I haven’t received an assistance grant in the past few months that I’ve been the new director.”

“...Wha?!”

Charlotte had likely never even imagined that being a possibility, as her eyes widened in disbelief.

“He is rotten beyond my imagination, I see. But if we cannot track him down, there is a chance that he might try to escape by implying that you’re lying, Ms. Ristia. And while I wish I could ascertain some evidence against him...”

Charlotte whispered to herself as she began to think. That was when Jein and his men tried to sneak out of the establishment, so Ristia called out to them.

“Going home already?”

And once they heard that, Jein and his men sprung up in an amusing manner.

“—Oh my, I had almost forgotten that you had customers here. I am sorry if I am intruding on you all. Please, go ahead and talk to her; I can wait,” Charlotte said with a bow, conceding the floor to Jein and his men.

“N-No, we don’t mind talking later!” he said in a hurried pace and tried to leave, but Ristia was not about to let that happen.

“‘Later’ would be a problem. As I’ve said before, I refuse to force either the children or myself to take part in ‘volunteer services’ in exchange for our tax payments.”

“*Hyaa-oh?!*” Charlotte unleashed a mysterious scream.

“Ms. Ristia, what are you talking about?”

“The man over there, Mr. Jein? He told me he was the mayor.”

“...Huh?” Charlotte’s eyes went wide, and Jein looked as though the world was coming to an end.

“So he demanded that I pay one hundred gold pieces in taxes every year.”

“...Huh? O-One hundred gold, every year...?”

“He then demanded that the girls and I volunteer our ‘services’ in exchange for paying the cost.”

“By ‘volunteer services’... Y-You don’t mean...?!”

“Yes, it’s exactly how it sounds.” Whether she understood Ristia’s explanation or not, Charlotte’s beautiful face started to take an enraged turn, while Jein, in the complete opposite reaction, started to go pale. Charlotte pointed her gaze upon Jein.

“Heh. Heh heh heh. Such crass behavior toward someone who the House of Count Warren is trying to extend a warm welcome to... It would seem that you are the one who is going to be taxed around here.”

“Eek! N-No! There’s a misunderstanding!”

“Oh? And what am I misunderstanding, pray tell? If you are saying that you

don't care to provide your head in place of paying your taxes, then would you care to explain to me your reasoning so that I follow?" Charlotte asked, her wrathful eyes beating down upon Jein.

"W-Well, I was just, uh... Yeah! I was coming to pay the assistance grant!" Jein rattled off, scared like a frog getting leered down by a snake. And raising his voice like that probably caused him to shake free of his fear, so he proceeded to ride the momentum and rattle off some more. "I never said a single word about demanding her to pay any taxes! And threatening her to do things in exchange for the taxes was just her getting things confused!"

"You sure do have some gall to fabricate such atrocious lies like that."

"I-I'm not lying! If you're saying I'm lying, then prove to me that girl's statements are the truth!"

"Khh, why you... How dare you so impudently suggest that...!" Charlotte said with a face full of vexation.

*Hmm~ Seems like saying that I'm just a normal girl won't serve as evidence here, huh?*

Ristia came to that conclusion, but suddenly snapped her fingers, bringing all attention on her. Once her eyes met with Jein, she activated her True Blood Vampire charm ability.

"Now then... tell everyone what you came here to do—Everything," Ristia quietly ordered, making her crimson eyes glint.



In the next moment...

“I came here because I thought it’d end up making me money. If I overcharged you in taxes so much that you couldn’t possibly pay them, and I could have you do what I want in exchange, I could embezzle the assistance grant meant for the orphanage.”

“...Huh?” Jein suddenly started to confess his crimes, which left Charlotte dumbfounded in response.

“Also, I heard that the new director was an unbelievably beautiful young girl. I thought that if I tricked her into making her owe me a debt, then I could use that beautiful body of hers.”

“Wh-What a vile plan... You’re abhorrent!” Charlotte’s pure blue eyes were rife with disdain and rage. Once Ristia figured that he had talked enough, she released the charm spell over Jein.

“...Huh? What was I just saying...?! Th-That was all a misunderstanding! I was just saying what came to my mind—I mean, no, I was just saying stuff that *wasn’t* on my mind! A-Anyway, you’ll have to excuse me!” At the same time, Charlotte, shivering in anger, raised her right hand up, lining it up to face level.

“Seize this blackmailer!” she said in a gallant voice, dropping her hand down. Once she did, men dressed like knights barged in from the outside and restrained Jein and his men in the blink of an eye.



## Epilogue: The Self-Proclaimed Normal Girl Gains a Sister

One month had passed since Jein had been arrested for embezzlement and blackmail. One day, as Ristia was practically waltzing on the floor, waiting on customers, Charlotte paid the cafeteria a visit.

“Welcome back home, Big... Oh, I mean, good afternoon to you, Ms. Charlotte.” Ristia greeted the customer in her usual little sister mode, but once she realized that it was Charlotte in a similar dress to last time, she corrected herself.

“Good afternoon, Ms. Ristia. I planned on telling you the details of the incident, along with everything I wasn’t allowed to talk about prior to today. Would you mind sparing some time?” Ristia checked around the eatery to make sure that she could.

“Hmm... That would be fine. We’ll take this discussion to the back, if you don’t mind,” she said, leading Charlotte to the waiting room. She suggested that she sit at the head of the table, but Charlotte took the seat directly across from her. However, she didn’t sit down, and instead opted to look Ristia right in the eyes.

“First, allow me to apologize for the incident with Jein. Had I made one false move, that would have been an unbelievable inconvenience to you, Ms. Ristia. For that, I truly must apologize,” Charlotte said, taking a deep bow in regret.

“Erm... why are you apologizing, Ms. Charlotte?”

“Because it was us of the House of Count Warren that appointed Jein as mayor of this town. And Jein’s misconduct reflects onto me.”

“Aah, I see.” Ristia was the princess of the True Bloods, so she understood the concept of higher-ups taking responsibility for their subordinates’ misconduct. However...

“I wasn’t holding any of that against you, Ms. Charlotte. Of course, if you’re saying that apologizing will help clear your mind, I will gladly accept your

apology.”

“Thank you very much, Ms. Ristia.”

“Think nothing of it. On that note, please go ahead and take a seat.”

Suggesting that Charlotte take a seat, Ristia also sat herself down directly across from her. Stealing a small glance at Charlotte’s face, she saw her take a small sigh of relief and smile. It seemed as though one of the issues troubling her had already been alleviated. Her smile was so adorable that Ristia wondered if Charlotte would willingly become her little sister if she asked.

“Anyway, Jein is in the midst of being interrogated, but he seems to have done quite the sizable amount behind closed doors, so I wouldn’t be surprised if he does get sentenced to death.”

“Oh, I see. Hearing that puts my mind at ease.” Jein was the person responsible for hurting Maria and the others. Punishing him wouldn’t help wipe Maria’s past from existence, but it would at least guarantee that no further casualties would take place, at the very least, so Ristia was a tad bit relieved.

“And as for the children that were sold, we plan on tracking them down and taking them into custody as much as possible. Which is why it would be helpful if you could provide us with some information, but I know that...”

“I understand. I’ll do some investigating myself.” The children, sans Maria, weren’t aware of what happened to the children that “graduated” from the orphanage, which is why Ristia thought that asking Maria about it might be the best idea.

“As for what I truly wanted to talk about... Well, before that, I would like to ask you again: Was it the truth when you said that you do not hold anything against me for what happened?”

“No, of course not. Quite the contrary. I find you to be quite the kind and pleasant girl.” *And if all goes well, I want to make you my little sister!* Ristia tacked on in her head. Charlotte started to shiver all over as a result of Ristia’s words.

“I-I think that you are a kind and cute woman yourself, Ms. Ristia.”

“Ehehe, I appreciate that.”

“I-It’s nothing, really. I’m just speaking the truth. There is nothing in particular to thank me for!” Charlotte said, getting a tad bit bashful, which was also incredibly cute.

*Little sister! Please be my little sister!* Ristia screamed inside of her head.

“*Ahem!* Getting back on topic. I was actually considering the next mayor to govern this town... and figured that I would step up to the plate.”

“...You are, Ms. Charlotte? But you’re the only daughter of the House of Count Warren, right? Do they get to run one town?”

“The territory of Count Warren doesn’t include many towns, and it isn’t very rare for a relative to run them.”

“But hasn’t the ordeal with Mr. Jein caused some distrust to form with the territory owners?”

“Yes. Very much so, in fact. And this is just a hunch of mine, but I think that this town might have to dissolve from the Warren Territory.”

“...Oh, I see.”

Ristia didn’t realize that the reason why this town was important was *because* of her herself, but she *did* take notice of and acknowledge Charlotte’s earnest concern about the situation.

That was why Ristia kept things to herself. *It would probably be a bad idea to interject.*

“...You wouldn’t happen to be concerned over me, would you?”

“I am. It is a matter of concern, after all.”

All pure-hearted younger girls were little sister candidates, so it was only natural that it would weigh on Ristia’s mind. Ristia then took out a magic stone, some platinum, and other materials from her Item Box and created a flower-shaped brooch that she thought would look nice on Charlotte. It was enchanted with abilities that nullified all bodily ailments and caused regeneration.

“Huh...? Ms. Ristia, what was that you just did?” Charlotte asked, her eyes wide in surprise.

Ristia simply put her index finger to her lips and replied, "It's a secret." She proceeded to walk around the table and to Charlotte's side, pinning the brooch to her chest.

"Um, excuse me, but... what is this?"

"A present from me to you. It's a good luck charm!"

"A good luck charm? It is very pretty. Is it truly alright for me to accept this?"

"Mm-hmm, of course. I don't want you to go out and get hurt, after all."

"...Ms. Ristia..." Charlotte spoke, her cheeks becoming flushed as though she were overwhelmed with emotions. This reaction was just from her being given what she assumed was a normal brooch. If she knew that the gift was an enchanted item and that it included the ailment nullifying and regeneration effects exhibited at the auction, then things would have taken a drastic turn. Granted, Ristia had read the mood of the room and kept that part a secret, but she was oblivious to the fact that she had merely postponed the uproar Charlotte was likely to raise once she found out the truth. Regardless of that, Charlotte reached out and gave Ristia a hug. It was a considerably tight hug, but due to the fact that the two girls were roughly the same height and had extremely ample breasts, the level of contact was surprisingly scant outside of that one area. If any girls with less-endowed chests were to have witnessed this sight, they would probably have been gripped with despair over the unjust society of cup sizes.

"Thank you so much! This is the first time that a girl so close in age has given me such a present; this is such a joyous occasion, indeed!"

"Ehehe, if I managed to bring you some joy, then I'm happy as well. Extremely so!" Ristia returned Charlotte's hug, but deep down inside, she was screaming, *You can fawn over me and call me 'Big Sis' if you'd really like, too!*

"This is truly a joyous event. I would appreciate it if you would let me thank you in turn." Before long, Charlotte regained her composure and let go of Ristia.

"No need to worry about returning the thanks. I simply gave you that present because I wanted to; that's all."

"That simply will not do. Is there nothing that you desire?"

“Hmm, something I desire? Nothing in particular comes to mind.”

“Oh, I see... Ah, in that case, I do have a suggestion.”

“...A suggestion, you say?” *What could it be? Omigosh, I sure do hope she says, “I want to be your little sister!”* Ristia thought, fantasizing.

“I am the only daughter of my family, and I have never had someone close in age to talk to up until now. Maybe that is the reason why. I am not sure if I hold you *special*, but I do hold a strong affinity for you...”

“R-Right...” *Oh! Is this build up going where I think it is? Is she going to say she wants to be my little sister? Am I actually going to get a little sister?!* Ristia anticipated eagerly as she desperately tried to keep herself looking calm.

“So, what I am asking is, well.. would you mind if we were to agree to be sisters?”

*I did iiiiiiiit!! Yes, I did it! My first of hopefully many little sisters! Yay! My little sister! And what an adorable and beautiful little sister she is!*

“Um... of course, it would only be in title alone, but... would you mind that?”

“Me? Mind? Not at all! In fact, it pleases me to no end myself!”

“That is great news! Then, from now on, please consider me...”

“Uh-huh?!”

—*My new little sister!*

—*your new big sister to love and adore!*”

The exclamation in Ristia’s mind overlapped with a set of words that weren’t quite what she was expecting. Once Ristia realized what that meant... her whole body flopped over the table.



## Side Story: A Normal Girl Working Behind the Scenes of an Auction

“I want you to obtain an Artifact that will nullify the effects of lethal poison, as well as being an exquisite accessory.” Grannis Walter, the head of the House of Duke Walter, stated his request to the merchant he had befriended.

“An exquisite accessory, sir? I would believe something of that nature to be unbelievably pricey.”

“I realize that. But money is no object in this case.”

Enchanted items all shared a common weakness, which was that if the magic item itself was destroyed, then their ability would also be lost. There also existed Artifacts with self-repairing abilities, but those were exceptions to the exceptions. Generally speaking, it was said that the most important thing in preserving a magic item was making sure that the item itself didn't break. In other words, there were many an enchanted magic item that were prone to having crude designs. That trend was especially prominent among the Artifacts that currently existed, so an Artifact that was also an exquisite accessory piece was extremely rare. If it were an accessory and Artifact as two separate entities, then it would go for anywhere from a few hundred gold pieces to a few thousand gold pieces, but if it were an item of that nature that was two-in-one, then ten-thousand gold pieces would be the bare minimum. It was a price that not even Duke Walter was able to easily pay, and he would need to sell other pieces of art that he owned in order to raise the money. However, there was a reason why he was willing to go that far to attain this kind of Artifact.

“I want to have my beloved daughter take it with her.”

“Would you happen to mean...”

“...Quite. She is to be wed in the neighboring nation.”

They were at war with the neighboring nation, with skirmishes still continuing. It was a result of both nations struggling for fertile land to use to

compensate for the food shortage brought on by the population boom—a struggle that lasted for over a hundred years and had caused both nations' resources to slope toward a decline. In order to resolve this stalemate, the king made a decision. That decision stated that a girl of royal blood was to be wed to the prince of the neighboring nation to serve as a symbol of goodwill between the two countries. And the girl chosen for that task was Duke Walter's beloved daughter. The fate of the two nations was on her shoulders. While it was an incredible honor to him as a Duke, as a father... it was a very painful choice. Although many people desired peace, there were people who also still wanted war, and from those war-hungry people's perspectives, the daughter of Walter was nothing more than a nuisance. It was the same as the Artifact. No matter how powerful of an effect it possessed, it couldn't utilize its power if you destroyed the main component of the item. That was the reason he wanted an Artifact—one that not only could his daughter, who would be exposed to poisoning attempts on a daily basis now, could walk around with anywhere she went, but one that was discrete enough from a single glance.

“The wedding date is six months from now. I beg of you to produce something before then. If you succeed, I promise you that I will make it worth your while.”

“Very well, good sir. I will try my very hardest to find the best of items that suit the young miss,” said the merchant under the Duke's employ as the Duke bowed to him, but Artifacts themselves only popped up on the market in sparse supply every year. Not only that, but considering that the Duke was specifically after an Artifact that nullified fatal poisons and doubled as a piece of jewelry, it was rather dubious as to whether anybody would even offer one up for sale anytime soon—let alone in the next few years. Regardless of price being no object for the Duke, that wasn't helping him obtain his coveted item—all the while, the day of his daughter's wedding drew nearer with each passing hour.

That was, until one day, when a social gathering for aristocrats and nobles was held in the imperial capital. Normally, the Duke couldn't afford to spend time enjoying social gatherings in any capacity, but as a Duke, he also couldn't afford to easily brush the event aside and not show up. There was also the chance that one of the aristocrats there knew about the kind of Artifact that he



was after. Staking his hopes on that possibility, Duke Walter attended the gathering, but...

“An Artifact that both nullifies the effects of deadly poisons, and also functions as a beautiful accessory?”

“Yes, I wish to obtain it for my daughter.”

“...For Lady Liliane, I see. For a matter such as that, I, well...”

“It’s fine. You are not obligated to tell me anything. This is a great honor, and I myself know that you have pressing matters. I simply remembered that you are well-versed in artistic pieces yourself, Lady Charlotte.”

“Lady Liliane has been a wonderful friend, so I wish to help if at all possible, but... you must forgive me. I do not have a clue as to where to find an item of that caliber.”

“No, I should be the one apologizing for asking such a strange question out of the blue.”

She was the lone daughter of the House of Count Warren. Duke Walter tried his hand at asking someone who was on friendly terms with his daughter, but he hung his head when he realized he wouldn’t be getting the information he sought.

“Duke Walter, I understand how you must feel. Tomorrow is the day of the auction in the imperial capital. It is just an assumption, but perhaps they will have something that fits Lady Liliane’s needs.”

“An auction...? Yes, I could see that....”

If there were any eye-catching goods like an Artifact that people wanted, it was common for auction-goers to be notified ahead of time so that they could prepare the funds necessary to purchase them. Not having any information come in at this point in time meant that it wasn’t likely that such an Artifact would be appear, but... that didn’t mean that there would be nothing there worthy to give as a gift to his daughter. Duke Walter said his thanks to Charlotte and excused himself. However, the area he moved to allowed Duke Walter to witness something unbelievable occurring in a seat surrounded by people.

Duchess Roadwell was boasting about the gift she had received from her husband to the other aristocrats. The former Duke Roadwell was a great man and was quite friendly to Duke Walter, but... the Duke Roadwell that succeeded him was always at odds with Duke Walter.

*He probably just acts stubborn so that no one may take him lightly, seeing as he succeeded the title at such a young age,* Duke Walter thought, never approaching him until now. However, today, he had a specific reason to do just that.

The item that Duchess Roadwell was boasting about was the very same item that Duke Walter had been searching for in order to give to his beloved daughter.

“Well? What do you think of this Artifact that I’ve gifted my wife, Duke Walter? Not only a beautiful accessory, but also nullifies any deadly poison.” asked a voice suddenly, right behind the Duke. Realizing that he was being mocked from such an antagonistic tone of voice, Duke Walter squandered his swelling annoyance to turn around.

“My, my, if it isn’t Duke Roadwell. Might I be able to *help* you?”

“Oh, not really. I just heard word that you’ve been looking for the same Artifact as me and just haven’t been able to find it.”

“Oh-ho...” Duke Walter wasn’t about to make any ridiculous requests for him to sell it to him. And even if he did make such a request, it would only help to stroke Duke Roadwell’s ego. While it was uncertain as to where that information was leaked, it wasn’t hard to imagine that Duke Roadwell had gained information about the item Duke Walter was looking for beforehand and bought it just to get in his way. Duke Walter was positively brimming with disgust.

“I believe searching now would be quite the task, but I do hope you do not lose heart, Duke Walter. If you are motivated, as I am, then I believe that obtaining something of the sort is *doable*, at the very least.”

*How dare this impudent welp mock me so brazenly!* Duke Walter almost allowed his thoughts to escape his mouth in fury, but he stopped himself just moments before he could. What Duke Walter needed to do now was find out

what he could do for his daughter. With that in mind, he swallowed his anger and prepared to make his exit, but that was when...

“Oh, right. I almost forgot. I don’t think it’s really possible for me to buy up two of the same item, but what do you say to me introducing you to the merchant I asked to reserve it for me just in case?”

“...Oh? Well, I would appreciate that, but...” This clearly wasn’t a gesture of good will, which prompted Duke Walter to keep his guard up, as he wasn’t privy to exactly what this man was ultimately after. His precaution ended up being meaningless, however, because his offer *was* out of the pure goodness of his heart—at least, that was what he hoped. In actuality, Duke Roadwell already had everything set up, so he was simply showing his hand as a courtesy, meaning that...

“That merchant’s name? Why, it’s...”

The name that he informed Duke Walter of with a devious grin was that of the merchant he had befriended. That night, said merchant appeared at Duke Walter’s estate without even being summoned. There, the Duke met with him, using reason to contain himself from exploding in anger.

“...Duke Roadwell boasted about a certain item to me at today’s social gathering,” he said, glaring at him as if to say that no further explanation was needed. However, his glare was met without an ounce of hesitation by the president of a company who was starting to stand out in the imperial capital nowadays.

“...So they did boast about it, did they? I know how you must feel now.” It seemed like he was practically *trying* to start a fight.

His voice shaking, Duke Walter asked just to be absolutely certain. “So you sold the Artifact to Duke Roadwell?”

“Indeed, it was I who sold it.”

“Then, do you plan to tell me that you have another of the same item? Tell me, Gratt.” Considering that he was a merchant, it was inevitable that he would sell to a higher bidder, but Duke Walter was never even given the news that he had obtained it.

Depending on your answer, you may come to regret it, he thought, giving off an aura of intimidation. Despite a major aristocrat's pressure being powerful enough to leave any normal man quaking in his boots, the merchant that Duke Walker befriended—the president of Gratt Commerce—remained unconcerned.

“Before I answer your question, please allow me to inquire about one thing.”

“...What is it?”

“If I were to tell you to bid on a certain item in tomorrow's auction... would you be confident in winning it, Duke Walter?”

“Tomorrow's auction, you say?”

He put off pondering what the man's intent was in favor of searching for an answer, smoothly changing his demeanor. Regarding the auction the following day—the duke hadn't heard anything about any sort of Artifact being featured. Given that, it would probably be safe to assume that no members of royalty would be participating. That also meant that his biggest sources of competition were the few major aristocrats and Duke Roadwell. The question was whether or not he could beat them out. In terms of total assets, it would be a one-on-one bout between Duke Roadwell and Duke Walter, but auctions weren't something that you could win just because one's total assets equated to a sizeable amount. The person who would win an auction was the person who had brought the most money with them *at that time*. And seeing as how Duke Roadwell had just recently purchased that Artifact with outstanding magic and artistic merits, his amount of cash on-hand probably wasn't all that impressive. Meanwhile, Duke Walter had been collecting the funds to purchase his daughter's gift, so if the auction were to take place tomorrow, it wasn't likely at all that he would lose. And it was the very moment when Duke Walter drew that conclusion that a certain possibility came to him.

“Might you be suggesting that the item I am seeking will be put up for sale at tomorrow's auction?”

“I have an agreement with my trading partner, so I am afraid I cannot say anything more. However... the only thing I will say is that this is from the good graces of a certain *normal* girl.”

“...A normal girl?”

“Indeed, once I told her about you, she happily complied with the idea. So, please, make it your mission to participate in tomorrow’s auction. I am sure that you will bear witness to a miracle.”

He wasn’t quite able to wrap his head around this being a “miracle.” The whole matter would be resolved if he were to just sell the item off to him from the start, so he was completely unable to comprehend why he was going through such a roundabout manner. The only thing he could think of was that he was trying to raise the price at the auction, but... nevertheless, he was determined to get the Artifact no matter how high the price. He just didn’t understand the point in making him bid for it. Besides that, there was no way that Duke Walker wouldn’t be informed in advance if the Artifact he was searching for was to actually show up in the auction. That was why, if he were to be truthful, Gratt was spitting nonsense to cover his own back. Either that, or he had gone daft in the head—both doubts spun inside the duke’s mind. However, he was all out of options. Hence, Duke Walter, essentially clutching at straws, decided to show up at the auction.

The day passed, and he arrived at the auction hall. There, he found himself literally witnessing a miracle.

“Wh-What is this...?” Duke Walter uttered, at a loss for words. The people who also looked at the item list clamored in a similar manner. Among the items listed on the parchment, there were Artifacts mixed into the lot. The fact that Artifacts were being put up for auction without prior notice was a surprise in itself, but the real shocker here was located in the descriptions listed.

A brooch with a beautiful design set with a large magic stone. The design was small yet delicate, with the brooch itself being appraised at no less than fifty gold pieces.

That by itself was a relatively shocking price tag. Of course, there are a number of other more expensive pieces of artistic merit, but the small brooch with the fifty gold piece price tag was considerably uncommon. Regardless, this brooch’s true value wasn’t in the design. It was said to be enchanted, and its appraised effects were described as following:

*In addition to an ability which nullifies any and all bodily ailments, it is also endowed with a self-repairing ability. Will instantly nullify the effects of fast-acting and deadly poison for the bearer. The brooch itself will repair itself even if shattered into pieces. A brooch made in a normal girl's free time.*

He didn't know where to begin when it came to picking this description apart. The Artifact was a small, artistically-sound brooch with a powerful enchantment. It was rare enough that it even existed, but the enchantment it possessed was infeasible. It nullified any and all bodily ailments. That alone was outside the realm of Artifacts and encroached into a realm of doubt as to if it was a miracle brought forth by God. Considering what it was, it wouldn't be surprising to see it with a price tag of ten-thousand gold pieces instead.

However, the startling facts didn't end there. The brooch was enchanted with a self-repairing ability. It was already in miracle territory at the point it was endowed with that Artifact-grade enchantment, and the fragile brooch having a self-repairing ability was a heavenly blessing. It was literally an Artifact among Artifacts, an item that should in no way exist, but... it was also a piece of work with a self-repairing ability. That clued Duke Walter in to what it actually was.

"This couldn't be... a part of the Unassigned Series...?"

If that were the case, he could see why they would price such a small brooch for fifty gold pieces, based on its value as a piece of art alone. If it were part of the Unassigned Series, then it wouldn't be surprising to see it with a price tag of a thousand gold pieces. The brooch had a built-in ability to nullify all bodily ailments. Putting a price tag on it was impossible. Even if he exchanged everything he had—his territory, his social status, the people of his territory—it wouldn't be a fair trade.

*—No. If it's being featured in the auction, then it's safe to say the auction price is the appropriate price. It's positively ludicrous, but in a certain sense, that is the truth of the matter. It is, but...* Duke Walter thought, trailing off.

Without informing anyone beforehand, it cut down the financial contenders that could bid with Duke Walter, so it made him wonder what Gratt's goal in all this was. Thinking reasonably, his goal would be sabotaging any competitors since someone else was exhibiting these to auction, but since Gratt was acting

as a representative of the exhibitor, then it wouldn't make sense if he was trying to sabotage himself. In which case, Duke Walter thought to himself before conjuring up what Gratt told him.

*"The only thing I will say is that this is from the good graces of a certain normal girl."*

Why did an Artifact of such caliber exist? Why were they attempting to sell off an Artifact of this caliber? Why did he emphasize the "normal" in "normal girl"? None of this made any sense. But what did make sense was that there was no better item to give his daughter as a gift than the Artifact being exhibited in the auction today. And then...

"Hurry! Scrape together all the gold pieces I have on-hand right away!"

Duke Roadwell and the rest of the aristocrats barked orders at their servants, but... they were too late. There was no one around that could beat Duke Walter with all of the the gold coins that he had gathered for the sake of his daughter. Duke Walter won the bid on the Artifact that would later be named the Angel's Blessing.

A few days later, the president of Gratt Commerce paid him a visit.

"Congratulations, Duke Walter."

"Thanks to you, Gratt, I was able to give my beloved daughter a delightfully unexpected present. You have my deepest gratitude. I promise you that I will devote my life to making it up to you."

"No, as I mentioned the last time, this was all because of the good graces of a certain self-proclaimed normal girl."

"Self-proclaimed normal girl, eh? You know, I was wondering what you were talking about when you told me that the first time, but..."

In the Artifact's description, it stated that it was created in a "normal girl's free time." That, combined with Gratt mentioning that the good graces of a self-proclaimed normal girl made this possible... Logically thinking, the author of that description and the self-proclaimed normal girl were one in the same. Naturally, a normal girl would never be capable of doing such things. Actually, no *human* would be capable. However, the Unassigned Series was unassigned

because the creator never tried to gain a reputation for themselves. The creator was also said to be the youngest daughter of the True Bloods. The True Bloods were a tribe that suddenly went missing a millennium ago, but since they were said to live for several millennia, it wouldn't be unusual if they were still living somewhere out in the world even now.

“...Would this self-proclaimed normal girl so happen to be...”

“I do not know.”

“And by that... do you mean ‘don't pry’?”

“Of course, that is a part of it, but I truly do not know. In fact, if I were to be so bold as to give my personal opinion... I would say she is an *angel* proclaiming herself as a normal girl.”

“...So she's an angel, is she? Then was all this a blessing for my daughter?”

“Precisely.”

Duke Walter had meant what he said entirely as a joke, but Gratt nodded in affirmation in seriousness.

“She wants to help any girl in need—that is her catchphrase, so to speak.”

“I see. Any girl in need...”

*In that case, she undeniably did all of this for my daughter's sake. I have to admit that I don't quite understand why this had to be done on such an overly-grandiose scale, but... angels work in mysterious ways,* Duke Walter thought to himself.

The duke's beloved daughter, Liliane, did eventually marry in to the neighboring nation. However, her life there was far from an easy experience. Those who tried to improve relations between the two nations were on her side, but those who wished for war were constantly after her life. That being said, she stood against adversity and began to win the trust of her husband, the future king, and it was told that, in the end, she made great contributions toward improving the relationship between the two nations. Known as Queen Liliane, she was pivotal as a bridge of peace between both countries. Although people attempted assassinations through several methods, including poisoning,



the reason as to why she was able to live such a long life was the subject of much speculation. There was also much absurdity among those speculations, which made it difficult to tell the truth from fabrications, but... the most plausible theory was, surprisingly, an anecdote about how she was being protected by an angel. That was said to be the reason, because once she passed away from old age in her final years, an angel descended from the heavens before all of her mourners... However, nothing was ever said for certain.

## Side Story: A Normal Girl Passing By Behind the Scenes of a Viscount Family

An auction regularly took place in an event hall in the imperial capital once per month. Standing nervously in the corner of the fervent hall was Lucrezia, the daughter of the House of Viscount Wilderness, who had just turned fifteen years old as of yesterday.

The Wilderness domain that her father governed over possessed a vast quantity of land, a quantity unexpected from a normal viscount, but... the majority of it was barren wasteland that wouldn't grow vegetation at all. Nevertheless, his family dedicated their efforts to continuously protecting the people of his territory. And the people responded in turn to Viscount Wilderness' zeal by continuing to work in order to enrich the struggling territory. However, it had been approximately a thousand years since people started living in the Wilderness territory. With the lives of the people not improving, the amount of citizens living in the area diminished, causing management of the territory to hit its limits. On top of that, Lucrezia's father, Viscount Wilderness, had collapsed yesterday from fatigue. At this rate, he wouldn't be able to properly manage the territory or pay his vassals' wages. If that kept up, the king would likely end up seizing the entire territory.

That was why Lucrezia had come to the auction grounds, her desire to help out her father burning strong. She had come to put up her brooch, a memento inherited from her mother, in the auction. Naturally, she had an aversion to putting a memento of her mother up for sale—even moreso since she knew it was a brooch that was passed down from generation to generation with her mother inheriting it from her mother, and so on and so forth. However, she ventured that her mother would allow it since it was to protect her father, the domain, and the people who lived within it. The real problem lied in how much she could sell it for.

The brooch had a magic stone set within it, but, unfortunately, it didn't have

any sort of enchantment built in. Be that as it may, it was decorated beautifully, so it wouldn't go for less than thirty gold pieces. She could set her hopes on even fifty gold pieces, if she was lucky enough. The auction grounds were oddly fervent today. She might even be able to have her brooch won at an even higher price. Thirty gold pieces would cover the wages to their current staff of vassals. Fifty would cover the aid for the impoverished people of the territory in addition to that. And one hundred pieces might even finally get their stagnant land cultivation plans into motion. At least, that was what she dreamed. However...

“It... can't be...”

Lucrezia stood off to a wing of the stage once the bidding began for her brooch, but what she saw wasn't a dream—it was a nightmare. Any aristocrat was supposed to leap at the opportunity to own such a delicate brooch that had been put out to exhibit. Despite that, not a single one of the aristocrats showed any interest. Which meant...

“Eighteen gold pieces. I have eighteen gold pieces. Any other bidders? Going once, going twice...”

They were probably buying it to resell it. A handful of merchants went into a short bidding war, but the opposition quickly dropped out. It was looking likely that the winning bid would be for eighteen gold pieces. However, a mere eighteen gold pieces would make it difficult to pay their vassals' wages. In which case, it made putting the memento from her mother up for auction pointless.

“...Mother, I'm so sorry. Mother... *Hic... Sniff...*” Lucrezia balled up her small white hands as large drops of tears poured from her eyes. As such, this tale ended in tragedy— or so it seemed, but there was still more to the story.

A few months passed since the auction had occurred, and with Lucrezia's father still in bad health, the finances of the House of Viscount Wilderness had finally hit rock bottom. She had resigned herself to the fact that the end was drawing near, but one day, Lucrezia's servant informed her that she had a visitor that had come to see her. However, she was clueless as to who it could have been, as she didn't have any acquaintances who would be visiting her around this time of year. The best she could come up with was it possibly being

a merchant or wealthy individual who was trying to marry her in exchange for providing aid to the House of Viscount Wilderness—with an ulterior motive of gaining the position of Viscount Wilderness. She was in such dire straits that she didn't know whether that sort of proposal was even feasible or not.

*Depending on the conditions, I'll do it to protect the vassals and the people of the territory,* Lucrezia thought to herself, setting her resolve.

“Who might this visitor be?”

“She introduced herself as a ‘normal girl passing by,’ milady.”

“...Come again?”

“It's as I mentioned, milady, um... she said she was a ‘normal girl passing by.’”

“I don't understand what you're saying. A normal girl wouldn't come to visit the house of a viscount, even if they do say they're just passing by.”

“Yes, well, um... while I also believe your counterpoint is sound, she seems to be dressed in quite expensive and exquisite garb. Which means she might be...”

“A spy... correct? I understand. In any case, I will go to meet with this person.”

Lucrezia quickly tidied herself up and proceeded to the parlor where her visitor awaited. There stood a girl so adorable that it boggled the mind as to how she considered herself a “normal girl.”

“Pleased to meet you, Lady Lucrezia. I am a normal girl just passing by in the area.”

“Oh, um, yes. Hello, I am Lucrezia. As a note, we are the only ones here, so...” she said, trailing off with the connotation that it was fine for her to drop all pretense and reveal her true identity, but the self-proclaimed normal girl passing by just looked at her in an adorable yet confused manner. She was most likely playing dumb, a clear sign that she had no intention of revealing who she was. “Um, might I ask if you are a holy woman making rounds, kind sister?”

“—‘Kind sister’?!”

She didn't know this girl's name, and in an attempt to gain some more information, addressed her in the way she would a woman of the church, but the self-proclaimed girl passing by gave her more of a reaction than she

bargained for.

“I-I apologize for my crass assumption. Did I strike a nerve with you by calling you a sister?”

“Huh? Oh, no, not at all.”

“I-I didn’t?”

“No, not all. In fact, I prefer it.”

While Lucrezia didn’t follow, this girl was grinning from ear to ear. And although she didn’t follow, she assumed that she was maybe fine—probably.

She seriously didn’t follow at all, though.

At any rate, Lucrezia decided to press on and ask for more details.

“In that case, um... what can I help you with?”

“Right, I wanted to ask you a few questions about this brooch.”

“That’s...!”

Lucrezia’s eyes opened wide. The self-proclaimed normal girl she couldn’t quite follow had pulled a brooch out of thin air. It was the same brooch that served as a memento from her mother, the same one that she had begrudgingly auctioned off.

“But why do you have that...? No, what a silly question. You must have bought it off the merchant that won the bid on it, correct?”

“Uh-huh, it was given to me. Seems that they noticed that I was interested in it.”

“...O-Oh, I see.” An item valuable enough to decide the fate of an entire region, and it was given to her as a present out of passing interest.

*How does she even consider herself a normal girl by that point?* Lucrezia thought to herself, comparing their circumstances and finding herself beset with sadness.

“So, yes, about this brooch. You are definitely the one who exhibited this at the auction, correct?”

“Yes, that is correct. But what about it, if I may ask?”

“Would you mind telling me as to where you acquired this brooch?”

“That brooch is a memento of my mother.”

“A memento of your mother...” The self-proclaimed girl passing by seemed somewhat surprised by the revelation. Lucrezia felt it was a reaction that criticized her for selling the precious memento in an auction, so she ended up trying to explain herself. “Um, but I only sold it to protect the inhabitants of our region.”

“And your mother? Did she mention who gave this to her?”

“Um... my mother said she inherited it from her mother. That brooch has been passed down from generation to generation.”

“Generation to generation... Yes... I see...” The self-proclaimed normal girl passing by trailed off, gazing off wistfully into the distance. Despite the girl looking only a few years older than Lucrezia, her expression gave off the impression of having a storied past.

“...Um, is something the matter, kind sister?”

“Mm-mm, not at all,” the girl said, her eyes taking a kinder turn as she looked at Lucrezia. At the same time, her rather reserved tone up until then turned more casual. It was a tad too over-familiar—although, not to Lucrezia. Quite the contrary; the tone carried a sense of nostalgia, for some reason. Lucrezia found her own emotions confusing.

“Um... So is that the only thing you wished to discuss?”

“Mm... I was just a little unsure, but I’m going to be giving this brooch back to you.”

“...Huh?”

Lucrezia gasped in shock as she then found the brooch pinned to her chest somehow. The girl was sitting on the sofa chair across the table, so how in the world had she pinned the accessory to Lucrezia’s chest? That question had to wait, as there was a more pressing matter at hand.

“You said you’re returning it to me, but as for the money to buy it back, I...”

she started, but she felt so pathetic that she couldn't finish her sentence. The self-proclaimed passerby, however, gently shook her head in response.

"If you promise me that you will never relinquish it ever again, money is not necessary."

"No, but..."

"It's fine. Besides, I made a promise myself."

"...A promise?"

"Mm-hmm. I made a promise with Misha. I told her that once she made something important, I would create an enchantment to protect it."

"Misha...?"

The first thing that came to Lucrezia's mind once she heard the name "Misha" was the noblewoman who had received the position of Viscount after all of her great accomplishments—the first Viscount Wilderness. But that was simply impossible. The House of Viscount Wilderness had been around for about a millennium. The first Viscount, Misha, and this self-proclaimed normal girl passing by couldn't possibly have known each other. But there was actually something even more concerning...

"Um, what do you mean by 'enchantment'?"

"Simple. The power for Misha—for you—to protect that which you wish to protect," The second that the self-proclaimed normal girl passing by said that, a miracle happened. An intricate and shockingly big magic circle started to unfold around the girl, with her in the center. A sacred light spread throughout the room... and eventually, the light was absorbed into the brooch shining on Lucrezia's chest.

"What... was that just now?" Lucrezia posed the question, but the self-proclaimed normal girl passing by just smiled without any answer.

"Alrighty then, I'll be on my way now." As fast as the girl managed to say that, she stood up and honestly tried to leave, which was why Lucrezia hurried to tell her to wait in order to stop her.

"...Do you have something you want to say to me?"

“Um, well... This brooch. Please, take it along with you.”

“...How come? I thought that brooch held fond memories for you as well.”

“Yes, that is why. I do not know what may happen in the future. But I don’t think that I will be able to keep any valuables on me, whether I like to or not.”

Whether the land was seized by the king, or whether some rich individual bought her for their own designs—either way, there was a high chance of the brooch being taken away from her. That was the deciding factor that made her want the girl to hold onto it instead. However...

“That won’t be necessary.”

“It won’t be... necessary? What exactly do you mean by...”

After she started to ask, the girl began to give her an unbelievable explanation. She explained that a large company called Gratt Commerce was willing to provide aid to the territory of Viscount Wilderness. Not only would they provide aid financially and for the food shortage, they would also provide the most gracious of aid by dispatching manpower to help. Once she heard that, Lucrezia set her resolve to sell her very soul in exchange. Despite that resolve, all they wanted as compensation was, should the territory of Viscount Wilderness begin to prosper, a deal with them to sell their local produce and other products with Gratt Commerce. That was it. The territory of Viscount Wilderness was impoverished. Even if they did have Gratt Commerce’s assistance, it was doubtful that they could make a deal that would satisfy the large company. There was also the fact that the territory of Viscount Wilderness had no “local produce” to even speak of. Logically thinking, this endeavor wasn’t profitable to Gratt Commerce in the slightest. Lucrezia told her all that, but...

“Teehee, you’ll see in due time.”

“I’ll see? See... what?” she asked, clueless as to what she meant.

The self-proclaimed normal girl passing by, on the other hand, simply smiled like an angel without answering her question. Instead, she simply spoke.

“Misha... I know I’m late on my promise... but I made good on it.”



Her gentle eyes were directed toward Lucrezia—no, toward the brooch pinned to her chest. As soon as she did, a pale light wrapped around the girl. And once the light dispersed... she was nowhere to be seen.

“Milady, I have brought you some tea. Milady...? I’m coming in.”

*Was all of that just a dream...?* Lucrezia sat thinking to herself, dumbfounded, as her maid entered the room in the meantime. Scanning around the room, the maid noticed that Lucrezia was the only one there and found herself puzzled.

“Oh my, wherever did your guest run off to?” asked Lucrezia’s maid as Lucrezia looked around the room. There was not a trace of the girl anywhere in the room.

*But...* Lucrezia trailed off in her mind, noticing the brooch adorning her chest.

“She... already went back home.”

“Oh, I see. Just who was she, if I may ask?”

“Good question... Who was she?” The talk of deals was extremely unbelievable, but her mother’s memento was right back with Lucrezia, so... “She might have been an angel passing by.” Lucrezia stared out her window as she softly touched the brooch.

The territory of Viscount Wilderness had been on the verge of bankruptcy, but one day, it started to rapidly come back to life. The head of the house, who had been bedridden, made a recovery, and Gratt Commerce started to provide aid around the same time. At first, the other merchants who learned of this started to gossip that Gratt was simply trying to gain the position of Viscount for himself, but Gratt Commerce denied that and declared that their actions were for the sake of future buying and selling. All of the other merchants laughed this off, saying that Gratt Commerce, a business that had been growing bigger rapidly as of late, was getting too big for its own britches and was making a foolhardy bet.

However... a few years passed, and the territory of Viscount Wilderness revitalized. The once-barren wasteland had come to life, making the land naturally prosperous and fertile. Not only that, but they even started cultivating some mysterious fruits that began to become extremely popular in the nation—

its origins wrapped in mystery. As such, the territory of Viscount Wilderness had completely transformed into a prominent and prosperous area within the nation. It was unknown as to how they were suddenly able to grow produce. The rumors said that Gratt Commerce had imparted them with some knowledge, but there was not a single piece of documentation that stated that for certain. There were also legends that whatever wasteland the beloved daughter of Viscount Wilderness visited would have their soil turn rich and plentiful... However, nothing concrete was ever said. And, eventually, it was counted as one of the Seven Wonders of the House of Viscount Wilderness.

## Side Story: A Normal Girl Suspected of Preferring Girls

Ristia, the youngest daughter of the True Bloods, had been detached from her vampiric impulses up until just recently. She never knew why other members of her race would give in to their compulsions, but that was only until she was assaulted by those same impulses and partook of Maria's blood. She bared her fangs at Maria's neck and sucked her blood. And the moment she did, she finally understood—she understood just how sweet drinking the blood of someone special to you really was to a vampire. Maria was like a little sister to her, and having her blood travel down her throat and dissolve into her body didn't satisfy a thirst within her throat—no, it satisfied a thirst within her heart.

Ristia was overcome with the urge to gain that euphoric sensation once again. With that urge coursing through her, she greeted the night. The moon basked in a crimson glow. Ristia went to Maria as she tidied up from that night's dinner, grabbed her sleeve and called her name.

"Maria..."

"Director Ristia? What's the matter?"

"Um, well..." At a loss as to how to propose her request, Ristia awkwardly hesitated.

"Is it what I think it is...?"

"...Mm-hmm, that urge for you is back."

"I see... Okay, then. Then, this time... I'll come to your room, okay?"

"...Thank you, Maria."

Slightly bashful, Ristia made her way back to her quarters.



"...Tonight, I'll come to your room, okay?" Maria answered Ristia in a

whispered tone. Allen happened to overhear what she said by coincidence, but he couldn't help his heart from going into an uproar.

*"...I understand. I will come to your room tonight."*

The image of Maria saying that with a furrowed brow ran through his head. She was talking to the former director, Georg, and Maria had an expression that pained his heart just to look at. The young Allen had no idea what that exchange was about at the time. No, even now, he didn't really have a firm grasp. What he did know was that Director Georg was forcing Maria to do something she didn't want to, which was why he hated Director Georg, and also hated Ristia, who he assumed was in league with Georg.

That all changed when Ristia kicked out the former director and became their savior. All of his wariness ended up being needless, and Ristia ended up being a friend to all of the children. But that was exactly why such an exchange just now made Allen's heart go into a frenzy. It made him ponder the possibility that Ristia might be the same as Director Georg after all.

*"No, there's no way. Director Ristia treats all of us so kindly..."*

Ristia and Director Georg were far too different from one another. It *had* to be a misunderstanding. Allen firmly thought that and took action, unlike back with Director Georg, when he was too afraid to do anything. Tonight, he was going to check for himself to see what was going on in Ristia's room. What he saw was...

*"Maria, Maria... I... can't contain myself any longer."*

*"Hyaa... mm...! Ah... hm... Come now, Director Ristia... you don't need to be so impatient."*

Into the wee hours of the night, Allen kept his ear peeled outside of the door to Ristia's quarters, which is where he heard Ristia and Maria's sweet, entranced voices. Of course, what they were doing in the room was simply—maybe or maybe not safe to say, but it was vampire-related activity and not at all the type of action you'd associate from their conversation. However, Allen misconstrued their conversation, thinking that the pair were in the midst of something naughty. All of the blood immediately rushed to Allen's head. In his mind, Ristia was forcing Maria into doing something. He had to make sure

whether that was the truth or just some sort of misunderstanding. So with that in mind, Allen put his hand on the doorknob and cracked the door open ever so slightly... to take a peek on what was going on inside. He opened the door as narrowly as he possibly could in order to avoid detection, so he had an extremely limited field of view. Even so, the canopy bed was lined up perfectly in his sights. And atop that canopy bed, he saw the side profile of Maria being embraced by Ristia.

“Ah... uh... ..Mm! Director Ristia, hold on, you’re going too hard...!” Maria wriggled and softly pushed Ristia off. This sent the misconception that Ristia was indeed forcing Maria into something into overdrive, until...

“Mm... Ah... hmm... Director Ristia, be a little more gentle. Otherwise, I’ll... Mm~!!”

She bit her finger to stifle herself as her body shivered all over. The expression captured on her face had hints of joy, but not a trace of contempt. Ristia wasn’t forcing her; Maria was willfully accepting it. Those were things that Allen understood.

“...Mm, I’m sorry. It’s getting harder to put on the brakes.”

“Oh, Director Ristia~ But I am happy you want me that much.”

“Maria... Ehehe. Then would it be okay if I... went for a little more?”

“Oh, geez... Well, who am I to say no? Okay, just one more time, got it?”

“Yup, thank you, Maria!”

Ristia took Maria into her embrace and pushed her down to the bed. The two then disappeared from Allen’s vision, but Maria’s sweet cries and faint sucking noises echoed throughout.

What the pair was doing was... actually not what it seemed, but the thing that any adult would draw from seeing this sight was not something that Allen himself was able to imagine. Although, he was able to understand one thing—Ristia and Maria had a relationship outside of the ordinary. Maria was the prettiest and kindest older girl in the whole orphanage, and Allen had feelings for her, which was why this sight was so shocking to him—so shocking that he fled. While he did flee, Allen fought to the bitter end with Director Georg as

well. He was a child, but he possessed an iron-clad heart. Then, the following day...

“Mark my words, I’m not giving Big Sis Maria up to you, Director Ristia!” said Allen, sitting at the breakfast table, declaring full-blown war against Ristia. Maria’s eyes widened in shock, and the other children were left with blank stares. With a finger pointed at her, Ristia replied with a broad smile,

“Don’t worry. I love each and every one of you. I wouldn’t try to take anyone from anyone. I’ll give each of you the care you deserve,” she said with the connotations that implied, *Yup! I’m everyone’s Big Sis!* And while that was her intention, the answer that Allen gave after seeing yesterday’s sight was not what she expected. And so...

“I-I’m going to show you no mercy, Director Ristia! I won’t be ensnared by your wiles!”

Allen’s misunderstanding was going off the rails even further. Allen was just a child, but he was aware of his feelings for Maria. As such, so that he would never falter to Ristia, he would train himself and later reach heights to be called a hero by others... However, that was a story for another time.

## Afterword

Hello, and thank you so much for picking up volume one of *Seriously Seeking Sister! Ultimate Vampire Princess Just Wants Little Sister; Plenty of Service Will Be Provided!* I'm the author, Hironoame. Truth be told, I've wanted to be an author for a long time, but it actually took me eight years before I made my debut. I submitted about thirty works for contests, and I would occasionally get dropped in the first round of screening. A good majority made it through to the second round, and I only had two works that ended up reaching the third. And to add onto that, most of the feedback said that the characters had charm, among other things, but the structure was bunk. And, boy, do I remember my reaction at the time. I screamed at the top of my lungs, "Whadd'ya mean my structure is bunk?!"

Afterward, I had a fateful encounter with the "three-act structure" and the work that I posted on the Shosetsuka ni Naro (Let's Be an Author) website immediately after. I received some very helpful feedback that mentioned the composition was solid, and that led to my eventual debut. And so, although I am a relatively firm believer in the three-act structure, for this book, I only utilized the general framework of a three-act structure and poured my all into bringing out the charm of our protagonist, Ristia. I hope you enjoy this tale of our powerhouse of a helplessly cute girl, Ristia.

\*A "three-act structure" is a form of literary structure that is used in several fields, including movies. If I were to explain it, it would go on longer than the actual novel, so I suggest that anybody interested in the topic search about it online. Now, I would like to take this time to advertise some of my other work.

The first volume of *The Ignorant and Powerless Village Girl Rises Up Under the Reincarnated Lord of the Land* was released eleven days prior to this novel by Sankosha's UGnovels. On the same day, volume two of *Even in an Alternate World, a Yandere Loves Me to Death* went on sale under Futabasha's M-Novels. *Ignorant and Powerless Village Girl* is a spinoff-like title of my debut work, *Alternate World Sisters*, and while it doesn't have any direct correlation to the

novel you're reading now, it is set in the same world in a different era. *The Ignorant and Powerless Village Girl* is, as the title suggests, a story about a village girl's struggles with a reincarnated lord and a band of non-standard companions. *Alternate World Yandere* is a story about her struggles with a perverted yandere. I highly suggest that anybody interested in those titles pick them up.

Lastly, I'd like to address the publishers, my personal supporters, and everyone who helped support *Seriously Seeking Sister*. It was thanks to your efforts that I was successfully able to put out a volume one. I really do appreciate it.

Alright, that's my time. Hope to see you all again in volume two.

—Hironoame, July 2018



# Digital Version Extra Short Story: Ristia's Cooking Class

It was around the time when the orphanage was still being reconstructed that Maria was summoned to the backyard of the orphanage, where she met with Ristia.

“You’re going to run a cafeteria from the orphanage?”

“Yup, sure am~!” Ristia answered with a broad smile, but Maria looked doubtful.

“What’s wrong? Are you against a cafeteria in the orphanage?”

“...No, I think it’ll work to everyone’s benefit, but whenever a man touches my body without warning, um... it brings up bad memories.”

Forced into volunteering her services at a young age by the former director, Maria had a fear of being touched by men. That was why she thought she would make for a pretty lousy waitress, but... seeing Maria like that, Ristia hugged her small body tight.

“It’ll be alright. I planned on having you in charge of cooking, not being a waitress.”

“...Me, in charge of cooking? But I can only cook the bare minimum.”

“But you were in charge of cooking here at the orphanage, right?”

“Technically, yes, but... my ingredients were limited, and I was only allowed to use the bare minimum of firewood, so I don’t have much in my repertoire.”

“That shouldn’t be an issue, then. I’ll make sure to teach you juuust right.”

“...You, Director Ristia? Cooking?”

Director Ristia had never betrayed the expectations of Maria or the other children. That being said, going past any and all of their expectations was an everyday occurrence.

“...I’m not too sure how this will work out, though.”

“Oh, it’ll be fine. Don’t worry.”

“...Well, if you insist, Director Ristia.”

“Ehehe. Now then, let’s get cracking on your cooking lessons~!” Ristia made a one-eighty, turning her back to face Maria as she opened her arms wide. Immediately after, an adorable house manifested right in front of Ristia.

“...Huh? What is that?”

“This is my kitchen. Always handy to have around, so I never leave home without it~”

“...Oh, I see.”

*You normally don’t just carry a kitchen around with you.* That was the quip that made the most sense, but Maria refrained from making it. After all, she knew that even if she did make comments to pick her argument apart, there would be no end to it.

“Okay, I’ll just be going inside now,” Maria said before opening the door and entering the room.

“Oh, mind taking your shoes off there?”

“...My shoes? Well, no, I don’t mind.” Maria took her shoes off as she was told and entered the room. There, lined up in perfect order, were cooking utensils that Maria had never seen before.

“...And here we go again with all the strange and amazing-looking stuff.”

“That there is a refrigerator, and this is a flash freezer. That is a centrifuge, and... uh, if I explain any of that to you now, you won’t be able to process it, I guess. Let’s start things off by cooking something up.”

“...Yes, let’s do that instead, please.” She wasn’t letting her guard down around any of the magic items in Ristia’s possession.

*If I ask for an explanation and get shocked at what each and every thing does, it’ll be nightfall before we’re through,* Maria thought, opting to glance over things.

“Right, let’s see, then... Ah, yes. I’ll teach you how to make shrimp au gratin.”

“...I don’t know what an ‘au gratin’ is, but I’ll watch and learn nonetheless.”

“Good. Then, first, we’ll take this fresh shrimp I pulled out... and after we prep them...”

The things she called “shrimp” were sliced up in an instant.

“Next, we’ll peel and chop our onions and place them in a frying pan coated with butter.”

The onions were also chopped into thin slices in an instant, and it took a mere ten seconds until a sweet aroma drifted out of the frying pan. Maria held her temple, speechless.

“...Um, Director Ristia, I’m not sure what just happened.”

“Huh? Then let’s try one more time... There.”

Once a whizzing sound echoed, out appeared another frying pan. And inside of it, it already had all of the same ingredients sizzling.

“No, um, what I meant was... I wasn’t able to see what just happened.”

“Oh. Okay, okay. I get you. Sorry about that,” Director Ristia apologized with an adorable smile, this time slowly and carefully showing how she peeled the shrimp. “By the way, it’s important that you take out the digestive tract inside~”

“Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, I see.”

“Oh, and another note, the onions... You know what onions are, right?”

“Yes, I’m good on that. But moving on... what’s this ‘butter’ stuff?”

“Butter is when you take milk like this, and...” Director Ristia took a bottle filled with milk and started shaking it up, side to side.

*How is something this cute allowed to exist? ...Huh? But upon closer inspection of the hand she’s shaking around, it looks like it’s producing afterimages... No, that was just my imagination, right? Just how much force is she putting into shaking that thing?* Maria thought, amazed.

“And just like that, using centrifugal force, we separate it, add salt to the fresh cream we just made, and whip it up.”

The completed butter sat atop the plate on the table. It wasn't there a second ago, but the bottle that was supposed to have been in Director Ristia's hand was gone as well, so this was most likely the current state of the bottle's contents.

"That is butter?"

"Mm-hmm, it's yummy when you spread it on bread~ ...Now, say 'aaah.'"

Ristia scooped up some butter on her finger and presented that finger to Maria. Maria hesitated for a second, but she put her lips around Director Ristia's finger.

*Oh, it has a pretty unusual taste... Still, Director Ristia's finger sure is slender and soft.*

"...Mm! All that licking on my finger is ticklish~"

"O-Oh, I'm sorry!" Maria drew her my mouth away from Director Ristia's finger in a panic.

"Ehehe, I'm glad that you seem to like it. Alright, time for the rest of the lesson."

"Y-Yes, please go on." Maria's heart was racing just a little bit for whatever reason as she received the rest of her lesson from Director Ristia.

At first, there were a lot of instances of Maria getting confused over the cooking demonstrations being finished before she even had a chance to pay attention, but Ristia gradually became accustomed to all this, and her teaching methods improved over time. As such, Maria started to gain more and more of a repertoire, and she eventually developed until she was a good enough cook to be considered Ristia's righthand woman. However, the thing that pleased Maria the most was that she was able to cook together with Director Ristia, the sunshine in her life.

## Author Profile

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Hiironoame

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I'm a light novel author based out of Osaka. Hiironoame means "crimson rain," but it's a name I picked with the image of raindrops against the sunset and *definitely* not a downpour of blood.

...No, I'm serious, okay?

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Siso

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I'm an illustrator based out of Kansai. Thank you for appreciating my work.







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Plenty of Service Will Be Provided!

by Hiironoame

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Edited by Noelle Spence

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